



RESEARCH REPORT

Who Makes Planning Choices?

How Women, People of Color, and Renters Are Systematically Underrepresented on Land-Use Decisionmaking Bodies

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Executive Summary

Land-use laws influence home prices, class and racial segregation, carbon emissions levels, and labor market efficiency. As such, identifying who writes, adjudicates, and implements such rules is essential to understanding the degree to which they reflect a representative democracy. The Urban Institute conducted a first-of-its-kind survey of land-use decisionmakers nationwide to collect and analyze data on the racial and gender characteristics, housing tenures, and occupations of land-use decisionmaking board members across 482 jurisdictions and 601 land-use decisionmaking bodies within the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. The jurisdictions in this study are broadly, though not exactly, representative of jurisdictions in metropolitan areas nationwide.

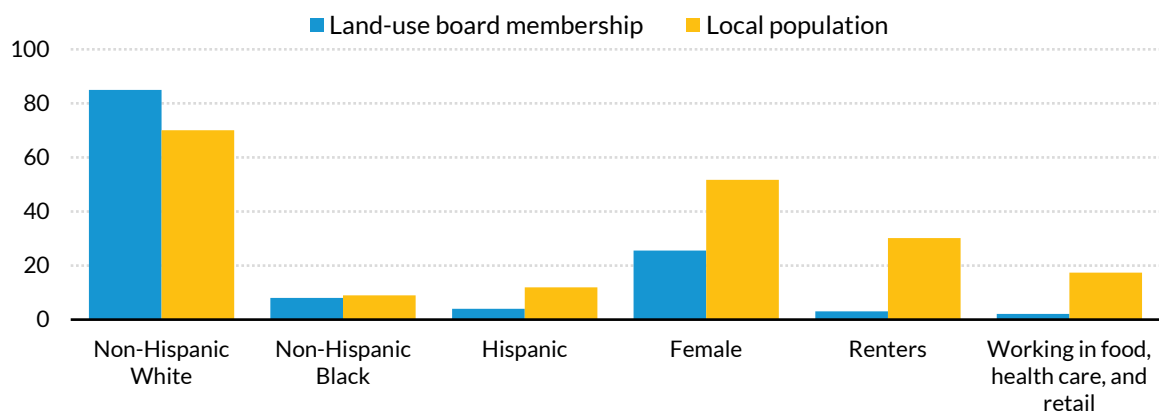
Among the localities we surveyed, we find that the people who draft, adjudicate, and implement land-use laws rarely share similar demographics, occupations, or housing tenures as their jurisdiction's residents. Instead, we find that land-use boards—including planning and zoning commissions, boards of zoning adjustment, and a subset of local legislatures—feature persistent overrepresentation by non-Hispanic white residents, men, homeowners, and real estate or planning professionals. Specifically, we find the following:

- Non-Hispanic white residents are overrepresented by 15 percentage points (i.e., the share of non-Hispanic white members on boards is, on average, 15 percentage points higher than the share in the jurisdiction), while Hispanic, Asian, and Black residents are underrepresented by 8, 4, and 1 percentage point(s) respectively. Forty-five percent of land-use boards have a membership that is at least 95 percent white, even though only 5 percent of jurisdictions have such high white population shares. Overrepresentation by non-Hispanic white residents is more pronounced in jurisdictions with a smaller share of non-Hispanic white residents, indicating a persistently inequitable structure channeling white residents into these positions.
- In terms of gender, men are overrepresented by more than 20 percentage points on average, though this result varies by board type, local racial demographics, and region. Zoning commissions are the most male dominated (compared with zoning or planning commissions, local legislatures, or other land-use decisionmaking boards); jurisdictions with lower shares of non-Hispanic white residents and jurisdictions in the West have the highest levels of female representation. No respondent reported any transgender or nonbinary board members.

- Renters are also underrepresented. Their underrepresentation is so extreme that a 1 percent higher share of renters in a jurisdiction is associated with a nearly equivalent (0.88 percent) increase in the overrepresentation of homeowners on land-use decisionmaking boards. Renters are underrepresented in 99 percent of the jurisdictions for which we collected data. In other words, land-use decisionmaking is dominated by homeowners, and the share of renters in a jurisdiction has next to no bearing on how well represented they are in land-use decisionmaking.
- Board members with occupations directly or potentially related to land-use development are overrepresented relative to their share of the national population. People with jobs in legal and business occupations are also more likely to hold positions on such boards than their relative share of jobs would indicate. Meanwhile, there are few board members hailing from the food, health care, and retail sectors, and retirees, homemakers, and unemployed people are similarly underrepresented.
- Jurisdictions with a higher share of liberal residents have higher levels of representation for Hispanic residents and women than do jurisdictions with more conservative residents. Nevertheless, these two groups remain underrepresented, even in liberal jurisdictions. Renters are underrepresented in jurisdictions of all ideological stripes.

We illustrate these findings in figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Land-Use Boards Overrepresent White Residents while Underrepresenting Hispanics, Women, Renters, and People in Certain Occupations
Average share of land-use board membership and local jurisdictional population, by demographic group



Source: Authors' mapping of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Composition Survey respondents.

Notes: Data do not include legislative bodies or responses of "unknown" or "prefer not to answer."

We thus document a largely privileged group of white, male, homeowners, white-collar decisionmakers—not a group of leaders who represent their communities' respective demographics. Our findings raise questions about whether land-use boards are making planning choices that appropriately reflect local needs and desires. These results may offer one explanation for why US cities have suffered from decades of inadequate housing construction, low levels of housing affordability, and high levels of segregation.

The lack of representativeness on land-use boards may stem from inequitable appointment processes or from restrictions related to board membership; many jurisdictions, for instance, require members to be property owners or to hold specific degrees. Additionally, most jurisdictions provide limited support for participation. The vast majority of positions are uncompensated, burdensome (requiring at least one day's work per month to attend and prepare for meetings), and lack important supports such as child care. Our data show that boards offering compensation, transit access, and flexible meeting times had, on average, fewer white members and more Black, Asian, and female members. One explanation for this outcome is that jurisdictions interested in promoting inclusivity establish supports to encourage accessibility and expanded participation. We recommend state-level standards—such as requirements for compensation, child care or flexible meeting time options, and elimination of property ownership requirements—to open these roles to groups that are currently underrepresented in land-use decisionmaking.

Who Makes Planning Choices?

Local governments use land-use laws to determine how a city's built environment and pattern of uses (residential, commercial, and industrial) fit together, as well as how easily these can evolve as the city's population size, preferences, and needs change (Freemark et al. 2022). Because they cast votes of approval for land-use laws, changes to those laws, and execution of those laws, the people who sit on local government legislative councils and planning boards have significant influence over how much housing can be built and where; the location of jobs, recreational and public facilities, and services; and how much access residents have to jobs and other amenities (Clowney 2009; Lo and Freemark 2022). In short, these bodies have significant power over how a city's public goods and ills are distributed among different neighborhoods.

Localities have often leveraged land-use laws to reinforce inequitable outcomes for people of color and families with low incomes, in part through environmental injustice and segregation (Trounstein 2018). Key issues influenced by local planning decisionmaking bodies that have consequences for social and racial equity include the siting of industrial or noxious uses, which are often major pollution sources (Been 1993, CDC 2013, Mizutani 2019, Mohai and Saha 2015, Rosenlieb et al. 2018, Villarosa 2020); the location and approval of affordable housing projects (Dawkins 2011; Harvard Law Review 2022; Rabe Thomas 2019); prioritization of public infrastructure investments (Hirsch et al., 2016; Jones and Armanios 2020; Rigolon and Nemeth 2021; Wilson et al. 2008);¹ and how close neighborhoods are to jobs or how they connect to them via highways, trains, or buses (Freeman Anderson and Galaskiewicz 2021; Jones Allen 2017; McKenzie 2013).

Understanding who makes planning decisions is important given the relevance of these choices on residents' health, well-being, and economic mobility. We thus conducted a national survey of land-use bodies nationwide with the goal of assembling a broad view of the demographics of their members. In this report, we analyze survey responses to assess the degree to which these decisionmakers represent and reflect the characteristics of their respective jurisdictions. Though land-use policies are largely artifacts of past choices and past decisionmakers, the level of representation on planning bodies today informs jurisdictions' ability and willingness to make policies that promote socially positive outcomes.

Many different actors are involved in land-use decisionmaking in most localities in the United States. Although their roles and scopes of influence vary by state and locality, the key groups are, generally, as follows:

- **Executive:** An executive such as a mayor, county executive, or manager typically has no direct authority over land-use decisionmaking, though they often sit on the local legislature if elected. However, they often set overarching policy goals and may appoint members to planning and zoning commissions or boards of appeals. In strong mayor jurisdictions, mayors oversee local planning departments directly as they implement elements of the planning process; in weak mayor jurisdictions, appointed managers typically do so.
- **Local legislature:** Members of city or town councils or county boards make policy decisions and approve ordinances, reforms, resolutions, and other legislation, including but not limited to land-use ordinances and rules. Local legislatures are always elected and comprise members who represent a portion of the jurisdiction (e.g., a ward), represent the full jurisdiction (at large), or both. Their decisions on land use primarily relate to changes to the passage of a jurisdiction's comprehensive plan or changes to land-use ordinances, reforms of zoning maps, and approval of planned unit developments. They may also appoint members to land-use decisionmaking commissions or boards.
- **Planning and/or zoning commission:** These commissions provide policy advice to local legislatures or boards of appeals on land use and development issues. Members can be elected, appointed by the executive or local legislature, or both. Their primary function is to lead residents in crafting comprehensive and sometimes community-level plans, creating recommendations for the local legislature regarding changes to the zoning code or other land-use ordinances, and occasionally reviewing development applications (special permits, rezonings, or planned developments) or approving special applications (e.g., conditional use, variance, or subdivision applications). Planning commission recommendations are, at least in some cases, the most significant determinant of a local legislature's decisions on land-use matters (Lo and Freemark 2022).
- **Board of appeals:** These are quasi-judicial bodies, usually appointed by elected executives or legislators, whose role is to make decisions on contested land-use applications. Their decisionmaking processes usually involve discrete parties related to a specific development project and a public hearing. These bodies have no authority to make or change any laws. Examples of decisions boards of appeals might make include approving variances or waiver applications; ruling on appeals of administrative permitting; or granting conditional use or special permit approvals.
- **Planning department:** Most local governments in the United States have planning or community development departments. These departments, staffed by civil servants and

sometimes led by an appointed planning director, enforce the zoning code by working with developers and landowners to ensure that proposals meet by-right requirements or, if not, that they are routed through various processes that require involvement by the land-use boards described above.

- **General public:** Members of the general public are invited and encouraged to participate in comprehensive planning sessions, permitting hearings, and board of appeals hearings. Yet the participants are typically not representative of the jurisdiction as a whole or even of the neighborhoods surrounding the developments in question. Research shows that participants tend to be white, wealthy homeowners (Einstein, Glick, and Palmer 2019) and that their opinions often have outsize influence on planning commissions' and local legislatures' decisions (Been, Madar, and McDonnell 2014; Lo and Freemark 2022).

Less common land-use decisionmaking bodies include historic planning commissions and design boards. State zoning enabling acts define what powers each jurisdiction has. Each jurisdiction's land-use authority bodies and processes are a product of either its respective state's requirements or its local charter. In this report, we primarily examine the membership composition of land-use boards—meaning mostly planning commissions, zoning commissions, and boards of appeals—since these were the focus of our survey. That said, we do present some information about local legislatures and historic commissions, as some survey respondents provided data about these bodies as well.

Representativeness in Land-Use Bodies

An exploration into how well land-use bodies represent residents in a jurisdiction could evaluate one of three dimensions of representativeness: descriptive representation, delegate representation, and trustee representation. An investigation into *descriptive representation* would explore the degree to which the demographics of elected officials or members of local government boards match the demographic characteristics of residents. The other two explorations focus on what officials do once in power. An investigation into *delegate representation* assesses how well officials' decisions match residents' expressed preferences, and an investigation into *trustee representation* investigates how well officials advance residents' best interests given representatives' specialized knowledge about a situation or topic, even if that specialized knowledge causes them to go beyond or even act against residents' expressed preferences. Our research focuses on descriptive representativeness.

Scholars have explored the descriptive representativeness of local decisionmakers to some degree, with a focus on legislative bodies. Black Americans, for instance, are grossly underrepresented on city councils (ICMA 2019; Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja 2020; Shanton 2014). Women are largely underrepresented in local government positions (Farley, Rauhaus, and Eskridge 2021; Fox and Schuhmann 1999), as are renters (Einstein, Ornstein, and Palmer 2022) and blue-collar workers (Anderson, Brees, and Reninger 2008). Other research has evaluated the latter two types of representativeness in local legislatures but not in land-use planning boards; future research could combine an evaluation of descriptive representation with the other qualities of representation in the realm of land-use decisionmaking.

Descriptive representativeness has consequences for delegate and trustee representation. Decisions by descriptively nonrepresentative local legislatures do not usually align with the priorities of residents of color (meaning that descriptive representativeness has consequences for delegate representation), which is of particular concern given the nation's history of racial discrimination (Hanjal and Trounstein 2016; Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja 2020). Nonwhite residents have distinctive priorities that differ across racial and ethnic groups and from the priorities of white residents, so their lack of participation on boards could have similar consequences (Hanjal and Trounstein 2016; Marschall and Ruhin 2007). The housing tenure of board members also has importance given that homeowners are more likely to oppose new residential development and support exclusionary zoning (Einstein, Glick, and Palmer 2019). If white homeowners tend to hold disproportionate power compared with renters in local government, they may make decisions to advance their specific interests and not those of renters.

