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An Examination of Decision Making of Local Elections Officials and Voter

Education Programs Throughout the State of California

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Public Administration

Jesse Armon Harris, Sr.

Division of Online and Professional Studies

Department of Public Administration

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An Examination of Decision Making of Local Elections Officials and Voter

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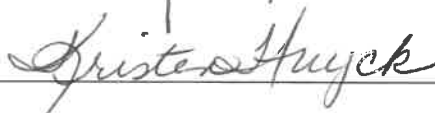
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for the degree Doctor of Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of Decision Making of Local Elections Officials and Voter

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by Jesse Armon Harris, Sr.

Recent literature fails to confirm significance between direct democracy (participation in

local elections and associated voter education and outreach programs) and perception of

low voter turnout as a problem (Seabrook, Dyck, & Lascher, 2015). Evidently, empirical

evidence is mixed, weak, or non-substantial in identifying inference of bureaucratic

management of voter education programs based on perception of low voter turnout. This

research study analyzed how local elections officials' beliefs, experience, and perception

of low voter turnout may have shaped their decision-making processes. This research

surveyed 72 city clerks in California using a qualitative methods research design based

on theoretical themes and concepts found in decision theory and procedural fairness

principles. The study suggests that city clerks make decisions concentrated in bounded

rationality as opposed to procedural fairness decision-making ideology.

Keywords: decision theory, procedural fairness, voter turnout, voter education

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insight, enlightenment, and inquisition that catapulted my first, second, and third drafts into an acceptable research project.

This moment in my life would not be possible without the energetic encouragement of my mother, Juanita, and the witty wisdom of my grandmother, Jessie Mae. These women have been the foundation on which I securely stand and the strong fortresses that reinforced the idea that an education is an advantage for life. How can I say thanks for the things you two have done? How can I express my gratitude for the sacrifices you've made, for the many times you've had to live uncomfortably so that I can live my purpose happily? If I could learn how to say "thank you" in all the languages of the world, it still wouldn't be enough. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

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DEDICATION

To God be the Glory!

I am grateful for this process. Over the course of three academic years, I have
learned more about myself than I have learned over my lifetime. Being a full-time
husband, father of three beautiful children, son, friend, mentor, community leader,
candidate for public office, student, and adjusting my career trajectory and taking on new
career adventures has been a whirlwind of successes and challenges. All in all, I've had
my share of moments when I am reminded to "trust the process."

Trust the process. . . . I've learned that when you can't have something now,
you're being prepared for something greater later. Timing is everything. You can't rush
your garden to grow, and while you wait, you learn how to nurture your field until your
harvest is ripe. This is when you appreciate the sweat equity you put into once barren
ground. Now that you've gone through something and have grown through something
that is unique to only you, your life will be fruitful in due time; and with hard work you
will reap the benefit of that which you have sown. Alexandra Elle said in *Love In My
Language* that "Beautiful things come to us when we accept who we are, where we are,
and how God is working."

This is what I've learned.

This is my internalization of Isaiah 40:31.

This is the process I've learned to trust.

This is living my purpose.

To the memory of my father, Tony Arthur Harris

To my mother, Juanita.

To my grandmother, Jessie Mae.

For Erica, Reign, Trinity, and Jesse, Jr.

To my mother. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to "go for your doctorate" as you said at a celebration in achievement of my master's degree. It was your words that challenged me to apply and take on this life-changing journey. You have always been my biggest fan, and I appreciate the weekends you took the children so I could complete assignments and write my dissertation. This process also made me sorely miss the blank checks you would write at the start of each academic year as an undergraduate and how I wish for those days again now that I am footing the bill. I realize how dedicated you were to my academic success, not knowing how or where you would get the money, but you never let me see you sweat! You wrote the check *in* faith and it cleared *by* faith! This is the same trust I've depended on during this journey. I feel the same sacrifice you felt with the satisfaction that it will all pay off in the future. I will never be able to repay you or my grandmother, but what I do have to offer is this degree and the lifetime of joy it will bring you when you proudly proclaim that "my son is a Doctor!" This achievement could not have been possible without your love and support. Thank you!

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not have been possible without everything you have done to endorse my academic achievement since elementary school. Your prayers, wisdom, and words of encouragement are effervescent in overcoming daily challenges and achievements. You saw a little boy who did not know how to read or write and took action to provide me with every resource you could afford or request to ensure that I was prepared for the world. As I look back over my life, you have always been there; even while taking care of others and working swing shifts, you somehow managed to always be there and help me with schoolwork, even at times when you didn't know the answer. You gave me my best chance, and that chance is revealed today. I appreciate you beyond imagination and love you with all my heart. Thank you for EVERYTHING!!!

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To my beautiful children, Reign, Trinity, and Jesse, Jr., so you could be inspired without having to look far into a history book. You three are the reason I pursued this dream. Now, if Daddy could do it, I expect to see even greater achievements from each of you! May you grow up knowing and experiencing the power of a rich educational experience. May you come to see the fruits of my labor and be inspired to ascend to even greater heights. I love you with all my heart and dedicate this degree to each of you in hopes that when schoolwork becomes challenging, you think back to the moment when you witnessed your dad cross the stage to receive his doctorate degree, and you are inspired to "trust the process" and be motivated to push yourself beyond limitations and reach for your dreams.

I am very grateful to God and my supportive network through this life-changing experience. It is because of this irreplaceable love that I can soar above life's storms, buoyed up by the joy Jesus gives; I am able to run with endurance against the winds of discouragement and walk boldly in times of uncertainty.

But those who wait for the Lord [who expect, look for, and hope in Him]
Will gain new strength and renew their power;
They will lift up their wings [and rise up close to God] like eagles
They will run and not become weary,
They will walk and not become weak.

—Isaiah 40:31 (Amplified)

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
—Margaret Mead

Recent literature fails to confirm significance between direct democracy

(participation in local elections and associated voter education and outreach programs)

and perception of low voter turnout as a problem (Seabrook, Dyck, & Lascher, 2015).

The administration of election and voter systems is characterized by an extremely

complex decentralized arrangement. Charter cities across the United States are tasked

with running an election and the voter engagement opportunities associated with

increasing political participation at the local (city) level. Local elections officials have a

duty and obligation at a minimum to educate voters on election processes and prepare

citizens to responsibly participate in local elections (*California Elections Code*, Section

2131, 2018; California Ethics and Democracy Project, 2018-a). Plainly, there is no

empirical evidence to determine how modern-day management of voter outreach

programs influence perception toward voter turnout in municipal elections. There is

ample research that has examined the relationship of public participation through

information technology and voter outreach efforts steered by nonprofit civic

organizations (Aikins & Krane, 2010; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Tapia & Ortiz, 2010); yet

studies that examine municipal clerks' motivation and actions significant to voter

education programs and perception of voter turnout have been widely ignored. Voter

education and engagement provides meaningful support to voters to understand and

navigate a complex election system. In the same way, Diridon (as cited in California

Ethics and Democracy Project, 2018-b) acknowledged that city clerks are chief

democracy officers and are leaders in campaigns that engage voters "by providing voters

with tools to be more effective consumers of political rhetoric, they can raise the caliber

of debate and build public trust in a meaningful way" (p. 1). Similarly, the City Clerk

Association of California (CCAC) recognizes that one of the responsibilities of a city

clerk as an elections official is to manage the process that develops active public

participation in a manner that promotes a balanced democracy at the local level (CCAC,

n.d.). This study argues that local elections officials may not consider every tool and

resource obtainable or imaginable to help increase voter turnout in local elections.

To date, there has been no empirical evidence to identify significances of civic

engagement activities and the implications of social equity consciousness of local

elections officials' decision to improve voter outreach efforts relative to voter turnout.

Simply put, social equity theory emphasizes that the concept of procedural fairness

guides actions that responsibly consider social problems within decision-making

processes. Procedural fairness is posited as placing equal importance on the procedures

that lead to a decision, the decision choice, and the outcome. Social equity theory

explains that actions are motivated by problems and influence decisions (administrative

behavior) to constantly assess public programs to ensure greater utility for all members of

society (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Gooden, 2017). This study examined the range of

decisions made to improve voter education program outcomes based on factors that

promote increased political participation in local elections or whether decisions are made

without regard to low voter turnout.

The overarching theme of social equity theory is the accurate management of efficient, effective, and equitable administration of social policy programs that aim to promote social change (Frederickson, 2010; Frederickson & Smith, 2003; Frederickson, Smith, Larimer, Licari, 2016). Frederickson (2005, 2010) conveyed that social equity in a nutshell is justice in action and influences administrative behavior (decision making based on cognitive perceptions, societal problems, social awareness, etc.) to implement fairness, justice, and equality in bureaucratic actions that create opportunities and resources for people given their history and set of circumstances. It is important to start with a discussion on equity and equality. Although synonymous on the surface, when prescribing social equity to procedural fairness, social equality bears a different meaning. The National League of Cities (2018) argued that equality is comparable to sameness or identicalness. In other words, equality ensures that all people receive the same thing. When applied to the theory of social equality, this rule is found to work only when all people are given the same resource, disregarding need and circumstance. By way of further explanation, social equality would not exist between two members in society if one member was born wealthy and went to an ivy league school and the other was born into poverty and attended a local community college. Since these two members of society are not equal in this regard, it is through the efforts of social equity that the lacking citizen is given resources and opportunities toward becoming more lateral to the other (National League of Cities, 2018).

It is important to further understand the equity relationship in part due to the vital role city clerks play in managing information disseminated to local residents. Diridon (as cited in California Ethics and Democracy Project, 2018-a) emphasized that city clerks

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manage democratic outcomes and serve as democracy officers who ensure citizens are highly engaged and proactive in local elections. It is through this premise that social equity theory could further identify how city clerks, as election administrators, perceive their role, identify social problems and what administrative procedures are employed to improve voter education and civic engagement program outcomes. Finally, this study hoped to provide perspective of a large government program that is highly understudied. According to Milner (as cited in Pero and Nelson, 2012), elections officials are public administrators who are responsible to provide resources and information that help educate citizens about the entire voting process and the implications of not participating in local elections. Therefore, research that examines the motivation of administrative decisions to improve voter education programs in the context of social equity is warranted.

Background of the Problem

Voter turnout in America continues to decline and is a problem that continues to receive global attention (Birch & Lodge, 2015). Given the history of social inequity and the challenges associated with achieving voting rights during the 1960s Civil Rights Era, today's elections should expect higher voter turnout (Gaynor, 2017; Gooden, 2015, 2017a). While the national voter turnout is low, local communities experience low voter turnout in even greater numbers. The city of Long Beach, California held an election to vote for mayor and more than half of its councilmembers in April 2018, and a total 41,415 of 261,577 eligible voters turned out to vote, equating to 15.8% turnout for an election that cost more than $2 million to conduct (City of Long Beach, Office of the City Clerk, 2018). Even more problematic is the near nonexistent participation of residents

living in poor and underserved areas. As described previously, of the nearly 16% turnout in Long Beach, less than 2% of those who reside in some of the city's most poverty-stricken districts participated in the election (Haire, 2018). When turnout is low, it sparks two political events, one, demonstrating satisfaction in government or two, creating underrepresentation of elected officials and diminishing consideration of social equity and equality in public policy decisions (Hill, 2006). In observation of the findings in the literature, understanding social equity within the context of voter turnout could further enlighten decision theory research on how city clerks, as election administrators, perceive their role, identify social problems, break barriers in access to information and what remedies are used to improve turnout for all, especially, highly disengaged and nonparticipatory citizens.

It has been argued that active involvement in local civic and voter education programs could curb low voter turnout. Gerber, Huber, Biggers and Hendry (2017) found that voting is vast among those who perceive voting as a civic duty, especially those who participate in voter education and outreach that emphasizes the normative rules and outcomes of voting. The counter argument is simple: citizens who are complacent and do not participate in civic activities will most likely not participate in elections unless otherwise informed (Fowler & Margolis, 2014; Stucki, Sager, & Pleger, 2018). Fowler and Margolis (2014) affirmed that uninformed voters are unable to translate their political desires and are often subgrouped as the economically disadvantaged. The voter turnout problem has had numerous negative implications on social justice and equality, most notably through the act of underrepresentation in diverse communities (Ashe & Stewart, 2012; Bochsler & Hänni, 2017).

Local elections officials' role in voter education planning decisions is important to informing voters, encouraging participation of the economically disadvantaged, and reversing the trend of low voter turnout. Furthermore, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (2014) noted that "voter education program impact voter turnout" (p. 1), and indicated the importance of strengthening voter education programs through collaboration efforts with local elections officials. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission's research found that using data to guide voter education efforts will help increase administrators' understanding of voter needs before, during, and after an election. Moreover, the Commission identified that giving voters personalized attention by establishing different levels of opportunity that bring city hall to the voter by setting up small local civic groups and creating voter toolkits with essential and easy to read information. Lastly, the recurrent theme in driving decisions and policy to increasing voter turnout is simply coordinating education across platforms, making voter education a priority in boosting voter turnout. Well planned programs have the direct and indirect potential to motivate and increase citizen participation in the voting process (U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

Voter turnout is appallingly low and continues to decline, especially in local elections, such as city and school board elections (Holbrook & Weinschenk, 2014). Hajnal and Lewis (2003) highlighted that important policy is made at the local level and many resident voices are not included in the decisions that affect their activities for daily living. Hajnal and Trounstine (2005) and Hajnal (2010) found that low turnout in city elections highly reduces fair representation of marginalized groups and the economically

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disadvantaged. Bearing this in mind, research that examines motivation and decisions of city clerks as local elections officials through a social equity lens can shed some light on the rationale for local voter and civic education policy reform.

The purpose of this study was to explore the decisions to participate in the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) or improve an existing voter education program and whether that decision(s) was made through the recognition of low voter turnout using a social equity theoretical framework. Identifying whether rationale(s) toward improving voter turnout was the source of a decision could provide more insight on complex decision-making processes, tools, theories, and outcomes in municipal voter services. This research surveyed 72 city clerks in California, and qualitative analysis was conducted on participant responses to understand motivation, rationale, and decisions. This research heavily relied on decision theory to understand the role of decision making among city clerks.

Significance of the Study

Holbrook and Weinschenk (2014) acknowledged that voter turnout in municipal elections has not been examined. Previous studies of voter engagement have primarily focused on the strategies implemented by nonprofit civic organizations and disregarded the influence of public organizations on increasing voter participation (LeRoux & Krawczyk, 2014). The major idea of this investigation examined the relationship between the decision to participate in the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) and improve voter education programs and thoughtfulness of improving a social problem analyzed under social equity theory. Identifying the significance of the relationship may advance the understanding of how local strategic management of social

systems and the suggestions found in public administration theory, such as social equity, can improve public programs and social outcomes (Valenzuela, 2017). Incorporation of social equity theory and decision theory may significantly inform this study on the ethical implications that negligible voter education and outreach can have a negative impact on voter turnout. Ethical considerations in this study seek to advance the public's interest and acquaint the moral obligations of the democratic process. The promotion of democratic participation helps safeguard against a lack of citizen involvement of governance that can weaken the barrier of elite power and associated politically-charged problems or government setbacks. This study is an attempt to assess the contribution of local election official's decisions based on perception of voter turnout and ideologies of increased democratic participation.

Public management of improving voter turnout has been challenging for nearly all cities across the United States (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006; Trounstine, 2012). According to Hajnal and Lewis (2003), the challenge is found in feeble approaches to improving civic engagement and voter education programs, consequently largely discounting and ignoring the problem as a problem, which sets the precedent for this study. A missing link in this area of concern is that social equity and administrative decision making on inventive voter education outcomes lend support to improving democratic participation. It is widely known that education has been associated with a "higher propensity to vote" (Lassen, 2005, p. 104), but little evidence has been provided as to whether administrative decisions to improve municipal voter education programs have some indication of voting tendency. To this end, a main component of the CEDP was developed to equip and challenge local elections officials to improve their voter

outreach and education program using a master blueprint or template to increase voter turnout. The CEDP participation has grown through the network of city clerks and membership in the International Institute of Municipal Clerks and the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials. The nature of the CEDP program as adopted or self-initiated by local municipalities has been selected to evaluate the decision-making responsiveness of city clerks based on the program's context in relation to the voter turnout and problem solving. Additionally, the program serves as a sizable system that can provide some insight on the role of decision making within social equity premise.

Study Exploration

This study argues that local elections officials may not consider every tool and resource obtainable or imaginable to help increase voter turnout in local elections. This study explored the role of decision making and the motivation of those decisions to improve voter education and civic engagement programs. Through closer exploratory investigation, this research aimed to discover the unique cause and reason behind decisions made to improve voter turnout as implied in the theory of social equity. The theory of social equity in public administration prompts public administrators to respond to public problems in a manner that continues to work toward improving that problem. In this context, social equity theory requires public administrators to constantly evaluate public programs and their performance and make necessary modifications that best maximize the public's interest and utility. For Frederickson (2010), social equity facilitates the efficient, cost-effective, and equitable administration of public goods and services and promotes social change.

Emphasis is given to procedural fairness, an interactive tool loosely explained within social equity as ongoing monitoring of program outcomes as a decision-making process. Through this description, the literature surrounding social equity guides the management of public organization and the administration of decisions that stimulate improved outcomes. In this most basic sense, the research questions are comprehensive to the understanding of how decisions are made and further define procedural fairness decision making in social equity theory.

Frederickson (2010) understood social equity in public administration as the careful, considerate, and methodological identification of problems, which in return motivates administrative behavior to respond responsibly to evaluate and resolve social problems in a fair and accurate manner. Fundamentally, social equity is the ongoing review of public programs and influences administrative cognitive behavior and perception to develop procedural tactics to ensure the efficient, cost-effective, and equitable administration that produce positive social outcomes.

Focus of the Study

Local government management of improving voter turnout has been challenging for nearly all municipalities across the United States (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006; Parvin & Saunders, 2018; Trounstine, 2012). According to Hajnal and Lewis (2003), the challenge is found in feeble approaches to improving civic engagement and voter education programs, consequently largely discounting and ignoring the problem. A missing link in this area of concern is the assessment of decision making on inventive voter education outcomes in relation to potentially increasing democratic participation in local elections. It is widely known that education has been associated with a "higher

propensity to vote" (Lassen, 2005, p. 104), but little evidence has been provided as to whether municipal voter education programs' efforts to increase voter participation has improved voting tendency.

The CEDP was a strategy developed to support and challenge local elections officials to build a program with the chief goal of increasing voter turnout through systematic techniques to grow civic participation and improve stagnant voter education programs. It can be beneficial to the practice of public administration to discover whether the decision to participate in the CEDP was motivated through the theory of social equity. Understanding the role of decision making within the premise of social equity can further validate previous theorist claims that social equity moves the needle of public administration practice and should be built within the fabric of the professional and the administrative behaviors that seek to improve society. Hill (2006) confirmed that low voter turnout in America has negative impacts on local government systems, yet inadequate attention is given to local voter education programs and decisions toward improving program outcomes.

Some changes within election administration has primarily focused on political reforms that have included increasing the number of days of voter registration before an election, providing early voting, relaxed vote-by-mail options, and providing electronic voting systems to boost voter turnout (Flanders, 2011). Although these efforts appear feasible and attractive, they have not significantly increased voter turnout (Stein & Vonnahme, 2008). An examination of social equity theory procedural fairness and bureaucratic decision making giving attention to voter education program could possibly answer how local elections officials can more steadily improve voter turnout in local

elections. This work will contribute to the discussion of election administration, voter turnout and political participation goals, and election reform policy. Local elections officials seeking to engage voters can greatly benefit from this study of the analysis of local voter education programs and decisions toward revamping those programs to maximize voter turnout. The goal of this study was to increase the level of knowledge specific to public administration management and to test the merger of theory and practice in decision making when applied to voter education programs.

The findings in this study provide invaluable information for policymakers at the local level to better comprehend the causes and understanding of low voter turnout, the implications low turnout has on democracy, and how decision-making practices can benefit the goals and outcomes of higher political participation in local democracies. This work will assist scholars and practitioners, as well as candidates for public office, nonprofits, political campaigns, and elections officials to further understand how mobilizing voters affects voter turnout results.

Methodology Overview

This study argues that local elections officials may not consider every tool and resource obtainable or imaginable to help increase voter turnout in local elections. The examination of administrative decision making partly within the context of social equity theory is guided by three overarching research questions.

Research Questions

1. How are decisions made as related to improving voter education programs efforts?

2. Do local elections officials evaluate voter education program outcomes on an ongoing basis?

3. How are decisions made through the social equity component of procedural fairness decision processes as related to voter turnout and voter education programs?

The schematic in Figure 1, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, identifies how the research is posited to answer the questions. The probative research areas and study questions derived from the review of the literature and study of the problem. The research was designed to discover how local elections officials make decisions using two concepts of decisions theory, bounded rationality and rationality, and the idea of procedural fairness decision-making process within social equity theory, based on developing literature (Stadelmann & Torgler, 2013). Although this study cannot generalize for the entire population of public administration practice, it can offer some relative information to the literature governing application to duty in decision making toward problem solving. Data for this research were collected through an online survey in which participants had an opportunity to provide personal narratives that were aggregated during data analysis and examined for themes and trends.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to the research are identified as limited information in the subject area regarding voter education programs, variations of programs, city demographics and size typology. For the purpose of the research, motivations for both elected and appointed clerks were measured the same. Further limitations can have varying effects on participation and response rates, such as membership required for the CCAC and the fees associated to subscribe to the City Clerk ListServ. This limitation may have presented bias about who could participate and in the sample. Additionally, some cities might be

against the program due to the objectives of the project, requirements of officials, funding

requirements, program design or political reasons.
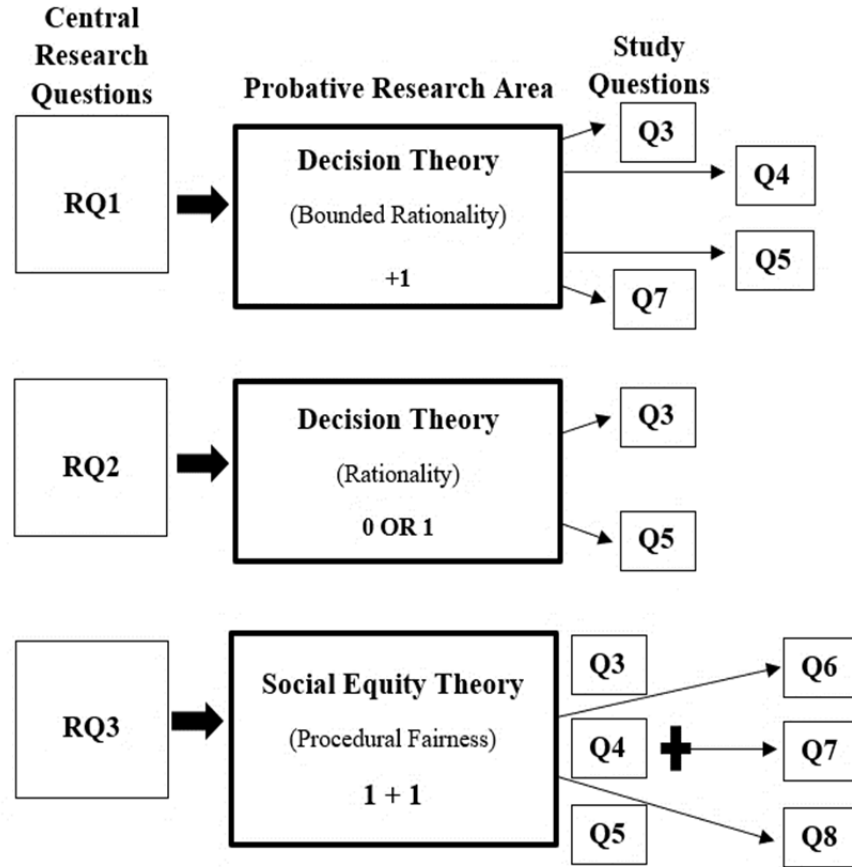
Figure 1. Schematic of research design and research methodology.

Another limitation can be found in availability of data due to funding sources and

the effects money has on robustness of program outcomes among agencies. Unlike state

and county agencies that receive appropriate funding to increase voter education and

turnout efforts through programs like Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, cities do

not qualify for HAVA due to restrictions imposed on federal and state elections. Since

local municipalities do not have access to these funds, and have limited budgets for voter

education and outreach programs, participation may be widely narrowed. This research intended to gain insight from city clerks throughout California representing more than 400 incorporated cities that may have voter education programs or even partnered with and implemented the CEDP, a program that stimulated this study. Using voter turnout as a variable, this research examined how decisions are made. The research was designed to study the role of decision making among local elections officials in relation to their recognition of social problems toward improving civic engagement programs and outcomes.

