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The Paradox of a Town Meeting: The Influence of Forms of Local Government on Citizen Representation

Item Type	Dissertation (Open Access)
Authors	van Erve, Wouter Marc
DOI	10.7275/12681204
Download date	2026-03-07 00:13:10
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/17622

**THE PARADOX OF A TOWN MEETING: THE INFLUENCE OF FORMS OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ON CITIZEN REPRESENTATION**

A Dissertation Presented

by

WOUTER M. VAN ERVE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2018

POLITICAL SCIENCE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The most difficult thing to accomplish in graduate school is not the passing of your comprehensive exam, the defense of your dissertation prospectus, or even forcing yourself to sit down and write your dissertation. No, the hardest thing is to find ways to maintain your sanity. I want to take this opportunity to thank the many brilliant individuals who throughout my time at UMass helped make my life a little bit easier.

First of all, I want to thank my advisors, Ray La Raja and Brian Schaffner, who took me under their wings early on, and who both tirelessly encouraged me to ask the right questions, frame them and reframe them, and tirelessly provided me with feedback along the way. Their faith in me, as someone relatively new to the discipline, has been a continuous source of empowerment, for which I will forever be indebted to them. But I would be remiss if I didn't mention Ray's tremendous generosity on a personal level as well—I truly appreciated being invited into your home and I will miss our meals, discussions of European politics, and off-the-record discussions of local goings on.

My advisors are a subset of a larger contingent of exceptional faculty mentors I have had throughout my time at UMass. These mentors all showed me tremendous kindness and instilled me with the confidence to complete what can sometimes seem like an endless endeavor. Lauren McCarthy has always been there for me with advice about teaching or the job market, and I appreciate the introduction she and Paul Collins gave me to the world of legal studies—without them, I would not be where I am now. I am also grateful for Paul Musgrave's thorough feedback on my writing, and his practical advice about life in the discipline. I am also indebted to Jennie Southgate, Trish Bachand, Michelle

Goncalves, Crystal Paul, and Emily White for all their kind help and support as I navigated the vagaries of the UMass system.

In completing this dissertation, I also owe a great deal of gratitude to Liz Berman and Cole Garvey, the two undergraduate research assistants who went above and beyond in working alongside of me as I collected and processed the data on which this dissertation is based. Without their help, it would no doubt have taken even longer to finish this manuscript.

I also want to thank my friends and colleagues at the Interdisciplinary Studies Institute at UMass for encouraging me to always keep an open mind, for allowing me to engage with so many inspirational scholars across many different disciplines, and for their generous collegiality over the past four years. Stephen Clingman, Amanda Waugh-Lagji, John Kingston, and Lauren Silber were all instrumental in making my tenure at ISI the enjoyable and rewarding experience it has been.

I could not have wished for a better group of friends and colleagues to remind me of the importance of things other than grad school. From meeting Ardeshir Pezeshk on Craigslist in the summer of 2011, I quickly managed to surround myself with a wonderful and tight-knit support system. Ardeshir, James and Kristen Heilman, and Katie Boom provided me with tremendous amounts of chicken wings, beer, and support over the years, and I am grateful for their incredible friendship and the many laughs we've shared. Melinda Tarsi and Jeanette Harvie were always happy to share their experiences from the trenches, to proofread my ramblings, and to provide moral support at those times where I had trouble seeing the bigger picture. I am also happy to count Kaylee Johnson, Jim Ben-Aaron, and Allen Linken as my friends, editors, and confidants, and for being great scholars and

models of kindness. And if there is one thing I learned in grad school, it's that distance doesn't matter in great friendships: I could always rely on Ursula LaFosse to provide me with a listening ear whenever I needed it (whether from Texas, Nevada, or Indiana) and Bas Barendregt and Hugo Strang, two of my oldest and dearest friends from the Netherlands, were always there to make sure I wouldn't Americanize too much.

I also would not have been able to get to this point in my academic career without the support and encouragement of my many mentors. I mentioned my advisors Ray La Raja and Brian Schaffner, but Shannon Mariotti at Southwestern University, and Cyrille Fijnaut at Tilburg University have also been instrumental in their encouragement of my academic pursuits.

And, last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, Marc and Rosemarijn van Erve, my brother Joris, and Sara Duhl for never questioning my decisions to keep going back to school and support me in my intellectual endeavors without so much as lifting a brow. Their unconditional support and tireless encouragement has meant the world.

ABSTRACT

**THE PARADOX OF A TOWN MEETING: THE INFLUENCE OF FORMS OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ON CITIZEN REPRESENTATION**

SEPTEMBER 2018

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When the federal government fails to provide guidance, or takes positions citizens disagree with, the importance of having strong, responsive local political institutions increases. As a result of either longstanding tradition or political reforms, a number of subnational political institutions now include elements of participatory and direct democracy in an effort to cure perceived democratic deficits. In my research, which uses a comparison of traditional, New England (representative) town meetings to city councils, I address the question of how the choice between using large, participation-oriented representative institutions and smaller legislative assemblies affects citizen participation and representation in local politics. My findings demonstrate that though the motives to include elements of direct and participatory democracy in local institutions may be pure and intuitive, communities that use these elements and have large legislative assemblies may in fact impose greater barriers on citizens, resulting in lower and more biased electoral turnout and representation than in comparable communities that use more conventional, smaller legislative bodies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Having been used continuously in the New England colonies since the early 17th century in the form of (open) town meetings, popular self-government—at least on the local level—has deep ties to foundational moments in U.S. history. Yet despite its seemingly smooth and continuous use, especially in the New England colonies, open, self-governing popular democracy—using democratic structures that are highly permeable, and encourage participation by large numbers of individuals, whether directly or through representation—presents somewhat of a contradiction when it comes to its place in American politics.

The United States' love affair with direct democracy, however, can be characterized as ambivalent. The Founders, for instance, as famously voiced by James Madison in Federalist No. 10, believed popular influence should be limited as well as tightly controlled, so as to temper the influences of competing factions (Madison 1787). The institutions the Founders designed and codified in the Constitution were thus more republican in nature, possessing a strong interconnected structure that allowed for three separate branches of government with a capacity to check each other's work. This interconnectedness, while allowing the institutions of government to work in concert, left little room for public democratic practice.

This period of popular 'exclusion' did not last for long, as the young American republic saw a dramatic shift in its incorporation of democratic principles in the early 19th century, under the auspices of Andrew Jackson (Achen and Bartels 2016). Jackson believed

strongly in popular rule and sovereignty, and under his reign as president, the United States saw great changes as they jumped headlong into a new democratic experiment that simultaneously emphasized the role of the common people as it took away power from the educated elites that had dominated the political landscape so strongly until then. Though a radical departure from the Founders' design principles, this new structure, in some ways, hearkened back to the colonial days where small municipal entities governed themselves in absence of a strong federal government. Noting the revolutionary nature of this experiment on a national level, Tocqueville observed a nation in which “the people reign over the American political world as God reigns over the universe” (Tocqueville 1848 [1969], p. 60).

This romantic view of democracy that originated in the 19th century has had a profound effect on modern attitudes towards democracy. The romantic view holds that all citizens will participate when they are given the possibility of engaging directly with their government, and places great stock in grassroots movements and other principles of direct, decentralized democracy. Reality today, however, paints a different picture—especially (though not exclusively) in local politics. Contrary to the democratic intuitions that have been passed down to us through history lessons, works of art, and even popular culture (see also Musgrave and Daniel (N.d.)), arranging our local democracies in a way that relies on direct popular control, as can to this day be observed in a number of locales across the United States, influences who decides to participate in the democratic process, and who elects to stay home (Hajnal 2010; Hajnal and Trounstone 2005; Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Trounstone 2010, 2009a).

While American democracy in the post-Jacksonian era is based on a core commitment to popular sovereignty, citizens often disagree on how to balance a number of core democratic values, as well as on how to design democratic institutions. Within the realm of local politics, this balancing act results in municipalities employing a variety of different ways to organize their local governments, with some communities placing a larger emphasis on principles of direct democracy and popular participation than others, that seek to provide a government that emphasizes representation over participation.

On one end of the spectrum, there are those communities that employ governments relying on a legislature (in the form of a council) and an executive, either in the form of a mayor, a manager, or some combination of both. These mayor-council (and mayor-manager-council, manager-council) forms of government dominate the municipal government landscape overall, chosen for their familiar approach to delegation and representation we are familiar with on the national political stage. Manager-council governments make up 55% of all municipal governments in the United States, whereas mayor-council governments represent 34% of all municipalities (ICMA 2011).

In most locales, the mayor/manager-city council system of government is the default choice—there exist no other options, such as direct popular democracy. Yet, other forms of government do exist: in certain parts of the country, particularly in the Northeast, municipalities can consider a wider range of options in organizing their local government. Among the options are several varieties of the town meeting: a form of direct democracy, where all citizens (either directly or through large numbers of representatives) are able to participate in political decision-making. These municipalities—representing about 6% of U.S. municipal governments (ICMA 2011)—defend their use of direct, popular democracy

by arguing that it is more democratic and representative than its alternatives, allowing for more popular control and increased accountability over municipal decisions because citizens control the entire decision-making process, without interventions by intermediary leadership.

When municipalities have options, we can investigate not only the reasons why a community would make a choice for a particular option, but also the effects of that choice. First, how does the design of governmental institutions affect who participates, and who is represented? Secondly, and as an extension of the previous question, to what extent does broad, direct participation in democratic institutions serve the interests of a given community? Examining these questions through the lens of local government presents an important case study in American politics, allowing us to examine the influence of institutional design on governments with which individual citizens have the most (and the most direct) interactions, and which through these interactions act as laboratories of democracy, cultivating citizens' relationships with and attitudes towards the political realm. In addition, this examination of institutional designs puts into focus those intermediary institutions such as robust political campaigns and ever-present media coverage whose presence we may take for granted on the national level, but whose influence on the local level cannot be underestimated—even if the local political environment does not always allow for their presence.

The importance of this research is twofold. First, in examining the differences in candidate emergence, mobilization, voter turnout, and representation between municipalities that use different forms of government, this project illuminates how the decision to govern a community using a particular set of institutions creates an environment

that either encourages or prevents broad popular participation and, consequently, representation. Secondly, in considering the decision to use a form of government as a choice rather than as a given, this project engages with a broader question that is relevant to all levels of political science, that is, whether we should place political power in the hands of the many, or of the few.

In this project, I provide evidence that our intuitions about democratic institutions do not always match up with reality: while we may intuitively prefer broad popular participation in government and feel good about grassroots democracy, I demonstrate that this broad popular participation can only succeed under the right conditions. Drawing from the literature on candidate emergence (Kazee 1994; Krebs 1999; Maisel and Stone 1997; Wikstrom 1979) and the economic theory of political participation (Downs 1957; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba and Nie 1972b), I argue that the form of government used by a community creates an opportunity structure for political candidates, influences the presence of informal, mediating institutions that condition citizens' electoral participation, and thus determines who participates, and who is represented.

Contention 1: The form of government creates the opportunity structure for political candidates, determining which types of candidates choose to run for office under the chosen form of government.

I argue that the form of government a community elects to use sets up an 'opportunity structure' for candidates. Candidates interested in running for office have their own objectives. They might be interested in participating in municipal government out of a sense of civic voluntarism (Verba et al. 1995; Hersh 2017), or they may be driven by

progressive ambition (Abramson et al. 1987; Black 1972; Brace 1984; Ehrenhalt 1992; Einstein et al. 2018; Fox and Lawless 2005; Maestas 2003; Maestas et al. 2006). Progressive ambition entails that the would-be candidate is interested in using their career and achievements in a lower political office for the purpose of achieving success on higher political levels. In order to be successful in this upward mobility, these candidates require robust political platforms, a record of achievements while in elected office, and name recognition with a political base in order to have a shot at a political career. The candidate angling for an upward trajectory is often willing to invest significant amounts of time and effort to gain experience, and to establish their bona fides. Municipal politics can be a launching pad for these candidates, as the barrier to entry is relatively low. I argue, however, that not all municipal forms of government provide candidates with an environment that suits their progressive ambition, and as such, political environments that do provide these elements may attract more career-oriented representatives than forms of government that do not offer these properties. While one is not necessarily better than the other, a choice for a form of government can thus lead to communities having distinctly different types of candidates running for office in their elections—candidates who, when elected, may also approach their positions in different ways.

Contention 2: The features of a form of government employed by a community condition the environment for mediating institutions and determine their presence and robustness.

I argue that political parties, campaigns, and media coverage assist in encouraging a diverse body of candidates to emerge, and thus also aid in fostering a broad spectrum of

mobilization activity. In turn, this mobilization results in a higher likelihood for citizens to turn out in a municipal election, and, consequently, find themselves—in one way or another—to be represented by their local elected officials. These mediating institutions affect who participates.

However, the robustness of these mediating institutions and the allocation of resources is not distributed equally across various systems of local governance; I provide evidence in this dissertation that systems of government such as the representative town meeting, which relies on broad citizen involvement and large numbers of candidates, are less likely to support strong mediating institutions and the devotion of other cost-offsetting resources in relation to their elections due to their relative size and the type of candidates who run in their elections. This leads to levels of participation in these communities that are considerably lower than in comparable communities that use council-style governments—a system of government that does support (and requires) the robust mediating institutions that make broad electoral participation by a representative cross-section of the public not just more inviting, but also more likely. The form of government, therefore, is an important conditioning factor in determining the cost of democratic participation, and as such, the ability for individual citizens to govern themselves, as the consequences of a democratic deficit are especially pronounced on the local level, given local government's more direct ability to affect citizens' daily lives than politics that happen at the national or state level.

Contention 3: Mediating institutions such as political parties, campaigns, and media coverage greatly influence turnout and representation in municipal elections.

Political participation comes at a cost: citizens who are looking to participate need to invest time, devote cognitive resources, and sometimes invest money to satisfy their locality's voting requirements (for instance, by having to acquire photo ID to present at time of voting). Generally speaking, those with more resources at their disposal will therefore be more likely to participate in the political sphere (Verba and Nie 1972b; Verba et al. 1995). However, the resource equation is not necessarily black and white: measures can be taken to offset the costs related to political participation: candidates and the media can play a role in the provision of information so that citizens have to conduct less research on their own, electoral institutions can be designed to be accessible and intuitive with straightforward timing that coincides with national-level elections, and citizens benefit from having visible, competitive candidates that present clear choices (Lupia 1994; Cain 2015; Anzia 2013; Berry and Howell 2007b; Hajnal and Lewis 2003). Off-setting the cost of political participation makes it more likely that individuals with fewer resources at their disposal will participate as well, and this process has been relatively robust in national-level elections (Schaffner et al. 2001; Green and Gerber 2015).

However, the resource debate in local politics is not as settled. Local races—regardless of form of government—are burdened with the stigma that they matter less than national races and as such, fewer resources are allocated to them and mediating institutions such as campaigns and media coverage are far less robust, resulting in lower levels of participation when compared to national elections. Therefore, the role of mediating institutions is especially vital in assuring broad participation and accurate representation.

This project puts into focus once more the notion that citizens will be more likely to participate in politics if they find that they have the resources to do so satisfactorily. In demonstrating how the choice for a form of government, and, speaking more generally, the size of the political class can influence the health of democratic institutions by supporting cost-offsetting mediating institutions, my research continues a conversation about individual participation in politics and the role of the citizen in relation to political institutions that was started by Tocqueville (1848 [1969]) and continued by Schattschneider (1960), Cain (2015), Achen and Bartels (2016), as well as many others.

Research Focus and Design

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is one of few states that offer municipalities the option to choose their own form of government. Broadly speaking, communities have to choose one of three distinct types of government: open town meeting, representative town meeting, or a council form of government. Conducting my research in Massachusetts where this choice exists allows for a comparison that isolates the form of government as the independent variable in a relatively contained environment.¹

Open town meeting is based on the principle of direct popular control, whereas the representative town meeting is a hybrid form of the iconic Athenian form of democracy in which everyone can participate, and a representative democratic government that relies on the use of delegates from the community at large—the latter of which being the principle

¹ To further ensure that my research does not produce spurious results that can be ascribed to variation in different variables, I make use of matched pairs of communities in this research; I will discuss this in greater detail, below.

on which the mayor-city council types of government are based. In Massachusetts, the use of an open town meeting government is restricted to smaller communities with a population of less than 6,000, but larger communities have the option to operate with either a representative town meeting or a mayor-city council style government.

Representative town meetings are often large in size, varying between 100 and 250 representatives on average. They are a regional phenomenon, and can be observed in large parts of New England, including Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut (Bryan 2010). Representative town meetings most often convene twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall. Before the meeting takes place, articles will be placed on the “warrant” for the meeting, and while town meeting is in session, discussion will remain limited to the topics on the warrant. There is no time restriction: town meetings can last just one evening, or, if discussion gets heated, can last for weeks. While the legislative function of government is being performed by the representative town meeting, the executive power is shared between a Board of Selectmen, which is comprised of a number of elected town meeting members who together form the executive committee, and an appointed town manager as the head of operations of the municipality. The Board of Selectmen and the town manager have little to no autonomy, and merely execute the decisions made during the twice-annual town meetings.

City councils are of course a far more common form of government, and can be observed around the United States as well as in other western democracies (ICMA 2011). Compared to their representative town meeting counterparts, city council governments consist of a limited number of representatives. City councils, however, rarely have fewer than five or more than fifteen members. Representatives on a city council form the

community's legislature, with a mayor or a city or town manager acting as the executive. Whether or not the executive is elected varies from community to community, but the elected official in this position acts as the face of the community's government, and works with and reports to the city council in order to keep day-to-day municipal operations running smoothly. Depending on the exact model of government chosen, the executive can have a purely managerial job description, or have a stronger profile granting him more autonomy and flexibility.

While markedly different in execution, both the city council system of government as well as the representative town meeting rely on representation (and thus, necessarily, use elections to determine who gets to serve in a representative capacity) as their mechanism of ensuring the enactment of legislation that reflect the political will of the larger community. In addition, they are both options available to the same type of communities in terms of size and location (municipalities with populations of over 6,000 in Massachusetts). My research will therefore be based on comparative analyses of these two types of communities. In this dissertation, I will examine the consequences of assigning governing responsibility to a large group of citizens as opposed to a smaller group of elected officials.

Design

To determine whether the chosen form of representative government has an impact on electoral behavior and representation I perform a variety of analyses in this dissertation. I discuss the relevant mediating institutions and their resulting impact on political

participation and ultimately, representation. In each of this dissertation's substantive chapters, I analyze data pertaining to five pairs of communities located throughout Massachusetts, each pair consisting of a town with a representative town meeting, and a nearby and comparable community with a council form of government. As discussed above, Massachusetts provides a unique opportunity to conduct this kind of research since it affords localities the choice between different forms of government at will—this makes for an environment in which these forms of government can coexist in otherwise similar communities. The variation in configurations is not imposed by the state, the communities are autonomous in exercising their choice for a form of government. While the decision to change the municipality's form of government is dependent on the political environment within the community and may therefore introduce some inherent selection bias in that something about the political climate may have spurred this transition, I have taken care to account for this potential bias by only including in my sample communities that had similar participation rates in national elections as well as having had stable forms of government; i.e., not having changed forms of government recently.

The wide spectrum of available forms of government has allowed me to select a variety of different types of communities to analyze in detail, while achieving geographic diversity as well. At the same time, this comparison is not colored by any major geographical and/or regional differences that might limit such a comparison if made between municipalities in different parts of the United States.

In making the determination of which towns to analyze I believed it to be important to maintain a certain diversity between the pairs of towns, while making sure that the towns within a single pair would remain comparable. At the same time, given the volume of data

to be collected, I determined it unfeasible to include every single Massachusetts municipality in my comparison within the scope of this dissertation, as that would greatly increase the data collection efforts—this, however, may be feasible in future iterations of this project. Furthermore, I decided it would be most instructive to make individual community-to-community comparisons and avoid making comparisons based on aggregate data as much as possible, as similarities exist primarily within the pairs of communities under analysis. This necessitated imposing a limit on the number of comparison pairings due to the unequal numbers of representative town meeting and council communities.

To address the concerns as outlined above, I used a list generated by Catalist, LLC containing information on every single community in the state of Massachusetts, across a large number of demographic, economic, ideological, as well as geographic variables. Catalist maintains a vast database of individuals in the United States based on voter files appended with commercial and other political data. While Catalist largely markets their services to progressive candidates and organizations, they also provide an academic subscription, which is how I obtained access to the database for the purpose of my research. The Catalist database allows the user to match in their own lists of names to extend the usefulness of the database, which is a feature I rely on heavily in for this project.

Using the data obtained from Catalist, and merging it with data from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts identifying each community's type of government, I used the Coarsened Exact Matching program in Stata to assist me in identifying towns similar to one another based on these criteria. From these groupings that Stata identified, I manually selected the pairs that were the closest across all areas, making sure each pair consisted of one representative town meeting, and one city council government. I ran the

Coarsened Exact Matching program (CEM) for each of five geographic regions available in the dataset, thereby achieving geographic diversity as well. Maintaining five pairs of communities maintains a balance between specificity and diversity and allows for a degree of generalizability of any findings, as different types of communities are included in the comparison. In Table 1, below, I demonstrate the similarity between the paired towns.

Table 1 Similarities Between Town Pairs

<i>Town</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Urban Population</i>	<i>Population over 18</i>	<i>White Population</i>	<i>Black Population</i>	<i>Hispanic Population</i>	<i>Turnout in 2008</i>	<i>Region</i>
Amherst	34,874	95.92%	30,398	80.86%	4.78%	5.43%	41.86%	West
Northampton	28,978	87.80%	24,061	91.05%	2.02%	4.09%	67.75%	West
Gloucester	30,273	93.66%	23,614	97.48%	0.52%	1.24%	64.87%	Shores
Falmouth	32,660	94.91%	25,896	94.17%	1.75%	1.00%	75.20%	Shores
Easthampton	15,994	96.13%	12,612	96.14%	0.56%	1.59%	69.95%	West
South Hadley	17,196	94.49%	13,817	94.12%	1.30%	1.90%	65.25%	West
Weymouth	53,988	100.00%	42,132	95.39%	1.35%	1.11%	65.22%	Central
Chelmsford	33,858	100.00%	25,403	93.71%	0.81%	1.20%	76.14%	Central
Somerville	77,478	100.00%	65,983	79.40%	5.44%	7.63%	49.02%	Boston
Brookline	57,107	100.00%	47,604	82.25%	2.48%	3.33%	57.64%	Boston

Data and Methods

Analyzing the effects of the choice of a system of government and its defining features on public participation and representation lends itself to the use of a combination of quantitative as well as qualitative data. Where a novel use of individual-level quantitative data allows for a comparison and contrasting of electoral behavior among different population groups, the use of qualitative data as obtained through interviews and the analysis of media coverage lends additional depth to the quantitative data obtained, making it possible to identify cause and effect more confidently.

In each of the substantive chapters that follow, I identify the causal pathways to each of the four effects of the choice of form of government that I hypothesize: the differentiation in candidate emergence between the two systems of government under analysis, the different levels of observed mobilization activity, disparities in levels of political participation, and, ultimately, any differences in citizen representation as a result. Relying on theoretical principles applied to national-level politics, I trace the mediating institutions that contribute to individual election turnout. I identify key differences between the two systems of government, and demonstrate how these key differences contribute to the observed variation in outcomes.

Throughout this project, I will be relying on data obtained in and from these communities, supplemented by and matched to data obtained from Catalist about these communities and the entire state of Massachusetts as necessary. Further, Catalist's database contains individual-level observations for the entire American electorate, including detailed voter histories with demographic and commercial data from external vendors appended to each name. The database allows the merging of lists of names with the Catalist dataset, which provides extensive information about these individuals. In addition, I rely on interviews held with elected officials in some of the communities listed above, as well as a collection of media coverage gathered from these towns.

These main data sources all pertain to the 2015 election year. I elected to make the 2015 municipal elections the subject of my analysis since in this year no municipal elections in Massachusetts coincided with any other state or national-level elections that would potentially skew the observed data. I wanted to ensure that I would only observe the effects of a variation in the system of government on participation and representation in

these communities, and therefore avoid including any boosting effects that national or state level elections might have on candidate emergence, mobilization, and participation in these local races, which might lead to spurious conclusions about the relevance and causality of the variation in my independent variable.

Plan of the Project

In Chapter 2, I begin with the first step in the lead-up to any election: the emergence of candidates. The available candidates on the ballot of a given election condition the choices that citizens are able to make. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the institutional features of a system of government, specifically the representative town meeting and the city/town council, can cause different types of candidates to emerge. Specifically, I find evidence that the main difference between the two systems of government is in the opportunity structure it sets up for candidates and officeholders: the way actors within the system can utilize their position to further their own goals. The council form of government allows its elected officials to be more visible and claim ownership of individual issues, and is therefore more suited to candidates that hold ambitions for higher political office. Additionally, officeholders in a council government are more likely to have a strong awareness of their relationship to their constituency. Moreover, I suggest that candidates in city council environments are more likely to be willing to invest significant time and effort in their position. Conversely, the representative town meeting allows for a more casual attitude towards governance as well as the effort required, and is more likely to attract candidates who do not want to be involved in community leadership on a full-time

basis—the opportunity structure simply is not that useful to candidates who do hold grander aspirations. Finally, I demonstrate that the institutional structure of a council government encourages candidates to think about their contributions as a representative in broad terms, whereas the environment of the representative town meeting is more hospitable to single-issue participation.

Chapter 3 focuses on mobilization activity. Addressing a variety of forms in which mobilization might take place, I examine the differences in such activity between the two forms of government under investigation. Mobilization activity is one way in which the mediating institutions can become visible; they play a crucial role in reducing the participation-related costs that voters incur during an election season. The form of government used affects the presence and robustness of mediating institutions in direct and indirect ways: directly, as a result of the size and composition of a given community's legislature, making candidates more or less visible, and affecting the degree to which voters can refer to a given (incumbent) candidate's record or platform in evaluating their voting decision. Media coverage is directly affected by institutional size and composition as well: covering a larger candidate pool is more resource-intensive, and less visible candidates further reduces salience and increases the resources required for adequate coverage. Indirectly, the system of government affects mobilization by setting up candidates' opportunity structure, resulting in the emergence of candidates with more or less political conceptions of the positions they are vying for, as well as by setting up the competitive environment through the use of particular electoral systems that can make campaigning more or less utilitarian. Media outlets are affected indirectly as well: less campaign activity originating with candidates takes away an important origin point for media coverage.

Chapter 4 addresses voter participation in municipal elections, making the leap from mediating institutions to voter turnout. In this chapter, I make the effects of the observed findings from the first two substantive chapters visible by comparing voter turnout in both representative town meetings and council government municipalities. Relying on the logic established in previous analyses of national-level politics, I demonstrate that the presence of mediating institutions has a strong and visible effect on turnout. In addition to the number of individuals turning out to vote, this chapter also investigates *who* turns out to vote. Recalling that resources are unequally distributed among voters, this chapter demonstrates how Downs' resource model of voting and election participation applies to the municipal context, finding that lower turnout numbers are indeed unequally distributed among population groups. Turnout overall is lower in elections for representative town meeting, but those with more resources at their disposal retain a disproportional presence in these communities' electorate.

