

# MAYORS AS MANAGERS. ASSESSING THE ROLE OF LOCAL LEADERS IN THE U.S.\*

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## Abstract

How do local officials approach the task of managing their city governments? And do the managerial abilities of local leaders matter for cities and their residents? We answer these questions using an original phone survey of U.S. local executive leaders – both mayors and city managers – in 9 states (California, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Washington, Florida, New York, and Indiana). We collect data on leaders’ managerial practices, as well as on a host of additional individual characteristics. Using a difference-in-differences design, we study how a variety of city outcomes evolve after cities elect or appoint leaders with more or less managerial competence. Data collection is ongoing. Here we describe the survey instrument, present a descriptive summary of the data obtained so far, and outline the future empirical strategy.

## 1 Introduction

In the U.S., nearly 20,000 municipal governments employ millions of public employees and raise over half a trillion dollars in revenue to provide essential public services. City leaders also make critical policy decisions in the areas of education, policing, environmental sustainability, affordable housing, and public health. How do local officials approach the task of

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managing their city governments? And do the managerial abilities of local leaders matter for cities and their residents?

These questions are at the heart of a longstanding debate about whether the characteristics of city officeholders matter for local government decisions. While classic work in this area suggests that cities are constrained in their ability to implement policy (e.g. [Tiebout 1956](#); [Peterson 1981](#)), more recent research finds that factors like partisanship influence how city leaders approach their task of governing ([Gerber and Hopkins 2011](#); [Einstein and Kogan 2016](#); [De Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016](#)). But despite these advances, we know little about whether and how the managerial styles of local leaders impact the performance of city government.

At the same time, the economics literature has made strides in identifying the characteristics of effective leaders when it comes to managing firms. In one canonical study, [Bloom and Van Reenen \(2007\)](#) evaluated managers' managerial practices and found that these strongly predicted corporate productivity, profitability and survival rates. Can similar dimensions of managerial competence be identified for local officials and linked to the performance of city government?

We design and carry out an original phone survey of two types of local executive leaders, mayors and city managers, to measure their managerial practices. We then link the results of the survey to a variety of city-level fiscal and demographic data to compare outcomes in municipalities with officials that receive higher and lower managerial effectiveness scores. Our analysis relies on a difference-in-differences design where we compare outcomes in cities before and after they elect or appoint officials who utilize more (or less) effective management practices. As explained below, this design relies on a series of assumptions, one of which hinges on the correlation between the management practices of a local leader and of her predecessor. Therefore, whenever possible, we also interviewed the former mayor or manager in order to examine how managerial practices evolve in the same city over time.

## 2 Do Local Leaders Matter? Theoretical Perspectives

The question of whether and how the actions of individual leaders matter for government outcomes has received surprisingly little attention in the empirical social science literature. Causally identifying leadership effects is challenging, and in recent decades both political scientists and economists have tended to focus more on the impact of institutions rather than individual politicians (e.g. North 1990; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2005). But a growing body of work motivated by Jones and Olken (2005) has demonstrated that political leaders can also influence economic growth patterns, at least at the national level (Besley, Montalvo, and Reynal-Querol 2011; Yao and Zhang 2015; Easterly and Pennings 2018; Berry and Fowler 2018).

At the same time, there are reasons to believe that individual leaders might matter less at the local level. Cities are constrained both by the state environments in which they operate and the pressures of Tiebout (1956) competition, which can lead local politicians to uniformly pursue economic development above all else (Peterson 1981). Sure enough, the empirical literature assessing the policy impact of individual leaders is decidedly more mixed at the local level than at the national level. While there is some evidence that mayoral partisan affiliation matters for certain types of fiscal policy (Gerber and Hopkins 2011; Einstein and Kogan 2016; De Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016), other work finds no differences across mayors of different races or genders (Pelissero, Holian, and Tomaka 2000; Hopkins and McCabe 2012; Ferreira and Gyourko 2014). More recently, Kirkland (2018) finds that mayors with a business background tend to prioritize different spending areas than those coming from non-business occupations, although Berry and Fowler (2018) find little evidence that individual mayors matter for local economic outcomes.

But one of the open questions at both the national and local level is *why* different leaders sometimes produce different outcomes. Here, the managerial economics literature offers insight, as researchers have made strides in documenting that managers matter when it comes to predicting corporate performance (Bertrand and Schoar 2003; Bloom and Van Reenen

2007; Bloom et al. 2015). In particular, Bloom and Van Reenen (2007) show that management practices correlate with firm-level productivity, profitability, and survival. Can effective managerial practices also be applied successfully when it comes to managing local government?