An additional limitation to this method is that the survey was designed to ask a series of questions relating to attitudes, behaviors, actions, decisions, and beliefs that may have taken place approximately six years ago. An additional limitation to note is that responses only were derived from California clerks and excludes other municipal agencies in other geographical locations. Considering this length of time, being asked to recount why a decision was made may be vague, ambiguous, and imprecise. However, the questions were intended to direct participants to a specific event that may help them recollect memory and involvement; therefore, this method of inquiry was identified as a proficient means to collect and analyze the results.

The Study of Social Equity Limitations

Although Frederickson (2005, 2010) realized social equity theory to transcend from a philosophy of fairness and justice to a variety of operationalized terms toward guiding administrative actions in decision making, this research was meant to further examine a single social equity concept on city clerks across various cities in California. Procedural fairness is concerned with the fair and proper procedures of administrators

and does not place immediate importance on the outcome (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Procedural fairness is imbedded in social equity theory and guides administrative actions and decisions to improve public outcomes (Jos, 2016). The study of procedural fairness as a decision-making tool within government programs is limited and largely underdeveloped. The research inspected individual city clerk choices to ascertain an amassed understanding of administrative actions through motivation, influence, and decision making.

<div align="center">**Definitions of Key Terms**</div>

Throughout this study, some key terms are used that highlight this study based on the categories of social equity in public administration and voter disenfranchisement underpinnings. This work features repetitive use of such terminology that should be commonly understood prior to entering this discussion and is clearly defined in this section.

Procedural fairness. Procedural fairness is concerned with the fair and proper procedures of administrators and does not place immediately importance on the outcome (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Procedural fairness is imbedded in social equity theory and guides administrative actions and decisions to improve public outcomes (Jos, 2016).

Social equity theory. Social equity theory is a perspective rooted in problem solving for economic, social, and political inconsistencies and anomalies. Social equity is a construct that serves as a procedural framework for socially controlling public administration practice and bureaucratic behavior (Frederickson, 2010).

Voter apathy. Voter apathy is a voting behavior defined as having no interest or care about voting in an election. Political scholars have coined voter apathy as lack of interest in elections and a major cause of low turnout among eligible voters in local jurisdictions (Alberda, 2014; Fowler & Margolis, 2014; Levinson, 2013; Moral, 2016).

Voting behavior. The action assumed by a voter that explains how and why he or she votes in an election, which is inclusive of his or her reason or rationale for not participating.

Voter disenfranchisement. Voter disenfranchisement is the intentional and/or unintentional suppression, oppression, discouragement, and intimidation imposed on any individual or group of individuals being part of a protected class that ranges from race, nationalization, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation or identity that prohibits or obstructs their freedom to exercise their right to vote (Friedman, 2005).

Voter education. Voter education is identified as government and community organizations' attempts to motivate and prepare voters to fully participate in elections. Considering broader concepts underlining democracy, voter education is innovative programs developed to emphasize awareness and participation in elections and all aspects of a democratic society (Administration and Cost of Elections Electoral Knowledge Network, 2018).

Voter turnout. Voter turnout is the percentage of registered voters in a jurisdiction who participate in an election by casting a ballot for the candidate(s) they would like to elect to public office and the ballot measures that they would like to approve or not approve as new legislation.

Chapter Preview

This study examined the range of decisions made to improve voter education program outcomes based on factors that will promote increased political participation and are connected in the following ways as illustrated in the following workflow schematic (Figure 2).

Overview of low voter turnout problem, causes and trends. Discussion of voter and civic education program benefits towards improved democracy, role of decision-making. Discussion of social equity theory.	Chapter 1
Historical analysis of theoretical concepts. Identifying gaps in the literature, detecting necessity for study and formulation of research prospectus, questions and design.	Chapters 2 and 3

Research Questions

How are decisions made as it relates to improving voter education programs efforts?	
Do local elections officials evaluate voter education program outcomes on an ongoing basis?	Chapters 3 and 4
How are decisions made through the social equity component of procedural fairness decision processes as it relates to voter turnout and voter education programs?	
Conclusion recognizes of how these findings can (1) improve decision-making in the future and (2) how research methodologies can be improved to further test administrative decision-making processes to move public administration problem solving techniques further along.	Chapter 5

Figure 2. Schematic of organization of study and research workflow.

Chapter 1 of the study presented the introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, theoretical underpinnings supporting the rationale for the study,

the overview of the methodology to be used, research questions to be answered, the significance of the study, and the definitions of terms.

Chapter 2 consists of a theory analysis of social equity as it relates to procedural fairness and decision theories and briefly discusses the role of low voter turnout on American democracy. Chapter 2 also focuses on the literature surrounding the history and evolution of voting in America, the evolution of public administration's response to social injustice, and summarizes the literature on bounded rationality, procedural fairness decision-making, and administrative behavior that applies to the decision-making processes. Theory analysis includes in-depth inspection of the history of decision theory, evolution and social context of both social equity theory and decision theory, and how these theoretical frameworks further inform the research design and methodology.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study including the research design, population and sampling procedures, and instrumentation selection or development. Chapter 3 further describes the procedures for data collection and the plan for data analysis. The chapter presents an overview of the proposed methods employed to facilitate the study and discusses the research landscape, design, participants, procedures and instruments used for data collection, and how the data were analyzed.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the survey responses and interprets the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the results, culminating with conclusions and recommendations for further research and implications for public administration practice.

Although voter turnout is the research topic, the prevalent goal here is to highlight the way administrative behavior is influenced by social problems and the range of

decisions developed to address those problems. What this study hoped to discover was how decisions are made in public administration by analyzing local elections officials' approach to identifying problems relevant to voter turnout and managing outcomes of voter education programs. Understanding voter education administration can help identify an actualized theory and practice that social equity theory and decision-making practices can offer the field.

Chapter 5 draws these elements together and presents practice and research implications. The study highlights the importance of adopting a qualitative methods approach to examining complex social issues and processes, and contributes to the literature related to procedural fairness and voter information management in four ways:

- Identifies a set of indicators that captures elements of social equity in voter education planning and decision making;

- Develops methodologies to measure outcomes of voter information using decision theory that focus on improved democracy;

- Deepens the understanding of how perception motivates responses toward improving local government and engagement outcomes; and

- Expands the ideas of bureaucratic politicking in policy formation and fund allocation for enhanced civic programs.

Ultimately, this research brings awareness of important voter-related social equity goals and increases the objective these goals play in decision-making processes.

This study contributes to the literature through the development of empirical evidence on the ways local elections officials understand and make decisions in reference

to social equity. Specifically, the research considers how 72 city clerks manage voter

education programs and address social equity issues in their program reform.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recent literature fails to confirm significance between voter education and outreach (civic/community engagement) program planning and perceived higher voter turnout (Seabrook et al., 2015). Evidently, there is no empirical evidence to determine how modern-day management of voter outreach programs influences perception of increasing voter turnout in municipal elections today. There is ample research that examines the relationship between public participation and voter outreach efforts steered by nonprofit civic organizations or how city's bridge civic services through the promotion of Internet among its citizens (Aikins & Krane, 2010; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Tapia & Ortiz, 2010); yet, studies that examine municipal clerks' motivation and actions significant to voter education programs and perception of administrative actions on increasing voter turnout have been ignored. To date, there has been no empirical evidence to identify significances of voter education activities and the implications of social equity consciousness of local elections officials' decision to improve voter outreach efforts relative to voter turnout. Simply put, social equity theory emphasizes that the concepts of fairness, justice, and equality guide actions that responsibly combat social problems within these core concepts. Social equity theory motivates actions and decisions (administrative behavior) to constantly assess public programs to ensure greater utility for all members of society (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Gooden, 2017).

Documentation

The researcher gathered documentation from various search engines, such as Google Scholar and public and university libraries: Los Angeles County Public Library, City of Long Beach Main Library, California Baptist University, and Loyola Marymount

University. Key terms searched in various databases and indexes were social equity

(theory), decision making (theory), bounded rationality, rationality, procedural fairness,

public administration theory, civic engagement, political participation (theory),

democracy and democratic participation, nonprofit voter programs, municipal voter

education programs, program evaluation management, voter education, voter turnout, low

voter turnout problem, qualitative research methods, city clerks, elections officials,

election results.

Voter Turnout

Low voter turnout has negative impacts on the fair distribution of equality and

even influences the trust level in government (Gaynor, 2017; Gooden, 2017). These and

other related social disturbances are causative of underperforming voter outreach

programs (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). City elections are significantly important since local

elected officials make important decisions about critical services that directly impact the

lives of residents every day. From schools, library services, public safety and city

infrastructure, local elections are an essential aspect of local communities, yet turnout is

consistently low, and the reasons for such low turnout are unfounded.

Low voter turnout has negative implications for both social and economic

equality. Haire (2018) reported that part of the problem is perception and application to

duty. Local elections officials acknowledge the importance of voter education programs,

yet administrators remain unsure about how to improve outreach efforts and where to

begin (Haire, 2018). Hill (2006) and Trounstine (2012) expressed the opinion that

administrators of civic programs have some perception of the value voter outreach has on

the larger society, yet their actions do not support the practicality of increasing

engagement and turnout. To put it more clearly, high voter turnout is desirable and literature validates how advantageous civic engagement and political education are to the goals of democracy (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006; Trounstine, 2012).

King and Hale (2016) noted that even the smallest exposure to civic activity for teenagers and young voters through civics classes and high school voter registration drives have continued steady voting participation well into adulthood (Shino & Smith, 2018). Participation has been linked to increased voter turnout in such cases and often made available through city/school partnerships (King & Hale, 2016). Through the evidence found in civic program participation, further data through the social equity lens can provide a greater understanding of the administrator/social program paradigm and how theory can be used to strengthen democratic processes.

Most notably, voter participation is significantly important to local democracy; therefore, voter education and outreach are fundamental in preserving fair political representation and equal distribution of public goods and services in local government. There is sufficient evidence that higher voter participation demonstrates trust in government, ensures equality in service distribution, and diminishes elite power and underrepresentation on city councils (Bochsler & Hänni, 2017; Hill, 2006). Milner (2010) posed a theoretical framework that suggests political engagement and participation increase civic literacy and prepare voters to make informed decisions at the polls. Milner's observations are important to the literature that can further explain the relationship between education and higher rates of political participation, which can inform improvement measures of voter education programs.

In a review of Milner's work, Olsen (2003) noted that voter education brings about civic literacy that boosts voter turnout. High voter turnout indicates greater

equality because voters are more politically charged and cognizant. The act of voting has been discussed as indicative of weighing trust in government. When citizens disregard voting, they ultimately are protesting their disdain for the behavior of the governments. The rationale for not voting is based on the understanding that voters are not satisfied with the status quo, a concept that has been underdeveloped and not substantiated, yet scholars maintain that the act of not voting is closely related to discontentment, voter fatigue, voter apathy, or compliancy (Alberda, 2014; Fowler & Margolis, 2014). When voters are shown that representatives and potential candidates are credible and knowledgeable in policy and politics, they may very well turnout to vote. Britt's (2012) research found that "people who are perceived as credible and intelligent are more likely to impact our decisions" (p. 1). When public officials are perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable of political issues, turnout increases and voter education and outreach have been known to guide the public narrative and perceptions of candidates and information on initiatives (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003). Voter education is the vehicle that drives information and shapes perception of political events through.

There are conflicting views on what exact issues arise out of the low voter turnout problem. Yet, what is unanimous is that scholars agree that low voter turnout dilutes the democratic process and deprives the poor of equality and fair representation in policy decision making (Hill, 2006; Mikołaj, 2006). Hill (2006) insisted that nonparticipation, or low voter turnout, in local elections allows room for elite power to materialize and decreases political equality and fair distribution of social wealth. What Hill (2006) proposed is that political leaders internalize low voter turnout as disinterest in political affairs and that social accountability is low, causing elected officials to assume that they

have the freedom to act independently of their constituents. To put it another way, when citizens do not vote or in this case, fail to register to vote, their voices are not heard, and their desires are not a matter of concern. Even consider; if individuals want to remove someone from office, they must be registered to vote in order for their signature to count toward recalling an elected official (*California Elections Code*, 2018). Considering this fact, the issues of low voter turnout have negative implications for society, especially at the local level. Schroedel and Aslanian (2017) claimed that higher registration and turnout have been identified as the most likely avenue to create a more representative government. In Schroedel and Aslanian's representation claim, it is evident that higher turnout is an indicator that winning officials and measures is the will of the all voters. In the same way, when a small fraction of voters participates in elections, representation is unbalanced and the collective will of the people is not fully realized (Bochsler & Hänni, 2017). Considering this notion, participation in voter education and civic engagement can lead to positive turnout. Political researcher, Olsen's (2003) review uncovered the following:

> High levels of civic literacy and voter turnout are significant achievements in themselves, they also are important means of fostering greater equality because more politically literate citizens are more likely to choose and support economic and social policies that provide greater certainty and security and distribute wealth more equally. And this outcome, in turn, encourages citizens to keep informed and politically active to ensure that such measures are sustained and promoted. (p. 677)

Finally, Olsen (2003) discovered that the imbalance of poor voter turnout is found in extremely low civic involvement, which is linked to trust or confidence in government. Determining the significance of the strength of a robust voter education on voter turnout may advance the understanding of how city clerks make decisions and whether corresponding behaviors and actions are entrenched in Frederickson's social equity theory.

Low voter turnout has negative impacts on representativeness, trust, and equality in government (Hill, 2006). These and other related social disturbances are causative of underperforming voter outreach programs (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Theoretical underpinnings have claimed that voter education programs impact voter turnout and that well-managed programs can motivate and encourage citizen participation in elections (Hart InterCivic, Inc., 2017; U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2018). Local elections are significantly important since local elected officials are making influential decisions about critical services that impact residents each day. Schools, library services, public safety, and city infrastructure, local elections are important aspects of local communities, yet turnout is consistently low (Holbrook & Weinschenk, 2014). Low voter turnout has negative implications for both social and economic equality (Hajnal, 2010). Fundamentally, part of the problem is that local elections officials' acknowledgement of the theoretical importance of voter education programs on social equality is not met with the practical application of achieving increased voter participation (Hill, 2006; Trounstine, 2012). To put it more clearly, high voter turnout is desirable, but local jurisdictions do not appear to place immediate importance on bringing

about worthwhile results such as financially supporting voter education program improvements (Hajnal, 2010).

It is evident that higher voter participation is key to maintaining trust, equality, and diminishing elite power in government (Hill, 2006; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018). Most notably, voter participation is significantly important to local democracy; therefore, voter education and outreach is fundamental in preserving fair political representation and equal distribution of public goods and services in local government (Hajnal, 2010). In a review of Milner's work, Olsen (2003) noted that voter education brings about civic literacy that propels voter turnout and trust; this indicates greater equality due to voters being more politically charged and cognizant. The act of voting has been discussed as indicative of weighing trust in government. When citizens disregard voting, they ultimately are protesting their disdain in governments' behavior and representation frameworks (Hill, 2006). When voters are shown that representatives and potential candidates are credible and knowledgeable in policy and politics, they may very well turn out to vote. Britt's (2012) research found that "people who are perceived as credible and intelligent are more likely to impact our decisions" (p. 1). When credibility and intelligence in candidates and local policy are mostly made known by means of voter education programs, turnout increases (Hajnal, 2010; Hajnal & Lewis, 2003).

Holbrook and Weinschenk (2014) admitted that voter turnout in municipal elections has been untapped and that the literature is scarce. Scholars acknowledge the limited research found in this subject area, especially on local elections officials and their administrative behavior when dealing with voter education and turnout in city elections. Previous studies of voter engagement have primarily focused on the strategies

implemented by nonprofit civic organizations and disregarded the influence of public

organizations on increasing voter participation (LeRoux & Krawczyk, 2014). Unlike

state and county agencies that receive appropriate funding to increase voter turnout and

improve election equipment efforts through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of

2002, cities do not qualify for HAVA funding due to restrictions imposed on federal and

state elections (U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2018). Since municipalities do not

have access to these funds and have limited budgets for voter education and outreach

programs, participation may be widely narrowed.

The Local Voter Turnout Dilemma Cause and Effects

At the county and city levels (statewide and municipal elections), 11% or 600,000

of the more than 5.2 million eligible voters in Los Angeles County turned out to vote to

elect mayors, councilmembers, city officials, school board members, and initiatives

across 88 cities for the Consolidated Municipal and Special Election held on March 7,

2017 (Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, 2017; Madrid, 2017;

Nazarian, 2017). When considering the average of the voting age and voting-eligible

populations, this implies a problem for American politics, especially at the municipal or

local level. Presidential and state elections are held to select the political leaders who

represent large districts and make policy that may have little to no impact on daily lives.

Kaplan (2016) profoundly noted the following about the voting paradox in

America:

The most ironic thing about Americans is that even though we have much less

control over federal issues than over state or local issues, we are far more likely to

vote for President of the United States than we are for governor of our state. Still

fewer vote for school board, mayor, county supervisor. (p. 2)

Kaplan (2016) argued that voters participate in higher rates in presidential

elections than in local elections. Higher registration and turnout of a diverse community

ensure the will of the people and most likely create a more representative legislative body

(Schroedel & Aslanian, 2017). What is true for voter turnout theory is that participation

in local elections is extremely important because it is at this level where policy directly

impacts the activities for daily living and social life more than policy formed at the

federal and state level (Kaplan (2016). To say it another way, higher participation in

democracy that elects' mayors, county supervisors, and school board members is vital to

the ebb and flow of good democracy. Local officials influence policy that directly

impacts residents from classroom education, public transportation, property, business and

street improvement, water quality, and waste management services. These services

impact activities for daily living, and residents should be more civically involved at this

level. Properly managed voter education programs can help bridge the voter gap and

encourage citizens to participate in local elections in higher numbers (Hajnal, 2010).

Municipal elections are not held on the same day as national elections, and

policymakers have analyzed the impact election days have on voter turnout and includes

underfunded and feebly managed voter education and civic engagement programs

(Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Sharp, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wood, 2002). Since

election timetables are imposed by federal and state law, local agency reform is far from

adjusting the timing of elections; therefore, other administrative management measures to

strengthen voter education programs that seek to improve voter turnout can be beneficial

to the goal of democracy. A growing number of scholars agree that meagerly planned

voter education programs attribute to low voter turnout, which devalues democracy and

ultimately creates fiscal waste (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wood,

2002). Given the sources of research evaluating municipal voter education programs and

political activity, declining voter participation confirms that voter education programs are

slow to improving voter turnout (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Furthermore, the conceptual

issue is that there is no new literature or evidence that has demonstrated improvements in

voter education programs and their implications on improved voter turnout. This

research study is provided to revive the conversation and inspire more empirical evidence

to be conducted in this area. Be that as it may, a majority of the public has not primarily

focused on or comprehended the low voter turnout problem. It is more the responsibility

of the government to educate, inform, and prepare its constituents to actively engage in

civic affairs and elections (Hill, 2006).

The low voter turnout problem funnel model was developed based on greater

research assessed through the literature and used to illustrate the layers within one

framework of the voter turnout problem (Fowler & Margolis, 2014; Hajnal & Lewis,

2003; Hill, 2006; Holbrook & Weinschenk, 2014; Olsen, 2003; Sharp, 2003; Uslaner &

Brown, 2005; Wood, 2002). Figure 3 illustrates a composite of research that found

limited or dormant voter education and civic outreach programs lead to uninformed

constituents who are disengaged in civic activity and participation in elections (Fowler &

Margolis, 2014; Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006; Holbrook & Weinschenk, 2014;

Olsen, 2003; Sharp, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wood, 2002). In other words, lack of

voter education programs creates inactive voters, leading to low turnout and potentially

weak democracy (Hill, 2006). The low voter turnout problem diagram depicts the

complexity of the effects of inactive voter education programs as demonstrated in the

literature.

Low Voter Turnout
Problem Funnel

Substandard Voter
Education/Outreach
Programs

Uninformed Voter

Disengaged/Inactive
Voter

Low Voter Turnout

Low Return on
High Civic Investment
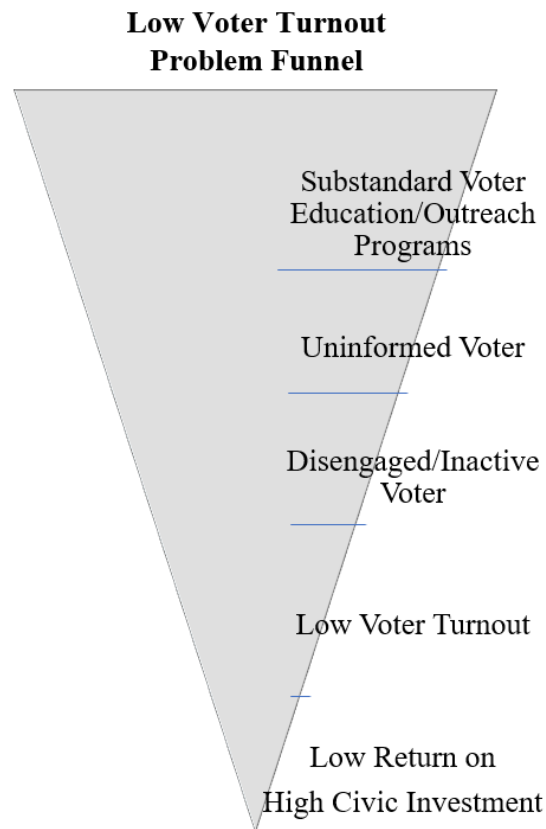
Figure 3. Low voter turnout problem funnel model.

Voter turnout is a serious problem in America and has negative consequences on

equity, equality, and fair representation in political arenas. Very few researchers have

looked at the impact of voter education efforts at the local level; therefore, this research is

relevant and appropriate as election administration and election reform are becoming

primary topics of discussion at every level of government. This study looked at the

administrator's decisions to distinguish whether those choices were funneled through a

social equity premise. Such study can have positive effects on how local elections officials view their role and influence in improving social equity issues. This study investigated decision-making processes through the idea of social equity and perceiving the thoughtfulness of social equity issues. Learning more about the relationship between voter turnout and voter education programs could offer some guidance as to how decision theory and social equity theory can better equip administrative measures for improving participation in municipal elections.

Hill (2006) confirmed that low voter turnout in America is widely regarded as a problem, yet little thought has been given to local voter education programs and the implication on improving voter turnout. Elections officials at the local level in the state of California were recruited for the study to discover the impact of the program on improved voter participation. Considerable research has been given to voter turnout in America, yet analysis of local elections officials' decision-making practices toward improving voter turnout locally has received little attention. The aim of this research was to assess whether and how decisions are made to increase the effectiveness of voter education programs and voter turnout in local jurisdictions.

This research intended to gain insight from city clerks throughout California, representing all incorporated cities that may have voter education programs and partnered with the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) to improve voter and community education efforts with an interest in increasing voter turnout. The CEDP is a program that equips city clerks to build a community outreach program with a special interest in promoting citizens to be more informed and politically savvy and to promote higher turnout in city elections. The CEDP pilot program partially encouraged this study

in a way that merges participant responses of those who may have participated in the CEDP and those who improve voter education outcomes and ultimately guided the research methodology. Particularly, the research takes the template of the "Create Your Own Program" from the CEDP, which provides structural program elements for cities to consider when establishing or improving their own community and voter education outreach programs (CEDP, 2018-a). The CEDP advocates that city clerks, as local elections officials, lead democracy efforts in the following ways: create meaningful measurable results and processes that increase more informed voter turnout and bridge the voter gap through voter education outreach and partnerships with local schools. Furthermore, the Project supports all efforts that seek to improve voter turnout with various tools and resources from creating forums to learn more about candidate's ideology to simple reminders through push notifications and social media advertisements.

Using voter turnout as a variable, this research examined the art of motivation and the perception of problems though a social equity lens. The research was designed to study the role of decision-making among local elections officials in relation to their recognition of social problems (e.g., low voter turnout) and the snowball effects associated as confirmed in the literature.

