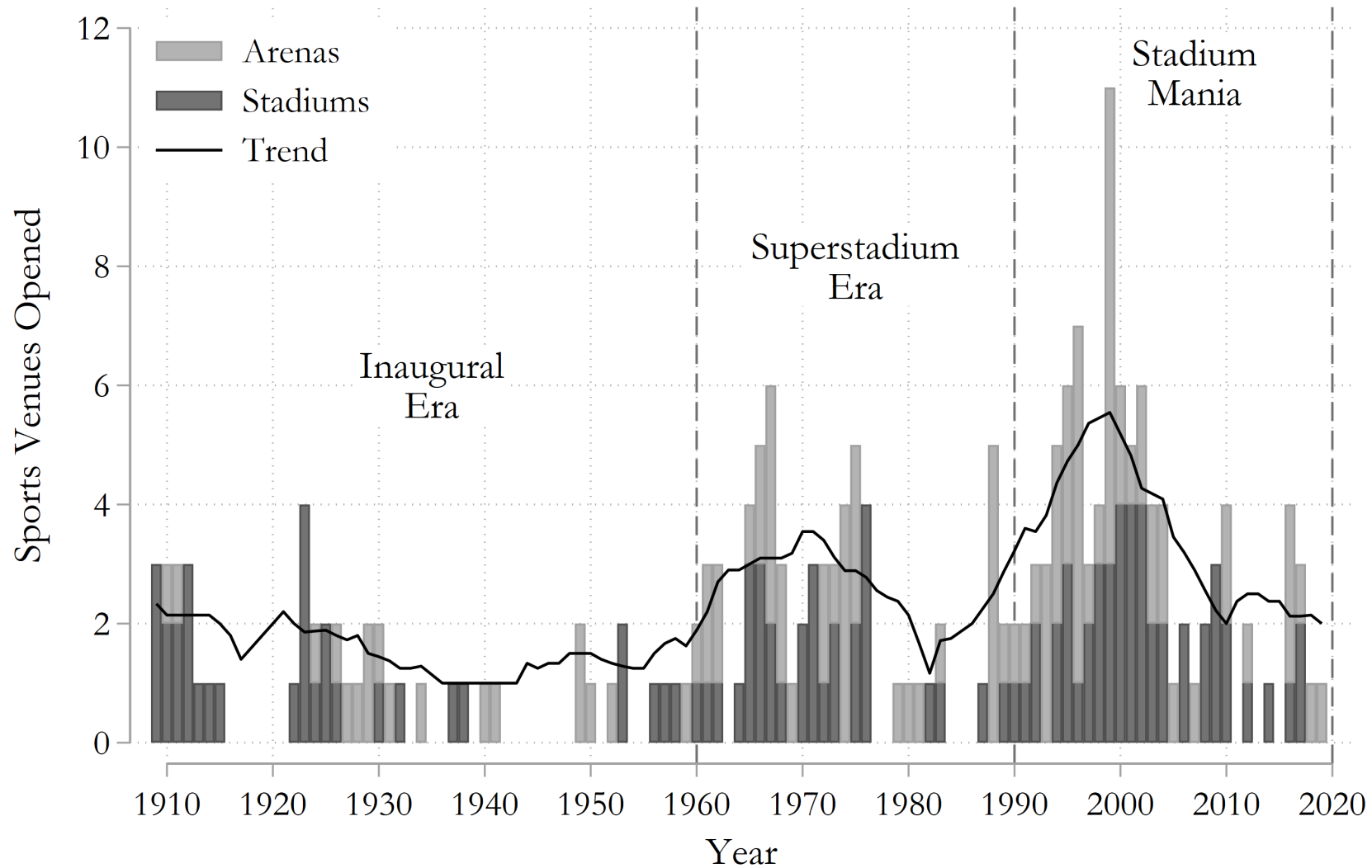


An Economic History of Ballparks

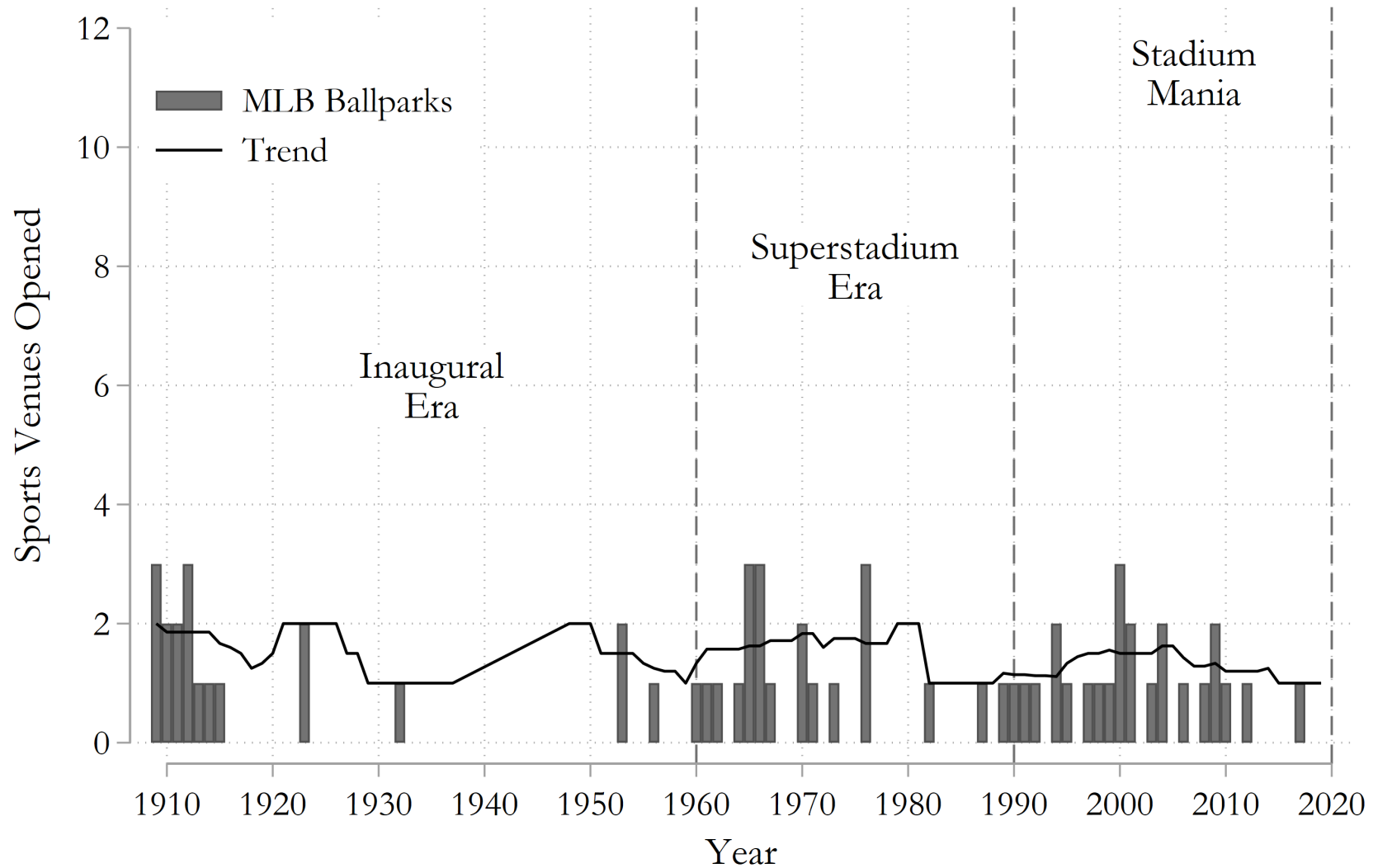
J.C. Bradbury

Presented at SABR 54
Cleveland, 2026

Big-4 Sports Venues Opened (1909–2020)