Bodies that are more descriptively representative are more apt to make decisions that benefit the most marginalized members of the community (Beach et al 2019; Brookman 2013). This may not always be the case—nondescriptively representative boards can make policy decisions that align with low-income, female, renter, or Black residents' preferences (i.e., they may still have a high quality of trustee or delegate representation), and the converse may be true as well (descriptively representative boards may not offer high levels of trustee or delegate representation). Separately, diverse boards may be more frequently locked in gridlock and thus unable to invest efficiently (Beach and Jones 2017). Even so, local governmental bodies' descriptive composition matters in a broad sense for the likelihood that local governments will better represent and act in the interests of historically underrepresented residents (Farley, Rauhaus, and Eskridge 2021; Fox and Schuhmann 1999).

Despite the relatively large body of literature investigating how well city councils represent their constituents in terms of composition, little research has been conducted on the representativeness of local land-use decisionmaking bodies such as planning commissions and planning boards of appeal. We

identified only state-level descriptive racial and gender representation studies in North Carolina (Buansi 2020) and Massachusetts (Einstein and Palmer 2022). We also found only one national study on the representativeness of land-use boards in terms of occupations (Anderson, Brees, and Reninger 2008). This latter study found that board members held disproportionately white-collar jobs, particularly in professions with a direct interest in zoning and land-use development decisions, compared with other residents in their jurisdictions.

The failure to understand who is making planning decisions is a major issue given the role of policies such as zoning in historically enforcing racial segregation and limiting access to adequate housing. Zoning policies have also reinforced sexist divisions of labor and uses (e.g., by separating homes from one another and from child care or restaurants, making it harder for women to hold occupations other than being homemakers; see Criado Perez 2019 and Hayden 1982). Given the proclivities of homeowners to oppose development—and the possibility that people with planning-related occupations do not adequately represent the broader public’s point of view—planning boards disproportionately representing homeowners may reinforce inequitable outcomes in planning policy. More data are necessary to understand exactly who is making land-use choices.

Given this gap in the national evidence on decisionmaking representativeness, we seek to establish the degree to which land-use bodies’ memberships reflect the composition of their communities. We ask three key questions:

- How closely do land-use decisionmaking bodies reflect the racial, gender, housing tenure, and occupational composition of their respective jurisdictions?
- What kinds of jurisdictions have more representative bodies?
- What board membership qualifications or job supports (e.g., compensation, child care, or flexible meetings) are associated with land-use decisionmaking bodies that reflect the characteristics of their communities?

To answer these questions, we conducted a survey of 2,805 jurisdictions nationwide in the summer of 2022 and received 482 responses detailing representation on 601 land-use decisionmaking bodies (some jurisdictions provided answers on multiple types of bodies). Responses were slightly biased toward jurisdictions with higher bureaucratic capacity, at least as measured based on local incomes and housing costs. We find that land-use decisionmaking bodies—including planning and zoning commissions, boards of zoning adjustment, and local legislatures—feature persistent overrepresentation by non-Hispanic white residents, men, homeowners, and real estate or planning

professionals, such that their board compositions rarely reflect the balance of residents in their jurisdictions.

- Non-Hispanic white residents are overrepresented by 15 percentage points (i.e., the share of non-Hispanic white members on boards is, on average, 15 percentage points higher than the share in the jurisdiction), while Hispanic, Asian, and Black residents are underrepresented by 8, 4, and 1 percentage point(s) respectively. Forty-five percent of land-use boards have at least 95 percent white membership, even though only 5 percent of jurisdictions have similarly high white population shares. Overrepresentation by non-Hispanic white residents is more pronounced in jurisdictions with a smaller share of non-Hispanic white residents, indicating a persistently inequitable structure channeling white residents into these positions.
- In terms of gender, men are overrepresented by more than 20 percentage points on average, though this result varies by board type, local racial demographics, and region. Zoning commissions are the most male dominated (compared with zoning or planning commissions, local legislatures, or other land-use decisionmaking boards); jurisdictions with lower shares of non-Hispanic white residents and jurisdictions in the West have the highest levels of female representation. No respondent reported any transgender or nonbinary board members.
- Renters are also underrepresented. Their underrepresentation is so extreme that a 1 percent higher share of renters in a jurisdiction is associated with a nearly equivalent (0.88 percent) increase in the overrepresentation of homeowners on land-use decisionmaking boards. Renters are underrepresented in 99 percent of the jurisdictions for which we collected data. In other words, land-use decisionmaking is dominated by homeowners, and the share of renters in a jurisdiction has next to no bearing on how well represented they are in land-use decisionmaking.
- Board members with occupations directly or potentially relating to land-use development are overrepresented relative to their share of the national population. People with jobs in legal and business occupations are also more likely to hold positions on such boards than their relative share of jobs would indicate. Meanwhile, there are few board members hailing from the food, health care, and retail sectors, and retirees, homemakers, and unemployed people are similarly underrepresented.
- Jurisdictions with a higher share of liberal residents have higher levels of representation for Hispanic residents and women than do jurisdictions with more conservative residents.

Nevertheless, these two groups remain underrepresented even in liberal jurisdictions. Renters are underrepresented in jurisdictions of all ideological stripes.

These findings reflect a largely privileged group of white, male, homeowners, white-collar decisionmakers—not a group of leaders who represent their communities’ respective demographics. These outcomes may stem from inequitable appointment processes or from restrictions related to board membership; many jurisdictions, for instance, require members to be property owners or to hold specific degrees. Additionally, most jurisdictions provide limited support for participation. The vast majority of positions are uncompensated, burdensome (requiring at least one day’s work a month to attend and prepare for meetings), and lack important supports such as child care. Our data show that boards offering compensation, transit access, and flexible meeting times had, on average, fewer white members and more Black, Asian, and female members.

Data and Methods

Our primary data source is a survey of officials with in-depth knowledge about local planning issues (e.g., planning directors, planning commission chairs, town clerks, etc.) in local jurisdictions with power over at least some aspects of land-use planning. Depending on the location, these jurisdictions include villages, towns, townships, cities, and counties. The details of the survey, which we refer to as the 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Composition Survey, are outlined below. Topics included in the survey included:

- Jurisdictions’ land-use planning powers
- Types of land-use decisionmaking bodies active in the jurisdiction
- Number of members per body and their method of board assignment (election, appointment, or other means)
- Members’ racial, gender, housing tenure, and occupational characteristics
- Decisionmaking bodies’ responsibilities, requirements, and supports (e.g., compensation, child care, transit, etc.)

We gave respondents from each jurisdiction the option to fill out information (number of members and method of assignment, composition, and responsibilities or supports) for up to three boards. We asked all respondents to provide this information for at least the most active land-use planning body in their jurisdiction, though they could provide answers for more than one body. The survey included a

note that, although local legislatures are often very active in land-use decisionmaking, we wanted to focus on their other land-use decisionmaking bodies given the dearth of information on these boards. Nevertheless, 71 respondents (distributed randomly by jurisdictions' regions, types, and demographics) proactively provided us with information about their local legislatures. Collectively, these data represent the most comprehensive known national survey of land-use decisionmaking bodies' demographic compositions, responsibilities, and supports. The full survey instrument is included in appendix A.

We also collected data from the 2015–19 five-year American Community Survey and associated these data with each of the jurisdictions in our database. We assembled information on local racial and ethnic demographics; the share of residents by gender; and the share of households that rent or own. Then, we generated estimates of over- or underrepresentation by taking the share of a land-use decisionmaking board with one characteristic (e.g., share of members who are female) and then subtracting the share of the jurisdiction's population with that characteristic. We excluded any members for whom a respondent answered “don't know” or “prefer not to answer” (this response accounted for 6, 2, and 1 percent of answers for board members' race, gender, and housing tenure questions, respectively). We instead calculated the share of each type of member on a board using the summed total of only members for whom the respondent provided answers. This approach yielded a differential variable for each type of board member (e.g., female, non-Hispanic Black, or renter) that was negative if a board had lower membership shares of that type than the jurisdiction's actual population (e.g., share female on the board < share female in the jurisdiction). It was positive if the board had higher share of members of one type than the jurisdiction (e.g., share female on the board > share female in the jurisdiction).

Finally, we assembled information from Warshaw and Tausanovitch (2022) on the political ideologies of residents during the period from 2017 to 2021. This ideology score, developed based on election results and political surveys, reflects residents' political points of view on a liberal-to-conservative scale; these data were available for about 48 percent of jurisdictions in our sample.

Survey Sample Design

To gain as accurate a picture as possible of land-use decisionmaking boards nationwide, we created a sample of jurisdictions' planning departments, pulling directly from the sample design used for the 2019 National Longitudinal Land Use Survey (NLLUS) (Gallagher, Lo, and Pendall 2019). The 2019 NLLUS's universe consisted of the following:

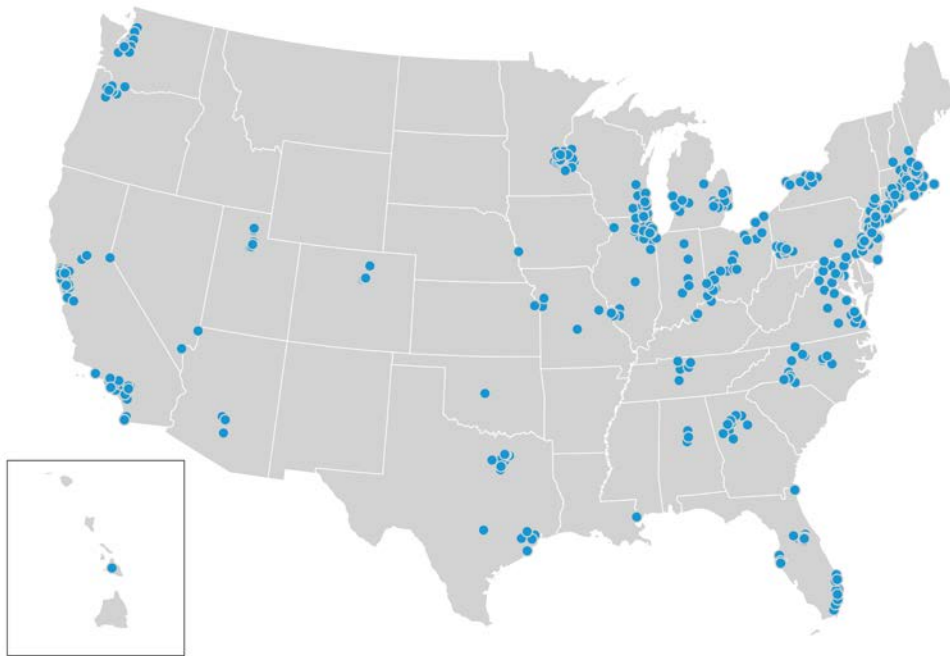
1. All jurisdictions (villages, towns, townships, cities, and counties, depending on the location) with planning power and populations of at least 10,000 in the 50 largest core-based statistical areas (CBSAs) within the United States, as of 2016.
2. Jurisdictions included in the 1994 and 2003 iterations of the NLLUS located outside the 50 largest 2016 CBSAs and/or with populations below 10,000.
3. Samples of jurisdictions with populations below 10,000 in the Cincinnati, Chicago, and Minneapolis–St Paul CBSAs.²

The list of jurisdictions included in our survey did not encompass all these jurisdictions, however, as our survey contact list included only those jurisdictions within the NLLUS's contact database. This list, which included 3,100 contacts, prioritized the person most likely to know about planning practices and decisionmaking boards in each jurisdiction as of 2018. Our review and updates to validate and update this list to account for retirements and staff turnover resulted in an email outreach list of 2,805 government officials in planning-authorized jurisdictions—meaning localities with state-authorized control of land use and typically zoning policy—across the United States.

Survey Implementation

After three rounds of internal instrument pre-testing and revisions, we uploaded the contact database and sent out the first invitation to our sample on May 12, 2022. We collected email addresses for which we received bounce-backs and corrected email addresses where possible. Accounting for the bounce-backs and corrected emails, we reached staff in a total of 2,508 jurisdictions. The survey closed on June 24, 2022, after six weeks in the field, with 482 valid responses (figure 2), or a 19.2 percent response rate. We retained any responses for which more than 15 percent of the survey was completed, since this captured the more important initial questions regarding land-use decisionmaking authority and which bodies are active in land-use decisionmaking within the jurisdiction. We report all statistics in aggregate to avoid identification of any one jurisdiction, preserving their confidentiality.

FIGURE 2
Survey Respondent Jurisdictions



Source: Authors' mapping of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Composition Survey respondents.

Response Analysis

To understand how well the jurisdictions from which we received responses represented the survey universe, we performed statistical tests comparing respondent jurisdictions with nonrespondents across multiple characteristics, including jurisdiction type, census region, population size, population density, share of residents who are non-Hispanic white, housing vacancy rates, share of housing that is renter occupied, gross rent, median home value, and median household income. For most local characteristics, jurisdictions with responses were, on average, not statistically distinguishable from those without responses (table 1). The survey has slightly better representation among counties and jurisdictions in the West, though these differences are not statistically significant. However, respondent jurisdictions had statistically significantly higher rents, home values, and median household incomes than nonrespondent jurisdictions. Given jurisdictions' planning resource constraints, this response bias may reflect the fact that jurisdictions with higher rents, housing prices, and incomes also may have local governments with more resources and thus staff time to answer surveys.