Voter Education Programs and Public Administration Practice

According to the Administration and Cost of Elections Electoral Knowledge Network (2018), voter education is significant for preparing voters to fully participate in the electoral process. The art of preparing voters to be politically savvy and completely literate builds confidence that the voting process is the utmost effective and appropriate system for electing political representatives and enacting policy that benefits the

individual voter (Administration and Cost of Elections Electoral Knowledge Network, 2018). Local governments' management of advantageous voter education programs has been problematic to the effective promotion of social equity and legitimacy in the democratic process (Parvin & Saunders, 2018). Hajnal and Lewis' (2003) and Uslaner and Brown's (2005) comparable theories that feeble civic and voter education programs are a main contributor to low turnout are extremely useful because they shed light on the difficult problem of political participation. It is at this juncture that the consequence of administrative decision making can be evaluated through the value implied in Frederickson's theory of social equity in public administration. The literature only supported isolated cases where early exposure to democracy through civic classes while in high school demonstrates high proclivity to voting in adulthood (King & Hale, 2016). High political involvement is also true for those who actively engage in civic education programs (King & Hale, 2016). Taking this analysis to heart, most voters receive accurate information about elections from their local elections officials; therefore, importance should be placed on encouraging voters to consistently participate in the electoral process. It is evident that voter turnout is low in local elections partly due to inadequate voter outreach efforts. The literature could benefit from better analysis of the effects of administrative decision making have on voter education and turnout in municipal elections. What the lack of literature does assume is that local elections officials' decisions related to civic engagement and voter education may reveal solutions to the low voter turnout crisis, but studies in this area have been largely ignored.

What Happens When People Do Not Vote?

A discussion of this magnitude should include the cause(s) and reason(s) why voters elect not to show up on election day. Elections officials and political researchers continue to be amazed at the year-after-year decline in voter turnout (Munks, 2017). Exercising one's right to vote has been an intrinsic and personal right since the fight for equal voting rights. The historical timeline of voting in American has been an inconsistent one. Historically, voting was reserved for white male landowners, then exclusive to all white men, then expanded to freed slaves, then to women, and eventually granted as a right to every registered or voting-eligible citizen. Through a historical observation of events, scholars continue to battle to agree on the primary cause or causes that discourage eligible voters from participating in elections (Munks, 2017).

Low voter turnout has been argued not to have a negative impact on the rules of democracy. Although the cause and effect of low voter turnout is ambiguous to the function of democracy, it is clear that low voter turnout weakens the essential essence and purpose of democracy. Democracy continues to function as provided by law even if voters choose not to participate in elections. In a broader sense, elections are held with one objective, and that is to elect representatives; once the polls are closed, the objective has been met and therefore, democracy continues to function. What holds true is that democracy still operates as designed (i.e., holding an election to elect representatives). Underrepresentation on legislative boards contradicts the objective of democracy and minimizes fairness, equality, and justice during policy planning and funding distribution (Hill, 2006). In other words, when legislatives are unbalanced due to at-large elections,

underrepresented districts do not have much influence on policy decisions and equal

funding allocation (Hill, 2006).

Fiscal Accountability and Election Spending

On average, cities spend nearly $1 million to hold a citywide election (Levinson,

2013; Munks, 2017). City and county clerks are puzzled at the cost of elections and how

the turnout does not meet the amount of resources and manpower put into an election

(Levinson, 2013; Munks, 2017). To illustrate this concept, the mathematical equation is

Election Cost ÷ Registration Total = X (Cost Per Voter); this simple formula can provide

the monetary value per voter that is used at an election. Furthermore, to see the actual

spending per voter who did not participate, compute, Y (Cost Per Voter) ÷ Turnout = Z.

Z is then considered the amount of money spent for each voter who did not cast a ballot.

Y in this case is considered the amount of money wasted for an election. To further

elaborate, the city of Las Vegas spent $1.47 million to hold a citywide election in 2016

where less than 10% of eligible voters participated; roughly that equates to $152 spent for

every one of 7,366 ballots (Munks, 2017). Stein and Vonnahme (2008) suggested that

the decline in turnout reflects a voting behavior that citizens do not perceive the personal

benefits from political participation and are far-removed. Considering this ideology, the

charge of local elections officials toward improving voter outcomes must include an

analysis of the cost benefit when planning voter engagement efforts. Local elections

officials who make decisions based on the cost of elections, fiscal waste when voters do

not participate, and low voter turnout consider a holistic approach to decision making as

expressed in procedural fairness and unbounded rationality decisions viewpoints

(Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Secchi, 2012). The fiscal responsibility of elections is further discussed in this chapter.

Voting Behavior

Why People Do Not Vote

There are varying degrees in the depth of voting behavior, also known as political behavior or electoral behavior. The reason why a citizen may choose or not choose to register to vote and/or participate in any eligible election still bewilders researches today. The explanations as to why voters would decide not to participate in an election are far and wide, ranging from education level and literacy, delimited trust in government, history of failed electoral systems, limited information on candidates and ballot measures, personal time, election infrastructure (outdated election equipment), ease of access, distance of polling location, and the list continues to build. The study of voting behavior takes into consideration all aspects of life: age, race, gender, social differences, political affiliation, and education. Seabrook et al. (2015) confirmed that citizens normally do not pay close attention to policy and politics, voters have very partial or inadequate information about local elections, and voters, although in small numbers, typically rely on cues from political instructions (municipal voter education). Ultimately, greater volumes of information supplied to citizens from municipal public managers relating to elections and local value in participatory democracy may significantly increase voter turnout in local elections (Seabrook et al., 2015; Stadelmann & Torgler, 2013).

Interest and Disinterest

Voting is understood to be an important activity by political researchers, yet both political scientists and psychologists present vague information on the motivation behind

voting and not voting (Britt, 2012). Rotemberg (2009) built upon psychological

assumptions that supported the theory of public choice when understanding voter turnout.

Britt's (2012) research confirmed Rotemberg's theory asserting that voting is an altruistic

behavior and that the well-being of others encourages another to vote, even when the

outcome will have nominal effect on them (Britt, 2012; Evren, 2012; Rotemberg, 2009),

while others confirm that voting is an act of egocentrism and self-expression (Acevedo &

Krueger, 2004). Simply put, voters are more inclined to support candidates who have

similar attitudes and ideologies as opposed to candidates who do not match their interests.

Britt (2012) realized that "high-profile events (national events, foreign and local

terrorism, presidential elections and statewide measures) indirectly influence voting

behavior by heightening emotions and drawing attention to specific issues" (p. 1). That

opinion is confirmed by the slight increase in voter participation at presidential and direct

statewide primary elections. Although limited documented analysis of voting behavior

exists, researchers have focused on the external variables that impact voting behavior.

These variables included age, political party preference, large group or organization

membership, social pressure, emotions, education level, ballot measures, and candidate

campaigns (Britt, 2012). There is limited evidence identifying what implications voter

education and civic engagement have on voting behavior. Because of this limited

evidence, this study is warranted and designed to test theory and practice using

administrative behavior (decision making) and social equity theory applied to local

elections officials and their perspective voter education programs.

Another theory to explain voter participation is the conception of natural duty,

also known as political or civic obligation (Britt, 2012). As previously discussed, voting

is an American civil liberty and fashioned to provide the public with opportunities to elect their representatives and political desires. Rawls's consideration of the problem of political obligation in-depth, questioning to what degree citizens' compliance with voting is debatable (as cited in Forst, 2014). In other words, at what point does low voter participation become problematic? Rawls expressed that the principle of civic duty was demonstrated through participation in government (i.e., electoral process) and consequently formed and informed a just society (as cited in Forst, 2014; Höffe, 2014). The debate among political theorists continues to carry over into today's political discussions that focus on problems derived from low voter turnout. What is true is that political scholars do agree that low voter turnout is itself a problem and a problem for various political, social, and economic landscapes worldwide. Political philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant stood in opposition to Rawls's theory and believed that political obligation was unobtainable without the existence of a social contract or theory of obligation (as cited in Forst, 2014). Rawls further exemplified that citizens' obligation to their society is achieved through compulsory laws that encourages good citizenry and "taking part in the political process" (i.e., voting; as cited in Forst, 2014, p. 128). Forst (2014) offered various strategies to address Rawls's natural duty and obligation out of fairness, but what resonates is that fairness and justice, as theorized through social equity, is democratic participation, and without such participation, society is susceptible to an assortment of synchronized political, social, and economic dilemmas.

Trust and Cynicism

Despite some efforts being done to increase democracy through improved measures such as government's use of e-government, social media, and partnerships with

National Voter Registration Day (Aikins & Krane, 2010; Kang & Gearhart, 2010; Shino & Smith, 2018; Tapia & Ortiz, 2010), voter turnout remains shockingly low. This problem has negatively impacted trust in government causative of inconsequential voter outreach programs (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Although research has demonstrated a strong relationship between increased citizen participation and increased democracy goals, not all groups and interests are empowered to contribute to democracy in meaningful ways (Michels & De Graaf, 2010). Michels and De Graaf (2010) confirmed that strong political involvement greatly benefits democracy, but negatively affects unrepresented and marginalized groups. Michels and De Graaf (2010) found that

> Citizen involvement has a number of positive effects on democracy: not only do people consequently feel more responsibility for public matters, it increases public engagement, encourages people to listen to a diversity of opinions, and contributes to a higher degree of legitimacy of decisions. One negative effect is that not all relevant groups and interests are represented. (p. 477)

A possible cause of this problem is inertia in considering planning of civic engagement programs that limit voter turnout among underrepresented and silent groups. Conceivably, a study that investigates local elections officials' bureaucratic or administrative decision making to implement the CEDP or a like program should provide evidential value to further comprehend how public administrators perform to solve problems.

The Turnout Debate

A conversation about voter turnout is the idea of compulsory voting. Compulsory voting supports the awareness that low voter turnout is a problem for democracy. Compulsory voting is a licit system that imposes legal ramifications on individuals who fail to participate in elections. Although this system is not practiced in America, compulsory voting has been linked to more favorable voter turnout levels in several countries across the globe. Birch and Lodge (2015) argued that strong voting laws like compulsory voting were created to remedy turnout inequality, which has been linked to political inequity. There is a laundry list of political scholars who argue low voter turnout is problematic and make various claims as to why this is the case. Two of the most critical areas of concern are representative democracy and government spending or cost associated with conducting an election. Hoffman, León, and Lombardi (2017) conducted a study to test the consequence of compulsory voting on government spending (lessening election cost) and found no evidence asserting that this form of voting reduces expenses associated with holding an election. As these researchers have sought to solve for excessive government spending on conducting elections, scholars continue to develop additional methods to combat low voter turnout in America, specifically at the local level.

A handful of scholars argue the opposite and beg to question whether declining voter turnout hinders democracy in any way. The argument is then whether low voter turnout is necessarily a bad thing. Saunders (2012) contended that "high levels of turnout are not necessarily democratically better than low levels of turnout" (p. 306). What Saunders was insisting is that turnout is not necessarily a problem from the perspective of democracy because the idea of having the opportunity to vote is a realization of an active

and healthy democracy (Saunders, 2012). Saunders (2012) did not take into consideration the actualities that have been evidential in the cases of low voter turnout at the local level.

While one could argue that low voter turnout is not necessarily bad, there are many who attest to sundry problems that stem from declining turnout and demonstration of an inactive democracy. There have been several positions to solve low turnout among America's political scientist community. Little attention has been given to the idea that more robust voter education and civic outreach can aid in the increase of voter turnout. This study seeks to further understand the relationship voter education has on voter turnout. Voter education may be as important to voter turnout as high voter turnout is a key indicator of a balanced participatory and representative democracy. Hill (2006) described turnout as a needle that could indicate citizen satisfaction with governmental affairs. Alberda (2014) concurred with this idea adding that low turnout is a sign of a suffering democracy and disengaged public. More and more, turnout is seen as a problem as opposed to not being a necessarily bad thing. There is unparalleled support that suggests that low voter turnout is a problem for American politics. On the surface, low turnout can demonstrate how well a government is functioning and a significant measure of its performance. Hill (2006) maintained that turnout in and of itself is "indicative of general satisfaction with government and politics" (p. 208).

<div align="center">Decision Theory and Administrative Action Review</div>

Decision Theory and Administrative Decision Making

Based on the model of psychological and mathematical descriptions of human choice behavior, Takemura (2014) outlined the underpinnings of administrative

<div align="center">43</div>

behavioral decision theory using three distinct characteristics. Administrative behavioral decision making is identified under three series, making decisions under risk, under certainty and under uncertainty, which fully explains the dimensions of decision-making behavior. Social equity principals can inform the study and enrich both the normative and descriptive concepts of decision theory in public administration application to public policy and programming. With this in mind, the research design that seeks to answer what goals of voter education that inform their vote quality are provided to residents and what values of voter education encourage voter participation may inform how the use of decision theory suggests how decisions that impact social outcomes are made.

Decision theory (decision making) has been a mainstay in public administration since its conception under Woodrow Wilson (Frederickson et al., 2016). Frederickson et al. (2016) analyzed decision-making theory in the context of group behavior and not from experience. Group behavior is linked to perception on society and praises the deliberation process of making decisions and suggests that the process of thinking about decisions to solve problems is just as important as the actions and implementation of the plan. Frederickson et al. critiqued Simon's administrative behavior philosophy, which argued that administration is nested in decision making and that administrative behavior is as important as actions derivative of corresponding decisions. Frederickson et al. later confirmed this by expressing the theory further and indicating that "decisions are the predicates of actions, and actions are almost always based on accumulated decisions" (p. 167). In the most basic sense, decision theory places equal value on the thought process that formulates decisions, the implementation of that decision, and the actions implicated by that decision.

Rooted in decision theory is rational choice theory, which is an application of decision theory that validates the need and use of social equity theory in practice (Frederickson et al., 2016). By way of further explanation, rational choice theory confirms the importance of decision-making logic and calls for the analysis of decisions. Decision theory is described as both an analysis of social issues and an ongoing quest to resolve problems as a persuasive management behavior and function that designates the goals to improve public service organizations and social outcomes (Frederickson et al., 2016; Simon, 1965). This use of decision-making theory addresses the gap in the literature that connects social equity and decision-making theories in public administration as quality principals that set the foundation for efficient and effective improvement of social programs in a fair, just, and equitable way.

Decision Theory in Context

Chater (2012) revived the original opinion of decision making that implicated in a rational choice model to include a Darwinian worldview. The Darwinian understanding of decision making mentions that the decision-making process is constant and multilayered involving multiple cognitive apparatuses at play (Chater, 2012). Decisions are not uniformed and will continue to involve multiple analyses to better understand the reasons that support decisions. Low or declining voter turnout poses three major threats to equity, equality, and local economy. There have been several ways of approaching the topic of voter turnout on equity, equality, and local economy. One is that the general rule found in social equity theory should be applied to ensure administrative decision making is linked to equitable distribution of public service (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Frederickson et al., 2016). The second is that equality is met with securing fair and equal

representation of political leaders through an informative voter education and electoral process. And finally, protecting local economy through administrative decision making that uses resources responsibly through the adaption of social equity theory through relentless program planning that seeks to improve underperforming public problems that waste government funds. A continuous review of voter education programs and making decisions for improved measures will increase internal political efficacy (King & Hale, 2016; Frederickson, 2005).

The Evolution of Administrative Decision Theory

Simon (1965) is regarded as one of the pioneers of decision-making framework in public administration, highlighting that the development and evolution of administrative decision theory and scientific framework for how decisions are made is deep-seated in administrative behavior and systematize common sense approach. The structure of decision making and the persuasive and elicitation nature of decision-making power are gauged by giving strict attention to a problem, intellectual processes, and involving professional judgment. Since social problems are sometimes novel, urgent, complex, and vast, practitioners do not have the preference of leaning solely on their experience to gauge possible results and must adhere to decision-making philosophy. Public administration practitioners do not work in a science lab with the ability and flexibility to run trial-and-error tests before the final release of the best antidote; therefore, the concepts rooted in decision theory in public administration are necessary to adapt to be successful in public administration application. This is why a study dedicated to voter turnout using the decision-making framework is timely to possibly inform the best practices toward improving decision making in public administration management. This

connects the ideas that decisions and rational choice are merged and that thought and experience play a critical role in the development of decisions toward public administrative functionality, learning, and purpose (Simon, 1965). Decision theory and decision-making theory is recognized through a notion of rational choice built on the model of expected value of outcomes. The evolution of decision-theory framework considers the role of learning as significant in administrative decision making that is governed by experiences and the imprints of society in the mind of the decision maker (Hammerstein & Stevens, 2012).

Bermúdez (2009) enhanced decision theory and incorporated the theory of rationality as the overarching feature that is distinguished as the aide that guides the normative processes to predict and explain actions, as seen through social equity theory. Put more fundamentally, both decision theory and social equity theory are action guiding and propel public administration practitioners to constantly pursue and devote time to change and improved outcomes of social program service delivery. In the most basic sense, the inclusion of these theoretical frameworks into public administration culture is necessary to inform quality decision-making action that maximizes expected utility of the democratic process (Eder, 2010). And through acceptance of this concept, the research that seeks to answer what goals of voter education that inform their vote quality are provided to residents, and what values of voter education encourage voter participation may inform how the use of decision theory suggests the ideas of how decisions are made amalgamated with social equity theory that impacts social change.

Social Equity Theory, Decision Theory, Turnout and Administrative Practices

Low voter turnout has depressed advances in social equity, equality, and trust in government (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Local elections are significantly important as local elected officials make influential decisions about critical services that impact residents each day. Local decisions affect the funding allocations for library services, homeless relief, health and human services, public safety, and city infrastructure, yet turnout is consistently low. The literature demonstrates that low voter turnout has negative implications for both social and economic equality (Gooden, 2017). Furthermore, low voter turnout is a social problem that has negatively impacted social equity and equality in America (Gooden, 2017; Hill, 2006). Political scientists and street-level bureaucrats (i.e., local elections officials or city clerks) have advocated that local elections are critically important as local officials and local services affect millions each day, from synchronized traffic signals and public transportation to the quality of drinking water and timely waste management. Considering these incredibly vital resources and shared necessities, voter turnout in local elections is extremely low, oftentimes ranging from 6% to 10% of the eligible voting populations for both even-numbered and odd-numbered election years in mayoral/councilmanic elections (Capps, 2016; J. M. Johnson, 2008).

Municipal elections are not held on the same day as national elections, and policymakers have analyzed the impact election days have on voter turnout, including underfunded and feebly managed voter education and civic engagement programs (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Sharp, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wood, 2002). Since election timetables are imposed by federal and state law, local agency reform is far from

adjusting the timing of elections; therefore, other administrative management measures to strengthen voter education programs that seek to improve voter turnout can be beneficial to the goal of democracy. Charted cities do have the authority to conduct city elections to elect municipal officers and matters such as charter changes (League of California Cities, 2018). Charter cities, as highly democratic communities find it necessary to develop and expand voter education and outreach efforts for maximum electorate participation (League of California Cities, 2018). A growing number of scholars agree that meagerly planned voter education programs attributes to low voter turnout, which devalues democracy and ultimately creates fiscal waste (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wood, 2002). Given the sources of research evaluating municipal voter education programs and political activity, declining voter participation confirms that voter education programs are slow to improving voter turnout (Uslaner & Brown, 2005).

Administrative Efficacy and Voter Education Programs

Voter education is essential to facilitating a methodical process by which voters can exercise their right to vote and participate in the political process (Gerber et al., 2017). In short, voter education is fundamental to the successful participation of informed and engaged voters in local government. In the same way, if a voter is ill prepared or unmotivated to participate in the electoral process, quite possibly the goal of the electoral process is significantly reduced. For city clerks, voter education should be an ongoing civic education effort, and through this, democratic participation is achieved. In recent work, political researchers Ruxton and Saunders (2016) inferred that civic education that routinely offers fresh adaptions to voter outreach throughout the year, and not just during an election cycle, can help increase interest and motivate turnout. It is

then understood that citizens have a need to constantly engage the political process to be more inclined to participate year round, not just near or on election day (King & Hale, 2016). In the same way, social equity is positioned within decision making and confirms that participation in government does encourage administrative behavior to work toward a fair and just society. In the most basic sense, social equity theory informs procedural fairness in administrative decision making (Frederickson et al., 2016).

The following illustration further explains decision making based on a social equity framework of procedural fairness. Procedural fairness is concerned with the fair and proper procedures of administrators and does not place immediate importance on the outcome (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Procedural fairness is imbedded in social equity theory and guides administrative actions and decisions to improve public outcomes (Jos, 2016).

Decision Making Based on a Social Equity Framework

As illustrated in Figure 4, the principle of social equity is deeply rooted in the decision-making process. According to Frederickson (2010), this decision-making process best depicts the theory of social equity influenced by further analyzing the social implication of problems and making decisions to address those social concerns. Procedural fairness is the close examination of problems and making decisions that will reform programs that generate solutions to problems, such as fairness, justice, and equality, based on the concepts of social equity theory (Frederickson, 2010; Gooden, 2015). Furthermore, Frederickson (2005) determined that the crux of social equity is manifested in justice, fairness, and equality and should be both guiding principles to social problem awareness and applied to all behaviors leading to resolving those

problems. It is at this juncture Frederickson's (2005) argument that "the initial elements of the concept of social equity are found in the claim that justice, fairness, and equality have everything to do with public administration" is realized (p. 32). Finally, organizational scientist, David K. Hart believed that rationality was imperative to establishing rules of administrative behavior and administrative success, concluding that all decisions and administrative behaviors are guided by theory, and to this degree, social equity ranks high (Frederickson, 1974; Hart & Scott, 1975). The discussion of rationality in administrative behavior is discussed in a later chapter.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION (Decision Theory)

+

EVALUATION OF THE PROBLEM & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS (Procedural Fairness)

=

DECISIONS, ACTIONS, IMPLEMENTATION & ONGOING PLAN EVALUATION (Decisions Theory and Procedural Fairness)
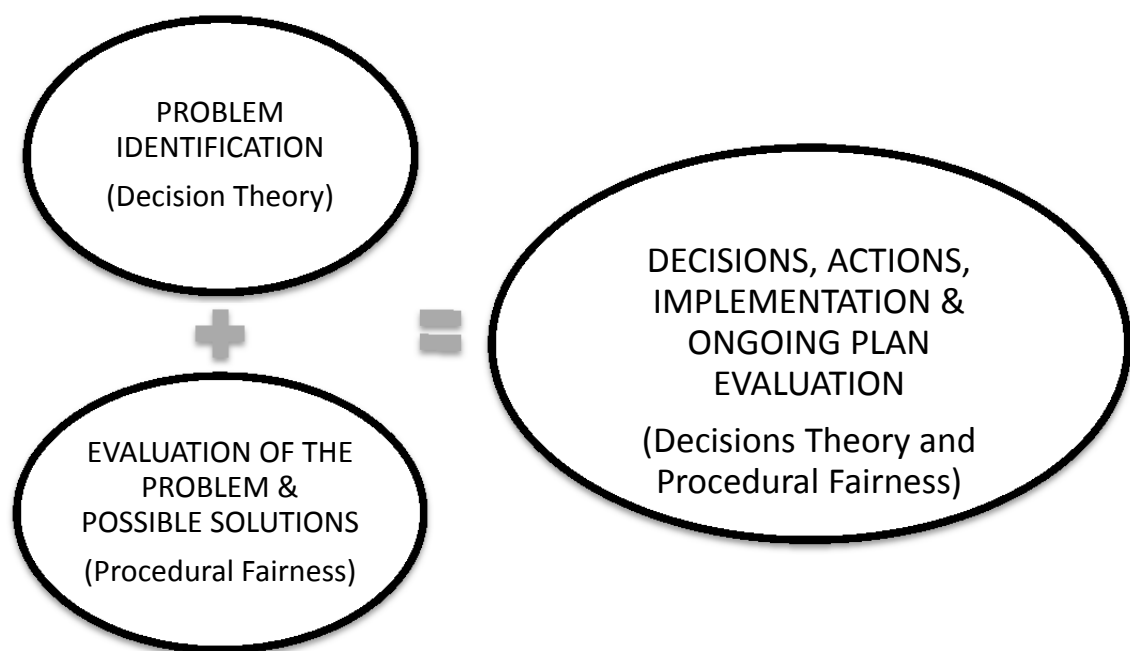
Figure 4. Decision making based on a social equity framework model.

The goal of this study was to discover whether the decision to participate in the CEDP and/or the decision to implement and/or enhance voter education programs was based on low voter turnout. The underlining focus was to ascertain whether decisions to improve voter education outcomes were made through the recognition of distresses of

low voter turnout that have been identified in the literature and from what was discovered in this research study. The design was to examine the administrative action (decision making) of local elections officials to uncover how decision theory is expressed in practice regarding voter education and turnout. Put simply, the aim of this research was to distinguish whether the acknowledgement of low voter turnout was invoked by local elections officials being influenced by voter turnout problems to test the theories of bounded rationality, rationality, or procedural fairness perceptions within decision theory and social equity theory.

