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Growth Imperative, Postmaterialism and Local Decision-Makers*

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A prominent feature in studies of urban political economy is the emphasis on economic growth. More recently, the literature on postmaterialism has suggested the rise of new political culture among urban elites, which sees the limit of economic growth. In testing these two competing theories, we borrow insights from literature regarding the differences between central cities and suburbs. We hypothesize that postmaterialist values are most apparent among suburban elites, and are reflected in their perception of the problems facing their city. Based on a survey of city administrators in Texas, our findings indicate that regardless of the type of city in which they are employed, administrators exhibit a pronounced concern with infrastructure and economic redevelopment. However, suburban policymakers perceive a greater need to control economic growth by comparison to administrators in central cities. Our findings, therefore, generally support the overriding importance accorded to economic growth, but also offer some modest support for the postmaterialist thesis among city administrators, at least as reflected by concerns about uncontrolled growth.

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A prominent feature of the study of urban political economy is the emphasis on economic growth. Since Harvey Molotch published his groundbreaking paper, "The City as a Growth Machine," in 1976, students of urban politics have added an economic dimension to the traditional research of community power (see Jonas and Wilson 1999 for a historical account of the urban economic growth literature). Paul Peterson's work is perhaps the most influential theorization of an "economic-centered" approach to urban political economy (Saiz 1999). In *City Limits* (1981) Peterson argues that the mobility of capital of urban America "forces" policy makers to pay special attention to economic development. From the perspective of some scholars, however, this emphasis on economic growth as a "unitary interest" does not necessarily produce success in governing. Since Ronald Inglehart published his seminal work, *The Silent Revolution* (1977), the concept of postmaterialism has been used frequently in the study of Western societies. From the postmaterialist perspective, economic growth may lead to a new "political culture." This new culture challenges the traditional "material" political orientation. Attention is shifted away from economic growth, and directed toward values that relate to issues such as growth control and environmental protection, among other "new politics" (Inglehart 1990, 1977). This "new politics," sometimes resulting in a "culture war," has become more pronounced in the decades after World War II, and concerns a variety of non-economic and social issues (see Carmines and Layman 1997; Inglehart 1981; Inglehart and Abramson 1999. Also see Sharp 1999 for a discussion of "culture war" issues at the local level).

Inglehart's conclusions were based on an analysis of attitudes at the level of the mass citizenry in wealthy advanced industrial societies (also see Kidd and Lee 1997 for a discussion of the influence of mass opinions on environments in poor coun-

tries). Recent studies of public attitudes, interestingly, have provided conflicting findings about the linkage between the opinions of leaders and those of the general public (Cunningham and Moore 1997). Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot (1998) suggest a top-down process. They argue that postmaterialist values are initially best reflected at the elite level. The rationale is that political leaders are more likely to be the "carriers" of new political cultures, and are typically better able than are average citizens to articulate new ideas. Comparatively, "citizens may be less outspoken but over time reelect new types of leaders to office" (p. 72) who may reflect postmaterialist values. Drawing upon the Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation (FAUI) project, that was based on elite (e.g., mayor) interview data from 550 respondents across 35 countries, Clark and his associates argue that postmaterialism, manifested by such new important cultural emphases as environmental protection, growth control, and quality of life politics, has entered into the political thinking and policy making process of new urban elites.

Incorporating recent literature about social and economic contexts of central cities and suburbs, this paper tests both Peterson's economy-centered thesis as well as the influence of postmaterialism at the elite level. Because prior empirical tests of Peterson's theories have mainly surveyed elected officials, our study seeks to enhance understanding of Peterson's theories by extending analysis to non-elected, administrative positions—particularly that of city manager. The role of city manager is more than policy executor. Studies suggest that there is a good deal of shared policymaking responsibility between mayoral and city managers (Morgan and Watson 1992). Particularly in the absence of leadership by elected officials, city managers can come to play an entrepreneurial role in policymaking (Teske and Schneider 1994). City managers assume a pronounced leadership role in smaller cities and suburbs because of the part-time nature

of elected positions (Ruhil *et al.* 1999). Moreover, according to Nalbandian (1992) "City management has become a politically active profession" (139) and "city managers are commonly seen today as brokers, negotiators, and consensus builders in a community" (152). Thus, the modern city manager plays a "quasi administrative" role, part administrator and part policymaker. As such, the modern city manager interacts with a broad range of community actors. There is a good reason, therefore, to survey city administrators to test both Peterson's thesis and postmaterialism at the elite level.