TABLE 1

Comparing Respondents with Nonrespondents by Jurisdictional Characteristics

Jurisdiction characteristic	Nonrespondents	Respondents	Response rate
Jurisdiction type			
Municipality*	1,635	283	15%
Town or township	739	138	16%
County	330	61	19%
Region			
Midwest	927	155	14%
Northeast	776	133	15%
South	547	105	16%
West	393	89	18%

Jurisdiction characteristic (mean)	Nonrespondents	Respondents	Statistical significance of difference between groups
Total population	86,128	90,351	-
Total housing units	34,623	36,463	-
Share non-Hispanic white residents	69%	70%	-
Vacancy rate	8%	8%	-
Share renter-occupied housing	31%	30%	-
Median gross rent	\$1,228	\$1,281	***
Median home value	\$309,792	\$355,556	***
Median household income	\$80,811	\$87,213	***

Source: Authors' analysis of Land Use Decisionmaking Body Survey 2022 data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: * In later tables, we draw out the 11 jurisdictions that reported being a combined county/municipality, but those are included in this category herein. We performed t-tests on both continuous variables and binaries of regions and jurisdiction types to see if respondents differed significantly from nonrespondents by their characteristics. *** $p < 0.01$ in difference of means. We do not include comparison data on political ideologies of residents because the Warshaw and Tausanovitch (2022) data are incomplete.

Limitations

Our analysis is limited insofar as it may not accurately represent jurisdictions with lower resource budgets, which in turn may have different practices with regard to their land-use decisionmaking boards. Beyond this limitation, this survey also mostly represents jurisdictions in the 50 largest US CBSAs as of 2016 (though it includes some additional jurisdictions from the 2003 and 1994 iterations of the NLLUS), which may not have the same local government appointment and election practices or representational tendencies as jurisdictions in smaller CBSAs. Moreover, not all respondents answered all questions about their boards; we therefore may be missing key information about some bodies. Additionally, survey respondents were the planning directors, managers, town clerks, or other

individuals most knowledgeable about land use, but they may not have had adequate knowledge about board member characteristics. We did not ask for any information about respondents' planning departments, which are not elected or appointed positions, though those bodies do have significant influence over outcomes. And though we provide some data about the demographics of legislative bodies, these data are not representative; this is an important issue to evaluate in future research given the importance of local legislatures in making the final decisions about most land-use policies.

Beyond response and sample limitations, our research was limited insofar as it only explored representational equity in terms of race, gender, housing tenure, and occupation. Representational equity may also be reflected in members' incomes, intersectional identities (e.g., representation by race and gender simultaneously), and other unmeasured characteristics. One key issue we did not survey specifically was members' ages, which could have major implications for their preferences, since age is correlated with homeownership, length of time living in a community, and other characteristics. It may be that boards are more representative of the *older* adults in jurisdictions, but we did not evaluate this possibility.

Additionally, the survey only considers representation from a compositional perspective. As a result, we do not capture how well board members reflect or act upon the wishes of their constituents. Other research—e.g., Hanjal and Trounstein (2016)—provides a model for how to conduct such research. Findings from this research on representational equity should not be taken to imply conclusions related to equity of decisionmaking outcomes; there is an endogenous relationship between board membership and a jurisdiction's residents because of the class dimensions built into zoning laws and distributions of populations across jurisdictions. Namely, the people who vote on land-use approvals heavily influence the price of housing and thus the socioeconomic class of people who can afford live in the jurisdiction; because most land-use boards reported residency requirements, this in turn influences who can serve on boards.

Moreover, our findings do not measure equity of outcomes, as many land-use decisions do not depend solely on these boards' members; public participation may often be a greater determinant of project approval than board composition (Lo and Freemark 2022). Finally, our survey data represent a single point in time; as such, our research cannot assess the causal origins or impacts of descriptive representativeness over time. Since land-use policies in effect now reflect decades of decisionmaking by *past* board members, it is possible that understanding the representativeness of previous land-use body members is even more important to evaluating the link between decisionmakers and decisions.

Findings

We first review the types of boards for which respondents provided information, along with their basic features: board member recruitment means, qualifications for board membership, and any incentives or supports provided for members. These features become important lenses through which we interpret the analyses that follow of board demographics by race, gender, housing tenure, and occupation. Using survey data, we find that boards' compositions are, on average, not representative of their localities, raising questions about the degree to which land-use policy is being undertaken in a democratic manner.

Types and Features of Land-Use Decisionmaking Boards

The most prominent land-use decisionmaking body in most jurisdictions is the planning commission: 60 percent of the bodies listed as “most active” in making land-use decisions were planning commissions, and these represented 50 percent of the total number of bodies for which respondents reported information (since some respondents described characteristics of more than one body). Combined planning and zoning commissions were the second-most common category, at 17 percent of most active bodies and 13 percent of all bodies in our sample. Boards of zoning appeals were the most popular “second-most active” land-use decisionmaking body, representing 40 percent of all second-most active bodies and 8 percent of all bodies in our sample.

Notably, despite instructions on the survey to exclude legislative bodies from the reporting, respondents wrote in that their legislative bodies (generally city councils or county boards) were the most or second-most active decisionmaking body 10 percent and 14 percent of the time, respectively. However, the distribution of jurisdictions with respondents choosing to write in about their legislatures appears random; there were no statistically significant biases in the types of jurisdictions with staff who wrote in about their legislatures by region, population, racial population shares, shares of homeowners in a jurisdiction, home values, or per capita incomes. Additionally, only 11 of the 71 jurisdictions (with no consistent characteristics differentiating those 11) with responses about their legislatures had them as their sole reported land-use decisionmaking body. We do not include results related to local legislatures in most summaries of land-use decisionmaking body characteristics that we report below.

The types of bodies making decisions about land use in jurisdictions varied by region, jurisdiction type, and jurisdiction size (table 2). Jurisdictions in the West most frequently used planning commissions and boards of zoning appeals; we received no responses indicating that any Western jurisdictions had zoning commissions. In contrast, the Midwest had a high share of jurisdictions that

reported using combined planning and zoning commissions as well as distinct zoning commissions. We identified no other significant trends in the use of different land-use decisionmaking body types across jurisdiction type or size, though the smallest jurisdictions were somewhat more likely to use combined boards (combined BOZA and planning commissions or combined planning and zoning commissions) than larger jurisdictions. This might stem from limited government funds to support multiple land-use decisionmaking bodies; it may also indicate that smaller jurisdictions have fewer specialized individuals making decisions across legislative and judicial lines (i.e., both writing and approving legal texts and revisions, as well as adjudicating deviations from those laws).

TABLE 2

Types of Land-Use Decisionmaking Bodies, by Jurisdictional Characteristics

	BOZA	Planning commission	Zoning commission	Combined BOZA and planning or zoning commission	Planning and zoning commission	Historic commission	Legislative body	Other	Total
Region									
Midwest	14	75	16	9	33	3	19	8	176
Northeast	36	94	13	5	16	3	17	9	193
South	18	60	1	2	28	0	22	2	133
West	7	70	0	1	4	0	13	3	98
Jurisdiction type									
Municipality	32	168	8	10	60	6	47	13	344
Combined City/county	3	5	0	1	0	0	0	2	11
Town or township	32	90	17	4	17	0	17	7	184
County	8	36	5	2	5	0	7	1	64
Jurisdiction size									
Small	14	54	7	6	17	3	10	4	115
Mid-small	14	55	9	5	19	0	19	9	130
Medium	16	66	8	2	17	0	10	3	122
Mid-large	15	55	1	3	18	3	16	1	112
Large	16	68	5	1	10	0	16	4	120
Total	75	299	30	17	82	6	71	21	601

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015-19 data.

Notes: BOZA = board of zoning appeals. Comm. = Commission. Populations for jurisdiction size are as follows: small = 157–11,534, mid-small = 11,540–19,646, medium = 19,744–35,105, mid-large = 35,246–64,674, large = 65,817–3,168,044. There were two boards for which census data were unavailable.

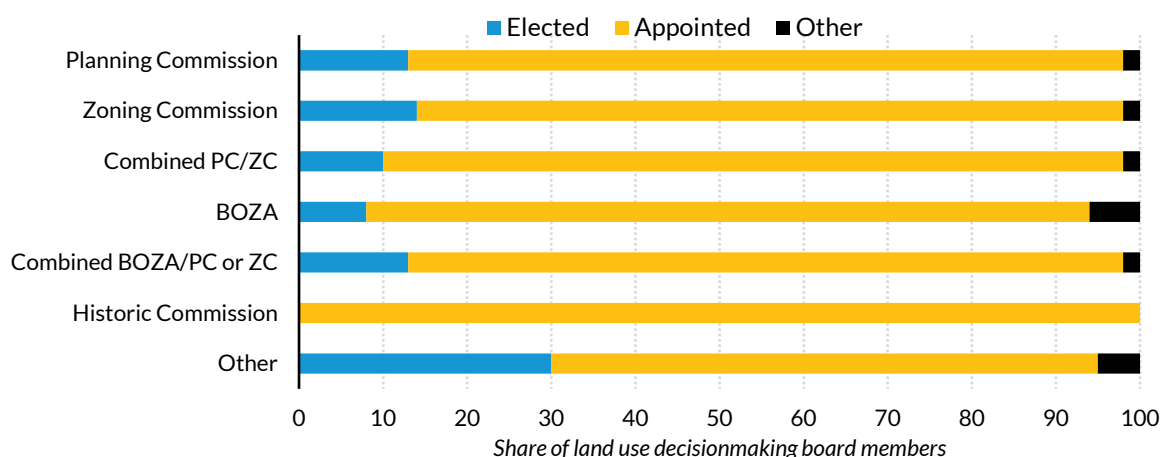
The number of administrative bodies jurisdictions respondents reported as active in land-use decisionmaking did not vary significantly by any jurisdictional characteristic other than geographic region; Northeastern jurisdictions reported significantly more active land-use decisionmaking bodies on average than those in other regions (1.62 versus 1.35, $p < 0.001$). We hypothesize that this indicates that older jurisdictions have evolved more complex democratic decisionmaking structures; the average number of active bodies respondents reported decreased as we traced the path of settlement across the United States (Northeast = 1.62, then South = 1.46, then Midwest = 1.35, and then West = 1.23).

The mechanism by which members join these boards varies significantly by the type of board in question as well as other characteristics. Among the land-use decisionmaking board types, the most common land-use decisionmaking bodies, such as planning commissions, were almost entirely comprised of appointed members (figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Most Land-Use Decisionmaking Bodies Are Constituted Primarily of Appointed Members

Land-use decisionmaking board recruitment mechanism by land-use body type



Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: Members appointed by other means include staff such as secretaries or legal counsel. BOZA = board of zoning appeals. PC = planning commission. ZC = zoning commission. Other means of recruitment to a board most often indicated permanent, hired staff such as secretaries or legal counsel.

REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPORTS FOR DECISIONMAKING BOARD MEMBERSHIP

We paid particular attention to the requirements for membership and supports provided to those members since those conditions may influence who is willing and able to serve, as well as boards' ability to attract and retain members. Of the boards analyzed, only 35 percent provided compensation for members (excluding legislative bodies, which tend to be compensated; see table 3). Outside of

compensation, other supports jurisdictions often provided for board members included remote meetings, public transit accessibility, flexible meeting times, parking or mileage compensation or coverage, and training. On average, respondents noted that board or commission members are required to attend 16 meetings per year and spend 8 hours preparing for and attending meetings each month. Outside of attending meetings, members spend an average of 3.5 hours per month on related responsibilities. Given that jurisdictions require this much time of members, uncompensated positions are likely unattractive to a broad section of a jurisdiction's population that is unable to afford child care or devote so much time to an unpaid job. Keeping in mind that our sample skewed toward more highly resourced jurisdictions, it seems unlikely that jurisdictions elsewhere in the United States have more compensated candidates serving in these positions.

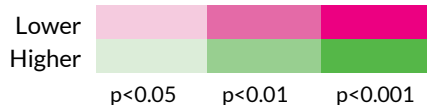
TABLE 3

Supports for Board Members, by Jurisdictional Characteristics

T-tested percentage point differences between average characteristics of jurisdictions providing support minus average characteristics of jurisdictions not providing it

Support type	Share of boards offering support	Board or jurisdiction characteristic	Share NH white	Share NH Black	Share Asian	Share Hispanic	Share female	Share renter
Compensation	35%	Board	-16	8	4	2	7	-1
		Jurisdiction	-14	7	2	4	0	15
Remote meetings	32%	Board	-4	-1	2	1	5	0
		Jurisdiction	-3	-3	2	2	0	2
Accessible by public transit	8%	Board	-16	8	4	2	7	-1
		Jurisdiction	-14	7	2	4	0	-7
Flexible meeting times	3%	Board	7	4	1	-3	-2	3
		Jurisdiction	14	-6	2	-5	-1	-2
Parking or mileage coverage	2%	Board	-7	0	0	-2	-11	-1
		Jurisdiction	6	12	-3	-4	2	15
Training	2%	Board	-4	-2	0	5	0	-1
		Jurisdiction	-11	-2	-3	16	1	9
No supports	5%	Board	4	-4	2	3	-4	-1
		Jurisdiction	-2	-1	2	2	-2	0

LEGEND



Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: We ran these t-tests on all land-use decisionmaking boards excepting local legislatures. To provide an example of how to read this table, the share of non-Hispanic white board members in jurisdictions offering compensation was 16 percentage points lower than in jurisdictions that did not offer compensation (statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level); the share of Black residents in jurisdictions offering compensation was 7 percentage points higher than jurisdictions that did not offer compensation (significant at the $p < 0.001$ level). NH = non-Hispanic.

Boards that provided compensation differed significantly from those that did not along some key metrics (table 3). Notably, jurisdictions that provided compensation had significantly lower shares of white board members and residents, as well as higher shares of Black, Asian, and female board members, compared with those that did not provide compensation. Jurisdictions that ensured meetings were accessible by public transportation had similar trends. And jurisdictions with remote meeting options on average had a 5 percentage point higher share of women on their boards and a 2 percentage point higher share of Asians on their boards, compared with those without remote options.

We also found that boards that provided compensation were in jurisdictions with statistically significant lower median household incomes and home values plus larger populations, compared with jurisdictions with boards that did not provide compensation. Jurisdictions that provide additional support for board members are not necessarily those with the greatest resources or those with the highest white population shares but are more likely to be more economically and racially diverse, indicating that they are more likely to be central cities.