MLB Ballparks Opened (1909–2020)



The Homes of the Braves

Pre-Modern Era (before 1909)

- Basic
- Wooden
- Impermanent



South End Grounds II, Boston (1889-1894)
Courtesy of National Baseball Hall of Fame

Pre-Modern Era (before 1909)

- Basic
- Wooden
- Impermanent
- Prone to fire



South End Grounds II, Boston (1889-1894)

Courtesy of [John Thorn](#)

Inaugural Era (1909-1959)



Shibe Park, Philadelphia (1909-1970)
Courtesy of Temple University Libraries
George D. McDowell



Forbes Field, Pittsburgh (1909-1970)
Courtesy of [Marc Rochkind](#)

Inaugural Era (1909-1959)



- \$19 million (2024 \$)
 - 100% private
- Steel and Concrete
 - Durable
- Upgrade
 - Basic amenities

Braves Field, Boston (1915-1952)

Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection

Inaugural Era (1909-1959)

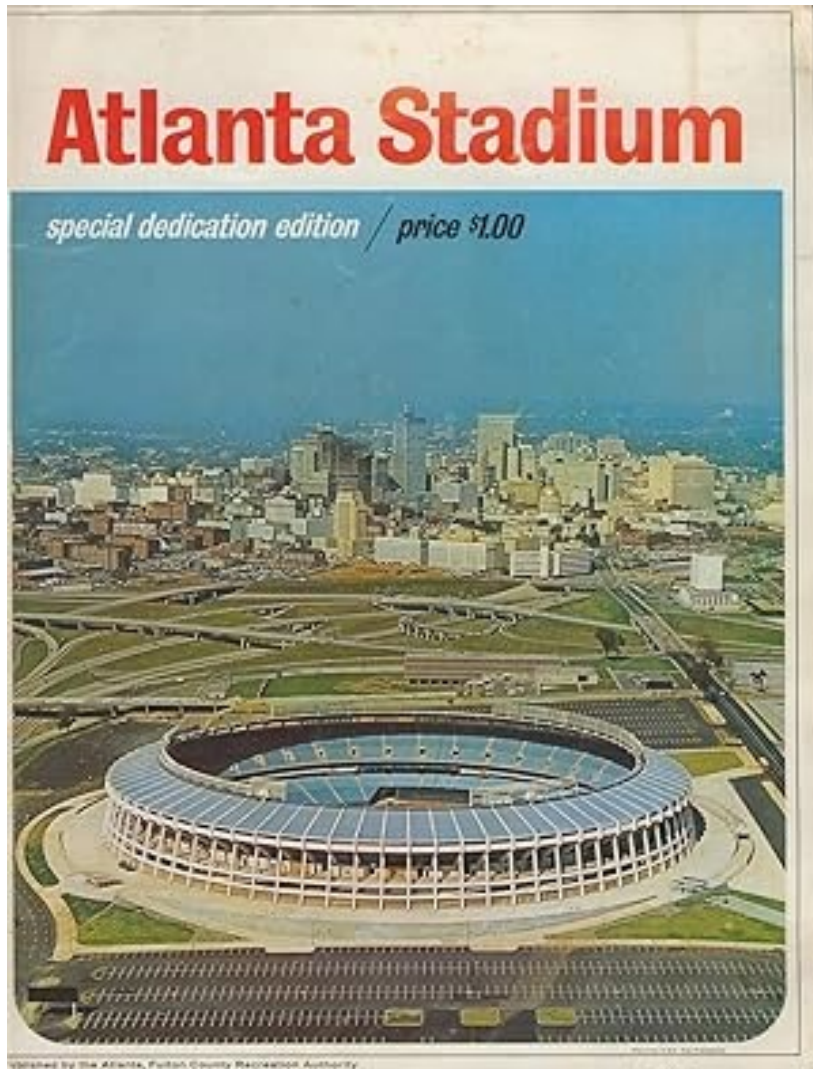


- \$59 million (2024 \$)
 - 100% public
- Steel and Concrete
 - Durable
- Upgrade
 - Basic amenities
- Could host football
 - ...uncomfortably

Milwaukee County Stadium (1953-1965; 1970-2000)

Courtesy of Raynor Library, Marquette University

Superstadium Era (1960-1989)



Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium (1965-1996)

- \$189 million (2024 \$)
 - 100% public
- Private → Public provision
 - Begins in 1930s
- Multi-sport
 - More expensive
 - Practical as public projects
- Cookie-cutter designs
 - More fans revenue model
- Upgraded amenities
 - Restrooms
 - Concessions
- Car culture friendly
 - Moats of parking

Stadium Mania Era (1990-2019)



- Return to “ballparks”
- Classic/Retro designs
- Smaller size
- Amenity-based revenue streams
 - *“More than just a ballpark...”*

Camden Yards (1992 –)

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Carol M. Hightower

Stadium Mania Era (1990-2019)



Turner Field (1997-2016)

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Carol M. Hightower

Stadium Mania Era (1990-2019)



Turner Field (1997-2016)

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Carol M. Hightower

Stadium Mania Era (1990-2019)



Atlanta Fulton-County Stadium (1965-1996)

Stadium Mania Era (1990-2019)



- \$474 million (2024 \$)
 - 85% subsidized
- “*A baseball theme park*”
- 20-year lease

Turner Field (1997-2016)

