

TOWARD A THEORY OF LOCAL ELECTIONS: BUILDING A THEORETICAL
FRAMEWORK BY ANALYZING SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS

by

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To my parents: Thank you for the example you set and for your unending support of all my endeavors. I hope to provide my daughters what you have provided me.

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FRAMEWORK BY ANALYZING SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS

by

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TOWARD A THEORY OF LOCAL ELECTIONS: BUILDING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK BY ANALYZING SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS

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Despite the substantial impact of local government on individuals' daily lives, very little research exists regarding a theory of local government elections. Building upon the work of Kaufmann (2004) and Oliver (2012), this study aims to help fill this void by examining three key concepts for any theory of local elections: retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context. These concepts are analyzed using local school bond election outcomes. Specifically, the dissertation examines school bond elections held in the State of Texas between 1994 and 2012. Using accountability ratings, the racial distance between voters and students in a school district, and the electoral structure of school boards in districts pursuing bond elections, the analysis shows that retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context are important concepts to include in a theory of local elections. Further, the study offers three additional insights. First, gatekeepers serve an important function in elections, like school bond elections, that require the actions of an elected body to be placed on the ballot. Second, in keeping with previous studies, it appears that voters in local elections are quite knowledgeable of the issues on which they are voting. Finally, the results of this study indicate that voters may be evolving in the way they approach local elections, particularly regarding intergroup competition.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Need for Research

Despite the fact that local governments accounted for almost \$1.7 trillion in spending in 2013, and the daily decisions made by local government officials significantly affect individuals' lives, such as by dictating where one can live, what one's children will be taught in school, and even what one can eat, very little is known about the elections that determine who will be making decisions at the local level (Peterson 1981; Kaufmann 2004; Oliver 2012). Even less is known about local contests, such as bond measures, which do not feature candidates, but instead offer voters a chance to participate in a more direct form of democracy by choosing whether to fund projects through their support for or opposition to issuing debt for the particular measure (Oliver 2012). Bond elections have a significant financial impact nationally. In 2013, local government debt totaled over \$1.8 trillion in the United States, and while not all of that debt was directly voter-approved, voters had a role – either directly by approving the debt, or indirectly by electing the decision makers who approved the debt – in the process (United States Census Bureau 2013).

Several scholars have recognized and begun to address the void in the literature surrounding local politics and policymaking, each one noting the significant contrast to the vast amount of research surrounding national elections. Peterson (1981), for example, laments the fact that cities are often treated like nation-states in the literature. He posits that cities encounter limits that nation-states do not, and these limits greatly impact how the jurisdictions operate. Specifically, Peterson claims that because local governments cannot make war or peace, issue passports or control the influx of people into their jurisdiction, issue currency, or control imports

or establish tariffs, they are very different from national governments. These differences are substantial enough, he argues, that one cannot extrapolate findings from the national to the local level. Cities' limits, according to Peterson, result in three main policy areas on which local governments focus: developmental, redistributive, and allocational. Further, the ways in which cities address these policies differ from how other levels of government address them, which creates the framework for his book.

Another author, Kaufmann, examines local politics and policymaking and claims existing studies "offer little in the way of theoretical development, and in general are methodologically restricted to correlational analyses," and, "Given the relatively large body of theoretically driven research conducted on presidential elections...it is reasonable to conclude that the current body of research on local politics has not even begun to approach a state of the art comparable to that at the national level" (Kaufmann 2004, p. 12). Kaufmann suggests four concepts critical to developing a theory of local political behavior: groups and group identities, individual decision-making processes, intergroup competition, and political context. She weaves these concepts together using group interest theory as a framework, and provides empirical support through a study of mayoral elections in Los Angeles and New York.

Oliver (2012) also addresses the unique circumstances surrounding local politics and policymaking, and creates a framework for a theory based on three key characteristics that impact local electoral politics: size, scope, and bias. Like Peterson and Kaufmann, Oliver notes that it is incorrect to simply extrapolate findings from national electoral behavior to local electoral politics; however, he recognizes the complications surrounding developing a theory that addresses elections held in tens of thousands of local governments across the United States (Oliver 2012). Therefore, his delineations of size, scope, and bias are intended to help clarify

how local electoral politics impact policies in what can be vastly different jurisdictions. Oliver uses empirical evidence from local candidate elections to support his contention that size, scope, and bias define local electoral behavior and subsequent policies. However, the author notes in the conclusion of the book that he “leaves many aspects of local government unexamined,” including non-candidate elections like bond elections (Oliver 2012, p. 206).

This dissertation will continue to fill the void in the literature related to building a theory of local elections, and specifically address one of the least-examined types of local contests: school bond elections. School bond elections are often the only tool school districts have to fund the renovation of existing, and construction of new, school facilities, and school districts currently face an estimated \$197 billion worth of infrastructure needs nationwide (NCES 2014). Despite this estimated need for school facilities, Theobald and Meier claim, “School bond issue elections are an ignored arena in both political science and the politics of education” (Theobald and Meier 2002, p. 2).

Building on Kaufmann (2004) and Oliver (2012), this dissertation identifies three key concepts vital to the development of a theory of local elections:

1. Retrospective voting
2. Intergroup competition
3. Political context

These concepts will be analyzed by determining how they impact school bond election outcomes. Further, in addition to studying the contests themselves, bond elections offer another interesting paradigm to examine – the decision to place the bond on the ballot. Therefore, this dissertation will not only analyze key factors related to election results, but also how these factors influence elected officials’ decisions to attempt a bond at all. Bond proposal studies are

even less prevalent in the literature, with an extensive review finding no studies related specifically to a school board's decision to propose a bond measure.

In addition to this dissertation's contribution to developing a theoretical framework for local elections, school bond elections are an especially salient subject matter to research because of the importance of facilities in many school reform movements. Theobald and Meier, for example, state, "Major urban school reforms, an education issue that has dominated the policy agenda, almost always require capital expenditures; and bond issues are a common way of funding non-incremental capital expenditures" (Theobald and Meier 2002, p. 2). In addition to its importance to the schools, this is a theoretically interesting issue because voting in school bond elections allows the public to engage in a process that directly determines public policies, making them one of the few examples of "primary democracy" (Giles et al. 1976).

Finally, it appears that while there is a great need for school bond elections across the nation, the funding decisions are controversial. Tedin et al. (2001) claim that financing public schools has become an increasingly contentious issue facing local governments, with the Department of Education estimating that more than 6,000 additional schools need to be built to handle the increased student population. Cataldo and Holm (1983) claim that while school bond referenda enjoyed widespread support in the 1960s, this support waned in the 1970s. Bowers et al. (2010a) note that this trend from the 1970s is continuing, stating that school district leaders often float the same bond request numerous times before it passes. Further, researchers have shown that this lack of support is impacting local schools. The United States General Accounting Office (1995) found that 60 percent of schools in the nation need facility upgrades; the NCES (2014) reports public schools in the United States need approximately \$197 billion in facility improvements; and Crampton et al. (2001) put the unmet school infrastructure need at

\$266.1 billion. These staggering reports of facilities needs again highlight the importance of understanding as much as we can about local elections, and specifically school bond elections.

It should be noted that the study of local school bond elections conforms to Peterson's (1981) contention that local governments address redistributive, developmental, and allocational policy areas. In fact, the author devotes an entire chapter in his book to the provision of education through local governments, claiming, "Americans have stressed the importance of local financing and local control of the educational system" (Peterson 1981, p. 93). Peterson, however, debates the specific policy area to which education belongs. In some ways, education can be viewed as a developmental policy, seeking to improve the human capital within the jurisdiction. It is also redistributive, however, because, in order to function, public school districts must take disproportionately from the wealthy to educate the poor. To place education within his theoretical framework, the author finally concludes that, "Schooling services can be classified as more of a developmental policy or more of a redistributive policy depending on the degree to which the benefits of schooling are distributed either in proportion to the amount paid for the services or to all members of the community equally" (Peterson 1981, p. 94). This is an important distinction to consider when examining local school bond elections because it will influence voters' perceptions related to all three key characteristics that I argue are vital for a theory of local elections: retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context.

About School Facility Funding

Before building a theory based on school bond elections, it is helpful to discuss their primary purpose, which is to provide facility funding for school districts. Since education policy and management are handled primarily at the state and local level, the way in which facilities projects are funded varies across jurisdictions. For most states, however, funding for school

construction is contingent upon local voter approval, with 40 states requiring voters to approve bonds for facility construction and seven additional states allowing voters to petition to have bond issues placed on the ballot (Hiller and Spradlin 2010). Some states place additional requirements on districts following a successful school bond election, such as mandating approval from a state official or agency prior to bond authorization.

The threshold for voter support to pass a bond varies across states. The vast majority of states that hold school bond elections require a simple majority, but school districts in nine states must meet a 55 percent threshold or higher for bond passage. These thresholds may even change within states depending on the type of district requesting the bond. Missouri, for example, has different percentage thresholds for metropolitan, non-metropolitan, and urban school districts (Hiller and Spradlin 2010).

While most states rely solely on local funding for school facilities, as indicated by the 47 states that require or allow for bond elections to approve debt to be repaid by local taxpayers, some states also appropriate state funding to help augment local efforts. Texas, for example, which will provide the data for this study, has two programs to help local districts fund facilities projects after they have been approved by the voters of the district: Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) and Existing Debt Allotment (EDA). The IFA provides funding for the purchase, construction, renovation, and expansion of instructional facilities for districts whose local revenue falls below \$35 per student per penny of debt service tax needed. Districts apply for this funding through the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the funding is limited. TEA prioritizes projects in property-poor districts first, and also gives greater consideration to projects that have been submitted in previous years (Texas Association of School Boards 2016; Texas Education Agency 2016a).

The EDA program also serves to provide funding to school districts in an effort to help them reach \$35 per student per penny of debt service tax effort, with a maximum state assistance of 29 cents per \$100 assessed property valuation (Texas Education Agency 2016b). Unlike IFA, funding for this program is not based on a prioritization; instead, the Texas Legislature funds EDA each biennium for all qualifying schools that do not receive IFA funds. In order to receive EDA funds, districts must have made at least one payment on the bond on or before August 31 in the year prior to the start of the new fiscal biennium (Texas Association of School Boards 2016).

Both of these programs are fairly new in Texas, with the IFA created in 1997 and the EDA approved in 1999. Further, they only support school districts that do not meet the \$35 per student per penny of debt service tax effort on their own. Therefore, these programs do not cover the costs of facilities in all school districts in the state. Finally, the local district must still pass a bond election in order to be eligible for this funding as the state only funds bonds that local voters have approved.

Dissertation Outline

Despite a vast amount of information and theories surrounding national electoral behavior and policymaking, the current literature is sparse surrounding theories of local electoral decision-making. Even less is known about local non-candidate elections, like school bond elections. This dissertation will begin to address this deficiency by identifying three key concepts that are important for any theory of local elections, and it will examine these concepts using data from school bond elections. Specifically, the three concepts to be analyzed are: retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context. The following outline details the organization of the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Retrospective Voting. Contrary to often-studied national elections, scholars have found that cues such as partisanship and candidate charisma are not drivers of vote choice in local elections (Kaufmann 2004; Oliver 2012). Instead, local election voters are more knowledgeable of the issues facing local governments and vote based on those issues. Further, studies have shown that local voters are not only knowledgeable but are also likely to hold incumbents accountable for the outcomes of the elected officials' decisions. This chapter will discuss in detail retrospective voting and its importance in local elections. It will then look specifically at retrospective voting in public school bond elections, using accountability ratings as a measure of performance that voters can know and use when casting their ballots.

