4-26-2021

Voter Intentions and Political Implications of Legislated Stadium Subsidies

Timothy Kellison
Georgia State University, tkellison@gsu.edu

Brian M. Mills
University of Texas at Austin, brian.mills@austin.utexas.edu

Recommended Citation

Kellison, Timothy and Mills, Brian M., "Voter Intentions and Political Implications of Legislated Stadium Subsidies" (2021). *Kinesiology Faculty Publications*. 46.
doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2020.07.003

Highlights

- In absence of public vote, it is unclear whether locals support stadium subsidies
- Voters affected by US$722-million ballpark subsidy in US were surveyed
- Results suggest majority favoured subsidy but were dissatisfied with process
- Lack of public vote on stadium subsidy may empower citizens to vote in future

Title Page (with Author Details)

Voter Intentions and Political Implications of Legislated Stadium Subsidies

Timothy Kellison

Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia USA

Brian M. Mills

University of Texas at Austin

Austin, Texas USA

Corresponding author: Timothy Kellison, Georgia State University, PO Box 3975, Atlanta, GA USA 30302, email: tkellison@gsu.edu, phone: +1 404-413-8363, fax: +1 404-413-8053

This work was supported by the Janet B. Parks NASSM Research Grant and the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute–Bill Sims Endowment Faculty Research Award.

Abstract

In the US, decisions to allocate public funding toward professional sports facilities are usually made not by voters via referendum or initiative, but rather by their elected representatives. We examine the attitudes of residents in a region affected by a no-vote stadium subsidy to determine whether policymaking is congruent with public will and to consider the political impact of residents' support of or opposition to the stadium subsidy. Using survey data from 369 registered voters in Cobb County, Georgia, we found the average voter would have approved of publicly funding a new ballpark, but felt that voters should have had the opportunity to vote via referendum. Additionally, we identified factors contributing to voters' support of the financing plan, perceptions of support by other residents, and intentions to vote in future elections. Finally, we identify prospective impacts of plan support on voter behaviour in subsequent elections that could have political implications for legislated stadium subsidies.

Keywords: public policy, political science, public subsidies, public sport facilities, sport finance, stadium construction

Voter Intentions and Political Implications of Legislated Stadium Subsidies

1. Introduction

Recent stadium developments in Atlanta, Detroit, Edmonton, Minneapolis, and Washington, DC exemplify the latest instances of North America's no-vote-subsidy trend (Kellison & Mondello, 2014). A review of the stadium-financing literature illustrates that scholarly inquiry, though extensive, has been limited mostly to studies focusing on economics, finance, or urban regime theory. Perhaps because of the lack of data available in no-vote-subsidy cases, researchers have largely neglected the effects these subsidies may have on voters and how expectations, perceptions, and policymaking may be managed during these political processes.

Additionally, investigations of voter characteristics and behaviour in stadium-financing issues that do exist have failed to look beyond voting outcomes (Kellison & Kim, 2014). In the absence of a direct vote on issues like public-stadium financing, it is unclear if the majority of the electorate favours or opposes such policymaking without surveying or polling. These changes are particularly relevant to sport managers and policymakers, as consequences resulting from (un)popular political action could have implications for both the teams seeking public funding and policymakers that negotiate on behalf of the voting public.

In this work, we therefore seek to address this gap by examining local sentiment toward a no-vote subsidy for a professional baseball stadium and the potential for polarization on stadium-subsidy issues to result in general election impacts. Our work uses the Atlanta Braves' relocation from downtown Atlanta, Georgia, to suburban Cobb County in 2017 as the setting for empirical inquiry. A new venue, SunTrust Park (now Truist Park), was built to anchor a $1.3-billion stadium district covering 60 acres of undeveloped land about 15 miles northwest of the Braves' former stadium. The ballpark project required $392 million in public funding, a county subsidy approved

by Cobb's elected leadership (Center for Sport and Urban Policy, 2020). Cobb residents did not vote directly on the public funding package.

The subsidy in the Atlanta area, like the vast majority of stadium subsidies in North American professional sport, reflects a political strategy in which elected policymakers allocate public spending toward a stadium project without the direct consent of voters. Given that this approach is both lawful and routine, there may be little incentive for policymakers to subject a stadium-subsidy plan to a referendum or initiative because it could open the possibility that voters would reject the proposal (Kellison, Newman, & Bunds, 2017). However, if these plans are mostly unfavoured by the voting public, and stadium-subsidy issues are motivating for these voters, policymakers may experience repercussions during general elections. Without a public vote, there is little insight on whether the public supports a stadium initiative, the factors that influence public support, and the likelihood voters would express any (lack of) support in subsequent elections.

While some researchers have considered voter characteristics in their analyses of public–private stadium and mega-event cases (Brown & Paul, 2002; Streicher, Schmidt, & Schreyer, 2019), there has been less empirical investigation of the responding opinions and behaviours following no-vote subsidies. As noted by Kellison and Mondello (2014), "The most immediate outcome of a pro-subsidy policy is that public funds are allocated to a stadium or project; clearly, this outcome is favored by the policymakers behind it." They continue, "It is unclear if other, more problematic outcomes also emerge from such policies" (p. 173). We therefore empirically test the potential impacts of polarization on the stadium issue on voter turnout in subsequent general elections, complementing meaningful discourse about the issue in the academy and among policymakers, activists, sport managers, and everyday citizens.

2. Literature Review

The public financing of professional sports stadiums continues to flourish with promises to deliver prosperity to cities and regions seeking to attract pro sports teams to their area, despite these promises often ringing hollow economically (Humphreys, 2019). However, discussion of the benefits of sports and sporting events has moved from the economic to the intangible. Indeed, some economists have acknowledged the possibility that public financing of sports at lower levels may be justified (Matheson, 2019). Substantial work over the past decade has attempted to estimate the intangible value of sports events and facilities using qualitative methods, contingent valuation methods, or identifying capitalization of these intangible values in real estate (Feng & Humphreys, 2018). Still, questions remain as to whether the residents should weigh in directly on decisions to allocate tax dollars toward sport, and whether even direct referendums will achieve representative decision making (Horn, Fort, & Cantor, 2015).

Questions also remain as to how and why financing schemes, often touted as economic engines by policymakers despite evidence to the contrary, continue to be approved by local governments. In this section, we highlight the arguments made by elected officials when supporting stadium-subsidy plans. Additionally, we discuss the democratic models that enable policymakers to govern in ways that might not wholly reflect the will of the people. We further consider the consequences of this governing, particularly from the perspective of citizens who may not vote on a particular issue but may demonstrate their support or opposition in other ways. Finally, we cover the literature on single-issue voters, polarization, and consequences to policymaking that is misaligned with irregular voters.

2.1. Stadium Boosterism and Civic Paternalism

Nearly all professional sports venues in North America are funded, at least in part, using public money (Long, 2013). Regardless of whether these subsidies are awarded via referendum or

legislation, they require championing from influential civic leaders who represent political or business interests. Often, these advocates argue that a new stadium is necessary to obtain (or, in the case of stadium replacement, maintain) "major-league city" status (Sapotichne, 2012). Thus, civic leaders often allocate significant public funding toward sports and entertainment projects like stadiums. Under this rationale, a city that can attract world-class events and maintain global competitiveness will be effective in growing its economy, improving municipal institutions and services, and sustaining a high quality of life among its citizens.

Policymakers who support stadium subsidies often reason they are governing in a manner that best serves the public. This expression of civic paternalism is most common in cases of unpopular stadium proposals, in which policymakers cite the obligation to use their knowledge and expertise, even if doing so means overriding public sentiment and subsequently jeopardizing their political future (Hutchinson, Berg, & Kellison, 2018). Of course, an elected official's *public* justification for supporting a stadium subsidy may contradict her underlying reasons, which may instead be motivated by urban power structures and growth coalitions (Delaney & Eckstein, 2007). Indeed, economists have suggested that public opinion on stadium funding is often ignored in favour of corporate interests due to significant investments to gain political power (Hudson, 2002).

In addition to government leaders, ordinary citizens play an essential role in the passage or defeat of a stadium-subsidy proposal. As discussed in the introduction, the majority of research on public support of public stadium projects has focused on elections and ballot issues. One line of inquiry has focused on attributes of the election itself. For instance, Mondello and Anderson (2004) identified several factors influencing the outcome of a stadium-subsidy vote, including its timing in the election cycle, the number of issues presented on the ballot, the amount of money invested in a stadium campaign, the age of the team, and the proposed sources of taxation.

A smaller body of research has been oriented around voter characteristics. In one such study, Depken (2000) found that relative fan loyalty was a significant predictor of subsidy support. Other studies have focused on voters' proximity to the proposed stadium site. For example, Dehring, Depken, and Ward (2008) provided evidence of the so-called "homevoter hypothesis," in which voters favoured public projects they expected to impact their property values positively. Additionally, Coates and Humphreys (2006) noted individuals who lived closer to a proposed venue were more likely to favour a subsidy than those living at a greater distance.

