The Public Assistance Policies of Cities and the Justice Concerns of Elected Officials: The Centrality of the Floors Principle in Addressing Urban Poverty

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The Public Assistance Policies of Cities and the Justice Concerns of Elected Officials: The Centrality of the Floors Principle in Addressing Urban Poverty

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Abstract: City councils are significant, though seldom central, actors in local policy networks providing public assistance to disadvantaged residents. Mayors and council members in 12 American cities more often support than oppose public assistance initiatives. They claim that their own normative judgments are more important to their preferences and voting behavior on such matters than are public opinion, group demands, or economic considerations. While such elected officials hold a variety of justice principles, the most important of these affecting their positions on public assistance issues is the "floors" principle. A broad ethical commitment to providing social minimums enhances support for living-wage ordinances, for linking subsidies for economic development to assistance to less advantaged citizens, and for exempting spending on social services from budget cuts. We discuss the implications of these findings for major theories of urban politics and policies – collective-action theory, regime theory, and pluralism – and for advocates on behalf of the urban poor.

Key words: local public assistance policy networks; policies toward the homeless; living wage ordinances; linkage policies; social service funding; the floors principle; reconstructed pluralism

The conventional wisdom asserts that the capacity of local governments to assist their most needy residents, never very great, has declined in an era of rising conservative attitudes and fiscal stress.[1] Hacker and Pierson (2010, 2) provide a typical assessment when they claim that recently "state and local governments, faced with unprecedented budget deficits, were slashing gaping holes in the safety net" (see also Gais, 2009). While some state and local governments in the U.S. have indeed reduced social welfare programs during the current recession, it is not yet clear how deep and widespread these cuts are. Comprehensive data, such as the reports on *State and Local Government Finance*, by the U.S. Census Bureau, are only available up to 2009, and these data are far from ideal. Still, they suggest that welfare spending at the local level (by counties and municipalities) increased by 9.2 percent between 2006-7 and 2008-9, and public welfare constituted a slightly higher share of municipal budgets (3.16 percent) after the recession had begun than before (when it comprised 3.13 percent of municipal expenditures).[2]

Examples of municipalities demonstrating their continued commitments to needy citizens during the current recession and budgetary crises can be seen in some of the cities that we examine in more detail in this paper. When the State of Kansas announced during the summer of 2011 that it was closing the Lawrence local office for Social and Rehabilitation Services (as well as such offices in a half dozen smaller communities), the Lawrence City and Douglas County Commissions agreed to temporarily co-fund the local office, in order to continue to provide its nearly 20 thousand persons living below the poverty level convenient access to public assistance opportunities. In Kansas City, Missouri, the City Council approved more than a 30% increase in its allocations to agencies providing shelter and services for the homeless. And the City Council of Berkeley, California, made a Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program one of its priorities. Although these initiatives involved relatively minor increases in welfare spending and were inadequate to the growing needs of the poor, they

do illustrate that city councils often regard municipal governments as having enduring public welfare responsibilities.

Most theories of urban politics stress that municipal governments are unlikely to pursue welfare policies. Federal, state, and county governments have far greater jurisdiction for assisting the poor (Kantor 1995). Cities have economic disincentives for helping the needy, because generous local welfare programs can prompt capital flight, encourage in-migration of those who consume city services but pay little in city taxes, and lower municipal bond ratings (Peterson 1981; Hackworth 2007). And there are systematic biases in local power structures that make city officials more responsive to business interests than to the poor (Stone 1980; Logan and Molotch 1987).

This paper reassesses the role of city governments in this area. We first provide the theoretical bases for such a reassessment. After describing our study, which draws on interviews with 95 elected officials in 12 cities, we then describe their support for various public assistance issues that arose in these cities and their support for hypothetical issues that have arisen elsewhere. Our reassessment does not claim that mayors and city council members are likely to be at the forefront of providing social justice to the urban poor, but it does enable us to see such officials as occasionally acting as moral agents prompted by justice principles to pursue public assistance policies, even in the face of jurisdictional, economic, and political constraints.

Reassessing the Role of City Governments in Assisting the Poor

The urban literature tends to use terms like public welfare policies, redistributive policies, and antipoverty policies interchangeably and loosely. We believe that an old-fashioned term – *public assistance* – is a more appropriate concept for analyzing municipal provisions to improve the conditions of needy citizens. Municipal governments do not provide much welfare as that term is commonly understood, as delivering goods and services directly to people who qualify for needs-based assistance; they do not establish welfare rights for the poor beyond

those provided by federal and state governments. They do not directly redistribute money, imposing progressive taxes on the rich to provide transfer payments to the poor. And they certainly do not try to eliminate poverty. What city governments can do is provide some programs to assist lower-income residents with basic housing, health, and other needs, offer some financial assistance for social service agencies that serve the poor, coordinate social service programs within the community, and adopt regulatory policies intended to improve the conditions of their most needy citizens. Today, some municipalities do nothing more in terms of providing public assistance than allocate funds from Community Development Bloc Grants (CDBGs) in ways that benefit lower-income residents, as required by federal law.[3] But others do more (Craw 2006). Some urban scholars argue that officials in central cities have supported "social-centered policies" (Savitch and Kanter 2002, 102-111) including "the expansion of social services for needy constituents" (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2004, 219). Other urban scholars argue that city officials can do much more to improve the lives of their least advantaged citizens (Harvey 2009; Fainstein 2010).

The understanding that municipalities have little or no jurisdiction for pursuing public assistance policies is based on readily available measures indicating that city governments are seldom involved in the administration of federally assisted welfare programs and rarely provide much welfare funding from local sources (Sharp and Maynard-Moody 1991, 942). However, some more recent studies suggest a larger local welfare role than indicated by such measures. First, Janet Pack (1998, 1995) has argued that "a substantial part of public expenditures associated with poverty are financed from local resources," and has shown that "indirect poverty expenditures" – such as those on public safety and recreational facilities – are disproportionately targeted at the poor. Second, cities can adopt regulations – such as lifeline utility rates and rent controls - having redistributive impacts. The living-wage ordinance movement suggests that many cities have been willing and even eager to pursue such measures

(Swartz and Vasi 2011). Third, city governments may collaborate with community-based organizations and other entities to provide financial and organizational support for needy citizens (Lipsky and Smith 1990; Rich, Giles, and Stern 2001). Because this third challenge to the conventional wisdom involves the greatest theoretical revision to our understanding of urban policy, it merits a more extended discussion.

Robert Stein (1990) has provided the most comprehensive and important analysis in this regard. He stresses that analysts must distinguish between the provision and the production of public welfare (and other local services) and recognize that alternative institutional arrangements can be employed to produce services – such as child care for low-income families – that are publically provided. Beyond the direct municipal production of a welfare service, municipalities increasingly employ such alternative arrangements as contracting with nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses to provide the service, subsiding such entities to enable them to provide the service to the poor at reduced cost, or providing vouchers to the poor which they can redeem for services by such entities. Stein finds that these alternative arrangements can avoid some of the economic and political costs of public production of public assistance and can be more efficient than public production, although the overall effectiveness of the alternative arrangements is affected by many factors including the nature of the service being provided. According to Stein (1990, 59-61), "municipal governments with functional responsibilities for social services overwhelmingly employ nondirect methods for the provision and production of these services."