Chapter 3: Intergroup Competition. The third chapter will focus on the importance of intergroup competition in local election outcomes, and, specifically, the importance of race and ethnicity in local electoral contests. Extensive research on local candidate elections has shown that the race of the voter and the candidate is one of the most consistent predictors of election outcomes (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 2003; Kaufmann 2004; Hajnal 2007; Oliver 2012; Hajnal and Trounstein 2014). Because school bonds do not have a race, ethnicity, or group, however, this chapter will investigate the consequences of the racial distance between students in a school district and the voters of that district. Racial distance is calculated by obtaining the difference between the percentage of the white voting age population (VAP) in a school district and the percentage of white students in that same district.

Chapter 4: Political Context. Political context is the third key concept vital to any theory of local elections. Political context is important because it can bias the structure of government, resulting in an uneven distribution of costs and benefits (Oliver 2012). Political context can include myriad factors, one of which is a jurisdiction's electoral arrangements, such as partisan

elections versus nonpartisan elections, district elections versus at-large elections, scheduling of elections at unusual times, and so on. To assess the importance of political context in a theory of local elections, this chapter will investigate the relationship between the electoral structure of a school board and school bond election outcomes.

Chapter 5: Conclusion. The final chapter will address how the three key concepts detailed above can be woven together to continue to develop a theoretical framework through which we can better understand local elections. It will also discuss the limits to generalizations that can be drawn from this study. However, these limits do not negate the benefits provided by the dissertation, which not only adds to our knowledge of local electoral processes, but can also serve as an important tool for practitioners interested in pursuing bond elections.

CHAPTER 2

KEY CONCEPT 1: RETROSPECTIVE VOTING

Introduction

National Elections

At the national level, retrospective voting, or casting one's vote based on policy outcomes, has been well-documented in the literature (Kiewiet and Rivers 1984; Berry and Howell 2007). Dating as far back as the 1940s, scholars have studied the relationship between policy outcomes and voting decisions in presidential and congressional elections. Most often, these studies of retrospective voting have focused on macro-economic factors, such as the unemployment rate, inflation rate, and disposable income (e.g. Kerr 1944; Kramer 1971; Alvarez and Nagler 1998; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias 2008). These studies show that decisions based on economic outcomes at the national level appear to outweigh other considerations, including partisanship (Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias 2008) and social issues (Alvarez and Nagler 1998). Other non-financial factors have also been considered, however, and have been shown to be significant. For example, Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida (1989) find that voters make decisions based on their foreign affairs preferences and candidates' performance on these policies. Additionally, Healy and Malhotra (2009) show that voters hold the president's party accountable for relief spending after natural disasters. In all, a vast literature finds that citizens engage in retrospective voting at the national level, holding their leaders accountable for the policies enacted during their (or their party's) reign.

Local Elections

Less information exists on retrospective voting at the local level. As Oliver and Ha claim, "Every year, thousands of suburban municipalities, townships, and special districts in the

United States hold elections....Although these elections arguably represent the most immediate democratic experience for a majority of Americans, political scientists have little understanding of what determines vote choice in these settings” (Oliver and Ha 2007, p. 393). Oliver, Ha, and Callen (2012) claim this void in the literature is at least in part due to a lack of indicators on which to judge local officials. The authors claim, for example, that voters are unlikely to hold their local elected officials accountable for a lagging economy or unsuccessful war, as they would a federal official. Therefore, the work of researchers is to determine on what measures voters may hold their locally elected officials accountable.

Oliver and Ha (2007) analyzed survey data and local voting behavior of 1,400 voters in 30 different suburban communities, finding that voters’ evaluation of local economic conditions appears to influence their decisions. This impact is minimal, however, because the voters surveyed were overwhelmingly pleased with their city’s economy, giving incumbents a great advantage. Mondak, Mutz, and Huckfeldt (1996) produced similar results, showing that a deflated real estate market produces negative outcomes for incumbent local elected officials. In another study, economic and public safety policy outcomes were shown to affect both the approval ratings and electoral outcomes of New York mayors between 1984 and 2009 (Arnold and Carnes 2012). Specifically, the authors showed that performance of the local economy – not the national economy – and the crime rate significantly influenced mayoral approval ratings, and approval ratings served as a good indicator of the incumbent’s electoral success.

Finally, in a study perhaps most closely related to the current topic, Berry and Howell (2007) found that voters in South Carolina held school board members accountable for student achievement on standardized tests when the results of these tests were highly publicized. In years when the state’s accountability system was not in the news, however, student performance

did not appear to influence election outcomes. The authors conclude that future research is “vital if we wish to untangle the various institutional and informational forces that shape retrospective voting in the more common, though admittedly less glamorous, local elections in American politics” (Berry and Howell 2007, p. 857).

Scholars have found that cues such as partisanship and candidate charisma are not drivers of vote choice in local elections (Kaufmann 2004; Oliver 2012). The simple reasons stated are that many local elections are nonpartisan, thus removing the option of voting by party preference; and that candidates in local elections do not have the same resources or attention of national candidates, making their charisma less important since many voters will not see them covered in television media, and are more likely to know the candidates personally, diminishing the more superficial “charisma” factor. What Oliver (2012) found instead was that voters in local elections are more likely to be educated on the issues facing local governments, and are therefore more knowledgeable than voters in national elections. This is both predictable and surprising. It is predictable because the scope of local jurisdictions is smaller and closer to voters; it is surprising because local elections receive so much less media attention than national elections.

When extrapolating the findings from local candidate elections to local school bond elections, it follows that voters in bond elections will be knowledgeable regarding the performance of the school district and will hold the district accountable for its performance. In order to empirically test this concept, however, one must identify a measure of school district performance. Education accountability ratings offer a useful way to measure retrospective voting in school bond elections.

Accountability Ratings

About Accountability Ratings

Education accountability reforms, highlighted by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, rely upon measuring student performance on standardized tests and using the results to sanction or reward schools. A fundamental piece of the reforms serves to publicize detailed information on school-specific outcomes, letting citizens know how their schools perform based upon the indicators included in the accountability system (Dee and Jacob 2011). This publication of school district outcomes provides a way to measure school district performance, which can be used as a retrospective voting tool in school bond elections.

Impact of Accountability Ratings on Citizen Decisions

The next question becomes, do citizens know about and consider educational outcomes? Several studies suggest that they do. For example, school district educational outcomes have been shown to affect the amount local citizens are willing to pay for houses. In fact, Brasington and Haurin (2006) claim that standardized test results have replaced educational expenditures as the most widely accepted measure of school quality's impact on house prices, and Black (1999) found that homebuyers who are parents are willing to pay 2.5 percent more in home prices for a five percent increase in test scores. Figlio and Lucas (2004) concluded that school accountability ratings in Florida influenced home prices and affected where families with high-achieving students chose to live. The authors tempered their results, however, claiming that the effect on home prices lasted several years, but the choice of home location based on school ratings dramatically decreased following the second round of school rating assignments. In addition to influencing home prices and home location decisions, school district performance on standardized tests has been shown to affect the district's bond credit ratings and the amount of

funding the district is able to raise philanthropically (Denison et al. 2007; Figlio and Kenny 2009).

Finally, there are two published studies on the way accountability reforms influence school bond election outcomes, and the results are mixed. Wheatley (2012) authored a study limited to 177 school district tax levy elections in Ohio, finding that the outcomes of the elections were not highly correlated with the components of Ohio's Local District Report Card. Hickey (2004), however, found a positive correlation between higher accountability ratings and bond election success. Based on these limited studies and the more exhaustive examples showing how accountability rating systems influence citizen decisions within a community, it is appropriate to use accountability ratings to measure the importance of retrospective voting in local school bond elections.

Factors Affecting School Bond Election Outcomes

Few empirical studies of factors affecting school bond election outcomes exist in current political science and public administration literature. Bowers and Lee (2013) claim that while the subject was fairly well reviewed in the 1960s and 1970s, works published since 1973 have been sparse, and Theobald and Meier write, "The research that does exist is based on the observations of a single or a hand full of elections" (Theobald and Meier 2002, p. 1). The most extensive review of factors affecting successful school bond passage to date is Piele and Hall's (1973) *Budgets, Bonds, and Ballots: Voting Behavior in School Financial Elections*, which synthesizes research on school financial elections from 1960 through 1972. The following variables represent what Piele and Hall, as well as more recent publications, found significantly influence school bond election outcomes. The following literature review will provide the basis for control variables for the analysis in this chapter, as well as Chapters 3 and 4.

School District Size and Demographics

Most studies hypothesize that larger school district enrollments will lead to less successful school bond outcomes because the benefits gained will be more dispersed, but Piele and Hall (1973) reported no significant relationship between school district size and bond outcome. More recent studies have produced mixed results. Bowers and Lee (2013) did not find a significant relationship between the size of a school district and bond passage in their review of Texas school bond elections from 1997 through 2009, and neither did Beckham and Maiden (2003) in their study of Oklahoma school bond elections from 1995 through 2000. However, in a study of school bond elections held in Michigan between 2000 and 2005, Bowers et al. (2010a) found support for the hypothesis that as district enrollment goes up, likelihood of bond passage goes down. Likewise, Theobald and Meier (2002) found a significant negative relationship between the size of a district and likelihood of bond success in their study of Texas bond elections held between 1997 and 2001.

The demographic characteristics of a school district have also been shown to influence school bond election outcomes. Bowers and Lee (2013) report that higher proportions of Asian and Hispanic students increase the likelihood of passing a bond, and Hickey et al. (2008) found that a higher percentage of Hispanic students increases the likelihood of school bond passage in their study of Texas school bond elections held in 2006. Findings on the influence of the percentage of economically disadvantaged students are mixed. Theobald and Meier (2002) report that a one standard deviation increase in the percentage of low-income students produces a five percent increase in bond election success, but Bowers et al. (2010b) find a negative relationship between low-income students and bond passage in their study of Michigan school

bond elections held between 1998 and 2006. Bowers and Lee (2013) found no statistical significance with this variable.

Financial Factors

Financial factors have also proven to influence school bond election outcomes. Specifically, the bond election's effect on the tax rate, the amount of the bond, and the district's indebtedness are important determinants for voters. As might be expected, researchers hypothesize a negative relationship between a bond's effect on the tax rate and its likelihood of success. While Piele and Hall (1973) found no statistically significant relationship between the tax burden created by the proposed bond and its likelihood of passage, recent studies, including Tedin et al. (2001), Stauffacher (2012), and Packer (2013) all found a negative correlation between tax rate and bond success. Like Piele and Hall, Theobald and Meier (2002) reported no statistically significant relationship.

In Piele and Hall's review, studies of the relationship between the amount of the bond and bond passage produced mixed results. More current studies, however, have consistently reported a negative relationship (Theobald and Meier 2002, Bowers et al. 2010a, Bowers et al. 2010b, Packer 2013). The impact of school district indebtedness on the outcome of school bond elections has also produced mixed results. Piele and Hall (1973) report a negative relationship or no significant relationship whereas more current studies have resulted in findings of a positive relationship (Sielke 1998; Theobald and Meier 2002; Zimmer and Jones 2005; Zimmer et al. 2011; Bowers et al. 2010b).

External Factors

In addition to school district size, demographics, and financial factors, a few other variables external to the district have been reported in multiple school bond election studies.

