Check Yes or No: Identifying Factors That Predict Rural Wisconsin Public School District Referendum Passage

By

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Abstract

Wisconsin school districts are increasingly reliant on revenue garnered via referendums. The frequency, passage rates, and dollar amounts of school referendums in Wisconsin have all reached levels that are unprecedented in Wisconsin school finance history, even in White, working-class, rural communities that are growing more politically conservative. I review 60 factors that are associated with referendum outcomes. Rather than relying on old adages—football championships do not, in fact, improve the chances of referendum passage—I use methods of predictive regression to generate a model that best predicts post-Act 10, rural referendums in Wisconsin. This model produced particularly high sensitivity and excellent discrimination. The model also demonstrated that conservative, rural, White, working-class Wisconsin communities cannot and should not be written off as places that are antagonistic to referendum passage. I then present case studies focusing on two deviant rural referendum sites, one whose referendum passed when I predicted it would fail and one whose referendum failed when I predicted it would pass. I interviewed 53 people across both communities. My findings suggest that variables outside of school boards' and administrators' direct control, e.g. median income, are still "campaign-able." Independent campaign committees must answer three questions to persuade voters: where is the referendum money going, why is that project needed, and why is that project needed now? In order to make an impact, answers to these questions must be sent through an amenable social, cultural, political, and economic environment in which the district is situated. This method of campaign work is persuasive because of directed giving through voluntary taxation (DGVT). DGVT can be invoked via altruism, warm glow, preference elicitation, common identity reinforcements, and making individuals the face of the campaign.

Key words: school referendum, school finance, political behavior, predictive regression, case study, rural education

Dedication

For Mom, Dad, Dave, & Helen

“Let’s polka tonight and get to work tomorrow.”

Acknowledgments

My name may be listed as the sole author of this dissertation, but a doctorate is the result of the work of many, many people in my life.

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Introduction

On Monday, June 4, 2018, Kellie Roske dropped off her daughter, Lola, at Arena Community Elementary, a school in the River Valley School District in rural southwestern Wisconsin. It was the last day of school for Lola but also the last day of school for the elementary building. The school board voted to close the school permanently after a $9.3 million referendum failed by about 200 votes a year and a half earlier. It was the second elementary school to close in the district within a year. The village of Lone Rock, located about 20 miles west of Arena, lost theirs in spring 2017. Only one remains: River Valley Elementary School in Spring Green, a village that splits the difference in distance between the now-shuttered kindergarten through grade four buildings (story originally reported by Bosman, 2018).

Voters in the Palmyra-Eagle Area School District in southeastern Wisconsin faced a similar, albeit much direr, dilemma in the spring of 2019: approve a referendum increasing the district's budget by nearly 100 percent over four years or insolvency would close the *entire* district. Palmyra-Eagle was in the midst of an escalating enrollment-financial cycle. Enrollments dipped as students open-enrolled elsewhere. This put the district in a financial bind in a state where aid is largely disbursed on a per-pupil basis. The financial problems and massive cuts motivated additional students to leave the district, and the problem intensified (Polcyn & Davis, 2019). The district proposed referendums 15 times between 1996 and 2019; two have passed, including the most recent in 2003. On April 4, 2019, 61 percent of voters voted no. Six days later, the district's board of education approved a resolution to consider dissolving the district, and, just three months after that, the school board voted unanimously to dissolve (Dohr, 2019). The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School District Boundary Appeal Board ruled in early 2020 that the district could not yet dissolve and would need to evaluate more financial recovery options. There has only been one Wisconsin school district dissolution since 1965—

Ondossagon School District in 1990—and none since revenue caps were instituted in 1993. The Department of Public Instruction is unsure whether neighboring Whitewater, where some students could attend upon potential closure, would see an increase in per-pupil revenue limits if Palmyra-Eagle ceased to exist (Pierce, 2019).

The Merrill Area Public School District is in Merrill, a city in north-central Wisconsin that serves as a gateway to the state's northwoods. An April 2018 referendum asked district voters to approve $10 million over four years in order to avoid teacher layoffs and closure of two of the district's elementary schools (BeMiller, 2018a). Unlike River Valley and Palmyra-Eagle, Merrill Area Public School District residents approved the referendum by a 63-37 percentage point margin (BeMiller, 2018b). With that vote, residents chose to approve an increase in their property taxes by about six dollars per year for a $100,000 home.

Clearly, these ballot questions are high stakes. Money matters in education. Prominent researchers have demonstrated the link between money and outcomes in three waves in the past three decades. Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine published one of the most impactful of these studies in 1996. In a widely-cited, meta-analytic study, they determined, among other things, that a $500 increase in per-pupil expenditures is associated with an increase in achievement of one-sixth of a standard deviation, an improvement they deemed significant.

Beginning in the early 2000s, researchers began to exploit state-level, court-ordered school finance reforms to ascertain whether money made a difference in student outcomes. The general consensus was that additional money paid off in many respects, especially for low-income children. Guryan (2001) studied school finance reforms in Massachusetts and consistently found that a $1,000 increase in per-pupil spending increased math, reading, science, and social studies scores by about one-half of a standard deviation for the state's fourth-grade

students. While he did not find similar results for eighth-grade students, he argued that the difference was the result of the longer duration Massachusetts students spent in better-funded elementary schools. Meanwhile, Card and Payne (2002) used a nationwide dataset and found that court reforms increased funding, particularly for lower-income districts; the increased funding resulted in additional spending; and the spending, in turn, reduced the gap in SAT scores by approximately five percent between children with highly-educated parents and poorly-educated parents. They also found an increase in the number of lower-income children who chose to complete the SAT writing portion.

Fifteen years later, researchers continued to use the exogenous timing of state-level, court-ordered reforms to investigate the link between resources and outcomes. Similar findings persisted. Jackson, Johnson, and Persico (2016) suggested with nationwide data that a 10 percent increase in per-pupil spending for 12 years of public school was associated with 0.46 additional years of schooling, 9.6 percent higher earnings, and a 6.1 percent decline in rates of adult poverty. Moreover, these effects were concentrated in low-income children which helped close the gap between affluent and low-income childhood outcomes. They went on to find that a 25 percent increase in per-pupil spending per year throughout a child's K-12 educational experience, while expensive, would completely eliminate the gap in adult incomes between children from poor and non-poor families. Hyman (2017) studied school finance reforms in Michigan and responded to Jackson, Johnson, and Persico. He argued that students who received 10 percent annual increases in per-pupil education spending experienced a three-percentage-point increase in college enrollment and, crucially, a 2.3 percent increase in college degree attainment. This financial intervention was more cost-effective for degree outcomes than the highly-touted Tennessee STAR experiment of the 1990s.

Finally, Lafortune, Rothstein, and Schanzenbach (2018) utilized National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores from states with court-ordered reforms. States that experienced these reforms increased funding in low-income districts by $700 to $1,200 per pupil per year. These same low-income districts increased their achievement by approximately 0.1 standard deviations or, stated differently, between about one-tenth and one-quarter of a standard deviation for every $1,000 annual increase. For purpose of comparison, this was double the achievement impact of the Tennessee STAR class size reduction experiment, which resulted in fifth-grade students from small class sizes being about five months ahead of students from regular class sizes (Finn & Achilles, 1999). These improvements were concentrated in low-income and non-White students which helped decrease the gap relative to affluent and White students.

Wisconsin politicians and legislative leaders appear to be unconvinced by these resource-outcome findings. An analysis of Wisconsin school finance shows that the state has an established history of school finance political dissension, broken school funding promises, and school district revenue limitations that ultimately result in the high-stakes referendum ballots experienced by the people of River Valley, Palmyra-Eagle, Merrill, and many others in the state of Wisconsin. With that in mind, I present a history of Wisconsin school finance here for two reasons. First, it is impossible to understand the frequency and historically high dollar amounts of public school referendums contemporarily without a foundation of knowledge regarding Wisconsin school finance politics. Second, the historical context is critical to the positionality statement I make later in this paper.

Equalization Aid and the Fight over Local Control

Article X, Section 3 of the Wisconsin constitution proclaims that "the legislature shall provide by law for the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable …" After the constitution was written, the legislature promptly authorized local school boards with the power and responsibility to establish and maintain district schools (Kingston, 1984). Local school boards retain the ability to making staffing decisions, create a mission and vision for students and staff, track academic progress, confer academic degrees, and, crucially, levy local property taxes. These local property taxes were, and continue to be, a major source of revenue for schools. Today, about 47 percent of a Wisconsin district's revenue stems from local sources (Kava & Pugh, 2019). However, reliance on local property taxes for nearly half of revenue can create severe funding disparities. By the early 1920s, Wisconsin's richest school districts had 20 times more taxable property wealth per student than the poorest districts (Kingston, 1984).

The legislature tweaked the finance formula in 1949 to address these disparities. Lawmakers increased the state's financial responsibility and ensured that each district had a guaranteed per-pupil tax base, but they also retained inequitable flat grants (Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007). Significant school finance changes were instituted by the state legislature in 1973. First, the state agreed to pay about 40 percent of the total education budget. Second, these changes ushered in a tiered equalization formula that would be familiar to Wisconsin school finance experts today: state aid was tied to the ability of school boards to raise money from the local tax levy. Property-poor districts received more state aid, property-rich districts less. District funding below the primary cost ceiling, defined as 110 percent of the previous year's average shared cost, was eligible for primary state aid (Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007). Districts were free to spend beyond the primary cost ceiling, but these secondary costs were shared with the

state at a lower ratio and fell much more heavily on the backs of local taxpayers. Third, "negative aid" was implemented in order to promote between-district equalization efforts and indirectly impact the amount of money school boards levied via property taxes (Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007, p. 629). "Negative" in this context did not mean that the school district did not receive state aid. Rather, the state's primary aid to the district was reduced if a property-rich district's tax base surpassed the state's secondary tax base guarantee. In effect, this meant that a marginal $1 increase in school revenue cost taxpayers more than $1 from the local levy (also see Hoxby, 2001). This concept of negative aid has been incorporated into every school finance reformulation since 1973.

One clause of the 1973 school finance changes was never implemented due to immediate court challenge (*Buse v. Smith*, 1976). Some of the wealthiest and highest-spending districts were subject to so much "negative aid" that locally-levied taxes were "recaptured," paid to the state, and redistributed to less property-rich districts (Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007, p. 629). This arrangement was invalidated by the Wisconsin Supreme Court and thwarted "true" equalization since wealthier districts were able to meet their share of local taxing responsibility with a much lower tax rate than poorer districts (Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007, p. 629).

The changes to Wisconsin's school finance formulas in the early 1970s had two purposes. The first purpose was a preemptive response to the *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) and *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) court decisions. *Serrano* was a landmark education case decided in California in 1971 but had an impact far beyond the borders of California alone (Goldstein, 1972). At the time of its decision, all states with the exception of Hawaii designed their school finance systems with nearly complete reliance on locally-levied property taxes. In 1968, the Western Center on Law and Poverty filed a complaint in California

courts on behalf of students, parents, and taxpayers in poor school districts. The organization argued that Article IX, Section 6 of the California Constitution, which gave cities and counties the authority to levy taxes for local school district revenues, violated a fundamental right to education, a right they argued was guaranteed by the Equal Protection Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment (*Serrano v. Priest*, 1971; Scribner, Chu, & Milne, 1973). The California supreme court sided with the organization, and California immediately began to implement an equalization financing system—a system Wisconsin imitated and described above.

Meanwhile, a similar case, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, was making its way through federal court in the Western District of Texas. Like *Serrano*, the plaintiffs argued that education was a fundamental right under the Fourteenth Amendment and that property-poor districts were being denied access to that right because of their small tax base valuations. Plaintiffs prevailed in this case as well, but, unlike *Serrano*, the state of Texas appealed to the United States Supreme Court where the ruling was overturned. Justice Powell wrote on behalf of the majority and stated that education is not a fundamental right recognized in the United States Constitution. This was hugely consequential: school finance cases were shifted to the jurisdiction of state court systems under the Tenth Amendment and federal rights to education funding equity were erased in most circumstances in 1973.

Local control of education has a deep and lasting influence not only in Wisconsin but across the country. The local school board has been the primary authority responsible for maintaining public schools since the creation of America's first public schools in Massachusetts townships in the late 18th century (Kaestle, 1983). Local control is perceived to be beneficial because decision-making is close to the "action," citizens are most interested in what is their "own," and this sense of ownership is a "powerful motivator toward insistence upon quality"

(Uerling & O'Reilly, 1989, p. 5). Justice Powell espoused these core values in his *San Antonio* opinion, writing that local control allowed for optimal levels of participatory opportunities and created the chance for schools to innovate and compete for student success and teacher quality (Shelley, 1994).

Wisconsin took a small step toward more centralized, state-controlled funding in 1973 when the legislature agreed to foot about 40 percent of the education budget (up from 29 percent), modify the distribution of dollars, and share a portion of districts' capital and teacher retirement costs (Hall, 2007; Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007). However, this step also created resentment toward the state government and teachers' unions. Property taxpayers felt that local control and autonomy over funding decisions were slipping away at the same time that deindustrialization, globalization, and stagflation gripped the country. Wisconsin was hardly immune from economic precariousness. Thus, taxpayers were losing control on two fronts: their school finance decisions and their financial well-being. One parent in the Kimberly School District complained in the early 1970s that "[local control] is diluted out of existence by teachers' unions, state agencies, courts, and the legislature. … The parent has been steadily excluded from the school and yet still expected to finance more of the same" (Scribner, 2015, p. 540).

This era's political fight to retain local control culminated in the 1976 *Hortonville District v. Hortonville Education Association* Supreme Court case. In 1959, the state of Wisconsin became the first to recognize public sector collective bargaining rights (Moe, 2012; Baron, 2018). Shortly thereafter, the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), the state's teachers' union, tripled in size, as local chapters spread from their more urban core of Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Kenosha and established chapters in rural and suburban

parts of the state. Increasing size led to more substantial requests: tenure and academic freedom, higher salaries and more generous benefits, and capital improvements to school infrastructure (Scribner, 2015; Collins & Carlson, 2018). WEAC was fortunate that rural school consolidation was still occurring across the state at the same time as expansion efforts. This allowed the union to concentrate more heavily and more effectively on the state legislature and fewer school boards (Scribner, 2015).

In the early 1970s, unionized teachers in Hortonville, Wisconsin, ran into a firm wall of resistance. The district's teachers struck in spring 1974 in an attempt to raise salaries and improve school infrastructure. All 88 striking teachers were promptly fired by the Hortonville School Board in order to reexert local power and counter union expansion. This decision divided the area. Younger and newer residents with fewer community ties supported the teachers while long-time village residents, farmers, and local conservative politicians supported the school board in a demonstration of solidarity against growing union influence in their district (Schirmer, 2017). Divisions between union supporters and detractors quickly became tense and, in some cases, even violent. One union leader was hospitalized for several days after being hit by a car driven by a frustrated board member while a union ally from Milwaukee was subjected to racial slurs, hit, and dragged by a car for over a city block (Barrington, 1979; Schneider, 2012; Schirmer, 2017).

Ultimately, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the teachers forfeited their right to due process prior to contract termination because they were illegal strikers (Scribner, 2015; Schirmer, 2017). This ruling against teacher strikes boosted local control by putting substantial power back into the hands of local school boards' bargaining teams and removed an important tool from unions' toolkits. WEAC lobbied for and won legislatively-granted arbitration rights in

Wisconsin, but some scholars have criticized the decision to focus on the legislature since the permanency of these decisions was much more fragile (see Schirmer, 2017). Regardless, this growing resentment among state lawmakers, teachers' unions, and property taxpayers was key in foreshadowing the acrimony that would redevelop among the same players nearly 40 years later in 2011, another period of global economic upheaval.

State Promises, the Qualified Economic Offer, and Revenue Caps

A second major shift in Wisconsin school finance occurred in 1993 under the leadership of then-Governor Tommy Thompson. The United States economy continued to shift from primarily manufacturing-based to greater service sector-orientation throughout the 1980s, and the federal deficit ballooned under President Reagan (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Gest, 2016a; Gest, 2016b; Case & Deaton, 2017; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018; Collins & Carlson, 2018). As this economic shift intensified, the federal government began to increase their role in and demands of American public schools. *A Nation at Risk*, a 1983 report produced by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, spurred many of these demands. The publication's argument was fairly simple: American schools were failing to keep pace with international competitors, an issue that was creating both a crisis for the nation's economy and an embarrassment during the remaining years of the Cold War (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). In order to protect and improve the nation's workforce, economy, and reputation, pro-business groups used the demands of *A Nation at Risk* to implore state governors, state legislators, and local education agencies to increase their education budgets, raise salaries in order to attract and retain top-tier teachers, design rigorous curriculum with clear standards, and improve colleges' and universities' schools of education (Moe, 2012). These demands were supported by teachers'

unions—now with a newfound business ally—who began appealing for budget and salary increases in the 1970s (Moe, 2012).

During this period, Wisconsin's manufacturing and agricultural bases were threatened by deindustrialization and globalization in the same way as the rest of the nation. The Milwaukee-Kenosha-Racine metropolitan corridor lost 35 percent of its manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 1995 (Collins & Carlson, 2018). To address the issue, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* hired John Udell, a University of Wisconsin business professor, to investigate the decline and suggest potential remedies. Udell's report contended that businesses should receive significant tax breaks and exemptions in an effort to incentivize employers to move to or stay in Wisconsin, an argument that neatly aligned with the neoliberal policies advocated at the federal level by the Reagan administration and augured the state's Foxconn deal 25 years later. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Governor Tommy Thompson and the Wisconsin legislature acted upon Udell's recommendations and exempted businesses from many state and local property taxes (Collins & Carlson, 2018).

Business groups were dually victorious: they made appeals to improve the nation's and Wisconsin's public education system while at the same time decreasing their tax bills that would fund the demands they favored—all with the help of the academy. These education costs had to fall somewhere. The burden ended up on the shoulders of residential properties and homeowners, the same people who remained vulnerable to a changing economy. And the burden was heavy. Net property tax levy per capita in 1980 was $402 (Olin, 2003). By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, Wisconsin property taxpayers weathered six straight years of seven percent increases in property taxes on average *per year* (Institute for Wisconsin's Future, 2001).

In the early 1990s, the anti-tax political heat was intensifying, and taxpayers were growing increasingly angry. However, the anger ended up being directed at school districts and schools, not the business community or state government. Thompson's 1993 biennium budget included considerable changes to the Wisconsin school finance system, the biggest overhaul since the alterations exactly 20 years prior (Kava & Olin, 2019). Known as the "three-legged stool," the adjustments included three parts. First, in an effort to lower the local property tax load, the state agreed to fund two-thirds of public school revenues. However, the Wisconsin legislature feared that, without additional reform, school boards would continue to feel pressure to increase teacher salaries, which would prevent local property tax levies from actually decreasing as hoped (Maher, Skidmore, & Statz, 2007). Therefore, two other measures were concurrently instituted. The legislature passed a statewide teacher compensation capping system called the qualified economic offer (QEO). The QEO required that all teachers' salaries in a district be totaled. If a school board increased this pot of money by at least 3.8 percent per year, the district's teacher bargaining unit lost the right to arbitration that was lobbied for by WEAC following the *Hortonville* ruling. This allowed districts to hold down costs and ensured that teacher salaries did not excessively consume newly-capped revenue—the third leg (*Racine Journal Times*, 1997). The legislature placed revenue caps or limits (both terms are used interchangeably) on the state's school districts in order to ensure that the state aid helped ease local property tax rates. These caps were tied to inflation and limited the amount of state and local revenue a district could raise per student. If a district exceeded its revenue cap, state aid would be reduced dollar-for-dollar (Kava & Olin, 2019).

There are several implications of the 1993 school finance changes that are worth noting. First, the new policies ran counter to the equity the state had been attempting to build since 1973.

When the limits were enacted in the 1993-1994 school year, they were tied to districts' spending at the time. Therefore, school districts that were exerting efforts to hold down costs for property taxpayers or districts with low property wealth had the autonomy of levy flexibility removed. The disparity was substantial and immediate. The expenditures of the lowest spending districts were 41 percent of the expenditures of the highest spending districts. Framed differently, the lowest spending districts spent about 71 percent of the statewide spending average while the highest spending districts spent about 174 percent of the statewide spending average (Association for Equity in Funding, n.d.). While these figures may have been in place prior to 1993, the implementation of revenue caps served as a cementing effect.

Second, referendums became the only recourse for districts to escape the revenue limits. Maher and Skidmore (2008) found that poorer Wisconsin districts were actually more likely to approve referendums than their wealthier Wisconsin counterparts. Revenues raised via referendum are added to revenue limit calculations for the duration of the referendum, i.e. perpetually for a recurring referendum and a specified number of years for a nonrecurring referendum (Kava & Olin, 2019). Districts with low property wealth may receive more than $1 in state aid for each marginal dollar spent at the local level based on their spending and tier of equalization, but this does not mean that the initial dollar will be easily paid by residents in the low property wealth district, especially if they are poor.

Third, the QEO system may have held teacher salaries in check, but it also damaged poor and especially rural, districts from retaining a highly-qualified staff because of their relatively smaller, capped budgets. Chang (2007) found that teachers in low-paying districts had salaries effectively bound after revenue caps were established. School boards did not have the flexibility to increase local tax levies, pay staff, and remain competitive the way they did prior to 1993. As

a result, wealthier districts that had higher revenue caps due to prior spending decisions could poach these teachers away with promises of a higher salary. Teacher salaries, which had been above the nationwide average in the early 1990s, fell to the average (Chang, 2007). Some district administrators and human resource managers blamed this for their difficulty in attracting and retaining highly-qualified and effective teachers from other Midwestern states (Chang, 2007).

With salaries capped and arbitration all but removed for union leadership, teacher bargaining units instead sought improved benefits packages, an element of compensation that was not affected by the 1993 QEO leg. However, this, too, backfired on teachers as insurance premiums began to rise in the late 1990s and early 2000s. School districts pushed these costs onto teachers which had the effect of erasing any increase in pay that the QEO guaranteed (Stein, 2008). Even worse for the unions, these hefty benefits packages were soon to be fodder for Governor Scott Walker in 2011, who depicted teachers as wealthy "haves" while private sector employees lost insurance coverage *and* continued to support teachers "Cadillac" packages (Cramer, 2016).

Fourth, the state backed out of its two-thirds funding commitment by 2003, blaming slow growth, stagnant revenue streams, and increasing school funding costs (Division of Executive Budget and Finance, 2003; DeFour, 2010). Revenue caps, along with the QEO, remained in place, and the stool was down to two legs.

Fifth, the 1993 biennium budget served to bring together strange bedfellows in some matters of policy while pitting old enemies against one another in others. Local school boards, district administrators, and WEAC railed against Thompson's revenue caps, but conservative lawmakers, think tanks like the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, and property taxpayers celebrated them (Stein, 2008). Property taxpayers, school boards, administrators, and teachers

lauded the state's two-thirds funding commitment, but, in the early 2000s, these groups found themselves at odds with small-government Republicans who argued that the commitment was no longer financially feasible and was antithetical to the American value and tradition of local control (Verstegen, 2000). Later, conservative legislators, superintendents, and school board negotiating teams decried Governor Jim Doyle's eventual repeal of the QEO system in 2009 while WEAC praised the plan (*Wisconsin State Journal* Editorial Board, 2009). Only one leg of the Thompson stool remained: revenue caps.

By the late 2000s, the American economy was falling into the throes of the Great Recession. New ideological arguments emerged over the state's education budget responsibilities, the capacity for the state to fund schools, and the use of transportation dollars for education finance (Marley & Walker, 2010). The *Wisconsin State Journal*, a major newspaper in Wisconsin, and even former public school teachers were calling for teachers to accept "shared sacrifice" in propping up the state's fiscal house—even as tax cuts benefited some of Wisconsin's wealthiest residents (Kertscher, 2018). These groups called for reinstituting the qualified economic offer and perhaps decreasing the 3.8 percent increase guarantee (Eyster, 2009; *Wisconsin State Journal* Editorial Board, 2009). Meanwhile, Wisconsin elected former Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker as governor during the height of Tea Party activism in 2010. As most of Wisconsin basked in a Green Bay Packers Super Bowl XLV win hangover, Walker dropped his budget "bombshell" on Wisconsin public sector labor unions and public school districts mere days after his January 2011 inauguration, a bomb he did not reveal during his campaign (Kroll, 2012).

The End of Collective Bargaining and the Rise of Alternative Funding

Wisconsin's 2011 budget introduced a flurry of changes to the state's education system and was, by far, the most politically contentious and comprehensive of all of Wisconsin's shifts in school funding. First, the newly-inaugurated Scott Walker ushered through the legislature a $1.2 billion cut to education budgets, including a $792 million reduction in state aid to K-12 public schools (Kertscher & Umhoefer, 2014). By the following school year, school districts' revenue shrank by 8.33 percent, and spending was reduced by 6.2 percent—the largest cuts by any state in the country during the recession (Kertscher & Umhoefer, 2014). Five years later, Wisconsin remained among the top-twelve states in education funding cuts over a ten-year period (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017). In 2019, Wisconsin school districts received $153 million less in inflationary-adjusted state aid than they did in 2011, a cut of 2.6 percent (Cornelius, 2018). Had funding remained at levels prior to the 2011 cuts, state government would have disbursed $3.5 billion more aid to public schools (Brogan, 2018).

Ostensibly, Wisconsin school districts were encouraged to make up for the cuts by utilizing the budget repair bill's Act 10 provisions. Seven other portions of the budget repair bill are relevant for the purposes of this review. Chicago-Kent law professor Martin Malin thoroughly explained the changes in a 2012 *Marquette Law Review* piece, and I rely upon his work here.

First, the bill eliminated nearly all collective bargaining rights from every general Wisconsin public employee with the exception of some public safety groups, including the State Patrol, firefighters, sheriff deputies, and motor vehicle inspectors. Second, the bill prohibited general employees from bargaining over anything but increases to base wages which were, in turn, capped at the rate of inflation 180 days prior to a contract's expiration unless approved via referendum by the relevant stakeholder constituents. Third, all remaining aspects of arbitration

were abolished for teachers and outlawed for general state employees with the continued exception of the public safety employees listed above. Fourth, public sector bargaining units were subject to annual recertification votes in which 51 percent of all employees eligible to join the union—regardless of actual membership—must approve the union's representation of the employee group. Fifth, fair share and agency fees were banned. Sixth, non-public safety employers were prohibited from allowing their payroll software to deduct union dues on behalf of those employees who chose to remain in their union. Seventh, the bill required that all general public employees contribute to 50 percent of their annual pension payments and, at minimum, 12.6 percent of their healthcare premiums (Malin, 2012).

In addition to budget cuts and collective bargaining repeals, the another portion of the 2011 budget helped ensure that Wisconsin school districts would be unable to make up for the cuts via increases in local property tax levies. Since 1993, increases in per-pupil revenue limits were tied to inflation. This allowed for an average increase of about $225 per year between 1993 and 2010 (Kava & Olin, 2019). The budget's Act 32 slashed the revenue limit by 5.5 percent, a cut of about $554 on average *per student* (Borsuk, 2015; Kava & Olin, 2019; Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2017). Revenue limits increased by $50, 75, and 75 in the three years following the 2011 Act 32 and froze with $0 changes through 2018-2019 (Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2017; Kava & Olin, 2019). The first biennium budget under Governor Tony Evers increased revenue limits by $175 per student beginning in 2019-2020 (DPI, 2019).

While Walker claims to have invested hundreds of millions of dollars back into education, this money often does not reach classrooms. When revenue caps do not increase, additional dollars earmarked for education simply reduce local property taxes; they do not get invested into school districts (Borsuk, 2015; Richards, 2016; Marley, Stein, and Zettel-

Vandenhouten, 2017; Johnson, 2018b). Prior to his last budget, Governor Walker made a politically appealing claim: his 2017 biennium budget would put the most dollars in education funding in the state's history (Brogan, 2018). This is true only if inflation is ignored. The 2017 budget earmarked $11.6 billion in absolute dollars for education. The 2009 budget allocated $10.5 billion for education, equivalent to approximately $12 billion in 2018, and $400 million less than Walker's last biennium (Brogan, 2018).

Many Wisconsin residents supported these reforms, including many areas that are more ideologically conservative. Every Marquette University Law School poll between 2012 and 2014 showed residents favored keeping Act 10 in place (Schneider, 2018). Support was especially strong in the state's rural areas. Walker, who regularly tied his political identity to his signature budget repair bill, won rural Wisconsin by 11 percentage points in 2010, extended that margin to 22 percentage points during the Act 10-motivated recall effort, and won rural Wisconsin again by 17 points in his reelection bid in 2014 (Gilbert, 2017). President Obama lost rural Wisconsin by seven percentage points in 2012. Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton lost four years later in rural Wisconsin by almost four times as much (Gilbert, 2017). Even in his failed reelection campaign in 2018 Walker won some northern and central counties by his biggest margins to date (Gilbert, 2018).

The Critical Role of the Public School District Referendum

The only mechanism by which school districts can attempt to increase capped revenue—beyond legislator mercy in the state capitol—is a referendum (Kava & Olin, 2019). Voters across the state are increasingly familiar with public school district referendum questions and their passage's impact on property tax rates. According to data available from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in the eight academic years preceding the 2011 budget, 817

referendums were proposed statewide, and 52.1 percent of those were approved. In the eight academic years following the 2011 budget, 831 referendums were proposed statewide, and 73.4 percent of those were approved—a 21 percentage point spike in approval rates.

Meanwhile, comparing 2010-2011 (the last school year prior to the 2011 budget enactment) and 2018-2019 (the most recent school year at the time of writing), the total amount of money requested via referendums increased by a factor of four from $650 million to $2.6 billion while money approved increased by a factor of 10.5, $208 million to $2.2 billion. This pattern of hikes continues across the three referendum types. Dollars requested for debt issuance increased from $438 million to $2.3 billion (over five times as much money), and dollars approved increased by a factor of nearly 14—$138 million to $1.91 billion. For non-recurring referendums, requests roughly doubled from $157 million to $350 million and approvals more than quadrupled from $61.4 million to $258 million. Finally, recurring referendum questions' requests and approvals both roughly quadrupled: requests increased from $9.1 million to $37.3 million, and approvals increased from $8.2 million to $36.7 million. In grand sum, between 2011-2012 and 2018-2019, referendum requests amounted to $10.8 billion, an average of $1,858 per person living in Wisconsin, and approvals to $7.2 billion, an average of $1,339 per person living in Wisconsin.

In the 2018-2019 school year alone, voters approved 86 percent of the referendums put before them while the 2018 calendar year saw approvals of roughly 90 percent (Johnson, 2018b). Three of the top six school years with the most approved dollars have taken place since 2014-2015. The $2.2 billion approved by voters in 2018-2019 is a 23 percent increase over the previous record set by voters in 2016-2017 when Wisconsin residents approved $1.79 billion in local property tax increases. The 2018-2019 school year approval is also an approximately *960*

percentage point increase in approved dollars relative to the last school year prior to Act 10's implementation. The top six school years with the highest proportions of dollars approved are the last six school years. (I return to some of these noteworthy statistics in my methods section below.)

Going forward, district stakeholders must have a crystal-clear understanding of why referendums are passing (or failing) in their respective districts if Wisconsin public schools are going to continue to rely so heavily on referendum approval for extra dollars. This is especially true for public schools in rural Wisconsin. Rural Wisconsin districts are losing students, and this is especially problematic since school funding in Wisconsin is allocated per pupil (Johnson, 2018a). Between the 2012-2013 and 2016-2017 academic years, 56 percent of school districts classified as town lost students, and 67 percent of school districts classified as rural lost students (Kemp, 2018a). Over that same period, town districts lost approximately 1 percent of their students, and rural districts lost about 3.3 percent of their students (Kemp, 2018a). Schools must continue to pay costs that are fixed, such as utilities, transportation, and personnel salaries, even as enrollments decline.

As referendum reliance grows, rural schools and districts' constituents are especially vulnerable because districts that are property-rich are not necessarily income-rich (Johnson, 2017). For instance, rural school districts in areas that are heavily dependent on tourism may have properties with a tremendously high valuation but stubbornly stagnate seasonal incomes tied to tourist seasons. Unless the state increases their share of revenue with accompanying revenue limit hikes, low-income residents in property-poor school districts may need to raise their own property taxes via referendum approval—a massively inequitable setup.

Personnel salaries are especially consequential in rural schools. Act 10 had major implications for Wisconsin's teachers, and recent research highlights the substantial damage to teachers' morale. Teachers expressed that they felt like mere cogs in a large machine with work that became "commodified, product-oriented, [and] efficiency-driven with students as the outputs" (Swalwell et al., 2017, p. 488). Teachers also indicated that district leadership was increasing workloads and classes while decreasing pay since, as one business manager put it, teachers could not "do anything about it" (Swalwell et al., 2017; Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016a). Over 60 percent of Wisconsin school districts reported that teacher salaries had slowed growth, no growth, or even declines in the five years following Act 10 (Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016a). Because Act 10 tied base wage increases to inflation, by definition, teachers are only guaranteed a cost of living increase. Teachers dropped out of the state's union as compensation stagnated, a political goal alluded to on the floor of the Wisconsin Senate chambers by the now-Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (*WEAC v. Walker*, 2013, p. 34). The state teachers' union retained only 40 percent of its pre-Act 10 membership base (Murphy, 2017).

As teacher frustrations grew, many educators chose to seek employment in other districts. There is no published evidence to suggest that teachers in rural school districts were any more or any less discouraged or discontented than counterparts in more urbanized parts of the state. However, rural teachers—and districts—were already starting from a disadvantaged financial position: teachers in rural areas make about $6,000 less on average per year than urban teachers (Trone, 2018). Wealthier Wisconsin districts again began to poach teachers from poorer districts that could not offer matching salary offers, just as Chang's (2007) findings highlighted after Governor Thompson's school finance changes unfolded in 1993 (Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016b). Reporting by two major state newspapers, the *Wisconsin State Journal* and the *Milwaukee*

Journal Sentinel, revealed that wealthier districts were paying contract penalties and moving costs in order to incentivize other districts' teachers to join their own (Beck, 2014; Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016a, 2016b). Superintendents in rural districts bemoaned that their districts were becoming a minor league farm team of maturing teachers for wealthier districts to pick off when needed (Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016b).

Poaching and turnover have real consequences for Wisconsin's low-income, rural schools. Recent research focused solely on Wisconsin and published by Florida State researcher E. J. Baron (2018) found that teachers chose to seek employment in other districts because of the damage to salaries in poorer districts. Teacher-shopping by wealthy districts decreased math and science achievement on state standardized tests by 0.2 standard deviations. Alarmingly, this achievement reduction was isolated to students that were already in the bottom half of academic achievement and contributes to Wisconsin's stubborn and distressing achievement gap (Becker, 2015; Borsuk, 2018; Baron, 2018). Moreover, the achievement decline in the short-run was attributable to a decline in teacher salaries and subsequent teacher mobility—an addendum highly relevant for the purposes of this review (Baron, 2018).

At face value, people in rural areas appear to be just as concerned as any other state resident about school funding and its allocation implications. Infusions of locally-derived public education dollars are not being driven solely by more urban areas of the state. In fact, the majority of school districts seeking referendum-driven revenue boosts are classified as rural (Kemp, 2018b; Johnson, 2018a) and, as I highlighted above, are voting for Republican candidates, some of whom are tied deeply to budgetary cuts. The difference in post-Act 10 referendum approval rates between rural voters and voters in general across the state is separated by mere hundredths of a percentage point, 72.94 percent and 73.41 percent respectively.

This historical and political context leads me to wonder what exactly is influencing the political behavior of constituents in rural areas of Wisconsin who are faced with high-stakes referendums such as those in River Valley, Palmyra-Eagle, and Merrill. The elements that influence whether voters choose yes or no on a referendum ballot drive my research. *Specifically, I ask, "What factors predict rural Wisconsin public school district referendum passage?"* I address what is currently known about public school referendums below.

Section Review

School boards have been granted substantial authority over their local public school districts since Wisconsin's constitution was signed in 1848. This concept of local control is deeply ingrained in norms of both the state's and country's concepts of democracy and liberty. However, ruinous school funding inequities manifest because of local control. The state legislature modified and centralized school funding formulas in 1973 in order to address some of these disparities. Districts welcomed the infusions of cash but lamented the loss of local tax levying autonomy that accompanied it, especially during a time of economic anxiety. Voters' anger was targeted at state lawmakers who made the change but also at the state teachers' union, who was blamed for the budgetary stress.

Business groups and the Reagan administration made demands to improve the nation's public school system. Unfortunately for residential property taxpayers, the financial demands mostly fell on their shoulders, and Wisconsin property tax rates skyrocketed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Governor Tommy Thompson curtailed property tax rates, as he promised that the state would cover two-thirds of the education budget bill; created the QEO system, which limited teacher salaries; and established revenue caps, which constrained the amount of money a school district could raise per pupil.

Fifteen years later, the United States fell into the Great Recession. Governor Scott Walker proposed to balance Wisconsin's budget by, in part, cutting Wisconsin's education budget, ending collective bargaining rights for most public employees, and further limiting school district revenue caps. Since these changes, Wisconsin has seen record numbers of referendum attempts and referendum dollars. These frequencies and dollars hold up for districts in rural Wisconsin—districts that are politically conservative and especially vulnerable to funding cuts, teacher mobility, and achievement declines.

Because referendum dollars are so deeply important to schools' day-to-day financial well-being, it is critical for school boards, district administrators, parents, and taxpayers to understand what factors best predict referendum passage in rural Wisconsin public school districts.

Literature Review

The school referendum research corpus has not had sustained attention in education or economics fields. Instead, the literature ebbed and flowed, at times seeing scores of researchers attempting to ascertain referendum passage or failure, and, at times, there have been decades between a revival in attention. In 1973, Piele and Hall published what was, at the time, the most thorough and widely-cited review of the factors influencing who voted in school referendum elections and the factors that were associated with passage. The timing of this publication was not coincidental. The large baby boomer generation was making their way through America's school system in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and growing enrollments placed tremendous pressure on school facilities (Alexander & Bass, 1974; Bowers & Lee, 2013). School boards and district administrators needed to pass infrastructure referendums merely to make space for incoming children, and burgeoning research aided these efforts.

The subject of Piele and Hall's work never completely evaporated over the next 30 years. Strong empirical research analyzing passage or failure factors surfaced, and I include this work in my review below. Nonetheless, in the late 1970s, the 1980s, and even into the 1990s, researchers' focus shifted slightly from the *factors* influencing referendum passage to the *voters* who choose to vote in referendums for public goods (e.g. Gramlich, Rubinfeld, & Swift, 1981; Rubinfeld & Thomas, 1980; Brokaw, Gale, & Merz, 1990; Greene & Bergman, 1995; Dunne, Reed, & Wilbanks, 1997). During this same time period from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, many states were tweaking their aid formulas in response or preemption to litigation related to school funding equity or adequacy of dollar disbursal. These state-level financial reallocations and infusions ushered in a wave of research that focused on the relationship between school spending and student outcomes, the relationship between school spending and family incomes, and the capitalization of school quality in residential home prices (e.g. Hanushek, 1997, 1998; Bogart & Cromwell, 1997; and Hoxby, 1998).

Research investigating the passage and failure of referendums continued in the meantime, but it was largely outside the scope of empirical journals (Johnson & Ingle, 2009). Instead, this line of work was written by and for district consultants and superintendents, reflected on what worked or did not work to get a referendum passed, and included many "tips and tricks" for getting a referendum passed. Unfortunately, the work also tended to be vague, subjective, and specific to one or two communities' experiences. The recommendations included instructions like be committed, target supportive voters and encourage them to vote, gain trust, use social media, maintain open relationships with district constituents beyond referendum campaigns, and make use of local press coverage (First, 1986; Henry, 1987; Walker, 1996; Kelly & Zieper,

2001; Sheeran, 2003; Davis & Tyson, 2003; Healy, 2009; Banach, 2011). How to do these things was less clear.

The focus on potential factors influencing school referendum passage began to recapture researchers' attention most earnestly in the late 1990s and early 2000s after studies by Lentz (1999) and Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001). I follow the suggestion made by Bowers and Chen (2015) and group the conclusions reached in these studies regarding the factors that predict referendum passage into three categories: school district factors, referendum factors, and community factors. I define and address each of these respective categories below.

School District Factors

Table 1

Referendum Passage – School District Factors

School district size	Students' economic status	Feelings about teachers
Change in school district size	Students' limited English proficiency	Revenue sources
Enrollment in alternative types of schools	Student achievement	District tax rate
Student-teacher ratio	Feelings about school district leadership	District financial health
Racial heterogeneity	Proportion of teachers in community	Staff compensation
District locale	Sense of urgency	

School district factors refer to characteristics or attributes of a school district's students, staff, financial health, tax rates, and locale. Piele and Hall (1973) report that the majority of studies they reviewed found no significant relationship between **school district size** and a referendum election outcome. Twenty-five years later, Sielke (1998) also found no relationship in her analysis of Michigan data. Beckham and Maiden (2003), Shober (2011), Bowers and Lee

(2013), and Brunner, Robbins, and Simonsen (2018) corroborate these findings that enrollments of school-aged children in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Texas, and Minnesota and Wisconsin school districts respectively were unrelated to the likelihood of referendum passage. Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010a) initially reported a different conclusion from data collected in Michigan: as enrollment increased, the chances a referendum will pass increased. However, when these same authors later expanded the number of years and number of referendums in their analysis, district enrollment failed to research significance (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b).

Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004) operationalized size slightly differently and found that the greater number of students per school board member was associated with a decrease in referendum approval, but they pointed out that this variable was likely still capturing overall district size. In line with this finding, recent research from Wisconsin concluded that decreasing student enrollment was associated with an increase in passage likelihood (Amiel, Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016). Some research suggested that the size of the district was not as important as the perception of student density and student overcrowding. The likelihood of referendum approval increased when voters perceived that the population of students was becoming denser and when residents believed schools were overcrowded, though these effects were smaller than actual school district size (Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001; Johnson & Ingle, 2009).

The **change in school district size** is a closely related variable and one with a bit more inconsistent results. Voters in school districts with increasing enrollment were more likely to pass a referendum, especially increasing enrollments in districts with aging populations (Lentz, 1999). Bowers and Lee (2013) also found that increasing enrollments were associated with referendum passage, and they did not include a caveat regarding age. Using a sample of

Oklahoma districts, Gong and Rogers (2014) contended that both enrollment growth and student density were positively related to school bond approval. Earlier research by Kastory and Harrington (1996) agreed with these claims but also showed that voters must *perceive* the growth in enrollments in order for the positive relationship to manifest.

The likelihood of public school referendum passage is also influenced by **enrollment in alternative types of schools** within the public school district's boundaries that compete with the local public schools. Parents increasingly have more options than traditional public schools (TPS), including magnet schools, charter schools, online alternative schools, and private schools. The working hypothesis in most referendum literature is that passage likelihood decreases as enrollment in non-TPS increases because families do not feel responsible for contributing to a good they do not use.[1] For the most part, this hypothesis holds. Voters with children in non-TPS placed a low value on public school improvement and were more likely to vote no on a school referendum, which, in turn, meant that increasing proportions of these voters were associated with referendum defeat (Piele and Hall, 1973; Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2004; Stair, Rephann, & Heberling, 2006). Castles (1994) concurred, though at a much broader level. He argued that nations with a history of strong Catholic influence were less likely to create expansive public service, including public education systems. Ebdon (2000), meanwhile, did not find a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of a district's students in private school and referendum passage.

Shober (2011) developed the strongest and most nuanced approach in analyzing politically contentious school choice movements and its effect on school referendums. His

[1] This is the only instance in which the term "traditional public schools" is used. In the rest of this paper, I use the terms "public schools," "public school district," "school district," "district," and other synonyms interchangeably but use them in reference to traditional public schools.

research found that charter and magnet schools served to attract and retain highly-attentive parents and students who would otherwise enroll either in private schools or a different district. These highly-attentive parents were also supportive of school bonds but only if the charter and magnet schools in which their kids enrolled were part of the public school district. Increasing charter enrollments from zero to five percent of students increased referendum passage by 3.4 percent while increasing magnet enrollments from zero to five percent increased referendum passage by five percent.

Enrollment can also be related to school district personnel factors. Much of the public is likely persuaded by the idea that a smaller **student-to-teacher ratio** will improve learning and that extra resources, in this case via a referendum, can help lower this ratio. This is what Theobald and Meier (2002) found in their study of Texas bond elections. One standard deviation increase in class size improved the probability of passing a referendum by 15 percent, one of the largest effects of any variable in their model. Gong and Rogers (2014) did not find a similar effect in Oklahoma twelve years later. Student-teacher ratios did not reach significance, even at a generous 0.15 *p*-value.

Support for income redistribution and public goods depends heavily on population heterogeneity, especially racial demographics. Perhaps Americans are not the rugged individualists they are perceived to be when it comes to welfare and state aid. Most Americans strongly support government efforts to assist citizens, including spending money to reduce poverty and homelessness and improve health and education outcomes (Gilens, 1999). However, public attitudes shift when a social service becomes racialized or when the service appears to be a handout without accompanying requirements to work hard. Black Americans are, to a great degree, disproportionately represented in media and political depictions of welfare recipients,

and the deeply racialized history of the United States has lowered support for the welfare safety net (Gilens, 1999). Americans are more supportive of welfare and redistributive efforts when local recipients are of the same race (Luttmer, 2001).

These effects spill over into other arenas of public goods, including public education. In general, findings highlight the importance of **racial heterogeneity** across generations and this effect on school spending preference. At a broad level, racial resentment in Whites is associated with a negative vote in school bond elections, regardless of the makeup of the school district (Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001). Poterba (1997) used state-level data and found an inverse relationship between ethnic heterogeneity in school-aged children and preference for school spending in people over the age of 65. This inverse relationship was strengthened when the senior population was mobile. In other words, White seniors who retire in a community with children of a different race were much less likely to support school spending (Poterba, 1997). Four years later, Ladd and Murray (2001) corroborated Poterba's findings with regard to racial mismatch, but they analyzed county-level data. They defined racial mismatch as the difference between the fraction of children who were non-White and the fraction of senior citizens who were non-White. A 10 percent increase in racial mismatch between seniors and children between the ages of 5 and 17 led to a six percent decrease in school spending. Brunner and Balsdon (2004) brought additional nuance to these findings and related them to ballot measures. Using community-level data in California, they found that older, White voters were less likely to support increases in school spending via local initiatives when the school-aged population became more non-White. Corcoran and Evans (2010) and Theobald and Meier (2002) both found the same inverse community-school racial relationship as the aforementioned researchers, but these authors' findings did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

The student racial heterogeneity factor was not the same in every study that used it. Student racial makeup had no effect on bond passage in Michigan between 1999 and 2001 (Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, & Liu, 2011), no effect on bond passage in Ohio between 2007 and 2010 (Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013), and no effect in New York between 1975 and 1997, although this last study only used the proportion of Black and Hispanic students (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2004). In Texas, a greater proportion of Asian and Hispanic students was actually associated with a greater likelihood of bond approval (Bowers & Lee, 2013).

This last finding is an important factor for future scrutiny. Carr and Kefalas (2009) studied rural communities in Iowa that were experiencing a brain drain of younger people. They found that high-performing high school graduates leave their rural communities in search of greater educational and career opportunities elsewhere, typically more urbanized areas. These small towns need workers for agricultural, home health, and low-paying service work. However, these positions are largely filled by people from the fastest growing segment of the American population—Latinx people. These migrant "outsiders," people who may have little knowledge of local norms, cultures, and ways of life, are feared and ostracized by local Whites. I am not aware of any public school referendum empirical research using Iowa data, but, based on the findings of Carr and Kefalas and the racial heterogeneity authors above, results in the Midwest may look different than what Bowers and Lee found in Texas.

Similar to students' race, students' **economic status** may not necessarily be the same as the community in which the school sits. Accordingly, the public school district referendum literature treats students' economic status as a separate and additional variable than the community's. All of the literature used free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) as the measure for

students' economic status. Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010a) identified a high correlation between FRL status and enrollment and FRL status and bond amount. They dropped the FRL variable for future research, research they published later that year. They found that the likelihood of bond approval decreased in Michigan as the number of students receiving FRL increased (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b). Three years later, Bowers completed similar research with Lee using Texas school district bonds but did not find a statistically significant relationship between FRL status and bond approval there. These findings by Bowers and Lee stand in contrast to findings reported earlier by Theobald and Meier whose data show that one standard deviation increase in low-income students was associated with a five percent increase in the likelihood that a bond will pass.

Researchers turned their attention back to Rust Belt states in order to compare results to the Bowers, Metzger, and Militello Michigan studies from a few years prior. Two sets of researchers found no statistically significant relationship between student poverty and bond passage in Ohio between 2007 and 2010 and Wisconsin between 2001 and 2012 (Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013; Amiel, Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016). Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004) used slightly different data, but a substantial amount of referendum research still uses, and often heavily relies upon, their findings. Nearly all New York districts must have their school budgets approved annually by the residents of the district via referendum. The authors did not find a relationship between students' FRL status and the probability of budget passage between 1975 and 1997.

One potential referendum-related factor, **limited English language proficiency**, has not been used repeatedly in the literature but is worthwhile to point out because I apply it in my own Wisconsin prediction model. This variable may be an important encapsulation of school-

community cultural disconnect, as opposed to racial. It reflects a degree of assimilation. The percentage of students classified with limited English language proficiency had no effect on budget referendums in New York according to Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004).

In a most basic sense, the job of a school district is to help build a child's education and increase **achievement**. It is less clear what the impact of underperforming school outcome measurements might be on referendum outcomes. On the one hand, voters may be unwilling to hand additional tax dollars over to a district that is not currently improving children's education because residents may see this investment as a lost cause—despite the ability for those potential tax dollars to implement crucial reforms. Voters may "reward" high-performing districts with additional money. On the other hand, voters may perceive that additional tax investments will improve their community's academically-struggling schools and be less willing to pay for upgrades in already-successful districts. Surprisingly, only a few studies include a basic measure of a school's performance, regardless of the validity of the measure, e.g. standardized test scores.

The earliest research found no association between voters' perceptions of their schools' quality and a vote for or against a school bond (Piele & Hall, 1973). Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2003) hypothesized that voters would be more likely to support high-performing districts, defined by a mixture of student passage rates on standardized tests, attendance rates, dropout rates, and college-going rates. They, too, found no relationship between their definition of high-performance and election outcome. The only other study to include a measure of achievement was by Johnson and Ingle (2009). These researchers found that Ohio districts deemed "effective" were more likely to pass a referendum than districts rated "excellent," lending a kernel of evidence to the former position above: taxpayers approving dollars for districts that are not already the highest achievers.

Next, I turn my attention away from school districts' student characteristics and toward the adults running the school districts and the **feelings residents have about school district leadership**. School boards with more stability, a strong record of financial responsibility, and higher approval ratings were more likely to be associated with referendum approval (Piele & Hall, 1973; Rasinski & Rosenbaum, 1987; Kastory & Harrington, 1996). Voters also had to perceive that all of the school board members were united in support of the referendum that was proposed (Kastory & Harrington, 1996). School boards with longer tenures were less likely to see a budget referendum fail (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2004), though this may be an indicator of trust which is discussed below. If a referendum has failed several times in the past, referendum supporters should seek to elect new board members before attempting further floats (Holt, Wendt, & Smith, 2006). Referendum considerations and proposals are highly consequential for school board members. Often, their reputations and electoral future depend on their support for a school referendum and the outcome of that referendum (Ebdon, 2000).

Piele and Hall (1973) presented analysis that suggested that the experience of a district's superintendent, as measured by the number of years employed, was not connected to whether a referendum passed. Rasinski and Rosenbaum (1987) found that qualitative evaluations of a superintendent did matter, but the evaluations may not matter in the same way for the entirety of the district's population. They suggested that the actions of a superintendent mattered most for people who lived in the community the longest because these people were the most likely to notice the policies and procedures of the superintendent and were most likely to have a comparison reference to prior superintendents. Brokaw, Gale, and Merz (1990) not only studied *who* voted in referendum elections but also *how* these particular voters made ballot decisions. They operationalized affective beliefs about the school district by whether voters believed the

superintendent was doing a good job. Voters who believed this were more likely to approve a referendum request. Recently hired school superintendents have a window of opportunity to usher through a successful referendum but only if the new hire worked to establish trust with the community immediately (Holt, Wendt, & Smith, 2006).

Trust is an important determinant of referendum passage beyond just the administrator and is encompassed in a community's **feelings** about teachers, staff, and the quality of the school district as a whole. Residents were more likely to vote yes on a referendum ballot if they felt the people in leadership positions were good stewards of public money (Kastory & Harrington, 1996) and expressed confidence that school officials would use money responsibly to improve the education of the community's children (Piele & Hall, 1973; Shober, 2011). Residents who gave the district a positive evaluation in terms of job duty fulfillment and school-community relationship maintenance were also more likely to vote yes (Rasinski & Rosenbaum, 1987; Greene & Bergman, 1995; Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001).

This evaluatory perception has meaningful implications for school districts holding a referendum because these elections are viewed by the public as an effective and low-cost way of expressing (dis)content with their local public schools (Berkman & Plutzer, 2005). If a school district is not viewed positively by many members of the community or if an administrator has not had ample time to establish trust with the community, the school district risks encouraging turnout for people who are seeking an avenue to express animosity. Gur, Boyaci, and Ozcan (2015) looked at trust in isolation and found that people who expressed more trust in government generally speaking had a greater propensity to support public education expenditures. A study of non-White referendum voters in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District found that trust and confidence in public officials, including the school board and school leadership, was an even

more important determinant of voting behavior than whether the voter currently had children in the school district (Priest & Fox, 2005).

Several school district financial factors affect referendum passage, including the district's sources of revenue, debt health, and budget allocation decisions. School revenues are generally collected from local property tax levies, state aid, and federal categorical dollars. The proportion of these revenues from each source appears to have an association with referendum approval. There are two important cautionary points to highlight before reporting results related to **revenue sources**. First, federal aid, while important, does not typically contribute to a large proportion of a school's revenue. For instance, schools in Wisconsin amass 93 percent of their revenue from a combination of local and state sources while only seven percent comes from the federal government (Kava & Pugh, 2019). Second, the goal of state equalization aid is inversely related to a district's property wealth. Districts that receive greater state aid are likely to be poorer in terms of property wealth, and districts receiving very little state aid are likely to have high property wealth. As such, some researchers use this aid breakdown as a proxy for a community's wealth since aid data is easier to locate than wealth or income specific to residents within a school district's messier boundaries.

With these cautions in mind, Lentz (1999) analyzed referendum data from Illinois in the 1980s and contended that referendums became more likely to pass as the proportion of revenue from state aid declined. On the contrary, Maher and Skidmore (2008) collected referendum results in Wisconsin between 1991 and 2004 during a time when Wisconsin experienced a shift in its state aid formula, a change under Governor Thompson that I discussed in the historical section above. They found that the likelihood of referendum approval rose when an additional dollar raised locally brought in more than one dollar from the state. I return to Maher and

Skidmore's 2008 research and this particular claim in a few paragraphs below. Shober (2011), however, did not find a relationship between the proportion of funding raised via local property tax and the success of school referendums. Sielke (1998) and Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004) in their studies of New York budget referendums found that the share of local property tax revenue and changes in state aid were not significant predictors of budget referendum approval.

Very early referendum research conducted in the 1950s and 1960s closely analyzed **district tax rates** at the time of the referendum proposal. These studies entered the research with the assumption that voters were likely to deny a referendum if their taxes were already relatively high (Piele & Hall, 1973). However, Piele and Hall strongly cautioned against relying too heavily on financial or economic models to predict a referendum's outcome: there was a great deal more to referendum voting behavior than current tax rates. Nevertheless, the most powerful financial model they referenced showed that greater school tax rates were actually associated with increased chance of referendum success. Sielke (1998) lent some support to this claim as well. She found that a decrease in Michigan districts' millage rates due to finance centralization did not make passing a bond any easier and made a point to characterize this as quite unfortunate for school district administrators who held hopes that prior decreases in taxes would help districts persuade their residents to support a later tax increase. Instead, this suggested that taxpayers became used to a new norm of low taxation and are hesitant to let go of this norm.

Theobald and Meier (2002) also found that greater tax rates were related to increased chances for referendum success, but their results were not statistically significant. Still, they pointed out the noteworthy result that increased tax rates were *not* associated with decreased chances of success either. These researchers hypothesized that high tax rates in a district signaled

residents' taste and preference for taxation and public goods established via policy through many years and served as a cue to potential newcomers. While not mentioned, this argument aligned neatly with Tiebout choice theories, which contend that households will sort themselves into communities with taxation and public good allocation preferences that are similar to their own (Tiebout, 1956).

Two related, albeit slightly orthogonal, taxation factors can affect referendum passage. Brunner, Robbins, and Simonsen (2018) analyzed tax share, defined as a district's median home value divided by the district's total assessed valuation. As the share of taxation increased for the median home, the likelihood of referendum passage for the district decreased, although this statistic failed to reach significance. Second, Maher and Skidmore (2008) included inverted tax price data in their referendum models specific to Wisconsin. The inverted tax price is a measure of how much a marginal dollar of spending will cost a school district in local tax levies (Hoxby, 2001). An additional dollar spent in poorer school districts costs less than a dollar in local taxation because state equalization aid will provide more than the marginal dollar. Wealthier school districts experience the opposite effect: an additional dollar spent will cost more than a dollar to raise locally because the state will recapture some of the potential revenue. Poorer districts generally have inverted tax prices above 1, while wealthy districts generally have inverted tax prices below 1. Poorer districts, therefore, have a financial incentive to raise dollars locally—though this may not be easy for the local community to do. Maher and Skidmore's analysis contended that an increase in the inverted tax price by one standard deviation is associated with a 7.5 percent increase in the votes in favor of a referendum.

Research in the past twenty years has more closely analyzed the relationship between a district's **financial health** and the likelihood that a referendum will pass. Many researchers who

chose to include this explanatory metric operationalized financial health as the debt load a school district carries, a measure tracked at the district level by the National Center for Education Statistics. The results were rather surprising and stable. Sielke (1998) utilized this data in an analysis of school finance centralization in Michigan in the early 1990s. She found that an increase in debt payments also increased the likelihood that voters would tax themselves more in support of their public schools, but she also did not include a theoretical explanation for this finding. Perhaps voters became acclimated to a particular level of debt and treated it as a new normal, perhaps voters regularly approved debt to signal their taste for public education as demonstrated by Tiebout choice, or perhaps voters felt altruism toward and particularly attached to their schools and wanted to ensure a healthy financial future.

Seven years later, Zimmer and Jones (2005) also studied Michigan school finance centralization and expanded upon some of Sielke's 1998 research. They found that centralization constrained per-pupil funding for wealthy districts but did not affect capital purchases and maintenance; these remained local-level decisions. After centralization was solidified, wealthy districts sought and approved referendums for capital improvements and therefore, explaining Sielke's finding, debt and likelihood for passage were positively associated because voters taking on debt were voters who could afford it.

Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010a; 2010b) also used Michigan data to investigate the possible connection between a district's financial health and its likelihood of bond passage. In their first attempt, the researchers found a high correlation between debt and enrollment and debt and bond amount and ultimately dropped the health variable from their analysis. Shortly after, the authors expanded the years included in the study and used descriptive statistics to point out, interestingly, that districts that approved referendums had double the average amount of debt

than districts that failed referendums. In a causal analysis, the researchers found that, controlling for the dollar amount of the bond, higher debt loads at the beginning of the fiscal year were associated with an increased chance a referendum would pass. This was particularly true for school districts in small towns, a point I readdress in the next section. The last of the Michigan-focused research was published in 2011. Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, and Liu (2011) corroborated all of the prior debt-referendum approval relationships and again found that voters in high-debt districts were more likely to pass a referendum than voters in low-debt districts.

The published research analyzing school financial health and referendum approval outside of Michigan is sparse, but two recent studies expand this corner of referendum literature. (Bowers and Lee included a health variable in a 2013 study of Texas school referendums but removed it due to multicollinearity issues.) Interestingly, Amiel, Knowles, and Reschovsky (2016) found that a district that was "too healthy" had trouble passing a referendum. These researchers utilized fund balance data and reported that increasing dollars in a fund balance made voters less likely to raise their property taxes via a referendum. Second, Thompson and Whitley (2017) exploited Ohio's fiscal stress labels. Ohio school districts and municipalities that struggle with budget issues must submit a financial recovery plan to the state and are subsequently and publicly labeled as "financially stressed." Thompson and Whitley (2017) used data between 2004 and 2012 and found that school districts were 15 to 23 percentage points more likely to pass a referendum after receiving a fiscally stressed label from the state government. The authors made a point to address both the opportunity and danger of this result. On the one hand, a district that is financially strapped appeared to be more likely to get the help it needed in order to get its budgetary house in order. On the other hand, voters did not appear to believe local officials about

budget constraints until the state issued an official stress label. In general, though, voters appeared to exercise some sympathy toward school districts that were struggling financially.

Decisions regarding how a district allocates its budget, specifically in relation to personnel costs, affect referendum passage. With regard to **compensation**, there are two general, competing hypotheses. On the one hand, if voters believe teacher salaries are too high, they may be inclined to vote no as a way to signal their preference to redistribute the budget away from teachers' compensation. On the other hand, voters may want to retain relatively high-income and high-quality teachers and vote yes on a referendum to achieve this end. Rasinski and Rosembaum (1987) aligned toward the latter. They found that non-self-interested residents, those who do not own homes and/or do not have children or grandchildren enrolled in local public schools, were more likely to vote in favor of tax increases if they believed higher salaries would attract and retain better teachers. Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt (2013) also linked toward the latter but with an important caveat. These researchers separated Ohio teachers' salaries and teachers' benefits packages between 2007 and 2010. They noted that their most stable finding was that increasing teacher salaries was associated with an increased probability of referendum passage, but an increase in teachers' benefits packages was associated with a decrease in the probability of referendum passage. This relationship between referendums, salaries, and benefits is readdressed in the next section with particular attention to Wisconsin politics.

The probability of passing a referendum also increases as the **proportion of teachers** in a community increases. One standard deviation increase in the percentage of teachers improved the probability of passing a referendum by about 19 percent (Theobald & Meier, 2002). There were several potential reasons why this may be. First, teachers were rationally self-interested. They were more likely to vote for an increase in taxes in which they felt the concentration of

immediate benefits, e.g. improved working conditions, while the costs were spread (Stair, Rephann, & Heberling, 2006). Second, because of this rational self-interest, teachers were motivated to turn out in high numbers. Third, an increase in the percentage of teachers increased the opportunity for teachers to discuss and potentially persuade fellow voters in their community of the referendum's benefits (Theobald & Meier, 2002).

Referendum passage expectations differ depending on a **school district's locale**—rural, suburban, or urban—but this variable emerged only relatively recently in the referendum literature. The results differed between states but remained largely stable within them. Much of the locale literature pointed initially to Lentz (1999) and her study of locale classifications in Illinois. She determined that rural districts had higher pass rates than suburban districts (urban districts were not a focus). In fact, districts with "more" rurality, i.e. more agricultural and less residential tax bases, actually had the highest passage rates at the time and, critically, the passage rates appeared to be insulated from economic downturns (Lentz, 1999; Maher & Skidmore, 2009). In New York, rural districts were about four percentage points more likely to pass an initial budget referendum than suburban school districts (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2004). Oklahoma voters produced similar results: residents in small, rural areas were more likely to support a school referendum than their residents in suburban and urban areas (Gong & Rogers, 2014). In Michigan, districts in rural areas and towns were less likely to pass a referendum than suburban and urban counterparts (Zimmer & Jones, 2005). Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010a; 2010b) corroborated these Michigan results and added that small towns were the least likely to pass a referendum relative to other classifications. Johnson and Ingle (2009) and Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt (2013) included income in their analyses of Ohio locale effects. Johnson and Ingle found that relatively affluent and low-poverty urban and suburban districts

were less likely to pass a school referendum than rural districts with high poverty and low median income, but there was no relationship found in the data four years later. There was no association between locale and passage likelihood in Texas (Bowers & Lee, 2013).

Two studies focused on Wisconsin specifically. In the first, Maher and Skidmore analyzed the difference in referendum passage before and after the state's two-thirds funding promise. They found that rural school districts were more likely than other locales to pass a referendum before the state agreed to fund two-thirds of education budgets. After additional responsibility fell to the state, rural school districts became less likely to approve than suburban and urban districts (Maher & Skidmore, 2008). A year later, they studied recurring and non-recurring referendums again found an association between rurality and success: a 10 percent increase in rural land encompassed by a school district was associated with a six-percentage-point increase in passage.

Regardless of location, many of the researchers that studied locale included an addendum regarding homogeneity. Their point was that rural districts may be more successful in many states because the people that constituted the district were similar in terms of race, income, and occupational status. This homogeneity signaled to voters that everyone in the district would have an equal stake in the cost and equal reaping of the rewards of the referendum. This was different than more urbanized districts in which the cost could be pushed onto one segment of the population, e.g. the business community and the commercial tax base, or one segment received "undue" benefits. This notion comported with the racial heterogeneity literature reviewed above. In more racially and economically diverse urban districts, school districts had a more difficult time passing school referendums; the payers and beneficiaries did not overlap to the same degree as rural areas.

The final school district factor is rather sparsely addressed in the referendum literature but may be important for the analysis of referendums specific to Wisconsin. When constituents are asked to contribute to a common-pool resources (CPRs) such as public education, they become concerned with the immediate financial loss that comes from making the contribution. As a result, they are averse to approval (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Aquino, Steisel, & Kay, 1992). If potential contributors do not believe the fruits of their contributions will be distributed equally, support for the public good will be reduced even further (Aquino, Steisel, & Kay, 1992). Clearly, however, all public goods do not fall into a spiraling cycle of collapse. Rather, the public will be highly motivated to contribute to CPR maintenance and even rejuvenation if they perceive the CPR to be shrinking, deteriorating, or disappearing (Iturbe-Ormaetxe et al., 2011).

Nearly all Wisconsin residents have attended school in some capacity; as of 2017, 92 percent of people in the state attained a high school degree (American FactFinder, 2018). Therefore, most people are able to generate at least some foundational opinion regarding the nature and quality of education. When local controversies or debates arise, these issues can "awaken dormant attitudes, values, and predispositions that prompt an immediate evaluation of the school and education" (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 79). For better or worse, schools are a highly mobilizing arena. School closings are one concern in particular that generate emotions and conflict. This is evidenced by the introductory anecdotes from Arena, Palmyra-Eagle, and Merrill. Johnson and Ingle (2009) indicated that school district leadership teams were more likely to usher through successful referendums when they created a deep **sense of urgency** in their constituents. Schools are an integral part of a community, especially in rural areas, a point I

return to several times in upcoming sections. If the school district is able to incite urgency by threatening a potential school closure, the voting constituents may be more likely to vote yes.

Referendum Factors

Table 2

Referendum Passage – Referendum Factors

Turnout	Use of dollars	Competing Referendums
Timing	Time elapsed since prior referendum	Diffusion
Cost of referendum	Anchoring	Campaigns, education, and messaging
Length of bond or tax increase	Repeated referendum attempts (refloats)	Specificity of ballot language

Referendums in Wisconsin can be proposed for debt issuance, temporary revenue cap increases, or permanent revenue cap increases. Wisconsin school districts are able to issue up to $1 million in debt before triggering the need to pass a referendum. Debt issued under to this $1 million trigger must be paid off using funds within the district's revenue limit (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2018). Any other debt must be approved via a referendum (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2018). A non-recurring referendum raises the revenue limit for a ballot-specified number of years. At expiration, the revenue caps and, therefore, tax rates, revert back to the prior level of taxation or a district's new mill rate within the state-imposed revenue limit. A recurring referendum's approved amount is permanently added to the district's tax base unless removed by the board of education (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2018). Several referendums can be presented to voters at one time and cover several school needs including, for example, capital improvements, temporary cap increases for curriculum or technology infrastructure upgrades, and permanent cap increases for personnel salaries with the goal of attracting and retaining a

high-quality staff. Each of these questions may cultivate a different result because of the various goals and depend on the cost, the intensity of the tax increase, or the perception that approval would benefit most of the district's children. Accordingly, contemporary research treats individual referendums as the units of analysis (see Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a; 2010b; Bowers & Lee, 2013; Bowers & Chen, 2015).

The first referendum-specific factor is how many people vote in the referendum election. Generally speaking, the higher the **turnout**, the less likely the referendum will pass—a finding that has been mostly solidified since Piele and Hall first reported on this research in 1973. Stevens and Mason (1996) studied budget approval referendums in Oregon in the 1980s. These referendums were similar to the budget referendums New York required and that Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004) studied. The data from Stevens and Mason demonstrated that expenditures per student fell by a nominal $3.50 for every one percent increase in turnout. More generally, they contended that high turnout in school referendums typically mobilized the voters who wanted to constrain, not expand, funding. Lentz (1999) advised against administrators and school boards scheduling referendums during general elections. She, too, found that turnout during general elections was higher which led to a greater chance a referendum would be defeated.

There is, in fact, no referendum research I gathered that contested the finding that higher turnout will decrease chances of success; it is, rather, remarkably stable across the literature (Pecquet, Coats, & Yen, 1996; Dunne, Reed, and Wilbanks, 1997; Holcombe & Kenny, 2007; Johnson, 2008; Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018). The only slightly different finding came from Gong and Rogers (2014). These researchers found that high or low turnout itself was not associated with passage but rather the predictability of the

turnout was associated with passage. However, they also clearly noted that higher than predicted or expected turnout was associated with a greater likelihood a referendum would fail.

Turnout is largely determined by the **timing** of the referendum ballot and, as such, this strand is closely connected to and overlaps quite neatly with the literature that includes a turnout variable. The results, however, are not as crystallized as the turnout variable. The earliest research, stemming from the 1960s, studying timing of the election did not initially find an association between timing and referendum outcome (Piele & Hall, 1973). Lentz (1999) found that referendums held during fall and spring Illinois general elections were less likely to pass, but Beckham and Maiden (2003) found no such relationship in Oklahoma. Similarly, Wisconsin referendums held in special elections, defined as elections outside the April-November general elections months, and Ohio elections held outside of November general elections did not have greater electoral success (Maher & Skidmore, 2008; Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013). Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010b) included the time of the year in their expanded Michigan study and noted a curious result. Holding turnout constant, they found that referendums held later in the calendar year were more likely to pass than referendums held earlier in the year. They cautioned that their results were correlational, not causal, but offered explanations for this finding, including residual holiday debt early in the year, lingering snowstorms in late winter and early spring that changed the composition of voters, and an increased focus on school when a new school year starts in September. Bowers and Chen (2015) corroborated this finding in another study of Michigan five years later. A Texas-focused study led by Bowers and Lee (2013) found no relationship between time of year and election outcome.

Three studies that analyzed election timing deserve separate attention. The studies above mostly included election timing as a control variable or extra explanatory variable included

beyond the independent variable(s) of primary interest. As a result, most of these studies, while helpful, mentioned timing in passing in a few sentences at the end of a results section. However, three studies focused on timing specifically and its impact on direct elections, including school referendums. First, Meredith (2009) found that school districts purposefully held school referendums during elections in which school leadership believed they would have the best opportunity for approval. For the most part, this meant holding referendums during special or non-general elections.

Critically, for the purposes of this review, he found a different and theoretically unexpected result in Wisconsin. Referendums proposed in Wisconsin and held during November general elections had a higher probability of passage than referendums held during any other election throughout the year. He did not elaborate deeply on the reasons for this reason but did offer the hypothesis that general elections appeared to increase the proportion of younger voters, the same voters with a greater propensity to support public education expenditures.[2] In two recent state legislative sessions, Wisconsin Republicans proposed policies that would limit school referendums to spring and fall general elections in order to hold down opportunities for property tax hikes (Beck, 2017). Based on Meredith's work, these efforts may not produce the results Republicans hope for.

The final two studies do not address school referendums specifically, but the studies do focus on school elections. The results are applicable and relevant to referendum outcomes. First, Berry (2009) reported, like Meredith, that special-purpose taxing authorities, including school districts, purposefully held elections on days with low voter turnout, and they chose to do so because of pressure by rationally self-interested teachers' unions. California school districts who

[2] The community factors portion of the paper below provides much greater detail regarding the relationship between age and referendum approval.

held school board elections in odd-numbered years without prominent general elections were significantly more likely to negotiate teachers' contracts with higher pay than school districts who held school board elections in even-numbered years coinciding with general elections (Berry, 2009). These off-year elections were associated with lower turnout and a greater ability for teachers' unions to sway the outcome of the election with large turnout of their own members or allies.

Finally, Anzia's (2014) work concentrated most thoroughly and most heavily on the effects of election timing. She found that the timing of an election affected how many people vote, who chose to vote, which candidates won, and finally, to whom the winning candidates felt responsible. Like Berry (2009), she argued that election timing and the consequences of it were due to teachers' unions' powerful interest group influence. Corroborating Berry's California research, she found that off-cycle school board elections led to a two percent increase in teachers' pay regardless of a district's ideological leanings. Administrators in the same districts did not see any increase in pay, a result she attributed to administrators' lack of union representation. Moreover, teachers employed by districts in states that changed election law and required school board elections to coincide with higher turnout general elections saw their salary increases evaporate. In short, the timing of an election affected who voted in that election, which, in turn, had effects for education expenditure preferences.

The **cost of a referendum** and the purpose of a referendum are related variables. The research literature did not consistently find that costlier referendums were doomed to fail. While this claim was found in some studies, the relationship between magnitude, i.e. requested dollar amount, and likelihood of approval was decidedly mixed. In other words, just because the referendum "product" is expensive does not mean the voters will not buy it. Piele and Hall

(1973) reported from research at the time that there appeared to be very little association between a referendum's dollar amount and the likelihood it would pass. Sielke (1998) and Beckham and Maiden (2003) also reported no association in their studies of Michigan and Oklahoma referendums. In Wisconsin, the size of the referendum had no association with the likelihood of approval before the state agreed to fund two-thirds of the state's education budget (Maher & Skidmore, 2008). After this state-level policy shift, increasing dollar amounts were associated with a decreased chance of passage.

Theobald and Meier used Texas data to demonstrate that the likelihood of referendum passage decreased as dollar amount increases. Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010a; 2010b), Bowers and Lee (2013), Gong and Rogers (2014), and Bowers and Chen (2015) all later replicated these findings in separate and additional studies in Michigan, Texas, Oklahoma, and Michigan respectively. Using data from Wisconsin, Maher and Skidmore (2009) found a positive relationship between referendum success and the dollar amount as a share of school district equalized valuation.

Lentz (1999) did not address bond size but did address the size of the tax increase. A large tax increase was associated with a lower probability of passage, suggesting that school district leadership should elongate the bond length or seek more regular, small tax increases. Fortunately for school district stakeholders, there did not appear to be an association between the **length of time** taxes will increase and the likelihood it will pass (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a). There are also issues of voter perception. Kastory and Harrington (1996) found that voters would approve a referendum provided the dollar request was "reasonable" for the schools' needs, but, similar to Lentz (1999), Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001), provided data that showed that referendums would have a greater difficulty passing as the number of voters who

believed the tax hike will be substantial increased. As Bowers and Lee (2013) suggested, the "sticker shock" of a bond amount and its relationship to passage likelihood appeared to be specific to state contexts.

Research has also taken into account the **use of referendum dollars**. Much, although certainly not all, of this research focused on referendums specifically for capital improvements. As such, the best indicators here helped explain what kinds of infrastructure improvements voters would approve as opposed to approval between different types referendums. This situation also reflected the state-by-state context of referendum laws, e.g. Michigan's limits to capital referendums in the early 1990s. Early research cited by Piele and Hall (1973) did not produce a relationship between the purpose of proposed construction and likelihood of passage, but research produced closer to their publication date showed that new construction meant to replace old facilities was more likely to pass than any other usage proposal. Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001) provided insightful differences in racial voting patterns as they applied to capital referendums. They found that in a racially heterogeneous school district such as Houston the chance of getting a new school was a significant predictor of voting yes on a capital referendum and was, in fact, an even more powerful effect than having children in the district. For Black and Hispanic voters, the prospect of getting a new school was not a significant predictor. The authors pointed out that this supported Whites' self-interest in increasing or protecting their property values in multiracial districts by using their social capital to build neighborhood schools close to them.

Beckham and Maiden (2003) also focused on infrastructure but specifically on technological infrastructure in Oklahoma. They found that referendum passage likelihood increased when the technological infrastructure share of the total requested dollar amount

increased. In other words, the more technology a district asked for, the more likely the referendum was to pass. Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010b) could not replicate this finding in Michigan; there was no association between technology and outcome. All else being equal, requests for sports facilities (Maher & Skidmore, 2008; Bowers & Chen, 2015; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018), band equipment, art equipment, and parking lots (Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, & Liu, 2011) were less likely to pass than requests for maintenance on current capital. Band, art, and parking lot improvements could decrease approval percentages by about six percent (Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, & Liu, 2011). Referendums for existing capital renovations or debt refinancing were over 1.5 times more likely to pass than referendums not requesting renovations or debt refinancing (Bowers & Lee, 2013; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018).

Two studies did reference operation levies. Maher and Skidmore (2009) studied elections in which debt-issuance referendums, which usually cover new infrastructure or extensive renovation, appeared on the ballot alongside referendums to exceed revenue limits, which typically cover operations expenses. They found that revenue limit referendums are about three percent more likely to pass when debt referendums pass, a result that was especially applicable to more rural districts. Amiel, Knowles, and Reschovsky (2016) updated and addended Maher and Skidmore's study. They, too, found that operations referendums were more likely to pass when a bond referendum passed in the same year. Their research also added that districts that passed a revenue limit increase were more likely to pass a subsequent revenue limit increase as compared to districts that did not pass an initial revenue limit increase. Nevertheless, operations levies remained particularly difficult to pass. These referendums had the highest failure rate of any type of levy (Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013). Cost perceptions by voters differed greatly between debt and operations referendums. Debt-issuance referendums fund new infrastructure

that is tangible, highly visible, and a source of pride for the community; the dollars were seen as an investment. On the other hand, operations levies were perceived to be merely additional taxes that funded abstract costs like curriculum, salaries, and other personnel expenditures (Shober, 2011; Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013).

Like the cost variable above, the use of referendum dollars also includes elements of perception. Stair, Rephann, and Heberling (2006) did not study one particular kind of improvement. Instead, they analyzed willingness to pay for increased educational expenditures regardless of the proposed use. They found that, unsurprisingly, households with children voted with their children in mind. These households were more willing to pay for a proposed improvement if they believed that their children would benefit from the proposed improvement with achievement scores that were equal to or greater than the schoolwide average. Alarmingly, if these improvements were not approved, these same parents who expected their children to benefit equal to or more than the rest of the student's population were also the parents most likely to remove their children from public schools and send them to nearby, private institutions—an ominous sign for failed referendums in areas with other alternative schooling options.

A referendum's relationship with other referendums was one of the most commonly studied factors. Various researchers conceptualized this relationship in different ways, e.g. how frequently referendums occur in general, the years since a previous referendum, whether a current referendum is the same as a prior referendum attempt, the presence of a competing referendum, and the referendum behavior of other nearby districts. Early research did not provide much clear guidance to hopeful administrators. Piele and Hall (1973) cited some work that found that districts with the highest referendum success rates were the same communities

with the fewest referendum attempts over a five-year period, but they also reported that the **time elapsed since a district's last referendum** election had no statistically significant relationship with a current referendum's likelihood of passage. Gong and Rogers (2014) provided some clarification with Oklahoma data but not until over forty years later: a longer period between bonds was associated with greater support for a current bond. Without an adequate, context-specific waiting period, voters can suffer from feelings of "levy fatigue" or feeling "taxed out" (Johnson & Ingle, 2009, p. 62).

More contemporary research shed some light on how voters behave with regard to **repeated referendum attempts**. In other words, are voters more likely to pass a referendum when the same referendum experienced a prior failure? Unlike the Maher and Skidmore, Amiel, Knowles, and Reschovsky, and Johnson and Ingle research referenced above with regard to different types of referendum attempts, this strand of the research refers specifically to identical referendums that fail the first time and are later tried again.

Sielke (1998) did not find that voters easily changed their mind: repeated requests did not increase the chance the referendum would pass. Data using New York budget referendums pointed to a similar conclusion. A budget referendum defeat in one year increased the chance the next budget referendum would fail by about eight percent, a phenomenon Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004) referred to as a referendum "narcotic effect."

This narcotic effect was supported by quite a bit of research. Maher & Skidmore (2008) found that referendums that previously failed in Wisconsin were less likely to pass than first-time referendums unless there were also concurrent "substantial downward revisions in a referendum's proposed spending" (p. 452). Shober (2011) approached the narcotic effect in a slightly different manner. He totaled the number of referendum attempts over a five-year period

per district in California, Colorado, and Wisconsin. His data showed that one standard deviation change from the mean number of attempts decreased the likelihood of passage by about eight percent. Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt (2013) argue that additional attempts saw an increase in the likelihood of passage—trying again increased the chance the referendum would pass.

Professor Alex Bowers has studied repeat referendum attempts the most across several years and various research teams. First, descriptive data from Michigan between 2000 and 2005 showed that the majority of school bonds passed the first time (around 55 percent), a much lower percentage passed with a second attempt (34 percent), and, despite a small sample size, third floats pass somewhere in between (approximately 42 percent) (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a). This team's logistic analyses showed that only the first attempt of a bond was a significant predictor of passage, and the team urged administrators that, if they wanted to pass a referendum, they should put substantial work into passing it on the first attempt. Later that year, the team added three additional years of bond data to their study and calculated similar results. If a district failed to win approval for a bond on the first attempt, chances the bond would pass on the second attempt fell. However, if two failed attempts occurred, the team encouraged the district to attempt a third time; third attempts actually had a greater likelihood of passing than first attempts (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b). Third, Bowers and Lee (2013) found that, in Texas, every additional referendum attempt was associated with significantly decreased probabilities of passing. Fourth, Bowers and Chen (2015) revisited Michigan data between 1998 and 2014. As before, they found that the first attempt of a referendum was 2.484 times more likely to pass than subsequent identical attempts.

Competing referendums can be particularly problematic for approval, regardless of whether the competing referendums are other, additional school district requests or referendums from other levying authorities such as counties and municipalities. Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010b) first studied this in their expanded study of Michigan capital bond referendums. They argued that referendums that were the first or the only on the ballot were the most likely to succeed. More property tax proposals resulted in voters "suffering" from "fatigue," echoing Johnson and Ingle's 2009 work (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b, p. 393).

Bowers and Lee (2013) employed data from the Texas Bond Review Board, a notably and uncharacteristically thorough database, which included a description of a referendum's purpose and its location on the ballot for residents affected by the potential tax increase. The researchers' goal was to provide additional nuance to the voter fatigue theory. Indeed, they found that a lower place on the ballot was associated with decreased odds of passage. A referendum placed fourth or lower on a ballot was 5.71 times less likely to pass than a ballot listed first. Bowers and Chen (2015) made use of another particularly accessible and strikingly thorough database, the Michigan Department of Treasury School Bond Qualification and Loan Program. They again calculated that a bond that was second on the ballot was about 4.5 times less likely to pass than a proposal that was first or only. Proposals third or lower were about 14.5 times less likely to pass than a proposal that was first or only.

Referendums may not only compete; they may also **"diffuse" from nearby or comparable school districts**. In other words, referendum approvals in one district can have an effect on another district's referendum proposal at a later time. This argument is well-supported in political science and education literature. Policy diffusion is defined as "one government's

policy choices being influenced by the choices of other government" (Shipan & Volden, 2012, p. 88). In fact, governments rarely undertake or select policies purely for internal reasons (Shipan & Volden, 2012). Shipan and Volden (2012) provided several foundational points for this factor. First, they pointed out that governments competed with one another, particularly at the local level. Second, these local level entities, including school districts, wanted to appeal to residents who were willing to move in order to express their spending preferences (also see Tiebout, 1956). Third, governments learned from one another's successes and failures, and they could do so easily with 21st century communication and information access. Fourth, environments were ripe for diffusion when policy- and decision-making were decentralized—an environment encompassing local public school district referendums and property tax levies.

There are four ways policies can diffuse: learning, economic competition, imitation, and coercion (Shippan & Volden, 2008). First, referendums are not a new policy; school district leaders did not need to learn of their existence from other districts. However, districts could learn whether, how, and why a referendum approved elsewhere had been successful and use these shortcuts in their own districts (Berry & Berry, 2007); successes spread, and failures are abandoned as the policy diffused (Volden, 2017). School districts in Wisconsin are subject to competition through private schools, online schools, charter schools, magnet schools, and other traditional public schools. Alternative schooling options have different depths of infiltration in different parts of the state, but all public school districts compete for student funding by way of students since state aid is disbursed primarily on a per-pupil basis. Districts with declining enrollment have a difficult time staying solvent (Kemp, 2018b). Third, local government leaders imitate one another in order to demonstrate acumen and competency. School district leaders do not want to look as though they are incapable of solving financial issues when other school

district leaders have patched budget holes via referendums. Fourth, school district governments are coerced vertically from state governments to hold referendums because referendums display American values like local control, federalism, and self-determination. As Volden (2017, p. 369) explains, coercion can "force the hand of another government." Local entities can choose to spend more on public education, but that additional money is likely to come from local property tax levies, not injections from state coffers.

Policy diffusion would not occur if decision-makers were blind to other government entities' decisions, purposefully or not. However, this is not the case. Both community and local government leaders and residents in non-leadership positions compared their resources with those of another community. High-quality school districts provided value—capitalized in home prices—far beyond the higher taxes that were levied for the districts' services, and homebuyers were especially good at discerning high-achieving districts (Bogart & Cromwell, 1997; Fischel, 2001; Cellini, Ferreira, & Rothstein, 2010). Residents also used a "yardstick model" in which they compared the cost, i.e. tax, of their resources and services with comparisons to other, nearby jurisdictions (Thompson & Whitley, 2017). Residents then decided on a level of taxation that mimiced those nearby jurisdictions (Brueckner, 2003).

Anchoring is conceptually similar to competition and diffusion, but, in this case, the current referendum "competes" against the prior referendum a district had. If a new referendum occurred at the expiration of a prior referendum, approval might not be detrimentally impacted because voters became used to a newly established property tax status quo (Green, Jacowitz, Kahneman, & McFadden, 1998). The amount of property tax that a population had been paying becomes normalized, serves as an anchor, shifts directly into a new and potentially entirely different purpose, and may increase the chance the proposing district succeeds.

All of these claims are applicable and present in education research. Fiscal decentralization was associated with higher levels of education spending because school boards, as tax levying authorities, competed for students and provided more attractive "bundles" of public goods (Busemeyer, 2007). More specifically, a one-dollar increase in the average per-pupil revenue of nearby districts caused a district to increase its own per-pupil revenue by about $0.20 (Reback, 2007). The results were even stronger when the district was previously outspending the other comparison districts. In states where school districts were unable to exercise local fiscal control, these spillovers disappeared (Reback, 2007). Moreover, school districts engaged in these competitions in order to attract and retain students to local public schools and increase the popularity and image of schools with households with children (Reback, 2007).

These competitions are not limited only to adjacent school districts. Spillovers were approximately $0.08 to $0.22 for districts within 20 miles and about $0.22 to $0.27 for districts within 30 miles. As such, "Local spillovers are less often a matter of 'keeping up with the Joneses' than a matter of 'staying ahead of the Joneses'" (Reback, 2007, p. 15). Simply put, "Districts appear to directly respond to changes in neighboring districts' revenues" (Reback, 2007, p. 18). Millimet and Rangaprasad (2007) found an even more expansive set of competitive items across school districts. Not only did school districts compete with their neighbors over per-pupil expenditures, they also competed over student-teacher ratios, teacher salaries, and school size. This research also argued that competitive policy choices were only in places with tax caps because caps place even greater importance on state and, in a more limited sense, federal aid.

In other words, school districts held referendums in order to raise money that would make their district more attractive to potential homebuyers. As households with children moved,

per-pupil allocated state aid followed, which allowed the district to "stay ahead of the Joneses." This competition was highly detrimental to equity. Districts that could not achieve referendum approval fell further and further behind relatively wealthier neighboring districts that approved referendums, improved infrastructure, attracted (or poached) high-quality teachers, and purchased rigorous curriculum (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b). This situation is happening in Wisconsin, as Baron (2018) explained in his research of teaching poaching that I referenced in section one. A Wisconsin school district was more likely to pass a referendum to exceed revenue limits when a member of their athletic conference passed one in the previous two years (Amiel, Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016).

The public school referendum corpus includes very little qualitative research. The work that does exist mostly falls into the non-empirical, practitioner experience literature that I referenced in the opening of this section. However, there is some qualitative work with regard to **campaigns, education, and messaging**. If the vote is to pass, referendum leaders should explain the potential successes, opportunities, and benefits of referendum passage to the community (Piele & Hall, 1973; Holt, Wendt, & Smith, 2006). This is, admittedly, a very fine line. Communications must create a strong sense of urgency and be clear about the consequences of a no vote, but leaders that focused only on the needs of the school were less likely to pass a referendum (Johnson & Ingle, 2009; Piele & Hall, 1973). Rather than a needs-focused campaign, referendum supporters would be well-served in explaining how the proposal dollars would improve the education of all the district's children. Referendums were more likely to pass when voters perceived this benefit for all children, not a select few (Kastory & Harrington, 1996).

The source of campaign information is important. Voters must receive school and levy information from supportive, non-school related community leaders, especially those in business

and media, and community member-led task forces, lest the campaign will be viewed as too self-interested (Piele and Hall, 1973; Greene & Bergman, 1995; Kastory & Harrington, 1996). These community boards should be tasked with providing referendum recommendations to the school board, present school needs to district residents, and communicate the yes-messaging (Holt, Wendt, & Smith, 2006). Positive referendum coverage in local newspapers increased the chances for success, though it is unclear if that finding remains relevant in a 21st century media ecology. How long this referendum information should be provided is debatable. Piele and Hall (1973) noted that longer campaigns were associated with increased passage rates, while Ingle, Johnson, and Petroff (2012) urged short, targeted campaigns. Only one study included campaign expenditures, a quantitative measure, and should be understood with some caution. Ingle, Johnson, and Petroff (2012) found this data to be incredibly onerous to collect, as many administrators had no record of previous expenditures. Nevertheless, the researchers reported that the likelihood of approval increased with greater campaign expenditures.

It is critical that school board members, district administrators, and teachers engage with the community much more holistically than only being highly visible when the district needs additional money. School budgets are complex. Potential voters were in a much better position to understand the district's financial needs if leadership provided ongoing education, opportunities for input about resources, and information about ways to participate in budget allocation at times other than during referendum campaigns (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Franklin & Ebdon, 2007; Ingle, Johnson, & Petroff, 2012). Education and public input increased trust and feelings of accountability (Franklin & Ebdon, 2007). An established history of positive parent-teacher relationship perceptions was a weak but positive predictor of success (Ingle, Johnson, & Petroff, 2012). However, without ongoing work, faces of the district are forced to play catch-up in

fiscally high-stakes environments. District administrators must be comfortable with ongoing political and public relations work if their referendum campaigns are going to be met with success (Ingle, Johnson, & Petroff, 2012; Scott, 2013).

Campaign consultants are available for school district referendum efforts, though their efficacy is debatable. Piele and Hall (1973) reported on some research that demonstrated no relationship between consultants and school board success. Other research in their work showed that campaign consultants actually decreased the likelihood of passage. Ingle, Johnson, and Petroff (2012) completed case study research on Ohio districts undertaking referendums and noted that one successful district hired a consultant, but this finding was mentioned in passing and did not point to causation.

A handful of other qualitative factors have only been studied sporadically in the literature. One is the **specificity of the referendum's ballot language**. More "general" bond proposals were more likely to pass in small districts than were referendums that were very specific. Other research did not find any relationship with regard to wording (Piele & Hall, 1973). Relatedly, ballot language that was deemed to be very **complex** decreased the likelihood voters would approve, although this finding was not specific to school referendums (Bornstein & Thalmann, 2008).

Community Factors

Table 3

Referendum Passage – Community Factors

Population of district	Educational attainment	Knowledge of and information about spending
Population churn	Racial makeup	Property wealth
Feelings toward taxes	Sex	Homeownership

Table 3 (continued)

Equalitarianism	Median income	Political ideology
Age	Income inequality	Voters with school-aged children
Source and steadiness of income		

The final set of factors that can affect referendum passage are attributes of the community or communities in which the school district is located. These factors including characteristics such as the district's median income, homeownership rates, population, and educational attainment. These factors are essential for school leaders to consider before attempting a referendum. However, these are also the factors that school board members and district administrators are least able to change. The property wealth of a district is not highly malleable yet has an influence on voting behavior. I purposely end with this section because several of these factors are highly important to my positionality, a topic I take up in the third section of this paper.

The **population of a district** is related to but different than a district's locale, a factor discussed in relation to the school district. A school district could very well be classified as rural, but, if the district is large, include a relatively high population relative to other geographically smaller rural districts. Theobald and Meier (2002) included a population variable in their analysis and found that referendum success decreases as population increases. Brunner, Robbins, and Simonsen (2018) also found a negative relationship between total population and passage but a positive relationship between population density and passage.

A more commonly referenced variable is what I deem "**population churn**." This variable is addressed differently by various research teams but includes migration, length of residence,

and/or community attachment—highly related factors in the literature. To some extent, this variable may be capturing age, a variable with highly debated effects and one I take up thoroughly below. Piele and Hall (1973) explained that the longer a voter has lived in a community, the less likely they were to vote yes on a referendum. In turn, referendums that turn out these voters primarily were more likely to fail. By the same token, they also cited research that argued that recent transplants were more likely to vote yes on a referendum.

Later research provided nuance to Piele and Hall's findings, and most of this clarity revolved around attachment. Rasinski and Rosenbaum (1987) found that their study sample included many people who lived in the community for a great deal of time, were attached to their community, and demonstrated investment in its success by voting yes on school property tax increases. Berkman and Plutzer (2005), Johnson and Ingle (2009), and Brokaw, Gale, and Merz (1990) all later lent support to this affect-driven hypothesis. Districts with high churn and substantial net out-migration may not have the time or capacity to develop these affective attachments. Indeed, high-churn, high-migration communities were less likely to pass school referendums (Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, & Liu, 2011). Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2004) used pupil mobility as opposed to adult mobility but found no relationship to budget vote passage.

One early strand of research worth following in this realm is directed at rural America. "New" rural economies defined not by farming by but recreational amenities and services were much more likely to see in-migration of wealthy and educated residents who strongly supported Barack Obama during his presidential campaigns (Scala, Johnson, & Rogers, 2015). Wealth and education are taken up below but, in short, are solid predictors of referendum passage. These strands of research have not been connected yet, but it is plausible that rural areas with in-

migration may see support for local schools despite otherwise very little long-term school or community attachment.

The community attachment to which researchers refer is known as "psychological sense of community" (PSC), a term that refers to the strong attachment people experience toward others in their community based on where they live, where they work, where they go to school, and the groups with which they affiliate (Davidson & Cotter, 1993). PSC does not have a direct impact on elections, but it does have an impact via school beliefs. Residents with high levels of PSC expressed more favorable school beliefs, which, in turn, increased their intention to support school revenue ballots (Davidson, & Cotter, 1993). Attachment can manifest in unexpected ways. One case study of an Idaho district showed that district leaders expected a referendum to pass because of previously expressed school support. However, the community exhibited strong emotional ties to a high school building that would have been decommissioned, and the referendum failed (Davis & Tyson, 2003). This speaks to the importance of familiarity that school district leaders must have with their constituents, regardless of whether a referendum campaign is in swing. The White, working-class in particular expressed a great deal of pride and nostalgia for these once-powerful community institutions such as public schools (Cramer Walsh, 2012; Illing, 2016; Wuthnow, 2018).

Referendum passage is also influenced by the community's general **feelings toward taxes**. This is a slightly different take than the prior referendum voting behavior discussed in the referendum factors above. That research analyzed a referendum's likelihood of passage based on support for prior referendums, i.e. the referendum was the unit of analysis. A few researchers chose to study referendum passage analyzing the community's broader taxation opinions and beliefs. According to Piele and Hall (1973), citizens who expressed greater support and positive

attitudes for taxes were more likely to support school levies. This was operationalized in various ways by different research teams: level of public (versus private) regardingness, unitary (versus individualist) ethos, and depth of civic responsibility (Piele & Hall, 1973). Regardless of the measure, the findings consistently showed that some voters were highly and consistently supportive of community improvements and voted yes on school referendums. Interestingly, these feelings from tax-supporting residents superseded economic conditions. Support for community improvement *vis-à-vis* local tax increases was insulated from economic swings (Piele & Hall, 1973). A few decades later, Lentz (1999) termed this prior support for taxation as a "culture of support." Communities with this culture were significantly more likely to pass school referendums than those without it. She, too, found that this culture was insulated from economic downturns. Neither expanded on the malleability of this culture.

A referendum's success can also depend on the extent of a community's commitment to **equalitarianism**, defined as the value placed on equality of opportunity for all people. Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001) hypothesized that people who demonstrated the most commitment to equalitarianism would also support school bonds because well-financed public education could play a strong role in promoting equal opportunities for all children. This commitment to equalitarianism was not a significant predictor of referendum support for Black or Hispanic people. However, there was a positive relationship, albeit weak, between Whites' commitment to equalitarianism and their likelihood of voting yes.

Referendums also depend on a number of the community's demographic characteristics. I begin a discussion of demographics with **age**, one of the most debated factors in the entirety of the referendum literature. It is generally assumed that older voters are less likely to vote for school referendums. The logic behind this claim is intuitive and sensible: older voters are retired,

living on fixed incomes, and, without children in the household, are unlikely to have direct connections to the schools. By the time Piele and Hall published their 1973 work, already over a half-dozen studies argued that younger voters were more likely than older voters to approve a school referendum. Some contemporary research found the same. An increasing share of people over 65 negatively and significantly decreased the likelihood of referendum passage in Texas (Theobald & Meier, 2002; Bowers & Lee, 2013) and in Michigan (Bowers & Chen, 2015).

This negative association also extended to preference for education expenditures. An Oregon-focused study linked a one-percent increase in the number people over 60 to a reduction in educational expenditures by about 5.5 percent (Stevens & Mason, 1996). Unfortunately for school district administrators, board members, and district stakeholders, elderly people tended to concentrate their preference for lower spending on schools as opposed to other public goods. At the state level, one standard deviation increase in the share of elderly people in a state produced a nearly five percent decline in education spending even as spending increased in a state's noneducation-related public services (Poterba, 1997). Ladd and Murray (2001) followed and shed light on Poterba's claims at the county level. They found a pattern of segregation in elderly voters. Seniors tended to live in areas with a relative scarcity of children. This resulted in other counties having higher proportions of children relative to the rest of the population, increasing these other counties' educational tax bills, and motivating voters in these overrepresented counties to spend less (Ladd & Murray, 2001). Therefore, jurisdictions looking to attract senior citizens and retirees need to be cognizant of the spending beliefs of their new, incoming residents. Whether direct or indirect, the elderly can be a real and genuine threat to local education agency budgets by advocating for lower property tax bills, but local tax bases can remain durable provided incoming seniors contribute to economic growth and business

development (Lambert, Clark, Wilcox, & Park, 2009). In short, the elderly must spend money that will not be provided via property taxes.

As the referendum literature burgeoned, researchers argued that refinement to the prevailing age-referendum relationship was evidently needed to understand the voting behavior of older residents. Brunner and Balsdon (2004) later added even further granularity to Poterba and Ladd and Murray. These 2004 results found that elderly voters were unlikely to support statewide votes to increase education expenditures. However, this negative relationship diminished greatly at the local level, suggesting that elderly voters expressed preferences for reduced educational expenditures in general but were open to supporting their local public schools. Local spending was valuable because it could be capitalized into home prices for future buyers; state spending did not have this same effect (Harris, Evans, & Schwab, 2001; Hilber & Mayer, 2004). Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001) provided a racial context in Houston: the negative age-referendum relationship was limited only to Whites.

Not all research produced a significant relationship between age and voting behavior (Rasinski & Rosenbaum, 1987; Brokaw, Gale, & Merz, 1990; Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2004; Zimmer & Jones, 2005; Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013; Amiel, Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018), an important null finding worthy of mention considering what was otherwise thought to be a clear and strong relationship between age and school finance elections. Lentz (1999) also calculated a narrowly tailored significant association between increasing elderly populations and referendum failure but only in mixed rural residential areas, not residential suburbs or small rural areas.

Additional subtlety produced a competing and equally logical hypothesis from the literature: older residents have deep ties to their communities, and this attachment is a powerful

predictor of referendum support, as I discussed above. Older voters have a strong incentive to maintain their property values because, morbidity aside, there is a greater likelihood they will have to sell their houses in the relatively near future, and school quality is capitalized in home prices. Additionally, older voters are not completely disconnected. There may be grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or other young family members who remain enrolled in local schools.

Chew (1992) did not find a strong relationship with age until he included a measure of political ideology. He noted that the age of residents in Orange County, the location of his research focus, was not a significant predictor of a school tax increase. However, older people were more likely to be conservative, and, in his model, conservatism was a significant predictor of voting no. Davidson and Cotter (1993) reported a similar finding via indirect effects: older residents had a stronger psychological sense of community which improved their beliefs about the local school system. These positive school beliefs affected school finance vote intentions, but age itself did not.

Interestingly, these results have shifted as elderly cohorts change. Plutzer and Berkman (2005) updated Chew's findings and noted that "new" elderly cohorts were less conservative than prior generations and therefore less opposed to increased school spending. In fact, their update argues that "… there is no evidence whatsoever for aging/life-cycle effects—thereby undermining the inference of self-interested politics and the prediction of the growing grey peril to school finance" (Plutzer & Berkman, 2005, p. 71). Elderly voters did not reject school tax rate hikes because they were not self-interested, i.e. do not have kids in school; they were generally supportive of school spending (Button & Rosenbaum, 1989). Shober (2011) actually found that one standard deviation increase in the percentage of senior citizens actually improved the

likelihood of referendum passage by 6.4 percent. However, senior citizens may still vote against referendums because they want to raise taxes by slightly less than what boards propose and because they are generally less-trusting of government and school bureaucracy (Plutzer & Berkman, 2005).

Elderly voters demonstrate self-interest but perhaps not in the way researchers originally expected. Older voters are protective of the communities to which they are attached, and they are protective of their home values. **Voters with school-aged children** have a much greater and more direct sense of self-interest. Their children will directly benefit from a referendum approval's increase in revenue. In the 1960s and early 1970s, eight studies demonstrated that voters with children enrolled in the public schools were more likely to approve of school financial issues than voters without children enrolled (Piele & Hall, 1973). These findings have held. In general, parents with kids in the public schools were more likely to vote yes and more likely to support increased expenditures for public schools (Chew, 1992; Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001; Brunner & Balsdon, 2004; Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Stair, Rephann, & Heberling, 2006).

A few notable contributions were made regarding this factor and are highlighted here. Rasinski and Rosenbaum (1987) also found that voters without children were more likely to vote no unless they were concerned that a failed referendum would damage property values. Stevens and Mason (1996) made an interesting addendum from their Oregon data. They found that as individual households increased in size, educational expenditures decreased, most likely, they argued, because household expenses increased with more children which left less disposable cash for voluntary tax increases. Ebdon (2000) produced the most surprising results using New York state budget referendum data. In her results, an increase in the number of households with

school-aged children increased the chances of a budget defeat, but an increase in the number of households with private school-aged children decreased the chances of a budget defeat. The unexpected findings were noted, but no additional explanation or theorizing was provided. Priest and Fox (2005) analyzed non-White voters in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District and determined that there was not a parent-nonparent voting behavior gap for non-White voters. Parents of color there were no more or less likely to vote for a school bond than a person of color with no children, substantiating the group- and equity-based voting focus elucidated by Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001).

Slightly fewer studies have analyzed the relationship between public school district referendums and **educational attainment** of the community, but the findings were more consistent than the community's age. Piele and Hall (1973) referenced six studies that argued that as voters' educational level increased, the more likely they were to approve a referendum—a finding they deemed "established" and "predominant" (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 118). Few studies have disagreed with Piele and Hall's synthesis: as educational attainment increases, so did support for school finance elections and greater school revenue (Chew, 1992; Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2004; Brunner & Balsdon, 2004; Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Corcoran & Evans, 2010; Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b; Shober, 2011; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018).

A few researchers agreed with this assertion with a few caveats or particularities. Lentz (1999) calculated that referendum passage increased as the percent of college graduates increased in suburban residential areas and mixed rural residential areas but had no relationship in the smallest rural areas. Tedin, Matland, and Weiher, (2001) found a positive educational attainment-referendum association with Whites but a near zero relationship with Blacks and

Hispanics. Neither Bowers and Lee (2013) nor Gong and Rogers (2014) found any relationship in Texas and Oklahoma respectively. Only one study, an analysis of Oregon in the 1980s, found a negative relationship between educational attainment and education spending preferences, and the authors stated the reason for this relationship was unclear based on their data (Stevens & Mason, 1996).

Some research analyzed the **racial makeup** of a community's voters without a concurrent focus on whether the community's and school's racial compositions were different. This research approached the topic by proposing that minorities in the U.S. were more likely to vote for increases in school taxes because of a focus on group-related, as opposed to individually-based, benefits and the possibility that educational investments would improve equity (see Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001). Indeed, it appeared that Black and Hispanic populations, regardless of age, were more likely than Whites to vote in favor of a school finance proposal (Piele & Hall, 1973; Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001; Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Priest & Fox, 2005). Ebdon (2000) produced results for non-Whites, not just Blacks, and found that an increasing share of minority populations was significantly and positively associated with school budget approvals. Gong and Rogers (2014) did not find a significant relationship. Only one study, an analysis of Wisconsin and Minnesota referendums, found a negative relationship between approval and Black and Hispanic population share (Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018).

Voters' **sex**[3] is not commonly included in the literature, but a few studies do include it as a potential factor of voting behavior. Very early work did not provide much clarity. One study

[3] Much of the referendum literature that analyzed this variable is now several decades old and reflects antiquated nomenclature. I use the term "sex" because this was used by the authors in the cited literature instead of the more inclusive and appropriate "gender."

found women were more likely than men to support a school referendum, one study found men were more likely than women to support a school referendum, and two studies did not find a statistically significant relationship (Piele & Hall, 1973). Chew (1992) also found no initial relationship between sex and approval but found indirect effects: men were more likely to be conservative in his Orange County data, and this conservatism made them less supportive. Another indirect effect applied to women. Women had a greater psychological sense of community; this sense of community improved their school beliefs; and these school beliefs, in turn, increased approval vote intentions (Davidson & Cotter, 1993). In Houston, sex was only a significant predictor of referendum approval for Hispanics. Hispanic women were more likely to vote for a referendum than Hispanic men (Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001).

The relationship between a community's **median income** and referendum approval is subject to two competing explanations. On the one hand, communities with a higher median income may be more likely to vote yes because they have the capacity to pay for it. On the other hand, communities with a lower median income may be more likely to vote yes as a mechanism to improve local public schools and help the community's children move out of poverty or economic precariousness. Piele and Hall (1973) referenced one report that stated that as a citizen's income dropped, the more likely it was that they would perceive a referendum-generated tax increase to be excessive. However, they stopped short of explicitly saying that this would entice people to vote no. Instead, they chose to point out that voters would weigh the costs and benefits of their potential choices. Chew (1992) reported "no discernible" effects between Orange County incomes and support for school tax increases. Following Chew's work, a fair amount of research landed in the former explanation: higher incomes were associated with increased spending and referendum approval (Ebdon, 2000; Fernandez & Rogerson, 2001;

Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang; Stair, Rephann, & Heberling, 2006; Maher & Skidmore, 2008; Johnson & Ingle, 2009; Corcoran & Evans, 2010).

This claim was not universally supported, however. Throughout the 20th century, the relationship between local per-capita income and per-pupil spending decreased in statistical significance (Hoxby, 1998). Lentz (1999) found that Illinois referendums were more likely to fail as the percentage of poor people increased, though this finding was applicable only to rural areas; no relationship was found in suburban areas. Tedin, Matland, and Weiher's (2001) data were dependent on the voter's race. White voters' income and approval rates were positively related, but no relationship was found for Black and Hispanic voters. Zimmer and Jones (2005), Shober (2011), Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt (2013), and Gong and Rogers (2014) found no income relationships whatsoever in Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Oklahoma, regardless of race. Later, Zimmer, Jones, Buddin, and Liu (2011) expanded their Michigan data and clarified that an increase in family income was associated with an increase in percentage yes votes but not with the probability of passing a referendum. Brunner, Robbins, and Simonsen (2018) had inconsistent income-approval results across their specifications.