Much of the previous empirical research into local economic development relies on aggregate-level analysis of policy inputs and outcomes. Drawing upon a survey of city administrators in Texas (discussed in a following section), we have an opportunity to investigate suburb/central city economic development differences from the perspective of administrators' attitudes and perceptions.

ADMINISTRATORS IN CENTRAL CITIES AND SUBURBS

We propose that elite administrators in suburbs are more likely to reflect postmaterialist values in their decision-making process than are those in central cities. Our research focus on local political economy in the context of differences between suburbs and central cities is based on the extant literature. A pro-growth orientation may be characteristic of many local governments because of economic imperatives (Peterson 1981), a coalition of business interests, and training and socialization within the city management profession (Fox and Schuhmann 2000). A pro-growth orientation, however, may be most pronounced among leaders in larger, more populous cities (Molotch 1976). Research concerning geographic, social, and economic differences between suburbs and central cities points to a divergence

in policy preferences between local leaders as well as a divergence in policy outputs. As the nexus of transportation systems, for example, central cities are located at the geographic center of SMAs, and are expected to offer substantial employment (Mills and Lubuele, 2000b). Furthermore, minorities and newly immigrated populations are more likely to be concentrated in central cities, enhancing the need to create new jobs and to focus on economic development. In addition to pressure resulting from inter-city competition and globalization, central city leaders can reflect an "outward-oriented development orientation" that stresses regional economic development and growth (Lewis 2001).

By contrast, suburban leaders tend to emphasize local concerns (Maurer and Christenson 1982). Suburban dwellers may reflect a rather profound anti-urban and anti-city bias (Angotti 1993), and because of the higher level of participation among more educated and wealthier local residents (Hajnal and Clark 1998), suburban leaders are more likely to place emphasis on quality of life issues (Thomas 1998; Davis 1990). Suburban leaders also opt for slower, more managed economic development and growth, while central city leaders favor growth politics and more vigorous economic development efforts.

PERCEPTION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS

A leadership's perceptions are a potentially important linkage between policy inputs, such as citizen demands and development proposals, and policy outputs in the economic development process. Accordingly, we investigate responses of key city administrators to a question asking about the economic development problems confronting their city (discussed in the following section). Because of the greater tendency of suburbs to reflect an

anti-growth, anti-city bias (as noted above), we test the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Relative to central-city administrators, suburban administrators will perceive the need for better quality of life (e.g., adequate environmental protection) as an economic development problem.

Hypothesis 2: Relative to central-city administrators, suburban administrators will perceive lack of adequate growth control as an economic development problem.

Further, because of their city's position as regional economic leader, as well as the social and economic characteristics of central cities, we test for two additional hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Relative to central-city administrators, suburban administrators will be less likely to perceive lack of sufficient job creation as an economic development problem.

Hypothesis 4: Relative to central-city administrators, suburban administrators will be less likely to perceive inability to encourage regional economic growth as a development problem.

Research and theory regarding the economic development of rural communities is comparatively limited. To help address this research gap we include administrators from rural areas in our analysis to examine their perceptions of economic development problems.

Data and Methods

We use responses to the following open-ended question: "In your opinion, what is the biggest problem facing your city?" Respondents were asked to answer this question in the context of

local economic development. One hundred and eighty-one administrators responded to the open-ended question (out of a total of 190 who returned the survey). Twenty-four responses came from central city administrators (out of 25 who returned the survey), 107 came from suburban administrators (out of 112 who returned the survey), and 50 came from rural (i.e., non-metropolitan area) administrators (out of 53 who returned the survey).