Several studies have tested the hypothesis that older voters are less likely to support a school bond than younger voters, with most finding support for this contention. The bulk of the literature reviewed by Piele and Hall found that older voters are less likely to support school bonds, and Chew (1992), Button (1992), Hickey et al. (2008), and Bowers and Lee (2013), all find a significant negative relationship between age and support for school bonds. Berkman and Plutzer (2004) report more nuanced results. They found that elderly citizens are supportive of school bond proposals unless a significant number of them are new arrivals to the area without strong ties to the community. Theobald and Meier (2002) are an outlier on this variable, reporting no statistically significant relationship between voter age and bond success.

The ethnic background of voters is also a variable included in many studies. Piele and Hall (1973) report that their review of the literature overwhelmingly supports the finding that black voters are more likely than white voters to cast their ballots in favor of a school bond. Button (1993) also found that black citizens favor public school funding more than white citizens, and Tedin et al. (2001) reported that blacks and Hispanics are more likely to support school bonds overall and that a voter's race/ethnicity also effects a number of other variables related to school bond elections. For example, whites, blacks, and Hispanics each have statistically significant differing views on what constitutes a "large" tax increase and report divergent views on whether or not it mattered that new schools would increase neighborhood property values (Tedin et al. 2001, 279). A host of other studies confirm the relationship between being a minority voter and displaying greater support for school bonds. Cataldo and Holm (1983), Bachelor (2001), and Bali (2008) are a few examples, but the literature on this subject is extensive. Suffice it to say that the vast majority of a well-researched field finds that

race and ethnicity influence voting behavior in school bond elections, with minority voters more likely to support school bonds than white voters.

The income level of voters is another variable with consistent results. Blasdon et al. (2003), Brunner (2010), Colburn and Horowitz (2003), and Tedin et al. (2001) all reported a positive relationship between voter income and school bond passage. This is in line with Piele and Hall's findings in the literature published from 1960 through 1972. Lentz (1999), however, found that income only had a positive effect if the election were held in a highly homogenous district. Finally, voters' trust in government and, specifically, in school district officials also influences school bond election outcomes. Tedin et al. (2001) reported that the greater citizens distrusted the government in Washington, the more likely they were to vote against a local school bond. Additionally, Priest and Fox (2005) reported that their survey of minority voters in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, indicated voters were less likely to support a school bond if they lacked confidence in public officials. Further, Faltys (2006), Lifo and Senden (2010), and Stauffacher (2012) all note the importance of trust in school administrators for successful bond elections.

Data and Hypotheses

Texas Accountability System

This study will examine bond elections held in Texas between 2004 and 2011, which represents the entire "TAKS era" of accountability in the State of Texas. In 1993, the Texas Legislature in 1993 enacted statutes mandating the creation of a public school accountability system that would rate school districts and evaluate campuses (Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2012). This initial system remained in place through the 2001-2002 school year, but the assessment mechanism changed in the 2002-2003 school year to the Texas Assessment of

Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which included more subjects and grades and was more difficult than the previous assessment (TEA 2012). Due to the change, no accountability measures were reported at the conclusion of the 2002-2003 school year; therefore, this study begins in 2004. The analysis concludes with 2011 data because the Texas system again changed in 2012.

Data Sources

An administrative dataset collected from the Texas Bond Review Board (TBRB) and Texas Education Agency (TEA) was constructed to investigate the importance of retrospective voting in local elections. The dataset is comprised of three main components: (1) school bond results from TBRB, (2) accountability results from the TEA's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data portal, and (3) district-level characteristics from the Texas Education Agency in its Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). All data is linked by district and year codes to create a panel dataset of all school districts from 2004 to 2011.

Texas Bond Review Board

School bond election data, including date of the election, amount of the proposed bond, and success of the proposal were obtained from the Texas Bond Review Board, which is a state agency with the mission to “ensure that debt financing is used prudently to meet Texas’ infrastructure needs.”

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) collects data on the AYP status of each school district in Texas. AYP was a federally mandated accountability benchmark required under NCLB. All school districts in the State of Texas were required to be evaluated annually for the accountability program. These indicators were reported at both the district and campus level. This dissertation will examine AYP at the district level because school bond elections are held at

the district, not campus, level. In the AYP data, districts are classified as either meeting or failing to meet the standards set forth by NCLB.

Academic Excellence Indicator System

School district characteristics, including district enrollment, demographic characteristics, debt service, tax rate, and expenditures are provided by TEA in its Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). Additionally, the AEIS provides detailed data related to school districts' state accountability benchmarks. Based on the standard rating labels, districts are classified as: (1) exemplary, (2) recognized, (3) academically acceptable, or (4) academically unacceptable. Thus, in the state accountability regime, school districts will fall under one of these classifications.

Descriptive Statistics

Bond Data

In the sample, there were 1,158 bond proposals from 2004 to 2011. Of these proposals, voters passed 841 bonds, while 317 were rejected. Also, it is interesting to note that the number of bonds proposed increased from 149 in 2005 to 233 in 2007. During the economic recession, the number of bonds in Texas decreased to 168 in 2008, 95 in 2009, and back up to 131 in 2010. Bonds were significantly more likely to fail after the recession than before. The average bond amount requested was \$46,000,000.

Accountability

Federal accountability standards under NCLB rate school districts as either meeting or failing to meet AYP. From 2004 through 2012, approximately 80 percent of Texas school districts met AYP, while 20 percent of school districts failed to meet the AYP standards. Thus, it appears that most school districts did not face extensive pressures under the NCLB Act. In

regard to state accountability, approximately 5.5 percent of school districts are classified as exemplary; 29.7 percent are classified as recognized; 54.8 percent are classified as academically acceptable; and only 3.5 percent are classified as academically unacceptable. Six and one-half percent of the school districts were either given an alternative classification or not rated based on the conventional rating.

Method

This dissertation tests two dependent variables: (1) bond proposal and (2) bond passage. The main analysis employs probit regression to predict school bond proposal and school bond passage as a function of the accountability rankings (*Accountability*) and the characteristics of the district (*D*), as shown in equation

$$\text{School Bonds}_{jt} = \text{Accountability}_{jt}\beta + D_{jt}\delta + \gamma_t$$

where j indexes school districts, and t indexes time in years. To reduce issues of omitted variable bias, the model includes a fixed effect specification at the year level. This controls for any time-invariant characteristics about the year. Estimates are derived with robust standard errors. To ease interpretations, marginal effects are presented for each coefficient. In the bond proposal model, the analysis includes all school districts in the State of Texas from 2004 to 2011; however, in the bond passage model, only school districts that proposed a bond between 2004 and 2011 are included.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this chapter reflect the fact that voters in local school bond elections are likely to engage in retrospective voting and hold school districts accountable for their performance. Hypothesis 1 focuses on the contention that school board members will recognize that voters will hold the district accountable, and, therefore, in an effort to protect the bond from

failure be less likely to place a bond on the ballot if the district has not performed well.

Hypothesis 2 reflects the actual outcome of retrospective voting. Specifically, the hypotheses tested are:

H₁: Failing to meet a state or federal accountability benchmark is negatively related to school bond proposal.

H₂: Failing to meet a state or federal accountability benchmark is negatively related to school bond passage.

Results

School Bond Proposal

Hypothesis 1 predicts the likelihood of proposing a school bond as a function of state and federal accountability standards. As shown in Table 1, school districts with an acceptable rating under the state accountability system are associated with a 4.3 percentage point increase in the likelihood of proposing a bond than school districts with an unacceptable rating. Similarly, school districts with a recognized rating are more likely to propose a bond than school districts with an unacceptable rating ($\beta=0.0358$). However, the relationship between school districts with the highest rating (exemplary) in the state accountability system and bond proposal is not statistically significant. This is enlightening, because it seems that school districts that are on the threshold of meeting state accountability benchmarks are more likely to propose school bonds; yet, the highest and lowest achieving school districts based on the state accountability system are not statistically more likely to propose a bond. Thus, there is a curvilinear relationship between state accountability ratings and school bonds.

Because it is essential to control for time-invariant characteristics across the years, a model with a year fixed effect is also reported. After including a year fixed effect, it appears that school districts with an acceptable rating are more likely to propose a school bond to voters than

school districts who scored an unacceptable rating ($\beta=0.0260$). This is slightly lower compared to the previous model without the year effect. Additionally, the coefficients for school districts with exemplary and recognized ratings are not statistically significant. These results indicate that being classified as acceptable under the state accountability regime increases the likelihood of proposing a bond to voters compared to unacceptable school districts.

Interestingly, passing NCLB requirement has a negative coefficient, but it is not statistically significant for either model. Thus, it appears that school boards are more sensitive to state accountability ratings than federal ratings when considering whether to propose a school bond to voters. From this, one might infer that school boards believe state accountability ratings are more salient to voters and the penalties are more punitive than the federal requirements.

In regard to the control variables, factors such as total enrollment, total tax rate, total per pupil expenditure, and some demographic variables are associated with proposing a bond to voters. As expected, total per pupil expenditure is negatively associated with proposing a bond. This might be related to the fact that school boards are conscious of the total cost of education. The total adopted tax rate, however, is positively associated with proposing a bond to voters. This might demonstrate a school board's belief that certain communities possess a willingness of voters to support their school district. Lastly, these results show that larger school districts are also more likely to propose a bond to voters; however, this variable has a small effect, which disappears in the model that includes year fixed effects.

School Bond Passage

Once a bond is proposed, voters determine whether it passes or fails. Based on the data in this analysis, it appears that state accountability ratings have a bigger impact at the proposal stage than the passage stage. As shown in Table 2, state accountability ratings are not

Table 1. Influence of Accountability Ratings on Bond Proposal

	No Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se
State Rating - Exemplary	0.0210	-0.0026
	(0.0251)	(0.0195)
State Rating - Recognized	0.0358+	0.0177
	(0.0199)	(0.0177)
State Rating - Acceptable	0.0434**	0.0260+
	(0.0162)	(0.0153)
NCLB (Passed)	-0.0021	-0.0030
	(0.0072)	(0.0068)
District Enrollment (1,000s)	0.0004*	0.0002
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Black Student Percent	0.0007**	0.0007**
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0008**	0.0007**
	(0.0002)	(0.0001)
Native American Student Percent	0.0002	0.0005
	(0.0029)	(0.0025)
Asian Student Percent	-0.0004	-0.0002
	(0.0011)	(0.0011)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	-0.0014**	-0.0013**
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0007*	0.0006*
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
District Indebtedness	0.0008	0.0002
	(0.0006)	(0.0006)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	0.0958**	0.1252**
	(0.0076)	(0.0081)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (1,000s)	-0.0025**	-0.0034**
	(0.0009)	(0.0009)
Plant Maintenance & Operations per pupil (100s)	0.0004	0.0006
	(0.0007)	(0.0007)
N	9,532	9,532
r ² _p	0.0702	0.1005

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

significantly associated with bond passage rates. However, there is an association between NCLB and bond passage. Specifically, school districts that meet the NCLB requirement are associated with a 5.8 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of school bond passage. The NCLB coefficient is statistically significant at the .10 level with the year fixed effects, only. This result could be interpreted to mean that voters believe if school districts are meeting federal requirements they are “good enough,” and therefore additional resources are not needed.

