

The Tasks of Elected Officials within the Policy Process of Interlocal Cooperation

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Abstract

Interlocal cooperation provides local governments with a third means of service provision, after direct provision and contracting out, that allows problems to be addressed at the regional level. Much of the academic literature on this topic places appointed officials as those who take the lead role in these types of arrangements. This research explores the involvement of elected officials, specifically city mayors, in interlocal cooperation. Based on 64 responses from mayors in the southeast region, this research finds statistically significant relationships between mayoral comfort level with tasks associated with interlocal cooperation and a number of variables including city size and racial homogeneity. Additional attention is paid to how elected officials communicate with other governments and with the public in the cooperative context, through both quantitative and qualitative data derived from the survey instrument.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In January 2014, the 169,000 square-foot Owensboro Convention Center in Owensboro, Kentucky had its long-awaited opening. After over a decade of discussion and delay, the creation of the convention center was the largest project within a more than \$1 billion multi-faceted program to revitalize the city's languishing downtown area. Spearheaded by the city's mayor Ron Payne, the program received national attention for the sizable tax increase that was approved to finance the project in the middle of a politically conservative region. The convention center project was funded jointly by Owensboro City, contributing \$7 million, and Daviess County, contributing \$20 million in land and bond proceeds (Schneider 2011). Since its opening, the Owensboro Convention Center has had quite the impact. According to Dean Dennis, the convention center's general manager, "With 424 events, attracting 189,748 attendees, we helped the city book 8,238 (verified) hotel room nights, making an economic impact of over \$25 million on our local economy" (Vied 2015).

In May 2014, the *Tampa Bay Times* reported on the proposed launch of the Tampa Bay Advanced Manufacturing Skills Initiative, a German-style apprenticeship program aimed at bringing high-tech employers to the Hernando, Pasco, and Pinellas county area (Behrendt and Shopes 2014). Modeled after a similar program in North Carolina, the program would provide an incentive for businesses to relocate to the Tampa Bay area by creating a pool of new skilled workers. The program would first place enrolled high school juniors into apprenticeships with high-tech companies in the area in order to learn hands-on skills. Following graduation, the students would then attend a community college or vocational school for an additional two years. Speaking

on the proposed program, Hernando County Commissioner Nick Nicholson noted, “This would be such a home run in my opinion... Three counties working together can really enhance our opportunities.”

In January 2016, it was reported that after a year and a half of delay, the Sumner County Consolidated E-911 and Emergency Operations Center is finally set to open in June of this year (Yankova, Lee, and Cross 2016). One of the major setbacks for the center was the realization that the project would cost \$2 million more than originally projected. Now at a cost of \$4.8 million, the new center will unify emergency dispatch calls for Sumner County, Tennessee and the cities of Hendersonville, Gallatin, Portland, Westmoreland, and Millersville. The additional cost, attributed to larger than expected construction bids, was finally addressed by Sumner County funding taken out of a \$70 million bond approved in 2015 and through an additional \$600,000 in state block grant funding. Proponents of the project hope that the center will bring about improved effectiveness and an elimination of redundant activity. As County Executive Anthony Holt explained, “Right now, a call can be bounced three or four times before the proper agency is notified. The center will be the location that will be called and then the proper emergency agency will be contacted and sent to respond.”

A blighted downtown, an unskilled workforce, and a lack of coordinated emergency services are each very different kinds of public problems facing cities today. But the examples above have at least two common elements. First, each of the three examples is taken from a state located in the southeast United States. The geographical distinction is important because this region has traditionally held a politically conservative orientation. Yet, despite these conservative ties, the local governments

mentioned above have sought to solve their problems by turning to other governments rather than the private sector. Second, and more importantly, by turning to other local governments, problems are able to be addressed at a more regional level. When local governments collaborate to solve regional problems, the practice is known in public administration and political science literature as interlocal cooperation (ILC). Each of the examples of local government activity mentioned above was authorized, structured, and funded by an interlocal agreement, a formal resolution passed in each of the participating jurisdictions. But are these examples of collaborative action unique or are they representative of local government activity across the nation?

Since 1982, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has administered a survey every five years on alternative service delivery (ASD) to the chief administrators of all municipalities with city-type governments with a population of over 2,500 citizens and to all functioning counties (Homsy and Warner 2014). The survey questions local officials about a variety of topics including the feasibility, implementation, and barriers to private service delivery; returning service back to in-house delivery; and the motivations and obstacles to entering into intergovernmental contracts. One of the key areas of the survey is set of questions about whether service delivery is provided in-house, privately, with another government or authority across a number of different tasks. Services included in the survey are divided into categories such as public works and transportation, utilities, safety, parks and recreation, cultural and arts programs, and support services.

The 2007 edition of the survey revealed that the most common form of service delivery across all service types is the traditional form of in-house or direct service

delivery at 52 percent of respondent governments. But what about the remaining 48 percent of services? Interestingly, the survey finds that intergovernmental contracting, or agreements between neighboring local governments, accounts for 16 percent of public service delivery, which represented an increase of 5 percent since the 2002 survey. But the story of intergovernmental contracting does not end there. Though the full reports are still not publicly available as of the drafting of this report, the 2012 edition of the ASD survey found that intergovernmental contracting is the only alternative service delivery strategy that continues to grow, having increased again to almost 24% of all service delivery in 2012 (Homsy and Warner 2014).

What the ICMA survey on alternative service delivery makes clear is that in recent years, local governments are turning to each other more and more for their service delivery needs. It is due to this increased utilization of ILC that my research focuses in on this topic. Though there are a number of lines of inquiry already being pursued in this area, I have chosen to examine one that is, to date, still underdeveloped. My interest in interlocal cooperation, and the subject of this report, is how city mayors are involved in this process, in terms of their involvement with the functional aspects of cooperative agreements and their communication about cooperation with others.

In Chapter 2, I begin the discussion of mayors and interlocal cooperation by compiling a literature review of earlier theory and research on the topic. Specific topics covered include definitions and typologies, incentives and barriers, and theoretical paradigms within which ILC might be discussed. The purpose of the literature review chapter is twofold: First, I will examine and discuss the topic of interlocal cooperation through the lens of academic literature in both political science and public

administration. Second, the literature review sets the groundwork for the following chapters by explaining why various factors may influence mayoral behavior in this policy area. The literature review also highlights the fact that, while a variety of different research avenues have been pursued concerning interlocal cooperation, there has been relatively little discussion of elected officials and their role in ILC in the literature.

Following the literature review, I use the following two chapters to present original research, conducted for the purpose of learning more about city mayors and their attitudes toward interlocal cooperation. In order to obtain data for this research, a survey instrument was submitted to 137 city mayors in cities within a ten-state southeastern region of the United States with a population of greater than 50,000 residents, not including the metropolitan area. Alphabetically, the states included in the survey are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Qualifying mayors within these states received an initial survey mailing, a follow-up postcard one week later, and a new survey and cover letter three and seven weeks following the initial mailing as necessary. At the close of the survey period, I received 64 responses out of a total of 137 surveys sent, a response rate of just over 46%.

The choice of limiting the survey to only southeastern cities was both theoretical and practical. From a theoretical perspective, focusing only on the southeast will provide a foundation for future research by establishing that patterns of behavior are similar among states within a geographical and political region and that sampling from within a region is an appropriate practice. From a practical perspective, limiting the survey to one region of the country cuts down dramatically on cost in terms of time and resources.

The limited survey also allows for future surveys over a larger geographical area to be refined to address emerging research questions. City size in terms of population was used as a filter to include only those cities that are most likely to be sought after by smaller governments to assist in the provision of public goods. The use of larger cities also allows for an evaluation of the beliefs and opinions of a specific set of elected officials. Given their experience as the executive of a large city, these mayors are uniquely situated to seek higher office.

In Chapter 3, titled “Elected Officials & Interlocal Cooperation,” I examine mayoral comfort with performing eleven unique tasks that mayors might perform in the policy process of interlocal cooperation. The tasks are derived from multi-step models of the policy process and include identifying problems, increasing public awareness, informing and educating the public, networking, collaborating with public officials and private parties, delegating power, creating specific agreement terms, implementation, monitoring, and program evaluation. I perform Spearman’s rank order correlations for each of these tasks and four variables that previous research indicates are important to the decision to enter into cooperative agreements. These variables include city size in terms of population, length of term in office, racial homogeneity of the city, and mayoral interest in higher office. Additionally, I perform Mann-Whitney U tests on each of the policy process tasks and two additional variables: the administrative structure, or city type, and mayoral preference for either financial concerns or service quality.

Each of the explanatory variables listed above had at least one theoretical reason for their inclusion in this research. In other words, there were expectations that each variable would have a strong correlation with mayoral comfort levels with

participating in tasks associated with interlocal cooperation. Because this research is limited to measures of correlation and not causation, and because this research represents an introductory exploration into this aspect of cooperation, these expectations do not rise to the level of formal hypotheses within this research. Instead, these expectations and statistical results represent a foundation for future lines of research and theory building.

In very general terms, the following discussion describes the expectations for each of the variables in this research. A summary of these expectations can be found below in Table 1-1. First, city size has competing expectations when it comes to mayoral comfort with these tasks. On one hand, mayoral comfort may be low because larger cities should be more diversified or heterogenous in terms of race and other factors, so mayors may not feel comfortable being involved in policy that could bring about opposition. On the other hand, mayoral comfort could be high because mayors from large cities should enjoy an imbalance of power with other communities seeking help and thus can pick and choose the program with which they choose to participate.

The expectation for length of term in office is that with more experience, mayors should feel more comfortable with performing tasks in the interlocal cooperation process. Taking a somewhat pessimistic view of politics generally, the primary concern of the city mayor, especially one having served a long term, is to maintain his or her own office. That being noted, the name recognition brought about by a longer term in office only builds a mayor's electoral advantage over time. In general, longer tenured mayors, therefore, can feel confident in their position and more comfortable taking chances than

a less experienced official. These lesser experienced officials should not feel as comfortable putting their career on the line should a cooperative effort result in failure.

As noted above, greater racial homogeneity, or lesser racial heterogeneity, should result in greater comfort with performing tasks associated with interlocal cooperation. Again, with a greater variety of groups, there are likely to be many different viewpoints leading to greater debate over the proper course of action. Because there is debate between viewpoints due to race, any action taken by a mayor is likely to disappoint some portion of the population. Mayors, therefore, should feel more comfortable when their city is more unified in terms of race because they can feel confident that any action they take is more likely to be met with approval.

The expectations for interest in higher office are a bit more refined than the previously discussed variables. A mayor that has an interest in running for higher office in the future should be more comfortable performing interlocal cooperation tasks that are related to communication but not those that are related to more technical tasks of cooperation. In other words, mayors should feel more comfortable with discussing the nature of the problem and possible solutions with the public because these tasks help to build the mayor's name recognition with a broader public. More technical tasks such as drafting the specific terms of cooperation, however, would not be tasks that a politically ambitious mayor would feel comfortable performing because it would do nothing to improve their ability to attain higher office in the future.

With administrative structure, mayoral comfort should be higher among cities with a mayor-council structure and lesser for cities with a council-manager structure. In a mayor-council city, the mayor serves as the primary executive figure and has the power

to make policy decisions. In a council-manager city, the mayor has comparatively less power, as the primary executive actor within this city type is the city manager. The city mayor in this type is likely to be either drawn from the city council by rotation or by tenure. Given these characteristics, mayors from mayor-council cities should feel greater levels of comfort because they have greater control over their own policy activities, and council-manager city mayors have relatively less control and thus should have lesser levels of comfort.

Finally, mayoral preference for either financial concerns or service quality has its own set of expectations. Mayors that prefer to ensure that cooperation meets financial goals are more likely to feel comfortable with more technical tasks of ILC, but not feel as comfortable with the communication-based tasks. The reason for this distinction is that by being involved in the more technical aspects of cooperation, mayors can ensure that the terms of cooperation keep financial concerns in mind. Speaking to the public, however, does little to help achieve this task. It is for these same reasons that the opposite is true with regard to comfort levels for mayors that prefer service quality. Service quality is a measure of how well received a policy is by the public. A mayor wanting to please the public should be more comfortable communicating with the public in order to ensure that their needs are met through cooperation. Speaking only with policy experts, however, does little to achieve the end of service quality.

Table 1-1: Explanatory Variable Expectations for Mayoral Comfort with ILC Tasks

Variable	Expectation(s)
City Size (Population)	<p>Greater city population should lead to less comfort with performing ILC tasks due to greater diversity.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <p>Greater city population should lead to greater comfort with performing ILC tasks due to relative power with other communities.</p>
Length of Term in Office	<p>Greater length of term in office should lead to greater comfort with performing ILC tasks due to strength of incumbent advantage.</p>
Racial Homogeneity	<p>Greater racial homogeneity should lead to greater comfort with performing ILC tasks due to less political opposition.</p>
Interest in Higher Office	<p>Greater interest in higher office should lead to greater comfort with performing ILC tasks <i>related to communication</i> due to ability to build brand name with future voters.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>and</i></p> <p>Greater interest in higher office should lead to less comfort with performing ILC tasks <i>related to technical aspects</i> due to inability to build brand name with future voters.</p>
Administrative Structure	<p>The presence of mayor-council structure should lead to greater comfort performing ILC tasks due to greater control over policy decisions.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>and</i></p> <p>The presence of council-manager structure should lead to less comfort performing ILC tasks due to lesser control over policy decisions.</p>
Mayoral Preference	<p>The preference for financial concerns should lead to greater comfort performing ILC tasks <i>related to technical aspects</i> due to greater ability to ensure compliance with financial goals.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>and</i></p> <p>The preference for service quality should lead to greater comfort performing ILC tasks <i>related to communication</i> due to greater ability to address the needs of the public.</p>

In Chapter 4, titled “Political Communications and Interlocal Cooperation,” I address questions related to how city mayors communicate with other public officials and the public. In terms of communication with other public officials, this study began with the expectation that mayors would communicate more frequently with elected officials from other cities rather than county leaders from either their own county or a neighboring county. This expectation is based on the observation that mayors are more likely to be involved in networking opportunities with other elected officials at the city level than with county leaders. Additionally, in terms of the type of government involved, there is an expectation that mayors from mayor-council governments would be far more likely to have had discussions about interlocal cooperation with other public officials than would mayors from the council-manager form of government. The mayor-council form of government places more formal power in the position of mayor, so mayors of from this city type should be expected to feel more empowered to take action than would their counterparts in council-manager cities.

A second important feature of the research on mayoral communication in the interlocal cooperation setting is the relationship between mayors and the public, especially as based on past experience. This relationship may even be more important to the elected official in particular because without public support, a cooperative policy failure could lead to negative results in future elections. In terms of their communication with citizens and citizen groups about interlocal cooperation, mayors should be expected to feel more comfortable performing public communication-type tasks when they have experienced higher levels of activity and productivity in the past. This should be the case because higher levels of activity and productivity should convey positive

reinforcement to mayors that citizen engagement is worth their efforts. Conversely, where mayors have viewed citizens and citizen groups as inactive or not productive, this should have sent a negative message to mayors about their future citizen engagement efforts. The type of task in question is also important because some communication tasks involve less potential public scrutiny than others. Generally speaking, mayors should be far more comfortable with the task of informing the public about the nature of the problem than informing and educating the public about possible solutions. Whereas the nature of the problem may be generally agreed upon, mayors may experience greater levels of public scrutiny when delivering support for one policy over another.

Finally, Chapter 4 includes the responses to several quantitative questions about the types of activities performed in the past to include the public in discussions of interlocal cooperation with neighboring communities and activities that they would like to perform in the future. Though these questions are included in large part to capture information not anticipated or expressly covered by this survey, the general expectation is that mayors either will not include the public or will use traditional methods of public engagement such as town halls. The expectation of zero public engagement is based on the assumption that the topic of interlocal cooperation may be too complex for the public in the eyes of the mayor or that the public will have no interest. This may also be a reflection of what mayors personally understand of interlocal cooperation. In other words, if a mayor feels that he or she does not understand the topic, then how could the public comprehend the types of complex plans often involved in regional governance? Alternatively, mayors may simply seek out traditional methods of engagement because

they are familiar with these types of activities and because complicating the engagement process may further confuse an already complicated policy process.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I conclude with a summary of where future research on elected officials and interlocal cooperation should proceed based on the questions that emerged from subsequent literature and as a result of my own research. Among the topics that require future research are a detailed state-by-state comparison of statutes authorizing interlocal cooperation, analysis and comparison of interlocal cooperation training of elected officials through state municipal leagues, and a more nuanced examination of the impact of race on cooperation. As noted from the outset, scholarship concerning this type of regional governance is gaining increased interest, and I believe that my research has identified many future avenues for examination.

Chapter 2: Interlocal Cooperation Literature Review

“Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made.”

- John Godfrey Saxe, Lawyer-Poet (1816-1887)

“Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

- Proverb of Unknown Origin

If for only just this once, food-based metaphors can provide some insight into the inner workings of local government. Interlocal cooperation (ILC) is a means of allowing multiple local governments within close proximity of one another to come together to solve regional challenges more effectively than they could either on their own or through a partnership with a private entity. As an alternative to in-house production and contracting out to the private sector, these collaborative ventures return at least partial control of service provision responsibility to government. ILC also allows governments to combat region-wide problems that have grown in number and intensity while also capturing the efficiency benefits of a larger market (Feiock, Tao and Johnson 2004). Research reveals that this form of service provision is now so common that a majority of cities and counties are involved in at least one form of interlocal agreement (Chen and Thurmier 2009, Agranoff 1989, Henderson 1984, United States Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations 1985).

But, as Saxe suggests of laws generally, the process of creating and implementing these collaborative policies can be messy and challenging. Not least among the factors that contribute to this mess is the number of actors that participate in cooperative efforts, including but not limited to citizens, appointed officials, and elected officials both within and outside of a single jurisdiction, each vying for their opportunity

to create an agreement fit to their taste. The purpose of this research is to learn more about one set of these cooks, elected officials. Before examining the empirical research that is the basis of this study, it is necessary to dive into the essential features of interlocal cooperation to see what other researchers in this field have already discovered. The following literature review will proceed in four major sections: First, I will compile a variety of definitions of ILC found in the relevant academic research, administrative texts, and state law. Second, I will discuss some of the more important benefits and costs associated with entering into ILC arrangements. The third section will discuss three broad theoretical frameworks within the political science and public administration literature that others have used to help explain ILC. In conclusion, I will summarize the major sections of this chapter and, based on this background, present the research topics of the two following chapters. Through this process, I hope to whet the reader's appetite for a more thorough understanding of interlocal cooperation and how elected officials can be better utilized to serve their constituents.

I. Definitions of Interlocal Cooperation

My own research is based on a 2015 survey of city mayors and their opinions and beliefs about interlocal cooperation.¹ The survey instrument that is the basis of this research limits the definition of interlocal cooperation to, “the sharing and contracting of local government services with other local governments.” Some of the services commonly provided through these arrangements include law enforcement, fire

¹ For the sake of the reader, I will interchange use the terms interlocal, intermunicipal, intergovernmental, and interjurisdictional as well as the terms agreements and cooperation, drawing distinctions when necessary. The terms “interlocal” and “intermunicipal” are not synonymous with “intergovernmental” or “interjurisdictional” outside of the context of this research given that either of the latter terms could be used to refer to arrangements involving larger units of government (state or federal).

protection, emergency medical response, data processing, community and economic development, city utilities, electrical power generation, public transit, and library services (Miller and Davidson 2015). As will be clear from a review of academic research, government texts, and state law, however, the boundaries of interlocal cooperation are quite expansive. By examining broader definitions and typologies of the term, it may be easier to understand the limitations of my research and the possibilities for applying the research in a different context. I conclude this section of the research by restating my more limited definition of interlocal cooperation, and providing justifications for its use.

Basic definitions of interlocal cooperation from academic literature include many of the same features, but tend to differ about the scope of what is considered interlocal activity. Bickers, Stein and Post (2006) state that, broadly defined, interlocal cooperation “includes all policy activities that require some level of policy coordination between local governments” (4), while Bickers and Stein (2004) state that the purpose of cooperation “is motivated by a desire to achieve a shared goal or preference that could not be realized by solitary action” (804). Finally, Skuzinski (2015) defines interlocal cooperation as: “discretionary, purposive action among the officials of two or more units of local government to address an issue that could not be addressed as well (in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, or another criterion of importance to local actors) without coordination of resources” (4). These definitions are representative of broadest definitions of interlocal cooperation, definitions that feature “policy coordination” and “achieving a shared goal.” These definitions represent the ideal type of cooperation in which no single jurisdiction dominates the policy relationship for their sole or dominant

benefit. In reality, however, resource asymmetries between parties and other factors may lead to this ideal type not being met.

Whether stated as “policy activities” as in Bickers, Stein and Post (2006) or as “address[ing] an issue” as in Skuzinski (2015), it is important to remember that interlocal cooperation is a type of governmental action and is based on a statutory framework and certain funding requirements at the state level (Andrew and Hawkins 2012). As an example of a statutory framework for ILC, the Tennessee Interlocal Cooperation Act (§ 12-9-101 through 12-9-112) states that the purpose of the law is:

“...to permit local governmental units the most efficient use of their powers by enabling them to cooperate with other localities on a basis of mutual advantage and thereby provide services and facilities in a manner and pursuant to forms of governmental organization that will accord best with geographic, economic, population, and other factors influencing the needs and development of local communities.” (§ 12-9-102)

In Tennessee, the Interlocal Cooperation Act (T.C.A. § 12-9-104) permits any local government within the state to enter into an interlocal agreement for any legitimate government purpose with any other local government in Tennessee or in any other state, so long as the local government outside of the state has the same authorization to do so. While most states provide this sort of broad authority, there are also a number of peculiarities between states. The state of Iowa, for instance, is unique in that it provides a broad statutory framework with which to create regional agreements, but requires that the formation of these agreements be filed with the State Secretary (I.C.A. § 28E.8). Tennessee and similar state codes only require a filing with the state upon the creation

of a “local government joint venture entity” (T.C.A. § 12-9-111). which the code defines as “any entity created..., including, but not limited to, a self-insurance pool, trust, joint venture, nonprofit organization, or any other type of organization that is sponsored, owned, operated, or governed by two (2) or more local government entities as a separate and specific activity” (T.C.A. § 12-9-103).

Just as Dawes and Préfontaine (2003) define collaboration as “a reciprocal and voluntary agreement” (1), the Skuzinski definition refers to cooperation as being voluntary or discretionary. This aspect of the definition has some exceptions, as there are several examples of state-mandated collaboration, such as among counties in open-space protection (Smith 2009) and in the case of interlocal financial transfers (Bickers and Stein 2004). Like other government mandates, mandated interlocal cooperation may face ideological scrutiny by those opposed to top-down intrusion into local matters. This type of opposition might not be unjustified, as Andrew and Hawkins (2012) find that when mandated or strongly encouraged by incentives from higher levels of government, local governments are often left with little direction as to the type of agreement to be employed. Additionally, even voluntary agreements may involve services that are mandated to be provided in some form by counties (though not cities) (Jung and Kim 2009), are subject to state-mandated caps on local taxing and spending (Hawkins 2011), and may require statutory support from state government (Feiock 2008), though these qualifications in and of themselves do not rise to the level of a government mandate.

The Skuzinski (2015) definition also highlights a basic though important feature of interlocal cooperation—it always involves two or more units of local government.