One study used measures of **income inequality** over time as opposed to median family income. Corcoran and Evans (2010) gathered data across 30 years and 10,300 school districts. They found that locally-generated dollars for elementary and secondary schools increased as the measure of income inequality grew in a district. The authors suggested that there was the opportunity for local governments, including school districts, to raise additional funds from high-income earners in their jurisdictions when social inequality was high—provided those high-income earners lived or owned property there.

The **source and steadiness of income** provide an interesting corollary to income-referendum relationships. This information, though not particularly common, provides important contextualization for income-focused research. It is not just a matter of how much money people make but rather whether people believe they will continue to make money in the future. This factor addresses educational spending and a referendum's affordability in a longer-term sense. Voters who had greater income satisfaction, positive job outlooks, income stability, and a recent raise preceding the election were much more likely to vote yes for a school referendum (Piele & Hall, 1973). Voters in professional and business sector occupational categories were also more likely to vote yes as opposed to blue collar workers, perhaps reflecting the shifting economic structure of the 1970s when Piele and Hall published. However, other research from the time found no relationship between occupation and voting behavior (Piele & Hall, 1973). Little to no research included these types of factors for the next three decades. Brunner and Balsdon (2004) addressed this topic very briefly when they reported that California residents who perceived good financial times in the near-future were more likely to support referendums. Willingness to pay also increased alongside households' perception of the primary breadwinner's income security (Stair, Rephann, & Heberling, 2006). At a national level, increases in economic development, measured by gross domestic product per capita, were also positively associated with increases in educational spending (Busemeyer, 2007). Interestingly, Michigan communities' unemployment rates had no statistical association with referendum passage (Zimmer & Jones, 2005).

Another recent study analyzed **knowledge of and information about local education spending** and its relationship to support for additional spending. Using nationally representative data, Schueler and West (2016) found that survey respondents assumed their local district spent

only 54 percent of the dollars the district actually spent. Likewise, survey respondents underestimated their state's average teacher salary by approximately 30 percent. When complete information was provided to respondents, support for additional school spending plummeted. The information reduced by 22 percent the probability that respondents would support funding increases. These results force referendum supporters onto a fine ethical line. Residents may not know much about spending decisions. Increasing transparency and providing additional spending information may actually make it more difficult to garner and sustain support public education spending in local districts (Schueler & West, 2016).

A measure of a community's **property wealth** is not referenced as frequently in the literature as income. However, these two metrics can and should be addressed differently. A resident, particularly in a rural area, could have very high property wealth but low income, which can create difficulties for farmers experiencing increased property taxes (Pender, Marré, & Reeder, 2012). Different studies approached wealth in various ways but, if it was included, it was usually measured as per-pupil assessed valuation, per-pupil property value, or total district property value. Regardless of measure, it appeared to be a critical addition to models. Per-pupil valuation was an effective measure of the "taste" or local demand for local public school spending (Hoxby, 1998).

Nevertheless, early research did not establish much of a relationship. Piele and Hall (1973) referenced one study in Illinois that did find a positive relationship between per-pupil assessed valuation and election outcome, one study in Iowa that found a negative relationship between per-pupil assessed valuation and election outcome, and two studies that found no relationship. Data collected in the 1990s and early 2000s also revealed no relationship between property values and election outcomes in Michigan, New York, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma

(Sielke, 1998; Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith & Zhang, 2004; Zimmer & Jones, 2005; Shober, 2011; Gong & Rogers, 2014). In 2002, Theobald and Meier found a positive relationship between property values and likelihood of success. One standard deviation increase in Texas district property values increased the likelihood of referendum success by approximately six percent. They argued this finding was unsurprising since a bond would have far less tax impact in a district with high property values than a similarly sized bond in a district with low property values. Similarly, Cellini, Ferreira, and Rothstein (2010) studied housing prices specifically and found that higher-priced districts were more likely to pass a bond with a greater margin of victory than lower-priced districts. Rasinski and Rosenbaum (1987) did not study absolute property values but rather the potential for relative change. Voters who were concerned about a decrease in property values were more likely to vote for a tax increase, regardless of whether they were homeowners.

Since public schools generate a substantial amount of revenue from property taxes, **homeowners** are especially sensitive to property tax rate changes. Renters have a degree of insulation from property taxes. Even though rent payments can certainly be affected by increases in property taxes, homeowners receive a bill annually or biannually clearly outlining the costs from various tax-levying authorities. With that mind, there is some speculation that high rates of homeownership may depress the likelihood of referendum success while high rates of renters increase the likelihood (Theobald & Meier, 2002). Overall, not every study found a relationship between homeownership and referendum success. Initially, no relationship was found between rates of homeownership and school finance elections (Piele & Hall, 1973; Rasinski & Rosenbaum, 1987), and this finding was replicated in Minnesota and Wisconsin years later

(Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018). However, most of the other research is bifurcated without a lot of answers for school stakeholders.

Some research finds that an increasing proportion of and reliance on residential land decreased the odds that education budgets would expand (Ladd, 1975; Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Johnson & Ingle, 2009). Sielke (1998), for instance, demonstrated that a one percent increase in residential land decreased the likelihood of approval by 1.4 percent. At the same time, homeowners were likely to keep a close eye on property values. If a referendum had the chance to improve property values, including homes, in a school district, the more likely it was voters would support the election (see Fischel, 2001; Hilber & Mayer, 2004). However, this meant homeowners only supported tax increases when their home values could improve, a scenario that was unlikely when the tax hikes supported statewide education efforts (Brunner & Balsdon, 2004). Like several other factors, Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001) found racial differences. White homeowners were less likely to vote for a referendum than White renters, but there was no statistical significance in this relationship for Black and Hispanic voters.

The final factor most commonly included in the literature is a measure of **political ideology**. I purposely include this one last because I expand upon this measure in great detail in section three. This is a difficult variable on which to gather data, which can make results sparse, inconsistent, and difficult to compare. Political boundaries and school district boundaries rarely overlap. County-level election data can result in an ecological fallacy while municipal-level data can ignore outlying school district land. In general, most researchers who have attempted to use this factor approach it with fairly straightforward and commonly understood political presuppositions. Liberals are associated with a greater role for government, support for taxation, and support for expansion of public services. Conservatives, on the other hand, advocate for

smaller government, decreased taxation, and self-reliance. At face value, school finance elections are nonpolitical in the sense that there is no “D” or “R” next to the options. Therefore, Piele and Hall (1973) suggested that other variables, including many of those referenced in this section, would be a greater determinant in referendum voting behavior. In fact, with five studies, they demonstrated that liberal and conservative ideological loyalties were poor indicators of potential school finance election outcomes.

Chew (1992) limited his data to Orange County, California, but found that liberals expressed more support for greater school taxes than conservatives, an effect stronger than parenthood. Brunner and Balsdon (2004) expanded their dataset to include all of California and, like Chew, showed that conservatives were less willing to support an increase in taxes for school spending. Because of data collection issues, Stevens and Mason (1996) used referendums on utilities and nuclear policy as proxies for political ideology. Their proxies showed that an increasing share of liberal views on these other referendums was associated with greater school spending. Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001) separated ideology and partisanship. Ideology was a significant predictor of election behavior for Whites and Blacks but not Hispanics. Partisanship, meanwhile, was a significant predictor of election behavior for Whites and Hispanics but not Blacks. In Michigan, the share of Democratic-leaning voters had no effect on the percentage of people voting yes on a referendum ballot and, instead, was actually associated with a negative, albeit rather weak, relationship with the probability of referendum passage.

Three studies analyzed this factor in Wisconsin specifically. The results were mixed: districts with more Republican voters were less likely to support school finance increases (Shober, 2011); there was no relationship between political leanings and voting outcome (Amiel,

Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016); there was no relationship between Democratic vote share and probability of bond passage (Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018).

Section Review

It should be no wonder that school boards and administrators find referendum campaigns to be tremendously draining and exasperating. Suppose a set of practitioners are looking for evidence-based and research-backed findings—instead of non-empirical, "what seemed to work for me five years ago" reflections—to help them increase the chances of success on an upcoming referendum. As they review the literature seeking advice, they would find all kinds of contradictions and competing information. The rural school district superintendent overseeing a district with high rates of low-income students would find that these proportions can lead to a greater likelihood of passage … a diminished likelihood of passage … and no relationship to passage. The school board president in a suburban area would find that high homeownership rates will increase the chance of referendum approval … and decrease the chance of referendum approval. The urban administrator looking to improve the district's technological infrastructure would find that including technology-specific requests on a ballot will substantially increase the likelihood that it will pass … or it will make no difference at all.

When Piele and Hall synthesized the referendum research over 40 years ago, they included an accompanying cautionary note. They stated, "Although the dedicated school proponent or opponent might examine this review in hope of finding methods for developing a 'grand strategy' to influence the outcome of elections, several strands of evidence suggest the manipulation of any school finance election at any given time may prove extremely difficult" (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 91). This message was bleak for school boards and administrators. In essence, the most thorough referendum publication of that time was saying that factors within the school's control, e.g. campaign efforts, were ineffective at changing votes, and the elements that

did affect votes, e.g. district characteristics, were outside administrators' control. School district residents' support for school referendums was fixed. Some communities would pass referendums and others would struggle because of the demographics and attitudes of the community members, which would result in outcome variation *between* communities but rarely *within* (Piele & Hall, 1973; Bowers & Lee, 2013). This is partially what led to growth in the non-empirical, practitioner-focused work of the following decades and helped administrators ascertain their community's feelings—do I live and work in a referendum-supporting district or not?

More contemporary research included richer theories of median-voting and agenda-setting. Briefly, the median voter theorem argues that there is an ideological space from left to right. Each and every voter is represented by an ideal point that reflects their preferred policy, or in this case electoral, outcome (Downs, 1957; Achen & Bartels, 2016). Voters' preferences are well-satisfied because this median point is, by definition, the closest to all other voters' ideal points. Thus, according to the median voter theorem, policymakers and political parties, in particular, are well-suited to find this median voter and their preferences. As the referendum literature grew, researchers postulated that the median voter's ideal point may shift depending on factors such as the voter's income, the amount of state aid a district receives, the perceptual extent to which all children may benefit, or the attachment the voter holds to the community (see Maher & Skidmore, 2008). This shifting ideal point refutes Piele and Hall because the community—and some of its characteristics or attitudes— is now more malleable and less fixed than what was originally thought in the 1950s and 1960s.

Referendum scholars also included variables developed from the agenda-setting framework. Agenda-setting refers to the ability of the mass media and, more importantly for this review, policymakers to define and control what information appears for people and what, in

turn, is determined to be important (Lippmann, 1922; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). School referendum agenda-setters include school district leadership, i.e. the school board and district administrative teams. These players have the ability to manipulate certain aspects of the referendum, including the time the election will take place, the financial impact of the referendum, whether to reattempt a referendum, and the length of the levy increase (see Ebdon, 2000; Maher & Skidmore, 2009; Meredith, 2009; Amiel, Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016). As I detailed in this section above, these agenda-setting factors also influenced the likelihood of referendum passage—some, like timing, to a great extent—which further weakened the fixed-result approach from Piele and Hall.

To their credit, the Bowers et al. teams cited above have produced empirical research studies with useful formulas "into which school district leaders can insert their data to consider their chances …" (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a, p. 416). However, these formulas remain tremendously context-specific with atheoretical bundles of results. Consider the following quotes (emphasis added):

- "If the type of jurisdiction in which a school district is located affects referenda passage, *a statewide theory of referenda prediction may be inappropriate*." (Lentz, 1999, p. 464)
- "By their nature, school levy campaigns are contextual and abound with complex interacting variables. […] *Every school election is unique*, and *there is no set formula* that will guarantee success in every case." (Johnson, 2008, pp. 46, 49)
- "We acknowledge that our comprehensive analysis *does not fully capture the nuance that may determine the outcome* of a referendum in any particular community (effectiveness of promotion, advertising, political climate, etc.)." (Maher & Skidmore, 2009, p. 88)
- "In the decentralized American system, in which local voters remain largely responsible for building and improving their own school facilities, considerable and persistent variance in levels of capital asset funding should come as no surprise. When it comes to persuading voters to provide capital-improvement funding, *each school district is largely on its own*." (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a, p. 403)
- "… this study investigated just one case (Michigan) over a manageable scope of time (2000-2005). Additional studies investigating other cases would be useful comparisons. Deeper investigations of the case of Michigan also would be useful. … We recommend qualitative research to examine case studies of actual bond elections by school districts as

'lived experiences'; we suspect that this qualitative approach could explore *how local context and decision-making processes affect the outcome of bond elections* that statistical analysis alone cannot capture." (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a, p. 417)

- "Given that adequate capital facilities are a very publically visible component in this equation, school district leaders need to find strategies for convincing local voters to approve bond requests. However, do different types of districts experience different chances? *What really matters* when it comes to getting school bond elections passed? Despite the importance of school bond passage to U.S. school districts, the area is unsurprisingly under-researched by scholars." (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b, p. 375).
- "In the dual effort to build both generalizable theory as well as widely applicable recommendations, *there is a need in the literature to study these models and effects in other state contexts*. Likewise, the variance explained across the bond election models has been relatively low … While to date, explaining 25% of the variance from a single state is informative, *in the attempt to build theory and practical recommendations, further work is needed to refine the models and test them in other contexts*. Second, the research domain *lacks a strong theoretical model*." (Bowers & Lee, 2013, p. 741).
- "Like Bowers and Lee (2011), we contend that district locale may be state/context specific. Recent case study research (Boschee, 2003; Davis & Tyson, 2003; Ingle, Johnson, et al., 2012) has focused not on generalizability, but on the particularity of campaign(s) and the rationales for their chosen course(s) of action. Such studies provide insight into *the complexities of their micropolitical environments* and the strategies used to win support for school levies." (Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013, p. 29)
- "… all of the research in this area notes that *the local context of the community is paramount*, and so lessons learned from one district case may be difficult to apply in another community." (Bowers & Chen, 2015, p. 2)

To date, the majority of public school district referendum research has focused on the states with the greatest data availability. These include Michigan, Ohio, Texas, Oklahoma, New York, and, to a lesser extent, Wisconsin and California. Beyond the Bowers et al. teams, researchers have not produced formulas that could help administrators in other states. Instead, most other studies attempt to isolate the effects of a few variables of interest, e.g. holding all else constant, what does a different type of referendum do to the potential for passage? A different dollar request? A different policy landscape? A different locale?

My intention is *not* to repudiate the utility and prior application of median-voter and agenda-setting political science theorems. Median-voter and agenda-setting models were critical for helping to determine what factors matter—or don't—in school finance elections. Rather, my

point is that these theorems were *necessary but insufficient* for understanding contextualized public school district referendum voting behavior. Communities have their own deeply personal historical contexts, educational cultures, and relationships with their schools. With all of this in mind, it remains to be seen *how* and *why* these referendum-influencing factors matter at the community or school district level in rural Wisconsin. Theoretical constructions need to be proposed that address different contextualized outcomes.

I propose a theoretical understanding of rural Wisconsin public school district referendum factors, one that I think may represent well the high rates of passage in this locale type. This potential understanding is a highly-contextualized theoretical approach since that is exactly what the research calls for, as evidenced by the sample of quotes above. *Contextual specificity does not preclude the necessity of theoretical understanding.* By nature, theories have the ability to offer grand, wide-ranging answers to the question, "Why?" Previously used theories, such as median-voter and agenda-setting, may very well be appropriate and useful for understanding aggregate, large-scale referendum behavior at a national or state level. However, considering the deeply ingrained nature of local school control, a contextualized approach makes sense, one that better understands what "considerations" are most salient when voters enter their ballot box (Zaller, 1992).

Positionality

I do not enter this domain free from any *a priori* claims and judgments; no researcher does. Rather, my goal in this section is twofold: first, provide a working hypothesis that attempts to identify and explain referendum voting behavior factors in rural Wisconsin public school districts and, second, explain my reflexivity. To be clear, I created space for rural Wisconsin public school district residents to reveal *any* factor that contributes to or works against referendum passage in their community, but I enter this arena having spent a considerable

amount of time and energy contemplating why rural Wisconsin referendum passage rates and dollar amounts look the way they do.

I believe it to be highly appropriate and ethically necessary to provide readers with a clear and detailed explanation of my position as I enter the research. Researchers, including those leaning toward qualitative approaches, should include a hypothesis in order to acknowledge "hunches" and "test these [hunches] against the findings of other researchers" (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 34). Luker (2008) refers to these pre-research hunches as "conjectural theories."

My conjectural theory encompasses both postmaterialism and political resentment. These political science theories have been examined at and pertain to federal and state levels of government. However, to the best of my knowledge, they have not been applied to the local government level, especially via school districts. I believe they offer great utility in predicting referendum outcomes. As Bowers and Lee (2013) pointed out, the variance explained by current models is fairly low. Some *thing*(s), some *factor*(s) may be currently unaccounted for that could improve the quantitative models. These theories offer additional factors or explanations for referendum outcomes that, at best, show up inconsistently in referendum research or, at worst, have not been included at all. I believe that the following hypothesis can help researchers better understand why referendums are passing in rural Wisconsin and offer a foundation or suggestions for research in the future.

Conjectural Theory

The terms "White, working-class" and "rural" are both used frequently in this section. Researchers and authors who use the term "White, working-class" generally use it to describe the group of White Americans who have, in some way, been "left behind" (e.g. Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Beider, 2014; MacGillis, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018; Wuthnow, 2018). Any definition that is more specific sparks a healthy

debate, one led prominently between Thomas Frank and Larry Bartels (Frank, 2004; Bartels, 2006; also see Ehrenfreund & Guo, 2016; Hanley, 2017; Horowitz, 2018). "White, working-class" data can be gathered according to *income* (Carmines & Stanley, 1992; Stonecash, 2000; Stonecash et al., 2000; Brewer & Stonecash, 2001; Bartels, 2006; Abramowitz & Teixeira, 2009; Prasad et al., 2009); *occupational category or industry*, i.e. "blue-collar workers" (Abramowitz & Teixeira, 2009; Jones & Cox, 2013; Gest, 2016a; Morgan & Lee, 2017; Morgan & Lee, 2018); *education levels* (Frank, 2004; Brooks, 2005; Bartels, 2006; Abramowitz & Teixeira, 2009; Prasad et al., 2009; Williams, 2017b) or *individual perceptions of social identity* (Carmines & Stanley, 1992; Cramer Walsh, Jennings, & Stoker, 2004; Kenworthy, Barringer, Duerr & Schneider, 2007; Prasad et al., 2009; Hacker & Pierson, 2013; Jones & Cox, 2013; Rubin et al., 2014; Gidron & Hall, 2017). Others (e.g. Cowie & Boehm, 2006; Prasad, Hoffman, & Bezila, 2016) acknowledge the nebulousness and ambiguity of the term and do not provide an explicit, definitive definition. There is no settled upon definition in the literature. Rather, it appears most important to choose a definition, maintain fidelity with it, and avoid monolithic interpretations with over-generalization.

Defining "rural" is neither easier nor more uniform (Cramer, 2016). Oliver (2000), Schafft (2016), Morgan and Lee (2017), and Howley and Howley (2018) use the definition provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau defines "rural" as everything that is not urban, which, in turn, is based on population clusters, density, and land use (Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016). A second option is the Rural-Urban Continuum Codes developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, which are defined by population, degree of urbanization, commuting patterns, and adjacency to a metropolitan statistical area (Welty et al., 2018; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). A third option comes from

the Office of Management and Budget (O.M.B.). Like the U.S. Census Bureau, whatever is not urban is rural. A metropolitan county is one that has a core urban area of 50,000 or more people. If a county is not metropolitan, it is rural (Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, 2018; Scala, Johnson, & Rogers, 2015; Scala & Johnson, 2017). Other references either do not provide a definition source (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Illing, 2017; Tieken, 2017; Johnson, 2017; Cox, Lienesch, & Jones, 2017; DelReal & Clement, 2017) or use a more subjective measure that is based on participants' beliefs or descriptions (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; Cramer, 2016). Still others do not clearly tie an explanation to an official definition (Gilbert, 2017; Gilbert, 2018; Johnson, 2018a) and instead combine Census Bureau metropolitan measures with population caps, dichotomously classifying city or not, or use their own created measure (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006; Kenworthy, Barringer, Duerr, & Schneider, 2007; Meckler, 2014; Case & Deaton, 2017). Illustrating the flexibility of definitions, the University of Wisconsin-Extension at times uses an informal cow- and deer-to-person ratios as a rural operationalization (Jones & Ewald, 2017). Education researchers often refer to school district locale codes that classify districts into city, suburban, town, or rural categories (e.g. Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a, 2010b; Bowers & Lee, 2013; Gong & Rogers, 2014). These codes are developed by the National Center for Education Statistics but stem from Census Bureau definitions. The codes are based on population caps and distance from an urban cluster (Geverdt, 2015).

Before I propose a theory regarding referendum voting behavior in white, working-class communities in conservative rural Wisconsin, I first need to establish that these communities are, indeed, rural, white, working-class, conservative, and holding—and passing—referendums. It would not make a great deal of sense to offer a theory regarding an event's occurrence if the event never happens.

I take up the rurality and ideological leanings of Wisconsin school districts in my methods section below. There, I carefully address why my definition of a rurality is appropriate and show that roughly 60 percent of voters in rural districts now support Republican governor and presidential candidates. In terms of whiteness, rural Wisconsin communities are overwhelmingly white. Across the revenue cap era, an average of 89.46 percent of residents in rural districts are white. This compares to 86.14 percent in urban districts and 97.34 percent in suburban districts. Rural districts also have the lowest average median family income in the revenue cap era, the greatest proportion of people in blue collar jobs, and the lowest percentage of people obtaining a bachelor's degree or more relative to other locale types. The average median family income in rural Wisconsin districts is $58,844, $60,150 in urban districts, and $79,406 in suburban districts. Just under half of rural Wisconsin district residents work in blue collar jobs while 40 percent of urban district residents do and 35.58 percent of suburban district residents. Approximately 17 percent of rural district residents have a bachelor's degree or more, while 25.37 percent of urbanites and 30.74 percent of suburbanites do.

As I enter the research, my hunch, to use the language of Heath and Street (2008), is that political ideology is notable because—in the context of referendums—it is relatively unimportant. In other words, conservative districts, particularly in rural areas, should not be written off as places that are less amenable to referendum approval *simply because they are ideologically conservative*. Instead, as I outline below, I suggest that it makes a great deal of sense for a conservative school district in rural Wisconsin to pass a public school referendum. However, it would, I reiterate, be difficult to provide a theory about rural referendum political behavior, particularly in conservative communities, if conservative rural communities never hold referendums. This is not the case.

To investigate this, I coded referendums as being held in a conservative district if a majority of people voted for the Republican candidate in gubernatorial and presidential elections. Figure 1 shows the total number of rural conservative referendums held and the number of rural conservative referendums approved for each revenue cap era school year. Figure 2 highlights the proportion of rural conservative school district referendums passed each school year according to gubernatorial and presidential conservatism.

Looking first at gubernatorial conservatism, the highest numbers of rural conservative referendums were mostly held in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the exception of 2015 and 2019. However, the proportion of rural conservative referendums passed is dominated by recency. The top seven school years in terms of proportion passed are all within the past eight school years—only 2012-2013 is not included—and all are post-Act 10. Rural conservative referendums passed at a rate of 82 percent in 2017-2018 and 84 percent in 2018-2019. If conservatism is measured in presidential elections, there are a higher number of recent years near the top of the list of total referendums held, including 2014-2015, 2016-2017, 2015-2016, and

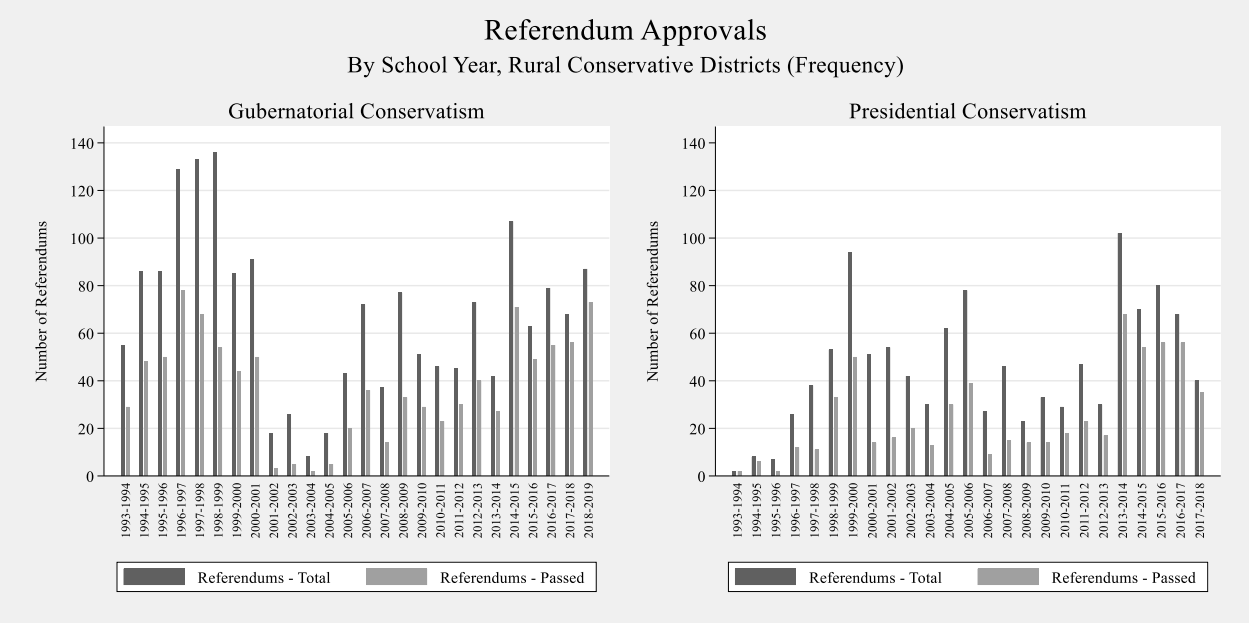

Figure 1: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Rural Conservative Districts (Frequency)

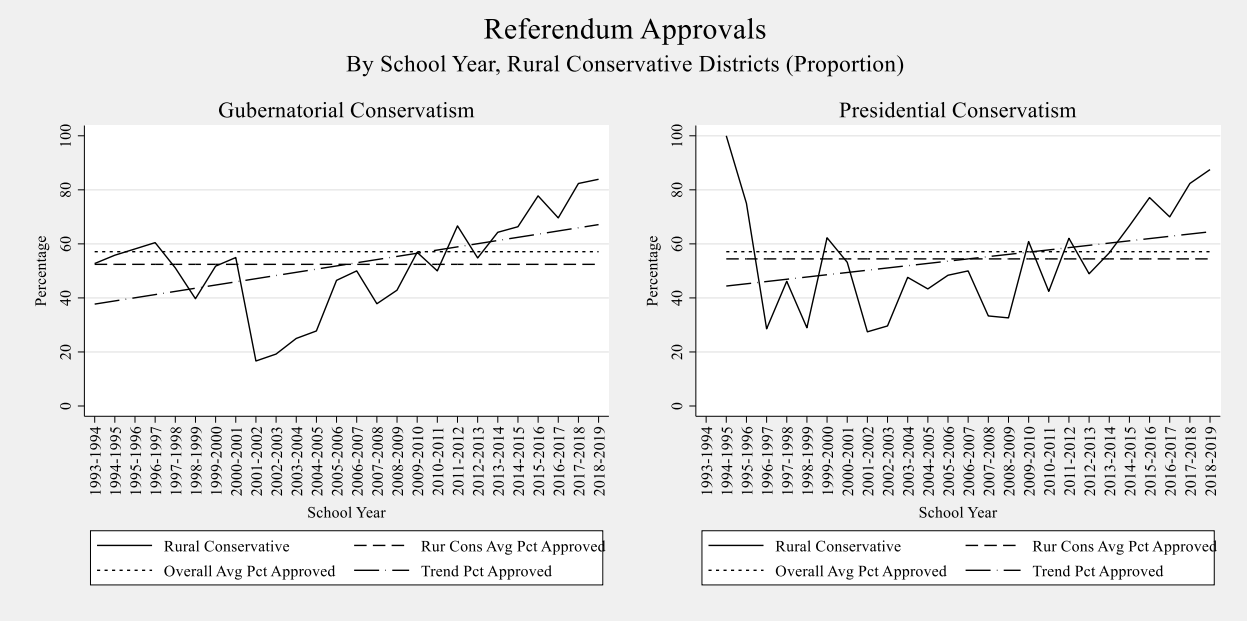

Figure 2: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Rural Conservative Districts (Proportion)

2017-2018. Proportion of rural conservative referendums passed is very similar to gubernatorial conservatism. When sorted on proportion passed, the past five school years all fall within the top seven school years overall. The 1995-1996 and 1994-1995 schools are the only two relatively non-recent school years to appear in this list. Moreover, 100 percent of rural conservative referendums passed in 1994-1995, but only two were held. Seventy-five percent of rural conservative referendums passed in 1995-1996, but only eight were held. On the contrary, none of the past five school years has seen fewer than 40 rural conservative referendums.

These rates are not driven by a mere handful of districts nor are there only a handful of conservative referendums. To the contrary, there are a great deal more conservative referendums than liberal referendums: 76.2 percent of referendums are classified as conservative (i.e. in a district in which a majority voted for the GOP gubernatorial candidate) and only 23.8 percent are classified as liberal (i.e. in a district in which less than a majority voted for the GOP gubernatorial candidate). Of the 434 school districts included in this analysis, 397 have held a referendum classified as conservative. This picture hardly changes when analyzing only rural

referendums: 77 percent of referendums are classified as conservative while only 23 percent are classified as liberal. Over the course of the analysis, 330 districts held a rural conservative referendum.

I recognize that perhaps it is not appropriate to consider a rural referendum "conservative" if a gubernatorial or presidential election resulted in only 51 percent of the electorate supporting the GOP candidate. Instead, consider quartiles of gubernatorial GOP candidate support: rural liberal referendums are those with 0 or greater but less than 25 percent GOP support; moderately liberal are those with 25 or greater but less than 50 percent GOP support; moderately conservative are those with 50 or greater but less than 75 percent GOP support, and conservative are those with greater than 75 but 100 or less GOP support. Even this blunt definition of conservatism results in 57.58 percent of rural conservative referendums passing. This is higher than rural moderately conservative referendums (56.31%), rural moderately liberal referendums (53.56%), suburban conservative referendums (50%), suburban moderately conservative referendums (52.44%), and urban conservative referendums (50%). The only rural category that has a greater proportion passed is the most liberal of rural referendums at 75 percent, but there have only been four held in 26 school years.

I hypothesize that to understand this pattern of political behavior in rural referendums it is critical to address the post-1970s political behavior of rural and conservative Whites from a comprehensive perspective. This context may be crucial to understanding local school finance elections. With that in mind, I do not filter this review according to only one definition of "rural," i.e. I am not filtering the literature for studies that only use an O.M.B. definition. This was an intentional and purposeful choice made in order to provide the reader with a holistic, inclusive, and thorough understanding of the research foundation for my conjectural theory.

However, I do decide which districts qualify as "rural" in my methods section below. I address that distinction there.

Political science Professor Ronald Inglehart first articulated the concept of postmaterialism in his 1977 seminal work titled *The Silent Revolution*, and the theory has been updated periodically since then (Inglehart, 1981; Inglehart & Abramson, 1994; Inglehart & Abramson, 1999; Welzel & Inglehart, 2005; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Postmaterialism argues that, until the late 1960s and early 1970s, most Americans were largely concerned with material values: sustained economic growth, financial stability, protecting the postwar world order, and preserving global peace. The attachment to these values made sense. The people getting married and having children began their families and careers after coming of age during the Great Depression, world war, nuclear proliferation, and the development of the Cold War. However, this generation's children, the baby boomers, matured and began entering the workforce during a booming postwar American economy in which economic growth and financial stability appeared to be a more settled matter—at least for most White Americans.[4] This allowed many baby boomers to focus on issues that Inglehart dubs "postmaterialist": gender equality, civil rights, environmental regulations, and abortion rights.

Crucially, these values were not able to manifest equally in all segments of the population, a point made by Teixeira and Rogers (2000). As postmaterialist values solidified in the more affluent, many American workers, particularly White, working-class, blue-collar workers engaged in manufacturing and mining industries, began to feel the effects of 1970s globalization, deindustrialization, layoffs, factory closures, oil shocks, and stagflation (Cowie,

[4] The claim that "growth" and "stability" were "settled" hardly apply to People of Color, especially Black Americans, who continued to be lynched and denied the most basic American rights in post-war America (see, for instance, Anderson [2018]). This is undeniable. I take up the relationship between political resentment and postmaterialism and their relationships specifically with White Americans later in my conjectural theory.

2010; Gest, 2016a; Gest, 2016b; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Page & Gilens, 2017; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). Some political science scholars (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Abramowitz & Teixeira, 2009; Hochschild, 2016) use an escalator analogy to describe these different economic and social experiences, a visualization I, too, find helpful. More affluent and materially secure people near the top of the escalator were more likely to exhibit Inglehart's postmaterialist values and be concerned with social issues (Gelman, 2008). Fueled by unionization, job security, and postwar economic booms, working-class Whites were comfortably riding this escalator until it stalled in the 1970s.

In addition, the growth in 1960s Great Society social programs, such as President Johnson's civil and voting rights acts and housing desegregation policies, led many Americans to believe that social order and racial harmony would improve. If the government was going to assume responsibility for these issues and attempt to tackle these problems, the thought went, then they better be solved (Hetherington, 2005). Increased power and authority bred heightened expectations. However, as racial unrest increased in intensity and frequency, Watergate scandals emerged, and the country became severely disillusioned with Vietnam, many Americans wondered why they needed to pay more in taxes for educational and social programs that did not seem to be making any headway (Meckler, 2014; Gest, 2016b; Schirmer, 2017).

White, working-class voters turned to the government for help in restarting the escalator and getting what they perceived to be their share of social program funds. They were seeking help like that which was provided to their parents after World War II through programs such as the New Deal, the Wagner Act, GI Bill, and Social Security and help that was provided to women and People of Color in civil and equal rights legislation in the late 1960s. However, help was not provided, and many Americans simply lost confidence in government's and Democrats'

ability to protect economic success, prosperity, and security. Working-class Whites believed they were, therefore, left behind by government, business, and other Whites who sided with a multicultural, pluralist, and postmaterial world they could not and would not enter. And most importantly, the escalator has not restarted (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Hacker & Pierson, 2016; MacGillis, 2016; Gest, 2016a; Gest, 2016b; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Hochschild, 2016; Williams, 2017a; Page & Gilens, 2017; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Lindsey & Teles, 2017). At the same time, working-class Whites were under the impression that their tax dollars were used for what they believed to be faltering programs that would have allowed underrepresented Americans to "cut the line" in the escalator ride to the top (Hochschild, 2016). This impression violated blue-collar values that Teixeira and Rogers identified, including the centrality of hard work and individual achievement, fair reward for that hard work, social order in America's cities, and equal responsibility for all Americans (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000, p. 62).

These economic shifts, perceived lack of subsequent government aid, and violations of closely held values fundamentally altered the political behavior of the White, working-class and created a lose-lose situation for them (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Abramowitz & Teixeira, 2009; Gest, 2016a; Gest, 2016b). On the one hand, these voters could maintain long-held allegiance to the Democrats, but the Democratic Party of the 1970s was perceived to be mostly concerned with policies for postmaterialist urban elites, cosmopolitan women, and People of Color. Returning to the analogy, the belief was that Democrats were responsible for creating social policies, e.g. civil rights legislation, that allowed people to "cut the line" in the escalator and join on the way up as opposed to riding from the bottom, as working-class Whites believed they had (Hochschild, 2016). On the other hand, these voters could choose to support the Republicans, but they were a party associated with the very wealthy and corporate leaders—the people perceived

to be responsible for stopping the escalator by shipping jobs and factories overseas, which created the lose-lose situation in the first place. The fact that neither party seemed particularly interested in courting working-class Whites only served to alienate this potentially powerful voting bloc even further (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Beider, 2014; Howley & Howley, 2018).

Nevertheless, White, working-class voters were increasingly worried about their declining mobility in American society and were looking for "villains and ways to cut public spending" by the 1980 presidential election (Katz, as quoted in Gilens, 1999, p. 45). As such, they threw their support firmly behind then-candidate Ronald Reagan and the GOP's small-government tenets while Democrats paid the price of being associated with government interventions (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Cowie, 2010). Reagan's and the GOP's animus toward government was especially appealing to White, working-class voters who rationally chose to shrink government as much as possible in order to diminish government's influence and minimize government institutions they perceived to be collecting their tax dollars without providing any corresponding assistance or benefit—at least for them (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Wuthnow, 2018). Thus, a two-step process was underway. First, working-class Whites felt economically and culturally ignored and disaffected. Second, they lashed out at the federal government, whom they felt was bloated with projects that did nothing to help them.

So far, all of these political patterns apply to the federal level. However, political science Professor Katherine Cramer found nearly identical sentiments at the state level during her study of rural Wisconsin between 2007 and 2012 (Cramer Walsh, 2012; Cramer, 2016). In her work, she found that rural conservatives distrusted state government because they perceived that state politicians and policymakers took their hard-earned tax dollars and granted very few benefits in return. Instead, these tax dollars were sucked into urban areas like Madison and Milwaukee

where they were never seen again. These same White, working-class voters highly resented folks in urban areas, particularly the public workers who often lived there, because they perceived that urban people looked down upon them, disrespected them, and did not share in the economic struggles that they experienced since the 1970s, especially the Great Recession and the years after. Former Governor Scott Walker exploited these attitudes after his election in 2010 in which he declared to Wisconsin, "We're broke." (Nelson, 2011) His solution, explained in the history section above, was to end public sector collective bargaining for all general public employees.

Walker was now a Reagan 2.0, the Wisconsin edition. Using the same currents of economic upheaval present in the 1970s, he used the Great Recession as an opportunity to paint urban elites as "haves" while proposing to massively shrink the responsibilities of the state government. This solution was cheered by rural conservatives in non-urban, deindustrializing parts of Wisconsin who transitioned from being citizens as public beneficiaries to citizens conceived as private taxpayers (Schirmer, 2017). These residents believed that state employees should share in the budget-balancing sacrifice, regardless of whether the public employees actually lived in urban areas or not. People in out-state areas beyond Madison and Milwaukee used racial undertones to claim that "urban" workers were undeserving "dependents" and "haves," while "rural" people in rural regions were hardworking taxpayers expected to unfairly support both themselves and members of cushy public sector unions (Cramer; 2016; Collins & Carlson, 2018).

There are clear parallels at the Wisconsin level in the 2000s as there were at the federal level a few decades prior. Working-class Whites in Wisconsin were subject to the same perceived escalator stoppage as working-class Whites were nationwide. From their perspective specific to Wisconsin, tax dollars that should helped out-state areas recover economically were

instead used at their expense to help public sector employees statewide continue their ride up. This created a substantial amount of animosity that Cramer called "the politics of resentment." By no means is this resentment isolated to Wisconsin. People in rural areas across the country feel estranged from urban areas and are concerned about fairness, who wins and loses in the new economy, and who deserves help (DelReal & Clement, 2017).

Cramer, referring to the rural populations she interviewed, explains, "… government action is by definition an injustice to themselves, and taxation only results in rewarding the antithesis of good Americans' work ethic" and "… preferences for small government are a function not just of policy type …" (Cramer Walsh, 2012, p. 529). Later, Cramer (2016, p. 160) wrote, "The opposition to 'big government' was more commonly rooted in a perception that government was not functioning on behalf of people like themselves than in a belief that government in general should do less." In other words, working-class Whites in Wisconsin do not have a predisposed ideological preference for small government. This particular group of Americans actually support financially responsible government program expansions in areas such as healthcare, retirement, and education and government efforts to control inflation and support industry (Gilens, 1999; Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Morgan & Lee, 2017). However, like working-class Whites nationwide, these Wisconsin residents chose to shrink a state-level government that they perceived to be doing very little for them.

Elements of "us vs. them" undergird the shift in White, working-class voting behavior—who should get what and who deserves what? (Gilens, 1999; Gimpel & Karnes, 2006; Roemer, 2009; Cramer Walsh, 2012) Most people, regardless of their privilege or societal advantages, want to see that economic and political circumstances are fair and legitimate (Gest, 2016a). Working-class Whites are no different. They evaluate redistributive programs and government

actions through the lens of merit, fairness, and deservedness, but also through the lens of zero-sum: what "your" community, school, family, neighborhood, race, etc., gains, "mine" loses (Gilens, 1999; Cramer, 2016; Marquart-Pyatt & Petrzelka, 2008; Howley & Howley, 2018). After being abandoned by both major political parties, working-class Whites appear to have decided to rely on a contemporary rugged individualism and a cultural backlash toward government, welfare, and elites who shape redistributive policies (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; McArdle, 2017; Williams, 2017a).

This individualism fosters the belief that antipoverty programs like welfare destroy work ethic and merely reward laziness in people who are too undisciplined or unindustrious to make it on their own—even though rural Wisconsin counties experience greater levels of poverty, lower wages, and higher rates of unemployment relative to their more urban counterparts (Gilens, 1999; Murray, 2012; Cramer, 2016; Williams, 2017a). However, expansions of programs that require adults or children to put in work and effort, e.g. Medicaid drug tests or Head Start, are widely supported (Gilens, 1999; Franklin, 2017a). These beliefs are found in survey evidence as well. Seventy percent of rural Wisconsin residents believed that the government represents their community a small amount or none at all even when Republicans hold power in all branches of the government. Sixty-nine percent believed that rural areas received much less or somewhat less than their fair share of resources (Cramer, 2016).

In the minds of working-class Whites, "we" made it on our own despite being abandoned by Republicans and Democrats whereas "they" needed to cut the escalator line and rely on plum government jobs and handouts in order to make it to the top. Working-class Whites did not want to help a downtrodden "other" at the bottom of the escalator when they themselves felt like the downtrodden and overlooked. Instead, they wanted to look up to elites who they felt should be

emulated in order to gain wealth and power (Hochschild, 2016; Reeves, 2017). Liberal demands seemed misplaced to working-class Whites.

This antagonism helped produce a political realignment. Working-class Whites' decline in support for the Democratic Party is strongest in the South (Brewer & Stonecash, 2001; Bartels, 2006), but it certainly is not contained there (Petrocik, 1987; Carmines & Stanley, 1992; Nadeau, Niemi, Stanley, & Godbout, 2004). White Americans have become much more likely to vote Republican in presidential elections between 1972 and 2012 (Zingher, 2018), and this is particularly true for White, working-class men (Brady, Sosnaud, & Frenk, 2009). The intersection of postmaterialism and racial resentment is a prominent cause of the realignment. Whites' anti-Black attitudes were fueled by the perception that Black Americans did not possess an adequate work-ethic, comprising self-reliance, hard work, obedience, and discipline (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Knuckey, 2005). Lower-status Whites believed that affirmative action, school busing, and welfare policies meant to help Black Americans displaced their economic concerns in the Democratic Party platform (Giles & Hertz, 1994; Gilens, 1996; Gilens, 1999; Brewer & Stonecash, 2001; Bartels, 2006; Tesler, 2016), a belief for which Democrats mounted only "passive resistance" (Tesler, 2016, p. 14). Meanwhile, Republicans wooed these voters by rejecting the Democrats' policies. They did this by stressing "states' rights," dramatizing tropes of the "welfare queen," and emphasizing individualism, minimal government intrusion, and slashed taxes (Brewer & Stonecash, 2001; Tesler, 2016)

It would not be fair to claim that the White, working-class has completely shifted their political allegiance unwaveringly to the Republican Party. Rather, it is more accurate to say that the White, working-class is not as firmly tied to the Democratic Party in the same way that they were a generation ago, though younger working-class Whites are even more likely than older

working-class Whites to identify as Republican (Cox, Lienesch, & Jones, 2017). Debates raged in the political science literature: were working-class Whites increasingly voting Republican because of social policy preferences (e.g. Frank, 2004) or economic preferences (e.g. Bartels, 2006)? The evidence appears to be leaning toward the latter economic argument: working-class, White Americans have a difficult time engaging in values debates about, for instance, environmental restoration when it is difficult to put food on a table (see Kenworthy, Barringer, Duerr, & Schneider, 2007; Hacker & Pierson, 2016). There is no "post" in their materialism. This bloc of voters is on a rightward march since the 1970s because of a focus on the significance of material and economic well-being—policies that can restart the escalator above all else (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Bartels, 2006; Abramowitz & Teixeira, 2009; Hacker & Pierson, 2013).

Thus, Wisconsin and federal-level Republicans have been able to scoop up a large contingent of White, working-class voters and especially those living in non-urban places because the party has been able to sell a more preferable package of economic individualism, opportunities for self-reliance, resistance to social policies that inhibit or ignore individualism and self-reliance, and attention and recognition that poorer Whites used to get two generations ago (Illing, 2016; Confessore, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Hochschild, 2016; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018; Scala & Johnson, 2017; Wuthnow, 2018; Mutz, 2018). At the same time, Democratic candidates are perceived to be unable to deliver economic goods because of their continued focus on social issues that are believed to merely allow for escalator line-cutting (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006; Kenworthy, Barringer, Duerr, & Schneider, 2007; Sherman, 2009; MacGillis, 2015).

Potential relationship to referendums: Working-class Whites began to feel a decline in their social, political, and economic advancement in the early 1970s. These voters sought help from the government just as their parents received a generation prior and underrepresented populations were at the time. However, help did not arrive. Democrats were understood to be helping those with or espousing postmaterialist values, and Republicans were the party to jumpstart the economic woes. Feeling no aid, the White, working-class broke their long-held allegiance to the Democratic Party and began to vote instead to shrink a government they perceived to be taking their money with no concurrent benefits. The lack of aid also generated animosity toward those receiving government benefits. It was a zero-sum, us versus them game: anything "they," be it People of Color, women, urbanites, environmentalists, etc., received was a loss to "us." This political environment on its own does not explain why referendums would pass just as frequently in conservative, rural areas with heavy White, working-class populations. Nevertheless, this post-1970s political environment sets the stage for working-class whites to prefer policies and tax burdens at the more controllable local level, keep money at home, and pull themselves up by their bootstraps instead of continuing to wait for absent federal and state governments.

Working-class Whites and Democrats in government forged a tight relationship after the New Deal and passage of legislation that helped solidify unions' role in labor negotiations. These voters expected a lot from their government and were extremely angry when, 30 years later, government was no longer perceived as effective. Working-class Whites' felt government, and Democrats especially, turned their backs against them in their time of great need. Sensing they were no longer cared about, trust in upper levels of government plummeted in the decades following the 1970s, and a disconnect between politicians and the people emerged (Teixeira & Rogers, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Beider, 2014; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Rothman, 2016; Lindsey & Teles, 2017). Imperatively, this decline in trust did not manifest at the local level—a point I suspect is hugely important for referendum passage.

Trust matters, but the effects of distrust are unclear. On the one hand, political distrust could lead to disengagement with, alienation from, and disaffection for political institutions and political actors. On the other hand, political distrust could actually create conditions for political involvement in order to restore previous levels of trust (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Recent research

appears to show that both of these conditions are happening simultaneously, albeit at different levels of government.

Trust in federal government is not high. Nearly 80 percent of Americans in 1964 believed that the federal government could be trusted to do what is right just about always or most of the time (Pew, 2017). That percentage is approximately 15 percent today, including only three percent of Americans who believe the federal government will "just about always" do what is right (Pew, 2017). Closer to home, levels of trust increase but still do not represent majorities. Only 47 percent of Wisconsinites trust the state government all or most of the time (Franklin, 2017b).

Unfortunately, this low-trust climate is not shocking but rather highly rational, especially in low-income areas. Americans who are not affluent believe that public officials do not care about the preferences of "people like me." They appear to be exactly right (Gilens, 2005). There is a strong relationship between lawmakers' responsiveness and affluent constituents' political and policy preferences (Gilens, 2005, 2009, 2011). The average politician comes from a white-collar background and contemplates solutions on behalf of white-collar workers (Carnes, 2013; Page & Gilens, 2017). In fact, there is "a complete lack of government responsiveness to the preferences of the poor …" (Gilens, 2005, p. 788). If and when politicians are responsive to the needs and desires of the poor and middle class, it is only because high-income Americans happen to share the same policy views, e.g. expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and bolstered federal role in education (Gilens, 2011). Since state and federal governments are not perceived to, and indeed do not, pay attention to the needs of the poor and working-class, local government provides an opportunity to exert actual political power and responsiveness.

Upper levels of government are also evaluated on whether they can manage social unrest and uphold economic security. When federal and state governments failed to maintain either of these for working-class Whites in the early 1970s and onward, devolution, i.e. the transfer of power and responsibility away from centralized governments and toward local levels, became increasingly appealing (Jennings, 2003). At the local level, there is a clear link between common citizens, public officials, and policy decisions (Jennings, 2003).

As expected then, trust increases substantially at the local level. Nearly two-thirds of Wisconsin residents trust their local government all or most of the time according to the most recent Marquette Law Poll to ask the question (Franklin, 2017b). This finding is hardly specific to Wisconsin. The fall in trust at the federal and state levels after the 1970s was virtually nonexistent at the local level (Jennings, 2003). The public believes local governments provide the most bang for their buck, are more responsive, and more efficient than upper levels (Cole & Kincaid, 2000; Hetherington, 2005). Cramer (2016) found that some prominent local leaders who railed against government disconnect were actually local government officials themselves. Local officials usually receive, at minimum, passing marks since they are community "insiders" who understand and value local community norms and cultures (Wuthnow, 2018). Importantly for the purposes of this paper, these beliefs are especially true for both independents and Republicans. Both of these party identification groups believe local government provides the greatest level of services for the money spent (Cole & Kincaid, 2000).

Increased trust has real policy and political consequences—consequences that are familiar in light of White, working-class experiences beginning in the 1970s. Voters will strongly resist paying federal taxes, will vote to shrink government, and will vote for politicians who share these beliefs if they distrust government or if they believe that there are great

informational asymmetries between policymakers and residents (Hetherington, 2005; Caplan, 2007). These consequences also neatly align with the school finance developments in Wisconsin and nationally beginning in the 1970s. In connection with the history presented in section one, local control is deeply ingrained into the culture of American education. As such, efforts to diminish local control are met with hostility and rancor, as evidenced by the response to teachers' union efforts to expand in places like Hortonville. These teachers with their financial demands were "others" and "outsiders" who could not be trusted because they were not long-time residents of the largely rural community. Alongside growing antipathy toward state government, Wisconsin residents were not enthusiastic about more centralized school funding and less local autonomy just as their trust in non-local government began to collapse. Kastory and Harrington (1996) made clear that referendums will only pass if the voters perceive both community leaders, e.g. business owners, and school leaders, e.g. the school board, to be good stewards of public money. The only remaining good, i.e. trustworthy, government stewards appeared to be local government officials.

Voters do not need to maintain a great deal of political knowledge or awareness to espouse these beliefs. If constituents do not know where their money will go, feel they have no power to control where their money will go, or do not feel they will see any returns from payments, they will reject the policy and vote for politicians who share the concerns (Cramer Walsh, 2012; Cramer, 2016; Gest, 2016a; Vance, 2016; Morgan & Lee, 2017); "when in doubt, say no" (Caplan, 2007, p. 105). At the same time, voters are more likely to delegate responsibility to and provide more tax money for a government that they trust (Caplan, 2007). If an upper-level government attempts to regain or reassert authority, constituents may become

angry that their autonomy is being trampled by representatives who do not have in mind or do not care about local circumstances (Wuthnow, 2018).

Any time a policy requires sacrifice, in this case, increased property taxes, political trust and self-interest are required (Hetherington, 2005). Political trust is relatively high at local levels, and voters' self-interest is upheld with high-quality public schools and elevated capitalized property values. Unsurprisingly then, trust in government has a positive and statistically significant effect on support for public education spending. One standard deviation increase in government trust increases the probability of supporting public education expenditures by 12 percentage points (Gur, Boyaci, Israfil, & Ozcan, 2015).

Increasing tax rates in order to fund social programs like public education is typically a liberal tenet. However, researcher Mark Hetherington found, at least at the federal level, that increasing trust in government produces a cycle that results in more liberal policy enactments (Hetherington, 2005). He argues that trust begins as a dependent variable explained by past performance. This trust then transitions to an explanatory variable and elicits support for new programs, legislation, or investments. If these new programs, legislation, or investments are successful people "update" their levels of trust, now a dependent variable again. After trust is updated, people will then evaluate again whether they should support continued or new programs, legislation, or investments (Hetherington, 2005).

Potential relationship to referendums: Following the economic shocks of the 1970s and continuing into today, the White, working-class largely abandoned hope that federal and state governments would help them, and their trust in government to do so in the future collapsed. However, local government trust remains relatively strong and unchanged. Constituents may be voting yes on referendums because they trust that their local school board governing authorities will use the money appropriately. Regardless, tracking and keeping tabs on the money is easier: the money remains at home where control is elevated and levies are kept at sustainable levels, just as Governor Thompson promised. If trust is breached, removing local policy- and decisionmakers from office is easier than at upper levels of government. White, working-class

voters are supportive of government expansion of social and economic programs provided they are able to receive some of the benefits. *If approved referendum money is handled appropriately and successfully, trust increases, which elevates the chance referendums will pass again in the future.*

Not only are people more trusting of their local government and local government leaders, they are also highly attached to where they live. The local level is a haven for community attachment and feelings of authenticity. In short, working-class Whites are proud of where they live. As residents attach themselves to their community and the local way of life, they have begun to exercise what Kenny (2012) refers to as the political theory of recognition. For nearly five decades, working-class Whites have felt economically and culturally disaffected from fellow Whites affluent enough to express postmaterialist values, from underrepresented populations who have cut the escalator line, and from wealthy business leaders who, despite being revered for their fortunes, were culpable for stopping the escalator (Gidron & Hall, 2017). Different scholars refer to this recognition differently when it manifests in rural areas. What Cramer (2016) refers to as "rural consciousness," Ulrich-Schad and Duncan (2018) refer to as rural culture, rural identity, or rural lifestyle. Regardless of the terminology, White, working-class voters, especially those in more rural areas, are seeking to be recognized as a distinctive culture with a particular political voice, and the foundation of this culture and voice is built with local identity.

Many Americans, but rural residents, in particular, are unlikely to move—even if compromises have to be made in terms of economic opportunities, convenience, and retail access—because kinship ties run deeply and powerfully in more rural areas (Sherman, 2009; Cowen, 2017; DelReal & Clement, 2017). A little over half of working-class Whites live in rural areas, and a little over two-thirds of working-class Whites have either never left or live within two hours of their hometown (Cox, Lienesch, & Jones, 2017). Over half of working-class Whites

also report regularly spending time with neighbors in their community (Cox, Lienesch, & Jones, 2017). People here are overwhelmingly community-oriented: being able to look out for one another, neighbors, and never-leavers is a point of pride and the source of community spirit for residents of more rural areas and something rural residents feel they are unable to replicate in more urban areas (DelReal & Clement, 2017; Wuthnow, 2018). At least 80 percent of people in rural areas believe that local people work together to solve their local issues, that local people are willing to help their neighbors, and that local people trust and get along with others in their community (Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). The longer people lived in these rural communities, the stronger these attachments become (Marquart-Pyatt & Petrzelka, 2008).

Moving for the sake of better economic prospects demonstrates that you care more about your job and money than you do your community, which violates the social norms that prevail in rural areas across the country (Williams, 2017a). By making this decision to leave, it is true that you can never really go home again. As Sherman (2009, p. 41) describes it, "… home is much more than just a place on a map. The rural environment, community, and lifestyle are extremely important to local residents, most of whom can't conceive of life anywhere else." Men describe their attachment as based on freedom, space, and outdoor activities while women express the appeal of family and notions of community (Sherman, 2009).

Sherman's work speaks to and helps tie together much of the literature discussed thus far. Both Republicans and Democrats are unlikely to pay much attention to working-class Whites' needs either at the federal or state level. This leaves local citizens to improve their community via local channels because they are deeply attached to these areas. Because schools are so deeply and inherently part of a community's identity, those who work within local education are perceived to be more accountable to the community in which they serve relative to state and

federal leaders (Schafft, 2016). What's more, improving the local community can improve the self-esteem of working-class White men in particular who feel they can reestablish the perception that they are hard workers who can be counted on to complete a job when asked—an understanding that is lost as blue-collar jobs continue to be eradicated by outsourcing and automation (Lamont, 2000).

The school plays a particularly important role in the development and maintenance of community identity and pride.

> Despite the heterogeneity of rural places, a common feature among most rural communities is the central social, institutional, and economic role of the school. More than in urban places, rural schools function as the centers of community. Public schools are institutions of the state, but, mandated to provide services within local communities and run by locally elected school boards, they are also local institutions that help to inscribe the boundaries of community. Because of this, rural schools often impart a strong sense of local identity and shared purpose, and act as important sites of local civic engagement. (Schafft, 2016, p. 139)

This attachment extends to all types of stakeholders. Parents feel more able to volunteer and attend rural school events. Rural teachers report increased job satisfaction and fewer behavior problems. Students detail the close-knit feel of their school community and express much greater opportunities for extra-curricular participation (Schafft, 2016). Cramer (2016) emphasized this finding in Wisconsin specifically. Like other rural areas across the country, rural schools in Wisconsin provided an important element of social cohesion and community identity that was difficult to replace. In fact, the school was deemed to be the only identity for many Wisconsin towns, the most important business, and the only reason that many people in northern and central Wisconsin chose to live in a smaller place (Cramer Walsh, 2012).

The potential of a rural school closing is remarkably destructive to a community's spirit. The ability to keep a school open is one of the most revealing measurements of how a

community is doing (Wuthnow, 2018). Rural residents revealed these sentiments to researcher Robert Wuthnow in no uncertain terms. “Residents in one of the mining towns we studied remembers when children’s laughter from the school could be heard throughout the town. Now, the silence told them the town was dying. In another community, a resident spoke emotionally of losing the school, ‘It was just like they took the heart out of our town. People no longer had a regular place to go.’” (Wuthnow, 2018, p. 60). Even school consolidation is viewed as a failure on the part of the local community (Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Willborn, 2013; Cramer, 2016).

This school-community affect presented by Cramer Walsh and Wuthnow has some evidentiary base in the referendum literature already. First, this seems to be a clear example of the psychological sense of community (PSC) that I outlined in the literature review. PSC is the strong attachment people experience toward others in their community based on where they live, where they work, where they go to school, and the groups with which they affiliate (Davidson & Cotter, 1993). Residents with high levels of PSC have more favorable school beliefs, and these beliefs increase voters’ intentions to support school finance elections. These affect-driven motivations are strong predictors of voting yes on a referendum. Second, the common-pool resource literature stressed that deterioration to the point of closure is highly motivating for people to overcome their hesitance to contribute to a public good. This appears to be precisely what is playing out in rural locations that are facing the loss of their identity-forming public school. The sense of urgency that Johnson and Ingle (2009) and Piele and Hall (1973) discuss that is helpful for referendum passage is alive and well in rural areas.

Because people have attachment and connection, they are not eager to create division. Even people who do not feel a deep connection to the schools may feel as though they should support local public education. As I explain later, neighbors, friends, and relatives in small

communities talk about political issues, and these conversations with familiar people lead to political mobilization (Oliver, 2000).

> We learn about politics through casual conversation. You tell me what you've heard and what they think, and I accommodate that new information into my mental database as I ponder and revise my position on the issue. In a world of civic networks, both formal and informal, our views are formed through interchange with friends and neighbors. Social capital allows political information to spread. (Putnam, 2000, p. 343)

Cramer Walsh, Jennings, and Stoker (2004) call these effects "conversion through conversation." Social interactions and conversations influence political attitudes through the adoption of, reaction to, or conformity with neighbors and friends (Cramer Walsh, Jennings, & Stoker, 2004). The effects of these conversations include, but are certainly not limited to, working-class Whites. Shortly after writing *Bobos in Paradise*, David Brooks wrote in a follow-up piece in *The Atlantic* that people in small towns do not want to offend fellow residents of their small town since social networks overlap, run-ins are common, and people are likely to run into each other on the street for decades. In his view, controversial subjects are downplayed in Small Town, USA.

Some empirical research supports Brooks' claims of conflict-avoidance in less urbanized places. Members of the public who are resistant to contributing to public goods such as public education may be coaxed, or perhaps coerced, by the community's normative expectations (Rege & Telle, 2004). Besides the sense of urgency discussed above, it is also likely that holdouts will feel more motivated to contribute if contributions are expected because the public good is a symbol of the community, a representation of the community's resilience, and a fixture for upholding the community's local economy. It is logical to think that these normative expectations will be even stronger in small towns. Finally, kindness may be compelling if social

pressure is ineffective at motivating people to open their wallets. Messages that invoke compassion, care, and kindness can be a powerful encouragement to financially support a public good (Andreoni, 1995).

Problems have emerged as membership in civic networks and social organizations collapsed, especially among the persistently poor (Putnam, 2000; Cox, Lienesch, & Jones, 2017; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). We no longer have the same exposure to alternative or opposing viewpoints but instead have become increasingly polarized via online forums, partisan websites, and social media (Baum & Groeling, 2008; Sunstein, 2017; Bail et al., 2018). Sunstein (2017, p. 6) states, "… [M]any or most citizens should have a wide range of common experiences. Without shared experiences, a heterogeneous society will have a much more difficult time addressing social problems." Wisconsin has no immunity here. Following the upheaval of Act 10, many residents of Wisconsin used social media to stimulate political talk with like-minded friends and closed off political talk with those who disagreed. Many citizens who agreed to continue to talk chose not to interact about any political controversies so as to not stir the pot; other citizens cut off all social interactions with particular opposing people altogether (Wells et al., 2017).

New avenues for social binding and cohesion are desperately needed (Putnam, 2000). The local public school is one entity that can still serve as a binding agent and generator of common experiences. Since the decline of mass-membership organizations began, working-class Whites, especially men, have been without a group that looks out for their economic interests (Hacker & Pierson, 2013). When an occupational identity is removed, lower-class members of society search for other organizations to help fulfill this role (Gest, 2016b). Schools cannot provide these men with organizational binds directly. However, schools serve as an institution

that props up the local economy, a point I more fully flesh out below. Working-class White men who are involved with the school as leaders for apprenticeships or organizers for school-community economic partnerships may feel more connected to their communities and will find others with common experiences, a role that used to be served by unions (Hacker & Pierson, 2013; Lindsey & Teles, 2017).

A lingering question asks what the effect of local control has on equity. As I explained in section one, historical inequities were common in Wisconsin until the state took a stronger role in disbursing equalization aid. However, this centralization was resisted. Teacher mobility due to poaching by wealthier districts or districts that have passed a referendum is not uncommon, especially after the 1993 and 2011 school finance changes that increased local decision-making (Chang, 2007; Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016a; 2016b; Baron, 2018). Rural Wisconsinites' concern about inequality may be allayed if they can pass a referendum that will slow or stop teacher poaching or, alternatively, allow their district do it. However, if the ability to pass a referendum becomes the only way to retain a high-quality teaching staff, schools unable to do so may not be able to provide a minimum standard of education. This opens the door to arguments that Wisconsin's school finance system has changed enough to warrant litigation (see *Kukor v. Grover*, 1989; *Vincent v. Voight*, 2000).

Potential relationship to referendums: White, working-class voters, especially those in rural America, are deeply attached to their communities. They are unlikely to move but rather age in place, look out for one another, and improve where they live. One potential way to improve where they live is by ensuring that the local school remains solvent and open. The possibility of losing a school creates a strong sense of urgency and is profoundly detrimental to a rural community's psyche. It signals that they are unable to maintain the place they care for so viscerally. On the other hand, approving a referendum can keep the doors to a school open, improve the place where the "heart" of a community beats, and attract a high-quality teaching force. Even those who do not express the same attachment to the community can feel social pressure to support the school financially because of normative expectations, compassion, or the desire for membership in a fulfilling, identity-based organization.

What local government trust and community attachment expose is that few people desire massive cuts to education. Rather, as I've mentioned above, working-class Whites are more than willing to expand government efforts in fighting inequality (provided the fight is not a handout; see Gilens [1999] above), securing retirement programs, expanding healthcare access, improving public education, fighting inflation, and supporting struggling industries. There is nuance to this claim, but the overall argument holds. For instance, as I mentioned in the literature review, even older voters do not unequivocally reject the expansion of school expenditures. Older voters appear willing to raise additional money locally because this can improve local public schools, and this improvement, in turn, is capitalized into home values. There is less support for additional taxes to support public education at the state level, but even this view is diminishing as older, more conservative cohorts are being placed with "new" older cohorts who are more liberal in their spending preferences than "old" older cohorts.

With regard to fighting inequality specifically, findings by McCall and Kenworthy (2009) show that Americans have become more aware of and concerned about wealth inequality over time, and support for inequality reductions have subsequently increased over time. Those who supported inequality reductions were much more likely to support additional education spending as a mechanism to reduce the growth of inequality. This meshes with previously reviewed research. Many Americans are hostile to the idea of expanding redistributive efforts that appear to be handouts. However, expanding funding for programs that help people take care of themselves, like the opportunity to work hard and attend good schools, is widely accepted (see Gilens, 1999; Hetherington, 2005).

The working-class and rural voters Cramer (2016) interviewed in her Wisconsin research were open to additional school spending as well, as long as the money did not support teachers,

the “haves” in the community. One man she referred to as Fred explained, “If you can tell me the school needs a million-dollar referendum to buy computers for the junior high, new labs for the senior high, and a science class or whatever, I’d be more than happy to pay extra taxes and do my share. If it’s truly for what the kids need” (Cramer, 2016, p. 161). Fred was no liberal, but he was willing to pay additional taxes in order to support the local public education system. Fred also illustrated a human dimension to Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt’s (2013) research from Ohio. Ohio experienced much of the same upheaval as Wisconsin did in response to public employee rights curtailment. Their research showed that teacher salaries did not have a great impact on referendum voting, but the value of benefits packages did. These authors suspected that voters were resentful of the “Cadillac” packages to which they needed to contribute while their own benefits were lost—a sentiment former Wisconsin Governor Walker also stirred.

Certainly, it is debatable whether a school can be highly successful without the financial resources to attract and retain a high-quality teaching staff, but Fred’s statements are nevertheless hugely insightful for school leaders. Conservative community members are not opposed to school spending provided the money is used in ways that they deem acceptable and not filtered through public employees and bureaucrats who disrespected their culture and lifestyles. It also means being financially responsible and careful with money, not strict austerity (Prasad, Hoffman, & Bezila, 2016). This is vastly different than being completely opposed to any new government money.

Beyond the trust granted to local governments and the attachment with schools, investing additional dollars in public education is perceived to be valuable for the community’s students and the community’s economy. As Lareau (2011) pointed out in her thorough ethnographic research on different classes’ parenting decisions, lower-income and working-class parents *in no*

way care less about their children's education, pay less attention to their children's education, and are no less eager for their children to succeed in school regardless of the time commitments they can make or the resources they can afford. This concern for kids' future is a motivation for investment.

At the same time, investment is a smart decision to boost local, struggling, rural economies. Rural areas nationwide have struggled with long-term poverty and unemployment, aging populations, vulnerable and precarious economic opportunities, and out-migration; Wisconsin is no stranger to these forces (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Meckler, 2014; Cramer, 2016; Ulrich & Schad & Duncan, 2018). This presents a potentially dangerous feedback loop (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). Rural areas are highly-dependent on low-wage and labor-intensive, blue-collar work, which hollows out opportunities to return home for highly-skilled and talented young people looking for work after high school or college. Low-wages, shuttered factories, and homes in disrepair depress local property taxes which, in combination with this brain-drain creates a disincentive for allocating additional financial resources to local public schools. As local public schools' quality diminish, fewer highly-trained workers will be available to create or fulfill jobs, reinforcing the cycle once more (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; also see Wuthnow, 2018). Moreover, this cycle leads to fewer newcomers which results in less cultural change and more fear and anger at the "others"—immigrants, public employees, or the people perceived to be cutting the escalator line (Vigdor, 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Cramer Walsh, 2012; Meckler, 2014; Gest, 2016a; Hochschild, 2016; Wuthnow, 2018). When tight-knit communities experience detrimental change, they are quick to seek outsiders to blame (Wuthnow, 2018).

Carr and Kefalas (2009) pointed out in their study of Iowa small towns that rural schools achieved a Pyrrhic victory when they were highly successful at educating students (also see Rose, 2004). High-achieving students were likely to attend college and subsequently be unlikely to find the job prospects or salary they desired if they returned to their hometown. Carr and Kefalas (2009) illustrated this in their description of a town named Ellis:

> Teachers, parents, and neighbors feel obligated to push and prod the talented kids to succeed, yet, when their best and brightest follow their advice, the investment in them becomes a boon for someplace else, while the remaining young people are neither afforded the same attention nor groomed for success of any kind. Whether this is willful neglect or a rational deployment of resources, the result is the same: small towns such as Ellis have become trapped by their self-fulfilling prophecies. (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 24)

Later, Schafft (2016) provided important clarification to this finding. The authors agreed that the high-achieving students end up living elsewhere but not because of a strong desire to escape home. Rather, these students have strong attachments to their homes and would actually seek to return with their new skills, training, experience, knowledge, and networks, but they do not because of insufficient economic opportunities.

Evidence suggests that strong and sound public schools are an effective way to combat economic insecurities. The school itself is a large employer, but even besides this, there appears to be a positive relationship between the presence of a school in a rural community and housing values, employment rates, and entrepreneurship and a negative relationship with inequality (see Schafft, 2016). A rural school provides a foundational “civic” and “municipal infrastructure” that can spur business investment (Lyson, 2002, pp. 135-136). The presence of a rural school can also “integrate academic and vocational education” by “building collaborations with local businesses through job shadowing, mentoring, school-to-work programs, and apprenticeship opportunities” (Schafft, 2016, p. 146). This means that school-community economic partnerships can help train

workers to maintain surviving local businesses or empower students to start their own businesses in or near their hometowns which, as I pointed out, is where they are likely to end up living.

Potential relationship to referendums: Working-class Whites value public education because they want to see their own and their community's children succeed. They also value public education because it enhances the local economy. There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between keeping high-achieving students in the community (or drawing them back) and the opportunity for new job growth for the community's residents. Referendum approval may be able to slow or stop the rural brain-drain, boost the local economy, improve the quality or image of the local public schools, and keep high-fliers and their children living and working in the local property tax base.

The American, White, working-class is fiercely self-sufficient and individualistic. They seek to regain control and agency over their lives—control that was perceived to be co-opted by Democrats who allowed line-cutters and by Republicans who allowed jobs to evaporate. While these attitudes are not necessarily new to the American psyche nor exclusive to these people (Gilens, 1999; Gimpel & Karnes, 2006), they became elevated in this population after being spurned by major political parties and all levels of government besides the local. These constituents have learned that the government is not likely to help and any accomplishments will need to be achieved on their own. The importance of perceptions cannot be overstated. Black Americans, too, have been ignored by both parties and every entity of government and have been for much longer than working-class Whites. However, what makes the White, working-class different is the perception that government *used to be* a tremendous help to previous generations but no longer is over the past several decades. These perceptions of change in subjective social status, i.e. a person's sense of where they feel they belong in the social hierarchy, is enough to dramatically change a person's voting behavior and electoral preferences (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Mutz, 2018).

The research provides a tremendous amount of support for working-class Whites' desire for independence, self-sufficiency, and opportunity for hard work, including in Wisconsin (Gilens, 1999; Gimpel & Karnes, 2006; Cramer Walsh, 2012; Grove, 2015; Cramer, 2016; Gest, 2016b; Isenberg, 2016; Williams, 2017a; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018; Wuthnow, 2018; Howley & Howley, 2018). As Isenberg (2016, p. 277) wrote, "Seeing themselves as hardworking and self-reliant, the upwardly mobile sons of white trash parents believes […] that 'he is responsible for himself and himself alone.'" At the same time, there is a desire on the part of working-class Whites to be recognized and granted a great deal of respect for their lives that they understand to be built through hard work—even if government social programs aid in the effort (Mettler, 2011; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Williams, 2017a). From this point of view, they have been locked out of state and federal governments and feel powerless to make any changes there via either major political party (Morgan & Lee, 2017). As a result, in their view, they should be given credit for establishing self-reliance in their own small communities where neighbors look out for one another, hometown pride is rampant, and trustworthy links still remain.

As I explained above, working-class Whites remain focused on financial security and economic well-being, and the movement toward the ideological right appears to be caused by this, not social concerns. However, this does not render social preferences moot. Rather, these preferences are one specific way to exert self-sufficiency. Working-class Whites support conservative social policies and moral behaviors because of a belief that these will help them prosper economically, the primary concern, and give them back control over their lives (Prasad, Hoffman, & Bezila, 2016; Page & Gilens, 2017). Social preferences are the means to the end. Prasad, Hoffman, and Bezila (2016) refer to these collective preferences as "walking the line." It works as follows.

Working-class Whites do not believe that individuals should spend much money or irresponsibly take on debt because this is not the "right way." Excessive spending and debt destroy the ability to be self-reliant and increase the likelihood a person or family will become reliant on the untrustworthy government. Moreover, the importance of being careful with money is extended to government and its programs. For instance, working-class Whites do not necessarily support massive tax cuts for the wealthy, but they do support efforts to increase marriage rates and reduce premarital sex because these efforts supposedly help improve financial well-being. The government, like households, should only spend what they have and not take on debt, even if that means slashing social programs, because debt jeopardizes restarting the escalator. Substantial government programs, supported mostly by Democrats and loathed by Republicans, encourage far too much consumer spending which allows people to breach responsible budgets (Prasad et al., 2009; Prasad, Hoffman, & Bezila, 2016). Democrats fail to "walk the line."

These forces are unlikely to reverse in the near future. According to research by Gimpel and Karnes (2006), as the rural economy is hollowed by traditional manufacturing, it is increasingly defined by two factors: self-employment and property ownership. These two factors breed economic individualism. Working-class Whites occupying rural areas view themselves as independent business people who do not require the same sort of handouts, union protections, and housing vouchers as the more urbanized "on-the-clock wage slaves" (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006, p. 469).

It is not true that working-class Whites reject any and all spending, a point I have made several times. Up to now, I have stressed that social spending is supported as long as the benefits are equally shared by all people who have worked hard. Prasad, Hoffman, and Bezila (2016, p.

292) include an important addendum: working-class Whites can support additional spending as long as it avoids "impulse satisfaction" and "instant gratification." Debt must be carefully considered and well-planned before it is accepted.

Working-class Whites who do not appear to value individualism, hard work, and self-reliance are vilified. Sherman (2009) provides the most thorough explication of this claim, although her findings are well-supported. Inequality, while present, is not rampant in more rural areas, largely because many people are more equally poor (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006). This limits the ability for distinctions to be created along economic qualities. By removing money, working-class Whites are forced to divide and discriminate based on "moral capital," which accumulates to the extent that one maintains a strong work ethic and family values (Sherman, 2009, p. 65; Lamont, 2000; Eliasoph, 2017). Character replaces finance (Williams, 2017a). Social distance is created between people who do and do not have moral capital, even though incomes and wealth may be similarly small. Entire families are defined by their reputation as hard workers (Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). The "lowest form of white" are those who have "given up and resigned themselves to poverty" (Grove, 2015, p. 141).

Policy and political consequences follow from the desire for social distance. Working-class Whites one step from the bottom are particularly hostile to and deeply resentful of the idea of raising minimum wages or increasing welfare subsidies to their "lay-about" neighbors who live off the government's dime and presumably spend their paychecks on booze and drugs (MacGillis, 2015; MacGillis, 2016; Rampbell, 2016; Vance, 2016). In their minds, they should not have to help fellow Whites up the escalator at the same time that others, "they," continue to cut. In fact, low-income voters in similarly homogeneous low-income communities are some of the least likely to support redistribution efforts (Vigdor, 2006).

According to Hochschild (2016, p. 114), “For everything else it is, the government also functions as a curious status-marking machine. The less you depend on it, the higher your status.” Similarly, a *New York Times* report found attitudes similar to Reagan’s depiction of a welfare queen, except this time applied to Whites and particularly men. Interviewing residents of the Kentucky Appalachians, the piece provided the following quote, “There are a lot of people on the draw. It’s Cousin Bobby—‘he’s on Oxy and he’s on the draw and we’re paying for him. If you need help, no one begrudges your taking the program—they’re good-hearted people. It’s when you’re able-bodied and making choices not to be able-bodied” (MacGillis, 2015). Seeking help is therefore not a weakness. However, one should only seek help if all options have been exhausted to solve the problem on one’s own, and, even then, community organizations, e.g. churches, should be the go-to, not government. “Don’t be a burden if you can help it, and pitch in generously when you can be of help” (Wuthnow, 2018, p. 7). (Prevalent drug use has become a political sticking point for these voters. Research by Case and Deaton [2017] found that circumstances for working-class Whites have become so dire that life expectancies have begun to drop due to drug and alcohol abuse. Thus, Whites with the lowest incomes are doubly impacted by social stigma and addiction.)

In turn, the ability to afford improvements to the school can serve as an important marker of both self-sufficiency and social distancing. It marks the community as one that can take care of its own without relying on state or federal aid. Moreover, improvements to the school system, particularly tangible, capital improvements, can easily be seen and shown off to community members and visitors. Debt issuance for school infrastructure has the highest likelihood of passing of any kind of referendum, a point I made in section two. The result is a demonstration of pride and a signal that this district can “stay ahead of the Joneses” (Reback, 2007, p. 15)

These highly discernable investments are anything but many of the "submerged" government programs that Americans do not even realize are provided by the government (Mettler, 2011). Operations levies for more abstract uses, like staff compensation, are not as clearly demonstrable to the community or, just as importantly, neighboring communities and, instead, incite resentment for public employees. Tangible investments with clear returns or benefits increase people's perception that the tax system is fair, which aligns neatly with working-class Whites' acceptance of government investment, assuming the perks assist those who worked hard to supply the money (Mettler, 2011).

Potential relationship to referendums: Feeling that they have been abandoned by politics and state- and federal-level government, working-class Whites are determined to achieve accomplishments via self-reliance, individualism, and self-sufficiency. They are determined to solve their own problems with and among people in their communities whom they trust and look out for. Additionally, the ability to be self-reliant and independent is a marker of social status among people who are more uniformly poor. Passing a school referendum allows a community to prove to itself and surrounding districts that they are a proud people who do not have to rely on state and federal governments to take care of their children. Supporting public education if and when it is needed via local property tax levies is therefore not viewed as government aid but rather a sound financial investment that "walks the line" for the betterment of the community.

In order for the community to be self-sufficient and independent, local citizens must be active and involved. And, indeed, they are to a great extent in rural areas, especially with local issues. Beyond factors such as education, income, and age, city size is the greatest predictor of whether a person is politically mobilized (Oliver, 2000). According to Oliver (2000), people in larger communities and urbanized areas are far less likely to be involved in local civic activities, and this is at least in part caused by the fact that they are not mobilized by neighbors and acquaintances. Constituents are far more likely to talk about politics and recruit fellow neighbors, friends, and family for action when they are familiar with each other and close-knit, as rural areas tend to be. A second influence is the high rate of property- and homeowners in rural areas (Fischel, 2001; Gimpel & Karnes, 2006). Because these owners are responsible for

paying property taxes, they have a strong incentive to pay attention to local politics and policies that could affect the value of their largest asset and biggest source of wealth—their house (Fischel, 2001).

Interestingly, these findings dissolve when national political interest is investigated. This suggests that working-class Whites in more rural places are no less interested in national issues as their urban counterparts and express no less confidence in understanding the problems and political issues facing the contemporary United States (Oliver, 2000; Morgan & Lee, 2017). Nevertheless, these voters are particularly keen on involving themselves in local issues where they feel they can make the most obvious and substantial impact (Oliver, 2000; Wuthnow, 2018). This feeling of decision-making, agency, and change can encourage people to remain invested in and informed of local politics over the long-term (Benz & Stutzer, 2004; Marquart-Pyatt & Petrzelka, 2008).

Thus, there are differences in information and mobilization between more and less urbanized places. However, it is also worth noting who is most actively involved in less urbanized places. People in the quintile second from the bottom are much more likely to vote than people in the first or lowest quintile. It is these people in the second rung who are seeking the dissociation and social distance described above (MacGillis, 2015). Therefore, it appears that actual voters in less urbanized places are the same residents who express the greatest interest in self-reliance and the most hostility toward government-reliance, which results in support of work requirements and opposition to welfare expansion and minimum wage hikes (MacGillis, 2015).

Potential relationship to referendums: People in places with smaller populations are particularly in tune with local public issues. They are more likely than urban dwellers to be aware of, informed about, and mobilized for politics and policies specific to their local areas. Residents may be willing to approve a referendum because they understand the specific needs of their school, the impacts of a referendum, and how a referendum can help the community

economically. People in rural areas are heavily invested, literally and figuratively, in property—land and homes. These rural people are likely to know about, support, and protect their largest sources of wealth.

Reflexivity

Validity, be it for quantitative or qualitative research, is upheld when the researcher addresses their theories, beliefs, perceptions, and worldviews—their reflexivity— and how these influence and structure the conclusions of the study and its design. Validity helps determine, "How might I be wrong?" and is evaluated by how the researcher rules out "specific plausible alternatives and threats to interpretations and explanations (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124).

In the context of this review, my goal is to provide an historical explanation of the political contexts that led to the growth in public school referendums across the state of Wisconsin. Referendums are seeing historic highs in terms of frequency and dollars requested. Scholarship, especially over the last ten to fifteen years, has attempted to pinpoint what factors contribute to and what factors work against referendums passing. Based on the research presented in section two, it should be clear that the factors are expansive and vary tremendously by state. What matters in Texas may or may not matter in Michigan which, in turn, may or may not matter in neighboring Ohio.

While a few studies have analyzed Wisconsin, none of these are holistic or predictive. Instead, they isolate a particular explanatory variable to investigate its impact on Wisconsin referendums, e.g. the presence of district magnet and charter schools in Shober's 2011 piece. No work to date has attempted to quantitatively predict referendum passage by using factors that are identified via qualitative research. Here, I offer a conjectural theory that hypothesizes plausible factors that *may* contribute to referendum voting behavior in Wisconsin. The word "may" cannot be emphasized enough. It is not my intention to attempt to answer my question without undertaking the requisite research. Instead, I offer a hypothesis of voting behavior based on

credible political science theories developed over the last five decades. There is a chance that none of my conjectural theory is correct. I acknowledge and leave space for this. Later, I compare subsequent work to my conjectural theory expounded here, and its accuracy is evaluated.

Section Review

In this section, I defined a conjectural theory, why it is needed, and my own as applied to rural Wisconsin public school district referendums. Beginning in the 1970s, working-class Whites began to feel economically and culturally disaffected from American society. These voters felt like Democrats were allowing women, People of Color, and cosmopolitan urbanites to cut the line in the escalator to the top of society (Hochschild, 2016) and felt like Republicans were responsible for allowing globalization and deindustrialization to kill their jobs and union protections. Seeing no aid from federal or state governments, working-class Whites rationally chose to shrink a government that was supposedly for everybody but them. It also created resentment toward people who were receiving government assistance, including underrepresented populations, corporate boardrooms, and Whites in the lowest stratum. Any government assistance was zero-sum: what "they" got, "we" didn't. Moreover, the government assistance that was allocated was not perceived to be distributed according to who worked hard and who deserved it.

Because of these circumstances, trust in federal and state governments collapsed. Local government, however, was largely unchanged and retained trust at a relatively high level. With familiar faces and clearer channels of communication, local government is seen as more responsive and more controllable. Voters are much more willing to provide tax dollars and delegate responsibility to governments they can trust. School boards are arguably the most local

of any government entity, which may be why voters in rural Wisconsin are so willing to check yes on their referendum ballot.

Working-class Whites also demonstrate a tremendous attachment to and pride in their local community. Working-class Whites in rural areas are much less likely than other Americans to move, and they are more likely to visit with neighbors and be community-oriented. In this way, home is more than a place; it is the basis of an identity that simply cannot be conceived of anywhere else. With this pride comes the desire to maintain and improve the local community, especially through the most visible local public institution, the school district. Social cohesion and community identity depend on the presence of a school, and people in small towns talk about the school. The loss of one can be devastating to the community's spirit. Because these attachments are so prominent, even residents who do not feel a particular connection to the schools themselves feel a normative and social pressure to invest in the district.

Few people are so acrimonious toward schools and school leaders that they are willing to see consistent, massive cuts to education. The public understands that saving money on education budgets is a short-term victory. Eventually, cuts will harm children's future and damage the local economy—*their* children, *their* economy. Rural areas, which have long struggled with poverty and unemployment, are well-served by a large employer like a school that can also create school-community economic partnerships which help stem out-migration of the community's brightest students. Rural schools protect housing values, employment rates, and entrepreneurship.

Working-class Whites feel as though they and only they can be relied upon. They are fiercely self-sufficient, self-reliant, and individualistic. Hard work is valued very highly, and entire families and communities are defined by whether they are hard workers. They also want to

be recognized for this hard work. Working-class Whites are supportive of conservative moral positions, but social beliefs do not necessarily drive voting choices. Instead, social beliefs are supported because they are a means to economic security, a destination valued above all else. Liberal moral positions are more likely to cause debt, and debt jeopardizes autonomy and independence. Spending is acceptable, but only when it is financially responsible to do so and the benefits are dispersed to those who have paid their share. Lower-income Whites who live off the government dole and do not work hard are reviled. This creates a desire for social distance between those just above the bottom of society and those truly at the bottom. Communities of working-class Whites do not want to be seen as reliant on federal and state aid. It is ideal if money can be raised and kept at home where it can be monitored and tracked for appropriate use.

For a community to be self-reliant, its citizens must be aware, informed, and involved. Residents in places with smaller populations fulfill all three of these requirements when issues are local. Local public school districts referendums are remarkably local in scope. Referendums are a particular issue that local residents are highly likely to understand and be mobilized for because it is the opportunity to protect home and property values—the largest sources of rural wealth.

Providing these potential explanations is critical so that the reader can best understand how I approach the work—what hypotheses, theoretical works, and bodies of knowledge shape my worldviews and beliefs. These worldviews and beliefs shape the study structures, investigations, and result interpretations for any research, whether they employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods tools.

Methods

The question driving this paper reads, “What factors predict rural Wisconsin public school district referendum passage?” The goals of this study were twofold. First, I sought to

improve predictive models so that school district leaders could employ the models to ascertain whether a referendum in their community will pass or fail—a hugely consequential scenario for districts across the state that rely heavily on the availability of referendum funds. In order to improve these models, I conducted qualitative research in communities whose referendum outcomes were predicted both very well and very poorly by my quantitative outcome construction in order to better understand why their voting behavior deviated from what was expected based on my models developed here. The reasons for these deviations may then be incorporated into and used in future quantitative models that may better predict Wisconsin public school district referendums moving forward. Second, I responded to the call for theoretical foundations for referendum voting behavior that remained largely absent in the school finance literature.

The first portion of this methods section addresses the quantitative component of my research. In this section, I explain two types of regression models that can be used to predict a referendum outcome: 1) a logit model that predicts a dichotomous result (referendum passage or failure) and 2) an ordinary least squares model that predicts the proportion of voters who will support the referendum ballot (e.g. 45 percent, 62 percent). Next, I explain the tools I will apply to each respective model in order to evaluate whether the model is "good"—both logistic and linear, respectively. In other words, I address how I will know whether the model effectively predicts referendum passage or yes-proportion based on the variables currently understood to affect referendum outcomes. Third, I address how I plan to go about building the logistic and linear models, including variable selection methods. Also, in this section, I introduce what metrics can be used to identify districts that deviate from their expected voting behavior based on the predictive models. Fourth, I present the variables from which the logistic and linear models

will be built. These variables largely reflect the literature review presented in section two. Here, I explain the operationalization of the variables and the sources from which my dataset was produced. Fifth, I present a series of descriptive statistics and figures with regard to referendum passage rates and dollar amounts in Wisconsin since 1993. Sixth, and finally, I explain how I will resolve missing data issues.

The second portion of this methods section addresses the qualitative component of my research. In this section, I first present and define the type of qualitative research I plan to conduct: the case study. Second, I address the critical step of case selection strategy and defend the strategy that I plan to employ—deviation from expected behavior. I also highlight examples of this type of qualitative research, particularly from political science, and what case selections are able to accomplish. Third, I explain what qualitative tools I will use to answer my research question, my interview protocol, the validity of my approach, and the extent of generalizability—particularly with respect to a qualitative epistemology. Fourth, I outline my plan for analyzing qualitative data and the importance of the flexible nature of the procedure. Potential qualitative data analysis tools include the case summary analysis, the partially-ordered and role-ordered meta-matrix, the explanatory effects matrix, and the checklist matrix.

Quantitative Tools for Site Selection

Sampling frame and presentation of models.

The purpose of this section is to present and explain the quantitative models that can be used to best predict referendum passage in rural Wisconsin. There are two ways to approach predicting an election's outcome. The first approach operationalizes the outcome of the election as passage (coded 1) or failure (coded 0). This dichotomous outcome is most effectively predicted by logistic regression models since the outcomes are binary, clustered at 0 and 1. The

second approach operationalizes the outcome of the election as the percentage of people who vote in approval. This outcome is predicted using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.

My sampling frame is identical regardless of which model is ultimately used. I used all referendums that were held between July 1, 1993 and June 30, 2019. This did not include the 11 referendums that districts cancelled because no result was ever recorded. This left 3,202 referendums across the state of Wisconsin. My research focused on traditional public school districts. I did not include county-run schools for children with special development needs nor schools run by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. I also did not include charter schools. Instrumental charter schools would receive funds from the district in which they exist and are not considered their own local education agency (Chapman, Mueller, & Henken, 2018). They would already be eligible for money procured by a district's referendum. Non-instrumental charter schools are considered their own local education agency by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, but they receive state and federal funds (Chapman, Mueller, & Henken, 2018).

Even if I did not make this filtering decision, the only referendums ever held in Wisconsin were issued by Wisconsin's elementary, secondary, or unified school districts. In total, there were 434 districts that could have held a referendum across these 26 school years. This number is greater than the 421 traditional school districts that exist in Wisconsin today because of realignments, consolidations, and splits. For instance, Bloomington and West Grant became River Ridge in 1995, Trevor Grade and Wilmot Grade became Trevor-Wilmot Grade in 2006, and Shawano-Gresham split into Shawano and Gresham in 2007.

In the application of logistic regression, referendum success or referendum failure is a binary response variable with an outcome of two categories, 1 or 0 respectively. Regression models for binary outcomes represent the probability a subject, which in this case is a school

district holding a referendum, will experience the event, i.e. approval (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). When an outcome is dichotomous, the error term is not normally but rather binomially distributed, the error term does not exhibit homoscedasticity, and responses outside the 0-1 boundary are nonsensical (Kutner, Nachtscheim, & Neter, 2004; Agresti & Finlay, 2009; Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013). Thus, an OLS model typically inappropriate for a dichotomous outcome. In addition, the probability of a subject experiencing the event changes at a greater rate for middle values of the *x* distribution than for values high and low on the *x* distribution, which results in a plot that resembles an *S*-shaped curve (Cizek & Fitzgerald, 1999; Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

The model can be "linearized" by taking the natural log of the ratio of the probability of success against the probability of failure, i.e. the odds of the event occurring. While this outcome transformation sacrifices some intuitive interpretation, once linearized, a unit change in a predictor variable corresponds to a consistent change in the log odds regardless of where the predictor variable lies in its *x* distribution (assuming the predictor has not also been mathematically transformed) (Menard, 2002). A series of iterations then identifies the "strongest linear combination of independent variables that increases the likelihood of detecting the observed outcome" (Stoltzfus, 2011, p. 1100).

In some prior referendum work, researchers used discrete time hazard modeling using logistic regression in order to predict referendum outcome (see Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a, 2010b; Bowers & Lee, 2013; Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013). This was beneficial to both researchers and practitioners because districts in Wisconsin are not barred from reattempting a previously failed referendum. Rather, a failed referendum may be put back on to a Wisconsin ballot as soon as six months have passed (DPI, 2017; Kemp, 2018b). The

model was discrete as opposed to continuous because the concern was not with investigating the number of days or months for "survival" but instead whether the next attempt simply passed or failed. A bond that succeeded on the first attempt was censored; a referendum that failed on its first attempt became eligible for a second "float"; and a second failure was eligible for a third "float" (Singer & Willett, 2003). Thus, board members and administrators considering a second or even third float were able to take into account the conditional nature of their reattempts (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010a; Singer & Willett, 2003).

Unfortunately, Wisconsin data did not permit this type of analysis. For a substantial portion of the dataset, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the department to which all referendums must be reported, did not collect the purpose of the referendum. This was particularly true throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Only very recently was any attempt made to collect even rudimentary data regarding the specific usage of money, and this remained vague, e.g. "building improvements," "technology," or "athletics." Thus, it was very difficult to tell the difference between, on one hand, referendums that were a second or third attempt with congruent or similar dollar requests and, on the other hand, what referendums were an entirely different request with altogether different goals. Nevertheless, I did make an attempt to code referendums for possible refloats. I address how I did this in the fourth part of my quantitative methods section.

Fortunately, the opacity of Wisconsin's data may not be too detrimental. In 2013, Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt used several hundred Ohio referendums from the early 2000s in order to compare binomial methods of logistic regression with floats coded as interval data and Bowers et al.'s recommendation for discrete time hazard modeling with logistic regression. The Ingle et al. team found very little difference between the two approaches. Neither model

produced any significant results for refloats regardless of the analytic strategy. Moreover, the percentage of referendums predicted correctly were very similar (78 percent correct versus 76 percent correct).

With this in mind, I proceeded with a binomial logistic regression method. The model took the following form:

$$\text{Equation (1): logit } (Y) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \ldots + \beta_k X_k + \epsilon$$

In this model, the outcome is the logit of referendum passage likelihood, β_0 represents the model's intercept, β_1 through β_k represent the factors that have been shown to be correlated with referendum passage from the prior literature, and ϵ represents the error term. To convert to more easily interpretable units, the outcome is exponentiated to present the odds. Odds are then converted into probability by dividing the odds of equaling 1 by 1 plus the odds of equaling 1, P(Y = 1) = (odds that Y = 1)/(1 + odds that Y = 1).

The second approach to predicting referendum outcomes operationalized the outcome of the election as the percentage of people who vote in approval. This outcome was predicted using OLS regression. Several studies have operationalized the outcome in this manner, including Lentz (1999), Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, and Liu (2011), and Silverman (2011). There are two main reasons for operationalizing in this way. First, the outcome variable is easily interpretable, especially in an area of educational and political science research that is very practitioner-focused. Second, the researchers who have used percent-yes argue that it provides much more nuanced information than simple, dichotomous yes-no prediction (Zimmer, Buddin, Jones, & Lie, 2011). Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt (2013) highlight the benefit of *realpolitik*. A model may show that a referendum is highly likely to pass, but there is of great value to school

districts' leaders to know whether the referendum is highly likely to pass with 55 percent of the vote or 85 percent of the vote. The general model of this regression is comparable to Equation (2) above:

Equation (2): $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \ldots + \beta_k X_k + \epsilon$

In this equation, Y equals the percentage of people predicted to vote yes on the particular referendum ballot, β_0 represents the model's intercept, β_1 through β_k again represent the factors that have been shown to be correlated with referendum passage from the prior literature, and ϵ represents the model's error.

These models were not the only avenues by which to identify districts that deviated from expected voting behavior. They were, however, the most appropriate. One alternative route was a linear probability model (LPM). In this case, the probability of the outcome is produced using ordinary least squares regression. There were several problems with this approach that were of particular importance for my work. First, homoscedasticity was violated by the nature of the outcomes being clustered at 0 and 1, and the relationship between predictors and the outcome was nonlinear. An LPM model was an incorrect specification of the functional form (Deke, 2014). The result of this misspecification was the assumption of a constant marginal effect of X when, in actuality, the marginal effect of X varies as X varies—hence nonlinearity (Deke, 2014; Chatla & Shmueli, 2016). Further, this misspecification can produce nonsensical probabilities that are less than 0 or greater than 1.

Second, an LPM can produce biased coefficients (Horace & Oaxaca, 2006). This, in and of itself, is not fatal because the focus of my work was not on the effect of a particular variable; the work focused on the cumulative effect of the predictors on the predicted outcome. When the goal of the research is parameter estimation and testing, an LPM can be highly useful (Chatla &

Shmueli, 2016). However, "… LPM is generally unsuited for the goal of prediction because it can provide unbounded predictions. … LPM is not suitable if the goal of the study is exact prediction of probabilities" (Chatla & Shmueli, 2016, p. 18). This is precisely what my research was intended to produce: accurate predictions of the probability of the referendum outcome.

Third, two tests of LPM appropriateness failed in my data (von Hippel, 2017). There were referendums outside of the 20 to 80 percent probability guardrail that make an LPM appropriate. Roughly 11 percent of rural referendums were outside of this range. Additionally, the relationship between the log odds of the outcome and the probability of the outcome was nonlinear with respect to rural referendums—the primary focus of my work. If this relationship was linear, especially probabilities between 0.2 and 0.8, consistent marginal effects of X would manifest. This was not the case. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

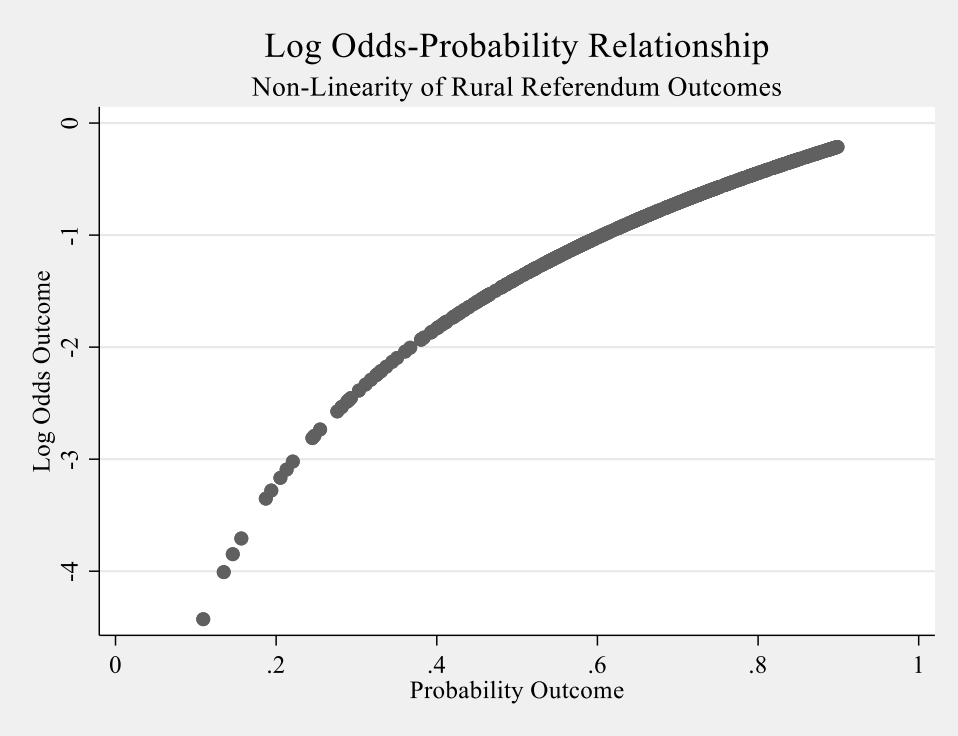

Figure 3: Log Odds-Probability Relationship in Rural Referendum Outcomes

Quantile regression is a second alternative route to predict referendum outcomes. Quantile regression is used if and when a set of predictor variables is hypothesized to produce different outcomes at different percentiles of the data (Despa, 2012). For example, quantile

regression can be used to study the relationship between the effects of prenatal care for infants with varying levels of birth weight (Despa, 2012) or the relationship between class sizes and academic achievement of students with varying levels of parental income (Koenker, 2015). At first, this may seem appropriate for modeling referendums that deviate from expected voting behavior: perhaps a set of predictors behaves differently in analyzing referendums that pass or fail with a great deal or hardly any support. At this point, however, I had no theoretical reason to believe this was true. In other words, there was no evidence in the literature that suggested that there were different sets of variables or differently behaving variables at varying levels of referendum results. For example, I had no reason to believe that trust exhibited a different effect at high and low probabilities of passage. Rather, I hypothesize that trust in school leaders is high when probability of passage is high, and trust in school leaders is low when probability of passage is low. The effect of trust is the same; the difference is simply whether it is present.

Additionally, I had no theoretical basis for presuming that referendums that deviated from expected results were demonstrating a need for different modeling. I address this much more thoroughly in my methods section when I discuss the purpose of deviant case studies. In brief, though, I expected that districts that deviated from expected voting behavior were deviating because current sets of quantifiable predictors were not capturing well the outcomes in the community. In other words, the problem is not of a model misspecification (i.e. traditional OLS to quantile regression) but rather bewilderment over omitted variables. Based on the literature that exists to date, I expected that currently deviating districts would be better modeled after having a more holistic understanding of referendum voting behavior—the impetus for my qualitative research.

Measuring effective prediction—logistic and linear.

It is worth repeating that these models were *not* developed for the purposes of making causal claims. For instance, I cannot claim that every $10,000 increase in a community's median income *causes* an increase in probability of passage by five percent. Rather, these models were created to say that a community with a median income of X_1 dollars and values of other predictor variables has a probability of passing a referendum at Y_1 percent while a community with a median income of X_2 dollars and values of other predictor variables has a probability of passing a referendum at Y_2 percent. This subtle but crucial difference changed how I evaluated the quality of the models I produced. In general, it is safe to say that I placed greater concern on improving the left than the right side of the equation. In other words, the types of regression diagnostics that were most useful to me to evaluate and improve prediction were different diagnostics than if I were trying to analyze a model that isolated the impact of a single variable. Despite this, I followed the guidance of Peng, Lee, and Ingersoll (2002) who recommend reporting an overall evaluation of the model in question, the statistical tests for the parameters included, goodness-of-fit statistics, and, most importantly here, an assessment of the quality of predictions.

Secondly, the focus of this research project was rural school districts—not the entirety of the state. Therefore, while I analyzed metrics of predictive effectiveness for all school districts and rural districts, I prioritized and ultimately chose a model that best predicted the outcomes for rural districts even if an alternative model was more effective when including suburban and urban districts as well. I also investigated whether a rural model was improved when taking into account only referendums after the passage of Act 10. In sum, this amounted to four groups of models: all locales/all years; all locales/post-Act 10; rural referendums/all years; and rural referendums/post-Act 10. The tools I used to determine a model's predictive quality are outlined

in Table 4. The potential logistic models were evaluated on three categories and six metrics. The potential linear models were evaluated on three metrics.

Table 4

Tools to Evaluate Models' Predictive Effectiveness

Logistic Model	
1) Overall performance	McFadden's adjusted R^2
	Deviance
2) Model calibration	Classification table
	Proportional change in error
3) Model discrimination	Tjur's R^2
	c-statistic/AUROC
Linear Model	Adjusted R^2
	Root mean square error
	Akaike information criteria

Note: The equations for these metrics can be found in Appendix 1.

A logistic model's predictive capabilities can be assessed in three ways: 1) overall performance, 2) model discrimination, and 3) model calibration. The overall performance of the model can be measured with a pseudo-R^2. Menard (2002) recommends McFadden's R^2 as the most appropriate for logistic regression because of its conceptual congruence to an OLS R^2: "a proportional reduction in the quantity being minimized," which is -2 multiplied by the log likelihood (Menard, 2002, p. 27). Second, Menard (2002) points out that McFadden's R^2 is not dependent on the sample size and only on its ability to reduce the model's deviance. Third, McFadden's R^2 is not sensitive to the event's base rate, meaning the proportion of cases that

experienced the event, whereas the Cox and Snell R^2, Aldrich and Nelson R^2, and the Nagelkerke R^2 are sensitive to this measure (Menard, 2002). Fourth, McFadden's adjusted- R^2 varies between a bounded 0 and 1, where 0 represents no predictive ability of the independent variables and 1 represents perfect predictive ability of the independent variables, and includes a penalty for including unnecessary predictors (Menard, 2002).

The second way to measure overall model performance is the deviance of the logistic regression model. Maximum likelihood estimation functions range from 0 to 1: 0 when all subjects who did not experience an event have a predicted probability of 0, and all subjects who did experience an event have a predicted probability of 1. The log of this maximum likelihood function ranges from an infinitely negative number to 0 (Menard, 2002). This value can be difficult to interpret. Therefore, it is multiplied by -2 and becomes known as the logistic model's model deviance (Menard, 2002). In this way, it is comparable to the error sum of squares in an OLS regression: the less deviance, i.e. a lower -2LL statistic, the better the model fits the data (Cizek & Fitzgerald, 1999; Menard, 2002). The Ingle et al. team relied on this statistic and the classification table (taken up below) in their papers to evaluate the quality of models.

The second assessment of a logistic model's predictive effectiveness is via model calibration. Calibration is defined as the agreement between observed outcomes and the model's predictions and "reflects the extent to which a model correctly estimates absolute risk" (Alba et al., 2017, p. 1380; also see Steyerberg et al, 2010). One model calibration tool is the classification table. The classification table displays the number of true positives, false positives, false negatives, and true negatives relative to the model employed. The table also displays the model's measure of sensitivity, i.e. the proportion of actual positives that are correctly classified as positives; specificity, i.e. the proportion of actual negatives that are correctly classified as

negatives; and the overall rate of correct classification (Peng, Lee, & Ingersoll, 2002; Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013). The statistics provided in a classification table depend on the classification cut-point or threshold. The threshold determines whether an observation's probability is classified as an observed event or non-event. A threshold of 0.5 means that any observation that has a probability greater than 50 percent is predicted to be 1, and any observation that has a probability of 50 percent or less is predicted to be 0.

There is no clear direction in the referendum literature regarding an appropriate cut-point, likely because of the dearth of referendum prediction work. Moreover, the costs of error are unclear. Classification tables are common in medicine, biostatistics, and epidemiology where tolerance for a threshold can vary based on the severity of an illness. For instance, it may be worth lowering the cut-point and accepting false positives in order to justify providing additional vaccinations despite higher monetary costs if the additional vaccines lead to containment of a highly contagious and deadly disease. The trade-offs in school finance are more difficult to weigh. It is not clear whether it is worse to recommend to a district that they do not pursue a referendum when, in fact, it may actually pass or to recommend to a district that they do pursue a referendum when, in fact, it may not actually pass. The former prevents school districts from receiving money that may improve the educational services provided to the community's children while the latter may spend a great deal of political capital that is difficult to accumulate and make it much more difficult to pass another referendum down the road—just as the refloat referendum literature makes clear. When the costs of incorrect prediction are approximately the same or unclear, a cut-point of 0.5 is reasonable and recommended (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004).

The classification table's overall correct classification percentage is useful, but it must be understood relative to the "null accuracy" that is achieved merely by predicting the most frequent classification (Menard, 2002). A model's predictive worth can be evaluated based on its improvement over the null accuracy value. Menard (2002) describes this as a proportional change in error (PRE) as measured by predictive efficiency. This equals the absolute number of errors with the potential model subtracted from the absolute number of errors with the null model divided by the absolute number of errors with the null model (White, 2013). Models are compared based on the improvements they make over the null accuracy.

The third assessment of a logistic model's predictive effectiveness is via model discrimination. Model discrimination is the ability of a model to correctly separate the subjects into those who have and have not experienced the event or outcome (Taktak, Eleuteri, Lake, & Fisher, 2007; Steyerberg et al, 2010; Alba et al, 2017). Tjur's coefficient of determination is a Pseudo-R^2 metric that measures the difference between the mean of the two categories of the dependent variable. Subjects who experienced the event should have large probabilities in the model, and subjects who have not experienced the event should have small probabilities in the model. A large difference between the means of the two groups indicates that the model did well in discriminating between experience, and, importantly, the statistic is not dependent on the type of model used to make the predictions (Tjur, 2009).

A second measure of model discrimination is the *c*-statistic. The *c*-statistic is "the standard" for evaluating the predictive effectiveness of a binary outcome model (Pencina, D'Agostino, & Vasan, 2010, p. 4). The *c*-statistic equals the probability that, if two observations are paired and one observation has experienced the event while the other has not, the observation with the event will receive a greater predicted probability from the model than the observation

without the event (Pencina, D'Agostino, & Vasan, 2010). The *c*-statistic is equal to the area under the receiver operating curve (AUROC). The receiver operating curve (ROC) is a plot of the proportion of true positive rates, the sensitivity, against the proportion of false positive rates, 1-specificity, across all cut-off points or thresholds (Goldman & Glei, 2015). A perfect ROC includes two straight lines from (0,0) to (0,1) and (0,1) to (1,1). In this case, the AUROC (and, therefore, the *c*-statistic) is equal to 1. A diagonal line drawn from (0,0) to (1,1) represents a pure, 50-50 chance of correct classification. The change or improvement in the *c*-statistic or AUROC is the differences in the *c*-statistic or AUROC in models within and without the additional, potentially useful variables of interest (Pencina, D'Agostino, D'Agostino, & Vasan, 2008). Pepe et al. (2004) warned that changes in the *c*-statistic/AUROC are often fairly small in magnitude because of the 0-1 bounded nature of the ROC (also see Pencina, D'Agostino, D'Agostino, & Vasan, 2008). An area between 0.5 and 0.7 is considered poor discrimination, 0.7 to 0.8 acceptable discrimination, 0.8 to 0.9 excellent discrimination, and greater than 0.9 is outstanding discrimination (Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013).