While state accountability ratings may not play an important role in predicting bond passage, other factors such as student composition, bond amount, district indebtedness, tax rate, and plant maintenance and operations are associated with bond passage. Particularly, a higher percentage of black students is associated with a lower likelihood of a bond passing. Similarly, higher numbers of Native American students are associated with lower bond passage rates, whereas higher percentages of Asian students are associated with higher likelihood of bond passage. Surprisingly, these results show larger bonds are more likely to pass, which is contrary to findings in previous studies. In keeping with previous findings, district indebtedness has a positive relationship with bond passage, but it is only significant in the model with year fixed effects. The total adopted tax rate results are interesting because they show a significant positive relationship in model 1, but change to a significant negative relationship when year fixed effects are introduced. This could be reflecting the differences in voters’ decisions based on the years of recession included in the sample. Finally, plant maintenance and operations, a variable added to the model to reflect need (districts with older buildings likely devote more resources to maintenance), produces a significant positive relationship in both models. This result perhaps shows that voters are aware when their districts have older buildings and need new or updated facilities.

Table 2. Influence of Accountability Ratings on Bond Passage

	No Fixed Effects Bond Pass b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Pass b/se
State Rating - Exemplary	-0.0958 (0.1604)	0.0628 (0.1198)
State Rating - Recognized	-0.0151 (0.1152)	0.0872 (0.1014)
State Rating - Acceptable	0.0304 (0.1127)	0.0666 (0.1132)
NCLB (Passed)	-0.0058 (0.0379)	-0.0597+ (0.0356)
District Enrollment (1,000s)	-0.0019 (0.0012)	-0.0010 (0.0012)
Black Student Percent	-0.0039** (0.0013)	-0.0035** (0.0013)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0007 (0.0010)	0.0014 (0.0010)
Native American Student Percent	-0.0473* (0.0241)	-0.0497* (0.0250)
Asian Student Percent	0.0122* (0.0057)	0.0127* (0.0061)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	-0.0011 (0.0013)	-0.0006 (0.0014)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0017 (0.0021)	-0.0001 (0.0022)
Bond Amount (100,000s)	0.0001** (0.0000)	0.0001* (0.0000)
District Indebtedness	0.0026 (0.0034)	0.0123* (0.0049)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	0.2228** (0.0751)	-0.4205** (0.1469)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (1,000s)	-0.0045 (0.0047)	0.0029 (0.0050)
Plant Maintenance & Operations per pupil (100s)	0.0175** (0.0050)	0.0122* (0.0054)
N	1,158	1,158
r ² _p	0.0498	0.0937

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

Conclusion

This study has uncovered interesting relationships between state and federal accountability measures and public school bond measures. Perhaps the most meaningful finding is that state accountability ratings appear to have a greater impact on whether a school board calls a bond than it does on bond passage. When placing these results in the larger context of retrospective voting in local elections, it may signal an important difference between candidate elections and bond elections, and specifically bond elections in which a group of elected leaders must decide to place an initiative on the ballot. The results of this study appear to show that school boards in low-performing districts “protect” their schools from the voters by deciding not to place bond issues on the ballot. Likewise, board members in high-performing districts may sense that voters would not believe they needed additional resources, and are therefore not significantly more likely to call bonds. It is only the board members in districts that are on the brink of meeting desirable accountability outcomes that exhibit a positive relationship with bond proposal. It could be argued that as a result of these actions at the school board level, voters do not have a chance to engage in retrospective voting in bond elections to the extent they do in candidate elections, leading to a lack of significance in the bond passage models.

These results provide a rich foundation for future research. For example, qualitative or mixed methods studies could be used to build upon our understanding of both school board members’ and voters’ knowledge and consideration of accountability ratings when making decisions. Further, one could add to the work of Berry and Howell (2007) to determine the extent to which accountability ratings influence the reelection of school board members. Perhaps voters hold the districts accountable through school board elections, not school bond elections, showing that retrospective voting is prevalent in local candidate, not issue, elections. Therefore,

these findings do not lead to the conclusion that retrospective voting is unimportant in local elections, just that it could take different forms when elected officials play an intermediary role.

Limitations

This study is limited due to an inability to control for certain variables. For example, other, smaller, studies have shown that voter demographic characteristics such as age, income, and race, influence voter decisions in school bond elections. However, the United States Census Bureau only collects this data at the school district level on a decennial basis, making generalizations about the population difficult, especially in fast-growing and fast-changing districts. Further, the only measure available is Voting Age Population, which is not an accurate measure of who actually votes, which in local elections is often an incredibly small percentage of eligible voters.

Another omitted variable is the existence and activity level of outside groups, such as political action committees. While many Political Action Committees (PACs) form both to support and oppose school bonds across the State of Texas, prior to 2015 these efforts were not tracked at the state level, and local enforcement of disclosure policies differed across districts. As of September 1, 2015, however, all PACs created to support or oppose school bond measures are required to file campaign finance reports with the Texas Ethics Commission, much like candidates for state-level offices (Texas Legislature Online 2016). Therefore, in the future this data will be easily accessible and will inform future research.

Finally, it is understood that these results may not be generalizable outside the State of Texas. However, despite this and the other limitations noted above, this study provides fresh insight into how retrospective voting may influence local election outcomes and works to

continue the development of a theoretical framework to help us better understand these important democratic processes.

CHAPTER 3

KEY CONCEPT 2: INTERGROUP COMPETITION

Introduction

Race & Local Elections

Extensive research on local candidate elections has shown that the race and ethnicity of the voter and the candidate is one of the most consistent predictors of election outcomes (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 2003; Kaufmann 2004; Hajnal 2007; Oliver 2012; Hajnal and Trounstein 2014). Addressing the effects of white voter preferences regarding black candidates, Hajnal claims white voters “fear that a black leader will favor the black community over the white community...In short, they imagine that black control will have negative consequences for themselves and their neighbors,” thus setting up a clear intergroup competition (Hajnal 2007, p. 3). Hajnal and Trounstein expand the analysis to include multiple races and ethnicities, finding, “Blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and whites tend to vote as blocs and often as competing blocs. Within-group cohesion and across-group division strongly shape urban politics” (Hajnal and Trounstein 2014, p. 86).

Theories

Intergroup competition extends beyond candidates to voters’ outlook on public policies. According to Hutchings and Valentino (2004), the study of racial attitudes as they relate to political preferences can be traced to Sears and Kinder (1971), who introduced the term symbolic racism. The authors defined symbolic racism as “a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, work ethic, obedience, and discipline” (Kinder and Sears 1981,

p. 416). The authors claim that symbolic racism is illustrated by white voters who oppose political issues that involve what they view as “unfair” government assistance to blacks (Kinder and Sears 1981).

An alternative, more group-oriented theory, known as racial threat theory, posits that voters of one race are less likely to support policies that they feel benefit citizens of another race because they view policy making as a zero sum game in which their ethnic group will lose power if another receives it (Blumer 1958; Campbell 1965; Giles and Hertz 1994; Giles and Buckner 1993; Giles and Buckner 1996). Regardless of whether it is symbolic racism or racial threat, numerous authors have built upon the works included above, noting their impact on various policy sectors.

Race and Public Goods

Alesina et al. (1999) studied the supply of public goods including education, roads, and sewers and found that voters choose to provide fewer public goods when it is believed that one ethnic group is being taxed to provide public goods for other ethnic groups. Likewise, Luttmer (2001) reported that individuals’ support for more welfare spending increased as members of their own racial group received more welfare dollars. Fox (2004) took this line of research one step further by delving deeper into the reasons for these racial effects on public policy and by considering changes based on the familiarity between the races. Specifically, Fox found that white stereotypes of both blacks and Hispanics affect their support of welfare policies they believe support minorities. The author’s results showed that the more Hispanics there are in a community, the more whites believe them to be hardworking, and thus the more whites support welfare policies (Fox 2004). She found that the opposite holds true for blacks; the more blacks

there are in a community, the lazier whites believe they are, and thus whites support welfare policies less.

Further, authors, including Putnam (2007) and Goldin and Katz (1999), claim that increased diversity leads to decreased community cooperation overall. Putnam, in particular, found that the more diverse a community is, the more likely it is that all races will “hunker down” and, in his words, “pull in like a turtle” (Putnam 2007, p. 149). This will result in a lower confidence level in local government, less likelihood of working on a community project, and less likelihood of giving to a charity or volunteering (Putnam 2007). Goldin and Katz (1999) found similar results in their study of the establishment of secondary schools in the United States. In particular, the authors found that homogenous communities banded together to form high schools more quickly than less homogenous communities.

Race and Education Issues

Racial group competition as it relates to school bond passage is an especially significant issue to address, given the history of race in education. Desegregation, in particular, has been shown to have a significant effect on racial attitudes, with a specific impact on bond elections. For example, the citizens of Jackson, Mississippi, did not pass a school bond issue between 1964 (the year in which Mississippi integrated) and 1991 (Glaser 2002). Further, in 1964, as Mississippi was beginning to integrate its schools, the legislature created an “escape hatch” provision in its education code, providing grants to white parents to move their children out of the public schools that had been mandatorily integrated by order of a federal judge (Glaser 2002).

In addition to the Mississippi experience, a 1974 survey of 520 parents in Florida found that white parents who opposed school desegregation were less likely to support a school bond

that increased taxes, further noting the importance of race and ethnic divisions in school bond issues (Giles et al. 1976). A study of voters in an April 1978 school bond election in Cleveland, Ohio, conducted at a time of a federally mandated desegregation, found that race accounted for 22 percent of vote variance, with black voters more likely to support a bond and white voters less likely to do so (Cataldo and Holm 1983). The next closest measure included in the survey accounted for only 4.6 percent of the variance.

Similar results were obtained in Button's study of bond elections in five Florida counties between 1987 and 1989. Specifically, Button concluded, "Blacks favor public school funding more than white citizens, perhaps reflecting the fact that black children are more likely than their white peers to attend public schools" (Button 1993, p. 38). Bachelor (2001) also found stronger support for school bonds in black neighborhoods as compared to white neighborhoods in a 1998 Lucas County, Ohio, school tax referendum.

Bali (2008) expanded the study of education-related election results to include Hispanic voters, analyzing the effect of race on voting in three California education reforms (the elimination of bilingual education, vouchers, and decreasing the bond passage rate to 55%). She found that white voters, black voters, and Hispanic voters differed in their support of all three initiatives, again providing support that race is a factor when voters have the opportunity to make decisions regarding public school education.

Given the extensive research showing the influence of intergroup competition on not only local elections, but also public policy preferences, including this concept in a theory of local elections is key. Building on racial threat theory, in particular, this chapter will investigate the importance of intergroup competition by analyzing the racial distance between a school district's voters and the students in the district, with racial distance being calculated by subtracting the

percentage of white students in a school district from the percentage of the white voting age population (VAP) in that district. Many states, like Texas, have growing numbers of minority students, whereas the voting age population is often substantially non-Hispanic white.

According to a former Texas state demographer, this difference is due to the fact that minorities, primarily Hispanics, have higher birth rates than non-Hispanic whites (Collier and Ura 2015).

Therefore, racial distance will be prevalent in many school districts and can serve as a useful measure of intergroup competition in bond elections.

Data and Hypotheses

Data

Like the previous chapter, this analysis will draw on administrative data from the State of Texas. Specifically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides student demographic data as well as measures for many of the control variables; the Texas Bond Review Board (TBRB) provides school bond information, including date, amount, and bond passage or bond failure; and the United States Census Bureau provides demographic information for the Voting Age Population (VAP) for each school district. The study examines all school bond elections held in the State of Texas from 1998 through 2012, and uses decennial census data from both 2000 and 2010. Elections held between 1998 and 2004 will use the 2000 census to supply data for the independent variable, and 2010 census data will be used for years 2005 through 2012.

