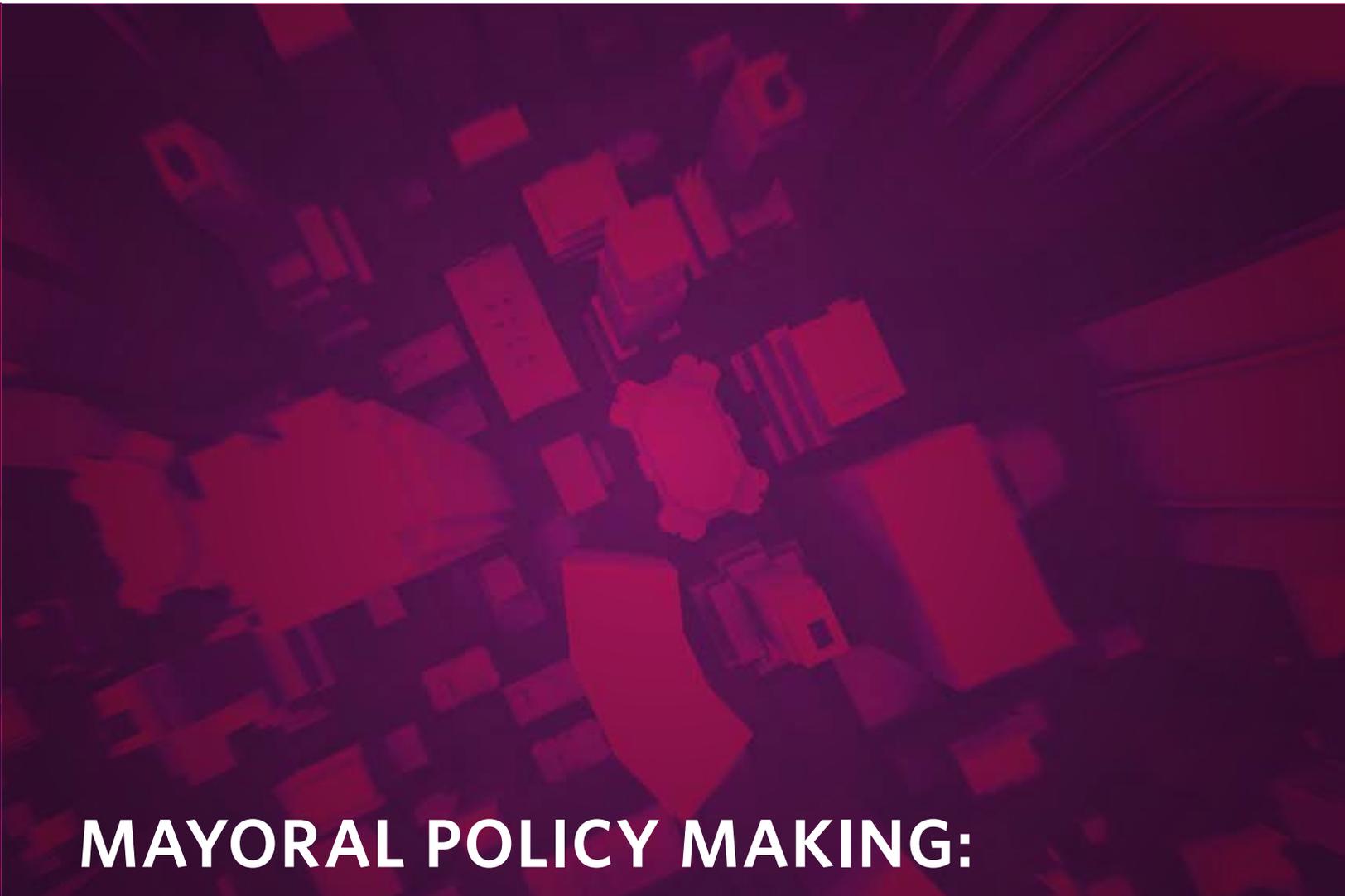2014-10-01

Mayoral Policy Making: Results from the 21st Century Mayors Leadership Survey

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MAYORAL POLICY MAKING:

Results from the 21st-Century Mayors Leadership Survey

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Despite the importance of local government to people's everyday experiences, and mayors' importance to local government behavior, there is little systematic information about how mayors lead their cities. In an effort to better understand mayoral priorities, as well as their challenges, relationships, and where they gain inspiration, the Initiative on Cities at Boston University initiated a project to survey a representative sample of mayors nationwide from cities of all sizes and affluence. Our team asked mayors about the challenges they face, the policy areas they are currently putting on the agenda, the issues on which they plan to expend political capital, sources of information on which they rely, and with whom they're able to cooperate.

This report is a summary of our findings from over 70 mayoral interviews. It yields fresh insight into the issues mayors care about, how they learn, and who they work well with. It should be useful to mayoral networks, policy makers, urban scholars, community and corporate partners, and others who seek to work with and shape the future of American cities.

We are grateful for the willing participation of so many mayors, as well as their candor and thoughtful insight.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mayors' primary challenges lie with the physical and fiscal infrastructure of their cities. In the wake of diminished federal and state resources and scarce local revenue, many mayors emphasize their struggles to address their cities' fiscal shortfalls, improve economic growth, and revamp aging infrastructure. Over half of the responses to our question about the current challenges facing American mayors mention economic development, financial management, or infrastructure.

Policy priorities for the upcoming year vary widely, but economic development, quality of life concerns, and urban infrastructure were the most frequently cited. Mayoral policy priorities are remarkably consistent across large and small city mayors and those who govern both economically thriving and disadvantaged cities. It appears that the issues mayors view as their cities' biggest keys to growth and vitality—economic development and infrastructure—make up two of the top three areas of focus. But, many mayors also highlight quality of life concerns, including public safety, urban planning, and improved sustainability.

Mayors anticipate tough battles around many of these same issues, and plan to expend political capital to realize their goals. Mayors plan to expend political capital on a variety of issues, including some, such as economic growth and infrastructure investments, that are not popularly believed to be politically controversial. Some mayors suggested that they require investment of political capital because of the requisite financial investments and associated tradeoffs. Other frequently cited political capital expenditures include quality of life issues and education.

Partisanship is the most consistent source of variation in mayoral priorities and beliefs, with Republican mayors focusing relatively more on economic growth and infrastructure and Democratic mayors investing more in social infrastructure, including public safety, education, and equity. Many practitioners and scholars have argued that partisan differences do not affect local policy, consistent with the famous aphorism that there is no Democratic (or Republican) way to pick up the garbage. Our survey suggests the opposite: mayoral party affiliation is associated with meaningful, statistically significant differences in policy priorities. Partisanship was more frequently associated with variations in answers across the survey than city size or affluence. Republican mayors plan to prioritize and invest political capital in economic development and urban infrastructure, such as transit and improved municipal operations. In contrast, Democratic mayors are more likely to prioritize quality of life issues like public safety in the year ahead, and will expend political capital to improve public education and reduce poverty. Some of the most notable distinctions relate to the role cities should play in combating climate change and reducing income inequality, where mayors of different parties express sharply different views that mirror national politics. Fewer than one third of Republican mayors believe cities should expend resources to mitigate the risks of climate change, compared to nearly 9 in 10 Democrats. The partisan divide is equally apparent on the subject of inequality, with near unanimous Republican opposition to a direct city role in reducing inequality at the expense of the affluent. In comparison, just over half of Democratic mayors endorse active local policy to combat income inequality.

Big-city mayors are tackling many of the same challenges and priorities as their peers in smaller cities. We were able to interview the mayors of just over one quarter of the 61 American cities with more than 300,000 residents. This sample allows us to glean

insight into the challenges facing big-city mayors. Our data reveal that in many ways big-city mayors are surprisingly similar to the mayors of smaller communities, especially relative to the ostensible differences between a city of 500,000 and one of 50,000. There are few differences in the policy priorities and preferences for redistributive initiatives and climate change policy between the two groups. That said, there are several modest differences worth highlighting: mayors of large cities are somewhat more likely to cite infrastructure and governance as major challenges and education and financial management as political capital expenditures. In addition, mayors of large cities are more likely to be supportive of neighborhood gentrification. Finally, large- and small-city mayors differ notably in the set of other cities they look to for policy ideas, which we explore further below. Generally, though, the main story here is one of similarity rather than difference.

Mayors of less affluent cities have highly similar preferences to mayors governing wealthier cities, though they are more likely to expend political capital on quality of life and economic development concerns and support gentrification. Using median housing prices to determine relative affluence, we measured whether mayors of wealthier cities exhibited different priorities and preferences to those which are more economically disadvantaged. As with city size, the similarities between the two groups are quite striking across an array of questions, but we do observe several salient differences. Mayors in less affluent cities are much more likely to be challenged by and plan to invest political capital in quality of life concerns in the year ahead. In addition, they are more apt to expend political capital on economic development. Finally, mayors of the most disadvantaged cities are significantly more likely to embrace gentrification relative to mayors of the most affluent cities.

Mayors rely on a remarkable breadth of sources for policy ideas, including a large array of other cities. Regardless of city size, affluence, or mayoral party affiliation, mayors nationwide seek ideas from experts, peers, and their constituents. Not surprisingly, their most frequently cited source of policy information is their staff. Other cities and mayors and unofficial advisors are close behind as frequent sources of information. When asked which cities they most often look to for ideas, there is no primary city or set of cities that influenced all mayors. Indeed, mayors offer a wide array of cities, and the set of cities they provide varies enormously by mayoral and city demography. Evincing the nuance with which mayors learn from other cities, New York and Denver are very frequently named by mayors of large cities, while mayors of small cities look most often to Boston for policy ideas. Mayors also frequently borrow specific ideas from other locales: nearly every mayor surveyed is able to identify a program or policy s/he has taken from another city and brought to his or her own, most of which are relatively modest and pragmatic.

Mayors report highly cooperative relationships with a wide range of actors, with the city's business community, on average, at the top of the mayoral ratings and state government at the bottom. Mayors view their relationships with an array of governmental and non-governmental entities as largely cooperative, a surprising result given the political rancor that seemingly dominates higher levels of government. These generally cooperative ratings persist across mayoral partisan lines, city size, and city wealth. There are, however, important variations: while mayors consistently rate their relationship with business at the higher end of the spectrum, they place federal government agencies and their states' governments at the lower end of their ratings.

METHODOLOGY

Because this project represents, to our knowledge, the first academic survey of mayors in the United States, we were faced with an overwhelming array of subjects to explore. We focus our analysis on the formation of local policy and on governing challenges, broadly construed. Using a mix of open- and closed-ended questions, we ask mayors about their cities' top challenges and policy priorities, main sources of policy information, relationships with other local, state, and federal governments, and relationships with business, non-profit, and labor organizations. The mix of question type and topics allows us to understand a wide variety of issues, from mayoral attitudes toward income inequality to the cities they look to most often for policy ideas. Moreover, our open-ended questions in particular offer depth; mayors were able to volunteer the first policy priorities and challenges that came to mind and to explain why.

Recruitment
Our goal in designing a survey-sampling procedure was straightforward: to contact and obtain responses from a national sample of mayors while assembling a substantial sample of the mayors of the largest cities. Given the mayors' busy schedules, we offered them options including in-person interview, phone interview, Internet survey, and print/mail survey. Since there are few large cities and hundreds of medium and small ones, we made special efforts to over-recruit large-city mayors. We essentially invited all mayors to the survey but a subset got extra attention in the recruitment process. We timed the survey around the June US Conference of Mayors meetings in Dallas. Mayors of the 50 largest cities by population and 15 other large city mayors who were registered for the conference received an email invitation which included a scanned, personally addressed letter from Thomas M. Menino, the former Mayor of Boston and Co-Director of the BU Initiative on Cities. This message invited them to participate in an in-person conversation at the conference along with a follow-up phone interview invitation to those we missed in Dallas. All other mayors (many from small cities) on the US Conference of Mayors database received a more generic email invitation to the online version of the survey. To ensure that our sample was not overly biased toward large cities, we also selected a random sample of 20 smaller cities to receive extra recruitment analogous to that used with their larger counterparts.

Participating Cities Similar to Cities Nationally
Given how difficult it is to gather systematic data from elites and how limited mayors' time is, our sample is impressively representative. We have responses from cities in 30 different states and all parts of the country. Table 1 compares attributes (collected from the census) of cities that participated to all US cities with a population greater than 30,000. This comparison (and some of the analysis below) is split into large and small cities. In this report, large cities are those with more than 300,000 residents. Prior academic and policy research suggests that large central cities in metropolitan areas frequently have qualitatively different interests, constraints, and political powers than their smaller counterparts, and therefore might provide markedly different survey responses.

The demographic comparison in **Table 1** highlights the fact that our sample is similar to a complete set of cities. Our cities are slightly whiter and less Hispanic than cities as a whole, but these differences are minor. Our economic attributes—including income, poverty rates, property values, and property value growth—almost perfectly match those in the full set of cities, which is especially important since many of the questions and results concern economic and housing issues.

