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DO CITY MANAGERS IMPROVE GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE?

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ABSTRACT

Why do some local governments perform better than others that are socioeconomically, culturally, and geographically close? This paper examines variation in local government performance across 209 Catalan municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants. We test whether the municipality's administrative structure affects local government performance. In particular, we explore the effects of replacing a traditional public administration structure (i.e., headed by bureaucrats) with a new public management model (i.e., headed by city managers) in two dimensions: first, transparency and accountability; and, second, financial performance. Results indicate that, *ceteris paribus*, municipalities with a city manager are more transparent, responsive and open to citizens, but do not perform better in financial indicators. Financial performance seems to be more driven by political factors: Right-wing governments are associated with higher debt levels but a faster ability to reduce debt; and, conversely, coalition governments are less indebted than single-party governments but are slower in debt reduction.

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Introduction

Public managers are in the spotlight. On one hand, managerial reforms in local governments have, for over a century, been seen as a tool to foster good government and to fight corruption. That was what the “founding father” of US city managers, Richard S. Childs, had in mind when devising them: to bring local governments closer “to the private business corporation with its well-demonstrated capacity for efficiency” (Frant 1993, 996). Early on, American scholars noted that city managers made municipal government more rational (Hays 1964), more moral (Stone, Price and Stone 1940), more efficient (Dye 1967), and more encompassing of the major social groups in the municipality (Stillman 1974). Consequently, versions of the city manager have been adopted in many Western local governments (Mouritzen and Svava 2002) as well as in Latin America (Longo and Ramiò 2008) as a tool for improving governance within the general framework of new public management (NPM).

On the other hand, despite conventional wisdom on the advantages of city managers, the empirical evidence to support having one is lacking (Bae and Feiock 2013, 780). Research during the latest decades on US municipalities reports little support of city managers on government performance (Morgan and Pelissero 1980; Hayes and Chang 1990; Jung 2006; Carr and Karuppusamy 2010). The conclusion after decades of empirical research on the performance of city managers is that “we simply do not know what we know” (Carr 2015). One of the reasons is that there is a lack of studies that directly explore the effects of city managers on proxies for effectiveness, economy, and efficiency (Carr 2015).

Outside the United States, there is a complete lack of systematic studies on the effects of city managers. And, generally speaking, there is neither a consensus on the effects of NPM reforms (Pollit and Bouckaert 2011). On one hand, managerial reforms in general have been questioned for increasing corruption opportunities in developing or transition countries (Schick 1998; Polidano 1999; Manning 2001; Peters 2001; Elias Sarker 2006) or reopening the way to corruption in advanced democracies (Bergh et al. 2016). Consequently, some scholars argue for a “revival of Weberianism” (Pierre and Rothstein 2011, 407), given that “corruption and its related problems are of course the anathema of Weberianism” (Pierre and Rothstein 2011, 408), in contrast to the managerial values of NPM. On the other hand, the introduction of city managers has been argued to con-

tribute to improved policy-making and implementation both in Western democracies (Mouritzen and Svava 2002) and Latin America (Longo and Ramiò 2008).

This paper aims to bridge these gaps by, first, contributing to the general debate on the performance effects of managerial reforms in general, and the introduction of city managers in particular, outside the US context. We will compare the performance of local governments in Spain's Catalonia region, where municipalities with a traditional public administration (TPA) structure headed by autonomous civil servants cohabit with municipalities with a NPM structure headed by city managers. And, second, we will directly examine the effects of city managers on specific indicators of transparency and accountability, and financial performance.

Municipal governments in Catalonia thus represent a unique setting, and a least-likely case, to test the effects of managerial reforms. Catalonia has two distinctive forms of local administration within the strong mayoral form of government characteristic of Spanish municipalities (Mouritzen and Svava 2002). First, like the vast majority of Spanish municipalities, many Catalan municipalities have a TPA model, where the chief administrative officer (CAO) is a nationally recruited civil servant who exerts a legal check on the local government's actions (Mouritzen and Svava 2002). The organization of Spanish local governments is, thus, similar to other Southern European countries, influenced by French administrative law (Torres, Pina, and Martí 2010). Second, following the example of Barcelona during the Olympic Games (1992), many Catalan municipalities have adopted an NPM structure in which city managers are in charge of the local administration (Brugué and Gallego 2003; Longo 2003).

Unlike American city managers under the council-manager form of government and unlike city managers in other Western countries—such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK, or Belgium (Mouritzen and Svava 2002)—city managers in Catalonia cohabit with a strong mayor, who can hire and fire them at will. Consequently, Catalan municipalities represent a least-likely scenario: If we find effects of city managers on performance in a case where city managers lack the autonomy their counterparts in other Western countries enjoy, then we can be more confident in the effect city managers may have in other scenarios.

Theoretically, the paper bases its hypotheses on the existing literature on the effects of a city manager's professionalism. Accounts from different countries and historical periods note that managers form an epistemic community. They tend to observe peer group review and their own standards of

expertise (Stillman 1977), adhering to codes of ethics, even when it is voluntary (Adrian and Press 1977). This professionalism would encourage city managers to resist the pressures of both politicians and administrators (Ramiò and Salvador 2012), such as short-sighted policies (Feiock, Jeong, and Kim 2003), and ensure a stronger commitment to efficiency and innovation (Schneider, Teske, and Mintrom 1995). Consequently, *ceteris paribus*, the presence of city managers should improve local government performance.

