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# Examining Policy Diffusion Mechanisms in the Contemporary Local Government Landscape of a Politically Polarized United States

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EXAMINING POLICY DIFFUSION MECHANISMS IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT LANDSCAPE OF A  
POLITICALLY POLARIZED UNITED STATES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Ph.D.  
Policy Studies

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by  
Jacob D. McCauley  
May 2024

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the nuanced relationship between political polarization and policy diffusion within local governments in the United States, a topic of considerable relevance given the country's increasing political divide. By examining the diffusion of COVID-19 policies, historical marker modifications, and the implementation of eGovernment services, this research identifies a novel mechanism of policy diffusion that is significantly influenced by political party lines. The study employs a comprehensive methodological approach, incorporating case studies and quantitative analysis to examine policy implementation across politically diverse local governments. The findings reveal that political affiliation profoundly impacts policy choices, with distinct patterns of policy diffusion observed among local governments led by officials from different political parties. In particular, the research highlights how Democratic and Republican local governments have diverged in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, approaches to historical marker changes, and adoption of eGovernment services. This divergence underscores the need for a new understanding of policy diffusion mechanisms beyond traditional models to account for the influence of political polarization.

This dissertation contributes to the policy studies field by providing empirical evidence of a fifth mechanism of policy diffusion that captures the complexities of governing in a politically polarized environment. It offers valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners interested in the dynamics of local governance and the interplay between politics and policy diffusion in the contemporary United States.

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## 1. Research Introduction

This research explores the impact of political polarization on policy diffusion in local government in the United States. Policy diffusion is defined as the process by which policymaking in one government influences policymaking in other governments (Berry & Berry, 1990). While existing literature categorizes policy diffusion in local government into four mechanisms, namely, learning from early adopters, economic competition among proximate cities, imitation of larger cities, and coercion by state governments (Gray & Lowery, 1996), this research intends to provide evidence that there is a fifth mechanism that captures how policy is diffusing along political party lines in today's politically polarized climate.

The polarization of politics in the United States is a well-known phenomenon that has been the subject of many studies (Abramowitz, 2018; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). The divide between Republicans and Democrats has become increasingly pronounced in recent years, leading to a challenging environment for policymaking (Klarner, 2019). This research aims to investigate how this polarization impacts the diffusion of policy in local government. Using a case study approach, the research will examine three timely and relevant policy implementations in local government. The goal is to show that the existing policy diffusion mechanisms are insufficient in capturing how local government policy diffuses in today's polarized political climate.

In my exploration of the relationship between the political affiliation of a city's mayor and the broader concept of political polarization, I delve into how the former, though not inherently indicative of the latter, can indeed serve as a telling proxy under



certain conditions. The distinction between the two is crucial for a comprehensive understanding. Political affiliation pertains to aligning or identifying with a political party or ideology, shaping a mayor's policy priorities and governance style. On the other hand, political polarization reflects a societal phenomenon where political beliefs and values within a population diverge towards opposite extremes, often leading to heightened tensions and diminished compromise (Brown & Iyengar, 2014).

Through this research, I investigate if the political affiliation of a mayor can reflect the dominant political ideologies of their electorate, acting as a mirror to the community's collective political leanings. This becomes particularly evident in cities where a mayor secures office with overwhelming support, suggesting a homogeneity in political beliefs among the voters. Shifts in the political affiliation of successive mayors can signal changing political tides within a city's populace. Such transformations, especially when rapid or pronounced, can hint at emerging polarization as different community segments rally around distinct political identities. The governance and policy-making approaches influenced by a mayor's political affiliation significantly exacerbate or alleviate local political divides. A mayor who champions inclusive and cross-partisan initiatives may cultivate a less polarized political climate, while one who leans into partisan governance may deepen existing fissures.

The portrayal of a mayor's political stance in the media and its subsequent influence on public discourse can further serve as a catalyst for polarization, shaping public perception and potentially entrenching divisions. The political affiliation of a city's mayor sometimes becomes a battleground for broader state or national political

issues, attracting external forces that can amplify local polarization. This intersection of local governance with national debates underscores the complexity of the relationship between a mayor's political leanings and the broader polarized landscape.

While a mayor's political affiliation is not a direct measure of political polarization, it undeniably provides insights into a city's political dynamics and sentiments. The relationship between a mayor's political stance and societal polarization is intricate, influenced by governance style, media portrayal, and the interplay of local issues with national debates. My research underscores the importance of considering these factors in understanding how political affiliation can act as a proxy for detecting and analyzing political polarization within urban settings.

The case studies will analyze the relationship between political affiliation and policy diffusion, with two of the policies being politically charged issues and the third being a policy that can objectively be viewed as politically neutral. The research will conduct a comparative analysis of the case studies to determine if political affiliation has a strong enough influence on policy diffusion to stand alone as a separate mechanism. The aim is to provide evidence for including a new policy diffusion mechanism distinct from the four existing mechanisms described in the literature.

The first case study focuses on the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policies during the pandemic period of 2020 to 2023. While federal and state governments enacted policies and guidelines to manage the pandemic, local governments had to decide how to implement those policies in their communities. Some policies that reached the local government's level of discretion included mask-wearing requirements,

travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, and business closure. Local governments also had to determine whether to reduce government services or dismiss employees and decide what type of employee testing and quarantine policies to implement. This research examined external COVID-19 policies that primarily affected the citizens of local communities. To ensure a clean research sample, local governments were selected that had sufficient decision-making autonomy regarding COVID-19 matters were of primary focus. Some local governments were mandated by State law to enact policies and were excluded from this research. Other sources of local government policy were utilized to define the partisan positions of the selected local governments based on the partisan makeup of their elected officials (primarily mayors) and their similarity to the national partisan COVID-19 position.

This analysis aims to identify evidence that policy diffused into and throughout local government along political party lines and that an additional fifth policy diffusion mechanism is needed to explain the phenomenon comprehensively. The results of this case study will provide insight into the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policy during the pandemic period and the role of political affiliation in this diffusion process. This research contributes to the existing literature on policy diffusion by introducing a new mechanism for understanding the process in a modern and politically polarized environment. This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how local governments make policy decisions during politically charged and uncertain times (such as pandemics) and how these decisions ultimately impact local communities. This research aims to determine whether political affiliation had a sufficiently strong influence

on policy diffusion to be considered a distinct policy diffusion mechanism. The analysis compared the case study results to identify similarities and differences in the diffusion of COVID-19 policies based on political affiliation.

The second case study focuses on historical marker changes as they have garnered significant attention in recent years, sparking heated debates and contentious discussions about the role of historical monuments and statues in contemporary American society. As symbolic representations of historical figures and events, historical markers have been criticized for their potential to perpetuate narratives inconsistent with contemporary societal values, particularly regarding racial justice and equality. Given the multifaceted nature of this issue, it is crucial to explore the underlying factors that motivate decisions to remove monuments in American cities and the relationships between historical marker modifications and other societal factors. This research will investigate whether a relationship exists between modifying historical markers in American cities and those cities' political affiliations. The primary objective is to ascertain whether there is a discernible relationship between the decision to change historical markers and the prevailing political ideologies within those urban centers.

This study explores the interplay between politics, history, and public memory by examining the collected data through rigorous quantitative analysis to identify potential relationships between monument removal and political affiliation. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the sociopolitical dynamics shaping contemporary American cities by illuminating the underlying factors that drive decisions to alter or remove monuments in American cities. This research provides insight for policymakers, urban

planners, and communities grappling with similar debates and decision-making processes regarding historical monuments. It also bridges the gap in understanding the intricate connections between monument removal, political affiliation, and the social, cultural, and historical contexts shaping American cities. I generated valuable insights through rigorous empirical analysis that inform future scholarship, public discourse, and policy considerations related to preserving or removing U.S. historical markers.

In the third case study, the implementation of eGovernment services by local governments, which have experienced a steady increase since the late 1990s, will be analyzed. The primary objective of this case study is to investigate the diffusion of eGovernment policies, with a specific focus on the effect of political affiliation on citizen access, government transparency, and self-service options that local governments offer to their constituents. While previous studies have explored the reasons behind the growing adoption of eGovernment, this research aimed to analyze the mechanisms through which this diffusion occurs. To achieve this goal, a comparative analysis of local government political affiliation, website functionality, and features will be undertaken. Particular emphasis will be placed on evaluating citizen access, government transparency, and self-service options for conducting government-related tasks. The eGovernment offerings provided by different local government entities will be evaluated, translated, and categorized to facilitate a meaningful and informative comparison. Several factors are involved in exploring how local governments adopt and implement eGovernment services. These services enhance the ease with which citizens interact with local administrations, creating avenues for transparent governance, self-service options, and

general access to government resources. Understanding the determinants behind their implementation offers valuable insights for developing a new policy diffusion mechanism tailored to local governments.

The analysis of these case studies will contribute to the existing understanding of the diffusion mechanisms surrounding eGovernment services and may uncover any gaps or limitations that necessitate the exploration of a new policy diffusion mechanism. By contrasting the diffusion patterns of this non-politically charged topic with politically charged issues, this study intends to demonstrate that non-politically charged topics do not diffuse similarly to politically charged ones. Such results would provide further evidence supporting the inclusion of a separate and distinct diffusion mechanism related explicitly to political party affiliation.

In policy diffusion within local government, examining various case studies becomes imperative to understand the mechanisms at play comprehensively. In this context, the following three case studies have been meticulously chosen to illuminate whether a fifth policy diffusion mechanism should be recognized. By delving into these real-world instances, this research aims to discern patterns, influences, and dynamics that may have previously gone unnoticed or underexplored. This exploration is vital for enhancing our theoretical understanding of policy diffusion and informing policymakers and practitioners in local government. This research will delve into each case study, dissecting the nuances that may suggest the emergence of a novel diffusion mechanism while also drawing connections to established theories in the field.

## 2. Literature Review

This section explores the mechanisms of policy diffusion in U.S. local government. In their article "Policy Diffusion: The Issue-Definition Stage," Gilardi et al. (2020) defined policy diffusion as "the process by which policymaking in one government affects policymaking in other governments." The current research focuses on the local government policy diffusion mechanisms described in Shipan and Volden's (2008) article "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion" as learning, economic competition, imitation, and coercion. Through a case study using policy narrative and historical event analysis, the research examined how modern policies have recently been diffused in local government. This research aids in understanding how modern policy diffusion mechanisms operate and what factors influence them in U.S. local governments.

This research analyzed what policy diffusion mechanisms are most prevalent, effective, or favored by local government policymakers. By examining policy diffusion at work through a case study of policy narrative and event historical analysis specific to local government, this research has sought key, common influences on local government policymaking strategies. Analyzing policy diffusion at the local level identifies predictors for future policymaking strategy success and suggests which mechanisms best support them on a local level.

For this research to achieve its goals, it must first establish a basic understanding of the policy diffusion literature by identifying the common definition of policy diffusion. This definition contains subsets of the policy diffusion mechanisms referred to as learning, economic competition, imitation, and coercion.

## 2.1 Policy Diffusion Defined

Historically, the concept of policy diffusion has lacked a consistent operational framework (Braun & Gilardi, 2006). Before a coherent framework was established, policy diffusion was viewed more generally—as a political routine or shortcut to an expedient way of making policy (Leichter, 1983). Diffusion was viewed as a nontraditional way of policymaking rather than an actual process. Policy was thought to diffuse among government entities (specifically states) from contact between actors of cultural similarity (Strang & Meyer, 1993). This does not, however, explain the occurrence of unlike non-state government entities with actors dissimilar in culture embracing similar policies. A framework not limited to actors' interactions was needed to explain the phenomenon of policy diffusion. In addition to this limitation, policy diffusion still needed a framework to identify how and why one state inspired policies from other states' national policy debates and legislative models, and the framework also needed to account for intrastate diffusion's influence on the process (Karch, 2007a). Separating the policy diffusion process, the characters involved, and the content of the policy being diffused helps to establish a less rigid framework for examination (Karch, 2007b).

For this research, Shipan and Volden's (2008) "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion" supplied the definition of policy diffusion framework in the context of local government. This model subdivides policy diffusion into four mechanisms: learning from early adopters, economic competition among proximate cities, imitation of larger cities, and coercion by state governments (Shipan & Volden, 2008). These concepts of



learning, imitation, economic competition, and coercion are traditionally used to explain policy diffusion in local government, but they can also be scaled to address policy diffusion between any set of government entities. *Learning* is defined as a city adopting a policy that has broadly been adopted by other cities throughout the state (Shipan & Volden, 2008). Contrasted with learning, *imitation* is defined as the likelihood of a city adopting a policy based on whether a larger neighboring city has adopted the same policy (Shipan & Volden, 2008). *Economic competition* is defined as a city's likelihood of adopting a policy being determined by the direct or indirect positive economic implications it may confer on the city (Shipan & Volden, 2008). The fourth avenue for policy diffusion is *coercion*, defined as the likelihood of a city adopting a policy that the state has already adopted (mandated) or that the state explicitly prohibits (Shipan & Volden, 2008).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework: Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion

### *Learning*

Learning is the policy diffusion method best described as one local government looking to the consensus of similar state entities when deciding whether to adopt a policy. Although important, in this case, the impact of policy adoption by others does not take precedence over the local government's inclination to adopt a policy solely because its counterparts have successfully done so. The learning mechanism of diffusion is concerned with processes rather than outcomes as the local governments navigate an uncoordinated interdependence (Elkins & Simmons 2005). This uncoordinated

interdependence is characterized by a natural dispersion of expertise that requires a policy diffusion process to adequately provide for knowledge sharing (Binz-Scharf, Lazer, & Mergel, 2012). This learning diffusion mechanism does not account for policymakers' selective learning from the experience of others (Gilardi, 2010). Rather than weighing policy adoption based on merit, local governments enact policy using the learning mechanism as part of a group; therefore, a groupthink mentality applies rather than a critical evaluation of policy. This is counterintuitive to the name—learning mechanism—as the only thing learned is whether another local government has enacted the policy successfully rather than whether the policy fits the local government's specific needs. This is essentially mimicking, rather than learning by mimicking and modifying, as laid out in Glick's (2014) piece, *Learning by Mimicking and Modifying: A Model of Policy Knowledge Diffusion With Evidence From Legal Implementation*. While modifying a policy to meet the local government's specific needs seems ideal, this is not in the scope of the learning mechanism as defined. The learning policy diffusion mechanism is satisfied with a copy-and-paste method of replication.

Although the learning mechanism presumes that local governments are indirectly learning about the diffusing policy, there remains a role for a policy advocate (Nicholas-Crotty & Carley, 2018). Indeed, the learning policy diffusion mechanism requires an advocate to help political actors determine which, among the available policy alternatives, will survive and should be promoted for replication (Jones-Correa, 2000). These individuals can function as policy entrepreneurs who help stimulate the diffusion and promote acceptance of a specific policy alternative (Mintrom, 1997). In the learning

mechanism, policy entrepreneurs work to promote the general workability of the policy to be replicated, assisting in the diffusion process (Mintrom, 1997). The policy entrepreneur is successful in the learning diffusion mechanism when their reach has a positive regional effect, which is all that is needed for a policy to diffuse in the learning mechanism (Mooney, 2001). The salience of the policy also contributes to a more rapid diffusion of noncomplex policies (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). This shows that there is a proclivity to accept the policy of a neighboring local government at face value and that only a complex policy will motivate an adopting local government to determine whether the policy is the right fit for its constituents.

### *Economic Competition*

The economic competition policy diffusion mechanism focuses on local governments vying for funds. This mechanism explains direct competition, through which a government entity enacts a policy to pull revenue from a neighboring local government. The mechanism also accounts for indirect competition, through which a policy is enacted to prevent loss of revenue to a neighboring government agency. In this policy diffusion mechanism, each local government enacts a policy either in response to or in anticipation of a policy intended to reduce revenue. This equates to a strategic game that local governments play in which their neighbors influence their choices (Baybeck, Berry, & Siegal, 2011). Given the reactionary nature of policies described through this mechanism, it can be difficult to determine which are proactive and which are reactive. Regardless, competition occurs, and it can ultimately be used as a predictor for policy

adoption and expansion (Boehmke & Witmer, 2004). If there is a loss of resources to one neighbor, either expressed or implied by policy, a nearby local government is likely to respond by enacting a reactionary policy. This reactionary competition extends to taxes and revenue, which are often considered implicit (Brown & Rork, 2005).