Analytical Approach and Caveats
In this report we analyze mayors' responses to a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions about topics including policy priorities, sources of information, and views on difficult tradeoffs that cities face. For each question we cut the data by three

Table 1: Comparison of Traits of Cities in Our Sample to All Cities

Variable	Under 300,000 People		Over 300,000 People	
	In Sample	All Cities	In Sample	All Cities
Population				
Population	84,700	70,800	728,000	837,400
Population Density	3,300	3,800	4,500	5,100
Race				
% White	64%	59%	48%	43%
% Black	12%	12%	23%	22%
% Hispanic	14%	20%	18%	26%
Socioeconomic				
Median Household Income	$58,200	$58,600	$48,600	$48,200
Median Income Growth	25.5%	23.7%	26.3%	24.5%
% Poverty	16%	15%	20%	20%
% Unemployed	6%	6%	7%	7%
% Owner Occupied	53%	56%	46%	46%
Median House Value	$246,000	$242,000	$226,000	$226,000
Median House $ Growth	63%	59%	71%	71%
Number of Responses	50		18	

Distribution by Census Region
(national distribution)
East 10% (4%)
Midwest 24% (15%)
South 25% (35%)
West 31% (45%)

Notes: 1) Some numbers are rounded. 2) Not all mayors included in this table answered all questions later in the survey. (We included all mayors that completed the open-ended priorities and challenges section of the survey in these demographics.) All data are from the 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, the Office of Management and Budget's 2013 list of principal cities. Cities under 30,000 people are excluded. Income and Housing Price Growth are 2000 Census to 2012 ACS change. 3) While our sample is generally representative, it is skewed toward large cities. One solution to this issue would be to use survey weights in our analyses. We were concerned that, because large cities are a relatively small share of the population of US cities, weights might mask many of the important insights gleaned from large city mayors. Consequently, to address our skewed sample, we instead break down responses to all questions by city size.

variables. The first is city size. We compare cities with over 300,000 people to the rest of the cities in our sample. This attribute is based on the 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. The second attribute is the mayor's partisanship. While the power of partisanship in national politics and policy is hard to dispute, its role at the municipal level is less understood and more contested. We collected this variable from participants at the end of the survey (irrespective of whether their elections use party labels) and supplemented it with internet searches where necessary.[1] The third key variable in our analysis is a city's median housing price (again from the 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates) which we use as an indicator of wealth. We calculate whether each city is in the lowest, middle, or highest third in the national distribution.[2] We compare cities in the top third (highest wealth) to those in the bottom third (lowest wealth). We use property values instead of income primarily because the former are more closely related to the city's financial resources via property taxes. Moreover, we expect property values to better reflect a variety of factors, including planning constraints, crime rates, demand to live in the city, and others which may tie to the mayors' views and behavior.

The reader should be aware of two important caveats at the outset. The first is that our sample size is still relatively small. Even though our cities approximate American cities as a whole, with fewer than 100 observations it is likely that some ostensible differences are merely the result of randomness. Second, the key attributes we focus on are highly correlated with each other and with other important variables. This is a reality of cities that makes it difficult to cleanly separate out effects no matter how much data one has. For

example, nearly all big cities are Democratic and relatively racially diverse. There just are not many potential opportunities to observe the thoughts of a Republican mayor in a large and racially diverse city, for example. This means that one should cautiously interpret from our findings and be aware of other plausible interpretations. For example, an ostensible large city effect could partly be the result of partisanship, racial diversity, or the fact that different types of people may endeavor to be the mayor of a large city. This does not mean that big cities are not different than small. It simply means that one cannot make a claim that city size itself directly causes differences.

In the sections that follow, we report the results of some open-ended questions concerning *challenges, priorities, and political capital*. To analyze these open-ended responses, we coded them into the nine "macro" categories that appear on the figures: financial management, economic development, education, governance, socioeconomic issues, infrastructure, quality of life, relationships, and miscellaneous. **Table 2** displays the kinds of issues these different macro categories comprise.

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1. Comparing our partisan breakdown to the national population is difficult because many local elections are non-partisan while our mayors self-reported their partisanship even when they run without partisan labels. Nevertheless, the two-party partisan split in our data is 65% Democrat. This number is very similar to the 67% "Democrat Wins" statistic that Gerber and Hopkins report in Table 1 of the supplemental information for their 2011 study of large cities with discernible mayoral partisanship. On these grounds, our sample seems reasonable. This representativeness has the additional benefit of further guarding against the possibility that Mayor Menino's participation might have yielded a biased sample; indeed, despite the former mayor's Democratic leanings, our sample features a representative number of Republican participants. (Elizabeth R. Gerber and Daniel J. Hopkins, "When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy," *American Journal of Political Science*, 2011, 55(2):326-339)

2. We base these thirds upon the distribution of cities with more than 45,000 residents because this set has almost exactly the same median city size as our sample.

Table 2: Open-Ended Question Categories

Financial Management	Budgeting
	Financing
	Federal/State Funding
	Generating Revenue
Economic Development	Attracting Development
	Managing Growth
Education	Schools
	Vocational Training
Governance	Labor
	Leadership
	Technology
Socioeconomic Issues	Poverty
	Housing Affordability
	Racial and Income Disparities
	Inequality in Health Care Access
Infrastructure	Operations
	Transportation
Quality of Life	Crime
	Planning and Sustainability
	Healthy Living
Relationships	Local
	State
	Federal

CHALLENGES

Mayors face a wide range of challenges led by infrastructure, economic development, and financial management. Mayors were asked: "what are the two largest challenges you face in your role as mayor?" This open-ended question yields a variety of responses along with some clear patterns. **Figure 1** displays the frequency with which mayors cite issues from those nine categories as one of their top two challenges. The figure evinces the breadth of challenges mayors say they face. While a relatively large number of mayors cited infrastructure, financial management, and economic development, generally, no one challenge dominates the responses.[3] Significant proportions of mayors worry about issues ranging from their relationships with the federal government, to maintaining their transportation infrastructure, to rising income inequality. Mayors are not merely concerned about minor technocratic and constituent service issues—they worry about the big social, financial, and institutional problems facing American cities.

Infrastructure a major mayoral challenge in a wide variety of cities.

Figure 2 breaks down the responses to the challenges question by city size, mayoral partisanship, and real estate values. These breakdowns show that the challenges are relatively similar across the different traits. The lists are not radically different—indeed, none of the three cuts produces statistically significant distributions of responses. Despite the incredible variation in American cities, the same challenges come up over and over again. Mayors from all American cities thus appear to spend a significant amount of energy thinking about how to better grow and plan their cities, how to manage transportation and city operations, and how to budget limited resources given contemporary fiscal constraints.

Nevertheless, there are some slight variations that may tentatively point toward interesting differences. While all sets of mayors focus on infrastructure, financial management, and economic development, these issues are more all-encompassing for small-city mayors. Those three issues comprise over 60% of the responses from small cities. Conversely, a comparatively larger percentage of large-city mayors view governance and education as central challenges facing their communities. Partisan differences are similarly sharp: Republican mayors cite economic development as their top challenge, while Democrats are relatively more likely to list education. A city's economic success appears to have little effect on mayoral perceptions of challenges, with one salient exception: mayors of less affluent cities are far more likely to highlight quality of life issues relative to their peers governing wealthy communities.

"[OUR CHALLENGE IS] FINDING A WAY TO FUND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS IN A NO/LOW REVENUE GROWTH ENVIRONMENT AT A TIME WHEN PEOPLE ARE TURNING TO AND MOVING TO CITIES, AND WHEN PEOPLE NEED SERVICES THE MOST. SO, FIGURING OUT HOW TO PERMANENTLY FIX THE CITY'S BUSINESS MODEL."
—SOUTHERN MAYOR

"[OUR CHALLENGE IS] MAINTAINING FISCAL DISCIPLINE—IN SOME WAYS IT'S EASIER TO SAY NO WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH. WHEN WE HAVE A GOOD YEAR, A SURPLUS, EVERYONE WANTS TO SPEND ON THEIR PET PROJECT."
—SMALL-CITY MAYOR

"HOW DO WE ACTUALLY MANAGE GROWTH AND PRESERVE WHAT PEOPLE LOVE ABOUT THE CITY—ITS NATURE, ITS NEIGHBORHOODS—AND AT THE SAME TIME ACCOMMODATE AS MANY AS 100,000 NEW PEOPLE?"
—AFFLUENT-CITY MAYOR

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3. The figures mask the true variety because we condensed their answers, many of which were quite elaborate and/or specific, into nine manageable categories.

Figure 1: Challenges for All Cities: Mayors were asked what are the top two challenges they face in their role as mayor. We coded these responses into policy/policy making areas.

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face

Relationships

Misc

Socioeconomic Issues (e.g., poverty)

Education

Quality of Life (e.g., crime, sustainability)

Governance

Economic Development (e.g., growth, planning)

Financial Management (e.g., budgeting)

Infrastructure (e.g., transportation, operations)

General Policy Areas

Percent of All Responses (two per city)
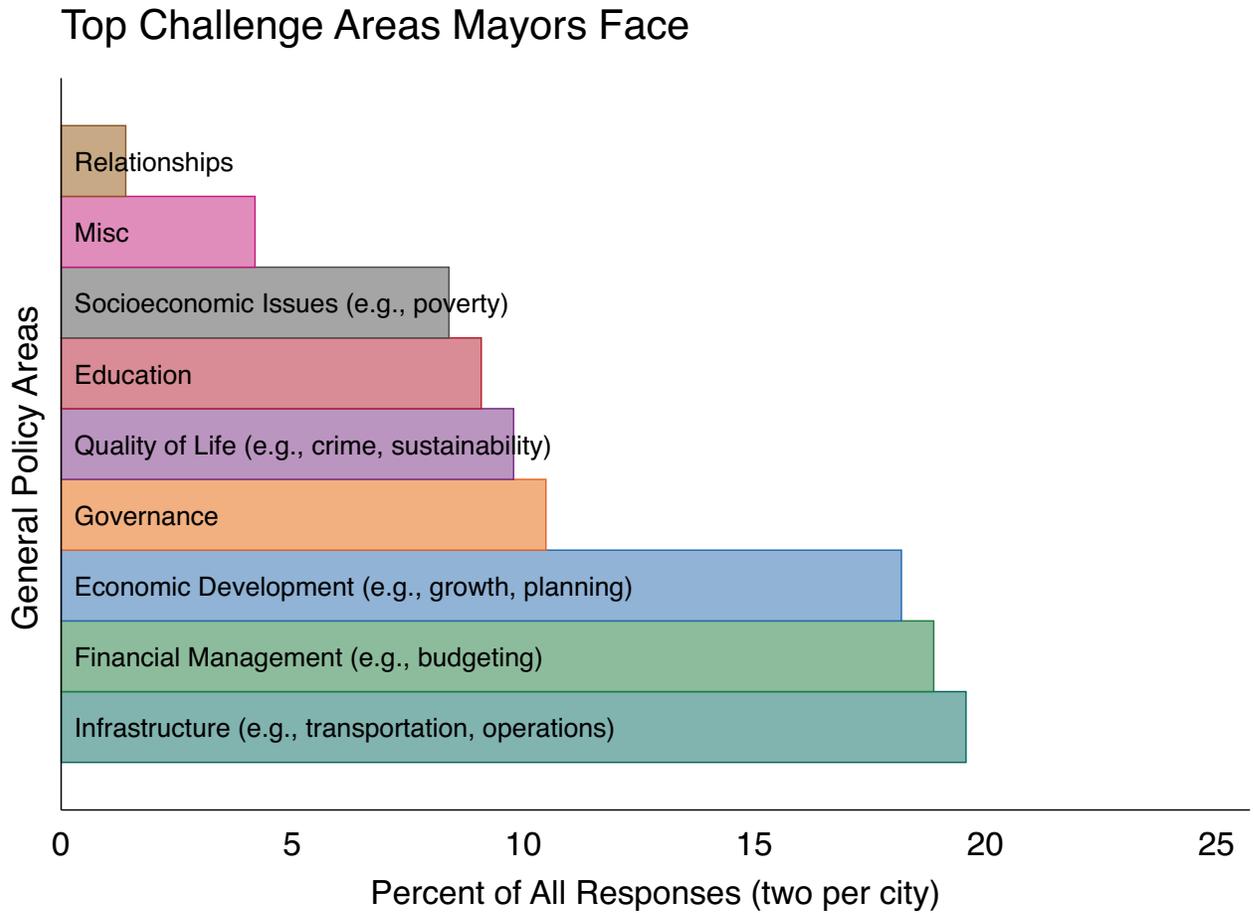
Figure 2: Challenges by Traits: Mayors were asked what are the top two challenges they face in their role as mayor. We coded these responses into policy/policy making areas.

