

**If They're Riding It, We're Not Voting for It: Assessing the Role of Racial Threat on Voter Support
for Regional Public Transit in Atlanta and Detroit**

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother, Bernice Bettis. Her toil, tears, wisdom, and ceaseless prayers nourished the soil from which all of my opportunities and inspiration grow.

Rest easy, Mom. I'm gonna be alright.

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Abstract

Regional transit ballot measures in racially segregated metropolitan areas of the United States have historically faced fierce opposition by suburban voters. Proposed public transportation network expansions often reveal acute tensions between constituencies and their priorities, with urban residents tending to support such proposals while suburban residents do not. Furthermore, support for transit proposals tend to show differences by race, with Black, Latino, and other marginalized groups typically supporting transit at higher rates than White voters. The spatial patterns of this support suggest that race itself, and particularly increasing diversity, play a role in this disparity, and further suggests a connection between a region's contentious racial history and suburban transit opposition. To study this relationship between diversity and transit support, this dissertation employs multiple regression and geospatial analyses of demographic and election data to support an examination of demographic composition's role in reflecting and influencing changing levels of regional transit support. Using the Racial Threat Hypothesis to interpret past and current suburban voter opposition to transit, the project examines four suburban counties in the Atlanta and Detroit metropolitan regions as case studies. Regression analyses of precinct-level voting data and 1990, 2000, and 2010 census tract-level data find that measures of Black population density and proximity exert moderately strong influence on transit support: positive in more racially diverse census tracts, and negative in tracts and subregions with less diversity. These results are more pronounced in homogeneously White portions of segregated counties: the study shows a statistically significant decrease in transit initiative support associated with growing proportions of nearby Black populations, with Black residential

density and proximity being second only to partisanship in influence. The study also finds a direct relationship between increases in Black populations and increasing support for conservative policies and candidates in homogeneously White portions of metro counties. This suggests that areas with recent, significant Black population growth exhibit voting behavior more consistent with the Racial Threat Hypothesis, while those with longer exposure to integration show more tolerance for minority-beneficial policies. This research has implications for understanding how demographic transition, racial group concentration, and proximity to communities of color can influence voter support for regional transit expansion. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the relationship between democratic processes and the success of equity-associated policy can be tenuous in areas where diversity has historically been resisted or absent.

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Under many circumstances, direct democratic processes in the United States do not produce policies and social goods that promote equity and progress. The country's history is replete with examples of unjust social policies that were either tacitly endorsed or formally accepted by popular will, and that promoted social, political, and economic environments that have compounded the existing structural disadvantages faced by the poor, immigrants, and people of color. While many of the more egregious systems have over time been dismantled, abandoned, or legislated out of existence, their tenure leaves a lasting mark on society, including the geographies of social and economic disadvantage.

A common result of large-scale inequitable configurations of political power, wealth, and prejudice in the U.S. has been racially segregated, politically polarized metropolitan regions that rely on both artificial and very real differences to maintain their resource-inequitable equilibrium. The most common spatial distribution of regional populations in recent history - minority-dominated urban central cities that once formed the industrial core of the region, surrounded by sprawling majority-White suburbs that siphoned away much of the employment from those cities - is rapidly becoming an obsolete reality with the re-urbanization of industry and affluent workers and the suburbanization of poverty. Despite this, many metro areas

continue to struggle with cooperation for large-scale regional priorities, such as distributing affordable utilities, placing and developing low-income housing, and creating solutions to long-standing problems of regional mobility and accessibility.

Public transportation, despite its potential to be broadly beneficial as both a means of connecting people with desired destinations and a catalyst for economic development, is a frequent casualty of regional failures to reach consensus, or even to properly set an agenda. There are numerous points of possible contention between central cities and their surrounding suburbs when deciding the goals, limitations, and requirements of a comprehensive regional transit system: prioritizing strong connectivity between a few vital regional destinations and the central city versus a broader network that less-efficiently serves these places; transit's effectiveness at providing service in dense neighborhoods versus sprawling suburbs that are less well-suited for transit accessibility, flat-rate fare structures that benefit long-distance passengers versus distance-based fares that benefit intra-city commuting; and the common issue of how the burden of financing the system will be distributed and through what mechanisms, such as property taxes (initially laying the burden on suburban homeowners) or sales taxes (distributing the burden more broadly but inequitably with their inherently regressive nature)(Hanifin et al. 2014, Walker 2012). While these issues are contentious when dealt with by legislators, putting the question of how or even if a regional transit system should be developed to the voters¹ can have tremendous implications for its likelihood of success, depending on the racial and economic demographic makeup of the region itself and the communities that the system would potentially serve.

¹ This process of ballot measure-driven transit development is frequently selected due to the decreasingly reliable and abundant funding from federal and state government sources (National Center for Sustainable Transportation, 2021).

1.2 Partisanship, Race, and Regional Priorities

While many historians and social scientists primarily discuss the racial politics that precipitated and perpetuate regional segregation, partisan politics continues to be a powerful tool for articulating a vision and process through which to maintain long-established avenues of resource allocation. While today's toxic political ecosystem makes it easy to conflate the two, it would be a mistake to obliterate the distinction between racial and partisan politics and thus discount ways that party politics enable power preservation or accumulation that is, at least superficially, separate from race. With a numerical majority, institutions that promote and facilitate political involvement, and a self-perpetuated mythos that corroborates a population's feelings of entitlement to political influence (even if at the expense of numerical minority groups), rallying behind a political party is highly effective: it not only translates a majority community's desires and beliefs into policy, but also provides plausible cover for any social agendas that, on their own, may seem overtly self-serving. On a metropolitan scale, this can produce and sustain inequality that ensures the prosperity and continued separateness of wealthier suburban districts at the expense of, and sometimes purposely in opposition to, central city communities (Kruse, 2005b).

During recent decades and often continuing to the current day, the urban-suburban split has not only been marked by spaces that are majority-Black and poor or majority-White and affluent, respectively, but also with politics that are markedly different, with cities generally overwhelmingly supporting liberal or progressive policies while suburban communities have more mixed politics that frequently skew conservative (Parker et al., 2018). In fact, trends analysis shows that racial segregation itself is a very strong predictor of regional partisan segregation (Dottle, 2019). This adds yet another source of spatially defined tension against

which regional cooperation for policy priorities must contend, perpetuating disagreements and even hostility between both regional leadership entities and the voting public. Because of the asymmetries of political and economic power that have generally favored suburban communities and residents since the mid-20th Century, the confluence of greater social capital for White Americans, wealth, moderate conservatism, and disproportionate access to opportunities for economic mobility can be viewed as nearly inseparable, making development and policies that do not align with those interests a ‘tough sell’ in more severely segregated regions (Connor, 2015).

Regional transit, through a lens of the popular imagination, is portrayed as misaligned with all of the aforementioned traits of suburbanness: many perceive public transportation, especially bus transit, as being the exclusive domain of Black, poor, underemployed urbanites in liberal strongholds, who seek to fund service with suburban tax money, amounting to a wealth transfer (Karner 2019, Garrett and Taylor, 1999). For these reasons, legislation, interest groups, or politicians that propose changes to the distribution of resources for reasons such as transit funding, or that propose producing broadly beneficial development but with associated costs that affluent communities do not feel inclined to bear, are often very unpopular at the polls, and gain little traction from community support (Karner & Duckworth, 2018). However, regional transit referenda, even in contentious spaces, have recently found allies and supporters in formerly ambivalent or hostile places such as chambers of commerce and economic development-minded conservative politicians (Coyne, 2020), who recognize what a comprehensive regional transit system can bring and are willing to sideline old prejudices and concerns. Still, this reasoning can fail to sway enough suburban residents and officials who have historically claimed that transit development represents an incursion that threatens the character and values of the community

(Binkowitz, 2017), setting up a clash between forces of inclusive expansion and those of preserving a narrowly advantageous status quo.

These points can best be illustrated through recent examples of transit ballot measures in regions historically marked by racial segregation and hostility and how that history informed the results. Most of the suburban counties surrounding the city of Atlanta, which swelled in population during a mass exodus primarily during the 1960s and 1970s as political power shifted towards Black dominance in Atlanta proper, have historically been strongly resistant to expansion of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) system since its first funding referendum in 1968 and successful initiation in 1971. While the reasons for this resistance were publicly and overtly racial well into the 1980s and 1990s, the rhetoric surrounding the rejection of system expansion later interwove themes of political party-centric ‘fiscal responsibility’ and concerns about ‘big government’ overreach with the creation of a regional authority centered in urban Atlanta, as well as branding the system as dangerous and the domain of poor urbanites (Bennett and Walker 2018, Partnership for Southern Equity 2017, Bouie 2014, Henderson 2006). However, some of these counties in recent years have or are now considering opting into the agency’s administration, creating plans to expand local transit capacity and integrate their systems with that of MARTA. Clayton County, whose local administration was staunchly anti-Atlanta and hosted a Black population below five percent in 1970, was among the original counties included in the 1965 legislation authorizing the formation of MARTA but eventually rejected participation in 1971 by popular vote (MARTA 2020, Karner 2018). These objections were explicitly racial, mirroring the county’s desire to prevent Atlanta and Fulton County’s influence on a prosperous suburban county (Henderson, 2006). However, after massive racial shifts that resulted in its population being nearly two-thirds Black by 2010,

the desire for greater connectivity with employment and amenities in urban Atlanta led to a successful referendum to contract with MARTA and expand its service throughout the county in 2014 (Pathak et al., 2017). More recently in 2019 and 2020, wealthy neighboring Gwinnett County, which had been particularly instrumental in blocking bus and rail expansion throughout the region through racially antagonistic speech and measures (Henderson, 2006), chose to hold a ballot initiative to develop its own rail system and connect it to rail serving the city of Atlanta, something that was unthinkable less than a decade ago (Estep, 2018). The ballot initiative had the support of local business leaders and environmentalists, who publicly described the opportunities for economic growth and equity in glowing terms, and there has been enthusiasm among local residents about the potential benefits for increased mobility into the city as well as investments in new development around transit stops (Cardinale 2018, Yeomans 2018). Despite the momentum that the project had built, it was narrowly defeated in both 2019 and 2020, though this was partially due to effective maneuvering by anti-transit Republican operatives (Karen Winger Interview, 2019).

In partial contrast, the metropolitan region of Detroit, whose county boundaries, similar to Atlanta, were strictly enforced to dampen movement and influence from the city, continues to struggle on the future of its transit. Deemed to have the worst public transportation system of any major city in the country (Colomer, 2018), Detroit has attempted numerous times to integrate and expand regional transit through ballot initiatives, most of which have failed as recently as 2016 (Schmitt, 2018). Though the city and its long-dwindling population differs notably from ever-growing Atlanta, Detroit's regional make-up presents a comparable mix of both affluent and low-income, largely White counties that have also historically been unambiguous in their rejection of integrated public transit. Local leaders like the deceased Oakland County Executive

L. Brooks Patterson, as representatives of their constituents, continue to undermine efforts at regional partnership by portraying transit as wastefully expensive or ill-suited for the suburbs (Watts 2016, Livengood 2018). Despite the debatable nature of those claims, the region's inability to agree on and fund a system implies that the rhetoric of these leaders either influence or reflect the feelings of much of the suburban population.

Despite historically sharing a common Black-urban/White-suburban regional configuration (Lassiter and Niedt 2013), Detroit's spatial demographics have remained largely stable,² while Atlanta's have experienced massive shifts, both through population growth and increased diversity. With these population changes in Atlanta, or the lack thereof through much of Metro Detroit, comes seemingly proportional changes in urban-suburban cooperation, with Atlanta experiencing much more connectivity and coordination with the rest of Fulton County and most of the counties in its metro region, while Detroit is seeing more modest and county-specific gains in inter-county trust and cooperation. Because of the regional coordination required to develop a comprehensive transit system, it is logical that Metro Atlanta has had greater relative success at both building broad support for and passing transit ballot initiatives. This then begs the question: is the Atlanta metro region's stronger progress with referenda due exclusively to its greater racial integration, or do other complex factors such as political partisanship's relationships to race and socioeconomics provide better explanations?

1.3 Study Approach

The research informing this study reflects a question that has been discussed in the context of policy and planning interventions such as affordable housing, affirmative action, and

² With notable exceptions along the city of Detroit's northern border.

welfare benefits, but never satisfactorily in reference to public transportation: *What role does large-scale racial demographic change and integration play in determining support for regional transit expansion in segregated metro regions?* To answer this question, several assumptions had to be interrogated and reframed to understand their suitability for this research. Foremost among these assumptions is that there is a direct relationship between tolerance for racial integration and partisanship, and that this relationship determines a region's capacity for cross-jurisdictional cooperative efforts, such as developing regional transit. Another assumption is that proximity between different social groups does not produce trust or the capacity for cooperation in the absence of social integration, and that proximity without integration can potentially exacerbate intergroup tensions. Lastly, a fundamental assumption that is tied to this project's conceptual framework is that powerful groups will act through political or social means to prevent challenges to their primacy, and that these actions commonly involve both creating institutional advantages for themselves and eroding or eliminating those of ascendant groups. All of these ideas inform the way that this study is structured and the data that were collected, and provide coherence in the face of a complex research question.

This study, because of the complexity of the questions asked, is structured using a mixed-methods approach. Spatial and demographic data from 1990 to 2010 provides the foundation of the quantitative analyses, with regression analyses and two-sample t-tests utilized to recognize patterns and test the validity of the project's underlying assumptions. Elections data capturing the outcomes of partisan contests, theoretically non-partisan policies, and referenda on regional transit development between 2014 and 2019 were incorporated into the quantitative analysis and inform the qualitative historical and sociological examination of race, space, and politics. The method around which these analytical tools are structured is a comparative case study of two

quintessential “chocolate cities”: Atlanta, Georgia and Detroit, Michigan. Because of the similarities of their histories and their very different regional population and political trajectories in recent decades, the metropolitan areas surrounding these cities provide suitable cases for examining the relationships between levels of racial segregation, partisanship, indications of racial anxiety or hostility, and support for publicly created social goods. This project examines these relationships at varying scales, looking at trends at the metro regional scale, as well as at the county, census tract, and voting district level, all of which provide different advantages for discussing the political and social dynamics that influence support for comprehensive regional transit.

The primary vehicle for answering the questions motivating this study, as well as testing the assumptions that animated my interest in the topic, are a set of four hypotheses that reveal the suitability of my conceptual framework.

1. Metro regions and cities that have historically been more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods.
2. Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.
3. Non-urban Whites in proximity to urban minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites.
4. Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites.

These hypotheses lend coherence to the study's larger questions and allow me to empirically discern demographic and political trends while attempting to answer those questions. The observations used to test these hypotheses provide quantitatively derived evidence, enabling me to answer what is ultimately a qualitative question: are the underlying forces that are driving regional transit opposition racial, political, or both?

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the effects of demographics and demographic change on support for regional transit. Complementary objectives of this study are as follows:

- To observe and discern if or how racial diversity is associated with support for developing comprehensive regional transit;
- To examine the roles of racial population change and partisanship in influencing how suburban residents vote for both transit and other race-relevant policies;
- To gain insight into the circumstances under which race and partisanship are complementary forces and when they are in conflict; and
- To identify spatial and population characteristics associated with transit support and opposition.

1.4 Dissertation Chapter Outline

The purpose of this dissertation project, as discussed above, is to discern the effects of racial diversity and the process of demographic change on the willingness of suburban voters to support regional transit development in racially segregated metro regions. The qualitative and quantitative methods selected to analyze data collected for this purpose are arranged throughout this study to methodically reveal and explain the forces that impact transit and political support,

and to make clear their relationship to demographic change, historical race relations, and the spatial patterns that resulted from both.

Chapter 2 of this project is devoted to discussing the history and internal politics of the Atlanta and Detroit metropolitan regions, which serves to provide context for each region's current-day relationship with transit development. This chapter discusses the relationships between the four suburban counties (Clayton and Gwinnett in metro Atlanta, Macomb and Oakland in metro Detroit) included in the study and the central cities themselves, and examines their problems with regional cooperation and coordination. It then looks at the formation of Detroit's SEMTA, DDOT, and SMART transit agencies, Atlanta's MARTA system and the suburban C-Tran and Gwinnett County Transit systems, and the political struggles that defined their formations and, in some cases, eventual failures and dismantling. This chapter also includes discussion of each county's history of demographic change and racial settlement patterns, and discusses changes to their partisan makeup and relationship to the central city in the current day.

Chapter 3 outlines the conceptual framework for the study, grounding the project's assumptions and methods in a body of interwoven theories. This is accomplished through a review of diverse literatures, including racial and spatial segregation, racial threat, intergroup contact and conflict, the relationship between diversity and cooperation, and conflicts between democracy and equity. This chapter discusses the complex web of theories surrounding intergroup hostility and cooperation, providing perspective on the impediments to regional coordination and generating social goods that arise from perceptions of divergent race- and class-based interests. I also question how methods of direct democracy, such as ballot measures, are efficient vehicles for delivering public policy priorities but can be used to oppress and

disadvantage vulnerable minority populations, especially when race-relevant issues are on the ballot.

Chapter 4 solidifies how the theoretical framework is operationalized by providing the methodological framework that supports this study. I begin by orienting the study around the primary theoretical perspective of the project, the Racial Threat Hypothesis, and how it is used to discern the racial and political forces driving transit opposition. I then explain the merits of structuring the project around a comparative case study and supporting it with regression analysis, followed by an explanation of the foundational assumptions that shaped the four hypotheses to be tested in this analysis. The procedure through which spatial, demographic, and electoral data are processed, transformed (as needed), and analyzed is detailed, and analytical techniques such as using location quotients and merging geographic units with centroid data are discussed. I explain my data sourcing and analysis techniques, outline how each of the four hypotheses is tested, and explain the variables of interest and regression models that underpin the quantitative analysis. I conclude the chapter by discussing the study's limitations and opportunities.

Chapter 5 provides the summary of the project's findings. It begins with a detailed explanation of the demographic and spatial analysis outcomes for each hypothesis test, and reveals the validity of the study's assumptions. This involved examining the characteristics and trends in subsets of each county's census tracts to provide evidence that rejects, or fails to reject, the null hypothesis. This is followed by observing the results of the primary regression analysis and a discussion of the variables that were statistically significant and their hypothesized role in influencing the dependent variable, transit support. I then discuss the findings from the secondary regression analyses, which focus on race-influenced partisan change and support for

racialized policies, and advanced analytical techniques such as geographically weighted regression analysis and what they can tell us about social and political population trends beyond what can be inferred from the demographic analysis.

Chapter 6 analyzes the findings and generates conclusions. It begins by providing a summary of the findings from the regression, spatial, and demographic analyses, and identifying if the affirmative expectations for each hypothesis test were met. The results of each test are compiled in order to confirm the validity of each hypothesis and how these outcomes inform my assessment of the underlying forces driving transit voting patterns. I conclude by summarizing how the evidence from each hypothesis test translates into both theoretical and on-the-ground context and how I came to my final conclusions.

Chapter 7 is devoted to project reflection and policy recommendations. I discuss the ways that integration timing coincides with different results in transit support at the county level, identifying the traits associated with transit opposition, and the strongly significant role of partisanship and how it complicates analyses of racial animus. These recommendations and observations are derived from the primary findings of this project: *the combination of low levels of racial diversity and the significant presence of Republican partisanship have a strong relationship with voter opposition to regional transit, regardless of the speed or magnitude of local Black population growth.*

Chapter 2 Comparative Metropolitan History & Demographics

2.1 Introduction: Black cities within White metro regions and residential spatial distribution

The histories of Atlanta and Detroit, in significant ways, typify the struggles of all US cities that experienced significant disinvestment and an exodus of White residents. Both were seen as sites of opportunity and potential prosperity by Black workers seeking alternatives to the domestic and agricultural work to which they were so often relegated (Bayor 1996, Widick 1989). Despite the abundance of Black migrants gravitating to the new possibilities afforded by joining the growing industrial workforce, the hierarchies of economic and racial control were not suspended in those spaces, and these cities presented significant social and racial hurdles to meaningful inclusion despite the value of (underpaid) Black labor (Sugrue, 1996). Mirroring the efforts of White agricultural landowners who had exercised strong control over the movements of Black workers at their origin points of the Great Migration, White leaders, business owners, and residents utilized both formal and informal methods of circumscribing the spaces in which Black newcomers could work, live, and recreate. This process of strictly defining the spaces where Black people could exist served to erect countless boundaries to their movement in those cities and surrounding areas (Muhammad 2010, Thomas 1997).

However, this process and its attendant restrictions did not manifest the same results in each case, as urban and metropolitan segregation processes followed distinctly different patterns in the North and South. Histories of fraught racial coexistence since Antebellum times produced spatial arrangements in Southern cities that valued proximity between Blacks and Whites, partially owing to the longstanding subordinate but essential role that Black Americans played in maintaining the commerce and comforts of White residents and (former) slaveholders (Grigoryeva and Ruef 2015, Campanella 2007, Bayor 1988). Atlanta, as a result, resembled more of a checkerboard pattern of racial habitation during the Postbellum period, with Black residents occupying neighborhoods that were often distinctly separate but adjacent to White residents (Bayor, p. 54).

By contrast, Detroit was arguably more forceful in steering its Black population. Despite the purported greater freedom for opportunities in the North, its cities did not welcome migrating Black newcomers with open arms, instead testing out forms of segregation that more resemble what most metropolitan regions experienced after White flight (Tolnay, 2003). Detroit largely relegated its new Black residents to neighborhoods on the city's east side such as the Black Bottom neighborhood, or to communities outside of the city such as Inkster, while neighboring industrial cities like Dearborn forbade their residential access altogether (Sugrue, 1996). The spatial distributions of Black residents in these metro regions resulted in differing relationships between these groups and the majority-White populations that refused to allow their full integration. Both relationships were marked by tension and often open hostility, and though segregation became much worse in both regions during periods of White residential exodus, the early 20th Century's patterns of intergroup contact set Detroit and Atlanta on subtly different trajectories for future race relations and regional cooperation (Logan et al., 2015).

This chapter will discuss the recent histories of the Detroit and Atlanta metro regions, and how the spatial distributions of their Black communities both affected and were affected by regional policies. Both case study histories begin with discussions of their struggles to develop comprehensive regional transit, as that sets the context for reasons and outcomes of the primary analysis of this project. Just as important, the history of each region's public transportation provides illustrations of how their residents view the value of public goods provision, as well as the conditions that nurtured each region's demographic evolution. A section is devoted to discussing the ways in which both Detroit and Atlanta have historically related to and clashed with their suburban neighbors and their respective regions. In the case of Atlanta, I draw links between the city and region's changing racial demographics and the political shifts that have dramatically changed its partisan landscape. Suburban resistance to greater integrative ties with Atlanta evolved to encompass more facially economic justifications, creating possibilities for more regional cooperation as the city becomes both more affluent and more racially mixed than it has been since prior to White Flight. I discuss Detroit's relationship with the region, however, by describing its long-fraught history with its northern boundary, Eight Mile Road, and the communities beyond it. Even though some of those communities are experiencing racial integration after a history of stout resistance to Black incursion, the pattern of Black residential expansion looks more like gradually ceded territory, and this pattern both explains and is explained by the increasingly divided social politics of the region.

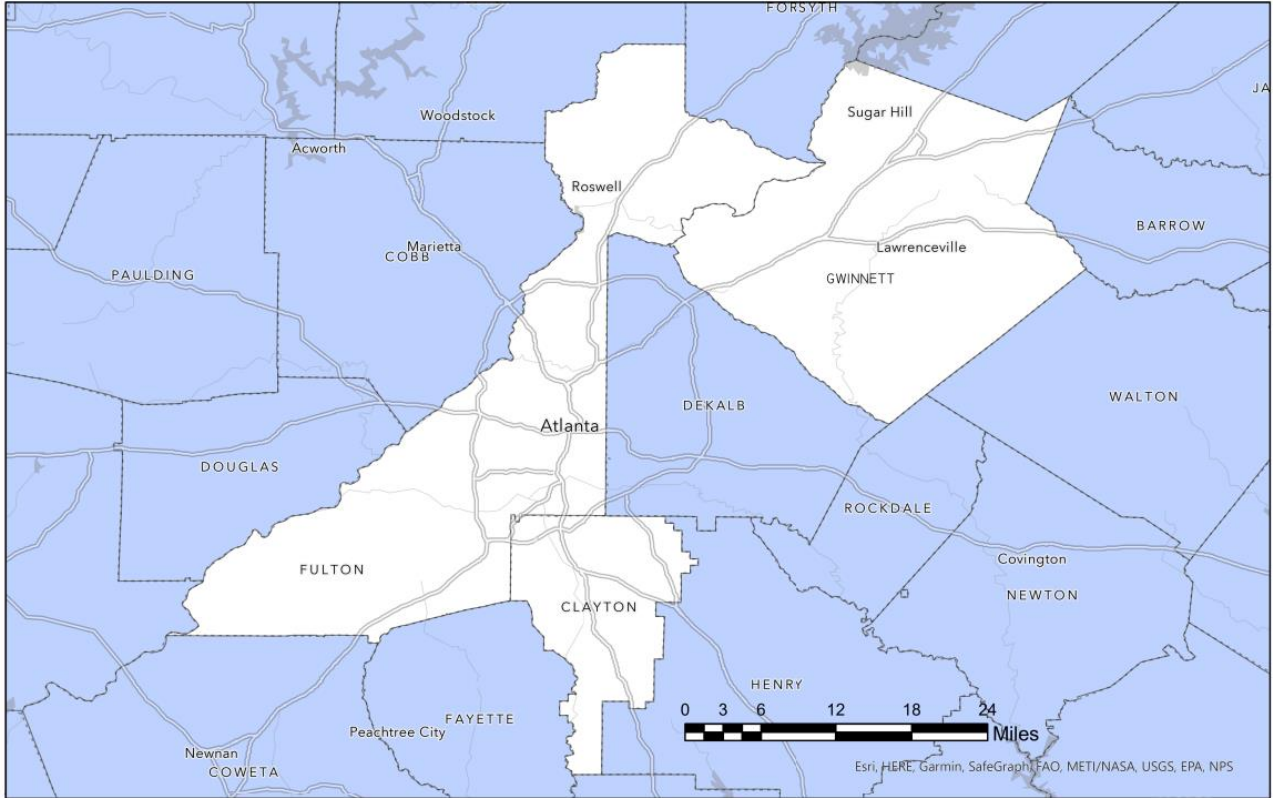
Following these sections, a more detailed profile of each suburban case study county provides a look into their racial, social, and political evolutions from the mid-twentieth century up to the transit ballot measures around which the analysis is centered. I describe the demographic patterns that fostered their exclusionary stances against racial integration beginning

in the 1970s, as well as the speed and intensity of integration in each county. The descriptions of where racial mixture and, in some cases, Black majority attainment occur gives vital insight into how each county's White population responded to new residents of color. These patterns provide some explanation for the increasing political divergence between Macomb and Oakland Counties, as well as illustrating the ways in which Clayton and Gwinnett Counties may be at different stages of the same social and economic trajectory.

Following the pattern of selected influential Detroit scholars, the Macomb and Oakland profiles both highlight a major suburban community within the county, creating a focal case that illustrates that county's relationship to its aspiring and eventual Black residents. While the Macomb County city of Warren illustrates the impacts that both deindustrialization and strained race relations can have on a community's social fabric, Southfield in Oakland County serves to show how both a diversified economy and a more deliberate approach to incorporating newcomers lends itself to more sustainable prosperity (Darden and Thomas, 2013). For the Atlanta case study counties, we re-engage with their histories of transit development from the suburban county perspective, detailing how both Clayton and Gwinnett approached their own needs for public transit in the absence of MARTA expansion. The role that regional system integration has played (in the case of Clayton County) or could potentially play (in the case of Gwinnett County) in expanding accessibility for local residents within their communities and into urban Atlanta is also discussed, as well as how resident perceptions of that accessibility's value led to their respective ballot measures' outcomes. These focused profiles of each metropolitan county, just as does the chapter as a whole, add contextual grounding to the complex relationship between politics, racial anxiety, and spatial segregation in these regions, as

well as illustrate how this analysis’ conceptual framework operates at different levels of racial integration.

2.2 Atlanta’s Recent History and Demographics



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton, Fulton, and Gwinnett Counties

Figure 1 Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton, Fulton, and Gwinnett Counties

2.2.1 MARTA county-opt out and suburban isolation of Atlanta

The history of Atlanta’s transit development is not entirely unique to the region, but rather resembles that of many metropolitan regions with a majority-Black urban core and growing majority-White suburban periphery, including its peer case of Detroit. Despite the

contentious nature of city and regional politics during the Civil Rights Era, the Georgia General Assembly legislatively authorized the creation of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) in 1965 (West, 2017). This empowered a five-county portion of the Atlanta Metro Region, consisting of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett Counties, with the ability to begin drafting plans and authorize the levying of taxes (Karner and Duckworth 2018, Konrad 2006). Each county held a referendum on the public's appetite for a cross-jurisdictional, eventually highly connective transit system, and the residents of Cobb County, which borders the city of Atlanta on its northwest, strongly rejected the proposal (West, 2017). Among the purported reasons were widespread concerns about buses full of black Atlanta children forcibly desegregating all-white suburban schools, as well as fears of a de facto annexation and absorption into the city, which would have ended the period of informally exclusionary communities and carefully defended county borders against black incursion (Lassiter 2013, Kruse 2005a).

The remaining four metro counties regrouped to work on plans for potential rail alignments, bus service, and funding mechanisms that would suit all parties. However, the same primarily race-centered hostility to MARTA development that compelled Cobb County to opt out was brewing in the other suburban counties of Gwinnett and Clayton (Gioielli, 2021). This placed politicians who otherwise were supportive of the opportunities for connectivity to central city employment in precarious positions, and threatened to undermine the aims of business leaders who wanted to signal to the country that Atlanta was preparing to be a world-class business hub (Kruse 2005, Partnership for Southern Equity 2017, Ross 2014).

The following 1968 referendum, which proposed a new property tax as the transit system's funding mechanism, proved disastrous and resulted in none of the four remaining metro

counties voting for approval (West, p. 84). While much of the dissatisfaction with the plan in the suburban counties came from a combination of tax aversion and desire to prevent black commuters from accessing employment outside of Atlanta, a significant portion of the frustration in Fulton County was centered on concerns among Black residents that the system was built primarily for White suburban commuter use, rather than for the Black majority within city limits. These concerns were well-founded, owing to the fact that only a small fraction of the system served black neighborhoods, with one local Black leader saying “[O]f the 36 miles of transit system to be opened by 1975, only 4.3 miles have been earmarked to serve the large Negro west side population” (Partnership for Southern Equity, p. 15, Paget-Seekins 2017)³. While Black residents only then began to meaningfully be brought into the planning process in an attempt to address their concerns, White suburban residents had made their voices heard, both at the ballot box and in the smear campaign that sought to brand regional transit as an express route for black urban crime (Kruse 2005, Bayor 1996). In the 1971 referendum that finally granted MARTA a funding source, Fulton and DeKalb passed the referendum, while both Gwinnett and Clayton overwhelmingly rejected it, giving MARTA permission only to operate within two counties (Bullard et. al, 2000). “With the support of the black community”, wrote transportation scholar and practitioner Laurel Paget-Seekins, “the second referendum one-cent tax passed in Fulton and DeKalb Counties in 1971, but it failed in suburban counties due to both a lack of planned rail services and racially motivated fears that transit would provide black residents with access to the suburbs” (Paget-Seekins, p. 174).

³ The postmortem audit, prepared by the University of Georgia for the use of the US DOT and the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, lists several reasons for the bond issue’s failure, two related to concerns among Black residents and leaders but conveniently omitting any reference to white suburban concerns, despite the large apathy or hostility shown by suburban county voters. US DOT, 1981).

2.2.2 The changing politics and complexion of Atlanta

Those who are familiar with the Greater Atlanta Area’s history and politics know that the story of MARTA’s anemic start and very slow expansion over the last half-century are emblematic of many elements of its regional governance. Even in a place styled “the city too busy to hate”, attempts at marshalling resources for a collective effort are often fraught, caught up in a web of interrelated social, political, bureaucratic, and economic hurdles. Just as in many historically segregated metro regions, what began with well-defended battle lines along the urbanized periphery against racial penetration slowly evolved into other competitive alignments, most prominently partisan ones (Connor, 2016). Despite the Atlanta region’s historical tendency towards voting democratic before the Great Realignment⁴, a majority of the 10-county region voted for Republican presidential candidates until as recently as 2008, with half voting for Mitt Romney in 2012 (Bacon, 2020). However, despite a continued valorization of small government and low taxes among most suburban county residents (Pew Research Center, 2022), as the metro region demographically has morphed to look more like the city of Atlanta, so have their partisan politics, reflecting the complexity that comes with a rapidly growing and racially diversifying southern region (Badger, 2019). Similarly, the conversation about obstacles has also evolved with the times and its consequent shifts in social desirability. While race was explicitly discussed in parts of the suburbs as a reason to vote against transit expansion during the 1960s, the framing evolved to focus instead on concerns about crime, itself a thinly veiled allusion to fears about a growing Black presence in the suburbs (Schmidt, 1987).

Today, the conversation more often revolves around resistance to taxation, government overreach, and losses of county autonomy with the imposition of a multi-jurisdictional body that

⁴ Every county in Georgia supported Jimmy Carter, a Georgia native, in his 1976 presidential run, though his margins were comparatively slim in many suburban Atlanta counties

is not under the sole control of suburban communities (Hatfield, 2006). The city's capacity for regional cooperation is also a victim of its own historical dynamism. In a 10-county metro region of 4.6 million⁵, which grew by approximately 63,000 people between 2019 and 2020 (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2022) and has historically shown robust growth, Atlanta has been forced to form tenuous coalitions with parties with very different interests. "The shapes of counties here are odd", said MARTA Public Engagement Manager Eric Scott in 2019. "Fulton annexed a few other counties, which forced disparate actors to deal with each other. North Fulton is very White and affluent, while South Fulton is very rural. [Fulton County] is the one entity that doesn't allow for individual cities to divest and silo." (Eric Scott interview, 2019).

However, the underlying racial and demographic component of the region's aversion to cooperation has continued to shape its outcomes for the generation of social goods, particularly with MARTA. The city of Atlanta, which was still the residential center of the region, reached its population peak of 496,973 residents in 1970 (it did not attain this population again until 2020) (Heath and Heath, 2017). More importantly for this analysis, it did not become majority-Black until that same year, an event that prompted both another large exodus of its White residents for the suburbs and a seismic shift in its politics, as it finally had the population and political will to vote black candidates into high office⁶ (Bayer, 1996). This change in governance and population was the backdrop for the 1968 and 1971 MARTA referendum votes, providing more instability and outgroup distrust and fear in a region that was already struggling with a rapidly changing race relations landscape, at the peak of the Civil Rights Era and desegregation movements (Lassiter, 2013). Concerns about exploding Black populations and a regional center

⁵ Footnote: Sidney Douse, ARC: *The 20-county region of Atlanta is expecting to grow 100,000 people per year until 2050. Currently 5.8 million. In 2050, they are expected to be at 8.3 million. For perspective, that is the population of the Denver metro region ADDED to the Atlanta metro region during that time.*

⁶ With the election of Maynard Jackson, Jr. as Atlanta's first black vice-mayor in 1969 and subsequently its first black mayor in 1974.

of gravity that was now controlled by Black Atlantans was to be resisted by Atlanta's suburban communities and counties at all costs, even at the expense of the economic development and accessibility gains that were forecast with the development of MARTA rail.

2.2.3 Gwinnett County: an unparalleled example of diversity and demographic change

Gwinnett County, which borders Fulton County to the northeast, presents a perhaps unparalleled case study in the interconnected nature of demographics and politics. Gwinnett, once an almost entirely rural community, hosted a population of 72,349 residents in 1970, less than 15% of the population of the city of Atlanta alone during that same year. Its minority population was miniscule, amounting to approximately 5.2% of its population, with Black people (the largest non-White group) numbering 3,692 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 1975). While the population experienced explosive growth in subsequent decades, nearly quintupling to 356,500 by 1990, its combined minority population failed to exceed 10% of the county's composition. However, since that time, there have been significant racial demographic shifts to accompany its continued runaway growth, hosting a population that was 67.5% non-White in 2020. (Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners 2019, U.S. Census Bureau 2020).

Kofi Wakhisi, Planning Administrator at the Atlanta Regional Commission, described Gwinnett County's evolution as both a rapidly developed county and as an unexpected destination for people of color. "Gwinnett County was maybe the fastest growing suburb in the country for many years. It was purely a bedroom community perhaps into the 1980s with low density, but then began attracting commercial and industrial development. Then, edge cities began developing that have their own development. They were very successful because of their local incomes and employer location. It was pretty typical interstate-driven, suburban office park

development for a long time. But then immigrants began choosing Gwinnett, rather than the typical pattern of populating Atlanta” (Kofi Wakhisi interview, Nov. 12, 2019). Geoffrey Butler, Gwinnett County Long-Range Planning Manager, similarly touted the remarkable demographic diversification of the county, saying that until 2000, it was primarily a white community, but then diversity started to become the norm. He stated his belief that the Atlanta region’s own evolution as an economic destination resulted in spillover populations seeking out residence in Gwinnett, both from around the country as well as internationally (Geoffrey Butler interview, Nov. 15, 2019).

The shift in demographic composition has had tremendous impacts on the county’s image and conditions. Far from its previous perception as a distant, exclusionary, semi-rural and all-White enclave, it is now a widely sought-after destination for ethnic food and shopping (Geoffrey Butler interview 2019, Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners 2019). While the moderate but sustained growth of the county’s Black population from 5.1% in 1970 to nearly 27% in 2020 has been noteworthy considering the county’s recent historical posture of resistance to Atlanta residents, the growth of its Asian and Hispanic populations has been the source of considerable attention. Gwinnett’s Hispanic population numbered 1,426 in 1980, but has since multiplied to over 150 times that size, numbering 220,460 according to the 2020 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Though numerically smaller, the county’s Asian population increase is more remarkable: numbering only a few dozen residents in 1970, Gwinnett’s Asian residents numbered 126,526 in the 2020 Census, an increase of more than 5,200-fold in 50 years (U.S. Census Bureau 1975, U.S. Census Bureau 2020). Together, these ascendant populations account for over 36% of the county’s overall population. Presumably as a result of the dramatic increase in the county’s non-White population, Gwinnett appears to be experiencing a new iteration of

White Flight, though it has not lost its legacy White population with the same rapidity as its overall growth: From 2010 to 2020, while the county grew by 151,741 residents overall, its White population decreased from 354,316 to 310,583, a decrease of 43,733 residents, or 12.3% of its 2010 population (U.S. Census Bureau 2010, U.S. Census Bureau 2020).

These demographic changes, combined with shifts in the community's partisan makeup and the persistently terrible traffic congestion, set the stage for the adoption and expansion of the kind of public transit that was once deeply unpopular to Gwinnett residents. Though Gwinnett County, like Clayton and Cobb Counties, rejected the opportunity to develop rail infrastructure as part of MARTA's initial regional transit system plan, its voters approved the formation of a public transit agency in 1998 to provide transit connectivity within Gwinnett and to other regional employment centers (Bullard et al., 2000). The county created Gwinnett County Transit (GCT) in 2000, which began providing express bus service to the city of Atlanta and then local service during its first two years of operation (Connect Gwinnett, 2017). Operating 12 routes, Gwinnett's transit system connects county residents to several destinations, including MARTA rail stops. While this may be economical and provide a boost to MARTA ridership, this arrangement has drawn the ire of many Fulton and DeKalb residents, believing that Gwinnett residents are unscrupulously taking advantage of a system that they electorally rejected in 1971 and 1990 and bear no responsibility to pay for⁷ (Bullard et al., 2000).

Despite the popularity of using GCT's express buses to connect directly to downtown Atlanta and to MARTA stops, Gwinnett County residents, when given the opportunity in 2019 to vote on a referendum to expand service and integrate it with MARTA, rejected it for a third time (Gwinnett County Elections, 2019). While the margin of rejection was very small – fewer than 8,000 total votes – and did not fall entirely on partisan or racial lines, it was still a defeat for the

⁷ Fulton, Clayton, and DeKalb residents pay for MARTA service with a one-percent sales tax, in addition to farebox revenue.

goal of creating a truly regional transit system (Estep and Coyne, 2019). It also reflected a reality that, even in the face of growing diversity and dramatic change, the mentality that inspired bumper stickers that read “Share Atlanta Crime — Support MARTA” in the 1980s still has a place in the minds of many Gwinnett voters (Gioielli 2021, Partnership for Southern Equity p. 16).

2.2.4 Clayton County: once an anti-Atlanta stronghold, now a majority-Black suburb

While Gwinnett County has more recently captured headlines for its explosive population growth and rapid diversification, Clayton has its own compelling story of dramatic demographic change and shifts in community character. Bordering Atlanta and several other Fulton County communities to the south, Clayton County historically had a relationship of resistance and hostility to Atlanta’s influence and provided a suburban escape for White residents who sought to divest from the city (Farley, 2015). Like Gwinnett County, despite its proximity to Atlanta, Clayton County resisted large-scale Black migration for several decades after it was initially settled, hosting a Black residential population of 4.56 percent as recently as 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1971). However, by 1990, a combination of Black former Atlanta residents relocating into the county and the consequent outmigration of longer-tenured White Clayton residents to other counties such as Forsyth and neighboring Spalding resulted in the county becoming majority-Black 30 years later in 2000 (Farley 2015, Towns 2020).

Though Black residents now constitute an overwhelming majority of the county population at 66.1 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) and fewer than one-quarter of census tracts in 2010 had majority-non-Black tracts, the legacy of racial transition and retreat are evident in space. Similar to many major metropolitan regions, major roadways frequently act as

racial dividing lines, and Clayton County is no different: the communities east of the Interstate 75/Highway 41 corridor are perhaps the final areas where White Clayton residents can be found in abundance⁸, particularly as one moves south away from Atlanta and towards Henry County, a place that is undergoing its own rapid demographic changes but remained narrowly majority-White in 2010.⁹ Similarly, the wealthier portions of the county can be found to the east and south, likely reflecting the continued dividends from significant investment in the communities farthest from urban Atlanta as well as these areas suffering fewer residual effects of the 2008 foreclosure crisis, even though racial transition has changed the complexion of most of the area since the wave of White settlement in the mid-20th Century (Kemp 2022, Jennings 2016).

The county has largely maintained its low-density, suburban character with an aging housing stock and few defined main street-style downtowns in its cities (Ray, 2017). While these built environmental factors would theoretically lower the cachet of Clayton County communities relative to the growing appeal of urban amenity-rich Atlanta, these features have positioned the county to be attractive for different reasons. With the strong population growth that Atlanta has experienced in recent years and the resultant price pressures and displacement that have accompanied an affluent worker influx, Clayton has become a safe harbor to low-income metro residents who have been unable to weather the region's rapidly increasing rents (Keenan 2019, Katz and Liu 2000). The movement of lower-income Atlantans into the county has accelerated the demographic change that was already taking place, contributing to communities that have also welcomed new Asian and Latino immigrants in large numbers (Towns, 2000).

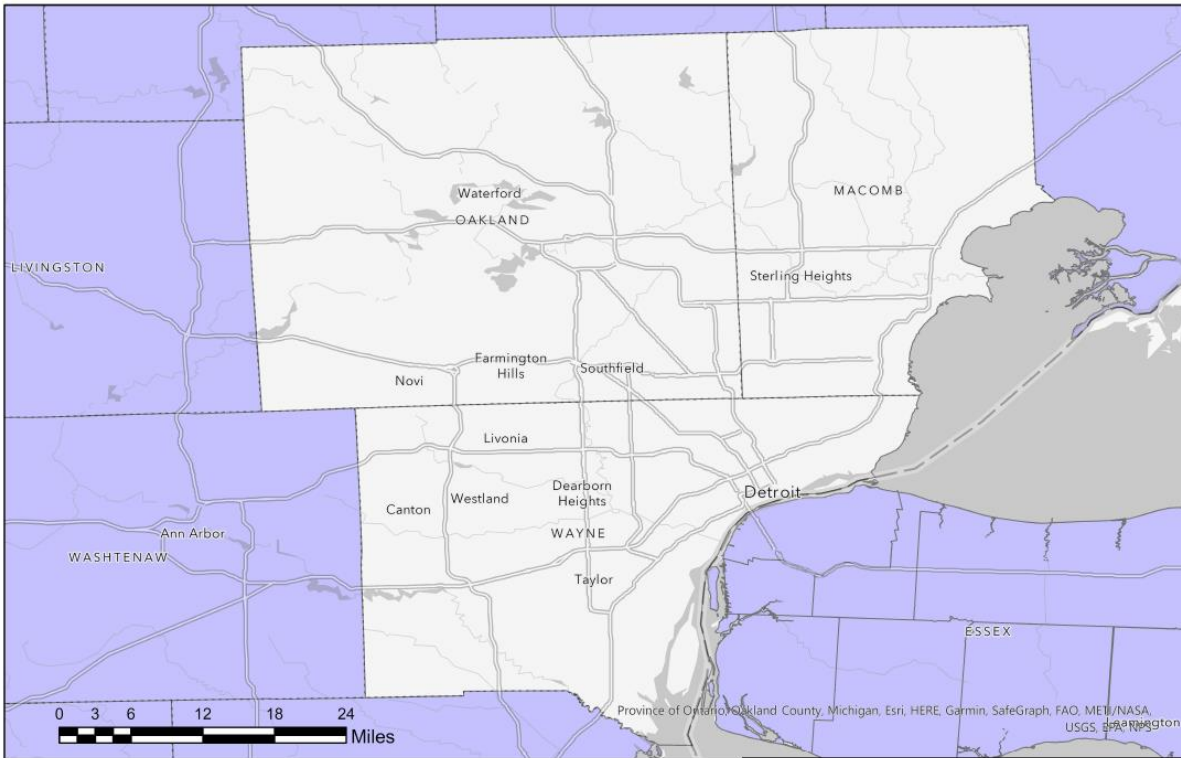
The changing character of Clayton County's communities - from overwhelmingly White and affluent to young, multiracial, and lower-middle-income - has both necessitated and

⁸ These findings were derived from the spatial analysis that underpins the Atlanta region's section this study.

⁹ It has since gained a Black plurality (2020 Census)

precipitated significant changes in county priorities. Among the largest investments, the reintroduction of public transportation has garnered some of the greatest attention, both in the region and nation-wide. Clayton County was part of the original five-county MARTA Act's jurisdiction, and though it ultimately opted not to allow MARTA to expand into Clayton in the 1971 referendum, county residents voted in 2000 to establish a local transit provider (Center for Transportation Excellence, 2022). Clayton County Transit, or C-Tran, began operations in 2001 under the management of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, providing service through three bus routes that many deemed inadequate to efficiently connect suburban residents to prime employment destinations throughout the county (Ray 2017, Joyner 2011). A combination of the transit service's increasingly untenable cost to the county budget and inadequate ridership to support operations led to the elimination of C-Tran service in 2010. This created significant hardship for low-income carless residents who depended on transit for job access, and spurred a re-evaluation of Clayton's transit needs (Fausset, 2010). In 2014, more than 40 years after opting out of the fledgling regional transit system, Clayton voters supported funding an expansion of MARTA transit into the county through a referendum that garnered 73 percent support (Clayton County Government, 2014). As of 2022, MARTA now operates ten bus lines in the county, with expansion plans that include bus rapid transit service connecting the East Point MARTA rail station to several destinations in the northern half of the county, as well as the potential expansion of commuter rail (MARTA, 2022). This service expansion has been crucial for providing greater connectivity for residents, both for accessing the county's abundant employment as well as the services and amenities of urban Atlanta, thus mitigating some of the negative impacts that can occur when low-income residents relocate to accessibility-poor suburban communities.

2.3 Detroit's Recent History and Demographics



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb Counties

Figure 2 Detroit Metropolitan Region: Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties

2.3.1 SEMTA and Detroit's Recent History of Regional Discord

Detroit, as a region that has long been plagued by urban-suburban competition to the point of open hostility, faced transit development problems beyond the logistical issues posed by its regional sprawl (D'Anieri 2007). Its approach to providing transit was piecemeal, with private bus companies providing service between Detroit's urban core and the growing suburbs, while service within the city was largely within the purview of the Department of Street Railways (DSR), which had inherited Detroit's bus fleet (Pfaff, 2021, D'Anieri 2007). Both the inefficiency of this arrangement as well as the limitations it presented in terms of regional access

inspired a study commissioned by the region's leadership-sponsored research arm, the Metropolitan Fund, into the feasibility of developing a regional transit entity (Darden et al., 1987). Its conclusions, that the Detroit Metro Region would benefit from developing a comprehensive transit system that balanced urban and growing suburban needs, led to the Michigan State Legislature passing a bill creating of the Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA)(Pfaff, 2021).

Despite the inherently cooperative nature of such a regional entity, nearly every element of its function and mandate became controversial before it became fully operational. The passage of the legislation authorizing SEMTA in early July of 1967 preceded the Detroit Rebellion that would occur later that month, a multi-day event that would further destabilize already fraught race relations in the city and region, spur another White residential exodus to the suburbs, and stir up greater distrust of forging cross-jurisdictional agreements with Detroit (Batterman, 2021). The Rebellion's aftermath fundamentally changed the calculus for any regional cooperative effort: as soon as representatives were appointed by local politicians and jurisdictions, intense power struggles erupted in an atmosphere of low trust. The contention was particularly centered on two foundational issues, which would serve to undermine all subsequent efforts towards creating a functioning system: how the future transit network would be funded, and how the resources it produced would be distributed (D'Anieri, 2007).

Even after securing dedicated funding through a half-cent portion of a two-cent gas tax in 1972, SEMTA remained mired in inaction towards meaningful service integration, with the DSR still operating city buses and having limited reach in the suburbs (D'Anieri, 2007). Mistrust continued as fights between the City of Detroit and SEMTA over how gas tax and later federal funds were allocated: "According to SEMTA's own reporting...the regional transit authority

kept for its own suburban operations a portion of the regional funding stream far out of proportion to the service it provided. Measured in the number of miles its buses drove, Detroit provided 84 percent of the region's transit service. Measured in the number of people served, Detroit provided 91 percent. Yet the city received only 61 percent of the state and federal operating subsidies that passed through SEMTA. On a per-passenger basis, Detroit's operating subsidy was one-sixth of that of the suburban bus lines, less than 25 cents compared to more than \$1.50. The city subsidized its service out of its own general purpose revenue, while the suburbs provided no local revenue to support their transit service." (D'Anieri, p. 135).

The region's aversion to cooperation tainted other organizations and efforts towards concerted action. The rising inefficiency of utility and service administration, as well as the lack of coordination for housing and transportation development in the region prompted the promotion of an "Area Unity Bill" in the Michigan State House in 1975, aimed at restructuring the weak existing regional governance apparatus (the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) that would have provided more guidance for and oversight with SEMTA, to give it more authority (Darden et al. 1987). Politics within the chamber, as well as suburban fears about Detroit having some power over the suburbs, quickly doomed its passage. White suburban residents had powerfully expressed aversion to urban influence over bussing and school desegregation in particular, and there was strong concern about suburban tax money being taken to share with the inner city (Thomas, 1997).

This sustained dysfunction ultimately proved to be costly. In 1974, conflict between the DSR (which was rebranded as the Detroit Department of Transportation, or DDOT, later that year) and SEMTA over the distribution of resources prompted the Urban Mass Transit Administration (the precursor to the Federal Transit Authority) to threaten to cut off the region's

federal funding because of the lack of coordination and failure to present viable plans for merging the two entities (Nelles 2012, D’Anieri, 2007). This threat forced suburban leaders and the newly elected Detroit mayor, Coleman Young, to set aside longstanding conflicts, and between 1974 and 1979, significant effort was made to create a coherent plan for ensuring the SEMTA-DDOT merger, as well as the provision of more dedicated funding and the full capacity of the planned regional transit system (D’Anieri, 2007).

During this period, there was considerable optimism about the prospects for a regional system’s development by many in the city and along corridors slated for transit improvements, particularly in the face of rising energy prices and the region’s desire for reinvention with the decline of the auto industry. However, public acknowledgement that it would require agreement, planning, and financing at a regional level in order to be successful tempered that optimism, particularly because the old debates about resource allocation had yet to be resolved (Cooper, 1975). While Governor Milliken devised a plan that provided many benefits for both Detroit and the suburbs, disputes about representation and voting power again resurfaced, and Milliken’s plans were effectively scuttled by actions from both SEMTA’s board and Mayor Young. Milliken devised another plan that more closely resembled suburban leaders’ wishes and secured its passage through the Michigan Legislature in 1976, after which he gained assurances from President Gerald Ford that \$600 million in federal funding would be available (Bernasconi et al., 2014b).

However, serious conflicts over funding and planning a proposed subway under the Woodward Corridor, as well as the election of a transit skeptic in President Reagan, signaled weakening prospects for regional transit (Neill, 1988). There were still optimists in both political and commercial circles, who touted a proposed \$1.9 billion regional transit “consensus plan” that

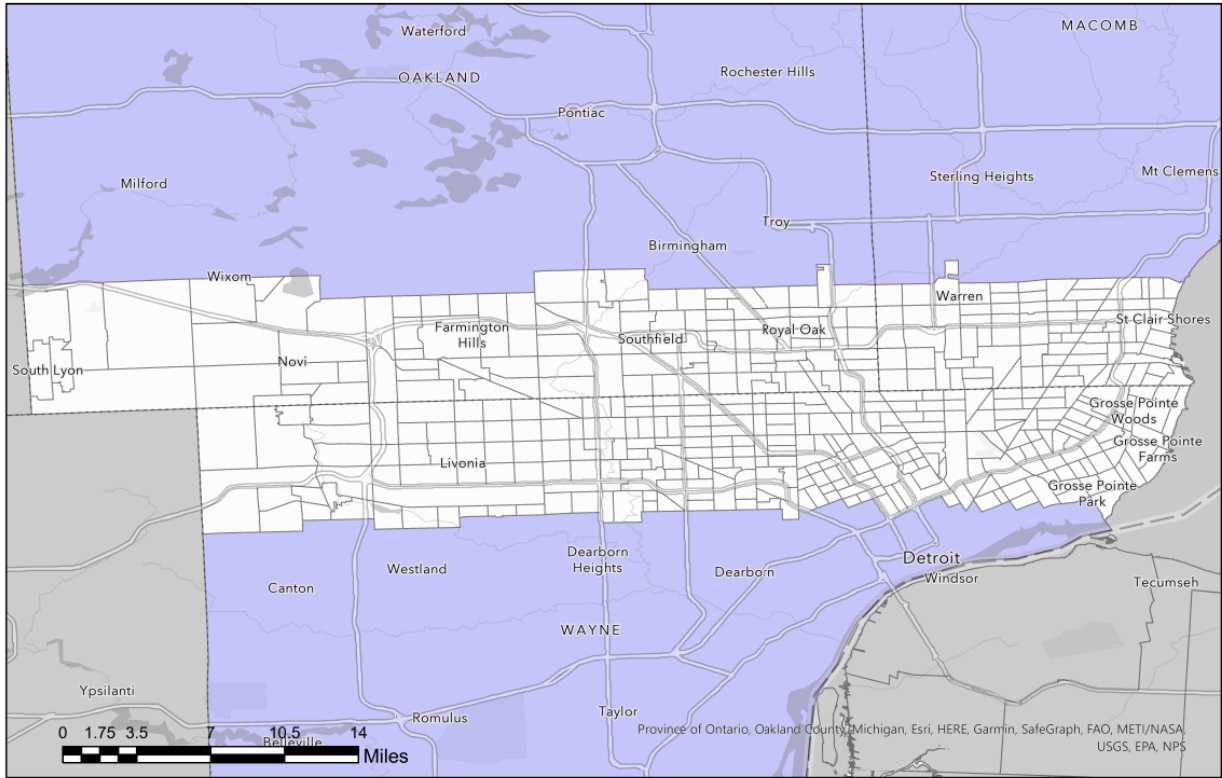
would have supplied more east-west connectivity in Macomb and Oakland Counties to complement the hub-and-spoke configuration that would radiate from downtown Detroit (a major source of frustration for suburban transit advocates), as well as rail connections along Woodward and Gratiot Avenues to Pontiac and Mt. Clemens, respectively (Nelles 2012, Ratliff 1983). Unfortunately, these plans were still being debated, and the decades-long process had undermined the little confidence that the White House had in regional transit. Though the \$600 million was not immediately withdrawn, new stipulations left the region with only enough funds to develop the downtown People Mover, with the remainder being forfeited (Bernasconi et al. 2014b, D'Anieri 2007). Efforts at developing a regional system were effectively abandoned after this loss. Realizing that a merger with DDOT was infeasible because of Detroit's reluctance to cede control of its rolling stock and infrastructure, SEMTA was dismantled and reconstituted without Detroit's influence and renamed the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) in 1989 (Bernasconi et al. 2014a, D'Anieri 2007).

