The Process of Minority Incorporation
in Local Politics and Government

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Executive Summary

Despite the fact that more than nine in ten black elected officials represent local rather than federal or state government, the study of minority representation in American local politics and elections has been a relatively unexplored area of inquiry. In this paper take an historical approach and examine the processes of black office-seeking and office-holding in local government. Our study relies on data compiled by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Research and the Southern Regional Council's Voter Education Project as well as Louisiana State Secretary of State election returns and candidate characteristics collected by the Local Elections in America Project (Marschall and Shah 2010). In the first set of analyses, we examine trends in the number and distribution of African American candidates and elected officials across office levels and types so that we can better understand: (1) where African-Americans have made the most progress, (2) what patterns might exist across offices, and (3) where we see little or no progress in black office-holding in Louisiana. From here we conduct a multivariate analysis to understand how the election of black council members in Louisiana occurred over time. Using event history analysis, we examine how municipal electoral arrangements and other institutional factors, as well as the socio-economic and racial context of cities shape the timing of the initial election of a black candidate for city council. This analysis spans the period immediately following passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, when the first African Americans won elected office since Reconstruction, up until 2010.
Over the past 40 years, the racial and ethnic complexion of elected officials in the U.S. has changed dramatically. Nowhere are these changes more apparent than at the local level. For example, although the first black elected to the mayor’s office of a major city did not occur until 1967, today there are more than 500 black mayors and some 300 Latino mayors. That minority candidates are challenging and winning elections in virtually every region of the U.S. marks a significant change in the political landscape and one that has gone largely unnoticed. Questions of where, how, and when minority candidates have gained access to specific political offices and positions is critical to the study of representation. However, research has focused almost exclusively on exploring regularities that govern election results for a specific office rather than looking across offices within local electoral geographies. While informative, this approach is limited when it comes to understanding the extent and nature of minority political incorporation since it does not take into account the choices potential candidates face when considering a run for office, the relationship among different elective office and the potentially varied pathways for minority candidates, or the way in which choices are mediated by external factors, campaign, and candidate characteristics.

The larger goal of this study is to expand the current approach and begin developing a theory of political incorporation that integrates the office-specific features of local elections and government with what we see as the distinct stages of the incorporation process: candidate emergence, electoral success, progressive political ambition, and substantive representation. In this paper, we begin with a more modest set of first steps. Specifically, taking a historical approach, we examine the processes of black office-seeking and office-holding in local government. While the larger project will eventually look at a larger set of cases, at present we focus on a single state—Louisiana. This allows us to hold constant several institutional and contextual factors such as Section 5 coverage under the Voting Rights Act and partisan elections, while minimizing variation in others (e.g., the size of local legislative bodies, office remuneration). This largely descriptive analysis will enable us to compare trends in the number and
distribution of African American candidates and elected officials across office levels and types so that we can better understand: (1) where African Americans have made the most progress, (2) what patterns might exist across offices, and (3) where we see little or no progress in black office-holding in Louisiana. From here we conduct a multivariate analysis to understand how the election of black council members in Louisiana occurred over time. Using event history analysis, we examine how municipal electoral arrangements and other institutional factors, as well as the socio-economic and racial context of cities shape the timing of the initial election of a black candidate for city council. This analysis spans the period immediately following passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, when the first African Americans won elected office since Reconstruction, up until 2010.

Our study combines historical data compiled by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Research and the Southern Regional Council’s Voter Education Project as well as Louisiana State Secretary of State election returns and candidate characteristics collected by the Local Elections in America Project (Marschall and Shah 2010). With 13 states completed to date, the LEAP database includes hundreds of thousands of observations spanning all levels and offices of local government.

**Background and Motivation**

We begin with an accounting of black office holding in local politics—specifically, mayoral, city council and school board, and county positions. We focus on this level of government because it is the most numerous, offers the most variation in electoral and institutional features, and is where the majority of minorities hold office. Of the 89,527 governmental units enumerated in 2007, municipalities numbered 19,492 (22%), towns and townships 16,519 (18%) and school districts 13,051 (15%) (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Over half a million public officials hold elected positions in local government, accounting for 96% of all elected officials in the U.S., with municipal and town governments taking the largest share (53%) and school districts the second largest (18%) (U.S. Census Bureau 1995). The distribution of African American elected officials reflects this general pattern. For example, in 2000, about 50 percent of all
black elected officials held municipal/town offices, followed by 21 percent in school board positions (Bositis 2002). As Figure 1 indicates, the total number of black elected officials has increased steadily over time, as has the number of black elected council and board members.