Stein's work is informed by Elinor Ostrom's larger "collective-action" theoretical perspective. Ostrom (1990) is concerned that public goods can be under-produced (when citizens and beneficiaries hope to escape the costs of their provision) and that common-pool resources can be over-used (when self-interested people seek to maximize personal gains in ways that deplete them). Ostrom argues that the traditional solution to these collective-action

problems – relying on governmental coercion to require free-riders to pay their fair share and to regulate overconsumption – is often less effective than various self-governance arrangements. Affected stake-holders at the local level can work out their own solutions to collective-action problems, though these solutions are most effective when they take place within nested governmental institutions that encourage self-governance to occur and that threaten to impose governmental coercion if there is inadequate compliance with more decentralized solutions. Thus, her work has encouraged analysts to search for alternative arrangements beyond relying solely on coercive governments or voluntary markets. In short, Ostrom provided a theoretical basis for Stein and subsequent analysts of human and social services to see governments generally, and municipal governments specifically, as being important but sometimes over-stressed and sometimes under-recognized agents in providing public assistance to needy citizens, because they are only part of a wider network of institutional agents involved in this policy arena (Feiock and Schotz 2010).

While Ostrom and Stein enable urban policy analysts to better conceptualize the role of municipal governments in local social service networks, work in this tradition has inadequately theorized and investigated the role that normative concerns play in prompting city officials to play stronger (or weaker) roles in the alternative arrangements that emerge in cities for dealing with public assistance (Mansbridge 2010, 592).[4] This paper addresses this deficiency by drawing from newer developments in pluralist theory and regime theory, which remain even more prominent paradigms for urban policy analysis than Ostrom's collective-action approach (Sapotichne, Jones, and Wolfe 2007, 80-84).

While most contemporary urban analysts continue to see pluralism as explaining urban outcomes by reference to the diversity of interests in cities and the distribution of resources and power applied on behalf of different interests, political theorists now stress that leaders and citizens of pluralistic political communities have diverse normative principles – or alternative

moral doctrines (Rawls 1993) – that are brought to bear on politics. Such a *reconstructed* pluralism seeks to describe the distribution of support and opposition to diverse ethical and justice principles in different communities as they apply to various policy issues, to understand when, where, and why various normative principles matter, and how political communities effectively manage ethical differences and conflict (Eisenberg 1995; Schumaker 2010). Reconstructed pluralism thus draws attention to the ethical concerns that are ignored in collective-action theory. While some studies such as that by Scott, Matland, Michelbach, and Bornstein (2001) and Scott and Bornstein (2009) begin to identify those ethical principles that are most applicable to particular policy issues, much work remains to be done here. This paper seeks to identify the justice principles that are most important in prompting urban officials to play greater or lesser roles in the provision of public assistance at the local level.

Regime theory, as developed by Elkin (1987) and Stone (1989), initially portrayed cities as ordinarily governed by coalitions of public and private power-wielders oriented toward redevelopment and growth. However, as regime theory evolved, Stone (1993, 18-23) recognized that some circumstances give rise to "middle-class progressive regimes" (oriented toward such things as affordable housing and extracting from developers linkage funds for social purposes) and "lower-class opportunity expansion regimes" (oriented toward enlarging educational, job-training, home ownership and other opportunities for the lower class). In a review of case studies of urban regimes, Kilburn (2004) found that almost half of the cities examined though the lenses of regime theory had such regime types. According to Stone (2005, 322), more populist and progressive regimes were possible because actors in these regimes "are not merely interest-driven creatures but they are also meaning seekers. As such, their identities can be infused with moral codes and intertwined with purposes" that can include helping the poor. However, regime theorists have yet to develop any systematic understandings of the moral and justice orientations of policymakers and how these orientations affect policy

decisions. Scholars working within that tradition have yet to provide "ethical maps" of decision-makers and relate such concerns to their policymaking behavior.[5] The extent to which officials can bring their ethical ideals to their decisions is likely to vary across different policy domains, and it is unclear whether ethical concerns will be particularly significant in the public assistance domain. Some might suppose that officials would see public assistance issues as invoking their sense of social justice, but others might think that "the city limits" surrounding the capacity of city officials to deal with public assistance would make justice principles especially unimportant in this issue area.

In summary, the substantive goal of this paper is to identify some of the ways that city governments assist the poor. Our theoretical goal is to show that the justice principles of urban officials play an important role influencing the extent of public assistance that cities offer, and to begin to identify the most potent of these principles. Our methodological goal is to explore two modes of analysis that might be more fully utilized in examining these substantive and theoretical concerns.

A New Study of the Role of Elected Officials in Urban Policymaking

For this exploratory study, we completed 95 interviews with mayors and council members in 12 cities. Table 1 lists these cities and shows their considerable social, economic, and political differences.[6] Eight cities in the Kansas City metropolitan area provided convenient locations to begin these explorations. Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO) and Kansas City, Kansas (KCK) were included as central cities having extensive minority and low-income populations. Overland Park and Lee's Summit were selected as the area's largest and most prosperous suburbs. Raytown is a smaller suburb on KCMO's eastern border that thrived as a "white flight" community during the 1950's and 60's, but has recently seen an influx of minorities and lower-income citizens. St. Joseph was included because it was once one of Missouri's largest cities and one noted for its individualist culture, but has experienced economic decline in recent

decades. Topeka, 50 miles to the west of Kansas City, was chosen as a government city; the State Capitol is now 24 percent nonwhite, and more than 22 percent of its residents live below the poverty level. Lawrence, located between Kansas City and Topeka, was chosen because over 25% of its residents – including students – live below the poverty level; it has a reputation as a liberal university town, and a majority of city commissioners comprised a governing progressive coalition when most of the data for this paper was collected.

– Table 1 goes about here –

In order to provide a basis for considering whether the findings from the Kansas City area might extend beyond America's heartland, we also studied four cities in California, though not in the same depth as the KC metro area. Berkeley was selected because of its history of leftist politics and having progressive city government. Richmond, to the north of Berkeley in the East Bay, was selected because its extensive minority population was partially incorporated into a biracial governing coalition 30 years (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1983, 259-60) and is now well represented. Stockton was selected as the largest city in California's Central Valley; although racially mixed and reasonably diverse economically, it has been slow to achieve minority incorporation. Lodi is a smaller city in the Central Valley and its politics have generally been regarded as economically and socially conservative.

Despite their diversity, we do not, of course, claim that these sites constitute a random sample of American cities. While we attempt to control for selection bias in the quantitative models presented below, the findings must be regarded as tentative. Much more extensive research in representative cities throughout the U.S. and elsewhere will be required to develop and test theories of how ethics matter in the provision of public assistance by municipalities.

Between 2003 and 2007 we contacted incumbent mayors and council members in these cities, asking them to participate in extensive two-stage interviews.[7] All but two mayors agreed,

and the participation rate of council members was also high, ranging from 62 percent in Berkeley to 100 percent in Lee's Summit.

The first interview focused on officials' responses to various hypothetical issues and to specified principles of morality and justice. Additionally, we asked each official to identify and provide basic information on what he or she regarded as the most controversial and/or significant issues that had arisen recently or were currently under consideration in various policy areas, including social spending, neighborhood revitalization, and low-income housing. After completing the first-round of interviews in a city, we determined the most frequently mentioned concrete issues that had been at least partially resolved (i.e., there had been at least some council votes on the matter).

After examining minutes of council meetings, staff reports, and newspaper accounts, and conducting occasional interviews with other informants to familiarize ourselves with these issues, we then proceeded to the second round of interviews, which focused on officials' stances on each of the issues and the bases of their positions. We asked each official how they had voted and then asked them to explain, in their own words, the basis of their preferences and votes.[8] Drawing on a technique pioneered by John Kingdon (1989), we followed up on their responses by going through a checklist of factors that might have played a role in the positions they took. Were their positions influenced by public opinion? group pressures? the views of other officials? economic considerations? legal considerations? jurisdictional considerations? the local political culture? their own principles of morality and justice? In addition to scoring the degree to which each of these factors influenced their positions, we asked follow-up questions concerning such things as the content of the moral and justice concerns that influenced their positions.