While decoupling the fate of regional transit from Detroit's influence was an animating element of the formation of SMART, suburban residents' desire for greater autonomy from regional cooperation continues to keep truly comprehensive regional transit out of reach: a 1995 transit millage and the incorporation of public transit authorities in Wayne and Oakland Counties under Michigan's Public Transportation Authority Act of 1986 created the possibility of individual communities 'opting out' of transit service (Hamilton 2012, Cavitt 2018). County commissioners in Wayne and Oakland took advantage of this provision and, as of 2022, nearly two-thirds of Oakland municipalities and nearly 40 percent of Wayne municipalities have opted out of regular SMART transit service (Herberg 2022, SMART Path 2020). As of this project's publication, Macomb County is considering creating a provision that will allow for similar

community control over opting into local transit service (Lawrence and Hall, 2022). This threatens to further compromise the reliable coverage of the suburban transit system and cut off captive riders from accessing destinations both within the suburbs and in urban Detroit.

2.3.2 Eight Mile: An imaginary boundary, a very real frontier

A source of struggle for segregated metro regions, and Detroit in particular, is that political boundaries often become heavily policed racial boundaries, with initially formal and later informal mechanisms set in place to prevent incursion (Darden and Thomas, p. 243). The Detroit region has a long history of racial animus and conflict that is both a product of and has been reproduced by both its internal and external boundaries. Streets, railroad tracks, and parks have been used as artificial battle lines, where Detroit's urban White residents used legal and illegal means of maintaining racially homogeneous spaces, and ceded territory en masse as Black newcomers succeeded in breaking through those lines in even small numbers (Sugrue, 1997). However, arguably no battle line was ever drawn in the region that matched the near-impermeability of Eight Mile Road. For decades, it stood as a fortification against what White suburbanites viewed as Black degradation and dysfunction, providing them with real estate upon which to build and preserve the wealth they had historically extracted from Detroit while rejecting its growing diversity.



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Census Tracts in Proximity to Eight Mile Road

Figure 3 Map of Eight Mile Census Tracts and Communities Along its Boundary

Eight Mile Road, the Wayne County boundary, serves as a dividing line between the city of Detroit and its two northern neighbors, Macomb and Oakland Counties. Just as significantly, it has long served as a line separating the two dominant racial groups in the region, with Black residents south of the line primarily in Detroit, and White residents north of the line in cities and towns such as Warren, Ferndale, Farmington Hills, and Oak Park. For generations, it stood as an active monument to the region’s segregation, with suburban residents seeing it as a line across which mandates for racial bussing, federal desegregation efforts, integrated public housing, and taxes to fund regional priorities had no authority and could thus be safely ignored or mitigated (Perez, 2019). When manufacturing and other lucrative, low- and moderately skilled jobs left

Detroit, and when services and institutional capacity fled the city with those jobs, the economic and social barriers that suburban communities erected served to very effectively keep the vast majority of Black Detroiters out. It was not until the 1970s that some Black families gained the economic mobility to begin settling the suburbs in any notable numbers, and in most cases, those moves took the form of migrating to communities that were already experiencing decline (Darden and Thomas, 2013). In response to Eight Mile becoming more porous, many of the White residents who had inhabited the suburbs immediately north of Detroit relocated further north to up-and-coming towns with new construction, gaining even more distance from Detroit (Darden and Thomas, 2013).

In a metro region that was experiencing rapid industrial decline, aging White populations, and fewer opportunities for gainful employment, the pace of infiltration and integration has been slow (Farley, 2018). Between 1960 and 2010, the Black residential presence north of the county line grew from 3.7 percent of the suburban population to 12.2 percent (Darden and Thomas, 2013). While a similar pattern of flight that typified the White exodus from the city occurred in parts of the inner ring suburbs, the modest but steady shifts in White attitudes towards Black people and growing opportunities for wealth-building through increased job access and higher quality housing provided many Black former-urbanites with the building blocks for greater prosperity than had previously been available (Darden and Thomas, 2013). However, this process did not signal the cessation of interracial hostility, nor did it prove race to no longer be an impediment to equity. As Massey and Gross (1991) wrote: “[T]he decline in racial segregation that occurred only serves to underscore the continued salience of race in the United States, since they occurred almost entirely in cities with small Black populations, where White preferences for limited interracial contact are not threatened by racial desegregation” (Massey

and Gross, 1991, p. 15). This is borne out when looking at the patterns of settlement: the inner ring suburbs along Eight Mile Road hosted the majority of the metro region's population by 1970, and while Black families had made gains in accessing some of these suburban communities, they could only be found in numerical significance in ten communities and neighborhoods, many of which still staunchly opposed meaningful residential integration. "Beyond those segregated areas, African American only made up 0.5 percent of the suburban population" (Farley, p. 208).

Even in recent decades, metro Detroit is still only slowly becoming less residentially segregated. In 1960, the three-county metro region had a dissimilarity index of 88.9, which had only decreased to 79.6 in 2010. Within Detroit city limits, the shift has been much more rapid, decreasing from 80.4 to 59.2 in 2010 during that same 50-year period (Darden and Thomas, 2013). A more geographically focused examination reveals that the suburbs along Eight Mile Road had a dissimilarity index of 92 in 1970, its peak, but through Black migration, inner ring suburban dissimilarity declined to 57 by 2016 (Farley, 2018). This implies that, while Black residents have become much more numerous (though still a very small minority) and have undoubtedly made gains in their residential choice in the communities along the county line, they are not becoming well-integrated into White communities in meaningful numbers. Even socioeconomics cannot fully explain this state of partial stalemate, as affluent Black families continue to experience high levels of segregation from affluent White residents in suburban communities (dissimilarity index score of 68.5), which undermines arguments about segregation being merely a function of wealth and access. The structural barriers that continue to undermine greater racial equity remain intact, even though there is evidence that they are weakening (Darden and Thomas, 2013).

While the spatial legacy of racism still affects patterns of residential settlement, the change has been undeniable. Currently, more than half of the middle-income Black population of the metro region now lives in Detroit’s suburbs (Darden and Thomas 2013, Darden et al. 1987). Furthermore, with the increasing in-migration of formerly suburban White families and workers from Macomb and Oakland Counties (and across the country) into Detroit and the out-migration of lower-middle-income Black Detroiters to communities north of Eight Mile, 44 percent of all Black metro residents lived in the northern suburbs as of the time of the 2016 RTA transit vote that forms the basis of this project (Farley, 2018). While these demographic trends were not sufficiently strong to alter the outcome of that ballot measure, there are those who are optimistic that these shifts could set the stage for greater regional cooperation and collaboration. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) developed an ambitious regional transit plan that targets the counties and communities that show the greatest signs of potential support, and as of this writing, transit advocacy groups around the region largely support it (SEMCOG, 2022). This optimism is not unprecedented: back in 1975, prominent voices like that of Kent Mathewson, the president of the Metropolitan Fund,¹⁰ articulated a collaborative vision for the city and suburbs, and called for both sides of Eight Mile Road to recognize that their mutual interests far outweighed their tribal struggles (Mathewson, 1975). If Auguste Comte’s famous words that “demographics are destiny” are true, there may be substantial progress on the horizon.

¹⁰ This is the organization that commissioned the regional transit study for SEMCOG in the 1960s.

2.3.3 Macomb County

Macomb County grew to prominence as a national industrial leader, developing a reputation as a blue-collar enclave with urban form like that of Detroit (in contrast to the more opulent suburbs of Oakland County), but without the growing threat of Black residential incursion (Sugrue 1996). It historically hosted a considerable portion of the region's industrial workforce: in 1987, an estimated 46 percent of its population was employed in manufacturing jobs, largely in either auto manufacturing or complementary industries such as those that supplied automobile components (Darden et al., 1987). While it was insulated from the industrial downturns that accompanied the flight of factories from urban Detroit, it could not withstand the larger macroeconomic forces that eventually forced much of the industrial employment out of the region or existence, and its once-rapid population growth began to slow, then decline in the 1970s.¹¹

Macomb County's largest city, Warren, exemplifies much of the Detroit Metro Region's rise, struggle, and evolution. From 1950 to 1960, the city's meager population of 727 mushroomed to 89,000, a 122-fold increase (Thomas, 1997). This was no doubt spurred by the abundance of employment available, with the Warren Stamping Plant, Warren Truck Assembly (aka "Dodge City"), Mound Road Engine Plant, and Sherwood Heavy Assembly Truck Plant all located within city limits. These factories provided tens of thousands of well-paying jobs after World War II, elevating many families into comfortable middle class living. However, though employment could be found in the plants for most able-bodied men, access to the community itself was highly restricted to White workers: even though 30,000 Black workers found

¹¹ Its population began to slow or decline in the 1970s, and unemployment was rampant by 1980 (15.3% in March 1981), with many relying on welfare.(perhaps find something that talks about perceptions of welfare, and how this interacted with partisanship, with them largely being democrats at a point when Reagan was beginning an assault on welfare.

employment in Warren's manufacturing sector in 1960, the city had only 19 Black people in residence (Batterman 2021, Darden and Thomas 2013).

The city served as a bulwark against Black migration into the more spacious, newly developed communities north of the Wayne County and Detroit city limits at Eight Mile Road, a charge it took very seriously. Even after the city began to struggle in the face of deindustrialization and the southern end of the city fell into disrepair, hysteria about infiltration by Black Detroiters in the aftermath of the Detroit Rebellion drove Warren residents and officials to extreme lengths to thwart their settlement (Batterman, 2021). In one instance, the city refused to even apply for or accept generous external grants that would have potentially revitalized the community: "In 1970, when Warren residents voted to pass over \$30 million in federal urban renewal funds to rehabilitate substandard wooden homes on the city's south side, Time Magazine called Warren the nation's most racist city" (Darden et al, p. 32). This was done out of concern that the federal government would require the city to build public housing, and there was fear the urban renewal-funded housing in southern Warren (along Eight Mile Road) would provide Black Detroiters with a federally opened door into the city, or "beachheads for a Black invasion of Warren" (Farley et al. 2007, Riddle 1998, p. 34). This decision resulted in the city being deprived of federal housing funds for a decade, and ultimately resulted in portions of Warren along Eight Mile becoming further degraded (Darden and Thomas, 2013).

These racially motivated exclusionary measures ultimately proved ineffective. Over time, Black families moved north from Detroit in small but consistent numbers to settle in Warren and into other parts of the county, with many of the newly arrived Detroiters showing up with higher levels of skill and education than the median White Macomb resident by 1990 (Darden and Thomas, 2013). Warren's Black population exploded between 2000 and 2020, growing from 2.7

to 19.8 percent, or approximately 27,600 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). While white residents have left the community or passed away from old age in substantial numbers over the last few decades, they have maintained a majority, constituting 66.2 percent of the population in 2020. The increasing numbers of Black residents and their residential dispersion throughout the city has resulted in significant racial integration, with Warren now boasting a dissimilarity index of 32 (Darden and Thomas, 143-4).

2.3.4 Oakland County

Oakland County, despite sharing Macomb's enthusiasm for preventing Black migration for much of the mid-20th Century, followed a distinctly different path in terms of its approaches to both development and dealing with race relations. The county hosted its share of manufacturing facilities, including a General Motors plant that produced a brand of vehicles eponymous with the city of its birth, Pontiac. However, while its neighbor to the east capitalized more fully on its industrial capacity, Oakland County focused more on office and clerical employment, becoming a nationally recognized center for commercial and industrial administration. As recently as 1987, nearly 20 percent of Fortune 500 companies had a headquarters at some scale in Southfield, located just north of Eight Mile Road (Darden and Thomas, 2013). This emphasis on managerial and administrative services resulted in a well-educated, affluent population relative to the rest of the metro region, with 41.6 percent possessing bachelor's degrees or higher and a median income of \$60,266 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Being among the wealthiest counties in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, Oakland County was very attractive to both long-time residents of the Detroit region as well as

transplants from around the country in search of solidly middle-class living in newly built suburban communities. For this reason, Oakland experienced a growth rate higher than 99 percent of all counties in the US during the 1970s (Darden et al., 1987). Its wealth and growth trajectory may have informed the kind of disconnection from Detroit that many Oakland County residents have expressed in recent history. Rather than the variety of racial animus exhibited by many in Macomb County, which some scholars associate with low socioeconomic class more typical of blue-collar communities (Gest, 2015), Oakland County residents have more often been documented publicly to hold Black Detroiters in a contempt that is more directly paired to their perceived economic failings, and always in stark contrast to their own fortunes (Schaub et al., 2020). In an interview with writer Ze'ev Chafets in 1989, then-County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, who had long been "regarded as the symbol of suburban racism" (McGraw, 2014), was quoted as saying, "In this county, robbery is a crime. In Detroit, it's an occupation. It's warfare in the city, it absolutely is. A baby born in Detroit has a bigger statistical chance of being killed than a soldier in World War Two. I'd call in the National Guard." (Chafets, *Devil's Night*, pp. 134-5). Patterson, by this time in 2014 the Oakland County Executive, produced a quote whose infamy outlived him: "I made a prediction a long time ago, and it's come to pass. I said, 'What we're going to do is turn Detroit into an Indian reservation, where we herd all the Indians into the city, build a fence around it, and then throw in the blankets and corn.'" (Williams, 2014).

Like Warren in Macomb, Southfield illustrates some of the incredible change that has marked life in the Detroit Metro Region. However, it followed a very different social and economic path, which may have provided it with the characteristics to weather the region's downturn better than many other communities. Southfield is located immediately north of the Wayne County border and adjacent to Detroit across Eight Mile Road, and like Warren, the city

endeavored to preserve the racial homogeneity of its suburban neighborhoods. In 1960, before it experienced two decades of explosive population growth, the city was home to 31,435 White residents, but only 34 Black people had managed to settle within city limits (Darden and Thomas, 2013). The growth of the Black community, however, was rapid during the 1970s, reaching 6,976 residents, or 9.2 percent of the population, by 1980 (U.S. Census). Because of the dominance of office and administrative work as the primary industry in Oakland County, as well as the relatively higher cost of living, many of the Black newcomers from Detroit and around the country were more affluent and highly educated than the average regional resident; they represented a new Black elite, who were determined to share in the benefits and amenities that suburban living, with its newer development and better schools, had to offer but which was so jealously guarded (Darden and Thomas, 2013).

Though Southfield experienced its own growing pains in terms of interracial friction, it proved not to be as exclusionary as other communities in the northern suburbs. As a result, the city was and continues to be more diverse than many, hosting large Chaldean and Jewish populations who are well-integrated into the community (Thomas, 1997). The city stands in stark contrast to Warren's persistent efforts to repel or resist Black newcomers, opting instead to actively manage its growth trajectory. In the 1980s and 1990s, civic leadership devised ways of actively quelling the fears of long-tenured residents, being strategic about how it would accommodate incoming Black residents and preventing the racial turnover that occurs from reactively fleeing White residents (Thomas, 1997). This included creating a unique organization, the Oakland County Center for Open Housing, that actively worked to manage and boost integration in the city and in nearby communities, and provided counseling and funds to assist in this aim. As a result of this program and the city's general commitment to integration and public

uplift, Southfield has the distinction of being one of exceptionally few cities in metro Detroit where Black and White residents have achieved meaningful equality in terms of resource-driven outcomes. As of 2010, in terms of education attainment, income, and professional status, Black residents of Southfield had surpassed the city's White population in many of these metrics (Darden and Thomas, 2013).

2.4 Conclusion: Detroit's static nature versus Atlanta's demographic dynamism, and contributing sociopolitical factors

The politics of these metropolitan regions and the counties that constitute them cannot be simply boiled down to the speed and patterns of their demographic shifts. Each has a complex history that was also influenced by state and national policy, the industries that defined their development and modernization, and the words and actions of influential leaders who imposed their own agendas, prejudices, and visions onto these regions. However, these histories are also a record of how the aforementioned forces were driven by each county's changing populations, and how their demographic compositions impacted the levels of cooperation or conflict with their central cities and broader metro region. Based on the recent histories of both the Detroit and Atlanta metropolitan regions, race and the social politics around it were of central importance, both when all of these counties were homogeneously White and resisting minority residential settlement and, later, when growing racial diversity changed their patterns of political support.

Though general population growth is not deeply explored as a factor in influencing voting patterns in this project's analysis, this chapter's examination of the case study regions' histories and broader context is useful in that we can begin to theorize the relationships between each county's demographic dynamism, their residents' perceptions of the implications of this growth, and their resulting support for the production of social goods. Each county presents a

compelling argument for the processes that led to their respective transit support votes. Clayton County, as a strongly majority-Black county, appears to be a case of how the sheer force of numbers brought about an unequivocal change in the population's support for regional transit investment. Like all other counties in this analysis, the period when its Black population was small and its relationship to the central city was hostile was marked by greater support for conservative policies and the rejection of cooperative regional efforts, as evidenced by its rejection of MARTA expansion in 1971 and the refusal to develop its own transit capacity until 2000.¹² Oakland County, in partial contrast, continues to host a majority-White population with few signs of minority population dominance in coming decades, but still had moderate support for regional transit. While the areas with the densest concentrations of Black residents were generally the areas of greatest support for the RTA proposal, many of the largely White communities in proximity to these areas – which were also the areas that deliberately managed and accommodated the growth of incoming Black residents in decades past - similarly showed support for transit, and have also continued to demonstrate much of the Democratic electoral support that they have historically.

Gwinnett County, like Clayton County, has become majority-minority, though its racial composition is more broadly diverse than the Black-White binary once typical of US metro regions. The county has experienced greater transit support nearly in proportion to that growth of new minority residents, and furthermore, this population change has been accompanied by a shift towards the political left, as Gwinnett County was once a reliable Republican stronghold that has shown majority support for Democratic presidential candidates in recent election cycles. Lastly, Macomb County, diverging from the others, has greeted the low levels of recent racial diversification with greater skepticism about the role of regional transit than in recent decades,

¹² This was also the first decennial census identifying that the county had a Black majority.

and has also moved towards more politically conservative voting patterns. In contrast to neighboring Oakland County, the communities in proximity to areas with a notable Black presence are not dramatically less conservative-voting than its northernmost, very racially homogeneous communities, implying that the political views of White residents are not softened by having Black neighbors, and may in fact be hardening.

The history of these case studies provides a compelling case that each county is at different stages of the same path towards greater diversity. All of these counties showed hostility to Black urbanites from Atlanta or Detroit and erected barriers to complicate or completely restrict their entry. Initial penetration of county lines by new Black residents was a cause for alarm, with longer-tenured White residents frequently moving further from the central cities or out of the county altogether. However, greater diversity and integration over time demonstrably changes this trend. Whether this is due to greater mutual understanding through intergroup contact, sheer force of numbers, new investment within and increasing diversification of central cities by formerly suburban White families and workers, or a combination of these factors, suburban communities in the case study regions with substantial populations of color have defied the hostility of their past and have built more cooperative relationships with their urban counterparts. The growing or demonstrated interest in facilitating greater transportation ties to Atlanta and Detroit, which was once unthinkable, is evidence of this shift.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

In the United States context, the majority of metropolitan regions follow a spatial development pattern of multiple suburban communities with proximity to a ‘central’ city that historically served as a commercial and industrial center for the region (Marcantonio et al. 2017, Goldsmith and Blakely 2010). Historical processes have frequently promoted the development of cities that, at various points, have both cooperative and competitive relationships with the communities that surround them (Einstein 2011, Gerber and Gibson 2009). In the absence of existing multi-jurisdictional cooperative agreements (and because of contentious imbalances within them) to provide utilities or public services, many municipalities within a region may even develop adversarial relationships that make new collective reforms or projects difficult to design and execute (Bouie, 2014).

Researching case studies of regional transit expansion efforts or many other region-scale development or policy efforts, the literature shows that numerous US metropolitan regions suffer from conflict or complete breakdowns when cooperation is required (Gerber and Gibson, 2009). Some of this resistance to collective action will inevitably be due to the inherent conflict between a one-size-fits-all uniform regional agenda and the autonomy of local governments, who are charged with securing the largest relative share of amenities or benefits for their own citizens.

However, this friction between competing counties and municipalities cannot account for the willingness of entities to divest from or even sabotage the process, effectively eliminating the possibility of any party to reap the rewards of regional cooperative efforts (D'Anieri 2007, Kirouac-Fram 2012). Furthermore, the literature frequently cites successful examples of significant cooperative effort, from the municipal to the national level, in other industrialized countries, even when they have federal models not dissimilar from that of the United States (Alesina and La Ferrara 2002, Giddens 2007). Similar levels of cooperation can also be found in US metropolitan regions that are relatively homogeneous in their demographics, such as Portland, Oregon and Minneapolis, Minnesota (Stolle et al., 2008, Putnam 2007).

If collective action is possible in such areas, what is it that makes cooperation difficult or impossible in areas that are not homogeneous? If history is to be a guide, the answers will be both complex and nuanced. One enduring illustration of the gravity of this question can be found in the history and layout of many major U.S. metropolitan regions. Preceding, during, and following the era of the mass exodus of affluent urban residents for the suburbs that is popularly branded as “White Flight”, there have consistently been efforts among immigrant groups (meaning all ethnic groups that came to this continent in large numbers voluntarily) to, at least for a period, separate and insulate themselves from others (Vaughn and Arbaci 2011, Goldsmith and Blakely 2010, Marcuse 1997). While this was often done out of a sense of communal protection (as was the case with many White ethnic and Asian immigrants who arrived during the 19th and early 20th Centuries), some groups have sought more to distance themselves from those with whom they feel little affinity or shared fate (Jargowsky, 1997). When cities eventually became crowded with Black migrants or newcomers from abroad, and 1.) those newcomers encroached on more affluent, established White communities that were often already largely

homogeneous, followed by 2.) an erosion of White political dominance in those urban spaces, any pretense of cooperation was often abandoned in favor of divestment and the erection of self-isolating legal and economic barriers often too formidable for less-wealthy urbanites to overcome (Alesina and Ferrara 2005, Jaret et al. 2000). This process has played out countless times, and has been meticulously detailed in the urban historical literature of Detroit (Thomas 1997, Sugrue 1996, D'Anieri 2007), Greater Los Angeles (Schneider 2008, Sides 2004), Chicago (Wilson and Taub, 2006), and Atlanta (Kruse 2005, Bayor 1996), among others.

While numerous credible theories about the forces that undermine cooperation between groups for mutually beneficial goals exist, most are derived from a simple, foundational concept: intergroup contact and competition. Sociology scholars point to a lack of trust between differing groups (based on numerous factors) as the primary explanation for conflict, and a sizeable minority of these scholars conclude that diversity itself can be a liability when planning any large-scale cooperative endeavor (Putnam 2007, Alesina et al. 1999). There are, however, caveats. US-based studies point to the tendency of White residents to be the least amenable to cooperation and residential colocation with other racial and ethnic groups (Stolle et al., 2008), and while other ethnic groups may experience levels of discomfort during limited exchanges with outsiders, White Americans report the highest level of discomfort during cross-cultural exchanges and are the most likely to relocate when racial demographics shift towards greater diversity (Guest et al. 2008, Crowder and South 2008).

One theoretical approach that provides greater potential for intergroup cooperation and lower levels of distrust is the frequent finding that tendencies towards self-segregation or opposing the interests of others may be mitigated with greater contact and social integration (Stolle et al. 2008, Leitner 2012, Pettigrew 1998). However, studies also show that proximity

without social contact is counterproductive, resulting in even greater anxiety and hostility between groups (Zingher and Thomas 2014, Kinder and Mendelberg 1995). This is particularly evident at formal and informal spatial boundaries between groups: in instances where race and poverty readily map and coincide over geography, the often-contested community frontiers can be a place where stark disparities and differences are most clearly on display. However, even when neighboring areas are economically similar but racially different, rather than providing opportunities for greater understanding through increased outgroup exposure, these zones on the edges of neighboring but estranged communities more often tend to yield confirmation of outgroup fears and prejudices based on circumstantial differences (Legewie, 2018). The increased feelings of threat and hostility, particularly among non-Blacks towards Black people, is evident and quantifiable: properties in majority-Black neighborhoods in areas of racial division or transition are disproportionately subject to nuisance citations and police contact, even when controlling for crime rates and despite the well-documented aversion among many Black residents to calling the police (Desmond and Valdez, 2013).

The difficulties inherent to cultivating greater social contact between groups presents a formidable and durable obstacle to cooperation and decreased hostility, with decades of deliberate urban and regional segregation processes giving way to emergent institutional and economic norms that hinder integration. For example, the placement of highways and interstate freeways in majority-Black neighborhoods physically disconnected and extracted real estate value from those communities while providing both greater connectivity and value to far-flung majority-White suburban communities. This difference in real estate values serves to constrain the economic and social mobility choices of the former group. This often results in reduced opportunities for urban Black families to access resources associated with higher-income

communities, such as well-funded schools (funded by higher property values), among countless examples of society's de facto segregative processes (Orfield and Luce 2013, Thomas 1994). These built-in practices serve to prevent meaningful intergroup contact, exacerbating the perceptions of separateness and rivalry (Thomas, 1994) and ultimately perpetuating the cycles of hostility, segregation, and sociopolitical division.

This chapter will consider the conceptual challenges and opportunities of diversity and its potential for determining the fate of equity-based policy and social goods. This review of sociology, urban studies, and public policy literatures will also provide a conceptual framework, centered around the *Racial Threat Hypothesis*, through which we will build the theoretical foundation required to discuss the connections between identity, group interests, and segregation, and how they affect policy and development. Within this chapter, we will discuss the role of perceived threat in mobilizing hostility for both people and policies, and how this manifests in American metropolitan regions. We will also examine how intergroup contact and integration interact, and its implications for how demographic change can serve to either trigger or mitigate hostility. This will be followed by looking at the reasons that segregation is corrosive to regional cooperation and equity-based policy, as well as discussing the history of such policies and how, under particular circumstances, democratic methods can undermine them. Of the most direct importance for this analysis, this chapter will consider the implications of these pitfalls to cooperation and opportunities for collective action for the goal of regional transit expansion. This review of the literature will underpin the foundational argument of this dissertation project: historically segregated metropolitan regions, particularly while experiencing substantial racial demographic change, will struggle with collective action-based policy such as regional transit until they gain greater diversity, while regions that have traditionally been less segregated,

regardless of the relative size of their minority populations, will experience greater support for effective regional transit.

3.2 Theoretical lens: The Racial Threat Hypothesis

The discord between regional voting blocs along social and racial lines briefly described above is not a problematic hypothetical. While every highly segregated geography has its own history and particular political challenges, it is remarkably common to see dramatic differences in support for policies on different sides of central city municipal or county boundaries (Trounstine, 2018). For example, after decades of White out-migration from the city, majority-Black New Orleans vigorously promoted integrated, cross-parish transit that was successfully resisted by nearly all of its majority-White neighbors in 1983. This created frustration and inconvenience among riders transferring streetcars and buses across parish lines for decades, only changing after interagency agreements linked the parishes in 2018, notably after New Orleans had undergone significant economic and demographic changes that made it wealthier and less Black (Ride New Orleans 2019, Melendez 2018). Similarly, nearby East Baton Rouge Parish found itself embroiled in a protracted legal battle from 2011 until 2022, with a portion of unincorporated Baton Rouge seeking to form a breakaway city in order to exercise exclusionary control over education access. The proposed city of St. George, which endeavored to incorporate a majority-White, highly affluent suburban portion of the parish, fought to prevent students from the now-majority-Black remainder of the metro region from continuing to exercise the school choice they have more recently enjoyed. Though legal battles had ceased in 2022 with the breakaway city's organizers suffering defeat, St. George incorporation advocates pledge to continue fighting, even though the town's formation continues to be vehemently resisted by

Baton Rouge city government and a majority of its residents (outside of the proposed St. George area) (Duhé 2022, Samuels 2019, Samuels 2013).

The progression of this regional dynamic is also largely predictable: after a demographically dominant group¹³ holds disproportionate economic, social, and political power but decides that it no longer benefits from proximity to a marginalized minority, they frequently seek to segregate themselves at various spatial scales (Enos 2016, Zingher and Thomas 2014, Tolbert and Grummel 2003, Giles and Hertz 1994). This pattern of exodus and resettlement is perhaps most manifest in highly segregated metropolitan regions which consist of a majority-Black and Brown urban core and a majority-White, suburban and exurban geographic distribution (Timberlake, 2018). In instances when the now-isolated minority groups begin to grow in sufficient influence, numerical size, or strength to begin shaping regional policy or landscapes, the majority population (now typically suburbanized) will reliably exercise its relatively greater aggregate power to promote policies with the intent of checking or reining in that growing power (Baybeck 2006, Krysan 2000). This can take many forms, such as rejecting new equity-based development or implementing new, more restrictive laws: Hopkins (2011), in his study of trends within communities undergoing primarily immigrant-based demographic change, explains that “both high levels of diversity and large increases in diversity can induce criminal justice spending.” (Hopkins, p. 360). This heavily implies a reactionary response among the broader voting population to rapid changes in a community’s racial makeup, signaling concerns about newcomers posing a threat to existing norms, which manifests in reflexive calls for law and order.

Though any particular set of social occurrences and political circumstances that proved to be a tipping point for intervention is highly individual to each metro region (and has, to the

¹³ In terms of population.

author's knowledge, never been undertaken as a study), majority-White suburbs have historically been vigilant with and reactive to changing regional power dynamics (Matsubayashi 2010, Tolbert and Grummel 2003). If it becomes apparent that majority-Black city centers can have a discernible effect on the permeability of majority-White community boundaries, suburban or not (in terms of political effects or population movement), it has historically been commonplace for resistance to be mounted to dampen or disrupt Black political interference with White community affairs (Enos, 2016). Brewer's (1999) discussion of intergroup preference and outgroup contact lends explanation to why many suburbs, which eagerly divested from central city affairs following their urban exodus, often react with such political vehemence at the prospect of imposed urban contact and influence: "The emotions of contempt and disgust are associated with avoidance rather than attack, so intergroup peace is maintained through segregation and mutual avoidance. Contact is strongly resisted, but social changes that give rise to the prospect of close contact, integration, or influence are sufficient to kindle hatred, expulsion, and even 'ethnic cleansing'" (Brewer, p. 435).

Today, hostile reactions to (urban) outgroup encroachment will more often look more like changing suburban zoning to block the development of multi-family residential development, writing an ordinance that places restrictions on developing single-family housing on small lots, or opting out of regional transit agreements that provide convenient access between the outer neighborhoods of central cities and exurban communities: all serve to prevent lower-income urban transplants from seeking out suburban amenities. These efforts at shaping suburban spaces and erecting barriers against Black entry, particularly in the midst of unfavorable demographic change, reflect a demonstrated tendency among the dominant group to

resist being a numerical or sociopolitical minority, where competing claims on resources, norms, and power are more easily contested (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996, Duneier 2016).

Overlaying much of the literatures on intergroup conflict and White supremacy (Schlueter and Scheepers 2010, Danbold and Huo 2021, Goetz et al. 2020, Jardina 2019) specifically onto the American suburban case, there is strong evidence that the paramount motivation that made, and arguably continues to make, White Americans receptive and amenable to race-relevant, suppression-oriented political and social action is *threat* (King and Wheelock 2007, Quillian and Pager 2001). Klar (2013) touts the effectiveness of prompting behaviors using threat-based priming, saying that it “raises the salience of a given identity when a group is made to believe that there is a credible threat against their group’s interest” (Klar, pg. 1110). Regardless of the quality of any policy recommendations promoting collective action for the benefit of many groups (such as investing in a comprehensive public transportation system that could provide increased regional accessibility for all transit riders), political messaging based on values or emotional appeals that focused on the dangers to norms posed by considering the interests of minority groups are strongly likely to be more successful. The reason is simple: even in the presence of an efficacy prime (a prompt that speaks primarily to the productive interests of an identity group) that speaks to a salient identity (one’s residence in a particular metropolitan region, for example) and ties a group’s interests to interracial cooperation through policy, identity priming using threat is almost always more effective at eliciting a desired response – even if the threat is not entirely credible (Djupe and Calfano 2013, Klar p. 1114).

Simply, while tying a community’s welfare to a policy position is frequently effective if the link between them is coherent, tying that community’s welfare to the rejection of a perceived threat is even more effective, producing both ingroup solidarity (and a consequent de-emphasis

on other relevant identities) and the sense of urgency that can provide justification for otherwise impractical or even morally objectionable measures to be instituted (Jardina 2019, Klar 2013, Gilliam and Iyengar 2000). This heightened imperative for threat-fueled collective action manifests in measurable ways: According to Zingher and Thomas' (2014) study of 21st Century general elections in the U.S. South, White residents of 'diverse' yet segregated counties or parishes turned out to vote between 21 percent and 23.1 percent more in counties that were 66 percent Black than in homogeneously White counties¹⁴ (Zingher and Thomas, 2014). While the study did not identify factors such as if there were issues of relevance that would drive greater voter turnout among White residents, the pronounced differences between counties or parishes that were diverse or homogeneous points to the relevance of the status of numerical minority.

Directly relevant to this examination, reflexive political resistance of the type mentioned above frequently occurs during discussions of expanding regional transit, when suburban leadership finds methods of discouraging expansion into their communities. Whether inspired directly by political rhetoric or driven by a suburban mythos surrounding public transportation and its ties to Black or urban degeneracy, ballot measures and referenda have historically been frequently rejected by suburbanites, often by significant margins (Mineta Transportation Institute 2001, Lazos 1999). It must be noted, however, that this brand of transit rejection does not fall exclusively within affluent White communities, as is evident in the spatial and demographic analysis of low- and middle-income census tracts in Macomb County in Chapter 5.

Suburban hostility to public transit or housing development that would increase local influence and access by Black or low-income citizens provides an example of the *Racial Threat*

¹⁴ However, this study also identifies that the effect is the opposite at the voting precinct level. White voters that lived in precincts that were 66 percent Black were less likely to vote than those in racially homogeneous precincts, indicating that exposure to Black neighbors at the local level (which provides greater likelihood of social contact than at the county/parish level) mitigates the threat response.

Hypothesis: simply put, when a marginalized minority population increases in relative social, economic, political, or numerical power, dominant populations in proximity will adopt political or economic tactics to fight against and undermine that increase in power (Enos 2016, Zingher and Thomas 2014, Giles and Hertz 1994, Blalock 1967). This hypothesis will serve as a conceptual lens for this project. Because its basic premise rests on the idea that the increasing demographic strength of urban Black or Brown residents spurs a conservative policy or economic reaction among White suburbanites, it provides a model with which to observe the level of success of transit expansion ballot initiatives.

Specifically, we can examine these cases through the lens of demographic change. Urban centers such as Atlanta and St. Louis, which have long had overwhelming Black majorities, have been the site of numerous historical and current examples of suburban backlash, resulting not just in highly isolated urban populations, but also distrustful, fragmented inter-county cooperation. Cities such as Seattle and Denver, on the other hand, as diverse but still overwhelmingly White cities that are surrounded by even more homogeneously White suburbs, have not faced the same level of suburban resistance to regional initiatives, including transit expansion. This project grants us an opportunity to use this framework to deepen our understanding of regional cooperation, as well as the racial implications of large-scale cooperative effort towards transit expansion. It also allows an opportunity to observe differences in suburban sentiment with demographic change (as measured by transit support). This also allows a chance to study the role of segregation in resistance to transit expansion and see how it plays out over geographic space.

3.3 Demographic Shifts

Though the technical aspects of demographic forecasting and current population calculation are complex with competing methodologies, the fundamental concept of demography is simple. Population shifts are calculated (in simplified form) as follows: Within a given area, population change = Births (t_2-t_1) – Deaths (t_2-t_1) + In-migration (t_2-t_1) – Out-migration (t_2-t_1) (Mueller 2021, Preston et al. 2001). A population's ability to thrive is dependent on finding a balance of these factors: minimizing childhood mortality and general morbidity, sustainably increasing or maintaining births in a fashion that doesn't strain local resources, and maintaining a flow into and out of the community that similarly allows for sustainable preservation and production of resources (such as housing, food, and public services) (Bratter 2015, Saenz et al. 2015, Caldwell 1981). Finding such a balance is rarely simple, as evidenced by the differing struggles of the aging, depopulating countries of Western Europe and the high-birth, high-mortality nations of South Asia. A prevalent conceptual framework, Demographic Transition Theory, portrays these differences as evidence that both regions are in different places in their trajectories of modernization. This theory claims that, as societies modernize, the process of development creates various means of reducing mortality,¹⁵ followed by voluntary stabilization and decline of birth rates because children become more relatively costly¹⁶ (Kirk, 1996).

For differing reasons, every constituent element of the equation of births, deaths, and migration is political. Immigration has served as an inflammatory partisan topic for many decades, and the forces that drive regional and metropolitan exodus both produce and are products of a politics of exclusion and hostility (Bennett and Walker 2018, Muhammad 2010). However, the subject of which population's children are being born and which populations are

¹⁵ Primarily through controlling disease spread and mitigating environmental hazards

¹⁶ Both in terms of child-rearing inputs as well as opportunity costs for parents

aging and dying out also fuels fear and anger among those who resist demographic change (Wong, 2018). The subtle implications of Demographic Transition Theory offer an explanation for this: populations that are less ‘developed’ are typified by higher birth rates, greater poverty, and lower levels of community health when compared to wealthier, less vulnerable populations. This has a clear analog in many European and US communities when considering the criticisms that members of more ‘established’ White communities make towards the lower-resourced immigrant or Black populations that currently or historically settled and grew within those White communities. Combined with non-socioeconomic factors such as religion and cultural norms that can drive higher fertility rates (Bongaarts, 1978), arguments about the detrimental role that immigrants and newcomers play in disrupting community cohesion are often at the crux of immigration and integration opposition (Jardina, 2019). Intergroup contact and competition, as theoretical lenses for the politics of population growth, will be discussed in greater detail below.

3.3.1 Beyond the Formula: How Politics Shapes Demographics

While demographic change has been a historical constant of human settlement and movement, just like every element that enables it, it is also an inherently political phenomenon. Most generally, the ways that a community reacts to or anticipates population growth or loss is reflected in policy and development decisions, which sets a trajectory for that community’s prosperity and character. For example, Santa Barbara County, whose population is both affluent and aging, has long resisted new low- or middle-income housing development that would provide space to accommodate younger families. This housing shortage and the long commute that would-be job seekers must endure has resulted in difficulty maintaining the service sector (which is typically staffed by lower- and middle-income workers) that is necessary to sustain the

lifestyles of affluent local residents (California Economic Forecast, 2012). Demographic shifts are also political in the more explicit sense of being responsive to partisanship and local ideology. For the entirety of US history, but perhaps most explicitly since Reconstruction for Black Americans and the late 20th Century for Latinos, political groups have singled out the movement and growth of minority populations as problematic for the ‘character’, ‘values’, and resource allocation of previously all-White communities (Caldwell 1981, Bennett and Walker 2018), and this has had dramatic effects at both the national and local levels.

Politics infuse demographics in ways that are both less and more overtly political. As discussed above, communities make development and policy decisions which make them either more welcoming or more hostile to outside groups, both deliberately and unwittingly. This can range from subsidizing particular kinds of development (whether that is a vote to support allocating funds for affordable housing or courting high-end retailers that make shopping cost-prohibitive for poorer residents) to vocalized community outrage against building mosques, corner stores, or luxury condominiums (Jones 2019, Donovan 2012). Demographic shifts can also happen in a more mechanical, overtly political fashion through the creation or movement of official boundaries. The process of redistricting or redrawing jurisdictional lines (or ‘gerrymandering’) is an effective way to dilute the relative power of population groups and curtail minority representation, just as local majorities rejecting potential newcomers by limiting housing affordability prevents the creation of a meaningful minority presence in the community. Both are political acts, serving to create distance between minorities and their interests – the primary difference is that the former act seeks to stem the flow of newcomers over time, while the latter accepts their presence but seeks to rapidly neutralize its influence (Tannen, 2016).

3.3.2 Demographics and Diversity

Demographic shifts can take many forms within major metropolitan regions, and are catalyzed by several, often competing imperatives and opportunities. For example, the increasing cost of living in rapidly developing central cities is forcing long-term residents to reconsider their housing options, as well as preventing immigrants who, generations earlier, would have seen the city as a launch point for a new life in the United States (Murdie and Teixeira 2011). This changing calculus has led to a migration of lower-income people into suburban communities, resulting in one manifestation of a phenomenon coined “the suburbanization of poverty” (Goodling et al. 2015, Kneebone and Garr 2010). Conversely, affluent white workers have been leaving the confines of those same once-homogeneous suburbs and are seeking the amenities that urban spaces can provide, dramatically changing the racial makeup of many neighborhoods or the city as a whole. Black residents in Seattle’s Central District, which served as one of the major concentrations of Black Seattleites for decades, now account for 15 percent of the population in the 2020 Census, down from 64 percent only 30 years earlier and 75 percent in 1970 (Sumpter 2022, Ishisaka 2014). Similarly, Atlanta’s West End and Westview neighborhoods, the site of Martin Luther King Jr.’s teenage home and many of the nation’s most elite historically Black colleges, once hosted a black population greater than 97 percent (1.7 percent white) in 2000, but the development of that neighborhood’s portion of the Beltline both spurred and was spurred by an influx of white residents from within and beyond the region, who comprised 12.57 percent of the population in 2020 (85 percent black) (US Census Bureau, Chapple et al. 2021). Both communities have experienced mixed benefits and detriments, with new businesses and amenities spurring growth and new investment, though sometimes at the cost of pricing out long-term residents.

The migration and growth of multiracial populations in areas that were once almost racially homogeneous has prompted increased discussion about the role of diversity within communities. While some approach it as a hurdle to harmonious living in previously uncomplicated spaces (Guest et al., 2008), many scholars and businesses look at a diversifying population as an asset that may lead to positive synergies (Galinsky et al. 2015, Myers 2015). A great deal of scholarly work shows that diversity can bring valuable inputs that can, with time and effort, strengthen a community's prosperity. Despite the struggles that can come with diverse policy interests, the homogeneity that appears to make some entities (be they racial, political/official, or social) so high-functioning can eventually sow the seeds of their own stagnation and obsolescence. Galinsky et al. (2015) discuss how diversity can produce novel and long-lasting policy solutions to a community, both through cooperative and competitive processes. A greater variety of voices, while potentially slowing down decision-making, also produce more broad-based positive outcomes by facing social and economic problems with a greater sample of information and perspectives (Galinsky et al. 2015, Crisp and Turner 2010).

3.4 Diversity and Social Fracture

If the assertion that diversity can yield positive societal dividends and produce more innovative and broadly beneficial policy is simple and predictably true, the frequent clashes between liberal cities and their diversifying suburbs during opportunities for substantial collective action, such as during regional ballot initiatives to develop or fund large-scale projects and programs, would theoretically cease to occur. However, the continued divergence in electoral outcomes within metropolitan regions, such as rapidly diversifying Gwinnett County's failed 2019 and 2020 transit referenda in Metro Atlanta, shows that diversity's effects are not

simple or predictable. Scholarly work reveals that diversity has wide-ranging theoretical and observed effects. The Chicago School of Sociology, for example, was essentially united in their conjecture that diversity, particularly in the forced proximity of crowded urban streets, would almost inevitably lead to social tension and even intergroup hostility (Wirth 1938, Park 1936). Within that group of scholars and those who succeeded them, a variety of causes for urban intergroup disharmony were theorized, among them the decentralizing and weakening of the family unit (Wirth, 1938), the social chaos that comes with transient populations in urban slums (Burgess, 1930), and volatility within ethnic and racial hierarchies (Park, 1950). These theoretical viewpoints had an enduring influence on social scientific thought and how large-scale national and urban planning was practiced (Salerno, 2018).

The suburbanization of affluent White Americans provided both a rebuke of diversity and a ‘natural experiment’ to observe how suburbanites use their political and economic resources in the absence of diverse policy priorities (Kye 2018, Krysan 2002, Thomas 1997). Spending on community amenities and well-maintained public facilities has been a signature characteristic of middle-class, majority-white suburbs, presumably through a combination of more easily created consensus (with lower diversity of interests) and less concern about collective resources being utilized or depleted by those perceived to be outside of the community (Putnam 2007, Alesina et al. 1999). Impediments to this sort of less-complicated collective action, or to a willingness to engage in collective action at all, can be explained by the negative perceptions some harbor of diverse settings. Putnam offers evidence that diversity itself acts as a hurdle to social cohesion. He finds that this erosion of the social fabric occurs not just between members of different groups but can even take place within groups when in diverse settings, a finding that he simultaneously confirms and actively laments (Putnam, 2007).

Even within predominantly White *urban* spaces, diverse opinions and culture can bring with them a sense of threat: Guest et al. (2008), in their findings within Seattle neighborhoods, suggest that White residents generally report that ethnically mixed neighborhoods are less “harmonious” and pleasant to live in, even when controlling for economic and quantifiable social factors (Guest et al., 2008). Surprisingly, their study found that the racial groups in the community didn’t greatly matter, which suggests that “Whites are more concerned about non-Whites ‘just being different’ from them rather than the content of specific ethnic lifestyles” (Guest et al., p. 521). In contrast, the other groups alluded to in the study (Blacks, Asians, and Latinos) reported lower levels of discomfort in heterogeneous spaces. Class differences can reinforce these feelings of low-level racial hostility: association with those one views as socially and economically inferior makes cooperation less desirable and thus less likely (Schaub et al., 2019). This is partially explained by distrust of outgroup members, but also informed by perceptions of distance between affluent interests or values and those of the poor. These findings, particularly in the Seattle case (a city known for its diversity and tolerance), provide evidence of distrust-based obstacles to diverse collective decision-making, which is consistent with suburban examples (Giddens, 2007).

3.4.1 Diversity’s Effects on Racialized Urban and Regional Policy

The sense of threat experienced by numerical majorities within or in proximity to diversifying communities produces ripple effects, both politically in general and for regional policy in particular. Demographic change itself has connections to the hardening of political opinions: a 2020 study, which evaluates the remarkable rise in political polarization that has defined 21st century American politics, estimates that our shifting demographics account for 34

percent of the rise in political polarization. Factors reflective of a changing society, among them widening age gaps among aging White residents and younger populations of color, increasing educational attainment in segments of the population, and changing racial characteristics of communities, all have impacts on our increasingly fractured national and regional politics (Boxell, 2020).

This polarization is in evidence when looking at ways that increasing diversity affects local spending. According to Hopkins (2011), most local spending reflects the complex and seemingly divergent priorities of residents. While most other municipal priorities shift only slightly with increases in diversity (as evidenced through local spending), three areas which experience significant increases in investment are housing, transit, and anti-crime spending (Hopkins, 2011). Consistent with the Racial Threat Hypothesis, increased spending on anti-crime measures reflects two changing demographic realities: the well-documented changes and increases in policing that accompany the gentrification of urban communities by affluent newcomers (Beck 2020), and even better-documented concerns about public safety voiced within affluent communities that accompany an influx of lower-income or minority residents (Bennett and Walker 2018, Rothstein 2017). The other two priorities, housing and transit, can also partially be attributed to the simple fact of a growing bloc of minority voters in suburban communities, as well as an influx of wealthier residents into cities with whom transit and other collective goods provide some appeal (Ray 2017, Jennings 2016).

This presents a strong break from a dominant assumption in the literature, including those of foundational sociologists such as those of the Chicago School: many scholars presume that, with the decrease in communal trust that can occur with diluting previously homogeneous populations with newcomers, there should be a predictable decrease in investment in collective

goods (Alesina and La Ferrara 2005, Alesina and La Ferrara 2002, Luttmer 2001). Funding for transit in particular and other shared-space public goods, such as libraries and parks, have been hypothesized to suffer in terms of support due to low levels of communal trust, based on underlying assumptions about the nature of intergroup conflict and its catalysts¹⁷ (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002). Hopkins' findings, if true, reveal a deeper complexity to urban and suburban cooperation and its impediments: diversity may not inevitably lead to greater levels of simple outgroup hostility, though his findings do not entirely dismiss intergroup conflict as a salient factor.

The fundamentals of Intergroup Contact Theory, the modern framework from which many of the American sociological approaches to metropolitan racial and ethnic tensions are derived (Pettigrew 1998, Allport 1954), provide an account for both why central city voters in segregated regions have more uniform and consistent voting patterns (often for policies deemed to be 'liberal') and support development that may provide more broad-based benefits for residents than their regional counterparts. Its general premise, that exposure to outgroup members through proximity or social contact leads to decreases in hostility and increases in trust, lends credibility to arguments about why those living in proximity (as is typical of urban settings) are more likely to develop the social capital for cooperative policy efforts, even in light of notable levels of partisan diversity¹⁸ (Doherty et al. 2018, Johnston et al 2005, Branton 2004). It similarly accounts for why individuals and groups who sought spatial separation from diverse urban environments may not show significant alignment with those who remained in urban places, both causally (providing the impetus to leave) and consequently (with diminished opportunities for social contact and interaction). Zingher and Thomas (2014) distill these

¹⁷ E.g., cultural norm differences, competition for scarce resources, etc.

¹⁸ Also known as "neighborhood effects"

alternatives in their study of Southern voting: “Racial diversity mitigates racial threat if it is associated with interracial contact. Racial diversity exacerbates perceptions of threat in the absence of contact, which is conditional on the level of segregation” (Zingher and Thomas, p. 1141).

Despite the strength of both theoretical traditions and their wide applicability for understanding group interactions, there is a tension between the underlying premises of Intergroup Contact Theory and the Racial Threat Hypothesis. The former asserts that groups that compete for resources are poised to create ties of mutual interest when provided opportunities for contact through proximity, while the latter suggests that such proximity actually intensifies hostility and makes identifying mutual interests improbable. This seeming disconnect makes the concept of diversity an unwieldy and dynamic subject in analyses of its social effects, as it is associated anecdotally with a healthy and innovative population while it historically has been a driver of racial, ethnic, and social tension. However, Zingher and Thomas’ observations about racial diversity in the previous paragraph reveal the key to the reconciliation of these theoretical approaches: “Racial diversity mitigates racial threat if it is associated with interracial *contact*” (emphasis mine) (Zingher and Thomas, p. 1141). It is interpersonal contact and opportunities for interaction that prevent the intergroup encounters from becoming intergroup conflict. In the absence of the ‘humanizing’ social effects of contact that promote the building of social capital and the cultivation of mutual interests, competition and potential hostility are the likely products of intergroup proximity.

The element of proximity appears to be crucial, as the building of interpersonal trust is a difficult process in heterogeneous environments, even among those of similar interests (Rotolo and Wilson 2014, Costa and Kahn 2013), and physical closeness can either exacerbate tension or

start to ease it (Marschall and Stolle, 2004). Indeed, the long history of US immigration and tensions between newly arrived ethnic groups and both longer-tenured domestic White and Black residents, who often lived in close quarters (Grigoryeva and Ruef, 2015) illustrates how fraught the process of intergroup community-building can be. The systematic urban divestment and suburbanization of affluent White Americans (and, later, White ethnics) during the period of White Flight attests to both low social capital built with Black urbanites and the abandonment of any efforts to build it through continued sharing of space and resources, and at least partially explains the continued social and political fissures between racially homogeneous suburbs and their central cities (Krysan 2002, Marschall and Stolle 2004).

3.4.2 Partisan and Racial Isolation, Polarization, and the Perceptions of Divergent Interests

Counterintuitive to the primary assertion of Intergroup Contact Theory, hostility directed towards outgroups does not dissipate once proximity to that outgroup ceases to be a factor. On the contrary, social psychological research suggests that the cultural homogeneity of unintegrated suburban spaces is associated with the hardening and amplification of negative opinions about the newly geographically distant urbanites, even though they are largely absent from those suburban spaces (Gest 2015, Lupia 2015). Increasing polarization in anti-urban sentiment can thrive in these environments, with feedback loops increasing the potential for people to “become more extreme in their thinking” (Bishop 2008, p. 6). Just as in the ghettos that many suburbanites demonize and that William Julius Wilson documents, uninterrupted geographic and cultural isolation can exacerbate fears and animosity towards outgroups, revealing malignant and often destructive practices that promote further isolation (Wilson 1987, Kinder and Mendelberg 1995).

Perceptions of divergent interests are frequently a product of these processes. Geographic divestment from urban spaces, a lack of diverse viewpoints that results from cultural homogeneity, and fear and hostility towards those within central city limits are conditions that both precipitate and reinforce doubts about a collective welfare or feelings of mutual accountability with urban residents (Danbold and Huo 2021, Galinsky et al. 2015). The result is often stark differences in electoral and referendum results between regional centers and the towns and cities that surround them (Sellers, 2007). Even partisanship cannot solely account for this: the Detroit metro region, which has historically been a Democratic stronghold, has suffered from fractured regional politics that has stymied cross-jurisdictional efforts for decades, culminating in the bucking of partisan labels in support of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential candidacy in the region's second- and third-most populous counties (Rackaway and Rice, 2018).

While this artificial belief in the incompatibility of interests creates complication from a racial harmony perspective, the practical implications may be more significant from a public policy perspective. Scholars like Jacobsmeier contend that, in the minds of the average White American voter, there is a sizeable gap between the perceived progressivity of 'Black policy priorities' and its demonstrated reality. Even when public information about the effects of programs believed to promote racial equity or the stances of Black candidates is readily available, the White electorate is believed to rely overly upon "partisan stereotypes as informational shortcuts"¹⁹ to form strong opinions that are often quickly cemented, even with the presentation of contradictory data (Jacobsmeier, p. 607). This assumption of sizeable differences in partisan and ideological stance promotes the belief that the priorities of the Black electorate are not only different, but in conflict with those of White voters, leading to reflexive rejection of those priorities.

¹⁹ Such as urban residence and race.

Lupia et al. (2015), in their discussion of why Intergroup Contact Theory fails to fully explain persistent hostility and anti-Black prejudice in voting behavior, note that negative sentiment is not sizably diminished even after repeated exposure to information that clarifies mistaken assumptions or undermines a stereotype. The distorted or inaccurate beliefs that much of America's demographic majority, as a powerful voting bloc, frequently harbors about Black citizens lead to misperceptions of the Black voter agenda and assumptions of its radicality (or, at least being 'out of step' with the 'average American'), and frequently prompts strong election participation by more conservative White voters to counter it (Dyck 2012, Trounstein 2018). Lupia's research suggests that, even after Black candidates and political reforms that promote Black interests more frequently appear on ballots and White voters have opportunities to evaluate a 'Black agenda' more clearly, their likelihood of decreased hostility to those candidates and reforms remains low. It is only when White voters realize that this hostility may be costly to their own interests, and when they can align purported Black priorities with their own that antipathy decreases (Lupia et al., 2015).

This dynamic has clear implications for the success of regional planning efforts that require cooperation and electoral support. For example, rail transit projects, which are associated with economic development and suburb-g geared rapid regional travel, may be seen as beneficial by a sufficiently large contingent of suburban voters to gain strong political traction. However, investment in an accessibility-boosting bus system, which could provide connections to a broader range of beneficial destinations for a lower (initial capital) cost, would be unlikely to garner as much support among the affluent²⁰ (Kirouac, 2012). For those familiar with the difficulties of coordinating transit expansion, the reasons are multiple and significant but arguably come down to one thing: there are longstanding associations between this mode and

²⁰ It may be subject to attack as 'wealth redistribution' between suburban White and urban Black residents.

