Close to Home
Place-Based Mobilization in Racialized Contexts

Abstract
How do concentrated, racialized policy changes translate to political action? Using official election returns, the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, and original data on the unprecedented mass closure of schools in highly segregated, predominantly Black neighborhoods across Chicago, we demonstrate that those living in the communities affected: 1) increase their attendance at political meetings; 2) mobilize in support a ballot measure intended to avert such closings in the future, and 3) increase their participation in the subsequent local election, and decrease their support for the political official responsible for the policy was on the ballot. These findings shed light on how groups ordinarily associated with low national participation become moved to mobilize on localized, racialized issues that matter in their communities. We develop a theory of place-based mobilization to explain this phenomenon of “community” as a site of co-identification and political action for marginalized groups.

Wordcount: 11916
Introduction

In recent months, waves of intense political activism (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #Defundthepolice) have washed over many of America’s cities, particularly in “race-class subjugated communities” where the resources that usually predict individual-level engagement are less common (Soss and Weaver 2016). This isn’t necessarily new—cities have been hotbeds of intense grassroots mobilization since at least the dawn of the industrial age—especially in places where state–society interactions are often more contentious and where direct negative experiences with public policy in daily life make the urgency of informed participation clearer. Many activists and residents in these contexts frequently display both a commitment to sustained, costly participation and a sophisticated understanding of political issues learned from direct experience.

At the same time, current political science research suggests that local politics has become far less important to most Americans, particularly in the realm of voting (i.e., Hopkins 2018). While more than half of Americans voted in recent national elections for President, turnout for local elections is typically between 10 and 20 percent. The average American may view their local government more favorably than the federal government, but local political outcomes appear less consequential to them than those at the national level (Oliver 2012). Behavioral trends suggest that this may be because Americans identify less strongly with and know less about politics in their states and local communities (Hopkins 2018). Regardless, these findings put into question local residents’ capacity to not only serve their theoretical role as retrospective evaluators of government performance but also their civic role as voters. In other words, contemporary waves of activism and participation are in tension with the emerging theories political scientists use to explain Americans’ engagement with politics, locally and in general. How do we reconcile these two realities?

In this paper, we develop and test a theory that illuminates how local experiences of
geographically concentrated policy change matter for political engagement in racialized contexts. Further, we demonstrate that such geographically concentrated policies matter most for those who we ordinarily would expect to participate the least: Black Americans with low levels of political or social resources. Analyzing original data from a wave of school closures in Chicago that disproportionately affected Black American neighborhoods, responses to the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES), and official elections returns, we use difference-in-difference analyses to examine how residents of the race-class subjugated communities responded to this policy.

The study reveals that proximity to a school closure is associated with increased meeting attendance, increased mobilization to change the institutional framework by which school policy is made, and increased mobilization against the elected official responsible for the closures. These findings demonstrate a model of “place-based” policy feedback through which residents of areas with concentrated policy change gain important information and insights useful for forming political attitudes and local political mobilization in their communities. Those who previously participated at the lowest rates go on to participate at the highest rates on community issues that matter to them--in this case, school closure.

In this case, community refers both to the geographic location for which the policy is concentrated and the racial group for which the policy most affected. Accordingly, one’s identification with their community becomes a critical mechanism for inciting their political action. Altogether, these findings bridge theories of policy feedback, urban politics, and political behavior to highlight how local, place-based policy experiences enable citizens to participate in political actions consistent with their collective interest, particularly in marginalized communities like those that faced school closures.
Local Political Behavior and Policy Feedback

Many evaluations of American voters incline toward pessimism. For starters, Americans in general typically demonstrate low levels of political knowledge; the description in Bartels (1996) of the “political ignorance of the American voter” has held up fairly well under decades of subsequent investigation (Achen and Bartels 2016). Citizens’ attitudes on specific policies are often characterized as either randomly in flux, easily manipulated, or as functions of prior group-based predispositions rather than well-reasoned judgments. This seems particularly true of citizens with little interest in or information about politics, traits often associated with low levels of formal education (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Bartels 1996). Strong and perhaps immovable partisan and ideological positions also impede clear-eyed policy evaluation, as voters choose sides and retrospectively justify positions and/or misjudge the performance of their favored and disfavored political actors (e.g., Green et al. 2002, Mason 2018).

These judgments are typically made by analyzing national samples and issues, but the prognosis typically does not improve closer to home. Longstanding models of local political systems emphasize elite control of outcomes through partisanship and/or racial cues, with little role for considered, evaluative electoral behavior by voters (Gosnell 1937, Banfield and Wilson 1963, Stone 1989, Kaufmann 2004, Trounstine 2008). More recent studies suggest an increasingly nationalized media environment has obscured the salience of local policy issues and made Americans generally less interested in or knowledgeable about local affairs (Hopkins 2018). Institutional and contextual features of small democracies such as low levels of campaign advertising, low policy stakes, demographic homogeneity, non-partisan formal organization, off-cycle timing, and obscure offices on the ballot contribute to this diminished salience (Oliver 2012, Hajnal and Trounstine 2005, 2013, Oliver 2001). The result of all these factors can lead to extremely low turnout at the local level, which
increases class and racial biases in the electorate and other participatory fora (e.g., Berry and Gersen 2011, Oliver 2012, Trounstine 2018) In other words, local politics tend toward something that falls well short of engaged, informed, and representative democracy (Trounstine 2008, Stone 1989).

Despite these claims, there is also evidence of instances where citizens are especially informed and active toward policies that matter to them. At the local level, research of gender and politics reveal how women are especially knowledgeable on issues of education (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Paolino 1995, and Dolan 2011). Research in urban politics illustrates how Black and Latinx citizens’ can become particularly mobilized by threats from the state to take over their schools and/or reduce their budgets (Morel 2018, Orr 1999). Further, these works demonstrate how traditional partisan cues may be less relevant due to citizens’ easier access to policy actors and policy information (Berry and Howell 2007, Malhotra and Kuo 2009). Scholar of Race, Ethnicity and Politics, add to this work demonstrating the mobilizing effects of controversial policies such as those related to immigration once they become racialized (e.g., Zepeda-Millan 2016). Together, these findings provide specific instances where marginalized groups may exhibit high levels of political knowledge and/or high rates of local participation. However, it remains unclear why we see such variation across issues in prompting mobilization by groups that would ordinarily be associated with lower levels of participation.