At various stages of these interviews, we also attained information on a variety of other matters regarding the backgrounds and characteristics of the officials and their perceptions of

the cities and districts from which they had been elected. In short, we also measured their perceptions of the sort of factors that social scientists usually examine to explain the policymaking behavior of urban officials.

From these data we report here four sets of findings. First, we describe the public assistance issues that emerged in these cities and how they were resolved. Second, we show that elected municipal officials generally held and applied justice principles that led them to vote to enhance public assistance. Third, we show that these officials are generally a bit more supportive than opposed to four hypothetical public assistance issues – to issues that have come up in many American cities even if they had not arise in their particular community. Fourth we show that commitment to the floors principle increases support for hypothetical issues, even when controls are applied for such factors as the officials' ideological orientations and various personal and community characters.

Recent Public Assistance Issues in 12 Cities

Table 2 lists 22 public assistance issues that arose in our cities, the percentage of officials who voted to enhance public assistance when these issues were settled, and the extent to which they genuinely supported these enhancements. For example, it shows that the Raytown Council voted (6 to 4) to cut its locally funded emergency assistance program (REAP) due to budget shortfalls, despite general support for the program. However, as shown (in the first column), the vast majority of officials voted in favor of what they regarded as improvements or enhancements to public assistance on the other 21 issues. As shown in the second column, city officials expressed more support than opposition on most issues, but the reservations and opposition indicated by support scores of less than "5" reveal that officials had varying levels of dissatisfaction with these public assistance initiatives. While a detailed description of each is beyond the scope of this paper, our research supports the following overview and generalizations.

– Table 2 goes about here –

City governments have established modest programs to provide locally funded public assistance to agencies that serve poor and underprivileged citizens, to revitalize distressed neighborhoods, and to write regulations and create programs serving lower-income residents. Many of these programs have been institutionalized in ways that diminish controversy when they have returned to the council for continued funding, and elected officials vote in support of them with various degrees of enthusiasm. While interesting issues have arisen regarding initiatives, expansions, contractions, and reorientations of these programs, there have been few major changes during the past decade in the overall involvement of municipal governments in public assistance in our sample cities.

The federal Revenue Sharing (RS) program begun in 1972 enabled many cities to partially fund agencies providing social services and related forms of public assistance. During the 1970s, many social service agencies emerged and grew, attaining funds from many sources: from private charities and philanthropic foundations, from state and federal grants, from services rendered – as well as from RS. In 1987, RS disappeared, and some cities decided to continue to fund social service agencies, partly by seeking other forms of state and federal funding and partly by drawing upon local funding sources. At that time Topeka decided to replace lost RS monies with local funding, and it continues to provide about $500,000 to such agencies in its 2012 budget. Within the past decade, several social service agencies in Lee's Summit and the United Community Services board in Overland Park pleaded for supplemental city funding. In both of these cases, these requests were approved and funding is now renewed with little debate. Nevertheless, some of our cities have reported controversies over the funding of certain agencies. For example, in St. Joseph a slim majority approved transferring half of the city's funding for Eastside Human Resources (which offered recreational opportunities for low-

income youths) to Midcity Excellence (which proposed an alternative program emphasizing education and the arts).

Since 1974, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) have been used for revitalizing lower-income neighborhoods, but city officials have often been unhappy with these programs – less with the philosophy that city governments should play a role in improving the housing of the poor than with the results of these programs. Among the cities in our sample, Kansas City, Missouri, seems to have had the worst record in this regard. For many years, its Council allocated the bulk of its CDBG funds to the Housing and Community Development Financial Corporation and assigned it the task of increasing affordable housing for low-income residents. When it produced only a small number of units in relatively affluent neighborhoods, extensive negative publicity lead the Council to dismantle the agency and create an alternative. In Topeka and St. Joseph the wide dispersion of CDBG funds for rehabs throughout the community resulted in almost no visible improvements anywhere, which led council members to support alternative approaches that targeted funding on particular distressed blocks, with the hope that such targeting would generate the visible improvements that would attract private investments and thus significant progress in at least some locations.

Cities are also involved in "affordable housing" programs in various ways. In Stockton, the city used CDBG funds to support a first-time homebuyers program and to assist with neighborhood revitalization through property improvement grants. Similarly, in Lee's Summit the Council approved using some of its CDBG funds to provide $3000 grants to lower-income residents seeking their first mortgage. Lawrence used CDBG dollars and unspent bond funds to capitalize a Homeowners Out Of Tenants (HOOT) program, that enabled 200 tenants to purchase their homes; but within a few years, many had been resold, capital gains had been realized, and few remained "affordable." In response, the City Commission converted HOOT into a Land Trust. Under this program, the City has used funds from the Trust to purchase land

for affordable homes; eligible lower-income families can build on this land (lowering their mortgages by as much as $50,000), provided they sign a 99-year lease with the City limiting the capital gains they would realize if they resell their home, a provision intended to ensure that the homes remain affordable.

Such programs had strong support among urban officials, but others proved highly controversial. In Raytown, the council rejected a multi-family low-income housing project abetting more affluent homes, but a year later, it approved for the same plot of land another project (Jessica Estates) that would serve low-income *senior* citizens. While Jessica Estates was unanimously approved, several Council members thought that rejection of the original project illustrated class and racial biases that they found all too familiar in the history of this community.

Homeless shelters were prominent issues in our cities, but they were usually built and staffed through charitable contributions, with City Hall providing only modest support. In Lodi, the Salvation Army raised $1.2 million to expand and relocate its shelter, and the City used $300,000 of its CDBG funds to support this project. The Lodi Council also approved annual contributions of $50,000 from local funds to staff the shelter, despite some reservations that funding the Salvation Army (a religious organization) violated separation-of-church-and-state principles. In 2003, a progressive Lawrence City Commission appointed a Task Force on Homelessness, which proposed a new $2.7 million shelter to consolidate and enhance the programs of three agencies, with the city contributing $500,000 toward the building and another $500,000 annually for operating expenses. While the progressives who dominated the City Commission between 2003 and 2007 were enthusiastic supporters of this recommendation, and while subsequent Commissions have generally supported the project, it has remained in limbo pending the resolution of funding and locational issues.

Still, Lawrence and other cities have found ways to provide public assistance to its lower-income residents from local funds. In 2000 Lawrence increased property taxes to begin "The T," a mini-transit system that is widely viewed as a service for the poor, improving their access to jobs, medical centers, and various public facilities. When a new set of city commissioners expressed reluctance to continue funding the T from property taxes, Lawrence voters approved a half-cent sales tax for that purpose in November 2008. In 2003, Lawrence also passed an ordinance requiring businesses seeking a tax abatement to pay their employees a living wage. In 2003 Berkeley's City Council voted to increase living wage rates by more than 10 percent and later separately approved a plan to provide supplemental funding of those nonprofits that would have difficulty providing such increases. In 2006, the Richmond City Council voted to require any entity doing business with the city to hire at least 30% of its workers locally; according to some council members, this ordinance was motivated by a desire to enhance job opportunities for lower-income youths living in the city. Perhaps most impressively, KCMO voters upheld a Council proposal for a 2.2 mill increase in property taxes to finance indigent health care by designated hospitals and ambulance services in Kansas City. While such initiatives are perhaps the exception to the overall pattern of limited city involvement in public assistance programs, they do illustrate that city officials are responsive to perceived needs of the disadvantaged and suggest that they often have "progressive" justice principles and act upon them.

