"To Govern Well is to Govern for All": Analyzing Manager Behavior in Partisan and Nonpartisan Local Governments

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Abstract

This study examines the behaviors and attitudes of managers in nonpartisan and partisan local systems. It examines relevant literature relating to public service motivation, nonpartisan elections impact on managerial culture, and nonpartisan governance. This study includes a survey of managers in North Carolina in municipalities of 5,000 or more. With an n of 173 we captured respondents' attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and values as well as demographic characteristics. Our findings suggest that there are significant differences in public administration training, public service motivation, understanding of council's responsibilities, and questioning of work-life balance between managers in nonpartisan and partisan systems. Supporting these findings, in our interviews, managers touched on two major areas where a partisan and non-partisan context likely influenced operations. These were most evident in areas of differing government function and manager selection.

1. Introduction

In a 1915 American Political Science Review article, Lapp (1915:314) argued that "To govern well is to govern for all, not for a part or a class. To act in official capacity (sic) should be to act solely for the benefit of the State, and that official acts best who forgets every other consideration, but the interest of the State." Flush with progressive era optimism, scholars argued for a neutrally competent manager, and a nonpartisan government as the best way to ensure that political partisanship would not decrease the efficiency and effectiveness of local governments. Others, like James, (1914) argued that hiring a nonpartisan manager to report to a nonpartisan "commission" could lead to government reforms at the local level. In their view, this would decrease the inefficiency of political infighting and organizational power struggles. \

When understood through the modern lens of public administration, this idea seems woefully naïve. It hearkens to ideas of public interest and administrative autonomy that still form the basis of effective government local government in our American system. Similar to many of the country's founders, the early thinkers of the progressive era believed that political parties disintermediated the people from a government of public interest. In subsequent years, we have seen this is not entirely the case (Kelly & Holmes, 2011; McAlpine & Drabek, 1991; Lee, 1960; Hawley, 1973). Nevertheless, in practical terms, sometimes managers are forced to work under or collaborate with nonpartisan and partisan councils interchangeably.

Our research is driven by the following question:

Do local government managers behave differently when operating in nonpartisan or partisan systems?

Little is known about the differences in the behaviors and attitudes of managers in nonpartisan and partisan local systems. Our research seeks to examine if these differences exist and if so, what are they. Drawing on a survey and elite interviews of local managers who work under partisan or nonpartisan councils, we study the differences in skills that managers should have for partisan or nonpartisan councils and if there are differences in the types of managers who select employment for partisan or nonpartisan councils. We begin with an analysis of the relevant literature, followed by a discussion of our propositions and methods, and conclude with a discussion of our findings.

2. Literature Analysis

To give context to the question of partisan and nonpartisan impacts on manager behavior and job choice, we first

turned to previous studies of the topic. In general, three themes underpin this topic: 1) factors that motivate managers' employment choices, 2) nonpartisan elections and their transference to manager behavior, and 3) governance relating to nonpartisan and partisan issues in localities.

2.1 Public Service Motivation

An individual's employment sector choice is the focus of most Public Service Motivation (PSM) research. This work explores the relationship between an individual's beliefs, attitudes, choice of employment, and, job satisfaction. Although definitions of PSM vary, research suggests that public servants are motivated by a sense that serving the public interest is valuable work (Perry, 1996; Perry & Wise, 1998; Brewer & Selden, 1998; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999; Naff & Crum, 1999; Taylor, 2008; Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). Further research focuses on the antecedents of PSM (e.g. Perry, 1997; Vandenabeele, 2007) while other scholars suggest that there are important environmental and institutional factors that must be considered alongside PSM when discussing job recruitment and retention (Bakker, 2015; Steijn, 2008; Vandenabeele, 2008; Christensen & Wright, 2011; Giauque, Ritz, Varone, Anderfuhren-Biget & Waldner, 2011).

Thus, PSM is an important concept in studying why people choose to serve in the public sector, but researchers much consider additional criteria, such as environment, organization, and job. For example, Steijn (2008) argues that there is a relationship between PSM and the environmental fit. Acknowledging that not all government organizations are the same, Vandenabeele (2008) finds that publicness of organizations is positively correlated with higher PSM. He suggests that the fit between person and organization is an important factor to consider, agreeing with Wright and Pandey (2008), who suggest that shared values mediate the effect of PSM. Christensen and Wright (2011) find no significant relationship between PSM and sector choice in a survey of law students. Instead, these authors suggest that job characteristics may serve as motivators for initial employment selection. Together, these studies echo Taylor's (2008) research, which suggests that in addition to PSM, there are characteristics of the environment, organization, and job that may drive individuals to choose certain types of employment.

Moreover, Taylor (2008) finds that PSM is a dynamic construct that requires a more nuanced understanding of the different motivational and organizational dimensions that may influence an individual. Although overall PSM scores may be high for individuals in the public sector, she asserts that "future research should focus on the combinations of [affective, normative, and rational motives] that are most important for different work and professions" (Taylor, 2007, p. 951). One place to study these differences would be in local government, where there is a paucity of research on the motivations for employment choice.