Research on policy feedback and political behavior, provides a potential explanation by demonstrating how the political attitudes and actions of citizens may be influenced by their direct experiences with policies (Cramer and Toff 2017, Lerman and McCabe 2017, Mettler 2011, Soss 1999). Lerman and McCabe (2017), for example, find that personal experiences with public health insurance programs can “lead to meaningful opinion formation or attitude change” on Medicare and the Affordable Care Act, with particularly strong effects for voters (Lerman and McCabe 2017, 624). Observations by Weaver, Prowse, and Piston (2019), make clear that citizens’ direct experiences with
the state—especially “negative” experiences with a repressive or unresponsive state—reveal a depth of sophisticated policy understanding that is less common in the public at large. They also argue that the tools typically used by political scientists – national opinion surveys – may make it difficult to gauge these effects.

Additional studies demonstrate that citizens’ personal experiences can not only influence attitude formation but also political engagement. Mettler (2005), for instance, finds that veterans’ experiences with the benefits from the GI bill shape their increased civic engagement. Campbell (2005) finds a similar relationship for recipients of social security. More recently, Barnes (2020) finds that properly designed after-school programs finds can be empowering for participating families. Together, these studies of policy feedback suggest a potentially powerful role for personal experience in a range of political dispositions (attitudes, behavior, self-conceptions), and provide a theoretical framework for understanding sophisticated engagement by citizens without the individual-level resources (formal education, direct financial stake) usually associated with such participation. We identify four ways in which these insights can be extended through a focus on community, place-based policy feedback.

First, while these works highlight the significant role of specific policy experiences for citizens’ political behavior, most of them focus on national level issues (e.g. Soss 1999, Mettler 2005). Scholars of policy feedback have touched on education policy and political behavior, specifically (e.g., Bruch and Soss 2018, Rose 2018), but the field has tended to focus on welfare, social security, health policy, and criminal justice (e.g., Soss 1999, Campbell 2005, Weaver et al 2019). This may be due to the decentralized complexity of education governance, especially at the  

1 Though not conventionally considered policy feedback, the limited work that does focus on K-12 education is perhaps best exhibited in Morel’s book, *Take over*, where the author illustrates the varying patterns of mobilization among African American and Latinx citizens following the decision by state to take control over the local school district.
K–12 level, but this oversight is unfortunate because K–12 education is an area of government with which the vast majority of Americans have years of direct, daily experience (as students, parents, or teachers). It is therefore an especially consequential area of policy.

For Black people, in particular, public schools represent some of the first institutions in which they held leadership roles, such as principal and superintendent, before taking on formal political roles like mayor (for example, W. W. Herenton became the first African American superintendent of Memphis Public Schools in 1979 and then the first African American mayor of Memphis in 1991). Public schools have also acted as central sites for organizing around social and political issues for African Americans; for example, the Freedom Schools throughout the 1960s were used to provide students with the educational tools needed to attain political equity (Todd-Breland, 2018). In an era in which private-sector employment discrimination is stubbornly prevalent, schools serve as major centers of Black employment through the hiring of teachers, staff, and administrators as well as mechanisms to sustain Black businesses, which benefited from contracts such those to serve lunch and/or provide janitorial services. In a context where most programs of social welfare have seen significant disinvestment, schools have become, and continue to be, engines of social, economic, and political mobility. Permanent school closures disrupt this and thus act as a threat to Black futures.

Amid the global COVID pandemic, over 50 million children across the U.S. have experienced the temporary closing of their schools with permanent closures likely to follow. And yet, it remains unclear how experiences with permanent school closure might shape the political attitudes and actions of marginalized people. This work is the first to answer this question, and in so doing provides significant insights on community-based mobilization toward the increasingly important policy issue of school closure.

Second, and related, much of the work on the role of personal experience assumes that citizens’ encounters with these policies are static rather than changing. The result is that we know
very little about how citizens respond to policy changes (or rather, shocks) that affect them. For example, how might Mettler’s (2011) conception of invisible government be transgressed by select policy shocks that make government hyper visible to some groups as opposed to others? Furthermore, in what ways does the hypervisibility of these policies matter for the mobilization of some groups as opposed to others? This paper illustrates that our models of feedback have to account for change, or rather shocks to the system that make specific policy events matter for the mobilization patterns or actions of the affected group. An analysis that treats policy experiences (e.g., welfare, medicare) as constantly negative, neutral or positive, misses these important policy shocks that likely have serious and lasting consequences for citizens relationship to and/or with government. This seems particularly true for policies with geographically concentrated effects that are targeted in a racialized way, or administered differently across a highly segregated city. ² Studying changed behaviors in response to concentrated policy shocks, then, may provide substantive insights on local political mobilization.

**Finally,** citizens may show different patterns of behavior in response to elements of their political and social context, for example communities with high levels of racial segregation and/or descriptive representation (e.g., Tate 2001; Gay 2004). Black Americans, in particular, may link racialized contexts to heightened political engagement. For instance, Black electoral participation appears to be higher when substantive and descriptive representation initially appear as ballot choices in local races (Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Tate 2001, Spence and McClerking 2010). Nonetheless, these effects may wax or wane over time, due in part to concentrated poverty, social isolation and/or specific policy events (Gay 2002, Cohen and Dawson 1993, Alex-Assensoh 1997, Harris et al 2005, Laird 2019). Members of such communities often experience an unresponsive state, and yet tend to

² Michener (2019) develops a “racialized feedback framework” where she argues that if a policy is both highly disproportional and decentralized than race should be centered in the analysis.
have fewer resources with which to deal with state failure thus likely shaping the types of political attitudes and actions they take on.

Gay (2002), for example, demonstrates how Black residents support candidates who champion their policy preferences, regardless of race, thereby providing less support for representation that is purely descriptive as opposed to substantive. Further, Harris et al (2005) highlights how descriptive representation has positive influences on mobilization but that these gains are constantly undermined by harsh economic conditions, arguably spurred by neoliberal policies (Spence 2012). Similarly, Alex-Assensoh (1997) finds that social isolation, due to economic and racial segregation, undermines the political participation of African Americans, making them less likely to vote, discuss national affairs, and express interest in national politics. Yet, she also demonstrates how the above can be circumvented, specifically through community meetings and discussing politics with neighbors, when citizens of these communities view their participation as remedying inequality (Alex-Assensoh 2002). Together, studies in race, political behavior and urban politics suggest that the specific racial and policy context matters for the participation of individuals and the communities from which those individuals came. But, the two are rarely examined together.³

Relatively, established literature on policy feedback references race and policy experience across many of its investigations, but rarely investigates the community for which that policy event is concentrated (Michener 2017).⁴ In this paper, we show that the geographic location and policy

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³ In fact, most political science studies do not directly address the role of policy change in racialized contexts. In the studies that do exist, place-based effects appear to be quite strong when considering racialized issues, contexts or outcomes (Enos 2018, Hopkins 2010, Hajnal and Abrajano 2015, Wasow 2020), but they tend to focus on the behavior or attitudes of white Americans, and examine how social geography shapes attitudes rather than political action.