Empirically, we test the effects of city managers using cross-section OLS analyses with different dependent variables capturing two aspects of local government performance. First, we explore the effects of city managers on different indicators of transparency and accountability: an index of the publicly disclosed information by the municipal government; a proxy for the extent that a local administration reacts to citizens' requests (measured by the number of days to respond to information requests); and an indicator for the direct participation of citizens in policy-making (i.e., the number of direct consultations opened by the local government for a given year).

And, second, we analyze the effects of having a city manager on economic efficiency by exploring a series of financial performance indicators: the budget surplus/deficit, the level of municipal debt in a given year, the debt reduction/increase, the municipal net savings, the payment compliance, and the tax collection effectiveness (percent difference between the actual and projected tax income).

In order to deal with potential problems of endogeneity and reverse causality, we follow a twofold strategy. First, we control for variables that the literature on the adoption and abandonment of city managers (Kessel 1962; Gordon 1968; Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Choi, Feiock, and Bae 2013) has noted as relevant factors, and for which we have data for Catalan municipalities, such as fiscal health of the local government, the ideology of the incumbent, and socio-economic contextual variables, GDP per capita, and usual proxies for social capital, such as the level of blood donations at the municipal level. Second, we instrument our independent variable (i.e., the existence of a city manager in the local administration) with a variable correlated with the adoption of city managers and not correlated with the dependent variables (on local government performance): the distance (in kilometers) from the town to Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia and Spain's pioneering city in adopting a city manager in the years leading to the 1992 Olympic Games.

Despite these efforts, we cannot completely rule out the possibility of reverse causality, and there could be unobserved factors affecting both the adoption of city managers and local government

performance. For instance, there could be some prevailing local “ethos” fostering or hindering both the adoption of city managers and good local governance in Catalan municipalities, like the one famously argued by Wilson and Banfield (1963, 1971) for the United States. Yet, along the lines of empirical studies for US municipalities spanning over 50 years, from Wolfinger and Field’s (1966) failure to find support for Wilson and Banfield’s thesis to the encompassing test of multiple contextual factors by Choi, Feiock, and Bae (2013), this study does not find indications that there is a systematic difference in ethos across the surveyed municipalities. Similarly, the existing scholarship on adoption in Catalan municipalities (Longo 2003; Brugué and Gallego 2003; Fernández 2013; Drapalova 2016) does not highlight any particular ethos as driving the adoption of city managers and, quite the opposite, it points out a variety of factors as leading to the establishment of city managers in some towns and not in others.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section presents the hypotheses on why we should expect better performance indicators in local governments with city managers, in comparison to those with a TPA government structure. Subsequently, we discuss the case selection—a novel dataset on 209 Catalan municipalities with over 5,000 inhabitants—and the methods employed (OLS regressions with an instrumental variable). The results section shows positive effects of city managers on the transparency and accountability dimension, but null effects on financial performance, after controlling for a series of socioeconomic and political factors.

The presence of a manager in a local administration increases the transparency of municipal government by 2.5 points on the scale from 0 to 100, and, with each additional year of having a city manager in office the transparency increases by 0.47 points. Additionally, the presence of a city manager reduces the period to respond to information requests to municipal officials by 17 days. The presence of a city manager is also associated with a 0.49 unit increase in the number of citizens’ consultations, which taking into account that the average number of consultations is two (with a maximum of 8), this is a considerable effect. In sum, having a city manager seems to foster a more accountable and transparent local government.

Intriguingly, the results do not show a clear positive effect of city managers on financial performance. Having a city manager is not statistically correlated with the available measures of financial health explored—for example, the level of debt, the budget surplus/deficit, the debt reduction/increase (euros/capita), net savings (in %)—even controlling for the initial debt levels, in or-

der to reduce the problems of reverse causality. If any, having a city manager has a negative, although not significant, effect on municipal payment compliance, and a negative, and this time significant, effect on tax collection efficacy.

Unlike what happens with transparency and accountability, political factors seem to matter more to financial performance. Specifically, we find that right-wing governments, on one hand, tend to have higher municipal debt levels; on the other, they are faster in reducing such debt levels. The effects of coalition governments—vis-à-vis majority or minority single-party governments—are almost opposite to the effects of right-wing governments. Coalition governments, on one hand, tend to be less indebted than single-party governments, and save more. On the other, they are less successful in reducing municipal debt.

Theory

There is an agreement in the literature that the presence of city managers alters the motivations and incentives of local executives (Terman and Feiock 2015). Their professionalism brings different values, orientations, and career interests to the local administrations (Feiock and Kim 2003). Yet there is less agreement on whether the particular effects of city managers, or the general effects of introducing the managerial logic in public administrations, are positive or negative for local government performance.

Many scholars and policy-makers fear the appointment of managerial figures in the public realm aimed to “escape the iron cage of legalism” (Pierre and Rothstein 2011, 414). Consequently, we should re-think the replacement of career bureaucrats for private-sector-like managers. As Olsen eloquently states after noting the problems generated by many managerial reforms, “maybe it is time to rediscover bureaucracy” (2006, 1). A Weberian administration with civil service protections and lifelong careers may provide the motivation and capacity to improve government performance (Olsen 2006). Even if sometimes “Weberian bureaucracy is infuriating” (Knott and Miller 2006, 239), civil servants routinely applying standard operating procedures stabilizes the rules of the game and gives predictability (Knott and Miller 2006). This is the argument behind the permanence of career civil servants as municipal CAOs in several countries belonging to the Napoleonic administrative tradition, such as France or Spain (Mouritzen and Svava 2002). These career bureaucrats acting as CAOs mostly undertake a legal check of what otherwise is a monopolistic control of poli-

cy-making by elected officials. Using Pierre's (2011) terminology, they emphasize more "law" than "management."