The Implications of Voter Education Program Decisions

Locally administered voter education programs generally have the same mission and seek similar outcomes. In a curious review of more than 40 city clerk election websites and mission statements, the general theme was improving local democracy through increased civic participation and accurate, transparent and accessible information. Voter education programs intend to inform and inspire local constituents and are purposed to provide vital information regarding the election and its processes (voting opportunities and candidate information) and to inspire residents to register and turnout to vote on election day. Local elections officials are not only tasked with conducting the election with a high level of accuracy and transparency, but they are also responsible for ensuring visibility of civic engagement programs that educate and prepare voters to be well informed and ready to engage and participate in local elections. These programs can include but are not limited to the following:

- Voter registration drives
- Coordination of community and candidate forums and workshops

- Mock elections at local community events and schools

- Social and print media, free and paid election advertisement mediums

- Detailed sample ballot booklets and voter information guides

- Election information (day of the election, right to time-off of work to vote)

- Voting opportunities (vote-by-mail, early voting)

- Publishing of election and candidate information in a general circulator

- Electronic election guides and mobile applications

- Using city collateral to promote the election (utility bill inserts, etc.)

The decision-making behavior of local elections officials over voter education programs and their involvement to spark higher voter participation in their elections can provide insight on the value of social equity theory in everyday public administration practice. This study sought to discover how decisions were made to participate in a program that was designed to improve turnout throughout Southern California by looking at the administrative behaviors (decision-making attitudes) of local elections officials.

What Is the Big Deal With Low Voter Turnout and Why Study It?

Low voter turnout is a social problem that has negatively impacted social equity and equality in America (Ashe & Stewart, 2012; Bochsler & Hänni, 2017; Gaynor, 2017; Gooden, 2015, 2017). Political scientists and street-level bureaucrats (i.e., local elections officials or city clerks) have advocated that local elections are critically important as local officials and local services affect millions each day, from synchronized traffic signals and public transportation to the quality of drinking water and timely waste management (Bochsler & Hänni, 2017; Hill, 2006; J. M. Johnson, 2008). Considering these incredibly vital resources and shared necessities, voter turnout in local elections is extremely low,

oftentimes ranging from 6% to 10% of the eligible voting populations for both even-numbered and odd-numbered election years in mayoral/council elections (Capps, 2016; J. M. Johnson, 2008). This research explored the problem of low voter turnout and will contribute to the theoretical value of the literature and offer some practical solutions to public administrators to resolve the critical social issues instigated by low voter turnout.

Voter turnout is a serious problem in America and has negative consequences on social equity, social equality, and social justice due to underrepresentation during policy creation and advocacy for funding and services to a certain area or demographic (Bochsler & Hänni, 2017). Considering these facts, what are the causes of low voter turnout and what does this imply for the greater benefit of both citizens and government? Few scholars have recently begun to turn their attention to the impact of voter education and civic engagement activities at the local level, yet the findings offer diminutive support to the root or repair of the issue (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006). However, a study that looks at decisions made through a social equity premise can have a positive effect on how local elections officials view their role and influence in improving social equity issues. This study was created to investigate decision-making processes through a social equity premise and the perception of administrative behavior to offer some support to the cause, effect, and resolution of low turnout, most notably at the local level. The hope was to offer some insight on the complexity of election administration of local voter education programs as being one of the causes that affect turnout in local elections. It is widely documented that voter turnout is a problem for local government as the lack of voter education and civic engagement programs are limited and sketchily developed and monitored (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003). Learning more about the relationship between voter

turnout and voter education programs could offer some guidance as to how decision theory and social equity theory can better inform the management of democratic systems in municipal elections.

As discussed earlier, just 11% of the more than 5.2 million registered voters in Los Angeles County turned out to vote during the March 7, 2017 Consolidated and Special Municipal Election on a countywide ballot measure and to elect citywide high ranking officials and decision makers: mayor, city attorney, city auditor, city prosecutor, city council members, and water district directors according to the report of offices to appear on the ballot provided by the Los Angeles County Registrar of Voters (Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, 2017; Madrid, 2017; Nazarian, 2017). The March 7, 2017 Consolidated and Special Municipal Election was a consolidated election with incorporated cities in Los Angeles County appearing on one ballot. When political researchers and local election commissioners attempt to decipher what major disconnects elections officials and voters have, they agree that voter education and outreach is feeble and ineffective. Voter turnout is a serious issue for local government, which is partly due to lack of voter education and civic engagement programs that are loosely developed and monitored (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003). Investigating the relationship between voter turnout and voter education programs should divulge how decision making within democratic systems and the use of social equity theory impact low voter participation in municipal elections.

Concerns of Voter Turnout and the Cost of Elections

Several researchers have noted that low voter turnout does not only weaken local democracy and fair representation, but it also wastes taxpayer funds (Bochsler & Hänni,

2017; Capps, 2016; Levinson, 2013; Stein & Vonnahme, 2012). When hundreds of

thousands of dollars are put into conducting an election and the return on investment is

not met, government funds are grossly wasted. Current election law governs the planning

and preparation of elections to ensure that voters have equal opportunity and access to

participate in the democratic process. To put it more clearly, the elections official must

ensure that a ballot is available for each registered voter in a voting precinct, also known

as a polling place. In addition, there must be additional ballots in the event a voter makes

a mistake or that anyone is voting provisionally. When one considers efficiency,

effectiveness, and cost, municipalities waste in excess due to low voter turnout. As an

example, if 10,000 voters are registered in a precinct, then approximately 15,000 or more

ballots will be required (*California Elections Code*, 2018). Even at a large election, a

polling place of this size can average a 2% voter turnout, ultimately causing more than

14,000 ballots to be discarded (Capps, 2016). The same is true for all cost associated

with an election. For every election, sample ballot booklets, voter information guides,

and official ballots must be printed. Additionally, more than 2,000 poll workers making

$175 for the day also need to be paid. These election activities can cost well over 2

million per election in large cities, often resulting in a gross waste of public funds, as in

the case of the city of Las Vegas (Capps, 2016; Levinson, 2013).

The following chart depicts the approximate totals and values related to the

prescribed election activities for a large municipality in California with a voter education

approach (see Figure 5). The city of Long Beach is a large city in Los Angeles County

when compared to population and voter registration totals. Election activities for Long

Beach further explain the voter turnout problem as an issue and how public funds are lost.

Election activities are identified in this graph by voter registration, voter turnout, election

preparation, and cost. The election activities model (Figure 5) illustrates the relationship

between registration totals compared to voter turnout, the estimated cost required to

conduct the election, the total cost per registered voter, and the fiscal impact per election

in millions.

ELECTION ACTIVITIES FOR THE CITY OF LONG BEACH

2,500,000	
	$2,100,000
2,000,000	$1,730,962
1,500,000	
1,000,000	
500,000	285,029
0	49,870
	Registration Cost Turnout Lost
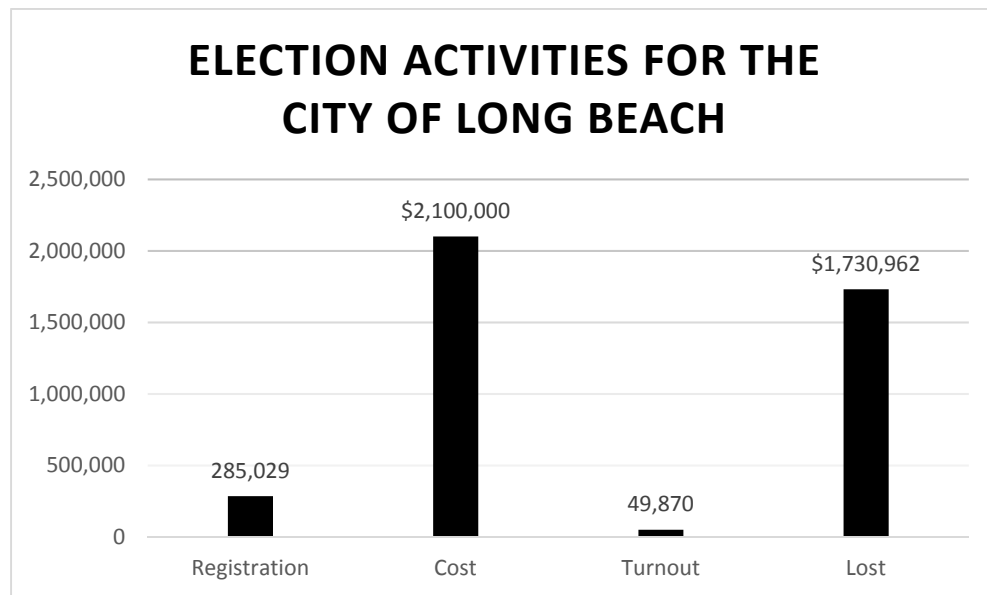
Figure 5. Election activities for city of Long Beach, California—2016. Data from "City of Long Beach Election Statistics," by City of Long Beach, Office of the City Clerk, 2018 (http://longbeach.gov/globalassets/city-clerk/media-library/documents/elections /results/2018/2018-april-10----primary-nominating-election---cumulative-report).

Local elections should be viewed as an investment to both city officials and the

voter. Informed local constituents are the fuel to local economy and ensures fair and

equitable governance when they participate in government (King & Hale, 2016; Shino &

Smith, 2018). Scholars have argued that when voters fail to participate in elections, this

causes a wide divide in fair and representative government and wastes vital city resources

and spending (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Sharp, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wood, 2002).

As illustrated in Figure 5, the voter registration value that overshadows voter turnout; in addition, the lost data grid shows a high financial waste when compared to the cost of the election. This trend has become the status quo for almost every municipality across the United States. It can be concluded that this financial loss can be a premise for evaluating the presence of social equity theory within decision-making processes of local elections officials.

The Urgency for Applied Study of Social Equity Theory and Voter Turnout

There is a limited number of researchers who have evaluated the application of Frederickson's theory on modern public administration practice. It has become common today to overlook the important relationship of public administration philosophy and practice in decision-making processes. As with all complex or wicked problems experienced by public administrators, Frederickson's theory can be readily applied. When considering the role of social equity in public administration with declining voter turnout, Frederickson (2010) believed that social equity is the constant review of public programs that nudge public administrators to use efficient, effective, and equitable administrative behaviors to resolve social problems. Administrative behaviors informed by social equity are vital to successfully resolving social problems that exist in political institutions (Valenzuela, 2017). When public programs and services are not met with the high cost associated with operations, social equity is not being exercised as outlined in the new public administration described by Frederickson (Frederickson, 1974, 2010; Frederickson et al., 2016). Applied social equity theory, limited attention to or absence

of voter education programs can have debilitating effects on voter participation and election program outcomes. It is at this juncture that voter education and civic engagement decision making can be evaluated against social equity to better realize the significance of effective decision-making practices.

History of Voting in America and the Rise of Social Equity Theory

The concept of social equity can be traced as far back as the times of renowned philosophers Aristotle and Plato—original ideologies of social equity related to workplace equality, opportunity, and the cost of equality (Gooden, 2015; Vasavada, 2011). Traditionally, the extent of social equity literature was rampant in political science writings. It has not been until recently that the conception of social equity has been well regarded as the model for guiding public administration practice and bureaucratic behavior (Frederickson, 2010). As noted, social equity meanings have evolved and vary across disciplines with each variation emphasizing the values of fairness, justice, and equality. This examination and application of social equity theory realizes the implication of the role and behavioral procedures of public administrators and how their actions should certify equitable distribution of public services that promote social equality in election programs.

A recurring theme in the political science literature is fairness and justice. Rawls's theory of justice presented a claim fairly favorable to Frederickson's social equity theory. Rawls's 1972 theory attempted to look at distributive justice or the social contract of justly distributing goods in society as a method of solving equity problems in public administration practice (as cited in Höffe, 2014). The theory is clearly characterized in literature as justice represented as fairness or "justice as fairness" (p. 5)

and tightly linked with decision theory as its primary method of operation (Höffe, 2014). Rawls understood that the application of justice had to reflect best practices derived from decision theory and assertively could not exist without the procession of the other. In the same way, Frederickson's (1974) preeminence of fair, just, and equitable dissemination of public services (as promoted in effective public program management and administrative behavior) has been the guiding source for modern public administration. Considering the theoretical concepts, social equity was developed to achieve optimum fairness and justice in public service and Rawls's theory of justice proposed to promote justice as fairness is analogous.

The goal of the theory of justice was to advance the original thought of utilitarianism, which was a theory that suggested the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people is ideal for a just society. The concept of utilitarianism has now been redefined as justice and within that framework, the importance of fairness in administrative actions. Fairness, in its most universal sense, is identified as the impartial and just application to duty and service (Frederickson et al., 2016). By way of further explanation, fairness in practice is a concept that promotes judicious and unbiased administrative behaviors in decision-making practices when implementing and improving public programs. When applying these theories to practice, the planning of voter education programs should be designed to adapt to all citizens regardless of race, political party preference, social class, or educational attainment. Ensuring that voter education programs promote a transparent government and provide necessary information to voters to make informed decisions is in fact a commitment to Frederickson's and Rawls's theories. Social equity theory is driven by the theory of justice and is equivalent in its

meaning and application, and both independently inform decision theory. This study was dedicated to discovering the implications of applied social equity in postmodern public administration; the theory of justice rather adds another layer of understanding that enhances the benefit of theory and practice.

Social Equity Concepts of Procedural Fairness and Public Administration

Social Equity and the Core Pillars of Public Administration

Acknowledging the core pillars of public administration is vital to any discussion of social equity construct. Social equity informs all six ideologies of the core pillars of public administration (Frederickson, 2010). In fact, social equity is the underpinning of public program management or even more, the spirit of ethical public administration practice (Frederickson, 2010; Gooden, 2017). Since the conception of social equity, the core pillars are worked in a way that cannot escape the essence of the theory when put into practice (Svara & Brunet, 2005). The core pillars consist of (a) the politics-administration dichotomy, (b) accountability, (c) representation and responsibility, (d) legitimacy, (e) fairness and equality, and (f) efficiency and effectiveness. Social equity is deeply rooted in the application of each core pillar, and although it is not a statutory charge, its philosophy infers a calculation of fairness and justice (Guy & McCandless, 2012). Guy and McCandless's (2012) claim established the notion that social equity is a behavior or positive motivating force within Public Administration that encourages leaders to act with intended fairness, basic right, and justice. Finally, social equity is a foundational value for each pillar in all aspects of theory and research. In other words, it is through the application of social equity theory that the core concepts are permitted to operate and be effective in practice.

Social Equity: Its Many Faces and Theoretical Transformations

       The product and by-products of social equity are relatively antiquated, dating as

far back as Plato and Socrates. Guy and McCandless (2012) recognized that "equity as a

concept evolved from a philosophical (social contract) to a structural (constitutional) to

an administrative (social equity) concern" (p. 6). Put more fundamentally, equity was

part of the social contract that has its bearings in political obligation and is a metaphorical

contract among citizens that orders the way in which life will be managed. The structural

or constitutional concept of equity evolved out of race and gender issues, which is where

laws become an effective means to assert social equity. Finally, this series of events led

to the administrative concept of social equity from general concern of inequalities that

resulted in procedural fairness and justice (Guy & McCandless, 2012). Historically,

social equity theory was meshed in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory.

Rousseau (in 1762) articulated that the greatest good for all people is only possible with a

reduction in civil liberties and social equality (Guy & McCandless, 2012). Over time,

this thought received resistance as the new public administration gathered momentum. It

was important to cast a system that promoted the security of natural rights and facilitation

of a more just society through civil laws and participation in government, as proposed by

social political philosophers Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Paul Appleby (Guy &

McCandless, 2012). Social equity is the premise on which developing theories are

grounded based on Rawls's discussion of justice as procedural fairness in public

administration (Denhardt & Denhardt 2003; Wooldridge & Gooden 2009). To date,

Frederickson's (2010) social equity theory, to which this study is dedicated, is concerned

with the determinations of fairly operated administrative systems and their public service

delivery as well as the interpretation of the professional when problem solving and using theory to guide behavior (Guy & McCandless, 2012). As with all conceptual frameworks, there is normative rejection of social equity fluidity as demonstrated through the historical transformations; the new public administration has maintained this framework as most notable and feasible (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Wooldridge & Gooden 2009).

The History of Social Equity

Social equity was later reclassified to clarify justice and fairness in the board scheme of public administration application and the inference of how administrators' behavior should be guided by this theory. Frederickson (2010) understood that social equity in public administration influenced perception of events, shaped responses to improving society, and provided a rationale for professional behaviors and actions that encourage improvement to programs and organizations. He also noted that social equity involved a relentless review of public services and practices that discovered new measures of improved government and how the theory application requires flexibility and repetitive reform in public administration practice (Frederickson, 2010).

Some scholars argue that social equity is not social equality or social justice for that matter although on the surface, these social action terms share the same sentiments (Frederickson, 2010; Gooden, 2015; Guy & McCandless, 2012). However, as evidence-based research, each of these perspectives are not completely synonymous and can be easily misread without proper delineation. At first glance, social equity, social equality, and social justice can be viewed as the fair and impartial management and administration of the fair, unbiased, and equitable distribution of public services and programs. Until

the Minnowbrook Conference in 1968, the first ever documented meeting of the most prolific scholars of public administration and managers reframed and repurposed social equity as the topmost goal of public administration, which is the foundation of this study. Social equity in this sense is a relentless review of public services and practices that discovered new measures of improved government and how the theory application requires flexibility and repetitive reform in public administration practice (Frederickson, 2010). Of the three most popular terms denoting fairness, justice, and equality in public administration, social equity itself stands alone and is clearly defined. Furthermore, it is understood that social equity will not be misinterpreted with its closely related counterparts. Frederickson (2010) also argued that social equity is also the basis for planning for the unforeseeable problems that can result from the remedy of present ones.

The discussion of social equity cannot commence without a brief review of the historical context in which the theory grew and now stands. The main underscore that set the tone of social equity in public administration today was the controversial race relations protest, social inequality, and the voting discrimination practices experienced by minority groups in the early 1960s. Argument of the history of social equity in public administration in the United States has been well documented and made very clear. Acknowledgment of voting discrimination that led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, voter disenfranchisement, and social repression realized the need to promote social equity in public administration. It was at this point in time when equality was redefined, commencing with the separation of races that had recently been enforced by law and seen as unfair and unjust (N. J. Johnson & Svara, 2011). In the context of this study, major attention was given to social equity in the field of public administration during the

national Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s that streamed from social inequalities in voting (Gooden, 2015). Bearing this in mind, social equity research and theory was birthed out of social disparities such as voter disenfranchisement and injustices based on protected class categories and racial prejudices.

How Social Equity Theory Became the Model for New Public Administration

The Civil Rights Movement was pivotal in gaining national attention and bringing awareness to social injustices, thereby steering the work of social equity in modern public administration. Through this awareness, theory development, and literature, the evolution of social equity has guided social action and public policy reform, such as The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which is federal legislation in the United States that prohibits racial discrimination in voting practices. Voter disenfranchisement has not received attention post-Civil Rights Era. It would be ideal to now focus on this problem through the lens of social equity theory (Friedman, 2005). The study of social equity theory and voter turnout is a major step toward identifying the resistance to modern civic participation. Furthermore, both the problem and research questions reaffirm the critical need for the social equity principle to encourage advanced studies aiming to define and diminish postmodern voter disenfranchisement. The urgency of this problem has become imperative to comprehend as voter disenfranchisement or marginalization has moved from subtle formal injustices, to being governmentally invested, to now being widely ignored (Friedman, 2005).

Social Equity in Context

Frederickson's theory of social equity can be applied to a study that is examining the relationship of voter education programs and voter turnout. Since the social equity

perspective is rooted in problem solving of economic, social, and political inequalities,

this theory best informed this study. Prior to its evolution, social equity was a widely

conceived concept that defined equity and equality in the workplace and equal

opportunity. It was later conceptualized to denote fair and impartial public service

delivery and manage administrator's decisions and actions toward ensuring equality in

public goods. By way of further explanation, social equity and decision theory serves as

a universal public administration code of conduct that guides decision and behavior that

seek constant social change and improved outcomes. Social equity theory is used to

analyze social issues, direct the application of services, and solve problems; it is a

descriptive management behavior and function that describes the social perspective and

management styles that improve public service organizations (Frederickson et al., 2016).

Frederickson's theory of social equity was conjured to resolve the very expressive

inadequacies in theory and practice and canonized it as the pillar of public administration

(Gooden, 2015). Contemporary review of social equity literature looks to public

administrator behavior to influence planning decisions that advance equality for the

public with an ever increasing progressive "emphasis on the importance of passionate,

practical, and measurable strategies" (Jos, 2016).

Equally, Gooden (2015) stated that "social equity is directly related to the

democratic principle of justice. It is the concept of fairness applied to all, not just select

groups" (p. 13). Social equity in public administration implies that public administrators

should be attentive to differences of injustices and inequalities in society that seek to

threaten the viable nature of democracy and good government (Gooden, 2015). N. J.

Johnson and Svara's (2011) work highlighted social equity as "the promotion of equality

in a society with deep social and economic disparities" (p. 3). Social equity is now understood to be the fair, just, and equitable distribution of public goods and services regardless of social status, race, or gender. The grain of literature discussion on social equity guides the management of public organizations and the administrative decisions that produced better quality-of-life outcomes. With this proposition in mind, the research questions are balanced enough to respond to social equity as the fair, just, and equitable distribution of public goods and services with improved voter education programs that are purposed to increase voter turnout in local elections.

Social equity theory commands the procedural fairness in the identification and examination of problems and in making decisions that will improve programs and create feasible solutions to problems (Gooden, 2015; Svara & Brunet, 2005). Jos (2016) affirmed that advancing social equity in modern day administration is realized through the existence of procedural fairness. Procedural fairness is concerned with the fair and proper procedures of administrators to promote greater access and participation in civic engagement, in this case, making decisions that encourage and motivate increased voter participation through various methods (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Perceived procedural fairness is imbedded in social equity theory and guides administrative actions and decisions and consistently reviews decisions to improve outcomes (Jos, 2016). Furthermore, Norman-Major (2011) argued that procedural fairness in decision making should be part of educating public administrators to be successful in application of duties. As demonstrated, the literature supports the idea that the foundation of procedural fairness in decision making prepared public administrators to be effective as agents of change. Herian, Hamm, Tomkins, and Pytlik-Zillig (2012)

explored the relationship between public participation and procedural fairness and found procedural fairness can in fact increase public participation in government through perception of public trust when the public perceives that decisions are fair and just. Herian et al. (2012) clarified that the application of procedural fairness can be beneficial in advancing the goals of public participation and engagement efforts through acknowledgement of problems and influence fair and correct decisions. This research study uses social equity theory to discover how voter education planning is used to further improve vote quality and participation. A discussion of goals and attitudes of voter education programs tied to social equity could enhance the logic behind the motivation of improving civic participation in local elections.

Considering the implications of public administration application and the implication of how administrators behave, social equity advised this study on how bureaucratic actions impact social change and improve social outcomes. As described earlier, deficient voter education programs have been challenging to the advancement of social equity and legitimacy in the democratic process. Despite some positive efforts toward increasing civic engagement and participation, voter turnout remains astonishingly low. This problem has negatively impacted social equity, equality, and trust in government, which is why it is necessary to apply the social equity framework to accurately reflect and respond to the phenomena and, in some way, provide a unique explanation to the problem. According to Hill (2006), voting is the meter of the public's trust in government; when citizens do not vote, they are expressing their opposition to the status quo or are just not informed. This concept in political behavior is still being monitored and argued. On the other hand, when voters are shown, through robust

political involvement and voter education outreach, that public officials and potential candidates are credible and knowledgeable in the areas of public policy, voters may very well turn out to vote in local elections. Citing the work of Avant, Britt (2012) noted that "people who are perceived as credible and intelligent are more likely to impact our decisions" (p. 1); this acknowledgement should drive higher voter turnout at elections with candidates who closely project these traits or demonstrated such skill.

Social Equity Gives Direction to Public Administration Behaviors and Outcomes

Furthermore, social equity is considered the crux of public administration and the foundation on which all policy decisions are made and how bureaucratic behaviors are directed. Vasavada (2011) affirmed that "social equity is a core concept in the modern public administration and need due attention in policy development and implementation" (p. 592). To put it more fundamentally, social equity theory should be reevaluated and brought to the forefront to assist local election bureaucrats to revamp policy and improve performance of voter education programs. Considering the aspects of voter education that motivate elections officials' commitment to civic engagement programs is a research inquiry that links effective building of voter education programs to social equity theory. Social equity is the premise on which all policy decisions are made and confirms how scholars should connect it (social equity) to the fundamental motions of bureaucratic behavior and practice (Vasavada, 2011).