Most interlocal agreements involve only two local governments, but others are multilateral agreements (MLAs) involving three or more actors (Andrew 2009). The types of government actors involved can include a city, county, special district, or other specialized agency such as an emergency management agency (Andrew and Hawkins 2012). In addition to governmental actors, third party actors from profit or non-profit organizations can be involved in interlocal cooperation. Third party organizations may serve on the front lines of providing a public service but may also serve to resolve disagreements, facilitate collective action, and monitor to ensure that program objectives are met as agreed upon (Hawkins 2009; Ostrom 1990). Hawkins (2009) also notes that third parties “may provide incentives, such as monetary assistance, that can shape the decision of a community to cooperate with other government units in the region” (110). Beyond simply understanding the structure of these agreements, knowing that multiple parties are involved lends insight into the kinds of problems that might arise and the types of mitigating steps that might be necessary to prevent them. As the number of participants to an agreement increases, so too do the opportunities for coordination problems, as well as the costs associated with monitoring and imposing sanctions on participant activity (Andrew 2010). In order to mitigate risks when dealing with a formalized agreement, the design of the agreement is given careful consideration.²

Distilling these definitions down to their essentials, a good definition of interlocal cooperation should consider the following components: 1) policy activities, 2) based on

² See, for instance, Andrew and Hawkins (2012) for an in-depth comparison of adaptive contracts, those providing broad discretion and flexibility for future changes, and restrictive contracts, those providing procedural safeguards and clearly stated outcome requirements, and in what kinds of situations each of these contract designs is most appropriate.

state statutory authority, 3), between two or more governments, 4) that are voluntarily entered into, 5) to achieve a shared goal that could not otherwise be achieved as efficiently or effectively alone. This last point of the definition will be discussed more thoroughly in next major section of this chapter. Before discussing two important typologies of ILC, however, Zeemering (2008) adds one final note to these definitions by referring to interlocal agreements as “innovative governance arrangement[s]” (731). The “innovative” nature of interlocal cooperation is due in part to its newness or the recency with which these methods have been relied upon, at least relative to more traditional methods of public service. But interlocal cooperation is also innovative in the sense that it provides local governments with less rigid means of solving problems. It is precisely this freedom to act which should be so exciting to practitioners and academics alike when speculating about the future state of local governance.

a. Interlocal Cooperation Typologies

Academic definitions of interlocal cooperation provide increased explanatory power as their examination becomes more nuanced. When possible, the formation of typologies allows social scientists to form and refine concepts, draw out underlying dimensions, create categories for classification and measurement, and sort between cases (Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright 2012). Typology creation in the field of interlocal cooperation is especially important given its relative infancy in the academic research. The following discussion will focus on two typologies of interlocal cooperation that view the subject through two very different lenses. The first typology presented in Collins (2006) distinguishes between interlocal agreements based on the arrangement of responsibility between parties in the deliverance of a public service. The second typology from

Warner (2011) distinguishes between types of interlocal cooperation by their level of formality and the number of purposes involved in each. Despite differences in their focus, both typologies are useful means of evaluating and comparing specific instances of interlocal cooperation.

Detailed below in Table 2-1, the Collins (2006) typology distinguishes between forms of interlocal agreements based on the arrangement of responsibility between parties in the deliverance of a public service. The first three types (joint service, delegated agreements, and transfer of functions) retain control of services within existing structures by sharing, delegating, or entirely transferring responsibility respectively to each type. These types can be distinguished from consolidation of services, which creates a new governmental structure for the activity. This typology is important because it speaks to the role of large cities in cooperative ventures and the possibility of power asymmetries between governmental parties. Future research could utilize this typology by examining incidences of each type with regard to one or more kinds of governmental activity. This research could evaluate whether arrangements involving large cities are more likely to take on the delegated agreement and transfer of

Table 2-1: Interlocal Agreement Forms (based on Collins 2006)

Agreement Form	Definition
Joint Service Agreements	Two or more local governments cooperating to conduct an activity
Delegated Agreements	One or more local governments designating another jurisdiction to conduct an activity under their oversight
Transfer of Functions	One or more local governments transferring an activity to the responsibility of another local government
Consolidation of Services	One or more local governments transferring an activity in entirety to a new separate entity created to handle the activity

functions type, or whether the absence of a large city tends to take on a more balanced type such as the joint service agreement or consolidation of services.

A second useful typology of interlocal cooperation is found in Warner (2011), and is detailed below in Table 2-2. One of the key distinguishing features of interlocal cooperation is the level of formality involved in the creation of an agreement. Interlocal agreements may be formalized, as with written contracts for service provision, or may be informal agreements such as a handshake or “good faith” agreement that services will be provided in a time of need. Warner (2011) places forms of interlocal cooperation on a continuum of formality, ranging from informal to intermediate to formal. These forms are further distinguished within that continuum by whether the activity is a single function or multi-functional activity. In the informal category, Warner lists mutual aid agreements as single function activities and councils of government as multi-functional activities. In the intermediate category, Warner lists interlocal contracting alone as a single function activity. Finally, in the formal category are single function special districts and multi-function consolidated governments. The following discussion will describe and provide examples of each of these types of cooperation.

Of the levels of formalized levels of cooperation, informal agreements are the hardest for researchers to pin down. By their very nature, informal agreements lack any

Table 2-2: Continuum of Interlocal Cooperation (Based on Warner 2011)

	<i>Single Function</i>	<i>Multi-Function</i>
<i>Informal</i>	Mutual Aid Agreements	Councils of Government
<i>Intermediate</i>	Interlocal Contracting	-
<i>Formal</i>	Special Districts	Consolidated Governments

formal structure that can be easily studied, and often require the use of qualitative interview techniques to discover. Andrew (2009) notes that while less formal agreements are entered into, these agreements are often focused on short-term and specific issues rather than long-term or regional policy issues. In general, agreements that are larger in scope are more likely formalized through some type of legal resolution (Collins 2006). The most common form of informal agreement in use among local governments in the United States are mutual aid agreements (Warner and Hebdon 2001). Mutual aid agreements may occur in a variety of contexts including the sharing of road maintenance equipment or aid in response to weather-related issues such as floods or snow storms (Warner 2011). The benefit of mutual aid agreements, especially in weather-related issues, is that they take advantage of “redundancy in equipment and expertise that can be deployed... where more capacity than is normally available locally is needed” (Warner 2011, 424).

Another, less common form of informal interlocal cooperation are councils of government (COGs). The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) defines a COG, also known as a regional council (RC), as “a multi-service entity with state- and locally-defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs while carrying out its function as a planning organization, technical assistance provider, and ‘visionary’ to its member local governments.” An example of a COG is the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (KRTP). KRTP membership includes Knox, Blount, Loudon, and Sevier County; the cities of Alcoa, Clinton, Knoxville, Lenoir City, Loudon, Maryville and Oak Ridge; the Town of Farragut; and the Tennessee Department of Transportation and East Tennessee Development District.

Interlocal service sharing agreements, the subject of this research, falls within the formal, single-purpose activity type of the Warner typology. The first distinguishing characteristic of this type is that, unlike informal agreements, when formalized cooperative agreements are created, they often require that city councils vote to approve their adoption (Zeemering 2008). As a result, formalized agreements will have a higher level of visibility and should, therefore, be subject to a higher level of public scrutiny. Alternatively, as a subsequent chapter of this research will discuss, interlocal agreements are often more technical and involve more actors than other forms of local government policy and thus may escape public scrutiny due to their complexity. In practice, there are a number of uses for formal service sharing agreements. Andrew (2009) provides a list of contracting agreements often entered into by local governments, which include fee-for-service contracts, arrangements for coordinating service provision or sharing equipment or facilities, joint planning agreements, and intergovernmental boundary agreements to share tax revenues from development, coordinate land-use decisions, and negotiate other potentially contentious border issues.

The Warner typology is unique in that it refers to interlocal contracts as an intermediate form of cooperation rather than being a formal type within a formal-informal dichotomy as is typically found in the ILC literature. The typology is also unique in that it includes special districts and consolidated governments which are typically given their own branches of research apart from the interlocal cooperation literature. Including these more formal, institutionalized forms of regional cooperation, however, is helpful to

provide a fuller understanding of the scale with which a variety of actors can come together to solve regional problems.

b. Justification for the Use of a More Limited Definition of Interlocal Cooperation

As noted from the outset of this section, my own research questions mayors about their involvement in a much more limited form of interlocal cooperation which I define as, “the sharing and contracting of local government services with other local governments.” The following will demonstrate that the narrow definition of interlocal cooperation incorporated into my survey accounts for the essential elements of definitions found in academic research, and draws necessary distinctions between types to include only those that allow mayors to be included in the policy process.

To reiterate the earlier discussion, an ideal academic definition of ILC states that it is policy-based activity performed under statutory authority between multiple governments that is voluntarily entered into to achieve a shared goal that could not otherwise be achieved as efficiently or effectively alone. While my limited definition explicitly mentions a type of policy-based activity between multiple governments, the other features of the academic definition should be implied. For instance, it seems unlikely that an elected official would have in mind illegal or coercive agreements between governments when responding to the survey instrument.

Where my definition of interlocal cooperation deviates from the above discussion is in its contrast to the Collins and Warner typologies. The Collins typology contains a “consolidation of services” type that would not be included under my definition. The Warner typology contains similar types in “special districts,” singled-function activities, and “consolidated governments,” multi-function activities, both of which appear to be

more defined forms of the Collins type. The reason for excluding this type is that this form of interlocal cooperation transfers power and control of the activity to a third party. With my survey I am attempting to capture what mayors actually do within the policy process. Similarly, the Collins typology also includes “delegated agreements” and “transfer of function” types that could potentially take control of an activity away from a city mayor. Including these types would confuse the issue because mayors would likely not be involved in the policy process. That is not to say, however, that future research would not benefit from examining mayoral decision-making in this policy context. It would be interesting to investigate mayoral involvement in deciding whether to maintain control of an activity or delegate to a third party, and the factors that go into making that kind of decision. That analysis, however, is beyond the scope of my research.

Additionally, while my research makes a distinction between maintaining control versus delegating to a third party, it does not draw a distinction between the level of formality involved as in Warner. It seems likely that most agreements falling under my narrow definition of ILC would be formalized, but it could also include informal decisions that are simply agreed upon under good faith. The time involved and the level of detail that go into the policy process of an informal agreement would seem to be less than that of one that is formalized, but I believe that the same tasks investigated in my research would be conducted. It also might be the case that formal agreements might evolve out of long-standing informal agreements.

II. The Incentives of and Barriers to Interlocal Cooperation

While the preceding definitions of interlocal cooperation explain the forms that cooperation can often take, therefore answering the “what” question of interlocal

cooperation, there still remains the important question of “why” these agreements are used or not. In other words, what incentives are there from seeking governmental partners for service delivery, and what are some of the barriers that prevent cooperation from being a viable option? Though the following discussion cannot cover all possible incentives and barriers, especially those that are specific to certain kinds of policy issues, there are a number of rationales that commonly appear in both academic and governmental texts. In terms of benefits, in what follows I will discuss: 1) the presence of fiscal constraints that encourage participation, 2) cost savings through the creation of scale economies, and 3) building up or maintaining local interests by addressing regional issues. I will conclude with a summary of additional incentives that are no less important, though less frequently mentioned in the relevant literature. This discussion will be followed by a review of some of the more important barriers that might prevent interlocal cooperation, including the number of parties involved, the pursuit of individual interests, and an inability to compromise. Finally, a section will be devoted to explaining how these incentives of and barrier to interlocal cooperation have been incorporated into my own research.

a. Avoidance of Fiscal Constraints

As with any form of government collaboration, the use of cooperative ventures between governments means ceding some control over the formation of the agreement. Given the choice between less control and more control over their own activities, it seems likely that officials would choose to maintain control if for no other reason than to ensure that project directives are followed through as planned. Unfortunately, economic reality can often come between governments and the ideal of complete control. Often quoted

in the more recent interlocal cooperation literature is Robert J. O'Neill, the Executive Director of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) who in 2012 made mention of the interplay of economics and local government policy in stating that,

“[T]he next decade will be a time in which the *fiscal woes* of federal and state governments will leave local and regional governments on their own, struggling to balance the need for innovation against the necessity of making tough choices... it will also be a decade in which local government will lead the way in developing creative solutions to extraordinary problems. There are a number of reasons to be optimistic about this coming decade of local government” (emphasis added). (O'Neill 2012)

While the presence of fiscal constraints may be a burden on other local government activity, their avoidance serves as a benefit to be derived from creative processes such as interlocal cooperation.

In a meta-analysis of academic literature, Bel and Warner (2013) further demonstrate the importance of interlocal cooperation as a means of circumventing fiscal constraints, noting that it is the most frequently used factor in analyses of interlocal cooperation. Much of the theorization employed in this literature takes root in Tiebout (1956), who predicts that increasing local tax burdens will push citizens to demand governmental reform. While city officials are assumed to prefer the in-house production of services, fiscal constraints created by “inadequate tax resources, a population insufficient for the cost-effective provision of services with high fixed costs, or budget deficits stemming from low population growth or outright decline” push local officials to seek external means of service provision (Carr, LeRoux & Shrestha 2009, 416).

Additionally, economic recession in the local fiscal environment, declining state and federal aid, highly restrictive tax limits on local governments in some states (Andrew 2009), aging infrastructure, mandated service responsibilities, escalating pension fund obligations, and an inability to compete globally for jobs (Benton 2013) have contributed to the fiscally challenging environment faced by local governments.

Brown and Potoski (2003) note that of these fiscal constraints, contracting scholars stress the importance of post-1978 property tax limitations in particular. As an example of how property tax limitations are structured, California's Proposition 13, adopted by voters in 1978, mandates a property tax of 1 percent plus the cost of interest on locally approved bonds (Wasi and White 2005). In addition, property is to be assessed at market value at the time of purchase with future assessments to rise by no more than the inflation rate or 2 percent a year, whichever is lower. The intended purpose of property tax limitations was to reduce the role of government in society and encourage more efficient government spending (Brown and Potoski 2003). To illustrate the often absurd impact of restrictive property tax limitations, Wasi and White (2005) provide the example of Warren Buffett who announced in 2003 that he paid "property taxes of \$14,410 (or 2.9 percent) on his \$500,000 home in Omaha, Nebraska, but paid only \$2,264 (or 0.056 percent) on his \$4 million California home" (59). Though property tax limitations may have had a noble purpose, the Buffett example illustrates how they have allowed homeowners to gain a windfall at the expense of meeting public budgets. Though citizens certainly reap the benefits, Brown and Potoski find that tax limitations create incentives for local government to find cheaper alternatives to internal production.

Many scholars believe that property tax limitations and other fiscal constraints are not a temporary phase, but instead represent a “new normal” for local governments (Carr and Hawkins 2013). In the midst of an unstable and restricted economic environment, many options are available to local government including the consolidation of administrative services with other governments, reduction or elimination of investment in lower priority services, increased taxes to make up for rising operation costs, reduction of employee benefits, freezing salaries, and percentage budget reductions (Abels 2012). Abels, however, makes the point that public managers have used these tools of efficiency to their effective limit due to the new political environment characterized by the shortcomings of traditional revenue sources (i.e., property taxes and state aid) and increasingly complex problems and issues. As alternatives to the traditional tools available to local government, greater consolidation of tasks, possibly through special districts, privatization, and interlocal agreements are available. According to ICMA survey findings, 59 percent of municipalities cite “external fiscal pressures, including restrictions placed on raising taxes, e.g. Proposition 13” as reason to explore alternative forms of service delivery (Hefetz and Warner 2004, 181).

Research has shown that the choice of public over private vendors at a time of fiscal stress is in part a result of past experience. Carr and Hawkins (2013) note that the combination of fiscal, demographic, and political similarities, along with a history of successful collaboration, tends to lead to further collaboration. In a study of thirteen cities in Nebraska, Bartle and Swayze (1997) find support for the notion that fiscal pressure is a reason for interlocal cooperation. Morgan and Hirlinger (1991), however, do not find that fiscal stress is a major reason for contracting with other governments in

a much larger study of 615 U.S. cities. Chen and Thurmier (2009) take a more nuanced approach to fiscal stress in their finding that while fiscal condition of the local government is a reason to enter into interlocal agreements, it is secondary to the more primary concerns of effectiveness and efficiency (see also Hawkins 2009 where fewer than 15 percent of local governments surveyed reported “resolve fiscal pressures” as a rationale for interlocal cooperation). Taken together, this body of literature seems to suggest that fiscal stress typically plays an important role in the decision to cooperate with other governments but that whether this is the primary motivation is dependent on the situation.

b. Creating Economies of Scale

Bel and Warner (2013) find that the creation of economies of scale is the second most mentioned factor for why governments engage in cooperation. As noted above, the poor economic environment that local governments are often faced with is conducive to cooperative activities in order to capture cost savings. In addition to benefits such as cutting redundant services and gaining access to services not previously available (Hawkins 2009), interlocal cooperation allows for savings through economies of scale. The concept of economies of scale has its theoretical origins in the production processes of organizations (Drew, Kortt, and Dollery 2014). While “returns to scale” refers to changes in the physical outputs created by altering inputs (such as labor and capital) into a production process, “economies of scale” refers to whether the cost of production varies as a result of input alteration. Applied to local government, the input that is changed under governmental reconfigurations such as consolidation or interlocal agreements is the size of the constituency being served by a government program. The

goal of governmental reconfigurations is to identify an optimal size at which economies of scale, or the fiscal benefits of a program, are maximized. In other words, the goal is to find the point at which the average cost of a unit of output, a government program, is at its lowest per consumer citizen.

Drew, Kortt, and Dollery (2014) note that larger local governments are assumed to possess substantial economies of scale whereby citizens benefit from “from relatively lower administrative costs, increased purchasing power, and improved utilization of equipment” (635). Unfortunately, because not all governments represent large constituencies, in-house delivery and privatization may cease to be viable options, and instead cooperation with other governments is necessary in order to capture these benefits. Somewhat surprisingly, however, cost savings in general may not always be the primary consideration of government officials. In a study of interlocal agreements in the Kansas City metropolitan area, Thurmier and Wood (2002) revealed that administrators are primarily concerned with improving service effectiveness, and are less concerned with governmental efficiency, even noting that costs or savings are often not monitored. Similarly, Marvel and Marvel (2008) find that government-to-government contracts are monitored far less intensively than the provision of the same services when contracted out to a for-profit or non-profit service provider. The authors also suggest that as public pleas for oversight intensify, governments are more likely to turn to non-governmental entities. While these findings may be disconcerting to those who treasure fiscal responsibility, an optimist might argue that, because public officials understand the cost saving benefits of economies of scale, efficiency is assumed, allowing for a greater focus on program effectiveness.

c. Building and Maintaining Local Interests

The final major incentive of interlocal cooperation is the potential to build and maintain local interests, especially among larger, more affluent communities, though this benefit is not always evident. There is an abundance of research and conventional wisdom supporting the argument that wealthier communities may not favor participation in interlocal cooperation from both an individual citizen and community perspective. Greene (1996), for instance, discusses the fact that wealthier individuals tend to be more active and politically conservative, thus advocating for a lesser role for government, including its role in service provision. Joassart-Marcelli and Musso (2005) find in a study of the Southern California region that while poorer cities are more likely to outsource and to prefer interlocal agreements, wealthier cities are more likely to select service providers from the private sector (though see Wood 2006, for greater incidence of interlocal cooperation among wealthier communities in the Kansas City region). Further, in a model utilizing both U.S. Census and ICMA data, Jung and Kim (2009) find that wealthier cities are able to provide their own services independent of interlocal agreements, and are thus able to retain autonomy over their means of service production. Carr and LeRoux (2005) even note that in the area of police and fire services, “some places, particularly smaller, wealthier, suburban communities, residents may hold a belief that the services offered by their jurisdictions are the best available, and therefore seek to exclude non-residents from the benefits of that service” (2). Some have even argued that because the desire for local autonomy is so strong among wealthy communities, legal regimes should be altered to incentivize cooperation in order to solve regional problems (Frug 1999).

Despite these findings, there are dissenting studies. Wealthier communities may possess an incentive to see local services improved in order to maintain or enhance their own property values. For instance, smaller or less affluent communities may be concerned about improving local conditions, while a larger or wealthier neighboring jurisdiction may be pursuing a sort of preemptive, NIMBY (“not-in-my-backyard”) strategy of keeping less affluent citizens from migrating to their area where they could enjoy higher standards in public service. Additionally, Morgan and Hirlinger (1991) note that wealthy communities may show more support for interlocal cooperation because wealthier citizens utilize a wider array of services, can afford more specialized services, and are more supportive of experimentation in service delivery. Support for ILC may also arise where wealthier, more educated citizens able to foresee the long-term impact of a program (Smith 2009).

Despite this discussion of community wealth and whether interlocal agreements can help to build up or maintain community interests, it may instead be the case that community wealth is not important to the decision about whether to enter into these arrangements. In a study of public managers in Iowa, Chen and Thurmier (2009) conclude that fiscal condition is not actually a primary consideration in agreement adoption when compared with program effectiveness and efficiency. Alternatively, the concept of community wealth may be too difficult for communities to assess. Andrew (2009), for instance, calls into question the usefulness of community wealth measures in stating, “Measures of levels or changes in the local property base, per capita personal income, and government spending are commonly used as proxies for fiscal capacity

and fiscal health more generally, but it is not clear whether these measures accurately depict the financial condition of a community” (137).

d. Additional Benefits of Interlocal Cooperation

Finally, there are a number of other potential benefits claimed by advocates of interlocal cooperation such as personal gain for public officials, risk aversion, ease of design, and potential career advancement. A subsequent chapter of this research goes into detail about benefits that elected officials might receive from participation in ILC ventures such as improved political reputation (Bickers 2005) and the potential to gain electoral support when running for higher office (Bickers, Stein, and Post 2010). On the administrative side, Feiock (2007) identifies selective benefits for local leaders to enter into collective agreements. City managers, for instance, can rely on a record of successful service production through interlocal cooperation to advance their careers, finding higher pay employment in larger cities.

City officials may also prefer interlocal cooperation as these agreements are often considered relatively easy to design and implement when compared to other regional methods of service delivery (Kwon and Feiock 2010, Stephens and Wikstrom 2000, Wood 2006). ILC can act to maintain and improve relations between local governments. Wood (2004) finds that governments that are a party to interlocal agreements “share common goals and values, which results in more trust, fewer agency problems, and lower transaction costs” than public-private partnerships (Chen and Thurmier 2009, 538). As alternative to privatization, local officials also use interlocal cooperation to avert risk in services with high levels of asset specificity. Asset specificity refers to “whether specialized investments are required to produce the service” (Brown

and Potoski 2003, 444). Brown and Potoski find that at low to moderate levels of asset specificity, internal production decreases slightly relative to external production. At very high levels of asset-specificity, however, governments do in fact externalize production, and that the primary contract partners for highly asset-specific services are other governments. The authors conclude that as cost pressures rise with highly asset-specific services, governments seek to reduce the risk of opportunism by contracting with other governments.

Finally, interlocal cooperation may provide service delivery benefits to local governments when no other options are available. The 2007 ICMA service delivery survey, for instance, finds that interlocal agreements serve as a preferred alternative to service delivery in rural areas. As Warner and Hefetz (2009) note, “Rural governments traditionally have had trouble attracting private vendors due to the high costs of serving a sparse population and the limited number of rural governmental clients to attract outside vendors” (5). In other words, interlocal cooperation serves a superior form of alternative service delivery when too few private vendors allow for privatization to be a viable option.

e. Barriers to Interlocal Cooperation

Though they are receiving increased attention in academic literature and greater use among local governments, interlocal agreements are no panacea for all local government service provision problems. There are a number of theoretical approaches that have been used to explain the difficulties of interlocal cooperation including resource dependence theory, collaborative management theory, and transaction cost theory (Hawkins 2009). More recently the barriers associated with interlocal agreements

have been understood through the lens of Feiock's institutional collective action (ICA) framework. ICA has been used to investigate interlocal cooperation in a variety of contexts, including grant coalitions (Bickers and Stein 2004), urban service provision (Feiock 2004, 2007), economic development (Feiock, Steinacker, and Park 2009), and regional management of natural resources (Lubell, Schneider, Scholz, and Mete 2002). The main argument of this framework is that ICA will occur when the benefits of cooperation outweigh the costs of service delivery as well as transaction costs. The following will discuss the kinds of costs that might hinder ICA from occurring.