### 3 Institutional Background and Case Selection

Two main forms of government prevail across U.S. cities: mayor-council systems and council-manager systems. The most notable difference between these two forms of government lies in who holds executive power. In mayor-council systems, mayors are elected as heads of their city councils and maintain significant budgetary and administrative authority. In council-manager systems, the city council appoints a full-time city manager to serve as the government's chief administrator. The city manager has full responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the local government, and she has the authority to hire and fire local government staff, recommend policy to the council, and prepare the budget. The average city manager spends 5-7 years in her position (Ammons and Bosse 2005). Mayoral term lengths are typically 4 years, but the length of tenure varies dramatically across cities. Term limits are uncommon, with only 9% of cities employing mayoral term limits.<sup>1</sup>

We contacted the universe of cities above 5,000 residents (as measured by the 2012 census) in California, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Washington, Florida, New York, and Indiana.<sup>2</sup> There are 880 cities above this population threshold in these states (213 in California, 62 in Louisiana, 137 in Minnesota, 132 in North Carolina, 224 in Ohio, 112 in Washington, 214 in Florida, 117 in Indiana, and 60 in New York). We picked 5,000 residents as our population threshold because below this size the responsibilities and scope of municipal government falls dramatically.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.nlc.org/mayors-term>

<sup>2</sup>These nine states were chosen for considerations of budget data availability, number of municipalities, geographic diversity, and form of government (i.e. to obtain a mix of mayor-council and council-manager cities).

In mayor-council systems we interview the mayor, while in council-manager systems we interview the city manager. We generally interview the current mayor or manager, unless that person assumed office in 2017 or later. In these cases, we interview the former mayor or manager, because we generally do not have outcome data past 2017. After conducting an interview, we always try to contact the interviewee’s predecessor in order to obtain within-city measures of managerial effectiveness over time.

Our city-level outcome data include city population data, median housing values, and budgetary data. We also use this data to compare cities whose executive agreed to participate in the study with cities whose executive declined to participate or did not respond, in order to discuss external validity based on these results. Table 1 shows that the cities represented in our sample tend to be smaller, whiter, and wealthier than other cities in the nine state in our sample. We plan to conduct additional balance tests once the remainder of the data are collected.

Table 1: Interviewed vs. Non-Interviewed Cities - Balance

	Declined Interview	Accepted Interview	Difference	S.E. of Difference
Population (thousands)	59.85	37.31	22.54	27.85
Median Home Value (thousands of \$)	224.55	262.77	-38.22	15.55*
Percentage Black	10.74	8.60	2.13	1.14*
Percentage Unemployed	27.85	28.01	-.158	.285
Median Income (thousands of \$)	53.88	59.33	-5.45	2.03*
Total Revenues (thousands of \$)	72,529.13	74,093.34	-1,564.21	14,846.29
Total Expenditures (thousands of \$)	70,247.93	69,702.18	545.75	14,331.34
Observations	388	237	625	

*Notes:* \* is significant at the 5 percent level.

## 4 Measuring Managerial Effectiveness

The core of the survey is designed to measure the extent to which local executive leaders use the management practices associated with successful organizational performance. The survey methodology is inspired by Bloom and Van Reenen (2007)’s study of management approaches in firms, which has been applied to the context of Italian local governments by Carreri (2019).<sup>3</sup>

Bloom and Van Reenen (2007)’s survey focuses on a set of four practices in the management of firms: target setting, performance monitoring, operations and incentives. This set of practices should be similarly important for effectively managing local government: a good local leader needs to clearly set her goals, constantly monitor the performance of the government in attaining these objectives, be knowledgeable of the daily operations of the government, and successfully administer the bureaucracy. In the following sections, we describe the measure of managerial effectiveness, how the survey methodology is designed to obtain an unbiased measure of managerial competence, and the steps that we take to maximize the response rate.

### 4.1 Scoring Interviews

The main goal of the survey is to obtain an outcome-agnostic measure of the managerial competence of respondents (mayors or city managers). This is achieved by posing questions that do not focus on the “output” of the leaders but rather deal with the practices involved in producing said output. Managerial effectiveness is evaluated along the four dimensions (*target setting, performance monitoring, incentives, operations*), with a total of seven questions. The full survey questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

The target setting section of the survey deals with the goals that the mayor/manager has set for her time in office. Respondents are evaluated not on the content of their goals (whether

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<sup>3</sup>Surveys that build on Bloom and Van Reenen (2007) have also been successfully used to evaluate the management practices of bureaucrats (Rasul and Rogger 2018; Rasul, Rogger, and Williams 2017) and school principals (Bloom et al. 2015; Di Liberto, Schivardi, and Sulis 2015).

that be increasing tourism, a redevelopment project, etc.) but rather on the clarity of those objectives. For example, are the goals clearly stated with associated practical targets? Do the leaders identify a mix of short and long-term goals with appropriate time horizons? Are these goals communicated to other members of the city staff, with specific subtasks delegated when appropriate? The monitoring section deals with tracking the performance of the government in attaining its goals. In particular it asks whether the progress tracking is informed by data, how often this monitoring takes place, and how the monitoring practice involves different levels or people within the city government.