Large Cities

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face: Big Cities

Small Cities

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face: All Other Cities

Democrats

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face: Democratic Mayors

Republicans

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face: Republican Mayors

High Wealth

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face: Higher Real Estate Prices

Low Wealth

Top Challenge Areas Mayors Face: Lower Real Estate Prices
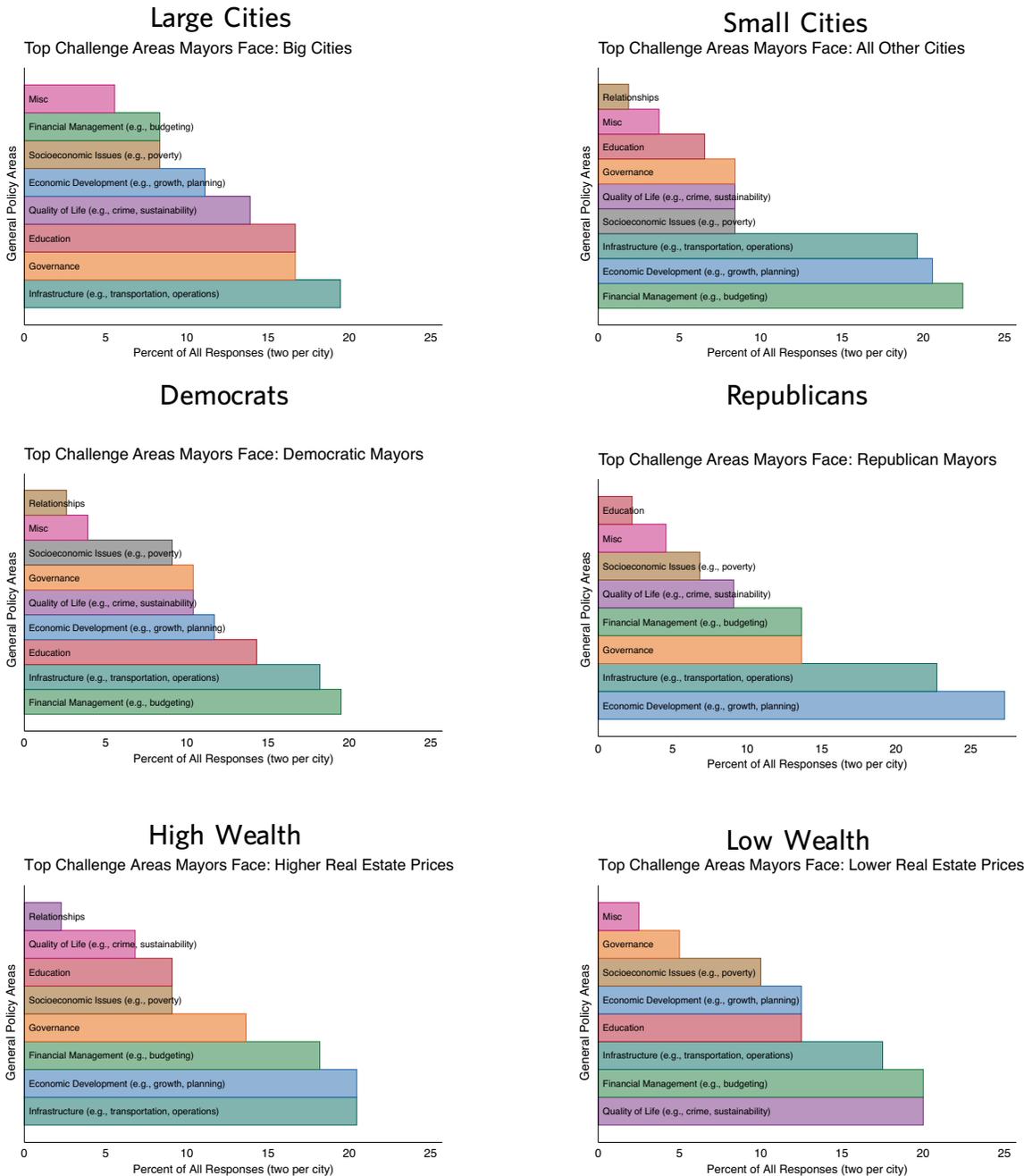
Large cities have populations greater than 300,000. Wealth based on whether cities fall in the top 1/3 or bottom 1/3 of the national distribution of median house price (based on cities over 45,000 people in 2012 ACS)

POLICY PRIORITIES

Mayors are prioritizing and planning to spend political capital on economic development, infrastructure, and quality of life issues.
Given these challenges, the next question is what issues mayors see as their top policy priorities. Analogous to our question about challenges, we asked mayors to think about their two most important policy priorities for the next year. We specifically asked about the upcoming year to get mayors to focus on their current priorities rather than more abstract ones. We also asked mayors to list the two areas on which they plan on spending the most political capital in the coming year. These two questions allow us to determine how much the contentious issues mayors take on (or have foisted upon them) align with their policy priorities.

We display responses to these survey items in **Figure 3**. The mayors' combined lists of policy priorities and issues on which they plan on spending political capital closely align. The three most frequently mentioned issues on both lists are: economic development, quality of life, and infrastructure. While these three top both lists, a number of other priorities make the cut. As in our analysis of mayoral challenges in the previous section, no one or two issues dominate. Instead, the responses suggest that city leaders will be pursuing a range of policy agendas in the coming year.

Mayors of large and small cities have highly similar policy priorities, but differ on their political capital expenditures.
Figure 4 tallies the priorities and political capital expenditures data by city size. As with the challenges (above), the most striking result emerging from our analysis of mayoral policy priorities is the striking similarity between the mayors of large and small cities; we observe no substantively or statistically significant differences (even by lenient standards) between the two sets of mayors. We do, however, see some statistically significant variations when we compare the planned political capital expenditures of

large- and small-city mayors. In particular, the mayors of large cities are more likely to plan to expend political capital on financial management and education, while their peers governing smaller municipalities anticipate spending their capital on infrastructure and economic development. Again, though, there are important commonalities—both sets of mayors list socioeconomic issues and quality of life towards the middle of their planned political capital expenditures.

Among small cities, policy priorities and challenges (above) mesh closely: two of the issues listed as major challenges—economic development and infrastructure—also appear as policy priorities and political capital expenditures. Mayors of small cities view their policy priorities as at least partially tackling the central challenges facing their cities. For larger cities, the connection is not as clear. While economic development figures prominently as both a policy priority and a challenge, infrastructure and financial management—which were frequently listed as challenges by large-city mayors—fall by the wayside in favor of quality of life (which includes crime), education, and socioeconomic issues. This may reflect the electoral and demographic constraints limiting the mayors of larger cities and/or the fact that larger cities face a more diverse set of challenges relative to their smaller peers.

"I see my role as using the bully pulpit I have and the tools I have to move our economy in a stronger, long-term sustainable direction. There is no reason we should have the roller-coaster economy that we do."
—Southwestern mayor

"I want equity in our neighborhoods. I want all schools to be good. I don't want where someone lives to impact their quality of life."
—Big-city mayor

"[My top priority is] public safety. People need to feel safe and want to move to town."
—Small-city, nonpartisan mayor

Figure 3: The Year Ahead: Policy Priorities and Issues on Which Mayors Plan on Spending Political Capital. Each mayor noted their top two priorities for the next year and the two areas in which they plan on spending the most political capital.

Priorities
Policy Priority Areas

General Policy Areas (y-axis)

- Relationships
- Misc
- Governance
- Education
- Socioeconomic Issues (e.g., poverty)
- Financial Management (e.g., budgeting)
- Infrastructure (e.g., transportation, operations)
- Quality of Life (e.g., crime, sustainability)
- Economic Development (e.g., growth, planning)

Percent of All Responses (two per city)

Political Capital
Political Capital Expenditure Priority Areas

General Policy Areas (y-axis)

- Relationships
- Governance
- Misc
- Financial Management (e.g., budgeting)
- Socioeconomic Issues (e.g., poverty)
- Education
- Quality of Life (e.g., crime, sustainability)
- Infrastructure (e.g., transportation, operations)
- Economic Development (e.g., growth, planning)

Percent of All Responses (two per city)

Figure 4: *By City Size*. The Year Ahead: Policy Priorities and Issues on Which Mayors Plan on Spending Political Capital. Each mayor noted their top two priorities for the next year and the two areas in which they plan on spending the most political capital.
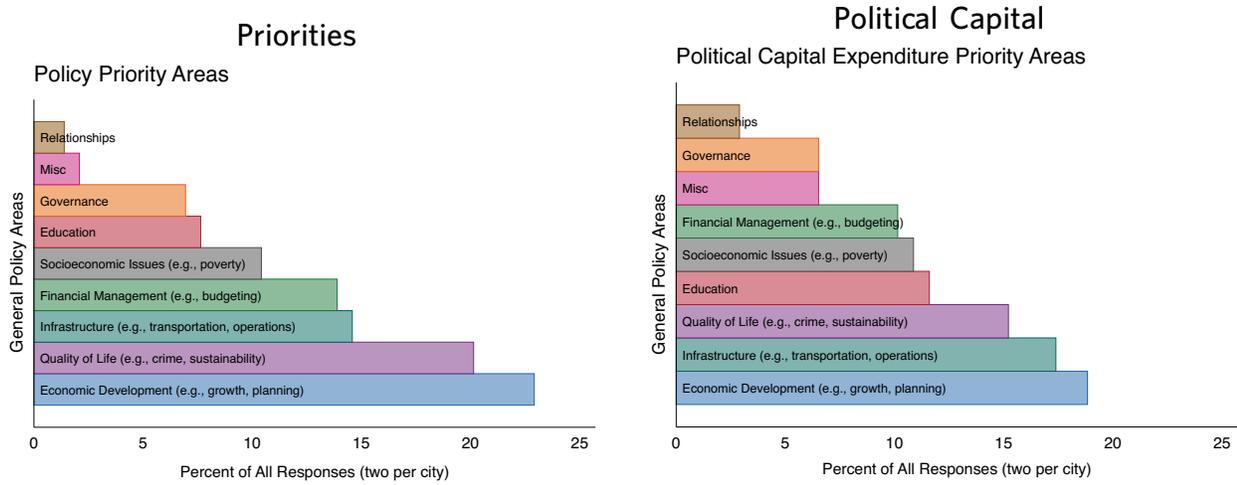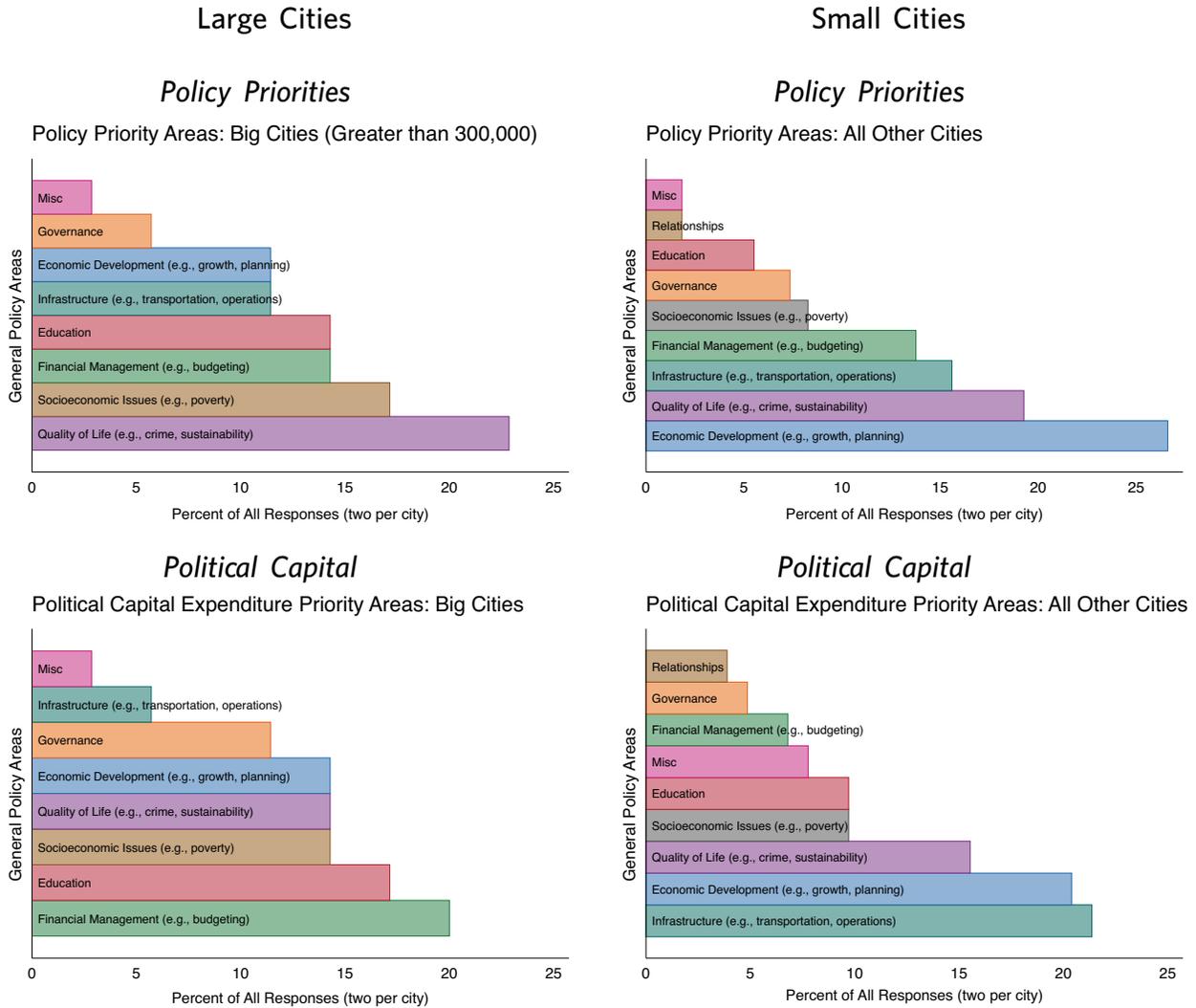
Large Cities

Policy Priorities

Policy Priority Areas: Big Cities (Greater than 300,000)

Small Cities

Policy Priorities

Policy Priority Areas: All Other Cities

Political Capital

Political Capital Expenditure Priority Areas: Big Cities

Political Capital

Political Capital Expenditure Priority Areas: All Other Cities

Large cities have populations greater than 300,000.

Republican mayors prioritize infrastructure and development relative to Democrats. Democrats prioritize socioeconomic issues, education, and quality of life relative to Republicans.

Mayoral partisanship is associated with more meaningful differences in policy priorities (**Figure 5**). The priorities lists are statistically different from each other and the political capital lists approach conventional significance levels. Republican mayors are more likely to prioritize the two related issues of economic development and infrastructure. These categories compose roughly 50% of all Republican priorities. While Democrats also prioritize development, they are much more likely to also emphasize issues related to inequality, education, and quality of life. These differences suggest that partisanship does matter at the local level in unsurprising ways that also likely follow from mayors fitting and responding to differing constituent priorities.

Mayors of wealthy and less wealthy cities have highly similar policy priorities, but exhibit sharp differences in their political capital expenditures.

As with our analysis of city size, we find no statistically significant differences in the policy priorities of mayors of wealthy and less wealthy cities (**Figure 6**). There are, though, substantial and statistically significant differences in their sets of political capital expenditures. Mayors of communities with high housing values plan to expend political capital on infrastructure, economic development, and socioeconomic issues, while their counterparts governing less wealthy cities are more focused on quality of life and economic development. Although economic development features highly on both lists, the other planned political capital expenditures evince little overlap.