Descriptive Statistics

Bond Data

Between 1998 and 2004, 980 bonds were proposed in the State of Texas. Of these proposals, voters passed 764 bonds, while 216 were rejected. The average bond amount requested was \$33,000,000. Between 2005 and 2012, 1,169 bonds were proposed, with 835

passed and 334 rejected. The average amount of bonds requested during these years was \$46,000,000.

Racial Distance

Racial distance was calculated by subtracting the percentage of white students in a school district from the percentage of the white voting age population (VAP) in that same district. For the 1998 – 2004 dataset, this variable ranged from -44 to 55.5, with an average racial distance of 10, meaning the percentage of the white VAP in Texas school districts is on average 10 percentage points higher than the percentage of white students in that district. The 2005 – 2012 dataset also had quite a large range of racial distance, with a minimum of -43 and a maximum of 60. The average was quite similar to the 1998 – 2004 data, at 11 percent. While these ranges seem dramatic, it is important to remember that some school districts in Texas are as small as 10 students, so small numeric differences can create large percentage differences.

Method

This chapter will test two dependent variables: (1) bond proposal and (2) bond passage. The main analysis employs probit regression to predict school bond proposal and school bond passage as a function of racial distance (*RacialDistance*) and the characteristics of the district (*D*), as shown in equation

$$\text{School Bonds}_{jt} = \text{RacialDistance}_{jt}\beta + D_{jt}\delta + \gamma_t$$

where j indexes school districts and t indexes time in years. To reduce issues of omitted variables bias, the model includes a fixed effect specification at the year level. This controls for any time-invariant characteristics about the year. Estimates are derived with robust standard errors. To ease interpretations, marginal effects are presented for each coefficient. In the bond proposal model, the analysis includes all school districts in the State of Texas for the years of the

sample; however, in the bond passage model, only school districts that proposed a bond during the sample years are included.

Hypotheses

Given previous findings on racial threat and intergroup competition, the hypotheses for this chapter are:

H₃: Greater racial distance between students and voters in a school district is negatively related to school bond proposal.

H₄: Greater racial distance between students and voters in a school district is negatively related to school bond passage.

Results

1998 – 2004 Dataset

Hypothesis 3 predicts the likelihood of proposing a school bond as a function of racial distance. As shown in Table 3, between 1998 and 2004, for every percentage point increase in racial distance, districts were 0.15 percent less likely to call a bond. This relationship held even after including a year fixed effect, and indicates that school boards may be aware of racial tensions affecting their districts and therefore less likely to place a bond on the ballot when they fear intergroup competition could threaten its passage.

Other variables significant in this model include student demographic characteristics as well as per pupil expenditures. The negative relationship between per pupil expenditures and bond proposal is expected as it shows school boards may be sensitive to the total cost of education in their districts. The significant demographic variables, however, are difficult to analyze. Previous literature has reported mixed findings on the relationship between student demographic characteristics and bond passage, and it appears bond proposal is also influenced by these variables. To develop a theory to address these relationships, it would perhaps be best to

Table 3. Influence of Racial Distance on Bond Proposal (1998 – 2004)

	No Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se
Racial Distance	-0.0015** (0.0005)	-0.0015** (0.0004)
District Enrollment (in 1,000s)	0.0004 (0.0003)	0.0004+ (0.0003)
Black Student Percent	0.0018** (0.0004)	0.0018** (0.0004)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0012** (0.0003)	0.0011** (0.0002)
Native American Student Percent	-0.0073 (0.0050)	-0.0078 (0.0049)
Asian Student Percent	0.0022 (0.0020)	0.0024 (0.0019)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	-0.0023** (0.0003)	-0.0023** (0.0003)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0016** (0.0005)	0.0015** (0.0005)
District Indebtedness	0.0002 (0.0009)	-0.0001 (0.0009)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	0.0172 (0.0209)	0.0132 (0.0204)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (in 1,000s)	-0.0167** (0.0046)	-0.0146** (0.0045)
Plant Maintenance and Operations per pupil (in 100s)	0.0038 (0.0025)	0.0026 (0.0025)
N	7,160	7,160
r ² _p	0.0429	0.0648

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

begin with a qualitative study of school boards to determine how student demographic characteristics affect their decision-making.

Once a bond is proposed, voters determine whether it passes or fails. Hypothesis 4 tests for a relationship between racial distance and bond passage. Based on the data in this analysis, it appears that racial distance has a negative impact on bond passage, as hypothesized (see Table 4). Specifically, a one-percentage point increase in racial distance leads to a one percent decrease in likelihood of bond passage. This relationship holds even after year fixed effects are introduced; however, the effect is slightly diminished to a 0.8 percent decrease in likelihood of bond passage.

Like the bond proposal model, this model also shows that student demographic characteristics are significantly related to bond passage. Specifically, higher percentages of black and Hispanic students lead to a higher likelihood of bond passage. The significance of the Hispanic student percent variable disappears, however, in the model with year fixed effects. District indebtedness, total adopted tax rate, and total per pupil expenditures, are all positively related to bond passage. These results are in keeping with previous findings that some districts simply have greater appetites for education-related costs than others.

2005 – 2012 Dataset

Table 5 shows that between 2005 and 2012, school boards were less likely to propose bonds in districts with greater racial distance. Specifically the effect in the model without fixed effects is identical to the 1998 – 2004 dataset ($\beta = -0.0015$). Unlike the earlier data, however, the 2005 – 2012 model shows a slight decrease in the effect of racial distance ($\beta = -0.0011$) when year fixed effects are introduced.

Table 4. Influence of Racial Distance on Bond Passage (1998 – 2004)

	No Fixed Effects Bond Passage b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Passage b/se
Racial Distance	-0.0104** (0.0023)	-0.0081** (0.0022)
District Enrollment (in 1,000s)	0.0014 (0.0013)	0.0013 (0.0012)
Black Student Percent	0.0031+ (0.0016)	0.0029+ (0.0017)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0020+ (0.0011)	0.0015 (0.0011)
Native American Student Percent	0.0007 (0.0294)	0.0084 (0.0298)
Asian Student Percent	0.0115 (0.0085)	0.0111 (0.0082)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	0.0006 (0.0012)	0.0004 (0.0013)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0038 (0.0029)	0.0044 (0.0028)
Bond Amount (in 100,000s)	-0.0000 (0.0000)	-0.0000 (0.0000)
District Indebtedness	0.0100** (0.0037)	0.0093* (0.0037)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	-0.2215+ (0.1159)	-0.1559 (0.1212)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (in 1,000s)	0.0265+ (0.0150)	0.0425* (0.0167)
Plant Maintenance and Operations per pupil (in 100s)	0.0112 (0.0105)	0.0152 (0.0115)
N	976	976
r2_p	0.0544	0.0775

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

Student demographic characteristics, including black student percentage, Hispanic student percentage, and economically disadvantaged student percentage, were again significant. Other significant control variables included district indebtedness (though only in the model with fixed effects), total adopted tax rate, and total per pupil expenditures. Total per pupil expenditures again reflected a negative relationship with bond proposal; however total adopted tax rate was positive in the first model, but changed to negative after year fixed effects were included.

The results of the bond passage model, reported in Table 6, provide an interesting change from the earlier data. Specifically, racial distance is no longer significantly related to bond passage. Therefore, although school boards still appear to be sensitive to potential intergroup competition, the voters no longer seem driven by intergroup competition.

In regard to control variables, this model shows that several student demographic characteristics are again significant, as are bond amount, district indebtedness, total adopted tax rate, and plant maintenance and operations. An interesting change between the 1998 – 2004 data and 2005 – 2012 data is the result related to the need for new or renovated facilities as measured by the percentage of a district's budget devoted to plant maintenance and operations. While this variable was not significant in the older data, the more recent years show a significant positive relationship, meaning voters are more likely to approve school bonds when the need is higher.

Conclusion

The results of this study offer insight into what is perhaps a dramatic change in the importance of intergroup competition in local elections. While previous studies of local electoral politics have shown time and time again that race is an important factor in election outcomes, this study shows that perhaps its influence is fading. This conclusion is supported by the finding

that racial distance, as calculated by the difference between the percentage of white students in a school district and the percentage of white VAP in that same district, has a significant negative relationship with bond passage when analyzing data from 1998 through 2004, but this relationship disappears in bond elections held between 2005 and 2012. Additionally, the percentage of a district's budget spent on plant maintenance and operations, a measure of a district's need for a school bond, is not significant in the 1998 – 2004 model, but shows a significant positive relationship with bond passage in the 2005 – 2012 model. These results could be interpreted to mean that perhaps voters are paying more attention to a district's need for new or renovated facilities and less attention to whether the beneficiaries of the bond reflect voters' own demographic characteristics.

Conversely, racial distance has a negative relationship with bond proposal in both time periods, perhaps illustrating that school boards remain wary of calling bonds when the voters in their districts do not reflect their student demographics. If future studies continue to support the findings of bond passage reflected in the 2005 – 2012 dataset, school board members may become more willing to call bonds based on the need for facilities instead of factors like intergroup competition.

When placing these results in the larger context of local elections, it becomes important to continue to analyze all types of local elections, including local candidate elections, to determine if race and intergroup competition are diminishing in importance. Future studies could continue to help clarify whether the results of this chapter reflect an evolution of factors important to local election voters or whether intergroup competition presents itself differently in candidate versus bond elections.

Table 5. Influence of Racial Distance on Bond Proposal (2005 – 2012)

	No Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se
Racial Distance	-0.0015**	-0.0011*
	(0.0004)	(0.0005)
District Enrollment (1,000s)	0.0003 (0.0003)	0.0004 (0.0003)
Black Student Percent	0.0023**	0.0021**
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0014**	0.0014**
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Native American Student Percent	0.0016 (0.0039)	0.0022 (0.0035)
Asian Student Percent	-0.0007 (0.0019)	-0.0001 (0.0018)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	-0.0021**	-0.0018**
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0004 (0.0005)	0.0003 (0.0005)
District Indebtedness	0.0012	0.0031**
	(0.0008)	(0.0008)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	0.0331+	-0.0670**
	(0.0182)	(0.0208)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (1,000s)	-0.0036**	-0.0027*
	(0.0012)	(0.0011)
Plant Maintenance and Operations per pupil (100s)	0.0008 (0.0010)	0.0005 (0.0010)
N	7,161	7,161
r ² _p	0.0260	0.0411

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

Table 6. Influence of Racial Distance on Bond Passage (2005 – 2012)

	No Fixed Effects Bond Passage b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Passage b/se
Racial Distance	0.0006	0.0005
	(0.0021)	(0.0022)
District Enrollment (in 1,000s)	-0.0017	-0.0003
	(0.0017)	(0.0017)
Black Student Percent	-0.0038*	-0.0039*
	(0.0016)	(0.0016)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0001	0.0009
	(0.0010)	(0.0011)
Native American Student Percent	-0.0397+	-0.0291*
	(0.0223)	(0.0144)
Asian Student Percent	0.0161*	0.0188**
	(0.0066)	(0.0070)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	0.0002	0.0008
	(0.0014)	(0.0015)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0030	0.0011
	(0.0024)	(0.0025)
Bond Amount (in 100,000s)	0.0001*	0.0001*
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
District Indebtedness	0.0021	0.0108*
	(0.0037)	(0.0047)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	0.3161**	-0.2521+
	(0.0787)	(0.1491)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (in 1,000s)	-0.0003	0.0037
	(0.0042)	(0.0046)
Plant Maintenance and Operations per pupil (in 100s)	0.0129**	0.0079+
	(0.0045)	(0.0046)
N	1,020	1,020
r ² _p	0.0566	0.1005

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

Limitations

Like the discussion of retrospective voting in Chapter 2, one of the limitations of this analysis is lack of ability to control for the influence of outside groups. While many Political Action Committees (PACs) form both to support or oppose school bonds across the State of Texas, prior to 2015 these efforts were not tracked at the state level, and local enforcement of disclosure policies differed across districts. As of September 1, 2015, however, all PACs created to support or oppose school bond measures are required to file campaign finance reports with the Texas Ethics Commission, much like candidates for state-level offices (Texas Legislature Online 2016). Therefore, in the future, this data will be easily accessible and will inform future research.