I now shift attention to evaluating the predictive capabilities of linear models. As a reminder, the ultimate OLS model utilized here was for the purpose of predicting the proportion of people voting yes on a particular referendum. The diagnostic tools used for evaluating the predictive qualities of a linear, predictive model tended to be more straightforward relative to the logistic model diagnostics and are not subdivided into categories.

The first measure is the adjusted-R^2. The multiple coefficient of determination, R^2, is defined as the error sum of squares divided by total sum of squares and subtracted from one. In other words, it is the proportion of sample variation in *y* explained by the applied least squares regression model (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). Mendenhall and Sincich (2012, p. 181) point

out that, in general, "the closer the value of R^2 is to 1, the better the model fits the data." However, an unadjusted-R^2 value will approach one if the number of variables begins to approach the number of sample data points. To account for this, the adjusted-R^2 metric divides the average squared difference between the predicted values and sample *y*-values (the mean square error [MSE]) by the total sum of squares, multiplies the value by one less than the total sample data points, and subtracts that entire number from 1. In this way, the adjusted-R^2 can only increase if the MSE decreases (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004; Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). Moreover, the addition of an unuseful term to the model may actually decrease the adjusted-R^2 if the MSE does not improve (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). The values of adjusted-R^2 can be compared across the linear regression models; the model with the highest adjusted-R^2 could then be selected, depending on the results of the complementary measures below (Makridakis, Wheelwright, & Hyndman, 1998).

A second, but highly-related, measure is the root mean square error (RMSE). This metric presents a measure of the variation in the distribution of the residuals (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). Like the MSE, the RMSE is the average of the squared residuals, but the square root of that average is then calculated. Both Mendenhall and Sincich (2012) and Makridakis, Wheelwright, and Hyndman (1998) encourage calculating the RMSE because of its ease of interpretation for practitioners and other professionals concerned about forecasting methods.

Third, and lastly, Akaike's information criterion is a valuable postestimation statistic because it takes into account the number of observations, the error sum of squares, and, importantly, a penalty for including a greater number of predictors than is necessary for predictive efficiency (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004; Agresti & Finlay, 2009). A model with a smaller AIC value is chosen. In other words, the AIC aids model parsimony. Several

authors recommended including the AIC in the evaluation of predictive models (e.g. Pencina, D'Agostino, D'Agostino, & Vasan, 2008; Goldman & Glei, 2015; Alba et al, 2017).

Variable selection methods.

So far, I presented the skeletal structure of the logistic and linear models that were used to identify districts deviating from predicted voting behavior. I then presented the tools I will use to evaluate the predictive quality of the logistic and linear models, respectively. Next, I describe the methods I used in order to select which variables were included in the models that were evaluated. The variable selection methods were conceptually identical regardless of whether the model is logistic or linear. I consider four methods by which to screen variables: enter, stepwise, best subsets, and least absolute shrinkage and selection operator (LASSO). I discuss each in turn.

The enter method is "block" of independent variables that are entered in a single step (Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013; Ranganathan, Pramesh, & Aggarwal, 2017). If this were explanatory research, this would not likely be done. Elimination of critical variables can hamper the explanatory power of a regression model, inflate standard errors with collinear variables, and bias regression coefficient estimates (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). Moreover, a variable "dump" without screening tools in explanatory research may not respect what prior theoretical contributions contribute to variable selection (Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

I acknowledge and respect these arguments. However, Shmueli (2010) and Osborne (2000) addressed why these principles are greatly relaxed in predictive research. I provide several of their arguments here.

> The criteria for choosing variables differ markedly in explanatory versus predictive contexts. In explanatory modeling, where variables are seen as operationalized constructs, variable choice is based on the role of the construct in the theoretical causal structure and on the operationalization itself. […] In predictive modeling, the focus on association rather than causation, the lack of [functional clarity], and the prospective context, mean that there is no need to delve into the exact role of each variable in terms of an underlying causal

> structure. Instead, criteria for choosing predictors are quality of the association between the predictors and the response, data quality, and availability of the predictors at the time of prediction, known as ex-ante availability (Shmueli, 2010, p. 10).

In other words, as I stated at the beginning of this section, the goal here was not to be able to state what the role of, say, income is on referendum passage likelihood, controlling for other theoretically-contributed variables. Instead, prior literature suggested that a community's median income is associated with referendum passage and therefore should be included to best predict the referendum outcome or proportional support. In addition, prior explanatory research might suggest that a variable be operationalized in a particular way, according to the theory that explanatory research helped develop. In predictive research, that precise operationalization is less of a priority provided that some related variable is able to capture that operational contribution just as well.

Osborne (2000) also addresses the different purposes of explanatory and predictive research.

> When one uses MR [multiple regression] for explanatory purposes, that person is exploring relationships between multiple variables in a sample to shed light on a phenomenon, with a goal of generalizing this new understanding to a population. When one uses MR for prediction, one is using a sample to create a regression equation that would optimally predict a particular phenomenon within a particular population. Here the goal is to use the equation to predict outcomes for individuals *not in the sample used in the analysis*. Hypothetically, researchers might create a regression equation to predict twelfth-grade achievement test scores from eighth-grade variables, such as family socioeconomic status, race, sex, educational plans, parental education, GPA, and participation in school-based extracurricular activities. The goal is not to understand why students achieve at a certain level, but to create the best equation so that, for example, guidance counselors could predict future achievement scores for their students, and (hopefully) intervene with those students identified as at risk for poor performance, or to select students into programs based on their projected scores. *And while theory is useful for identifying what variables should be in a prediction equation, the variables do not necessarily need to make conceptual sense. If the single greatest predictor of future achievement scores was the number of*

> *hamburgers a student eats, it should be in the prediction equation regardless of whether it makes sense* […] [first italics in original; second are my own] (Osborne, 2000, p. 1).

For my purposes, theory certainly was not ignored. In fact, like I stated at the conclusion of my literature review, agenda-setting and median-voter theorems proved extremely helpful in identifying potential variables that may or may not demonstrate an association with referendum passage. Unfortunately, that was where the theoretical contributions to the public school district referendum literature ends. To date, there has been no attempt theoretically analyze what variables "hang together" to best predict referendum research. Admittedly, this requires a delicate balance of achieving predictive precision without sacrificing theoretical accuracy, despite its dearth (Shmueli, 2010).

There are certainly issues of multicollinearity with use of the enter method because all variables that have previously demonstrated an association with referendum passage are input at the same time. Multicollinearity is far less of a concern in predictive as opposed to causal models (Makridakis, Wheelwright, & Hyndman, 1998; Vaughan & Berry, 2005; Shmueli, 2010). "Multicollinearity is not a problem unless either (i) the individual regression coefficients are of interest, or (ii) attempts are made to isolate the contribution of one explanatory variable to *Y*, without the influence of the other explanatory variables. *Multicollinearity will not affect the ability of the model to predict*" [emphasis added] (Makridakis, Wheelwright, & Hyndman, 1998, p. 288).

The second method by which to screen variables is a stepwise method. Stepwise procedures are fairly common in referendum research. In fact, several teams of researchers across the lifespan of the topic have used stepwise methods in order to predict the likelihood of an outcome, including Hall and Piele (1976), Bachelor (2001), Johnson and Ingle (2009),

Bowers, Metzger, and Militello (2010a), and Ingle, Johnson, Givens, and Rampelt (2013). Nevertheless, stepwise methods are not without controversy. As Menard (2002) explained, some researchers defend stepwise procedures for exploratory research while other researchers argue that the procedure demonstrates theoretical ignorance on the part of the researcher who employs it. However, Menard (2002, p. 63) clarified,

> In purely predictive research, there is no concern with causality, only with identifying a model, including a set of predictors, that provides accurate predictions of some phenomenon. … In exploratory research, there may be a concern with theory construction and development to predict and explain a phenomenon, when the phenomenon is so new or so little studied that existing "theory" amounts to little more than empirically unsupported hunches about explanations for the phenomenon.

My focus fits squarely into Menard's descriptions. It would not be fair to contend that current referendum research is purely exploratory. Indeed, median voter and agenda-setting concepts have, to some extent, driven variables selected for correlational inspection (see Maher & Skidmore, 2008; Maher & Skidmore, 2009; Amiel, Knowles, & Reschovsky, 2016). Other models, however, began with researcher curiosity, such as the effect of technology dollars on referendum outcomes, and not necessarily on prior political behavior theorems (see Beckham & Maiden, 2003). Regardless, even models with median voter and agenda-setting variables do not speak to *why* or *how* these variables differ in significance or passage likelihood across different states and contexts. As I explained above, referendum research, especially in Wisconsin, is in particular need of contextualized, theory-based explanations.

There are many factors that are correlated with the likelihood of a referendum's outcome, and, as a result, it is not uncommon for referendum literature to include upwards of 30 to 40 explanatory independent variables. The large potential pool of variables is one reason why stepwise procedures are selected (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004; Mendenhall & Sincich,

2012). There are four procedures from which to choose (adopted from Agresti & Findlay, 2009; supplemented with Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012):

1. *Backward elimination*: This procedure places all of the potential predictor variables in the model. One variable is deleted one at a time until a point is reached where all of the remaining variables make significant contributions to predicting the outcome. If every predictor makes a significant contribution to the outcome, that initial model is the final model. If not, the insignificant predictor with the largest *p*-value, controlling for the other predictors, is removed. Once removed, the model is reassessed, and the process repeats.

2. *Forward selection*: Unlike backward elimination, which begins with all eligible predictor variables included in the model, the forward selection procedure begins with none of them. One variable is added one at a time to the model until none of the remaining variables make a significant contribution to predicting the outcome. At each step, the variable added is the variable that is most significant with the smallest *p*-value.

3. *Forward stepwise*: This procedure is a slight modification to forward selection. Previously added variables are dropped if they lose their statistical significance as other variables are added. At each step, the variable added is the variable that is most significant with the smallest *p*-value, and, once that variable is added, variables that no longer make contributions to predicting *y* are dropped. Therefore, a variable added may later be dropped.

4. *Backward stepwise*: This procedure is a slight modification from both backward elimination and forward stepwise. Previously dropped variables are added if they gain statistical significance as other variables are dropped. A variable that had been dropped may later be added again.

A determination of statistical significance must be made regardless of the four procedures used. Menard (2002) asserted that the standard 0.05 *p*-value be relaxed in order to prevent the failure to find a relationship between the predictor and outcome when one exists, especially since the predictor may still contribute some predictive value. Thus, Menard (2002) recommended *p*-values between 0.15 to 0.20. In this sort of exploratory, predictive research, it is better to err on the side of finding predictor variables that contribute as opposed to eliminating "bad" ones (Menard, 2002, pp. 64-65). This would not be true if the purpose of the research was causal.

Multicollinearity did not present the same sort of nonissue with stepwise procedures as it did with the enter method. Variables that are highly collinear have inflated standard errors which affects whether the variable will demonstrate significance, and collinear variables have unstable beta coefficients (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012; Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). Thus, a stepwise procedure may be dropping variables that improve predictive effectiveness. One way I measured this effect was by running a stepwise procedure without attention to multicollinearity and predicted results based on that model. Then, I reran the respective stepwise procedure with variables removed that had a variance inflation factor above the standard of 10 and again calculated the predictions (Midi, Sarkar, & Rana, 2010; Menard, 2002; Myers, 1990). The model that had the "best" predictions according to the tools outlined in the previous section was chosen for further review because accurate predictions were a top priority. If they had similar prediction metrics, I will chose the model with fewer predictor variables to lessen the load of data collection for practitioners.

The third variable selection option is the best subsets algorithm. The best subsets process compares all of the possible models that could be developed from the eligible predictors. "Best" is defined by the researcher. For instance, this could be Mallows's C_p, AIC, or adjusted-R^2. If the

researcher chooses AIC, the algorithm employed by the statistical software produces a set of models built from subsets of the predictor variables (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). Further, the algorithm can provide the "best" subset according to the preferred metric but can also provide other models that are "good" but may be strong on other quality metrics. The researcher then chooses a model that balances quality of prediction, parsimony, and the preferred evaluative metric.

Unfortunately, the computational processing power needed for these calculations was astronomically expensive. Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Neter (2004) said that the best subsets algorithm may be excessive when the potential pool of predictor variables reaches into the 30s or 40s. More recently, Hastie, Tibshirani, and Tibshirani (2017) wrote, "The accepted view in statistics for many years has been that this problem is not solvable beyond (say) p in the 30s, this view being shaped by the available software for best subset selection." The research for this dissertation included 60 variables.

Despite the computational difficulties posed by best subsets regression, the process was still used as a secondary complement to the enter or stepwise methods described above. For example, even though multicollinearity does not pose problems for statistically sound and effective prediction, multicollinearity is at its root redundant information (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). It is reasonable to assume that a school district considering an upcoming referendum will have fairly limited resources for gathering data to predict the outcome. If the district is able to collect data on one predictor that will only be redundant with other predictors, it makes sense to prioritize one of the variables. With that in mind, when computationally possible, I ran a best subsets regression on the remaining set of predictor variables after a "best" model was chosen. The purpose was to ascertain whether a subset of these "best" predictors could be

utilized that cut down resource-intensive data-gathering for school districts. If predictive value was not sacrificed, it made sense to use a model with a smaller number of predictor variables. Additionally, it made little sense to identify a subset of variables from a model that did not have high predictive effectiveness. In other words, it did not do much good to run a best subsets algorithm on an already poor model.

The final variable selection method is the least absolute shrinkage and selection operator (LASSO). Relative to the other variable selection techniques, this is quite new and has only been included in some statistical software packages as recently as this year. The overarching goal of LASSO regression is twofold: identify the variables and respective coefficients that reduce predictions errors and produce a parsimonious model when a great number of potential variables are available to a researcher (Ranstam & Cook, 2018). For instance, this could mean attempting to predict a response to a particular survey question from a survey that included over one-hundred questions.

LASSO is conceptually very similar to ridge regression and ridge regression's use in capping beta coefficients that are suffering from the effects of multicollinearity. The process works as follows (adopted from Tibshirani, 1996; Tibshirani, 2011; Hastie, Tibshirani, & Wainwright, 2015; Hastie, Tibshirani, & Friedman, 2017). First, variables are standardized so that units are comparable. Second, the data is split into two samples: a learning set and a testing set. Third, the learning set is used to build a model that has strong predictive value and a much narrower subset of variables. To determine which predictor variables are selected, a series of test models is run using automated *k*-fold cross-validation in the learning set. In each fold, the absolute values of all beta coefficients are summed. This sum is then multiplied by a tuning parameter called lambda (λ). This creates a "penalty" known as L1. The penalty is subtracted

from each beta coefficient. If the penalty is bigger than the coefficient, the variable will be dropped from the model so that only strongly contributing variables remain. Thus, a λ of 0 means no penalty will be applied, no variables will be removed, and the resulting model is the same as an OLS regression. A λ that approaches infinity removes all variables and simply approximates the mean of the outcome. Thus, any positive λ is potentially available; this is why automation is required.

A statistical program begins with a particular λ, applies it to the k-1 subsample, develops a potential prediction model, applies the model to the remaining subsample, and measures the R^2 and mean square error. (A variation substitutes these model evaluations with a minimum Bayesian information criterion rather than the R^2 and mean square error.) This is repeated k times. The program will then use a smaller λ in order to allow more variables without sacrificing predictive capabilities, capabilities that include penalties for unnecessary predictors. If the reduction in variables produces better or, at least, no worse prediction, this new λ becomes the "winner." Eventually, a smaller lambda will produce worse predictive capabilities than the λ prior, producing a convex shape if predictive error is modeled on a Y-axis and λ plotted on an X-axis. Put differently, the "winning" λ is the value at the bottom of the convex curve.

If the BIC variant is used, there is one "winning" λ based on R^2 and mean square error and another based on the BIC. Thus, there are two different potential models, each with its own set of successfully reduced predictor variables. Step four uses these two λ-generated model options developed in the learning data and applies the two models in the testing data, the sample half that was separated in step two. The model with the λ chosen based on R^2 and MSE is applied to the testing data and another R^2 and MSE is measured in the testing data. The model with the λ

chosen based on the minimum BIC is also applied to the testing data and an R^2 and MSE are measured using this model.

The model that produces a greater R^2 and smaller MSE is singled out. This "winning" LASSO model is, in turn, evaluated in the exact same way that models from the enter, stepwise, and best subsets are evaluated—AIC, adjusted- R^2, and so on. Furthermore, the process is the same whether the developing model is linear or logistic. If a high quality, parsimonious logistic model is sought instead, the likelihood ratio test and deviances are substituted for MSE.

While LASSO regression can be an extremely powerful way to balance the needs of parsimony and predictive capabilities, there are several downsides. First, LASSO suffers from the same atheoretical criticism as stepwise and best subset approaches: a procedure is choosing variables as opposed to acknowledging prior theoretical insight. Second, the LASSO method very intentionally introduces bias in the predictor coefficients in order to reduce the variance in prediction (Tibshirani, 2011). Thus, one is left with a model that may be highly useful in predicting an event or outcome but the coefficients are not be particularly interpretable in terms of their individual causal contributions to the outcome in question. Just as with the prior three variable selection methods, priority is granted to the left-side outcome as opposed to the accuracy of the right-side partial contributions (Ranstam & Cook, 2018).

There are four final notes to address. First, I list all of my variable screening methods in Table 5. Second, at this point, I have included the statistical tools that can be used to evaluate models for predictive efficiency, and I have presented how the models may be built. One goal of this research project is to better understand the voting behavior of people in rural districts of Wisconsin and, if quantifiable, update and improve the models by including previously omitted predictor variables. One method of uncovering unexpected voting behavior is through the use of

deviant case studies—analyzing subjects, observations, or people who do not conform to behavior that would be expected based on the statistical models developed here. I fully explain how and why deviant case studies are identified and their utility in the qualitative portion of this methods section below. Third, all of the methods above—enter, stepwise, best subsets, and LASSO—include main effects terms. I will also add potential predictor variables that have been transformed because of nonlinearity and require, for instance, a quadratic term. All of the eligible predictor variables are taken up in the next section. Fourth, in total, there are 280 models that must be built and evaluated. This includes 35 models for each of the four categories of evaluation: all locales/all years; all locales/post-Act 10; rural referendums/all years; rural referendums/post-Act 10 across enter, stepwise, best subsets, and LASSO methods with and without multicollinear terms. It also includes 140 each for both logistic and linear evaluations.

Table 5

Variable Screening Methods

1) Enter method	
2) Stepwise method	A. Backward elimination
	B. Forward selection
	C. Forward stepwise
	D. Backward stepwise
3) Best subsets method	A. Post-enter method
	B. Post-stepwise method
	C. Post-LASSO method
4) LASSO	

Note. Each stepwise selection method (A-D) can be rerun with attention to multicollinearity (VIF>10) and without attention to multicollinearity.

Predictor variables, operational definitions, and data sources.

I now turn to the variables included in the models just described. Table 6 provides the name of each variable, its definition, and the source of the data for all 60 variables included in the dataset. The variables listed in gray scale are operationalized no differently than the way they were operationalized according to the literature review. Whenever possible, I tried to maintain fidelity to these operationalizations since they had been analyzed for outcome associations in prior research. Variables with no highlight are operationalized differently because 1) the variable has not been included in prior research, or 2) there were issues of data availability. First, I explain how I operationalized variables that have not been included in prior literature. Then, I explain how I operationalized variables that have been included in prior literature but in a different manner.

Administrator salary, benefits, and local experience: Compensation packages have been analyzed for teachers but not for administrators. I included them here because of the local notoriety of a district administrator. Unlike teachers, there is typically only one district administrator, and the hiring of that person is likely to draw a great deal more local media coverage and attention. Some districts, such as Appleton in the 2000s, had co-district administrators. Salary and benefits packages were averaged when that was the case. Prior literature mentioned a district administrator's tenure of employment as a district administrator but not specifically local employment. A community may need time to gain trust in an administrator regardless of how long that person has worked in the position elsewhere.

District type: Wisconsin school districts are classified as unified, secondary, or elementary depending on the number of grades served. A unified school district serves secondary and elementary students while a secondary or elementary district serves only that respective set of students. Because these categories were not included in a previous study, there was not a great

Table 6

Dataset Variables – Name, Operationalization, Definition, and Source

School District Factors

Name	Operationalization	Definition	Source
Administrator benefits	Staff compensation	Value of superintendent fringe benefits	DPI
Administrator local experience	Feelings about school district leadership	Number of years superintendent has worked in the district	DPI
Administrator salary	Staff compensation	Superintendent salary	DPI
Administrator total experience	Feelings about school district leadership	Number of years superintendent has worked as superintendent	DPI
Change in school district size	Change in school district size	Annual percentage change in the number of students attending district schools	DPI, NCES
Debt	District financial health	Combined short-term and long-term debt of the district	DPI, NCES
District type	Author's	Coded 0 if district is unified; 1 if secondary; 2 if elementary	DPI
Economically disadvantaged students	Students' economic status	Proportion of public school students classified as economically disadvantaged	DPI, NCES

Table 6 (continued)

Football championship	Author's	Coded 1 if district won or was runner-up in state football championship; 0 if otherwise	WIAA
Levy	Author's	Amount of money levied by school district taxing authority	DPI
Limited English proficient students	Students' limited English proficiency	Proportion of students classified as limited English proficient	DPI, NCES
Locale code	District locale	Category of district locale collapsed as urban (0), suburban (1), or rural (2)	DPI, NCES
Mill rate	District tax rate	Amount of money levied per $1,000 of assessed valuation	DPI
Private school enrollment	Enrollment in alternative types of schools	Proportion of school aged children enrolled in private schools within the district	Author calculation, DPI
Proficiency – math	Student Achievement	Proportion of eighth grade students scoring advanced or proficient on state math test (1-year lag)	DPI
Proficiency – reading	Student Achievement	Proportion of eighth grade students scoring advanced or proficient on state reading test (1-year lag)	DPI

Table 6 (continued)

Public employees	Proportion of teachers in community	Proportion of community members employed in the public sector	ACS
Public school enrollment	School district size	Number of students enrolled in district schools	DPI, NCES
Racial mismatch	Racial heterogeneity	Proportion of district students who are nonwhite divided by the proportion of adults who are White	Author's calculation, ACS, DPI, NCES
Revenue – federal	Revenue sources	Proportion of revenue generated from the federal government	NCES
Revenue – local	Revenue sources	Proportion of revenue generated from local property taxes	NCES
Revenue – state	Revenue sources	Proportion of revenue generated from the state government	NCES
Students of Color	Racial heterogeneity	Proportion of students who are Students of Color	DPI, NCES
Student-staff ratio	Student-teacher ratio	Ratio of students to licensed staff members	DPI
Teacher benefits	Staff compensation	Average value of districts' teachers' fringe benefits	DPI

Table 6 (continued)

Teacher local experience	Feelings about teachers	Average number of years teachers have worked in the district	DPI
Teacher salary	Staff Compensation	Average teacher salary in that district	DPI
Teacher total experience	Feelings about teachers	Average number of years teachers have been employed as teachers	DPI
Urgency (five years)	Sense of urgency	Number of referendums held within previous five years	DPI
Urgency (total)	Sense of urgency	Total number of referendums held in revenue cap era	DPI
Referendum Factors			
Name	Operationalization	Definition	Source
Anchoring	Anchoring	Coded 1 if a referendum was on the ballot as a prior, passed referendum was expiring; coded 2 if the previously passed referendum did not include an end-year; 0 if otherwise	Author calculation, DPI
Competing referendums	Competing referendums	Number of other school district referendums on the same ballot	Author calculation, DPI

Table 6 (continued)

Diffusion	Diffusion	Number of capital referendums passed by other districts within the same athletic conference in the previous two years	Author calculation, DPI
Dollar amount	Cost of referendum	Cost of the referendum, as presented on the ballot	DPI
Length	Length of bond or tax increase	Number of years of a non-recurring referendum	DPI
Post-Act 10	Author's	Coded 1 if the referendum was held after Act 10 was enacted; 0 if otherwise	Author calculation, DPI
Refloat	Repeated referendum attempts	Coded 1 if the referendum was the first reattempt of a previously failed referendum; coded 2 if the referendum was the second attempt of a previous failed referendum; 0 if first attempt	DPI
Tax impact	Cost of referendum	Ratio of the dollar amount of the referendum to the district's property wealth	Author's calculation, DPI
Time elapsed	Time elapsed since prior referendum	Number of years since a referendum was held within revenue cap era	Author's calculation, DPI

Table 6 (continued)

Timing	Timing	Month referendum election was held	DPI
Turnout	Turnout	Combined yes and no votes divided by number of adults within district	ACS, DPI
Type	Use of dollars	Coded 0 if debt issuance; 1 if non-recurring; 2 if recurring	DPI
Use of dollars	Use of dollars	Project or fund on which referendum money is to be spent	Author's calculations
Community Factors			
Name	Operationalization	Definition	Source
Age	Age	Proportion of senior citizens in district	ACS, NCES
Age ratio	Age	Proportion of senior citizens to school-aged children	ACS, NCES
Educational attainment	Educational attainment	Proportion of community aged 25+ with a bachelor's degree or more	ACS, NCES
Equalized value	Property wealth	Total assessed value of property in district	DPI

Table 6 (continued)

Homeownership	Homeownership	Proportion of people who own a home	ACS, NCES
Households with children	Voters with school aged children	Proportion of households with school-aged children	ACS, NCES
Ideology (gubernatorial)	Political ideology	Proportion of voters voting for the GOP candidate in a gubernatorial election	Author's calculation, DPI, LTSB
Ideology (presidential)	Political ideology	Proportion of voters voting for the GOP candidate in a presidential election	Author's calculation, DPI, LTSB
Income inequality	Income inequality	Ratio of a district's mean to median income	Author's calculation, ACS, NCES
Income ratio	Author's	Ratio of district's median income to district's average teachers' salary	Author's calculation, ACS, DPI, NCES
Median income	Median income	Median income of people living in the district	ACS, NCES
Migrant population	Population churn	Proportion of people who lived in a different county one year prior	ACS, NCES
Population	Population of district	Total population of people living in district	ACS, NCES

Table 6 (continued)

Property value per member	Property wealth	Assessed property value per student	DPI
Race	Racial makeup	Proportion of district residents who are White	ACS, NCES
Sex	Sex	Proportion of adult women in district	Author's calculation, ACS, NCES
Source and steadiness of income	Source and steadiness of income	Proportion of district residents working in blue-collar professions	Author's calculation, ACS

Note. The abbreviations include American Community Survey, Department of Public Instruction, Legislative Technology Services Bureau, National Center for Education Statistics, and Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association. The author's calculations are variables constructed with data provided by these sources. A more complete description of the data sources is provided later in the Methods section. The factors correspond to the referendum factors provided in the literature review in Section Two.

deal of guidance on the effect of this potential predictor on the outcome. On the one hand, voters may support a non-unified district no differently than any other. On the other hand, voters may be less likely to support a non-unified district if their children will only spend a few years there.

Football championship: For many years, I heard the adage, "If you want to pass a referendum, win a football championship." Admittedly, this does not include many districts—even after including runners-up. Nevertheless, I coded this variable 1 for any district that won a championship or was a runner-up during the school year that they won and the school year following. The variable is an alternative way of measuring community engagement and attachment to the school district, a factor that is particularly important in rural districts where the school is the community.

Levy: This factor's operationalization is distinctly different than what can be captured by property value, property value per member, or the mill rate. Taxpayers are likely to know how much their property is worth and how much tax money they contribute. However, that remains individual and isolated. If a voter is able to see the aggregate sum of taxpayers' contributions, they may be less likely to vote yes simply because of the appearance of that number. The actual cost of running a district may not be evident to voters, and that sum may seem like plenty of money to a potential voter.

Teacher local and total experience: Administrator total experience was analyzed in prior literature, but teacher local and total experience had not. However, I believed this factor may also represent an element of trust community members have in their district. It is logical to assume that voters may be persuaded of the necessity of a referendum if convinced by a long-standing member of the faculty. I included both measures of local and total experience for the same reason I did for administrators. Voters may be influenced by the total time a person has been

teaching, but it is more likely they will put more trust in a teacher teaching in their community for a longer duration.

Anchoring: I included this as a measure of tax normality. Anecdotal experience working in and hearing from districts who are considering holding a referendum has taught me that boards of education attempt to do this before a prior referendum has expired. In this way, voters get used to a new level of taxation and are less concerned about maintaining the taxation rate than they were to initially raise the mill rate. If the mill rate lapses to a prior level, voters may recall what it was like to have a few hundred dollars back.

Income ratio: Cramer (2016) frequently discusses communities' perceptions of public employees as the "haves" in the area, teachers included. If the ratio of median income to teacher income is low, community members may feel that their money is being funneled to staff "Cadillac" benefits rather than the district's children. Additionally, voters may feel as though the district does not need extra dollars if public school teachers are already making such a great deal more than local community members.

Next, I discuss any operationalizes I produced that differed from prior operationalizations in the literature.

Locale code: I did not operationalize any differently the classification of school districts according to NCES data. However, I did collapse the districts into three categories (urban, suburban, and rural) for three reasons: 1) the locale code classification system changed several times since revenue caps were instituted; 2) locales in the NCES system were unnecessarily separated for the purposes of my research, e.g. two types of rural districts and three types of urban districts; and 3) the framework used prior to the 2005-2006 school year was not directly comparable with previous years and some judgment had to be made in grouping districts when

research included districts before and after that year (Geverdt, 2015). Between the mid-1980s and 2005, districts were categorized according to their population and relative location to a metropolitan area (Geverdt, 2015). After the 2000 census, NCES transitioned to using a combination of population and the urbanicity of the census block. (Geverdt, 2015). This resulted in the creation of 12, urban-centric categories first used in 2005-2006.

I collapsed locales in the following way. Urban districts included large city (1), midsize city (2), city-large (11), city-midsize (12), and city-small (13). Suburban districts included urban fringe of a large city (3), urban fringe of a midsize city (4), large town (5), suburban-large (21), suburban-midsize (22), and suburban-small (23). Finally, rural districts included small town (6), rural-outside metropolitan area (7), rural-inside metropolitan area (8), town-fringe (31), town-distant (32), town-remote (33), rural-fringe (41), rural-distant (42), and rural-remote (43). Table 9 lists these breakdowns and some example districts for each category of my collapsed groups. Classifications were not fixed but rather depended on the year the district held a referendum. In other words, a referendum in a town that was growing and relatively near an urbanized area may have been classified by the NCES as a town at one time and a suburb later. I updated my own locales accordingly.

As I made clear in introducing my conjectural theory, choosing a definition for "rural" is not easy procedure. Indeed, choosing an *objective* measure of rurality introduces its *own* degree of *subjectivity*. One Wisconsin-specific report in 2019 provided ten rural classification systems: urban areas; core-based statistical areas; rural-urban continuum codes; urban-rural classification scheme for counties; urban influence codes; census tract rural-urban commuting areas; United States Health Resources and Services Administration rurality; frontier and remoteness; zip code rural-urban commuting areas, and municipality urban-rural classifications (see Wisconsin Office

of Rural Health, 2019). The United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service included all of these and added labor market area codes, agricultural population-interaction zones, dependence on farming, dependence on mining, dependence on recreation, the amount of natural amenities, the proportion of people employed in the "creative classes," and degrees of oil and gas production (Cromartie & Parker, 2019).`

I made the decision to include referendums from small towns (6), towns-fringe (31), towns-distant (32), and towns-remote (33) as rural referendums for several reasons. First and foremost, I relied on my own deep knowledge of Wisconsin as a lifelong resident and researcher of the state. I have a firm understanding of the attitudes, behaviors, and predispositions of small-town Wisconsin residents, having been born and raised in one, spending the majority of my life in one, and using the entirety of my student career researching them. I understood that my fellow residents were likely to describe their area as rural. Municipality and school district boundaries are hardly coterminous. Even small municipalities can include a great deal of countryside.

For the sake of empirical precision, I supplemented my knowledge with data from the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health (WORH) and the Department of Health and Human Services Rural Health Information Hub (RHIH). My purpose in doing this was to see how these government entities classified towns that I considered rural. They agreed. Table 7 provides a list of all town districts that held a referendum in Wisconsin in 2017-2018 through 2018-2019 and their rurality according to RHIH and WORH. Fully 100 percent of Wisconsin town districts provided here are classified as rural; this lent credibility to my own choice.

Table 7

Rurality of Town Districts according to RHIH and WORH

Town District	Rural?
Arcadia	Yes

Table 7 (continued)

Baraboo	Yes
Big Foot	Yes
Brillion	Yes
Brodhead	Yes
Burlington	Yes
Delavan-Darien	Yes
Edgerton	Yes*
Ellsworth	Yes
Evansville	Yes*
Fall River	Yes
Horicon	Yes
Kiel	Yes
Manitowoc	Yes
Marshall	Yes*
Merrill	Yes
Monroe	Yes
New London	Yes
Oregon	Yes*
Plymouth	Yes
Port Edwards	Yes
Reedsburg	Yes
River Falls	Yes

Table 7 (continued)

Somerset	Yes*
Sparta	Yes
Stevens Point	Yes
Sturgeon Bay	Yes
Tomah	Yes
Union Grove	Yes
Viroqua	Yes
Whitewater	Yes
Wisconsin Heights	Yes

Note. Districts with an asterisk are classified as rural but do not qualify for rural grants because at least one census tract in the residing county is classified as urban—regardless of whether the census tract is part of the town district.

Third, I utilized Cramer's (2016) work to establish that residents from small towns can, will, and do exhibit rural consciousness even if they do not reside in a strictly country or farm area. Understandably, Cramer does not reveal the sources of her qualitative work. However, her appendices made clear that rural consciousness is deeply prevalent even in small towns with several thousand people. These sorts of communities still demonstrated the levels of community attachment, feelings of deprivation, and attitudes of animosity toward more urbanized areas that were relevant for my conjectural theory.

Fourth, I produced maps of all Wisconsin school districts according to my collapsed locale codes (Figure 61 and Figure 62) and Wisconsin's town school districts (Figure 63 and 64). I then cross-referenced these maps with other definitions of rurality. All of these maps can be found in Appendix A. The categorization of every town district as rural was by no means perfect. However, it was clear that rural districts, including towns, were noted by their distance from

urbanized areas and clusters (Figure 65); their micropolitan and non-metropolitan status (Figure 66); their micropolitan and small town commuting patterns (Figure 67); their agricultural, grassland, and forest land usage patterns (Figure 68); their density of cow and deer ratios per person (Figure 69); their low population density (Figure 70); and, for some, even their frontier status (Figure 71).

The final point regarding collapsed locale codes is my decision to include large towns as suburban. To be clear, only two districts holding a referendum have ever been included as a large town: Fond du Lac and Manitowoc, these were primarily in the late 1990s, and Fond du Lac held more referendums than Manitowoc did (five versus three). As the NCES locale code accuracy improved with advancements in GIS technology, Manitowoc eventually dropped into a town category. Fond du Lac is more difficult to classify: it is a census designated place with greater than 25,000 people, it is not inside a metropolitan statistical area, and it is not really suburban (to what would it sub?). However, I felt more comfortable including a few Manitowoc referendums as suburban than I did including more Fond du Lac referendums as rural. Moreover, the Fond du Lac land area, according to the maps, was a great deal more developed, had a high metro-area commuting core, was a more urbanized area, and had a population density on par with other suburban areas of the state (see maps).

Table 8

Locale Classifications

Mid-1980s through 2005-2006	Definition	Examples
Large city (1)	A principal city of a metropolitan area, with the city having a population greater than or equal to 250,000	Milwaukee, Maple Dale-Indian Hill, Brown Deer, Glendale-River Hills, Fox Point J2

Table 8 (continued)

Midsize city (2)	A principal city of a metropolitan area, with the city having a population less than 250,000	Madison, Superior, Janesville, Kenosha, Ashwaubenon
Urban fringe of a large city (3)	Any incorporated place, census-designated place, or non-place territory within a metropolitan area of a large city and defined as urban by the Census Bureau	Cudahy, River Falls, Grafton, Hudson, West Bend
Urban fringe of a midsize city (4)	Any incorporated place, census-designated place, or non-place territory within a metropolitan area of a midsize city and defined as urban by the Census Bureau	Oregon, West De Pere, Kohler, Ripon, Howard-Suamico
Large town (5)	An incorporated place or census-designated place with a population greater than or equal to 25,000 and located outside a metropolitan area	Fond du Lac, Manitowoc
Small town (6)	An incorporated place or census-designated place with a population less than 25,000 and greater than or equal to 2,500 and located outside a metropolitan area	Sevastopol, Park Falls, Hayward, Tomahawk, Clintonville
Rural-outside metropolitan area (7)	Any incorporated place, census-designated place, or non-place territory not within a metropolitan area and defined as rural by the Census Bureau	Stratford, Cadott, Pardeeville, Gibraltar, Weyauwega-Fremont

Table 8 (continued)

Rural-inside metropolitan area (8)	Any incorporated place, census-designated place, or non-place territory within a metropolitan area and defined as rural by the Census Bureau	Freedom, Stanley-Boyd, Belleville, Suring, Random Lake
2005-2006 through present	Definition	Examples
City-large (11)	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of 250,000 or more	Milwaukee
City-midsize (12)	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000	Madison, Green Bay
City-small (13)	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000	Waukesha, Fond du Lac, Sheboygan, Eau Claire, Racine
Suburban-large (21)	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more	Pewaukee, Verona, Greenfield, Saint Francis, Merton
Suburban-midsize (22)	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000	Kimberly, Altoona, Silver Lake J1, Chippewa Falls Area, Holmen
Suburban-small (23)	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 100,000	Sheboygan Falls, Beloit, Onalaska, Slinger, Campbellsport

Table 8 (continued)

Town-fringe (31)	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area	Lodi, Prescott, Brillion, Evansville, Winneconne
Town-distant (32)	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area	Algoma, Wautoma, Sparta, Cambridge, Reedsburg
Town-remote (33)	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area	Boscobel, Turtle Lake, Wabeno, Crandon, Mercer
Rural-fringe (41)	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster	Nekoosa, Wrightstown, Amery, Peshtigo, Hortonville
Rural-distant (42)	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster	Juda, Rio, Flambeau, Shell Lake, Osceola
Rural-remote (43)	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster	Hillsboro, Seneca, Wild Rose, Butternut, Kickapoo

Table 8 (continued)

Author's classification	Definition	Examples
Urban (0)	Collapse of 1, 2, 11, 12, 13	Racine, Appleton, Janesville, Wausau, La Crosse
Suburban (1)	Collapse of 3, 4, 5, 21, 22, 23	Sun Prairie, Little Chute, Port Washington-Saukville, Cedarburg, Whitnall
Rural (2)	Collapse of 6, 7, 8, 31, 32, 33, 41, 42, 43	Poynette, Deerfield, Manawa, Tomorrow River, Menomonie Area

Note. All definitions with the exception of author's classifications are from Geverdt (2015). Example districts are sourced from DPI and NCES.

Proficiency math and proficiency reading: I stated in my literature review how surprising it was that the relationship between student achievement and referendum passage was nearly absent. Only two studies analyzed the variable: one used standardized tests (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2003), and other used Ohio's qualitative categories of whether the school was "effective." Wisconsin implemented three testing schemes since the implementation of revenue caps: the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations, Badger examination, and Forward examination. The value for this variable is a one-year-lagged proportion of eighth grade students who tested proficient or advanced on these examinations. For the purposes of this research, I did not believe it was an issue that the tests have changed over time. Voters are not attempting to compare how their district did in 2015-2016 to a different district 20 years prior and translating the results. Rather, I believe that voters are seeing results in their local newspaper or media outlet and asking themselves, "Can the kids read? Can the kids do math?" Voters are not going to take the time to understand nuanced ways tests have changed, especially if they do not have children in school. Instead, I firmly believe voters analyze the proportion of students who are proficient or advanced and compare that to the proportion from the year or two prior.

Public employee percent: Only one study used the proportion of teachers in the community as a predictor for referendum success. Theobald and Meier (2002), however, never described in what way they obtained this data. The American Community Survey does not reach this level of granularity. Thus, as a proxy, I used the percentage of residents who are public employees. Both teachers and public employees in general have much higher rates of union membership than private sector workers and, from a nationwide perspective, also make significantly less money than similarly aged and educated private sector counterparts (Schmitt, 2010; Loewus, 2017; BLS, 2019).

Racial mismatch: This factor was included in studies that specifically analyzed the effect of age, i.e. the proportion of senior citizens, on school spending and referendum passage. Therefore, racial mismatch was only applied to these older citizens. Because I have data for entire district communities, I expanded this measure to include all adults rather than only senior citizens.

Urgency: Only one study (Johnson & Ingle, 2009) referenced generating a sense of urgency and its association with passage. The measurement, however, was not operationalized or formally defined. Instead, interviews with superintendents who ushered through referendums stated that creating a sense of urgency in constituents as a campaign strategy was key to additional passages. Presumably, referendum passage was urgent because failure would result in cuts, closures, and loss of programming. I operationalized urgency in two ways—both with regard to referendum frequency. First, urgency was measured on a shorter-term basis by how many referendums occurred in a five-year time span. Second, a chronic sense of urgency was measured by the total number of referendums held since revenue caps were emplaced in 1993. If a district was in dire financial straits or if a district put a particularly important and previously

failed referendum on the ballot several more times, I surmised that the sense of urgency was high.

This captures a slightly different feeling that Johnson and Ingle. Whereas that study analyzed how effective urgency generation was in constituents, my operationalization was a measurement of the sense of urgency in school administrators and boards, since taking a referendum to ballot was their decision. It would make little sense to spend political capital on a referendum if it was not urgent, but there was no guarantee that constituents shared this urgency. This was also the reason why urgency was classified as a school district factor as opposed to community factor in my work.

Competing Referendums: The literature review highlighted the completeness with which Michigan collects election data, including other referendum questions from the state, county, or municipality, and the order in which these questions appeared. Unfortunately, based on telephone communication with the Wisconsin Elections Commission, Wisconsin does not keep such records. Therefore, I was unable to reach the depth of the effect of competing referendums in the same way the Bowers et al. teams did. However, I was able to easily tell whether a school district chose to hold several referendum questions on the same ballot. I coded the Wisconsin referendum data based on the number of questions with which a referendum competed. If a referendum question appeared on its own, it was coded 0. If there were two referendums on the ballot on the same day, each referendum was coded 1 to indicate that each question was "competing" with one other question; a code of 2 marked three questions on the same ballot.

Diffusion: Research from Fischel (2001) and Thompson and Whitley (2017) demonstrated that constituents were quite apt at delineating high-achieving districts from low-achieving districts and continued to compare their district to others in terms of taxes and

outcomes over time. However, as Amiel, Knowles, and Reschovsky (2016) pointed out, comparisons were not always with next-door neighbors if the neighboring district was substantially different than the constituents' district. Athletic conferences provided a suitable substitute to solely analyzing neighbors because these are the schools that parents and students visit for sporting events, music competitions, or cultural events. Thus, to operationalize diffusion, I noted the frequency of passed capital referendums by schools in the same athletic conference within a two-year timeframe. Capital referendums were chosen because these were tangible examples of a community's investment in their schools and were a beacon of easy comparison for visitors. A new gym, auditorium, academic extension, or football field are easily noticed by passers-by. It is much more difficult for a visitor to know whether that district purchased a new math or reading curriculum via an operations referendum because it is not easily displayed. I followed the lead of Cellini, Ferreira, and Rothstein (2010) who showed that the effects of a referendum's passage are evident with a two-year lag and then quickly evaporated.

Refloat: In prior work, refloats (putting a previously-failed referendum on the ballot for another attempt) were analyzed causally to determine the relationship between "surviving" to another attempt and the likelihood of passage. The results were significant in some work (Bowers et al. teams) and insignificant in others (Ingle et al. teams). It was a bit of an art to determine what qualified as a refloat in Wisconsin. Only fairly recently did the referendum database provide enough granularity to determine whether a referendum was another attempt. I used a combination of cost, the project's description, and, if available, actual question wording for guidance. Referendums were coded 1 if the cost of the referendum was roughly similar and the purpose of the money was the same. Thus, the referendum was marked as a refloat if money

was funneled to the same upgrades and costs were largely equal (e.g. $10 million 10.5 million). However, I closely analyzed—to the degree the database afforded—whether the upgrades really were similar. For instance, at times, costs remained largely equal and the purposes were the same, e.g. technology upgrades, but the targeted school was different, e.g. an elementary school instead of a high school. This did not qualify as a refloat. In the same vein, a referendum did not qualify as a refloat if the purposes were the same but a second attempt was more encompassing, e.g. classroom additions and athletic upgrades at a middle school on a first attempt and classroom additions, athletic upgrades, and security improvements at a middle school on a second attempt. Because the purposes expanded, the referendum did not qualify.

Previously published literature did not delve deeply into the gatekeeping strategies of the authors, so it was difficult to tell whether my strategy was more or less conservative relative to their efforts. Of the 3,202 referendums held since 1993, 6.9 percent or 220 were classified by me as refloats. Refloat was coded as 0 if the attempt was the first, 1 if it was the first reattempt of the previously failed referendum, 2 if it was the second reattempt of the previously failed referendum, and so on.

Migrant population: The term “migrant” in this context is different than the connotation assumed with farm workers in rural Wisconsin who move into the area for a short period of time for work in agriculture. It is the term the American Community Survey uses for people who have moved within the past year. Migrant patterns were used to capture population churn in the community, a measure the literature deemed worthy of inclusion because churn may impact how attached a person is to the community and schools. The literature that included this measure approached the variable assuming that residents who lived for a greater period of time in the community would be more likely to approve a referendum than those in the community for less

time. As this research matured, however, the association was unclear, largely because "migrants" were younger residents who were more likely to have children in or soon entering school.

The ACS has several "levels" of migration relative to the prior year: same house; different house, same county; different county, same state; different state; and abroad. Even though the data is disaggregated at the school district level, the migration patterns remain measured on a county basis at the "lowest" level. To capture migration, I used the proportion of people who lived in a different county, same state; people from a different state; and people from abroad. This was not an ideal measure because school districts and counties are not coterminous. Nevertheless, moving to a different county at least implied a move across a municipality which increased the chances the school district changed as well.

Ideology: The final four variables are operationalized differently because of the methods of data collection: large-scale databases versus small-scale surveys. For instance, Chew (1992), Brunner and Balsdon (2004), Tedin, Matland, and Weiher (2001) used surveys of sample voters in California and Texas, and these surveys included ideological preferences. Amiel, Knowles, and Reschovsky (2016) used ward-level data of gubernatorial elections at the municipality level and, for municipalities divided by school district boundaries, assigned a share of voters to each using the proportion of property wealth in each municipality belonging to a school district. Shober (2011) placed all wards into school districts. For divided wards, he aggregated wards into Census blocks and made geographically proportionate allocations of presidential election voters. Lastly, Stevens and Mason (1996) used proxy measures of ideology precisely because of the difficulty in disaggregation. They measured liberalism by the proportion of people voting for a freeze on nuclear weapon development on the same ballot.

Like these other researchers, I quickly learned that obtaining election results disaggregated by school district was a remarkably difficult thing to do. Any number of election databases can provide presidential, congressional, state-level, and local-level data. Indeed, many are a few Google clicks away. However, these databases collected data by ward, municipality, county, state, or congressional level. School districts, as any education researcher can attest, do not neatly overlay with these more commonly searchable entities. Instead, school districts cross cities and villages, wards are split, and mapping is incredibly difficult. In fact, my hunt for congressional election results disaggregated by school district included, but was not limited to, organizations or groups including the Wisconsin Legislative Technology Services Bureau, University of Wisconsin Applied Population Lab, political science librarians, education librarians, the Department of Revenue, the Wisconsin Elections Commission, Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Education Association Council, National Education Association, Lucy Burns Institute, Ballotpedia, L2 Consultants, The Shop Data Consulting, the Republican Party of Wisconsin, the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, the Roper Center, Professor Michael Wagner, Professor Katherine Cramer, and the Data Information Services Library. After months of dead ends, Jamie Martindale, a librarian with the Robinson Library in the University of Wisconsin Geography Department, and Codie See, a Program Specialist with the Wisconsin State Cartograph's Office, became invaluable resources for my data collection.

First, two publicly available and preexisting GIS maps were downloaded from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Legislative Technology Services Bureau (LTSB). The DPI map provided 2018 boundaries for all school districts in the state of Wisconsin. The LTSB map provided election results for 6,975 wards, also from 2018. A "union" was produced between these maps which essentially laid one map over the other. This created thousands of

boundaries over the state of Wisconsin, most of which at this point were largely meaningless as wards and school districts were divided many times over. Second, because my research focused specifically on a measure of ideological political conservatism, Republican vote shares were introduced into the model via the ward data in order to create a calculation of the percentage of voters who voted for a Republican congressional candidate in that particular year's election. In other words, the number of people who voted for the Republican congressional candidate was divided by the number of people who voted for a congressional candidate in total in that particular November general election.

At first, congressional elections were purposefully chosen in order to maximize frequency and turnout. However, for reasons that were unclear, there was a great deal more unreported ward-level data from the LTSB for congressional elections than presidential and gubernatorial elections. The vote-tallying system broke when a ward went unreported because the program did not know how to allocate the votes. This did not occur with presidential or gubernatorial elections. Thus, I sacrificed frequency for availability. However, I included both presidential and gubernatorial election results as predictors because turnout and issues may be vastly different in each case because of the off-cycle characteristic of Wisconsin's election for governor.

When a ward was divided by a school district boundary, the entirety of a ward's election results was assigned to the number of school districts intersecting it. In this way, the results were incorrectly multiplied by a factor of however many times a ward was divided by a school district. The third step rectified this issue. Election results were divided by the percentage of land a school district occupied in a ward. In other words, if a school district overlapped with 60 percent of a ward's land area, 60 percent of the Republican vote share and total vote was assigned to that

school district area. Finally, ward boundaries needed to be "dissolved" in order to put back together school district boundaries. This was necessary because of step one—the division of wards and boundaries many times over. School district boundaries were reassembled using school district-specific state identification numbers used by DPI, and each "piece" of that school district was realigned in order to total each section's total Republican vote shares. The number ultimately reported to me was the percentage of people who voted Republican in that school district in that particular year.

Referendums do not necessarily occur on general election dates and especially November general election dates. If a referendum was held during a general election year, I used the measure of ideology from the general election held that year. For example, if a referendum was held in 2004, I used the presidential election results from 2004. If a referendum was held in an off year, I used the election results temporally nearest: referendums in 2003 and 2005 also used 2004 presidential election results. If a referendum was held in a midterm year, I used an average of results on either end: 2002 referendums used the mean of 2000 and 2004 presidential election results.

Certainly, there are limitations to this methodology. Those limitations (and their defenses) are mine and mine alone. Both Ms. Martindale and Mr. See were very clear about the potential drawbacks to this method. For instance, because a school district occupied 60 percent of a ward did not necessarily mean 60 percent of the population (or even 60 percent of Republican voters) resided in that portion. Voters may not be randomly scattered uniformly throughout a ward. However, I went ahead with this method because wards remained fairly compact. On average, they were approximately three miles by three miles. I communicated my research choices, and they helped generate the function that produced the results I requested. It is

worth repeating that these research designs were mine alone and did not reflect the decisions of the staff at the Robinson Library or the State Cartographer's Office.

Households with school-aged children: Referendum results were disaggregated by yes and no votes and no other measure. The survey methods used by researchers named just above were able to understand not only how people voted but also whether they had children in public schools. Again, not having survey data, I substituted the proportion of households with a person under the age of 18, regardless of whether that person was the head-of-household's biological child. This better captured blended families and intergenerational families. It assumed, however, that voters and heads-of-households voted at the same rate.

Sex: While not common, some literature included the effects of sex on referendum passage since women usually assume the primary caretaking role of the household in a heterosexual relationship. Like head-of-household data, this assumed that women vote at the same proportion they are found in the population. This data collection decision was a conscious decision to sacrifice highly-precise, smaller-scale data with some data proxies relative to the entire population of Wisconsin school districts.

Source & steadiness of income: Researchers included this predictor unevenly over time. It is meant to capture whether voters will be more likely to approve a tax hike if they feel that they will be able to continue affording the tax hike a few years down the road. The thought was that if the economy feels shaky, unemployment is rising, or GDP is shrinking, voters may be less likely to vote yes. I followed the lead of Piele and Hall (1973) and divided the proportion of residents into white- and blue-collar jobs according to occupational categories. This research assumed that districts with a greater proportion of blue-collar jobs were less likely to approve

referendums because of the American economy's shift to the service sector, loss of manufacturing jobs, and blue-collar automation.

Unfortunately, a clear and definitive definition of "blue-collar" was as opaque as a clear and definitive definition of "rural." Moreover, occupational categories gained greater granularity over time, leading to the classifications of more and more occupations. In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau classified blue-collar jobs as occupations within the construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations (Fronczek & Johnson, 2003). I included the following occupations as blue-collar workers: precision production, craft and repair occupations; machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors; transportation and material moving occupations; and handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers (Buckley, 2003; Krieger, Barbeau, & Soobader, 2005; Morefield, Ribar, & Ruhm, 2010; Arheart et al., 2011). Because U.S. military members are increasingly representative of lower SES ranks, I emulated the Minneapolis Federal Reserve and included occupations from the armed forces (Wirtz, 2015). I did not, however, follow their lead in including service and sales-related occupations because these occupations included executives and high-powered managers along with secretaries and assistants (Krieger, Barbeau, & Soobader, 2005). Only very recently were these jobs disaggregated more thoroughly. Finally, because of the economic vulnerability of Wisconsin farmers (Barrett, 2019a; 2019b), I included occupations in farming, forestry, and fishing, excluding executives and managers (Morefield, Ribar, & Ruhm, 2010; Wirtz, 2015).

Finally, I explain my coding process for categorizing the use of referendum money, even though it is included in prior literature in similar fashions. This is an entirely separate predictor than the referendum type, which is classified by DPI as debt issuance, non-recurring, or recurring. Usage was divided into five categories: capital, operations, refinance, multiple, or

undefined. Capital referendums were further divided into ten subcategories and operations referendums divided into eight subcategories. Table 9 outlines the various categories.

Table 9

Categories of Referendum Money Use

1	Capital	11	Renovations and upgrades – Academic
		12	Renovations and upgrades – Athletic
		13	Renovations and upgrades – Maintenance
		14	Renovations and upgrades – Multiple
		15	Renovations and upgrades – Undefined
		21	Renovations and additions – Academic
		22	Renovations and additions – Athletic
		23	Renovations and additions – Maintenance
		24	Renovations and additions – Multiple
		25	Renovations and additions – Undefined
		31	New construction – Academic
		32	New construction – Athletic
		33	New construction – Maintenance
		34	New construction – Multiple
		35	New construction – undefined
		4	Demolitions
		5	Transportation
		6	Building and land purchases
		7	Safety and security
		8	Technology

Table 9 (continued)

		9	Multiple capital
		10	Undefined
2	Operations	41	Salaries and personnel
		42	Educational programming
		43	Prevent closures
		44	Fund balances
		45	Retirement
		46	Operate new facility
		47	Multiple operations
		48	Undefined
3	Refinance	51	Refinancing
4	Multiple	61	Capital and operations
5	Undefined	71	Undefined

To define a referendum's fund usage, I first decided whether the money was used to build anything new. If not, and the project was for preexisting school property, I subcategorized the referendum according to whether the renovations and upgrades were for academic use (i.e. classrooms and laboratories), athletics (i.e. gymnasiums, locker rooms, fields, courts), maintenance (i.e. HVAC, buildings and grounds, energy), multiple categories (i.e. a new roof, an upgraded science laboratory, and a new basketball court), or undefined (i.e. no reason was provided in the database or the reason was vague, such as "general improvements to school facilities").

If the money was used to build something new, I decided whether it was a new addition onto a piece of the facility that already existed or whether construction was for a brand-new entity. Rows 21 through 25 included construction for additions to a part of the facility that already existed. For instance, adding classroom space, additional parking spaces for buses, or expanded weight room facilities qualified for these subcategories, and these were again subcategorized according to academics, athletics, maintenance, multiple, or undefined.

If the money was used to build something new, it was categorized under rows 31 through 35. These included projects such as a new middle school, a second gymnasium, or a school-community pool space. I also made the judgment to include the biggest ticket items in this category because of their size and note. For instance, if a school already had a gym or auditorium but were knocking them down to build new facilities, I included them in rows 31 through 35. Technically, the facility portion may have existed before, but, if they were being rebuilt, I made the judgment to include them as new construction as opposed to an upgrade because of the relative cost difference in updating a single science laboratory versus outfitting an upgraded performing arts facility.

Subcategory 4 was used for demolition of old, unused facilities that were not being rebuilt. Subcategory 5 was used for purchases such as buying new buses. Subcategory 6 was used for building or land purchases that may be used for additional developments to accommodate growth in the future but would not be improved at the time. Subcategory 7 was used for safety and security upgrades. I chose to separate this from maintenance because of the frequency with which these were offered and the attention and anxiety school shootings produce. Subcategory 8 was used for technology improvements such as wireless internet and rewiring telephone systems. Subcategory 9 was used for large, omnibus referendum questions that may

include money for a new elementary school, middle school technology upgrades, new doors at the high school, and roof repairs to the bus garage. Finally, subcategory 10 was used for vague capital expenses that were more common in older referendums, e.g. descriptions of "general upkeep."

Operations referendums encompassed eight subcategories. Subcategory 41 was used for personnel salaries and included salary boosts for current staff and/or allocation of additional salary money for more positions. Subcategory 42 included educational programming which included funds like maintenance of world language programs or departmental curriculum updates. While fairly uncommon, subcategory 43 coded referendum questions specifically mentioning the prevention of closing down the district. Subcategory 44 was used for referendum questions targeting specific fund balances, such as Fund 41 capital expenditures. Subcategory 45 was used for referendums that contribute to Wisconsin Retirement System obligations. Subcategory 46 was often paired with new construction or substantial upgrades and was used to maintain operations of a facility upgrade such as a pool or high-tech performing arts center. Subcategory 47 was used for multiple operations but did not include any capital projects, e.g. salaries and educational programming. Finally, subcategory 48 was used for unspecific operations expenses.

The last three categories do not have subcategories. Some referendums are specifically used to refinance debts when the debts exceeded the $1 million limit. Any refinancing was coded 51. Referendums with many varied projects were coded as 61. In general, I noticed a general trend from separating projects into two to eight questions at a time to one, large focused question that I presumed was meant to include all of the public's preferred projects into one. In this way, a group of parents who wanted upgrades to athletic facilities were also going to have to vote yes

for other projects if they were all wrapped up into one question. In the past, the list for these projects was as varied as the districts and might include one question for reconfiguring building entrances, upgrading security cameras, building tech-ed classrooms, updating science labs, purchasing instructional materials, replacing windows on older buildings, rewiring electrical infrastructure, and building additional custodial space to operate these improvements. Lastly, category 71 was used almost exclusively for referendums in the very early stages of revenue caps. At that point, DPI's referendum database included very little information other than that the election occurred, its date, and the result.

There were several factors that were not included as predictors in this analysis. These include 1) feelings toward taxes; 2) knowledge and information about spending; 3) equalitarianism; 4) campaigns, education, and messaging; and 5) ballot language. Feelings toward taxes was very intentionally removed because in the past this was measured on surveys by political ideology. However, based on my literature review and positionality, I believed this was flawed. As I have explained, I believed using conservatism as a substitute for propensity to support tax increases broke down at the local level. Without the use of survey data, I was not able to get a feeling for how knowledgeable voters were about the impacts of the referendum based on exit questionnaires, nor was I able to gather voters' affect toward equalitarianism. Similarly, I was unable to reproduce the qualitative work that investigated the effect of particular types of campaign messaging from hired consultants or community groups. Lastly, I did not include a measure related to ballot language complexity because the referendum questions that were provided in the database—a relatively recent inclusion—were worded in a very similar manner regardless of school district type, location, or needs.

Next, I provide more clarity on the sources of these variables. Administrators' and teachers' salary, benefits, total experience, and local experience are included in DPI's public school staff reports. School districts' total enrollment, annual change in enrollment, students' English proficiency, students' economic status, and students' racial characteristics are provided by the NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) table generators, DPI WISEdash enrollment option, and the omnibus Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS) historical files. School district debt and revenue proportions are available via the NCES form F-33 finance survey. The district type and the boundaries for political ideology measures are available via DPI's Open GIS Mapping Data portal. Football results are available through the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association's (WIAA) football state results archive. Districts' levy and mill rates are available through the DPI's School Financial Services (SFS) Basic Facts Section H Equalized Levy and Tax Rates. Locale codes are available through the CCD and DPI's EDFact's Federal Data Reporting School District Directory. Private school enrollment is held in DPI's WISEdash annual private school enrollment report. Student achievement reports are made public through DPI's WISEdash WINSS, Badger, and Forward download types. Student-staff ratios are available through CCD, WISEdash WINSS files, and the Wisconsin School and District Performance Reports.

Referendum urgency, anchoring, competition, dollar amount, length, date, refloat, impact, time elapsed, turnout, type, and use are all available through DPI's SFS Custom Referenda Reporting portal. Schools' athletic conference memberships, used for referendum diffusion, are available in the WISEdash Agency download type.

All of the data sources from the American Community Survey (ACS) are generated via the same medium: the United States Census Bureau's American FactFinder people and housing

guided searches. The 1990 NCES School District Data Book and the 2000 NCES School District Tabulation provided community data prior to FactFinder's existence. Community data gathered from the ACS, Data Book, and District Tabulation include occupational categories, age, sex, educational attainment, homeownership, households with children, mean income, median income, migrant population, total population, race, and sex. The ward-level data for district political ideology is available from the Wisconsin Legislative Technology Services Bureau Open Election Data portal.

Descriptive statistics of predictive models.

This section provides some initial analyses and descriptive statistics of the models' predictors. Descriptive statistics for the variables, referendum trends over time, and some variable correlations are presented here in order to provide the reader with a general sense of the scope of Wisconsin referendums since the institution of revenue caps in 1993. I set up each school year to run from July 1 through June 30 of the following year, which follows the financial year. Thus, a referendum held in August was considered part of the upcoming school year while a referendum held in June was considered a part of the previous school year. In total, 3,202 referendums were included in this analysis. These observations included every referendum held between July 1, 1993 and June 30, 2019. Table 10 provides the mean, median, range, and standard deviation for all continuous variables included as potential predictors.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Predictor Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
School District Factors					
Administrator benefits (dollars)	38,668	39,539	0	98,033	12,284

Table 10 (continued)

Administrator local experience (years)	8.73	6	0	40	7.89
Administrator salary (dollars)	129,543	129,314	14,544	257,017	29,936
Administrator total experience (years)	25.56	27	0	50	9.98
Change in school district size (%)	0.08	0.08	-19.76	19.9	3.46
Debt (dollars-millions)	16	7.99	0	205	22.6
Economically disadvantaged students (%)	26.47	24.52	0	98.69	14.78
Levy (dollars-millions)	13.4	6.53	0.31	303	22.8
Limited English proficient students (%)	2.23	1.02	0	36.7	3.42
Mill rate (dollars)	10.25	9.83	1.58	25.84	3.10
Private school enrollment (%)	12.86	11.99	0	72.77	8.17
Proficiency – math %)	47.16	45.25	2.86	100	17.31
Proficiency – reading (%)	58.29	57.53	0	100	22.42
Public employees (%)	11.75	11.2	4.90	39.63	3.59

Table 10 (continued)

Public school enrollment (students)	2,365.02	1,308.5	62	27,274	3,412.92
Racial mismatch (ratio)	0.12	0.08	0	1.34	0.14
Revenue – federal (%)	4.5	3.92	0.23	48.27	3.12
Revenue – local (%)	47.72	43.48	14.01	97.97	16.76
Revenue – state (%)	47.78	52.22	1.17	75.62	16.51
Students of Color (%)	8.59	5.7	0	99.63	9.87
Student-staff ratio (ratio)	12.54	12.70	5.78	20.44	1.53
Teacher benefits (dollars)	24,725	24,050	7,716	51,811	4,524
Teacher local experience (years)	12.84	12.8	1	23.83	2.28
Teacher salary (dollars)	58,148	57,702	35,586	86,094	6,022
Teacher total experience (years)	15.31	15.22	3.38	26.5	2.26
Urgency – five years (years)	3.47	3	0	22	2.7
Urgency – total (years)	5.95	5	1	29	4.66

Table 10 (continued)

Referendum Factors					
Competing referendums (number of referendums)	0.78	0	0	7	1.08
Diffusion (number of referendums)	1.57	1	0	12	1.91
Dollar amount (dollars-millions)	10.4	4.07	0.024	174	16.2
Tax impact (ratio)	0.01	0.01	0.000019	0.1	0.02
Time elapsed (years)	3.11	1.98	0	22.88	3.79
Turnout (%)	40.03	37.2	0.04	89.85	17.11
Community Factors					
Age (years)	15.72	15.30	3.79	45.39	4.95
Age ratio (ratio)	93.51	85.94	28.75	477.75	43.29
Educational attainment (%)	22.35	19.63	7.49	76.5	10.27
Equalized value (dollars-millions)	1,350	716	55.6	27,600	2,060
Homeownership (%)	77.62	78.98	45.8	96.97	7.68
Households with children (%)	31.43	31.3	9.6	51.38	6.42

Table 10 (continued)

Ideology (gubernatorial) (%)	58.32	59.05	20.16	84.8	11.67
Ideology (presidential) (%)	49.74	49.32	16.58	78.6	10.57
Income inequality (ratio)	1.21	1.21	0.99	2.45	0.1
Income ratio (ratio)	113.68	110.11	67.15	194.71	22.82
Median income (dollars)	63,986	61,024	35,743	125,744	14,445
Migrant population (%)	4.65	4.2	0.42	23.01	2.37
Population (people)	15,248	8,071	620	246,375	24,716
Property value per member (dollars)	673,266	467,484	141,580	13,900,000	827,776
Race (%)	95.3	96.83	51.82	100	5.13
Sex (%)	49.97	50	38.2	58.06	1.9
Source and steadiness of income (%)	45.99	47.31	9.61	65.27	8.81

Note. All dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation to reflect dollars amounts for the 2018-2019 academic year. Annual inflation is calculated by averaging the consumer price index across calendar years. I, too, took the average but adjusted the year to reflect academic years instead.

Table 11 provides frequencies for categorical and dummy variables included as potential predictors of referendum passage. As a reminder, the unit of analysis for this research was the

referendum. The data presented in Table 11 is of the referendums held, not of districts in the state. For example, 2,962 or 92.5 percent of the referendums held since 1993 were on the ballot in unified districts. Many unified districts are represented more than once; some are not included at all.

Table 11

Frequency and Percentage Distribution for Categorical and Dummy Variables

Variable	Categories	Frequency and percentage
School District Factors		
District Type	Unified	2,962 (92.5)
	Secondary	66 (2.06)
	Elementary	174 (5.43)
Football championship	No championship appearance	3,037 (94.85)
	Championship appearance	165 (5.15)
Locale code (collapsed)	Urban	153 (4.78)
	Suburban	770 (24.05)
	Rural	2,279 (71.17)
Referendum Factors		
Anchoring	No expiration	2,848 (88.94)
	Expiration	311 (9.71)
	Unclear expiration	43 (1.34)
Length and type	1 year (NR)	41 (1.28)
	2 years (NR)	49 (1.53)
	3 years (NR)	199 (6.21)
	4 years (NR)	112 (3.5)

Table 11 (continued)

	5 years (NR)	171 (5.34)
	6 years (NR)	13 (0.41)
	7 years (NR)	11 (0.34)
	8 years (NR)	1 (0.03)
	9 years (NR)	1 (0.03)
	10 years (NR)	14 (0.44)
	14 years (NR)	2 (0.06)
	15 years (NR)	1 (0.03)
	20 years (NR)	2 (0.06)
	Undefined years (NR)	143 (4.47)
	Recurring	512 (15.99)
	Debt issuance	1,930 (60.27)
Post-Act 10	Pre-Act 10	2,371 (74.05)
	Post-Act 10	831 (25.95)
Refloat	0	2,982 (93.13)
	1	194 (6.06)
	2	24 (0.75)
	3	2 (0.06)
Timing	January	12 (0.37)
	February	339 (10.59)
	March	39 (1.22)
	April	1,272 (39.73)
	May	190 (5.93)

Table 11 (continued)

	June	88 (2.75)
	July	14 (0.44)
	August	24 (0.75)
	September	225 (7.03)
	October	161 (5.03)
	November	759 (23.7)
	December	79 (2.47)
Use	Renovations and upgrades – Academic	89 (2.78)
	Renovations and upgrades – Athletic	51 (1.59)
	Renovations and upgrades – Maintenance	100 (3.12)
	Renovations and upgrades – Multiple	62 (1.94)
	Renovations and upgrades – Undefined	45 (1.41)
	Renovations and additions – Academic	398 (12.43)
	Renovations and additions – Athletic	12 (0.37)
	Renovations and additions – Maintenance	2 (0.06)
	Renovations and additions – Multiple	257 (8.03)
	Renovations and additions – Undefined	0 (0)

Table 11 (continued)

	New construction – Academic	274 (8.56)
	New construction – Athletic	103 (3.22)
	New construction – Maintenance	6 (0.19)
	New construction – Multiple	11 (0.34)
	New construction – undefined	2 (0.06)
	Demolitions	2 (0.06)
	Transportation	6 (0.19)
	Building and land purchases	39 (1.22)
	Safety and security	7 (0.22)
	Technology	58 (1.81)
	Multiple capital	422 (13.18)
	Undefined	8 (0.25)
	Salaries and personnel	26 (0.81)
	Educational programming	200 (6.25)
	Prevent closures	0 (0)
	Fund balances	16 (0.5)
	Retirement	7 (0.22)
	Operate new facility	135 (4.22)
	Multiple operations	30 (0.94)
	Undefined	141 (4.4)
	Refinancing	15 (0.47)

Table 11 (continued)

	Capital and operations	334 (10.43)
	Undefined	337 (10.52)

Note. The first number represents the count. The parenthetical number represents the proportion that category represents of that factor.

Moving forward, I break down Table 12 to provide a more detailed picture of referendum passage based on school year (1993-1994 through 2018-2019), the type of locale in which the referendum is held (based on my collapsed categories—urban, rural, suburban), the type of referendum (debt issuance, non-recurring, recurring), and the amount of money approved via referendum. I also briefly address some ideological components of referendum passage as they pertain to my literature review in section two.

Of the 3,202 referendums proposed, there have been more passages than failures. Approximately 56 percent of referendums held during these 26 years have been approved and approximately 44 percent failed.

Table 12

Referendum Results – All Years

Result	Frequency	Percentage
Failed	1,400	43.72
Passed	1,802	56.28
Total	3,202	100

The total number of referendums and the number of referendums passed is also presented graphically in Figure 4.

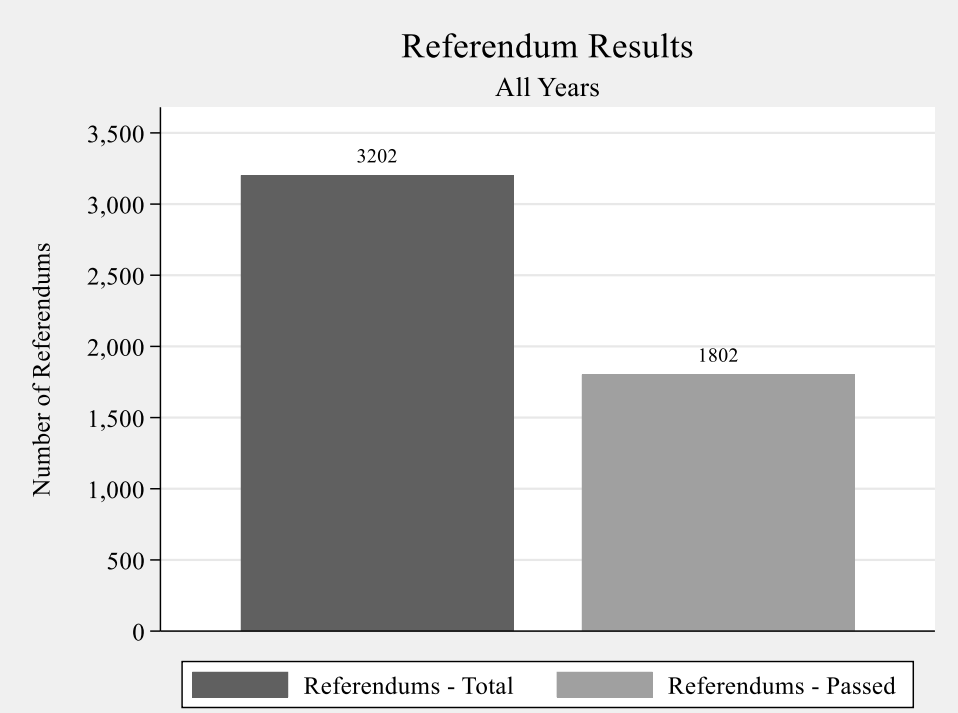

Figure 4: Referendum Results - All Years

Referendum proposals and passages vary substantially by year. Table 13 and Figure 5 demonstrate this variability. The highest number of referendums took place in the 1998-1999 school year. There were 230 referendums total, representing 7.18 percent of all referendums held in the revenue cap era. The greatest number of failures also occurred in 1998-1999 with 131, and the fewest number of failures was 15 in 2017-2018. In terms of percentage, the highest rate of failures happened during the 2002-2003 school year when 70.94 percent of referendums failed while the lowest rate of failures occurred in

Table 13

Referendum Results – By School Year

School year	Failed – Frequency (Percentage)	Passed – Frequency (Percentage)	Total – Frequency (Percentage)
1993-1994	32 (51.61)	30 (48.39)	62 (100)
1994-1995	77 (49.36)	79 (50.64)	156 (100)

Table 13 (continued)

1995-1996	48 (37.80)	79 (62.20)	127 (100)
1996-1997	71 (38.80)	112 (61.20)	183 (100)
1997-1998	104 (51.23)	99 (48.77)	203 (100)
1998-1999	131 (56.96)	99 (43.04)	230 (100)
1999-2000	67 (42.23)	88 (56.77)	155 (100)
2000-2001	95 (47.98)	103 (52.02)	198 (100)
2001-2002	80 (65.04)	43 (34.96)	123 (100)
2002-2003	83 (70.94)	34 (29.06)	117 (100)
2003-2004	43 (49.43)	44 (50.57)	87 (100)
2004-2005	54 (51.43)	51 (48.57)	105 (100)
2005-2006	47 (44.76)	58 (55.24)	105 (100)
2006-2007	64 (42.95)	85 (57.05)	149 (100)
2007-2008	55 (52.38)	50 (47.62)	105 (100)
2008-2009	58 (50.43)	57 (49.57)	115 (100)
2009-2010	34 (45.33)	41 (54.67)	75 (100)

Table 13 (continued)

2010-2011	36 (47.37)	40 (52.63)	76 (100)
2011-2012	21 (35.59)	38 (64.41)	59 (100)
2012-2013	38 (37.25)	64 (62.75)	102 (100)
2013-2014	19 (29.69)	45 (70.31)	64 (100)
2014-2015	47 (32.64)	97 (67.36)	144 (100)
2015-2016	21 (22.58)	72 (77.42)	93 (100)
2016-2017	40 (28.78)	99 (71.22)	139 (100)
2017-2018	15 (17.86)	69 (82.14)	84 (100)
2018-2019	20 (13.70)	126 (86.30)	146 (100)

2018-2019 when 13.7 percent of referendums on the ballot failed. The greatest and fewest number of passages bookend the data. The greatest number of passages occurred in 2018-2019 with 126, and the fewest number of passages was 30 in 1993-1994. In terms of percentage, the highest rate of passages also happened during the 2018-2019 school year when 86.3 percent of referendums passed. The lowest rate of passages coincided with the highest rate of failure in 2002-2003 when 29.06 percent of referendums on the ballot passed. Figure 5 is similar to Figure 3 but breaks the total and passed referendums by year.

Figure 6 is a representation of the proportion of referendums passed by all districts who held a referendum between 1993-1994 and 2018-2019. Also included in this graph is the overall

average percent approved across all years: on average, 57.11 percent of referendums pass each year.

This is helpful to see at which school years the proportion approved is above normal as determined by overall mean. Third, this graph includes a linear trend line across all school years in order to see in what general direction approvals are moving. Fourth, graphs of proportions passed

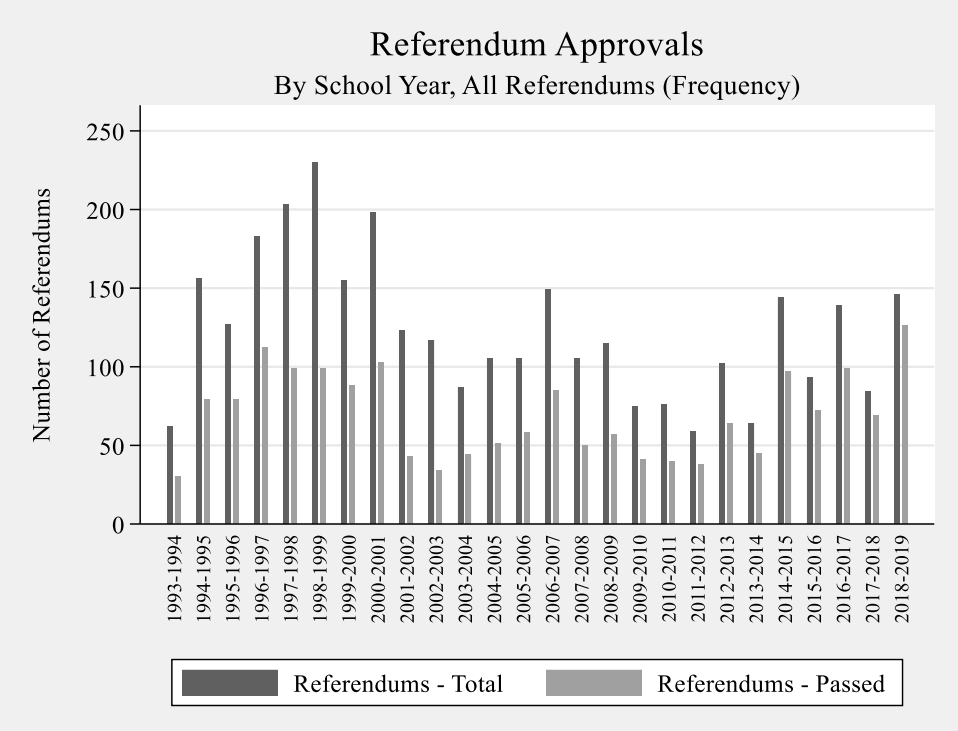

Figure 5: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, All Referendums (Frequency)

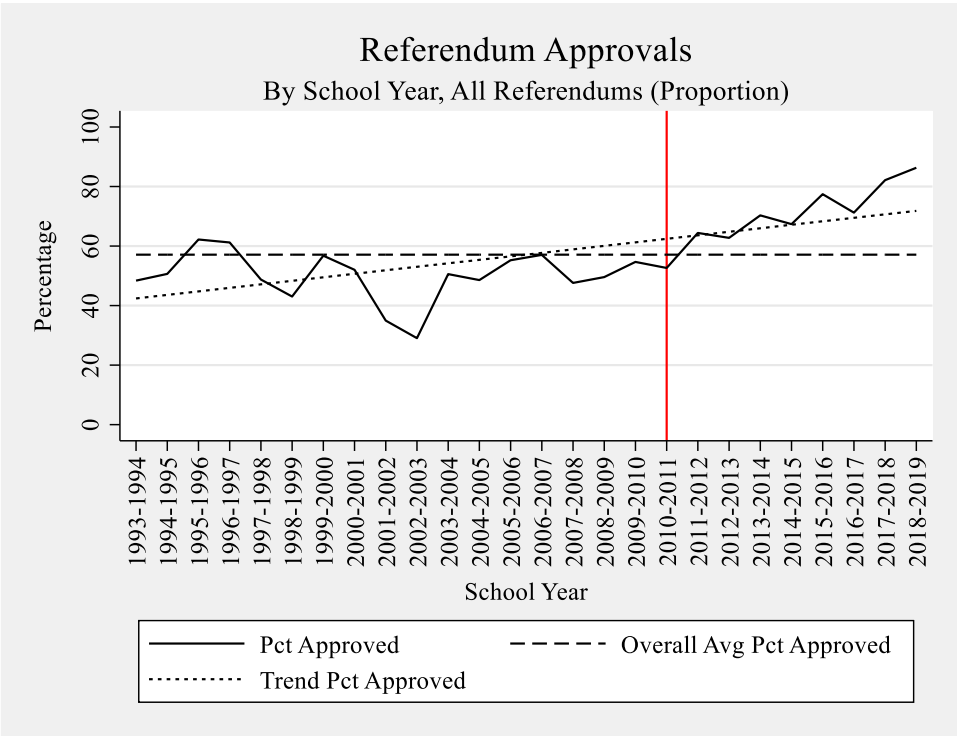

Figure 6: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, All Referendums (Proportion)

Table 14

Referendum Results – By School Year, by Collapsed Locale Code

	Urban			Suburban			Rural		
	Failed	Passed	Total	Failed	Passed	Total	Failed	Passed	Total
1993-1994	4	0	4	2	1	3	26	29	55
1994-1995	8	5	13	31	26	57	38	48	86
1995-1996	0	9	9	12	20	32	36	50	86
1996-1997	6	7	13	14	27	41	51	78	129
1997-1998	3	5	8	36	24	60	65	70	135
1998-1999	3	11	14	41	32	73	87	56	143
1999-2000	0	5	5	26	38	64	41	45	86
2000-2001	1	8	9	24	29	53	70	66	136
2001-2002	2	0	2	21	18	39	57	25	82
2002-2003	1	2	3	26	10	36	56	22	78
2003-2004	3	3	6	13	15	28	27	26	53
2004-2005	8	6	14	19	19	38	27	26	53
2005-2006	0	4	4	8	13	21	39	41	80
2006-2007	3	3	6	4	18	22	57	64	121

Table 14 (continued)

2007-2008	1	2	3	4	12	16	50	36	86
2008-2009	4	3	7	5	7	12	49	47	96
2009-2010	0	2	2	9	7	16	25	32	57
2010-2011	4	1	5	2	6	8	30	33	63
2011-2012	0	1	1	3	4	7	18	33	51
2012-2013	0	1	1	4	9	13	34	54	88
2013-2014	0	8	8	4	6	10	15	31	46
2014-2015	1	3	4	6	16	22	40	78	118
2015-2016	0	1	1	5	10	15	16	61	77
2016-2017	1	5	6	13	28	41	26	66	92
2017-2018	0	1	1	2	10	12	13	58	71
2018-2019	0	4	4	5	26	31	15	96	111
Total	53	100	153	339	431	770	1,008	1,271	2,279

include a vertical line indicating when Act 10 was passed. The trend is generally increasing. At the time of writing, there have been 8 full school years since the implementation of Act 10, 2011-2012 through 2018-2019. If all school years are sorted by the proportion of referendums approved each year, these eight years hold all eight top spots. The most recent school year, 2018-2019, holds the top spot with 86.3 percent. This is followed by 2017-2018 (82.14%), 2015-2016 (77.42%), 2016-2017 (71.22%), 2013-2014 (70.31%), 2014-2015 (67.36%), 2011-2012 (64.41%), and 2012-2013 (62.75%).

It is helpful to see the results of referendums across locale categories since the focus of my research is on rural referendums in particular. Table 14 presents the total number of referendums, the number of referendums passed, and the number of referendums failed by collapsed locale code and school year

Figure 7 represents Table 14 graphically by plotting the proportion of referendums passed in each collapsed locale code by school year. Like Figure 6, Figure 7 includes the overall average proportion of referendums passed across all school years, 57.11 percent. It also

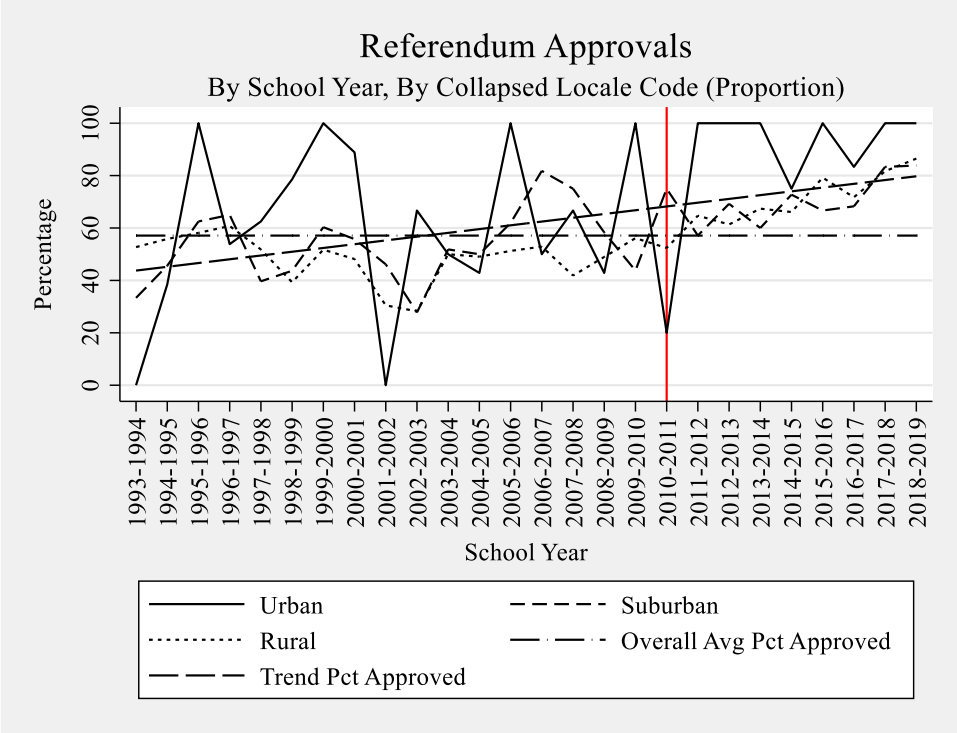

Figure 7: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Collapsed Locale Code (Proportion)

again includes the trend line across the locale groups. All three collapsed locale codes have been above the overall average every school year since 2011-2012; none has dropped below 57.11 of referendums approved. The two most recent school years, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, are the highest proportions of referendums ever passed in each of all three collapsed locale codes. Just like the overall passage rates, recent years dominate the top spots of proportion passed. The top eight years of proportion of referendums passed in the rural locale code is the last eight years—all eight years following Act 10. Five of the last eight years are also included in the top eight suburban spots, and six of the last eight years in urban referendums, including the top six.

The next set of figures breaks down Table 14 and Figure 7 into their constituent collapsed locale groups. Even though my focus is rural referendums, I found it helpful to understand rural referendums relative to their suburban and urban counterparts. Figure 8 is a frequency plot of total referendums held and referendums passed across all school years but only for urban locale codes. There are several pieces to note. First, no urban referendums passed in 1993-1994 and 2001-2002. Second, Wisconsin has very few districts classified as

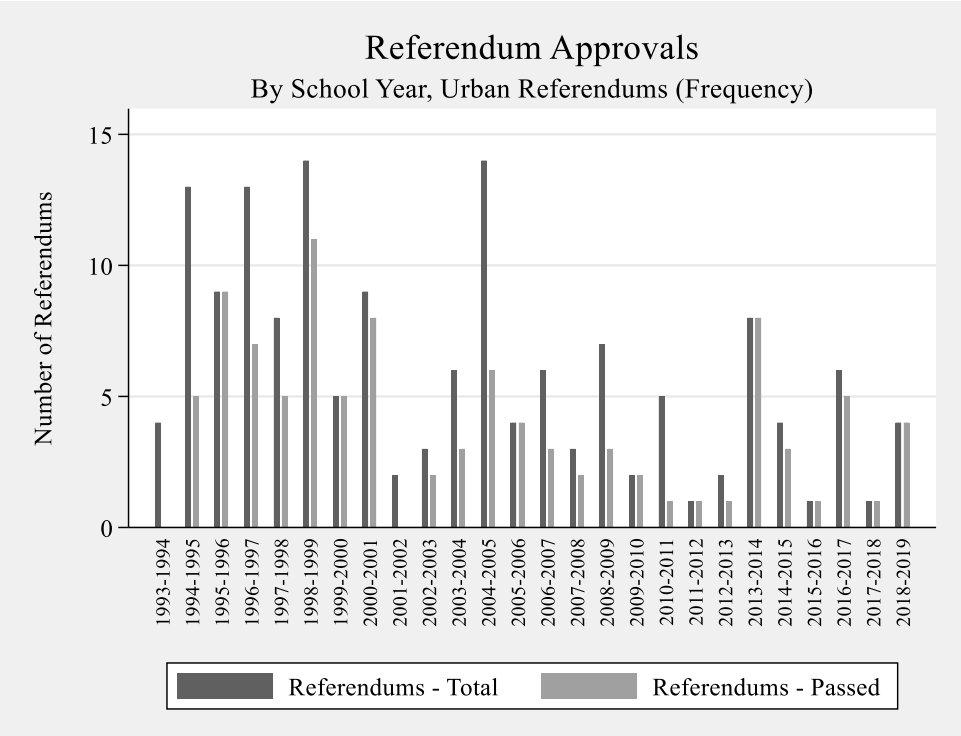

Figure 8: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Urban Referendums (Frequency)

urban, even with my collapsed categories. There are few urban referendums in turn: only 153 urban referendums have been put forth, encompassing 4.78 percent of the total number of referendums held. There have also been noticeably few urban referendums in the past ten years—only 33—but 26 of these 33 have been approved. Figure 8's *y*-axis scale is narrowed to better see the frequencies across school years.

Figure 9 is a representation of the proportion of referendums passed by the urban collapsed locale who held a referendum between 1993-1994 and 2018-2019. Also included in this graph is the overall average percent of referendums passed each year, a rate of 57.11 percent. This is helpful to see at which school years the proportion approved is above normal as determined by overall mean. Third, this graph shows the overall average percent of urban referendums passed each year, a rate of 68.06 percent. Lastly, this graph includes a linear trend line across all school years in order to see in what general direction urban referendum approvals are moving. Because there are relatively few urban referendums, the proportion line tends to scatter about more so than suburban and rural referendums. This is clear in just the first several

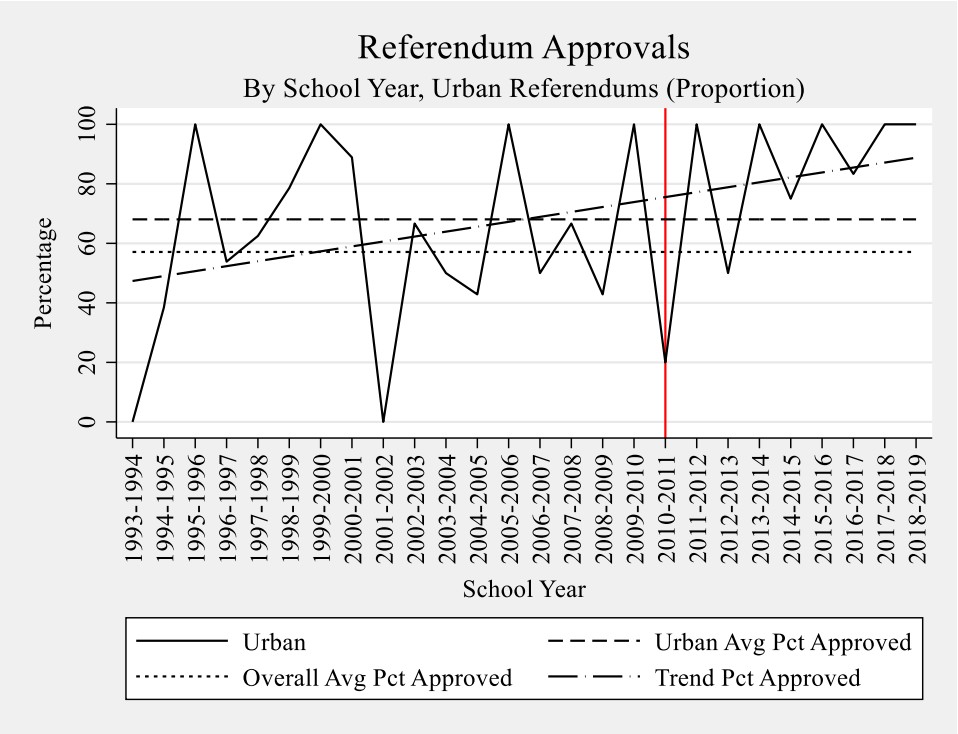

Figure 9: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Urban Referendums (Proportion)

years of referendums following revenue caps when passage rates jumped from 0 to 100 percent. However, there were only four referendums the first year and nine referendums the third.

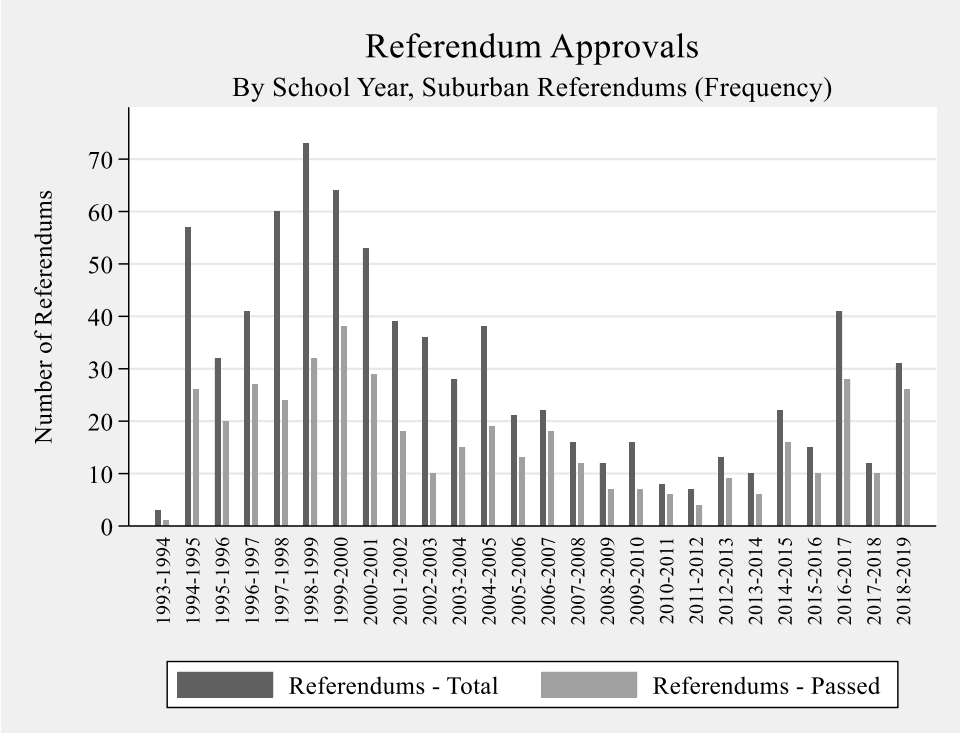

Figure 10: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Suburban Districts (Frequency)

The years in which most of the urban referendums took place include 1998-1999 (14), 2004-2005 (14), 1994-1995 (13), and 1996-1997 (13). With the exception of 1998-1999, these years in which the

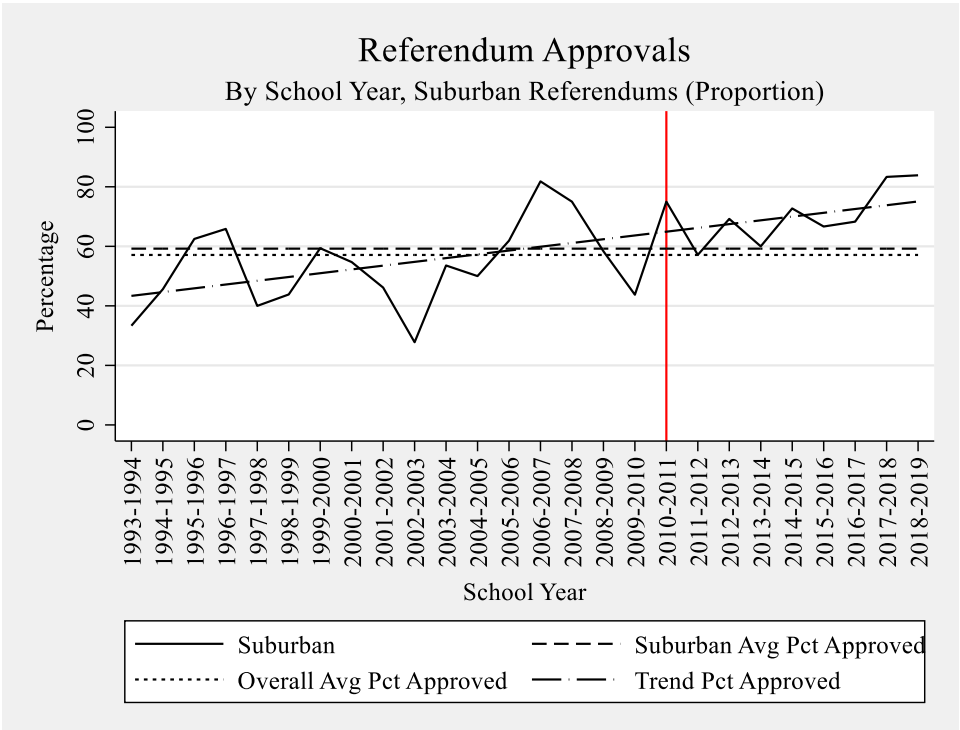

Figure 11: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Suburban Districts (Proportion)

most referendums took place also coincide with some of the lower proportions of referendums approved by voters in the urban collapsed locale code.

Figure 10 plots the total suburban referendums and passed suburban referendums across all revenue cap era school years. Figure 11 includes the yearly proportion of referendums passed in suburban districts, the overall average percent of referendums passed each year for all districts, the overall average percent of referendums passed each year for suburban districts—59.22 percent—and the linear trend line across all school years for suburban districts.

Suburban voters were asked to approve the most amount of referendums in the mid-to late 1990s and early 2000s. The top five years with the most referendums overshadow the remaining years. These include 1998-1999 (73), 1999-2000 (64), 1997-1998 (60), 1994-1995 (57), and 2000-2001 (53). The number of suburban referendums approved recently are comparable to the numbers approved in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, there are fewer proposals today, and, therefore, the proportion of referendums approved is a great deal higher.

Finally, Figure 12 plots the total rural referendums and passed rural referendums across all revenue cap era school years. Figure 13 includes the yearly proportion of

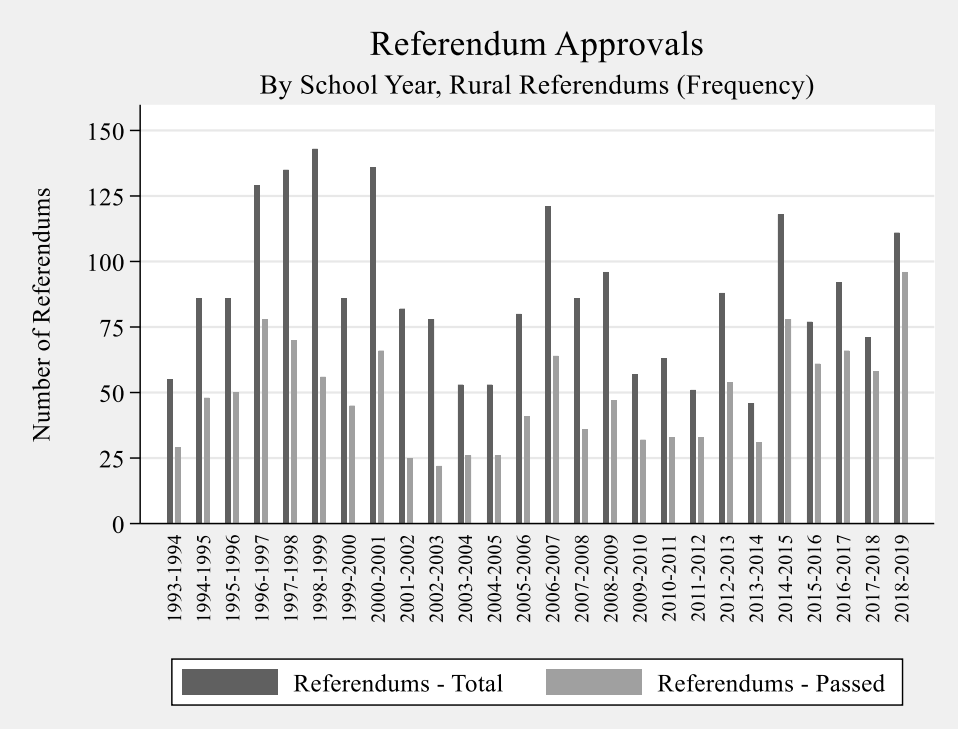

Figure 12: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Suburban Districts (Proportion)

referendums passed in rural districts, the overall average percent of referendums passed each year for all districts, the overall average percent of referendums passed each year for rural districts, and the linear trend line across all school years for suburban districts. The overall average percent of referendums passed each year for rural district is 56.07 percent. Recent years dominate the proportion of rural referendums approved. At no point in the last eight years has the proportion of rural referendums passed fallen below 61 percent. However, these past eight years do not neatly overlap with the years in which rural voters experienced the most questions. Only 2018-2019 and 2014-2015 stand out among recent years for the total number of referendums proposed. Otherwise, 1998-1999, 2000-2001, 1997-1998, and 2006-2007 are the top five school years with the most rural referendum questions. About one-quarter of school years account for 40 percent of the referendums proposed. These include all of the school years just listed. While the most recent school year tops the list for the highest absolute number of referendums passed, recent years are not noted for this. The highest absolute number of rural referendums passed were otherwise in 1996-1997 (78), 2014-2015 (78), 1997-1998 (70) and 2000-2001 (66).

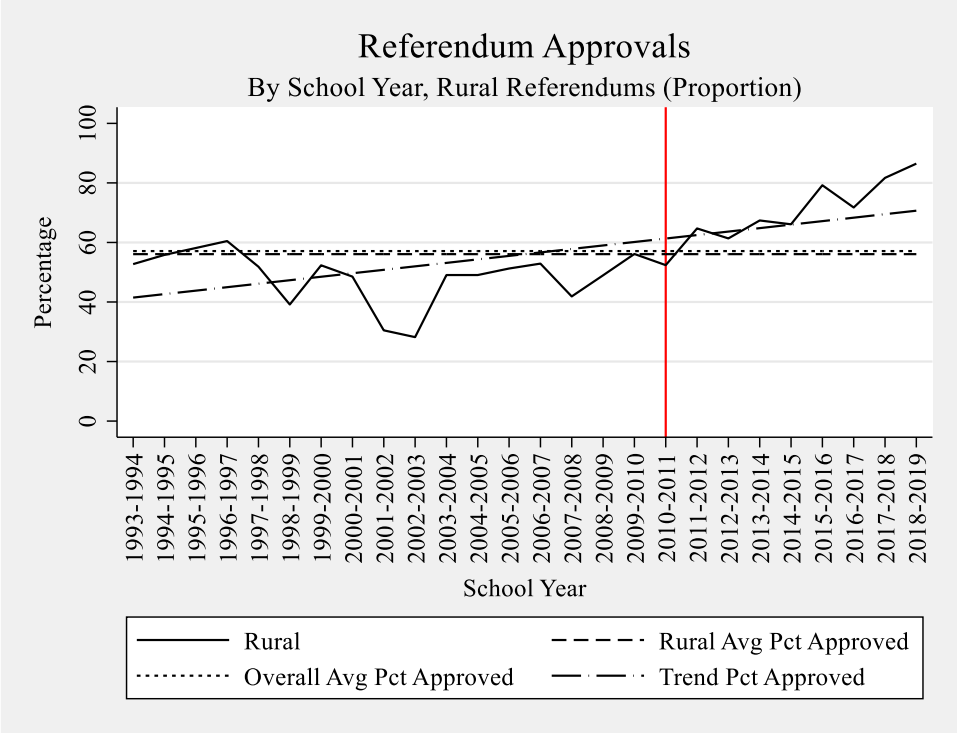

Figure 13: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Rural Districts (Proportion)

I now turn my attention away from collapsed locale codes and toward the three types of referendums a school district may place on a ballot: debt issuance, non-recurring, and recurring referendums.

Table 15 is set up very similarly to Table 14, but locale codes have been replaced by referendum types. All school years in the revenue cap era are presented. Figure 14 represents Table 15 graphically by plotting the proportion of referendums passed in each referendum type by school year. The other lines include the 57.11 percent overall average proportion of referendums passed across all school years and includes the trend line across the referendum types. All referendum types have been above the overall average of approval since 2013-2014. In other words, no proportion has fallen below 57.11 percent approval. This is a fairly new development, which an average can hide. In fact, all three referendum types were below or very near the overall average between 1997-1998 and 2009-2010. This reflects the divisions in passage rates between the 2000s and 2010s that were evident in the data broken down by collapsed locale types.