Black ridership. In addition to many suburban voters' hesitancy to subsidize transit service that they are unlikely to use (even if it is available for their use) with their taxes, there is a likelihood of the system serving a greater number of urban Black patrons (assuming the system does not primarily connect suburban employment, residential, and commercial centers), providing them increased access to less racially diverse portions of the metro region. Antipathy to increasing bus service could be sufficiently intense to lead the region to reject it altogether, resulting in a missed opportunity for *any* transit expansion, as in the case of Detroit metro area in the 1970s (D'Anieri, 2007). A successful campaign to augment and upgrade bus service, particularly in a long-segregated region, would likely require its promotion as a necessary connective component of a rail network that still prioritized suburban service (Taylor and Morris 2015, Garrett and Taylor 1999). This illustrates a recurring obstacle to metro area cooperation: as long as suburban White residents are able to divest themselves from urban Black spaces (and thus limit intergroup contact) and maintain a belief that Black electoral priorities are, at best, inconsequential to their own, suburban residents will likely continue to be skeptical of policies that promote Black interests and, consequently, mobilize opposition to those policies (Zingher and Thomas, 2014).

3.5 Intergroup Contact, Social Capital, and Cooperation in Public Policy

Today, cities are arguably more complex political spaces than in the past. Without significant increases in the economic fortunes of urban Black men in particular for decades (Holzer 2021, Reeves et al. 2020) but with the influx of affluent former-suburbanites, economic inequality could present an impediment to any unified urban agenda. Because of the marginalized status and poverty that has historically marked urban Black communities and many scholars' contention that socioeconomic status is a major obstacle to building social trust (Rotolo

and Wilson 2014, Alesina and La Ferrara 2002, Letki, 2008), any assumption that liberal cities are full of heterogeneous yet collaborative and mutually embracing groups is an exaggeration. If so, what accounts for the fairly consistent support by a broad swath of urban residents for communal social goods like transit and parks, as well as those that are more targeted at low-income urbanites like affordable housing, even in the face of racial and economic heterogeneity? I contend, consistent with Intergroup Contact Theory, that proximity has enabled many urban groups to be less antagonistic to the priorities of others through the partial alleviation of threat, particularly since the intensity of any belief in resource scarcity (which defined earlier scholarly reasoning for the origins of intergroup conflict) is mitigated when those resources are inherently more communally accessible in shared urban space. Even if a level of intergroup conflict can still exist, it is in the mutual interest of groups to promote improvements and advancement²¹, even if some of the benefits are disparately allocated²² (Trounstine 2018, Alesina et al. 1999). Intergroup Contact Theory hypothesizes that barriers to collective action are lowered with exposure to other groups, and it stands to reason that this provides for the acknowledgement and mobilization of shared or parallel interests where the deeper social bonds more typical of homogeneous populations are not readily available.

Such agreement between urban residents and their suburban or rural counterparts is less likely. Tensions about resource allocation and the subsequent authority over or access to those resources under favorable conditions, differing political philosophies and partisanship, and perceptions of divergent or even conflicting interests are all symptoms of a historical lack of social capital, and social capital is a valuable component in the success of any cross-

²¹ An alternative explanation about how liberal priorities tend to succeed in the face of political heterogeneity relies on the studied assumption that partisans in areas where they are a decisive minority have lower instances of voting, thus concentrating the power of dominant partisan groups (Gimpel et al., 2004)

²² Which is itself a frequent source of conflict between groups, even when they desire similar policy and development outcomes.

jurisdictional, region-scale cooperative effort such as building or expanding a regional transit system (Costa and Kahn 2003, Alesina et al. 1999, Marschall and Stolle 2004). As mentioned above, both the geographical space that separates these groups and the reasons that the suburbanites of the latter half of the 20th Century chose to abandon cities demonstrates evidence of low tolerance for intergroup contact and little appetite for coalition-based collective action, with the accompanying antagonism that typifies ‘competing’ groups (Crowder 2000, Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996). Unfortunately for advocates of greater intergroup contact, increasing the ethnic or racial diversity of suburban or rural communities frequently garners negative reactions from longer-term residents, eliciting feelings of ‘outgroup or racial threat’ that can prompt hostility (Weaver and Bagchi-Sen 2015, Pais et al. 2007). This effect can be particularly acute if the newcomers arrive in large numbers over a short period of time²³, and even more so when such population movement or increase is highly politicized (Hopkins, 2010). With the majority of U.S. suburbanites and rural residents being non-Hispanic White (68 and 79 percent, respectively. Parker et al., 2018), 54 percent of White Americans having voted for Trump (with 39 percent supporting Clinton), and the vast majority of 2016 Trump voters (88 percent) being from suburban and rural areas²⁴ (Doherty et al. (a), 2018), this suggests that there may be a cleavage between the perceived sociopolitical interests of non-urban White voters and most other demographic groups that is not explicable through simple partisan affiliation, which is nearly split in suburban counties (Doherty et al. (b), 2018).

In such a fraught climate where partisanship and race interact significantly at every geographic scale, intergroup trust and social capital between groups in a diversifying country

²³ Patterns of increasing defection to the Republican Party, particularly in Southern counties experiencing growing Black populations, were identified by Giles and Hertz (1994) as evidence of race-relevant threat.

²⁴ With Trump support being, as is widely discussed among social scientists since his candidacy, an indicator of what Abramowitz (2018) calls “white racial resentment”.

will be low. Consequently, the effects of that decreased trust on diversity-based policy support can be substantial: a study of higher education spending demonstrates that, under Republican control, state legislators were very generous with funding appropriations (or, when necessary, less aggressive with funding cuts) when White students were overrepresented in colleges (relative to Democratic or mixed-party governments). However, when demographic and opportunity changes led to a growing share of non-White enrollment representation, even when those students were still in the minority, those same legislatures were the least willing of all examined groups to invest in higher education (Taylor et al., 2020). Similarly, even historically democratic-leaning states experience a level of hostility towards diversity- or equity-driven policy, with Affirmative Action being systematically dismantled in Washington's Initiative 2000 in 1998, Michigan's Proposal 2 in 2006, and California's Proposal 209 in 1996 (Moses and Farley, 2011). Significantly, each of these Affirmative Action statutes was struck down through a democratic process that more transparently reflects the sentiments of a voting majority²⁵ than others – the ballot measure.

3.6 Ballot Measures: Initiatives and Referenda

Ballot initiatives and referenda are curious and yet intuitive innovations in US democratic processes. Only 26 states and Washington, D.C. currently have referendum or ballot initiative mechanisms in place, and the geographical distribution of participating states, while not neatly falling on partisan lines, is distinctly a phenomenon more prevalent in the western half of the country (Ballotpedia, 2022). While both ballot initiatives and referenda offer forms of direct democracy (in some iterations) and often are deployed with similar ends, these policy devices

²⁵ In the US context, this majority has historically been majority-White and suburban.

often work differently. Initiatives most often allow voters to take an active role in the generation of policy, giving them the right to propose new laws or change elements of existing laws. This extends in limited cases to amending the state constitution +or, as is most relevant for this examination, levying or abolishing taxes. This is a powerful tool for directly shaping policy, providing opportunities for citizens to bypass the typical legislative process. Conversely, initiatives can also be proposed by legislators, with the intention of providing citizens a direct opportunity to approve or reject proposed law changes on future ballots (typically during elections). Referenda, on the other hand, allow citizens to approve or force the repeal of legislature-derived laws, in whole or in part (Georgetown Law, 2021). Both are initiated by groups of citizens at the local level, and successful campaigns are then elevated to the ballot as ‘propositions’ or ‘ballot measures’, allowing every voter within the proposed law’s jurisdiction to vote on its passage.

This people-centered approach to shaping the political discourse represents a shift from the often-detached workings of ‘authorized’ parties that is typical of representative democracy. This shift has significant potential for greater citizen engagement: “There are three key arguments in favor of direct democratic ballot initiatives: (a) They provide citizens an important opportunity for access to the democratic process; (b) they stimulate increased voter education and participation; and (c) they provide a crucial check on legislators and policymakers” (Moses and Farley, p. 268). The first two arguments, which pertain to voter power and participation, are crucial elements for mobilizing support for reforms that are outside of the everyday business of governing, such as the promotion of regional transit. Because the decision-making process around public transportation development is largely technical and thus opaque to average

citizens, tying its fate to a referendum presents opportunities for engaging and educating residents in a process that might otherwise seem out-of-reach.

However, the greater policy transparency that is believed to come with ballot measures does not always translate into simple, clear connections between a transit agency's plan and its success at the ballot box. Aggregate analyses of transit ballot initiatives in the U.S. and their outcomes frequently point to a multitude of factors that go beyond a plan's relative strength and cost to taxpayers (Lowe et al. 2014, Werbel and Haas, 2001). A 2014 report released by the Mineta Transportation Institute (Bernasconi et al., 2014a) was crafted to provide recommendations for promoting regional transit expansion in Detroit, and while it did marginally discuss the material and lifestyle improvements anticipated to come with better transit access in the region, it, along with several other reports and articles analyzing transit ballot measure success released by the Mineta Institute and others, ignore the connection between the power of branding, the potential for manipulating opinions/associations, and the identities of those potentially served by transit. Manville and Levine (2018) discuss what makes for successful promotion, suggesting that the key lies in appealing to the narrow, material circumstances and values of specific constituencies. Based on the results of a survey they conducted in Los Angeles County (a politically liberal location), they claim that promoting transit as a means of traffic reduction or to mitigate climate change tends to garner support, but that framing transit as helping the poor does not compel the majority of voters to support it. The reasons are simple. Traffic reduction (according to the framing used in the survey) translates into time savings for drivers, who are thus incentivized to vote for transit even if they do not plan to ride it themselves. Climate change mitigation (again, based on survey framing) not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions, but also could result in cleaner air for voters living in dense cities and fewer resulting

ailments like asthma, and reinforces self-perceptions of being eco-friendly. Helping the poor, however, does not necessarily translate into material concerns or a direct challenge to the values of most voters, largely because they are not poor themselves (Manville and Levine, 2018).

The social and convenience-based values of affluent voters and voter sentiment-based survey outcomes underscore the tendency of transit agencies to more intensively prioritize transit development geared more towards the interests of middle-class non-users or choice riders, who they view as a deeper, underexploited market to tap (Garrett and Taylor, 1999). While transit agencies are not indifferent to the concerns of the low-income residents that provide the bulk of their ridership, the limited literature that discusses transit expansion, values, and voting largely suggests that promotional framing that focuses primarily on the interests of low-income or other marginalized populations is not a winning strategy, even among middle-income residents or those who generally support transit. This strategy, however, has historically been popular among those who oppose transit, but for very different reasons.

Manville and Levine's (2018) findings about the elements of transit promotion that resonate most with voters compel a vital question: how can public or social goods be promoted through direct democracy when they would be particularly positive for a minority of the population? As discussed above, referenda and initiatives can provide an effective means of getting around legislative gridlock, allowing the will of the population at large to spark meaningful change, regardless of longstanding legal or legislative precedent. While Moses and Farley (2011) highlight the positive elements of this system, they do not omit some of its more problematic elements: "(a) Moneyed and powerful interests play a disproportionate role; (b) campaigns are too easily deceptive and corrupt; (c) most citizens are not informed enough to

play a direct role in making...policy; and (d) the majoritarian intuition inherent in direct democracy too often tramples minority concerns” (p. 268).

Moses and Farley’s (2011) final point is of the greatest interest to this examination. While most Americans almost certainly conflate optimally fair, good government with unfettered democracy, there is potential for democratic expression of the public will to work in a regressive, discriminatory manner with potentially dangerous results for vulnerable segments of the population. Simply put, if direct democracy is an expression of the majority’s will, that may place numerical minorities with needs or priorities that do not align with that majority in a tenuous position, often reinforcing the precarity that they have long suffered (Lazos, 1999). For this reason, many scholars have discussed the opportunities for discriminatory and even racially regressive policies to reassert themselves, often decades after progress had been established and codified in law (Donovan 2013, Grummel 2001).

Ballot measures have a history and record worthy of scrutiny. In Gamble’s extensive 1997 study of US ballot initiatives between 1959 and 1993, she found a trend that reflected the lack of racial and social progress: during this period, initiatives that would result in greater restrictions on racial and sexual minority civil rights had a 78 percent rate of success (whether that was passage of a regressive reform or defeat of a law that would reinforce minority rights), while all other ballot measures experienced a 33 percent success rate (Gamble, 1997). Lazos undertook a similar study of ballot measures from 1960 to 1998 with nearly identical conclusions: she found that minorities’ rights were curtailed, they were meaningfully disadvantaged, or failed to gain further rights or means of pursuing equity in 4 out of 5 ballot initiative votes during that period (Lazos, 1999). The social forces pushing back against minority progress are often well-understood, and direct democracy has historically been purposefully used

to support that pushback. Junejo (2016) makes this claim when discussing a fair housing case in Akron in 1969, asserting that by finding a means of putting a measure with discriminatory intent on the ballot, opponents of fair housing were able to reverse important equity gains in the city. This was a particularly effective strategy, as these fair housing opponents factored in their knowledge of the general public's racially hostile sentiment against Black people, which could be directly channeled into policy, to effectively undermine the actions of local legislators who had recently passed fair housing reform (Junejo, 2016). Ironically, despite the equitable aims of the legislation and the legally sanctioned process through which the reforms were passed in the city, the ultimately discriminatory outcome of the ballot measure was legitimized as the product of the democratic process.

While metro regions known for their conservative politics or historical racial animus would be the locations most anticipated to wield direct democratic processes in search of regressive policy results, the fact that both Gamble's and Lazos' studies included nationwide samples undermines assertions that this is a predictable local or regional issue. The data show that California, long viewed as the genesis point of much of the nation's progressive policies, has been a particularly contentious battleground in the struggle to safeguard equity against the anti-minority will of the masses. Despite its purported diversity and liberal if divided political leanings, Hosang (2010) exhaustively details numerous ballot initiatives, from affirmative action to school desegregation and busing to English language-only reforms, illustrating the hostility to the rights and welfare of minorities and immigrants that simmered beneath the surface. His analysis finds the simple 'white backlash' thesis that fits so many other historical examples to be inadequate for the California cases. He instead explores the often-unspoken sets of claims that White residents have made to safeguard their interests against favorable changes for minorities

or the steady progress of fairness-geared efforts towards them. Hosang's work lays bare the hazards inherent to democratizing decision-making for politically or racially divisive issues when racial minorities are still numerical minorities: "[B]y putting a question about civil rights on the ballot, black people are essentially asking a white majority to give them their natural rights." (Junejo, 2014)

Baker (2019) corroborates other scholars' assertions about the relationship between racial demographics and equitable policy when observing patterns in the approvals of Affirmative Action bans. In her study of states considering striking down existing Affirmative Action policies, she claims that states with fewer White students at flagship university campuses (relative to other groups) are more likely to adopt bans than those where White students constitute clear majorities on their flagship campuses. Though she is careful not to deeply diagnose systemic reasons for her study results, Baker feels compelled to state plainly her belief that White people will vote against minorities when resources to which they feel entitled are threatened: "I find evidence that state affirmative action bans may be a punitive action of the dominant group to secure access to a scarce commodity, an education at the state flagship institution" (Baker, p. 1887). Similarly, Branton's (2004) work establishes that voting patterns are associated with partisanship, ideology, and the diversity of the area where voters live, particularly with "ballot initiatives that specifically target racial and ethnic minority groups." (p. 295). In her study of "English-as-the-official-language" ballot measures, Branton observes that the more homogeneous areas are within a county and the greater the size of the Latino population, the greater the likelihood that White residents would vote for measures making English the official language. Conversely, she notes that ballot measures pertaining to Native

American gambling had a strong tendency to be approved in areas where the native population was low (Branton, 2004).

Many of the abovementioned studies provide insights into the ways in which politics, perceptions and realities of material advantage, and race interact to produce policy that either prevents the expansion of rights and resources to under-resourced populations or rolls back the rights that they have already gained. While ballot measure outcomes do not typically boil down to votes that fall entirely on either racial or partisan lines, patterns can be observed that suggest that these factors, along with geography, segregation, and the prevailing political moods across the country, are strongly impactful. In addition, the literature of intergroup conflict and diversity's impacts on racialized policies creates stronger connections between White voters' perceptions of threat and the historically negative record of equity-boosting ballot initiatives, providing a material and social motive for opposing policies that disrupt a system that works well for the majority. For these reasons, and because most of these studies possess a spatial component that takes diversity levels into account, I contend that the literature discussed in this analysis largely supports the Racial Threat Hypothesis. The studies described above provide ample evidence of connections between low levels of interracial solidarity or perceived mutual interests, the effects of spatial proximity between largely White voting populations and either minority groups or developments that will benefit those minorities, and the social politics that drive resistance and backlash against such developments and policies. While these connections have potential implications for any ballot measure contest with equity impacts, this project's focus on regional transit expansion and its historical relationship with racial hostility in more segregated regions allows us to ask a vital question. Because the will of the voting majority in direct democracy contests most often works against social minorities' interests, should one

expect that regional transit ballot outcomes will be dramatically different when the majority perceives the primary beneficiaries to be those same social minorities?

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Objectives of this study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the effects of demographics and demographic change on support for regional transit. Because transit support in this project is measured through voting results from ballot measures, we gain insights into how demographics influence the behavior of residents, and make more direct connections between conditions on the ground and the public's political will. This approach to project design and data use was selected rather than relying on measures of attitudes such as polling, which can deviate from demonstrated beliefs due to social desirability, survey or interviewer bias, or other methodological issues that can cause a disjointing of stated positions and deeply held beliefs (Huddy and Feldman 2009, Davis and Silver 2003). However, the selection and analysis of quantitative data, on its own, would fail to facilitate a deeper understanding of the potential causes for voter behavior and any tendencies that may accompany it. For this reason, this study utilizes a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative research that provides insights into how social, political, and economic context may be driving voting trends, as well as what the histories of intergroup competition in the examined regions can tell us about the fraught relationship many suburban voters have had with regional transit development and expansion.

The conceptual framework that guides this analysis, the Racial Threat Hypothesis (RTH), was chosen based on several factors: the social scientific literature on intergroup contact, competition, and conflict; scholarly discussion about the struggles of regionalism in historically segregated metropolitan areas in the United States; political science and public policy literature discussing the conflict between diversity and the generation of public or social goods; and observations of the demonstrated tendency for racially heterogeneous communities, counties, or regions to struggle with producing robust public transit that increases accessibility for transit-dependent residents. The theoretical lens provided by the RTH sensitizes this analysis to any role that demographic factors may play in driving support or opposition to regional transit, which historically has been a racialized policy in segregated regions.

Because this dissertation examines the Racial Threat Hypothesis as it manifests in political (voting) behavior, it is essential to clarify this project's claims about the hypothesized influence of racial threat on that behavior. Scholars who examine race, race relations, and regional politics (Goetz et al. 2020, Jardina 2019, Darrity 2005) largely contend that racial animus or the desire to maintain relative advantage among majority-population residents not only impacts metropolitan politics, but is in fact inseparable from politics itself²⁶. There is ample literature to support that racial threat has even been a fundamental driver of metropolitan spatial relationships and the resources that accompany those relationships²⁷ (Iceland and Sharp 2013, DeFina and Hannon 2009, Logan et al. 2004).

While I contend that past and present reactions to racial threat exert significant influence over metropolitan politics, this project sought to identify spaces where it could be discerned and measured. This is a complex task because, over time, the spatial distribution of political ideology

²⁶ And possibly partisanship itself.

²⁷ The metropolitan history and conceptual framework chapters of this project support this assertion.

and partisanship in segregated metro regions starts to look predictable and nearly ‘natural’,²⁸ even if this distribution is actually highly contrived (Sellers et al., 2013). Regional location-based opinions on issues such as transit support²⁹ can then take on a ‘small town versus big city’ or partisan lens, and the formative role of race in both shaping both the built environment and the attitudes of those who inhabit different parts of it can be minimized in the process. For this reason, in order to study regional politics and still measure cases of racial threat, it required ‘normalizing’ the infusion of racial struggle in politics and seeking to detect instances where racial threat ‘overperforms’ in driving political behavior. This enabled me to distinguish ‘politics as usual’ from cases when the Racial Threat Hypothesis was recognizably at play, above and beyond any established norm of regional politics, and capture it. This was necessary, as the role of partisanship in influencing transit support is undeniably significant and could not be discounted.³⁰ The process through which I determine this is described in the following paragraphs of this section.

RTH contends that powerful populations politically or economically respond to growing minority power by neutralizing or disrupting that power. In the case of transit voting behavior, the RTH would suggest that subsets of White voters who perceive a growing influence from racial minority populations would be more likely to oppose public transit compared to White voters who do not perceive racial change. However, RTH’s complexity creates a high threshold of proof and requires several factors to be demonstrably at play. For example, there may be ample evidence that a community’s racial composition has a strong relationship to its voting patterns, but if that racial composition has been stable or there has been a slight decline in that

²⁸ And thus perceived as a given.

²⁹ Aside from the practicality of regional transit infrastructure and its availability for use based on proximity to areas dense enough to warrant its development

³⁰ As will be discussed in the next chapter, partisanship has a very strong statistically significant relationship with transit support in both case study regions.

community's long-substantial minority population, a claim for the presence of racial threat would be undermined. For this reason, it was prudent to identify related but alternative explanations to capture what motivations are driving the phenomenon, and to design tests to provide evidence of their presence. This analysis will thus present a tiered approach to testing and interpreting this project's underlying assumptions, with testable hypotheses that point to the validity of these explanations.

The alternative explanations for transit support patterns identified in this project are racial threat and two of its constituent elements: the spatial legacy of racism, and simple partisanship.

The project defines them as follows:

- *Racial Threat*: The reactionary politics (primarily among White Americans in the US context) that accompanies changes in the cultural, political, or economic environment resulting from the increasing population or influence of a minority group. Resistance to this influence and resulting efforts at suppressing it can be driven by either implicit prejudice or overt racial animus, and manifests in areas where increasing racial diversity threatens a previously established equilibrium of cultural or political influence.
- *Spatial Legacy of Racism*: The social, political, and economic environment fostered by the residual effects of a history of racial segregation and hostility, manifesting in spatially localized 'cultural' tendencies that predispose (primarily White) community members to demonstrate anxiety or mistrust towards political, social, or economic agendas of communities of color, regardless of their relative number or local influence. Importantly, this motivation can operate in either the presence or absence of overt racial animus, and most often manifests in areas lacking meaningful levels of racial diversity.

- *Simple Partisanship*: The shift in primarily conservative politics towards a (possibly unconscious) conflation of the interests of communities of color with a generic liberal agenda, resulting in a de facto political orthodoxy that places these purported liberal values in direct opposition to the interest of those who subscribe to conservative ideologies. This motivation is not directly connected to traditional racial animus, and can also be present in communities that have historically had or are currently experiencing levels of racial diversity.

The operative presence of each alternative explanation will be evaluated through both qualitative and quantitative means, with differing burdens of proof required to be demonstrated. The tiers, organized by strictness of standards to be met, are in order as follows:

- 1.) Racial Threat
- 2.) Spatial Legacy of Racism
- 3.) Simple Partisanship

The hypotheses constructed to test the pillars upon which each of these explanations were built will be individually discussed and justified in this chapter, providing an intuitive means of interpreting the data and giving evidence to support which explanation is driving transit opposition in segregated metropolitan regions.

4.2 Selected Methods

4.2.1 Comparative Case Study

The case study provides a comprehensive method for multifaceted social scientific analyses. According to Yin (1994), this empirical method allows the examination of a

phenomenon (such as the connection between the success of transit ballot initiatives and metropolitan segregation) as well as its context, with the possibility of making significant inferences about both, despite the functional inseparability of the phenomenon from its context. The comparative case study that forms the foundation of this project documents a relationship between regional demographics and ballot initiative success through several units of analysis. This project allows for a multi-scale study in terms of geographical political entities (e.g., metro regions, counties, voting precincts, and census tracts) and examines case study metropolitan areas to understand their respective political and social conflicts, both current and historical, at the regional level. Additionally, each region's constituent counties were studied as discrete actors with a political, social, and built environmental stake in the outcomes of ballot initiatives.

Case studies provide unique opportunities for the consideration of all these data collection methods, as well as the triangulation of the data that come from these sources. This allows the vetting of the evidence produced through each method, as well as gaining a better contextual understanding of why regional transit has so frequently faced resistance in these regions (Bartlett & Vavrus, 901-2). Within this comparative case study, evidence to address my research questions is derived from: geospatial mapping of the case study regions; census and electoral/ballot initiative data; an analysis of archival records; and informal interviews with planning officials in case study regions. These data collection methods will be described in greater detail below.

The selected data sources, and the methods chosen to analyze those data, enabled me to derive connections between voter sentiment, local demographics, and spatial relationships between suburban populations. In combination with an exploration of intersecting literatures on prejudice, public policy, and spatial segregation, these methodological approaches provided

evidence of factors that drive or reflect sentiment among White suburbanites to oppose transit expansion. With the evidence produced through these data-gathering approaches, this comparative case study demonstrates a feasible methodological approach for synthesizing these data, as well as allowing the inclusion of vital context for understanding each region's social and political climate (Yin, p. 13-15).

4.2.2 Multiple Regression Analysis on Voting Outcomes

The methods employed under the umbrella of the comparative case study all contribute to a greater understanding of the relationship between demographic change and support for regional transit. However, the employment of a multivariate regression provides the most direct and robust evidence of the relationships between variables. In this analysis, I used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions to determine the strength and significance of each demographic and spatial element in influencing voter behavior, which is captured in the primary OLS regression by the dependent variable of *transit support*. The data gathered enabled me to understand other relevant relationships, such as connections between partisanship and diversity and how the speed of demographic transition and median income influence or reflect which racial groups are more likely to be present in large numbers in a voting district.

With the use of multivariate regression, the underlying assumptions of this analysis were tested, with the outcomes providing solidity to the contextual elements introduced through the project's other methods. Outcomes that would confirm the validity of my research question include a high level of statistical significance and directional effect for measures of relative diversity, the magnitude of population change, and the proportion of Black (and in select

analyses, Hispanic residents) within geographic units, all of which would support the underlying assumption that racial diversity is a primary factor in determining transit support for this project.

4.3 Comparative case study

4.3.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research question of this project, “What role does large-scale racial demographic change and integration play in determining support for regional transit expansion in segregated metro regions?” required the articulation and exploration of some of my guiding assumptions about how racial diversity affects regional politics:

1. Metro regions and cities that have historically been more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods (Trounstine 2016, Rocha and Espino 2013).
2. Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity (Junejo, 2016).
3. Non-urban Whites in proximity to urban minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites (Weaver and Bagchi-Sen 2015, Enos 2016).
4. Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites (Krysan 2000, Rocha and Espino 2013).

Each of these foundational assumptions, based on related and largely mutually reinforcing sociological and political science literatures, point to potentially different explanations for the patterns of transit support frequently observed in segregated metropolitan regions.

The first assumption, which states that diversity,³¹ greater integration, or merely the absence of intense racial segregation allows for the production of more social goods, relies on theoretical perspectives pertaining to intergroup contact and means of increasing trust and social capital. A demonstration of supporting evidence would include observations that areas of case study regions with more diversity or higher Black populations would be more amenable to supporting publicly beneficial development compared to less diverse areas of the same segregated metro region. However, partisanship can also play a mediating role in affecting political and social outcomes: elements of conservative ideology frequently promote a greater emphasis on private or personal gains, rather than directly investing in more widely accessible public goods.

The second assumption, that policies that potentially have a disproportionate impact on Black populations will attract strong attention from less diverse, majority-White portions of metropolitan regions, is founded in intersecting literatures, ranging from those supporting the Racial Threat Hypothesis to those that point to race's impact on partisan behavior and policy formation (Dyck 2012, Taylor et al. 2020). Evidence to support this concept would include clear patterns in white voting behavior towards race-relevant reforms - in this analysis, regional transit development and Affirmative Action policy are examined - that could either further disadvantage Black regional residents or deprive them of an expansion of privileges.

³¹ Whether long-stabilized or after an indeterminate threshold

The third assumption, that areas with concentrations of White residents that are spatially proximate to densely Black communities will exhibit political and social competition or antagonism to those Black communities, rests on broadly explored theoretical premises, including much of the literature about segregation and intergroup trust (Sharp and Iceland 2013, Rocha and Espino 2009, Marschall and Stolle 2004). While this concept is also an important element of the Racial Threat Hypothesis, several other scenarios can account for the presence of intergroup hostility and the political consequences of it. Supporting evidence would include disproportionately strong opposition to publicly beneficial regional development, or strong support for minority-disadvantageous policies, among residents that are adjacent to areas with a significant Black population.

The fourth assumption, that growing power among minorities acts as a catalyst for intense reactionary politics among suburban and rural White residents, presents the highest burden of proof and has the most controversial conceptual foundations. This theoretical process forms the foundation of the Racial Threat Hypothesis: evidence to support it would need to demonstrate that, as the Black population in the case study regions become more numerous or influential over time, policies that benefited minorities directly or indirectly would become increasingly unpopular among the region's majority-White population.

Because each of these assumptions are, directly or indirectly, capable of being tested using the methods selected to support this case study, they will be used as hypotheses and their validity will be evaluated using processes described in detail in the Research Design section.

4.3.2 Comparative Case Study Research Design

Within the framework of the comparative case study that serves as the project's primary method, a variety of methodological tools were used, with the metropolitan regions of Atlanta and Detroit being the primary subjects of this dissertation. A brief historical study underpins the project, spanning from the years immediately preceding the founding of Atlanta's MARTA and Detroit's SEMTA up to the year 2019. This aspect of the analysis is primarily concerned with the regional electoral politics and relevant social conflicts that have characterized these regions during that time, which provides valuable context for the study and its conclusions.

The following ballot initiatives and referenda were discussed and examined in both case study regions:

- Atlanta: Clayton County MARTA expansion referendum (2014), Gwinnett County MARTA expansion referendum (2019)
- Detroit: Regional Transit Authority ballot initiative (2016)

Each of these votes provide both context and substance to the analysis, and voting data for these contests were used to support the spatial and demographic analyses and provide visualization of voting trends, as well as constituting the dependent variable for the statistical analyses.

There were numerous criteria and contextual elements that factored into the selection of these metro regions, as well as the exclusion of other potential case study choices. Atlanta, as a major city in the U.S. Sun Belt, was among the fastest-growing large city metropolitan regions in the country at the time of this study. Conversely, Detroit was selected both for its regional location, the Upper Midwest and part of what is popularly known as the Rust Belt, as well as its place among the slowest-growing large metros in the country (Census 2020, McCann 2020).

These cities also provide contrast in political dynamics, with the counties that constitute the Atlanta Metropolitan Region slowly becoming more liberal in their partisanship with each presidential election cycle, while the suburban counties in the Detroit Metropolitan region becoming more nominally conservative. However, of greatest interest to this project, these places represent metro regions in differing stages of both racial diversity and regional segregation. Detroit and Atlanta have traditionally been among the most segregated metros while also having large minority populations, with dissimilarity indices of 0.737 and 0.588, respectively (Maciag, 2019). While Detroit remains in the top 10 segregated metro areas, Atlanta has significantly diversified in recent decades (Michigan Population Studies Center, 2019). Lastly, both regions have had transit ballot initiatives or referenda since 2010, providing ample recent and reliable quantitative and qualitative data to analyze and examine.

The selected cases provide further circumstantial variety: some of the counties have numerous examples of failed regional transit ballot measures, with the central city and its surrounding communities frequently in opposition in their voting behavior (Bouie, 2014), while others have fewer instances of failed referenda and much more cooperative regional relationships; some counties experienced urban out-migration among White residents, leaving a majority-Black, largely low-income urban core (with low connectivity to job centers via public transit), while others have historically had only small urban Black populations, or are currently experiencing large Latino population growth. This comparative combination also provides an opportunity to investigate the commonalities and disparities between growing metros (Atlanta) and shrinking ones (Detroit) and discuss the magnitude of any role that population dynamics play in each region's approach to regional transit integration. While there are strong similarities between the cases, they also possess fundamentally contrasting elements which, when

considering the reasons for their emergent differences in political appetite for regional transit, provide sufficient grounds for a comparative inquiry.

4.4 Geospatial Mapping

This project involved mapping racial, social, and economic characteristics and spatial distribution patterns of districts which support or oppose regional transit. This tool was used to map sections of each region that are undergoing demographic change to, among other reasons, test the intensity of transit support or opposition and how it corresponds with spatial patterns. Mapping the proximity of particular metro regional areas to communities with sizeable Black and Latino populations also allowed me to evaluate the validity of the Racial Threat Hypothesis, providing an opportunity to observe which in-census tract demographic or cultural traits, if any, undermined or supported that hypothesis. Except when supplied by a previous researcher and subsequently validated, electoral data from both current and historical precincts were paired with available geospatial data that matched those data, which were subsequently combined with census data.

4.4.1 Transformation and Aggregation of Electoral, Demographic, and Spatial Data

This analysis required the synthesis of demographic and electoral data. The majority of demographic data, such as median income, racial composition, and vehicle ownership, can most readily be found at the census tract level, while election data for transit referenda and partisan political contests are available at the voting district (VTD) level. In ArcGIS, the use of *Feature to Point* and *Spatial Join* tools allow the merger of VTDs and census tracts, preserving the

boundary lines of select spatial unit types while placing and preserving the data of the other within those boundaries.

To preserve the maximum amount of data in the aggregation process, I selected census tracts as the primary unit of analysis to remain intact, with voting district data to be incorporated into them. Consequently, all VTDs in each case study county were transformed using the *Feature to Point* tool, creating a centroid, or a point feature that contains all of the data attached to the VTD upon which it is centered. I then performed a spatial join that merged the data of each census tract with the VTD centroids within its boundaries, aggregating and summing the appropriate data about total vote counts for partisan contests, party voter affiliation, and transit ballot measures from each VTD. With each county's census tracts bearing the electoral data of their coincident VTDs, the data were then used for statistical and spatial analyses.

4.4.2 Geographically Weighted Regression Analysis

An advanced spatial analytical tool, geographically weighted regression (GWR) analysis, is incorporated into this project to understand the complexity of spatial relationships between census tracts, based on the variables used in the primary OLS regression analysis. GWR creates an individualized regression model for each census tract being analyzed, with the explanatory variables being weighted differently depending on their spatial relationship to other geographic units. In this project, it is used to understand statistical relationships such as the suitability of regression model fit (R^2) as applied to that census tract, as well as the strength and direction of specific variable coefficients, all modeled over space so that patterns can be easily discerned across the case study regions. In addition to providing visualized data on the influence of explanatory variables, GWR can capture standardized residuals, enabling us to see how many

standard deviations the examined variables are from a spatially weighted anticipated mean of those variables, and thus which tracts yield unexpected results.

This tool is a powerful supplement to the OLS regression analysis, as the GWR analysis can capture and visually represent the effect of selected variables at a granular level, whereas the OLS regression models aggregate data at the metro regional level. Of particular importance for this analysis, GWR allows us to see which parts of case study regions are most heavily influenced by selected variables so that their impact can be discerned and measured spatially in every tract of each county. Based on their analytical significance to the conceptual framework as well as their explanatory power, AdjTract (a variable identifying the proportion of Black residents in adjacent census tracts) and LQ Black (a variable measuring the level of underrepresentation or overrepresentation of Black residents, relative to the county as a whole) were selected to model the spatial relationships between tracts in the GWR analyses. In addition to the goodness-of-fit and standardized residuals, AdjTract and LQ Black will be mapped using this tool, enabling us to draw inferences about the relationship between these variables and the demographics of portions of each region.

4.4.3 Spatial Autocorrelation

The spatial nature of this analysis provides a means of deriving patterns of transit support and opposition across each metro region. In addition to the inferences about public sentiment derived from intersecting electoral and demographic data, this project identifies how voting districts are distributed in space to determine if their dispersal is random, as well as if identified spatial characteristics could account for any clustering. The ArcGIS *Spatial Autocorrelation* tool (which is based on Moran's I, a multidimensional measure of autocorrelation) is used to test the

placement of spatial features (primarily voting districts and census tracts in this analysis) based on select attributes (variables).

While the primary utility of this tool is to test significance of any clustering of voting districts that either supported or opposed transit referenda, there were opportunities to draw other inferences, such as how race, partisanship, proximity to densely Black census tracts, and other socially determinant traits are distributed in a defined area. From these tests, we gain a greater understanding of the level of racial and economic segregation, how dense pockets of political similarity are in parts of the region, and if the perceived benefits of transit development and expansion are uniformly or randomly distributed, or else if those benefits are particularly valued in some places and rejected in others.

The Moran's I statistic for spatial autocorrelation is given as:

$$I = \frac{n \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^n w_{i,j} z_i z_j}{S_0 \sum_{i=1}^n z_i^2} \quad (1)$$

where z_i is the deviation of an attribute for feature i from its mean ($x_i - \bar{X}$), $w_{i,j}$ is the spatial weight between feature i and j , n is equal to the total number of features, and S_0 is the aggregate of all the spatial weights:

$$S_0 = \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^n w_{i,j} \quad (2)$$

The z_I -score for the statistic is computed as:

$$z_I = \frac{I - E[I]}{\sqrt{V[I]}} \quad (3)$$

where:

$$E[I] = -1/(n - 1) \quad (4)$$

$$V[I] = E[I^2] - E[I]^2 \quad (5)$$

<https://pro.arcgis.com/en/pro-app/latest/tool-reference/spatial-statistics/h-how-spatial-autocorrelation-moran-s-i-spatial-st.htm>

Figure 4 Spatial Autocorrelation

4.5 Demographic Analysis - Electoral and Census Data

I conducted analyses of census data to provide information about changing demographics in each metro region. This involved charting conditions and changes in racial makeup, income levels, partisan political adherence, and other relevant considerations to transit voting behavior. From this, I derived vital statistics in select counties and drew inferences about shifting demographics and historical behaviors. This method is facilitated by the data derived from the GIS analysis: following the pairing of electoral and geospatial data into a single dataset, census data pulled from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 decennial censuses and the 2016 American Community Survey were organized by either precinct name or with unique identifiers for geospatial matching, and subsequently integrated with those data. Because the smallest geographical unit at which racial, economic, and behavioral data are reliably available is at the census tract level, this scale was selected to provide the greatest granularity. Through a process of pairing the tract-level demographic data and electoral data found at the voting district level (described in detail in the GIS Mapping section) within census tracts, I derived a set of spatial units which provide a combination of all information that was affixed to each constituent unit. These demographic and spatial data are then exported into a spreadsheet. This allows for both simple observational methods of data analysis and multiple regression analysis (described in the Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis section below), from which I derive conclusions about which demographic and electoral factors best coincide with varying levels of transit support (the dependent variable). Because of the likelihood that a voter's circumstantial and inherent traits will have a significant influence on how they vote (Rugh and Trounstein 2011, Alesina and La Ferrara 2000), I was able to make inferences about what demographic traits or

combinations of traits are likely to be present in a census tract to influence a voter to support or oppose transit.

4.5.1 Demographics, Politics, and the Racial Threat Hypothesis

A pivotal element of this analysis involved observing the political behavior of voters in the face of rapid or significant demographic change. The Racial Threat Hypothesis asserts that White voters³² (who constitute a numerical majority in most metro regions) have a tendency to oppose both the population increase of racial, ethnic, or social minorities as well as any policies that are seen to be disproportionately beneficial to those groups (Booza 2009, King and Wheelock 2007). Based on this theoretical perspective, I expect to see greater opposition to regional transit and greater support for policies with negative implications for Black residents³³ in suburban and rural geographies (regardless of population density) that are majority-White and either experiencing or in proximity to those experiencing significant racial demographic change.

To test this assumption, demographic data from the 2010 decennial census, which most closely pre-dated all three regional transit ballot measures, were collected. In addition, demographic data from the two decennial censuses (20 years) prior to 2010, and electoral data from one decennial cycle (10 years) prior were collected and incorporated. This 20-year period, beginning in 1990 and ending in 2010, is our observed period of demographic shift, used to understand the level of population change in each census tract. Both of the case study regions, because of their recent ballot measures being held between 2014 and 2019, have three decennial censuses through which to analyze prior electoral and demographic data. Using three major

³² In the United States context

³³ Affirmative Action is examined in this analysis and is explained below.

racial and ethnic categories in each metro region (Non-Hispanic White³⁴, Black or African American, and Hispanic or Latino), the numerical difference between these two census periods (in the form of percentage change) is introduced as a variable in the statistical analysis.

Additionally, for the Detroit Metro Region case study, voting data pertaining to the 2006 Affirmative Action ballot measure, Michigan Proposal 06-2, was collected and analyzed. This enabled a complementary discussion of another racialized policy issue with even more explicit conceptual connections to the Racial Threat Hypothesis' triggering conditions. It similarly offers an opportunity to discuss the alternative explanations, Spatial Legacy of Racism and Simple Partisanship, as plausible motivations for the resultant passage of the measure, which banned Affirmative Action in Michigan. These data were collected at the precinct level and then aggregated at the municipal level. This was done because of the unavailability of reliable spatial data to which these voting data could be paired, as well as the abundance of absentee votes that could not be spatially assigned to voting precincts. Precinct-level data from the 2004 Presidential Election were also collected for both metro regions to contrast from the 2016 partisan data that informs the primary transit support analysis. The 2004 election was chosen primarily because it is arguably the last presidential contest before racial identity³⁵ became an inflammatory, contentious, but inseparable part of the electoral conversation; it was the cycle before the candidacy and election of the first US president of color, Barack Obama, which many see as a watershed moment in the nation's race relations. These data serve to show the level of demonstrated partisan voting change, displaying which VTDs may have become more conservative-leaning in their voting behavior. Because of the prominent place that increasing

³⁴ This racial/ethnic group is only incorporated into the secondary OLS regression analysis of Percent Racial Change and Percent Republican Change.

³⁵ In reference to either the president candidates or the explicitly named target of policy

conservatism levels holds in the Racial Threat literature, this analysis provides a complementary test of any relationship between demographic dynamics and changing partisanship over time.

4.6 Document Analysis and Planner Interviews

4.6.1 Archival work and historical analysis

A significant element of this project's purpose is drawing clear connections between past political and social sentiment towards public transportation's expansion and current-day developments in regional transit policy. A historical analysis which builds a portrait of each region's metropolitan politics provides much of this context in Chapter 2. Archival work, undertaken in collections available at libraries, local government offices, and other physical and virtual public institutions within the case study counties, revealed primary source materials such as print media and transportation planning documents. Primary source documents also provided access to descriptions of contemporary attitudes towards policies with social or economic justice implications. Relevant data sources were identified and located through discussion with trusted scholars with archival experience in both case study regions, and the search was further refined through consultation with archive administrators whenever possible.

This method's products were contextualized through pairing with secondary source materials that lend coherence to fragmented data. These secondary source materials include scholarly books and journal articles about the effects of racial and class prejudice on public opinion and policy, regionalism and segregation, histories of mass transportation and transportation planning, and effects of demographic change. This archival data collection and broader historical analysis enabled me to discuss the trajectories of recent historical regional transit opposition and their consequent effects on current transportation development patterns.

4.6.2 Interviews

To facilitate a better-focused approach to historical and press media data collection, as well as to provide on-the-ground context to this project, I engaged in a series of informal in-person interviews with eight planning professionals and scholars, both in the case study regions and other regions that provide perspective on what forces influence transit support. Many of these interview subjects were identified by colleagues, who also facilitated introductions and initial contact. Additional interview subjects were frequently identified through my discussions with the initial participants in a ‘snowball sampling’-style process. These interviews yielded significant insights into social and political developments in each region, which contextualized many of the large-scale processes that were either documented in the press or else captured in official demographic or electoral data. A list of interview subjects and pertinent details from each interview session is in Appendix G.

Both the interviews and methods of historical analysis strongly informed the metropolitan history and context chapter, and while the products of these methods were not factored into the analysis detailed in the next chapter, they provide vital context for the discussion and policy recommendations included in Chapter 7.

4.7 Data and Sources

The variety of methods used in the case study portion of this project required gathering and processing diverse data from several sources. The demographic data were primarily retrieved from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 Decennial Census surveys, provided by the US Census Bureau and IPUMS NHGIS’s geographic data files (Manson 2022, U.S. Census Bureau 2001, U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Characteristics categories that formed variables of interest which could

not reliably be found in the decennial censuses, such as data concerning housing and occupancy characteristics or educational attainment, were retrieved from American Community Survey 5-Year estimate tables from 2010 and 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau 2011, U.S. Census Bureau 2017). The data concerning partisan elections contests, regional transit ballot measures, and referenda concerning racially relevant policies were identified and gathered from several official sources, primarily the Clerk and Recorder or Elections Division websites of each case study county (Gwinnett County Elections 2019, Gwinnett County Elections 2016, Wayne County Clerk 2016, Macomb County Clerk/Register of Deeds 2016, Oakland County Elections Division 2016, Clayton County Government 2016, Clayton County Government 2014).

Historical transit voting data, which informs the historical discussions of transit support in Atlanta and other referenced cases, were either personally located in archives and manually transcribed or else required placing records requests for specific election contests with regional and county archives. The spatial data required for the GIS analysis came from several sources, including county GIS technicians embedded within government offices, as well as open GIS websites that are maintained and monitored by county and regional governments in both Michigan and Georgia. The historical documents and media used to both conceptualize this project as well as provide evidence of socially and politically relevant information were primarily personally retrieved from county, institutional, or city government archives, or else retrieved from local government archives that provided digital copies of documents. More recent media and official documents were similarly sourced from archives and government offices, and in some cases located in reputable online sources such as established media outlets such as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution or research institutions such as the Pew Research Center.

4.8 Analysis Techniques and Project Hypotheses

This analysis is designed to test the validity of the Racial Threat Hypothesis as a conceptual framework for explaining the spatial and racial patterns of regional transit support in the two case study regions, as well as if these patterns are better-explained by simpler explanations of the evolving power of partisanship or the enduring spatial legacy of racism. For that reason, this project presents testable hypotheses based on empirical evidence to provide clarity on which sociopolitical forces are most at play in these case studies. These hypotheses are derived from the four guiding assumptions discussed above, with parameters specified to provide testable conditions and examples of evidence that are empirically discernable and measurable.

Hypothesis 1: Metro regions and cities that have historically been more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods

The first hypothesis assumes that portions of case study regions that have more established patterns of racial mixture or are themselves majority-Black will have a greater tendency to vote in support of developments or policies that provide broad-based benefits for the public. This explicitly implies that the opposite also be true: *regions, cities, and portions of counties that are majority-White and have resisted significant integration will exhibit hostility to providing social goods, specifically those that are not for the near-exclusive use of their communities*. The null hypothesis is as follows: *There is little or no relationship between the diversity of a census tract and its voters' support for the provision of social goods*. This concept has ample support in the sociology and political science literatures, with foundations in Intergroup Conflict and Contact theories and other scholarship that supports both racial and partisanship explanations for hostility to notions of a collective welfare (Luttmer 2001, Brewer

1999). Evidence to support this hypothesis primarily includes the occurrence of diverse tracts or tracts that have historically been proximate to diversity exhibiting greater support for regional transit expansion than the overall region.

Hypothesis 2: Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.

The second hypothesis has implications for every tier of this project's explanations for patterns of transit support: racial threat as a motivation for purposefully curtailing growing minority power, a spatial legacy of racism that promotes an antagonistic view of urban Black populations by suburbanites, or simple partisanship that can conflate minority-benefiting policies with policy that is in conflict with conservative interests or ideological orthodoxy. Like the hypothesis that precedes it, this hypothesis must be supported in order to provide evidence of any role that the Racial Threat Hypothesis plays in driving negative voter sentiment to regional transit, but can also provide evidence of the other two explanations if any hypothetical conditions are not met. The null hypothesis is as follows: *There is little or no relationship between the voting patterns of majority-white tracts in highly segregated parts of metro regions and support for policies with racial implications.* Evidence to support this hypothesis includes: significant patterns of voter rejection of regional transit from portions of case study regions that are majority-White and lack meaningful diversity; greater proportions of voter support for policies that are harmful to Black populations in census tracts that are majority-White and not evidently part of a racially well-integrated portion of a metro region.

Hypothesis 3: Non-urban Whites in proximity to urban minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites

This hypothesis resembles the fourth hypothesis in the significance of a sense of threat in influencing voter behavior; however, while the fourth is premised on growing numerical or political strength in the Black population, the third hypothesis identifies proximity as a fundamental source of negative voter sentiment. This hypothesis is not required to be supported in order to provide strong evidence of racial threat,³⁶ and can also meet the less stringent threshold for evidence of the enduring spatial legacy of racism. The null hypothesis for this test is as follows: *There is little or no relationship between the relative proximity of Black populations and the attitudes and voting behavior of majority-White populations within census tracts.* Evidence to support this hypothesis includes: the coincidence of census tracts that are majority-White but located near densely Black tracts and census tracts with significantly lower rates of support for regional transit expansion than the county average; dramatic differences in voter support for policies with racial implications on either side of locations that have traditionally served as implicit or explicit racial boundaries; dramatic differences in partisan voting or affiliation on either side of historical spaces of racial segregation.

Hypothesis 4: Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites

This hypothesis, as the one which most prominently features the mechanisms underlying the Racial Threat Hypothesis, provided the opportunity to examine the potentially direct role of growing and changing population dynamics in driving transit rejection. As mentioned above,

³⁶ Proximity is frequently referenced in the racial threat literature, but there is no consensus on its necessity to elicit race-based fear or hostility

evidence that supports this hypothesis must demonstrate that regional policies that promote improvements for the Black population will be opposed by suburban White majorities in response to the numerical growth of that group. The null hypothesis is as follows: *There is little or no direct relationship between the changing size of the Black population and the electoral popularity of policies or developments that could disproportionately benefit members of that population in majority-White census tracts.* This means that, among suburban White voters, the intensity of voting sentiment against perceived minority-beneficial policies should be proportional to the growth level of the Black population.

The high burden of proof required to support this hypothesis creates a scenario in which race may be found to have a strong relationship with non-urban White voting preferences without firmly establishing evidence of racial threat. Processes that support this hypothesis include: tracts within portions of counties that experienced dramatic or rapid Black population growth or are in proximity to tracts that are experiencing growth rejecting regional transit ballot measures in significantly higher rates than the county as a whole; tracts experiencing or near significant Black population growth supporting policies that curtail minority power and rejecting policies that promote minority well-being; these tracts changing their partisan behavior, either through growing voter support for the Republican party or for policies that are considered political conservative (Giles and Hertz, 1994).

4.9 Comparisons between Atlanta and Detroit

The two case study regions were selected both for their historical similarities and for their emerging differences. Each region has inherited the divided politics that come from a history of racial animus and competition for economic and social resources, with many of the same

political battles being fought along similar lines but with different labels. Each region also exhibits the spatial patterns of racial segregation that are relics of White flight but also largely function as modern-day concentrations of economic class, though that relationship is becoming less pronounced as urban communities are experiencing both new financial investment and an influx of White residents. This analysis captures how both the Atlanta and Detroit Metro regions are experiencing these changes and how they impact voter sentiment towards racialized policies such as public transportation. Particular attention is focused on the differences between the cases themselves, as well as within different portions of each metro region.

This analysis compares the patterns of population change in the case study regions, contrasting how strong population growth in Metro Atlanta has changed the complexion of the city and its suburbs from the Detroit Region's less dynamic but nonetheless noteworthy changes in racial composition in the northern metro counties. Observing these population shifts informs our understanding of the spatial patterns of transit support, enabling us to interpret the findings and discuss what role, if any, that racial threat played in determining each region's transit ballot measure outcomes. Accompanying this spatial analysis, each of the demographic characteristic categories retrieved from the US Census, as well as the indicators of racial diversity and concentration derived from those categories, serve both as variables in the regression analyses and vital data that provide explanations for what drives voter sentiment. Lastly, this analysis devotes a level of focus to discussing how the differences in regional politics between these cases both drive and are driven by these spatial and demographic characteristics.

4.10 Ordinary Least Squares Regression Analysis

Section II, the comparative case study, addresses the overarching research question of this study: *What role does large-scale racial demographic change and integration play in determining support for regional transit expansion in segregated metro regions?* The section outlined below, which details the OLS regression analysis, addresses a more specific question to which the capabilities of multivariate statistical analysis are well-suited, with the aim of testing whether the Racial Threat Hypothesis is supported in the cases of Atlanta and Detroit.

4.10.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

As stated above, the selection of multivariate regression analysis as the method to best complement the case study provides a robust statistical check on the qualitative data and assertions presented in this study. While spatial patterns emerge and notable social and political trends seem to provoke behaviors in the populations of the two case study regions, a large N quantitative analysis provides solidity to any claims of such effects taking place if they are present and evident. This method enables me to articulate and subsequently interrogate a second research question, which is derived from the case study's engagement with the first: *Do the cases of Atlanta and Detroit provide supporting evidence for the Racial Threat Hypothesis?*

Answering this research question required the inclusion of the case study analysis, as the evidence gathered and discussed during its undertaking provided the context and material circumstances needed to interpret the regression analysis outputs. In addition, the four hypotheses that are tested during the case study analysis provide the foundational evidence upon which the final hypothesis is formulated and answered: *Recently homogeneous census tracts that*

have experienced recent change toward increasing racial diversity will be associated with lower levels of voting support for transit initiatives.

4.10.2 OLS Regression Analysis - Research Design

Addressing the second research question

In order to ensure that the research design for the multivariate regression is appropriate, the validity of the four hypotheses that provide the basis for the case studies are also evaluated based on the OLS regression's outcomes. Applying these tests to both the Detroit and Atlanta regional datasets, the strength, direction, and significance of each of the relationships detailed above provide evidence of the validity of this project's foundational assumptions. The outcomes of each assumption's tests are used to support or undermine this analysis' confidence in the presence of racial threat among primarily suburban census tracts in both case study regions, and thus provide an answer for this project's second research question: "Do the cases of Atlanta and Detroit provide supporting evidence for the Racial Threat Hypothesis?"

4.10.3 Regression Analysis Data

Universe and Units of Analysis

Due to several imperatives pertaining to data availability, processing, and management, the census tract was chosen as the most appropriate unit of analysis for the multiple regression analysis. As discussed in the "*Transformation and Aggregation of Electoral, Demographic, and Spatial Data*" section, census tracts were assigned voting district data by a spatial matching technique, often resulting in the voting data of multiple VTDs being aggregated and summed

within a single census tract. This study, while not a large study on the order of the most statistically powerful quantitative analyses, has a *N* of 518 for the census tracts within the two selected suburban counties of Oakland and Macomb in the Detroit Metro Region's 2016 planned RTA expansion³⁷ and a *N* of 149 for the two selected suburban Atlanta Metro counties of Gwinnett and Clayton that voted on separate transit referenda during the study period. The following is a breakdown of the regional and county census tract counts, with their constituent VTDs in parentheses:

- Atlanta Metro Region: 149 tracts (214 VTDs)
- Gwinnett: 99 tracts (156 VTDs)
- Clayton: 50 tracts (58 VTDs)
- Detroit Metro Region: 799 tracts (1,342 VTDs)
- Macomb: 201 tracts (337 VTDs)
- Oakland: 317 tracts (511 VTDs)
- Wayne: 281 tracts (494 VTDs)

From these datasets of suburban census tracts, subsets are selected and analyzed to provide evidence in support of the four hypotheses in this project, and are chosen either because of their relationship to selected variables or a spatial relationship with geographic features of interest within case study counties. These census tract subsets include those with high LQ Black ratios, high LQ White ratios, and those that exhibited majority support for the 2016 Republican Presidential Candidate, among other variable-based criteria. These subsets are primarily utilized in the demographic and spatial analyses that support the comparative case study component of the project.

³⁷ In addition, 281 census tracts in Wayne County are analyzed for the test of Eight Mile Road buffer tracts, as evidence to support Hypothesis 1.

Data Sources

The data gathered for the OLS regression analysis, much of which also supported the case study portion's methods, came from several sources. The US Census Bureau's 1990, 2000, and 2010 Decennial Census surveys were the primary source sought for demographic data (Manson 2022, U.S. Census Bureau 2001, U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Also, like the spatial analysis and demographic analysis portion of this project, census categories that were not found in the decennial censuses were retrieved from the 2016 American Community Survey 5-Year estimate tables (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Regional transit ballot measure data, which provides the dependent variable for the OLS regression, and partisan election data were found at official county Clerk and Recorder or Elections Division websites (Gwinnett County Elections 2019, Gwinnett County Elections 2016, Wayne County Clerk 2016, Macomb County Clerk/Register of Deeds 2016, Oakland County Elections Division 2016, Clayton County Government 2016, Clayton County Government 2014).