⁴ An uncommon example of this work is Michener (2017), who examines the impacts of concentrated disadvantage on political participation and finds that as the percentage of persons on Medicaid increases in a county, ties to civic engagement associations and aggregating voting declines.
concentration should and does matter for understanding political behavior, especially in Black communities that are segregated in resource-poor neighborhoods. In particular, using proximity-based measures of exposure to policy change, we test a theory of what we call a model of “place-based mobilization.” The next section describes the model in more detail.

A Model of Place-based Mobilization

The concept of place-based mobilization describes the process by which citizens faced with a policy change concentrated in their community respond to it. Their engagement is based not on their experiences with distantly formulated policy but rather their contextual experiences as members of the community in which the policy occurred. By contextual we mean that the citizen may not have direct exposure to the policy personally, but rather contextually through their geographic location. In other words, they likely live in a community where a policy’s effects are concentrated.

To be sure, this conceptualization is similar to recent scholarship that accounts for those who may not be direct targets of a policy but know those who are. Burch (2014), for example, finds that the racially targeted policies associated with mass incarceration decreases participation of those directly affected and fellow members of their neighborhood. Walker (2014, 2020) finds that proximal experiences with the criminal justice system lead to increased protesting but not voting. While both works are specific to the justice system, they illustrate how feedback effects are often not limited to direct beneficiaries but also entire communities (see also, Michener 2017).

A place-based model extends this work in that it considers who is a target of closure as inclusive of those directly and indirectly affected by the policy but argues against the significance of this distinction when considering the behavior of a community. In previous work on attitudes towards school closure, for example, the author finds no differences in opposition to closure between those who are directly and indirectly impacted by them. They argue that this is related to how school closure
is constructed at the local level as a race and neighborhood concern, which meant that the target category is not just inclusive of those who have children that attend schools threatened for closure but also poor black communities where those schools were located more generally. In short, it is the community that is targeted for closure, not the parent.

Read this way, the construction of who is included as a target of school closure is not just an empirical issue, it is a political tool and strategy used by communities to facilitate collective investment and mobilization against the state. In other words, citizens may come to see themselves as directly impacted by a policy as a community, even if in they are indirectly affected at the individual level, and this conception of being member of an affected community facilitates opportunities for both informal and formal political participation. This paper, in particular, reveals the multiple ways that classic literature on policy feedback and political behavior may benefit from a conceptualization of the policy target category that assess the effects of geographically concentrated political events or policies that affect many members of a community as a community.

The geographically concentrated policy, and the contextual experiences it produces, are at the center of a place-based model of political mobilization. For a policy to be geographically concentrated, it must occur in some areas of a city or state more often than others, and its effects must be discernible and have some effect even on those who are not directly impacted. In the case of the Stop-and-Frisk program in New York, for example, the policy occurred largely in Brooklyn and the Bronx. In these communities, residents were stopped by the police more than four times as often as in Midtown and Chelsea. This policy is about more than stopping and frisking particular individuals, however; it requires a heavy police presence, which places all residents of the neighborhood under more intense and frequent surveillance. Yet, since geography is also racialized in America, most residents of neighborhoods targeted through Stop and Frisk are also members of marginalized Black
and Brown communities. Accordingly, it is both their geographic location and racial identification that is shaping their local policy experiences and actions.

More broadly, citizens—including, or perhaps especially, those with weak attachments to national or conventional electoral politics—come to engage in and understand the stakes of politics through their experiences with policies that are imposed from above and which directly affect their lives and communities. Beginning from a point of low engagement, citizens shift their behavior and attitudes in ways predictably related to those policies by mobilizing politically and opposing them. This may entail increased participation in less costly forms of non-electoral participation (such as community meetings), but we also expect these changes to manifest in mobilization to replace public officials as residents come to attribute responsibility for the policies from which they seek relief over time (see Figure 1).

![A Model of Place-Based Mobilization](image)

According to our model, the policy feedback effects will be geographically concentrated. This means that otherwise similar areas that are not affected by these targeted local policies will not change in the same ways. Because the policy is targeted in a geographically concentrated way, its effects will be different from typical social security or welfare policies disbursed directly to households. In other words, we do not argue that this place-based model will explain behavior for nationalized issues or among every group of actors. It is also unlikely that this model will explain much about responses to policies without a spatial-community element, in which either individuals are not locally connected
to each other or the effects of the policies are not concentrated in space and by race. *This is not a universal theory of policy response or opinion formation,* but we believe it is an important one for understanding important and often overlooked community-policy dynamics. This model, we argue, contributes to an understanding of how a community of citizens respond to concentrated policy changes over which they had little initial control or knowledge, especially in racialized contexts due to the pervasiveness of segregation. While this mobilization may not necessarily succeed in overturning the undesired policy (in part for the same reason the community was targeted in the first place), the change in community attitudes may spill over into other areas of politics and persist.

**Black Residents and Place-based Mobilization**

In this paper, we document how Black Americans who live in communities targeted for school closure, measured in terms of proximity to a school on the closure list, became more likely to attend a community meeting, mobilize a ballot measure for an elected school board, and increase their vote turnout for mayor, who in Chicago has control over the schools. These effects do not appear to be limited to the parents of children in the affected schools. We suggest that it is the community's contextual experiences - as members of a neighborhood *and* racial group targeted by closure - that enable this political engagement to occur. These community level, place-based experiences facilitate informed political action consistent with their collective interests.$^2$

For Black residents, and to some extent other minority groups, race has played a powerful role in building a collective political identity, referred to as group consciousness or linked fate, around important political issues (Dawson 1994). Thus, it might be the case that group consciousness (rooted in historical experiences with race) explains the ensuing actions of community members as opposed to their contemporary racial experiences with concentrated policy change.

Nonetheless, group consciousness can vary across policy issues. As McClain et al. (2009, p. 471) observe, “it is important for scholars to understand better the contexts that activate and those
that might limit or stymie the development of group consciousness.” Further, Laird (2019) states in her analysis of racial group identification, “political context… shapes the way group members see their own interests as connected with those of the group.” Accordingly, while one’s connectedness to a racial group may in some cases shape how polices are understood, policies can also play a critical role in constructing race and thus the extent to one connectedness to a racial group.⁶

In this paper, we conceive of group consciousness as an attitude modified by citizens’ contextual policy experiences. In particular, we view low-income minority groups as making political decisions not only based on racial cues but also through their engagement with specific policies happening in their community. By examining the experiences with school closings, specifically, we demonstrate how they provide an opportunity for racial consciousness to activate and place-based mobilization to ensue.