Conversely, in their analysis of Munich's Allianz Arena, Ahlfeldt and Maennig (2011) observed voters near the proposed project were more likely to oppose it, indicating a NIMBY (i.e., not in my backyard) preference. Similarly, in an examination of the Seattle Seahawks' 1997 stadium referendum, Horn et al. (2015) found a nonlinear distance effect: voters who lived nearest to the proposed site were the least supportive, while support was strongest among those further from the city centre (between 10–30 miles) but with "easy access" to the future stadium. More recently, Johnson and Hall (2019) examined two ballot measures from 2016 for a new downtown football stadium for the San Diego Chargers. The measures, which coincided with the 2016 Presidential election, were both defeated. Johnson and Hall concluded that high voter turnout likely hurt the stadium proposal, as the collective voice of clearly-defined groups like Chargers fans was drowned out by unaffiliated voters who opposed tax increases.

As illustrated above, much of the scholarly attention on stadium-subsidy issues has focused on direct democracy, in which citizens are entitled to express their support or opposition by voting in a local election. However, the vast majority of stadium subsidies in North American professional sport are appropriated through local legislation carried out by elected officials (e.g., at the city

council or county commission level). In the next section, we highlight the incidence of the no-vote stadium subsidy and discuss the political theories that underlie this approach to governing.

2.2. No-vote Stadium Subsidies and Democratic Representation

Between 2005 and 2020, legislated stadium subsidies (i.e., no-vote subsidies)—public appropriations awarded to stadium proposals without the direct approval of citizens—were applied in more than 80% of all professional stadium projects in North America (Kellison, Kim, & James, in press). Projects funded via no-vote subsidies accounted for more than $10.5 billion[1] of public funding since 2005 (Center for Sport and Urban Policy, 2020). One of the most recent examples of a legislated stadium subsidy is Allegiant Stadium, the $1.8-billion home of the Las Vegas Raiders and University of Nevada, Las Vegas football teams. The stadium is scheduled to open in 2020 and will come at a public cost of $750 million.

In the absence of a vote by citizens, the elected official must lean on her understanding of the nature of democratic representation when voting on a stadium-subsidy issue. On a fundamental level, the policymaker may subscribe to either a mandate or independence philosophy. In the former, the elected official is delegated to be a proxy for constituents and, as a result, votes in a manner that best reflects the public will; in the latter, the official is considered a trustee and may legislate independently of her constituents' preferences (Pitkin, 1967). Other models of representation expand the delegate–trustee archetype, but as Kellison, Kim, et al. (in press) summarized, "Although the manner in which representatives are held accountable differs across models, all retain the assumption that a democratic system should be evaluated, at least in part, by the degree to which legislative actions align with constituent preferences" (p. 6). A challenge for policymakers who are genuinely interested in understanding their constituents' preferences is

[1] All financial figures are presented in U.S. dollars.

collecting reliable data on voter sentiment. On the other side, constituents may struggle with finding the most effective strategies to voicing their opinion on a non-voting issue.

Without a referendum, citizens must resort to other methods to express their support or opposition toward a public issue. In Kellison, Sam, Hong, Swart, and Mondello's (in press) review of global politics and public stadium finance, they identified several non-voting tools citizens employed to participate in a stadium-subsidy debate. These tools included canvassing and petition-signing; donating money, time, or other resources to pro- or anti-subsidy campaigns; contacting their elected representatives; attending or speaking at public hearings; using traditional media outlets or social media to promote their viewpoints; and participating in rallies or protests. In some cases, calls for improved information disclosure and transparency have led to greater availability of public meetings, although Scherer and Sam (2008) observed public meetings moderated by the government might actually serve to enflame discord and divide the community.

In many ways, the lack of previous research on the public opinion of no-vote stadium subsidies suggests a citizen's voice in these cases is considered inconsequential. After all, once legislators approve a subsidy, the stadium project can proceed as planned. However, voters may respond to legislative actions in unanticipated ways, particularly in instances of unpopular policies.

2.3. Voter Behaviour and Policymaker Vulnerability

Even in no-vote-subsidy scenarios, ordinary citizens who oppose public funding for stadiums and other sporting infrastructure may be effective in defeating a proposal. For instance, after public polling revealed less than 40% of residents supported Boston's bid for the 2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, the city's mayor withdrew it from consideration (Lauermann & Vogelpohl, 2017). Furthermore, Pauschinger and Lauermann (2018) reported that "since 2013, at least 13 cities have cancelled their Olympic bids in response to referendums or

pressure from civic society activists" (para. 1). The public outcry led to reforms in the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) bid process: in 2019, the IOC announced it would consider redefining what it meant to be an Olympic host to allow for the Games to take place across multiple cities, regions, or countries. The threat of public opposition has also pushed policymakers to structure stadium deals in ways that avoid the requirement for a referendum (Kellison et al., 2017).

When policymakers' actions do not reflect the platforms that got them elected, they may face reproach by voters. Through retrospective voting, citizens may vote for or against an incumbent politician based on the policymaker's behaviour in office (Malhotra & Margalit, 2014). Retrospective voting has been widely studied in the political science literature, and previous studies indicate the threat of retrospective voting can be used to hold policymakers accountable (Woon, 2012). For example, Burnett and Kogan (2017) argued that "by conditioning their support for political incumbents on one piece of easily accessible information—the observed government performance—voters can use elections to… [ensure] only faithful agents retain their offices over the long haul" (p. 302). Under this rationale, policymakers may be expected to face similar penalties for supporting unpopular stadium subsidies (Kellison, Kim, et al., in press).

Surprisingly, the few studies exploring retrospective voting in stadium-related cases have suggested that the political cost of supporting stadium subsidies is low. Carr (2009) analysed public support for mayors who promoted public stadium projects and found they were neither rewarded nor penalized for approving or opposing stadium subsidies. Additionally, in Miller's (2013) investigation of the relationship between professional sports records and mayoral elections, he argued the link between mayoral support and stadium funding was "highly unlikely," partially because "most stadium funding is handled through private and state financing and public referenda, not city budgets under mayoral control" (p. 63). While state funding is a common source

of stadium subsidies, Miller overstates the utility of public referendums, though it is worth noting this misconception frequently appears in the literature (Kellison & Mondello, 2014). Furthermore, there is recent evidence that voters may penalize incumbents for unpopular subsidies. In one high-profile example, in 2011, Carlos Alvarez was recalled and subsequently ousted as Miami mayor after he supported a $488-million subsidy for a new major-league ballpark (Kellison, 2016).

As reflected in this review, in stadium-subsidy cases, the voices of policymakers and voters are heard differently depending on the political process undertaken to approve funding. Still, regardless of whether a subsidy is decided through a referendum or no-vote legislation, neither perspective is inconsequential. Without a public vote, citizens may express their views toward a stadium subsidy in other ways leading up to and following legislative approval. Thus, in this study, we explore the attitudes of residents affected by a no-vote stadium subsidy to determine their level of support for public funding and to investigate the lasting impact of that endorsement (or lack thereof). The work here differs from the past work of Carr (2009) and Miller (2013) in that we tie voter intentions for general elections directly to support levels using a survey instrument. This past work used only team performance success on the arrival (departure) of a sports team as a general control variable. Only more recently have investigations used direct survey measurements of individual support levels, allowing micro-level inquiry. However, we model our inquiry in a way that allows estimation of the effects of public support—and more specifically, polarization—toward a stadium issue as a predictor of potential political ramifications through asymmetries in new voter turnout (Dodson, 2010).

3. Empirical Context and Research Questions

We place our inquiry in the context of recent events in the Atlanta area. In late 2013, the Atlanta Braves announced the formation of a public–private partnership to develop and construct

a new $722-million ballpark in nearby Cobb County, some 15 miles northwest of the team's existing downtown location (Center for Sport and Urban Policy, 2020). This stadium, SunTrust Park, was expected to provide several benefits to the Braves, including physically positioning the team closer to its fan base, a large portion of which resides in Atlanta's northern suburbs (Tucker, 2013). Cobb County Commissioners unanimously approved the plan on May 27, 2014, following a contentious public hearing in which "several dissenters were forcibly removed from the room" (Kimes, 2014, p. 12).

Announcement of the plan's approval was met with controversy almost immediately. Some opponents of the project expressed anger over the Braves' decision to leave Turner Field, a stadium less than 20 years old at the time of the announcement. Another source of discontent was the process through which nearly $400 million of public money was allocated to the new ballpark development; critics described the decision-making process as nontransparent and hurried (Klepal & Schrade, 2014). Cobb residents did not directly vote on the stadium issue, and as noted by Zavodnick (2018), "the three-party agreement between the [county building] Authority, Cobb, and the Braves [appeared] structured specifically to bypass the debt limitation clause in the Georgia Constitution that requires municipal borrowings to be approved by a voter referendum" (p. 428). Groundbreaking took place a few months after the plan was approved, and SunTrust Park opened in 2017.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether Cobb residents favour public subsidization of the new Braves' ballpark, to determine what factors contribute to their favourability toward the public-financing plan—and how they perceive others' favourability—and to examine the public response to such financing decisions as it relates to voting intentions in a subsequent general election. We propose three central research questions to explore these aims.