In Chapter 5, the final substantive chapter of this project, I arrive at a discussion of representation. By analyzing the demographic, socio-economic, as well as ideological (substantive) composition of three discrete groups (the eligible electorate, voters, and representatives) I am able to make inferences about the descriptive and substantive/ideological accuracy of the representation taking place, both descriptively as well as substantively through ideological congruence by relying on Catalist's ideology model. In an ideal situation, where representation is fully realized, demographics, socio-economics, as well as ideological attitudes of the three groups of individuals would seamlessly map onto each other and reveal no differences. While this would be impossible in any institutional configuration, I find important and consistent differences between the

representation taking place in council governments and representative town meetings. The latter provide high-quality representation of voters, whereas in council environments voters and the eligible electorate are represented to a similar extent.

I conclude my research in Chapter 6, reflecting on the influence of the institutional configurations on participation and representation in municipal governments and the lessons that my findings carry for political scientists studying institutions, as well as actors in government charged with institutional design. I also reflect on the broader takeaways that can be drawn from my findings in relation to the size and scope of political environments, and the power of grassroots politics.

Considering the size and nature of political institutions and environments is important as one sets about deciding on using or designing systems of government. The ways in which the use of a form of government can affect mediating institutions that in turn affect participation in ways quantitative as well as qualitative has important consequences for the composition of the municipal ruling class and who it represents. As communities endeavor to find ways to include more individuals in their political conversations and decrease the distance citizens experience between themselves and those who represent them politically, we must be cognizant of the costs our systems of government impose on individuals looking to participate, and the ways in which these systems encourage its actors to offset these costs. Using Massachusetts municipal politics as its case, this project suggests a need to recalibrate our intuitions as to what constitutes a democratic, representative form of government, and what does not.

CHAPTER 2

WHO RUNS?

In most advanced democracies, representatives are the mechanism by which a population's wishes are translated into policy outcomes. By choosing representatives, individual citizens can choose, depending on the institutional configuration, to delegate or mandate a smaller group of individuals to make political decisions on their behalf. While voters decide who will serve as their representatives, it is important to note that voters do not have *unlimited* options when they cast their ballots—their range of options is limited to the candidates who have decided to run for office (Fowler 1993). Those individual, candidate-level decisions set the playing field within which the electorate will exercise its power (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Depending on the roster of candidates the electorate is presented with—which may vary considerably from one election cycle to another—the very same voters may end up with very different representation as the options provided to them limit the range within which they can exercise their discretion (Ehrenhalt 1992).

Since the candidate roster provides the bandwidth within which individuals can exercise their democratic rights, the roster and its creation determine in large part how the electorate will be represented (both substantively as well as descriptively) by their elected officials (Canon et al. 1996). It is therefore important to examine in detail who *runs* for office, who *decides* who runs for office, and how those decisions are made. As such, it is necessary to investigate the decisions that lead up to the final version of a candidate roster being presented to voters. In some cases, candidate emergence can be the result of a party machine recruiting candidates, but alternatively, candidates could also be inspired by career

prospects, a sense of duty, or simply by issues relevant to them as individuals, or to their immediate social network (Rolfe 2012).

In local elections, the issue of candidate emergence becomes even more crucial because these elections usually have lower salience to voters. This lower level of salience, combined with the presence of a group (or groups) of interested, likeminded individuals, can make these races vulnerable to capture by these groups, yielding disproportionately biased representation (Hajnal 2010). Given local politics' proximity to potential candidates' daily lives, social pressure can condition political engagement. Additionally, local politics are prone to "political hobbyism"—participation in political decision-making that is not dictated by civic duty or self-interest, but chiefly by self-gratification (Hersh 2017). Ehrenhalt (1992) suggests that the increasing openness of the U.S. political system has led to an environment in which the supply side of politics, as he calls it, sets the tone: aspiring politicians are limited only by their ambition, unencumbered by any gatekeepers that used to be able to keep candidates from running for office.

Given their low salience, their potential for interest group capture, and the potential of elected officials to significantly impact their neighbors' lives through decisions in the realms of finances, education, and public safety, I am particularly interested in how the local institutional context matters when it comes to candidate emergence. I use a sample of municipalities that use different systems of government with varying degrees of openness to candidacies to establish whether this variation in governmental arrangements leads to different types of candidates running for office—possessing different qualities and intentions—and to see whether there is variation in ambition or motivation to become a candidate.

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that institutional elements such as professionalism and the presence of recruitment activity have a distinct and noticeable impact on *who* decides to run for representative office for local offices in Massachusetts. My study applies previous theories in new ways by illustrating how the relative ease of getting to elective office in representative town meeting paradoxically attracts candidates who are not very representative of the town population. My study raises questions about how the design of democratic institutions affects representativeness. This dynamic, in turn, may affect the democratic legitimacy of the system by defining the choices that voters have (Fox and Lawless 2005; Mansbridge 1999).

Previous Research

Political ambition has long been deemed to be central to legislators' decisions to run for political office, and studies of political candidacy have predominantly focused on ambitious office-seekers who reach their decision to run all on their own. Much of this research focuses on state and national-level politics, and follows a rational actor model, conceiving of the decision to run as a function of the benefits of the office, the probability of winning the race, and the associated costs. In his seminal study of political recruitment, Schlesinger (1966) suggests that,

“The central assumption of ambition theory is that a politician’s behavior is a response to his office goals. Or, to put it another way, the politician as office-seeker engages in political acts and makes decisions appropriate to gaining office (...) It

makes little difference to the theory of ambition whether men adopt the ambitions suitable to the office or attain the office because of their ambitions. It is sufficient to conclude that governors of New York will behave as though they were Presidential candidates while governors of Mississippi or South Dakota will not.”

In his work, Schlesinger attempts to identify the causal mechanism driving a politician’s decision to run for higher office, and examines specifically the ambition of office-seekers and the opportunity structure within which they operate. Based on his observations, Schlesinger finds that those candidates who display a desire to run for higher office, all demonstrate what he calls ‘progressive ambition.’ These candidates continuously evaluate the opportunities that provide the best fit to achieve their political goals, what it would take to get there, and their probability of succeeding in that endeavor.

But how does the concept of political ambition factor into the considerations of local political actors? Black (1972) reframes Schlesinger’s findings as a rigid cost-benefit utility maximization process, casting aside any idealistic motives to run for office as mere fiction, and arguing instead that “almost all American politicians appear somewhat suspect to the public at large” when it comes to their motives to run for office. Black surveyed a number of city council elections of varying size, finding a strong correlation between the size of a community and the strength of a city council candidate’s desire to run for local legislative office.

Building on Schlesinger’s and Black’s work, Rohde (1979) argued that almost all politicians in the U.S. display some form of the progressive ambition that Schlesinger identified, and that the distinguishing quality determining a willingness to run for higher

office was not (a lack of) ambition, but rather an individual politician's willingness to take risks. Further research has demonstrated the importance of candidates' strategic considerations, and the impact that their legislative behavior may have on laying the groundwork for a future decision to run for higher office (Abramson et al. 1987; Brace 1984; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Rohde 1979).

Fowler (1993) emphasizes the role of candidacy in American politics, noting that candidates are necessary instruments for popular control of government. (Conversely, Fowler argues that a lack of candidates would hurt a political environment in its achievement of popular control.) Building on Ehrenhalt's work on the importance of individual politicians in shaping local political landscapes and conversations, Bledsoe (1993) argues that while there is no such thing as an archetypical 'local politician,' there is significant variation in motivation, ambition, and style of governing.

Having found this variation in motivation, ambition, and governing style is one thing, but that leads to the follow-up question of what drives all this variation. For an answer to that question, researchers have turned to investigate the backgrounds and motivations of those individuals who have made the decision to run for office, and of those who considered running for office but reconsidered and dropped out of the pool (Fox and Lawless 2005). This research gives a deeper insight into "past experiences, career goals and perceptions of the accommodations political candidacy requires" (Kazee 1994).

Who emerges as a candidate (and, conversely, who never enters the field) can have important implications for (descriptive and symbolic) representation of minorities and underrepresented groups (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2005). Previous research suggests that distinct sociodemographic groups, such as women (Thomas and Wilcox 2014; Lawless

2004; Mansbridge 1999; Dodson 1998; Thomas 1994), and racial/ethnic minorities (Barreto 2010; McConaughy et al. 2010; Hajnal 2007; Whitby 2007; Banducci et al. 2004; Epstein and O'Halloran 1999; Canon 1999; Kerr and Miller 1997; Carsey 1995; Lieske 1989) have their own distinct motivations and considerations related to running for office, as well as for substantive representation and policy-making beyond the electoral stage (Holman 2014). Potential candidates' partisan identification in relation to incumbent's party affiliation has been shown to be an exceedingly relevant component of a potential candidates' decision to run or drop out of the race as well (Maisel and Stone 1997). Individuals' decisions to run for office are further conditioned by the resources they have at their disposal (Verba et al. 1995), and by the degree to which they enjoy political participation as a way to spend their free time (Dahl 1961; Hersh 2017).

In addition, we need to consider the role of recruitment in the process of candidate emergence. Matthews (1984) has defined the concept of recruitment (on the congressional level) as the study of “who belongs to legislative assemblies, and how they got there” (Matthews 1984, p. 547). In turn, Hibbing (1994) has described the concept of recruitment as the first of three phases of a representative's career—a career that can be defined as limited to one within a particular institution, or to the entire career of a given representative. Whether inter- or intra-institutional, recruitment to a particular position is part of a series of recruitment instances. Since recruitment has often been found to take place within existing party structures, it is somewhat evident that most research has been conducted in areas where party organizations are most robust (Gierzynski 1992; Jewell and Whicker 1994; Shea 1995; Hogan 2001; Buchler and LaRaja 2002). Unless local-level (potential) candidates reach their decision to run for office in a vacuum, it would be likely that some

sort of recruitment mechanism exists, even in those environments that are formally non-partisan. Recent research on the state level demonstrates that party influence, combined with personal ambition, plays an important role in candidates' decision to run (Sanbonmatsu 2006).

This previous research has increased our knowledge about candidate emergence, but it has mostly been focused on candidate-level considerations and variables, with little attention paid to institutional variables. However, some interesting observations have been made by Matthews (1984), finding a relationship between institutional variables such as size, compensation, and the nature of the individuals serving as representatives and by Ehrenhalt (1992) and Bledsoe (1993) who found the decision to run for office to be influenced by several key determinants: the candidate's political ambitions, the presence of incumbents, recruitment (by parties or interest groups), and institutional factors such as legislative professionalism and capacity. More recent research shows that professionalization of state legislatures specifically has had a significant impact on (potential) candidates' career-related considerations in determining whether or not they should run for office (Moncrief 1999). Berry et al. (2000) suggest that the level of legislative professionalization is correlated with the likelihood of incumbents being reelected to office, and thus the strength of the candidate roster and the competitiveness of elections overall.

The existence of the factors mentioned above amount to what I will refer to as the "opportunity structure." The opportunity structure is the environment that a particular institutional configuration sets up, and in which (potential) candidates exist. It includes such factors as opportunities for advancement, legislative professionalization,

compensation, and recruitment/party relations. Depending on the opportunity structure, an individual with a given set of political ambitions or career-related concerns may or may not end up running for office, as holding office in a given opportunity structure may or may not allow them to advance their personal goals. As such, a change in institutional configuration that meaningfully alters the opportunity structure in a community would lead to different individuals deciding to run for office, and, consequently, different types of individuals to be elected to represent these communities. The opportunity structure therefore is the missing link between institutional configuration and individual candidacy considerations.

Theory: The Local Opportunity Structure

How can we generalize about candidates for local government when each candidate for office assessed individually might seem unique, and have very personal motivations for running for elected office? The answer lies in their political environment: the type of person who decides to be a candidate for elected office changes depending on the position they run for—after all, a person who tends to run for the position of city councilor will be very different from a person running for governor.

As noted previously, the institution of the representative town meeting followed from the traditional open town meeting that was the dominant form of local government in the early colonial days of the United States. These town meetings served as the local legislature: introducing articles, voting on them, and appropriating money as they saw fit. Open town meetings were, as the name suggests, open to participation of every member of

the community otherwise eligible to vote (as such, in the early days, participation was limited to white males over the age of 18). This form of government, while still used in a number of small communities in the New England region of the United States, has largely fallen out of favor, and has been replaced with representative forms of government.

While the most dominant form of representative municipal government has been the city council, combined with either an elected mayor or an appointed city or town manager, a hybrid form, which combines elements from both the open town meeting as well as the council form of government, has been in existence in New England. This form of government, called ‘representative town meeting,’ is similar to the open town meeting in the sense that it still relies heavily on participation and deliberation, and is large in size, yet it differs from the original open town meeting in that its membership—like the council form of government—consists of elected representatives.

The system of government employed in a political environment sets up the opportunity structure for representatives. As an example of a large, permeable, and participation-heavy system of government, the New England representative town meeting places different demands on its membership than does the more common institution of city/town council, which is also seen throughout New England communities. Besides placing different demands on elected officials, each system also accommodates to different degrees the interests and demands of the individuals (potentially) occupying these posts. As such, each system of government will make different types of individuals interested and feel compelled to run for office.

Different opportunity structures will lead to different types of candidates running for elected office, and, as a result, different types of officials being elected: ambitious

politicians will seek ambitious career ladders, while individuals without said ambition may just be looking for a hobby—something to occupy their time. For instance, a person with mayoral ambitions will find themselves unfulfilled if they happen to live in a community that uses only a city manager. This person, who undoubtedly has a certain level of political ambition, will be unlikely to run for a post on a local commission instead, because such a post does not align with their political career-related objectives: the position does not afford them the prestige, the name recognition, and the clout necessary to in time campaign for higher office. Ambitious politicians are a special breed: their ambition is not defined by their background, or by the color of their skin, but by an innate sense of attraction to positions that will help them achieve their professional goals; in the local context, a city councillorship will allow them to do so. Conversely, someone motivated solely by civic duty or self-interest will be less likely to want to stage a high-profile campaign to run for mayor or city councilor—those posts do not align with their motivations to become involved in municipal government. In representative town meetings, therefore, the individuals who end up serving can be characterized by that lack of progressive ambition, and by a surplus of time and other resources that allow them to serve. This residual group is inherently unrepresentative of the rest of the municipal population.

Who runs for office is an important question to consider, because the roster of candidates and the representatives elected to office condition the space in which legislative decisions are being made. For instance, if candidates for town meeting positions are overwhelmingly white and old, this homogenous composition of the candidate roster will most likely have a negative impact on the representation of the interests of minorities and students. Likewise, a city council dominated by real estate developers might be likely to

disproportionally favor development over historical conservation (Bowen and Clark 2014; Whitby 2007).

Expectations

The decision to adopt a particular system of government is one that can have many different consequences; consequences both immediately anticipated as well as those that may be less expected. While this dissertation overall aims to demonstrate that the choice for particular system of government will affect levels of citizen participation as well as representation, it is important to consider what intermediary factors feed into these differences in outcome. The nature of candidates and representatives is one very important piece of this puzzle.

To this end, this chapter presents an in-depth look into the individuals that run for office and are elected to hold legislative positions in local representative government. As regular citizens, individuals balance their ambitions, their interests, the resources at their disposal, and their civic mindedness as they decide whether or not to run for elected office. As candidates, this weighing of resources and ambitions continues, and, if elected, as representatives, each of these elected individuals are in a position to decide how they execute their elected office: how much time and effort they are going to devote to their office, and for what reason?

In this chapter, I hypothesize that the system of government in which individuals come to a conclusion about running for office and getting elected to hold representative office sets the opportunity structure I have discussed above. The opportunity structure

shapes not only the requirements for the position, but also the demands it places on an individual's time, as well as the degree to which a position in a given opportunity structure can serve as a launching pad for a future political career.

1. I expect that in an environment with a city or town council, there will be more diversity among elected officials as measured by their demographics and socio-economic factors. While the institutional structure of representative town meeting government presents few barriers to candidacy for office, there is a very specific incentivizing structure in which name recognition and social connectedness is crucial to a successful bid. In addition, a lack of communication about the business of town meeting may present a burden for first-time candidates, unless they possess alternative means to overcome said information deficit. Finally, since town meeting members aren't compensated for their time, I expect individuals of modest means to be less likely to serve on town meeting.
2. I expect that representative town meetings will be professionalized to a lesser degree than comparable city or town councils, as measured by time commitment, remuneration, and preparation for a career on a higher political level. Representative town meetings meet at least once, and sometimes two times a year. While the meetings last for as long as it takes for the Meeting to conduct its business, the brunt of the work for its membership is concentrated in one or two weeks per year—though during town meeting sessions, a significant time commitment is expected. Town meeting members are not compensated for their time. In contrast, council governments operate on a regular schedule, its members

are compensated, and governance takes place according to principles and procedures that are similar to those used on other levels of government. As such, I expect that council members take a more structured approach to their position as an elected official, and to take on more (representative) tasks.

3. I expect that in communities with city or town councils more recruitment activity for elected positions takes place by or through organizations, or parties; conversely, I expect representatives in town meeting communities to be predominantly motivated by personal concerns in their decision to become a candidate for office. While in Massachusetts both institutional environments are necessarily non-partisan, I expect a higher level of strategic behavior in council environments on behalf of parties and interest groups. First of all, there is a greater incentive for parties to join the fray, as there are fewer positions to allocate and the payoff of having a party member occupy a council position is greater than the payoff of having a party member on town meeting. (Logistically, this support is easier to operationalize as well, due to the smaller size of a council versus representative town meeting). Partisan or organizational support may result in candidates that have stronger, more ideological profiles, as well as candidates with more clearly defined and more readily accessible electoral platforms.
4. I expect that in an environment with a representative town meeting, elected officials will be less likely to be oriented on a political career beyond the municipal realm than in communities that have city or town councils. Operating in a city council allows a representative to create a public profile, demonstrate effective (and distinguishing) performance, as well as a record of being held accountable by an

electorate. As such, the council environment is a more political environment, in which officials can establish a record as a public servant. This is not impossible but more difficult in town meeting environments, where representatives have many more colleagues to compete with for electoral attention. Additionally, in a body of between 70 and 240 representatives it is more difficult to establish a definitive record of political performance which could be used in subsequent campaigns for higher office.

Data and Research Design

To establish whether the chosen form of representative government has any bearing on the nature of the candidates elected to representative office, I analyze demographics and socio-economic properties of representatives across my five pairs of communities in Massachusetts where, as stated, each pair consists of a town with a representative town meeting, and a community with a city council government.

In addition, I have conducted interviews with elected representatives in one such town meeting-city council pairing (Amherst-Northampton) to gain an understanding of these representatives' considerations with regards to their candidacies, their work as elected officials, and their thoughts about their future careers as political officeholders.

In the first prong of this chapter, I focus on descriptive, quantitative information about officeholders. For the analyses I conduct in this first prong, I rely heavily on data obtained from Catalist to gain an understanding of descriptive demographic and socio-economic properties of individuals; in the case of this chapter, I use the Catalist data to

create profiles each community's representative population. In addition, I use local ballot and membership data to establish competitiveness and incumbency.

In the first analysis of this chapter, I compare differences on a number of key demographic, political, and socioeconomic variables between the representatives in on the one hand, representative town meetings, and on the other hand, council environments, all using the Catalist data mentioned above. This will give an indication of systematic differences between those serving as town meeting members, and those individuals serving as councilors in their respective communities. I expect that the analysis will reveal a representative population that is more homogenous in town meeting municipalities than their counterparts in council communities.

For the second analysis, I redirect my focus to incumbency, turnover, and competitiveness of local elections in the five town pairs that are the subject of this project. For this part of the chapter, I rely on ballot, election result, and meeting/council membership data from the 10 communities under investigation, as obtained from each community's clerk's office. As I do throughout this project, I use the 2015 election data as a baseline; I use information about the election prior to that² to draw conclusions about incumbency and turnover.³

The descriptive data analysis mentioned above does not address the qualitative motivations and decision-making processes individuals encounter throughout the process of deciding to run for office, any campaign activity, and the way in which elected

² In town meeting communities, elections are held annually, thus the prior election I reference is the election of 2014; in council communities, elections are held biannually, and as such I rely on information from election year 2013 for these communities.

³ In future iterations of this research, I intend to expand the timeline of this analysis, and come to a full, longer-term longitudinal analysis of turnover and incumbency in these two types of communities.

officeholders conceive of their tasks as representatives. This information is necessary, however, to determine whether or not any descriptive differences between types of officeholders do in fact result in substantive differences.

Therefore, the second prong of this chapter will feature a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with three representative town meeting members of the town of Amherst, MA, and three city council members in the city of Northampton, MA. This within-pair comparison will provide insight into the considerations, challenges, and operational practices of individual representatives in both systems. This information alone is of substantive value, but the between-systems comparison of representatives' responses can provide insight in how these representatives experience the influence of their institutional contexts, which in turn allows for a determination as to whether any descriptive differences revealed in the first set of this chapter's analysis manifest themselves as qualitative differences as well—qualitative differences that have a causal relationship to the differential institutional context.

Interview candidates were selected at random, after which I contacted the selected candidates and requested their participation. Once I had received responses from three officials in each community, I scheduled interviews with them. Interviews were conducted in a structured manner, in which each subject answered the same set of pre-determined questions.

Variables

Throughout this dissertation, the system of government is used as the independent variable, and this chapter is no exception. In the context of this research project, I am focused on the differences between representative town meeting government on the one side, and city council government on the other.

This chapter's overarching dependent variable is the concept of the "type of the candidate/representatives." After all, I hypothesize that the independent variable, the system of government, causes different *types* of individuals to emerge in the position of elected officials. The two types of representatives that I distinguish are "professionally oriented representatives" on the one hand, and "hobbyism-oriented representatives" on the other, in which professionally-oriented representatives express a desire for an enduring political career, and in which hobbyism-oriented representatives assume their positions more so from a perspective of self-gratification (Hersh 2017).

In determining which type of representative emerges in which system, I rely in part on the descriptive Catalist data mentioned above, which allows for determinations about socio-economic, socio-political, and demographic variables. To complete the typology of representatives I rely on the qualitative interview data I discussed previously in an effort to categorize the systems of government under investigation by the type of "opportunity structure" they provide. The opportunity structure consists of the degree to which a municipal legislature is professionalized as evidenced by the time requirements imposed on representatives, whether or not representatives are compensated, and whether or not the position allows representatives to make a name for themselves in a way that can be leveraged for the purpose of developing a distinct, possibly upward, career trajectory; i.e.,

can they take ownership of certain accomplishments or identify with particular issues in ways that allow for building a political platform.

Results

Quite possibly the starkest property of representative town meeting government is the age of its membership. While advocates for this form of government often tout how easy it is for a diverse population of individuals to join town meeting, these representative bodies have a tendency to end up looking quite homogenous in terms of the age of its population. While political scientists have often remarked that those who are more generously endowed with resources are more likely to run for office, the size of the difference—combined with the observed homogeneity—as compared between the five pairs of towns under investigation is remarkable, especially taken into account the fact that the primary difference between these communities is their system of government. Their demographics, their socio-economics, and political activity otherwise are not qualities that set these paired communities apart from each other. As such, an age difference of approximately 10 years between town meeting representatives on the one hand, and city council members on the other, stands out (see Table 2 below).

This age difference has several different implications. First of all, the advanced age of town meeting members implies that few members intend to parlay their town meeting membership into a career for higher office. Secondly, the age difference is reflective of another, intuitive notion: town meeting members, when asked “how much time [they] spend on their town meeting work” respond that to be fully engaged during town meeting

sessions, they can spend “upwards of 30 hours” on meeting preparation, in addition to several (3 to 4) nights over a two to three-week period from 7:00-10:30 p.m. to attend the actual sessions that compose the town meeting. While concentrated into one or two these legislative meetings, full engagement with the process places a high burden on participants’ time. This (irregular and non-routine) time burden makes it difficult for younger individuals to serve on town meeting, as they often have families or have careers that require them to be at their workplace while town meeting is in session, precluding them from (fully) participating without incurring the additional cost of taking time off. While councilors are quoted to spend at least 20 to 30 hours a week on their position while the council is in session between attending (bi-weekly) council meetings, committee meetings, and constituent contact, participants noted that they “settled into a routine” that “made it possible to plan around.” Whereas most councilors found that it was possible to combine their service on the council with a full-time job, one councilor indicated that she sacrificed her professional career to combine full participation in council business with being available to raise her children.

Table 2 Median Age of Representatives in Massachusetts Communities

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Median Age</i>
Northampton	CC	58
Amherst	RTM	63
Gloucester	CC	44.5
Falmouth	RTM	64
Easthampton	CC	51
South Hadley	RTM	64.5
Weymouth	CC	52
Chelmsford	RTM	60
Somerville	CC	57.5
Brookline	RTM	60

Furthermore, members of representative town meetings tend to predominantly be long-term members of their communities to a higher degree than their counterparts in city and town councils (and this follows from the previous observation that town meeting members tend to be older than members of city councils). While politics is no-doubt an insider sport in both types of communities to some extent, the representative town meeting, while intuitively more permeable, appears to encourage less “outsider” participation. Though it is easy to take out papers and there is a higher availability of positions to run for (between 70 and 240, depending on the community), the representative town meeting communities’ lack of party and interest group organization combined with a general dearth of information about available positions, elections, and campaigns generally speaking, makes conditions favorable to those who can benefit from strong, pre-existing ties to the community. By having a certain amount of name recognition and good contact with neighboring residents, a resident can increase their chances of getting elected in absence of the opportunity to establish a visible political platform. As such, in the absence of visible political campaigns, long-term residents with well-established social networks in the community are at an advantage, as they are able to both actively mobilize people through their established contacts in an effort to attract votes, as well as rely on their name recognition, garnering votes from individuals who know their name from previous encounters in the community.

Table 3 Length of Residence of Representatives in Representative Town Meeting and City Council Communities, 2015

Town	Government	Unknown	<1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	10-20 years	>20 years
Northampton	CC	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	22.22%	11.11%	55.56%
Amherst	RTM	3.85%	2.14%	13.25%	10.68%	27.78%	42.31%
Gloucester	CC	0.00%	11.11%	22.22%	11.11%	22.22%	33.33%
Falmouth	RTM	0.90%	1.35%	4.05%	19.82%	18.47%	55.41%
Easthampton	CC	0.00%	12.50%	12.50%	25.00%	25.00%	25.00%
South Hadley	RTM	2.75%	2.75%	7.34%	17.43%	12.84%	56.88%
Weymouth	CC	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%	72.73%	18.18%
Chelmsford	RTM	4.48%	0.00%	6.72%	8.21%	17.16%	63.43%
Somerville	CC	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	36.36%	18.18%	36.36%
Brookline	RTM	6.58%	3.95%	7.89%	14.47%	21.05%	46.05%

Another interesting observation is with regards to household income. Members of town meeting in the five town pairs under investigation on average have household incomes that are \$5,900 per year higher than their counterparts who serve on city councils (see Table 4, below). At first glance, this is an intuitive observation given the above-mentioned observations about the resource-intensiveness of full town meeting participation. Following this notion, those with more resources at their disposal should have an easier time allocating the time and other resources required to fully participate in town meeting government.

