Urban voting behavior and campaign strategy: the 2013 Boston mayoral election

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URBAN VOTING BEHAVIOR AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGY:
THE 2013 BOSTON MAYORAL ELECTION

by

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To my mother, Nancy,

for her unconditional love and support.

We made it.
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ABSTRACT

Although the topics of voting behavior and campaign strategy have vast amounts of political science literature, there is not much evidence that campaigns embrace theories of why people vote and how to get them to vote – especially at the local government level. This paper analyzes the urban voting behavior theory Kaufmann develops in *The Urban Voter*, Group Interest Theory, and combines with generally accepted methods of campaign strategy that produce the best outcomes. Applying this synthesis to the 2013 Boston mayoral election, the Group Interest framework does not seem to fully explain an open seat election in a rapidly changing Boston population. However, this framework does prove successful for the campaign strategies utilized in the preliminary election. Using archival research, personal interviews, and polling results, there is limited support for using the Group Interest framework and best campaign practices in being successful in an urban election.
# Table of Contents

- Dedication iv
- Acknowledgements v
- Abstract vi
- Table of Contents vii
- Introduction 1
- Literature Review 2
  - Overview 2
  - Voter Behavior 3
  - Campaign Strategy 8
- Research Design 11
  - Hypotheses 11
  - Methodology 12
- Analysis 14
  - **Hypothesis 1: Political Context** 14
    - **Institutional Features** 14
    - **External Conditions** 16
    - **Campaign-Specific Factors** 19
    - **Overall** 21
  - **Hypothesis 1: Results** 22
  - **Hypothesis 2: Best Practice Campaign Strategies** 25
Face-to-Face Voter Contact

Newspaper Endorsements and Media Attention

Incumbency Advantage

Expenditures

Overall

Hypothesis 2: Results

Conclusion

Discussion

Appendix A

Bibliography
Introduction

On March 28, 2013, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced his retirement at the end of his fifth term in office as mayor in which he served for over twenty years. Having served in some capacity of municipal government over the past thirty years, Mayor Menino left an open seat that had long been assumed to be his had he chosen to run for reelection cycle after cycle. Soon after Menino’s announcement, several candidates – twelve in total qualified for the preliminary election – emerged in an effort to succeed the long-time incumbent in the highest position of power in a diverse city of over six hundred thousand citizens.

After over two decades of incumbency, Boston voters had to make the choice of who ought to be their next mayor. The large field of candidates, diverse selection of choices, and nearly identical platforms made this election even more difficult for an electorate that had gone a generation without having to make such a tough decision. So what set apart the winning candidates in this election? With two white, Irish males winning the preliminary election, was this outcome any different than a typical Boston election? Were there factors aside from the candidates that indicated the outcome, like campaign success or failure? What were Boston voters looking for in their selection of a new mayor?

Many of these questions are impossible to answer without being able to read the minds of the entire voting population; however, the question of whether or not theory suggests that the campaigns chose the right strategies to appeal to urban voters poses the
question of whether the campaign tactics used in urban elections should differ from other types of elections. This paper seeks to ascertain this question by examining the theory behind urban voting behavior and local election campaign strategy, synthesizing them together for practical use, and applying it to the 2013 Boston mayoral election. It asserts that candidates who used the strategies that theory implies should work were the most successful, and candidates who failed to use these strategies were less successful. Candidates who concentrated their resources on successful strategies should have amounted to the most support of voters from both their base and their targeted populations; those who used their resources otherwise should have failed to gather the necessary votes to move forward in succeeding the retiring incumbent.

Literature Review

Overview

Previous literature on local elections and campaigns is somewhat limited. While many theorists pose questions on presidential elections, congressional candidates, and the dynamics of statewide elections, local politics (and particularly the structure of local campaigns) has been largely ignored partially due to the lack of availability of information. In the *Handbook of Research on Urban Politics and Policy in the United States*, Arnold Fleischmann (1997) suggests that many scholars have led the way in terms of research on contacting, interest groups, and political parties in local elections, but they
do not focus on the “electoral strategies” relevant to participation in local elections. Likewise, literature on urban politics often cites the “boss and machine” as the preeminent thinking in making voter preferences and campaigns in local elections irrelevant; however, an era that ushered in reforms like nonpartisan elections (despite their lack of major effect) as well as the emergence of minority voting blocs has largely dispelled this model (Baker 1971).

More recently, the argument for why we should study local elections and campaigns is mostly focused on three main components: the prevalent non-partisan nature of many local elections, voter turnout, and the change in behavior based on ethnic and racial diversity (Baker 1971; Bickers 2010; Holbrook and Kaufmann 2012; Kaufmann and Rodriguez 2011). Even fewer have looked into campaign strategies in local elections and how they might differ.

**Voter Behavior**

Voter behavior theory has been a constant research topic over the past fifty years, mainly focusing on what influences the choices for voters in national elections. *The American Voter Revisited* highlights the work that Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes had previously achieved on voter behavior theory and updates it for the twenty-first century. Using the “funnel of causality”, Lewis-Beck et. al. (2008) theorize that the national electorate is most influenced by socio-demographics, then party identification, issues, and finally the actual candidates over a time dimension that leads to whether a
voter decides to vote and who they vote for. However, as first postulated by Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson (1963) in their seminal work *City Politics* published in 1963, “differences in turnout are enough to make the electorate which votes on local matters very different from the one which votes on state and national matters”.

Banfield and Wilson (1963) helped carve out the field of urban voter behavior by making the first major distinctions between voting groups in cities – “public-regarding voters” and “private-regarding voters”. While public-regarding voters hope to make the city a better place as a whole, private-regarding voters tend to view their particular area of the city as their sole interest and at odds with the other areas in the city. Banfield and Wilson (1963) refer to this as an “ethos” that does not necessarily always determine voting behavior in one way or another, but it is normally a good indicator, and which ethos voters fall into is generally a function of both socio-economic status and ethnic identity. The main issue with the Banfield and Wilson theory is that it may be out of date. The data Banfield and Wilson use comes largely from elections in or prior to 1960, and it is simply unrealistic to think that the composition of US cities has not changed drastically since this time period that would evoke change in urban voter theory. US Census information has indicated this to be true; medium-sized cities like Boston have gone from majority white to majority-minority demographics. While serving as a good foundation to the study of urban voting behavior, more recent studies offer better insight to how voter choice today shapes the dynamics of a local election.

