

A Details of the 2012 and 2014 American Municipal Official Survey

The questions and survey experiments analyzed in the paper were administered online to a randomly selected subsample of participants in the 2012 and 2014 American Municipal Officials Survey (AMOS). We begin with a detailed description of AMOS 2012.

The sample of city officials for AMOS 2012 was constructed by first obtaining a list of 26,566 municipalities from the U.S. Census Bureau.²⁵ We defined municipalities as general-purpose local governments using the following categorizations from the Census Bureau:

- *Incorporated Places* – in most states, they are called cities, towns, boroughs, and villages.
- *Consolidated Cities* – these are a “unit of government for which the functions of an Incorporated Place and its county or Minor Civil Divisions have merged.”²⁶
- *Minor Civil Divisions (MCDs)* in CT, ME, MA, MI, MN, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, and WI – in these states, they are usually called townships or towns. We included Minor Civil Divisions from these states based on the Census Bureau’s assessment that “Most of the MCDs in [these] twelve states ... serve as general-purpose local governments that can perform the same governmental functions as incorporated places.”²⁷

Student research assistants then searched for the website of each municipality on this list in random order. If the research assistants were able to identify the city website, they then collected the name and email address of the elected executive (i.e., mayor) and elected

²⁵Specifically, AMOS 2012 relied on the Census Bureau’s “Subcounty Resident Population Estimates: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009,” which was released on September 2010.

²⁶U.S. Census Bureau. 2012. “Geographic Terms and Concepts – County Subdivision”, http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/gtc/gtc_cousub.html (January 9, 2014).

²⁷Ibid.

members of the governing legislative body (e.g., city councilors). The survey itself was created using the web-based program Qualtrics and was administered to municipal officials by emailing them a link to the survey. Each official received three email invitations, sent 2 to 3 weeks apart.

The response rate for AMOS 2012 was around 23%, on par with recent expert surveys of this nature (e.g., Fisher and Herrick 2013, Harden 2013). As illustrated in Figures A-1 and A-2, participants in AMOS 2012 provide broad geographic coverage across the United States. (These same figures for AMOS 2014 look quite similar.)

AMOS 2014 was implemented in a similar fashion as AMOS 2012. One important difference is that AMOS 2014 did not include officials from cities with a population below 3,000. This was done for costs concerns given the low percentage of cities below this threshold that had websites in AMOS 2012 and the significantly lower response rate of officials from these smaller cities. In addition, we also included all of the email addresses obtained for AMOS 2012 in AMOS 2014. AMOS 2014 was conducted in July and August 2014 with 28,725 municipal officials invited to participate. The response rate was 19%. (Our estimated response rates are understated since some of the emails obtained were either erroneous or no longer active. This would be particularly true of emails obtained for AMOS 2012 and used in AMOS 2014 as many of these officials may have no longer been in office two years later. If we had accurate information on the accuracy of the emails, our response rate would be higher.)

There were thus three types of municipalities: (1) municipalities that did not have a website with email addresses available,²⁸ (2) municipalities that did have emails listed but where no official accepted the invitation to take the survey, and (3) municipalities where at least one of the officials took the survey.²⁹ Figure A-3 shows the relationship between cities'

²⁸The decision to restrict the sample to city officials with email addresses meant that we also excluded some large cities that provided a contact forms in lieu of email addresses.

²⁹If any of the emailed officials responded, the municipality is placed in this category.