While an average difference of \$5,900 per year is sizable, this number obfuscates some wild swings from community to community. As can be seen in the table below, the average income of Northampton and Easthampton city councilors is higher than that of their town meeting counterparts in Amherst and South Hadley, respectively. Therefore, the average income difference is not a consistent one; there is simply too much variation to draw any definitive conclusions.

However, even with that (major) caveat taken into account, it is imperative to take a closer look at this income difference, and note that this difference is artificially attenuated

by two factors, both causing the actual difference being much larger than perceived initially. First of all, given town meeting members' more advanced age, they are much more likely to be retired from the workforce than their councilor counterparts; their status as retirees would have a negative impact on their household income. This might explain some of the swings in the income difference between the community pairs, but it is remarkable that despite this negative impact, the median household income of town meeting members is still, on average, higher than that of council representatives.

Secondly, town meeting members without exception are not compensated for their efforts, while city and town councilors are, though to a modest extent—exact figures as obtained from the respective municipal clerks' offices can be seen in Table 4, below. Representatives' income figures as included in the table below therefore include this (lack of) compensation. Despite said compensation, councilors' household wages are still lower than that of their older, often-retired, town meeting counterparts. When taking the compensation into account and subtracting those numbers from the initial income figures, a more drastic income difference between town meeting and council representatives begins to appear; where initially, I found the average difference to be \$5,900, after taking the councilors' compensation figures into account, that difference grows to \$17,200.

Town meeting members unanimously indicated that while they believed town meeting imposed a significant time commitment, they should not be compensated for their work—all of them regarded their membership as an act of civic voluntarism. The Northampton councilmembers I interviewed, on the other hand, each indicated that in their opinion, they were not compensated adequately, in spite of their compensation having been doubled from \$4,500 to \$9,000 in recent years. The councilmembers were quick to note

that they all regarded any further raises to be impossible to achieve in the current political climate, even though they believed such a raise to be justified based on the amount of time and effort they put into their positions.

Table 4 Median Income of Representatives in Representative Town Meeting and City Council Communities, 2015

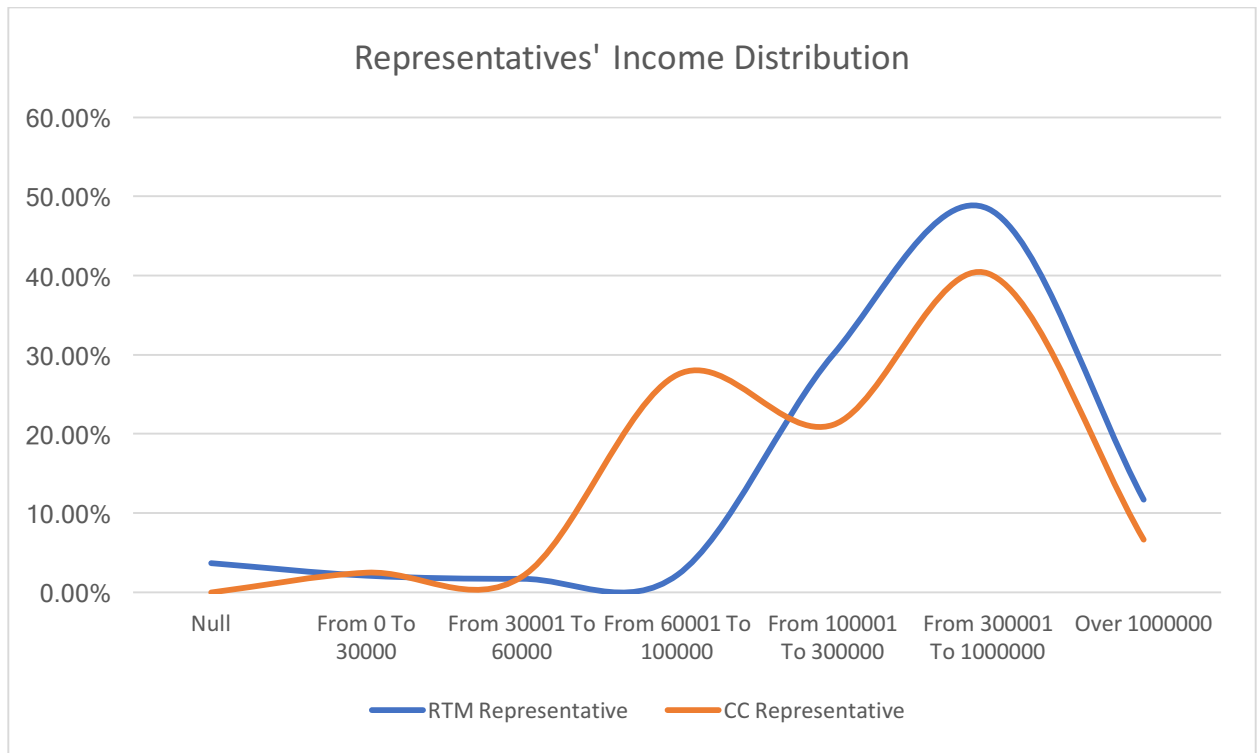
<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Median Household Income</i>	<i>Compensation</i>	<i>Adjusted Median Income</i>
Northampton	CC	\$ 55,000	\$ 9,000	\$ 46,000
Amherst	RTM	\$ 44,000	\$ 0	\$ 44,000
Gloucester	CC	\$ 51,000	\$ 11,500	\$ 39,500
Falmouth	RTM	\$ 67,000	\$ 0	\$ 67,000
Easthampton	CC	\$ 75,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 72,000
South Hadley	RTM	\$ 62,000	\$ 0	\$ 62,000
Weymouth	CC	\$ 76,000	\$ 7,500	\$ 68,500
Chelmsford	RTM	\$ 82,500	\$ 0	\$ 82,500
Somerville	CC	\$ 71,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 46,000
Brookline	RTM	\$ 102,000	\$ 0	\$ 102,000
Difference:			\$ 5,900	\$ 17,200

Since the household income figure proved somewhat inconclusive, I decided also examine representatives' personal wealth. Instead of focusing on what individuals take home in compensation annually, this information serves to assess the size of an individual's total assets, which includes household income, but also real estate holdings, stocks, bonds, et cetera. The distribution of the membership across wealth categories reveals compelling differences, as can be seen below in Figure 1.

From Figure 1, below, it becomes clear that in town meeting environments, individuals who fall in the higher wealth categories (\$100,000-\$300,000 and \$300,000-\$1 million) have a substantially stronger presence on these representative bodies. In city council environments, in contrast, we see a much more prevalent population of individuals in a middling wealth category (\$60,000-\$100,000) as serving on city councils. This presents another indication of a more immediate ability for lower-resourced individuals to

be able to not only run for, but also serve on city councils; whereas members of that same lower wealth category may find it harder to do so in town meeting communities, despite the overall lower threshold to take out papers and become a candidate.

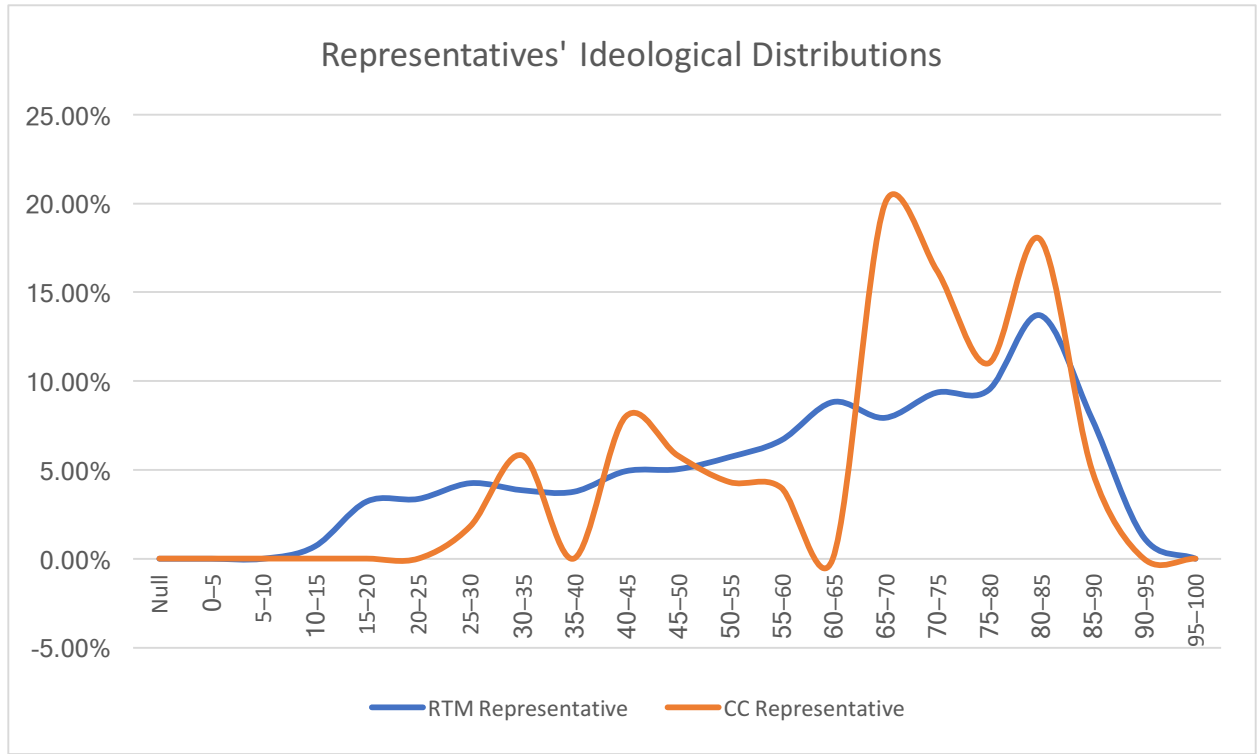
Figure 1 Representative Town Meeting and City Council Representatives' Income Distribution, 2015



Another interesting difference surfaces when examining ideology and partisanship of representatives in both systems, especially when observing the distribution of representatives' ideologies (see Figure 2, below). When looking at the medians of the ideology distributions, not much of a difference can be observed between both systems of government; however, when taking a look at the distribution of representative ideologies, it becomes clear that this distribution in council communities is more skewed towards either the right side or the left side of the ideological spectrum, whereas representatives in town meeting communities are much more clustered together around the same values.

This difference in distribution reflects a political reality. In a system of government where fewer actors run, and where individual candidates have to stage campaigns to get elected, having an easily distinguishable political platform is an asset and a necessity (more on this in a subsequent chapter). That is, it becomes necessary for candidates to distinguish themselves from one another, which in turn is something that can be accomplished by staking out clear ideological positions on either side of the political spectrum. Doing so will make it easier for voters with limited familiarity with the candidate to make a decision about (not) voting for them; not taking a strong ideological stance will make it more difficult to run a successful campaign. Since campaigns are rarely, if ever, used in representative town meeting environments, this necessity to develop an ideological profile that would otherwise exist, is obviated—which would thus explain the relative lack of ideological polarization in town meeting communities.

Figure 2 Representative Town Meeting and City Council Representatives' Ideological Distributions (Data from Catalyst, 2015)



Why Run? Competition, Turnover, Incumbency and the Opportunity Structure

The data discussed above explain, to an extent, who was successful in running, and what they look like demographically, socio-economically, as well as ideologically. What the data does not explain, is why these individuals chose to run for office. This second prong of the chapter will serve to do so by providing data about electoral competition, turnover, and incumbency, as well as evidence of progressive ambition of individual representatives. In addition to quantitative data, I will rely on interviews with members of the Northampton City Council as well as Amherst Town Meeting members, who were asked a battery of questions concerning their motivations to run, their engagement with

their position, and their future (political) career plans. The data combined with the interviews will shed more light on the opportunity structure as it exists in both types of communities.

Why do people tend to run for town meeting, and why do people run for city council? From the interviews I conducted, it became clear that all parties interviewed are motivated, to a degree, by self-interest, and a desire to contribute to the wellbeing of their community to some extent. From the interviews I conducted with town meeting members, a common thread appeared throughout when it concerned their motivations to join: two members indicated that they entered the race “because of the schools” and “because of the closing of [a school]” (i.e., a single-issue motivation) and another town meeting member cited “zoning and development issues affecting [my] business in the downtown area” as their primary reason for running for town meeting (i.e., a self-interested reason). One town meeting member indicated that “there was no negative consequence to running,” which made their town meeting membership sound less like a passion project and more like a decent way to spend their time. With motivations being so deeply personal and not motivated by broader considerations, it was hardly surprising that these members indicated that they would cease running for reelection if “[their issue was] no longer relevant” or if “[they] were not interested anymore.” One of the town meeting members had prior experience serving in an elected position (on the Amherst School Committee), but the other members I interviewed had no prior political experience, professionally or otherwise. For them, serving on town meeting was their first foray into politics.

What is interesting, is that two of the three town meeting members interviewed mentioned having been recruited to do so by acquaintances. One member was recruited by

an ad-hoc, informal group they referred to as “the rationalists”, whose primary concern was the schools and establishing greater influence of parents on town meeting.” The other member that mentioned recruitment indicated that they were a part of the recruitment efforts (possibly of the same group as mentioned above), and that this group organized a slate of candidates across different precincts; this member indicated having been “asked to run for town meeting” along with a number of like-minded individuals after having served on the Amherst School Committee where they had “demonstrated commitment” to the issue of schools in Amherst.

Northampton city councilors provided different answers when asked about their motivations to run for office. One Northampton councilor whom I interviewed recalled a particularly contentious race in which they ran against a candidate from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, and where an electoral victory required speaking to their constituency on a wide variety of issues in addition to the zoning issue that initially sparked their interest in municipal politics; they found this interest complementary to their professional experience in issue activism and running issue-based campaigns. Asked about their motivation to run for city council, another councilor noted that they, “really loved campaigning” and that they ran for office out of a previous affinity with political activism, having served on several presidential campaigns prior and having established themselves as a campaign consultant before having moved to Northampton. This councilor stressed that they felt their decision to run for office was “a natural extension of [those] interests.” Their previous engagement with the Democratic Town Committee was helpful in establishing a network of willing supporters, however; though this councilor was not ready to acknowledge that that constituted organized recruitment efforts by said party committee.

A third councilor noted that their decision to run for city councilor was born out of their previous activity on a neighborhood council group, and that their decision to try for a position on city council was related to a desire to provide a voice for their neighborhood's interest on a citywide level, but also that he was approached by several existing councilors to gage his interest. This councilor in particular stressed the importance of being embedded in existing political networks, in order to have the necessary support for a successful campaign. The councilor did not characterize his interactions with these party and interest groups as recruitment activity, however.

None of the councilors interviewed indicated being motivated by a single issue, and all of them had previous professional experience with activities relevant to the running of a political campaign, or establishing a political platform and/or strategy. When asked about the position of their councillorship vis-à-vis their political career and broader political ambitions (if any), the councilors interviewed provided evidence of a more sustained interest in serving on the city council. All three see tremendous value in the work they do, and are, as mentioned above, motivated by broader concerns in the community. When asked about the most important issues facing their community, responses were varied: councilors answered, "surveillance cameras" to "treatment of marginalized individuals," and "refugees and taking a stand against DACA"; all of them being community-wide, broad, and overarching issues that extend beyond simple constituent service or self-serving interests. While none of the councilors I interviewed had any immediate ambitions for higher office, all of them recognized that several of their colleagues had made the leap from their city councillorship to higher office: they noted that the current mayor of Northampton used to be a city councilor, and that one individual currently serving on the council is

running for statewide political office and is leveraging their political experience in Northampton in doing so.

In summary, town meeting representatives I interviewed in Amherst expressed a variety of motivations, but none of those motivations were related to political careers or gave evidence of a professional approach to politics. Their motivations were particular: either very personal, or driven by a single issue. In contrast, the Northampton councilors I spoke to revealed broader motivations that spoke to larger concerns about the community, or a passion and/or affinity with politics or activism writ large.

Engagement and professionalism

None of the interviewed town meeting members indicated that they feel a particular responsibility to an electorate, or expressed that they felt their position on town meeting was relevant to an ambition to run for higher political office. One town meeting member, when asked, stated that “town meeting [did not] provide enough opportunity for visibility” or to “have ownership of particular issues” which they felt would be required in establishing a successful path towards higher political office. This same town meeting member indicated that “a town-wide elected position” would be “more helpful” in establishing the political platform required for elections for another office, and that their service on town meeting was not something they undertook with higher office in mind. All town meeting representatives interviewed noted an absence of constituent communication; one member noted that they would sometimes “talk to [a] neighbor[s] while walking [their] dog” and another explained that they “[would] respond to emails when [they] received

them” but none of the members interviewed made mention of consistent constituent outreach and communication about the positions they occupied while town meeting was in session. As such, all town meeting members I spoke to indicated that, when asked, their decisions to occupy certain positions during a session of town meeting were predominantly motivated by their own considerations and beliefs, not by a sense of responsibility to their constituency or influenced by deliberations during a session of town meeting. One town meeting member did note that they placed specific stock “in the opinions of town administrators” as they tried to make up their mind about voting on a specific issue, thereby substituting their own lack of expertise on a particular topic with the knowledge from those who deal with such issues on a more frequent basis. In addition, one of the town meeting members even went so far as to say that “they mostly followed their intuition” when it came to voting, while another member said that “no meaningful deliberation takes place during town meeting” and that they believed “most members have already made up their minds before entering the room.”

When it comes to concrete engagement with their position, the town meeting members I interviewed noted that they spend between 20 and 30 hours per week on town meeting business, while town meeting is in session—which may be once or twice a year, for up to two weeks at a time.⁴ Since no town meeting members mentioned spending any significant time on constituent outreach or other service in their capacity as town meeting member, I asked them what they spend these 20 to 30 hours a week on. From their answers,

⁴ The length of a town meeting depends on how quickly deliberations proceed, and thus, how much time Town Meeting takes to address all the issues on its warrant, which serves as the agenda. Town Meeting will take as many sessions as it needs to finish discussing all warrant articles, and therefore, some meetings may take two weeks, whereas others can be finished in two or three sessions. It all depends on how many articles have been put on the warrant prior to Town Meeting being opened.

it becomes clear that a lot of time is spent on actually attending the town meeting sessions, and that the rest of the time is spent on “preparation” which primarily consists of “reading” and, as one town meeting member noted, “talking to town employees” to “ask them for more information.”

All this stands in stark contrast to the answers that the Northampton city council members provided during their interviews. All of them provided extensive evidence of *constituent communications*, be it through precinct-wide email lists, a consistent use of social media, or the use of regularly scheduled coffee hours at a local coffee shop where constituents can drop in to ask questions or give feedback. One councilor noted that not all forms of outreach were equally as effective, explaining that they found social media (and Facebook in particular) very useful, but that the coffee hours they hosted were often not very well-attended. Another councilor found impressive residual effects of the calling cards they handed out during their campaign for office, which included the councilor’s phone number. This councilor indicated that they regularly received calls from constituents and while often about “simple annoyances,” the councilor found this to be a helpful way to establish trust and dialogue with their constituency. These better relationships with their constituents also surfaced when I asked the councilors about their decision-making process. While only one councilor said that they provided their neighborhood’s perspective on the issues at hand, despite their own personal opinions—and thus acting as if they were a delegate—the other two councilors I interviewed saw their position as being based on a mandate from their constituents. One of them expressly indicated that they “represent the progressives from my precinct,” making no express effort to give a voice to more conservative views from their district during city council meetings, whereas the other

councilor interviewed recognized a diversity of views among their constituents, and taking careful steps to navigate those differences while also noting that they believed they “[were] elected for their ability to apply common sense.” This councilor indicated they would “pre-emptively reach out to constituents to solicit opinions” and “provide explanations” about their own positions to “acknowledge to [constituents] that [they] had ‘heard’ them.” In coming to their decisions, two councilors specifically mentioned conducting “a lot of research” as they made up their minds, and spending considerable amounts of time on doing so. In addition, all councilors noted their participation in committee meetings as helpful in figuring out the nitty-gritty details of important issues.

By spending considerable amounts of time on meeting preparation, attendance, and constituent service, a picture of a somewhat *professionalized* council environment begins to appear. There is clear structure: issues get discussed in committee meetings before being put on the council’s agenda, and after doing so, the council votes on issues not once, but twice, in an effort to thwart any possible capriciousness. What is interesting is the influence of compensation on this professionalized structure: based on the responses I received to my interview questions, it appears that the compensation has an empowering effect, in that it both underlines the seriousness of the position, as well as providing a (sometimes minimal) financial justification to spend a certain amount of time on the work required. While I do not believe any councilors perform this work for the compensation, I do believe they appreciate it as a recognition of their dedication.

Altogether, a very different picture of professionalism begins to appear when comparing representative town meetings to city councils. Not only (as I discussed above) do both systems of government differ dramatically when it comes to compensation

(councilors are compensated whereas town meeting members are not) and time commitment (councilors spend considerable time on their position every week, whereas all of town meeting members' substantial efforts are concentrated in approximately two weeks of service per year), but members of each legislative body conceive very differently of their positions as well. Town meeting members do spend a lot of time on their service, but it appears that most of the time spent goes into discrete preparations for the annual town meeting: reading documents, doing their own research, and gathering information. Council service extends far beyond the person of the individual councilor, with councilors serving on committees or attending their meetings, performing constituent outreach and service, and attending (biweekly) council meetings and preparing for those. There is a real structure and a routine to the position of city councilor, which makes the position both easier to take on (because a candidate knows, going in, what is expected of them) as well as more difficult (because more sustained effort is required). There is a payoff for exemplary performance, however, in the sense that a successful councilor may be able to successfully parlay their service into a successful run for higher political office. (More on that later.)

Competition, turnover, incumbency

By examining electoral competition, position turnover, and incumbency it is possible to make a determination with regards to the permeability of a political environment. Do individuals compete for seats on their municipal legislature, or does a mere candidacy guarantee a position in municipal office? Is there regular turnover, or do positions tend to stay in the same hands for longer periods of time? And if new individuals

get elected to positions, what is their impact on the overall composition of the legislative body?

In assessing competition, turnover, and incumbency, I rely on information from two subsequent election cycles: 2014 and 2015 for town meeting elections (since those races happen annually), and 2013 and 2015 for council elections (those elections take place biannually) in the five town pairs under investigation throughout this dissertation. Using ballot and membership roster information, I come to a determination of which individuals entered the race for the first time in 2015, who held on to their seat as an incumbent, and which (if any) districts/positions in the respective elections were competitive. Additionally, this information facilitates a determination of what percentage of both the seats up for reelection as well as of the total representative body changed hands. It is this last bit of information that lends some additional meaning to the absolute numbers. After all, because of the larger size of the representative body in town meeting communities, more turnover is expected just by virtue of the number of positions up for reelection each year, though the amount of turnover may not actually change the total makeup of the representative body in a meaningful way.⁵ Turnover of elected official becomes more meaningful the larger the proportion of position changing hands is relative to the total size of the representative body.

Examining the data in Table 5, below, there are few consistent trends to observe in the dependent variables relative to the independent variable of system of government.

⁵ An example to illustrate this issue: in the town of Amherst, MA, 80 3-year town meeting positions are up for election every year (for a total of 240 positions). With 10 districts, 8 of each district's 24 members are up for grabs at every election. If half of those positions change hands, town meeting will see 40 new elected members join their ranks, which works out to a turnover rate of 16.67%. In comparison, a similar degree of turnover in a 9-member city council (such as the one in Northampton, MA) would entail a turnover of 1.5 elected positions.

Based on this data—which is admittedly limited in scope, given that it covers change from just one election cycle to the next—there appears to be no *consistent* relationship between electoral competition and the system of government adopted, though with the exception of the Gloucester-Falmouth pairing, representative town meeting elections do tend to have larger numbers of competitive districts/position than their council counterparts. This is intuitive, however: running for elected office in a council environment presents a higher threshold and requires more effort and planning on behalf of the would-be candidate, since running a campaign is a necessity. Winning a race in a competitive town meeting district requires fewer votes, as turnout tends to be lower (see the chapter on turnout later in this volume); since more votes are needed to win an election for a council position, a candidate needs a supportive base that extends beyond their immediate neighbors and members of their social network. Furthermore, all Northampton councilors I interviewed as part of this project indicated that their position requires a routine investment of time and resources—a year-round commitment. Throughout their interviews, Amherst Town Meeting members cited a need for significant time investments while town meeting is in session, but they conceded that serving on town meeting is a commitment with a limited scope. One member said their service “felt like a limited position”, while another described their service as “not really political” and that “representation is not [my] primary concern”—despite it bearing the moniker of “representative town meeting.”

Based on that same logic, where the more modest structural requirements and lower turnout present a lower threshold for running for elected office in town meeting communities, it makes sense that there is consistently more turnover of positions in town meeting environments, relative to the number of positions up for grabs. As mentioned

above, there is a low entrance barrier to candidacy for a town meeting position, but the barrier to exit is equally low as well. As discussed previously in this chapter, town meeting positions are not very visible nor do individual representatives hold much power, making for weaker incentives to stick around for multiple years at a time, beyond being motivated by a sense of civic volunteerism. In addition, the lack of individual visibility as well as the ability to claim individual issue ownership make it somewhat more difficult to parlay a position on town meeting into a successful run for higher office; the structure of town meeting does not allow for representatives to establish much of a legislative record on which they can run in the future.

Table 5 Competition and Turnover in Massachusetts Municipal Races, 2015

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Comp. Races</i>	<i>Absolute #</i>	<i>Turnover of Elected Officials</i>	
				<i>As % of total positions</i>	<i>As % of positions up for election</i>
Northampton	CC	1 of 9	1 of 9	11%	11%
Amherst	RTM	5 of 10	33 of 240	13.75%	41%
Gloucester	CC	4 of 9	4 of 9	44%	44%
Falmouth	RTM	3 of 9	54 of 242	22.3%	66.67%
Easthampton	CC	1 of 9	3 of 9	33%	22% ⁶
South Hadley	RTM	0 of 5	13 of 120	10.83%	32.5%
Weymouth	CC	1 of 11	0 of 11	0%	0%
Chelmsford	RTM	2 of 9	20 of 162	12.35%	37.03%
Somerville	CC	2 of 11	1 of 11	9%	9%
Brookline	RTM	5 of 16	18 of 240	7.5%	22.5%

Another intuitive—though also inconsistent—observation can be made from the table displayed above, namely, that *if* there is any turnover of elected positions in a city council community, that turnover as a proportion of the total number of council positions is *larger*

⁶ Easthampton had three positions change hands, but one district councilor moved to an at-large position; this explains why there was turnover in three positions, but only two new councilors joined the city council.

than the proportional turnover rate in town meeting communities.⁷ This is an intuitive finding: councils are universally composed of a smaller number of positions than town meetings, and as such the turnover of even a single position has a relatively large proportional impact on the total composition of the council. To reach an equally large proportional change in town meeting elections, more positions need to change hands; therefore, voting majorities in town meetings are more resistant to change than in city councils. As such, by winning a race (which may or may not be competitive), a candidate for council stands to gain more relative political influence than their counterparts in town meeting environments. Therefore, while the political realm in town meeting communities does appear to be more permeable to outsiders than in similarly situated city council municipalities, this permeability does not immediately translate into more influence for those new entrants, as the impact of the larger turnover is relatively modest compared to the size of the overall representative body. This discrepancy in turn can affect the nature of the individuals running for office, and, based on the responses I received during the interviews I conducted, it does. As mentioned previously, individuals running for council are looking for broad(er) influence, and express an interest in community-wide (and sometimes even national) issues, whereas the town meeting members I interviewed had more particularized, narrow interests.