Ethics Matter in the Provision of Public Assistance

As Table 3 shows, public officials are quite supportive of justice principles that might lead them to support public assistance. The first three rows indicate that there is more support than opposition for principles that claim that officials should provide floors (or minimal needed goods) for disadvantaged citizens, focus on the poor, and uphold welfare rights. The fourth and fifth rows show more opposition than support for other distributive principles. Those council

members opposing the principle of "equal distribution" (55%) and neutral regarding that principle (23%) usually explained their opposition or hesitation by stating that "unequal needs" must usually take priority over "equality." Not only is there more overall opposition than support for libertarian principles, but only 13% of our officials claimed to be strong libertarians who reject using governmental taxing powers to "redistribute" resources and provide public assistance. However, the final row shows that utilitarianism is one of most supported principles of justice and morality among urban officials, and as argued by John Rawls (1971), it can be understood as undercutting support for helping the poor.[9]

– Tables 3 and 4 go about here –

Table 4 shows that urban officials report that the most important factor affecting their decisions on the 22 issues listed in Table 2 were their own principles of justice and morality. The average (mean) scores in this table indicate the overall importance of each of the listed factors in affecting their positions on the specific public assistance issues. Officials thought group pressures were irrelevant to their positions on over 60% of their public assistance decisions, and another 10% of the time, they claimed to take a position that was counter to dominant group pressures. Officials also reported being little influenced by constituency preferences. More than half of the time, officials said they thought citizens in their district and throughout the city had no meaningful preferences on public assistance issues. Although urban officials are constrained by federal requirements in their allocation of CDBG funds and by various state regulations, they normally skipped over such constraints in expressing the factors that influenced their positions. For most such officials, jurisdictional matters were simply "givens" that bounded broader policy options in public assistance but did not come to mind as influencing decisions on particular issues.

City officials often cited economic considerations as very important, especially on the neighborhood revitalization issues. On most of these matters, they saw programs helping the

needy as having a positive economic impact on the city. On only a few occasions did officials say that they wanted to reduce support for social services or neighborhood revitalization because they thought such programs had a significant negative impact on the economic condition of the city or on the municipal budget.

In general, officials saw ethical principles as being the most important factor influencing their positions on these issues, and they cited a wide variety of such principles as the basis for both supporting and opposing public assistance. Officials most often simply expressed a general ethical obligation of public officials to help the disadvantaged. However, it would be too simple to limit analysis of the moral principles of public officials to their embracing "an obligation to assist the poor." Officials referred to a much wider set of moral and justice principles when they explained why they considered such principles important to their policy decisions. Sometimes they spoke about the need to ensure their residents had access to the basic minimal goods required for survival. Sometimes they mentioned the need for the public to help those "handicapped folks without marketable skills." Sometimes they simply spoke of generating more equal conditions for everyone. Beyond such redistributive concerns, they also expressed related social justice ideals. For example, some Lee's Summit officials cited the desirability of enhancing class and racial *diversity* as the basis for their support of the first-time homeowners program. Providing *fair equal opportunity* – enabling inexperienced minority youths to have better job prospects – was cited as a key justification for Richmond's local employment ordinance. And *equity* – having those businesses that benefit from city subsidies assume the legal responsibility of enhancing the benefits they provide their employees – was cited as an important basis for adopting Lawrence's living wage ordinance.

Officials who opposed public assistance also express principled reasons for their positions. Such officials often claimed that local government had no legitimate role to play in the area of public assistance. Libertarian norms were occasionally cited; some officials claimed

that the role of government should be limited to satisfying common needs like public safety and should not extend to "playing Robin Hood." Various principles of "just deserts" were also expressed to limit public assistance. For example, one official said, "I believe in a hand up, not a hand out. We should help people get off the ground, but we shouldn't help those who refuse to help themselves, who refuse to put out effort." Those officials who opposed concentrating CDBG funds on specific neighborhoods in Topeka and St. Joseph expressed the principle of "equal treatment;" they stressed that non-targeted neighborhoods (their neighborhoods) were unfairly excluded. As mentioned above, the principle of moral neutrality was brought to bear on the Salvation Army issue in Lodi, as several council members were concerned that such funding might violate the norm of separation of church and state. Procedural justice was sometimes violated by favoritism in the allocation of some public assistance funding, according to a few officials. For example, one council women in Overland Park who was highly supportive of increasing local funding for social services was deeply concerned that people connected to specific social service agencies sat on the board making recommendations for how to allocate public funds among agencies.

In sum, an examination of the resolution of concrete policy decisions regarding public assistance suggests that officials normally support on-going programs, seek ways of improving their public assistance allocations, and often support using local funds for what they regard as "good causes." Officials see themselves little constrained by economic imperatives, public pressures, or jurisdictional limitations in such decision-making. They instead see their support for public assistance as based on their principles of morality and justice. Because ethical concerns cannot be reduced to focusing on one or two precepts of justice, a pluralist conception of justice that embraces a wide range of principles is required. Many principles are brought to bear on public assistance issues, strengthening our belief that "ethics matter" in policymaking.

But our analysis of concrete issues leaves unclear which, if any, justice principles are particularly potent in prompting officials to adopt public assistance policies.

How Urban Officials Respond to Hypothetical Public Assistance issues

Examining the reactions of urban officials to various hypothetical issues can supplement our understanding of the role of justice principles. Table 5 lists four such issues that we presented to each of our 95 officials and their preferences on them. Examining these preferences assesses the proclivity to act rather than actual policymaking behavior,[10] but three gains can be had from such an analysis. First, public assistance is always an evolving frontier at the local level. Policy innovations like living-wage ordinances diffuse through cities (Martin 2006), but many public assistance issues have never arisen in certain cities, perhaps because they have been suppressed by the exercise of the "second face of power" (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). Yet, by introducing hypothetical issues, we can assess the receptivity of officials to such innovations. Second, hypothetical issues enable analysts to determine linkages between principles and policy orientations, measured in separate contexts, rather than accept at face value the "socially acceptable" and "political correct" ethical justifications that officials might provide for their policymaking behavior. Third, hypothetical issues provide the equivalent policy preferences, lacking in the assorted concrete issues that we have discussed in the last section, that enable analysis of overall causal relationships linking officials ethical principles to policy goals.

– Table 5 goes about here –

Overall, Table 5 shows that city officials are quite polarized over living wage ordinances and linkage policies; they are fairly evenly divided between opposing and supporting living wages and were somewhat more supportive than opposed to seeking linkage concessions from businesses seeking incentives for locating in the community. Officials tended to take more neutral positions regarding the homeless, though generosity toward them was more supported

than adopting unwelcoming restrictions on their behavior. Most officials were also neutral on the issue of targeting or exempting social service agencies from cuts during a budgetary crisis, though there was more support for exempting social services from such cuts than for targeting them for especially deep cuts.

Factors affecting support for public assistance

Our most general hypothesis is that the justice principles of public officials are significant factors affecting their receptivity to more generous public assistance policies. But this general hypothesis gives us little purchase on the specific principles that enhance (or reduce) support for public assistance. Allegiance to any of the six principles listed in Table 3 (and perhaps others not included there) might be the key determinant on all or any of our hypothetical issues, but there is, as yet, no sound theoretical basis for claiming that a particular principle will be particularly compelling on policy decisions generally or on specific public assistance issues in cities.

In the absence of such theoretical guidance, analysts have often retreated to using ideological orientations as a summary measure of the justice principles to which officials are allegiant. This approach seems reasonable, as we have elsewhere shown that city officials who regard themselves as liberals are most allegiant to providing floors and focusing on the disadvantaged, while those who regard themselves as conservatives are most allegiant to libertarian and utilitarian principles (Schumaker and Kelly 2012). But these relationships are weak, and the interrelationships among the six justice principles listed in Table 3 are not particularly strong.[11] Findings that liberals tend to support and conservatives tend to oppose public assistance do not, therefore, enable us to know which justice principle(s) is the basis for the policy orientation. Linkages between ideological orientations and policy choices provide evidence that some justice principles are important, but they do not allow us to specify which

one(s). We thus include measures of various principles of justice (as well as a measure of ideological orientation) as possible determinants of support for public assistance policies.