Emphasis is given to social equity and decision theories as the foundation of public administration's guarantee of fair, just, and equitable delivery of public goods implemented by fair public policy and administrative practices. Frederickson (2010) understood social equity in public administration as the careful, considerate, and

methodological identification of problems, which in return motivate administrative

behavior to respond responsibly to evaluate and resolve social problems in a fair and

accurate manner. Fundamentally, social equity is the constant review of public programs

and the requirement to develop operational tactics to ensure the efficient, cost-effective,

and equitable administration that produce positive social outcomes.

Procedural Fairness Guides Decision Making and Administrative Behavior

As two of the main ideas of public administration, equity and equality serve a

guiding principle for public administrators and define the application of public service

and delivery. Social equity theory favors procedural fairness as the behavior guiding

system informing public administrators to make comprehensive decisions with a full

understanding of the complexity of the problem as well as the goals and outcomes once a

decision is implemented. Even more, procedural fairness is defined as the decision-

making process that ensures direct application in decision planning with fairness, justice,

and equality in social systems. In this context, procedural fairness claims that efficient

and effective public administrators constantly assess voter education program

performance and formulate solutions to problems specific to increasing low voter turnout.

For Frederickson (2010), social equity is procedural fairness that facilitates the efficient,

cost-effective, and equitable administration of public goods and services and promotes

social change. In the same way, R. I. Johnson (2012) acknowledged that social equity

informs the best practices to public administration leadership and voter outreach. He

continued to proclaim that academics have made mild attempts in the field to adopt social

equity as a serious area of inquiry, warranting the necessary promotion of this theoretical

framework in applied public administration study and practice. Social equity guides

leadership to be proactive to solutions that ensure distribution of public services and controls that have been most notable in public health, traffic control, environmental protection, and the like, but not in voter education and civic engagement services.

Key social equity theorists support the underpinnings of social equity as the prime behavior configuration governing how to plan, coordinate, and implement qualified public service programs (Frederickson, 2010). The association with open democracy and one-vote rule extends the importance of mastering robust voter education programs that encourage at minimum, the urgency to participate in elections (Frederickson, 2010). Imperial equity and social equity theorists such as Dwight Waldo and H. George Frederickson agree that social equity theory in public administration is a continuous examination and analysis toward improved changes to public services (Frederickson et al., 2016). In this instance, local elections officials' responsibility to social equity can be found in constant modification of voter education services that warrant increased voter turnout. Frederickson (2010) concretized that "a commitment to social equity not only involves the pursuit of change but attempts to find organizational and political forms which exhibit a capacity for continued flexibility or routinized change" (p. 8). It is sufficient to say that social equity facilitates the well-organized, cost-effective, and reasonable administration of public that conducts administrators' behavior to regularly monitor and regulate change to improve social systems to produce greater benefits and outcomes.

A Combined Theory of Decision Making Supporting the Value of Democracy and Representative Government

Hajnal and Lewis (2003) determined that important policy is made at the local level, and the will of local constituents is not included in the decisions that affect their activities for daily living. Hajnal and Trounstine (2005) and Hajnal (2010) found that low turnout in city elections highly reduces fair representation of marginalized groups and the economically disadvantaged. In the same way, they noted that elective offices are not reflective of the majority within a specific area or district. When considering the national average voting age and voting eligible populations, this implies a problem for American politics, especially council-manager forms of government. This research explored the problem of low voter turnout and contributes to the theoretical value of the literature and offers some practical solutions to public administrators to resolve this critical social issue. Finally, voter turnout is a serious problem in America and has negative consequences on social equity, social equality, social justice, and legitimacy and efficiency in government.

Hill (2006) argued that high voter participation is key to maintaining trust and ensuring equitable distribution of public goods and services. For this reason, voter participation is significantly important to local democracy; therefore, voter education and outreach is fundamental in preserving fair political representation and equal distribution of public goods and services in local government. Olsen (2003) noted that voter education brings about civic literacy that propels voter turnout and trust; this indicates greater equality due to voters being more politically charged and cognizant. Olsen (2003) discovered that the imbalance in high social capital and poor voter turnout is found in

extremely low civic involvement and trust or confidence in government, which was originally made available through robust civic engagement and voter outreach programs. Determining the significance of the strength of robust voter education on voter turnout may advance the understanding of how local elections officials make decisions to increase voter turnout, and whether corresponding behaviors and actions are entrenched in Frederickson's social equity theory.

Another idea of voter participation is the conception of natural duty, also known as political or civic obligation. As discussed previously, voting is an American civil liberty and fashioned to provide the public opportunities to elect their representatives and political desires. Forst (2014) discussed that Rawls considered the problem of political obligation more in depth to further understand to what degree voting compliance is debatable. In other words, at what point does low voter participation become problematic. Rawls expressed that the principle of civic duty was demonstrated through participation in government (i.e., electoral process) and consequently formed and informed a just society (Forst, 2014; Höffe, 2014). In the same way, social equity is positioned within decision making and confirms that participation in government does encourage administrative behavior to work toward a fair and just society. In the most basic sense, social equity both forms and informs fairness in administrative decision making and justice in procedural obligations.

The debate among political theorists continues to carry over into today's political discussions that focus on problems derived from low voter turnout. Political scholars do agree that low voter turnout is itself a problem and a problem for various political, social, and economic landscapes worldwide. Political philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke,

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Rousseau, and Kant stood in opposition of Rawls's theory and believed that political obligation was unobtainable without the existence of a social contract or a contract theory of obligation (Forst, 2014). He further explained that citizens' obligation to their society is achieved through compulsory laws that encourage good citizenry and "taking part in the political process" (Forst, 2014, p. 128). Forst (2014) offered various strategies to address Rawls's natural duty and obligation out of fairness, but what resonates is that fairness and justice, as theorized through social equity, is democratic participation and without such participation, society is susceptible to an assortment of synchronized political, social, and economic dilemmas.

Low voter turnout is problematic to the democratic process and weakens trust and deprives the poor of equality and fair representation (Hill, 2006; Mikołaj, 2006). Hill (2006) also insisted that nonparticipation or low voter turnout in local elections allows room for elite power to materialize and decreases political equality and fair distribution of social wealth. Similarly, strong voter education and civic engagement leads to positive turnout. Finally, Olsen (2003) discovered that the imbalance in high social capital and poor voter turnout is found in extremely low civic involvement and trust or confidence in government, which was originally made available through robust civic engagement and voter outreach programs.

There is ample research that has studied the variances of voter turnout. Goebel (as cited in King & Hale, 2016) observed the relationship between turnout and direct democracy, using ballot measure initiatives as a variable. The hypotheses or expectation was that higher voter turnout would be a result of having multiple initiatives on the ballot (King & Hale, 2016). Studies suggest a positive relationship between having multiple

initiatives on the ballot concerning social issues and increased voter turnout in a handful

of elections (King & Hale, 2016). Ballot initiatives that focus on social issues like the

legalization or decriminalization of marijuana as opposed to political reform issues like

term limits and redistricting have generated a slight increase in turnout, but still very

minimal (King & Hale, 2016). Although many researchers have studied the relationship

between voter turnout and voter-by-mail and early voting, this relationship is still being

studied (King & Hale, 2016). In other words, turnout increases when voters are informed

and engaged. It is sufficient to say that voter education contributes to this distribution of

collective political knowledge and is arguably important to turnout upsurge efforts.

Conclusion

The concept of social equity is an ancient one and has been a guiding principle

and core pillar of public administration that dates back to Aristotle and Plato. Original

ideologies of social equity only related to workplace equality, opportunity, and the cost of

equality (Gooden, 2015; Vasavada, 2011). Traditionally, the extent of social equity

literature was rampant in political science writings; it has not been until recently that the

conception of social equity has been well regarded as the model for guiding public

administration practice and bureaucratic behavior (Frederickson, 2010).

Frederickson's expansion of social equity provides a valuable leadership blueprint

to support the development of decision-making processes and solving wicked problems

from a fair, just, and equitable perspective, which as has been noted, can only be

provided through conscious and conscientious administrative behavior in local

government. The literature also identified several reasons for low voter turnout and

subsequent risk factors pinpointing lackadaisical voter education and outreach programs at the local level as a major area of concern (Hajnal, 2010; Hajnal & Trounstine, 2005).

Finally, as one of the core pillars of public administration, social equity enlightens the application of all six ideologies that comprise the core pillars. Since the conception of social equity, the core pillars have been worked in a way that cannot escape the essence of the theory when put into practice (Svara & Brunet, 2005). The core pillars consist of (a) the politics-administration dichotomy, (b) accountability, (c) representation and responsibility, (d) Legitimacy, (e) fairness and equality, and (f) efficiency and effectiveness. Social equity is deeply rooted in the application of each core pillar, and although it is not a statutory charge, its philosophy infers a calculation of fairness and justice (Guy & McCandless, 2012). Guy and McCandless's (2012) claim establishes the notion that social equity is a behavior or positive motivating force within public administration that encourages leaders to act with intended procedural fairness. Finally, social equity is as a foundational value for each pillar in all aspects of theory and research. In other words, it is through the application of social equity theory that the core concepts are permitted to operate and be effective in practice (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Guy & McCandless, 2012; Svara & Brunet, 2005).

The next chapter discusses the methodology that was used for this research study based on the discussions in Chapters 1 and 3. The conversation of procedural fairness, as explained within the confines of social equity and decision making, shaped the qualitative research design, instrumentation, and measurement standards as a research design for this study. The methodology chapter details the overall research design and rationale, the protocol, sample and population, the construction and sources of the data set, the

statistical instruments, data collection, significance of the study, accepted limitations, and the variables measured. Chapter 3 also highlights the research design and how the research was mapped from merged sources of literature. This study examined the range of decisions made to improve voter education program outcome based on factors that will promote increased political participation in local elections and whether decisions are made without regard to low voter turnout. The examination of administrative decision making partly within the context of social equity theory is guided by three overarching research questions, which are detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 details the overall research design and rationale, the protocol, sample and population, the construction and sources of the data set, the statistical instruments utilized, data collection methods and disposition, significance of the study, accepted limitations, and the variables measured. Chapter 2 provided previous research on what challenges local government has experienced in the management of voter education programs that are beneficial to increasing democracy and improving voter turnout (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006; Trounstine, 2012). According to Hajnal and Lewis (2003), the challenge is found in feeble approaches to increasing civic participation, improving voter education programs, negating the use of media outlets, and consequently, voter turnout being largely discounted and ignored. Among city organizational structures, the role of the city clerk has been designated to promote the democratic process and increase voter participation. Through an effort to promote professionalism of the role as a member of the executive team, various municipal clerk organizations are leading the efforts toward giving city clerks a roadmap for cultivating innovation to increase voter participation. Such organizations are creating models to assist cities in boosting active citizen involvement in democracy. Notably, the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) was created to assist city clerks' response to the declining turnout in their jurisdiction and help build a program to grow civic participation by improving voter education programs. Hill (2006) discovered that low voter turnout is problematic to the democratic process and may cause unfair representation in local legislation. Hill also insisted that nonparticipation in local elections removes the control of curtailing elite power and decreases political equality and representation.

Diverse conceptual thought is vast about this problem for many observers of American politics and scholars leading research and discussion on election administration. Green, Gerber, and Nickerson (2003) researched the fact that voter turnout is exceptionally low for local jurisdictions outside of federal and state concurrent elections. Similarly, Burden and Neiheisel (2013) noted that voter turnout is low for nonconcurrent elections. City officials' strategic management to improve and increase voter turnout should be a primary goal in response to low voter turnout. The problem allows for closer examination of the CEDP as a strategic management system and its implications on improving voter turnout in various municipalities in the state of California who piloted the program. The pilot program was not used as an analysis for this study. The essence of the program was used to guide the research design and research questions.

Some changes within election administration has primarily focused on political reforms that included increasing the number of days of voter registration before an election to 15 days, to providing early voting as soon as 29 days prior to an election, and relaxed vote-by-mail options (*California Elections Code*, 2018). Although these efforts appear feasible and attractive, they have not significantly increased voter turnout (Stein & Vonnahme, 2008). The intention of voter education is to inform and inspire local constituents; its purpose is to provide vital information regarding the election and its processes (voting opportunities and candidate information), and to inspire residents to register and turn out to vote on election day. Local elections officials are not only tasked with conducting the election with a high level of accuracy and transparency, but they are also responsible for ensuring visibility of civic engagement programs that educates and

prepares voters for the upcoming election. These programs can include, but are not limited to the following:

- Voter registration drives

- Coordination of community and candidate forums and workshops

- Mock elections at local community events and schools

- Social and print media, free and paid election advertisement mediums

- Detailed sample ballot booklets and voter information guides

- Election information (day of the election, right to time-off of work to vote)

- Voting opportunities (vote-by-mail, early voting)

- Publishing of election and candidate information in a general circulator

- Electronic election guides and mobile applications

- Using city collateral to promote the election (utility bill inserts, etc.)

Rational of the Study

Holbrook and Weinschenk (2014) acknowledged that voter turnout in municipal elections has not been examined. Previous studies of voter engagement have primarily focused on the strategies implemented by nonprofit civic organizations and disregarded the influence of public organizations on increasing voter participation (LeRoux & Krawczyk, 2014). The major idea of this exploratory investigation examined the relationship between the decision to participate in the (CEDP) and improve voter education programs and thoughtfulness of improving a social problem analyzed under social equity theory. Identifying the significance of the relationship may advance the understanding of how local strategic management of social systems and the suggestions, such as social equity, found in public administration theory can improve public programs

and social outcomes. Incorporation of social equity theory and decision theory may significantly inform this study on the ethical implications that negligible voter education and outreach can have a negative impact on voter turnout. Ethical considerations in this study sought to advance the public's interest and acquaint people with the moral obligations of the democratic process. The promotion of democratic participation helps safeguard against a lack of citizen involvement of governance that can weaken the barrier of elite power and associated politically charged problems or government setbacks.

Public management of improving voter turnout has been challenging for nearly all municipalities across the United States (Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Hill, 2006; Trounstine, 2012). According to Hajnal and Lewis (2003), the challenge is found in feeble approaches to improving civic engagement and voter education programs, consequently largely discounting and ignoring the problem as a problem, which set the precedent for this study. A missing link in this area of concern is understanding the relationship of procedural fairness that decision-making theories have on inventive voter education outcomes toward improving democratic participation. It is widely known that education has been associated with a "higher propensity to vote" (Lassen, 2005, p. 104), but little evidence has been provided about whether municipal voter education programs have some significance in increased levels of voting tendency. To this end, the CEDP was developed to challenge local elections officials to improve their voter outreach and education program using a master blueprint or template to increase voter turnout. The CEDP was piloted in 2009 with 19 cities, and participation has grown through the network of city clerks and membership in the International Institute of Municipal Clerks and the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials. This program has been

selected to evaluate the decision-making amenability of local elections officials based on the program's context in relation to the study topic. Additionally, the program serves as a sizable network that can provide some insight on the role of decision making within a social equity premise. The CEDP was not the program under evaluation as found in a specific case study design. This research observed the decision-making behaviors of city clerks using the CEDP program model.

Voter turnout is a serious problem in America and has negative consequences on equity, equality, and fair representation in political arenas. Very few researchers have looked at the impact of voter education and civic engagement activities at the local level; therefore, this research is relevant and appropriate as election administration and election reform are becoming hefty topics of decisions at every level of government. This study looked at the administrator's decisions to distinguish whether those choices were funneled through a social equity premise. Such study can have positive effects on how local elections officials view their role and influence in improving social equity issues. This study investigated decision-making processes through the idea of social equity and perceiving the thoughtfulness of social equity issues. Learning more about the relationship between voter turnout and voter education programs could offer some guidance as to how decision theory and social equity theory can better equip administrative measures for improving participation in municipal elections.

Hill (2006) confirmed that low voter turnout in America is widely regarded as a problem, yet little thought has been given to local voter education programs and the implication on improving voter turnout. Elections officials at the local level in the state of California were recruited for the study to discover the impact of the program on

improved voter participation. Considerable research has been given to voter turnout in America, yet analysis of local elections officials' decision making toward improving voter turnout locally has received little attention. The aim of this research was to address the effect and impact of how grassroots programs are being implemented to increase voter turnout in local jurisdictions.

Research Questions

This study examines the range of decisions made to improve voter education program outcome based on factors that will promote increased political participation in local elections or whether decisions are made without regard to low voter turnout. The examination of administrative decision making partly within the context of social equity theory is guided by three overarching research questions:

1. How are decisions made as related to improving voter education programs efforts?

2. Do local elections officials evaluate voter education program outcomes on an ongoing basis?

3. How are decisions made through the social equity component of procedural fairness decision processes as related to voter turnout and voter education programs?

Research Question 1 (RQ1) seeks to understand how local elections officials make decisions to improve voter education programs. RQ1 relies on qualitative methods to analyze the reason and cause a decision was made in context of the study.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) is intended to answer whether local elections officials evaluate (consider improvements, perceived to acknowledge a problem exist) voter education program outcomes at least once every 12 months. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (n.d.), effective program management involves an annual review

of program performance or times when a program appears to be falling below its performance goals. The third research question (RQ3) is designed to further investigate theory in practice and examine the concept of ongoing review of public programs and "monitor outcomes" (Guy & McCandless, 2012, p. 5, which is operationalized as any act of evolution, improvements, or modifications performed at least once within a 12-month time span (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Svara & Brunet, 2005). The research predetermined the social equity theory construct of constant review of program outcomes to include any frequency range between weekly and annually. According to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (2017), continuous improvement review is suggested to happen within 12 months.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) seeks to answer what motivated local elections officials to improve a voter education program? The research question was developed to examine two of the several concepts that shape social equity theory: (a) identification of social problems and needs (e.g., administrator's acknowledgment of low voter turnout as a problem) and (b) perception forming decisions (e.g., administrator's perception of low voter turnout related to decisions to streamline voter education programs; Guy & McCandless, 2012). RQ3 relies on qualitative methods to analyze (a) perception of voter turnout and (b) motivation to streamline voter education efforts, two operational terms to identify the existence of conceptual administrative behaviors found within social equity theory.

Research Design

The research examined the decision to participate in the (CEDP) or improve an existing program and what relationship exists between decisions to improve voter

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education programs and the social equity premise, using social equity theory and decision theory frameworks. Identifying the significance of the relationship may advance the understanding of how local strategic management of social systems and the implications of open government (or participatory government: a government that provides opportunity for civic participation and managing a program that promotes this effort, i.e., the CEDP) can influence or improve voter turnout locally. Incorporation of social equity theory and decision theory may significantly inform this study on the ethical implications of negligible civic engagement and voter participation. The promotion of the democratic participation helps safeguard against a lack of citizen involvement of governance that can weaken the barrier of elite power and associated politically charged problems or government setbacks.

Assuming that motivation can be analyzed from different levels and multiple perspectives, this study follows a qualitative method approach to analyze perception of low voter turnout. The theory under examination is social equity theory, which was realized as ideas of New Public Administration by H. George Frederickson in 1968, which was the campaign to making fair, just, and equitable treatment of citizens the primary focus of administrators when responding to problems (Frederickson, 2005). Social equity theory has since evolved into the foundation of public administration guiding theory and practice (Frederickson 2010). Social equity guides administrative behavior and decision making in managing productivity of government systems, such as program evaluation and budgeting (Guy & McCandless, 2012). Within the social equity context, administrative behavior and actions (decision making) are conceived by identification of complex social problem (e.g., low voter turnout), which is the causal

value being used to test significance of social equity theory in modern public administration practice.

This study examined how elections officials perceive the relationship between voter turnout and voter education program planning, how the concepts intersect in their decision making, and what actions elections officials take based on that awareness. Additionally, the social equity theory component under examination is procedural fairness. Procedural fairness is concerned with the procedural tools (problem identification and decisions-making process to solve problems) administrators used to address social issues through program policy. As local elections officials seek to demonstrate measurable program achievement gains to meet accountability requirements, they must leverage and balance decisions with those that address issues of social justice in program management.

A qualitative method was used to explore decisions that lead local elections officials to participate in the CEDP or revise current program efficiency, and whether that decision was motivated by low voter turnout (the problem). The research was designed to discover whether the concepts found within social equity theory are applied in program management through operationalized measures. Participant responses were interpreted and analyzed to evaluate any existence of applied social equity principles that motivated decisions to review and improve programs due to low voter turnout.

Administrative decision making and perception of low voter turnout significant to social equity theory constructs were measured and categorized during data collection and analysis using qualitative methods research design. The qualitative methods research design was used to examine perspective and confirm or corroborate research findings

(Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010; Creswell, 2009). Additionally, this design was

selected to identify motivations that influence decisions and discover the significance of

social equity theory in public administration practice. Research participants were asked a

series of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) and responses were examined using

axial coding qualitative analysis method to group core themes based on each narrative.

The qualitative method employed a narrative collection method to analyze perception and

rationale; this is an appropriate tool to use when defining interactive characteristics and

relationships that help describe culture and trends (Creswell, 2009). The narrative

method was used to allow participants to be descriptive in their responses in the same

format as in-depth interviews. The research design explored all responses and conducted

close analysis using an axial coding qualitative method that grouped core themes and

trends found in the responses, in a manner similar to grounded research methods

(Creswell, 2009).

The measurement and matrix were created from the themes (experiences and

behaviors) discovered in the survey results. To more profoundly test for the social equity

concept in modern public administration, a quantitative measure was used to test

frequency. This test of frequency is based on the number of times administrators

consider, evaluate, or make decisions to alter or improve the voter education program.

Frederickson (2005, 2010) confirmed that social equity is the practice of consistently

thinking about and evaluating public programs in order to improve social outcomes. To

account for this, questions were asked that require a response to be provided in a

numerical format or numerical range. This number or range was analyzed to show the

frequency of voter education program evaluation, which tested the social equity concept of procedural fairness developed by H. George Frederickson.

This research sought to understand whether the theory of social equity, as a construct that at its core suggests public administrators who constantly evaluate public education programs on civic engagement and its performance and make necessary modifications that best maximize the publics' interest and utility, acknowledges social equity in decision-making processes. Data analysis incorporated a qualitative method design that consisted of inductive data analysis. Additionally, the design research had some characteristics of an emergent design in which questions may be altered once data collection begins (Creswell, 2009). The flexibility to modify questions increases internal validity of the study ensuring that participants understand questions and helps guide reasonable narrative responses. This research design was suitable for this topic because it allowed for greater clarity of the impact of the piloted program and its implication on voter turnout when investigating perception and values.

Individuals decide to do things for different reasons but may end up with the same benefit, solution, or result. The same is true for public administrators; however, understanding whether they make decisions under a social equity premise will better inform the profession as to whether social equity theory truly guides administrative behavior and decisions. To put it more clearly, a person may have decided to attend a baseball game because his or her favorite team is playing, another person may have decided to attend in memory of his or her late father who had love for the game, whereas another person may have decided to attend because he or she won tickets from a radio contest or holds season passes. Whatever the case may be, each decision was made

independently, yet those decisions led to attending the same game. The same is true for all decisions; therefore, in the context of this research, it was important to test the social equity theory significance to the role of public administration. Decisions are not uniform and continue to involve multiple analyses to better understand the reasons that support decisions. This study was designed to use a layer of analysis to further understand research in this area.

Methodology

The convoluted repetitive form of questioning within the online survey using different key words such as motivated, reasons, decision was used to allow for the results to be cross-checked and to gather additional information that online surveys are often not able to fully capture. Organically, open-ended questions can provide meaningful input, yet online surveys have their drawbacks due to incompletion and limited explanative responses (Creswell, 2009; Tyreman, 2017). The online survey was preferable above in-depth phone or in-person interviews due to timing and availability. Local elections are conducted on even years during the month of April (which was when the online survey was available) for most cities, and the aftermath of elections even takes longer to certify and wrap up elections. Online surveys are faster to complete at a time most convenient for the responder as opposed to participating in an in-depth interview (Creswell, 2009; Tyreman, 2017). Additionally, the researcher was empathic to the high demand and time constraints during such an election period and was also involved in conducting a citywide election.

The prevailing or overarching theme was that public administrator's decision was driven by acknowledgment of social problems. As an illustrated example, the research

discovered whether the decision of a city clerk to participate in the CEDP was done with consideration of low voter turnout and/or ineffective or low-activity in his or her voter education program. This study argues that local elections officials may not consider every tool and resource obtainable or imaginable to help increase voter turnout in local elections. The examination of administrative decision making partly within the context of social equity theory was guided by three overarching research questions:

Research Questions

1. How are decisions made as related to improving voter education programs efforts?

2. Do local elections officials evaluate voter education program outcomes on an ongoing basis?

3. How are decisions made through the social equity component of procedural fairness decision processes as related to voter turnout and voter education programs?