⁷ The turnover rate in proportion to the total size of the representative body in town meeting communities is capped at 33.33% per annum, as all town meeting elections take place on a three-year staggered schedule, meaning that each year, only a third of the positions are up for election. No such limits exist in council communities, where all positions are up for election at two-year intervals.

Political Careers After Municipal Office

In addition to examining competition, turnover, and incumbency, I approached the topic of political careerism from the other end of the spectrum as well. Where my analyses so far approached the issue primarily from the perspective of those individuals running for or serving in municipal office, I wanted a fuller picture of the long-term career prospects and intentions of municipal politicians. By examining biographies of current representatives on the Massachusetts State Legislature, and coding the political positions they held prior to being elected to statewide office, one may get an idea of how likely a position on town meeting can be translated into higher political office when compared against the office of city council. In Table 6, below, I provide an overview of the prior political experience of members of the Massachusetts State Legislature in 2018:⁸

Table 6 Progressive Ambition of Massachusetts State Representatives, 2018

	<i>City Council</i>	<i>Town Meeting</i>	<i>Select Board</i>	<i>Mayor</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Other (townwide)</i>	<i>Other (statewide)</i>	<i>Other public service</i>
Total	28	14	26	3	46	51	1	59
Mean # of prior positions held	1.425							
Median # of prior positions held	1							

Prior to their service on the Massachusetts State Legislature, 28 of 160 members served on their local city council, whereas 14 members served on town meeting. In addition, 26

⁸ In gathering this data, I used the biographies as reported to the Massachusetts State Legislature by the representatives themselves. I verified this information by searching the public record, consulting representatives' campaign websites and other publicly available information about their previous occupations and political involvement.

members noted service on their town's Select Board, which is the elected executive arm of towns in New England, and is thus comparable in scope and weight if not entirely equivalent to the position of mayor in city council environments (which three of 160 members cite as a position they previously held).

Not only does Table 6 underline that more individuals serving on city councils move on to becoming state representatives, but an overall picture emerges in which a large number of state representatives mention having experience in *townwide (elected)* positions. Recalling my interviews with city councilors in Northampton and Amherst town meeting members, both cited the importance of visibility and issue ownership in establishing a political platform, and one of the town meeting members interviewed even mentioned explicitly that in their opinion, holding a townwide elected position could be more effectively parlayed into a upward political career path than a relatively anonymous position on town meeting.⁹

Conclusion

Who runs for municipal office? And does the system of government cause any differences in who decides to run, and is successfully elected? The answer is yes, to an extent.

Consistent, major differences do not appear when looking at simple demographic, socio-economic, and ideological measures of representatives. Some differences do exist,

⁹ Anecdotally, it is worth mentioning that Solomon Goldstein-Rose, state representative for Hampshire County's Third District (in which Amherst is located) had previously served on the Amherst School Committee before running for the office of state representative.

but not all of them show up consistently across the five pairs of communities under investigation. The overall picture that arises from the data collected about these ten communities, however, does suggest a few salient overall takeaways. Members of city councils do tend to be younger than their counterparts serving on representative town meetings, and the difference (of approximately 10 years) is fairly significant. More often than not, members of town meetings also happen to have lived in their communities for longer than city councilors have. Some differences with regards to household income and wealth emanate as well (though inconsistently—not in the expected direction in all town pairs). Taken together, the picture that emerges from these analyses is that generally speaking, barring some notable exceptions, those serving on town meeting tend to possess more resources in terms of time, money, and social capital (as measured by length of residence) than their colleagues serving on city councils. These increased levels of vital resources result in lower barriers to run for office in a system in which the barriers to run are already low, but in which the barriers to get elected is heavily influenced by the amount of social capital since voting decisions can be based on as little information as the candidate's name or the street on which they live. As a result, town meetings tend to be fairly homogenous bodies: ideologically, as well as in terms of these demographic and socio-economic variables.

Contrasting these findings about town meeting communities with those from the municipalities that use city councils, I find that there is greater diversity on the city councils included in my sample. Not only are the individuals serving on city councils younger on average, but there is also a greater spread of financial backgrounds, resulting in lower observed household incomes for councilors; the fact that these councilors are compensated

for their time allows for this greater income diversity on municipal legislatures. Though candidates for city council may have fewer resources at their disposal, they put in considerable (campaign) efforts in order to get elected, and establish a recognizable political profile, leading to increased (perceived) ideological polarization.

Professionalism does appear to vary between systems of government, and matters in two complementary ways. First of all, the professionalization of the representative body influences how individual representatives conceive of their position, and how they operationalize their day-to-day activities. Secondly, the degree of professionalization of a representative body sets up a particular opportunity structure for its membership, which they can leverage for future political careers. Based on the analysis of the data I gathered, and on the interviews I conducted with town meeting members and city councilors, a variation in level of professionalization and opportunity structure does arise. In town meeting environments, less routine effort is asked of members, and the structure of the meetings does not allow for individual members to make a name for themselves, to rise up from the crowd. There is no routine interaction with committees or with constituents, and the position is of a much more casual nature than the position of city councilors. City councilors are required to serve all year, attend frequent council meetings, be present at committee meetings, engage in constituent outreach and service, and establish a positive public image to facilitate, at the very least, a successful run for office as an incumbent, or to establish a positive platform for a future race for higher political office. Consequently, my analysis reveals that town meeting members are substantially less likely to progress in their political career (at least to the level of state representative) than their counterparts on city councils, or even those who serve in townwide elected positions in town meeting

communities (both open and representative). Representative town meeting, as a political office, lacks the visibility and political power to be successfully parlayed into higher political office.

There is variation in terms of recruitment activity as well. Not a lot of organized recruitment activity takes place overall, at least not based on what I found through my interviews with town meeting members in Amherst and city councilors in Northampton. However, social-network based recruitment did take place in Amherst's town meeting races, where groups of individuals got together to compose slates of likeminded individuals, and supporting them with (modest) campaign materials, thus fulfilling some of the functions a political party might in an environment that wasn't explicitly non-partisan. In Northampton, I identified one councilor who might have run at the behest of the Democratic Party Committee, but who themselves characterized their decision to run as having come from internal motivations. Another city councilor had spent a lot of time embedding himself in local political networks to garner their support, which one might be able to consider as reverse recruitment—or at least as proactive engagement with organizations to garner their support and prevent their recruitment of other candidates. The data I obtained about state representatives' political careers does indicate a relevance of service on local party committees for successful career progression; the influence of city council service is less pronounced, but still more so than service on any town meeting.

To summarize, and to return to my initial hypothesis: based on my findings in this chapter, I can conclude, to an extent, that different systems of government (in this case, representative town meeting and city council) attract different types of candidates, leading to different types of individuals who serve on these representative bodies. While overall,

representatives tend to trend towards the wealthy and well-heeled under both political configurations (though councils do appear somewhat more diverse on most variables), important and substantial differences do arise when representatives are asked about their motivations and activities as representatives. Further, more extensive research will remain necessary to establish whether these differences exist in a broader range of communities as well.

CHAPTER 3

MOBILIZATION

In the previous chapter I addressed why the identity of the individuals running for local elected office matters, and how the political environment of a municipality can encourage or discourage certain types of individuals from running. In this chapter, I turn my gaze towards the period leading up to the local election: campaign season. I investigate how the system of government employed in a particular municipality affects how the candidates running for office appeal to the public for their votes. In doing so, I look for systematic differences in campaign efforts: do candidates running for a position in large, permeable political systems such as representative town meetings wage more or less elaborate campaigns than their counterparts running for office in a city council race? In the current chapter, I will take a closer look at the mobilization efforts undertaken by candidates for elected office in both types of communities; the consequences of any differential in voter mobilization efforts will be addressed in a subsequent chapter on turnout.

Subnational elections have an image problem: because they do not directly concern the administration of our country at the federal level, they are often seen as less important—even though the impact of the decisions made at the state and local level can in some cases be more immediately perceptible to the public than decisions made by the federal government. Frequently, local races are considered too limited in scope to be relevant or interesting, with little more at stake than potholes, property taxes, and paying for schools (Oliver et al. 2012). This perceived lack of scope and importance makes for especially

dismal participation figures in local contests, numbers even less impressive than turnout rates in state-level elections (Hajnal and Trounstein 2005; Hajnal and Lewis 2003). However, there are sufficient examples that demonstrate that there can be important, non-managerial and ideologically divisive at stake on the subnational level (and certainly on the local level), making elections in this realm important, as their outcomes can have great implications on how citizens lead their daily lives (Green and Gerber 2015).

These dismal levels of voter participation (Hajnal and Lewis 2003) are bad enough, and warrant a closer look at voter mobilization in these local contests to see what efforts are being undertaken to encourage people to show up to the polls. Mobilization efforts provide voters with information about the election and about candidates, and ordinary citizens need this information in order to feel comfortable about participating in an election, and become voters. (Downs 1957; Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Jackson 1993, 1996; Lassen 2005; Verba et al. 1995). Mobilization can take place in a variety of ways, and certain strategies are more likely to be used in subnational contests than others. Nevertheless, mobilization as a concept has been shown to possess a strong, positive relationship to turnout in these subnational electoral contests. (Fukumoto and Horiuchi 2016; Holden 2016; Boudreau et al. 2015; Cox 2015; Jacobson 2015; Goldstein and Ridout 2002).

Information is central to effective mobilization, and that information can originate in a variety of places, and still be effective at mobilizing citizens to vote. Different types of information may matter: basic information about the election and when it takes place, information about the candidates running for office and their positions, as well as a conception of the benefits they might derive from their participation (Jacobson 2015). All

these pieces of information combined provide helpful cues to voters that reduce the costs voters incur related to their participation in the election—instead of having to gather the relevant information on their own, other entities jump into the fray to aid them in their decision-making process (Lupia 1994; Lupia and Matsusaka 2004; Jacobson 2015). Candidate campaigns are one important source of election information, but they are far from the only place the voter can turn for information: additionally, voters may derive voting cues from information provided by the government, campaigns run by interest groups or other organizations, election-related media coverage, or from voters’ own social network (Lau and Rovner 2009; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Iyengar and Simon 2000; Lieske 1989; Lassen 2005; Snyder Jr and Strömberg 2010; Bhatti et al. 2015). All of these sources of information have been shown to matter in a variety of contexts and to a variety of degrees—from presidential elections to the municipal races emphasized in this dissertation.

Previous research: mobilization in national and subnational contests

Most voters are familiar with campaigns during presidential election season. Presidential elections are distinct from all others, and not just because of the office up for election but also because the baseline level of interest among the public tends to be high compared to other elections. Throughout the presidential election season voters are exposed to candidate campaigns, but these presidential races also feature broad, ample, and relatively balanced (in the aggregate) media coverage. This generous amount of attention all but guarantees that anyone who is about to cast a ballot will arrive at the polls on election day with some

basic knowledge about the candidates running for office. This knowledge is what drives the individual's confidence in having sufficient ability to make an educated vote choice (Jacobson 2015; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba et al. 1995).

Presidential campaign strategy, at the macro level, is intuitive: campaigns aim to provide information about the race and about their candidate specifically to the voting public (Bartels 1996; Holbrook 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Popkin 1991; Gelman and King 1993). Their effects, however, are not always clear, as their efforts are difficult to distinguish from media coverage already taking place, and the aforementioned pre-existing high levels of interest in the elections. Nonetheless, previous research has demonstrated that presidential campaigns are effective in their mobilization of voters, particularly the ability of parties to mobilize their core groups to make the trek to the polls on election day (Holbrook and McClurg 2005). Holbrook and McClurg argue specifically that core partisan supporters are more likely to respond to messages from the campaign by appealing to their existing partisan predispositions. Instead of attempting to influence voters' partisan allegiances and ideological predispositions, campaigns work to frame the election and leave voters with a distinct idea of what the campaign is about, hoping that cues in that form might affect voters' internal deliberations (Hillygus and Shields 2014; Vavreck 2009).

Lower-level electoral races differ from their presidential counterparts in many ways, but importantly, they attract a less generous baseline level of media attention and pre-existing awareness among voters (Jacobson 2015; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014). However, like in national-

level campaigns, information remains crucial for voters to acquire the elementary knowledge they need to feel confident to participate in the election, and previous research that uses campaign spending as a measurement of campaign activity has found that in those subnational contexts campaign spending has been shown to add votes. The rationale is that races at the state and municipal levels do not inspire even a fraction of the intense external coverage seen during national contests, and with the additional complication that these subnational contests can be non-partisan, would-be voters often find themselves in an environment in which their thirst for information is much less easily satisfied than during the elections season preceding national-level races (Schaffner et al. 2001; Schaffner and Streb 2002; Schaffner et al. 2007).

Though mobilization preceding local elections has not been studied to the same extent as national and state-level races, prior scholarship has led to a number of interesting discoveries (Krebs 2014). First of all, because of the quieter mobilization environment a candidate's basic name recognition plays a much more influential role during these races than during national contests, putting incumbents at an even larger advantage than in national elections (Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr 2002). Candidate campaigns become more powerful as well, since they operate in a relative information vacuum, in that they do not have to compete for voters' attention with media outlets' incessant coverage, interest group interference, or other grassroots campaign efforts (Jacobson 2015). But although the primary focus of a campaign run by a candidate for office is to persuade people to vote for them instead of for a competing candidate, campaigns have a secondary influence as well: campaigns can reduce the overall information costs associated with participation in the election, thereby serving as an indirect mobilization mechanism (Holbrook and

Weinschenk 2014). Even if a particular voter is not swayed by a candidate's campaign messaging, being exposed to campaign communications increases the voter's awareness of the election taking place, and of the issues being discussed (Bartels 2006). The framing effect on mobilization noted in presidential elections as discussed above is likely to feature in local races as well, given that partisan allegiances matter even less in these contexts.

Research findings vary on whether the lower levels of information available to voters about upcoming local elections is problematic, and, correspondingly, if we should be worried about lower levels of turnout in these local races. Some authors argue that we should distinguish voters in local-level elections from those who vote in state and national-level races, as party allegiances simply matter less on the local level. Instead of partisanship, this strand of the literature assigns more weight to ethnic and group identities, finding these cues more salient to voters especially in areas characterized by intergroup conflict (Kaufman 2004; Boudreau et al. 2015). Other authors argue that voters in local elections are different because have a "high interest in local affairs" and are much more likely to base their voting decisions on incumbent performance, and stances on particular issues that are salient to them, and less so on partisanship, candidate charisma, or "memorable nicknames such as Iceman" (Oliver et al. 2012, p. 150). Following that logic, the helpful cue that party affiliation provides in partisan contests might be inherently less important in those local, non-partisan races not just because of its absence, but because of its lack of relevance to the issues at play. Oliver et al. (2012) hold the local voter in high esteem, noting that they are much more likely to live up to the ideal of the informed voter. This may be the case in communities that are highly homogenous and where, as Oliver et al. (2012) note, the scope of government is limited, but even in those environments, as I

demonstrate in subsequent chapters on turnout and representation, a homogenous group of representative in a non-homogenous community can still have important consequences for the community at large.

Previous research has demonstrated that it matters *who* campaigns. By using campaign spending as a proxy measure for campaign activity, authors have shown that spending matters especially for candidates challenging an incumbent for office. This makes intuitive sense given incumbents' base level of name recognition and voters' general hesitance to vote them out of office. However, if challengers elect to increase their campaign spending, they can decrease the inherent advantage of the incumbent they are seeking to challenge; this finding holds true for state level races (Gierzynski and Breaux 1996; Donnay and Ramsden 1995; Miller 2008), city council races (Krebs 1998), as well as mayoral elections (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014). This finding was reproduced in experimental research designs surrounding municipal elections, in which concrete mobilization activity on behalf of a challenger candidate was shown to have a significant, negative impact on an incumbent's electoral performance (Gerber 2004; Panagopoulos and Green 2008).

At the same time, Holbrook and Weinschenk (2014) note that campaign spending can also serve as a measure of electoral competition, finding that a small spending gap between candidates signals a competitive race (before election returns are in), in which candidates are vying for voter attention to similar degrees. The authors find that this signals a greater importance of the race to voters, increasing their likelihood to turn out. During campaigns where spending is skewed in either the direction of the incumbent or the

challenging candidate(s), and in which less total money is spent, Holbrook and Weinschenk (2014) find that the margin of victory for the winning candidate is significantly larger.

Prior scholarship finds that not all campaign spending is equally effective; voters tend to respond well to mobilization through face-to-face contact, while more impersonal outreach tactics such as direct mail and phone calls were found to be substantially less effective (Gerber and Green 2000b). Further reinforcing the notion that candidate campaigns have secondary effects in addition to primarily serving as a tool of persuasion, Gerber and Green (2000a) found that leafletting is an effective tool to increase turnout, but primarily among those individuals not affiliated with a party. And, in addition, lawn signs—though also decidedly impersonal—were found to work surprisingly well to increase the advertising candidate’s vote share, and in boosting turnout even in adjoining districts (Gerber 2004; Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014; Green et al. 2016). Almost any organized exposure to political activity has been shown to create positive impacts on turnout.

In addition to being influenced by candidate-driven campaign efforts, research has demonstrated that voters respond well to mobilization that originates elsewhere as well. This is important, as mobilization writ large is one of the “intermediary institutions” I examine in this dissertation; intermediary institutions that are affected by a change to the system of government. First on the list is media coverage, which is influential in exposing citizens to the goings on in their local political environment, but which is—especially in these local environments—constrained by limited means. The media fulfill three functions in a political landscape: they are sorters (assisting citizens in figuring out which candidate to pick to hold office by publicizing about them), they are disciplinarians (holding

politicians' feet to the fire by publishing on any (potential or future) improprieties), and they are agenda-setters, determining which issues are salient to voters (Besley et al. 2002).

However, like citizens, media outlets have various levels of resources to appropriate, and in making the decision of what to cover and what not, they are driven by consumer interest and newsworthiness. In political environments with large numbers of candidates who do not run on clearly-defined political platforms, nor make use of campaigns, newsworthiness is difficult to determine, and limited resources are less likely to be deployed towards universal candidate coverage. Additionally, news media suffer from the same issues that normal citizens do: in large, open political environments like town meetings, links between candidates and issues are difficult to draw since power is shared between so many individuals, making both the sorting as well as the disciplinarian functions difficult to fulfill. In contrast, news media operating in an environment which does support campaigns, candidate platforms, and candidate-issue linkages would be more robust.

The influence of such coverage cannot be underestimated. Berry and Howell (2007b) found that, in evaluating the results of school board elections, voters are sensitive to cues about incumbents' performance, but that such retrospective voting triggers need to receive coverage by the media in order to be effective. The situation in this study was a typical one for most local elections, with little money spent on campaigns by candidates, but where shifts in media coverage of school ratings drove voters to rely on different heuristics instead, leading to differences in candidates' vote shares that could not be explained by changes in test scores, property taxes, or other external factors. Boudreau et al. (2015) find that while partisan allegiances may not matter explicitly, voter preferences

may indeed be driven by ideological differences, albeit without the related cue of party allegiance in non-partisan races. The authors found that voters could be mobilized by non-partisan election communications stating the positions candidates held (Boudreau et al. 2015). The case for cues in non-partisan environments is further bolstered by Binder et al. (2011) who note that in direct democracy elections featuring referenda or initiatives, the quality of citizen deliberation can be improved if voters are exposed to information about the policy proposals, for instance in the form of public debates between supporters and opponents of the initiatives up for election (see also Lupia and Matsusaka (2004)). This further demonstrates the potential impact of robust media coverage, and, conversely, the influence that a lack of media coverage might have on an already lower-salience political environment.

For whom does mobilization in local races matter most? While it has been established that mobilization matters most in environments that do not benefit from as much built-in attention as national-level elections, and that candidate campaigns are especially effective in filling the informational void under those circumstances, it is also true that voters have often already made up their mind as soon as candidates declare their intention to run for office. There remain people whose participation and vote are not predetermined, and those are the individuals on whom mobilization measures will have the most impact. In local environments, any pre-determined opinions about candidates running for office may come from personal knowledge of the candidate, and less likely from partisan affiliation, due to the non-partisan nature of these elections. Mobilization efforts that create urgency and awareness of the election, as well as improve the public's

knowledge of the candidates running may therefore have an outsized impact on individuals' likelihood of participation in a local election.

Conceiving of voting as a cost-benefit calculation, as I have throughout this dissertation, it makes sense that those individuals who possess an excess of intellectual and/or financial resources will be more likely to be able to bear the costs of participating in an election even without the help of mobilization measures. The cost of voting for people who are less educated or are part of a traditionally underrepresented group, such as young people or ethnic minorities is much higher, and it is those voters who are impacted the most by being at the receiving end of mobilization initiatives aimed at making voting easier and less costly (Leighley and Nagler 2013). In addition, citizens vary in the degree to which they are susceptible to substantive mobilization appeals, that is, appeals to persuade them to change their vote (Jacobson and Carson 2015). On the national level, the proportion of persuadable or 'swing' voters is smaller than on the subnational level, given the important role of ideology and partisan attachments as cues on the national level. Election outcomes on the subnational level are much more volatile than in national races (Jacobson 2015).

Theory: The Institutional Context and Mobilization

It has been firmly established that mobilization matters. Mobilization matters more in some contexts than in others, it matters more for some individuals than for other people, and not all mobilization tactics are equally as effective. But it remains important, and at the nexus of all the factors I just mentioned is the realm of local politics, where mobilization can accomplish the most: the low-salience, low-information elections require extensive,

and resource-intensive information shortcuts to bring not just traditionally underrepresented populations, but even voters who would face few barriers to electoral participation on the national level, into the local political fold.

Some work has been done with regards to the influence of institutional rules on mobilization, but scholarship has mostly focused on small modifications to election timing, campaign finance, and other factors rooted in either law or public policy that could shrink the participation deficit in the local political realm. As this dissertation considers the implications of variation in *system of government*, I demonstrate how the choice of a particular form of government may result in observed variations in mobilizing activity.

Recall that, as I have touched on previously, local communities in Massachusetts are entitled to, under certain conditions, choose what form of government they would prefer to employ in their municipality. Communities have two options: on the one hand, they can choose to adopt a charter that includes a city council government (with or without a mayor) featuring both district-based and at-large representation and in which voters end up with a small number of representatives. An alternative is presented in the form of the representative town meeting, which is an adaptation of the classic open town meeting, and which results in large representative bodies with multiple members for each voting district.

I distinguish two categories of ways in which the choice for either a city council or representative town meeting form of government may influence the level of mobilization activity observed. On the one hand, there are direct reasons: those factors that are the direct result of the institutional design of the form of government used, such as its size and composition. On the other hand, there are indirect factors which influence mobilization through intermediary means, for instance by way of the actors operating in the system, and

their behavior; behavior that is conditioned in part by the opportunity structure the system sets up for them.

A direct consequence of the institutional design of a given form of government that may affect the amount of mobilization activity is the visibility of the individual legislator in a large legislature. I highlighted this as an area of concern in discussing candidates' considerations to decide whether or not to run for office in the previous chapter, but in addition to factoring into candidates' career considerations, the visibility of individual legislators can affect the extent to which voters are able to hold an individual legislator accountable.

The core issue is that it is difficult for outsiders to link policy outcomes to activities by one or more legislators, which in turn makes it difficult to decide what to do come election time: staying loyal to an incumbent, or replacing them with a newcomer. Though a lack of information in its own right, this is distinct from a lack of information *provision*; the nature of the political institution simply makes it difficult, if not impossible to provide the cues that would make it easier for voters to hold their legislators accountable.

A large legislature, whether on the national level or on the local level, makes individual legislators' contributions relatively invisible, leaving them with less ammunition for any mobilization activities, should they want to use those. (It also makes an electoral challenge to an incumbent more difficult, since challengers need to provide the electorate with good arguments in order to persuade them to vote for them instead of for the incumbent.) This issue is not unique to municipal political environments, as Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr (2002) have previously demonstrated the impact of a (lack of) individual representatives' visibility on mobilization activity and competition in congressional races.

The form of government a municipality uses also affects the amount of mobilization in indirect ways. First of all, recall that I discuss in the previous how choosing either a representative town meeting or a city council form of government can affect candidate emergence in elections. I found that, among other things, members of representative town meetings have a very different conception of their position in town government. In short, they—unlike their city council counterparts—do not describe their position in the same political terms as their colleagues serving on a city council. Rather, town meeting members expressed being motivated by self-interest, civic voluntarism, or expressed single-issue motivations they sought to address as reasons for running for an elected position.

In contrast, city council members I interviewed did emphasize the representative aspect of their position, highlighting their engagement with constituencies and expressly seeking out public input in preparing their positions on the council—their motivations to run for office were more externally-facing. City councilors are more likely to consider themselves politicians rather than volunteers, and holding political office, they consider campaigning a necessary aspect of the position—whether campaigning is something they enjoy or not—as it helps them gather the required votes to win as well as to communicate their ideas. Combined with the fact that city council positions are universally compensated, the nature of the position becomes less casual than the equivalent position on a representative town meeting.

There is another way in which the chosen form of government indirectly affects the amount of mobilization activity observed. While representatives' conception of their position within their local democracy is an important driver of mobilization activity—after all, candidates can play a big role in instigating campaign or other mobilization activity—

there is more than just representatives' conception of self that affects political mobilization. While representative town meeting members may be reluctant to consider their position in a political light and thus reach out to and ask for voters' endorsement of their candidacy, town meeting members may also assess the competitive environment of the election in a different way than their counterparts vying for a position on a city council. If prospective town meeting members do not believe that they need many votes to achieve their goal of being elected, the rational cost-benefit equation would not favor the spending of any money on mobilization efforts.

Both of these considerations originate with the (would-be) representative in town meeting contests. These intrinsic considerations cause us to find ourselves in the middle of a chicken-and-egg situation: those interested in running for town meeting positions do not campaign because they do not consider their positions political and because they believe campaigns are unnecessary to achieve their goals.

Expectations

The central premise of this dissertation is that variation in a chosen system of government is a key factor that determines election participation and citizen representation. The general hypothesis of the dissertation is that the causal link between form of government and representation operates through a number of mediating institutions such as parties or campaigns that can help facilitate anything from candidate recruitment to voter mobilization. My working hypothesis for this chapter is that the choice for a system of government affects the amount of mobilization activity in both direct as well as in indirect

ways, as a result of distinct institutional differences between the systems, and the distinctly different behavior of the actors within them as outlined in the previous chapter.