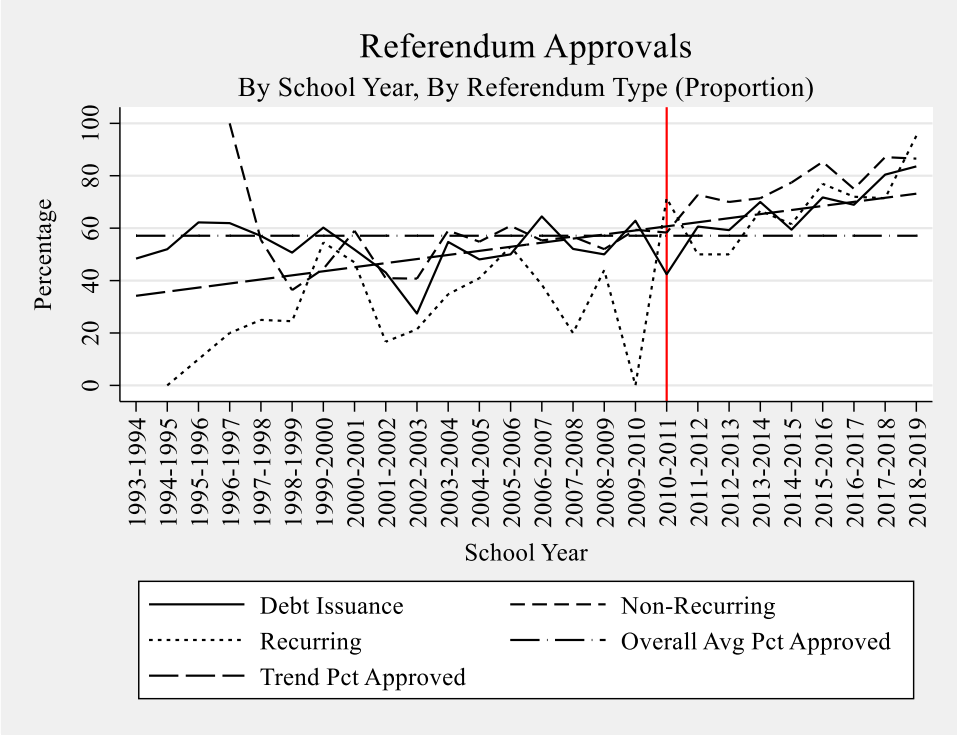

Figure 14: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, by Referendum Type (Proportion)

Table 15

Referendum Results – By School Year, by Referendum Type

	Debt Issuance			Non-Recurring			Recurring		
	Failed	Passed	Total	Failed	Passed	Total	Failed	Passed	Total
1993-1994	32	30	62	0	0	0	0	0	0
1994-1995	73	79	152	0	0	0	4	0	4
1995-1996	48	79	127	0	0	0	0	0	0
1996-1997	67	109	176	0	2	2	4	1	5
1997-1998	61	81	142	4	5	9	39	13	52
1998-1999	73	75	148	21	12	33	37	12	49
1999-2000	37	56	93	10	8	18	20	24	44
2000-2001	53	57	110	16	23	39	26	23	49
2001-2002	37	28	65	13	9	22	30	6	36
2002-2003	45	17	62	16	11	27	22	6	28
2003-2004	19	23	42	9	13	22	15	8	23
2004-2005	27	25	52	14	17	31	13	9	22
2005-2006	21	21	42	18	28	46	8	9	17

Table 15 (continued)

2006-2007	27	49	76	21	26	47	16	10	26
2007-2008	23	25	48	16	21	37	16	4	20
2008-2009	20	20	40	24	26	50	14	11	25
2009-2010	13	22	35	13	19	32	8	0	8
2010-2011	19	14	33	15	21	36	2	5	7
2011-2012	13	20	33	6	16	22	2	2	4
2012-2013	22	32	54	12	28	40	4	4	8
2013-2014	9	21	30	8	20	28	2	4	6
2014-2015	28	41	69	14	48	62	5	8	13
2015-2016	13	33	46	5	29	34	3	10	13
2016-2017	23	51	74	10	30	40	7	18	25
2017-2018	9	37	46	4	27	31	2	5	7
2018-2019	12	61	73	7	45	52	1	20	21
Total	824	1,106	1,930	276	484	760	300	212	512

Figure 15 presents the total number of debt issuance referendums held and the number of approved debt issuance referendums passed each respective year since 1993-1994. The total number and the number approved are both greater in the earlier portion of the revenue cap era. Approval rates are on an increasing trend, but the denominator has decreased. In fact, the overwhelming majority of referendums held in the first four to five years of revenue caps were referendums to issue

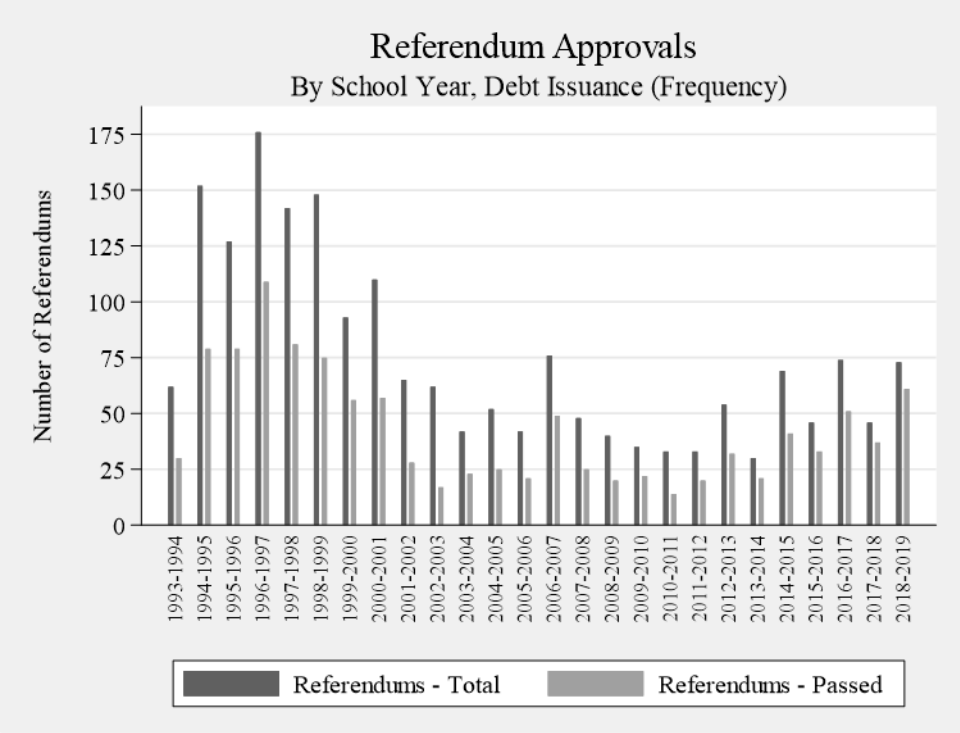

Figure 16: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Debt Issuance (Frequency)

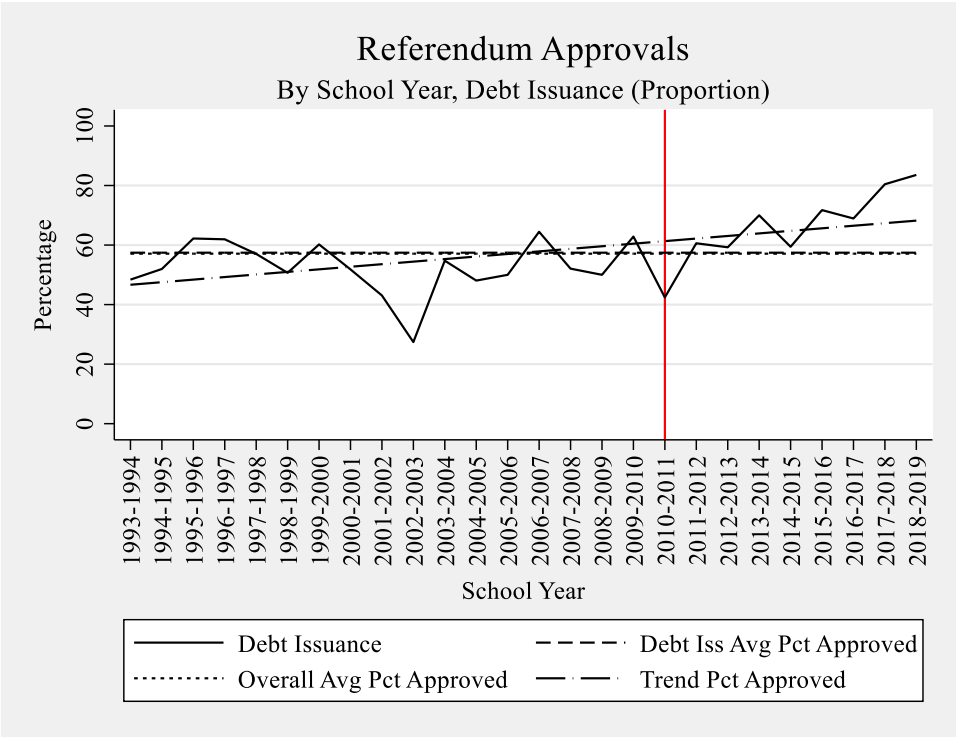

Figure 15: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Debt Issuance (Proportion)

debt. A little over 90 percent of the referendums held between 1993-1994 and 1997-1998 are debt issuance.

Figure 16 presents the proportion of debt issuance referendums passed each year. In this particular instance, the overall average annual approval for all referendums across all years is nearly the same as the overall average annual approval for debt issuance referendums across all years—57.11 percent versus 57.44 percent. The proportion of debt issuance referendums approved has set new records in four of the last six school years: 2013-2014, 2015-2016, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 all saw what was, at the time, the highest proportion ever passed. The most recent record, which was set in 2018-2019, is particularly noteworthy since that school year falls in the top ten in terms of highest number of debt issuance referendums held. In other words, not only did a high percentage of them pass, there were also quite a few of them.

With regard to non-recurring referendums, the data begins in 1996-1997 because that was the first year a non-recurring referendum was held following the institution of revenue caps. This can be seen in

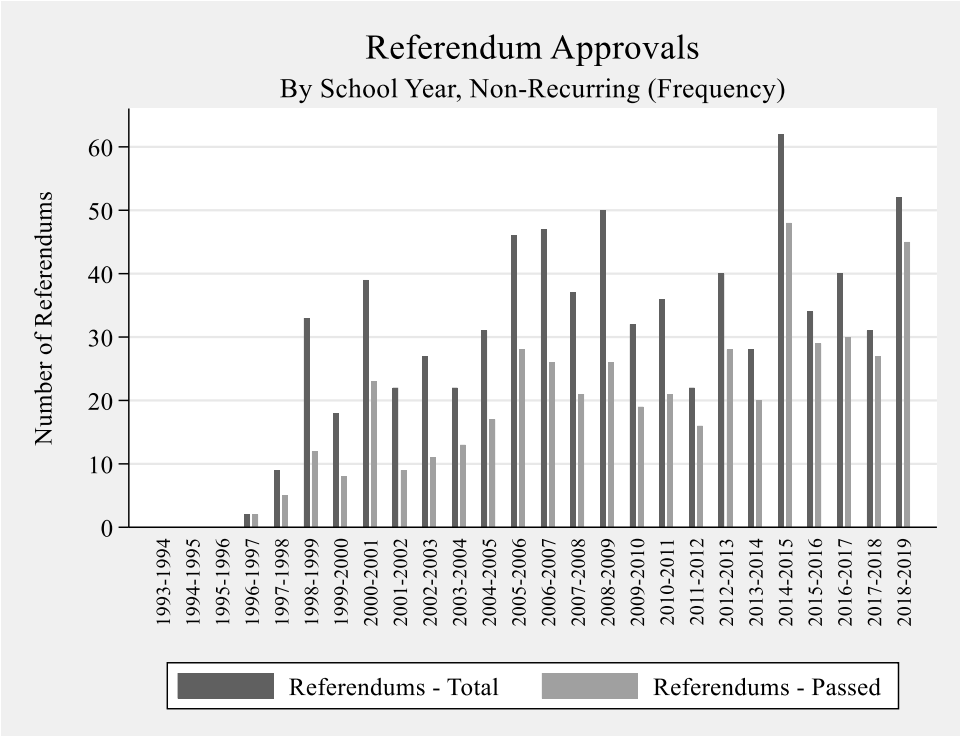

Figure 17: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Non-Recurring (Frequency)

Figure 17. The trend in non-recurring referendum frequencies ebbs and flows in three- to five-year cycles. This is not surprising. Many non-recurring referendums are approved on a three- to five-year cycle basis, so it would make sense that this pattern would emerge visually here. Note the spikes around 2000-2001, 2006-2007, 2008-2009, and 2014-2015.

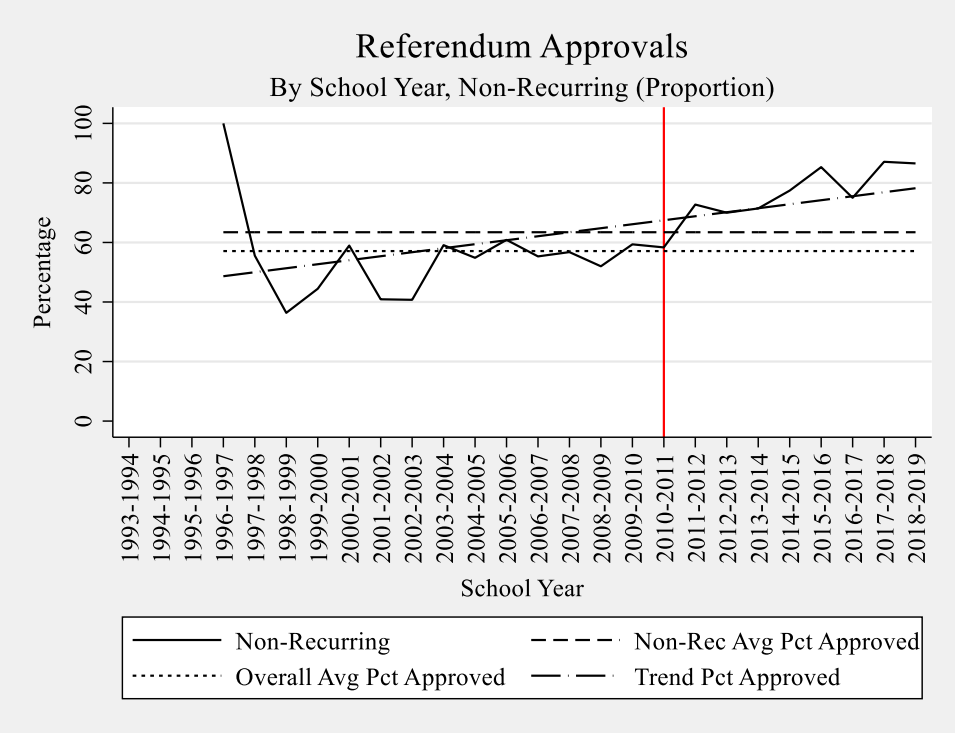

Figure 18: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Non-Recurring (Proportion)

There was a fairly steep drop in non-recurring referendum approvals fairly quickly in the 1990s. Non-recurring approval hovered around the 50 percent mark between the late 1990s and early 2000s before steadily rising above 50 percent since the 2003-2004 school year. Since 2003-2004, no school year has seen fewer than 50 percent of non-recurring referendums pass. When ordered by proportion passed, the last eight, post-Act 10 years hold the second through ninth spots. The only year that had a greater proportion of referendums pass was 1996-1997. However, that school year also had only two. This is not the case in the past eight years. Since 2011-2012, no school year has seen less than 22 non-recurring referendums on ballots. Thus, there tends to be more non-recurring referendums in recent, post-Act 10 years, and a greater percentage of them are passing. The only other years with as many non-recurring referendums were 2005-2006

and 2006-2007. The trend line is much steeper for non-recurring than debt issuance referendums, suggesting that the rate at which these have passed has gone up much more quickly over time.

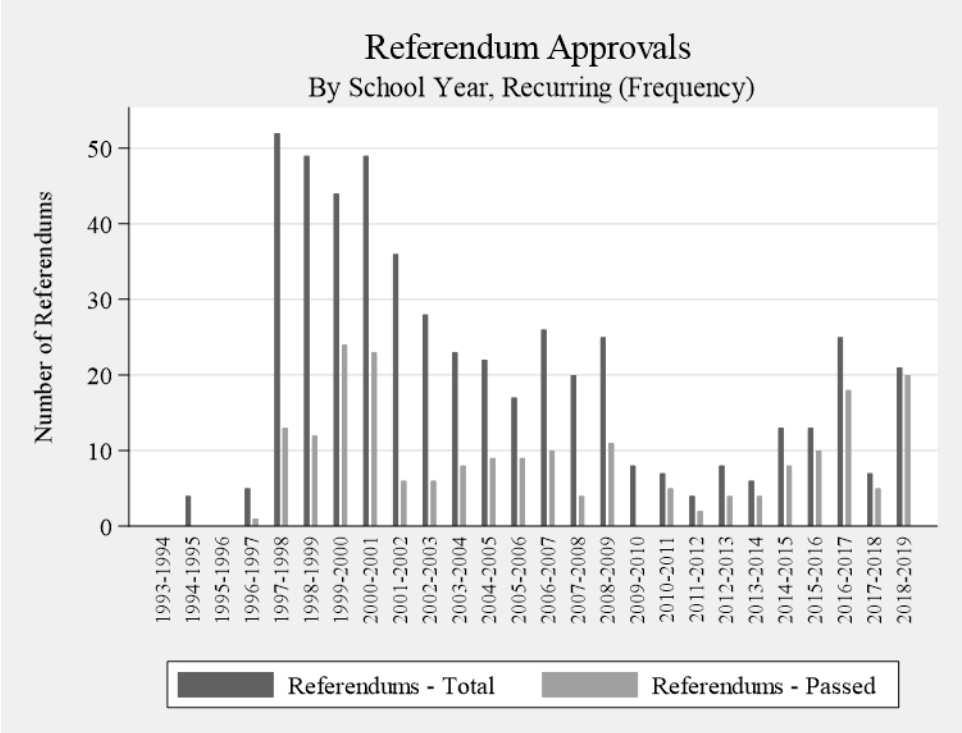

Figure 19: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Recurring (Frequency)

Data for the third type of referendum, recurring, is presented in Figure 19 and Figure 20. First, recurring referendums are more infrequent than debt issuance and non-recurring referendums. Very

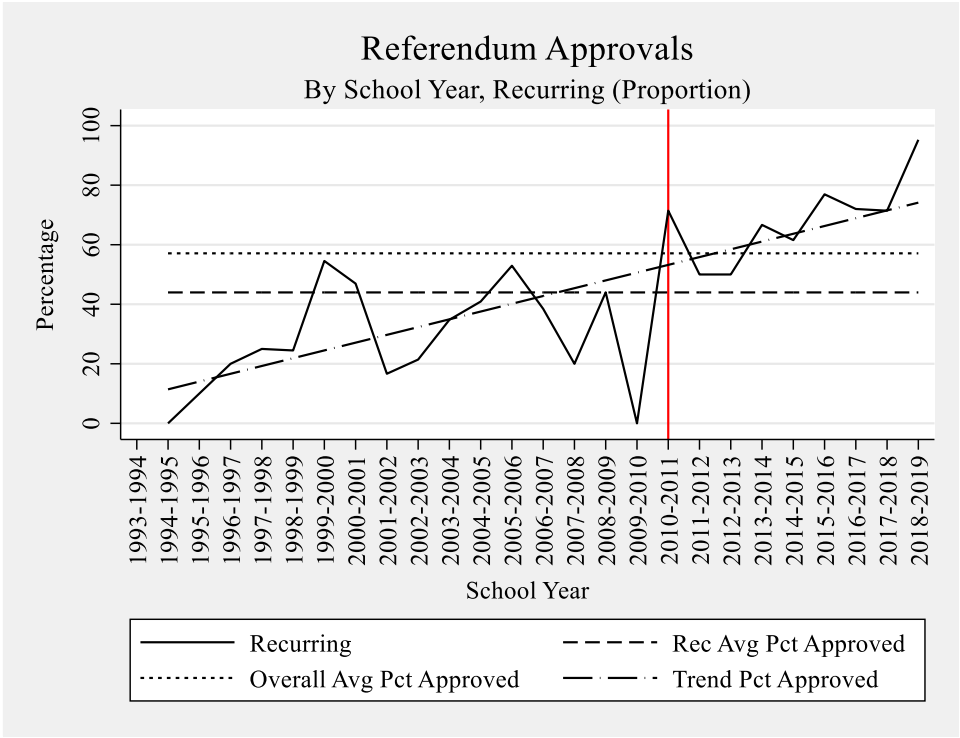

Figure 20: Referendum Approvals - By School Year, Recurring (Proportion)

few were held in the mid-1990s before a large spike in the late 1990s and early 2000s. No other years have matched these numbers of requests. The years with the most requests include 1997-1998, 2000-2001, 1998-1999, 1999-2000, and 2001-2002. The high number of requests around 20 years ago is distinctly different than non-recurring referendums—which have generally been increasing in frequency through time—but more closely matches the frequency pattern of debt issuance referendums. By definition, however, recurring referendums allow a district to raise revenue caps indefinitely. The linear trend line for recurring referendums is also increasing through time, and the line is the steepest among all three referendum types. Nevertheless, the average proportion of recurring referendums passing each year is almost 15 percentage points less than the overall average for all referendums: 43.97 percent versus 57.11 percent. This can be seen in the horizontal lines in Figure 20.

The data presented so far—my collapsed locale codes and referendum types—can also be paired in order to better understand how different referendum types fare in different locales. First, I present how the three different referendum types differ in passage by collapsed locale codes across all school years together. Second, I present how the three collapsed locale codes differ in their passage of referendum types across all individual school years. Table 16 provides this encompassing breakdown.

Table 16

Referendum Results – By Referendum Type, by Collapsed Locale Code

		Failed	Passed	Total
Issue Debt				
	Urban	30	62	92
	Suburban	233	325	558
	Rural	561	719	1,280
	Total	824	1,106	1,930

Table 16 (continued)

Non-Recurring				
	Urban	14	32	46
	Suburban	35	45	80
	Rural	227	407	634
	Total	276	484	760
Recurring				
	Urban	9	6	15
	Suburban	71	61	132
	Rural	220	145	365
	Total	300	212	512

Figure 21 shows the total number of debt issuance referendums and the number of approved debt issuance referendums for each of the three types of collapsed locale codes. Overall, 67 percent of urban debt issuance referendums have passed, 58 percent of suburban, and 56 percent of rural.

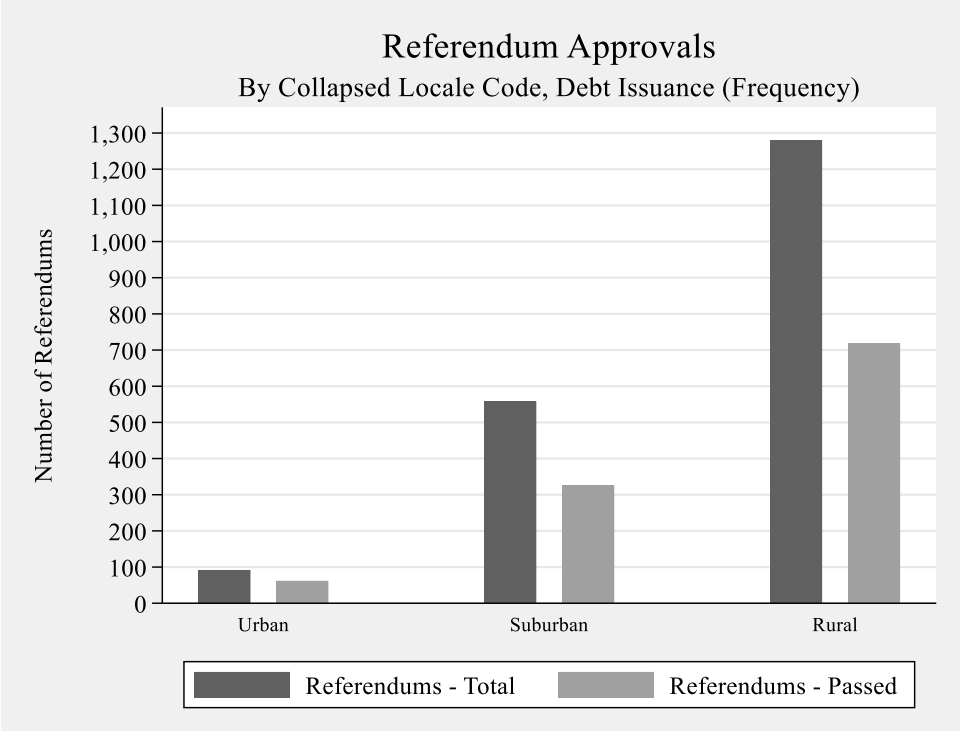

Figure 21: Referendum Approvals – By Collapsed Locale Code, Debt Issuance (Frequency)

These proportions are developed, however, from vastly different denominators. There are 13 times as many rural debt issuance referendums relative to urban debt issuance referendums and 12 times as many approvals. Likewise, there are two times as many rural debt issuance referendums than suburban debt issuance and 2.5 times as many approvals.

Turning attention to non-recurring referendums, Figure 22 illustrates the total number of non-recurring referendums across all years and the number of non-recurring referendums approved across all years by collapsed locale code. There have been 14 times as many rural non-recurring ballots as urban non-recurring ballots and 16 times as many approvals. Relative to suburban referendums, rural non-recurring referendums questions have been in front of voters eight times more and approved nine times more. Rural, non-recurring referendums fall between the two other locale codes in terms of overall proportion passed. Approximately 64 percent of rural, non-recurring referendums have passed, about 69 percent of urban, and 56 percent of suburban.

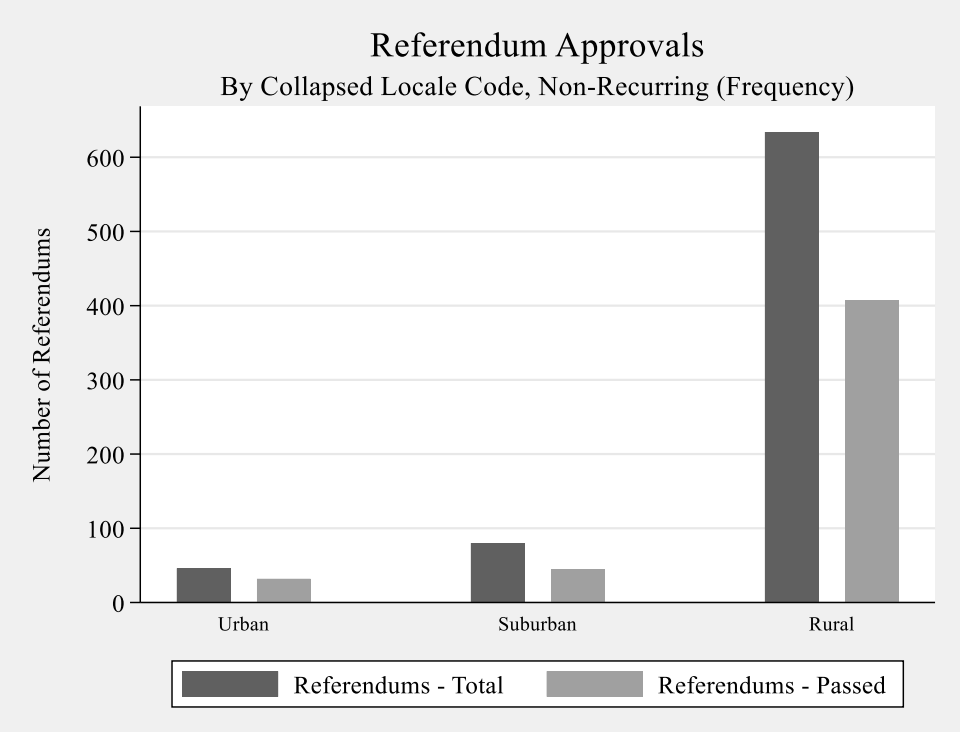

Figure 22: Referendum Approvals - By Collapsed Locale Code, Non-Recurring (Frequency)

Figure 23 presents recurring referendums, again according to locale. It also highlights the disparity between the number of recurring referendums that are proposed and the number of recurring referendums that are passed. None of the locale codes reach a 50 percent passage rate. Suburban recurring referendums come closest at 46 percent. Urban and rural recurring referendums each see an overall passage rate of approximately 40 percent. As both Figure 23 and Table 16 show, recurring referendums are the only type in which less than 50 percent of ballots presented to voters have been approved.

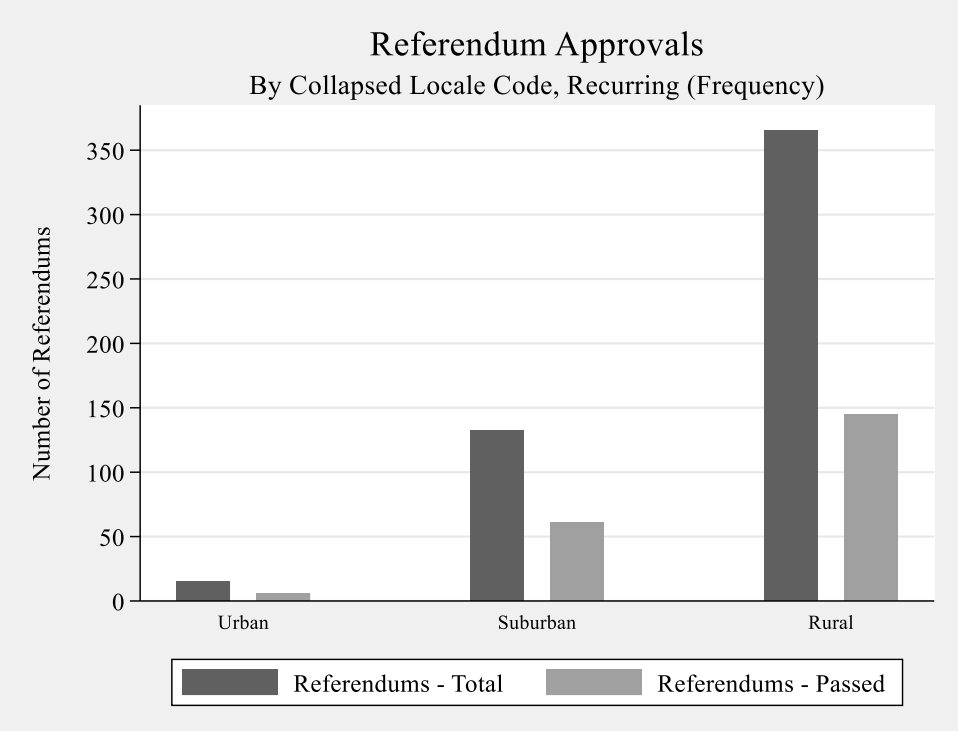

Figure 23: Referendum Approvals - By Collapsed Locale Code, Recurring (Frequency)

Similar to the pattern of debt issuance referendums through time presented above, these overall and average numbers for recurring referendums can mask the trend in recurring referendum passage rates. For instance, between 1993-1994 and 2009-2010, the proportion of recurring referendums passed reached 50 percent twice: 55 percent in 1999-2000 and 53 percent in 2005-2006. Otherwise, during these years, it was not uncommon to see recurring passage rates hover around the twenties and teens—and twice reach zero percent approval. This picture changes quite substantially after zero percent of recurring referendums were passed in 2009-

2010. Not once since 2010-2011 has the percentage passed fallen *below* 50 percent. In fact, the top seven years in terms of proportion passed are within the last nine academic years. In 2018-2019, 95 percent (20 of 21) recurring referendums were approved. This is roughly 20 percentage points higher than the previous record set just a few years before in 2015-2016.

Figure 24, Figure 25, and Figure 26 plot each collapsed locale code's referendum types. Figure 24 looks only at urban referendums, Figure 25 suburban referendums, and Figure 26 rural referendums. Note that there are different scales used on each graph due to the varying number of floated and approved referendums. Urban referendums decrease in frequency and approvals moving from debt issuance to recurring referendums. Debt issuance and non-recurring referendums also pass at about the same proportion for urban referendums—approximately 68 percent. Urban recurring referendums pass at a lower rate, about 40 percent, though they occur much less frequency. Only 15 urban recurring referendums have taken place since 1993-1994.

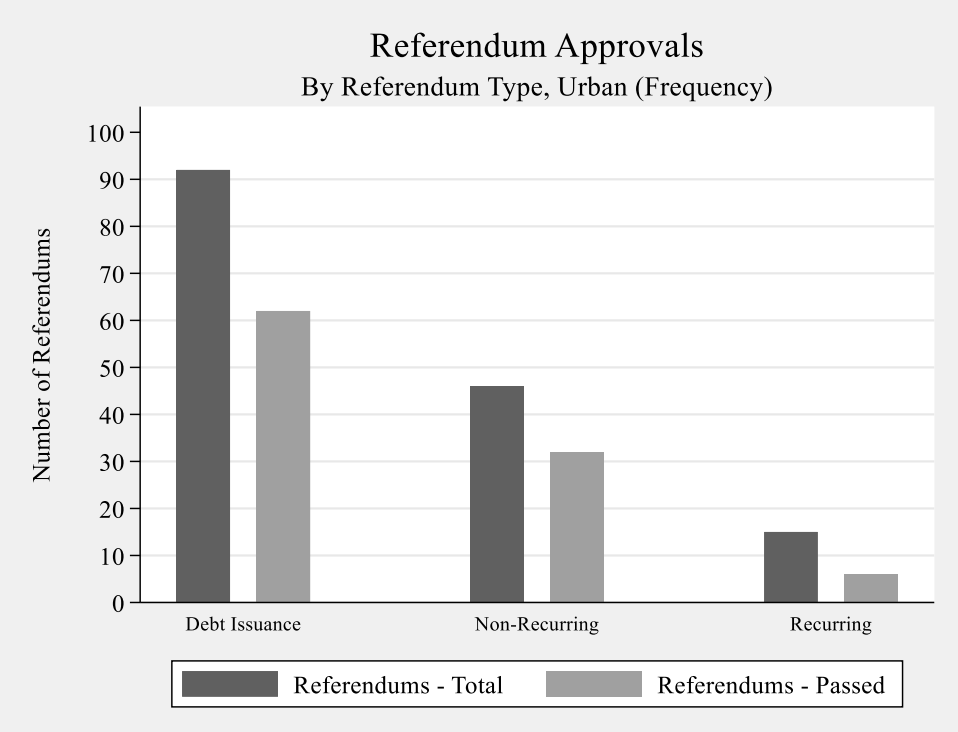

Figure 24: Referendum Approvals - By Referendum Type, Urban (Frequency)

Figure 25 plots the same referendum types for suburban ballots. Suburban ballots differ slightly in their frequencies compared to urban and rural ballots. Urban and rural ballot

frequencies decrease in descending order from debt issuance to non-recurring to recurring. Alternatively, there have actually been more recurring referendums held and recurring

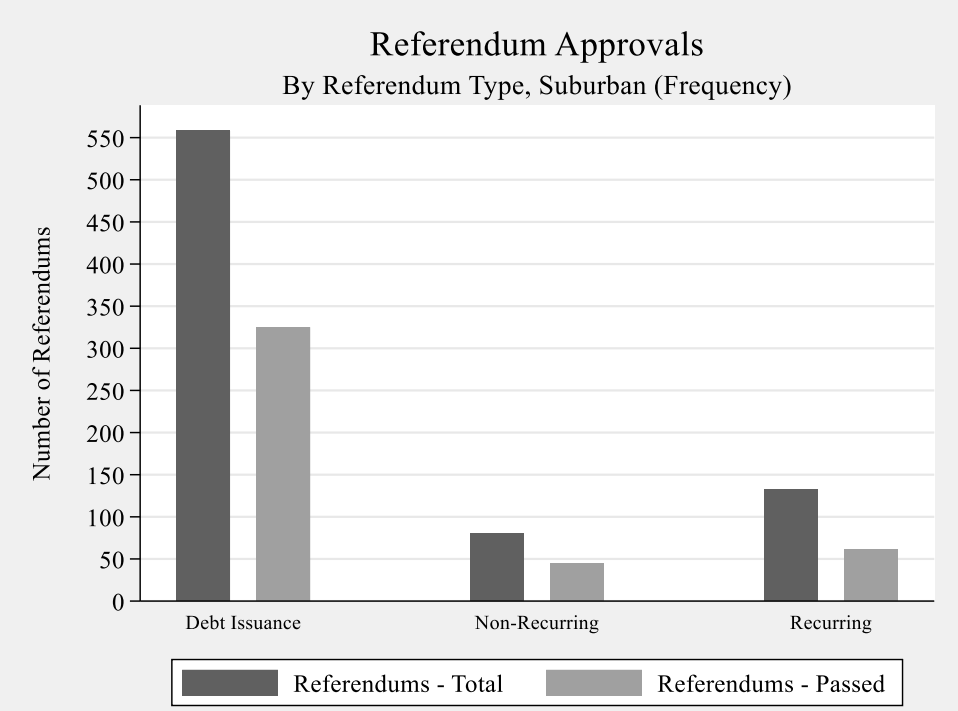

Figure 25: Referendum Approvals - By Referendum Type, Suburban (Frequency)

referendums passed in suburban districts. This is fascinating because of the permanent nature of a recurring referendum tax increase, but suburban districts also have a higher median income than the other two locales. Nevertheless, suburban ballots exhibit a similar passage rate to urban and rural referendums and do not deviate from that pattern. Suburban recurring referendums still get approved at the lowest rate, around 46 percent, while debt issuance and non-recurring are passed at 58 percent and 56 percent respectively.

Figure 26 illustrates the total number and frequency of passage for the three referendum types for rural ballots. Compared to urban and suburban ballots, rural debt issuance referendums are passed at a lower rate. This is also true for recurring referendums. Rural recurring referendums have passed at the lowest rate of the three. Only 39 percent of rural recurring referendums are passed while urban and suburban recurring referendums are both 40 percent or above. About 56 percent of rural debt issuance referendums have passed whereas approximately

67 and 58 percent of urban and suburban debt issuance referendums have passed since 1993-1994. Otherwise, rural referendums reflect urban referendums in the sense that debt issuance referendums are most common, followed by non-recurring referendums, and recurring referendums.

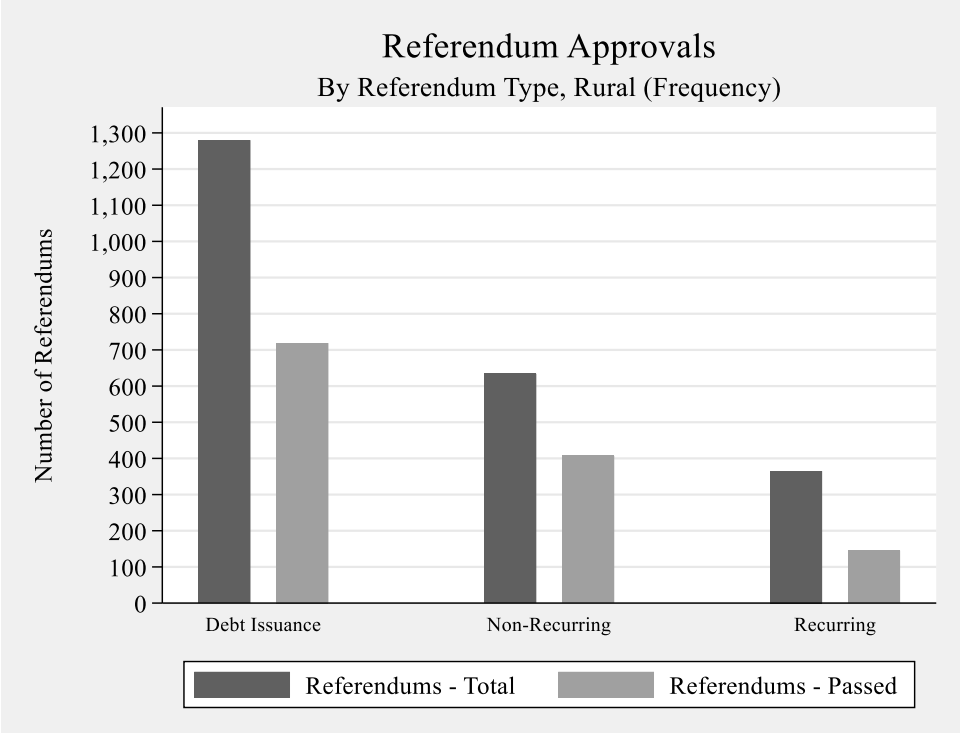

Figure 26: Referendum Approvals - By Referendum Type, Suburban (Frequency)

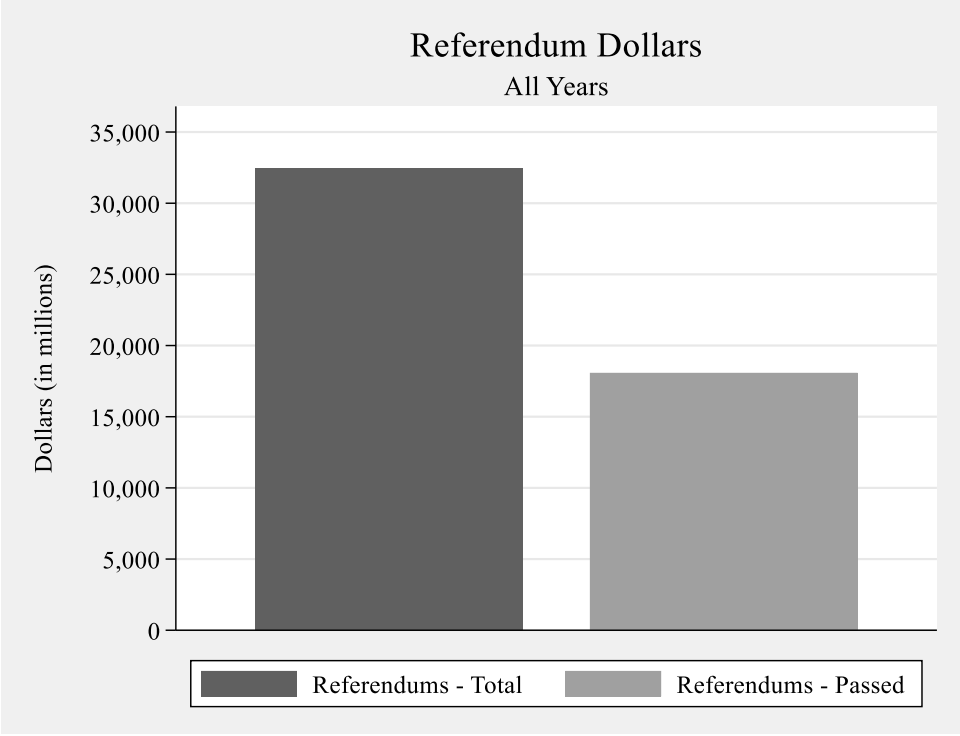

Figure 27: Referendum Dollars - All Referendums

Another way of presenting information on referendum passage is not by

referendums held or passed but, rather, by how much additional money is provided to school districts via voluntary hikes in local property taxes. After all, if there are many referendums but each referendum is cheap, the effect on school districts' bottom lines may not be particularly potent. Figure 27 presents a simple illustration of this additional money. Across all years, collapsed locale codes, and referendum types, a little over $32 billion[5] has been proposed via referendums. Of this $32 billion, a little over $18 billion has been approved.

Table 17

Referendum Dollars – All Referendums, by School Year (in millions)

School Year	Total Request	Amount Approved
1993-1994	582.14	236.85
1994-1995	1,625.4	684.72
1995-1996	1,374.29	788.45
1996-1997	2,208.54	1,291.81
1997-1998	1,666.5	889.67
1998-1999	2,166.81	1,067.1
1999-2000	1,718.76	970.75
2000-2001	1,358.39	670.41
2001-2002	932.48	417.45
2002-2003	868.97	159.62
2003-2004	716.91	285.79
2004-2005	1,116.02	448.4
2005-2006	722.42	296.76
2006-2007	1,632.96	886.89

[5] All dollar amounts continue to be adjusted for inflation to reflect dollar amounts in the 2018-2019 academic year.

Table 17 (continued)

2007-2008	1,080.91	485.34
2008-2009	815.71	317.65
2009-2010	503.8	264.29
2010-2011	647.48	205.99
2011-2012	435.20	236.67
2012-2013	930.58	528.36
2013-2014	678.07	508.67
2014-2015	1,444.19	950.89
2015-2016	1,112.03	811.76
2016-2017	2,445.83	1,776.74
2017-2018	986.14	731.61
2018-2019	2,659.99	2,172.46
Total	32430.49	18085.08

Table 17 presents the total amount of money requested and amount approved by voters each year between 1993-1994 and 2018-2019 regardless of referendum type. Figure 28 delineates the dollar amounts by school year. Both total dollars requested and dollars approved take on a *W*-shape, roughly reflecting the broader health of the U.S. economy. Requests and approvals were relatively high in the mid- to late 1990s before decreasing into the early 2000s. Both increased again to a peak in the 2006-2007 school year before again declining between 2009-2010 and 2011-2012.

Requests and approvals have both steadily increased since that time, though appear to be interrupted on an every-other-year basis. This may be because of the election system in Wisconsin. Every recent peak year also included a major general election for either governor and

Congress, the president and Congress, or a major primary and supreme court election. School districts do not have to pay the cost of printing ballots and running the election if the referendum coincides with a municipal, state, or federal election.

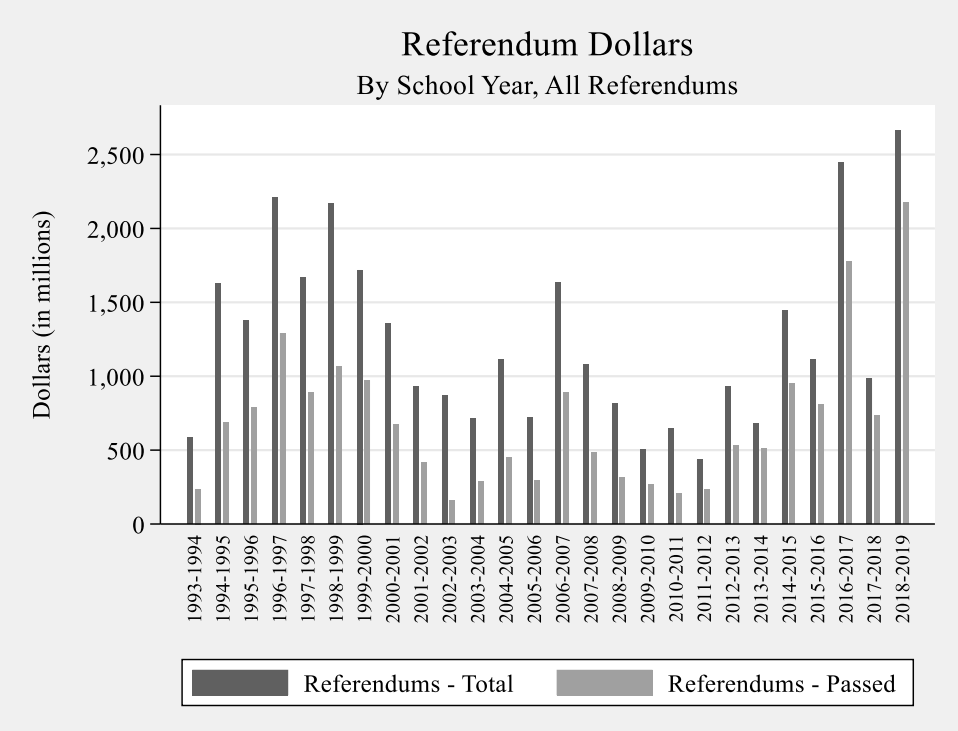

Figure 28: Referendum Dollars - All Referendums, by School Year

There is not a great deal of overlap between recent school years and the school years with the most referendum money requested. The 2018-2019 and 2016-2017 school

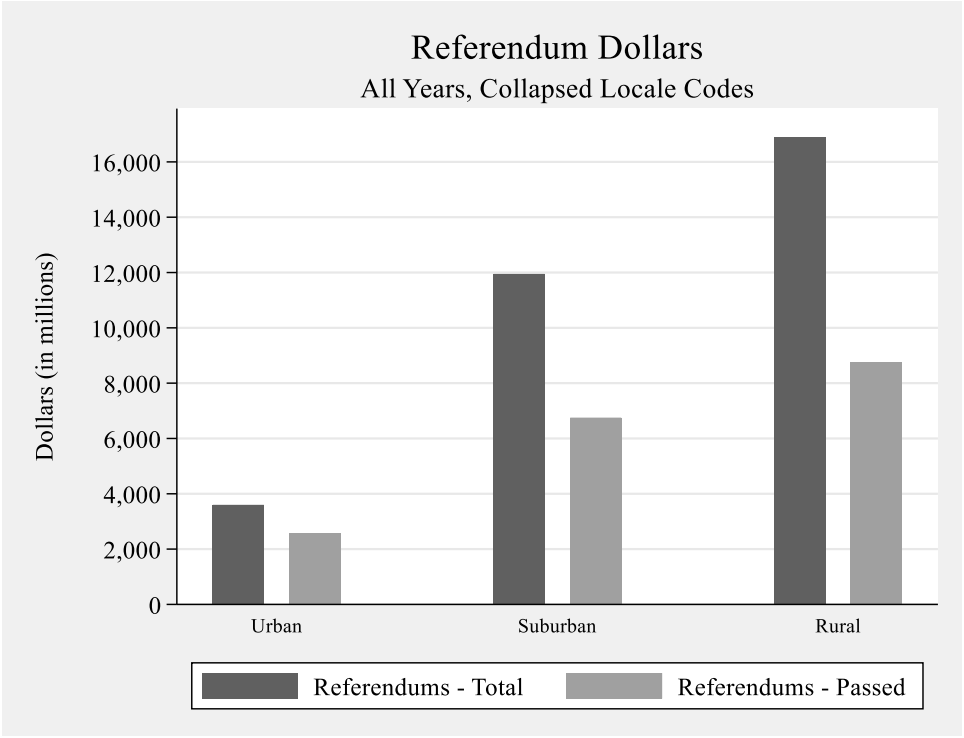

Figure 29: Referendum Dollars - All Years, by Collapsed Locale Codes

years take the top two spots in terms of dollars requested (both major general election years), but otherwise the late 1990s and 2006-2007 had higher requests than any other in the past ten years. On the other hand, the top six years in terms of the proportion of money approved are the last six school years. At no point in the previous six school years has the proportion of dollars approved fallen below 65 percent.

Table 18

Referendum Dollars – All Years, by Collapsed Locale Codes (in millions)

Collapsed Locale Code	Total Request	Amount Approved
Urban	3,600.44	2,572.43
Suburban	11,949.75	6,753.72
Rural	16,880.3	8,758.93

Figure 29 divides the dollar data into respective collapsed locale codes but does not yet represent the collapsed locale codes by year. Rural ballots have both requested and approved the greatest amount of money. This is followed by suburban referendums and urban referendums. This is also reflected in Table 18.

I represent the total amount of dollars requested and the amount of money approved in each year by collapsed locale code and referendum type by school year just as I did with referendum passages above. I first focus on urban referendums. These dollars requests and approvals are presented in Table 19 and Figure 30. Urban requests tend to vary pretty substantially from year-to-year, which may reflect the number of referendums held. As I illustrated above, urban referendums simply are not that common, so even several in one year can create a spike in requests and approvals. Similarly, there are other years in which no requests were approved, such as 1993-1994 and 2001-2002. The increases in requests and approvals have

Table 19

Referendum Results – By School Year, by Collapsed Locale Code (in millions)

	Urban		Suburban		Rural	
	Total Requested	Amount Approved	Total Requested	Amount Approved	Total Requested	Amount Approved
1993-1994	40.74	0	44.85	11.26	496.55	225.59
1994-1995	190.73	92.17	689.6	240.24	745.07	352.32
1995-1996	99.71	99.71	438.62	252.47	835.96	436.27
1996-1997	281.69	145.4	544.89	329.32	1381.96	817.09
1997-1998	168.18	147.34	688.58	262.42	809.75	479.91
1998-1999	248.47	215.97	784.11	263.67	1132.91	587.45
1999-2000	202.57	202.57	825.86	470.31	690.32	297.86
2000-2001	155.94	141.33	500.71	240.09	701.74	288.98
2001-2002	21.49	0	414.38	238.64	496.61	178.81
2002-2003	86.42	34.14	383.62	55.54	398.93	69.95
2003-2004	105.65	32.22	390.95	176.62	222.23	78.87
2004-2005	268.56	136.79	502.89	191.93	344.57	119.68
2005-2006	19.55	19.55	344.69	148.56	358.17	128.65

Table 19 (continued)

2006-2007	271.99	125.86	508.03	273.55	852.93	487.48
2007-2008	87.43	45.1	342.093	314.76	651.39	125.43
2008-2009	85.36	45.43	157.3	45.27	573.05	226.95
2009-2010	19.72	19.72	129.9	63.4	354.18	181.17
2010-2011	213.12	59.97	86.8	58.81	347.56	87.2
2011-2012	14.62	14.62	143.95	105.23	276.63	116.82
2012-2013	17.36	17.36	263.7	174.57	649.52	336.43
2013-2014	138.48	138.48	151.52	83.37	388.07	286.82
2014-2015	225.3	214.47	396.39	311.51	822.49	424.9
2015-2016	30.1	30.1	369.89	263.88	712.04	517.78
2016-2017	409.93	396.74	1197.75	775.94	838.15	604.06
2017-2018	21.52	21.52	371.98	272.29	592.64	437.8
2018-2019	175.8	175.8	1,131.5	1,005.34	1,352.69	991.32
Total	3600.44	2572.43	11804.54	6628.99	17026.12	8885.59

Note. Totals may not equal the addition of columns due to rounding.

been a tad more consistent since 2013-2014, though urban referendums may continue to show some irregularity because of how few urban districts Wisconsin has.

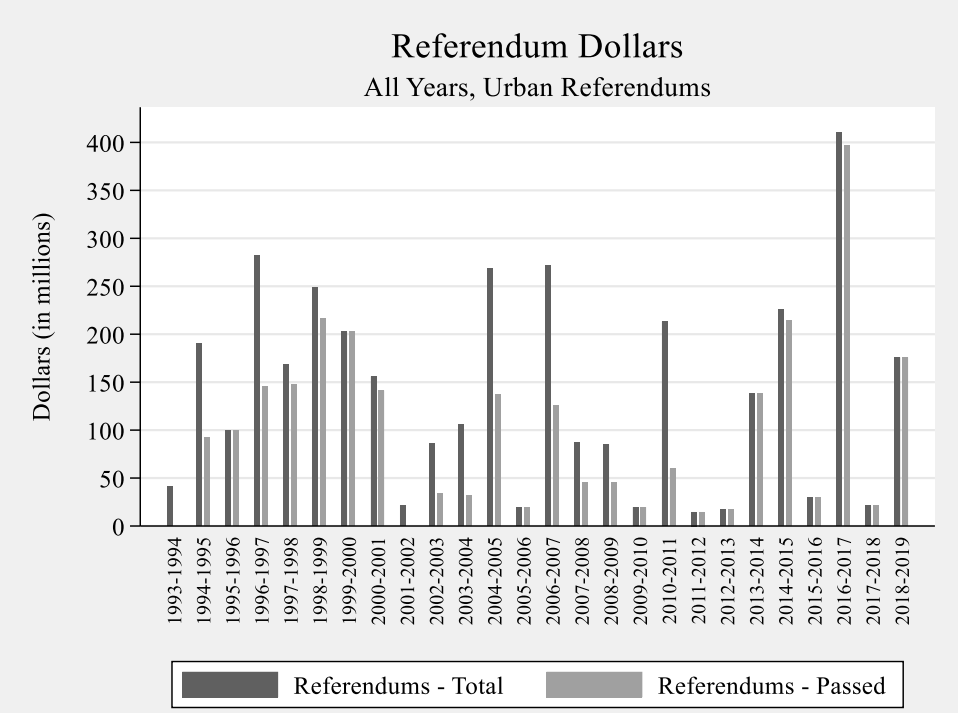

Figure 30: Referendum Dollars - By School Year, Urban

With the exception of 2016-2017, recent years are not noted by their difference in total amount of money requested from voters. Besides this notable exception, the other school years with the most amount of money requested on urban ballots includes 1996-1997, 2006-2007, 2004-2005, and 1998-1999. In the same vein, 2016-2017 stands out for the most money approved, an increase of 83 percent over the prior record in 1998-1999. Otherwise, 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 also stand out for the most amount of money approved on urban referendums.

Suburban referendums are presented in Figure 31. Suburban referendums have fewer sudden spikes than urban referendums. Suburban referendums had a greater difference in requests versus approvals in the earlier years of revenue caps than in later, more recent years, which is highlighted by the difference in bar heights between 1994-1995 and 2005-2006. Both requests and approvals have generally trended upward since 2008-2009, but two years really stand out for suburban referendums—2016-2017 and 2018-2019. Just these two years alone

represent over one-quarter of the total amount of money approved by suburban districts across the last 26 school years. If suburban referendums are sorted by the proportion of money approved each year, eight of the last ten years are included in the top ten. Never once in the past five years has the proportion of money approved on suburban referendums been below 65 percent.

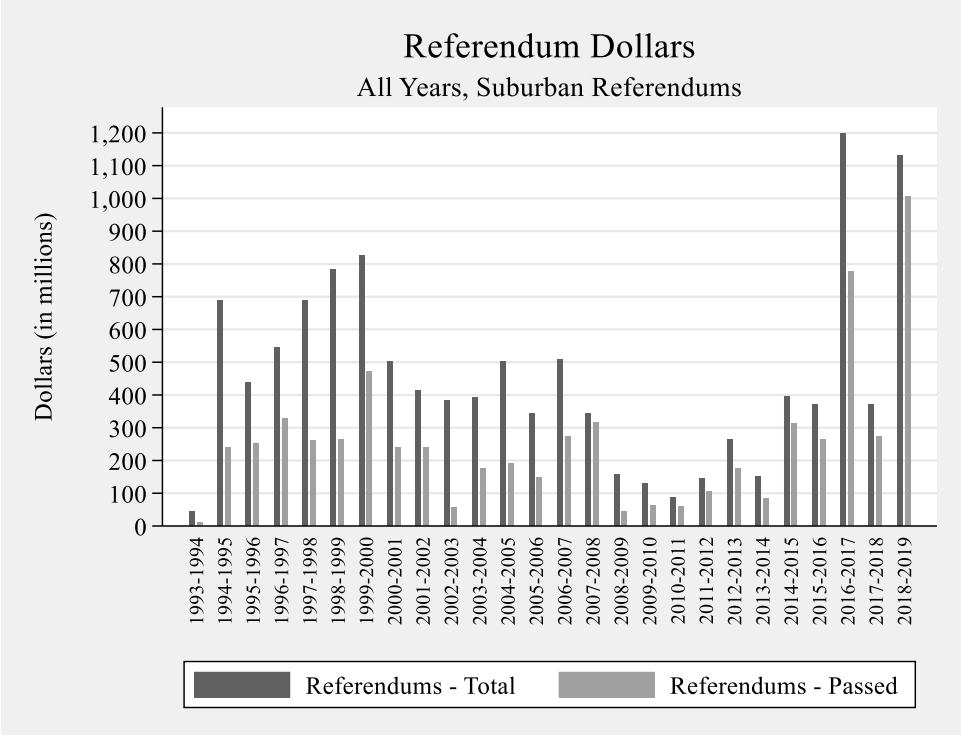

Figure 31: Referendum Dollars - By School Year, Suburban

Rural referendum dollar amounts largely reflect the *W*-shape of all referendums, which demonstrates just how many referendums and how much money this collapsed locale code has contributed to the complete picture. Requests and approvals increase in tandem until the late 1990s before decreasing through the early 2000s. These dollars increase then again until 2006-2007 before decreasing until 2011-2012. Since that year, both requests and approvals demonstrate a steep upward trend. It is too soon to tell whether a decrease such as those after the late 1990s and mid-2000s will occur again or whether these requests are merely a new standard in a post-Act 10 environment.

Like suburban referendums, rural referendums are not noted by the recency with which the total amount of money is requested. The 1996-1997, 1998-1999, and 2006-2007 make up three of the top four years in terms of total dollars on ballots. This is similarly true for dollars approved. This picture changes when rural referendums are sorted by the proportion of dollars approved. The top five years of proportion of dollars passed are all within the past six school year: 2013-2014, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. However, the proportion of dollars approved does not reach the levels of suburban referendums. In rural areas, the percentage of dollars approved tops out in the low-70s. The percentages of dollars approved reaches into the upper-80s and lower-90s for suburban referendums. Urban referendums occasionally reach 100 percent, but there are relatively few dollars requested in those years compared to suburban and rural collapsed locale codes.

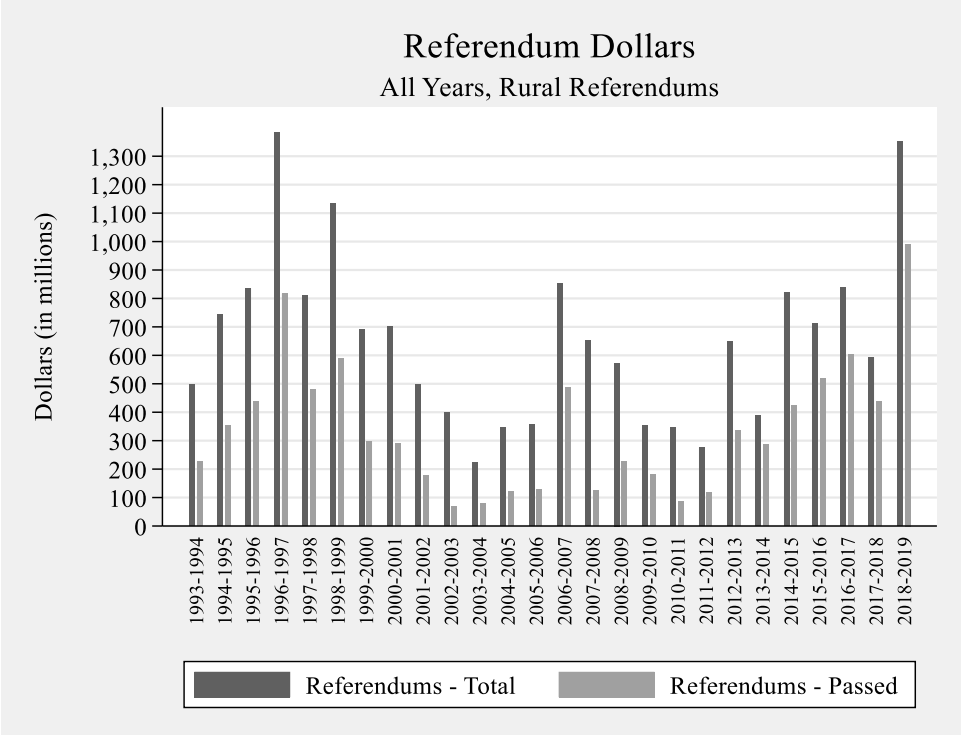

Figure 32: Referendum Dollars - By School Year, Rural

Referendum dollars can also be presented by the type of referendum that is floated by a district—debt issuance, non-recurring, or recurring. Figure 33 illustrates the total amount of dollars requested and the amount of money approved across all collapsed locale codes and years.

It is immediately evident that debt issuance dwarfs non-recurring and recurring referendums in terms of money. This is not surprising.

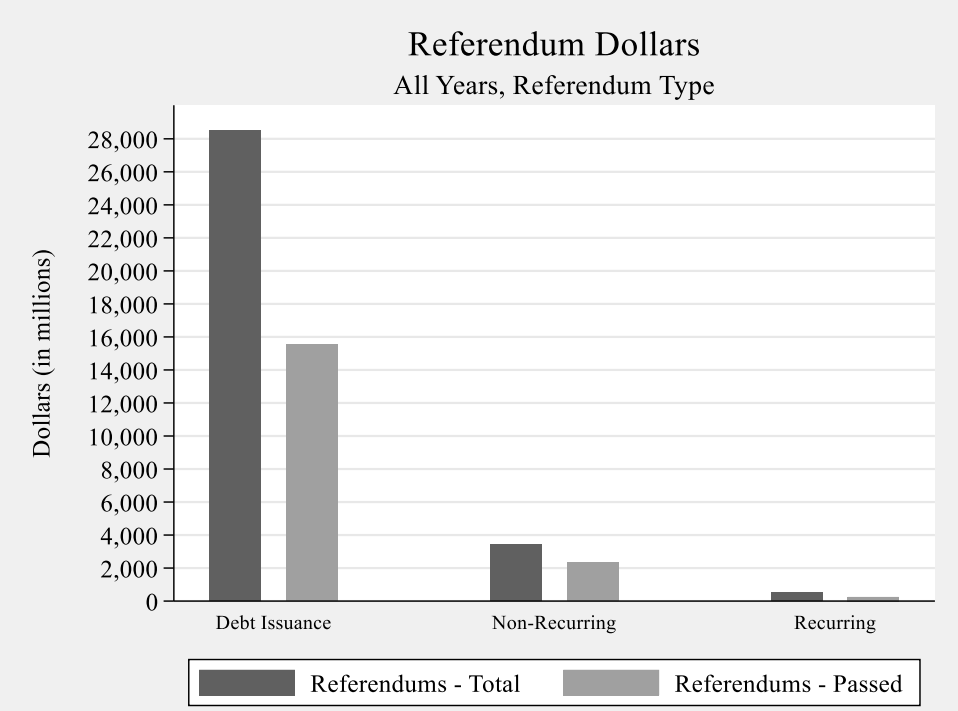

Figure 33: Referendum Dollars - All Years, by Referendum Type

Debt issuance is often used for massive infrastructure projects, additions, or new construction. Non-recurring and recurring referendums are mostly used for operations referendums and, for non-recurring, are time-limited. For instance, according to my coding of referendum dollar use, only 12 percent of non-recurring referendums were used for capital improvement projects only, e.g. a small roof fix. The remaining 88 percent were used for operations costs, such as salaries or programming, or joint capital-operations projects. Likewise, these percentages were 5 and 95 percent respectively for recurring referendums. Debt issuance referendums mirror almost exactly opposite the coding of recurring referendums. Fully 95 percent of debt issuance referendums went toward capital projects such as infrastructure upgrades, classroom additions, or entirely new buildings. These debt referendums can add up quickly. In the past two school years alone, Middleton-Cross Plains, Neenah, and Sun Prairie have approved a collective $433 million in debt issuance.

Table 20

Referendum Results – By School Year, by Referendum Type

	Debt Issuance		Non-Recurring		Recurring	
	Total Requested	Amount Approved	Total Requested	Amount Approved	Total Requested	Amount Approved
1993-1994	582.14	236.85	0	0	0	0
1994-1995	1,620.22	684.72	0	0	5.18	0
1995-1996	1,374.29	788.45	0	0	0	0
1996-1997	2,204.07	1,288.7	2.91	2.91	1.56	0.2
1997-1998	1,638.76	884.06	2.62	0.83	25.13	4.78
1998-1999	2,050.59	1,014.41	71.34	47.1	43.56	5.59
1999-2000	1,580.85	905.32	102.58	45.86	35.33	19.57
2000-2001	1,213.08	587.18	115.62	63.39	29.68	19.83
2001-2002	864.65	385.98	45.43	25.52	22.4	5.96
2002-2003	773.93	120.43	83.71	36.49	11.33	2.7
2003-2004	613.84	252.19	80.4	31.03	24.6	4.5
2004-2005	888.36	332.51	189.66	104.44	38	11.44
2005-2006	546.51	204	143.11	85.75	32.79	7.02

Table 20 (continued)

2006-2007	1,368.66	747.77	240.95	127.36	23.36	11.77
2007-2008	917.77	387.05	145.04	93.69	18.11	4.61
2008-2009	618.52	213.18	148.93	81.69	48.26	22.78
2009-2010	345.07	194.45	144.68	69.83	14.04	0
2010-2011	482.93	138.4	155.43	59.37	9.12	8.21
2011-2012	376.95	206.49	55.46	28.61	2.79	1.57
2012-2013	779.67	417.55	142.79	105.59	8.12	5.22
2013-2014	534.48	384.07	126.34	110.02	17.25	14.57
2014-2015	1,166.22	709.67	269.44	235.67	8.52	5.54
2015-2016	884.99	622.72	207.74	179.34	19.29	9.7
2016-2017	1,946.65	1,342.27	440.91	387.22	58.27	47.25
2017-2018	817.05	576.07	162.65	152.7	6.44	2.84
2018-2019	2,291.04	1,896.25	332.02	239.91	36.94	36.3
Total	28,481.28	15,520.73	3,409.75	2,314.33	540.07	251.95

Table 20 provides the breakdown of total dollars requested and amount approved across school years by referendum type, not the collapsed locale code.

Figure 34 is a *W*-shape as well. The reason for this is likely to be exactly what I just explained: debt issuance requests and approvals simply swamp out the other referendum types. The 2008-2009 school year also appears to be a breaking point in terms of when debt issuance referendums were put in front of voters. Following 2008-2009, debt issuance referendums see substantially more money requested and approved in even number, general election years, though even odd-numbered, mid-cycle election years are trending upward as well. The first eight years of debt issuance referendums and the last eight years of debt issuance referendums are financially comparable, and the intervening 10 years are noted by a relatively quiet period in terms of dollars approved. Roughly $6.4 billion were approved between 1993-1994 and 2000-2001, $2.9 billion between 2001-2002 and 2010-2011, and another $6.2 billion between 2011-2012 and 2018-2019. Thus, post-Act 10 years look notable—and they are—when compared with

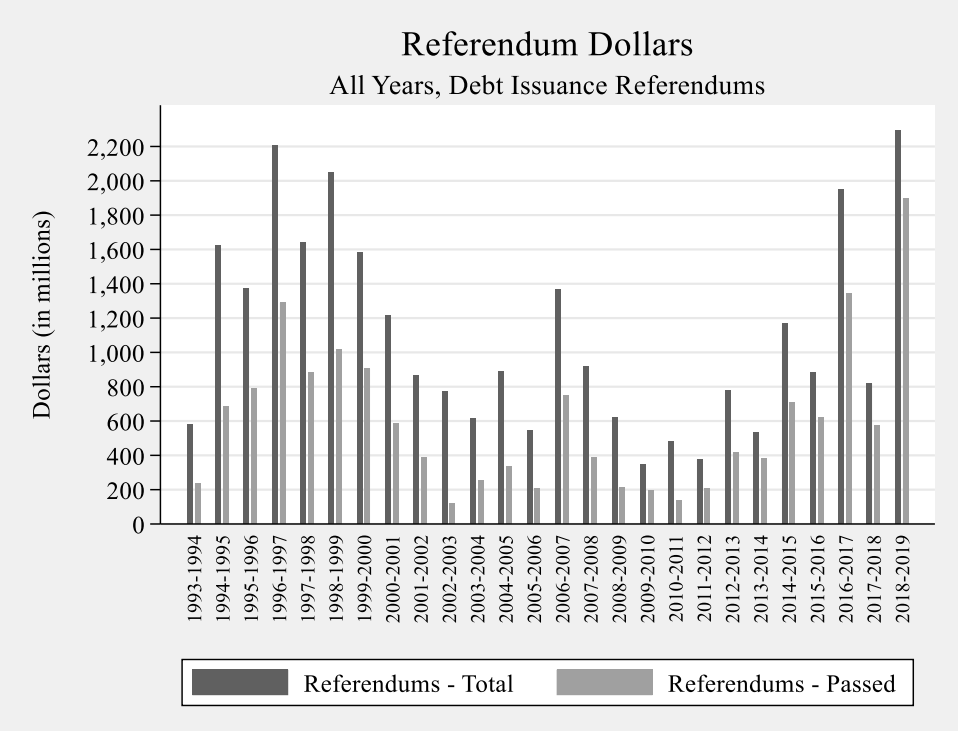

Figure 34: Referendum Dollars - By School Year, Debt Issuance

the 10 years prior, but these years stand out less when compared to the 1990s. That being said, it is difficult to tell what period, if any, is “normal.”

Non-recurring dollars are presented in Figure 35. Non-recurring dollars appear to follow two waves. There were no non-recurring referendums held in the first three years of revenue caps and very few dollars approved in the two years following. Beginning in 1998-1999, non-recurring requests and approvals generally trended upward until 2006-2007 before falling sharply. This began a new wave of generally trending upward from 2011-2012 to present. Like debt issuance, there appear to be notable increases in requests and approvals during even-numbered, general elections years. However, unlike debt issuance, there is no early, comparable period to the total dollars requested today. The 2015-2016, 2014-2015, 2018-2019, and 2016-2017 school years hold four of the top five spots in terms of dollars requested; only 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 come close. The previous five school years are also the school years with the most money approved by voters on non-recurring referendums. In terms of proportion of money passed, 1996-1997 holds the top

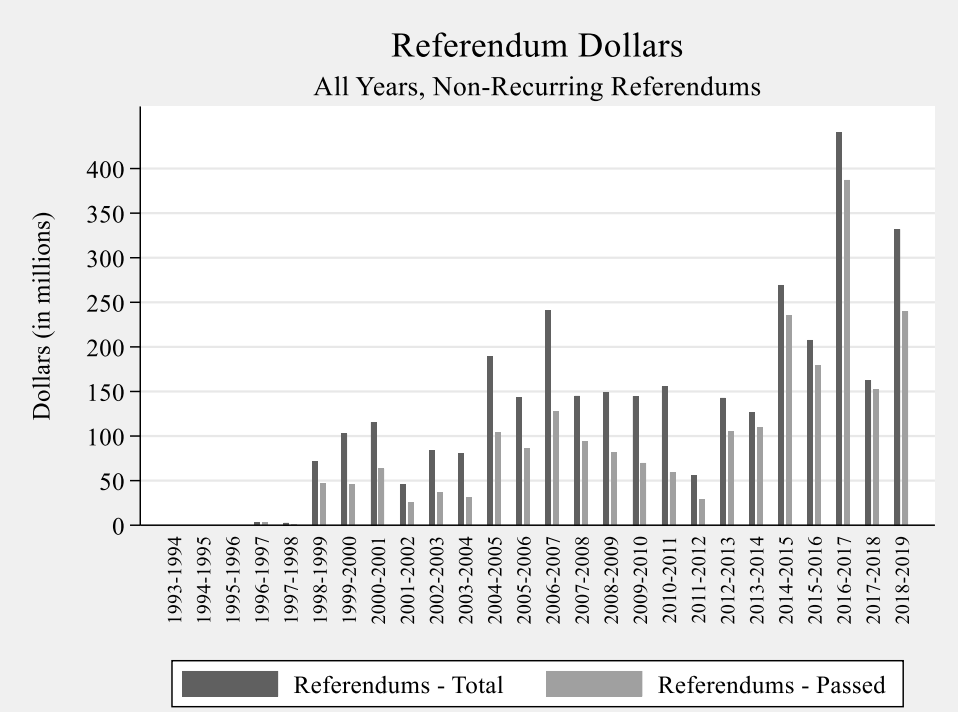

Figure 35: Referendum Dollars - By School Year, Non-Recurring

spot with 100 percent of money approved. However, there were only two non-recurring referendums held that school year. Beyond that, the other top seven spots include the previous seven school years. In these years, the percentage of money approved has never fallen below 72 percent, and the number of referendums held has never fallen below 28.

The final referendum category presented throughout the school years is the recurring referendum. Here, there appears to be a dividing line in terms of the difference between requests and approvals beginning in the 2010-2011 school year. Prior to that time, the amount of money requested via recurring referendum vastly overshadowed the amount actually approved by voters. However, beginning in 2010-2011, these paired bars are much closer, and the proportion approved has risen. In fact, in the last school year represented here, fully 98 percent of the money requested via recurring referendums was approved. Otherwise, there is not an evident pattern of dollars requested or dollars approved in recurring referendums. This changed when sorting recurring referendums by the proportion of money approved. Eight of the last ten years take the top eight spots in terms of proportion of money approved. Only 2015-2016 and

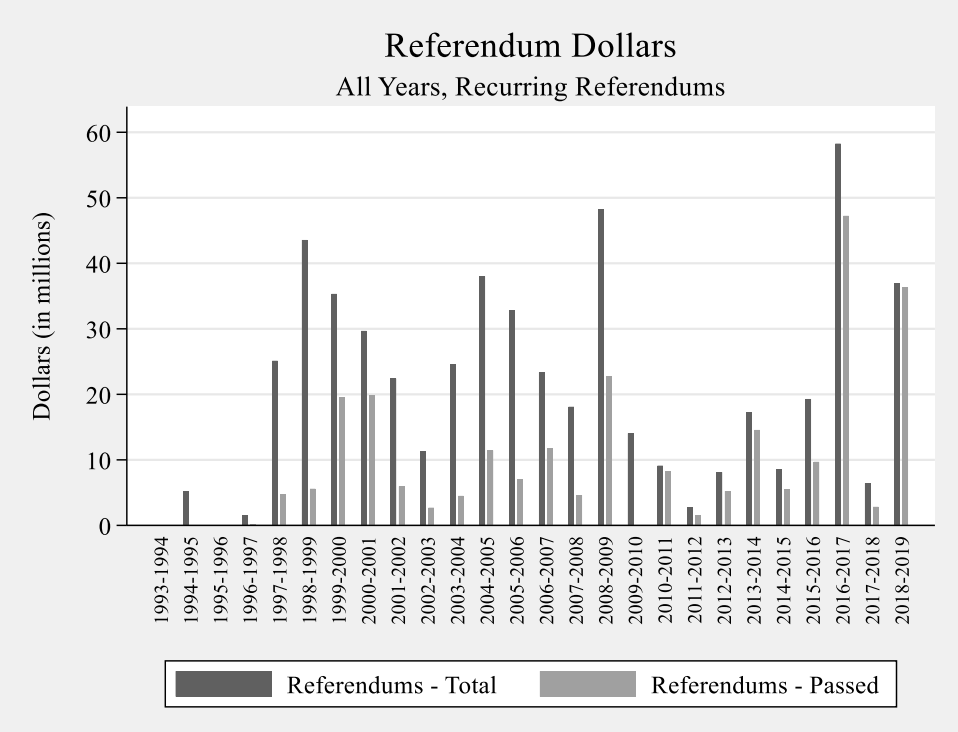

Figure 36: Referendum Dollars - By School Year, Recurring

2017-2018 do not make this top eight, and only 2017-2018 does not reach a 50 percent approval threshold. Otherwise, these other eight years range in approval percentage from 56 to 98 percent.

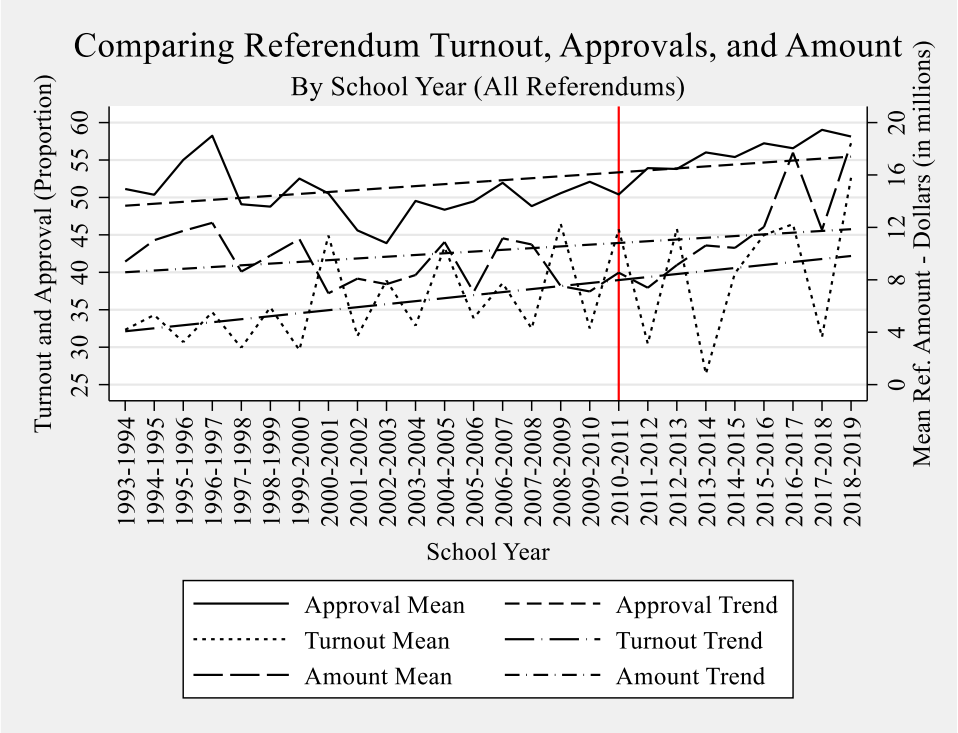

Figure 37: Comparing Referendum Turnout, Approvals, and Amount - By School Year (All Referendums)

Before changing course away from frequency and dollar amounts, I want to reiterate that the previous eight years have seen tremendous amounts of dollars requested, dollars approved, and proportions of referendums passed. And this is hardly isolated to a certain locale or referendum type. I also want to point out that these same recent years are not simultaneously seeing referendums that are any smaller in terms of average dollar requests or turnout. Put differently, it does not seem likely that these dollars and approvals are happening because the requests are smaller, and/or hardly anyone is voting. Rather, both of these factors are trending upward. This is shown in Figure 37 for all referendums across all school years in the revenue cap era. There are three sets of paired lines. The top set of lines shows the average percentage of people voting in favor of a referendum across all referendum types in a particular school year paired with the trend (left axis). The trend is increasing. In other words, the average percentage of people

choosing yes is increasing. The middle set of lines shows the average dollar request across all referendums in a particular school year paired with the trend (right axis). In general, more money is being requested by school districts via referendums as time moves forward. The bottom set of lines shows the average turnout across all referendums in a particular school year paired with the trend (left axis). Recall that general elections in Wisconsin occur in even-numbered years. This is evident in the spiked, every-other-year nature of the turnout line. However, it is interesting note that this alternating year patterns breaks down somewhat in more recent years. Again, all three factors though are clearly trending upward through the 26 years.

Figure 38 provides the same information across all 26 schools years but respective only to rural referendums. The top two lines show the approval mean and trend for rural referendums (left axis). The middle set of lines highlight the pattern in referendum amounts (right axis). Note first that the trend is nearly flat. Therefore, despite the high approvals, at the very least, referendum dollar requests are certainly no smaller now than in the past. However, the per-year average amounts have recently

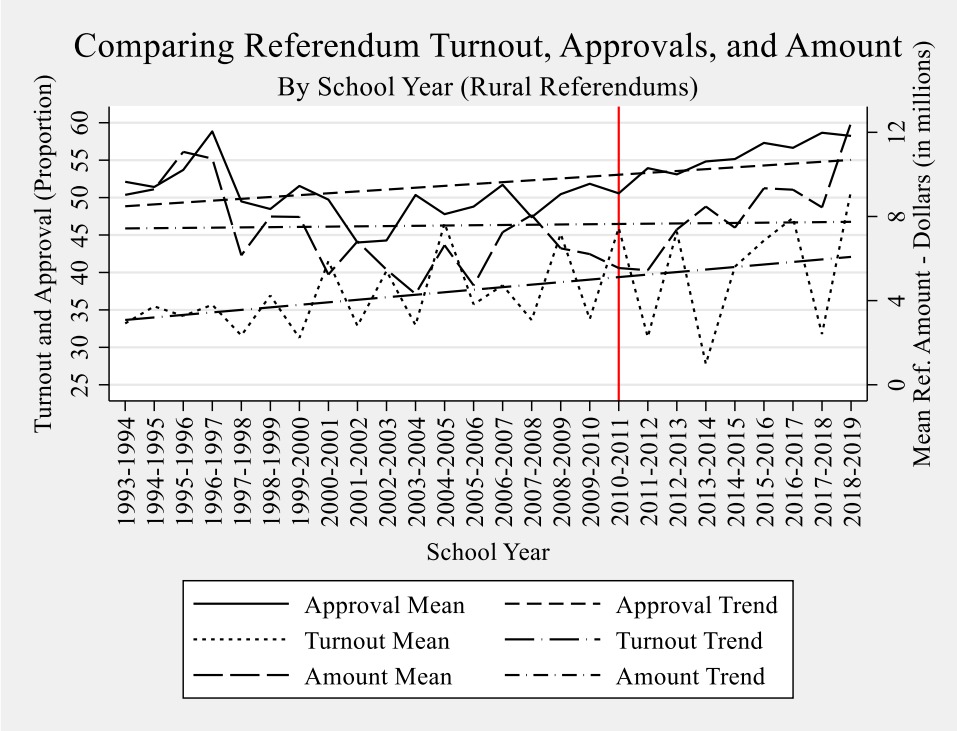

Figure 38: Comparing Referendum Turnout, Approvals, and Amount - By School Year (Rural Referendums)

escalated. Finally, turnout is noted in the bottom set of lines (left axis). Like all referendums, the spiky nature demonstrates the pattern of general election, but this also breaks down slightly more recently.

Changing course slightly, I now move away from frequencies and dollar amounts to the number of districts who held a referendum across these 26 revenue cap era school years. In all, 416 different school districts have held a referendum in this time, and 18 school districts have not. Table 21 lists the school districts who have never held a referendum between 1993-1994 and 2018-2019.

Table 21

Districts That Have Not Held a Referendum in the Revenue Cap Era (1993-1994 – 2018-2019)

Bloomington†	Herman-Neosho-Rubicon*	West Grant†
Chetek	Holy Hill*	Rubicon J6
Chetek-Weyerhaeuser*	Milwaukee*	Trevor Grade†
Erin*	Neosho J3	Wilmot Grade†
Glidden†	Norris*	Wautoma*
Herman #22	Park Falls†	Weyerhaeuser

Note. Districts marked with an asterisk still exist in the 2018-2019 school year. Districts marked with an obelus are now reorganized and are part of a district that has held a referendum since their consolidation.

Of these 18 school districts, only seven still exist in the 2018-2019 school year. These include Chetek-Weyerhaeuser, Erin, Herman-Neosho-Rubicon, Holy Hill, Milwaukee, Norris, and Wautoma. Another six districts did not have referendum before consolidation but are now part of a district that has had at least one. These include Bloomington and West Grant (River Ridge), Glidden and Park Falls (Chequamegon), and Trevor and Wilmot (Trevor-Wilmot). In sum, what this means is that there are exceedingly few communities who have not experienced a referendum since revenue caps were put into place in 1993-1994.

Another way of looking at this district data is by analyzing the cumulative number of districts that have experienced a referendum over time. This is presented in Figure 39. The bars represent the number of districts that held a referendum for the first time in the revenue cap era (left axis). The line represents the proportion of the 434 eligible districts that held a referendum at that school year point (right axis). Clearly, many districts wasted little time in proposing their first referendum(s). It took five years for 75 percent of Wisconsin districts to experience at least one referendum, eight years to reach 86 percent, and 13 years (half of the total time) to reach 90 percent.

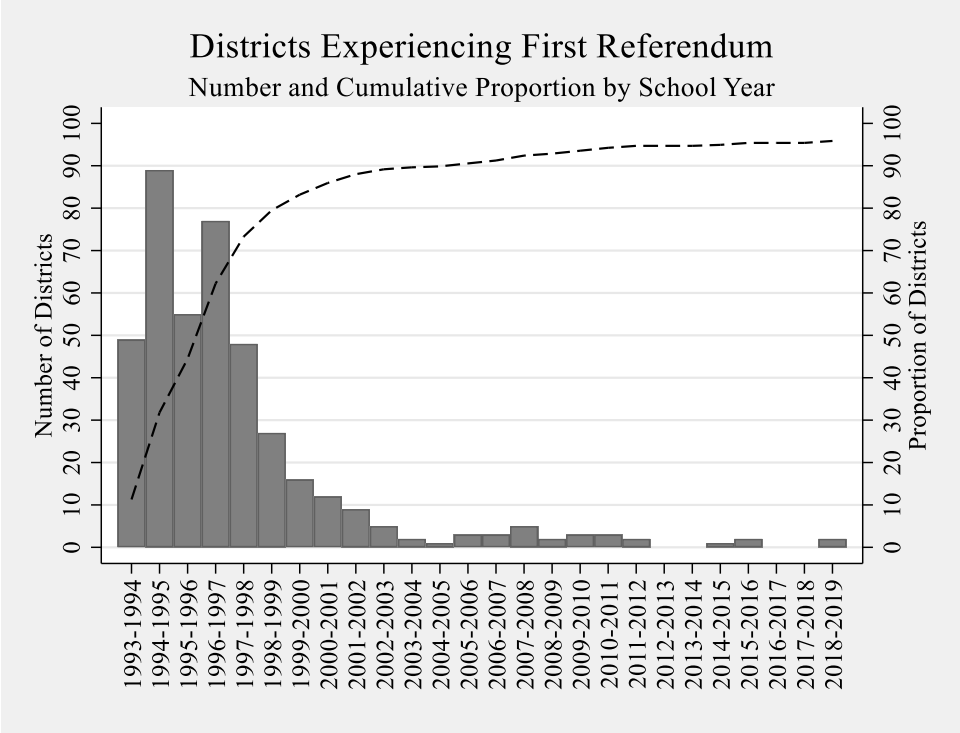

Figure 39: Districts Experiencing First Referendum

The final statistics I present are correlation coefficients between the proportion of residents voting yes on a referendum and measures of conservatism at the federal and state level. There were many, many correlations I could have analyzed with 60 eligible predictor variables. However, I chose to focus here only on political ideology because of the attention I gave to ideology in my literature review and conjectural theory. Table 22 is a correlation matrix between the percentage of people approving a referendum, the percentage of people voting for the

Republican candidate for president, and the percentage of people voting for the Republican candidate for governor.

Table 22

Correlations – Referendum Approval Proportions and Political Ideology

Variables	1	2	3
1. Referendum – Yes	-		
2. Pct GOP – Gov	-0.0087	-	
3. Pct GOP – Pres	-0.0899***	0.3240***	-

Note. *p<0.05. **p<0.01. ***p<0.001

Figure 39 is a scatterplot of the proportion of people voting yes on a referendum on the *y*-axis and GOP preference for governor and president on the left and right respectively. It also includes a fitted, linear trend line. First, the relationship between GOP preference gubernatorially and GOP preference presidentially is strongly significant but exhibits a fairly weak relationship. Second, the relationship between yes-proportion and GOP presidential preference is strongly

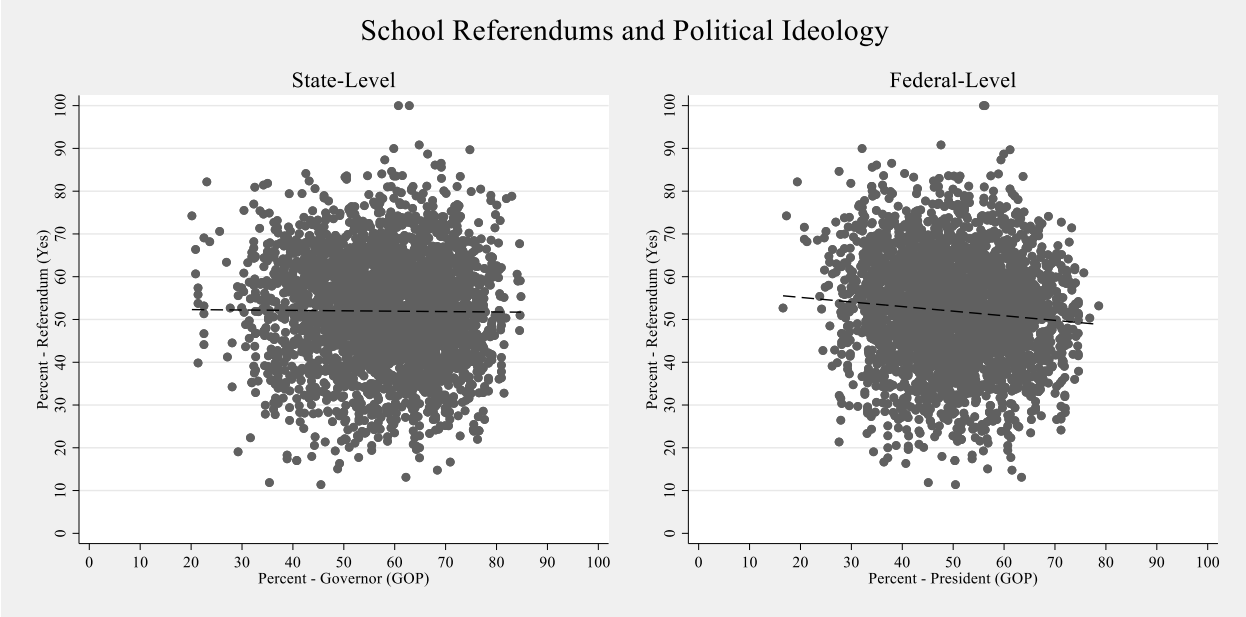

Figure 40: Correlations between School Referendums and Political Ideology

significant but very weak. Third, there is no significant relationship between yes-proportion and GOP gubernatorial preference whatsoever.

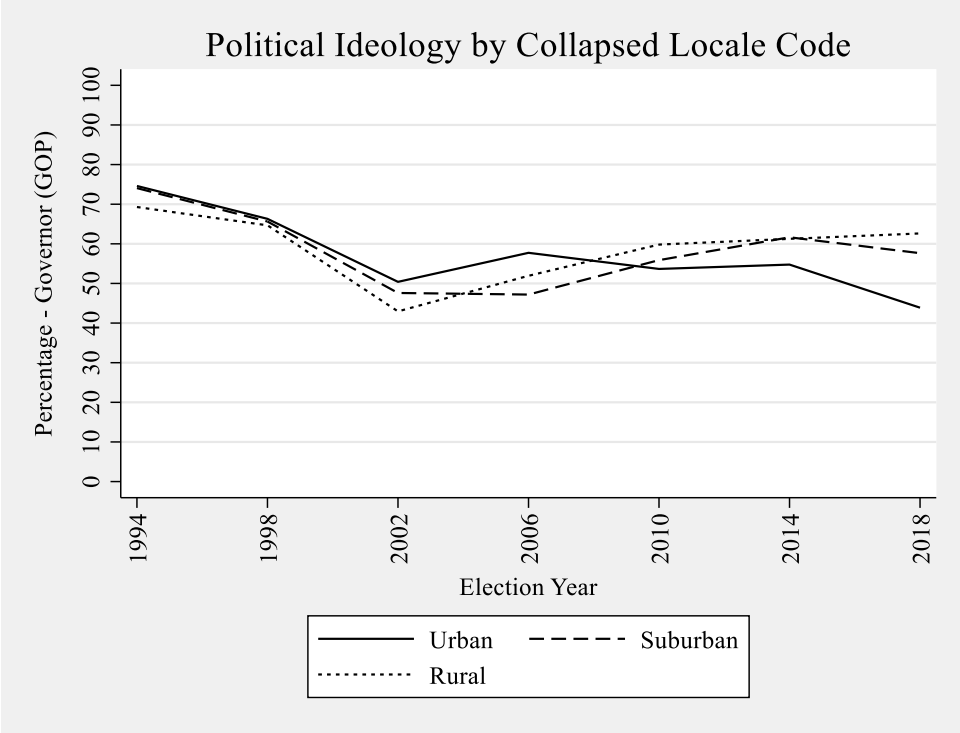

Figure 41: Political Ideology by Collapsed Locale Code (Governor)

I discussed at length in prior sections my conjectural theory regarding conservative political ideology, rural, White, working-class people, and attitudes toward local governments, particularly school districts. It is, therefore, useful to know whether people in rural districts that have held referendums are ideologically conservative. Figure 41 demonstrates this for gubernatorial races.

Interestingly, urban districts holding referendums actually had greater votes for the Republican candidate than did rural districts holding referendums until the 2010 election. Republican candidates accumulate greater proportions of votes in rural districts holding referendums than accumulate in urban and suburban counterparts, but Republican candidates are accumulating still less support than they did in the mid- to late 1990s. Meanwhile, Figure 42 differentiates urban, suburban, and rural districts that have held referendums for presidential

races. Unlike governor races, in which results across the districts were fairly similar and diverged more recently, presidential returns by collapsed locale code hold the opposite pattern.

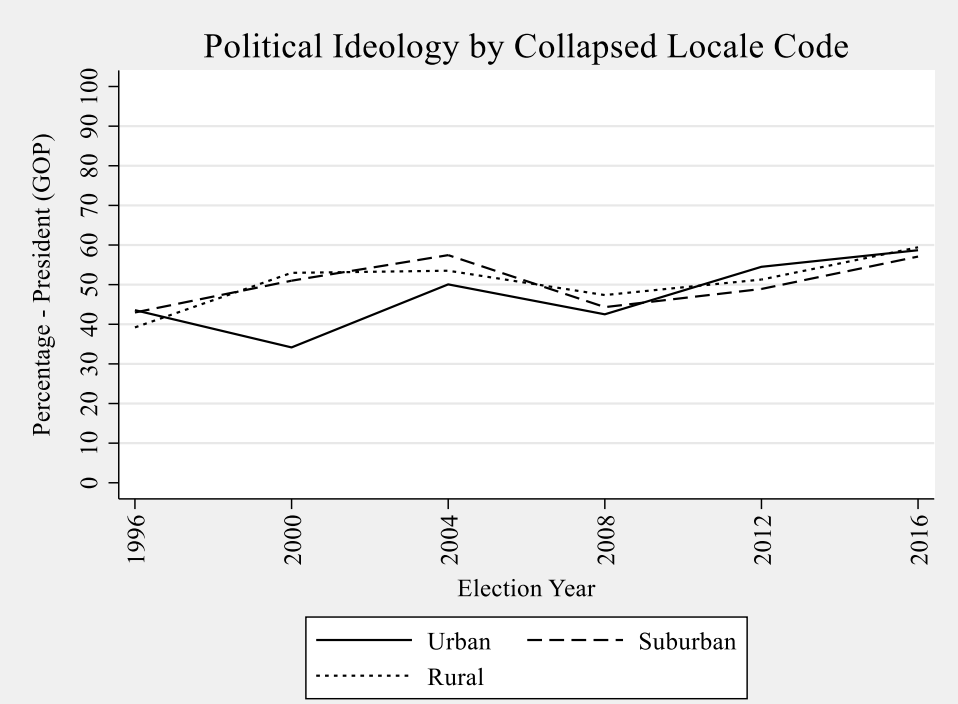

Figure 42: Political Ideology by Collapsed Locale Code (President)

Collapsed locale codes exhibited some variability until the 2008 election, at which time Republican vote shares converged around 45 percent and have steadily climbed upward in tandem to proportions of support in the upper 50s most contemporarily.

Table 23 is a correlation matrix only for rural districts who have held a referendum. It first shows—regardless of year— the correlations between the percentage of people approving a referendum, the percentage of people voting for the Republican candidate for president, and the percentage of people voting for the Republican candidate for governor. It also shows the correlation coefficients for the rural collapsed locale code pre-Act 10 only and post-Act 10 only.

Figure 43 illustrates the correlation between political ideology and proportion voting yes in rural districts who have held referendums for both gubernatorial and presidential elections. It includes correlations for all years of the revenue cap era, correlations pre-Act 10, and correlations, post-Act 10. These statistics may be some of the most important presented so far.

Very briefly, the conjectural theory I offered above argued that it is logical that rural, conservative districts should not be assumed to have more difficulty in passing referendums *simply because they are ideologically conservative*. As I argued, there are a host of reasons it would make sense for rural, conservative areas to vote yes on a referendum.

Table 23

Correlations – Referendum Approval Proportions and Political Ideology (Rural)

Variables	1	2	3
Years – Complete			
1. Referendum – Yes	-		
2. Pct GOP – Gov	0.0338	-	
3. Pct GOP – Pres	-0.0642**	0.2441***	-
Years – Pre-Act 10			
1. Referendum – Yes	-		
2. Pct GOP – Gov	0.0626*	-	
3. Pct GOP – Pres	-0.1519***	0.0470	-
Years – Post-Act 10			
1. Referendum – Yes	-		
2. Pct GOP – Gov	-0.1906***	-	
3. Pct GOP – Pres	-0.1391***	0.8365***	-

Note. *$p<0.05$. **$p<0.01$. ***$p<0.001$

The relationship between conservatism and referendums appears to change the "closer" the conservatism is applied to home. The association between the proportion of the vote for a Republican presidential candidate and proportion voting for referendum approval is always negative and, though weak, always statistically significant. Looking at the rural collapsed locale

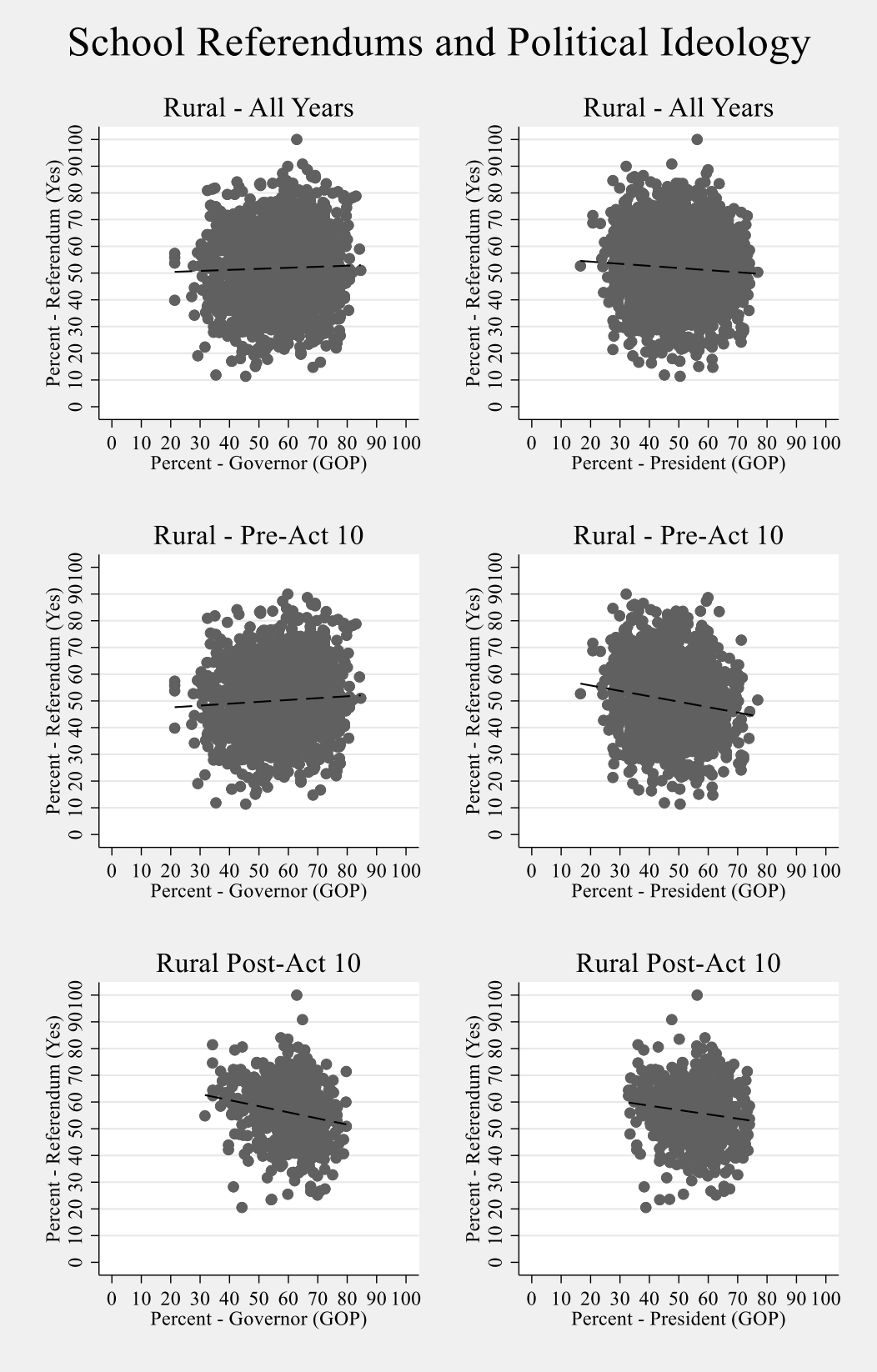

Figure 43: Political Ideology by Rural Collapsed Locale Code (Governor and President)

code in isolation regardless of year, there is no statistically significant relationship between state-level ideological conservatism and referendum approval proportions, though the direction is actually positive. Things change when a division is created with Act 10. Prior to Act 10, the rural collapsed locale code had a weak but positive and statistically significant relationship with proportion of approval. After Act 10's passage, the relationship grew more statistically significant, stronger, but negative. Perhaps Act 10 created such animosity toward public employees and public entities in Wisconsin that political rhetoric was able to shift residents' political behavior in public school referendums in a short period of time. However, based on the data presented here, I am unable to say what causal relationship ideological conservatism and referendum approval proportions have in rural districts that have held referendums. This effect could be explained away by a different factor if this were a causal analysis. Nevertheless, this correlational finding provided me with an excellent springboard for interview protocols. I turn my attention toward my qualitative data collection shortly. The next—and final—element of my methods section is my approach to dealing with missing data.

Missing data.

Missing data is a substantial problem in survey research. Bias can be introduced if a particular group of people refuse to participate in a survey or refuse to answer particular questions. There are several types of missing data (definitions adopted from Gelman & Hill, 2007). The first is missingness completely at random (MCAR). MCAR occurs when the chance of being missing is the same for all units or subjects. Observations can be discarded without bias if the missing data is truly MCAR. The second is missingness at random (MAR). MAR is a situation in which the chance a variable is missing depends only other available information. For instance, earnings are MAR if the chance of skipping an earnings question depends on the respondents' age, sex, race, and education, and the survey collects these other variables without

missingness. When a variable is MAR, a researcher can remove the observations without bias provided the analyses controls for variables that affect the chance of missingness. Missingness transitions away from randomness if the missing value depends on other predictors that are not observed or recorded. Excluding observations in this case will introduce bias, similar to the problem of omitted variable bias. Lastly, missingness can depend on the value of the missing variable itself, such as wealthy people refusing to answer how much they make (Gelman & Hill, 2007). Controlling for other factors associated with high incomes can make this problem look more like a MAR situation (Gelman & Hill, 2007).

Of these four missing issues, mine most closely resembled MCAR. However, my situation was a tad different than a survey in the sense that chance of missing was, indeed, the same for all units simply because of when data was collected. There was a systematic data missingness issue: in general, if a variable was missing data for one observation, it was missing data for every observation for that year—all or nothing. For example, I was missing teachers' salary and benefits for every district prior to 1997-1998, and I have every districts' information through 2017-2018 without any issues of missingness. Similarly, I am missing every districts' median income until 2000-2001 and then again until 2009-2010, at which point I have data on every district.

I could drop these observations without introducing bias into my model if I were conducting a causal analysis of one particular type of variable, just as Gelman and Hill (2007) note. However, dropping all of this data would reduce my ability to predict referendums effectively. Without imputed data, my models only ran on 511 referendums. With imputed data, my models ran on 2,406 referendums, a nearly 400 percent gain. All else equal, more data helped me improve my models' predictive abilities. Fortunately, this missing data issue was detrimental

as it sounds because of the systematic nature of the missingness. To impute missing data, I used the following equation.

Equation (3): $Y = \beta 0 + \beta_1(SchoolYear*LEAID) + \beta_2(MillRate) + \beta_3(PropValMem) + \beta_4(TotalLevy) + \beta_5(TotalEqValue) + \beta_6(TotPubStdts) + \beta_7(LocaleCode) + \epsilon$

In this equation, *Y* equals the imputed value for a particular variable, school district, and school year. *SchoolYear* presents the academic year for which the data is missing, and *LEAID* is the DPI identification number for the district missing the information. This interaction allows *Y* to change by school year but also allows a different slope for each district in the analysis. *MillRate, PropValMem, TotalLevy, TotalEqValue, TotPubStdts,* and *LocaleCode* represent the district's mill rate, property value per member, total levy, total equalized value, total number of students in the public schools, and the district's locale code respectively. These covariates were chosen because no district was missing any data for any of these variables.[6] Observations with missing covariates would otherwise be dropped from the model, and no imputed data would be available.

There are several reasons why this approach worked. First, the standard deviations of variables for which there were missing data were fairly tight. In other words, districts do not see massive and unpredictable shifts in the number of college-educated residents, teachers' total number of years teaching, or student-teacher ratios from one year to the next. For instance, the within-group standard deviation for educational attainment was 4.29 percent, sex was 1.2

[6] Technically, there are 42 missing observations for this set of variables. At times, districts would remain in a federal dataset a year after they dissolved/reorganized or the LEA identification number would appear in a dataset prior to existence but after reorganization approval. A district obviously cannot hold a referendum prior to or after its existence, so these missing observations are irrelevant to the analysis.

percent, source and steadiness of income was 3.3 percent, teachers' average salary was $3,203, and student-staff ratio was 1.4 students.

Second, I had the data bookended for all community variables. This provided a sense of stability even for data at the early stages of the school year sampling frame.

Third, a good deal of imputed data was dropped anyhow. The earliest year of achievement data that I had was 1998-1999. That meant all referendums prior to this year were dropped. I did not—and actually *could not*—impute achievement data because the achievement tests differed across the years of my sampling frame. All of the DPI datasets I used were available by this point. Moreover, my analysis focused on districts who held a referendum, not all districts. Therefore, I dropped any observation in which a referendum did not take place, i.e. if Bayfield did not hold a referendum in 2003-2004, it was not included in the final dataset of 3,202 referendums, and its imputed data was dropped with it. This further reduced the percentage of imputed data.

Fourth, there were many, many variables in this dataset, and none of them were being used for causal analysis. This missing data would have been substantially more detrimental if I were seeking to understand the causal relationship between, say, homeownership rates and referendum outcomes while holding other variables with missing data constant. This was not what I was doing. Homeownership rate was merely one of 60 variables used for prediction, not explanation.

Fifth, this was not an uncommon way of fixing missing data issues (Allison, 2001). Linear regression imputation could lead to issues with underestimating standard errors and *p*-values (Allison, 2001). I once again return to the point of my research: prediction. This would have been an issue if I were looking to determine causality between the outcome and an

independent variable with missing information or a covariate with missing information. However, *p*-values that are too low are not problematic since my models will be evaluated based on predictive effectiveness, not individual predictors.

Methodological limitations.

This design is not without methodological limitations. First, I recognize the limitations in attempting to use what I fully acknowledge is an incomplete regression model in order to determine what should be added to the same regression model. However, the factors included in this model have repeatedly demonstrated significance in comparable, Rust Belt state contexts over the past two decades. It is important to honor and respect this historical research and the significant variables that are published. I do not believe the model will not be useful. Instead, I think it is an excellent starting point in order to unpack the model's error term and evaluate the correlations between the outcome and that error term. The analytical methods described above—both quantitative and qualitative—help me determine what, if any, *quantifiable* variables could be included in the model in order to improve it for use in future predictions.

I acknowledge and recognize that all the potential vote-influencing factors may not be quantifiable. My research may turn up feelings, emotions, or an affect that are not easily reducible to a number. At the same time, factors that are difficult but still possibly quantifiable may remain remarkably context-specific. It may be that quantitative models may reach—or may have already reached—a ceiling of utility and that the remaining factors must be unpacked at extremely local levels. Various models may perform equally well (or poorly), but it may never be possible to explain all of the variation for a given outcome (Ragin, 1997). Regardless of quantifiability, I have no reason to believe that the factors that affect deviance upward are different than the factors that affect deviance downward. For instance, suppose I had not included a measure of trust (operationalized by administrator tenure) in my work. The literature

gives me no indication that trust affects only upward deviating referendums or is manifesting itself differently in a downwardly deviant district. I hypothesize that a preponderance of trust and a lack of trust will lead to upward and downward deviation respectively. Thus, research in both deviating districts could lead to uncovering the same factors.

