Municipal Policy Knowledge and the Limits of Local Democratic Accountability[*]

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Abstract

Theories of democratic accountability expect voters to observe government performance to reward or punish incumbents accordingly. This paper asks whether residents can accurately identify the policies enacted by their city governments, whether partisan reasoning helps or hurts that accuracy, and what the consequences of voters' municipal policy knowledge are for democratic accountability. Linking an original survey of over 1,000 American city residents to a comprehensive accounting of the policy decisions of 321 city governments on 20 issues, I show that residents are only marginally better at accurately identifying their city governments' policy than chance, with errors skewing toward over-assuming government action. Partisan reasoning ultimately undermines accuracy because most residents cannot correctly identify which policies are more likely to be enacted in Democratic and Republican cities. Residents reward and punish their city governments based on their perceptions of congruence between city policy and their preferences, regardless of whether those perceptions match reality. These findings suggest that even in an era of nationalized politics, most residents are unable to use partisan reasoning to substitute for direct knowledge of local policy, and that frequent misperceptions of city government action hold real consequences for local democratic accountability.

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> *"A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."*
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> - James Madison, *Letter to W.T. Barry, 1822*

Representative democracy, as its architects envisioned it, rests on an informed citizenry. To hold government accountable, voters must be able to observe an incumbent's record, weigh those actions against their own preferences, and issue a political reward or punishment accordingly. An ignorant electorate cannot meaningfully evaluate and monitor those who govern them, and thus would be unable to reward responsive officials or sanction those who act against constituent preferences.

Yet, decades of public opinion research demonstrate that this load-bearing requirement for accountability is far from satisfied. The finding that the U.S. public is overwhelmingly uninformed on core aspects of civics and politics remains one of the most robust consensus points in modern social science (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Friedman 1998). If "good decision making requires good information" (Converse 1990, p. 369), the reality of voter ignorance suggests the electorate is ill-equipped to hold government accountable.

Scholars disagree about whether the informational environments of local governments are a favorable or unfavorable terrain for democratic accountability. One tradition holds that government at a smaller scale brings officials and voters closer in proximity, making monitoring and sanctioning more feasible (Dahl and Tufte 1973) and allowing residents to sort into communities on the basis of local policy offerings (Tiebout 1956). Recent empirical work extends this claim, finding that the policies of city governments respond to constituent preferences in the aggregate (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2016). A second tradition characterizes local politics as a low-information and low-engagement environment (McDermott 1997 1998; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian and Trounstine 2020), in which structural features such as nonpartisan ballots and off-cycle

elections compounded by the shuttering of local newspapers (Hayes and Lawless 2021) and shifting of remaining news coverage away from local issues (Martin and McCrain 2019) leave voters with little information on which to base their local electoral decisions. The disagreement between these traditions turns on an empirical question that has received little direct attention: whether residents actually know the policy outputs of their city governments.

Of course, an optimistic school of thought suggests that a lack of direct policy knowledge is not fatal to the democratic enterprise. A substantial body of research establishes that voters need not possess encyclopedic levels of information to hold government accountable and can rely on judgmental shortcuts instead (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Page and Shapiro 1992; Popkin 1994). Chief among these shortcuts is partisanship (Rahn 1993), which has grown more informative as the parties have sorted into increasingly distinct and legible ideological coalitions (Sides, Tausanovitch and Vavreck 2023). As media attention prioritizes national political conflict over local-specific information, voters appear to increasingly rely on national party cues to guide their assessments of local political actors (Hopkins 2018). The importing of partisan cues could prove problematic, however, if the policy decisions of city governments do not neatly mirror the divides of the national parties (Anzia 2021). A resident who assumes that a Democratic-leaning city will inevitably adopt certain policies that a Republican-leaning city will not may be incorrect in their assumptions of what their own city government has actually done. Rather than correcting for voter ignorance, partisan reasoning applied to local government may actively distort residents' perceptions of local policy, substituting an inaccurate picture of city governance for genuine local knowledge.

Resolving these competing possibilities requires directly comparing what policies citizens believe their cities have enacted with their cities' actual policy outputs. This paper asks whether residents' beliefs about which policies have been passed by their city governments align with reality, whether partisan thinking helps or hurts that alignment, and

what the consequences of voters' knowledge about municipal policy are for local democratic accountability. To answer these questions, I compile comprehensive data on the policy actions of hundreds of city governments regarding local policy issues that have been extensively studied in the local political economy literature. I link this information to an original, representative survey of over 1,000 Americans that live within these cities which assesses their knowledge of their city governments' policy choices.

The results indicate that the accuracy of residents' beliefs about their cities' policies is only marginally better than chance would predict, and errors are not random. Misperception most often takes the form of believing the city government has enacted a policy that it has not. The partisan heuristic that might compensate for a lack of detailed knowledge works in principle but fails in practice. Residents who hold accurate beliefs about both their city's partisan character and the partisan valence of a given municipal policy are more likely to perceive that policy's presence or absence in their cities. But, most residents' beliefs about which policies are more likely to enacted in Democratic- versus Republican-leaning cities are poorly calibrated. Because of this miscalibration, partisan reasoning about municipal policy more often leads individuals to incorrect conclusions.

More troubling than the lack of knowledge itself is that these frequently incorrect beliefs about city policy influence how voters evaluate their city governments. Residents' evaluations of their city governments and local incumbents are shaped by the policies they *think* their city has enacted, rather than by those that have been enacted in reality. This alignment between residents' preferences and what they believe their city has done affects evaluations of government and incumbents independently of retrospective assessments of city conditions and shared partisanship with officials. Critically, the factual accuracy of perceptions of city policy is irrelevant to this process. Residents weigh accurate and inaccurate perceptions of policy congruence equally when forming evaluations, rewarding and punishing their governments and incumbents for what they imagine them to have done rather than their actual policy record.

These findings carry implications for our understanding of local democratic accountability in a highly polarized and nationalized era. While prominent critiques of electoral accountability argue that democracy falls short of its potential because voters blindly punish or reward incumbents for random events outside of their control (Achen and Bartels 2017), this paper introduces an alternative pathway whereby voter cognition may limit accountability. Rather than responding to irrelevant information, voters appear to respond to perceptions of government action that do not always reflect actual policy outputs. While earlier scholarship found that municipal policies broadly align with resident ideology in the aggregate (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2016), the present findings suggest that this aggregate responsiveness is not driven by voters accurately observing and rewarding incumbents for their city governments' policy decisions.

Accountability, Ignorance, and the Promise of Heuristics

The dominant theoretical framework for understanding how elections discipline politicians to ensure responsiveness is a principal-agent model of electoral accountability. Under this framework, voters (the principals) select, monitor, evaluate, and sanction elected representatives (the agents) to ensure policy responsiveness (Fearon 1999), rewarding good behavior or "throwing the rascals out" (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999, p. 42) as a punishment for adverse outcomes (Ferejohn 1986). As such, holding agents accountable is dependent on voters' capacity to observe government actions, attribute them to incumbents, and evaluate whether those actions match their preferences. Yet the theoretical requirement of an informed electorate frequently collides with a stark reality: voter knowledge about government, policymaking, and politics is notoriously sparse (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Friedman 1998).

Nevertheless, a prominent strain of behavioral scholarship maintains that account-

ability remains possible because voters can rely on judgmental shortcuts, or heuristics, to make decisions approximately aligned with their interests even without high levels of knowledge (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Page and Shapiro 1992; Graber 1994). For instance, voters can assess easily observable economic and societal conditions to engage in retrospective voting and reward or punish incumbents accordingly (Fiorina 1981), or rely on the increasingly legible brands of the two major political parties (Sides, Tausanovitch and Vavreck 2023) to make reasonable guesses about partisan candidates' would-be behavior in office. Yet, the effectiveness of these shortcuts depends on whether they assist voters in arriving at the same conclusions they would reach if they were fully informed. Evidence suggests that heuristics can also easily deceive voters, leading them to form conclusions contrary to the truth or their objective interests (Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Dancey and Sheagley 2013).

A heuristic's validity heavily depends on the context in which it is used. Partisanship is a useful shortcut to judge between candidates for U.S. Congress, for instance, because Congressional roll-call votes follow party lines more often than not (Dancey and Sheagley 2013; Murphy and Tausanovitch 2026). However, when the informative signal carried by a partisan label is weak or poorly calibrated to the conditions in which it is used, voters relying on it will arrive at distorted conclusions (Boudreau, Elmendorf and MacKenzie 2015). City politics, where elections are frequently nonpartisan and policy debates can be highly technocratic, represents a context where this miscalibration is particularly likely to occur.

The Local Political Information Environment

In theory, local government should be a highly favorable terrain for democratic accountability. Because municipal governments determine policy over immediate, consequential issues—e.g., public safety, land use, transportation infrastructure, and housing—many of

their policy decisions are immediately visible to city residents as they live, move around in, and interact with their communities. Foundational theories of local democracy suggest that the smaller scale of city governance brings officials and residents closer together, facilitating easier observation of government action and incentivizing individuals to participate in and learn about local politics (Dahl and Tufte 1973; Buchanan 1995; Oliver 2012). Tiebout (1956)'s influential model of local public finance implies that residents actively select communities whose public policy matches their preferences, suggesting that individuals should be meaningfully attentive to the actions of city governments.

Despite these theoretical conditions that predict informed and attentive local electorates, empirical scholars have long characterized local politics as a low-information, low-engagement political environment (McDermott 1997 1998; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian and Trounstine 2020). Several features of local politics conspire to produce this setting. Progressive Era reforms introduced nonpartisan ballots and off-cycle election timing to insulate local politics from partisan competition and political machines, stripping the ballot of the cues that voters rely on most heavily in national contests (Schaffner, Streb and Wright 2001; Hajnal and Lewis 2003). On top of these institutional barriers, recent media trends have driven local newspapers out of business and shifted remaining news coverage away from municipal affairs (Martin and McCrain 2019; Hayes and Lawless 2021), dismantling the civic infrastructure traditionally thought to transmit local political information. While some encouraging evidence suggests that voters can rationally respond to information about incumbent performance in local elections when it is made sufficiently visible (Berry and Howell 2007; Burnett and Kogan 2017), these findings say little about what happens in the broader local political environment where such clarity is absent.

Compounding this information scarcity is the rapid nationalization of American politics, or the broad shift whereby voters increasingly evaluate local political actors through the lens of national partisan conflict (Hopkins 2018). Voters applying partisan frames to local politics will likely assume that cities inhabited by more voters that support Democrats

in national elections will adopt different policies than those inhabited by more Republican voters. However, municipal policymaking is frequently orthogonal to national ideological and partisan divides (Anzia 2021), or as former New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia put it, "there is no Republican or Democratic way to pick up the garbage."[1] As a consequence, a partisan heuristic may often be poorly calibrated to municipal policy. A resident using her city's partisan character to approximate its policy output, absent genuine policy knowledge, may be led to incorrect conclusions because their beliefs about which municipal policies to associate with which types of cities are shaped more by national expectations or partisan stereotypes than the realities of local governance. Whether these distortions materialize and what consequences they carry for accountability depends on how closely residents' beliefs about city policy track reality.

Policy Congruence as the Micro-foundation of Political Accountability

A substantial body of research attempting to quantify the quality of democratic representation asks whether the policy decisions of elected officials and governments align, or are congruent, with the preferences of those they represent. This tradition dates to Miller and Stokes (1963), who found that the correlation between constituent opinion and legislator behavior varied considerably across issue domains and fell short of their idealized standard of representative democracy. Subsequent scholarship has extended this inquiry to subnational governments with increasingly precise measurement, finding modest to encouraging evidence that state and local government policy responds to constituent preferences (Lax and Phillips 2012; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2016; Caughey and Warshaw 2022).

Implicit in this line of research is an assumption about how accountability functions at

[1] Quoted by Diana Lind, *StreetsBlogUSA*, 2024.

the individual level. Each individual facilitates accountability by rewarding incumbents when policy is congruent with their preferences and punishing when it is not. The aggregation of individual voters behaving in this manner ensures that the majority's preference for a given policy is satisfied. Ansolabehere and Kuriwaki (2022) provide perhaps the most direct evidence for this individual-level mechanism in congressional representation, showing that voters reward their members of Congress specifically for issue-level congruence with their own preferences (although see Murphy and Tausanovitch 2026). For this individual-driven aggregate accountability to occur, the accountability mechanism runs from government or official action being congruent with an individual's preferences, to the individual's observation of that congruence, to electoral reward or punishment.

Yet we should be careful in assuming voters will recognize actual policy congruence simply because researchers can measure it. This assumption may be defensible in the context of congressional representation, where partisan signals are strong and information is more readily available, but it is harder to sustain in the local context as described above. If misapplied heuristics or a scarcity of reliable information nudge residents' beliefs about municipal policy to diverge from reality, residents may reward governments for preferred policies that were never enacted, punish for the presumed lack of desired policies they have in fact adopted, or otherwise evaluate government performance on the basis of a false picture of local policy. The remainder of this paper provides evidence that this is often the case.

Data

To assess residents' knowledge of their city governments' policy choices and its consequences for political accountability, the analyses combine data from two sources. The first is a comprehensive accounting of currently enacted municipal policies within U.S. cities with populations about 75,000 residents relating to twenty key policy areas. The sec-

ond is a demographically representative survey of 1,028 American adults sampled from residents living within those cities. The proceeding sections describe the data gathering procedures for each source.

City Policy Data

This study draws on information about the policy decisions of the 484 U.S. municipalities home to a population of more than 75,000 residents as of the 2020 U.S. Census. These span twenty salient policy areas. Several criteria guided policy selection. First, each policy falls within the jurisdiction of city governments. Second, together, the twenty policy areas span major functional domains of local governance that have been widely studied in the local political economy literature, including land use and zoning (Trounstine 2018; Einstein 2020), housing and homelessness (Hankinson 2018; Einstein and Willison 2025), public safety (Owens and Ba 2021; De Benedictis-Kessner et al. 2025), environmental sustainability (Feiock et al. 2014), transportation (Taylor and Morris 2015), and resident inclusivity (Cravens 2015; Taylor, Lewis and Haider-Markel 2020). Third, each policy is one that residents could plausibly encounter as a topic of local debate or campaign discussion, rather than an obscure administrative matter unlikely to reach the public's attention.

While no battery of twenty policies can be exhaustive, restricting attention to salient policies spanning widely studied domains of municipal governance provides a reasonable basis for assessing local policy knowledge, and one that plausibly stacks the deck in favor of finding accountability. If residents cannot accurately identify policies of this kind, it is unlikely they would perceive more obscure or technical ones any better. Table 1 presents the twenty policies on which data were gathered and how they were defined for the purpose of this study.[2]

[2]To address potential concerns that the paper's findings are a product of the particular policies included in this battery, Section A.3 of the Supplementary Information reports sensitivity analyses in which each policy is excluded from the data, as well as simulations that randomly drop five or ten of the twenty policies

Table 1: City Policies Under Investigation

Policy	Definition	Policy	Definition
Environmental Sustainability		***Land Use/Zoning***	
Climate Emergency Declaration	Officially declared climate change is a public emergency	Accessory Dwelling Unit	Allows homes to contain a secondary dwelling unit, such as a garage/basement apartment or backyard cottage, to be built on the same property as a primary residence
E.V. Charger Incentives	Requires or incentivizes property owners and developers to install electric vehicle charging stations	Big Box Retailer Restrictions	Forbids or severely limits the establishment of big-box and warehouse-style retail stores (e.g., Costco, Sam's Club) within the city
Zero Emission Fleet Plan	Committed to transition all government-owned vehicles to zero emission or electric vehicles	Inclusionary Zoning	Requires or incentivizes developers to set aside some units in new housing developments as affordable for low- or moderate-income residents
Housing/Homelessness		***Policing/Public Safety***	
Anti-Displacement Assistance	Requires landlords to pay relocation costs to tenants displaced through no-fault evictions, such as when a property is demolished or converted	Civilian Police Oversight Committee	Authorizes a committee of civilian volunteers to conduct investigations on the conduct of the police department
Homeless Response Unit	Created a new government office to oversee and coordinate the city's response to homelessness	Mental Health Co-Responder	Sends a mental health professional alongside a police officer to respond to calls involving mental health and substance use crises
Housing First	Prioritizes placing homeless individuals into permanent housing quickly, without requiring sobriety or mental health treatment as a precondition	Police Demilitarization	Limits the types of military-style weapons and equipment, such as armored vehicles or tear gas, that the police department can obtain or use
Just Cause Evicition	Prohibits landlords from evicting tenants without a specific legal reason, such as nonpayment of rent or property damage		
Inclusivity		***Transit Infrastructure***	
D.E.I. Initiative	Advances diversity, equity, and inclusion in the city government through a D.E.I program or office	"15-Minute City" Plan	Enacted into law a plan to make neighborhoods walkable enough that residents can reach daily necessities like groceries, parks, and schools within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from home
Gender Neutral Language	Requires all language in city documents to be gender neutral (e.g., "firefighter" instead of "fireman")	E-scooter/Bike Share	Allows private companies to operate shared e-scooter and bike rental services on city streets
LGBT Non-Discrimination	Prohibits the discrimination of individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity in housing and employment	Removal of Off Street Parking Minimums	Does not require developers to include a minimum number of off-street parking spaces in new residential and/or commercial buildings
		Transit-Signal Priority/Bus Lanes	Establishes bus-only dedicated lanes and traffic signals on major city streets

To facilitate a systematic data collection process on policymaking in these twenty areas across hundreds of cities, data gathering began through the implementation of an automated internet search procedure using GPT-5's web-search capability accessed through the OpenAI API. The web-search tool allowed the agent to search for up-to-date information via the internet and provide responses accompanied by detailed citation information based on a set of explicit instructions. See Section A.1 of the Supplementary Information for a more detailed discussion of the implementation of this automated search process. A team of trained human researchers audited model-generated data entries to assess the model output's accuracy and made corrections where necessary. For this study, each policy in each city is coded as a yes-no binary which indicates whether the policy is present or absent in a given city as of the time the study was conducted. Table 2 communicates the prevalence of each of the twenty policies in the cities from which respondents were sampled.

