Cultivating Political Powerhouses: TFA Corps Members Experiences that Shape Local Political Engagement

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Abstract: In recent years, Teach for America (TFA) has invested in developing corps members as leaders. Although TFA asks corps members for a two-year commitment, TFA celebrates the achievements of alumni who have gone on to careers in politics, public policy, and advocacy. Thus, many community leaders see the arrival of TFA corps members as having a greater impact than just inside the classroom. While expectations for corps members are often high both from TFA and from the communities they serve, we seek to understand whether and how corps members become

actively engaged in the broader political life of their placement city. Do corps members find the city fertile with opportunities to solve problems and engage in civic and political life? Or will these corps members leave their placements, viewing the political and educational challenges as intractable due to larger city politics? Using data from a panel study of 2012 corps members in four mid-sized city TFA placement sites, this study examines how attitudes towards and engagement with local politics shift as a result corps members' experiences. Our research indicates that commitments to local politics shift significantly. While some corps members report an increased commitment to local politics, a sizable group actually becomes less enthusiastic and involved. These shifts appear to be related to the perceived openness of the local political arena to newcomers, one's teaching placement and the local actions of TFA spin-off organization Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE).
Keywords: Teach for America; political engagement; civic engagement; civic leadership

Cultivando equipos políticos poderosos: Experiencias de miembros de TFA que configuran la participación en la política local

Resumen: En los últimos años, Teach for America (TFA) ha invertido en el desarrollo de sus miembros como líderes. Aunque TFA pide a sus miembros un compromiso de dos años, TFA celebra los logros de los alumnos que continúan en carreras políticas, políticas públicas, y similares. Por lo tanto, muchos líderes comunitarios ven la llegada de miembros de TFA teniendo un impacto mucho mayor y no solo dentro del salón de clases. Mientras que las expectativas sobre los miembros de TFA a menudo son altas tanto dentro TFA como en las comunidades a las que sirven, buscamos entender en que medida y cómo los miembros de TFA se involucran activamente en la vida política más amplia de la ciudad donde son asignados. ¿En que medida miembros de TFA encuentran en la ciudad un territorio fértil, para resolver problemas y participar en la vida cívica y política? ¿O será el caso que los miembros de TFA dejan sus posiciones, entendiendo los desafíos políticos y educativos como intratables debido a los desafíos políticos de la ciudad? Utilizando datos de un estudio de panel de 2012 con miembros de TFA en cuatro ciudades medianas que incorporan miembros TFA, este estudio examina cómo las actitudes hacia y el compromiso con la política local cambia con las experiencias. Nuestra investigación indica que los compromisos con la política local cambian significativamente. Mientras que algunos miembros de TFA informan de un mayor compromiso con la política local, de hecho un grupo considerable se vuelve menos entusiasta y comprometido. Estos cambios parecen estar relacionados con la percepción de apertura con los recién llegados a la arena política local, el puesto asignado para enseñar y las acciones locales de *Liderazgo para la Equidad de la Educación* (LEE) una organización que emerge de TFA.
Palabras clave: Teach for America; compromiso político; compromiso cívico; liderazgo cívico

Cultivando grupos políticos poderosos: Experiências de membros de TFA que configuram a participação na política local

Resumo: Nos últimos anos, Teach for America (TFA) tem investido no desenvolvimento de seus membros e líderes. Embora TFA peça aos seus membros um compromisso de dois anos, TFA celebra as realizações de alunos que continuam em carreiras políticas, políticas públicas e similares. Por isso, muitos líderes comunitários olham a chegada dos membros do TFA como tendo um impacto muito maior e não só dentro da sala de aula. Embora as expectativas sobre os membros do TFA são muitas vezes elevadas, tanto em TFA e como nas comunidades nas quais servem, procuramos compreender até que ponto e como membros de TFA estão ativamente envolvidos na vida política mais ampla da cidade onde estão inseridos. Em que medida membros TFA encontram na cidade um território fértil, para resolver problemas e para participar na vida cívica e política? Ou

seria o caso dos membros da TFA deixarem as suas posições, por compreender que os desafios educacionais não são prioritários frente aos desafios políticos da cidade? Usando dados de um painel de 2012 estudo com membros de TFA em quatro cidades de médio porte que incorporam membros TFA, este estudo examina como as atitudes e compromisso com a política local podem mudar a experiência dos membros de TFA. Nossa pesquisa indica que os compromissos políticos locais mudaram significativamente. Enquanto alguns membros da TFA relataram um maior compromisso com a política local, na verdade, um grupo considerável torna-se menos entusiasta e empenhado. Estas alterações parecem estar relacionadas à percepção de abertura para os recém-chegados à cena política local, a posição atribuída ao ensinar e a ação local da Liderança para a Equidade em Educação (LEE) uma organização que emerge de TFA.

Palavras-chave: Teach for America; compromisso político; participação cívica; liderança cívica

Cultivating Political Powerhouses: Corps Members Experiences that Shape Local Political Engagement

In recent years, Teach for America (TFA) has invested in developing corps members as leaders. In fact, leadership is a core value of Teach For America. TFA celebrates the achievements of alumni who become outstanding leaders across several domains: teacher leaders, school leaders, school system leaders and social entrepreneurs. In particular, TFA highlights alumni who have gone on to pursue careers in civic and political leadership roles and TFA supports such paths with specialized resources. As of fall 2015, TFA boasted over 90 elected public officials; 270 policy, organizing, and advocacy leaders; and over 100 elected union leaders as evidence of their contributions to the development of civic and political leaders (Beard, 2015).

In light of these numbers, many community leaders see the incorporation of TFA corps members into their communities as having a greater impact than just inside the classroom. In Detroit, for example, the return of TFA was met with hope and optimism not just for schooling, but for the whole city. As Tenbusch (2010), vice president of United Way for Southeastern Michigan, noted in his *Detroit News* commentary, "It [the return of TFA] signals that at a time when new talent and innovation is needed more than ever, this region is ready to welcome and integrate the investment and opportunities that come our way" (para. 11).

Cities across the nation now compete to attract and retain young adults that are interested in community involvement, civic engagement, and broad-based public participation (e.g., Cooper, 2014; Craig, Fraser, Mecca & Nick, 2012; Dobson, 2015; Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce, 2009; Tipton, 2015) – characteristics that many TFA corps members and alumni possess (McAdam & Brandt, 2009; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014). In particular, mid-size cities work to attract and retain young adults who can help revitalize these cities. Once defined almost exclusively by manufacturing and industry, mid-size cities have struggled to respond to economic hardships because of their smaller resource base and lack economic diversity. As a result, many of these cities now work to create diversity in their economies through the development of knowledge- and service-based industries (Kline & Forbes, 2012). This shift has led mid-size cities to engage in strategic efforts to lure young professionals to work in these new industries (Kline & Forbes, 2012).

While expectations for corps members are often high both from TFA and from the communities they serve, we seek to understand whether and how corps members become actively engaged in the broader community and political life of the cities they serve. Because of the concerted efforts of mid-size cities to attract young adults like those who join TFA, we focus specifically here on corps member engagement and leadership in mid-size cities. Do corps members see engagement in local politics as a possible avenue for their efforts? Or, do corps members see the

national stage as the means for change, as is often portrayed in media coverage of prominent alumni members? Do corps members find their mid-size placement cities fertile with opportunities to solve problems and engage in civic and political life? Or, do corps members leave their placement cities, viewing the economic, political, and educational challenges as intractable due to insular city politics?

Using data from fifty-five 2012 TFA corps members who completed three waves of a panel study in four mid-size city TFA placement sites, follow-up interviews with 11 corps members and interviews with TFA executive directors and regional staff, we examine how attitudes towards and engagement with local politics shift as a result corps members' experiences. While there is no universal corps experience, our research reveals that corps member attitudes do shift as a result of their two-year experience. While some corps members take on a new heightened awareness of the role local politics plays in shaping education, others disengage from local leadership and instead, put their energies elsewhere. To understand these shifts, we connect corps member attitude shifts to specific experiences during the two-year commitment to understand the role that TFA as an organization plays in shaping local civic and political leadership. Overall, we find that while some corps members reported an increased commitment to local politics, not all corps members developed the local commitment mid-sized city leaders envision might help revitalize their communities.

Background

It is well documented that corps members enter already highly engaged (McAdam & Brandt, 2009). In short, corps members are not typical young adults. These energetic and committed young leaders are exactly the people many mid-size cities are seeking. As mid-size city community leaders seek to rebuild their economic base, many are pursuing policies that specifically seek to attract and retain young leaders in their cities. As our review below demonstrates, these efforts, though widespread, are relatively understudied. Below, we first describe the efforts of mid-size cities to attract young adults; next, we examine to what extent and how TFA cultivates leaders, focusing specifically on civic and political leadership; and finally, we note the potential synergy that may occur between the efforts of mid-size cities and the leadership goals of TFA.