Pluralist value theory recognizes the role of many principles, and pluralists doubt that the special relevance of a particular principle of justice can be determined by philosophical reasoning. Instead, pluralists suggest that the principles that apply and should apply to particular decisions are best discovered through anthropological or sociological investigations; they seek to discover the "social understandings" about fairness that are widely held and pursued in particular communities (Walzer 1983, 3-6).

In accord with such a pluralist approach, we hypothesize that allegiance to the floors principle is the strongest predictor of officials' support for public assistance in American cities. In response to criticisms that his earlier *A Theory of Justice* relied too much on abstract philosophical reasoning and over-stated the importance of his famous "difference principle" that required steadfast attention to improving the conditions of the disadvantaged, John Rawls (1993,164) subsequently argued that the overlapping consensus among people in pluralist societies includes the idea that governments are responsible for responding to the essential needs of the disadvantaged. He stressed there is widespread commitment to such a floors principle among people holding different moral and ideological doctrines. While part of what it means to be a liberal today is to support more extensive floors, it should not be forgotten that "compassionate conservatives" also acknowledge the need for "safety nets" and participate in local social service policy networks. Frohlich and Oppenheimer (1992) and Scott, Matland, Michelbach, and Bornstein (2001) are among many scholars who have shown widespread support for the floors principle in American society. In short, the floors principle provides a general minimal conception of social justice that most city officials are likely to find persuasive when they confront public assistance issues.

In contrast, we hypothesize that other social justice principles are likely to have drawbacks that reduce their impact. Academics may have long debated the competing ideas that policymakers should follow Rawls' difference principle that seems to forbid creating policies that further burden the disadvantaged or the libertarian idea associated with Robert Nozick (1974) that policymakers should avoid redistribution, but if political philosophers have been unable to resolve the Rawls-Nozick debate and agree on the universal applicability of these contrasting justice principles, it is doubtful that urban officials find either completely compelling. When confronted with linkage, living wage, or homelessness policy issues, officials may regard the impact on the poor as important, but they are likely to have other concerns that make them skeptical that the poor should have some sort of veto power over their decisions. Similarly, they seem likely to regard the libertarian prohibition of redistribution as an unjustified veto power by the well-off over their decisions.

While many urban officials find the principle of welfare rights morally compelling (as shown in Table 3), they usually indicated in our interviews that welfare rights are and should be provided by federal and state law, and they expressed little inclination to have municipal governments provide additional welfare rights. While normally allegiant to the utilitarian principle, officials are unlikely to turn to it for guidance on public assistance decisions because it makes distributional (justice) considerations subordinate to moral considerations (about the overall public interest); at least on issues regarding public assistance, they are likely to believe that the needs of the poor must take priority over "the greater good." Finally, the idea of pursuing equal distributions is simply indeterminate because of the many meanings that can be attached to the concept of "equality" (Rae 1981).

While our primary concern is with how support for local public assistance is affected by such justice principles of city officials, other factors must be considered, as the principles that officials hold, proclaim, and apply could be a function of the sort of personal and community

characteristics that are usually studied by urban and political analysts. When using multiple regression to examine how officials' justice principles impact their support for our four hypothetical issues, we thus controlled for the following factors: the socioeconomic status and race of officials,[12] the affluence and racial composition of the officials' constituency, the extent to which "compassion for the poor" is an important element of the political culture in the city, the extent to which the regime that dominates local politics is characterized as economically conservative, and the extent to which the city's bargaining position in competition with other cities to attract mobile wealth is strong. Officials provided estimates on 5-point scales of each of these contextual variables.[13]

We report our findings from our 12 cities about the factors associated with support for generous policies toward the homeless (Table 6), for living wage policies (Table 7), for linkage policies (Table 8) and for exempting public assistance form budget cuts (Table 9). The independent variables include officials' ideological orientations, their support for the six justice principles listed in Table 3, and various personal and contextual characteristics. The first columns of these tables show that there are many significant correlations between these factors and support for public assistance; ideological orientations and support for various justice principles are often significantly linked to policy preferences, at levels at least as strong as the links between personal and contextual factors and policy preferences. However, to address the limitations of correlation analysis, we also report the results of two different kinds of regression models used to estimate the independent impacts of these factors.[14] In contrast to the thinner models (2), the fuller models (1) include a measure of (increasingly liberal) ideological orientations and a measure of the interaction effects between support for the floors principle and the economic position of the city. Including this interaction effect in the fuller models is intended to address the problem of possible sample selection bias. Perhaps our cities are relatively free from the inter-city competition for attracting mobile wealth that Peterson (1981)

claims is a major constraint for providing generous public assistance policies. Perhaps support for the floors principle could appear to be an important determinant of support for public assistance policies, but only because officials in our sample are in cities having economic positions that are strong compared to other communities, and this comparative economic advantage produces both support for the floors principle and support for public assistance policies. But our interaction term allows a test for this possibility because there is significant variation within our sample cities on their economic position, and our fuller models (1) show that the combination of supporting the floors principle and being in a city that is well-positioned economically has no independent effect on our results.[15] As a consequence, we can eliminate this interaction term in more parsimonious models (2). We also eliminate our measure of ideological orientation in models 2, but for very different reasons. While ideological orientations are inadequate indicators of officials support for various justice principles, they are associated with such principles. Thus, the inclusion of ideological orientations in models 1 means that some of the impact of a principle (such as support for floors) will be accounted for by the measure of ideological orientation. While it is illuminating to see how well measures of ideology, in comparisons to measures of various justice principles, predict support for public assistance policies (as is done in models 1), it is also illuminating to see how various principles of justice influence such support when the impacts of these principles are not diluted by the simultaneous influence of ideology (as in models 2).

– Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 go about here –

In general, the adjusted coefficients of determination of our models indicate that these variables explain between 17 and 41 percent of the variance in officials' stances on public assistance. Except for the issue of exempting public assistance from budget cuts, the ideological orientations of officials are significantly correlated with positions on public assistance, but these associations become less significant when controls are applied for the specific principles of

officials and other factors. Except for the ideal of equal distribution, the other justice principles were significantly correlated with positions on at least one public assistance issue, but no justice principle had a significant independent impact on stances of any of our four hypothetical issues. Except for officials' perceptions of the economic position of their cities in competition with other cities for mobile wealth, our other control variables were each significantly correlated with stances on some public assistance issue, but none had strong impacts across all issues. The multiple regression coefficients (B) and associated standard errors (s.e.) indicate that only one or two factors had significant independent effects on support for our four hypothetical issues. The factor that most often and most strongly impacted such support was officials' allegiance to the floors principle.

Being nonwhite and having a liberal ideological orientation are the two factors that most directly and significantly prompt officials to be generous to the homeless. Nonwhite officials are probably particularly sensitive to minorities being disproportionate homeless and are sensitive to their needs. On this issue, a broad liberal orientation is sufficient to capture the notion that various social justice principles are relevant to supporting of opposing policies toward the homeless, but the results in Table 6 indicate that no particular justice principle is the key factor. On this issue, different liberal officials draw on various liberal ethical inclinations (including those justice principles correlated with generosity toward the homeless in Table 6), but no particular justice principle adds significant explanatory power to positions on homelessness after ideological orientations are taken into account.

Receptivity to the living wage ordinance is significantly enhanced by both a liberal ideological orientation and by support for the floors principle. Living wage ordinances are crafted to ensure more employees have incomes sufficient to provide for the basic needs of themselves and their families, and so it is not surprising that the floors principles has the strong independent impact on support for living wages that is revealed in model 2. While allegiance to

the floors principle is part of what it means to be liberal, the floors principle is important beyond its role in liberalism. Some moderates and conservatives see the floors principle as ethically compelling, and so allegiance to it can generate support for living wages that is missed when analysts take into account only broad ideological orientations.