4.10.4 Analysis Technique

Variables

The selection of OLS regression analysis as an appropriate technique for this project was contingent on the identification of suitable variables to test the presence of racial threat, the spatial legacy of racism, or simple partisanship and their relationship to regional transit support. Each of the variables listed below reflects theoretical components of these explanations, with most variables being suitable for testing the validity of all three because of their interrelated nature.

Variable Name	Shortened Name	Description	Unit of Measure	Expected Effect on Transit Support	Data Source
Dependent Variable					
Support for Regional Transit Ballot Measures	Transit (Yes)	Proportion of voters who vote to support regional transit on a ballot measure or referendum	Proportion	N/A	County Elections/Clerk and Recorder Site
Hypothesis Variables					
Racial composition of adjacent census tracts	Adjtract	Mean proportion of the Black population within a census tract's neighboring tracts	Proportion	+ (Majority Black), - (Majority White)	Decennial Census
Location Quotient	LQ Black	Level of relative population representation within a census tract experienced by a specified group	Ratio	+ (Majority Black), - (Majority White)	Decennial Census
Control Variables					
Family Median income	AMI	Median wage income for families within the census tract	US Dollar	-	Decennial Census
Percent Conservative	Partisan (Rep)	Percentage of residents who voted for the 2016 presidential candidate	Proportion	-	County Elections/Clerk and Recorder
Percent Households without a Vehicle	NoVehicle	Proportion of households without reliable access to a private passenger vehicle	Proportion	+	Decennial Census
Population per square mile	Density	Mean quantity of residents living within any given square mile within the census tract	People per sq. mile	+	Social Explorer/Decennial Census

Table 1: OLS Regression Analysis Variables

Variable Selection and Justifications

While other variables are identified in the literature that are believed to have an impact on the success of transit ballot initiatives³⁸, the primary conceptual framework that informs this project, the Racial Threat Hypothesis, prompted an examination that factored in the roles of demographic and political factors in transit support. The continued political relevance of poverty, demographic change, and diversity in shaping attitudes and policy priorities in metro regions necessitated the selection of variables for race (primarily reflecting two major U.S. population groups, Black and White), relative wealth, and population heterogeneity.

Variables such as carless households, density, and median income (AMI), which theoretically have some impact on transit support, are used as control variables in this analysis. This allows me to control for the wealth and other contextual and personal circumstances of voters, which provides greater insight directly into people's attitudes towards transit expansion,

³⁸ Such as the reputation of transit agencies, participation of the local business community in planning the system, regional traffic congestion, etc. (Werbel and Haas, 2001)

as reflected in their support or rejection of ballot measures. Similarly, because political partisanship anecdotally and demonstrably (in my model) has a logically significant relationship to transit support, I chose to use it as a control variable in model iterations. Holding political leanings constant allows me to eliminate some of the influence that party politics and its norms exercise over vote choice on the provision of public goods like public transportation.

Variables Constructed for Measuring Segregation and Diversity

A foundational element of this analysis was the assumption that diversity, particularly when it occurs rapidly, has a negative relationship with levels of support for racialized policies, such as transit expansion. In order to dynamically calculate the varying degrees of diversity and segregation within case study regions, this analysis utilized the *Location Quotient* (McMillen 2005, Wheeler 2005):

$$LQ = \frac{X_i / \sum X_i}{N_i / \sum N_i}$$

Where

X_i = subset of a racial population in geographic subarea i

$\sum X_i$ = total population within geographic subarea i

N_i = total population of racial group within the county

$\sum N_i$ = total population of all groups within the county

Rather than calculating a single, more complex proportion of population dissimilarity within a defined area (the county in this analysis), this measure provides greater usability by deriving an easily interpreted ratio using simpler calculations for determining relative diversity levels within that geographical area. In this analysis, the Location Quotient is calculated for each

census tract, with the mean diversity level for the county as a whole being used both as the denominator of the LQ measure itself ($N_i/\sum N_i$) and as a secondary comparative measure for the county's overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a given racial group when compared to others. The LQ of each census tract is factored in as a variable in the OLS regression analyses, and serves as evidence of the roles that diversity, racial overrepresentation, and segregation play in support for transit expansion. Though LQ is calculated for three racial groups in this analysis (White, Black, Hispanic), the variable used in the primary OLS regression model is *LQ Black*, as the proportion of Black residents at each census tract relative to the proportion of Black residents in the county, and its hypothesized effects on the voting behavior of White regional majorities is measured.

Adjacent Tracts

Though it is not explicitly stated as a requirement in the literature, proximity to outgroups is frequently cited as a potential trigger for aggression or fear (Stolle et al. 2008, Crowder and South 2008, Hopkins 2010). This can translate into political backlash against communities of color, according to conceptual frameworks such as the Racial Threat Hypothesis (Enos 2016, Zingher and Thomas 2014, Dixon 2006). While a tract's location quotients act as indicators of how divergent its racial makeup is from the mean of the county and metropolitan region, these do not capture diversity differences between local neighborhoods. To address the possible effects of outgroup proximity on voting behavior, this analysis tests the variable *Adjacent Tracts* (AdjTract). *AdjTract* is calculated for each census tract as the mean proportion of Black residents among all immediately neighboring census tracts.

Because both case study regions historically and currently host large Black and White populations with other groups being less represented, and because this analysis is primarily interested in how majority-White populations respond to the proximity and growth of outgroups, this variable is formulated to calculate the proportion of Black residents within census tracts. The *Adjacent Tracts* variable is derived from the *Polygon Neighbors* function of ArcGIS, which retrieves selected data from all adjacent polygons within a chosen geography, along with the number of adjacent polygons to the one being examined. In this project, the data selected for retrieval were “Total Population” and “Total Population Black or African American”, with these population counts summed within their respective categories using the *SUMIF* function in Excel. These totals are subsequently divided by the number of neighboring polygons from which these data were derived, then made into a proportion by dividing the aggregated Black population count by the total population, resulting in a mean Black percentage of each tract’s immediate neighbors.

Operationalizing Integration

This project’s identification and measurement of integration relies on the geographic scale of its primary unit of analysis, the census tract, as well as its use of race-relevant variables. In this analysis, integration is treated as the opportunity or potential that residents have to interact with significant quantities of Black neighbors, at both the census tract and county levels. It is essentially determined by examining two aspects of diversity: diversity within the examined unit(s) and the diversity of tracts in proximity. *Diversity can exist at the county or regional scale in the absence of integration, but integration is evident as diversity at the local scale.*

Integration is relative, and is primarily discussed and measured in observed tract subsets of the population.³⁹ At the tract subset level, when tracts show low racial diversity (as evident through a low Black population proportion), and Black residents are either underrepresented or White residents are overrepresented (with low LQ Black or high LQ White, respectively) with low AdjTract levels, this typically indicates a high level of White racial isolation. Census tracts are evaluated in a similar way. The census tract is used by many researchers to serve as a proxy for neighborhoods (Lee et al., 2019), which can experience levels of internal segregation but are generally conceived to provide opportunities for social interaction among residents. A low in-tract proportion of Black residents, combined high LQ White or low LQ Black scores and a low AdjTract level indicate that the tract is likely in a segregated portion of the case study county. Cases in which the in-tract racial composition indicates the low presence of Black residents but with higher AdjTract proportions (signaling a greater proportion of Blacks in neighboring tracts) indicates that the tract itself is racially isolated.⁴⁰

4.11 OLS Regression Analysis Models

This analysis, which is primarily structured to test the validity of the Racial Threat Hypothesis as the explanation for regional transit support's failure in the selected case study regions, requires a model that accounts for racial and diversity-based factors as well as any contextual, social, or economic variables that may contribute to a transit ballot measure's success or failure. The iterations of the full regional model captures all of these variables, featuring those that signify both racial demographic change, intergroup proximity, and levels of existing

³⁹ E.g., tracts that supported the Republican candidate, high LQ White tracts, etc.

⁴⁰ This may indicate a likelihood of internal segregation between racial groups if the disparity between in-tract Black population proportion and AdjTract proportion is large.

diversity, which would be potential predictors of the presence of racial threat (see Figure 5). In addition, because this analysis also seeks to understand potential complementary or alternative explanations such as the spatial legacy of racism or the dominance of partisan attitudes, and because several hypotheses have been advanced in order to test for elements of these three explanations, the models have been formulated to respond to these hypotheses. Because of the interrelated and sometimes mutually dependent nature of many of these variables, special care was taken to avoid exacerbating multicollinearity in these models.

4.11.1 Primary OLS Regression Equation Series - Regional and County Models

For each case of Atlanta and Detroit, two models are run ($y = \text{Transit [Yes]}$):

Model A (LQ Black): $y = b_0 + b_1(\text{LQ Black}) + b_2(\text{AMI}) + b_3(\text{NoVehicle}) + b_4(\text{density}) + b_5(\text{partisan (Rep)})$

Model B (AdjTract): $y = b_0 + b_1(\text{AdjTract}) + b_2(\text{AMI}) + b_3(\text{NoVehicle}) + b_4(\text{density}) + b_5(\text{partisan (Rep)})$

Figure 5 Regional and county models for Primary OLS Regression Analysis

4.11.2 Urban and Suburban Community Behavior, and Defining Suburban Status

A foundational assumption of this analysis, that political, racial, and spatial tensions have historically defined the relationship between urban and suburban communities in segregated regions, prompted the decision to apply the statistical model to suburban counties that received population outflows from the urban Atlanta and Detroit. This choice is in line with the project's contention that there are conceptual differences between the political and social interests of suburban and urban voters. More precisely, those who choose to move to or remain in less dense

communities outside of the central city with lower racial and economic diversity are likely to exhibit values and priorities less oriented towards sustained social integration than who choose to move to or are lacking the resources to leave diverse urban communities.

In this analysis, suburban areas are identified as select counties that either neighbor the region's central city or are directly adjacent to that city's host county. Counties that contain central cities were excluded: because transit ballot measures are frequently tabulated at the county level, this avoids problems of inclusion and measurement owing to the porous nature of municipal boundaries, as well as creating complex selection criteria for what typifies 'suburban character', which can be subjective. In this study, the northern metro counties of Oakland and Macomb as the suburban subjects of the Detroit case, and Gwinnett and Clayton County were identified for the Atlanta case study. All four counties have historically held oppositional or combative relationships with their neighboring central cities, and all were sites of White population influx during the period of White Flight from Detroit and Atlanta.

4.12 Limitations and Elements to Consider

While this study and the means of description and measurement were carefully selected (and adapted when necessary), it does have shortcomings. An example can be found with the choice of employing a comparative case study as the primary method. While the case selection itself was appropriate - the regions that were chosen contained cities that represented exemplary cases, reflecting both a regional distribution across the country as well as elements such as growth and decline, relative segregation, complex racial histories, and current-day political change - a larger *N* study, with data gathered from most or all major metropolitan regions with

transit referenda, may have had more explanatory power. However, it would also have lacked the deeper contextual analysis that is only possible with a few cases.

Another example pertains to the use of the GIS tool, Spatial Join. While this tool makes it possible to analyze electoral and demographic data at the census tract level, there are some inaccuracies that cannot be avoided. The unreliability of VTDs coinciding with census tract boundaries necessitated the use of centroids in order to distill and pair the data. This serves to preserve the maximum amount of each VTD's data possible for the analysis. However, because some VTDs straddle more than one census tract, the distribution of voters throughout those VTDs that would presumably fall into multiple tracts is instead apportioned entirely to the census tract which contains each VTD's centroid. While this does potentially lead to some minor geographic inaccuracies at a granular level, the preservation of all electoral data and its placement predominantly within appropriate tracts or adjacent ones (which generally share similar characteristics) creates minimal discernible inaccuracies when evenly distributed across counties, particularly when tracts are aggregated for analysis.

A limitation of this analysis, which was carefully considered but was ultimately beyond this project's scope, pertains to precisely identifying the mechanisms that animate the relationship between increasing diversity and greater support for public transportation. Three highly plausible and non-mutually exclusive explanations are alluded to, based on segregation and intergroup contact literatures as well as the findings of this analysis. The first pertains to the migration of formerly urbanized Black⁴¹ people to suburban communities and counties, which is both discussed in the historical narratives of Chapter 2 and demonstrated through analyzing demographic data in Chapter 5. The absolute and relative increase of Black residents in the suburbs, even in the absence of social or demographic effects on the pre-existing population,

⁴¹ Or, in some cases, Deep South rural migrants or former residents of other metro regions.

would directly serve to increase voter support for regional transit through sheer force of numbers.⁴² Many of the census tracts in once-majority-White but currently majority-Black Clayton County show evidence of this phenomenon, with both increases in democratic voting support and the passage of its 2014 MARTA referendum coinciding with this increase in the county's Black population.

A second explanation for the connection between increased diversity and greater transit support is 'geographic sorting', meaning the tendency of regional residents to remain in their communities or move to new ones in response to changing circumstances, such as demographic change or political shifts⁴³ (Martin and Webster 2020, Lang and Pearson-Merkowitz 2015). These residential choices frequently reflect personal preferences for living in communities that reflect one's values or desires. Demographic analysis of northern and eastern portions of Gwinnett County, for example, substantiate the strong likelihood of geographic sorting taking place, with its White populations changing dramatically during times that coincide with massive influxes of Black, Latino, and Asian in neighboring census tracts⁴⁴.

The final explanation for this connection between diversity and transit support is the consequences of exposure to (out)groups who support transit. A foundational assumption in this analysis asserts that social contact with other groups will lower hostility between them, resulting in the potential for identifying mutually beneficial interests and arrangements (Tropp and Pettigrew 2005, Pettigrew 1998). Census tracts along Eight Mile Road in Oakland County, where the presence of Black residents in majority-White tracts coincides with disproportionately high

⁴² Assuming that Black voters disproportionately support transit and equity-related policies. Various social scientific literatures and comparative analyses of census tracts with varying proportions of Black residents in this project support this assertion.

⁴³ Reactive residential choices prompted by cost-of-living concerns could be placed in under the umbrella of geographic sorting. However, presumably because such moves are often compelled by necessity rather than values, and because the communities selected more likely reflect economic circumstances rather than preferences, this motivation is not frequently included in discussions of entirely voluntary residential decision-making.

⁴⁴ Which, based on historical and recent accounts of regional demographic change, implies that White residents are leaving the county or concentrating in fewer portions of it.

regional transit and Democratic presidential support⁴⁵ compared to tracts with fewer Black voters in the region, suggest that the integration along this corridor had a discernible effect on voting patterns. Despite the perceived presence of any of these mechanisms within case study counties, identifying and implementing a means of discerning which are at play in a given tract is infeasible and thus outside of the scope of this project. This is partially due to the likelihood of all three mechanisms operating at varying levels in each county, but attempting the task would also be impractical because these three mechanisms can act in concert or even in sequence.⁴⁶

4.13 Conclusion

The methods detailed above were carefully selected to provide sufficient evidence to answer a very complex question, which lies at the intersection of multiple social and political issues: *What role does large-scale racial demographic change and integration play in determining support for regional transit expansion in segregated metro regions?* The diverse set of literatures that were engaged to conceptualize this question, the multiple geographic and political scales at which this question had to be discussed, and the interacting forces that influence attitudes and behaviors around regional transit all benefit from employing a mixed methods approach. Leaning primarily on one method would have failed to provide both deep qualitative understandings of the racial-spatial politics present in case study regions and data-driven clarity on which demographic traits and conditions are contributing most heavily to voter behavior.

⁴⁵ Meaning higher than could be accounted for purely by adding reliably Democratic and transit-voting Black people to the population.

⁴⁶ For example, Black population increases can drive the exodus of some White residents but leave behind those who are unperturbed by a greater Black residential presence. Those remaining White residents might either have greater pre-existing sympathy for transit and Democratic partisan support or else develop it through greater intergroup contact with Black newcomers. Spaces that reflect those values and interests may, in turn, attract more residents with whom those values resonate.

Additionally, this project benefits from the alternative explanation framework, which prioritizes providing a nuanced analysis of what drives a group's support for social goods, particularly under historically contentious conditions. While discussing alternative explanations is more conventionally relegated to a small section in a findings and conclusions chapter, bringing these alternatives directly into the discussion of racial threat allows us to evaluate their merit more critically, as well as when different aspects of what we are observing warrant considering different explanations. It is tempting to shrink the scope of potential sociopolitical forces that are considered valid down to one during the analysis while excluding all others, but as stated above, the complexity of the research question demanded a sensitive, inclusive analysis that could follow wherever the data led it. With the diversity of methods employed and an upfront examination of possibly interrelated alternative explanations, I believe that this analysis was well-suited to that aim.

Chapter 5 Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reveals and discusses the findings of the analyses outlined in Chapter 4. Because this project utilized a mixed-methods approach that included GIS mapping, analyzing demographic change, and regression analysis, the findings will be initially introduced in the context of the method yielding the results, then discussed below in a manner that integrates the data from each method to provide each assertion's evidence. Furthermore, as discussed in the Methodology chapter, the findings in this chapter will be largely organized to address the four hypotheses upon which this project is based:

1. Metro regions and cities that have historically been more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods.
2. Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.
3. Non-urban Whites in proximity to urban minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites.
4. Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites.

Characteristics of the case study populations, which I have determined to provide evidence for the presence or absence of Racial Threat, will be presented with the relevant hypothesis, and will be supported by a combination of spatial, demographic, and statistical data as appropriate. Each test to support or undermine these hypotheses will be concluded by identifying the alternative explanations that are most valid based on evidence, as well as how that evidence meets the previously stated thresholds for each explanation. These alternative explanations are:

- a.) Racial Threat Hypothesis
- b.) Spatial Legacies of Racism
- c.) Simple Partisanship

This chapter will begin with a presentation of demographic and social background data for the case study regions, including descriptive statistics for each of the four examined counties. I then present the findings of the comparative case study by addressing the four hypotheses, the characteristics-based analyses that serve as tests for each, and how each test provides evidence for meeting thresholds for each alternative explanation. This will be followed by a presentation of the results of the primary OLS regression analysis for the case study regions and a discussion of the variables that were most and least consequential in the statistical model. These results provide a link to much of the demographic analysis that precedes it, and promotes a discussion of the role of partisanship as a variable of great significance in this project. I conclude the chapter with a summary of how each hypothesis' test results illustrate if conditions were met or failed to meet the threshold for indicating the operation of Racial Threat. Further discussion of these results in political, historical, and social context will take place in the final chapter of this dissertation project.

	White	Black	AMI	LQ White	LQ Black	NoVehicle	Density	Partisan (Rep)	Transit (Yes)	AdjTract
Mean	0.7934	0.1269	67228.42	1.0105	1.0969	0.0562	3225.6572	0.4779	0.4738	0.1307
Standard Error	0.0091	0.0084	1210.17	0.0118	0.0672	0.0025	85.6668	0.0073	0.0049	0.0074
Median	0.8678	0.0473	61159.00	1.0845	0.4371	0.0379	2971.1190	0.5077	0.4640	0.0644
Mode	0.0000	0.0000	57692.00	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.5370	N/A	N/A
Standard Deviation	0.2078	0.1921	27436.49	0.2675	1.5291	0.0574	1949.7443	0.1653	0.1105	0.1685
Sample Variance	0.0432	0.0369	752760883.58	0.0716	2.3381	0.0033	3801502.7128	0.0273	0.0122	0.0284
Kurtosis	3.4104	5.7677	1.11	2.9977	3.9139	6.0994	1.7699	0.1919	-0.4732	5.5768
Skewness	-1.9365	2.4916	1.03	-1.7558	2.1265	2.1839	0.7023	-0.8392	0.3876	2.3756
Range	0.9805	0.9533	161390.00	1.3004	7.1412	0.3674	15088.4800	0.7674	0.5313	0.8972
Minimum	0.0000	0.0000	13169.00	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0136	0.2365	0.0044
Maximum	0.9805	0.9533	174559.00	1.3004	7.1412	0.3674	15088.4800	0.7810	0.7678	0.9016
Sum	411.0008	65.7258	34555406.00	523.4421	568.1928	28.8628	1670890.4373	247.5623	245.4167	67.7232
Count	518	518	514	518	518	518	518	518	518	518

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics, Detroit Metro Region

	White	Black	AMI	LQ White	LQ Black	NoVehicle	Density	Partisan (Rep)	Transit (Yes)	AdjTract
Mean	0.3801	0.3851	61375.11	0.9925	0.9708	0.0485	2563.3251	0.3262	0.5870	0.3968
Standard Error	0.0172	0.0197	2007.60	0.0414	0.0372	0.0043	113.7446	0.0154	0.0138	0.0175
Median	0.3885	0.3040	56690.00	0.9002	0.9163	0.0250	2322.9305	0.3122	0.5872	0.3125
Mode	0.3820	0.1870	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.0000	N/A	0.3012	0.6728	0.7472
Standard Deviation	0.2093	0.2393	24423.46	0.5031	0.4528	0.0518	1383.7633	0.1864	0.1667	0.2133
Sample Variance	0.0438	0.0573	596505547.70	0.2531	0.2050	0.0027	1914800.9692	0.0347	0.0278	0.0455
Kurtosis	-0.8542	-0.5730	0.4618	11.1357	1.1807	1.1928	5.1047	-1.2589	-1.1501	-0.7822
Skewness	0.0768	0.7311	0.7939	2.3407	0.8997	1.4069	1.7942	0.1452	-0.0540	0.6646
Range	0.8783	0.9733	128248.00	3.7947	2.5327	0.2156	8366.8780	0.6626	0.6698	0.8528
Minimum	0.0087	0.0020	25038.00	0.0550	0.0072	0.0000	388.0200	0.0313	0.2580	0.0400
Maximum	0.8870	0.9753	153286.00	3.8497	2.5399	0.2156	8754.8980	0.6939	0.9278	0.8928
Sum	56.2514	56.9984	9083516.00	146.8939	143.6760	7.1776	379372.1210	47.6269	85.7007	58.7209
Count	149	149	149	149	149	149	149	149	149	149

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics, Atlanta Metro Region

5.2 Demographic and Spatial Analysis - Testing Hypotheses

The comparative case study component of this dissertation, as well as the spatial and demographic analyses that support it, offers a means of detailing the findings of this dissertation with incorporated contextual elements that allow for a meaningful interpretation of those findings. The section below presents those findings as they pertain to the four hypotheses, all of

which underpin this project's contention that the Racial Threat Hypothesis explains regional transit voting behavior in segregated metro regions. Subsets of each region's census tracts and their behavior or characteristics are discussed as tests of the validity of each hypothesis. Each test concludes with a statistical analysis to determine the significance of its findings, and each hypothesis section concludes with an evaluation of the appropriateness of the Racial Threat Hypothesis as an explanation for the outcomes illustrated by the aforementioned tests.

5.2.1 Hypothesis 1: Metro regions and cities that are more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods (Integration and social goods)

This hypothesis presupposes that reaching a threshold of racial integration or maintaining a state of population heterogeneity for a prolonged period fosters conditions that promote greater voter support for social goods such as public transit. This operates under assumptions that intergroup contact, facilitated by exposure to members of racial outgroups (that might otherwise be seen as competitors for resources) in less segregated spaces, decreases feelings of threat or hostility and lowers barriers to forming collective priorities. Segregation, even with a level of proximity between racial or ethnic groups, would make such intergroup trust difficult to form, thus presenting barriers to broad support for shared development for public use. In the context of the case study regions, we would expect that, as census tracts surpass a low level of non-White representation and attain higher levels of racial diversity, their support for regional transit will increase. However, this increase is expected to be disproportionately large compared to the percentage of minority voters, as both raw demographic change and intergroup contact should theoretically be in operation.

In order to evaluate the relevance and operation of this hypothesis, this analysis identified variables that directly point to levels of relative diversity and racial concentration, as well as

sought physical sites where intergroup contact and significant demographic change were most likely to occur. I isolated and examined census tracts with *high LQ Black* scores in both metro regions and, in Metro Detroit, also examined the tracts located within five miles of the Wayne County border along Eight Mile Road.

High LQ Black tracts

As discussed above, tracts with high LQ Black most often indicate the presence of greater diversity, rather than homogeneity, in a segregated region. In this analysis, tracts possessing high LQ Black status are those with scores above 1.0, showing that Black residents are proportionally overrepresented within the tract in comparison to the county average. Because LQ is indexed to each county’s demographics, it does not rely on a fixed quantity or proportion to signify diversity. Rather, high LQ Black points to tracts that have attracted a greater proportion of Black residents,⁴⁷ creating a greater likelihood of interracial contact. High LQ Black tracts are thus ideal for testing a hypothesis pertaining to diversity’s effects on voting for social goods production.

County	Proportion of Tracts	Mean Transit Support	County Mean Transit Support	Mean Republican Support	County Mean Republican Support	Mean LQ Black	Mean County LQ Black	Mean Black Percentage	Mean County Black Percentage	Mean White Percentage	Mean County White Percentage	Mean AdjTract	County Mean AdjTract
Clayton	25/50	77.4	74.9	9.3	14.0	1.2486	0.9914	79.9	63.4	9.8	15.9	72.9	64.9
Gwinnett	45/113	52.7	50.1	32.6	41.4	1.4917	0.9911	49.3	27.0	35.7	48.2	41.0	27.3
Macomb	76/217	47.1	41.7	43.4	53.3	2.3681	1.0975	20.3	9.5	72.9	84.7	18.2	10.4
Oakland	89/338	61.5	50.95	23.2	44.3	3.2683	1.0731	44.1	14.5	45.6	76.5	38.2	14.7

Table 4 High LQ Black Census Tracts, Detroit and Atlanta Metropolitan Counties

⁴⁷ Or lost a greater proportion of White residents in many cases, which often occurs in concert with increasing Black proportion

Overall Observed Trends

The presence of case study counties representing near-extremes in proportion of Black residents, with Macomb County possessing a relatively small Black population by percentage, Clayton County having a large percentage of Black residents, and both Oakland and Gwinnett falling within that distribution, which provides an opportunity to examine how high LQ Black works differently at different degrees of overall county diversity. As inferred from the hypothesis that high levels of diversity produce greater support for social goods production, tracts that are overrepresented with Black residents (as all high LQ Black tracts inherently are) outperform the county as a whole in transit support, with higher mean support among these tracts than the county mean. Within the case study counties, there is furthermore a relationship between racial diversity (measured through mean Black percentage) and transit support. However, the relative concentration of Black residents in these high LQ Black tracts appears to amplify the effect of influencing transit support: high Black density within these tracts appears to be as or more important than the broader diversity of the county as a whole, meaning that the relative level of Black representation may be a stronger indicator of transit support than the raw percentage of Black residents (see Table 4).

In direct contrast to (though theoretically in line with) the case of transit support, high LQ Black tracts display lower voter support for the 2016 Republican presidential candidate than the county as a whole, with the mean voter support in this subset of tracts being lower than the county mean. We can thus infer that overrepresentation of Blacks has a relationship to decreased conservative electoral support, either through dampened conservative voter turnout, the flight of more conservative residents from these more diverse tracts, or a lowering of outgroup threat responses that are associated with conservative voting in the racial threat literature. Similar to

transit support, the level of mean Black overrepresentation appears to have a moderating effect on the impact of racial composition on transit support, meaning that both LQ Black and the overall Black percentage together appear to indicate a likelihood of high transit support. However, this may also be indicative of each county's relationship with integration: the two counties that have a more recent and intense history of resistance to integration (Macomb and Gwinnett) display both the lowest mean support for transit and the highest mean support for the Republican presidential candidate, despite Gwinnett having a higher overall percentage of Black residents than Oakland County, which has a somewhat less hostile history of Black settlement.

Detroit Metro Region

In the suburban counties of the Detroit Metro Region, tracts where Black residents are overrepresented are primarily located along the Wayne County line on Eight Mile Road, but can also be found along the Gratiot Avenue Corridor through much of Macomb County and in the city of Pontiac in central Oakland County. However, because northern counties are demographically dominated by their White populations, even tracts with high Black location quotients are most often still majority-White, particularly in Macomb County.

The high LQ Black tracts in Oakland and Macomb Counties contrast dramatically. Even in the tracts with disproportionately high proportions of Black residents in Macomb, the mean Black population percentage remains comparatively small (20.3 percent). Oakland County's greater relative integration (both within communities and throughout the county more generally) is evident in its population proportions, which are more consistent with a moderately rapid trajectory of diversification. Further evidence of differences in county diversity are reflected in the mean percentage of Black residents in adjacent tracts: Macomb County's most densely Black

tracts have a mean AdjTract percentage of 18.2 percent, which implies that high LQ Black tracts harbor few Black people, that the vast majority of suburban Macomb's Black residents are highly concentrated in a few census tracts, or both. By contrast, Oakland County's mean *AdjTract* percentage level (38.2 percent) implies that tracts with high Black percentages are still clustered and contain the majority of the county's Black population, but that they are much less so than in Macomb.

Each county's voting behavior underscores the differences in relative diversity, providing evidence of a relationship between areas of White racial homogeneity and more conservative policy positions. Reflective of the fact that even Macomb's most densely Black tracts largely remained majority-White, and noting the county's voting behavior in the 2016 elections, its high LQ Black tracts still showed a mean of 43.4 percent support for the Republican presidential candidate and 47.1 percent support for the regional transit initiative, showing a functional nullification of Black, liberal voting power. In contrast, Oakland County's high LQ Black tracts strongly rejected the Republican presidential candidate in 2016, with only 23.3 percent support. Furthermore, these tracts showed solid support for the RTA millage, with a mean support level of 61.5 percent.

At 95% confidence (p-value of > 0.001), the null hypothesis, that high LQ Black tracts have similar transit support levels as the populations of all other Oakland and Macomb County tracts, is rejected.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Detroit Metro Region: High LQ Black		
	High LQ Black	All Other Tracts
Mean	0.548289195	0.441372057
Variance	0.008851779	0.010232814
Observations	157	361
Pooled Variance	0.009815292	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	516	
t Stat	11.28844884	
P(T<=t) one-tail	7.29636E-27	
t Critical one-tail	2.333596293	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.45927E-26	
t Critical two-tail	2.585390767	

Table 5 Two-sample T-test of high LQ Black tracts and all other tracts, Atlanta Metro Region

Atlanta Metro Region

Clayton County’s high LQ Black tracts are heavily concentrated in the portion of the county west of Interstate 75 and U.S. Highway 41, a primary connector that bisects the city of Atlanta to the north. Gwinnett County’s high LQ Black tracts display slightly more spatial dispersion, occupying much of southern and central Gwinnett, as well as small pockets of tracts in the county’s larger cities. High LQ Black tracts in Gwinnett, as a rapidly diversifying county that recently shows less of the segregation that has long-defined Atlanta and its host county of Fulton, have a plurality of Black residents (slightly under 50 percent) and a significant White residential presence, as well as many other minority groups that have settled in the county.

With the abundance of Black residents in this subset of Clayton County tracts, the mean transit support reaches approximately 77 percent, slightly above the average support for all Clayton tracts. Gwinnett County’s high LQ Black tracts had mean transit support levels significantly lower than those of high LQ Black tracts in Clayton, proportionally in line with its lower share of Black residents. While these tracts have a higher mean share of Republican voters

than the examined tracts in Clayton, almost exactly half of voters in these Gwinnett tracts are Black. Higher transit support, relative to the county as a whole, in tracts with a higher percentage of Black residents, may be a sign of the sheer force or numbers, as according to scholarly research, the presence of larger Black populations is associated with lower support for liberal policies and social goods production among White voters (Enos 2016, Donovan 2010).

At 95% confidence (p-value of 0.01595), the null hypothesis, that high LQ Black tracts have similar transit support levels as the populations of all other Clayton and Gwinnett County tracts, is rejected.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Atlanta Metro Region: High LQ Black		
	High LQ Black	All Other Tracts
Mean	0.616128195	0.552333863
Variance	0.029702393	0.03234648
Observations	62	86
Pooled Variance	0.031241759	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	146	
t Stat	2.166349731	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.015953643	
t Critical one-tail	2.352159981	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.031907287	
t Critical two-tail	2.609922682	

Table 6 Two-sample T-test of high LQ Black tracts and all other tracts, Atlanta Metro Region

Tracts in proximity to Eight Mile Road

The communities bordering Eight Mile Road, the boundary separating Detroit and the remainder of Wayne County from the northern counties of Macomb and Oakland, have historically existed in a state of tension, initially over resistance to racial integration and more recently over regional governance and cooperative efforts. However, as this boundary became

more porous and Black residents from Detroit began making their homes in these suburban communities, the social and racial politics of the past have also changed. This portion of the analysis will evaluate how well those politics are reflecting the demographic changes experienced by communities on both sides of Eight Mile Road, and explores if the politics of diversity have supplanted those of historical exclusion. To accomplish this, data from all census tracts within 5 miles of Eight Mile Road to both the north and south were gathered and analyzed.

County	Tracts that Supported Transit	Mean Transit Support	County Mean Transit Support	Tracts that Supported Republican Candidate	Mean Republican Support	County Mean Republican Support	Mean LQ White	Mean LQ Black	Mean Black Percentage	Mean County Black Percentage	Mean White Percentage	Mean County White Percentage	Mean AdjTract	County Mean AdjTract
Macomb	15/76	45.7	41.7	36/76	45.6	53.3	0.9621	1.5597	13.4	9.5	80.7	84.7	15.3	10.4
Oakland	89/107	59.4	50.95	10/107	30.9	44.3	0.8741	1.9561	26.4	14.5	65.7	76.5	26.8	14.7
Wayne	233/271	60.8	56.6	36/271	14.4	22.9	0.5349	1.7221	69.3	48.3	26.4	45.1	67.2	46.9

Table 7 Census Tracts Within Five Miles of Eight Mile Road, Detroit Metropolitan Region

Looking at the demographic data, the overrepresentation of Black residents (LQ Black) along this corridor in all three counties gives indication of how tracts in this portion of the region show higher transit support levels than each county’s mean. However, each county’s other indicators of diversity, their proportion of Black residents and LQ White, also prove predictive of their levels of support: as LQ White increases towards 1.0 and as Black population percentage decreases, transit support decreases. Interestingly, despite the strong demographic differences between Oakland and Wayne tracts, they both show strong transit support (approximately 60 percent in both cases). Macomb County, conversely, did not demonstrate mean transit support sufficient for the ballot measure to have passed even in this more racially diverse subset of the county, despite being more demographically similar to Oakland County. Another consequential difference is apparent in the way that partisanship coincides with transit support. In both Wayne and Oakland Counties, only small percentages of tracts demonstrated majority support for the

2016 Republican president, and mean support for that candidate within tracts was inversely proportional to their mean Black populations. Macomb's transit support seems more complicated. Its mean level of transit support and mean support for the Republican presidential candidate were nearly identical, showing a disconnection between partisanship and transit support that was not seen in the other counties. This would imply that, while transit is at least partly a partisan issue in addition to being a race-relevant one in Oakland and Wayne Counties, it is less partisan but still racially influenced in Macomb.

The OLS regression model, when applied to better-integrated and more diverse⁴⁸ subset of the Eight Mile-proximate census tracts, corroborates these findings. Measures of racial diversity and concentration, AdjTract and LQ Black, both exert more influence on the models than any other variable. However, in this zone of greater racial diversity relative to the broader region, their coefficients are positive, implying that the Black representation and proximity has positive impacts on transit support, rather than the negative impacts it has in less diverse portions of the region. Support for the Republican presidential candidate is only significant in the model that takes adjacent tract Black populations into account, but its positive coefficient is a marked shift from the full region's effects, implying the aforementioned disconnection of partisanship from transit support, though its source cannot confidently be solely attributed to Macomb County.

⁴⁸ Relative to their respective counties and the region as a whole.

Variables	Coefficients (Std. Error)	
	(A)	(B)
AMI	0.170** (0.000)	0.114* (0.000)
LQ Black	0.331** (0.006)	
AdjTract		0.788** (0.030)
NoVehicle	0.315** (0.068)	0.070 (0.068)
Density	0.109* (0.000)	0.031 (0.000)
Partisan (Rep)	-0.048 (0.042)	0.278** (0.048)
R2	0.244	0.341
Adjusted R2	0.236	0.334
N	477	477

a. Dependent Variable: Transit (Yes)

b. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

c. Unit of analysis is census tracts in suburban counties.

Table 8 OLS Regression Analysis – Eight Mile Road buffer tracts (LQ Black and AdjTract Explanatory Variables)

Evaluation of Hypothesis 1: Metro regions and cities that are more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- High LQ Black tracts: condition met
- Eight Mile Road buffer tracts: condition met

5.2.2 Hypothesis 2: Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.

This hypothesis operates under the assumption that portions of a metro region that lack racial diversity will exhibit hostility to race-relevant reforms for several theory-based reasons: the voters expect to receive either little or an under-representative proportion of the benefits of such reforms (Luttmer, 2001); they perceive such reforms as potentially disadvantageous in a relative sense, giving minorities a means of acquiring greater freedoms or influence (Darity et al., 2015); or they have concerns that some reforms may provide them greater access to physical, sociopolitical, or economic domains to which residents of these areas of the region have historically had near-exclusive access (Donovan, 2013). This hypothesis, when it is operationalized, contains elements of each alternative explanation:

- The presence of *racial threat* would be indicated by opposition to policies or development deemed beneficial to minority residents because it might increase their relative power;
- *A spatial legacy of racism* would be illustrated in the fact that areas that have traditionally been exclusionary (and often continue to be) are voting disproportionately (meaning at levels beyond what can be explained by partisanship) as if they view minority populations in oppositional terms.
- *Simple partisanship* would be indicated if levels of support or opposition to race-relevant policies were similar to indicators of partisan alignment, such as support for the Republican presidential candidate.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ This can be complex to discern, as support for the 2016 Republican presidential candidate itself has been hypothesized as a possible indicator of racial threat.

In the context of the case study regions, we would expect that census tracts that have high percentages of White residents, particularly relative to the county as a whole, will vote in opposition to transit development in greater proportion than the county mean. In addition, in testing the analytical connection between racially homogeneous suburban voting patterns and race-relevant policy, we would expect that the least diverse census tracts in Macomb and Oakland Counties would strongly support Michigan's 2006 Affirmative Action ballot measure in greater proportion than the counties as a whole.

To test this hypothesis, I identified tracts designated as "high LQ White" (having LQ White scores greater than 1.0) as those most appropriate to evaluate for their voter support for transit. In addition, as discussed above, demographic and statistical analyses of the results of Michigan's 2006 Affirmative Action ballot measure reveal the patterns of directly race-relevant policy support which, theoretically, is not inherently tied to partisanship.

As described in the High LQ Black section, the selection of case study counties provides demographic variety, which resulted in a tract's designation as high LQ White potentially representing several differing racial dynamics within tracts. Because metropolitan counties outside of major urban centers are frequently majority-White, tracts that are identified as high LQ White tend to be racially homogeneous with a majority of residents being White. However, the presence of racially diverse and strongly majority-Black counties in this study undermines this generalization and gives insights into the behavior of tracts that are disproportionately white but still diverse. Because high LQ White tracts can represent areas that have either fended off Black residential incursion to remain majority-White or else contain the remaining White residents who have yet to leave counties undergoing strong demographic change, this subset of

census tracts is well-suited to examining the validity of a hypothesis concerning homogeneity's impact on race-relevant policy.

High LQ White Tracts

Overall Trends

Tracts designated as high LQ White, consistent with the hypothesis that areas that are more homogeneously White will show more hostility to race-relevant policies with positive implications for minorities, displayed higher levels of opposition to regional transit in their respective ballot measures than their counties as a whole. In addition, there is a strong relationship between transit support and the degree of White population proportion in these tracts relative to the county mean in census tracts: counties with a small difference between high LQ White tracts' White population and that of the county population as a whole tend to show lower levels of support for transit (this effect is identical for Black proportions of populations). This result was unexpected, as this hypothesis suggests that census tracts that are much less diverse (or having a higher proportion of White residents) than the county in general would show lower levels of transit support. However, this effect is confounded by the fact that the aforementioned difference between the White population of high LQ White tracts and the county mean of White populations is not connected to the *absolute* level of diversity in the county or its high LQ White tracts.

Though a statistically significant direct relationship between LQ and transit support exists when observing the datasets of each region and county, the results are less clear when observing the means of each county in the high LQ White subset, due entirely to the behavior of Oakland County. Despite its lack of diversity relative to the Georgia case study counties, Oakland County

proportionally outperforms all counties in both low Republican support and high transit support and outperforms all counties except Clayton in absolute terms. This occurs in spite of being a less diverse county than Gwinnett, which may indicate that liberal partisanship acts as a mitigating force, which is indicated in partisanship’s high significance levels in the OLS regression analysis. Oakland County’s behavior could weaken the case that less diversity results in greater hostility to both social goods production and constructive race-relevant policies, even if the trend generally is supported by the other counties. In addition, contrasting the transit support outcomes of the high LQ White subset from the complete dataset corroborates this analysis’ assumption that lower-diversity, majority-White areas tend to show lower support for beneficial race-relevant policy and greater support for policies (or candidates) that stand to harm minority interests, regardless of the outcome between cases within this LQ White subset. Mirroring the relationship between diversity and transit support, high LQ White tracts support the 2016 Republican presidential candidate at higher levels than the overall county mean, supporting the hypothesis. Similar patterns emerge as in the examination of transit support, with Oakland County proving itself to be an outlier while the other case study counties display a proportional inverse relationship between Republican support and both LQ White and Mean Percentage Black.

County	Proportion of Tracts	Mean Transit Support	County Mean Transit Support	Mean Republican Support	County Mean Republican Support	Mean LQ White	Mean County LQ White	Mean Black Percentage	Mean County Black Percentage	Mean White Percentage	Mean County White Percentage	Mean AdjTract	County Mean AdjTract
Clayton	18/50	70	74.9	21.1	14	1.7450	1.0069	46.4	63.4	27.6	15.9	56.5	64.9
Gwinnett	54/113	42.5	50.1	52.3	41.4	1.2736	0.9707	19.8	27	60.8	48.2	23.5	27.3
Macomb	139/217	38.9	41.7	58.9	53.3	1.0899	1.0092	3.8	9.5	91.5	84.7	6.7	10.4
Oakland	230/338	47	50.95	52	44.3	1.1926	1.0209	3.8	14.5	89.6	76.5	6.7	14.7

Table 9 High LQ White Census Tracts, Detroit and Atlanta Metropolitan Counties

Detroit Metro Region

Areas where White residents were overrepresented in the northern counties, meaning those with a LQ White index greater than 1.0, generally are home to those living in very homogenous communities, as the overall percentage of White residents in Oakland and Macomb Counties were 75.1 percent and 83.9 percent in 2010, respectively. While many of the northernmost tracts in each county have not experienced significant racial diversification or even exposure through outgroup proximity, there are instances of high LQ White tracts in communities bordering Eight Mile Road, such as Farmington and Royal Oak. This reflects both the increasing access that minority groups have gained in Macomb and Oakland, as well as the fact that there are still enclaves that resist significant integration, remaining more densely White than their neighbors. This measure of racial concentration provides opportunities to observe how relative group insulation informs partisan behavior and policy support.

Areas with high White LQs in the suburban counties were generally areas of the strongest support for the 2016 Republican candidate as well as opposition to the RTA ballot proposal. However, Oakland and Macomb experienced meaningful dissimilarities in both their support levels and the racial composition of those tracts. Once-rationally insulated Macomb County, which continues to host a small percentage of Black residents relative to the other metro counties, nonetheless experienced substantial proportional increases in its Black population between 2000 and 2010, relative to neighboring Oakland County. Many of these areas of greatest Black population growth by proportion showed the greatest increase in voter support for the Republican candidate over the previous three election cycles. Similarly, many census tracts along Eight Mile Road that stood to benefit from transit infrastructure and service, which were also the sites of new Black population settlement, opposed transit at levels similar to communities in

northernmost Macomb, which stood to benefit little from transit. Notably, however, these tracts did not express support for the Republican candidate at equivalent levels to heavily isolated northern Macomb, but were similar to still high-LQ White central Macomb. High LQ White tracts in Oakland, conversely, showed much greater support for the Republican candidate relative to the rest of the county (though still substantially less than Macomb) but transit support more closely in line with the rest of the county. However, because Oakland is more racially diverse than Macomb, its high LQ White tracts are more relatively isolated and homogeneous than those of Macomb. This implies that high LQ White tracts in Macomb County, which is less diverse but undergoing more rapid racial change and has a shorter and more contentious history of racial integration, show a greater tendency to both support a more political conservative candidate and show less support for regional transit.

At 95% confidence (p-value of > 0.001), the null hypothesis, that High LQ White tracts have similar transit support levels as the populations of all other Oakland and Macomb County tracts, is rejected.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Detroit Metro Region: High LQ White		
	High LQ White	All Other Tracts
Mean	0.439980621	0.540019217
Variance	0.010730532	0.008539791
Observations	343	175
Pooled Variance	0.009991794	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	516	
t Stat	-10.7732579	
P(T<=t) one-tail	7.51951E-25	
t Critical one-tail	2.333596293	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.5039E-24	
t Critical two-tail	2.585390767	

Table 10 Two-sample T-test of high LQ White tracts and all other tracts, Detroit Metro Region

Atlanta Metro Region

While a high White location quotient signals a space of White overrepresentation, the Atlanta Metro Region's diversity level (relative to Detroit's suburban counties) produces areas of less racial homogeneity. The history of resistance to racial integration in the communities of Clayton and Gwinnett Counties bears a resemblance to that of Macomb and Oakland Counties. However, while Clayton began its process of intense racial integration earlier with heavy Black migration from Atlanta, Gwinnett resisted significant minority residential influxes until the last few decades, resulting in large portions of the county with much greater densities of White residents than the county's averages, often with demarcations as apparent and abrupt as that of Eight Mile Road in the Detroit region. However, the trajectory of Gwinnett County's rapid racial diversification has resulted in it having fewer and less densely populated enclaves of high LQ White than the Atlanta Metro Region as a whole, even those portions in greater proximity to the heavily Black-populated city of Atlanta.

The behavior of tracts with a high LQ White in the Atlanta Metro region appear to vary based on both the local racial demographic breakdown as well as the stability of those demographics. The duration of intergroup exposure and contact, even in a region historically marked by conflict, may also influence these behaviors. While the relative racial homogeneity (as measured by Percent White and LQ White) and isolation (measured by AdjTract) of these tracts does have a strong relationship with both their transit opposition and conservative voting levels, those that appear most prone to these tendencies are those that are experiencing rapid demographic change. This can best be illustrated in Gwinnett County: with its intense racial shifts of the last 30 years, even its census tracts of greatest White population density contain more diversity than the county average in 2000. However, more recently diversifying tracts in

moderate or moderately high LQ White spaces, such as in the northern portion of Gwinnett, more enthusiastically supported the 2016 Republican presidential candidate than similarly high LQ White spaces that have long had Black population representation, such as along the Dekalb and Fulton County boundaries. This suggests that their White populations are disproportionately voting Republican in comparison to more demographically stable high LQ White tracts. Similarly, Gwinnett’s high LQ White tracts that have experienced most of their minority growth over the last twenty years displayed lower support for the Gwinnett MARTA transit referendum than both more diverse tracts and those that are more densely White but began their racial integration in the 1990s. This includes high LQ White areas that stood to substantially benefit from the proposed transit expansion, such as the Sugar Hill and Dacula communities.

At 95% confidence (p-value > 0.001), the null hypothesis, that High LQ White tracts have similar transit support levels as the populations of all other Clayton and Gwinnett County tracts, is rejected.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Atlanta Metro Region: High LQ White		
	High LQ White	All Other Tracts
Mean	0.474722359	0.648225181
Variance	0.028794257	0.022384037
Observations	59	89
Pooled Variance	0.024930563	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	146	
t Stat	-6.545316534	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.71325E-10	
t Critical one-tail	2.352159981	
P(T<=t) two-tail	9.4265E-10	
t Critical two-tail	2.609922682	

Table 11 Two-sample T-test of high LQ White tracts and all other tracts, Atlanta Metro Region

Spatial, Demographic, OLS Regression Analysis - Michigan's 2006 Affirmative Action Vote

Regional transit tends to be a racialized issue in historically segregated metro regions, arousing concerns about minority access to communities, the use of tax dollars as a subsidy for poor minority accessibility, and the extension of often minority-run urban governance into suburban affairs. However, as evidenced in less-segregated or low-minority metro regions, public transportation is not inherently a contentious policy issue and can find enthusiastic coalitions in suburban, urban, and civic leadership. In order to evaluate the correctness of conceptualizing transit as a point of racial disharmony as it is conjectured to be in this project, this analysis identified a policy that is inherently racial to examine if it aroused similar patterns of voter support and opposition: Affirmative Action. The 2006 state-wide ballot measure in Michigan, which voted to ban consideration of race or other identity categories in favorable consideration for employment and college admissions, was spatially analyzed, and relevant trends are discussed below.

Case Study County Details

Both of the Detroit Region's northern counties supported Proposal 2, with Oakland County voting 57.1 percent (284,554 to 213,285) in favor and Macomb County supporting it at a margin of 68.3 percent (209,656 to 97,227). A pattern that is immediately apparent is that, in both counties, there is a very direct connection between the proportion of Black residents and the level of support for the proposal. Voting precincts that were homogeneously White tended to support the ban at higher levels, while those that had more a more substantial Black presence showed less support. However, the two counties displayed differing behaviors with this connection. Communities in Oakland County, presumably because of its larger and arguably better-integrated Black population, voted for the ban in lower proportions than Macomb. Of

particular interest, most communities with more than a token Black presence, even when they supported the ban at over 50 percent, voted in much lower numbers for it than homogeneous White communities in a way that was disproportional to the percentage of Black residents in the community. In other words, having a substantial Black presence in the community had an outsized effect on voter opposition to the ban. Macomb County communities, on the other hand, showed much less sensitivity to the presence of Black people in its voting patterns. There appears to be little direct connection between the level of partisanship or the proportion of Black residents and voting outcomes, with only a few exceptions: The two cities of Eastpointe and Mt. Clemens, which both had Black populations approaching or narrowly surpassing 25 percent in 2000, had notably lower levels of support (around 52 percent); and the northernmost rural communities, which have both negligible Black populations and have long-defied the county's historical Democratic party support, instead voted in support of Republican presidential candidates in all election cycles since at least 2004.

As mentioned above, the presence of Black residents in Oakland County communities has a clear relationship to voter opposition to banning Affirmative Action. There was also a relationship between proximity to the Wayne County line and ban opposition, which in many but not all cases coincide with the presence of Black residents. Spatial analysis shows that, of the 8 Oakland municipalities that voted to reject Proposal 2, the vast majority (6) were located between the county line, Eight Mile Road, and nearby Ten Mile Road, which runs parallel to it approximately 2 miles north. The two exceptions are Huntington Woods, a small community bordering Ten Mile Road with a negligible Black population but that borders majority-Black communities to its west and south, and the city of Pontiac, which is further north in central Oakland County but which was poised to attain a majority-Black population (49.4 percent in

2000). Four of the six communities in southern Oakland also had Black majority populations in 2000, with all communities having proximity to majority-Black Detroit.⁵⁰ In contrast, proximity to Eight Mile Road had little effect on most Macomb community vote tallies.

While all Macomb communities and the majority of Oakland communities voted in favor of the Affirmative Action ban, both counties saw the most intense support for the Affirmative Action ban in their northernmost rural communities. Because of the extremely small proportion of Black residents in those communities as well as its distance from Detroit, there would be little direct reason for local residents to be materially concerned about the effects of that policy on their personal or community welfare. This suggests that either partisanship, racial isolation from little outgroup exposure, or both exerted influence on voting outcomes in this portion of both counties.

⁵⁰ This has implications for diversity, with Black residents either present but in small enough proportions to prevent activation of threat, or in the majority and capable of rejecting the proposal through sheer force of numbers.

Variables	Coefficients (Std. Error)
Partisan (Rep)	0.474** (0.033)
AdjTract	-0.138** (0.044)
AMI	-0.107** (0.000)
LQ Black	-0.391** (0.005)
Density	-0.004 (0.000)
R2	0.900
Adjusted R2	0.807
N	425

a. Dependent Variable: % Support for abolishing AA

b. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

c. Unit of analysis is voting precincts in suburban counties.

Table 12 OLS Regression Analysis of the 2006 Michigan Affirmative Action Measure, Detroit Metro Region⁵¹

Evaluation of Hypothesis 2: Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- High LQ White tracts: condition met
- Spatial and demographic analysis of 2006 Affirmative Action ban: condition met

⁵¹ NOTE: The variable *NoVehicle* was omitted from regression because of its lack of relevance to this question, though it was not statistically significant, and its omission resulted in better model fit

5.2.3 Hypothesis 3: Non-urban Whites in proximity to minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites

This hypothesis tests the relevance of integration and proximity in nurturing or mitigating intergroup conflict. The role of proximity in eliciting a threat response from White suburban residents is an element of the Racial Threat Hypothesis that is not uniformly theorized to be required, but holds potential significance for understanding the politics of spaces of racial turnover. Because metro regions frequently contain communities or large portions of counties with racial groups that live near each other and yet remain strongly segregated, this hypothesis provides an opportunity to examine how this dynamic affects support for generating social goods and perceptions of ingroup relative advantage. In the context of this project, we would expect that majority-White census tracts in proximity to disproportionately minority-heavy tracts will vote in opposition to minority-beneficial policies in equal or greater numbers than homogeneously White communities that are more isolated from minority influence. This hypothesis allows observation of how elements of Intergroup Contact Theory, particularly those pertaining to proximity's potential role in building intergroup trust, operate in historically segregated regions.

To test this hypothesis, I isolated and evaluated all tracts in the case study counties that did not support their respective ballot initiatives to reveal any relevant patterns in demographic, spatial, and political traits and behaviors. In addition, I did a spatial analysis of the 2006 Michigan Affirmative Action ballot measure to observe how support for this minority-detrimental policy was distributed across the northern metro counties, as well as how that support overlaps with pockets of suburban Black residential density.

County	Proportion of Tracts	Mean Transit Support	County Mean Transit Support	Mean Republican Support	County Mean Republican Support	Mean LQ White	Mean LQ Black	Mean Black Percentage	Mean County Black Percentage	Mean White Percentage	Mean County White Percentage	Mean AdjTract	County Mean AdjTract
Clayton	1/50	48.8	74.9	48.1	14.0	3.6570	0.4770	30.5	63.4	57.8	15.9	57.9	64.9
Gwinnett	49/99	39.6	50.1	53.5	41.4	1.2556	0.6164	22.3	27	59.1	48.2	26.2	27.3
Macomb	175/201	39.9	41.7	56.4	53.3	1.0288	0.8818	7.6	9.5	84.3	84.7	8.9	10.4
Oakland	148/317	40.7	50.95	58.5	44.3	1.1742	0.2272	3.0	14.5	88.2	76.5	4.4	14.7

Table 13 Census Tracts that Rejected Regional Transit Ballot Measures, Detroit and Atlanta Metro Counties

Tracts that did not support transit

Overall Trends

In the two case study regions, the census tracts that have mean transit support levels below 50 percent uniformly possess similar demographic and political characteristics. In all cases, these suburban tracts were overrepresented by White residents (relative to their counties), each having a mean LQ White greater than 1.0, with each county's LQ White increasing with their respective levels of racial diversity to indicate the relative density of White residents in these spaces. Consistent with the observations of high LQ White tracts, these portions of each county also display higher mean support for the 2016 Republican presidential candidate, with every county other than Clayton displaying majority Republican support in this subset of census tracts. Similarly, within the subset of tracts that did not support transit, the higher transit-supporting counties also had very large differences between their mean White population percentage and the county-wide white population percentage, signifying that, like partisan alignment, there is a connection between transit support and race, with Whiter spaces showing greater opposition to transit. Those with lower transit support showed little or no difference between the subset mean White population and county mean White population. Mirroring this trend, the transit-opposing tracts within those counties with greater transit support levels showed dramatically lower percentages of Black residents than their overall county mean Black

populations, again illustrating a connection between a relative lack of diversity and opposition to minority-beneficial development.