In 1989, Joel Lieske acknowledged the lack of literature that theorized how urban voter behavior is framed and created his own model for determining vote choice in local
city council elections. Starting with legitimacy theory, Lieske (1989) argues that there are three main factors in determining outcomes in local elections: “cultural acceptability of candidates for public office”, “social standing within the community”, and “political mechanisms and processes that legitimate or bestow group and institutional approval on them”. This legitimacy theory serves as the underlying framework for a voting model. Lieske’s (1989) calculus of voting in local elections offers four essential sources of credentials in gaining support: “ascribed…and achieved…personal characteristics”, “political resources, such as incumbency and campaign expenditures”, “partisan and newspaper endorsements they receive”, and finally “the size of a candidate’s political following”. Ultimately, the study concluded that political following was the strongest indicator of electoral victory, but it is followed immediately in importance by political resources – the focus of the following study of the Boston mayoral election. The issues with applying this theory broadly to a mayoral election are mainly that it is a city council election study so voting populations are more homogenous, the study is nearly three decades old making it non-representative of cities today, and the city in question (Cincinnati) does not have the history nor the type of ethnic diversity that many other American cities are characterized by because of the generally polarized black-white racial make up rather than multiethnic make up.

The most relevant theory to the study of mayoral elections emerges from Karen M. Kaufmann’s (2004) work on Group Interest Theory in *The Urban Voter*. Group interest theory (GIT) focuses directly on vote choice and what determines it; in doing so, it stresses a framework that acknowledges the electoral setting in developing the political
context of an election, but it overall asserts that the degree of conflict between groups determines when voters will choose to either vote along group identities or political identities (Kaufmann 2004). This group-based voting, termed “group distinctive voting”, refers to the idea that sometimes people vote “based on nonpolitical or alternate group identities” (Kaufmann 2004). Kaufmann’s (2004) declaration that intergroup conflict is important in assessing voting behavior relates back to Banfield and Wilson’s public-versus private-regarding voters; when group conflict is low, the “relative weights that voters apply to these sets of attitudes” changes from the direction of private- to public-regarding ethos. In times that intergroup conflict is low, voters should revert to political identities, also known as traditional partisan identification and issue salience. In order to determine when intergroup conflict is perceived as higher or lower, Kaufmann cites three categories that develop political context: institutional features, external setting, and campaign-specific factors.

First, in terms of institutional features, GIT refers to classic notions of voting behavior determinants in local elections like the partisan versus nonpartisan factor as well as the setup of a government and its conduciveness to co-opted forms of governing like boss-machine relations. Second, for external setting, Kaufmann (2004) explains that demographics, social history, and the current state of the economy are key indicators in how strong intergroup conflict is at the time of an election. Issues of particular importance to urban voters tend to be crime, jobs, and social services, and there is an additional factor of retrospective voting – voting on incumbents’ performance. Likewise, in major cities that dealt with the challenges associated with the civil rights movement
like mandatory busing and desegregation, there are socio-historical external issues that affect the state of intergroup relations. Third, campaign-specific factors, which many scholars focus on in national elections, contribute to the dynamic of intergroup conflict. This includes but is not limited to the candidates that choose to run, issues the candidates choose to focus on, and the campaign strategies incorporated by each separate candidate.

Although GIT does not serve as a perfect model for determining urban voter behavior, the strengths it shows in considering context, group dynamics, and the uniqueness of each campaign’s efforts make GIT the most applicable tool for evaluating major urban mayoral elections. The intergroup conflict that Kaufmann describes moves past orthodox interpretations that race and ethnicity are the only real factors in determining local voting behavior; instead, Kaufmann offers the flexibility of including social group identification like union membership, sexual identity, and economic class as possible groups that can conflict with each other in addition to traditional ethnic and racial identities. The weakness of Kaufmann’s argument is the implication that partisan identities and issue salience are the major determinants in elections where intergroup conflict is low. Some elections do not have many differences in partisan choice and issue focus, and this leaves no viable alternative to the intergroup conflict portion of the model. In addition, Kaufmann’s (2004) claim that “social diversity…automatically elicits heightened tensions between different racial and ethnic groups” removes falsifiability from the theory because of the evolutionary changing nature of cities towards majority-minority populations. Despite these weaknesses, GIT offers the best foundational framework for identifying the factors that lead to vote outcomes in local, urban elections.
Campaign Strategy

While urban voter behavior is a common research topic in political science, much less literature exists on local election campaign strategy. The reasons for the lack of study on campaign strategy could be numerous, but it is likely that scholars are more interested in national, state-wide, and congressional-type elections rather than local elections due to the availability of data and general popularity surrounding the former elections. In a national election like the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, there is a ton of infrastructure involved in coordinating campaigns plus vast media attention to campaign dynamics, but local campaigns are usually lacking in structure, sometimes non-existent, and gain very little press outside of the locality. In looking at suburban elections in Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy, J. Eric Oliver (2012) posits that campaign strategy is more basic in local elections:

“Among political professionals there is a well-established, conventional wisdom about how to run a local campaign: ingratiate yourself to local party leaders, make yourself known to local organizations; raise a lot of money; build a political ‘team’; canvass voters by knocking on doors; send out fliers, press releases, and other ‘professional’ materials; and, seemingly most important, blanket your constituency with ubiquitous yard signs displaying your name.”
Despite this tongue-in-cheek tone, Oliver (2012) qualifies this “wisdom” by explaining that “there is very little systematic evidence showing what, if any, decisive difference such activities make”, and he continues into an analysis of effective campaign strategy for suburban campaigns. Oliver’s analysis represents one of the few analyses of local campaign strategy effectiveness, and it does so in a purely quantitative examination of statistics from the suburban areas he writes about. Unfortunately, this analysis was not the main point of Oliver’s study, so it only touched the surface of how local campaigns can shape their outcomes using particular strategies known to mobilize voters. Likewise, it only examines how suburban elections are run successfully which cannot be applied broadly to a denser, urban setting like that of a major American city.