Allegiance to the floors principle has a strong positive impact on support for linkage policies. The ideological orientations of officials are correlated with their seeing merit in requiring those businesses granted public incentives to locate in a city to provide linkage benefits for the more disadvantaged segments of the community, but both of our regression models enable us to locate attachment to the floors principles as being the principle component of a liberal orientation that is important. Officials who operate within conservative political regimes are, not surprisingly, relatively adverse to linkage policies, but controlling for regime type does not diminish the role that allegiance to the floors principle has on supporting linkage policies.

Finally, model 2 in Table 9 shows that the factors that directly increase support for exempting public assistance from budget cuts are officials being nonwhite, representing minority constituencies, and supporting the floors principle. Because minorities are disproportionately dependent on public assistance, the racial interests of officials who are minorities and who represent minorities are important beyond the ethical principles that officials hold. But even when such racial interests are taken into account, support for the floors principle seems to have an independent impact on officials being willing to exempt public assistance from budget cuts when hard financial decisions must be made during economic crises.

Summary and Discussion

City governments have a limited role in providing public welfare, but they do oversee and support some modest public assistance programs. When public assistance issues arise, mayors and council members see themselves as little constrained by group pressures and public

opinion, and they claim to be only modestly constrained by economic considerations. They regard their decisions as more strongly based on ethical considerations. While such officials hold a wide variety of principles of justice and morality, most include concerns for the least advantaged among such principles. Justice principles are often invoked when they take positions and vote on public assistance issues. Ethics seem to matter on such issues.

No factor seems more important when it comes to being receptive to public assistance initiatives than embracing the idea that "public officials should adopt policies that ensure all citizens a minimal level of the goods they need." Such a floors principle – along with other social justice principles – is embedded in a liberal ideological orientation, and it is associated with being a racial minority and living in a political culture that is sympathetic to the poor, but considering just these other factors when trying to understand receptivity to public assistance is insufficient. Not all officials support the floors principle, but enough do that – regardless of their race or ideology – allegiance to it can be important.

These findings have implications for policy analysts who study urban policy, for political theory generally and urban theory in particular, and for advocates of redressing urban poverty. Students of urban policy should be clear that American cities do not provide a context where much redistribution of wealth is likely to occur or where citizens have welfare rights provided by city governments. Nevertheless, such governments are engaged in a variety of public assistance programs that can provide some basic services and address some basic needs of the impoverished, even if the poor do not have legal rights to such services and resources. When studying what city governments do for the poor, urban policy analysis should frame their research as urban public assistance policy - not urban redistribution, not urban anti-poverty programs, or other such terminology.

Our findings are consistent with the leading theoretical approaches for studying urban politics: Ostrom's collective-action approach, regime theory, and reconstructed pluralism.

Urban officials are significant, if often secondary, actors in public assistance policy networks. What they can bring to these networks are not just the (limited) financial resources of local governments, but their commitments to social justice. To some extent, regime theorists can use ideological orientations to analyze the role of moral and justice principles of elected officials in urban policy, but these are very blunt instruments. Conservative officials, for example, generally support both utilitarian and libertarian principles. A regime analysis that includes a study of officials' ideological orientations may conclude that efforts to adopt living wage ordinances have failed due to resistance by the conservatives, but such analysis cannot enable us to specify whether it was their allegiance to utilitarianism or libertarianism that was the more decisive moral concern. If regime theorists take seriously Clarence Stone's claim that urban officials bring their moral codes and purposes to urban decision-making, they should seek to specify as precisely as possible the moral principles in play.

Our findings are also consistent with a reconstructed pluralist theoretical understanding of politics generally. Political outcomes are not just a function of power politics, of applying power resources to achieve one's interests. The ethical understandings that people bring to politics matter. But people have allegiances to many moral and justice principles, and certain principles come to the forefront on particular issues. In this paper we bring attention to the diversity of justice principles of officials. We show that both broad ideological orientations and more specific justice principles play a role in the receptivity of elected officials to providing public assistance to the disadvantaged. Our findings suggest that urban officials are particularly likely to apply the floors principle when confronting public assistance issues at the local level. We do not claim that the floors principle is the dominant justice principle that officials apply in a variety of contexts and to most distributive decisions. Urban officials may be most guided by utilitarian principles on economic development issues, and federal officials may be most guided by allegiance to welfare rights when addressing welfare issues. A reconstructed or *principled*

pluralism will seek to understand when, where, and why various justice principles matter in politics.

For advocates on behalf of the urban poor, our findings suggest that urban officials may be most receptive to arguments that are framed in the language of the floors principle. Officials have some allegiance to the idea that they should focus on the poor, as suggested by the justice principles of John Rawls, but making a Rawlsian argument is unlikely to be effective because few officials think they should *always* focus on the poor. Perhaps officials doubt that every policy decision has to improve the conditions of the disadvantaged, but public assistance measures that can improve their conditions are hard to reject. Officials have some allegiance to the idea that citizens have welfare rights, but claims that the homeless have a right to shelter is unlikely to be effective because few city officials think that they or their constituents have a duty to provide that right. Perhaps the poor have no right to shelter, but few officials are so hard-hearted as to be unreceptive to meeting basic needs. The floors principle resonates with some officials who generally hold more conservative principles and who have little sympathy for welfare rights or focusing on the disadvantaged. Finding a language that brings the floors principle to the forefront of such officials might well increase the amount of public assistance available to the urban poor.

[1] The quantitative data compiled from the interviews reported in this paper will be available at the principal author's website within six months of publication.

[2] Local welfare spending increased from $47.5 Billion to $51.9 Billion in these two years while state welfare spending increased from $335.5 Billion to $379.2 Billion. These figures are available at www.census.gov/govs/estimate. While the 2007 data provide breakdowns for various governments including municipalities and counties, the 2009 data provide only estimates for all local governments collectively. According to the 2007 data. American counties provided 75% of all local welfare spending, municipalities 23%, and special districts only 2%.

[3] Current federal law requires cities to allocate 70% of their CDBG funds for activities that benefit low- and moderate-income persons.

[4] Piven (2001) emphasized the role of ideological norms in explaining cutbacks of public welfare.

[5] While Eulau and Prewitt (1974) described the "policy maps" of city officials, they conceptualized these maps without attention to the sorts of moral and justice principles that have concerned contemporary political philosophers. Subsequent work referring to the moral and justice norms of policymakers has been limited in scope. For example, studies of "progressive" cities (e.g., DeLeon 1992) and politicians (e.g., Rast 1999) provide thick descriptions of certain norms and the capacity of actors to translate these norms into urban policy, but these studies do not provide the sorts of conceptual frameworks or systematic empirical analyses that enable a broad theoretical understanding of the role of ethics in urban politics. As an antidote to these limitations, we have conceptualized and examined such ethical maps that include both moral principles (conceptions of the public good) and justice principles (principles about the fair distribution of social goods). Our focus in this paper is on only some

justice principles, but an overview of the ethical maps of urban officials can be found in Schumaker and Kelly (2012).

[6] Because the Census does not report current data on individuals living below the poverty in two of our cities (Raytown and Lodi), we list the median household income for 2007.

[7] Most officials included in our data set were from a particular council within our sample cities. However, a few persons who had served on a previous council were also interviewed when they were identified as playing key roles in the concrete issues under investigation. Most interviews within particular cities were conducted within a 3-6 month period when officials were not subject to electoral pressures. Among the factors contributing to extended time-period for completing the data collection was the need to await the resolution of certain issues that had arisen but remained unresolved, even after interviews were completed. In such circumstances, call-back telephone interviews were sometimes used as required.

[8] We found no discrepancies between self-reported voting and what the record revealed. Of course, officials sometimes voted in ways that did not reflect their own preferences.

[9] We defer further discussion of these principles and the philosophical support for them until they are analyzed as possible determinants of officials' receptivity to public assistance issues in the final section of this paper.