The complete dataset includes information on relevant policymaking actions (city ordinances, resolutions, charter amendments, executive orders, official policy publications) pertaining to the twenty policy areas in each of the 484 U.S. municipalities with populations greater than 75,000 residents as of the 2020 U.S. Census. This sample spans medium- to large-sized cities and captures substantial variation in urban forms and geographic contexts. These municipalities govern more than one-third of the U.S. population and more than a majority of Americans that live within municipal boundaries. Cities above this population threshold are most likely to possess the administrative capacity and institutional autonomy necessary for meaningful discretion over the set of policies the present study investigates (Oliver 2012). Furthermore, previous data collection efforts have noted the difficulty in finding reliable information on governance in smaller cities through the internet (Hopkins and Pettingill 2015; De Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016).

from the analyses. Across each of these specifications, the estimated relationships remain consistent in magnitude, direction, and statistical significance with those reported in the main text, indicating that the results are not an artifact of the particular policies surveyed.

Table 2: Prevalence of Policy Enactment in Respondents' Cities

Policy	# Of Cities Policy Present In	# Of Respondents Living in Cities Where Policy is Present
Accessory Dwelling Unit	248 (77.5%)	877 (85.3%)
Mental Health Co-Responder	196 (61.3%)	762 (74.1%)
Homeless Response Unit	163 (50.9%)	691 (67.2%)
LGBT Non-discrimination	142 (44.4%)	638 (62.1%)
Removal of Off Street Parking Minimums	137 (42.8%)	647 (62.9%)
D.E.I. Initiative	123 (38.4%)	618 (60.1%)
E-scooter/Bike Share	114 (35.6%)	450 (43.8%)
Civilian Police Oversight Committee	109 (34.1%)	625 (60.8%)
Housing First	100 (31.2%)	550 (53.5%)
"15-Minute City" Plan	98 (30.6%)	442 (43%)
Just Cause Eviction	86 (26.9%)	255 (24.8%)
E.V. Charger Incentives	76 (23.7%)	233 (22.7%)
Inclusionary Zoning	73 (22.8%)	417 (40.6%)
Transit-Signal Priority/Bus Lanes	71 (22.2%)	494 (48.1%)
Zero Emission Fleet Plan	54 (16.9%)	392 (38.1%)
Climate Emergency Declaration	45 (14.1%)	325 (31.6%)
Big Box Retailer Restrictions	41 (12.8%)	100 (9.7%)
Anti-Displacement Assistance	39 (12.2%)	142 (13.8%)
Police Demilitarization	24 (7.5%)	83 (8.1%)
Gender Neutral Language	11 (3.4%)	42 (4.1%)
Total:	321	1,028

Original Survey on City Residents

These policy data are linked to the responses of an original survey of U.S. adults demographically representative of the national population (N = 1,028) sampled from those living within the 484 U.S. municipalities with populations over 75,000 residents. The survey was fielded from April 23–28, 2026. Respondents were recruited by Verasight via random address-based sampling, random person-to-person text messaging, and dynamic online targeting. First, respondents indicated the municipality in which they live (respondents come from 321 of the 484 cities in the sampling frame, see Section A.2 of the Supplementary Information for more detailed information about the sample) and provided information on their length of residence, partisanship, interest in public affairs, turnout in the most recent local election, and other demographic information. Soon after, the survey asked how much respondents approved of the way their city government is currently doing its job, whether they would vote to re-elect their current mayor if the election were today, if they think their current mayor is a Democrat or Republican (or more likely to be either, in cases with nonpartisan elections), and if they would say their city is a better or worse place for someone to live in today compared to a few years ago.

The survey then presented respondents with the definitions of the twenty policies (as defined in Table 1) one at at time in three separate blocks of questions. In the first block, a question asking respondents to indicate whether they believed each item describes actions taken by their city government accompanied each policy definition. Respondents were not given an option to indicate "I don't know." This is because allowing people who are uncertain but still somewhat knowledgeable to opt out of answering can introduce systematic bias in estimates of knowledge (Mondak and Davis 2001; Luskin and Bullock 2011). Instead, respondents were encouraged to give their best guess if they were unsure. The second block reintroduced respondents to each of the policy definitions one by one and asked whether they would support or oppose each if it were enacted in their city. The final block presented the policies once again and asked respondents to indicate whether they think each would be more likely to be enacted in a city where most voters are Democrats, in a city where most voters are Republicans, or equally likely in both types of cities.

The order in which the policies were presented was randomized for each respondent. Additionally, the presentation of the survey was randomized such that half of the respondents answered the block of questions asking for their perceptions of their city governments' actions first and the block of question inquiring their preferences for each policy second, and another half of respondents answered these in the reverse order. To minimize potential survey fatigue from answering multiple series of similarly formatted questions, filler questions separated each of the three blocks.

Measurement

These data sources supply the key variables used in the analyses, each described in turn.

Perception Accuracy (Knowledge)

A respondent's perception of a policy's enactment by their city government is considered accurate when it matches the city's actual policy record. For instance, if a respondent believes their city has a plan to transition the city fleet to zero emission vehicles, and the city in which they lives has actually enacted such a plan, their perception is accurate for that policy. Each respondent is given an accuracy score or rate that describes the proportion of the twenty policies in which that respondent's beliefs about their city's policies mirror reality, ranging from 0 (always incorrect) to 1 (always correct).

Perceptions of Partisanship

Respondents also reported their perceptions of the partisan composition of their city's residents and of which type of city is more likely to enact each policy. The city partisan composition measure originates from a question asking respondents to estimate the share of votes cast in their city for Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election, which is then simplified into a binary that captures whether the respondent believes their city to be majority Democratic or majority Republican. Measures of the actual partisan composition of each city come from aggregating precinct level 2024 presidential election returns within municipal boundaries (precinct election return data is sourced from Datar et al. 2026). For each policy, a policy-party association measure is derived from the block of questions asking respondents whether they believe each policy as more likely to be enacted in a city where most voters are Democratic or Republican, or equally likely in both types of cities.

Policy Congruence, Actual and Perceived

For each policy, a respondent experiences policy congruence when their city government's policy matches their own preference for that policy. The analyses distinguish between two types of policy congruence: actual policy congruence and perceived policy

congruence. Actual policy congruence occurs when the city government's policy in reality corresponds with a respondent's preference for that policy. Similarly, perceived policy congruence occurs when the respondent's perception of their city's policy correspondents with the respondent's preference for that policy. If the respondent's belief about a policy in their city is accurate, then their actual congruence and perceived congruence for that policy will be identical. Table 3 provides a non-exhaustive list of examples of how actual and perceived congruence would be defined for a hypothetical respondent i based on their perceptions and preferences on a set of hypothetical policies.

Table 3: Measuring Policy Congruence & Perception Accuracy for a Hypothetical Respondent

Respondent	Policy	Reality	Perception	Preference	Perception Accuracy	Actual Congruence	Perceived Congruence
i	x	Present	Present	Support	Accurate	Congruent (+1)	Congruent (+1)
i	y	Absent	Absent	Oppose	Accurate	Congruent (+1)	Congruent (+1)
i	z	Present	Present	Oppose	Accurate	Incongruent (-1)	Incongruent (-1)
i	a	Present	Absent	Support	Inaccurate	Congruent (+1)	Incongruent (-1)
i	b	Absent	Present	Support	Inaccurate	Incongruent (-1)	Congruent (+1)
i	c	Present	Absent	Oppose	Inaccurate	Incongruent (-1)	Congruent (+1)

Each policy-respondent pairing is given a score of +1 if there is congruence, 0 if the respondent neither supports nor opposes the policy, and -1 if there is incongruence. A cumulative actual and perceived policy congruence score is then generated for each respondent by taking the sum of the individual policy scores and dividing them by the total number of policies. As such, these cumulative scores range from -1 to +1. A negative value suggests that a respondent's preferences are more often incongruent with their city's policy choices (or their perceptions of those policy choices), while a positive value suggests they are more often congruent.

Perceptions of policy congruence can be further divided into accurate and inaccurate perceptions. Each respondent is given an accurate perceived congruence score which summarizes their perceptions of policy congruence *only* among policies accurately identified, which also ranges from -1 to +1. Here, a value of -1 would indicate that for every policy a respondent identifies accurately, their preferences are incongruent with city pol-

icy, while a +1 would indicate that for every accurately identified policy their preferences are congruent. Correspondingly, a respondent's inaccurate perceived congruence score functions the same as the accurate perceived congruence score, only it summarizes their perceptions of congruence *only* among policies inaccurately perceived.

Accountability Outcome Variables

In assessing the impact of policy knowledge on residents' ability to hold their city governments accountable, the primary relationship of interest is whether respondents reward or sanction their city government in a manner consistent with their preferences. Two outcome measures are informative on whether this is the case. The first is a respondent's approval of the way their city government is doing its job, which is measured on a scale from 1–7. The second is a respondent's support for a local incumbent, measured as their intention to re-elect their incumbent mayor were the election held today.

Results

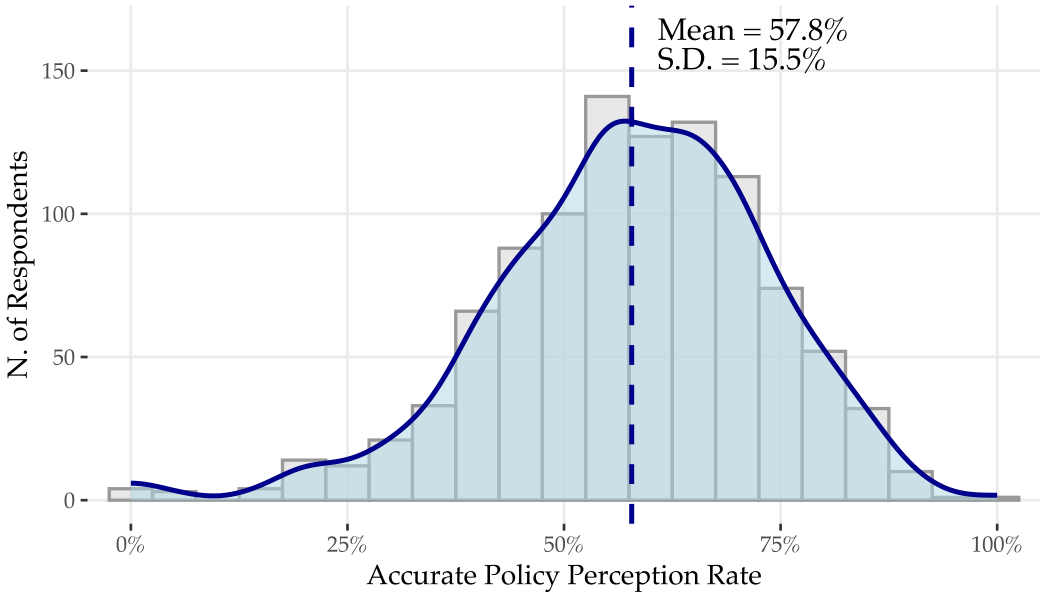
The analysis proceeds in three stages. The first documents how accurately respondents perceive the policy choices of their city governments. The second assesses whether partisan reasoning could theoretically improve city policy knowledge and whether it does so in practice. The third examines the consequences of respondents' policy knowledge for democratic accountability.

Local Policy Knowledge

How often do people accurately identify the policy decisions of their city governments? The data reveal that the average respondent is accurate in their perceptions of which policies their city has enacted about 57.8% of the time, or on 11.6 out of 20 policies. Figure 1

visualizes the distribution of respondents' accurate policy perception rate. Few respondents appear either very knowledgeable or as knowing next to nothing, while most cluster relatively close to the mean.

Figure 1: Distribution of Policy Perception Accuracy



To conceptualize the magnitude of the mean accurate perception rate, consider comparing it to two potential baselines. The first is what could be considered a "coin-flip" baseline of 50%, or the expected score a respondent that answered each policy question at random would receive if there were an equal probability of answering each question correctly. The second baseline is a modal guessing baseline of 73.5%. This value represents the expected score of a respondent who lacks genuine, city-specific knowledge but strategically guesses the majority (modal) outcome for each policy across all cities in the sample (see Table 2). Because policy adoption is highly skewed—some policies are widespread, such as accessory dwelling unit allowance (present in 78% of the sample's cities), whereas gender neutral language requirements are rare (only 3% of cities)—always choosing the modal response would yield a higher accuracy rate than would guessing at random. Consequently, a respondent who understands which policies are generally widespread and which are rare can score well above the 50% random-chance baseline without knowing

anything about their own city's actual policy actions.

The observed mean accurate perception rate of 57.8% falls between these two baselines: better than random guessing (t = 16.15, $p < 0.001$), but meaningfully below the modal guessing threshold of 73.5%. The mean's position between these two baselines suggests that respondents are not simply guessing at random, but they also fall short of the accuracy a naive heuristic which requires no city-specific information could provide. Substantively, the comparison to these two baselines reveals a level of disconnect between what residents perceive the policy decisions of their city governments to be in reality. While residents possess enough local awareness to outperform a coin flip, they frequently assume their city has adopted many policies it has not (or vice versa).

Another relevant point of comparison for this value is how well voters are able to perceive the roll-call voting behavior of their representatives in the U.S. Congress as documented in prior work. Ansolabehere and Kuriwaki (2022) find that respondents to the CES who ventured a guess about their representative's roll-call votes on salient bills were correct 74.5% of the time. Because the present survey on local policy knowledge did not give its respondents the option to indicate "I don't know" and the CES did, a direct comparison between these accuracy rates may require some adjustment. Under an assumption that CES respondents who did not guess their representatives' voting behavior would have been correct half of the time were they forced to give an answer, the average accuracy rate for perceptions of Congressional voting behavior would still reach 67.5%. By contrast, the average respondent in the present sample correctly identified their city's policy position on 57.8% of issues. The difference between these accuracy rates underscores that the average American is much less knowledgeable about the decisions of their city government than they are about those of their federal representatives.

City policy perception accuracy is strikingly uniform across demographic groups, as illustrated by Figure 2. Nearly every respondent subgroup clusters between a mean accuracy rate of 55% and 60% with frequently overlapping confidence intervals. Respondents

who follow public affairs closely, have higher incomes, or identify as non-Hispanic white tend to be marginally more accurate in their perceptions. But, these differences are modest, equating to correctly identifying the status of less than one additional policy in each comparison. No noticeable differences in accuracy exist between respondents that have lived longer in their communities, work within their city's boundaries, own their home, or participate in local elections and those that do not. The lack of variation between these groups suggests that local embeddedness does not translate into higher levels of knowledge in regard to city policy.