[Figures 1 Here]

Despite the fact that more than nine in ten black elected officials represent local rather than federal or state government, the study of minority representation in American local elections has been a relatively unexplored area of inquiry. While there is a well developed literature examining particular cases—specific minority mayors, elections, or cities—and a body of more quantitative work that focuses on black and, to a lesser extent, Latino representation in councils and boards, when it comes to *general patterns of minority office holding* across time and space we know shockingly little. Thus, questions regarding the commonalities and differences in representation across legislative bodies, minority groups, or other factors remain unanswered. Moreover, the processes and outcomes of the elections that determine whether minorities hold public office and get access to positions of political influence and power have been almost completely ignored.

**Black Representation and the Process of Minority Incorporation in Local Politics**

The literature on black representation and minority incorporation in local politics has tended to focus primarily on the relationship between electoral arrangements (single member versus at-large systems) and council or board representation and the interaction between candidates’ and voters’ racial/ethnic characteristics and voting in local (especially mayoral) elections. Apart from theoretical contributions in Browning, Tabb and Marshall’s (1984) study of black and Latino incorporation in a handful of California cities, few studies have focused on the larger process of incorporation. While these avenues of inquiry have made important contributions to our understanding of where and how blacks and Latinos gain elective office, there is still much that we do not know. Our project is motivated by gaps in theory, data, and methods of existing research and we seek to fill these gaps by examining not only the process of city
council, school board, and county representation, but by also considering the mayor’s office, other administrative and law enforcement positions (e.g., sheriff, chief of police, and by looking across all local offices simultaneously.

**Minority Representation in Local Legislatures**

With the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the attendant restrictions it placed on the ability of ‘covered’ jurisdictions to alter their electoral and other governing arrangements, scholars became increasingly interested in the relationship between electoral structures (primarily single member vs. at-large election systems), voting strength of African Americans or Latinos, and minority representation on school boards and city councils (Davidson & Grofman 1994; Engstrom & McDonald 1981; Karnig & Welch 1980; Robinson, England & Meier 1985; Sass & Mehay 1995; Welch 1990). The story that emerges from over four decades of research is far from conclusive, in part due to inconsistent sampling, measurement, and modeling. Moreover, while blacks have made significant gains in local office holding over time (see Figures 1), few studies have attempted to explain these gains, relying instead on cross sectional analyses of school boards or city councils (but see Marschall, Shah & Ruhil 2010; Sass & Mehay 1995; Sass & Pittman 2000). And, while studies have found that single member districts are more efficacious when it comes to translating black votes into black legislative seats, few studies have compared these effects across local governments (county, school district, municipality). Finally, nearly all existing research has focused on larger cities and school districts, leaving black representation in suburban and especially rural jurisdictions (where a considerable portion of the black population has traditionally been concentrated, particularly in the South), as well as counties, virtually untouched by scholarly research. Do electoral systems operate on black representation or across city councils, school boards and county legislative bodies differently? Are there points of commonality, if so what are they? Have these mechanisms changed over time? To date, most studies have not addressed such questions (but see Marschall et al. 2010).
Ascending to Power: African Americans in the Mayor’s Office

Like the presidency and governorship, mayors are a seldom studied office in American politics. Although there are thousands of mayors governing cities and towns across the U.S., we know even less about this executive office than we do about governors or the presidency. At the same time, the power, prestige, and resources at the mayor’s disposal have increased substantially over recent decades (particularly in big cities). For example, in many of the largest U.S. cities (e.g., New York, Chicago) mayors now have control over urban school systems. In addition, mayors in big and small towns play increasingly important leadership roles in other policy areas (e.g., homeland security, emergency management and disaster relief). Apart from their increasing visibility in these traditionally state and federal policy-making arenas, mayors’ powers of appointment, coordinating personnel, directing the policy agenda, awarding contracts, and overseeing fiscal, racial, neighborhood, and other key local issues, make them important actors on the local stage and thus a critical part of any analysis of minority representation and incorporation.