Mid-Size Cities: Seeking Talented and Energized New Leaders

While large urban centers such as Chicago, New York and Los Angeles are densely populated and home to much economic activity, more urban residents and a greater portion of the economy resides within America's mid-size cities such as Cleveland, Ohio; Bloomington, Indiana; and Rochester, New York, to name but a few. In 2010, 23.6 million people lived in America's nine largest cities (those with a population of greater than one million), while 30.1 million people lived in 64 mid-sized cities (those with a population of more than 250,000 but less than one million) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, mid-size cities are home to more than 2.2 million (13%) of America's employers that account for more than $3.1 trillion in America's total business sales and receipts (16.8% of all sales and receipts) (Survey of Business Owners, 2002). In contrast, cities with a population of more than one million house approximately two million employers (12%) that account for $2.5 trillion (13.8%) of all sales and receipts in the nation (Survey of Business Owners, 2002). In short, while mid-size cities may not attract the media and scholarly attention that large cities often do, they significantly shape the lives of many U.S. citizens and thus represent a significant portion of U.S. urban areas. Yet, mid-sized cities have struggled in recent decades.

Mid-size cities struggle for revitalization. Mid-size cities have been hit hard by population loss and economic decline due to changes in the economy (Conteh, 2015). Efforts to

revitalize mid-size cities must be distinct from the revitalization of large urban areas, which possess different resources upon which to draw. Local economic restructuring in mid-size cities must take into account the complex relationship between globalization and local economic resources that, especially for mid-size cities, reinforces the strategic significance of local institutions, leadership and political culture (Conteh, 2015). To stimulate and foster innovation and economic growth in these environments, network structures of key stakeholder groups and the interaction between these groups is imperative (Conteh, 2015). As numerous current economic redevelopment efforts show, many mid-size cities, including those that are part of this study, have begun to engage in the development of networking structures that work to attract and retain new residents and engage them in the redevelopment efforts (Sutton, 2009).

In the 1990s and 2000s, researchers of urban economic development began to emphasize the importance of incorporating both the needs of people and places (Ladd, 1994; Sutton, 2009). Ladd (1994) defined *place-based* economic development strategies as those that aim to preserve and strengthen community institutions within a particular place, while at the same time generating more jobs and a higher standard of living for existing residents. However, Ladd's (1994) research found these strategies to be ineffective since, in many cases, new jobs were simply relocated from nearby places, rather than generated for those who lived in the distressed urban area.

Mid-size cities turn to people-based place strategies to attract talent and energy.
Expanding upon Ladd's (1994) work, Sutton (2009) introduced the concept of people-based place strategies, which aim to alter the behavior of people in a place to increase the place's value. One example of a people-based place strategy is the inducement of artists to move into a neighborhood as "pioneers" to make that neighborhood more appealing to wealthier households, thereby increasing rents and property values. A similar example could be the inducement of young, innovative college graduates to move to a neighborhood as both role models for the younger generation and pioneers of more creative approaches to education.

According to Sutton (2009), people-based place strategies are less frequently researched or discussed in the academic literature of urban redevelopment. Nonetheless, many mid-size cities are investing in such strategies that, at least in part, aim to entice young, "creative class" workers[1] to their cities. Several strategies that aim to attract creative class workers are found in *The Creative City,* a practitioner-oriented book aimed at an audience of "urban innovators" (Landry, 2008). The toolkit emphasizes the importance of incorporating "outsider talent" since outsiders are "initially at least, more free from institutional pressures and constraints. They can bring virtues of freshness to a city and their first impressions are often very revealing" (Landry, 2008, p. 112). Given TFA's role in incorporating outsider talent into cities across the U.S., TFA can be viewed as an avenue through which mid-size cities can attract young, creative class workers and potential leaders. However, attracting new knowledge and creativity, in itself, it not sufficient to generate economic growth and development (Mathur, 1999; Sands & Reese 2008); mid-size cities must also find ways to retain these individuals. Incorporation quickly into leadership position throughout the civic and political networks of the city may be a way to retain talented young adults.

The potential match between mid-size city needs and TFA. TFA relocates thousands of young adults to mid-size cities across the U.S. to focus on education, but also to become more

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[1] The term "creative class" worker is attributed to Richard Florida's work on the concept of creativity as a plausible paradigm for contemporary economic growth. Florida (2002) contends that members of the creative class (e.g., scientists, engineers, architects, designers, educators, artists, musicians, entertainers) stimulate a region's economy by introducing new ideas, new technology, or new content.

broadly engaged in local life. As corps members form networks and relationships both within and outside of the education system, these teachers come to know and be known in their community and build community ties that may motivate them to become engaged beyond education issues and remain in their new communities. In many cases, these efforts go beyond coincidence and hope, and are explicit goals on the part of TFA. For example, TFA's executive director in Memphis, a mid-sized city seeking to revitalize, stated in a recent article that TFA Memphis is working to "increase the number of TFA members who choose to be long-term citizens of Memphis, hoping to capitalize on corps members' history of improving education" (Roberts, 2012, para. 15).

Given TFA's ability to attract highly engaged individuals, many mid-size city leaders view the potential incorporation of TFA corps members into local civic and political organizations as an important step toward revitalization. For example, the official TFA website for Connecticut explicitly mentions the importance of city revitalization within text that describes the role of TFA members in the city (Connecticut TFA, n.d.). Official TFA websites for Alabama, Missouri, Indiana, Colorado and New Jersey contain similar statements. Thus, if motivated to remain in the city, TFA corps members could encapsulate many of the characteristics mid-size cities seek to attract and retain: believing in change, identifying opportunities and innovative ideas to improve or adapt the community, and inducing collaboration and consensus building among stakeholders (Stimson, Stough & Salazar, 2005). In the following section, we describe ongoing efforts by TFA to cultivate leadership amongst corps members and alumni.

Teach For America: Cultivating Talented and Energized New Leaders

While TFA may be best known for placing "top" college graduates into schools in low-income communities around the country (e.g., Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Vasquez Heilig, 2005; Glazerman, Mayer & Decker, 2006; Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2008; Vasquez Heilig & Jez 2010; Xu, Hannaway & Taylor 2008), this is just one aspect of TFA's work. In addition to impacting students directly through teaching in high need areas, TFA works to "enlist, develop, and mobilize as many as possible of our nation's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellent" (TFA Our Mission, n.d.); this work extends far beyond the classroom and the two-year commitment. As TFA states, "Corps member don't just teach their students, they learn from them" (TFA Our Mission, n.d.) and, subsequently, use this knowledge to pursue opportunities that continue to shape public education.

TFA's focus on leadership. TFA, which strives to develop "the leaders necessary to realize educational excellence and equity," promotes multiple forms of leadership both inside and outside of schools and school systems (TFA, *The Foundation of Our Culture*, n.d.). As highlighted by TFA Executive Directors in mid-size cities, corps members are offered a multitude of opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and networks to become leaders both within schools and the larger community. In particular, TFA corps members and alumni are offered opportunities to engage in professional development and training related to careers in business, social entrepreneurship, teaching, and policy. "We try to provide professional development for our corps members that are aligned to not just teaching but any other job," one Executive Director described. TFA Executive Directors also have measurable goals related to fostering school and community leaders. As one Executive Director explained to us, "within the next three years we want at least two people to run for office and we set a goal of at least one person actually taking office" and "we want to see within the next three years, 10 people working in and taking on leadership roles within non-profits […] specifically within policy nonprofits." Another Executive Director described goals related to the

number of interactions between corps members and five main civic and civil rights organizations in the city. As these national and regional efforts demonstrate, TFA makes concerted efforts to develop the leadership capacity of their corps members.

TFA's emphasis on leadership both within and outside the classroom has not gone unnoticed. In fact, many news sources and education commentators have reported on the activities of TFA alumni in leadership roles. As Simon (2013) noted, TFA produces an "astounding number of alumni who transform the education landscape in states" (para. 5). As a result, Simon (2013) labeled TFA and its alumni a "political powerhouse" (para. 2). Thomas Toch, co-director of the think tank Education Sector, was quoted as saying, "TFA is front and center in the emerging generation of policy leaders" (Hoff, 2008, p. 18).

While education commentators have been tracking leaders associated with TFA, formal research on TFA's efforts to cultivate leaders is sparse. Higgins, Hess, Weiner and Robinson (2011) produced one of the few studies on TFA and its emphasis on cultivating leaders. Specifically, this work examines the link between educational entrepreneurs and membership in TFA. By examining the background of entrepreneurial leaders, they find that TFA appears more often than any other association or experience. In fact, they find that 15% of the organizations they examined were either founded or co-founded by alumni of TFA, a percentage unmatched by any other organization. TFA itself stated that, "more founders and leaders of education organizations participate in Teach For America than in any other organization or program" (TFA Fueling Long-Term Impact, n.d.). Among TFA alumni with prominent roles in influential educational organizations are Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, founders of the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) network of charter schools; Tom Torkelson and JoAnn Gama, co-founders of IDEA charter network; Sarah Usdin, founder of New Schools for New Orleans, a charter advocacy group; and Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor of Washington, D.C. public schools and founder of StudentsFirst.