Consequently, it is argued that in practice, Weberian bureaucracies may introduce a long causal chain from politicians' commands to actual compliance by street-level bureaucrats (Olsen 2006). The practical result can be a red-tape-ridden administration. And, as the successful introduction of NPM reforms in local governments such as those of Denmark and Sweden indicates, moving away from a rule-bound Weberian bureaucracy may lead to better performance (Pierre and Rothstein 2011). NPM instruments, such as the introduction of city managers, would thus imply a shift from a focus on "law" to a focus on "management." Managers enjoy a larger margin of maneuver than their Weberian counterparts (i.e., protected civil servants). Free from bureaucratic red tape, autonomous public managers, such as those in charge of cutting-edge Danish and Swedish day-care and preschool facilities, may use their flexibility to maximize the well-being of every child. In those cases, when managers do follow their professional managerial ethos, managerial reforms do seem to lead to a more effective and efficient provision of public services (Pierre and Rothstein 2011).

As several scholars have underlined, it is not that city managers are less self-interested (Feiock and Kim 2003), but that they are responsive to their professional peers and their professional associations, such as the American International City/County Management Association (ICMA) (Adrian and Press 1977; Nalbandian 1989) or the Catalan *Associació Catalana de Gestió Pública* (Longo 2002). The result is a labor market of city managers (Ramió and Salvador 2012) in which the employment opportunities of city managers increase if they are known to implement efficient and innovative management strategies (Feiock and Kim 2003). This contrasts with the low-powered incentives prevailing within a Weberian-like local administration where the CAO is a civil servant with a life-long career whose mission is to check the legality of political officials' initiatives, as it is customary in most Spanish municipalities (Mouritzen and Svava 2002).

Following this reasoning, municipalities with city managers should present more equilibrated budgets, more efficient services, but also more accountability, less abuse of power, and more transparency. In particular, we test two different hypotheses on the effects of city managers on municipal performance. The first is a hypothesis on transparency and accountability: Should we expect municipalities with city managers as CAOs to be more transparent and more responsive to citizens' demands than towns where the CAO is a civil servant? The second hypothesis regards financial per-

formance: Should we expect municipalities with city managers as CAOs to have more sound finances than those with standard career bureaucrats as CAOs?

Regarding transparency and accountability, most of the literature presumes city managers are less responsive to specific interests and more responsive to the whole community at large (Carr 2015). Managers will avoid actions that may damage their reputation of neutrality and impartiality, such as corruption and unethical behavior. It has long been argued that city managers tend to give high importance to peer group review (Stillman 1977) and that despite the affiliation to ICMA being voluntary, its code of ethics is widely respected by most city managers (Adrian and Press 1977), who are aware of the high reputation costs they would face by not adhering to them. Empirically, it has been found that city managers seem less eager to accommodate specific interests, such as, those of property owners (Lubell, Feiock, and Ramirez 2009), or those of wealthier citizens at the expense of the well-being of the whole community (Feiock, Jeong, and Kim 2003). Similarly, industrial interest groups seem to exert more negative impacts on the adoption of sustainability policies in towns lacking a city manager (Sharp, Daley, and Lynch 2011). City managers help to adopt policies that are more comprehensive and accountable to the whole community (Svara, Watt, and Jang 2013; Homsy and Warner 2015).

Related to this, scholars have noted that city managers are more likely to encourage public participation and involve residents in policy-making beyond voting (Nalbandian et al. 2013; Carr 2015). Although city managers do not seem to exert a positive influence on voting turnout (Carr 2015) and on the perceptions of representational effectiveness (Ihrke 2002), they have been found to have a significant effect on other participation mechanisms. For instance, Nelson and Wood (2010) found that towns with a city manager made more extensive use of 16 participation strategies than cities without. And, generally speaking, city managers are more likely to adopt innovative practices, such as e-government and measures associated with reinventing government (Nelson and Svara 2012).

As a result of these insights from the existing literature, in our analysis we should thus expect city managers to adopt more measures of transparency and innovative practices in accountability and open government, such as a higher disclosure of information, a swift responsiveness to citizens' queries, and a more extensive use of public participation mechanisms beyond voting.

Regarding the second hypothesis, according to a relatively large literature, one should expect better financial performance of towns with the city manager. To start with, city managers spend significantly more of their time managing the municipal organization than CAOs who are not city managers (Newell and Ammons 1987; Carr 2015). Although some scholars have found that towns with city managers have higher spending than cities without them (Campbell and Turnbull 2003; Craw 2008), the conventional view in the literature is that towns with city managers tend to spend less (Lineberry and Fowler 1967; Dye and Garcia 1978; Anderson 1979) and put more emphasis on the efficiency of government operations (Stein 1990; Zhang and Feiock 2010). Unlike elected officials, managers do not need to cultivate political support among voters (Clingermayer and Feiock 2001), they do “less political decision making” and “more professional management” (Carr 2015, 675), and they may prefer policies that reduce operational costs in the public sector, such as efficiency enhancements in climate change mitigation efforts (Bae and Feiock 2013). City managers are supposed to be more responsive to the norms of professional management issued by the ICMA than to the short-sighted demands of municipal politics (Carr 2015).

And although the evidence is weaker than the conventional view of the efficiency and efficacy of city managers (Carr 2015), cities with a city manager have higher perceptions of service quality (Ihrke 2002; Wood and Fan 2008) and higher levels of service (Folz and Abdelrazek 2009) than in cities without. They also seem to use more managerial techniques, such as cost-benefit analysis (Ha and Feiock 2012).