Feiock (2007) refers to the institutional collective action framework as a type of second-generation rational choice model. While first-generation models are based on the assumption that "individuals have complete information, consistent preferences over outcomes, and seek to maximize material benefits (48)," second-generation models add an additional focus on the context of collective decision-making. Heckathorn and Maser (1990) provide an extensive list of contextual factors that might contribute to difficulties in any type of partnership, including the number of principal parties involved, heterogeneity among the principal parties, spatial dispersion of the parties, temporal distribution of costs or benefits, the level of acceptable risk, non-transferability of costs and benefits, and instability of contractual relations. Perhaps the most important contextual factor influencing interlocal cooperation, however, is the addition of multiple levels of preferences that must be considered in institutional collective action. Based on these contextual factors, transaction costs can arise from five sources: bargaining, information, agency, division, and enforcement costs (Feiock, Steinacker, and Park 2009; Inman and Rubinfield 1997, 2000). Feiock et al. (2009) note that bargaining costs,

those associated with the process of negotiation, and enforcement costs, those associated with monitoring and enforcing the contract, present only minimal problems to interlocal cooperation. Bargaining costs come about largely as a result of delays in the cooperation process, but most delays are minimal when compared with the length of the actual agreement. Enforcement costs remain low first due to the nature of the good or service being provided, especially in the case of financial transactions. These costs also remain low because, when formalized, failure to perform means violating a legal agreement. Much more problematic, however, are information, agency, and division costs.

Information costs arise in cooperative agreements because institutions operate without complete information (Heckathorn and Maser 1990). Given the lack of complete information, the most feasible options are not always known to decision makers. Heckathorn and Maser (1990) note that early in the negotiation process there exists a common interest in choosing a policy that will contribute to the collective welfare, but that at this point in the policy process there is no confrontation between winners and losers. The primary difficulty, therefore, is choosing the policy option that best generates mutual gain from all involved in the agreement. A lack of information can also breed distrust between parties where it may be assumed that one party to the agreement is hiding information about possible benefits and costs from other members of the agreement (Inman and Rubinfield 1997). In order to overcome the lack of complete information about possible options, institutions must expend resources in the form of search costs.

The ICA framework assumes that, like individuals, governments have “identifiable interests and the capacity to pursue them (Kwon and Feiock 2010, 877).” When dealing with collective action at the individual level, agency costs arise when members of the collective have divergent preferences. The problem of divergent preferences is further compounded at the institutional level because not only might governments, serving as agents, have varied preferences, but so too might there be varied preferences among principals, or each government’s constituency. Ultimately, public officials are faced with the question of how closely constituent demands address regional needs, and if not, whether straying from those demands could result in a loss of job security for the official.

Finally, division problems complicate matters as they bring into question whether feasible options are equitable for all parties involved. Even after deciding that some action is necessary, public officials may be unable to come to a compromise based on the division of responsibilities and benefits within the agreement. Feiock et al. (2009) note that, “The greater the homogeneity of the participants and the more clear-cut which party benefits most, the higher the political opposition to a cooperative solution may be” (258). According to Kwon and Feiock (2010), in order to improve joint outcomes from cooperative ventures, institutions (agreements, standardized behaviors, or authorities) must be developed.

f. Incentives and Barriers as Explanatory Factors

The importance of the preceding discussion on incentives of and barriers to interlocal cooperation is that they inform our understanding of how elected officials might approach these kinds of agreements. Elected officials, for instance, may see

cooperation as a means to bolster their own electoral support by bringing about community incentives such as avoidance of fiscal constraints, savings through economies of scale, and building local interests. As will be detailed in subsequent chapters, my research directly examines mayors and the values that they believe should be maximized when entering into a shared service agreements. Among these values to be maximized are the financial implications of the agreement, which can be tied to fiscal constraints and savings, and service quality, which can be tied to building local interests.

In terms of barriers, the institutional collective action framework draws our attention to those related to information, agency, and division. Each of these barriers can greatly impede a community's willingness to enter into a regional cooperative agreement. One of the key means of overcoming these barriers is through relationships built upon continuing communication between local governments. My research examines mayoral communication with officials from other local governments, in part, to evaluate whether mayors, as a result of the frequency of their communication, could be beneficial to overcoming these barriers. As will be clear from the following section on academic paradigms for interlocal cooperation, communication not only allows for barriers to be overcome through exchanges of information but is also instrumental in shaping the final policy decision through persuasion and negotiation.

III. Interlocal Cooperation within Paradigms of Public Administration

The traditional understanding of government services, from law enforcement and fire safety to road maintenance and garbage collection viewed local government as the exclusive service provider. The basic metaphor of layer cake federalism would place

these services far below federal or state concerns, allowing for no overlap of responsibility between layers. And there would certainly be no thought of more complex, horizontal relationships between local governments or even non-governmental providers. Over time these divisions would blur, with federal and state government intervening into the realm of local operations. Local governments faced mandates on certain activities by state government, while the federal government engaged in redistributive policies to help economically disadvantaged local governments.

The 1960s marked a major turning point in local government service delivery, as economic and public administration scholars began to endorse the market-based solutions of privatization (Bel, Hebdon, and Warner 2007). Niskanen (1971), for instance, was highly critical of government monopolies on public service delivery, noting that they were likely to result in overproduction and inefficiency. Later, Savas (1987) and others, suggested that greater efficiency and lower costs could instead be found through the contracting out of services. Though privatization is often viewed as being synonymous with the contracting out of services to private and non-profit vendors, it actually encompasses a wide range of activities including asset sales, public-private partnership financing arrangements, club forms of service delivery, and service shedding (Warner 2012). The introduction of privatization strategies was meant to bring about a number of advantages to traditional service production including increased efficiency, in terms of lower costs, elimination of waste, innovation, and increased consumer voice (Warner 2011, 2012; Savas 1987).

In many nations, however, privatization began to fall out of favor by the late 1990s as the movement's results often fell short of expectations (Warner 2012). Brown

(2008) notes that while privatization, and contracting out specifically, may promise efficiency, cost savings, and innovation, it also has a number of potential downsides including corruption and nepotism, fractured accountability, diminished service quality, and the “hollowing” of the State. In fact, research has shown that the benefits of contracting out are limited and may erode over time (Bel et al. 2007, Hodge 2000, Boyne 1998). While privatization techniques turn to the private sector for service provision, government still remains responsible and accountable for the delivery and finance of public services. For some services, the cost savings of privatization may be negated by the cost of maintaining service capabilities as a contingency plan in the event of a private vendor’s failure to perform.

One of the key selling points of privatization is that while government produces a wide variety of services, market vendors produce only one or a few services over which they can gain a higher level of expertise than their government counterpart. If this is the case, the expertise of market vendors can be relied upon to produce more innovative service delivery solutions, resulting in higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency. In the area of environmental concerns, Warner (2011) calls into question the ability of privatization to produce innovative solutions to public problems: “Innovation does not just require the private profit motivations of entrepreneurs, increasingly we recognize that to tackle environmental sustainability concerns we need a more deliberative and collaborative space to imagine alternative possibilities — beyond those the market deems competitive today” (422).

a. Finding a Theoretical Home for Interlocal Cooperation

The traditional mode of public service proved to be too inflexible, while the promise of privatization reforms have often come up short. In their place, a new approach emerged that focused not only on cost efficiency but also service quality, market contestability, and citizen voice. Cooperation between local governments serves as one of many solutions to newer, more complex problems. But where does this kind of government action fit within a broad, theoretical framework? Three theoretical niches where interlocal cooperation and similar governmental tools exist are 1) Issue Network Theory as first explained by Hecló (1978), 2) the New Public Governance as detailed by Salamon (2002), and 3) Regime Theory of Governance of Frederickson (2005).

First, interlocal cooperation and its reliance on multiple actors both in and out of government could be viewed as representing an extension of issue network theory, as discussed in Hecló (1978). In his discussion of the history of issue networks, Hecló noted that state and local employment grew at a much faster rate than federal government employment between 1955 and 1977, due in large part to an array of more challenging issues requiring greater participation between the different levels of government. These same issues also mobilized private and semi-private organizations looking to claim some control over emerging policy issues. As a result of the strengthening of state and local government and non-governmental bodies, the traditional “iron triangles” of government were in some instances supplanted by “issue networks.” Issue networks “comprise a large number of participants with quite variable degrees of mutual commitment or of dependence on others in their environment (275).” In other words, rather than an easily identifiable set of actors with an influence on policy,

issue networks seek to solve complex problems by employing a loose alliance of governmental and non-governmental actors.

Interlocal cooperation at the state and local level of government operates in a manner similar to issue networks. Andrew and Hawkins (2012) provide a definition that highlights the complex nature of interlocal agreements, as those agreements which “enhance regional cooperation by integrating activities vertically and horizontally among different units of government and enable local governments to cope with problems arising from a polycentric governance system” (460). Though traditional policy concerns may be more easily dealt with in-house, problems that cross jurisdictional borders may require different means of government problem solving. Interlocal cooperation provides an alternative to in-house service delivery (analogous to “iron triangles”) by incorporating multiple actors, and placing emphasis on bargaining and negotiation to achieve shared goals much in the same way that issue networks operate (Zeemering 2008; Agranoff and McGuire 1999).

A more modern and precise theoretical home for interlocal cooperation comes in the form of the New Public Governance (NPG) approach. Salamon (2002) provides a useful overview of NPG and draws contrasts to earlier public administration paradigms. Taking a broad perspective, Salamon makes note of the words used to describe two important features of the paradigm. First, rather than “government,” the use of “governance” indicates that problem solving will require the collaboration of many partners from within and outside of government. This same notion can be found in other works such as Garvey (1997), who uses the term “governance” to distinguish between traditional public administration as founded on the politics-administration dichotomy with

its separate sphere of appropriate governmental activity and new theories of public administration that are reliant on diffuse network for public service provision. Second, while collaborative ventures are not “new” strictly speaking, these collaborations “must now be approached in a new, more coherent way, one that explicitly acknowledges the significant challenges that they pose as well as the important opportunities that they create” (Salamon 2002, 8).

Salamon goes on to describe many of the more specific features of the New Public Governance paradigm. Of particular importance to the discussion of interlocal cooperation are the focus on organizational networks, the cooperative relationship between the public and private sector, and the importance of negotiation and persuasion. The first of these features, the focus on organizational networks, is particularly important because it relates to the basic structure of interlocal cooperation. Whereas traditional notions of public administration relied heavily upon the command-and-control benefits of hierarchical government agencies, the organizational networks of New Public Governance allow for shared responsibility across a number of governmental and non-governmental actors. Though centralized control is lost in these arrangements, government gains valuable allies that are often close to the communities that they serve.

The focus on organizational networks within New Public Governance also sets it apart from New Public Management and privatization in that the latter approach each hold an assumption that government and its private partners will have shared goals, whereas NPG advocates rely on principal-agent theory and network theory to show that this may not necessarily be the case. Principal-agent theory focuses on the relationship

between principals who make rules and their agents who carry out those rules. This theory posits that agents will come to know more about the processes that they are carrying out than their principals. Recognizing this knowledge disparity, agents may take advantage of the opportunity to shirk on their responsibilities unless principals are willing to acquire greater knowledge about their activities at great cost to themselves. In other words, the disparity in knowledge between principal and agent may lead to a disparity in goals between the two as well. Applied to privatization, the government as principal could be subject to these moral hazards when working with private sector agents in public service delivery.

Network theory further adds that even when principal and agent values align, indirect tools of governance such as interlocal cooperation provide significant management challenges for the principal. To explain why these interactions are so difficult to manage, Salamon (2002) relies on four key attributes of network theory (13). First, “pluriformity” tells us that because networks engage a wide range of actors, each actor will have only a limited amount of experience collaborating with and information about each other actor. In the case of interlocal cooperation, such a lack of experience, understanding, and trust between parties can bring about program failure. Second, “self-referentiality” refers to the fact that the multiple actors within a network will each have their own perspectives and incentives. As discussed above in the section on barriers to interlocal cooperation, this challenge is compounded by the fact that both public officials and their constituents may not share the same perspectives on public policy.

Third, the network theory concept of “asymmetric interdependencies” notes that while all actors within a network are dependent on each other, disparities between the parties in terms of urgency of need or resources place the parties at an imbalance. This characteristic of networks is often present in examples of interlocal cooperation involving “hub” cities or larger markets that serve as a go-to partner for smaller jurisdictions that surround it. Finally, “dynamism,” Salamon (2002) explains, is an understanding that each of the aforementioned features of networks, in other words, the range of familiarity, incentives, and dependence on one another, are subject to change over time. Dynamism in the context of interlocal cooperation is especially important to recognize early in the policy process because the flexibility or rigidity of an agreement can be decided upon in order to account for possible changes. Taken together, these four features of network theory allow government officials to more thoughtfully consider the challenges of networked governance rather than assuming away the problems inherent in NPM and private contracting.

The second major feature of the New Public Governance paradigm that is visible in interlocal cooperation is the more positive, less adversarial, relationship between the public and the private sector. As Salamon (2002) states, NPG does not favor either the public or private sector but instead represents a “blend” of these sectors, each retaining their own individuality in collaboration, not competition, with one another (14). While it is true that interlocal cooperation, for instance, necessarily requires the presence of two or more public sector entities and does not at all require private sector interaction, private sector partners are not viewed as the sole means of achieving governmental goals (as in privatization) nor as anathema to those purposes either (as in traditional public

administration theory). It is this individuality or separateness from government, in fact, that makes private sector involvement in interlocal cooperation so attractive, such as in instances of program monitoring where government may not possess the ability to be unbiased about its own performance.

Third, like Heclo's issue network approach, New Public Governance places an emphasis on negotiation and persuasion. Whereas traditional public administration places control in a centralized government and privatization takes directions from the market, networked government maintains government control but with management that provides incentives to the actors over which they lack perfect control (Salamon 2002, 15). The results of interlocal cooperation will almost always represent a compromise position between different jurisdictions and even within those jurisdictions there may be those for and against cooperation. Given the likelihood that constituent proponents of cooperation may not get all that they hope for out of cooperation and that opponents will be dissatisfied with any form of cooperation, government officials may see other forms of service delivery as more politically safe routes to take. With the possibility of a hostile political environment, cooperative leadership must be willing to bargain and persuade in order to overcome this and other potential hurdles.

Finally, interlocal cooperation finds a theoretical home in the Regime Theory of Governance (Frederickson 2005). Frederickson explains that the term "governance" has come to mean many different things, and that a useful approach for clarifying what that term means would be to employ regime theory from the field of international relations. Doing so, Frederickson identifies a new governance theory in three parts:

“(1) vertical and horizontal inter-jurisdictional and inter-organizational cooperation; (2) extension of the state or jurisdiction by contracts or grants to third parties, including sub-governments; and (3) form of public non-jurisdictional or nongovernmental policy making and implementation.” (Frederickson 2005, 294)

Taken together, Frederickson then defines “governance” as “a distinct form of public administration, [that] has to do with the extension of the state or jurisdiction either beyond its boundaries, through third parties, or by nongovernmental institutions” (295). The first part of this definition, which Frederickson refers to as inter-jurisdictional governance, consists of three features, 1) governmental and non-governmental actors representing their interests, 2) in a voluntary form of cooperation, and 3) almost exclusively within a specific policy area. Clearly, based on this definition of inter-jurisdictional governance, interlocal cooperation falls within this theoretical framework. What makes this framework so attractive as a means of studying ILC is that it first narrows the definition of what should be considered “governance.” Second, and more importantly, this framework allows for the same logic and accumulated knowledge that helped to evolve the concept of regime theory in international relations, which existed far earlier than governance theory in public administration, to be applied to how we study and think about interlocal cooperation.

Though each of these theoretical approaches has something to contribute to the discussion of interlocal cooperation, my own preference for this research is to consider mayoral involvement through the lens of New Public Governance. Again, NPG places an emphasis on bargaining and persuasion, and I see those roles as being particularly

suited to elected officials given their experience in the campaign setting. Many of the tasks of mayors in the ILC process that I examine in this study, such as collaboration and delegation to other parties, would necessarily have to be based on finding some form of common ground with others. It is unlikely that even the crafting of the specific terms of agreements would be done unilaterally and would require some give-and-take on the part of the official. In other words, the tasks that are evaluated in this study should be viewed with an underlying assumption that mayors are utilizing their experience as a communicator to try and reach an optimal outcome for his or her jurisdiction.

V. Conclusion

The purposes of this chapter are to discuss and examine interlocal agreements generally and to provide some insights into how mayors might view their potential involvement in this form of service delivery. One thing that should be very clear from the review of this literature, however, is that it does very little in the way of directly addressing the topic at hand. In fact, there has been very little in the way of research on this topic and even less theory to help explain how mayors fit into the picture of interlocal cooperation. Still, there are several insights that we can try to draw from the existing literature. First, the very definition of interlocal cooperation notes that it is a form of government action, and for many, the face of the government is the executive. In order to bring out positive outcomes through regional policy, mayors should be involved in the process not only to utilize their experience as communicators, but also to fulfill the representative role that citizens place upon them as well. In the next chapter, I propose that there are a number of different tasks that mayors can take on in the ILC process,

and seek to explain why mayors may or may not feel comfortable performing each. This research is important because it moves beyond simply stating that mayors should be involved in a general sense by examining what their survey responses might reveal about how mayors might be best utilized across a variety of specific tasks. If those involved in the ILC process know best how to take advantage of their skill sets, mayors may be able to provide the kind of leadership that can benefit their community.

Chapter 3: Elected Officials and Interlocal Cooperation

“It does not appear that leaders or their constituents are devoting much attention to the cross-jurisdictional issues of regional governance, but they will need to start doing so and provide leadership at the regional as well as the jurisdictional level.”

- James H. Svara (2008, S45)

This chapter on interlocal cooperation (ILC) examines how elected officials, specifically city mayors, might choose to participate in this form of service delivery and why. This chapter seeks to build upon the emerging body of research concerning elected officials and interlocal cooperation. I will first provide a review of research exploring the relationship of professional administrators and elected officials in interlocal agreements. I will then detail my own research, which examines mayors of large cities and their comfort level in performing certain defined tasks within the policy process of interlocal cooperation. Through an analysis of survey findings of mayors across a ten-state region, my research finds several statistically significant correlations between these tasks and variables that are theoretically relevant to this form of local service delivery. Following an earlier line of research by Bickers, Stein, and Post (2010), I examine the popular notion that city mayors lack an electoral incentive to participate in interlocal cooperation. I utilize political ambition theory (Schlesinger 1966) to examine whether tasks associated with greater public engagement are especially appealing to mayors who have identified themselves as being potentially interested in seeking higher office at some point in their career.

The aim of this research is to understand more about mayors and their involvement in interlocal cooperation. From an academic perspective, I want to explore the possibility that mayors leverage success within the ILC context as a means of

building electoral support, especially in races for higher office. Additionally, a more detailed understanding of the activities that mayors would prefer to conduct in the ILC process could aid future administrators in structuring the responsibilities allotted to mayors and other parties to a cooperative agreement. Through their keen understanding of political communications with the public and the media, elected officials may be able to aid the ILC process in a number of ways such as increasing public support and eliciting greater public participation in the policymaking process. I believe that this study is timely in that ILC has been the subject of increased attention over the last decade and that investigation of this topic will only increase moving forward. According to ICMA findings on methods of service delivery, cooperative service provision has shown continued growth, likely as a result of both fiscal pressure that can make direct provision unfeasible and negative externalities that can make contracting with the private sector unattractive.

I. Literature Review

The area of research devoted to elected officials has not received as much attention as other aspects of interlocal cooperation, primarily because of the presumption that ILC is a realm of public policy to be left exclusively to professional administrators. This impression is found among prominent researchers in the field such as H. George Frederickson, who stated plainly that, “[t]here are few incentives for elected officials to spend much energy or political capital in the interest of non-constituents who cannot vote for them” (1999). The primary incentive that is lacking in Frederickson’s estimation is the possibility for elected officials to turn regional action into votes. Mayors of large cities, for instance, would seem to have very little in the way of an electoral incentive to

engage in interlocal activity since those that stand the most to gain by these arrangements are non-constituents that are unable to vote in future city elections. In this situation, the only opportunity for an electoral gain would be to hope that constituents are informed enough to understand how their mayor was instrumental in the cooperation process. But even then mayors would only be seeking to maintain the political office that they currently hold. If retaining one's own office is the only goal, then locally targeted actions would most likely have a greater utility for these mayors than regional policy solutions would.

The idea that interlocal cooperation should simply be left to administrators goes deeper than just electoral incentives though. Due to the regional scope of ILC, the length of term in office for appointed officials, and the more direct opportunity for career enhancement, it is not unreasonable to see how administrators would be viewed as the most appropriate governmental actors for these ventures. Again, the most fundamental aspect of interlocal cooperation is that it is regional in scope. The basic nature of this aspect of ILC, however, should not be overlooked when considering the appropriate parties to be included among a pool of appointed and elected officials. With so much emphasis on elections, elected officials can be blinded to the scope of issues as their impact crosses jurisdictional borders (Frederickson 1999; Chen and Thurmier 2009). Shielded from political concerns that require constant interaction with the public, administrators can instead focus on reaching outside of their own jurisdictions to build the kind of networks that can form the basis of regional policymaking.

Professional administrators also tend to serve longer terms than their elected counterparts, providing them with a number of benefits when it comes to interlocal

cooperation. First, longer terms contribute to the higher level of policy expertise among administrators because they allow for extended involvement with professional associations. These professional associations are likely to be comprised of other administrators that may share a common educational background (LeRoux, Brandenburg, and Pandey 2010; Frederickson 1999). Policy expertise is important because interlocal cooperation, especially agreements establishing long-term service provision relationships, are apt to be technical in nature, requiring the kind of expert knowledge that an elected official is unlikely to possess. Possessing technical expertise, as Raab (2002) suggests, may allow professional administrators to more quickly take control as rapid change or technical difficulties occur than elected officials. Even before beginning their terms, professional administrators should have a leg up on elected officials in terms of expertise and how it contributes to effective cooperation. Professional administrators are more likely to share common training, experiences, values, and preferences with administrators in other jurisdictions than elected officials who are more likely to come from a variety of different backgrounds (Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood 2004). Given the lack of time and political limitations, professional administrators should be able to build on this knowledge base.

In contrast, mayors are likely to find it difficult to build policy expertise due to continued electoral demands, the growing number of cities adopting terms limits (DeSoto, Tajalli, and Opheim 2006), and even the size of the constituency. As Oliver (2000) discusses, residents in larger cities may be less involved in local politics, and therefore less likely to bring local issues to light by contacting their elected representatives. Without cues from their constituency, mayors may not know what they

need to know when it comes to policy issues in their own area, let alone regional concerns. In addition to greater policy expertise, longer terms also provide administrators with a more long-term perspective of community needs, whereas elected officials may only care about achieving more actionable short-term goals (Clingermayer and Feiock 2001). Longer terms are especially beneficial to administrators because they allow for proposals, even popular proposals, from elected officials to be delayed indefinitely if they are adverse to regional concerns.