Who are American mayors and to what extent do they represent the racial/ethnic characteristics of the residents they serve? What are the most common paths to office and are these similar across black and non-black mayors? Are African American mayors more or less likely to gain office when appointed by the council or in places where blacks are better represented on school boards, county and city councils? Do patterns of office holding vary by local political arrangements such the form of government (council-manager versus mayor-council systems), terms limits, district versus at-large council systems, or office remuneration? Interestingly, to date existing studies have completely overlooked these questions (but see Browning et al. 1984; Marschall & Ruhil 2006), largely because the vast majority of research on minority mayors (and mayors in general) is based on case studies of one or a handful of cities that perforce lack variation in these critical features of local governance. Even the small number of studies examining larger samples have largely overlooked the role of governing
arrangements, focusing instead on racial and socio-economic features of city populations and regional location (Alozie 2000; Karnig & Welch 1980; Marshall & Meyer 1975; O’Hare 1990). By and large, the focus of existing research on minority mayors has centered on who votes for, and more specifically, which groups are pivotal in the electoral success of minority candidates. This body of work tends to rely on either big-city mayoral races or the political experiences and governing styles of big-city mayors (Ardrey and Nelson 1990; Colburn and Adler 2001; Hahn and Almy 1971; Kaufman 1998; Munoz & Henry 1986; Perry 1990; Preston et al. 1987; Sheffield & Hadley 1984; Sonenshein 1986; Summers & Klinkner 1990). Although these studies contribute importantly to our understanding of the conditions under which black mayors emerge, their restricted scope limits the generalizability of their findings.

The Process of Minority Incorporation in Local Politics and Government

Our project seeks to integrate the legislative, executive, and other (administrative/law enforcement) branches of local government to develop a broader theory of the process of minority incorporation in politics. While understanding where, how, and when blacks have gained access to specific offices and positions is critical to building this broader theory, without looking across offices within local jurisdictions we have only a limited and potentially misleading picture of the extent and nature of minority political incorporation. We conceptualize incorporation as a process that integrates the office-specific features and what we see as the distinct stages of this process: candidate emergence, electoral success, progressive political ambition, and finally, substantive representation. In addition, we pay special attention to electoral and other governing arrangements, opportunity structures, and the costs and benefits of seeking and holding political office (Schlesinger 1966; Stone & Maisel 2003; Goodliffe 2001; Moncrief et al. 2001; Kazee & Thornberry 1990; Herrnson 1986).

The project outlined above is admittedly ambitious and involves a considerable amount of data collection and analysis. The goals of this paper are more modest and involve primarily descriptive analysis that are intended to establish the foundation for further empirical analysis. Before we turn to
our empirical analysis, we first provide a brief overview of local governments and the electoral landscape in our research site—Louisiana.

**Louisiana’s Local Governments and Elections**

Louisiana has 64 parishes (counties),¹ 303 municipal governments, 69 school districts. Most parishes (41) are governed by a “police jury,” which functions essentially as a county commission. The other 23 have various other forms of government, including: president-council, council-manager, parish commission, and consolidated parish/city. Parish councils range from 3 to 15 members, with a mean of 9.5. Other commonly elected parish officials include sheriff and tax assessor.² Each parish also elects a school board, which ranges in size from 6 to 15 and has a mean of about 10 members. While school board members typically serve six-year terms, all other parish elected officials serve only four-year terms.³ Municipalities in Louisiana are classified by the state as villages, towns or cities based on population. Municipal officials include the mayor, chief of police and a council or board of alderman. Though Louisiana granted municipalities much easier access to Home Rule in its 1974 Constitution,⁴ the vast majority continues to operate under charters created by the Lawrason Act (1898). Under this Act, the number of alderman (council members) is designated as three for villages, five for towns and between five and nine for cities. In 2011, the average council size was 4.5. The Lawrason Act also specifies how aldermen/council member would be elected (by district or at-large).⁵ Both the mayor and chief of police are elected at-large, though in many municipalities with and without Home Rule, police chiefs are appointed rather than elected. In addition, all elected municipal officials serve four-year terms.