Unlike the learning diffusion mechanism, the economic competition mechanism accommodates modifications and enhancements to previous policies (Miller & Richard, 2010). Whereas the learning mechanism has a collaborative focus, the economic competition mechanism focuses on competitive advantage and addresses how governments must innovate on previous policies to achieve that advantage. These policy changes do not, however, happen overnight, as their reactionary nature would suggest. As with any change in government policy, the economic diffusion mechanism is often slow and methodical (Fry, 2019). It takes time to learn which policies to enact. To retain their positions, elected officials gauge public opinion on policies that neighboring governments have enacted, and they work to garner support for potential reactionary competitive policy (Pacheco, 2012). Game theory also supports the economic policy diffusion mechanism because politicians seek credit for providing goods and seek to avoid blame for the imposition of taxes on those goods (Volden, 2005). Economic policy diffusion aptly addresses this dilemma, as the blame for the need for potential negative policy (e.g., taxes) can be shifted to the neighboring local government, with which the elected officials' constituents compete.

### *Imitation*

The imitation policy diffusion mechanism focuses on the proximity of the government entity to where the policy was enacted and the success of that policy. In this mechanism, the entity replicating the policy is smaller in terms of population and financial means, and the local government looks to a larger city or the state or national level for policy replication. A local government is likelier to emulate other government entities (particularly larger ones) that have demonstrated the ability to succeed (Shipan & Volden, 2014). This idea presumes that a larger entity has a successful best practice that can be scaled down to a smaller local government. Policymakers' responses to observing other government entities' experiences are, however, unpredictable and vary with the size and location of a specific population (Berry & Baybeck, 2005). This interdependence shows that government organizations influence one another even if a replicated policy was enacted originally out of compliance or external competitive pressure (Ben-Aaron, et al., 2017). Thus, a policy enacted by a larger government entity could be replicated or imitated for different reasons than those for which it was initially enacted. This illustrates a potential disconnect between the expectations of the imitating agency and the policy-originating entity.

Interdependencies in policymaking have always existed. Essentially, policy diffusion involves a government entity making policy choices based on other governments' existing policies (Phillips, 2016). For instance, a policy made by one set of elected officials who were influenced by another set of elected officials may, in turn, influence other entities (Braun, et al., n.d.). This imitation extends beyond policymaking

to the repeal of a policy. The noneconomic influence of policy repeal may be attributed to the imitation policy mechanism (Hwang, 2021). If a policy is deemed ineffective on a larger scale, the repeal of the policy may diffuse to a local government through the imitation mechanism for the same best-practice-emulation reasons. The local government may opt to repeal the policy before it fails based on the negative outcome of the policy it imitated (Volden, 2016). National networks with local actors assist in this diffusion of best-practice policy (Martin, 2001). The local actors associated with national networks help facilitate the knowledge transfer of how larger entities and the state and national governments are addressing the topic. These national networks are issue-based and may not be present in every local government jurisdiction.

### *Coercion*

Policy diffusion through the coercion mechanism results from a policy enacted at a higher state or federal level. That state or federal policy's enactment decreases the likelihood of a local government passing a similar policy due to redundancy or a counter policy due to violating state or federal policy precedence. If a state or federal policy is silent on an issue or leaves room for local discretion, a policy enacted could be deemed to have diffused through the coercion mechanism. The coercion mechanism illustrates the political influence that the adoption of state or federal policy has on local government (Biggers & Hammer, 2017). Policies that diffuse in this manner are not uniquely configured to meet the local government's needs. State government policy is more likely to extend benefits to strong, popular, and powerful target populations or impose burdens

on the state's weaker and politically marginalized groups (Boushey, 2016). These groups may not reflect the precise makeup of the citizens in a specific locality. Often, the structural advantages of state politics are too substantial for a small, dissatisfied local government to replicate (Myers, 2018). Thus, policy diffused through the coercion mechanism has limited avenues for opposition.

As mentioned, national networks can assist policy diffusion by adapting a state or national policy to fit a local demographic. Another avenue that assists in policy diffusion is utilizing religious organizations, as they transcend geographic and demographic barriers (Djupe & Olson, 2010). When regional and local policy diffusion is unsuccessful or is met with opposition, national networks and religious organizations can represent advocacy coalitions that are useful when paired with favorable state characteristics (Donald & Haider-Markel, 2001). This avenue for coercive policy diffusion is not affected by the policy's level of importance, as would usually be followed by a groundswell of public opinion to support it (Koski, 2010). However, a policy broker or advocate holds a critical role that could link the state policy to the disaffected local government citizenry (Koski, 2010). There are provisions that a policy can have an even greater coercive effect on local government. Policies may impose certain conditions or requirements on local governments in order to reap a benefit, thereby coercing an action that would otherwise not be in the local constituent's favor (Soule & Zylan, 1997).

## Conclusion

This literature review has identified the primary avenues through which policy diffuses in local government. Future research can uncover the factors underlying the most successful mechanism in policy diffusion in U.S. local government. Event history analysis appears to be the predominant research method utilized on this subject and represents the starting point for future research. This literature review aids future research in helping to determine whether policy diffusion mechanisms are unique to a particular policy issue, type, interested group, specific local government, or another factor yet to be identified. Future research based on this literature review can contribute to the policy diffusion literature by identifying a diffusion mechanism preference and the factors motivating that preference in U.S. local government.



JOURNAL ARTICLE ONE:

UNITED STATES LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
COVID-19 POLICIES AND POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS

### 3.1 Introduction

This case study focused on the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policies during the pandemic period of 2020 to 2023. While federal and state governments enacted policies and guidelines to manage the pandemic, local governments had to decide how to implement those policies in their communities. Some of the policies that reached the local government's level of discretion included mask-wearing requirements, travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, and business closures. However, local governments also had to determine whether to reduce government services or dismiss employees, as well as decide what type of employee testing and quarantine policies to implement. This research examined external COVID-19 policies that primarily affected the citizens of local communities. Policies unique to local governments were considered – those policies that the federal or state governments had not mandated. To ensure a clean research sample, local governments that had sufficient decision-making autonomy regarding COVID-19 matters were of primary focus. Other sources of local government policy were utilized to define the partisan positions of the selected local governments based on the partisan makeup of their elected officials (primarily mayors) and their similarity to the national partisan COVID-19 position.

This research aimed to test two hypotheses. The first hypothesis posited that the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policies occurred along political party lines. By examining the data, I expect to find a significant relationship between the political leanings of local government officials and how closely their COVID-19 policies mirrored the national partisan stance. In other words, conservative local governments would

exhibit policies that were more in line with national conservative views, while liberal local governments would draft policies reflecting national liberal views.

The second hypothesis predicted that a unique policy diffusion mechanism related to political affiliation was at play in the spread of COVID-19 policies. I anticipated finding evidence of a particular pattern in which local governments, based on their political affiliation, varied in how they adopted and propagated these policies. I predicted that local governments with similar political alignments would be more inclined to embrace and enact COVID-19 policies at an accelerated rate (higher total count in the given 2020-2023 timeframe) than those with differing political stances.

The primary research method for this case study involved historical document analysis. I analyzed policies that local governments published or promulgated to the public via official channels through resolutions, ordinances, or emergency orders. Using document analysis, I collected and analyzed these documents to find similarities and differences among them. Through an intentional coding and validation approach, I identified trends and patterns in the data and developed a classification schema to determine the partisan nature of local government COVID-19 policies.

The dates of local government policy implementation and the level of similarity between policies were examined to provide a timeline, potential path, and rate of COVID-19 policy diffusion. Whether any of the four existing policy diffusion mechanisms were in play during the selection process of the local government's COVID-19 policy was also identified. If there were no current policy diffusion mechanisms, the specific local government policy was analyzed to the benchmark conservative and liberal

local government policies for similarity. This secondary analysis was then compared with the city mayor's political party to explore the link between policy selection and political affiliation.

This analysis aimed to identify evidence that policy was diffused into and throughout local government along political party lines and that an additional fifth policy diffusion mechanism is needed to fully explain the phenomenon. The results of this case study provide insight into the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policy during the pandemic period and the role of political affiliation in this diffusion process. This research contributes to the existing literature on policy diffusion by introducing a new mechanism for understanding the process in a modern and politically polarized environment. This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how local governments make policy decisions during politically charged and uncertain times (such as pandemics) and how these decisions ultimately impact local communities. The goal was to determine whether political affiliation had a sufficiently strong influence on policy diffusion to be considered a distinct policy diffusion mechanism. The analysis compared the results of the case study to identify similarities and differences in the diffusion of COVID-19 policies based on political affiliation. Identifying a significant relationship between political affiliation and policy diffusion supports the inclusion of a fifth policy diffusion mechanism in the literature.

This research aimed to examine the effects of a politically polarized climate on policy diffusion in U.S. local government, specifically focusing on the diffusion of COVID-19 policies from 2020 to 2023. By analyzing the diffusion of this policy issue in

local government and comparing the results, this research sought to identify a new policy diffusion mechanism that accounts for the diffusion of policies along political party lines. The results of this research are valuable to policymakers, academics, and citizens interested in understanding how policy is formulated and implemented in local government, particularly in a politically polarized climate.

### 3.2 Methodology

The study's methodology examined the relationship between COVID-19 policy and political affiliation data. Specifically, the research question was whether a significant relationship exists between a local government's political affiliation and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To answer this question, the study used two primary sources of data: the NLC's COVID-19 Local Action Tracker (National League of Cities, 2021), which provides information on cities' policies and actions taken in response to the pandemic as well as the political party of the mayor at the time of the enactments. For each policy domain, the mean number of policies enacted by cities with Democratic and Republican mayors was calculated. This mean served as an indicator of the central tendency of policy enactments within the political cohorts. T-tests were employed to understand the mean differences of the data. The standard deviation was computed for each policy category within each political affiliation, illuminating the extent of dispersion from the calculated mean. The standard error of the mean (SEM) was determined, which provided an estimation of the variability of the sample mean relative to the true population mean—a measure of the statistical accuracy of the mean estimates. These methods were used to evaluate the relationship between the type of COVID-19 policy selected and the political affiliation of those who selected it.

This research employed a cross-sectional analysis utilizing secondary data to examine the relationship between the political affiliations of local government officials and the COVID-19 policies they enacted. Specifically, the study utilized the NLC's COVID-19 Local Action Tracker and political affiliation data, categorizing cities based

on the political party of their mayor. The analysis sought to identify relationships between the political leanings of local government officials and the nature and extent of COVID-19 policy implementations. This approach allowed for the examination of policy responses across a broad spectrum of jurisdictions at a specific point in time, facilitating comparisons and the identification of patterns or trends that might be associated with political affiliation. The use of secondary data from reputable sources provided a solid foundation for the analysis, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. The cross-sectional design was particularly suited to addressing the research questions, as it enabled the capture of a snapshot of policy responses during the pandemic, highlighting differences and similarities across local governments with varying political orientations.

#### *Data Sources*

The first data source used was the National League of Cities (NLC) COVID-19 Local Action Tracker, which provides information on COVID-19 policies such as mask mandates, stay-at-home orders, and business restrictions at the local level. The second data source was the political party of the selected city's mayor. The data was then prepared for analysis by cleaning and organizing it so that each data point corresponded to a specific location. Each location was coded with the types of COVID-19 policies implemented based on the data provided by the NLC COVID-19 Local Action Tracker on which restrictions (if any) were implemented. The same locations were then used to search for the mayor of the city and their political party during policy adoption. Based on

the mayor's political party, the corresponding Republican or Democrat data point for the location was assigned.

### *Method of Analysis*

The t-test analysis was employed to examine whether the political leanings of local government officials, particularly mayors, significantly influenced the enactment of COVID-19 policies. The goal was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the mean number of policies enacted by cities with Democratic mayors compared to cities with Republican mayors. This approach focuses on comparing average outcomes, providing a clear measure of how political affiliation may serve as a determinant in local policy responses during the pandemic. The t-test, a method used for hypothesis testing, assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other (Lani, 2021). This is particularly relevant in exploring whether political ideology influences policy decisions, as it directly compares the average number of policies implemented by different political administrations. Unlike correlation analysis, which evaluates the strength and direction of a linear relationship between variables, the t-test specifically addresses the question of whether the difference in means is likely to be due to random chance or a significant underlying effect.

The value of using a t-test in this context lies in its ability to provide a straightforward answer about differences between groups (Lani, 2021). It is a powerful tool for testing hypotheses about population means under the assumption that the data follow a normal distribution. This method is particularly useful when the research design



limits the ability to manipulate variables or when the objective is to compare specific groups based on a categorical independent variable, such as political affiliation.

In addition to its primary function of hypothesis testing, the t-test also enhances the rigor of the study by allowing researchers to quantify the effect size and evaluate the practical significance of the findings. This can inform policymakers and scholars about the extent to which political affiliation might impact governmental responses to crises, supporting the investigation of potential mechanisms of policy diffusion based on political ideology. While correlation analysis can indicate relationships and patterns, it does not establish causation, nor does it typically focus on categorical variables like political affiliation. The t-test addresses this gap by directly comparing the means of policy enactment between the identified groups, thus offering a more targeted approach to understanding how different governance styles affect policy outcomes.

The use of a t-test in this study is justified by the need to explore direct comparisons between the political ideologies of local government officials and their respective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on the differences in policy enactment between cities governed by Democratic versus Republican mayors, the t-test provides a clear, statistically valid conclusion about the influence of political ideology on government actions during a critical period.

This research systematically examines the relationship between the political affiliation of city mayors—categorized dichotomously as either Democratic (D) or Republican (R)—and the quantity and typology of enacted COVID-19 policies. To facilitate this examination, a comprehensive dataset from the National League of Cities

that chronicled an array of policies implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic across various jurisdictions. Each policy under consideration was tagged with the political party of the city's mayor to delineate the partisan lines. The mean was then tabulated for the number of times each policy was enacted, which formed the basis for the quantitative analysis. The dataset was structured to include a variety of policy domains, from fiscal initiatives like the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to public health measures such as vaccination drives.

For each policy domain, the mean number of policies enacted by cities with Democratic and Republican mayors was calculated. This mean served as an indicator of the central tendency of policy enactments within the political cohorts. Further statistical measures were employed to understand the distribution and variability of the data. The standard deviation was computed for each policy category within each political affiliation, illuminating the extent of dispersion from the calculated mean. The standard error of the mean (SEM) was determined, which provided an estimation of the variability of the sample mean relative to the true population mean—a measure of the statistical accuracy of the mean estimates.

The analysis then proceeds with the computation of the difference in means between the two political affiliations for each policy category. This calculation is pivotal, as it directly compares the average number of policies enacted between cities with Democratic and Republican mayors, thus manifesting the potential partisan divide in policy enactment. The statistical methodology chosen to extract the significance of these mean differences was the independent samples t-test. This test compared the means from

the two distinct political groups for each policy area to ascertain if the differences were statistically non-random. Each t-test was approached with a two-tailed hypothesis framework. The null hypothesis proposed that there was no difference in the mean number of policies enacted between cities led by Democratic and Republican mayors for any given policy area. The alternative hypothesis contended that such a difference existed.

The p values derived from each t-test were critical to hypothesis testing. These values provide a measure of the strength of evidence against the null hypothesis. Should a p value fall below the conventional level of 0.05, it would suggest that the observed difference in policy enactment between the political affiliations was unlikely to have occurred by chance, thereby indicating a statistically significant difference. The methodology employed was meticulously designed to ensure robustness and replicability. It encompassed a balanced approach to quantitative analysis, allowing for a rigorous investigation into how political ideology may shape municipal responses to a global health crisis. The study abstained from rendering causal inferences, focusing instead on the association between mayoral political affiliation and policy enactment patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3.3 Results and Discussion

The initial hypothesis speculates that local government policies related to COVID-19 were influenced or disseminated based on political party affiliations—that Democratic and Republican mayors were more likely to adopt certain policies because of their party alignment. If these findings are confirmed, then a second hypothesis will be examined. Here, the aim is to determine whether the observed patterns in policy adoption are strong enough to suggest a distinct and previously unobserved method of policy diffusion. This would mean that political alignment was not just a minor factor but a dominant force that dictated how COVID-19 policies spread across local governments.

As shown in Table 3.1, Of the 100 largest U.S. cities analyzed, 98 enacted 3,231 COVID-19 policies.