The operations section investigates the respondent's knowledge and oversight over the procurement procedures of her city (one of the most important and time consuming operations for municipal governments) and the efficiency in their implementation. Finally, the incentives section deals with assessing how well the mayor/city manager incentivizes the municipal bureaucracy, specifically by rewarding top performers and addressing or rectifying poor performance among the staff.

Each answer is evaluated in real time by the interviewer who assigns a score for each question ranging from one to five. The interviewer assigns the score based on a rubric containing the criteria that the respondent's answer has to satisfy in order to obtain each score. The unweighted average across all individual scores assigned to each leader will be used as the measure of the mayor or city manager's overall managerial effectiveness.

All respondents are also evaluated in terms of their oversight of anti-corruption measures in their city and are asked the standard questions associated with the Perry public sector motivation index. Interviewers also collect data on the respondents' age, birthplace, educational attainment, previous occupation, years of experience as mayor/city manager, and ideological leaning. The survey for mayors contains an additional question on the mayor's political aspirations, as well as three questions on city characteristics, measuring if the city holds partisan elections, if the city has a full-time administrator on the staff, and the extent of mayoral powers (to differentiate between strong and weak mayor-council cities). These

characteristics are collected at the end of the survey in order to minimize both attrition and interviewer’s bias, as described in the next section.

## 4.2 Collecting Unbiased Responses

The managerial competence score described above is potentially subject to both interviewee and interviewer induced bias. The interviewee could answer untruthfully, systematically gearing her responses toward what she believes is the best answer. The interviewer might also systematically under or over score responses based on interviewees’ characteristics and preconceptions he might have about the competence of the interviewee or about the local government in question. The use of a double-blind survey technique based on [Bloom and Van Reenen \(2007\)](#) minimizes these two biases.

Interviewee bias, or bias from self-reporting, is minimized in two ways: respondents are unaware that they are being scored,<sup>4</sup> and the questions they are posed are open-ended (i.e. “What types of professional development opportunities are provided for top performers?”) rather than being closed (i.e. “Do you provide professional development opportunities for top performers[yes/no]?”) so as not to clearly indicate a “best” or a “worst” answer.

Interviewer bias is limited by the fact that interviews are conducted by phone, and that the interviewer has no information on the performance of the city. Finally, all interviewers go through a training workshop stressing the importance of scoring each answer separately, based on the scoring rubric, rather than on the overall impression of the interviewee. Each interview is recorded (conditional on the respondent’s permission to record), and we validate the reliability of the procedure by having a second interviewer score the same interview based on the recording. Moreover, each interviewer will conduct a minimum of 40 interviews, allowing us to account for interviewer fixed effects in the analysis. This controls for an interviewer’s general tendency to over- or under-score responses irrespective of the interviewees’ characteristics.

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<sup>4</sup>Respondents are de-briefed on this and all aspects of the interview via email after the interview as per the IRB protocol.



### 4.3 Obtaining Interviews

Obtaining a high response rate is key given the relatively small size of the target population. However, city leaders can be harder to reach than the average survey respondent, and securing an interview often required multiple phone calls and emails with city staff. We took several steps to maximize the response rate. First, we portray respondents' participation in the most neutral terms possible by *i)* presenting the interview as a “conversation” and without mentioning the word “interview” or “survey”, *ii)* never mentioning or asking about the performance or fiscal soundness of the municipality, and *iii)* by stressing throughout that the project is an academic endeavor. Questions are similarly neutral in tone. For example, the question on target setting reads: “What types of goals or objectives have you set for your city and what are the practical targets related to these objectives? How are these goals assigned or delegated down to the individual members of the government and of the staff?”. Finally, we secured the institutional endorsement of the National League of Cities (NLC), a nonpartisan, non-profit advocacy organization representing U.S. municipalities.