The Case: School Closures and Electoral Context

We test this model by examining the way Black residents responded to school closures in their communities. School closures are increasingly common across the country. About 2,000 public schools across the United States permanently close each year.³ Further, the current COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated the temporary closing of every school district in the nation, at some point, over the past year, and will likely contribute to the permanent closure of many of these same schools in the upcoming year. Further, they involve a policy with which select citizens have a great deal of experience and are rarely desired by those whom they most directly affect (Tilsley 2017).

In 2012, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) board initiated the largest wave of public school closures in U.S. history (10% or 49 of nearly 500 schools). CPS officials framed the policy as a

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⁶ To be sure, group norms and racialized social pressure play an important role in forcing connectedness (White and Laird 2020), but the independent policy event can still shape how that pressure operates and its overall effectiveness.
product of population loss in particular areas of the city. Further, by closing schools, CPS claimed that it would be able to not only resolve the issue of population loss but also redirect those dollars from closed schools “to ALL schools, then . . . make investments that support student growth through new technology, AC, libraries, art/music, more counselors and nurses, and others” (North-Lawndale, 2013).

On the surface, the policy made sense: it seeks to resolve a clear problem, population decline, while also ensuring that the solution results in more resources being made available to support students across the city. Consequently, one could expect a majority of citizens to support it. The problem, of course, is that the policy disproportionately targeted one racial group: low-income Black residents. Black residents made up 48% of the public-school population, but 88% of those affected by the school closure policy.

Despite the policy’s racially disparate impacts, CPS officials classified it as nominally nonracial. In contrast, several local groups - including the Chicago Teachers Union - promoted narratives that ran counter to the race-neutral one promoted by CPS (i.e., under-enrollment). The primary counter-narrative argued that the school closure policy was racist for disproportionately targeting Black and Brown neighborhoods. The framing of the policy as racist (or what we view as “the racialization of school closure policy”) likely played a role in facilitating mobilization among affected racial groups.

Mobilizing Against School Closure

The closures were not immediate or automatic; by law, the school district must collect input on school closure decisions from those potentially affected. The collection of feedback took place at a series of meetings over a multi-month period at local churches and community centers during which CPS officials presented the decision to affected communities. These meetings were the only formal venue
to voice opposition to the plan.  

While the meetings outlined above marked the single mechanism provided by the school district for those affected to contest the decision, the vast majority of affected individuals belonged to resource-poor communities of color that traditionally participate at low levels, particularly around school issues (e.g., Henig et al., 1999). In fact, schools had been closing in Chicago since 2001, and although there had been some engagement, it paled in comparison to what observed in the 2013 closures. Across many cities, participation in school board elections, for example, rarely surpass 5% (Fuerstein, 2002; Allen and Plank, 2001). Thus, it was unclear whether those affected would participate in the 2012-13 public meetings to contribute their opinions on the school closure decision.

Nonetheless, with the support of community organizations and district facilitated resources, 

For the 2012-13 closures, support for the policy was miniscule. In the closures that came later (17-18), there appeared to be much more public support than previously by persons that attended the district meetings and even wore shirts making their commitment to closure explicit. There was a general sense of surprise by other members that these groups existed and a feeling that they had been planted by the district because of its departure from the united front presented in previous closures.

To be sure, Burns et al argue that citizens learn skills they can use to mobilize through their engagement at churches and community organizations. Thus, it may be the case that affected residents mobilized in part because of the skills gained from their affiliations with community organizations such as the church. Yet, it is also important to note that the neighborhood context can affect citizens access to community organizations and the capacity of community organizations to provide skills and services, especially as those neighborhoods are dealing with declining populations and perpetual disinvestment (see for ex. Alex-Assensoh, 1997, 2002). Accordingly, while we acknowledge the potential power of community organizations, we also acknowledge their limits. Further, we argue that it is separately important to recognize that residents may also learn civic skills through their experiences with the policies themselves, particularly policy shocks, and the learning that occurs through participation in the community process led by the policy perpetrators. This is why the merging of policy feedback, local politics and political behavior is so important as it is illustrating how experiences with the policies at the local level are shaping political learning, whether or not one is affiliated with a local organization.

In newly published work on the topic, the data reveal that the school district and local community organizations enabled parents to develop and strengthen their civic skills throughout the closure process.
the 2012-13 meetings were well-attended, and community members who attended and spoke were overwhelmingly against school closures. Their critiques focused on the rationale (efficiency), the decision-making process (by an unelected school board), the disproportional targeting (racism) and the loss of a community institution. Despite community opposition, 49 schools were closed in a single wave in 2012–13.

These closures were not randomly scattered across the city but concentrated within certain communities: 88 percent of the closed schools were located on the South and West sides of the city, where the majority of the population is Black and low-income. Figure 2 depicts the locations of schools closed in 2012–13.
Further, the mass closure of schools in Chicago were not an isolated event. They followed nearly two decades of school reform in the city: the arrival of charter schools, intermittent closures, teacher contract disputes, and the perceived distance of the centralized school board. Though technically a separate local institution, the CPS board is chosen by the mayor. This means that the mayor is the only elected official responsible for setting school policy. The wave of school closures of 2012–13 occurred during Rahm Emanuel’s first term and exacerbated this conflict. In 2012, there was also an advisory ballot measure calling for a change to an elected, decentralized school board, and a similar ballot measure followed in 2015. These ballot measures and the mayor’s position as the only elected public official with control over the school board (and thus CPS policy) provides us with leverage for examining the ways Chicagoans responded to targeted school closures, because Chicagoans had two opportunities to vote on each: first before and then after the major wave of closings.

**Hypotheses: The Political Effects of School Closures**

Our analysis examines whether this salient, place-based racially targeted closure policy had political effects beyond the school walls. Specifically, we are curious whether members of communities that were targeted for closure, which are historically disadvantaged and without many of the political and socioeconomic resources of other communities within the city, responded to closure policy in ways consistent with the place-based model of policy feedback mobilization. That is, did Chicagoans in areas targeted by the closings policy mobilize and participate in political actions congruent with their collective interests, despite their resource-poor background? 4
Observations of the community meetings during the closure period indicate that at least some Chicagoans in closure areas did learn from the process and took political action to oppose closures. We are investigating in part whether these observations were unusual or typical. Among the observable implications drawn from the place-based model for Chicago are the following:

1. When residents encounter a negative policy change concentrated in their community, they will mobilize against it. Thus, we hypothesize that political participation will increase among people who live in the areas affected by school closures. More precisely,

   a. In Chicago, the sole explicit opportunity that CPS made available to register opposition toward the school closure policy was the community meetings, so we believe that participation in community meetings should increase in areas targeted for closure (Hypothesis 1).

   b. Because school closures occurred under a mayor-appointed school board, we expect residents of closure areas to mobilize in support of an institutional change to an elected school board after the wave of closures (Hypothesis 2).