**Table 3.1** COVID-19 Policy Count by Type

<b>COVID-19 Policy Count by Type</b>	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Nonpartisan
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)	148	19	6	8
Business Economic Stability	223	46	6	12
City Fiscal Stability	23	9	3	4
Combating Discrimination	15	0	0	0
Communication	42	7	6	7
Digital Connectivity	49	11	0	1
Education and Childcare	55	8	5	3
Food/Nutrition	53	17	2	0
Government Operations	222	64	8	15
Housing	273	47	9	11
Individual/Family Economic Stability	73	15	3	1
Long-term Community Resilience	45	7	4	1
Medical/Behavioral Health Services	70	25	1	9
Mobility and Transit	103	12	6	2
Participatory Governance	33	8	1	1
Prevention/Flattening the Curve	422	137	40	26
Public Safety/Law Enforcement	26	1	1	2
Re-Opening	251	68	15	19
Utilities	78	27	2	3
Vaccinations	200	31	17	8
<i>Subtotals</i>	<i>2,404</i>	<i>559</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>All Policy Total</i>				<i>3,231</i>

Of those 98 cities, 64 had Democratic mayors, 24 had Republican mayors, four were independent, and six were nonpartisan. Of the 3,231 city policies related to COVID-19, a vast majority were instituted by cities with Democratic leanings. Specifically, Democratic cities accounted for 2,404 policies—74.40% of the total.

This significant figure suggests that cities under Democratic influence were the most active or diversified in their policy responses to the pandemic. By contrast, Republican-led cities contributed to 559 policies, comprising 17.30% of the total. Independent- and Nonpartisan-led cities appeared less active, with under 5% of the total policies.

The most prioritized policy across all affiliations was focused on preventing the spread of the virus and flattening the curve. Democrats allocated 17.55% of their policies to this, while an even higher proportion of Republican city policies, 24.51%, fell into this category. It was a top priority for independent cities, which dedicated nearly 30% of their policies to this cause. The challenges and considerations surrounding the reopening of cities post-lockdown were another dominant theme: Democratic cities allocated 10.44% of their policies to this topic, with Republican cities slightly higher at 12.16%. Nonpartisan cities led in this category, with 14.29% of their total policies related to reopening.

As shown in Table 3.1, economic concerns, both for businesses and individuals, as well as housing issues, were pressing across all political affiliations. Democrats were particularly active in the housing sector, with 11.36% of their policies addressing it.

Democrats and Republicans shared a concern for economic stability in business, dedicating 9.28% and 8.23% of their policies to it, respectively.

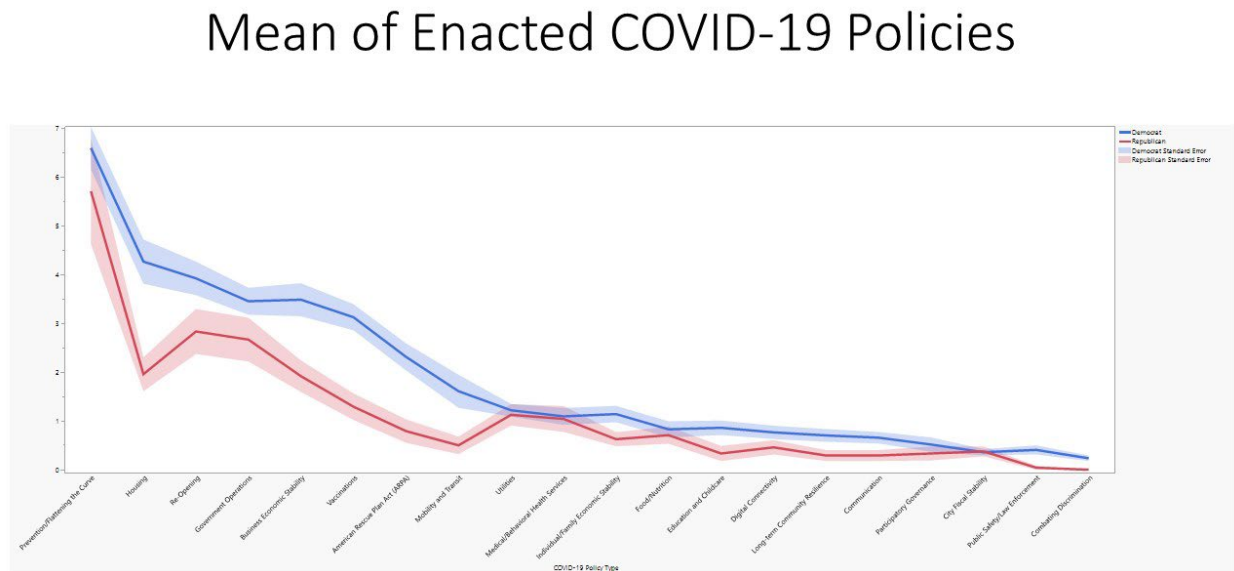
Combating discrimination was a policy area with a stark difference in focus. Only Democratic cities addressed discrimination in the context of the pandemic, albeit at a relatively modest rate of 0.62%. The absence of this policy in Republican, Independent, and Nonpartisan cities suggests differing priorities or differences in the challenges faced by cities of varying sizes and demographics. While all affiliations recognized the importance of policies related to vaccinations, there was a divergence in emphasis. Democratic and Independent cities prioritized this more, allocating 8.32% and 12.59% of their policies to it, respectively. Republican cities, by contrast, dedicated only 5.55% of their policies to vaccinations.

The data paints a picture of cities nationwide grappling with the pandemic, tailoring their responses based on their political orientations, local challenges, and demographics. While certain priorities like flattening the curve and reopening were universally shared, other areas like combating discrimination or digital connectivity varied in emphasis. While the pandemic was a shared challenge, the nuanced responses were deeply embedded in local political, social, and economic landscapes.

The methodology examines two key variables in order to rigorously evaluate these hypotheses. The first variable was the political party affiliation of the mayors in question, and the second variable was the specific type of COVID-19 policy each mayor chose to implement. By correlating these variables, this research hopes to uncover whether political leanings had a significant role in the decision-making processes of local

governments during the pandemic. This data and its relationship are visualized in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1** Mean of Enacted COVID-19 Policies



This research scrutinizes the potential relationship between city mayors' political leanings and policies' enactment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodology entailed the analysis of a comprehensive dataset reflecting a spectrum of policy types ranging from economic relief efforts to public health initiatives. The policies were categorized based on the mayoral political affiliation, either Democratic (D) or Republican (R), and the data was analyzed using independent samples t-tests to compare the mean number of policies enacted by mayors of each political party. The analysis showcases that Democratic mayors, on average, enacted more policies than their Republican counterparts, with a mean difference of approximately -0.71 across all policy

types. This difference indicates a proactive approach by Democratic mayors in addressing the pandemic through a range of policy interventions. However, the overall p value of approximately 0.22 across all compared policy areas suggests that, when aggregated, the differences in policy enactment are not statistically significant, pointing to a complex interplay of factors influencing policy decisions beyond mere political affiliation.

The standard deviation and standard error measures across policy categories shed light on the dispersion and reliability of the data. Larger standard deviations in certain policy areas indicated that there was a wider variance within the political groupings, suggesting that factors other than political affiliation may have had a substantial influence on policy enactment. Meanwhile, the standard error provided a measure of the confidence I could place in the sample means representation of the wider population.

Delving into specific policy areas, stark contrasts emerge, particularly in policies related to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (Figure 3.2), Business Economic Stability (Figure 3.3), Combating Discrimination (Figure 3.4), and Housing (Figure 3.5). In these areas, Democratic mayors exhibited significantly higher rates of policy enactment, with p values well below the 0.05 threshold, indicating a statistically significant difference influenced by political ideology. For instance, in the case of ARPA policies, Democratic mayors enacted policies at a mean rate of 2.3125, compared to a mean rate of 0.791667 by Republican mayors, with a strikingly low p value of  $<.001$ , underscoring a significant disparity in response to federal relief efforts.



**Policy = American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**

Number Enacted 2

Mayor Political Party

Legend:

- (D)
- (R)
- (D)
- (R)
- Standard Error

**Policy = Business Economic Stability**

Number Enacted 2

Mayor Political Party

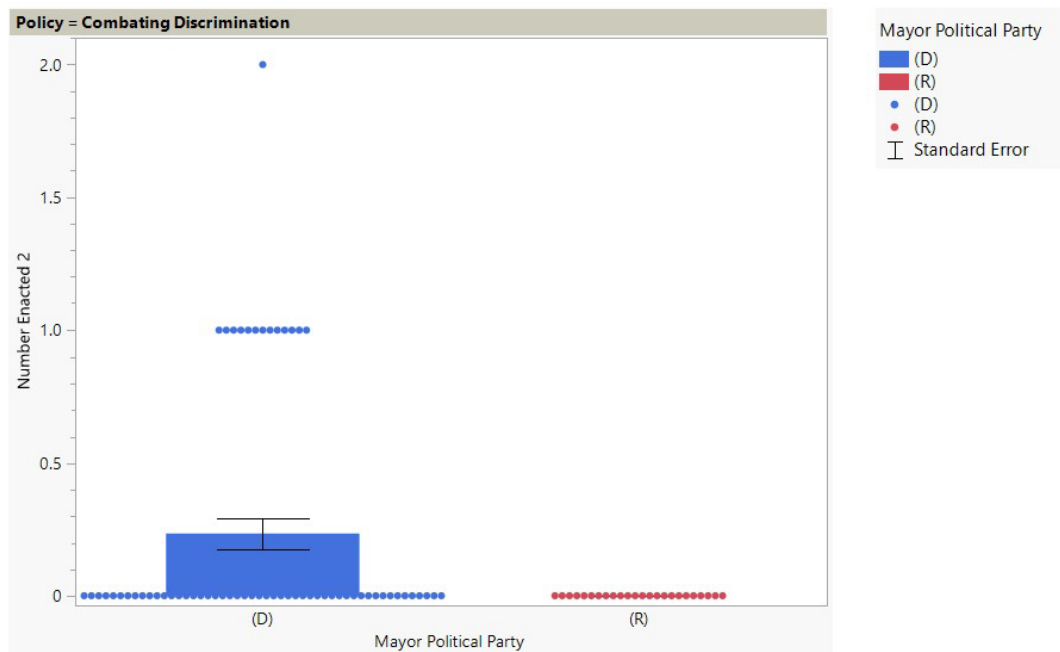
(D)

(R)

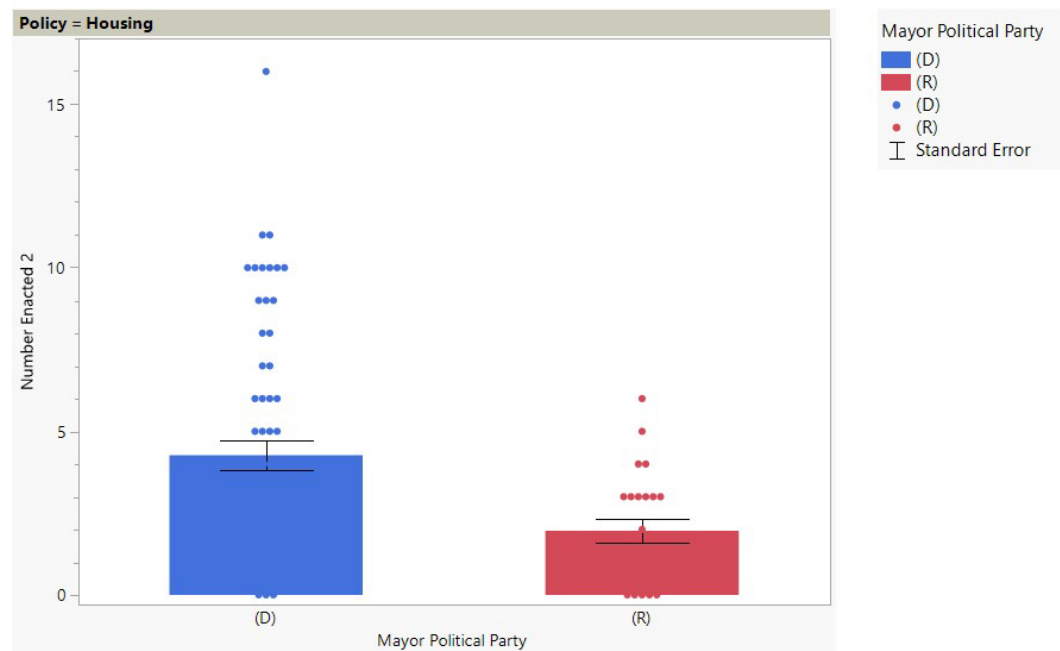
Legend:

- (D)
- (R)
- (D)
- (R)
- Standard Error

### Figure 3.4 Combating Discrimination Policies



### Figure 3.5 Housing Policies



After a thorough examination, the results indicate a significant partisan difference in the enactment of certain types of COVID-19 policies. The p values associated with these differences were markedly below the conventional alpha level of 0.05, suggesting that these variances were unlikely to be due to random chance and could be attributed to political ideology. Alternatively, areas such as City Fiscal Stability, Food/Nutrition, and Utilities did not show significant differences in policy enactment rates between Democratic and Republican mayors, as reflected by higher p values. This suggests that in certain domains, the response to the pandemic transcended political divisions, converging towards a unified approach. The policy domain of Prevention/Flattening the Curve, despite showing a high level of activity, did not exhibit significant differences between political parties, highlighting a common ground in addressing the immediate health crisis. However, significant differences were observed in policies focusing on Communication and Digital Connectivity, Education and Childcare, and Mobility and Transit, among others, where Democratic mayors were more active, as evidenced by lower p values.

The findings indicate that political affiliation played a role in the prioritization and implementation of COVID-19-related policies, with Democratic mayors generally enacting more policies in key areas. This suggests that political ideology influenced the approach to tackling the pandemic, with Democrats possibly placing a greater emphasis on direct intervention across a spectrum of policy areas. While certain areas witnessed significant differences based on political ideology, others saw a more unified approach. This study underscores the importance of examining the intricacies of policy enactment within the context of a global health crisis, highlighting the influence of political ideology

on governance and response strategies. The results suggest that political ideology may influence the prioritization of policy responses to the pandemic. This influence may be particularly pronounced in areas where political philosophies are more likely to diverge, such as economic relief, where Democrats traditionally advocate for greater government intervention.

It is essential to consider these findings within the multifaceted context of local governance and the multifactorial nature of policy implementation. While there is a relationship between political affiliation and policy enactment, this does not establish causation. Other variables that were not controlled for in this study—such as the severity of the pandemic in the city, demographic variations, economic conditions, and state-level policies—could also significantly affect policy decisions.

In my exploration of the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policies, I discovered a pronounced influence of political polarization on policy decisions. My findings indicated that the policies adopted by local governments were often aligned with the political leanings of their officials, effectively mirroring national partisan stances on the pandemic. This alignment suggests that political ideologies significantly impact local government responses to public health crises. The implication of this discovery is profound, suggesting that political polarization could hinder unified responses to future health emergencies, presenting a major challenge in managing public health effectively across different jurisdictions.

### *Limitations*

In examining the diffusion of local government COVID-19 policies and their alignment with political affiliations, my study encountered several limitations. The reliance on available data sources, particularly the National League of Cities' COVID-19 Local Action Tracker, introduced constraints related to the completeness and potential biases of the dataset. While the dataset provided valuable insights into local government responses to the pandemic, its coverage and depth might not fully encapsulate the breadth of policy initiatives implemented across the United States.

The methodological approach, predominantly quantitative and employing t-tests, provided valuable insights but also had inherent limitations. T-tests can determine if there are statistically significant differences between groups, yet they do not establish causality (Lani, 2021). Although significant differences were identified in certain areas, these findings could be influenced by external variables not included in the analysis. This highlights the complexity of policy diffusion, indicating the need for more advanced statistical models to fully understand the dynamics involved. The temporal scope of the study, concentrating on the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, might not capture the evolving nature of local government responses over time. The political, social, and public health landscapes have rapidly changed throughout the pandemic, which could affect policy diffusion mechanisms in unforeseen ways.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The lack of significant differences in certain policy areas suggests a bipartisan or nonpartisan approach to addressing some aspects of the pandemic. This could reflect a collective recognition of the urgent need to act, transcending political divisions in the face of a public health emergency. This research project aimed to determine if the political party of city mayors had a significant influence on the amount and type of COVID-19 policy enacted during the pandemic. Through a detailed analysis of the provided data, several key findings emerged, highlighting the complex relationship between political affiliation and policy response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The analysis revealed that for certain policy areas, such as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Housing, Combating Discrimination, and Vaccinations, there was a statistically significant difference in the number of policies enacted by Democratic and Republican mayors, with Democratic mayors generally enacting more policies. This suggests that political ideology influenced the prioritization and implementation of these types of policies during the pandemic. Specifically, policies that directly addressed economic stability, discrimination, and public health showed clear differences based on the political party of the mayor, indicating that differing policy priorities likely influenced these areas and approaches inherent to each party's ideology. In other areas, such as City Fiscal Stability, Food/Nutrition, and Utilities, the analysis did not find a statistically significant difference in policy enactment between Democratic and Republican mayors. This indicates that for certain policy areas, decisions may have been driven more by situational factors and immediate needs rather than political ideology.