The debate over whether or not campaign strategy is important in electoral outcomes dates back several years, most notably to Thomas M. Holbrook’s (1996) work *Do Campaigns Matter?* in which he argues that, on a presidential campaign scale, there are minimal effects that campaigns can muster impact on vote choice. However, in a piece fourteen years later revisiting the subject, Holbrook (2011) argues that there needs to be a shift in focus from presidential to state and local elections. “The information environment most likely to produce strong campaign effects” according to Holbrook “is that found in elections for state and local offices…the influence of contests taking place elsewhere on the ballot [than presidential] surely warrants scrutiny, because that is where effects are likely to be most pronounced”. Despite Holbrook’s plea, few scholars have embraced local election campaign strategy studies.
Given that there is no encompassing, prevailing theory around campaign strategy in local elections, it is important to adapt previous research about effective campaign tools. Most notably, Alan Gerber and Donald Green produced their 2000 *American Political Science Review* field study of effective campaign get out the vote efforts. Gerber and Green (2000) found that canvassing was the most effective tool in significantly increasing voter turnout, much more so than phone calls or direct mail pieces (Gerber and Green. They repeated the study with David Nickerson in a 2003 article specifically focusing on face-to-face contact in municipal elections; they found a seven-point additive effect on those who had been contacted versus those who had not (Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003). These results, in local elections that tend to have low turnout, imply that additional resources spent on canvassing are most effective in producing favorable mobilization.

In addition to popular tools like canvassing and voter contact, other electoral assets that candidates find valuable in higher stakes elections should hold the same type of benefit for local election candidates. Timothy Krebs tested this in “The Determinants of Candidates’ Vote Share and the Advantages of Incumbency in City Council Elections” by analyzing data from Chicago City Council elections between 1979 and 1995. His results indicate what we would expect from previous research: incumbency, newspaper endorsements, party support, and campaign expenditures were the strongest predictors of electoral outcome (Krebs 1998). This provides a good basis for studying mayoral elections, but it is important once again to note that city council districts represent more homogenous populations whereas a mayoral election combines the entire diverse city into
one voting base. Similarly, this study is focused around a partisan election; nonpartisan elections will not benefit from party organizations because there either is not strong party involvement or candidates tend to be in ideological agreement.

Combining these studies, it is clear that there is agreement on which tools work best in campaign strategy: face-to-face voter contact usually demonstrated by canvassing; newspaper endorsements and media attention; incumbency advantage; and expenditures. Applying these concepts to local elections should result in predicting the winners of the respective elections.

Research Design

Hypotheses

Based on the work on urban behavior and local campaign strategy, the hypotheses for this case study analyze the effects of campaign efforts on theoretical voter predictability. The model used will evaluate campaigns in the 2013 Boston mayoral election based on Group Interest Theory combined with the best practices evaluated in local election campaign strategy. The main points for determining electoral outcome are in the areas of political context and best practice campaign strategies (canvassing, newspaper endorsement, media attention, and expenditures). Incumbency advantage will only be partially included in analyzing strategies because the election is an open seat
(some candidates held seats on the Boston City Council or in the Massachusetts General Assembly, but none held the mayoral seat). The hypotheses are as follows:

H1. Successful campaigns will be those who acknowledge and adapt to the political context indicated by the level of intergroup conflict determined by Group Interest Theory.

H2. Successful campaigns will be those who apply best practice campaign strategies to groups that Group Interest Theory predicts will be most likely to vote for them.

Methodology

The case study in this analysis focuses on the Boston mayoral election that officially started on April 17, 2013, the first day that interested candidates could apply for nomination papers; however, candidates announced prior to that date both before and after incumbent Mayor Menino announced his retirement on March 28, 2013. While the time period extends from early 2013 until November 5, 2013 – the day of the election – this analysis will emphasize the period between Mayor Menino’s announcement and the preliminary election on September 24, 2013 because there were twelve candidates that competed for two spots in the general election as opposed to just two candidates pitted against each other. Much of this analysis will exclude three of the candidates who came
in the last three places and barely waged campaigns (David Wyatt, Charles Yancey, and Charles Clemons).

Research was conducted from October 2013 until March 2014 using both archival analysis and interviews. The archives used were articles, op-eds, and columns from the Boston Globe, Boston Magazine, CommonWealth Magazine, and The New York Times. Archives date between January 2013 and December 2013.

Interviews were conducted in late February and early March of 2014, a few months after the general election and several months after the preliminary election, with five separate campaign staff members that varied in position on the campaign (either communications, finance, or field), campaign they worked on (successful and unsuccessful candidates in the preliminary election), and whether they worked on just the preliminary election or both the preliminary and general elections. Interviewees were promised anonymity in the form of their names, campaign they worked on, and position on the campaigns, but interviews were recorded either via phone recording or personal recording. Interview questions were uniform for all interviewees and can be found in Appendix A. Questions were intentionally vague so that interviewees could interpret and elaborate on what their impressions were of what was most important in their respective campaigns’ strategies.

Archives and interviews were evaluated based on the criteria present in Group Interest Theory on political context. Practices were gathered based on campaign staff member claims, and expenditures were measured via the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF). Success is measured by both public opinion
poll taken from polling institutions including the Suffolk University Political Research Center, the University of New Hampshire Survey Center, and outcome of the election including specific neighborhood turnout.

Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Political Context

Using the three factors of political context, the situation in Boston in 2013 is a unique time in history to elect a new mayor. Institutional features, external setting, and campaign-specific factors influence this particular election to set it apart as symbolic of urban voter behavior in the twenty-first century.