The survey was mailed to administrators of cities in Texas with a population of at least 5,000 during February and March, 2000 (in Texas, cities can operate under a home rule charter only when their population reaches 5,000). A list of cities was obtained from *Estimates of the Total Populations of Counties and Places in Texas for July 1, 1998 and January 1, 1999*, (The Texas State Data Center, The Texas State Population Estimates and Projections Program, August, 1999), and cross-checked against census data when these became available. A list of city administrators was obtained from the *1999-2000 Texas City Officials Directory and Buyer's Guide* (Texas Municipal League, 1999).

One hundred and thirty three respondents listed their job title as city manager (73.5%), 20 as economic development coordinator (11.0%), and 10 as assistant city manager (5.5%). The remaining respondents listed job titles such as administrative assistant, finance director, planning director, and business development coordinator (none of these represented more than 3.0% of respondents).

Our sample is representative of Texas municipalities generally. As Table 1 shows, 10% of the total 330 Texas municipalities are central cities, while about 12% of the survey respondents were from central cities. In addition, about 60% and 30% of the total Texas municipalities are suburbs and rural areas, while the survey respondents from suburban and rural areas were about

58% and 30% of the total respondents, respectively. Table 1 also shows the breakdown of the population figures. The sample is highly representative of the population breakdown of Texas municipalities.

TABLE 1
ALL TEXAS MUNICIPALITIES AND SURVEY RESPONDENTS
COMPARED

Type of Area	All Texas Municipalities		Survey Respondents	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Central city	33	9.9	25	12.4
Suburb	197	59.7	118	58.4
Rural	100	30.3	59	29.2
Population				
250,000 or more	7	2.1	4	2.0
100,000-249,999	16	4.9	13	6.4
50,000-99,999	24	7.3	18	8.9
25,000-19,999	48	14.6	37	18.3
10,000-24,999	100	30.3	65	32.2
7,500-9,999	41	12.4	18	8.9
7,499 or less	94	28.5	49	24.3

Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Descriptive Findings

Postmaterialist values are expected to emerge in the context of economic prosperity. On the face of it, the emergence of postmaterialist values seems to have occurred in some Texas cities. Texas experienced pronounced and rapid growth and a generally healthy economy during the 1990s. Between 1990 and 2000 the population increased an average of 25%, and the level of unemployment declined by 42% among municipalities. However, population growth spurred by a booming economy came at

a cost. For example, by the late 1990s, Austin was classified as one of the 12 most congested medium cities in the nation. Four other Texas cities—Brownville, Beaumont, Corpus Christi, and Laredo—made the list of the 12 most congested small cities in the nation¹. There is some anecdotal evidence that the rapid growth produced efforts to forge a new direction. Texas is part of the Sunbelt in which, according to previous studies, citizen activism has been relatively successful in launching anti-growth campaigns (see, e.g., Abbott, 1987). In Houston, for example, the only major city in the U.S. with no zoning regulations, “citizens have come to recognize the need for some controls to bring some order on helter-skelter, haphazard patterns of land use” (Ross and Levine, 2001, 314). In Dallas-Fort Worth, the “planning of a regional rail system was hindered by the refusal of certain municipalities to join in the venture” (Ross and Levine, 2001, 335).

Responses to our open-ended question allow us to move beyond anecdotal evidence and shed a more systematic light on the extent to which postmaterialist values have taken hold among Texas municipalities. Responses were aggregated into seven response categories: quality of life concerns, need for better growth management, need for redevelopment, lack of jobs, insufficient infrastructure/resources, intergovernmental/regional problems, and lack of revenue. Table 2 reports these “biggest problem” response categories from administrators according to city type. These descriptive findings lend support to three of our four hypotheses.