"[My priorities are] #1: To build a city of equity. That means affordability, diversity, and working with people who are being priced out. And #2: Growing right—transit, planning, etc."

—Large-city, Democratic mayor

"I think there are two types of cities. Those that basically run themselves—'born on third, think they hit a triple.' ...Other cities have been distressed; mayors have to take them apart and rebuild."

—Mid-sized-city mayor

Figure 5: *By Mayoral Partisanship.* The Year Ahead: Policy Priorities and Issues on Which Mayors Plan on Spending Political Capital. Each mayor noted their top two priorities for the next year and the two areas in which they plan on spending the most political capital.

Democrats

Policy Priorities

Policy Priority Areas: Democratic Mayors

Republicans

Policy Priorities

Policy Priority Areas: Republican Mayors

Political Capital

Political Capital Priority Areas: Democratic Mayors

Political Capital

Political Capital Priority Areas: Republican Mayors

Figure 6: *By Housing Value.* The Year Ahead: Policy Priorities and Issues on Which Mayors Plan on Spending Political Capital. Each mayor noted their top two priorities for the next year and the two areas in which they plan on spending the most political capital.
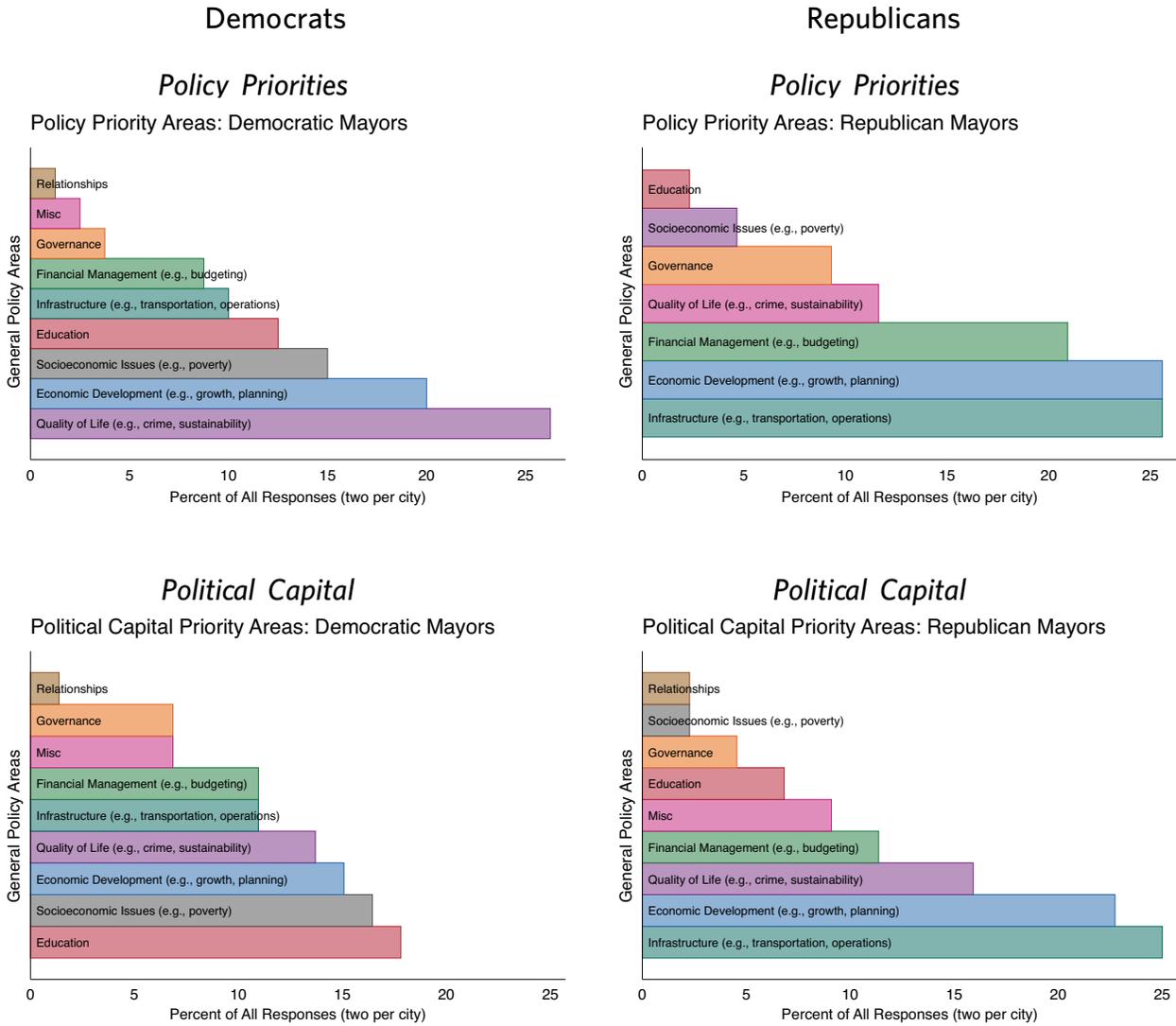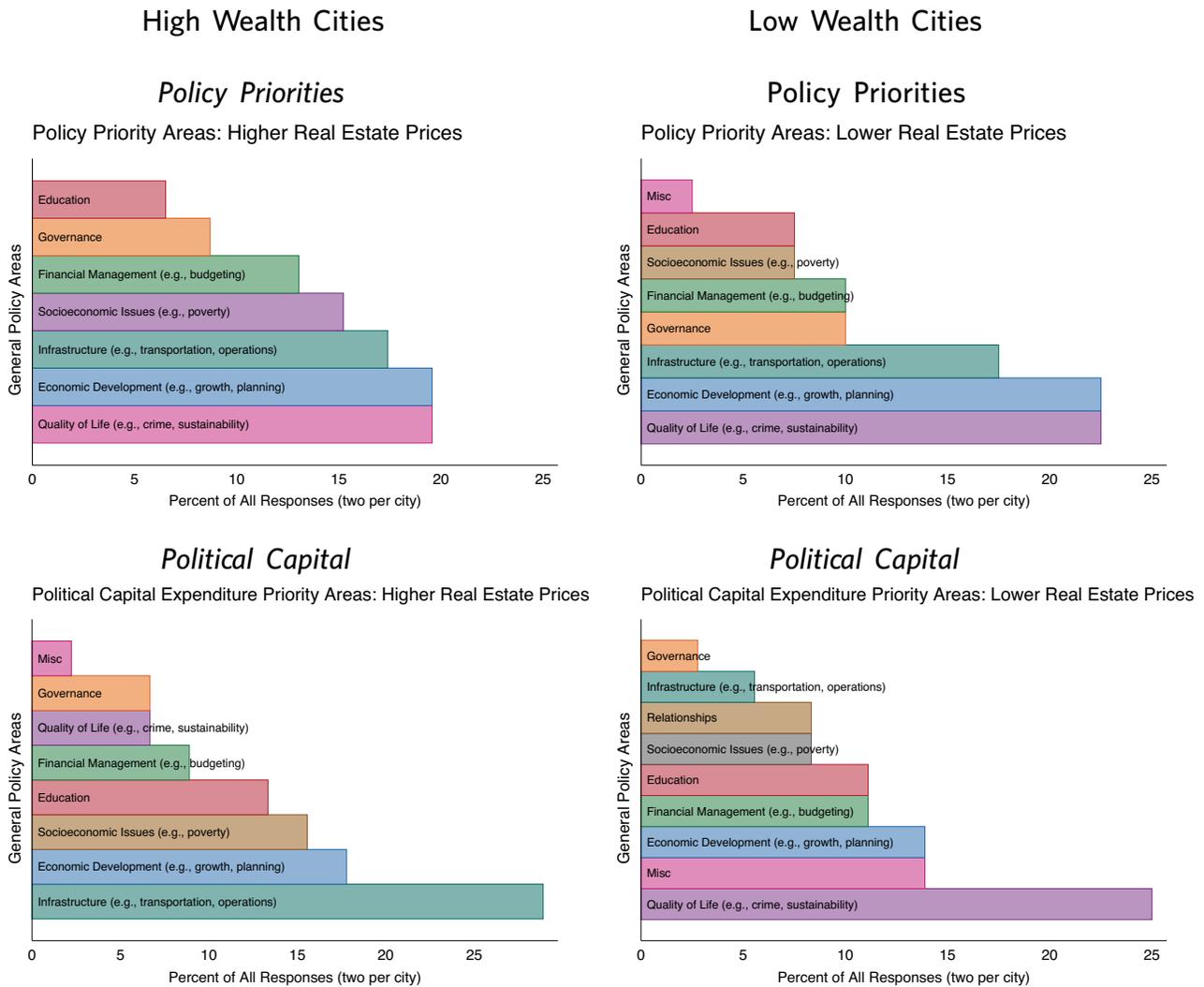
High Wealth Cities

Policy Priorities

Policy Priority Areas: Higher Real Estate Prices

Low Wealth Cities

Policy Priorities

Policy Priority Areas: Lower Real Estate Prices

Political Capital

Political Capital Expenditure Priority Areas: Higher Real Estate Prices

Political Capital

Political Capital Expenditure Priority Areas: Lower Real Estate Prices

Wealth based on whether cities fall in the top one third or bottom one third of the national distribution of municipal median house prices (based on cities over 45,000 people) in 2012 (2012 ACS 5-Year Estimates).

Mayors believe their challenges and priorities are similar to those of other mayors.

While aggregating across all of the mayors' responses to the questions about policy priorities and challenges suggests that mayors are focused on a variety of issues, nearly all mayors believe that their own lists strongly resemble those of other mayors. **Figure 7** illustrates the extent to which mayors believe that their lists are similar to those provided by other mayors. Almost 90% of mayors think that their lists are either "very similar" or "somewhat similar" to those offered by their counterparts in other cities. On the one hand, this convergence is striking given the variation in topics actually covered by their lists. As the lists show, there are not one or two issues that nearly every mayor mentions. On the other hand, this perception of similarity is consistent with the fact that the data generally show that mayoral challenges and priorities do not vary greatly across city types.

Figure 7: Perceived Similarity. "How similar do you think your lists from the previous two questions are to those provided by other mayors?"

Perceived Similarity With Other Cities' Lists
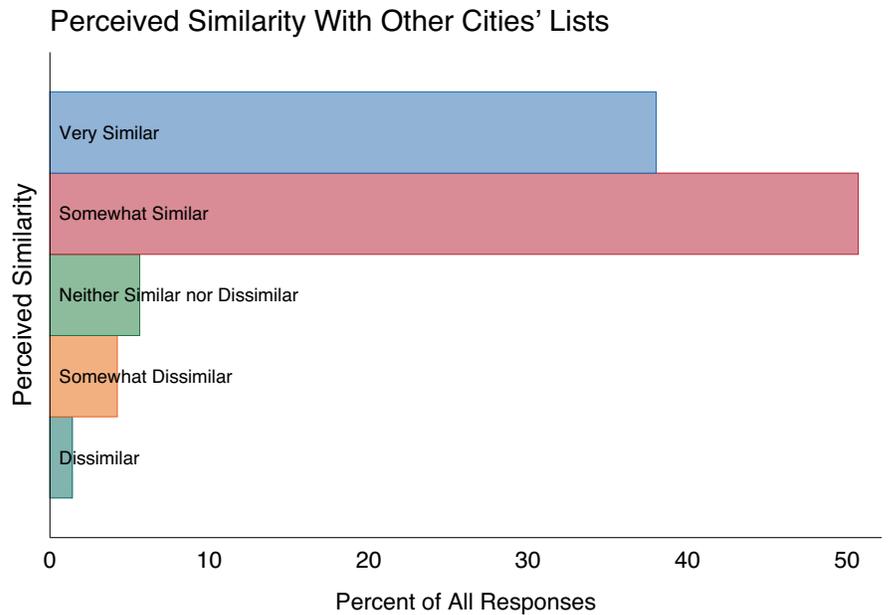
Question asked immediately after mayors provided lists of challenges and priorities.

KNOWLEDGE DEFICITS

Mayors primarily want to learn more about technical issues such as public financing.

To follow up on the responses to the challenges and priorities questions we asked mayors, "what one thing would you like to learn more about?" In some ways the responses to this question (**Figure 8**) correspond to the lists of priorities and challenges, but they also deviate in some interesting ways. Issues related to financial management, including public financing, topped the list. Indeed, the financial management category garnered a higher percentage of responses on this question than any priority or challenge did above. On the other hand, some issues that were fairly common above, especially infrastructure and quality of life (including crime) were rarely mentioned as things mayors would like to learn more about. The responses to this question suggest that mayors generally feel that more technical expertise about running the city (e.g., budgeting) rather than more knowledge about particular policy areas would best help them do their work. Finally, splitting these responses by partisanship and property values evinces no differences. It is especially interesting, given some of the other ways that responses differ by partisanship, that Democrats and Republicans want to learn more about the same things. On the other hand, the city size variable approaches conventional statistical significance levels. Specifically, the big-city mayor's set of "learn more" responses was especially dominated by two issues: education and financial management. These two combined to comprise 73% of responses. Despite their importance in the priorities and challenges questions, only one big-city mayor said "economic development" and only one said "infrastructure."

Figure 8: Futher Learning. "As mayor, what one thing would you like to learn more about?"