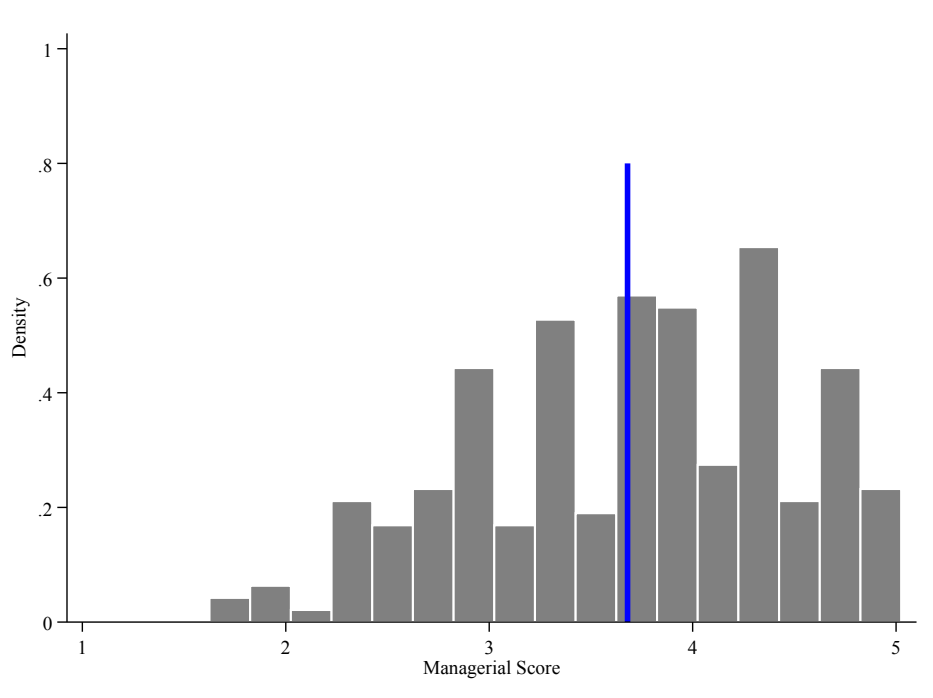
Each respondent is contacted by phone and receives a short presentation of the project and an invitation to participate, followed by an email presenting the project in details and sharing the letter of support by the NLC. The body of the email and the letter of support are shown in the Appendix. Interviewers keep contacting the mayor/manager by phone until the mayor/managers declines or agrees to participate. In case of acceptance, a date and time is set up for the interview. Each respondent is contacted by one interviewer only.

### 4.4 The Management Score

So far, we have conducted 235 interviews. In the remainder of the paper, we present some initial descriptive results and describe the research design that we will implement once the rest of the data has been collected. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the management scores so far. The scores range from a low of 1.625 to a high of 5, with substantial variation. The average score is 3.68. As an initial validity check, we compare the scores of mayors and city

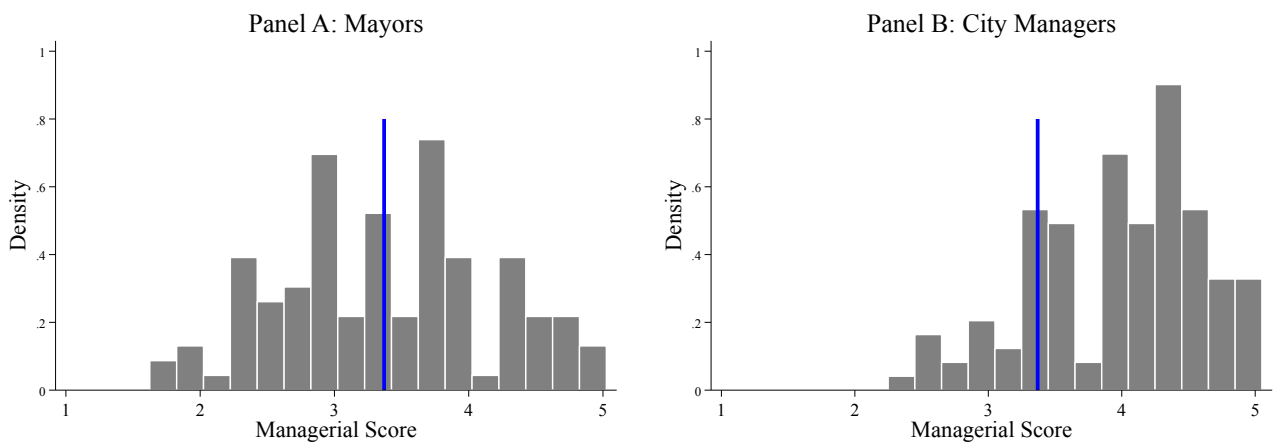
managers. Figure 2 shows the distributions for the two types of leaders. Unsurprisingly, city managers tend to receive higher average scores than mayors, reflecting the fact that they have generally received professional training in municipal management.