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Carol M. Hightower

Next Generation

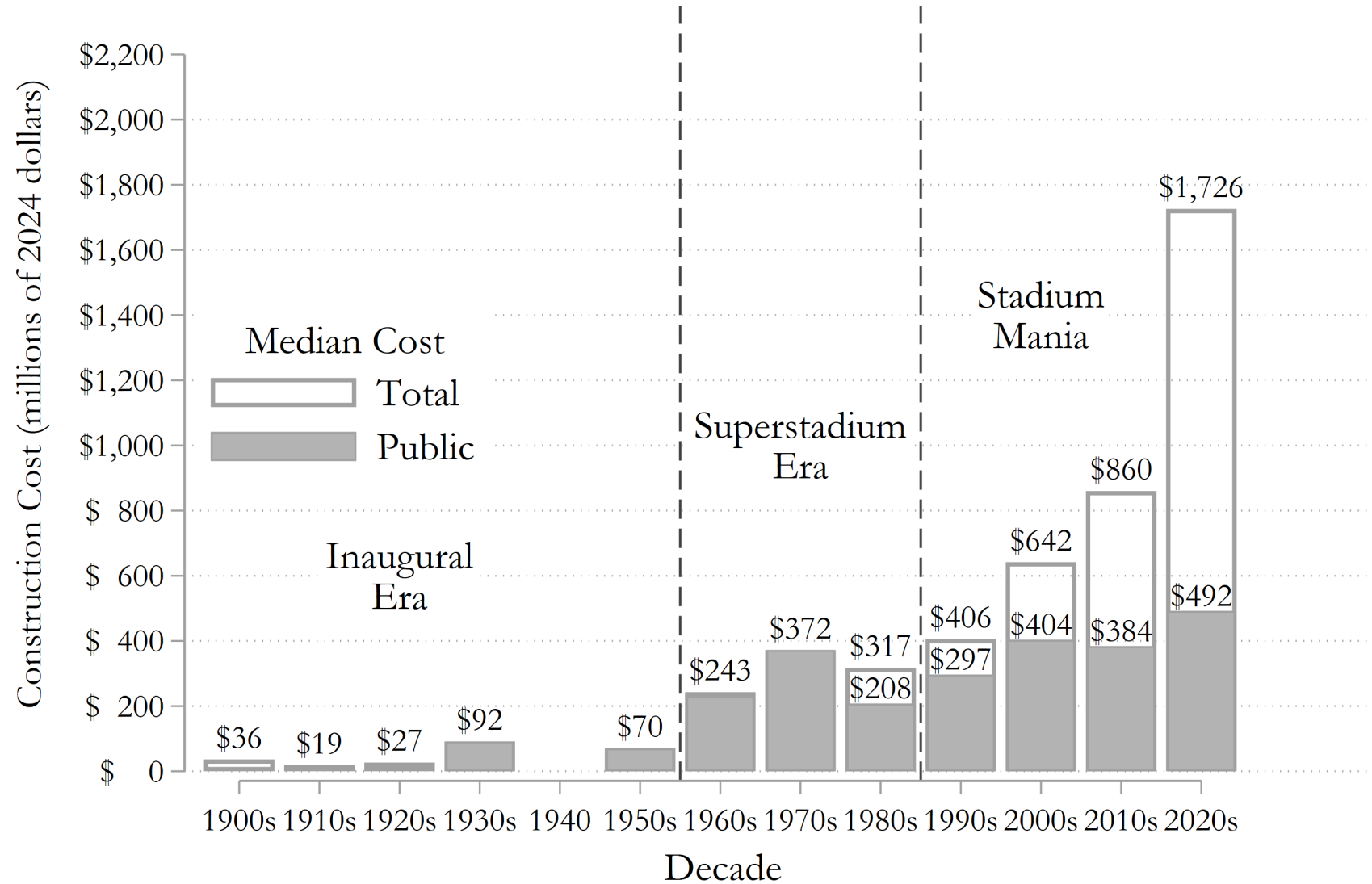


- \$860 million (2024 \$)
 - 45% public (\$384 mil)
- Complementary Mixed-Use Development
 - The Battery Atlanta
- Increased focus on amenities
 - Turner Field on steroids
- Turner → Truist
 - ↓ 8,500 seats
 - 2/3 suites
 - 10x ↑ premium seats
 - Closer to field
 - Exclusive clubs

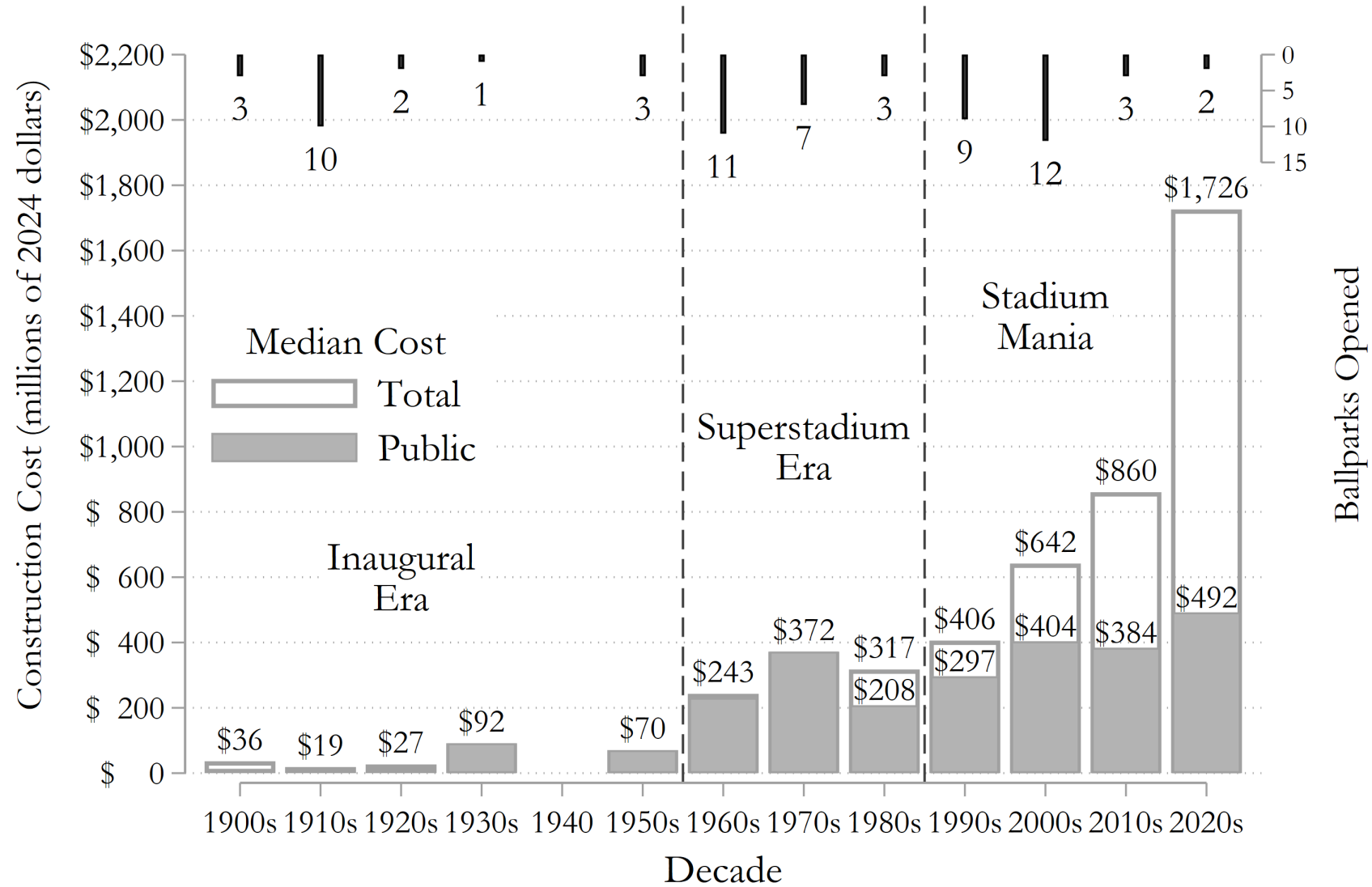
Truist (SunTrust) Park (2017-)