Finally, respondents recorded what regulations are in place that limit who can be appointed to land-use boards. Nearly all surveyed jurisdictions required local residency as a qualification for board appointment. Several have more intensive requirements detailing occupations (e.g., quotas for architects, engineers, and lawyers), shares of property owners or homeowners (three jurisdictions require all members to own local property), or “balanced” representation that includes members from different political parties. Some jurisdictions used caps rather than quotas. For example, one jurisdiction’s board required “no more than 2 members of the same occupation and no more than 2 members involved in the buying/selling of real estate.” Other jurisdictions had more action-oriented requirements rather than status requirements, namely that members attend trainings, attend a percentage or certain number of meetings a year, serve limited terms, or pass a land-use course test.

Descriptive Representation by Race and Ethnicity

Our survey results harmonize with those of previous researchers on racial representation in local governance. We find that non-Hispanic whites are systematically overrepresented on land-use decisionmaking boards, by 15 percentage points on average (table 4). Hispanic residents are extremely underrepresented. Just 4 percent of members of the average board are Hispanic, even as Hispanics comprise 12 percent of the average jurisdictional population. Asians typically represent 2 percent of board members, though they constitute 6 percent of the population of the average survey jurisdiction. Perhaps surprisingly, we find that non-Hispanic Blacks’ representation tracks closely with population

shares across jurisdictions, with 8 percent representation on the average board, compared with 9 percent of the average jurisdictional population.

TABLE 4

Land-Use Decisionmaking Board Composition and Differentials with Local Race and Ethnicity

Average share of boards by racial and ethnic composition, with percentage point difference between administrative body composition and local demographics in parentheses³

	n	NH white	NH Black	NH Asian	Hispanic
Boards overall	538	85% (+15 pts.)	8% (-1 pts.)	2% (-4 pts.)	4% (-8 pts.)
Local demographics overall	538	70%	9%	6%	12%
Board type					
BOZA	63	89% (+16 pts.)	9% (-1 pts.)	0% (-5 pts.)	2% (-7 pts.)
Combined BOZA/PC or ZC	14	89% (+13 pts.)	9% (+2 pts.)	0% (-3 pts.)	0% (-9 pts.)
Combined PC/ZC	67	82% (+15 pts.)	9% (-2 pts.)	2% (-3 pts.)	5% (-10 pts.)
Historic commission	6	62% (+14 pts.)	28% (+7 pts.)	5% (+1 pts.)	5% (-19 pts.)
Legislative body	62	83% (+15 pts.)	12% (-2 pts.)	2% (-3 pts.)	2% (-10 pts.)
Planning commission	244	85% (+16 pts.)	6% (-2 pts.)	2% (-4 pts.)	5% (-8 pts.)
Zoning commission	20	92% (+15 pts.)	5% (-3 pts.)	1% (-5 pts.)	2% (-6 pts.)
Miscellaneous	48	86% (+12 pts.)	6% (-1 pts.)	2% (-3 pts.)	5% (-6 pts.)
Other	14	86% (+11 pts.)	8% (-1 pts.)	4% (-3 pts.)	1% (-4 pts.)
Region*					
Midwest	145	92% (+11 pts.)	6% (-1 pts.)	1% (-3 pts.)	1% (-5 pts.)
Northeast	148	91% (+16 pts.)	5% (-2 pts.)	1% (-6 pts.)	2% (-7 pts.)
South	105	77% (+17 pts.)	17% (-2 pts.)	2% (-2 pts.)	3% (-12 pts.)
West	78	75% (+20 pts.)	3% (-1 pts.)	7% (-6 pts.)	13% (-11 pts.)
Jurisdiction size*					
Small	78	96% (+8 pts.)	2% (-1 pts.)	0% (-2 pts.)	1% (-3 pts.)
Mid-small	96	89% (+15 pts.)	8% (-1 pts.)	1% (-5 pts.)	2% (-7 pts.)
Medium	117	88% (+15 pts.)	7% (-1 pts.)	2% (-4 pts.)	1% (-8 pts.)
Mid-large	89	82% (+20 pts.)	6% (-3 pts.)	3% (-4 pts.)	8% (-12 pts.)
Large	95	74% (+16 pts.)	13% (-1 pts.)	3% (-5 pts.)	8% (-10 pts.)
Jurisdiction type*					
County	57	87% (+15 pts.)	7% (-4 pts.)	1% (-4 pts.)	2% (-7 pts.)
Combined city/county	11	81% (+3 pts.)	13% (+3 pts.)	0% (-2 pts.)	6% (-3 pts.)
Municipality	264	80% (+16 pts.)	11% (-1 pts.)	3% (-4 pts.)	6% (-10 pts.)
Township	158	95% (+14 pts.)	2% (-2 pts.)	1% (-5 pts.)	1% (-6 pts.)

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: For parenthetical body-to-census differences, + indicates the administrative body has greater representation in this racial/ethnic category than the local population overall and - indicates the body has less representation in this racial/ethnic body than the local population. We defined racial and ethnic categories using Census definitions. We analyzed three additional racial categories (Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American and Alaskan Native, and two or more races) but did not include them in this table due to inadequate data. All cases where the total percentages do not equal 100 or the discrepancies do not add to 0 are a result of the omissions of these racial categories. NH = non-Hispanic. BOZA = board of zoning appeals. PC = planning commission. ZC = zoning commission. Populations for jurisdiction size are as follows: small = 157–11,534, mid-small = 11,540–19,646, medium = 19,744–35,105, mid-large = 35,246–64,674, large = 65,817–3,168,044. * These assessment categories exclude legislative bodies.

Racial or ethnic over- and underrepresentation varies by board and jurisdiction type, region, and jurisdiction size. Hispanic people are particularly underrepresented on historic commissions in the few jurisdictions that leverage this type of board. Small jurisdictions have the lowest overrepresentation for non-Hispanic whites, but that is because, on average, there are relatively few residents of other races or ethnicities in those jurisdictions. Non-Hispanic Blacks are well-represented on combined county and municipal land-use boards. Underrepresentation is the worst for Hispanics in the South and West, and their underrepresentation is generally more extreme in jurisdictions with higher population sizes.

To further explore the relationship between under- or overrepresentation among racial and ethnic groups, we ran a series of multivariate linear regressions using local demographic and survey data (table 5; for descriptive statistics on each variable within these regressions, see appendix B). These results show that the baseline level of a jurisdiction's racial composition correlates with how under- or overrepresented a racial or ethnic group is on a land-use decisionmaking board. Specifically, once controlling for other local characteristics, a higher share of non-Hispanic white residents is associated with a lower differential in their representation (meaning the difference between the population share and the board share of people of that race; model I). Described differently, jurisdictions with relatively lower shares of non-Hispanic whites in their populations have higher levels of non-Hispanic white overrepresentation on their land-use decisionmaking boards. A one standard deviation lower share of a jurisdiction's residents who are non-Hispanic white is associated with a 6 percentage point higher share of white overrepresentation on land-use boards.

Additional factors affecting non-Hispanic white residents' representation differentials include home values. For example, a 10 percent higher median home value in a jurisdiction is associated with a 0.3 percentage point higher representation differential (i.e., wealthier jurisdictions have higher levels of white overrepresentation). A 10 percent higher share of women on a board, meanwhile, is associated with a 1.6 percentage point lower representation differential (i.e., more female representation is associated with lower overrepresentation by non-Hispanic whites).

There is a strong and significant negative association between the share of Hispanic residents in a community and the level of representation of Hispanic people on land-use boards (table 5, model II). This means that jurisdictions with a higher share of Hispanic residents have worse relative representation for those residents. The level of representation for non-Hispanic Black residents on boards appears not to be associated with local demographic characteristics—even the share of Black residents in the community—or many other survey elements, though a higher share of women on boards was significantly associated with a higher Black representation differential (model III).

TABLE 5

Regressions of Jurisdiction and Board Characteristics on Racial/Ethnic Representation Differentials

	(I) Board – local population non- Hispanic white differential	(II) Board – local population Hispanic differential	(III) Board – local population non-Hispanic Black differential
Share non-Hispanic white	-0.30*** (0.05)		
Share Hispanic		-0.44 *** (0.07)	
Share non-Hispanic Black			0.00 (0.07)
Log median home value	0.03 * (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Estimated monthly hours in meetings	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Estimated monthly hours prepping for meetings	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Board share female	-0.14 ** (0.04)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.06 ** (0.03)
Constant	-0.03 (0.20)	-0.21 * (0.09)	-0.03 (0.10)
Observations	419	418	418
R-squared	0.17	0.40	0.02

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

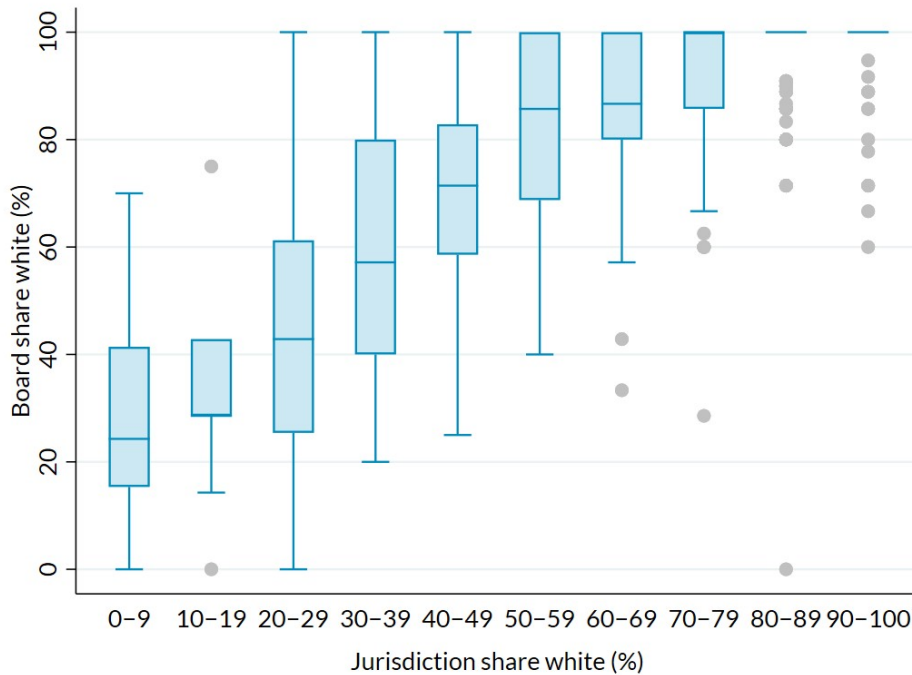
Notes: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. Results exclude legislative bodies. Variables capturing the jurisdiction's total population, number of board meetings each year, binaries of whether the board offered compensation or the flexibility to meet remotely, the share of the board that was appointed versus elected, and binaries of the jurisdiction's region (Midwest, Northeast, and South, excluding West) and type (municipality, township, and county/city mergers, excluding counties) dummy variables were all included in these regressions but none had significant influence over the representation differentials. Though 538 jurisdictions responded to racial representation questions, but after excluding all legislatures, we only had answers related to hour burdens for board members for 418.

We illuminate these trends in more detail through plots of land-use decisionmaking board shares of different races and ethnicities compared with their respective jurisdiction population shares (figures 4–6). Non-Hispanic whites represent nearly 100 percent of the board members for the median jurisdiction where white population shares exceed 70 percent (figure 4); this condition occurs for roughly half the jurisdictions in our sample, since the average jurisdiction is 70 percent non-Hispanic white. In fact, 45 percent of jurisdictions' boards are more than 95 percent white, while only 5 percent of jurisdictions' populations are 95 percent white. Put another way, nine times more land-use decisionmaking boards were 95 percent white than actual jurisdictions' populations. White residents are overrepresented in the median jurisdiction across all the population ranges we evaluated. Non-Hispanic Black board representation, on the other hand, tracks closely with jurisdictional population shares (figure 5). Hispanic representation on boards, finally, is abysmal nationwide. Even when Hispanics represent 40 to 60 percent of the population, the median jurisdiction's board is less than 20 percent Hispanic (figure 6). Hispanic people are underrepresented across all the Hispanic population ranges that we evaluated.

FIGURE 4

On Average, Land-Use Boards Overrepresent White Residents Relative to the Local Population

Share of jurisdictional population non-Hispanic white, compared with share of land-use decisionmaking board members who are non-Hispanic white



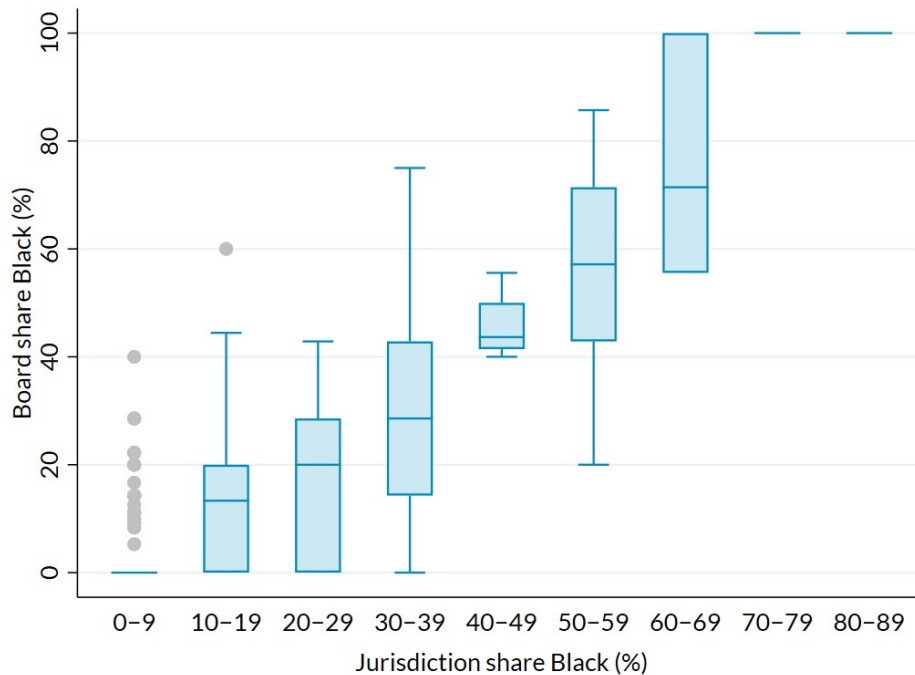
Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: This graph includes all land-use decisionmaking bodies excepting local legislatures. Additionally, the distribution of boards' share of non-Hispanic white members was so tightly clustered around a mean of 98 percent that the box does not extend. There were 209 such jurisdictions in these top two deciles out of 476 possible boards under analysis in this figure. Data exclude legislative bodies.