Figure 1: Distribution of the Management Score



Notes: The plots above represent the distribution of the managerial score. The blue vertical line marks the mean.

Figure 2: Distribution of the Management Scores: Mayors vs. City Managers



Notes: The plots above represent the distribution of the managerial score in the two subsamples of interviewed mayors (Panel A) and city managers (Panel B). The blue vertical lines mark the mean.

## 4.5 Validity and Reliability

Recall that the overall management score is the average of the scores that the local leaders receive across four different areas: target setting, performance monitoring, operations, and incentives. Table 2 shows the pairwise correlations across these components of the overall score. While the correlations are all positive, indicating that mayors scoring highly on one dimension are also likely to score highly on other dimensions, the fact that the correlations generally do not exceed 0.5 suggest that each component captures something distinct in terms of overall management capability. The overall management score also has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.745.

Table 2: Reliability of Management Score: Pairwise Correlations of Components

	Target Setting	Operations	Performance Monitoring
Operations	.288*		
Performance Monitoring	.489*	.483*	
Incentives	.450*	.775*	.484*

*Notes:* Each coefficient reported in the table is from a regression of the variable reported in the column on the variable reported in the row and a constant term using the 237 observations in the cross-sectional dataset. \* is significant at the 5 percent level.

In Table 3 we examine the correlates of the management score based on the individual characteristics of the mayor or manager. Years of education is positively correlated with receiving a higher score, as well as previously working in local government. However, this previous experience in local government mostly seems to capture working as a city manager, as the correlation no longer holds for mayors when examining the two types of leaders separately.

Table 3: Correlates of the Managerial Score

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Managerial Score	Managerial Score	Managerial Score	Managerial Score	Managerial Score	Managerial Score	Managerial Score
<b>Panel A: Full sample</b>							
Age	-0.017* (0.005)	-0.017* (0.005)	-0.014* (0.005)	-0.013* (0.005)	-0.010* (0.005)	-0.010* (0.005)	-0.010* (0.005)
Female		0.181 (0.146)	0.130 (0.138)	0.116 (0.141)	0.138 (0.138)	0.138 (0.138)	0.151 (0.137)
Education (years)			0.103* (0.019)	0.105* (0.019)	0.089* (0.019)	0.090* (0.020)	0.075* (0.020)
Yrs in Elected Office				-0.004 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.006)
Job in Local Govt					0.342* (0.098)	0.354* (0.102)	0.221* (0.114)
Job in Business						0.062 (0.145)	0.027 (0.144)
Observations	233	233	233	232	231	231	231
R-squared	0.044	0.051	0.159	0.160	0.201	0.202	0.274
State FE							✓
<b>Panel A: Mayors</b>							
Age	-0.013* (0.008)	-0.013 (0.008)	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.013* (0.008)	-0.013* (0.008)	-0.013* (0.008)	-0.010 (0.008)
Mayor/Manager is a woman		0.233 (0.214)	0.136 (0.211)	0.150 (0.211)	0.149 (0.214)	0.147 (0.214)	0.269 (0.217)
Education (years)			0.073* (0.027)	0.067* (0.028)	0.067* (0.028)	0.067* (0.028)	0.060* (0.028)
Years in an elected office position				0.011 (0.011)	0.011 (0.011)	0.011 (0.011)	0.009 (0.011)
Previous Job in Local Govt					-0.012 (0.260)	0.018 (0.265)	-0.012 (0.262)
Previous Job in Business						0.120 (0.179)	0.085 (0.179)
Observations	111	111	111	111	111	111	111
R-squared	0.026	0.037	0.098	0.107	0.107	0.111	0.242
State FE							✓
<b>Panel C: City Managers</b>							
Age	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.000 (0.007)	0.000 (0.007)	-0.003 (0.007)
Mayor/Manager is a woman		0.201 (0.176)	0.210 (0.172)	0.125 (0.175)	0.107 (0.175)	0.108 (0.176)	0.100 (0.180)
Education (years)			0.074* (0.031)	0.077* (0.031)	0.076* (0.031)	0.076* (0.031)	0.067* (0.033)
Years in an elected office position				-0.014* (0.007)	-0.014* (0.007)	-0.014* (0.007)	-0.009 (0.007)
Previous Job in Local Govt					0.199 (0.131)	0.203 (0.137)	0.143 (0.140)
Previous Job in Business						0.028 (0.300)	0.029 (0.306)
Observations	122	122	122	121	120	120	120
R-squared	0.003	0.014	0.060	0.095	0.114	0.114	0.160
State FE							✓