Second, the literature remains divided on how to deal with repeated floats of the same referendum. Bowers and Lee (2013) and Bowers and Chen (2015) maintain that refloats are fundamentally different than initial floats and should be treated as such with survival analysis. At the same time, Ingle et al. (2013) argue that the predictive results will be comparable regardless of the refloat treatment. When the next recession takes hold in Wisconsin, property taxpayers may find it difficult to continue to open their wallets for their local public schools. Wisconsin may see an increase in failed referendum attempts. As these accumulate, it may be helpful to reanalyze the differing float claims in a Wisconsin context. These results could also become instructive as referendum attempts are limited. Since 2017, school districts have been prohibited from holding referendums during elections with the lowest historical voter turnout and are limited to two referendum requests per year (Department of Public Instruction, 2017). Voters may behave differently on refloats if the school is forced to hone and calibrate a referendum communications message in the interim prohibited period. This is empirically unverified but conceivable. Regardless, regression models benefit from parsimony. Since, at this time, standard OLS and survival analysis behave the same, researchers may continue to use the more approachable OLS methods.

Third, the work presented here provides substantial nuanced information from deviant districts in order to build theory. But, as Bowers and Chen pointed out, local contexts may still reign supreme. This study would be improved by future research that scrutinizes other

communities' voting behavior and investigates the impetus for referendum choices. Future research should replicate this work in other rural communities to evaluate the extent of my theory building. Additionally, future research should extend this theory building to more suburban and urban places to understand whether school district politics heavily depends on locale or common threads of political ideology.

Qualitative Case Study

I conducted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design in which qualitative case study data was used to "enhance, complement, and … follow up on … quantitative findings" (see Harwell, 2011, p. 153). As a reminder, the practitioner-focused goal of this project was to further improve the predictive capabilities of whatever model proved most useful from the quantitative portion of this section. At the same time, the scholarly-focused goal of this project was to begin to develop a theory of referendum political behavior in a rural context. To make these improvements and expand theoretical knowledge, I conducted qualitative follow-up work in two districts identified using the predictive models above. The first was chosen by upward deviation: the district whose predicted referendum outcome was above what actually occurred. The second was chosen by downward deviation: the district whose predicted referendum outcome was below what actually occurred.

However, there was still an important, outstanding question: deviant according to what model? There was no clear or easy way to compare which equations were "better" for predicting outcomes because the dependent variables were different in each. The first model used logistic regression with a dependent variable of passage likelihood. The second model used OLS regression with a dependent variable of percentage-yes. Suppose the best predictive logistic model suggested five potential districts that were deviating upward from their predicted

probability, and the best predictive OLS model suggested five potential districts that were deviating upward from their predicted approval proportion. In an ideal world, the same districts would deviate the most in all models. However, how would I go about selecting my districts for follow-up if the deviating districts were not the same from each—would I choose a site for qualitative follow-up from the logistic or OLS approach?

Unfortunately, there were few empirical strategies for reconciling this issue. The field of microbiology made some headway in tackling the problem but the solutions were largely inapplicable to the social sciences (see Zhao, Chen, & Schaffner, 2001). In brief, the solutions required strict control of the probability of witnessing an event, e.g. bacteria growth, and then comparing the probability to the actual outcome. Clearly, there was no way for me to specifically design a referendum with a 60 percent chance of passing and then witnessing the outcome.

My solution to this problem was to look for overlap in the deviating districts. First, this meant comparing districts with a low probability of passing a referendum but did to districts with a low predicted yes-proportion that ended up having a great deal of people voting yes. A district that overlapped these two lists became a potential site for upward deviation qualitative follow-up. Second, this also meant comparing districts with a high probability of passing a referendum but did not to districts with a high predicted yes-proportion that ended up having a great deal of people voting no. A district that overlapped these two lists became a potential site for downward deviation qualitative follow-up.

The deviation was subject to time constraints. I limited my qualitative investigations to districts that deviated from my model for a referendum that took place within the 2018-2019 academic year. I made this decision to maximize the chance voters would accurately recall why they voted the way that they did. Through the course of my research, I realized this time

constraint was completely unnecessarily. School referendums were even more impactful in these communities than I had imagined. There were countless times I had to correct interviewees and say something akin to, “No, I’m not talking about the 1996 referendum. I’m talking about the 2019 referendum.” Or, “Alright, that gives me a good overview of the 2007 referendum. Let’s talk about the one in 2018.” I believe I got caught up in the fact that 3,202 referendums have taken place in Wisconsin since 1993. Obviously, the regular voter was not considering this fact. They were remembering the last three in their particular district. And they were remembering them clearly. With that in mind, this section includes three parts. First, I defend my qualitative method and the appropriateness of deviance site-selection strategies. Second, I explain my data collection plan. Third, I explain how I analyzed my qualitative data.

Case selection strategy.

Case study research is a qualitative methodology in which “the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system(s) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Merriam (1998, p. 27) provides a similar definition, stating that a case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit.” Both Creswell and Merriam emphasized an element of “boundedness,” though Merriam especially so. In fact, she remarked that the bounded system was the “single most defining characteristic of case study research” because it “delimits the object of study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). If the subject of the research cannot be “fenced in” in some way then it cannot be a case study (Merriam, 1998, p. 134). Contemporary methodological debate centers not on the analysis and theory development of a case study but rather in determining the bounded system(s) from which that analysis and theory manifest (Seawright, 2016a). Certainly, choosing the bounded system(s) depends on the goals of the researcher and its intended contributions to the literature.

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) resisted the notions of rigid boundedness, especially as they are applied early in the research endeavor. Their concern was that tightly bounding the research context would only uncover evidence that was too contemporary and limited on too narrow geographic or place-based contexts. They warned that *a priori* boundary setting would ignore history, people, economic and political situations, and the interaction of any or all of these various components.

While I heeded their warnings, the focus of my research was, in some ways, bounded without my interference or influence. School districts and voting wards have boundaries. As a resident of one and only one district, I am unable to vote in a neighboring district's referendum. Therefore, place or geographic context is narrowed by school district boundary lines. However, beyond these formal borders, I allowed my case study investigations to proceed unbounded by time or other government or economic limitations—what Bartlett and Vavrus referred to as transversal and vertical case study axes. In other words, I acknowledged that lingering 1970s economic factors may continue to influence the votes of rural Wisconsin sites. Likewise, I acknowledged that the influence of state government public school aid or economic events like the Great Recession could certainly influence how people chose to vote in their local public school district's referendum. My research was limited by a one-year window for the sake of remembering voting decisions. However, in no way did I limit my research to local events in a short period of time that influenced referendum voting decisions. I return to the concept of boundedness below when I discuss a case study's relationship with generalizability.

The latest quantitative public school district referendum approach appears to be reaching a ceiling of utility, a point I made at the conclusion of my literature review above. Current models struggle to explain 40 percent of the variance in passage prediction, and factors that

appear to matter in some contexts have no bearing whatsoever in others. A marriage of qualitative and quantitative methods is one approach that can advance referendum research. Harwell (2011, p. 153), like I stated above, referred to this as a sequential explanatory research design in which qualitative data is used to "enhance, complement, and … follow up on … quantitative findings." Similarly, Lieberman (2005, pp. 435-436) described this mixed-method design as a nested analysis which "combines the statistical analysis of a large sample of cases with the in-depth investigation of one or more of the cases contained within the large sample." Lieberman continued,

> The strategy of combining the two approaches aims to improve the quality of conceptualization and measurement, analysis of rival explanations, and overall confidence in the central findings of a study. The promise of the nested research design is that both LNA [i.e. "Large-*N* Analysis" or the statistical portion of the work] and SNA [i.e. "Small-*N* Analysis" or the case study portion of the work] can inform each other to the extent that the analytic payoff is greater than the sum of the parts. Not only is the information gleaned complementary, but also each step of the analysis provides direction for approaching the next step. Most prominently, LNA provides insights about rival explanations and helps to motivate case selection strategies for SNA, whereas SNA helps to improve the quality of measurement instruments and model specifications used in the LNA. (Lieberman, 2005, p. 436; bracketed words mine)

The process proceeds as follows. First, the researcher must evaluate the quality of the LNA. Does the quantitative model explain the theoretical hunch behind the phenomenon of focus? Here, the model can be evaluated using fairly standard tools of a model's goodness-of-fit, including the number of cases whose outcome is correctly predicted, the amount of variance explained, or, depending on the model's construction, an *F*-test or Pearson chi-square test of overall fit. Another important evaluatory tool is a graphical representation of predicted versus actual outcomes. Second, the researcher must decide whether the unexplained portion of the model is due to random noise or if the model could be improved by subsequent SNA. If the

LNA's findings are not suitably robust, the follow-up SNA's purpose is model building—the third step. At this point, the researcher may have underdeveloped or very general theoretical hunches regarding the relationship between explanatory variables and the outcome. To improve theoretical understandings and improve the model, the researcher hunts inductively for events, processes, factors, behaviors, or attitudes that connect the variables and the outcome. This process can be repeated endlessly until either every case is explored or a model is produced that consistently predicts accurate outcomes. (These steps are adapted from Lieberman, 2005, pp. 439-443.)

There is a final critical point in this process. A model-building SNA may not produce a reliable theoretical explanation for cases even as previously uncovered vote-influencing factors are newly incorporated into the quantitative model. This is not a failure of the process. Rather, this is an indication that extremely local and contextualized factors are influencing votes that other communities may not experience in the same way. With regard to referendums, it is possible that the currently existing quantitative models may not improve much, at least as measured by variance explained. A school district community may vote yes on a referendum because of a previously beloved superintendent, a natural disaster in which the school used their resources to aid relief, or a school took an active approach in mitigating economic impacts after the closure of a major manufacturing plant. These factors may not be easily quantifiable, but they nevertheless provide important clarity on referendum passage prediction, even if they remain extremely context-specific. In other words, consistently bad quantitative models are instructive in their own right.

It is worth elaborating on the inductive processes Lieberman proposed because this is where the value in case study work really lies. A case study is particularly well-suited for the

research I proposed, both in terms of theory generation and modeling improvements. Some case study research presents two options for theory-focused case study researchers: theory generation or theory testing, what Bennett (2004) refers to respectively as "logic of discovery" or "logic of confirmation" (also see Lieberman, 2005; Gerring, 2004; Gerring, 2007; Levy, 2008). However, there is little reason to believe that a well-constructed case study design could not make headway on both goals; they are not mutually exclusive. In the research proposed here, I am able to *confirm* whether postmaterialism and political resentment extend to a local level of government, and I am able, in turn, to *generate* a new hypothesis for rural referendum voting behavior depending on whether I am able to confirm the presence of these political science theories or other vote-influencing factors that local citizens self-identify.

Quantitative methods, especially standard methods of regression, help explain the relationship between a variable and an outcome, controlling for other factors (Weller & Barnes, 2016). However, with regard to theory-generation, methods of qualitative case studies are critical for better understanding "*how* X generates Y." (Weller & Barnes, 2016, p. 425). Or, perhaps even more likely, how *combinations* of *X*s generate *Y*. In my case, state financial support or property wealth may be predictors of referendum outcomes as determined quantitatively, but only follow-up qualitative case studies could best determine *how* or *why* those factors over time led to a choice on a ballot, a situation known as "process tracing" (Levy, 2008, p. 11). At the same time, qualitative case studies help explain how a previously unaccounted for or unknown *X*, the omitted variable, generates *Y* (Baškarada, 2014; Seawright, 2016a; Seawright, 2016b). As such, a much more nuanced view of reality is presented that is otherwise relegated to the "suggestions for future research" section of a quantitative study.

Case studies for theory generation are not without precedent, though it is more uncommon in educational research. Other fields, including business management, organizational structure, and information systems have a nearly four-decade-long history with using case studies for theory development (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Langley, 1999; Siggelkow, 2007; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Gibbert et al, 2008). Political science scholars have also developed theory from case studies, though they are under-recognized and frequently criticized from political scientists steeped in quantitative traditions (see Skocpol, 1979; Putnam, 1993; Elman, 1997).

By definition, case studies are context-dependent, which is important for testing theory. While I believe my particular working theory and conceptual framework have plausible merit, case studies are critical for determining the *extent* of a theory's applicability and generalizability (Flyvbjerg, 2006). If conservative fiscal values take a backseat when applied to local school districts, a prediction not yet tested empirically at the local level, then case studies can reveal how widespread this theory applies in rural Wisconsin. Finally, case studies allow theory testing between units of comparison (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Perhaps, for instance, low property tax wealth is an important indicator of referendum passage. While one low property wealth community may approve their referendum in order to locally recoup slashed state aid, another low property wealth community may approve their referendum as a "reward" or appreciation for prior school district efforts to tighten the financial belt. A case study can untangle what, on its face, looks like an otherwise identical predictor-outcome relationship.

In sum, case studies allow the researcher to refine a hypothesis, replace the existing hypothesis with a new idea or perspective that is generated from doing the fieldwork, or delineate the scope or extent of a theory's reach. Researchers do this by specifying *X*-*Y*

relationship mechanisms: how an *X* or set of explanatory *X*s produce a particular outcome (Bennett, 2004; Gerring, 2004; George & Bennett, 2004; Gerring, 2007; Levy, 2008; Gerring, 2008; Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Rohlfing & Schneider, 2013; Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016; Weller & Barnes, 2016). Researchers are able to "'see' how *X* and *Y* interact" (Gerring, 2007, p. 103)

Regardless of whether a case or set of cases are used for logics of discovery or confirmation, the researcher must still be able to articulate a clear process for case study site selection. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, p. 128) did not mince words while stressing how important this is, stating,

> No issue is so ubiquitous in the early design phase of a research project as the question: which cases (or more precisely, which observations) should we select for study? In qualitative research, the decision as to which observations to select is crucial for the outcome of the research and the degree to which it can produce determinate and reliable results.

Recently, an entire issue of *Sociological Methods & Research* was devoted to identifying case studies in mixed-methods projects. Two political science professors, John Gerring and Jason Seawright, who also authored articles in that journal issue, have spearheaded the argument for the usefulness of deviant case studies. These authors defined a deviant case as one "that by reference to some general understanding of a topic (either a specific theory or common sense), demonstrates a surprising value" and "is therefore closely linked to the investigation of theoretical anomalies" (Seawright and Gerring, 2008, p. 302). Levy (2008, p. 13), meanwhile, stated that deviant designs "focus on observed empirical anomalies in existing theoretical propositions, with the aim of explaining why the case deviates from theoretical expectations and in the process refining the existing theory and generating additional hypotheses." Bennett (2004, p. 22) simply argued that a deviant case is a case "whose outcomes are not predicted or explained

well by existing theories." The case is selected via statistical methods from which an observation demonstrates the maximum residual value of the model. The extent of deviance can range from zero (falling onto the regression line and known as a typical case) to positive or negative infinity in OLS regression (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Irrespective of preferred definition, a deviant case study is a form of congruence testing. It "tests whether the predicted value of the dependent variable, in view of the values of the case's independent variables, is congruent with the actual outcome of the case" (Bennett, 2004, p. 24).

There are several reasons why a deviant case study was appropriate in the context of referendum results. First, these sorts of case studies can validate researcher-chosen measurements (Bennett, 2004; George & Bennett, 2004; Seawright, 2016a). For instance, the amount or extent of trust a community has in their district leadership is related to referendum passage likelihood. However, the "best" way to measure trust is debatable. I operationalized and quantified this measure of trust with two variables, average tenure of district administrators and average tenure of teachers. This may not be the most appropriate operationalization. Instead, a better-operationalized predictor of trust might be a dichotomous factor that includes whether the district administrator is required to live within the district's boundaries. A case study can help the researcher determine which operationalization among many options is "best." Measurement error in variables may misclassify a case as deviant when, in actuality, the case is quite typical if a validated measure is instead incorporated. By the same token, a case may appear to be typical and near the best-fit line when it is actually heavily deviant (Levy, 2008).

Second, process-tracing is revealed. Explained above, this is the idea that case studies can reveal the complex and cumulative prior decisions and actions that lead to a positive or negative relationship between a variable and its outcome (Seawright, 2016b).

Third, a deviant case provides theoretical insights (George & Bennett, 2004). These outliers can reveal the extent to which a theory applies. In my particular work, a deviant case sheds light on whether my conjectural theory is on the right track, whether postmaterialism and political resentment are expressed differently or greatly limited at the local level, or whether the theory is bounded to a different set of cases. This is the generalization that Flyvbjerg was referencing that I discussed above: does the extant theory accurately explain the predictor-outcome relationships of a particular case, and, if so, to what sorts of cases does it apply? (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Bennett, 2004)

Fourth, deviant cases are excellent at revealing new and unspecified explanations (Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Seawright, 2016a, 2016b). This element cannot be overstated. The whole point of a deviant case study is to uncover and unpack the error term—what omitted variable(s) might be located in that residual that could be included in a model that better predicts the outcome moving forward? In this way, a deviant case study is not supposed to remain deviant. Rather, a deviant case study should fall much nearer to the regression line once the omitted or previously unexplored variable(s) is included in the model (Gerring, 2008). Therefore, the amount or level of "deviant-ness" is dependent on the model used (Gerring, 2008).

This is precisely what Bowers et al. were calling for when they alluded that some *thing*(s), some *factor*(s) is currently accounted for that seemed to be guiding referendum likelihood outcomes. Additionally, this currently unaccounted for variable may serve to produce even better predictions for other rural Wisconsin districts within the reflection population—despite the initial definitionally-required *unrepresentativeness* of the deviant case (George & Bennett, 2004; Gerring, 2008; Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Rohlfing & Schneider, 2013; Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016). Several researchers' work is worth quoting at length regarding this point:

> This feature of the deviant case study also helps to resolve questions about its representativeness. The representativeness of a deviant case is problematic since the case in question is, by construction, atypical. However, doubts about representativeness are addressed if the researcher generalizes whatever proposition is provided by the case study to other cases; that is, a new variable is added to the benchmark model. The modified cross-case analysis should pull the deviant case toward the expected value, mitigating an initial problem of unrepresentativeness. The deviant case, one hopes, is now more or less typical. (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 303)

> When a case study researcher asks a participant, "Were you thinking *x* when you did *y*," and they get the answer, "No, I was thinking *z*," they may have a new variable demanding to be heard. Statistical methods lack any counterpart for this process; some methods of "data mining" or "exploratory data analysis" can be used to identify potentially relevant variables, but even these methods can use only data that is already coded into data sets, or data that someone has already identified as sufficiently useful to be worth coding. Statistical studies that do not involve archival work or interviews to measure or code variables have no inductive means of identifying new variables, although deductive theorizing, whether by a researcher using statistical methods or a formal model, can also identify new variables. (Bennett, 2004, p. 35)

> … a very different set of strategies for case selection should be adopted in the case of Mb-SNA [i.e. model-building Small-N Analysis]. First, at least one case that has not been well predicted by the best-fitting statistical model should be selected. Although it may be useful to select additional cases that are on the best-fit line for comparative analysis, the assessment that the preliminary statistical model was not sufficiently robust or that there were not sufficient data available to test certain critical hypotheses compels the scholar to examine cases that are not explainable by the right-hand-side variables including the preliminary LNA. (Lieberman, 2005, p. 445; bracketed words my own)

Thus, this type of case selection can lend credence to what would otherwise be non-statistical case selection by intuition, a strategy that may produce valuable outcomes but would be much more difficult to defend empirically. A case I might otherwise believe to be unique or deviant could end up being quite well-predicted by the model. However, if the statistical analysis reaffirms the outlying nature of the observation, this "provides a strong justification for intensive study" (Lieberman, 2005, p. 446).

Identifying the site for intensive study using what is, by definition, an incomplete model is not the leap of faith it may initially appear to be. The regression equation should include all of the quantifiable knowledge about the *X*-*Y* relationship which, in this case, is the passage or failure of a referendum and a set of explanatory variables. Begin where you are. Again, the goal of my research was not causal. Rather, it was "discovery" (Seawright, 2016b). Incomplete is not equivalent to subpar. A case study selected from an equation that does not include the most current and meaningful predictor-outcome information will likely end up only uncovering variables that are already known. The hope is simply to make the regression "as good as possible" with the understanding that it will hopefully improve with the incorporation of the sequential or nested design (Seawright, 2016a, p. 500).

Case studies are not immune to unjustified, yet ongoing, criticism of qualitative research in general. These criticisms include the argument that they are unrepresentative, full of selection bias, and wholly unable to provide generalizations. The field of political science addressed these criticisms more heatedly beginning in the mid-1990s as comparative politics investigated the onset of war, the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, or unexpectedly high or low economic growth (Collier & Mahoney, 1996). Over the last 20 years, political scientists of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms responded with the potential benefits of various case study selection strategies; a case study's impact on causal, quantitative mechanisms; and, in general, simply being more upfront regarding the appropriate application of the approach (Levy, 2008). *Any method or approach, be it quantitative or qualitative, has limits to its utility.* I am not looking to articulate the benefits and drawbacks of qualitative case study approach. The utility of a case study is well-established in the education and political science literatures (see Merriam, 1998; Seawright, 2016b; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Rather, I seek to be open about what this particular

methodological choice can and cannot accomplish, just as I seek to be open about my own prior theoretical understandings or preconceptions that shape my beliefs as I conduct qualitative work.

In 1994, political scientists Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba published *Designing Social Inquiry: Inference in Qualitative Research*. Their goal was to formalize an approach to research designs in the political science field and argue that qualitative and quantitative paradigms shared the same fundamental goals albeit with different tools: persuasive logics of inference and avoiding systematic bias. The range of reactions to the new textbook are external to the scope of this paper, but, in sum, they were substantial. *The American Political Science Review* devoted significant space to authors who chose to review the book, and several follow-up textbooks written by those reviewers were published shortly after, e.g. Brady and Collier's *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*.

One area of concern for King, Keohane, and Verba was selection bias when choosing a case study site. Selection bias occurs when inferences are produced from a nonrandom selection of cases that are not statistically representative of a target population which results in reduced slope estimates (Collier, 1995). The concern in political science in the mid-1990s was that several then-recent political science case studies that selected on or limited the dependent variable produced biased estimates of explanatory variables. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, 1995) provided examples: studying the causes of the outbreak of war in countries that experienced an outbreak of war; studying the liberalization of authoritarian regimes by studying countries that allowed the researcher(s) to enter; studying support for Democratic candidates in elections that had an endorsement from a state Democratic Party even though a state Democratic party does not issue endorsements in elections they are highly likely to lose.

In relation to the research design presented here, this is akin to making inferences about the reasons for rural school district referendum support by researching only highly conservative rural school districts that overwhelmingly passed a referendum ballot. Cases should not be chosen on the basis of the likelihood for confirming *a priori* theories (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). Fortunately, this was not the structure my research. The dependent variable was unconstrained and included what Collier and Mahoney (1996) deemed "contrast space": highly likely and hardly likely passage outcomes were included in my model. Collier and Mahoney were very clear about the benefits of contrast spaces. Qualitative researchers undertaking small-*N* analyses, they argued, have "unusually good tools for discovering new explanations … and missing variables" but not if the insights were accumulated from a truncated sample from which novel findings would not extend to a full and representative set of cases (Collier & Mahoney, 1996, p. 71).

Moreover, cases from my unconstrained dependent variable were *not* selected randomly. Instead, observations were selected from the notably high and low dependent variable values in order to explain "fascinating instances of variation in behavior" (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 141). Cases were purposefully selected in order to advance theoretical knowledge. Eisenhardt and Seawright both rejected choosing cases randomly when the goal is to better understand theory, an argument that has held across four decades worth of research.

> … the sampling of cases from the chosen population is unusual when building theory from case studies. Such research relies on theoretical sampling (i.e., cases are chosen for theoretical, not statistical, reasons, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The cases may be chosen to replicate previous cases or extend emergent theory, or they may be chosen to fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types. *While the cases may be chosen randomly, random selection is neither necessary, nor even preferable.* As Pettigrew (1988) noted, given the limited number of cases which can usually be studied, it makes sense to choose cases such as extreme situations and polar types in which the process of interest is "transparently observable." Thus, the goal of theoretical sampling is to choose

> cases which are likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory. (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 537; emphasis added).

> The reason random sampling is a bad reason to choose cases for case study research is in fact the same as the reason it is a good way to draw survey samples: the law of large numbers. That law tells us that, on average, random sampling will select cases from a given category in proportion with that category's share of the overall population. But because the cases that constitute success for discovery-oriented case study analysis are by definition the most unusual cases, it will be unusual for random sampling to produce successful case studies. The main methodological justification for random sampling is that it prevents scholars from selecting cases because those cases are likely to fit the substantive argument of interest (Fearon and Laitin 2008). Yet in fact, *any systematic case selection algorithm has this same virtue, and thus there is really no viable justification for randomly selecting case studies.* (Seawright, 2016a, p. 511; emphasis added).

The quantitative portion of my research also was not immune to limitations in what it could accomplish. Some of the limitations I have mentioned already, including a quantitative model's inappropriate construction (e.g. logistic versus an OLS model); its incompleteness; and its weakness in confirming measurement validity. The algorithm that points to deviant cases is only as good as the particular model that is chosen, and that model, in turn, is only as good as the accuracy and availability of the required data (Lieberman, 2005; Elman, Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016).

At the outset of this section, I asserted that the marriage of quantitative and qualitative methods presented a tremendous opportunity to advance public school district referendum research. This marriage, like any marriage, allows one partner to alleviate the weaknesses of the other. I close this section with a summarizing quote from Georgetown Political Science Professor Andrew Bennett.

> The primary advantages of statistical methods include their ability to estimate the average explanatory effects of variables, their ability to analyze the representativeness or frequency of subsets of the data collected, their visual display, and the high degree of replicability of studies using the same database.

> Limitations of standard statistical methods include the challenges they face in identifying new variables, dealing with multiple conjunctural causality or equifinality, devising conceptually valid operationalizations of qualitative variables, and providing or testing historical explanations of individual cases. Some of these limitations may be inherent in statistical methods, while others may involve trade-offs that could ease somewhat with the development of more sophisticated statistical techniques. Notably, these advantages and limitations are almost precisely the converse of the ones associated with case study methods, which are poor at partial correlations and measures of frequency but good at identifying new variables, dealing with complex causal relations, and devising and testing historical explanations. (Bennett, 2004, pp. 45-46)

Research Sites.

I investigated referendum voting behavior in Lewes, home of the Grizzlies, and Hackenden, home of the Mountaineers. Lewes was the third most downwardly deviant district according to probability of passage. I predicted their fall 2018 referendum had a 65.4 percent chance of failure, but it passed. They were the most downwardly deviant district in terms of proportion-yes voters. I predicted 39.5 percent would vote yes, but 55.7 percent ultimately did. In terms of upward deviance, Hackenden was the fourth most upwardly deviant district according to probability of passage. I predicted their spring 2019 referendum had a 75.4 percent chance of passage, but it failed. They were the second most upwardly deviant district in terms of proportion-yes voters. I predicted 50.9 percent would vote in support, but 31.7 percent ultimately did.

Hackenden was one of two districts that appeared upwardly deviant in both metrics, and, combining their rankings, showed more deviance than the other. In that way, it was a natural pick. Lewes was also one of two districts who appeared in both metrics and, in combination, was actually slightly less deviant than Duncan, another rural Wisconsin district. However, in consultation with my dissertation committee members and individuals from a statewide public education advocacy group, I made the decision to proceed with Lewes. Duncan, like Hackenden,

is within commuting distance to a midsized city and has comparable economic characteristics. Lewes, on the other hand, is more remote and much smaller than either. It presented a different kind of Wisconsin rurality in terms of heritage, culture, economic stability, wealth, and size, and I sought that type of rural variation.

Lewes is a small, rural district in northeastern Wisconsin. It is north of the unofficial north-south dividing line in Wisconsin, Highway 29, and is a gateway of sorts to the lake and forested area of northern Wisconsin. Its main municipality, also called Lewes, is a village with a population of about 550 people. The Lewes School District encompasses several neighboring townships, bringing the district population to about 1,850. Two lakes nearly meet in this area, and Lewes is settled between them, a village just four blocks long and seven blocks wide. Two American Indian reservations are just outside of Lewes, and the district includes portions of these reservations, which are split among neighboring districts.

Median household income in Lewes is about $44,680 (see Table 24 below). On average over the last 10 years, 56 percent of people work in blue-collar jobs, and 12 percent have attained a bachelor's degree or more. Seventy-seven percent of residents live in owner-occupied homes. Twenty-seven percent of people who live in the district work in public employment, and about 41 percent of residents are People of Color. The district has trended a great deal more Republican over the last three presidential elections: 41 percent voted for McCain in 2008, 44 percent voted for Romney in 2012, and 53 percent voted for Trump in 2016. Gubernatorial results have been less variable but consistently Republican: 53 percent voted for Walker in 2010, 54 percent did so in 2014, and 51 percent in 2018.

The Lewes School District is, simultaneously, very old and quite new. The district has existed for about a century. In the mid-1950s, during a time of rural school consolidation across

Wisconsin, Lewes joined with the much larger but nearby Glassbridge School District about 15 minutes away to form the Glassbridge-Lewes School District. Both communities retained the schools they had always had but under the umbrella of one leadership team. Lewes split again and became its own entity for the 2007-2008 academic year. This joining and subsequent split is an integral part of the community's fabric and a topic nearly all interviewees referenced. I take this up much more thoroughly in the Findings section below.

In terms of demographics and achievement, nearly two-thirds of Lewes students, about 61 percent over the last 10 years, are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 45 percent have limited English proficiency. The proportion of non-white students has, on average, been about 47 percent of the student body, but this has increased from about 36 to 55 percent more recently. The average teacher in the district has about seven years of total teaching experience. Academically, the school is a regular recipient of the Title I School of Recognition award, particularly for high progress—a category denoted by small achievement gaps between student populations. Since the implementation of the school report cards by DPI in 2011-2012, the district has met expectations every year with the exception of 2015-2016, a year in which they met few expectations.

Financially, the school's mill rate hovers around $9.79 on average since 2009. Approximately 38 percent of the district's revenue comes from local sources, 51 percent from the state, and 11 percent from the federal government. The district has about $462,000 in property value per member over the last 10 years. The community's median income has historically been lower than teachers' average salary, specifically about 97 percent of the teachers'.

Hackenden is also a small, rural school district but is located in the unglaciated region of southwestern Wisconsin. It is a very old community—one of the first White settlements in Wisconsin—and, as is common in southwestern Wisconsin, was tremendously influenced by miners who immigrated to the region from northern and western Europe. The streets in the city are illustrative of this history. Some are barely wide enough for a modern-day car and were clearly designed for use by horses and buggies. The hilly and agricultural region is home to many state parks and reserves in the area. Hackenden is not particularly close to major bodies of water but is near a major federal highway that links multiple states. Like Lewes, Hackenden's main municipality is also named Hackenden. About 2,500 people live in the city of Hackenden, and approximately 4,400 live in the district.

Hackenden's median household income is approximately $65,000—about $21,000 greater than Lewes's. Using the 10-year average, 40 percent of Hackenden district residents are employed in blue-collar fields, and slightly over one-quarter have attained a bachelor's degree or more. Roughly three-quarters of residents live in owner-occupied homes. Twelve percent of residents work for the public sector, and the district's residents are overwhelmingly White—White people typically account for about 98 percent of the district population. Like Lewes, the district has been trending more Republican in presidential races. McCain accumulated 42 percent of the vote, Romney 45 percent, and Trump 51 percent. Republican governor candidates have seen their share of the vote stay roughly consistent. Walker received 55 percent of voters' support in 2010 and 2014 and 53 percent support in 2018.

Hackenden shares Lewes's school-community identity: the school is the community, and the community is the school. Residents describe the community as a ghost town during basketball games because everyone can be found in the gym. The city's newspaper reflects this

connection. Many stories reflect the happenings at the school, including elementary students' trips to the library, seniors' post-graduation plans, or upcoming FFA events.

Less than one-quarter of Hackenden's students are economically disadvantaged, about 24 percent, and Hackenden has a very low LEP population. Only one student has been identified as LEP the last three academic years, and the 10-year average is less than one percent of the student body. Non-White students make up about 4 percent of the student body, and teachers in the district have, on average, about 15 years of total experience over the last 10 years. The district is quite successful academically, a point residents in Hackenden bring up just as much as Lewes residents discuss their district's split. The district has "only" met expectations once since DPI report cards were created. More commonly, the district significantly exceeds state expectations, a standard they have met the last four years running.

Financially, the mill rate is, on average, $11.30 over the last 10 years. The district receives 43 percent of its revenue from local sources, 51 percent from the state, and six percent from the federal government. They average about $463,000 in property value per member. The community's adults tend to make about 11 percent more than the teachers' average salary.

Table 24 provides a comparison among Lewes, Hackenden, all districts in the state, and all rural districts in the state. The data presented above and in Table 24 are meant to provide an overview of the districts researched deeply in this paper in order for the reader to better understand the communities' attributes. The Findings section thoroughly expounds on life in the communities. In order to protect the identities of these communities, I highly only select attributes. Strong divisiveness and anger over referendums was quickly apparent in these districts, particularly in Hackenden, where some family members still refuse to speak to one another because of their referendum campaign support and voting decisions.

Table 24

Case Study, State, and Rural District Attribute Comparisons (10-Year Averages)

Characteristic	Lewes	Hackenden	State (All Districts)	State (Rural Districts)
Population – district	1,850	4,400	13,900	7,470
Median income ($)	44,680	65,000	62,330	59,150
Blue-collar employment (%)	56	40	46	49
Public sector employment (%)	27	12	12	12
Educational attainment – Bachelor's (%)	12	26	23	19
Homeownership (%)	77	75	78	79
Non-White resident population (%)	41	2	6	5
Republican support – 2008 President (%)	41	42	48	48
Republican support – 2012 President (%)	44	45	54	54
Republican support – 2016 President (%)	53	51	59	61
Republican support – 2010 Governor (%)	53	55	60	60

Table 24 (continued)

Republican Support – 2014 Governor (%)	54	55	61	61
Republican Support – 2018 Governor (%)	51	53	60	61
Economically disadvantaged students (%)	61	24	35	38
LEP (%)	45	1	3	2
Non-White student population (%)	47	4	13	11
Average total teacher experience (years)	7	15	15	15
Mill rate ($)	9.79	11.30	9.57	9.56
Proportion – local revenue (%)	38	43	52	51
Proportion – state revenue (%)	51	51	41	42
Proportion – federal revenue (%)	11	6	7	7
Property value per member ($)	462,000	463,000	918,100	936,500
Income ratio (%)	-3	+11	+11	+9

Note: The 10-year time frame was chosen to reflect a more stable, long-term representation of the data. A timeframe longer than 10 years was unavailable because of the relatively recent recreation of the Lewes School District. A 10-year frame also incorporated both pre- and post-Act 10 characteristics. The income ratio data is percentage difference between the community's median income and the teachers' average salary. For instance, the Hackenden median income is 11 percentage points greater than the teachers' salary; in Lewes, the community makes three percent less.

Data collection and analysis.

My primary data collection tool was a semi-structured interview with both key community players and less prominent "regular" community folks. There are several reasons why this was the most appropriate method. Broadly speaking, "less structured approaches … allow you to focus on the *particular* phenomenon being studied, which may differ between individuals or settings and require individually tailored methods" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88; emphasis in original). This less-structured approach sacrifices *some* elements of generalizability but is highly useful for "contextualized understanding and … useful in revealing the processes that lead to specific outcomes"—in this case, factors correlated with referendum approval (Maxwell, 2013, p. 89). In a similar vein, Luker argued that interviews allow the interviewer to better understand "what's going on inside lots of people's heads" (2008, p. 167). With regard to my research, Maxwell's quote suggests that a less structured procedure allowed me to probe for information that was relevant to voting behavior—behavior that could and did vary by the individual. For example, the voting behaviors among retired people are likely to differ depending on whether these individuals are new to the community or lifelong residents or whether these retirees have grandchildren in the local public schools. A strict interview protocol that treats senior citizens monolithically would be a wholly inadequate tool to unearth the impetus behind the behavior in a ballot box.

More specifically, there are two additional reasons why interviews were the most appropriate method for data collection. First, voting, like interviewing, is a solitary activity, and I believe the method should reflect the researched circumstance. I am not saying that group dynamics do not affect a person's vote. In fact, the political communication literature has numerous examples of experiments describing voting behavior intentions after group discussion is introduced (e.g. Druckman & Nelson, 2003). However, my research did not investigate how

manipulation of groups caused changes in political opinions. Second, Wisconsin is still recovering from Act 10's political fallout. After the law's passage and during the Walker recall campaign, Wisconsin experienced deep division along occupational, geographical, and personal circumstances (Wells et al., 2017). Even violence ensued (Garza, 2012). I did not think it is ethical for me to substitute focus groups for interviews when legitimate political and personal damage was quite possible, especially when a divisive blow comes at the expense of a child's school district with which I have no affiliation.

I initiated interviews with participants in three ways. First, I emailed or called local leaders in the community that I was able to collect via school district, business association, media, and civil society websites (e.g. economic advancement associations, Kiwanis Clubs, local newspapers, and arts organizations). A majority of the school boards in both communities were willing to speak with me, including both school board presidents. On the other hand, both superintendents were clearly adamant about *not* participating, though in different ways. One superintendent did not respond to my emails, suggested we make contact again in the future several times, and eventually chose to speak through his school board president and the administrator of the building for which the facility referendum was meant. The other superintendent did not respond to any contact. I was able to introduce myself face-to-face following a school board meeting, and he strongly brushed off my introduction with sarcasm, dismissiveness, and coldness.

Second, I made an effort to spend time where the locals spend time. I made some in-roads at Bud's bar in Lewes and Joe's restaurant in Hackenden. This approach mirrored the "cold" approach interview requests similar to Cramer's (2016) work throughout Wisconsin between 2007 and 2012. This kind of cold approach rarely—but purposefully—led to a fully-fledged,

hour-long interview like my otherwise scheduled interviews. That was not the point. Few people had the time or desire to speak for over an hour in a bar over lunch or happy hour. Instead, these short but invaluable interviews gave me great insight into the character of the town, the views of the school district, and the reasons people voted yes or no on their respective referendum.

Third, I utilized snowball methods from each source in order to broaden my access and improve rapport with members of the community (Luker, 2008; Creswell, 2013). Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to snowballing as an "opportunistic approach" that follows new informant leads and readily takes advantage of unexpected interviewee tips. Regardless of the terminology, the ultimate goal remained the same: achieving saturation—gathering information and sufficient triangulation from enough interviewees to the point at which very little new or surprising information is uncovered (Small, 2009). Saturation requires the researcher to constantly ask, "How might I be wrong about my claims?" This broad swath of district constituents was essential to rule out "specific plausible alternatives and threats to interpretations and explanations" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). About one-half of my interviews were setup via snowball techniques, especially those in January and February.

The semi-structured interview protocol included the following seven questions.

- I'm from rural Wisconsin, but I'm definitely not from [Lewes/Hackenden]. I don't know much about the area. I'm curious what I should know. How would you describe it to someone who doesn't know much about it?
- I have a question similar to my first but related to the schools. How do people feel about the schools? Are they satisfied? Not satisfied? Do they trust the school? Not trust the school? What do you think people would tell me?
- One of the things I'm most interested in for my research is school referendums. Suppose I could rewind time. It's [month/year of election]. Pretend I'm standing outside the ballot box and I stop yes voters and ask, "You're about to vote yes. What is it that's getting you to vote yes?" Or I stop no voters and ask, "You're about to vote no. What is it that's getting you vote no?" What do you think those two groups of people would tell me for the reasons they're voting the way that they are?

- When I started my research, I tried to predict if [Lewes's/Hackenden's] referendum would pass. I was flat-out wrong, which is one of the reasons I came here—to learn from people about why I was wrong. Were you surprised the referendum [passed/failed]?
- One of the things I think about a lot with my project is political parties and school referendums. Based on the numbers I saw, [provide presidential and gubernatorial election results]. I bring those numbers up because, before I started this project, I talked to some former superintendents or board members who said things like, "Democratic districts pass referendums. Republicans districts don't." Do you think they're right? Do you think people are thinking about their political party when they go vote on a referendum?
- I decided to go to districts where I didn't know anybody because I wanted to avoid people telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. So, for better or for worse, I don't know anybody here. I'm curious if there's anybody that comes to mind that you think might be good for me to talk to?
- If this is the last time you and I get a chance to talk, what is it that you think I should take away from [Lewes/Hackenden]? What should be the number one thing I remember about [Lewes/Hackenden] after my interviews are over and I'm back at home?

The three approaches discussed above fostered 53 interviews between November 2019 and March 2020. Twenty-eight of these interviews were with people associated with Lewes and 25 with Hackenden. Three people from Lewes did not want to be recorded, and six people from Hackenden requested the same. The remaining 44 interviews produced 31 hours and 15 minutes of audio recordings. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim by me with aid from an automated online transcription application. Interviews in Hackenden were usually conducted in one of three diners, a local coffeeshop, the public library, or, sometimes, people's homes. Interviews in Lewes were occasionally conducted at Bud's bar or a local breakfast diner. Much more commonly, however, interviews were conducted at the interviewee's homes because of the dearth of available gathering spaces. I conducted one interview with each participant.

Case studies generally require data collection from multiple sources of information beyond just interviews (see Yin, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013). Political scientist Jared Wesley pointed out that complementary documents and archives are underutilized in political science research and can be an efficient route to achieving saturation

(Wesley, 2010). However, document and archival work were, in a way, subservient to interview data. This complementarity is not an uncommon use of both document and archival data (Bowen, 2009). Both types of data were particularly helpful in understanding the context, background, and setting of research rather than directly developing concepts and theories (Fischer & Parmentier, 2010).

I triangulated my interview data with other media, including 27 newspaper clippings (i.e. letters to the editor, journalist-produced articles), 12 campaign flyers, four sets of school board committee notes, and 60 school board meetings (some of which were I attended, some were recorded, and some were approved minutes). These document and archival sources were useful because they were synchronous with the referendum unfolding. For example, I interviewed several people who also wrote letters to the editor for the local newspaper. These documents allowed me to compare their reasons for voting yes or no at the time of the referendum versus their memories regarding why they voted yes or no. These flyers, articles, and letters also addressed counterarguments that I was then able to cross-reference with my interview data.

Hackenden had substantially more and much richer technological infrastructure in place to review these triangulation sources. I reviewed the video recordings of 28 Hackenden school board meetings between August 2017 and April 2019. Lewes, on the other hand, had 32 school board meeting documents, but these were fairly sparse. For example, one set of June 2017 school board meeting minutes read, “Motion to proceed with phase 1 of survey proposal.” No other details were given. Nevertheless, these documents were useful in better understanding when certain referendum plans were approved and the general timeline of the referendum’s trajectory.

The timing of the research was just as important as the people in the interviews. I purposely waited until after winter wheat planting and gun season to begin my interviews in

order to increase the chance potential interviewees would be available. By the end of February, I was confident in and comfortable with the depth and scope of my qualitative data, though I continued with any previously scheduled interviews. This was a stroke of luck and fortune because, soon after, the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak halted nearly all face-to-face qualitative work.

My analytic focus centered on the reasons or factors identified by district residents that influenced the passed or failed referendum in their community. The analytic process became the link between the raw data and a developing theory that may or may not align with postmaterialism and resentment (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The first way I organized the interview data was to use codes to consistently answer the research question. This was not unnecessarily complex. For example, "Yes-voters were people who wanted to pick up their kids in one place and have basketball practices all run at the same time, so kids could be done earlier in the evening," was coded as "one-campus efficiencies." "No-voters were people who were worried that we would have another abandoned school in town like after the last referendum," was coded as "lack of old buildings plans." In short, I was seeking answers about what motivated residents to vote the way they did. Approaching the data by trying to answer this question was a form of initial, first-round coding known as holistic coding. Holistic coding is a useful tool for gathering the basic themes or issues in the data as opposed to analyzing line-by-line in-vivo codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Descriptive coding complemented the holistic codes. Saldaña (2016, p. 102) likened descriptive coding to hashtags. The purpose is to summarize in a word or a short phrase the basic topic or essence of a passage. These codes are particularly useful for "documenting and analyzing material products and physical environments" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 102). I used

descriptive coding to analyze the context in which the referendum was occurring, and this allowed me to better understand the broader environment for the voting decisions that were more explicitly stated elsewhere in the interview transcripts. For example, one Lewes resident described the move to the community as a feeling of "stepping back in time" when individual, small communities were more self-sustaining. Descriptive codes also captured the extent of rurality of Lewes, e.g. "Ever been somewhere this rural?" or "I landed, like, like, I dropped like an alien from space."

My second-round analytic tools included a combination of causation coding and pattern coding. "Causation" in this lexicon is not synonymous with quantitative notions of causation, though it is certainly not subsidiary. Instead, this type of coding uncovers what people believe or think about events and their causes; focuses on people's intentions, choices, objectives, values, perspectives, expectations, needs, desires, and agency; and continually asks why an outcome occurred as it did (Saldaña, 2016). The codes, which are the descriptive words and phrases that describe the piece of data or data fragment, then become grouped into categories that relate to the same issue, topic, or feature of the data (Goodrick & Rogers, 2015). These "descriptive" categories served to explain what factors contributed to the community's voting behavior (Maxwell, 2013). Pattern coding comprises explanatory or inferential codes that identify emergent themes, configurations, or explanations and coalesce first-cycle codes into "more meaningful and parsimonious units of analyses" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 235). These codes served as the bridges between categories, causes, relationships, and theoretical constructs (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Causation and pattern codes were especially valuable in helping me connect campaign messages, residents' reasons for voting yes or no, and the general environment of the rural

community in which the campaigns and voting decisions were made. I delve deeply into my findings in the next section, but a valid and fair question is how I am sure that these campaign messages were responsible for producing the yes or no votes. Nobody said outright they voted yes or no because the campaign committee told them to. Why would they? It is pretty unlikely anyone would admit to this complete handoff in decision-making, especially to an outsider like me. The best way to prove this message-vote connection would be to run the exact same referendum without the influence of a campaign and investigate whether voters produced the same yes or no factors. Obviously, this is not possible. However, causation and pattern coding provided the next best option. Pattern and causation coding allowed me to create matrices that compared how particular voters described their community, the campaign, and their reasons for voting in support or opposition.

By framing the analysis this way, I was able to identify 10 predominant reasons voters checked yes or no, 10 focal campaign messages, and 10 rural community environmental attributes between Hackenden and Lewes. For example, these codes and matrices allowed me to recognize that the group of voters who discussed the school's referendum as a way to infuse the local economy with new talent was the same group of voters that described a general environment of economic difficulty and the prevalence of farm bankruptcies. Put differently, causation and pattern codes helped me recognize the relationships between how people described their community and its needs and their ultimate voting choice.

Finally, the second-round pattern and causation categories were grouped into themes that can speak to theoretical behavior (Goodrick & Rogers, 2015). Theoretical codes are akin to umbrellas that "cover and account for other codes and categories formulated" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 250). These codes are not the theory itself. Instead, they function as "an abstraction that models

the [theoretical] integration" of the data (Saldaña, 2016, p. 250). These kinds of codes helped me to address overarching how and why questions that began to speak to wider referendum behavior. Two theoretical codes were used this research: control and knowledge.

With respect to the document and/or archival work, the data analysis was driven by the question, "What could potentially influence voting behavior?" As a reminder, these documents and archived sources were a way in which I could unearth vote-influencing, community-specific factors that did not currently appear in the referendum literature. The potential factors uncovered from the documents and archives were then incorporated into the interviews that I explained above. Holistic coding and descriptive coding were useful tools to aid this search as well. Letters to the editor, for example, demonstrated some clear reasons why people might clearly vote no for a new school—appreciation for a building's historical architecture and accompanying nostalgia—and the role of the writer as an influential community member whose views should be considered, e.g. a tenured doctor or attorney. Regardless of interview or archival source, all the data was weaved congruently into pattern, causation, and theoretical coding.

Validity and generalization.

As I quoted above, qualitative validity is evaluated by how the researcher rules out "specific plausible alternatives and threats to interpretations and explanations" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). It is meant to determine, "How might I be wrong?" One approach to maintain validity is to address the researcher's reflexivity: the theories, beliefs, perceptions, and worldviews that influence the structure and conclusions of the study and its design. A researcher cannot, and should not, be separated from the ideas, pursuits, writings, and interpretations of the research design and execution (Creswell, 2013, p. 214). The researcher's perspectives, past work, prior theoretical knowledge, and experiential learning will always influence how the researcher

conducts and produces their work. While this may be inevitable, it is critical for the researcher to be explicit about their reflexivity and how it may impact what they investigate and find.

For instance, I approached this study by placing tremendous value in public education and its possibilities of providing an education to students who are not always alike one another—an opportunity that can be difficult to replicate later in life. This perception and the research interest—factors correlated with passage—inherently assume that maintaining or improving public education is also important to fellow residents but that other circumstances are temporarily impeding their support, e.g. "I would vote yes if my income was just a little higher," "… if my property taxes were a little lower," "… if I wasn't about to retire," etc. This belief that I hold may simply not exist in populations extremely disaffected by schools and school leaders, government institutions, or secular educational opportunities, and it is a belief I must check for reflexivity.

Maxwell (2013) provides other validity assurances. These include efforts to create rich, thick data developed over multiple visits and long-term community involvement encapsulated in verbatim transcripts. In other words, qualitative research is not a one- or two-time visit; it requires repeated observations and detailed interview transcripts. Repeated observations must also include people from various backgrounds, experiences, economic outlooks, occupations, relationships to the school, and community prominence. These key differences are critical for finding conflicting or contradictory predictive evidence that guard against guaranteed hypothesis confirmation (Maxwell, 2013). In other words, these differences help ensure that the researcher does not blindly seek mere hypothesis corroboration without considering the likelihood of competing hypotheses. The differences also help establish how wide-ranging a voting behavior factor might be in a community.

The introductory article of the case study-focused issue of *Sociological Methods & Research* referenced above explained that case study authors generally wish to say something about a population of cases (e.g. rural Wisconsin school districts) using one case (or more) as a reflection. To properly select a study's boundaries, the author must be able to identify one or several cases that represent the broader population about which the author seeks to speak (Elman, Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016). Moreover, the type of case selection procedure a researcher undertakes will influence what insights are able to be produced or discussed. However, reliability, or generalizability, is a curious concept in qualitative case study research.

In general, the goal of qualitative research is not to create a perfectly representative case in order to generalize to other congruent samples; there is no single "Truth." This would run counter to the interpretivist epistemology prevalent in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Rather, the goal is to provide "logical," not scientific, inference to other cases that have similar characteristics in terms of "explanatory schema" (Small, 2009, p. 22). Stated differently, the goal is not to say with formal statistical confidence that the evidence I found is applicable to *every* community with demographics that fail to reject null hypotheses of difference. Instead, the goal is to provide such thick, particularized descriptions of voting behavior that the reader can find elements that are relatable to their own particular contexts and life experiences (Wright, 2017). Noted statistician Judith Singer referred to this as "face generalizability": there is no reason to believe that the case study results do *not* apply more generally (see Maxwell, 2013, p. 138).

It is my responsibility as the researcher to avoid over-generalizations, not the reader (George & Bennett, 2004). I can recommend and caution that my findings developed here are most applicable for rural Wisconsin public school districts that have held a referendum, but, for the most part, it is the reader who can determine generalizability, not the researcher. It is critical

to “leave scope for readers of different backgrounds to make different interpretations and draw diverse conclusions regarding the question of what the case is a case of. The goal is not to make the case study be all things to all people. The goal is to allow the study to be “different things to different people” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 23).

Findings and Interpretations

I divide this findings section into two respective parts in order to reflect the structure of my methods section. In part one, I present the final models (logistic and linear) that best predict rural Wisconsin referendums, I present sample referendums with model-predicted expected results, and I present the marginal effects of several predictor variables of interest.

Quantitative Findings

The models that best predict rural Wisconsin referendum outcomes are presented in Table 25 (logistic) and Table 27 (linear). Respective goodness-of-fit statistics are in Tables 26 and 28. Tables 25 and 27 are purposefully constructed to reflect Table 6, where I summarized and operationalized the variables from the literature review. They are divided into school district, referendum, and community factors.

Before breaking down a few of the results, there are a handful of points about which I seek to be transparent. First, regarding my logistic model, my referendum use categories were too granular. My maximum likelihood iterations produced convergence errors because a few categories, e.g. new construction on “other” facilities, such as new bus garages or athletics pole buildings, had only one result. To fix this, I collapsed my usage categories according to purpose (i.e. academic, athletics, combination), not type of build (new, renovations). I made this decision because of the literature’s focus on voter responses to how money is used. In other words, the literature divides the work into the purpose of the money, not whether the referendum is proposing new construction or renovations to upgrade previously existing buildings. A “new”

Table 25

Significant Predictors of Rural Wisconsin Referendum Passage (Logistic Model)

Predictor	Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient	Variance Contribution
School District Factors				
Change in district size	0.1004	0.0402	0.3259	0.006
Change in district size^2	-0.0109	0.0063	-0.0905	0.006
Football	-1.066	0.6040	-0.1915	0.001
Levy	-0.0121	0.0029	-0.6763	0.025
Private school enrollment	-0.0113	0.0065	-4.4818	0.001
Proficiency – math^2	-0.0003	0.0001	-0.0392	0.007
Revenue – local	0.0538	0.0224	2.0934	0.001
Revenue – state	0.0907	0.0317	2.3054	0.002
Students of Color	0.0367	0.0202	0.2312	0.002
Student-staff ratio	-1.953	1.0634	0.0204	0.002
Student-staff ratio^2	0.0829	0.0429	0.1746	0.003
Teacher salary	1.3695	0.4028	6.2945	0.017

Table 25 (continued)

Referendum Factors				
Anchoring	1.6744	0.3460	0.7281	0.035
Diffusion	-0.5191	0.2234	-0.3439	0.005
Diffusion^2	0.0908	0.0533	0.1644	0.005
Length – 4-year NR	-0.5501	0.4208	-0.1615	0.001
Length – RR	-0.7002	0.3669	-0.1266	0.002
Tax impact^2	-458.2555	98.7358	-0.1630	0.030
Timing – May	-1.2631	0.9438	-0.1715	0.001
Timing – October	2.6533	1.8427	0.1847	0.002
Turnout^2	0.0002	0.0001	0.1370	0.007
Urgency – 5-year	-0.1246	0.0880	-0.1335	0.001
Urgency – Total^2	0.0021	0.0013	0.1093	0.001
Use – athletics	-2.9396	0.5542	-0.5789	0.043
Use – miscellaneous	-0.6899	0.5205	-0.1240	0.001
Community Factors				
Educational attainment	-0.1369	0.0965	0.2084	0

Table 25 (continued)

Educational attainment^2	0.0034	0.0017	0.2896	0.003
Homeownership	-0.0504	0.0287	-0.3331	0.001
Households with children	-0.6106	0.2340	-0.5340	0.008
Households with children^2	0.0094	0.0037	0.2538	0.008
Ideology – Pres.	-0.0275	0.0146	-0.2605	0.002
Income ratio	1.3222	0.3847	13.9352	0.018
Income ratio^2	-0.0029	0.0009	-1.2413	0.015
Median income	-0.0022	0.0007	-14.07588	0.014
Median income^2	8×10^{-9}	3×10^{-9}	1.0578	0.012
Race	0.0750	0.0308	0.2960	0.005
Sex	-4.9577	2.7217	-0.24201	0.003
Sex^2	0.0480	0.0274	0.1261	0.002
Source and steadiness of income^2	-0.0007	0.0004	-0.1776	0.002

Note. Total levy and teacher average salary are both scaled at units of $100,000 and $1,000 respectively. Zero variance contributions are due to rounding.

$N = 623$

Table 26

Evaluation Metrics (Logistic Model)

Overall performance	
McFadden's adjusted R^2	0.171
Deviance	526.943
Model calibration	
Classification table	
Correctly classified	78.65%
Sensitivity	91.59%
Specificity	44.44%
Proportional change in error	22.22%
Model Discrimination	
Tjur's R2	0.306
c-statistic	0.846

Table 27

Significant Predictors of Rural Wisconsin Referendum Passage (Linear Model)

Predictor	Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient	Variance Contribution
School District Factors				
Change in district size	0.2671	0.1211	0.8688	0.0041
Economically disadvantaged students	-0.0819	0.0390	-1.1517	0.0037
Levy	-0.1333	0.0262	-7.4197	0.0267
Mill rate^2	0.0179	0.0139	0.2412	0.0007
Proficiency – math	-0.0444	0.0264	-0.6383	0.0019
Revenue - federal	-0.4689	0.1419	-8.5295	0.0106
Revenue – local^2	0.0002	0.0001	0.4167	0.0113
Students of Color	0.6793	0.1905	5.7060	0.0126
Student-staff ratio	-6.0122	2.4839	0.3610	0.0052
Student-staff ratio^2	0.2619	0.1031	0.6786	0.0059

Table 27 (continued)

Referendum Factors				
Anchoring	5.9919	0.9461	2.6970	0.0420
Diffusion	-0.9663	0.2859	-1.2498	0.0112
Length – 2-yr NR	-6.9281	2.5474	-0.9281	0.0069
Length – 4-yr NR	-3.1773	1.3832	-0.8259	0.0046
Length – RR	-3.1299	1.2996	-0.8366	0.0052
Referendum amount	-0.0181	0.0096	-1.1450	0.0028
Tax impact^2	-1408.4940	401.2683	-0.5323	0.0122
Time elapsed	0.1393	0.0856	0.6870	0.0018
Timing – June	34.9629	6.2246	1.8475	0.0328
Timing - October	12.4787	3.7208	1.1392	0.0110
Turnout^2	0.0004	0.0002	0.3555	0.0014
Type – 3-yr NR	-2.1121	1.1427	-0.6850	0.0026
Urgency – 5-yr	-0.7178	0.3046	-1.0088	0.0049
Use – academics (new)	-5.4913	1.6984	-1.2570	0.0102
Use – athletics (new)	-15.4813	2.1627	-2.5246	0.0539

Table 27 (continued)

Use – athletics (renovations and upgrades)	-13.4052	2.8302	-1.6319	0.0230
Use – building and land purchases	-8.3998	4.4674	-0.6263	0.0027
Use – capital and operations	-1.8755	1.0270	-0.7194	0.0025
Use – educational programming	-2.4310	1.2415	-0.7080	0.0030
Use – multiple (new)	-17.7835	6.1846	-0.9980	0.0078
Use – multiple capital	-4.3415	1.4040	-1.2135	0.0092
Use – operate new facility	-5.7370	3.0949	-0.6866	0.0026
Use – other (renovations and additions)	-30.2307	6.7411	-1.7604	0.0205
Use – refinancing	-15.3398	8.7802	-0.5613	0.0022
Use – salaries and personnel	-5.0334	3.2298	-0.5579	0.0015
Use – technology	-6.5426	2.3704	-0.9956	0.0071
Community Factors				
Age	0.4050	0.1133	2.2106	0.0127
Age ratio^2	-1.1×10^{-7}	4.6×10^{-8}	-0.0850	0.0051

Table 27 (continued)

Educational attainment	0.3237	0.0898	2.5493	0.0129
Ideology – Gov.	-0.1526	0.0485	-1.3391	0.0095
Population	0.3049	0.1236	1.8704	0.0055
Property value per member	-0.0338	0.0090	-3.2575	0.0140
Racial mismatch	-50.8583	14.7337	-5.3906	0.0117
Sex	-1.0178	0.2145	-1.8504	0.0231
Total equalized value	0.0066	0.0022	4.0451	0.0089

Note. Several variables are measured in scaled units: total levy ($100,000), property value per member ($10,000), total equalized value ($1,000,000), population (1,000), and referendum amount ($250,000).

N = 635

Table 28

Evaluation Metrics (Linear Model)

Adjusted R^2	0.3665
RMSE	8.6165
AIC	4,581.469

parking lot is not equivalent to a "new" middle school. This left nine categories: capital-academic, capital-athletic, capital-other (e.g. roof replacements, asbestos removal, HVAC), capital-multiple (combination of capital purposes, e.g. new high school gym and elementary air conditioning upgrades), capital-undefined (purpose not presented in DPI database), capital-miscellaneous (demolitions, building and land purchases), operations, joint capital-operations (e.g. educational programing and new secure entrances), and undefined (unlabeled in DPI database).

Second, notes in each table articulate which variables are measured in scaled units and how those variables are measured. This was a choice I made early in building my dataset with the goal to make coefficients easier to interpret. Eventually, my research shifted away completely from causal purposes, which made the magnitude of individual coefficients far less important. Thus, this scaling is now most important if and when school leaders would use these models with their own particular district characteristics.

Third, and relatedly, the logistic model coefficients are measured in log odds. If this were causal research, I would change these coefficients to reflect the more easily interpretable odds ratios. Again, however, the magnitudes of individual coefficients are not—*and should not be*—the focus of the results. The focus is squarely on the outcome as it is measured in terms of probability of occurrence. Some sample probabilities are presented below. In fact, the log odds were presented very purposefully to draw attention away from them. I do not want the size of individual coefficients to be at the forefront. They are difficult to interpret, and that is the point. The signs, though, remain useful.

Fourth, the routes to obtain the best models were slightly different. The best, i.e. highest predictive quality, logistic model was gleaned using a backward elimination stepwise model with

a *p*-value threshold set at 0.20. The best linear model was obtained by running a best subsets model prioritizing adjusted R^2 on a model developed from a backward elimination stepwise model with a *p*-value threshold also set at 0.20. These models were developed using the statistical program Stata. Briefly, Stata does not allow for factor-variable notation when running stepwise models; all quadratic terms must be manually created by squaring the appropriate variable. This means that quadratic terms may be included in the model without main effects if the squared term met statistical significance while the linear term did not. I would not produce a model in this way if the focus were causal analysis. However, it was not my concern to interpret how a main effect's slope changes with every unit increase in *X*. Predictive research is merely concerned with capturing a model that best predicts the outcome—not necessarily the terms that *produced* that outcome (Osborne, 2000; Shmueli, 2010).

Fifth, I have more confidence in my logistic models than I do in my linear models. This was not something I anticipated when I began this work. However, there were simply more evaluation tools at my disposal for logistic model evaluation than there were linear model evaluation tools. This should not have been surprising to me. Explanatory modeling (i.e. causal research) dominates empirical work, especially in the academic realm (Shmueli, 2010). Over a 17-year period spanning the 1990s and early 2000s—arguably one of the most important eras of technological development in modern history—only 4.9 percent of published articles in the top two information system and computer science journals were devoted to predictive work (Shmueli, 2010). To paraphrase Berk (2008), social science researchers either do causal work, or they do not do quantitative research. With that in mind, I present findings from both types of models below, but I defer to my probability-based models.

Turning my attention to the specific results, the data analyzed here suggested that the probability of passing a referendum in Wisconsin is quite high. The average probability of passage was 72.9 percent with 56.1 percent of voters supporting approval. Clearly, there are many variables that impact how this average will change depending on the characteristics of the school district, referendum, and community. Moving forward, I do not provide a litany of the impacts of every single variable and its effect on the outcome. In other words, I do not compare every variable to the findings from my literature review. That is not the point of this research. The literature review was useful in the sense that it provided me with the variables that I knew I needed to input into a predictive model.

Instead, I do two things. First, I revisit my hypothesis and devote the remainder of the quantitative findings within that guardrail. Second, I present a few of the variables with results that surprised or focused my attention. The factors presented below are on an "as observed" basis. In other words, the variable of focus is subject to manipulation while the other characteristics of the school district, referendum, and community remained the same unless otherwise noted.

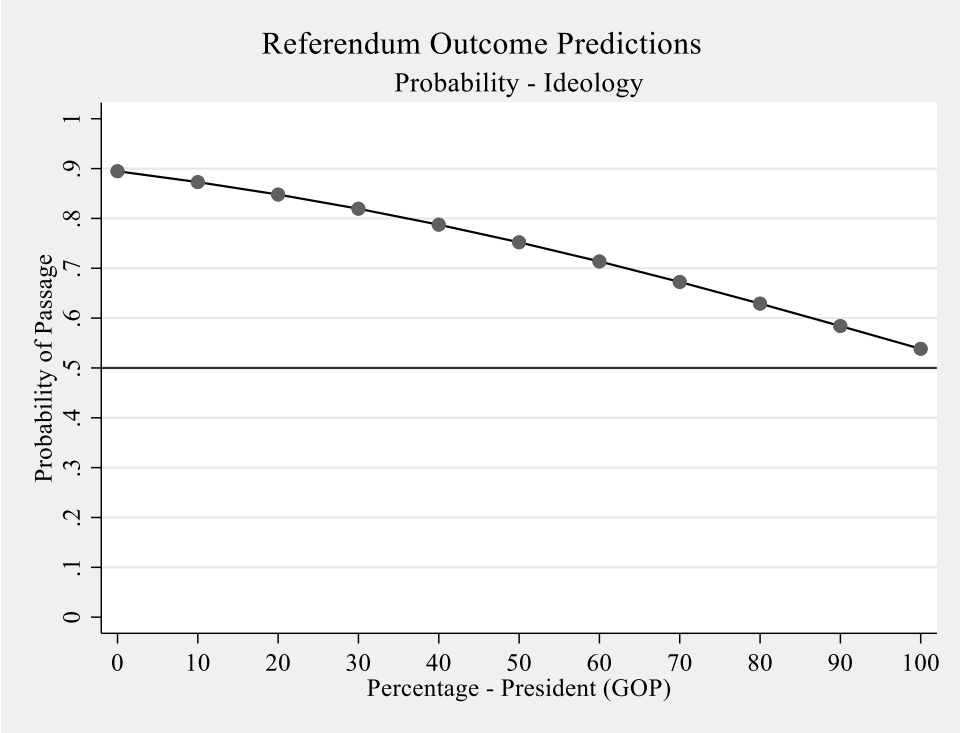

Figure 44: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Ideology)

My hypothesis was that White, working-

class, rural communities should not be written off as places that do not and would not support local public school district referendums, even if the local voting base exhibited a pattern of ideological conservatism.

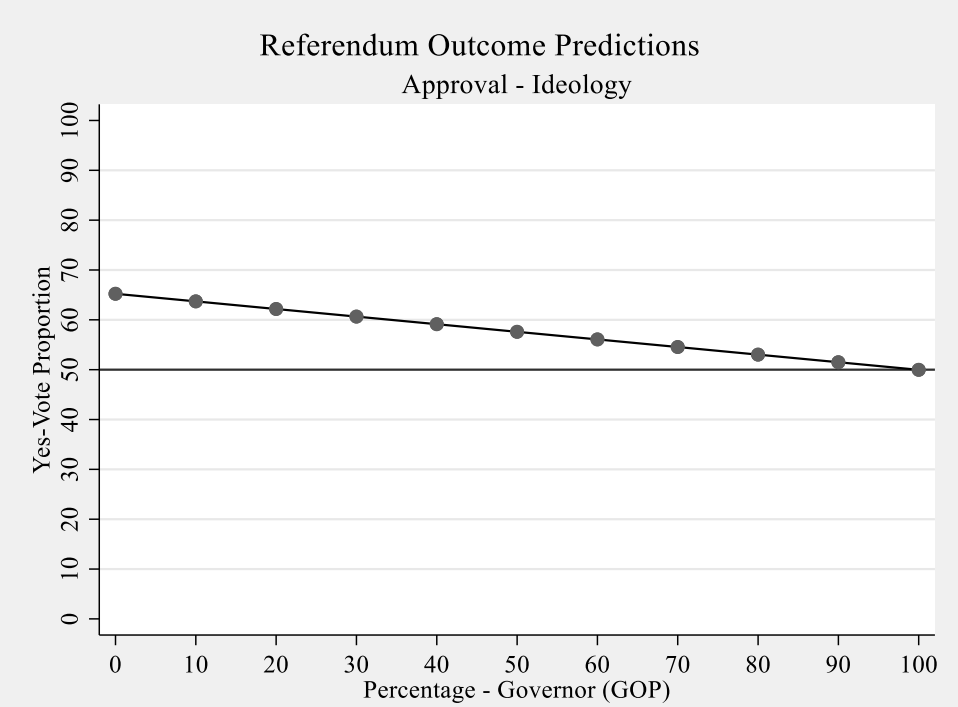

Figure 45: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Approval - Ideology)

Political conservatism as measured by GOP support in gubernatorial elections did not reach statistical significance in my logistic model. Political conservatism as measured by GOP support in presidential elections did. The relationship was negative. However, the probability of passage was so high at low levels of presidential conservatism that increasing support for GOP presidential candidates merely changed the probability of passage from extremely likely to likely. GOP presidential candidate support ranged from 32 to 74 percent in my observations. A referendum occurring in a community with the highest record of conservative GOP presidential support still had a 65.5 percent probability of passage. In fact, as conservatism grew, the likelihood never fell below 50 percent.

In terms of proportion of yes-voters—the linear model—presidential conservatism did not reach statistical significance, but gubernatorial conservatism did. Beyond this, a similar

picture emerged: the relationship was negative but began from a fairly high starting point. A referendum taking place in a community in which 100 percent of people voted for the GOP gubernatorial candidate—a situation that has not occurred—would have 49.97 percent of people voting in favor, a whisker below majority. This was the only percentage at which this occurred. Support at 99 percent was associated with 50.1 percent approval. The range of GOP support post-Act 10 was roughly 30 percent to 80 percent post-Act 10. A referendum in the most conservative community should expect to see approval proportions around 53 percent.

These particular statistics, however, could include any type of rural community. Next, I focus on working-class communities more intently. The proportion of White people was held at the mean (95 percent in rural districts post-Act 10). Figure 46 shows the relationship between the probability of a referendum's passage and employment in blue-collar jobs. The proportion of people employed in blue-collar jobs was one way to measure the extent of working-class status, a point I made at the outset of my conjectural theory. The current range of blue-collar employment in Wisconsin is roughly 25 to 65 percent of workers in a community. The graph in Figure 46

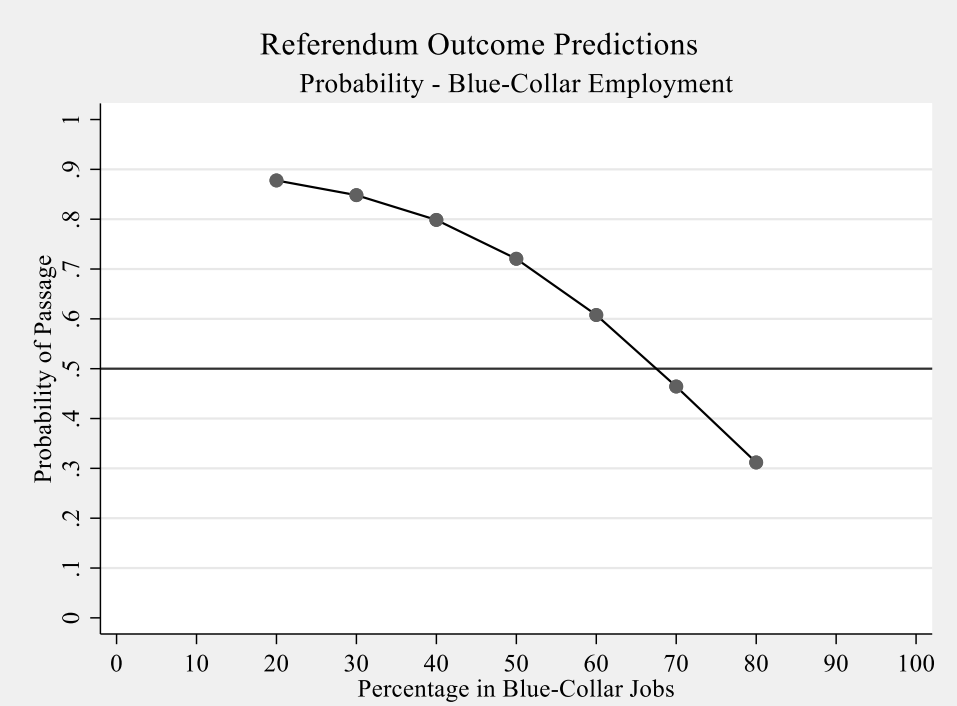

Figure 46: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability – Blue-Collar Employment)

extends this range from 20 to 80 percent, thus presenting some hypotheticals. The probability of passage at the maximum of the current range remained above 50 percent: 53.9 percent at 65 percent blue-collar employment proportions. The probability of passage did not extend below 50 percent until the share of blue-collar workers reached 68 percent of the community. There was no statistically significant relationship between the share of blue-collar workers and yes-voters in the linear model.

Employment was not the only avenue by which to measure working-class status. Educational attainment can also accomplish this. Figure 47 is similar to Figure 46, but the proportion of district residents holding a bachelor's degree or more at the time of referendum replaced the proportion of voters in blue-collar jobs. The proportion of White people continued to be held at the mean. The range for this variable was approximately 7.5 percent to 48.5 percent. This educational attainment variable demonstrated a curvilinear association with the probability of passage. Very low levels of educational attainment at the time of the referendum and very high levels of educational attainment at the time of the referendum were associated with very high

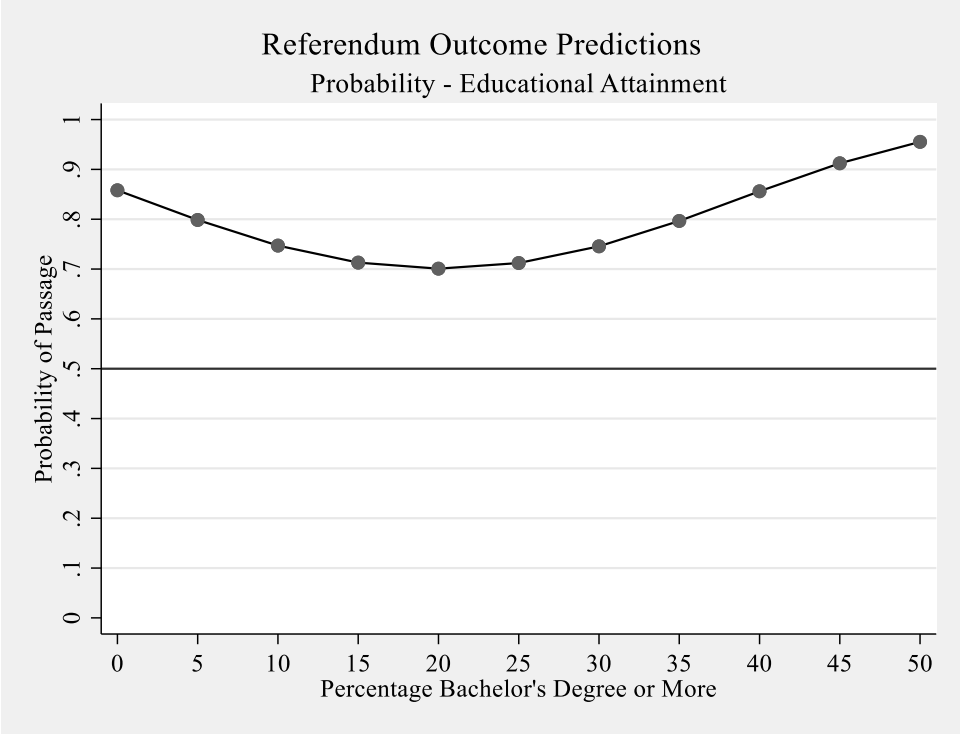

Figure 47: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Educational Attainment)

probabilities of passage, roughly 80 to 95 percent chance of passage. The mean value for educational attainment was 20.5 percent, which corresponded closely to bottom of the curve. Nevertheless, the bottom of the curve demonstrated an approximately 70 percent chance of referendum passage.

The linear relationship between educational attainment and proportion of yes-voters is presented in Figure 48. The proportion of White people in the community at the time of the referendum did not have statistical significance in the linear model. Here, the relationship increased steadily as education levels increased. The only data point in the graph below the 50 percent approval threshold was the minimum possible educational attainment: 0 percent of residents with a bachelor's degree or more. This remained on the precipice of approval with 49.46 percent of residents expected to support the ballot. This point, however, lies outside the current range of data for post-Act 10 rural communities in Wisconsin. A referendum in a community with the current minimum of educational attainment observed (7.5 percent) would expect to have 51.89 percent of voters voting in approval.

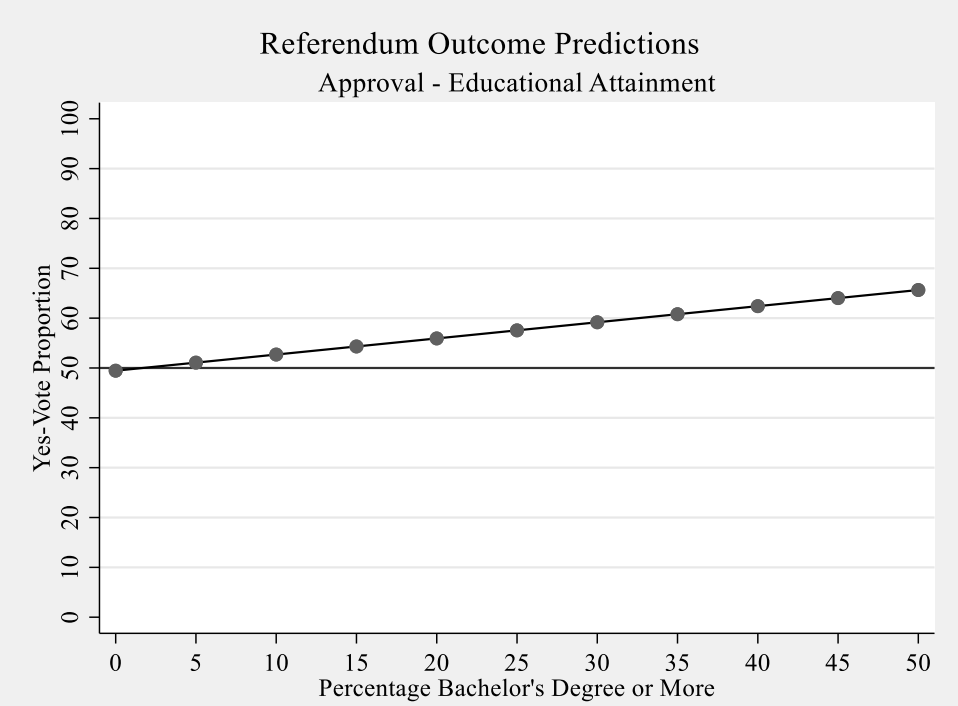

Figure 48: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Approval - Educational Attainment)

Income was a third objective way to measure working-class status. Prasad et al. (2009) defined working-class as those in the bottom half of the income distribution. Bartels (2006) used the bottom one-third of the income distribution. For the sake of example, I followed Bartels's lead and used the bottom one-third of the income distribution. This was family income of $52,500 in rural communities that have held a referendum post-Act 10 in Wisconsin. The minimum family income in that group was about $32,000.

Table 29 combines the previous three variables and adds median income. Its purpose is to illustrate the probability a referendum will pass in districts with varying levels of ideological preference, blue-collar employment, educational attainment, and median income. White percent is at the mean. Sample statistics are provided for each variable. The final column shows the likelihood of referendum passage. The table is sorted by descending probability.

Table 29

Probability of Referendum Passage at Varying Levels of Ideology, Blue-Collar Workers, Educational Attainment, and Median Income

Ideology – Pres.	Proportion Blue-Collar	Educational Attainment	Median Income ($)	**Probability (%)**
60	40	10	30,000	**100**
60	60	10	35,000	**99.5**
100	80	0	35,000	**99.3**
80	40	20	40,000	**99**
80	20	10	45,000	**96**
80	40	10	45,000	**95.1**
80	80	10	45,000	**89.8**
80	80	20	45,000	**89.1**

Table 29 (continued)

40	40	10	50,000	**83.7**
40	80	10	50,000	**75**
60	80	20	50,000	**72.6**
80	80	10	50,000	**72**
100	80	20	50,000	**69.7**

This table is not intended to be exhaustive. There were many, many combinations of 20 percent ideology increments, 20 percent blue-collar increments, 10 percent educational attainment increments, and $5,000 median income increments, which led to hundreds of lines of results. Instead, this table is intended to highlight the probabilities at sample, varying levels of conservative, white, working-class definitions in rural Wisconsin.

This table can appear somewhat messy at first glance. However, the key takeaway is the likelihood of passage. Regardless of a rural community's variations in ideology, blue-collar share, educational attainment, and median income, a referendum was likely to pass. Consider the final row first. This is the minimum expected probability of passage across all combinations of characteristics when ideology ranged from 0 to 100 percent, blue-collar ranged from 20 to 80 percent, educational attainment ranged from 0 to 50 percent, and median income ranged from $30,000 to $50,000. I could have input any other combinations of these four variables and the probability would be above the final row. The fact that the minimum expected probability of passage across the combinations of these factors is nearly 70 percent demonstrates an astounding level of expected referendum support in conservative, White, working-class communities in rural Wisconsin public school district referendums.

There were several other interesting findings that emerged beyond support from conservative, White, working-class communities. I hypothesized that schools would exhibit a kind of keeping-up-with-the-Joneses voting behavior (Reback, 2007). More specifically, I expected that probability of passage would increase as approved capital referendums from fellow conference

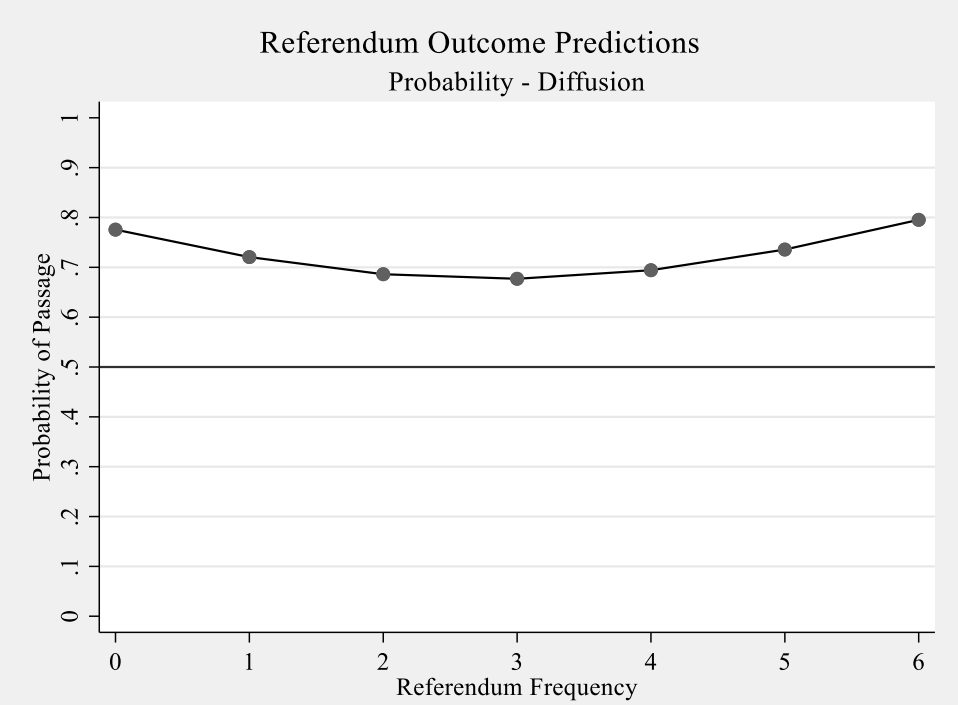

Figure 50: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Diffusion)

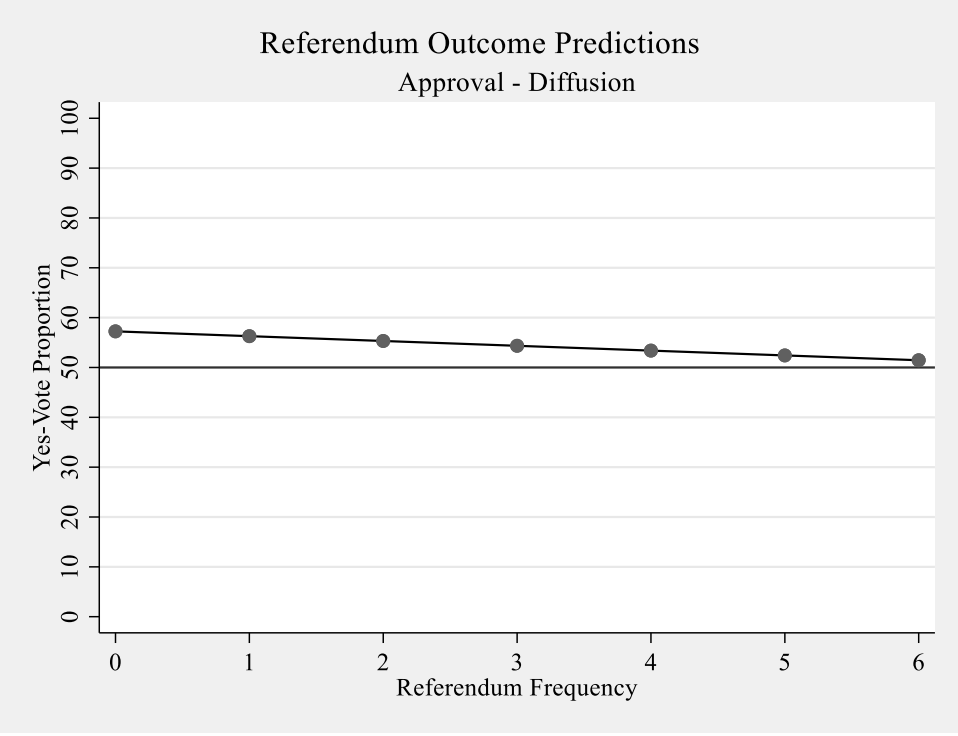

Figure 49: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Approval - Diffusion)

members in the prior two years increased. This relationship actually exhibited a curvilinear relationship. The data ranged from zero to six peer referendums. The highest probabilities of passage associated with the diffusion were found at the minimum and maximum—zero approved capital referendums in the athletic conference and six approved capital referendums in the athletic conference. Both of these were approximately 79 percent. The lowest probability occurred in the middle of the data: 67.7 percent.

Diffusion also achieved statistical significance in the linear model, though not with a quadratic term. In this case, the association is negative: probability decreases as other schools passed capital referendums. The probabilities ranged from 57.3 percent with no diffusion to 51.5 percent with maximum observed diffusion.

In general, the probability of approval increased as turnout increased. Importantly, though, there was no way to know whether the referendum was actually driving turnout. In the post-Act 10, revenue cap era, approximately 88 percent of Wisconsin referendums were held during April and November general elections. Therefore, it is reasonable that turnout was impacted a great deal by the state supreme court, primary, congressional,

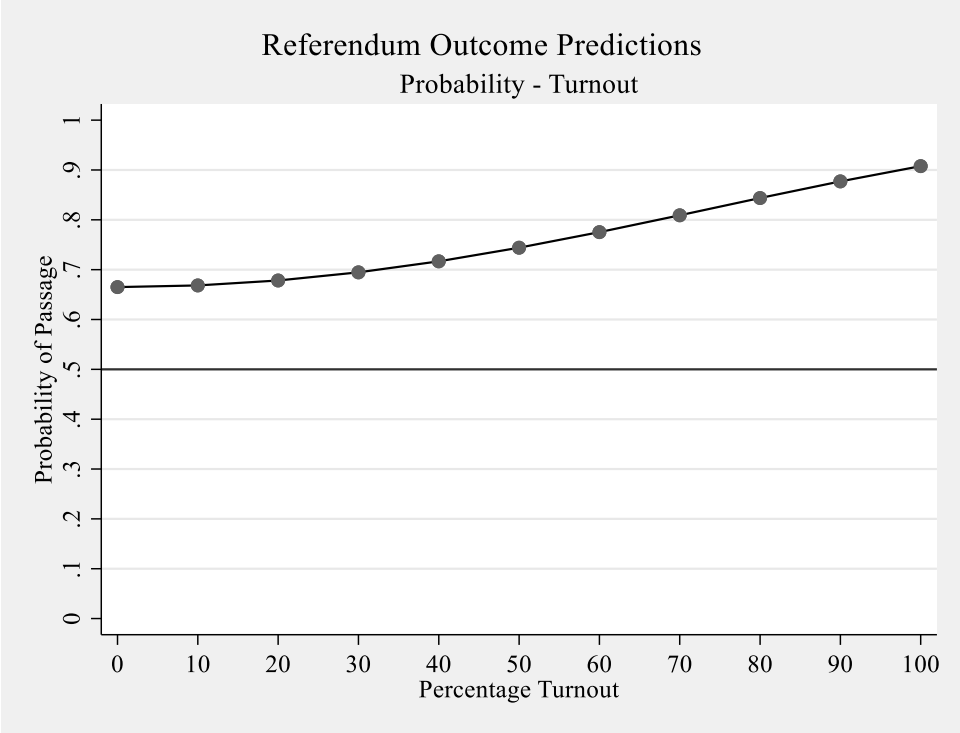

Figure 51: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Turnout)

presidential, or gubernatorial elections regardless of whether a referendum was on the ballot. Nevertheless, probability curved upward as turnout increased and did so particularly steeply once a 50 percent threshold is met. Very high turnout was associated with approximately 90 percent chance of passage.

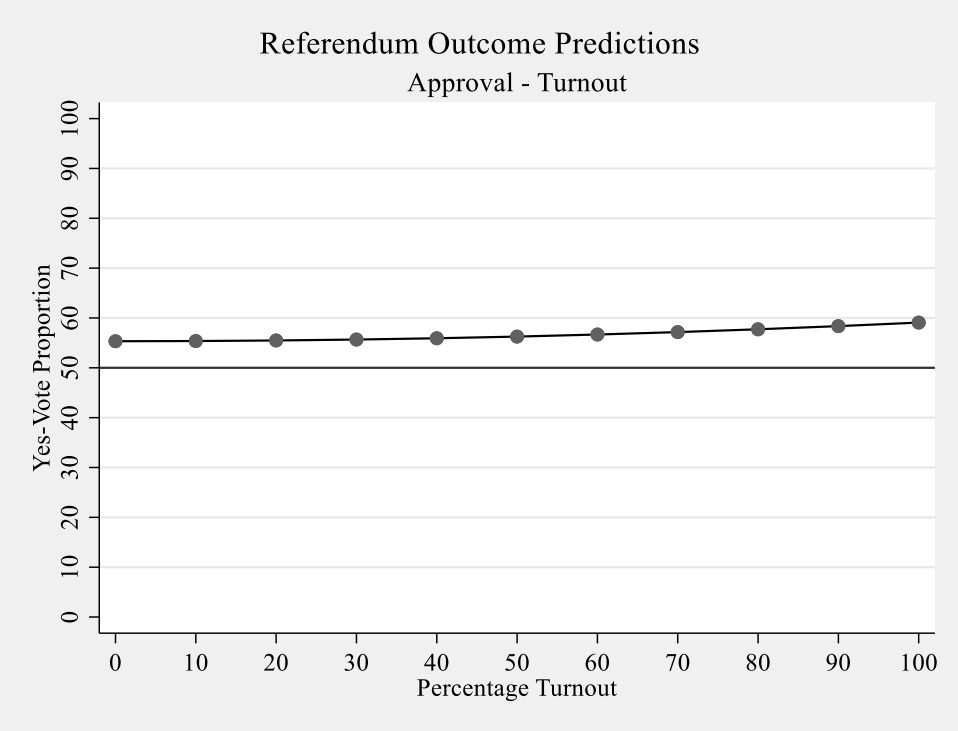

Figure 52: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Approval - Turnout)

A very similar shape was illustrated in the model predicting yes-voters. While the effect was not particularly strong, the proportion of expected yes-voters tended to curve up slightly as turnout increased. Very low turnout was associated with about 55 percent approval and very high turnout was associated with about 60 percent approval. Importantly, though, contrary to the findings from the literature review, increasing turnout did *not* predict *fewer* proportions of people voting yes.

The logistic model captured a sense of urgency with regard to the number of referendums held in the previous five years. Each time a referendum was on a ballot I totaled the number of referendums excluding the current competing referendums on that particular ballot. This ranged from zero referendums in the previous five years to eight referendums in the previous five years.

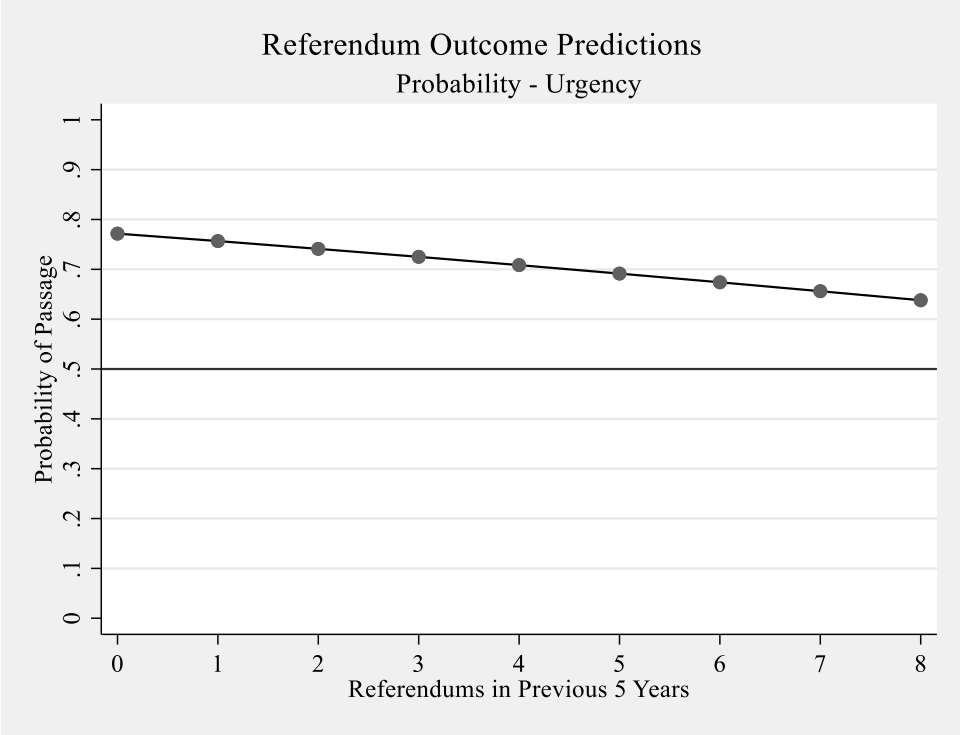

Figure 53: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Urgency)

As I stated in the literature review, this particular method of measuring urgency leaned on the perception of school board members and administrators since they, presumably, are the people leading the efforts to put a referendum on the ballot. A referendum on a ballot in a district that had zero referendums in the previous five years had a 77.2 percent chance of passing. A referendum on a ballot in a district that had eight referendums in the previous five years, an average of one every seven and a half months, still maintained a 63.4 percent chance of passing.

The literature that addressed sex was few, far between, and unclear. The literature that did include a male-female variable was mostly survey data since gender breakdowns at the level of school referendums in nearly impossible to accumulate; it simply is not collected. Thus, I operationalized sex as the proportion of female-gendered people in the school district. The percentage of female residents was significant in both the logistic and linear models. The range of female residents was quite wide: 38 to 55 percent. However, approximately 98 percent of the data was between 44 and 53 percent. The probability of passage is *U*-shaped. The likelihood of passage decreased from 92.5 percent when women encompassed 45 percent of residents to a low

of 67.5 percent at 52 percent women. The likelihood then rose again to approximately 76.6 percent at 55 percent women. Like many of the variables presented in this section, the probability never once crossed below 50 percent chance of passage.

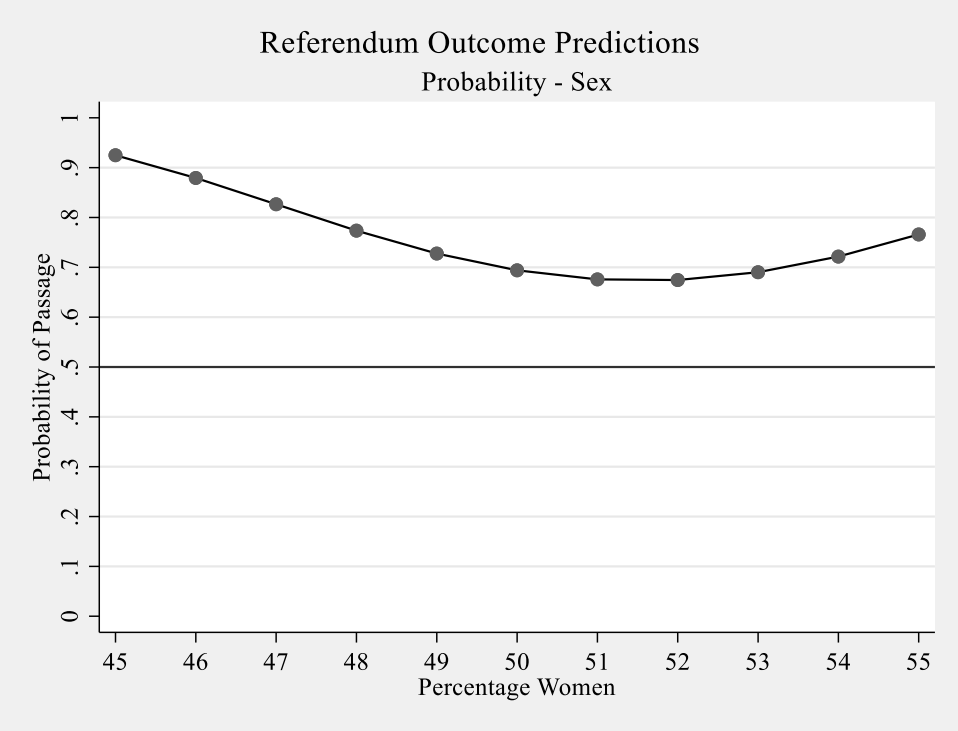

Figure 54: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Women)

The linear relationship was one I did not expect. Here, the proportion of yes-voters steadily decreases as the proportion of women residents increased. Like the

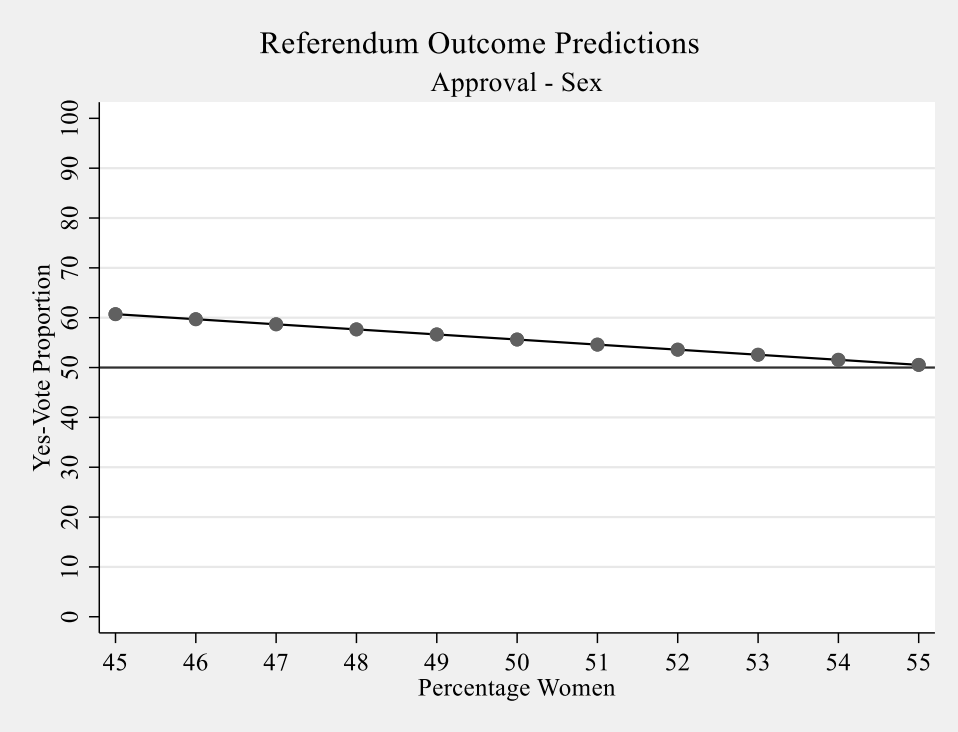

Figure 55: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Approval - Women)

logistic model, though, the outcome never crossed the 50 percent threshold. The expected proportion of yes-votes in a community with 45 percent women was 60.7 percent. At the other end of the range, the expected proportion of yes-votes in a community with 55 percent women was 50.5 percent.

Considering the ultimate task of a school system is to improve a child's learning, it was surprising how few studies incorporated a relationship between outcome and achievement. Admittedly, this is not easy. Tests often change and few may be uniform across a great deal of districts. Because of the dearth of research, it was also not immediately clear how to hypothesize a relationship. Voters may choose to "reward" a district with more money when achievement is high and be apt to withhold money if the perception is that additional money will not help. At the same time, voters may feel additional money is needed to help a low-performing district, while a high-performing district may be seen as doing enough already with the resources provided.

Based on the data provided in this dissertation, holding all other variables as they are observed in the districts that held referendums, increasing math achievement was associated with a decreased chance a referendum will pass. The range of this data spanned

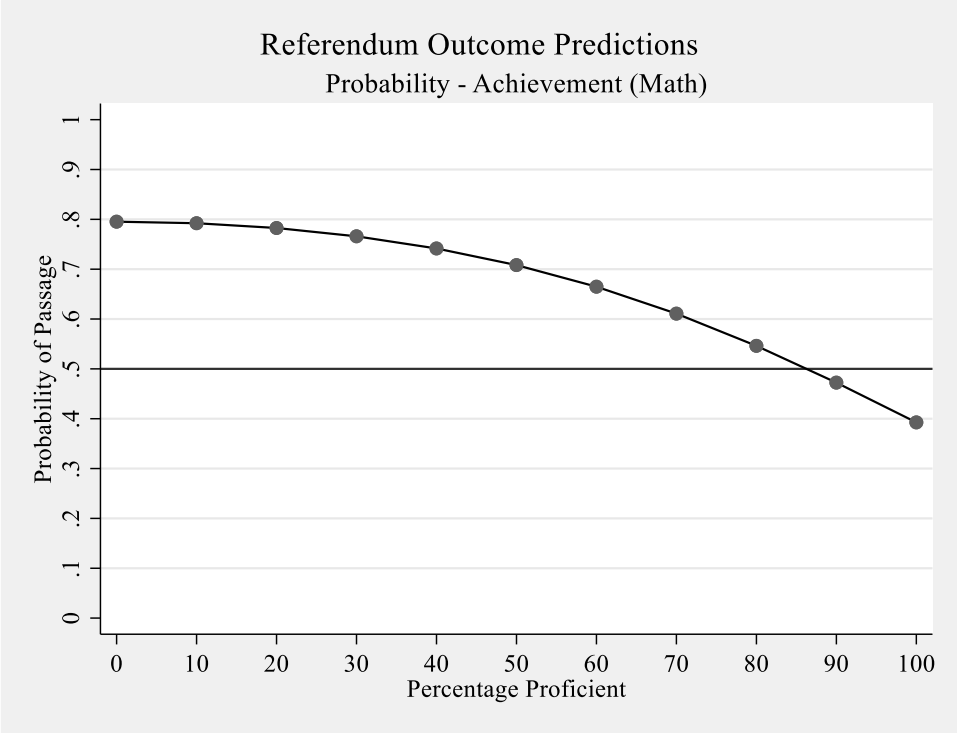

Figure 56: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability – Achievement [Math])

nearly the entirety of the percentages represented in Figure 56. The lowest percentage of students achieving proficiency in a district that held a referendum was just over 2 percent while the upper bound was close to 90 percent. The decline was much more precipitous in the upper-half of achievement than the lower half of achievement. The average probability of referendum passage with zero percent of students reaching proficiency was 79.5 percent, and this declined to 70.8 percent at 50 percent proficiency—a difference of about nine percent. However, a referendum in a district with the entirety of the student body achieving proficiency had an average expected passage probability of 39.3 percent, a further decline of 31.6 percent.

The relationship between the probability of referendum passage and the change in the enrollment of the school district presented a unique relationship among the variables. It was also one of the few variables that extended so deeply into low probabilities. Like the percentage of women residents, the range in district size change was wider than expected: a loss of 15 percent of students to a gain of 15 percent of students. It appears there was a "sweet spot" for growth in terms of referendum passage. A referendum held in a district where enrollment grew

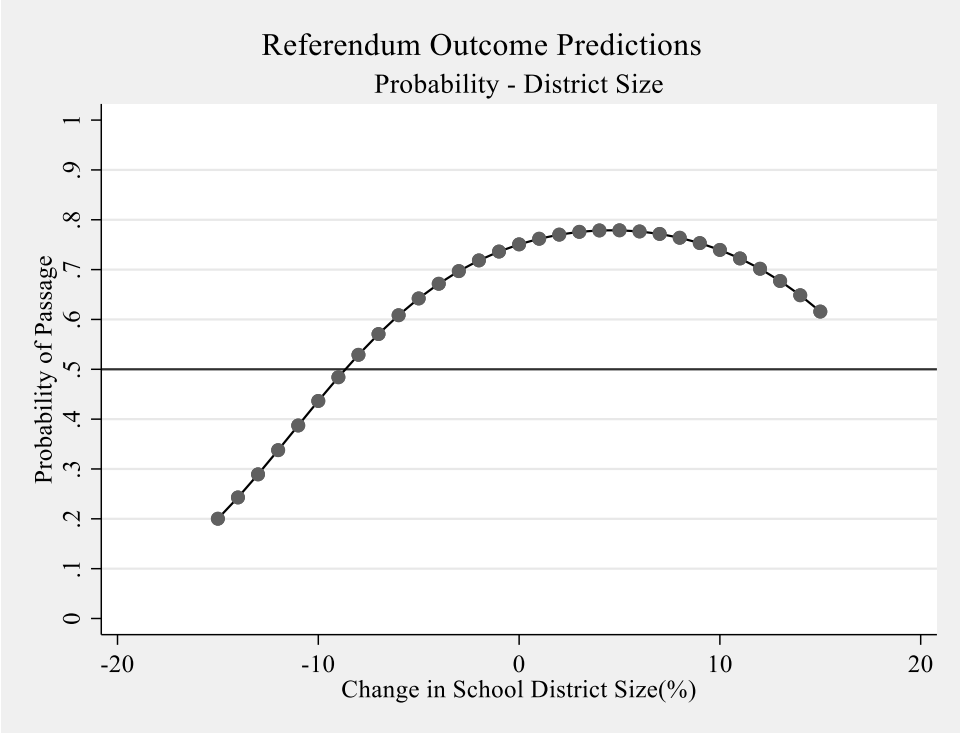

Figure 57: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - District Size)

by 5 percent had a 77.9 percent chance of passing. A referendum held in a district where enrollment declined by 5 percent still had a 64 percent chance of passage. Probability dipped below 50 percent at a loss of 9 percent of students: 48.4 percent.

I next consider the role of median income and income ratio and their associations with referendum passage probability. Recall that the income ratio was the ratio of the community's median income to teachers' average salary in that district. Thus, a value of 110 meant that the community's median income was 110 percent of the average teachers' salary or, stated differently, 10 percent greater than teachers' average salary. The range of income ratio was approximately 75 to 190.