Institutional Features

The institutional features of this election are strongly rooted in the role of the mayor in Boston’s city government, the nonpartisan nature of the position, and the setup of how machine politics in Boston have traditionally worked. According to the Boston City Charter that was last updated in 2007, the city of Boston operates under three main branches: the mayor’s office, the city council, and the school committee. Under this charter, there is “a mayor who shall be the chief executive officer of the city, a city council…which shall be the legislative body of the city, and a school committee…which
shall have the powers and duties conferred and imposed by law” (Boston City Council 2007). Essentially, the city council creates legislation and the mayor either approves or declines the legislation and then is empowered to enforce the legislation, and the mayor appoints heads of departments in City Hall. This describes the common Mayor-Council relationship in city government; however, the situation in Boston is different because “a mayor can have enormous and often unfettered influence” in a system that is described as “strong-mayor-and-weak-council” (Keane 2013c).

In addition to the mayor being a very powerful position, the Boston City Charter sets in place incumbency advantages for their electoral procedures; the only type of statement that may be included on nomination papers and eventually the ballot are elective public offices that candidates either hold or have held before. Systemically, this gives people who have previously held office the additional advantage of having some sort of credentials listed right on the ballot.

Finally, the nonpartisan designation of Boston City Government elections serves as an institutional feature that is designed to make city elections less influenced by political parties. The City Charter specifically designates that “no ballot used at any preliminary or regular election shall have printed thereon any party or political designation” essentially blocking candidates from running purely on party lines as well as precluding preliminary elections from becoming de facto party primaries (Boston City Council 2007). Despite this nominal designation, candidates openly acknowledge that they are from political parties, and candidate David James Wyatt ran on the platform of being the only Republican in the mayoral election (Lowery 2013).
As a result of these institutional features, there is cause to believe there may be slight intergroup conflict due to the competitive nature of such a powerful position being open, but the liberal homogeneity of Boston makes it not as prone to intergroup conflict as another city with larger conservative representation because institutional features typically serve to heighten tension between the two parties. In this case, because registered Democrats populate the majority of Boston, the institutional features do not pit one party against another.

External Conditions

External conditions in 2013 in Boston represent a vast amount of socio-political history, change in demographics, and a quickly recovering urban economy. Fully explaining the history of urban politics in Boston would take volumes of work, but there are a few things that can be highlighted as representative and relevant for this election.

For one, Mayor Menino built up a massive political machine that consistently worked to get him reelected over the over twenty years he was in office, and his absence from an election opened the field to a range of office-seekers. As one interviewed campaign staff member said “it was kind of a given that if Mayor Menino wanted to be mayor then he would be…he wasn’t really challenged”.1 But prior to Mayor Menino, the main focus on urban voting behavior was the high racial tension – according to one *Boston Globe* article “in the 1960s and ’70s…[politician Louise Day] Hicks gained popularity as a defender of

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1 Interview with campaign worker, March 6, 2014.
working-class white interests against desegregation and what she called ‘civil rights infiltrators’”, and even when Menino was on the city council “in 1983, the only time a black candidate made it to the final round of a Boston mayoral contest, an electorate sharply divided on racial lines handed [white candidate] Ray Flynn a landslide victory over [black candidate] Mel King” (Waxman 2013). This history of identity politics in Boston has set the stage for every election to have high intergroup conflict because of the notion that groups have historically been at odds with each other.

The city’s changing demographics support this claim as well. According to the 2010 US census, Boston is forty-seven percent white, giving the city a majority-minority population; at the 1990 US census (three years before Menino ran for mayor for the first time), Boston was fifty-nine percent white (Melnik 2011). The black population in Boston has stayed relatively constant while the white population has declined, the Hispanic population has increased, and the Asian population has increased. These demographic trends help to entrench identity politics as a force in city elections, supplemented by the neighborhood-centric divides of Boston. Boston has eighteen different planning districts: North Dorchester, South Dorchester, Harbor Islands, Boston (downtown and North End), South End, Roslindale, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, East Boston, Fenway/Kenmore, Allston/Brighton, Central, West Roxbury, Charlestown, Mattapan, South Boston, and Back Bay/Beacon Hill (Melnik 2011). According to an interviewed campaign staff member, all of these areas are generally considered neighborhoods that tend to be divided roughly along racial and ethnic lines.² This tension

² Interview with campaign worker, March 12, 2014.
should translate to increased intergroup conflict as different neighborhoods, races, and ethnicities vie for power over City Hall.

Finally, the growing urban economy can shape the perception of external features in urban voting behavior. According to one *Globe* article:

“The national economy is growing, doing a slo-mo bounce-back from the Great Recession. And Boston in particular is hot. The industries that are its mainstays – health care, technology, bio-tech – are surging, hiring more and generating profits. Attracted by the city’s charm, safety, culture, and nightlife, people are moving in. Developers are spending billions on new construction, all with the promise of millions of dollars of new tax revenue. The city is in solid shape, and lenders likely would be willing to lend it more.” (Keane 2013a).

This economic forecast makes new ideas for improving the city particularly appealing to voters who want to utilize the heavy growth in the economy. Similarly, a strong economy should ease tensions between groups because it lessens unemployment concerns and generally everyone is better off when the economy is doing well. It is important to note that economic disparity was considered an issue in the election, but it became more of a focus in the general election rather than the primary.

Combining these factors, the external impacts on this election should serve to moderately heighten conflict between social groups. Although the economy was doing very well, the socio-political history and changing demographics systemically increase
tension between groups in Boston. As Kaufmann referred to earlier, increased diversity should automatically increase intergroup conflict.

Campaign-Specific Factors

The most dynamic feature of any given election will always be the campaign-specific factors; they are what makes an election cycle unique based on diversity of candidates, competitiveness, campaign issues, and the campaign strategies employed by each campaign. Because H2 focuses explicitly on campaign strategy, this portion will focus on candidates who chose to run, campaign issues, and the spread of candidates.