FIGURE 5

Black Residents' Representation on Boards Is Relatively Proportionate to Their Share of the Local Population

Share of jurisdictional population non-Hispanic Black, compared with share of land-use decisionmaking board members who are non-Hispanic Black



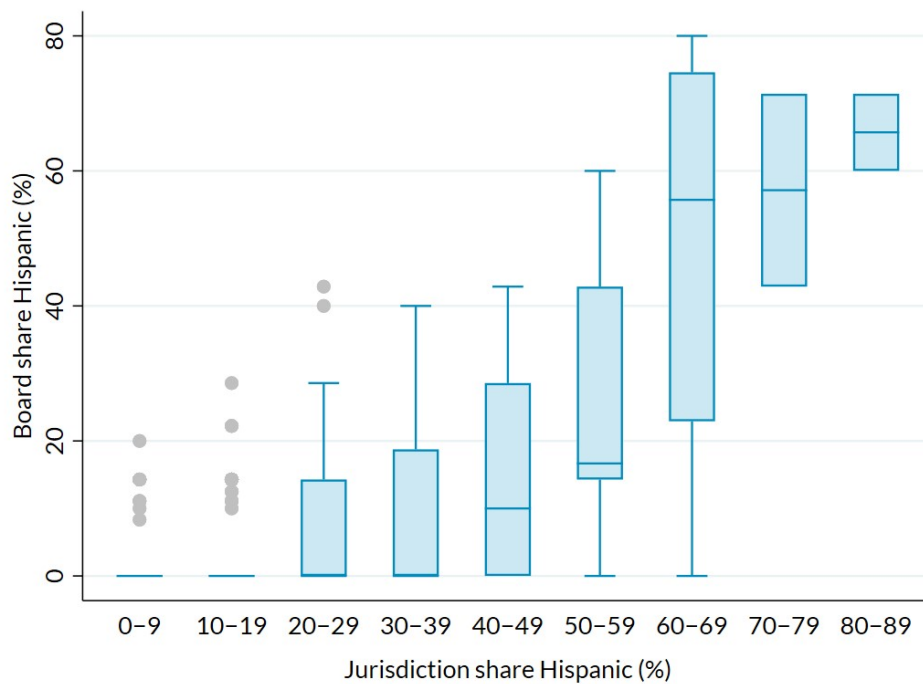
Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and ACS 2015–19 data.

Notes: These results are the total average representation across all land-use decisionmaking board types (planning and zoning commissions, BOZAs, combination boards, historic commissions, and other boards) excepting local legislatures. There were no observations included where Black residents represented more than 90 percent of the jurisdiction's population. Data exclude legislative bodies.

FIGURE 6

Hispanic Residents Are Largely Underrepresented, Particularly in Minority-Hispanic Jurisdictions

Share of jurisdictional population Hispanic, compared to share of land-use decisionmaking board members who are Hispanic



Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: This includes all land-use decisionmaking boards excepting local legislatures. There were no jurisdictions in our sample with populations that were 90 percent or more Hispanic residents. Data exclude legislative bodies.

The explanations for these findings may be at least in part due to local institutional requirements related to board appointments or elections. As noted, these requirements overlap with several documented areas of racial imbalance in local election voting turnout and pipelines of trained land-use professionals (e.g., engineers, architects, urban planning professionals, and lawyers). Board membership may also impose requirements on members that systematically disenfranchise nonwhite candidates—and particularly Hispanic candidates (who are more likely to be noncitizens)—from holding these positions. Some of the board requirements noted above, such as requirements related to property ownership, have racially or ethnically biased implications that could function as inexplicit racial filters.⁴ Further research on representativeness trends, local political viewpoints and racial animus, and board assignment requirements over time would be necessary to determine the source of this racial and ethnic imbalance.

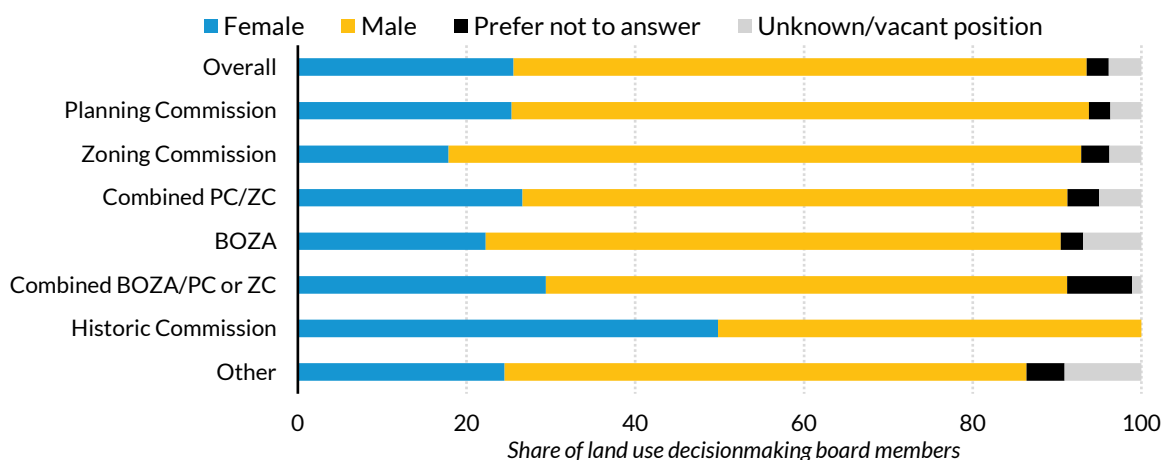
Gender Representativeness of Land-Use Bodies

Survey respondents who answered about their land-use boards' gender composition confirmed that women are largely underrepresented when it comes to making decisions related to land use. On average, women hold 28 percent of positions, though this varies by board type, region, and jurisdiction type and size (figure 7; table 6). They have better representation on historic preservation commissions, though only six jurisdictions reported on these bodies' compositions. Additionally, women hold higher shares of land-use positions in jurisdictions within the West and in jurisdictions with larger populations. Conversely, they hold lower shares of positions in county governments, zoning commissions, and boards of zoning adjustment, averaging closer to 23 percent of positions across these categories. Again, as the regressions in table 4 show, boards with lower shares of non-Hispanic white residents had higher shares of women, indicating that white men in particular hold a particular advantage in attaining board representation above white women or nonwhite residents.

FIGURE 7

Men Are Overrepresented on All Land-Use Board Types Except for Historic Commissions

Land-use decisionmaking board gender balance by land-use body type



Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: Data exclude legislative bodies. No respondents noted any board members who were transgender or nonbinary. BOZA = board of zoning appeals; PC = planning commission; ZC = zoning commission. n = 605.

No respondents noted the presence of a transgender or nonbinary board members on any of the bodies nationwide. This may either reflect respondents' hesitancy to impute transgender or nonbinary status on members, or it may reflect low representation on these boards. This lack of representation in planning choices is troubling as housing insecurity and discrimination are particularly salient issues for transgender people, with 1 in 5 experiencing homelessness at least once and around 23 percent

reporting that they experienced housing discrimination in the past year (James et al. 2016).⁵ Future research may explore methods for capturing more accurate data on transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals and the impact of the presence of gender minorities on land-use decisionmaking and outcomes.

TABLE 6

Women Are Slightly More Likely to Be Members of Land-Use Bodies in Jurisdictions in the West
Representation by gender, by jurisdictional type

	N	Female	Male	Other
Region				
Midwest	164	26%	74%	0%
Northeast	168	27%	73%	0%
South	117	28%	72%	0%
West	85	33%	66%	1%
Jurisdiction type				
County	64	24%	76%	1%
Combined	11	33%	67%	0%
City/county				
Municipality	294	29%	70%	0%
Township	165	26%	74%	0%
Jurisdiction size				
Small	100	25%	75%	0%
Medium-small	111	28%	71%	0%
Medium	124	26%	74%	0%
Medium-large	111	27%	73%	0%
Large	102	32%	67%	1%

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and ACS 2015–19 data.

Notes: These calculations include all land-use decisionmaking bodies excepting local legislatures. Respondents who selected the “other” gender category wrote in that those seats were vacant, not that the member was transgender or nonbinary. Populations for jurisdiction size are as follows: small = 157–11,534, mid-small = 11,540–19,646, medium = 19,744–35,105, mid-large = 35,246–64,674, large = 65,817–3,168,044

Our findings related to gender are particularly surprising given the gender balance of graduates from urban planning, architectural, and legal professional programs. Roughly 40 percent of graduates and professionals across these disciplines are female (Greenlee et al 2018; Leland and Read 2013).⁶ Further qualitative research is needed to understand whether these outcomes are produced by methods of appointment or election, prevailing views regarding women’s capacity, or some other factor.

Housing Tenure Representativeness of Land-Use Bodies

Our survey results confirm prior research findings that homeowners are vastly overrepresented on local decisionmaking bodies. Among the jurisdictions with staff who provided responses to our survey, homeowners made up around 97 percent of land-use board members (table 7). While we identified low

levels of renter representation across board types, regions, and jurisdictions, renters had slightly higher shares of board members on average on legislative bodies, in land-use bodies in the West, and in larger jurisdictions.

TABLE 7

Renters Hold Very Few Positions on Land-Use Legislative Boards Nationwide

Representation by tenure, by jurisdictional type

	N	Renter	Homeowner	Vacant seats
Board type				
BOZA	48	1%	98%	0%
Combined BOZA/PC or ZC	12	3%	97%	0%
Combined PC/ZC	63	2%	98%	0%
Historic commission	6	0%	100%	0%
Legislative body	58	4%	96%	0%
Planning commission	224	3%	97%	0%
Zoning commission	24	1%	99%	0%
Region				
Midwest	163	2%	98%	0%
Northeast	148	2%	98%	0%
South	109	3%	97%	0%
West	72	6%	94%	1%
Jurisdiction type				
County	50	4%	96%	0%
Combined city/county	8	3%	97%	0%
Municipality	283	3%	97%	0%
Township	151	1%	98%	0%
Jurisdiction size				
Small	88	1%	99%	0%
Medium-small	111	2%	98%	0%
Medium	120	3%	97%	0%
Medium-large	99	3%	97%	0%
Large	73	6%	94%	0%

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

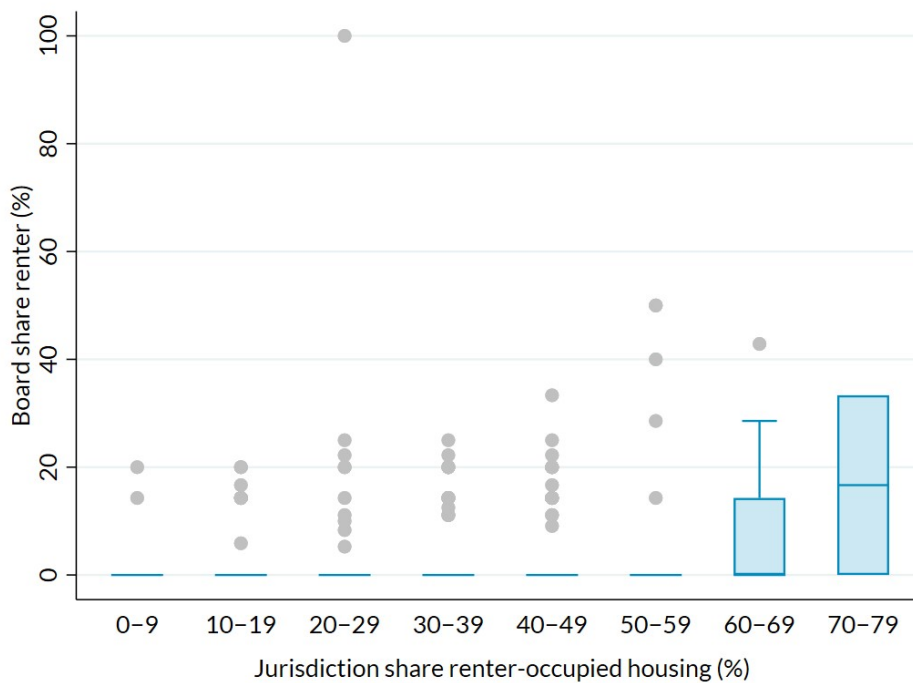
Notes: Respondents who selected the “other” tenure category wrote in that those seats were vacant or that respondents lived within the jurisdiction. Responses where the tenure of all board members was reported as unknown, left blank, or where respondents preferred not to answer were excluded from the analysis. Populations for jurisdiction size are as follows: small = 157–11,534, mid-small = 11,540–19,646, medium = 19,744–35,105, mid-large = 35,246–64,674, large = 65,817–3,168,044.