This evidence for US municipalities seems to align with the anecdotal evidence on Catalan city managers. In Catalonia, it has been noted that despite their heterogeneous backgrounds, most managers tend to have a business degree, they form an epistemic community of shared professional norms, and, by moving across administrations, they have created a Catalan labor market of public managers (Ramiò and Salvador 2012). Consequently, we should expect more concern with efficiency and thus better financial performance in municipalities with a city manager than in municipalities lacking this figure.

In sum, we aim to test the following two hypotheses on the effects of city managers on the performance of local governments:

H1: Towns with a city manager as CAO will be more transparent (i.e., disclose more information) and accountable (i.e., respond quicker to citizens' demands and involve residents in decision-making through consultations) than cities without a city manager.

H2: Towns with a city manager as CAO will exhibit better financial performance (i.e., lower municipal debt, more savings, and higher tax collection effectiveness) than towns without a city manager.

Case Selection, Data, and Methods

The empirical test of these hypotheses relies on data from the *Pi i Sunyer Foundation* on administrative structure and performance of Catalan municipalities.¹ We complement the data with indicators of economic performance and public goods delivery from several governmental, regional, and private organizations as well as from already published research. We limit our sample to all cities over 5,000 inhabitants because under this threshold most of the socioeconomic indicators are not available. Also, small cities have low administrative professionalization and limited capacity to provide public services. Even limiting our sample, there is still a large variation in the main variables of theoretical interest. Moreover, the subnational focus enables us to control for a wide array of factors by the way of design, thereby improving the causal inference (Snyder 2001; Slater and Ziblatt 2013).

Estimation Techniques

To test our hypotheses, the analysis proceeds in two stages. First, in order to test the effect of city managers' presence on our dependent variables we employ a multivariate linear regression. We separately examine several models having the transparency, the number of citizens' initiatives, and economic performance indicators as the dependent variables. After diagnostics, we excluded Barcelona and Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant as influential cases, one for being too large and the latter for being excessively rich.

¹ The survey data were compiled on the biannual basis from 2005 to 2014 in all provinces of Catalonia. The survey combined basic municipality information with data on its structure and functioning (at the political and management level), on its public services and the management formula used for its production, and on economic and budgetary information. The data are not based on opinion but on evidence.

Due to the cross-sectional format of our data, in the second stage we employ a two-stage least squares (2SLS) instrumental analysis in order to limit the risk of endogeneity between our independent and dependent variables. As it is possible that cities that perform better are more likely to adopt administrative reforms, such as having a city manager, than those that perform comparatively worse, we use the distance in kilometers from Barcelona as the instrument.² Barcelona was the first town to adopt this administrative innovation. The distance is a good instrument because the proximity to Barcelona could potentially influence the likelihood of having a city manager due to a diffusion effect. The cities that are close could learn about administrative reforms more swiftly as their administrators and politicians interact more frequently. Moreover, there are no theoretical or empirical reasons to think that the distance from Barcelona influences on its own the dependent variables of transparency explored here.

Independent Variable

The main independent variable is the presence of a city manager in the municipality. The city manager (*gerent* in Catalan) was adopted during the 1990s in the city of Barcelona as a part of the long-term process of administrative innovation and spread across other cities in Catalonia during early 2000s. Previously, most of the city manager's competencies were performed by the municipal secretary general. According to the study by the research institute of local government Pí i Sunyer Foundation, cities with dual government are on average larger. From the 29 municipalities with over 40,000 inhabitants, 12 have a city manager (Magre Ferran 2006). That is, 37% of the population of Catalonia lives in cities with dual government (with mayor and city manager).

In order to be considered a city manager, the local directive has to fulfill two conditions. First, he or she should occupy a position of hierarchical superiority over other civil servants who report to him or her. Second, he or she has direct control and supervision over municipal finances and budget, general services, personnel hiring, and information systems (IT) (Recoder and Joly 2010). There can be some slight variations in terms of specific responsibilities, but, in all cases, the city manager's main task is to introduce efficiency in the management of the local administration and to control policy implementation and evaluation.

² We use Google Maps for the calculation of distances: <http://www.distanciasentreciudades.com>

For the purpose of this paper, we operationalize the city manager in two ways. First, the city manager is operationalized as a dummy variable scoring one if the city has a city manager. The data are from the survey by Pi i Sunyer Foundation.³ From a total of 209 cities in the sample (see Table 1), 54 cities replied affirmatively in 2014 (25.8% of the sample). We also checked the municipal statutes to control that in all these cities the city manager really exists. The second version of our independent variable is “years of city manager.” It is operationalized as number of years since the adoption of a city manager in a municipality. Given the first survey is from 2006 and the last is from 2014, the maximum value is 8 years. We expect that the positive effect of this figure will be larger in cities where the city manager was established for a longer period.

TABLE 1, SUMMARY OF CITY MANAGERS BY CITY SIZE

Manager	Size of City			Total
	Small 5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants	Medium From 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants	Large More than 50,000 inhabitants	
No	72	73	9	154
Yes	17	23	14	54
Total	89	96	23	208

Source: authors' elaboration

Dependent Variables

We focus on two aspects of government performance: transparency and accountability, and financial performance or economic efficiency. Transparency is operationalized through three indicators. First, we employ a proxy for “top-down” transparency (i.e., the level of information on municipal activities disclosed by the local government). This index of **publicly disclosed information** by the municipal government ranges from 0 (least transparent) to 100 (most transparent). The 2015 data were provided by two institutions: a non-government organization, *Fundació Pi i Sunyer* (www.pisunyer.org), and the regional government, *Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya* (www.sindic.cat). Second, we also use an indicator of access to information or “bottom-up” transparency (i.e., up to which extent the local administration reacts to citizens’ requests as measured by the **number of days to respond to a request for information**). These data were provided by Villoria et al. (2016) and *Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya* (www.sindic.cat). The third indicator of transparency and accountability relates to direct participation by citizens. We, therefore, included a variable that measures the

³ The exact wording of the question is, “*Existeix la figura de gerent, coordinador general, director?*” (Does the figure of manager, general coordinator, and director exist in your municipality?).

citizens' participation operationalized as a **number of direct consultations in one year** (2015), also from the Pí i Sunyer Foundation survey.