In total, twelve separate candidates qualified for this election: John Connolly, Marty Walsh, Mike Ross, Charlotte Golar Richie, Dan Conley, Bill Walczak, Charles Yancey, David Wyatt, Charles Clemons, Felix Arroyo, Rob Consalvo, and John Barros. Of these candidates, Connolly, Ross, Yancey, Arroyo, and Consalvo were all sitting City Council members; Conley served on the City Council and then became the District Attorney for Suffolk County; Barros sat on the Boston School Committee; Richie served in Mayor Menino’s office at one point in her career as well as in the capacity of a state representative; and Walsh was a state representative from the Dorchester neighborhood. The remaining three candidates (Clemons, Wyatt, and Walczak) did not have government experience, and many even wrote off the candidacies of Wyatt, Clemons, and Yancey as unrealistic and unviable (Keane 2013d). The nine viable candidates include three persons
of color (Richie, Arroyo, and Barros) while Connolly, Conley, and Walsh represented the traditionally Irish heritage of many Bostonians. There were clear minority-backed candidates, and many community leaders even sought to reduce the number of minority candidates so that the communities can gather around just a few in support (Johnson 2013). The final largest social groups represented by these candidates were labor unions, in which both Arroyo and Walsh were active members and leaders, and the economic elite, which Connolly and Ross were considered symbolic of due to their wealth and college educations. Despite economic issues being a main focus in the general election, it was less focused in this large preliminary field, but union members represented an active voter and volunteer base for Walsh and Arroyo.

These subgroups were complemented by the neighborhoods that many candidates had clear connections with. Ross and Consalvo represented the Back Bay and Hyde Park/Roslindale on the city council, respectively; Connolly hailed from West Roxbury though he was an at-large councilor; Walsh and Richie both represented Dorchester in the state legislatures; Arroyo, also an at-large councilor, had strong roots in Jamaica Plain; and Barros ran an initiative to help revitalize parts of Roxbury (Schwartz 2013). These obvious identities help to increase intergroup conflict by pitting geographic groups that should support a candidate against each other.

In terms of campaign issues, many seemed to argue along the same platforms. Many observers attempted to cast this election as one of ideas, but as one Globe article put it: “In a political climate where Menino remains popular, the prospect of departing significantly from his priorities appears not to appeal to his would-be successors on most
issues” (O’Sullivan 2013). Issues, while important in urban elections, tend to be the same from cycle to cycle, and columnist Tom Keane (2013b) wrote “no one cares if you’re right-wing or left-wing as long as crime is low, streets are paved, parks are well-kept, and all the other details of urban living are attended to” when it comes to picking a mayor that could last for multiple terms as they have in the past like Menino. The lack of tough issues creates an oxymoron for intergroup conflict: while lack of tough issues should lower conflict because there are not too many tough decisions to make, a decrease in conflict would make group identity less important and shift the focus to issues. This creates a circular argument that is hard to justify being included in this situation.

In sum, the campaign effects would make intergroup conflict appear to be high. The large amount of diversity in candidates, especially those who represent different parts of the city in another capacity, ensures that intergroup sparring should be prevalent. While the similarity in campaign issues may mitigate this slightly, it contributes to an overall larger effect of intergroup conflict.

*Overall*

When all three of these points are considered, intergroup conflict should be considered intermediate. Institutional features may not contribute significantly to higher intergroup conflict in this election, but external conditions and campaign-specific factors build upon each other to make the degree of intergroup conflict at an intermediate level. While the Kaufmann model appears to make this path exclusively one way or another,
this analysis treats the model as more ambiguous and indicates that group identities are not the determining factor in voting behavior in this election but do contribute significantly.

**Hypothesis 1: Results**

When it came to candidates being successful, this election showed that relying on intergroup conflict as a means of gaining support did not produce support with voters who identified in the same groups as candidates. The two successful candidates, John Connolly and Marty Walsh, were white, Irish men. According to a campaign staff member intimate with the election, the Connolly campaign was able to pick up “the North End, West End, Downtown, Beacon Hill, Back Bay…Fenway/Kenmore area, Allston/Brighton, and Jamaica Plain” which was what was known as “progressive Boston” or “New Boston”.

These areas, where Connolly did not have a base, were new places that the campaign focused on and was successful in gaining support though they were natural constituencies from the likes of Ross and Arroyo. Connolly was able to pick up his natural constituency of West Roxbury and Hyde Park as well, further pushing him to victory (*Boston Globe*, 2013).

Richie, Barros, and Arroyo notably had failed to gain significant traction in their group identities. The only somewhat successful one was Richie, who came in third overall; she polled with thirty percent support from black likely voters just one week

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*Ibid*
before the election. Arroyo, however, polled with nineteen percent support from the Hispanic or Latino community, which was just one and two points ahead of Connolly and Walsh in that community, respectively (Boston Globe, 2013). Barros was unable to gather support from the black community, or much of anyone, mainly due to his appearance as a newcomer in a field with many experienced other candidates (Bernstein 2013c). With all of these “candidates of color” and Richie being the only woman running, one campaign staff member commented that it was shocking that Richie or at least one minority candidate did not go up against either Connolly or Walsh in the general, saying that “we woke up the next day…everyone was expecting from the prelim that we might have one white guy and then we will have a minority or a woman…we’re going to have some diversity in this race…people were a little shell-shocked to find two white Irish guys running against each other who were already elected officials in one capacity or another”. While minorities may represent a majority of the city, they only represent about thirty-eight percent of registered voters – so turnout needed to be very high in order to rely on race or ethnicity alone. Moreover, the minority groups in Boston are not unified as voting blocs as a result of being minorities; Boston minority groups vary greatly in origin with major ethnic splits among the populations. While twenty-two percent of Boston is considered racially black and eighteen percent Hispanic or Latino, these populations are ethnically diverse with about twenty-seven percent of the city being foreign-born. Within the black and the Hispanic or Latino populations, at least seventeen percent of the foreign-born population are from the West Indies (Haiti, Cape Verde,

4 Interview with campaign worker, March 6, 2014.
Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago) and there are sizable populations of Latin and South Americans (El Salvadorians, Dominicans, Colombians, and Brazilians) which contribute to the black and Hispanic or Latino populations, respectively (Melnik 2011). Merely assuming that identifying with a racial group would translate to electoral support from that group ignored the ethnic diversity of the black and Hispanic/Latino communities. Richie, an American-born black woman, did not automatically receive support from foreign-born black voters, while Barros may have picked up the Cape Verdean community due to his ethnic descent. Arroyo, of Puerto Rican descent, also did not assume the support of all Hispanics/Latinos for identifying in that group. On the whole, campaigns seemed to ignore this cleavage in evaluating group identity.