Focusing on civic and political leadership. Of particular interest to this research are TFA's initiatives emphasizing leadership in civic and political organizations. Wendy Kopp, founder and Chair of the Board of TFA, stressed this goal for the organization in her reflection on TFA in its 20th year by stating that TFA seeks to "foster and accelerate the leadership of our alumni … in policy, advocacy and elected office" (Kopp, 2011, p. 26).

Growing numbers of TFA alumni now serve as political leaders both locally and nationally: alumni are present in congressional offices and committees, as well as neighborhood councils, school boards and high-ranking jobs in major local school districts (Simon, 2013; Sawchuk, 2014). Efforts to support alumni to assume these roles are intentional. Elisa Villanueva Beard, CEO of TFA, stated, "We don't have a choice" but to raise up more alumni as leaders, or "in 2- years, we'll just wake up and find…we have made only incremental progress. We've got to be aggressive" (Simon, 2013, para. 7). These aggressive efforts include providing TFA alumni with fellowships to work with personal executive coaches and attend regular leadership retreats aimed at grooming them for posts as state cabinet secretaries or superintendents (Simon, 2013). Among TFA alumni that have held prominent elected or appointed political positions are Kevin Huffman, former Tennessee commissioner of education; Michael Johnston, Colorado state senator; Kaya Henderson, chancellor of Washington, D.C. schools; and Steve Zimmer, Los Angeles school board president.

To focus on political leadership specifically, TFA launched the Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE), a 501c(4) in 2008. TFA corps members and alumni can join LEE, which supports alumni interested in pursuing elected office. "Through fellowships, trainings, partnership programming, and multimedia resources" LEE provides TFA alumni with tools to "help them succeed in the fields of politics, policy, advocacy, and community organizing" (TFA Public

Leadership Initiative, n.d.). Through the LEE programs, TFA alumni have access to campaign resources, including a large group of donors and canvassers in the TFA network. For example, recently elected North Carolina legislator Rob Bryan indicated that he was "in contact with them [LEE] during my race. I had some folks donate to me. They helped support my get-out-the-vote effort and sort of contacts" (Dewitt, 2013, para. 10).

Getting Inside the Black Box of the TFA Experience

While it is evident that TFA alumni are assuming leadership roles in school district administrative offices, statehouses and on Capitol Hill and that TFA sets aggressive goals to increase the number of alumni in leadership positions, very little is known about how the experiences during their two-year commitment and the programming TFA provided during their two-year corps experience influence corps member commitment to local civic and political leadership.

It is plausible that because the TFA recruitment process attracts individuals who are already highly civically and politically engaged, corps members need very little prompting to become engaged in local city politics; while alumni do go on to pursue civic and political leadership positions, these efforts are due to preexisting dispositions rather than the TFA experience. Research demonstrates that TFA attracts individuals with unbounded energy and ambition (Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2014) and that these individuals tend to be already highly engaged civically and politically (McAdam & Brandt, 2009). However, it may also be that the two years corps members spend in local classrooms, engaging with TFA, and encountering local officials and civic groups shapes their attitudes and levels of involvement in politics and civic life in important ways not yet captured by extant research. Thus, this research seeks to shed light on the ways mid-size cities and TFA efforts incite or impede local political and civic engagement among corps members throughout their two-year corps member experience.

Data and Methods

The factors that lead to civic and political engagement are multiple and act in synergistic ways (Acock & Scott, 1980; Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Cohen, Vigoda & Samorly, 2001; Miller, 1982; Sallach, Babchuk & Booth, 1972, Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenksin, Delli, & Michael, 2006). Moreover, young adults vary in their interests and efforts to become civically and politically engaged (Astin et al., 2006; Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2011; Zukin et al., 2006). To best understand the ways in which entering attitudes, programming and messages from TFA and experiences working in and with local constituents interact to influence local civic and political leadership and engagement, we draw upon multiple data sources to inform the analyses presented herein, including three waves of panel survey data, interviews with corps members and interviews with TFA executive directors or their designee in four TFA placement sites, and supporting documents that address TFA's emphasis on leadership generally and political leadership specifically.

Site Selection

Because of the emphasis mid-size cities place on attracting and retaining young adults to engage in urban revitalizations efforts, we focus this research on four mid-size cities that are also TFA placement sites to study. Unlike large urban centers such as New York City or Los Angeles (also TFA placement sites) that are already crowded with potential leaders, mid-size cities have explicitly pursued policies aimed at attracting young adults with the characteristics TFA corps members often hold. Thus, selecting mid-size cities ought to provide a window into the ways in

which local politics and existing leaders interact with TFA efforts to cultivate leadership amongst corps members.

We selected sites from two types of mid-size cities: older, industrial cities, which are characterized by declining economic growth, a loss of young-adult population and a low average educational attainment; and new economy cities, which are characterized by more rapid economic growth, stable or growing young-adult population and moderate to high average educational attainment.[2] All of the cities in our study are actively working to recruit and retain young professionals similar to those who enter TFA. For example, stakeholders in all four of the cities included in this study have recently published reports or have been publically quoted discussing their interest in and efforts to attract and retain young talent.[3] For example, in one of our selected cities, the mayor's vision includes becoming a city where young, talented people choose the city as their home and a city where young talent is developed and retained. A mayor in one of the other cities in this study has frequently discussed the city's vision of building a city where young, talented people want to move. Thus, the sites selected for study here represent mid-size cities actively recruiting young adults to become local community leaders, at least rhetorically. This context afforded us the opportunity to examine the extent to which TFA corps members find leadership opportunities open and available and the whether TFA corps members view themselves as being able to fill these leadership roles.

Accessing TFA Corps Members

To gain access to corps members, the lead researchers on this project submitted a proposal to the Office of Research Partnerships at TFA national. Once approved, the lead researchers on this project signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the researchers and TFA. The MOU specified the data that would be provided by TFA, the content focus of the data that the principal investigators (PIs) would collect, the sites in which the data collection would take place, and specified that data would not be shared with other parties. The MOU further specifies that the four mid-size cities would not be named to ensure that individuals would not be able to be identified. With regard to publishing, the MOU only requires that TFA be given an opportunity to comment prior to publication. The MOU specifies that the PIs "are not obligated to revise their work based upon TFA's review and comments" and thus, the views expressed herein represent only those of the authors.

Survey Development and Administration

Longitudinal panel survey design. Because of our interest in changing attitudes and actions due to the corps experience, we selected a panel survey as the best method to capture any changes as they occur. Panel studies collect repeated measures for the same individuals overtime, thus allowing researchers to identify determinants of stability or changes in reported attitudes or behaviors (Krosnick, 1988; Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). The impact of social events, such as engagement in the TFA experience, can be assessed with panel data.

One major drawback of panel studies, however, is the loss of respondents at each additional wave of panel data collected. While respondents may be willing to participate in a single, cross-sectional survey, far fewer may be willing to complete multiple surveys overtime (Visser, Krosnick &

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[2] In accordance with our Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) with Teach For America, we cannot include the names of our four case study cities.

[3] In accordance with our MOU with TFA, we cannot provide citations of these reports or media sources because doing so would identify our sites.

Lavrakas, 1999). The issue of survey fatigue due to multiple surveys is further compounded in this case by the high number of surveys TFA corps members are asked to complete by TFA itself throughout their corps experience. To increase response rates during waves 1 and 2, corps members who completed the survey were entered into a drawing to win $50 Amazon.com gift cards. Additionally, TFA regional staff alerted corps members to the survey and encouraged them to respond. To preserve as many survivors as possible for the wave 3, corps members who completed waves 1 and 2 were each offered a $20 gift card to complete wave 3. Nonetheless, survey fatigue and attrition from the panel was an issue that impacted our survey response rate and ultimate sample size. Because of this, we supplement our survey data with interview data to further support the findings indicated by the survey data (Olsen, 2004).

      Survey instrument development. Items were selected to assess the following areas: 1) attitudes towards and interest in civic and political engagement including a specific section on social entrepreneurship, 2) previous engagement levels in high school and college, 3) attitudes toward local and national politics including a section specifically about the politics of their placement city, 4) an assessment of self-efficacy to create change though various engagement activities, and 5) current teaching placement, organizational memberships, and leadership roles. Finally, a section that collected basic demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, family educational attainment levels, etc.) was included.