Studying tenure among local government managers, Mani (2014) finds that local government and budgeting expertise is positively correlated with longer tenures, higher education is negatively correlated, and at-large and district election systems result in no statistical difference. One reason for the absence of an election system effect may be that partisanship was not included in the research. Political science literature suggests that nonpartisan and partisan election systems result in different operating environments, which the PSM literature suggests may be important.

2.2 Nonpartisan Elections

To understand the differences between managing in the nonpartisan and partisan environments, we must first understand the implications of nonpartisan elections. Nonpartisan elections serve to change and slightly muddle the cues that voters take from ballots and campaign. Schaffner et al. (2001) found that nonpartisan elections represented a reform designed to force voters away from partisan cues when making electoral decisions. Nonpartisan elections depress voter turnout and cause voters to rely more on incumbency.

Previous studies also find that nonpartisan elections may affect the candidate pool, potentially changing the compositing of the council that managers must satisfy. In an early study, Adrian (1952) found that nonpartisanship might serve to undermine candidate recruitment. Nonpartisanship also poses a fundraising challenge to potential candidates entering politics for the first time. Candidates cannot rely on party fundraising mechanisms and must build support within the community on an ad hoc basis. While changing who runs and limiting first-time candidates from participating in nonpartisan races, this also may serve to complicate efforts by managers to build relationships within the city. Council members who engage in retail politics because of the lack of party infrastructure may be more likely to serve as the intermediary for citizen engagement, rather than relying on the city manager.

The complex relationship with party structure may also complicate city managers' jobs in nonpartisan districts. Wright's (2008) survey of Adrian's work argues that progressives believe political parties damaged American government. He further found that instead of partisan cues, voters substitute other information (such as race and

ethnicity). If voters are taking cues that the manager does not understand or is not aware of, it might be more difficult for that manager to collaborate and effectively build coalitions.

2.3 Nonpartisan Governance

Nonpartisan elections' impact on localities is far from straightforward. For example, previous research on nonpartisan governance shows that it can change citizens' expectations and interactions with government. Welch and Carlson (1973) found that nonpartisanship makes decisions in nonpartisan elections and accountability decidedly low-information. If citizens expect to make decisions with minimal information regarding political accountability and are socially reinforced in doing so, it may further serve to disengage the citizens. Therefore, managers must be able to re-engage citizens who may be used to engaging the political process only through elected officials at particular times.

Some research suggests that nonpartisan elections lead to lower levels of polarization in municipal races (Ferreira & Gyourko, 2009). Lower levels of polarization occur because of the removal of individuals' partisan identity from the governing process. It also may occur because lower levels of citizen engagement occur where there is greater homogeneity among the populace.

Interestingly, while there are lower levels of polarization, this does not preclude council members on nonpartisan bodies from attempting to use partisan cues. Kelly and Holmes (2011) found that nonpartisanship can lead to attempts by candidates to frame opponents as being from the area's minority party. Supporting Kelly and Holmes's conclusion, McAlpine and Drabek's (1991) study of nonpartisan governance on Canadian city councils. They found that nonpartisan management can be as complex as that in the partisan environment. However, rather than aggregating preferences around partisan identity, council members form blocs around similar background traits. Therefore, in political environments with a largely transient or gentrifying citizenry, nonpartisan councils may suffer from extreme polarization.

There might also be a subtle partisan bias in nonpartisan elections, which may be reinforced by the particular form of government coupled with nonpartisanship. Morgan and Pellisero (1980) found that cities with city managers, at-large seats, and nonpartisan elections tend to be more fiscally conservative than those that are not. Lee (1960) and Hawley (1973) found that Republicans have an advantage in nonpartisan elections. Others have argued that there is still a Republican advantage, but it has decreased over time (Welch & Bledsoe (1986). Schaffner et al. (2007) found that it is not an advantage of a particular party, but rather an advantage to the minority party within a district.

2.4 Expectations from Previous Studies

Although they serve in nonpartisan and partisan environments respectively, both city and county managers serve the public. Therefore, in keeping with prior research, it was expected there to be no significant difference in PSM overall. However, we would expect that there are differences in the skills, motivators, and behaviors of managers in nonpartisan and partisan systems, based on research that suggests environmental, organizational, and job factors are important mediators of PSM.

In nonpartisan systems, which have greater incumbency and fewer engaged citizens, we potentially could expect a stronger and more assertive council than those with partisan elections. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that we would find shorter tenures and less professionalism in nonpartisan cities than in partisan counties. Furthermore, managers in nonpartisan jurisdictions face a different problem-set, which will change who councils hire and how they behave. Managers in a nonpartisan system may expect less engagement and accountability from the citizens, more homogeneity among councils, and less polarization (Fiorina, 2017).