[10] The proclivity to act, however, is associated with actual behavior, at least for a couple of issues discussed below. Regarding our hypothetical living wage issue, only two of our cities (Berkeley and Lawrence) have passed living wage ordinances, and support for our hypothetical was significantly higher in these two cities (3.83) than in our ten cities without such an ordinance (2.82). Regarding our hypothetical issue of exempting public assistance from budget cuts, council members in two communities (Topeka, and KCK) were most supportive of such exemptions and those in two other communities (Richmond and Lodi) were most willing to disproportionately cut public assistance. Recent budgets from these cities generally uphold this

pattern, as Topeka has increased its contributions to (identifiable) social service agencies since the recession began in 2008 by 4% and KCK (which is, interestingly, a consolidated municipal and county governmental entity) has increased its contribution to such agencies by about 20%. In contrast, Richmond discontinued its only public assistance program (supporting disadvantaged youth) while Lodi has not expended any local funds on public assistance during the past decade.

[11] The strongest correlation (r = .55) is between providing floors and upholding rights. Less than a quarter of the inter-correlations among these six principles are statistically significant.

[12] Lacking measures of income, we used educational attainment and occupational history to attain a five-point scale of increasing socioeconomic status. Fifteen of our officials were African-American, Asian-Americans, or Latinos, and so a dummy variable of race is employed with 0 assigned to whites and 1 assigned to all nonwhites. While 29 of our officials were women, we found few interesting differences between the men and women in our sample and thus ignore gender in our models below.

[13] Perceived, rather than "objective," measures of city and district characteristics are analyzed for two reasons. First, many of these characteristics resist clear objective measurement (see, for example, Peter Fisher (2005) for a discussion of the difficulties in measuring the economic position of cities). Second, what matters for our purposes is how officials internalize and assess these factors. For example, if the economic position of a city matters in public assistance decision-making, then surely what is important is how officials' perceive their city's economic position.

[14] Because our dependent variables were measured using 5-point ordinal scales, we tested our models using ordered logit as well as ordinary least squares (OLS). Since there were no important differences, we report only the more easily interpretable OLS coefficients here.

[15] Reporting the insignificant regression coefficients examining these potential interaction effects is the most parsimonious way of addressing this issue. However, we have also re-examined our models while omitting the 28 cases where officials perceived that their cities were advantaged in their competition for mobile wealth with other communities. The results were basically the same for this smaller subsample of 57 officials living in communities lacking the sort of economic advantages that might have prompted them to hold more strongly to the floors principle and to support public assistance policies. For both the living wage and the linkage policy issues, the regression coefficients remained statistically significant at the .05 level. For the issue of exempting social service from budget cuts, the regression coefficient for the smaller sample was almost identical to that in the larger sample; however, the larger standard error in the smaller sample produced a result that was only statistically significant at the .10 level.

Table 1

Sample of cities and selected characteristics

	Population -2010	Pop change 2000-2010	Percent nonwhite 2010	Median household income-2007 (thousands)	Form of government[1]	#on council (plus mayor)	% elected by district
Missouri							
Kansas City	460	+4%	41	56	CM	12 + 1	46
Lee's Summit	91	+29%	14	82	CM	8 + 1	88
Raytown	30	- 4%	32	47	MC	10 + 1	91
St. Joseph	77	+ 4%	12	52	CM	8 + 1	56
Kansas							
Kansas City	146	-1%	48	44	CM	10 + 1	72
Overland Park	173	+15%	16	91	MC	12 + 1	88
Topeka	127	+ 3%	24	52	MC	8 + 1	88
Lawrence	88	+9%	18	62	CM	5	0
California							
Berkeley	113	+10%	41	87	CM	8 + 1	89
Richmond	104	+ 5%	69	66	CM	8 + 1	0
Stockton	295	+19%	63	64	CM	6 + 1	86
Lodi	62	+ 9%	26	51	CM	5	0

[1]CM = Council-Manager (reformed); MC = Mayor-Council (unreformed)

Table 2
Councilmember positions on public assistance issues in 12 Cities

	% voting in support of assistance	Mean expressed support for assistance*
Raytown, MO		
Exempt REAP (the Raytown emergency assistance program) from budget cuts	40	3.7
Support Jessica Estates low-income housing for the elderly	100	2.8
Kansas City, MO		
Property tax increase to provide $13 million to hospitals and ambulance services for indigent medical care	100	4.8
Transfer $18 million in annual CDBG funds to new housing authority for low-income housing, emergency shelters, and mortgage assistance for first-time homeowners	100	4.1
Lees Summit, MO		
Provide local funding to build Hope House and emergency home-heating assistance	100	3.7
Allocate CDBG funds for mortgage assistance for first-time homeowners and for helping disabled improve accessibility within homes	100	3.2
St. Joseph, MO		
Reallocate CDBG funding among agencies serving low-income youth	100	2.9
Target CDBG funds for rehabbing homes to designated low-income neighborhoods	63	3.1
Kansas City, KS		
Fund locally Willa Gill Food Kitchen and provide start-up funds for agencies	89	3.3
Permit and partially fund low-income scattered-site housing projects	100	4.3
Overland Park, KS		
Supplement CDBG and private funding of United Community Services by $750,000	100	3.8
Enhance enforcement of building codes for rental units in less affluent neighborhoods and subsidize efforts of low-income home owners to bring their dwellings up to code	100	3.8

Table 2 (continued)

Lawrence, KS		
Initiate and fund "The T" bus system	100	4.4
Commence homeless shelter initiatives	80	3.0
Create Land Trust program applying unused bond funds for building affordable housing	100	4.6
Require businesses receiving tax abatements to pay employees a living-wage	60	4.0
Topeka, KS		
Fund social services from local sources	62	3.8
Target CDBG funds for rehabbing homes to designated low-income neighborhoods	89	4.2
Berkeley, CA		
Increase living wage rate and increase funding of nonprofits affected by the increase	100	4.0
Stockton, CA		
Pass action-plan to use CDBG funds for various agencies and property improvements in targeted areas	100	MD
Lodi, CA		
Fund Salvation Army homeless shelter	75	3.3
Richmond, CA		
Pass local employment ordinance	100	3.0

* Average of council members support for public assistance on a 5-point scale, where
1 = opposition in principle to local governmental role on the issue
2 = criticize effectiveness of existing programs or proposed enhancements
3 = neutral, maintain existing level and form of funding and present programs
4 = qualified support for either greater or more effective assistance by city
5 = strongly supportive of enhanced city role on the public assistance issue

Table 3
Councilmember support for various distributive principles*

	% supportive	% opposed	Mean support
Provide floors: Public officials should adopt polices that ensure all citizens a minimal level of the goods they need.	57	17	3.62
Focus on the least advantaged (Rawls' egalitarian liberalism): Public officials should adopt policies that improve the conditions of the least advantaged citizens – those who were raised in unfavorable social circumstances or who were less endowed at birth. They should reject policies that make relatively disadvantaged citizens worse off -- even if such policies are otherwise beneficial. They should normally try to make the disadvantaged better off, even if this imposes some costs on the more advantaged.	55	18	3.56
Uphold welfare rights: Public officials should uphold the right of all citizens to basic food, shelter and health care.	63	17	3.69
Distribute equally: Public officials should distribute goods and services equally to all citizens, even ignoring such things as the different qualifications and needs of people.	22	55	2.52
Avoid redistribution (Libertarianism): Public officials should avoid redistributing those allocations of goods that have been made by the free choices of individuals in the free market.	36	48	2.77
Seek overall public welfare (Utilitarianism): Public officials should adopt those policies and programs that serve the overall public interest -- that provide the greatest good for most citizens -- and not be overly concerned about who is most benefited and who is most hurt by policies that best serve the public good.	55	15	3.61

* After presenting and discussing these principles with each official, scores of "1" (strong opposition) to "5" (strong support) were assigned. While we took seriously officials' own scaling of support for these principles, we sometimes negotiated altered scores when official's comments about the meaning and applicability of these principles belied their initial self-assessments. In column 1, strong and weak support for a principle are combined. In column 2, strong and weak opposition to a principle are combined. Column 3 reports mean support scores based on the 5-point ordinal scale.