The overall p value across all policy areas suggested that when considering the data as a whole, the influence of a mayor's political party on COVID-19 policy enactment might not be statistically significant. However, this overarching conclusion masks significant differences in specific policy areas, underscoring the importance of disaggregating the data to understand the nuanced ways in which political affiliation can impact policy decisions.

This research provides evidence that the political party of city mayors influenced the amount and type of COVID-19 policies enacted in certain key areas, reflecting the role of political ideology in shaping policy responses to the pandemic. However, the influence of political affiliation was not uniform across all types of policies, indicating that the relationship between political ideology and policy enactment during the COVID-19 pandemic is complex and multifaceted. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how political factors can influence policy decisions in times of crisis and underscore the need for further research to explore these dynamics in different contexts and policy areas.

This study's findings do contribute to the broader discourse on how political ideologies shape policy decisions during a crisis. The significant relationships observed underscore the potential for political affiliation to impact the strategic choices made by city leaders in response to a global health emergency. These insights enhance the understanding of the intersection between politics and policy, highlighting the need for further research to explore the causal pathways and to control for additional variables that may influence policy enactment. Future research should aim to implement multivariate

analyses to parse out the effects of different factors on policy decisions. Such studies would provide a more detailed understanding of how political, social, and economic factors converge in the crafting and implementation of policy, especially during times of crisis.



JOURNAL ARTICLE TWO:

UNITED STATES LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
HISTORICAL MARKER POLICY AND POLITICAL AFFILIATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

Over the years, there has been a lot of focus on changes to historical markers, leading to intense debates and discussions about the significance of historical monuments and statues in modern American society. These markers, representing figures and events, have faced criticism for upholding narratives that do not align with current societal values, especially in terms of racial justice and equality. It is important to delve into the reasons behind the decisions to remove monuments in cities and how these changes relate to broader societal dynamics. My study looked into whether there is a connection between adjustments made to markers in cities and the political affiliations of those cities. The main goal was to see if this link was strong enough to support an additional diffusion mechanism related specifically to political affiliation. This would add to the existing four diffusion methods of learning from early adopters, economic competition among proximate cities, imitation of larger cities, and coercion by state governments (Gray & Lowery, 1996).

This research delves into the intersection of politics, history, and collective memory. The first hypothesis I explore is the relationship between changes made to markers in cities and the political stance of the city's mayor. I hypothesized that there would be a connection between how these alterations occur and the dominant political ideologies within communities. I anticipated that these ideologies would strongly influence decisions regarding markers. The second hypothesis builds upon the first by exploring whether there was a connection between the type of marker changed and the political alignment of the city's mayor. The third hypothesis delves into the timing of

these modifications, suggesting that decisions to alter or remove these monuments were influenced by events that served as catalysts or pivotal moments. This relationship emphasizes how broader social and political contexts shaped the destiny of these monuments.

Data from the Whose Heritage? project by the Southern Poverty Law Center offered a repository of changes made to historical markers in various U.S. Cities. It includes information like change dates, types of items involved, reasons for removal, and locations where removals took place. These curated records allowed for an examination of modifications made to markers (Whose Heritage, n.d.). I incorporated public records data from the 100 U.S. Cities, which included each city's leanings based on their mayor's party affiliations. By examining the leanings of these regions, I set up a framework to delve into how marker removal may be linked to political beliefs. I carefully analyzed the gathered data to spot connections between marker removal and political alliances. The study looked into aspects such as the rate of marker removals, where they were located when they were taken down, political occurrences, and the political atmosphere in those cities. By utilizing techniques and visualizing data, I uncovered patterns that enhance our comprehension of how marker removal relates to affiliations.

This research adds to the discussions about policy diffusion and the sociopolitical dynamics that influence modern American cities by shedding light on what drives decisions to modify or remove monuments in these urban areas. It offers insights for policymakers, city planners, and communities who are dealing with debates on historical monuments. It helps bridge gaps in understanding the links between monument

removals, political affiliations, and broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape cities. Through analysis, this study has generated meaningful findings that can guide future academic studies, public conversations, and policy decisions regarding policy diffusion related to political affiliation as well as the preservation or removal of markers in the United States.

## 4.2 Methodology

This research aims to investigate the potential differences in the rate of removal or renaming of monuments between cities with mayors of different political affiliations. The study utilizes the SPLC's Whose Heritage? dataset and information on the political affiliation of the mayors of the largest 100 cities in the United States. The objective of this study is to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the modification of historical markers based on the mayors' political affiliations, which would suggest the potential for policy diffusion influenced by political factors.

The hypothesis is that cities with mayors from a particular political party will show a significantly different rate of actions on historical markers compared to cities with mayors from another party. This implies that shared political leanings among mayors might influence their likelihood of adopting similar local government policies regarding monument modifications. To test this hypothesis, a t-test will be conducted to compare the mean number of modified historical markers in cities led by mayors of one major political party against those led by mayors of the other major party. The outcome of the t-test will help to understand how political affiliation influences policy decisions and could suggest the need to consider political factors in the mechanisms of local government policy diffusion. The underlying assumption is that individuals with similar political affiliations are more inclined to adopt and advocate for policies that align with their beliefs. A significant difference between the groups would reinforce the importance of considering political affiliation in policy diffusion strategies.

Through this research, policymakers can gain insight into the role of political affiliation in policy diffusion processes. The results will inform the development of targeted strategies to engage individuals with specific political orientations and facilitate the adoption of policies in local government settings. Understanding the relationship between the data points contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the factors driving policy diffusion and can help researchers design mechanisms that effectively consider political dynamics.

This study on historical marker policy changes across U.S. local governments applied a cross-sectional analysis using secondary data, specifically leveraging the Southern Poverty Law Center's "Whose Heritage?" database alongside election results for mayors in the largest 100 cities in the U.S. This approach allowed for the examination of the relationship between the political affiliations of city mayors and decisions to modify or remove historical markers. By analyzing data at a specific point in time (2020-2023), the research illuminated patterns of policy diffusion related to historical markers, exploring whether political ideology influences these government decisions. The secondary data utilized in this study provided comprehensive coverage of historical marker changes and political affiliations, contributing to the robustness of the analysis. The cross-sectional design facilitated comparison across different political administrations, enabling the identification of any significant relationships between political affiliation and policy decisions regarding historical markers.

### *Data and Procedure*

Data was gathered from two primary sources: the SPLC's Whose Heritage? initiative and a dataset on the United States Mayoral Elections. Each source provided distinct data sets that were integral to the analysis. The SPLC's Whose Heritage? initiative has been recognized for its role in documenting Confederate monuments and other U.S. public symbols that some perceive as celebrating a questionable legacy. For a research project on historical marker modifications, the Whose Heritage? dataset provides an essential foundation. Establishing where and when these monuments were erected offers insight into past political and cultural climates. Observing when these markers were most actively erected assists in drawing connections with specific sociopolitical movements. Furthermore, a dataset that monitors changes to these monuments, such as their renaming, removal, or alteration, illuminates evolving community sentiments and decisions by governing bodies. The proffered justifications and debates surrounding these symbols' installation, retention, and modification provide an in-depth understanding of sociopolitical dynamics.

The United States Mayoral Elections dataset serves as a rich source of information about the political landscape of American cities at that time. This data set, which contains details about candidates, their affiliations, and the demographics of the cities they represent, can be instrumental in understanding how the political leanings of city leadership influence decisions related to historical markers. Merging insights from both data sets created a comprehensive picture. By cross-referencing, I determined the existence and strength of relationships between the political affiliations of city mayors

and decisions concerning historical marker modifications. Analyzing the political environment of a city at the time of a specific marker modification helped identify broader trends, such as whether conservative or liberal administrations were more predisposed to certain actions regarding the historical markers.

Although patterns may emerge linking mayoral political leanings with decisions on historical markers, it is critical to remember that detecting differences does not necessarily imply causation. Many factors contribute, such as the general public's sentiments, decisions made by city councils, and broader influences at the national or state level. When it is impossible to control for all potential confounding variables, as in this research design, conducting t-tests can still offer insight into whether observed differences between groups are statistically significant, even if causation cannot be established (Lani, 2021). In certain circumstances, establishing causality may not be necessary or practical, and the results from t-tests provide valuable information for decision-making purposes.

Once the data was gathered, a series of preparatory steps were performed. Data compatibility was ensured by organizing it in a consistent format using CSV or Excel files. Data cleaning procedures were then applied to address any issues (such as duplicates, missing values, or outliers) that could affect the analysis and interpretation of results. The dataset was refined by performing these data-cleaning techniques to enhance its quality and reliability. The data sets from both sources were merged based on geographic location to establish a common reference point for analysis. This merging process allowed for the alignment of data points and facilitated a comprehensive



examination of the relationship between political affiliation and the connection between the platforms.

### *Method of Analysis*

In this research, t-tests were employed to examine the influence of the political affiliations of city mayors on decisions regarding modifications to historical markers. This methodological choice allowed for the comparison of means between groups—specifically, comparing actions taken by mayors from different political parties. I hypothesize that mayors' political affiliations might lead to differing approaches in altering, removing, or maintaining historical markers, reflecting broader societal and cultural values. T-tests helped to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between the actions of mayors affiliated with different political parties, potentially influenced by contemporary debates on racial justice and equality. This approach provided a quantitative basis to assess the impact of political ideologies on public memory and historical representation, contributing to an understanding of the dynamics of policy diffusion in the context of local government decisions about historical narratives.

I opted for t-tests as this method allows for direct comparisons between groups. It enables researchers to identify significant differences in outcomes based on categorical variables, such as political affiliation (Lani, 2021). One key benefit of using t-tests is their ability to assess the effect of one variable on another in different groups. This method is particularly useful for testing hypotheses about causes and effects under

controlled conditions. While t-tests do not confirm causation by themselves, significant differences in means between groups suggest that further investigation into causal relationships may be warranted (Lani, 2021). This aids in understanding how changes in one variable (political affiliation) might impact another (decisions on historical markers).

The significance of employing t-tests lies in their capacity to provide insights into differences between groups, uncover trends, and support decision-making processes (Lani, 2021). T-tests are particularly advantageous when the research design involves comparing two groups on the same measure. They are also valuable in studies where controlling influencing factors is feasible, allowing for clearer interpretations of the data. In cases where data is limited or when establishing robust causal connections proves challenging, t-tests still offer valuable insights into the effects of categorical variables on outcomes. T-tests are a powerful tool for exploration, enabling researchers to test hypotheses about group differences and informing decisions in research contexts.

Within the framework of this study, my aim was to explore the link between the political leanings of city mayors and their tendency to alter historical markers. To accomplish this, I gathered a dataset comprising the types of markers. I categorized these markers based on the political party affiliation of the mayor in office at the time of data collection, distinguishing between Republican and Democrat affiliations. I gauged the impact of affiliation on markers through the variable mean number of policy types enacted by each political party. This variable compares the number of actions taken by each political party in a specific policy area to all actions taken by the political party in the marker modification policy arena.

To identify trends, I looked at the number of policies put in place by mayors from political parties for each type of historical landmark. I analyzed the variability in policy implementation using the standard deviation, a measure showing how spread out the data is compared to the average. I used the standard error of the mean to gauge how accurately my sample mean represented the population mean. A key part of my study involved comparing policy implementation between Democratic and Republican mayors. This was done by calculating the difference in the mean of policies enacted under Democratic mayors for each historical landmark category. To determine if these differences were statistically significant, I used hypothesis testing with a p value set at 0.05 as the threshold for significance. A p value below this level would imply that differences in policy implementation were not likely due to chance suggesting a link between a mayor's affiliation and changes to historical landmarks.

Statistical analysis was carried out using Excel, making it easier to conduct comparisons between different historical marker categories for policy enactment across two political affiliations. The study included two-sample t-tests to compare the means of policy implementation between the affiliations with p values, indicating the reliability of observed differences in policy enactment related to markers.

Considering factors, this analysis helped determine whether political affiliation could predict policy diffusion effectively. It's crucial to recognize the study limitations, such as biases in sampling, measurement errors, and omitted variables, to gain an understanding of the research findings. The study delves into the context and implications of its results, exploring the practicality of introducing a local government policy diffusion

mechanism based on political affiliation. The findings shed light on how political factors influence policy adoption and diffusion within government settings.

The research investigated how city mayors' political affiliations correlate with data from the Whose Heritage? project by SPLC to assess if a new local government policy diffusion method based on affiliation is necessary. Various challenges and constraints were associated with this examination. For example, the information gathered from these platforms and other sources might contain inherent biases or constraints that could affect the accuracy and applicability of the findings. To ensure an accurate assessment, I recognize these limitations and address their potential impact on the outcomes. Ethical considerations played a role throughout the research journey. I prioritized data privacy and confidentiality, obtained permissions, and adhered to guidelines. In order to uphold transparency and honesty, my research followed practices by detailing the methodology, results, and conclusions.

### 4.3 Results and Discussion

#### **Research Hypothesis One**

The first hypothesis investigated the relationship between the city's historical marker alterations and the political leanings of the city's mayor. This hypothesis predicted that a tangible link exists between the likelihood of historical marker changes and the dominant political ideologies of the communities. The prevalence of these ideologies was expected to drive decisions concerning historical markers.

The dataset examined contained information on different types of historical markers and the political affiliation of the mayor of the city where each marker is located. It also included data on the number of policies enacted, the mean number of policy types enacted by political party, standard deviation, standard error mean, the difference in means between Republican and Democratic mayors for each marker, and the p value for marker type. The dataset covers various types of historical markers, such as bodies of water, bridges, and buildings. Upon examining the dataset, I focus on determining if there is a connection between a city's mayor's political affiliation (Democratic or Republican) and whether a historical marker was modified, as inferred from the policies enacted and statistical measures provided.

The data presented in Table 4.2 illuminates the relationship between city historical marker alterations and the political affiliation of a city's mayor. Of the 139 total markers that remained unchanged, a majority (118) were located in cities governed by Democratic mayors, compared with 21 markers remaining unchanged in cities with Republican leadership. While this finding suggests that cities under Democratic leadership were less

inclined to modify their historical markers, a more critical investigation into the specific types of modifications suggests otherwise.

**Table 4.2** Historical Marker Modification Status

<b>Historical Marker Modification Status</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<i>Live (remains unchanged)</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>139</i>
Live (statue removed; pedestal remains)	1	0	1
Pending	3	0	3
Relocated	1	1	2
Removed	10	2	12
Renamed	17	1	18
<b>All Modifications Total</b>			<b>36</b>

When observing all changes, which included removal, renaming, and relocating, cities with Democratic mayors accounted for a larger number of alterations. For instance, a significant majority of renamed markers (17 of 18) were in cities with Democratic mayors. Similarly, of the 12 completely removed markers, ten had belonged to cities with Democratic leadership. Moreover, specific alterations, such as those labeled "Pending" and "Live (statue removed; pedestal remains)," were found exclusively in cities with Democratic mayors.

This data indicates a relationship between the political affiliation of a city's mayor and decisions concerning historical markers. It suggests that cities with Democratic leadership are more proactive or willing to modify their historical markers, whereas their Republican counterparts are more reserved in this regard. As hypothesized, the dominant political ideologies of these communities might be influencing decisions related to historical marker alterations. However, it is crucial to underscore that this is merely a connection, and one cannot conclusively infer causation.

The data on the number of policies enacted suggests variations in policy enactment across different types of historical markers, regardless of the mayor's political affiliation. The average number of policy types enacted by political parties offers a more detailed perspective, enabling me to evaluate the influence of political affiliation on these enactments. For bridges, the mean number of policy types enacted by Democratic mayors is slightly higher than that by Republican mayors, as indicated by a negative value in the difference between the Republican and Democratic means. This suggests that Democratic mayors might be slightly more inclined to enact policies affecting bridges, although the p value of 0.323636 indicates that this difference is not statistically significant at conventional levels (e.g.,  $p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, for buildings, the difference in mean policy enactment between Republican and Democratic mayors is more pronounced (-0.498834), with a p value of 0.065664. This p value is closer to the conventional threshold for statistical significance, suggesting a trend where the political affiliation of the mayor might influence policy enactment regarding modifications to buildings, though it still does not reach the conventional level of statistical significance. It's important to note the absence of p values for types of markers like bodies of water, which could indicate that no statistical test was conducted due to a lack of variance in the data.

While there are indications that the political affiliation of a city's mayor could influence policy enactments related to historical markers, the evidence does not strongly support a significant relationship across all types of markers. The variance in significance levels (p values) across different types of markers suggests that other factors

might also play a crucial role in the decision-making process for policy enactment related to historical markers. Further analysis, possibly including additional variables and a larger dataset, could provide more insight into these relationships.