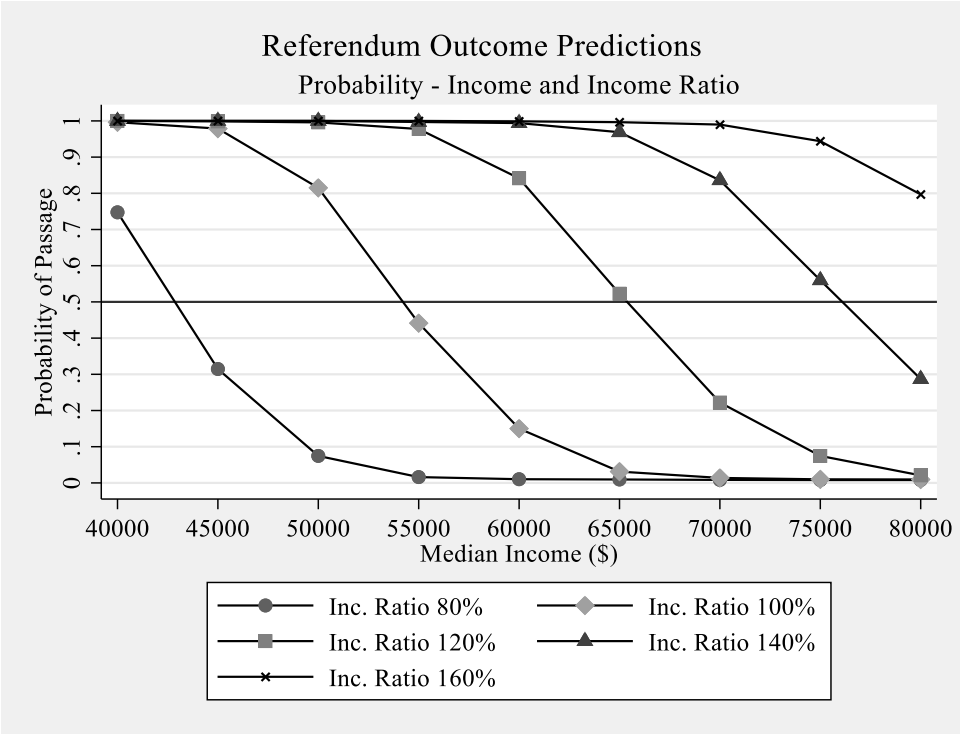

Figure 58: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Probability - Income and Income Ratio)

Increasing income was associated with a decrease in the probability of referendum passage. However, the probability of passage was a great deal higher when the community in general was making much more than their teachers. Consider the median of rural districts median incomes which is about $57,500. When a community is making 80 percent of the average teachers' salary, the average probability of referendum passage was about 1.2 percent. When the

ratio is equal, the chances were about a quarter: 26.2 percent. However, when the community members were making 120, 140, and 160 percent of teachers' average salaries, the average predicted probabilities were 93.2, 99.7, and 99.9 percent respectively. These sharp effects faded slightly as teachers' average salaries increased but not at the same rate across income ratios. Nevertheless, when the community was making substantially more money than teachers, a referendum was almost guaranteed to pass.

The final graphic presented here presents information about race. The relationships between race and outcome were studied pretty extensively in the literature. However, as the literature grew, researchers made clear that the racial composition of the student body must be considered alongside the racial composition of the community in general. I defined racial mismatch as the ratio of non-white students to white adults. A racial mismatch of 0.25 meant that there was one non-white student for every four white adults. Figure 59 illustrates the effect of increasing percentages of non-white students at various levels of racial mismatch. Non-white student proportions ranged from about 23 to 63 percent in rural Wisconsin districts that have held a post-Act 10 referendum. A referendum in a district in which the ratio was 1:1 never

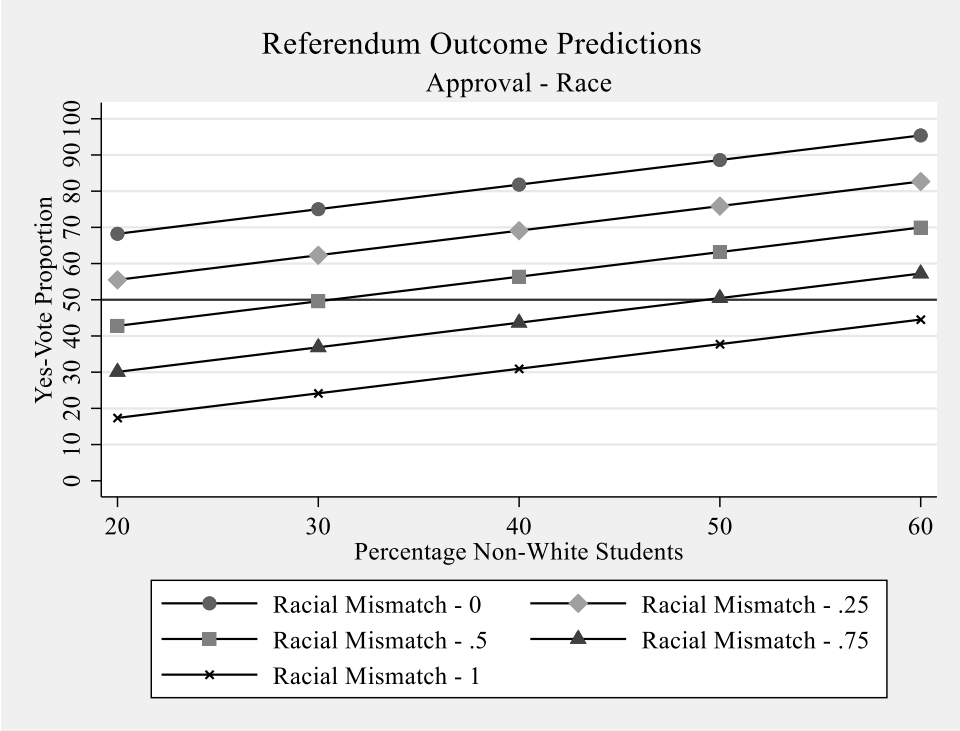

Figure 59: Referendum Outcome Predictions (Approval - Race)

crossed into majority approval; yes-vote proportion topped out at 44.5 percent support. A referendum in a district in which the ratio was 0.75:1 did reach 50 percent support when the proportion of non-white students was 50 percent. The takeaway from this graphic is that the proportion of residents voting in approval decreases at a particular level of non-white student percent *when racial mismatch increases*.

Lastly, I present some of the results from my dichotomous variables. Here, I calculated predicted results by maintaining the characteristics of the communities that have held a referendum and predicted an outcome by changing only the respective variables addressed. For instance, for many years, I heard the adage that winning football teams led to passed referendums. When pressed, those school leaders who expressed this belief anecdotally explained that success on the football field increased positive feelings about the school and made the community more engaged with the school. Surprisingly, this was not the case in the data examined here. I operationalized football success as appearing in a state championship game in the year the referendum occurred or the year prior. The average predicted probability for a referendum in a district that did not send a team to Madison was 73.3 percent. A referendum in a district that did send a team to Madison was 57.7 percent—a decrease of close to 16 percentage points.

Approximately five percent of the post-Act 10 rural Wisconsin referendums were devoted specifically to athletics purposes—new gyms, expanded football field seating, track resurfacing, joint school-community weight rooms, and so on. These did not have a strong track record of success. The average predicted probability of a referendum that was not exclusively for athletics was about 75 percent. When a referendum was proposed only for athletics purposes, even if the community in general may benefit, the expected chance of passage was 29.2 percent.

This was a drop in probability of nearly 46 percentage points. A very similar result occurred in the linear model. The average predicted level of support for a referendum that was not used for athletics renovations and upgrades was 56.3 percent while one that was came to 42.9 percent—critically crossing the below-majority threshold. Similarly, a referendum not used exclusively for new athletics facilities was predicted to garner 56.5 percent voter support while one that was garnered 41.1 percent support.

Interestingly, referendums specifically for the non-student core of the school—the teachers and curriculum for the students—also decreased voter support, though not below a majority level. The average predicted results for an educational programming operations referendum was 53.9 percent, down from 56.4 percent for a referendum that was not specifically for that purpose. Meanwhile, a salaries and personnel operations referendum would expect to garner an average of 51.1 percent voter support, and 56.2 percent otherwise.

Many Wisconsin districts in the last 10 years chose to hold a referendum as the previous referendum was expiring. I cannot be certain that this was intentional, but the frequency with which this occurred suggested it perhaps was. For those in support of passing a referendum, it greatly behooves them to do just that. Holding a referendum as the prior one is expiring increased the average probability of passage by 20 percent: 67.4 to 87.5 percent. Meanwhile, the average proportion of yes-voters was expected to increase six percent: 54.4 to 60.4 percent. Timing appears to matter, but the same months do not produce statistically significant results via each method. All other data held as observed, holding a referendum in June increased the average proportion of yes-voters from approximately 55 to 90 percent. This translated to the cusp of referendum failure to overwhelming success. With regard to probability, holding a referendum in October increased the likelihood of approval from 67.4 to 94.2 percent. An October

referendum held as a prior one was expiring appeared to nearly guarantee passage: the average probability was over 98 percent chance of approval.

Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

First and foremost, I believe the results above lend a great deal of support to my hypothesis that conservative, White, working-class communities in rural Wisconsin should not and cannot be written off as places that are less supportive of public school district referendums in their particular district simply because they are conservative. The graphs and data above demonstrated that even the most presidential or gubernatorial conservative communities have average likelihoods of referendum passage and yes-proportions that are quite high, especially within in the current range of ideological data. This finding extended to rural areas that were defined as working-class across job categories, income levels, and education levels.

Null results are equally important. The results showed that the proportion of workers employed in blue-collar fields is unrelated to the expected proportion of voters checking yes on the referendum ballot. Gubernatorial conservatism had no bearing on outcome probability outside of mere chance and vice versa for presidential conservatism on yes-proportion. The graphs and data above also made clear that probability of outcome and yes-proportion do *not* increase as conservatism gets stronger. Both measures of conservatism have negative signs in each respective model that they demonstrate significance. However, even extending GOP vote proportions to percentages currently unseen in Wisconsin resulted in the probability of referendum passage shifting from extremely likely—89.6 percent chance of passage with zero GOP support—to "merely" likely—53.8 percent chance of passage with 100 percent GOP support.

My quantitative work at this point does not definitively answer whether conservatism is causing either of these outcomes. My conjectural theory argued that conservative, White,

working-class communities in rural Wisconsin may be voting for referendum passage for several reasons including, but not limited to, a deep connection with their schools as a result of living nearby, local economic importance of the schools, high awareness of local government issues and policies, and government distrust. It is completely plausible that the most conservative of communities have a (slightly) lower propensity to vote for a referendum because a) they are the most distrustful of government after having felt abandoned by Democrats and Republicans alike; b) this distrust is causing the decline in referendum probability; and c) administrator tenure is not the appropriate way to operationalize local government trust. All that being said, I do not believe this detracts from the initial level of hypothesis support, only that more work must be done—work I take up in the qualitative section below.

At the conclusion of this paper's literature review, I quoted Piele and Hall who, quite literally, wrote the book on public school referendum passage in 1973. I reiterate their words here saying, "Although the dedicated school proponent or opponent might examine this review in hope of finding methods for developing a 'grand strategy' to influence the outcome of elections, several strands of evidence suggest the manipulation of any school finance election at any given time may prove extremely difficult" (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 91). Over time, this message was interrogated by researchers who, directly or indirectly, questioned whether this were true. I believe that rural Wisconsin districts in a post-Act 10 environment lend *some* credence to this claim.

Of the top 10 variables that impacted the probability of passage the most, only one, anchoring, is directly controllable by school leaders—at least in the very short run. These most-influential variables (presented with standardized coefficients in Table 25 and Table 27) included characteristics such as the community's median income, the income ratio between the

community and teachers, teachers' average salary, the proportion of students attending private schools, the district's total levy, and the proportion of households with children. It is technically true that district administrators and school boards could alter teachers' salaries or decrease their total levy. However, it would not make much sense to decrease a district's levy simply to pass a referendum. It is also remarkably hard to believe that school leaders would avoid football success or math proficiency merely to improve the chances a referendum will pass.

There were 31 different variables that were statistically significant predictors of the passage probability.[7] From a generous perspective, there were 11 factors directly manipulable by school leaders: the decision to hold a referendum as a previous is expiring, the decision to hold a 4-year non-recurring referendum, the decision to hold a recurring referendum, the referendum's tax impact, the decision to have the ballot in May or October, the referendum's turnout, the number of referendums in revenue cap era and previous five years, and whether the referendum is for athletics or miscellaneous purchases such as buildings and land. I use the word "generous" because only school leaders with a very long tenure would have had referendum decision-making power since 1993, the tax impact is affected by the non-controllable total equalized value, and turnout may be driven by many more things that the efforts (or lack thereof) by school leaders. Moreover, eight of these controllable factors fall into the bottom 15 variables when ranked by influence.

The one variable that was most manipulable by school leaders and impactful was the decision to hold a referendum as a prior is expiring (ninth most impactful, positive sign). The other highly controllable factor was the decision to hold an athletics-related referendum (eleventh most impactful, negative sign). School systems looking to hold a referendum for

[7] This is less than the total number of rows in Table 25 because some variables will move in tandem, i.e. the significant squared diffusion term cannot and will not change unless the diffusion main effect also changes.

capital academic improvements are largely left with anchoring as a way to manipulate income based on the statistically significant predictive factors.

Similarly, from the linear model perspective, only one variable in the top-ten most impactful was directly controllable by school leaders, and this, again, is anchoring. Assuming school leaders want the referendum to pass, which presumably they do, their best bet is to hold the election in June even if this means paying the cost of holding the ballot. There were other impactful, school leader-controlled variables in the top-fifteen, but these were all mutually exclusive from one another. These include money for new athletics facilities, renovations and additions to "other" facilities (e.g. maintenance buildings, bus garages), and renovations and upgrades to athletics facilities. A single referendum cannot simultaneously be all three of these at the same time, or the referendum would have been coded to reflect the multiple purposes of the capital dollars. What this means is that school leaders can directly control a maximum of three of the top-fifteen most impactful factors.

From the perspective of school leaders and invested community stakeholders, this message may seem as bleak as Piele and Hall's 1973 moral: you either live in a referendum supporting community or you don't. However, the silver lining for referendum supporters is that this dissertation's quantitative results say nothing about the impacts of campaigns by supporters and community yes-committees that help drum up support, increase awareness, and increase turnout of fellow supporters. The proportion of a district's students enrolled in private school held a strong, negative relationship with the likelihood of the referendum's outcome. However, there is nothing to say that this result would be a great deal more negative if, for instance, referendum supporters did not convince homeowners that their property values are protected by strong schools. On the other side of that coin, the district's total levy has a fairly strong, negative

relationship with the probability of passage. This may be because referendum detractors do an excellent job of making residents aware of the total pot of money already available to the school without providing nuance into the district's cost to operate.

The results produced in the quantitative portion of this dissertation may have manifested *because of* the influence of campaigns and their effects. The quantitative portion of my research does not spell out what contextualized campaign messages school leaders or allied stakeholders should use for their specific district. A persuasive message in one may be futile in another. However, this research does highlight which variables are ripe for influencing the outcome the most and getting the most bang-for-the-buck—even if a specific strategy does not accompany. Likewise, I am unable to articulate which variables are alterable with strong campaign messaging. Perhaps voters in one district are receptive to arguments about reducing student-staff ratios and unreceptive to messages about passing a referendum to draw more students. There is also a chance that voters in the community next door are receptive to a growth message and unresponsive to student-staff ratio arguments. In other words, just because a variable could be directly controlled by a school board or superintendent does not mean that voters will be receptive to persuasive messaging regarding that variable.

Equally critical, though, is the point that referendums in the contemporary Wisconsin landscape—rural or otherwise—are highly likely to pass. Period. Many of the variables presented in the findings section graphics above are well above the 50-50 chance of passage. It is nearly impossible to ignore that roughly three-fourths of rural Wisconsin referendums have passed in the last 8 years, and many school years have passage rates well above that. The average probability of passage is 72.9 percent, and the average level of support is 56 percent. This is not a sheltered experience among a handful of districts either. There are 255 rural Wisconsin districts

that have existed in the post-Act 10 environment. Only about 43 percent of these districts have never experienced a referendum success during this time either because they have not held one or their ballots have failed. Put differently, 142 different rural districts have experienced at least one referendum success in the eight years following Act 10, an average of nearly 18 new districts each year.

There were several positive or negative signs attached to variables in Table 25 and Table 27 that are worth noting. Greater proportions of students of color were positively associated with referendum passage probability, as was the proportion of white adults. However, the linear model demonstrated that greater levels of racial mismatch were correlated with fewer people supporting a proposed referendum. Stated differently, it appears white adults are less supportive of referendums when there is great deal of brown kids enrolled in local schools. Tragically, this is not altogether surprising. The UCLA Civil Rights Project has made it quite clear that school segregation is on the rise (Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, & Orfield, 2019), and Wisconsin is hardly immune, even in mostly White, rural areas (EdBuild, 2015; Chang, 2018).

The effects of the income variables were unexpected. First, I did not foresee referendum probability decreasing as median income increased even though the literature did not produce a clear directional effect. The majority of studies that analyzed this relationship (Zimmer & Jones, 2005; Shober, 2011; Ingle, Johnson, Givens, & Rampelt, 2013; Gong and Rogers, 2014; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018) found no or inconsistent income-referendum outcome relationships. Lentz's (1999) research was instructive since she focused specifically on rural locales. This work found that referendum failures were more likely to occur as the proportion of people in poverty increased. This makes intuitive sense. People may be more likely to support additional school money if they can afford it. My research did not support my intuition. It does,

however, corroborate Cramer's (2016) work in rural Wisconsin. She added much needed nuance to the income-referendum relationship. As the figure in my findings section exemplified, the effect of income cannot be considered without taking into account the income of the community *relative* to teachers. Teachers may still be seen as the "haves" in the community. Even as increasing median income increased, the chance of referendum approval skyrocketed provided people in the community made more than their teachers. It is also interesting that this finding is expressed via salaries and not benefits. Governor Walker made a point to call out teachers' "Cadillac benefits" during the Great Recession, and Ingle et al. (2013) found that increases in teachers' benefits packages were associated with decrease referendum probabilities. Teachers' benefits did not show any statistical significance whatsoever in either model here.

Referendum timing and turnout should be considered in tandem as they are usually roped together in the research literature. In general, the thought has been that a referendum should be timed so that turnout is minimized and easily controlled to include the most fervent school and referendum supporters. From the perspective of timing alone, this seems true. Referendum supporters should seek to have their elections in June or October, neither of which corresponds with general elections in Wisconsin. A third month, May, is negatively associated with passage despite it also being a non-general election month.

My work shows that increasing turnout is not the plague of referendums about which other researchers have been so adamant (Stevens & Mason, 1996; Lents, 1999; Holcombe & Kenny, 2007; Brunner, Robbins, & Simonsen, 2018). Perhaps the particular time of the year provides a better explanation of the effects of these months. It could be that October elections allow just enough time for students and parents to readjust to the school year and fully realize the needs of the school. This is also the time in odd-numbered years in which biennium and school

budgets are published and their effects more closely analyzed. School finance may be at the forefront of voters' thoughts—to the extent, at least, that it is ever at the forefront. Similarly, most Wisconsin school districts complete their school year in June. It is plausible that this is a time of reflection on the school year for students and parents, and referendum passage is more likely when the academic year dominates the minds of voters. Providing a hypothesis about May is a little more difficult. It could be that students and parents are anxious to finish the year and are devoting less cognitive capacity to the school year. This is a time of grade advancement and graduation. Voters, and parents in particular, may be considering from a self-interested perspective whether referendum money will truly help their child since the child may be moving on.

My linear model found significant negative associations between referendums for multiple capital purposes and proportion of yes-votes. This may be an important warning for school board members and administrators who are considering roping several goals into one referendum question. The purpose of minimizing questions makes sense. While not present in my findings, my literature review explained the fairly strong negative relationship between passage and the number of competing referendums. Residents appear unwilling to say yes to everything. In addition, constituents who are supportive of various purposes must vote for all purposes or risk losing their own. Voters who really want a community workout facility and new pool may also have to approve what is, in their mind, an unneeded new elementary school if all capital aspects are combined into one question.

There appears to have been a movement to fewer but larger questions over the past 25 years in Wisconsin. Two examples are illustrative. In the late 1990s, Eau Claire placed seven different referendum questions on a single April ballot (six passed). Fast forward 18 years and

Barneveld wrote a single question that proposed to demolish old portions of a school, building an addition for a new elementary school, build new music and art rooms for students, replace entrances with security technology, build a new cafeteria, upgrade kitchen hardware, renovate several bathrooms, and upgrade HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems (it passed). Examples like these abound through the DPI referendum database. It is a curious strategy because these questions are inevitably more costly, and both referendum amounts and tax impacts have negative signs. In the work presented here, there are negative coefficients related to multiple new capital projects and multiple capital projects (i.e. some renovations, some upgrades, and some new builds). A better route seems to be upgrading existing academic facilities in a single question, separate from other goals—though even new academic facilities still garner expected average yes-votes above 50 percent.

Both models had five-year urgency variables demonstrate significance. The interest in this variable stems not from the negative sign but the fact that the slope was not stronger. Marquette University Law polls have shown that Wisconsin residents support increased public school funding, but, nevertheless, a referendum on average every seven and a half months is a lot (Franklin, 2015). I expected more voter fatigue. Johnson and Ingle (2009) showed that creating a sense of urgency is effective, but this quantitative data cannot articulate how the urgency is created. Voters may feel pressure to support the common good (Andreoni, 1995), because voters feel all children will benefit (Kastory & Harrington, 1996), or because campaigners have done an effective job of making clear the consequences of a failed vote (Johnson & Ingle, 2009). Voters who have experienced six or seven referendums in the previous five years still maintain a 63.8 percent chance of approving the eighth one. I take this as evidence that the urgency felt by school leaders who decide to undertake a referendum process is also being felt by the voting

constituents. This finding may also be evidence that voters tolerate, and even support, this taste for public education spending that is controllable at home. Even a seventh referendum in five years in a community with 70 percent of people voting GOP for president and 70 percent GOP for governor has a 59.4 percent chance of passing and 51.8 yes-proportion. Local control, indeed.

With regard to anchoring, I was not surprised that the sign was positive. However, I was struck by the strength of this variable's contribution to the both models' outcomes. This was one of the final variables that I chose to include, and I initially conceptualized it as a foundation of tax normality: once a new mill rate was set, residents would soon come to think of this as the new "normal." As long as this rate was upheld and residents did not have the opportunity to "remember" what their old mill rate was, a referendum would be easier to pass. I became more confident about the need for this variable when I saw this situation manifest as I coded each referendum since 1993. There is a good chance this variable is even more important than what these results suggested. Voters may also be approving referendums when previously incurred debt for capital improvements is paid off by the district. The DPI referendum database does not include this information because each district's loan terms are going to be different depending on debt history, financial security, financial institution, etc.

I developed the idea to include a measure of tax normality only after reviewing media effects literature for an entirely different project, which, I believe, speaks to a much larger point regarding the state of the referendum literature. There is so much more to be done. Research strands that, at face value, had little initial connection to rural school referendums made a big difference in the quality of my logistic and linear models. This is reflected in my goodness-of-fit statistics and evaluation metrics. I chose to rely on McFadden's adjusted-R^2 measure as opposed

other pseudo-R^2 measures because of the appeal of penalizing models with too many unnecessary coefficients. I had other options.

My logistic model's Cox and Snell pseudo-R^2 was 0.281 and my Nagelkerke pseudo-R^2 was 0.406. These metrics are greater than Ingle et al.'s (2013) study of Ohio referendums from 2007 to 2010. These researchers' enter model registered at 0.252 and 0.359 respectively, and their stepwise model registered at 0.158 and 0.225 respectively (though their discrete time hazard model was higher on both measures). My pseudo-R^2 measures are also comparable to Bowers and Lee's 2013 study of Texas referendums. My unadjusted R^2 measure is approximately four percent greater than Bowers, Metzger, Militello's 2010 study of Michigan referendums, a study that produced one of the highest R^2 measures in the referendum literature to date at 24.6 percent. My linear model accounts for 41.1 percent of the variance, over twice the R^2 measure of Zimmer et al.'s (2011) unadjusted model. Among the rural, post-Act 10 models that I produced, the final model presented here was actually slightly below the average sensitivity, 92.79 percent. However, this particular model was over 12 percentage points higher than the average specificity among the potential models. One of the benefits of this model is its relative strength in finding the true negative rate, especially in a dataset that contains so many passages.

My point here is not a back-patting exercise of statistical success. My point is that referendum literature will not move forward unless the research literature expands to incorporate other political science, political communication, anthropology, and sociology literatures and qualitative research with individual district constituents to better understand voting behavior. I turn my attention here in the next section.

There are some variables that did not demonstrate significant associations with a referendum outcome in either model. These are presented in the table below.

Table 30		
Variables without Significant Outcome Associations (Logistic and Linear)		
School District Factors		
Administrator benefits	Administrator experience	Administrator salary
Debt	District type	Limited English proficient students
Proficiency – reading	Public employees	Public school enrollment
Teacher benefits	Teacher experience	
Referendum Factors		
Competing referendums	Refloat	
Community Factors		
Income inequality	Migrant population	

Several of these stand out, the most surprising of which is all of the administrator variables. Only one study specifically inspected the potential connection between tenure and outcome, Piele and Hall in 1973, and they did not find report an association. Nevertheless, I believed the connection made sense. I presumed that a long-time administrator would have amassed enough trust with community members that referendum passage would be easier. This did not appear to be the case. It could be that tenure of school leaders is still important but captured in school board member terms, not administrators. After all, school board members face reelection and are accountable directly to residents, whereas administrators are not. In a similar vein, I believed that there would be a negative predictive association between administrator salaries and referendum outcome because constituents would believe that, if this person made a certain dollar amount, there would be money for other things too. There is generally only one administrator, and the hiring of this person is a public affair. Learning the salary of the

superintendent is not particularly difficult. Perhaps, however, the administrator salary is perceived as being appropriate or rural administrator salaries are not very high. Regardless, an association does not exist here.

I also believed that the number of competing referendums would be negatively associated with referendum outcome. Data from Michigan suggested that every additional referendum on the ballot reduced the probability of success (Bowers, Metzger, & Militello, 2010b). There is a chance that is also true Wisconsin, though the data is not available. As I stated in my methods section, the Wisconsin Elections Commission communicated to me that they do not archive sample ballots (at least publicly), especially those beyond municipal elections. It is possible that voters are conceptualizing all school referendums as one particular need, regardless of the number on the ballot. The addition of county and municipal referendums could reduce probabilities as they compete with the whole of school referendums.

Third, additional time may clarify the role of referendum refloats. There were very few referendum refloats in rural Wisconsin post-Act 10: 23, or 3.6 percent. One reason for this was because they were unneeded. Refloats, by definition, can only occur if the first attempt failed, and, frankly, few rural referendums after the 2010-2011 school year failed—a point I have made repeatedly. A significant association may manifest if referendum outcomes change, greater numbers of failures amass, and reattempts become more common.

Fourth, I expected a significant relationship between public employees and outcome. This did not happen. One reason could be that there were relatively few public employees in rural areas of Wisconsin. The median proportion of public employees in a community was a little over one in ten. A second reason could be due to the rural consciousness that Cramer (2016) investigated and reported on deeply. Rural public employees may be no different than any other

rural resident, regardless of employer. The fact that they are rural may overshadow the fact that they have a public employer.

Fifth, district type did not reach significance. Most school districts in Wisconsin are unified, i.e. K-12 instead of K-8 or 9-12, and this is especially true of rural districts. However, it could be that the district type really is not relevant to voters. School is school, teaching is teaching, and school finance is school finance. Voters did not appear to vote for or against a referendum based on whether their child or community's children were enrolled in the particular school for four, nine, or twelve years.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there were 15 factors included in the previous table. I gathered data on 60 factors that I believed could have an association with referendum passage or have demonstrated an association in the past. This means that 75 percent of the factors included here had a significant relationship with referendum passage in some capacity. Thus, there were a substantial number of factors that affected whether a referendum passed and the proportion of yes-voters, at least across rural Wisconsin as a whole. This may not be true at the individual level. The models presented here could be a sum of many parts. For some voters, the only thing that may matter is whether they are staying ahead of tax-grabbing teacher "haves." For others, the only thing that may matter is making sure that teachers make enough money as possible to ensure that the district retains the best and brightest. I highly doubt 75 percent of the many factors here are being considered by every voter when they enter the ballot booth. However, understanding what factors do matter at the local level—and why—is the most important next step for referendum research, and I turn there now.

Qualitative Findings

I provide first my findings from Lewes before turning my attention to Hackenden. The synthesis of these findings, including the theoretical contributions are provided in my qualitative

interpretations section, next. Lewes was the community I expected would fail a referendum when, in actuality, the referendum passed. Hackenden, on the other hand, was the community I predicted would pass their referendum when, ultimately, the referendum failed. The Lewes and Hackenden school districts had strong, underlying levels of support, though the route to this support was different for each: Lewes drew the bulk of their support from their secession from a larger, neighboring district a little over a decade ago. Hackenden drew from their strong academic success over the last ten years.

At the outset of this research, my expectation was that voters would have a clear connection between their voting choice and a district, referendum, or community factor that led them to make this choice, e.g. “I am voting yes because the school employs so many people in the area.” I was not wrong, but I was incomplete. Voters articulated these voting choices and reasons, but, for the most part, most voters did not produce these connections on their own, as I expected them to do. Instead, the connections between voting decisions and influencing factors were filtered through small and hyper-local campaign committees who succeeded because there was a community culture or environmental amenable to their message.

Put differently, there is a hidden sentence that would precede the example just presented that, prior to this research, was not clear to me. For example, a more complete reason to vote yes might be, “The campaign committee reminded me just how many farm bankruptcies there were in our district last year. Clearly, we are living in a fragile economy. I am voting yes because the school employs so many people in the area.” Both of these districts experienced the results that they did because of the strength of respective campaign committees advocating for and providing information about their preferred side—Lewes yes and Hackenden no. These campaign committees comprised people unaffiliated, at least formally, with the districts and were powerful

because they successfully "activated" in voters' minds the connection between preferred referendum outcome and important economic, psychological, and/or cultural attributes of the community. Put another way, the "message" of the campaign committee was a particular characteristic of the community, and the message resonated because of the broader environment in which the district was situated.

In the subsections that follow, I present the reasons residents voted yes or no on their respective referendums, the respective community characteristics that were "activated" by the campaign committee that motivated people to vote yes, and, finally, the general environment in which these activations were taking place that allowed them to be "successful"—with success being defined as the outcome preferred by the campaign committee. After I illustrate these connections, I explain what I believe these campaign committees did that allowed them to get what they wanted. I also address the reasons people did not vote the way the campaign committee wanted them to, what role the district played in a formal, institutionalized capacity and, finally, what role, if any, political attachments played in Lewes and Hackenden.

Lewes Grizzlies.

Lewes's $6.5 million debt issuance facilities referendum was put in front of voters on November 6, 2018. The purpose of the referendum was to build a new high school and, following construction, demolish the existing high school built in 1934. Leftover money was to be used for renovating remaining sections of the building used by the rest of the K-12 students and creating a new commons area.[8] I predicted this referendum would fail. Instead, it passed with a 12-percentage point spread—56 percent (491) voted yes, and 44 percent (388) voted no.

[8] I very purposefully do not provide the specific ballot language for either districts' referendum(s). Referendum questions are easily searchable in DPI databases and would quickly reveal where my research was conducted.

This referendum was a refloat—a reattempt from a prior, failed $6 million referendum held on April 5, 2016. That referendum failed with 39 percent (314) voting in favor, and 61 percent (481) voting no. The debt issuance referendum question read largely the same that year. The 2016 referendum, however, was also paired with a separate $3.2 million question focused on athletic fields, a track, playgrounds, and community recreation facilities. athletics and recreation. This failed with a wider margin than its paired facility question—34 percent (269) voted in favor, and 66 percent (515) voted no.

The left column of Table 31, below, presents the six predominant reasons in order of importance residents voted yes on the 2018 Lewes referendum. The middle column of the table presents the corresponding community attribute that was "activated" by the yes campaign committee's messaging that motivated voters to carry that particular factor into the voting booth with them. The right column of the table describes the general environment of the community that allowed the activated characteristic to succeed in producing the yes factor.

I defined predominance and determined importance by the frequency about which these factors were discussed by interviewees, the level of passion and emotion used by interviewees while discussing these factors, the factors interviewees spoke of first, and the congruence between peers' expected voting behavior and their ultimate voting decisions. In other words, people were right about the ways other people voted. Again, as I said in this section's introduction, following these connections, I will elaborate on why I believe the campaign was successful in making these connections.

Table 31

Predominant Yes Factors, Campaign Message, and Accompanying Environment

Yes Factor	Campaign Message	Accompanying Environment
1. "Because we said we would."	Secession	Desire for local control
2. Avoiding loss	"The village is the school, and the school is the village."	Forced change and change avoidance
3. Appropriate cost	Extent of the needed repairs	Fragility of the local economy
4. Success of the school	District strength and quality	Aligned school and community goals
5. "It's for the kids."	Tight-knit, family-like community	Prototypical "small-town life" and a strong sense of nostalgia
6. Transportation	Accessible academic and social opportunities	Rurality and isolation

The most important reason Lewes voters decided to approve the referendum was, simply put, because they said they would. Lewes residents felt a strong, strong chip on their shoulder following secession from Glassbridge 13 years ago. This point cannot be overstated. Nearly every person weaved the identity of their community into a description of standing on their own two legs again beginning over a decade ago. This included people in bars and diners who had no idea I was an education researcher and would not know this would be something I would care about. One school board member, Duke, emotionally encapsulated this feeling on behalf of their constituents.

> I think the one thing that always sticks in my mind and I think the people, why people supported the school so much is, over the years, because we were in the Glassbridge School District. We were, we're seen—because we're 15 miles from the other school—we were always seen as kind of an extra burden. We're this little school out here. We're an extra burden. So, it was always, there was always

> that threat that they were going to close us. And they were going to start with the high school. So, when they, every time the threat of closing the high school came up, it was like, well, that's step one. And they're gonna close the school eventually because… And just bus everybody to Glassbridge. And we thought if our community loses the school, they'd lose a lot.

Residents absolutely refused to been seen as failures in maintaining their school. This was, matter-of-factly, not an option. Mark, a recently retired teacher, was an in-service teacher during the secession.

> If you back in the history of the Glassbridge-Lewes divide, you know, Lewes was supposedly—in some people's minds—treated so poorly by Glassbridge that [Glassbridge] forced us to break away—the only time that's ever happened in this state, I believe, where a smaller district leaves a bigger district. And I think it was unprecedented at the time. So, yeah, I think [the secession] crossed people's minds. And we knew that that was part of the argument too, Rob, when I think about it is that, "Hey, we voted overwhelmingly as a community to sever relations with Glassbridge." To breakaway and form our own school district, you know. We decided that as a community. So, it's important, this referendum, is part of that decision to move forward and be on our own.

Alex was a local landlord and small business owner and served on the committee that spearheaded the secession. Early in our conversation, he stated,

> I don't know if you know our backstory, but Lewes school, in particular, was part of a larger school district, the Glassbridge-Lewes School District. And, I believe, 12 years ago, we voted to split away, which was, I think, the first time anybody in the state had ever done that. And, in my mind, it's the best thing we ever did. You know, because when we were with Glassbridge, it was like they were the big sister. We were the little sister. And we, at best, got hand-me-downs, and sometimes not even that. And, now, we've got a really good little school. It's little. It's always going to be little. But, at the same time, as far as education and stuff goes, we've got a, my gosh, we're right up there with everybody else, you know? You know, Chromebooks in every kid's hands.

A man who went by CC had administrative experience in both districts over the last 10 years, including Lewes when the referendum passed. He, too, was firm about the role secession played into the voting decisions of many people.

> What I can tell you just from the background that I do have is they, 10 years prior [to the referendum], just passed that referendum, seceded from the Glassbridge School District. So, when you have a community that's willing to take on their own school district at that size, to the degree that they would split, you know, it says a lot about the passion that community has for education and wanting to have their own, their own, their own school district. So, I think that probably played into the results …

Thus, the campaign committee helped create a condition in which many residents voted with a chip on their shoulder because the committee renewed the feelings surrounding severed relations with Glassbridge and reinvigorated some of that anger Lewesites felt as they seceded in 2007. Lingering anger toward Glassbridge was nearly universal among the interviewees, and it was clear Lewes residents will never fully forgive Glassbridge. According to people close to the secession process, Glassbridge accused Lewes of "abandoning" the district when, in their minds, Glassbridge was abandoning them with death by a thousand cuts. The campaign committee was able to remind people that, in their view, Lewes never received an amount of money back from Glassbridge in proportion to what they contributed.

There was real and long-lasting anger directed at Glassbridge, but, at the same time, Lewesites remembered that time during secession fondly as a circumstance when the community rallied together in a way they never had before. It served as a point of warmth and camaraderie when times were difficult or village disagreements arose. Parents described to me painting protest signs with their children and marching outside district offices. Other residents used powerful language in connecting the community with support for the school, saying that Glassbridge was not going to be allowed to "kill" Lewes's school, that removing the school would mean Lewes would "die," or that Lewes's "passion for education saved" their school from Glassbridge.

Secession, however, was 13 years ago. I asked interviewees in Lewes whether they thought that this passion and drive was fading over time. This produced mixed responses. Some residents believed this kind of protective support for the school they "saved" would never go away. Molly was a young, local businessowner with young children in the school. She believed this type of support was and is fading as the years went by, as people moved, or as people passed away—and the support was not being replaced by another mechanism. Still other residents believed that support via secession waxed and waned but that the people who had "gone through several generations never lose" this rallying point when "push comes to shove."

Secession was also representative of Lewes's deep desire for control. I met Clarence, another retired teacher, and his wife, Sharon, in their dining room on a snowy February day. Sharon put it this way, "Sustainability, independence is its strongest suit. That, no matter where—and I've probably said that before—no matter where or what comes up, if it's about this community—and I hate to say it—but versus somebody else coming in and doing it. Or taking away. They, they will not tolerate it. They are very strongly independent." Lewes did not want help. If it's not necessary, they won't pay for it. If they won't pay for it, it's not necessary. If it's necessary and you can't pay for it, you should work harder. These types of values, residents said, were inculcated into them from German heritage and sayings such as, "If you're starvin', you ain't workin' hard enough."

This desire for control and choice at the local level was often paired with statements regarding secession. One current teacher said, "We split from Glassbridge 12 years ago or how many ever years ago now because we wanted say in our district, and we wanted to be able to control and keep our school here—or the community did. … So, we were, you know, able to take more local control here." Local control was hardly limited only to secession, however. Rather

than addressing the costs of higher education at a higher level of government, the people of Lewes held regular banquets for a scholarship fund. To date, the scholarship fund had an endowment of over $800,000 for graduating classes that averaged about 22 students. Another kind of local control was over curriculum. One current teacher described parents' and grandparents' role in, at times, "dictating" and, at other times, "influencing" what their children and grandchildren were learning, a task that was much more difficult when joined with a district 10 times its size.

The secession from Glassbridge and the relative increase in residents' local control also meant that the campaign committee could remind people that a vote yes was a vote to avoid a re-consolidation. Talk of potential consolidation had, at times, arose in Lewes—a circumstance not uncommon in many financially precarious rural Wisconsin schools—but this notion was swiftly batted away. To residents, the district, in its entirety, was in Lewes, and that was where they intended it to say. Annette, a teacher in the high school, said she believed many residents saw consolidation as a threat to Lewes's academic quality. For her, Lewes was making a statement toward much wider educational problems. As schools got bigger and more institutionalized, Annette believed, individual attention was lost and children became widgets in the assembly line. Annette also reckoned that Lewes had the courage to "… choose something different: they broke away" during an age in which she believed that people were looking at why additional money did not seem to be helping large school districts.

Gloria, a former school district employee, heard rumblings that maybe not enough research had been done on consolidation during the 2018 referendum. I expressed surprise at this statement considering the troubled history with Glassbridge. Her response was simply, "And that's why it hadn't been researched. Because for the few times it was brought up, it very much

got squelched as an idea." Fred, a longtime resident and former member of both the village and county boards remarked, "People love the school. We're Grizzlies. People love the Lewes school. … In a way, we identify ourselves from that school, you know?" By consolidating, a key component of residents' identities is lost—an identity they only recently regained. This tight intermingling of the school and the community led to Lewes residents' second predominant reason to vote yes: "The village is the school, and the school is the village."

The boundaries of the school and the community were nonexistent; they were one and the same. A wound to one left a scar on the other. The events of the community revolved around what was taking place at the school. The community attended cultural events such as the annual powwow, and the district's basketball games could have been a *Hoosiers* scene. One retired teacher remembered community members and teachers standing side-by-side to paint hallways, move equipment, or fix odd jobs around the school throughout his career. This support continued even after students graduated, since Lewes built up that scholarship fund worth over $800,000.

Therefore, the loss of the school would mean a loss of the community that some families farmed for six generations. Loss was a very real threat to Lewes School District residents. In some sense the school had been "lost" to Glassbridge through watered-down local control. Act 10 and accompanying funding cuts took place in the district's fourth year, just as the district's share of the Glassbridge-Lewes debt was settled. Lewes residents have also seen numerous schools close in communities surrounding them. Loss was a real and familiar experience. The thought of losing the school was extremely disconcerting for residents who equated their well-being with the school's and those who believed the school was an entity that served as an avenue to viability and rejuvenation for the village.

Interviewee after interviewee in Lewes predicted extremely dire results for the town if the school was closed. Francis, a grandmother who raised both her children and grandchildren, said she, like many of her friends, were not excited by the prospect of paying more in taxes, but without the school, "the town would kaput." Residents certainly had first-hand experience with this, as they watched neighboring district's close school after school. One couple, Dot and Gene, whom I interviewed jointly in their business, stated, "People know what it means to the community. You know, there's a couple of other towns quite nearby that lost their schools or… And it crushes them. Yeah, well, yeah. Who's gonna wanna move there?" One man, who lived a block from the school, said that residents,

> … have one common goal. And that common goal is the school. Because, again, if the school fails, this village is going to be nothing more than a few houses of old people. … We're Grizzlies. And if we lose that school, again, we're gonna be like [list of towns that lost schools]. Couple of houses off of [highway] on [highway]. And what do we see going by? Logging trucks. And that's it.

Molly, a local businessowner and young mother, said the threat of loss was a motivating factor for yes voters. These voters were "the ones who like small schools, had value for small schools, the ones who viewed schools as essential to communities surviving. I heard the, you know, 'Look at [township]. Look at this little town' argument."

To produce this yes factor, the campaign committee repeatedly reminded people that the school was the community, and the community was the school. This reminder meant different things to different district residents, depending on their role in the community. For people who owned businesses, the school was the only reason their business and livelihood existed. Alex, a local entrepreneur whose hands were in several businesses was crystal clear about this.

> I mean, one of the things is, you can see in small towns, where schools have left, it kind of just, just decimates a community. Like, if you just look around, like, there's this town called [township] that used to have a grade school. Well, that

> kinda got swept up and closed. And the kids went to [nearby town]. Well, now, this just, it's just kind of a little bit of a dying community. I mean, you see that in [nearby town]. You see that in [nearby town]. The little town of [township]. I mean, all the towns that had the local schools, I mean, even if it was a grade school only, like, a K-8 school, still, you know, there's just less people in town. I mean, there's less employed people. You know, the Lewes school employs, like, 55 people. You know, it brings people into town for games. … You know, so it brings people into town for business. I mean, really, people stop and buy groceries and milk, you know?

Marcy, a local resident whose husband, Jack, was born and raised in Lewes, stated a seemingly nonsensical but highly corroborating remark, "I like that the school is here because I can go get milk." This, however, is exactly what Alex was describing. People came to town for basketball games, plays, concerts, parent-teacher nights, science fairs, powwows, playground time, gym-walking, access to the shop, open gyms, and myriad other things that happen in a school throughout all 12 months. When they do, they get gas, they get groceries for dinner, they stop at the post office, they price microwaves at the appliance store, they drop off their donation to the church, they get an oil change, they get fish and an old fashioned, they pick up fishing line at the hardware store, the list goes on. If the school evaporated, the option to get milk was removed because business would suffer, travel was great deal longer for elderly people, and you did not run into age-old friends that you have been meaning to have dinner with for three months—the seemingly mundane but absolutely critical interactions and transactions that keep communities ticking. The school was a job even for people not employed by the school, and, with that job-supporting institution removed, a large local landowner said, "It literally, could, I think, not tear the town apart if it, if we lose the school, but I think it would have a big, big negative impact on the community."

Some community members encompassed these feelings with the word "viable." For some residents, viability meant a way to keep the community surviving and maintain property taxes

values. Even retirees who moved to the community had an incentive to maintain high property values by having a quality school nearby. Other residents equated viability with attractiveness. By investing in the school, that item on the list could get crossed out. Then, residents could use that as a gem to see the village grow, invest in other upgrades like roads, utilities, and housing, and, along the way, attract families who may have chosen to build elsewhere.

The campaign committee reminded people that the school was their identity when they pushed out messages of school-community overlap. Over and over, Fred said that the people of Lewes were Grizzlies, the home of the Grizzlies—a place in which people's identities emanated from the school. Towns who lost schools simultaneously lost the identity that bound them together and separated them from others. Certainly, he was not the only one. Losing the school would be a signal that the identity they chose, an identity that prized local control and hard work, was not effective, a failure. By seceding, keeping close tabs on the district, financing it, and providing a college fund, the district's residents were signaling that this was something they could and would take on on their own without outside help. Dot and Gene, the business-owning couple who chose to be interviewed together, used a nearby town as an example. Repeatedly, they stated that the town "couldn't" keep their school, "couldn't" keep their school, despite all of their fighting for it. However, eventually their language changed—they "didn't" keep their school, they "didn't" keep their school. In other words, perhaps this town *could* have if they had only fought harder, not given up, and, maybe most importantly, worked harder. It was a choice to let their school go, and Lewes was making the choice not to.

The committee's school-community messaging was effective because Lewes had a palpable resistance to or skepticism of change. The driving need for change differed between generational families and "new" people. "New" people in Lewes may not be "new" as defined by

people who are unfamiliar with small towns in Wisconsin. Some "new" people I interviewed were residents of Lewes for over five decades. Other "new" residents were three generations deep in the community. Nevertheless, these residents were—and always will be—"newcomers" because they have not farmed the same land for over a century, and/or did not have one of "the" last names that were common and deep in the community. Some of these "new" residents wanted to utilize the casino industries and major highway nearby to encourage people to take up residence in Lewes. One "newcomer" community leader put it as follows.

> I'm on the village board, and we do want to see the village grow a little bit—but not a whole lot. We would like… There was a time when the thought was, "Let's get industry here. Let's bring in more retail stores or something." And that didn't work, you know. And I've always pushed the impression we should be a bedroom community. Bedroom to [city], bedroom to [city]. We have a nice, nice, little community. It's off the beaten path a little bit. [Major highway] is four miles down the road. So, you can still get there. … You know, we got to have a village that grows again. We don't want to grow exponentially. We don't wanna grow, you know, where we got 1,000 people here. But we want to be a spot where people want to come to. You know, and to do that, we already have, like I said, a good deli. We have good stores—not many but a couple. We have a good school. … We already have a good academic school.

Lewes residents wanted to tout the district's low staff-student ratio and see investment in the school as an advertising feature. Larry, a lifelong resident, was eager to attract manufacturers to replace the two factories that existed several decades ago but all but threw in the towel saying, "You could help the area big time, but how do you get something in a small town?" Without a reliable economic base, students continued to leave. As one teacher put it, building this base needed to be a community-school-village team effort.

> I had a community conversation just a little while ago. And I think there's a little bit of some of the businesses that are frustrated because, you know, how do we keep, how do we keep our kids to stay there? And want to work there? And, you know, our kids, when they, when they graduate, you know, a lot leave. And [the businessowners] are frustrated that, you know, how to keep, how to retain that. And that's a bigger, that's a bigger, that's a bigger issue in that community. That,

> that is where, you know, the Lewes village board and the board has to do a better job.

Unfortunately, for this particular teacher and others who wanted to see the village grow and adapt, the wall of resistance was high. Another "newcomer," Bruce, a person who has been on the same land for 40 years, recounted a story from about six years ago.

> I got involved in the [local economic development group]. And we wanted to do some things to improve Lewes. And we had a meeting with, we had a couple of people from the, from the county that were kind of the facilitators. And one of the things that we got was Lewes was described by a person who was looking for a home—and they almost bought here—they came back for a second look. And the comment they made was, "Lewes is a dumpy little town, isn't it?" And I mentioned this at this [village board] meeting, and the village president was there. And, you know, the, the village board, they all showed up. But [my comment] didn't sit good with people. And, anyway, the village president said, "I like Lewes the way it is."

This change avoidance was driven by feelings of nostalgia, deep generational roots, and the inability to control the outside, i.e. non-Lewes, world. Lifelong Lewesites had a strong nostalgia for the WPA-era building where three to four generations of families all sat in the same classrooms and, upon graduation, took up work in the same places. A current school board member summarized this into generalized nostalgia simply "for what there once was," the WPA-era school, the now-shuttered factories that used to employ people in the village, the adult children who moved away for work, or the sold family farm that is now part of a face-less corporation with no ties to the local people.

The roots of some families extended to the original White settlement of the community and family names that continued to dominate the local landscape. These kinds of families were proud of their contributions to their community over time and a local community that served their particular needs well. For others, deep, change-resistant ties were an impediment.

> It's the way it's always been. Why should we change? You know, and what I've learned by living up here—not just Lewes but in northern Wisconsin the last 36 years—that's the mentality of a lot of people that are born and raised here. It's been good to me. Why should I change? – Fred

> And change, here, is another thing that people don't take kindly to. People are very stuck in their ways. You know, it's, it's, change is not something a lot of people like. They like things the same. You know, we've had to merge churches. You know, we actually attend church in [township] and not [local parish]. But our churches are, have to work together because we have two priests that are serving four parishes in the area. So, but, even that, they want things their way. And [township] people want things their way. So, I think it's, it's kind of, there's some of that too, you know? Change is hard for people. … We lived five miles away, which doesn't seem like far. But it's not Lewes. – Marcy

Another resident used his neighbors as an example of this change resistance.

> You know, the sun rises and the sun sets. But you'll see them Friday night at the basketball game. … But you'll see them Friday night. They'll be there, you know? Just like we have our [local baseball league] ball, you know, we have the [team name]. Any Sunday afternoon in the summertime, if they're playing in town, you'll see. And it's going to be the guys that are my age and older, you know, going to there just watching. Because why? Because that's what they've always done, you know? – Marty

Situations, people, or circumstances that could change the community without the community's control were threats. Too much change was, essentially, an insult to the "extended family community" that have all "been here for so long." Change in Lewes was, in essence, a way of saying, "The way you have lived for 150 years—or much, much longer in the case of the local American Indian tribes—is incorrect."

The change that has occurred, whether it be children moving away, farm losses, or businesses closing, resulted in a less connected community culture and outright despair. Molly, whose family is "new," believed she saw this manifest over the course of her life.

> I think there's a lot less connectedness. I mean, I used to know all the kids. And maybe it's because I was in school with them. You know, I knew all the kids' parents. I still know them when I walk around town. My daughter's class? I know

> who they are, but I don't have any relationship with most of them. I mean, I know who they are. I say hi to some. But most? I don't. … But I think people feel very lonely and desperate, and they don't feel connected to anything. And whether it's the school or not. Just, I, I, just looked at my, look at, people, people don't have joyful lives. I mean, they're so wrapped up in this, I mean, the world is a scary place, but it's not quite as, I don't know, it's awful scary. I just, with what, just employees, more employees, employees across the board have said to me. And just watching them and listening to them about their personal lives and things. And you're going, "Man, you guys, you don't have it that bad. You're not Syrian refugees, for Pete's sakes." I mean, you've, you have, you're making more than living wages. You, but, there's no sense of connectedness. I have several of them, they don't have any, coming to work is their highlight. They've told me that. … But I just go, "That's kind of sad." Like, you want to be here on weekends, not going out with significant others or kids. Volunteer. Go do something.

The school, however, has not changed. It was the rock around which the community rotates, and its presence remained, for the most part, immune to changes forced by deindustrialization and a changing economy. One former county board member said, "We have that common goal. We had a common bond—the school district." This was emblematic of the school-community relationship in its entirety.

The third predominate yes factor was the appropriate and more realistic cost of the referendum in 2018, especially after gaining a better understanding of the extent of the needed repairs in the building. The 2016 academics-focused referendum was nominally cheaper than the 2018 referendum—$6 million versus $6.5 million. However, voters largely did not separate the two 2016 referendums, one for academics and one for athletics. Thus, in many people's minds, 2016 cost $9.2 million dollars, and 2018 cost $6.5 million, a "decrease" of $2.7 million. This packaging was not necessarily due to voter ignorance but rather ambiguities in district communication. It was not clear if the athletics renovations would move ahead even if a new school was denied. For many voters, athletics upgrades without a new school would amount to lipstick on a pig. Thus, it was not entirely illogical that voters combined the two. Even board

members later admitted that these questions were not very clear, and both appeared because of one strong-willed board member who pushed for an athletics referendum and who was no longer on the board at the time of my work.

Lewes's school board president stated that the school board and relevant committees approached the 2018 referendum continually asking themselves, "What do we really need?" They pointed out to the community that the new referendum was very bare-bones, basic facility amenities. An employee at a local media outlet corroborated this from his experience covering local governments and the perspectives of local residents.

> And then they came back [in 2018] with the, with something that had all the essentials of basically the middle school, high school, additional classrooms, and tech labs, and everything, demolishing the old 1935 portion. … And, also, there were no frills attached. I mean, there wasn't the promise of, "Oh, we'll build an additional gym with this money. We'll, we'll have athletic fields." That sort of thing. … They did a more manageable chunk with just the essentials. I mean, once they put in a more management size, I mean, that's, and that seemed to be more likely to succeed in my view.

One local American Indian tribal leader mentioned "this pie-in-the-sky type of thinking" present in the first referendum. "They were there to do some of this [athletics] stuff, but, you know, we have to be realistic about the cost." Other residents who did not hold any sort of leadership position *vis-à-vis* the school repeated the phrase "realistic cost" as an important factor when they entered the voting both in November 2018. People wanted the options "pared down" to something that would be the minimum necessary to keep the school open and, yet, be a gem in the community. Kory was a "new" resident who married into an established family, and he was a leader in the secession efforts. He recalled, "Yes, we want the school here. And [the board] got it down to a manageable place where we're doing the minimum of what we need to do to keep it here." Clarence, a retired teacher, said "I'm not opposed to doing the building. But it needs to be

the right building, and something that's gonna be not so expensive and get to the future." Residents described the original referendum as a "Grand Chalon," "something exorbitant," and a way for athletics supporters to gain upgraded facilities even though "we don't need no new gymnasiums, you know, big fancy field house in this little, little town. Plain Jane, okay?"

Not only were costs believed to be more realistic in 2018, but, because of the campaign committee, residents felt like they had a better understanding of the extent of needed repairs. Gloria, a former school district employee and active member of both campaign committees, said, "When we [seceded], we knew we were buying an old building. We knew that we were going to have to pay to make, you know, to pay to upgrade it, to pay to replace it, something." Even voters not actively involved in the school soon clearly understand the infrastructure issues with the school. Their statements read like a laundry list of to-dos. "Yeah, we really need this. You know, it's just bad." "The old part of the building [has] rooms that are boiling hot and others that are freezing cold and trying, trying to maintain a system, you know, where you're having to put out so much money for heating and cooling." "The old building was just extremely dysfunctional, right? I mean, there was rooms that you had to, in the winter, you had to keep the windows open because they're too hot. And rooms that you had to wear your coat on because they were too cold." "Geez, I didn't realize that the building flooded or the roof was leaking or that you could feel the wind blowing through the windows." "It's falling apart. … But, now, it's getting to the point where you better do something." "If we don't get this thing passed, the building is going to crumble." "They really couldn't bring it up to the, you know, the ADA standards." "This part of the school was pretty unsalvageable." "It was deteriorating and deteriorating fast." "This old part that's going to be coming down in May is really bad. It's bad.

If you ever go down in the basement of that thing, you'll see why. It's bad. I mean, the stones and stuff, that's all stone wall down there, are starting to crumble out. It's really bad."

The district was, in the words of a building principal, being "financially innovative" at the same time they were paring down the referendum and demonstrating the extent of the needed repairs. The definition of financial innovation in this context is essentially making additional cuts, hunting for alternative funding sources, or making creative staffing decisions. The district recently won several grants designed to support schools in rural areas with high proportions of non-white and low-income students and another grant for school safety. A local American Indian tribe recently donated $100,000 to the school district. The school was also using building leadership to teach courses for which they were previously certified. These funds freed up money that was then used to revamp the curriculum in each core subject from kindergarten through 12th grade. The "innovation" also served as a signal to community members that the school was doing everything it could to "creak forward" in the words of a building principal and that a referendum was the only remaining option to gain additional funds.

The fact that voters entered the voting booth considering what might be appropriate costs to do a bare-bones, minimum amount of work, admittedly, does not sound like an overwhelming tone of approval or support for the school district. Nevertheless, it was after understanding better the economic environment in which the referendum took place. The economy of Lewes was influenced by logging, agriculture, tourism, the business loyalty I described above, and people's willingness to commute. The agricultural industry in Lewes was not immune to any problems American farmers are seeing nationally. They are affected by consolidation, trade wars, and large-scale bankruptcies.

One school board member took great pains to describe the two farmers on either side of them, both of whom declared bankruptcy in the last year alone. They[9] were clear that these two families were strong supporters of the school and the village in general but were not unable to vote for any candidate or issue that could raise their taxes because they could no longer afford food for their kids. Clarence, a retired teacher, and several other middle-aged residents recalled a time when the village, despite being a similar size, supported two factories, a feed mill, a dentist, a doctor, a shoe store, several hardware stores, and four churches. Today, one plant with about 20 employees stands in place of the two former factories, one hardware store, and three churches remain. Sadly, one local small business burned to the ground twice in the last year. These business losses meant residents worked for the school; sought employment in the seasonal and fluctuating tourism industry, fed by local casinos and fishing and wildlife; or they commuted to work in larger, nearby cities and towns. It also meant that keeping high-flying students in the district was very difficult. Students who continued on to universities infrequently returned, which, according to one resident who recently returned for retirement, meant that Lewes was filled with "the residual of non-attainers."

Business transience and fragility meant that businessowners had to be careful in how they spoke, acted, and talked around town. One wrong move or one ill-advised, off-hand comment to an unrecognized relative could be "devastating," according to one lifelong resident, because the community will, essentially, turn their back on the business and refuse to support it. While this was always the case, the Lewes economy in the past meant the proprietors could find another job. In fact, business inconsistency—the regular coming and going of local entrepreneurs—was, paradoxically, a consistency. Now, that's no longer the case. Relationship maintenance and

[9] Occasionally, I use gender-neutral pronouns to protect the identities of people who may be relatively easy to identify and/or for people who were particularly concerned about their privacy.

stability was even more critical now than before because there were fewer alternative employment options.

Housing was a substantial concern for residents across several roles. One small businessowner and local landlord made a large proportion of his living buying houses or apartments in the area, renovating them, and putting them back on the rental market. He cited his last apartment as proof of both rural housing shortages and rural housing affordability writ large. One of his newly listed apartments garnered a dozen calls from people who wanted to rent it, all of whom would have made good lessees. Molly, the local businessowner and young mother, also noted housing concerns, pointing out that there were very few houses on the market and the ones that were needed significant renovations to be comfortable—a skill she believed was both a dying art and one that most people in or moving to Lewes could not afford. Lewes's school board president was confident that the district could grow if housing was available to people, but she said this was largely in the village board's power, not hers. At one school board meeting I attended, an unexpectedly long period of time was devoted to openly discussing two families who *might* buy two lots and build within the district which could, they hoped, increase enrollment by four to five students.

The dearth of housing and death of former employers meant that any increase in school tax levies was falling heavily on residential properties and household taxpayers. There simply was not a substantial commercial base that could help offset some of these costs. This point was not lost on referendum voters who knew that they would have to shoulder the brunt of any additional tax burden.

The fourth predominant reason yes voters provided was the pride in the success of the school. I spoke at length with Karen, a person on the school board who I later came to know was

the “anti-tax hawk” whom other interviewees had spoken of. She repeatedly made the point that the Lewes district was low income, but people’s votes were not determined by their low-income status. She argued that, if that were the case, Lewes would never have a referendum passed. Instead, to paraphrase her words, yes voters brought with them a profound sense of, “Look at everything we’ve been able to do. Let’s keep it going.” Bruce, the man whose desire for progress ran into the village president’s brick wall, saw this pride as a way to improve the area’s reputation for both retirees and young families alike. Bruce lives in the district but a township next to the village.

> I was at a meeting one time, and I said, you know, I’m not a resident of Lewes. But, when, when I tell people where I’m from, I say I’m from the Lewes area. So, I’m, I’m associating myself with Lewes. [Senior citizens] tend not… They don’t have any kids in school. And the whole deal. And I don’t. I just like to blow the horn for Lewes.

The foundation of the board member’s and Bruce’s message is, in a way, a culmination of the previous three factors. The board member, an anti-tax hawk, and Bruce, a person who very quickly described himself as a “staunch Republican,” helped ensure the district seceded and avoided loss at an appropriate and reasonable cost and that these developments provided the community not only what they needed, but, further, a way to show off to other districts in the area. Thus, the referendum helped the community and district move forward together. Francis, the woman who sent her kids and grandkids through the school, viewed her support and the referendum’s ultimate passage as a “step forward” in terms of the community’s and school’s success in terms of “removing themselves from the divorce from Glassbridge.”

Pride was also built from what residents believed the school could do for students. Many children came from deeply supportive and loving households, but, as the data bore out, around two-thirds of these families were low income. Childhood and young adulthood were not easy in a

community in which the former major economic activity, logging, employed less people, the current major economic activity, farming, was suffering through foreclosures, and what manufacturing jobs did exist mostly take place in areas outside of the village. The school, however, had been there through all of these changes and still provided a way for young adults to get the training they needed to keep themselves and the village economically viable. The school's ability to do this was one of the primary reasons Alex voted yes. While I quote him here, this opinion was hardly isolated to him.

> At that point in my life [young adulthood], I didn't know what the hell I wanted or where I was going. And moving up to this small town really helped me focus on where I wanted to go, where I wanted to be. And I, I love this little town. Not everybody does, but I really do. So, I got heavily involved with our [economic development group]. I get, I was heavily involved with the school for years. And, now, I've kind of backed off on a lot of that. But, yes, I have been single my whole life, no kids, and just a businessowner, and I guess that partly ties into it. But that's not the only thing. I technically own three businesses, [business names]. So, I've got an investment in the community in that sense, but, but that's not it. That's not the only thing, you know? … [The school] helped me grow up. I guess that's a good way to put it. It helped me grow up. And I just felt like I always wanted to give back.

Parents frequently used their own children as examples of what kinds of education the school provided, citing their kids' current careers as veterinarians, small business owners, CPAs, Peace Corps members, and musicians as proof that the school was successful. Residents were also quick to bring up the School of Recognition accolades the district consistently received over the last decade. Parents and grandparents understood that other districts, particularly Glassbridge, had "fancier" labs or "better equipment," but they countered that, in Lewes, kids could be involved in everything from theater to sports to music without having to "pick" or "specialize" in one particular thing. Caregivers were clear that these varied extra-curricular activities were one reason the district's kids were so successful. District residents also touted their low staff to

student ratios as a way for kids to get the extra attention that they need. Low ratios versus better equipped labs was a tradeoff residents seemed very ready to make, including one couple who lived in Glassbridge but whose kids attended Lewes where their father taught.

> We truly, truly felt that [Lewes] had more to offer—even though labs weren't as up to date and things like that. But class sizes. When you can have a child studying chemistry with a good teacher, and there's give kids in there versus 40 or 35, the outcome is definitely positive. And the amount of… Our kids went on to college, graduate school, whatever.

To activate these feelings of pride, the campaign committee pushed out messages of what the school accomplished. They reminded people of what kinds of students and adults the community produced over the years. For many residents, they recalled what their own kids or families had gone on to do. Molly's mother, a woman who financed her own referendum mailings, did this to help garner referendum support.

> What I liked—my kids went there—and they've both been highly successful, you know? My daughter runs the business now. My son's … got a couple grad degrees, you know? I mean, the education is, you know, I mean, it's very good. I think you can, I think you can talk about any school, and, I mean, I've worked in schools, so you can, some places, I mean, every school's got good things about it and bad things about it. You know, this thing about, you know, the athletics and band programs, if kids wish to participate, they can. It's not super, highly-selective where, you know, you want to play basketball, and you never get on the team because, you know, 50 other people are better than you.

Annette, the teacher, lived outside of the district, cannot vote in the community, and could not formally advocate for a referendum position. However, she did not hesitate to remind people that they "were a school of recognition."

> So, we're a school of recognition. We've done really well in surrounding, you know, when you look at the other schools that we, that we, we're around, you know, we've held up really, really well. And we're able to compete on such a level that, you know, right now, especially our special education department, we have people on a waiting list to get in. I would like to believe that, that a lot of people will be like, "Well, no, you know, we like it. We appreciate it. You know,

> we're investing in it." You know, we have, I think, they, I think, I think they believe, I think the vast majority of the community believes we have really good educators. And they value education.

This messaging was effective because residents believed the education was appropriate for the cultural and economic environment in which Lewes was positioned. During the course of the research, I never encountered anyone who coupled support for the referendum with an expansion of AP classes or a new college-preparatory mathematics curriculum that would put them on par with larger and/or wealthier districts. Instead, even people who were remarkably supportive of the school, often made qualifications regarding the school's success. These people said things such as, "*For a rural school* … it's good." "We have a very, very good school, you know, *for a small community*." "[It's] good enough. Good enough *for people like us*…" "We don't need no new gymnasium … *in this little, little town*." "*Plain Jane*. Don't get too fancy with it." "Kids do very well scholastically. When you look at the income, you know, *if you compare with the socioeconomic background*, they're very successful." [All emphasis added by me.]

The holistic translation is that support was strong if and when the educational inputs and outputs were appropriate "for people like us." In Lewes, people like us referred to the fiercely independent residents, as referenced above, who did not want to follow edicts from Glassbridge or any other entity about what education would be best for people who were still likely to enter trades, agriculture, or other blue-collar jobs. Rather, the district's trades-focused education niche that would come about with a new technical education space created a symbiotic relationship with the local economy and its jobs, even if this local economy and its blue-collar and agricultural foundations were fragile. Lewes's vocational and technical education programs existed and were available to students, but these facilities were in an aged, New Deal-era building with limited technological infrastructure. Now, both students and community

members—who may not have access to or be able to afford high-tech tools—could use the space at the high school to complete home repair projects, fix something on the farm, or build something for their property.

Over the years, a prominent—though "new"—community member worked to connect the school with a local college so that high school students could learn trades at the college, and college students could work in Lewes on various construction or building projects in order to complete their apprenticeships. One school board member, a person who had been on the board for the entirety of the district's existence, believed that having a modern tech ed facility in the soon-to-be new school would be a way for students to be trained by and with current college students and would allow the K-12 school to step into a role that was previously filled by the college. This created an isolated economic cycle. Students were trained for blue-collar and trades jobs, so they sought and filled blue-collar and trades jobs—however limited. Because these were the jobs that were common in the community, the school and college then created programs to fulfill these types of jobs. I do not believe the referendum would have passed if the goal of the money was to build a space that would have increased AP Physics passage rates. The product—a high-tech lab—could be identical, but, because the goal of the product would be something that would not match the economic and cultural characteristics of the community, it seems doubtful the money would be approved.

This "goal of the product" idea serves as a transition into the fifth predominant factor residents voted yes: it was for the kids. Residents in Lewes had qualms about the appropriateness of cost, the seriousness of the repairs needed, or to what extent athletics should be included, but no resident believed that the community would be better off if kids had exposure to a worse education. That served nobody, regardless of how self-interested a voter was. The local media

employee made this succinct, saying that people were in support of the referendum because a vote yes was a vote in support for kids learning. Two Lewes mothers, one a lifelong resident and the other a "newcomer," were interviewed separately but could have been speaking to each other. "How can you not help them, the kids?" "You know, the kids are our future. And if don't invest in education, you know, then, you're not, you're not, you're not helping out the community." Francis thought that she and her neighbors voted yes because the school needed to be "modernized" for the kids, which, to her and her neighbors meant that the school should be ready to have hook-ups for computers, tablets, wireless internet, and other technological infrastructure that would help kids in the 21st century.

Residents could do this for kids by "paying it forward," so to speak. For some voters, it was their time to take care of the kids, just as their predecessors had done for them. Gene, the husband in the couple interviewed together, often made this argument to people hesitant to vote yes, and he was confident this really made people think.

> And that's exactly what I said to another guy from [Dot's] generation. He was bitching about it. You know, the taxes are gonna kill him and all this. And I said, "Someone built this, so you could go." Because they're, "Oh, that building was built in the '40s or '50s. It's fine." Well, no. It's not. But I said, "Someone built this it, so you could go, [name], when you were a young man. Let's think about this."

Kory ingenuously said that he voted yes because he believed it was very important for them to have a "good educational system." This was an easy vote for him. It was a way to maintain and improve a school that produced results for his own four children, two of whom were valedictorians and were now employed in medical or business fields around the world.

To instill this yes factor into voters, members of the campaign committee pushed messages of how family-like and tight-knit the small Lewes community was. Most people were,

somehow, family, and those that were not related were family-like. Bars, diners, churches, and recreational events were small-town American *Cheers* episodes. One person said, “Lewes is … small-town Wisconsin. And you get to know everybody. Or, if you don’t know them, they know you.” A second stated, “I love it because of the small town. Everybody knows everybody.” A third simply said, “Everybody knows your name.”

One downtown businessowner was born elsewhere but came of age and spent nearly his entire adult life in Lewes. For him, it became “my extended family.” He continued, “You know so many people in town that they’re family. … It’s kind of like everybody you run into. And you know what’s going on with their families and things like that. And it’s just that, it’s, I grew up in a big family. It’s just like I extended my family.” In a perfect reflection of the community closeness, a person I later learned was his sibling echoed him saying, “I got a whole different perspective on things in a small town. It’s, you know, I’m sure you got all the, you know, whatever, the gossip, all this stuff. It’s still, when push comes to shove, they’re there for you.” This connectedness resulted in a great deal of intermarriage among families, a blending of family names, and increased the tightness of the community. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked residents what they felt I should take away or remember about the community. This feeling of being close-knit or like family was, by far, the most common request for me. Gloria, a district resident and former school employee, summed it up as,

> I guess the one thing, I guess, that sticks with me always with these, you know, small communities is, is just that fact about coming back to the whole family. There is no anonymity with anything. When you’re in a small community, you’re in. And it’s like being part of a family, as dysfunctional as we are. But that’s the piece of it. And I think that’s the difference, you know? For better or for worse. And, you know, that’s just a piece that those of us that have been in a small town for a long time, you just live with. You learn to accept. And you either embrace it, or you hide from it, you know? And you don’t participate in the community then. The vast majority of people don’t do that. The vast majority of them do embrace it. And, so, you do get this certain level of, you know, familiarity with everyone.

The family-like bonds extended into and emanated from the school. Long-time teachers described teaching three generations of a single family. The deep bonds that were forged over these generations meant that teachers were intimately tied into major family milestones. One former teacher and his wife described former students bringing their newborn children over to the house to introduce them to formative adults in the parents' lives, like this teacher's own family. In a very positive way, she described it as a "different world in a community like this." Another teacher contrasted this public school experience with private school admission. From his perspective, the bonds at a private school were inauthentic because they were purchased via tuition. In a small-town public school, however, the bonds were forged with joint blood, sweat, and tears, which manifested in trust in teachers to do the right thing with their children's education through multiple generations.

> We know the community members. We talk to parents. They're family. We're all family. We've gotten… We know their older siblings. We know their younger siblings. We know the whole family, all the way down. Who's coming up and that. … I can't tell you how many parents I've had come in and say, "Well, if you gotta, if you gotta cuff them [for misbehaving], just go ahead and do that." I'm like, "I can't put your child in cuffs…"

Teaching staff, both current and former, believed that this family-like environment was a major impetus to remain in the district. One long-time teacher stated,

> [The teachers] like it there. There's, you know, given that it's a small, very small school, there's definitely a feeling of family. You know, you get very close with the people that are in the building every day. The staff is very close. You know, they get to know the kids on a very personal level. And not just necessarily the kids in their classroom but the entire, you know, the entire high school, the entire middle school. Everybody.

Family-like ties manifested in other ways beyond support of children. Just like any family, the people of Lewes were proud of each other and proud of their community, even though, at times, intra-village cultural clashes emerged. Special decorations adorned barns in the county that village residents and nearby farmers were proud to display, and village residents described one another as having a good work ethic, one of the most important compliments one could receive in an area built on logging, farming, trucking, trades, and other blue-collar work.

Family-like bonds were embodied in a quintessential small-town environment. In fact, life in Lewes would be familiar to anyone who grew up in a small town, complete with recognizable affordances and drawbacks. This sort of close-knit, protective, family-like atmosphere produced an interesting juxtaposition of a sense of warmth and a feeling of walking on eggshells—a wolfpack sort of environment. Residents described their village as very friendly and very welcoming, but these descriptions could be fragile. One lifelong resident described restaurants that were purchased by people who were not from the community. These restauranteurs were not part of this village "family," and some residents simply refused to go. Others chided the new owners for not understanding what kinds of breakfast specials locals would want and switched to a different restaurant nearby. For those who were new town, i.e. did not have generational last names, this meant you "learned right away to keep your mouth shut," and you "never say anything bad about anybody 'cause you never know who you're talking to." A man who worked for a local media outlet warned me on my first day that I could not give the impression that I was an outsider. He suggested that, even though I obviously was, I could avoid awkward or damaging moments by "talking to people on their level"—a warning he often repeated but upon which he rarely elaborated. It was implied, however, that I listen, not talk, and to be clear that I was learning, not researching.

The feelings of family ties could be jarring at times, especially for those who did not expect it. Several interviewees described their move to the community as if they were "stepping back in time." For some, particularly those who lived their entire lives in the community, the idea of stepping back in time was borderline pejorative, especially the person who described the breakfast klatch restaurant loyalty. In their mind, these were behaviors that would have occurred "back in the day" but should not now. For others, especially those who moved to the community from other places, the idea of stepping back in time was a welcome Mayberry-like scene in which they could escape the crime or traffic of their former homes. Even though they knew they would never be wholly accepted as a member of the family, the escape was cherished. This sort of "back in the day" nature was quickly evident to me, even as a fleeting outsider. Larry, a senior-aged man lived all 78 of years on the same road, a road that is named after his family. A rift in the family briefly occurred when he and his wife decided to move to a house a half-mile down the road. However, this new residence was "on the other side of the hill" from the six-generation dairy farm his family began in the early 1800s.

This sort of "family" dysfunction meant that some people were cut out to living in a small town and others were not. Those that could not retreated into their homes or into other, neighboring communities. Village warts were not hidden. Molly, the local, established businessowner, remarked that they've "got all the social problems of alcoholism, drugs. … Well, I think you have it everywhere. Here, you can't zone yourself out of it. You can't go to a different school area and pretend it doesn't exist where, I think, in urban areas—or bigger—people who live, you know, you can pretend it doesn't happen if you live in [city] or [city]." These sorts of issues "hit you across the face" because they afflicted people you knew and loved, and you were very aware of it.

Lewes was an area that, at times, needed healing among "family members" who were distrustful or downright resentful of others. When asked to describe the community, residents described three groups of people: German Republicans, Indian Democrats, and Mormons. These descriptors were not generated by me via analysis. The perceived bond between being German and Republican in northern Wisconsin was so tight that they were seen as one and the same. This is also true for "Indian Democrats." These two groups were not without conflict. More recently, some tribal leaders made efforts to repurchase land that was once, obviously, theirs. This resulted in lawsuits that reached a federal appeals court in Chicago. Nevertheless, there was an understanding of coexistence among the German Republicans and Indian Democrats. Their children long attended school together, and both had a clear understanding of the other's culture, leadership, and community dynamics. In fact, one local tribe donated $100,000 to the Lewes School District during a school board meeting I attended, which nearly brought a White board member to tears. A teacher who taught in the district for 35 years was firm in his belief that fraught relations between "natives" and "Germans" dissipated during his career, being much more notable at the beginning. Now, the school sponsored a powwow that was jointly led by nearby tribes. There seemed to be an attitude of, "We don't always agree. But we know who you are."

The influence of Mormon culture was much more difficult to ascertain. One woman I interviewed was part of an original German settlement family. She explained that, shortly after arrival, the family split: one brother remained Catholic and the other converted to Mormonism. Based on her account, there have been Mormons in Lewes for well over a century. Contemporarily, more Mormons moved into the area, the share of German Republicans fell, the Lutheran church shrunk, and some members of the Mormon population assumed roles of

leadership in the community. This led to a perception that Mormons were encroaching on a community in which they were once more marginal.

Some residents were extremely angry and suspicious about this. Early in my research, a friend of man I was speaking with was largely quiet. However, toward the end, he argued that Lewes was "just a Goddammed Mormon school now." Another resident later explained to me that people of the Mormon faith assumed positions on the school board and administration. Some residents suspected what they called "nepotism" between the board and school office. In other words, they did not believe the administrator would have gotten his job if it were not for "friends" on the board. Another resident was incensed that a newspaper article introducing the new administrator quoted the administrator saying that he would bring his principles of leadership he gained from his time as a Mormon bishop into his role as the superintendent. This resident, who saved all of these newspaper clippings, argued that "the Mormons got themselves a Goddammed religious school paid for by public dollars—my Goddammed dollars."

One mother of kids who went through the district explained that Lewes "is a mixed community, whether, it's religious, familial, or otherwise, whether Mormon, Catholic, Protestant, of other branches, it doesn't matter. They are standing behind, beside, or in front of somebody from this community." One woman was originally from a different state, but her husband was born in raised in Lewes. She, similarly, explained that after "moving out to Lewes 25 years ago, I find the community very interdependent, but fiercely—*and I mean fiercely*—protective of its own." [Emphasis from the speaker whose fist rattled her dining room table as she spoke.] Regardless of perceived division, a younger, lifelong resident described her fellow community members as brusk, gruff, and rough around the edges. For proof, she suggested I visit an

upcoming bazaar held by one of the local churches where, she said, I would meet women who were “a little raw” and men who were “straightforward raw.”

The “raw” residents used the school as a place that brought them into contact with each other and helped some of the animosity melt. Clarence, the retired teacher, believed this was exactly what happened between the German Republicans and Indian Democrats. According to Oscar, a retired resident who held statewide political office, was adamant residents could go to bars and hear the “residual of non-attainers” still “bitching and moaning about the ‘fucking immigrants’ and ‘Goddammed Indians.’” Clarence believed these types of attitudes were now, however, more confined to a smaller group who hid in bars instead of common throughout the community. Over the course of his 35 years in the district, he witnessed a massive decrease in White-Indian fights, sometimes literally between students. Two men, one Indian and one White, were actually on opposing sides of property lawsuits, found common ground on the referendum, and actually worked side-by-side on the campaign, including phonebanks. The school was one area they could set long-simmering differences aside and work together. Both of them had nothing but good things to say about the other’s work toward the school. Patty, the Indian man, told me, “I thought [the campaign] was a nice cross-section, you know, of at least that was in the phonebank. Some people I would probably not have a cup of coffee with. But, for this thing, I could work together with [him], you know?”

There is some evidence that animosities between German Republicans and the Mormons are heading in the same direction—albeit slowly and perhaps only through “newcomers.” Kathy, Molly’s mother, said that many of the Mormon families were instrumental in keeping the school going, providing leadership, and serving on parent-school committees. Fred, the former county and village board member, used to work with Kory in one county. Fred described Kory has his

"conservative Mormon friend" with whom he has never once agreed on a political issue. Nevertheless, they had "one common goal," "one common bond—the school district." Clarence, Kathy, Molly, Fred, and Kory area all "newcomers," however. This characteristic seemed to be correlated with their attitudes.

The sixth and final predominant reason voters checked yes was transportation, a clear an unequivocal factor. There were generally two types of roads in the Lewes area: a large, open highway where snow easily drifted or infrequently traveled backcountry highways surrounded by thick woods and much wildlife. As my travel was between mid-November and late February, it was not uncommon for me to see semis in ditches, snowmobiles as primary transportation, and unplowed roads days after snowstorms swept through. Transportation concerns applied to kids, families, and the community in general.

One woman spent all but college in the Lewes area. She argued that families did not want to deal with moving families around if the district were to close or consolidate. "They don't want their children on the bus over and hour there and an hour back, unable to participate in extracurricular, extracurricular activities because they have to be on the bus, or they're, they're just gone the greater part of the day. And there's no family time, no supper time. They're just gone because of the rural location." There was a convenience factor in having the kids in a location where people also went to the post office, went to the hardware store, and got gas.

Time spent driving meant that was time kids could not join school activities or be at home doing homework. Clarence, the retired teacher, saw this often. "And, you know, and when it came, then it came to the extracurriculars with the extra chasing, particularly before the years a kid can drive, when they're a freshman, a sophomore. And what is the impact going to be on their scholar, scholarship success? As well as extra-curricular participant, which is an important

part of school." Even when kids could drive, it did not mean their parents were enthusiastic about it. Clarence's wife, Sharon, a parent to grown children remembered these worries. "The distance made a lot of difference to a lot of parents too. Because the kids, to participate in sports, too many kids can't drive until they're, like, 16 or 17. And who, in the dead of winter up here, when winter lasts six months, wants their kids to be driving into Lewes because the school buses bring them back from a sport?"

Transportation concerns also extended to community members, which was one element the campaign committee pointed out. Molly's mother, Kathy, a leader on the campaign, argued that "people like having, you know, some things in Lewes that they don't have to drive long distances to get to." Annette, a current teacher, said residents wanted to go to "games without having to drive, you know, or experience long distance or different distance." This was a point the campaign committee utilized in their strategy. Not only was the school a source of direct and indirect income, as I pointed out above, it was the social center and social hub of the community—the necessity of which was obvious to me even after spending a short time there. I, at times, struggled to find places to do interviews. One restaurant closed at 2 o'clock, and the other had irregular wintertime hours. There was no library in the community. The most convenient place for me was the one regularly open bar in Lewes. Unless people were drinking or traveling to a friend's house, the school was the meeting place. Annette, the high school teacher, realized this quickly when her career began in Lewes about 10 years ago.

> But it just seems interesting because, you know, we do have a lot of people that are still supportive of the school. You look at basketball games. You look at a lot of things. The community still comes out, you know? We still have a powwow. We do the powwow thing. … And the people who say yes are people that really believe that the school is something that really keeps Lewes, Lewes. It is a community center. I think they realized that, you know, it, we have to support, we have to support the school. Otherwise, this community, you know, the community, we have no idea where the community's gonna go without the

> school. School brings in a lot of different things and a lot of different people. And it's a meeting center you know? We're a community center where everyone gets together, and I think that's something that they can all be proud of. … It's a lot of different things to people. And you're right. You know, we do have open gyms. We do that a lot. We have really good people who try to keep it open and do things with students and kids and, and of all ages. Plus, we're, we're K through 12. We're a K through 12 school, so, so we have, we have literally families that have four children at multiple stages going through out school, and it's a one-stop shop.

Fred, the former village and country board member; Marcy, the woman from out-of-state whose husband was born and raised; and Kory, a father and government worker who helped lead the secession all echoed Annette's statements. Fred said Lewes had a "small-town atmosphere" that "just centered" around things like basketball games at the school. Marcy became a teacher later in life and completed student-teaching in Lewes. During that time, she said that "one of the things that impressed me about the community was the parental involvement. Everybody gets involved. When you go to a basketball game, the stands are packed because people don't have kids. I mean, that's a social event for this community. So, the school is really the center of social events, as well. … I mean, it's sort of the heartbeat of the community." Finally, Kory was emotional talking about the school's atmosphere for the community, "Lewes is a place that, it's a tight-knit community that loves that school. If you… It's amazing on a Friday night how many people, you'll go over there, and will be there to watch a basketball game. People that have no ties to the kids that are playing. But it's their Friday night. They go out, have fish, and, then, they come and watch that basketball."

This messaging worked because Lewes existed in an environment of rurality and isolation. The very first resident I interviewed asked if I had ever been somewhere "so rural." Mark, a now retired middle school teacher, felt like he was "an alien dropped from space" when he arrived because of the sense of being isolated from other, larger communities. Even lifetime

residents felt a relative sense of isolation, though this stemmed from their experience with the Glassbridge School District, not life lived elsewhere. One resident encapsulated this saying, "Over the years, because we were in the Glassbridge-Lewes School District, we were, we were seen—because were *15 miles from the other school*—we were always seen as kind of extra burden. We're this *little school out here*. We're an extra burden." [Emphasis by interviewee.]

As a consequence of isolation, Larry, the 78-year lifelong resident, believed rural school districts "out here" were overshadowed by larger school districts who received a disproportionate share of state aid. "We don't get the pie that Racine, Madison, Milwaukee gets. I mean, they get, they're always, like, number one. They get, you know, if there's some money, they get it, you know? Which, I don't know, that should be divvied out to the smaller school districts, I think." Interestingly, though, he was the only person that ever mentioned anything about their "fair share" or "proportionality" in school finance.

Events that happened in major Wisconsin cities were filtered through local television news outlets. A now former school employee worked in several districts but solely districts classified as rural. He stated, "We're sitting in a rural community. We're not, we're not sure what's going on in Madison or what's happening down there. It's very different. So, all people see is what's on the news or what's on the TV."

The extent of isolation led to rifts regarding the kind of education students received and the appropriate tax levies for the school and village. One resident was born in Lewes, moved to a large metropolitan area for a few years during elementary and middle school, and returned for late middle school and high school. Her first year back, she was taught material she learned a year earlier in the larger school district. The academic and social isolation carried forward to college when she had "no life experience" to speak of other then her "little rural area to kind of

bounce things off for reference or just speaking-wise." In other words, she felt like she did not have a full grasp of others' perspectives or political or social problems for other students because of Lewes's insularity.

Students and families unhappy with isolation or educational opportunities either moved or felt a sense of entrapment. "We, in a small community, you don't… Like, in a bigger community, you have, you have your parochial schools and stuff that, okay, kids can have choices. They can go to, you know, public or parochial or whatever. We don't even have that here," said one longtime resident and person active in school administration.

Feelings of isolation and rurality certainly were not uniformly negative. For some, this was a particular highlight of the Lewes area. Many lifetime residents seemed quite satisfied and pleased with the isolation. A school employee was adamant that Lewes had everything a larger city offered, just on a smaller scale, including an arts scene, outdoor recreation, and restaurants. The sparse population allowed people easy access to hunting and fishing areas that did not require a cabin "up north." They were, indeed, already up north. A gas station, small market, and summer baseball team meant that, for some, the "sun rises and sun sets" in Lewes, and that's the way they liked it. Fred remarked, "If they're happy, who am I to say, 'You must think more broadly!' You know, that's not my place." "New" people, however, described a desire for established families to gain a sense of enlightenment with what high taxes were actually like in comparison to Lewes. Fred moved to the village over 40 years ago to be closer to his wife's home.

> I'll tell you the truth. It took me 10 years to get used to leaving up here. There was awhile when I thought, "What the fuck am I doing up here?" You know, but it was like, "What am I doing?" You know? And, well, I, all of a sudden, I said, "Fred, don't fight it. Go with it." And everything we want is right here. And not that we'll, someday were going to leave. … Our sons live in [city]. We'll probably end up there someplace [for care].

Increased taxes in order to change or expand educational opportunities was surmountable but remained a major barrier. One local businessowner argued that people "think [the tax rate] is exorbitant now, but it's not. … This isn't high. They don't know what they're talking about because they never lived anywhere else." A retiree who made her career in Lewes believed residents were "very much worried about their taxes. And being from [city] and then coming here, I know there's a big difference in the tax bases. And some of them, if they grew up here, they only think they're the highest tax base." One man I interviewed worked in local government in Lewes but had since moved away. He also experienced people's reluctance to pay taxes due to isolation and a lack of relativity.

> I'm just gonna be honest and say people up here don't know what it's like to pay taxes. Because in [Wisconsin region], they were a lot more expensive on my property that I had there. You know, I'm gonna imagine [city]'s probably a little bit more expensive, even how it's been in [Wisconsin region]. So, you know, when you see those type of variances, I think it really, again, goes back to your background and your individual budget.

Clarence was one person who experienced this firsthand as a retired teacher and someone who worked on a campaign for a referendum that ultimately passed.

> I had parents who were my former students, after the referendum failed and before the second one came around, and say stuff to me like, "Well, it was good enough for me. It's good enough for my kids." But, see, that's because they're wearing blinders because they don't see the world. They don't see where the world is at in compared, comparison to Lewes. … But that's all those Lewes graduates have ever seen is the old school. "And it's good enough for me" They've never walked into a school that's got nice computer labs and nice stuff. So, you're fighting that conservatism. "I'm proud of my community, but, Goddammit, I don't want to spend a dime."

Some retirees to the community, despite being on a fixed income and having few attachments to the district, were still amenable to voting to approve a referendum for the Lewes

School District. This was certainly not unanimous, but the experience of having lived elsewhere made a powerful mark on what kinds of tax levies were appropriate. Lou, a man at Bud's bar made this case.

> We have a high number of retirees. We do have a high number of seniors. And, but, I would say, for the most part, the ones who retired up here were very understanding of how [the school] affects their property values and stuff like that. And, so, it wasn't such a big issue. And they also knew—some of them are, these are summer homes—so they understand that, you may think your taxes are high, but go down to [Wisconsin region] and pay for the taxes.

I now turn my attention to the ways the campaign committee and school district accomplished their messaging—the *how* of the campaign committee's efforts. Their tactics were not flashy, complex, or high tech. In fact, they seem almost too simple. However, I believe this simplicity is one reason why the referendum passed, and the campaign was successful. Give people "a reason to vote yes," as CC, an administrator said, whom I quote below. Over and over, interviewees said that voters needed "information," that information was key to voters' decision-making capacities. As my interviews continued, I realized that information was defined as the answers to three key questions:

1. Where is the referendum money going?
2. Why is that project needed?
3. Why is that project needed now?

It seems a referendum will fail if voters cannot convincingly answer these three questions. However, providing answers to these three questions builds a foundation on which voters can compare the answers to their prior held beliefs and attitudes toward education, digest campaign and district information, and, ultimately, make a decision in the voting booth. The campaign provided "information" that pointed out how the community made input, they demonstrated the district's needs, and they tailored information to particular voters or sets of

voters. The committee was also run by people that community members deemed influential. The school district also had a more formal role to play in the referendum's success. Some of these roles overlapped with the campaign committee, and others were strictly in the purview of the school institution. These roles included generating the avenue to community input, building school finance understanding, creating a long-term story of and for the district, demonstrating the district's needs, and beginning the referendum process early enough to allow these roles to occur.

Table 32

Referendum Roles for Campaign Committee and District (Lewes)

Key questions voters need answered	1. Where is the referendum money going? 2. Why is that project needed? 3. Why is that project needed now?
Responsibilities assumed by the campaign committee	Made clear the community's avenues for input Demonstrated the district's needs Tailored information to particular voters or sets of voters
Responsibilities assumed by the district	Generated the avenue for community input Built basic school finance understandings Created long-term story of and for the district Demonstrated the district's needs Began process early enough to allow other responsibilities to occur

CC, the former Lewes administrator but administrator at the time of the approved referendum, has been through multiple referendum processes in three Wisconsin districts. I quote his statements here at length.

> Well, yes people are going to tell you information [as their reason for voting yes]. They're going to feel comfortable with the information they received to support the referendum. I, I totally believe that. … But the yes was, I can tell you exactly why 2016 versus 2018, that one passed and one didn't pass. And that's what you can't measure in my opinion. And that's 2016, financially speaking, square footage-wise, building the design, that model was better, but, yet, that model failed. In 2018, it was lower square footage because the cost per square foot was higher. And that model passed. Reason being is the information that was delivered to the public. There wasn't a good communication method in 2016. The committee wasn't serving in 2016. There wasn't a yes group that got out in front of it, so people went to the polls and they didn't have the information they needed to make an informed decision. In 2018, the district corrected that wrong. They surveyed the community, found out what the target range from a financial perspective should be, they put particular plans, they put it out in front of the community, they got a yes group behind it. Well, I should say people actually stepped forward as a yes group. Those people held informal meetings, they put out flyers, they brought information, they got key stakeholders behind it. So, people went out to the polls, they had a reason to vote yes, if you will. … So, by having a lot of information out, making people aware that they, getting them to the polls, the yeses out there, you're gonna get a lot more positive feedback. … Based on just what we know about our state, there's a general passion in communities to support education. So, it's not that people don't want to for the most part. I mean, there's some people who are gonna care more about their taxes. There's always gonna be that segment of population. But the overall majority of the population, I believe, want to support education. It's just you got to give them information. The more work you put in, the more transparent you are to the taxpayers, the more you try to… not even necessarily sell it because, as a school district, you can't try to promote it as yes or no. You can just provide them with information. But what you can do is you can flood them with information and get in front of it. And the more that you get in front of it, the better the success—I'd say. Are you guaranteed a passed referendum ever? You're not. But you can certainly play your cards.

CC's points bubbled up over and over again with the vast majority of interviewees. Toni, a lifelong resident of American Indian descent, said, "They had the school meetings. And, then, they direct mailed to try to get information out there. So, people were informed. I think that

probably helped." Judy, the current school board president, said the second of their bimonthly board meetings was devoted to the referendum as it approached. In her mind, "openness" was key. "You simply cannot tell the community too much. They are the supporters. They need full breakdowns [of cost]," she stated. Even people who were definitely going to vote no appreciated being informed, she said. Another current school board member said, "And [lack of information], I think, was the reason some of them voted no [in 2016]. They just didn't have enough communication of what was going on. It wasn't that they were necessarily against it. They just didn't feel comfortable voting yes—yet." Marcy, whose husband was Lewes born and raised, said, "… one of the things that I think made people reconsider [in 2018] was the fact that they actually came through with, with, you know, colored pamphlets that showed schematics, and the literature was present, you know? And, again, they might have said the average person … as far as your taxes going up, you know, they, they, I think, they explained it well."

The result of increased communication was an increase in trust. Gloria, another former administrator, mother of school-aged children, and district resident, saw this firsthand in her role on the committee.

> I think the yes committee and the school district, along with the consultants they hired, did a phenomenal job of getting the information out to the community as to why this was necessary … And I think they did a really great job really getting that information out to the community to the point of some people were sick of hearing about it. Because I heard that from them. "Just tell them to stop calling." We get it. We just don't want to hear that, "Hey, I just didn't know." … The money really wasn't, actually, I think it might have been even more [in 2016]. So, the money really wasn't a factor. It was presentation, and trust, and, you know, the trust-building, and the presentation and communication was key.

The community had ample opportunities to provide input on the 2018 referendum, and this input process was an effective and versatile way of providing information to people, allowed people to feel ownership over the process with the school that they "saved," and built additional

trust that the school would be something in and of the community. According to school board meeting minutes, the 2016 referendum was approved by the board in January 2016 and put in front of voters in April 2016. An employee of a local media outlet said that "a lot of people felt like they were blindsided. Like this was coming at the last minute in their eyes." Other residents used more forceful language, saying that the referendum was "being forced on them," that it was "being rammed" or "being railroaded down people's throats" because the school board just "looked at some pretty pictures" of new schools.

Furthermore, there was a perception that some board members and administrators were doing some things "under the table" that soured residents on the referendum. The people who brought this up were not willing to elaborate on this because of their ongoing relationship with current board members. However, evidently, board members believed they had enough clout that community members would not need to provide input. At the same time, some school leaders involved with the referendum were Mormon. This was anathema to people who hated being controlled, fought strongly for school independence, and were skeptical of this religious faith gaining influence in the school.

The lead-up to the 2018 referendum lasted about a year and half and began almost immediately following the 2016 failure. The 2018 referendum included a survey for residents which asked them about their vision for the school and their tax threshold tolerance. Over one-quarter of residents returned the survey, a figure the hired consultant expected to be between 10 and 15 percent. Two current board members said this effort, despite costing some money, reestablished feelings of autonomy and power in potential voters. The survey also became a tool for the campaign to committee to say, essentially, "The district asked voters what they would

support, people are willing to pay *X* amount, we're not spending too much, and we have the data to show it."

Once the tax tolerance was established at $6.5 million, the committee set about educating people on the needs of the district that the money would fix and why those projects needed fixing now. The local media employee observed,

> [They] took the time to meet with parents, meet with other people in the community and point out, "This is what we're doing." "This is how this will benefit your children, customers, that sort of thing." They took more of the time than the average school district would. I mean, most of the other referendums I've covered, I mean, they do it within the legal timeframe. And two, three months doing a couple of community meetings, that sort of thing. But I mean, Lewes went above and beyond, and they, they really wanted to show the community, "This is what we want to do. This is what we're hoping we can accomplish by having these additional classrooms, this tech lab."

Mark, the former teacher, had nothing to do with either referendum beyond voting and watched only from the sidelines. He described mailers featuring various "pillars" of the community and/or alumni, and these pillars "gave a short statement of why this is, why the school needs this, and why it would be a great thing for it to pass. And broke everything down and made it simple. You know, an itemized list of, 'Here's what we're doing. Here's…' And then they gave some background about the part that's falling apart—when that was actually built and what's wrong." Dot and Gene described meetings that were hosted with tours of the old part of the school to "explain why it was a necessity" instead of simply telling people, "Well, it's junk." They continued, "They maybe didn't need it 10 years ago. But they need it now." These messages about the foundation were coupled with the needs I described above, including the new shop space and tech lab, bigger special education classrooms, and improved wireless internet.

The committee was also nimble enough to tailor these messages to particular sets of voters. This did not mean that different groups of voters received different mailings. Instead, the

mailers that everyone received were designed to play to different voters' concerns. For instance, one man in Bud's bar, Jerry, was a government leader in a local township and never lived anywhere else. He was not active in the campaign, but he knew that some neighbors and friends were influenced by the breakdown of what the costs to a taxpayer would be on a monthly or weekly basis. For him, this was a business-like transactional approach because "it's time." He used his own life as an example. He said he was going to "do his usual rounds" that afternoon, "get pissed up," and knew he would spend a lot more in one day than he would over the course of the month on the referendum. For him, this was a useful and realistic comparative cost. He also shared that the school-village coupling and employment power of the school was influential for his community. Some of them had approached him saying, "We're all fucking poor. Are we gonna be less poor if the school went away?" As a source of employment, the answer was no.

Another tailored message was the tech ed and shop space. Kathy, Molly the local businessowner's mother, pointed out that both students and community members were going to be able to use this space, and students would receive training for trades work. One mailer featured a local, blue-collar trades worker holding various power tools and advocating for the new school to be built. For members of the population who found trade work less appealing, graduates who went on to form businesses were featured and described how their Lewes education prepared them for their current careers and leadership. A third mailer, financed by a four-decades long resident, underscored Lewes's family-like structure, pointed out that a yes vote was a vote for the kids, the next generation, and what the previous generation did for the current voters. Finally, a fourth mailer, again financed by a private resident, compared what might happen to Lewes to what had already happened in surrounding towns whose schools were recently lost.

The actual routes used by the committee to pass along these messages were twofold and remarkable in both their simplicity and effectiveness. First, the committee sent out the three aforementioned categories of mailers. The first category of mailers featured various community leaders, alumni, and businessowners with a feature about why they were planning to vote yes. These also included information regarding what the money would be used for, why that money was needed, what the tax impact would be, and the logistics of the election. The second category of mailers was sent out closer to the election and included a list of hundreds of names of people who had committed to vote yes. The purpose of this flyer was to show that referendum opponents were—hopefully, based on the committees wishes—fewer than referendum supporters and that opponents were in the minority. In other words, there was room on the bandwagon. The third category of mailers was sent out by a private citizen and businessowner separate from the committee—though she worked on the committee—outlining why she, personally, believed this referendum was needed for the school and highlighted some of the school-village connections I discussed above.

The other messaging route I simply deemed "conversations." These were both formal and informal. Formal conversations were phonebanks run by committee members and other volunteers who called fellow residents and offered to explain the referendum. Voters who were definitely voting no were thanked for planning to vote and crossed off the list. Definite supporters were reminded of election logistics. Those in the middle were given referendum information that rehashed the mailers—where the money was going, why those projects were so critical, what the school meant to the village, and examples of supporters willing to be mentioned.

The other category of conversation was informal, and this route incorporated all of the outreach topics from the committee. Informal conversations were discussions between potential voters and referendum supporters who potential voters deemed to be influential. The conversations could have happened at Bud's, at church, at a bonfire, fishing, at a basketball game, or over the fence in the backyard. The referendum passed not because of the mechanisms of engagement but rather because of the people *leading* the mechanisms of engagement. Support was not generated because one type of mailer was "better" than another or one phone call was better timed than another. In fact, some referendum supporters in 2016 used the same techniques. However, the people who led campaign efforts in 2018 were a broad range of people who were able to mobilize and influence their fellow community members. The theme of influential people—and the lack thereof in 2016—was constant.

One group of influential people was local businessowners. Scott, a current teacher and coach who was going to benefit from the new space was clear that,

> … when there's actual businesspeople that are taxed, lifelong businesspeople a little more involved in that, I think that was probably a huge difference. … Knowing some of those community members that jumped on board and got involved and were, you know, key stakeholders into decisions on what it was going to be—very influential people from the community, very respected, I guess, maybe is a better word. … People that other people would look to and say, "Hey, if they're supporting it, I trust them. I'm gonna be on board with them."

Fred, the village and county board member corroborated this saying, "I can't say the political leadership but maybe the business leadership. [Business name], you know, people like that. They started to put some, put, give it some lip-service." Not only did businessowners support it, but they also began to convince others that passage was the right idea. Annette contrasted the two referendums,

> The biggest difference was some people who were very influential in the community, and they were on board [in 2018]. Because they realized that if the school closed down, their businesses, their, their livelihoods would be greatly impacted. And I think those people really recognized it and then persuaded a lot of other people too. "You know what, look, [the committee] is right. We need to do something with this school."

Lewes had reverence for businessowners. The people of Lewes were not enthusiastic supporters of tax increases in an otherwise conservative and economically fragile area with people who praised hard work. Support from businessowners was a signal that, if they were willing to take on the extra property tax burden, residents should also be willing to shoulder this burden too.

Another set of influencers were the people who led the 2007 secession efforts. The secession was arguably the most consequential event in Lewes in the last two decades. Kory, the man who helped lead that effort, saw that very few of the committee members from that effort were involved in the failed 2016 referendum. However, they were much more active in the 2018 passed referendum. Lewesites put trust in this particular set of community leaders because they helped Lewes secede from loathed Glassbridge and helped initiate the school back into the community. If they could be trusted with that responsibility, they could be trusted with a referendum with much lower stakes. Kory contrasted the 2016 and 2018 referendums. He continued,

> I'm hearing negativity from [the former committee leaders]. There's no way this is going to pass because a lot of people listen to them. And it failed. And then I went back. We ended up getting another superintendent. And I'm friends with him. And I went back to him, and I said, "You know, you want to do this right. You need to involve the community, and you need to involve the right people. It's just like when we broke away."

Other influential people were not in "formal" positions of leadership like businessowners and former committee members. Influence was relative. For some, it was the chair of their church committee; for others, it was retired teachers; for still others, it was the neighbor next door. The influential person in my life may be vastly different than the influential person in yours. Thus, the breadth of influencers—the "main" people, the "leaders," the "pillars"—involved with the committee was critical for their success. Clarence was extremely influential as a retired teacher and was against the 2016 referendum. However, he and other "anti-first ones" lent support to 2018, which made an impact on the three generations he taught. Mark, his friend and fellow retired teacher, said,

> It was different pillars or people from the community who graduated from Lewes. And they, they gave a short statement of why this is, why the school needs this, and why it would be a great thing for it to pass. [Clarence] was anti-the first one. The second one, when the flyer came around, there was his picture with a little blurb of how great this thing is, and we got to pass this referendum. So, you won some important people over.

Bruce, the longtime landowner and "staunch Republican," Alex, the multifaceted small business owner, Duke, a current school board member, Gloria, the former administrator, and Quinn, a current administrator, all recognized the impact "Joe Blows," i.e. "regular" people with no formal positions of leadership, could have on voters. Including Joe Blows increased the frequency of the integral informal conversations that administrators and committee members knew were the key to an election victory. Alex described this abstract person in terms of the phonebank,

> You know, this is really important. And, you know, and we tried to hit people who knew people. Like, if I knew someone, they were my neighbor or we were connected or whatever, it was, you tried to, you know, go through people that, you know, were on the list to see if you could find people who you know or somehow had a connection with that you could call them because it made more sense for somebody who knows someone personally to call them.

Duke described calls they received about the referendum, which put them in a difficult position as an elected school board member.

> Yeah, I would say most people follow, follow someone else that they know. And, you know, I actually had some people contact me and say, "What do you think about this?" Because they knew I was involved in the school, and I was also involved in [local township]. And, so, they'd call to… And that's what they might do is call somebody who they think might have a little knowledge on it and say, you know, and, they're, then, they'll go with whatever that person says.

Gloria, who joined the committee a little later, recognized the impact that joint former no and Joe Blow voters could have on the election.

> Another thing that we did in the [campaigning] respect was we did it with other community members that had gone on the record of, in the 2016 one that failed, that had gone on the record against it. And we got them to back this one. We publicly made that known … through, you know, flyers that people wrote a little article for and things like that. And I think that that really helped because they trusted those people. They trusted them to do, you know, to ask and do the research. That, you know, maybe they didn't have the time for. But they trusted their opinions. And having those actual faces on too, you know, a picture of the person saying, "Hey, I support this referendum, and here's why." It made the difference. We did one where it was just, it was the one side was just a kind of quick little deal of what the plan was and whatever. And then the flip side simply said, "I support. I vote yes on this date." Whatever. "I support Lewes's referendum." Da da da. And then we just listed names. Anybody that had agreed to. And we had a whole list of, you know, 100 names or whatever of people. Yeah, so, that one, too, made a huge impact. Because if you think people didn't read *every single name on that list, think again*. … They did. Oh, yeah. In small, small towns, especially. But, yeah. Oh, yeah. Because they want to know how their neighbor voted. Or will vote. … They want to know how their neighbor sits on this issue. So, you know, some of the little things like that made a big difference. [Emphasis by interviewee.]

Quinn, a current administrator, clearly understood that his formal capacity did not allow him to advocate for a yes vote. At the same time, he knew that people would reach out to him to ask questions *because* of his formal position. He was not shy or withdrawn about this. Clearly,

he felt like it was his duty, as an advocate for kids in his community, to make it clear why this referendum was so crucial for the district. On my final trip to Lewes, Quinn—who was not recorded—drove me around the village to show me where he lived and what his neighbors' homes looked like. He did this to demonstrate that people in and around the village experienced deep poverty. He described to me the bonfires held in his neighborhood, the one-on-one conversations he held with his low-income neighbors, and how that person-to-person contact was what swayed people, a tactic that, in his mind, was the only to sway people. These low-income neighbors then, in turn, communicated with people in their own social circles and began to create influence. According to Quinn, "Relationships are where the magic happens."

Quinn, knowingly or not, acted as a personal bridge between the committee and the school. Many residents made comments such as "they" put out information, "they" held meetings, "they" made presentations, "they" showed people around the basement of the school. "They" referred to both the district and the committee collectively. The school had a role to play, as well, but the same three questions needed to be answered: where is the money going, why is that project needed, and why is that project needed now? The difference between the district and the committee, however, was that the district answered these questions on a much longer-term basis. The school told the "story" of the *district*. The committee told the "story" of the *referendum*.

For example, one role played by the district was establishing the tolerable tax threshold for the committee. One way to do this was by planning for the referendum long before the vote. Lewes, according to board members and past and present administrators, had to learn this the hard way after their "rushed" and "rammed" failed 2016 referendum. Nearly immediately after failure, the district hired a consultancy to survey the community to determine what amount of

additional money they would be willing to pay for the school and where they believed that money should go, the same survey I previously described. By doing this, the district increased feelings of autonomy, decision-making authority, control, and empowerment upon which the district had been built for 13 years.

Karen, the perceived anti-tax hawk who had been on the board since the school's reinception, described what the district could accomplish through long-term storytelling. This was new for them. Only recently, following the failed referendum, did the district create a school newsletter describing school-related happenings. She referred to those newsletters as a version of a "continual campaign" so that voters never again felt as though anything was "sprung" upon them. She stated, positively, "This campaign is never going to end." The district would be "quietly soldiering on" in the face of revenue caps, previous aid cuts, and a precarious economy.

They were also using this newsletter as a preemptive mechanism by which to highlight problems with the elementary school. Karen anticipated that something would soon need to be done with the infrastructure of that portion of the building as well. The district was holding a massive cookout and open house for the new school as a way to celebrate what the community produced with their tax dollars and to create "new nostalgia" that current and future graduates could begin to form just as previous generations had done in the 1935 WPA building. These newsletters, though, were not conceived just to highlight infrastructure needs and wants. They featured stories of graduating seniors, academic achievements by elementary school students, speech contests held in the conference, and many other accomplishments by students and staff.

Another purpose long-term storytelling could achieve was building a foundational understanding of school finance. The current board president stated that many people did not fully understand why the district had debt immediately upon recreation. To some, this seemed

like immediate public employee budget mismanagement. In actually, Lewes was required to take on their proportion of debt after the Glassbridge-Lewes split. CC, the former Lewes administrator, discussed the confusion people had when faced with curriculum, technology, and other operational costs. In his experience, voters viewed these as core functions of a school budget that should not need to be in front of voters. Thus, efforts were made to make clear what revenue caps were, where they were set, and what kinds of fixed costs ate up more of a budget. These were complex for school finance professionals; they were downright absent for voters.