The low level of renter membership on land-use decisionmaking boards reflects dramatic underrepresentation. The average survey jurisdiction has roughly 30 percent renter-occupied housing, meaning renters are typically represented on boards at just one-tenth of their actual share of the population. Renters are underrepresented compared with their respective jurisdiction’s households on 99 percent of boards for which we assembled data. Our examination of the share of renter representation by each jurisdiction’s share of renter-occupied housing shows that the share of renters

in a community has no average effect on board representation until renters represent more than 70 percent of a jurisdiction's households (figure 8). There were only three respondent jurisdictions with this high of a level of renter-occupied housing. The median land use board with less than 70 percent renter households had zero renter members.

FIGURE 8

On Average, Renters Lack Representation in Jurisdictions with Less than 70 Percent Renter Shares
Share of jurisdictional renter-occupied housing, compared with share of land-use decisionmaking board members who are renters



Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: Includes all land-use decisionmaking boards excepting local legislatures. There were no jurisdictions in our sample that had 80 percent or more renter-occupied housing.

We used regressions to show that higher shares of renter-occupied housing in a jurisdiction are correlated with higher underrepresentation on land-use boards (table 8). After controlling for jurisdiction type, administrative supports, and region, we find that a 1 percent higher share of renters in a jurisdiction is associated with a 0.88 percentage point higher degree of homeownership overrepresentation on land-use boards (model IV). In other words, the share of renters on a board is almost entirely divorced from the share of renter households in a jurisdiction, such that an increase in the share of renters merely increases the degree of underrepresentation one-for-one.

Table 8 (model III) also highlights the unintuitive finding that land-use boards in municipalities and boards in jurisdictions that provide member accommodations including remote meetings and public transit access had lower renter representation on average. This may occur because these jurisdictions are generally larger, more urban, and have higher shares of renters overall. Indeed, the statistical significance of these associations disappears in model IV, once we control for a jurisdiction's share of renter-occupied housing.

TABLE 8

Renter Underrepresentation Increases Nearly Directly with the Share of Renters in a Jurisdiction
Regression of jurisdiction characteristics on the differential between renters' share of board representation minus share of jurisdiction population

Independent variable	I	II	III	IV
Share of renter-occupied housing				-0.88*** (0.04)
Midwest (binary)	0.14*** (0.02)			-0.01 (0.02)
Northeast (binary)	0.09*** (0.02)			-0.02 (0.02)
South (binary)	0.03 (0.03)			-0.03 (0.02)
Combined city/county (binary)		0.04 (0.05)		0.02 (0.05)
Town or township (binary)		0.00 (0.03)		-0.02 (0.02)
Municipality (binary)		-0.09*** (0.03)		-0.02 (0.02)
Remote meetings (binary)			-0.05* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
Flexible meetings (binary)			-0.01 (0.04)	0.00(0.00)
Parking or mileage coverage			-0.00 (0.06)	0.02 (0.01)
Training (binary)			-0.07 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.01)
Public transit access (binary)			-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)
Number of supports			0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)
Constant	-0.35*** (0.02)	-0.22*** (0.03)	-0.24*** (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)
Observations	432	432	432	432
R2	0.11	0.08	0.08	0.74

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Results exclude legislative bodies. Variables capturing the jurisdiction's total population, number of board meetings each year, binaries of whether the board offered compensation or the flexibility to meet remotely, and the share of the board that was appointed versus elected. Model I on the jurisdiction's region (Midwest, Northeast, and South) excluded Western jurisdictions, model II on jurisdiction type (municipality, township, and county/city mergers) excluded counties, and model III on individual administrative body supports (remote meetings, flexible meetings, parking or mileage coverage, training, public transit access, number of supports, and total lack of supports) excluded compensation.

Our demonstration of this stark underrepresentation of renters on land-use decisionmaking bodies is unfortunately unsurprising given previous research showing that homeowners are more likely to dominate public meetings related to planning and to serve as elected officials in local, state, and federal

positions. It is also important to note that no respondent wrote that any board members were experiencing a form of housing insecurity, such as being unhoused. This could reflect a lack of knowledge or hesitancy to report on the housing status of board members but warrants more exploration and consideration given the important needs of people facing housing insecurity and the potential for planning choices to improve their access to homes.

Occupational Composition of Land-Use Bodies

Land-use decisionmaking bodies make key choices about zoning policy, which addresses important questions such as where to locate employment; as such, a representative board should have a membership reflecting the occupational characteristics of the jurisdiction. But previous research demonstrates the dominance of people with professional, technical, and managerial occupations among board members (Anderson, Brees, and Reninger 2008). Similarly, we found in our research that people with white-collar professions dominate land-use board membership, to the detriment of representation from other major occupations such as retail, food, and health care.

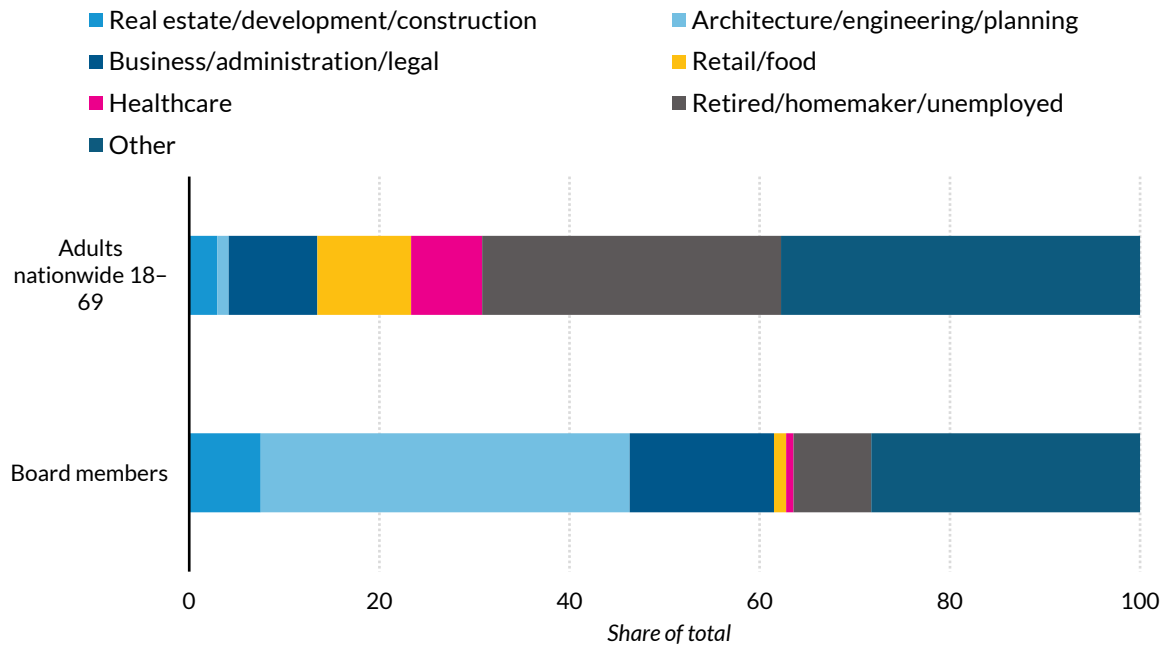
Our data show that about 39 percent of board members nationwide have occupations related to architecture, engineering, or planning. This is logical to some degree, in that people in those fields have expertise in the subject and considerable background in understanding the issues facing the built environment. We find that additional 23 percent of members are in business, construction, development, legal, and real estate fields, all of which have some role to play in property and building. On the other hand, respondents identified very few board members with occupations in food service, health care, and retail.

To assess the occupational representativeness of land-use boards in the jurisdictions for which we received responses to our survey, we compared their employment characteristics with the national distribution for adults younger than 70 years old (figure 9). We found that land-use boards vastly overrepresent people in real estate, architecture, planning, and business professions, each of which are relatively well-paid, high-influence jobs within the development sector. On the other hand, people working in less prominent jobs—such as retail, food services, and health care—are vastly underrepresented relative to the nationwide employment distribution, with their board representation representing only one-ninth of their share of the national population. People outside of the traditional job market—such as people who are retired, homemakers, or unemployed—are far less likely to serve on land-use bodies than their share of the general adult population would suggest.

FIGURE 9

Compared with the Nation's Workers, Land-Use Boards Overrepresent People in Planning-Related Fields and Underrepresent People in Health Care, Food, and Nonworking Positions

Share of total board members and adults nationwide, by occupational category



Sources: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data, US Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2021 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, and US Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Level and American Community Survey 2021 data.

Notes: Includes all land-use decisionmaking boards excepting local legislatures. We classify people in Bureau of Labor Statistics Construction and Extraction Occupations, plus Real Estate Brokers and Sales Agents as in the real estate category; those in Architecture and Engineering Occupations as in the architecture category; those in Business and Financial Operations Occupations, Legal Occupations, and Management Occupations in the business category; those in Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations, First-Line Supervisors of Sales Workers, and Retail Sales Workers in the retail category; and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations and Healthcare Support Occupations in the health care category. We calculate the number of retired, homemaker, or unemployed persons by subtracting the number of employed people nationwide from the total number of adults ages 18–69.

We are hesitant to overinterpret our findings related to the construction category, which we unfortunately failed to offer as a multiple choice option for respondents in the survey. Though many respondents inputted these data into the survey through open-entry fields (which we later hand-coded), it is possible that they classified some of these occupations (such as owning a construction-related business) in the business category. As a result, we choose not to provide more fine-grained interpretation of our results in terms of the occupations, such as evaluating differences between jurisdictions based on their racial or ethnic compositions.

Nevertheless, our findings do illustrate the class and occupational bias of land-use boards throughout the United States. These bodies do appear to underrepresent people who are outside of the architecture and planning fields, giving little space for people who work in retail, food, and health care. Meanwhile, they offer less-than-proportional space for people who are not traditionally employed. Additionally, none of the respondents noted that their respective land-use bodies had any members who were students.

There may be several explanations for these outcomes. One is that there is a generally agreed upon view that people in architecture and planning occupations should be making most choices related to planning, as they are experts in the field. Another is that this view is encoded in the law. Of the 216 jurisdictions with data in this category, about 15 percent of respondents noted that there were local requirements regarding board member occupation, which encourage or require participation of business owners, architects, land-use lawyers, and engineers. Only two jurisdictions place explicit limits on the share of members who are directly involved in real estate development.

Resident Political Ideology and Representativeness

As we prepared our survey, we hypothesized that representation was likely to vary based on the ideologies of each jurisdiction's residents. For this final section, we thus assembled data on the average political points of view of residents in as many of the jurisdictions as possible and compared them with the variety of indicators of descriptive restrictiveness that we have detailed above. Our findings suggest that political perspectives are indeed associated with different levels of representation, but even in the most liberal jurisdictions, people who are Hispanic, women, and renters are less likely to serve as members of land-use bodies than their population share would indicate is equitable.

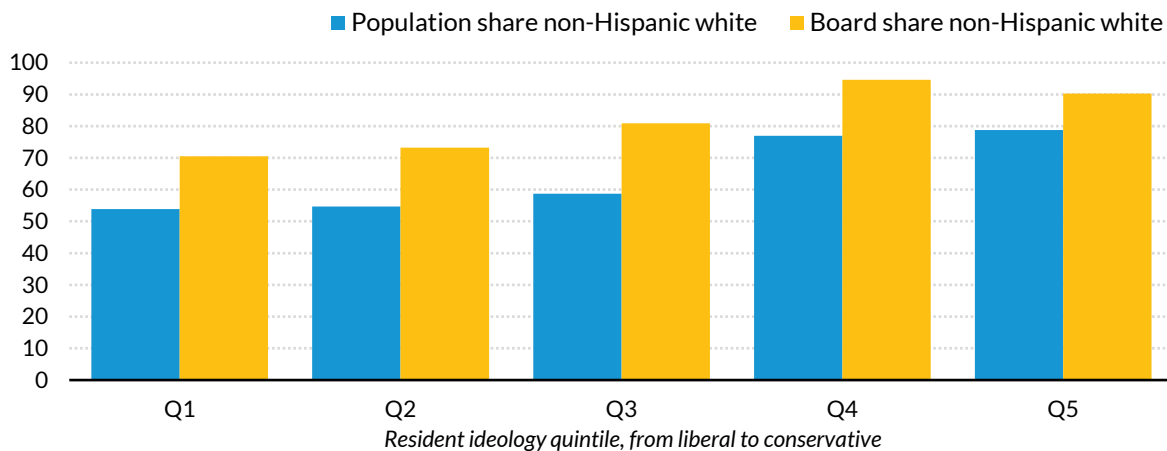
We divided jurisdictions into quintiles based on their resident ideologies, from liberal to conservative. In figures 10–12, we evaluate those groups of jurisdictions based on the racial and ethnic composition of their populations and boards. Figure 10 shows that non-Hispanic white residents are overrepresented in jurisdictions of all ideological stripes. The opposite is true for Hispanic residents, as shown in figure 11. Though Hispanic people are much more likely to be members of boards in liberal jurisdictions than in conservative ones, they comprise less than half their representative share of board members, even in the average liberal jurisdiction. Finally, in figure 12 we compare Black resident population shares with board memberships. Here, we show that Black residents are actually slightly overrepresented in the most liberal jurisdictions on average, speaking to the political capital Black Americans have built in liberal cities over the past few decades. Though Black residents are

underrepresented in moderate and conservative jurisdictions, they are much more likely to be members of land-use boards than Hispanic residents in those places.