      Whenever possible, survey questions were drawn from known instruments such as The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the General Social Survey and previous studies that focus specifically on young adult civic and political engagement. By using questions commonly found on other survey instruments, we were able to compare the responses of TFA corps members to the larger U.S. population. Because most items in the survey have been used in other national surveys, and were previously tested for reliability and validity, we did not conduct our own reliability and validity testing. With limited access to TFA corps members, the PIs opted not to not lose potential respondents by using them in a pilot study. We did conduct a small pilot of the survey mode with non-TFA corps members to assess survey length, question clarity and ensure that the online mode was working as programmed (e.g. skipping questions if appropriate based on screening questions). While it is possible that the reliability and validity testing that was completed previously may not translate to a new study, this risk is minimal here because the previous surveys were also focused on adults or young adults. Thus, the population we examined for this study closely mirrors the demographics (e.g., age, educational attainment, socio-economic status) of the population for which the questions were originally developed. When new items were created because no pre-existing items were located or because the items needed to be tailored to specific TFA experiences or locations, the PIs developed questions using survey item development standards (Converse & Presser, 1986; Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau, 2009; Schuman & Presser, 1996).

      Survey items reflected both "traditional" notions of civic and political engagement (i.e. voting, canvassing for a political candidate, contacting the media, etc.), as well as more current conceptions of engagement that include social entrepreneurship and engaged citizenship (i.e. "buycotting" – the purchasing of specific items to support a social cause such as GAP "red" t-shirts, walk/run/bike-a-thons, blogging, starting a not-for-profit, etc.). This reflects extant research on the changing nature of young adult civic and political engagement (Dalton, 2008; Flanagan, 2013; Zukin et al., 2006).

      Other survey items examined corps members' perceptions of their placement city and the potential for political engagement. These items were developed by the lead researchers to reflect current events and the specific political context within which corps members were situated. For

example, respondents were provided a series of statement such as "Local political and community leaders in *City* care a great deal about attracting young professionals to the city" and "*City* has a lot of opportunities for young people to be involved in local politics." Respondents expressed their agreement to each statement on a five point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Yet another set of survey items focused on corps' members beliefs about political and civic engagement, providing statements such as "being actively involved in local politics is my responsibility," "being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility," and "I believe that citizens have an obligation to vote in elections."

Finally, the survey included questions specific to the political and social context of TFA corps members' placement city to understand how corps members became engaged with local activities. To create these questions, we examined local media sources to understand the central education issues and topics of conversation within each of the four mid-size cities. Efforts were made to ask similar questions across sites when possible, but some variation was inevitable due to local political context. For example, survey respondents were asked about recent policies regarding teacher evaluation and tenure, which had been introduced across multiple sites. Additionally, respondents were asked their opinions regarding mayoral control, the Common Core State Standards, and charter school expansion, all of which were political issues salient across the cities. In other instances, questions specifically related to elections unique to a site, such as the local school board election, were included to understand both awareness of local politics and the extent of engagement in these local elections.

Survey administration. With support from the Office of Research Partnerships at TFA and the Executive Directors of each site, we obtained a complete email contact list for all entering 2012 corps members in the four selected TFA sites. More than 500 members in the four TFA placement sites were contacted with an initial invitation to participate in the research study in the fall of 2012 and again in the spring of 2013. In total, 173 unique TFA corps members responded to at least one wave of the survey, however only 55 completed all three waves of the survey. Because of the potential issues with variation in sample composition when attempting to compare findings across survey waves, we focus our analysis for this paper only on the 55 corps members who completed all three waves of the survey, thereby ensuring that any changes in attitude or engagement do not simply reflect changes in the composition of the sample.

The 20-25 minute surveys were administered via Survey Monkey, which allowed for surveying of corps members via the Internet at three time points: wave 1: pre-TFA impressions and experiences – August/September 2012; wave 2: end of year 1 impressions and experiences – July/August 2013; wave 3 – post-TFA commitment impressions and experiences – July/August 2014. For each wave, corps members received an introductory email from the PIs on the project, which included a link to the survey. The initial email identified the PIs as alumni of TFA and explained that the Research Partnerships Team at TFA had approved the research project. Follow-up reminder emails were sent one week, two weeks and four weeks after the initial email.

Survey Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed in several different ways. First, we used descriptive statistics and cross-tabs to examine differences in the types and frequency of participation in civic and political activities among corps members. These descriptive statistics provided a starting point for further statistical investigation by detecting possible differences between different groups at different time points through paired t-tests. Further, we looked for patterns within and across TFA sites in the following five areas: 1) attitudes towards and interest in civic and political engagement including a

specific section on social entrepreneurship, 2) previous engagement levels in high school and college, 3) attitudes toward local and national politics including a section specifically about the politics of their placement city, 4) efficacy to create change though various engagement activities, and 5) current teaching placement, organizational memberships, and leadership roles.

Because we used a panel study design where respondents were interviewed at multiple time points, we also examined changes in attitudes, levels of involvement, and knowledge about local issues in TFA corps members' placement city within an individual across the TFA two-year commitment. By comparing corps members' own attitudes and levels of engagement at multiple time points, we were able to better understand whether the corps experience seemed to have shaped and influenced beliefs and actions. We looked specifically at positive and negative changes in attitudes and behaviors. To statistically examine these changes over time, we conducted paired t-tests, using a Bonferroni correction, on each the survey items listed in Table 2. We also examined whether there appeared to be relationships between patterns that were emerging. However, because of the small sample size, we were cautious about drawing strong claims about these relationships. To support these initial impressions that emerged out of the survey data, we conducted interviews to further understand potential drivers of the changes we were detecting.

Follow-Up Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted in Spring 2015 with a sub-sample of 11 TFA corps members across all four cities in order to gain a better understanding of the specific experiences that shaped corps member attitudes and behaviors. From the 55 individuals in our sample, we purposively sampled those individuals who expressed substantial movement (either positive or negative) in their attitudes. We utilized a purposive sampling strategy because we sought "information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose" of our inquiry (Patton, 1990, p. 230). We focused on individuals with survey responses that indicated significant changes in two constructs: civic commitment and self-efficacy as well as perceptions of local support and engagement. Item analyses of the survey items that made up these two constructs were conducted (see Appendix A). Interviewing those who experienced a substantial shift on these survey items was desirable since these "movers" would likely provide a robust set of insights regarding what experiences shaped their attitudes and behaviors. Because these individuals were impacted the most (i.e. had the greatest shift in their attitudes and behaviors), their insights would uncover the role that specific experiences during the two-year commitment had on these shifts.

Substantial movement in either a positive or negative direction was defined as at least a two-step movement on a five-step Likert scale (e.g., from "disagree" to "agree," from "strongly agree" to "neither disagree or agree," from "neither disagree or agree" to "strongly disagree"). Fifteen individuals were identified as "substantial movers" with three moving solely in a positive direction, four moving solely in a negative direction, and eight moving in a positive direction on one construct and negative direction on the other. Both the proportion of gender and TFA placement cities represented by the fifteen selected interviewees were reflective of the overall sample. Of the 15 potential interviewees, 11 agreed to be interviewed.

Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the research team asked respondents to answer questions related to 1) attitudes towards and interest in civic and political engagement including a specific section on social entrepreneurship, 2) previous engagement levels in high school and college, 3) attitudes toward local and national politics including a section specifically about the politics of their placement city, 4) efficacy to create change though various engagement activities, and 5) current teaching placement, organizational memberships, and leadership roles. Interviews

lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Upon completion, all interviews were transcribed for analysis. A baseline a priori coding scheme was established and applied during the first round of coding the data. The scheme was informed by an extensive literature review related to civic and political engagement as well as a review of TFA goals and priorities. The coding scheme was refined after the first round of coding to reflect emergent themes and ideas related to our research questions but not yet captured by the a priori codes. Utilizing this revised scheme, we coded interview transcripts using the constant comparative method (Patton, 2002). The process was both iterative and theory-driven, and reflected inductive and deductive analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In addition to the above, we conducted interviews with members of the TFA staff (the executive director or his/her designee and members of the staff directly focused on alumni retention) in each of our four sites. These interviews provided additional supporting data on the number and types of programs offered to corps members that focus specifically on local civic and political engagement and leadership. We used a semi-structured interview protocol that focused on understanding the types of training and opportunities offered to TFA corps members during their two-year corps experience. We focused on activities that were meant to develop leadership skills or encourage engagement in civic or political local organizations. Similar to above, the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews were coded using the constant comparative methods in which we compared transcripts for similarities and differences (Patton, 2002). Moreover, transcript analyses for these data followed a generally inductive approach for analysis. The purpose for using solely an inductive approach was to allow themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Findings

While it is certainly true that corps members enter highly engaged, the TFA experience had a profound impact on how many corps members in our study viewed their role in local civic and political organizations. Many corps members became deeply engaged in their local communities, taking on leadership roles and making longer-term commitments to their new placement cities. However, this commitment is not uniform; some corps members also became disenchanted with the mid-size city political environment they encountered and turned to other outlets.