   c. Because the mayor is the primary elected official responsible, we expect residents of closure areas to increase their turnout at local elections for which the incumbent mayor is on the ballot (Hypothesis 3). Secondarily, we also expect that support for the incumbent will decline in closure areas. (Hypothesis 3a)

Because of Chicago’s high levels of racial segregation and the concentrated spatial pattern of school closings in areas with predominantly Black American residents, we expect the relationships above to be stronger among Black Americans than other Chicagoans where we can observe such distinctions. Yet, if our theory is correct, we should specifically find a moderated treatment relationship, where residents are likely to mobilize if they are both Black and living in a closure area due to the overlapping roles of race and neighborhood at the local level.
Data and Analysis

While we have observed Chicagoans participate in closure meetings and have developed the intuitions behind our hypotheses based on those observations and extant research, in the following analyses we use public opinion and elections data from the period around the closings to test the generalizability of these insights. We compare changes in political behavior before and after the wave of 2012–13 closures across areas of Chicago with varying exposure to the school closure policy. Of course, this is not a tightly controlled experiment—the closed schools were not randomly selected, and the opinion and voter data are observational—but the underlying logic of comparison is similar in that we focus on variable change across policy conditions. We examine whether the “treatment” of school closures will be associated with the changes hypothesized in the previous section (see more in Appendix).

To test these hypotheses, we rely on three data resources that connect measures of attitudes and behavior to time and space. First, to evaluate individual-level relationships and mechanisms, we use the waves of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), which includes spatial location data in the form of respondents’ ZIP code and questions about political participation and local government performance. These measures, combined with the CCES samples of Chicagoans from all parts of the city, allow us to test our hypotheses at the individual level and examine fine-grained shifts in attitudes related to the policy change. We analyze changes in the waves just before and after the biggest closure wave (2010 and 2014, respectively).

Second, we use a dataset based on precinct-level results from the Chicago Board of Elections and spatially joined Census data that ties demography to electoral outcomes. These data, allow us to estimate over-time political changes in small-area aggregations and to evaluate actual political behavior in the form of election results (as opposed to reported behavior, as in survey collection).
We use the same analytical logic on these data, comparing changes in behavior from the local elections just before the closure wave (2011 for mayor and 2012 for school board referendum) to the election just after it (2015 for the revisiting of each).

To examine voters’ and respondents’ proximity to a community affected by school closures, we develop an original dataset of schools closed in Chicago in 2012–13. These data (which we geocode using their addresses) are used to construct two measures of community-based experiences with public school closures in Chicago. For CCES analyses, we link the schools’ ZIP codes to respondents, to estimate whether a respondent lives in a ZIP code with at least one closure. For electoral results analyses, we calculate the distance from the centroid of an electoral precinct to the nearest closed school. These measures allow us to analyze the concentrated geographic effects at the lowest level possible given the available data. Table 1 summarizes which data and measures we use in the analyses.

<table>
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<th>Year of Analys</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
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<th>Measure of Participation</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Precinct</td>
<td>Distance to Closure</td>
<td>Turnout, Ballot Measure Mobilization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: **Data sources key and measures for analyses**

**School Closures and Meeting Participation**

To test our first hypothesis (1), we compare levels of participation in closure and non-closure areas of Chicago in 2010 and 2014. We can assess political participation before and after the closures
directly using the CCES. This survey has a battery of political participation questions that it has repeated in each wave since 2008. The questions ask whether respondents have participated in various ways recently. If the wave of closures in 2012–13 had the predicted effects, we should see relatively larger increases in participation in closure areas, especially in attending the meetings associated with closures. To be clear, we suspect an increase in meeting participation among residents of communities affected by closure because meetings were a central resource provided by the school district to collect community input toward the issue.

Using the battery of participation questions from the CCES, this is indeed what we observe. Figure 3 shows how participation rates changed from 2010 to 2014 among Black respondents from closure and non-closure areas of the city, as well as non-Black respondents generally. The estimates represented in the figure are predicted probabilities of participation based on regression models of participation in each of the activities. Before the closures, Black Chicagoans in closure ZIPS were the least likely to have attended a political meeting; after, they were the most likely group. Predicted meeting attendance among Black Chicagoans outside of closure ZIPS did not change. For our analysis, the estimated difference between Black respondents in and out of closure ZIPS is particularly interesting for assessing the underlying role of closures in fostering participation (see Hypothesis 1). The expected difference in changed probability of meeting attendance between Black respondents in and out of closure areas is approximately 10 percentage points.
Figure 3: **Changes in Participation by Race and Closure Status, 2010 to 2014.** Each set of arrows represents the participation rate in the activity indicated on the x-axis for different groups of respondents in 2010 (the circle end of the arrow) and in 2014 (the pointy end). In each set, from left to right, there is a Black arrow to show levels among Black respondents from ZIP codes with closures in 2012–13, a dark grey arrow to show levels among Black respondents from non-closure ZIPs in the city and, a light arrow for respondents from non-Black Chicagoans. The magnitude of the group’s expected shift on that measure is given in the figure at the end of the arrow. Group means estimated using Chicago-based census weights. Question wordings and numerical summary in Appendix. Source: *CCES 2010 and 2014, and CPS Schools Closure Data.*

**School Closures and Electoral Change**
As school closings dramatically reshaped communities and citizens’ learned more about the process, they also made significant changes in their electoral behavior. We again leverage time and space to examine changes in electoral outcomes. Using precinct-level returns from the CDP database, we compare closely related elections just before and after the wave of closures in 2012–13. In this section, we present evidence of these changes.

School Board Ballot Measures, 2012 and 2015

The first of these is support for a non-binding ballot measure advocating an elected school board. This measure was proposed twice, in similar though not identical form, in 2012 and 2015. Support for the measure where it was on the ballot was very high in each year: average precinct-level support was 87 percent in 2012 and 90 percent in 2015; each time more than 99 percent of precincts reported more than 70 percent support. The biggest change in the ballot measure vote was listing: many communities where the school board measure was not important enough to list in 2012 seem to have become more interested in the idea by 2015. The areas of the city with the measure on the ballot increased and shifted, covering more of the city in 2015 (1,489 precincts, as opposed to 327 in 2012 – a 67% difference) and including much more of the South Side, one of the areas where closings were concentrated (Figure 1).

Technicalities in Chicago’s ballot rules required that signatures be collected separately in each precinct to list the elected school board measure on the ballot. This procedural hitch makes analysis slightly trickier—we cannot just compare support for the measure before and after, because it was not on the ballot in the same places. But, especially given that actual votes on support of the measure only varied from very supportive to extremely supportive, it also affords analytical leverage because of the observed patterns in where the measure was added: simply getting it on the ballot may be interpreted as a sign of sophisticated, organized reaction against school closure policy. The locations in which these measures appeared on the ballot are shown in the maps in Figure 4.
Figure 4: **School closure locations and precincts with ballot measure, 2012 and 2015.** At left, dark shade indicates precincts that voted in the 2012 school board ballot measure. At right, precincts that voted in the 2015 ballot measure. Circles depict locations of closed schools in each subfigure.