## 5 Empirical Strategy

While data collection is still ongoing, we outline here a plan for the empirical strategy that will be used to analyze the data collected. We plan to use a modified difference-in-differences design to study how city outcomes vary according to the managerial competence score received by the local leader. We collected financial reports for all cities in our nine states of interest, which will provide one source of outcome data. Following other studies on the effect of local leaders, we can examine how revenue sources and expenditure distributions within a city change over time when mayors (or managers) with higher or lower scores assume office. Our second set of outcomes includes demographic information from the American Community survey. Of particular interest are how city population and median housing values change over time in cities with more or less effective managers in leadership.

We will estimate equations of the form

$$y_{ist} = \alpha_i + \beta_{st} + \gamma(\text{ManagerialScore}_{is} \times \text{Post}_t) + \delta_y + \sum_{k=1}^m \lambda_k(x_{kis} \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{ist}$$

where  $t$  represents a normalized measure of years, indexing the number of years since the interviewed mayor/city manager of city  $i$  was elected, with  $t = 0$  being the election year. City fixed effects,  $\alpha_i$ , control for any time-invariant city-specific characteristics that might have an effect on our outcomes. Normalized year times state fixed effects,  $\beta_{st}$ , control for political budget cycles within each state.  $\text{ManagerialScore}_{is}$  is the managerial competence score for the interviewed mayors/managers of city  $i$  in state  $s$ . The coefficient of interest,  $\gamma$ , captures the average difference in the outcome for cities with better mayors after the election relative to before the election. The calendar year fixed effects,  $\delta_y$  control for year-specific effects. We also include  $k$  controls -  $x_{kis}$  - interacted with the  $\text{Post}_t$  dummy, to allow for differential trends among cities with different mayor/manager-specific characteristics. Standard errors are clustered at the city level.

We estimate the modified difference-in-differences model above, rather than studying

the cross-sectional correlation between the Managerial Score and the outcomes of interest, in order to account for the fact that cities with more competent executives might also have more effective institutions or other characteristics that make them more likely to have positive outcomes compared to other cities. The modified difference-in-differences design helps to alleviate some of these concerns by comparing outcomes in the same city over time.

Two identifying assumptions are behind the model above. Firstly, we assume the presence of parallel trends, i.e. we assume that the outcomes of cities that elect better leaders would have evolved similarly to the outcomes of cities that elect worse leaders in absence of the treatment (i.e. the election of leaders with different competence levels). To provide evidence in support of this assumption, we will analyze whether there are differential pre-trends in outcomes between municipalities that will elect mayors of different levels of managerial competence by estimating a version of the equation above where the effect of  $ManagerialScore_{is}$  is allowed to vary flexibly over time:

$$y_{ist} = \alpha_i + \beta_{st} + \sum_{t=-5}^{+5} \gamma_t ManagerialScore_{is} + \delta_y + \sum_{t=-5}^{+5} \lambda'_t X_{is} + \varepsilon_{ist}$$

Secondly, we assume that the Managerial Competence of the interviewed mayors/managers is uncorrelated to the Managerial Competence of their predecessors. This is an additional identifying assumption that we need to add on top of the standard difference-in-differences assumption above, because of the modified nature of our difference-in-differences model, in which we observe  $ManagerialScore_{is}$  only for the interviewed mayor/manager and not for her predecessor. Note however that in presence of a positive correlation in  $ManagerialScore_{is}$  between interviewed leaders and their predecessors, our estimates will be biased toward zero. Our coefficient  $\gamma$  captures both the effect of having elected the interviewed leader and the effect of having ousted her predecessor (of unobserved managerial competence). Intuitively, in presence of strong positive correlation in managerial competence between a mayor and her predecessor (*i.e.* in case of two very competent, or very incompe-

tent, mayors), the two effects cancel each other out, resulting in an estimated effect biased closer to zero with respect to the real effect. The problematic case would arise in presence of a negative correlation between interviewed leaders and their predecessors. In this case, the two effects reinforce each other, resulting in an estimated effect biased away from zero with respect to the real one. Specifically, the size of this bias can be bounded: in the worse case of a perfect negative correlation in managerial competence between a mayor and her predecessor, our estimates would be twice the real effect size.