Walsh, the most successful candidate, won the election because he was able to turn out support from both his natural constituency and new constituencies. In addition to the heavy support of labor unions that Walsh expected, he received a great deal of support from progressives (Vennochi 2013). Walsh’s image as a pragmatist gave him the necessary credibility to carry both his union support and New Boston support; in a similar fashion, Connolly grasped at new constituencies by running a great ideas campaign (Lehigh 2013).

Ultimately, the preliminary election came down to who could produce the most turnout with additional voters from areas other than their bases. According to an article in the Globe, only thirty-one percent of voters turned out in this election; of those who did turn out, they were heavily from “parts of Dorchester” and “West Roxbury and Hyde Park also turned out strongly” which are the areas that Walsh and Connolly hold natural
constituencies in, respectively (Boston Globe, September 26, 2013). According to David Bernstein (2013d) of Boston Magazine, there was not a significant candidate for voting groups like black voters to turn out for, so they end up “split[ting] their votes” to “black candidates with some legitimacy…non-white candidates with a legitimate chance…black candidates with no chance…and white candidates they know and don’t actively dislike”. On the other hand, in an op-ed for The New York Times, Thomas B. Edsall wrote that this could signify an end of race being a major factor in city politics. Edsall (2013) describes how electorates that were historically racist went for Walsh while at the same exact time some of the strongest black areas also went for Walsh. It appears that, in 2013 in a growing and diverse city like Boston, Group Interest Theory fails to completely predict who voters will choose as their elected representatives.

Hypothesis 2: Best Practice Campaign Strategies

In addressing campaign strategies, responses from campaign workers were the most important research gathered because campaign workers had first-hand experience and were intimate with the strategies carried out by each campaign. For this purpose, campaign strategy analysis will focus on the practices used by the two successful campaigns – the Connolly campaign and the Walsh campaign – that really set them apart from the rest. Respondents who were not affiliated with either winning campaign often had just as many thoughts about the success of the Connolly and Walsh campaigns as the respondents who did work directly for those campaigns. Moreover, it was often the case
that workers who supported a candidate that did not win in the preliminary went to work for one of the winning campaigns in the general election.

*Face-to-Face Voter Contact*

In surveying campaign workers, all of them said that the campaigns they worked with spent the most of their resources on their field strategy with an emphasis on voter contact. The value of voter contact in the preliminary election is best explained by a September 15, 2013 *Globe* article:

“The Sept. 24 preliminary election for mayor is expected to play out as a fierce ground war -- a highly personal, all-out skirmish to claim individual voters and urge them to the polls. The candidates in the first wide-open mayor's race in a generation are using good old-fashioned shoe leather to pursue voters, while tapping technology that was unimagined when the current mayor took office to identify and lock down their bases of support.” (Ebbert 2013)

This mentality was very much reflected in campaign worker responses as well. One worker for a losing campaign described the election by saying that “it was common knowledge that the best ground game was going to win” partially because “Boston is a small place…you can canvass quite a bit”.  

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3 Interview with campaign worker, March 13, 2014.
each candidate in this race knew that the field and door-to-door efforts would be the most important factors in determining success, but many of the campaigns differed in strategies employed to garner support.

One of the main distinctions found between the two winning candidates and the losing candidates was whether face-to-face contact focused on mobilization or persuasion; each campaign had some measure of both strategies, but eventually one or the other was decided as more important and more heavily pursued. The most interesting point is that the Connolly campaign tended to focus on persuasion while the Walsh campaign focused on mobilization, and the rest of the campaigns were divided about half and half between persuasion and mobilization. One losing campaign that used a mobilization strategy described their efforts as “identifying voters as one to five…one being in full support and five supporting another candidate…and mobilizing the voters in our base”.  

Another campaign worker whose campaign used a persuasion focus described it as “weeding out voters who only voted in presidential elections…and figuring out who were strong supporters of [the candidate] and who were against [the candidate]…[then finding out] who they were supporting”. While they used the same type of tools to filter supporters, persuasion-focused campaigns then used their efforts to sway undecided voters while mobilization-focused campaigns used their efforts to make sure supporters showed up to vote on Election Day.

Despite the varied success of choosing between mobilization and persuasion tactics, all campaigns acknowledged the key necessity to divide efforts by neighborhood.

6 Interview with campaign worker, March 25, 2014.
7 Ibid
According to one campaign worker, most campaigns divided their work into three main regions: Traditional Boston, Progressive Boston, and Communities of Color. Traditional Boston consisted of white voters from neighborhoods like Dorchester, Hyde Park, West Roxbury, and Roslindale; Progressive Boston, or New Boston as referred to earlier, consisted of young, white voters in areas like gentrified South Boston, Downtown, the North End, the South End, Beacon Hill, and Back Bay; and Communities of Color consisted of non-white voters in Dorchester, Roxbury, Allston/Brighton, Jamaica Plain, and Mattapan, among others. Walsh had a stronghold in Dorchester while Connolly had one in West Roxbury and Roslindale, but the field strategy for Walsh emphasized getting the Dorchester voters to the polls while the Connolly campaign wanted to pursue new voters. Other candidates who stressed mobilization worked solely on canvassing their own neighborhoods that have traditionally supported them like former city council constituencies and neighborhoods that they resided in. In a comment about what they thought was most important for distinguishing voters in this race, a campaign worker noted, “it was so much more important to understand the local dynamics…to know the neighborhood leaders”.