In a given area, there are four possible patterns of ballot measure listings across 2012 to 2015. *Mobilizing* areas did *not* have the ballot measure in 2012 but did have it in 2015, indicating a mobilization to consider the shift (most of the South Side is like this in the map). *De-mobilizing* areas had it on the ballot in 2012 but *not* in 2015, indicating a falloff in mobilization on the issue over time (see the far Northwest side). *Always Mobilized* areas had it on the ballot both years, indicating a higher level of interest in the first place, which was sustained (these precincts are mostly on the Near Northwest Side). *Never Mobilized* areas had it on the ballot in either year, indicating low levels of mobilization in both years (the small areas near downtown fit this description).
Table 2 shows the relationship between ballot measure mobilization and proximity to school closures. The columns reflect a three-part division of the distance between a precinct and the nearest closed school: the closest third, middle third, and farthest third. Mobilization for the second ballot measure was related to proximity. Among the precincts nearest a closed school, 76 percent were mobilizing, and only 8 percent kept the measure off the ballot; among those farthest from a closure, only 48.5 percent were mobilizing, and 41 percent did not mobilize to vote on the ballot. This is a difference of nearly 20 percent when compared with areas closer to closures. In a companion regression analysis of precincts that did not have the 2012 ballot measure, an additional mile of distance from a school closure is associated with an approximately 7 percent decrease in the likelihood that the precinct added the measure to the ballot in 2015, even when we account for precinct-level demography, crime rates, poverty, and school populations. In summary, proximity to a school closure was strongly associated with mobilizing to list a school board measure on the ballot in 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precinct Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Near Closures (%)</th>
<th>Middle-Distance (%)</th>
<th>Far from Closures (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobilizing</td>
<td>2647</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-Mobilizing</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always Mobilized</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Mobilized</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: **Total precinct fragments and percentages in each ballot measure category.** Proximity categories are top-third, middle-third, and bottom-third of distance between precinct fragment centroid and nearest school closure.

**Mayoral Vote**

In our final analysis, we analyze local voter turnout, hypothesizing that voters experiencing school
closures will mobilize to vote in the mayoral election. In this case, Mayor Rahm Emanuel was elected just before the closures in 2011 and ran for re-election in 2015, just after the closures. As in the analysis of school board referenda, this before-and-after timing provides leverage for our analysis. Unlike the school board referenda, Emanuel was on the ballot in every precinct in both elections. Figure 5 shows the location of school closures represented as small triangles and the change in turnout by precinct fragment from 2011 to 2015 represented by shades of grey, with darker shades representing bigger increases in turnout.

This figure shows an apparent association between school closures and change in support for Emanuel in those two elections. Of course, especially given the city’s high levels of class and racial segregation, we should look more closely to be more confident of this relationship. To do so, we examine changes in support for Emanuel at the precinct level in the CDP data, which also includes demographic covariates spatially matched to the voting geography (see appendix for information on demographic estimates).
Figure 5: **School Closures and Change in Voter Turnout and Support for Mayor, 2011 to 2015.**

Areas depicted are community areas, shaded by the change in support for Emanuel (percent 2015 minus percent 2011). Small Black circles indicate locations of closed schools.

Our theoretical expectations are that proximity to the target area should be associated with mobilization against the incumbent mayor’s re-election bid, which is the actor that made the policy change (Hypothesis 2b). Figure 6 shows the bivariate relationship between distance and changes in support for Emanuel from 2011 to 2015. In the figure, negative values indicate a drop in the key outcome (e.g., values below zero indicate decreased turnout) from 2011 to 2015. The distance along the x-axis is measured in miles, such that a precinct fragment that was very close to a closed school is close to the left-hand side of the frame. About half of all fragments are within 1.5 miles of a school closure. Overall, both turnout and support for Emanuel fell on average, so these change measures assess mainly differences in the intensity of the decrease.

![Figure 6: Difference in precinct-fragment outcomes by distance from closest closed school. At left, change in turnout for mayoral election, February 2011 to](image)
February 2015. At right, change in percent supporting Rahm Emanuel, 2011 to 2015.

Points represent precinct fragments; lines are smoothed local averages with confidence intervals.

Figure 6 shows that the relationships between the key outcomes and distance to a school closing appear fairly strong. Each mile of distance from a closure is associated with about a 1.6 percent larger decline in turnout (as the moving average line in the figure shows, the relationship is even stronger in the 93% of precincts within 4 miles of a closure, before it flattens out in remote areas). This turnout change was paired with a shift against the only elected official involved in the closings. Support for Emanuel fell much more in areas near a closure: with each mile of distance from a school, his decline in support was about 5 percent less severe.

Indeed, these figures are noisy; moreover, the city’s high level of segregation and the pattern of closings shown in Figure 5 suggests the possibility that the observed relationships may be confounded by other factors such as race or class. However, when we use a multivariate regression to account for alternative factors that might explain higher mobilization or declining support for Emanuel—including precinct-level measures of crime rates, public school attendance, housing unaffordability, poverty, percentage Black, percentage Latinx, median household income, and parallel changes in national political participation—the key relationships between proximity and outcomes remain substantively the same. These findings also hold when we examine only subsets of precincts whose residents are primarily Black or Latinx (for more, see Appendix). For each of the models estimated, the relationship between distance to a school closure and the outcome is both significant and in the expected direction. After adjusting for these potential factors, turnout decreased by about .9 percent more with each mile in distance from a closure. In this model, drops in support for Emanuel are also larger near closure areas, at about 2.8 percent per mile. Broadly, these analyses
support our hypotheses, that school closures would increase turnout and decrease support for school closers.