The first two response categories displayed in Table 2 relate to postmaterialist values. Suburban administrators are more concerned with managing growth, and somewhat less concerned with the overall quality of life by comparison to central city and

¹ See Timothy J. Lomax and David L. Schrank, *Urban Roadway Congestion Annual Report 1998*, Texas Transportation Institute

rural administrators. The finding regarding quality of life appears contrary to Hypothesis 1, that suburban administrators would most perceive the need for better quality of life (e.g., adequate environmental protection) as an economic development problem.

The findings reported in Table 2, however, show that almost 15% of suburban administrators perceived uncontrolled and unmanageable growth as a major problem. Most responses in this

TABLE 2
CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S PERCEPTION OF
THE BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING THEIR CITY, BY CITY TYPE

	Central City	Suburb	Rural
Biggest Problem			
Quality of Life Concerns	4.2	0.9	5.4
Growth Management	0.0	14.9	1.8
Infrastructure	29.2	43.9	30.4
Insufficient Redevelopment	25.0	17.5	32.1
Jobs	25.0	1.8	17.9
Intergovernmental Relations	12.5	7.0	1.8
Revenue	4.2	14.0	10.7
Mean			
Population	231,776	26,247	11,073
Percent Black	11.8	8.2	10.3
Percent Hispanic	39.2	24.8	37.9
Percent Unemployment	4.3	3.4	4.6

category were generalized comments about the need to control and manage growth. Among the more specific responses, the majority centered on the adverse effect of economic growth on traffic and streets, and on the city's ability to deliver an adequate supply of water. This finding, regarding the problem of managing economic growth, lends support to Hypothesis 2. Rural administrators perceived job creation, aging infrastructure,

insufficient housing to accommodate growth, and the effect of development on the environment as major problems. From the perspective of rural administrators the challenge is the lack of natural resources, notably water, to accommodate growth. Only one rural administrator referred to the adverse impact of economic growth on air quality.

About 80% of responses from central city administrators related to problems in aging infrastructure, job creation, and insufficient economic redevelopment. About 63% of responses from suburban administrators and 80% of responses from rural administrators noted the same problems. These findings reveal areas of commonality among respondents. Regardless of city type, infrastructure was perceived as a major problem. More than anything else, responses in this category were general references about the need to upgrade, improve, or replaced aged infrastructure. Though critical for economic growth, and therefore of practical importance to a wide variety of communities, infrastructure reasonably might have been expected to be most important for central city administrators, given their city's regional status. Suburban administrators actually perceived aging infrastructure—more than any other single issue, and more frequently than administrators in other cities—as the biggest problem facing their city. The concern with aging infrastructure suggests a connection with the problem of revenue generation, also noted by suburban administrators. Comments in about revenue generation referred to the need for new revenue or new revenue sources, and lack of adequate funds; more specific comments noted the problem of insufficient revenue generated from sales tax. Many suburban administrators may be troubled by the idea that their community might be less than fully able to afford infrastructure replacement.

Jobs are perceived to be a major problem by administrators in central cities and in rural communities. Jobs were not always

perceived as an unemployment problem, however. Some responses referred, instead, to a shortage of workers and, more specifically, to an insufficient number of skilled and trained workers to support economic growth. As suggested by Hypothesis 3, central city administrators saw employment as a major problem; relatively few suburban administrators held the same opinion. Employment was also perceived as a major problem among rural administrators.

Though the findings regarding jobs are compatible with the idea that central city administrators view their city as regional economic leader, there also may have been local reasons to accent job opportunities, because of political and economic pressures. Though the difference in the level of unemployment between types of cities was relatively modest, the average percentage of ethnic and racial minorities was highest in central cities and was also high in rural communities (Table 2).

Responses referred to a stagnant local economy because of lack of economic diversity, and to insufficient city incentives to encourage diversification. Finally, administrators from central cities were more likely to report intergovernmental relations or the regional economy as their biggest problem than are suburban administrators. This finding is compatible with Hypothesis 4.