FIGURE 10

White Residents Are Overrepresented in Jurisdictions with Varying Resident Political Ideologies

Percent of jurisdictional population and land-use board members



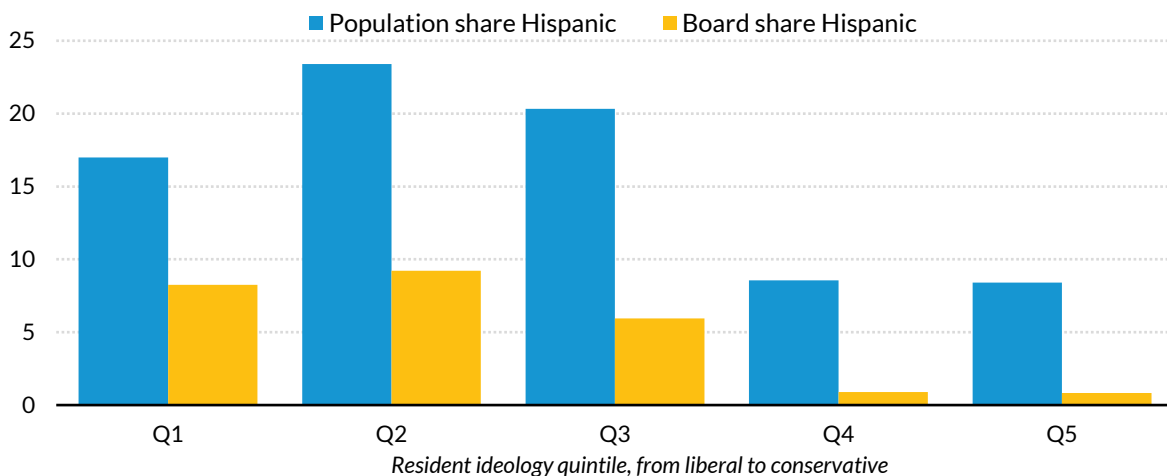
Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey Data (Warshaw and Tausanovitch 2022) and American Community Survey 2015–19.

Notes: Data exclude legislative bodies.

FIGURE 11

Hispanic Residents Are Underrepresented in Jurisdictions with Residents of Varying Political Views

Percent of jurisdictional population and land-use board members



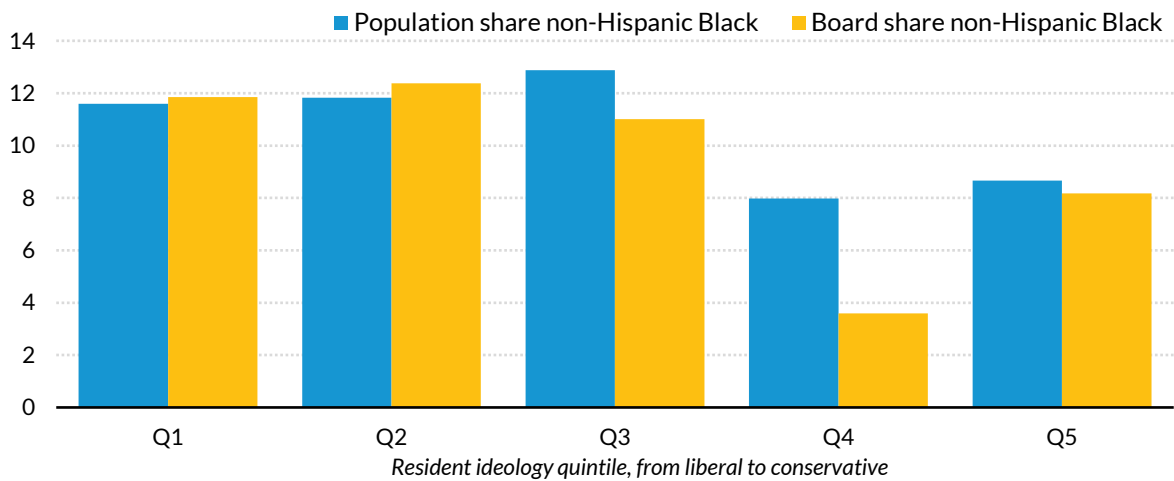
Sources: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey Data (Warshaw and Tausanovitch 2022) and American Community Survey 2015–19.

Notes: Data exclude legislative bodies.

FIGURE 12

Black Residents Are Typically Underrepresented in Moderate and Conservative Jurisdictions

Percent of jurisdictional population and land-use board members



Sources: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey Data (Warshaw and Tausanovitch 2022) and American Community Survey 2015–19.

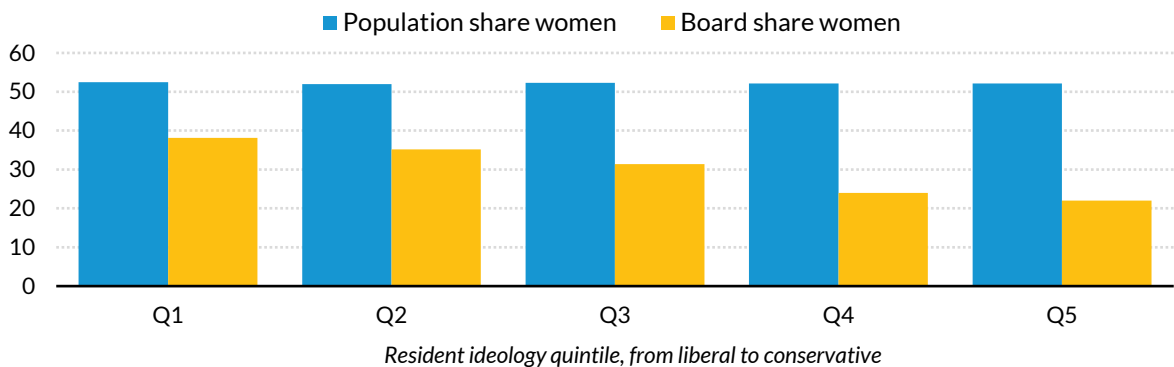
Notes: Data exclude legislative bodies.

Next, we evaluate the links between local ideologies and gender (figure 13). Women account for about 52 percent of the population in most jurisdictions. But while they comprise about 38 percent of board members in the most liberal 20 percent of jurisdictions, they account for less than 22 percent of board members in the most conservative 40 percent of jurisdictions. There may be dramatic differences in perceptions about the role of women on land-use bodies that correlate with broader points of view.

FIGURE 13

In Jurisdictions with Conservative Residents, Women Are Underrepresented

Percent of jurisdictional population and land-use board members



Sources: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey Data (Warshaw and Tausanovitch 2022) and American Community Survey 2015–19.

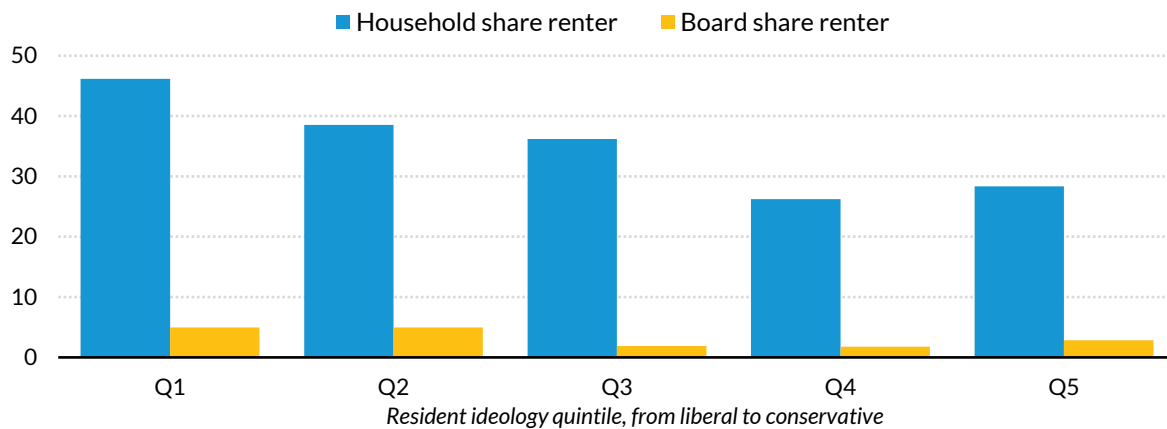
Notes: Data exclude legislative bodies.

Finally, we compare the composition of renters in jurisdictions with their board shares in figure 14. As noted above, renters are dramatically underrepresented on land-use bodies throughout the United States. Though renters are more likely to serve on boards in the most liberal jurisdictions than the most conservative ones, the difference is minimal, and liberal jurisdictions have, on average, a much higher share of renting households than conservative ones. These conditions speak to a mass underrepresentation of a huge share of American households, which persists regardless of local ideological perspectives. These data also suggest that similar trends would persist if we were to examine the incomes of board members, though we do not have the data available to do so.

FIGURE 14

Renters Achieve Descriptive Representation in Virtually No Jurisdictions

Percent of jurisdictional households and land-use board members



Sources: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey Data (Warshaw and Tausanovitch 2022) and American Community Survey 2015–19.

Notes: Data exclude legislative bodies.

Conclusion

Our research provides new insight into the descriptive representativeness of land-use boards throughout the United States. We demonstrate that, on average, board membership is overrepresentative of non-Hispanic white people, men, homeowners, and people whose occupations are in the planning and development sectors. This overrepresentation occurs in jurisdictions big and small, in regions throughout the nation, and among towns, cities, and counties.

The nonrepresentativeness of land-use boards raises major concerns. If people who are Hispanic, women, or renters—or who hold occupations outside of the development sector—are systematically

excluded from decisionmaking roles, one key element of local government polity is in the hands of a group of people who do not adequately reflect the residents of these communities. It is possible, even likely, that the decisions being made about land-use policy do not serve the interests of underrepresented groups. This, in turn, may be one explanation for the inequitable outcomes we have historically seen in planning policy in the United States.

The representativeness of local boards may reflect varying political power among people of different demographic characteristics. We were unsurprised to find that white homeowners are overrepresented, but we were somewhat surprised to discover that Black people are relatively fairly represented on land-use boards. This may reflect long-term power building among Black residents that has allowed them to achieve greater equity over time. This is not something we found in examining Hispanic representation, however. These differences may also stem from political ideology, relative variations in economic inequality, citizenship status, or another factor (Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja 2020).

We were also surprised by how common it is for jurisdictions to impose significant requirements for board membership, including the extreme requirement in some localities of property ownership to serve on a board. At the same time, most jurisdictions provide no support for board members, whether through compensation, child care, or other services. These findings point to a strong relationship between residents' incomes and their ability to hold positions on land use boards. And it suggests that there are structural explanations for why some demographic groups are overrepresented.

In light of these findings, we recommend that localities or state governments make several major reforms. First, they should evaluate the representativeness of their existing boards by comparing their membership with local demographics. If there is a major gap, they should consider resolving it by a comprehensive effort to appoint people who more closely reflect the population. Second, localities should make a concerted effort to open membership on land-use decisionmaking bodies to individuals who are currently underrepresented in land-use planning. This could include requirements or standards for offering compensation, child care, and flexible meeting time options, as well as eliminating classist mandates such as property ownership rules.

Future research offers an opportunity to extend upon our work. First, we need to know more about why board membership on land-use bodies is so unrepresentative of local jurisdictions throughout the United States. Other researchers have demonstrated that city councils, county boards, and local executives also have characteristics—whether racial, gender-based, or in terms of homeownership—that do not match those of the populations they are expected to represent. Do these bodies have a

tendency to reinforce their lack of representativeness in the choices they make for board appointments? Or, as we hypothesized, do the requirements and responsibilities for board membership, combined with limited supports, make it impossible for many people low incomes to participate in local planning matters? Finally, does the extremely poor representation of Hispanic people, compared with the relatively fair representation of Black people, reflect the gains from long-term political action by Black communities that have not materialized in the same way for Hispanic communities?

Second, in our research, we explore only descriptive representation because we have inadequate data to explore the choices made by planning bodies. More work is necessary to understand the degree to which planning bodies achieve equity of outcomes, such as through delegate representation (meaning representatives promote the points of view of a certain cohort of people) or trustee representation (meaning representatives act in the best interests of a certain cohort of people). Moreover, we need to understand the links between descriptive representation and equity of outcomes. Are boards with more representative membership likely to produce better outcomes for people who have been historically disenfranchised? How do changes in board representation over time influence outcomes?

Appendix A. Survey Protocol

Below, we provide the language we used in the survey distributed to jurisdictions throughout the United States. The survey was dynamic, allowing respondents to provide information about membership of multiple land-use bodies. The text below includes variables that adjusted automatically on the online survey platform to reflect that responses were from different bodies.

The Land Use Lab at the [Urban Institute](#) (a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Washington, DC), is conducting a survey to understand the composition of the administrative bodies that make major decisions related to land-use planning, regulation and zoning at the local level. We are reaching out to you because we identified you through a public search as a key contact with knowledge about planning and zoning in your jurisdiction. This survey asks about the types of entities that make land-use planning, regulation, and zoning decisions in your jurisdiction, their basic roles and responsibilities, and the demographics of members. It should take about 15 minutes to complete the survey.

Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary, but by filling out the survey, you will help us inform planners and decisionmakers across the United States about the nature and structure of land use and zoning decisionmaking bodies. We will not ask for your name and your responses will be kept anonymous. However, your responses will be tied to your jurisdiction and we will publish our findings, reporting data both in the aggregate and for specific places. It may be possible for readers to discern your identity from context.

Please answer every question to the best of your knowledge, consulting relevant documents as needed. If you have any questions about the project or survey, please email Eleanor Noble (enoble@urban.org) or call (202) 261-5920.

Q1 What is the name of your jurisdiction?

Q2 What is the state in which your jurisdiction is located?

a. ▼ Alabama ... Wyoming

Q3 What is the ZIP code in which your jurisdiction's main government offices are located?