It is expected that managers in nonpartisan districts may expend more effort building networks with citizens. Citizens may be socialized to participate in governance through the elected process and directly through the elected in nonpartisan environments. Being disintermediated by nonpartisanship leads managers to potentially spend more time and energy communicating with constituents or through council members to stakeholders than in partisan districts. Second, although working in a nonpartisan system, we anticipated a partisan bias towards smaller government and pro-business values, coupled with greater fiscal conservatism reflected in manager attitudes. Finally, there may be substitutes for party identification that may generate conflict on nonpartisan councils. While there may be less party polarization, managers may have to deal with similar amounts of conflict (Williams, 2021).

3. Methodology

North Carolina is in the United States, located in the upper South region. As with most southern states, the state has considerable economic, and racial diversity. It also has a decentralized executive function in state government, and a large number of local governments compared to other American states (Fleer, 1994).

The population of North Carolina local government managers offers several advantages in an examination of the differences in top local government managers serving partisan and nonpartisan boards. North Carolina offers a unique mix of similar managers in different partisan environments. Currently, all one-hundred counties in North Carolina operate under boards elected in partisan elections, and all utilize full-time professional managers. Similarly, a majority of cities in North Carolina also operate with full-time professional managers. However, most of these managers work under boards elected on nonpartisan ballots. Additionally, the powers and duties of both North Carolina city and county managers are consistent with each other, and both are set out in state statutes (Steinberg, 2007). Previous research shows that we can consider city and county managers in North Carolina "equivalent as professional local government managers" (Svara, 1993, p.2075). Our survey allows us to tap into for comparison a similar pool of managers working under both partisan and nonpartisan boards. North Carolina is also unique among many states because of county commissioners across the state, similar to city councils, serve in a part-time capacity, delegating most administrative functions to a hired professional manager.

3.1 North Carolina Managers' Survey

To examine differences in top local government managers serving in partisan and nonpartisan positions, in fall of 2016 we conducted a survey of all seventy-three North Carolina city managers in municipalities of 5,000 population or more with nonpartisan council[1] elections and identified by ICMA as using the council-manager form of government (ICMA, 2010). the study also surveyed county managers currently serving in all 100 counties in North Carolina.

To improve the response rate, we provided all 173 identified managers with both a hard copy of the survey delivered via U.S. mail and an option to complete an electronic version of the survey using the *Qualtrics* online survey software package. Each manager received: 1) an invitation letter to participate in our forthcoming survey via self-addressed and stamped return mail or a using a web address provided 2) hard copies of the survey with return postage, and 3) two email reminders to return the survey delivered over the next few weeks. We received a total of ninety-eight responses back (a 57% total response rate) with forty-eight county managers (48% response rate) and fifty city managers (68% response rate) returning completed surveys. STATA was used to analyze this data. To gather additional information we conducted follow-up phone interviews with ten managers identified as having experience working under both partisan county commissions and nonpartisan city councils.

The survey instrument captured information on respondents' attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and values as well as demographic characteristics. To capture a measure of public service motivation (PSM), we use the revision to Perry's (1996) original sixteen-question measurement instrument as developed in 2013 by Kim and his colleagues (Kim et al., 2013). This 2013 instrument uses sixteen questions[2] to capture four dimensions of public service motivation; four measure 'attraction to public service' (APS), four measure 'commitment to public values' (CPV), four measure 'compassion' (COM), and four measure 'self-sacrifice' (SS). These four scores allow us to calculate an overall score for an individual's 'public service motivation' (PSM). To capture each respondent's political

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[1] City boards utilize various names in North Carolina such as Alderman, Commission, and Council to refer to identical bodies. All counties work under the commission label. We use the term council and commission interchangeably.

[2] We measured the questions using a 5-point Likert scale from 1-disagree to 5-agree. The Chronbach's Alpha score for the PSM scale was .811. the questions asked for each dimension were as follows:

1) I admire people who initiate or are involved in activities to aid my community. – *(APS1)*

2) It is important to contribute to activities that tackle social problems. – *(APS2)*

3) Meaningful pubic service is very important to me. – *(APS3)*

4) It is important for me to contribute to the common good. – *(APS4)*

5) It is fundamental that the interests of future generations are taken into account when developing public policies. – *(CPV1)*

6) I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important – *(CPV2)*

7) It is important that citizens can rely on the continuous provision of services – *(CPV3)*

8) To act ethically is essential for public servants – *(CPV4)*

9) I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged. – *(COM1)*

10) I empathize with other people who face difficulties. – *(COM2)*

11) I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly. – *(COM3)*

12) Considering the welfare of others is very important. - *(COM4)*

13) I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society. – *(SS1)*

14) I believe in putting civic duty before self. – *(SS2)*

15) I am willing to risk personal loss to help society. – *(SS3)*

16) I would agree to a good plan to make life better for the poor, even if it costs me money. – *(SS4)*

ideology, we asked each participant to describe their political ideology using a five-point Likert scale from 1-'very liberal' to 5-'very conservative' for both 'fiscal issues' and 'social issues.'