Multivariate Analysis

To determine the extent to which suburban and central-city administrators perceived economic development problems differently when other factors were taken into consideration, we performed a multivariate analysis. Table 3 reports the results of logistic regression models for three biggest problem response categories. In each equation, the dependent variable is dichotomous. For example, in the first logistic model a response is coded as "1" if it referred to growth control and "0" if it did not. We report three models as models with the remaining four re-

sponse categories because the dependent variable did not yield statistically significant findings, probably because of a lack of variation in the dependent variable.

Our main interest is in examining differences in perceptions between suburban policy makers and others policy makers, especially those from central city areas. Therefore, our main independent variable is whether a respondent is from a suburban area. We also introduce a series of control variables. First, we account for the influence of minority population. Minority population percentage can affect the general policy priorities of urban politicians and administrators (Lewis 2001). Moreover, minority concentration tends to be strongly linked to the distribution of environmental risk (Ringquist 1997; Boer, *et al.* 1997). Second, we also consider the total city population. A variety of studies show that the larger the population size, the greater the pressure for job creation (Mills and Lubuele 2000a), the greater the need for a regional plan (Savitch and Vogel 1996), and the greater the number of development programs adopted (Green and Fleischmann 1991). Third, we control for the influence of education and wealth, which are two robust predictors of the rise of postmaterialist values (Inglehart 1990, 1977). Finally, we consider the structure of city government. Previous studies show that the policy-making role of city administrators may be shaped by the form of government; for example, the structure of council-manager cities "promotes recognition of the manager's executive authority and division of labor among departments" (Svara, 1990, 184).

Equation 1 of Table 3 tests the influence of postmaterialist values at the elite level. We posited that suburban elites are most likely to reflect postmaterialist values. Results of logistic regression support the descriptive findings discussed above and confirm Hypothesis 1. Suburban policymakers were more likely than were central city administrators to report managing growth

as the biggest problem facing their city. No other variable in this model has a statistically significant influence. The model correctly predicts 91.7% of the cases, and yields a pseudo R-squared at the 27% level.

TABLE 3
LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF PERCEPTIONS OF
BIGGEST PROBLEM

City Type	Growth Control	Jobs	Inter-Governmental
Suburb	2.28 (1.15)†	-4.12 (1.44)‡	-3.49 (1.7) †
Rural		-1.84 (1.29)	-4.34 (2.0)†
Population Variables			
Total population	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.001 (.00)*
Population growth	0.003 (.00)	-0.016 (.02)	-0.012 (.02)
Black population	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
White population	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	-0.001 (.00)*
Hispanic population	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Percent Black population	-0.028 (.04)	-0.216 (.17)	0.01 (.17)
Percent White population		-0.058 (.11)	0.074 (.16)
Percent Hispanic population	-0.014 (.02)	-0.004 (.05)	-0.049 (.07)
SES Variables			
Unemployment		0.326 (.19)*	0.40 (.28)
Unemployment change			-0.01 (.02)
Median income	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)*	0.00 (.00)
Percent graduate degree	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Government Structure			
Mayor-Council Form	.729 (1.11)	-1.45 (1.5)	-1.47 (1.08)
Council Size		-0.686 (.56)	
Constant	-4.33 (1.45)‡	5.02 (9.96)	-8.11 (13.01)
N	181	153	150
Pseudo R ²	0.27	0.51	0.31
Percent Correctly Classified	91.70	92.2	94.0
* p < .10 † p < .05 ‡ p < .01			

Equation 2 of Table 3 tests Hypothesis 3, that relative to suburban administrators, central-city administrators will perceive

lack of job creation as an economic development problem. The logistic coefficient for the suburb dummy variable is negative and statistically significant, indicating that respondents from suburban areas are less likely than central city respondents to report jobs as their biggest problem. These results confirm Hypothesis 3. The model reported in Equation 2 also tests the differences between rural and central-city administrators. In this model, there are three main dummy variables, measuring whether a respondent is from a central city, a suburban area, or a rural community. In the equation, however, only two of these variables are included (suburban or rural community) because central city status is used as the comparisons variable. The direction, magnitude, and significance of logistic coefficients for the rural and suburb variables test the differences between city and rural administrators, and between city and suburban administrators. The results indicate little reliable difference between central city and rural administrators regarding the extent to which they consider jobs to be a big problem. Regression results further reveal that administrators from areas with a high level of unemployment are likely to perceive job creation as the most important problem. Median income also has a statistically significant, positive influence, though the magnitude of the logistic coefficient is too small to report. The remaining control variables in this model fail to achieve statistical significance. The model as a whole correctly predicts 92.2% cases, with pseudo R-squared at the 51% level.