Finally, the research measured awareness of low voter turnout and whether the issue was regarded as a problem. The research also measured the role of social equity (did the problem motivate the decision to participate) and measured the rationale/decision to participate (is social equity identified and does it motivate participation or evaluation for program improvement).

Population and Sample

This research study surveyed city clerks in the state of California. The research design sampling methodology was convenience sampling due to availability, accessibility to the most concentration of qualified individuals in the population, convenience, and willingness to participate. Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling method used because of convenience and opportunity, being drawn from part of a populations

that was readily close and available (Creswell, 2009). Application of convenience

sampling in this research recruited participants from one of the largest network

associations for California city clerks where a smaller sample was expected to participate.

The population for this study was city clerks in the state of California. The study

recruited individuals who are members of the city (CCAC) and also signed-up to receive

e-mail correspondence via the City Clerk ListServ. It is important to note that every

member of the association may not have signed-up to receive messages from the

ListServ. Clerks who opted to receive messages from the ListServ served as the sample

for this study. Equally, it is not definite that all city clerks in California are in fact

members of the CCAC. The ListServ was used because of its availability to the

researcher and timing considerations. When considering time, the research was

conducted during a time when California municipalities were conducting a citywide

election or coordinating an election with the county authority. Be this as it may, this was

a time when elections officials were dedicated to ensuring a successful election and may

have been unavailable for lengthy phone solicitations. The ListServ provided access to

the highest concentration of targeted members of the population conducive to this study

in one recruitment effort. Professionals who opted to receive electronic messages from

the association received an e-mail soliciting participation in the study. The sampling

focused on city clerks who may have participated in the CEDP and/or individuals who

manage and oversee civic engagement and voter education programs. The population for

this study was city clerks in municipalities within the state of California.

    This sampling technique was accomplished by accessing the California

Association of City Clerks, the largest and most known professional membership

organization for city clerks in California. The City Clerk ListServ, a member only communication portal made available through the California Association of City Clerks (CCAC) was used to send an e-mail and invite participants to take the survey. This Listserv is an electronic communication tool (i.e., e-mail blast) used by city clerks throughout California to share ideas, get information, and network among its diverse membership. Through a professional membership and personal access to the City Clerk Listserv, the researcher was granted permission by the Listserv moderator to send the invitation to participate in the study to its members (see Appendix B).

The study was completely anonymous; there was no identifying information that divulged the identity of the research participant. Individuals who wished to participant were asked to provide informed consent before continuing on to the survey questions and were given the opportunity to opt out at any stage of the study (see Appendix C). The name of the participant, city/agency, exact or directional geographic location, jurisdiction, demographics, form of government or population size were not disclosed in the study. A unique identifier classified the subjects. Once exported from the survey collector, the survey results and data collected were stored in an electronic file maintained on a password protected USB flash drive. All printed surveys were securely kept in a key-locked home office filing cabinet. Printed surveys were destroyed once the study was approved and published. The words participant, responder, respondent, subject, and interviewee are used to identify and address participants in narrations and discussions. Participants had the opportunity to review the study after it was published and available to the public.

Instrumentation

A causal qualitative analysis methodology was used to study the variables for this study mainly because this research aimed to study multiple realities and perspectives of individuals. The variables for this study are motivation and cause. The research questions were designed to sift decision-making behaviors of elections officials that were analyzed as sources to discover whether officials were motivated to make program management decisions based on a social problem (low voter turnout), thus testing the concepts of social equity theory in practice. Acknowledgement of social equity was measured and classified after data collection and analysis of the responses received. The measurement was created from the self-reported experiences of individual participants and then coded for qualitative and quantitative analysis and testing using the heterogeneity methodology. The research instrument was an online survey using SurveyMonkey. The research measured the administrative behavior of elections official (i.e., decision-making process and perception of events, such as, low voter turnout, problem solving, strategic management principles, program management practices, etc.).

A qualitative method strategy was used to explore decisions that led local elections officials to participate in the CEDP or revise current program efficiency and whether that decision was motivated by low voter turnout (the problem). The research was designed to discover whether the concepts found within social equity theory are applied in program management through operationalized measures. Participant responses were interpreted and analyzed to evaluate any existence of applied social equity principles that motivated decisions to review and improve programs due to low voter turnout. Administrative decision making and perception of low voter turnout significant

to social equity theory constructs were measured and categorized during data collection and analysis using a qualitative methods research design. The qualitative methods research design was used to examine perspective and confirm or corroborate research findings (Castro, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2009). Additionally, this design was selected to identify motivations that influence decisions and to discover the significance of social equity theory in public administration practice. Research participants were asked a series of open-ended questions, and each narrative was examined using axial coding qualitative analysis method to group core themes based on each narrative. The qualitative method employed a narrative collection method to analyze perception and rationale, which is an appropriate tool to use when defining interactive characteristics and relationships that help describe culture and trends (Creswell, 2009). The narrative method was used to allow participants to be descriptive in their responses in the same format as in-depth interviews. The research design explored all responses and conducted close analysis using axial coding qualitative method that grouped core themes and trends found in the responses (Creswell, 2009). The measurement and matrix were created from the themes (experiences and behaviors) discovered in the survey results. To more profoundly test for the social equity concept in modern public administration, a quantitative measure was used to test frequency. This test of frequency is based on the number of times administrators consider, evaluate, or make decisions to alter or improve the voter education program. Frederickson (2005, 2010) confirmed that social equity is the practice of consistently thinking about and evaluating public programs in order to improve social outcomes. To account for this, questions were asked that required a response to be provided in a numerical format or numerical range. This number or range

was analyzed to show the frequency of voter education program evaluation which tested the social equity concept developed by H. George Frederickson.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through an online survey information management system known as SurveyMonkey to collect the data from city clerks who implemented and actively engaged in monitoring the performance and improved measures of a local voter education program. The city clerk elections official or designee (assistant city clerk, deputy city clerk, etc.) was the public employee questioned for this research study. The city clerk also known as the local election official or designee with management decisions was the core focus of the data collection. The research questions were designed to capture the reason and rationale of why city clerks decided to participate in the CEDP or to improve an existing voter education program. Additionally, the CEDP was a great program to use for this evaluation since voter education, outreach, and civic engagement programs are public service programs under the purview of the city clerk that directly impact people. Therefore, how decisions are made to enhance voter education programs related to improving voter turnout was the best possible program to evaluate at this level, centering this research topic.

For the data collection set, each election official was asked the following open-ended and closed-ended questions, and the measurement instrument was created based on information gathered in the review of the literature on social equity theory and the CEDP model. Furthermore, the literature justifies the type of question and unit of analysis:

- Why did local elections officials decide to improve their voter education program and/or participate in the CEDP? (to examine the concept of "how problems shaped responses to improving social outcomes" within social equity theory)

- What motivated city clerks' decision to participate? (to examine the concept of "rationale for professional behaviors and actions" within social equity theory procedural fairness)

- Do local elections officials constantly evaluate voter education program performance? (to examine the concept of "relentless review of public programs" within social equity theory)

The research design asked the following open-ended questions considering decision-making theory (DT) and social equity theory (SET) research areas. Open-ended questioning: (DT = decision-making theory research area; SET = social equity theory research area).

1. What is your position/title?

2. What was the reason you participated in the California Ethics and Democracy Project or reason to implement and/or consider improving a voter education program, if you did not participate in the California Ethics and Democracy Project? (DT)

3. Why was implementing the California Ethics and Democracy Project or implementing and/or consider improving a voter education program important to you and your agency? (DT)

4. What motivated your decision to participate or implement and/or enhance a voter education program? (DT)

5. What ideas come to mind when you think about voter turnout in your City? (SET)

6. How was fiscal impact and election cost part of your consideration to participate and/or consider improving a voter education program? (SET)

7. How often do you evaluate or make decisions to improve your voter education program? (SET)

    Select one:
    ☐ Weekly
    ☐ Bi-weekly
    ☐ Monthly
    ☐ Bimonthly
    ☐ Quarterly
    ☐ Semiannually
    ☐ Annually
    ☐ Bi-Annually
    ☐ Not at all
    ☐ Other, please specify

Data were gathered through an online survey. SurveyMonkey is an online survey tool that has been used by many students to conduct research for their dissertations or graduate-level work, according to the product creators (SurveyMonkey and IRB Guidelines). Within SurveyMonkey, a survey generator was used to ask a series of questions to city clerks and local elections officials to aid in the further decoding and understanding of perception of behavior and actions related to voter education programs and how those programs are matched to consistently improve public programs and outcomes as set forth in social equity theory. An official letter that provided evidence of permission to use the SurveyMonkey platform to conduct this research was obtained from SurveyMonkey and submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California Baptist University for review and approval.

Informed consent and participant rights. Informed consent was published on the first page of the survey and did not allow the participant to begin the survey without first having agreed to participate (see Appendix C). A waiver to documentation was approved by the IRB at California Baptist University. Participants were required to confirm they agreed, acknowledging receipt of the consent to participate before proceeding with the survey. If a participant did not wish to respond to a question, the survey allowed for a "no response "or "prefer not to respond" selection or he or she was given the option to skip the survey question as not to violate the respondent's right to withhold information before moving to the next question. Furthermore, the respondent also had the option to withdraw from or exit the survey at any point during the survey as not to infringe on his or her right to withdraw at any stage of the research process as outlined in the bill of rights for research participants.

Participant Anonymity and Safety

Subject and participant security features of the online survey included secure transmission of sensitive information through the enabling of SSL encryption that protects sensitive data as it is transmitted through electronic communication pathways from the participant's computer and SurveyMonkey servers according to the survey standards of secure transmission practices. The participants did not need to change any current settings on their computer; SurveyMonkey has already encrypted this through its secured measures. When the survey was created, the IP address tracking was disabled to make sure that the survey participants remained anonymous. Participant anonymity and safety was the utmost concern to ensure that the policies set forth by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research and the provisions for protecting

human research participants were followed. The procedure to support subjects who potentially experience anxiety, stress, or physical harm in the course of this research was to refer participants to the Employee Assistance Program offered through the Human Resources Department. All records were destroyed after the completion of the study and publication of the results.

Each participant was provided the link to SurveyMonkey's *Issues Taking Surveys*, which is an information guide for individuals taking the online survey. This information provides examples, instructions, and resources pertaining to various issues and concerns that may have arisen when taking the survey. These helpful tools provide instructions on how the information is collected and stored and information about responding anonymously, special features, survey design and formatting, and technical issues and technical support. The link provided was the following: https://help.surveymonkey.com /categories/Taking_Surveys.

Getting Responses: E-mail Initiations

The survey was sent using California Association of City Clerk's ListServ. Through the e-mail, the survey invitation was delivered to every city clerk in the state of California. The survey had a cutoff date and time that was identified after IRB approval. The survey link and letter of introduction were sent using the CCAC (n.d.) Membership ListServ. Rationale and justification for using the ListServ was provided in Chapter 3.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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Data analysis incorporated a qualitative method approach and mimicked sequential exploration strategy. Sequential exploration strategy begins with qualitative analysis and is then complimented by quantitative explanation and support (Creswell,

2009). Through a qualitative approach, the questions were coded to group themes and patterns to evaluate and measure how the decision to participate in the CEDP was made. The social equity principle was analyzed and interpreted to reveal whether administrative decision making through a social equity premise existed. After data collection and analysis, a matrix was created consisting of the respondents' narrative for decision making and social equity theory, and the researcher analyzed, compared, and grouped those statements to test significance.

The codification of the data was conducted through a detailed analysis of each response to identify key words and to group similar or approximating words and phrases in order to classify them into the most recurrent themes. Themes where selected based on the words or phrases found to be identical in each response. For example, the research posed questions seeking to learn why an individual was motivated to do something. These responses were analyzed in step one to gather a sense of reoccurring words and phrases. The second step required that the researcher prepare a manual table to list key words and phrases on a cross-sectional chart. These words and phrases were totaled and the number was presented in tables listed in the findings chapter.

Data were analyzed and explored to decode personal narratives for decision making on each survey question. The analysis included a scrutiny on all narratives, words, phrases, or list of phrases to discover recurrent themes and compared and grouped those responses into categories. Using a quantitative approach, the frequency of how many times throughout the year city clerks plan program activities, evaluate, and modify a voter educator program further studied the combined theories under investigation. For the purposes of this study, responses were grouped and assigned subcategories during

close examination of key phrases, words, meanings, and definitions decoded from personal narratives and closed-ended questions. As an example, low voter turnout was classified based on various responses that acknowledged the concept as a social problem, problem, social injustice, voter disenfranchisement, voter apathy, weakened democracy, and the like as provided in the short answer provided by the respondent.

This examination did not measure or evaluate the performance or effectiveness of the voter education programs and only assessed the administrative behavior of city clerks (i.e., decision-making process and perception of social events). The results are presented graphically to display the relationship between the independent variables of decision making and dependent variable of knowledge to voter turnout as a social equity issue. For the purposes of this study, social equity was assigned subcategories to not disenfranchise the administration behavior of city clerks. As an example, social equity was classified also by the following terms and concepts: social problem, problem, social injustice, voter disenfranchisement, weakened democracy, wicked problem, and the like. Data analysis coding method for testing bounded rationality and procedural fairness linkages is discussed in detail in the next section.

Bounded Rationality Decision Making

Bounded rationality decision making is designated as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on low voter turnout but disregarded high election cost in that decision exhibit bounded rationality or heuristic decision-making behavior. The argument is that decisions are based on external notions of problems and do not necessarily consider the full range complexity of the issue to reach a satisfactory decision as immediate resolve. As an example, the discussion on

high election cost and waste spending validates the fiscal crisis consideration of low turnout when individuals do not participate in elections. Nonetheless, administrators who do not consider election cost in decisions to improve voter turnout may exhibit bounded rationality decision behavior. The absence of a cost/benefit analysis is part of a bounded rationality decision-making process (Simon, 1965). On the other hand, rational decisions would consider the cost and guide local elections officials to make program decisions based on fiscal responsibility among any other goals.

The opposite test of bounded rationality is rational or unbounded rationality, which suggests that decision makers take into account a comprehensive view of complete and available information and configurable computations and data that can be used to close evaluate a problem and make decisions that are true and accurate. A limitation to this study is that the research did not test for optimal configuration of organizational resources that could further identify what decision theory is custom to individual decision makers. What this study does offer is a series of questions that can assess rationale and motivation that can be analyzed to makes empirical suggestions based on these theoretical frameworks.

Rationality Decision Making

Rationality decision making is designated as the concept that local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on ideas other than voter turnout would exhibit decisions based on rationalization and rationality. This argument is based in rationality decision making. The rationality model suggest that decision makers select the first acceptable solution to a problem even if it is not ideal for solving the problem. Rationality decision makers are mechanical and immediate (Secchi,

2012). Administrations exhibit rationality decision behavior when the first satisfactory or

practical solution is realized without regard to the effectiveness of the decision (Secchi,

2012). In the same way, rationality selects the first acceptable solution to a problem even

if it is not ideal for solving the problem. Administrations display rationality decisions

when the first satisfactory or practical solution is chosen without regard to the success of

the outcome (Viktorovna, Pavlovna, & Mokhailovna, 2018). Historically, rationality

decision making was mainly used in the study of human behavior related to financial

decision making (Viktorovna et al., 2018). The rule and approach of rationality decision

making can also be applied to any study of administrative decision making. In the same

way, Viktorovna et al. (2018) suggested that examining the degree of rationality can be

studied as a feature of information processing (knowing about the problem/issues).

Making decisions based on rationality and risk averting plants the idea that administrators

do not acknowledge problems when making decisions. Risk aversion or averting is best

denoted as avoiding risks due to the unknown and whether the outcome is expected to be

less than basic utility (Dow & Ribeiro da Costa Werlang, 1992). Finally, Viktorovna et

al. (2018) found that individual decision making uses rationality as the basis of analysis

of the information presented or rationalized as reality based on the situation or problem.

It is within this framework that administrations display rationality decision behavior by

selecting a status quo average or satisfactory choice (Viktorovna et al., 2018).

Procedural Fairness Decision Making

        Procedural fairness is designated as local elections officials who decided to

participate or improve a voter education program solely based on major areas of voter

concerns, access, low voter turnout problem and conducted an evaluation of voter

education programs within a 12-month period (Frederickson, 2005, 2010). Procedural fairness decision-making processes are made on the perception of a social problem, indicating the concept of social equity of procedural fairness. Procedural fairness does not place more consideration on the outcome as much as the process of the decision itself (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015; Gooden, 2015; Herian et al., 2012; Jos, 2016; Svara & Brunet, 2005). All in all, the perception of procedural fairness decision making places equal value on the process and the directed outcomes. This process is closely linked to the goals of public administration practice in identifying problems, planning responses to solving problems, and monitoring the plan to ensure the proposed outcome is targeted and achievable. In the same way, procedural fairness as informed by social equity theory is best understood as the consistent evaluation of decisions, plans, and the outcomes in a manner that allows administrators to measure the success of the decision plan and make necessary adjustments throughout the decision plan lifespan (Frederickson, 2005, 2010). The process of making decisions to improve voter education programs based on voter issues suggests realization of the social equity theory concept of procedural fairness in public administration practice. Moreover, attitudes toward consistently monitoring program outcomes and making cost effective measures is also preferable in procedural applications. Local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program, monitored program outcomes at least once every 12 months, and considered high election cost exhibit procedural fairness in decision making. Stein and Vonnahme (2008) suggested that the decline in turnout reflects a voting behavior that citizens do not perceive the personal benefits from political participation and are far removed. Considering this ideology, the charge of local elections officials toward

improving voter outcomes must include an analysis of the cost benefit when planning

voter engagement efforts. Local elections officials who make decisions based on the cost

of elections, fiscal waste when voters do not participate, and low voter turnout consider a

holistic approach to decision making as expressed in procedural fairness and unbounded

rationality decisions viewpoints (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Secchi, 2012).

To test this theory, participants who indicated the reason to participate in a

program to improve voter education efforts was low voter turnout and did not indicate

program evaluation performed within the 12-month period would not be considered to

practice procedural fairness in decision making. Equally, participants who indicated the

reason to participate in a program to improve voter education efforts was low voter

turnout (problem identification) and also stated they evaluate program outcomes within

the 12-month period (ongoing measurement of outcomes from decisions and actions)

would be considered to practice procedural fairness in decision making. Social equity as

procedural fairness encourages administrators to look at problems constantly and

monitors outcomes. Through this method of constant assessment, administrators are able

to make necessary adjustments to program plans to effectively and efficiently solve

problems (Frederickson, 2005, 2010).

The two-way decision theory test example was predetermined from the literature.

For the purpose of Figure 6, CC indicates city clerk. Findings were reported as a group;

individual survey responses were not presented in figures as shown in Figure 6. The

purpose of a qualitative design was to identify any trends across various administrators

and analyze results using the two-way theory test shown in Figure 6.

CC 1 Hypothetical Decision-Making Responses

Q3 Answer: Decision to participate or improve was **Low Voter Turnout**	**+**	**Q7** Answer: I did **not** consider high election cost	**=**	**Bounded Rationality Decision Making**

CC 2 Hypothetical Decision-Making Responses

Q3 Answer: Decision to Participate was **Low Voter Turnout**		**Q8** Answer: **Semiannual** program evaluation	**=**	**Procedural Fairness Decision Making**
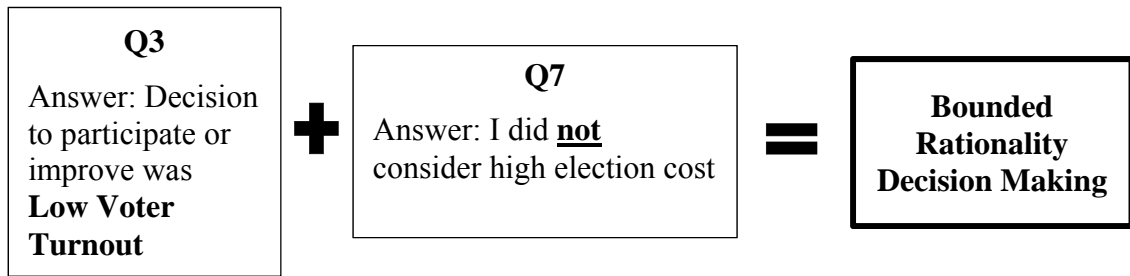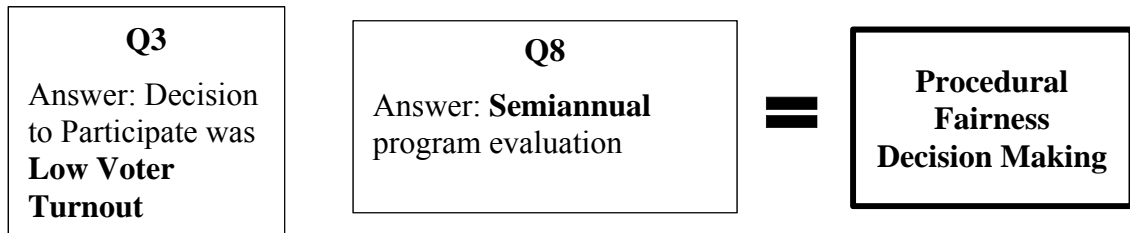
Figure 6. The two-way decision theory test sample.

Some limitations in the data collection might have occurred during the cycle of this study. Due to the CEDP being a model open for individualized interpretation, there may have been some variation in program design. Some limitations may include a difference in definition of civic values and even the regard of low voter turnout as a problem. Although there are some variations across the board, there were no foreseen limitations. Considering the small and close-knit community of professionals through an annual summit, participants may have provided contact information of officials who also piloted the program with similar measures and success to the researcher.

This research was inconclusive in supporting the theory of social equity as outlined by H. George Frederickson for procedural fairness, yet further in-depth study or other instrumentation could provide greater insight using this population. This exploration was designed to discover the emphasis of the principle of social equity on

administrative behavior, also identified as decision-making processes. Understanding the role of decision making within the premise of social equity can further validate Frederickson's social equity theory and the importance of such theory in public administration practice on improving social problems. Although this study cannot generalize for the entire population of public administration practice and services, it can in fact offer some relative information to the literature governing its application to duty. This study used an online survey that collected personal narrative and filter responses for attitudes, behaviors, actions, decisions, and beliefs that were extracted from rationales that may have taken place approximately six years earlier. Considering this length of time, being asked to recount why a decision was made may be vague, ambiguous, and imprecise. However, the questions were intended to direct participants to a specific event that may help recollect memory and involvement; therefore, this method of inquiry was identified as a proficient means to collect and analyze the results. Another limitation is that employee turnover is uncertain between the time period in question (2010 to present), which would invalidate the participant from the study and potentially reduce the population sample. Considering the typology of discovery and the role of theory, a potentially low population sample would not heavily nullify the study. The raw survey data are presented in the appendix section.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the rationale for the study and the methods used to conduct examination of local elections officials' motivation and actions for improving a voter outreach and education program. The methodology used a qualitative research design that guided the development of research questions derived from layering sources of

literature to best assist in the discovery of why decisions to improve voter education programs occurred. Decision-making theories such as procedural fairness were explained within the confines of social equity and merged with other key decision-making theories that shaped the qualitative research design, instrumentation, and measurement standards as a research design for this study. Chapter 3 detailed the overall research design, rationale, protocol, sample and population, the construction and sources of the data set, survey design, the statistical instruments, data collection, significance of the study, known and potential limitations, and the variables measured.

The theory under examination is social equity theory which was realized as ideas of New Public Administration by H. George Frederickson in 1968, which was the campaign to making fair, just and equitable treatment of citizens the primary focus of administrators when responding to problems. The research methodology was designed to examine the decision to participate in the CEDP or to improve an existing program and the relationship that exists between decisions to improve voter education programs and the social equity premise using social equity theory and decision theory frameworks.

This chapter also discussed data collection and design through use of an online survey information management system known as SurveyMonkey to collect the data from city clerks who implemented and actively engaged in monitoring the performance and improve measures of a local voter education program. Finally, the chapter concluded with the overall causal qualitative analysis methodology and how the study examined the variables or multiple realities and perspectives of individuals. The variables for this study are motivation and cause. The research questions were designed to sift decision-making behaviors of elections officials that were analyzed as sources to discover whether

officials were motivated to make program management decisions based on a social problem (low voter turnout), thus testing the concepts of social equity theory in practice.

Acknowledgement of social equity was measured and classified after data collection and analysis of the responses received. The measurement was created from the self-reported experiences of individual participants and then coded for qualitative and quantitative analysis and testing using the heterogeneity methodology. The research measured the administrative behavior of elections officials (i.e., decision-making process and perception of events, such as low voter turnout, problem solving, strategic management principles, program management practices, etc.).