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¹ Four of these are consolidated city-parish/county governments: East Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Orleans, and Terrebonne.
² Many fewer parishes elect district attorneys (about 1 in 6) and only one parish elects a coroner.
³ In addition to the 60 parish boards, Louisiana also has 4 consolidated parish-city boards and 5 city school boards (Baker, Bogalusa, Central, Monroe, and Zachary).
⁴ Home Rule was first provided in Louisiana under the Constitution of 1921; however, that document contained an excessive amount of ‘detailization’, making it impractical (see Engstrom 1976 for more details).
⁵ If a city has eight or more aldermen, two must be elected from each district and the remainder elected at large. If a city has seven or fewer aldermen, an equal number of aldermen are elected from each district and the remainder elected at large. If a town is divided into districts, one alderman is elected from each district and one elected at large. Aldermen in villages are elected at large. (Guillot 2004; R.S. 33:382(B))
When it comes to the timing of local elections in Louisiana, there is a considerable variability. The Lawrason Act stipulated that elections be held every four years on “the date for municipal and ward elections,” so that those elected take office on the first day of July following the election. However, it also allowed for the governing authority, by ordinance, to adopt an irrevocable plan for holding elections concurrent with congressional elections. In this case, elected officers take office on January first following their election. (Guillot 2004; R.S. 33:383(A)(2)). Finally, the Act also included a provision allowing the governing authority of a municipality with a population of less than 1,000 persons that hold municipal elections at the 2004 congressional election, to adopt by ordinance, a plan for holding municipal elections concurrent with gubernatorial election.

Descriptive Empirical Analysis

We begin by examining the total number and distribution of black elected officials across local government offices in Louisiana. Our purpose here is to assess which offices African American have been most successful getting elected to, how their electoral success has occurred over time, and what the general patterns of office-holding look like across levels of local government. Since no study to date has been able to examine the question of local office-seeking in a systematic fashion, we also present preliminary descriptive analyses of black candidates for legislative (parish, school district and municipal), mayoral and chief law enforcement positions (sheriff, chief of police, marshal). With these data, we eventually hope to definitively address the question of whether the absence of black elected officials in Louisiana local government stems from the fact that black candidates are simply not winning or due to the fact that blacks are not running.

African American Office-Holding: Where Has the Most Progress Been Made?

The first question we investigate with regard to descriptive representation focuses on which offices of local government African Americans occupy and where they have made the greatest progress over time. In Figures 2 and 3 we report data going back to the election of the first African Americans since
Reconstruction, 1969, to 2001. Figure 2 includes legislative offices across municipal, parish (county), school district governments, while Figure 3 contains data for the most significant executive/chief offices in these local governments—mayors, sheriffs, chiefs of polices and marshals.

As the data in Figure 2 reveal, there are more African Americans in municipal legislative offices (city council) offices than either parish or school district legislative bodies. This has been true for most of the time series, however, in the period immediately following passage of the Voting Rights Act, when African Americans first began participating in the electoral process, there was not much difference across the three local legislative bodies. Indeed, up until the mid-1970s, more blacks gained seats on local school boards than on city councils. Since 1978 however, African Americans representation on city councils has increased more sharply than either parish or school board representation, and parish councils (or police juries) have seen the lowest numbers of African Americans holding office. Of course, it is important to note that there are significantly fewer parishes (64) and school districts (69) than municipalities (303). At the same time, the parish and school district legislatures have on average nearly 10 members, whereas the mean city council size is 4.5.

Shifting attention away from local legislative bodies to other important offices of local government, Figure 3 shows a steady increase in the number of African Americans elected to mayoral and chief law enforcement positions over time. The number of black mayors surpasses the combined number of black chiefs of police, sheriffs and marshals, and the gap between these two categories grew wider in the 1990s. By 2001 there were 33 black elected mayors and 24 black elected chiefs of police, sheriffs and marshals. Note also, that whereas the first black was elected to the mayor’s office in 1969, it

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6 Data for this analysis is drawn exclusively from the Joint Center and the Southern Regional Council’s Voter Education Project, and 2001 is the last year for which comprehensive roster data is available since the Joint Center has not been updated its rosters for blacks elected to local office. While LEAP data can be used to update this series to the present, we are still checking and cleaning these data.
was not until 1976 that the first blacks were elected to chief law enforcement offices. Most striking however, is the comparison between the data reported in Figures 2 and 3.

What these data seem to suggest is that the hurdle of gaining access to elected executive or chief law enforcement positions is much higher for African Americans than it is for local legislative positions. However, is this really the case? What these data cannot tell us is whether the relatively smaller number of jurisdictions that have elected black mayors and chiefs is due to the lack of success of African American candidates or the absence of African American candidates in these electoral contests.