Of particular note are the county characteristics pertaining to proximity and spatial diversity. Census tracts that did not support transit uniformly contained a lower Black residential percentage than the tracts immediately surrounding them, illustrated by mean AdjTract percentages that are higher than the mean Black percentages in this subset of tracts. In the cases of the counties with greater transit support, these differences were sizeable, with an AdjTract Black population percentage of nearly twice the mean Black population of Clayton County and 50 percent greater in Oakland County. Furthermore, the mean AdjTract percentages for this subset of tracts in all counties are lower than those of their counties as a whole, with Oakland's County's overall mean being more than three times the AdjTract mean of the non-transit-supporting adjacent tracts and nearly five times the mean Black percentage in non-transit-supporting tracts. This implies that, on average, tracts that did not support transit are the least diverse tracts within the least diverse portions of each case study county.

Detroit Metro Region

The Macomb and Oakland County tracts that did not support the 2016 RTA ballot proposal both share several traits with each other, as well as strongly resemble the characteristics of tracts with high LQ White. These tracts more heavily supported the 2016 Republican presidential candidate than their counties more broadly, and have a higher mean proportion of White residents and lower proportion of Black residents than their county averages. Both are also racially more isolated in space than other tracts, with LQ White scores greater than 1.0 and low mean AdjTract percentages that do not reflect diverse surroundings. However, Macomb County, which rejected transit in nearly 90% of all tracts county-wide, required few demographically

extreme characteristics to undermine transit support. Tracts that rejected transit were not significantly more proportionally or densely White than the county average, nor did they have significant Black residential underrepresentation or intense racial isolation. In essence, Macomb County tracts that voted against regional transit were not dramatically different from the average tract, primarily because the vast majority of tracts fall into the category of having rejected transit. Oakland County tracts that rejected transit, conversely, were demographically more polarized. Fewer than half of the county's tracts rejected transit, and those that did were significantly more Republican-leaning and proportionally White than the average Oakland County tract. In addition, White residents were generally much more overrepresented in tracts, while Black residents were dramatically underrepresented, and these tracts were spatially isolated from areas of diversity. In sum, Oakland tracts that rejected transit were unequivocally the whitest, most conservative, most racially isolated portions of the county. Of particular analytical significance is the observation that the examined Macomb tracts were more racially diverse than those of Oakland, yet there was more intense political will to reject regional transit, which suggests that diversity in Oakland tracts serves to decrease hostility against transit but does not have similar effects in most of Macomb County, and may possibly exacerbate hostility to transit.

Spatially, the distribution of transit support in Oakland County largely resembles the map of where the most significant investments in the planned regional transit system were planned: along the major road corridors of Grand River and Woodward Avenues, which would extend service to up to distant Pontiac and out to Wixom, as well as between the county line at Eight Mile Road and Ten Mile Road. Though many of these areas and corridors have larger Black populations than the county at large, several large moderately conservative-leaning, and less racially diverse communities such as Troy, Rochester Hills, and Royal Oak were scheduled for

large infrastructure and service investments, and these communities provided moderate voter support for the plan. Macomb County exhibited a spatial pattern of support that partially resembled that of Oakland County, but almost always to much lower degrees. Support was moderate along the Gratiot Avenue corridor extending to Mt. Clemens, which was scheduled for significant investments including bus rapid transit, as well as in small pockets of Warren. There were only three tracts that supported the transit proposal at a level greater than 60 percent, and no tracts reached 62 percent support. Many of the tracts with the largest (though still low) Black populations, such as Sterling Heights and portions of Warren along Eight Mile Road, showed particularly low transit support.

At 95% confidence (p-values > 0.001), the null hypotheses that tracts that rejected transit have similar AdjTract and LQ Black as the populations of all other Oakland and Macomb County tracts is rejected.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
Detroit Metro Region: AdjTract of Tracts that Rejected Transit		
	AdjTract of Transit-Rejecting Tracts	AdjTract of All other Tracts
Mean	0.068403884	0.216686428
Variance	0.005219089	0.046287602
Observations	323	231
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	267	
t Stat	-10.07682164	
P(T<=t) one-tail	9.46692E-21	
t Critical one-tail	2.340395032	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.89338E-20	
t Critical two-tail	2.594367909	

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
Detroit Metro Region: LQ Black of Tracts that Rejected Transit		
	LQ Black of Transit-Rejecting Tracts	LQ Black of All other Tracts
Mean	0.581897173	1.787450628
Variance	0.618877705	3.734923708
Observations	323	231
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	285	
t Stat	-8.964639861	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.10654E-17	
t Critical one-tail	2.339503055	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.21307E-17	
t Critical two-tail	2.593189643	

Table 14 Two-sample T-tests of AdjTract and LQ Black tracts that rejected transit and all other tracts, Detroit Metro Region

Atlanta Metro Region

The census tracts in Clayton and Gwinnett Counties that did not support their respective MARTA transit expansion referenda show similar trends but also reflect the dramatic demographic conditions in their counties. Perhaps of greatest importance are the levels of support as evidenced by the numbers of tracts that opposed transit: Gwinnett County voters rejected transit expansion in the 2019 referendum in almost exactly half of the county's census tracts, while Clayton voters opposed transit development in its 2014 referendum in only one tract. These levels of transit support are further reflected when looking at the mean support levels in these subsets of tracts, with Clayton voters in the sole transit-rejecting tract still garnering 48.8 percent support, nearly enough to have supported the ultimately successful referendum's passage. Conversely, Gwinnett voters in transit-rejecting tracts displayed mean support below 40 percent. Both are reflective of overall county trends, with Gwinnett's county-wide mean level of transit support being barely greater than 50 percent,⁵² while Clayton's mean support level reached approximately 75 percent. Tracts that rejected transit tended to exhibit dramatically higher Republican support than their counties more generally, with Clayton's lone tract showing 48 percent support for the 2016 Republican presidential candidate, nearly 3.5 times the county mean level of Republican support. Gwinnett's transit-opposing tracts were also overrepresented with Republicans, though only 30 percent greater than the county mean.

A look at the racial demographics of the transit-opposing subset of tracts in both metro Atlanta counties provides evidence of a link between race and transit support. White residents were overrepresented in these census tracts, both counties having mean LQ White scores that would qualify them as "high LQ White" tracts. Clayton's transit-rejecting census tract, being

⁵² The county-wide percentage of the failed transit referendum was 45.6 percent, reflecting sufficient diversity between enthusiastic supporters in the western portion of the county and staunch opponents in the northeastern Gwinnett.

within a county with a strong Black residential majority, had an intense level of White overrepresentation that exceeded its level of Republican overrepresentation, while rapidly diversifying Gwinnett, with a plurality of White residents, displayed much more moderate overrepresentation. Similarly, the lone Clayton tract that did not support transit had less than half of the Black proportional representation of the county mean, while Gwinnett's subset of tracts had Black people underrepresented at a margin of closer to 20 percent. Lastly but consequentially, these subsets of census tracts differ in terms of their levels of relative racial segregation or isolation. The lone Clayton tract had neighboring tracts that had nearly twice as much Black representation, and even those surrounding tracts were less proportionally Black than those in their vicinity, with this tract having an AdjTract percentage of 58 percent (relative to its in-tract Black population of 30.5 percent), situated in a county with an AdjTract mean of 65 percent. Gwinnett's transit-rejecting tracts, conversely, displayed an AdjTract that was not strongly different than the mean Black population percentage, with that county-wide mean AdjTract itself being similar to that of the subset of tracts that rejected transit. This implies that, in rapidly diversifying Gwinnett, transit opposition does not necessarily emerge in spaces that are strongly segregated by race, while already-diverse Clayton County displays pockets of transit opposition that are unambiguously racially and politically correlated.

At 95% confidence (p-values > 0.001), the null hypotheses that tracts that rejected transit have similar AdjTract and LQ Black as the populations of all other Clayton and Gwinnett County tracts is rejected. (See Table 15)

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Atlanta Metro Region: LQ Black of Tracts that Rejected Transit		
	LQ Black of Transit-Rejecting Tracts	LQ Black of All other Tracts
Mean	0.812702208	1.069654921
Variance	0.180794929	0.209112478
Observations	50	111
Pooled Variance	0.200385686	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	159	
t Stat	-3.370182452	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00047143	
t Critical one-tail	2.350029098	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00094286	
t Critical two-tail	2.607103489	

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Atlanta Metro Region: AdjTract of Tracts that Rejected Transit		
	AdjTract of Transit-Rejecting Tracts	AdjTract of All other Tracts
Mean	0.26869372	0.438081862
Variance	0.014133532	0.04948048
Observations	50	112
Pooled Variance	0.038655478	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	160	
t Stat	-5.065402832	
P(T<=t) one-tail	5.559E-07	
t Critical one-tail	2.349879665	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.1118E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.606905817	

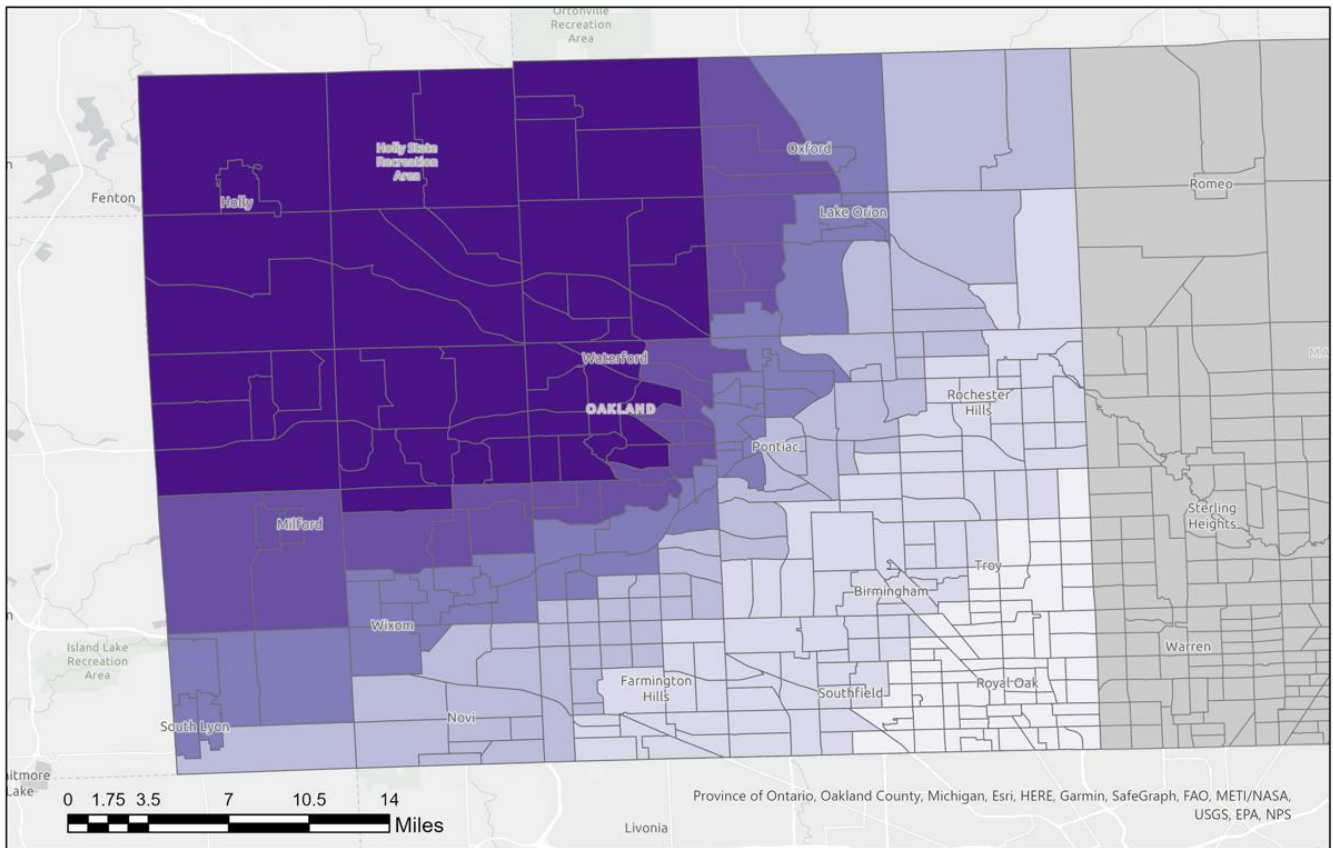
Table 15 Two-sample T-tests of AdjTract LQ Black tracts that rejected transit and all other tracts, Atlanta Metro Region

Spatial analysis of regional transit votes – Geographically Weighted Regression Analysis

Transit: Detroit Metro Region

The spatial analysis of Oakland and Macomb Counties, just as in many instances described above, indicate that there are different dynamics influencing the effect of proximity to Black populations on support for regional transit. The Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) analysis allows us to discern that the spatial pattern of impact for LQ Black on transit support is distinctly different and, in fact, nearly opposing between counties. In Oakland County, the GWR analysis (see Figure 6) shows that the coefficients for LQ Black’s influence have an inverse correlation with the portions of the county with the highest Black population. In other words, the denser the concentration or proximity to Black residents, the lower the effect of LQ Black is on determining transit support, with the effect being weakest in the southeast corner of the county along Eight Mile Road and increasing in strength towards the northwest corner of

Oakland County, where the Black population is lowest. This result can most easily be interpreted to mean that, where Black residents are most plentiful, race is less relevant for influencing voters support or opposition to the 2016 ballot measure. Where Black people are less abundant, primarily in northern portions of the county, their presence has a much higher impact on how local residents vote. This would serve to support the concept of intergroup contact's impact on increasing levels of trust and lowering levels of hostility, with more diverse places being less polarized by race than places that are homogeneously White. This would also serve to undermine the hypothesis, and thus cast doubt on the effects of racial threat.



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland County

Geographically Weighted Regression - Location Quotient - Black

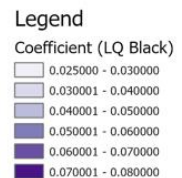
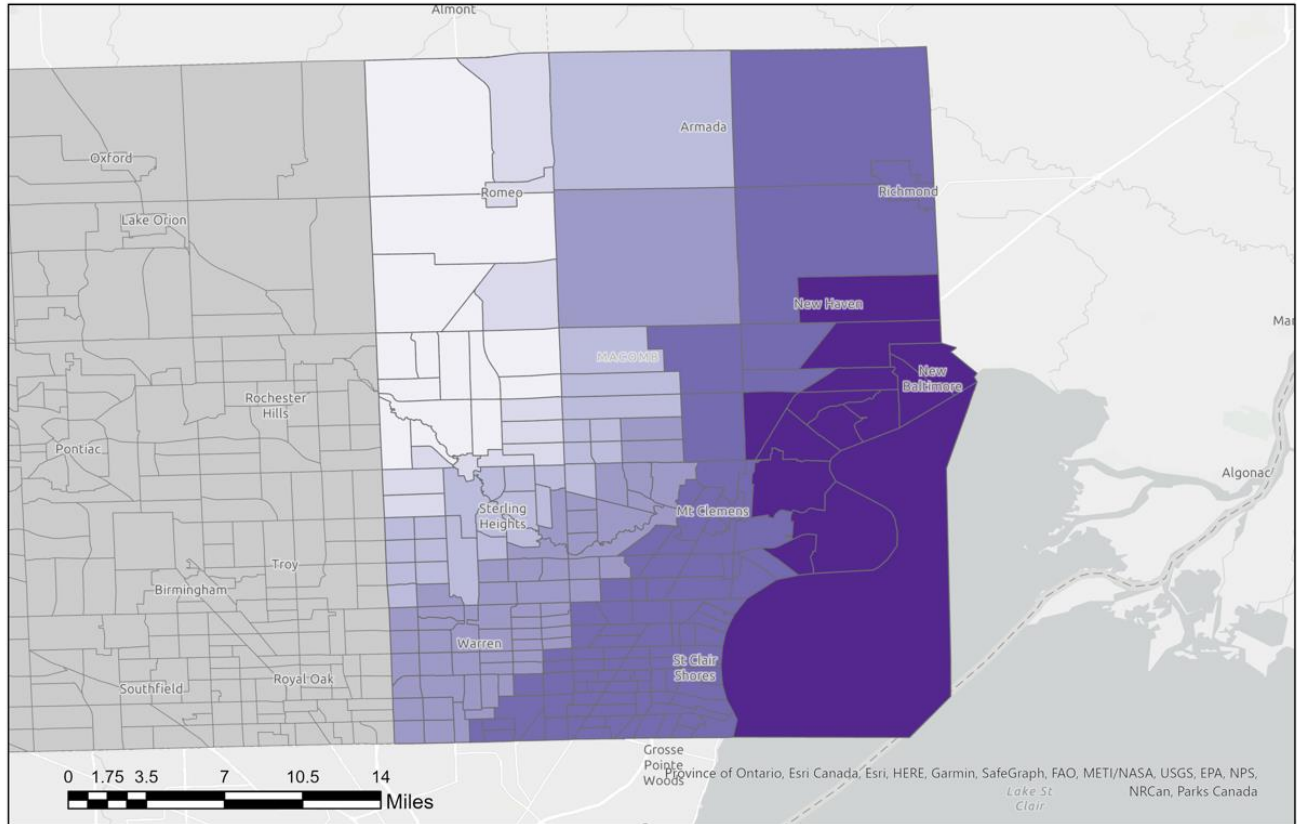


Figure 6 GWR analysis map of LQ Black's influence on transit support, Oakland County. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of LQ Black on transit support in different portions of the county.



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Macomb County

Geographically Weighted Regression - Location Quotient - Black

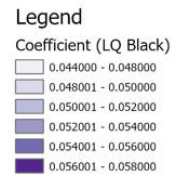
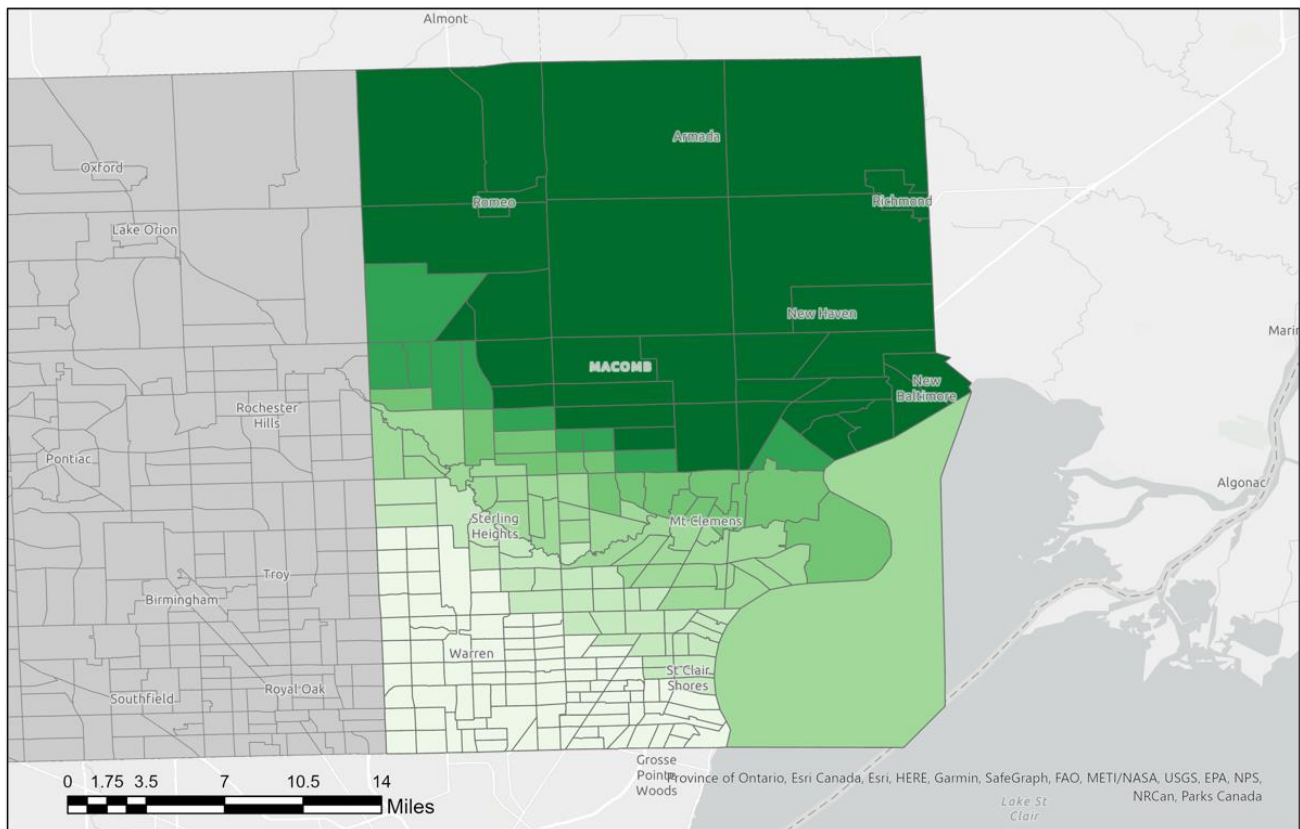


Figure 7 GWR analysis map of LQ Black's influence on transit support, Macomb County. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of LQ Black on transit support in different portions of the county.

Macomb County, conversely, tells a different story. Unlike Oakland County, the GWR analysis show that the coefficients for LQ Black's influence are highest in the eastern and southern portions of the county, which are the areas with the greatest concentration of Black residents, and decrease in strength as one moves towards the northwest corner of the county along the Oakland County line (see Figure 6). This result can best be interpreted to mean that where Black populations are most dense, the impact on support for transit is highest. Two

explanations for this effect, which may or may not be complementary, are available. The first explanation is that places where Black residents are most densely present support transit because Black voters disproportionately vote for it, and areas with a lower density of Black residents generally do not support transit. The other explanation is that areas where Black people are most abundant, even though they are a small minority throughout the vast majority of the county, spur the greatest impacts on voting patterns, regardless of which populations are doing the voting.



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Macomb County

Geographically Weighted Regression - Mean Percentage of Black Population in Adjacent Tracts

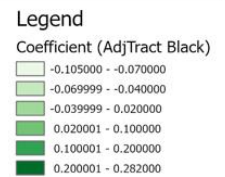
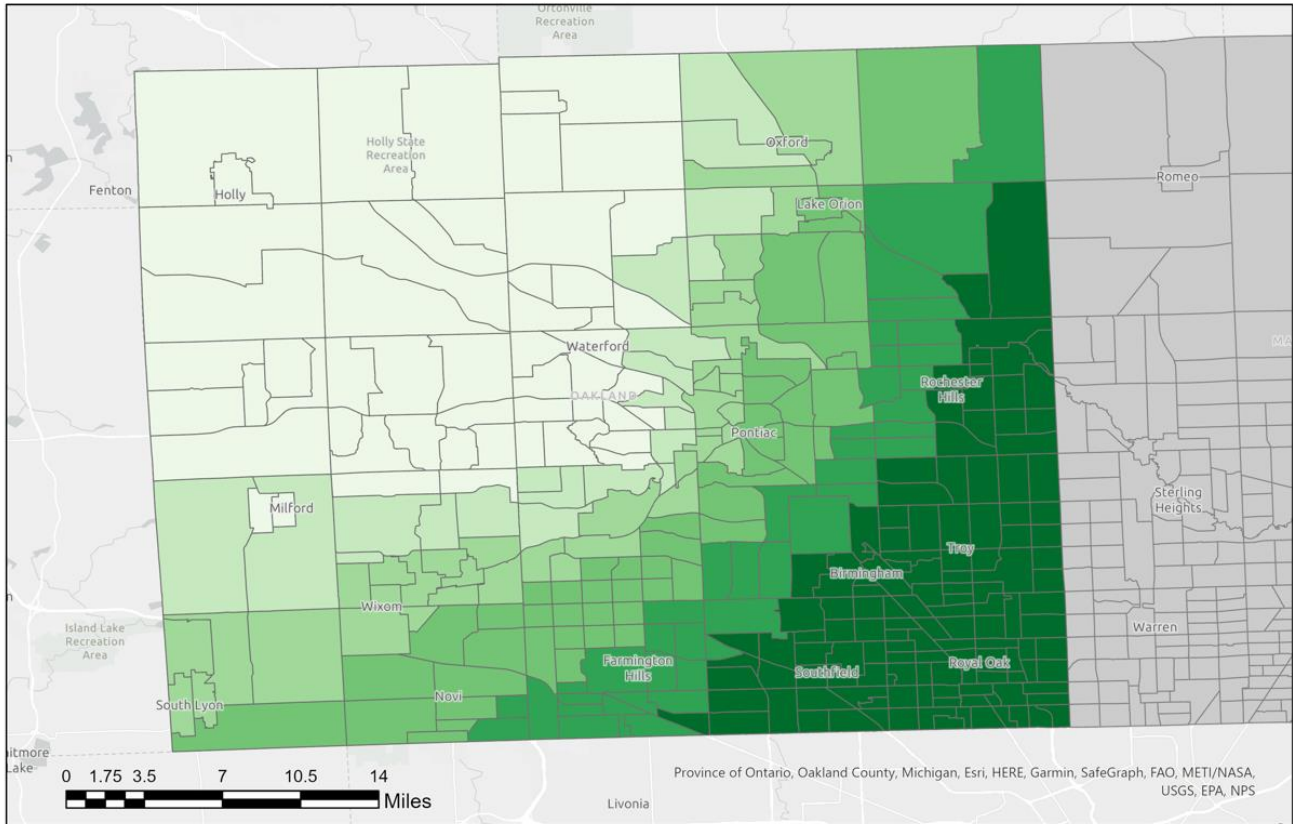


Figure 8 GWR analysis map of AdjTract's influence on transit support, Macomb County. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of AdjTract on transit support in different portions of the county.



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland County

Geographically Weighted Regression - Mean Percentage of Black Population in Adjacent Tracts

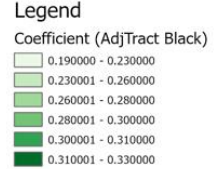


Figure 9 GWR analysis map of AdjTract’s influence on transit support, Oakland County. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of AdjTract on transit support in different portions of the county.

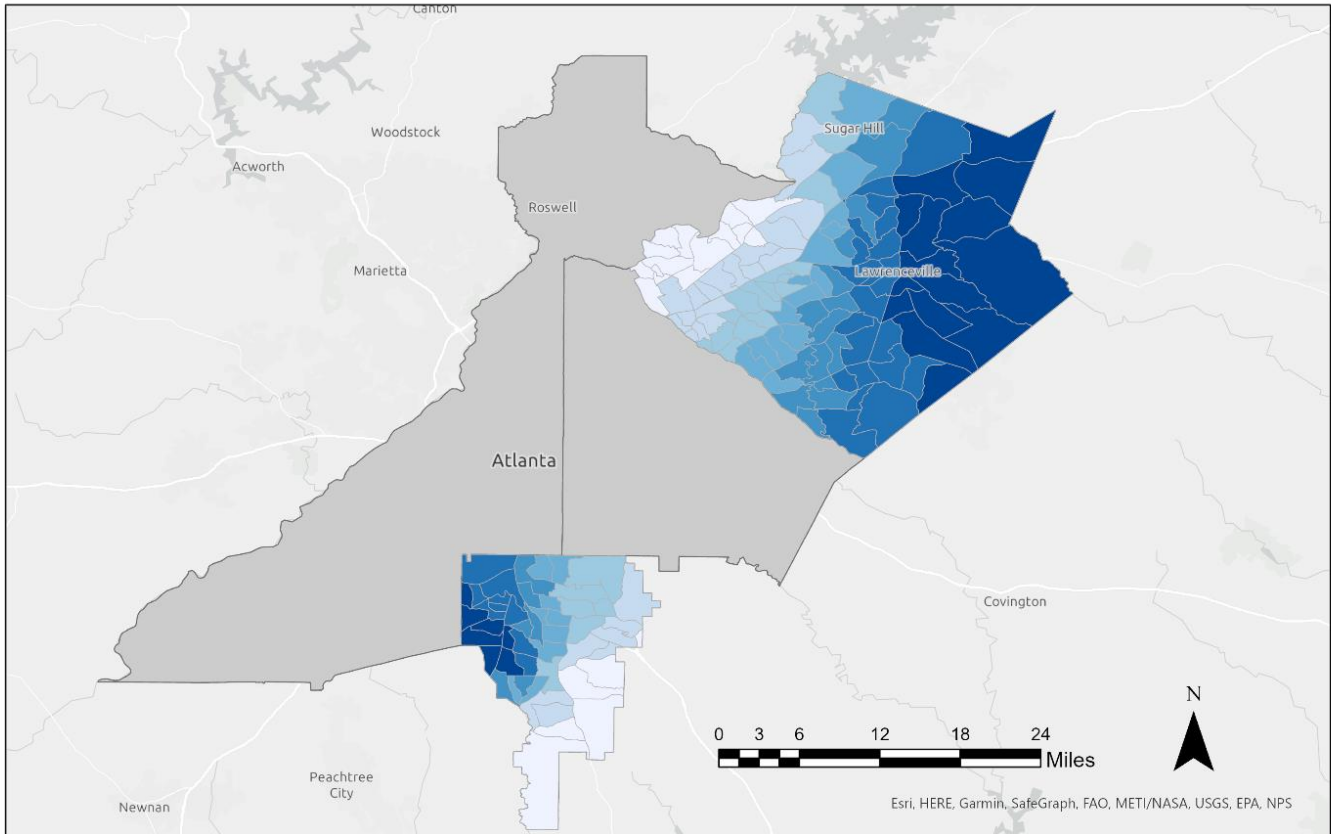
While the effect in Macomb appears to be inconclusive when examining the coefficients for LQ Black, an examination of the GWR analysis for AdjTract provides greater contextual clarity. We can observe that the pattern of AdjTract’s coefficients in Macomb County are actually negative near the Wayne County border, where Black residents are most plentiful (see Figure 8). This means that, in southern portions of the county where Black families have most densely settled, their presence in neighboring tracts is associated with lower transit support. This is counterintuitive to the assumption that a larger Black population would stimulate both higher

turnout both due to the tendency for Black voters to support transit and due to greater intergroup contact and consequent lower intergroup hostility. Also, as AdjTract is an absolute measure of the quantity of Black residents in proximity (as opposed to a relative measure of concentration in the case of LQ Black), this demonstrates an unambiguous direct relationship between the quantity of Black residents and opposition to regional transit. This supports the hypothesis and provides evidence that the presence or proximity of Black residents provokes (or at least is associated with) greater opposition to transit. This relationship changes as one moves farther north, becoming positive just north of the places where Black residents are present in more than token quantities. This means that the presence of Black people in small amounts in these areas has positive effects on transit support, which implies either that Black voters are largely supporting transit but not stimulating a threat response because of their small numbers, or that having small quantities of Black people in proximity lowers threat to the point where White residents are slightly disproportionately likely to support transit. These conclusions are supported when examining AdjTract coefficients in Oakland County's GWR analysis (Figure 9). AdjTract does not have a negative coefficient in any tracts in the county, and follows the same pattern that could be predicted by the LQ Black GWR, with its coefficient being highest in the southeastern portion of the county and decreasing towards the northwest. This follows the argument for simple demographics, with a greater level of support for transit coming both with a greater quantity of Black residents and a higher degree of diversity.

Transit: Atlanta Metro Region

Many of the spatial relationships between race and transit support in Gwinnett and Clayton Counties differ as much as their demographic profiles and transit referendum outcomes.

Based on both the literature and the findings of this analysis, this likely reflects the differing dynamics around race and social policy that emerge at varying levels of diversity and particularly, as illustrated in this project, in majority-Black spaces. In Gwinnett, we observe that LQ Black's coefficient increases in value from west to east, with the impact of this variable being most positive on influencing transit support in eastern portions of the county with a moderately low Black population (Figure 10). Of note is the weak negative coefficient for LQ Black stretching from the western tip of the county, which is home to most of the county's Hispanic population and which exhibited the greatest transit support, to the central part, including part of the very homogeneously White north-central portion of Gwinnett County. This means that tracts in portions of the county, none of which have a Black majority, experienced some negative influence as Black populations increased in density. Of note is the fact that while some of the northern, densely White portions had negative coefficients, they were not the areas where transit support was most negatively impacted by density of Black residents, perhaps because that is where Black families are most sparse. Areas in the western, southern, and parts of the central portions of the county, which are where the concentrations of Black residents are primarily located, experienced positive impacts from an increasing Black density within tracts.



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Geographically Weighted Regression
 Location Quotient: Black

Legend - Clayton County Coefficient (LQ Black)	Legend - Gwinnett County Coefficient (LQ Black)
0.13500 - 0.18000	-0.07500 - -0.04500
0.18001 - 0.23000	-0.04499 - -0.01500
0.23001 - 0.27000	-0.01499 - 0.00500
0.27001 - 0.31000	0.00501 - 0.03000
0.31001 - 0.34000	0.03001 - 0.06000
0.34001 - 0.38000	0.06001 - 0.10000
0.38001 - 0.45000	0.10001 - 0.13000

Figure 10 GWR analysis map of LQ Black's influence on transit support, Atlanta Metro Counties. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of LQ Black on transit support in different portions of each county.

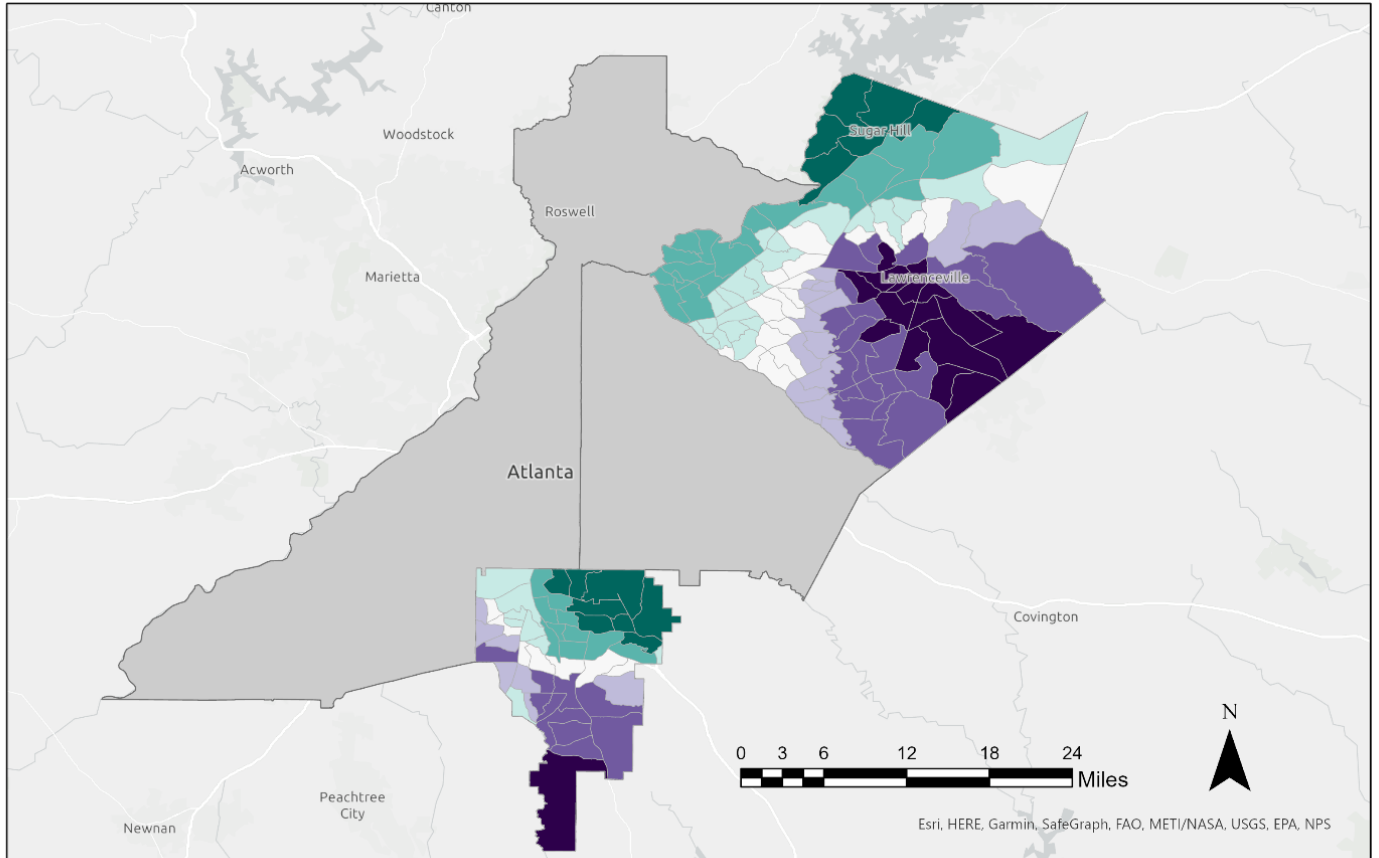
While LQ Black gives us some indications of how the presence of Black people influences transit support, observing the GWR coefficients for AdjTract provides greater evidence of the impact of proximity on voting (Figure 11). The pattern of coefficient increase is distinctive, radiating from the county's southeast and center, where the coefficients are strongly negative, outward towards all other corners of the county with the highest positive coefficients being in the western and northwestern portions. Very notable about the area with the most

negative AdjTract coefficients is that it is situated directly between the southernmost portion of the county, which is the area with the highest Black density in the county, and the east-central portion of the county, with most of remainder of tracts with a significant Black presence, and directly abuts them both. In other words, the majority-White area that separates some of the most densely Black tracts in the county displays the greatest, most negative effects of having Black neighboring tracts on transit support. Conversely, areas in the north of the county with very low Black populations had low or moderately positive impacts on transit support from having Black people in proximity, possibly indicative either of the uniform transit support among the few Black voters in those tracts or the valuation of the benefits of transit among White Gwinnettians who did not experience a racial threat response from the small Black population there.

Clayton County, as a majority-Black area of the metro region, displays a different relationship between Black proximity and transit support. The county's GWR coefficients for LQ Black, all of which are positive, increase from the southern strip and southeastern part of Clayton towards the county's northwest corner. This defies any uniform pattern of racial relationship, as the area of lowest LQ Black coefficients includes both areas of strong relative and absolute Black proportion and some of the few tracts in which Black people are not in the majority. Areas where the LQ Black coefficients were strongest were those with the greatest concentration of densely Black tracts, though not exclusively so. An interpretation of the significance of this spatial pattern is that areas to the south and east, which are generally more affluent and furthest from transit connectivity with the city of Atlanta, experienced particularly strong opposition from White voters in these tracts.⁵³ A more likely explanation is that in an area that has a large Black population but lacks proximity to Atlanta and its amenities, the density of

⁵³ This may possibly be for reasons having little to do with race and more to do with the questionable benefits from transit expansion for them.

Black people as likely transit supporters diminishes as a significant factor in predicting transit support, meaning that Blackness is largely irrelevant in voting behavior.



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Geographically Weighted Regression - Mean Percentage of Black Population in Adjacent Tracts

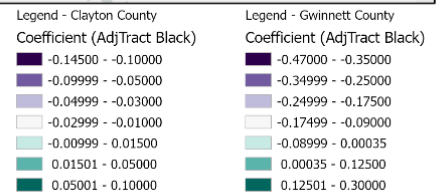


Figure 11 GWR analysis map of AdjTract's influence on transit support, Atlanta Metro Counties. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of AdjTract on transit support in different portions of each county.

Looking at the spatial patterns of the GWR coefficients for AdjTract presents similar findings (Figure 11). Rather than coefficients being more positive as they approach the northwest corner of the county, coefficients for AdjTract increase from the southern tip of the county towards the northeast corner, along the Dekalb County boundary. Like in the case of LQ Black,

the pattern does not conform or coincide neatly with patterns of racial distribution, and only bears some minor coincidence with tracts of relatively moderate Republican partisan support (compared to the county mean). A significant element of note in the distribution of this coefficient is the fact that, with the exception of the northeastern corner of the county, all tracts in Clayton have a negative or near-zero coefficient for AdjTract, meaning that having a greater quantity of Black people in proximity dampened support for regional transit. Interpretations of this phenomenon resemble those for LQ Black, meaning that either White southern Clayton residents disproportionately rejected transit for racial or practical reasons⁵⁴, or being Black in a portion of the county that is majority-Black makes that status less tied to transit support, or both. For northeastern tracts, some of which are narrowly majority-White or nearly balanced with Black residents, consistent voter support among Black residents within tracts and in neighboring ones would serve to create a positive, albeit weak, coefficient, indicating that more Black residents in proximity translates into more overall transit support.

Evaluation of Hypothesis 3: Non-urban Whites in proximity to minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- Tracts that did not support transit: condition met
- Spatial analysis of 2016 transit vote: Conditions partially met/unmet. Supported in Macomb and Gwinnett, not supported in Oakland and Clayton

5.2.4 Hypothesis 4: Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites

⁵⁴ There is some validity to this assertion, based on the weak effects and small value of the coefficients and the relatively small White population in these tracts.

This hypothesis encapsulates the central tenet of the Racial Threat Hypothesis, and provides the greatest evidence of the relevance of race and demographic change in a metro region's political behavior. It presupposes that when a marginalized racial group begins to suburbanize and either grows in population or is present in disproportionately large numbers relative to the rest of the county, the typically majority-status White population will either support policies that disadvantage that group or oppose policies that could potentially be beneficial. This hypothesis does not preclude the theoretical effects of increasing intergroup contact, which is expected to build greater levels of trust and to lower levels of hostility⁵⁵, and is more likely to occur in regions where minority populations are large and well-integrated. In the context of this analysis, we would expect that tracts with lower levels of diversity than their neighbors, as well as any low-diversity area that has experienced increases in minority residents, will be more prone to supporting policies and candidates associated with political conservatism.

In order to evaluate the presence of racial threat and understand the complexity of this hypothesis, this analysis identified voting characteristics and policies that, when paired with racial demographics, give direct evidence of how these two factors interact. I identified the census tracts that exhibited majority support for the 2016 Republican presidential candidate, due to his association with rhetoric and policy positions that were not necessarily ideologically conservative but rather reflected outgroup hostility (almost exclusively targeting both native-born and immigrant non-Whites), which conceptually reflects the tacit or explicit support of that ideological viewpoint. In addition, this analysis directly evaluates the relationship between

⁵⁵ Resulting in lower support for minority-detrimental policies and political candidates (Dyck 2012, Schlueter and Scheepers 2010).

increases in Republican party support between the 2004 and 2016 Presidential elections and Black and Hispanic population change during the same period.

Census Tracts that supported the Republican Candidate

Overall Trends

Census tracts that supported the 2016 Republican presidential candidate, like tracts that did not support their regional transit ballot measures, share several characteristics with high LQ White tracts. They are, on average, overrepresented by White residents, with each of these conservative subsets of tracts having a mean LQ White above 1.0 and having an inverse and proportional relationship between mean Republican support and Mean LQ White, which reflects their respective counties' levels of overall racial diversity. Closely connected, there is a direct relationship between the proportion of tracts that support the Republican candidate and the mean county-wide percentage of White residents. However, this proportional relationship begins to break down when instead considering the mean White percentage of this subset of tracts, with Oakland underperforming in both the proportion of Republican-supportive tracts and mean Republican support within those tracts relative to its White population. These tracts also tend to have dramatically lower proportions of Black residents than their counties as a whole, ranging from approximately 35 percent fewer Blacks (Clayton County) to 83 percent fewer Blacks (Oakland County). In addition, because of the previously discussed connection between regional transit opposition and conservative voting, census tracts that supported the Republican candidate typically showed dramatically greater mean opposition to transit ballot initiatives than their respective counties as a whole. Lastly, these more Republican-supportive tracts tend to be in the least diverse portions of the county: their mean AdjTract percentages are frequently well-below

the county mean, meaning that the communities in which these tracts are located tend to house fewer Black residents in them and have fewer in proximity than the average census tract in the county. This implies that a localized lack of diversity is a condition that nurtures support for both a conservative presidential candidate and more conservative policy positions such as opposing regional transit.

This analysis establishes the link between Republican voting and racial diversity, demonstrating that, among these case study counties, greater diversity is associated with lower levels of Republican support, whether through simple demographic dilution or through alleviation of threat through increases in intergroup exposure among White suburban residents. Because all of these counties were almost entirely populated with White residents as recently as 1970, tracts that remain densely White are frequently the last to experience demographic change while those around them are undergoing dramatic racial population shifts. This is reflected in the often-large mean percentage differences between the Republican-leaning tracts and those at the county mean. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the most homogeneously White tracts in diversifying counties have the greatest tendency to support the 2016 Republican presidential candidate. The following OLS regression analysis, which tests the relationship between changes in Republican support and racial populations over time in the case study counties, directly demonstrates the conclusions implied in the analysis of Republican-supporting tracts.

County	Proportion of Tracts	Mean Transit Support	County Mean Transit Support	Mean Republican Support	County Mean Republican Support	Mean LQ White	Mean LQ Black	Mean Black Percentage	Mean County Black Percentage	Mean White Percentage	Mean County White Percentage	Mean AdjTract	County Mean AdjTract
Clayton	N/A*	67.5	74.9	21.1	14.0	1.5235	0.7226	46.3	63.4	24.0	15.9	50.6	64.9
Gwinnett	37/100	38.1	50.1	52.3	41.4	1.3484	0.5011	18.1	27.0	63.6	48.2	22.6	27.3
Macomb	138/201	38.3	41.7	58.9	53.3	1.0550	0.6382	5.5	9.5	88.5	84.7	7.6	10.4
Oakland	132/317	40.0	51.0	52.0	44.3	1.1990	0.1853	2.5	14.5	90.1	76.5	3.7	14.7

Table 16 Census Tracts that Supported the 2016 Republican Presidential Candidate, Detroit and Atlanta Metro Counties

* No Clayton County tracts displayed majority support for the 2016 Republican candidate. This analysis instead uses the top 25% of Republican-supporting tracts.

Detroit Metro Region

Census tracts in both Oakland and Macomb Counties that supported the 2016 Republican presidential candidate exhibited similar demographic and policy support traits: their mean White population percentages were higher than their respective county averages, while their mean Black populations were below their averages,⁵⁶ and their transit support mean was low (40 percent or less). However, small but notable differences in the demographic averages between the counties offer support for the integration-driven effects that are theorized to undermine racial threat: intergroup contact through proximity. In Oakland County, which has experienced significantly more racial integration than Macomb, had much lower support for the Republican presidential candidate (44.6 percent), and only 132 out of its 317 supported the conservative candidate at a margin of 50 percent or greater (see Table 16). These tracts were generally moderately overrepresented in their proportion of White residents, with a mean LQ White of 1.199, and further were strongly underrepresented in their proportion of Black residents, with a mean LQ Black of 0.1853. Their probable insulation from diversity is underscored by the very

⁵⁶ With the exception of a small tract in Warren with a total population of 36 (30.55 percent Black), no tract with a Black population greater than 30 percent in the northern counties supported the Republican presidential candidate in 2016.

low mean percentage of Black residents in adjacent tracts (3.7 percent). In Macomb, where 138 of 201 tracts supported the Republican candidate, such extremes were not necessarily in evidence: Despite its comparatively higher proportion of White residents county-wide, Republican-supportive tracts were only slightly overrepresented by White people (LQ White of 1.055), had much greater Black representation within tracts (LQ Black of 0.6382, or 3.4 times as much Black representation as equivalent Oakland Tracts), and on average had a higher mean proportion of Black residents in adjacent tracts (7.6 percent, or more than twice the Black percentage in equivalent Republican-supporting Oakland tracts).

As both of these counties have been undergoing significant demographic change but starting at different periods (as explored in Chapter 2), the implications are significant: because Oakland County has both accommodated and experienced higher levels of integration over a longer period, census tracts that are the most racially homogeneous and isolated from exposure to minorities were the most likely to support the Republican candidate. Macomb residents, in contrast, show much lower sensitivity to the presence of minorities while still voting Republican. This means that exposure and proximity to Black people does not as significantly moderate the tendency to support conservative positions as it does in Oakland County, and may have exacerbated that conservative support (a defensible conclusion with the growth of Republican support in Macomb over recent decades).⁵⁷

At 95% confidence (p-value > 0.001), the null hypothesis, that tracts that supported the Republican candidate have similar transit support levels as the populations of all other Oakland and Macomb County tracts, is rejected. (see Table 17)

⁵⁷ The implication is that counties with longer relationships with diversification and integration react less intensely in terms of swings towards favoring conservative political candidates. Demographic change itself partially explains this, but theorized reactions among suburban populations to greater social contact with other racial groups also likely provides some explanation.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
Detroit Metro Region: Tracts that Supported The Republican Candidate		
	Tracts that Supported the Republican Candidate	All other Tracts
Mean	0.391712355	0.563816469
Variance	0.00353061	0.006238398
Observations	271	247
Pooled Variance	0.004821532	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	516	
t Stat	-28.17519676	
P(T<=t) one-tail	9.4133E-107	
t Critical one-tail	2.333596293	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.8827E-106	
t Critical two-tail	2.585390767	

Table 17 Two-sample T-tests of census tracts that supported the 2016 Republican Presidential Candidate and all other tracts, Detroit Metro Region

Atlanta Metro Region

While no census tracts in Clayton County gathered majority support for the Republican presidential candidate in 2016, there are demographic and spatial patterns that are evident when observing the tracts that displayed the most Republican support. Most tracts are located east of US Highway 41 and the northern portion of Interstate 75, which is significant because most of the tracts located to the west of this highway are high LQ Black. Though a tract's status of high LQ Black and having a high relative concentration of White residents are not necessarily mutually exclusive, these more conservative tracts largely tend to be high LQ White, following the broader trend in both case study regions. Similarly following the patterns evident in the case study regions, tracts that maintain a Black plurality (if not a majority) generally do not generate Republican majority support, and though these tracts have the highest concentrations of White residents in Clayton County and are low LQ Black, the fact of their mean White percentage being less than one-quarter White would act as an impediment to higher levels of conservative

support. Significantly, while the spatial patterns of high LQ White and more Republican-supporting tracts strongly overlap, the level of transit support in Republican-supporting tracts is lower than those of high LQ White tracts and far below the county mean. This suggests that, while a concentrated White population itself exerts a suppressing effect on transit support, conservative partisanship provides an additional and possibly larger effect on deterring transit support than race.

In Gwinnett County's Republican-leaning tracts, just as in the broader case of Macomb County, the relatively significant presence of Black residents does not act as a dramatic deterrent to support for the 2016 Republican presidential candidate in counties experiencing racial diversification. These tracts have smaller proportions of Black residents than the county mean, but still account for a much higher proportion of the population than its peer counties in Michigan by several orders of magnitude. These tracts are also not overly racially isolated, having AdjTract levels that are not significantly lower than the county mean, and in some cases spatially abutting tracts with moderately high LQ Black levels and AdjTract levels as high as 50 percent. Republican-supporting tracts also show substantial overlap with high LQ White tracts, with White residents being strongly overrepresented. In fact, while White residents have a plurality of the county population, they have an unambiguous majority (63.6 percent) in this subset of census tracts. Similar to Clayton County, Republican-supporting tracts exhibit much lower support for regional transit than high LQ White tracts, suggesting that there is a strong partisan component to transit voting in these census tracts, in addition to any racial element that may be present.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Change in policy appears to be happening from sheer force of numbers. White regional residents are migrating to northern and eastern parts of the county as minority population grows. With both the persistence of high Republican support in tracts with neighbors only slightly less diverse than the county mean, as well as the movement of Gwinnett's White population to the exurban and rural fringe, racial threat appears to be in evidence.

At 95% confidence (p-value > 0.001), the null hypothesis, that tracts that supported the Republican candidate have similar transit support levels as the populations of all other Clayton and Gwinnett County tracts, is rejected. (see Table 18)

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
Atlanta Metro Region: Tracts that Supported The Republican Candidate		
	Tracts that Supported the Republican	All other Tracts
Mean	0.381442703	0.639172146
Variance	0.003978163	0.027480707
Observations	37	112
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	144	
t Stat	-13.71985931	
P(T<=t) one-tail	3.16356E-28	
t Critical one-tail	2.352522323	
P(T<=t) two-tail	6.32712E-28	
t Critical two-tail	2.61040215	

Table 18 Two-sample T-tests of census tracts that supported the 2016 Republican Presidential Candidate, Atlanta Metro Region

Change in Republican partisan voting over time: OLS Regression Analysis of Percent Change Black and Percent Partisan Change

Discerning whether changes in partisan voting behavior are independent of contextual factors or are themselves being driven by context is a significant element of understanding the primary forces behind transit opposition. To provide evidence, I ran an OLS regression on the four case study counties, testing the relationship between changes in partisan voting and shifts in community racial composition between the 2004 and 2016 General Elections (Table 19).⁵⁹ Because of the evident salience of immigration and, in particular, Hispanic population growth in partisan political discourse in recent decades, I incorporated data on Hispanic population change

⁵⁹ Demographic data sourced from 2000 and 2010 Decennial Censuses

in addition to observations of Black population change. Despite the often-dramatic differences in racial makeup and voting patterns, the analysis presented statistically significant results for Black population change, which provides evidence to meet the threshold of the “Spatial Legacies of Racism” alternative explanation at a minimum (Simple partisanship would have been supported as the appropriate alternative explanation if this relationship was not statistically significant). Additionally, the positive value for the coefficient of “Percent Change Black” suggests that as the percentage of Black residents increases in the aggregated counties, the support for the 2016 Republican Candidate also increases. This provides evidence for the presence of racial threat in driving Republican support, as one would expect the opposite effect (i.e., as Black populations increase, Republican support decreases) if the increasing presence of likely Democrat-voting Black residents was simply diluting the voting power of frequently Republican-voting White residents in historically segregated counties (Spatial Legacies of Racism). However, the relative weakness of the model fit (R^2 of 0.116) suggests that 1.) other demographic or social factors that were not captured in this analysis may also influence changes in Republican electoral support, and 2.) the diversity between the case study counties creates statistical ‘static’ because of the differing effects of racial demographic change between homogeneously White counties such as Macomb and majority-Black counties such as Clayton.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Only two municipalities in Macomb County decreased in their percentage of Republican voters, despite the increases in both Black and Hispanic residents. One of these two, the Village of Grosse Pointe Shores, is both split between Wayne and Macomb Counties and has a miniscule Black population (17 residents, or 0.6 percent), which presented methodological problems and resulted in its omission from the dataset.

Variables	Coefficients (Std. Error)
% Change Black	0.258* (0.008)
% Change Hispanic	0.204 (0.017)
R2	0.116
Adjusted R2	0.093
N	77

a. Dependent Variable: Pres_Rep_Change_%

b. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

c. Unit of analysis is municipalities in suburban counties.

Table 19 OLS Regression Analysis – Percent Change Black and Percent Change Republican

Evaluation of Hypothesis 4: Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- Tracts that supported Republican candidate: Condition Met (with evidence from Secondary OLS regression)
- Secondary OLS (All cases Percent Change Black and Percent Republican Change): Condition Met, but with caution (weak R²)

5.3 Primary OLS Regression Analysis Findings

5.3.1 OLS Regression Results

Ordinary Least Squares regression was selected to test whether conditions within census tracts in Macomb, Oakland, Gwinnett, and Clayton Counties, as reflected by their combined demographic and election data, support the Racial Threat Hypothesis in the Detroit (Table 20)

and Atlanta (Table 21) metropolitan regions. As discussed in the previous chapter, both the OLS regression and the demographic analyses were limited to census tracts in suburban counties, both because including counties that contain central cities might capture clashing political dynamics between county and municipal entities and actors,⁶¹ and because of the historically antagonistic relationship exhibited by suburban residents and leadership towards urban centers and the transit expansion policy that frequently originates there.⁶² In the model constructed for this analysis, the variables of primary interest are *LQ Black* and *AdjTract*. As described in the Methods chapter, *LQ Black* is a ratio that indicates the magnitude of a census tract's proportion of Black population relative to the overall county proportion of Black population, with values greater than 1.0 indicating that the observed census tract contains a greater proportion of Black residents than the county more broadly. *AdjTract* is a census tract-level measure of the mean proportion of Black residents among all adjacent census tracts. Each of the tables below display results for two models: Model A includes *LQ Black* as the key variable of interest, while Model B includes *AdjTract*.