In addition to capturing numerous personal demographic information on education, income, gender, age, race and marital status, we also gathered data on the number of elected board members for the county or city as well as how many female members are currently serving on the board. We also asked managers to rate some factors concerning their perceptions on how much of a shared understanding they share with their boards on some items including the role and responsibilities of the council and the role and responsibilities of the manager. Finally, we asked managers if they had ever experienced or observed certain bias behavior toward themselves or in their organizations.

The following table lists the descriptive statistics obtained from survey participants.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

			Mean by Type of Council Served		
Variable		**N**	**Nonpartisan**	**Partisan**	
% Board Female		89	23.6%	15.2%	**
Personal Social Ideology		97	2.85	3.29	**
Personal Fiscal Ideology		97	3.65	3.91	**
PSM Score		98	4.66	4.74	
Four PSM Dimensions	**APS**	98	4.83	4.84	
	CPV	98	4.85	4.87	
	COM	98	4.73	4.78	
	SS	98	4.24	4.47	**
Shared Understanding concerning responsibilities of:					
	Council	97	4.46	4	**
	Manager	97	4.52	4.15	*
Relationship Processes		96	2.34	2.09	

P value: *=.10; **=.05; *<=.01**

Can identify several differences in city and county boards and managers from Table 1. First, we find that there is a significant difference in the percentage of females serving on partisan (county) and nonpartisan (city) boards. Close to a quarter (23.6%) of city council members are females while that number is significantly lower for county boards at just over 15%. We also discover several differences between managers in cities and counties. County managers are significantly more conservative in fiscal matters than are city managers and this difference is even greater when we examine their ideology on social issues. County managers display a higher PSM score than city managers, although this only reaches levels of significance when we look at the Self Sacrifice (SS) dimension measurement.

Table 2. Demographic variables

Variable		N	Nonpartisan	Partisan	
			Type of Council Served		
First Top Manager Job?	Yes	50	38%	60%	
	No	48	62%	40%	
	Total	**98**	**100%**	**100%**	**
Gender	Male	80	92%	71%	
	Female	18	8%	29%	
	Total	**98**	**100%**	**100%**	***
Age	Under 30	1	2%	0%	
	30-39	11	10%	13%	
	40-49	23	16%	33%	
	50-60	40	45%	39%	
	60 and Over	20	27%	15%	
	Total	**95**	**100%**	**100%**	
Education Level	Some college	4	4%	4%	
	4 year degree	23	18%	31%	
	Masters or higher	67	78%	65%	
	Total	**94**	**100%**	**100%**	
Degree in PA	Public Admin.	61	76%	50%	
	Other	36	24%	50%	
	Total	**97**	**100%**	**100%**	***
Salary Level	Under $100K	23	20%	28%	
	$100K - $160K	49	55%	48%	
	Over $160K	23	24%	24%	
	Total	**95**	**100%**	**100%**	
Total Years as a Top Manager	Less than 1 year	4	2%	7%	
	1 to 5 years	25	26%	31%	
	6 to 10 years	17	13%	26%	
	11 to 20 years	27	40%	19%	
	Over 20 years	16	19%	17%	
	Total	**89**	**100%**	**100%**	
Years in your Current Position	Less than 1 year	6	7%	7%	
	1 to 5 years	46	52%	54%	
	6 to 10 years	19	13%	32%	
	11 to 20 years	15	26%	7%	
	Over 20 years	1	2%	0%	
	Total	**87**	**100%**	**100%**	*

P value: *=.10; **=.05; *<=.01**

Table 2 lists some demographic findings from survey results. First, we discover that there are significantly more managers serving in their first top manager job in counties than there are in cities. There is a significant difference in the number of female managers serving city and county boards. Partisan boards employ a substantially higher

number of female managers than nonpartisan. Those serving as managers in nonpartisan cities are older than those serving in partisan counties. We see more managers in cities with graduate degrees than we see in counties and significantly more managers in cities have a degree in the field of Public Administration than found in managers in counties. Interestingly, there is no significant difference in salaries between city and county managers. Lastly, managers in cities appear to have served longer as a top manager overall as well as significantly longer in the position that they currently hold.

Table 3 lists some results from questions asked to measure workplace bias. Results are mixed, but the trend toward more bias found among nonpartisan cities than partisan counties.