Q4 Which of the following best describes your jurisdiction type:

- a. County
- b. Municipality (city, village, town, or borough)
- c. Township (or town in New England and New York state)
- d. Combined county/municipality
- e. Other _____

Q5 Does your jurisdiction plan and regulate land use and development, such as through comprehensive planning, zoning, or subdivision regulation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Skip To: End of Survey If Does your jurisdiction plan and regulate land use and development, such as through comprehensive... = No

Q6 Which of the following best describes the elected or appointed administrative bodies that make major decisions about land-use planning, regulation and zoning in your jurisdiction? (select all that apply)

Note: We understand that your jurisdiction's legislature (e.g., city council or county commission) and your planning office/agency may make many decisions about land use, but this question is asking about voting, administrative bodies that focus primarily on land-use planning, regulation, or zoning.

- a. Planning commission or board
- b. Zoning commission
- c. Combined planning and zoning commission
- d. Board of appeals/adjustment
- e. Combined appeals and planning or zoning board
- f. Other _____

Q7 Which of these decisionmaking bodies is most active in making decisions or recommendations on residential development?

- a. Planning commission or board
- b. Zoning commission
- c. Combined planning and zoning commission
- d. Board of appeals/adjustment
- e. Combined appeals and planning or zoning board
- f. Other

Q8 How many members are there on your jurisdiction's \${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}?

- a. Elected members: _____
- b. Appointed members: _____
- c. Other members: _____
- d. Total [auto-sum of all inputted values]

Q9 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's
\${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by race/ethnicity.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q8/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. White (non-Hispanic): _____
- b. Black or African American (non-Hispanic): _____
- c. American Indian and Alaska Native: _____
- d. Asian: _____
- e. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: _____
- f. Hispanic or Latino: _____
- g. Two or more races: _____
- h. Other: _____
- i. Prefer not to answer: _____
- j. Do not know: _____
- k. Total: _____

Q10 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's
\${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by occupation:

Note: You previously said there were \${Q8/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Architecture, engineering or urban planning: _____
- b. Business services or office and administrative support: _____
- c. Community, religious, or social services: _____
- d. Farming, fishing, or forestry: _____
- e. Government or military: _____
- f. Health care: _____
- g. Homemaker, retired, or unemployed: _____
- h. Real estate finance, development, or management: _____
- i. Research or education: _____
- j. Retail sale or food service industries: _____
- k. Technology: _____
- l. Other: _____
- m. Prefer not to answer: _____
- n. Do not know: _____
- o. Total: _____

Q11 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on each of your jurisdiction's \${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by housing tenure.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q8/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Homeowner: _____
- b. Renter: _____
- c. Other: _____
- d. Prefer not to answer: _____
- e. Do not know: _____
- f. Total: _____

Q12 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's \${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by gender.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q8/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Woman: _____
- b. Man: _____
- c. Other: _____
- d. Prefer not to answer: _____
- e. Do not know: _____
- f. Total: _____

Q13 Does your jurisdiction have rules that govern the composition of appointed planning, zoning, or land use decisionmaking board members (e.g., requirements around age, educational attainment, occupation, investment, residency, etc.)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Do not know

Q13A Please describe the nature of the restriction(s) or requirement(s) for your \${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}:

Q82 What is the average number of times your jurisdiction's \${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} meets per year?

Q81 What is the estimated number of hours the average \${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} member spends preparing for and attending a typical meeting?

Q83 How many estimated additional hours a month are required of
\${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} members beyond preparing for and attending meetings?

Q15 Are there any accommodations or supports for serving on your jurisdiction's
\${Q7/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}?

- a. Financial compensation (paid position)
- b. Child care
- c. Flexible meeting time
- d. Accessible via public transit
- e. Remote meetings/live streaming
- f. Other _____
- g. Prefer not to answer
- h. Do not know

Q16 Are you willing to answer these questions about another board or commission that also has a role
in the approval of residential development?

- a. We have no other such boards or commissions
 - b. I decline to answer additional questions
 - c. Yes, I would answer these questions about another board or commission
- Skip To: Q40 If Are you willing to answer these questions about another board or commission
that also has a role... = We have no other such boards or commissions
 - Skip To: Q17 If Are you willing to answer these questions about another board or commission
that also has a role... = Yes, I would answer these questions about another board or commission
 - Skip To: Q40 If Are you willing to answer these questions about another board or commission
that also has a role... = I decline to answer additional questions

Q17 Which of these decisionmaking bodies is the second-most active in making decisions or
recommendations on residential development?

- a. Planning commission or board
- b. Zoning commission
- c. Combined planning and zoning commission
- d. Board of appeals/adjustment
- e. Combined appeals and planning or zoning board

- f. Other

Q18 How many members are there on your jurisdiction's \${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}?

- a. Elected members: _____
- b. Appointed members: _____
- c. Other members: _____
- d. Total: _____

Q19 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's
\${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by race/ethnicity.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q18/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. White (non-Hispanic): _____
- b. Black or African American (non-Hispanic): _____
- c. American Indian and Alaska Native: _____
- d. Asian: _____
- e. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: _____
- f. Hispanic or Latino: _____
- g. Two or more races: _____
- h. Other: _____
- i. Prefer not to answer: _____
- j. Do not know: _____
- k. Total: _____

Q20 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's
\${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by occupation:

Note: You previously said there were \${Q18/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Architecture, engineering, or urban planning: _____
- b. Business services or office and administrative support: _____
- c. Community, religious, or social services: _____
- d. Farming, fishing, or forestry: _____
- e. Government or military: _____
- f. Health care: _____
- g. Homemaker, retired, or unemployed: _____
- h. Real estate finance, development, or management: _____

- i. Research or education: _____
- j. Retail sale or food service industries: _____
- k. Technology: _____
- l. Other: _____
- m. Prefer not to answer: _____
- n. Do not know: _____
- o. Total: _____

Q21 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on each of your jurisdiction's
 \${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by housing tenure.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q18/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Homeowner: _____
- b. Renter: _____
- c. Other: _____
- d. Prefer not to answer: _____
- e. Do not know: _____
- f. Total: _____

Q22 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's
 \${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by gender.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q18/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Woman: _____
- b. Man: _____
- c. Other: _____
- d. Prefer not to answer: _____
- e. Do not know: _____
- f. Total: _____

Q23 Does your jurisdiction have rules that govern the composition of appointed planning, zoning, or
 land-use decisionmaking board members (e.g., requirements around age, educational attainment,
 occupation, investment, residency, etc.)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Do not know

Q23a Please describe the nature of the restriction(s) or requirement(s) for your
\${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}:

Q24 What is the average number of times your jurisdiction's \${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}
meets per year?

Q25 What is the estimated number of hours the average \${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}
member spends preparing for and attending a typical meeting?

Q26 How many estimated additional hours a month are required of
\${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} members beyond preparing for and attending meetings?

Q27 Are there any accommodations or supports for serving on your jurisdiction's
\${Q17/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}?

- a. Financial compensation (paid position)
- b. Child care
- c. Flexible meeting time
- d. Accessible via public transit
- e. Remote meetings/live streaming
- f. Other _____
- g. Prefer not to answer
- h. Do not know

Q28 Are you willing to answer these questions about another land use decisionmaking board or
commission?

- a. We have no other such boards or commissions
 - b. I decline to answer additional questions
 - c. Yes, I would answer these questions about another board or commission
- Skip To: Q40 If Are you willing to answer these questions about another land use
decisionmaking board or commission? = We have no other such boards or commissions
 - Skip To: Q40 If Are you willing to answer these questions about another land use
decisionmaking board or commission? = I decline to answer additional questions
 - Skip To: Q29 If Are you willing to answer these questions about another land use
decisionmaking board or commission? = Yes, I would answer these questions about another
board or commission

Q29 Which of these decisionmaking bodies is the next-most active in making decisions or recommendations on residential development?

- a. Planning commission or board
- b. Zoning commission
- c. Combined planning and zoning commission
- d. Board of appeals/adjustment
- e. Combined appeals and planning or zoning board
- f. Other

Q30 How many members are there on your jurisdiction's \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}?

- a. Elected members: _____
- b. Appointed members: _____
- c. Other members: _____
- d. Total: _____

Q31 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by race/ethnicity.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q30/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. White (non-Hispanic): _____
- b. Black or African American (non-Hispanic): _____
- c. American Indian and Alaska Native: _____
- d. Asian: _____
- e. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: _____
- f. Hispanic or Latino: _____
- g. Two or more races: _____
- h. Other: _____
- i. Prefer not to answer: _____
- j. Do not know: _____
- k. Total: _____

Q32 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by occupation:

Note: You previously said there were \${Q30/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Architecture, engineering, or urban planning: _____

- b. Business services or office and administrative support: _____
- c. Community, religious, or social services: _____
- d. Farming, fishing, or forestry: _____
- e. Government or military: _____
- f. Health care: _____
- g. Homemaker, retired, or unemployed: _____
- h. Real estate finance, development, or management: _____
- i. Research or education: _____
- j. Retail sale or food service industries: _____
- k. Technology: _____
- l. Other: _____
- m. Prefer not to answer: _____
- n. Do not know: _____
- o. Total: _____

Q33 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on each of your jurisdiction's
 \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by housing tenure.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q30/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Homeowner: _____
- b. Renter: _____
- c. Other: _____
- d. Prefer not to answer: _____
- e. Do not know: _____
- f. Total: _____

Q34 Please provide an estimate of the number of people on your jurisdiction's
 \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} by gender.

Note: You previously said there were \${Q30/TotalSum} members on this decisionmaking body.

- a. Woman: _____
- b. Man: _____
- c. Other: _____
- d. Prefer not to answer: _____
- e. Do not know: _____
- f. Total: _____

Q35 Does your jurisdiction have rules that govern the composition of appointed planning, zoning, or land-use decisionmaking board members (e.g., requirements around age, educational attainment, occupation, investment, residency, etc.)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Do not know

Q35a Please describe the nature of the restriction(s) or requirement(s) for your \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}:

Q36 What is the average number of times your jurisdiction's \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} meets per year?

Q37 What is the estimated number of hours the average \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} member spends preparing for and attending a typical meeting?

Q38 How many estimated additional hours a month are required of \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} members beyond preparing for and attending meetings?

Q39 Are there any accommodations or supports for serving on your jurisdiction's \${Q29/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}?

- a. Financial compensation (paid position)
- b. Child care
- c. Flexible meeting time
- d. Accessible via public transit
- e. Remote meetings/live streaming
- f. Other _____
- g. Prefer not to answer
- h. Do not know

Q40 Is there anything else we should know about the composition, responsibilities, or supports for land use, planning, and zoning decisionmaking bodies in your jurisdiction?

Q41 Any final comments?

Appendix B. Descriptive Statistics for Regression Data

TABLE B.1

Descriptive Statistics of Jurisdiction and Board Characteristics

	N	Minimum	Median	Mean	Maximum
Board share white	475	0%	100%	85%	100%
Board share Black	475	0%	0%	8%	100%
Board share Asian	475	0%	0%	2%	67%
Board share Hispanic	475	0%	0%	4%	80%
Board share female	534	0%	27%	28%	100%
Board share renter	433	0%	0%	2%	100%
Midwest	177	-	-	30%	-
Northeast	195	-	-	33%	-
South	127	-	-	21%	-
West	94	-	-	16%	-
Median home value	592	\$72,400	\$284,000	\$358,285	\$2,000,001*
Median household income	592	\$27,062	\$81,094	\$88,159	\$250,001
Compensation provided	188	-	-	32%	-
Remote meetings	192	-	-	33%	-
Flexible meetings	20	-	-	4%	-
Parking or mileage coverage	10	-	-	2%	-
Training	12	-	-	2%	-
Public transit access	51	-	-	9%	-
Number of supports provided	593	0.00	1.00	0.79	4.00
Estimated monthly hours in meetings	531	0.00	2.00	9.02	184.00
Estimated monthly hours prepping for meetings	516	0.00	1.00	2.78	160.00

Source: Authors' analysis of 2022 Land Use Decisionmaking Board Survey data and American Community Survey 2015–19 data.

Notes: These statistics average all boards' characteristics, excepting local legislatures. * Census data on median home values do not exceed \$2,000,001.

Notes

- ¹ “Ensuring Equity in Transportation and Land Use Decisions to Promote Health and Well-Being in Metropolitan Areas,” American Public Health Association, October 26, 2021, <https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/10/Ensuring-Equity-in-Transportation>.
- ² The inclusion of additional jurisdictions from the Cincinnati, Chicago, and Minneapolis–St. Paul CBSAs resulted from a quirk in the survey development for the 2019 NLLUS. It did not affect the representativeness of the respondent jurisdictions.
- ³ We also examined the percentage of over- and underrepresentation for racial and ethnic groups on land-use decisionmaking boards scaled to the share of that group in the jurisdiction (i.e., group share on board minus group share in city, and that difference divided by the group share in the city). These results were the same in terms of their directionality for this descriptive table, but they had an inflationary effect on levels of underrepresentation for Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians because the small percentage point average board underrepresentation was large relative to the small share of the jurisdiction their group represented. With this scaled analysis, on average, whites were overrepresented by 31 percent, Blacks underrepresented by 15 percent, Asians underrepresented by 79 percent, and Hispanics underrepresented by 84 percent. We decided to use percentage point measures of over- and underrepresentation instead to avoid these inflationary effects and to improve the ease of interpretation.
- ⁴ In the United States overall in 2021, for example, 73.3 percent of non-Hispanic white households were homeowners, compared with 44 percent of Black households, 50.6 percent of Hispanic households, and 62.7 percent of Asian households (American Community Survey one-year data).
- ⁵ “Issues: Housing & Homelessness,” National Center for Transgender Equality, accessed March 1, 2023, <https://transequality.org/issues/housing-homelessness>.
- ⁶ Lian Chikako Chang, “Where Are the Women? Measuring Progress on Gender in Architecture,” ACSA, October 2014, <https://www.abalegalprofile.com/women.php> ; <https://www.acsa-arch.org/resource/where-are-the-women-measuring-progress-on-gender-in-architecture/>.

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