⁶¹ This would potentially introduce unnecessary and confounding analytical issues.

⁶² Thus making suburban residents a compelling population on which to focus in the wake of demographic change.

Variables	Coefficients	
	(Std. Error)	
	(A)	(B)
AMI	0.076** (0.000)	0.127** (0.000)
NoVehicle	0.100** (0.034)	0.065** (0.039)
Density	0.020* (0.000)	0.049* (0.000)
Partisan (Rep)	-1.186** (0.016)	-1.081** (0.018)
LQ Black	-0.387** (0.002)	
AdjTract		-0.229** (0.017)
R ²	0.900	0.870
Adjusted R ²	0.899	0.869
N	518	518

a. Dependent Variable: Transit (Yes)

b. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

c. Unit of analysis is census tracts in suburban counties.

Table 20 Regression Results, Detroit Suburban Counties, 2016 (Dependent variable is Transit)

Variables	Coefficients (Std. Error)	
	(A)	(B)
AMI	0.120* (0.000)	0.111* (0.000)
NoVehicle	0.016 (0.228)	0.043 (0.220)
Density	0.100* (0.000)	0.088* (0.000)
Partisan (Rep)	-1.257** (0.075)	- 1.154** (0.098)
LQ Black	-0.645** (0.022)	
AdjTract		- 0.584** (0.067)
R ²	0.860	0.844
Adjusted R ²	0.853	0.837
N	149	149

a. Dependent Variable: Transit (Yes)

b. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

c. Unit of analysis is census tracts in suburban counties.

Table 21 Regression Results, Atlanta Suburban Counties, 2014 and 2019 (Dependent variable is Transit)

The regression results show moderate support for the Racial Threat Hypothesis. As shown in the tables, even when controlling for socioeconomic and built-environment characteristics, and while holding constant the tendency to vote Republican, the primary

variables of interest show a moderately small but statistically significant decrease in support for transit initiatives, as anticipated with the predictions of RTH. *LQ Black* is a dimensionless index, which makes interpreting the coefficients difficult. The standardized coefficient – sometimes referred to as the Beta value – allows for interpreting without the use of units of measure. In the case of the Detroit case study counties, as shown in Appendix F, for Model A, the results show that each one standard deviation increase of *LQ Black* was associated with a decrease of 0.03 standard deviations in the proportion of votes supporting the transit initiative. While the result is statistically significant, the strength of this association in the Detroit counties is small. However, in the case of Atlanta’s suburban case study counties, the strength of the association is substantially larger, with a decrease of about a tenth of a standard deviation in the proportion of votes for each standard deviation increase in the *LQ Black* variable.

While the results of Model A rest entirely on the conditions present within a census tract, Model B includes the *AdjTract* variable, which addresses conditions in surrounding tracts. In Detroit suburbs, a one-unit increase in the proportion of Black population in surrounding tracts is associated with a decrease of 0.150 in the proportion of votes supporting the transit initiative, holding constant the other variables (see Appendix F). This suggests that as the diversity of racial demographics increases in surrounding neighborhoods (as exemplified by the Black residential population), suburban neighborhoods in Detroit are likely to show a small but statistically significant decrease in support for transit initiatives, consistent with the RTH. Although the effect is small in Detroit, the case of Atlanta shows an effect of 0.382 – more than twice the magnitude of Detroit.

To put the results of these models in context, the small effects of the key variables are partly explained by the enormous effect of partisanship in predicting support for transit

initiatives. The *Partisan (Rep)* variable – a measure of voter support in the 2016 presidential election for the Republican candidate – exerts large influence on all of the models and explains the majority of variation in transit support. Although the *LQ Black* and *AdjTract* variables show comparatively small effects on voting outcomes, the standardized coefficients (Beta) show that these variables of interest are the second-most influential variables in explaining the variation in transit support, second only to the highly influential variable of *Partisan (Rep)*. For example, in Detroit as shown in Table 20, Model A, and setting aside the variable for partisanship, the standardized coefficient for *LQ Black* of -0.387 has nearly four times the magnitude of the next largest variable of *NoVehicle* at 0.100. While partisanship plays the dominant role in explaining transit support, no other variable other than the race-based variables of interest exert as much influence on predicting support for transit initiatives. Both of the models show a strong fit in explaining the variation of the dependent variable, with adjusted R-squared values no smaller than 0.8. This unusually large value is a result of the partisanship variable's outsized influence on the models.

5.3.2 Explanatory Variables of Primary Interest

Significance of LQ Black

LQ Black, as the variable that represents how overrepresented Black residents are within a tract in comparison to the rest of the county, acts as an indicator of diversity. Because of the centrality of diversity and segregation to discussions of racial threat and spatialized racism, as well as their growing salience in partisan politics, LQ Black serves as a signal of very localized population dynamics: it allows the observer to infer a great deal about both the diversity levels of the county as well as some of the conditions within the census tract being observed. In Detroit

Metro's northern counties, Black people, who constituted 11.6 percent of the population, are not evenly distributed in space, and are unlikely to be present in notable numbers within tracts unless they make up large proportions.⁶³ The Black populations in the selected suburban Atlanta counties are, compared to Metro Detroit, much better represented and spatially distributed: once-homogeneously White but rapidly diversifying Gwinnett County hosts Black populations greater than 25 percent in 51 of its 113 census tracts, and majority-Black Clayton County has Black majority populations in all but one of its 49 census tracts.

The regression model output provides evidence of the complexity of LQ Black's relationship with transit support. With its negative coefficient, it is evident that higher concentrations of Black residents within census tracts is associated with low transit support, which implies that disproportionate Black representation discourages regional transit support. Because of the fact that most tracts where Black residents are strongly overrepresented still have White populations in the strong majority in all cases except Clayton County, the hypothesized effects of hostility to transit resulting from racial diversity come into focus as a possible explanation. The line of best fit provides more information about population dynamics likely at play. The fit line shows the prevalence of tracts not supporting transit, meaning crossing the 50 percent support threshold, until LQ Black is greater than 2.0. In other words, the average census tract that supports transit tends to have Black residents dramatically overrepresented, with lower levels of representation (even when still strong) being associated with transit rejection. Possible explanations for transit favorability's relationship with high LQ Black include: sheer force of numbers, with many of the transit-supporting tracts having Black overrepresentation at factors as high as 600 percent or 700 percent, and with Black residents reliably voting for transit in high

⁶³ Of Macomb's 217 tracts, Black people constitute more than 25 percent of the population in 22 tracts; Oakland County shows more diversity, with 53 of its 338 tracts hosting Black populations greater than 25 percent

proportions; tracts where Black residents are in greatest concentration are also areas that anticipated seeing significant transit service and infrastructure investments, bolstering support through perceptions of direct benefits; more significant contact between Black and White residents in tracts with greater quantities of Black people, leading to outcomes of greater intergroup trust and thus lower levels of racially motivated hostility to transit expansion.

Significance of AdjTract

AdjTract has similar implications as LQ Black, but more directly captures either the precursors of racial threat or signifies location within segregated portions of the metro region. Because it quantifies the mean proportion of the Black population within all adjacent tracts, it can indicate stark localized population composition differences in regions with high levels of segregation. As stated in the discussion of LQ Black's effects, because of the low percentage of Black residents throughout the northern metro counties, high values for AdjTract Black in a tract that is adjacent to a diverse or majority-Black tract but is itself less diverse may provide a pretext for the proximity element of racial threat. In the OLS regression model, this variable has a negative coefficient, indicating that as the proportion of Black residents in neighboring tracts increases, support for transit within examined tracts decreases. Because these counties and the vast majority of tracts (with the exception of most of Clayton County) are overwhelmingly White by proportion, this indicates that having a relatively high percentage of Black people in proximity has a strong association with negative sentiment and low support for regional transit. Possible explanations include: outgroup hostility, with majority-White populations associating transit support with the growth or movement of Black residents in nearby communities; negative sentiment among residents of strongly majority-White tracts (in proximity to more diverse tracts)

with the urban form and density that tends to coincide with urbanized areas that often host both higher proportions of Black residents and transit.

Significance of Partisanship as the Most Influential Variable

Partisanship in this analysis captures the strength of the relationship between party-based voting and transit support and provides evidence of perceptions of transit as a partisan issue. For example, despite the long history of Metro Detroit's strong affiliation with the Democratic Party even in many of its more conservative communities, this analysis complicates any assumptions about party registration and ideology, choosing instead to examine how support for transit relates to the candidates that voters chose for president. Because of the contentious nature of the 2016 Presidential race across the country and how it was perceived as a reconfiguration of conservative ideology, this variable captures the sentiments of Macomb and Oakland County voters through the perspective of this partisan realignment.

Statistical analyses of Republican partisan voting and transit support indicate the strength of this association. The OLS regression presents a negative coefficient with very large effects, indicating that the relationship between Conservative voting and support for the Detroit RTA and both Metro Atlanta transit votes are the strongest of all other variables in this analysis, exerting influence that appears to be much larger than race-associated or other demographic variables. A correlation analysis of transit support and proportion of Republican voters in tracts corroborates this finding, with an R^2 of 0.832.

While the much clearer effects of partisan voting on transit outcomes would appear to signify that partisanship stands alone as the dominant explanatory variable, other elements of this analysis complicate that assumption, largely because of the highly segregated nature of the metro

region. Spatial analyses indicate that areas of high transit support tend to overlay areas that are both heavily Democratic-leaning and with higher proportions of Black residents. Also, in most iterations of the OLS regression formula, partisanship reliably showed strong (though not problematic) autocorrelation with race. For those reasons, it is reasonable to suspect that variables may be somewhat mutually dependent or constitutive.

Of importance for the consideration of alternative explanations in this analysis, because race-associated variables reliably show statistical significance and sizeable influence relative to all variables besides partisanship, the fact of their relevance indicates that race is highly salient to this analysis and thus cannot be precluded as a central determinant of voter support. *This means that the data point to the likelihood that Racial Threat, Spatial Legacies of Racism, or varying degrees of both are present and demonstrated, and thus that conditions have been met to support them as explanations.* Because the thresholds for race-relevant explanations have been met, this supports the conclusion that Simple Partisanship is not the only viable explanation, even though partisanship clearly exerts the most statistical influence on voting outcomes.

5.3.3 Other variable outcomes

Control variable results: AMI, NoVehicle, Density

Median family income (AMI) was the chief economic variable used in this analysis. While the Detroit metro area has several instances of majority-White census tracts with family earnings below the area median (this phenomenon was much more rare in Atlanta's suburban counties), both regions exhibit severe economic inequality that strongly correlates with racial group distributions. The general lack of efficient, comprehensive region transit in and around

Detroit⁶⁴ largely precludes the phenomenon of the affluent choice transit rider, though this does occur in the Atlanta case, particularly among GRTA Express and MARTA riders in Gwinnett County (Hart, 2013). The OLS regression shows positive coefficient for *AMI* in both the Detroit and Atlanta regions, which runs counter to theorized expectations because of the relationship between increasing incomes and the proportion of White residents within census tracts in both regions. However, while the results are statistically significant in both regions, their coefficients are miniscule, and thus exert an infinitesimally small impact on transit support.

The proportion of households without access to private automobiles provides a more straightforward relationship with transit support. Though it would not be as clear a connection in more affluent metro regions with well-developed, commuter-oriented regional transit systems, this measure serves as an effective proxy for household wealth, second only to *AMI* in this analysis. Census tracts with high proportions of carless households are likely to be very low-income tracts. This measure, just like *AMI*, has a positive coefficient in the regression models for both Detroit and Atlanta. It must be noted that the coefficient for *NoVehicle* is both large enough to influence transit support and statistically significant only in the Detroit's suburban counties, with the impact being both small and not significant in Atlanta.⁶⁵

Density was selected to serve as an indicator of how appropriate a census tract might be for efficient transit provision, and thus a potential reflection of local resident attitudes towards the usefulness of transit. All four case study counties host a variety of densities due to the presence of both well-developed cities and remote rural communities, with an expectation that

⁶⁴ The Detroit Metro Region spent \$67 per capita on public transportation in 2015, while peer regions that were examined spent an average of \$231 per capita (HNTB Corporation and Nelson\Nygaard, 2015)

⁶⁵ Plausible explanations for this relationship between proportion of carless households and support for regional transit are: those who would most benefit from the dramatic increases in regional accessibility afforded by transit expansion are those with the most precarious access to automobiles; because the 1.2 mill property tax in metro Detroit was to be progressive, property owners with more expensive homes in presumably wealthier communities would pay significantly higher nominal taxes, while many residents of low-automobile-ownership tracts would be paying less in taxes (in quantity, not percentage) if they owned their homes, and low-income renters would only be indirectly burdened by the tax through the probable rent increases that would accompany the increase in landlord property taxes.

tracts of lower density would display lower transit support due to both the infeasibility of efficient service and attitudes related to their residential choice of low-density portions of the county. While *Density* was a statistically significant variable with positive coefficients in both metro regions, those coefficients were, like *AMI*, very small, indicating a negligible impact on transit support. This result was unexpected, as one could expect that the population density of one's community, and the built environment that would likely reflect that density, would more heavily influence perspectives on, and consequently support for, regional transit access.

5.3.4 Explanatory variables that failed to yield strong results

Two variables that were formulated to capture change over time, *ChangeMag* and *ChangeRate*, yielded results that were statistically significant but had negligible influence on transit voting behavior. This indicates the likelihood that there is little association between the amount or speed of racial demographic change that a tract experiences and its level of support for regional transit. Other race-indicative variables yielded statistically significant and more effective results, which indicates that changing demographics do not themselves act as a deterrent for suburban voters in the Detroit Metro Region.

5.4 Conclusion

When taken together, the individual findings from each of this project's methods present results that support the majority of the primary hypotheses but also show complexity that those hypotheses and statistical models could not account for. The Racial Threat Hypothesis provided a theoretical framework through which to look at how diversity, segregation, and changing

demographics influence the way that voters perceive the benefits or threats of expanded regional public transportation. The individual tests for each hypothesis have operationalized diversity, demographic change, and partisanship in ways that allow us to measure the validity of those hypotheses and of the accuracy of the Racial Threat Hypothesis as an appropriate lens for examining the politics of segregated regions. Consequently, these tests provide a fuller picture of the underlying racial, social, and political forces that influence voter support, and allows us to infer which of the three alternative explanations is most well-suited to explain political behavior in segregated metro regions such as Atlanta and Detroit. The preliminary results of these hypothesis tests will be examined and evaluated in the next chapter, and the outcome will provide evidence to support an answer to this project's research question, thus providing overall conclusions about the roles of racial change, space, and partisanship in regional transit voting in this dissertation.

Chapter 6 Results and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is primarily focused on interpretation of the results from the Findings and Analysis Chapter, as well as deriving a deeper understanding of the implications of those findings. The mixed methods approach used to both gather and process the data produced a considerable number of findings that, when taken together, reveal a great deal about the case study counties, the metro regions that contain them, and likely other metropolitan areas with similar histories and demographics. This final chapter synthesizes those findings into takeaways from which we can extract policy recommendations, call attention to existing gaps in the literature, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this analysis in hindsight. This process begins with a review of each method's results from the analyses through the lens of the four foundational hypotheses of this project, followed by a synthesis of those findings to produce evidence of which conditions were met and if they met burdens of proof for the alternative explanations. Next, the conclusions derived from the evidence are situated within the historical and current context of the case study counties so that project-relevant questions can be discussed in a more concrete way through demonstration. The chapter concludes with a presentation of policy recommendations and insights derived from the project.

6.2 Review of Analysis Results

6.2.1 Comparative Case Study - Demographic and Spatial Analysis

Hypothesis 1

Metro regions and cities that are more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- High LQ Black tracts: Mean voter support level, race-based variable (LQ Black and AdjTract) values, and partisanship of high LQ Black tracts were distinctly different from county mean values for variables; difference between high LQ Black and county mean variable values were in line with theory-based expectation; Two-sample t-test of high LQ Black tracts and all other tracts indicate statistically significant difference in mean transit support

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

- Eight Mile Road buffer tracts: Mean voter support level, race-based variable (AdjTract and LQ Black) values, and partisanship of buffer tracts were distinctly different from all county mean values for variables; difference between transit support levels in buffer tracts and county mean transit support values were in line with theory-based expectations; Macomb County buffer tracts displayed lowest transit support and lower Black population proportion

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

Hypothesis 2

Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- Demonstrated failure of ballot measures: Failure of ballot measures in each majority/plurality-White county is approximately proportional to both percentage of White population and relative increase in growth of Black population
Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH
- High LQ White tracts: Mean voter support level, race-based variable (LQ Black and AdjTract) values, and partisanship of high LQ White tracts were distinctly different from county mean values for variables; difference between high LQ White and county mean variable values were in line with theory-based expectation; Two-sample t-test of high LQ White tracts and all other tracts indicate statistically significant difference in mean transit support
Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH
- Spatial and demographic analysis of 2006 Affirmative Action ban: Oakland and Macomb County voting precincts exhibited strong support for Affirmative Action abolition; Macomb displayed strong support for abolition in precincts with both minimal and moderate-sized Black populations, regardless of proportion of Republican voters; Oakland precincts displayed lower support for abolition in tracts where Black people had even moderate population representation
Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

Hypothesis 3

Non-urban Whites in proximity to minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- Tracts that did not support transit: Mean of race-based variable (AdjTract and LQ Black) values and partisanship of transit-opposing tracts were distinctly different from county mean values for variables; difference between transit-opposing tract and county mean variable values were in line with theory-based expectation; Two-sample t-test of transit-opposing tracts and all other tracts indicate statistically significant difference in race-based variable means

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

- Spatial analysis of regional transit votes: Oakland tracts display pattern of GWR coefficients indicating an inverse relationship between the influence of racial variables on transit support and the proportion of Black residents in census tracts (not in line with theory-based expectations); Clayton showed minimal spatial relationship between racial variable impact on transit support and Black population proportion (inconclusive with theory-based expectations); both Macomb and Gwinnett Counties display patterns of GWR coefficients indicating direct relationships between the influence of racial variables on transit support and the proportion of Black residents in census tracts, as well as evidence of greater racial variable influence in majority-White tracts in proximity to minority-heavy tracts (in line with theory-based expectations)

Conclusion: condition partially met for consideration as evidence of RTH: Supported in Macomb and Gwinnett, not supported in Oakland and Clayton

Hypothesis 4

Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- Tracts that supported Republican candidate: Mean of race-based variable (AdjTract and LQ Black) values and transit support in Republican-supporting tracts were distinctly different from county mean values for variables; difference between Republican-supporting tract and county mean variable values were in line with theory-based expectation; Two-sample t-test of Republican-supporting tracts and all other tracts indicate statistically significant difference in transit support means

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

6.2.2 OLS Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1

Metro regions and cities that are more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- LQ Black: Variable is statistically significant; negative coefficient is in line with theory-based expectations; coefficient shows LQ Black is among the most influential variables

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

- AdjTract: Variable is statistically significant; negative coefficient is in line with theory-based expectations; coefficient shows AdjTract is among the most influential variables

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

- Secondary OLS (Primary OLS model with Eight Mile Road buffer tract subset): LQ Black and AdjTract are statistically significant; positive coefficients for LQ Black and AdjTract in line with theory-based expectation of diverse geographies; Republican support has negative and small coefficient, indicating lower salience of partisanship

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

Hypothesis 2

Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- LQ Black: Variable is statistically significant; negative coefficient is in line with theory-based expectations; coefficient shows LQ Black is among the most influential variables
- Secondary OLS (Affirmative Action vote): LQ Black and AdjTract are statistically significant; negative coefficients for LQ Black and AdjTract in line with theory-based expectation for segregated regions; LQ Black and AdjTract coefficients indicate sizable impact on transit support, second only to partisanship.

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

Hypothesis 3

Non-urban Whites in proximity to minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- AdjTract Black: Variable is statistically significant; negative coefficient is in line with theory-based expectations; coefficient shows AdjTract is among the most influential variables

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH

Hypothesis 4

Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites

Evidence of racial threat as a viable explanation

- Lack of effect of change variables: ChangeMag and ChangeRate are statistically significant but have small coefficients, indicating weak influence on transit support

Conclusion: condition not met for consideration as evidence of RTH

- Secondary OLS (Percent Change Black and Percent Republican Change): *% Change Black* variable is statistically significant; positive coefficient is in line with theory-based expectations

Conclusion: condition met for consideration as evidence of RTH, but not robust (low R^2)

6.3 Reviewing the three explanations, and presenting evidence of conclusions

This section evaluates how well the thresholds for the alternative explanations are met, based on results from each method's tests of the four hypotheses. Strong evidence from each of the tests within a hypothesis must be met in order to substantiate this project's primary assertions that racial threat is an essential driver of regional transit opposition, support for policies that are detrimental to racial minorities, and an increase in conservative voting in the face of greater racial diversity. If that threshold is not met but there is evidence presented that a racial element is present and influential, we will infer that the spatial legacy of racism was influential in producing the conditions for each test's results. If there is no evidence of a pronounced racial element in a test's outcome, we will conclude that the results of the policy and electoral results were due primarily to the acknowledged strong influence of partisanship.

6.3.1 Metro regions and cities that have historically been more racially integrated will exhibit greater support for providing social goods.

- The OLS regression's identification of the variables LQ Black and AdjTract as statistically significant in the analysis of regional transit voting demonstrates that race is a discernibly important element in influencing voter support for public transportation.
- The OLS regression analyses focusing on the buffer census tracts along Eight Mile Road in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties, with their identification of LQ Black and AdjTract as statistically significant and having higher coefficients than the Partisan (Rep) variable, demonstrate the importance of the relationship between race and transit vote outcomes in portions of the region that are more racially diverse and integrated.

- The spatial and demographic analysis of all case study tracts identified as “high LQ Black” demonstrate a marked difference in several characteristics from all other tracts and generally distinct patterns of spatial grouping. Two-sample t-tests comparing the mean transit support in high LQ Black tracts and all other tracts further corroborate the findings that the mean levels of support are different, with High LQ Black tracts showing greater mean support for transit than other tracts.
- The spatial and demographic analysis of the buffer census tracts along Eight Mile Road demonstrate distinct spatial patterns of transit support that also mirror racial residential patterns, with variable means that are markedly different than the means of the other census tract in the three metro counties.

Explanation conclusions

All tests validate the significance of race in influencing voter support for regional transit. Because the tests of this hypothesis were intended to demonstrate that tracts that would theoretically not be prone to racial threat produced higher levels of transit support, it does not inherently demonstrate the operation of the racial threat. However, it does support the strong inference that voter support in less-diverse tracts is influenced by racial threat or the spatial legacy of racism.

Hypothesis conclusions

The demonstration of racial integration’s relationship to transit support provided by each test’s results provides sufficient evidence for this analysis to **reject the null hypothesis** that *there is*

little or no relationship between the diversity of a census tract and its voters' support for the provision of social goods.

6.3.2 Policies perceived as disproportionately beneficial for minorities, even if limited and not explicitly linked to race, will face opposition from areas of a metro region that are majority-White and lack diversity.

- The OLS regression's identification of LQ Black as a statistically significant variable demonstrates the relevance of racial density's effect on influencing regional transit support.
- The secondary OLS regression analysis pertaining to Michigan's 2006 Affirmative Action vote and the statistical significance of both AdjTract and LQ Black in influencing support demonstrates that the proportion and density of Black residents is inversely related to support for abolishing an equity-based reform. Republican partisanship, however, was a much more influential variable.
- The demographic and spatial analysis of tracts designated as "high LQ White" demonstrate a strong difference from all other tracts in terms of its mean transit support and other variables, and shows spatial patterns that make a connection between transit opposition and White population homogeneity. Two-sample t-tests comparing the mean transit support in high LQ White tracts and all other tracts also validate the finding that the mean transit support levels differ, with mean support in high LQ tracts being lower than other tracts.

- The spatial and demographic analysis of the 2006 Affirmative Action vote demonstrates that communities that were homogeneously White showed the most support for abolishing Affirmative Action.

Explanation conclusions

All tests indicate the importance of race in influencing either regional transit support or support for racialized social policy. However, while Macomb convincingly demonstrates evidence of racial threat's impact on voting behavior, the broader patterns and variable direction of race's impact on voting across case studies suggest the spatial legacy of racism is the most viable explanation for the interactions of race and partisanship in influencing the voting behavior of census tracts that are the most homogeneously White.

Hypothesis conclusions

The strength and consistency of results from each examined element of this hypothesis lead me to conclude that these findings **reject the null hypothesis** that *there is little or no relationship between the voting patterns of majority-white tracts in highly segregated parts of metro regions and support for policies with racial implications.*

6.3.3 Non-urban Whites in proximity to urban minority communities frequently harbor more negative sentiment and greater feelings of threat than urban Whites.

- The OLS regression's identification of AdjTract as a statistically significant variable demonstrates the relevance of having Black populations of increasing size in proximity in influencing regional transit support.
- The demographic and spatial analyses of census tracts that did not support regional transit demonstrate a clear relationship between areas with high white populations, areas with high Republican support, and transit opposition.
- The geographically weighted regression analysis of each county's regional transit vote display a clear relationship between race and spatial voting patterns, but results differed between case study counties, with evidence of the impact of proximity being strong in Macomb and Gwinnett Counties but less robust in Oakland and Clayton Counties.

Explanation conclusions

All tests validate, to varying degrees, the conclusion that race and proximity have distinct and significant impacts on voter behavior. While the GWR analysis' conclusions were mixed, the counties where proximity clearly had a significant impact showed distinct characteristics that illustrated the ideal conditions for racial threat, primary among them being a recent history of integration, while the others were either majority-Black (Clayton) or had a longer history of integration and established, affluent Black communities (Oakland). Because the other tests showed clear evidence of the impact of Black residential proximity on voting behavior, I conclude that racial threat provides the best explanation for the impact of racial minority proximity on lower levels of transit support.

Hypothesis conclusions

The affirmative results of all tests of this hypothesis lead me to conclude that this analysis **rejects the null hypothesis** that *there is little or no relationship between the relative proximity of minority populations and the attitudes and voting behavior of majority-White populations within census tracts.*

6.3.4 Increases in relative power among urban minority groups within a segregated metro region frequently provoke political backlash by non-urban Whites.

- Despite their statistical significance, the very low coefficients for change variables that measure magnitudes or rates of Black population growth in any iteration of the OLS regression model fails to demonstrate that rapid or sizeable increases in Black populations within census tracts, across all case study counties, strongly influences regional transit voting behavior.
- The secondary OLS regression that analyzed the relationship between increasing Black populations and the growth of Republican voting demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between Black population increase and growth of Republican support over time across all case studies. However, the small size of both the coefficient and the goodness-of-fit suggest that the results should be interpreted with caution.
- The demographic and spatial analysis of tracts that supported the 2016 Republican presidential candidate demonstrate a strong difference from all other tracts in terms of its mean transit support and other race-related variables, and displays spatial patterns that clearly show a relationship between race and transit support. Two-sample t-tests comparing the mean transit support in Republican-supporting tracts and that of all other

tracts validate the finding that their mean transit support levels are different, with transit support among tracts that with majority support for the Republican presidential candidate being lower than other tracts.

Explanation conclusions

The results of efforts to test the hypothesis about increasing minority power and political backlash produced inconsistent results. The influence of race-relevant variables unrelated to change in the primary OLS regression analysis on transit support, as well as the spatial and demographic analyses of Republican-supporting tracts validate the previously established relevance and strength of race's influence on voting behavior. For this reason, the best-suited explanation for the results of the tests with affirmative results is the spatial legacy of racism.

Hypothesis conclusions

Because the test of racial change variables failed to yield results that suggest they have more than negligible influence, and because the results of the secondary OLS regression analysis pertaining to Black population growth and Republican support change were not robust, these tests **fail to reject the null hypothesis** that *there is little or no direct relationship between the changing size of minority populations and the electoral popularity of policies or developments that could disproportionately benefit members of those minority populations in majority-White census tracts*

6.4 Analysis Conclusions

Based on the findings of the analysis and the outcomes of testing this project's four hypotheses, I conclude that the Spatial Legacy of Racism presents the most compelling and defensible framework through which to understand the voting behavior of suburban residents in the segregated metropolitan regions of Atlanta and Detroit. The strength and consistency of the evidence of race's relationship with transit voting, as well as the distinct spatial patterns that illustrate elements of the Racial Threat Hypothesis provide little doubt that racial anxiety or animus, whether traditional or manifesting in unconscious bias, is a factor in influencing suburban voting habits. This is in evidence by the behavior of social policy voting in rural, homogeneously White areas of metro counties, which voted overwhelmingly to abolish Affirmative Action when it posed little threat to the economic fortunes of residents in these communities. It was similarly in evidence in the more recently diversifying communities in Macomb and Gwinnett Counties, where proximity to Black residential pockets frequently led to underperformance in transit support in majority-White census tracts, and even strong conservative candidate support and opposition to transit in majority-White tracts that were surrounded by more Black-populated tracts, even when located near proposed transit facilities.

These instances indicate disproportionate opposition to policies that could benefit Black residents, or disproportionate support for policies that could harm Black people, in a way that likely cannot be accounted for solely by differences in partisan priorities. This assertion is supported by the finding that, though there was some presence of autocorrelation between the variable for Republican partisanship and those for race in the primary OLS regression analysis, the factors were not sufficiently high to conclude that they were too closely tied as to be inseparable. This indicates that the influence of race on the dependent variable, transit support,

was distinct from partisanship, even if those race-relevant variables were second to partisanship in terms of magnitude of effect on transit support. The presence of racial threat, though discernible in this project's analysis of particular sub-population characteristics in Gwinnett and Macomb Counties, also fails to provide a sufficiently compelling or versatile framework to account for all of the examined political behavior in the case study regions. An example is the geographically weighted regression analysis of Oakland County's transit ballot initiative, in which the presence of Black residents in rural White areas of the county had a positive coefficient, indicating that the higher the density or proximity of Black residents, the greater the level of support for transit would be. This implies the likelihood that simple demographic change influences voting in a linear sense, meaning that more Black people voting for transit results in higher support for transit, whereas a racial threat response in these areas would have elicited a depression response to transit support by the White majority (indicated by a negative coefficient for *LQ Black* and *AdjTract*). Additionally, the lack of impact of racial change variables in comparison to the racial variables of *LQ Black* and *AdjTract* likely indicates that the pace of change in demographics is less important than the overall presence of Black people in general. This means that tracts that went from having a negligible percentage of Black residents to having a more substantial Black presence during the timeframe of this study were likely to elicit a transit opposition response, regardless of the speed or size of population growth.

Chapter 7 Discussion and Policy Considerations

7.1 Policy Conflicts and Recommendations

7.1.1 Difficulty of identifying a tipping point of diversity

This analysis, at least in part, supports the relevance of Racial Threat Hypothesis and the underlying premise that increasing levels of diversity in a region can trigger a hostile response from a majority group that has traditionally asserted unrivaled influence. The case studies of Gwinnett County in Metro Atlanta and Macomb County in Metro Detroit provide strong examples of this, with both only experiencing meaningful racial diversification in recent decades and, in the case of Macomb, primarily in small geographic areas that still tend to be predominantly White. However, the diversity of the four cases and the varying levels of receptivity to social goods production or explicitly racial policy corroborates the presence of a gap in the literature that should intuitively have been filled if possible: the concept of a diversity tipping point.

These cases demonstrate that there is no concrete proportion of minorities in a region, county, or city that will reliably trigger either a shift towards more liberal voting patterns or blunt the force of racial backlash-based voting. Intergroup Contact Theory asserts that proximity and social interaction provides the conditions under which intergroup anxiety and hostility can be

diminished, making cooperation and community-building more feasible. However, the literature is largely silent on if there is a threshold of minority group saturation that both triggers the initial racial threat response and later aids in its dissipation as enough White community members (in the case of this project) are exposed to Black neighbors. Both the racial threat literature and the case of Macomb County specifically validate the notion that Black residents are tolerated in overwhelmingly White communities while they are few in number, as is evident in the geographically weighted regression analysis of transit support. However, both in Macomb and Gwinnett Counties, proximity to or hosting a modest but relatively large (compared to the county mean) Black population was associated with increased Republican voting support and transit opposition, which would be counterintuitive if 1.) one subscribed to Intergroup Contact Theory and 2.) there was meaningful intergroup contact between Black and White residents in these spaces. It seems apparent that, in places that are newly struggling with the rapid pace of integration (or, more precisely, an influx of minority residents), the presence of diverse newcomers does not readily create a force multiplier of liberal or social goods votes.

The example of Clayton provides a perspective that reliably liberal voting in racially segregated regions can only come from sheer weight of population numbers. However, Oakland County may provide evidence that this is not a prerequisite, demonstrated through its earlier if begrudging acceptance of Black residents before its regional neighbor, the much greater concentration and integration of Black families along Eight Mile Road, and its comparatively greater Democratic candidate and regional transit support that in part result from its greater integration. This dissertation does not provide definitive evidence of the social, racial, and economic preconditions for a shift away from what appears to be partially minority-averse voting

patterns, but this work will hopefully provide more data through which one can make more successful inquiries about if a diversity tipping point exists that triggers intergroup trust.

7.1.2 Identifying counties and tracts that are most likely to oppose transit expansion

The county- and tract-level analyses of each metro region provided consistent results that affirm the characteristics most heavily associated with opposing regional transit in historically segregated metro regions. While variability can exist, there is a constellation of traits that, when present together, have a strong association with census tracts that show majority voter opposition to transit ballot measures. Foremost among those traits is high levels of Republican party support, which is shown in Tables 20 and 21 in the regression analysis to have a strong, statistically significant, direct relationship with transit opposition. Though racial variables were among the most influential statistically significant variables in identifying transit-supportive census tracts, Republican partisanship is, in fact, the examined variable most heavily responsible for a tract's failure to support transit ballot measures. This is confirmed through the demographic analysis of tracts that displayed majority Republican support, which demonstrated mean transit support far below the overall regional means of all examined counties.

Another characteristic that is strongly tied to tract-level transit opposition is possessing a homogeneously White population, or a population that is disproportionately White in comparison to the rest of the county. As I show in Section 5.2.4 of Chapter 5, The spatial and demographic analysis corroborate the relationship between this trait and Republican support, meaning that the most heavily Republican tracts also tend to be the most densely White and vice versa. This finding, however, is only valid in historically and currently segregated metro regions, as analyses of more racially integrated counties and metro regions show a much more tenuous relationship

between race and partisan voting, particularly among White residents (Ansolabehere et al., 2012). This strengthens an underlying argument of this project, namely that diverse, less conservative, racially integrated metro regions are able to promote stronger cross-jurisdictional cooperation and consequently produce more social goods like public transit. It also shows that majority Whiteness as a trait, in a vacuum, does not inherently or consistently correlate with transit opposition, and that the social characteristics that accompany segregation appear to be an important ingredient in generating hostility to transit.

Though less clear, an observation from this project that arouses interest for future study is the role of proximity to areas of Black population concentration. This connection is less clear because it appears to be contingent on the county's experience with racial integration. Taking the historical analysis and the OLS regression of Black population change (as reflected in the variable *% Change Black* of Table 19) and Republican support into account, it is apparent that, in counties that are more recently experiencing meaningful racial integration, tracts that have moderate or high proportions of White residents and are adjacent or in proximity to densely Black tracts tend to exhibit disproportionately low transit support (see the analysis in section x of chapter y). This, however, is less in evidence in counties with a longer history of racial integration.

7.1.3 Referenda for transit expansion should be carefully rolled out when demographic change supports it

A crucial policy-oriented takeaway derived from this analysis concerns the stakes of understanding regional population characteristics while promoting and advocating for ballot initiatives with social equity implications. While making policy recommendations for how

regional transit should be branded in order to avoid race-related political backlash is beyond the scope of this project, there are grounds to recommend that equity and public transportation advocates focus more of their analysis and decision-making on racial demographic trends, beyond observing them to estimate potential transit ridership. This project's analysis demonstrates that the combination of political partisanship, a community's current racial characteristics, and the region's history of political and social fragmentation are highly predictive of both regional transit and race-relevant policy outcomes. When the public will is directly translated into policy through referendum and the public itself is highly politically polarized, the policy interests of minority (both racial and numerical) voters are inherently at risk. For that reason, the expenditure of political, economic, and human capital to promote policies that champion minority interests such as regional transit should be strategic in how it confronts that risk.

As discussed above, it is difficult to identify a demographic tipping point at which one could expect a shift towards majority support of transit or other plausibly equity-advancing policies. Because there is no universally applicable model to signal a population's readiness to adopt transit expansion, and because the success of transit ballot measures is dependent on a multitude of factors and activities with associated costs, transit and equity advocates should be more strategic about how and when to initiate campaigns for significant policy change. This includes generating strategies for targeting areas of metro regions that are likely to be sites of backlash very differently (or not at all) than those with established track records of supporting liberal policies or that have achieved sizeable minority populations. While a place undergoing demographic churn like Gwinnett County could have easily produced a different result in its 2019 transit ballot initiative just like its democratic-leaning performance in 2016, the contentious

recent history and current demographic realities of places like Macomb County make failures to pass regional transit or most other social equity-centered reforms dependably likely. Though the growth of racial minority populations in Macomb would likely result in a numerical increase of liberal voters who support transit, the primary and secondary OLS regression analyses showed that their presence was actually associated with increased opposition to regional transit and increased support for the Republican presidential candidate, respectively, and the fact that non-Whites in general were such a numerical minority meant that this negative sentiment among White suburbanites towards transit and Democratic candidates would more than negate the growing minority political influence.

This analysis produces valid evidence that majority groups are prone to supporting positions that mitigate threats to the social and political equilibrium that they have long-maintained, and that they will use official tools such as the ballot box for that purpose. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, the direct democratic process that underlies the ballot measure provides a snapshot of public sentiment on the targeted issue, and can be used to gauge a region's policy preferred direction for future issues. While this process does not inherently benefit any specific ideological orientation in the abstract, this policy generation approach greatly benefits numerical majority groups in a metropolitan region that is politically and socially polarized. Metro regions that are racially segregated and experiencing both demographic churn and the intense partisan hostility that typified the 2016 election cycle fit in this category, with the Detroit Region providing an effective example. Despite the enthusiasm among regional transit advocates and Democratic operatives that the metro counties would deliver both a comprehensive public transit system and secure Michigan as Democratic-leaning state, both efforts were foiled in what has widely been perceived as instances of backlash politics

(Abramowitz and McCoy 2019, Hunter 2018, Milligan 2016). Conservative, typically Democrat-voting White residents outperformed other demographic groups in terms of voter turnout, fueled partially by racial grievance politics that renewed focus on the danger of undeserving outgroups and a ‘big government’ apparatus that protects them to the detriment of ‘practical’, ‘hardworking’ Americans (Bennett and Walker 2018, Tyson and Maniam 2016, Fonger 2016).

A more politically sensitive analysis of how the region’s demographics were coinciding with the hardening of conservative political views, as well as the rhetoric around racial change and even ‘invasion’ that reflected those conservative views, should have given planners and officials promoting the RTA’s plans some pause and, perhaps, insight into where different messaging and resources could go to increase transit expansion’s likelihood of passage. While these recommendations and the analysis that supports them have the benefit of hindsight, the history of each region’s racial antagonism and the employment of legal means of undermining avenues of opportunity for Black residents is still instructive. Reliance purely on racial characteristics for policy-making is overly deterministic and certainly should be supplemented with other data-gathering and analysis techniques such as polling and political trend forecasting, but recognizing the inflexibility of a voting bloc, particularly when they have identity-based elements around which to calcify their views, makes viewing regional demographic trends dispassionately a necessity.

7.1.4 The difficulty of discerning the role of partisanship versus racism, and the problems it creates with demographics-based policymaking

While partisanship and race are clearly distinct both as variables and broader systemic influences, the ways that they interact or coincide in certain contexts makes isolating their effects

difficult. Less racially segregated regions illustrate this point, with their respective White populations being strongly represented among both the most liberal and conservative districts (Brown and Enos, 2021). Race's distinction from partisanship weakens when considering Black voters, who vote heavily and disproportionately Democratic regardless of the segregation levels of the counties and regions, with 83 percent of Black voters leaning or solidly voting Democratic (Igielnik and Budiman, 2020). White voting patterns, however, look quite different in highly segregated regions, with suburban maps of racial composition and Republican support strongly informing each other, if not being direct analogs.

In this project's analysis of the Detroit metro region, there was a strong relationship between conservative voting and support for banning Affirmative Action (Baker, 2019), a policy position that served little purpose beyond restoring a prominent form of systemic disadvantage against minorities. While this policy clearly had strongly negative implications for minority workers and students in general and Black people in particular and is a direct example of acknowledged or unacknowledged racial anxiety and hostility, it is also a policy position in line with mainstream conservative partisanship (Sidanius et al., 1996). Similarly, while transit support is an issue much more strongly tied to partisanship and less tied to race in better-integrated metro regions, it has a strong relationship to both partisanship and race, and possibly racial hostility, in segregated regions according to the findings of this analysis. This connection is corroborated by a history of the consistent invocation of overtly or indirectly racist imagery and a reliance on arousing race-based threat in anti-transit rhetoric, as evidenced by a variety of bumper stickers, signs, and slogans deployed during transit referenda in Atlanta and whenever regional cooperation for transit development was a prominent issue in Detroit (Kruse p. 249, Goodnough 2016, Bouie 2014).

While it would be a mistake to reflexively conflate racial hostility and Republican support, a project of this kind necessitates finding a means of making sense of the connection. I see three plausible avenues of conceptualizing it:

- a. People with racial anxiety or hostility tend to gravitate toward and congregate in the Republican Party.
- b. The Republican platform itself possesses policies that tend to disadvantage minorities, but also holds other policy positions that are attractive to a subset of the population that finds the oppressive policies sufficiently tolerable to prevent defection.
- c. It is a coincidence that conservative policies consistently disadvantage minorities, particularly in the context of segregated metros, and many Republican voters are unaware of the impacts of those policies or conceptualize their impacts differently than those who are disadvantaged by them (even when they themselves experience that disadvantage directly or indirectly).

The most benign of these perspectives presupposes that Republican voters are indifferent to or misinformed about the harmful impacts of the policies they support particularly on low-income minorities, sufficiently distanced from the impacts so as not to be concerned, or self-assured that these policies will eventually prove beneficial once the policy-induced suffering ends. In the context of this analysis and in the current moment, that may take the form of viewing transit spending as wasteful despite it being a vital resource for many low-income workers, or harboring prejudices against bus transit as dirty or unsafe despite little or no personal experience, or choosing to ignore the demonstrated realities of identity-based prejudice and arguing that Affirmative Action is actually unfair to and discriminatory towards White workers. While these presuppositions strongly informed my use of Republican voting as a proxy for race-conscious or

race-anxious voting, it fails to provide clarity on where partisanship ends and outgroup hostility begins. The racial and partisan variables have levels of autocorrelation that are strong but not so much so that they are untenable to analyze together in the OLS regressions, and keeping the historical forces that created and perpetuated what has been a very durable form of segregation in perspective, it is difficult to reframe Macomb County's strong shift towards Conservatism just as the county began to experience significant Black migration across Eight Mile Road as a coincidence.

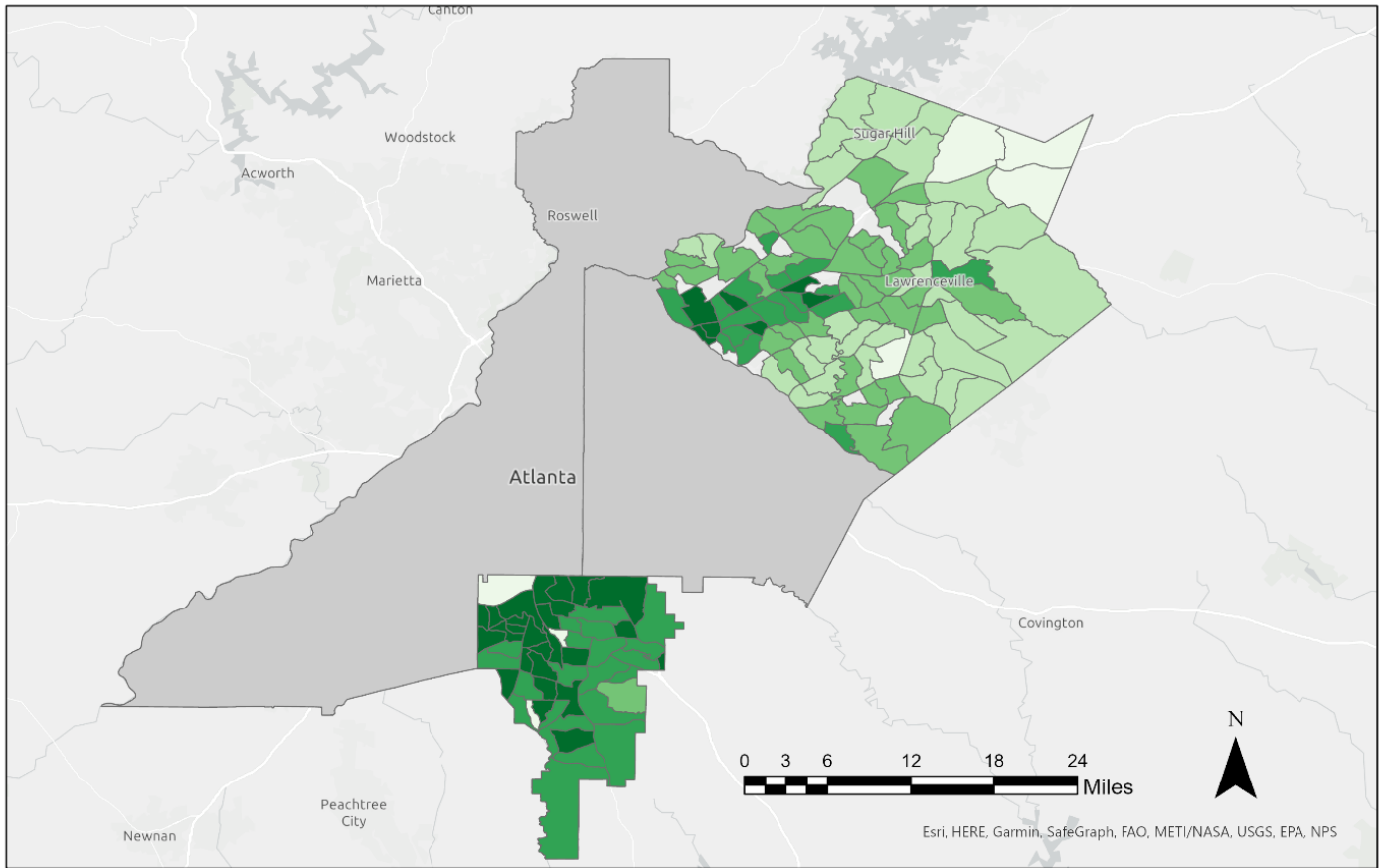
This confluence of racial anxiety and political conservatism presents a problem for making recommendations for demographics-based policy in historically and currently segregated metro regions. It is simplistic to observe and document racial demographic trends and make strong inferences about the political appetite for various policies, particularly when those policies have little or no direct connection to race. In addition, even though a majority (53 percent) of White voters supported Republican candidates in 2018, and that subset of voters may be disproportionately distributed in highly segregated metro regions in the US South and Midwest, there is still a significant portion of the White population living in those regions that support Democratic candidates and policies, including in the metro regions examined for this study. This means that making assumptions about the hostility of densely White portions of these regions to equity-oriented policies may be premature without observing the prevailing political trends, particularly if those policies promote broad benefits such as transit. For example, even though Oakland and Gwinnett Counties have White majorities and pluralities, respectively, and harbor a strong minority Republican presence, both nearly passed their transit ballot measures.

Still, the preservation of a status quo of relative group advantage, particularly in regions with recent histories of contentious racial politics, can be sufficient to mobilize opposition to

development or policies that shift power or benefits to marginalized groups. This is evident in how leadership in both of the aforementioned counties demonized transit expansion as ‘wealth transfers’ to the residents of Detroit and Atlanta or leaned on old tropes about importing crime and poverty from the city (Gioielli 2021, Trounstein 2018, Lawrence and Gallagher 2015, Estep 2019). For this reason, regional policymaking resulting from demographic trends analysis must be acutely sensitive to the racial strife of recent decades, the distribution of communities of color during times of demographic churn, and the prevailing, often nationwide, sociopolitical mood towards policies with social equity implications, in addition to simply observing partisanship.