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Carol M. Hightower

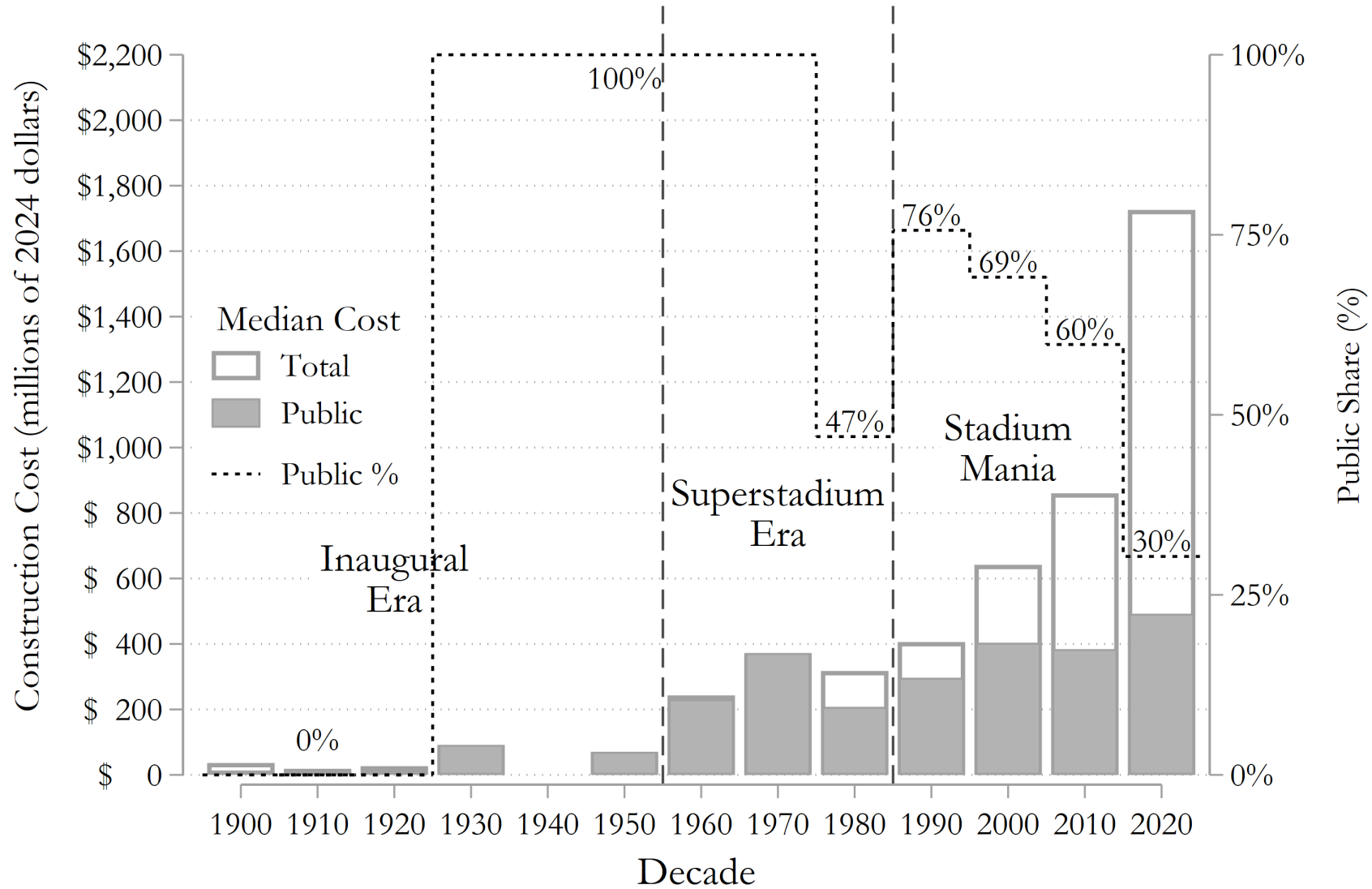
Construction Costs of MLB Ballparks



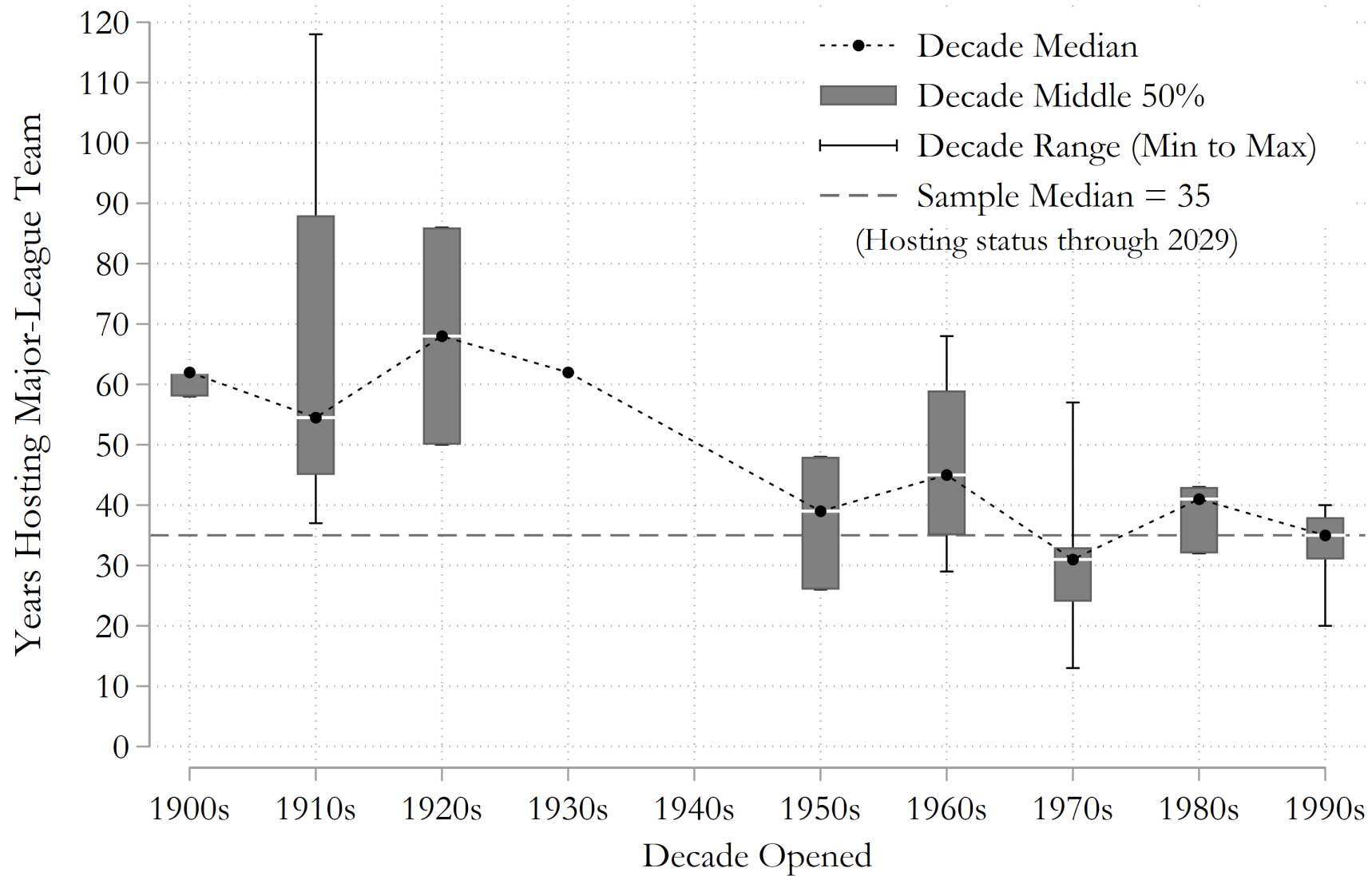