We begin by exploring the general favourability of the subsidy plan among registered voters to provide insight into whether public will and public policy are generally congruent in Cobb:

RQ1: To what degree do Cobb residents favour the use of public funding to subsidize the Atlanta Braves' new ballpark?

If a majority of voters favour the plan, this result would suggest that policymaker decisions are indeed congruent with public sentiment among registered voters. However, if a majority of voters oppose the plan, questions about the efficacy of Cobb's representative government remain.

Regardless of public poll results, there remains the question of how opinions toward public stadium financing are formed. Thus, we also identify the factors related to a citizen's attitude toward a stadium-financing plan approved without the public's direct consent. Although there are reasons to suspect that many citizens would oppose policymakers' allocation of taxpayer dollars without a public vote, some factors may contribute to favourable perceptions of a subsidy. As these perceptions may be influenced by social circles (e.g., Van Boven, Judd, & Sherman, 2012), we also evaluate the relationship between one's own favourability and the perception of other voters' favourability toward the no-vote subsidy in Cobb:

RQ2: What factors influence a private citizen's favourability toward a plan to finance a professional sports stadium using public funds?

Citizens may support the public financing of a stadium if they perceive doing so will result in benefits to the community, including positive economic impact and civic pride (Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2016). Additionally, citizens may trust policymakers' motives; in this case, ordinary citizens may acknowledge their lack of understanding and defer to elected officials, expecting policymakers to act in ways that reflect the will of the people.

Despite the common-sense prediction that enacting policies contrary to her or his

preferences will displease a voter, the target(s) and extent of this expected discontent are unclear. Citizens dissatisfied with public policy may express their dissatisfaction in a variety of ways (e.g., with antagonism or with apathy), including by penalizing policymakers in the next election. For example, past work has found that polarization is associated with the likelihood of voting in a general election, presumably to act on that (lack of) support (Dodson, 2010). Although much of the work in this area has considered party-level polarization, we address whether the choice to publicly subsidize a sports stadium is an issue that can affect future general election intentions among registered voters, particularly among representatives that were associated with a(n) (un)favoured deal. If these issues are politically relevant in general elections, this result can provide insight into the importance of stadium funding at the voting booth. To guide this line of inquiry, we propose a third research question:

RQ3: Is the level of favourability, positive or negative, associated with intentions of voters to vote in a subsequent election?

Additionally, we extend our inquiry to examine whether this effect is more pronounced for participants who did not vote in the most recent election. If less engaged voters are more likely to vote in a subsequent election due to a specific issue, then turnout may be impacted by the stadium issue. Finally, we address whether turnout intentions are biased toward favourability or unfavourability, providing implications for the directional effect of the stadium issue on turnout and election results. Specifically, if individuals who are usually unlikely to vote are more likely to vote in a subsequent election when they oppose a no-vote subsidy, then this finding could imply political accountability for policymakers. Alternatively, if favourable and unfavourable voters are both as likely to reach the polls, then the net effect may be inconsequential to election outcomes.

4. Methods

4.1. Measurement

Aligned with the purpose of this research, we employed a modified version of the Proxy Referendum on Public Stadium Appropriation (PROPSA; Kellison & Kim, 2017) to measure voter attitudes toward the Atlanta Braves' ballpark plan. The 60-item paper-and-pencil survey contains several categories of questions, including: items designed to test seven constructs (i.e., perceived stadium impact, trust in policymakers, support of the financing plan, team consumption intentions, congruence with democratic norms, attitudes toward policymakers, and political apathy), several poll-style questions meant to yield descriptive insight, and space for open-ended comments. At the beginning of the survey, participants were provided with the following details about the case:

> Recently, Cobb County commissioners approved a plan to construct a new $672-million ballpark[2] for the Atlanta Braves to be opened in 2017. Cobb County is responsible for half the costs, which will be paid mostly using existing taxes.
>
> Supporters of this deal have argued that it will anchor a new entertainment district, create jobs, and stimulate significant economic growth in Cobb County.
>
> Opponents of this deal have voiced concerns about traffic and the public cost, arguing that tax money should instead be spent on other programs, including schools and road improvement.

The survey was administered shortly after the May 2014 approval of public funding, prior to the subsequent general election for Cobb County. This timing is key, as it allowed our participants to respond with their intentions to vote in an upcoming election around the time after approval was known.

[2] At the time of survey release, the project's cost was widely estimated to be $672 million. An additional $50 million was later applied to account for "other costs and equipment related to the new ballpark" (Tucker, 2015, p. C5).

The PROPSA was developed "to measure voters' attitudes toward a public-stadium finance plan in cases of no-vote subsides" (Kellison & Kim, 2017, p. 470) based on three underlying areas of focus: citizens' attitudes toward a no-vote stadium subsidy plan, the direct outcomes associated with citizens' favourability of the plan, and the political outcomes associated with policymakers' use of the no-vote-subsidy mechanism. The key constructs and the manner in which they were measured in this study are described in Table 1.

As detailed by Kellison, Kim, et al. (in press), the PROPSA was designed to minimize the impact of common method variance, nonresponse and measurement errors, and social desirability bias (e.g., positive–negative item balance, proximal separation of predictor and criterion variables, reduction of ambiguous items and the social desirability of response choices), and previous studies using the PROPSA have provided evidence of its reliability and validity.

The population of interest was Cobb voters. Thus, to identify our sample, we employed a simple random sampling technique using records obtained from the Cobb County Board of Elections and Registration, which provided contact information (including name, address, year of birth, gender, race, voter registration date, and previous elections participated in) of 392,790 active voters. We assigned each case a random number and selected 4,000 records to receive survey packets. The packets included a cover letter, survey, and postage-paid reply envelope. Survey packets were mailed upon Institutional Review Board approval.

4.2. Estimation Procedure

We address RQ1 with a summary of our responses to favourability (*Support*) and perceived others' favourability (*Congruent*) items from the PROPSA. For all constructs from the PROPSA survey, we use composite scores as the average score across each construct item measured on the 7-point Likert-type scale. For RQ2, we use ordinary least squares regression (OLS) with standard

errors robust to heteroscedasticity to estimate the relationship between voter characteristics associated with hypothetical votes (*Proxy*), general support for the public stadium subsidy (*Support*), and perceptions of others' support of the plan (*Congruent*). The regression estimation takes the form as follows, with y_i taking either a [0,1] value of the *Proxy* variable, or the average response for each individual to the financing plan favourability (*Support* or *Congruent*)[3]:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Trust + \beta_2 Apathy + \beta_3 Consume + \beta_4 TeamID + \beta_5 Impact + \beta_6 Congruent + \beta_7 Efficacy + \beta_8 Relevance + \beta_9 Ref + \beta_{10} Aware + \beta_{11} Interest + \beta_{12} PastVote + \beta_{13} Age + \beta_{14-16} Education + \beta_{17-23} Income + \beta_{24-27} Race + \beta_{28} Female + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

We note that *Congruent* and *Support* are included in these models both as dependent and independent variables. As a result, we do not make causal claims related to whether support for the plan influences how participants perceive others' support, or vice versa. However, we control for each to estimate differences in other independent variables' influences on the support measures.

For our third research question, and to simplify interpretation and avoid multicollinearity in these models, we aggregate the constructs from PROPSA that indicate support specific to the stadium-financing plan. We refer to this aggregate as *Favour*, which takes the average of all items within *Support*, *Congruent*, *Impact*, *Relevance*, and *Referendum*. We propose that this composite measure provides a broad and comprehensive measure of favourability. We use this variable in regression estimations with voting intentions (*Vote*) as the dependent variable of interest.

We initially estimate these models with OLS with standard errors robust to heteroscedasticity and with bootstrapping; however, because *Vote* is measured on a Likert-type scale, there can be questions about the inherent space between values in the scale (and it is effectively censored at 1 and 7. Given this, we estimate a proportional odds model (ordinal logit)

[3] We note that the model for *Proxy* is a linear probability model. We find similar results with a logistic model.

for robustness, which accounts for the *Vote* variable being measured between 1 and 7. We begin with a model of *Vote* as a function of *PastVote* and *Favour*, and include control variables such as age, income, education, race, gender, information about team identification and consumption intentions, awareness of and interest in the stadium plan, and remaining general items from the PROPSA survey (i.e., *Apathy*, *Trust*, *Efficacy*). A linear effect of *Favour* in the negative direction would indicate that those with negative views about the stadium subsidy are more likely to vote in the subsequent election, and vice versa for a positive linear effect.

As voting intentions may be more closely related to polarization on an issue—in this case, favourability toward the no-vote stadium subsidy in either direction—we also consider a squared term that allows estimation of effects specific to the extremes of favourability for or against the stadium subsidy. A U-shaped relationship would indicate that voters at these extremes are more likely to vote in a subsequent election, while an inverted U-shape would indicate that polarized voters are less likely to vote even after controlling for the level of voter apathy. We also split the *Favour* variable into three categories: High (6–7), Middle (3–5), and Low (1–2), which results in an alternative model using dummy variables for the categories to ensure that we have not forced the parametric relationship upon the variable generated from Likert-type items.