Table 3. Changes in Vote and Turnout by Race and Closure Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miles to nearest closure</td>
<td>-0.0163***</td>
<td>-0.00894***</td>
<td>0.0494***</td>
<td>0.0282***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000909)</td>
<td>(0.00113)</td>
<td>(0.00126)</td>
<td>(0.00163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% In School</td>
<td>0.0118</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0409**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0199)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0205)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ # crimes</td>
<td>-0.0428***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.146***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0142)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0211)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>0.0490***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0739***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00499)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00734)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hisp.</td>
<td>0.0261***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0664***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00568)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00817)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med. HH Inc. ($10k)</td>
<td>-0.00113**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.29e-05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000556)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000677)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Pov.</td>
<td>0.0297***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0108)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0153)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Unaffordable Rent</td>
<td>0.0519***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.116***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0137)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0187)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Presidential turnout, 2012-2016</td>
<td>0.181***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0234)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0332)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.0564***</td>
<td>-0.111***</td>
<td>-0.166***</td>
<td>-0.0813***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00155)</td>
<td>(0.00658)</td>
<td>(0.00240)</td>
<td>(0.00982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,062</td>
<td>4,006</td>
<td>4,062</td>
<td>4,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>0.388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses
As a further test of the relationship between school closures and political change in Black communities, we compared changes in precincts within the footprint of a closed school’s attendance area to nearby precincts based. Figure 7 shows the 2010-11 school attendance boundaries for elementary schools in the city, along with areas of the city known colloquially as “sides” outlined in heavier lines: the South Side, Near West Side, and so on. Schools that were closed are shaded darker grey (See Appendix for a similar map of high school attendance zones). Consistent with the previous figures, the closures are clustered on the predominantly Black Far South and West Sides—indeed, some sides are completely unaffected—but it’s also true that there is variation within the heavily affected areas. Some schools are closed and some not. While our theory is about broader community effects that may spill over beyond these lines, we still expect to find a stronger effect within the small sub-communities in which schools were closed.

![Elementary attendance areas in Chicago, 2010-11 school year.](image)

Indeed, this is what we find. Using maps of elementary and high school attendance areas, we determined whether a precinct was in the discrete area of closure or not. We then compared the the
political outcomes previously examined—change in turnout, change in support for incumbent mayor, and mobilization for the school reform ballot measure—across closure and non-closure areas within the same area of the city. Because, we are focused on Black communities, we included only precincts from the West and Far South Sides of the city. The high level of segregation in Chicago (shown in Figure 2) means this approach also effectively controls for many other neighborhood-level measures that covary and appear in Table 3. When we compare closure-area and non-closure areas within these areas of the city, we find that the change in turnout is about 1 percent higher, support for the mayor drops about 1.7 percent more, and mobilization for the school board referendum is about 6 percent more likely in the footprint of closed schools than elsewhere in the area.\textsuperscript{10}

While this test more precisely differentiates between residents of official closure zones than those in non-closure zones, it may underestimate the role closures play on members of the community, who likely identify with their neighborhood or “side” of the city, but not necessarily with their elementary school boundary zone. However, the consistency between this test serves as an indicator of the robustness of the previous findings, especially within predominantly Black communities within the city.

\textbf{Discussion}

The results presented here support a model of place-based mobilization, measured by proximity to the policy event, in shaping political behavior. In 2010 and 2011, residents in what would become school closure areas were the least likely to participate in politics. In 2012 and 2013, a large wave of school closings was implemented by CPS. During the time of the closures, informational meetings

\textsuperscript{10} All of these differences are statistically significant and full results are detailed in the Appendix.
were held that allowed citizens to learn about the closure policy, voice concerns about it, and ultimately organize against it. From 2010 to 2014, participation in areas affected by school closures increased more than elsewhere in the city, an increase that was driven by affected Black residents attending more political meetings. These individual-level processes were consistent with aggregate-level electoral changes that took place across the wave of school closures: areas near closed schools were more likely to mobilize for a ballot measure designed to support local schools and those areas saw relative increases in voter turnout in the next local election (and greater shifts against the official responsible for the change). These electoral outcomes are consistent with 2015 election-day exit polling, which indicated that CPS policy was the most frequently indicated concern among voters, and that a majority of voters opposed closures.\textsuperscript{12}

Still, the evidence presented is not without its limits. In the aggregate analysis, parents/guardians with children are pooled with everyone else, thus making it unclear the extent to which those directly affected (parents) may be driving the results. To partially account for this possibility, we found that the proportion of residents currently in school does not appear to be associated with changes in turnout, and in the individual-level analysis, including a measure of “children in the home” does not affect results (the variable is not significant in any model we tested). This finding is consistent with other recently published research on racial attitudes toward closures, which finds that less than 30\% of those who attended the 2013 community meetings for closure were parents directly affected by them. The vast majority were members of the community, public officials, teachers and staff. These findings provide suggestive evidence that school closures mobilized more people than just those students and parents directly affected.

Future work on place-based mobilization may also benefit from incorporating a systematic analysis that includes questions on experiences with public school closure to buttress the individual-level analyses and better understand the mechanisms. While qualitative analysis is not reported in
this particular paper, collected ethnographic observations provide evidence that community meetings acted as key sites of political learning and mobilization for Black residents. For example, one of the authors observed several participants comment on the size of the venue selected by CPS with statements like the following: “But you knew it would be a big meeting. It’s been huge all over the city and now you’re going to try to tell us [it’s over capacity]. . . No! We want to hear from our elected officials.”9 Participants went on to frame their experiences as an example of how they were being devalued by elected officials, as one parent stated, “I just don’t like how [CPS officials] are treating us at this meeting . . . sending us here and there. . . ” Quotes such as these suggest that many of the Black residents who participate in community meetings learned information in situ about the policy decision and politics more generally.

Qualitative data can also provide important insights on the gender dynamics that may be operating in the analysis. For instance, Karen Lewis, a Black woman, led the Chicago Teachers Union and ran for Mayor against Rahm Emanuel in 2015 before falling ill and boosting the candidacy of the eventual challenger. If we accept the empowerment thesis of participation, this descriptive representation should have a positive effect on mobilizing Black women in communities facing school closure.

At the same time, we observe differences by gender, particularly in the ethnographic observations of community meetings. For example, we observe that even as women participate at high rates as attendees and leaders, men appear to still represent a disproportionate percentage of those who spoke at the mic (relative to their level of general engagement) at community meetings. While women in the context of school closures could be more comfortable speaking up (given that they represent the majority), they still have to work with men that are affected. As Kathlene (1994) argues, once women become the majority, men become more aggressive. Further, Karpowitz et. al (2012) reveal that men may use their minority status to exceed equality in a context where all
participants must agree on a single solution. These differences are less observable using existing survey data. However, this may be a reflection of how questions around engagement are asked and measured in ways that are not gender relevant (Dolan 2011). A future investigation would benefit from using qualitative data to center gender alongside race and class in participation around school closure.