Figure 2: Policy Perception Accuracy Across Demographic Groups

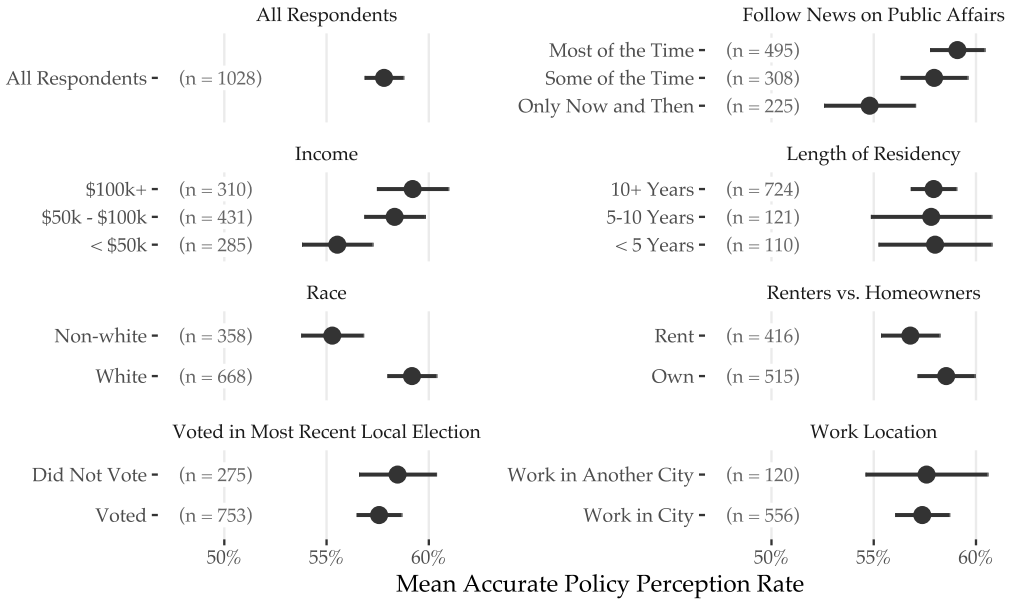
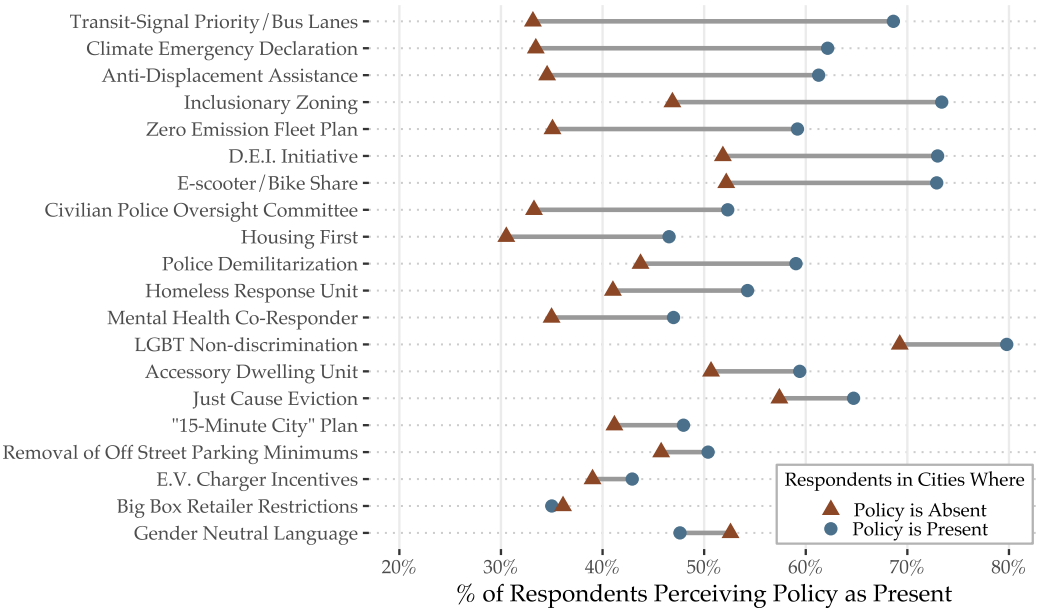


Figure 3 visualizes how well respondents identify the presence or absence of each of the twenty policies within their cities. Blue circles plot the percentage of respondents living within cities where a given policy has been enacted that correctly perceived its presence (the true-positive rate). By comparison, red triangles plot the percentage of respondents living in cities where a given policy is absent, but incorrectly believe that policy to be present (the false-positive rate). The greater the distance between these two points for a given policy, the better respondents are able to discriminate its actual presence from

its absence. A wide gap indicates that perceptions are responsive to the policy's actual status, while a narrow gap indicates the opposite. Figure 3 is arranged such that policies with the highest level of perceptual discrimination, or those with the largest gaps between the true-and false-positive rates are at the top, with these gaps decreasing in size as they are situated down the y-axis.

Figure 3: Knowledge Heterogeneity by Policy



For roughly half of the policies surveyed (9 of 20), respondents discriminate well between presence and absence, such that true-positive rates exceed 50% and false-positive rates fall below it. A second cluster (5 of 20) shows high true-positive rates paired with false-positive rates also above 50%, indicating respondents over-assume that these policies are enacted regardless of whether they are in actuality. Two policies, big box retailer restrictions and gender neutral language requirements, invert the ideal pattern with false-positive rates exceeding true-positive rates. For gender neutral language policies especially, respondents in cities *without* the policy are more likely to believe it exists than respondents in cities that have actually adopted it. Across all 20 policies, awareness varies by policy area, with a repeating tendency for respondents to overestimate how active

their cities have been in enacting them.

The elevated false-positive rates observed across several policies raise a concern about the nature of incorrect perceptions of city policy. 58% of all incorrect perceptions consist of respondents believing a policy is present in their city when it is not (false-positives), suggesting a tendency to over-assume policy adoption. A natural question is whether this tendency is responsible for respondents' generally low accuracy rates. Section A.4 in the Supplemental Information addresses this directly with a counterfactual simulation that artificially suppresses "present in my city" responses by 10, 20, and 50 percent, converting a share of correct "present" responses into errors and converting a share of false-positive responses into correct ones. Even a 50% reduction leaves the mean accuracy rate unchanged (57.4% vs. the observed 57.8%; see Table A.3), indicating that the observed mean accuracy rate is not simply an artifact of respondents' tendency to over-assume policy adoption.[3]

Collectively, the data describe the local policy information environment as one in which residents know slightly more than they would if they were guessing at random, but less than what they know about the policy decisions of their federal representatives. Even more, policy perception accuracy is more or less uniform across different demographic groups of residents such that there is not highly informed "type" of voter. When residents misperceive policy, it is most often because they assume their city has enacted policies that it has not. Additionally, no clear pattern regarding which policies residents most accurately perceive emerges. Residents most commonly correctly identify whether their city has bus lanes, which may be due to the potential that this policy is highly visible to residents as they navigate city streets. However, other policies one might think to be comparably observable (e.g., e-scooter/bike share, accessory dwelling units, and big box retailer restriction policies) do not appear among the most correctly perceived.

[3]This aggregate stability masks substantial policy-level heterogeneity. Reduced over-assumption sharply improves accuracy rates for rarely-adopted policies (e.g., +24 percentage points for gender neutral language requirements) while worsening it for commonly-adopted ones (see Table A.4).

Partisan Reasoning On Municipal Policy Presence

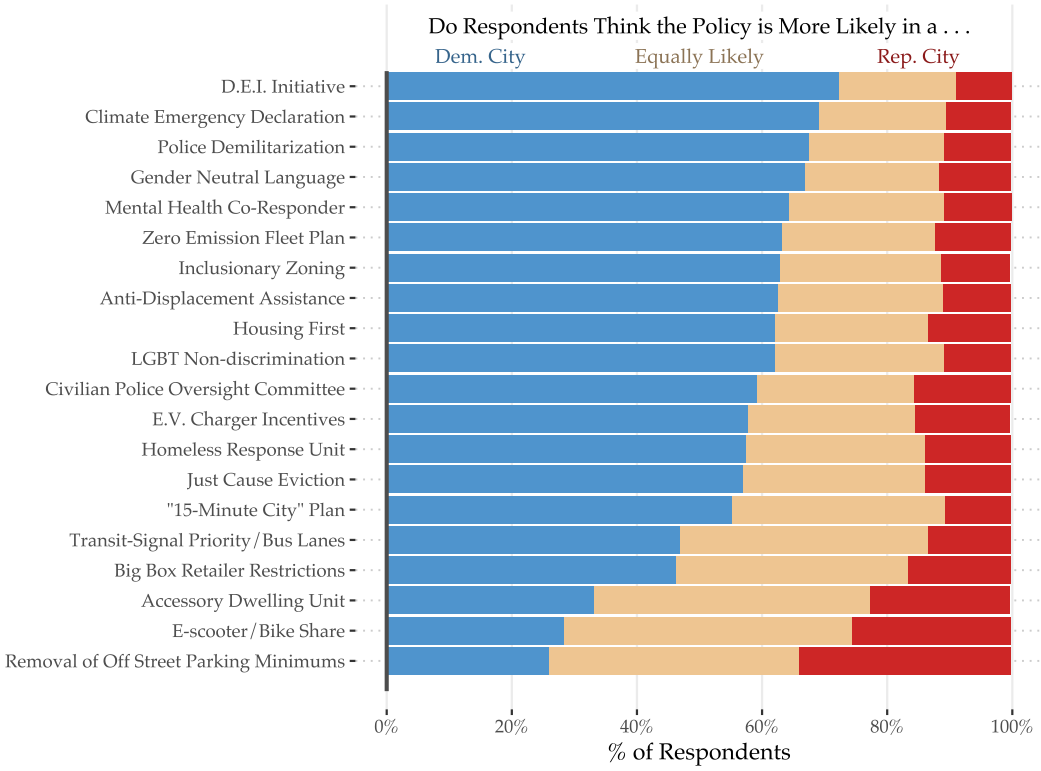
Does partisan reasoning about city policy have the potential to improve residents' policy knowledge, and do voters use it effectively enough to realize that potential? A voter who knows the partisan lean of their city's electorate and the partisan nature of a particular policy may be able to correctly deduce the presence or absence of that policy in their city without having any city-specific information, depending on the reliability of these two inputs. Testing the utility of this strategy first requires establishing what residents believe about the partisan nature of their cities and the partisan nature of each of the twenty policies, then comparing those beliefs to reality.

Most respondents are capable of correctly identifying the partisan leaning of their cities' voters. About three-quarters of respondents (73%) could accurately identify whether more of their cities' voters supported the Democratic or Republican candidate for president in the 2024 general election. Of the 321 cities that respondents represent, majorities of voters supported the Democratic candidate for president in 2024 in 230, while majorities in 91 cities supported the Republican candidate.

Figure 4 reveals how respondents think about each of the twenty city policies with reference to the partisan character of the cities they believe are more likely to enact them. Majorities of respondents believe fifteen of the twenty policies are more likely to be adopted in cities where most voters are Democrats. More than two-thirds of respondents associate D.E.I. initiatives, climate emergency declarations, police demilitarization programs, and gender neutral language requirements with cities with more Democratic voters. At the same time, the share of respondents attributing a policy equally to both city types only exceeds 33% for six policies. In only one case, removal of off street parking minimums, a greater number of respondents associate the policy with Republican-leaning cities than with Democratic-leaning cities.

By comparison, Table 5 presents the actual rate of adoption for each policy among cities with Democratic voter majorities and Republican voter majorities in the 2024 pres-

Figure 4: Respondents' Associations Between Policies and City Partisanship



idential election in the sample. In reality, all but one of the policies, "15-Minute City" plans, are more frequently adopted in Democratic cities. While the direction of partisan differences in policy adoption broadly matches what respondents expect, the magnitude of these differences differs. Two policies that a supermajority of respondents associate with Democratic cities, police demilitarization and gender neutral language policies, exhibit among the smallest actual partisan gaps in adoption, with differences of only 4.3 and 0.18 percentage points respectively. Meanwhile, policies removing off-street parking minimums are more likely to be adopted in Democratic cities by nearly 25 percentage points, despite it being the policy respondents are least likely to attribute to Democratic cities.

Figure 5 compares the difference in the actual adoption rate of each policy between Democratic and Republican cities in the sample to respondents' tendency to correctly associate that policy with cities dominated by one party over another. Respondents are

Table 4: Policy Adoption Patterns by City Partisanship

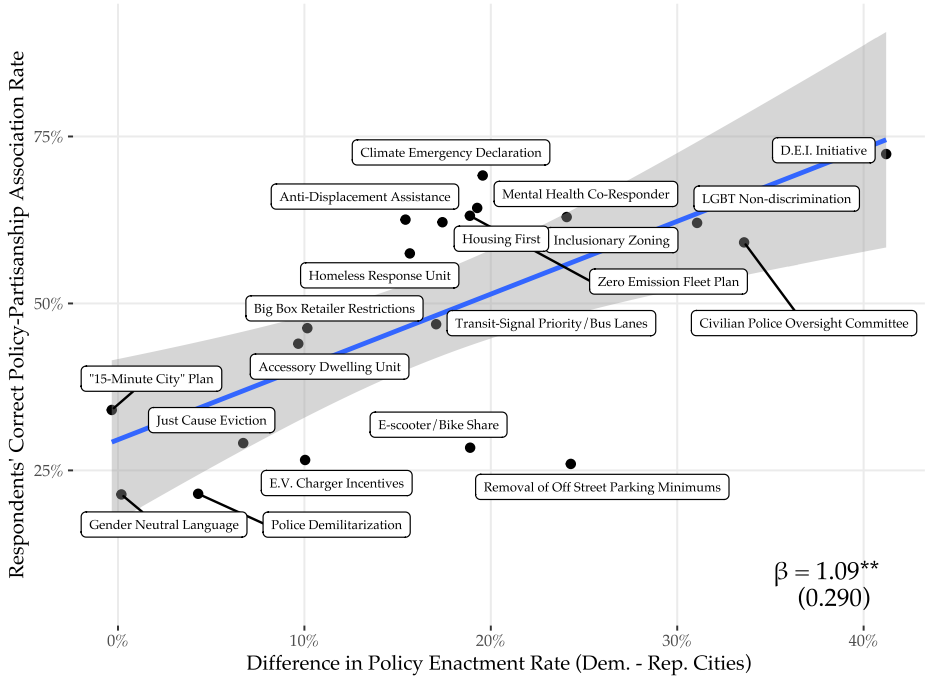
Policy	Adoption Rate in Dem. Cities	Adoption Rate in Rep. Cities	Difference
D.E.I. Initiative	50%	8.79%	41.21***
Civilian Police Oversight Committee	43.48%	9.89%	33.59***
LGBT Non-discrimination	53.04%	21.98%	31.07***
Removal of Off Street Parking Minimums	49.57%	25.27%	24.29***
Inclusionary Zoning	29.57%	5.49%	24.07***
Climate Emergency Declaration	19.57%	0%	19.57***
Mental Health Co-Responder	66.52%	47.25%	19.27**
E-scooter/Bike Share	40.87%	21.98%	18.89**
Zero Emission Fleet Plan	22.17%	3.3%	18.88***
Housing First	36.09%	18.68%	17.41**
Transit-Signal Priority/Bus Lanes	26.96%	9.89%	17.07***
Homeless Response Unit	55.22%	39.56%	15.66*
Anti-Displacement Assistance	16.52%	1.1%	15.42***
Big Box Retailer Restrictions	15.65%	5.49%	10.16*
E.V. Charger Incentives	26.52%	16.48%	10.04
Accessory Dwelling Unit	80%	70.33%	9.67
Just Cause Eviction	28.7%	21.98%	6.72
Police Demilitarization	8.7%	4.4%	4.3
Gender Neutral Language	3.48%	3.3%	0.18
"15-Minute City" Plan	30.43%	30.77%	-0.33

Note: Statistical significance of differences in means calculated using Fisher's Exact Test. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

considered "correct" about a policy's partisan association if they believe the policy is more likely to be enacted in Democratic cities and the difference in the adoption rates between Democratic and Republican cities is greater than ten percentage points. For the policies where the difference in adoption rates is less than ten percentage points, respondents that indicated the policy is equally likely in Democratic and Republican cities are considered correct. Because none of the policies are significantly more likely in Republican cities, respondents that attribute a policy to Republican cities are always treated as incorrect.

Respondents are better at associating policies with political parties when those policies have larger actual partisan gaps in adoption rates (β = 1.09, p = 0.01). Yet, several notable outliers, including e-scooter/bike share, E.V. charger incentives, and removal of off-street parking minimums, fall below the trend. Despite this positive relationship, on average, respondents correctly associate a given policy with the partisan character of cities that actually enact it only about 48% of the time, no better than chance would predict. The overarching implication being that most resident possess an accurate sense of the partisan nature of the city they live in, but a poorly calibrated sense of which party to associate

Figure 5: Respondents Better Associate Policies With Parties When Rates of Enactment Differ Between Democratic and Republican Cities



with each city policy.

For partisan reasoning to facilitate higher levels of knowledge about city policy, correct judgments about the partisan nature of one's city and the policy in question would more often lead to correct inferences about that policy's presence or absence. Table 5 presents the results of a multilevel linear probability model that predicts the accuracy of a respondent's belief about a given policy's presence in their city. Every observation is a respondent-policy pairing. The model controls for respondent demographic characteristics alongside crossed random intercepts for each policy and respondent to account for baseline variation in the outcome across policies and individuals. The estimator of interest is the coefficient on the interaction between a respondent being correct about the partisan nature of her city *and* correct about the party with which to associate the given policy.

The positive interaction coefficient presented in Table 5 confirms that possessing both forms of accurate partisan knowledge—identifying the city's partisan lean and correctly

Table 5: The Effect of Accurate Partisan Associations on Perception Accuracy

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Accurate City-Partisanship Association	0.004
	(0.014)
Accurate Policy-Partisanship Association	-0.028
	(0.014)
Accurate City × Policy Partisan Association	0.042*
	(0.017)
Constant	0.528***
	(0.062)
Observations	17,377
R^2 Marg.	0.008
R^2 Cond.	0.059

Note:
Estimates (with standard errors in parentheses) are derived from a multilevel linear probability model with random intercepts for each respondent and policy. The model also includes controls for respondents' partisanship, gender, age, education, sexuality, race/ethnicity, income, length of residency, work location, homeowner status, interest in policial news, voter registration, and turnout in the most recent local election. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

associating the policy with the right party—compounds to significantly increase the accuracy of beliefs about a given policy's presence or absence, all else equal. Substantively, the effect translates to a 4.2 percentage point increase in the probability of an accurate policy perception on average across all twenty policies. Partisan reasoning about city policy facilitates greater knowledge, but only when that reasoning is predicated on accurate beliefs on the partisan nature of cities and policies.