One Thing Mayors Would Like to Know More About
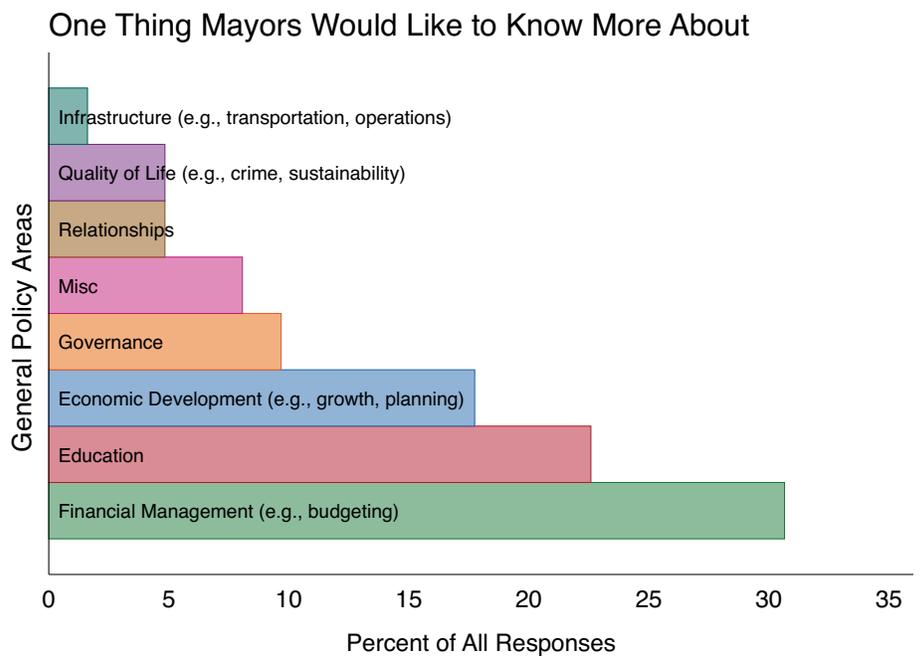
ISSUE: INCOME INEQUALITY

A majority of mayors are skeptical about cities' role in reducing income inequality and these views vary with partisanship.

To supplement the open-ended questions, we asked three closed-ended questions that capture mayors' views on the important, contentious, and challenging tradeoffs that their cities may face. The first of these three tradeoffs concerns income inequality. **Figure 9** illustrates mayoral attitudes towards income inequality for the full sample and by our three main attributes. Our question forces mayors to make a tradeoff between addressing the gap between rich and poor and implementing policies that may negatively impact more affluent residents and/or businesses. The exact question wording is: "Cities should try to reduce income inequality, even if doing so comes at the expense of businesses and/or wealthy residents." Unsurprisingly, perhaps due to the fiscal and economic challenges facing many American cities, the bulk of mayors disagreed. A significant minority (around 30%), however, agreed, believing that addressing income inequality is worth the potential loss of wealthy residents and/or businesses.

City size and wealth appear to have no relation to views on these issues. The responses from big cities are virtually identical to the rest. Similarly, a city's position in the wealth distribution does not appear to be associated with attitudes towards the inequality tradeoff. Responses do, however, vary sharply by partisanship (and these differences are highly significant). While the overwhelming majority of Republican mayors (almost 90%) disagree with our inequality statement, just over half of Democrats agree. This stark partisan divide seemingly mirrors national politics surrounding income inequality: the Republican mayors' nearly unanimous opposition to reducing income inequality at the expense of businesses and/or wealthy residents is in line with the national party's stance.[4] The attitudes of the Democratic mayors, however, reflect an interesting divergence from national politics: while national Democrats are more unified in their willingness to aggressively address income inequality, Democratic mayors are notably more reticent. In a recent Pew poll, 90% of Democrats said that "government" should do more to reduce the gap between rich and poor.[5] In comparison, only 55% of Democratic mayors say that cities should address income inequality, even if doing so adversely affects richer city residents and businesses. Almost half of Democratic mayors either are neutral towards or disagree with our proposed inequality tradeoff.

"I don't think cities should try to get inside people's pocketbooks."

—*Small-city, Democratic mayor*

"We are consistently presented with insurmountable social issues. Our solution has been to try to address it by creating jobs."

—*Republican, midwestern mayor*

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4. We note that some Republicans may, in good faith, reject the premise of the question—that there is a plausible tradeoff between reducing inequality and what is good for wealthy residents and businesses.

5. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/29/inequality-poverty-divide-republicans-more-than-democrats

Figure 9: Mayoral Responses to Inequality Tradeoff. "Cities should try to reduce income inequality, even if doing so comes at the expense of businesses and/or wealthy residents."

All Cities
Income Inequality Tradeoffs

By City Size
Income Inequality Tradeoffs

By Mayor's Party ID
Income Inequality Tradeoffs

By Median Housing Value
Income Inequality Tradeoffs

"Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" collapsed into "Agree" and "Disagree." Big cities have populations greater than 300,000. Partisanship based on self reported Party ID (irrespective of whether elections include labels) supplemented by Google searches where self reported not available on the survey. Median housing values are split by thirds of national distribution of cities over 45,000 based on median house price in 2012 (American Community Survey 2012 5-Year Estimates).

ISSUE: GENTRIFICATION

Mayors sharply divided on gentrification issues, with city wealth representing the main dividing line.

The second question explores tradeoffs related to gentrification: "It is good for a neighborhood when it experiences rising property values, even if it means that some current residents might have to move out." This question forces mayors to weigh the social and tax base benefits of increased property values against the potential for lower income residents to be displaced. **Figure 10** displays the responses to this question. Unlike on the inequality tradeoff question, here partisanship does not appear to affect mayoral agreement or disagreement. Democrats' and Republicans' distributions of answers are virtually identical. Across party lines, mayors struggle to find a balance between the competing considerations. Just under 30% of all mayors actively refuse to make the tradeoff, choosing the "neither agree nor disagree" response. A small plurality of mayors from both parties agrees with the statement, meaning that they prioritize the rising property values over the displacement of current residents. While a few more mayors lean toward the higher property values end of the spectrum, mayors across party lines are almost evenly distributed on these issues. These two facts taken together suggest that: (1) Gentrification is a thorny issue that mayors struggle with (and are reluctant to take sides on), and (2) at the city level, views on these tradeoffs do not polarize along ideological lines.

City size and especially property values, on the other hand, are more strongly linked with mayoral responses to the gentrification question. Mayors of large cities are significantly more likely to agree with the statement than smaller city mayors. The most powerful (and statistically significant) differences emerge between wealthy and less wealthy cities,

with cities in the lower third of the property value distribution much more likely to agree with the gentrification tradeoff than their counterparts in wealthier cities. Mayors of cities with high property values thus appear more apt to combat gentrification, though it is worth highlighting that, even among this group, only 40% *disagree* with the tradeoff. Indeed, it is noteworthy that *none of our three cuts of the data*—mayoral partisanship, city size, and city wealth—produces a subset in which the majority of mayors disagrees with the gentrification tradeoff.

Figure 10: Mayoral Responses to Gentrification Tradeoff. "It is good for a neighborhood when it experiences rising property values, even if it means that some current residents might have to move out."

All Cities
Rising Property Values Tradeoffs

Rising property values are good for a neighborhood...

By City Size
Rising Property Values Tradeoffs

Rising property values are good for a neighborhood...

By Mayor's Party ID
Rising Property Values Tradeoffs

Rising property values are good for a neighborhood...

By Median Housing Value
Rising Property Values Tradeoffs

Rising property values are good for a neighborhood...

"Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" collapsed into "Agree" and "Disagree." Big cities have populations greater than 300,000. Partisanship based on self reported Party ID (irrespective of whether elections include labels) supplemented by Google searches where self reported not available on the survey. Median housing values are split by thirds of national distribution of cities over 45,000 based on median house price in 2012 (American Community Survey 2012 5-Year Estimates).

ISSUE: CLIMATE CHANGE

Mayors sharply divided along partisan lines on cities' role in fighting climate change.

The final policy tradeoff question focuses on climate change, and whether cities should be involved with addressing its effects. We ask whether respondents agree with the following statement: "Cities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or expending financial resources." **Figure 11** displays the results. As with income inequality, we again see a sharp (and statistically significant) partisan divide that mirrors national politics on environmental issues. Democratic mayors are especially unified on this issue as nearly all of them agree with the statement. Republican mayoral attitudes swing in the same direction as those of national politicians, and mirror increasing GOP internal divisions on climate change policy.[6] However, like the Democrats who oppose the income inequality tradeoff, fewer than half of Republican mayors disagree with the statement and 30% support the idea of cities addressing climate change. That is, almost one third believe that cities should actively address climate change, *even if it results in a loss of revenues or financial resources*. This number is likely higher than one we would obtain in a survey of national- level Republican elites. Big-city mayors are also significantly more likely to agree with the climate change statement than small-city mayors. Finally, city wealth is not associated with mayoral attitudes towards the climate change tradeoff.

Together, the tradeoff questions point to the importance and limits of partisanship in explaining mayoral preferences.

In concert, the responses to the three tradeoff questions suggest several interesting conclusions. First, a general comparison across the three policy tradeoffs reveals that mayors are more willing to take a stand, one way or another, on the tradeoffs inherent to climate change and income inequality policies than they are for gentrification. Gentrification, then, represents a particularly thorny and challenging issue for mayors.

Second, the partisan polarization that dominates national policy making appears to be relevant for local issues at least some of the time: both income inequality and climate change policy exhibit sharp partisan divides.[7] Importantly though, our results also suggest that the realities of governing cities may sometimes mute the pull of national parties.

"All installations of alternative energy and buildings, etc., occur in a local community. Cities should play a strong role in that."

—Small-city, Democratic mayor

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6. www.people-press.org/2013/11/01/gop-deeply-divided-over-climate-change

7. When interpreting these partisan divides, it is important to remember that for all three we explicitly framed the question in terms of cities. We did not ask the mayor's personal views on the issues more generally. For example, our questions allow for one who strongly believes that inequality or the environment is a problem (perhaps one for state or federal government) to say that *cities* should not make the hypothetical tradeoffs.

Figure 11: Cities' Role in Fighting Climate Change. "Cities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or expending financial resources."

All Cities
Climate Change Tradeoffs

By City Size
Climate Change Tradeoffs

By Mayor's Party ID
Climate Change Tradeoffs

By Median Housing Value
Climate Change Tradeoffs

"Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" collapsed into "Agree" and "Disagree." Big cities have populations greater than 300,000. Partisanship based on self reported Party ID (irrespective of whether elections include labels) supplemented by Google searches where self reported not available on the survey. Median housing values are split by thirds of national distribution of cities over 45,000 based on median house price in 2012 (American Community Survey 2012 5-Year Estimates).

INFLUENCES

Staff, unofficial advisors, and other cities are mayors' top three information sources.

We turn our focus now away from mayoral policy priorities and preferences to understanding how they acquire relevant policy information. We asked mayors how often they rely on various sources of policy information, with our results displayed in **Figure 12**. Interestingly, results are remarkably similar across city size, partisanship, and wealth. (The full set of figures showing the similarity across traits is in the **Appendix (Figure A1)**.) Mayors consistently list their mayoral staff as a frequent source of policy information. Other cities and mayors, unofficial advisors, and business leaders are also frequently cited as information sources. The fact that informal advisors and other cities' mayors top the list alongside a mayor's own staff suggests that many mayors rely on a "kitchen cabinet" approach in which they combine their formal resources with a network of trusted advisors. On the other end of the spectrum, mayors appear relatively unlikely to consult the media, labor groups, and state and federal officials to obtain advice on policy matters. As the four figures show, the ratings of information sources are remarkably consistent across contexts. Despite some obvious differences between cities, mayors rely on similar sources of information.

Mayors look to a wide variety of other cities for policy ideas.

"Other Cities and Mayors" was the second most popular category in the policy information sources rankings and we collected additional data concerning these issues. In particular, we can address (1) which other cities mayors look to for ideas, and (2) what ideas mayors have recently adopted from other cities. We asked the mayors "Which three cities (either domestic or foreign) do you most often look to for policy and/or management ideas?"

Figure 13 depicts the percent of mayors who provided lists that mentioned each city (mayors listed three different cities). Two key trends emerge from this graph. First, mayors look to some cities more than others. In particular, cities like New York, Boston, Austin, Portland (Oregon), Philadelphia, and Denver stand out as the most cited.[8] Second, while cities are not cited equally, there are no dominant national influencer cities that everyone looks to first. Indeed, the mayors' elaborations on these questions highlight the fact that they will look anywhere for good ideas and *where* they look depends a lot on the issue. The most referenced cities are mentioned by 28% of mayors. That is, the most common answers make only 28% of mayors' top three lists. 40% of mayors mention a city that only they name.

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8. While our sample demographics suggest little reason for concerns over sampling bias, these questions are one place in which it could show up. In particular, we cannot discount the possibility that the number of "Boston" responses is inflated. Some mayors may have participated because they held favorable views of Boston and/or Mayor Menino which could marginally inflate the number of mentions of looking to Boston for ideas. Alternatively, they could have simply had Boston on their minds when responding to the survey which could also affect the data via a priming effect.

Figure 12: Mayoral Sources of Policy Information. "In general, how often do you rely on the following sources of policy information?"