## **Research Hypothesis Two**

In this study's second hypothesis, the focus was not simply on the presence or absence of alterations to city historical markers and their relationship with the political leanings of the city's mayor. Hypothesis Two examined the specific type or nature of the alterations made. For instance, alterations could have been related to the language used, the events highlighted, or the individuals commemorated on the markers. This hypothesis sought to determine whether there was a discernible pattern or relationship between the nature of these alterations and the political affiliation of the city's mayor. To that end, the study attempted to identify if, for example, mayors from a particular political affiliation were more inclined to approve changes that portrayed certain events in a favorable light or perhaps downplayed or omitted others.

This investigation aimed to determine whether the type of historical marker altered—whether its content concerned a particular event, person, or era—had a significant connection with the mayor's political affiliation. Such findings can help identify the possible influences of politics on how a city's history is publicly remembered and represented.

Table 4.2 provides a detailed view of the relationship between the types of historical marker alterations and the political leanings of a city's mayor. Broadly



speaking, when observing buildings, colleges, flags, parks, plaques, and roadways, all alterations were exclusively undertaken in cities governed by Democratic mayors. This suggested a proclivity among Democrat-led cities to engage in modifications across a diverse range of historical markers.

**Table 4.2** Historical Marker Modification Type by Political Party of Mayor

<b><i>Historical Marker Modification Type</i></b>	Democrat	Republican	Totals
Building	2	0	2
College	3	0	3
Flag	1	0	1
Monument	6	2	8
Park	1	0	1
Plaque	1	0	1
Roadway	2	0	2
School	16	1	17
Seal	0	1	1
All Modifications Total			36

The analysis of changes made to monuments presented a slightly more nuanced view. While a majority of the alterations (six of eight) were in Democrat-led cities, two instances were recorded in cities with Republican leadership. Schools, another significant category, showed a similar pattern. A majority of the alterations (16 of 17) were in cities under Democratic governance, with just one instance in a city led by a Republican mayor. Notably, the only alteration concerning seals happened in a city with a Republican mayor, marking a deviation from the overarching trend. The data suggested a pronounced trend: Cities with Democratic leadership were more inclined to make modifications across various types of historical markers. Of the cumulative 36 alterations, 34 were made in cities governed by Democrats, while only two were made in Republican-led cities.

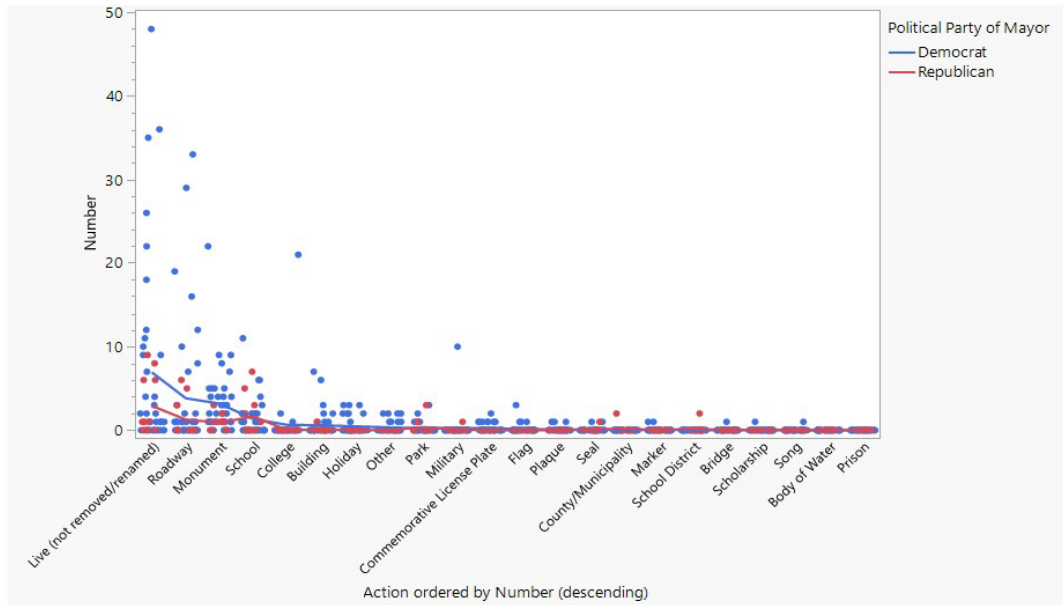
Based on this data and in line with the second hypothesis, there was a distinct connection between the nature of the historical marker undergoing change and the political affiliation of the city's mayor. Democratic leadership in cities showed a broader engagement in alterations across multiple historical markers. Nevertheless, while these relationships offer insights, they do not conclusively determine causative relationships.

In analyzing the dataset concerning the modifications of historical markers under the governance of city mayors with varying political affiliations, I conducted a detailed examination to uncover patterns in how Democratic and Republican mayors approach the preservation and alteration of historical monuments. This inquiry specifically aimed to compare the types of historical monuments modified by mayors from the two major political parties in the United States, focusing on statistically significant differences and policy enactment behaviors.

My analysis revealed several key insights into the modifications of historical markers by Democratic versus Republican mayors (Figure 4.1). The dataset indicated statistically significant differences in the approach to modifying certain types of markers, most notably in categories such as "Commemorative License Plate" and "Monument." These differences were quantified through mean differences in policy enactments and evaluated for statistical significance with p values.

**Figure 4.1** Number vs. Action by Political Party of Mayor

## Number vs. Action



For markers within the "Commemorative License Plate" and "Monument" categories, Democratic mayors exhibited a more pronounced tendency towards modification or policy enactment. The low p values ( $< .01$ ) in these categories underscored the statistical significance of this finding, suggesting a deliberate approach toward altering or implementing policies related to these types of historical markers. This observation implies a proactive stance by Democratic mayors in engaging with historical markers that perhaps reflect contemporary social values or historical reinterpretation.

My analysis did not identify specific types of historical markers that Republican mayors were significantly more inclined to modify than their Democratic counterparts. While there were differences in policy enactment across various marker types, none

demonstrated a statistically significant trend favoring Republican mayoral action. This might hint at a more conservative approach towards historical marker modification by Republican mayors, possibly prioritizing preservation or a different set of urban policy objectives.

The insights garnered from this analysis contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between political ideologies and local policy-making, particularly in the realm of historical preservation and modification. The tendency of Democratic mayors to actively modify or enact policies concerning "Commemorative License Plate" and "Monument" markers reflects broader political and cultural values. Such actions may indicate the prioritization of revising historical narratives to align with contemporary values or to address historical oversights and biases. The lack of clear trends in modifications by Republican mayors across the analyzed categories suggests a nuanced approach to historical marker modification, which may reflect a broader inclination towards maintaining historical narratives as they are or focusing policy efforts on other local priorities. This finding invites further contemplation on how political values and ideologies shape decisions regarding urban historical landscapes, highlighting the potential for political affiliation to influence policy outcomes and the cultural and historical narratives that define local spaces.

In reflecting on these findings, I recognize the importance of further research that could elucidate the qualitative aspects of these modifications, such as the motivations behind policy enactments and the public discourse surrounding historical marker changes. Such explorations could offer a richer understanding of how political ideologies

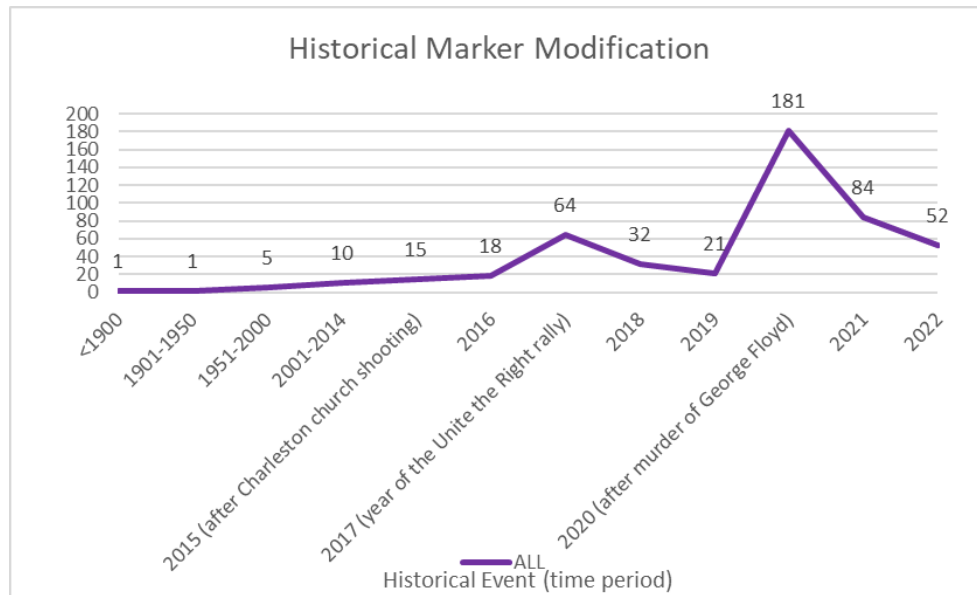
shape, preserve, or alter our collective historical memory and the representations of history in public spaces. This analysis, while revealing, is but a step towards uncovering the complex dynamics at play in the interaction between politics, history, and local government policy-making.

### **Research Hypothesis Three**

The third hypothesis addressed the timing of these historical marker changes. It predicted that the decisions to alter or remove the monuments were not made in a vacuum. Instead, they were expected to align with specific sociopolitical events that acted as catalysts or tipping points. This alignment would underscore the premise that broader social and political narratives have played a pivotal role in influencing the fate of these monuments.

The data visualization in Figure 4.2 delineates the number of historical marker changes across different periods, with certain years highlighted due to their association with significant sociopolitical events. The changes in historical markers were relatively minimal in the earliest time frames (before 1900 through 2000). There were only seven modifications across the span of a century. This could suggest that in these periods, sociopolitical events were less influential in these decisions, or the momentum for such changes had not reached a significant level.

**Figure 4.2** Historical Marker Modification Over Time



The pace of change began to quicken in the 21st century, with ten modifications from 2001–2014. The table highlights specific events in subsequent years that might, however, have acted as catalysts for change.

For instance, in 2015, after the Charleston church shooting, there were 15 marker changes. That number rose to 18 in 2016. This increase in alterations might suggest a growing awareness or urgency regarding the significance of these markers in light of contemporary events. In 2017, the year of the Unite the Right rally, an overwhelming 64 historical markers were altered. This event, which revolved around the potential removal of a Confederate statue, garnered national attention and sparked intense debates on the place of such monuments in modern society. It is evident from the data that this event resonated deeply, leading to an increase in monument changes. This trend of reacting to pivotal sociopolitical events continued in 2020, following the murder of George Floyd,

with 181 alterations, underscoring the profound impact of this event on the national consciousness and the subsequent reckoning with systemic issues and historical symbols. Following 2020, there was a noticeable but tapering response, with 84 changes in 2021 and 52 in 2022.

Given the data in Figure 4.2 coupled with the third hypothesis, broader sociopolitical events did indeed influence decisions regarding the alteration or removal of historical markers. A clear pattern suggests that significant incidents, which likely acted as tipping points, were followed by heightened activity in monument alterations. This alignment emphasizes the notion that these decisions are intertwined with larger social and political narratives, reflecting societal introspection and evolving perspectives on history.

In my investigation into the changes in historical markers, I found that the political affiliations of city leaders significantly influenced decisions regarding the alteration of historical narratives. Progressive or liberal leaders were more inclined to engage in actions that modified historical markers, aiming to align public commemorations with contemporary societal values. The implication of these findings is crucial for understanding the dynamic interplay between politics and public memory. It suggests that as political power shifts, so too might the narratives commemorated in our public spaces, potentially deepening divides over historical interpretation and heritage preservation.

### *Limitations*

The investigation into the modification of historical markers in American cities relative to the political affiliations of their mayors revealed distinct challenges. One primary limitation was the reliance on the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Whose Heritage?* project data set. While this dataset is a rich source of information on the subject, it is not exhaustive and may reflect certain biases in the selection and portrayal of historical marker modifications. The analysis was significantly qualitative, interpreting the motivations and implications of historical marker changes within the political context of each city. This qualitative approach, while providing depth and nuance to the findings, limits the generalizability of the results. The interpretations offered are bounded by the available data and the subjective nature of qualitative analysis.

Another limitation concerns the exploration of the timing of historical marker changes in relation to sociopolitical events. While the study identified relationships between significant events and spikes in marker modifications, establishing a causal link between these phenomena exceeds the scope of the research. This limitation points to the need for further studies that could employ longitudinal data analysis to more definitively explore these relationships.



#### 4.4 Conclusion

This study offers a nuanced exploration of the relationship between the modification of historical markers in American cities and the political affiliations of their mayors. Through detailed quantitative analysis and examination of the SPLC's *Whose Heritage?* project data set, alongside mayoral political affiliations in the United States' largest 100 cities, this research has illuminated the intricate ways in which political ideologies influence decisions regarding historical markers. The findings reveal a complex interplay between politics, public memory, and the representation of history, underscoring the significance of political leanings in shaping the urban historical landscape.

The study's first hypothesis posited a relationship between the frequency of historical marker modifications and the political ideologies of city mayors, suggesting that such changes are motivated by the prevailing political beliefs within the community. The analysis, while revealing variations in policy enactment across different types of markers, did not find a universally significant link strong enough to affirm the hypothesis across all categories of historical markers. However, nuanced trends and patterns emerged, hinting at the influence of political ideologies on certain types of historical marker modifications, particularly those involving buildings and monuments.

The second hypothesis expanded the investigation to the nature of modifications and found notable differences in the approach of Democratic versus Republican mayors, particularly with respect to "Commemorative License Plates" and "Monuments." This points to a broader tendency of Democratic mayors to engage in modifications reflecting

contemporary values and historical reinterpretations, while Republican mayors showed a more conservative approach, emphasizing preservation or different urban policy objectives.

The third hypothesis focused on the timing of historical marker changes, uncovering a significant connection between these modifications and specific sociopolitical events that acted as catalysts for change. This aspect of the study highlights the profound impact of broader social and political narratives on the decision-making process related to historical markers, reflecting a societal movement towards introspection and the reevaluation of public symbols in light of contemporary values and events.

This research contributes significantly to our understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics influencing the modification of historical markers in American cities. By revealing the subtle yet impactful role of political affiliation and broader sociopolitical events in these decisions, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and communities engaged in debates over historical representation. It bridges a critical gap in understanding how political ideologies intersect with public memory and history, offering a foundation for future research and policy development to navigate the complexities of preserving or modifying historical monuments in a manner that aligns with contemporary societal values. The findings underscore the importance of considering political, social, and cultural contexts in decisions about historical markers, highlighting the need for continued dialogue and research to foster a more inclusive and reflective public historical narrative.

JOURNAL ARTICLE THREE:

UNITED STATES LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
EGOVERNMENT POLICY AND POLITICAL AFFILIATION

## 5.1 Introduction

In my study, I thoroughly examined how local governments have been incorporating eGovernment services since the 1990s. My main focus was to look into how political affiliations influence the availability of citizen access, government transparency, and self-service options offered by governments. While previous research has delved into why eGovernment's becoming more popular, my aim was to understand the ways in which this trend spreads. How eGovernment policy spreads is paramount to this research as I sought to explore the need for an additional policy diffusion mechanism that better incorporates the influence of political affiliation on policy decisions at the local government level.

To accomplish this, I conducted an analysis of how political affiliations within governments relate to the functionality and features of their websites. I paid attention to aspects such as citizen access, government transparency, and self-service options for government tasks. By evaluating and categorizing the eGovernment services provided by entities, I aimed to make a meaningful comparison. Various factors come into play when examining how local governments embrace and implement eGovernment services. These services play a role in improving citizens' interaction with their administrations by promoting transparent governance, offering self-service options, and ensuring easy access to government resources. Understanding the factors that drive their implementation provides insights for creating a customized policy diffusion explanation for governments.

One initial idea was that local governments led by Democrat mayors would offer citizens more access to eGovernment services compared to those governed by Republican

mayors. This notion implies that political party affiliation plays a role in shaping eGovernment service provision. It suggests that local governments under an administration indicated by the mayor's Democratic party affiliation are more inclined to enhance citizen access to eGovernment services than those led by Republican mayors. This preference could stem from a politically based commitment to governance and citizen empowerment. This would support the theory that democratic administrations prioritize advancements by allocating resources and implementing policies of eGovernment initiatives. This observation highlights how political beliefs influence the evolution of governance, emphasizing the importance of considering the political landscape when designing new policy diffusion strategies.