Voter turnout data also presents a limitation of this study. Specifically, Voting Age Population (VAP) is not an accurate measure of who actually votes in elections. Voter turnout in local elections is historically very low, and minority turnout is generally lower than white turnout (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014). Therefore, using VAP in the measure for racial distance likely introduces bias into the analysis. However, Texas does not record demographic information of voters in school bond elections, making a more accurate measure difficult to attain. Additionally, VAP at the school district level is only available on a decennial basis. Therefore, matching it to a year span instead of specific years likely limits its accuracy.

Because VAP is not an accurate measure of voter turnout and is only available on a decennial basis, the decision was made not to control for other variables available in decennial census data such as voter age and income, which have been shown to influence bond election results in previous studies.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study offer extraordinarily interesting results as they show that a major tenet of local electoral behavior theory could be changing. Intergroup competition, and race, specifically, have been shown again and again to be important in local election outcomes. This study, however, begins to offer a new narrative on their influence.

CHAPTER 4

KEY CONCEPT 3: POLITICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

Political Context

Both Kaufmann (2004) and Oliver (2012) address political context in their proposed theoretical structures of local elections; however, they do not define it in the same way. Basing her local election theory on group interest theory, Kaufmann claims that the political context is defined by the degree of group conflict, and that relative levels of group conflict are related to different forms of voting behavior. Oliver, on the other hand, addresses political context as “bias” in local electoral politics. The author defines bias as “the extent to which costs and benefits are unevenly distributed among a democracy’s constituents” (Oliver 2012, p. 35). Within this definition, Oliver includes a jurisdiction’s electoral arrangements, such as partisan elections versus nonpartisan elections, district elections versus at-large elections, and the scheduling of elections at unusual times. This chapter will align with Oliver’s definition of political context. Specifically, it will investigate the relationship between the electoral structure of a school board and school bond election outcomes. Recognizing Kaufmann’s contribution to local election theory, conflict does play a role even in this definition of political context, however, because studies have shown that conflict is related to electoral structure (as discussed later in this chapter).

Electoral Structure

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reform-minded citizens supported several Progressive Era initiatives in a stated effort to insulate government from corruption. Many of

these reforms centered on the way candidates were elected to office at the local level. For example, reformers supported non-partisan local elections in order to diminish the influence of high-powered political machines on the decisions of local policymakers. Another way to depoliticize local elections was to implement at-large, as opposed to single-member district, elections of local governmental entities. By enacting this reform, Progressives claimed that local ward bosses would have less control over the outcome of elections due to the dissipation of their influence jurisdiction-wide (Welch and Bledsoe 1988). Further, according to reformers, elected officials in at-large systems would be more likely to consider a policy's effect on the entire jurisdiction, not simply the area that he or she represented, which would lead to better public policy. While much of the conversation surrounding this reform centered on city councils, reformers targeted school boards, as well. As Hess writes, "By the dawn of the twentieth century, Progressive reformers thought it necessary to 'clean out' school boards plagued by patronage and politics" (Hess 2008, p. 220).

However, as Meier (2002) claims, the at-large structural design does not remove education from politics nor politics from education. Instead, it contributes to the political context of elections, and advantages some while disadvantaging others. In fact, some scholars (e.g. Davidson and Korbel 1981; Welch and Bledsoe 1988) claim that creating winners and losers through a change in electoral structure was intentional, and instead of simply attempting to enact good government practices, Progressives were actively seeking to disadvantage lower income and minority groups by forcing them to compete in larger, more expensive elections where they would have a lower likelihood of success and might even be too intimidated by the structure to attempt to place their names on the ballot.

In an effort to determine the actual effects of electoral structures, as opposed to what the reformers may or may not have hoped to accomplish, scholars have analyzed the differences in the characteristics of candidates elected in at-large versus single-member elections, how policy outcomes differ, the amount of conflict experienced by boards/councils elected through different types of electoral structures, and more. Building upon this work, this chapter will test the importance of political context in local elections by investigating the relationship between school board electoral structure and school bond election outcomes.

Electoral Structures and Representation

The vast majority of the research on the effect of electoral structures relates to how at-large versus single-member districts influence the election of historically underrepresented groups to local governing bodies. Many scholars have shown that single-member districts increase the representation of African Americans on both city councils and school boards (Davidson and Korbel 1981; Vedlitz and Johnson 1982; Robinson 1985; Svara 1990; Welch 1990; Zax 1990; Trounstein and Valdini 2008). Some of the studies qualify their findings, however. For example, Trounstein and Valdini (2008) and Vedlitz and Johnson (1982) conclude that single-member districts only improve African American representation when the minority group is geographically concentrated, with Trounstein and Valdini further limiting the effects to jurisdictions wherein the minority group makes up a moderate percentage of the population.

While single-member districts appear to increase representation for African Americans, the effect of electoral structure on Hispanic representation is not as clear. Whereas some studies confirm the conventional hypothesis that single-member districts increase Hispanic representation (Davidson and Korbel 1981; Fraga et al. 1986; Leal et al. 2004; Meier and Juenke 2005; Trounstein and Valdini 2008), others show no significant effect (MacManus 1978; Welch

1990; Zax 1990). Like the analyses of African American representation, several of these studies produce nuanced results. Leal et al. (2004) and Meier and Juenke (2005) show that at-large elections only disadvantage Hispanics when they are a minority in the population – districts with a majority Hispanic population show no significant difference in Hispanic representation on school boards elected via at-large versus single-member systems. Zax (1990) finds that while Hispanic city council representation appears to increase in single-member district elections, this effect disappears after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic variables.

The effect of electoral structure on the election of women appears to be contrary to the findings regarding election of minorities. The vast majority of studies have found either no impact (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Bullock and MacManus 1991), or a positive impact (Karnig and Walter 1976; Welch and Karnig 1979; Herrick and Welch 1992; Trounstone and Valdin 2008) of at-large electoral structures on the election of women to city councils. No literature was found specifically related to the election of female school board members. Scholars tend to attribute this result to the fact that women are not geographically concentrated like racial and ethnic minorities tend to be, and therefore are not advantaged by single-member districts (Welch and Karnig 1979; Trounstone and Valdin 2008). In qualifying their results, Welch and Karnig note the positive effect of at-large districts is very small and “in the long run women might do better in district than in at-large races because of the greater name recognition and financial support necessary even to get the nomination in at-large contests” (Welch and Karnig 1979, p. 491).

Like the findings regarding gender representation in general, studies that separate minority women from minority men show that minority women do not experience positive effects from single-member districts. All gains experienced by African Americans in single-

member districts are attributed to African American men (Herrick and Welch 1992; Trounstein and Valdini 2008). The results for Latino versus Latina representation are less clear, with Trounstein and Valdini (2008) finding no significant relationship between electoral structure and Hispanic representation after separating by gender. This finding may be the result of a small sample size, however, as the authors were only able to collect the data for a single year.

Electoral Structures and Policy Development

Electoral structure has also been shown to affect the way in which locally elected officials view their role, as well as the amount of conflict experienced within the governing body. Banfield and Wilson (1963) categorize one's perception of the public interest into two types: public-regardingness and private-regardingness. Those in the public-regardingness group value "efficiency, impartiality, honesty, planning, strong executives, no favoritism," whereas private-regardingness describes those who "are far less interested in the efficiency, impartiality, and honesty of local government than in its readiness to confer material benefits of one sort or another upon them" (Banfield and Wilson 1963, p. 46). The authors conclude that individuals elected in an at-large system are more public-regarding than those elected in single-member district elections, because the single-district members are interested in obtaining benefits for their sub-districts. Welch and Bledsoe (1988) find support for Banfield and Wilson's contention. Wolfinger and Field (1966), however, conclude that region of the country, not electoral structure nor any other governmental reform variable, is responsible for policy outlook differences across jurisdictions.

Svara (1990) defines the difference in how officials define their roles as delegates, trustees, or politicians. Delegates seek to reflect the wishes of their constituents, trustees strive to use their judgment to act in the best interest of the community, and politicians are a combination of

delegates and trustees. Whereas one would expect single-member district city councils to more closely reflect a delegate outlook, the author did not find evidence to support that hypothesis. Two-thirds of the councils studied were derived from single-member district elections, but only seven percent of respondents identified themselves as delegates.

Scholars have also studied whether electoral structure affects the amount of conflict generated as elected officials make decisions. Results have been mixed, with Welch and Bledsoe (1988) and Svara (1990) reporting a positive relationship between single-member district structures and conflict, and Ihrke and Niedrjohn (2005) showing no significant relationship between electoral structure and perceived conflict on city councils. In his study, Grissom (2010) finds a positive relationship between single-member district structures and the percentage of divisive decisions, but no significant relationship between electoral structure and respondents' belief that the school board works well together.

Electoral Structures and Policy Outcomes

In addition to affecting who gets elected and policy development, electoral structures have been shown to influence policy outcomes at both the city council and school board level. Several studies have shown that increases in the number of minority members on a school board, including increases tied to the implementation of single-member district elections, lead to more minority school district employees (Fraga et al. 1986; Meier and Smith 1994; Meier et al. 1999). Fraga et al. (1986) and Meier et al. (1999) take their findings one step further to show that an increase in the number of minority teachers improves educational outcomes for students. While Fraga et al. limit their study to outcomes of Hispanic students, Meier et al. conclude that increases in the number of minority teachers lead to improved outcomes for all students.

Other studies of the policy effects of electoral structures have spanned various types of policies, with the collective outcome less clear. While some analyses find significant relationships, others show no relationship between electoral structure and policy outcomes. Morgan and Pelissero (1980) and Hajnal and Trounstein (2010), for example, find no significant relationship between structure and the fiscal decisions of city councils. Alternatively, Clingermayer (1994) finds that city councils made up of single-member districts are more likely to exclude, through the use of zoning ordinances, group homes that care for the mentally retarded, juvenile offenders, and recovering alcoholics/drug users. Clingermayer attributes this finding to his belief that elected officials in single-member districts are most responsive to the voters in their particular districts, and since group homes are viewed as undesirable neighbors, no councilmember is willing to accept one into his/her district. Lineberry and Fowler (1967) also show a significant relationship between electoral structure and policy outcomes, with at-large city councils resulting in lower taxes and lower spending and single-member district councils being more responsive to class, racial, and religious cleavages. Like Clingermayer, Lineberry and Fowler (1967) claim single-member districts are more responsive to society's cleavages because they allow voters in sub-jurisdictions greater influence over their councilmembers. Thus, the officials are electorally responsible to only a small, geographically-concentrated population. Finally, Dalenberg and Duffy-Deno (1990) conclude single-member district structures result in more investment in public infrastructure projects than do at-large systems because council members trade favors in order to accomplish their individual goals, increasing expenditures overall.