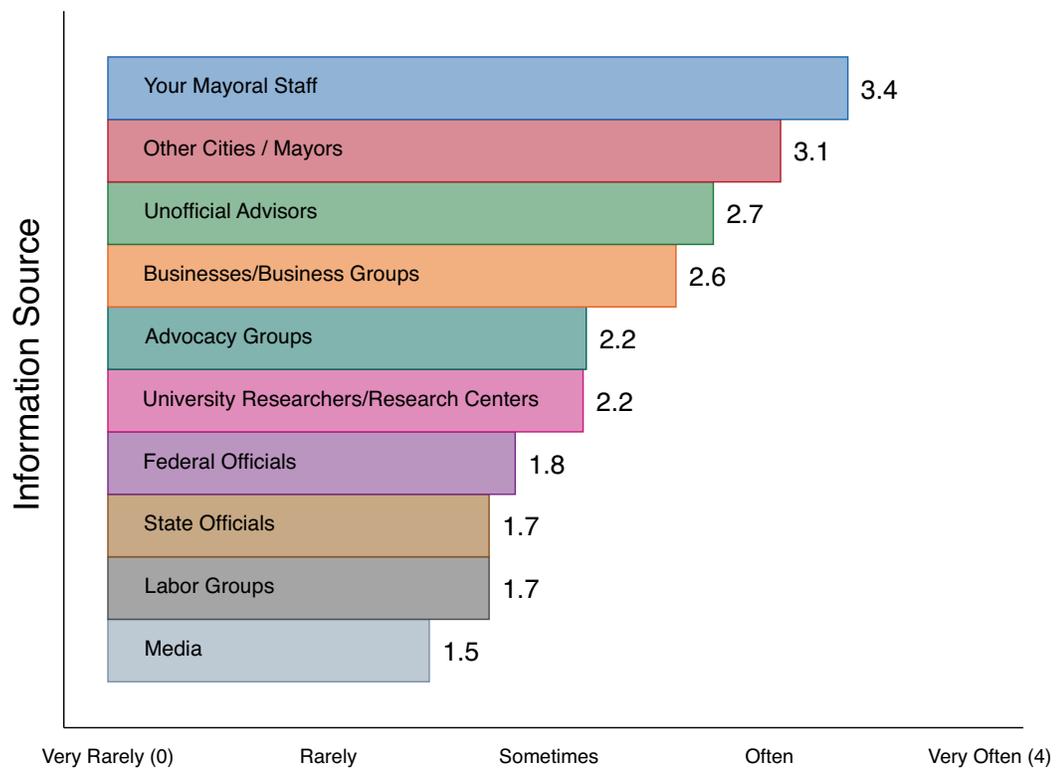## Average Frequency of Reliance on Information Sources

Information Source	Value
Your Mayoral Staff	3.4
Other Cities / Mayors	3.1
Unofficial Advisors	2.7
Businesses/Business Groups	2.6
Advocacy Groups	2.2
University Researchers/Research Centers	2.2
Federal Officials	1.8
State Officials	1.7
Labor Groups	1.7
Media	1.5

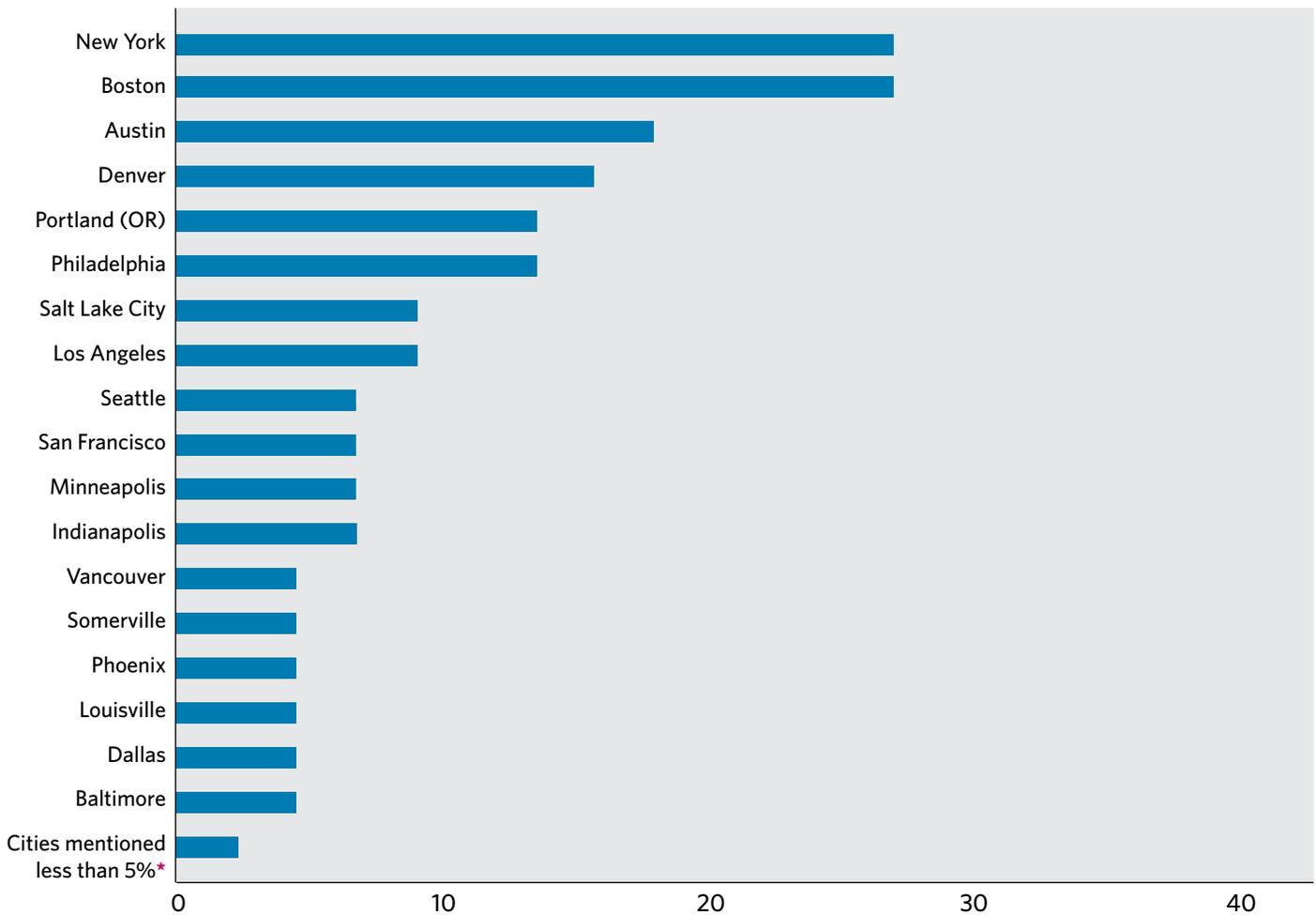Very Rarely (0) — Rarely — Sometimes — Often — Very Often (4)

Figure 13: Cities Mayors Look To for Policy Ideas. "Which three cities (either domestic or foreign) do you most often look to for policy and/or management ideas?"

Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City As a Source of Policy Ideas

Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.

*Woodbridge, Weston, Wausau, Washington, Tyler, Tulsa, Tucson, Tempe, Syracuse, Sterling Heights, St. Paul, Scottsdale, Savannah, Santa Fe, Sandy, Sacramento, Raleigh, Portland (ME), Pittsburgh, Oshkosh, Oklahoma City, Oakland, Northampton, Nashville, Naperville, Medford, Madison, Lake in the Hills, Kokomo, Kettering, Ketchikan, Kansas City, Jersey City, Jacksonville, Houston, Greenville, Glendale, Germantown, Galena, Farmington Hills, Durham, Dublin, Dayton, Columbus, Charlotte, Centerville, Carmel, Atlanta, Asheville, Arlington, Anchorage

The figure is adjusted to represent the proportion of mayors who cite each city. For example, New York does not receive 28% of all of the mentions (each mayor was able to list up to three cities). It is cited once by 28% of the mayors.

City traits affect which other cities mayors look to for policy ideas.

Figures 14 (A, B, C) illustrate that the cities mayors look to vary enormously by city size, mayoral partisanship, and city wealth. New York and Denver top the big city mayors' list. Each is mentioned by more than one third of large-city leaders. While New York also appears near the top of the small cities list, it is joined there by Boston, Austin, and Portland (OR). While those three cities are certainly cited by the big-city mayors, they are much more popular sources of ideas for smaller cities. Moreover, small-city mayors in particular look to a wide range of cities large and small, while the big-city mayors largely list other big cities.

Among Democratic mayors, New York and Boston compose a clear top tier; nearly 40% of Democrats mention each of these cities. On the other hand, New York and Boston virtually disappear from the Republicans' list. Interestingly, Republican mayors' top two most cited cities are Austin and Portland (OR), suggesting that Republican mayors do not simply look to other right-leaning cities.

Splitting the data by city wealth reveals a similar pattern. New York and Boston, well known for their high real estate prices, top the lists from mayors whose cities have higher housing values. On the other hand, these cities once again disappear from the top of the list of the lower wealth cities. They are replaced by Austin, Indianapolis, and Dallas. These differences at least suggest that mayors take policy context into account when deciding which other cities to look at. As with our other data cuts, they also show that there are no cities that are broadly and disproportionately influential on mayors' policy ideas.

Mayors adopt a wide range of (mostly) lower profile policies from other cities.

To follow up our question on influential cities, we asked mayors to describe one recent instance in which they adopted a policy idea from another city. This question provides insight into which policies and types of policies are spreading from city to city. Mayors, it turns out, use ideas from other cities for an extraordinarily varied array of policies. We collected approximately 45 responses to this question, comprising at least 35 different policies and policy areas. Only bicycling policies, out-of-school programs, and rooftop parks and gardens are mentioned more than once (twice each). The enormous range of policies that mayors have borrowed from other cities includes the following: open-carry laws, same-sex couple benefits, affordable housing, criminal recidivism programs, bus rapid transit, installing traffic circles, and music festivals. In short, nearly all mayors say they frequently adopt policy ideas from other cities, and aggregating their responses shows that they borrow a wide range of ideas from other cities. Moreover, while some of these ideas concern major hot-button issues, many are more mundane, small scale, and pragmatic. To provide a better sense of the range of issues, we include the full list we collected (edited to protect anonymity and for concision) in **Figure 15**.

"I really look to all cities. If something is going well somewhere, that's important."

—Mid-sized-city mayor

Figure 14A: Cities Mayors Look To for Policy Ideas. "Which three cities (either domestic or foreign) do you most often look to for policy and/or management ideas?"

Large Cities

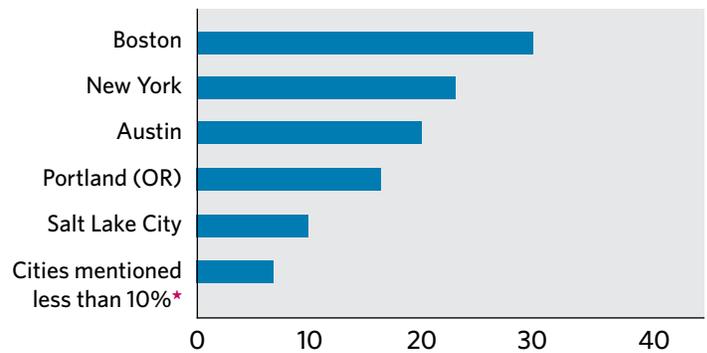Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City as a Source of Policy Ideas: Lists from Big-City Mayors
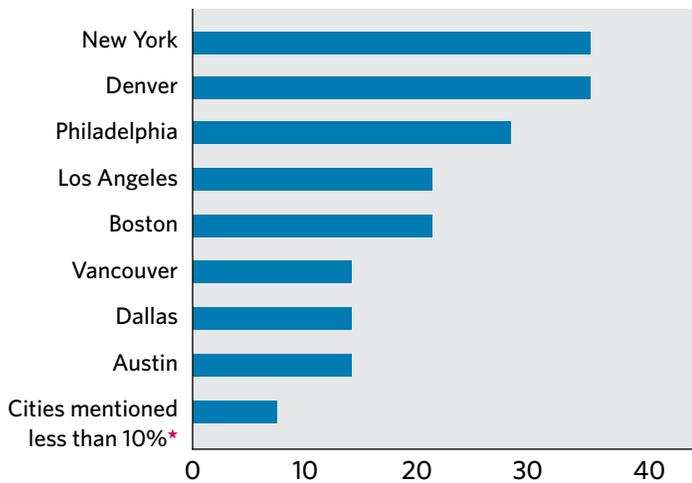
Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.

*Tulsa, Tucson, Tempe, Seattle, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Portland (OR), Phoenix, Oklahoma City, Nashville, Minneapolis, Louisville, Indianapolis, Houston, Dublin, Charlotte

Small Cities

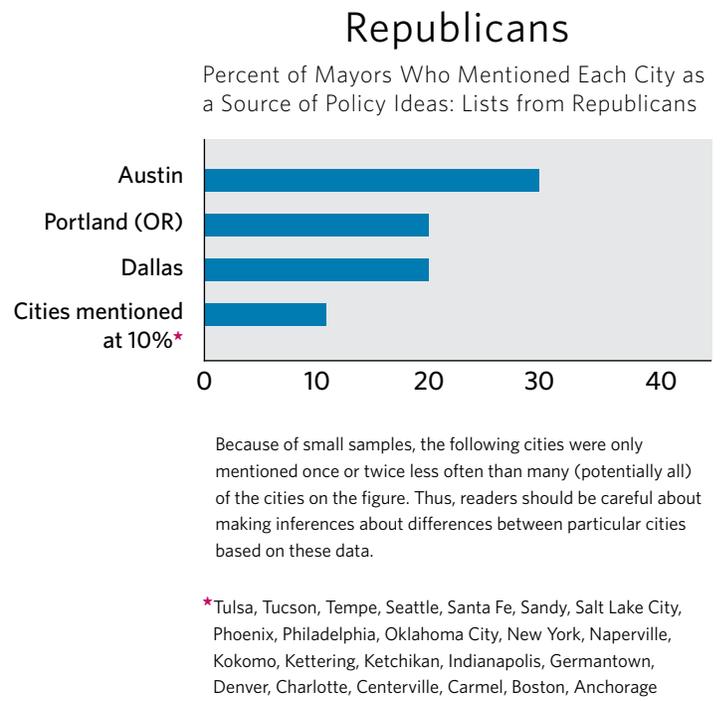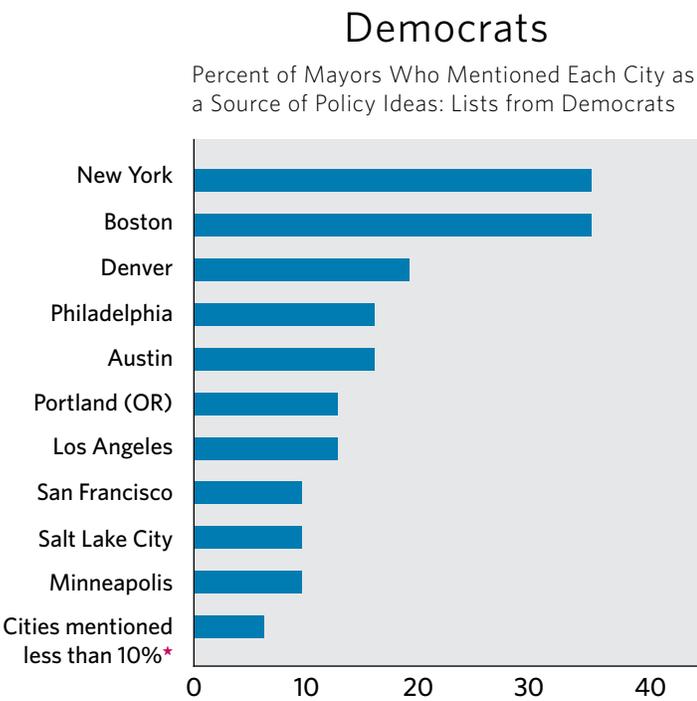Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City as a Source of Policy Ideas: Lists from Smaller-City Mayors

Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.