Expanding on the theory associating mayors with increased citizen access to eGovernment services, another hypothesis explores the specific types of eGovernment services more commonly available under mayoral leadership from different political affiliations. This theory suggests that the political beliefs of the mayor impact the range of eGovernment services provided and influence the services that are emphasized and developed. In particular, it suggests that local governments led by Democratic mayors tend to prioritize eGovernment services that support welfare, environmental sustainability, and community involvement, reflecting their party's traditional values and policy goals. Conversely, local governments, with Republican mayors, may focus on eGovernment services that improve business efficiency, public safety, and financial responsibility, aligning with values of effectiveness, security, and economic growth. This distinction in service priorities highlights how political ideologies influence the landscape

of government in nuanced ways by indicating that a mayor's political party affects not only the extent of eGovernment service delivery but also the thematic direction of these digital projects.

Examining these results adds to our knowledge about how eGovernment services spread and could reveal any deficiencies or constraints that warrant exploring approaches to policy diffusion. By comparing how nonpolitical topics diffuse with issues, this study aims to show that nonpolitical topics do not spread in the same way as politically charged ones. The findings would offer backing for the need for a new policy diffusion mechanism linked to political party association. Various factors were taken into account in the case studies to guarantee the precision and dependability of the outcomes. These factors, including party dominance, budget scale, population size, and geographical position, help in separating the diffusion factors from other local attributes that could impact the diffusion procedure.

## 5.2 Methodology

This research aimed to comprehensively investigate the relationship between a city's political affiliation and the level of implemented eGovernment services. The study focused on four scaled variables: informational, interactive, financial, and social media aspects of eGovernment services. This research aimed to build upon the findings of Epstein's (2022) study, "Two Decades of eGovernment Diffusion Among Local Governments in the United States." The current study incorporated data offering valuable insight into the geographical distribution of cities and their respective political affiliations, which could influence eGovernment implementation and usage patterns.

The research methodology involved collecting and analyzing data from cities across the United States that have implemented eGovernment systems. The level of eGovernment implementation and usage was assessed using a variety of metrics. For the informational aspect, I focused on the availability and accessibility of government information through digital channels, such as websites and online portals. For the interactive component, I evaluated the extent to which citizens can engage with government services and officials through digital platforms, including online forms, feedback mechanisms, and virtual town hall meetings. For the financial dimension, I examined the integration of electronic payment systems and online tax filing options. For the social media aspect, I explored local governments' utilization of social media platforms to disseminate information and engage with residents.

The study aimed to uncover connections and trends that can provide insight into the factors influencing the acceptance and use of eGovernment services. It also delved

into the necessity of an approach in government policy diffusion that considers political leanings. Political affiliation could impact how eGovernment initiatives are accepted and put into action, as varying political beliefs and priorities may influence attitudes and strategies toward governance. By investigating the link between leanings and eGovernment implementation, the study sought to determine if political aspects play a role in how eGovernment policies spread among governments.

In examining how eGovernment policies spread within U.S. local governments, this research utilized a cross-sectional analytical method using existing data to evaluate how political affiliation affects the acceptance and implementation of eGovernment services. This research utilized data on eGovernment service offerings in the largest 100 U.S. Cities compared with details on their mayor's political affiliations. This technique allowed for a comparison of the level and types of eGovernment services provided by governments with different political leaderships. The use of existing data provided a view of the eGovernment landscape across jurisdictions, enabling the identification of trends connected to political affiliations. The use of a sectional approach was crucial in uncovering how political beliefs could impact the prioritization, progress, and execution of eGovernment projects.

### *Data*

The data utilized in this research consisted of two main sources: Epstein's (2022) study on eGovernment diffusion among local governments in the United States and the political affiliation of each selected location's mayor. Epstein's study comprehensively



examined eGovernment adoption among local governments in the United States. The study collected data on various aspects of eGovernment implementation, including informational, interactive, financial, and social-media scaled variables. Epstein identified and measured these variables to assess the extent to which local governments have integrated eGovernment practices. Each variable was assigned a numerical value based on the level of implementation, allowing for quantitative data analysis. The study served as a valuable resource for understanding patterns and trends in eGovernment adoption across different local governments.

In addition to Epstein's study, the political affiliation of each local government's mayor was used to provide a political affiliation variable. The data provided information on the political affiliations of different cities in the United States. This variable allowed us to explore potential relationships between the political orientation of a city and its adoption of eGovernment practices. Each city was assigned a political party based on the political party of the mayor. This allowed for the inclusion of a political dimension in the analysis, which could help identify any associations between political factors and eGovernment implementation. By combining Epstein's research data with the political affiliation variable, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing eGovernment adoption among local governments in the United States. The inclusion of the political affiliation variable allowed for a deeper exploration of the potential relationship between political orientation and eGovernment implementation, offering insight into how political factors may shape the adoption and diffusion of eGovernment practices at the local level.

### *Method of Analysis*

In the investigation of the diffusion of eGovernment services, t-tests were employed to examine the extent to which political affiliation influences the adoption and implementation of digital government services designed to improve citizen access, transparency, and self-service options. The hypothesis posited that Democratic-leaning local governments would demonstrate a greater emphasis on providing comprehensive eGovernment services compared to their Republican counterparts, reflecting differences in policy priorities and ideological commitments to digital governance. T-tests provided a method for comparing means between two groups, allowing us to statistically assess differences in the level and types of eGovernment services offered by municipalities with Democratic versus Republican mayors. This approach highlighted how political orientations might shape digital transformation strategies within local governments and facilitated a deeper understanding of the interaction between political ideologies and technology adoption in the public sector, underlining the potential for political affiliation to influence policy diffusion in the domain of eGovernment services.

The selection of t-tests was motivated by the need to establish statistically significant differences between groups rather than merely identifying correlations. T-tests are particularly useful when the objective is to determine whether the means of two groups differ under different conditions (Lani, 2021). By comparing the average extent of eGovernment service implementation between Democratic and Republican cities, researchers can infer whether political ideology plays a significant role in digital governance strategies. This method moves beyond merely recognizing relationships, as

seen in correlation analysis, to ascertain if one variable, such as political affiliation, has a measurable impact on another, like the scope of eGovernment services.

Although t-tests provide a powerful tool for identifying differences between means, they require that data meet certain assumptions, such as normality and homogeneity of variances (Lani, 2021). These prerequisites ensure the reliability of the test results. T-tests are chosen over correlation analyses in situations where the research question specifically calls for testing differences between groups on a particular outcome, thus offering clear insights into the cause-and-effect dynamics between examined variables. By applying t-tests, the study aimed to quantify the direct impact of a city's political leanings on its implementation of eGovernment systems, providing a robust analytical framework for understanding how political ideologies influence administrative actions in the realm of eGovernment.

In this study, I aimed to investigate whether there is a connection between the political affiliations of city mayors and the range and types of eGovernment services provided within their jurisdictions. To achieve this goal, I collected data on eGovernment services and grouped them based on whether they were offered by mayors affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican party. The dataset contained variables for each type of eGovernment service, such as the number of services, the average number of services implemented by the mayors from different political parties, the variability in these services (standard deviation), the reliability of mean estimates (standard error of the mean) the comparison between Republican and Democratic mayors for each services average number and the significance level ( $p$  value). I analyzed by calculating the number

of eGovernment services offered by cities with mayors from each party to see if there were any discernible patterns or differences based on political affiliations. The standard deviation showed how much services varied, while the standard error provided insight into how reliable our estimates were.

A key part of my analysis involved comparing the averages of eGovernment services between Democratic and Republican mayors. This comparison was shown through the difference in means for each service between these two affiliations. A positive difference indicated services offered in cities led by Republicans, while a negative difference suggested otherwise. To determine if these mean differences were statistically significant, I used  $p$  values. If the  $p$  value is below 0.05, it would imply a distinction hinting at a link between a mayor's political leanings and the variety and quantity of eGovernment services provided.

### 5.3 Results and Discussion

#### *Research Hypothesis One*

The initial hypothesis investigated whether municipal administrations led by a Democrat mayor provided more citizen access to eGovernment services compared to those led by a Republican mayor. In today's era, the utilization of eGovernment services involving the interactions between local governments and residents is increasingly crucial. These services, ranging from tax submissions to accessing documents, play a significant role in enhancing government service efficiency and availability. The political alignment of mayors was anticipated to impact the implementation and prioritization of these services. This study delves into the theory that municipal administrations under a Democrat mayor would offer citizens more access to eGovernment services compared to those under a Republican mayor.

The data provided in Table 5.1 illustrates the eGovernment services offered across various cities, classified by political affiliation: Democrat, Republican, or Nonpartisan. Collectively, these cities provided a total of 1,556 eGovernment services. Democrats led the way in certain cities, with Baltimore, MD, being noteworthy in offering 25 eGovernment services—the highest among the cities listed for Democrats. Meanwhile, San Francisco, CA, another Democrat-led city, and Mountain View, CA, which is Nonpartisan, offered 22 services. For the Republican cities, Huntsville, AL, provided 23 services, marking the zenith for the Republican category. However, Democrat-led Springfield, MA, offered only 11 eGovernment services, the lowest in this dataset.

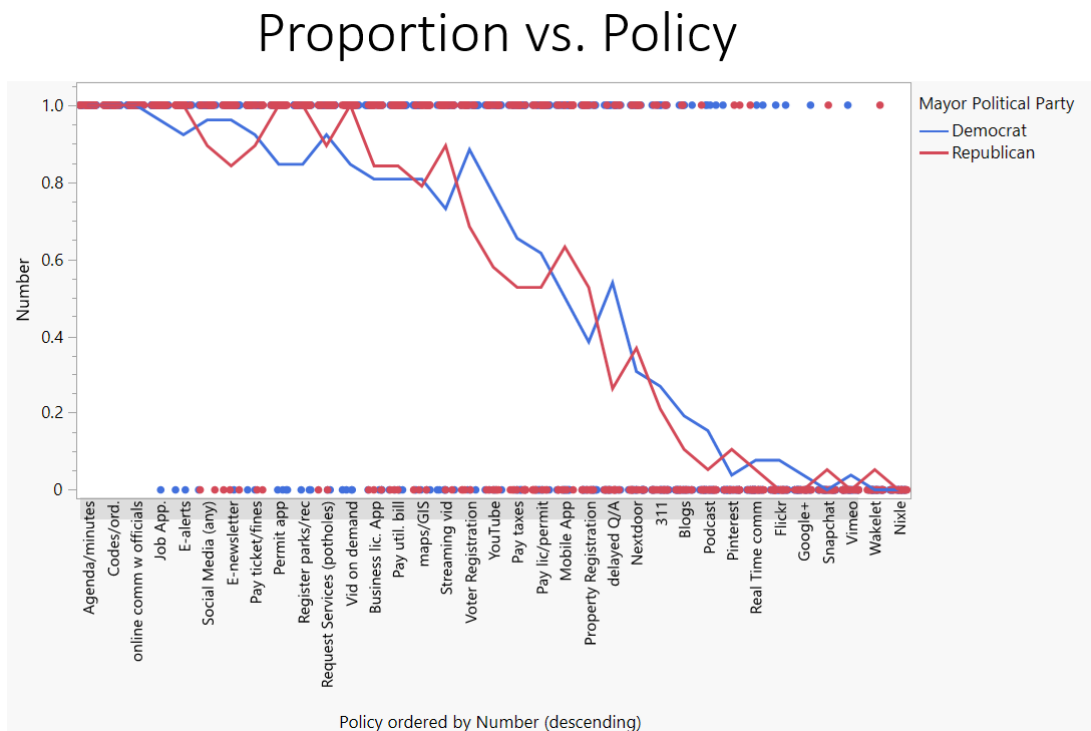
**Table 5.1 Total eGovernment Services Offered**

<b>Total eGovernment Services Offered</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Nonpartisan</b>	<b>Total</b>
Albany, GA	19			19
Albuquerque, NM	23			23
Alexandria, VA	20			20
Allen, TX		21		21
Appleton, WI		22		22
Auburn, WA			19	19
Baltimore, MD	25			25
Beaumont, TX			18	18
Bend, OR			19	19
Bossier City, LA		14		14
Carlsbad, CA		21		21
Carson, CA	16			16
Carson, NV			21	21
Chula Vista, CA		21		21
Clifton, NJ		17		17
Daly City, CA			18	18
Danbury, CT		21		21
Delray Beach, FL			20	20
Des Plaines, IL	19			19
Duluth, MN	22			22
Fayetteville, NC			21	21
Flagstaff, AZ	19			19
Fort Collins, CO			21	21
Fullerton, CA			21	21
Greeley, CO			21	21
Gulfport, MS		16		16
Huntsville, AL		23		23
Irving, TX		20		20
Kansas City, KS			21	21
Kirkland, WA	21			21
La Mesa, CA	19			19
Lafayette, IN		19		19
Lake Forest, CA			19	19
Lakeville, MN			20	20
Lakewood, CA			18	18
Lawton, OK			16	16
Madera, CA			17	17
Manhattan, KS			22	22
Margate, FL			19	19
Medford, OR			17	17
Minneapolis, MN	20			20
Mission, TX			12	12
Moore, OK			17	17
Mountain View, CA			22	22
Nashua, NH	19			19
New Britain, CT		19		19
New Haven, CT	17			17
Norman, OK			18	18
North Richland Hills, TX			18	18
Norwalk, CT	19			19
Palatine, IL			18	18
Pasadena, TX			17	17
Pasadena, CA	20			20
Peabody, MA			16	16
Perth Amboy, NJ	15			15
Placentia, CA		17		17
Port St. Lucie, FL			19	19
Rapid City, SD		20		20
Reading, PA	16			16
Richland, WA			19	19
Roseville, CA		19		19
Royal Oak, MI	20			20
San Diego, CA	20			20
San Francisco, CA	22			22
Santa Monica, CA	19			19
Scottsdale, AZ			20	20
Sioux City, IA			16	16
Spokane, WA			21	21
Spokane Valley, WA		18		18
Springfield, MA	11			11
Springfield, IL	16			16
Springfield, OH	12			12
St. Louis, MO	19			19
St. Peters, MO		15		15
Sugarland, TX			18	18
Sunrise, FL			16	16
Tempe, AZ			21	21
Thornton, CO		19		19
West Allis, WI	19			19
West Covina, CA			20	20
Weston, FL			17	17
Yakima, WA			19	19
Yorba Linda, CA		15		15
<b>Totals</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>1,556</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Median</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Mode</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>

The data demonstrated significant consistency in the overall averages. Each of the political groups, on average, offered 19 services in every city. This number was also the median for each group, suggesting a balanced distribution of services. While the mode for Democrats was 19, both the Republican and Nonpartisan entities most frequently offered 21 services. What is particularly striking is the role of Nonpartisan entities. They offered a substantial 712 services, which is more than Democrats (487) or Republicans (357). This dominance of Nonpartisan entities suggests that many eGovernment services are provided without a direct tie to the major political parties.

The findings depicted in Figure 5.1 reveal that there is no distinction in the number of eGovernment services provided between administrations with Democratic mayors versus Republican mayors.

**Figure 5.1** Proportion vs. Policy by Political Party of Mayor



This deduction is based on the  $p$  values associated with the comparisons, all of which exceed the threshold for significance (typically  $p < 0.05$ ). Across most of the enumerated eGovernment services, there is no pattern favoring either Republican or Democrat mayors in terms of mean service enactment.

In situations where there are variations in averages, such as in "Mobile App," "Nextdoor," and "Streaming vid," the  $p$  values remain above 0.05, indicating that the distinctions are not statistically significant. As for services such as "Permit app," "Register parks/rec," and "Vid on demand," where the Republican average is 1 (indicating all mayors have implemented these services), the  $p$  values are slightly lower (0.043014357) hinting at a potential trend. However, these results are on the edge and should be interpreted cautiously. It's important to note that in the case of "Voter Registration," the difference in averages is 0.200404858 with a  $p$  value of 0.124633027, showing that while there seems to be a tendency for Democratic mayors to offer services on average, it is not statistically significant.

The data does not support the idea that cities with Democrat mayors offer citizens greater access to eGovernment services compared to those with Republican mayors. The observed differences are minimal and lack significance, indicating that a mayor's political affiliation might not significantly influence the availability of eGovernment services. Factors other than political beliefs may play a bigger role in the choice to introduce and prioritize digital services in local government.



### *Research Hypothesis Two*

The second hypothesis extends the initial exploration by delving into the specific categories of eGovernment services that are influenced by the mayor's political affiliation. It proposes that the mayor's political ideology not only broadly impacts the availability of eGovernment services but also shapes which digital services are emphasized and developed. According to this hypothesis, administrations under Democratic mayors tend to prioritize eGovernment services that align with social welfare, environmental sustainability, and community engagement, reflecting the party's core values and policy objectives. Conversely, Republican mayors are likely to focus on digital services that support business efficiency, public safety, and fiscal prudence, mirroring the conservative principles of efficiency, security, and economic growth. This distinction highlights the subtle, yet significant role political ideologies play in molding the digital offerings of local governments, suggesting that the mayor's party affiliation influences not just the scope but also the thematic orientation of eGovernment initiatives.