In a study most analogous to the current research question, Rugh and Trounstein (2011) report mixed results related to the effect of electoral structure on the outcome of municipal bond

elections. Whereas the authors find a positive relationship between single-member districts and the number of expenditure categories included in proposed municipal bonds, electoral structure does not have a significant impact on whether or not a bond is called, the bond amount, or the passage rate. Rugh and Trounstine's primary research question relates to how diversity levels in a community influence municipal bond election outcomes. The authors' results show that more diverse communities call fewer, larger bonds with more spending categories. They attribute their finding to strategic elected officials who "build more diverse bond packages in an attempt to garner the support of a broad base of constituents" (Rugh and Trounstine 2011, p. 1045). It follows that single-member bodies would face the same type of situation, which is exemplified in Rugh and Trounstine's finding that these councils have more categories in their proposed bonds.

Data and Hypotheses

Data

Like the previous chapters, this analysis will draw on administrative data from the State of Texas. Specifically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides student demographic data as well as measures for many of the control variables; the Texas Bond Review Board (TBRB) provides school bond information, including date, amount, and bond passage or bond failure; and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) provides data on each district's school board electoral structure. The study examines all school bond elections held in the State of Texas from 1997 to 2012. All data is linked by district and year codes to create a panel dataset of all school districts from 1997 to 2012.

Descriptive Statistics

Bond Data

Between 1994 and 2012, 2,542 bonds were proposed in the State of Texas. Of these proposals, voters passed 1,912 bonds, while 630 were rejected. The average bond amount requested was \$38,000,000.

Electoral Structure

Although most of the scholarly discussion surrounding electoral structure frames it as a dichotomous variable – at-large or single-member – in reality, six categories exist: at-large, single-member, mix of at-large and single-member, appointed, mix of at-large and appointed, and mix of single-member and appointed. Studies have addressed these categories in various ways, with some authors using the proportion of the board that is elected at-large and others including several categories of the variable. Because all traditional Texas school board members (not counting prison schools or other special types of districts) are elected, not appointed, this paper will include three types of the independent variable: at-large, single-member, and mixed. All are transformed into dummy variables, and the model will test the likelihood of bond passage in single-member and mixed districts as compared to at-large districts. In the dataset provided by TASB, 495 districts were classified as at-large, 462 as single-member, and 57 as mixed.

Method

This chapter will test two dependent variables: (1) bond proposal and (2) bond passage. The main analysis employs probit regression to predict school bond proposal and school bond passage as a function of electoral structure (*ElectoralStructure*) and the characteristics of the district (*D*), as shown in the equation: $School\ Bonds_{jt} = ElectoralStructure_{jt}\beta + D_{jt}\delta + \gamma_t$,

where j indexes school districts and t indexes time in years. To reduce issues of omitted variable bias, the model includes a fixed effect specification at the year level. This controls for any time-invariant characteristics about the year. Estimates are derived with robust standard errors. To ease interpretations, marginal effects are presented for each coefficient. In the bond proposal model, the analysis includes all school districts in the State of Texas for the years of the sample; however, in the bond passage model, only school districts that proposed a bond during the sample years are included.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this chapter are:

H₅: A single-member district electoral structure is negatively related to school bond proposal.

H₆: A single-member district electoral structure is negatively related to school bond passage.

Hypothesis 5 is based primarily upon Rugh and Trounstein's (2011) results showing that city councils in diverse communities are more likely to call fewer, larger bonds in an effort to satisfy the desires of a wide range of constituents. Based on their analysis, the authors determine that elected officials must act strategically in order to achieve the goals of a diverse city. This finding can be extrapolated to school boards elected via single-member districts – they will need to call fewer bonds that incorporate projects in more members' sub-districts in order to ensure district-wide support. Other scholars have found that elected officials in single-member districts must act strategically (i.e. through vote trading and logrolling) in order to support their reelection efforts (Dalenberg and Duffy-Deno 1990; Southwick 1997; Simpson 2001), which would also lead to fewer, more expensive bonds.

Hypothesis 6 is contrary to Rugh and Trounstein's (2011) finding of no significant relationship between electoral structure and municipal bond outcomes; however, based on the research specifically related to school bond elections, it is likely that an analysis of school bond elections will produce different results. Specifically, the literature shows that bond amount is negatively related to school bond election success (Theobald and Meier 2002; Bowers et al. 2010a; Bowers et al. 2010b; Packer 2013). Therefore, because it is likely that boards operating under single-member district structures will call larger bonds in order to "buy" the support of a majority of the members, success will be more difficult to achieve.

Further, studies of school bond elections report the importance of unanimous board support in order to pass school bonds (Fairbank 2006; Holt et al. 2006; Nagardeolekar and Merritt 2006). Because single-member electoral systems often lead to greater conflict (Welch and Bledsoe 1988; Svara 1990; Grissom 2010), they will likely have fewer unanimous decisions and that will result in negative election outcomes.

As discussed in previous models with significant student demographic variables, these results are difficult to analyze. Previous literature has reported mixed findings on the relationship between student demographic characteristics and bond passage, so this analysis is reflective of past results. To develop a theory to address these relationships, it would perhaps be best to explore these results with a qualitative study.

Results

Bond Proposal

As shown in Table 7, this analysis does not support the hypothesis that single-member districts are less likely to call a bond than at-large districts. In fact, the model shows that single-member districts are 1.7 percent more likely to call a bond than at-large districts. This

relationship holds in the year fixed effects model, though its influence decreases slightly to 1.6 percent. Districts with a mixed structure do not show statistically significant results.

District enrollment is also significantly related to bond proposal, as are some district demographic variables, district indebtedness, and total per pupil expenditures. District indebtedness has a positive relationship, perhaps reflecting the fact that this variable is often positively related to bond passage, so perhaps school board members are aware of their districts' appetite for debt. Total per pupil expenditures is negatively related to bond passage, which could reflect board members' sensitivity to the total cost of education.

Bond Passage

This analysis supports the hypothesis that single-member districts are less likely to pass bonds than at-large districts. Specifically, Table 8 shows that the likelihood of bond passage decreases by 6 percent in single-member districts when compared to at-large districts – quite a large effect. After year fixed effects are added to the model, the relationship remains negative, but the effect size decreases to 4.9 percent. Like the bond proposal model, a mixed electoral structure does not appear to influence election outcomes.

In this model, the percentage of black students, percentage of Asian students, percentage of limited English proficient students, bond amount, district indebtedness, total adopted tax rate, and plant maintenance and operations per pupil are all significantly related to bond passage. The relationship between total adopted tax rate and bond passage as well as the relationship between total per pupil expenditures and bond passage are both very interesting. They both show counterintuitive results in the original model, with total adopted tax rate ($\beta = 0.1701$) showing a quite large effect. The relationships, however, disappear in the model with year fixed effects.

Table 7. Influence of Electoral Structure on Bond Proposal

	No Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Proposal b/se
Single Member	0.0171**	0.0164**
Mixed	(0.0053) 0.0201	(0.0053) 0.0197
District Enrollment (1,000s)	(0.0123) 0.0004+	(0.0122) 0.0004+
Black Student Percent	(0.0002) 0.0015**	(0.0002) 0.0016**
Hispanic Student Percent	(0.0003) 0.0012**	(0.0003) 0.0012**
Native American Student Percent	(0.0002) 0.0005	(0.0002) 0.0001
Asian Student Percent	(0.0026) 0.0012	(0.0026) 0.0009
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	(0.0013) -0.0024**	(0.0013) -0.0025**
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	(0.0002) 0.0015**	(0.0002) 0.0015**
District Indebtedness	(0.0004) 0.0018**	(0.0004) 0.0019**
Total Adopted Tax Rate	(0.0006) 0.0016	(0.0006) -0.0137
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (1,000s)	(0.0145) -0.0048**	(0.0189) -0.0054**
Plant Maintenance and Operations per pupil (100s)	(0.0011) 0.0004	(0.0012) 0.0002
	(0.0009)	(0.0010)
N	16,175	16,175
r2_p	0.0310	0.0383

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01

Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

These results likely reflect the 16-year time span of this study, showing how the year of the election can impact voters' decisions related to financial considerations. The significant positive relationship between the percentage of a district's budget devoted to plant maintenance and operations and bond passage is also interesting because it shows that voters may be aware of the infrastructure needs facing districts and are therefore more likely to approve bonds for districts with older buildings that are more costly to maintain.

Conclusion

The results of this analysis provide additional evidence that political context, as measured by electoral structure, matters in local elections. Specifically, in the bond passage model, single-member districts were over 6 percent less likely than at-large districts to hold successful bond elections. Two reasons for this outcome that have been provided in previous literature include single-member districts call larger bonds in order to appease multiple board members and creating sub-districts creates additional conflict on the board. Whereas single-member districts in this study are positively correlated with bond amount, this does not appear to be the reason the elections fail because bond amount is positively related to bond passage (though it is a miniscule effect). Therefore, heightened conflict is likely the reason single-member districts are negatively related to bond success. This finding leads to an opportunity for future research as one could collect data on school board votes and analyze the relationships between electoral structure, unanimous board support, and bond passage. By augmenting the current research, we could better understand why the relationships shown in the data exist.

Contrary to expectations, this analysis shows that school boards in single-member districts are more likely than at-large districts to propose bond elections. This finding is in opposition to Rugh and Trounstein's (2011) results showing that city councils in diverse

Table 8. Influence of Electoral Structure on Bond Passage

	No Fixed Effects Bond Passage b/se	With Fixed Effects Bond Passage b/se
Single Member	-0.0602**	-0.0489**
	(0.0182)	(0.0183)
Mixed	-0.0605	-0.0387
	(0.0403)	(0.0391)
District Enrollment (1,000s)	-0.0015	-0.0012
	(0.0009)	(0.0009)
Black Student Percent	-0.0014+	-0.0016+
	(0.0009)	(0.0009)
Hispanic Student Percent	0.0007	0.0009
	(0.0006)	(0.0006)
Native American Student Percent	-0.0176	-0.0157
	(0.0116)	(0.0102)
Asian Student Percent	0.0106*	0.0144**
	(0.0044)	(0.0046)
Economically Disadvantaged Student Percent	-0.0008	-0.0001
	(0.0008)	(0.0008)
Limited English Proficient Student Percent	0.0037**	0.0031*
	(0.0014)	(0.0014)
Bond Amount (100,000s)	0.0000*	0.0000*
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
District Indebtedness	0.0028	0.0074**
	(0.0022)	(0.0025)
Total Adopted Tax Rate	0.1701**	-0.0732
	(0.0519)	(0.0817)
Total Per Pupil Expenditures (1,000s)	-0.0067*	0.0018
	(0.0033)	(0.0038)
Plant Maintenance and Operations per pupil (100s)	0.0088**	0.0099**
	(0.0033)	(0.0037)
N	2,516	2,516
r ² _p	0.0296	0.0660

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01
Marginal effects presented in parentheses.

communities are more likely to call fewer, larger bonds in an effort to satisfy the desires of a wide range of constituents. Instead, the single-member school boards included in this study did call larger bonds, but they called them more often than their at-large counterparts. There is very little research on factors influencing bond proposal, making this topic ripe for additional research in an effort to better determine what encourages local elected boards to take an issue to the voters.

Limitations

Like the limitations discussed in the previous chapters, this analysis is limited to the State of Texas and therefore may not be generalizable to other jurisdictions. It is also inhibited by a lack of ability to control for the influence of outside groups. While many Political Action Committees (PACs) form both to support and oppose school bonds across the State of Texas, prior to 2015 these efforts were not tracked at the state level, and local enforcement of disclosure policies differed across districts. As of September 1, 2015, however, all PACs created to support or oppose school bond measures are required to file campaign finance reports with the Texas Ethics Commission, much like candidates for state-level offices (Texas Legislature Online 2016). Therefore, in the future this data will be easily accessible and will inform future research.