Based on the theory as outlined above, and my hypothesis as previously formulated, I expect to find the following:

1. Rooted in my findings from Chapter 2, I expect that in an environment with a city or town council, there will be more campaign activity taking place on behalf of the candidates running for office, as measured through campaign spending. The institutional structure of a council form of government, in which candidates and officeholders share the limelight with relatively few peers, requires that a candidate appeal to more individual voters than candidates in representative town meetings, especially in district-based races where only a single seat is up for grabs. Campaigns are therefore both necessary and more useful in city council environments: more votes are required, and a lower number of highly visible candidates necessitates presenting the electorate with clear options.¹⁰
2. I expect that media coverage of elections preceding representative town meeting elections will be scarcer than during the same length of time preceding elections for city or town council government. The large numbers of candidates running in representative town meeting elections makes assignment of accountability for legislative accomplishments difficult (Sullivan 2003). This makes it hard for media

¹⁰ Representative town meeting elections rely on what is called “plurality-at-large voting”: plurality voting in multi-member districts. Voters in these systems have as many votes as there are positions to be filled, and can use as many or as few of these votes as they wish. Candidates therefore do not need a majority of the vote, but only a plurality. If n is the number of positions and the number of candidates running is greater than n , only the n candidates with the most votes (who may or may not obtain a majority of all available votes) are the winners and fill the positions (Reynolds et al. 2005). The situation is different in council elections: there, one candidate receiving a plurality of the votes in a competition with multiple candidates would trigger a runoff election between the top two candidates instead.

outlets—much like individuals—to connect incumbents running for office to concrete community issues, essentially preventing the media from functioning as the watchdog it might be able to serve as elsewhere. Additionally, while media coverage can have a significant impact on voting behavior in local elections, outlets are limited as to how much of an election they can cover: covering every single candidate running may be impossible during elections where there are 80 candidates running for office without any distinguishing properties to set them apart—power sharing in representative town meetings makes holding incumbent candidates accountable difficult (Berry and Howell 2007b; Binder et al. 2011; Besley et al. 2002). As mentioned previously, the media have a sorting function, and their ability to cover candidates (both new as well as incumbents) may suffer if there is less campaign communication originating from candidates.

Data and Research Design

To make a determination about the influence of the system of government on mobilization activity, I analyze campaign spending and media coverage across five pairs of communities in Massachusetts, each pair consisting of a town with a representative town meeting, and a community with a city council government. In addition, I have conducted interviews with elected representatives in one such town meeting-city council pairing (Amherst-Northampton) to gain an understanding of these representatives' considerations with regards voter mobilization and how they approach campaigning as they seek elected office in their respective community.

With regards to campaign spending, I look at both the total campaign spending in each of the ten communities under investigation for the 2015 municipal elections. In doing so, I make comparisons with regards to the amount of spending that has occurred in both communities, in each five pairs of municipalities under investigation. In addition, I investigate campaign spending on the district-level for each municipality, accounting for the competitiveness of each district in which the would-be representatives run to determine if district competition has any bearing on the amount candidates spend on their campaign. I have obtained the data for this analysis from the campaign finance reports that each candidate is required to file with their municipal clerk following Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 55, Section 18. All candidates in all types of municipalities are required to file such reports at regular intervals as determined by law, and list the contributions they receive and the expenditures they make in their pursuit of elected office. Data on district-level competition was obtained from municipal clerks as well, and is computed based on ballot data and election returns.

The second analysis pertains to the amount of media coverage of the election that occurs in each of the ten communities in the six months preceding the election. Since these are local elections, I focused on obtaining information from the written news media, since not every community has a dedicated TV station providing local coverage. Each of the ten communities, however, had at least one newspaper of record, if not multiple written news outlets covering the municipality. To facilitate this comparison, I obtained news articles about each of the ten local elections, either directly from the appropriate newspaper(s) in question, or through the NewsBank database, which is a news database resource that provides archives of media publications as reference material to libraries. News articles

were gathered according to a consistent list of search terms that were used for each community. After finding news articles based on these search terms, they were coded based on their content. The coding mechanism allows for a determination of the type of media coverage taking place: for instance, if the article is about the election in general, mentions a race in a specific district or for a specific position, or if the article mentions any specific candidates by name.

Variables

As in the other chapters of this dissertation, the independent variable at issue here is the form of government employed by each community under investigation. The dependent variable is the amount of mobilization activity taking place throughout each community's 2015 municipal election, which I measure through the amount of campaign spending by each candidate running for office, and the amount of media coverage the elections receive in each of the respective communities. These are two forms of mobilization that feature prominently in national elections, and research has demonstrated them to be good gauges of the total mobilization activity taking place. By looking at both campaign-centric as well as at information that does not originate with campaigns, I am able to measure mobilization activity in both direct and indirect ways, capturing the information landscape voters may encounter with some breadth.

Results

Campaign Activity

For this chapter's first analysis, I measured the amount of campaign spending taking place in each of the ten paired Massachusetts communities that are part of this research project. What stands out from the findings immediately is that there are significant differences in campaign spending between the communities that have a representative town meeting government, and the communities that use a city council government. In all of the five communities with a representative town meeting, none of the candidates running for town meeting membership filed a campaign finance disclosure form with their municipal clerk, leaving the tally for the total amount of campaign spending at \$0 for all of these communities. In most city council environments—save for one community, Somerville, where no candidates filed campaign finance reports—significant campaign spending did occur for the 2015 municipal elections, as can be seen in Table 7, below.

Table 7 Campaign Spending in Massachusetts Municipal Elections, 2015

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i># Candidates filing</i>	<i>Total campaign spending</i>
Northampton	CC	5	\$ 14,887
Amherst	RTM	0	\$ 0
Gloucester	CC	14	\$ 39,246
Falmouth	RTM	0	\$ 0
Easthampton	CC	2	\$ 1,761
South Hadley	RTM	0	\$ 0
Weymouth	CC	8	\$ 15,557
Chelmsford	RTM	0	\$ 0
Somerville	CC	0	\$ 0
Brookline	RTM	0	\$ 0

This finding of \$0 in campaign spending in all of the town meeting communities under investigation is remarkable, if not entirely unexpected. The finding is remarkable for two related reasons: the number of positions up for election, and the competitiveness of the district races. In races for representative town meeting, a large number of positions are up for election every year: a third of the total number of seats available on the representative body, since members are elected to three-year staggered terms.¹¹ In addition, races for town meeting tend to be more competitive than races for city council (see Ch. 2 of this dissertation). Under those conditions—an environment with not just a multitude of candidates but with, often, more candidates than elected positions available—one might expect that there would be a necessity for candidates to communicate to voters as to why they feel they would be a better fit for the elected position than someone else on the ballot. And in the event of a challenge to an incumbent, one might expect even more mobilization taking place, as the challengers would be attempting to control the conversation, and challenge any incumbent representatives on their record, or on the platform they would be running on.

However, in town meeting environments, whether a candidate for town meeting is running in a competitive district or not has no bearing on their campaign spending habits, as spending remains \$0 uniformly, across all districts. As such, a conversation about accountability, ideas, or political platforms never really materializes through political campaigns. Confirming my initial hypothesis, the expected spending patterns do show up

¹¹ In my sample, this equates to elections that have between 40 (Easthampton) and ~80 (Amherst, Brookline, and Falmouth) up for election each year.

in city council environments when campaign spending in non-competitive districts are separated from spending in competitive districts, as can be seen in Table 8, below.

Table 8 Campaign Spending in Massachusetts Municipal Elections (2015) as Related to Electoral Competition

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Comp. Races</i>	<i>Absolute #</i>	<i>Spending in non-competitive races</i>	<i>Spending in competitive races</i>
Northampton	CC	4 of 9	4 of 9	\$ 830	\$ 14,057
Amherst	RTM	5 of 10	33 of 80	\$ 0	\$ 0
Gloucester	CC	8 of 9	8 of 9	\$ 905	\$ 38,341
Falmouth	RTM	3 of 9	54 of 82	\$ 0	\$ 0
Easthampton	CC	1 of 9	1 of 9	\$ 165	\$ 1,596
South Hadley	RTM	0 of 5	13 of 40	\$ 0	\$ 0
Weymouth	CC	1 of 11	1 of 11	\$ 1,842	\$ 13,715
Chelmsford	RTM	2 of 9	20 of 54	\$ 0	\$ 0
Somerville	CC	2 of 11	2 of 11	\$ 0	\$ 0
Brookline	RTM	5 of 16	18 of 80	\$ 0	\$ 0

The reason the \$0 spending finding is not entirely unexpected given my findings from the interviews with town meeting members in Amherst. I asked each member I interviewed if they campaigned for their position, and why they did or did not do so. The answers I received were compelling and confirm my hypothesis: two town meeting members indicated that they did not personally campaign for office, and as such did not spend any funds. Neither of them believed campaigning to be necessary; one of them answered that since “voting happens by street or by last name”¹² and a vote could thus be gained based on familiarity, proximity, or both—in either instance, the candidates assumed that voters would arrive at their voting decisions based on their social networks. And, as I noted previously, none of the town meeting members I interviewed described their position

¹² On the ballot, each candidate is listed with their name and their local address. As such, voters know where they live come election day.

in political terms, or expressed career-related motivations having factored in to their decision to run for their position.

However, one town meeting member I interviewed made an interesting campaign-related remark that could indicate that some mobilization activity may in fact be happening, albeit in a non-transparent, fly-under-the-radar sort of way. When asked about the lead-up to the election and whether or not they campaigned for office, this town meeting member answered that they had been at the forefront of an effort to run a slate of candidates (with members of the slate living in every voting precinct in town) for this election, and that, on behalf of the slate, they had sent out postcards with their own name, and the name of the other people on the slate to voters in town. The town meeting member stated that they had paid for this using their own funds. However, as is evident from the data, this mobilization activity did not appear in the spending reports for the 2015 Amherst municipal election. This curious finding speaks to the casual perception of town meeting elections among those who serve on this representative body (which came through in the interviews I conducted as well), and leads me to wonder whether more (and if so, how much) casual campaign spending takes place during the time preceding these town meeting elections.

As can be seen in the table, above, the picture is decidedly different for city council elections. When separating campaign spending in competitive districts from spending in non-competitive races, it becomes apparent that the spending habits of the city council candidates in these communities do appear to follow the established logic from national-level elections. The overwhelming majority of the campaign spending occurred in races that were competitive, i.e. where more than one candidate was running for the same position. There is a large spread in the amount of money spent as can be seen in the table,

but this is due to both the number of contested positions up for election, and the number of candidates running for these positions and filing campaign finance reports, which can be seen in the first table of this section.

The stark difference in campaign spending between representative town meeting elections and city council elections makes sense when one takes into account the institutional features of both forms of government. As I have discussed above, the lack of visibility and issue ownership that characterizes town meeting membership does not apply in the same way to a city council. A city council is much smaller in composition, with fewer candidates running, and allows for individual councilors to identify themselves and be identified by voters in relation to controversial or issues otherwise salient to voters. This structure provides councilors with an opportunity to structure their campaign—issue stances and/or ownership allows them to rise above vague platitudes in their campaign and provide useful cues to voters looking to participate.

In speaking with the Northampton city councilors I interviewed on the topic of campaigns, all of them indicated that they found campaigns necessary, but not all for the same reasons. One councilor, when asked, if they campaigned, responded that they did, but had done so reluctantly; they noted that they find campaigning a “dirty business” and that they do not like to solicit money from contributors. However, when pressed on the spending of campaign money, this same councilor indicated that “name recognition is essential” as was “putting [their] stance on the [issue facing their district] out there.” Another councilor, in response to the same question about whether or not they campaigned for their position, responded that they “love” campaigning, and that they had previous professional experience in doing so. This councilor noted that even though their race in

2015 was not competitive, they still spent money on campaign materials with the express purpose of increasing voting turnout in their district, which the councilor cited as a problem due to the district's demographic composition. The third councilor to whom I spoke had also campaigned enthusiastically (though also unopposed), but had focused their campaign efforts primarily on constituent service: they had handed out campaign calling cards with the candidate's name and phone number, to ensure voters' impression of them as "approachable" and being "on the council to represent them."

Media Coverage

The data I gathered reveals variations in the amount of media coverage as well, with more media coverage of the 2015 elections occurring in municipalities with city councils than in communities with representative town meetings. The data gathered covers the nine months leading up to and including the elections at issue.

It is important to note that the differences I observe with regards to total media coverage are not as stark as the observed differences in campaign spending. In some of the city council communities, coverage of the elections was very scant as well. When examining the total amounts of media coverage, city council municipalities' coverage does come out ahead, but not by much. The numbers, however, do warrant closer scrutiny. As you will be able to tell from the table below, I purposely covered a broad spectrum of potential media coverage in my coding scheme. Instead of focusing just on articles making simple mention of the city council races or the town meeting elections, I recognize that articles with different types of content may be published that would have the same

mobilization effect. City council candidates, for instance, do not run in a vacuum; if a newspaper article makes mention of a mayoral race taking place on November 3rd, and a reader of the newspaper is prompted by that article to show up to the polls, then they will most likely also fill out their ballot for the city council races relevant to their precinct. As such, I elected to gather a universe of newspaper articles containing articles that mention anything from a town's selectboard, to generalized campaign coverage (which is a catchall category—here, you might think of newspaper articles reminding readers of the election date, or articles writing about competitive races for town-wide offices such as municipal clerk, library trustee, etc.). I also made a distinction between editorials, regular reporting, and letters to the editor so as to identify the source of the coverage. I was curious if the nature of the coverage might differ between institutional environments as well, with media focusing more on their sorting and disciplinarian functions, or perhaps if they would emphasize their agenda-setting/policy-focused capabilities.

As such, looking beyond the total numbers of media mentions related to the 2015 municipal elections, I can make a few interesting observations. In town meeting municipalities, exactly zero mentions were made about the town meeting election. None of the newspapers in either of the five town meeting towns had anything to say about any of the candidates running for representative town meeting. This stands in stark contrast to the newspapers in city council communities, which, if you look at the total mentions of city council elections, published a rather large number of articles relating to city council races, be they reports or letters to the editor. (I do not expect that distinction to matter, as I believe the mobilizing effect of a letter to the editor maybe just as strong or even stronger than a neutral report by a journalist employed by the paper in question.) Newspapers also paid a

lot of attention to mayoral races, if and when they took place, and in the town meeting communities, they covered races for the local selectboards as well.¹³ Selectboards are small executive boards, and are considered town-wide offices; as such, their visibility can be compared to those of city councilors, even though functionally they fulfill a completely different role. However, the size of the board and the fact that the number of candidates for these positions tends to be limited in number can explain the attention for these positions in the amount of election-related coverage by newspapers in the relevant communities. Interesting to note, however, is that where articles written about mayoral races often also make mention of the council contests happening at the same time, this same phenomenon is not observed in town meeting municipalities, where newspapers publishing articles mentioning the town selectboard consistently do not mention races for the local legislature.

Some of the differences that appear in the level of media coverage are confirmed through the interviews I conducted with the Amherst town meeting members and the Northampton city councilors. In our conversations, I asked both groups of individuals several questions with regards to their campaign activity. As I have commented on in the previous chapter as well as above in this chapter, town meeting members did not engage in much, if any, campaign activity—not the kind of activity that required the spending of money, at least. However, not spending money on a campaign does not necessarily have to mean that a candidate has not engaged in organized mobilization activity; evidence of such

¹³ Selectboards appear in towns with town meetings as the executive committees of a municipality. Though executives, their powers are more limited than those of mayors, and their positions are not considered full-time. Members of the selectboard are elected on a town-wide basis, and those running for these positions sometimes will campaign. However, since the main focus of this dissertation is a comparison of legislative bodies in municipal politics, I do not specifically cover these boards, just like I do not specifically cover mayors or mayoral races either.

activity could, for instance, include media reports about their campaigns. This remained a theoretical possibility for the town meeting members I spoke to, but two of the city councilors I interviewed made mention of having hosted a campaign kickoff event at the beginning of campaign season, where they had also explicitly invited the media. Now, in the case of Northampton, this only resulted in generalized newspaper coverage of the campaign season prior to the election; however, from the articles I gathered from the other towns, it did become apparent that some journalists had attended and written about these campaign events. This is one way in which candidates can increase their mobilization efforts, without spending money, yet still increase their visibility and mobilize large groups of voters.

Table 9 Media Coverage of 2015 Massachusetts Municipal Elections (9 months leading up to election date)

Town	Gov't	Article Content						Type of article			Total
		Town Meeting Election	Selectboard Election	Mayoral Election	City Council Election	General Campaign Coverage	Mentions Specific Candidate	Letter to the Editor	Editorial	Report	
Northampton	CC	—	—	—	2	1	2	—	—	3	3
Amherst	RTM	0	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Gloucester	CC	—	—	12	11	1	17	—	15	7	22
Falmouth	RTM	0	4	—	—	3	3	—	1	5	6
Easthampton	CC	—	—	—	1	2	2	—	—	3	3
South Hadley	RTM	0	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	2	2
Weymouth	CC	—	—	5	1	3	4	—	—	6	6
Chelmsford	RTM	0	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	5	5
Somerville	CC	—	—	0	6	6	5	—	—	8	8
Brookline	RTM	0	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
TOTAL		1	8	17	21	20	33	16	0	40	

Conclusion

The limited amount of data on mobilization activity I obtained for the purpose of this chapter's comparison between five pairs of city council and town meeting municipalities does support my hypothesis, and confirms my expectations about the campaign and media environments in municipal elections in Massachusetts. Based on the data I gathered, and supplemented with the interviews I conducted with actual representatives, I believe it reasonable to conclude that the form of government employed in a given community can indeed make a vast difference as to the mobilization activity that takes place during election season.

A large, open political environment with a low barrier of entry, the representative town meeting relies on a large number of representatives, and an even larger number of candidates. I believe that this environment suffers from similar problems plaguing large legislatures on different levels of government, especially with regards to the relative invisibility of its membership. On the national level, this issue is attenuated somewhat during congressional elections by the large geographical spread of its membership and the vastly different local interests each Member of Congress represents. This same principle, though to a lesser extent, applies to state legislatures. Town legislatures on the other hand, however, have memberships that rival state legislatures in size, while covering only a fraction of the geographic area. And while interests and issue relevance may certainly vary from precinct to precinct, dramatic swings like the ones that may be visible nationally, cannot be expected on the town level. It is therefore extraordinarily difficult for members of town meeting to distinguish themselves from each other, both in their own minds ("we're

all here to do what's best for the town," as one town meeting member mentioned to me) as well as to the eyes of voters. Positions and programs are unclear, if they even exist at the time of the election and aren't decided on an ad-hoc basis during the annual town meeting.

Secondly, the representative town meeting's lack of mobilization activity is influenced by town meeting participants' regard for town meeting. Serving on town meeting is seen as an act of civic voluntarism, as a way to contribute to the town's wellbeing. Members value deliberation, but hesitate to call their participation political; even if they do, they may be frustrated by other members' apolitical approach to governing. Serving on town meeting is a decidedly casual and communal affair, with an important social aspect. The town meetings meet only once a year, and address all of the town's legislative business during that time. As a result, elected representatives aren't called upon to serve during the other 51 weeks of the year, which helps cement the voluntary and almost casual nature of the office.

All of these drawbacks to town meeting, both in terms of structure as well as perception, are not present in city council environments. Of course, in absolute terms, not a whole lot of mobilization takes place in these communities, nor do newspapers publish an especially large number of articles concerning electoral contests. However, one has to keep an eye on the relative differences, and those are stark. In the city council elections of 2015, there was a 100% more campaign spending than in the comparable town meeting races (and in the following chapter, I will investigate the consequences of this difference with regards to election turnout). City councilors see mobilization as a necessary part of their position, and as essential to win voters, and to increase election turnout. Their perception of what is necessary, combined with a smaller number of candidates running

for office and clear opportunities for issue ownership makes for an environment in which it is necessary as well as useful for candidates to campaign for office: after all, a plurality vote share will not be sufficient to win the election.

Previous authors have argued that lower interest in local elections may be the result of the limited size and scope of local government (Oliver et al. 2012). I believe that statement should be refined, since it does not explain variation between systems of local government that all face very similar issues when it comes to taxes, schools, zoning, road maintenance, and state funding—the city councils and representative town meetings are all equally limited in scope. Therefore, that aspect alone cannot explain an observed difference in mobilization activity: the community size and the corresponding scope of these local government pairs are very similar, yet the mobilization activity as observed differs dramatically. This difference does not exist, I believe, because people are inherently disinterested in local politics; in these pairs of very similar towns, significant money is only being spent in city council elections. If candidates did not think this was necessary (as their counterparts in running for town meeting appear to think) or useful, it would not happen. The amount of effort being made *can* therefore be explained by the variation in system of government; spending on mobilization does not occur because the issues in municipalities with city councils are inherently more interesting or impactful.

CHAPTER 4

TURNOUT

Declining levels of political participation have characterized the United States' political landscape since the second half of the 20th century. It is, as Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) called it, arguably "the most important, most familiar, most analyzed, and most conjectured trend in recent American political history" (p. 57). In recent history, explanations of political participation have centered primarily on individual-level factors as opposed to sociological explanations, following the emergence of the so-called "Michigan school." As such, political behavior is deemed to be the subject of rational choice decisions made by individuals who offset the costs of participation against the potential benefits of such an activity. Following that logic, political participation becomes a resource game. Verba and Nie (1972a), for example, found a strong influence of socioeconomic status on political participation. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) specifically emphasized the influence of education on citizens' likelihood to participate in the electoral process. And when Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) found the sizeable decline of political participation, they linked this phenomenon explicitly to a decline in elite mobilization of voters.

Since resources in a capitalist society such as ours are almost by definition unequally distributed, it is hardly surprising that observed declines in political participation are not equally distributed among demographic groups either. Generally speaking, those with more resources at their disposal will be more likely to turn out to vote, leading to unequal and potentially biased political participation (Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie

1972a). Institutional elements, such as education, have the potential to further amplify or neutralize the influence of these resource differences (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Converse 1972). Education, for example, influences citizens' processing capacity of election-related information; this is a topic that Cain (2015) discusses at length as well. Other factors, such as religious attendance, political knowledge, mobilization and strength of conviction have been found to have an influence on the likelihood of participation as well (Campbell 2013).

Previous Research

Addressing the problem of representation necessitates being mindful to the different ways participation can take shape. Should a political system encourage universal participation in the form of governing, or should the system provide different tiers of participation, emphasizing electoral participation over participation *in* government so that elected representatives may lighten the burden of the citizenry at large? This age-old debate has been revived in recent years, with political reformers debating the merits of either choice (Trounstine 2010, 2011; Hajnal 2010; Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Marschall and Ruhil 2007; Berry and Howell 2007b). Interestingly enough, however, while those debates often revolve around the various democratic principles involved, attention far too rarely turns to what the impact of a particular choice might be. This same debate has undergirded Massachusetts municipalities' choices to use either a representative town meeting, or a mayor-city council style government, and the continued existence and use of the town meeting concept of government in modern times has everything to do with these

discussions on how to address the failure points of representative democracy. In the eyes of town meeting advocates, the argument to retain representative town meeting government is in part based in the charm of its longstanding tradition, but in large part on the belief that it is the better, more democratic form of government as well. As such, retaining the (representative) town meeting in Massachusetts municipalities fits neatly in the populist reform trend that advocates for the creation of more opportunities for citizens to participate in the democratic process. Representative town meeting, being the hybrid form of government that it is, relies on representation to keep the process of governing somewhat manageable, while giving as many people as possible the opportunity to involve themselves in a way that, by its advocates, is deemed transparent.

Theory: The Problem of Participation in Local Government

The many arguments in support of representative town meeting notwithstanding, the question remains if the use of this form of government cures the ails of pure representative government beyond the simple fact of involving more individuals in its legislative body. The danger, as Cain (2015) notes, is that the creation of more avenues for political participation leads to cognitive overload in citizens, rendering them unable to effectively use the plethora of participatory instances available to them. As noted previously, effective political participation on behalf of citizens requires resources: education, information, and time, to name some of the more important ones. The question is whether the use of direct, participatory democracies on the local level assists in decreasing the imbalances in resource allocation, or if it serves to amplify them?

To overcome the abovementioned resource asymmetries, democratic societies rely on a certain type of institutional safeguards (McGrath 2012). These safeguards are “mediating institutions” because they mediate between the resource-starved citizen, and the information necessary to participate that is often only accessible to those with an abundance of resources. These mediating institutions can come in a variety of forms, the media are one important example, as are, for example, political campaigns, and political parties (Schaffner et al. 2001). These institutions all serve to better inform the citizen about what happens in the political arena, and provide information about candidates, representatives, and other political officeholders. As a society, by having these resources at our disposal, we avoid instances of gross representational inequality, for not allowing particular, resource-deficient individuals to participate in the political process.

The way in which a system of government is configured can influence the absence or presence of these mediating institutions. In their research into non-partisan races in the Midwest, Schaffner et al. (2001) found that with less resources at their disposal, voters would be less likely to vote in these elections where they lacked the useful signifier that party identification could lend to a particular candidate. In addition to political parties, subjecting potential voters to campaign mobilization messages, even in non-partisan elections, can make a significant difference in boosting election turnout (Green and Gerber 2008). In short, the absence of mediating institutions can raise the cost of voting, thus prohibiting certain groups of community members from effectively participating in elections. This can skew the makeup of the electorate, and consequently affect who is elected to represent the community as a whole. Kaufmann (2004) found that in the absence of partisan cues, race becomes more influential as a factor affecting vote choice. Trounstein

and Valdini (2008) found that having a minority candidate running for office was the most important factor influencing minority participation, and Hajnal (2010) found that the probability of a potential voter's non-participation in a local race is highly correlated to said individual's race. These findings further confirm the potential incentives for political majorities to discourage minority participation, and demonstrate the importance of the availability of sufficient information to ensure even, unbiased turnout. Heuristics are an important factor in reducing individuals' information costs, and to overcome any obstacles that might stand in the way of their electoral participation.

Lacking information about candidates and about the performance of the incumbent representatives creates a political environment that places a high cognitive load on its citizens, and discourages retrospective voting (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981; Berry and Howell 2007b; Bhatti et al. 2015), which is a phenomenon already quite uncommon in local politics (Berry and Howell 2007a; Oliver and Ha 2007). Yet, even if retrospective voting is not used by voters in local elections, information about candidate personality, issue agreement and party membership or ideology are important factors weighing into voters' decisions. When that information is absent, or if there is an informational overload in this respect, voters will be discouraged to go to the polls—either because they have to do too much digging on their own, or because there simply is too much information to process, leading to cognitive overload (Cain 2015). Convenience, as Dyck and Gimpel (2005) illustrate, is an important driver of voter turnout.

Institutionally conditioned differences in the availability and dissemination of electoral information is part of what makes the comparison between mayor-city council governments and representative town meeting governments compelling, since it reveals

different underlying dynamics of participation and its related cognitive costs. Though most local governance tends to happen in a realm that is somewhat removed from the public eye regardless of institutional configuration, the choice for a particular form of government may exaggerate and exacerbate features already common in all municipal environment. For example, while most local elections have in common that they receive less media coverage than national elections, a city council election with a total of seven elected positions will be easier for a local newspaper to cover than an election for a representative town meeting with 240 seats. The differences in media coverage, as I have shown in the previous chapter, are quite remarkable: recall that the news media did not publish any articles about candidates running for town meeting, whereas city council candidates were published on regularly.