Construction Costs of MLB Ballparks



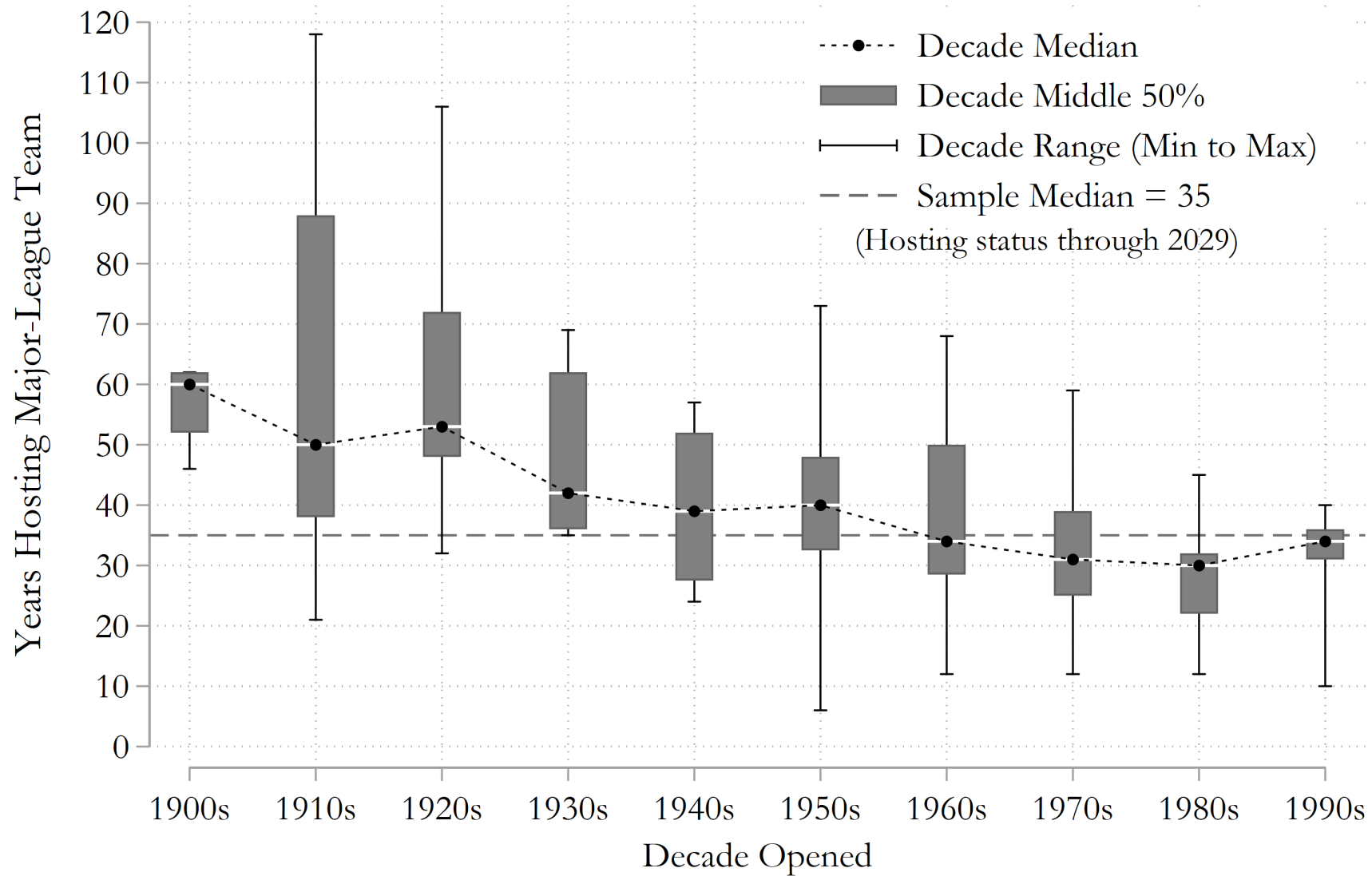
Construction Costs of MLB Ballparks



Shrinking Hosting Lifespans of MLB Ballparks