Finally, though elected officials may see little in the way of an electoral benefit for participating in interlocal agreements, LeRoux and Pandey (2011) suggest that professional administrators may engage in interlocal agreements to advance their own careers. To support this argument the authors cite the high turn-over of city managers (DeHoog and Whitaker 1990) and the fact that at least a quarter of city managers in large cities in America have worked their way up from the same position in smaller cities (Watson and Hassett 2004). The authors then tie ambition to interlocal cooperation by citing Teske and Schneider (1994), whose work finds that city managers tend to emerge as the primary policy entrepreneurs among local government actors and that successful policy implementation is the best means of enhancing a city manager's reputation and career mobility. Taken together, not only are city managers viewed as having better opportunity and expertise to bring about success in cooperative ventures, they may also have a personal motivation to see policy succeed.

a. Elected Officials in Interlocal Cooperation Research

In spite of all of the arguments for why public managers may be best suited to participate in interlocal cooperation, the local elected official should not be written off entirely. Studies of ILC are an emerging area within the public administration literature, and new to this research field is an understanding of how elected officials can be useful to this form of policy. Mayors are seen as “the most active elected officials in intergovernmental relations” (Zeemering 2008, 733), but what else do we know to this point? Often, elected officials appear in the ILC research as passing notes in a larger work about procedure or the motivation of public servants. Procedurally, for instance, we know that as interlocal agreements rise in formality, such as in the case of agreements for the sharing of public services, elected members of a city council are often required to ratify agreements through a formal resolution (Feiock 2008). But rather than being relegated to footnotes or describing their activity simply as a final, perfunctory role, elected officials can serve important roles in ILC and are, therefore, deserving of closer examination. Based on an analysis of related literature, two of the primary benefits of the involvement of elected officials are their connection to the constituents and their ability to bring trusted governmental partners into cooperation discussions.

The relationship that mayors have with their constituents is unique among local public officials and serves as a potential benefit for any type of policy that might be pursued. For many constituents, the mayor is “both the most visible person in the community and, on questions of public policy, probably the most influential” (Salisbury 1964, 787). When local policy fails, citizens are likely to hold a mayor accountable, even

when certain factors that would lead to policy success are out of the mayor's control (Arnold and Carnes 2012). An elected official that pursues policy that is contrary to the wishes of his or her constituency does so at his/her political peril (Gerber and Gibson 2005).³ But far from the impression given in some of the academic literature, there is no reason that regional and local interests cannot coincide. From the constituent perspective, resolving a regional problem may prevent the intensity of the problem from worsening. Alternatively, as suggested in the previous chapter, local citizens may want to solve regional problems in order to prevent outsiders from relocating to their area for its superior service provision. Elected officials may also recognize the possibility of service-based citizen migration, and utilize interlocal cooperation to prevent the dilution of their own electoral support (Bickers 2005).

Arguably the most important benefit of elected official involvement is the ability to establish trust between parties to an interlocal agreement. Interlocal agreements are a form of collective action in government where multiple parties must come to a mutual understanding about the terms of the agreement. In other forms of collective action, arriving at a mutual understanding can be difficult based on the value preferences and resources that a party brings into the agreement discussions. The difficulty of reaching a consensus is compounded in the case of interlocal agreements because it is likely that not only will municipal leaders hold different backgrounds, but so too will the constituents they serve. In reaching a consensus on a multi-jurisdictional arrangement, public officials are given the difficult task of arriving at a compromise that will be

³ Feiock (2007) notes that the preferences of city council members are more likely to match those of their constituents in smaller geographic areas than in larger areas with at-large elections where council preferences are more likely to match those of the executive.

pleasing to both themselves and their varied constituents. Given the delicate nature of this task, it is important that trust be established between the parties to the agreement to ensure that the compromise that is agreed upon is the policy that is delivered.

An elected official can be beneficial to the agreement process through his or her close connection to the public and to other elected officials. In the area of interlocal cooperation, Feiock (2007) notes that trust and performance expectations are built through repeat interactions and previous relationships among local officials. One setting that provides such an opportunity for interaction and trust-building is membership in social networks of administrators and elected officials (Carr and Hawkins 2013). Beyond simply developing interpersonal trust, social networks may also serve as an important source for policy ideas and regional cooperation. Policy-specific networks, such as councils of government, which are considered a type of interlocal agreement, can provide a venue for policy creation. Wood (2006), for instance, finds that mayors and council members from the Kansas City metropolitan area regularly participate in councils of government. Alternatively, more general assemblies, such as regional planning commissions may provide for a more free discussion of past policy success or current issues that might inspire cooperation.

b. Studies of Elected Officials and Interlocal Cooperation

One of the more prominent names in research on elected officials and interlocal cooperation is Eric Zeemering. Two of Zeemering's studies are particularly worth reviewing because they form a basis for my research. The first study compares the interests in interlocal cooperation between city managers and city council members in the council-manager context (Zeemering 2008), while the second examines the roles

that elected officials play within the interlocal cooperation context (Zeemering 2015). Each study contributes to the notion, which is fundamental to my research, that the policy process of interlocal cooperation provides a variety of opportunities for elected officials to realize their own goals.

Zeemering (2008) examines city council members' interests in the development of interlocal cooperation and contrasts those interests with those of city managers. Through a series of personal interviews, three areas are examined: entrepreneurship and problem identification, the negotiation of cooperation, and public representation and education. As will be detailed below and presented in Table 3-1, these interests provided a basis for my own research, as I have taken these three categories and expanded them into eleven, more specific policy roles within the interlocal cooperation process.

In the first of these interests, "entrepreneurship and problem identification," city council members can choose to initiate the creation of solutions to regional problems. As entrepreneurs, elected officials may be able to reduce costs and improve the quality of public services. In addition to achieving these benefits, Zeemering explains that city council members may be particularly suited to play the role of cooperative policy entrepreneur due to their ties to the public and other government officials. Many city council members have other occupations in addition to their political office. By being embedded in the public, as opposed to working full time in government as is the case with professional administrators, city council members are in a better position to hear first-hand the complaints of citizens. The study also revealed that city council members are already in regular contact with other public officials outside of any cooperative

context, with 61.7 percent of interviewees reporting that they speak with other officials “often” and another 29.8 percent reporting “some” communication (Zeemering 2008). Taken together, elected officials appear to be more responsive to citizen demand for action by being closer to the public than public administrators and may be particularly well-suited to initiate regional solutions through their continued communication with other public actors outside of their own jurisdiction.

The second interest is “negotiation of cooperation,” or the crafting of specific contractual provisions in an interlocal agreement. The common argument that elected officials are only jurisdictionally-interested, rational actors should lead to the conclusion that city council members would not be concerned with such a technical role in the interlocal policy process. Further, it might be supposed that elected officials would lack the expertise to craft agreements that might involve the more technical aspects of service provision. Zeemering, however, finds that city council members have overriding considerations in finance and policy control that attract them to the creation of contractual terms. Interlocal agreements often involve large-scale capital investment, such as water and wastewater infrastructure programs, and a shift of authority over these programs to a partnership or a network of actors. It is in the interest of elected officials to become involved in the creation of contract provisions in order to gain the benefits of an agreement but also to protect their own jurisdictions from burdensome financial and control concerns. Zeemering also notes that elected officials have an interest in ensuring the clarity and equity of distribution costs for citizens, administrators, and future elected officials.

Third, Zeemering (2008) discusses city council members' interest in "public representation and education." From a rational choice perspective, the roles of representative and policy educator would seem to be conducive to elected officials' desire to please their constituents, as they allow officials an opportunity to shape program perception with the public. Unfortunately, Zeemering notes that elected officials report a lack of interest from the general public about interlocal agreements and that elected officials instead often face program opposition from "small but mobilized groups" (737). Though these pockets of opposition are small, they can generate enough attention to derail government programs, negating months of contract negotiation. Understanding the lack of general interest and the potentially destructive power of small local interests is important because it allows mayors to focus on identifying potential opponents and tailoring their messages about cooperation to mitigate their impact. Zeemering offers a few alternatives to combat opposition such as the development of new public participation strategies, a focus on the educational role in interlocal agreement discussions, and training on consensus and coalition building.

Finally, Zeemering (2015) assesses whether local elected officials express different levels of support for different roles in interlocal cooperation. Part of this study, which I replicated in my own research, questioned elected officials about six different roles that could be taken on in the interlocal cooperation process. These roles are important because elected officials should show greater levels of support for roles that correspond with their own strengths or interests. While the following roles, Zeemering noted, do not represent an exhaustive list of all possible roles for elected officials, they do represent a good starting point for research in this area. Four statements placed

mayors in a “protective” role, with two roles presented mayors as advocates for either their jurisdiction or the jurisdiction’s employees and a second pair of roles related to the protection of community identity and independence. According to Zeemering, officials expressing a disposition toward protective roles should be less inclined to participate in interlocal cooperation, as these types of arrangements can result in a loss of policy control.

The final two roles pertain to relationship building within extra-jurisdictional actors: one role seeking to benefit all involved governmental parties and a second role focusing relationship building with other local governments and how those relationships might be beneficial to one’s own political career. While Zeemering makes the point that elected officials expressing an interest in building these relationships should be more likely to favor interlocal cooperation, this final role related to political career interests requires closer examination. Are elected officials advancing their own political careers, and if so, how might interlocal cooperation provide elected officials with an electoral benefit? The cynic will answer to the first question quickly with a resounding affirmation, but the second question has largely gone unexplored in the relevant literature.

c. The Political Motivation of Elected Officials

The motivations of elected officials, at all levels of government, have been a major subject of inquiry in political science, and many of the insights from other venues of activity are pertinent to the examination of elected officials in this setting. One of the preeminent texts examining the behavior of elected officials is David Mayhew’s *Congress: the Electoral Connection* (1974). One of the key contributions of this work is the argument that the primary motivating factor for behavior for members of Congress

(MCs) is reelection. In furtherance of electoral goals, MCs participate in three primary tasks: advertising, credit-claiming, and position-taking. Whether the action is taking advantage of the franking privilege (advertising), touting one's success at bringing federal dollars back to their jurisdiction through pork barrel policies (credit-claiming), or announcing one's position on an issue through a roll call vote (position-taking), the end of each of these activities winning reelection. Though even Mayhew concedes that his view of elected officials as single-minded, electoral creatures is merely an abstraction by which officials might be evaluated, there is an undeniable logic to the notion that without achieving reelection, any other political goals of MCs cannot be met (Mayhew 1974, 2004; Carson and Jenkins 2011).

Mayhew's same argument about members of Congress can be extended to other elected officials. It seems likely that city mayors would possess a desire for reelection, even if that desire is not their sole motivating factor, and would utilize their own forms of advertising, credit-claiming, and position-taking in order to secure their office. Successful interlocal cooperation, for instance, could provide mayors with an opportunity for credit-claiming where agreements have led to decreased costs in service provision or have resulted in positive outcomes such as job growth (Hawkins 2009; Clingermayer and Feiock 2001; Steinacker 2004). LeRoux and Carr (2005), for instance, suggest that elected officials may gain an electoral benefit by providing a service through cooperation without increasing taxes. Research even suggests that, at times, political ambitions can lead local officials to promote interlocal cooperation in spite of weak demand from citizens (Kwon and Feiock 2010; Bickers, Stein, and Post 2010; Gillette 2000). In other words, local officials may in fact live up to Mayhew's

myopic view of electoral motivation if constituent demands are not what is actually driving cooperative ventures.

It is difficult at first blush, however, to discern a way in which local officials could benefit in an electoral sense by serving constituents outside of their jurisdiction. The link between interlocal agreements and electoral motivation is much clearer when allowing for the possibility that local officials, especially city mayors, might consider the possibility of running for a higher office in the state or federal government. According to Schlesinger (1966), political ambition can take one of three forms: “discrete” ambition occurs when candidates desire to serve in office for only a single term; “static” ambition occurs when candidates desire multiple terms within the same office; and “progressive” ambition occurs when candidates desire to “climb the political ladder” by capitalizing on success within one office to obtain an elected office at a higher level of government. Like Mayhew (1974), Schlesinger posits that an official’s behavior will be dictated by his or her electoral goals but distinguishes between the goals of these three very different types. Prewitt and Nowlin (1969) clarify that the progressively ambitious politician is more likely than the non-progressively ambitious politician to hold policy perspectives associated with regional, state, and federal government. In other words, elected officials seeking to improve their position may be predisposed to seeking out creative means of regional problem solving such as interlocal cooperation.

Applying Mayhew and Schlesinger to mayors and interlocal cooperation, the progressively ambitious officials should be motivated to participate in interlocal cooperation discussions in order to enhance his or her career opportunities. Among city managers, LeRoux and Pandey (2011) find support for this theory by noting an

inclination toward selling public services to other local governments among progressively ambitious managers. This study further notes that these same managers are less likely to buy services from other jurisdictions, a finding that emphasizes the role of progressively ambitious city managers as policy entrepreneurs. Among elected officials, Bickers, Stein, and Post (2010) test this theory in a study of survey data from 108 cities on the incidence of interlocal agreements and electoral data of city council members and mayors from those cities from 2002 to 2006. Interestingly, the authors find what appear to be two contradictory findings. First, interlocal agreements appear to inhibit the likelihood of progressively ambitious politicians from entering into races for higher office. Second, interlocal agreements were significantly associated with a higher rate of success among those who enter races for higher office. The authors argue that these contradictory findings could indicate that where intergovernmental agreements are numerous, progressively ambitious politicians are often unable to build support for a bid at higher office. But when faced with an open seat or weak incumbent, progressively ambitious politicians are able to use the success of intergovernmental agreements to build support for their campaigns. In other words, interlocal agreements are a useful tool when an opportunity presents itself but are not powerful enough to overcome support for an incumbent that is not otherwise perceived as weak.

II. Research Questions & Study Design

The preceding literature informs us of several important points. Despite the traditional understanding of public managers as the key players in interlocal cooperation, elected officials can also perform tasks within this process beyond just ratifying agreements. In fact, due to a number of factors including their connection to constituents, the ability to

include trusted partners and the ability to serve as a policy entrepreneur, local elected officials may be particularly suited to take part in cooperative ventures. The roles that elected officials can play in the cooperative process are diverse, with the potential to be involved in problem identification, negotiation, and public representation. While involvement may bring about more effective and efficient service, research on electoral connection and ambition theory can be applied to this context to suggest that interlocal cooperation might also assist elected officials with personal goals related to achieving higher office. Given this background on elected officials and interlocal cooperation, the purpose of this research is to answer the question of *what* tasks elected officials actually want to participate in within the cooperative process and begin to understand *why* they want to perform these tasks. Six variables based on characteristics of mayors and the cities they represent will be used to differentiate between types of mayors. In addition, this research includes a very direct measure of political ambition to help understand whether electoral goals influence the decision to participate in interlocal cooperation. The following discussion will detail the study design for this research, including survey design, variables used and their operationalization, and the statistical methods used to analyze this data.

a. Survey Design

The primary data source for this research is a four-page mail survey administered between August and November of 2015. The survey instrument, found in Appendix A, and accompanying materials were created with the assistance of a variety of sources, including Dillman (1977) and researcher Eric Zeemering who shared two similar surveys of public officials in this policy area. The survey was distributed to mayors of cities with a

population greater than 50,000 residents across a ten-state, southeastern region of the United States. Alphabetically listed, the states included in the survey are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. As discussed further below, population was used as a filter to include only those cities that are most likely to be sought after by smaller governments to assist in interlocal cooperative ventures. The use of larger cities is also especially fitting for the purpose of evaluating the behavior of elected officials. Given their experience and visibility as the executive of a large city, these mayors are uniquely situated to seek higher office. City mayors in this study received an initial survey mailing, a follow-up postcard one week later, and a new survey and cover letter three and seven weeks following the initial survey mailing. In total, 64 responses were received out of a total of 137 surveys sent, a response rate of just over 46 percent. This response rate exceeds expectations as response rates of surveys of elected officials are typically low.⁴

As listed in Table 3-1, the survey instrument asked mayors to rank their “comfort” level with performing eleven tasks associated with interlocal cooperation. These tasks were created, in part, by adapting the traditional policy cycle model, attributed to Lasswell (1951), to the cooperative context. This model is commonly characterized by five or more stages, typically including problem identification, agenda setting, policy making, implementation, and evaluation. Additional tasks involving communications with the public, such as increasing awareness, were included in the survey to reflect political aspects of cooperation that city mayors could take on. Finally, because interlocal

⁴ See, for instance, Zeemering (2015) with a response rate of just over 27% or Boyne (1998) for concerns about low response rates in government contracting research.

cooperation is a collaborative effort, tasks related to incorporating private and public partners, as well as delegation of duties to other parties, were included. Mayors ranked each task on a 1-to-7 scale, from very uncomfortable to very comfortable. The key term used to investigate elected officials “comfort” does not appear to be typical within public administration literature. Because this term is atypical within the literature, the following will discuss the two main reasons why the term is appropriate for this study and will address potential criticisms.

First, the “comfort” terms allows the research to discover what mayors would want to do given the *opportunity* to participate in interlocal cooperation. Employing this term, a mayor can respond to questions about interlocal cooperation despite a lack of time in office to participate, such as in the case of a mayor new to his or her office. Additionally, the comfort term allows mayors to answer questions about interlocal cooperation despite past experience of having been excluded from the process entirely or relegated to less preferred tasks by other actors within the process. In other words, the comfort term allows allows mayors to respond based on preference, not experience. Second, a measure of comfort, as opposed to “willingness,” allows me to draw a distinction between what a mayor would desire to do and what a mayor would do out of a sense of duty to his or her elected position. In other words, it may be the case that elected officials would perform one or more tasks out of a sense of responsibility to those he or she serves, such as those related to public representation, but would rather be involved in other tasks, such as those more technical aspects of cooperation. Though this distinction draws a fine line between duty and desire, it is an important distinction because elected officials may perform those tasks which he or she actually

Table 3-1: Mayoral Tasks Associated with Interlocal Cooperation

Identifying problems that require interlocal cooperation.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	6.39 (0.81)
	Median	7
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	4 / 7
Increasing public awareness of interlocal cooperation.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	6.17 (1.03)
	Median	6.5
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7
Informing and educating public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	6.28 (0.88)
	Median	6.5
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7
Networking to incorporate individuals or groups with issue expertise.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	6.25 (0.93)
	Median	6
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7
Collaborating with other public officials.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	6.36 (0.90)
	Median	7
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7
Collaborating with private parties (individual citizens or groups).	Mean (Std. Dev.)	6.27 (0.91)
	Median	6.5
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7

All tasks measured on a 7-point scale from "Very Comfortable" (7) to "Very Uncomfortable" (1).

Table 3-1: Mayoral Tasks Associated with Interlocal Cooperation (cont.)

Delegating power to other individuals or groups.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	5.61 (1.39)
	Median	6
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	1 / 7
Creating the specific terms of interlocal agreements.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	5.59 (1.24)
	Median	6
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	2 / 7
Implementing interlocal agreement activities or programs.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	5.83 (1.05)
	Median	6
	Mode	6
	Min. / Max.	2 / 7
Monitoring of interlocal agreement activities or programs.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	5.67 (1.05)
	Median	6
	Mode	6
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7
Evaluating the long-term success of interlocal cooperation.	Mean (Std. Dev.)	5.91 (1.09)
	Median	6
	Mode	7
	Min. / Max.	3 / 7

All tasks measured on a 7-point scale from “Very Comfortable” (7) to “Very Uncomfortable” (1).

wishes to perform at a more optimal level than to which are performed simply out of duty.

Taken together, however, these arguments do not make the claim that the “comfort” term is a perfect measure of task preference. Rather, I maintain that it is an acceptable measure. The primary criticism of the term is that its meaning may be

unclear. The mean results of this portion of the survey, reported in Table 3-1, may support this criticism, as the results for each task skewed toward the positive end of the comfort continuum. Alternatively, the skewing of responses may have resulted from a social bias where mayors were unwilling to admit a lack of comfort with any particular role because doing so would suggest weakness or lack of competence. No matter the reason for these results, it may be necessary to provide a clear definition of what is meant by the term in order to strengthen use of the “comfort.”

b. Variables

Beyond identifying mayoral comfort for certain tasks within the cooperative process, the goal of this research is to examine how preferences differ based on certain characteristics of mayors and the cities that they represent. The variables to be examined in this research include length of term in office, city size, racial homogeneity, city type, interest in running for higher office, and value preference between financial concerns and service quality. These variables were chosen for a variety of reasons. First, as described in the paragraphs below, each variable has strong theoretical significance to studies of interlocal cooperation and more broadly to studies of local government service provision. Many of the variables chosen in this study also have been commonly used in studies of ILC, as evidenced by a meta-analysis of studies on this topic conducted by Bel and Warner (2013), lending academic support to the relevance of their use. Finally, the variables chosen in this survey were done so for practical purposes. Data for the variables chosen in this survey were less burdensome to obtain because they were gathered through the survey instrument or through publicly available sources such as the U.S. Census and other governmental websites. This

study is by no means an exhaustive study of variables that could impact mayors and their involvement with ILC, but other variables, especially those related to local fiscal stress, are much more difficult to gather given limited resources.

The following variables about mayors and their cities have been chosen for inclusion in this study: length of term, administrative structure of the city, population size, and racial homogeneity of the population. Two additional terms were added that are unique to this study: interest in running for higher office, and a dichotomous variable that accounts for mayoral concern for either finances or service quality when dealing with cooperative efforts. The primary function of each variable incorporated into this study is examine their relationship with the mayoral comfort level of tasks associated with the interlocal cooperation process. The following discussion will describe why each variable is appropriate for this research.

i. Length of Term in Office

The length of term in office—that is, how long a mayor has held his or her position—is important in policy studies generally because greater time in office provides elected officials with more opportunities to develop expertise in both policy and policymaking (Hamm and Moncrief 2004; Nice 1994). Greater time in office also allows elected officials to deliberate on policy matters longer in order to come up with the best means of achieving their policy goals (DeSoto, Tajalli, and Opheim 2006) and may have the effect of shifting policy priorities from short-term to long-term concerns. Within the interlocal cooperation context, longer terms in office also provide elected officials a greater opportunity to develop political networks with other elected officials that could be beneficial to cooperation.

As can be seen in Table 3-2 below, of the 64 respondents to the survey, the mean or average number of years spent in office is just over seven (7) years, with a range of zero (0) to twenty-four (24) years in office. Twelve (12) respondent mayors, or 18.75% of respondents, had been in office for a year or less. In fact, one (1) year in office was the mode, or most reported term, of this data. Based on these responses alone, nearly 1 out of 5 mayors surveyed would have had very little opportunity to work in the ILC context as a mayor, though previous experience in either the public or private sector was not examined in this study.