**African American Office-Seeking: Some Preliminary Evidence**

To address the question of whether the lack of black office-holding is related to the unsuccessful bid for office versus the absence of a black candidate seeking office in the first place, we present preliminary data based election results and candidate racial/ethnic characteristics that have been compiled (and verified) by the LEAP project. In Figure 4 we compare the percentage of candidates who were black across the four key offices of local government: parish, school district and municipal legislatures and the mayoralty. These data provide evidence not only on whether any African Americans sought each of these offices over time, but also what percentage of all candidates seeking these offices were black.

![Figure 4 about here](image)

Figure 4 reveals a considerable amount of variability, which is partly explained by the timing of local elections. While nearly all parish and school district elections occur on a four-year cycle, municipal elections are held in all years and are more likely to follow two-year cycles due to the staggering of council seats. However, the data also show that the percentage of black candidates for mayoral offices is significantly lower than the percentage for city council seats and typically lower than parish or school board positions as well. This pattern is most striking in the earlier years of the time series, where the gap

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7 We can extend this analysis to the early 1980s using LEAP data, however, we are still cleaning and verifying candidate data for elections prior to 1990. Unfortunately, we have not been able to obtain candidate-level data for elections prior to this period.
between mayoral and other positions is largest and most consistent. Starting around 2000, the gap narrows and the percentage of black mayoral candidates even surpassed the percentage of black candidates for local legislative positions in some years.

Of course, since this is aggregate level data, it cannot tell us what the field of candidates looked like at the actual election level. In other words, we don’t know whether black candidates competed across many electoral contests or whether black candidates tended to compete against each other in a smaller set of electoral contests. Figure 5 sheds some light on this question. Focusing only on city council elections for this time period, it shows the percentage of council elections with 0, 1 and 2 or more black candidates. Again, variability is partly due to election cycles. Municipal elections in even years are more prevalent than in odd. The mean number of candidates for the 11 even-numbered years is 140, compared to 36 for the 10 odd-numbered election years. Clear in these data is that city council elections with no black candidates have not been the norm in Louisiana, at least for the 1990-2010 period. Only in seven of the 21 election years included in Figure 5 did a majority of council elections include no black candidates (1991, 1992, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007). In addition, it does not appear to be the case that elections with black candidates typically pit black candidates against each other. At the same time, a larger percentage of elections include two or more black candidates than only one.

[Figure 5 about here]

When Did the First African Americans Get Elected to Local Office?

The final descriptive question we consider here is the timing of the election of the first African Americans to local office. We have already seen that the first mayoral and chief law enforcement officials were elected to office several years later than the first parish, school board and city council members. However, what these data did not reveal was the diffusion of these first time elected officials over time and across office. How many local governments have witnessed the election of African
Americans to office and how many have still not experienced this event? Data in Figures 6 and 7 address these questions.

[Figures 6 & 7 about here]

Figure 6 shows the timing and total number of governments (parish, municipal, school district) electing their first African American to the offices of mayor and parish legislature, city council, and school board as a cumulative frequency. Thus in 1969, one municipality had elected its first black mayor and six had elected their first black city councilors, whereas seven parish and 5 school districts had elected their first black members to these legislative bodies. By 2010, out of 303 cities, 51 (155) had elected their first black mayors (city councilors), 50 of 64 parishes had elected their first black police jurors/legislators, and 64 of 69 school districts had elected their first black school board members.

To allow easier comparison across levels of government, Figure 7 reports this same information as a cumulative percentage of total governments at each level. As these data illustrate, African Americans have made more progress in crossing the hurdle of representation on parish and school district legislative bodies than on city councils. In fact, by 2010, 93% of Louisiana school boards had witnessed the election of a black school board member and 78% of parish legislative bodies had done the same. In contrast, only 51% of city councils in Louisiana had experienced the election of a black councilor. Further, the least progress has been made in electing blacks to the office of the mayor. By 2010 only 17% of Louisiana cities had ever done this.