Finally, it appears that the face-to-face contact efforts really came down to the number of volunteers and canvassers at each campaign’s disposal. One campaign worker for a losing campaign noted that their campaign employed paid canvassers – typically students who were working their first real job – in order to gain name recognition and

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8 Interview with campaign worker, March 9, 2014.
9 Ibid
identify support. This candidate was not alone in paying ground workers; Walsh, Consalvo, and Barros were all cited as utilizing paid staff to organize their fieldwork. What set Connolly and Walsh apart from the others was the massive amount of volunteers they were able to acquire. One estimate said that there were about 1,500 volunteers for the Walsh campaign while Connolly counted roughly 875; these numbers blew away the small masses built up by Richie (350) and the rest of the candidates (Ebbert 2013). A campaign worker explained that “Walsh had the union support and Connolly had education groups” that actually put them over these estimates, possibly putting Walsh at 2,500 volunteers and Connolly around 1,500. The sheer ability to recruit this many supporters not only gave them access to larger contact areas but also guaranteed votes. “It was hard to convert voters to volunteers” commented one campaign worker, suggesting that the larger the number of volunteers the more successful a campaign ended up being in this election. It remains unclear whether more volunteer support equated to higher success for candidates or that candidates who were the most successful were able to get higher volunteer support; the correlation exists, but causality is unknown.

In evaluating face-to-face voter contact, the most important aspects in this election tended to be the persuasion versus mobilization focus, the understanding and targeting of neighborhood differences, and the quantity of human capital available to

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10 Interview with campaign worker, March 6, 2014.
11 Interview with campaign worker, March 9, 2014.
12 Ibid
each campaign. The outcome of the preliminary election reflected the strength of face-to-
face voter contact enacted by each campaign.

Newspaper Endorsements and Media Attention

Another key tenet of campaign strategy success is acquiring endorsements. The most notable endorsements tend to be from the most traditionally visible media outlet: newspapers. In the Boston area, there are two main newspapers that release endorsements – the Boston Globe and the Boston Herald. The Globe is known as one of the most respected newspapers in journalism; many rank it among top newspapers like the New York Times, the L.A. Times, and the Washington Post. On the other hand, the Herald is known mainly as a conservative newspaper that serves as a counter to the liberal media bias assumed with mainstream newspapers like the Globe. Both newspapers distributed endorsements in the preliminary election as well as the general election.

The Globe’s endorsement process was the same as is typically done by newspapers: candidates meet with an editorial board who evaluates their positions, experience, and vision for the city in order to decide upon the top two candidates. The Globe decided to endorse Barros and Connolly in the preliminary election for Barros’s “broad understanding of the city’s potential…[and] shrewd political sense” and Connolly’s “understand[ing of] the difficulty of dealing with the Boston Teachers Union…[and] his depth and breadth of knowledge” (Boston Globe, September 17, 2013). The Globe qualified its endorsement with nods to Walczak, Ross, Conley, Consalvo,
Arroyo, Walsh, and Richie as strong candidates but lacking the distinction that pushed Barros and Connolly above and beyond.

The Herald’s endorsement process was notably uncommon. A Boston Magazine article dated September 12, 2013 claimed that the newspaper had not asked candidates to appear before the editorial board; in fact, the only candidate who had appeared before the editorial board was Dan Conley who received one of the two endorsements (Bernstein 2013a). In endorsing Conley and Connolly, the Herald cites Conley’s “managerial and executive experience…[and] solid pro-growth [candidacy]” and Connolly’s “first act of courage…announcing his candidacy before Menino had announced his decision to leave office…[and because] he has also billed himself as the ‘education candidate’” (Boston Herald, September 10, 2013). The Herald also chose to include an endorsement for anyone-except-Walsh, showing strong opposition to the union-backed candidate.

Additional media attention did not stand out for any individual candidate. There were a number of articles across Boston-area media that highlighted candidates, mainly focusing on the nine most credible candidates, but none of the media outlets chose to overwhelmingly support one candidate over another in the preliminary election. The only candidate’s supporter that addressed media bias was Frank Callahan of the Massachusetts Building Trades Council who accused the media of being strongly biased against Walsh in the general election (Bernstein 2013b). On the whole, though, media attention cycled between most of the candidates equally.

Endorsements by a city’s major newspapers are coveted among candidates in a large pool like this preliminary race. While the newspaper endorsements made clear
preferences towards some candidates over others, the rest of the media did not make the same distinction in this election.

*Incumbency Advantage*

Because this race was an open seat election, there was no incumbency advantage present. However, as Gary Jacobson (1989) describes, “candidates who have held elective office are considered high-quality”, and many of the candidates present in this election had held elective office, as described above in campaign-specific factors. While they were not technically incumbents, candidates Walsh, Connolly, Conley, Arroyo, Yancey, Ross, and Consalvo all had the added advantage of having held elected office either on the City Council, in the District Attorney’s office, or as a state representative.

*Expenditures*

The final component to campaign strategy, expenditures, is the most easily quantified. The Massachusetts Office of Campaign & Political Finance (OCPF) compiled spending records for all candidates in the preliminary election. Once again, activities for campaigns will be evaluated based on the nine viable candidates.

In May 2013, the first month that most of the candidates had kicked off their campaigns, expenditures were not very large. Connolly spent the largest amount of money at $100,294.38 followed by Ross at $83,474.07, Walsh at $73,574.68, and
Consalvo at $57,776.19. June and July, however, showed tremendous growth in expenditures with Conley taking the lead at $146,554.38 in June and $271,055.39 in July. Conley held the lead in expenditures for the rest of the preliminary campaign topping out at $1,583,333.43 in September. The next closest spender was Walsh at $971,254.72 – a whopping six hundred thousand dollar difference. Ross and Connolly relatively kept up with Walsh but had multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars less spent in the preliminary campaign (OCPF 2013).

Unfortunately, this information does not include independent expenditures. The role of outside money in this election was rampant as a result of it being the first mayoral election since the US Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*. *CommonWealth Magazine* calculated that general election spending in favor of Walsh by outside groups could have reached as high as $1.65 million which just about doubles total spending by the Walsh campaign (McMorrow 2013). Although these figures are for the general election, it is very likely that outside spending impacted the preliminary election as well and mostly in Walsh’s favor.