Table 3. Bias Variables

Variable		N	Type of Council Served		
			Nonpartisan	Partisan	
Sexual	More Than Once	7	6%	9%	
Harassment by a	One Time	6	6%	7%	
Board Member	Never	82	88%	84%	
	Total	**95**	**100%**	**100%**	
Inappropriate	More Than Once	57	65%	54%	
Behavior	One Time	7	4%	11%	
	Never	31	31%	35%	
	Total	**95**	**100%**	**100%**	
Question ability	More Than Once	26	35%	20%	
To Balance Work	One Time	9	14%	4%	
And Personal life	Never	60	51%	76%	
	Total	**95**	**100%**	**100%**	**
Observed Gender	Yes	26	34%	24%	
Bias in Hiring	No	62	66%	76%	
	Total	**88**	**100%**	**100%**	

P value: *=.10; **=.05; ***<=.01

To add detail to the findings, we undertook ten semi-structured interviews of respondents to the larger survey who had served in both county and city management positions in their careers. Interview questions focused on a combination of preliminary findings from the survey, and research expectations extracted from previous research. The questions primarily focused on the differences between county and city management in North Carolina with a particular focus on the impact of partisanship and nonpartisanship. Our interviews uncovered several themes relating to work differences, some corroborating our survey's findings, while others slightly diverged. The themes in our interviews between county and city management focused on 1) differences in the services delivered, 2) differences in managerial authority, and 3) the important impact of partisanship on local government functions and manager selection

4. Findings

Returning to the questions that framed our research, we explored the impact that serving in a nonpartisan or partisan Council has on manager behaviors, attitudes, and skills.

Our findings suggest that there are significant differences in the gender, age, public administration training, public service motivation, understanding of council's responsibilities, and questioning of work-life balance between managers in nonpartisan and partisan systems. Supporting these findings, in our interviews, managers touched on two major areas where a partisan and non-partisan context likely influenced operations. These were most evident in areas of differing government function and manager selection.

To examine these differences, we use a logistic regression model with nonpartisan (0) and partisan (1) as our

dependent variable (see Table 5[3]).

Table 5. Logistic regression for nonpartisan (0) verses partisan

N size	95
Independent Variables:	
Gender (male=0)	2.17**
	(2.40)
Age categories	-.934**
	(-2.48)
PA education field	-1.923**
	(-2.54)
PSM	3.36**
	(2.46)
Understand CC responsibilities	-1.38*
	(-1.85)
Understand CM responsibilities	.569
	(0.79)
Questioned about work/personal life balance	-2.07***
	(-2.84)
Relationship processes	-.662*
	(-1.87)
Total years as top mgr.	-.252
	(-0.92)
Personal ideology on social issues	.904**
	(2.18)
Personal ideology on fiscal issues	.398
	(0.74)
Constant	-9.63
	(-1.46)
Pseudo R Square	.3845
LR chi2	50.60
Model prob > chi2	0.000

P value: *=.10; **=.05; *<=.01**

This model indicates that there are some significant differences between partisan and nonpartisan managers in our study population and suggest that people with certain attributes might be more likely to work in one or the other situations.

Government functions require different skill sets. The differences in relationship processes and training for managerial functions through public administration education suggest that nonpartisan systems may require different skills necessary to carry out particular government than partisan systems. Partisan managers tended to focus more on influencing and consensus building, while nonpartisan managers anecdotally, were more interested in delivering services for constituents. These interviews echoed the implication in the survey that nonpartisan managers tended to be more pragmatic, with practical skills, while partisan were idealistic with political skills.

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[3] Three of the 98 respondents did not complete the entire survey and are not represented in this model.

Relationship processes are more difficult for managers in nonpartisan systems. the study found that relationship processes included in our index are more challenging for managers in nonpartisan cities. The index of relationship processes, including interactions with the council, public, media and balancing work and life, were significant in the model. In general, all of those relationships are more challenging for city managers in nonpartisan systems, with the interaction with the public being statistically more significant for city managers. We had predicted that nonpartisanship would result in managers having to work harder to build networks with citizens and our data supports this.

Despite perceiving that relationships are less challenging in partisan counties, county managers reported that there is much less of a shared understanding of the responsibilities of the council (see Figure 1). The lower levels of shared understanding of the council's role may have to do with tenures in partisan and nonpartisan systems. In other words, the shorter terms of partisan officials coupled with longer terms of nonpartisan managers may explain the lower levels of shared understanding of the council's responsibilities in a partisan system. Based on interviews, however, we posit that the difficulty of relationships may also relate to the nature of government services under partisan councils.
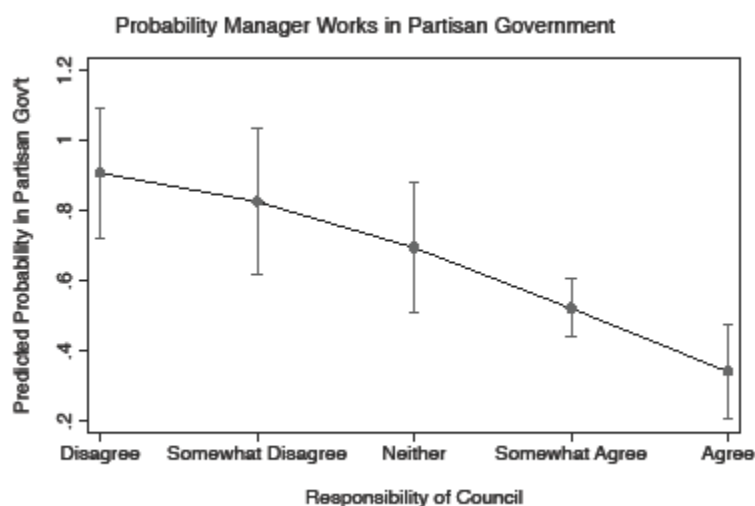