Already Highly Engaged: Entering Attitudes and Activities

Similar to previous studies of TFA corps members (e.g. McAdam & Brandt, 2009), we find that corps members were highly engaged prior to entering Teach For America. Corps members are highly atypical young adults, expressing very high rates of commitment to civic and political life and demonstrating an already strong track record of engagement and leadership.

As shown in Table 1, column 1, corps members in our sample entered their placement site with a very high level of engagement and a strong sense of civic duty. For example, approximately four out of every five of our entering TFA corps members were involved in volunteer or service work prior to entering their placement site. Additionally, 98% indicated that they were very or extremely likely to vote in the November election. This level of engagement is particularly high relative to national data that showed that just 63% of eighteen to twenty-nine year olds planned to vote in 2012 and just 18% followed political campaigns in 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2012a).

Before arriving in their placement city, TFA corps members in our study also expressed optimism about their ability to create change in their new setting. For example, more than 90% of our sample indicated that they believed the education achievement gap was a solvable problem and 80% believed that great schools could close the achievement gap. Moreover, approximately 90% of our sample indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that (a) being actively involved in

community issues was their responsibility and (b) being actively engaged in education issues were their responsibility. The TFA corps members we examined also generally felt that city leaders would be receptive to their efforts to improve education, and 87% of our sample agreed that local political and community leaders would be good allies in this work, stating that they believed local leaders cared a great deal about improving education. Unlike their views of city leaders, these TFA corps members were more critical of the receptivity of school district leaders to their engagement. Far fewer (52%) agreed that the school district was supportive of educators with new ideas to improve education.

Table 1
TFA Corps Members' Change in Civic and Political Engagement Activity

Civic and Political Engagement Activity	Percent Engaged in Wave 1 – Start of Placement	Percent Engaged in Wave 3 – End of TFA Commitment	Wave 1 to Wave 3% Change
Member of a group or association	48.8%	28.6%	- 41.4%
Volunteer regularly	43.6%	29.1%	- 33.3%
Involved in voluntary and/or service activities	83.3%	57.1%	- 31.5%
Read news online several times a week	58.2%	43.6%	- 25.1%
Talk to family and friends about politics	72.7%	65.5%	- 9.9%
Donate money to charities	47.3%	50.9%	+ 7.6%
Follow government and public affairs	43.6%	50.9%	+ 16.7%
Read political blogs or websites	40.0%	50.9%	+ 27.3%
Listen to radio shows about political issues	34.5%	45.5%	+ 31.9%
Read a newspaper in print several times a week	27.3%	54.5%	+ 99.6%

Shifting Engagement: Increased Local Civic and Political Engagement for Some

As compared to their reported engagement levels before entering their placement city, TFA corps members in our sample reported substantial shifts in how they engaged in civic and political life as they progressed through their two-year commitment. We also found that some corps members intensified their commitment to engagement, especially around local politics. Interviews with corps members and TFA Executive Directors suggest that these shifts in priorities likely reflect a response to messages they were receiving from TFA, a topic we take up in greater detail below.

Declining engagement in groups and volunteer opportunities. Many corps members reported a *decline* in engagement with civic and volunteer activities. For example, almost universally, corps members expressed less engagement in volunteer organizations. Given the demands of teaching, this decline ought not be surprising. During the follow-up interviews, corps members confirmed that the demands of the classroom often prevented them from engaging civically and politically as they once had. For example, one corps member stated, "Remember, I was that super-intense teacher who really was at my school, had three meals a day there, spent most of my time there, weekends, everything like that. I really didn't do a whole lot besides teach." Similarly, another corps member expressed that, "It was more of a time thing, rather than an interest thing." Yet another stated,

> It's so hard to focus, really, on anything else, except for those 20 to 30 kids that are in [the classroom] at a time. It's not that I lacked the interest. It was just that I pretty much gave up everything, except for teaching.

As these quotes exemplify, the decline in participation in some areas of civic and political life were a result of the time and energy that TFA teachers poured into their teaching responsibilities, but did not reflect a change in their commitment to engaging in such activities. Moreover, these corps members entered extremely engaged; thus, even with a decrease in engagement, levels remain relatively high amongst their age group.

Increasing focus on political knowledge and voting. Although many TFA corps members were less involved in organizational groups and volunteer activities, their rates of engagement *increased* in some areas. For example, overall, TFA corps members indicated that their voting rates increased. Forty-five% of respondents at the end of their TFA experience reported voting regularly, up from 38% at the start of their TFA experience. This increase is further noteworthy given that the wave 3 survey was administered during a non-presidential election year and research shows that only approximately 20% of millennials turned out to vote in local midterm elections in 2014 (The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2015). TFA corps members also reported spending *more* time keeping up on political issues. Corps members reported higher rates of reading the newspaper (increased from 27% in wave 1 vs. 55% in wave 3), reading political blogs and websites (40% in wave 1 vs. 51% in wave 3), following government and public affairs (44% in wave 1 vs. 51% in wave 3) and listening to radio shows about political issues (35% in wave 1 vs. 46% in wave 3). These rates are very high as compared to typical millennials. For example, the wave 3 rate of reading the newspaper is nearly twice the national average of 23% (Pew Research Center, 2012b) (See Table 1 for a complete list of wave 1-to-wave 3 changes in activity rates). It would appear that something about the TFA experience is fueling increased interest in political information and voting.

Growing sense of local political commitment. Focusing specifically on engagement in local politics, we found *increased* commitment amongst corps members at the end of their corps experience. Corps members in our sample were more likely to say that being actively involved in local politics was their responsibility at the end of their two-year experience (65% in wave 1 vs. 97% in wave 3). Additionally, corps members expressed greater self-efficacy. At the end of the corps experience, corps members in our study were somewhat more likely to believe that they had good ideas for programs or projects to solve community problems (40% in wave 1 vs. 47% in wave 3).

Not only did the average rate increase, but so too did the intensity with which some corps members expressed support. For example, the% of corps members who *strongly* agreed that being

actively involved in local politics was their responsibility more than doubled (15% in wave 1 vs. 34% in wave 3). Further, the percent of corps members who strongly agreed that they had good ideas to solve education problems nearly tripled, even though the average remained about the same.

In follow-up interviews, corps members commented frequently that their attitudes towards local engagement shifted dramatically during their two-year commitment. One corps member recalled,

> When I was in college, I was just a student and I found national politics much more glamorous overall, I guess you could say. I think I didn't realize the impact of local politics. Now I see the personal impact of local politics. As somebody living in [city], you really have to keep a closer [eye] on that, I think, than national things.

Similarly, one corps member felt that, at the local level, there are "so many more opportunities and there's just a lot more representatives that you can meet within your local area."

Corps members also came to realize that, although local politics may be less "glamorous," change may be more possible, come much faster, and be more effective in the long-term when pursued at the local level. As one corps member summarized, "local level changes happen faster, and the effects are seen faster." In part, corps members attributed their belief that change is more possible at the local level to a less complicated political landscape with "less people to go through" and where "your local representatives [are] more available to you, whether it's your local town planning board or town-hall meetings, your mayor. They're going be a lot more available than obviously even your senator."

While corps members expressed high degrees of interest in and engagement with local civic and political activities even prior to their corps experience, we believe that the *shifts* in their engagement focus and their *new* interest in local engagement can be attributed to specific activities organized and offered by TFA. Thus, TFA, as an organization, seems to significantly shape how these highly energetic corps members direct their energy. But not all corps members responded in such a positive fashion to these efforts.

Shifting Engagement: Disillusionment Sets In for Some

It is important to reaffirm that there is no universal TFA experience. Thus, while we document, above, the ways in which many corps members became newly engaged or shifted their efforts, likely as a result of the opportunities provided by TFA, not all corps members finished their experience with the same level of commitment to civic and political leadership. Rather, some corps members expressed more negative attitudes towards engagement, especially at the local level. These declines may be attributed to the disillusionment that some TFA corps members seemed to experience during their two-year commitment. Recall from the above, corps members entered their placement sites extremely optimistic about their ability to solve problems and create change.

As shown in Table 2, between the first and third wave of the survey, some corps members were less likely to state that being involved in community issues is their responsibility (91% in wave 1 vs. 77% in wave 3). Some corps members even reported significantly less support for being involved in education issues (89% in wave 1 vs. 62% in wave 3). When asked what hindered engagement with local politics, one corps member replied,

> I would not wanna [become engaged]—it's just everyone knows everyone and that type of a thing. I don't know, just the headache that it would be if I was still in [city] because I know all of the issues that they have.

Another corps member described how his new first-hand knowledge of the realities of urban education led to disillusionment with local coverage of the topic: "I think unbiased information is more difficult to find—well, it's difficult in both [local and national] senses, but I think it's really hard in local politics especially."