The municipal economic efficiency is operationalized by several indicators. First, we have included **the level of municipal debt** in 2015 (calculated as a percent of the municipal income). Nevertheless, the total level of debt can be determined by many other political and economic factors as well as being a result of previous economic situations and investments. We have complemented this indicator with others that are more related to economic management of the municipality on which the city manager should have an impact. We included the budget surplus/deficit (euros/capita), debt reduction/increase (euros/capita), net savings (%), payment compliance (%), and tax collection effectiveness (percent difference between the actual and projected tax income). These indicators are the most exhaustive available proxies for local economic efficiency. The data are provided for 2015 by the Ministry of Economy (www.minhap.es) and Sielocal (www.sielocal.org).

Control Variables

Although the argument developed here focuses on the effects of the city manager on local government, other factors may affect performance. We, therefore, added numerous controls to the analysis informed by the existing literature. We control for the **municipal size** measured as a number of inhabitants registered in the municipality. We use data from municipal registers, retrieved from (www.ine.es). We also control for the per capita **GDP** (in euros) to account for the municipal socioeconomic development that might influence the capacity and efficiency of local administration. The data are provided by Mendez et al. (2015) for 2012 only. Previous economic performance can be an important determinant of future performance; therefore, we use **public deficit** per capita and municipal **income** (euro per capita) (www.minhap.es). As a measure of social capital, we use the **blood-donor index** calculated as the number of donations per thousand inhabitants. Data were provided by the Blood and Tissue Bank Catalonia (http://www.bancsang.net/en_index/). This indicator is an alternative to newspaper readership, which has already been used by other authors (Cartocci 2007). Other indicators of civiness, such as the number of associations that exist in a town, are not available at the local level.⁴

⁴ Also, voter turnout in referendums is a problematic indicator for the Spanish case. Spain has celebrated only four general referenda (in 1976, 1978, 1986, and 2005) since the transition to democracy. The data at the municipal level are available only for the last two. The 1986 referendum was held to vote on NATO membership; it was highly politicized and followed the left-right cleavage. The last referendum took place in 2005 to accept the EU constitution.

In order to control for the education level of a population, we calculate the share of the population with completed tertiary education. The data are available for the Catalan statistical office (www.idescat.cat/) for 2011 only. We also include controls for the existence of a coalition government. We use the question (*Podria indicar el tipus de govern actual?*) from the local government survey by Pi i Sunyer Foundation. We recoded the question as a dummy variable with 1 indicating coalition government and 0 otherwise. The mayor's party ideology could also play a role, especially in influencing the economic policies (Ansell and Gingrich 2003). This indicator is operationalized as a dummy variable capturing whether the municipality is run by a center-right coalition. Table 2 reports the summary statistics.

TABLE 2, SUMMARY STATISTICS

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Manager	208	.2596154	.4394813	0	1
Manager years	208	2.120192	3.12694	0	8
Blood-donor index	203	30.57498	18.47344	5.040202	122.6501
Population	208	32503.25	116678.9	5062	1620943
GDP (2012)	208	21935.45	8816.092	7154.86	95599.59
Coalition gov.	208	.6057692	.4898638	0	1
Tertiary education (%)	208	16.95582	6.751395	5.52	46.32
Local income (euro/capita)	208	1170.576	451.386	0	3039.42
Debt (2011)	208	2251.036	2309.851	33.1567	10378
N. citizens' initiatives	194	1.087629	1.643814	0	12
Public goods investment (2014)	206	208.097	90.8462	77.77	867.11
Surplus/deficit	208	3868054	1.16e+07	-4130786	1.53e+08
Level of debt (%)	208	49.94962	37.49837	0	211.68
Debt increase	208	-2182871	1.01e+07	-1.35e+08	1.19e+07
Debt per capita	208	558.3965	466.8759	0	2740.18
Tax collection efficacy (%)	208	83.11538	19.39445	0	96.56
Payment compliance	208	86.2124	20.09227	0	99.21
Net savings	208	10.25298	8.615795	-32.7	44.25

Source: Pi I Sunyer; Spanish Ministry of Economy; SIELOCAL; Blood and Tissue Bank Catalunya; Idescat.es; Drapalova (2016)

Analysis and Results

Tables 3 and 4 show the magnitude and significance of the coefficients for the independent variables listed in the previous sections under a set of the above-specified controls. Each column reports coefficient estimates corresponding to the explanatory variables listed on the left, together with their robust standard errors and statistical significance. We anticipate that the city manager has a positive effect on both city transparency and economic performance. The results for transparency and accountability support the hypotheses. For instance, Models 1 and 1a show that the presence of a city manager (more years of a city manager) is positively and significantly associated with mu-

municipal transparency (H1). Holding all other variables constant, the presence of a city manager is expected to result in an average increase in 2.5 points in municipal transparency (on the scale from 0 to 100) (coefficient significant at 0.1). With each additional year of a city manager in office, transparency increases by 0.47 points (coefficient significant at 0.05). Therefore, city managers seem to be linked to more top-down information disclosure.