We subsequently consider the possibility that the relationship between the level of favourability and voting intentions may be moderated by having previously voted in an election. Specifically, we model whether the effects of stadium-subsidy favourability more strongly affect voting intentions among voters who did not previously vote using an interaction between *PastVote* and *Favour*. The full empirical model with all interactions and polynomials (with dummy variables and their interactions taking place of *Favour* and $Favour^2$ in alternative models) takes the form:

$$Vote = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PastVote + \beta_2 Favour + \beta_3 Favour^2 + \beta_4 (PastVote \times Favour) + \beta_5 (PastVote \times Favour^2) + \beta_6 Trust + \beta_7 Apathy + \beta_8 Efficacy + \beta_9 Consume + \beta_{10} TeamID + \beta_{11-12} Aware + \beta_{13-14} Interest + \beta_{15} Age + \beta_{16-18} Education + \beta_{19-25} Income + \beta_{26-29} Race + \beta_{30} Female + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Sample

Of the 4,000 surveys mailed, 13 packets were returned as undeliverable. From the remaining pool of 3,987 voters, 402 individuals returned surveys, resulting in an initial response rate of 10.1%. The response rate was typical of mail surveys (Griffis, Goldsby, & Cooper, 2003). We reviewed each returned survey for completeness and disqualified 28 cases due to insufficient data (i.e., 5% or greater incidence of missing responses). Five additional cases were removed because the respondents reported they were not Cobb residents, leaving a final usable response rate of 9.3% (n=369).

The median age of respondents was 52.4. The majority of respondents self-identified as White (81.6%), and more than 78% held a bachelor's degree or higher. The median per capita income fell between $100,000 and $249,999. The political affiliation most often reported was Republican (45.5%), followed by independent or no party affiliation (27.8%), Democrat (19.0%), and other (7.8%). Table 2 contains a summary of the sample, along with demographic information on all registered voters and all residents of Cobb County.

In comparison with all Cobb residents, the sample is generally older, has more formal education, and is more affluent. Based on File's (2018) profile of demographic trends among U.S. voters, the differences between the average voter in this study and the average Cobb resident is expected in surveying of voters, though we note that our sample is more white and slightly older than the registered voting population in Cobb. Therefore, we proceed with caution with respect to

generalizability of our results to non-registered residents, but note that the sample is relatively consistent with the demographics of voters, providing evidence of a low nonresponse error threat.

5.2. RQ1: Summary Statistics

We present summary statistics and alpha coefficients for additional variables in Table 3. Of voters in the sample, 54.7% would vote in favour of the stadium if given a chance at survey time (*Proxy*), 95.4% were interested or somewhat interested in the stadium issue (*Interest*), and nearly 99% of respondents were aware or somewhat aware of the stadium funding issue. The majority of respondents (73.6%) had attended at least one Braves game in the past five years, and nearly 32% had attended more than five games over the past five years. We also find that 73.8% of the sample voted in the previous general election. Participants in our sample were highly likely to vote, with the average voting intentions response a 6.33 (*Vote*). Among the participants, apathy was relatively low on the scale (ranging from a minimum possible value of 1.0 to a maximum possible value of 7.0) at 2.17 (*Apathy*), as was trust in government (*Trust* of 3.54) and the perception of their interest mattering for government officials (*Efficacy* of 3.75). Given these characteristics, it seems safe to say that our sample is largely made up of engaged registered voters.

Despite most participants having attended a Braves game in the past five years, they were not on average highly identified with the team (*TeamID* of 4.22) and did not have strong plans to attend games in the future (*Consume* of 4.65). However, participants felt relatively strongly that the ballpark plan was relevant and important (*Relevance* of 5.73) and that voters should have had a say before the subsidy package was approved (*Referendum* of 5.63). The average response for *Impact*, the expected economic and intangible effects of the new stadium on the local area, was 4.43, indicating that the average participant was agnostic or somewhat agreed there would be positive impacts. Further, the average respondent reported that the public at large was likely somewhat

unfavourable to the plan as a whole (*Congruent* of 3.17). This result demonstrates some inconsistency with the revealed voting majority (*Proxy*) in our sample and expectations about general support of the plan among participants.

Finally, despite the majority stating that they would vote in favour of the plan, the average of *Support* (support of the financing) was only 3.56; however, this response item had one of the highest standard deviations of all responses, indicating possible polarization along the support dimension. Indeed, among those who would vote in favour the plan (*Proxy*), support averaged 4.99 (*Support*). For those who responded that they would vote against the plan if given the chance in a referendum, the mean response for *Support* was only 1.84. Figure 1 shows the clear bimodal distribution of responses for *Support*. The split on perceptions of others' support of the stadium (*Congruent*) was similar, with "yes" proxy votes (*Proxy*) averaging 4.13 and "no" proxy votes averaging only 2.01. Overall, the split in support for the plan identifies relatively strong polarization on the stadium issue. Particularly interesting is the split on *Congruent*, as participants tend to believe others' views are more in line with their own, revealing a strong bias in perceptions of favourability. These relationships will be expanded upon in the subsequent sections.

5.3. RQ2: Proxy Votes and Stadium Funding Support

We present the results of the proxy vote (*Proxy*), support (*Support*), and perception of others' support (*Congruent*) regression estimates in Table 4. Beginning with the *Proxy* model, we find that intentions to consume Braves games in the future (*Consume*), perceptions of others' support of the financing plan (*Congruent*), and opinions about the positive impact of the plan (*Impact*) are all positively and significantly related to voting "yes" in a hypothetical referendum. *TeamID*, *Efficacy*, *Apathy*, *Trust*, *Aware*, and *Interest* were not significantly associated with voting one way or the other. However, *Referendum* was significantly and negatively associated with the likelihood of a "yes"

vote. In other words, citizens who were more likely to agree that voters should have a say in the financing plan were more likely to vote "no" in a referendum on the plan, indicating that this group may have felt left out of the political decision-making process. There was also some evidence that *Relevance* is negatively associated with the probability of a "yes" vote, indicating that participants finding relevance of the financing plan to the county and its residents were more likely to vote "no" in a referendum if given the chance.

We find very similar results with respect to sign and significance of coefficients using the *Support* measure as the dependent variable in our regressions. There are some small differences, including a statistically significant impact at the 5% level for *Relevance*. We also find a significant influence of *Aware* on *Support*, indicating that participants unaware of the stadium-financing plan are much less likely to have supported it. However, we interpret this effect with considerable caution, as only four participants were unaware of the financing plan before participating in our survey.

Moving to the estimates for *Congruent*, we find similar results for sign and direction of coefficients as in the *Support* and *Proxy* models for *Impact* and *Referendum*. Furthermore, there is a strong relationship between *Support* and *Congruent*, as before, indicating that participants are more likely to view others' support of the plan as similar to their own. However, there are two central differences in coefficient estimates in the *Congruent* model. First, we find a positive and significant effect of *Trust* on *Congruent*, indicating that higher levels of trust in government are associated with the assumption that others' strongly support the plan. Splitting means for *Trust* by "yes" and "no" votes (*Proxy*), we find that *Trust* is much higher among those who would have voted "yes." In other words, participants who supported the decision to fund the stadium in the first place are more likely to retain trust in government decision making. Therefore, we modify our model by adding an interaction between *Support* and *Trust* in the final column of Table 4. This modification shows the

relationship between *Trust* and *Congruent* is moderated by *Support*, thereby removing any main effect of *Trust* on *Congruent*. Thus, the influence of government trust on others' support of the plan is driven solely by strong supporters of the plan. Secondly, unlike in the *Proxy* and *Support* models, we find no significant relationship between *Consume* and *Congruent*, suggesting voters' intention to attend a ballgame in the future is not related to their perception that other residents favoured the financing plan. Given this, there does not seem to be evidence that perceptions of support take place through social transmissions related to attendance.

5.4. RQ3: Stadium Funding Favourability and Voting Intentions

The results of our estimations for voting intentions are presented in Table 5 (linear and squared *Favour*) and Table 6 (categorical *Favour* dummy variable). We do not present control variables in these tables, as many were non-significant and most had little bearing on the research question of interest; however, the results of these coefficient estimates are available upon request. Results are largely consistent across OLS and proportional odds models, as well as those using a categorical version of *Favour*. Models using standard errors robust to heteroskedasticity, bootstrapped standard errors, and jacknife standard errors matched with respect to statistical significance of our central variables of interest. We largely refer to OLS model coefficients, as these are most easily interpretable.