The model reported in Equation 3 of Table 3 displays the logistic regression results for the dependent variable, intergovernmental problems. The model tests Hypothesis 4, that relative to suburban administrators, central-city administrators will perceive inability to encourage regional economic growth as a development problem. Results indicate that both rural and suburban policymakers are less likely than administrators in central cities

to perceive intergovernmental relations as their biggest problem, thus confirming Hypothesis 4. In addition, policymakers from cities with larger populations are more likely to regard intergovernmental relations as their main concern. The size of white population, however, negatively affects the perception of intergovernmental relations as major concern. Overall, Equation 3 correctly predicts 94% of the results, and yields a pseudo R-Squared at the 31% level.

One may argue that the absence of statistical significance for most population and SES variables, i.e., the control variables, in our logistic regression analyses is because of our model specifications, which include several dummy variables (the dependent variables are also dummy variables). Furthermore, our models did not catch any threshold effects of control variables because they are all continuous variables. We therefore report our findings based on the percentage figures displayed in Table 4.

The most important findings in Table 4 are related to our control variables. We adopted a procedure to create new variables containing the categorical data. To do this, the population and other SES data were categorized based on percentile groups, with each group containing approximately the same number of cases. We use low, median, and high to represent three different groups, with "low" as those cases below the 33rd percentile, "median" as cases between the 33rd and 66th percentile, and "high" as cases above the 66th percentile.

The results show that population and SES variables have some effect on our dependent variables that the logistic regression did not reveal. Particularly, those administrators who reported growth management as their biggest problem were from

TABLE 4
 DEMOGRAPHIC AND SES EFFECTS ON PERCEPTIONS OF
 BIGGEST PROBLEM
 (in percents)

Population Variables		Growth Control	Jobs	Inter- governmental
Total population				
	low	3.8	9.6	7.7
	median	6.3	11.1	1.6
	high	16.2	8.1	8.1
Population growth				
	low	1.7	12.1	6.9
	median	4.2	12.5	6.9
	high	23.7	3.4	3.4
Black population				
	low	1.9	13.0	5.6
	median	11.3	8.5	5.6
	high	14.1	7.8	6.3
White population				
	low	1.9	11.1	7.4
	median	6.5	9.7	1.6
	high	17.8	8.2	8.2
Hispanic popula-				
	low	9.4	3.8	5.7
	median	8.8	7.4	7.4
	high	10.3	16.2	4.4
SES Variables				
Unemployment				
	low	16.1	1.8	5.4
	median	7.8	9.8	9.8
	high	3.8	13.2	5.7
Unemployment				
	low	13.7	3.9	7.8
	median	9.4	13.2	7.5
	high	5.7	7.5	7.5
Median income				
	low	6.3	11.1	4.8
	median	8.2	13.1	4.9
	high	12.1	4.5	9.1
Percent graduate degree				
	low	1.9	14.8	7.4
	median	9.5	6.3	4.8
	high	13.7	8.2	6.8

areas with the largest population, lower unemployment rate, and higher social economic status. In contrast, higher unemployment figures created a greater pressure on administrator to grow job, as did the size of Hispanic population. These findings, thus, provided some empirical support for the effect of demographic changes on local administrators perceptions of economic development.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