The power of this long-term story-building became crystal clear to school leaders during the approved 2018 referendum. The district held in-school meetings at which tours were given for attendees to highlight what the school's maintenance and administrator staff were dealing with on a day-to-day basis. According to Dot and Gene, the businessowner couple interviewed together, people left those meetings saying, "Geez, I didn't realize that the building flooded, or the roof was leaking, or that you could feel the wind blowing through the windows." School leaders learned how these meetings or the informational flyers could make a big difference in upgrading the elementary school next.

Despite all of these efforts, a number of voters still checked no on their ballots. These voters were not persuaded by the campaign's or district's work. Further, it was not clear that these voters *could* be persuaded. According to Judy, the current board president, and Duke, another current board member, referendum supporters had done everything they possibly could have to get the 2018 referendum passed. The fact that "only" 44 percent of voters chose no was a testament to their work, not a repudiation of it. Both of them argued that so much effort and time had been put into this one referendum that, if it had failed, they just could not do another. Judy

said people were “exhausted” and “worn out” by the campaign, and she was thankful that it passed because she did not know what would have become of the district in the future had it not.

It was nearly unanimous among no voters that they voted no because they did not want to pay more in taxes. However, beneath this veneer of anti-tax philosophy, there were four predominant reasons people voted no. Regardless of no reason, however, never, at any time, did no voters express any sort of ill-will toward the children of the community. There were, at times, a great deal of anger toward teachers and to previous board decisions. Barney, a prominent community member who owned a local business, strongly believed teachers are underworked and overpaid and were largely whiners. He had no qualms expressing this to anyone who patronized his business, a business that was well-established and now mostly run by other members of his family—a circumstance which allowed him even more time to vent.

First, voters felt like the school was good enough for them to get to where they were and, therefore, was good enough for the current crop of kids. These voters overlapped with the voters who did not value education as a route to enlightenment or a stable career ladder. This set of no voters adhered to the German Republican-associated statement I quoted above, “If you’re starvin’, you ain’t workin’ hard enough.” Success was not measured by GPA but rather whether you were a good, hard worker. School did not teach kids to be hard workers. Only farm work, logging, and other blue-collar jobs instilled hard work, and, ultimately, hard work was what determined a child’s fate in life. Formal education took time away from apprenticeships or early careers where “real skills” were taught and learned. Some of these voters were deeply, deeply impoverished. Nevertheless, they had a roof over their heads, they had a job—despite its low salary—and they had a place to be entertained, the school. The current system was serving *their* needs and, thus, did not need to be changed.

One local businessowner, an alumnus who did not want to be identified and recently returned to town, witnessed this with their own employees and related it to her perception of the community's fraying sense of connectedness.

> I don't know that, as Americans, we have a lot of empathy for other people. You know, how are you going to get upstairs [in the old school]? How are you going to get someone who's, I mean, but if it doesn't affect them? Their kids? Then it doesn't matter. I mean, I don't… But we have a person here whose son passed away from a terminal illness who was in a wheelchair. And his mom, or his grandmother, I don't think was in favor of it originally. Now, I'm going, "How could you be any more directly affected by that not being handicapped accessible?" I mean, your situation, and, yet, you still don't want to spend an extra 20 bucks or whatever it comes a month.

Second, some voters checked no because they did not feel the school was "theirs." Whose school was it? For some voters, the answer was "us." For instance, Kory, a leader in the secession movement, spoke at length about people who felt like the school did not need extra money because there was no threat to it anymore. For these voters, the school was within their control. A bigger entity, e.g. Glassbridge or the state, could not close down the school without their consent. This no voter made a powerful impact on Kory because he knew how hard his committee worked to secede in 2007. These voters were complacent. They had accomplished their mission—regain control of the school. Now, it really did not matter what direction the school went because, if it really needed saving, they could just do it again. There was no pressing need or concern. Kory iterated these voters' perspective, "You know, the school's gonna be here. We won. We broke away. We don't need to worry about it. We don't want our taxes to go up. We have it. We'll be fine. If it doesn't pass, we'll go back to the drawing board and figure out what we're gonna do."

For other voters, the answer to whom the school belonged was, "It used to be 'us,' but now it's someone 'else.'" This bloc of voters understood what project the referendum money

was going to fund, but, if the money was for someone else's school, why would they pay for it? For these voters, the school belonged to the Mormons now. I quoted a few of these perspectives earlier—"It's just a Goddammed Mormon school now" paid for "by my Goddammed tax dollars." Other voters moderated their language and described how, in their view, the school board and administrators were only hiring "their relation." Relation did not need to be literal. In these voters' minds, the Mormons were all related, and they were taking over. The perceived "nepotism" between the rushed prior referendum, new hires, news articles about Mormon students, and former school board members was all too much proof these voters needed to make their point. They did not want to support a school that did not "belong" to them anymore, just as they did not have any desire to see their tax dollars go to Glassbridge, a school that also did not "belong" to them.

Third, some no voters believed that the school in its current form actually *decreased* viability for the community. Interestingly, these were not just "newcomers" or parents. This view ran through long-time residents and retirees as well. For these voters, the most "viable" thing to do for the community was consolidate with another surrounding school, whether that be Glassbridge or another district roughly the size of Lewes, in order to increase the number of curricular offerings available to students, provide more technical education space, and maximize the AP course offerings. The community member who held statewide political office believed Lewes never should have split from Glassbridge because so many educational opportunities, electives, and extra-curriculars were stripped away from the children. He was adamant that many teachers and administrators were unqualified to get jobs in bigger districts, and the school only existed to keep them employed.

Some no voters who fit into this viability category knew that reconsolidation was a non-starter because of the history with Glassbridge. Yet, they still voted no because the referendum, then, did not go far enough. One of these voters, who used to serve on the school board, believed that the referendum should still have included massive investments in athletics spaces, community recreation centers, a 40 percent increase in classrooms, and an attractive metal façade. If Lewes was not going to reconsolidate in the near future, perhaps building a high-tech, glamorous building could have lured students away from other districts to enroll in Lewes. Extra capacity and features other schools did not have were ways to accomplish this. Thus, anything else would be a long-term waste of money.

Fourth, a common thread through no voters was the combination of fixed-income status and no connection to the district. In other words, retirees who moved to Lewes later in life. I asked Larry, the 78-year-old lifelong farmer about this. He was a very active supporter for the 2016 referendum but was not formally involved in 2018 efforts. He unequivocally and forcefully argued that there was a massive difference between senior citizens who had lived in the community for a number of years and senior citizens who retired there. “Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely,” he repeated. He described a “backstabbing” on the part of voters who assured him they would vote yes on the referendum in 2016, but then changed their minds because they did not have children or grandchildren in the schools because they only just moved there. Annette, the current teacher, heard new, fixed-income retirees say things such as, “Well, you know what? The school’s gonna go down anyway. You know, let this be a retirement community. Lewes is great, and people want to retire here. People move out here. They don’t have to worry about schools. They don’t have to worry about, you know, the taxes. We’re going to keep our taxes low.” Established retirees, on the other hand, were the ones who attended the basketball games,

watched their grandchildren graduate, reminisced about time spent within the walls. For them, the school was a fixture.

I close this section by noting that the campaign seemed to push the right buttons in terms of finding what motivated these groups of no voters. The campaign and other influential people knew these groups would be motivated by the family-like atmosphere of the school, the attributes of the local economy, and the school's importance to the viability of the community. The larger-scale environmental features that yes voters experienced were identical to the environmental features no voters experienced. They lived together. Unfortunately for the committee, these particular sets of arguments did not persuade. No voters agreed that the community was family-like, but one "family" encroached on what used to belong to "our family." No voters agreed that the community needed an economic leg-up and that the school could help provide it. However, they believed the school's role should be to instill hard work in trades and apprenticeships, not literature. No voters also agreed that the school was critical to the viability of the community. At the same time, some believed that the school needed more and fancier features to maintain viability for the next generation, and some believed the school was, in fact, an impediment to viability.

Based on the data that I collected, it is not yet clear to me what would have been effectual in changing these voters' minds—if anything. The purpose of my research was to capture why voters voted the way that they did, a step this work accomplished. I leave to future work the *extent* to which voters were persuaded by various arguments. Instead, I turn the page to better understanding the voting patterns of the Hackenden Mountaineers.

Hackenden Mountaineers.

Hackenden's $19.5 million debt issuance facilities referendum was put in front of voters on April 2, 2019. The purpose of the referendum was to build a new elementary school on land

owned by the district and currently shared between the current middle and high school on the western edge of town.[10] I predicted this referendum would pass. Instead, the referendum failed with a 38-percentage point spread—31 percent (547) voted yes, and 69 percent (1,181) voted no.

The path to this failed referendum was unorthodox—to say the least—and the backstory is essential to understanding Hackenden voters checking yes or no in April 2019. It was, in essence, a refloat of a previously *passed*, not failed, referendum. Several community leaders who were interested in suing the school board because of the 2019 referendum, a point I return to below, individually contacted Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction to inquire whether any other district in Wisconsin had ever reattempted a previously passed referendum. According to these potential litigants, DPI reported to them that, based on their information, none had.

In late summer 2017, a then-administrator, Matthew, and the school board began discussing options to improve the safety and security of entrances at the district's 1968 elementary school. Ryan & Sons, an architectural firm with a strong Midwestern presence, consulted on this project and later completed the work. Matthew and the building's principal, Theresa, emphasized that the elementary school was currently over capacity, did not meet ADA standards, and any substantial upgrades would trigger both ADA and fire code improvements. Ryan & Sons also prepared a space needs assessment for the district so that the board could gain greater clarity in what options they could or should pursue, including budgets.

As fall 2017 progressed, some board members became concerned that building construction, space needs assessments, and long-term planning might be a quick and "slippery slope" into a referendum before the community was ready. At this point, the school board decided that a referendum was not necessarily inevitable, and they approved the formation of a

[10] As with Lewes, I do not share specific ballot language to help protect the identity of the community.

Grade School Vision Panel (GSVP) to begin work in early December 2017. The GSVP comprised community members who gathered community input, evaluated space needs assessments from Ryan & Sons, investigated other districts who dealt with space needs problems, provided sample construction costs, and, ultimately, produced a report that was presented to the board for future facilities planning decision-making purposes. Members of the GSVP were instructed to consider elementary facility needs, constructions costs, and community members' tax tolerance and counsel the school provide regarding a best path forward, regardless of whether it was patches, renovations, or a new building entirely. Ryan & Sons aided in this process so that accurate, reliable, and up-to-date costs could be reflected. The GSVP aligned well with the district's six-year-old strategic plan which, among other things, emphasized community input, board-community communication, and improving board-community trust. The GSVP met regularly between December 2017 and April 2018.

Meanwhile, Ryan & Sons completed their analysis of the elementary school's needs and presented their findings to the board in February 2018. Their concerns included, but were not limited to: minimal masonry and sealant concerns; doors and doorframes that needed replacing; an ADA inaccessible main entrance; inadequate space around the gym floor; an ADA inaccessible gym entrance; undersized nursing, office, administrative, and teachers' lounge spaces; lack of unisex bathrooms; inadequate square footage based on national guidelines; and drainage issues on the north side of the building that caused pooling under the building and foundational settling. The GSVP and Ryan & Sons jointly proposed a community charette in spring 2018 during parent-teacher conferences and an FFA banquet. Ryan & Sons would send an architect and civil engineers to join the GSVP. Jointly, these representatives would listen to the public's thoughts and concerns about the elementary building, what kinds of designs and

schematics the community was interested in, and produce sample designs in front of the public in real-time. The school board did not approve this request because of cost. However, in March, they changed their mind and approved a charette at the cost of $13,000.

At the April 2018 regular board meeting, Ryan & Sons provided additional information regarding the water and foundation issues after additional engineers analyzed the problem. Ryan & Sons believed the total cost to address the community's input at the charette, the construction and architectural fees, the code violations, renovations, and extensions to the elementary school site would be about $12.5 million. Some board members immediately balked at this price and questioned why this was double the amount they were expecting. Ryan & Sons clarified that the original estimates that were closer to $5 million included only the more routine fixes, such as non-classroom space and bathrooms, and did not include the additional foundational issues that were elucidated later. One board member questioned whether it was smarter to just pursue a new school instead.

In the midst of Ryan & Sons' updated reports, the firm also administered a survey to district residents. The survey's purpose was twofold: gather support and educate the public, something these surveys often did. For instance, a question might ask, "Are you aware that the elementary school is in violation of ADA codes at a cost of $1.7 million?" Or, "Would you support a referendum that would raise $1.7 million to cover the costs of ADA violations at the elementary school?" The architects also noted that that the purpose of the survey was not so that people could pick a total size of a project. Instead, it helps set priorities for the board. Residents were asked if, for example, they would support a mill rate increase of $12 a month? $16? $24? $30? And so on. Then, decisions about what to do, how to spend, and where to allocate money was made based on the maximum threshold of tax tolerance that appeared likely to pass. In other

words, Ryan & Sons recommended districts should ask for the amount that they already felt confident would pass.

In May 2018, the GSVP recommended that the school board seek referendum approval in November 2018 to renovate the existing elementary school and add additional classroom space at a cost of $12 million. Ryan & Sons pointed out that Hackenden had a "significant amount of support" for these projects. And they saw the survey as "very, very positive," that numbers were "very, very good." A higher-than-expected survey response, 15.5 percent, produced a representative sample with strong support for renovation at a tax tolerance of $12-16 increase per month, including from voters who did not have any children or grandchildren enrolled in the schools. Ed, a school board member, father, and farmer who had long been known as a strong, conservative, Republican, anti-tax hawk, dismissed the survey's results, saying that people who did not fill out the survey were taxpayers too, and the board did not know what their wishes were.

In June 2018, the board began to debate whether to levy the whole amount, $12 million, or levy a smaller portion within the tax threshold to address the most pressing problems. Matthew pointed out that priorities could be difficult to order because of the renovation's ripple effects. If the board decided to enlarge classrooms on the same footprint, space would be lost. Because space would be lost, the additions would be needed for extra classrooms. The new space required a new entrance, and that new entrance reconfigured parking and bus routes. Matthew argued it was a bit of package plan. Hugh, a board member elected in April, believed that a new school was still the best option, but the board needed to work within the confines of what the public wanted. If that was a renovation and addition, that was their charge. Ed disregarded the building referendum and highlighted the fact that the district was preparing to run a budget with

a $350,000 deficit. He stated he could not support any facilities improvements until that was fixed.

In mid-summer 2018, Matthew, the district administrator, submitted a letter of resignation. July was his last board meeting. At this meeting, some board members, including Ed, expressed worry that mill rates were going to be too much compared to nearby, comparable districts; some board members were concerned that asking for money via referendum would signal to the public that the board was fiscally irresponsible; and the board president announced he would not support a $12 million referendum. Other board members countered that they collected the appropriate amount of data with community input to feel strongly enough that the community tolerated and would approve the ballot. These board voices figured that, if it failed, they could always reevaluate and attempt something else.

Two referendum questions were approved in August 2018 under leadership of, Stan, an interim superintendent. The $12 million facilities referendum question was approved for the ballot on a 4-3 vote. A $350,000 recurring referendum question to address the budget shortfall was approved on a 6-1 vote. Between August and November, events proceeded normally. Ryan & Sons assisted one very public-facing administrator, Natalie, in creating public-facing referendum literature that clearly explained the mill rate impact, what projects the increase would support, and the guidelines and recommendations that prompted the potential mill rate hike. Neither a yes or no campaign committee formed for the November 2018 renovations and additions referendum. It was, in the words of Natalie, very quiet. In fact, the community was so quiet that she wondered whether people were actually receiving communications. She felt as though she were talking into a vacuum. Both referendums quietly passed in November. The facilities passed by an 8-percentage point spread with 54 percent (1,138) voting yes and 46

percent (988) voting no. The recurring referendum passed by a 16-percentage point spread with 58 percent (1,239) voting yes and 42 percent voting no.

On November 12, 2018, the board held a regular meeting and discussed the results. Some referendum-related next steps were fairly mundane and related to logistics. For instance, the board would borrow $8.5 million, reinvest it, and use the accumulated interest toward the project, saving about $100,000. A design-build team would meet biweekly and would include teachers. The group would work on schematic designs to match the budget and would procure community input on designs. Two summers would be needed for the work with the least intrusive projects occurring during the school year. Because of the scope of the project, Ryan & Sons would take care of the design portion of the work and Masthead, a construction firm, would undertake the build work. At this point, Ryan & Sons felt good about the project and complimented the district for "hitting the ground running."

On November 16, 2018, Ryan & Sons pointed out that a new contract would be needed because the current contract did not include the referendum-related campaign work and initial designs. Ryan & Sons stated that they had been working in good faith with the district since the security improvements and charette were held. It was their understanding that the campaign work and initial designs would be rolled into the final fee.

Some school board members, led by Ed, argued that this was merely a handshake agreement with the now-departed administrator—two men who often butted heads—that the board was under no obligation to honor. Ed also argued that the district should not have to pay for work done by Ryan & Sons because Ryan & Sons should have been business savvy enough to write a new contract. The now former-administrator, whom I interviewed later, admitted he felt terrible about this because he had nothing but a good relationship with Ryan & Sons. He was

also adamant that he described the handshake agreement with Ed on Ed's farm, and Ed had stated, "In my world out here, a handshake still means something." This left both Ryan & Sons and Matthew feeling burned. Ryan & Sons were clear that no bid they could make would be "sealed" because competitors already knew their cost; therefore, they would just be undercut. Meanwhile, the board questioned whether they should have to pay for the campaign work and early designs Ryan & Sons had created if there was no contract that legally charged them.

At the same time, several board members, including Scott, the board president, stated that they had voters approaching them immediately after the referendum questioning why they were not given an option to build a new school. Ed agreed. Ed and two other board members believed that Ryan & Sons were not being truthful about the costs of the project, saying it "just didn't add up." He argued that a bidding process should be held for an additional foundation inspection. Then, depending what that turned up, an additional bidding process should be held for an architect.

By the end of 2018, the Hackenden School Board had essentially fired their architect and floated plans to rerun the referendum to see if voters would support a new school. School board members supportive of this action argued that the survey response, despite being a representative sample, was too low, that the GSVP had not uncovered enough opinions, and that voters were never given the option to express a clear preference between a new school and a remodel.

At the December 10, 2018, meeting, members of the GSVP spoke, saying that it was true that a dichotomous choice was never put in front of voters because the tax tolerance threshold never reached a point that a new school could be an option. In late December 2018, the board voted on a 4-3 margin to move ahead with putting a new school referendum question on the April 2019 ballot. In January 2019, the board started over with a new design-build firm from a

different part of Wisconsin. One board member who did not support asking voters for a new school put forth a resolution that, if April failed, the decision would revert to the November 2018 renovations/additions approval. This passed. The referendum, ultimately, did not, as I presented at the beginning of this section.

I organize this section the same way I did when presenting Lewes. The left column of Table 33 presents, in descending order of important, the four predominant reasons residents voted no on the 2019 Hackenden referendum. The middle column of the table presents the corresponding community attribute that was "activated" by the no campaign committee's messaging that motivated voters to carry the respective factor into the voting booth with them. The right column of the table presents the general environment of the community that allowed the activated characteristic to succeed in producing the no factor.

Table 33

Predominant No Factors, Campaign Message, and Accompanying Environment

No Factor	Campaign Message	Accompanying Environment
1. "They nullified my vote."	Board dysfunction and distrust	Divisiveness
2. Lack of building plans	Abandoned buildings and conducive location	Historical appreciation
3. Cost	Quality of physical plant	Insider-outsider coexistence
4. Operations over building	Quality of academics	Community support

The first reason many Hackenden voters checked no was a feeling that the school board "nullified" their November vote. These voters were saying that they expressed what their vision was via the GSVP, the architect charettes, prior board meetings, and, most importantly, a vote yes to renovate and add on to their existing elementary school site. The movement toward an

additional April referendum was perceived to be an indication that the board was either too incompetent to understand their messages or too dysfunctional to listen. Regardless of the two perceptions, the movement toward a new referendum touched a nerve that frustrated voters who thought about the power of democracy. For these voters, a referendum was the ultimate demonstration of a community's wishes. There was no committee through which to filter information, there was no charette that needed to be squeezed into an evening routine, there was no survey that risked being lost on the kitchen counter, and there was no school board meeting to sit through. The vote was an individual expression of power during a general election with high turnout that, in their view, was completely ignored by some members of the school board. This was emphasized during my very first Hackenden interview and continued throughout. The first interviewee, Frank, matter-of-factly stated, "Why did I even bother to vote?" Natalie, a district administrator, fielded many of these complaints directly.

> You know, and a lot of it's centered around this, this nullified, nullifying of the vote for lack of a better word. And the fact that, you know, we did everything right in the first process, really, by their, by their eyes. But then you had people—I think this is what really, really killed it in the eyes of a lot of people—was the board was considering taking away their vote, like, the most democratic, ultimate survey that you can ever do. And the board was like, "Okay, thanks, but no thanks." I think that really, really rubbed people wrong. I think you would have had some people who would have voted for a new school, but because, personally, they were just so hurt by that and offended that they, they chose… They're like, "No way. No way." So, I think there was a lot of trust lost there during that process. … But I think you had that core group of people that were just very upset about their vote not counting the first time that kind of steered that ship.

Another interviewee, Brian, did not live in the district but, like the administrator, fielded many complaints as an employee of a media outlet who covered Hackenden news.

> I think that part of it too was I think the, I think the people who had voted for the, the renovations were mad. You took away their right to vote now. … I also think the timing in November, it was a huge election. Like, you had more voter turnout.

> You just did. In fact, so, the numbers will back it up. And, then, in April, you didn't have as much of a turnout. You know, April's generally a smaller election. It's just a spring election. And, so, I think in senses that, too, plays a part, was, okay, so, you have this big election in November that, you know, everybody and their mother is going to show up for, and they're going to vote on it. And, you know, and then in April, you're going to have the people who really actually care. And the vibe that I got from the people who cared were the ones who wanted the renovation to go through because they had their right to vote essentially stripped from them. They're saying, "Your vote in November doesn't count. We're the school board. We're going to override these thousands of votes and say no." And, so, I think… I don't even know if that's legal—still don't. But there was talk about… Somebody was really upset and was like, "Maybe I'll sue the school. They took away my right to vote. My vote, they said, didn't count. And didn't matter." In schools, it's hard to get [a passed referendum]. And now you're like, "Well, we don't like this referendum. Let's do another one." … in November if I voted either way, it didn't matter. It just was overruled by the school board who, yes, we elected them. But … So, that, that's a lot of what I heard, too. And I was talking to people, it was just, they were just a little frustrated that it seemed their vote didn't matter.

Jordan, a member of the GSVP, did not mince words. "Are you fucking kidding me? We already voted on this. Hello. Democracy is a thing. We already, you know, this process fucking happened. Like, why are you coming back at me for more?" Ned, a former board member, calmly but forcefully said the board's move was an "abuse of power."

Some community members expressed a concern that this "nullification" could perhaps damage the district's ability to seek more referendum money in the future. Paige, a current board member, was resolute in her efforts to ensure that no referendum would occur again for a minimum of five years. Other residents were not fussed by this no vote and saw it as an anomaly. In their opinion, the community's referendum "default" was a yes vote because of deep, deep support and adoration for the school, a level of support I return to later in this section. Nevertheless, precarious trustworthiness is present in Hackenden minds. Matthew addressed this.

> … the anger that you're feeling is that, "Hey, we have, we have a referendum, and now you're ignoring that result and trying to get a different result because you didn't like the answer of the first result." … I thought that's really bold and really

> rude because it doesn't respect the community. It doesn't trust that… I mean, there's no ultimate way to get a decision that's any more finality than a referendum, an election, right? It's not like a survey that you don't trust or a committee you don't trust. This is… The community has spoken. They're giving you clear direction. And I think what caused it to be even worse of a failure was because it was in spite of what had just passed. And people felt like, "You're trying to cancel my voice and my vote, so now I'm just saying no to this." And I think what's yet to be borne out is what might be from future elections and future discussions. This lack of not trusting the board is how I cast my ballot. What are you going to do with that? That could be a real damaging piece when they go back for operations or they need something in the future. The board might find the community flipping on them and not trusting their vote any longer.

Members of the campaign committee reinforced underlying feelings of disappointment in and distrust of a "dysfunctional" school board. In essence, the campaign was fundamentally saying, "How can we trust the board to move ahead with this 'new' vote when they have so many other problems?" The campaign elevated these messages through three avenues. First, they pointed out that the large bloc of voters who were upset they did not get a chance to vote on a new school never really materialized. It was unclear who was pushing this new school message. A community member who did not want to be identified stated,

> So, then the school board came back and said they got—I don't know if it's true or not, if I'm being honest—hundreds of complaints that people wanted a new elementary. These people never materialized. These people never showed up to a school board meeting. … [The district] had a meeting in [December], I remember, and it was for, it was a big school board meeting about whether or not they're going to do a new referendum. And, so, there were maybe, I want to say five people that spoke in favor of a new building. A lot of them are teachers, actually, which makes sense. You know, they are the ones who are going to work in it, right?

Vince was a leader on the no campaign. His family lived in Hackenden since the 1840s, he was alumni of Hackenden, and he currently lived there with his family. He made sure to point out to fellow community members that the small number of non-teacher supporters who did turn out were completely unfamiliar to him, his family, and others in Hackenden. "… there's some

woman planted [at a board meeting] that none of us really knew who she was. Like, kind of in front of the room like, 'Yeah, you should really consider…' You know, I don't, I don't know, I still don't know who that lady was. But, you know, kind of ginning up support for this idea." By highlighting the absence of these voters, the campaign committee could persuade people that the board could not be trusted. In other words, if the board was fielding so many of these calls and pleas for a new school, then why couldn't these hundreds of people show up to a board meeting, the committee asked.

Second, the campaign team also pushed messages that the board was long divided on the issue of a referendum, fueled by ignorance. It is true that the renovations referendum was also divided. However, so many whiplash-inducing events had taken place since the initial referendum ballot approval—the first campaign, the actual vote, board turnover, architect firing, superintendent resignation and hiring—that this was swept under the rug. Hugh, a prominent community member and current board representative, said as much during his interview. The 4-3 "split decision" by the board to move ahead with a new school referendum meant the community was unpersuaded by its need. A "united board" that was both "very vocal" and "very local," meaning filled with representatives who had gathered clout as lifelong residents, would have fixed this. "I think if we had a united board, and if we hadn't been so timid from the initial request and just put it right out there initially, we would have been better off." Natalie, the administrator, said she learned in her "line of work" that "if you don't have a unanimous board vote, it's a kiss of death from the beginning because, if the community can't see that your board is aligned, they have a hard time buying in that this is the best solution for the district."

Paige, other past and present members of the board, and Matthew all pointed out that the board did not trust each other and refused to participate in any sort of board professional

development. This refusal to work together allowed the campaign committee to elevate the fact that the board did not seem to understand the referendum process or the community's feedback. Brian reported on the meeting at which the new school referendum was approved for the ballot. He observed,

> … the school board is just a whole beast of their own. They're very… They don't get along very well with each other, and it doesn't seem like they trust each other. So, the big meeting in April was when they decided to go and do the second referendum. And it was a four-three vote. And they voted the way I thought, I had, I had predicted they would. I had known they would vote that way because I know their personalities. And, so, I was just disappointed. There was a lot of convincing speech. It was just disappointing in some senses because during this whole long meeting, they would have to pull Jordan, who I told you to talk to—she was [a GSVP member]—she knew more than [the board] did. And they were trying to answer questions and they're like, "Hey, Jordan, can you answer this?" But they're voting on it.

Jordan, who did not support the new school, used this situation to make voters do "a double take." For instance, the school board needed several clarifications from Jordan that ballot questions presented to voters cannot be answered with "New School" or "Renovate Existing School" because state law requires referendum responses be yes-no answers. Jordan argued to both me and the community that the board could not answer these simple questions because "they hadn't engaged their brains." They were "caught flat-footed because it was they who put it on the, on the ballot, but they couldn't speak to it because they had no idea of any of the information. … They didn't know very basic information there that they're coming back to [the GSVP] to answer."

Frank, a man I met at The Hanger, a bar downtown, was not active in the formal committee but had no problem explaining to his friends that he believed "someone didn't do their jobs." He questioned, "How come, if you need a new building, why not just do it the first time around? A lot apparently didn't need to be done. Was it that the school board didn't know?

Someone screwed up. Someone didn't do their jobs. Why don't you just do it the first time?" Kathryn, a longtime resident and small businessowner, mirrored Frank's comments. She was in disbelief, saying, "[The problems] just didn't occur to them, which is a problem, you know? If it didn't occur to them until after the election… Come on, guys. Wake up. Do your job. Do your homework. Do your homework, man."

Third, the campaign pushed messages with appeals that the board was dragging their feet and in "saboteur mode." Ed, the tax hawk who voted against the renovations and recurring referendums, and Scott, the board president who did not support the renovations referendum, both changed their minds and supported the more expensive new school referendum. This dumbfounded constituents who believed these men were conservative, anti-tax hawks who were dead set against a $12 million referendum but supportive of a $19.5 million ballot five months later. Some residents and leaders held a perception that Scott, the president, was a political chameleon, whose passivity and timidity made for a directionless board taken for a ride by the whims of some political constituents. Vince believed Scott had more nefarious reasons for flip-flopping. Vince argued Scott was "in theory, a Republican Trump supporter. Very conservative. But I think he also really loves controversy, and just really loved this moment, and though, 'Oh, this could be my legacy.'"

Two teachers, Tracy and Quinten, were interviewed together and corroborated Vince's perspective. Both of these teachers were quite surprised that both of the first-round renovations and recurring referendums passed. In their view, the fiscally conservative board members, including Scott and Ed, did not expect the renovations referendum to pass. According to these teachers, Scott and Ed assumed that the cost bar for renovations would be set too high. Scott, Ed, and other board members assumed the renovations would fail, they could make-do for a few

more years with the old school the way it was, and, then, toward the end of their tenures, they could have a vote on a new school—the fiscally responsible thing to do to avoid throwing "good money after bad." Moreover, and just as importantly, the board members could get their name on a plaque in the new building.

Thus, the November renovations money that fell into the board's lap was unexpected and fiscally dangerous. School board referendum opponents did not necessarily want this money right now. It interfered with their legacy-building. Thus, they wanted to go to referendum for a new school right away the following April because that's really what they wanted in the end—it just came too soon. Jim, a man who moved from a neighboring state to town with his wife Bonnie, saw this legacy-building as pure greed. "Oh, that was easy. Let's try again!" Jim mockingly said of the newly-hired superintendent. "And he upped the ante. And, you know, he didn't have the support of the community or any of the other people on his own staff."

Matthew did not address a new school legacy on the part of board members, but he did acknowledge an unwillingness to spend on renovations.

> But I also believe that there's a part of the board that, that is just in a saboteur mode. They just want to sabotage. They still… So, I'll take Ed as the example. I don't think Ed wanted any money spent. He's, he's the school board member that's a large agricultural farmer in the area. Former president, yeah. So, he was the president prior to Scott. And when I was working through this process and Ed is, is a representative voice of all of the large farms in the area. And when the large farmers get in his ear, he, he will react accordingly because it's, it's representing a contingency that has a unique voice but also a very important voice to listen to it. If you don't listen to it, it will sabotage you. And, so, Ed's position was, "We shouldn't be spending any money on anything at any time." And that's kind of the conservative values that he represents. So, inside of that, I think there's some side conversations happening with Scott, who's a local business owner—[business name]. And he has a lot of influence and/or at least hears from a lot of people that will trip the ear. And, between the two of them, they quietly would use the one, new-school solution to sabotage the remodel. And/or even if that didn't come to fruition, … I've seen a lot of what I would call stall tactics: changing architects midstream, changing the either… the last vote, just on Monday, was, "What was the timeline going to be? Are we going to go with the

> recommended timeline? Are we going to bring in pods to house kids and do it longer timeline?" Just things that derail the process.

For the campaign committee, all of these sabotaging, delaying, or legacy-building board tactics were an opportune way to highlight the dysfunctional nature of that body. The committee created messaging that, at best, said the board was ignorant of their referendum options and far too reliant on unelected bodies to make decisions for them. At worst, the board was sabotaging the most coveted democratic responsibility in order to cement a legacy in their small town. Either way, the board was "nullifying" the wishes of the majority of Hackenden's November 2018 electorate.

Like Lewes, the messaging tactic by the campaign "successfully" produced a no vote because of the larger environment in which the messaging took place, an environment of strong divisiveness. Many residents felt burned and scorned by the board, a group that, according to Brian, are "seven people who think they're more important than the masses." I cannot overstate the anger that remained palpable in Hackenden. I was told that Ed's siblings still refused to speak to one another because of their voting preferences, and they were hardly the only family experiencing this. Cheryl, a lifelong resident from a well-known Hackenden family, chose to drive to me instead of meeting me in Hackenden so that people could not overhear what we were saying. Rose, a young mother who agreed to meet me in a Hackenden restaurant, looked over her shoulder before answering nearly every question and spoke in hushed tones throughout. Other residents only agreed to speak if we could use an overflow/storage room off of a main dining room in a restaurant. Natalie warned me on my first day in Hackenden that it could be hard to recruit residents for interviews. "I think people are scared to be honest. Because like I, like I said, I don't, I don't think this is done There's still people that do not want that building fixed up

down there. And I'm not sure what kind of lengths they're going to go. I don't know. I just, I just know the conversation still pops up from time to time." Vince was in Scott's business the day before our interview and described an interaction in which Vince said hello to Scott, and Scott refused to look at him and walked into the backroom—a full year after the campaign did its work.

An environment of divisiveness is not new to residents of Hackenden, particularly with regard to the school. Several times, I needed to remind interviewees that I was asking about the 2019 referendum, not the 1994 referendum, a referendum that, astonishingly, remained fresh in their minds. The 1994 referendum was eerily similar—a ballot proposal asked residents whether a middle-high school should be built on the outskirts of town or whether the then-current high school should be renovated for ADA and fire code updates.

Linda was a Hackenden resident for several decades, was married to a man who was born-and-raised, and was an expert on local history. According to her, it got very contentious. "Articles in the paper describe how people assembled in the high school gym or somewhere in town—I don't know where they all met then, I suppose it was in the gym—and had, you know, like, a huge, just, you know, blow up over whether we should build a new school or, or keep this old school." She recalled a local businessman who argued that an ADA advocacy office in Chicago was going to sue to shut down the district completely if the appropriate updates were not made. "But there were rumblings of that all over again. And the second referendum came up. 'Remember the '90s! Remember the '90s!'," Linda explained. In separate interviews, both Hugh and Paige relayed warnings from fellow residents who said that they should not attempt to join the school board until they reached retirement because people from Hackenden would refuse to

support their business if representatives did not vote the way residents wished. Hugh heeded this advice; Paige did not.

The second predominant reason no voters related to me was a lack of building plans for what would become the "old" elementary school. There were already two decommisioned schools in the community, one of which was the high school that was replaced in 1994. An approved referendum would have resulted in a third school in a prominent area of town being, as some residents described it, "abandoned." For no voters, there was a contradiction in supporters' new school arguments: how could the elementary school be so bad that a new school was desperately needed but, at the same time, in such good shape that someone would quickly buy it and take it off the district's hands? Linda, a no voter, broke this down argument by argument.

> So, we have this old school sitting here in this beautiful neighborhood and, I'll, I'll take you around it. And [the school board], they had no plans on what to do with the space. I mean, they were just going to walk out of it, and build this new school, and leave it empty, and sell it? … And, yeah, so, and, you know, it needs, it has this buckled floor that needs to be repaired to the tune of a million dollars. Well, who's going to buy this building? Do they think Qualcomm's going to come in and move in a tech force? I have no idea. So, at one of the school meetings that a bunch of us attended, we said, "You've got to get some plans together for what you're going to do with an old building." And they sat there one by one, you know, put their hands on their knees, and they came up with these stupid ideas because they were ridiculous. Well, "We'll give it to the city." The city? My husband was, just got off [board]. There's no money to maintain a building like that. Yeah. Okay, "Oh, someone will use it as a daycare." A daycare? I mean, there are probably in Hackenden 30 kids in daycare. And if you've got this buckling floor, and you know, okay, so that daycare was another issue. "Oh, [technical college] will use it to do their community GED programs." Oh, there's one, you know, they're, they're renting space in [nearby town] for that—that's seven miles that direction. And [another nearby town], you know, they're doing it 16 miles that direction. That's not going to happen. You know, absolutely no plan. So, this was, you know, at a meeting, so we gave them like 10 days to figure out more, you know, these were just some ideas. Figure out more. So, a week later, we all meet for one of the big community forums, and they just bring up the same dumb ideas again, and no one had ever gone and called up the mayor because we all, you know, everybody knows who everybody is here. Could have just gotten on the phone. "You guys want the building?" No one did that. You know, called a real estate agent and said, "How much is it worth?" You

> know, and because one of the things we effectively did was posted all the vacant school buildings in [region] on Facebook. They're used for storage. They eventually become antique shops and collapse. You know, it's just crazy. We've probably done the best with the two we've got with, you know, renting them out. But one more? Oh, yeah! Someone, someone else said, "Oh, condos for seniors!" You know, I mean it got, it got crazy. "Well, did you call anybody? Did you make one phone call to a developer and see if that's even a possibility? And then did anybody call here and get the cost to tear it down?"

Ned, the former board member, also questioned how the school could simultaneously be in such dire financial straits that an additional recurring referendum was needed while they also had enough money to decommission, raze, or temporarily maintain a large elementary school after a new one was built.

> It seems wasteful to abandon a solid building with zero plan for what was going to become of it. … We put up pictures of different… One [Facebook] post, we had four pictures of abandoned buildings—school buildings—in neighboring towns. And with the Hackenden one with a question mark. People got livid. That, actually, was, I think, a turning point. And I think that really did change people's decision. We had no plan as to what to do with that. And we just… There was another building on [main street], I don't know, within a year of this thing that was in disrepair, and it finally had to be torn down. And it cost the city, you know, a couple hundred thousand dollars. So, just the thought, there's no… You can't just abandon a school. There's going to be repercussions. So, I thought that was significant. And the school board had given it zero thought—absolutely no thought as to what to do with that school. And only when pressured by the no-group did they have a meeting about it. And they were literally spit-balling. "Well, it could be a this. It could be a that." And it was all just pie-in-the-sky. … Linda was going to the archives, digging up old papers because we have two other abandoned schools in town. One is an apartment building. It's rented. And another one is a bit of an eyesore. And she dug up what everyone was saying about that eyesore at the time that it was abandoned. Well, it was going to be a dancehall. It was going to be all these wonderful things that never got [built].

Linda and Ned were the most verbose regarding this factor, but it came up again and again in interviews. Brian, the journalist, heard much "concern about what they would do with the old building. … Are we going to have this building sitting and sitting and sitting forever?" Bonnie, the move-in from a neighboring state, carried the question into the voting booth with

her, “What are they going to do with the old building?” Phil, a current board member and lifelong farmer, remarked, “There was fear of that building being abandoned and then being, just sitting there, being an eyesore in the middle of town. Not knowing what was going to happen to it, the fear of not knowing what was going to happen to it.”

To instill this no factor, the committee spent a great deal of time focused on the conducive nature of the current elementary building site. In some sense, this nature was literal. There was a nature preserve attached the building that was meticulously created and kept up by an older man who recently passed away. The school used this site as a way to teach biology to younger students without having to take a fieldtrip. It was also an extremely aesthetically pleasing surrounding area adjacent to the school and older, well-kept homes.

The campaign also reminded people that the current location of the elementary school was in a neighborhood with both young families and retirees, both of whom parents felt would be able to keep an extra eye on their children as they arrived and departed school. Linda did not live in that neighborhood but acknowledged the power in that argument. “There was a strong feeling that, had part of the component of the new building factored in the cost of tearing down the old school and turning it into a public park or selling it off as a subdivision, it might have passed. I think people just simply did not want to see an empty, nasty looking school in a neighborhood.” Kathryn, the local small businessowner who did not have kids in the school, echoed this saying, “So, and the, the neighborhood where the old middle school is, is residential. And that, to most people, was more comfortable because the residents of that area keep track of the kids walking around. You know, they know everything. And, so, there was more security. I think people felt more security in the old site. So, I, that’s a lot to do with it, I think.”

Hackenden is not that big. It's a dense of community of 2,500 people. When people mentioned "the middle of town" versus "outside of town," it was a matter of about four blocks. But these four blocks were meaningful. Later in the conversation, Kathryn continued, regarding the location, "… the neighborhood is so protective where the location is now. [The high school], it's out there on the highway there on the edge of town there. Next to the big school, it's… I think people just felt more safety in the smaller neighborhood." The centrality also allowed the students to attend events in the downtown area five blocks away. JoAnne, an interviewee that was recommended to me as a representative of the district's farm bloc, praised the location.

> It's kind of in a, in a residential area. It's not that terribly far, far from our downtown area. The school system uses our library, our public library a lot. We have a renovated, what we call the [business]. It's a [business type]. That's used a lot by the school district. And just going there at, I don't know, was it Christmas time? They, the kids would draw, do some drawings about Christmas, and the local businesses would put these pictures up on the windows, you know. So, that kind of thing was why people didn't want the building to be moved up [to the high school].

The committee also specifically homed in on the current elementary neighbors to induce people to consider the lack of building plans as a no factor. Theresa, the building principal, described the effect of this on local homeowners.

> I think [the homeowners] were partially concerned about property values going down if you get some old rundown building. So, there was that fear, too, of what's going to happen to this building? There was no clear plan at the board of what they were doing with this building. I mean, I think if there was a plan, like, we have two people interested in buying it, and they're going to turn it into, you know, fixed income apartments like the other is, maybe it'd be different. But there was no plan. … So, it's close to people. I think, too, there's, well, I know, there's some—I would say—there's some wealthier families around here. Like, across the street.

Linda also described what some of these arguments looked like.

> Well, sure, in terms of your property values like that to have a healthy school in a neighborhood that's kept up by the school district. The lawn is mowed. There's playground equipment. It's in the neighborhood. It's like having a park. The baseball diamond is right next to it. The old football field is right next to it, you know, where they, where they practice and the junior high plays. You know, it, it was a whole… You know, it was a whole center of town where there was all this activity.

Vince, the community member whose family has been in Hackenden for many generations, and Natalie, the administrator, saw this campaign message as good cover for this homeowner corps.

> … A lot of emphasis came from the people in that neighborhood who were worried about their property values—whether or not they would say that. Now, that's not probably something [name] would say. But [their] house looks at the elementary school, and, if [the school] became tenement housing, you know, that's not great for them. – Vince

This campaign message and no vote translation was effective because Hackenden exists in an environment of deep, deep historical appreciation. If Lewes is the town of family ties, Hackenden is the town of history. It was settled by immigrants who gave the state their mascot—the original "Badgers." There were families who were neighbors in the country from which they emigrated, and they were neighbors now in Hackenden; these families have been living amongst themselves for upwards of three centuries. Furthermore, they have been living among the same buildings and building materials for three centuries as well. Kathryn, the small businessowner, contrasted Hackenden with a neighboring, rival district.

> … Very few people are aware that Hackenden was the big city before Chicago was. … And because of that early municipality feeling to it, there is a little bit more cosmopolitan flavor to most of the other cities in our area. And that's because it was the big city at that time, and it still retains some of that big-city cosmopolitan flavor even though it's very rural and very farm. But I think that's one of the interesting differences that separates Hackenden from the rest. It's, I think, visually easy to see how the architecture is different. The story is that—because [nearby town] became the county seat back in the 18-whatevers—they

> originally had just as many of these wonderful structures as we did, but, because they were the county seat, they had more money. And they were able to, quote, tear down those damn old buildings. Whereas in Hackenden, there was not enough money. And, so, we were "stuck" with these damn old buildings. Well, come to find out 50-100 years later, those damn old buildings are worth a lot.

Now, residents were eager to show off these "damn old buildings." Brian, the media employee, vouched for this. "I'd say it's just very historic. They're very interested in their buildings and their history. You know, it's, it's really something, it's history. Hackenden… Hackenden is the third oldest town in Wisconsin. So, they have that history, and they're very proud of it." Scott, the school board president who was interviewed with JoAnne, the local farmer, urged me to just drive around town if I wanted to better understand the place. "If you haven't been down main street, you should drive down that way because then you would know what [name] is talking about. So, the buildings and the architecture is second to none for the size of this town. It's quite amazing, actually."

Residents justifiably boasted about "saving" buildings the way Lewes described "saving" their school. JoAnne, the local farmer, noted that "a lot of the homes have… Limestone is, was, is the predominant—outside of the lead at times—but, so, a lot of these homes are built in limestone basements. And, over the years, that has deteriorated. And that's where a lot of, a lot of these buildings have been saved." Some former mining sites or buildings in related industry were converted into historical sites, artist studios, restaurants, and shops following the Great Depression and 1970s deindustrialization. Economic displacement was not something that "happened to" residents of Hackenden. Instead, busts were economic opportunities to revitalize the area, "restore the buildings they do have," and "refurbish" or "save" them so that the next generation could remain in Hackenden, an objective that Scott and Phil, both lifelong residents and current board members, stressed to me repeatedly. The determination to refurbish left a chip

on residents' shoulders. Vince argued, "We take care of what we have. We don't just, we're not the kind of people who want toilets that haven't been shit on before."

Thus, an elemental community appreciation for history lent powerful credence to maintaining an existing elementary school site. This argument was persuasive for people. Heather, a current school employee and lifelong farmer, attended every board meeting and function. She witnessed the no committee win over voters by framing the election as "defaming what makes Hackenden, Hackenden." Phil, a board member who made his final ballot decision shortly before he entered the voting booth, had a construction-related job and understood the appeal of building new, where there were fewer engineering surprises or hiccups. But for him there was an "original question" that people go back to "where we preserve old buildings in Hackenden. We don't waste." Bonnie and Jim, the couple from a neighboring state who moved to Hackenden, noted the historical appeal in their decision to choose Hackenden. "It's a preservation community. So, why do you want to build a new school? Why not preserve what you already have?" Jordan, a member of the GSVP, heard this expressed repeatedly in surveys and in-person charettes. "A lot of people felt very strongly about Hackenden not being a town that wastes buildings. That we are a town that can invest in buildings. We can fix things, you know, whatever. There was a lot of sentiment about that. People were just really into staying in that location, the [nature preserve], it being inside the town, not outside of the town. You know, people were just really into it."

People who supported building a new school, therefore, had to clear two hurdles: a tax increase and, perhaps even more importantly, the cultural tenet of historical preservation. Theresa, the elementary building principal, witnessed this battle at district informational meetings. "Voting no, I think, comes back to some of the cultural context, which I think is hard

to quantify. But people—that was my theory—is people just really like preserving old buildings. Now, this building, architecturally, it's not, it's a block, you know? There's not as much character to it. But more the concept of preserving our history." In other words, a building cannot become historical if it is not given the opportunity to do so. Run-down mining sites were not historical at one point either. Improvement over time, however, made them that way. Vince illuminated this on behalf of residents who ultimately voted no. "For the nos, … we already have bricks and mortar. So, why are we gonna invest $20 million in bricks and mortar? Like, we already have it. Let's just improve, improve what we've got."

The dominating cultural preservation context did not mean cost was irrelevant. In fact, the cost was the third predominant reason residents chose to vote no. For some voters, any cost was too much cost. This sentiment mostly emanated from the large, landowning farm bloc who was convinced that the school was good enough the way that it was. The school was "good enough for me, it's good enough for them." Matthew ran into this a great deal when he pressed for facility upgrades. Speaking as if he were a large landowner, he stated,

> "I went to that elementary. It was fine when I was there. There's, there's no reason for us to put $100,000 into it. If you need to, if you got a leaky roof, fix the roof, but you don't need to put 12 million. You know how many houses you can build for 12 million? Blah, blah, blah." So, it's just that disconnect between, I think, people that would be so fiscally conservative that they don't see the real benefits of a new building.

Hillary, a farmer and a person who moved to the district with her family several years ago, believed many of these residents thought that increasing the size of the classrooms without a simultaneous rise in enrollment was "frivolous or just too much." The school served its purpose for them to enter the business of the family farm. At the same time, these farms were no different than farms across Wisconsin: financial stability was a perpetual concern. JoAnne, a local farmer,

combined these perspectives on behalf of her economic bloc. Her fellow famers were struggling financially, and a new school would not be a big "bang for the buck" since the new school would be, according to her and her peers, mere adjustments to classrooms that already existed, an already gym that was used regularly, and a foundation that passed inspection just a few years prior.

> We're a rural area. A lot of agriculture in this area, although agriculture—and I don't want to get on my soapbox about that—but agriculture has really taken a hit now the last three, four years, and doesn't look like it's going to get a whole lot better. So, I can understand people's feelings on that from that perspective. … What am I going to get, you know, am I gonna get, well, am I going to get any bang for my buck or not? But, so, you have, and, and there's a lot of—not a lot—there's people in this community that it, it's, it's the money. They're, they're, I guess I shouldn't say they're not concerned about the kids, but they are. But when it all, when it comes right down to it, it's the dollars.

As with any broad claim like this, however, there was great deal of nuance. For many voters, it was a cost grounded in a perception that taxes were already high enough, regardless of whether this was because of the school. This perception was grounded in *some* factual accuracy. Some no campaign volunteers simply divided the cost of the project by the number of households and pushed that number to people without taking into account the tiers of school aid and what projects could have qualified for energy improvement grants. Nevertheless, the Hackenden School District was expensive relative to other Wisconsin districts. Over the last five years, they hovered around the 90th percentile as defined by mill rate—until 2018-2019 when they dropped to "only" the 85th percentile, an average of about $12.08 nominally. Furthermore, the cost was being added to other costs that residents could not vote on and impacted them differently depending on which municipality they lived. Brian fielded a great deal of commentary about this.

> I think taxes played a big role in it. So, the county's getting a new jail. The city of Hackenden is building a new city garage and a [police station]. So, I think there were a lot of building projects that were going on. And, I think, so, that played a part. … So, I think, in some senses, money played a big role, I think, in people's minds. There's just a lot of capital improvement projects going on in the area that, because you pay county, you pay state, you pay local taxes, and, so, they were all going up. … I think there was a lot of, like I said, concern just about money-wise. Can people afford this?

Linda, a campaign volunteer, heard this a great deal in her work.

> … There was a new city garage building going on. So, you know, definitely the city was going to be hitting up the taxpayers. And just due to the way laws and things are written, the city did not have to go to referendum to do that. They could just, yeah, they could just increase your taxes to do it. It was within whatever guidelines they're allowed to do. So, yes, so at the same time that was happening, we decided to take, you know, the school district or the, the school board decided to have a second referendum about the school, which was not helpful. I think people were keenly aware of that. Everybody, everybody was just simply keenly aware of that.

Thus, the April referendum was suffering from a bit of project "competition" that Scott, the board president, said was not present for the November renovations ballot. Further, these projects did not affect all residents in the same way, despite being under the umbrella of one district. The district included the city and multiple surrounding townships. The costs of village's road maintenance did not fall onto the backs of city taxpayers, and the watermain fixes in Hackenden were not shouldered by residents in a neighboring township. Thus, not only was there a sense of relative competition, but the perception of relative cost competition differed within and among district residents. JoAnne and Scott jointly explained this.

> Because [the projects were] in the works on the November one, but nobody threw that at the public like they did for the April one. It was, like, and for city people like us, it's like, you know, you're talking the jail, 30 million. You're talking the police department was 2 million. And now they're talking 2 million for the main street city. And it's, like, that's going to be very devastating to city people. Because that's all $4 million that's just on the city itself, which is 1,100 households, so…

For Jordan, the writing was on the wall after their GSVP committee work, surveys, charettes, and interviews. It was hardly a surprise that people were not ready to pay for a new school when the tax tolerance thresholds only supported renovations, a finding she attempted to make clear to the board. For her, it was simple, "Are you fucking kidding me? I don't want to pay that much in taxes."

Concerns about cost were a highly effective way for the committee to push messages of physical plant quality. Vince bridges these connections.

> People are just, like, it's got to stop somewhere. And we all, we also knew that the city was going to build the new city garage and police station. They're also talking about a new fire department. And they don't have to, that doesn't have to go to referendum. They just say we're going to do it, and we're going to increase the taxes. And then the county's talking about a new, a new sheriff's office that would come down to the taxpayers. There's this huge main street road project that's going to happen. A lot of our other streets suck. We'll probably need, you know, a newer sewer plant or definitely an addition on that sewer plant because the city council's wanting to open up for development there. So, just, like, like, we're aware of, like, all these other projects and things that needed to be done, and I think a lot of people were like, you know, the school's got enough.

The sense that a new school was *needed*, as opposed to just *wanted*, did not develop in people's minds, especially minds framed by agriculture. Ned, who had been on the school board for multiple previous consultant structural evaluations, was persistent in his efforts to make sure people knew that the elementary building, all things considered, was in good shape. The parts that needed work, including the direst water and foundation issues, were covered by the renovations referendum that accounted for these costs. Another no-campaigner, Allen, was a quintessential small-town guy. His family lived in Hackenden for many, many generations. These generations all owned businesses on the main street in Hackenden. Everybody—and I mean everybody—in town knew Allen. Allen, like Ned, used to serve on the school board and

was involved in the 1994 building referendum. Unlike in 1994 when Allen was for the new school, Allen was now for the renovations because,

> We're getting a great gymnasium. We're getting a great school. We're getting a remodel. And there were… The problem with the cracking in the floor, they thought there was a problem. But we had architects look at it, and they said "That school is built better than any other buildings around here." And it was built back… So, even though, it was a crack, it wasn't as bad as they thought.

Linda, a volunteer with Allen, had a pure and succinct message. "I think we don't need a new school because we simply did not need to have a new school. I mean, we're getting so much. Our contractors still say that 11 [million dollars], I mean, I saw part of the design for the new [i.e. renovated] school. It's going to be beautiful." Cheryl was even more blunt in her description of the situation. She and her family have been in Hackenden since "the rocks were placed," Hugh pointed out. Cheryl, too, used to serve on the school board and was a trusted voice in the farming community. She very candidly contended, "That school isn't going to slide down the fucking hill, for fuck's sake." With a renovation—the renovation that was approved by voters in November—the school would be ready to last for another three to four generations.

For some in the farming community, a renovation was exactly the cure for the building's woes because that's "what farmers do." (Other farmers believed this was financially inefficient, a point I return to later.) Phil, a construction worker and former farmer, stated to me, "Let's, you know, it's, let's just fix it and be happy with it. We had some 'want and need' thing. … So, it's, like, you're just, you know, it was just the way it is. That's the way you think. That is the way I think. Old farmer mentality or something, I guess." Hillary, a relatively new community member, farmer, and mother of young children, clarified Phil's points, despite being interviewed separately.

> So, you know, I think about this a lot when I look at that school, and I go to, like, I took kids to a basketball tournament in [district], which their school is relatively new, so, you know, I, you know, you, you look at this stuff. And then you go into some of these state-of-the-art schools and think, "Is really all this necessary?" You know, I would say this. And I'm like, "Wow, they did this pretty well. These new additions plus some nice remodeling. Made it, made it look, look it impressive." At the same time, as tasteful, right? So, still a school. It's going to be functional. This is not the cathedral in downtown [city]. Or this is not the Capitol where we need to have all of these open windows. You know, that's what I, what I see when I go past the [nearby city], like, that atrium-type thing. … I mean, what? Yeah. So, yeah. And, you know, I would, I'm bringing, I'm probably bringing my, my growing up on a farm, you know, with this. You only need what you need. You don't need to maybe that ninth hour. And, you know, and if you do go farther, what are you going to sacrifice?

That is to say, Hillary, like Phil, believed the most authentic farmer thing to do was to get what the districted needed, do it affordably, and improve what was already possessed. There was no need to "buy" the $19.5 million school when the one "already bought" for $12 million would be just fine to serve the purpose for which it was created. Anything more was a waste, an anathema to a farmer.

The final campaign message related to cost centered on the new architectural firm the school board hired after firing Ryan & Sons. The board had a more comfortable relationship with this new architect; the community did not. There was widespread concern that the new architect was pushing for a new school only to make more money. To Vince, this was obvious.

> Well, I think it's true. Why wouldn't you? As a business. And, and I think it leads back to… I think it leads back to what you were… It's not a rumbling. It's a fact. Like, they were the ones publishing the brochures and everything that was going before the public in the [school newsletter], which is a school publication. They were writing the materials. They're getting reviewed by the school board, but the school board president was all in favor of this. And gave them the green light. And they're getting mailed to people in town, I mean, literally, this company was, like, creating the material, printing it, and mailing it to try to convince them to build a new school. So, it's not a rumbling. It's a fact. And, in the meetings, you know, "Well, yeah, you know, you'd be okay with it—the old school—but really… Monorail!" You know? … And I got… Ned and I both got into a confrontation with the [new firm]. [The firm representative], like, he was trying to

> scare the shit out of people, like, about the crack in the foundation and, like, "Well, blood's on your hands if the school falls down." Like, we're, like, the school's not falling down, you know? It was wild.

In addition, Vince and his fellow committee members did not believe a new school was a wise, long-term financial move for the community because people pocketing new school money were not people living in Hackenden. This, too, was related to the architect. Vince summed up this argument as follows.

> Like, follow the money, you know? And, like, none of that money stays in town. So, you're buying bricks, which are cheap, but, you know, all that money's getting sucked out of the town by architects, engineering firms. We don't have a firm in Hackenden that can build a school. So, that money is, like, all going out of the community. You know, whereas, if we pass an operational budget—which I would totally support—and it goes to you, the teacher, and it, you know, they're spending money in town and contributing to the tax base.

In other words, Vince and the committee members disagreed when new school supporters said that was the "best bang for the buck." Rather, the "best bang for the buck" was the continual and cyclical reinvestment of dollars in teachers' pockets who then spent at main street shops, restaurants, and museums. The costs of a new school could jeopardize the community's willingness to shoulder an operations referendum down the road. This was very alarming to Hillary, who said, "In the end, it was about people. It was about teachers my kids will have. It was, it was taking a person out of a job that lives in this community."

These campaign messages were effective because Hackenden existed in a fascinating insider-outsider coexistence environment. Phil described families as either being "move-ins" or "forevers," a nomenclature I copy. Hackenden was very similar to Lewes in the sense that if you were not born and raised there from a long line of generations, you were always a move-in and never a forever. The very first day I stepped foot into Hackenden, I met a man who repeatedly

described himself as a newcomer to the area. At first, I was hesitant to proceed with questions because I was not sure he would be a valid source of information. Nevertheless, later in our conversation, he made clear that he had been living in Hackenden for 42 years; he was a move-in.

Move-ins and forevers lived in an awkward symbiosis. The agricultural community appreciated the move-ins because many of the move-ins were responsible for buying and rejuvenating many homes and businesses in the district—buildings that otherwise would have fallen into disrepair. Many move-ins also owned hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, small shops, or historical sites that brought in a substantial amount of summertime tourist dollars. At the same time, move-ins appreciated the small-town, bucolic feeling that the farming community maintained and the recreational land the farmers helped preserve and cultivate. Ned, Linda, and Phil all explained that the move-ins sometimes had a greater appreciation for the physical history of the community because they were the ones buying and refurbishing the buildings and better understood the history of the infrastructure. For forevers, the old buildings were valuable but familiar; they simply were and have been forever a part of life.

Move-ins, however, were usually a great deal wealthier than forevers. This led to awkward and sometimes bitter disagreements between community members about the direction and priorities of the community. Theresa, the school administrator, recounted several stories she heard of disagreements becoming physical altercations in the 1970s deindustrialization period. Today, the two groups existed in a much more peaceful manner—but often in parallel. Theresa and other residents described circles of friends that either included move-ins or forevers, but, with the exception of some marriages, rarely included both. If the walls between the parallel existences came down, though, it was usually because of the school. Jordan, the GSVP member,

believed that the division in the town was a bit overblown, at least with people connected to the school. Move-ins and forevers shared teachers, basketball coaches, FFA events, theater seats, and all of the other activities that made up a school. These interactions sprung friendship and collegiality.

The referendum was a school issue that was able to align move-ins and forevers, one reason why the referendum failed by a 2-1 margin. The move-ins were dual property taxpayers because many of them occupied both homes and small businesses on the main street or surrounding area. These people appreciated and even moved to Hackenden because of the historical features of the community; the opportunity to preserve a building that could *become* historical galvanized them. Reinvesting money, time, and sweat equity into a building was, after all, precisely their existence in Hackenden. Even those move-ins who did not own businesses often owned centuries-old houses they remodeled and increased the property values of. The renovations were a way to express historical appreciation and property tax sensibility. Many forevers occupied large farms in the area. Like move-ins, they were sensitive to property taxes because of the amount of land they owned. Farms were places where tools, equipment, and buildings were fixed, not thrown away. Thus, the environment provided for tight, overlapping goals between the otherwise parallel constituencies.

The fourth and final predominant reason Hackenden voters chose to vote no was captured by the yard signs many residents placed in their front yards: “Support Education. Vote No.” For these voters, the best thing residents could do to further education in the Hackenden community was oppose the new school and “save” that money for operational needs. Allen, the unofficial MC of the community and former board member, was the strongest voice of this view.

> We’re all education… I’m past school board president. And we got together, and I said the taxes are high enough in this town. I said I want the quality education of

> the kids, and this remodel will do that. But, if you want to tack another six or eight million on that, that money you're going to need maybe in three years for continuation, like we needed to pass 1.1 million. In three or four or five years, you might need that money from the people of Hackenden to keep things going. But if you've already got it locked up in that [potential new] school… So, I said, as we all did—I think I helped write the letter—we have always been for education. We have voted for what is best for education. And we believe this is best for education, not to vote for the new school, but to vote for the remodel like we did, so we can have that extra money down the road if we need it for our education. Because if you tap it all now, and it passed that way. … We might need that money later on. But if you want to keep the school the way it is, we got to keep it going. We spent the money to build a new school. And I don't want to cut two teachers. I don't want to cut band. I don't want to cut this. And that's what's going to have to happen. … We're past school board members. We, we've been proponents of everything good for the school, and we believe this is best for the school—not a new school but to remodel. And make sure that money's there, so we can pay the teachers that are in it.

Put differently, the community had been through several operations referendums already, including when Allen was president. Allen and people who shared his views were fearful that the desire—or even ability—to check yes on a future referendum would crater because of the cost of the new school. If costs escalated to an unsustainable level, there was fear that the most costly and important part of a school's budget, the teachers, would need to be cut. Residents from quite varied backgrounds were concerned about this. Allen was a lifelong resident, near retirement, boisterous, and had adult children. Hillary, on the other hand, was new to the community—even by move-in standards—had young children, and did significantly more listening than talking.

> I was worried about infrastructure. So, like, yeah, that's great to have all the flashy things. But, if you have flashy things, and you have to make cuts, then, the first thing will be, will it be your teachers? And, so, I think people were worried about staff numbers and making sure we sustain staff, staff numbers. … That worriedness that, you know, I think if it was a different budget climate. Like, if we wouldn't have had, like, maybe some of the turmoil of, you know, the, the budget cuts that Walker ensued, UW-related but also our schools. And still kind of riding that out and about the time this referendum was coming through, if that was all different, I think it would have maybe, maybe it would have been a different… There would have been a different outcome. … Having to cut off staff

> because we had this great school? That was the, that was the deciding factor for me.

Tracy and Quinten, two current teachers, frequently heard this argument when they advocated for the new school. For many detractors, "education" was different than the "school." Hackenden residents in opposition to the new school supported "education" by preferring the three Ts: teachers, textbooks, and technology. This was where Linda fell, "For a, … for a *building*? One of the reasons we were so adamantly opposed to building a new school is because we genuinely always wanted money to pay teachers. And buy books. Do you see where I'm going?" [Emphasis by interviewee.] Ned, like many interviewees, spoke highly of teachers like Tracy and Quinten, and, in his mind, support for them overtook the building.

> The people love the kids here, and they think… They instinctively go in and vote yes, so we tried to take the position that voting no is actually more supportive of the kids because the school would be strapped for cash going down the road. And, you know, we've struggled with giving teachers raises over the years. How are we going to do that if we are building a brand-new building we don't need?

Voters carried this message into the voting booth because the campaign committee devoted some focus to the quality of Hackenden's schools. As I said earlier, the district, especially over the last ten years, was near the top of the state in terms of its state report card ratings. The consistency of these ratings was now an expectation of the district by its constituents, not merely a pleasant surprise. Certainly, there are many drawbacks to rating a school on a star system the way one would rate an Amazon package. Nevertheless, these star ratings are easy for people to understand. Natalie described it this way.

> We've had a five-star report card ranking. This is our fourth year in a row as a district from the DPI, so I think that has… For people who don't understand the education world, I mean, they see that. That's a very public thing. And they can take pride in it, especially when the school districts around us have, have not had that same ranking. So, I think that that has put a lot of pride into people.

This ease of understanding meant that the no campaign could create easy messaging: new building, less money, fewer teachers, fewer stars. This kind of messaging was also important for getting the elderly vote. Longtime residents deeply tied to the community wanted to express pride in where they lived, even if their kids were no longer enrolled in the K-12 system. Maintaining five-star ratings was one avenue to do this. Hugh, a new school supporter, witnessed the effect of this from the other side of the aisle.

> They're extremely proud of their ranking. You know, that's become a measure, you might say, that people look at. I think they're very proud of their teachers, and their kids, and the school district as a whole. And I think there's a fairly good support—even amongst the elderly that don't have kids in school—to support education. Because that's a voting bloc that's important to reach out to because they can say, "Why do I want this? It's not going to help me." You know, but they're fairly proud of that.

Jordan, the GSVP committee member, also heard this from her work on the committee and as someone who was a strong new school opponent.

> I think that if you were just asking the most basic general question, like, "Are you satisfied with the schools?" It would overwhelmingly, you'd get a yes. Very satisfied. I'm satisfied. I think if you were to start to pick apart the different elements that make up the school system, you might find some acrimonious feelings one way or the other when it comes to the school board or particular sports fields or whatever, but… And the flip side of that is, if you were to ask about the teachers or the staff, everyone would be over the moon. Like, everyone is so happy with the teachers that we're able to retain and the institutional knowledge that we have as a result of their experience. That's just, like, outstanding. So, I think that there's certain things that people would feel even more enthusiastic about, certain things that people would feel less. But, on the whole, I would say, very supportive, very happy, and we definitely heard that during our work.

Hillary was on the receiving end of the campaign's messages—messages that were extremely motivating in her and her husband's no votes. She was fearful that tying up money in a

new school could, or even would, result in later financial troubles that would hinder the district's ability to hire progressive educators, adapt play into her children's education, and maintain the district's rating—factors that were all vastly different than the community from which they moved.

> … The school, I think they do a lot of cool things. Or that things that are inquiry-based in a lot of new ways of teaching that I don't see, you know, in others', other schools. They are really invigorating and accepting the different ways that kids learn that other schools are not, or are slower to, adapt and adopt. And there are some schools that I, that just won't. And I think that's the schools that we came from. … Some people, like, I would talk to, like, would say, "Well, not everything's fun and games. I hope, you know, they need to learn more. They need to, you know," and I just listen. I don't really comment. But I'm, like, you know, they will be learning more than you think that they are.

Linda, whose kids were older, pushed messages of participation opportunities. She and her husband moved and traveled frequently for work, which allowed them to experience quite a few different districts. They knew that their children would never have the same AP opportunities that a child in a bigger district may access, but, for them, this was a worthwhile tradeoff because their children did not have to "specialize" in one activity.

> I feel like the schools are excellent. We've always been pleased. I feel like they're small. I know [our children] would have gotten greater opportunities had we stayed in the [major US city] area in high school in terms of, like, baccalaureate programs that they had in their high schools and things like that, the opportunity that—in the high school—they could get in advanced placement classes. You didn't have to go online and, you know. There was just all of that, but I never really, I never really set… thought that that was negative in the sense that there were other positives here. Like in Hackenden, every kid gets to be in the musical and Hackenden, you get to run track whether you're good or not. In Hackenden, you know, in your… if you're in the band, you know, you get a solo. In Hackenden, you just get to participate in community events too.

These messages were effective because of the general environment of extreme support for the school system. If Lewes was defined by their secession from Glassbridge, Hackenden was

defined by their unwavering loyalty to the school district. This actually made the no campaign's job difficult. They had to buck what Rose, Ned, and others described as a default yes vote. Rose, the mother of three middle school kids, said, "[Voters] think we always have to vote yes to support our schools, no matter what." Scott experienced this in his position as the board president, as did Theresa in her position as a building principal. Other, neighboring school leaders approached these two looking for ways to emulate the support they had been able to garner.

> We've always been, we've always been at the forefront. It was always everybody else looking at us and it's like, "How does Hackenden do it? They're a small school district, and they have, have anything and everything." And we do. Because our, this community has always supported education. – Scott

> … This is a great district. In fact, I had someone who was visiting Hackenden and is an educator, but someone I knew from another community, and the person in the shop says, well, they just got chatting about education. She's like, "Oh, you gotta, these schools are great." And, I mean, just offered that without even being asked. So, yeah, and just, yeah, a lot of support for the, for the schools. They seem to rally around the schools. I'm almost to a point where I have to, sometimes I'll have, well, if I write an article for the local paper, say, we do have some work we need to do. Because they tout, like, the five-star rating. … But that is something that a lot of, the vast majority of the community can agree upon is supporting the schools here. That's just how it's been. When I came and, you know, they just seemed to take a lot of pride in that. – Theresa

Phil, a current board member, shared some of Theresa's concerns in that it was, at times, difficult to get a complete picture of the district's position to voters who were so quick to vote yes. This was a problem in the November renovations election.

> It had the school, right? So, they were saying yes. "We're pro-school. We're going to vote for, for this." But what are you really voting for? They, we had staff members that didn't know what we were voting for. After the first election, there were staff members coming up to administrators and saying, "When are we starting the new school?" After the first election. There was no new school.

The impetus for the overwhelming school support was difficult to identify. For many residents, it was a way of life, "the way it's always been." According to Matthew, the support was a positive feedback loop that began as the district's ratings began to improve about ten years ago. I do not know what, exactly, the district implemented or changed in order to improve their achievement; that was outside the purview of my research. However, I ascertained that ratings improved, a communications-focused administrator was hired, and the district's communication-focused strategic plan were instituted approximately the same time. Thus, not only did ratings improve, but people became better aware of the ratings improvements.

According to Allen, people supported the school because they felt heard by the school, which was not an altogether different point than Matthew's. Allen was the consummate community and district cheerleader. While he was against the new school, he was not necessarily opposed to having the new school election because then the issue could be closed once and for all. "We wanted to make sure we got what the people wanted—remodel at this much or new school at this much. We got our answer. You're pissed. You're pissed. Cost a little money. But we were confident now that we made the right decision based on what the people said. And I think that's what [the board] wanted."

Allen was the board president during very tumultuous financial times in the district. He made a great deal of effort to ensure that people were heard, even if the issues seemed small to a person unfamiliar with small-town politics. He described a passionate community debate about where to hold homecoming ceremonies after the "new" high school was built in the 1990s. He devoted precious monthly board meeting time for people to express their thoughts because he knew that would increase the feelings of buy-in from district constituents. For Allen, these types of behaviors instilled support. It was hard not to feel this, even as an outsider. I did not have to

follow a formal process to speak at a board meeting even though I did not live there. Scott simply went around the room at the beginning of the meeting and asked audience members if they had any thoughts or anything they would like to share. Time was only limited if a great deal of people wanted to do this, and those limits were flexible.

Support was also created by the school acting as a meeting place. As I explained earlier, Jordan, a move-in, did not feel the extent of insider-outsider division as others in the community did, a perception she attributed to having a child in the district. Her networks and social circles were expanded by meeting other parents of very young children, whether it be watching each other's children in a bind or advocating for the hire of an additional pre-K teacher together. For a person like Hillary, another move-in, these interactions occurred at middle school basketball games and science fairs. For someone like Phil, a forever, he met move-ins as a coach and attending basketball games and wrestling matches. Phil, Hillary, Jordan, Allen, and Matthew described the schools as a place where the community "gets together." Nobody in Hackenden was better off by a worse school system. This common self-interest was a powerful binding agent, as spelled out in a final point from Heather, a current district employee.

> So, for as long as I've been here, and, you know, the people that I've worked with, the people that my kids have grown up with, I feel that everybody has given in some way, shape, or form to the community and the school. All of the kids that, if you interview a student from Hackenden, they are always first to say that the community is always behind them and supports them. … I think all people are very important vested in what happens in Hackenden. And are just trying to do what's best in their minds, to do what's best, you know, in order to keep our small community viable.

I now turn my attention to Hackenden's campaign committee, just as I did above with Lewes's. Hackenden's committee did not contrast Lewes's to any notable degree. Like Lewes, the members of the Hackenden committee believed they were doing what was best to support

education in their community. However, instead of giving residents "a reason to vote yes," as CC remarked regarding Lewes, the committee provided reasons to vote no. Further, the committee provided "information" that answered the same three questions—where is the referendum money going, why is that project needed, and why is that project needed now—just from an opposing perspective. In this way, the committee attempted to clearly make people aware of where the money was going, why that project was *not* needed, and why that project was *not* needed now. Otherwise, the purpose of the committee was no different than Lewes: use relatively influential people to highlight the community's opportunities for input, demonstrate the district's needs, and tailor campaign messaging. The district's roles were also no different: generate an avenue to community input, build school finance understanding, create a long-term story of and for the district, demonstrate the district's needs, and begin the referendum process early enough to allow the aforementioned to materialize.

Table 34

Referendum Roles for Campaign Committee and District (Hackenden)

Key questions voters need answered	1. Where is the referendum money going? 2. Why is (isn't) that project needed? 3. Why is (isn't) that project needed now?
Responsibilities assumed by the campaign committee	Made clear the community's avenues for input Demonstrated the district's needs Tailored information to particular voters or sets of voters

Table 34 (continued)

Responsibilities assumed by the district	Generated the avenue for community input
	Built basic school finance understandings
	Created long-term story of and for the district
	Demonstrated the district's needs
	Began process early enough to allow other responsibilities to occur

"Information," defined as the answers to the three questions, was powerful because people needed to redefine what support meant for the school, at least according to the committee. "Success" and "results" were relative to the wishes of the committee; in this case, referendum failure. Matthew was a veteran of several referendums across multiple school districts. Information had always been a powerful tool for him. "[Board members] are the people, they are the community, they're just like anybody else—they're just in a more prominent position to get better information. And the better information, I do believe, leads to better results. I think people inherently want to do good. And when they're provided with the facts and are provided with the information, they will make a better decision …" Allen, who worked with Matthew, echoed his comments.

> I'm not on the school board. I'll read as much as I can. But there were many times I'd go up to talk to the superintendent. Or I would talk to the school board president or my friend who had been on the school board. "Tell me what's the school, what's the reason behind this?" And he would tell me. "Why does this guy want this, and why does this guy not want it?" And they would tell me. And then I would ask him, "What do you think?" And he'd say what he'd think. So, then I'd mull it over in my head, and I would think what would I do when I was on there. So, I think the ones… I think [district residents] are swayed. But they're not… they're swayed because they want the information. Right away, I'm thinking, "We don't need that remodel up there." And then, when I go to talk to them, they go, "Well, okay, the classrooms are this and that. And we don't have this." "Ope, I

> guess you're right. I didn't realize that." So, if they want to be swayed or they want to know, they will—the yeses and the nos.

The committee was aided by the fact that the referendum concept was not difficult for voters to understand—do you want a new elementary school by the high school? This was not a complex or esoteric topic couched in a referendum question with many clauses for different projects. The question itself was simple. Instead, the committee needed to explain why the referendum was happening again. This was challenging for the campaign to do because of the default support I described earlier. Jordan recalled,

> Because I think there's a lot of people like me who would normally just vote yes to anything the school board asked for or the school district asked for. I'm, like, yes, take all my money. Take it for the schools and give it to the school. It's fine. Take it. But I voted no on a referendum for the first time. And there were people who, who, who needed to hear what was happening for that one. I mean, that's such a strange situation. But there are people that would have voted yes if it was not for the no committee educating them on what was happening. Because, I mean, it's all very confusing for someone who's not, like, steeped in this, they're like, "Another referendum?"

The challenge, however, turned into a campaign opportunity because it allowed them to frame the additional referendum as something that was unneeded: we are having another referendum because the board did not listen to you the first time around; we are having another referendum because the board wanted their egos fluffed; we are having another referendum because the board did not understand the survey; etc. The committee recognized that the elementary school needed work, but the renovations referendum was enough to cover this. Frank, the 42-year "newcomer" believed that the school board should have been more aware of the problems of the school if it needed to be rebuilt, and they needed to extend that awareness to the community if it were so important that a referendum would be needed. The board did not do themselves any favors by sending contradictory messages that the school was in such good shape

that someone would quickly buy it while, at the same time, it was in such bad shape that it needed to be abandoned for new.

If constituents felt the elementary school was beyond saving, the survey would have demonstrated these assessments. The survey did not, and the committee used this to accomplish this messaging. Before he departed, Matthew stressed to the board that the "process, starting from the beginning, was really, really calculated. We took about three months of setup and prep, three months of surveying, and then three months of committee work to make a final recommendation to the board. It couldn't have been a more inclusive and comprehensive project." The committee, including Jordan and former board member Ned, reminded both the board and the community that the nearly decade-old strategic plan specifically stated that the board needed to continue to recognize the role of input and surveys, just as when Allen had been the president.

Scott, the board president, believed he was increasing the opportunity to create input by holding a second referendum. "And that's why we went to referendum the second time. Everybody was like, 'Oh, you guys are trying to ram a new school down our throat.' And I was like, 'No. We're not. The public was never asked. And they should have been asked.'" If this was his intention, it backfired, for many Hackenden residents believed plenty of input was derived from over six months of GSVP work and, ultimately, the most direct form of democracy, a referendum. Paige, a board member, and Theresa, a building principal, both described the power and sufficiency of the first referendum input.

> … I think the fascinating thing is that, after that referendum passed, the huge gripe was, "Why didn't we, why didn't we get to vote for a new school?" And the answer is in that survey. And it was, what, an 18 percent response? Maybe under, you know, under 400 people responded. But the questions asked were, "Would you favor a new school over, over a remodel?" And the other question was, "How much of a tax hike would you tolerate?" And, based on those data points, the

> board decided that a new-school referendum would not pass. So, we decided to not put the new school on the referendum. Because you can't put new-school versus old-school. You can't do that. It's yes or no. So, we decided to put the remodel at, you know, 18, at $8 million less of a price tag on the, on the referendum because the data from that small survey suggested it would pass. And, and, and data that, in fact, was rejected out of hand by a handful of organizers, you know. So, I thought that was a fascinating predictor that turned out to be prophetic. – Paige

> The survey was what informed us that there was not support for a new school and that there was support for a renovation. And when I was talking to [architectural firm rep], he's like, 'These surveys are accurate within, like, three percent.' … And that's kinda how it followed. – Theresa

The committee also made light of the argument that, not only had a survey and referendum been ignored, the firm to which the community's answers were given was fired, and the replacement firm did not conduct a survey. For Jordan, this was a mixture of resignation and satisfaction, as she told me, "That's why I was, like, to a certain extent, 'Fine. Have the vote. Have the vote. Like, I know what's going to happen.' And our numbers were very accurate for both."

For the committee, the space needs were being resolved by the additions and renovations, the foundation issues were being taken care of rerouting water flows from asphalt bus entrances, and ADA codes were being met. For historical preservationists and penny-pinching farmers, this satisfied need without delving into want, a point Theresa stressed. The committee effectively blocked the idea that the new school was "something of value," a threshold Paige argued was needed for a yes vote—a threshold met in November.

> But what I can say is, is whether it's accurate or not, my, my general sense is, when the school district needs help, the community will step up. So, the key there is, you have to convince the community that the school needs help. You know, that this is something that is worth the money. The community will not write the school district a blank check, you know. But if you can convince the community that what's passing in this referendum is something that's needed, something

> that's of value that is worth the money that's being asked, and I think if you make a reasonable argument for it, I think, by and large, it'll pass in this town. I wouldn't say it'll pass by an overwhelming margin, but it'll probably pass.

The committee also excelled at tailoring their messaging for various groups of constituents in the district. Rose, a younger mother of three middle school kids, and Vince, the member of the long-time family, were active in the community and made efforts to ensure that there were reasons for many groups to choose no. In Rose's words, "Like, pick a reason." For the "sports dads," as Brian tagged them, there were upgraded wresting facilities at the high school and a renovated gym at the elementary school. For the historical preservationists, there was the opportunity to elongate the life of another community institution and not bust the cultural norm that people from Hackenden "don't want toilets that have never been shit on." For the financially fragile farming community, there was a way to fix the school where their kids learned without pushing them into uncomfortable taxation territory. For the residents who saw competition in other districts and municipalities, there was the argument that Hackenden was already taxed at a relatively high rate. For the security-minded folks, upgraded doors, windows, and entrances were already in progress at the elementary school. For people concerned about bullying, the campuses would remain separate. For community members worried about the district's future education quality, there was the point made that renovations left room for future operations referendums. For the residents more disconnected from the school, it left room for the city and townships to complete their needed projects as well. All told, these arguments left new school supporters with few convincing arguments other than, "It'll be new."

The new school supporters were also left with very few influential stakeholders on their side. This, I think, was reflected by the referendum's landslide failure. I asked most Hackenden interviewees whether they believed move-ins and forevers sorted themselves into opponents and

supporters. This was not the case. The no committee included wealthy move-ins who had previously held positions as attorneys, retired tech professionals, yoga instructors, real estate brokers, main street businessowners, agricultural lending specialists, farmers, and non-profit leaders. The no committee was also aided by prominent forevers the farm bloc. These players did not formally participate in committee organizing, but they did lend their names to the no campaign, signed letters opposing new construction in letters to the editor, and offered to put a bug in the ear of their fellow farmers at co-op meetings. These folks did not always agree among themselves in terms of their opposition roots. The farmers approached the new school issue as being far, far too expensive for a group that was otherwise quite financially conservative. Many of the wealthy newcomers approached the new school as a waste of money that could otherwise support a large contingent of local public employees who would support the community. Like any narrowly focused but big-tent campaign, the means took a backseat to the ends. These blocs coalesced around a no vote despite their disagreements regarding why that was best.

The district also had an official role to play in the referendum campaign, even if it did not seem to mesh with the no campaign. Nevertheless, the no campaign could use official actions from the district as a means to make their points. The district, after all, cannot advocate for a vote. Matthew and the board created an official, board-sanctioned conduit that provided community wishes to the board via the GSVP, a conduit that dovetailed with the district's long-term strategic plan. The district held well-attended community forums at which people clarified the impact to their taxes, listened to the board's perspective on why the referendum was needed, and the scope of the work.

Three mailings were sent out by the district in the weeks preceding the November vote. Because of residents' default support, this led to Natalie's feeling that she was talking into a

vacuum prior to the first referendum. The district followed the exact same process for the second referendum, a process they felt was appropriate for providing financial information without tipping into advocacy. This failed for all of the reasons described above, but it is important to note that many, many district residents did not feel any vitriol or anger toward teachers, principals, or administrators. Instead, angry residents largely lent sympathy to these officials who they believed were carrying out the demands of the majority of the board—the body at which genuine anger was directed. "I don't think there was any venom addressed toward teachers or, you know, principals. Or anybody like that," Linda pointed out.

The district was also very successful in articulating the long-term "story" of the district, a path Lewes was just starting down. This, too, was in coordination with the communications portion of the strategic plan. The district's communications-focused administrator, Natalie, pointed out that she had never encountered another district comparable to Hackenden's size that had a person doing what she concentrated on. Over time, Hackenden created a newspaper specific to the school that profiled teachers and students, reviewed basketball games, highlighted the district's literacy successes, explained future fundraisers, and many other things. The newspaper was in its fifth year by the time the first referendum was held, an accomplishment Natalie stressed.

> … We really got out in front of… I don't even know how to say it, but my position was created in 2014. And it really was around the strategic plan saying that we needed more transparency and trust from the school district. And, therefore, I think, because we've been telling our story so well to the public for the last, you know, five, six years now, that really helped build trust with what the district was doing, you know, how we were doing it, and things along those lines that I think that was a big proponent of passing the referendum. … I tell people this in my line of work, like, *if you're starting a communication plan just for the referendum, it's too late. You have to do it long before and build that trust and that relationship. I think you also have to show that there's a real need for the money.* There's a lot of misconceptions around. First of all, school finance is a beast to try to even get people to understand. So, you have to break that down

> into, you know, a level that's digestible for people. But then you really have to show them a need, whether it's the operations referendum or a building referendum, that we're not just doing this to, you know, take more money from you, especially in a district like ours, where our mill rate is very high to begin with compared to others. So, I think those two things are big. [Emphasis by me.]

Natalie explained to a peer from Minnesota at a conference her disbelief regarding the relative ease of her work for the first referendum.

> And I said, "Yeah, you know, I don't really know how that happened." And he said, "Well, it happened because you've been telling your story forever. People understood the need in your district. They trusted the school district." He's like, "If I know what's going on in your district and I'm living in Minnesota, people in your community probably know what's going on in your district." So, I thought that was kind of telling.

Matthew, who hired Natalie, corroborated her take in a lengthy section of his interview.

> … Probably to this date [Hackenden] is still the only school district under 800 kids that has a dedicated communications director in [Natalie], which was put in specifically to start telling our story and, and sharing our accomplishments little by little, how we were growing, and also creating opportunities for awareness and needs about emerging things like referendum. … It's more about the story. It's less about the money. I agree with that. I inherited the [current district] position where they just came off of some failed referendums. One of them was for a large fieldhouse, and people didn't understand the need. And, so, the first thing I said is they didn't, they didn't have the story. You know, not literally the words, but the idea is they didn't, they didn't present the, the rationale well enough for people understand the need. There was confusion there. Like, how can you have a declining enrollment but need, need a large facility? The "great conversation" is telling your story about the school so that when you go to referendum, they already know the need. You're not trying to get it in the window from when the board says yes in December to the April or November referendum and you're trying to cram three years of problems and challenges into this little finite three- to nine-month window. Because, first of all, people can't, can't gurgitate take all of that in that compressed time. But they also then don't see the need because, "Why now? Why haven't I heard about this for three years? Now all of a sudden have this crisis, and you want us to vote yes with our pocketbooks?" I think it's more of an emotional… it's almost like an impulsive purchase for people rather than this, "I've been thinking about this for a long time, and I feel like I'm going to buy this gift." So, I think the telling the story can't be overemphasized.

Put differently, the long-term storytelling of the district increases constituents' awareness of the problem so that they better understand what is coming down the pike. When a referendum is approaching, the district can hand the baton off to a potential committee that can advocate specifically for what the district has been articulating for years. Additionally, the district can educate people on intricacies of school finance that are otherwise lost on non-school professionals. Matthew described efforts Hackenden made in making people aware of revenue caps and the capital expenses of the school. The newspaper could explain what a revenue cap was, what the district's outstanding capital budget needs were, and the translation of those costs into staff and teacher positions that were so beloved by the community. For Scott, this was an opportunity to point out to people that final state aid was not finalized early in the fiscal year if the budget was delayed. This meant the district had to push out approximate mill rate figures that changed. Fortunately, according to Hugh, the average resident knew about Governor Evers's plan to boost state aid. This could be printed in the school's newspaper. The committee, meanwhile, built on the district's communications foundation, a circumstance Linda took advantage of to explain the costs of the voucher program to voters and the feeling that they were being "taxed twice."

Like Lewes, Hackenden's campaign committee was not using high tech methods of targeted advertising, splashy TV productions, or expensive ad buys. And, again, like Lewes, the campaign's messaging systems were so basic one might be surprised they work. The campaign went door-to-door to explain face-to-face why they did not support the referendum; wrote letter to the editor in the local newspaper; started a Facebook page to create posts that were otherwise stated in person door-to-door; bought a single radio advertisement shortly before the election; agreed to talk to people they knew about their convictions; and purchased yard signs for

referendum opponents. I asked interviewees if they thought one particular messaging route was more effective than another. Based on the range of answers, apparently not. Some were fervent in their beliefs that yard signs were the most impactful because they were a clear and visual depiction of the number of opponents around town. For others, it was the letters to the editor because they were a condensed way to list large groups of opponents together in a medium that they knew many age groups still read.

Despite the efforts of the committee, some residents supported the construction of the new school. There were three predominant reasons they did so: good money after bad; athletics; and one-campus efficiencies. By far, the most common reason a yes voter supported the new school was the argument that anything else would be throwing good money after bad. Interestingly, this was the opinion of the other side of the farm bloc. Heather, the school employee and farmer, was able to speak on their behalf. From her perspective, the most fiscally responsible thing a farmer—and, therefore, their school—could do was spend the least amount of money possible to get what was needed. This put two farming blocs at loggerheads: those that believed that a renovated old building was still an old building and those that believed that a renovated old building solved issues that made it like new. Further, both farm groups included people in construction- and contracting-related fields who had done work on nearby old buildings before. Heather and her allies believed that an older school would not only need this renovation but additional renovations down the road simply because of the age of the building. Thus, this *particular* renovations price tag might be lower than a new school, but, cumulatively, the price tag for continued renovations would be bigger. Heather stated,

> So, we operate a large amount of crop ground, high taxes. … So, I think from the circle that I find myself in, a lot of the farm community was more focused on the new school and maybe headed that direction. For you to spend money, which we are—we're voting either for renovating the old school, you're going to put that

> much money into the old school or put even more money into a new school. In your farming operation, would you put money into fixing an old piece of equipment? Or would you invest a little bit more and have something new that you know is going to last a lot longer?

Undoubtedly, this perspective required speculation about what could go wrong in a renovated school or what might be uncovered during renovations. Ed, the extremely fiscally conservative board member, chose not to be interviewed by me. However, fellow community members conveyed that he agreed with Heather. He was opposed to spending in general, but, if the community was going to spend, spend the least amount as possible. Some of the fuel for this future cost speculation may have been driven by Ryan & Sons increased cost estimation for foundation repairs very early on and the fact that they did not present a complete package price tag right away. To paraphrase, fiscally concerned board members at board meetings would say, "If the renovations price went up once, how do we know it won't go up again? How do we know the foundation alone won't eat up all of our referendum budget?"

To be clear, it could be true that some board members had ulterior motives that were not uncovered or readily admitted to me, an unfamiliar outsider. It may be true that Ed and Scott did not think any money should be spent, that they were saboteurs, that they loved controversy and not solutions, or that they wanted the money later to cement their legacy. Many Hackenden residents, including the teachers who supported the new school, believed this to be the case. Scott agreed to be interviewed by me with a co-interviewee. Scott did not vote for the renovations referendum to appear on the ballot and explicitly stated he would not support it. He did not reveal too many cards to me except the following.

> And I really didn't think [the November renovations] would pass. Because, frankly, twelve and a half million dollars on to a school that's sittin' in a hole? It's really stupid, but that's what the public voted for, so that's what we're doing. And I was, I was opposed to that. And, frankly, I was opposed to the new school. But I

> voted for the new school in April because, if we're going to spend $12 million, literally, in a hole, that is as problem. Why not spend the extra five or six million and have brand new? … So, we're going to put the addition on, which is the gym and library, and then we're going to move all the kids into those areas temporary while they're fixing the problem area, and I'm like, "Okay, I'm overruled." So, that's… You live with it. But it's a mistake because you start with the addition, and what if that goes over budget? They have gotten… I mean, I've been on 18 years, so it's like, I've, I've been around for a while [to see this happen].

Hugh was a move-in but a longtime and very well-respected member of the Hackenden community. He held a great deal of sway over the entire community. He was the only board member that was on the record as never wavering from his support for a new school. He, too, believed that the construction firms were going to find additional issues that would suck up most of the referendum money.

> But, anyway, to make a long story short, there was a lot of things that had to be done to that elementary school that everybody just sort of ignored—including the original architect and the people that were promoting it. So, we… And then also the financial thing is, you know, interest rate's extremely low. And we could have, we had both sets of architects, the old and—the one we fired—and the new one say they could build us a brand new elementary school for 14.5, but we weren't allowed to tell the public that because you have to put down by the state law, what it is complete, meaning furnishings, everything. We would have used old furniture and things like that. We would basically, for about 2 million more—I know that, you know, 11.9 versus 13.9—had a brand-new building with more parking. We would have had an after-school facility for kids that live out in the country. I mean, just so many things. But the money scared people off. And then everybody starts talking about, "Well, if we get into that [new school] project, what's going to be the problem up there with digging holes?" And that. But all, both firms said there isn't the issues [with the proposed site]. We know there's not the issue with the mine shafts up there. So, it was a done deal.

The second reason people voted yes was the opportunity to have expanded gym space. Paige reiterated what he heard from this contingent.

> I think that from an athletic booster, athletic parents' standpoint, I think it made a lot more sense. You would have everyone on one campus, which means you could hold larger sporting events. You know, you could host large basketball tournaments, large wrestling tournaments, large volleyball tournaments, which

> would make Hackenden more of a hub for youth sports rather than having to travel everywhere because, you know, youth sports is a traveling commitment.

These supporters argued that an expanded athletics facility could host significant tournaments and WIAA events, and those events could turn into money-making opportunities for the district. This was hotly debated, but the belief stood. Allen did not decide whether he believed it to be true or not, but he delineated the thought.

> [The head of our athletic boosters] said, "I tell you what, make that gym bigger. Make it bigger than what you said you're going to do." And maybe it was another $100,000. "But, if you make it this big, we'll be big enough to host regional basketball games. It'll be big enough to hold regional or sectional volleyball matches. Put that extra gym on there. You do that, we'll guarantee in 10 years, we'll have $100,000 from…" Or whatever number it was. We had basketball tournaments and stuff up there. And we have three gymnasiums go this way. And then, of course, the main one was open here. And at the same time, you could have a freshman game, basketball, behind the curtain playing while the JV is playing. And, then ,you have the varsity game. And then when the kids come to play in these tournaments, we have at least three or four gyms where we can have a sixth-grade tournament, fifth-grade tournament. And that brings a lot of people to town.

Hugh did not focus on the money-making opportunity but instead concentrated on the school—and athletics in particular—acting as a community binding agent.

> Athletics, as you probably realize in a small town, is a big deal. And it unites the community. It's a position of pride. You know, you, you, may have three kids that go to Harvard, but they're still more interested in what happened to, you know, the football team and the basketball team, which I understand. So, you gotta, what I said to [name], we need to create a culture of student-athletes. And our athlete-students. And I'm all for that because, you know, body and mind is extremely important to keep both healthy and peak performance …

For Jordan and Vince, this was a real frustration. Vince believed that November felt education-related, whereas April felt basketball-related. Jordan expounded on this.

> The people that would have been going in for a yes were interested in having the school closer to the high school, which they believed—I think incorrectly—that

> there would have been more funds to invest in sports infrastructure. It was all about getting more sports infrastructure, better parking lots for the football field, you know, combined sports facilities of some kind. The only people I ever heard that were yeses on the new school or yeses on the idea of a new referendum were all about basketball courts, whatever. … And then the yeses were like, "Oh, we can get more basketball courts out of this deal!" … [They were] *so* focused on sports. *I can't even tell you*. [Emphasis by interviewee.]

The final reason people voted yes was one-campus efficiencies. In some ways, this was related to athletics. All student-athletes could complete their practices by 5:30p and be home by 6:00p because there would be enough gym space for all of them. Other voters motivated by one-campus efficiencies believed that the district could save money on internet infrastructure, fewer custodial staff, additional parking, fewer bus needs, lower utility costs.

Like Lewes, I am unsure whether there was any argument the no committee could have made that would have turned the tide for the 32 percent of voters who ultimately supported the referendum. This was particularly true for the farmers who believed a new school was the most financially sound route for the district. The hunt for fiscal sensibility was a deeply, deeply engrained agricultural tradition among these farmers, and, based on the data I collected, they were unwilling to believe that renovations would produce anything but an old building with some updates—lipstick on a pig. Many of these same farmers self-identified or were identified by community members as deeply conservative. However, I am not sure that this type of political affiliation had an effect on the deviating referendums in either Lewes or Hackenden. I take up the role of politics next, this section's final piece.

The role of politics.

I evaluate the role of politics in Lewes and Hackenden together because the findings were largely the same. I interviewed 53 people for this work, and 53 people believed that a person's political affiliation was not an important factor in their voting decision. Over and over,

interviewees had similar tones for me. “Politics is pushed aside because of the needs of the school.” “I do think a lot of times [political affiliation] plays into [elections]. But I wouldn’t, I don’t, I don’t think it holds as much water as you think when it comes to a school referendum.” “Political party takes a backseat.” “I don’t think that comes to mind.” “Results kind of point this out that it doesn’t really matter, right?” “I don’t care if I have an R or a D by my name. I’m not going by this or that.” “No. They’re not bringing that into this. No. No.” “I’ve never connected it.”

These seemingly definitive statements, however, are couched in nuance and subtlety. At no point in any interviewee did I hear a person explain that they voted for the referendum *because* they leaned liberal or conservative. None of the 10 predominant reasons voters checked yes or no included an overtly political element. With that in mind, this section has two goals. The first is to explain that political void, to give context on why political affiliation did not appear to be a factor based on the data I collected. Second, I explain how political ideology *may* have played a role despite not being at the forefront of voters’ minds.

I believe school identity engulfed and overtook ideological tendencies when voters entered the voting booth. I found that people checked yes or no on their ballots thinking, “How should I vote in this election as a Lewes Grizzly or Hackenden Mountaineer who otherwise has liberal or conservative tendencies?” not “How should I vote in this election as a conservative or liberal who lives in the Hackenden or Lewes School District?” Put differently, political party preferences were not a strong predictor of public school district referendums in Lewes and Hackenden because liberals and conservatives in Lewes and Hackenden largely agreed on their beliefs regarding funding for their local school district. There was little room for party “activation” to occur.

Party affiliation was not activated because voters did not see their local schools through a partisan lens. Interviewees had various perceptions regarding the level at which politics began to play a role, but no interviewee believed this was the school. For JoAnne, the farmer in Hackenden, this was state races like governor and the legislature. For Jordan, the Hackenden GSVP member, this began at judgeships and Assemblypersons. Lawrence, the media employee in Lewes, agreed that politics did not have a role to play until the state level. It was not hard for residents to see these upper offices through politics. Candidates are running with Ds and Rs next to their names. Political parties make endorsements, send literature, and recommend policies, all with a branded stamp. Political parties were not making endorsements in school referendums and, indeed, were not at all involved in school referendums. There was no signal to voters that this *should* be a political issue. In addition, the people making referendum decisions, i.e. the school board and administrators, were local people elected in nonpartisan elections. A hyperlocal elected official was someone you could get to know as a person, complete with individualities and human complexities. Residents and local officials knew where they agreed, where they disagreed, and where they could get over their disagreements. On the other hand, residents most likely did not personally know their state and federal representatives and executives. One could, though, ascertain a great deal about that person and their beliefs with the D or R next to them on a ballot.

Furthermore, people did not seem to *want* partisan cues. Jordan, the Hackenden GSVP member, commented,

> People will say, "Oh, education system in America is terrible, you know, what are we going to do, blah, blah, blah?" And then asked, "How do you feel about your school district?" they'll overwhelmingly say, "I love my school district!" You know, but if everybody says I love my school district, then, right? So, I think there's a lot of that at play. I don't think that it yet as, as of yet bleeds that far—the political divide. I think it, I think in my experience it ends at, like, judgeships

> or our congressional representative to the state, assembly representative. Like, even for school board members, I think you can kind of decipher. And but it's, it's all a guess. You know, because you don't really know—especially if someone's new. And it's so individual by that point. When you're voting on your, on your city council representative, it's such an individual, you know that person.

Larry, the man who lived within the same mile for all 78 years of his life, stated, "I don't think [residents] should be thinking about any particular party—not when you come to a school referendum. It shouldn't be. Politics shouldn't have anything to do with it. … I don't think it did." Residents in both communities framed state and federal politicians as far away, chest-puffing, run-of-the-mill politicians. For them, these players' impact on their day-to-day lives was on the fringe—a common view of local versus federal government. What's more, residents described themselves as people who could more easily cast aside personal ambitions and instead focus on "what's right and wrong" and "focus on the needs of the community." Gene and Dot, the Lewes businessowners interviewed together, agreed that "at some point, you gotta separate [politics] from what's right and what's wrong. What does the town really need versus what some political party is trying to tell you what they need. I feel that way about a lot of things." Duke, a current school board member, contrasted the way people vote in upper-ballot elections with school referendums. "[Politics] melts away, and [voters] just, they think responsibly. I wish all government was that way."

One way to do what was "right," according to Gene and Dot, was to think of kids before considering politics—a tenet upon which both communities agreed. It was morally wrong to put politics before the interests of the communities' children. According to Allen, the Hackenden MC, no resident had an interest in seeing the educational system flounder, "By golly, I'm living in a town where I want my kids to have a good education." Rose argued that people "around here know that if the school succeeds, it's good for the city. And they'll support it." This is good for

the city because residents move back and bring with them economic vitality. Cheryl, the Hackenden woman from a centuries-old farming family, witnessed over time the difference in the types of graduates Hackenden was producing. When she graduated, people entered farming or manufacturing jobs. Now, she said, she saw students entering business, medicine, and law fields, returning to their community, revitalizing buildings, and supporting the local tax base. Toni, a lifelong American Indian resident in Lewes, believed this right-wrong moral connection was easy for people to make because it,

> impacted their own pocket, their own homesteads. So, you may be Republican, that's your thought, but, once it affects your family life, your family household, you think with your family first before you do your political lines. … When it comes to family, there are no party lines. It's what's best for the family. And I think Lewes is a family-oriented community.

By opposing a school referendum, a voter was damaging their own family's ability to succeed and present a better future for their children. And, because family is community-wide, there was damage to the "family" of the town—a strong taboo in family-oriented places like Hackenden and Lewes. While there is strong self-interest in your children, there is also self-interesting in maintaining the community's "viability." As I pointed out, school events brought people to town, people went out to eat, they stopped at the hardware store, they drank beer, they purchased groceries. Damaging an institution that improved your ability to do business and maintain a livelihood was illogical in the minds of Lewes and Hackenden residents. Marcy, a Lewes resident, reiterated this point.

> A public school has always been sort of that non-political entity. You know, at least in people's view. I mean, it's a place for children. You know, and when people think of their own experiences and how their school experiences were, you know, I think they're thinking of how are these kids' experiences going to be? You know, and do I want to help improve that? Or that's not my problem. You know, so I don't think they think about it politically at all. I think they think of viability here. That, if the school goes away, like you were mentioning earlier, the

> community may go away too. … The school is different. You're talking about the minds of young people. And educating them. And, I mean, you're talking about children. And I think, I think that makes it different when you're talking about children. You know, that is something that's, that's hard in people's minds to politicize.

Vince, a Hackenden voter, agreed.

> And, because, at the end of the day, you're talking about your own kids and the kids in the community. But also about real estate prices. Like, if you don't have the school in your community, like, your houses aren't going to be worth much because that's something that, you know, attracts families and money to the community. So, I think it becomes much more personal and you think about how does this affect… And, and it's kind of a balance too, okay? Well, there's the property taxes. But there's property values, which could be, you know, ideally, your property would be worth a lot but you wouldn't be paying much tax on it. And, then, I think for anybody who's a parent, you know—and I've definitely experienced that transformation as a parent—even if it's not my kid, like, I want what's best for the kid.

Residents in both communities who would otherwise be categorized as fiercely independent took on an unexpectedly collectivist attitude—but collectivism at the most local level, the school. Based on my findings, I am hesitant to believe that a hypothetical statewide referendum to increase aid to schools would pass. It is true that several Marquette Law polls demonstrated a preference by voters for more school aid instead of property tax cuts—polls I cited in my literature review. However, these questions did not ask at what government *level* they would prefer this tradeoff. The referendums analyzed here were approved because they were tied to a local identity, the school identity, and were controlled locally. It's *our* school, *our* repairs, *our* votes, *our* values, *our* community, *our* businesses, *our* kids, *our* future.

At the beginning of this section, I pointed out that none of the predominant yes-no factors were related to politics. Instead, they were all hyper-contextualized vote-deciding factors. And this was true of both liberal and conservative interviewees. The common belief in local control

allowed, so to speak, these local factors to bubble up. Interviewees did not point to factors in upper levels of government because the referendum and appropriate school fixes were not within the purview of those levels. Interviewees viewed the referendums through the lens of control. As Hugh said, “I think both liberal and conservatives say that we’d like, they’d like to have control of the money to spend on their kids in the local situation.”

Hugh was right. Local control was a doctrine expressed by people who leaned both conservative and liberal, but both groups were driven by a scarcity mindset. According to Jordan, “The funding for our schools has been so strangled that everyone is seeing the decay. They're seeing the lack of capacity with their own eyes or their grandchildren or their children or people are seeing it. … But I think inherently they know that support is needed for our community, and they’re more willing to give it.” Conservative interviewees wanted good schools but espoused traditional anti-tax attitudes. Their compromise was to raise taxes but keep the tax hikes at a hyperlocal level where they could see the fruits of their tax’s labor. Liberal interviewees also wanted good schools and did not have an issue with an influx of state-levied aid. Seeing little, their compromise was to keep tax hikes local so that they could at least support their district to a point they wished the state would fund all schools.

Thus, residents never fully let go of their political preferences. This is not surprising. Americans and, indeed, voters around the world increasingly see their political party as a core part of their identity (Vavreck, 2017; Westwood et al., 2018). Nevertheless, residents did not see or feel these preferences as “activating” partisan alignment because the end remained the same: supporting a referendum. The means, however, were different and remained loyal to traditional ideological poles. Conservatives could accept a yes vote because the increase stayed at more trusted local level. Liberals could accept yes votes because a preferred, higher-level government

was not pulling their weight. Either way, spending was occurring at the local level. This is, in fact, a rather encouraging finding. It means that both liberals and conservatives can be persuaded to reach the same ends. Campaign committees just need different persuasive means to help residents reach the committees' preferred ends.

Later in the interview, Jordan continued, regarding local control.

> Local control's definitely part of the, what makes passing a referendum easier is because it's coming here, and it's staying here. We're going to spend it here. I personally believe that, like, both [referendums and state aid] should be possible. Because, you know, we let school districts that are already hamstrung just kind of decay, you know, without support. I think, I, I, just, I don't think we should all be so isolationist. But I do think that does help kind of the medicine go down.

Cheryl framed local control through the lens of trust. For her, the financial interest in the kids' schools was because there was tremendous local control with the money—the money was staying "close to home." "If we have an issue, we're going to fix it." At one point in her interview, Cheryl became quite emotional and wiped her eyes. She bound many of her answers regarding persuasion, political party, trust, and community attachment together in her interview. She believed that people simply came together in a small community, and they found ways to connect and solve problems. They needed to *because* they were a small town. "You're always looking people in the eye." This, in her opinion, made political ideologies melt away. However, they melted away *because* these were local issues, and people *could* look you in the eye.

Beyond the school, she used the example of a local food pantry she helped run. Self-described hard-right conservatives were some of the biggest supporters of these efforts and helped get the pantry off the ground. Cheryl was confident, however, that if the pantry were a state or federal effort—anything that was not hyper-local—the effort would have failed. People would not have supported it. Scott and JoAnne, both self-identified conservatives, were familiar

with the food pantry and agreed with Cheryl when I asked about it. It was successful "because it all stays local," Scott argued. JoAnne added,

> Yeah, right. And we *know* that. We know that the lady or [name] or whoever runs it, that that money is going to go to Johnny's family because Johnny's family needs it. It's not going to go first to the state and be thrown in and then disbursed back out because—like Scott said before with your, with your dollar, your tax dollars—we don't get it all back. But this is all controlled locally. And I… That's, that's very important. And I would agree that if it were a state program or a federal program, which I know there are many of those also, it might not get the support. It is true. And, like you talked about before, you know, it's *our* dollars. And we can see where *our* dollars going to go to. You know, it's *here*. It's not going to go somewhere else. [Emphasis by interviewee.]

Ned's point, meanwhile, was succinct. "[Republicans] will be pissed about it. They'll be pissed. But they'll vote for the kids." Kory, a staunchly Republican government employee in Lewes, spoke on behalf of his party members. "When you look at Republicans and what they talk about, Republicans like that local control. … 'I like to have control. What's happening with my money?'"

Republican endorsements for local control were not altogether surprising. This support for local control, however, also resonated with liberal-leaning voters who were so concerned about education that they could not afford, literally and figuratively, to send their tax dollars to the state and merely hope they would get back what they chipped in. Jordan expressed this above when she explained that she hoped voters would not need to be so isolationist, but, when the topic if your own children came up, it was difficult not to be. This came up several times but is also well-captured by the words of Vince in Hackenden.