*Somerville, Seattle, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Denver, Baltimore, Woodbridge, Weston, Wausau, Washington, Tyler, Syracuse, Sterling Heights, St. Paul, Scottsdale, Savannah, Santa Fe, Sandy, Sacramento, Raleigh, Portland (ME), Pittsburgh, Phoenix, Oshkosh, Oakland, Northampton, Naperville, Medford, Madison, Louisville, Los Angeles, Lake in the Hills, Kokomo, Kettering, Ketchikan, Kansas City, Jersey City, Jacksonville, Greenville, Glendale, Germantown, Galena, Farmington Hills, Durham, Dayton, Columbus, Centerville, Carmel, Atlanta, Asheville, Arlington, Anchorage

The figure is adjusted to represent the proportion of mayors who cite each city. For example, New York does not receive 28% of all the mentions (each mayor was able to list up to three cities). It is cited once by 28% of the mayors. Large cities have populations greater than 300,000. Wealth based on whether cities fall in the top 1/3 or bottom 1/3 of the national distribution of municipal median house prices (based on cities over 45,000 people) in 2012 (2012 ACS 5-Year Estimates).

Figure 14B: Cities Mayors Look To for Policy Ideas. "Which three cities (either domestic or foreign) do you most often look to for policy and/or management ideas?"

Democrats

Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City as a Source of Policy Ideas: Lists from Democrats

Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.
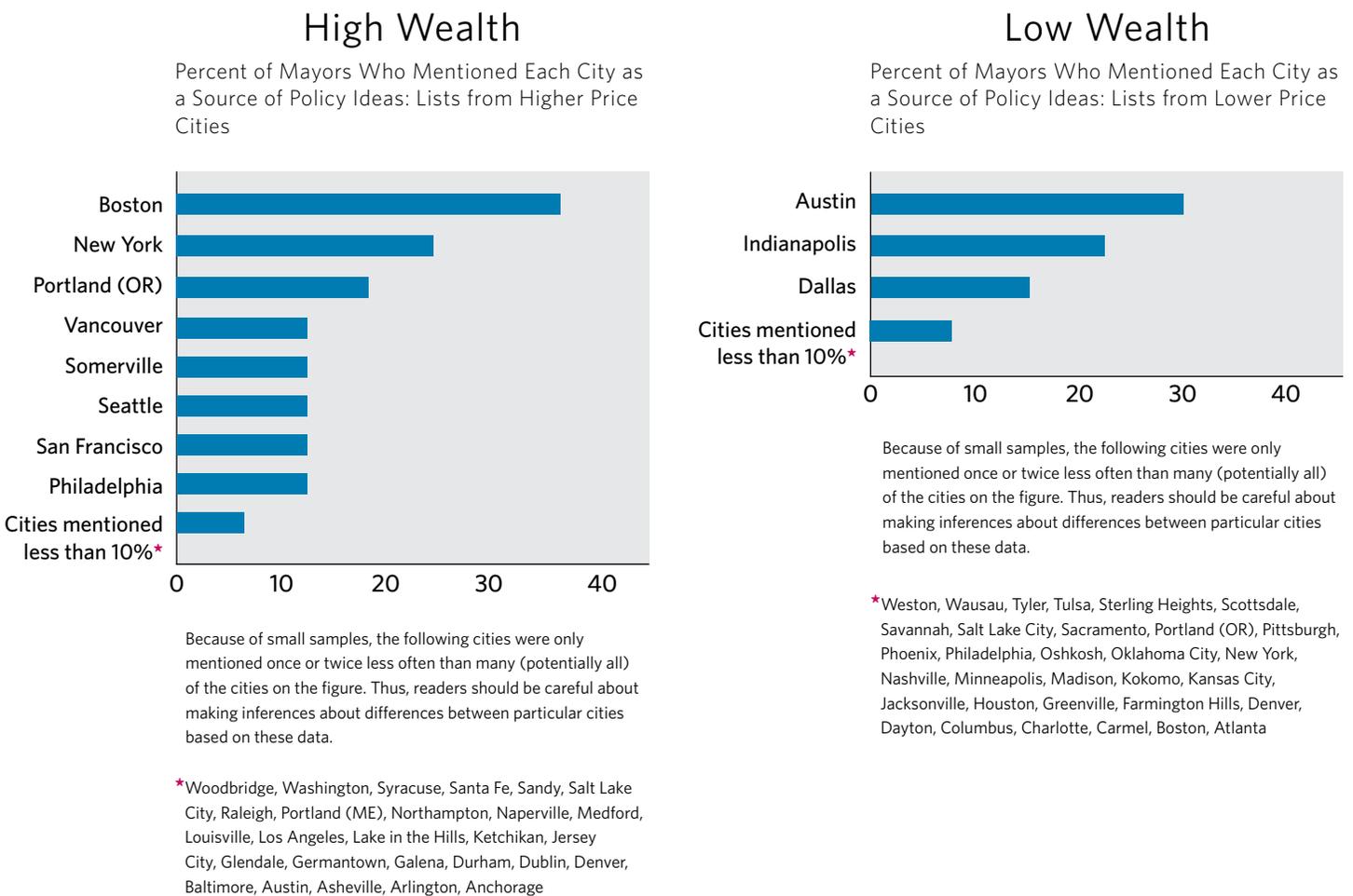
*Vancouver, Somerville, Seattle, Louisville, Indianapolis, Baltimore, Woodbridge, Wausau, Washington, Syracuse, St. Paul, Scottsdale, Sacramento, Raleigh, Portland (ME), Pittsburgh, Phoenix, Oshkosh, Oakland, Northampton, Nashville, Medford, Madison, Lake in the Hills, Jersey City, Houston, Glendale, Galena, Durham, Dublin, Dayton, Asheville, Arlington

Republicans

Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City as a Source of Policy Ideas: Lists from Republicans

Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.

*Tulsa, Tucson, Tempe, Seattle, Santa Fe, Sandy, Salt Lake City, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Oklahoma City, New York, Naperville, Kokomo, Kettering, Ketchikan, Indianapolis, Germantown, Denver, Charlotte, Centerville, Carmel, Boston, Anchorage

Table continued on next page.

The figure is adjusted to represent the proportion of mayors who cite each city. For example, New York does not receive 28% of all the mentions (each mayor was able to list up to three cities). It is cited once by 28% of the mayors. Large cities have populations greater than 300,000. Wealth based on whether cities fall in the top 1/3 or bottom 1/3 of the national distribution of municipal median house prices (based on cities over 45,000 people) in 2012 (2012 ACS 5-Year Estimates).

Figure 14C: Cities Mayors Look To for Policy Ideas. "Which three cities (either domestic or foreign) do you most often look to for policy and/or management ideas?"

High Wealth

Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City as a Source of Policy Ideas: Lists from Higher Price Cities

Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.

*Woodbridge, Washington, Syracuse, Santa Fe, Sandy, Salt Lake City, Raleigh, Portland (ME), Northampton, Naperville, Medford, Louisville, Los Angeles, Lake in the Hills, Ketchikan, Jersey City, Glendale, Germantown, Galena, Durham, Dublin, Denver, Baltimore, Austin, Asheville, Arlington, Anchorage

Low Wealth

Percent of Mayors Who Mentioned Each City as a Source of Policy Ideas: Lists from Lower Price Cities

Because of small samples, the following cities were only mentioned once or twice less often than many (potentially all) of the cities on the figure. Thus, readers should be careful about making inferences about differences between particular cities based on these data.

*Weston, Wausau, Tyler, Tulsa, Sterling Heights, Scottsdale, Savannah, Salt Lake City, Sacramento, Portland (OR), Pittsburgh, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Oshkosh, Oklahoma City, New York, Nashville, Minneapolis, Madison, Kokomo, Kansas City, Jacksonville, Houston, Greenville, Farmington Hills, Denver, Dayton, Columbus, Charlotte, Carmel, Boston, Atlanta

The figure is adjusted to represent the proportion of mayors who cite each city. For example, New York does not receive 28% of all the mentions (each mayor was able to list up to three cities). It is cited once by 28% of the mayors. Large cities have populations greater than 300,000. Wealth based on whether cities fall in the top 1/3 or bottom 1/3 of the national distribution of municipal median house prices (based on cities over 45,000 people) in 2012 (2012 ACS 5-Year Estimates).

Figure 15: List of Policy Ideas Mayors Adopted from Other Cities. "What is the most recent idea you have learned about from another city (domestic or foreign) and then brought to your own?"

Policies that mayors have recently borrowed from other cities

311-customer service	Green roofs
Affordable housing	Gun summit
Annual music festival, like South by Southwest	How to better use the internet
Anti discrimination ordinance	Improving communication with public
Banning open-carry law	"Let's Move" ideas/physical activity
Bicycle facilities	New cities summit
Bike share	New-business acceleration team
Bus rapid transit	No kill animal shelter
Community gardens	Out of school time programs
Community service initiative	Outside of school programs (mentioned twice)
Complete "green" streets	Peak performance (use of statistics)
Conversion to LED light	Permanent supportive housing for chronic homelessness
Converting village vehicles to recycled fuels	Prison reentry program
Creating an entrepreneurial incubator space	Program aimed at returning felons to workplace
Cycling events—closing roads to cars	Reading challenge for kids
Data driven decision making	Redoing intersections
Different faith invocations at city council meetings	Regional mayors meeting
Domestic partnership health care benefits	Rental registration
Electric power	Reverse 911 communication capability
Elevated parks and green space	Special lighting for iconic structures and infrastructure
Energy: LED lighting, energy efficiency, solar panel programs	Training public housing residents to become self sufficient
Entertainment and sports complex	Transportation balance, especially around bicycling and bikeways
Fish farming	Urban university campus development
Graffiti abatement program	Youth summer jobs program

Responses are shortened and edited to protect anonymity and for concision.

RELATIONSHIPS

Mayors say they are best able to cooperate with business community and other cities. Their least cooperative relationships are with higher levels of government.

In our final analysis section, we turn to perhaps the most important component of policy implementation: relationships with other governmental and non-governmental entities. Indeed, one of the central governance challenges mayors face is getting various agencies and interest groups—many of which have overlapping authority and competing interests—to cooperate. Uncooperative relationships could represent a significant obstacle to promulgating the policies cited as mayoral priorities.

To assess how mayors view their relationships with other entities, we asked them to rate the quality of their relationships with a variety of different groups on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 representing highly cooperative and 0 uncooperative. We explore a variety of different groups, ranging from federal government agencies to a city's business community. **Figure 16** shows our results.

Mayors (on average) view all of their relationships as at least reasonably cooperative—though some mayors did give some very low scores to some of the prompts. The responses to these questions show that our demographic variables have almost no association with mayors' views on these relationships. (The full set of figures illustrating this similarity is in the **Appendix (Figure A2)**.) All types of mayors tend to view their relationships with their cities' business communities most positively and the rest of the lists vary little with independent variables. Given the general mayoral focus on economic development and growth, it is unsurprising that mayors would cultivate and maintain close ties with their cities' economic bases. In addition, mayors largely view their relationships with neighboring cities positively. Perhaps most surprisingly given Congress's generally dismal public reputation, mayors also rate their congressional delegation in Washington relatively highly.

Mayors are relatively less sanguine on their ability to cooperate with federal government agencies and state government. Mayors of all types on average placed these institutions at the bottom of the lists.

"I'm proud of establishing a way to work with business and labor. That's a reflection of my style—consensus and collaboration."

—West Coast mayor

"If we wait for the legislature, we're going to be waiting forever."

—Southwestern mayor

Figure 16: Ability to Cooperate. "Please rate the quality of your city's relationship with the following entities, with 10 being 'cooperative and able to work together on important policies' and 0 being 'uncooperative and unable to work together on important policies.'"