However, respondents are incorrect about either the partisan lean of their city or the party with which a policy should be associated nearly two-thirds (63.3%) of the time. Given the frequency of inaccuracy, is partisan reasoning more likely to lead respondents to incorrect conclusions about their cities' policies? Table 6 addresses this question with a multilevel linear probability model that uses respondents' beliefs about which party to associate with their city and a given policy, whether correct or not, to predict accurate beliefs about a policy's presence or absence in their city. As in the prior model, this model

holds respondent demographics constant and includes random intercepts for each policy and respondent. The interaction coefficient here captures whether partisan reasoning, regardless of the accuracy of its inputs, helps or hurts voter knowledge about city policy on average.

Table 6: The Net Effect of Partisan Thinking on Policy Perception Accuracy

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Believes City is Dem.	-0.002
	(0.014)
Believes Policy More Likely in Dem. Cities	0.041**
	(0.013)
Dem. City $\times$ Policy Beliefs	-0.036*
	(0.017)
Constant	0.534***
	(0.061)
Observations	17,368
R^2 Marg.	0.009
R^2 Cond.	0.058

Note: Estimates (with standard errors in parentheses) are derived from a multilevel linear probability model with random intercepts for each respondent and policy. The model also includes controls for respondents' partisanship, gender, age, education, sexuality, race/ethnicity, income, length of residency, work location, homeowner status, interest in policial news, voter registration, and turnout in the most recent local election. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

The results reveal that partisan reasoning, because it is more frequently based on incorrect inputs, diminishes rather than improves knowledge of city policy on average. The model's negative interaction coefficient corresponds to a 3.6 percentage point decrease in the probability of accurately perceiving a given policy's presence or absence. The partisan heuristic is thus only useful when the knowledge that underlies it aligns with reality. Respondents who do accurately identify their city's partisanship and the partisanship of cities that tend to adopt a given policy are more likely to appear knowledgeable about that policy's presence or absence in their city. But because most respondents' beliefs about the partisan nature of municipal policy are poorly calibrated, partisan reasoning leads to incorrect conclusions more often than correct ones on the whole.

Consequences for Democratic Accountability

What implications do voters' shortcomings in knowledge about their cities' policy decisions have for democratic accountability? First, for democratic accountability to function as theorized at the individual level, a voter should reward a government when its actions align with their preferences and sanction them if not. Model 1 in Table 7 tests whether this is the case by estimating the relationship between respondents' actual level of policy congruence and evaluations of their city governments. Actual policy congruence has a positive and statistically significant effect on government approval, even when controlling for respondent characteristics. A respondent whose preferences are congruent with their city's policy on all 20 policies is predicted to approve of their city nearly a full point higher on the 7-point approval scale (Δ = 0.88) than one whose preferences are always incongruent.

Table 7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Actual Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)	0.443**		-0.101				
	(0.160)		(0.159)				
Perceived Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)		1.487***	1.513***				0.877***
		(0.130)	(0.136)				(0.113)
Accurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.873***			
				(0.125)			
Inaccurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.704***			
				(0.121)			
Retrospective Evaluation (-1 to 1)					1.791***		1.556***
					(0.082)		(0.081)
Perceived Co-partisanship w/ Mayor (-1 to 1)						0.539***	0.259***
						(0.059)	(0.050)
Constant	4.116***	4.053***	4.037***	4.092***	3.657***	3.435***	3.417***
	(0.568)	(0.535)	(0.536)	(0.532)	(0.467)	(0.551)	(0.448)
Observations	1,019	1,019	1,019	1,014	1,019	1,016	1,016
R^2	0.089	0.191	0.191	0.204	0.384	0.154	0.443
Adj. R^2	0.050	0.156	0.155	0.168	0.358	0.117	0.418

Note: Estimates are derived from OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses. All models include controls for respondents' partisanship, gender, age, education, sexuality, race/ethnicity, income, length of residency, work location, homeowner status, interest in political news, voter registration, and turnout in the most recent local election. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

But, as has been demonstrated, respondents' beliefs about the policy actions of their

cities are incorrect nearly as often as they are correct. Table 7's second model asks if individuals reward their city government more when they *think* they are getting the policies they want. Perceived policy congruence significantly predicts city government approval at a magnitude more than three times larger than the coefficient for actual policy congruence in Model 1. Additionally, the R^2 in Model 2 nearly doubles that of Model 1, suggesting that perceived policy congruence is more effective at predicting city government approval than actual policy congruence.

Model 3 incorporates both actual and perceived policy congruence simultaneously as predictors of city government approval. The coefficients reveal that perceptions of policy congruence decisively shape evaluations of government more than policy reality. When included in the same model, the effect of perceived congruence remains larger in magnitude while actual congruence's effect on approval is indistinguishable from zero. Taken together, the results of these three models demonstrate that evaluations of city governments are based on the conceptions of government actions within voters' heads—which are frequently incorrect—rather than they are upon the manifest actions of city governments.

A skeptical reader might object that the relationship could run in the opposite direction, or that residents who already approve of their city government tend to assume in the absence of concrete policy knowledge that it is delivering the policies they want. The cross-sectional nature of these data cannot fully adjudicate the causal ordering of this relationship. However, the ambiguity of whether perceived congruence or government evaluations come first does not resolve concerns about the health of local democratic accountability. If perceptions of policy congruence, and not reality, shape approval, then residents are rewarding and punishing their governments on the basis of frequently mistaken beliefs about policy reality. If, instead, approval shapes perceptions of policy congruence, then residents are not evaluating their governments on the basis of policy information at all, but are manufacturing a sense of policy congruence to rationalize eval-

uations formed on other grounds. Either account describes a local accountability process in which actual policy congruence exercises little independent influence over how voters assess their governments.

Model 4 tests whether accurate and inaccurate perceptions of congruence carry equal weight in shaping government approval. If voters discount beliefs about city policy held with less confidence, or if accurate policy knowledge is better integrated into political judgments, accurate perceptions of congruence would prove a stronger of approval than their inaccurate counterparts. The results offer no support for this expectation. Both accurate and inaccurate perceived congruence predict government approval at nearly identical magnitudes (β = 0.873 and β = 0.704, respectively) and a linear hypothesis test confirms the coefficients are statistically indistinguishable from one another (F = 0.333, p = 0.564). Functionally, the nearly identical effect sizes demonstrate that residents reward governments for perceived congruence regardless of whether that perception reflects reality. In other words, inaccurate perceptions of congruence—which by definition reflect actual incongruence—predict approval as strongly as accurate ones.

One might object that perceived policy congruence may merely be a proxy for other well-established predictors of government approval. Beyond perceptions of policy congruence, voters also hold broader assessments of conditions in their city that they may attribute to their local government. In addition, perceived policy congruence may be inflated among those who believe to be co-partisans with their local officials. We might expect these co-partisan voters to be both more approving of their local government and more likely to believe it is acting in accordance with their preferences. Models 5, 6, and 7 address these concerns by testing whether perceived policy congruence retains its predictive force when placed alongside retrospective evaluations of city conditions and partisan alignment between respondents and their mayor.

Model 5 tests for the effect of retrospective evaluations of city conditions on government approval. This measure comes from respondents' answers to a question asking

whether they believe their city is a better or worse place to live now compared to a few years ago. Respondents indicated their response on a 1 to 7 scale, with higher values indicating the city is a better place to live. To allow for easy comparison of coefficient magnitudes across predictors, the measure is rescaled from -1 to 1. The effect of retrospective evaluations on government approval is large, predicting those with the most positive perspectives of their city's living conditions will approve of their city government 3.58 points higher on the 7-point scale than those with the poorest evaluations of city conditions. In addition, Model 6 communicates that residents who believe their mayor shares their partisan identification exhibit higher levels of approval than those that do not, but by a magnitude more than three times smaller than that of retrospective evaluations.

Model 7 incorporates perceived policy congruence, retrospective evaluations, and perceived co-partisanship as concurrent predictors of city approval. When accounting for all three, perceived policy congruence remains a strong, statistically significant predictor of city government approval, with a magnitude more than three times larger than partisan alignment. Respondents' beliefs about which policies their city governments have adopted, both accurate and inaccurate, carry independent explanatory weight beyond generalized performance satisfaction and partisan affinity. Thus, perceived policy congruence is not merely an artifact of diffuse satisfaction with government or partisan attachment.

Residents appear to evaluate their city governments through a lens distorted by misperceptions, but evaluations are not the same as electoral decisions. Democratic accountability ultimately depends on voters acting on their assessments by rewarding incumbents they approve of with re-election and removing those of which they disapprove. If the dynamics uncovered in Table 7 reflect genuine failures of accountability, they should be visible not only in how voters rate their city governments but also in their vote choice intentions. Table 8 extends the analysis to an electoral outcome: whether respondents would re-elect their incumbent mayor were an election held today. This measure sits

closer to the electoral sanction at the center of accountability theory and represents a harder standard for the preceding findings to meet.

Table 8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents

	D.V.: Would Re-Elect Incumbent Mayor = 1						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Actual Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)	0.098*		-0.004				
	(0.044)		(0.045)				
Perceived Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)		0.284***	0.285***				0.154***
		(0.037)	(0.038)				(0.035)
Accurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.174***			
				(0.035)			
Inaccurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.104**			
				(0.034)			
Retrospective Evaluation (-1 to 1)					0.332***		0.276***
					(0.025)		(0.025)
Perceived Co-partisanship w/ Mayor (-1 to 1)						0.141***	0.092***
						(0.016)	(0.015)
Constant	0.406**	0.390**	0.389**	0.404**	0.318*	0.229	0.226
	(0.155)	(0.150)	(0.151)	(0.151)	(0.143)	(0.151)	(0.140)
Observations	1,020	1,020	1,020	1,015	1,020	1,017	1,017
R^2	0.132	0.178	0.178	0.178	0.260	0.191	0.306
Adj. R^2	0.094	0.143	0.142	0.142	0.228	0.156	0.275

Note: Estimates are derived from linear probability models with standard errors in parentheses. All models include controls for respondents' partisanship gender, age, education, sexuality, race/ethnicity, income, length of residency, work location, homeowner status, interest in political news, voter registration, and turnout in the most recent local election. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

The same patterns reassert themselves across all of Table 8's seven models. Perceived policy congruence out-predicts actual congruence, the accurate and inaccurate components of perceived congruence remain statistically indistinguishable from one another in their effects on vote intention, and perceived congruence retains independent explanatory power alongside retrospective evaluations and partisan affinity in the fully specified model. That the misperception-driven dynamics extend to vote intention suggest they are more than attitudinal noise and a feature of how residents translate frequently inaccurate beliefs about their cities' policy actions into electoral behaviors.

Taken together, the three sets of findings describe local democratic accountability operating under conditions of systematic informational failure. Residents perceive city policy correctly slightly more often than chance would predict, with misperception most often

taking the form of assuming government action in areas that has not occurred. The partisan heuristic that might compensate for this deficit works in theory—those with accurate conceptions of their cities' partisanship and the party with which to associate a municipal policy are more likely to appear knowledgeable—but fails in practice because most residents carry poorly calibrated beliefs about which municipal policies to associate with the national parties. And when residents evaluate their city governments and decide whether to reward or punish incumbents, those judgments are in party driven by—or drive—perceptions of policy congruence, regardless of whether those perceptions reflect reality. Thus, the signal voters transmit to local governments is distorted at each stage: beliefs about the city's policy are frequently inaccurate, a heuristic thought to enable voters to appear more knowledgeable is unreliable, and voters attach equal weight to accurate and inaccurate beliefs about government behavior when making electoral decisions.

Discussion

How much do voters know about the policy decisions of their city governments, and how does that knowledge—or lack thereof—affect democratic accountability? By compiling a comprehensive accounting of city policymaking across 20 issue areas and linking it to an original survey of over 1,000 residents of 321 medium- to large-size U.S. cities, this paper establishes three connected findings. First, residents perceive the policies enacted by their city governments only marginally better than chance, and their errors skew systematically toward over-inferring government action. Second, the partisan heuristic that might compensate for this deficit operates in theory but fails in practice because residents hold poorly calibrated beliefs about which policies to associate with Democratic and Republican city governments. And third, when residents evaluate their governments, those judgments are influenced by perceived policy congruence regardless of whether those perceptions are accurate. Residents who correctly identify a policy their city has enacted

and those who falsely believe their city has not enacted it weigh those beliefs identically when forming political evaluations. In other words, individuals reward and punish their city governments for the policy record they imagine rather than the one that exists.

My results extend and reorient existing critiques of voters' ability to hold governments accountable. Achen and Bartels (2017) contend that voters punish and reward governments for circumstances that lie entirely outside of the control of elected officials, a failure of voter attribution. The failure documented here is of a different kind. Voters are not misattributring the causes of outcomes they observe, but evaluating governments based on policy records they have partially constructed from poorly calibrated partisan expectations rather than direct observations. Voters are not punishing their mayor over forces outside of her control, but instead rewarding her for policy they agree with that has never been enacted.

These findings further complicate a literature that maintains democratic accountability can persist despite a widely uninformed electorate. Rather than substituting for genuine knowledge, the use of partisan shortcuts when perceiving local policy frequently leads voters to incorrect conclusions. In connection to the literature on local political behavior, Oliver and Ha (2007) find that a primary reason voters say they support local candidates is a sense of shared issue-positions. However, if voters systematically misperceive the policy actions of their city governments and reward or punish based on those perceptions, then the issue agreement that survey respondents report between themselves and preferred local candidates may be largely constructed rather than real.

That voters evaluate their local governments in this manner carries potentially troubling implications for the behavior of local officials. Ashworth and Bueno De Mesquita (2014) document the degree to which elections incentivize effort on the part of politicians depends on whether effort is observable and rewarded by voters. Because voters evaluate local governments based on their often unfounded beliefs about policy, actual policy performance becomes largely decoupled from electoral reward. The potentially optimal

strategy for a local official may therefore be less about governance than it is about signaling in ways that voters can readily perceive. Future research should address whether visible symbolic choices or the language with which local issues are framed by local officials yield greater electoral returns than the substantive but largely invisible work of policymaking.

Against this backdrop, the finding that municipal policy is broadly responsive to residents' ideology and partisan preferences deserves reevaluation (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2016). That result is often read as evidence that local democracy is working—despite informational constraints, city governments manage to track and respond to public opinion through their policy decisions reasonably well in the aggregate. But the mechanism through which aggregate responsiveness occurs remains underspecified (Tausanovitch 2019). The present findings work against the operation of the most intuitive potential candidate, that individual voters monitor their specific government's policy record and reward or punish elected official accordingly. If voters' evaluations of city governments are based on routinely incorrect perceptions rather than direct observation of actual policy, then individual-level accountability cannot be the primary driver of whatever aggregate responsiveness exists.

Taken together, these findings give empirical grounding to concerns raised about some of the political consequences of the nationalization of American politics. Hopkins (2018) argues that the diverting of attention from local to national concerns leads voters to judge local candidates, issues, and governments through the lens of national partisan competition. This shift, he claims, could lead to a deterioration in voters' capacity to evaluate local governments on their own terms. Indeed, the present findings identify that voters' knowledge of their cities' policy lags behind their knowledge of the actions of their federal legislators. Additionally, because voters' beliefs about which policies are more likely to be adopted by Democratic- and Republican-leaning cities do not match reality, the use of partisan reasoning is not always helpful at bringing them to the right conclusions. The

result is a status quo in which electoral rewards and punishments are governed more by misperceptions about policy rather than by the actual policy record of the governments voters are ostensibly evaluating.

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Supplementary Information

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A.1 Policy Data Gathering Procedure

Information on the policymaking history of every U.S. municipality with a population above 75,000 residents was first gathered through an automated search procedure using GPT-5's web-search capability accessed through the OpenAI API. The web-search tool allows the model to search through up-to-date information on the internet rather than rely on its training data. The agent was provided with a set of specific instructions and produced answers accompanied by detailed citation information information. As such, it served more as a research assistant than an autonomous classifier.

Each query instructed the model to search for documented evidence of policy adoption, amendment, repeal, state government preemption, and/or court invalidation in a given city over time for a given policy based on a detailed definition of each policy domain. Below is the standardized prompt given to GPT-5 for each query.