With regard to the 11 tasks presented in the survey instrument, I would anticipate that greater length of term in office would be most closely correlated with comfort with more technical tasks such as creation of terms of interlocal cooperation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and less closely correlated with the more public communication tasks such as increasing awareness and education. The reasons for this are two-fold: First, greater expertise through longer terms should provide mayors with a higher comfort level with technical tasks. A more seasoned mayor may have more opportunities to work with public administrators and in a regional policymaking

Table 3-2: Descriptive Statistics for Length of Term in Office (in Years)

Mean	7.09
Standard Deviation	6.37
Median	5
Mode	1
Minimum	0
Maximum	24

N = 64

context. Second, mayors who have served longer terms should have more secure electoral support, so building relationships with constituents through public communication tasks may no longer be necessary.

ii. Administrative Structure & City Size (Population)

Shifting to characteristics of the city that mayors represent, two of the more commonly used variables that could have an impact on comfort with interlocal cooperation are administrative structure and city population size. For many of the reasons discussed in the opening to this chapter, including the longer tenure of city managers and their ability to see long-term policy needs, council-manager cities should provide an atmosphere more conducive to regional cooperation than is found in mayor-council cities (Frederickson 1999; Wood 2006).⁵

City size is also important in joint cooperation due to the degree of resources and alternative partners available in larger cities. Andersen and Pierre (2010) refer to larger cities in the interlocal cooperation context as “hubs” for partnership. Regional hubs may command more resources than their neighbors and “tend to have more developed networks with key players outside the region and hence perform a brokerage function more efficiently than would any of the smaller the partners” (229). They caution, however, that larger cities can be subject to accusations of power exploitation from their partners. Though all of the cities in this study would be considered “large” with a population of over 50,000 residents, the range of participant cities in this study starts at

⁵ According to the most recent ICMA Municipal Form of Government Survey of 2011, there are two primary forms of local government present in the United States: council-manager, representing 59% of reporting municipalities, and mayor-council, representing 33% of reporting municipalities.

this base level and extends to just over 750,000 citizens. For a breakdown in the population of participating cities, see Table 3-3 below.

Table 3-3: Frequency of Respondents by City Size (Population)

500,000 or greater	3 (4.7%)
400,000 - 499,000	1 (1.6%)
300,000 - 399,999	0 (0.0%)
200,000 - 299,999	5 (7.8%)
100,000 - 199,999	14 (21.9%)
Under 100,000	41 (64.1%)

N = 64, Average Population = 130,620

iii. Racial Homogeneity

Race is one of the more commonly used demographic characteristics employed in studies of interlocal cooperation. In terms of service delivery generally, Hefetz and Warner (2004) note that “heterogeneous populations in large cities may make service delivery more complex and harder to monitor.” Racial homogeneity is typically measured as the proportion of the non-Hispanic white population within the total population (Feiock, Steinacker, and Park 2009, Kwon and Feiock 2010). The same measure was used in this study using data from the 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for race. Descriptive data for racial homogeneity of respondents cities in this study can be found in Table 3-4 below. Racial homogeneity is important to interlocal agreements, both between communities and within a single community. Between communities, racially homogenous populations are likely to have uniform preferences (Marando 1968; Zeemering 2009). Two or more communities sharing similar racial identities, therefore, should have an easier time finding common

Table 3-4: Racial Homogeneity (Proportion of Non-Hispanic White Population)

90-100%	4 (6.3%)
80-89%	8 (12.5%)
70-79%	19 (29.6%)
60-69%	14 (21.9%)
50-59%	10 (15.6%)
40-49%	3 (4.7%)
Less than 40%	6 (9.4%)

N = 64

ground on service-sharing agreements. Greater racial heterogeneity between communities, on the other hand, could produce political and economic power asymmetries that might provide advantages for one or more of the parties to an interlocal agreement (Feiock 2007).⁶ Where power asymmetries exist, dominant parties may refuse to come to an agreement with others unless they receive most or all of the benefits of the agreement. Interestingly, however, in a study of interlocal agreements in Florida, Andrew (2010) finds that communities that are predominantly white generally prefer to enter into agreements with nonwhite communities.

Within a single community, greater racial homogeneity reduces agency costs for representative officials. It should be more difficult to ascertain or aggregate a single community sentiment within a racially heterogeneous community (Feiock 2007). LeRoux and Carr (2007) note that where racial diversity is greater, public officials may be more likely to rely on a direct provision of services than interlocal agreements due to the

⁶ In a study that deviates from the common understanding of the relationship between race and cooperation, Andersen and Pierre (2010) present evidence from Norway where heterogeneity is far less of a defining factor in cooperative agreements than how political units define their role within regional governance.

difficulty of accommodating a diversity of preferences. In addition, it should be more difficult to hold a representative accountable for his or her decisions when negotiating on the behalf of a racially diverse community (Feiock 2007). The local public official within a racially homogenous community is able to “speak with one voice” in making decisions for his or her jurisdiction (Oakerson 2004).

Based on the prior research, it might be assumed that a city mayor from a city with greater racial heterogeneity would be less comfortable engaging in communications with the public about possible solutions to a local problem for fear of alienating a segment of the population. Instead, a mayor may prefer more technical aspects of policymaking or even those tasks which encourage participation among parties outside of his or her own government. By bringing more parties to the table, a mayor may be able to more easily deflect blame should a program produce unsuccessful results.

iv. Interest in Higher Office

One of the unique areas of inquiry within this research is the examination of interest in higher office and whether it has any relationship to tasks performed within the interlocal cooperation process. As noted previously, there are a number of other contexts where electoral ambition is thought to influence behavior, and this research seeks to examine this factor within the ILC context. In order to gather data on mayoral interest in higher office, the question “How likely would you be to consider running for a higher office (e.g., governor, member of Congress) at some point in your political career?” was included in the survey instrument. Table 3-5 below provides descriptive data for the responses to this question. The mean response to the question about

Table 3-5: Interest in Higher Office

Mean	2.45
Standard Deviation	1.10
Mode	3
Median	2
Maximum	5
Minimum	1

N = 64; Responses range from “Extremely Likely” (5) to “Extremely Unlikely” (1)

interest in higher office was 2.45 out of 5, which falls between “Neutral” (3) and “Unlikely” (2).

v. Value Preference

In a discussion of future research to be conducted concerning elected officials and interlocal cooperation, Zeemering (2008) notes that, “we must clarify officials’ interests in the financial implications of interlocal cooperation, in comparison to their service quality interests” (738). In an attempt to follow this directive, my survey instrument included a list of five values to be maximized when entering into a shared contract service agreement. The values listed included equality of citizen access to service, financial implications of the agreement, citizen engagement in formation, service quality, and political career interests. The respondent was tasked with placing these values in order from most to least importance, based on a 5 to 1 scale respectively. The results of this portion of the survey can be viewed below in Table 3-6. The value most preferred by mayors was service quality (4.25), followed by the financial implications of the agreement (4.02), equality of citizen access (3.34), and citizen engagement in formation (2.34). The least preferred value found in responses was political career interests

(1.05). As with other politically-oriented aspects of this study, the low ranking of political career interests may reflect a lack of willingness on the part of elected officials to admit their own interest in personal gain due to a perceived lack of social acceptance for such responses.

For the purposes of statistical analysis correlating value preference, between financial interests and service quality, and the tasks of mayors within the ILC process, I created a dichotomous variable based on responses to this set of questions. The value preference variable was created by assigning a zero (0) to those responses where service quality was prioritized, and a one (1) for those responses where financial implications of the agreement were favored. Despite the average ranking of each, twenty-six (26) mayors favored service quality, while thirty-five (35) favored financial implications of the agreement.

Table 3-6: Value Preference

Value Option	Mean (Std. Dev.)
Equality of Citizen Access	3.34 (0.73)
Financial Implications of the Agreement	4.02 (1.03)
Citizen Engagement in Formation	2.34 (0.76)
Service Quality	4.25 (0.92)
Political Career Interests	1.05 (0.29)

N = 59 (Reflects responses where all five values options were given a rank value.)

c. Methods

For the discrete variables in this study, length of term (or years in office), population size, racial homogeneity, and interest in higher office, Spearman's rank-order correlation (or Spearman's rho) analysis was performed to assess the relationship between these variables and mayoral comfort with each interlocal cooperation task evaluated in this study. An assumption of Spearman's rho is a monotonic relationship between variables. A monotonic relationship occurs when, as an increase or decrease in the value of one variable occurs, so too does that same positive or negative change occur in the value of the other variable. A monotonic relationship is less demanding than a linear relationship in that a linear relationship can be modeled with a straight line whereas a monotonic relationship does not necessarily have to conform to a straight line model. Prior to performing a correlation test, it is necessary to look at a scatterplot of the variables to determine the most appropriate method to employ. It would be ideal to use a Pearson product-moment correlation which requires a linear relationship, but the presence of a monotonic, non-linear relationship requires Spearman's rho to be used instead. Evaluating a scatterplot is important because the Spearman's rho test can indicate a monotonic relationship despite the data displaying a non-monotonic relationship, such as a U-shape. A scatterplot can also reveal outliers that might increase or decrease the size of the correlation coefficient.

Spearman's rank-order correlation produces both a correlation coefficient (r_s) and a significance level (p). The correlation coefficient determines the strength of the relationship being evaluated. Though there is no one agreed upon set of rules for assigning strength to an association, it is important to consider 1) that correlation

strengths for research within the social sciences tend to be lower than those found within the natural sciences and 2) that coefficients produced by Spearman's rho tend to be smaller than those produced by Pearson correlation coefficients. The significance level produced by Spearman's rho determines whether the correlation coefficient is statistically significantly different than zero. Finally, Spearman's rho is a measure of correlation, not causation. While the presence of an association is noteworthy, further information would be required in order to make a statement of causation. That being noted, the findings section of this research will include an analysis of the statistically significant relationships found between variables and speculate as to why these relationships exist, which may include causal language. Again, the reader should be cautioned that correlation results are not causation and further cautioned that the limited scope of this study, 64 city mayors over a ten-state area, does not necessarily mean that the results are representative of the much larger, national population of mayors.

For the dichotomous variables in this study, administrative structure and value preference, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed. The Mann-Whitney U Test compares the differences between two independent groups where the dependent variable, the various task rankings in this case, is not normally distributed. The Mann-Whitney U Test has four basic assumptions that must be met. First, there is one dependent variable that is either continuous or ordinal. In this study, the variables that meet this assumption are the mayoral tasks associated with interlocal cooperation as a continuous variable measured along a seven-point scale. Second, there is one independent variable that consists of two categorical, independent groups. In this study there are two dichotomous variables that fit this assumption, city type and value

preference. Third, there is independence of observations, meaning that no participant falls into more than one group, for instance, both mayor-council and council-manager cities. Finally, as will be elaborated on in the findings section, the distribution of scores for the independent variables affects how the results of the Mann-Whitney U Test will be interpreted.

III. Findings

The intent of this research is to examine city mayors and their preferred activities within the context of interlocal cooperation. Specifically, this research asks mayors to rank their own comfort level with performing certain tasks within this process. Of the variables examined through both Spearman's rank order correlation (findings detailed in Table 3-7 below) and the Mann-U Whitney test (findings detailed in Table 3-8 below), the variables of city size in terms of population, racial homogeneity, city type, and a preference for the financial concerns of interlocal agreement displayed varying levels of statistical significance for different tasks, while the remaining variables of years in office as mayor and interest in running for higher office did not display a statistically significant relationship for any task evaluated in this study. The following sections will detail the findings of this survey and attempt to provide explanations for why mayors responded in the manner that they did.

a. City Size (Population)

The second column of variables in Table 3-7 below reports the results of Spearman's rank-order correlations to determine the relationship between city population size and each of the interlocal cooperation tasks examined in this research. As highlighted in bold within the table, there is a statistically significant relationship between city size and

Table 3-7: Spearman's Rho Correlations of Explanatory Variables and Interlocal Cooperation Tasks

	Term Length (Years) Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)	City Size (Population) Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)	Racial Homogeneity Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)	Interest in Higher Office Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)
Identifying problems that require interlocal cooperation.	-0.010 (0.940)	0.012 (0.925)	-0.138 (0.278)	0.025 (0.847)
Increasing public awareness of interlocal cooperation.	-0.071 (0.576)	0.136 (0.285)	-0.121 (0.340)	0.115 (0.367)
Informing and educating public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions.	-0.157 (0.216)	0.290* (0.020)	-0.283* (0.024)	0.135 (0.287)
Networking to incorporate individuals or groups with issue expertise.	-0.202 (0.110)	0.330** (0.008)	-0.225 (0.074)	0.141 (0.267)
Collaborating with other public officials.	-0.040 (0.751)	0.225 (0.074)	-0.305* (0.014)	0.240 (0.056)
Collaborating with private parties (individual citizens or groups).	0.115 (0.367)	0.258* (0.040)	-0.298* (0.017)	0.132 (0.299)
Delegating power to other individuals or groups.	0.191 (0.131)	0.236 (0.061)	-0.339** (0.006)	-0.016 (0.903)
Creating the specific terms of interlocal agreements.	-0.060 (0.638)	0.116 (0.360)	-0.003 (0.983)	0.122 (0.338)
Implementing interlocal agreement activities or programs.	-0.094 (0.458)	0.139 (0.273)	-0.148 (0.244)	0.145 (0.251)
Monitoring of interlocal agreement activities or programs.	-0.171 (0.176)	0.093 (0.466)	-0.026 (0.837)	0.107 (0.401)
Evaluating the long-term success of interlocal cooperation.	-0.014 (0.911)	0.194 (0.125)	-0.077 (0.544)	0.132 (0.299)
	N = 64			

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

three of the tasks evaluated in this study. For each task with which the correlation with city size is significant, the null hypothesis that there is no linear relationship can be rejected. Additionally, the correlation coefficient for each of these three statistically significant task variables is positive, indicating that city size and each task, separately considered, tend to increase or decrease in value together. The three tasks for which there is a statistically significant correlation with city size are “Informing and educating public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions,” “Networking to incorporate individuals or groups with issue expertise,” and “Collaborating with private parties (individual citizens or groups).” The first task involves public communications, and the latter two tasks involve intergovernmental communications. The following will focus on the findings of each statistically significant task specifically.

First, there is a medium-to-strong, positive correlation between city size and level of comfort with the task of informing and educating the public ($r_s = .290$, $p = .020$). This correlation is significant at a 95 percent confidence level ($p = .020$; less than 0.05). In other words, as the size of a city increases, so too does a mayor’s comfort level with informing and educating the public about interlocal cooperation. On one hand, this finding could appear to be counter-intuitive because mayors of large cities are more likely to open a policy to greater criticism by making it more public. On the other hand, perhaps mayors from larger cities are immune or at least more hardened to policy criticism and do not fear that its costs will outweigh the potential gains of greater public awareness. Mayors from larger cities may also sense that they are unable to shield policy decisions from the public due to greater media and watch-dog presence and choose to adapt to this political environment by being more comfortable in this role.

Second, there is a medium-to-strong, positive correlation between city size and comfort with the task of networking to incorporate expert parties ($r_s = .330$, $p = .008$). This correlation is significant at a 99 percent confidence level ($p = .008$; less than 0.01). It is worth noting that the correlation coefficient and the confidence level for this relationship is the greatest among all relationships tested using Spearman's rho in this research. What the relationship demonstrates is that mayors from larger cities feel more comfortable networking to incorporate others with expertise than mayors from small cities do. This finding was anticipated as larger cities should have more access to policy experts within their jurisdiction. This finding may also suggest that because they are often turned to as "hubs" for regional governance, larger cities embrace a leadership role and attempt to incorporate expert support as much as possible to ensure program success.

Third, there is a medium-to-strong, positive correlation between city size and comfort with the task of collaborating with private parties ($r_s = .258$, $p = .040$). This correlation is significant at a 95 percent confidence level ($p = .040$; less than 0.05). Perhaps what is most interesting about this finding is that the relationship between city size and the task of collaborating with private parties is significant, while the relationship between city size and collaborating with other public officials is not, though this task does approach significance. This finding is anticipated if for no other reason than that larger cities should have a greater number of private vendors from which to choose than do smaller, rural jurisdictions. It is unclear, however, how mayors are impacted by the greater number of private vendors. It is possible that mayors may be more comfortable with private vendors when there is an excess of vendors to choose from. Alternatively, it

may be the case that mayors in cities with many private vendors may be unable to form close connections to any one vendor and may, in fact, be overwhelmed by their number.

b. Racial Homogeneity

The third column of Table 3-7 provides the statistical findings for Spearman's rho correlations of racial homogeneity and the mayoral tasks associated with interlocal cooperation. The findings demonstrate a statistically significant correlation at a 95% confidence level (p less than 0.05) for informing and educating the public ($r_s = -.283$, $p = .024$), collaborating with other public officials ($r_s = -.305$, $p = .014$), and collaborating with private parties ($r_s = -.298$, $p = .017$). Additionally, the findings demonstrate a statistically significant correlation at a 99% confidence level (p less than 0.01) for delegating power to other individuals or groups ($r_s = -.339$, $p = .006$). Interestingly, the sign for each of these tasks is negative, meaning that as the level of racial homogeneity rises, the comfort level for each of these tasks tends to decrease.

At first, the negative direction of these findings would seem to contradict previous research suggesting that racial homogeneity contributes to greater use of interlocal cooperation. Racially homogenous cities should provide a safer political environment in which to conduct regional policy, and these cities should be smaller in population size and more in need of regional assistance. But this study measures mayoral comfort level of certain tasks which cannot necessarily be equated with the actual use of regional agreements. In order to provide a clearer understanding of why these findings are negatively oriented, further research should be conducted with additional explanatory variables. For instance, perhaps the political divide between races within the same cities in the southeast is not perceived by mayors as being so drastic that it inhibits regional

action. Or perhaps there are specific cultural differences between races that make a difference such that a large African-American minority population and a large Hispanic minority population should not be treated similarly. Further, racial and other demographic similarities or differences between mayors and the majority population of their city may affect mayoral comfort levels.

c. Interest in Running for Higher Office

Though the variable of interest in running for higher office displayed no statistically significant correlations with any of the tasks of interlocal cooperation, it is worth discussing the potential inadequacy of this research with regard to this variable. This research attempted to capture mayoral interest in higher office directly by questioning mayors about their likelihood to run for higher office in the future. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know whether mayors were honest in their responses. It seems very possible that some mayors would be unwilling to admit to an interest in running for higher office while actively serving as a city mayor. Mayors may have felt uncertain about sending such information off to an unknown source with the possibility that such information would be published without their consent, despite disclaimers informing them that this would not occur. Future research may reveal a better means of assessing current interest in running for higher office, but this survey question represented a good-faith attempt at capturing the concept despite its potential drawbacks.

d. City Type

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests were run to determine if there were differences in mayoral comfort level with tasks associated with the interlocal cooperation process and city type, either mayor-council or council-manager. Table 3-8 reports the Mann-Whitney

Table 3-8: Mann-Whitney U Tests for City Type and Value Preference

	City Type Mann-Whitney U Stat. z-Score (Sig., 2-tailed)	Value Preference Mann-Whitney U Stat. z-Score (Sig., 2-tailed)
Identifying problems that require interlocal cooperation.	459.5 -.040 (.968)	435.0 -.329 (.742)
Increasing public awareness of interlocal cooperation.	458.0 -.061 (.951)	327.5 -2.023 (.043)
Informing and educating public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions.	399.5 -.966 (.334)	395.5 -.945 (.345)
Networking to incorporate individuals or groups with issue expertise.	309.0 -2.361 (.018)	451.5 -.056 (.956)
Collaborating with other public officials.	296.0 -2.642 (.008)	374.0 -1.326 (.185)
Collaborating with private parties (individual citizens or groups).	336.5 -1.938 (.053)	362.0 -1.483 (.138)
Delegating power to other individuals or groups.	294.0 -2.461 (.014)	438.0 -.256 (.798)
Creating the specific terms of interlocal agreements.	457.0 -.073 (.942)	364.0 -1.371 (.170)
Implementing interlocal agreement activities or programs.	451.5 -.155 (.876)	449.0 -.092 (.927)
Monitoring of interlocal agreement activities or programs.	456.0 -.088 (.930)	326.5 -1.950 (.051)
Evaluating the long-term success of interlocal cooperation.	382.0 -1.185 (.236)	452.5 -.038 (.970)
	N = 64	N = 59

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

U statistic, the standardized test statistic or z-score, and the approximate asymptotic p-value or significance level for each of these tests. Distributions for mayor comfort levels along all tasks were similar between city types, as assessed by visual inspection. Between the two types of cities, median comfort level scores were not statistically significant for problem identification ($U = 459.5$, $z = -.040$, $p = .968$), increasing public awareness ($U = 458.0$, $z = -.061$, $p = .951$), educating and informing the public ($U = 399.5$, $z = -.0966$, $p = .334$), collaborating with private parties ($U = 336.5$, $z = -1.938$, $p = .053$), creating specific terms of the contract ($U = 457.0$, $z = -.073$, $p = .942$), implementation ($U = 451.5$, $z = -.155$, $p = .876$), monitoring ($U = 456.0$, $z = -.088$, $p = .930$), and evaluating program success ($U = 382.0$, $z = -1.185$, $p = .236$).

Median comfort level scores, however, were statistically significant for networking ($U = 309.0$, $z = -2.361$, $p = .018$), collaborating with other public officials ($U = 296.0$, $z = -2.642$, $p = .008$), and delegating power ($U = 294.0$, $z = -2.461$, $p = .014$). For each of these tasks, the median for mayor-council was a 7, the highest level of comfort, while the median for council-manager was a 6. While both scores represent very high levels of comfort with these tasks, the statistically significant differences present here may have more to say about council-manager mayors than their counterparts. Council-manager mayors appear to more inclusive and less willing to cede their power than mayor-council mayors. Perhaps these findings indicate that, despite their title, council-manager mayors feel a lesser sense of authority to engage in networked governance given the presence of a professional public manager. Again, council-manager mayors report a high level of comfort for these tasks, but it is their lack of absolute comfort, especially given a series of questions where the mean responses were all high, that is

noteworthy.

e. Value Preference

As with the variable for city type, a series of Mann-Whitney U tests were run to determine if there were differences in mayoral comfort level with tasks associated with the interlocal cooperation process and mayoral preference for maximizing values related to either financial implications or service quality when entering into a shared services contract agreement with other local governments. Again, visual inspections were used to determine that distributions for mayor comfort levels along all tasks were similar between these value types. As detailed in Table 3-8, the only statistically significant median score among these tasks and value preference was found in increasing public awareness ($U = 582.5, z = 2.023, p = .043$). For this value, the median score for service quality was a 6, while the median score for financial implications was a 7. As with the findings on city type, both of these medians represent higher comfort level scores. But the statistically significant relationship present in this task may indicate that mayors who are primarily concerned with financial implications over service quality possess a higher sense of duty to their constituents, based on their need to save taxpayer dollars and to keep constituents informed of problems. While constituents still feel the effects of service quality, mayors may recognize that they cannot please all of their constituents all of the time. In other words, mayors may recognize that the public takes a varying, subjective stance toward service quality, but when it comes to public finances, the public is more objective or unified in their position.

IV. Conclusion

When examining city mayors and the tasks that they might like to perform in the interlocal cooperation process, there remains the all-important question of why mayors might want to perform certain tasks. In part, this research has attempted to answer this question by introducing factors related to the city itself and the mayor and his or her own experience and preferences. Certainly, there may be other factors that have not been included in this analysis including age, gender, prior work experience, and educational discipline that might have some bearing on mayoral decision-making. In addition, this research did not address reasons why mayors would not want to be involved in interlocal cooperation or the tasks associated with this form of policy. While questions concerning a lack of willingness to participate in interlocal cooperation were left out of the survey instrument for practical reasons, such an examination would be warranted in future research as it would help to paint a clearer picture of mayoral attitudes.