Figure 1. Shared understanding of council's responsibilities

Our interviewees gave greater evidence that managing partisan environments presents an additional level of complexity for local government managers. One interviewee said "… I think in a county, every elected board is going to have occasional groups get together on an issue then go to the manager. But I think in county government, the partisan nature of it the local party a lot of times drives commissioners thinking. Not all the time but a lot of the times. That just takes it to a different realm." Another interviewee touched on both partisanship and the connection between constituents and service in non-partisan municipalities. They stated, "I think one challenge in county government is it tends to be a lot more political with Republican/Democratic politics than municipal government in some cases. I think a challenge that you have in municipal government you get a lot more customer complaint issues that you have to deal with because people do understand more. Come fix my road, or garbage didn't get picked up what have you. A lot of the folks if they have issues with DSS a lot of times they don't know who to complain to. So, I think you deal with more customer complaints in local government, but you have more political partisan headaches in county government."

In jurisdictions that have split, partisan councils, one of the most important skills may be the ability for the manager to navigate partisan conflict. One manager said "I think when you add that partisan element it makes the job more difficult. Their political affiliation by whether or not the council commission would vote for them or not and the Democrats would only vote for democrats and republicans would only vote for Republicans."

Another interviewee further elaborated on these challenges; they said, "You have to be able to navigate those political waters in either place. But here in the county, you have not only the regular politics, but you have partisan politics that you have to deal with. There are places in this state that I would not work because of their political makeup."

We might mitigate the differences between managing in a partisan or non-partisan environment in a county in which all commissioners belong to the same political party mitigated. One interviewee stated ", I don't know if it's unique or not, every board I have worked for in a county has all been one party or the other. So, I never had a split board." Nevertheless, in general, interviewees regarded partisanship as a defining factor in differences between city and county management.

Two of the interviewees connected the variation in services delivered with partisanship directly. The first said "The one unique difference that I would see when I was in (county name redacted) commissioners individually got along great. When we would go to a conference they would get along well; they would laugh and cut up. The only time I would see differences are in board appointments, and there would be applicants for various boards who I didn't know who they were. But, I would learn I think the partisan element makes the job more difficult. I don't think there is a democratic or republican way to pick up garbage or pave streets. The second echoed the same narrative when they stated, "I think the partisan element makes the job more difficult. I don't think there is a democratic or republican way to pick up garbage or pave streets. I think when you add that partisan element it makes the job more difficult."

Most of the managers interviewed acknowledged differences in the partisan/nonpartisan managerial context. Counties operate under a more complicated legal context, which may result in a greater perception of distance from the constituents county governments serve. Another interviewee stated, "You know you hear it all the time from residents and it's not necessarily accurate, but you hear it all the time 'I don't mind paying my city taxes, I hate paying my county taxes.' I think part of that is it's easier to see what you are getting with your tax dollar from municipal government sometimes than from county government." Another interviewee elaborated on why the linkage may be more tenuous at the county level between services and providers. They stated "…services are more invisible. No one thinks about someone inspecting the restaurant where you eat lunch at, but it happens. They don't think about nursing homes inspections they think DSS is just food stamps and stuff like that but those are vital services. Municipal government I think the public understands more because they understand they drive on a road to work or to school, they understand water and sewer they take their garbage out it gets picked up they understand those things a lot easier Constituents not directly linking services provided to government, and more importantly, managerial perception of this, may in part explain some of the survey's variation among city/county managers, outside of partisanship/nonpartisanship."

Therefore, managers working for nonpartisan councils may find themselves working harder to interact with others, especially the public, suggesting a need for networking skills to influence and carry out government functions. Managers under partisan systems, however, require an acceptance of an operating environment where elected officials may understand their roles to be ones of both policy and managerial authority. Interviewees' beliefs supports that there are different skills required for managing partisan and non-partisan governments. The interviews also alluded to another theme, the idea that managers select partisan or nonpartisan positions based on their perception of their strongest skill sets.