*You are assisting with the **Municipal Policy History Project**. The goal is to compile an auditable history of policymaking in a single U.S. city. For the batch of policies specified below, conduct a real-time internet search to document all known relevant actions by the city government in [CITY], [STATE] ([PLACEFIPS] as Place FIPS, [STATEFIPS] as State FIPS) relevant to these policies*

REQUIRED OUTPUT FORMAT

Your entire response must consist only of pipe-delimited CSV output. Each row in the output will correspond to one policy action

- *No markdown tables, no code blocks, no additional text before or after the pipe-delimited CSV output.*

HEADER FORMATTING

*The first line of your output must be **EXACTLY** this header (pipe-delimited, no extra spaces): City—State—Policy Code—Policy Area—Year—Action—Value—Ordinance Number—Source URL—Continuous Measure Notes—Categorical Measure Notes—Other Notes—Place FIPS—State FIPS*

CODING AND FORMATTING RULES

- ***Only return the complete table. No other text or code blocks***
- ***Each row represents a single action for a single policy. Do not summarize or merge multiple actions into one row***
- ***Include every knowable action for each policy, as far back in time as the records allow***
- *City: Capitalize first letters (e.g., "San Jose")*
- *State: 2-letter USPS code (e.g., "CA")*

- *Place FIPS (5-digit) and State FIPS (2-digit): Enclose in parentheses (e.g., (061340) and (04)), preserve leading zeroes*
- *Year: Four-digit (YYYY), leave blank only when Action = "Absent"*
- *Action: Must be one of Enacted, Amended, Repealed, Pre-empted, Court Invalidated, Absent as defined:*
  - *"Enacted": First-time adoption*
  - *"Amended": Policy modified such that values in Continuous Measure Notes and/or Categorical Measure Notes column(s) will change*
  - *"Repealed": Policy rescinded/sunset*
  - *"Pre-empted": State override or standardized rule*
  - *"Court Invalidated": Court nullifies city policy*
  - *"Absent": No evidence policy ever existed*
- *Value: "1" if policy is or remains in effect post-action, "0" for repeal, invalidation, absence, etc.*
- *Ordinance Number: Official ordinance/resolution/order ID or title. If only media documentation exists or no official ID, write "MEDIA" and provide the corroborating URL. Must not be blank if Action = "Enacted", "Amended", or "Repealed"*
- *Source URL: Full canonical link to the city or official document; prioritize links directly to policy documents and never shorten links*
- *Continuous Measure Notes and Categorical Measure Notes: Complete as specified by the definition of the policy below for each action; if definition does not specify what to enter, leave column blank*
- *Other Notes: Succinct coding rationale (max 50 words), no long quotes/excepts. Always fill in, even when Action = "Absent".*
- *If you find evidence of multiple actions in one of the policy by the city over time, include each action as its own row, listing actions in chronological order by year (oldest first); if multiple actions occur in one year, order sequentially within the year*
- *Do not mix chronological ordering across different policies*
- *If prioritized sources yield no evidence of policymaking on an issue, set Action = "Absent", Value = "0", and leave Year/Ordinance Number/Source URL and Notes columns blank*

SOURCE PRIORITIZATION (SEARCH ORDER)

Official city sources (charter, code, ordinances/resolutions, council minutes, executive orders, city publications/program websites) → reputable local media or policy advocacy organizations → general internet search

- *When conducting the search, only examine the top 1 to 5 most relevant sources*

HALLUCINATION CONTROL

- *When multiple policies are included in the batch below, treat each policy as fully independent; do not use evidence from one policy to infer actions for another*

- *Any Action except "Absent" **must** cite a direct source URL*
- *For every "Amended" or "Repealed" row, there must be a preceding "Enacted" row for the same policy*
- *If no primary source is available, enter "MEDIA" in the Ordinance Number and a reputable media link in Source URL*
- *Never invent evidence; if not confident, record "Absent" and clarify in Other Notes if necessary*
- *If the policy is covered by multiple ordinances or concurrent actions, enter as separate chronologically ordered rows*
- *For each policy listed, only include actions relevant to that specific policy — Maintain strict separation of policies: sources, ordinance numbers, years, and notes must correspond exclusively to the policy code indicated in that row*

VERBOSITY

- *Output just the required table, *noting else*, matching the exact format and instructions above*
- *No apologies, summaries, or extraneous text*
- *Each row in the CSV must correspond to a single policy action for a single policy. Do not combine multiple actions or multiple policies into one row*
- *At least one row (even if Action = "Absent") is mandatory*

Each of the twenty policy issues was defined for the model as follows.

Environmental Sustainability

Climate Emergency Declaration

Has [CITY], [STATE] declared a climate emergency by resolution?

A climate emergency resolution is a resolution approved by the city's governing body that explicitly declares a climate emergency or crisis, recognizes climate change as an urgent threat, and calls for accelerated or emergency climate action. These declarations serve as a formal political commitment, without typically including any specific policy action. These are usually titled "Climate Emergency Resolution" or "Climate Crisis Declaration."

Do not include climate action plans or codified sustainability strategies or proclamations that do not explicitly declare an emergency or crisis.

E.V. Charger Incentives

Does [CITY], [STATE] offer incentives for the construction of electric vehicle charging infrastructure?

An electric vehicle infrastructure policy is any city ordinance, code, or program that formally supports, incentivizes, or mandates the construction or installation of EV charging infrastructure through financial incentives, regulatory measures, or coordinated city initiatives. This includes direct rebates, tax benefits, and zoning/building code requirements that encourage or require EV charger deployment.

Zero Emission Fleet Plan

Has [CITY], [STATE] adopted a Zero Emission Fleet Plan/Goal?

A zero emission fleet goal policy is an ordinance, resolution, or formally adopted plan that establishes a clear commitment, requirement, or target year for the city to transition some or all of its government-owned vehicles (fleet) to zero emission vehicles (ZEVs)—typically electric, hydrogen, or other vehicles that do not emit greenhouse gases or criteria pollutants.

Do not include general sustainability or climate plans that mention fleet electrification as an aspiration but do not set clear targets, timelines, or formal requirements, voluntary initiatives or internal reports not formally adopted by the governing body, or policies focused only on the procurement of low-emission (not zero-emission) vehicles or hybrids.

Housing & Homelessness

Anti-Displacement Assistance

Does [CITY], [STATE] provide financial relocation aid for those displaced during redevelopment or no-fault eviction?

An anti-displacement protection policy is any legislation or formal policy that requires landlords or developers to provide monetary relocation assistance to tenants displaced through no-fault evictions, such as eviction for owner move-in, condominium conversion, demolition, or compliance with government orders. These policies often define the amount or formula for relocation payments and/or require landlords to file declarations or applications with a city housing department before eviction notice and provide relocation payments within a set timeframe. Note: these policies are often included as part of a larger local rent stabilization ordinance or tenant protection ordinance.

Do not count general affordable housing programs that do not include tenant financial relocation components or voluntary relocation assistance without legal requirement.

Homeless Response Unit

Does [CITY], [STATE] have an administrative unit for coordinating homelessness response?

A homelessness response unit is an administrative unit, entity, or office created by formal city governmental action that coordinates response to homelessness within the city. The administrative unit typically has responsibility for overseeing and coordinating homelessness programs, services, and strategy at the city level.

Do not count informal committees or advisory groups without official authority or staffing, one-time task forces with no ongoing responsibility or administrative infrastructure, units established at the state or county level, or external nonprofit groups not officially part of the city government.

Housing First

Has [CITY], [STATE] enacted a "housing first"-type homelessness response strategy?

"Housing First" refers to a framework to responding to homelessness where cities prioritize providing permanent housing as quickly as possible to people experiencing homelessness, without preconditions such as sobriety, treatment participation, or housing "readiness." These strategies ensure access to safe, decent, and stable housing without barriers related to substance use, criminal history (unrelated to tenancy), or other traditional program requirements.

Count a city policy as Housing First if a city-adopted or otherwise reputable source—ordinance, resolution, executive order, administrative policy/manual, city program NOFA/guidelines, local journalism, professional policy brief—either explicitly states the city uses a "Housing First" approach or commits to placing people into permanent housing as quickly as possible without preconditions (no sobriety, treatment, or program-participation requirements) without using the "Housing First" moniker.

Do not include targeted federal programs through HUD or state programs or county/CoC-only documents. Focus only on those carried out by the city government.

Do not count city participation in regional (county- or CoC-led) homelessness programs unless the city has formally opted into these initiatives through a legislative or administrative act (e.g., adopting a resolution, executing an MOU, or embedding Housing First standards into city programs or contracts).

Just Cause Eviction

Has [CITY], [STATE] enacted a "Just Cause" eviction policy?

A "Just Cause" eviction ordinance is any legislation or formal policy that requires landlords to have a legally valid reason ("just cause") to evict tenants after a specified period of tenancy, protecting tenants from arbitrary or no-fault evictions. These policies typically define allowable eviction causes including "at-fault" reasons (failure to pay rent, lease violations, illegal activity, damage to property) and "no-fault" reasons (landlord moving in, property removal from rental market, demolition or major renovation, government eminent domain actions). They also typically set applicability criteria based on tenant tenure and types of properties included or exempted. Note: these policies are often included as part of a larger local rent stabilization ordinance or tenant protection ordinance.

Inclusivity

D.E.I. Initiative

Has [CITY], [STATE] established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative?

A Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative is any formal legislation or adopted program that creates structured and possibly funded mechanisms for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at the municipal government level. This includes offices, commissions, strategic plans, training mandates, and leadership roles explicitly dedicated to DEI.

Do not include general diversity or inclusion statements without formal policy adoption or enforcement, informal DEI advisory groups without a legislative or executive mandate, or voluntary or non-binding initiatives lacking formal structure or accountability.

Gender Neutral Language

Does [CITY], [STATE] have a policy or guidelines that require gender-neutral language in official documents?

A gender-neutral language policy is any ordinance, charter amendment, or established set of administrative guidelines that explicitly mandates or implements the use of gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language throughout official city laws, codes, documents, and forms. These include changes to language from "fireman" to "firefighter," for instance.

Do not include general diversity or inclusion statements or policies limited solely to non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation, unless they specifically mention recommended or required gender-neutral language use.

LGBT Non-discrimination

Has [CITY], [STATE] passed a non-discrimination policy covering sexual orientation and gender identity?

A non-discrimination policy is an officially adopted city ordinance that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity across any of the relevant domains: employment, housing, and/or public accommodations. These policies will explicitly list sexual orientation and/or gender identity among protected categories. They will also have mechanisms whereby the policy will be enforced at the local level.

Do not include general diversity, equity, or inclusion statements or policies without explicit non-discrimination clauses or legal enforcement, non-binding resolutions that do not create enforceable rights or prohibitions, or state/federal laws not locally adopted or enforced by the city.

Land Use & Zoning

Accessory Dwelling Unit

Does [CITY], [STATE] allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in residential zones?

Accessory dwelling unit (ADU) policies are any legislation or formal regulations that permit the development of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as secondary residential units on the same lot or parcel as a primary residence in designated residential zoning districts. These policies define what is considered as an ADU to the city, typically as a self-contained living unit with permanent provisions for sleeping, cooking, eating, and sanitation that are either attached or detached but on the same lot as the primary dwelling.

Do not count informal neighborhood guidelines or pilot programs without formal zoning or permitting standards.

Big Box Retailer Restrictions

Does [CITY], [STATE] limit, restrict, or ban the establishment of big-box retailers in commercial areas?" Consider the policy as enacted if a city-adopted land use action explicitly restricts large-format retail via at least one of the following: (1) maximum floor-area thresholds for retail uses; (2) prohibitions or special limits on "superstores," "discount superstores," or "membership warehouses"; (3) conditional use permit (CUP) or equivalent discretionary approval uniquely triggered by large-format retail; (4) caps on the percentage of floor area for nontaxable goods (groceries) within large-format general merchandise; or (5) a time-limited moratorium adopted to study or enact any of the above.
Do not include general zoning that incidentally discourages large stores (e.g., through height limits) without an explicit size/use trigger for large-format retail, economic impact studies not adopted with binding criteria, development agreements that do not create citywide rules, or county/state policies not specifically adopted by the city government.

Inclusionary Zoning

Has [CITY], [STATE] enacted an inclusionary zoning policy?
An inclusionary zoning policy is any formal ordinance, zoning code amendment, or otherwise official policy that requires or incentivizes developers to set aside a specified percentage of newly built residential units as affordable for low- or moderate-income households, usually within market-rate projects. These ordinances establish clear standards for affordability (income levels served), the percentage of required affordable units, and the duration of affordability restrictions. These policies often specify whether affordable units must be built on-site, nearby, or if developers may pay a fee in lieu of construction to support off-site affordable housing, allow for alternative compliance, offer density bonuses or other incentives for compliance, identify which developments the ordinance applies to, and/or specify development standards. These policies might apply to certain areas of the city, certain developments, or citywide.
Do not count informal incentives, programs without binding requirements, or affordable housing mandates not tied to new development or land use controls. Also, do not include legislation or policy established at the state or county level.

Policing

Civilian Police Oversight Committee

Does [CITY], [STATE] have a civilian police oversight board?
A civilian police oversight board policy is any city-adopted law, ordinance, charter chapter, or formal resolution that creates a formal civilian oversight board, commission, or committee with authority over the local police department aimed at increasing transparency, accountability, and community trust. These policies will define the board's composition, powers and responsibilities, authorities for conducting investigations or audits, and relationship with police departments and the city council.

Mental Health Co-Responder

Has [CITY], [STATE] implemented a co-responder program that pairs police with mental health professionals?
A co-responder program policy pairs police with mental health professionals by creating or authorizing programs where behavioral health specialists, clinicians, or social workers respond jointly with police officers to calls involving mental health crises or substance use issues. These programs specify that mental health professionals accompany law enforcement during crisis response shifts, with the goal to de-escalate crises, provide on-scene assessments, connect individuals to behavioral health services, and reduce arrests and emergency hospitalizations. These programs are different from crisis intervention team (CIT) programs, so be sure not to include a city's crisis intervention team here.
Do not include programs that were instituted or are administered at the county level.

Police Demilitarization

Has [CITY], [STATE] adopted a plan to demilitarize its police force?
A police demilitarization plan is any formal plan, law, ordinance, resolution, department directive, or budget provision specifically designed to prohibit, limit, or regulate the acquisition, deployment, or use of military-grade equipment and weapons by the police department. This includes policies that do any of the following: prohibit or restrict categories of military equipment such as armored vehicles, assault rifles, projectile launchers, tear gas, flashing grenades, and chemical agents, require the return disposal, or non-requisition of military equipment, establish guidelines or restrictions on the tactical deployment of such equipment, including bans during protests or in routine policing, and/or mandate transparency.

Transit Infrastructure

"15 Minute City" Plan

Has [CITY], [STATE] adopted an official "15-minute city" or walkability plan?
A 15-minute city or walkability plan is any city-adopted official plan, ordinance, or comprehensive strategies that aim to ensure residents can access most daily necessities like groceries, schools, parks, healthcare, transit, and services within a 15-20 minute walk or bike ride from their homes. These types of plans explicitly adopt goals or standards targeting walkability, bikeability, reduced car dependency, and local access equity. Include any such plans that incorporate these aims, even if they do not use the "15-minute city" title.

E-scooter/Bike Share

Has [CITY], [STATE] formally authorized, regulated, or funded a e-scooter or bike share program through government action?
A e-scooter or bike share program is any city-adopted ordinance, resolution, regulatory framework, contract, procurement policy, or officially adopted program that establishes the authorization and ongoing regulation or funding of a public or private e-scooter/bike share system operating within city boundaries. This includes the establishment of a permit or licensing system for private e-scooter/bike share operators, regulations covering safety standards, equipment requirements, service areas, and/or the creation or operation of a public bike share system or public-private partnership for bike share deployment.
Sources to find information on these programs include municipal code, council legislation databases, city transportation department webpages, formal contracts, and official bike share program documentation published by the city. Exclude informal proposals, community or advocacy group plans.

Removal of Off-street Parking Minimums

Has [CITY], [STATE] enacted a policy that removes minimum off-street parking requirements?
A policy that removes minimum off-street parking requirements is any ordinance, zoning code amendment, or comprehensive plan change that eliminates or significantly reduces the mandatory minimum number of off-street parking spaces that developers must provide for residential, commercial, or mixed-use developments. These policies allow developers to decide the amount of parking based on market demand or neighborhood context rather than fixed minimum parking ratios. Policies may include exemptions for parking requirements near high-quality public transit stops or within certain areas of the city.

Transit Signal Priority/Bus Lanes

Has [CITY], [STATE] implemented transit signal priority or transit lanes?
A transit signal priority (TSP) or transit lane policy is any city government-adopted ordinance, resolution, administrative policy, capital improvement plan, transit plan, or procurement authorization that formally authorizes or fund the deployment of transit signal priority (TSP) systems or dedicated transit lanes. TSP involves technologies or signal timing adjustment math extend green or shorten red signals for transit vehicles such as buses or streetcars at signalized intersections to reduce delays.
Policies that establish bus-only lanes, Bus Rapid Transit corridors, or queue jump lanes that provide exclusive or preferential right-of-way for transit vehicles should be included as a Transit Signal Priority Lanes policy.
Exclude informal planning documents or aspirational statements not formally adopted by the city government, as well as any county or regional policies not adopted or codified by the city government.

The model's search behavior was constrained to follow a source-prioritization rule designed to approximate conventional internet-based research practices. It was instructed to rely first on official city materials (e.g., codebooks, charter provisions, ordinances, council resolutions, council minutes, executive orders, voter-approved initiatives, and official program documentation). If such documentation was incomplete or unavailable, the model was instructed to consult reputable local news outlets, followed by policy advocacy organizations, and finally only to conduct a broader web search once the prioritized sources were exhausted. For each identified government action, the prompt required the model to produce detailed citation information: a policy title, ordinance/resolution/code number, citation to a relevant section or city code, or reference to a credible secondary source, along with the dat the action took place and a working URL.