A final aspect of this research that is worth examining is a series of questions within the survey examining the support of certain role statements in interlocal politics. These six role statements are replicated from the work of Zeemering (2015), which presents the results of a mail survey of San Francisco Bay Area mayors and city council members between November 2011 and January 2012. Zeemering created these roles based on previous literature in interlocal cooperation. For instance, the statements in which elected officials advocate for their jurisdiction or its employees is “consistent with the claim that elected officials can help anchor new governance arrangements to traditional political jurisdiction” (6). An additional role draws a contrast between the role of advocating for one’s own jurisdiction with a more collectively-minded role of seeking

Table 3-9: Descriptive Statistics of Support for Roles in Interlocal Politics

Role Statement	Adkins (2016) (n = 61)	Zeemering (2015) (n = 153)
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Mean (Std. Dev.)
I promote the interests of my city when talking with other local governments about sharing or contracting services.	5.70 (1.31)	5.88 (1.36)
I attempt to find solutions that will equally benefit my city and the other local governments with whom we work.	5.89 (1.07)	6.11 (1.10)
I protect my city from becoming too dependent on contracts and service sharing arrangements with other local governments.	4.57 (1.66)	4.36 (1.93)
I advocate for the interests of my city’s government employees during any discussions about sharing or contracting services.	5.38 (1.28)	5.15 (1.50)
Protecting the identity of my community is a priority when making decisions about local government services.	5.61 (1.54)	5.13 (1.83)
Forming working relationships with other local governments is beneficial to my political career.	5.00 (1.72)	4.60 (1.89)

equal benefits for all governments involved in an agreement. In addition, the roles pertaining to protection of community identity and dependence on agreements with other governments reflect common barriers to entry into interlocal agreements. Finally, the last role that mayors are asked to rank relates to obtaining political career benefits of involvement with interlocal agreements.

To evaluate these roles, city mayors were asked to rank their comfort with each along a 7-point scale. Table 3-9 below presents the role statements, the mean, and standard deviation scores for both this study and Zeemering’s research. Interestingly, both studies produced very similar results in terms of mean scores and how those

means rank against one another. In fact, the only difference between this research and Zeemering is that the position of protecting local identity and promoting government employees is flipped between the third and fourth positions. For both studies, the role with the highest mean was seeking equal benefits for all governments involved. While constituents may instead want their mayor to seek the highest possible benefit for their own jurisdiction, this more regionally balanced preference for benefits may bode well for the long-term viability of ILC service delivery.

The lowest ranked role in both studies was protection against becoming too dependent on contracts and service sharing arrangements with other governments. The low ranking for this role may reflect a common mayoral understanding that service sharing agreements are the new normal when it comes to service delivery and that between becoming too dependent on other local governments and becoming dependent to private partners, the former is the lesser of the two evils. If this is the case, it is once again an encouraging picture of mayoral governance as it displays a recognition of service delivery needs and available options. It is also worth noting that, in both studies, forming working relationships that are beneficial to one's political career finishes just ahead of becoming too dependent on other governments. In other words, the possibility of personal gain appears to provide more of a justification for entering into an interlocal agreement than the fear of dependence serves as a barrier. Still, in both this study and Zeemering, protection from becoming too dependent on other governments scores positively (with 4.57 and 4.36 respectively, each just above the median of 4.00), which seems to reveal that elected officials are not without some concern for this possibility.

Chapter 4: Political Communications and Interlocal Cooperation

For many, the term “political communications” may bring to mind images of campaign ads, especially those involving mud-slinging attacks on political opponents. Negativity in communications with the public during campaigns pervades elections at all levels of government, even races for mayor. On September 9, 2015, for example, the *New York Times* ran an article titled “In Mayoral Race, Nashville Politics Forgets Its Manners,” detailing the contentious race between candidates David Fox and Megan Barry (Fausset 2015). On one side, a series of radio ads by Fox and his supporters had accused Barry of opposing prayer before high school football games and neglecting to say “under God” when reciting the pledge of allegiance. On the other side, ads run by the Tennessee Democratic Party claimed that as mayor, Fox would “move Nashville back to the segregated 1950s.” Though both Democrats, Fox enjoyed support from members of both parties (Garrison 2015). The combined support, however, was not enough in the end to overcome Barry who won by a decisive ten percentage points in a run-off election.

But the role of city mayor as a communicator with the public, as well as within government, does not end upon taking office. Though pre-election communication may be filled with negativity, post-election communication may need to shift its focus toward more productive ends that bring people together rather than divide them. Grady, Rothman, Smith, and Balch-Gonzalez (2007) provide the example of former Denver mayor, and eventual governor of Colorado, Tim Hickenlooper and his role as communicator to bring about positive change in schools. According to the authors, mayoral communications are important because mayors hold a “unique position to

mobilize a community's diverse stakeholders" through the visibility and authority of their office (3). The authors even quote Hickenlooper as stating, "A lot of what the mayor's office can do is keep communicating different aspects of the challenge [of improving public schools]" (12).

The following chapter examines political communications, not from the perspective of elections and negative campaign ads, but in a more productive sense to understand more about how mayors use communication in the context of interlocal cooperation. Specifically, this chapter examines the following three questions related to political communications with the public and within government:

1. How often do city mayors talk with other government officials, and when they do, do they discuss interlocal cooperation?
2. How does past experience with citizens and citizen groups relate to willingness to participate in communications activities in the interlocal cooperation policy process?
3. Which forums for communication with the public have mayors used in the past during the interlocal cooperation process, and which forums would they like to use in the future?

Each question will be addressed individually with a brief literature review, an explanation of the methods used, and a number of questions that could be pursued in future research. Taken together, these questions are important to examine because political communications are so vital to networked governance. Given the scope and complexity of issues facing local government, it is arguably the case that modern mayors do not

have the luxury of sheltering themselves from their neighbors if they want to achieve meaningful policy while in office.

I. Communications with Other Public Officials

The first question addressed in my review of political communications concerns contact between mayors and representatives from other governments. Specifically, this research asks the questions: how often do city mayors talk with other government officials, and when they do, do they discuss interlocal cooperation? The following will briefly discuss why these questions are important to study through a discussion of relevant literature, a description of how these research questions are answered through the survey instrument, an explanation of the key findings, and some possible avenues through which future research might be directed.

Perhaps the most important reason to study mayoral communications with other public officials is that better communication between parties to an agreement can help to overcome many of the challenges that are unique to cooperative efforts. One source of difficulty in collaboration is the “social dilemma,” which Voogd (2001) defines as “a conflict between the choice the individual would make to maximise his or her self interest and the choice that would be best for the group” (80). Voogd notes that in order to prevent the ills of this kind of self-interested behavior, “individuals have to restrain themselves” but that this is “not an easy affair” (80). But in the absence of restraint, what options are available? In her review of cooperation literature, Ostrom (1998) states that one of the ways to limit the possibility of social dilemmas that threaten cooperation is through face-to-face communication between parties. Ostrom states that, “consistent, strong, and replicable findings are that substantial increases in the levels of coordination

are achieved when individuals are allowed to communicate face to face” (6). There are a number of reasons for the efficacy of face-to-face communication, but Ostrom concludes that “exchanging mutual commitment, increasing trust, creating and reinforcing norms, and developing a group identity” appear to be the most important.

Trust built through communication in social or interpersonal networks is often regarded as necessary to initiate and maintain cooperative agreements (Thurmaier and Wood 2002; Wood 2006). In the context of collaborative watershed planning, Bentrup (2001) notes that face-to-face interaction helps to reduce stereotypes and establish trust among stakeholders. There are a number of institutional structures that allow for repeated, face-to-face communication. Councils of government and other types of regional planning organizations, for instance, allow for this kind of interaction and are often cited as an important social networks from which interlocal cooperation might arise (Feiock 2007; Lackey, Freshwater, and Rupasingha 2002). As noted by LeRoux (2008), “when two jurisdictions share ties as members of a regional planning organization, their likelihood of becoming tied on another dimension (e.g., as parties to an interlocal service agreement) is substantially increased” (161). Evidence of the importance of social networks to cooperation is also found in LeRoux, Brandenburg, and Pandey (2010) who study of 919 municipal managers and department heads across the United States. The authors find that interlocal service cooperation increases when government officials frequently engage in network activities such as participation in a regional association or council of government.⁷ While this study does not question mayors about

⁷ LeRoux, Brandenburg, and Pandey (2010) also find that interlocal service cooperation increases when officials are united by shared professional norms and values as imparted to them by academic institutions, specifically through the acquisition of an MPA degree.

their preferred mode of communication in the cooperative context, research suggests that face-to-face communication within one of these social networks is likely to have served as at least a starting point for interlocal discussions.

Again, it must be stressed that the key to successful interlocal cooperation is not the form of communication but the trust that it can build. In fact, face-to-face communication is not always necessary for shared services, as conflict over values and objectives may be low from the outset (Emerson, Nabatchi, Balogh 2012). In a report targeted to county managers, Zeemering and Delabbio (2013) repeatedly stress the need for trust between parties to a shared services arrangement. In order to achieve this goal, the authors recommend transparent and continuous communications, resisting the urge to “set relationships on autopilot” (6). LeRoux and Carr (2005) refer to the norms of trust and reciprocity as “principal among the social factors” (15) involved in cooperation and that parties desire to bring these norms about in order to achieve individual and collective gains. Attempting to build these trusted relationships in the midst of a collaborative project is often referred to as “social capital,” which Lin (2001) defines as “investment in social relations with expected returns” (6). For example, one community might come to the aid of another in a time of emergency, even where no formal agreement is in place, in the hope that the favor may be returned one day (LeRoux and Carr 2005). Whether building trust is ultimately done for the good of the region or a single jurisdiction, or even just for individual gain, research seems to indicate that it will increase the likelihood of project success.

Beyond laying a groundwork of trust, there a number of more functional reasons why communication between public officials is important for successful collaboration.

Feiock (2008) notes that communication is necessary to exchange information about preferences and resources. This process, however, becomes more difficult as the number and distance between parties is greater. Even where information is successfully conveyed, communication must be open and clear so that interpretations of shared information are the same among parties (Margerum 2011). Communication between parties is also important from the outset of collaborative discussions in order to successfully negotiate the tasks that are to be completed either jointly or individually by parties (Carr and Hawkins 2013). Frequency of communication and accumulated trust over time may shorten the negotiation process of dividing responsibilities and benefits that might otherwise prove costly and destructive to an agreement (Kwon and Feiock 2010). So great is the barrier that negotiation poses to forming an agreement, that Carr, Gerber, and Lupper (2007) suggest that states should take steps to facilitate cooperation such as standardizing financial reporting for local governments so that parties begin discussions with a more common understanding of the cooperative environment.

a. Communication with Other Public Officials - Descriptive Findings

Given the theoretical benefits (exchanging mutual commitment, building trust) and more functional benefits (exchanging information, negotiating terms) that might be realized within the cooperative context from a history of frequent communication between public officials, the following section examines what city mayors have reported about their own experience. Descriptive data about the frequency of mayoral communications with other public officials was gathered from a survey of mayors from cities with a population of greater than 50,000 residents in 10 southeastern states. The questions concerning

communications were derived, in part, from a similar survey conducted by Eric Zeemering on elected officials' opinions about sharing local government services. For this research, the questions differ from those used by Zeemering in that the question, "How frequently do you talk with elected officials from other cities or from the county government?" was broken into three questions evaluating communication with officials from other cities, a mayor's own county government, and other county governments separately. The separation of these questions allows for a more detailed understanding of mayoral communication patterns.

Survey responses to questions concerning communication with other public officials were based on a 5-point scale ranging from "Never" (1), "A few times each year" (2), "Once per month" (3), "A few times each month" (4), to "At least once per week" (5). The mean scores for responses to these questions, found in Table 4-1 below, reveal that city mayors speak most frequently with officials from other cities (Mean = 4.125), followed closely by elected officials from the mayor's own county (Mean = 4.032). These mean scores occur around a score of 4, meaning that communication occurs "A few times each month." In a distant third is communication with elected officials from other counties (Mean = 2.968), scoring just below a 3 or "Once per month." Considering the multitude of obligations before mayors of large cities, both functional and ceremonial, the high frequency with which mayors report discussing cooperation with other city officials may suggest that mayors place a high level of importance in regional concerns. Alternatively, these findings may just show that mayors are mandated into attending a council of government or other regional meeting of public officials. The high frequency of discussions with officials in one's own county, however, may not be directly

Table 4-1: Descriptive Statistics on Discussion with Other Public Officials

	Mean * (Std. Dev.)
How frequently do you talk with elected officials from other cities?	4.125 (0.917)
How frequently do you talk with elected officials from your county?	4.032 (0.897)
How frequently do you talk with elected officials from other county governments?	2.968 (1.092)
How frequently do you attend meetings with elected officials from outside of your own city government?	3.143 (0.981)
Within the last 12 months, has your city discussed contracting with another city or county government to provide a service that you have traditionally provided on your own?	Yes = 38 (63.3%) No = 22 (36.7%)

* Measured on a 5-point scale from “At Least Once Per Week” (5) to “Never” (1).

attributable to a concern for regional issues, as there will always be some jurisdictional overlap between city and county governments.

A fourth question concerning the frequency of attending meetings with elected officials from outside of one’s own city government was included on the survey. As noted above in the literature review, councils of government and other regional planning associations provide an opportunity for face-to-face interaction that can be beneficial to cooperative agreements, even if regional cooperation is not the primary function of the meeting. Mayor responses averaged a score of just over 3 (Mean = 3.143), or “Once per month” for meetings.

The final question in this section, and one which directly addresses interlocal cooperation, is a yes-or-no question about whether the mayor has discussed contracting to provide a service traditionally provided in-house with officials from outside of their own government within the last twelve months. Of the 60 usable responses, 38

(63.3%) report having discussed service cooperation in the last year, while 22 (36.7%) had not. The important contrast to be drawn from this chart is that while both administrative structures display a positive preference for having discussed cooperation, there is a stronger bias toward discussion among mayor-council governments. This finding is to be expected because the primary executive office of the mayor-council form is the mayor, whereas the city manager enjoys this role in the council-manager form. In the mayor-council form, the mayor should be expected, therefore, to have more opportunities to engage in meaningful policy discussions.

With nearly two-thirds of mayors responding that they had discussed contracting, this finding shows that at the very least that mayors are aware of this provision option. This finding may also be conservative as some respondents to the survey may have been newer to the office and had lacked an opportunity for this type of discussion. Alternatively, twelve months is a long time period in the term of a mayor and that more mayors did not discuss this policy option may be surprising. This finding may also be exaggerated due to a sort of acquiescence bias where mayors responded that they had discussed cooperation despite not having done so because 1) to have failed to have discussed cooperation might portray the mayor in a negative light, and 2) the subject of the survey concerns cooperation generally.

b. Communication with Other Public Officials - Statistical Findings

While nearly two-thirds of mayors report engaging in cooperative discussions with other public officials over the previous year, these discussions do not necessarily imply actual governmental action. In order to refine our understanding of this finding, statistical methods were employed to examine the relationship of ILC discussions with regard to

administrative structure. In order to compare the response to discussion of interlocal cooperation over the last twelve months (yes-or-no) with city type (council-manger or mayor-council), a chi-square test for association was performed. The chi-square test is used to determine whether two nominal or dichotomous variables are associated, also phrased as whether the two variables are statistically independent. Applied to this research, the chi-squared test will allow us to see if these two types of cities vary in having discussed interlocal cooperation or not. The relationship between frequency of communication and city type is worth examining because among mayors, those that govern in mayor-council cities should be in a better position to act unilaterally to bring about cooperative action.

Based on the cross-tabulation of the two variables, as reported in Table 4-2 below, mayors from mayor-council cities were considerably more likely to have discussed interlocal cooperation than to have had a discussion in the last twelve months (Yes = 17, No = 4), while the count for mayors in council-manager cities was far more balanced (Yes = 21, No = 18). Based on the results of the chi-square test, there was a statistically significant association between city type and having discussed interlocal cooperation in the last twelve months, $\chi^2(1) = 4.319$, $p = .038$. Finally, though chi-square tests inform us about whether there is an association, they do not inform us about the strength or magnitude of the association. Phi (ϕ) is employed as a means of association for these two dichotomous variables. For this research, there was a moderately strong association between city size and discussion of interlocal cooperation, $\phi = -0.268$, $p = .038$. Though this analysis displays an association between city type and interlocal cooperation discussion, it is important to remember that other variables may have a

Table 4-2: Cross-tabulation of City Type and Interlocal Cooperation Discussion

		Discussion: Yes	Discussion: No	Total
Type: Mayor-Council	Count % within Type % within Disc. % of Total	17 81.0% 44.7% 28.3%	4 19.0% 18.2% 6.7%	21 100.0% 35.0% 35.0%
Type: Council-Manager	Count % within Type % within Disc. % of Total	21 53.8% 55.3% 35.0%	18 46.2% 81.8% 30.0%	39 100.0% 65.0% 65.0%
Total	Count % within Type % within Disc. % of Total	38 63.3% 100.0% 63.3%	22 36.7% 100.0% 36.7%	60 100.0% 100.0% 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square = 4.319, $p = 0.038$

Phi (ϕ) = -0.268, $p = 0.038$

bearing on this association. In the mayor-council category, it may be the case that many mayors were newly on the job or that there simply had not been a need for these discussions.

c. Areas for Future Research in Interlocal Communications

There are a number of questions that still remain unanswered in the area of interlocal communications. LeRoux and Carr (2005) specifically draw attention to the need for individual-level analyses focusing on communication and interaction patterns of elected officials and administrative professionals. Unfortunately, knowing only the frequency of discussions gets at neither the nature nor the reasons for engaging in discussion.

Additionally, a more focused research project could evaluate the frequency as well as the types of meetings. Such a project could also include questions about the involvement of private and non-profit organizations in these meetings, whether meetings are led by a single, dominant party or are more balanced and cooperative, and whether interlocal agreements arise out of these meetings. The following questions could also

be asked of interlocal meetings: are these meetings regularly scheduled? Are they policy specific or more general in nature? Though mayors are asked about talking with other officials and attending meetings, a fuller understanding of this topic would include more venue-specific questions. Do mayors discuss interlocal cooperation in a one-on-one setting or in a group setting? Are there different types of cooperation that are discussed more frequently in these different settings? There may also be aspects of the method of discussion (i.e., in-person, telephone, e-mail, digital meeting) that have important implications for following through on these discussions to transform talk into real policy action.

While the question on whether discussions had taken place over the last year represents a good first step in understanding communication concerning ILC, there are several lines of inquiry that could be explored in future research. First, this question only addresses whether discussions had taken place, not whether they had led to actual governmental action. It might also be useful to know whether a region-based approach to services that had been discussed with other public officials had also been discussed separately with private sector vendors. In other words, have other options for this service had ever been on the table? Finally, this question lacks depth about the nature of discussions with other officials. There would certainly be a difference between simply acknowledging that there is a problem that might be solved regionally versus actually brainstorming measures that might be taken to address the issue. In other words, there would appear to be a need for questions concerning the depth or extent of these discussions.

Finally, another line of inquiry that arises from the descriptive findings of this research concerns the frequency of attending meetings with other public officials. The findings of this research indicate that mayors attend these kinds of meetings just over once per month, possibly suggesting that mayors are only able to be a member of one regional organization with a monthly meeting at any one time. Future research might look into mayoral patterns of regional organization membership, or membership in organizations generally, and the factors that allow or restrain mayors from taking part in these groups. Time and salience of the group purpose would appear to be logical factors for analysis but additional factors such as educational background, party affiliation, or even governance style or personality type, such as an extroverted versus an introverted nature, would also be interesting variables for inclusion.

II. Past Experience as a Factor in Future Communications

One of the most basic features of interlocal cooperation that may be taken for granted is the fact that it involves governmental action that extends *beyond traditional jurisdictional borders*. Though Briffault (1996) ultimately advocates for a reduction in the significance of existing local boundaries and the creation of regionally-bounded governments to address matters of regional significance, he also elaborates on how local borders are critical to the development of local autonomy. One of the primary benefits of borders that the author mentions is that they limit the number of citizens that a public official needs to communicate with over matters of policy. For public officials, less communication should mean that they experience less stress on their time and patience than they would experience when governing a larger region. Perhaps more importantly for the citizen, local borders mean that their share of power and influence over

government is greater in a more limited region. Thus, when discussing communication between city mayors and members of the public in the context of region-spanning interlocal cooperation, I believe that it is critical to draw attention to the fact that officials may feel overburdened while citizens may feel a diminished sense of efficacy.

From a theoretical perspective, studies of how elected officials communicate with the public in the context of interlocal cooperation, for any purpose, would fit well in the diverse body of literature that examines public engagement at the local level of government. Some of the more recent topics covered in this literature include the following: the use of neighborhood-based organizations versus governmental organizations to promote engagement (Glaser, Yeager, and Parker 2006), building greater citizen engagement at the state and local levels of government through information and communication technologies (Dawes 2008), and the challenge of incorporating outsiders into the engagement process of community members in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Evans-Cowley and Gough 2008).

There are very few instances of literature directly addressing communications by elected officials in the interlocal cooperation context. LeRoux and Carr (2005), for instance, offer the suggestion that elected officials may favor cooperation as a means of policy delivery in order to bring public visibility to a favored political issue, a sort of indirect method of communicating with the public. Warner (2010) discusses the role of private approaches to providing public goods. Public goods provided by private clubs, such as swimming pools, security services, and roads are beneficial in that they encourage citizen engagement and investment into the production of services. Warner, however, urges local governments to explore ways to break down barriers that often

exclude some citizens from enjoying the benefits of these services based on age, income, and ethnicity. In one of the few studies of interlocal cooperation that directly mention citizen engagement, Zeemering (2008) notes that, “Collaborative processes that focus on efficiency without public representation and engagement run the risk of being sidelined when a mobilized opposition emerges” (737). Zeemering, however, finds that elected officials are more concerned with providing effective services and that public administrators should take on the role of informing and educating the public to clarify program goals and suppress future opposition. The following research findings attempt to add to this body of literature by addressing how past experience dealing with the public in the cooperation process has affected mayoral comfort in performing communication tasks with the public.

a. Communication with the Public - Descriptive Findings

City mayors were first asked four questions about individual citizens and citizen group involvement in interlocal cooperation. Table 4-3 below details the mean and standard deviation of responses to these questions. These questions draw a distinction between individual citizens and citizen groups on one hand and activity and productivity on the other. Though the terms “active” and “productive” were left to the interpretation of the respondent, my intent was that the terms would take on a common understanding, especially when paired together. By “active,” the intended meaning would be defined in terms of numbers of individuals or groups that participated relative to the population and to other forms of government activity that allows for citizen involvement. By “productive,” the intended meaning would be defined in terms of activity that in some manner improved an aspect of the regional cooperation effort.

Table 4-3: Descriptive Statistics on Discussion with the Public

	Mean (Std. Dev.)
In your experience, how active are individual citizens in interlocal cooperation discussions? *	3.000 (0.823)
In your experience, how productive has individual citizen activity been to interlocal cooperation discussion? **	3.476 (0.895)
In your experience, how active are citizens groups in interlocal cooperation discussions? *	3.000 (0.741)
In your experience, how productive has citizen group activity been to interlocal cooperation discussion? **	3.492 (0.821)

* Measured on a 5-point scale from “Always Active” (5) to “Never Active” (1).

** Measured on a 5-point scale from “Very Productive” (5) to “Very Counterproductive” (1).

Based on the experience of the mayor, two questions asked how active individual citizens and citizen groups are in interlocal cooperation. The possible responses for these questions ranged from “Always active” (5), “Usually active” (4), “Occasionally active” (3), “Almost never active” (2), to “Never active” (1). Two additional questions asked about citizen and citizen group productivity with the same response options tailored to productivity, from “Always productive” (5) to “Never productive” (1). The reason for drawing the distinction between individual citizens and citizen groups was to gauge whether mayors view organized group activity more favorably than they do that of individual citizens. While the policy area expertise of organized groups may or may not be greater than that of an individual citizen, what is not in doubt is the power that groups possess greater power through their numbers. Citizen groups may have greater access to resources, but even if they do not, their combined voting power may be enough to persuade elected officials of their right to be heard.