Appendices

Appendix A: Atlanta Metropolitan Region Maps



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Regional Transit Support

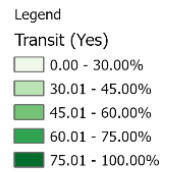
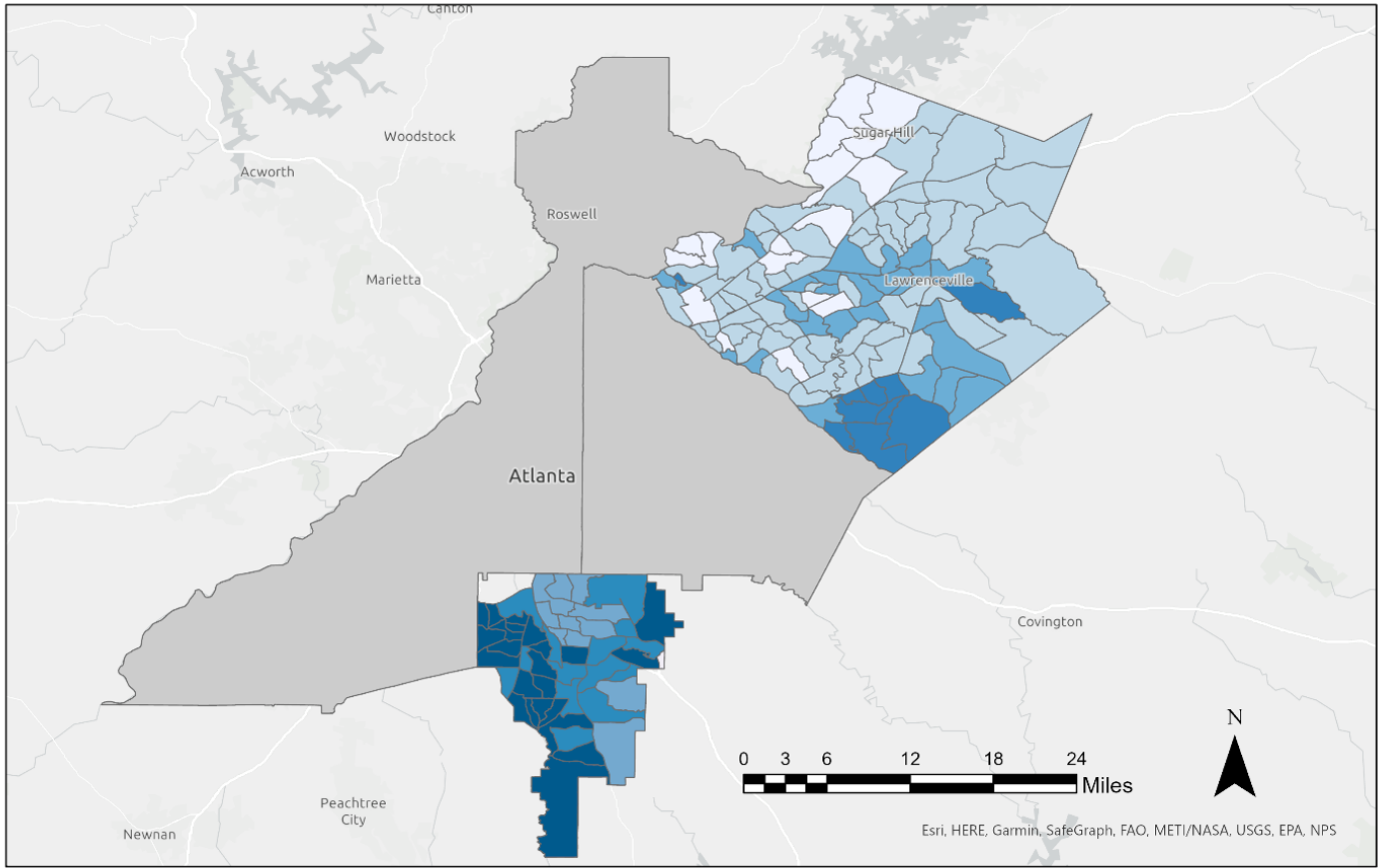


Figure 12 Map of voter support for regional transit ballot initiatives, Atlanta Metro Region



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Percent Black

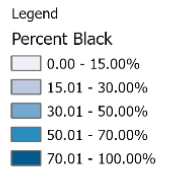
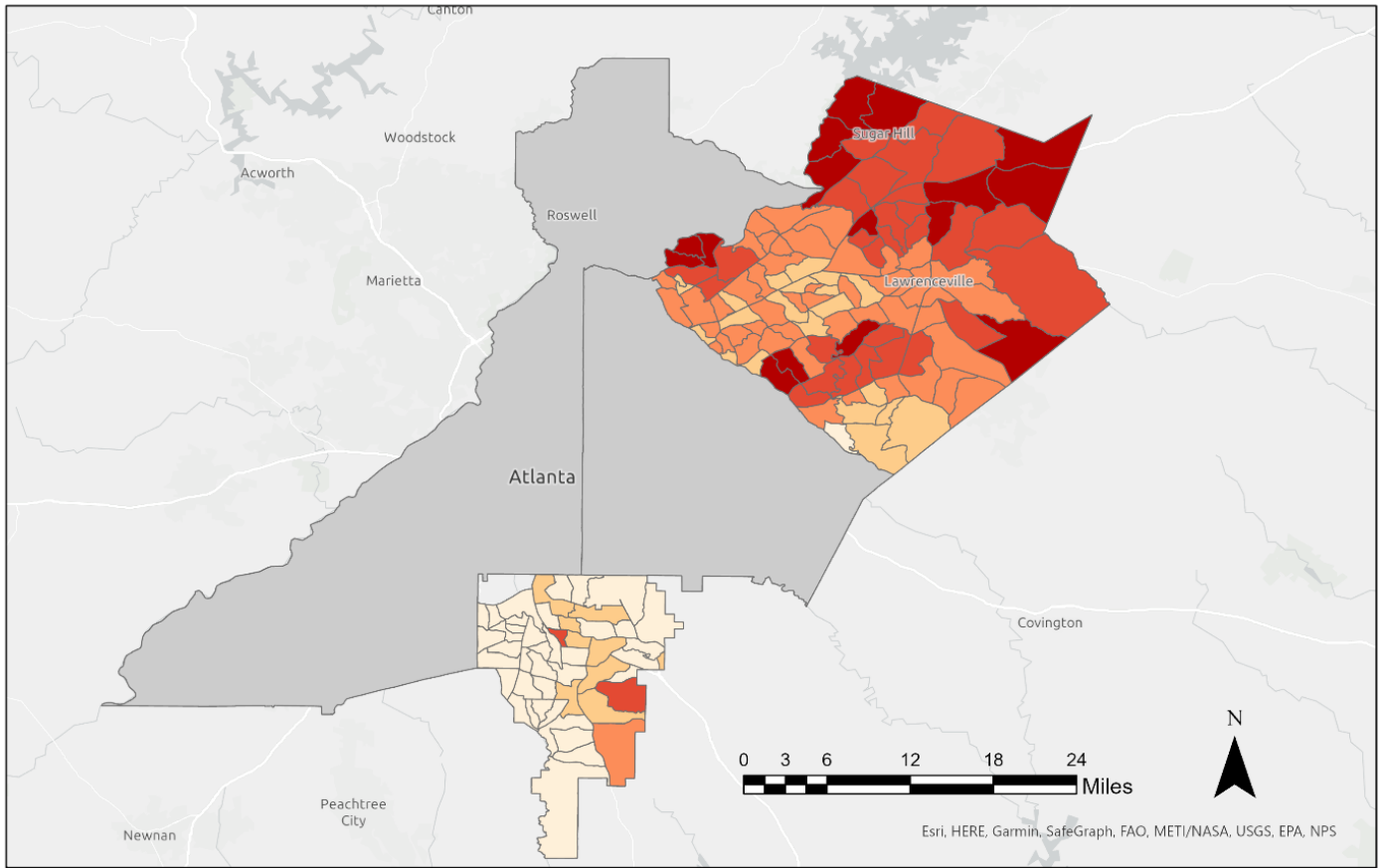


Figure 13 Map of Black population proportion within census tracts, Atlanta Metro Region



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Percent White

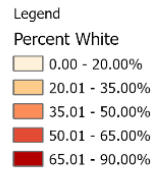
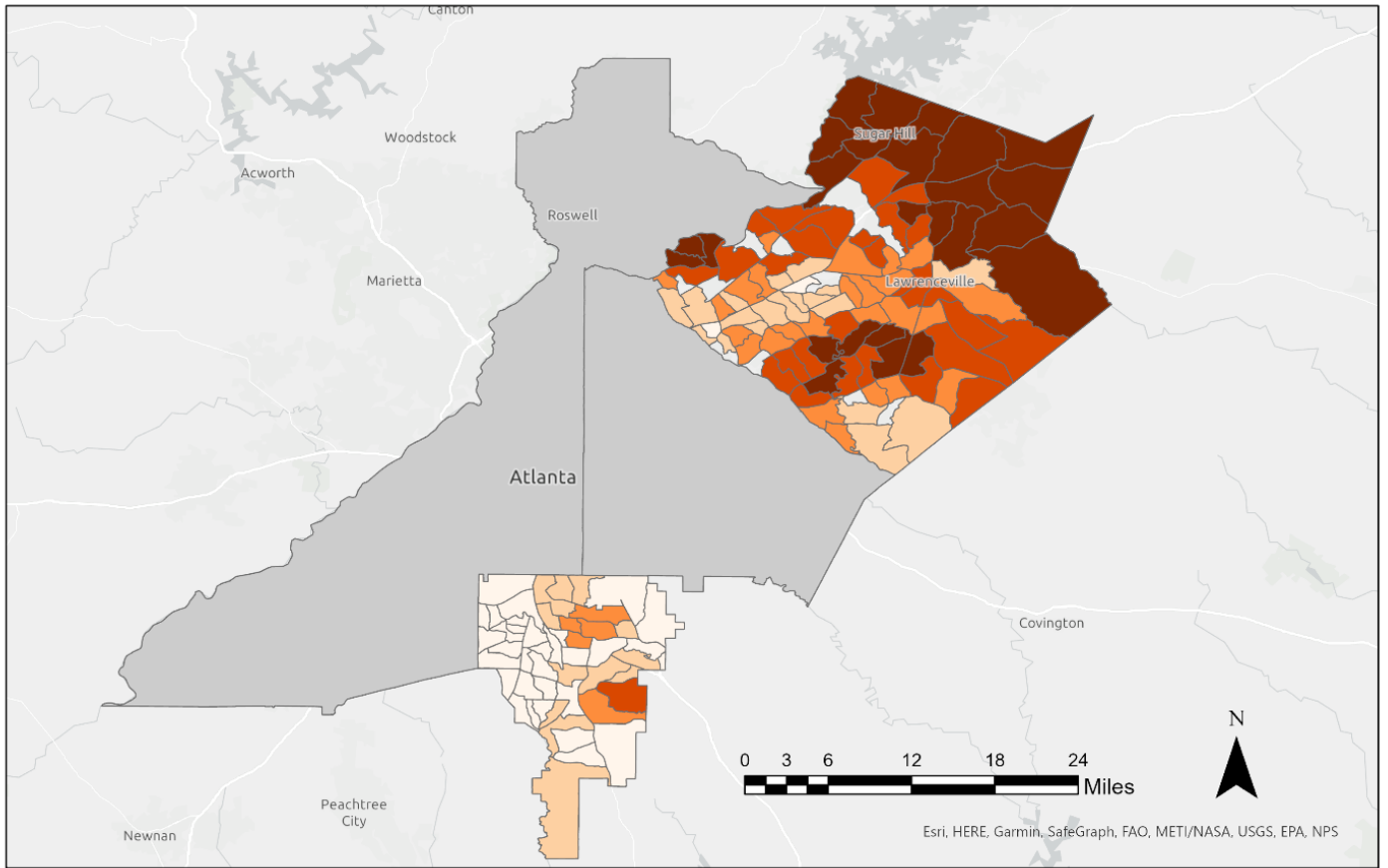


Figure 14 Map of White population proportion within census tracts, Atlanta Metro Region



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Partisanship: Republican Support

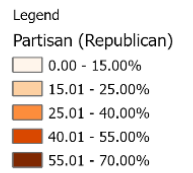
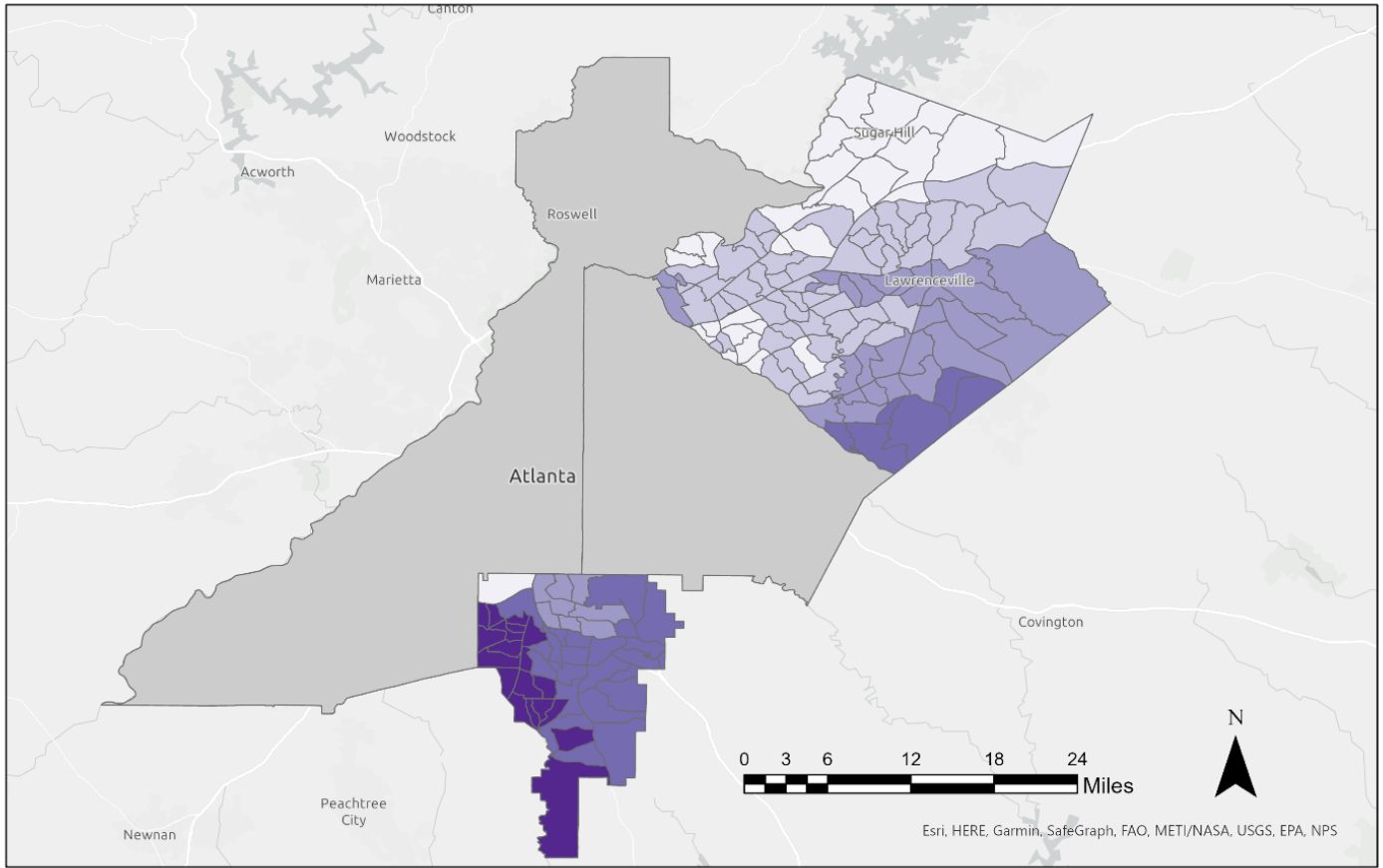


Figure 15 Map of Republican support, Atlanta Metro Region



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Mean Percentage of Black Population in Adjacent Tracts

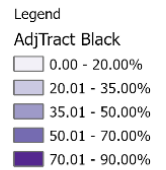
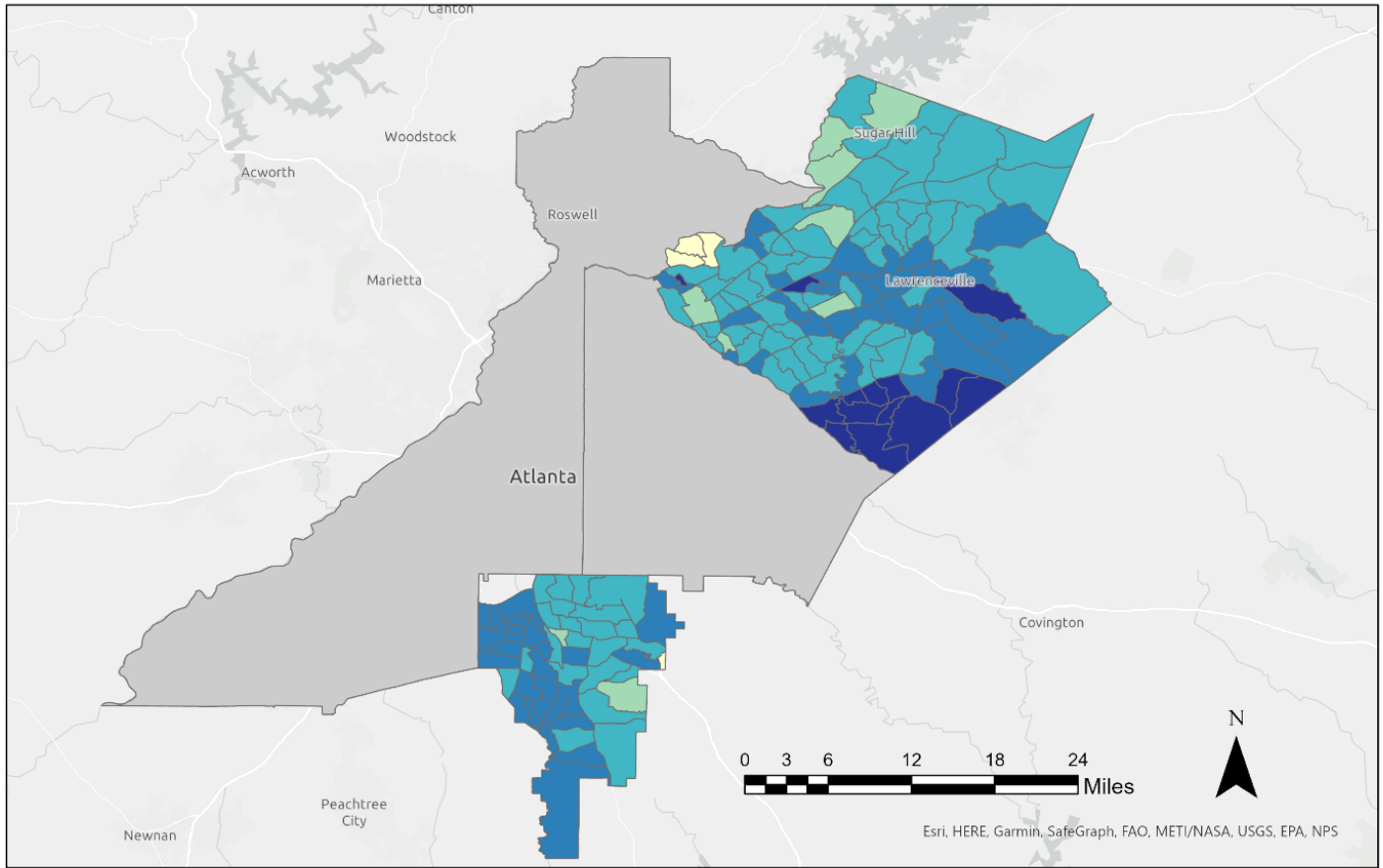


Figure 16 Map of mean Black population proportion in adjacent census tracts, Atlanta Metro Region



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Location Quotient: Black

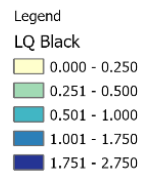
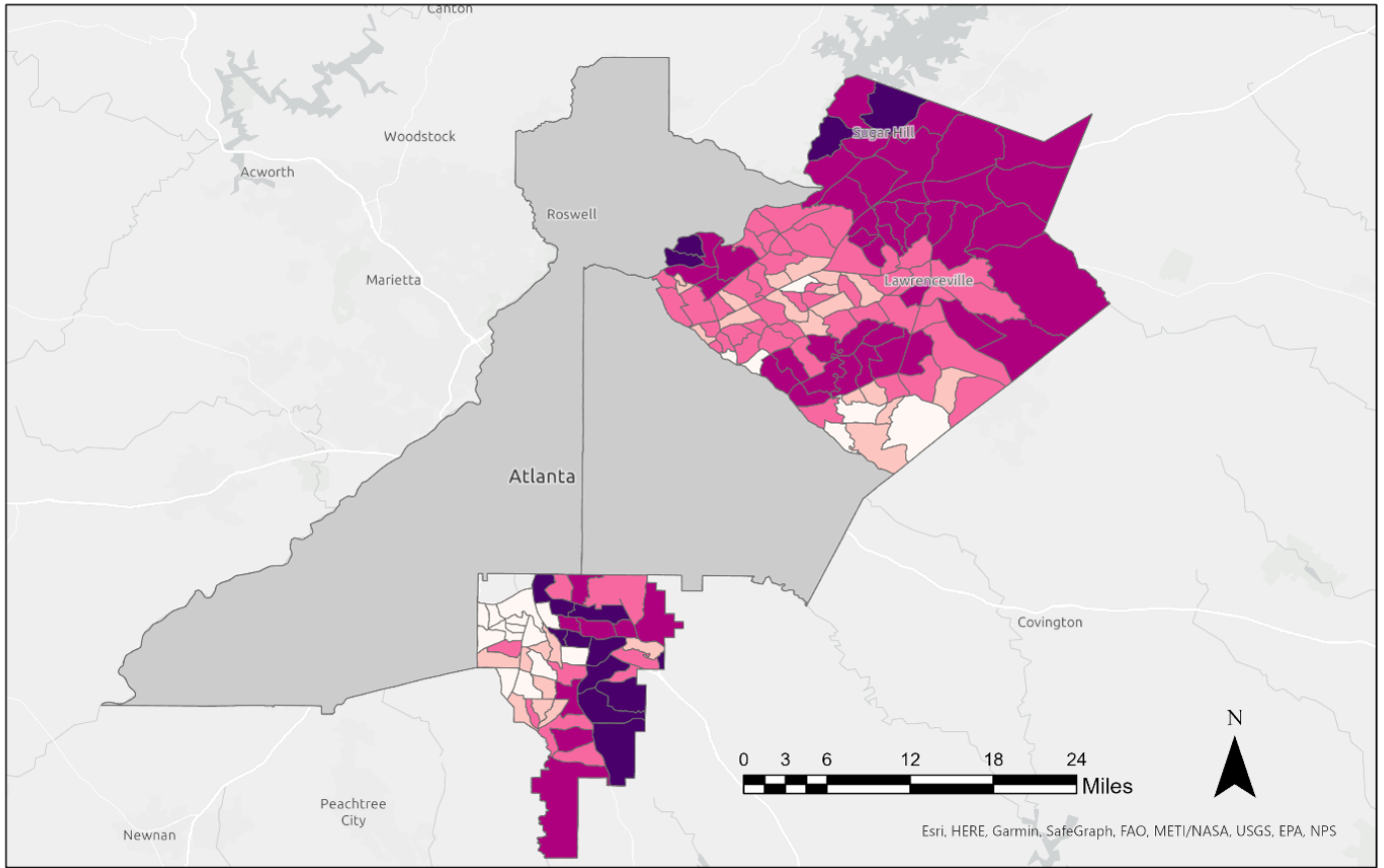


Figure 17 Map of location quotients of Black population within census tracts, Atlanta Metro Region



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Location Quotient: White

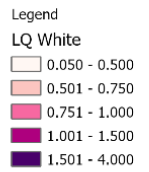
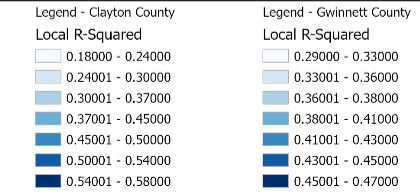
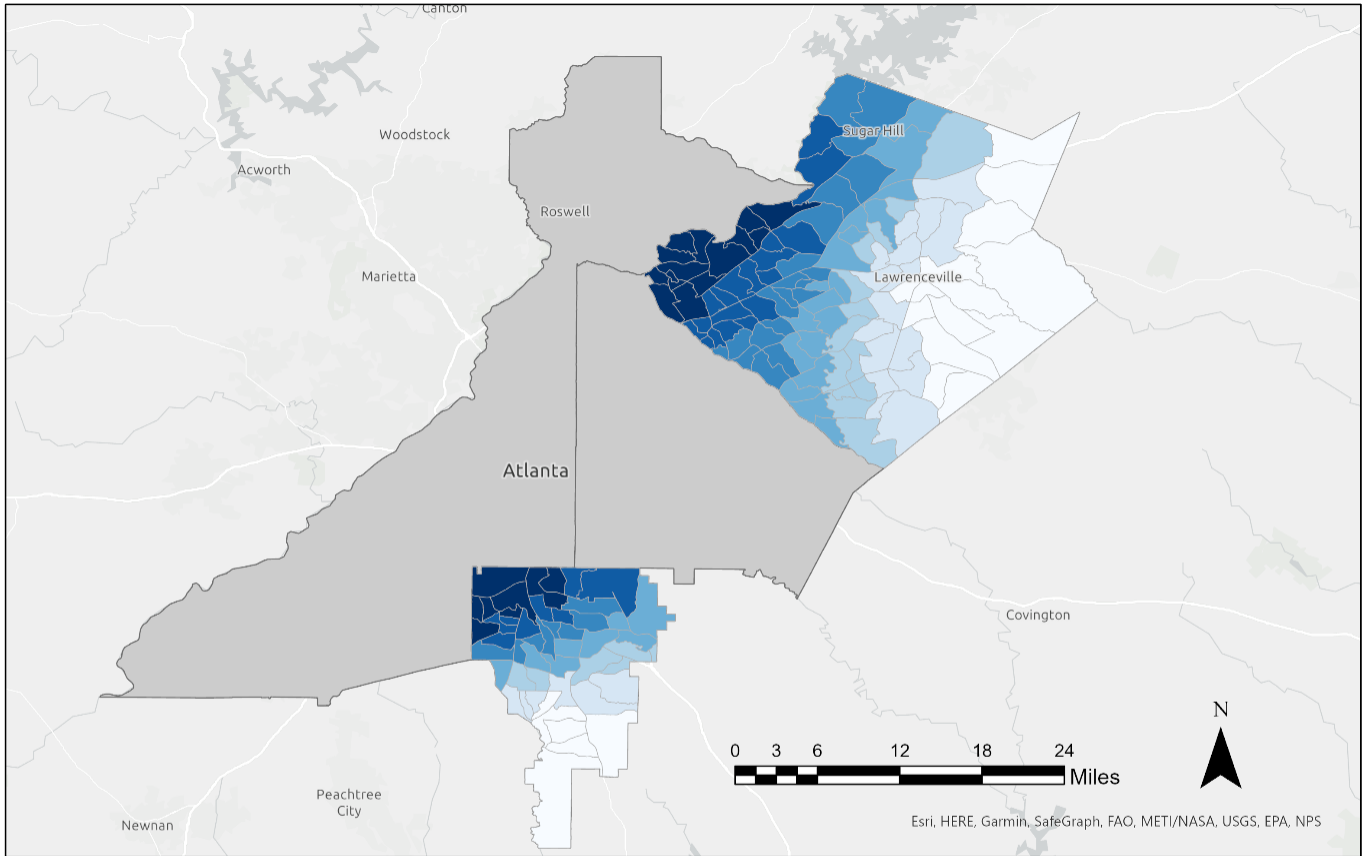


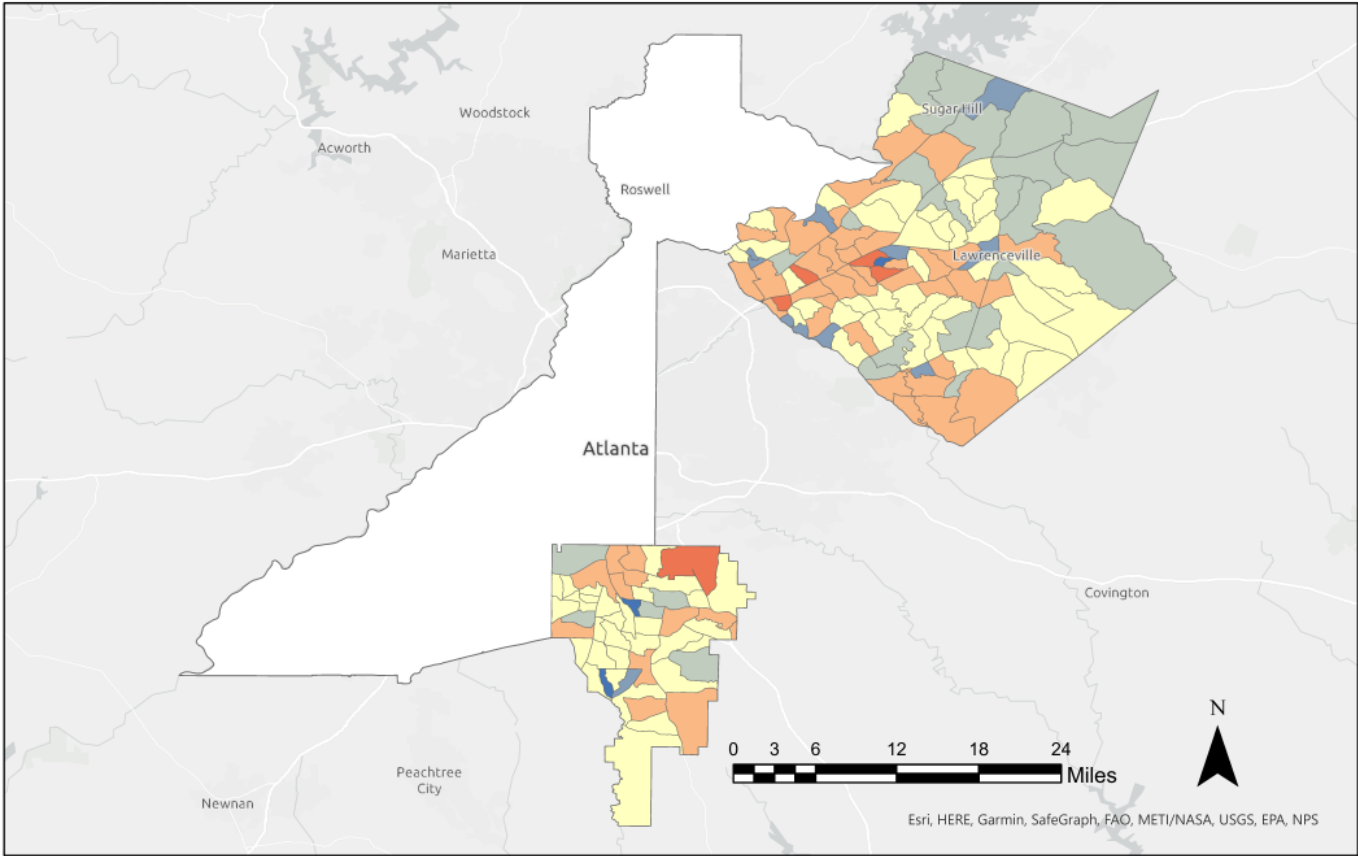
Figure 18 Map of location quotients of White population within census, Atlanta Metro Region



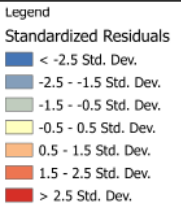
Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Localized R-Square (Model Spatial Goodness-of-Fit)

Figure 19 GWR analysis map of Model Goodness-of-Fit (R2), Atlanta Metro Region. Higher coefficients indicate increasing strength of the statistical model to accurately predict transit support within tracts.



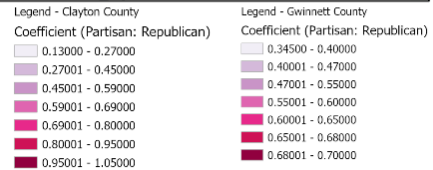
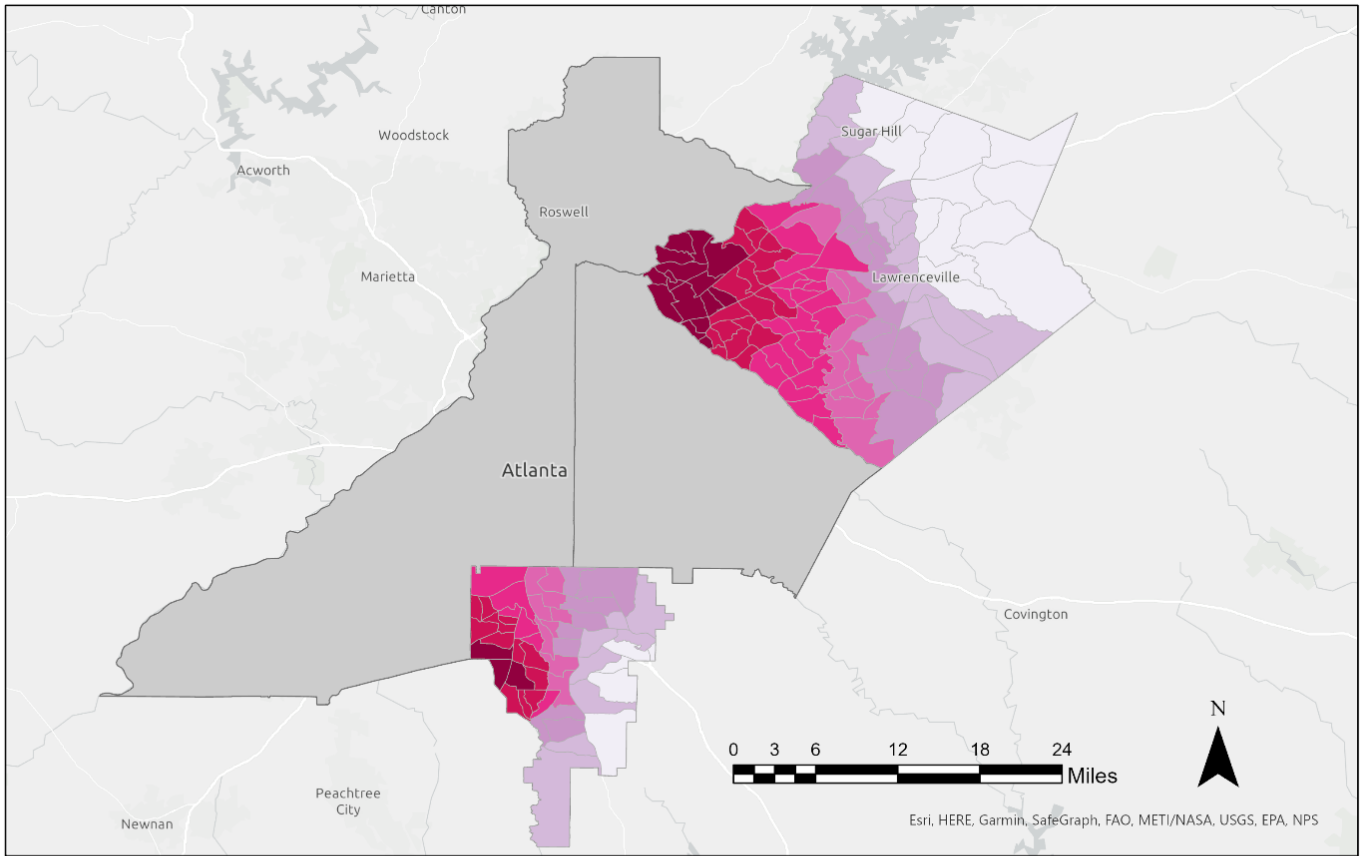
Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS



Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Standardized Residuals - Transit Support

Figure 20 GWR analysis map of the standardized residuals of transit support, Atlanta Metro Region. Coefficients indicate the underperformance or overperformance of transit support in each tract relative to model predictions.

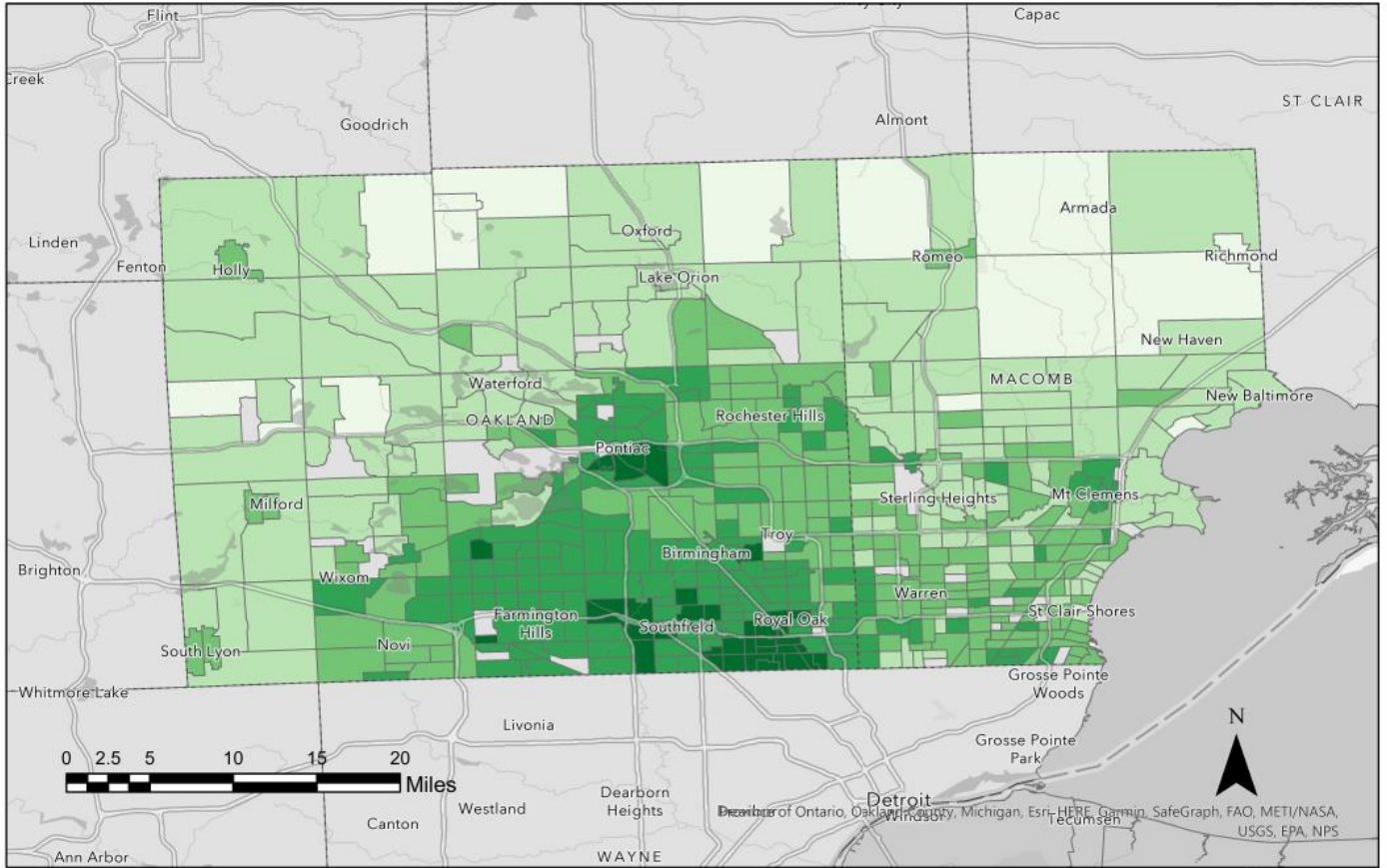


Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Clayton and Gwinnett Counties

Geographically Weighted Regression - Republican Support

Figure 21 GWR analysis map of Republican support's influence on transit support, Atlanta Metro Region. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of Republican partisanship on transit support in different portions of each county.

Appendix B: Detroit Metropolitan Region Maps



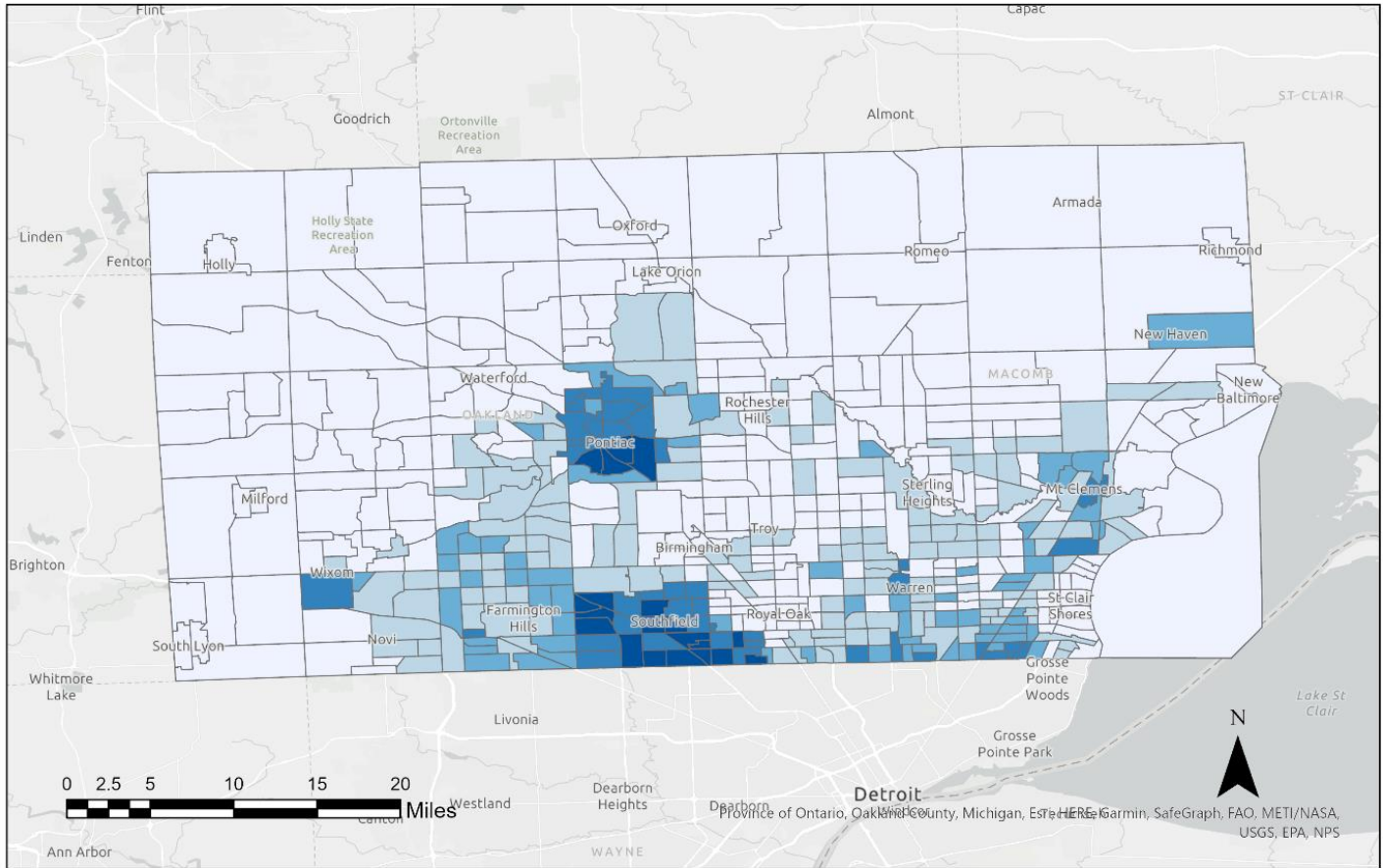
Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Regional Transit Support: 2016 RTA Ballot Measure

Legend

Transit Support	
	0.00 - 30.00%
	30.01 - 40.00%
	40.01 - 50.01%
	50.01 - 65.00%
	65.01 - 80.00%

Figure 22 Map of voter support for regional transit ballot initiatives, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Percent Black

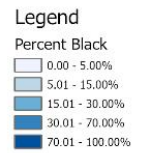
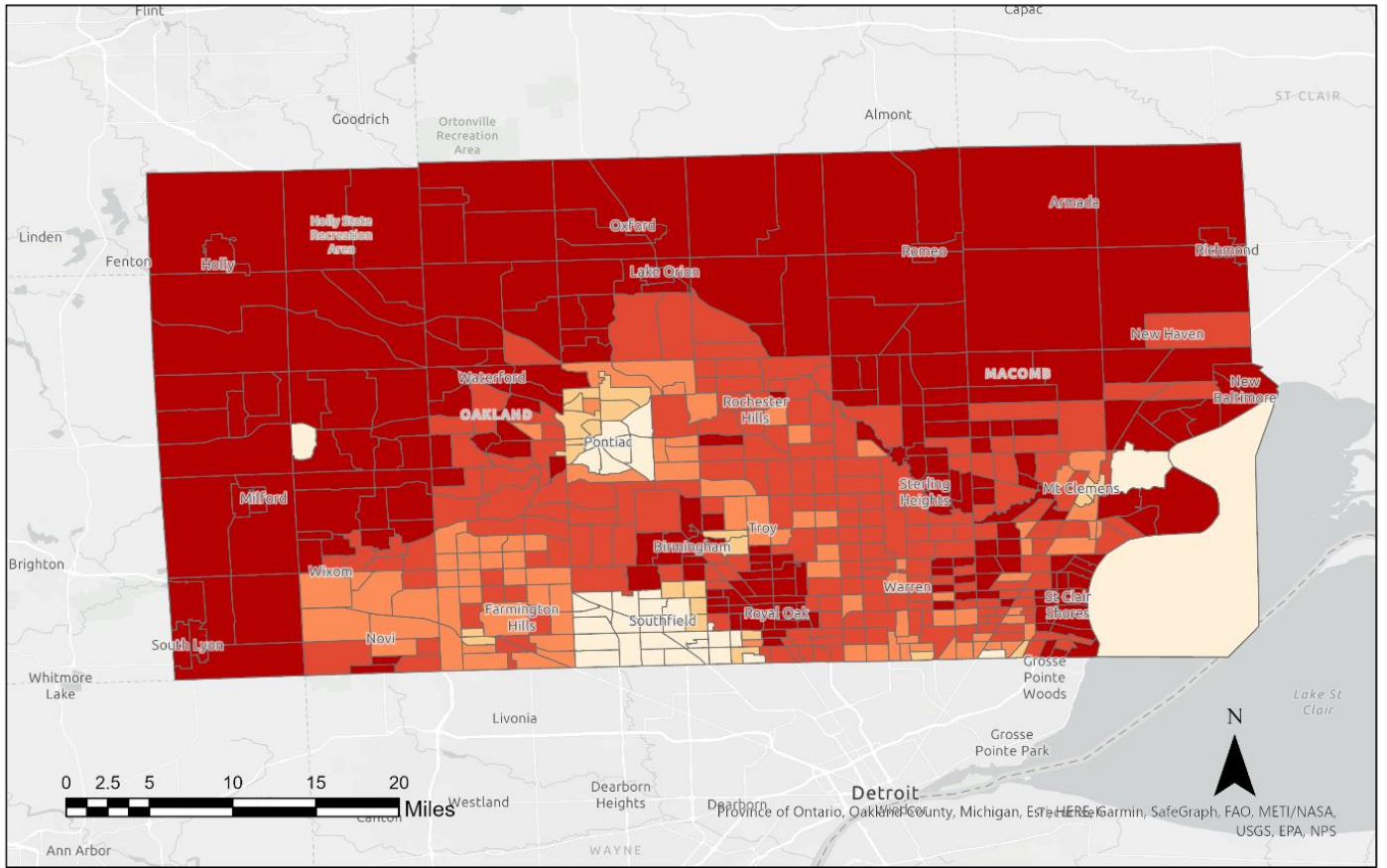


Figure 23 Map of Black population proportion within census tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Percent White

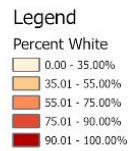
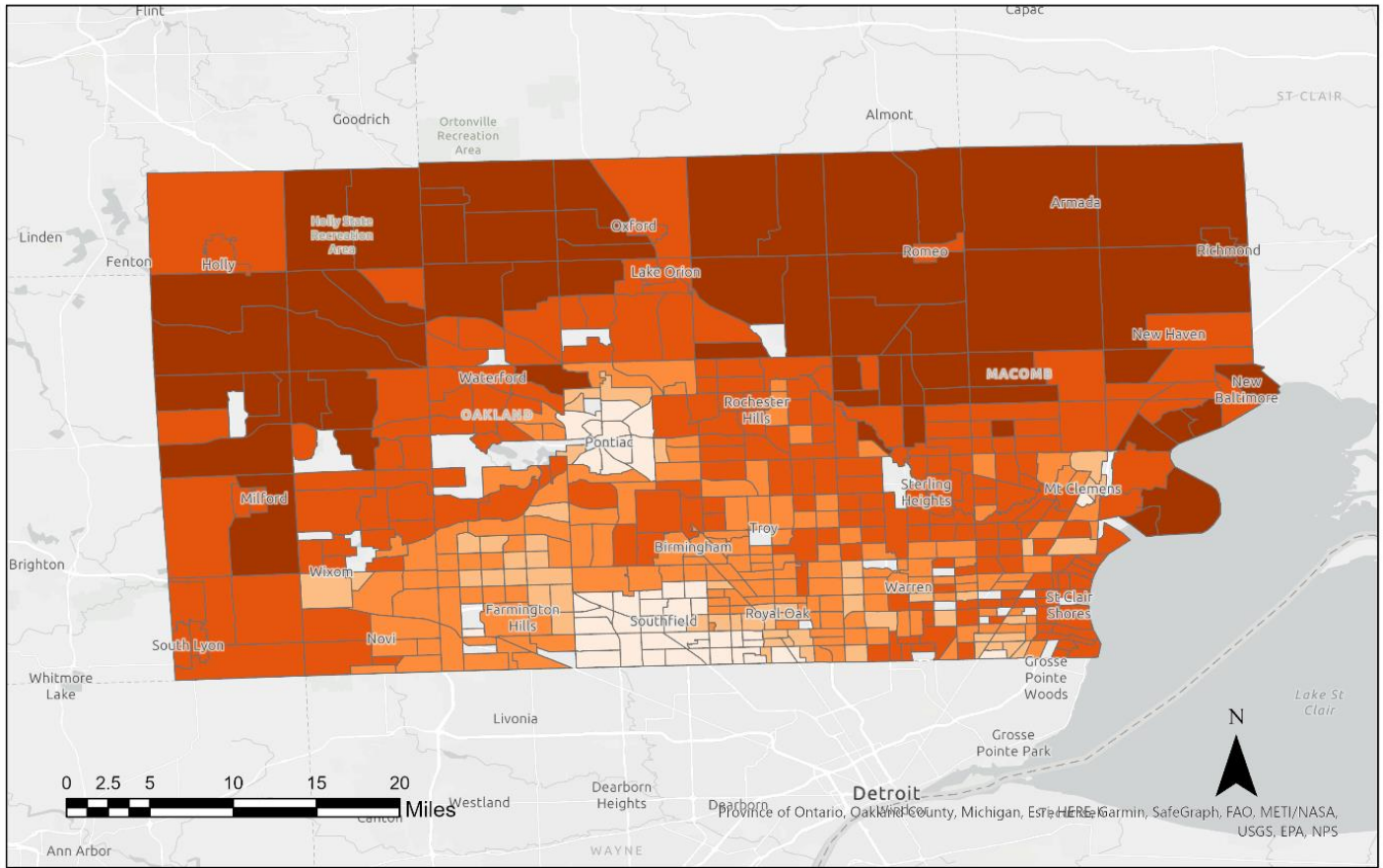


Figure 24 Map of White population proportion within census tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Partisanship: Republican Support

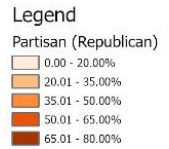
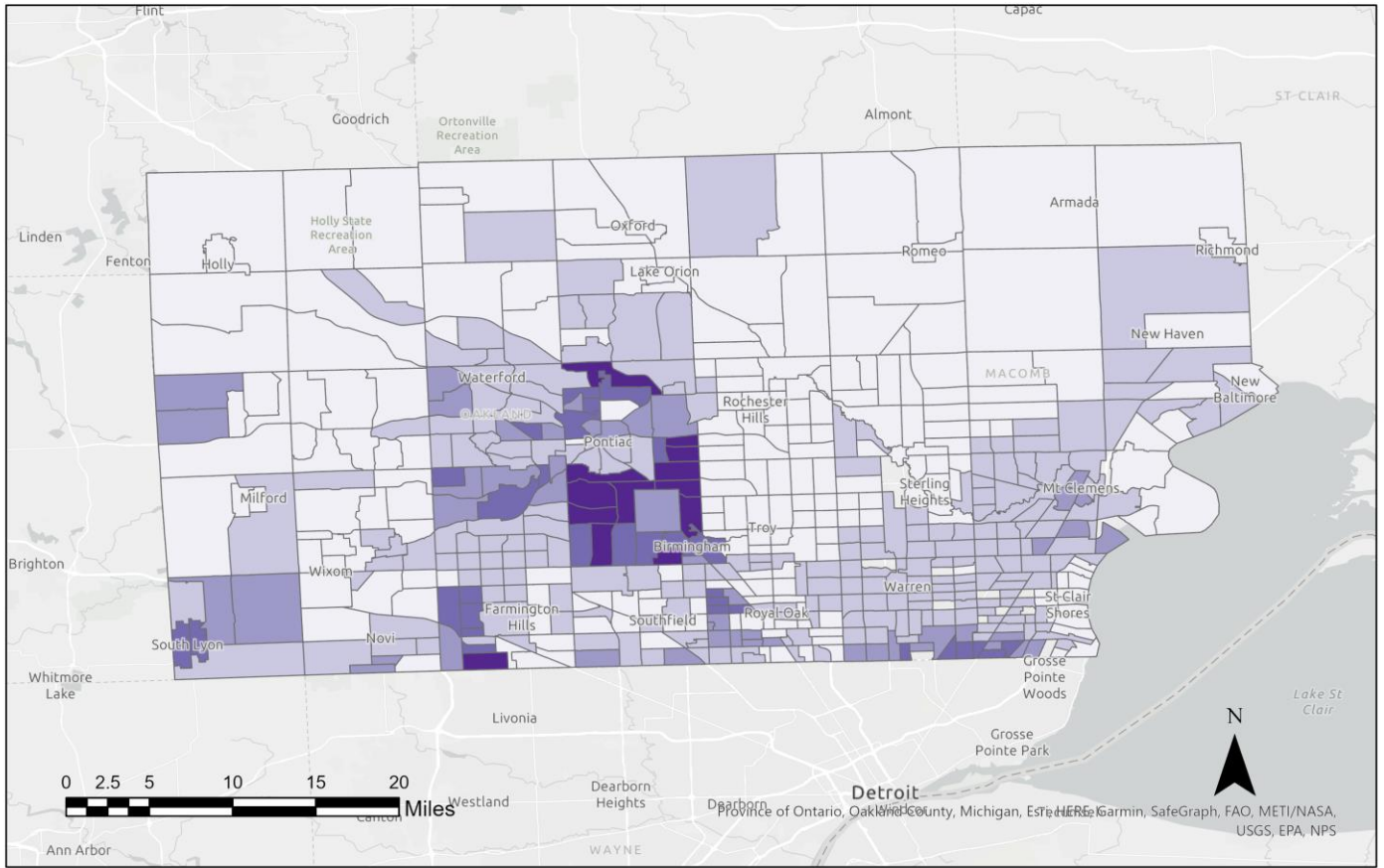


Figure 25 Map of Republican support within census tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Mean Percentage of Black Population in Adjacent Tracts

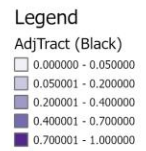
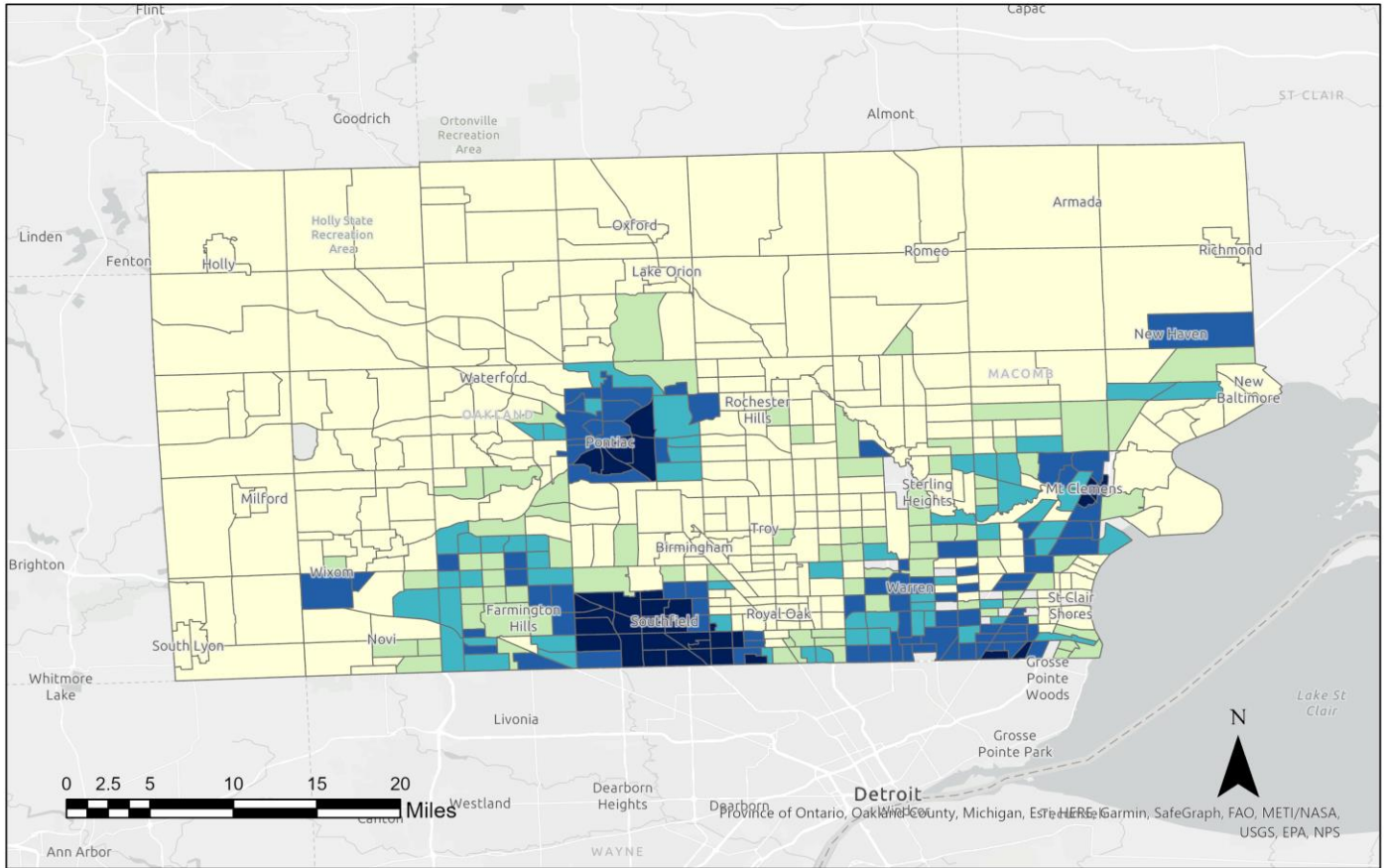


Figure 26 Map of mean Black population proportion in adjacent census tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Location Quotient - Black

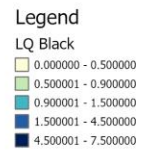
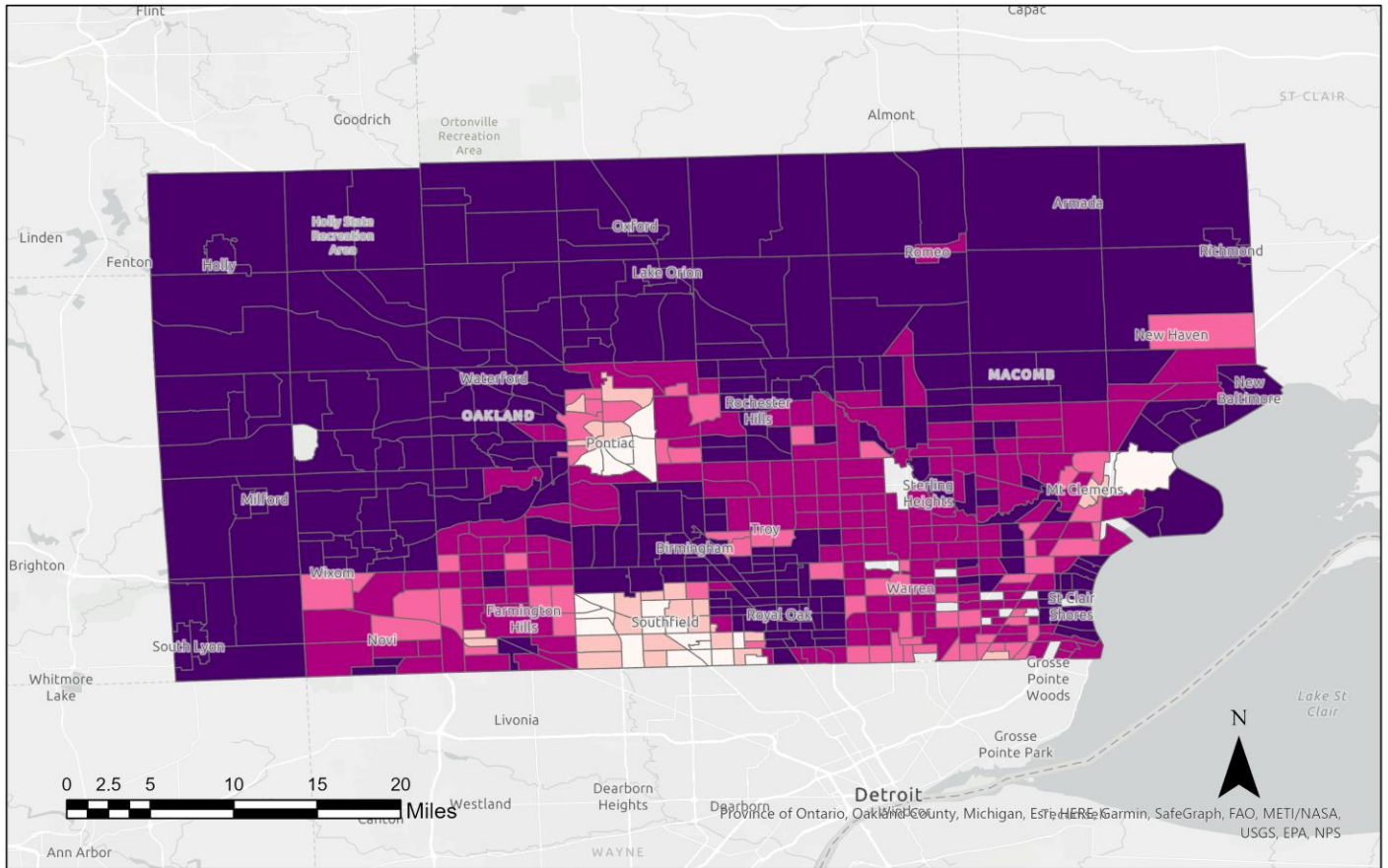