Additionally, previous studies have shown that voter demographic characteristics such as age, income, and race influence voter decisions in school bond elections. However, the United States Census Bureau only collects this data at the school district level on a decennial basis, making generalizations about the population difficult, especially in fast-growing and fast-changing districts. Further, the only measure available is Voting Age Population, which is not an accurate measure of who actually votes, which in local elections is often an incredibly small

percentage of eligible voters. Therefore, the decision was made to not include these variables in the model.

Finally, the electoral structure data provided by the Texas Association of School Boards included only the current electoral structures of school boards. TASB did not have historical data on this variable. Therefore, to the extent boards changed structures between 1997 and 2012, the data will not accurately reflect the change. A brief review of news reports, however, shows that it appears most districts underwent electoral structure changes in the 1970s in response to the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Primarily, these changes were in diverse communities and they went from at-large systems to single-member systems. These reports enhance confidence in the data, as it does not appear that electoral structure changes were common among Texas school boards during the years included in the sample.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Several scholars have noted the dearth of research related to a theory of local elections, despite their substantial impact on individuals' daily lives. This dissertation builds upon the work of Kaufmann (2004) and Oliver (2012) to help fill the void in the literature by examining three key concepts for any theory of local elections: retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context. By analyzing the impact of these factors on school bond election outcomes, the previous chapters offer insight on which future research can continue to build.

One of the greatest contributions of this dissertation is an analysis of factors influencing bond proposal, not just bond passage. Examining bond proposal is a new dimension to add to existing research, as very few studies examine this factor – with no studies of school bond proposal found after an extensive review.

In the end, the analyses provided in this dissertation support the argument that retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context should all be considered key concepts in any theory of local elections, with two caveats. First, local elections, like school bond elections, that have a group of decision makers who affect the outcome prior to an issue even being placed on the ballot may produce different results than elections without these “gatekeepers.” Support for this concept is provided in the retrospective voting model examined in Chapter 2, which showed accountability results were significant at the bond proposal, but not the bond passage, level. Second, voters may be evolving in their treatment of intergroup competition, as evidenced by the varying results in the two models investigating the impact of

racial distance on bond election outcomes. If future research continues to show that intergroup competition is not a significant factor in local election outcomes, then it could be removed as an important theoretical tenet. The results of one study, however, do not justify removing it from consideration as a key factor.

Insights

Looking forward, the three analyses in this dissertation offer three additional insights regarding local elections that should be further examined: (1) the importance of gatekeepers, (2) the knowledge level of local voters, and (3) the indication that voters may be evolving.

Importance of Gatekeepers

In an extensive literature review, no research was found regarding factors that influence school boards to propose a bond. In fact, little research exists on factors influencing the decisions of local elected boards in general. Therefore, this dissertation offers new insight into the importance of local elected boards. Specifically, the results of the retrospective voting model discussed in Chapter 2 indicate that school boards, acting as gatekeepers, can influence election outcomes. Whereas retrospective voting based on academic accountability ratings was not significant in the bond passage model, the bond proposal model showed that school boards in districts on the cusp of reaching a preferred rating were more likely to call bonds than poorly-performing districts. This could have had the effect of protecting poorly-performing districts from voters who would be unlikely to support additional funding for failing schools.

Gatekeepers also appeared to be important in the political context model discussed in Chapter 4. Previous research has shown that elected boards acting in diverse communities can propose successful bonds by working together to reach a consensus project (Rugh and Trounstein 2011). This has the effect of creating fewer, larger bonds because of the time it takes

to craft a proposal that includes all the stakeholders and the resources needed to address the needs of a wide range of constituents. In the study of Texas school boards, single-member districts, which resemble diverse communities because the members each represent a different sub-district, were more likely to propose bonds than their at-large counterparts, and bonds in single-member districts were more likely to fail. Therefore, this could be a case of gatekeepers failing to protect their districts. Perhaps if single-member districts took more time to craft packages that respect the needs of each sub-district the district would obtain more positive results. While the data does not reveal specific reasons why a bond failed, the analysis provides a logical base on which to further examine this contention.

Local Voter Knowledge Level

The data presented in this dissertation supports previous findings (Kaufmann 2004; Oliver 2012) that local voters are very knowledgeable of the issues when they vote. For example, the percentage of funds a district spends on its plant maintenance and operations per pupil was included in every model as a measure of the district's need for a new or renovated facility. If a district spends a great deal of its resources on maintenance, it can be inferred that it has older buildings and therefore may have a greater need for facilities support. This variable, used as a control, was positively related to bond passage in three of the four bond passage models, even when the models controlled for year fixed effects. The only model in which it was not significant was the relationship between intergroup competition and bond passage in the years 1997 – 2004. The results of this model will be discussed in depth in the next section, but one could argue that voters may have been aware of a district's need and ignored it based on the racial makeup of the school district. One could argue the most important piece of information voters should know when casting a ballot in a school bond election is whether the district needs a

new or renovated building. Therefore, because of this variable's significance over several analyses, it appears that local school bond voters are knowledgeable when they enter the voting booth, as predicted by previous studies.

Are Voters Evolving?

The results of the Chapter 3 models examining the relationship between intergroup competition, as measured by racial distance, and school bond election outcomes appear to support the notion that voters may be evolving in the way they make decisions. Whereas the early years studied – 1997 through 2004 – support previous findings that groups of one race are loathe to support benefits they believe will benefit groups of another race, the model analyzing data from 2005 through 2012 does not show a significant finding for racial distance.

Furthermore, a district's need for facilities, as measured by the percentage of its budget spent on plant maintenance and operations per pupil, is not significant in the early model, but is significant in the later years. One explanation for this difference could be that voters made decisions based on intergroup competition without consideration of need in the early years, but became more "color blind" and relied more on their understanding of the district's need for facilities in the later years.

Of course, this conclusion is reached on very limited data and, before making any strong claims, many more election outcomes need to be examined. Additionally, the effect may not translate into candidate elections where race and ethnicity are much more clear-cut, as opposed to school bonds that affect many different types of students. This study, however, produced very interesting results and could be promising for future local elections.

Limitations and Future Research

Each chapter has recognized the data limitations that impact this dissertation. First, the data for the independent variables is not perfect. The Census data used to calculate racial distance is only provided on a decennial basis, and the political structure data provided by the Texas Association of School Boards is only provided for the current year, making an exact match to each year in the respective samples impossible. Additionally, a control measure for Political Action Committees (PACs) is missing, despite the fact that outside groups are often involved in local school bond elections, and data for control variables like voter education level and age were not included in the analyses. While these measures are available in the Census data, it was determined not to include them as they would be estimates based on decennial data of the voting age population, not actual voters, diluting the accuracy of the data. Finally, all of the analyses rely on data from the State of Texas. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable outside the state.

The results of this dissertation can be built upon by continuing to investigate the three key concepts identified in this study: retrospective voting, intergroup competition, and political context. Specifically, more work should be done on the different types of local elections, like Oliver (2012) suggested. Additionally, different measures of the variables should be used to test the robustness of the relationships, and other jurisdictions should be examined to see if the Texas results would be replicated elsewhere. Finally, the quantitative analyses provide support that relationships exist between these factors and bond election outcomes, but they do not provide any evidence of why these relationships exist. Therefore, qualitative and survey research could greatly enhance our knowledge of local elections. Whereas there is still much work to be done to

meet the level of knowledge surrounding national elections, this dissertation provides future researchers with a strong foundation on which to build our understanding of local elections.

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Laura K. Jackson was born in Houston, Texas. After completing her schoolwork at Woodville High School in Woodville, Texas, in 1998, Laura entered Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. She received a Bachelor of Science in political science with a minor in communications in May 2002. During the following years she earned a Master of Public Service and Administration degree from the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. After earning her master's degree, Laura held myriad professional positions, including campaign manager, political consultant, and public school district communications director. In 2012, she began working at The University of Texas at Tyler where she currently serves as Assistant Vice President for Legislative Affairs and Strategic Initiatives. In August of 2013, she entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Dallas.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS, Richardson, Texas
Ph.D., Public Affairs, expected May 2017

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, College Station, Texas
George Bush School of Government and Public Service
Master of Public Service and Administration, May 2005

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, College Station, Texas
Bachelor of Science in Political Science; Minor in Communications, May 2002
cum laude

PRESENTATIONS

- Jackson, Laura K. (2016, November). "The Interplay Between Race and Voting Preferences: Does Racial Distance Affect the Outcome of School Bond Elections?" Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management Fall Research Conference, Washington, DC.
- Jackson, Laura K., and James R. Harrington (2016, January). "Examining the Consequences of Electoral Structures: How Do Electoral Structures Affect School Bond Elections?" Southern Political Science Association Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- Jackson, Laura K. (2015, November). "Does Debt Make a Difference: A Study of the Effect of School District Indebtedness on School Bond Election Outcomes." Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management Fall Research Conference, Miami, Florida.
- Harrington, James R. and Laura K. Jackson. (2015, April). "School Districts Under Pressure: Examining the Impact of Accountability Ratings on School Bond Passage Rates." Midwest Political Science Conference, Chicago, Illinois.

HONORS & AWARDS

- Recipient, 2016 John Forrest Kain Scholarship at The University of Texas at Dallas
- Recipient, 2014 Larry D. Terry Scholarship at The University of Texas at Dallas
- Recipient, 2004-2005 George Bush School of Government & Public Service Fellowship

PUBLIC SERVICE

Tyler-Smith County A&M Club

January 2009 – present

- Serve as President of the Club
- Oversee fundraising and distribution of up to \$25,000 per year in scholarships to new Aggies

Leadership Tyler

August 2011 – present

- Successfully completed highly selective leadership development program
- Serve as a member of the Board of Directors and on the Curriculum Committee
- Facilitated partnership between Leadership Tyler and The Bush School of Government and Public Service to quantify the impact of Leadership Tyler on the community

RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The University of Texas at Tyler

October 2012 – present

Assistant Vice President for Legislative Relations & Strategic Initiatives

- Serve as liaison between university and elected officials
- Advance the image of the university to key constituent groups
- Provide strategic counsel to senior administrators
- Research and coordinate special projects and initiatives

Tyler Independent School District

August 2011 – October 2012

Director of Communications

- Planned, developed, and led 20,500-member school district communication efforts
- Served as community liaison and official spokesperson for the district
- Advised district staff and elected school board members on effective communication strategies
- Led district rebranding effort
- Supervised nine employees and managed \$95,000 budget

J2 Strategies

June 2006 – November 2008

Political Consultant

- Created direct mailings, radio scripts, and e-mail campaigns for clients, including two statewide elected officials, two state senators, six state representatives, and one statewide issue campaign
- Independently managed two successful state representative special elections and one successful state representative special election runoff
- Served as fiscal manager for business with gross receipts of over \$1.2 million

Robert Nichols for Texas Senate

August 2005 – May 2006

Campaign Manager

- Created and implemented successful campaign strategy in sixteen-county senate district
- Prepared candidate for speaking engagements
- Represented candidate at public appearances and speaking engagements
- Developed media strategy including television, radio, and direct mailings
- Organized campaign events and fundraisers

Office of State Senator Todd Staples

May 2002 – July 2003

Legislative Assistant

- Served as staff advisor for Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education
- Tracked, analyzed, and advised Senator Staples on current legislation
- Monitored Senate District 3 gubernatorial appointments