Not only was there an overall decline in support from some, but several corps members decreased the intensity with which they expressed support for being involved in community issues and education issues. For example, while 91.5% of corps members in wave 1 either agreed or strongly agreed that active involvement in community issues was their responsibility, only 77.4% in wave 3 reported similarly strong feelings. Entering corps members were three times more likely to *strongly* agree that being actively involved in education issues was their responsibility than when they completed their corps experience. See Table 3 for a complete table of changes in intensity of support.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Civic Engagement between Waves 1 and 3

Engagement Area	Wave 1 Average (s.d.)	Wave 3 Average (s.d.)	T-test P-Value
Civic Commitment and Self Efficacy			
Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility	4.23 (0.60) N=47	3.89 (0.75) N=53	0.0236 df=45
Being actively involved in education issues is my responsibility	4.36 (0.79) N=47	3.68 (0.85) N=53	0.0000 df=45
Being actively involved in local politics is my responsibility.	3.81 (1.01) N=47	4.26 (0.64) N=53	0.0185 df=45
Being concerned about local issues is an important responsibility for everybody.	4.28 (0.62) N=46	4.09 (0.57) N=53	0.1596 df=44
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve education problems in City.	3.60 (1.06) N=47	3.92 (0.81) N=53	0.1233 df=45
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve community problems in City.	3.68 (1.18) N=47	3.55 (1.01) N=53	0.4642 df=45
Perception of Local Support for Engagement			
My city's school district is supportive of educators with new ideas to improve education.	4.00 (1.11) N=48	3.06 (1.26) N=55	0.0002 df=47
Local political and community leaders in my city care a great deal about improving education.	4.08 (0.66) N=40	3.60 (1.01) N=55	0.0051 df=39

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Civic Engagement between Waves 1 and 3

Engagement Area *Wave*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Civic Commitment and Self Efficacy					
Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility					
Wave 1	0.0%	0.0%	6.4%	66.0%	25.5%
Wave 3	0.0%	5.7%	17.0%	60.4%	17.0%
Being actively involved in education issues is my responsibility					
Wave 1	0.0%	4.3%	2.1%	51.1%	38.3%
Wave 3	0.0%	9.4%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
Being actively involved in local politics is my responsibility.					
Wave 1	2.1%	8.5%	19.2%	51.1%	14.9%
Wave 3	0.0%	1.9%	3.8%	60.4%	34.0%
Being concerned about local issues is an important responsibility for everybody.					
Wave 1	0.0%	0.0%	6.5%	60.9%	30.4%
Wave 3	0.0%	3.8%	3.8%	71.7%	20.8%
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve education problems in City.					
Wave 1	0.0%	17.0%	25.5%	44.7%	6.4%
Wave 3	0.0%	5.7%	17.0%	58.5%	17.0%
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve community problems in City.					
Wave 1	0.0%	14.9%	34.0%	29.8%	10.6%
Wave 3	0.0%	15.0%	35.9%	30.1%	17.0%
Perception of Local Support for Engagement					
My city's school district is supportive of educators with new ideas to improve education.					
Wave 1	0.0%	6.3%	25.0%	47.9%	4.2%
Wave 3	10.9%	20.0%	30.9%	29.1%	1.8%
Local political and community leaders in my city care a great deal about improving education.					
Wave 1	0.0%	4.5%	11.8%	64.5%	19.1%
Wave 3	6.9%	9.7%	19.4%	48.6%	12.5%
City has a lot of opportunities for young people to be involved in local politics.					
Wave 1	0.0%	6.5%	41.9%	38.7%	12.9%
Wave 3	1.8%	7.3%	29.1%	43.6%	9.1%
City has a lot of economic opportunities for young people.					
Wave 1	0.0%	13.6%	20.5%	52.3%	13.6%
Wave 3	1.8%	10.9%	20.0%	58.2%	7.3%
Local political and community leaders in City care a great deal about attracting young professionals to the city.					
Wave 1	0.0%	7.9%	21.1%	57.9%	13.2%
Wave 3	1.8%	3.6%	23.6%	49.1%	16.4%
City is an attractive place to live for a young person like me.					
Wave 1	1.9%	9.6%	0.0%	55.8%	32.7%
Wave 3	3.6%	12.7%	0.0%	65.5%	18.2%

Note. Some rows may not add to 100% due to non-responders and rounding error

TFA Experiences During the Corps Years

Because we captured entering attitudes, commitments and engagement activities, we can more confidently attribute the observed changes discussed above to experiences and opportunities that occurred during their time as a TFA corps members. To better understand what those experiences were and how and why they impacted corps member attitudes and engagement, we analyzed interviews with corps members and TFA regional staff to get inside the black box of the TFA experience in mid-size cities. Below we discuss the goals set by TFA for local engagement and leadership along with the messages and experiences TFA provided to cultivate local engagement and leadership. Finally, we discuss the crucial supporting role LEE played in developing corps member engagement and leadership.

TFA goals for local engagement and leadership. The changes we document above were not left to chance, but instead were cultivated by TFA through rigorous goal setting by each regional office. Interviews with Executive Directors revealed that regional staff was keenly interested in ensuring that TFA corps members had access to community organizations and leaders regularly provided corps members with opportunities to engage in discussions and share ideas with local leaders. In fact, regions set specific targets to ensure that they were attending to these outcomes. One Executive Director provided insight into the goals that TFA sites set to ensure that corps members are becoming local leaders. As he explained:

> One of our big goals is just pure numbers – how many folks within our base are connected or are becoming engaged civically. For them, [we ask] how do you then take it from being engaged to really being an advocate and really produce not only attending these events but also hosting these events or to actually working on a political campaign or from being a corps members to working in policy and actually transition from doing that to being an elected official. So we actually have specific goals around how many people we want to run for office in the next three years, how many people we want to win, how many people we want to be working in non-profits that work around policy, and how many folks we want to be civically engaged.

Interviews with other TFA Executive Directors also showed the great efforts taken to ensure every incoming TFA member is signed up as a member of LEE: each Executive Director that was interviewed commented on measurable goals of having between 75 and 90% of TFA corps members enrolled in LEE. One Executive Director had more detailed LEE engagement goals, stating:

> we try to get 80 to 90% of our folks to at least be at the base level of engagement and that is being signed up for LEE. And then I think our goal is around 30 to 40% who we want to be the next level up, which is attending a LEE event, attending a civic meeting around the community, things like that.

TFA messages for local engagement and leadership. As discussed previously and demonstrated in Table 1, one of our strongest findings was that corps members became more engaged with the tracking of political issues via various news sources including radio, newspaper, word of mouth, and online, especially in the local arena. Our follow-up interviews point to the role that TFA played in driving this finding. Corps members time and again explained to us that messages from TFA significantly influenced their attention to news and information sources, especially related to education policy. When asked what messages corps members recalled receiving

from TFA regarding civic and political engagement, every interviewee indicated that TFA promoted a message of "become informed" and that TFA actively facilitated local conversations about education issues and policies that enabled corps members to become knowledgeable about local education politics in their placement city. As one corps member explained, "I do think that TFA has kept me more mindful of local education policy. That's for sure. Like what different [education leaders] had planned or candidates had planned for education budgets. TFA definitely made me more cognizant of that." Another corps member summarized the messages she felt she received by stating: "I think that being aware about what's going on is probably the main idea [I received]."

While many corps members felt they sometimes received messages to "Do it, do it, do it. Engage, engage, engage", as one corps member commented, the majority of respondents indicated that they didn't feel obligated to take action; rather, they felt TFA wanted them to be informed but remain focused on the classroom during their two-year commitment. Leadership could then follow after they completed their two years. For example, one corps member indicated that TFA isn't "necessarily looking for everyone to be the champions all the time just because they realize our limitations." Similarly, another respondent reported that TFA wanted corps members "just to be aware of the issues that are affecting your community and how you can help be an advocate to change those things or to remedy them or whatever is within your power." Yet another corps member stated, "I heard a lot more: 'You should be aware. You should be aware. You should be reading the news,' those sorts of things. I didn't see a strong organizational push to encourage us to get involved in policy."

Moreover, TFA Executive Directors explained the numerous communication channels through which they provide TFA corps members with information about local events and policy issues and the ways in which corps members could become involved. All Executive Directors that were interviewed discussed information dissemination through both monthly newsletter blasts to all corps members as well as weekly e-mail communication between corps members and their assigned coaches. Additionally, all Executive Directors discussed the importance of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) in getting the word out about civic and political engagement opportunities such as "house meetings," "Ed Talks," and "Policy and Pints," which are programs that bring TFA corps members and alumni together to engage in debate and discussion around current education policy issues.

TFA programming for local engagement and leadership. In addition to providing information supports, corps members also noted that TFA helped connect them to others engaged in local politics (61% of those surveyed), and provided resources to become engaged in local politics (39% of those surveyed). As one corps member summarized "Teach For America created connections with other people, and not just our corps members, but other people that were politicians that were interested in the education movement." These efforts were further detailed in interviews with TFA Executive Directors, who frequently mentioned the importance of developing connections between corps members and local leaders. While leadership was a goal, TFA Executive Directors also thought about building capacity in their local communities as many mid-size cities hope. For example, one Executive Director discussed the relationship between community connections and retaining TFA corps members in the city:

> We try to be a conduit. We try to connect our folks to as many opportunities as possible because we know that at the end of the day if I, as a Corp member, get connected to an opportunity, I am going to be more likely to stay.