To begin, we find evidence that past voting is associated with future voting intentions. Having voted previously is associated with an increase in invention to vote in the next general election of approximately 0.7 points on the 1–7 scale. We do not find evidence for a general or moderated *linear* relationship between *Favour* for and voting intentions; however, there is a statistically significant U-shaped relationship between polarization on the *Favour* scale and voting intentions. This link is confirmed in Table 6 using categorical versions of the *Favour* variable, with

less extreme views on the subject showing lower levels of voting intentions. This relationship implies that as voters report more extreme views on stadium funding favourability, they are more likely to vote in the upcoming general election, providing evidence that stadium-subsidy issues could have political implications at the polls. The coefficients for this variable imply that participants with a *Favour* response of 3 are about 0.9 points lower on the *Vote* scale than participants with a *Favour* response of 2. From Table 6, moving from a *Low* (1–2) categorization to a *Mid* (3–5) categorization reduces *Vote* by nearly 1.5 points, on average. However, *Low* (1–2) and *High* (6–7) levels of *Favour* are not statistically different from one another.

There is also some evidence from the OLS models in Table 5 (columns 4 and 8) and Table 6 (columns 2 and 4) that this effect is moderated by past voting such that it is stronger among previous non-voters. More specifically, the model estimate implies that extreme (un)favourability toward the plan is largely driven by registered voters that did not vote in the previous election. This result provides some evidence that the issue motivates *new* voters to go to the polls, rather than strongly influencing previous voters. The general U-shaped effect is estimated to be asymmetric, with higher voting intentions among strongly unfavourable participants. We caution, however, that our sample consists only of those Cobb residents that are registered to vote, and our generalizability to new voter registrations are limited.

We visualize this relationship in Figure 2 separately for previous voters and non-voters. In this figure, the U-shaped relationship is particularly apparent for previous non-voters. Additionally, it is asymmetric and more strongly exhibited on the left-hand side of the left panel. This result again implies that being strongly unfavourable of the no-vote subsidy has a larger positive impact on voting intentions than being strongly favourable toward the plan. We also note the lack of variability in voting intentions among past voters on the right-hand side of the figure, but that the majority of less

certain intentions were also toward the middle of the *Favour* composite measure. Nevertheless, the asymmetry in the relationship may imply that new voters more negative about the stadium plan are more likely to express their discontent in the upcoming election, resulting in a net negative effect for political candidates responsible for the public financing approval.

Beyond the effects of past voting and favourability, only awareness (*Aware*) and apathy (*Apathy*) were significantly related to intentions to vote in an upcoming election. Consumption intentions (*Consume*) and team identification (*TeamID*) were not associated with voting intentions, making clear that our estimate is specific to the policy related to subsidization of the new stadium.[4]

These results demonstrate that, despite the lack of direct public input in a no-vote stadium subsidy, voters may follow the case with interest and—perhaps most important to policymakers—be prompted to vote in subsequent elections to express their (lack of) support. Additionally, despite the fact that a majority of respondents indicated they supported the plan, they may have been dissatisfied with the lack of referendum.

These empirical findings are complemented anecdotally by the case of then-Cobb County Commission Chairperson Tim Lee, the county's chief architect of the plan. In the months leading up to the public announcement of the public funding agreement, Lee met and negotiated with the Braves privately (Klepal, 2014), and he spearheaded the public investment proposal. As construction of SunTrust Park continued into 2016, Lee began his bid for re-election but found himself battling criticism of the SunTrust Park plan, including from his top political contender, Mike Boyce. Boyce made Lee's involvement in the stadium deal the primary plank of his campaign (Galloway, 2016). In the May 2016 primary election, Lee finished nine points behind Boyce, ultimately losing in a run-off election.

[4] We estimated alternative regressions interacting consumption and team identification variables with favourability and past voting, and did not find any moderating relationship of these team variables to voting intentions.

In cases of no-vote stadium subsidies, attention is usually—and understandably—placed on the elected officials who make the ultimate decision whether to support a public funding plan. However, as the results of this study demonstrate, no-vote stadium subsidies could carry consequences beyond the public financing itself. As a whole, we find evidence that legislated stadium subsidies have the potential to enter general voting decisions among registered voters in the affected districts. Although the case of Lee's loss itself in Cobb is anecdotal, the potential for stadium issues to (asymmetrically) sway voting intentions—as revealed in our data—is of interest to sport managers. In particular, managing public expectations of stadium subsidies may become more important as residents increase their scepticism over such deals. Finding common ground between public interest, public officials, and pro sports teams is of central interest to those in management roles alongside managing perceptions within the communities in which franchises operate.

6. Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the degree to which voters supported a stadium-subsidy plan, the factors that contributed to their favourability of the plan, and the extent to which subsidy-specific issues affected their intentions to vote in future elections. Given the incidence of no-vote subsidies for North American professional stadiums and arenas, this study has important management and policy implications. Without polling or election data, individuals can suppose their preferences are consistent with the polity. Similarly, the elected official who supports a stadium-subsidy plan may speculate her electorate to be in favour, while the dissenting citizen may contend that the public majority opposes the subsidy. Both civil servants and citizens must weigh the significance of legislation that fails, by and large, to reflect the public preference. Furthermore, this study contributes to a better understanding of how local citizens respond to stadium subsidization, particularly in cases when legislation is enacted without direct public approval.

In this study, voters reported a high level of awareness of and interest in the SunTrust Park project. These results are particularly noteworthy given the fact voters were not incentivized to follow the stadium case by the promise of a referendum or initiative; in other words, voters' engagement in the case was not impelled by the knowledge they would ultimately have to approve or reject the subsidy plan at the ballot box.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents indicated they would vote in favour of the stadium subsidy if given the opportunity, there is evidence that many were dissatisfied with the policymaking process. Voters reported relatively low levels of trust in government and confidence in elected officials. Additionally, most voters agreed that the ballpark plan was an important community issue and deserved a public vote. Unsurprisingly, voters' perceptions that the project would lead to positive tangible and intangible community benefits informed their support of the plan and approval of a hypothetical referendum. At times, however, voters' positive perceptions of the stadium project were at odds with their evaluation of the policymaking process, as voters who favoured a public vote were less likely to support the plan.

The results of this study suggest citizens may be empowered to vote in subsequent general elections based on their (un)favourability of a stadium-subsidy plan. As noted in the previous section, this effect is stronger among individuals who had not voted in the most recent municipal election. Interestingly, the fact that no referendum occurred in the SunTrust Park subsidy likely tempered the potential public influence of growth coalitions and the press observed in other cases. That is, the expedited process through which Cobb policymakers arrived at the subsidy decision narrowed the time—and need for—a public information campaign.

Several results emerging from this study differed from previous research. For example, contrary to prior work finding that team loyalty is related to subsidy support (Depken, 2000), we

find no evidence of this in our data using *TeamID*. Further, *TeamID* did not impact voters' intentions to vote in future elections. Given the asymmetry in voter intention motivation, this study also provides evidence that policymakers tied to an unpopular stadium subsidy may be penalized in later elections, suggesting a threat of retrospective voting in sports subsidy cases.

In the absence of a referendum in a situation like the Atlanta–Cobb ballpark case, identifying public sentiment is beneficial. For elected officials, team representatives, and other sport managers, gauging public support in the early stages of a stadium project can be used to identify possible sources of controversy, thereby allowing subsidy supporters to develop public communication strategies (e.g., Kellison & Mondello, 2012). For elected officials, there are clear incentives for understanding whether their positions are popular among the electorate: an unpopular position on a high-importance policy can hurt policymakers' chances of being re-elected (cf. Pietryka & Boydstun, 2012).

Though this line of inquiry has generally been positioned outside of the sport management literature, this research has clear implications for sport managers, especially for individuals seeking to generate excitement around a stadium-finance plan or promote a new stadium. Professional sports teams face particular challenges during the stadium-subsidy debate, and failing to build excitement—or worse, generating ill will—toward a new stadium may limit a team's ability to connect to citizens who otherwise might not consider visiting the new facility. Ultimately, future work evaluating not only the political implications of legislated subsidies for participating politicians but also consequences for the teams themselves would provide a welcome addition to the managerial implications for the work presented here.

References

Ahlfeldt, G., & Maennig, W. (2011). Voting on a NIMBY facility: Proximity cost of an "iconic" stadium. *Urban Affairs Review*, *48*, 205–237.

Brown, C., & Paul, D. M. (2002). The political scorecard of professional sports facility referendums in the United States, 1984–2000. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, *26*, 248–267.

Burnett, C. M., & Kogan, V. (2017). The politics of potholes: Service quality and retrospective voting in local elections. *The Journal of Politics*, *79*, 302–314.

Carr, P. J. (2009, April 2–5). *The politics of stadium financing: The price of mayoral support*. Paper presented at Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, Illinois.

Center for Sport and Urban Policy. (2019). North American Professional Sport Stadiums Receiving Public Funding, 2005–present. Retrieved from http://www.stadiatrack.org/public

Coates, D., & Humphreys, B. R. (2006). Proximity benefits and voting on stadium and arena subsidies. *Journal of Urban Economics*, *59*, 285–299.

Dehring, C. A., Depken, C. A., II., & Ward, M. R. (2008). A direct test of the homevoter hypothesis. *Journal of Urban Economics*, *64*, 155–170.

Delaney, K. J., & Eckstein, R. (2007). Urban power structures and publicly financed stadiums. *Sociological Forum*, *22*, 331–353.