**Exploring the Event of Electing Black City Councilors in a Multivariate Framework**

To further investigate the timing and pattern of the election of the first African Americans to local office in Louisiana, we conduct a more in-depth analysis of black electoral success in Louisiana’s city councils for the period 1969-2010. We focus on this office due to larger number of municipalities and greater variability in both the racial, socio-economic characteristics of municipalities and their electoral and governing arrangements, compared to either parishes or school districts. We conceptualize black
success as the time when the first black official was elected to a city council. Given this conceptualization, we decided to use survival analysis to estimate the appropriate hazard ratios of a first black official being elected at a certain time.

We focus on a relatively small set of explanatory variables initially, since candidate- and election-level variables are not available prior to 1982. Thus for now, our independent variables include all available electoral indicators as well as key socio-economic indicators identified in the literature as influential for minority electoral success. Specifically, we determine type of electoral system: at-large, district, or mixed for each of the cities. The literature shows that single member district (SMD) elections should be more conducive to black candidates winning local legislative seats (Engstrom and McDonald 1981; Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah 2010; Bullock and MacManus 1987). We hypothesize that the hazard of a black candidate being elected to a city council is higher in SMD systems than it is in both mixed and at-large elections. We also expect that this hazard is higher for mixed systems as compared to at-large systems since the former include elements of SMD system. In addition, we control for the size of city council since larger city councils indicate greater opportunities for election and potentially increased hazard of electing the first black official.

We supplement electoral data by socio-economic indicators. Studies consistently find larger black voting-age population to have a strong, positive effect on increasing the chances of black representation. Especially in majority-minority districts, this effect is well established. On the other hand, minority candidates are less likely to succeed in places that are not heavily minority in composition. We hypothesize that the hazard of electing first black official in heavily majority cities is higher than in places where blacks comprise less than a majority of the population. We also control for income. Beyond the additive effects of the electoral and socio-economic variables, the literature points to possible multiplicative effects. Shah and Marschall (2012) find, for example, that compared to at-large systems, district systems can increase minority electoral success only in places where minorities are
highly concentrated. To acknowledge this possible effect, we include interaction terms between black population and electoral system variables.

**Variable Operationalization and the Methods**

Given that our data on the number of black elected officials is collected yearly, we find time series analysis as the most suitable for determining the initial success of black candidates in city council elections operationalized as a dummy variable. The unit of observation is city-year. The variable takes on the value 1 for a year when the first black official is elected to the city council and 0 otherwise. Since we are looking exclusively at the hazard rates of the first black official being elected, once value of 1 is recorded for a city, the city drops out of the analysis.

To determine when a first black official was elected to a city council we use Joint Center’s for Political and Economic Studies -National Roster of Black Elected Officials. This data is available from 1969 until 2001. For the period of 2002 until 2010, we use data collected with the Local Elections in America Project. Electoral system variables are operationalized as dummy variables and city council size ranges from 3 to 12 members. Since we are really interested in the impact of SMD systems on minority representation we include District System and Mixed System and leave At-Large System as a control group. We use socio-economic (population, income) and race data collected by the U.S. Census. The data is available for the entire period for cities with population of more than 50,000 in 1970 (N=88) and for all Louisiana cities for the period of 1980-2010 (N=304). As a result, we have 88 cities that are left-censored in 1969 and 216 cities that enter our analysis in 1980. Since census data is available only at the 10-year interval, we interpolate the values for the socio-economic and race indicators between the census years using STATA. Since interpolation is impossible for 1969, we assign this year the values reported by the Census for 1970. We operationalize black-minority concentration in a city as Percentage Black Population. The cities range from zero to 99 percent of black population. We also control for Total Population. For easier interpretation and more meaningful interpretation of the
coefficient we specify *Total Population* in thousands of inhabitants. We include cities as small as 196 persons and as large as almost 600 thousands people. Income is operationalized in thousands for the same reasons with median family income in a city ranging from zero to 200 thousands. Given the limitation of the census measures, we use mean income for years 1969-1979 instead. For summary statistics see Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

We have several choices to estimate the hazard of electing first black official to a city council. We choose the Cox proportional hazard model given the simplicity of its applications and the fact that it does not require any assumptions about the shape of the hazard over time. Instead it assumes only that one subject’s hazard is proportional to another subject hazard, i.e. is a multiplicative replica of the other (Cleves at al. 2004). In this sense it is a semi-parametric model and estimates no baseline hazard- has no intercept. Instead the intercept is absorbed by the independent variables coefficients of which are interpreted only as a hazard ratio and not as actual hazard levels. We fit the following model:

$$ H(t|x) = h_0(t) \exp(\beta_1 \text{Percent Black Population} + \beta_2 \text{Total Population} + \beta_3 \text{Median Family Income} + \beta_4 \text{District System} + \beta_5 \text{Mixed System} + \beta_6 \text{Council Size} + \beta_7 \text{PctBlackPop*District} + \beta_8 \text{PctBlkPop*Mixed}) $$