This same Executive Director also stated, "it is all about pipeline in the program. When people get connected to something, they stay." An Executive Director in another one of our study sites also

commented on the ways in which they support TFA corps members who act as community leaders, sometimes even financially:

> We have three [TFA alumni] in medical school who started a non-profit called [name omitted] because they had students who wanted to be doctors but didn't have family (working) in hospitals. We (TFA) helped them fund it…they came in and talked to us…so we helped connect them with funding and then they go off and do their thing.

As these efforts demonstrate, TFA supports corps members to become actively engaged leaders in their new communities.

Support from LEE. While corps members noted the role that TFA played in shaping their attitudes and actions toward local political engagement and leadership, they also noted the critical role that LEE played in facilitating and encouraging political and civic engagement. Just over 50% of survey respondents indicated that they were members of LEE and 70% reported being contacted by LEE while serving as a corps member. In interviews, corps members in interviews discussed the various LEE offerings such as newsletters, town-hall meetings, training sessions, networking session, and internships. One respondent discussed LEE conferences and summits "which [were] trying to get kids more involved in their education" and another respondent discussed a LEE-led town-hall meeting where they "offered the opportunity to connect [with a LEE representative] to see how they can help me–whether it's professional development, career opportunities and becoming more engaged with local politics as well." Another respondent discussed the breadth of opportunities offered by LEE stating,

> I think they have things available to you on the small scale, for people like me–to go have a beer and talk about what's going on in politics all the way up to, 'I'm an elected official and I need help running my campaign again.'

Similarly, another respondent stated, "it [LEE] gave me some really great ideas about how to be an active participant in the politics of my community. … It was something that I had never even heard of or been exposed to." As these statements demonstrate, corps members highlighted the many ways that LEE acted as an important facilitator to engagement. LEE was overwhelmingly discussed by both TFA corps members and Executive Directors as the organization primarily responsible for getting corps members active and engaged.

City Experiences During the Corps Years

In addition to the experiences cultivated by TFA, corps members also encountered opportunities and messages from their new home cities. As previously discussed, mid-size cities often invest in strategies that aim to entice young, "creative class" workers to their cities, as well as convince them to remain in the city. We found this to be true in the mid-size cities included in our study. In fact, the Executive Directors in all four of our sites mentioned the importance of attracting and retaining corps members in their city. "We have two employees that solely focus on keeping alumni the city, attracting them to the city," one Executive Director stated. Yet another Executive Director explained, "If someone wants to do advocacy, we want to make sure they know there are viable options for that here in *City*. Want to retain 75% of our folks in *City* by 2020." In this section, we detail how corps members' interactions and impressions of the city shaped their local engagement and leadership.

Initially, 13 corps members (24%) indicated on the survey that they were unlikely to remain in their placement city beyond their two-year commitment, while 25 corps members (45%) indicated they would likely remain.[4] While both TFA and city leaders expressed a desire to see corps members remain in their placement city, we did not find that corps members are living up to these expectations. After their two-year commitment only 17 (31%) of the corps members in our sample actually planned to remain in their placement city. A few (4) corps members who initially indicated that they were unlikely to remain reversed their decision. Further, only half (13) of those who originally thought they were likely to stay in their placement city actually made plans to do so.

According to research, the "creative class" individuals care more about quality of life than the corporate rat race; prefer start-ups, small consulting firms or research labs; and want fun neighborhoods, art galleries, performance spaces and theaters, a teeming blend of cafes, nightlife and a tremendous amount of diversity (Florida, 2002). While TFA brought all of the study participants to their placement city and made efforts to support their engagement, other events and attractions within the city are often what compelled them to stay. Just 18% of respondents indicated that connections with TFA influenced them to stay in their placement city. In comparison, one in four survey respondents indicated that the quality of life in their placement city influenced their decision to remain and, one-third of survey respondents indicated that their friends living in the city influenced them to stay in their placement city beyond their two-year commitment.

Perceptions of TFA placement sites and retention. Even if TFA was not the driving factor that kept corps members in the city, corps members' perception of how welcoming the city was to TFA corps members specifically influenced their decision to remain in their placement city. Those corps members who indicated that they would remain in their placement city after their two-year commitment were slightly more likely to describe their placement city as "improving" (35%, compared to 25% of those who indicated they would not like to remain in their placement city), "fun" (29%, compared to 25% of those who indicated they would not like to remain in their placement city), and "diverse" (24%, compared to 20% of those who indicated they would not like to remain in their placement city). Similarly, corps members who indicated they would not remain in their placement city after their two-year commitment were slightly more likely to describe their placement city as "segregated" (35%, compared to 29% of those who indicated that they would like to remain in their placement city). These findings concur with Florida's (2002) idea of young entrepreneurs being attracted cities that are diverse, tolerant, and provide a varied, vibrant lifestyle.

When cross-referencing interview and survey responses, it is evident those who indicated they would remain in the city tended to have more positive interview responses around their placement city's openness and acceptance of outsiders. For example, one corps member who remained in his placement city described it as "a city that is growing very quickly," a place where "a lot of people […] aren't from [this city]," and a place where "people in political office are very receptive to new people and very excited about the vibrant, young culture of the city." In contrast, one corps member who did not remain in the city described her placement city's unwelcome atmosphere: "There were articles published in the paper like, 'TFA Corps members ineffective.' … They were not that receptive 100% of the time." While we are cautious about drawing strong conclusions from our limited sample, these statements suggest that the broader city context and feelings of being welcomed as an outsider were an important influence on corps members' long-term engagement.

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[4] Unlikely to remain was operationalized as selecting 4 or below and likely to remain was operationalized as selecting a 6 or higher on a 10 point scale for the question "How likely are you to remain in your placement city after your two-year commitment?" where 1=very unlikely and 10=very likely.

Limitations to Findings

While we document important ways that the two-years in Teach For America shape attitudes towards and engagement with local politics, it may be that our findings actually *underestimate* the extent to which the experience impacts these attitudes and actions because our final wave of data was captured right as the two-year commitment was coming to a close. It may be that there is a significant lag in the impact; the experiences that occurred during the two-years may take hold and shape attitudes and actions after the two-year commitment has officially ended. We heard hints of this lagged impact in our interviews with some of our least engaged corps members. For example, even when corps members didn't report becoming involved, the TFA experiences seemed to trigger corps member to think about local politics and civic engagement in new ways. For example, one corps member indicated that,

> as a [TFA] teacher, you really see yourself as someone that's transient. Also, I was just more interested in broader implications of federal policy. It's only when I'm thinking about actually settling down now to possibly be in a place for a while, that local politics become a lot more, both interesting and important for me to focus on.

This corps member was one of the negative movers and thus, we were surprised to hear such positive statements. It seems that, upon further reflection, the experiences are having a impact on corps members beliefs around local engagement, be it in their placement city or elsewhere. Additionally, one corps member thought that engagement in local politics would be "an extension of your time in the corps. It's the next step, I guess. If you really want to continue the impact that you're having in your classroom, that's where your efforts should be to have a lasting change." Thus, it is possible that if we had surveyed corps members at an even later time point, even more corps members would report positive impacts on their local engagement and leadership.

Conversely, it may be that our findings overestimate the impact of the corps experience. It may be that as corps members' networks change as some fellow corps members move to new locations and they no longer receive the consistent messages from TFA about the importance of engagement, that their attitudes and engagement may revert back to those captured by wave 1. Put simply, the TFA effect may fade out. Our interviewees, who were interviewed approximately nine months after their two-year experience was completed, suggest that this is not the case. Nonetheless, our sample of corps members is small and thus, larger and more diverse samples may yield different results. Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that the impact we detect may fade out over time.

Additionally, it is possible that our sample over estimates the impact of TFA on corps members because the survey invitation clearly indicated the topic (civic and political engagement). It may be that those who participated in all three waves were those that were most engaged. If this were true, it may be that our findings overstate the degree to which the TFA experience spur interest and engagement in local civic and political leadership. While we do not have data from non-responders, we do have data from those who completed at least one of the three survey waves. We used these data to test for sample selection bias using bivariate tests (e.g., χ^2 to compare the demographic characteristics of wave 1 and 3 completers and non-completers). Overall, we found small differences between our wave 1 and 3 completers and non-completers.

While these limitation should caution readers from drawing very strong conclusions based on this research, we do believe that the findings point to important ways that the TFA experience shapes corps members' civic and political leadership, especially at the local level.