Depken, C. A., II. (2000). Fan loyalty and stadium funding in professional baseball. *Journal of Sports Economics*, *1*, 124–138.

Dodson, K. (2010). The return of the American voter? Party polarization and voting behavior, 1988 to 2004. *Sociological Perspectives*, *53*, 443-449.

Feng, X., & Humphreys, B. R. (2018). Assessing the economic impact of sports facilities on residential property values: A spatial hedonic approach. *Journal of Sports Economics*, *19*, 188–210.

File, T. (2018). *Characteristics of voters in the Presidential Election of 2016*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Galloway, J. (2016, June 23). Challenger says he's not the insurgent some in Cobb think. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. B1.

Griffis, S. E., Goldsby, T. J., & Cooper, M. (2003). Web-based and mail surveys: A comparison of response, data, and cost. *Journal of Business Logistics*, *24*, 237–258.

Groothuis, P. A., & Rotthoff, K. W. (2016). The economic impact and civic pride effects of sports teams and mega-events: Do the public and the professionals agree? *Economic Affairs*, *36*, 22–32.

Horn, B. P., Cantor, M., & Fort, R. (2015). Proximity and voting for professional sporting stadiums: The pattern of support for the seahawk stadium referendum. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, *33*, 678–688.

Hudson, I. (2002). Sabotage versus public choice: Sports as a case study for interest group theory. *Journal of Economic Issues*, *36*, 1079–1096.

Humphreys, B. R. (2019). Should the construction of new professional sports facilities be subsidized? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *38*, 264–270.

Hutchinson, M., Berg, B. K., & Kellison, T. B. (2018). Political activity in escalation of commitment: Sport facility financing and government decision making in the United States. *Sport Management Review*, *21*, 263–278.

Johnson, C., & Hall, J. (2019). The public choice of public stadium financing: Evidence from San Diego referenda. *Economies*, *7*, 22.

Kellison, T. B. (2016). No-vote stadium subsidies and the democratic response. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 17, 452–477.

Kellison, T. B., & Kim, Y. (2017). Public attitudes towards no-vote stadium subsidies: The development and validation of an ex post proxy referendum. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *9*, 469–489.

Kellison, T., Kim, Y., & James, J. D. (in press). Secondary outcomes of a legislated stadium subsidy. *Journal of Global Sport Management*.

Kellison, T. B., & Mondello, M. J. (2014). Civic paternalism in political policymaking: The justification for no-vote stadium subsidies. *Journal of Sport Management*, *28*, 162–175.

Kellison, T. B., Newman, J. I., & Bunds, K. S. (2017). Framing democracy: Stadium financing and civic paternalism in Test Market, USA. *Sport in Society*, *20*, 1548–1564.

Kellison, T., Sam, M. P., Hong, S., Swart, K., & Mondello, M. J. (in press). Global perspectives on democracy and public stadium finance. *Journal of Global Sport Management*.

Kimes, M. (2014, December 8). Public cut out of stadium votes. *ESPN The Magazine*, 12.

Klepal, D. (2014, October 4). Email to lawyer: Lee says you're on deal. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. A1.

Klepal, D. (2016, May 29). Cobb race a delayed stadium referendum. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. B1.

Klepal, D., & Schrade, B. (2014, May 28). Cobb approves major stadium agreements: Supporters dominate, criticals shut out at meeting. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. A1.

Lauermann, J., & Vogelpohl, A. (2017). Fragile growth coalitions or powerful contestations? Cancelled Olympic bids in Boston and Hamburg. *Environment and Planning A*, *49*, 1887–1904.

Long, J. G. (2013). *Public/private partnerships for major league sports facilities*. New York: Routledge.

Malhotra, N., & Margalit, Y. (2014). Expectation setting and retrospective voting. *The Journal of Politics*, *76*, 1000–1016.

Matheson, V. (2019). Is there a case for subsidizing sports stadiums? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *38*, 271–277.

Miller, M. K. (2013). For the win! The effect of professional sports records on mayoral elections. *Social Science Quarterly*, *94*, 59–78.

Mondello, M. J., & Anderson, P. (2004). Stadiums, arenas, and sports referendums: A comparative analysis of cities involved in the stadium game. *International Journal of Sport Management*, *5*, 43–71.

Pauschinger, D., & Lauermann, J. (2018). Civic society, contestation, and the games. *Play the Game*. Retrieved from http://www.playthegame.org/news/comments/2018/071_civil-society-contestation-and-the-games/.

Pietryka, M. T., & Boydstun, A. E. (2012). Going maverick: How candidates can use agenda-setting to influence citizen motivations and offset unpopular issue positions. *Political Behavior*, *34*, 737–763.

Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Sapotichne, J. (2012). Rhetorical strategy in stadium development politics. *City, Culture and Society*, *3*, 169–180.

Scherer, J., & Sam, M. P. (2008). Public consultation and stadium developments: Coercion and the polarization of debate. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *25*, 443–461.

Streicher, T., Schmidt, S. L., & Schreyer, D. (2019). Referenda on hosting the Olympics: What drives voter turnout? *Journal of Sports Economics*, *20*, 627–653.

Tucker, T. (2013, November 12). Many unanswered questions for deal. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. A1.

Tucker, T. (2015, May 15). Stadium spending released: Team has spent $131 million on Cobb County project. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, p. C5.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Profile of general population and housing characteristics*. 2010 Census of Population and Housing. Retrieved from: https://factfinder.census.gov/

U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *ACS demographic and housing estimates*. 2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from: https://factfinder.census.gov/

Van Boven, L, Judd, C. M., & Sherman, D. K. (2012). Political polarization projection: Social projection of partisan attitude extremity and attitudinal processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *103*, 84–100.

Wickert, D., & Lutz, M. (2016, July 27). Challenger ousts Cobb chairman: Lee, who lured Braves to county, concedes defeat to retired colonel. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. A1.

Woon, J. (2012). Democratic accountability and retrospective voting: A laboratory experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*, 913–930.

Zavodnick, S. D., Jr. (2018). If you (pay to) build it, they will come: Rethinking publicly-financed professional sports stadiums after the Atlanta Braves deal with Cobb County. *Georgia Law Review*, *53*, 407–441.

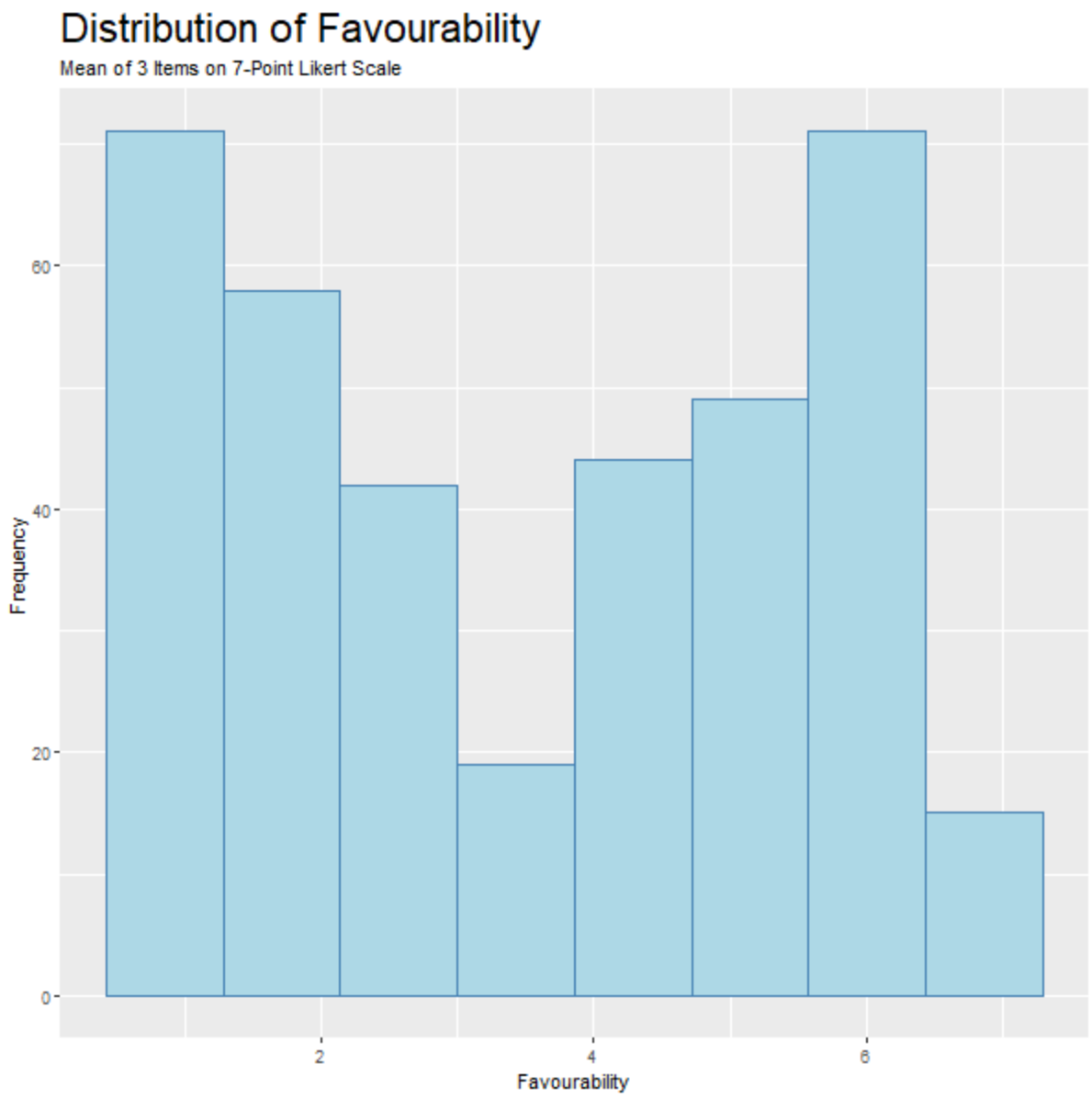

Figure 1. Histogram of raw average Favourability (*Support*) on 7-point Likert scale.