As Table 4-3 demonstrates, responses for individual citizens and citizen groups were nearly identical along both measure of activity and productivity. In terms of activity,

individual citizens (with a mean of 3.000) were viewed by mayors as being just as active as citizen groups (with a mean of 3.000). In terms of productivity, individual citizens (with a mean of 3.476) were viewed by mayors as being only slightly less active than citizen groups (with a mean of 3.492). Though these findings do not draw a distinction between citizen and citizen groups, there is a more clear distinction in terms of activity and productivity. The higher mean score among both groups in terms of productivity suggests that while mayors find public involvement in the interlocal cooperation process to be only occasional, the usefulness or productivity of that activity is fairly high. If this finding is correct, then elected officials should have an interest finding ways to engage the public in order to increase their participation in the future.

While the preceding questions examine mayoral impressions of past history with the public in the cooperative context, there remains the question of with whom mayors would like to communicate with in the future. Following the questions on citizen and citizen group activity and productivity, a final question asked mayors about which types of citizens they would be most interested to work with in future interlocal cooperation discussions, with five alternatives provided (business leaders, civic leaders, political party members, legal professionals, and the general public) and a sixth, open-ended alternative for additional groups to be included. The frequency of responses along with the percentage of respondents reporting each citizen type is reported in Table 4-4 below. The most frequently reported citizen type for inclusion in interlocal cooperation discussion is business leaders, appearing in 54 responses, or by 85.71% of mayors. This is followed by civic leaders with 49 responses (77.78%), the general public with 28 responses (44.44%), and legal professionals with 23 responses (36.51%). Political party

Table 4-4: Descriptive Statistics on Interest in Citizens to Work within Interlocal Cooperation

Citizen Type	Frequency (%)
Business Leaders	54 (85.71%)
Civic Leaders	49 (77.78%)
Political Party Members	9 (14.29%)
Legal Professionals	23 (36.51%)
General Public	28 (44.44%)
Other	2 (3.17%)

members only appeared in 9 responses (14.29%), and two responses listed “other” as a preferred citizen type but both responses failed to detail what that additional type might be.

The fact that business leaders rank highest among preferred citizen groups may lead us to the conclusion that city mayors are especially concerned about the financial aspects of interlocal cooperation. Alternatively, mayors may view private sector partners as trusted parties to include, possibly as a result of prior experience with privatization measures. It is also possible that responses to this question display a regional and political bias toward the private sector, as southern states tend to lean more toward the politically conservative, thus harboring a more favorable attitude toward the private sector. The low frequency of political party members as preferred parties for inclusion in interlocal cooperation may reflect the fact that the city mayor is, at least in name, a non-partisan office. The low frequency of legal professionals as preferred parties may reflect a number of different political realities. Mayors may independently possess legal knowledge as current or former attorneys, and each mayor should have access to a city law director. It may also be the case that mayors simply do not believe that legal

professionals would possess the kind of expertise that could be useful in a cooperative effort.

b. Communication with the Public - Statistical Findings

Much of the focus of this research has been involved the comfort level of city mayors in performing various tasks within the policy process of interlocal cooperation. While many of the tasks examined in this research are more technical in nature, three of the tasks (increasing public awareness, informing and educating the public, and networking to incorporate individuals and groups with issue expertise) are based on mayoral communications efforts with the public. Taking the very basic principle that past experience might dictate future behavior, the following section of this research asks the question of whether past experience with citizens and citizen groups has any correlation with mayoral comfort in performing communications efforts directed at the public in the future.

As in the previous chapter, Spearman's rank correlation test was used to evaluate correlation between the three public communications tasks and mayoral experience with citizens and citizen groups. The data produced by these correlation tests is presented below in Table 4-5. As highlighted in bold in the table, there are three statistically significant relationships, each involving the communication task related to "informing and educating the public." First, there is a medium-to-strong, positive correlation between this task and the perceived activity level of citizens in the interlocal cooperation process that is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($r_s = .297$, $p = .018$). Second, there is a medium-to-strong, positive correlation between this task and the perceived activity level of citizen groups in the interlocal cooperation process that is

statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($r_s = .271, p = .032$). Finally, there is a medium-to-strong, positive correlation between “informing and educating the public” and the perceived productivity level of citizen groups in the interlocal cooperation process that is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($r_s = .312, p = .013$).

Based on the findings of these correlations, there are a few observations to be made. First, while comfort with “informing and educating the public” was positively correlated with the activity level of citizens, citizen groups, and the productivity of citizen groups, correlation tests involving “increasing public awareness” showed no statistically significant relationships. Comparing these two tasks, “increasing public awareness” would seem to be a less demanding task for mayors to perform than “informing and educating the public” because the former should be less politically controversial. These findings may simply confirm this difference because it may be that “increasing public

Table 4-5: Spearman’s Rho Correlations of Public Activity/Productivity and Interlocal Cooperation

	Active Citizens Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)	Productive Citizens Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)	Active Citizen Groups Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)	Productive Citizen Groups Corr. Coefficient (Sig., 2-tailed)
Increasing public awareness of interlocal cooperation.	0.121 (0.344)	0.067 (0.599)	0.113 (0.378)	0.225 (0.076)
Informing and educating public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions.	0.297* (0.018)	0.153 (0.231)	0.271* (0.032)	0.312* (0.013)
Networking to incorporate individuals or groups with issue expertise.	0.183 (0.150)	0.067 (0.602)	0.160 (0.211)	0.214 (0.093)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

N = 63

awareness” does not require a history of active and productive citizens or citizen groups. Alternatively, it may be the case that there simply is no discernible relationship between these variables without any argument for why this might be the case. The more demanding task of “informing and educating the public,” however, displays correlations with citizen or citizen group activity and productivity, perhaps indicating that the public can provide positive or negative reinforcement to mayors through their actions that either encourages or discourages more demanding activity.

Like “increasing public awareness,” the variable of “networking to incorporate experts” displayed no statistically significant relationships with the activity and productivity of citizens or citizen groups. Compared to the aforementioned tasks, this task may be even more demanding on mayoral resources, as it requires mayors to identify experts within a community and may involve selecting some experts while excluding others. Again, the lack of any statistically significant relationship may simply imply that there is no discernible relationship between these variables and no reason for the lack of pattern. Like “increasing public awareness,” it may instead be the case that mayors are consistent in their need for experts in the cooperation process despite their history with the public in this context. The lack of statistically significant relationships may also represent a logical disconnect in the survey instrument itself as mayors may view their history with the public and the need to incorporate experts as drawing from two entirely different pools of public input. If this is the case, this correlation is inappropriate from the outset, but the lack of statistically significant findings within this research negates the need for further discussion on this point.

III. Qualitative Research on Public Communication Venue Preference

The final section of this research concerning elected officials and their communications with the public about regional policymaking is based on two open-ended questions found on the August 2015 survey of city mayors. The two questions posed to mayors were:

- 1) What actions have been taken to involve citizens in interlocal cooperation discussions, by either you, your office, or any other political actors involved in the process?
- 2) What actions would you take in the future, if any, to increase involvement in interlocal cooperation discussions?

Of the sixty-four (64) surveys returned, forty-seven (47) mayors (68.75%) provided a response to the first question about past citizen involvement, and forty (40) mayors (62.50%) provided a response to the second question about future citizen involvement. A full list of responses to these open-ended questions, with identifying material altered for the protection of respondent anonymity, has been included in Appendix B.

As noted in this and previous chapters, interlocal cooperation involves an added dimension of complexity given its incorporation of multiple governments. While this added level of complexity may suggest that all sources of input should be utilized in order to promote better policy, Yang and Callahan (2005) find that governments do not frequently seek citizen input in decision-making, functional areas that are managerial or technical, or involve issues of confidentiality. Though this section of the research only addresses two very basic questions about past and future involvement of citizens, these questions provide a useful start for further exploration about whether citizen involvement

is limited in regional policymaking. The following will examine responses to the two questions, attempt to provide explanations, and suggest lines of inquiry for future research.

The first question concerning actions taken to involve citizens in the interlocal cooperation process is a question of citizenship and civic engagement. Generally speaking, the hope is that our governmental and educational institutions are producing “good” citizens, or those that are active in political processes (Westheimer and Kahne 2004; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). The benefits of active public participation include, but are not limited to, increased citizen knowledge of society and its issues, as well as tolerance and attachment to fellow citizens (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005); increased representation and responsiveness in administrative and political institutions, increased political efficacy, and checks on administrative abuse (Cupps 1977); policy based on public preference, social change, and efficiency benefits (Irvin and Stansbury 2004); and a reduction in the probability of litigation with policy stakeholders (Randolph and Bauer 1999). On the other hand, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) outline a number of disadvantages to citizen participation including greater cost, the difficulty of diffusing citizen goodwill especially in larger communities, public complacency, unrealized expectations due to lack of representation or authority, undue influence over decisions, and persistent selfishness from the citizenry. Given the advantages and disadvantages of public participation, public officials face the challenge of identifying when conditions are optimal to include citizens in the policymaking process (Irvin and Stansbury 2004), and when involving citizens, creating inventive ways for people to be involved (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005).

a. Town Hall and Other Public Meetings

When asked about past efforts to involve citizens in interlocal cooperation discussions, many respondents noted the use of public gatherings. The primary method of reaching out to citizens in the past was through town hall or community meetings, which appeared nineteen (19) times out of forty-seven responses, or in 40.43% of responses. In addition to town hall meetings, other respondents noted the use of focus groups (2) and other types of group meetings (3). The type of public gathering used for discussing interlocal agreements may depend on the issue itself. As one respondent noted, “For complex items we have workshops to inform the public and share information, and allow citizens to meet with me one-on-one to voice their concerns on the issue.”

Given the frequency of group-related responses, there is a need to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of public meetings. Town hall meetings provide local governments with the opportunity to gather information from citizens about what they want from government in the future, with the potential of bringing a divided or weakened community together (Evans-Cowley and Gough 2008). As a form of engagement, town hall meetings are more involved affairs than others. In a typology of engagement, for instance, Berger (2009) frames attending town hall meetings as a means for citizens to be “engaged with” political affairs, a type of political engagement that is both active (as opposed to passive) and attentive activity. Town hall meetings are considered active because, ideally, they allow for two-way communication between citizens and their representatives.

While the image of the New England-style town hall meeting has become iconic to the image of participatory government in the United States, their usefulness as a

modern policy tool has been questioned. Thesis-Morse and Hibbing (2005), for instance, regard the town hall meeting as “a challenging and frustrating experience, one that many people could do without” (244). Frustration arising from public meetings, especially in the ILC context, may be the result of a single community voice dominating discussions, leading to a very limited selection of possible policy alternatives. One of the ideal conditions for citizen engagement efforts, identified by Irvin and Stansbury (2004) is when key stakeholders are not too geographically dispersed. Given the regional scope of ILC, it may be that attempting to engage citizens may not be appropriate for this type of policy. Further, when focused on divisive policy issues, especially national policy issues like healthcare reform, town hall meetings have resulted in angry and violent protests (Shea and Sproveri 2012). Even the threat of conflict at a meeting may be enough to keep some citizens at home. In a study of conflict avoidance and political participation, Ulbig and Funk (1999) note that, “The kinds of face-to-face avenues for participation such as town hall meetings and other forms of public deliberation are precisely the venues most likely to keep the more conflict avoidant away from politics” (277).

Certainly further research is needed concerning citizen engagement in the context of interlocal cooperation beyond the scope of these two questions. For instance, one question worth examining in future research is the scope of meetings in terms of how many communities are typically involved in a public meeting. But one cannot help but speculate that two of the major reasons for the high number of responses involving town hall or other public meetings are 1) that public meetings are a traditional form of engagement that have been repeatedly utilized in the past (meetings based on culture),

and 2) that public meetings are not difficult to organize relative to other forms of engagement (meetings based on ease or efficiency). With either explanation, breaking from town hall meetings to another form of citizen engagement may be difficult. Years of culture may be hard to break without a showing of success through another form of engagement, perhaps from a neighboring jurisdiction. If the predominant factor driving the use of town hall meetings is ease, especially where this form of engagement proves less costly than others, even forms of engagement shown to be successful elsewhere may not be within the government's capacity to act.

b. Advertising

Another aspect of citizen communication found in the survey responses concerned the means of informing and advertising utilized by mayors and their offices. The importance of advertising in the electoral context is well-documented. Campaign spending on advertising by challengers in city council elections, for instance, has been shown to undermine electoral advantage, exerting more influence on incumbent vote share than incumbent spending (Krebs 1998). More recently, Doherty and Adler (2014) found that partisan direct mail, with both positive and negative messages, increases candidate name recognition and likelihood of turning out to vote. Far less, however, is known about advertising in the policy context, let alone the interlocal cooperation context.

In terms of advertising interlocal cooperation, past use of traditional media outlets such as print, radio, and television were mentioned four (4) times combined, while the use of electronic media such as webpages and social media sites was also mentioned four (4) times by respondents. Based on the scarcity of responses involving advertising, the first question to be addressed is why these counts are so low. This question is

important to address because without some means of promotion, more substantive forms of engagement such as town hall meetings may not reach their their full audience. Two possible explanations are that advertising for local policy matter is either not typically conducted or is not traditionally conducted by the office of the mayor. It may, in fact, be the case that the only local policy matters that even warrant the use of advertising are those that involve high salience problems or that might have the most impact on the jurisdiction. But, in the case of interlocal cooperation, the problem is already one that extends beyond boundary lines, so it would seem more likely that these policy matters would be advertised if this was the case. If mayors are not the traditional means of advertising policy matters though, a follow-up question could be asked of who is the appropriate party for this task. Alternatively, the low response rate could instead be attributed to mayors seeking to limit the scope of the policy discussion to government officials and those most closely affected by the cooperative effort.

Though both response counts are low, the method of both informing and advertising to the public is also a topic worth considering because different methods may reach different audiences, especially in terms of age. A 2014 study performed by the Pew Research Center, for instance, finds that among internet users in the youngest adult age cohort (18-29), 87% have a Facebook account, 53% have an Instagram account, and 37% have a Twitter account, each of which represent the highest percentage of users within any cohort (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, and Madden 2015). Given the strong presence of young adult users, communication by public officials through these social networking platforms should be expected to reach this type of audience more efficiently than other forms of media. Alternatively, communications in

newspapers should reach older users. While yearly studies conducted by Nielsen confirm that newspaper readership is dropping among all age cohorts, the largest concentration of users is found among those that are 65 and older (Guskin 2014). Future research concerning interlocal cooperation and communications with the public might investigate whether elected officials are strategic in their media use decisions in order to include or exclude certain segments of the population.

c. Citizen Demand and Inclusion

One of the major themes of this research has been overcoming the presumption of scholars in the field that interlocal cooperation is not the realm of elected officials because of their lack of clear benefit from involvement. This final section covering the findings of qualitative survey questions reveals a similar sort of sentiment from mayors of citizens and their interest in regional matters. When asked about activity to include the public, one mayor responded that, “There is very little demand from the public on these issues.” Another mayor, when asked about future means of reaching the public noted, “Depends on the type. Not likely to involve citizens.” These mayors’ impressions of citizen interest, and disinterest in involving them from the outset, may be well-founded as interest in interlocal cooperation should require some knowledge of regional issues. Besides the lack of a personal gain for elected officials, this same rationale is used to explain why these agreements are generally considered the exclusive realm of appointed administrators. It is not unreasonable to think that an elected official should have a deeper understanding of regional issues than the average citizen, so why should citizens be involved?

What this discussion of citizen demand and inclusion brings into question is the role of elected officials as providers of information on policy issues to the public. It may be the case that the lack of demand is based on a lack of information flowing out of the mayor's office. And if the mayor is not the one to provide information to the public, especially in smaller market cities where media outlets may not be as developed, who fills this role? Further, if elected officials are not filling this role, what is their rationale for not doing so? Relying on policy literature going back to Schattschneider (1965), perhaps mayors are choosing to limit the scope of policy discussion in order to maintain control over the direction of the agreement. Alternatively, mayors may simply lack the political savvy or energy to make policy communications and issue awareness a top priority.

IV. Conclusion

Whether city mayors, members of a city council, or other elected officials should choose to communicate with officials from other governments or the public about matters of regional policymaking would seem to be largely dependent on their inclusion into the policymaking process by public administrators, barring situations where elected officials act as a policy entrepreneur. As revealed in this study, elected officials do seem to be in fairly regular contact with other officials generally, reporting monthly contact with both other city officials and officials within their own county. Whether those discussions regularly involve the possibility of cooperative efforts remains a lingering question, but at the very least, those discussions involved at least one discussion of interlocal cooperation in a year's time for nearly two-thirds of those responding. Though the connection between frequency of contact with other officials and discussion of

cooperation was not drawn together in this study, the repeated contact with other officials may be building the relationship of trust between community leaders that is so essential to the success of interlocal agreements.

As a final consideration in this broad study of mayoral communications, most of the discussion above appears to focus on communications at the beginning of the policymaking process, but political communications do not stop there. Instead, communications extend into program implementation and evaluation as well. As a report titled "Selling Stakeholders on Interlocal Cooperation" prepared by the Michigan Government Finance Officers Association states of program evaluation and ongoing communications:

"Measure performance, relying on widely accepted benchmarks from well respected organizations. This can help establish credibility and demonstrate to the citizens what the benefits truly were. In turn, success breeds success, and future [interlocal cooperation] endeavors will be much easier to accomplish." (Holdsworth 2007, 8)

In order to more fully understand mayoral communications in the interlocal cooperation context, future studies could focus on several topics including a comparison of means of communication throughout the policy process and means of reporting program outcomes in instances of both program success and failure.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The preceding chapters covered research on the topic of city mayors and their involvement with a unique form of policy known as interlocal cooperation. In the opening chapter, I provided several examples of how interlocal cooperation between different local governments can achieve a variety of goals such as invigorating a blighted downtown area, building a high-tech workforce, and improving emergency services. Interlocal cooperation allows government to pursue a number of new and interesting policy possibilities that more traditional methods of direct administration and even contracting out to the private sector do not.

In the second chapter, which served as a broad literature review, I discussed many of the benefits of interlocal cooperation. By combining resources across jurisdictions, local governments can benefit in terms of fiscal efficiency and responsiveness, but there are a number of other benefits that come along with this form of collective action. For instance, in addition to the benefit of shared expertise, local governments should also find that cooperative efforts provide more opportunities for creative input by providing participants from multiple jurisdictions the chance to discuss policy alternatives with each other. It is exactly this kind of creativity and ingenuity that may be necessary to address the new and difficult challenges to local government that lie ahead.

Viewed through the lens of federalism, interlocal cooperation may also provide local governments with the opportunity to increase their share of governmental power relative to the state and federal government. This opportunity may be especially attractive to politicians and citizens in the southeastern region of the United States

where fear of a distant and detached central government is still alive and well. By concentrating power at the local level, interlocal cooperation should allow local governments to maintain control over their programs and design those programs in a way that could be more appropriate to their jurisdiction in terms of both political acceptability and effectiveness.

The third and fourth chapters serve as my own unique contributions to the study of elected officials and interlocal cooperation. In the third chapter, I identified several correlations between tasks that mayors could perform within the stages of a cooperative policy process and commonly used variables in this field, including length of term, city size, city type, and racial homogeneity. In addition, two relatively new variables to this line of study were tested: interest in higher office and value preference between financial concerns and service quality. Using Spearman's rank order correlation and the Mann-Whitney U test, a number of statistically significant relationships were identified. For instance, city size was found to be related to informing and educating the public about the nature of the problem and possible solutions, networking to incorporate individuals or groups with expertise, and collaborating with private parties. A likely reason for the presence mayoral comfort with these tasks is the availability of a greater number of private parties and policy experts in larger cities.

Findings related to racial homogeneity levels were surprising in that there were statistically significant, negative relationships with informing and educating the public, collaborating with other public officials and private parties, and delegating power. In other words, as the racial homogeneity of a city is greater, mayoral comfort level with these tasks diminishes. Though these findings seem to defy contemporary wisdom on

the subject which views cooperation as more likely given greater homogeneity, it is possible that mayors interpreted “comfort” as “need” to perform each task. In other words, mayors might have felt less need to perform these tasks because of their understanding of the presence of a uniform racial city composition.

In the fourth chapter, I examined the communications of city mayors with other public officials and the public by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Survey responses revealed that, on average, mayors are more likely to talk with elected officials from other cities than those from their own county or a neighboring county. When asked about contracting with another city or county government for services in the last twelve months, 63% noted that they had. Looking at this question in more detail, mayors from mayor-council type cities were far more likely to have had these discussions than not, while mayors from council-manager type cities were more closely split in their responses.

An additional set of findings from this chapter examined the relationship between previous activity and productivity of citizens and citizen groups with mayoral comfort in tasks associated with communication with the public. Basic descriptive statistics found that mayors found citizen and citizen groups to be occasionally active in interlocal cooperation discussions, and that when citizens and groups are active they are usually productive. Examining the relationship with interlocal cooperation tasks, Spearman’s rho correlations found statistically significant relationships between active citizens, active citizen groups, and productive citizen groups with informing and educating the public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions. Informing and educating the public has a higher degree of political risk than does simply increasing public awareness, so

mayors may need to have experienced greater involvement in the past in order to feel comfortable with this task.

Finally, qualitative responses revealed mayoral thoughts about what they have done in the past and what they plan to do in the future with regard to communicating with the public about interlocal cooperation. Though there was some mention of advertising through various methods, the response repeated most often when it asked about previous efforts to involve citizens was through town halls. Previous literature suggests that while town halls may be a source for information, they may also stifle public interest, as they may be viewed as sources of challenge and conflict. Much more concerning were responses from mayors stating that they had not and did not plan to engage the public in interlocal cooperation. While the usefulness of engaging the public in interlocal cooperation may be dependent on the policy type, proponents of a truly representative government would argue that at the very least mayors should make an effort to inform the public about any new or altered policy decisions.

I. Importance of the Research

Having recounted the work of the previous chapters, the final step before moving on to future research considerations is to discuss why this research is important and what it adds to the field of knowledge. The first clear contribution that this research provides is an examination of city mayors and their attitudes toward interlocal cooperation, which is a unique and underdeveloped area of inquiry thus far in the relevant literature. Mayors are important public figures because, among other reasons, they can serve as a bridge between policy experts and the public. Understanding mayoral attitudes toward interlocal cooperation can help others in government direct mayors toward tasks that

they feel comfortable performing and that may also benefit the public. Through better utilization of mayors, cooperative efforts at the local level can improve and citizens can become more knowledgeable about the workings of government in their area.

Additionally, while other interlocal cooperation research has included mayors as part of a survey along with members of city councils over a relatively small region, this research is important because it is the first study of interlocal cooperation to be directed exclusively to mayors over a major geographic region of the United States. From a research perspective, this study demonstrates that survey research on this topic of mayors in large cities over a large geographic area is not only possible but can also be potentially very fruitful. In the coming decades, further research should follow the lead of this literature by being directed toward city mayors and their involvement in complex forms of governance. Doing so will allow for the building of theory through a greater accumulation of knowledge on this topic.

The design of this research has also been an important step for how interlocal cooperation is considered in future research because, rather than relying on a simple dichotomy of either support or opposition, this research has created a framework through which the policy process of interlocal cooperation can be divided. This is not to say that the notion of a multi-stage process is novel to the study of public policy, only the application of the process to this particular form of policy. Like the evolution of policy models in the past, the policy process presented in this research is very likely to be modified in future research but at the very least this research provides a starting point for others.