Discussion and Conclusion

As others have already documented in detail, TFA corps members are usually engaged young adults, many of whom go on to become prominent leaders across a wide range of sectors. In particular, TFA seems to produce an inordinate number of "political powerhouses" who work to shape education policy across a range of venues. What remained unknown, however, is the extent to which, or even if, TFA, as an organization, and the TFA experience play a critical role in the development of these "political powerhouses." After all, the admissions process to TFA rigorously works to attract already highly engaged young adults who display leadership qualities. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role TFA plays in shaping corps member leadership by tracking the ways in which attitudes towards and engagement with local civic and political organizations shifts throughout the two year corps experience.

We found that the TFA experience contributed to important shifts in civic involvement and political engagement. In some respects, the TFA experience actually *decreased* civic involvement, as corps members found themselves consumed with the work of a novice teacher. Additionally, many corps members relocated to new cities where they had to build new networks of people and organizations. As a result, we found declines in group or association memberships as well as volunteer work engagement during corps members' two-year corps experience. Yet, TFA also facilitates other forms of corps member engagement, especially around building knowledge of local politics and policy. Our interviews with Executive Directors provide evidence of the strategic, concerted efforts that are taken to cultivate corps members into civically and politically engaged citizens who are ready to take on leadership roles within their placement communities. "We want to create a context for people to understand the city and its leaders; who are the movers and how to get access to them," stated one Executive Director. In addition to TFA-led engagement efforts, TFA connects corps members with organizations, such as LEE, to bolster civic and political engagement opportunities. As one Executive Director stated,

> Our goal is to get and find out what their interests are and that way if we know that one day they want to run for office, we let the LEE Office know that and then we invite them out to some of these trainings and then they can make that decision and we can push them into that pipeline.

Likewise, survey results point to areas where corps members *increased* their attention to and involvement in local politics in mid-size cities. For mid-size cities seeking to bring in TFA members who will contribute to the community or be civically engaged, our results suggest that corps members may actually live up to the high expectations placed on them. Many corps members do become increasingly aware of and engaged in local, community efforts to improve.

Based on the evidence that emerged from our corps member and Executive Director interviews, TFA has developed specific strategies to promote corps member engagement through newsletters that highlight local issues and through outreach and events organized by both LEE and the local TFA leadership teams. In future analysis, we hope to explore how engagement that is mediated by TFA might lead to different types of political involvement, compared to engagement that corps members develop independently from TFA (though direct contacts to organizations or local activists).

Furthermore, in spite of TFA's role in working to facilitate corps member interest in local issues, corps members often attribute their decision to stay or leave a city to broader factors, not necessarily related to TFA. Many of these factors align with the quality of life preferences of "creative class" individuals—priorities that often appear on the economic development agenda in mid-size cities. These results may serve as confirmation to many mid-sized city leaders who continue

to pursue policies that redevelop their city in ways that align with the preferences of young professionals. As of yet, however, many corps members remain dissatisfied with the urban amenities provided.

Additionally, although many corps members indicated a growing interest and engagement in local politics, the survey results also display an undercurrent of cynicism or discouragement about the local school district. The share of corps members who disagreed with the statement that "*My city's school district is supportive of educators with new ideas to improve education*" grew substantially from wave 1 to wave 3. This could have important implications for the political strategies or preferences of corps members who became involved in local politics, including attitudes towards charter schools or other strategies that foster "new ideas" without relying directly on the school district. Moreover, these findings suggests that mid-size city leaders may consider policies and practices in partnership with local school districts and TFA that promote strong partnerships between school district leaders and TFA corps members as potential future city leaders. Although unlimited praise and buy in of TFA corps members ideas is not necessary, pointed efforts to engage TFA corps members in the rebuilding of mid-size cities may prove promising in efforts to retain young, creative class workers as well as future civic and political leaders. In future research, we plan to examine how experiences in the classroom compared to experiences outside the classroom or knowledge of local politics might produce both this shift in attitudes regarding local school district support for innovation.

TFA corps members and alumni are increasingly assuming political and civic leadership roles both within and outside of schoolhouses across the nation. This research also provides evidence of strategic and concerted efforts by TFA to encourage corps members to become politically and civically engaged, particularly within their own communities. Our findings suggest, however, that many of these efforts are done in isolation of genuine engagement of the city's current civic and political leaders. While TFA provided access to civic and political leaders through many programs and outreach opportunities, efforts to retain corps members in mid-size cities may require incisive, concrete policies, practices and partnerships that promote a sense of belonging for corps members and their futures in the city.

Our findings also shed light on the ways TFA corps members' attitudes and beliefs about civic and political engagement as well as their actions to become civically and politically engaged changed throughout their two-year commitment: while some corps members became more engaged in their locally community, others became less engaged, citing the heavy teaching workload as a central impetus for such disengagement. Even for those who reported decreased engagement, it is important to note that messages related to political and civic events, trainings and programs were still noticed by corps members. Whether, after their two-year commitment, these messages still do not influence TFA corps members or whether they have a lasting effect remains unknown. However, it is important to recognize that TFA corps members do indeed receive and acknowledge such messages: for mid-size cities looking to attract and retain civically and politically engagement entrepreneurs, strategic and concerted messaging may influence attraction and retention efforts as well as efforts to develop political and civic leaders within the city.

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Appendix A

Item Analysis for "Civic Commitment and Self Efficacy" and "Perceptions of Local Support for Engagement" Constructs

Table A1

Item Analysis for Wave 1 "Civic Commitment and Self Efficacy" Construct

Item	Obs	Item-test correlation	Item-rest correlation	Average inter item correlation	Alpha
Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility	119	0.7603	0.6206	0.3164	0.6982
Being actively involved in education issues is my responsibility	119	0.6713	0.4974	0.3526	0.7314
Being actively involved in local politics is my responsibility.	119	0.6732	0.4999	0.3516	0.7306
Being concerned about local issues is an important responsibility for everybody.	118	0.7041	0.5425	0.3390	0.7195
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve education problems in City.	119	0.6198	0.4295	0.3733	0.7486
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve community problems in City.	119	0.6340	0.4472	0.3678	0.7442
Test Scale				0.3501	0.7637

Table A2
Item Analysis for Wave 3 "Civic Commitment and Self Efficacy" Construct

Item	Obs	Item-test correlation	Item-rest correlation	Average interitem correlation	Alpha
Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility	70	0.7351	0.5835	0.3140	0.6959
Being actively involved in education issues is my responsibility	69	0.6767	0.4998	0.3398	0.7202
Being actively involved in local politics is my responsibility.	70	0.7178	0.5591	0.3206	0.7024
Being concerned about local issues is an important responsibility for everybody.	69	0.5858	0.3864	0.3737	0.7490
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve education problems in City.	70	0.5401	0.3278	0.3935	0.7644
I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve community problems in City.	70	0.7754	0.6404	0.2963	0.6780
Test Scale				0.3397	0.7553

Table A3
Item Analysis for Wave 1 "Perceptions of Local Support for Engagement" Construct

Item	Obs	Item-test correlation	Item-rest correlation	Average interitem correlation	Alpha
My city's school district is supportive of educators with new ideas to improve education.	125	0.4570	0.0739	0.1781	0.56563
Local political and community leaders in my city care a great deal about improving education.	110	0.6703	0.4442	0.1198	0.4495
City has a lot of opportunities for young people to be involved in local politics.	86	0.6278	0.4034	0.1328	0.4789
City has a lot of economic opportunities for young people.	111	0.6959	0.4934	0.1098	0.4253
Local political and community leaders in City care a great deal about attracting young professionals to the city.	103	0.5732	0.3379	0.1374	0.4887
The local government is not open to those who have only recently moved to City (note: reversed sign used in analysis)	119	0.2479	-0.0905	0.2317	0.6441
City is an attractive place to live for a young person like me.	131	0.5579	0.2239	0.1608	0.5348
Test Scale				0.1525	0.5574

Table A4

Item Analysis for Wave 3 "Perceptions of Local Support for Engagement" Construct

Item	Obs	Item-test correlation	Item-rest correlation	Average interitem correlation	Alpha
My city's school district is supportive of educators with new ideas to improve education.	72	0.6611	0.4672	0.1442	0.5028
Local political and community leaders in my city care a great deal about improving education.	72	0.6507	0.4524	0.1465	0.5074
City has a lot of opportunities for young people to be involved in local politics.	72	0.4190	0.1676	0.2067	0.6099
City has a lot of economic opportunities for young people.	72	0.6963	0.5157	0.1350	0.4836
Local political and community leaders in City care a great deal about attracting young professionals to the city.	72	0.6164	0.4081	0.1545	0.5231
The local government is not open to those who have only recently moved to City (note: reversed sign used in analysis).	70	0.1459	-0.1192	0.2716	0.6910
City is an attractive place to live for a young person like me.	72	0.5883	0.3721	0.1631	0.5391
Test Scale				0.1747	0.5970

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