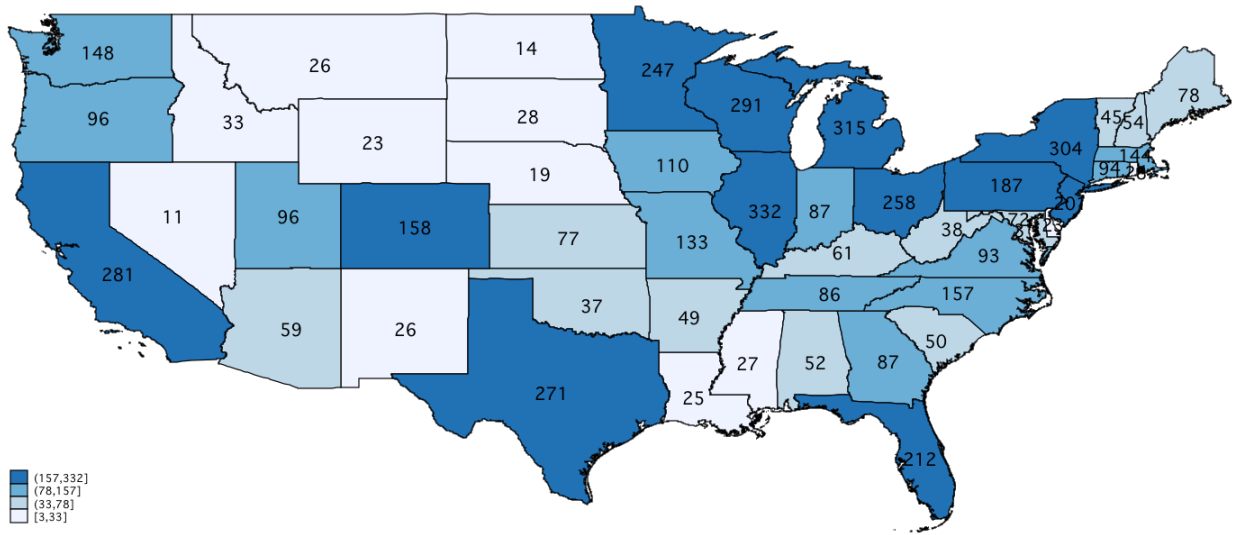


Figure A-1: Number of Municipal Officials (from each State) Participating in 2012 AMOS. Darker colors indicate greater participation in the survey.

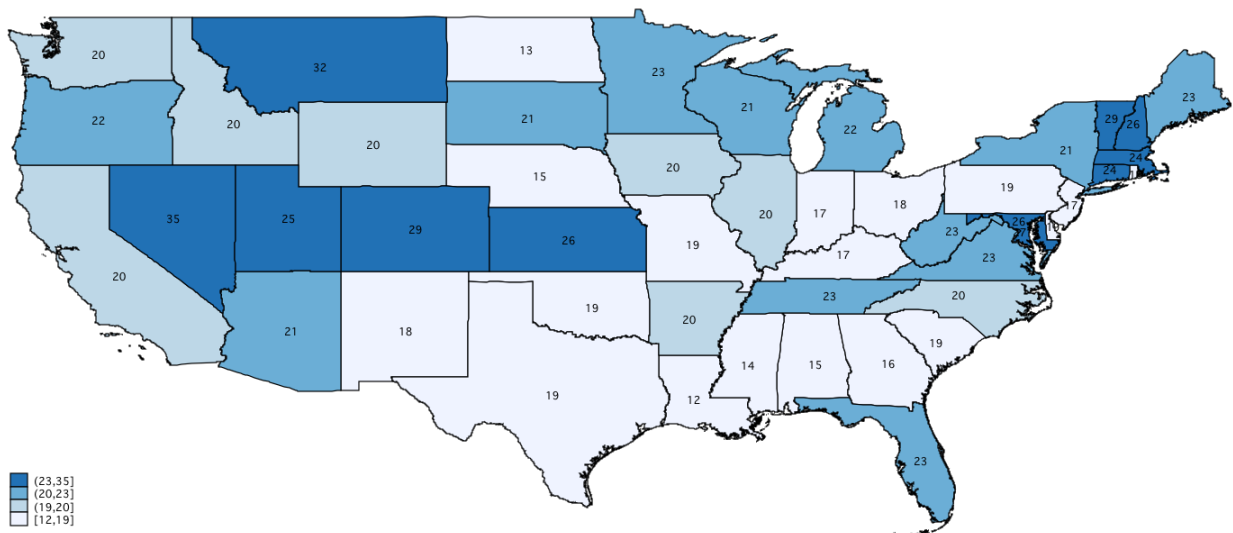


Figure A-2: Response Rates (by State) of Municipal Officials Invited to Participate in 2012 AMOS. Darker colors indicate greater participation in the survey.