Nonpartisan managers had greater levels of public administration training. As we explored the attitudes of managers for nonpartisan councils, we anticipated higher rates of incumbency and different power bases among stakeholders. Although all respondents were likely to have a graduate degree, our survey found a relationship between working on nonpartisan councils and a higher level of public administration education among managers. Additionally, managers working for nonpartisan systems had a statistically significant longer tenure in their current jobs. As suggested in numerous interviews, this may reflect different skills required in nonpartisan cities that deliver different services than partisan counties. One interviewee stated, "From a legal standpoint, it's dramatically different. Counties are under a lot of legal mandates that cities are not." This comment gives a bit of insight to the complexity of managing a county when compared to a city.

Not only is the legal context for county managers more complex, but is also is complicated by a manager's self-perception. One of our interviewees summarized these views. They stated "I think probably the biggest thing to take into account when you're looking at the two is those mandates because I hear a lot of (undecipherable) in (county name omitted) and hear a lot of tension about things like sales tax distribution between counties and cities. I think part of what's lacking even within our profession is that understanding the differences between county and city and mandates. I feel very much as a county perspective we are agents of the state."

Managers in nonpartisan locales may be more professional because, as our interviews expressed, partisan managers' jobs are more about influencing than controlling. This collaborative approach to governance may cause managers to tire of the challenges of partisanship and opt for nonpartisan jobs with clear lines of authority and accountability.

Managers in partisan and nonpartisan systems have different attitudes and beliefs. The significant

differences in self-sacrifice, partisan ideology, understanding and relationships with councils suggest that managers may have different preferences for working within nonpartisan or partisan systems. Several of our interviewees mentioned their preferences for partisan or non-partisan managerial contexts. Managers in partisan environments were more likely to score higher on the PSM scale.

Partisan managers had higher levels of self-sacrifice. There may be greater idealism among partisan managers. We found that partisan managers were more willing to self-sacrifice. The less experienced partisan county managers being mission-driven while city managers are exhibiting signs of administrative pragmatism (or burnout) might cause higher levels of this dimension of PSM. Partisan managers may experience a virtuous selection whereby as these managers stay mission-driven they can deal with partisan conflict. However, over time as their tolerance for conflict lessens their organizational commitment lessons as well, as evidenced by shorter tenures in current jobs. Alternatively, this may also be a result of the different nature of the jobs, which lead more autonomy and authority to nonpartisan city managers.

One interviewee stated, "I think it depends on what you are looking for from the job. If you are looking at the outcome, and what you are looking at improving the community and you want to improve people's lives in a meaningful way, then I think it's county government. You have to accept the challenges that come with that, and they are real. I think there is more stress in county government because of that. Because ultimately you have to navigate in this political way not just because of your political board but because of the politics that are just inherent in how the state statute that set up county government." Another followed this idea when they said, "I think you have greater control from an administrative standpoint of municipal services than you do county services. I have also learned even though municipal government has its elected officials' 'moments' if you will, I like the nonpartisan aspect of it much better. It just suits my personality better."

Interviewees also highlighted different structures of authority and accountability between cities and counties that may relate to self-sacrifice. One interviewee stated, "A good city manager may not make a good county manager." He reasoned that the public elect the sheriff, clerk, and register of deeds in county government. They do not work for you. The DSS, those employees are quasi-state/county employees. State personnel rules govern them in some cases. Health department same way. The school board, which is probably your biggest expenditure, has a superintendent who works for the Board of Education and you have to convince these people to do things that don't have to report to you. So, you have to have persuasion skills, the ability to collaborate with people that you really don't have to have as a city manager the police chief, fire chief, public works director, all those folks directly report to the city manager."

In this sense, there is a divide, supported by the legal structure of county and city managers. This makes managing at the county level similar to managing a public/non-profit at other levels, with the manager as an influencer with diffused authority. While for city managers, lines of authority and accountability seem to echo those in the private sector. One interviewee said, when referring to city management "I don't think it's easier, I just think it's easier to administrate. If that makes sense. I think as an executive we have clearer authorities up and down the line with managing employees, services, everything than county managers do." These differences specifically relate to accountability. Another interviewee said, "Well I think the only thing that I'm familiar with legally that's different is that the county manager doesn't have automatic statutory authority for firing and hiring situations. They have to be granted by the governing board which most cases it is. Where city manager has that statutory authority in council-manager form of government. That's the main legal difference that I see."

Greater gender diversity among nonpartisan councils. We anticipated finding some consequences among partisan managers of dealing with homogenous councils with less partisan polarization, engagement, and accountability. Interestingly, our survey found a significantly greater number of nonpartisan female council people. This finding was surprising because previous research had found greater homogeneity among nonpartisan councils. It may be that this reflects a changing norm among nonpartisan governments to attempt to diversify candidates for office. If this trend is emerging, candidates may not have worked their way through the party system in partisan districts. Managers dealing with more gender-diverse councils who are experienced may not be used to or prepared for the different discussions that gender diversity may bring.