Another major contribution that this research provides is further support for some basic understandings about city mayors that have been assumed but have yet to be found through empirical research. In Chapter 3, for instance, survey findings revealed that mayors would feel most comfortable with performing the task of informing the public of the nature of the problem to be addressed by interlocal cooperation, but feel least comfortable with performing the task of crafting the specific terms of an interlocal agreement. This finding supports what amounts to a common sense notion that less complex and less politically polarizing tasks would be favored over more complex and more politically polarizing tasks. Similarly, survey results presented in Chapter 4 found that while all mayors surveyed had spoken with other government officials about providing a public service through interlocal cooperation in the last year by a 2-to-1 ratio, mayors from mayor-council cities had done so at a far higher rate than their counterparts in council-manager cities. Again, this result is expected as mayors in these types of cities are provided with greater authority over matters of public policy. Both of these results, along with others in this survey, provide support for basic assumptions about how city mayors operate, which is important because they allow for future research to stand on firmer theoretical ground.

Finally, this research is also notable for at least one thing that it did not find, that being a lack of statistically significant correlations between tasks of the interlocal cooperation process and progressive political ambition. Had such a finding been present, it could have laid the groundwork for a theory of mayoral personality types that might have been able to predict which mayors may be interested in higher office in the future. On one hand, the lack of relationships seems to follow previous research by

Bickers, Stein, and Post (2010) where the electoral connection between mayoral candidates and interlocal cooperation was shown to be weak at best. Supporting previous research is a positive contribution in that it allows for future research to focus on other, less studied lines of inquiry.

On the other hand, however, the lack of an electoral connection may call for alternative means of research to uncover the truth of mayoral attitudes. In other words, this research may not have captured mayoral interest in higher office if mayors were unwilling to reveal their true aspirations through the survey. If this is the case, then perhaps the contribution of this research is to serve as a caution to those seeking politically sensitive information from elected officials. Alternatively, it may simply be the case that mayors would use interlocal cooperation as a means of building their own brand name, but do not do so because they simply do not understand this form of policy. With either of these alternatives, the contribution of this research is that it opens up the door for many other forms of future inquiry such as those discussed below in the next section.

II. Future Research Questions

The findings from this research represent a very modest step in the direction of understanding how city mayors interact with government officials and the public in the process of interlocal cooperation. Still, as a result of the insights gained through an analysis of survey responses, a realization of potential corrections and additions to the survey instrument, subsequently published work by other authors in the field, and discovery of new aspects of interlocal cooperation, there are many additional research questions that deserve attention moving forward.

Looking first to inspiration from the survey instrument, some of the first questions attempt to gauge how often elected officials talked with various city and county officials and whether they have discussed interlocal cooperation within the last 12 months. In order to connect the concepts of communication and interlocal cooperation, a future set of questions should ask mayors whether interlocal cooperation has been discussed with actors in each different governmental category and how often those discussions have taken place. Even more specific questions might inquire about the settings of these meetings and how the discussion was started. Are these discussions more likely to occur in an open meeting where multiple governments are represented, or do these conversations originate over the phone or in less formal settings? To what extent do mayors attempt to engage members of minority populations in interlocal discussions? Though this research seeks to understand how comfortable mayors are with articulating the nature of the problem and with seeking out expert advice, there remains a knowledge gap about whether mayors also seek guidance on the political repercussions of an interlocal agreement. Could mayors use interlocal cooperation to empower a traditionally undervalued population, such as a racial minority, when tensions exist within the community? For instance, could a mayor champion a minority cause on a regional scale in order to win back trust in government with a minority population? How many and to what extent do mayors rely on their own staff in the formation of interlocal agreements? What types of staff members are likely to be included in this process? Do mayors in larger cities establish offices especially to handle regional issues?

One question posed on the survey of city mayors asked if there were any additional comments that the respondent would like to make about his or her

involvement with interlocal cooperation. Though this question went largely unanswered, the majority of the answers that I did receive reflected a general sentiment of cooperation over individual concern, such as the statements “It takes a team approach to make our region better,” “Working together never hurts,” and “Can’t move forward alone.” One respondent, very likely cued by questions concerning higher political aspirations noted that, “If political interest is a consideration, the whole thing collapses.” These comments are all encouraging because they seem to show that mayors are aware that some policy issues need to be dealt with on a region-wide basis but do very little to increase our understanding of their experience.

After having an initial reading of the survey responses, I noticed that one question about “protecting the identity of my community” was left blank a handful of times and others replied with only a question mark. Unfortunately, one of the shortcomings of survey research, especially mail-only surveys, is the lack of flexibility in the survey instrument. Here it appeared that the concept of community identity was not fully understood by those that left the question blank, and quite possibly by some of those that did respond, but there was no opportunity for the term to be formally defined. Though defining and examining the concept of community identity beyond a common sense understanding of what the term might mean would likely lead to an entirely new set of research question far beyond the scope of this research, this concept is an important one for the study of any relationship where one community could hold significant sway over the future governance of another. This concern was reflected by one respondent who stated that, “When there are equally shared interests and it does not result in lost identity, interlocal cooperation can be the way to go.” At the

governmental level, future research in this area might focus on how elected officials and appointed administrators define their city's identity or identities, how other communities define a city's identity, and specific concerns about how identity might be lost. Community identity might also be evaluated by surveying community residents to see how their concept of identity matches up with governmental concepts of identity and in what contexts residents would be willing to sacrifice that identity for more efficient or effective services.

One of the key variables that my research examines are differences in mayoral involvement based on city structure. The distinguishing characteristic of city structure in this study has been whether the city has a mayor-council or a council-manager form. As noted in earlier chapters, this dichotomy represents a simplification of city structure in that many cities would more accurately be described as a hybrid form of government, existing somewhere in between these two types based on the allocation of power between city representatives. The city structure variable as used in this research is also incomplete in that it does not take into account whether a mayor presides over one of the three types of consolidated forms of government. On one hand this oversight is understandable as, according to the National Association of Counties, only 40 such consolidated governments exist in the United States. On the other hand, there are a number of large cities among these 40, and these cities are likely to face a different set of challenges than their non-consolidated counterparts.

One of the mayors that participated in the survey presides over a consolidated city/county government and noted that consolidated government was "different than other local governments." According to the respondent, "Most interlocal cooperation that

I have been involved with is working with other cities and counties in [the area]. Also, we have discussions with ‘small’ or ‘satellite’ cities that existed in [the county] before consolidation...” Though the mayor in question does not qualify how exactly his or her city is “different,” simply referencing the topic of consolidation points to the need for further study on the role of consolidated governments in interlocal cooperation. Due to the small number of cities that qualify as a consolidated government, a case study or comparison of case studies might evaluate how consolidated governments interact with their neighbors and whether this interaction differs from cities of comparable size that are not consolidated. It may be the case, for instance, that consolidated governments take on a more substantial leadership role than other cities based on their command of resources.

As a complement to the above comment from the consolidated city mayor, another mayor from a surrounding city responded that, “As a ring city of [the consolidated government], most of our interlocal agreements have been in place for decades. As we move forward on infrastructure-related issues, these new agreements will become extremely crucial.” Specifically, the mayor notes that new agreements related to “mass transit and distributed fiber on the communications front” are on the region’s agenda moving forward. This comment adds two new questions to the mix: First, are the types of programs on the agenda of regions with “hubs” (larger cities, and especially large consolidated cities), fundamentally different than those considered by aggregations of smaller, more rural communities? It seems likely, for instance, that these hub-based regions would be more likely to pool their resources to provide or acquire services beyond simply meeting basic standards of living. Second, are the

principles that lead to success in more basic service arrangements applicable to arrangements for services that are on the cutting-edge of technology, such as region-wide partnership with communications providers to install “distributed fiber” wiring to increase Internet access and speed in the area? This analysis would require the creation of a typology of services and a fairly thorough list of rules or principles that generally guide public officials when involved in cooperative ventures.

Another interesting aspect of interlocal cooperation that has not received enough attention in the relevant academic literature is the role of state law and its influence on local government. The response that drew my attention to this matter stated, “In [my state], there is a natural friction between large municipalities and county government. Its seeds are sowed in statutory powers and the divide of the role of government between urban and rural citizens. This requires a great deal of work and understanding when creating an interlocal framework.” Future research could take a broad approach by gathering and comparing interlocal cooperation acts from each of the 50 states or in a more narrow approach by examining the relationship between state, county, and city governments in a case study manner.

A final question for mayors and their place in interlocal cooperation is the training of elected officials in interlocal cooperation. Though there may be other sources of training for elected officials, The National League of Cities includes 49 state municipal leagues, each of which provides different training to their members. Some states, like South Carolina, offer training in interlocal cooperation to city mayors and other elected officials. Among the questions that could be answered about this training are which states offer training, approximately how many city mayors or other elected officials

participate in this training, how long this training occurs, and what kinds of topics are presented. If possible, it would also be useful to collect feedback from mayors that have undergone this training to learn what lessons were new and broadened their understanding of how interlocal cooperation could be used, any change in their likelihood of seeking out or initiating regional policy discussions, and what questions remain unanswered by their training. This line of research is an important new avenue for the field of interlocal cooperation but is also relevant to a broader literature on policy change. The advocacy coalition framework, for instance, posits that one source of policy change is learning. This research on interlocal cooperation training can help to demonstrate whether learning has taken place and has led to an actual change in public policy processes.

III. Conclusion

Based on the growth of related literature in the field, it seems likely that interlocal cooperation is the future of local governance and that public administration would benefit greatly from considering all of the possible actors that could contribute to this form of policy. Elected officials, in particular, may be able to contribute to the success of cooperative efforts, helping both citizens of the region and themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interlocal Cooperation Survey Instrument

MAYORS & INTERLOCAL COOPERATION: ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND BEHAVIOR *August 2015*

This survey is being distributed to mayors of large cities (i.e., those cities with a population greater than 50,000) across ten states in the Southeast region (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee) as part of a research study on mayoral involvement in interlocal cooperation. In recent years, city governments in the region have considered interlocal cooperation, sharing or contracting with other local governments, for services such as police, fire, and libraries. While these shared and contract service models are frequently discussed by city administrators and the media, we do not know about the extent to which mayors are involved in such arrangements. This survey is designed to gain insight into mayors' attitudes, beliefs, and behavior when dealing with the sharing and contracting of local government services with other local governments. (We are not asking about your views on contracting with private sector firms.)

Your responses will be used for academic research. Your responses to this survey will remain confidential. A code number, only accessible to the researcher, identifies your responses. Your name and the name of your city will not be used in research reports. The following questions will take about 15 minutes of your time. Thank you for your participation.

Your Background in Local Government:

What year were you first elected to your current office? _____

	Never	A few times each year or less	Once per month	A few times each month	At least once per week
How frequently do you talk with elected officials from other cities?	1	2	3	4	5
How frequently do you talk with elected officials from <i>your</i> county government?	1	2	3	4	5
How frequently do you talk with elected officials from <i>other</i> county governments?	1	2	3	4	5
How frequently do you attend meetings with elected officials from outside of your own city government?	1	2	3	4	5

Within the last 12 months, has your city discussed contracting with another city or county government to provide a service that you have traditionally provided on your own? Yes No

To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements about your work as a mayor? Please circle a number on the scale next to each statement.

	Disagree			Agree			
I promote the interests of my city when talking with other local governments about sharing or contracting services.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I attempt to find solutions that will equally benefit my city and the other local governments with whom we work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I protect my city from becoming too dependent on contracts and service sharing arrangements with other local governments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I advocate for the interests of my city's government employees during any discussions about sharing or contracting services.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Protecting the identity of my community is a priority when making decisions about local government services.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Forming working relationships with other local governments is beneficial to my political career.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please open and continue the survey inside →

To what extent do you feel comfortable involving yourself with each of the following tasks associated with interlocal cooperation?
Please circle a number on the scale next to each statement.

	Very Uncomfortable						Very Comfortable
Identifying problems that require interlocal cooperation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Increasing public awareness of interlocal cooperation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Informing and educating public of the nature of the problem and possible solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Networking to incorporate individuals or groups with issue expertise.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Collaborating with other public officials.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Collaborating with private parties (individual citizens or groups).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Delegating power to other individuals or groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creating the specific terms of interlocal agreements.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Implementing interlocal agreement activities or programs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Monitoring of interlocal agreement activities or programs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Evaluating the long-term success of interlocal cooperation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Listed below is a set of values to be maximized by mayors when entering into shared of contract service agreements with other local governments. Please rank each of these values to indicate how important they are to you when you enter into interlocal cooperation discussions. Place 1 in the box next to the most important value, 2 next to the second most important issue and so on. Do not place the same number in more than one box.

- Equality of Citizen Access to Service
- Financial Implications of the Agreement
- Citizen Engagement in Formation
- Service Quality
- Political Career Interests

Citizen Involvement in Interlocal Cooperation:

In your experience, how active are individual citizens in interlocal cooperation discussions?

- Never active
- Almost never active
- Occasionally active
- Usually active
- Always active

In your experience, how productive has individual citizen activity been to interlocal cooperation discussion?

- Very productive
- Somewhat productive
- Neutral
- Somewhat counterproductive
- Very counterproductive

In your experience, how active are citizens groups in interlocal cooperation discussions?

- Never active
- Almost never active
- Occasionally active
- Usually active
- Always active

In your experience, how productive has citizen group activity been to interlocal cooperation discussion?

- Very productive
- Somewhat productive
- Neutral
- Somewhat counterproductive
- Very counterproductive

Which of the following types of citizens would you be most interested in working with in interlocal cooperation discussions? (Check all that apply)

- Business Leaders
- Civic Leaders
- Political Party Members
- Legal Professionals
- General Public
- Other: _____

What actions have been taken to involve citizens in interlocal cooperation discussions, by either you, your office, or any other political actors involved in the process?

What actions would you take in the future, if any, to increase citizen involvement in interlocal cooperation discussions?

Reminder: Your responses will be used for academic research only. Your responses to this survey will remain confidential. A code number, only accessible to the researcher, identifies your responses. Your name and the name of your city will NOT be used in research reports.

Mayors, Interlocal Cooperation, & Politics:

How beneficial has your experience with interlocal cooperation been for your ability to govern within your city?

- Very beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Neutral
- Somewhat detrimental
- Very detrimental

How beneficial has your experience with interlocal cooperation been for your political reputation within your city?

- Very beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Neutral
- Somewhat detrimental
- Very detrimental

How beneficial has your experience with interlocal cooperation been for your political reputation within *outside* of your city?

- Very beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Neutral
- Somewhat detrimental
- Very detrimental

How likely would you be to consider running for a higher office (e.g., governor, member of Congress) at some point in your political career?

- Extremely likely
- Likely
- Neutral
- Unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

Do you have any additional comments about your involvement with interlocal cooperation?



You have completed the survey. Thank you!

Please fold the survey like a regular letter and place it in the return envelope that is provided. If you no longer have the return envelope, the survey can be mailed to: Mr. Stephen Adkins, P.O. Box 32876, Knoxville, TN 37930-2876. If you have any questions about this survey or about your participation in this study, you may contact Stephen Adkins at 865.207.8186 or by email at sadkins1@utk.edu. Questions about your rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study, may also be addressed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at irbchair@utk.edu or 865.974.7697.

Appendix B - Qualitative Findings

1. *What actions have been taken to involve citizens in interlocal cooperation discussions, by either you, your office, or any other political actors involved in the process?*

- 303 - "Davidson County has a unified county/city government. Most of my dealing with interlocal discussions involve planning, roads and transit. Specific organizations — MPO, RTA, Mayor's Caucus — contain these discussions. Citizen participation through public comment takes place at RTA and MPO meetings."
- 307 - "Meeting every month with homeowners and residents associations."
- 313 - "In working with the county to implement a new CRA and TIF district, we formed a Citizens Advisory Committee which met prior to adoption of CRA."
- 318 - "We have an extensive community plan that is developed by citizens and the business community."
- 319 - "TV, radio, print."
- 321 - "Joint IT, risk management, EMA, HR, library, ADA compliance. School capital [illegible]."
- 323 - "Identification of needs — input from professionals and public, formulating structure, implementing objectives."
- 327 - "There is very little demand from the public on these issues."
- 330 - "We have had community meetings and do a news briefing show to keep citizens involved."
- 332 - "Direct invitation, advertisements, Facebook, website."
- 334 - "Town hall meetings."
- 340 - "Town hall meetings."
- 343 - "Advertise meetings."
- 344 - "Social media, town hall meetings, press conferences, council meetings, various boards."
- 355 - "Town hall and workshop forums, mailings and announcements dedicated to potential interlocal options, surveys."
- 356 - "We hold town hall meetings and set up citizen advisory and oversight panels."
- 358 - "Tuscaloosa Forward, Transform Tuscaloosa County, PARA upgrades."
- 359 - "None."
- 360 - "Social media/communication."
- 366 - "Accept oral and written comments, suggestions."
- 368 - "Several groups currently, business groups, clubs and organizations, faith-based groups."
- 370 - "Public hearings."
- 371 - "Held meetings and solicited input."
- 373 - "Forums, open house discussions."
- 375 - "Public to be heard at each meeting, and then acting on worthwhile proposals."
- 379 - "Not much."
- 383 - "Public safety."
- 387 - "Initiating railroad crossing issues in neighborhood."
- 388 - "Citizen focus groups, advisory boards, and commissions."
- 389 - "EMS services, joint response agreement [fire and police]."
- 391 - "Advisory boards, appointments, drafting citizens."
- 393 - "Facilitating town hall groups, appointing committees, implementing recommendations."

- 397 - "Meetings are televised, on internet, advertised and encouraged!"
- 398 - "Open meetings."
- 406 - "Small group meetings, larger public meetings."
- 409 - "Series of public input sessions well in advance of the decision making process."
- 413 - "Meetings involving combined law and fire services."
- 414 - "We engage our neighborhood advisory boards as well as call upon our boards and commissions for input."
- 418 - "Open access to all area Sunshine Law."
- 420 - "Mostly done by the City Manager."
- 421 - "Boards and commissions. Citizens to be heard at council meetings."
- 424 - "We allow public discussion at all our meetings. For complex items we have workshops to inform the public and share information, and allow citizens to meet with me one-on-one to voice their concerns on the issue."
- 425 - "We are currently attempting to consolidate county-wide E911 dispatching, a seven-city consortium. To date, we have only involved emergency management experts from each municipality. As we finalize the consolidation, it is imperative that a citizen and business leadership group be brought in to assist to educate and disseminate information about where we are with 911."
- 427 - "Informing and involving community members through forums, press, mailings by myself and city staff is a regular action to engage."
- 428 - "Task teams, focus groups, surveys, town hall meetings, elected officials input."
- 434 - "Notified my residents of zoning near our city borders being decided by adjacent city. Held numerous town hall meetings in our city hall to host county and state officials."
- 435 - "Usually staff driven."

2. *What actions would you take in the future, if any, to increase involvement in interlocal cooperation discussions?*

- 303 - "Public outreach is taking place on transit issues."
- 313 - "Continue current actions."
- 318 - "1) Allow for open meetings/town hall meetings, 2) Push information through media outlets."
- 319 - "Same as above" ("TV, radio, print.")
- 321 - "Public forums, hearings, joint citizen review of issues."
- 323 - "More public hearings."
- 330 - "Continue to educate them on how they are affected. Sometimes they don't know the benefits or ramifications of such agreements."
- 332 - "Marketing campaign through multiple sources."
- 340 - "Better public notices where citizens will actually see them. Old mediums don't work."
- 343 - "None."
- 344 - "Much of the same."
- 356 - "We do a lot to engage our citizens in all aspects of policy setting. We are expanding our use of social media to reach individuals who are not engaged in traditional community communications programs. We also take surveys at places of employment, retail centers, and schools."
- 358 - "Continue to be transparent and open. Continue to leverage all types of media for direct communication."
- 368 - "Ongoing study to engage as many possible members of our city!"
- 370 - "Public hearings."

- 371 - "Provide the most transparent and open information available and hold meetings to solicit input and feedback."
- 373 - "Committee formation."
- 374 - "Outreach, Internet."
- 375 - "Whatever it takes."
- 379 - "Work through our communications office to promote the issues."
- 383 - "Street improvement."
- 387 - "Setting priorities for road paving."
- 388 - "Reach out more. Disseminate involvement using media sources."
- 389 - "Forums."
- 391 - "1) Meet one-on-one, 2) establish dialogue, 3) create a plan, 4) execute the plan, 5) measure results."
- 393 - "We continually assess and evaluate to be sure all citizens are involved and informed. Different perspectives and resources are sought."
- 397 - "Same as above." ("Meetings are televised, on internet, advertised and encouraged!")
- 398 - "None beyond targeted invitations."
- 406 - "Depends on the nature of service — recreation and transportation are foremost areas of intergovernmental partnerships — mostly positive. The wider the public show of support, the better."
- 409 - "Make sure we maximize social media and the use of our website."
- 413 - "Bring awareness of all law enforcement, paramedic, and fire services [to] the local media."
- 415 - "Depends on the issue and its importance as perceived by citizens. Potentially focus groups, meetings for stakeholder citizens."
- 418 - "Create citizen involvement."
- 420 - "Maybe step it up."
- 421 - "Small group meetings, appeal to civic groups."
- 424 - "Having more open dialogue and idea sharing with other cities."
- 427 - "There is always room for improving our communicating with the public and we make an effort to evaluate each encounter."
- 428 - "Same as above." ("Task teams, focus groups, surveys, town hall meetings, elected officials input.")
- 434 - "Improve communication to make citizens more aware of opportunities."
- 435 - "Depends on the type. Not likely to involve citizens."

3. *Do you have any additional comments about your involvement with interlocal cooperation?*

- 303 - "Metro Nashville/Davidson County is different than other local governments. Most interlocal cooperation that I have been involved with is working with other cities and counties in Middle Tennessee. Also, we have discussions with 'small' or 'satellite' cities that existed in Davidson County before consolidation in 1963."
- 327 - "It takes a team approach to make our region better. Teams have helped us land [illegible] economic developments."
- 332 - "When there are equally shared interests and it does not result in lost identity, interlocal cooperation can be the way to go."
- 358 - "In Alabama, there is a natural friction between large municipalities and county government. Its seeds are sowed in statutory powers and the divide of the role of government between urban and rural citizens. This requires a great deal of work and understanding when creating an interlocal framework."

- 368 - "Can't move forward alone. Must be at the table or 'be part of the meal.'"
- 391 - "*1) Very rewarding work, 2) natural (?) growth opportunity, 3) leveraging political assets, 4) consensus building.*"
- 405 - "If political interest is a consideration, the whole thing collapses."
- 420 - "Working together never hurts."
- 425 - "As a ring city of Nashville, most of our interlocal agreements have been in place for decades. As we move forward on infrastructure-related issues, these new agreements will become extremely crucial. Specifically, as a region we tackle items related to mass transit and distributed fiber on the communications front."
- 428 - "Public and private partnerships are key to a small city's success in today's world."
- 434 - "We work closely with our adjacent cities on issues such as traffic, public safety, development. We formed a regional 911 service, also have a regional police SWAT team to better utilize services."

Vita

Stephen Adkins was born in Knoxville, Tennessee to the parents of Danny and Barbara Adkins. He attended Bearden High School in Knoxville, and later attended the University of Tennessee where he attained his undergraduate degree in Advertising. Several years later he attended the Cumberland School of Law at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Upon returning to Knoxville, he passed the Tennessee Bar Examination and became licensed to practice law in Tennessee. He then returned to the University of Tennessee where he completed the Master of Public Administration program. Continuing into the Ph.D. program in Political Science, he accepted positions as both a teaching assistant and a teaching associate at the University of Tennessee. Beginning in Fall 2016, he will be the director of the Master of Public Administration program at the Lincoln Memorial University.