The findings from this study offer partial support for the hypothesis that the political ideology of mayors influences the thematic focus of eGovernment services. Specifically, Democratic mayors tend to prioritize services that align with their party's traditional values of social welfare, environmental sustainability, and community engagement. This is evident in the statistically significant differences in the provision of services such as permit applications and voter registration, which can be instrumental in fostering community involvement and promoting civic engagement. On the other hand, the hypothesis that Republican mayors would prioritize services related to business

efficiency, public safety, and fiscal responsibility was not fully supported. While there were areas where Republican-led governments showed a higher mean number of services offered, such as in the use of mobile apps and streaming video content, these differences were not statistically significant. This suggests that while there may be a tendency for Republican mayors to focus on these areas, the difference in service provision is not as pronounced as hypothesized.

It is also noteworthy that for several key eGovernment services, the political affiliation of the mayor did not result in a significant difference in service provision. Services such as agenda/minutes publication and online communication with officials were uniformly provided across municipalities, regardless of the mayor's political party. This indicates a consensus on the importance of these services in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in local governance. The nuanced findings of this study underscore the complexity of how political ideologies shape the digital landscape of local governance. While certain trends align with traditional party values, the implementation of eGovernment services also reflects a pragmatic approach to addressing the needs and priorities of local communities. Further research is needed to explore the underlying factors that influence these decisions, including budgetary constraints, demographic characteristics, and the digital maturity of the local government infrastructure.

This study contributes to the understanding of the impact of political ideology on the provision of eGovernment services. Examining the types of services offered by Democratic and Republican mayors highlights how political values and priorities can

shape the digital engagement strategies of local governments. The findings suggest a complex interplay between party ideology, service prioritization, and the pragmatic needs of local governance, offering valuable insights for policymakers, public administrators, and scholars interested in the intersection of politics and digital governance.

During my study on the implementation of eGovernment services, I uncovered that political ideology plays a critical role in the development and prioritization of digital governance initiatives. Specifically, I found that local governments led by Democratic mayors showed a higher level of commitment to providing enhanced citizen access to eGovernment services. This finding highlights the impact of political ideology on the strategic planning and execution of digital transformation efforts within local governments. The implication here is significant, suggesting that the digital divide and the efficiency of local governance could be heavily influenced by the political ideologies of those in power, underscoring the importance of considering political alignment in the strategic planning for eGovernment services.

### *Limitations*

The research into the diffusion of eGovernment policies among local governments, focusing on the impact of political affiliation, confronted several limitations. Chief among these was the challenge of accurately measuring the quality and extent of eGovernment services across a diverse range of local governments. While efforts were made to evaluate and categorize eGovernment offerings, these efforts were constrained by the variability in the availability and transparency of online government

services. The study's reliance on the political affiliation of city mayors as a primary variable introduces another limitation. This approach presupposes a direct influence of mayoral political ideology on eGovernment strategies, potentially oversimplifying the multifaceted process of policy diffusion. Local government policy decisions, especially regarding eGovernment, are likely influenced by a broader set of factors, including budget constraints, public demand, and technological infrastructure, which were not fully accounted for in this study.

The research design, focusing on a comparative analysis of cities with Democratic versus Republican mayors, may not capture the entire spectrum of political ideologies and governance styles present in local governments across the United States. This binary categorization could mask the nuanced ways in which different political ideologies shape eGovernment policy diffusion.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This study thoroughly examined how eGovernment services are adopted by governments in the United States, specifically looking at how political affiliation influences the rollout of these services. The research used a methodology and diverse data to uncover the relationship between political beliefs and eGovernment implementation. Despite the assumption that whether a Republican or Democratic mayor leads a local government would significantly impact the availability and nature of eGovernment services, my findings painted a more nuanced picture.

Surprisingly, my analysis showed that the political affiliation of mayors does not have an overall effect on citizens' access to eGovernment services. This conclusion was backed up by analysis indicating no difference in the quantity and type of eGovernment services offered between Democratic and Republican mayors. This suggests that the decision to implement these services goes beyond party lines, emphasizing a shared recognition of governance's importance across ideologies. The second part of my analysis delved into the themes of eGovernment services based on the mayor's political ideologies, which resulted in different outcomes. While some signals hinted that mayors preferred services aligned with their party's beliefs, like Democrats leaning toward social welfare and environmental sustainability, these distinctions didn't show any significant statistical importance. Likewise, the assumption that Republican mayors would prioritize services related to business efficiency and public safety wasn't definitively backed by the data.

These discoveries imply that in the realm of eGovernment services, local governments might be more motivated by considerations and the overall advantages of digitalization than strictly ideological convictions. The consistent delivery of services, regardless of political leanings, indicates a shared understanding of digital governance's vital role in improving transparency, efficiency, and citizen involvement. Given these insights, it's evident that while political ideologies could impact governance aspects, the acceptance and execution of eGovernment services are influenced by a range of factors. These factors encompass the progress demand for digital accessibility and the overarching objective of enhancing government service provision.

The results of this study add to the conversation on governance by emphasizing the necessity for further research to investigate other variables that might affect eGovernment adoption. Such variables include infrastructure quality, budget allocations, and demographic characteristics. This study highlights how policy spreading in today's era is intricate, showing that the journey towards change in local administration is affected by a variety of elements beyond just political ties. As local authorities grapple with the ups and downs of implementing eGovernment, this research provides perspectives on the forces that mold their environments, setting the stage for better informed and efficient decision-making in the realm of digital governance.

## 6. Research Conclusion

This research embarks on a journey through the politically charged terrain of local governance in the United States, ultimately introducing a groundbreaking mechanism for policy diffusion. This work signifies a pivotal moment of awareness within both societal and academic realms, recognizing the intricacies of policymaking against the backdrop of a nation starkly divided by political beliefs. The insights gleaned from this study highlight an urgent need for those involved in policy studies, practice, and formulation to rethink their strategies for understanding and enhancing policy diffusion in settings where political allegiance is increasingly influential.

The research delves into the intricate dynamics between political polarization and the spread of policies among local governments in the U.S., with particular attention to reactions to COVID-19, adjustments to historical markers, and the roll-out of eGovernment services. It proposes that political affiliations introduce a critical and previously overlooked dimension to policy diffusion. By suggesting a fifth mechanism, this study builds upon the traditional models of learning, competition, imitation, and coercion, showing how political ideologies not only inform policy decisions but also shape the channels through which policies proliferate across varied political landscapes at the municipal level.

Through this comprehensive examination of how political polarization affects policy diffusion within local U.S. governments, as seen in contexts ranging from pandemic responses to the adjustment of historical markers and the implementation of digital government services, this research breaks new ground in the field of policy

studies. It uncovers a politically charged method of policy diffusion, marking a significant leap in understanding governance amidst growing political divisions.

This study sheds light on the limitations of conventional models for policy diffusion, which fail to fully consider the impact of political affiliations on the adoption and implementation of policies. By exploring diverse policy areas, it identifies a crucial intersection between political ideologies and policy decisions, advocating for an enhanced model that acknowledges political affiliation as a fundamental factor. This refined approach deepens the comprehension of policy dissemination in an age characterized by pronounced political polarization, stressing the need for a more sophisticated framework that accounts for the relationship between political beliefs and policy processes within local governments.

The research emphasizes the critical role of political considerations in the study of policy diffusion. It reveals a marked division in policy adoption and execution based on the political leanings of local officials, suggesting that current models fall short of capturing the complete range of influences on policy diffusion in today's politically divided landscape. By introducing a novel mechanism centered around political alignment, this work offers a holistic view of policy evolution and dissemination across local governments, underscoring the significant effects of political polarization on policy decisions and laying the groundwork for future investigations and policymaking endeavors.



### *A Reevaluation of Existing Policy Diffusion Frameworks*

This research embarks on a thorough reevaluation of traditional policy diffusion frameworks, focusing on the intricate dynamics between political polarization and policy diffusion within the local governments of the United States. Highlighted by diverse responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, adjustments to historical markers, and the adoption of eGovernment services, it presents a compelling argument that traditional mechanisms of policy diffusion, learning, competition, imitation, and coercion, are not equipped to grasp the complexities introduced by political polarization fully.

At its core, the study argues that while learning, competition, imitation, and coercion have historically served as foundational pillars for understanding policy propagation across governmental levels, they fall short in today's politically polarized environment. The nuanced examination of local government actions across various policy domains exposes a significant oversight. These traditional mechanisms fail to capture the profound influence political affiliations exert on policy decisions and diffusion patterns. The observed discrepancies in policy adoption and implementation across local governments, influenced by the political affiliations of their leaders, spotlight the inadequacy of the existing frameworks to address the full spectrum of factors impacting policy diffusion.

The research critically examines the role of political ideology in shaping policy diffusion, a factor that existing frameworks have largely overlooked. A pattern emerges through a detailed investigation of policy decisions in local governments—ranging from pandemic responses to the modification of historical markers and the integration of

eGovernment services. This pattern, characterized by a divergence in policy decisions along political lines, underscores political ideology's significant role in influencing policy diffusion. This revelation challenges the sufficiency of learning, competition, imitation, and coercion as the sole mechanisms for explaining policy diffusion in a context marked by political polarization.

A clear deficiency in the existing policy diffusion frameworks becomes evident in exploring the diffusion of COVID-19 policies, the modification of historical markers, and the adoption of eGovernment services across politically diverse local governments. The traditional mechanisms, although fundamental, are insufficient in addressing the nuanced dynamics introduced by political affiliation into the policy diffusion process. The distinct patterns in policy adoption and implementation, particularly on politically sensitive issues, highlight the limitations of current frameworks to account for the full impact of political polarization.

The evidence presented in the research calls for a reevaluation of policy diffusion frameworks to incorporate political ideology as a central element. This proposed mechanism aims to bridge the conceptual gap, offering a more nuanced understanding of how political polarization affects local governance and policy choices, surpassing the explanatory power of traditional mechanisms. It delineates a need to reconsider how political affiliations, rather than just economic factors or intergovernmental learning, deeply influence policy choices in contemporary political landscapes. This reimagined framework posits political ideology not merely as a background factor but as a critical,

active force shaping policy diffusion in local governments, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

### *Necessity for a New Mechanism*

This research uncovers the critical role of political affiliation in shaping policy diffusion within local governments, challenging and expanding traditional understandings of policy propagation. It convincingly argues that political ideologies, manifested through party affiliations, are not just peripheral influencers but central actors in guiding, shaping, and sometimes polarizing policy decisions and implementations. Through rigorous data analysis, the study illustrates how political beliefs infiltrate the fabric of local governance, influencing policy choices beyond conventional diffusion methods.

A major contribution of this work is the identification of political affiliation as a key determinant in the diffusion of policies across local jurisdictions. This insight led to the proposal of a novel fifth mechanism of policy diffusion, which integrates political ideology at its core. This mechanism accounts for the nuanced ways political polarization affects governance, from policy conception to adoption, highlighting the ideological drivers behind policy preferences and the polarizing nature of policy debates.

The necessity for this new diffusion mechanism stems from empirical evidence that points to the significant impact of political ideologies on both the content and spread of policies. This proposed framework aims to complement, rather than replace, existing models by adding a layer that captures the intricate role of political beliefs in policy diffusion. It seeks to bridge a critical gap in current frameworks, offering a more holistic

and nuanced perspective on how policies are adopted and adapted within politically charged environments.

The findings highlight the critical need to incorporate political polarization into models of policy diffusion, emphasizing that political polarization acts as a pivotal force within the current political landscape. This landscape, characterized by profound divisions, plays a significant role in shaping policy implementation at the local level. Such an environment requires a model that prominently considers political ideologies. As revealed through the research's case studies, the intricate interplay between political affiliation and policy decisions points to the limitations of existing diffusion mechanisms in fully grasping the complex dynamics at play. The observed divergent policy responses among local governments affiliated with the Democratic and Republican parties, influenced by their distinct political ideologies, suggest a diffusion process significantly entangled with political beliefs.

The research posits that existing policy diffusion mechanisms fail to address the complexities of today's politically polarized local government context. It makes a compelling case for a fifth mechanism that recognizes the profound influence of political affiliation on policy choices and diffusion, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding policy dynamics in the contemporary United States.

### *Limitations*

In reflecting upon the research that I conducted into policy diffusion mechanisms within contemporary local government landscapes, several limitations inherent to my

methodological approach and thematic focus have emerged. These constraints not only delineate the scope of my findings but also highlight avenues for further inquiry. My investigation relied heavily on case studies to delve into the intricate dynamics of policy diffusion against the backdrop of political polarization. While these case studies provided valuable, detailed insights into specific policy implementations, I recognize that the findings may not extend broadly across different locales or policy domains. This limitation is inherent in the case study approach, which, despite its depth, may not capture the wide variance in local government operations or the full spectrum of policy diffusion mechanisms.

The data sources I utilized, such as the National League of Cities' COVID-19 Local Action Tracker and the SPLC's Whose Heritage? database, were instrumental in underpinning my analysis. However, the completeness, accuracy, and potential biases inherent in these datasets necessitate a cautious interpretation of my findings. Moreover, using mayoral political affiliations as a proxy for broader local government political orientation presented a simplification that may not fully encapsulate the nuanced political dynamics influencing policy decisions. The quantitative analyses I employed offered significant statistical insights but also bore limitations. Notably, the nature of t-tests does not establish causation, and the statistical significance identified in certain comparisons could potentially be attributed to unaccounted variables. This underscores the complexity of policy diffusion and suggests that more sophisticated statistical approaches or mixed-methods research could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

The political and temporal dynamics captured in my research reflect the influence of significant sociopolitical events on policy diffusion. Yet, the rapidly changing political landscape and societal values underline the potential temporal limitations of my findings. Political ideologies and societal priorities are subject to shifts that could impact policy diffusion in ways not captured within the scope of my study. Ethical considerations, particularly concerning data privacy and the sensitive nature of the topics explored, were addressed with due diligence. Nonetheless, the ethical implications of researching areas fraught with political and societal contention warrant ongoing attention, especially in terms of the impact of research outcomes on communities and public discourse.

As I contemplate the future directions of research in this field, I am acutely aware of these limitations and the need for further studies to explore causal relationships, incorporate additional variables influencing policy enactment, and delve deeper into the qualitative aspects of policy decisions. These gaps not only demarcate the bounds of my current research but also lay the groundwork for subsequent inquiries to build upon and extend the understanding of policy diffusion mechanisms within the intricately politicized environment of local governance.

### *Implications for Future Research*

This research serves as a foundational exploration into the nuanced effects of political polarization on governance and the diffusion of policies, paving the way for an expansive scholarly pursuit. It underscores the necessity for a deeper understanding of how divisive political landscapes shape the formulation and adoption of policies across

different governance structures and sectors. Future research should aim to encompass a wide array of studies that not only compare the impacts of political polarization within various international contexts but also delve into the specificities of its influence within distinct sectors such as healthcare, education, and environmental protection.

An important direction for future investigation involves the longitudinal tracking of policy diffusion mechanisms over time. This approach would provide valuable insights into how these mechanisms evolve in response to changing political environments, offering a dynamic perspective on the interplay between political ideologies and policy development. Examining the role of political affiliations in influencing policy diffusion at different levels of government, from local to federal, could reveal the adaptability and nuances of these influences.

Expanding the scope of research to include a wider variety of policy domains beyond those already scrutinized can help verify the broader applicability and impact of political affiliation on policy diffusion. The development of methodologies for the quantitative assessment of political influence on policy diffusion represents a significant yet rewarding challenge. This could create predictive models or indices that facilitate a more nuanced analysis of political landscapes and their effects on policy trends.

Beyond merely extending academic discourse, this research emphasizes the critical need for policymakers and practitioners to develop strategies that consider the political context. Advocating for a more collaborative and inclusive approach to policymaking, this work aims to transcend political divisions, enhance public

engagement, and ensure that policies accurately reflect all community members' diverse needs and priorities.

The investigation also signals the importance of exploring how social media and digital platforms amplify political polarization and its impact on governance and policymaking. Given the increasing significance of digital communication in governance, understanding its influence on political polarization and subsequent policy diffusion is essential. Examining the long-term effects of politically influenced policy diffusion on community cohesion, public trust, and the effectiveness of governance offers a fertile ground for future scholarly exploration. This research does not just broaden the conversation around political polarization and policy diffusion; it sets a comprehensive agenda for future research and practical action, aiming to bridge the gap between political ideologies and the effective development and implementation of policies that serve the wider community.