In Table 4 we show evidence consistent with the absence of a strong correlation between the managerial competence of the interviewed mayor and of her predecessor. We leverage the instances in which we were able to interview the city's former leader therefore collecting data on both the current mayor/managers and on her predecessor. So far, we have successfully conducted 23 such interviews. While we hope to increase this number in the future, the initial results are reassuring. Column 1 of Panel A of Table 4 shows that managerial effectiveness scores of current and previous local leaders are only modestly, positively correlated, suggesting that our estimates will be biased toward zero, and therefore will represent a lower bound of the effect of electing a competent local leader. In addition, Table 4 shows that any present correlation in terms of other traits (in levels of education and professional backgrounds) is positive.

Table 4: Correlation Between Predecessors and Successors

		<i>Panel A</i>				
		<i>Successor's</i>				
<i>Predecessor's</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
	Managerial Score	Female	Age	Education (yrs)	Yrs in Elected Office	
Managerial Score	0.149 (0.190)					
Female		0.364 (0.277)				
Age			-0.023 (0.201)			
Education (yrs)				0.442** (0.151)		
Yrs in Elected Office					0.070 (0.158)	
Observations	24	24	23	23	23	
R-squared	0.027	0.073	0.001	0.291	0.009	
Mean Successor	3.870	0.167	53.43	18.35	14.22	

		<i>Panel B</i>				
		<i>Successor's</i>				
<i>Predecessor's</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
	Job in Local Govt	Job in Business	Center-left Left	Center	Center-right Right	
Job in Local Govt	0.545* (0.205)					
Job in Business		0.447* (0.168)				
Center-left/Left			0.036 (0.223)			
Center				-0.214 (0.214)		
Center-right/Right					0.667** (0.117)	
Observations	23	23	21	21	21	
R-squared	0.252	0.254	0.001	0.050	0.632	
Mean Successor	0.522	0.130	0.619	0.286	0.0952	

*Notes:* \* is significant at the 5 percent level.



At this stage, we are continuing to conduct the remainder of the interviews and are actively seeking feedback on both the research design and appropriate outcomes to examine. While political scientists have traditionally emphasized the importance of developing robust institutions to improve government performance, institutional reform can be a slow and difficult process. If our research shows that the managerial practices of city leaders can positively impact city outcomes, this would pave the way to develop training initiatives that might help to increase the quality of governance in U.S. cities.

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# Appendix



Dear Mayor/City Manager,

We are a research team from New York University (NYU) and University California San Diego working on an academic research project on the different managerial styles and practices employed across the U.S. in its local governments. The project is directed by [Prof. Maria Carreri](#) at UCSD and [Prof. Julia Payson](#) at New York University. We believe that mayors and city managers play a fundamental role for the success of their city and the well-being of its citizens. It is based on this conviction that we are interested in understanding the different practices and managerial styles employed at the city level across the country, and your input would be extremely valuable in making this project successful. We invite you to take part in our study through a brief and confidential phone conversation revolving around your experience in city governments.

Potential benefits to you include:

- A copy of the results of our academic research prior to their publication
- An opportunity to contribute to an academic study with the potential to identify best practices across city governments
- Other mayors have enjoyed our phone conversation and have considered it a great opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their managerial practices in a completely confidential environment

The phone conversation will touch upon four macro areas related to your government practices: targets, performance monitoring, operations and people management. We will also pose a few questions on your experience and background. The conversation is expected to last 25 minutes. No compensation will be provided and neither you nor the city will incur any expense as a result of the study. The conversation will be confidential to guarantee that no risk will be associated to your participation to this academic study. Your identity and the name of the city will be kept confidential and not mentioned by name in the study. We will be delighted to answer any questions you might have at any time. We encourage you to contact Prof. Carreri or Prof. Payson, the project directors. This study (STU00208676) has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). You may talk to them at (312) 503-9338 or [irb@northwestern.edu](mailto:irb@northwestern.edu).

We will be in touch by phone in the coming days. Should it be more convenient for you to contact us directly, we will be grateful to receive an email or a phone call. We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Handwritten signature of Maria Carreri in cursive.

Maria Carreri  
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Handwritten signature of Julia Payson in cursive.

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October 10, 2018

To whom it may concern,

As Director of Research of the National League of Cities, I certify that the Dr. Maria Carreri (Northwestern University) and Professor Julia Payson (New York University) have communicated the details of their research study on U.S. the management practices of local officials. The NLC supports this academic study as it has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of city governments, to disseminate best practices, and to strengthen partnerships between local government practitioners and the academic community.

I therefore encourage you to feel free to participate in this study and to reach out to Dr. Maria Carreri ([maria.carreri@kellogg.northwestern.edu](mailto:maria.carreri@kellogg.northwestern.edu)) or Professor Payson ([julia.payson@nyu.edu](mailto:julia.payson@nyu.edu)) if you have additional questions.