Table 4
Extent to which various factors were perceived as important bases of officials' positions on public assistance issues*

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Group pressures	.71	1.41
Preferences of constituents within district	.99	1.35
Preferences of citizens within city	.96	1.28
Persuasive arguments of other officials	.72	1.27
Legal considerations	.58	1.13
Jurisdictional considerations	.64	1.17
The local political culture	.45	.98
Economic considerations	2.24	1.70
Principles of justice and morality	2.65	1.60

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* Officials were asked to indicate the importance of each consideration using the following scale:
-1 = Factor weighed against their position
0 = Factor was irrelevant
1 = Factor was a minor (positive) consideration
2 = Factor was a moderate consideration
3 = Factor was an important consideration
4 = Factor was a very important consideration
5 = Factor was the preeminent consideration

While most of our 95 officials provided such assessments on two issues arising in their city involving social service funding, low-income housing, and/or investments in low-income neighborhoods, some officials participated in fewer (or more) such issues. The total number of assessments (the N for this table) is 161.

Table 5
Hypothetical public assistance issues
(Percent of council members (N=95) opposing or supporting each issue)

	Strongly Opposed	Weakly Opposed	Neutral	Weakly Support	Strongly Support
Generosity toward homeless "Suppose there has been a marked increase in the number of homeless people in your community, leading to two proposals. The first toughens up on the homeless by restrict panhandling and otherwise making the community less hospitable to them. The second provides more generous subsidies to social service agencies that provide shelters for the homeless. Would you support the 'more welcoming' approach?"	4	13	33	23	27
Living wages "Suppose you must consider a living-wage ordinance that requires any business receiving a significant municipal contract or a financial incentive or subsidy from the city to to pay its employees a wage that would raise a family above the official poverty level as well as provide health benefits. Would you oppose or support such a proposal?"	32	15	6	19	28
Linkage policies "Suppose a giant in the computer industry is interested in locating in your community and investing hundreds of millions of dollars in an office park. Would you support providing this company the incentives (such as tax breaks) it wants to locate in your city but only if it agreed to 'linkage' provisions to help those who are not direct beneficiaries of the office park – for example through annual contributions to a community development fund to make improvements in the impoverished part of the city?"	21	16	6	37	20
Exempting social services from budget cuts "Suppose that an economic recession and reduced federal and state aid has resulted in a large projected budget deficit for the upcoming year. All painless solutions have been exhausted, and your options come down to increasing taxes or reducing services. Would you (make social service funding a primary target for such cuts or) support exempting public assistance for the disadvantaged from such cuts?"	4	7	68	6	14

Table 6
Possible factors enhancing support for policies generous to the homeless•

		Model 1		Model 2	
	r	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Liberal ideological orientation	.45**	.33**	.10	--	--
Provide floors	.30*	.04	.29	.12	.14
Focus on the least advantaged	.22*	-.04	.13	-.01	.14
Uphold welfare rights	.23*	.03	.12	.04	.13
Distribute equally	-.10	.01	.10	.01	.10
Avoid redistribution	-.38**	-.10	.10	-.16	.10
Seek aggregate public interest	-.26*	-.06	.11	-.13	.12
Political culture is compassionate	.17	.12	.12	.09	.13
Political regime is conservative	-.24*	-.12	.11	-.20	.12
Economic position of city is strong	-.10	-.03	.33	-.04	.09
Constituency is lower income	.12	-.02	.15	-.01	.16
Constituency is highly minority	.23*	-.09	.14	-.06	.15
Socioeconomic status of official	-.06	-.16	.15	-.14	.16
Official is nonwhite	.39**	.85*	.42	.84	.44
Interaction of floors and economic position	.10	-.01	.09	--	--
Adjusted coefficient of determination		.26		.17	

• Key to Tables 6 through 9:
R indicates Pearson correlation coefficients
B indicates regression coefficients
s.e. indicates standard error for regression coefficient
* indicates statistical significance at .05 level
** indicates statistical significance at .01 level

Table 7
Possible factors enhancing support for a living wage ordinance

		Model 1		Model 2	
	r	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Liberal ideological orientation	.55**	.43**	.14	--	--
Provide floors	.41**	.26	.39	.53**	.19
Focus on the least advantaged	.36**	.17	.18	.18	.18
Uphold welfare rights	.17	-.21	.17	-.20	.18
Distribute equally	-.06	.01	.13	.01	.14
Avoid redistribution	-.35**	-.15	.13	-.22	.13
Seek aggregate public interest	-.19*	-.09	.15	-.16	.16
Political culture is compassionate	.24*	.20	.17	.17	.17
Political regime is conservative	-.22*	-.07	.15	-.18	.16
Economic position of city is strong	-.15	-.35	.45	-.16	.13
Constituency is lower income	.11	-.16	.20	-.15	.22
Constituency is highly minority	.31**	.24	.19	.28	.20
Socioeconomic status of official	-.06	.07	.21	.07	.22
Official is nonwhite	.26*	-.42	.57	-.40	.60
Interaction of floors and economic position	.11	.06	.12	--	--
Adjusted coefficient of determination		.33		.25	

Table 8
Possible factors enhancing support for linkage policies

		Model 1		Model 2	
	r	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Liberal ideological orientation	.25*	-.04	.11	--	--
Provide floors	.56**	.55	.35	.65**	.15
Focus on the least advantaged	.32**	-.01	.15	-.03	.15
Uphold welfare rights	.36**	-.04	.14	-.04	.14
Distribute equally	.04	.03	.11	.03	.11
Avoid redistribution	-.27**	.01	.11	.01	.11
Seek aggregate public interest	-.18	-.08	.12	-.06	.12
Political culture is compassionate	.19	.05	.14	.06	.13
Political regime is conservative	-.19	-.31*	.13	-.30*	.12
Economic position of city is strong	-.21*	-.29	.38	-.16	.10
Constituency is lower income	-.20*	-.10	.17	-.10	.17
Constituency is highly minority	.35**	.16	.16	.16	.16
Socioeconomic status of official	-.05	-.12	.17	-.13	.17
Official is nonwhite	.44**	.74	.49	.76	.48
Interaction of floors and economic position	.16	.04	.10	--	--
Adjusted coefficient of determination		.39		.41	

Table 9
Possible factors enhancing support for exempting public assistance from budget cuts

		Model 1		Model 2	
	r	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Liberal ideological orientation	.08	-.08	.08	--	--
Provide floors	.35**	.11	.24	.25*	.11
Focus on the least advantaged	.18	.07	.10	.04	.10
Uphold welfare rights	.16	.06	.10	.05	.10
Distribute equally	-.04	-.06	.08	-.07	.08
Avoid redistribution	-.23*	-.01	.08	.01	.08
Seek aggregate public interest	-.12	.01	.09	.04	.09
Political culture is compassionate	.14	.15	.10	.17	.10
Political regime is conservative	-.04	.02	.09	.02	.09
Economic position of city is strong	-.05	-.23	.27	-.03	.07
Constituency is lower income	.17	.22	.12	.21	.12
Constituency is highly minority	.07	-.30*	.12	-.31**	.12
Socioeconomic status of official	.02	.04	.12	.03	.12
Official is nonwhite	.30**	.98**	.34	1.01**	.34
Interaction of floors and economic position	.18	.05	.07	--	--
Adjusted coefficient of determination		.21		.21	

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