population and these three categories. In general, cities with websites and respondents were systematically larger cities than those without websites or respondents. A major source of differences between the AMOS 2012 and 2014 samples stems from the exclusion of cities with a population below 3,000 (unless we already had their officials' emails). Thus, the number of respondents from cities below 3,000 is much lower in the AMOS 2014 sample. At the same time the response rates in cities near the median population increased (which appears to be due to there being more cities below 10,000 with websites that have their officials' email addresses) while the response rates among the largest cities slightly decreased.

TableA-1 provides more descriptive statistics about these three types of municipalities. Like Figure A-3 the table shows that the characteristics of the cities in the 2012 and 2014 samples differ somewhat in terms of population of cities with respondents, but they are quite similar in terms of other city characteristics. For brevity, we refer to numbers from AMOS 2012 in the discussion below of Table A-1.

The mean population of cities in this first category (3,627) is much smaller than those in the second (17,635) or third (36,304), which indicates that larger cities were more likely to have websites with emails and their elected officials were more likely to respond. This relationship between population size and having emails online and/or responding to the survey is illustrated in the density plot in Figure ???. That officials from larger cities were more likely to take the survey also means that respondents are from cities that are more representative of the types of cities in which most Americans live. If all of the cities in our original list of 26,566 cities were ordered from smallest to largest, the median citizen is found in a city with a population of 57,000.

Another important characteristic is the form of government employed by the cities in our sample, as this likely influences the types of individuals selected as policymakers as

Thus the response rate “by city” appears to be greater than the response rate by emailed official.

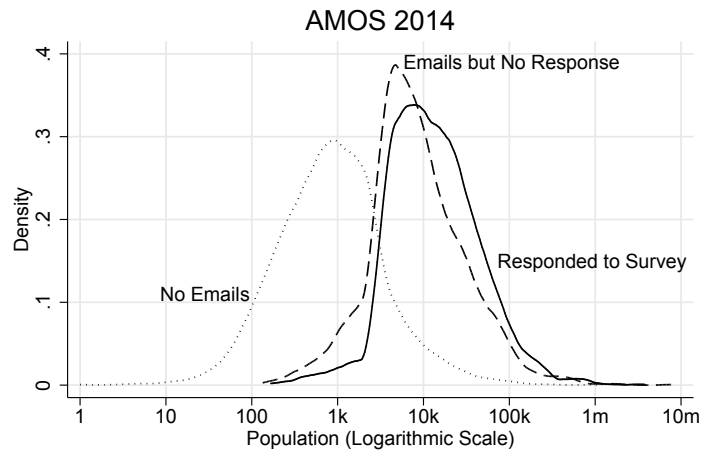
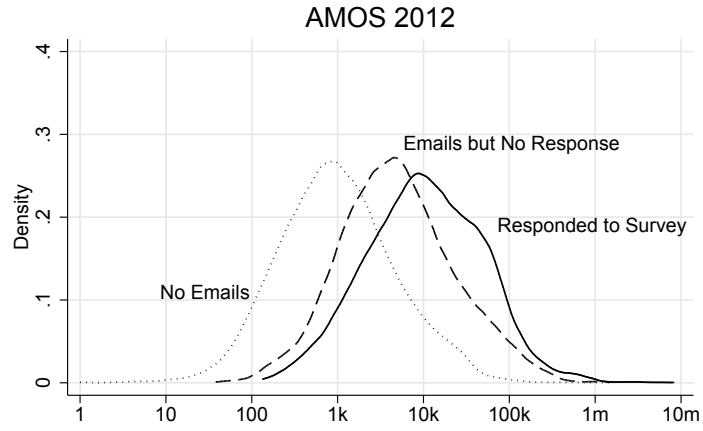


Figure A-3: Density Plot of Cities' Population by Email Availability and Response.