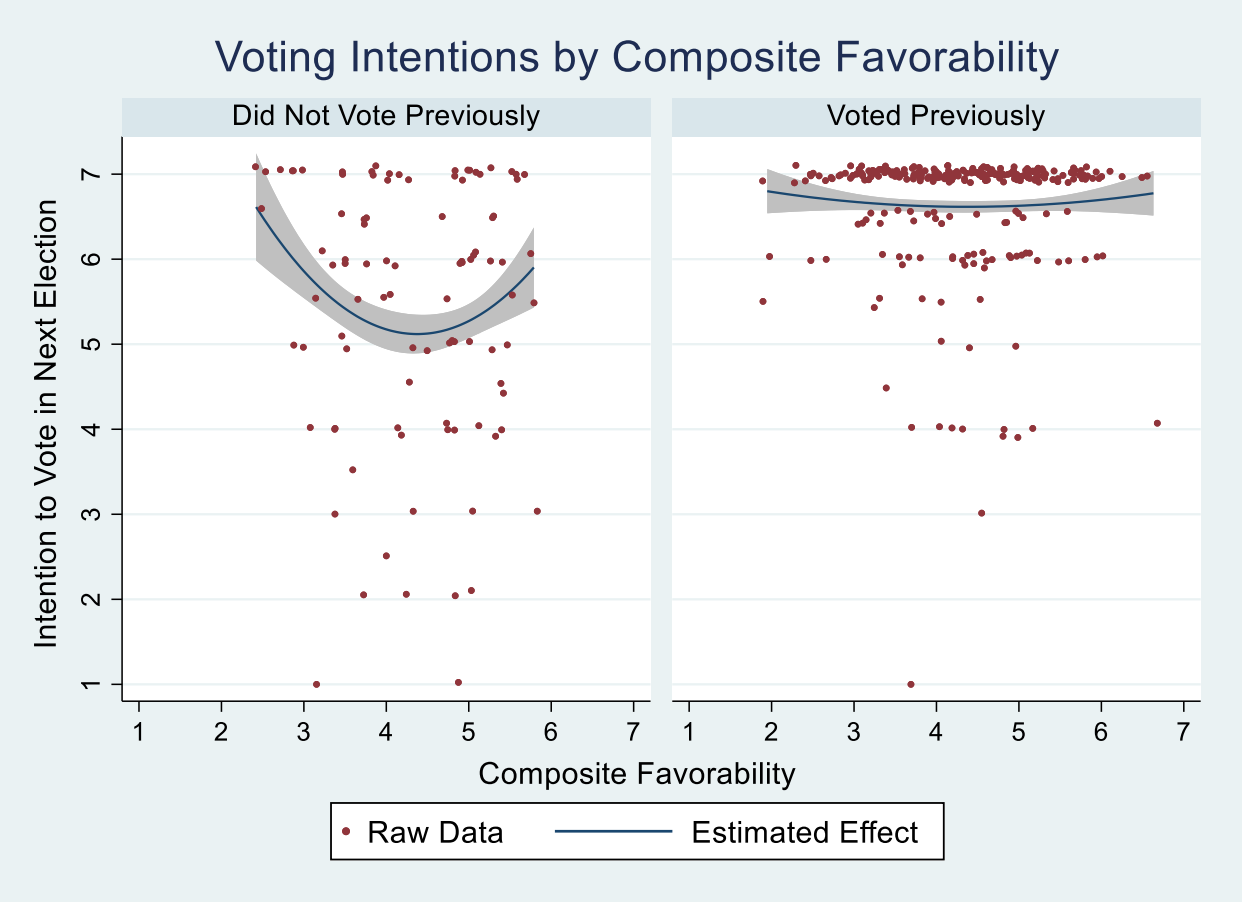

Figure 2. Visualization of composite favourability of public stadium funding. Estimated effect comes from Column 8 in Table 5. 95% confidence intervals shaded grey.

Table 1

Summary of Variable Descriptions

Variable	Description	Measurement
Proxy	Expected vote if public vote was held today	1 item / *For* or *Against*
Support	Support of public-financing plan	Composite of three items using 1–7 scale[a]
Congruent	Belief other Cobb residents supported stadium-subsidy plan	Composite of three items using 1–7 scale[a]
Trust	Belief elected officials act in the best interests of the public	Composite of five items using 1–7 scale[a]
Apathy	Lack of feeling or interest toward political issues	Composite of three items using 1–7 scale[a]
Ideology	Liberal or conservative tendencies toward social and economic issues	1 item using 1–8 scale[b]
Consume	Likelihood of attending game at SunTrust Park	Composite of two items using 1–7 scale[a]
TeamID	Social connection with Braves	Composite of three items using 1–7 scale[a]
Games	Number of Braves games attended in past five years	1 item reported across 5 intervals of games attended[c]
Impact	Expectation SunTrust Park will produce meaningful community benefits	Composite of seven items using 1–7 scale[a]
Efficacy	Confidence in personally affecting government affairs	Composite of four items using 1–7 scale[a]
Relevance	Importance of stadium-subsidy plan to ordinary citizens	Composite of two items using 1–7 scale[a]
Referendum	Belief public vote should have been held	Composite of three items using 1–7 scale[a]
Aware	Prior knowledge of stadium-subsidy plan	1 item / *Yes*, *Somewhat*, or *No*
Interest	Extent to which respondent has followed news about stadium-subsidy plan	1 item / *Yes*, *Somewhat*, or *No*
PastVote	Voter behaviour in most recently conducted municipal election	1 item / *Yes* or *No*
Vote	Intention to vote in upcoming general election	Composite of two items using 1–7 scale[a]
Favour	Composite measure of plan favourability	Composite of *Support*, *Congruent*, *Impact*, *Relevance*, and *Referendum*

[a]Anchored by *Strongly Disagree* and *Strongly Agree*. [b]1=Extremely Liberal, 2=Liberal, 3=Somewhat Liberal, 4=Moderate/Middle of road, 5=Somewhat Conservative, 6=Conservative, 7=Strongly Conservative, 8=I haven't thought about it much. [c]None, 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16 or more.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Sample, County Registered Voters, and All County Residents

	Sample	Registered Voters[a]	All Residents
N	369	392,790	688,078
Age			
Mdn age (years)	54.0	40.7	35.4
18 years and over	100.0%	100.0%	74.4%
21 years and over	97.8%	97.4%	70.5%
62 years and over	25.2%	21.2%	11.5%
65 years and over	19.8%	16.6%	8.7%
Gender			
Women	43.9%	54.7%	51.4%
Men	56.1%	45.1%	48.6%
Non-binary and/or other gender identification	0.0%	0.1%	—
Race[b]			
White alone	81.6%	63.3%	62.2%
Black or African American alone	9.8%	24.5%	25.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native alone	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%
Asian alone	1.6%	2.0%	4.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	—	0.1%
Persons reporting multiple or other races	7.0%	7.4%	2.7%
Persons of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	2.7%	2.7%	12.3%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	89.4%	—	87.7%
Political Ideology			
Extremely liberal	0.5%		
Liberal	7.0%		
Somewhat liberal	8.7%		
Moderate/Middle of road	22.0%		
Somewhat conservative	21.1%		
Conservative	26.8%		
Strongly conservative	6.8%		
Haven't thought about it much	7.0%		
Highest Level of Education Achieved[c]			
No College Degree	19.24%		47.4%
Associate's or Bachelor's Degree	46.34%		36.7%
Graduate or Professional Degree	32.52%		15.9%
Did Not Disclose	1.90%		
Income			
Mdn per capita income range	$100,000–249,999		
Per capita money income in past 12 months			$33,418[d]

Note. *Mdn* = median; — = not reported. Percentages of Sample declining to answer Race and Highest Level of Education not reported in table. All Residents data from "2010 Census of Population and Housing" and "2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates," by U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2014.
[a]As of June 2014. [b]Percentages reported for White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander include persons reporting only one race; Hispanic persons may be of any race, so may also be included in applicable race categories. [c]Percentage of persons age ≥25. [d]2010–2014; in 2014 dollars.