The coefficients for Cox proportional hazard models are calculated using maximum likelihood and need to be exponentiated in order to obtain the hazard ratios. Since the Cox model does not account for tied failures, i.e. it assumes that there is only one failure per year in the entire dataset and this is not the case for our data, we use the Breslow method for ties, which works well in data where the number of failures is small relative to the group that is at the risk of failure.

**Analysis and Results**

Before going into the complex estimation, it is a good idea to look at the structure of our data on black elected officials and the general survival without accounting for the possible effect of the
independent variables (Figure 8). Alternatively, one can analyze the cumulative hazard of first black official being elected (Figure 9). We see that the hazard is nearly equal 0 in 1969 and reaching 100% in 2010. These simple estimations of cumulative hazard can become slightly more complex when we graph them by accounting for differences in electoral systems. See Figure 10 for comparison on smoothed hazard estimates for district and non-district systems.

[Figures 8-10 here]

We see that at first similar to each other, district and non-district systems have become increasingly different. Over time the SMD systems have had increasingly higher hazards of electing first black officials to city councils. It is important to note that the graph indicates the possibly that the proportionality assumption required by the Cox model can be violated as the hazard rates for district and non-district models do not increase proportionately. We believe, however, that this will be adjusted once we account for other independent variables in the model, especially the predicted interaction effect between electoral systems and the racial composition of the cities.

Informed by the initial findings we are now turning to calculate the Cox model. For the reason of simplicity we start with the Vanilla model, which does not include any of the interaction terms. Table 2 reports raw untransformed coefficients from which we obtain statistical significance of our variables. We see immediately that the results confirm the positive effect that heavily minority places have on the initial success of black officials. Both district and mixed system also support this success. Median family income, on the other hand, has the opposite effect. Finally, the size of the city council and total city population seem not to have any effect at all.

[Table 2 here]

Our initial look at the cumulative hazard has alerted us as to the possibility of violating the proportionality assumption of the Cox model. This violation is confirmed for the Vanilla Model. When we interact analysis time with the covariates, the variables for electoral systems are statistically
significant indicating that their effect change with time in the ways that have not been parameterized in
the model and, in the current form, the model does not comply with the assumption of proportionality.
The specification test confirms that the model is not correctly specified, i.e. it is burdened by the
omitted variable bias. Fortunately, we have thought ahead of this issue and our next step is to include
interaction variable into the model (Unrestricted Model- Table 2). Including electoral system-black
population interactions in the model does not change the statistical effects of variables recorded in the
Vanilla Model. The interaction terms are, however, also statistically significant at least at the p<0.1 level.
Our decision to include interactions is also confirmed by the diagnostics. The specification test now
indicates correct model specification and none of the interactions between time and covariates are
statistically significant confirming that the model conforms to the proportionality assumption of the Cox
estimation.

Thus, we can turn towards looking at the substantive effects of the variables by analyzing the
hazard ratios that can be calculated by exponentiating the raw coefficients. We see that one additional
percent of black population in the city increases the hazard of electing the first black official by 4.2
percent. Our model also confirms that district systems are conducive to black electoral success and
increase it by over 640 percent. Under a SMD system the hazard of electing initial black city council
member is 6.4 greater than under an at-large system. Just as we predicted this hazard is also greater
under mixed systems but not to the same extent. Under mixed systems the hazard of electing the first
black official is “only” 4.44 times greater than it is under at-large system.

Surprising results are reported for the interactions. It seems that the multiplicative effect of
black population and electoral system variables is negative. Under district system one additional percent
of black population decreases the hazard of electing first black official by 3.1 percent. Under mixed
systems this decrease is slightly less and equals 2.2 percent. Also, income dampens the hazard ratio.
Each additional thousand of dollars in the median family decreases the hazard of electing first black
official by about 4 percent. To illustrate this we graph the baseline hazard for our model. Even though the Cox model produces no estimate of the baseline hazard (has no intercept) we can still obtain it as an effect of post-estimation. We see that the cumulative hazard increases as the time progresses, but how does it vary for different electoral systems?