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	Cities without emails		Cities with emails but no respondent		Cities with at least 1 respondent	
AMOS	2012	2014	2012	2014	2012	2014
Number of Cities	21,889	18,543	1,992	2,414	3,109	3,151
Population (in thousands)						
Mean	3.8	3.1	17.9	26.1	36.9	31.7
Total	83,672	56,862	35,735	63,017	114,832	99,947
Type of Municipality						
% Incorporated Place	29%	19%	24%	23%	19%	17%
% Consolidated City	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Minor Civil Division	71%	81%	76%	77%	81%	83%
Form of Government						
(% of these w/ town meetings)						
% Mayor-Council	61% (2%)	70% (2%)	58% (0%)	53% (1%)	52% (0%)	50% (0%)
% Manager-Council	10% (14%)	9% (15%)	23% (8%)	27% (7%)	33% (5%)	38% (5%)
% Selectmen/Supervisors	27% (76%)	18% (81%)	18% (79%)	17% (86%)	14% (78%)	11% (81%)
% Commission	2% (11%)	2% (9%)	2% (12%)	2% (13%)	1% (18%)	1% (22%)
Demographics (Mean)						
% Black	8%	8%	11%	10%	9%	10%
% Latino	6%	6%	11%	11%	11%	11%
% w/ Some College	20%	19%	20%	20%	20%	20%
% Unemployed	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
% w/ Unpaid 1st Mortgage	16%	16%	17%	17%	18%	18%
% w/ Unpaid 2nd Mortgage	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Table A-1: Details of Cities in AMOS 2012 & 2014. Unit of analysis is a city. Each column presents summary data for cities that fall under the following exclusive categories: (1) “Cities without emails” means cities where none of the email addresses of the city’s elected officials was found; (2) “Cities with emails but no respondent” means cities where emails were found but none of the officials took the survey; and (3) “Cities with at least 1 respondent” means cities where at least one of the officials from that city answered a question in the survey. Data for the Number of Cities and Type of Municipality come from the U.S. Census Bureau’s “Subcounty Resident Population Estimates: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009” for AMOS 2012 and “Subcounty Resident Population Estimates: April 2010 to July 1, 2012” for AMOS 2014. Data for the Form of Government come from the Census Bureau’s 1992 Census of Governments. Data for Population and Demographics come from the 2010 U.S. Census.

well as their behavior in office. The Census Bureau³⁰ tracks four forms of government: 1) Mayor-Council, in which the executive (mayor) is elected separately from the elected governing legislature (city council); 2) Manager-Council, in which the executive (city manager) is appointed by the elected city council; 3) Selectmen/Supervisors, common in the Northeast, in which the elected city council is responsible for day-to-day administration; and 4) Commission, in which each member of the elected city council is responsible for one or more departments in the city administration.

Cities with at least one respondent were somewhat less likely to be of the Mayor-Council form (52%) compared to cities without respondents (58%) or emails (61%). They were also much less likely to use the Selectmen/Supervisors model (14% compared to 18% and 27%, respectively). On the other hand, cities with respondents were more likely to use the Manager-Council form (33% compared to 23% and 10%). Such differences largely reflect the differences in city sizes across municipalities with respondents, no respondents, and no published emails. There were few differences across these three categories in terms of racial composition, educational attainment, employment, or unpaid mortgages.

³⁰The data on the form of government used by each city comes from the U.S. Census Bureau's "Census of Governments," which is a survey of municipalities conducted every five years. The most recent publicly available Census of Governments that asked municipalities to identify their form of government was conducted in 1992. This should not be problematic given the stability in the form of government employed by cities. Not all municipalities respond to the survey request; thus, we were only able to match 90% of the cities and respondents in our sample to the Census of Governments survey.