Partisan managers are more likely to perceive their ideology as moderate tending towards conservative regarding social and fiscal issues, with significant differences on social issues (see Figure 2). Based on the literature, we expected that we would find this was true for nonpartisan rather than partisan managers. It may be that the more experienced nonpartisan managers are more reticent about sharing their personal ideological beliefs when surveyed. Our interviews also illuminated some underlying reasons why the data showed this. Since partisan politics can serve as a complicating factor for managers, in partisan districts, councils expect greater ideology in

their managers. While in nonpartisan districts, it is easier for the manager to claim neutral competence and not forced into ideological positions to preserve their job.
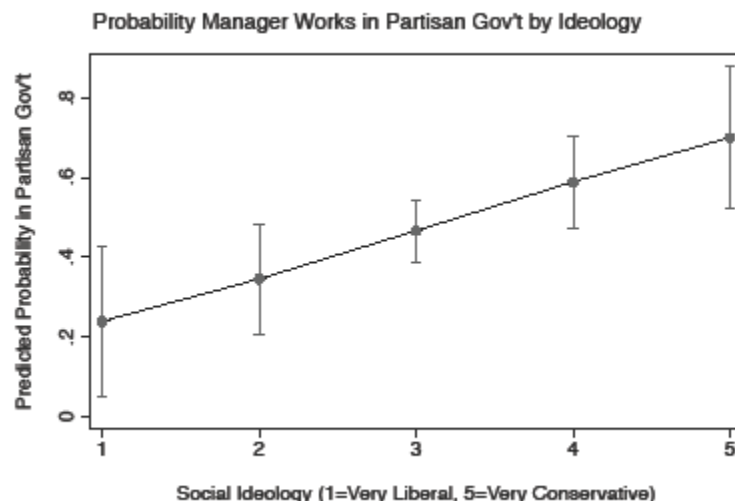

Figure 2. Manager ideology on social issues

For example, one manager mentioned the challenges when interviewing for a position that partisanship can create. They said "On the city end I never really, it may be different now in (city name redacted) but all the places where I worked, I couldn't tell you what their politics were. It was pretty much; they were there to talk about or argue about the budget, or what something cost. You know raising the water rates, or talking about electric rates. Whatever it was, there was a lot of discussions depending on what they're background was. But I really couldn't tell you what any of their politics were. On the county side, there's no doubt. When I interviewed for my first county job, they asked me what my party was, and I told them Methodist, I thought it was funny, but they didn't find it very funny. They knew I think, and eventually, they found out I was a Democrat. They were more concerned about party stuff. They haven't been that way here as much. In (county name redacted), one of those old ways of doing things when the party changed they changed almost all of their employees."

In general, partisan/county managers had a greater tolerance for conflict and expected greater political deference and autonomy. In part, this may be explained by partisan councils asserting managerial authority, as discussed by our interviewees, and supported by the finding that there was less of a shared understanding of the council's responsibilities. It does warrant further investigation, however, given the field's emphasis on increasing diversity among local government managers.

5. Conclusions

Returning to the initial concerns of the study, we found that there are, in fact, important differences in managing within nonpartisan and partisan governments. When we began this study, we anticipated that managers in nonpartisan jurisdictions would deal with a different problem set when working for nonpartisan councils that we expect will change who is selected for and how they behave in managerial positions. Our interviews affirmed this expectation, with partisanship being an important determinant in manager selection, service delivery, and the legal context.

Because nonpartisan councils experience higher rates of incumbency, maintain processes of candidate selection that may undermine managers' ability to build support within a community, have less engagement and accountability, more homogeneity, and less polarization, we anticipated that managers in these jobs would find them more complicated to navigate. In our study, we found little evidence of any of these phenomena. Surprisingly, we found that partisan managers were more complex with a greater disconnect with constituents. Disconnect did not occur because of the partisan nature of the governments, but rather the types of services provided. Partisan governments have fewer direct services, therefore; anecdotally citizens often questioned their value.

We also hypothesized that we would find nonpartisan governance would influence manager's behaviors and attitudes in several ways. First, we anticipated that we might find citizens socialized to participate in governance

through the elected process and directly through the elected in nonpartisan environments. Second, we anticipated a partisan bias towards smaller government and pro-business values, coupled with greater fiscal conservatism reflected in manager attitudes.

In our research, we found that indeed in partisan governments, administrative behavior differed because of the indirect lines of authority and accountability. We also anticipated that there might be substitutes for party identification that may generate conflict on nonpartisan councils. While there may be less polarization, managers may have to deal with similar amounts of conflict. We found little evidence for this expectation. Most managers felt that there was greater conflict on partisan councils (especially when they were split between parties), with sometimes mundane policy issues getting politicized and complicated.

This study paints a picture of two similar yet slightly different managerial contexts, sometimes managed by the same people at different points in their careers. The first or partisan has diffused authority and accountability and indirect services yet attract greater numbers of managers willing to self-sacrifice and collaborate. While the nonpartisan context attracts managers, who have higher levels of professionalism and tend to focus on managerial tasks of effectively delivering services.

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