Ability to Cooperate With Other Institutions All Cities
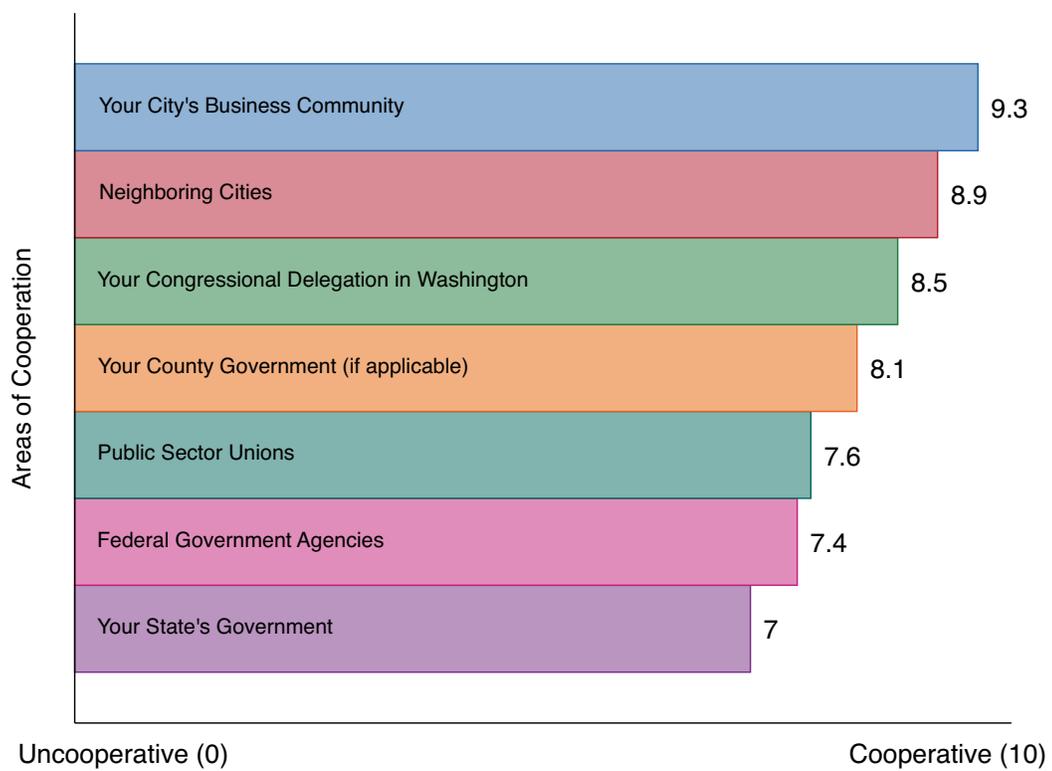
CONCLUSION

Our results reveal both striking similarities and variations across mayoral preferences. Perhaps most surprising is the extent to which mayors of cities big and small, wealthy and struggling, converge on a large number of policy preferences and priorities. Mayors broadly share perceptions of the challenges facing their cities and what policies they would like to use to address these issues. While cities vary, answers across most questions were similar enough that one would have a hard time determining what type of city a set of answers to our survey questions came from.

That said, there are important differences between mayors. Most starkly, the responses of Democratic and Republican mayors differ across a wide array of questions. Indeed, partisanship represents the most consistent divider of mayoral preferences. While this result would hardly surprise anyone aware of the partisan rancor in Washington, it is likely surprising to many in the realm of local politics, which scholars and local politicians have largely claimed is non-partisan. While partisanship is certainly not associated with variations in all responses—answers to the gentrification tradeoff question for example, were split by wealth, not party identification—its predictive power across a wide array of questions is impressive. Indeed, partisanship is associated with the way that mayors think about their policy priorities, political capital expenditures, tradeoffs associated with income inequality and climate change, and the cities they look to for policy ideas. In short, much of a mayor's agenda appears to be strongly linked with his or her partisan identification. This finding preliminarily suggests that local issues (or, at least, many of them) are becoming cleaved along the same lines as national politics and/or that municipalities are taking on issues that were formerly national.

City wealth and size were both also, at times, associated with mayoral preferences, though the links are less consistent and clear cut than for partisanship. Nonetheless, these two city traits appear to, at least some of the time, potentially constrain and shape mayoral thinking on the important issues facing their cities.

More broadly, mayors seem to have a nuanced sense of the challenges facing their cities and the policies they might use to address these issues. They cite a wide variety of challenges and priorities, and they carefully consider (and struggle with) the tradeoffs that come with implementing many of these initiatives. Moreover, mayors use a wide variety of sources of policy information and are cooperative with a broad array of governmental and non-governmental entities—though for both policy information and cooperation, some institutions and groups are more likely to be mayoral partners than others. In particular, on both questions, state and federal officials ranked towards the bottom of mayors' lists, suggesting that the American public is not the only group frustrated with the functioning of higher levels of government.

Finally, mayors look to a striking array of other cities when searching for policy ideas. Mayors are not simply parroting the ideas of the largest and most famous cities. Moreover, the cities they look to vary enormously by city and mayoral traits, with Democratic and Republican mayors, and mayors of cities big and small, expensive and inexpensive, exhibiting striking differences in their city lists.

These findings have broad and important implications for understanding and reporting on mayoral policy making. Most strikingly, there are important similarities between cities. An exclusive focus on, say, the mayor of San Francisco, might miss the fact that the mayor of another, less nationally prominent city shares many of the same concerns, priorities, and policy attitudes.

Analogously, an over-emphasis on San Francisco (and other prominent cities) would fail to take into account the salient differences in the types of policies cities tackle and places from which they obtain policy ideas. Indeed, cities that are less wealthy, more Republican, and smaller differ sharply on at least some of these metrics from the large coastal cities with high property values that seem to garner the most attention. In short, to understand both the similarity and diversity among American cities, we need to look beyond a few obvious city case studies and use broad-based national samples—as in this survey—to draw more systematic conclusions about the way urban governments operate.

APPENDIX.

Figure A1: Mayoral Sources of Policy Information by City Traits: "In general, how often do you rely on the following sources of policy information?"
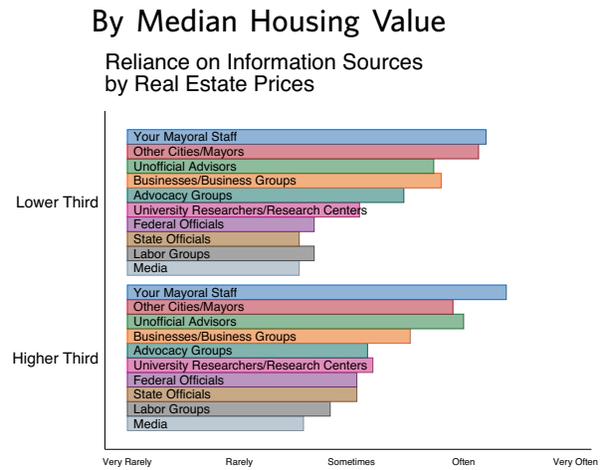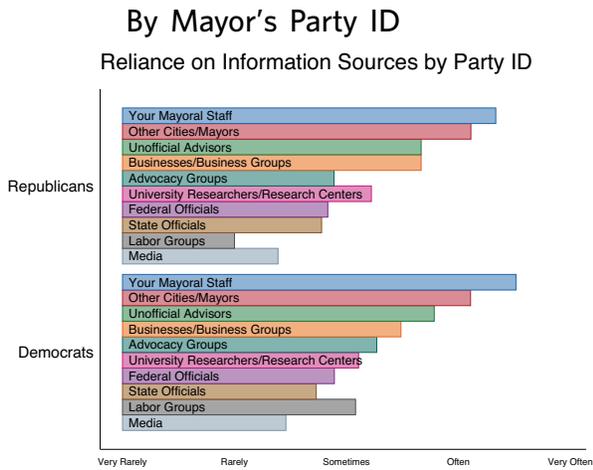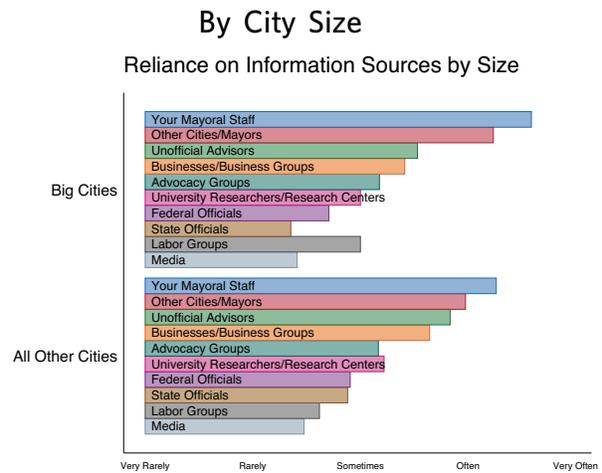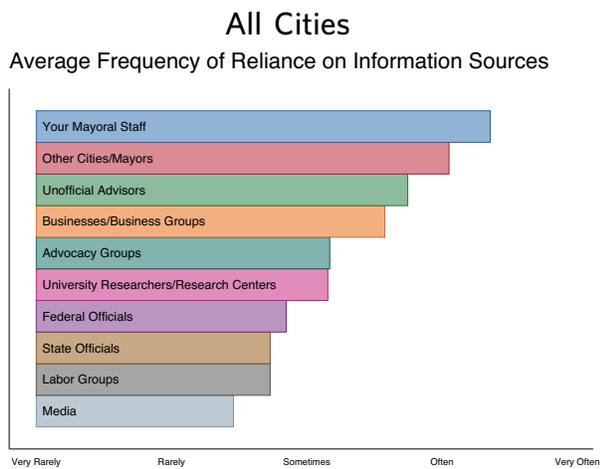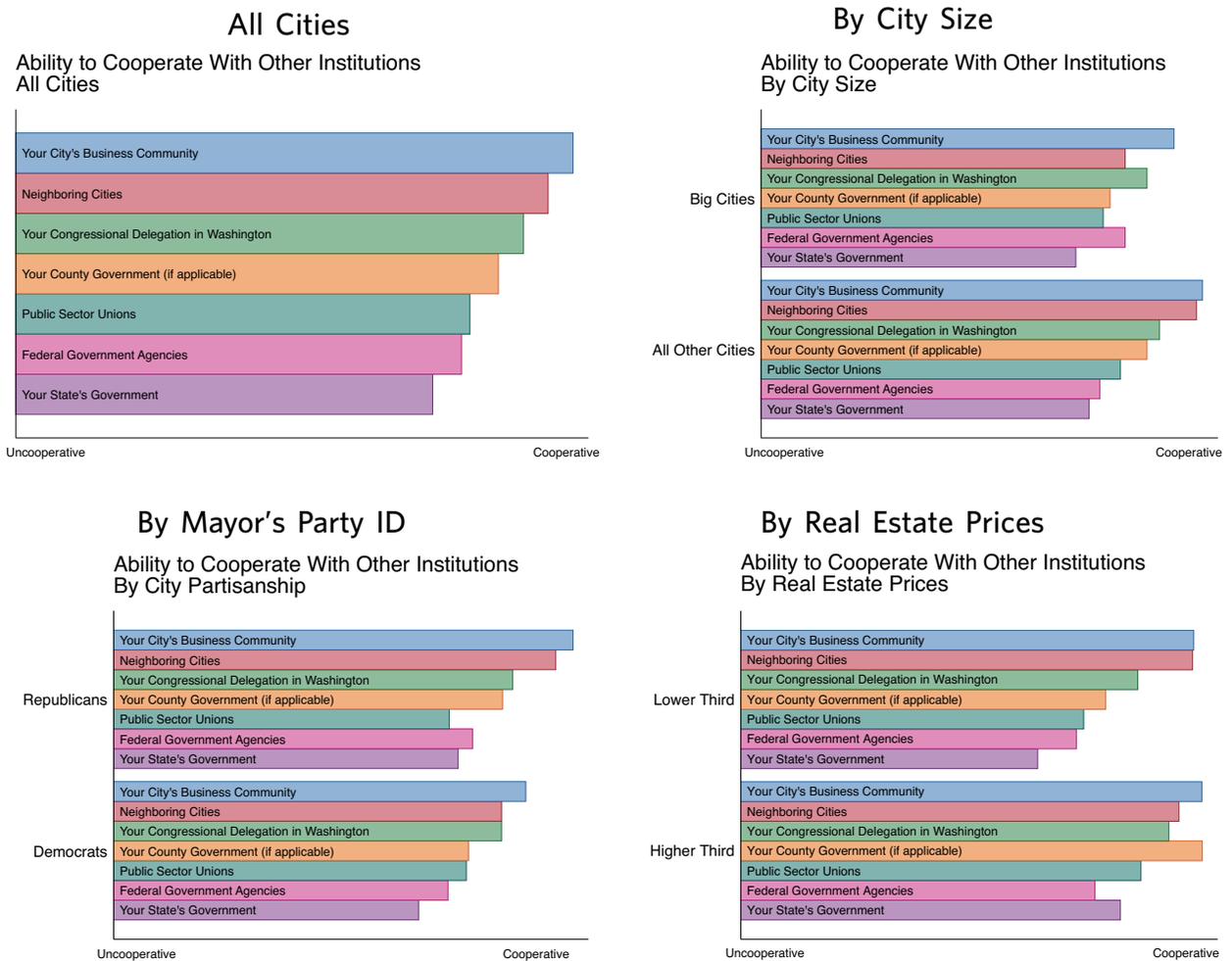
Figure A2: Cooperative Relationships by Traits: "Please rate the quality of your city's relationship with the following entities, with 10 being 'cooperative and able to work together on important policies' and 0 being 'uncooperative and unable to work together on important policies.'"

All Cities

Ability to Cooperate With Other Institutions
All Cities

By City Size

Ability to Cooperate With Other Institutions
By City Size

By Mayor's Party ID

Ability to Cooperate With Other Institutions
By City Partisanship

By Real Estate Prices

Ability to Cooperate With Other Institutions
By Real Estate Prices

Results displayed without 0-10 numerical scale

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