A qualitative method strategy was used to explore decisions that led local elections officials to participate in the CEDP or revise current program efficiency and whether that decision was motivated by low voter turnout (the problem). The research was designed to discover whether the concepts found within social equity theory are applied in program management through operationalized measures. The chapter supported reliability in coding and presentation of raw data results and documented the steps in which data were interpreted and analyzed to evaluate any existence of applied social equity principles that motivated decisions to review and improve programs due to low voter turnout. Validity and reliability were also strong due to the raw data for questions specific to the cross-sectional analysis required for codification of results as an appendix for only those questions that asked an open-ended question (see Appendices D-G). Administrative decision making and perception of low voter turnout significant to social equity theory constructs were measured and categorized during data collection. An analysis using a qualitative methods research design to support the cross-sectional

analysis of results and test the two-way decision-making theory as outlined in the

literature was also used and detailed in the methodology section.

Chapter 4 consists of the data results as explained in Chapter 3 and provides a

detailed account of the participation and the research findings and discusses the

procedures for analysis, offers conclusions and recommendations, and provides the

suggestions for further research. It also includes an overview of how the data were

collected, coded, presented, and summarized in a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter 4 discusses the research findings from the survey described in the previous chapter and summarizes the analysis and provision of the findings. The data was collected through SurveyMonkey, an online survey system specifically designed to collect data from city clerks who implemented a specified voter education program and/or actively engaged in program management efforts by enhancing program elements to increase voter participation in elections. The research questions were designed to elicit rationale and perception of events through open-ended questioning that would be analyzed, coded, and operationalized to test for any significance of social equity theory concepts selected for examination under this study. The rule of social equity theory posits that public administrators are constantly engaged in the evaluation and maturation of public programs. Social equity theory encourages administrative behavior to closely examine program performance and make necessary modifications that best maximize the public's interest and utility. This study assumed evaluation to be understood as its universal term. This research did not study the technical and procedural operations of the meaning of evaluation. Likewise, it did not go into deeper analysis of what evaluation looks like across program variations. The operationalized term for "ongoing evaluation" is presumed to be any general or personalized evaluation method of a voter education program used at least once within a 12-month period based on program performance literature.

For Frederickson (1974, 2005, 2010), social equity facilitates the efficient, cost-effective, and equitable administration of public goods and services and promotes social change. To test this theory, a qualitative methods approach was implemented to survey

city clerks in the state of California on the rationale, perception, and decision making (which is further operationalized as administrative behavior/action) of their role and its influence of voter education and program outcomes. Furthermore, social equity theory is built on the premise of recognizing unique social problems and solving those problems through various decision-making tools and practices. Motivation is the weighted unit of analysis to test theory. Research participants were asked several questions to which they had the opportunity to respond with a short narrative in their own words, phrases, or list of phrases. Personal narratives were analyzed and interpreted to discover whether administrative decisions are made through a social equity premise. The data are presented as a matrix consisting of the personal narrative or phrase(s) for each participant for decision making and then analyzed, compared, and grouped into themes based on similar statements that were used to test significance to the research questions.

As a sampling technique, convenience sampling was deployed to select subjects who hold the payroll title of city clerk and/or act as the elections official for a local jurisdiction that conducts stand-alone elections. The sampling focused on city clerks who may have participated in the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) and/or individuals who manage and oversee civic engagement and voter education programs. The population sample for this study was city clerks in municipalities within the state of California. This sampling technique was accomplished by accessing the City Clerk Association of California (n.d.), the largest and most known professional membership organization for city clerks in California. The City Clerk ListServ, a member only communication portal made available through the California Association of City Clerks was used to send an e-mail and invite participants to take the survey. This Listserv is an

electronic communication tool (i.e., e-mail blast) used by city clerks throughout California to share ideas, get information, and network among its diverse membership. Through a professional membership and personal access to the City Clerk Listserv, the researcher was granted permission by the Listserv moderator to send the invitation to participate in the study to its members. Participants for this study were $N = 72$. Once participants accessed the survey and the questions were not applicable, the participant aborted the survey after indicating as a response "I did not participate in this program" and "we have not improved our program." Ultimately, these incomplete surveys were not part of data analysis but reported in the findings accordingly. Considering these findings, external validity was not weakened since the form of questioning was specific to direct participation or a decision made to improve a program. The research identified that a qualifying question could have been used to prevent or minimize research subject confusion.

Organization of Data Analysis

The data are organized in chronological order of the survey questions. The data were closely examined for patterns, relationships, and evidences related to the research questions and the application of social equity theory. Research participants were asked five open-ended questions and three closed-ended questions (see Appendix A). The research did discover some inconsistency in the number of questions answered. Some participants may have responded to all questions whereas others chose to skip questions. Some respondents skipped all or several questions, yet the number of completed survey questions was sufficient and provided meaningful analysis and value to the study.

The survey allowed the consent form to be published on the first page of the survey and would not allow the participant to begin the survey without first agreeing to informed consent. The California Baptist University Intuitional Review Board (IRB) approved the use of electronic wavier of informed consent since completion of the survey was conducted online (see Appendix H).

The codification of the data was conducted through a detailed analysis of each response to identify key words to group similar or approximating words and phrases to classify them into the most recurrent themes. Themes where selected based on the words or phrases found to be identical in each response. For example, the research posed questions seeking to learn why an individual was motivated to do something. These responses were analyzed in step one to gather a sense of reoccurring words and phrases. The second step required that the researcher prepared a manual table to list key words and phrases on a cross-sectional chart. These words and phrases were totaled, and the number was presented in tables listed in the findings chapter.

Data were analyzed and explored to decode personal narratives for decision making on each survey question. The analysis included a scrutiny on all narratives, words, phrases, or list of phrases to discover recurrent themes and compared and grouped those responses into categories. Using a quantitative approach, the frequency of how many times throughout the year city clerks plan program activities and evaluate and modify a voter educator program. For the purposes of this study, responses were grouped and assigned subcategories during close examination of key phrases, words, meanings, and definitions decoded from personal narratives and closed-ended questions. As an example, low voter turnout was classified based on various responses, which

acknowledges the concept as a social problem, problem, social injustice, voter disenfranchisement, voter apathy, weakened democracy, and the like as provided in the short answer provided by the respondent.

Data analysis also included a cross-sectional study of results to confirm the use of decision theory identified in the literature. The two-way decision theory test example predetermined from the literature (see Chapter 3), was used to provide analysis of how a question was answered and how that question, when compared to another question, would detect the decision-making behavior of administrators particular to the subject under examination. This analysis was used to determine how decisions were made under bounded rationality, rationality, and procedural fairness decision-making theories based on review of the literature (see Figure 6 in Chapter 3).

Considering the confidential nature of the study and the various positions of those utilizing the ListServ, Question 2 was designed to confirm the leadership position of the participant. There was a total of 72 participants who responded, each holding a title representative of leadership in the city clerk's office (see Table 1).

Those who responded to Question 2 were 72 participants, each holding a title representative of leadership in the city clerk's office. Question 2 also demonstrates that high-level management positions are responsible for management decisions for voter education programs outcomes, which is critical to the internal validity of the study. Internal validity is important to using the position classification; it is the opinion of the researcher that all responses presented in the data are reflective of the desired population and support validity in the study. The research was designed to measure the motivation of city clerks and individuals who are elections officials in cities within California. The

results from Question 2 offer a snapshot of the list of positions who participated in the study. Legitimacy in the study can be guaranteed since the intended sample participated in the survey.

Table 1. *Question 2—Job/Payroll Title*

Response	#
Assistant city clerk	7
Assistant city clerk/records management director	1
Assistant board secretary	1
City clerk	30
City clerk/paralegal	1
Chief deputy city clerk	3
City clerk/clerk Services manager	1
Clerk/records manager	1
City clerk/sr. management analyst	1
Council services and legislative/records manager	1
Deputy city clerk	11
Clerk of the board	4
Elected city clerk	1
Executive assistant/deputy city clerk	1
Human resources director/deputy city clerk	1
Legal coordinator	1
Interim city clerk	1
No response	5
N =	72

The study was designed to discover how participants make decisions relevant to voter education program planning and outcomes and the rationale for participating in the CEDP or implementing a voter education improvement program. The method for assessing the data is further described under data analysis.

Data analysis incorporated a qualitative method approach and mimicked sequential exploration strategy. Sequential exploration strategy begins with qualitative analysis and is then complimented by quantitative explanation and support (Creswell, 2009). Through a qualitative approach, the questions were coded to group themes and patterns to evaluate and measure how the decision to participate in the CEDP was made. The social equity principle was analyzed and interpreted to reveal whether administrative decision making through a social equity premise existed. After data collection and analysis, a matrix was created consisting of the respondents' narrative for decision making and social equity theory, and the researcher analyzed, compared, and grouped those statements to test significance. This examination did not measure or evaluate the performance or effectiveness of the voter education programs and only assessed the administrative behavior of city clerks (i.e., decision-making process and perception of social events). The results are presented graphically to display the relationship between the independent variables of decision making and dependent variable of knowledge to voter turnout as a social equity issue. For the purposes of this study, social equity was assigned subcategories to not disenfranchise the administration behavior of city clerks. As an example, social equity was classified also by the following terms and concepts: social problem, problem, social injustice, voter disenfranchisement, weakened democracy, wicked problem, and the like. Data analysis coding method for testing bounded rationality and procedural fairness linkages is discussed in detail in the next section.

Bounded Rationality Decision Making

Bound rationality decision making is designated as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on low voter turnout but disregarded high election cost in that decision exhibit bounded rationality or heuristic decision-making behavior. The argument is that decisions are based on external notions of problems and do not necessarily consider the full range complexity of the issue to reach a satisfactory decision. As an example, the discussion on high election cost and waste spending validates the fiscal crisis when individuals do not participate in elections. Nonetheless, administrators who do not consider election cost in decisions to improve voter turnout may exhibit bounded rationality decision behavior. The absence of a cost/benefit analysis is part of a bounded rationality decision-making process (Simon, 1965).

The opposite test of bounded rationality is rational or unbounded rationality, which suggests that decision makers take into account a comprehensive view of complete and available information and configurable computations and data that can be used to close evaluate a problem and make decisions that are true and accurate. A limitation to this study is that the research did not test for optimal configuration of organizational resources, which could further identify what decision theory is, custom to individual decision makers. What this study does offer is a series of questions that can assess rationale and motivation that can be analyzed to make empirical suggestions based on these theoretical frameworks.

Rationality Decision Making

Rationality decision making is designated as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on ideas other than voter turnout would exhibit decisions based on rationalization and rationality. This argument is based in rationality decision making. The rationality model suggests that decision makers select the first acceptable solution to a problem even if it is not ideal for solving the problem. Rationality decision makers are mechanical and immediate (Secchi, 2012). Administrations exhibit rationality decision behavior when the first satisfactory or practical solution is realized without regard to the effectiveness of the decision (Secchi, 2012).

Procedural Fairness Decision Making

Procedural fairness is designated as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program solely based on major areas of voter concerns, access, a low voter turnout problem and conducted an evaluation of voter education programs within a 12-month period (Frederickson, 2005, 2010). Procedural fairness decision-making processes are made on the perception of a social problem indicating the concept of social equity of procedural fairness. Procedural fairness does not consider the outcome as much as the process of the decision itself (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015; Herian et al., 2012). The process of making decisions to improve voter education programs based on voter issues suggests realization of social equity theory concept of procedural fairness in public administration practice. Moreover, attitudes toward consistently monitoring program outcomes and making cost effective measures is also preferable in procedural applications. Local elections officials who decided to

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participate or improve a voter education program, monitor program outcomes at least once every 12 months, and considered high election cost exhibit procedural fairness in decision making.

To test theory, participants who indicate the reason to participate in a program to improve voter education efforts was low voter turnout but do not/did not evaluate the program within the 12-month period would not be considered to practice procedural fairness in decision making. Social equity as procedural fairness encourages administrators to look at problems constantly and monitors outcomes. Through this method of constant assessment, administrators are able to make necessary adjustments to program plans to effectively and efficiently solve problems (Frederickson, 2005, 2010).

The theme represented in the data collected was "increase voter turnout." The data showed that out of 31 responses, 22 participants indicated that their decision and rationale to participate in the program or implement a voter education improvement program was to increase voter turnout, which represents 71% of the value of responses. Also, 22% indicated the need to encourage more voter education, and outreach was also a reason for participation. The other 6% represent responses that were not conducive to being placed into a categorical theme. The responses that fall within the lowest percentage had no identifiable intention that could be analyzed to measure decision-making behaviors. The two themes discovered in the data set demonstrate a strong positive relationship with the role of public administrator behavior in solving problems outlined in social equity theory.

Bound rationality decision making was tested as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on low voter turnout

but disregarded high election cost in that decision exhibit bounded rationality or heuristic

decision-making behavior. The argument is that decisions are based on external notions

of problems and do not necessarily consider the full range complexity of the issue in

order to reach a satisfactory decision as immediate resolve. As an example, the

discussion on high election cost and waste spending validates the fiscal crisis when

individuals do not participate in elections. Nonetheless, administrators who do not

consider election cost in decisions to improve voter turnout may exhibit bounded

rationality decision behavior. The absence of a cost/benefit analysis is part of a bounded

rationality decision-making process (Simon, 1965). Table 2 shows the decision to

participate and/or improve voter education program.

Table 2. *Decision to Participate and/or Improve Voter Education Program (Open-Ended Question)*

Survey response themes and categories		
Theme	#	%
Increase voter turnout	22	30.55%
Increase voter education	7	9.72%
Other	2	2.77%
No response	41	56.94%
	N = 72	100.00%

The data from Question 3 supports that administrators have a high proclivity to

acknowledge problems and further implicates a categorical attitude toward problem

solving. In the data, 22 of the 31 (71%) respondents implicated that their decision to

improve their voter education program was to increase voter turnout whereas 22.5%

respondents stated increase voter education and outreach efforts were their primary reason to participate.

Finally, the data reflect a portion of participants declaring that voter education was the reason they decided to improve their voter education program, primarily through engagement and community information. Of the responses, 93.5% fell within the predetermined theoretical practice of bounded rationality. In this case, engagement, civic outreach, and voter outreach and education are with one other and generally universally interchangeable. Studies continue to support that there is no single definition of civic engagement and the term continues to be synonymous with voter education outreach (Adler & Goggin, 2005). The data are strong in specifying the principle of social equity actively at work. The data support the social equity concept of identifying problems and improving programs through fairness and equality. Ensuring that all voters have access to information through strategic engagement efforts is prevalent throughout the source of data presented in Table 5.

The data clearly suggest that the principle of social equity theory in public administration confirms that voter education was the reason city clerks decided to improve voter education programs, primarily through engagement and community information. Participants were asked to describe why the decision or decisions to improve a local voter education program were necessary and/or essential to the local elections official and the agency. In the data presented, "low voter turnout/increase voter turnout" and "inform and educate voters" were two consistent themes. There was a total of 24 responses to Question 4, each offering a qualitative description that was later generalized into two comprehensive themes: (a) increase voter turnout and (b) increase

voter education (inform and educate). Once analyzed and decoded, the two themes were

identified and categorized. Also, eight of the responses were equally weighted for both

categories and offered information that would contribute a value to both "low voter

turnout/increase voter turnout" and "inform and educate voters" categories. This

information is not included in Table 3 because it would positively skew the results over

100.0%, for which statistical significance has been satisfied, and therefore, be deemed

unnecessary based on the purpose of the research (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Necessity/Importance of Decision(s) to Improve Voter Education Program (Open-Ended Question)*

Survey response themes		
Theme	#	%
Increase voter turnout	15	20.83%
Increase voter education	9	12.50%
No response	48	66.67%
	$N = 72$	100.00%

The decision to improve voter education programs was highly motivated through

the acknowledgment of the low voter turnout problem, which is the primary foundation

for social equity theory. The data show that 62.5% of city clerks recognized low voter

turnout as a problem, which nudged their decision to consider participation in a program

that would help build a more robust outreach program and/or improve an existing voter

education program for those who did not use the program. In the same way, the data

reflect that 37.5% of city clerks recognized that voters do not receive the information and

voter specific education needed to make informed decisions about candidates and ballot

measures during elections. The results are identical within the data represented in

Table 3. The results in Table 3 further support the principle of social equity theory in public administration as the primary theory in practice in administrative behavior based on these results.

Question 5 was designed to discover motivation behind the decision to participate in or implement a voter education improvement program. The design included this form of questions because it could further indicate the decision or importance for participation in or improvement of existing program. In the same way, Question 5 is similar to the discoverable themes identified in Question 3 and Question 4, respectively. The data in Table 4 present three themes: (a) increase voter turnout, (b) voter education needs, and (c) duty to improve public programs. It was noticed that a slightly different pattern became evident in the decision to participate or implement a voter education improvement program with the addition of a third category, which was duty. This is the first data set that denotes the administrator reflecting on his or her duty to the role as motivation to improve a voter educator program. Table 4 displays responses of the 19 participants who responded to the survey question, 10 confirming that cause of low voter turnout was the motivating factor that influenced their decision to improve a voter education program. Ten participants affirmed that the importance of educating voters was what motivated their decision. Four participants revealed that it is their duty as the local elections official to improve the quality and benefit of their voter education program, and the other 53 participants did not respond to the question.

Table 4 represents the statistical distribution of responses that are suitable for the three major themes discovered during data analysis measuring motivation. Based on the results, nearly 53% of participants' decision to improve their current voter education

program was motivated by their desire to increase voter turnout. The data revealed that 26% indicated that their duty as a local elections official was the primary motivation behind their decision. Finally, 21% of the participants indicated their objective to increase voter education and civic engagement was motivation for them to decide to improve their program.

Table 4. *Motivation to Participate and/or Improve Voter Education Program (Open-Ended Question)*

Motivation categories		
Theme	#	%
Increase voter turnout	10	13.89%
Administrator duty	5	6.94%
Increase voter education	4	5.56%
No response	53	73.61%
	N = 72	100.00%

The data presented in Table 4 are reflective of a positive relationship between administrative behavior and actions as established on social equity theory. Frederickson (2010) believed that the application of procedural fairness within social equity is the nudging or force that persuades administrators to consistently review public programs where they carefully apply efficient, effective, and equitable decisions to solve social problems. It is at this juncture, it is recognized that administrative behaviors are centered in social equity and are vital to successful decision making and problem solving. When public programs and services are not met with the high cost associated with operations, procedural fairness is not being exercised as outlined in the new public administration delineated by Frederickson (2010).

Question 7 was designed to discover the perception of ideas and understandings about voter turnout and the impact on local elections and government. The question was intended to capture participants' understanding of low voter turnout as a problem. Additionally, the question may reveal how city clerks identify problems and show how problems influence behaviors to constantly monitor program outcomes through a social equity lens. A total of 19 participants responded to the question; of those, 14 individuals stated that they view turnout in their city as low or very low. Through the data, there is evidence to show that city clerks acknowledge problems as highlighted in social equity theory. Three participants indicated that voter turnout was high; this would propose that low voter turnout is not an issue or major area of concern from these administrators. Finally, the data include two individuals offering a phrase or list of phases that, once deciphered, did not fit into any measurable category. The data were analyzed and coded for (a) low voter turnout, (b) high voter turnout, and (c) other. The data showed a high inclination toward an acknowledgement of low voter turnout as a problem. The other reports in the data are not sufficient enough to make a claim that low voter turnout is not a problem. The data analysis is detailed in the Table 5 and represents the statistical distribution of responses.

Table 5. *Recognition of Low Voter Turnout as a Problem (Open-Ended Question)*

Survey response (themes observed)		
Theme	#	%
Increase voter turnout	14	19.44%
Increase voter education	3	4.17%
Other	2	2.77%
No response	53	73.61%
	N = 72	100.00%

Question 6 was designed to determine perception of voter turnout and how administrators identified low voter turnout as a problem. Acknowledging and understanding low voter turnout as a problem and working toward improving or solving that issue is conducive to the tone of administrative behavior mapped out in procedural fairness as defined within social equity theory. The data revealed that nearly 74% ($N =$ 14) of the participants acknowledge low voter turnout as a problem. The data revealed in Question 6 shows local elections officials acknowledge low voter turnout has negative implications for their local communities. This further authenticates the general theme of the research and highlights the connection between problem identification and the decision-making process aimed to correct a social problem. The data also show that 16% ($N = 3$) of the participants indicated that voter turnout is in fact high in their city. These cities noted that their communities are fairly small with small voter registration totals that are highly active during local elections. Through this interpretation of the data, turnout in these cities would be higher than relatively larger cities with higher voter registration totals. Additionally, a participant specified that "the number of registered voters in the city is small, we have very good voter turnout. We regularly report over 50% turnout" (as cited in Harris, 2018). Finally, 10% ($N = 2$) of participants did not respond sufficiently enough to decode perception of events and ideas of voter turnout and is listed in a separate category, which yields no significance to the study results.

Question 7 was designed to understand whether the high cost of elections was a determining factor to participate in the CEDP or improve an existing voter education program. It is revealed that election cost was not considered in the decision to participate or improve a voter education program. This does not predict in any way that local

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elections officials are oblivious to the high cost of elections; they may have a very tunnel view on fiscal impacts. Taking this critique to heart, city clerks may not necessarily concentrate on fiscal spending for various reasons, one being that departmental budgets may not include the election budget that is part of the General Fund (City of Long Beach, Office of the City Clerk, 2017). Election budgets are prepared during appropriate election planning stages and not during the annual budget adoption period, which would account for the gap in cost-analysis in decision making. In other words, the data can possibly indicate that election cost is absent from the habit of administrative thinking and decision making, and therefore is not considered a concern. It is important to note that this is the opinion of the researcher based on information found in the literature related to high election cost (Capps, 2016; Stein & Vonnahme, 2012). Table 6 shows that 72% (N = 13) stated that election cost was not a determining factor to participate or improve their program. Nearly 28% ($N = 5$) claimed that election cost was part of their decision to participate or improve their program. Based on this data, it is understood that election cost was not a leading reason to participate in the CEDP.

Table 6. *Responses Regarding the Assessment of Election Cost on Motivation to Participate or Improve an Existing Voter Education Program*

	Survey responses	
Theme	#	%
Yes	5	6.94%
No	13	18.06%
No response	54	75.00%
	$N = 72$	100.00%

The data presented in Question 8 show the program/project management frequency that was intended to test the social equity premise of constant review of programs. This research question was designed to discover whether the theory of social equity, which suggests public administrators constantly evaluate public programs and make necessary modifications that best maximize the public's interest and utility, was evidence of social equity in decision-making processes. The participant survey provided an explanation for the "Quarterly" and "During Election Periods" options. Answer choices presumed participants evaluated voter education programs at least once during the frequency choice selections. The choices include the following: weekly, biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, semiannually, and annually. The social equity theory concept of consistent monitoring of program outcomes is operationalized as all frequencies contributing to weekly, biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, semiannual, and annual choice options. Question 7 reported a total 18 responses. The data revealed that 5.56% ($N = 1$) indicated evaluation (monitoring) of voter education program outcomes performed at least once monthly, 11.11% ($N = 2$) indicated program evaluation is conducted every 3 to 4 months or quarterly. In the same way, 11.11% ($N = 2$) confirmed evaluation is performed twice a year or semiannually, 27.78% ($N = 5$) stated once a year or annually. Finally, the data exposed that 11.11% ($N = 2$) reported no evaluation activity performed at all.

Conclusion

Data analysis incorporated a qualitative method approach and a sequential exploration strategy. Through a qualitative approach, the questions were coded to group like themes and patterns and then evaluated and measured on how the decision to

participate in the CEDP or improve an existing program was made. The social equity

principle was analyzed and interpreted to reveal whether administrative decision making

exists through the procedural fairness premise constructed through interpretation of the

literature. It was discovered through this research design and based on the results of the

data that administrative decision making and behaviors are strongly grounded in social

equity theory. Once the data were analyzed, exploration of personal narratives for

decision making was conducted on each survey. Data analysis found recurrent themes

and compared and grouped those responses in like categories. Using a quantitative

approach, the frequency of how many times throughout the year city clerks plan program

activities and evaluate and modify a voter educator program. For the purposes of this

study, responses were grouped and assigned subcategories during close examination of

key phrases, words, meanings, and definitions decoded from personal narratives and

closed-ended questions. As an example, low voter turnout was classified based on

various responses, which acknowledges the concept as a social problem, problem, social

injustice, voter disenfranchisement, voter apathy, weakened democracy, and the like.

      Another discovery is that a few questions had to be modified to simply and unify

questions for more clarity because initial participants did not fully understand what was

being asked. The questions were not severely altered from what was approved by IRB;

just one word was changed that would better facilitate appropriate measurable responses.