TABLE 3, CITY MANAGER EFFECT ON MEASURES OF MUNICIPAL TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY. OLS RESULTS

VARIABLES	Transparency	Transparency	Citizen request	Citizen participation
	Model 1	Model 1a	(days)	Model 3
manager_years		0.477** (0.232)		
blood-donor_index	-0.0205 (0.0340)	-0.0173 (0.0336)	0.0367 (0.177)	0.00195 (0.00715)
inhab	1.30e-07*** (2.64e-08)	1.31e-07*** (2.43e-08)	-7.90e-08 (6.00e-08)	1.30e-08* (7.78e-09)
lggnp	-0.351 (2.219)	-0.235 (2.182)	-9.495 (11.33)	-0.258 (0.330)
gov_coalit	0.632 (1.372)	0.396 (1.352)	-15.60* (7.991)	0.354 (0.254)
education2011		0.172* (0.0943)	0.510 (0.620)	-0.0123 (0.0147)
manager	2.751* (1.554)		-17.45** (8.187)	0.487* (0.294)
Constant	39.31* (21.79)	35.00 (21.69)	169.9 (114.4)	3.113 (3.215)
Observations	202	202	102	190
R-squared	0.250	0.271	0.086	0.128

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Model 2, shows that a city manager reduces the response time to citizens' requests by 17 days. Holding all other variables constant, the presence of a city manager is expected to result in significant speeding up in addressing citizens' concerns (bottom-up transparency). In other words, if the city of Castelldefels would have adopted city manager, it would have replied to citizens' requests in 15 days instead of 32 days. Model 4 shows the association between the city manager and the number of citizens' consultations in 2015. The presence of a city manager is associated with a 0.49 unit

increase (coefficient significant at 0.1). Taking into account that the maximum number of events that have been organized is 8 and the mean is 2, this increase is positive.

TABLE 4, CITY MANAGER EFFECT ON MEASURES OF MUNICIPAL FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE. OLS RESULTS

VARIABLES	Surplus/capita	Level of debt (%)	Debt increase/capita	Tax collection efficacy (%)	Payment compliance (%)	Net savings (%)
	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
manager	11,397 (690,647)	-4.327 (5.094)	-692,960 (657,311)	-4.664 (3.019)	-3.171 (2.885)	0.538 (1.378)
ingresosporhabitantehab	1,598*** (457.4)	0.0138** (0.00648)	35.91 (792.8)	0.0281*** (0.00648)	0.0302*** (0.00669)	0.00582*** (0.00148)
lgpop	4.761e+06*** (613,677)	21.67*** (3.350)	-2.328e+06*** (566,475)	2.722** (1.252)	1.680 (1.365)	-2.304*** (0.634)
debt pc2011	399.4*** (110.9)	0.00761*** (0.00164)	-266.9*** (98.81)	-0.000229 (0.000591)	-7.86e-05 (0.000677)	-0.000850*** (0.000296)
lggnp	-733,598 (650,349)	-9.893 (6.657)	7,872 (701,817)	-4.646 (4.056)	-3.698 (4.251)	-0.211 (1.716)
1.right	-56,899 (523,376)	7.980* (4.428)	-749,670 (474,162)	-4.344* (2.285)	-4.796** (2.294)	-3.558*** (1.117)
gov_coalit	134,712 (523,488)	-9.561** (4.641)	371,872 (518,503)	-2.220 (2.237)	-1.243 (2.370)	2.502** (1.203)
blood-donor_index	-7,333 (10,518)	0.143 (0.110)	5,848 (7,448)	-0.0150 (0.0778)	-0.0106 (0.0699)	0.00995 (0.0331)
Constant	-3.787e+07*** (8.552e+06)	-94.60 (66.98)	2.140e+07** (9.741e+06)	76.06** (38.19)	76.28* (40.68)	29.31* (16.20)
Observations	202	202	202	202	202	202
R-squared	0.540	0.306	0.265	0.377	0.395	0.184

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

However, results do not support conclusively the hypothesis on the positive effects of a city manager on financial performance (H2). Although the presence of a city manager is associated, ceteris paribus, with a 4.32 lower level of debt, measured as a ratio between debt and income, the relation fails to be significant. For instance, if Cunit, one of the most indebted cities (debt ratio of 144%), had a city manager its debt would decrease by approximately 1,235,832 euros (from the total of 30,895,822 euros). However, it could be that the total municipal debt depends on many other factors than the city manager. Therefore, we used other proxies for economic performance that are more related to the financial management process. The results are in line with the previous indica-

tor. In 2015, cities with dual government have on average 11.40 euros per capita higher surplus, *ceteris paribus*.

Moreover, municipalities where a city manager operates decreased their debt in 2015 by 692.9 euros per capita more than those with the traditional CAO (Model 6). Consequently, the city manager is associated with a 0.5% higher net savings (Model 10). Although these results are substantive, they fail to pass statistical significance. From Table 3, we can see that compared to other factors such as city size, government composition, or ideology of government, the effect of a city manager on municipal finances is lower.

However, with other indicators of economic performance more related to management and processes within the local administration, we get a negative impact of the city manager. Surprisingly, we found that having a city manager is negatively associated with tax collection efficacy (Model 8) and with municipal payment compliance (Model 9). Holding other variables constant, the tax collection efficacy is 4.6% lower in municipalities with a city manager while municipal payment compliance regresses by 3.2%. Although these results fail to be statistically significant, the negative sign is puzzling.