**Overall**

In the preliminary election for Boston mayor, campaign strategy was a defining feature that made the difference between winners and losers. Face-to-face voter contact and the details around each candidate’s strategy behind it primarily motivated the differences in outcome, followed in no particular order by newspaper endorsements and
media attention, incumbency advantage, and expenditures. Distinct approaches taken by each campaign helped to shape the preliminary election.

**Hypothesis 2: Results**

There are two main indicators of success in campaign strategy: initial polling and final turnout. Polling and turnout broken down into neighborhoods best proves the success of campaign strategy as well as the overall result of the election.

First, initial polling proved Connolly to be taking the lead in a number of neighborhoods. The *Globe* poll conducted with the University of New Hampshire found that Connolly had the most support as of September 12, 2013 with thirteen percent overall and leads in Allston-Brighton, Back Bay, Downtown, South End, South Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, West Roxbury, and Hyde Park (Smith and Azem 2013). In second was Richie with nine percent overall but only leading in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. Surprisingly, this poll found Walsh tied for third with Conley at eight percent overall and without a lead in any of the four geographic neighborhood regions. A caveat to this information is that thirty-four percent overall were undecided with the Allston-Brighton, Back Bay, Downtown, South End, and South Boston regions having the most undecided voters at forty percent.

These initial results suggest evidence of success for Connolly’s persuasion technique because much of his support was in double digits outside of the traditional West Roxbury-Roslindale-Hyde Park stronghold he was known to have. They do not, however, support Walsh’s successful mobilization efforts because polling in his own
home area of Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan did not even favor him among all of the candidates. Conley’s financial strength is also supported with the high support overall, comparatively. It does lead to some confusion about Richie’s support due to her lack of major spending as well as small organization.

Next, neighborhood results also show signs that campaign strategies may have contributed to better results. Walsh heavily won in Dorchester and South Boston while splitting Allston-Brighton and Charlestown with Connolly, demonstrating some proof that his tactic of mobilizing his base was most successful (Benson 2013). Geographically, Walsh did not win most of the city, but he came in first in the preliminary because of the high turnout in his home neighborhood. Once again, Connolly’s persuasion strategy is advanced by his ability to not only pick up his home area of West Roxbury but also parts of Jamaica Plain, Allston-Brighton, Charlestown, and absolutely carrying most of the Downtown, North End, South End, and East Boston areas (Benson 2013). Consalvo, Richie, and Barros were able to pull support from their home areas but not enough to make a significant difference.

Overall results of this preliminary election again support Walsh’s mobilization strategy and Connolly’s persuasion strategy. Richie, the third place finisher, fell four thousand votes shy of second place Connolly, and Conley was a distant fourth place finisher at just eleven percent of the vote (Boston Globe 2013). Richie’s strong finish is puzzling because she did not seem to be very strong in any aspect of the campaign strategy framework, while Conley’s loss proved again that more money spent does not always predict a positive outcome. The outcome may lend evidence in Richie’s favor that
an intermediate level of intergroup conflict helped her campaign garner more support than it might have otherwise had there been no conflict present, but it is still uncertain as to what caused her third place finish.

The results of this election help to satisfy the predictions of the second hypothesis. In a time when intergroup conflict played a significant but not determinant role in electoral outcome, Walsh and Connolly consistently lead the pack in each of the criteria for successful urban campaign strategy, and the results offer at least partial confirmation that their campaign strategies were stronger than others. Moreover, Richie’s ability to get so much support suggests that intergroup conflict was at play because she picked up support from areas mostly representative of minority groups. As previously predicted, intergroup conflict may have played a significant role in shaping this election, but the influence of campaign strategy and non-conflict aspects determined the top two winners in this election.

**Conclusion**

The 2013 Boston Mayoral election presents a new opportunity to evaluate what we know about urban voter behavior while adding in the campaign aspect that makes every new election unique. As analyzed above, it appears that GIT – this particular aspect of urban voter behavior – did not predict electoral outcomes in this case; however, GIT was helpful in predicting which factors would be the most accurate indicators of electoral success. The first hypothesis, though supporting moderate intergroup conflict, was
ultimately not supported by the facts in this election. On the other hand, the second hypothesis was supported and could be used for future elections to help candidates and campaigns determine what might be the best way to go noticed in a crowded candidate field.

**Discussion**

This study was not perfect, and there are definitely areas where future studies can improve upon this. One such area would be factoring in the economic identification and implications of candidates in the election. This study ignored whether candidates were perceived as elitist, middle-class, or working-class, but a future analysis would be interesting to find how that shapes urban voter choice. As it turns out, recent research has found that economic class is somewhat linked to local elections and their outcomes (Hajnal and Trounstine 2014). Another area for improvement would be fielding more campaign workers from specific areas of the campaign that would be able to best provide insight into field strategies; this study was limited by campaign worker participation and the varied departments of campaign workers who did choose to participate. Furthermore, first-hand accounts from voters via large survey responses would enlighten this discussion to find out exactly what urban voters are looking for in campaigns as well as what strategies they find most appealing in luring them to vote one way or another.
Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. Please state your name, position on the campaign, and campaign you worked on. This information will only be used for organizational purposes

2. What was your role on the campaign?

3. What is your perception of the political context of this election?

4. What types of strategies did the campaign focus on?
   a. Were some strategies used more heavily than others? If so, which and why?
   b. Did you agree with this direction?
   c. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this direction?

5. Was the intention to persuade voters or mobilize them?
   a. Did it switch from one intention to another over the course of the election? When and why?
   b. Were the efforts successful? Why or why not?

6. Was party identification used to identify potential voters? If so, how?

7. What is the description of a typical voter the campaign tried to persuade and/or mobilize? Typical can be interpreted however you see best fit.

8. In your experience, how has an urban, municipal election field strategy differed from a state representative, regional, or statewide campaign?

9. Were you aware of any political science research being used for the campaign?
Bibliography