City administrators in Texas overwhelmingly perceive infrastructure and economic redevelopment as the major problems facing their cities. As previous studies suggest, city managers (the majority of respondents) are governed by professional norms that can be sufficiently strong to counter potential differences in job perception stemming from demographic differences among individual administrators (see, for example, Fox and Schuhmann 2000). However, in addition to an administrative role, city managers can very much play a policymaking, and political (though not partisan or electoral) role in city affairs (Morgan and Watson 1992; Zeigler et. al. 1985). Accordingly, our most important findings relate to two competing theories of urban political economy. Taking issue with Peterson's (1981) thesis of economic competition in urban America, political cultural analysts point to the limit of economic growth. Postmaterialist values stress the importance of growth control and environmental protection (Inglehart, 1990; 1977). Clark *et al.* (1998) further suggested the rise of the new political culture among city elites. Borrowing insights from literature regarding differences central city/suburb differences, we proposed that postmaterialism would be reflected most by suburban elites' perception of economic development. One precondition for the rise of postmaterialism is a high level of economic development. We tested our

hypotheses, therefore, by using survey data from Texas—a sun-belt state that has experienced significant economic growth.

The descriptive analysis and logistic models all point to the importance of variation in the perception of economic development problems associated with the overall environments of central cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Our findings suggest that suburban elites are somewhat more likely than administrators from other types of cities to reflect postmaterialist values. Although suburban elites do not report a greater level of concern with quality of life issues, such as environmental protection, they exhibit a greater level of concern that growth be managed. Because only one of our two postmaterialist hypotheses were confirmed, one might argue that postmaterialist values are not yet deeply entrenched among suburban elites. It is possible, though, that our study did not fully tap into values of postmaterialism among suburban administrators because our measure of the “biggest problem facing your city” may be closely linked to the factual reality of the communities in which the survey respondents worked. Administrators’ perception of the biggest problem facing their city, in fact, may have larger consequences on the policy-making process, if such a perception is strong enough to “replace” their personal belief. In this sense, therefore, our study provides an important opportunity to test how Peterson’s thesis of economic development can “overshadow” other elements, including local elite personal values. Elite administrative officeholders, such as city manager and economic development director, have direct and substantial influence regarding economic development decisions. The challenges these types of key local administrators perceive their city to face structures their decision-making. The manner in which these decision makers interpret their city’s circumstance influences the types of development proposals they will support and what kinds of projects they, and ultimately their city administration, will pursue.

Indeed, the strong empirical evidence our findings offer for Peterson's economic-centered thesis is the fact that city administrators overwhelmingly reported traditional economic concerns as their city's biggest problem. Even among suburban administrators, only 15% reported a problem that can be readily linked to postmaterialist values.

Our empirical findings allow us to make comparisons between administrators in three types of cities—central cities, suburbs, and rural communities. The findings indicate that administrators from suburban areas are less likely than central city and rural administrators to report jobs as their biggest problem. Previous studies provide many explanations of the desire of central-city administrators to emphasize job creation. The greater distance of rural areas from central cities likely leaves these communities more dependent on their own ability to provide employment, and therefore administrators in rural areas are likely to be more sensitive to the need to create jobs. The closer proximity of suburbs to central cities allows suburban administrators to rely more heavily on the central city to provide jobs.

Compared to administrators in central cities, both rural and suburban policymakers are less likely to indicate intergovernmental relations (or regional economy) as their biggest problem. Besides the traditional central city role as an engine of regional economic growth, our findings point to the importance of population size. Larger population heightens the perceived importance of regional growth. Interestingly, the size of the white population dampens administrators' desire to "grow" their region. It might be that a large white population provides a better local tax base, and therefore reduces the perceived need for regional growth. Furthermore, our findings seem to support the notion that demographic change, low unemployment rates, education and wealth may also shape the perception of local policy makers to respond to economy circumstances.

Education and income did not show a reliable impact on administrators' perceptions of the need for regional economic growth. Future research is needed to test directly the impact of economic development at the local level on local elites' development priorities. Our study, based on survey data, suggests that economic expansion in Texas did not necessarily produce an emphasis on postmaterialist issues among local decision makers.

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