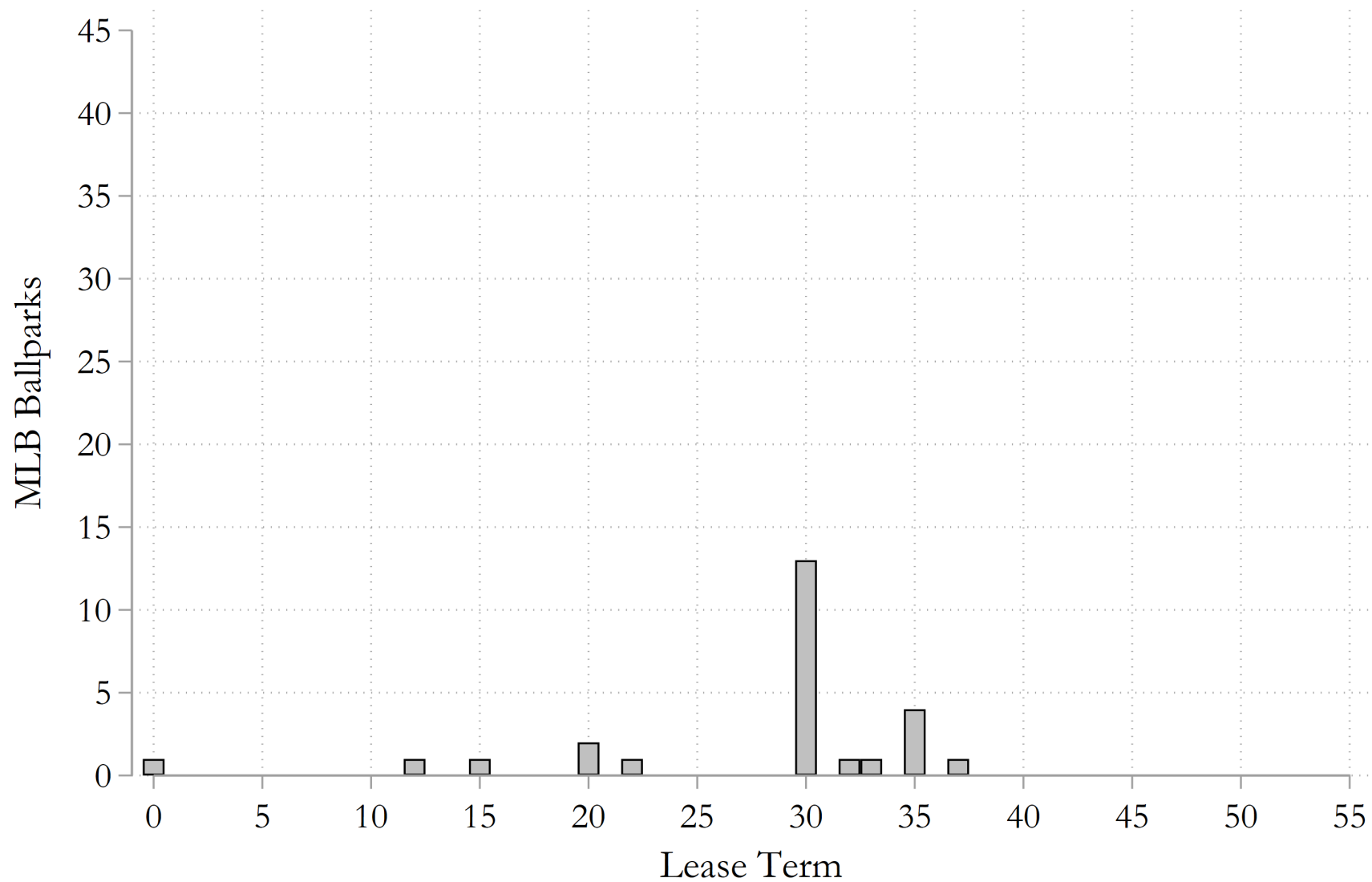
Shrinking Hosting Lifespans of Big-4 Sports Venues



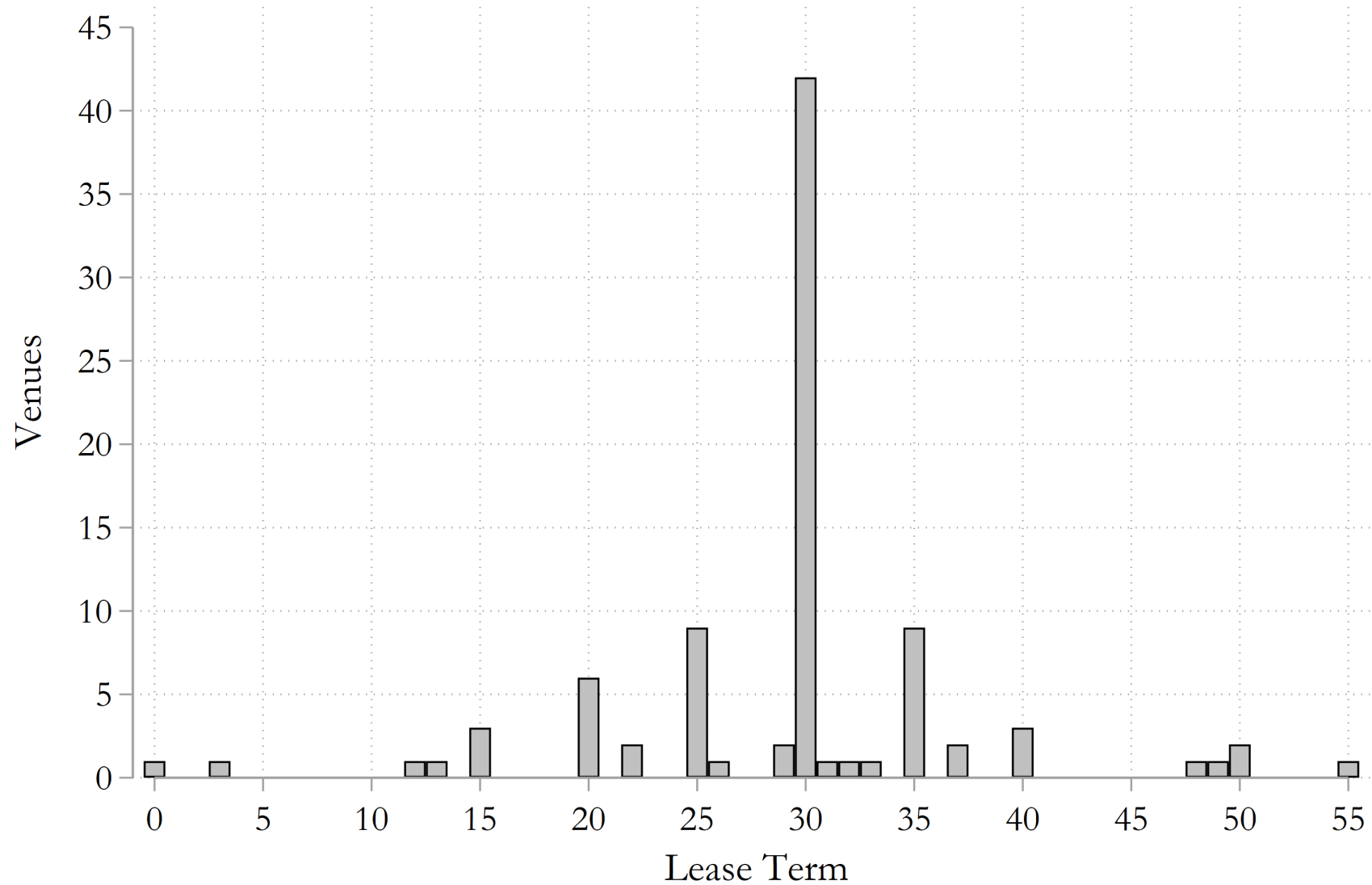
Why are stadium lifespans getting shorter?