A team of trained human researchers audited model-generated data entries to assess their accuracy on completeness. First, the team targeted entries with missing or broken URLs, vague or incomplete citation information, anomalous adoption dates, and policy actions that appeared inconsistent with the broader political or legal context of the city in question. After which, the team verified the results from a random selection of about 10% of data entries to generate an unbiased baseline estimate of model accuracy across the full dataset. For each audited entry, researchers examined the linked sources, verified citation accuracy, confirmed the classification and timing of the reported policy action, and conducted their own internet searches to catch any omitted actions. When errors were identified, records were corrected.

It bears noting that omissions in the data are most likely to occur in cities with thinner internet and archival footprints, such as smaller or less wealthy municipalities with fewer digitized records. More broadly, the database is necessarily bounded by what is publicly documents and discoverable online. Policy actions that were never digitized, that exist only in physical municipal archives, or that predate the widespread availability of online municipal records may go undetected regardless of the thoroughness of the search proce-

dure. This is a limitation shared by virtually any large-scale systematic effort to compile information on municipal governments over the internet, and it is one that targeted auditing alone cannot fully resolve. That said, this dataset represents a substantial advance over what has previously been available to researchers. No existing resource compiles comparable policy histories across so many cities with this level of citation documentation.

A.2 Survey Sample Characteristics

Figure A.1: Map of 484 Cities Covered by Policy Data

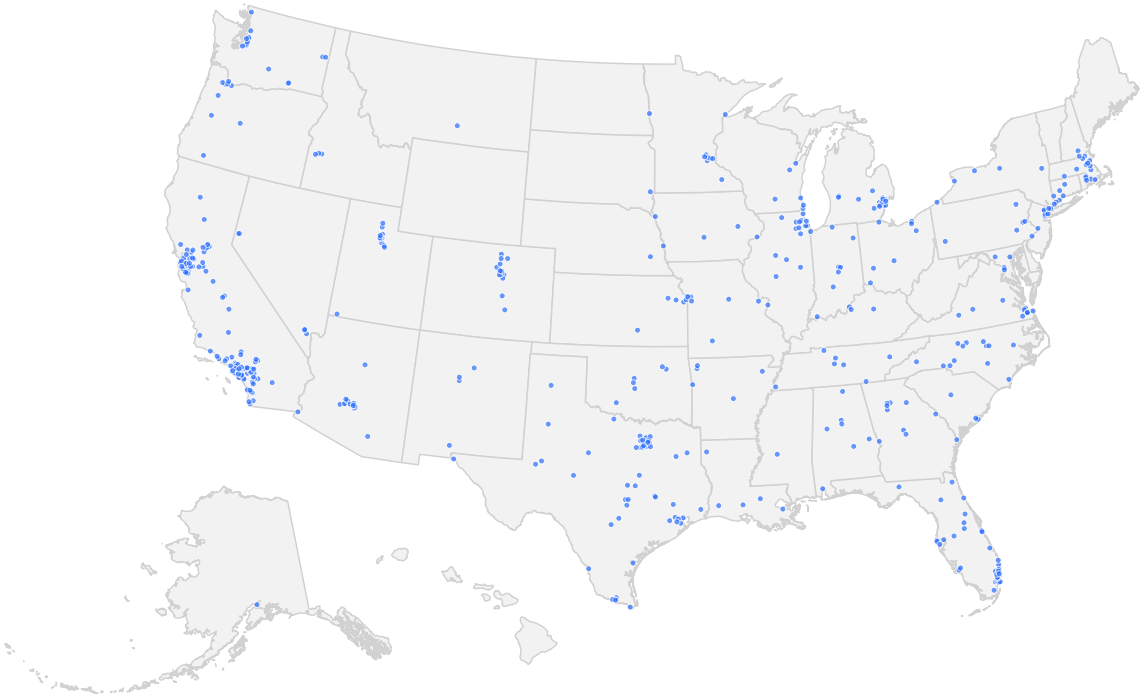


Table A.1: Survey Sample Summary Statistics

Education	Some high school or less	N	28
		Percent	2.7
	High school graduate or GED	N	257
		Percent	25.0
	Some college, no degree	N	180
		Percent	17.5
	2-year or associate degree	N	104
		Percent	10.1
	4-year or bachelor degree	N	298

Table A.1: Survey Sample Summary Statistics *(continued)*

		Percent	29.0
	Post-graduate degree	N	161
		Percent	15.7
Gender	Female	N	493
		Percent	48.0
	Male	N	527
		Percent	51.3
	Other	N	7
		Percent	0.7
Work Location	Work in City	N	556
		Percent	54.1
	Work in Another City	N	120
		Percent	11.7
	Not Employed	N	336
		Percent	32.7
	Prefer Not to Say	N	16
		Percent	1.6
Household Tenure	Less than 1 Year	N	31
		Percent	3.0
	1-3 Years	N	79
		Percent	7.7
	3-5 Years	N	73
		Percent	7.1
	5-10 Years	N	121
		Percent	11.8
	10+ Years	N	724
		Percent	70.4
Income	Less than $15k	N	103
		Percent	10.0
	$15k - $50k	N	182
		Percent	17.7

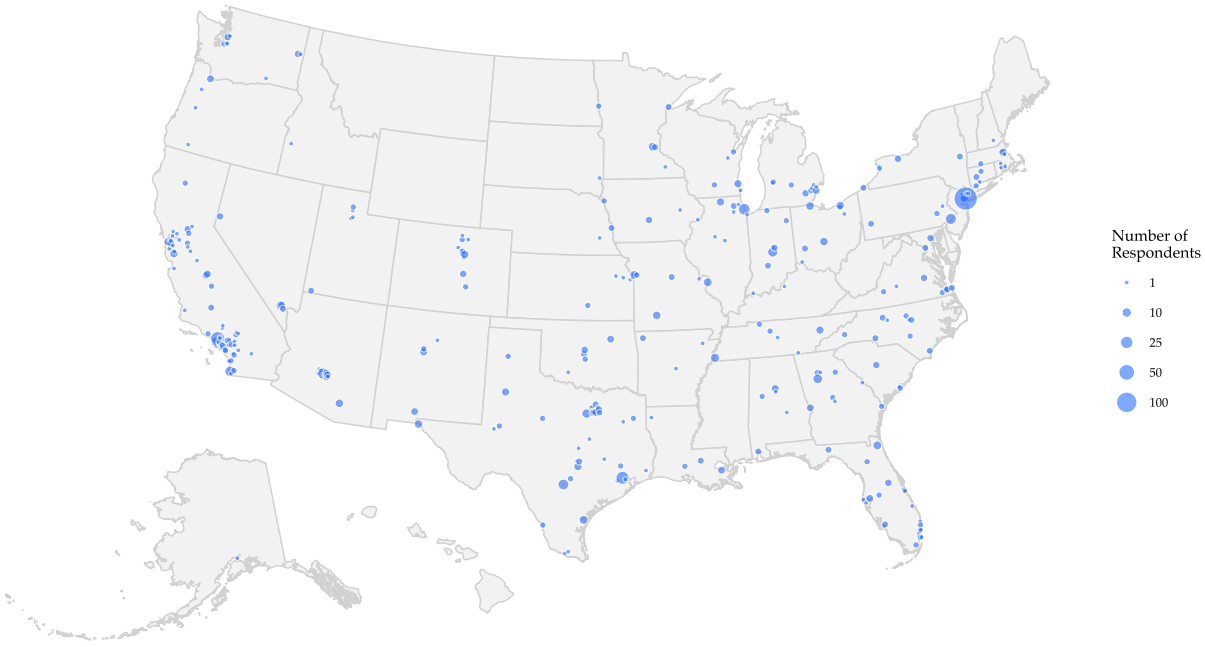
Table A.1: Survey Sample Summary Statistics *(continued)*

	$50k - $75k	N	244
		Percent	23.7
	$75k - 100k	N	187
		Percent	18.2
	$100k - $150k	N	185
		Percent	18.0
	$150k - $200k	N	59
		Percent	5.7
	Greater than $200k	N	66
		Percent	6.4
Residency	Own	N	515
		Percent	50.1
	Rent	N	416
		Percent	40.5
	Other	N	93
		Percent	9.0
	Prefer Not to Say	N	4
		Percent	0.4
News Interest	Hardly at All	N	98
		Percent	9.5
	Only Now and Then	N	127
		Percent	12.4
	Some of the Time	N	308
		Percent	30.0
	Most of the Time	N	495
		Percent	48.2
Race	White	N	668
		Percent	65.0
	Black	N	118
		Percent	11.5
	Hispanic	N	101

Table A.1: Survey Sample Summary Statistics *(continued)*

		Percent	9.8
	Asian	N	69
		Percent	6.7
	Native American	N	14
		Percent	1.4
	Middle Eastern	N	4
		Percent	0.4
	Mixed Race	N	41
		Percent	4.0
	Other Race	N	11
		Percent	1.1
Sexuality	Heterosexual	N	876
		Percent	85.2
	Lesbian/Gay	N	47
		Percent	4.6
	Bisexual	N	72
		Percent	7.0
	Other Sexuality	N	32
		Percent	3.1
Registered to Vote	Registered	N	919
		Percent	89.4
	Not Registered	N	95
		Percent	9.2
	Not Sure if Registered	N	14
		Percent	1.4
Age		Mean	48.0
		SD	16.4
Party ID (1-7)		Mean	3.9
		SD	2.2
Ideology (1-5)		Mean	2.9

Figure A.2: Map of 321 Cities Represented by Respondents in the Survey



SD 1.2

A.3 Sensitivity of Results to the Inclusion and Exclusion of Certain Policies

A reasonable potential criticism of the findings presented in the paper is that they may be conditional on the policies on which respondents were surveyed. In other words, if respondents gave their preferences and perceptions of a smaller or larger number of policies, the magnitude, direction, or statistical significance of the main effects may differ. To address this concern, I run a set of sensitivity analyses that exclude one or a group of policies from the data and recalculate some of the primary quantities of interest. Taken together, the results of these sensitivity tests suggest that I would arrive at estimates of similar magnitudes, directions, and statistical significance no matter the number of policies to which respondents gave their preferences and perceptions.

In Table A.2, I present the estimated mean accuracy rate (Figure 1 in main text), the interaction between beliefs about the partisanship of the city and the policy (Table 6 in main text), and the coefficients from the linear model that predicts city government approval by actual and perceived policy congruence (Column 3, Table 7 in the main text) when each of the 20 policies is excluded from the data as well as their 95% confidence intervals. The results demonstrate that leaving any of the policies out does not impact the magnitude, direction, or statistical significance of any of the key estimates of interest.

Figures A.3 and A.4 extend these sensitivity analyses by presenting the estimates of interest calculated from 1,000 simulations that randomly drop five and ten of the policies from the analyses respectively. In each subplot, the simulations are arranged from the smallest to the largest estimates across the x-axis. For reference, dashed lines in each subplot visualize the estimate presented in the main paper using all 20 policies, while dotted lines visualize those estimates' 95% confidence intervals.

Across both sets of simulations, the full-sample point estimates fall well within most of the interquartile ranges of the simulated distributions, and when they do not, the sim-

Table A.2: Replication of Main Results When Each Policy is Dropped from Analyses

Dropped Policy	Mean Accuracy Rate	Dem. City Belief × Dem. Policy Belief Interaction	Actual Congruence Coefficient	Perceived Congruence Coefficient
Accessory Dwelling Unit	57.9%	-0.040	-0.133	1.480
	[55.6, 60.2]	[-0.074, -0.006]	[-0.329, 0.062]	[1.309, 1.650]
Anti-Displacement Assistance	57.5%	-0.037	-0.107	1.486
	[55.3, 59.7]	[-0.070, -0.003]	[-0.301, 0.088]	[1.311, 1.662]
Big Box Retailer Restrictions	57.6%	-0.037	-0.037	1.436
	[55.4, 59.8]	[-0.071, -0.004]	[-0.239, 0.165]	[1.266, 1.607]
Civilian Police Oversight Committee	57.9%	-0.036	-0.136	1.452
	[55.6, 60.2]	[-0.069, -0.003]	[-0.333, 0.061]	[1.279, 1.626]
Climate Emergency Declaration	57.5%	-0.030	-0.131	1.484
	[55.3, 59.7]	[-0.064, 0.003]	[-0.329, 0.066]	[1.310, 1.659]
Mental Health Co-Responder	58.2%	-0.045	-0.152	1.508
	[55.9, 60.5]	[-0.079, -0.012]	[-0.355, 0.051]	[1.333, 1.683]
D.E.I. Initiative	57.6%	-0.041	-0.155	1.401
	[55.4, 59.8]	[-0.074, -0.008]	[-0.353, 0.043]	[1.226, 1.576]
Police Demilitarization	57.9%	-0.033	-0.054	1.486
	[55.6, 60.2]	[-0.067, 0.000]	[-0.245, 0.137]	[1.309, 1.662]
E.V. Charger Incentives	57.8%	-0.033	-0.038	1.444
	[55.6, 60.0]	[-0.066, 0.001]	[-0.230, 0.153]	[1.270, 1.618]
Housing First	57.9%	-0.032	-0.148	1.487
	[55.6, 60.2]	[-0.065, 0.002]	[-0.350, 0.055]	[1.313, 1.661]
Homeless Response Unit	58.0%	-0.041	-0.117	1.436
	[55.7, 60.3]	[-0.075, -0.008]	[-0.313, 0.079]	[1.260, 1.611]
Inclusionary Zoning	57.7%	-0.037	-0.092	1.476
	[55.5, 59.9]	[-0.070, -0.004]	[-0.291, 0.107]	[1.302, 1.650]
Just Cause Eviction	58.3%	-0.039	-0.046	1.469
	[56.0, 60.6]	[-0.073, -0.006]	[-0.239, 0.147]	[1.294, 1.645]
Gender Neutral Language	58.4%	-0.023	0.039	1.394
	[56.1, 60.7]	[-0.057, 0.010]	[-0.152, 0.229]	[1.219, 1.568]
E-scooter/Bike Share	57.8%	-0.028	-0.123	1.442
	[55.6, 60.0]	[-0.062, 0.006]	[-0.314, 0.069]	[1.272, 1.612]
"15-Minute City" Plan	58.1%	-0.041	-0.068	1.473
	[55.8, 60.4]	[-0.075, -0.008]	[-0.261, 0.124]	[1.297, 1.648]
LGBT Non-discrimination	57.7%	-0.034	-0.060	1.426
	[55.5, 59.9]	[-0.067, -0.000]	[-0.257, 0.138]	[1.254, 1.599]
Removal of Off Street Parking Minimums	58.2%	-0.044	-0.117	1.446
	[55.9, 60.5]	[-0.077, -0.010]	[-0.317, 0.082]	[1.276, 1.615]
Transit-Signal Priority/Bus Lanes	57.4%	-0.035	-0.063	1.463
	[55.2, 59.6]	[-0.068, -0.001]	[-0.260, 0.133]	[1.291, 1.635]
Zero Emission Fleet Plan	57.6%	-0.036	-0.122	1.502
	[55.4, 59.8]	[-0.069, -0.003]	[-0.321, 0.077]	[1.328, 1.676]
Full-sample Point Estimate	**57.8%**	**-0.036***	**-0.101**	**1.513*****

ulated estimates still maintain the same direction and level of statistical significance. The 95% confidence intervals from the full sample estimates overlap substantially with those from the simulated draws even when dropping up to half of the policy battery. In sum, these results indicate that the paper's findings are not an artifact of the particular set of 20 policies included in the survey instrument, but reflect a more general pattern in how residents perceive and evaluate municipal policy.