Figure 27 Map of Black population location quotients within census tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties
 Location Quotient - White

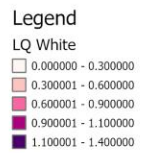
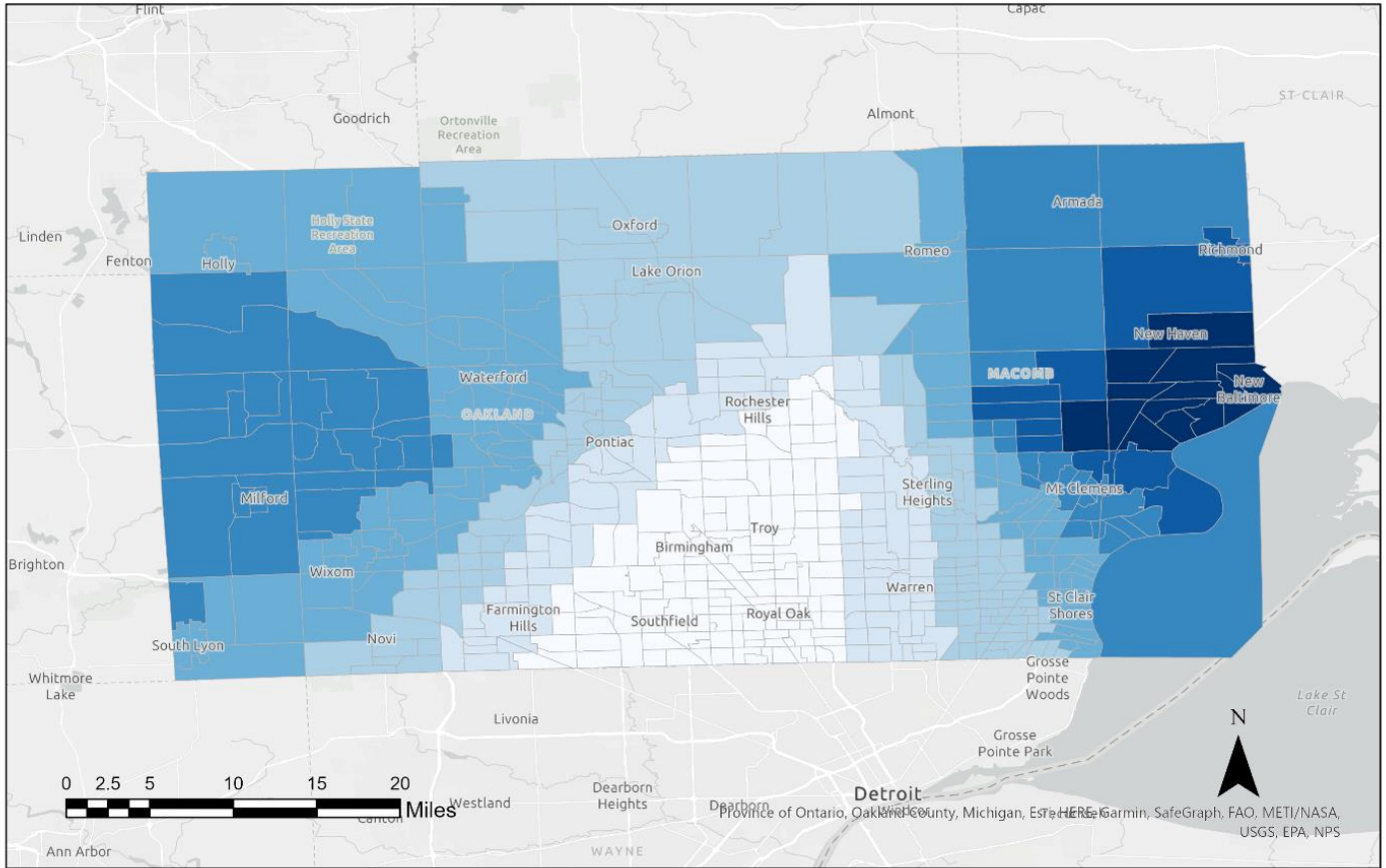


Figure 28 Map of White population location quotients within census tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Legend

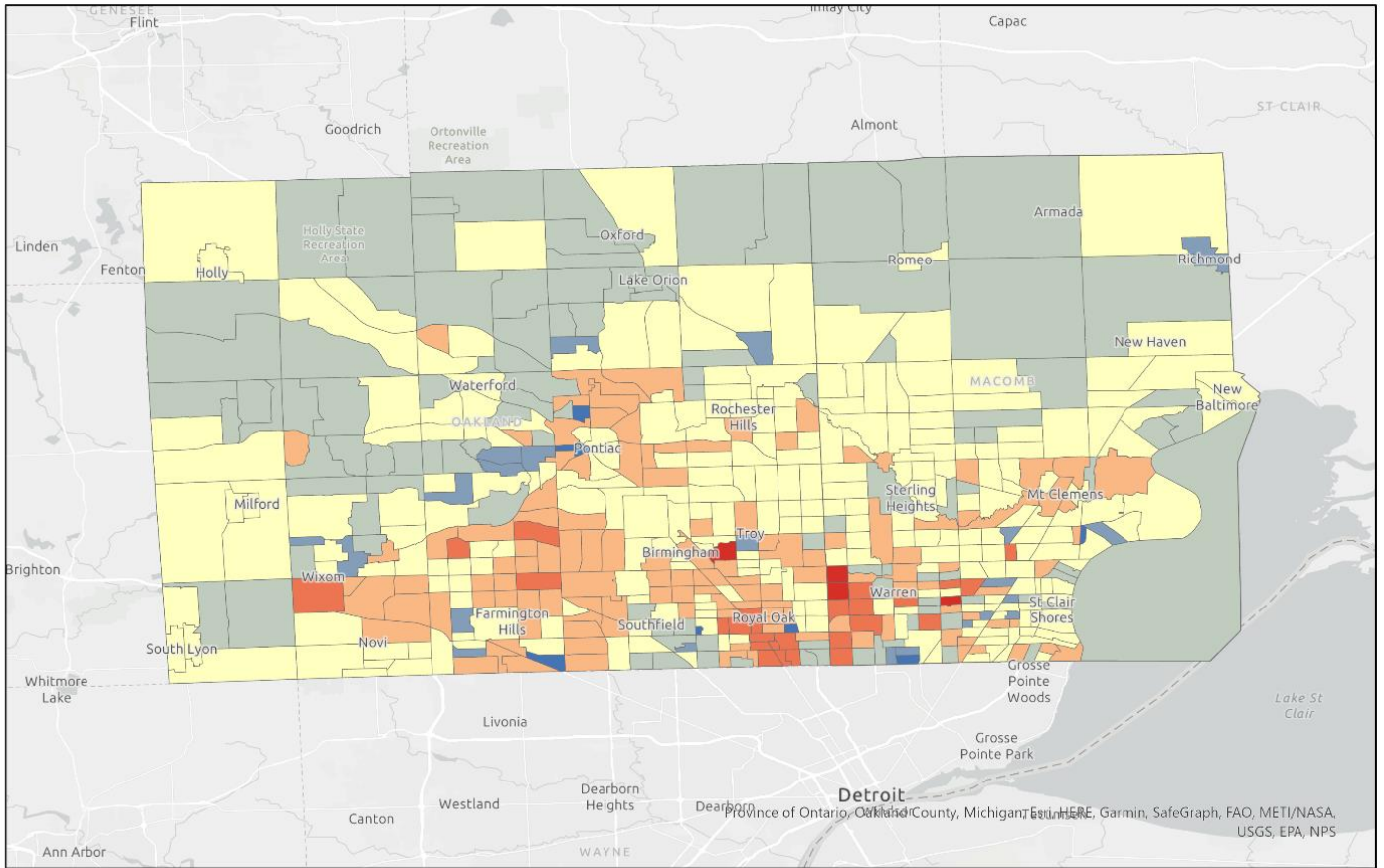
Local R-Squared

- 0.420000 - 0.480000
- 0.480001 - 0.510000
- 0.510001 - 0.540000
- 0.540001 - 0.570000
- 0.570001 - 0.600000
- 0.600001 - 0.630000
- 0.630001 - 0.660000

Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Localized R-Square (Model Spatial Goodness-of-Fit)

Figure 29 GWR analysis map of Model Goodness-of-Fit (R^2), Detroit Metro Region. Higher coefficients indicate increasing strength of the statistical model to accurately predict transit support within tracts

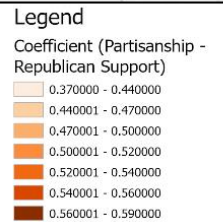
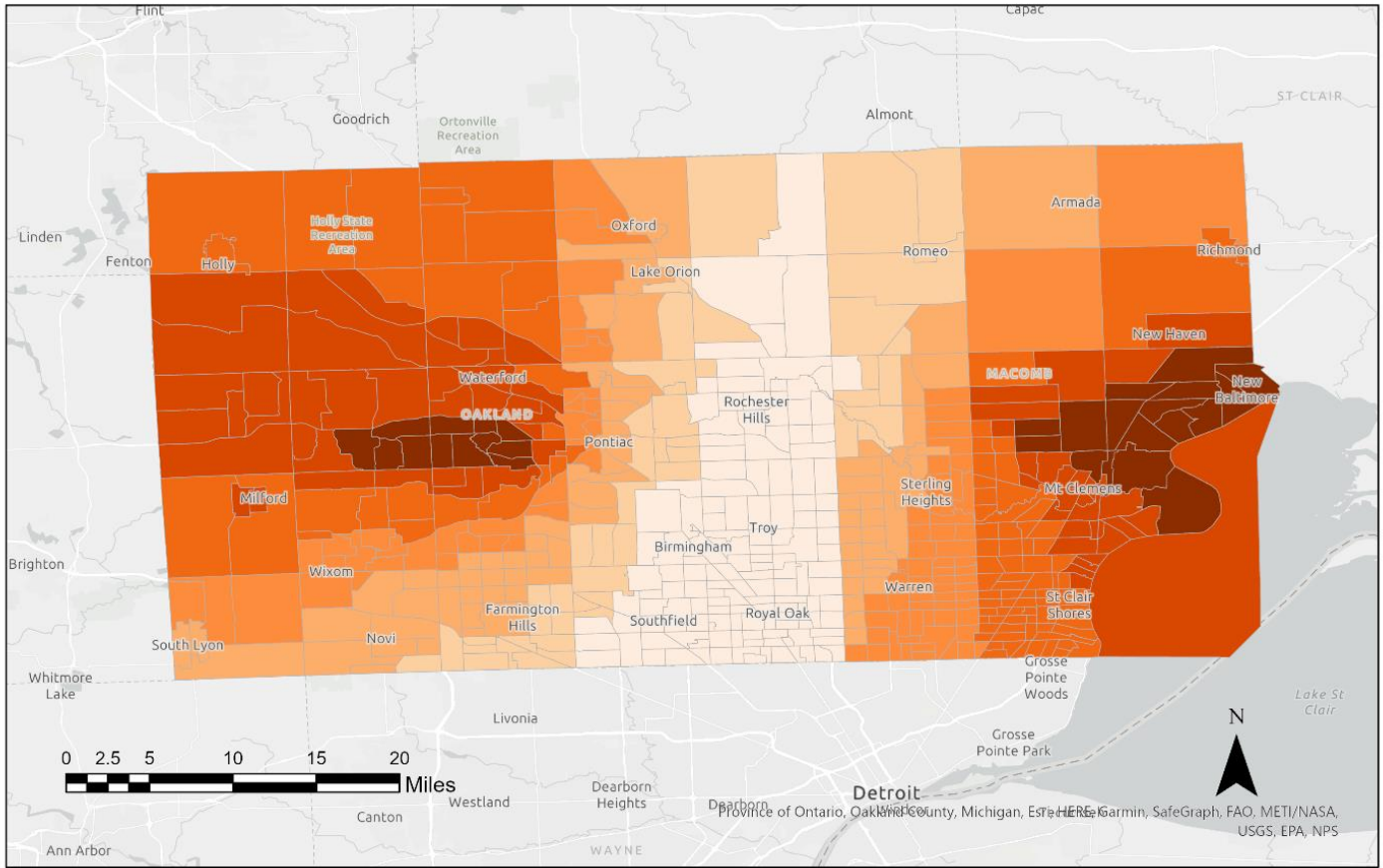


Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Standardized Residuals



Figure 30 GWR analysis map of the standardized residuals of transit support, Detroit Metro Region. Coefficients indicate the underperformance or overperformance of transit support in each tract relative to model predictions.

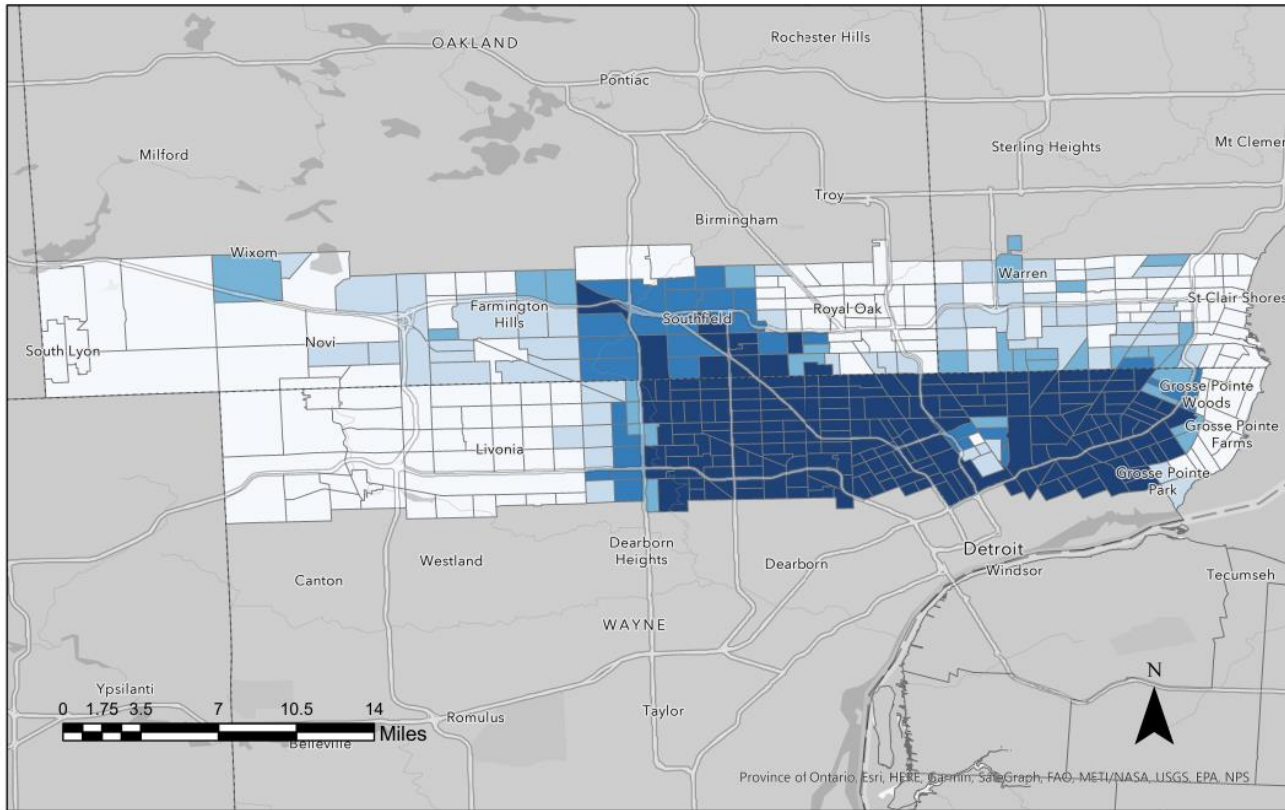


Detroit Metropolitan Region: Oakland and Macomb Counties

Geographically Weighted Regression - Republican Support

Figure 31 GWR analysis map of Republican support's influence on transit support, Detroit Metro Region. Higher coefficients indicate the increasing influence of Republican partisanship on transit support in different portions of each county.

Appendix C: Eight Mile Road Buffer Tract Maps



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Eight Mile Buffer Tracts

Percent Black

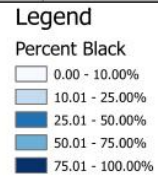
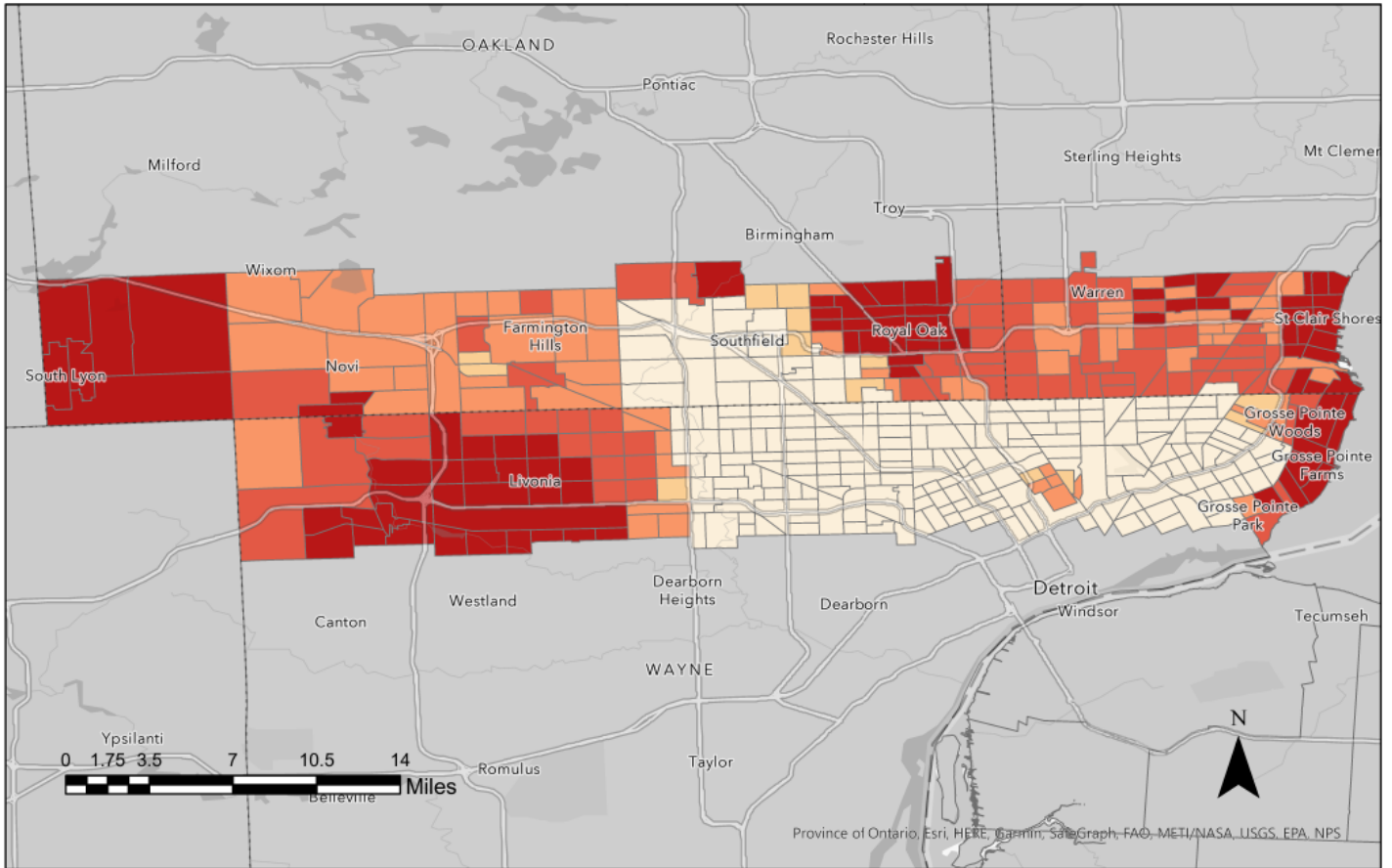


Figure 32 Map of Black population proportion within census tracts, Eight Mile buffer tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Eight Mile Buffer Tracts
 Percent White

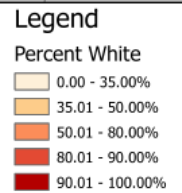
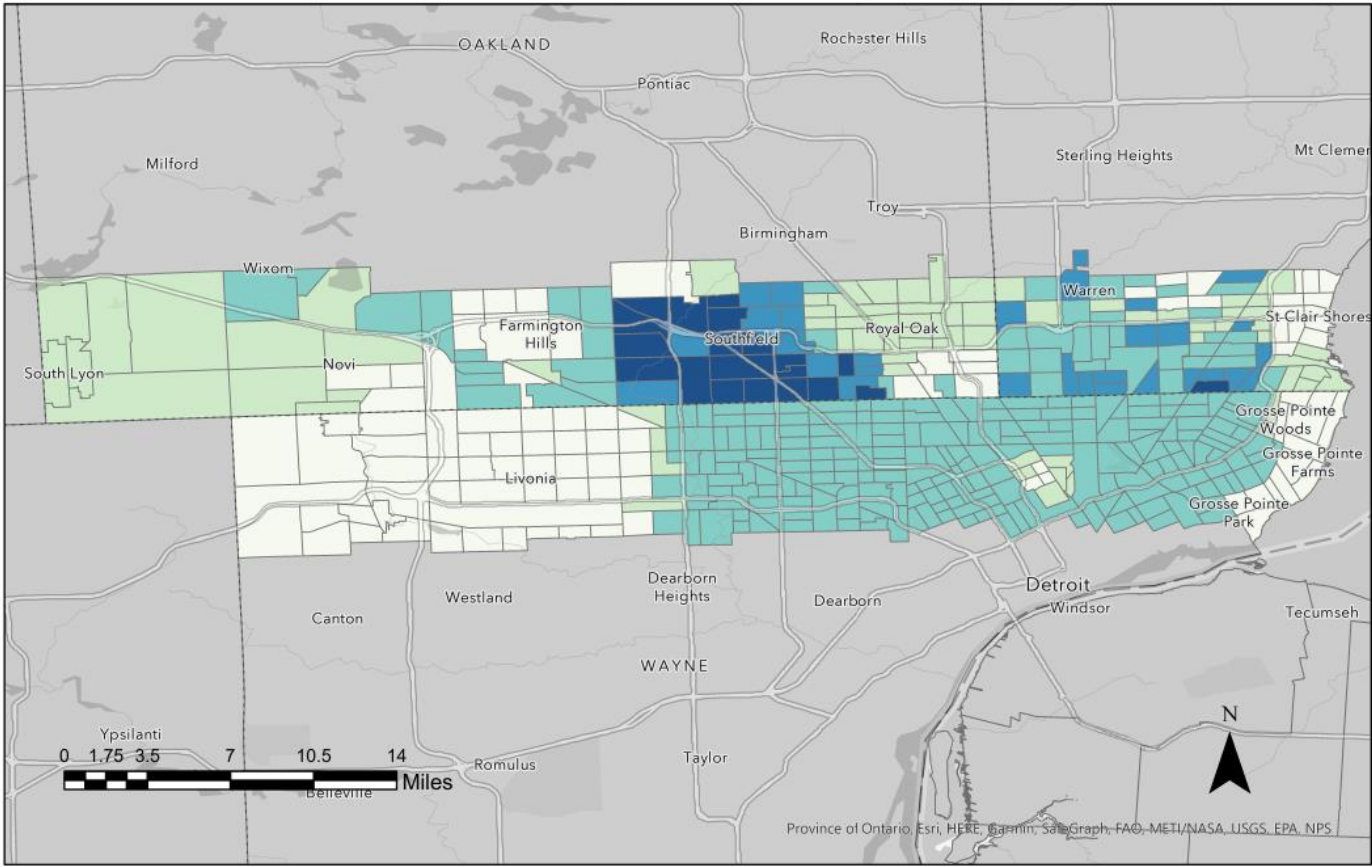


Figure 33 Map of White population proportion within census tracts, Eight Mile buffer tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Eight Mile Buffer Tracts

LQ Black

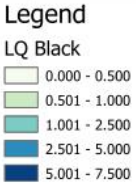
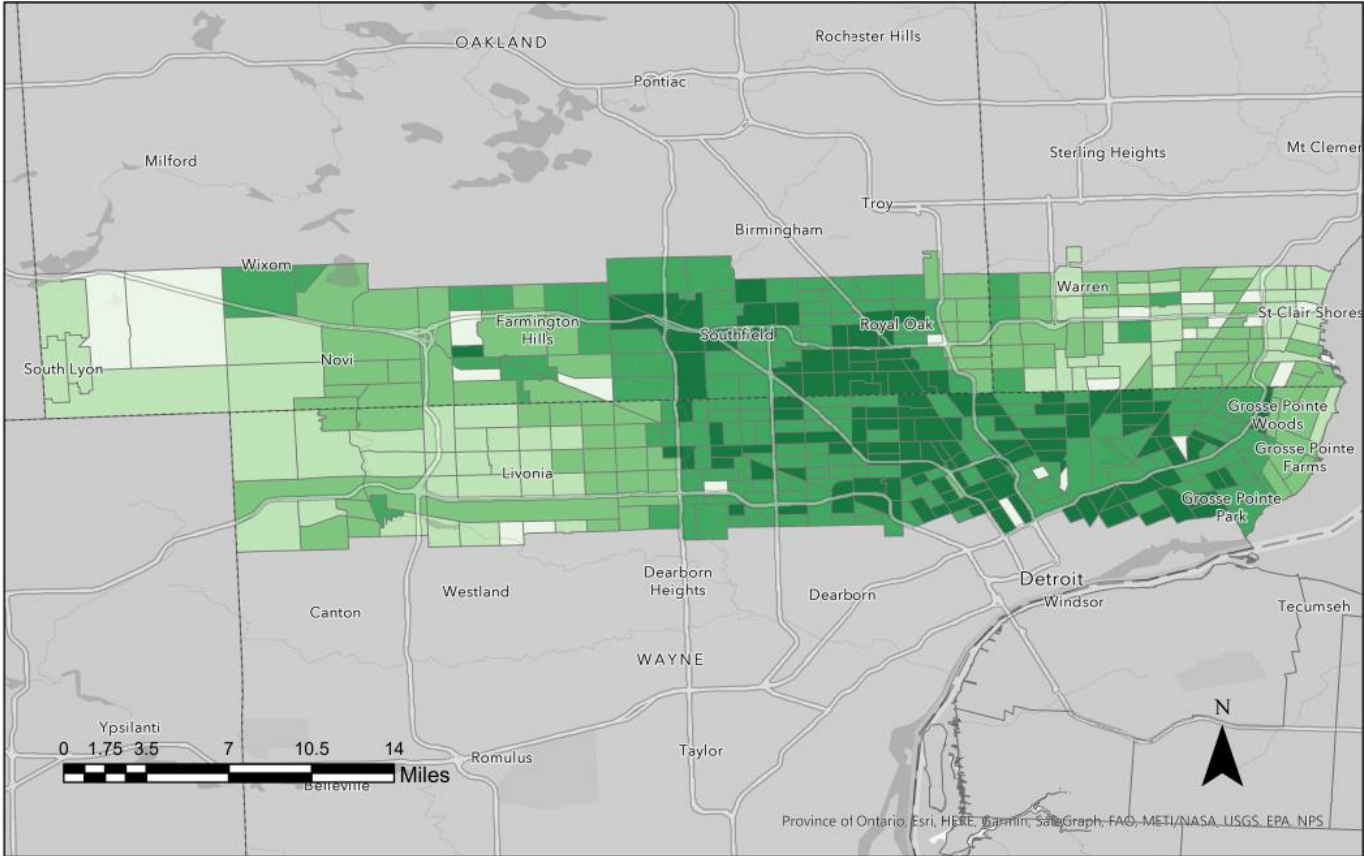


Figure 34 Map of location quotients of White population within census tracts, Eight Mile buffer tracts, Detroit Metro Region



Detroit Metropolitan Region: Eight Mile Buffer Tracts

Regional Transit Support: 2016 RTA Ballot Measure

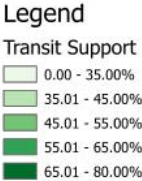
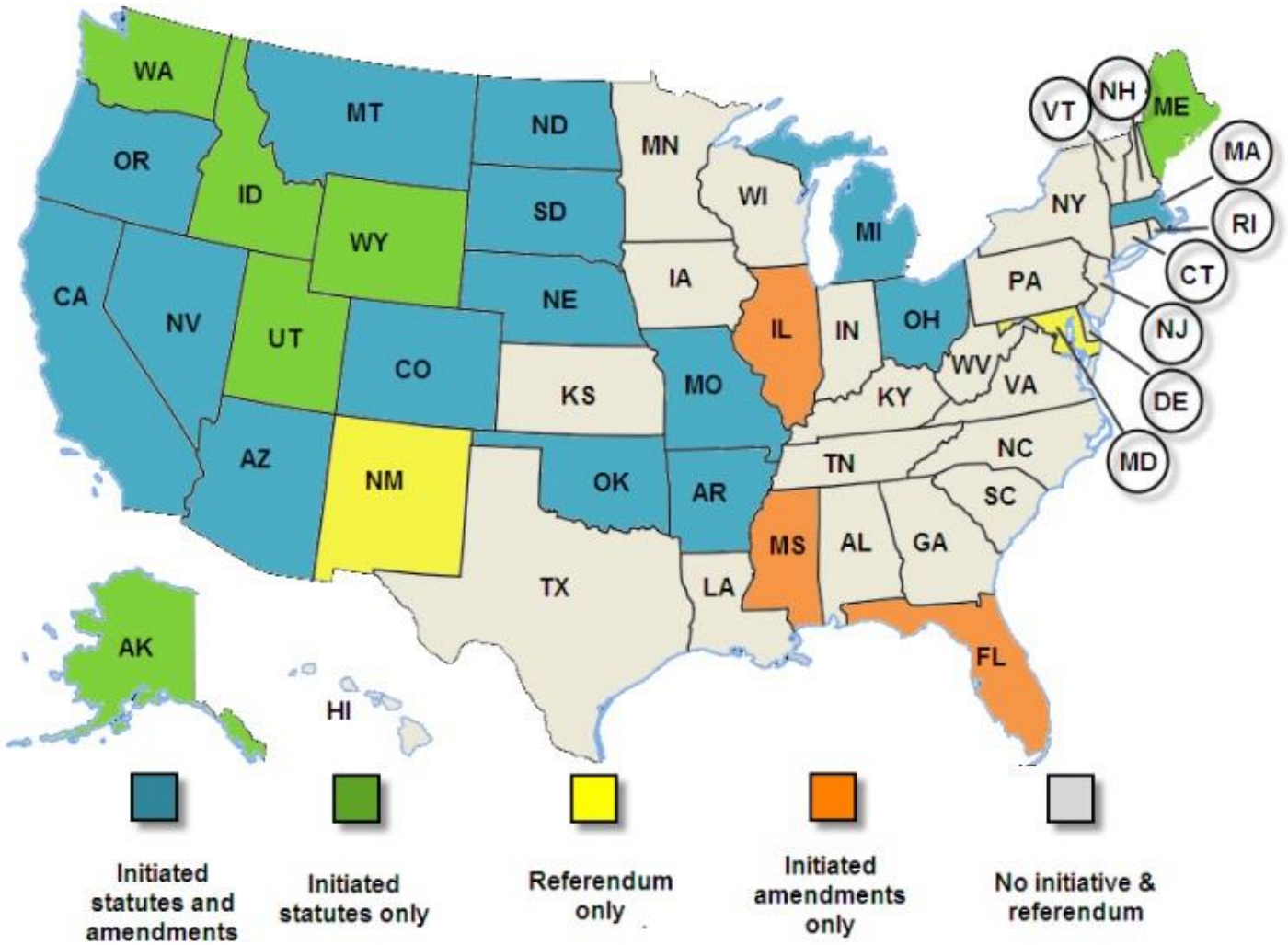


Figure 35 Map of voter support for the 2016 regional transit ballot measure, Eight Mile buffer tracts, Detroit Metro Region

Appendix D: Map of States That Use Ballot Measures



Picture Credit: Ballotpedia

Figure 36 Map of U.S. states that use ballot measures by type

Appendix E: OLS Regression of Eight Mile Road Buffer Tracts

Variables	Coefficients	
	(Std. Error)	
	(A)	(B)
AMI	0.170**	0.114
	(0.000)	(0.000)
NoVehicle	0.315**	0.070
	(0.068)	(0.068)
Density	0.109*	0.031
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Partisan (Rep)	-0.048	0.278
	(0.042)	(0.048)
LQ Black	0.331**	
	(0.006)	
AdjTract		0.788
		(0.0230)
R2	0.244	0.341
Adjusted R2	0.236	0.334
N	518	518

a. Dependent Variable: Transit (Yes)

b. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

c. Unit of analysis is census tracts in suburban counties.

Table 22: Primary OLS Regression Output, Eight Mile Road buffer tracts, Detroit Metro Region

Appendix F: OLS Regression of Detroit and Atlanta Metro County Tracts

Variable	Model A: LQ Black			Model B: AdjTract		
	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-score	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-score
Intercept	0.848 **		62.72	0.788 **		52.44
AMI	3.082E-7 **	0.076	4.13	5.151E-7 **	0.127	6.20
NoVehicle	0.193 **	0.100	5.62	0.124 **	0.065	3.20
Density	1.162E-6 *	0.020	1.23	2.792E-6 *	0.049	2.62
Partisan (Rep)	- 0.792 **	-1.186	-49.93	-0.722 **	-1.081	-39.99
LQ Black	- 0.028 **	-0.387	-15.98			
AdjTract				-0.150 **	-0.229	-8.83
R-squared	0.900			0.870		
Adj. R- squared	0.899			0.869		
N	518			518		

Notes: Unit of analysis is census tracts in suburban counties. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

Table 23: Primary OLS Regression Results, Detroit Suburban Counties, 2016 (Dependent variable is transit support)

Variable	Model A: LQ Black			Model B: AdjTract		
	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-score	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-score
Intercept	0.929 **		25.07	0.904 **		23.56
AMI	5.505E-7 *	0.120	2.22	5.103E-7 *	0.111	1.95
NoVehicle	0.024	0.016	0.33	0.067	0.043	0.85
Density	9.176E-6 *	0.100	2.16	8.051E-6 *	0.088	1.76
Partisan (Rep)	- 0.915 **	-1.257	-17.47	-0.840 **	-1.154	-16.18
LQ Black	- 0.144 **	-0.645	-11.04			
AdjTract				-0.382 **	-0.584	-9.94
R-squared	0.860			0.844		
Adj. R- squared	0.853			0.837		
N	149			149		

Notes: Unit of analysis is census tracts in suburban counties. Statistical significance denoted by p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

Table 24: Primary OLS Regression Results, Atlanta Suburban Counties, 2014 and 2019 (Dependent variable is transit support)

Appendix G: Planner Interview Notes

Notes from Discussions: Tuesday, Nov. 12th

Atlanta Regional Commission – Kofi Wakhisi and Sidney Douse, 9:00 – 11:30am

ARC has complex organizational structure/institutional arrangements. Throughout Georgia, most organizations are non-straightforward. Because they span multiple geographies that aren't necessarily well-integrated, their structure is complex by default. However, rather than geography, it is the politics of the region and each county that make things complicated.

The ATL's existence isn't straightforward. Their 'lane' and responsibilities aren't known yet, and the relationship between them and the ARC is still being worked out. The reason that they exist is clear. The legislation is fairly clear on their primary deliverables, but some of these deliverables contradict, pre-empt, or supersede the MPO or federal requirement process.

There are two general reasons why transit is difficult in Atlanta – one is, from a planning perspective, you have to have the right conditions to optimize a system and make it a feasible choice. Atlanta is the largest or second-largest urban agglomeration in the country (Note: They use "Urbanized Area" for funding and coverage service). This makes it difficult to provide premium transit with such larger regional dispersion, and it's hard to perform at a high level like other big cities. You don't even need to bring politics into the equation at that point, because practicality is already an obstacle. There are certainly parts of the region that make sense for regional expansion. There are New Starts/Small Starts criteria that must be met, and it is unclear how competitive parts or all of the Atlanta metro region are for those funds, relative to other

MSAs. This goes back to ridership, and density, and jobs-housing balance, and employment. It's not to say that they shouldn't expand, but it isn't an easy task.

Atlanta is experiencing an influx from the suburbs, but that might also be a hollowing out of middle, with people also heading out to the outer suburbs/exurbs.

The 20-county region of Atlanta is expected to grow 100,000 people per year until 2050.

Currently 5.8 million. In 2050, they are expected to be at 8.3 million. For perspective, that is the population of the Denver metro region ADDED to the Atlanta metro region during that time.

ARC is like many organizations around the country that wears many hats. It has mandates that are federal or state-driven, but also have local components.

In addition to their coordination role, ARC planners also have the responsibility of visioning for municipalities or counties that don't have the capacity to do it on their own. Specifically, for places that cannot create their own comprehensive plans, ARC has to do it for them. And then they have to review their plans.

They don't have the level of control or authority over development as some (probably more liberal) regions, so the ARC mostly advises policies of smart growth and mixed use while incentivizing these behaviors. This means they help funnel money into these kinds of projects in particular, though they can't easily prevent large-scale, single-family, land-intensive development. The DRI (development review? Look it up) can say that such things aren't in the interests of the region, but this may not deter a determined developer, particularly when they have the support of the local jurisdiction that will be the site of the development. The ARC cannot explicitly prevent a municipality from authorizing a development.

GRTA is very powerful on paper. So much so that they are actually unconstitutional. But they don't practice the powers that they have, which is why they have been largely uncontested. For

example, they have the power to remove (temporarily?) a municipality's QLG status (Qualified Local Government Status) if that government permits developments that GRTA deems not to be in the interests of the region, or else fails to comply with a standard or imposed conditions. If you aren't a QLG, you can't get any state or federal funding, which is disastrous. But this has never actually happened, to Kofi's knowledge.

Georgia developers are quick to sue when they see their proposed projects being obstructed, even by the most official authorities/channels. Local governments fear this, as it can be very inconvenient and expensive to fight it, and often just comply with developers in order to avoid the trouble.

Atlanta Region's Plan – The umbrella master document that ties together all of the individual plans of the ARC's departments.

Gwinnett County: Fastest growing suburb in the country for many years. Was purely a bedroom community perhaps into the 1980s with low density, but then began attracting commercial and industrial development. Edge cities began developing which have their own development. Very successful because of their local incomes and employer location. Typical interstate-driven suburban office park development for a long time. But then immigrants began choosing Gwinnett, rather than the typical pattern of populating Atlanta. When Gwinnett was still first growing, you wouldn't see so many immigrants and the development of businesses and neighborhoods that cater to them. Suburban poverty challenges. This has bred some conflict, particularly among rural long-time Gwinnett residents. Now that people are moving into Atlanta or into the cities, they are developing their main streets to attract people, making them walkable, and when possible, linking their transit.

The old guard of Gwinnett want to keep things as they are and are rejecting transit. The younger folks and immigrants, although they may not vote as much, do want transit. These pro-transit people tend to live within the cities, with the exception of the isolated ones that live in the single-family subdivisions. The aging housing stock is turning over and minorities are moving in, and this is bothering long-time locals who don't like ethnic-specific norms that don't conform to longstanding conventions.

A lot of minorities that left Fulton and Dekalb are among the transit opposition, as they deliberately left behind that life in search of the amenities of the suburbs. Many of them vote democratic. (There are, however, pro-business Blacks that vote Republican in Atlanta.) Lucy McBath, the woman whose son was shot for playing loud music, came to Gwinnett and won a county commissioner seat as a democrat.

In 2016 or 2017, there was a poll/mock vote discussing the expansion of MARTA into Gwinnett, which showed strong support. This triggered a transportation feasibility study, which wrapped up a year ago. This recommended a lot of different service growth suggestions. Even though they don't have a high-frequency system, they are very sophisticated, making them very successful in terms of revenue (based on their longstanding sales tax to fund GCT) and promoting economic development. With an increasing transit-dependent population and the suburbanization of poverty, they seemingly felt compelled to begin service in 2005 or 2006, though it is unclear what the politics were behind it, or if it was simply the sheer growth of population. And they then became eligible for FTA funding, which they likely were eager to spend (in order to maintain attractiveness in light of the shift of gravity back towards Atlanta?).

Notes from Discussions: Friday, Nov. 15th

Transit Division – Karen and Kirk, 9:40 – 10:30am

GCT started because of air quality issues and distrust of MARTA and Atlanta in general. Took advantage of CMAQ and ARA funds to start local and commuter bus service.

Look at the book “Planning Atlanta”. Discussion of formation of GRTA, which is important.

Distrust between MARTA and the state in terms of desire to control things in early 90s and 2000s.

Georgia as a nonsensical place to work in terms of the politics involved.

Karen has been with the county for four years. Transit was just starting to be a big conversation.

GCT ‘just existed’ before that, with two employees and contracted services.

In 2015, they started a comprehensive planning process (multimodal) for the county. In surveys, transit came up as #3 in terms of transportation priorities for the first time. Lead to the Gwinnett Connect Plan. 18-month long planning study. Many events. 6,000 or 7,000 respondents.

Reflecting, there is some suspicion that they lost out on Amazon HQ2 because they didn’t have their regional transit act together.

HB 930 is going through legislature during the plan creation, and suddenly they have the chance to levy 1-cent sales tax, which is substantial.

Gwinnett County’s history

60% of current SPLOST goes to transportation projects (but none to transit), and funds go to many things like parks

Can’t advocate, but can educate, so they used the same format as the SPLOST to get the word out. They feel like that may have been partially a failure.

Georgia is great at roads, but not great at coordinating or sharing tactical planning with transit planning.

County has historically NOT been pro-transit. Transit expansion plan was operator-agnostic, but association with MARTA was problematic, since people knew what's up. Not sure if MARTA was suggested as the operator, but likely was. Ultimately, the vote failed because of distrust of MARTA.

Wording on ballot was state-mandated, but there was some accusation that they were being deceptive.

Gwinnett County got a great deal in terms of control. Dekalb, Fulton had almost no control vs MARTA, and Clayton got a little, but Gwinnett wrote the contract in a way that was very advantageous. But it was too much to know for the average citizen. Even though MARTA has been functional, but the fact that a person was being thrown in jail for procurement fraud from MARTA and the Super Bowl Doraville fire/issue (even though they had buses to bridge to the next station) may have contributed. They think it was still just too much distrust. There will always be people, however, that won't vote for a tax, no matter what it is for.

Transit review committee – public comments are intense every meeting thus far.

Charlotte Nash – loves Gwinnett County, but is leaving after her term. She's not against transit but was nearly unseated by an opponent who ran almost solely on being pro-transit.

There are people that are actively trying to resist any change to Gwinnett, even in the name of economic development. Keep parts of Gwinnett rural, wanting to keep the characteristics the same. Karen's view agrees with focused growth and leaving character in place. Something in the plan for everybody. Good balance.

Suburban commuting county, with express service for them but also developing local service.

Hoping that the plan itself wasn't what voters objected to, and more likely that there was too much information to digest to effectively advocate for it through maps or sound-bites.

One person who kept on fighting the plan - Joe Newton. Not much in the way of Koch Brothers resistance. Not much unified or coherent resistance. No big negative, organized contingent.

The Sheriff and District Attorney, who are both republicans, and the school superintendent came out in support to the plan. The sheriff and DA were a surprise for Karen (presumably because of associations between MARTA and crime).

Even though they would contract operation out to MARTA, Gwinnett still has incredible control of the dollars according to the plan. But still, people think "MARTA, crime, rail bad". Even if it isn't true today, it's hard to change minds.

Most people in Gwinnett agree that something needs to be done for transit, even if there isn't a unified voice on what or to what degree. All roads have increased in traffic volume between 5 and 8%, and you can't keep expanding the roads. Much of this is associated with the good economy, as well as the population growth.

Large explosion of population diversity. One of the largest Vietnamese populations outside of Vietnam.

How well they've managed their existing sales tax, the collection, and how it is spent has been widely lauded, so the county is trusted. Still, it is hard to change people's minds about transit is hard.

Their opinion on diversity and suburban poverty: homelessness is a real issue, but more in the Extended Stays. There are large bus pickups for the public schools in front of those motels. Some consideration of doing a pilot program like Athens, GA did to give free rides to youth for the

summer, justifying that by thinking about cost of incarcerating kids. Also expanding this offer in order to help kids access free lunch programs around town, which helps grow the cycle of opportunity.

In Gwinnett, there are about 180,000 school children.

Issues with affordable housing and the ‘solutions’ they’ve pursued (knocking down large project buildings)

Definitely a shift in perceptions of Gwinnett between natives and new people.

Trailing grandparent phenomenon – elderly follow their children and grandchildren to be close, which brought a boom of the elderly to the county. This will create needs for transit for them.

There have been efforts by the county to possibly bring some projects for their benefit forward so that seniors can enjoy them before they die. Foremost, a 100% expansion of transit in the next 5 years.

People were fixated on the rail component, but there is \$1B in suggested bus expansion funds, which is a sizeable expansion. The rail expansion, however, is going to be a pivotal point in the county’s development. And there is political risk in advocating for it, and politicians may lose their jobs for them, even if they are the right thing to do.

It behooves them to develop their own heavy rail extension into Gwinnett, since if they don’t, they will end up spending a lot of money to maintain and expand stations that the county doesn’t have control over.

There are a fair amount of people who do commute from Gwinnett via MARTA, but it all depends on where you live. If driving towards Doraville and you are far out, you’ve sat in traffic, and then pass it after that point, so there’s no point in taking transit. But if you live close in Gwinnett, it is often worth it. Doraville is the main MARTA link and focal point, but it’s also the

system bottleneck. Ideally, they would be able to capture those commuters earlier (deeper) to take pressure off that county line traffic.

Very good at SPLOSTs in Gwinnett

In 1990, the MARTA referendum basically said “Join MARTA” even though they had no infrastructure, which further made it seem unfeasible and undesirable.

MARTA is safe (2nd safest in the country), and Kirk and Karen don’t ever feel unsafe on MARTA. But there is an association between large Black ridership and crime (codeword), even if things are perfectly fine on the train. There is also a failure by the media of reporting crimes with MARTA stops as landmarks, which makes people associate the stops with the crimes (even if the crimes are blocks away and had no association with MARTA).

Keith Parker worked on “Knucklehead behavior”, which is kind of like broken windows theory, focusing on clean station bathrooms and general cleanliness and good repair, which reflects how the system is run. It creates a better experience for a broader variety of riders. Also, the see something, say something app has made people feel safer, since it is discreet and MARTA police are very responsive (report it on the train, and the cops are ready at the next station to handle it) to crimes and bad behavior.

Some of the fear is actual aversion to crime, while some of it is just the perception of Blackness as inherently tied to criminality.

More openness to discussion about issues of diversity and race, which is allowing movement in considering transit more.

Some people had legitimate reasons to oppose the plan, as it didn’t fit them, and Kirk believes that engagement in general is a good thing.

People vote their interests. Seniors might not have supported the plan now, but if they develop disabilities or limitations, their interests will shift. But we all operate based on the best facts we have at the time.

Long-Range Planning Division – Geoff Butler, 10:45 – 11:30am

County that has evolved. In the context of the metro, it was a bedroom community. Agricultural into the 1980s. Place you go for quiet to get away from Atlanta. 80s and 90s, population explodes, industrial and retail employment become powerhouse industries.

Population: Until 2000, primarily a White community, but then diversity started becoming the norm. As Atlanta grows has evolved, it has drawn people and grown outwards, and that has spilled over into Gwinnett. Gwinnett has a lot of people from around many parts of the country, as well as a large international population.

For a place that is, in form, very suburban, there are nodes of diversity and activity (Lawrenceville and Duluth). Out east, it is still very rural (horseback riding). But there are places with lots of turnover, particularly around aging malls. Satellite Blvd., has lots of signs in Korean. International plazas with great food around suburban strip malls. Buford Highway is a large corridor that has international vibe (though primarily in Dekalb County). Satellite Blvd. connects the area with a lot of condo development. Not large coherent neighborhoods (like a Chinatown) of immigrants, but lots of areas of mixed minorities.

I-85 corridor is where the density is happening.

Gwinnett Place Mall, typical kind of old development that is being repurposed or serving as sites for mixed-use developments, where zoning is being relaxed, density is being encouraged, and mixed-use development is being incentivized. Modifying regulatory apparatus to encourage this

kind of development, as this is what will be in demand. Overlay district giving higher FAR, expedited permit review process. The development map shows areas that have particular intended characters, from which one can derive an understanding of preparation for intense change to intense desire to maintain current character.

The Atlanta region is challenged by mobility. Traditionally, the automobile ruled, and highway systems were developed post-war. Plans to develop another ring road, but probably way too expensive. Topography has also been a challenge, as roads are only primarily developed where land makes it easy, resulting in meandering roads (no grids outside of cities).

In the Atlanta region, the power structure resembles NYC boroughs, where political power is localized and centered within the region. There are 4 counties within the perimeter of what is considered Atlanta.

MARTA: original referendum, DeKalb and Fulton had constituencies and coalitions that were very enthusiastic about transit, while Clayton, Cobb, and Gwinnett opted out. Gwinnett in particular was still very rural, and didn't see a place or have a desire for transit. Considering the circumstances, Atlanta is very fortunate to have a heavy rail system, since most systems have more regional reach, and most Sunbelt cities don't have heavy rail at all, regardless of their politics or regional layout.

From 1970 and since to some degree, much of Gwinnett doesn't want anything to do with the city. And Transit conjures dystopian images of disorder and crime.

Providing transit is difficult because of road layout. Coming from certain parts of the county, even on the western side, the long, circuitous roads make bus travel expensive and inconvenient.

However, town centers in the (north)west side of the county have good access, with a good

supply of buses to route people towards Doraville Station. There is an effort at relaxing zoning around transit hubs, in concert with some of the new town center developments.

The county has identified areas that it hopes to develop (to varying degrees of intensity) which are typically parallel to transportation corridors. Character areas: regional activity centers, community mixed use. Run along transit lines, current and anticipated.

Transit plans show that commuting and population patterns show a choke point on the highway (check map) heading towards Doraville. Increasing capacity planned for that area. Currently anticipating plans to develop heavy rail from Doraville station to Jimmy Carter.

Land use policy that county is developing follows transit development, as densification requires a way to move more people. Atlanta has an advantage because they have an existing fabric that encourages dense, walkable, attractive spaces, and Gwinnett is behind the curve but seeks to catch up to remain attractive.

Gwinnett believes that lack of coherent transit was a large contributing factor to not getting Amazon HQ2, and knows that land use makes that kind of desirable development difficult.

Atlanta has an It-Factor that makes it attractive to a lot of companies and industries, which made them think that they were ripe for HQ2.

Aging population is creating new challenges. That is a driver of densification as well. There is town called Sugar Hill that has developed public recreation services, which is done in hopes of encouraging senior living developers to move in based on not having to supply these services/recreation amenities themselves.

Local Centers Initiative, a federal program, which helps get cities out of trouble with air quality attainment issues, and encourages new town centers.

Notes from Discussions: Saturday, Nov. 16th

MARTA – Eric Scott, 2:30-4pm

Cascade Avenue – Old guard of black establishment and political leadership – Andrew Young, Kaseem Reed, etc.

Emory jumped onto endorsement of the Atlanta city expansion plans AFTER the vote in order to possibly fund the Emory LRT

New Kroger development near Beltline/Krog street market, which has some of the highest development rents in Atlanta. New corporate headquarters and new condos.

Kevin Cruse – Wrote a lot about West End and Cascade; Wall – affluent or influential Black neighborhoods

Beltline – Ryan Grevell hoping to do a project with West End Mall redevelopment

SW Dekalb – Affluent Blacks (Lithonia, Stonecrest) and Gwinnett – demographic change and Black affluence. Gwinnett hasn't had much White Flight – their White population has remained there, but minorities have come in and grown, changing the demographic percentages

County shapes are odd. Fulton (?) annexed a few other counties, which forces disparate regional actors to deal with each other. North Fulton is very white and affluent, while South Fulton is very rural. It is the one entity that doesn't allow for individual cities to divest and silo. City Movement? All of Fulton is incorporated, so this movement would make it so that all areas essentially become more self-focused instead of county-accountable.

Hopes that the ATL will be good as a mechanism to get the state to fund transit (Georgia does not consistently or substantially dedicate any funding to MARTA). Its mandate is unknown, and it shouldn't have to exist, but it might need to in order to coordinate county transit agencies.

MARTA effectively operates as an agency of a county or multiple counties, but operating out of Atlanta, but is a necessity for the state because it is of such consequence for most large-scale events in Georgia. The state really should be contributing for this reason.

Big business/companies want to be close to heavy rail lines.

Race is a component and always has been in Georgia. Atlanta has had a Black mayor or the last 50 years, and White governors for the last 300 years. The state has been ruled by rural interests forever. There have always been fights over control, and it has been a long time, if ever, that there has been a governor from Atlanta. Why can't the state embrace its primary economic engine? "It's petty stuff."

The voting to change the referendum date was very political. Nobody spoke in opposition to voting on MARTA in Gwinnett, which was unexpected. But there was much debate about the date of the referendum.

The vote was close. Nash won a vote in the process of securing the vote. It may have been 3-2. Charlotte Nash has been pro-transit for a long time, but not publicly because of her political situation. Big business and the Chamber of Commerce have generally been very receptive and enthusiastic about transit.

Gwinnett is not the most prosperous county in the region. North Fulton in particular has been very prosperous, as well as North Gwinnett (north of I-85). Losses of large business in Gwinnett (like NCR) was a shock to their system.

Regions that are built in times of racial animus create land patterns that reflect that, and perpetuate racial separation. Land use is durable. It's easier to build TOD out of nothing than to retrofit suburbia. This makes transit a difficult thing for people in Gwinnett to imagine, regardless of if they have a car, and thus hard to support. Now, if many people who are in

Gwinnett today had been around when the county was being developed, many would likely not have chosen such a suburban style and may have opted for something a little more transit-friendly/walkable. But this is what they inherited, so they think that transit wouldn't work, and thus why should they pay for it when it is unlikely to benefit them.

The plan was decent, with BRT and expanding heavy rail. But the lack of density makes it difficult. And a lot of people didn't like that they were only going to get one or two rail stations for a multibillion-dollar plan. They are, however, enthusiastic about continued use of MARTA, which they don't have to pay for.

Despite how great BRT is, it is difficult to imagine that drivers will tolerate that for long, and then it is an easy leap for there to be some paid-for exemption for drivers to start using those lanes with the BRT.

Gwinnett got a great deal with the plan, and it's possible that they won't be able to get it again because it was dependent on Dekalb's cooperation. However, Dekalb is increasingly dissatisfied with the arrangement, as all they've gotten is some expanded bus service with few/no prospects of rail expansion. They think that Fulton and Atlanta get better service (which they do), and that suddenly Gwinnett gets preferential service even though they've been paying into MARTA since the beginning. But the fact that Gwinnett was a holdout put them into a better bargaining position. But now Gwinnett might not get such a good deal the next time.

The system where each county or unit has to pay for their own transit inherently creates inequalities and inefficiencies. The state really should pay into MARTA.

Atlanta, as the economic and administrative center and capital of the state, essentially subsidizes the rest of the state, since it pays for all judges and administrators that do their jobs all over the

state. So poor rural areas look at Atlanta wealth and power and think that the city should just pay for itself in every way but also continue to subsidize them.

Consultants play a large role in running transit agencies like MARTA, and many functions are contracted out.

Chris Tomlinson (at the state level) loops all transit together, as if each county's operations are equivalent and similarly complex and comprehensive. Each transit provider is very different and provides a different level of service. MARTA far outstrips all other regional agencies.

Historically and currently, undertaking large transit projects is difficult because coalitions are required to make things happen. However, many are too short-sighted during their opposition to recognize how transit will be beneficial in the future. Furthermore, the coalitions of today may be the opponents of tomorrow. The life of a transit system is so much longer than that.

Research the ATL further. There was possibly some incentive for the Gwinnett deal to get through before the ATL came into effect (bureaucracy). It might have expired, which is unfortunate because there was some state incentive to work it out.

According to the strategists that Eric talked to, GCT didn't target the right people during their efforts to get the word out.

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