In addition to media coverage, voters benefit from information disseminated by candidates' campaigns about their platforms, proposals, and ideologies. The presence of political parties contributes to making voters' decisions easier (Schaffner et al. 2001; Schaffner and Streb 2002; Lupia 1994). As I found in Chapter 3, campaign spending by candidates for town meeting is virtually non-existent; whereas campaigns for city council are well-funded, especially in competitive districts—though campaign spending did occur in non-competitive districts as well. This finding was remarkable, given the higher incidence of competitive races in town meeting communities.

Included in

Table 10 below is a comparison between Massachusetts representative town meeting governments and their mayor-city council counterparts on a number of key variables:

Table 10 Comparison of Government Characteristics: Town Meeting v. City Council in Massachusetts

	<i>Representative Town Meeting</i>	<i>City Council</i>
<i>Population</i>	>6,000 - < 70,000 Median: ~ 27,000	> 13,000 - < 685,000 Median: ~ 43,000
<i>Size of representative body</i>	> 70 - < 245	> 5 - < 15
<i>Number of representatives per district</i>	Multiple representatives for each district	Single-member districts, at-large councilors
<i>Career politicians</i>	Few career politicians	Career-minded representatives
<i>Party presence</i>	Non-partisan	Non-partisan
<i>Campaigning</i>	Limited campaign activity	Candidates campaign for positions
<i>Media coverage</i>	Scattered media-coverage	Candidates featured in media

The useful cues that these mediating institutions provide are of vital importance, something J.S. Mill (1861) equivocated in his treatise on representative government:

“[T]he mass of the population have very little opportunity of sharing personally in the conduct of the general affairs of the community. Reading newspapers, and perhaps writing to them, public meetings, and solicitations of different sorts addressed to the political authorities, are the extent of the participation of private citizens in general politics during the interval between one parliamentary election and another.” (1861, p. 281)

In the absence of the information that well-developed mediating institutions provide, politics in local democracies takes place largely in informal ways and through elite social networks for those with adequate resources and connections (as highlighted in Chapter 3, previously), while discouraging the participation of those not part of the local in-crowd by putting up considerable cognitive burdens to their participation. These reduced levels of participation have the potential to doubly affect the adequacy of political representation: on the one hand, those voted into office may or may not represent the public as well as when more citizens would participate in the process and encourage capture by organized interests (Anzia 2011), but additionally, a lack of participation may hinder the ability for the citizenry as a whole to hold their government officials/representatives accountable in subsequent elections.

However, some authors contend that local level politics are different, and that what happens on the local level is not quite as important as national or state-level politics. According to these authors, local politics are more managerial and less controversial than national or state politics, and thus are unlikely to generate much electoral interest (Gerber and Hopkins 2011; Morgan and Watson 1995; Bryan 2010; Rae 2008). This difference causes the importance of traditional mechanisms of government and representation to be less pronounced on the local stage, than on the state and national level (Oliver et al. 2012). Consequently, these authors contend that this lack of relevance of local politics to voters, and the subsequently reduced turnout, is not necessarily something that should be regarded in a negative light: the managerial nature of local politics makes for an environment in which public involvement is not strictly necessary, they argue. In addition, following this logic, low participation could simply be a reflection of this low salience of the political environment, in the sense that it inspires few people to come out and vote.

Expectations

Nevertheless, and a managerial nature of local politics notwithstanding, I believe that it remains important to consider *who* sits on these representative bodies in name of the community as a whole, and *who elect them to it*. A modest body of literature exists that has examined empirically what factors control voter turnout on the local level. Several factors have been found to be of significance, and while similar to those that affect turnout on a national level, it is important to note that these factors' influence may be more pronounced on the local level because of the uneven distribution of demographic groups across

communities. Hajnal (2010) found that this element of demographic segregation combined with low and uneven local-level turnout has immediate consequences for election results, and could lead to less equitable representation. Sharp (2012), in turn, finds that local government programs can have an impact beyond the managerial as well, and can have negative consequences for the civic engagement of its citizens.

While Tocqueville warned against these negative consequences on a national scale, he did not foresee these factors being problematic on the local level—in fact, Tocqueville lauded local self-government as a powerful preventative measure against majority tyranny, abuse of power, and excessive individualism and drive for equality.

Given the theoretical assumptions discussed above, I examine three sets of expectations about political participation in relation to the choice of a particular form of local government.

1. Lower turnout in municipalities that use a representative town meeting. I expect lower turnout in communities with representative town meetings than in their counterparts with mayor-city council governments because in town meeting environments the information costs are high, and campaigns are minimal, if they exist at all (see also my findings in Chapter 3). In addition, as a result of a lack of election publicity and the paucity of campaign activities, the range of citizens mobilized to vote in representative town meeting elections will be confined to those already in the personal social networks of the candidates. In contrast, candidates in a mayor-city council election will, even if just for mathematical reasons, have to

attract a wider range of voters, in number as well as in kind, and transcend their own social networks, thereby attracting a broader spectrum of voters.

2. More biased turnout in representative town meeting elections. All elections tend to have groups that participate at a higher rate than others. Local elections are no exception to that fact: homeowners and highly educated individuals tend to turn out at a higher rate than minority groups, for instance (Oliver et al. 2012; Hajnal 2010). Elections also tend to attract those with a higher than average interest in and knowledge of politics (Verba et al. 1995; Anzia 2013; Caren 2007; Gerber et al. 2008; Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014; Lassen 2005). These voters tend to be more ideological than the electorate as a whole. Taking into account the fact that representative town meeting systems of government impose higher information costs than mayor-city council governments, and provide less incentives to political elites to mobilize citizens to vote for them, I expect turnout to be restricted to those political elites, and show biases against those who have fewer resources (money, time, education and civic skills) in representative town meeting communities.

Data & Research Design

Throughout this dissertation, I rely on Catalist-sourced data related to five select pairings of Massachusetts communities that consist of one that uses a representative town meeting, and one that uses a council style of government. In Chapter 1, I discuss in detail how I arrived at my selection of communities. In order to make sure that I avoided generating a

biased sample of communities, I endeavored to select pairings of communities with both a geographic as well as a demographic and socio-economic variety, thereby avoiding making inferences about my dependent variables that would be correlated to factors others than my independent variable: the system of government. In Table 11 below I have reproduced the list of town pairings as previously selected; for a more complete overview of similarities between the towns in these pairings, refer to Chapter 1.

Table 11 List of Town Pairs

<i>Town</i>	<i>System of government</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Region</i>
Amherst	Representative Town Meeting	34,874	West
Northampton	Council	28,978	West
Gloucester	Representative Town Meeting	30,273	Shores
Falmouth	Council	32,660	Shores
Easthampton	Representative Town Meeting	15,994	West
South Hadley	Council	17,196	West
Weymouth	Representative Town Meeting	53,988	Central
Chelmsford	Council	33,858	Central
Somerville	Representative Town Meeting	77,478	Boston
Brookline	Council	57,107	Boston

In this chapter, I will focus on analyzing municipality-wide demographics and municipal election turnout data in the five pairs of Massachusetts communities I selected in Chapter 1 and listed above.

My first analysis is a comparison of turnout statistics between the selected pairs of towns, and beyond that, between the representative town meeting elections on the one hand and the mayor-city council elections on the other. To make these comparisons, I use data from the 2015 municipal elections that I have matched to the information in the Catalyst database, allowing me to make inferences about individual participation, and the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of those participating.

In Massachusetts, elections in towns with representative town meetings are held annually and, barring the odd exception, usually right before the start of Town Meeting in early spring. To ensure continuity, not every seat in a representative town meeting is up for election every year: members serve in seats with different (staggered) terms that generally vary between one and four years. Municipalities that use a mayor-city council system of government instead elect their local representatives on a biennial basis in uneven years, and these elections overwhelmingly take place in the fall. In 2015, general elections for representative positions were held in both types of towns while at the same time, no state or national level races were being held at the same time, ensuring that no other, non-municipal races would artificially boost turnout in either environment, which would have limited the explanatory power of the observed results.

For the second analysis, I compare differences across a number of key demographic (homeownership, education, wealth, and age) and ideological attributes among eligible voters and actual voters in representative town meeting and mayor-city council communities. In doing so, I will be able to establish whether differences between actual voters and eligible voters in the 2015 municipal elections in towns with representative town meetings are greater than the differences between those groups in mayor-city council environments. I expect that these comparisons will reveal a distinct profile of the voting population in the representative town meeting context, in the sense that voters in representative town meeting communities are likely to have different demographic and ideological profiles than the population at large, and that those who turn out to vote are not necessarily reflective of the municipality's citizenry as a whole.

Variables

The key independent variable under examination in this chapter is the system of government chosen to be used by a particular community. In the current study, I observe two forms: the representative town meeting on the one hand, and the mayor-city council form of government on the other.

Voter turnout is the dependent variable in the first analysis of this study, and I relied on the Catalist database to obtain this data. Catalist, in turn, obtains turnout data by periodically acquiring voter files from states' Secretary of State offices. Comparing the turnout data contained in the Catalist database to data obtained separately from the Massachusetts Secretary of State through individual city and town clerks offices, revealed no significant inconsistencies. Furthermore, I use the Catalist database to generate individual communities' voting age populations, in order to determine the number of voting eligible individuals in each municipality. I defined the eligible voting population as those individuals residing within city or town limits who were 18 years or older on the date of the municipal election. While this method does not take into account those rendered ineligible to vote due to felony convictions or other reasons, I believe that based on the overall similarities between these communities, not including these individuals would be unlikely to distort my overall findings.

For the purpose of this project, I define voter turnout as the proportion of eligible voting age individuals who cast ballots in the municipal election. I use the eligible voting population instead of the *registered* voter population for two reasons. First of all, the reason I compute voter turnout using the eligible and not the registered population, is because the

characteristics of registered voters (i.e., who chooses to register to vote in a community) may be conditioned by and endogenous to the system of government a municipality chooses to employ. As such, computing voter turnout as the percentage of the eligible voting population is the most neutral measure to use. Secondly, while I recognize that those who reside and are registered to vote in a community will have the *most* interest in how their community is governed, I believe that it is important for representatives to act in the interest of everyone living in their community, whether they are homeless, students registered to vote in their hometown, or just passing through.

The second analysis revolves around bias in turnout. I measure bias by comparing the same two groups as previously identified for each municipality (eligible voters and actual voters) across a number of demographic and ideological variables. For this, I again used the Catalist database to generate crosstabs of the demographic makeup of each community using variables of homeownership, age, wealth, and level of education. To make ideological inferences, I use Catalist's Ideology Model. This model generates an ideology score for each individual contained in the Catalist database based upon a proprietary ideology thermometer Catalist has developed.¹⁴ This ideology measure has been validated, and has been shown to be highly accurate.¹⁵ In analysis 2, I focus on differences in group turnout across the two systems of government, directing attention specifically to qualitative differences between the eligible and actual voter populations.

¹⁴ The ideology model provides an ideology score for each registered voter and unregistered Voting Age Person (VAP), predicting the propensity to hold progressive beliefs. The Ideology Model was constructed by analyzing the positions registered voters held on certain "thermometer issues," which indicate an overall point of view on key socioeconomic issues. The scores have a value between 0 and 100, with 0 being the most conservative and 100 being the most progressive.

¹⁵ See appendix in Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja (2016), "Race- and Class-Based Inequality and Representation in Local Government," *working paper* (accessed at http://people.umass.edu/schaffne/schaffner_rhodes_laraja_apsa_2016.pdf)

Results

Analysis 1: Turnout

The first analysis compares turnout data between representative town meeting and mayor-city council municipalities. As mentioned above, the turnout measure I use is based on the number of actual voters, divided by the number of eligible voters in a particular locale to achieve the most neutral turnout measure as possible and eliminate any endogeneity the system of government might impose on turnout numbers here. The outcomes here are consistent with my expectations, in that turnout numbers differ significantly between the two categories of towns for this 2015 election cycle.

As a first cut, I have performed this analysis on all communities within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that either have a mayor-city council or representative town meeting form of government to help assess whether or not the outcomes obtained from my sample of five town pairs can be deemed representative. Table 12 below contains the relevant summary statistics that allow me to interpret the correlation between form of government and level of turnout.¹⁶ From these statistics, a few things stand out. First of all, turnout in representative town meeting elections is, on average, lower than for elections that include a city council. However, what is especially interesting to note is that the difference between elections for representative town meeting and city council *only* is not

¹⁶ A full table with statewide turnout data of mayor-city council and representative town meeting municipalities can be found in **Error! Reference source not found.** in Appendix A.

¹⁷ It should be noted that all mayor-city council municipalities included in the sample had mayoral offices up

that great, but that the difference *triples* in size when the office of the mayor is included on the ballot, indicating that the presence of a mayoral race is an important driver of turnout.

Table 12 Local Election Turnout in Municipalities with Mayors and City Councils and Representative Town Meetings

<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Average Turnout</i>
All city councils	21.35%
Mayor and City Council on Ballot	22.93%
Only City Council on Ballot	17.00%
Representative Town Meeting	14.05%

Limiting the scope of the data to the ten towns included in my five-pair sample reveals largely the same trends. Table 13 shows significant differences in turnout levels, and with the exception of the Somerville/Brookline pair, all municipalities with a representative town meeting experienced lower turnout for their municipal elections in 2015 than their counterparts with a mayor-city council government.¹⁷ Even with taking into account the outliers of Amherst and Brookline, turnout in representative town meeting environments is on average 8.2 percentage points, which is a considerable difference. It becomes even more remarkable when we turn back to Table 1 in Chapter 1, and recall that each pair of communities contains two very similar towns, ostensibly not providing a reason as to why turnout between the two communities should differ so dramatically.

¹⁷ It should be noted that all mayor-city council municipalities included in the sample had mayoral offices up for (re-) election during the 2015 election year.

Table 13 Turnout bias in CC and RTM communities

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Eligible Population</i>	<i>Voting population</i>	<i>Turnout</i>	<i>Difference (% points)</i>
Northampton	CC	28,978	24,061	4,802	19.95%	
Amherst	RTM	34,874	30,398	1,432	4.71%	-15.24
Gloucester	CC	30,273	23,614	9,545	40.42%	
Falmouth	RTM	32,660	25,896	5,081	19.62%	-20.80
Easthampton	CC	15,994	12,612	1,873	14.85%	
South Hadley	RTM	17,196	13,817	1,290	9.33%	-5.52
Weymouth	CC	53,988	42,132	13,339	31.66%	
Chelmsford	RTM	33,858	25,403	5,356	21.08%	-10.58
Somerville	CC	77,478	65,983	6,533	9.90%	
Brookline	RTM	57,107	47,604	9,943	20.88%	+10.98

Analysis 2: Bias in Turnout

The second analysis compares the same five pairs of two towns, but uses a variety of demographic and ideological variables to establish what the populations of actual voters in these communities ‘look’ like, and, whether these voters reveal any significant differences on these variables, when compared to the eligible voting populations in the same communities. Here, as elsewhere, my hypothesis is that having a representative town meeting contributes to a bias in election turnout. To be more precise, I expect that those individuals who are drawn to the polls in representative town meeting elections will, on average, be more well-heeled and have more resources at their disposal.

To make the determination of whether or not there is a bias in turnout, I look at individuals’ age, their rates of homeownership, their financial ability, as well as their ideology. In an ideal situation a democracy will be able to encourage participation by as many individuals as possible. However, there are groups of people who are less likely to participate than others, including those who do not hold extreme ideological convictions,

those who are younger, more transient (renters, instead of homeowners), and those who have not enjoyed as much education in their lifetime. A well-oiled democracy would be able to attract these people to the polls, but following my hypotheses, I expect that elections in representative town meeting communities will be *disproportionally* less likely to attract these types of individuals.

With regard to age, I do find substantial differences between the two types of communities. As becomes clear from Table 14, below, the median age of the voting population in all towns is significantly higher than the median age of the eligible population. This is expected, as I hypothesized previously that older individuals are likely to have more time to devote to local affairs, as well as a stronger desire to. However, examining the results in Table 14 reveals a much larger age difference between the eligible populations in representative town meeting communities than in their partner towns with mayors and city councils. As all pairs of towns were selected based upon their demographic similarities, there should be no endogenous reason as to why the actual voter population in representative town meeting elections should skew, on average, 14.6 years older than the eligible population, as opposed to the 9.6 years older actual voter population in mayor and city council relative to their eligible voter population.

The interest for town meeting elections appears to be stronger among older individuals, and more so than in comparable mayor-city council elections in the same year. This is consistent with my expectations regarding biased turnout, as I expect older voters to have more time to devote to the significantly stronger cognitive demands of a representative town meeting election. The bar for younger (non-retired?) individuals to

participate is higher because of time constraints, explaining the disproportionately high turnout of older voters.

Table 14 Median Age, Eligible vs. Actual Voters

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Eligible Voters</i>	<i>Actual Voters</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Northampton	CC	51	60	+9
Amherst	RTM	34	64	+30 ¹⁸
Gloucester	CC	55	61	+6
Falmouth	RTM	58	67	+9
Easthampton	CC	52	59	+7
South Hadley	RTM	54	66	+12
Weymouth	CC	51	59	+8
Chelmsford	RTM	52	61	+9
Somerville	CC	36	54	+18
Brookline	RTM	45	58	+13
Average CC				9.6
Average RTM				14.6

With regards to homeownership, the results I find are incongruent with my initial expectations, insofar that apart from the Weymouth/Chelmsford pairing of towns, there does not seem to be a significant difference in homeownership rates between eligible and actual voters in the pairs of towns I selected (refer to Table 15, below). Overall, actual voter populations show a marginally higher concentration of homeowners, but the difference is small. Homeowners are only ever so slightly more likely to participate in representative town meeting elections than in mayor-city council races, but certainly not to a degree that warrants any definitive conclusions with regards to this matter. However, it would be

¹⁸ To note with regards to the significant age difference in Amherst: Amherst is home to the University of Massachusetts, and hosts a significant population of students, which explains this difference in large part. This, however, does not dilute the representational argument I am making, since these students are community residents as much as the ‘permanent’ population of the town, and thus meriting representation in some form.

interesting to examine whether the 0.8 percentage point increase in actual voter participation in representative town meeting elections holds up when expanding the scope of towns.

Table 15 Median Homeownership Rates

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Eligible Voters</i>	<i>Actual Voters</i>	<i>Difference (in % points)</i>
Northampton	CC	61%	61%	0
Amherst	RTM	55%	56%	+1
Gloucester	CC	69%	72%	+3
Falmouth	RTM	81%	80%	-1
Easthampton	CC	67%	67%	0
South Hadley	RTM	78%	78%	0
Weymouth	CC	78%	80%	+2
Chelmsford	RTM	83%	91%	+8
Somerville	CC	34%	34%	0
Brookline	RTM	48%	49%	+1
			Average CC	1
			Average RTM	1.8

My analysis of financial ability uses two important measures: first, the median household income as disclosed by Catalist, and second, Catalist’s individual measure of wealth. Wealth includes, in addition to household income, the total value of an individual’s assets, such as real property, etc. On both fronts, the data allow me to make some interesting observations.

For a comparison of median annual household incomes, I would like to direct your attention to Table 16, below. The data in this table demonstrates that income of actual voters is overall higher than the income earned by the entire eligible voting population, which is consistent with findings from current scholarship that demonstrates that those with

higher incomes are more likely to participate in elections. However, barring the one exception (again, the Weymouth/Chelmsford pair appears to be an outlier), the income differences between eligible and actual voters in representative town meeting elections appear to be more significant; the mean difference is \$2,600 between the two systems. While small, this difference is consistent with my expectation that participation in representative town meeting elections is better suited to those who have more resources at their disposal.

Table 16 Median Annual Household Income

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Eligible Voters</i>	<i>Actual Voters</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Northampton	CC	\$ 55,000	\$ 56,000	+ \$ 1,000
Amherst	RTM	\$ 43,000	\$ 47,000	+ \$ 4,000
Gloucester	CC	\$ 68,000	\$ 68,000	\$0
Falmouth	RTM	\$ 66,000	\$ 67,000	+ \$ 1,000
Easthampton	CC	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	\$0
South Hadley	RTM	\$ 61,000	\$ 62,000	+ \$ 1,000
Weymouth	CC	\$ 63,000	\$ 70,000	+ \$ 7,000
Chelmsford	RTM	\$ 81,000	\$ 87,000	+ \$ 6,000
Somerville	CC	\$ 66,000	\$ 66,000	\$ 0
Brookline	RTM	\$ 90,000	\$ 99,000	+ \$ 9,000
Average CC				+ \$ 1,600
Average RTM				+ \$ 4,200

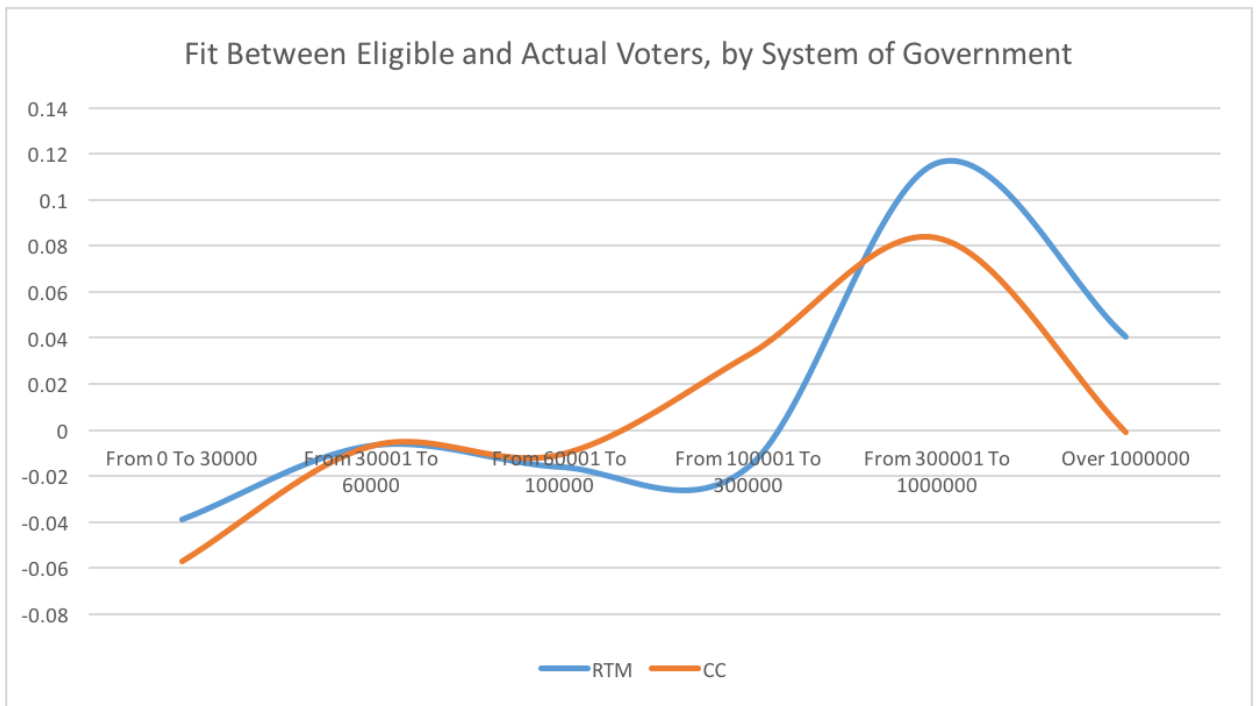
Analyzing the data regarding the second measure of financial ability, wealth, reveals another interesting observation. Figure 3, below, reveals the distributions of wealth in the eligible and actual voting populations in each individual town, and these distributions show some interesting differences.

Figure 3 Distribution of Wealth (in USD) in Eligible, Voting, and Representative Populations



While these distributions of wealth in the eligible and actual voting populations in each individual towns are compelling, a different kind of graph can identify the differences more clearly. For this, I developed a measure of fit by subtracting the proportional values in each wealth category of the eligible voting population from the actual voting population for each of the wealth categories. In cases where the fit is ideal (i.e, the bias between voters and the broader eligible population is absent), the fit line should be located exactly at 0 on the Y-axis. Thus, the further the line is removed from the Y-axis, the worse the ‘fit’ is between the eligible and actual voters in that wealth category. This measure of fit for wealth is displayed in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 Fit Between Eligible and Actual Voters’ Wealth, Represented by System of Government



Again, what is not surprising is that electoral participation skews towards towards the wealthy—this is established wisdom. What is a little bit more interesting, is that there is a difference in how the skew is distributed between these two electoral systems. Though both

systems see higher participation of wealthier individuals, the overrepresentation of wealthier individuals skews towards the middle to upper middle class in mayor and city council elections, whereas representative town meetings see stronger overrepresentation in the higher wealth categories (those individuals having a personal wealth of more than \$300,000).

To classify both the eligible and actual voter populations in each town on the basis of ideology, I used a model for ideological scores that Catalist, LLC has developed in conjunction with the Yuhas Consulting Group. The model provides an ideology score for each registered voter and unregistered Voting Age Person (VAP) and predicts the likelihood for each individual in the database to hold progressive beliefs. The ideology scores the model generates can have a value between 0 and 100, in which 0 means most conservative and 100 means most progressive. Catalist has recently revalidated the model's accuracy and while it remains a predictive model, the validation efforts reveal that this model can give us a good indication of an individual's ideological beliefs.

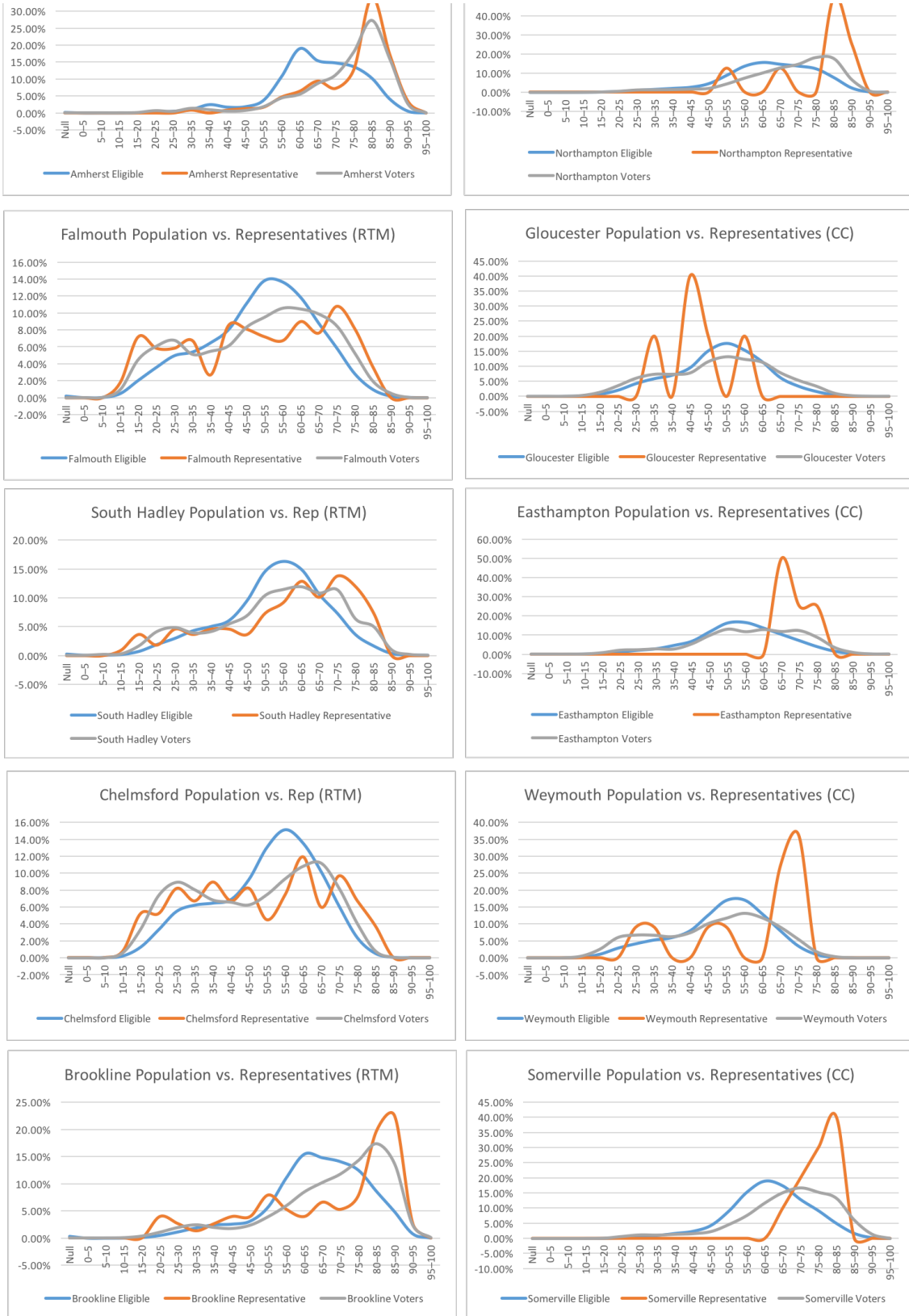
When looking at the ideology scores in Table 17 below, it becomes evident that the median ideology scores do not differ much—not between the pairs of towns, or between the representative town meeting communities and the mayor-city council locales. The median ideology score between all towns involved are very similar.