Figure A.3: Results from 1,000 Simulations Randomly Dropping Five Policies from Analyses

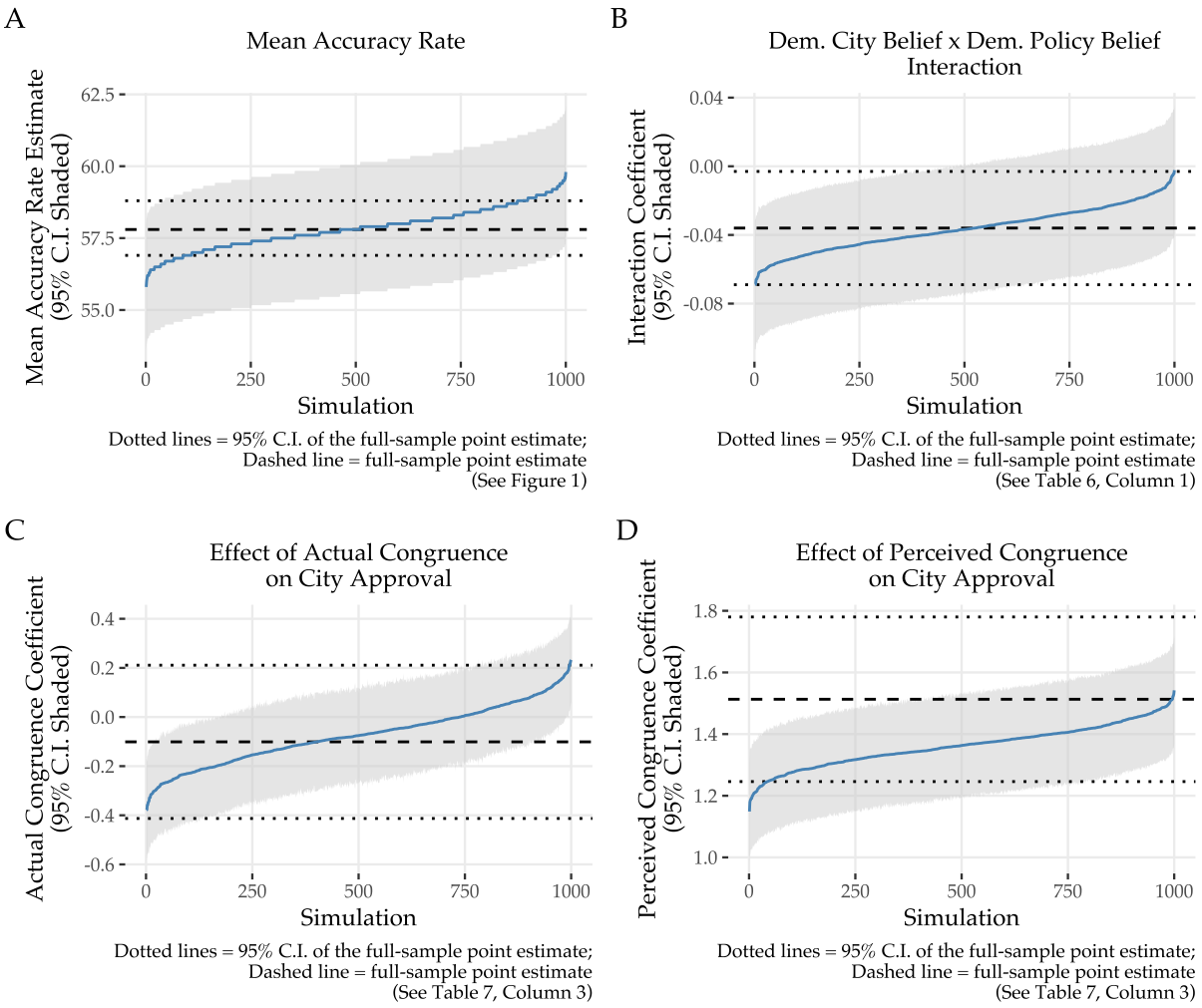
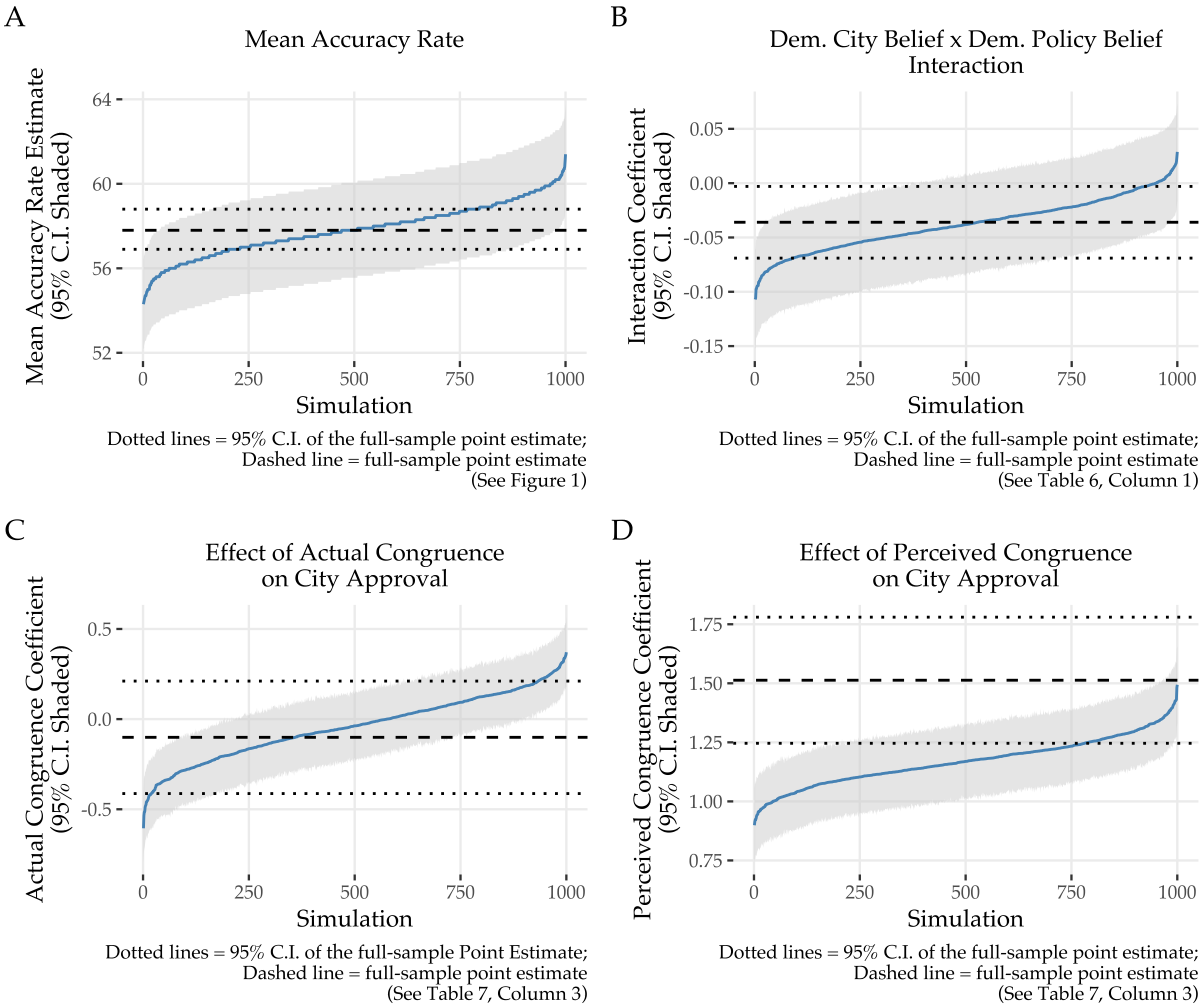


Figure A.4: Results from 1,000 Simulations Randomly Dropping Ten Policies from Analyses



A.4 Results from Counterfactual Simulations that Reduce Over-Assumption of Policy Presence

To assess whether respondents' generally low accuracy rates are an artifact of their tendency to over-assume policy adoption, I conduct a series of counterfactual simulations that artificially reduce the rate at which respondents report that a policy is "present" in their city. For each respondent-policy observation in which the respondent indicated a they believed the policy was present, I randomly recode a share of these responses (10%, 20%, and 50% in turn) to "not present." This procedure has two potential effects on perception accuracy: it converts a share of correct "present" responses (true positives) into errors, and it converts a share of incorrect "present" responses (false positives) into correct responses. Because false positive responses make up a substantial share of respondents' incorrect perceptions, this recoding is intended to simulate what accuracy rates would look like if respondents were less prone to over-amusing policy adoption. I then recalculate the mean accuracy rate under each counterfactual scenario, both in aggregate (Table A.3 and separately for each of the twenty policies (Table A.4).

Table A.3: Counterfactual Simulation that Artificially Reduces Over-Assumption, Across All Policies

Reduction in Tendency to Say "Present"	Accuracy Rate Under Counterfactual	Accuracy Loss/Gain
10%	57.72%	-0.09%
20%	57.63%	-0.18%
50%	57.35%	-0.46%

Table A.4: Counterfactual Simulation that Artificially Reduces Over-Assumption, by Policy

Policy	Reduction in Tendency to Say "Present"	Accuracy Rate Under Counterfactual	Accuracy Loss/Gain
Accessory Dwelling Unit	10%	53.44%	-4.34%

Table A.4: Counterfactual Simulation that Artificially Reduces Over-Assumption, by Policy *(continued)*

Policy	Reduction in Tendency to Say "Present"	Accuracy Rate Under Counterfactual	Accuracy Loss/Gain
	20%	49.11%	-8.68%
	50%	36.09%	-21.69%
Anti-Displacement Assistance	10%	66.61%	2.12%
	20%	68.74%	4.24%
	50%	75.1%	10.6%
Big Box Retailer Restrictions	10%	63.71%	2.91%
	20%	66.61%	5.82%
	50%	75.34%	14.54%
Civilian Police Oversight Committee	10%	55.8%	-1.89%
	20%	53.91%	-3.77%
	50%	48.25%	-9.44%
Climate Emergency Declaration	10%	65.1%	0.31%
	20%	65.41%	0.62%
	50%	66.34%	1.56%
D.E.I. Initiative	10%	60.6%	-2.33%
	20%	58.27%	-4.67%
	50%	51.26%	-11.67%
E-scooter/Bike Share	10%	58.29%	-0.27%
	20%	58.02%	-0.54%
	50%	57.2%	-1.36%
E.V. Charger Incentives	10%	58.65%	2.03%
	20%	60.68%	4.07%
	50%	66.78%	10.17%
"15-Minute City" Plan	10%	54.26%	0.27%
	20%	54.53%	0.54%
	50%	55.35%	1.36%
Gender Neutral Language	10%	52.01%	4.83%

Table A.4: Counterfactual Simulation that Artificially Reduces Over-Assumption, by Policy *(continued)*

Policy	Reduction in Tendency to Say "Present"	Accuracy Rate Under Counterfactual	Accuracy Loss/Gain
	20%	56.85%	9.67%
	50%	71.35%	24.17%
Homeless Response Unit	10%	53.33%	-2.32%
	20%	51.01%	-4.63%
	50%	44.07%	-11.58%
Housing First	10%	55.83%	-1.08%
	20%	54.75%	-2.16%
	50%	51.51%	-5.4%
Inclusionary Zoning	10%	60.89%	-0.2%
	20%	60.68%	-0.41%
	50%	60.07%	-1.02%
Just Cause Eviction	10%	50.65%	2.69%
	20%	53.35%	5.39%
	50%	61.43%	13.47%
LGBT Non-discrimination	10%	58.75%	-2.34%
	20%	56.4%	-4.69%
	50%	49.37%	-11.72%
Mental Health Co-Responder	10%	48.77%	-2.59%
	20%	46.19%	-5.18%
	50%	38.42%	-12.94%
Police Demilitarization	10%	59.76%	3.53%
	20%	63.29%	7.06%
	50%	73.88%	17.66%
Removal of Off Street Parking Minimums	10%	50.07%	-1.49%
	20%	48.58%	-2.98%
	50%	44.11%	-7.44%
Transit-Signal Priority/Bus Lanes	10%	65.54%	-1.59%

Table A.4: Counterfactual Simulation that Artificially Reduces Over-Assumption, by Policy *(continued)*

Policy	Reduction in Tendency to Say "Present"	Accuracy Rate Under Counterfactual	Accuracy Loss/Gain
	20%	63.95%	-3.17%
	50%	59.19%	-7.93%
Zero Emission Fleet Plan	10%	62.35%	-0.1%
	20%	62.26%	-0.19%
	50%	61.96%	-0.49%

A.5 Versions of Regression Tables With All Co-variates Listed

Table A.5: The Effect of Accurate Partisan Associations on Perception Accuracy (Table 5 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed)

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Accurate City-Partisanship Association	0.004
	(0.014)
Accurate Policy-Partisanship Association	-0.028
	(0.014)
Accurate City Accurate City × Policy Partisan Association	0.042*
	(0.017)
Party ID (1 to 7)	-0.001
	(0.002)
Age	0.000
	(0.000)
High School Grad	0.047
	(0.034)
Some College	0.048
	(0.035)
2-Year Degree	0.067
	(0.037)
4-Year Degree	0.061
	(0.035)
Post-graduate Degree	0.074*
	(0.037)
Male	0.003
	(0.011)
Non-binary/Other Gender	0.024
	(0.060)

Table A.5: The Effect of Accurate Partisan Associations on Perception Accuracy (Table 5 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Work in Another City	0.007
	(0.017)
Not Employed	0.018
	(0.013)
Prefer Not to Disclose Work Location	0.066
	(0.046)
1-3 Years in City	-0.007
	(0.036)
3-5 Years in City	-0.017
	(0.037)
5-10 Years in City	-0.019
	(0.035)
10+ Years in City	-0.009
	(0.033)
Income: $15k to $50k	0.004
	(0.022)
Income: $50k to $75k	0.023
	(0.022)
Income: $75k to $100k	0.027
	(0.023)
Income: $100k to $150k	0.038
	(0.024)
Income: $150k to $200k	0.051
	(0.029)
Income: $>$ $200k	0.018
	(0.030)
Renter	0.011

Table A.5: The Effect of Accurate Partisan Associations on Perception Accuracy (Table 5 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
	(0.012)
Neither Renter Nor Homeowner	0.015
	(0.021)
Prefer Not to Disclose Homeowner Status	0.138
	(0.078)
News Interest: Only Now and Then	-0.004
	(0.025)
News Interest: Some of the Time	0.015
	(0.022)
News Interest: Most of the Time	0.025
	(0.022)
Black	-0.072***
	(0.018)
Hispanic	-0.005
	(0.018)
Asian	-0.018
	(0.021)
Native American	-0.005
	(0.044)
Middle Eastern	-0.126
	(0.086)
Mixed Race	-0.020
	(0.028)
Other Race/Ethnicity	-0.025
	(0.047)
Lesbian/Gay	-0.023
	(0.025)

Table A.5: The Effect of Accurate Partisan Associations on Perception Accuracy (Table 5 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Bisexual	-0.017
	(0.020)
Other Non-Heterosexuality	-0.004
	(0.033)
Not Registered to Vote	-0.060**
	(0.021)
Not Sure if Registered to Vote	-0.049
	(0.056)
Voted in Most Recent City Election	-0.043**
	(0.015)
Constant	0.528***
	(0.062)
Observations	17,377
R^2 Marg.	0.008
R^2 Cond.	0.059

Note: Estimates (with standard errors in parentheses) are derived from a multilevel linear probability model with random intercepts for each respondent and policy. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A.6: The Net Effect of Partisan Thinking on Perception Accuracy (Table 6 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed)

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Believes City is Dem.	-0.002
	(0.014)
Believes Policy is Dem.	0.041**
	(0.013)

Table A.6: The Net Effect of Partisan Thinking on Perception Accuracy (Table 6 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
Party ID (1 to 7)	-0.002
	(0.002)
Age	0.000
	(0.000)
High School Grad	0.045
	(0.034)
Some College	0.044
	(0.035)
2-Year Degree	0.065
	(0.037)
4-Year Degree	0.065
	(0.035)
Post-graduate Degree	0.079*
	(0.036)
Male	0.004
	(0.011)
Non-binary/Other Gender	0.022
	(0.059)
Work in Another City	0.003
	(0.016)
Not Employed	0.020
	(0.013)
Prefer Not to Disclose Work Location	0.067
	(0.046)
1-3 Years in City	-0.011
	(0.036)
3-5 Years in City	-0.015

Table A.6: The Net Effect of Partisan Thinking on Perception Accuracy (Table 6 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
	(0.037)
5-10 Years in City	-0.024
	(0.035)
10+ Years in City	-0.009
	(0.033)
Income: $15k to $50k	0.003
	(0.022)
Income: $50k to $75k	0.025
	(0.022)
Income: $75k to $100k	0.030
	(0.023)
Income: $100k to $150k	0.037
	(0.024)
Income: $150k to $200k	0.054
	(0.029)
Income: $>$ $200k	0.018
	(0.030)
Renter	0.015
	(0.012)
Neither Renter Nor Homeowner	0.009
	(0.021)
Prefer Not to Disclose Homeowner Status	0.125
	(0.077)
News Interest: Only Now and Then	-0.002
	(0.024)
News Interest: Some of the Time	0.018
	(0.022)

Table A.6: The Net Effect of Partisan Thinking on Perception Accuracy (Table 6 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
News Interest: Most of the Time	0.028
	(0.022)
Black	-0.073***
	(0.018)
Hispanic	-0.005
	(0.018)
Asian	-0.022
	(0.021)
Native American	-0.011
	(0.044)
Middle Eastern	-0.121
	(0.086)
Mixed Race	-0.022
	(0.028)
Other Race/Ethnicity	-0.025
	(0.047)
Lesbian/Gay	-0.021
	(0.025)
Bisexual	-0.015
	(0.020)
Other Non-Heterosexuality	-0.007
	(0.032)
Not Registered to Vote	-0.063**
	(0.021)
Not Sure if Registered to Vote	-0.050
	(0.055)
Voted in Most Recent City Election	-0.042**

Table A.6: The Net Effect of Partisan Thinking on Perception Accuracy (Table 6 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Accurate Policy Perception = 1
	(1)
	(0.015)
Constant	0.534***
	(0.061)
Observations	17,368
R^2 Marg.	0.009
R^2 Cond.	0.058

Note: Estimates (with standard errors in parentheses) are derived from a multilevel linear probability model with random intercepts for each respondent and policy. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A.7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval (Table 7 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed)