Table 3

Summary of Survey Items

Variable	Mean	SD (%)	Min	Max	α
Vote	6.33	1.17	1.00	7.00	.80
Congruent	3.17	1.60	1.00	7.00	.93
Efficacy	3.75	1.35	1.00	7.00	.56
Impact	4.43	1.37	1.00	7.00	.91
Support	3.56	2.00	1.00	7.00	.95
Referendum	5.63	1.52	1.00	7.00	.91
Relevance	5.73	1.26	1.00	7.00	.63
Trust	3.54	1.43	1.00	7.00	.87
Apathy	2.17	1.20	1.00	7.00	.82
Consume	4.65	2.13	1.00	7.00	.96
TeamID	4.22	1.82	1.00	7.00	.94
Favour	4.41	0.91	1.90	6.65	.87
Aware					
Yes		97.83	—	—	—
Somewhat		1.08	—	—	—
No		1.08	—	—	—
Interest					
Yes		67.48	—	—	—
Somewhat		27.91	—	—	—
No		4.61	—	—	—
Proxy					
For		54.74	—	—	—
Against		45.26	—	—	—
PastVote					
Yes		73.84	—	—	—
No		26.16	—	—	—
Games					
None		26.36	—	—	—
1–5		41.85	—	—	—
6–10		17.12	—	—	—
11–15		6.79	—	—	—
16 or more		7.88	—	—	—

Table 4

Estimation Results for Support and Proxy Vote

Dependent Variable	(1) Proxy	(2) Support	(3) Congruent	(4) Congruent
Constant	0.275	1.419**	1.230**	1.498***
	(0.215)	(0.572)	(0.531)	(0.536)
Trust	-0.002	0.023	0.176***	0.041
	(0.018)	(0.058)	(0.053)	(0.070)
Apathy	0.023	0.037	0.018	0.016
	(0.018)	(0.052)	(0.043)	(0.042)
Consume	0.043***	0.141***	-0.009	0.006
	(0.015)	(0.037)	(0.033)	(0.035)
TeamID	0.018	0.037	-0.014	-0.023
	(0.013)	(0.037)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Support	—	—	0.443***	0.305***
	—	—	(0.052)	(0.092)
Trust×Support	—	—	—	0.039**
	—	—	—	(0.020)
Impact	0.093***	0.381***	0.139**	0.148**
	(0.021)	(0.072)	(0.060)	(0.061)
Congruent	0.062***	0.507***	—	—
	(0.020)	(0.055)	—	—
Efficacy	-0.009	-0.060	0.015	0.024
	(0.017)	(0.051)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Relevance	-0.015	-0.044	-0.016	-0.024
	(0.016)	(0.039)	(0.033)	(0.034)
Referendum	-0.077***	-0.248***	-0.144***	-0.127***
	(0.017)	(0.044)	(0.049)	(0.048)
Aware				
Somewhat	-0.050	0.357	0.211	0.178
	(0.133)	(0.424)	(0.381)	(0.392)
No	-0.225*	-1.110**	0.153	0.226
	(0.134)	(0.449)	(0.503)	(0.500)
Interest				
Somewhat	-0.031	-0.194*	-0.010	-0.003
	(0.044)	(0.111)	(0.105)	(0.106)
No	0.155	-0.357	0.334	0.349
	(0.105)	(0.346)	(0.256)	(0.267)
PastVote	0.028	-0.089	0.150	0.140
	(0.041)	(0.106)	(0.095)	(0.095)

Note. All models include controls for self-reported income, age, race, education, and gender. ***, **, and * refer to statistical significance at the 99%, 95%, and 90% level, respectively. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5

Estimation Results for Vote Intentions (Continuous Favourability)

Model	(1) OLS	(2) OLS	(3) OLS	(4) OLS	(5) Ord. Log.	(6) Ord. Log.	(7) Ord. Log.	(8) Ord. Log.
Constant	5.804***	5.889***	7.768***	12.193***	-----	-----	-----	-----
	(0.496)	(0.750)	(0.862)	(2.498)	-----	-----	-----	-----
Trust	0.042	0.042	0.047	0.043	0.060	0.060	0.075	0.075
	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.137)	(0.137)	(0.138)	(0.140)
Apathy	-0.389***	-0.388***	-0.398***	-0.390***	-0.902***	-0.902***	-0.941***	-0.928***
	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.120)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.123)
Efficacy	0.054	0.054	0.065	0.058	0.103	0.103	0.146	0.133
	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.118)	(0.118)	(0.119)	(0.119)
Consume	-0.019	-0.019	-0.001	-0.002	0.008	0.008	0.052	0.050
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.09)	(0.099)	(0.100)	(0.098)
TeamID	0.033	0.033	0.019	0.020	0.047	0.047	0.010	0.010
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Aware								
Somewhat	-0.794	-0.797	-0.931*	-0.926	-1.556**	-1.556**	-1.782***	-1.795***
	(0.570)	(0.574)	(0.550)	(0.570)	(0.693)	(0.692)	(0.677)	(0.687)
No	-0.235	-0.232	-0.214	-0.117	-0.495	-0.495	-0.389	-0.263
	(0.249)	(0.248)	(0.236)	(0.204)	(0.654)	(0.655)	(0.681)	(0.682)
Interest								
Somewhat	0.063	0.063	0.103	0.145	0.095	0.095	0.214	0.276
	(0.130)	(0.130)	(0.128)	(0.129)	(0.290)	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.297)
No	-0.776**	-0.779**	-0.742**	-0.746**	-0.987*	-0.986*	-0.921*	-0.914*
	(0.340)	(0.342)	(0.332)	(0.325)	(0.523)	(0.528)	(0.515)	(0.522)
PastVote	0.717***	0.603	0.706***	-4.305	1.618***	1.632	1.609***	-5.356
	(0.131)	(0.649)	(0.131)	(2.632)	(0.272)	(1.241)	(0.272)	(5.841)
Favour	-0.063	-0.083	-1.052**	-3.216**	-0.170	-0.168	-2.706**	-5.545**
	(0.098)	(0.162)	(0.423)	(1.312)	(0.229)	(0.314)	(1.259)	(2.637)
Favour^2	—	—	0.115**	0.370**	—	—	0.298**	0.637**
	—	—	(0.047)	(0.161)	—	—	(0.148)	(0.318)
PastVote×Favour	—	0.026	—	2.470*	—	-0.003	—	3.500
	—	(0.148)	—	(1.357)	—	(0.286)	—	(2.910)
PastVote×Favour^2	—	—	—	-0.290*	—	—	—	-0.419
	—	—	—	(0.166)	—	—	—	(0.351)
R^2 (Psuedo R^2)	0.429	0.429	0.438	0.444	0.184	0.184	0.189	0.191

Note: All models include controls for self-reported income, age, race, education, and gender. ***, **, and * refer to statistical significance at the 99%, 95%, and 90% level, respectively. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 6

Estimation Results for Vote Intentions (Discrete Low/Mid/High Favourability)

Model	(1) OLS	(2) OLS	(3) Ord. Log.	(4) Ord. Log.
Constant	6.051***	7.115***	-----	-----
	(0.430)	(0.538)	-----	-----
Trust	0.012	0.010	-0.015	-0.026
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.121)	(0.124)
Apathy	-0.401***	-0.415***	-0.953***	-0.990***
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.122)	(0.122)
Efficacy	0.068	0.065	0.164	0.156
	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.130)	(0.129)
Consume	-0.033	-0.034	0.022	-0.027
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.084)	(0.084)
TeamID	0.030	0.039	0.035	0.063
	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.085)	(0.083)
Aware				
Somewhat	-0.900	-0.850	-1.717**	-1.673**
	(0.570)	(0.571)	(0.291)	(0.722)
No	-0.179	-0.118	-0.319	-0.211
	(0.244)	(0.214)	(0.635)	(0.573)
Interest				
Somewhat	0.095	0.133	0.176	0.274
	(0.129)	(0.130)	(0.291)	(0.299)
No	-0.753**	-0.706	-0.946*	-0.853*
	(0.335)	(0.322)	(0.528)	(0.506)
PastVote	0.691***	-0.428	1.563***	-12.535***
	(0.131)	(0.347)	(0.265)	(1.453)
Favour				
Low	-----	-----	-----	-----
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Mid	-0.382	-1.455***	-1.272	-15.053***
	(0.241)	(0.319)	(0.995)	(1.235)
High	-0.0003	-0.277	0.077	-11.701***
	(0.293)	(0.586)	(1.183)	(1.668)
Favour×PastVote				
Low	-----	-----	-----	-----
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Mid		1.216***		14.325***
		(0.385)		(1.495)
High		0.242		11.610***
		(0.635)		(1.961)
R^2 (Psuedo R^2)	0.439	0.450	0.192	0.200

Note: All models include controls for self-reported income, age, race, education, and gender. ***, **, and * refer to statistical significance at the 99%, 95%, and 90% level, respectively. Standard errors in parentheses.