### *Policy Implications*

This research reveals the profound influence of political affiliation on the shaping of policies and the governance landscape, providing essential insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners. It highlights the intricate relationship between political ideologies and the policymaking process, stressing the importance of adopting strategies that are attuned to the political context to enhance policy acceptance and efficacy. The research advocates for a more inclusive approach to policymaking that integrates a wide range of political perspectives, aiming to foster unity and a collaborative spirit in



addressing societal challenges. The research introduces a groundbreaking paradigm in the study of policy diffusion by integrating the concept of political affiliation, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of how politics influence policy mechanisms. This approach not only contributes significantly to the academic debate but also navigates the challenges posed by political polarization in governance.

The findings have broad implications, extending to democratic governance and the strengthening of community bonds. They underline the necessity for policy mechanisms that can reconcile differing political ideologies, emphasizing the role of political literacy and dialogue in mitigating the effects of polarization. The research highlights the critical need for policies, especially in sensitive areas like public health and historical memory preservation, to be designed with an awareness of their potential to either divide or unite.

By proposing a policymaking model that looks beyond political divisions, this research suggests a method for creating governance practices that reflect and accommodate a wide array of political beliefs. Such an approach is invaluable in a society deeply divided by political beliefs, aiming to create a policymaking environment that respects and incorporates diverse viewpoints. The research also underscores the importance of public engagement in the policy diffusion process, suggesting that acknowledging the impact of political ideologies on policy preferences can lead to more inclusive and widely accepted policies. This recognition is crucial for ensuring that governance is not only influenced by the prevailing political ideology but also resonates with a wider constituency.

The research emphasizes the need for increased education and awareness about the complexities of governance in a politically polarized setting. It calls for educational initiatives and awareness campaigns that enhance understanding of the interplay between political ideologies and policy decisions, aiming to equip all stakeholders with the knowledge to navigate these complexities more effectively. This approach highlights the importance of considering political nuances in policy development and implementation, fostering a more informed and robust governance framework.

### *Conclusion*

This research underscores a crucial juncture in our understanding of policy diffusion against the backdrop of escalating political polarization, particularly within the realm of local governance in the United States. By introducing an innovative mechanism that intricately weaves political affiliation into the fabric of policy diffusion analysis, this work not only broadens the academic conversation but also paves the way for pragmatic approaches to tackling the challenges posed by governance in a divided society. It beckons scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to transcend traditional paradigms, urging a holistic embrace of the nuanced interplay between political ideologies and policy practices. This endeavor is not merely academic; it serves as a clarion call for a concerted effort to develop governance models that are not only inclusive and effective but also attuned to the diverse ideological landscape that defines our contemporary world.

The significance of this research lies in its pioneering approach to understanding policy diffusion through the prism of political affiliation, offering a fresh perspective that

acknowledges the complexities wrought by political polarization. It extends an earnest invitation to the broader community to engage with and reflect upon the implications of these findings. In doing so, it charts a forward-looking path that encourages further inquiry into the delicate balance between political influence and policy development. By advocating for a governance framework that is responsive to the full spectrum of political beliefs, this research lays a foundational stone for future research aimed at unraveling the intricate pathways of policy diffusion in an era marked by deep political divides.

This research marks a pivotal advancement in the discourse on policy diffusion, shining a light on the critical role of political affiliation in shaping governance strategies amidst the challenges of a politically polarized landscape. It calls for a reevaluation of our approaches to governance, advocating for strategies that are not only cognizant of political diversities but are also geared towards fostering unity and inclusivity in policymaking processes. As I forge ahead, it is imperative that I harness the insights from this research to guide our collective efforts in crafting governance practices that resonate with the rich tapestry of political ideologies, ensuring a more harmonious and effective policy diffusion process in the face of polarization.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Dataset Analysis for Journal Article One: United States Local Government COVID-19 Policies and Political Affiliations

Policy	Political Party of Mayor	Mean Number of Policy Type Enacted by Political Party	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	Republican mean - Democratic mean	p-value
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)	(D)	2.312500	2.231627	0.278953	-1.520833	0.000093
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)	(R)	0.791667	1.178767	0.240615	-1.520833	0.000093
Business Economic Stability	(D)	3.484375	2.707967	0.338496	-1.567708	0.001314
Business Economic Stability	(R)	1.916667	1.585715	0.323683	-1.567708	0.001314
City Fiscal Stability	(D)	0.359375	0.515388	0.064424	0.015625	0.896798
City Fiscal Stability	(R)	0.375000	0.494535	0.100947	0.015625	0.896798
Combating Discrimination	(D)	0.234375	0.462642	0.057830	-0.234375	0.000141
Combating Discrimination	(R)	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.234375	0.000141
Communication	(D)	0.656250	0.946485	0.118311	-0.364583	0.028562
Communication	(R)	0.291667	0.550033	0.112275	-0.364583	0.028562
Digital Connectivity	(D)	0.765625	1.094607	0.136826	-0.307292	0.131257
Digital Connectivity	(R)	0.458333	0.721060	0.147186	-0.307292	0.131257
Education and Childcare	(D)	0.859375	1.193464	0.149183	-0.526042	0.017351
Education and Childcare	(R)	0.333333	0.761387	0.155417	-0.526042	0.017351
Food/Nutrition	(D)	0.828125	1.328021	0.166003	-0.119792	0.621441
Food/Nutrition	(R)	0.708333	0.858673	0.175276	-0.119792	0.621441
Government Operations	(D)	3.453125	2.210578	0.276322	-0.786458	0.143391
Government Operations	(R)	2.666667	2.200132	0.449100	-0.786458	0.143391
Housing	(D)	4.265625	3.639476	0.454934	-2.307292	0.000126
Housing	(R)	1.958333	1.706233	0.348283	-2.307292	0.000126
Individual/Family Economic Stability	(D)	1.140625	1.355379	0.169422	-0.515625	0.023503
Individual/Family Economic Stability	(R)	0.625000	0.710939	0.145120	-0.515625	0.023503
Long-term Community Resilience	(D)	0.703125	1.049258	0.131157	-0.411458	0.019643
Long-term Community Resilience	(R)	0.291667	0.550033	0.112275	-0.411458	0.019643
Medical/Behavioral Health Services	(D)	1.093750	1.388373	0.173547	-0.052083	0.870380
Medical/Behavioral Health Services	(R)	1.041667	1.301476	0.265663	-0.052083	0.870380
Mobility and Transit	(D)	1.609375	2.717475	0.339684	-1.109375	0.004977
Mobility and Transit	(R)	0.500000	0.884652	0.180579	-1.109375	0.004977
Participatory Governance	(D)	0.515625	1.181769	0.147721	-0.182292	0.378801
Participatory Governance	(R)	0.333333	0.701964	0.143288	-0.182292	0.378801
Prevention/Flattening the Curve	(D)	6.593750	3.512873	0.439109	-0.885417	0.454858
Prevention/Flattening the Curve	(R)	5.708333	5.311834	1.084274	-0.885417	0.454858
Public Safety/Law Enforcement	(D)	0.406250	0.750000	0.093750	-0.364583	0.000635
Public Safety/Law Enforcement	(R)	0.041667	0.204124	0.041667	-0.364583	0.000635
Re-Opening	(D)	3.921875	2.756261	0.344533	-1.088542	0.064368
Re-Opening	(R)	2.833333	2.258639	0.461043	-1.088542	0.064368
Utilities	(D)	1.218750	1.046062	0.130758	-0.093750	0.715697
Utilities	(R)	1.125000	2.119074	0.219622	-0.093750	0.715697
Vaccinations	(D)	3.125000	2.149197	0.268650	-1.833333	0.000010
Vaccinations	(R)	1.291667	1.334465	0.272397	-1.833333	0.000010

## Appendix B

### Dataset Analysis for Journal Article Two: United States Local Government Historical Marker Policy and Political Affiliation

Type of Historical Marker	Mean Number of		Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	Republican mean -	
	Political Party of Mayor	Policy Type Enacted by Political Party			Democratic mean	p-value
Body of Water	Democratic	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Body of Water	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Bridge	Democratic	0.025641	0.160128	0.025641	-0.025641	0.323636
Bridge	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.025641	0.323636
Building	Democratic	0.589744	1.551196	0.248390	-0.498834	0.065664
Building	Republican	0.090909	0.301511	0.090909	-0.498834	0.065664
College	Democratic	0.641026	3.367704	0.539264	-0.641026	0.241932
College	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.641026	0.241932
Commemorative License Plate	Democratic	0.230769	0.484580	0.077595	-0.230769	0.005083
Commemorative License Plate	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.230769	0.005083
County/Municipality	Democratic	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.181818	0.340893
County/Municipality	Republican	0.181818	0.603023	0.181818	0.181818	0.340893
Flag	Democratic	0.153846	0.539906	0.086454	-0.153846	0.083155
Flag	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.153846	0.083155
Holiday	Democratic	0.461538	0.969160	0.155190	-0.461538	0.005083
Holiday	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.461538	0.005083
Live (not removed/renamed)	Democratic	6.923077	11.567615	1.852301	-4.013986	0.067003
Live (not removed/renamed)	Republican	2.909091	3.562430	1.074113	-4.013986	0.067003
Marker	Democratic	0.051282	0.223456	0.035782	-0.051282	0.159978
Marker	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.051282	0.159978
Military	Democratic	0.256410	1.601282	0.256410	-0.165501	0.545985
Military	Republican	0.090909	0.301511	0.090909	-0.165501	0.545985
Monument	Democratic	3.179487	3.999156	0.640378	-2.270396	0.002187
Monument	Republican	0.909091	0.943880	0.284590	-2.270396	0.002187
Other	Democratic	0.333333	0.662266	0.106047	-0.333333	0.003235
Other	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.333333	0.003235
Park	Democratic	0.230769	0.626668	0.100347	0.132867	0.661333
Park	Republican	0.363636	0.924416	0.278722	0.132867	0.661333
Plaque	Democratic	0.076923	0.269953	0.043227	-0.076923	0.083155
Plaque	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.076923	0.083155
Prison	Democratic	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Prison	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Roadway	Democratic	3.820513	7.880261	1.261852	-2.547786	0.082714
Roadway	Republican	1.272727	2.284334	0.688753	-2.547786	0.082714
Scholarship	Democratic	0.025641	0.160128	0.025641	-0.025641	0.323636
Scholarship	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.025641	0.323636
School	Democratic	1.333333	2.228208	0.356799	0.303030	0.714224
School	Republican	1.636364	2.419617	0.729542	0.303030	0.714224
School District	Democratic	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.181818	0.340893
School District	Republican	0.181818	0.603023	0.181818	0.181818	0.340893
Seal	Democratic	0.051282	0.223456	0.035782	0.039627	0.691501
Seal	Republican	0.090909	0.301511	0.090909	0.039627	0.691501
Song	Democratic	0.025641	0.160128	0.025641	-0.025641	0.323636
Song	Republican	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	-0.025641	0.323636

## Appendix C

### Dataset Analysis for Journal Article Three: United States Local Government eGovernment Policy and Political Affiliation

Type of eGovernment Service Offered	Political Party of Mayor	Mean Number of eGovernment Services Enacted by Political		Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	Republican mean - Democratic mean	p-value
		Type	Party				
311	Democrat	0.269231		0.452344	0.088712	-0.058704	0.655909
311	Republican	0.210526		0.418854	0.096092	-0.058704	0.655909
Agenda/minutes	Democrat	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Agenda/minutes	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Blogs	Democrat	0.192308		0.401918	0.078823	-0.087045	0.420368
Blogs	Republican	0.105263		0.315302	0.072335	-0.087045	0.420368
Business lic. App	Democrat	0.807692		0.401918	0.078823	0.034413	0.769436
Business lic. App	Republican	0.842105		0.374634	0.085947	0.034413	0.769436
Codes/ord.	Democrat	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Codes/ord.	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
delayed Q/A	Democrat	0.538462		0.508391	0.099704	-0.275304	0.062723
delayed Q/A	Republican	0.263158		0.452414	0.103791	-0.275304	0.062723
E-alerts	Democrat	0.923077		0.271746	0.053294	0.076923	0.161329
E-alerts	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.076923	0.161329
E-newsletter	Democrat	0.961538		0.196116	0.038462	-0.119433	0.216246
E-newsletter	Republican	0.842105		0.374634	0.085947	-0.119433	0.216246
Flickr	Democrat	0.076923		0.271746	0.053294	-0.076923	0.161329
Flickr	Republican	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	-0.076923	0.161329
Google+	Democrat	0.038462		0.196116	0.038462	-0.038462	0.326892
Google+	Republican	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	-0.038462	0.326892
Job App.	Democrat	0.961538		0.196116	0.038462	0.038462	0.326892
Job App.	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.038462	0.326892
maps/GIS	Democrat	0.807692		0.401918	0.078823	-0.018219	0.884232
maps/GIS	Republican	0.789474		0.418854	0.096092	-0.018219	0.884232
Mobile App	Democrat	0.500000		0.509902	0.100000	0.131579	0.390096
Mobile App	Republican	0.631579		0.495595	0.113697	0.131579	0.390096
Nextdoor	Democrat	0.307692		0.470679	0.092308	0.060729	0.680731
Nextdoor	Republican	0.368421		0.495595	0.113697	0.060729	0.680731
Nixle	Democrat	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Nixle	Republican	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
online comm w officials	Democrat	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
online comm w officials	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	
Pay lic/permit	Democrat	0.615385		0.496139	0.097301	-0.089069	0.563131
Pay lic/permit	Republican	0.526316		0.512989	0.117688	-0.089069	0.563131
Pay taxes	Democrat	0.653846		0.485165	0.095149	-0.127530	0.404732
Pay taxes	Republican	0.526316		0.512989	0.117688	-0.127530	0.404732
Pay ticket/fines	Democrat	0.923077		0.271746	0.053294	-0.028340	0.754295
Pay ticket/fines	Republican	0.894737		0.315302	0.072335	-0.028340	0.754295
Pay util. bill	Democrat	0.807692		0.401918	0.078823	0.034413	0.769436
Pay util. bill	Republican	0.842105		0.374634	0.085947	0.034413	0.769436
Permit app	Democrat	0.846154		0.367946	0.072160	0.153846	0.043014
Permit app	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.043014
Pinterest	Democrat	0.038462		0.196116	0.038462	0.066802	0.421723
Pinterest	Republican	0.105263		0.315302	0.072335	0.066802	0.421723
Podcast	Democrat	0.153846		0.367946	0.072160	-0.101215	0.263527
Podcast	Republican	0.052632		0.229416	0.052632	-0.101215	0.263527
Property Registration	Democrat	0.384615		0.496139	0.097301	0.141700	0.359261
Property Registration	Republican	0.526316		0.512989	0.117688	0.141700	0.359261
Real Time comm	Democrat	0.076923		0.271746	0.053294	-0.024291	0.747312
Real Time comm	Republican	0.052632		0.229416	0.052632	-0.024291	0.747312
Register parks/rec	Democrat	0.846154		0.367946	0.072160	0.153846	0.043014
Register parks/rec	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.043014
Request Services (potholes)	Democrat	0.923077		0.271746	0.053294	-0.028340	0.754295
Request Services (potholes)	Republican	0.894737		0.315302	0.072335	-0.028340	0.754295
Snapchat	Democrat	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.052632	0.330565
Snapchat	Republican	0.052632		0.229416	0.052632	0.052632	0.330565
Social Media (any)	Democrat	0.961538		0.196116	0.038462	-0.066802	0.421723
Social Media (any)	Republican	0.894737		0.315302	0.072335	-0.066802	0.421723
Streaming vid	Democrat	0.730769		0.452344	0.088712	0.163968	0.159250
Streaming vid	Republican	0.894737		0.315302	0.072335	0.163968	0.159250
Vid on demand	Democrat	0.846154		0.367946	0.072160	0.153846	0.043014
Vid on demand	Republican	1.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.153846	0.043014
Vimeo	Democrat	0.038462		0.196116	0.038462	-0.038462	0.326892
Vimeo	Republican	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	-0.038462	0.326892
Voter Registration	Democrat	0.884615		0.325813	0.063897	-0.200405	0.124633
Voter Registration	Republican	0.684211		0.477567	0.109561	-0.200405	0.124633
Wakelet	Democrat	0.000000		0.000000	0.000000	0.052632	0.330565
Wakelet	Republican	0.052632		0.229416	0.052632	0.052632	0.330565
YouTube	Democrat	0.769231		0.429669	0.084265	-0.190283	0.193982
YouTube	Republican	0.578947		0.507257	0.116373	-0.190283	0.193982

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