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Actual Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)	0.443**		-0.101				
	(0.160)		(0.159)				
Perceived Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)		1.487***	1.513***				0.877***
		(0.130)	(0.136)				(0.113)
Accurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.873***			
				(0.125)			
Inaccurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.704***			
				(0.121)			
Retrospective Evaluation (-1 to 1)					1.791***		1.556***
					(0.082)		(0.081)
Perceived Co-partisanship w/ Mayor (-1 to 1)						0.539***	0.259***
						(0.059)	(0.050)
Party ID (1 to 7)	-0.078**	-0.092***	-0.090***	-0.094***	-0.030	-0.007	-0.019
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.020)
Age	-0.004	-0.003	-0.003	-0.003	-0.001	-0.001	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
High School Grad	0.483	0.290	0.286	0.274	0.470	0.547	0.396
	(0.327)	(0.309)	(0.309)	(0.307)	(0.269)	(0.315)	(0.257)

Table A.7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval (Table 7 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Some College	0.677*	0.490	0.489	0.489	0.572*	0.710*	0.482
	(0.339)	(0.320)	(0.320)	(0.318)	(0.279)	(0.327)	(0.266)
2-Year Degree	0.392	0.194	0.188	0.133	0.357	0.373	0.245
	(0.359)	(0.339)	(0.339)	(0.337)	(0.295)	(0.346)	(0.282)
4-Year Degree	0.613	0.436	0.438	0.404	0.576*	0.671*	0.484
	(0.341)	(0.322)	(0.322)	(0.320)	(0.280)	(0.329)	(0.267)
Post-graduate Degree	0.959**	0.758*	0.764*	0.747*	0.799**	0.978**	0.667*
	(0.357)	(0.337)	(0.337)	(0.335)	(0.294)	(0.344)	(0.280)
Male	0.129	0.058	0.060	0.054	-0.082	0.125	-0.114
	(0.107)	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.089)	(0.103)	(0.085)
Non-binary/Other Gender	-0.457	-0.090	-0.091	-0.090	-0.573	-0.405	-0.281
	(0.646)	(0.610)	(0.610)	(0.606)	(0.531)	(0.623)	(0.507)
Work in Another City	0.129	0.230	0.229	0.228	0.115	0.157	0.200
	(0.170)	(0.160)	(0.160)	(0.160)	(0.139)	(0.164)	(0.133)
Not Employed	-0.069	0.018	0.019	0.002	0.024	-0.021	0.087
	(0.129)	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.121)	(0.106)	(0.125)	(0.102)
Prefer Not to Disclose Work Location	-0.094	0.104	0.107	0.118	-0.515	-0.046	-0.315
	(0.432)	(0.408)	(0.408)	(0.405)	(0.356)	(0.417)	(0.339)

Table A.7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval (Table 7 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1-3 Years in City	-0.014	0.207	0.198	0.205	0.276	0.095	0.478
	(0.353)	(0.333)	(0.333)	(0.331)	(0.290)	(0.340)	(0.277)
3-5 Years in City	-0.230	-0.100	-0.106	-0.011	0.058	-0.111	0.191
	(0.360)	(0.340)	(0.340)	(0.339)	(0.296)	(0.347)	(0.283)
5-10 Years in City	-0.333	-0.172	-0.178	-0.161	-0.014	-0.218	0.132
	(0.345)	(0.326)	(0.326)	(0.323)	(0.284)	(0.333)	(0.271)
10+ Years in City	-0.501	-0.315	-0.319	-0.316	0.039	-0.302	0.210
	(0.320)	(0.302)	(0.302)	(0.300)	(0.264)	(0.309)	(0.252)
Income: $15k to $50k	-0.097	0.015	0.017	-0.014	-0.009	-0.050	0.073
	(0.210)	(0.198)	(0.198)	(0.196)	(0.172)	(0.202)	(0.165)
Income: $50k to $75k	-0.039	0.045	0.047	0.018	0.035	0.062	0.119
	(0.210)	(0.198)	(0.198)	(0.196)	(0.173)	(0.203)	(0.165)
Income: $75k to $100k	-0.030	-0.056	-0.052	-0.065	-0.001	0.013	-0.016
	(0.224)	(0.211)	(0.211)	(0.210)	(0.184)	(0.216)	(0.175)
Income: $100k to $150k	-0.179	-0.093	-0.087	-0.126	-0.184	-0.051	-0.086
	(0.236)	(0.222)	(0.223)	(0.221)	(0.194)	(0.228)	(0.185)
Income: $150k to $200k	-0.346	-0.270	-0.261	-0.292	-0.122	-0.304	-0.112
	(0.296)	(0.279)	(0.280)	(0.279)	(0.244)	(0.287)	(0.233)

Table A.7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval (Table 7 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Income: > $200k	-0.421	-0.368	-0.359	-0.377	-0.225	-0.273	-0.183
	(0.299)	(0.281)	(0.282)	(0.280)	(0.246)	(0.288)	(0.234)
Renter	-0.057	-0.060	-0.050	-0.037	-0.004	-0.023	-0.041
	(0.124)	(0.116)	(0.117)	(0.116)	(0.101)	(0.119)	(0.097)
Neither Renter Nor Homeowner	-0.463*	-0.324	-0.316	-0.324	-0.307	-0.336	-0.208
	(0.211)	(0.199)	(0.199)	(0.198)	(0.173)	(0.203)	(0.165)
Prefer Not to Disclose Homeowner Status	0.680	0.784	0.803	0.932	0.814	0.357	0.624
	(0.838)	(0.790)	(0.790)	(0.785)	(0.689)	(0.809)	(0.657)
News Interest: Only Now and Then	0.338	0.306	0.304	0.325	0.300	0.233	0.242
	(0.225)	(0.212)	(0.212)	(0.211)	(0.185)	(0.217)	(0.176)
News Interest: Some of the Time	0.279	0.247	0.249	0.267	0.185	0.283	0.172
	(0.200)	(0.189)	(0.189)	(0.188)	(0.164)	(0.193)	(0.157)
News Interest: Most of the Time	0.262	0.184	0.182	0.221	0.084	0.169	0.019
	(0.205)	(0.193)	(0.193)	(0.192)	(0.169)	(0.198)	(0.161)
Black	0.005	-0.114	-0.112	-0.110	0.065	-0.078	-0.070
	(0.177)	(0.167)	(0.167)	(0.166)	(0.145)	(0.171)	(0.139)
Hispanic	0.345	0.332*	0.336*	0.327*	0.344*	0.356*	0.322*
	(0.177)	(0.167)	(0.167)	(0.166)	(0.145)	(0.170)	(0.138)

Table A.7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval (Table 7 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Asian	0.387	0.327	0.324	0.354	0.185	0.251	0.118
	(0.212)	(0.200)	(0.200)	(0.200)	(0.175)	(0.205)	(0.167)
Native American	0.154	0.026	0.023	0.007	0.120	0.031	-0.012
	(0.447)	(0.422)	(0.422)	(0.419)	(0.368)	(0.432)	(0.351)
Middle Eastern	-0.870	-0.454	-0.453	-0.399	-0.119	-0.540	0.209
	(0.815)	(0.769)	(0.769)	(0.764)	(0.671)	(0.787)	(0.640)
Mixed Race	-0.138	-0.032	-0.023	-0.033	-0.116	-0.010	-0.027
	(0.268)	(0.252)	(0.253)	(0.251)	(0.220)	(0.258)	(0.210)
Other Race/Ethnicity	-0.442	-0.525	-0.524	-0.524	0.006	-0.323	-0.055
	(0.491)	(0.463)	(0.463)	(0.459)	(0.404)	(0.473)	(0.385)
Lesbian/Gay	0.331	0.230	0.231	0.249	0.406*	0.313	0.318
	(0.248)	(0.234)	(0.234)	(0.235)	(0.204)	(0.239)	(0.194)
Bisexual	0.279	0.142	0.132	0.123	0.221	0.206	0.143
	(0.205)	(0.194)	(0.194)	(0.193)	(0.169)	(0.198)	(0.161)
Other Non-Heterosexuality	0.055	0.115	0.113	0.081	0.224	0.037	0.238
	(0.320)	(0.301)	(0.301)	(0.299)	(0.263)	(0.308)	(0.250)
Not Registered to Vote	0.102	0.112	0.109	0.086	0.137	0.053	0.128
	(0.206)	(0.194)	(0.195)	(0.194)	(0.170)	(0.199)	(0.162)

Table A.7: The Effect of Policy Congruence (Perceived & Actual) on City Government Approval (Table 7 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Not Sure if Registered to Vote	0.274	0.265	0.251	0.303	0.465	0.330	0.517
	(0.466)	(0.438)	(0.439)	(0.436)	(0.382)	(0.449)	(0.364)
Voted in Most Recent City Election	0.442**	0.301*	0.299*	0.310*	0.439***	0.324*	0.290*
	(0.147)	(0.139)	(0.139)	(0.138)	(0.121)	(0.144)	(0.117)
Constant	4.116***	4.053***	4.037***	4.092***	3.657***	3.435***	3.417***
	(0.568)	(0.535)	(0.536)	(0.532)	(0.467)	(0.551)	(0.448)
Observations	1,019	1,019	1,019	1,014	1,019	1,016	1,016
R^2	0.089	0.191	0.191	0.204	0.384	0.154	0.443
Adj. R^2	0.050	0.156	0.155	0.168	0.358	0.117	0.418

Note: Estimates are derived from OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A.8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents (Table 8 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed)

	D.V.: City Government Approval (1 – 7)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Actual Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)	0.098*		-0.004				
	(0.044)		(0.045)				
Perceived Policy Congruence (-1 to 1)		0.284***	0.285***				0.154***
		(0.037)	(0.038)				(0.035)
Accurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.174***			
				(0.035)			
Inaccurate Perceived Congruence (-1 to 1)				0.104**			
				(0.034)			
Retrospective Evaluation (-1 to 1)					0.332***		0.276***
					(0.025)		(0.025)
Perceived Co-partisanship w/ Mayor (-1 to 1)						0.141***	0.092***
						(0.016)	(0.015)
Party ID (1 to 7)	-0.026***	-0.029***	-0.029***	-0.030***	-0.017**	-0.008	-0.010
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Age	-0.003*	-0.002*	-0.002*	-0.003*	-0.002*	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
High School Grad	-0.009	-0.046	-0.046	-0.046	-0.011	0.007	-0.019
	(0.089)	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.082)	(0.086)	(0.080)

Table A.8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents (Table 8 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Would Re-Elect Incumbent Mayor = 1						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Some College	0.009	-0.025	-0.025	-0.024	-0.010	0.019	-0.022
	(0.092)	(0.090)	(0.090)	(0.090)	(0.085)	(0.089)	(0.083)
2-Year Degree	-0.022	-0.060	-0.060	-0.067	-0.029	-0.027	-0.049
	(0.098)	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.096)	(0.090)	(0.095)	(0.088)
4-Year Degree	-0.088	-0.121	-0.121	-0.125	-0.094	-0.073	-0.106
	(0.093)	(0.090)	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.086)	(0.090)	(0.083)
Post-graduate Degree	0.010	-0.027	-0.027	-0.030	-0.018	0.015	-0.040
	(0.097)	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.090)	(0.094)	(0.087)
Male	0.043	0.030	0.030	0.029	0.004	0.041	-0.001
	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.026)
Non-binary/Other Gender	-0.178	-0.109	-0.109	-0.117	-0.201	-0.163	-0.141
	(0.176)	(0.172)	(0.172)	(0.172)	(0.162)	(0.170)	(0.158)
Work in Another City	-0.049	-0.030	-0.030	-0.033	-0.052	-0.042	-0.035
	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.042)
Not Employed	-0.051	-0.034	-0.034	-0.039	-0.034	-0.040	-0.021
	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.032)
Prefer Not to Disclose Work Location	-0.008	0.029	0.029	0.028	-0.087	0.003	-0.044
	(0.118)	(0.115)	(0.115)	(0.115)	(0.109)	(0.114)	(0.106)

Table A.8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents (Table 8 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Would Re-Elect Incumbent Mayor = 1						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1-3 Years in City	0.014	0.055	0.054	0.044	0.065	0.045	0.113
	(0.096)	(0.094)	(0.094)	(0.094)	(0.089)	(0.093)	(0.086)
3-5 Years in City	-0.061	-0.037	-0.037	-0.022	-0.009	-0.027	0.026
	(0.098)	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.091)	(0.095)	(0.088)
5-10 Years in City	0.031	0.062	0.062	0.061	0.089	0.067	0.129
	(0.094)	(0.091)	(0.092)	(0.092)	(0.087)	(0.091)	(0.084)
10+ Years in City	-0.062	-0.027	-0.027	-0.031	0.037	-0.008	0.083
	(0.087)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.081)	(0.084)	(0.079)
Income: $15k to $50k	-0.057	-0.035	-0.035	-0.042	-0.040	-0.046	-0.025
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.051)
Income: $50k to $75k	-0.049	-0.032	-0.032	-0.039	-0.036	-0.023	-0.013
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.051)
Income: $75k to $100k	0.027	0.023	0.023	0.021	0.033	0.037	0.032
	(0.061)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.060)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.055)
Income: $100k to $150k	-0.017	0.001	0.001	-0.007	-0.017	0.017	0.011
	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.063)	(0.063)	(0.059)	(0.062)	(0.058)
Income: $150k to $200k	0.017	0.032	0.033	0.016	0.059	0.029	0.063
	(0.081)	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.075)	(0.078)	(0.073)

Table A.8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents (Table 8 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Would Re-Elect Incumbent Mayor = 1						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Income: > $200k	-0.079	-0.067	-0.067	-0.072	-0.042	-0.042	-0.026
	(0.081)	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.080)	(0.075)	(0.079)	(0.073)
Renter	-0.004	-0.003	-0.003	-0.003	0.008	0.004	0.000
	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.030)
Neither Renter Nor Homeowner	-0.133*	-0.105	-0.105	-0.109	-0.104	-0.099	-0.076
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.051)
Prefer Not to Disclose Homeowner Status	-0.117	-0.095	-0.094	-0.075	-0.089	-0.203	-0.156
	(0.229)	(0.222)	(0.222)	(0.223)	(0.211)	(0.221)	(0.205)
News Interest: Only Now and Then	0.062	0.057	0.057	0.058	0.055	0.036	0.038
	(0.061)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.055)
News Interest: Some of the Time	0.098	0.092	0.092	0.095	0.081	0.098	0.078
	(0.055)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.049)
News Interest: Most of the Time	0.148**	0.133*	0.133*	0.141**	0.115*	0.124*	0.097
	(0.056)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.052)	(0.054)	(0.050)
Black	-0.035	-0.057	-0.057	-0.055	-0.023	-0.057	-0.055
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.043)
Hispanic	-0.082	-0.083	-0.083	-0.084	-0.081	-0.079	-0.085*
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.043)

Table A.8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents (Table 8 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Would Re-Elect Incumbent Mayor = 1						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Asian	0.044	0.033	0.032	0.041	0.007	0.009	-0.015
	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.053)	(0.056)	(0.052)
Native American	-0.058	-0.082	-0.082	-0.081	-0.064	-0.089	-0.096
	(0.122)	(0.119)	(0.119)	(0.119)	(0.113)	(0.118)	(0.109)
Middle Eastern	-0.056	0.023	0.023	0.025	0.083	0.032	0.164
	(0.222)	(0.216)	(0.217)	(0.217)	(0.205)	(0.215)	(0.199)
Mixed Race	-0.171*	-0.147*	-0.146*	-0.150*	-0.166*	-0.135	-0.138*
	(0.072)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.067)	(0.070)	(0.065)
Other Race/Ethnicity	-0.052	-0.067	-0.067	-0.066	0.032	-0.021	0.026
	(0.134)	(0.130)	(0.130)	(0.130)	(0.124)	(0.129)	(0.120)
Lesbian/Gay	-0.035	-0.054	-0.054	-0.047	-0.021	-0.041	-0.040
	(0.068)	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.062)	(0.065)	(0.061)
Bisexual	-0.016	-0.042	-0.042	-0.041	-0.028	-0.032	-0.043
	(0.056)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.051)	(0.054)	(0.050)
Other Non-Heterosexuality	-0.102	-0.091	-0.091	-0.097	-0.071	-0.107	-0.072
	(0.087)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.080)	(0.084)	(0.078)
Not Registered to Vote	-0.031	-0.031	-0.031	-0.031	-0.026	-0.044	-0.031
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.052)	(0.054)	(0.050)

Table A.8: The Effect of Policy Reality, Perceptions, and Other Judgments on Support for Incumbents (Table 8 in Main Text With All Covariate Effects Listed) *(continued)*

	D.V.: Would Re-Elect Incumbent Mayor = 1						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Not Sure if Registered to Vote	0.068	0.064	0.064	0.079	0.101	0.086	0.119
	(0.127)	(0.123)	(0.124)	(0.124)	(0.117)	(0.123)	(0.114)
Voted in Most Recent City Election	0.203***	0.175***	0.175***	0.182***	0.202***	0.171***	0.165***
	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.036)
Constant	0.406**	0.390**	0.389**	0.404**	0.318*	0.229	0.226
	(0.155)	(0.150)	(0.151)	(0.151)	(0.143)	(0.151)	(0.140)
Observations	1,020	1,020	1,020	1,015	1,020	1,017	1,017
R^2	0.132	0.178	0.178	0.178	0.260	0.191	0.306
Adj. R^2	0.094	0.143	0.142	0.142	0.228	0.156	0.275

Note: Estimates are derived from linear probability models with standard errors in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.