We set the black population at two levels, when black population equals 20% and when it reaches 70%. In addition we differentiate between district and at-large systems. The remaining variables are kept at their means. The estimates (see Figure 11) right away indicate that the hazards for differently subjects are approximately proportional. As Figure 11 confirms, cities with a very high level of black population (red and yellow function) the hazard of electing first black official is higher since 1969 and increases proportionally as the time progresses. The hazard also increases with time for the cities with lower black population proportions. At the same time, we also see the interesting turn with respect to the multiplicative effect of the interaction terms included in calculating those functions. Surprisingly, places with 70 percent of black population using SMD system have lower hazards of electing black officials than exact same places where at-large systems are used.

The same relationship holds for comparison between places where proportion of black population is low (20 percent). This stands directly in opposition to the findings of Trounstine and Valdini (2008) who find that district systems increase diversity on city councils by positively impacting African American males electoral success. Of course, Trounstine and Valdini look at the predicted number of black councilors and not exclusively the first black councilor being elected. Our findings indicate that there just may be a difference in how electoral systems work in this regard. It is possible that initially it is harder for a black candidate to win under an SMD system since he or she needs a majority to win the elections. Under at large systems, however, there is no need for majority, a black candidate who is running in a city where no black has been elected so far is differentiated on the basis of
his or her race and is likely to get the needed plurality of votes by surpassing the white candidates for whom the race provides no additional cue for the voters.

Conclusion

All in all, we have hoped to show the extreme intricacy of local elections and minority electoral success in running for diverse local offices. Using Louisiana as our initial case study, we hope to broaden our focus to more states and elections as the data becomes available. Our descriptive analysis shows sea of opportunities for breakthrough research on issues such as minority candidate emergence that until now have been overlooked often because of data limitations. The Local Elections in America Project (LEAP) promises progress with regards to cross-office and cross-sectional data availability. Aided by the LEAP and the Black Elected Officials data provided by the Joint Center we have additionally embarked on empirical analysis of black electoral success. We have confirmed the regularities commonly acknowledged by scholars related to the type of electoral system and concentration of minority population. We have, however, also uncovered a surprising twist when analyzing their multiplicative effects, which inspires more research on the issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Summary Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median family income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-large Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of city council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Black Electoral Success (Election Hazard) in Louisiana City Councils:

1969-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vanilla Model</th>
<th>Unrestricted Model</th>
<th>Unrestricted Model Hazard Ratios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent Black Population</strong></td>
<td>0.032***</td>
<td>0.041***</td>
<td>1.042***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population (tsd)</strong></td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>1.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median family income (tsd)</strong></td>
<td>-0.037**</td>
<td>-0.041**</td>
<td>0.960**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District System</strong></td>
<td>0.561**</td>
<td>1.859***</td>
<td>6.417***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
<td>(0.66)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed System</strong></td>
<td>0.682***</td>
<td>1.490***</td>
<td>4.438***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of city council</strong></td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pct. Blk. Pop. X District Sys.</strong></td>
<td>-0.031**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.969**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pct. Blk. Pop. X Mixed Sys.</strong></td>
<td>-0.022 *</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.978*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>4955</td>
<td>4955</td>
<td>4955</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

*Numbers in parentheses are standard errors*
Fig. 1: Black Elected Officials, 1973-2000

Figure 4: Percent Candidates Black, by Office, Louisiana 1990-2010

Figure 5: Distribution of Black Candidates for Louisiana City Council, Louisiana 1990-2010
Figure 6: Number of Local Governments Electing First Blacks to Office, Louisiana 1969-2010

Cumulative Frequency - Number of Govts


Mayor CityCouncil Parish SchDistrict

Figure 7: Percent of Local Governments Electing First Blacks to Office, Louisiana 1969-2010

Cumulative Percentage - Governments


Mayor CityCouncil Parish SchDistrict
Figure 8.

Kaplan-Meier survival estimate

Figure 9.

Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazard estimate
Figure 10

Smoothed hazard estimates

![Smoothed hazard estimates graph](image1)

Figure 110

Cox proportional hazards regression

![Cox proportional hazards regression graph](image2)
Bibliography


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