These results differ to a certain extent from what the literature on city managers expects. These mixed results might suggest that a city manager is established in cities with a worse economic situation. However, when we control for the municipal debt levels a few years ago (2011) and the size of the municipal income, the relation does not change. Another plausible explanation might be that Spanish city managers lack the power to significantly alter the structure of municipal spending and financial performance due to their structural dependence on the mayor. As budgets are sensitive and politicized issues, they might be controlled by politicians. Here, the city manager's formal dependence on the municipal leader can be relevant. This formal dependence can limit the city manager's influence on politicized issues like budget or level of spending. The alternative results with years of a city manager are provided in the appendix.

Our results support the speculations that the form of government (coalition versus minority and majority government) and the presence of a right-wing mayor have greater influence and are statistically significant in most of the financial performance models. Indeed, right-wing governments are associated with higher debt and lower net savings. On average, cities with right-wing mayors have almost 8% higher debt levels than those cities governed by other political parties (the relation is

significant at 0.1). Interestingly, cities with right-wing mayors have lower tax collection capacity (-4.3%) and lower payment compliance (-4.8%). Both results are statistically significant at the 0.1 and 0.05 levels. Right-wing mayors reduce debt faster but it seems that they do it at the expense of net savings, which decrease by 3.5% (this association is highly significant). Therefore, it indicates that right-wing governments reduce spending and the deficit but do not necessarily improve the administrative procedures, such as tax or payment compliance.

On the other hand, the form of government (whether coalition or single-party majority or minority government) has an impact on economic performance. Coalition governments are less indebted than majoritarian governments (-9.56%) and save on average 2.5% more compared to majority governments. More importantly, coalition governments largely increase the responsiveness of the municipality to citizens' requests. The coalition governments reply, on average, 15 days faster. The negative association with the indicators of tax collection and payment compliance indicates that coalition governments are less effective in the management of policies than single (majority or minority) governments, however, the relations fail to be significant. In sum, the coalition governments improve government transparency and responsiveness. Coalition governments are also associated with less debt and more savings but do not necessarily have a (positive) effect on internal municipal economic management. As both variables (manager and coalition governments) seem relevant, we estimated the effects of interactions between coalition government and city manager, but they were not significant and the overall performance of the model did not improve.

Regarding the other control variables, the analyses show that city size is one of the most important factors influencing both transparency and economic performance. An increase of population by 1,000 is associated with an increase of 1.3%. In other words, if a city with 5,000 inhabitants increases its population to 20,000, the transparency would increase (all other factors constant) by 19.5 points. The size is also the most important factor for citizen participation (1.3 consultations more) (relation significant at 0.1). Although not significant, the largest cities are also more effective in responding to citizens' requests. This can be explained by the fact that city size encompasses many other factors such as administrative capacity, more civil servants, and better IT facilities. Similarly, the number of inhabitants influences economic performance. Larger cities have higher levels of debt, but also higher surpluses (in 2015) and better tax collection capacity. On the other hand, with city size, the net savings decrease.

Education level is positively associated with transparency. On the other hand, a more educated population is negatively associated with the municipal deficit and average tax collection efficacy. Contrarily, the municipal GDP is not significant in most of the models. The previous municipal debt limits the current level of debt, its increase, and the net savings. However, it is not significantly associated with the tax collection and payment compliance capacity.

Somehow puzzling is the negative association with the social capital indicator (blood-donor index) with transparency. In order to rule out any error, we used two alternative measures of social capital—turnout in the national referendum in 2005 and number of internet connections per 1,000 inhabitants—but the results (not reported in the table) are very similar. Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to investigate the possible impact of social capital on local government transparency and performance in general.

Instrumental Variable and 2SLS Regression

To address the endogeneity problem, we used the distance from Barcelona (in km) as an instrument. *F*-test for our instrument is 10.36, indicating a borderline strong instrument for the transparency model. In the rest of the models the instrument is not strong. Also in the case of municipal economic performance the exclusion rule does not apply, because the distance from the regional capital and local GDP are related. Tables 5 and 6 report all previous models using 2SLS specifications with robust standard errors. These specifications try to isolate the exogenous effects of municipal performance on the existence of a city manager. We include the control variables from the previous models. Compared to the OLS estimate, the substantive impact of a city manager on transparency has increased as hypothesized (although not significant). The coefficient for municipal debt is negative and significant, as it is also significant the negative association between the city manager and payment compliance. The rest of the coefficients are not significant.

TABLE 5, 2SLS REGRESSION WITH KM FROM BARCELONA AS INSTRUMENTAL VARIABLE

VARIABLES	Transparency	Citizen request (days)	Citizen participa- tion
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
manager	10.11 (7.979)	-59.73 (65.37)	-1.613 (2.020)
1.right	-1.707 (1.470)	-4.708 (7.800)	-0.524** (0.257)
lggnp	-0.962 (2.514)	-11.36 (11.46)	0.104 (0.539)
inhab	1.04e-07*** (3.52e-08)	3.61e-08 (1.81e-07)	1.86e-08* (9.73e-09)
education2011	0.214** (0.0919)	0.711 (0.654)	-0.00235 (0.0151)
blood-donor_index	-0.0213 (0.0357)	-0.0118 (0.205)	0.00156 (0.00706)
gov_coalit	0.646 (1.431)	-24.99 (16.74)	0.189 (0.289)
municipal income	-0.000359 (0.00152)	0.00584 (0.00887)	
Constant	41.86* (24.14)	195.7* (115.5)	0.124 (5.020)
Observations	202	102	190
R-squared	0.187		

*Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$*

TABLE 6, 2SLS REGRESSION WITH KM FROM BARCELONA AS INSTRUMENTAL VARIABLE

VARIABLES	Surplus/capita	Level of debt (%)	Debt increase/capita	Tax collection effi- cacy (%)	Payment compliance (%)	Net savings (%)
	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
manager	-3.655e+06 (3.539e+06)	-97.53** (46.06)	5.802e+06 (3.908e+06)	-18.94 (15.40)	-29.93* (17.75)	10.24 (8.363)
lggnp	-210,233 (867,747)	0.0106 (12.15)	-771,423 (1.185e+06)	-3.193 (4.667)	-0.828 (5.664)	-1.203 (2.133)
gov_coalit	-129,338 (677,162)	-13.98* (7.939)	740,051 (813,127)	-2.854 (2.695)	-2.530 (3.244)	2.936** (1.388)
1.right	-465,822 (499,776)	2.265 (7.510)	-228,778 (589,364)	-5.130* (2.707)	-6.473** (3.200)	-3.016** (1.417)
deudapc2011	456.4*** (152.9)	0.00896*** (0.00222)	-363.8** (177.0)	-2.34e-05 (0.000690)	0.000311 (0.000843)	-0.000990*** (0.000338)
education2011	59,035 (37,344)	-0.415 (0.497)	-21,287 (41,107)	-0.100 (0.166)	-0.104 (0.199)	0.0651 (0.0821)
blood-donor_index	-8,216 (12,455)	0.153 (0.166)	5,999 (12,223)	-0.0129 (0.0785)	-0.00798 (0.0825)	0.00854 (0.0316)
lgpop	5.288e+06*** (977,015)	35.82*** (8.971)	-3.294e+06*** (1.167e+06)	4.903* (2.788)	5.735* (3.345)	-3.784*** (1.403)
ingresosporhabitantehab	1,418*** (498.7)	0.0110 (0.00874)	277.7 (875.8)	0.0278*** (0.00629)	0.0294*** (0.00663)	0.00609*** (0.00159)
Constant	-4.773e+07*** (1.390e+07)	-292.9* (154.8)	3.660e+07* (1.916e+07)	46.68 (54.54)	18.94 (66.79)	49.35* (26.17)
Observations	202	202	202	202	202	202
R-squared	0.464			0.288	0.102	

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Conclusions

Managerial reforms are on the rise worldwide. It has increased steadily in both the proportion of American municipal governments using the council-manager form (Carr 2015; Choi, Feiock, and Bae 2013; Wheeland, Palus, and Wood 2014) as well as the number of worldwide local governments with an administration headed by city managers (Longo and Ramiò 2008). Yet the study of the effects that city managers have on municipal performance is still in its infancy. Even within the United States, there are not many studies exploring the presumed benefits of council-manager governments for local government performance in general and operational performance in particular (Carr 2015). Outside the United States, there are no systematic studies exploring how the introduction of city managers—in a large number of Western countries, such as Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, and Australia, and in some regions within countries, such as the Catalonian cases explored here—have impacted local governance.

This paper has aimed to fill these gaps by examining a novel dataset on 209 Catalan municipalities over 5,000 inhabitants, by exploring variables on both the political and administrative characteristics of the local government as well as on a large number of socioeconomic characteristics, including proxies for social capital.

Our analysis shows that the presence of a city manager increases some indicators of transparency, responsiveness to requests, and public participation. For instance, a city manager increases the transparency of municipal government by 2.5 points on the scale from 0 to 100 and reduces the period it takes municipal officers to respond to a request for information by 17 days. Yet the effects of a city manager are not significant in economic performance indicators.

We thus find robust support for H1, since towns with a city manager as CAO are more transparent (i.e., they disclose more information) and more responsive to citizens' queries, and encourage more public participation (measured by the number of consultations) than cities without a city manager. Yet we do not find clear support for H2, that is, towns with a city manager as CAO will exhibit better financial performance than towns without a city manager. It is quite the opposite: Having a city manager is associated with lower tax collection efficacy and payment compliance. Although towns with a city manager have on average less debt, and tend to have a surplus and higher savings, these results are not statistically significant.

Unlike what happens with transparency and accountability, political factors seem more relevant than having a city manager regarding financial performance. Specifically, we find that right-wing governments, on one hand, tend to have higher municipal debt levels, and on the other, they are faster in reducing such debt levels. The effects of coalition governments—vis-à-vis majority or minority single-party governments—are almost opposite to the effects of right-wing governments. Coalition governments, on one hand, tend to be less indebted than single-party governments, and on the other, they don't reduce municipal debt. In sum, when it comes to the health of municipal finances, political factors are more significant than the type of administration (i.e., having a city manager or not). Future research should explore the theoretical mechanisms and derive testable propositions on how these two political factors (i.e., the ideology of the incumbent party and the existence of coalition governments versus single-party ones) may affect so significantly the financial performance of municipalities controlling for a large number of confounders.

Generally speaking, our results are in line with those of Carr (2015) in his review of the research on how city managers may affect government performance. On one hand, we also find evidence in support of the claim that city managers improve performance in a series of relevant variables—in our case, those related to transparency and accountability. On the other hand, regarding financial performance, it is not like Carr (2015) argues, that the positive effects of city managers are not as strong as advocates assume, but simply that they are null.

This puzzling mixed statistical effect of city managers on financial performance—after controlling for numerous factors—should also be subject to further research. To start with, many of the effects attributable to city managers may actually be the result of, or contingent on, other factors (Bae and Feiock 2004; Carr 2015). Additionally, it might also be the case that financial performance may almost exclusively depend on political forces and social pressures that do not disappear just because a professional city manager has been appointed (Deno and Mehay 1987).

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