Best Regards,

*Christiana K. McFarland*  
Christiana K. McFarland

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## Management Survey Questions

### Target Setting

<p><b>1) Target Inter-Connection</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>a) We would like to start by learning what you think are some of the main issues currently facing your city. b) What types of goals or objectives have you set for your city and what are the practical targets related to these goals? c) How are these goals assigned or delegated down to the individual members of the government and staff?</p>		
<p><b>2) Time Horizon of Targets</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><i>Score 1: Objectives and targets are very loosely defined without specific targets associated with them; goals are not communicated and/or delegated to other members of the staff</i></p>	<p><i>Score 3: Objectives are well-defined with related targets; there is some communication and/or delegation but only to certain staff or departments</i></p>	<p><i>Score 5: Objectives are very clearly defined with specific related targets; targets are clearly and widely communicated and/or delegated to many different departments or members of staff</i></p>

Monitoring				
<p><b>3) Progress Tracking</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>a) So thinking more about [one of the goals or objectives just mentioned]: What kinds of indicators do you use to track the city's progress in reaching this goal? What sources of information are used to perform this tracking? b) How frequently are these indicators measured? Who gets to see this performance data?</p>	<p><i>Score 1: There are no specific indicators or measures to track if objectives are being met; tracking is an ad-hoc process (certain processes are not tracked at all)</i></p>	<p><i>Score 3: Most performance indicators are tracked formally; tracking is overseen by only a few members of the staff rather than communicated widely</i></p>	<p><i>Score 5: Progress is continuously tracked with specific, formal indicators. This tracking is communicated widely across the city government to a variety of staff.</i></p>
<p><b>4) Progress Review</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>a) And how often do you review whether [Name of City] is on track to meet its goals with other members of the government or with city staff, either formally or informally? b) Can you give me an example of a recent meeting where you discussed this? c) Who is usually involved in these meetings? Who gets to see the results of this review? d) What sort of follow-up plan usually results from these meetings?</p>	<p><i>Score 1: Performance/progress is reviewed infrequently or in an un-meaningful way (e.g. only success or failure is noted)</i></p>	<p><i>Score 3: Performance is reviewed periodically with successes and failures identified; results are only communicated to a few staff members; no clear follow up/ action plan is adopted</i></p>	<p><i>Score 5: Progress is continually reviewed, based on specific indicators; tracking consistently results in follow-up plans to ensure continuous improvement; results are communicated widely to staff members</i></p>

People Management

<p><b>5) Building a High-Performance Culture through Incentives and Appraisals</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>a) Do you have an appraisal system to assess staff performance? Could you explain how it works?                  b) Are there any procedures in place to recognize or reward the best performers across different staff groups, either formally or informally?                  c) What types of professional development opportunities are provided for top performers?</p>		
	<p><i>Score 1: No appraisal system, either formal or informal. No type of rewards, recognition, or professional development for top-performers</i></p>	<p><i>Score 3: There is an evaluation system which allows employees to get feedback and rewards or recognizes good performance, but the system is informal and not applied systematically</i></p>	<p><i>Score 5: There is a formal evaluation system that monitors staff performance and allows staff members to receive feedback. Rewards or recognition are given for top performers, formally or informally</i></p>

<p><b>6) Removing Poor Performers</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>a) If you had a staff member who was struggling or who could not do his/ her job, what would you do? Can you give me a recent example?</p>		
	<p><i>Score 1: Poor performance is not addressed or addressed very inconsistently; poor performers are rarely removed from their position</i></p>	<p><i>Score 3: Poor performance is addressed, but not always consistently, and usually through a limited range of methods (e.g. "encouraging the person to do better")</i></p>	<p><i>Score 5: Poor performance is frequently addressed either formally or informally and using a variety of methods and/or interventions</i></p>

Operations

<p><b>7) Efficiency of Procurement</b></p> <p>Score: 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> . <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>a) Could you talk me through the usual process of writing either a procurement bid or RFP in your city? [RFP = Request For Proposal]                  b) Thinking about a typical [RFP or bid], how far ahead of time do you usually issue the announcement relative to when the service is needed?                  c) How standardized is this procedure across different city departments?</p>		
	<p><i>Score 1: Mayor does not know about / there is no standardized process to issuing RFPs; RFPs are not anticipated ahead of time and are issued as needs arise.</i></p>	<p><i>Score 3: Mayor states there are common guidelines across staff groups on how to issue RFPs; RFPs are not anticipated far ahead of time and are issued as needs arise</i></p>	<p><i>Score 5: There are common official guidelines across staff groups; RFPs are anticipated in a timely manner.</i></p>