Table 17 Median Ideology Scores

<i>Town</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Eligible Voters</i>	<i>Actual Voters</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Northampton	CC	65.7	71.2	+6.5
Amherst	RTM	68.7	77.3	+8.6
Gloucester	CC	52.2	51.8	-0.4
Falmouth	RTM	52.8	52.95	+0.15
Easthampton	CC	56.9	59.4	+2.5
South Hadley	RTM	56.6	58	+1.4
Weymouth	CC	53.9	52	-1.9
Chelmsford	RTM	54.4	51.1	-3.3
Somerville	CC	65	69.7	+4.7
Brookline	RTM	66.8	73.1	+6.3
Average CC				+2.28
Average RTM				+2.63

Though the differences when looking at the median ideology scores may seem modest at best, and counterintuitive at worst, median ideology scores obscure differences in ideological distributions that do become visible when rendered in a visual representation. For this visual representation, refer to Figure 5, below.

Figure 5 Comparison of Distributions of Ideology between Eligible, Voting, and Representative Populations



What becomes clear from the visual representations above is that the ideological distributions in the five pairs of towns do reveal some differences between the voting eligible population and the actual voter population. In most cases, the graphs demonstrate the presence of some underrepresentation of those individuals holding moderate ideologies (as is evidenced by a smaller surface area below the curve of the lines representing the actual voting population), while those who are more ideological appear to be overrepresented. These distributional differences are more or less consistent regardless of the system of government employed, though when looking closely, it does appear that overall, the degree to which voters in representative town meeting environments are more ideological than their corresponding eligible voting populations tends to be marginally higher than in mayor-city council elections. However, these results do not allow me to confidently draw any far-reaching conclusions about institutionally-induced ideological bias in turnout in representative town meeting communities—for that, I would have to expand the scope of my research to be sure.

However, what makes these findings regarding turnout bias highly remarkable is that all the ways in which representative town meeting election turnout is skewed should theoretically contribute to *higher* turnout in those communities, not *lower*, at least according to the established wisdom in national-level politics (Verba and Nie 1972b; Verba et al. 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Dahl 1961). An electorate that on average is older, wealthier, and better educated should be turning out at higher rates than an electorate that has none of these built-in advantages. The fact that these factors alone cannot boost representative town meeting election turnout, suggests that something else may be afoot here.

Conclusion

To paraphrase Bruce Cain (2015): are we finding too much, or too little democracy in Massachusetts municipal governments? Do systems of local government encourage citizens to hold their elected officials accountable? And do local governments provide an adequate balance between representation and governance?

My findings in this chapter suggest that there is work left to be done, independent of the chosen political system. However, I do observe important differences in political behavior between the two systems of government under analysis. In municipalities that have large legislative bodies in the form of representative town meetings, election turnout is significantly lower than turnout for local elections during the same year in similar communities that have a mayor-city council form of government. This finding is even more remarkable given the slightly higher levels of income, education, and homeownership in these communities, since those are all factors that tend to boost turnout.

On the other hand, I recognize that my observations for turnout biases between eligible and actual voters in the two pairs of towns are mixed, and do not all conform to the expectations I formulated at the outset. The representative town meeting voter does tend to be disproportionately older compared to the municipality's eligible voting population, and to a higher degree than in mayor-city council environments. Slightly less significant, but still worth mentioning is the fact that the wealth gap between eligible and actual voters is larger in representative town meeting elections than in mayor-city council ones. Differences with regard to ideology, homeownership and education are minimal, if

not negligible, making it hard for me to draw any definitive conclusions at this point in the analysis.

Interestingly enough, however, I did find a high level of congruence between the eligible and actual voting populations in mayor-city council elections, a congruence that was notably absent in representative town meeting environments. Not only is the observed level of turnout in city council communities higher than in their counterparts with representative town meetings, the turnout as a whole appears more reflective of the population at large. This means that even the people who stay home at the time of the local election can feel reasonably confident that a broad enough swath of the population did turn out to vote, and that their views are (on a general level) likely to be accounted for, albeit by proxy of other similarly-situated individuals turning out to vote.

This is by far the most compelling finding that emanates from this chapter's findings, revealing quite starkly the dual impact that turnout can have on election outcomes. On the state and national level, turnout—in absolute numbers—is massive: hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people turn out to vote in those elections. And while we do focus on gross violations of the democratic process through gerrymandering and other forms of voter disenfranchisement, the sheer number of individuals who do show up to vote obfuscates the direct policy impacts that a biased electorate might have. Analyzing local-level turnout, as I did here, does bring out those differences quite starkly, and puts the dual purpose of turnout into clear view. Not only is broad participation in itself valuable, but the qualitative makeup of the electorate matters as well: small differences within the voting population are relatively meaningless if the voting population as a whole does not appear reflective of the community in which it is based.

While in both types of communities under investigation in this chapter turnout is biased in one way or another, city council environments do a consistently better job at attracting a cross-section of the town population to the polls. This stark difference, I believe, highlights the importance of intermediary institutions in general, and election communications specifically; particularly, election communications that are open and accessible to all members of a community, and that are not embedded in pre-existing, homogenous social networks of insiders. While this general tendency is unavoidable in any political system, the institutional configuration of city council communities promotes electoral competition and, importantly, active political campaigns in which candidates formulate coherent platforms to appeal to a broad base. As this chapter demonstrates, the positive effects of this on turnout cannot be underestimated.

CHAPTER 5

REPRESENTATION

Representation as a concept is at the core of both the city council system of government, as well as for governments that use the representative town meeting form of government: both systems make use of elections to elect officials who serve as representatives on behalf of the community at large. How both systems operationalize and implement representation varies tremendously, however, and as such they take different approaches to ensuring that the legislation that is enacted by their respective legislative, representative bodies reflects the political will of broader community.

As I have discussed in prior chapters, the representative town meeting as well as the city council fulfill a legislative function in their communities. The difference that stands out most at first glance is size: representative town meetings use many more representatives than town meetings. As I have demonstrated, this difference in institutional composition—which, at first blush could be deemed inclusive and highly encouraging of broad representation—has far-reaching consequences for those who choose to run for a position, for the campaigning these candidates do or do not engage in, and for the number and kinds of people who end up turning out to vote for the election. In this chapter, I demonstrate that when taken together, these impacts on candidates, campaigns, and turnout, have significant consequences for the representation taking place on and in these municipal legislatures.

Previous Research

A possible managerial nature of local politics notwithstanding, it remains important to consider *who* sits on these representative bodies in name of the community as a whole, and *who elect them to it* (Mansbridge 2011, 2009, 2003, 1999; Urbinati and Warren 2008; Plotke 1997).

Bohman (2012) attributes two primary functions to representation: for people to achieve self-rule, and, additionally, to secure freedom from domination. Pitkin (1969) described the representation as the act of bringing into the public arena citizens' voices so that their perspectives are made a part of the public policy-making process, stating that "representation means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin 1969). Pitkin's sentiments echo President John Adams' approach to representation, who believed that, "the representative assembly should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, reason, and act like them (...)" (Adams 1851).

Adams' and Pitkin's take on representation is often referred to as the classic account of representation. This classic account of representation understands representation as a promissory principal-agent relationship, in which constituents (principals) elect their agents (representatives) to act on their behalf, and defend their interests; and in which citizens hold their representatives accountable based on their promises and whether or not a representative follows through on those promises. Thus, the classic representative system assumes a certain amount of responsiveness of the representative to the wishes of his or her constituents. Pitkin distinguished at least four different kinds of representation:

formalistic representation (the institutional arrangements that precede and initiate representation), symbolic representation (the meaning that a representative has to those they represent), descriptive representation (the ways in which a representative looks like those they represent) and substantive representation (the degree to which a representative acts on behalf of or as an agent of those they represent). These four categories provide for different standards to evaluate representation—they are different perspectives, and the absence of one kind of representation does not mean that another form of representation is in fact taking place. Pitkin leaves open the question of desirability, and leaves the assignment of value to these different kinds of representation an open-ended matter.

The classic account requires the franchise to be extended to all to ensure political equality (Urbinati and Warren 2008). Under the classic account, Pitkin suggests using a formalistic perspective to evaluate representatives' performance in a democratic system, focusing on the study of (the quality of) electoral institutions while leaving the concrete, substantive exercise of representation in the hands of the individual representatives.

Over time, the classic account of representation as a promissory, principal-agent type of relationship, taking place in an environment characterized by a focus on achieving objectively equal representation through procedural and regulatory safeguards, has been challenged by a variety of scholars who contend that abundant evidence exists to question the success of these efforts to achieve representational equality. Plotke (1997) contends that the singular focus on representation as a result of democratic procedures is artificial, and that we would be better off broadening our understanding of representation to include the representation of citizens' interests, i.e. substantive representation. Procedural equality does not suffice if the electoral system allows for various forms of exclusion, either through

interest group or party activity or through informational deficiencies or institutional structures that encourage corrupt or self-interested behavior by representatives (Urbinati and Warren 2008). Plotke (1997) suggests a return to the debate of what makes for *good* representation, arguing that, “the opposite of representation is not participation. The opposite of representation is exclusion. And the opposite of participation is abstention (...) Representation is not an unfortunate compromise between an ideal of direct democracy and messy modern realities. Representation is crucial in constituting democratic practices.” In a rare empirical assessment of representation, Tate (2001) finds that in the case of congressional representation, black voters expressed a higher satisfaction with their representation if their Member of Congress happened to be black than if they were white, thereby lending empirical credence to the value of descriptive representation. These findings were later largely confirmed in research by Banducci et al. (2004), Lawless (2004) and Bowen and Clark (2014), altogether lending credence to the theoretical argument made by Mansbridge (1999).

Jane Mansbridge (1999), too, contends that our normative conceptions of representation have not kept up with reality, and that representation, aside from taking place within the formal-institutionally defined confines of the classic conception of representation, can also take place in other forms. Mansbridge defines four forms of representation, of which one (promissory representation) resembles closely what Pitkin defined as formalistic representation (Pitkin 1969). The three additional forms of representation Mansbridge distinguishes are anticipatory, gyroscopic, and surrogacy—each of these forms generate different criteria by which to assess representatives and all of

them are legitimate forms by which constituents can be represented, while not necessarily relying on formal processes of authorization and accountability.

Mansbridge attempted to broaden the concept of representation beyond the mere principal-agent relationship that for so long characterized the primary way of thinking about representation, and this has been a trend in the literature since. Plotke (1997), for example, suggests a consideration of representation as the dynamic between exclusion and inclusion, and Anne Phillips (1995), in her work *The Politics of Presence*, makes a similar argument. This strand of the literature makes an important distinction between the legitimacy of representation in a legal sense, and the representation of citizens *in representative bodies*. This literature argues that exclusion of groups on that front is just as big a problem as the legal exclusion from political *participation* these groups have faced historically. The argument made by Plotke (1997), Phillips (1995), and Mansbridge (2011) is a necessary one—and one that is highly relevant to the context of this chapter. Collectively, these authors argue for a qualitative assessment of representation, and to consider the legitimacy of representation in addition to its formal operation. The reasoning behind this argument is that while systems can provide formally equal opportunities for access and participation, a formal equality can still lead to a systematic exclusion from of particular groups from representative bodies, thereby delegitimizing its representational performance.

A modest body of literature exists that has examined empirically what factors control voter turnout on the local level, and its implications for representation. Several variables have been found to be of significance, and while similar to those that affect turnout on a national level, it is important to note that these factors' influence may be more

pronounced on the local level because of the uneven distribution of demographic groups across communities. Hajnal and Trounstein (2005) and Hajnal (2010) found that this element of demographic segregation has immediate effects on voter turnout, noting that if election turnout were spread evenly among demographic groups, there would be immediate and significant consequences for the outcomes of local elections. Additionally, Hajnal (2010) found that these turnout-related findings had strong impact on council representation, finding that in environments with higher turnout, more minorities serve on city councils.

Cox (1999, 2015) similarly agrees that tightly concentrated, geographically small districts reduce turnout as well by limiting candidates' incentives to mobilize. In addition, both Cox (2015) and Anzia (2013) note the deleterious effects on turnout of off-cycle election timing, and their unequally distributed demographic disparities. Sharp (2012), in turn, finds that local government programs can have an impact beyond the managerial as well, and can have negative consequences for the civic engagement of its citizens.

Oliver et al. (2012) have argued that while local government is plagued by issues of turnout and representation, these issues do not actually matter to the same degree that they do on the national level. Noting that local government is limited in size and scope, and does not have much authority beyond managerial issues, the authors argue that there is little at stake for residents when it comes to their political participation. However, while Oliver et al. argue that issues in municipal politics are rarely ideological, Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014) find that residents' political stances on municipal issues can be predicted by accounting for their positions on national-level issues. Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014), however, do find in their research that institutional configurations do not have

much bearing on representation, which is a finding that counters much of the existing municipal politics literature (Anzia 2011; Trounstone and Valdini 2008; Trounstone 2009b; Merrifield 1993).

Theory: Local Representation

I make an institutional argument about representation in municipal politics that is based in both empirical findings about turnout, as well as in the theory of political representation. My theory is that the form of government adopted by a particular community indirectly affects the representation said governmental body provides.

My theory about the influence of the form of government adopted by a municipality is therefore a compounded one, where the effect of choosing a particular form of government is the result of intermediary effects of that choice on the nature of those running for office, the mobilization activity surrounding elections, and ultimately the level of voter turnout. The underlying rationale is that representational structures, as designed by town charters, impose information costs on voters, and the level of those costs varies by the system of government adopted. A system with higher costs of voting will tend to filter out the kind of voters who lack the resources and social networks to bear the additional costs of participation (see Chapter 4). The additional costs of participation come in several forms: first of all, participation in representative town meeting elections requires voters to know about and assess the quality of many more candidates. In addition, municipal elections lack party labels which could otherwise provide useful cues about these candidates. Furthermore, larger legislative bodies do not allow for issue ownership on the

part of the representatives, making it difficult for voters to assess representatives' performance, and to decide whether to re-elect an incumbent or not. This linkage between policy output and individuals tends to be more present in council environments, as councils tend to be smaller groups, and voters can often assign responsibility either to an individual councilor, or to the community's executive (mayor) with whom a councilperson may or may not be affiliated. Altogether, the smaller size of the group of elected officials to watch makes municipal leadership more transparent and easier to "figure out".

My theory also considers the incentives for local political elites to defray these information costs by subsidizing information through political campaigns and other means of communication (see Chapter 3). To be sure, there are substantial differences in informational costs between the two systems, but there are also important differences in how these costs are offset by the behavior of political elites in either system. Candidates running for office in a municipality with a city council government need to appeal to a broader group of voters in order to get elected, and thus have a stronger incentive to mobilize and subsidize information for voters. As I show in Chapter 3, campaigns are considerably more common for city council elections, and media coverage is more pronounced as well. Even if local campaigns provide little information about policy platforms, residents are reminded to vote by the public advertising of campaigns and by the media drawing their attention to the election. Minimally, voters gain the heuristic of "knowing" candidates by recalling the names posted on lawn signs.

In representative town meeting environments, the already higher costs of voting need to be absorbed by the public in their entirety. Higher voting costs are not a problem for those who have the resources to offset them: for instance, if one is firmly embedded in

their community, has an in-depth understanding of the political issues at play, knows the candidates running for office through their social network, or has the time and the intellectual acumen to do the necessary research to facilitate confident participation in the election, then nothing stands in the way of successful and confident election participation.

The issue is that those resources required for successful and efficient participation in representative town meeting elections are not equally distributed: those who have not lived in the community for very long, those who do not have any connections to the political elite in town, those who have not enjoyed a college-level education, and those of modest means are often members of minority groups, low-income households, or students—or all of the above. This effectively makes these elections inaccessible for these already-disadvantaged groups.

Representation in local politics matters, despite its limited scope. While municipal elected officials have limited authority, and are typically only rated on whether they have provided town services adequately, leaders—in their managerial duties—do make decisions that weigh and balance the interests of different groups of constituents. Zoning, property taxes, and the opening hours of a food pantry may seem like minor issues, but depending on the group a constituent is a member of, these may have serious consequences. While broad and diverse representation on a municipal legislative body does not guarantee different outcomes, the conscious inclusion of a variety of perspectives may lead to different accents in agenda-setting, though evidence does exist that legislators are more responsive to voters than to non-voters (Griffin and Newman 2005). Additionally, this recognizes that representation has a function beyond the direct policy output, in the sense

that descriptive representation can signal a policy of inclusion, thereby taking representation beyond its classic definition.

Expectations

Given the theory I have outlined above, and based on my findings in the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have the following expectation expectation with regards to representation in municipal politics:

1. Less representative elected officials in representative town meeting elections.

Since I expect that the choice for a representative town meeting government will encourage self-selection among voters and will result in election turnout that is biased in favor of those members of the electorate with more resources, I expect the results of the election to reflect this initial bias. I expect that when comparing communities' voting eligible populations to their respective representatives that the demographic and ideological differences between these groups will be more pronounced in locales with representative town meetings.

Following this logic, I also expect to observe *fewer* differences between those who turned out to vote in representative town meeting elections and their representatives than between voters and representatives in mayor-city council towns, since I expect that voters and representatives in town meeting environments belong to the same social networks, or might otherwise be informally encouraged to cast their ballot in favor of a particular candidate. As such, I expect homogeneity

between voters and representatives in representative town meeting environments, and a greater degree of heterogeneity in towns that use mayor-city council representation.

Variables

As in previous chapters, the independent variable for my analysis in this chapter is the form of government used by the municipalities under investigation. The independent variables for this chapter are both descriptive as well as substantive in nature: I analyze citizens, voters, and representatives on the basis of their age, homeownership, years of education they have under their belt, household income, and lastly, their ideology.

Data and Research Design

This chapter is set up similarly to previous chapters. I will still be drawing from my population of five pairs of towns, which, if you recall, consist of communities that are similar but for their system of government: one community in each pair has a representative town meeting, whereas the other member of the pair will have a city council government. Based on their size (being communities with over 6,000 residents), each community has the option available to them to adopt either form of government. By comparing the town pairs, I will examine specifically whether assigning the responsibility for a community's governance to a large group of citizens has an impact on representation, either descriptively or substantively, when compared to municipalities that choose to task a small group of

elected officials with their administration. I do so by examining the composition of each community's voting eligible population, voting population, and representative population.

In an ideal representative situation, there would be no differences in the descriptive as well as the substantive compositions of these groups. Similarity of these groups indicates accurate representation, or at least the guarantee that those living in the community can reasonably feel represented by those who are elected into to office. Since turnout is traditionally low in municipal elections (see also Chapter 4), an intermediary form of representation can be compelling as well; that is, when the electorate-at-large finds itself accurately reflected in the composition of the (smaller) voting population, one can be reasonably confident that the variety of voices present in the community will be heard on election day.

As was the case for previous chapters, the data for this analysis is sourced from Catalist, which provides individual-level data for all persons involved. I extracted the relevant data by matching voter lists and membership lists into the Catalist database. With the data matched to the database, I

Results

This analysis investigates the degree to which representatives in either system of government are able to substantively and descriptively represent their communities. For this purpose, I define representation as the congruence between an elected representative and their constituency, which in turn I define as the eligible electorate at large of their community (see also Disch (2012)). I will assess the congruence between representatives

and the electorate on the same variables that I introduced in Chapter 4, and I will assess any representational bias in the same way as I did in Chapter 4 as well. Comparing eligible voters to their representatives allows me to assess whether a different system of government can bring with it a representational bias.

Table 18, below, displays the results of my comparisons of the representative town meeting populations and the inhabitants of mayor-city council environments across the abovementioned variables, and they allow me to make some interesting observations. First of all, I find only limited evidence of the existence of a greater representational bias in towns with representative town meetings. One variable that stands out is age, as it appears that those elected to town meetings are significantly older than the citizens in their community, and that age difference is greater than the one we observe in towns with mayors and city councils (see Table 18). This result is consistent with my expectation that older individuals have more time to allocate to serve their community. In addition, this result is intuitive given the assumption that older individuals often have stronger ties to a community by virtue of having lived there for a longer period of time and therefore, in a system of government that rewards personal relationships and social networks—as I expect representative town meeting to do—older citizens are more likely to a) want to run and; b) be elected by their friends and neighbors (see Table 18 on the next page).

Table 18 Comparison between City Council and Representative Town Meeting Eligible Voters (EV) and Representatives (Rep), noting percentage differences between both groups on listed dimensions.

Variable	Northampton (CC)		Amherst (RTM)		Gloucester (CC)		Falmouth (RTM)		Somerville (CC)		Brookline (RTM)	
	EV	Rep	EV	Rep	EV	Rep	EV	Rep	EV	Rep	EV	Rep
Median Ideology	65.7	81.8	68.7	80.8	52.2	45.25	52.8	51.35	65	78.1	66.8	83
Median Age	51	58	34	63	55	44.5	58	64	36	57.5	45	60
Home Ownership	61%	51%	55%	55%	69%	68%	81%	81%	34%	32%	48%	51%
Years of Education	14	15	15	15	14	12.5	14	14	14	15	16	16
Household Income	55000	55000	43000	44000	68000	51000	66000	67000	66000	71000	90000	102000

Variable	Easthampton (CC)		South Hadley (RTM)		Weymouth (CC)		Chelmsford (RTM)	
	EV	Rep	EV	Rep	EV	Rep	EV	Rep
Median Ideology	56.9	70	56.6	62.3	53.9	66.5	54.4	50.6
Median Age	52	51	54	64.5	51	52	52	60
Home Ownership	67%	90%	78%	78%	78%	83%	83%	91%
Years of Education	13	13	13	14	13	13	14	14
Household Income	50000	75000	61000	62000	63000	76000	81000	82500

	Δ CC	Δ RTM
Median Ideology	+9.59	+5.75
Median Age	+3.60	+13.70
Home Ownership	+0.03	+0.02
Years of Education	+0.10	+0.20
Household Income	+\$5,200	+\$3,300

On the other dimensions, I do not find the results to be nearly as remarkable, and in fact, they run, on some occasions, counter to my expectations. These findings have consequences for our conception of the dynamics of representation, and the relationship between the formalistic, descriptive, and substantive representation of voters.

From my observations, it appears that in these communities no formalistic mechanism of representation appears to exist. While both systems have completely different ways of electing their representatives, a choice for either set of rules does not lead to a substantial in- or decrease in the differences between eligible voters and representatives on the dimensions under investigation. For instance, the differences between the systems of government with regards to homeownership rates are insignificant. In both systems, representatives are slightly more likely to own a home, but there is less than one percentage point difference between representative town meeting members and mayors and city councilors. On the front of education, findings are very similar as well: representatives in both categories of towns are more educated, but there is but a marginal difference between representatives in either system of government.

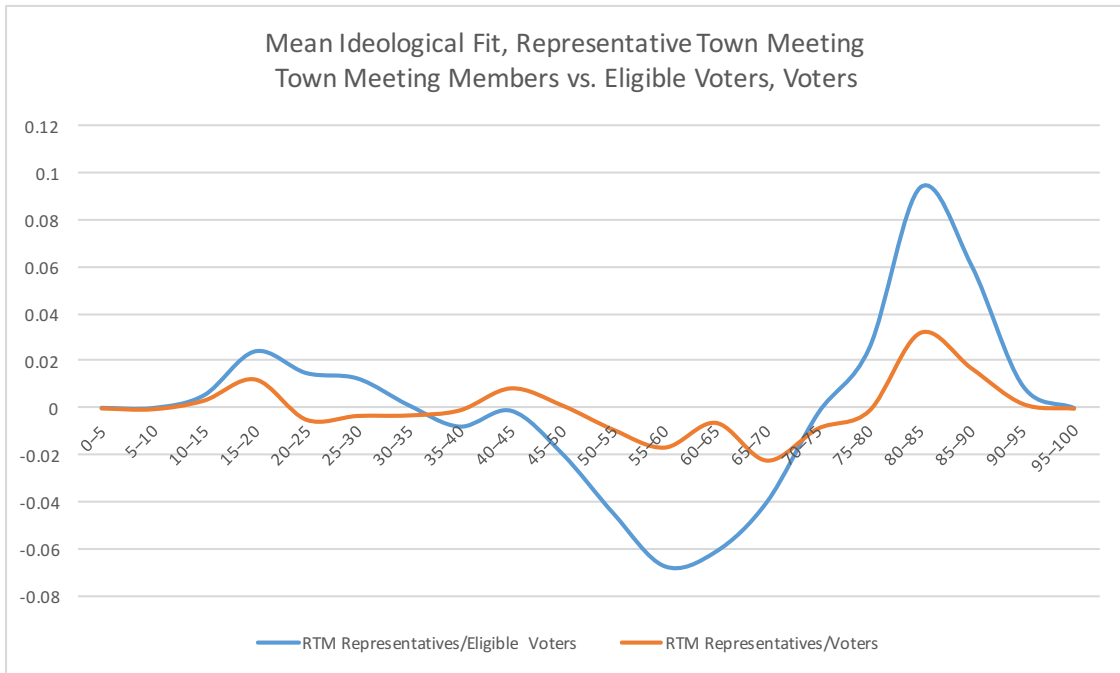
A bit more remarkable is that there are considerable differences between representative town meeting and mayor-city council governments on the dimensions of household income and ideology, but that those differences run contrary to my initial expectations. While under both systems of governments representatives tend to be more ideological than the eligible voting population, representatives in mayor-city council governments reveal a larger gap between their own ideology and their constituents'. Though my expectations were that a system of government more accessible and intelligible to voters would generate different—and more representative—elected officials, there

appears to be no real basis to assume that this kind of formalistic representation is effective on all dimensions (Pitkin 1969).