Ultimately, the quantitative data available allows us to observe patterns supporting the theoretical predictions of the place-based mobilization model. These findings have empirical and substantive implications for research on the political responses to real-world policy changes among otherwise low-participation citizens across multiple modes of inquiry. First, this research is critical for expanding the way in which one defines and measures experience to include meanings beyond direct formal encounters with a policy to an embedded contextual engagement through one’s community. It also extends this literature by demonstrating the behavioral changes that result after a concentrated policy change is implemented within a racially and economically segregated community. In so doing, it identifies “community” as a site of co-identification and political action for marginalized groups. Second, these findings contribute to literature on policy feedback by demonstrating how education policies related to the removal of public schools have broader consequences for electoral and non-electoral participation, thereby expanding not only the school policy areas on which this literature focuses, but also the political outcomes of interest examined. Finally, while we test this theory with evidence from public school closures, we expect that this model may provide a blueprint for analyses of other important policy decisions which often have racially and geographically concentrated effects that are felt most powerfully by poor communities across the United States, in areas such as policing, environmental justice, and economic development. Because these decisions are often made at the local level, we should also look at the local level for their effects, rather than concluding that place and space do not matter, or that marginalized
communities do not mobilize on issues that affect them. In sum, by bridging research on policy feedback with that on local politics and participation we demonstrate that, even within a single media market and political jurisdiction, there can be big differences in feedback effects depending on perceived localized and racially disparate impacts.

Conclusion

Citizens’ political attitudes and behavior are shaped by the communities in which they are embedded and the institutions that anchor those communities. Public schools represent these types of institutions for many Americans, but especially those with lower levels of socio-economic resources or interest in national politics. For Black Americans that reside in neighborhoods segregated by race and class, schools represent some of the first institutions in which they held leadership roles and the last public institutions in their communities (Todd-Brelan, 2018). Accordingly, when political scientists focus on issues such as schools that Black people engage with as part of their social and neighborhood context, we gain insights into the effects of the local place-based policy experiences that most affect their lives.

These insights clarify the tension between the apparent low engagement at the local level, as shown in the literature, and the intense waves of political action that are often observed on the ground, by demonstrating how the former often fails to focus on issues that matter most to the communities studied. Weaver et al (2019) observe that conventional political science tools for studying mass attitudes and behavior (i.e., large-N datasets and statistical analyses) fail to capture the political understandings of race-class subjugated communities. We find that these studies also miss the areas

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11 It may be the case that the feedback literature has not gotten to these types of analyses yet, but it might also be the case that the field’s focus on federal level policies, and the use of bureaucratic agencies as a site of research, limits the location by which mobilization can be observed. Ultimately, policy feedback can make room for this type of analysis if they take seriously those issues that are closest to those at the margins, rather than examining a similar set of federal policy issues because of its scope or breadth.
for which citizen participation may be the most consequential. If political scientists look locally and ask appropriate questions, then, they will likely find relatively high levels of political engagement on display from even the most traditionally “demobilized” communities.

As at the end of the turbulence of the 1960s, several recent articles have sought to remind the field of the usefulness of understanding “politics from below” and how predominantly Black big-city communities have experiences with the state that are fundamentally different from those of the (white, suburban, middle class) median voter who drives analyses based on nationally representative samples (Weaver et al 2019, Michener et al 2020). Our analysis takes this suggestion a step further and provides a model of how a deep understanding of these movements from below can be productively wedded to quantitative research approaches to assess aggregate changes. Undoubtedly, mass political protests across the country in recent months have been incited by local incidents that became nationalized. But the policy changes that result will be dependent on continued mobilization at the local level. It will require residents of neighborhoods that may have no direct experience with these policy changes to band together with members of their community who were directly affected to engage in political mobilization in the various ways they deem impactful. This means their efforts may not translate to participation in subsequent general elections, or to increased political knowledge on national level issues, but it will likely have dramatic impacts on their local level engagement and thus the policies applicable to their everyday lives. In our view, this is the political action that matters the most in any study of democracy; for it centers the participation of those most frequently targeted, but so often ignored because national conversations and electoral choices seldom engage with the issues that are closest to home. And through their participation, we learn not another story of uninformed, unengaged voters, but rather of rational citizens doing their part to hold democracy accountable to all it promises.
Notes


2


4 Recent examples include Newman and Hartman (2017) on the spatial effects of mass shootings on opinions on gun control, Enos (2016) on the relationship between large public housing project locations and white voting behavior, and Hopkins (2010) on the complex relationship between place and attitudes on immigration.

5 This treatment was not random, but no communities opted into it, so by observing changes theoretically linked to the closure policy, we can get a glimpse of its effects with at least mitigated selection effects.

6 Our data include 328 and 563 respondents from Chicago ZIP codes in 2010 and 2014, respectively. Because the CCES is designed to be nationally representative, not locally, we created and employed Chicago-specific weights on the CCES data used in the analysis; see Appendix for details.

7 ZIP code is the smallest available level of geographic identifier in the data. It is an imperfect approximation for exposure to a closed school (school catchment areas are not based on ZIP codes, but it is the best available measure). Also, the vast majority of non-black respondents were from non-closure ZIPS, and there was no difference in the participation changes between closure and non-closure ZIP residents among non-black respondents).

8 The questions include participation in political meetings, putting up a sign, working for a
campaign, and donating to a campaign. Each of these is included in Figure 3. For reference, the questions are CC417a1 through CC417a5 in the 2010 CCES, and repeated in subsequent waves. See Ansolabehere and Schaffner (2010-2014) for details of the CCES. Also, note that the most common measure of political participation, self-reported voter turnout, is not among the measures included here. The levels of turnout reported by survey respondents was extremely high (over 80 percent in 2014). This is almost certainly an overestimate.

9 Alternative assessments of these relationships, including versions of this figure based on unweighted samples and regression-based estimated predicted probabilities, and tests of statistical significance of these different relationships are presented in the Appendix. Though estimates vary according to model and technique of comparison, proximity to a closure is associated with about a .06-.09 increased change in meeting attendance, significant at the p<.10 level.

10 In fact, getting on the ballot appears to be a better assessment of variation in support for the measure because where it was on the ballot support was almost uniformly extremely high. For the measure, technically called an advisory referendum, to get on the ballot in a precinct or ward at least 8 percent of registered voters in the territory sign. For each of Chicago’s approximately 2000 precincts, this is typically 50 to 75 signatures. While these numbers may reflect increased activity by activists or organizers predisposed to support the referenda, the expansion of such action into huge swathes of the city suggests heightened mobilization in these new areas because signatories must be local residents, not from elsewhere in the city. Full rules governing this procedure are available at the Chicago Board of Elections (chicagoelections.com).

11 See Appendix for regression analysis of ballot measure mobilization. There is slightly more support for the 2015 ballot measure in areas close to closure, but overall support levels were so high in almost every area (over 75 percent) we are hesitant to make careful judgments about that relationship. The increased rates of ballot measure mobilization near closures are more compelling
and a better test of Hypothesis 2a.

Available toplines in the poll are consistent with our analysis. Without direct access to that proprietary data, we cannot confirm more precisely the relationship between closures, opinion, residence, and vote choice in the exit polls (Bosman 2015).

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