> I never had that conversation with any of the people I were working, I was working with on this … that we were worried about other communities. We're just worried about Hackenden and what was going to happen there. The idea of federal government and state government and things that are larger than us in, like, and, ideally, is that they make us behave responsibly so that we're helping people that were the victims of slavery in the South and are there historically.

> That we're helping Native Americans whose ancestors had their land stripped away from them. That we're making better environmental choices. Like, maybe I'm doing something that doesn't affect me in Hackenden, but it's harming Lake Michigan. But, you know, so it enforces some of those things. And, and so, you know, like, when it comes to the neighboring school districts, I don't think it ever crossed any of our minds like, "Well, if we do this, there's not going to be enough money leftover." Or, "How does this affect the other school districts?" If anything, there's animosity because of sports that's built up over time, just the rah-rah bullshit between, like, Hackenden and [nearby city] or Hackenden and [nearby city]. In theory, as long as there's not corruption and embezzlement and all those things, which is what people are concerned about, I suppose, is that, well, we're paying all these taxes, and you know, we don't really know what the governor of Louisiana is gonna do with that money. So, you just kind of, like, well, I earned my money. I'm paying my property taxes. My kids are here. I prefer to have it stay here.

Vince is employed by a nonprofit that helped ensure fair trade practices for products their clients grew or produced. This made his views even more fascinating. This was *their* money, *their* kids, and *their* needs in Hackenden and Lewes. This reaffirms my point above that the predominant factors were local because this was the job of local people in a local context. Whereas the state or federal government could help with the problem, that ship had sailed; the scarcity and need were so great for schools that residents needed to control what they *could* control. Additional state aid would be great. But unless or until that happened, people in Hackenden and Lewes needed to look out for their own.

Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

I intended a dual audience for this paper throughout: practitioners and scholars. The referendum literature for practitioners was sparse and largely non-empirical, a point I repeated several times in my literature review. These publications were written by district consultants and superintendents who reflected on what did or did not work to get a referendum passed in their particular community. These "tips and tricks," though, were instructive in a way that I was not expecting. I criticized these writings as vague, subjective, and specific to one or two

communities' experiences with the referendum process. I still believe that. They provide very few specificities beyond "use social media," "gain trust," or "maintain open relationships with constituents beyond referendum campaigns."

However, these tips and tricks are as specific as the authors *could* get. The vague lessons are all that *could* be extrapolated. "What worked for me" is difficult to write when they are 426 of "my" school districts in the state of Wisconsin. Consider what these publications would look like with specific tips from Lewes and Hackenden. "Stress the responsibility the district agreed to when they seceded from their prior district partnership." "Make light of the rural isolation of your community to help residents recognize the length of travel they will have to undertake to attend their most prominent social events." "Use the previously passed referendum to emphasize the importance of democracy." "Consider the tradeoffs that will have to be made to maintain your second-best elementary school in the state." These kinds of statements would be utterly irrelevant to any other committee or administrator. Instead, the best prior authors could do was say "use social media" because social media was their avenue to underscore an extremely idiosyncratic characteristic.

The yes factors, committee messages, and community environments I discussed above reaffirmed the extremely quirky and distinctive story each district and, indeed, each referendum needed to tell. My takeaways must reflect that. If an administrator were to ask me how to pass a referendum, the best I could say is, "It depends." The major finding from this dissertation is the same: it depends. The most I—and anyone, for that matter—can do is to provide a general framework of campaign points to consider before the election takes place. This is illustrated in Figure 60. The paragraphs below provide an answer to my research question. The factors that predict referendum passage in a rural Wisconsin community include the presence of a strong

campaign committee, staffed by people the community deems to be influential, who push "information," i.e. the answers to the three questions, to voters in an environment that is receptive and aligned with the messages the campaign creates.

In order for a referendum to be "successful," an unofficial, i.e. non-district, campaign committee should be in place. Success does not necessarily mean referendum approval, as Hackenden demonstrated. This campaign committee should be recognized by resident peers as including "influential" people. The sense of influence is relative. I may not be influenced by the local business elite, but I may find my neighbor whom I have lived next to for forty years to be influential to me. My neighbor may not be swayed by my perspective, but she is influenced by the retired teacher who voted no last time and this time is lending his support. I found that the committee should be led by three core people who lead the vision of the committee. Beyond them, the committee should include a mixture of "new" people and "forevers"; local businessowners who are willing to go on record to help shoulder some of the tax burden; retirees and parents of school-aged children; and people who have switched their voting preferences relative to the prior referendum.

This group of people must "push information" to potential voters. Information includes the answers to three key questions: where is the money going; why is that project needed; and why is that project needed now? Persuasive answers to these questions must be filtered through multiple characteristics and attributes of the local environment in order to reach voters who could agree with the campaign. For example, the campaign committee emphasized that the village is the school, and the school is the village. This message was filtered through an environment that is strongly traditional, stubborn, and change avoidant. Thus, people voted yes in order to avoid another sense of loss. This type of tailoring could be ineffective for a family that is newer to the

area. Those voters might be persuaded by the campaign's reiteration of the district's strength and quality in an environment that is aligning the need for manufacturing jobs with the school's need for technical education space. Thus, these voters choose to vote yes because they see the school as a success in providing for their needs and the needs of their children.

Some people vote yes for reasons other than what the campaign accentuates. Some voters may check yes because they sit by the administrator in church, and they like him. It would not make sense for a campaign committee to send a message that is this specific, singular, and extraordinary. Other attempts at message tailoring are going to fall on deaf ears. A retired voter may check no if they were not present for secession because they are choosing not to participate

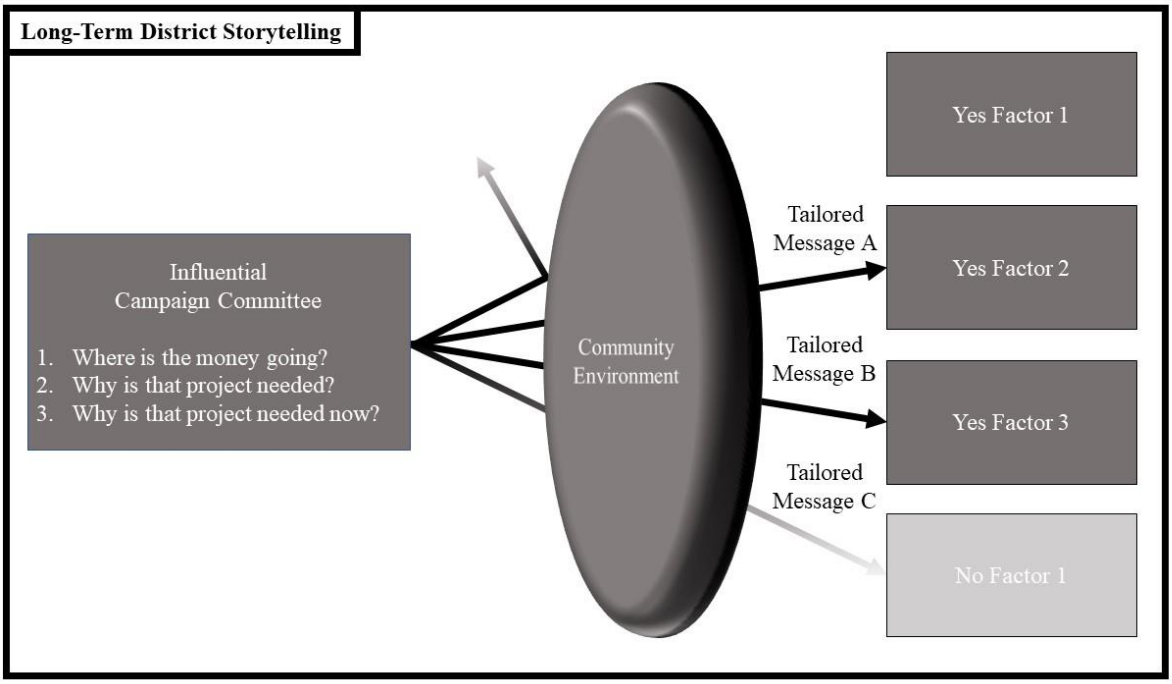

Figure 60: Idiosyncratic Referendum "Success" Structure

in locally-controlled decision-making—even if the message is in line with the community's environment. Finally, some campaign messages will not reach potential voters because they do not align with the environment. A referendum that focuses on the potential for new AP and IB curricula that could springboard kids to universities in the upper echelons is not likely to resonate

with voters who see school as training for work in jobs the community is familiar with, e.g. agriculture, manufacturing, business, etc.

Based on my work so far, a committee should account for two other ingredients. The first is a sense of relativity. Both of these referendums in Lewes and Hackenden were refloats, even if Hackenden's was a bizarre and exceptional refloat. Referendum supporters in Lewes could point to the previous referendum and highlight what had been stripped out, what was different, and what was cheaper. I do not know what would have happened if the 2018 referendum had occurred without 2016. In this counterfactual, Lewes's 2018 referendum may have failed simply because it was now the first, and a later second attempt would have been a stripped-down version of the first attempt. In other words, it is not clear whether Lewes's referendum in 2018 would have passed if 2016 had not failed, and it is not clear whether Hackenden's 2019 referendum would have passed if 2018 had not failed or never existed. There seems to be something about the experience of the first that affects a refloat.

Some school leaders, board members, and committee members indicated that they did not believe the second Lewes referendum would have passed if a first one had not failed because of how much learning took place in terms of appropriate community engagement, community input, and having the "right," i.e. influential, people involved. In Hackenden, several school board and committee members admitted to me that, if the board had asked for a new school right away, it may have passed because of the deep community support and "default" yes position of the voters. Instead, a second run in April gave people a sense that their first votes did not count, re-instilled a feeling of distrust for and dysfunction of the school board, and a "nullification" of a definitional form of democracy.

The second ingredient for committee consideration is the "default" position of the community's voters. Hackenden was a default yes—people instinctively voted yes to school measures in order to maintain the reputation of the school. Lewes was a default no—people instinctively voted no until they were provided with reasons to vote yes, according to CC. The default position changes the nature of the committee's work. If the default position was in line with the committee, the campaign's job would merely be to get people to the polls in order to express their default setting. In Lewes and Hackenden, however, the committee needed to change people's minds *and* ensure they showed up on election day. These campaign accomplishments speak to the strength of their work and the influence their members held over the community.

The committee's work takes place within the long-term storytelling of the district. A campaign is fleeting; it survives until election day. The storytelling can present factual—if not slightly tilted—information to voters about growing needs of the district, e.g. developing roof issues, building an understanding of school finance, e.g. what a revenue cap is and why that matters, and baseline taxation information, e.g. projected mill rates with and without a referendum approval.

Some administrators I interviewed would not be at all surprised by this information. It was obvious to CC, for example, that a referendum would not pass without a referendum committee. It simply was not an option. My contribution to this body of knowledge is a more thorough and fleshed out procedure that should be in place for committees to consider.

There are two contributions my work can make with regard to scholarship. The first is a recognition of what is quantifiable, and the second is a first-crack theory regarding referendum passage. An easy suggestion might be to include in a model the presence of a campaign committee. One very highly educated Hackenden resident scolded me for not including whether

a referendum committee had “the Facebook,” i.e. a social media account. I am very hesitant to believe that simply capturing whether these campaigns exist will be useful. Hackenden had neither a supportive nor oppositional campaign for their approved November renovations referendum, and Lewes had a committee that campaign volunteers believed was strong for their April 2016 failed referendum. This variable would also need to measure the extent to which community members believe this campaign includes people they deem influential—an influence that is not congruent across the population.

Similarly, cost, alone, may not be a wholly appropriate variable because of the sense of relativity to prior referendums. Measuring cost would need to simultaneously measure the extent to which community members perceive this cost to be appropriate for the amount of repairs the community perceives needs to be done to help maintain the perceived fragility of the local economy. In the same vein, I do not believe a model’s utility will be improved simply by comparing a refloat to an original. It would not be possible to know which previous referendum voters are comparing. Lewes voters compared their 2018 referendum to their 2016 referendum. However, based on the number of times I needed to remind Hackenden voters that I was not talking about their 1994 referendum, they could very easily compare a new school referendum to a previous new school referendum, regardless of how many decades ago it took place, and not necessarily the original float.

Certainly, every possible influencing factor does not need to be included in a predictive model if the variables that are present can shoulder enough of the work to produce quality predictions. My post-Act 10 rural district model explained 17 percent of the data’s variance (adjusted). The remaining 83 percent of the variance may have quantifiable factors that would serve to further improve this model. If so, I do not believe they were uncovered in my work.

Even a factor that feels quantifiable, rurality and isolation, may seem objective, but this would not capture the extent to which residents *feel* rural and isolated. I believe that, at this point in the work, the remaining 83 percent of the variance is "random" noise that is specific to the community in which the referendum is happening. They are, indeed, extremely contextualized factors that would only make sense if enough referendums were happening in communities so that a district-specific prediction could take place.

This begs a natural question: Why was I wrong? Why did my model not predict or capture the deviation that Lewes and Hackenden experienced? Frankly, I believe this deviation speaks to the strength of the campaign committees in each community. The people leading and volunteering in these committees described their work as a full-time job after their full-time job. Vince, Linda, and Ned regularly allocated 45-50 hours of work per week on their campaign after their regular work. Campaign leaders in Lewes described similar conditions. I strongly believe Lewes and Hackenden would not have experienced the outcomes they did without a campaign committee made up of the people they did, people who deeply understood the history of the district and the financial, academic, and political environment in which the district existed.

In the same vein, if the committee is so crucial, then why was I right with so many other referendums? I believe the answer to this lies in the number of variables that ultimately appeared in my final, most accurate model. Fully three-quarters of the 60 factors I hypothesized would make an impact did. However, after completing two case studies, I think this, too, is a reflection of all of the characteristics a campaign committee can or does use to sway voters. Every one of those factors can be manipulated to suit the relative needs of district that is holding the referendum. In other words, the change in the school district's size is not directly leading to a

voting decision. Instead, the change in school district's size is being persuasively filtered through campaign committee messaging.

At this point, I would be extremely hesitant to give this equation to an administrator, have them ascertain their likelihood of success, and decide whether to proceed with a referendum based on that data point. Anchoring was the most impactful and directly controlled predictor variable. But every variable is manipulable with a campaign. In general, the more women in that live in the community, the less likely a referendum is to pass. My data does not answer why. Perhaps women are the primary caretakers of both children and the budget and a have stronger sense of what families can comfortably afford. Referendum likelihood tends to increase as the proportion of households with children increases. There is no reason why a campaign cannot leverage the former to influence the latter. Further, I am not unconvinced that revealing my predictions to community stakeholders would not, itself, turn into an independent variable. In other words, if I had told voters in Lewes that their referendum had little chance of success, I firmly believe the campaign committee would have used that prediction to work even harder and prove me wrong. I cannot overstate the strength to which my interviewees were connected to their schools. My prediction would likely reflect Goodhart's law: once a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure (Goodhart, 1981).

The second scholarly contribution is a first-crack theory at local public school district referendum passage. In the Lewes and Hackenden sections above, I argued that committees pushed messages to the community that reminded, or "activated," for voters certain characteristics or attributes of their district (e.g. the extent of needed repairs). These messages were effective because they complied with the environment in which the district was situated (fragility of the local economy). The messages and environment resulted in the yes or no factors

I ultimately heard (appropriate cost of the referendum). The how was articulated by delineating what questions the campaign needed to answer and what their (and the district's) roles were. My explanations above, however, did not explain *why* this process was effective for committees to achieve the votes they did. I address that here.

I believe the most appropriate theoretical approach is an application of directed giving through voluntary taxation (DGVT). Directed giving allows donors "to target their gifts to specific organizations or functions" (Eckel, Herberich, & Meer, 2017) while voluntary taxation is a payment to the government before or without coercion (Li, Eckel, Grossman, & Brown, 2011a). Obviously, payment of property taxes is not an option post-passage. However, a public school district referendum is, by definition, a voluntary choice: voters may choose to approve or oppose a property tax hike for the local public school district. In this pre-referendum context, there is no government coercion. The powerful concept here is that the likelihood of supporting voluntary taxation and the amount of money that "donors," i.e. taxpayers, are willing to give increases when donors can choose where to direct their money. Certainly, this is not perfect. Voters are not allowed to express how to spend a single pot of referendum money on a ballot. The dollars' purpose is predetermined. However, this is substantially more directed than general state aid, a pot of money that is not easy to follow and voters cannot easily approve or oppose. Therefore, I believe this application is appropriate.

Donors are willing to donate nearly as much to a government entity as they are to a private charity. In one experiment, participants donated $4.40 of a $20 budget (22 percent) to a government agency, which was not vastly different than the $5.30 of a $20 budget (27 percent) these participants were willing to give to a private charity. In a later, follow-up experiment, these same researchers investigated how participants would give if they also had an option to direct

their contribution within the government or private agency, federal government (public, general), National Cancer Institute (public, specific), United Way (private, general), or American Red Cross Disaster Relief (private, specific). This experiment found that participants' likelihood to donate to the government more than doubled when a cause was specified (30 percent versus 64 percent), and gifts from a $20 budget were almost triple in size ($1.68 versus $4.78). According to these researchers, "This suggests that people value control over their contributions. When such control is lacking (e.g. the federal general fund or the United Way), people give significantly less and are more likely to give zero." (Li, Eckel, Grossman, & Brown, 2011b, p. 14; also see Listokin & Schizer, 2013). These researchers also state in a separate publication,

> … people value choice, and are more likely to give and give more generously when they can choose how they are able to selectively support causes that they consider more worthy and deserving than the average causes supported by the federal government. These results may explain the success of "crowd funding" of government projects and state check-off programs despite the unpopularity of general taxation. They highlight the potential value of providing new mechanisms for taxpayers to voluntary donate to specific government organizations. Voluntary donations such as these may be a useful additional source of funding for causes that are seen as salient and important to taxpayers. (Li, Eckel, Grossman, & Brown, 2015, p. 53).

According to the adjacent economics literature, there are at least five ways to invoke these donations. The first route is by making people feel altruistic with their donations. Altruism is that pleasure and utility that people get when they help provide, in this case, public goods that can be used by other people in their community (Listokin & Schizer, 2013). Genuine altruism may be elusive for some potential voters; they may not derive pleasure and utility from funding public goods. Nevertheless, altruism can still be elicited by generating "social concern for what others may think and for being held in high regard by others" (Eckel & Grossman, 1996). I addressed some aspects of this sort of altruism in my literature review. A second way to invoke

donations, particularly at the local level, is a type of pro-social, altruistic behavior cousin that economists refer to as “warm glow” (Listokin & Schizer, 2013). Donors value the good to which money is being funneled. However, they also value the fact that they are the ones providing and not “someone else” (Listokin & Schizer, 2013, p. 189). Importantly, warm glow can manifest both when donors choose to be the source of funds or when they simply are, without the choice, the source of funds.

The third way to elicit donations is by eliciting preferences, i.e. input (Djawadi & Fahr, 2013). Frustration from paying taxes stems from two factors of the tax collecting process: the disconnect between the tax payments and the goods received in return and the lack of influence over how taxes are spent (Lamberton, De Neve, & Norton, 2014). “Individuals are happier to give when they know what they’re giving for, and less likely to do so when the outcome of their payment is ill-defined” (Lamberton, De Neve, & Norton, 2014, p. 3). Additionally, gathering input is a powerful of instilling feelings of empowerment even when the individual’s preferences are not ultimately reflected in policy. “… Eliciting taxpayer preferences will increase tax compliance even when those preferences are not directly implemented in subsequent government expenditures. … Taxpayers who express tax preferences will experience proxy agency, defined as having the opportunity to influence individuals with decision-making authority (Lamberton, De Neve, & Norton, 2014, p. 4).

The fourth way to invoke donations and reducing free-riding is by reinforcing a common identity among potential donors. Li, de Oliveira, and Eckel (2017) investigated the claim that the promotion of a common identity would increase the voluntary contribution to *local* public goods (emphasis mine). They found that policymakers “may increase the set of contributors and overall contributions to local public goods through promoting common identity among residents, but

only in communities where the common identity is associated with a positive social image" (Li, de Oliveira, & Eckel, 2017). Willingness to make contributions is damaged, however, if a few "bad apples," i.e. vocal and influential people, are outspoken in their opposition to the public good.

Fifth and finally, donations are easier to invoke when individual people become the face of the good. Donations increase when donors are given more information about the characteristics of the recipient because the feelings of altruism increase (Eckel & Grossman, 1996). In a later publication, Eckel et al. continue,

> … We further confirm the importance of highlighting individual recipients whenever possible. Donors value the relative impact of their donation, and this impact is clearest when the recipient is an identified individual (even if the person is anonymous). While this is not a novel idea to current philanthropic fundraising practices, we believe there is a second important takeaway for organizations operating at several levels. If soliciting donations for a menu of operating levels within an organization, including an individual recipient on the list may change behavior. (Eckel, Priday, & Wilson, 2018, p. 95).

Directed giving through voluntary taxation seems appropriate because voters in Wisconsin certainly are willing to "donate" money to a government, the school district, when a cause is very specific, i.e. a school referendum. The approval rates and dollar amounts I illustrated are proof of this. What cannot be overemphasized is the hyper-local focus of a school referendum. The research on DGVT and the statements I heard run parallel: "People value control over their contributions," and "I like to have control. What's happening with my money?" Interviewees framed their arguments within a local context. The idea that the types of projects Lewes and Hackenden were undertaking were anything but a local problem plainly did not come up. Nobody expressed any inkling that what these projects should be borne by state or federal aid. If they wanted a new school, it was up to "us" decide and choose.

Residents already believed that money they to the state was not coming back to them. They did not trust that money that "went to Madison" would be returned to their communities. This is, in fact, incorrect. Both Lewes and Hackenden would receive more than a dollar in state aid for every dollar invested locally, but even a current school board member in Hackenden falsely argued that they "put in" far more than they get back. From a state perspective, this type of isolationist, distrustful behavior is extremely concerning.

It was not a surprise to me that politically conservative voters preferred to see their money stay at home where it could be closely accounted for. I was not expecting the same sorts of extreme desire for local control to be so evident in liberal-leaning voters. In the face of equalization aid cuts and revenue cap stagnation, these were people who saw no other way to invest in their school other than a referendum. As Vince said, they were not thinking about kids in the district next door. This is both rational and worrying. Wisconsin may be seeing a shift back to extreme local control that was present in the state until the early 1970s and begin to disregard what state and federal governments *could* or *should* do. Voters were instead essentially saying, "I guess we'll just do this ourselves too." To be sure, districts are going to receive more than a dollar in return regardless of whether they believe that to be true. State aid is not going way. Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to believe that a strong desire for local decision-making will stay online within the realm of school finance and not, say, curriculum.

I doubt campaign committees consumed evidence-based ways to invoke donations before they set up their campaign committees. The fact that they utilized each one of these donation-invoking strategies and each campaign achieved "success," I contend, gives additional credence to the DGVT theory. These relationships are easier to show in Lewes, but Hackenden—"Vote No. Support Education."—demonstrated them too. First, committees made people feel good

about giving up some of their money. They instilled a feeling of togetherness and the idea that the community is tight-knit and family-like. By pushing the narrative that the entire community is a family, any kid is "our" kid, and it feels good to help kids, to help them have easy access to extra-curricular activities that drum up nostalgia, to help them have access to technical education equipment that will help them find a job, to help them become strong readers that could continue our recent tradition of seeing kids go into business, law, medicine, and the arts. Furthermore, "we," the community, are doing this. We do not need the watchful, paternalistic Glassbridge to manage or money. We do not need the school board second-questioning our initial ballots.

Third, both communities established a strong foundation of community input before their approved referendums, and committees reminded their fellow community members of this process and were not afraid to say, "We made our voice heard." Or, at the very least, "You had the *opportunity* to make your voice heard." Both Lewes and Hackenden collected survey data, held community forums, and devoted board meeting time to their respective referendums. Interviewees in both communities asserted that this made community members feel autonomous, empowered, authoritative, influential, and included, even if they did not ultimately support the referendum—a goal, they mentioned, that was worthy in its own right.

Fourth, both communities heavily emphasized the common identity. We are Grizzlies. We are Mountaineers, #MountaineerProud. A person moving to the communities was not a Lewesite or Hackender. They were Grizzlies or Mountaineers. The identity of the village or town is subsumed by the identity of the school. Members of both districts repeated, "The village is the school, and the school is the village," or "The community is the school, and the school is the community." People in Lewes could finally take on this identity for their own following secession. Meanwhile, people in Hackenden proudly touted their district achievement to other

communities and defined themselves by the success of the school. The common identity was also pushed by the very nature of the referendums. Lewes's was meant to improve access to the school's technical education space and help stabilize the local economy. Hackenden's, meanwhile, would improve the gym for club sports use and maintain the vibrancy of the neighborhood in which the school was located. These two referendums were hardly specific to the school. These were community referendums just as much as they were for the kids and education in general.

Finally, both communities highlighted the focus and strength of individual people. Lewes used a series of mailings that featured one alumni or local community member who supported the school, why they supported the school, what they did in the community, and how the school helped them achieve that. The backs of these mailings included individual names of every voter who had pledged to support the referendum. Any abstraction of community support was removed by these mailings. The Hackenden School District runs a school-specific newspaper that is sent to every home within in the district's boundaries. This newspaper includes students and student groups that have exhibited academic success whenever they arise. These pictures with specific names and faces helps reinforce *who* is achieving and helps community members feel pride in the school, again, not as an abstraction, but with specific faces. And this is only the school's paper. Ned, the former Hackenden board member, said the local paper also reflects the school and treats the kids as celebrities, especially as they approach graduation.

At the outset of my qualitative findings, I said that my interpretation of voting behavior was not necessarily wrong; it was incomplete. I expected constituents to analyze their surrounding environment, and that environment would translate directly into a particular referendum vote. This was not the complete case. I was missing some steps. Rather, many voters

in both Lewes and Hackenden relied on the campaign committee to draw out elements of the community that ended up aligning with my conjectural theory, e.g. the bind between the school and the community. These elements were powerful because the messages were in harmony with the larger social, political, economic, and cultural environment in which both Lewes and Hackenden were situated. This motivated residents to voluntarily tax themselves, i.e. approve a referendum, for a very specific purpose, i.e. the referendum project. Both Lewes and Hackenden needed the campaign filter to nudge people into the campaign's preferred vote.

Put differently, Lewes and Hackenden campaign committees—not individual voters—were eliciting feelings of community attachment and a common identity that residents found so motivating that they were willing to voluntary tax for a directed project. When I produced my conjectural theory, I did not believe that the campaign was needed to create feelings in voters that DGVT was appropriate and acceptable. I thought voters would be able to establish these feelings on their own. With that in mind, there are some theoretical I hypotheses that I made that were wrong, some that were right, and some that I am not yet ready to evaluate. I revisit those here.

> *White, working-class voters, especially those in rural America, are deeply attached to their communities. They are unlikely to move but rather age in place, look out for one another, and improve where they live. One potential way to improve where they live is by ensuring that the local school remains solvent and open. The possibility of losing a school creates a strong sense of urgency and is profoundly detrimental to a rural community's psyche. It signals that they are unable to maintain the place they care for so viscerally. On the other hand, approving a referendum can keep the doors to a school open, improve the place where the "heart" of a community beats, and attract a high-quality teaching force. Even those who do not express the same attachment to the community can feel social pressure to support the school financially because of normative expectations, compassion, or the desire for membership in a fulfilling, identity-based organization.*

This portion of my conjectural theory is correct. Voters in Lewes and Hackenden viewed the school as a mechanism to create or preserve the viability of the community. A good school was an advertisement to potential families that this was a community that took education and the well-being of the children seriously. Hackenden was not in danger of losing its school, but they could lose their high rankings. This absolutely created a feeling of urgency, and diminished achievement would have damaged the community's psyche. Lewes, meanwhile, could have realistically lost their school in its entirety, whether through collapse or re-consolidation. Either loss would have damaged the core identity of both communities, as residents in Hackenden referred to themselves as "Mountaineers" and Lewes as "Grizzlies," regardless of the level of attachment to the school. One did not need to have kids in school or be among alumni to assume the mascot label.

"Fiercely independent" residents of Lewes with chips on their shoulder would have failed in their goal to prove to Glassbridge and other rural communities that they could take on what they committed to. The school was the social scene in both. Even residents who did not have kids in the school, including newcomer retirees, attended basketball games and ingrained themselves in the community. There was normative pressure to support the school when lifelong resident farmers knocked on your door to ask you to support an institution that provided you entertainment and human attachment.

> *Working-class Whites value public education because they want to see their own and their community's children succeed. They also value public education because it enhances the local economy. There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between keeping high-achieving students in the community (or drawing them back) and the opportunity for new job growth for the community's residents. Referendum approval may be able to slow or stop the rural brain-drain, boost the local economy, improve the quality or image of the local public schools, and keep high-fliers and their children living and working in the local property tax base.*

Residents in both communities invested in their schools as a way to prop up their local economies, though this had a different flavor in each. Now that such high literacy scores had been achieved, Hackenden felt what it was like to consistently send some of their kids on to Ivy League schools and, just as importantly, see these kids return as adults who were ready to practice law and medicine in Hackenden. A similar process happened with teachers. Many Hackenden teachers graduated from the district, earned their education credentials, and returned to Hackenden. And these teachers became career teachers in Hackenden; they did not use the small district as a stepping stone onto a larger, wealthier, suburban district. A job that allowed alumni to return to Hackenden was a prize that was not given up.

Lewes, too, saw the school as a training ground for future careers that were supported in the area, even if Lewes kids did not have to leave for several years to get higher education. New facilities in Lewes would further enhance relationships between local community colleges and apprenticeships. Post-secondary students could use Lewes's facilities for construction and contracting work while learning to build housing that Lewes sorely needs. Current secondary students could gain higher education credits without having to leave the walls of the school. This saved time, transportation, and, most importantly, money for local economically disadvantaged families. Hackenden already achieved drawing students back. Lewes was using the school referendum as a way to jumpstart the boomerang by carving out a specific niche in construction fields.

> *Feeling that they have been abandoned by politics and state- and federal-level government, working-class Whites are determined to achieve accomplishments via self-reliance, individualism, and self-sufficiency. They are determined to solve their own problems with and among people in their communities whom they trust and look out for. Additionally, the ability to be self-reliant and independent is a marker of social status among people who are more uniformly poor. Passing a school referendum allows a community to prove to itself and surrounding districts that they are a proud people who do not have to rely on state and federal*

> *governments to take care of their children. Supporting public education if and when it is needed via local property tax levies is therefore not viewed as government aid but rather a sound financial investment that "walks the line" for the betterment of the community.*

This section of my theory was met with mixed results. I am not ready to say whether the committees' efforts to initiate DGVT were driven by feelings of abandonment. Some interviewees did refer to scarcities, drops in state aid, and efforts to recoup some money they used to have. However, I am not sure if residents were necessarily opposed to having this money cultivated locally where decision-making was easier to influence and project. The feeling of acceptance with locally-procured monies may fade as districts begin to more clearly differentiate themselves with the money they are able to raise via referendums, whether it is because some districts are consistently wealthier or some districts experience deep economic decline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was correct that any kind of debt needs to be well-thought out and clearly explained. The referendums that failed in each community were anything but. Residents described feeling whiplash, feeling rushed, and feeling as though they did not understand why the project(s) was needed. And, as I described in my conjectural theory, working-class Whites' default response when feeling rushed or ignorant of spending purposes was to "just say no." On the other hand, the referendums that passed were only after many, many rounds of community input sessions, scores of school board meetings, and multiple presentations to civic organizations of the community. These events meant that information—where the money was going, why the project was needed, and why the project was needed now—could percolate through the community and be digested.

I was incorrect regarding social status. Few voters considered what was happening in districts around them—again, at least not yet. Their kids did not go to school next door. Neither district was seeing kids open enroll out. If there were any notions of "keeping up with the Joneses," it was isolated to the strong athletics crowds. This makes sense. The most common reason to be inside another school in the area or conference was an athletic event. Some athletically-involved parents did express a desire to "keep up," but this was not a contingent of people strong or large enough to sway an election, as Hackenden illustrated.

> *Working-class Whites began to feel a decline in their social, political, and economic advancement in the early 1970s. These voters sought help from the government just as their parents received a generation prior and underrepresented populations were at the time. However, help did not arrive. Democrats were understood to be helping those with or espousing postmaterialist values, and Republicans were the party to jumpstart the economic woes. Feeling no aid, the White, working-class broke their long-held allegiance to the Democratic Party and began to vote instead to shrink a government they perceived to be taking their money with no concurrent benefits. The lack of aid also generated animosity toward those receiving government benefits. It was a zero-sum, us versus them game: anything "they," be it People of Color, women, urbanites, environmentalists, etc., received was a loss to "us." This political environment on its own does not explain why referendums would pass just as frequently in conservative, rural areas with heavy White, working-class populations. Nevertheless, this post-1970s political environment sets the stage for working-class whites to prefer policies and tax burdens at the more controllable local level, keep money at home, and pull themselves up by their bootstraps instead of continuing to wait for absent federal and state governments.*
>
> *Following the economic shocks of the 1970s and continuing into today, the White, working-class largely abandoned hope that federal and state governments would help them, and their trust in government to do so in the future collapsed. However, local government trust remains relatively strong and unchanged. Constituents may be voting yes on referendums because they trust that their local school board governing authorities will use the money appropriately. Regardless, tracking and keeping tabs on the money is easier: the money remains at home where control is elevated and levies are kept at sustainable levels, just as Governor Thompson promised. If trust is breached, removing local policy- and decisionmakers from office is easier than at upper levels of government. White, working-class voters are supportive of government expansion of social and economic programs* provided they are able to receive some of the benefits. *If*

> *approved referendum money is handled appropriately and successfully, trust increases, which elevates the chance referendums will pass again in the future.*
>
> *People in places with smaller populations are particularly in tune with local public issues. They are more likely than urban dwellers to be aware of, informed about, and mobilized for politics and policies specific to their local areas. Residents may be willing to approve a referendum because they understand the specific needs of their school, the impacts of a referendum, and how a referendum can help the community economically. People in rural areas are heavily invested in property—land and homes. These rural people are likely to know about, support, and protect their largest sources of wealth.*

The final three major sections of my conjectural theory I am not yet willing to evaluate. I believe these sections are highly plausible and realistic. I just cannot answer them with my data. To answer these, I would need a better historical understanding of the motivations that made people amenable to DGVT. I established that voters preferred local control and, indeed, did not even consider some of these referendum problems as anything *but* local issues. Whether this was because these voters felt abandoned by both political parties is a topic for future research. Similarly, I am not ready to address whether trust in local government relative to state and federal governments changed in these communities over time. Voters may be willing to support a referendum via DGVT because they always trusted local government, and that has not changed. Alternatively, voters may trust all governments less now, and local government just had the highest relative trust. Residents certainly trusted local officials with whom they could look in the eye and know personally instead of having to ascertain as much information as they could with an adjacent D or R on a ballot. All that said, I contend that voters do support referendums because there was no disconnect between the money that went in and the projects that were produced, a necessity for DGVT to manifest. In fact, some interviewees stated that they believed voters would be just as willing to approve operations referendums *as long as the money was used*

for students, e.g. new curricula. Money that was used for adults, i.e. teachers, would likely not be supported in Lewes.

Finally, I am not ready to say whether rural voters were more knowledgeable about their local referendums than more urbanized voters would be. This research focused only on rural school districts. Certainly, I had no problem finding anyone who knew something about the referendum. Even interviewees in bars and diners who did not know I was coming had some knowledge of what the school was doing and why they were doing it. I do not know if suburban and urban voters would behave similarly.

There are four areas of potential future research. The first is the practical application of my more-fleshed-out campaign committee process. Architectural firms and school district consultants may already be implementing something very similar between local environments, campaign messaging, and yes votes. If not, the application of my procedure would be instructive.

Second, my pattern and causation codes helped me produce logical connections between the campaign committees' messaging efforts and voters' reasons for checking yes or no. Each campaign was pleased because they were met with what they defined as success. However, I cannot be sure that these particular yes or no factors were the feelings that campaign committees were trying to produce or whether they were hoping for an alternative yes or no factor. Perhaps by concentrating on the strength and quality of the Lewes School District, the committee was initially hoping to encourage residents to consider offering more AP and IB courses that could be used by future undergraduates, but, instead, district residents read the strength and quality of the district as a way to prop up the local economy. This may not have bothered the committee if their efforts were still translating into a yes vote, but it would be valuable to follow a committee from start to finish to investigate how messaging translates into voting decisions.

Third, Lewes and Hackenden both had campaign committees for their deviating referendums. Enlightening future research would analyze districts that approved a referendum without a committee even though I expected the referendum to fail and districts that opposed a referendum with a committee even though I expected the referendum to pass. This type of research could expose massive pitfalls that other committees need to avoid at all costs.

Fourth, could voters rouse DGVT feelings for themselves instead of having a campaign committee that creates feelings advantageous to DGVT? Perhaps instilling DGVT into voters in one campaign has residual effects in a follow-up referendum, and, in turn, perhaps a campaign committee is unneeded or less needed.

Conclusion

In 2015, Republican State Assemblyperson Jeremy Thiesfeldt told Wisconsin Public Radio, “A school district, if they decide that they need additional money to provide a quality education, what is wrong with them having to sell this to the providers of the tax dollars, the voters?” (Mills & Druke, 2015) In previous versions of this paper, I suggested that it was time we figure out why voters keep buying, Now, I am ready to answer.

Voters in both Lewes and Hackenden provided extremely specific and highly contextualized reasons to check yes or no. At face value, these reasons seemed utterly irrelevant to residents in other rural Wisconsin districts. This is not the case. Voters in both communities were ushered through the referendum process by very strong campaign committees led by influential community members, members that were influential to different voters in different ways—parish prayer leaders, hunting buddies, neighbors, and retired teachers. These campaign committees created campaign messages that focused on a specific characteristic of the community that was familiar to voters, e.g. secession, the extent of needed repairs, or board dysfunction. These messages existed in an environment that was friendly and amenable to that

particular kind of message. This combination of tailored message and tractable environment produced voting decisions that allowed the campaign to be "successful" because directed giving through voluntary taxation is an effective means of eliciting support.

Political affiliation was not a major factor in residents' voting decisions because identity with the school—"I am a Grizzly" or "I am a Mountaineer"—engulfed and overtook ideological affiliations—"I am a liberal" or "I am a conservative." Further, residents did not view their school through a political lens. Voters knew their school board members on a personal level. Political parties had no role in relatively small and local referendum ballots. Community members had no desire to politicize "their" kids because it was in everyone's self-interest to see the kids succeed. Self-identified liberals and conservatives both preferred their dollars stay at home during a time of aid scarcity.

As I write this in April 2020, the world is coping with a global pandemic and the most damaging employment collapse since the Great Depression. Nevertheless, voters approved 52 of 57 school referendums across the state, 91 percent. Voters in rural districts approved 45 of 50 school referendums, 90 percent, with an average margin of victory of over 20 percentage points.

Rural schools remain a rock of rural communities.

Appendix 1

Model: Logistic
Category: All locale types, all years
Variable selection method: Backward stepwise (0.20, 0.15)

Equation:

logit (Y) = -16.87 – 0.04(Administrator benefits) – 0.0019(Age ratio) – 0.00088(Income ratio^2) + 0.03(Administrator total experience) + 0.00043(Educational attainment^2) – 0.63(Income inequality^2) – 0.02(Economically disadvantaged students) – 0.39(Football) – 0.00058(Race^2) + 0.1(Limited English proficient students) – 0.88(Suburban) – 1.24(Rural) – 0.05(Population) – 0.0063(Private school enrollment) – 0.016(Ideology – Pres.) – 0.01(Teacher local experience^2) + 0.0032(Median income^2) + 0.02(Public school enrollment) + 7.87(Racial mismatch) + 0.05(Revenue – state) + 0.03(Revenue – local) – 0.11(Students of color) – 0.4(Use – undefined) + 0.04(Migrant population) + 0.38(Teacher local experience) + 0.31(Teacher salary) – 0.47(Teacher total experience) + 0.018(Teacher total experience2) + 0.0004(Turnout^2) + 1.33(Anchoring) + 0.75(Anchoring – Undefined) – 0.26(Competing referendums) – 0.000005(Property value per member^2) – 0.004(Referendum amount) + 1.2(Post-Act 10) – 0.47(Refloat) – 22.01(Tax impact) + 0.0013(Age^2) + 0.24(February) – 0.00002(Administrator salary^2) – 0.05(Homeownership) + 0.0056(Property value per member) + 0.13(Race) – 0.002(Limited English proficient students^2) + 0.000078(Population^2) + 0.00061(Administrator local experience^2) + 0.42(October) + 0.21(November) + 0.81(December) – 0.026(Turnout) – 0.03(Recurring) – 0.0009(Administrator total experience^2) – 0.83(NR 2-yr) – 0.61(NR 3-yr) – 0.86(NR 4-yr) – 0.47(NR 5-yr) – 0.66(NR > 5-yr) – 1.71(Use – capital athletics) + 0.54(Use – capital other) – 0.76(Median income) + 0.00043(Administrator benefits^2) + 0.39(Income ratio) + 0.0000000121(Referendum amount^3) + 0.00079(Urgency – total)

Table 35

Evaluation Metrics – All Locale Types, All Years (Logistic)

Metric	Statistic
<u>Overall performance</u>	
McFadden's adjusted R^2	0.142

Table 35 (continued)

Efron's R^2	0.222
Brier score	0.191
Log likelihood	-1347.619
Deviance	2695.328
Likelihood ratio	595.879
Model calibration	
Classifications Correct	70.91%
Sensitivity	77.45%
Specificity	62.31%
Proportional reduction in error	32.69%
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	0.1079
AIC	2825.238
Model discrimination	
Tjur's R^2	0.222
c-statistic	0.7738

Model: Logistic
Category: All locale types, post-Act 10
Variable selection method: Backward elimination (0.20)

Equation:

$$\text{logit}(Y) = 82.41 + 2.10(\text{October}) + 0.002(\text{Urgency} - \text{total}^2) + 0.000033(\text{Age ratio}^2) + 0.045(\text{Administrator total experience}) + 0.1(\text{Change in district size}) - 0.0011(\text{Administrator total experience}^2) + 0.05(\text{Race}) + 0.00083(\text{Administrator local experience}^2) - 0.0043(\text{Levy}) - 0.65(\text{Recurring}) - 0.46(\text{Suburban}) - 446.03(\text{Tax impact}^2) + 0.03(\text{Sex}^2) - 0.012(\text{Private school enrollment}) - 0.013(\text{Proficiency} - \text{math}) + 0.00075(\text{Public school enrollment}^2) + 0.069(\text{Diffusion}^2) - 0.058(\text{Public school enrollment}) + 2.63(\text{Racial mismatch}) + 0.11(\text{Revenue} -$$

state) + 0.067(Revenue – local) – 0.93(NR 4-yr) – 2.1(Use – capital athletic) + 0.00022(Turnout^2) + 0.005(Teacher salary^2) – 0.56(Teacher salary) + 1.53(NR 1-yr) – 0.0054(Time elapsed^2) + 0.0017(Educational attainment^2) + 1.76(Anchoring) – 0.28(Competing referendums) – 0.35(Diffusion) – 3.08(Sex) + 0.076(Migrant population) – 0.02(Ideology – Pres.) + 0.14(Time elapsed)

Table 36

Evaluation Metrics – All Locale Types, Post-Act 10 (Logistic)

Metric	Statistic
Overall performance	
McFadden's adjusted R^2	0.16
Efron's R^2	0.252
Brier score	0.1457
Log likelihood	-351.611
Deviance	703.222
Likelihood ratio	221.934
Model calibration	
Classifications Correct	78.5%
Sensitivity	92.01%
Specificity	41.04%
Proportional reduction in error	18.87%
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	0.8854
AIC	777.222

Table 36 (continued)

Model discrimination	
Tjur's R^2	0.257
c-statistic	0.818

Model: Logistic
Category: Rural locale, all years
Variable selection method: Forward selection (0.20)

Equation:

logit (*Y*) = 16.16 + 0.99(Post-Act 10) + 1.27(Anchoring) – 1.99(Use – capital athletic) – 0.0081(Administrator salary) + 0.00074(Educational attainment^2) – 1.05(Recurring) – 0.0044(Referendum amount) – 0.31(Homeownership) – 0.26(Competing referendums) + 0.0019(Administrator local experience^2) + 0.89(October) + 0.018(Race) – 0.24(NR 2-yr) – 228.86(Tax impact^2) + 0.00012(Turnout^2) – 0.47(Refloat) – 0.05(Teacher salary) + 0.003(Teacher total experience^2) – 0.94(NR 4-yr) – 0.0092(Economically disadvantaged students) + 0.42(Use – capital other) + 0.68(Anchoring – undefined) – 0.04(Administrator local experience) – 0.39(Income inequality^2) – 0.017(Teacher benefits) + 0.00000019(Total equalized value^2) – 0.000024(Levy^2) + 0.063(Mill rate) – 0.006(Private school enrollment) – 0.0018(Age ratio) – 0.65(NR > 5-yr) – 0.63(NR 3-yr) – 0.93(NR 2-yr) – 0.52(NR 5-yr) – 0.32(Use – multiple capital) + 0.0017(Homeownership^2) + 0.28(Age)

Table 37

Evaluation Metrics – Rural Locale, All Years (Logistic)

Metric	Statistic
Overall performance	
McFadden's adjusted R^2	0.15
Efron's R^2	0.2280
Brier score	0.1904
Log likelihood	-976.153

Table 37 (continued)

Deviance	1952.307
Likelihood ratio	434.007
Model calibration	
Classifications Correct	71.58%
Sensitivity	76.47%
Specificity	65.41%
Proportional reduction in error	35.76%
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	0.2672
AIC	2028.307
Model discrimination	
Tjur's R^2	0.227
c-statistic	0.7783

Model: Logistic
Category: Rural locale, post-Act 10
Variable selection method: Backward elimination (0.20)

Equation:

$$\text{logit}(Y) = 62.17 - 4.96(\text{Sex}) + 0.05(\text{Sex}^2) - 0.14(\text{Educational attainment}) + 0.0034(\text{Educational attainment}^2) - 0.05(\text{Homeownership}) + 0.1(\text{Change in district size}) - 0.011(\text{Change in district size2}) + 0.0021(\text{Urgency} - \text{total}^2) - 1.07(\text{Football}) - 0.012(\text{Levy}) + 1.32(\text{Income ratio}) - 0.0029(\text{Income ratio}^2) - 0.7(\text{Recurring}) - 0.011(\text{Private school enrollment}) - 0.00027(\text{Proficiency} - \text{math}^2) + 0.00022(\text{Turnout}^2) + 0.075(\text{Race}) + 0.091(\text{Revenue} - \text{state}) + 0.054(\text{Revenue local}) + 0.037(\text{Students of Color}) - 1.95(\text{Student-staff ratio}) + 0.083(\text{Student-staff ratio}^2) - 458.26(\text{Tax impact}^2) + 1.37(\text{Teacher salary}) + 0.12(\text{Urgency} - 5\text{-yr}) - 0.0022(\text{Median income}) + 0.0000000078(\text{Median income}^2) + 1.67(\text{Anchoring}) - 0.52(\text{Diffusion}) + 0.091(\text{Diffusion}^2) - 0.55(\text{NR 4-yr}) - 0.61(\text{Households with children}) + 0.0094(\text{Households}$$

with children^2) – 0.00068(Source and steadiness of income^2) – 0.69(Use – miscellaneous) – 1.26(May) – 2.94(Use – athletics) – 0.028(Ideology – Pres.) + 2.65(October)

Table 38

Evaluation Metrics – Rural Locale, Post-Act 10 (Logistic)

Metric	Statistic
Overall performance	
McFadden's adjusted R^2	0.171
Efron's R^2	0.303
Brier score	0.1388
Log likelihood	-263.471
Deviance	526.943
Likelihood ratio	205.284
Model calibration	
Classifications Correct	78.65%
Sensitivity	91.59%
Specificity	44.44%
Proportional reduction in error	22.22%
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	0.5904
AIC	606.943
Model discrimination	
Tjur's R^2	0.306
c-statistic	0.8456

Model: Linear
Category: All locales, all years
Variable selection method: Backward stepwise (0.15, 0.10)

Equation:

(Y) = 113.77 – 40.15(Use – Renovations and additions for other facilities) – 9.72(Use – Renovations and additions for athletics) – 0.055(Administrator salary) – 5.14(Use – building and land purchases) – 3.55(Use – technology) – 4.34(Use – salaries and personnel – 0.06(Economically disadvantaged students) – 2.57(Use – renovations and additions for academics) + 0.0015(Educational attainment^2) – 7.85(Use – new capital academic) + 0.00025(Turnout^2) – 1.44(Rural) – 9.62(Use – new capital multiple) + 0.0034(Revenue – state^2) – 5.15(Use – undefined) – 0.021(Proficiency – reading) – 2.48(Use – educational programming) + 0.025(Total enrollment) – 3.18(Use – undefined operations) – 0.32(Revenue – federal) – 0.37(Revenue – state) – 0.095(Source and steadiness of income) – 4.34(Use – operate new facility) – 0.18(Teacher benefits) – 5.3(NR > 5-yr) – 7.41(Use – multiple capital) – 1.18(Teacher total experience) + 0.053(Teacher total experience^2) – 13.41(Use – new capital athletic) + 5.1(Anchoring) + 3.06(Anchoring – undefined) – 1.6(Competing referendums) – 0.21(Diffusion) + 0.098(Income ratio) + 5.85(Post-Act 10) – 1.28(Refloat) – 129.87(Tax impact) – 13.76(Use – renovations and upgrades for athletics) + 2.73(Timing – February) – 0.23(Median income) – 3.29(Use – joint capital and operations) – 0.0011(Revenue – local^2) – 0.075(Ideology – Pres.) – 3.17(Use – renovations and additions for multiple capital) – 0.12(Homeownership) + 8.47(Use – Retirement obligations) + 2.89(Timing – October) + 2.73(Timing – November) + 4.23(Timing – December) – 0.058(Turnout) – 7.51(Recurring) – 4.58(NR 1-yr) – 4.5(NR 2-yr) – 4.02(NR 3-yr) – 7.35(NR 4-yr) – 3.74(NR – 5yr)

Table 39

Evaluation Metrics – All Locales, All Years (Linear)

Metric	Statistic
Adjusted R^2	0.267
RMSE	10.636

Table 39 (continued)

MAPE	18.395
MAD	8.239
PRESS	286,041.12
Mallows's C_p	28.53
AIC	18,261.029

Model: Linear
Category: All locales, post-Act 10
Variable selection method: Backward stepwise (0.20, 0.15)

Equation:

(Y) = 31.33 – 1.07(Median income) – 14.19(Use – new capital athletics) + 0.6(Income ratio) + 0.00035(Total enrollment^2) + 0.4(Change in district size) – 0.000084(Property value per member^2) – 3.99(Use – multiple capital) – 0.62(Sex) – 0.0014(Revenue – local^2) – 5.08(Use – educational programming) – 5.51(Suburban) – 6.56(Rural) – 2.44(Mill rate) + 0.43(Educational attainment) – 4.27(Use – multiple operations) – 4.71(Use – joint capital and operations) – 39.03(Use – renovations and additions for athletics) – 0.071(Total enrollment) + 0.000047(Referendum amount^2) – 0.67(Revenue – federal) + 0.048(Property value per member) – 10.46(Use – building and land purchases) – 5.29(Use – undefined) + 0.13(Mill rate^2) + 0.25(Teacher local experience) + 1.11(Teacher salary) + 0.0089(Revenue – federal^2) – 0.54(Urgency – 5-yr) + 6.15(Anchoring) – 6.03(Use – renovations and additions for athletics) – 1.77(Competing referendums) – 0.59(Diffusion) – 0.026(Referendum amount) – 14.49(Use – new construction multiple facilities) – 97.69(Tax impact) + 0.24(Time elapsed) – 1.14(Timing – April) + 8.63(Timing – May) + 32.36(Timing – June) – 12.78(Use – renovations and upgrades for athletics) – 3.2(Timing – August) – 5.13(Use – operate new facility) + 13.22(Timing – October) – 0.14(Ideology – Gov.) – 7.21(Use – new academic facilities) – 2.09(Recurring) – 8.34(Use – salaries and personnel) – 5.08(NR 2-yr) – 7.44(Use – technology) – 2.79(NR 4-yr) + 0.26(Age) – 3.68(Use – undefined operations) + 0.29(Source and steadiness of income)

Table 40

Evaluation Metrics – All Locales, Post-Act 10 (Linear)

Metric	Statistic
Adjusted R^2	0.355
RMSE	8.716
MAPE	12.837
MAD	6.516
PRESS	74,388.501
Mallows's C_p	19.328
AIC	5816.433

Model: Linear
Category: Rural locale, all years
Variable selection method: Backward stepwise (0.20, 0.15)

Equation:

(Y) = 76.77 – 0.13(Source and steadiness of income) – 0.25(Administrator local experience) – 0.13(Administrator salary) – 0.044(Administrator total experience) – 0.0033(Revenue – state^2) – 0.0074(Debt) – 0.066(Economically disadvantaged students) + 0.052(Teacher local experience^2) – 0.058(Levy) + 9.07(Use – retirement obligations) + 2.32(Mill rate) – 6.35(Use – new academic facilities) + 0.028(Proficiency – math) – 0.042(Proficiency – reading) + 0.15(Public employees) – 0.16(Median income) + 0.011(Administrator local experience^2) – 0.23(Sex) + 0.36(Revenue – local) – 14.11(Use – new athletics facilities) – 13.37(Use – renovations and additions for athletics) – 0.21(Teacher benefits) – 1.82(Teacher local experience) + 0.0014(Turnout^2) + 0.76(Teacher total experience) + 0.077(Income ratio) – 0.001(Revenue – local^2) + 5.24(Anchoring) + 4.07(Anchoring – undefined) – 1.22(Competing referendums) – 0.26(Diffusion) – 10.19(Use – new multiple facilities) + 5.57(Post-Act 10) – 1.46(Refloat) – 131.23(Tax impact) + 0.00036(Administrator salary^2) + 2(Timing – February) – 0.048(Ideology – Pres.) – 1.99(Use – undefined) – 0.1(Mill rate^2) + 0.0049(Total equalized value) + 0.073(Race)

– 0.19(Homeownership) – 2.12(Use – renovations and additions for academics) + 5.44(Timing – October) + 1.84(Timing – November) + 4.72(Timing – December) – 0.15(Turnout) – 9.93(Recurring) – 8.71(NR 1-yr) – 7.01(NR 2-yr) – 6.44(NR – 3yr) – 9.16(NR 4-yr) – 5.51(NR 5-yr) – 7.63(NR > 5-yr) + 7.84(Use – transportation) – 13.31(Use – renovations and upgrades for athletics) – 2.86(Use – renovations and additions for multiple facilities) – 37.23(Use – renovations and additions for other facilities) – 6.91(Use – multiple capital facilities)

Table 41

Evaluation Metrics – Rural Locale, All Years (Linear)

Metric	Statistic
Adjusted R^2	0.267
RMSE	10.806
MAPE	18.663
MAD	8.315
PRESS	323,157.58
Mallows's C_p	31.646
AIC	13,265.21

Model: Linear
Category: Rural locale, post-Act 10
Variable selection method: Best subsets of backward elimination (0.20)

Equation:

(Y) = 149.29 – 0.133(Levy) – 1.02(Sex) – 0.034(Property value per member) + 0.32(Educational attainment) + 0.41(Age) + 0.68(Students of Color) – 50.86(Racial mismatch) – 0.97(Diffusion) – 0.47(Revenue – federal) – 0.15(Ideology – Gov.) + 0.0066(Total equalized value) + 0.3(Population) – 0.72(Urgency – 5yr) + 0.27(Public school enrollment) – 0.082(Economically disadvantaged students) – 0.018(Referendum amount) – 0.044(Proficiency – math) + 0.14(Time elapsed) – 4.34(Use – multiple capital) – 30.23(Use – renovations and additions for other

facilities) – 1.88(Use – joint capital and operations) – 6.54(Use – technology) – 5.73(Use – operate new facilities) – 2.43(Use – educational programming) – 8.39(Use – building and land purchases) – 3.18(NR 4-yr) – 6.54(NR – 2yr) + 5.99(Anchoring) – 5.03(Use – salary and personnel) – 13.41(Use – renovations and upgrades for athletics) – 5.49(Use – new academic facilities) – 15.34(Use – refinancing debt) + 34.96(Timing – June) – 2.11(NR 3-yr) – 17.78(Use – new multiple facilities) + 12.48(Timing – October) – 15.48(Use – new athletics facilities) – 3.13(Recurring) – 1408.49(Tax impact^2) + 0.00024(Revenue – local^2) – 6.01(Student-staff ratio) + 0.26(Student-staff ratio^2) – 0.00000011(Age ratio^2) + 0.00037(Turnout^2) + 0.018(Mill rate^2)

Table 42

Evaluation Metrics – Rural Locale, Post-Act 10 (Linear)

Metric	Statistic
Adjusted R^2	0.367
RMSE	8.617
MAPE	12.927
MAD	6.542
PRESS	133,633.82
Mallows's C_p	46
AIC	4,581.469

Part one of my methods section presented various statistical metrics used to evaluate the quality of logistic and linear models. I prioritized the metrics presented in that section. However, there were not the sole indicators of quality. Other metrics were also used. This appendix displays these evaluation measures for the best models from each locale-era combination. Here, I present a brief definition of these additional metrics.

In addition to McFadden's adjusted R^2 and the deviance, a third way of measuring overall model predictive performance is Efron's R^2. Efron's R^2 is analogous to an OLS R^2. The difference between a predicted and observed probability is first squared and summed across the observations. This number is then divided by the summed squared difference between the mean outcome and observed outcome across the observations. Lastly, it is subtracted from 1 (Smith & McKenna, 2013).

The Brier score is a fourth way to measure overall model performance. The Brier score measures the difference between the event (the observed outcome) and the probability of that event (the calculated chance it will occur), squares the differences, sums the squares across the observations, and divides the square by the number of observations to which the score applies (Rufibach, 2010). A model perfectly predicting the outcome has a Brier score of 0; a model that contributes no predictive ability has a Brief score of 1. A forecast that predicts a 50/50 chance for each event has a Brier score of 0.25 (Rufibach, 2010). A brier score is conceptually reflective of a linear regression's mean squared error.

A third measure of model calibration is the Hosmer-Lemeshow test. Subjects are divided into classes with similar predicted values of probability outcomes; the number of cases per class should be approximately equal (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). If the proposed model is fit well, the subjects who experienced the event should fall within the upper-range of the classes and vice versa. The consequence of a poorly fit model is subjects spread evenly throughout the classes regardless of outcome (Stoltzfus, 2011). Hosmer and Lemeshow demonstrated that the test-statistic is approximately the chi-square distribution with c-2 degrees of freedom (where c equals the number of classes) when there are few probability replicates (Agresti, 2012; Hosmer,

Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013). The null hypothesis is of good model fit when the Hosmer-Lemeshow test is implemented (Cizek & Fitzgerald, 1999).

The fourth and final measure of model calibration is the Akaike information criterion (AIC). Depending on the type of statistical software used for analyses, the AIC is used instead of Mallows's C_p because of their similar goals and purposes (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). When applied to a logistic model, the AIC equals the deviance—the goal of which is minimization—plus a penalty of two times the number of predictors used in the potential model.

With regard to linear model evaluation metrics, a third measure—in addition to the two presented in my methods section—is the joint mean absolute percentage error (MAPE) and mean absolute deviation (MAD) statistic. They provide an evaluation of the accuracy of a model's predictions. The MAPE is the absolute value of the ratio of an observation's residual to its actual, observed value. All of these proportions are summed, divided by the total number of observations, and multiplied by 100 to provide a proportion (Makridakis, Wheelwright, and Hyndman, 1998; Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). The MAD value is very similar but is not presented as proportion. Rather, the absolute value of all of the residuals is divided by the number of observations in order to create the average of the deviations across all observations (Makridakis, Wheelwright, and Hyndman, 1998; Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). The MAPE and MAD are clear measures of the "center" of the error distribution while RMSE is a measure of the "variation" of that error (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012, p. 532).

A fourth measure for evaluating the predictive effectiveness of a linear model is the prediction sum of squares (PRESS) statistic. PRESS sums the square of the predicted residual for the *i*th observation with a model developed with the *i*th observation deleted. Therefore, the potential "best" model is applied to the sample data *n* times with one data point removed each

time, and calculating the predicted value of *y* for that deleted data point (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012, p. 334). A model is chosen based on a small PRESS statistic since the goal is the minimize the difference between the predicted and observed *y* values—the proportion of yes voters (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004; Agresti & Finaley, 2009). This method of omitting one data point is known as "jackknifing" (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012, p. 317). Typically, jackknifing is used when the sample data is too small to divide and utilize cross-validation. While my particular data set is not particularly small, jackknifing is appealing because it allows the candidate model to "learn" from all of the data points as opposed to a subset used for cross-validation. Mendenhall and Sincich (2012) stated that the PRESS statistic is larger than a fitted model's error sum of squares because of the omitted data point, which, in turn, results in a larger MSE and smaller R^2 value. They argued that a jackknife measure like PRESS helps unearth a model that provides a "more conservative" and, thus, a "more realistic" assessment of model's ability to predict additional observations (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012, p. 317).

Fifth, models for prediction and forecasting often also report Mallows's C_p criterion (Makridakis, Wheelwright, & Hyndman, 1998). Mallows's C_p evaluates the amount of bias in the predictions because of an underspecified predictive model or when sets of predictors are compared (provided they are nested in a complete or full model). Mallows's C_p is particularly helpful in identifying a model that is more parsimonious without sacrificing predictive abilities (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). A model is selected with a Mallows's C_p value comparable to a full model because it will have a small variance in prediction and the total MSE is minimized (Simon, Young, & Pardoe, 2018). However, the "best" value of Mallows's C_p will be from a model that contains all of the predictors and intercept. Therefore, it is not helpful in

evaluating the quality of the full model with no potentially unhelpful predictors removed (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004).

Appendix 2

The following table applies the most successful rural referendum, post-Act 10 model to the three types of referendums that a district can hold—debt issuance, non-recurring, and recurring. In other words, only rural, debt issuance referendums held post-Act 10 were kept in the dataset, and the best model was applied. This was then repeated for non-recurring and recurring. The evaluation metrics for each type are presented below.

Table 43

Best Logistic Model Applied to Referendum Types (Rural, Post-Act 10)

Evaluation Metric	Debt Issuance	Non-Recurring	Recurring
<u>Overall performance</u>			
McFadden's adjusted R^2	0.059	0.13	1
Efron's R^2	0.297	0.391	1
Brier score	0.1535	0.1031	0
Log likelihood	-138.311	-77.457	0
Deviance	276.623	154.913	0
Likelihood ratio	97.95	105.986	83.1
<u>Model calibration</u>			
Classifications Correct	77.52%	84%	100%
Sensitivity	87.62%	92.86%	100%
Specificity	56.25%	51.85%	100%
Proportional reduction in error	30.21%	25.93%	100%

Table 43 (continued)

Hosmer-Lemeshow test	0.4872	0.419	1
AIC	352.623	226.913	0
Model discrimination			
Tjur's R^2	0.299	0.402	1
c-statistic	0.8349	0.9058	1

Note. The best model actually achieved perfect prediction when applied to recurring referendums. This was not expected. There were 72 post-Act 10, rural, recurring referendums included in this analysis. Of these, 53 were correctly classified as having passed and 19 were correctly classified as having failed.

Table 44

Best Linear Model Applied to Referendum Types (Rural, Post-Act 10)

Evaluation Metric	Debt Issuance	Non-Recurring	Recurring
Adjusted R^2	0.424	0.2837	0.319
RMSE	9.1752	7.6933	8.7327
MAPE	14.0597	8.977585	8.592566
MAD	6.750868	4.800882	4.655378
PRESS	33,267.088	198,356.79	9,878.4337
Mallows's C_p	55.184279	-17.279239	160.72076
AIC	2224.768	1841.507	545.795

Appendix 3

The equations for each logistic and linear model evaluation metric are presented below. Explanations for each appear in my methods section above.

Table 45

Equations for Logistic Model Evaluation Metrics

Metric	Equation
McFadden's adjusted R^2	$R^2_{adj} = 1 - \frac{\log(M_{Full}) - k}{\log(M_{Null})}$
Efron's R^2	$R^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N}(y_i - \hat{y}_{i_i})^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{N}(y_i - \bar{y})^2}$
Brier score	$BS = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N}(\hat{y}_{i_i} - y_i)^2$
Deviance	$-2 * log(likelihood)$
Classification correct	$Correct\ Classification = \frac{TP + TN}{Total}$
Sensitivity	$Sensitivity = \frac{TP}{Observed_{Event}}$
Specificity	$Specificity = \frac{TN}{Observed_{Non-Event}}$
Proportional reduction in error	$PRE = \frac{Errors_{Null} - Errors_{Potential}}{Errors_{Null}}$
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	$G^2_{HL} = \sum_{j=1}^{10}\frac{(O_j - E_j)^2}{E_j(1 - E_j/n_j)} \sim \chi^2_8$
AIC	$G^2_{HL} = \sum_{j=1}^{10}\frac{(O_j - E_j)^2}{E_j(1 - E_j/n_j)} \sim \chi^2_8$

Table 45 (continued)

Tjur's R^2	$R^2 = \bar{P}_E - \bar{P}_{NE}$
c-statistic	$AUROC = \int_{x=0}^{1} TPR\left(FPR^{-1}(x)\right) dx$

Table 46

Equations for Linear Model Evaluation Metrics

Metric	Equation
Adjusted R^2	$R^2_{adj} = 1 - \frac{(1-R^2)(n-1)}{(n-k-1)}$
Root mean square error	$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\hat{y}_i - y_i)^2}{n}}$
Mean absolute percentage error	$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(\hat{y}_i - y_i)^2}{n}}$
Mean absolute deviation	$MAD = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}\lvert y_i - \bar{y}_i\rvert}{n}$
Prediction sum of squares	$PRESS = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2$
Mallows's C_p	$Mallows\ C_p = \left(\frac{SSE_p}{MSE_{Full}}\right) + 2p - n$
AIC	$AIC = n * \ln\left(\frac{SSE}{n}\right) + 2k$

Appendix 4

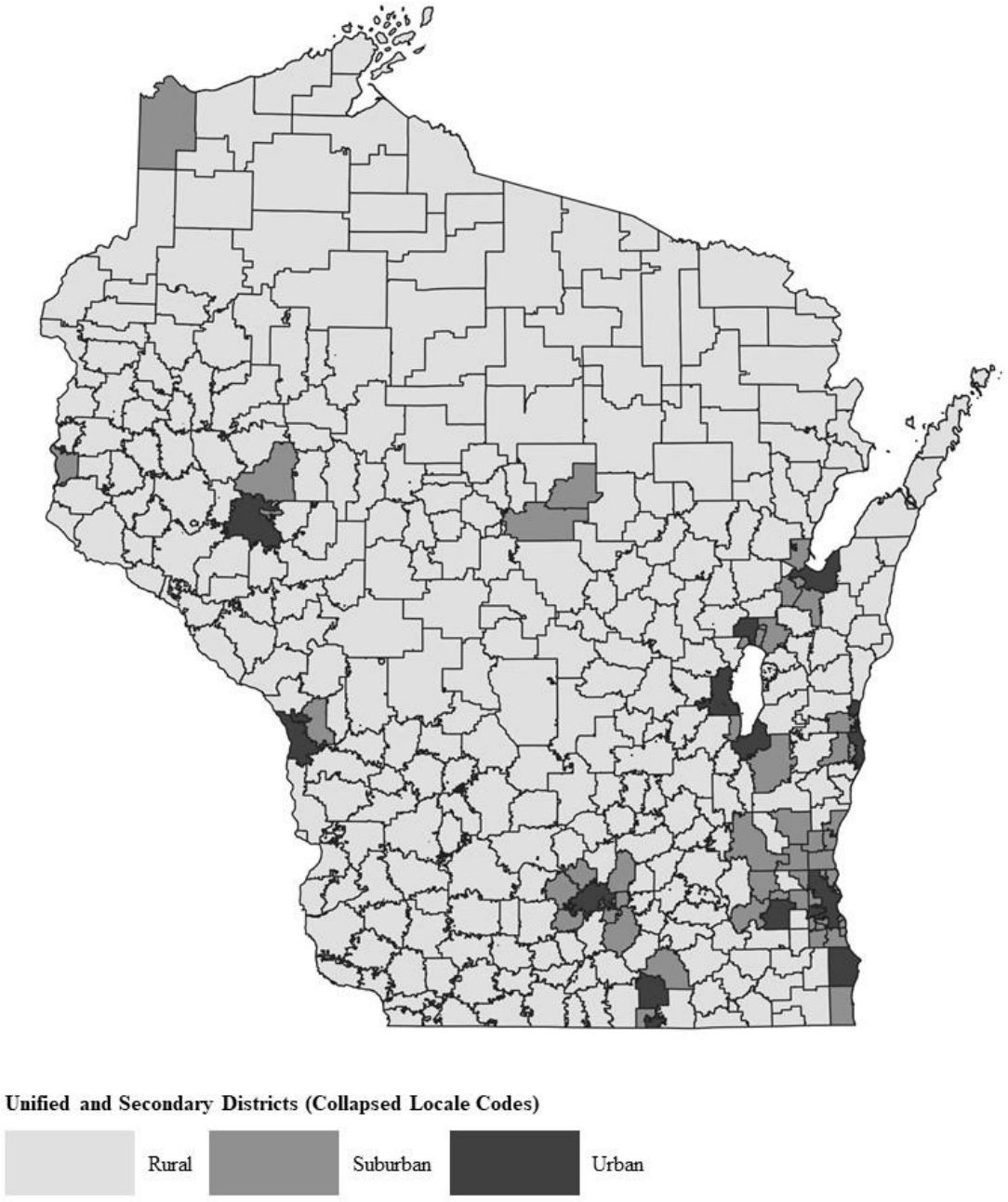

Figure 61: Unified and Secondary Districts – Collapsed Locale Codes

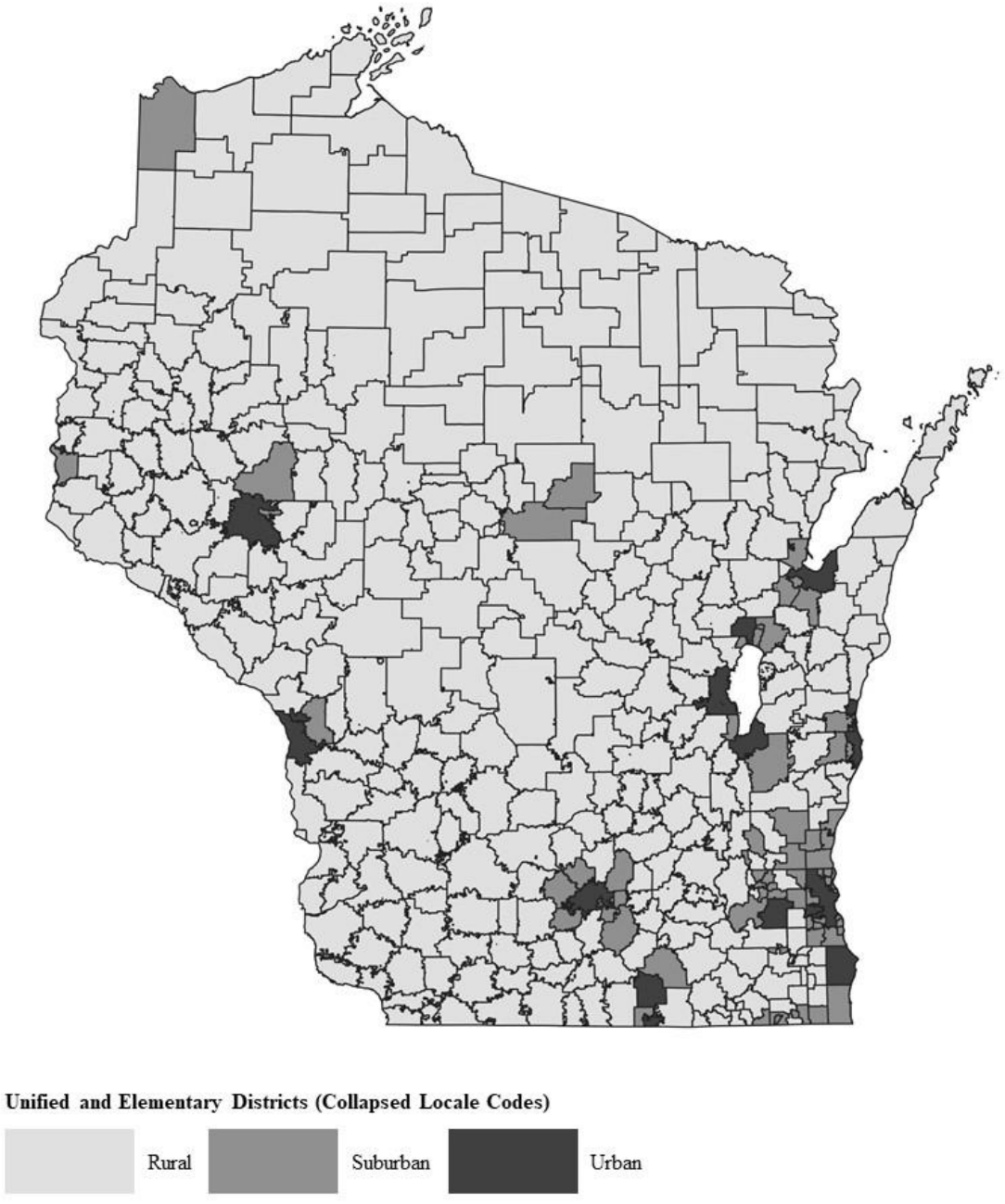

Figure 62: Unified and Elementary Districts – Collapsed Locale Codes

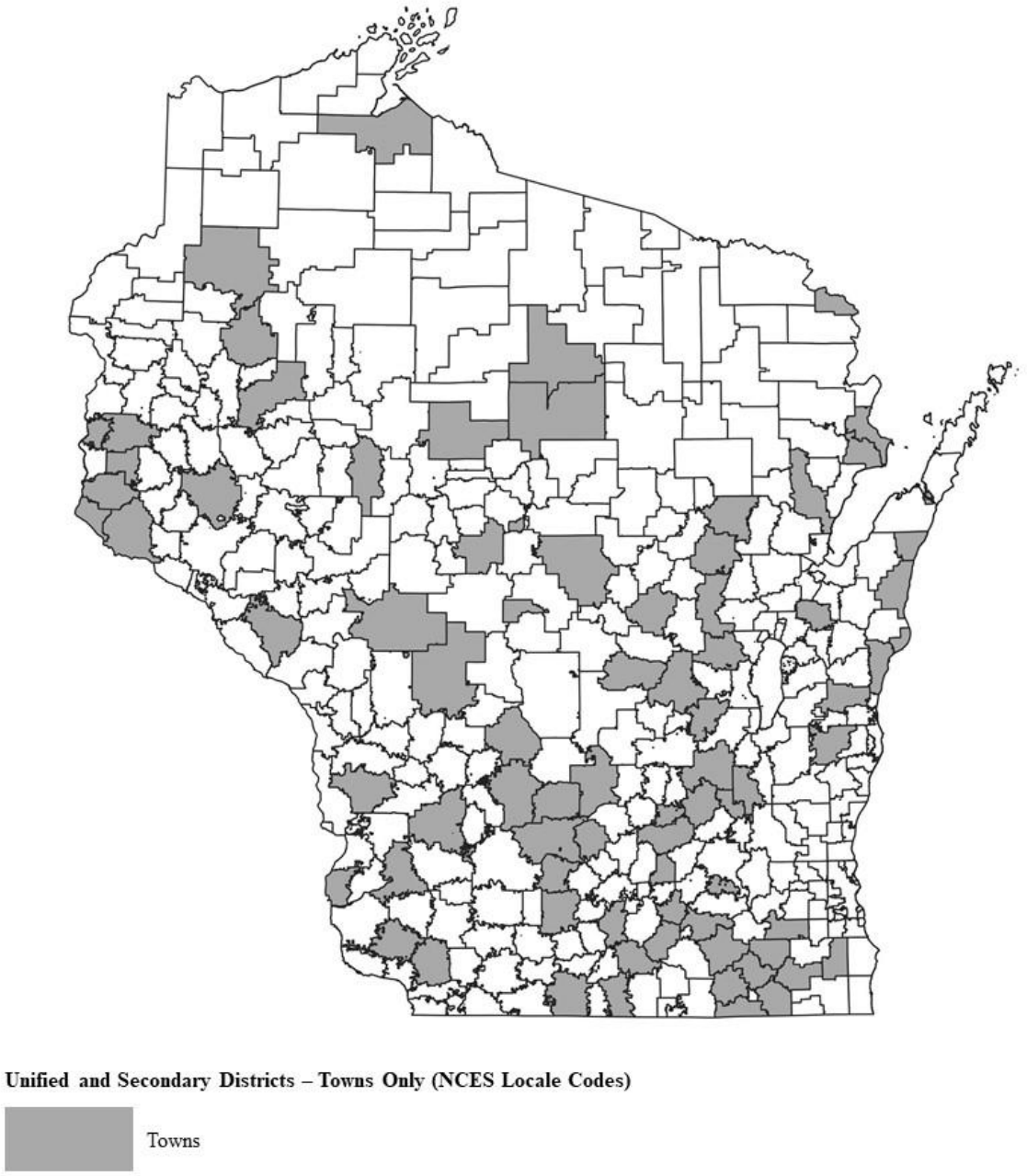

Figure 63: Unified and Secondary Districts – Towns Only (NCES Locale Codes)

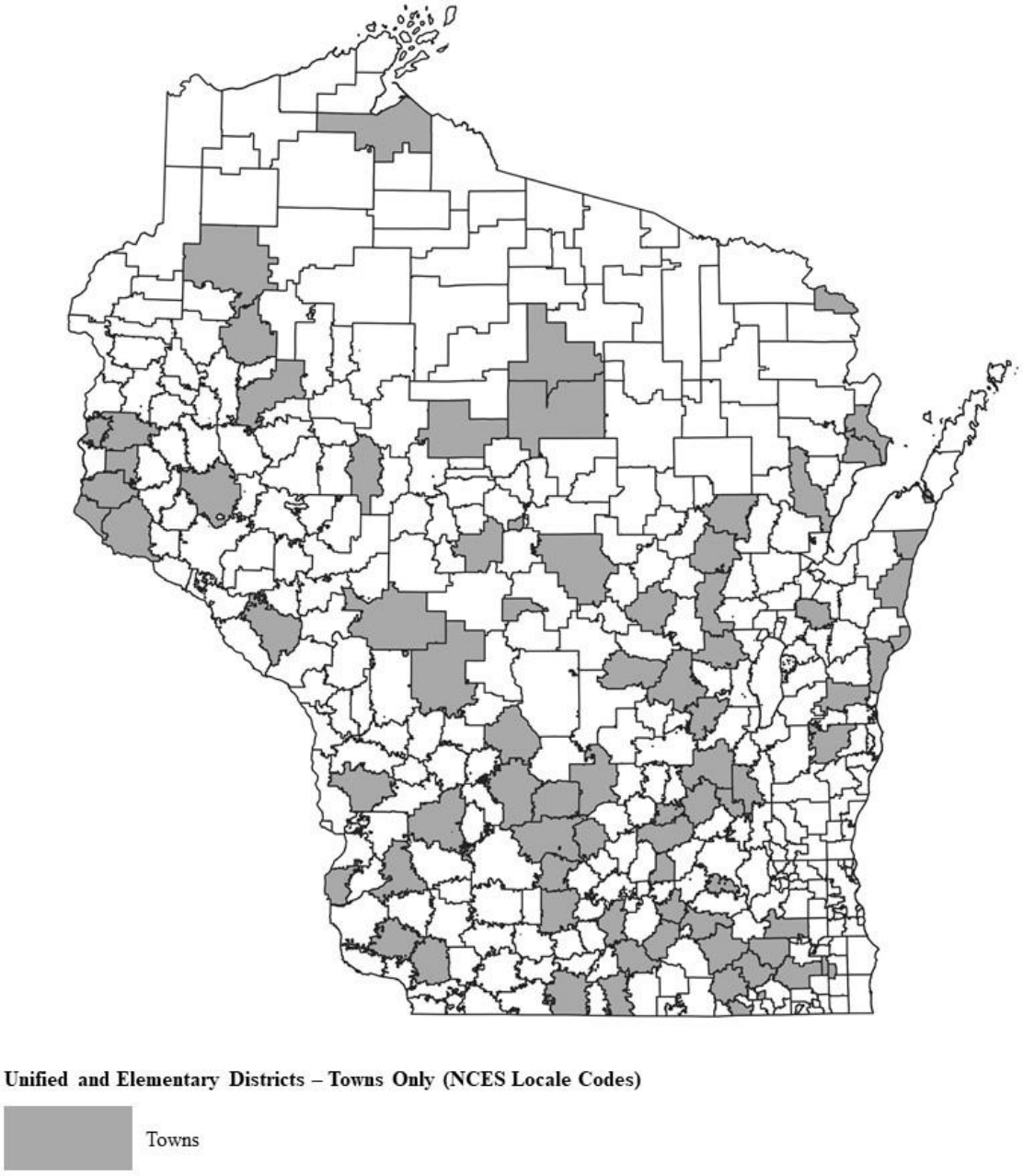

Figure 64: Unified and Elementary Districts – Towns Only (NCES Locale Codes)

Source: Data collected by Caitlin McKown, University of Wisconsin Applied Population Lab. Graphics produced by Caitlin Bourbeau, University of Wisconsin Applied Population Lab. Original article written by Malia Jones and Mitchell Eward (2017), University of Wisconsin Applied Population Lab. “Putting Rural Wisconsin On The Map” was originally published on WisContext, which produced the article in a partnership between Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television.

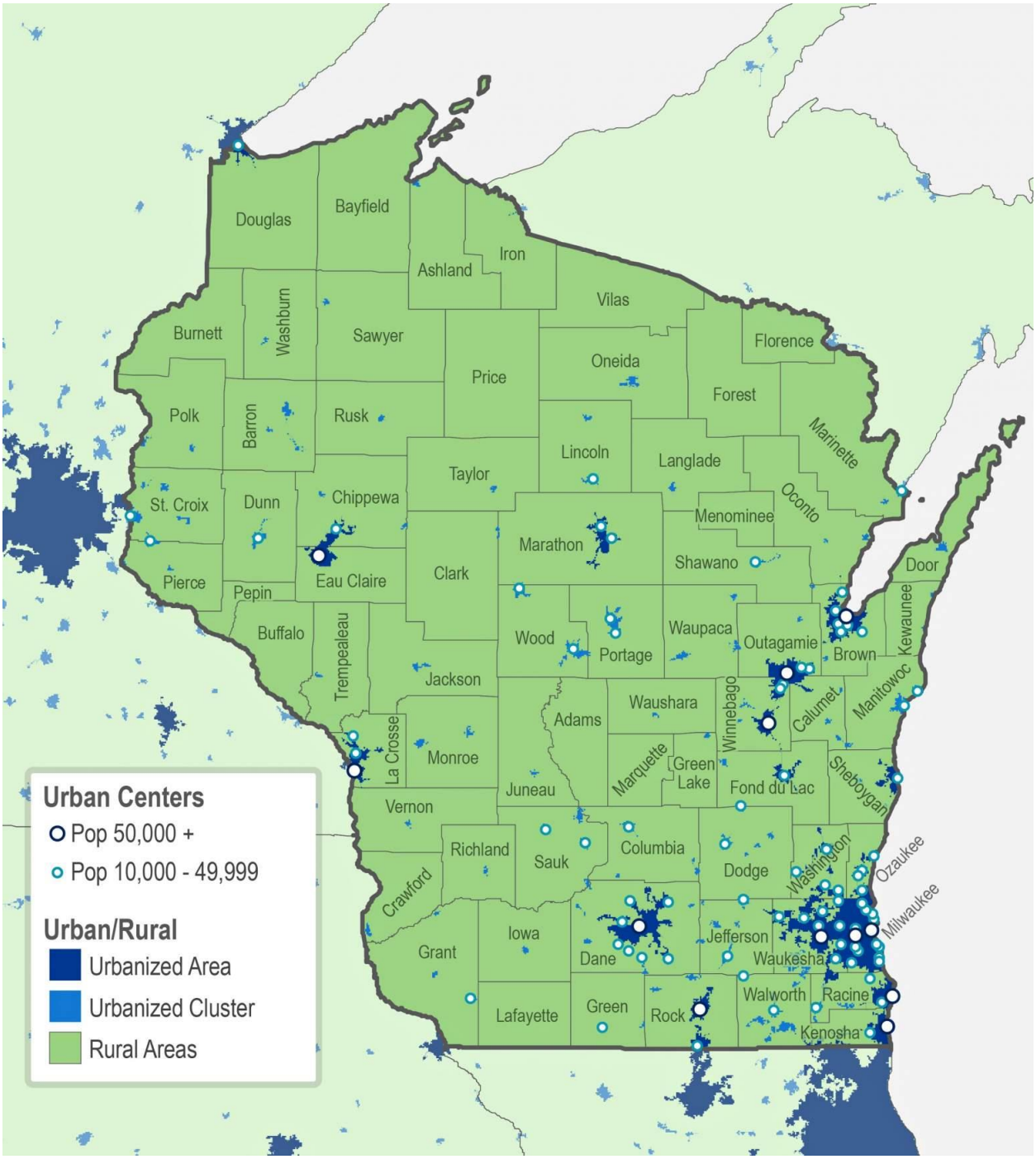

Figure 65: Rurality Defined by Urbanized Areas and Clusters

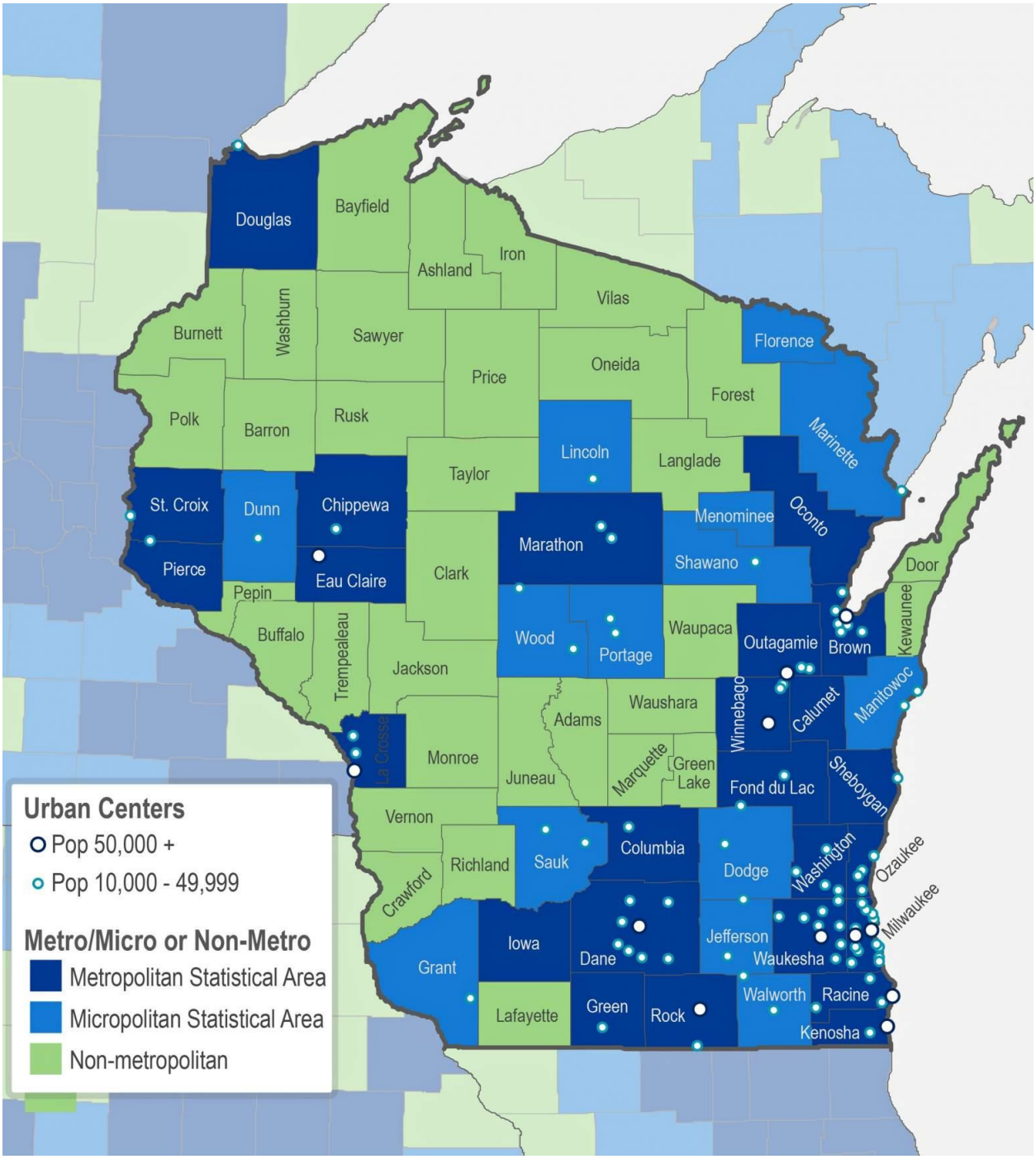

Figure 66: Rurality Defined by Metro- and Micropolitan Statistical Areas

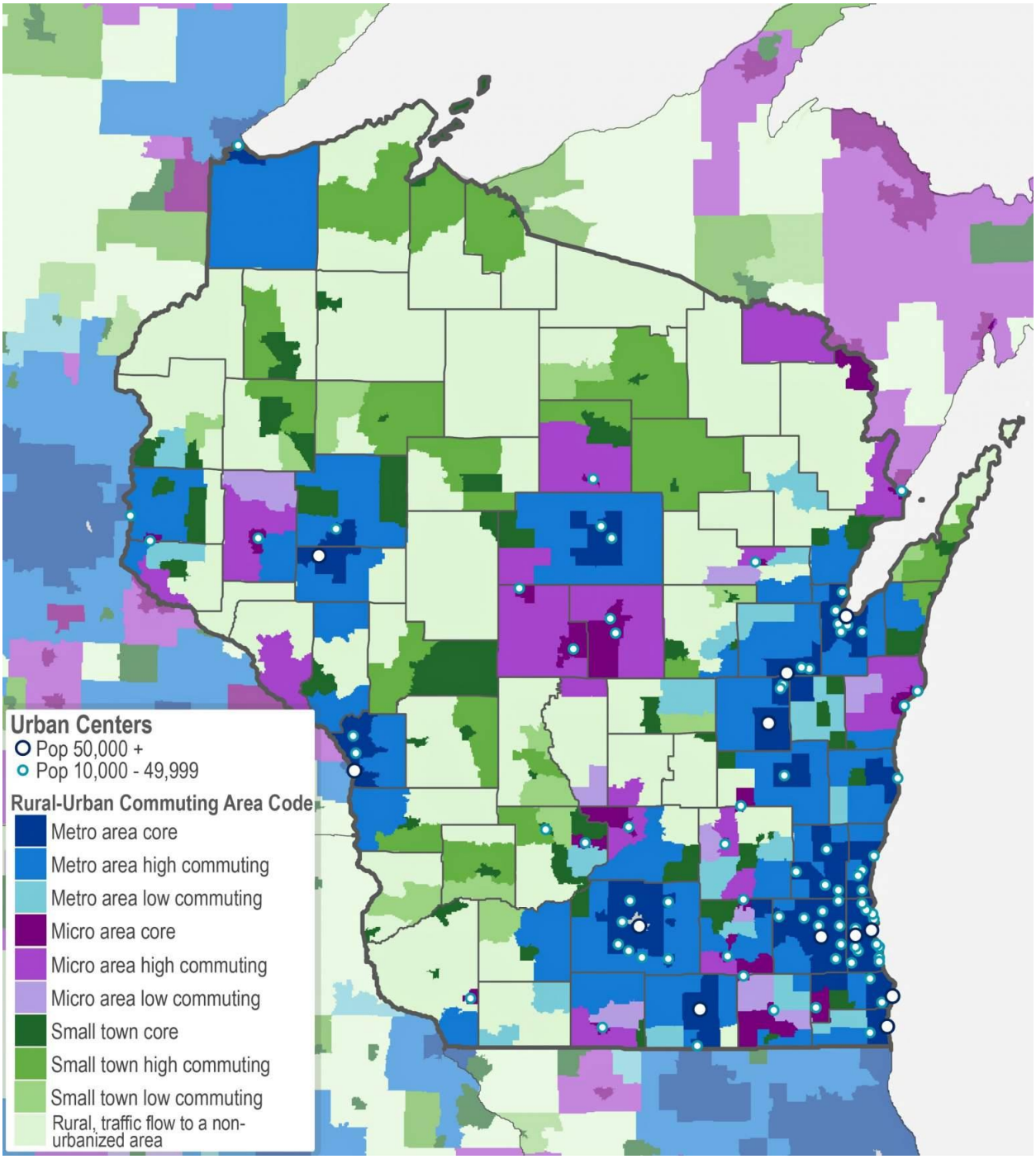

Figure 67: Rurality Defined by Rural-Urban Commuting Areas

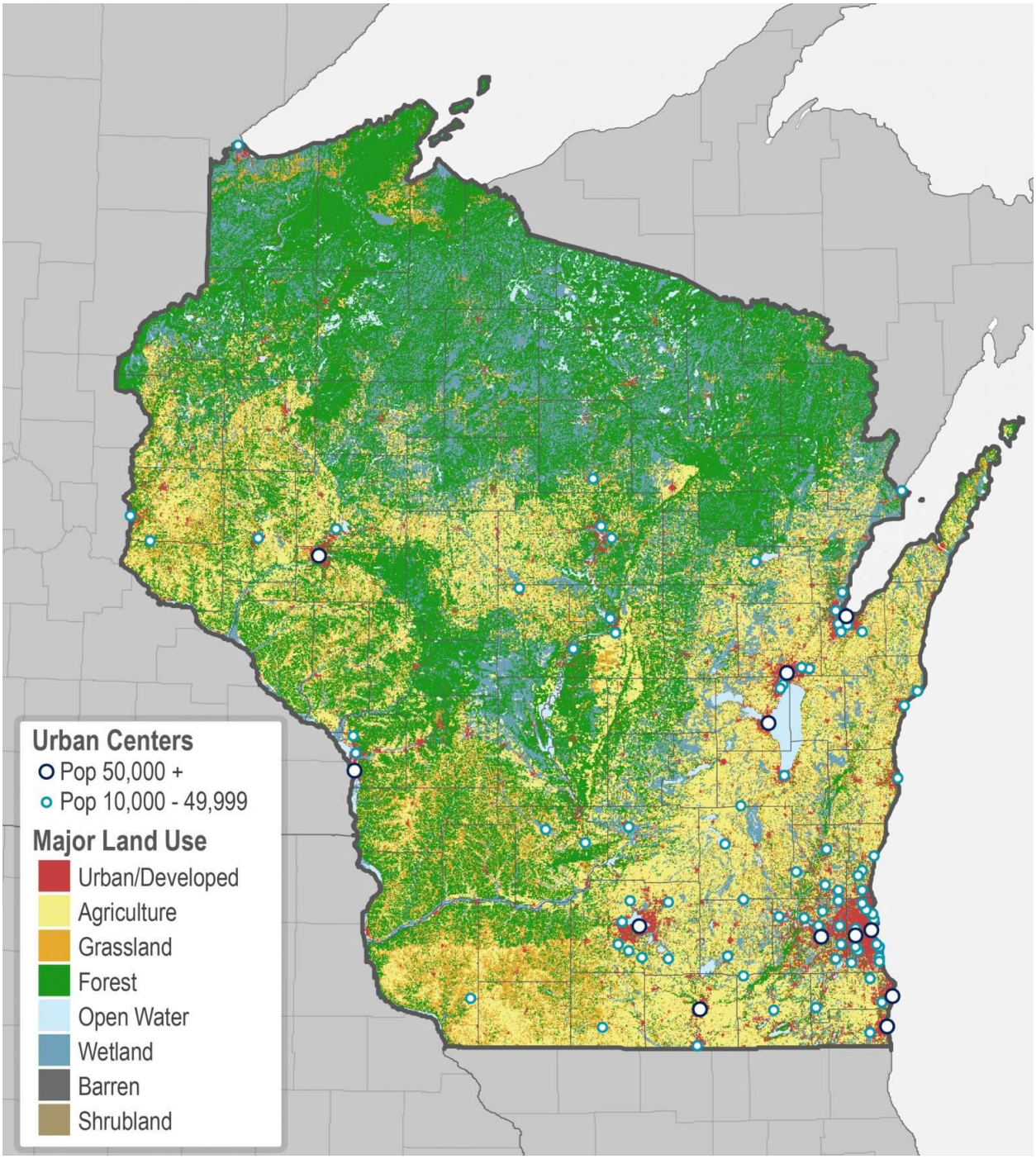

Figure 68: Rurality Defined by Land Use

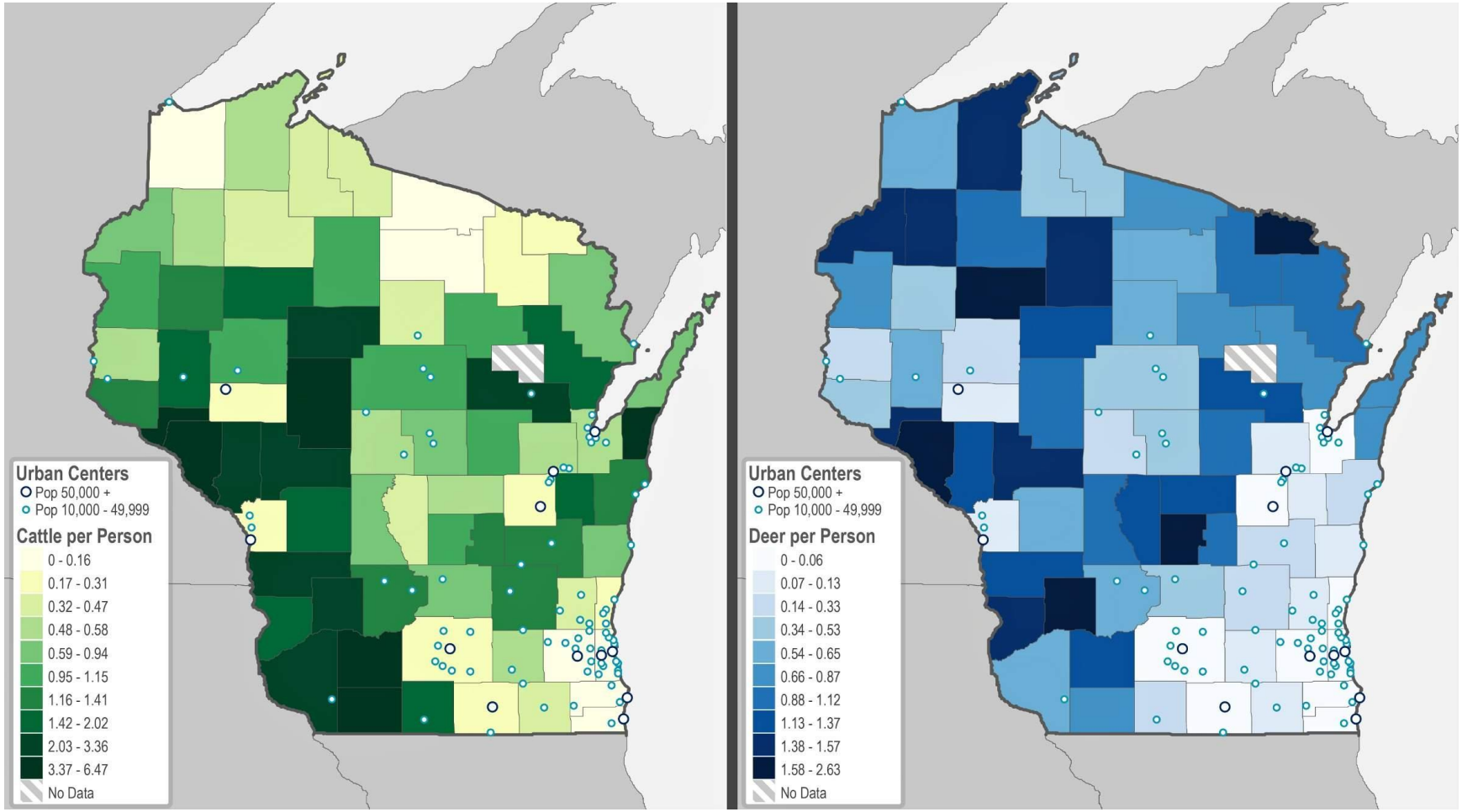

Figure 69: Rurality Defined by Cattle and Deer to Person Ratios

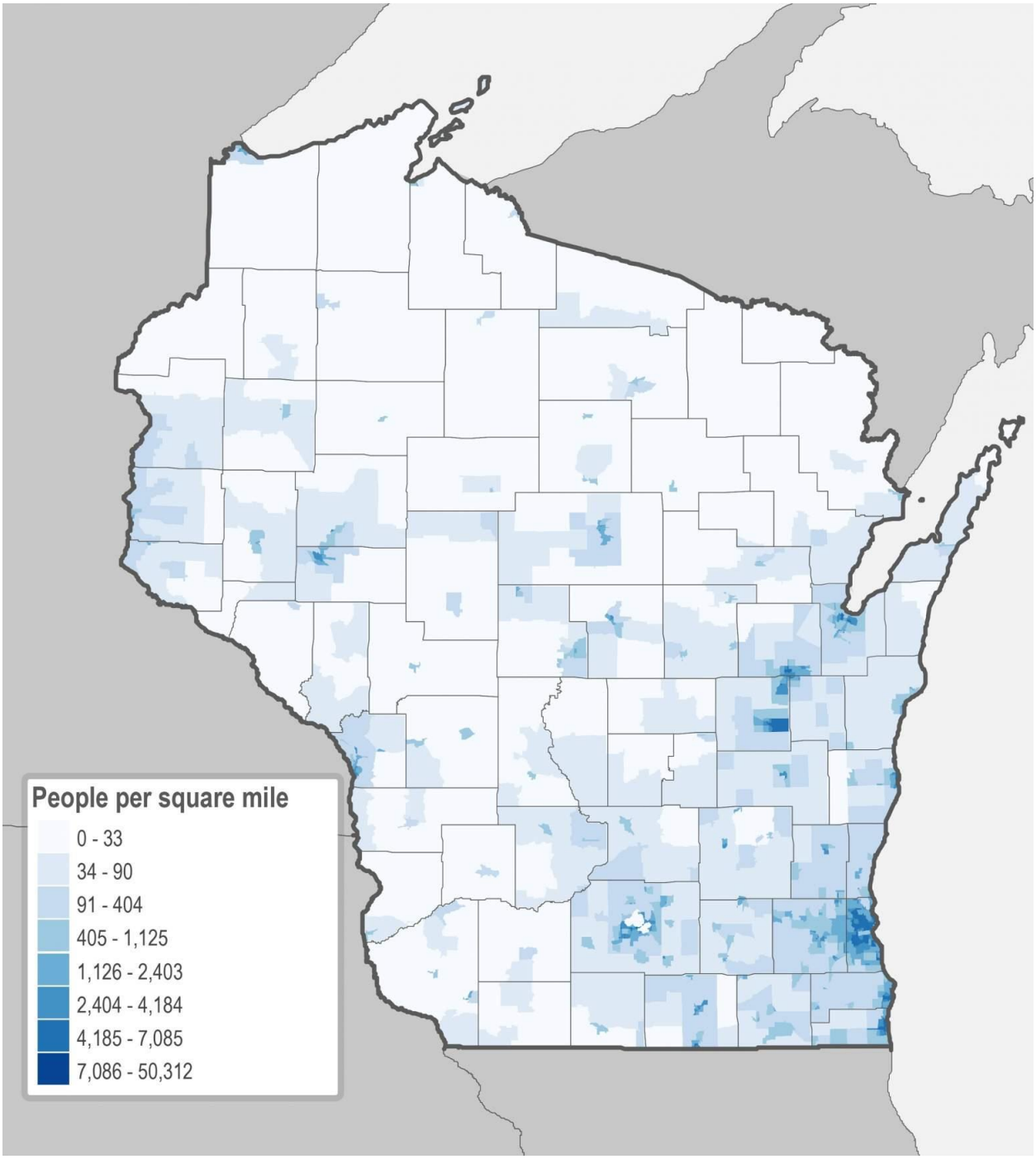

Figure 70: Rurality Defined by Population Density

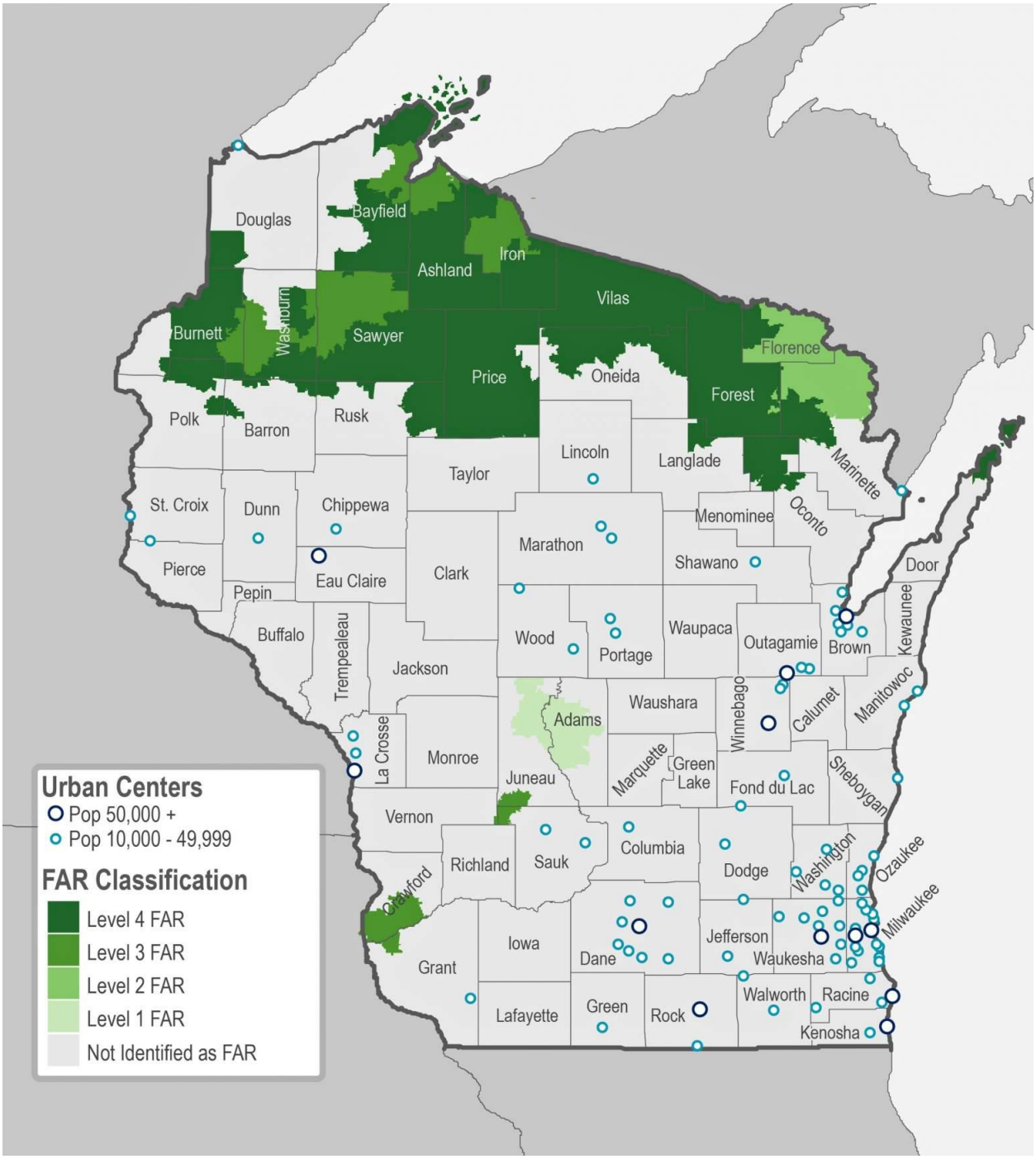

Figure 71: Rurality Defined by Frontier Status

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