Here as well as in the previous chapter, my measure of ideological ‘fit’ can help us go beyond the static median ideology scores; there are interesting observations to be made from looking at the distribution of ideology scores in the populations of eligible voters, actual voters, and representatives that allows for a more precise assessment of the quality of the substantive representation taking place based on the assumption that an individual’s ideology score is correlated to their stance on issues of policy, and that congruence between constituents and representatives on this dimension indicates a likely agreement on policy matters.

The blue line in Figure 6, below indicates that in representative town meetings moderate community members are severely underrepresented, compared to those eligible voters who are very liberal or very conservative. The deep dip below zero in the middle section of the blue line indicates that there are many fewer moderate town meeting members compared to the proportions in the eligible electorate.

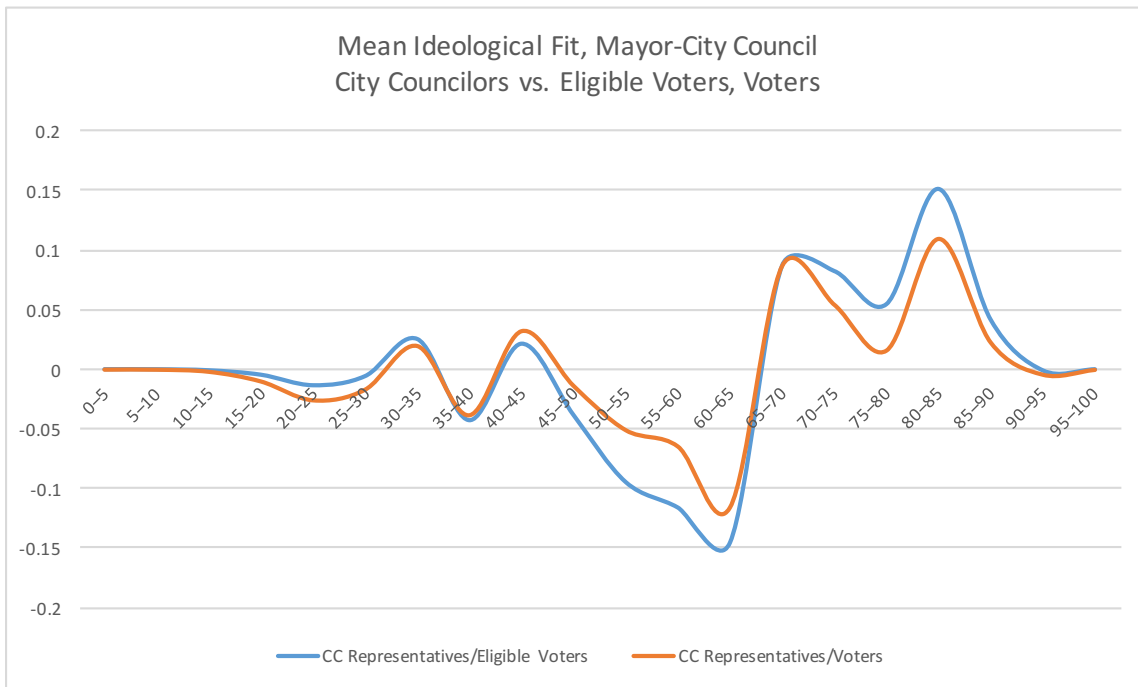
Figure 6 Mean Ideological Fit, Representative Town Meeting. Town Meeting Members vs Eligible Voters, Actual Voters



Conversely, looking at the orange line in Figure 6 implies that the representative town meeting form of government is highly responsive to residents who actually vote. The orange line remains fairly close to zero, indicating minimal ideological differences between those elected to town meeting, and those who helped them get there. This is a noteworthy finding for two reasons: first of all, this finding, which indicates that representation of voters in representative town meetings is simply very accurate, runs counter to my expectations of what to expect in terms of substantive representation in town meeting environments. At the same time, however, this seemingly disparate finding does confirm my expectations about the process of mobilization in representative town meeting elections, namely, that candidates for town meeting rely on their personal social networks to mobilize the electorate—the strong similarities between them and their voters are logical if they indeed rally their friends and neighbors to vote for them. Together, representatives and their voters are part of a homogenous network, sharing interests and values.

Taking a closer look at the mayor-city council governments, the data reveals that these legislative bodies do not do as good a job at representing their communities, again running counter to my expectations. The data in , above, show large discrepancies in household income, as well as ideology. Though representative town meeting members were likewise more polarized than their electorates, the difference between the electorate and their representatives in mayor-city council communities is larger by a factor of almost two. This finding is confirmed by the fit lines in Figure 7: the fit lines between elected officials in mayor-city council communities, voters, and eligible voters follow a different pattern than for representative town meetings. First of all, in mayor-city council environments it appears that moderates are slightly more underrepresented than in representative town meetings (indicated by the larger dip below the X-axis), which is consistent with the data shown in , but not consistent with my previously formulated expectation. Secondly, there are some distinct peaks on both the left side and the right side of the fit line, suggesting that representation in these environments may be more polarized. Overall, this figure represents the general finding gleaned from in that there is less overall ideological conformity between the public and its representatives in mayor-city council environments. This finding is unexpected: I hypothesized, based on the assumptions of a formalistic theory of representation, that the increased turnout in mayor-city council systems would lead to a more broadly representative group of elected officials and result in a better ideological ‘fit’. However, while unexpected, this finding has an important second dimension and is not entirely counterintuitive, as I will explain in a moment.

Figure 7 Mean Ideological Fit, Mayor-City Council. City Councilors vs. Eligible Voters, Actual Voters.



Having touched on the numerous ways in which both the formalistic as well as the substantive approach to representation have seemingly failed to provide accurate explanations for my observations of local Massachusetts governments, I turn to the descriptive perspective. Interestingly enough, while the differences between eligible voters and representatives in mayor-city council governments are larger than in representative town meetings, the differences between *actual voters* and *eligible voters* in mayor-city council elections are smaller, often significantly so, and this presents a compelling contribution to our understanding of representation. For example, recalling Table 9, eligible voters in Brookline, a representative town meeting community, have a median ideology score of 66.8, with actual voters scoring 73.1 on the same scale ($\Delta = 6.3$). In Somerville, which has a mayor and city council, eligible voters have a median ideology score of 65, and the actual voters there score 69.7 ($\Delta = 4.7$). This is a pattern that holds up

in large part across most variables, with voters resembling the eligible voting population more closely in mayor-city council environments than in communities that have representative town meetings. This same phenomenon becomes apparent in Figure 5, as evidenced by the overlapping blue and orange lines, indicating that the populations of eligible and actual voters are ideologically equally far removed from their representatives, which in turn suggests that they are largely the same. This same congruence is not seen in the representative town meeting system where the voters are more polarized than the electorate, and vastly more similar, ideologically speaking, to their elected officials.

This finding provides important evidence for the hypothesized role of social and personal networks in representative town meeting elections, as well as for the importance of the intermediary institutions as discussed prior. Since the voting public in representative town meeting environments has to contend with large candidate rosters, a lack of campaigns, and scarce media coverage—all factors that raise the costs of voting—the likelihood for an individual to turn out will be reduced, unless they have a strong intrinsic motivation to participate. In such a system that disincentivizes turnout, candidates running for office can rely on their immediate circle of like-minded individuals and members of their social network to get the necessary votes. The individuals choosing to run for town meeting are generally interested in politics and likely to be more ideological, older, and better situated than the average person. The result is that representative town meeting governments mirror almost perfectly the small group of voters who elect them. The residents who end up in office follow a somewhat bi-modal distribution because that is exactly how the ideological distribution of their voters are laid out. This is consistent with expectations as well: since town meeting elections have low salience, these races are less

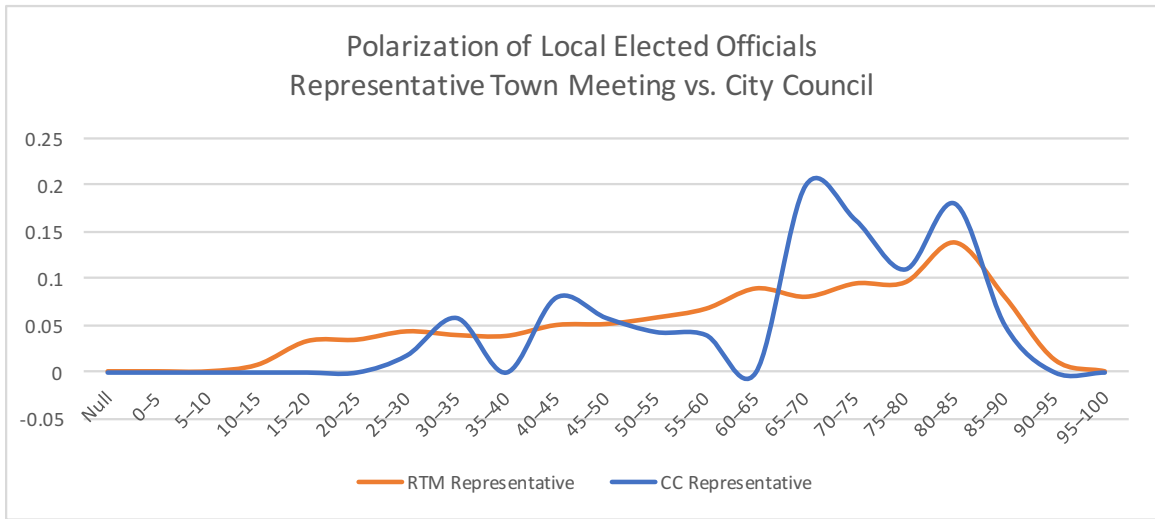
likely to draw non-ideological voters to the polls, and so the moderates stay home, instead of electing fellow-moderates to town meeting.¹⁹

Conversely, the close resemblance between citizens and the voting public in city council municipalities suggests a second-tier, descriptive relationship between the two. While superficially the relationship between the citizens, voting public and their representatives may appear even more tenuous than the one between town meeting representatives and their electorates, this finding provides an important insight: descriptive representation occurs in city council governments as much as it does under town meeting conditions, but it simply takes place *on a different level*: instead of occurring between voters and representative, there is a strong connection between voters and the larger electorate.

Overall, neither system of government appears to generate moderate officeholders: elected officials in both environments are polarized, as becomes evident from the ideological distribution of officeholders displayed in Figure 8 below:

¹⁹ An alternative explanation would be that moderates simply do not run for office as much as ideologues. That is, moderates might just not be passionate enough to run for office, giving moderate voters nobody to vote for but strongly ideological candidates. This alone could discourage moderates from showing up. Whether the non-moderate voters or the lack of a non-moderate candidate pool is driving this process of moderate exclusion is something I cannot disentangle in this chapter. I can say, however, that this finding is somewhat contradictory when considered in light of the democratic principles undergirding town meeting and the justifications for its continued use. Representative town meetings are supposed to yield highly accessible and transparent governments, and allow for a low threshold for individuals from all walks of life to pick up part of the shared responsibility of governing their community. Paradoxically, representative town meeting governments *do* make it easy for candidates to get elected, but it is only able to do so by virtue of having a structure that does not encourage participation from anyone but the most interested, with the most resources at their disposal, and descriptively the most similar to the candidates who have put themselves on the ballot.

Figure 8 Distribution of Ideology Scores of Elected Representatives in RTM and CC Systems of Government



This dynamic, while inconsistent with my original expectation that representatives in mayor-city council governments would be more similar to their constituents than their counterparts in representative town meetings, is not counterintuitive but reflects the realities of who wants to run for public office. People who choose to do so typically have strong opinions about politics and are therefore more ideological than the typical citizen, and as such, the motivation to run for office is unlikely to be determined by an institutional configuration.

Conclusion

Comparing representative town meeting elections to their mayor-city council counterparts makes for an important observation: neither system is better than the other in reproducing the ideological preferences of voters, and each system comes with its own set of trade-offs. Note how in mayor-city council environments the smaller number of candidates must present themselves to a broader voting public. This voting public is highly

similar to the eligible voter pool from which they stem, but the candidates who get elected are more ideological than this voting public.

On the dimension of substantive representation, elected officials tend to be more ideological than either eligible voters or actual voters, no matter the system of government. However, the representatives' bias ran counter to my expectations and was even stronger in mayor-city council communities than in representative town meeting towns. This suggests that having highly ideological leaders is something that is hard to escape when electing local leaders, but that some features of the local political environment can and will encourage the emergence of more polarized candidates. The key difference here is that in representative town meeting communities, voters tend to share the candidates' ideological biases, while in mayor-city council communities they do not. Nonetheless, the mayor-city council elections tend to attract a type of voter that is representative of the community at large, lending hope to the suggestion that the community might still be able to hold accountable to ideological representatives it elects.

Other scholars have suggested that municipal politics are characterized by their homogeneity (Oliver et al. 2012). The fact that I do find strong ideological and age-related biases in local political environments that correlate to the system of government used illustrates empirically that the choice of a particular governmental system, even in communities that are themselves fairly homogenous, can create distortions in the representation of citizens. Distortions that, when combined with even a moderately contentious political landscape, can have very real, substantive consequences.

However, based on these findings, I believe it would be a mistake to adjudicate between systems of representation based solely on the relationship between representatives

and those individuals who elect them. When it comes to representation, it is important to consider the link between elected officials and the community they serve as a whole. When examining representation from this perspective, the observation that representative town meeting governments are voted into office by a small swath of like-minded friends and neighbor becomes both highly salient as well as a red flag. The fact that mayor-city council governments get elected by appealing to a broader electorate further illustrates that there are real choices to be made in this arena. Because there are fewer candidates (and, as a result, fewer choices for voters), there is a greater need for candidates to mobilize voters beyond their immediate personal social circle. This means that they have to present voters with *choices*, which entails running on a well-defined platform that is different from opponents' platforms, essentially *encouraging* the polarization that I noted previously. Furthermore, the congruence between eligible and actual voters suggests that the former can rely on the latter to hold their elected officials accountable; given the similar profiles of eligible and actual voters, universal participation would be unlikely to lead to different elected officials.

Taking a birds-eye view of the representation taking place in town meeting and city council environments suggests that these two types of government may well have built their governments with different interpretations of the concept of representation in mind. Representative town meeting democracy, where few individuals elect likeminded individuals suggests an adoption of the logic of delegate-based representation, whereas mayor-city council environments in which a broadly representative group of voters elects a small group of less-similar representatives appears to follow the concept of trustee-based representation. If this is indeed the case, this has further consequences for individual

representatives' interpretation of their tasks, and the way the electorate holds them accountable. While this goes beyond the scope of the current dissertation, I plan to address this consideration more in-depth in future research.

In sum, neither representative town meetings nor mayor-city council governments produce leaders who are reflective of their eligible electorates—a finding that is consistent with findings previously made by Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014). However, there is an important effect on an intermediary level: representative town meetings do really well at representing the few who do turn out to vote, both substantively as well as descriptively, while mayor-city council governments appear to do a slightly better job at descriptive representation of the eligible electorate with an electorate that is notably more reflective of the community's larger population. This demonstrates that the choice for either form of government has consequences, as the choice for representative town meeting is more likely to yield a homogenous, elite-driven class of politically engaged individuals than a choice for city council would in like cases.

The bigger takeaway of these findings is that they demonstrate that our collective tendency to place more trust in bigger, more permeable and inclusive political environments may be somewhat misplaced. While their promise of more and more transparent democracy is very attractive, their use brings with it some real downsides in the areas of participation, representation, and accountability. Instead of focusing entirely on creating more opportunities for citizen involvement, democratic reformers would do well to consider how the layout of political institutions shape the flow and form of political information to voters. Information is an essential prerequisite for effective political participation. Institutional configurations that create additional cognitive burdens and do

not provide sufficient incentives for candidates to engage in extensive electoral mobilization fail to live up to our nation's democratic promise. While direct consequences in homogenous suburban townships might seem minimal at first glance, this study raises important questions regarding the design of political institutions in more diverse political environments at the county, state, or national level. Recent developments in locales such as Ferguson, Mo. further underscore that while lower-level representation may appear inconsequential at first glance, its absence may have real and sometimes violent ramifications (Schaffner et al. 2014). But regardless of whether one is convinced by the need for accurate representation at the local level, a high level of political participation on the local level may have benefits beyond the realm of local politics, as even J.S. Mill (1861) recognized local government as the 'training grounds for democracy,' creating civic habits and engagement that affect higher levels of government as well.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The realm of local politics suffers from a lack of attention, despite its prominent role as the level of government with which citizens interact the most on a daily basis. While the issues at play in municipal governance do not always speak to the imagination in the same way national issues can, the consequences of decisions made by local elected officials are often immediately felt by individual citizens. Whether it is a decision about property tax rates, building permits, or welcoming refugees in their community, the issues are many and diverse, even if they aren't 'sexy'. Local politics is the first point of contact: not only can consequences of political decision-making on this level be felt immediately, its proximity also affords the citizen an opportunity to interact with their representatives without having to suffer through phone trees or templated email responses. And the opportunity for local political actors to enact important, ideologically-driven decisions is ever-increasing in light of a national government that is willing to cede decision-making authority to lower levels of government. Dismissing the influence of local decision-makers as purely managerial therefore paints an incomplete picture of reality.

With the importance of local politics increasing, it becomes especially important to pay attention to *how* it operates, and *who* operates it. After all, local political institutions operate on a much smaller scale than national or even state level institutions, and are therefore not subject to as much oversight as these higher-level institutions. In addition, the proximity brings with it a sense of attachment on the side of the populace: community members who value tradition, and regard their local political environment as the perfect

test bed to do what they find impossible to achieve in state politics or on the national political stage. Despite having an understanding of what makes for a healthy, democratic, and representative political environment in state and national politics, political science is left with two questions about local political institutions: how does the design of governmental institutions affect who participate, and who are represented? And secondly, to what extent does broad, direct participation in democratic institutions serve the interests of a given community?

In analyzing the participatory and representative implications of two forms of municipal government that exist in parallel in the state of Massachusetts, the representative town meeting on the one hand, and the council government on the other, I contend that despite these forms of government sharing similar objectives and processes, the choice for either form has far-reaching consequences for citizen involvement and representation. While the representative town meeting is intuitively appealing for its incorporation of principles of direct democracy and its ability to enable large numbers of individuals to share in the process of municipal governance, a deeper analysis of the participation and representation taking place reveals a different picture. The representative town meeting's inability to incorporate into its ranks a representative cross-section of the community it serves, invites a deeper examination about the mechanisms and processes that drive participation and representation in municipal politics. What emanates from my findings is a chain reaction set in motion by the design parameters of the form of government employed.

Contention 1: The form of government creates the opportunity structure for political candidates, determining which types of candidates choose to run for office under the chosen form of government.

Though representative town meetings and council forms of government share a similar commitment to representative democracy, they each go about its implementation in different ways. By dividing legislative responsibilities among a large group of individuals that meet at most twice year for a modest number of evenings, the representative town meeting sets up a political environment that is radically different from its council government counterparts, in which governance is shared among a smaller number of individuals who meet on a regular basis year-round. This choice, I find in my analysis, has an immediate implication that touches at the very core of the democratic process: it alters the opportunity structure for candidates and as such, influences what types of candidates decide to run for office, thus conditioning voters' choices. By sharing legislative responsibility with many peers and meeting only twice a year, a representative serving on a town meeting remains relatively invisible, and their votes become mostly indistinguishable from those cast by others: the chance of casting a deciding vote, taking issue ownership, and make oneself visible as a political leader in the community is decidedly limited, which is further compounded by the once or twice-annual meeting schedule. As such, the representative town meeting does not attract many aspiring career politicians or individuals with prior political experience, and likewise does not encourage candidates to formulate comprehensive political platforms with which to appeal to voters. Indeed, few members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives hold prior experience as a town meeting member. Rather than providing a welcoming environment to potential

candidates with progressive political ambition, the representative town meeting provides an environment suitable for single-issue candidates, political hobbyists and those intrinsically motivated by civic volunteerism to find their place in municipal politics and contribute to their community. Thus, by altering the type of candidates that appear on the ballot, the political environment shaped by its form of government conditions the choices that its members can make come election time. I argue that these different options on election day will result in representatives who—between the two systems of government under investigation—approach their duties as elected officials with different levels of intensity. I find that city councilors, on average, spend more time on their elected positions, especially when taking into account that these officials serve on a year-round basis.

Contention 2: The features of a form of government employed by a community condition the environment for mediating institutions and determine their presence and robustness.

I find that the design of the form of government does not just set up an environment that is more or less welcoming to certain types of candidates, it also conditions the environment in which mediating institutions such as political campaigns and the news media operate. These mediating institutions have—as has been shown in numerous analyses of the workings of state and national-level elections—an important role to fulfill: mediating institutions reduce the costs associated with political participation that citizens experience. Citizens are asked to spend resources in a variety of ways: they have to devote time, cognitive resources, as well as the occasional financial expense in order to be a confident participant in the political process. Mediating institutions offset these costs by

providing citizens with access to easily digestible clarifying information: shortcuts that allow individuals to spend less effort in reaching the level of confidence they seek in order to make an informed choice.

But mediating institutions do not thrive equally well in all political environments, and I find that the form of government used is a differentiating factor. The form of government used in a community sets up the environment in which the relevant actors exist and operate: in addition to the opportunity structure as it applies to individual candidates, it also conditions the boundaries within which mediating institutions can function. I find that the environment created by the representative town meeting form of government is less suitable to healthy and robust mediating institutions than the landscape setup by comparable council forms of government, and results in negligible spending on campaigns by candidates for representative town meeting. The combination of large numbers of candidates and elected officials in representative town meeting governments, a prevailing non-careerist attitude towards the political process of those (interested in) serving, and the use of a plurality-at-large system of voting create an environment in which candidates favor informal ways of mobilization rooted in their own social networks over organized, outward-facing campaigns, both as a function of personal preference (members are attracted to the system's quaintness) as well as a lack of necessity (candidates do not require a majority of votes) as the stakes are lower because of the plurality-at-large method of voting. By concentrating any and all mobilization activity within their personal social networks, exposure to the mediating information provided by candidates remains exclusively accessible by members of their inner circle, making it more difficult for those not part of those networks to gather the information necessary to make an educated voting

decision. The situation is different for council government elections: while no large quantities of money are being spent on campaign activity, candidates do spend funds for organized campaigns. Supporting my argument that campaigns have a twofold purpose—advocating for a candidate as well as promoting higher overall election turnout—I find that candidates for council governments also campaign when their specific race is not competitive.

In addition to reduced candidate-centered campaign activity, I find that media coverage of representative town meeting elections is similarly scant. I argue that this can be attributed in part to the lack of organized and visible campaign activity combined with the large number of candidates running for positions, requiring news media to invest a significant amount of resources to gather information about candidates and their positions themselves. Moreover, news media coverage is impacted negatively by the same relative invisibility of individual town meeting members that also alters candidates' opportunity structure: a lack of visible position-taking and issue ownership makes it difficult for media outlets to hold individual town meeting members accountable on specific issues. While media coverage of the meeting as a whole does happen, this does not provide the voter with the mediating information that facilitates a more informed voting decision. In contrast, I find that while media coverage during elections for council government is by no means abundant, it exists and is different from the coverage of representative town meeting elections, addressing specific candidate issues as well as listing individuals running for office and discussing their platforms and positions.

Contention 3: Mediating institutions such as political parties, campaigns, and media coverage greatly influence turnout and representation in municipal elections.

Given the different levels of mobilization activity I observe during the 2015 elections in these two systems of government, a finding of significant turnout differences between the two forms of government is hardly surprising. While our intuitions lead us to believe that a government founded on principles of direct democracy and broad public participation would draw more people in, it turns out that in the end the circle is enlarged only for those who serve in elected positions, not the voting public. Between the otherwise similar communities that were the subject of this research project, turnout in city council elections was, on average, twice as high as the observed turnout for representative town meeting elections. Not only did I observe lower levels of turnout, when comparing the composition of the voting public in both types of elections I observed considerable qualitative differences as well, with those turning out in representative town meeting elections forming a relatively homogenous group of individuals, a homogeneity that was not observed in the eligible voting population of the same communities. Conversely, voters in city council elections not only revealed themselves as a more diverse group, but importantly also reflected the demographic and ideological makeup of their broader community more closely. These observations lend credence to my argument that visible, public-facing mobilization activities are of vital importance in not just increasing turnout, but reaching individuals that are not already a part of established social networks in which candidates for office might run themselves.

By conditioning the choices of those who do participate and through mobilization activity that is primarily being conducted in informal ways, the individuals that end up

being elected to representative town meetings become a fairly homogenous group. This homogeneity reflects the voting public quite well: the representative town meetings included in my sample were all a very close reflection of those voters who turned out to elect them. That same congruence did not exist in city council governments: individuals elected to serve in these governments were hardly the mirror image of their voters that I observed in representative town meeting municipalities.

While one might be tempted to conclude that the representation offered by city councils is therefore inferior, I suggest a different point of view. Instead, the implications of my findings are more nuanced: representative town meeting governments and city council governments each deliver representation, but in different ways, and to different individuals. Based on my findings with regards to participation, I conclude that part of the representation taking place in council governments happens by virtue of the voting public. Even though those who are ultimately elected to serve do not mirror the eligible voting population or the actual voters, the actual voters do reflect and represent the general makeup of the communities in which they live. Thus, I argue that those who stay home are still, in an indirect way, represented on election day—albeit by their fellow citizens. Their options and resultant choices for elected officials are imperfect, but their voices are likely heard. This stands in stark contrast to my findings from the communities with representative town meetings, which provide great representation to those who voted—but the voting public represents a small, unrepresentative slice of the community in which they live.

The larger takeaway of my findings is that they demonstrate that our collective tendency to place more trust in bigger, more permeable and inclusive political

environments may be misplaced. While their promise of more and more transparent democracy is very attractive, their use brings with it some real downsides in the areas of participation and representation. Instead of focusing entirely on creating more opportunities for citizen involvement, democratic reformers would do well to consider how the layout of political institutions condition candidate options and shape the flow and form of political information to voters. Information is an essential prerequisite for effective political participation, and elected officials with more progressive ambition will approach their positions in different ways, yielding different results.

Institutional configurations that create additional cognitive burdens and do not provide sufficient incentives for candidates to engage in extensive electoral mobilization fail to live up to our nation's democratic promise. While direct consequences in homogenous suburban townships might seem minimal at first glance, this study raises important questions regarding the design of political institutions in more diverse political environments at the county, state, or national level. Recent developments in locales such as Ferguson, Mo. further underscore that while lower-level representation may appear inconsequential at first glance, its absence may have real and sometimes violent ramifications (Schaffner et al. 2014). But regardless of whether one is convinced by the need for accurate representation at the local level, a high level of political participation on the local level may have benefits beyond the realm of local politics, as even J.S. Mill (1861) recognized local government as the 'training grounds for democracy,' creating civic habits and engagement that affect higher levels of government as well.

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