For example, the initial research question asked, "What social problems or issues come to

mind when you think about voter turnout in your city?" The question was later modified

to "What ideas come to mind when you think about voter turnout in your city?" so as to

not lead responses or confuse participants on what was being asked.

The next chapter offers additional summary of the findings of the research of the decision making of local elections officials in California hosted in a social equity theory context. The chapter also answers the research questions and provides recommendations for further research study in relation to bureaucratic behavior and decision making.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of research conducted on decision making of local elections officials in California in relationship to voter education programs in the context of voter turnout problems studying social equity theory. This study was conducted to examine the decision making and motivation of public administrators when developing or improving public programs and whether those decisions were made under the impetus of H. George Frederickson's social equity theory. Frederickson (2010) claimed that social equity theory in public administration was the careful, considerate, and methodological identification of problems that motivate administrative behavior to respond responsibly to evaluate and resolve social problems in a fair, just, and equitable manner. The responses from the surveys in Chapter 4 illustrate how some local elections officials who perceive low voter turnout as a problem express decision-making behaviors based on perception as analyzed by motivation for those decisions. The previous chapter provided clear descriptions to support decision making informed by a social equity premise; the qualitative findings empirically support the associations between administrative behavior and social equity principles in practice. Chapter 5 concludes with several recommendations for further research and considerations for modern public administration and expands the knowledge and use of theories that inform best practice in public program management.

Research Methodology and Probative Research Area Review

The examination of administrative decision making partly within the context of social equity theory is guided by three overarching research questions:

1. How are decisions made as related to improving voter education programs efforts?

2. Do local elections officials evaluate voter education program outcomes on an ongoing basis?

3. How are decisions made through the social equity component of procedural fairness decision processes as related to voter turnout and voter education programs?

As explained in Chapter 3, the probative research areas and study questions derived from the review of the literature and study of the problem. The research was designed to discover how local elections officials make decisions using two concepts of decisions theory, bounded rationality and rationality, and the idea of procedural fairness decision-making process within social equity theory. Although this study cannot generalize for the entire population of public administration practice, it can offer some relative information to the literature governing application to duty in decision making toward problem solving. Data for this research were collected through an online survey in which participants had an opportunity to provide personal narrative that was aggregated during data analysis and examined for themes and trends (refer to Figure 4 in Chapter 3).

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the decisions to participate in the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) or improve an existing voter education program and whether that decision(s) was made through the recognition of low voter turnout using a social equity theoretical framework. Additionally, this research was designed to distinguish whether the acknowledgement of low voter turnout was invoked by local elections officials being nudged by the philosophy of social equity for those cities that participated in the CEDP or adopted to improve an established program. This

study examined whether city clerks, as local elections officials, are or are not aware of the autonomy they possess to plan, create, and modify local voter education programs. This research studies the influence of social equity theory (procedural fairness) on decision making within voter education programs.

The research examined the decision to participate in the CEDP or improve an existing program and what relationship exists between decisions to improve voter education programs and social equity premise, using social equity theory and decision theory frameworks. Identifying the significance of the relationship may advance the understanding of how local strategic management of social systems and the implications of open government (or participatory government: a government that provides opportunity for civic participation and managing a program that promotes this effort, i.e., the CEDP) can influence or improve voter turnout locally.

Summary of Findings

Research participants were asked five open-ended questions and three closed-ended questions. Some respondents skipped all or several questions, yet the number of completed survey questions is sufficient for this study and should render meaningful analysis and summary of results. Although not significant for the results of the survey, the research design included a summary of position titles to illustrate those roles that make decisions in local government agencies. This question was designed to ensure that the responses received were from the intended population. There was a total of 72 participants who responded to this question, each holding a title representative of leadership in the city clerk's office. Here, one can see that high-level management positions are responsible for the oversight, independent management, and decision

making over local voter education programs. It is important to highlight the $N = 72$ city clerks who responded to the survey. This is imperative to note since the population for this study focused on city clerks. Using the position classification, it is the opinion of the researcher that all responses presented in the data are reflective of the desired population and support validity in the study.

The theme represented in the data collected was "increase voter turnout," which denotes a high validity for this study. The data showed that out of 31 responses, $N = 22$ participants indicated that their decision and rationale to participate in the program or implement a voter education improvement program was to increase voter turnout, which represents 71% of the value of responses. The two themes discovered in the data set are synonymous with one another and when compared, demonstrate a strong positive relationship with the role of public administrator behavior to solving problems outlined in social equity theory. Furthermore, the data presented proves that administrators have a high proclivity to acknowledge problems and further implicates a categorical attitude toward problem solving. In the data, 22 of the 31 (71%) respondents indicated that their decision to improve their voter education program was to increase voter turnout whereas 22.5% respondents stated increased voter education and outreach efforts were their primary reason to participate.

RQ1 was designed to understand how local elections officials make decisions to improve voter education programs. RQ1 relied on qualitative methods to analyze the reason and cause a decision was made in context of the study. The data reflect that local elections officials for this study decided to participate in the CEDP or improve an existing program because of low voter turnout or a desire to increase voter turnout.

RQ2 was intended to answer whether local elections officials evaluate (consider improvements, perceived to acknowledge a problem exist) voter education program outcomes at least once every 12 months. The data reflect that local elections officials for this study evaluate program outcomes at least once every 12 months. Based on the predetermined values operationalizing consistent review of programs, the data support the research question seeking to determine evidence of social equity theory. The data show that a cumulative 55.5% ($N = 10$) demonstrated program evaluation and performed monthly, quarterly, semiannually, and annually, providing evidence that local elections officials consistently monitor outcomes. Consistent monitoring of outcomes is a concept within social equity theory (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Guy & McCandless, 2012; Svara & Brunet, 2005) and indicates that administrators constantly evaluate public programs and monitor performance outcomes.

RQ3 seeks to answer what motivated local elections officials to improve a voter education program to test procedural fairness. The research question was developed to examine two of the several concepts that shape social equity theory: (a) identification of social problems and needs (e.g., administrator's acknowledgment of low voter turnout as a problem) and (b) perception forming decisions (e.g., administrator's perception of low voter turnout related to decisions to streamline voter education programs; Guy & McCandless, 2012). RQ3 relied on qualitative methods to analyze (a) reason to participate or improve a voter education program, (b) perception of voter turnout, and (c) evaluation frequency of voter education efforts, three operational terms to identify the existence of conceptual administrative behaviors founded within social equity theory as procedural fairness. The research found that local elections officials demonstrate

procedural fairness in decision making based on the operationalization of procedural

fairness found in the literature and designed for this study.

This research and design heavily relied on established literature that gave form

and concept to both the research survey questions and probative research areas as

founded in decision theory and procedural fairness decision-making frameworks. Table 7

represents the decision category models developed by chief decision theorists with

considerable work in bounded rationality, rationality (rational choice theory), and

procedural fairness decision-making theory as discussed in Chapter 2.

Table 7. *Decision Theory Concepts*

Two-way decision theory test results		
Theory	*n*	%
Bounded rationality	14	19.44%
Rationality	11	15.28%
Procedural fairness	11	15.28%
No responses	36	50.00%
	N = 72	100.00%

During data analysis, a cross-sectional study of results was used to identify

whether some of the most notable decision theories were used among this sample as

identified in the literature. The two-way decision theory test example predetermined

from the literature (see Chapter 3) was used to provide analysis of how a question was

answered and how that question, when compared to another question, would detect the

decision-making behavior of administrators particular to the subject under examination.

This analysis was used to determine how decisions were made under bounded rationality,

rationality, and procedural fairness decision-making theories (see Table 7).

Bounded Rationality Decision Making

Bounded rationality decision making is designated as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on low voter turnout but disregarded high election cost in that decision exhibit bounded rationality or heuristic decision-making behavior. The argument is that decisions are based on external concepts of problems and do not necessarily consider the full range complexity of the issue to reach a satisfactory decision or set of decisions. As an example, the discussion on high election cost and waste spending validates the fiscal crisis when individuals do not participate in elections. Nonetheless, administrators who do not consider election cost in decisions to improve voter turnout may exhibit bounded rationality decision behavior. The absence of a cost/benefit analysis is part of a bounded rationality decision-making process (Simon, 1965).

Rationality Decision Making

Rationality decision making is designated as the idea that local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program based on ideas other than voter turnout would exhibit decisions based on rationalization and rationality. This argument is based in rationality decision making. The rationality model suggests that decision makers select the first acceptable solution to a problem even if it is not ideal for solving the problem. Rationality decision makers are mechanical and immediate (Secchi, 2012). Administrations exhibit rationality decision behavior when the first satisfactory or practical solution is realized without regard to the effectiveness of the decision (Secchi, 2012).

Procedural Fairness Decision Making

Procedural fairness is designated as local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program solely based on major areas of voter concerns, access, and low voter turnout problems, and conducted an evaluation of voter education programs within a 12-month period (Frederickson, 2005, 2010). Procedural fairness decision-making processes are made on the perception of a social problem indicating the concept of social equity of procedural fairness. Procedural fairness does not consider the outcome as much as the process of the decision itself (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015; Herian et al., 2012). The process of making decisions to improve voter education programs based on voter issues suggests realization of the social equity theory concept of procedural fairness in public administration practice. Moreover, attitudes toward consistently monitoring program outcomes and making cost effective measures is also preferable in procedural applications. Local elections officials who decided to participate or improve a voter education program, monitor program outcomes at least once every 12 months, and considered high election cost exhibit procedural fairness in decision making.

To test the theory, participants who indicate the reason to participate in a program to improve voter education efforts was low voter turnout, but do not/did not evaluate the program within the 12-month period would not be considered to practice procedural fairness in decision making. Social equity as procedural fairness encourages administrators to look at problems constantly and monitors outcomes. Through this method of constant assessment, administrators are able to make necessary adjustments to program plans to effectively and efficiently solve problems (Frederickson, 2005, 2010).

Finally, the data reflect that a portion of participants declared that improving community relations such as voter education was the reason they decided to improve their voter education program, primarily through engagement and community information. The data are strong in specifying the principle of social equity actively at work. It is sufficient to say that the data support the social equity concept that says administrators are nudged to identify problems and assure the fair and equitable management of programs and public policy development.

Overall, the data confirm the principle of social equity theory in public administration. The qualitative description was later generalized into two comprehensive themes, (a) increase voter turnout and (b) encourage voter education participation. The decision to improve a voter education program was highly motivated through the acknowledgment of low voter turnout as a problem, which is the primary foundation for social equity theory. The results are consistent across the data set. These results further confirm the principle of social equity theory in public administration as the primary theory in practice in administrative behavior. The data were operationalized as acknowledging problems through social equity theory and proved a high inclination toward an acknowledgement of low voter turnout as a problem. In an attempt to capture fiscal responsibility in program planning as outlined in social equity theory, it was revealed that election cost was not considered in the decision to participate or improve a voter education program. This does not predict in any way that local elections officials are oblivious to the high cost of elections; they may have a very tunnel view on fiscal impacts.

Finally, the research was designed to discover whether the theory of social equity which suggests public administrators constantly evaluate public programs and make necessary modifications that best maximize the publics' interest and utility was evidence of social equity in decision-making processes. It is apparent in the data reporting more than 55% of participants dedicated time toward constantly evaluating public programs and performance outcomes, further validating the principle of social equity in public administration.

Application to Theory

The research placed importance on the theoretical frameworks of decision making and social equity procedural fairness. The research found that $N = 14$ survey results fall within the predesignated framework for that bounded rationality decision making, $N = 11$ exhibited rationality decisions making practices, and another $N = 11$ revealed likely procedural fairness decision-making practices. Out of the 72 who responded, 36 participants did not answer any question used for this analysis of application to theory.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the decisions to participate in the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) or improve an existing voter education program and whether that decision(s) was made through the recognition of low voter turnout using a social equity theoretical framework. The research discovered that city clerks decided to participate or improve an existing voter education program because of the increasing low voter turnout in local elections, the lack of participation in voter education programs, and because of duty and obligation to the profession. The research also confirmed that city clerks do operate in a social equity hierarchy that influences and

guides administrative decisions as expressed in Frederickson's social equity theory. Furthermore, there is a high sense of duty and obligation when managing voter education programs resulting from problem identification (low voter turnout) and managing solutions to those problems at the local level. Scholars agree that social equity is the practice of consistently thinking about and evaluating public programs toward improved social outcomes (Frederickson, 2005, 2010; Gooden, 2017).

Finally, the research was designed to measure awareness of specific social problems relative of specific social outcomes, meaning, is the problem of low voter turnout regarded or not regarded. The data showed that 39% of $N = 36$ respondents regarded low voter turnout as a problem as a motivating factor for participating or improving an existing program. Additionally, the research found that 30.5% of $N = 36$ respondents practice rationality decision making. This research also measured the role of procedural fairness and whether acknowledgment of low voter turnout as a problem motivated the decision to participate or implement performance improvement measures. The data showed that 30.5% of $N = 36$ respondents practice some form of procedural fairness in decision making. The data are inconclusive to provide evidence that the theory of procedural fairness is identified through motivation and program evaluation.

Recommendations for Further Research

The research examined a single department in municipal government throughout California using an online survey. As with all online data collection tools, there is information that could only be discovered via face-to-face interviews. This study expressed that limitation earlier in Chapter 3. It would be a recommendation for further research to adopt the same design to include in-depth face-to-face, telephone, or focus

group interview techniques to further test attributes of the theory that could not be discovered here. The qualitative design allowed the researcher to obtain minimum in-depth information; a research design that would promote longer narrative through dialogue might better inform this study. Although this research measured motivations for both elected and appointed clerks the same, future research that investigates the variation of motivation between elected and appointed municipal clerks can provide further contributions to the literature. Additional research should be conducted to examine the following:

- If the methodology of this study can be enhanced to included questions that further investigate and confirm the findings herein

- The implication of leadership styles on decision-making application

- How the core pillars of public administration are used decision-making processes

- If a mixed method design could test voter education and voter turnout significance

- How a specific program attribute or activity in voter education efforts impact voter turnout and related outcomes (i.e., how community forums in economically disadvantage communities influence voter turnout in those precincts).

Conclusion

The research indicates that a decision made by local elections officials to improve a public program was motivated by low voter turnout and lack of voter participation. The data further supports the idea that the goal to increase voter turnout was a chief decision to participate in the program. The analysis performed on this research does not confirm that city clerks have the potential to operate in a forum of procedural fairness that influences administrative behavior to take action once a problem is identified as designed

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in the research methodology. Perhaps another similar study could better identify the role

and depth procedural fairness has in this context. The significance of relationships

between problem identification and problem-solving behavior and subsequent decisions

needs to be further developed and analyzed. The data suggest that low voter turnout is

regarded as a problem and that problem identification motivates officials to take

corrective action autonomously. This data convinces the researcher to believe that local

elections officials are aware of specific social problems relative to low voter turnout. The

heart of this study questioned the ideas of procedural fairness and decision-making

processes based on motivation and perception or awareness of events (i.e., low voter

turnout). The data can be used and built upon in further research to help recognize

whether perception informs decision making and administrative behavior responding to

problems. Incorporation of social equity theory and decision theory significantly

informed this study on the ethical implications that negligible voter education and

outreach can have a negative impact on voter turnout. It is recommended that local

elections officials seek to advance the public's interest and acquaint people with the

moral obligations of the democratic process through more robust voter education

programs.

  The data collected are not presumed to further support or validate significance to

decision making in regard to this study or assertively answer the research questions due

to the low response rates. However, the study provides a premise for scholarly research

and information for policy-makers at the local level to better comprehend the causes and

understanding of low voter turnout. Local governments can learn to improve their

service delivery and make informed decisions from research that focuses on the

implications of low turnout on democracy. This work will assist scholars and

practitioners, as well as candidates for public office, nonprofits, political campaigns, and

elections officials to further understand how mobilizing voters affects voter turnout

results.

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APPENDICES

City Clerk Survey

Question 1 Informed Consent (Wavier to Documentation)
Question 2 What is your Official/Payroll Title?
Question 3 Why did you improve your voter education program implemented in your City?
Question 4 Why was improving the program necessary/important to you and your agency?
Question 5 What motivated your decision to participate or improve an existing voter education program?
Question 6 What ideas come to mind when you think about voter turnout in your City?
Question 7 Was election cost a determining factor in your decision to participate or improve an existing voter education program?

Question 8
How often do you make decisions to evaluate and expand/alter/improve/etc. your voter education program?
 	
Select one:
    Weekly
    Bi-weekly
    Monthly
    Bi-monthly
    Quarterly
    Semi-annually
    Annually
    Bi-Annually
    Not at all
    Other, please specify: _____

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Script

From:	City_clerks <city_clerks-bounces@lists.cacities.org> on behalf of Jesse Harris <Jesse.Harris@longbeach.gov>
Sent:	Monday, April 30, 2018 9:25 AM
To:	city_clerks@lists.cacities.org
Subject:	[City_clerks] City Clerk Research Study Participants Needed!!!
Attachments:	ATT00001.txt

Greetings Colleagues!

You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting.

I am a doctoral candidate at California Baptist University Graduate School of Professional Studies completing my dissertation focusing on voter education programs and voter turnout. With your help, I hope to learn the rationale/motivation surrounding your decision to participate in a specific voter education program and/or implementing improvement measures for an existing program.

You are receiving this e-mail because you best meet the criteria designed to test the theory and practice under examination. The survey should take less than 10 minutes and is completely anonymous. Please consider participating by Friday, May 18, 2018.

SURVEY LINK: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QXVKQFX

Your help is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

California Baptist University – Division of Online and Professional Studies
Name of Investigator: Jesse A. Harris

I would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to learn the rationale, perception and motivation of decisions made to participate in the California Ethics and Democracy Project (CEDP) and/or implementing/improving a personalized voter education program in your City. This survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

There are no anticipated risks, discomforts or inconveniences. If you perhaps feel any discomfort with the questioning, you have the right to discontinue the survey and/or contact your agency's Human Resources for more information about the availability and use of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in the instance such risks are experienced. Your participation and time are voluntary, and no financial compensation will be provided. However, your responses may help me learn more about the relationship between public administration theory and practice.

Your participation is anonymous to the researcher. However, because of the nature of web-based surveys, it is possible that respondents could be identified by the IP address or other electronic record associated with the response. Neither the researcher nor anyone involved with this survey will be capturing those data. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project. The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the web-based online survey, you can stop at any time.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Linda Marie Sundstrom at Lsundstrom@calbaptist.edu. This study has been reviewed and approved by the California Baptist University Institutional Review Board, Application #083-1718-EXP

Raw Data—Question 3

Why did you improve (or consider improving) your voter education program implemented in your city? Responses included:

- We have not updated program.
- Increase voter turnout and educate citizens.
- To increase voter turnout.
- Increase voter turnout and attract more citizen involvement.
- Ensure under served and non-English speaking communities have access to voting; outreach to youth via schools and express why their vote matters; educate voters as to how voting in local elections impact them.
- Increase voter turnout.
- Engage disinterested voters.
- Not participating.
- It looked interesting.
- Just curious.
- The clerk's office connects people to their local government and helps the navigate the process. It's my duty as a city clerk.
- Because this can be overwhelming for individuals, outreach and providing information is an effort to simplify the understanding of what it means to run for and hold office.
- Attract citizen involvement and educate the public on the new district elections.
- Increase voter turnout, engage voters of all ages, promote new format of district elections, educate citizens of the importance of voting.
- To help educate voters on their rights and the election process.
- Decrease voter apathy.
- I wanted to ensure as much as possible that voters and potential voters had accurate, unbiased information about candidates and initiatives.
- To educate the community on changes.
- To assist in the research.
- To increase civic engagement.
- To educate and engage voters.
- Ethics class to educate candidates.
- Increase voter turnout and engagement.
- Increase voter turnout and interest.
- Designing and promoting any activity you feel might benefit voters.
- Frustration with the low levels of voter turnout and high levels of voter apathy.
- Engage voters.
- I am always looking for new ways to increase voter turnout.
- I serve in a jurisdiction that has a small number of registered voters with that total number continually decreasing. I want to increase voter registration and engage the new voters in the community.
- To promote and encourage turnout in our elections.
- Increase turn out, improve greater understanding of the process, make the process as transparent as possible.

Raw Data—Question 4

Why was implementing this decision(s) necessary/important to you and your agency? Responses included:

- We did not update our program.
- We are still in the process of implementing programs. This year, however, we have multiple candidates for only two spots and want to be sure voters are making informed decisions.
- Voter turnout from unrepresented races is low.
- There is a great deal of focus on voter turnout, but numbers are not the whole story. Civic engagement and access to your government should be an option to every resident.
- For a balanced democracy.
- Not participating with elections.
- An engaged community is unified and informed.
- To help citizens realize the importance of our democratic right to serve as an officer and to have the right vote for whom you believe will make a sincere difference for the betterment of the city. The officers placed in office and the votes they make on policy will affect everyone positively/negatively both internally and externally.
- We have recently switched to district elections after 130 years and it is important the voters understand the new format.
- To be more transparent and to educate voters and hopefully improve voter turnout.
- Low voter turnout.
- There has been lots of talk lately about "fake news," and the Russian influence on the presidential election of 2016. I felt it was important to offer a trusted, unbiased alternative.
- To have an informed voter base.
- It is important to create community awareness of the importance to vote on local laws and representatives.
- It's important to educate the public so that they will want to participate in voting and understanding how important it is.
- Voter trends and education help standardize a voting message.
- Ensure we were meeting and fulfilling the needs of our community.
- Increase public participation.
- Increase voter turnout
- Engage citizens through the City Clerk's Office
- Increase transparency
- It was important because the number of registered voters in my jurisdiction is dwindling and there is a large population of residents who are now eligible to vote.
- Due to the drop-in participation in elections and to work to closing the voter registration vs voter turnout gap.
- It is important as nearly 50% of potential voters are not registered; and of the registered voters we have a steadily decreasing turn out.

Raw Data—Question 5

What motivated your decision to participate or improve an existing voter education program? Responses included:
− We did not.   − The hope for qualified candidates are elected.   − Transparent access to government.   − We are moving to districts and have formed a 5th district that has zero participation.   − Not participating with elections.   − It's my duty as a city clerk.   − Voter empathy has always been a target of improvement of mine.   − To help clarify the process and make sure things were up to date.   − Increase voter awareness.   − "Fake news" Russia, Facebook, Cambridge, Analytica.   − My duty to serve the public.   − Because we often lack meeting the population on a higher level.   − Importance of educating voters to make informed decisions when voting. Educating the newest voters - youth.   − Improve voter turnout.   − Lack of interest in established programs.   − Increase voter participation.   − To increase the number of voters in the city that I serve, and to support and encourage civic participation.   − Low turnout was a key factor.   − In complying with our city's mission to ensure the business conducted is transparent and to increase public engagement generally; it is hoped that we will increase voter turnout.

Raw Data—Question 6

What ideas come to mind when you think about voter turnout in your city? Responses included:
– Increasing
– The current national political environment
– People do not know how local elections impact their daily lives.
– Community outreach and advertising.
– Get the word out via Facebook and lobby advertisements - would be my suggestions for low cost / no cost awareness campaign.
– It could be better!
– Voter turnout is similar to other municipalities across the nation, low unless something major or hot topic is on the ballot.
– Why is it so low.
– Low.
– High.
– It is lower than it should be.
– Very minimal.
– Low - my goal is to get more voters to participate and become involved.
– Low.
– I'll vote if I see the potential for direct impact on me.
– Good but can be improved.
– Because the number of registered voters in the city is small, we have very good voter turnout. We regularly report over 50% turnout.
– Turnout is dreadfully low and civic participation is not high.
– Embarrassingly low - particularly as we are a "government town" being the state capital.

APPENDIX H

IRB Approval Document

IRB No.: 083-1718-EXP- Institutional Review Board Approval

Project: An Examination of Decision-Making of Local Elections Officials and Voter Education Programs Throughout the State of California

Date Complete Application Received: 4/4/18
Date Final Revision Received: 4/19/18

Principle Investigator: Jesse A. Harris   **Faculty Advisor:** Linda-Marie Sundstrom

College/Department: OPS

IRB Determination: Expedited Application Approved – Student research using anonymous survey questionnaires; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Waiver of Documentation of Consent: Per 45 CFR 46.117, the IRB has approved the request to waive the documentation of informed consent (e.g., no participant signatures will be collected, though participants do receive a copy of the consent information) because the signature of the participant would be the only linking record to the data that may harm the participant if released.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: Approval is granted for one year from date below. If you would like to continue research activities beyond that date, you are responsible for submitting a Research Renewal Request with enough time for that request to be reviewed and approved *prior* to the expiration of the project. In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: April 20, 2018