- Leases
- Novelty Effect

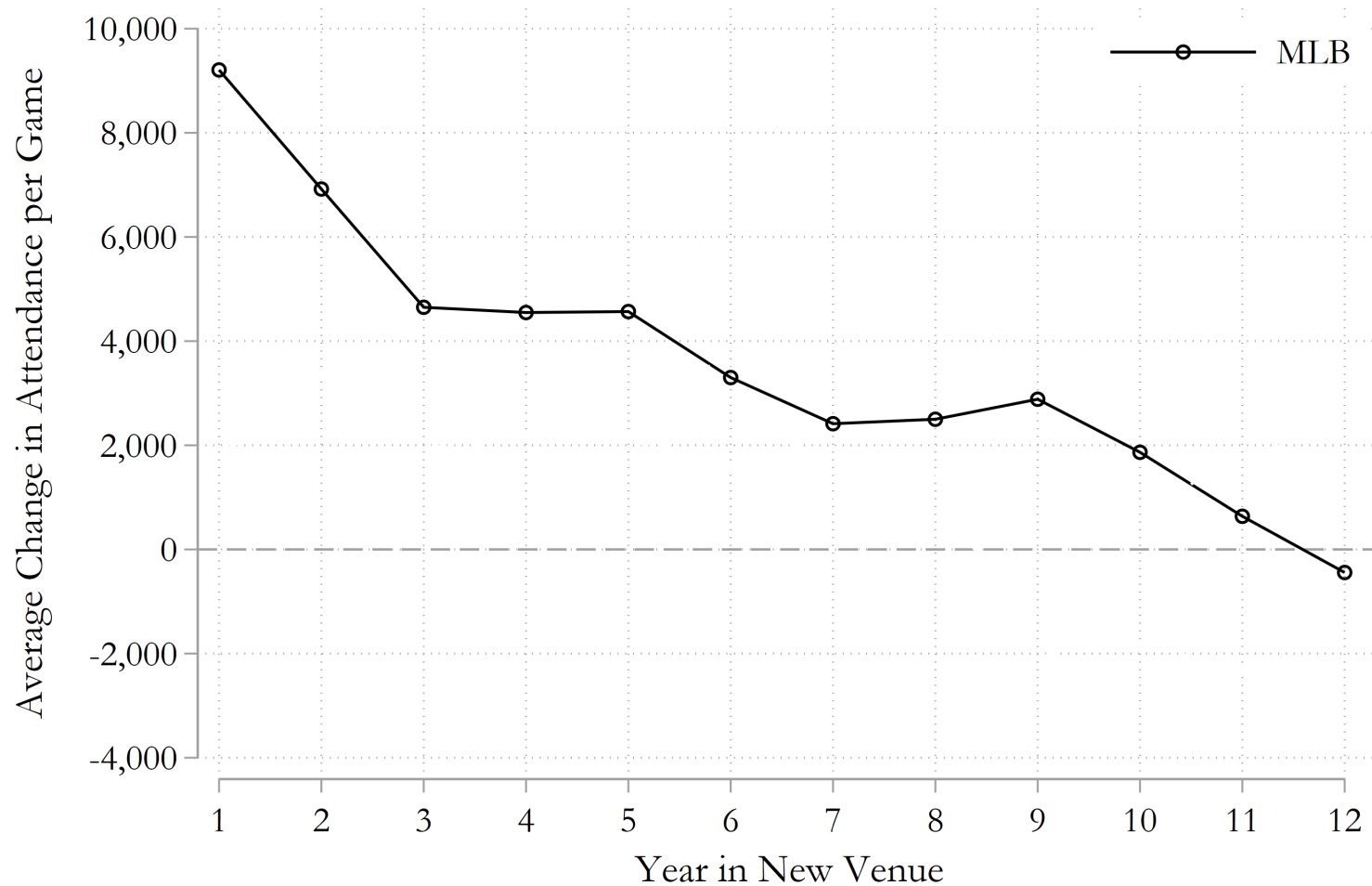
Lease Lengths of Public MLB Ballparks



Lease Lengths of Public Big-4 Venues

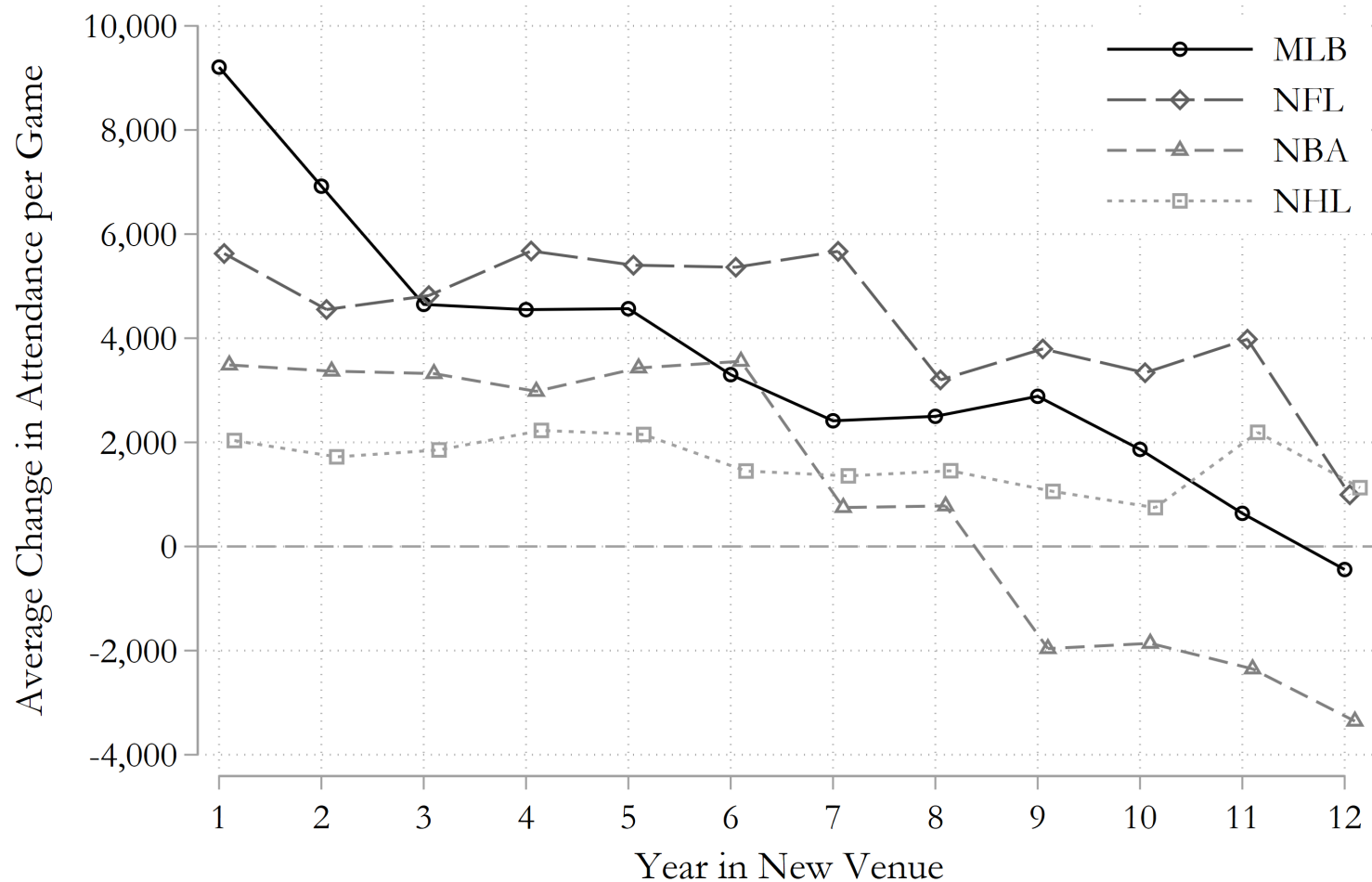


Novelty Effect (1980 – 2019)



- New Stadium
 - ↑ Attendance
 - ↑ Revenue
- Short-lived
 - 5-10 years
 - “Honeymoon effect”

Novelty Effect (1980 – 2019)



- New Stadium
 - ↑ Attendance
 - ↑ Revenue
- Short-lived
 - 5-10 years
 - “Honeymoon effect”
- Universal across sports
- Replacement worthwhile with subsidies

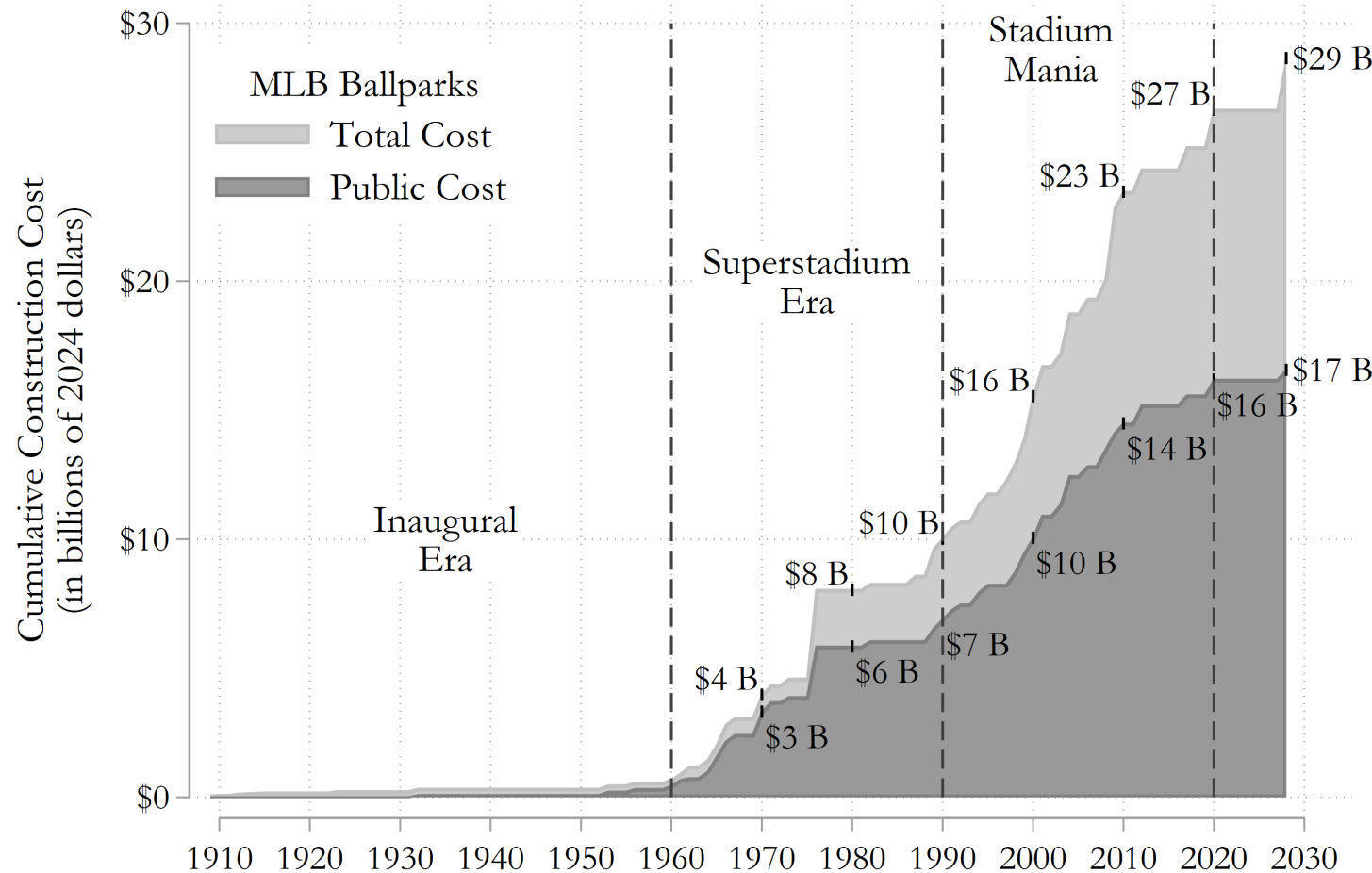
Why are stadium construction costs increasing?

- Novelty Effect
 - New stadiums opportunity to add contemporary amenities
- Gold-Plating
 - If you're paying, I'll have steak

Gold-Plating

- Team designs, government pays (James Quirk)
 - Effective price of new venue is lower → Replacement
 - Replacements are more opulent than predecessors
- MLB Executive: *“We believe using OPM (other people’s money), this is a very viable solution for us to explore.”*
- Subsidies correlated with greater construction cost per acre
- Gold-plating reflects 27% cost of “stadium mania” era venues
 - 48% of MLB ballparks

Cumulative Construction Costs of MLB Ballparks



- Total: \$28.6 Billion
- Public: \$16.6 Billion
 - 58%
- Current MLB Ballparks
 - Total: \$18.1 Billion
 - Public: \$10.3 Billion
 - 57%
- Median Hosting Term
 - 26 years
- → New Wave of Replacement/renovation

Minor League Ballparks

Modern Ballpark? *We just need a place to play*



- Wood
- Concrete
- Steel
- Aluminum bleachers

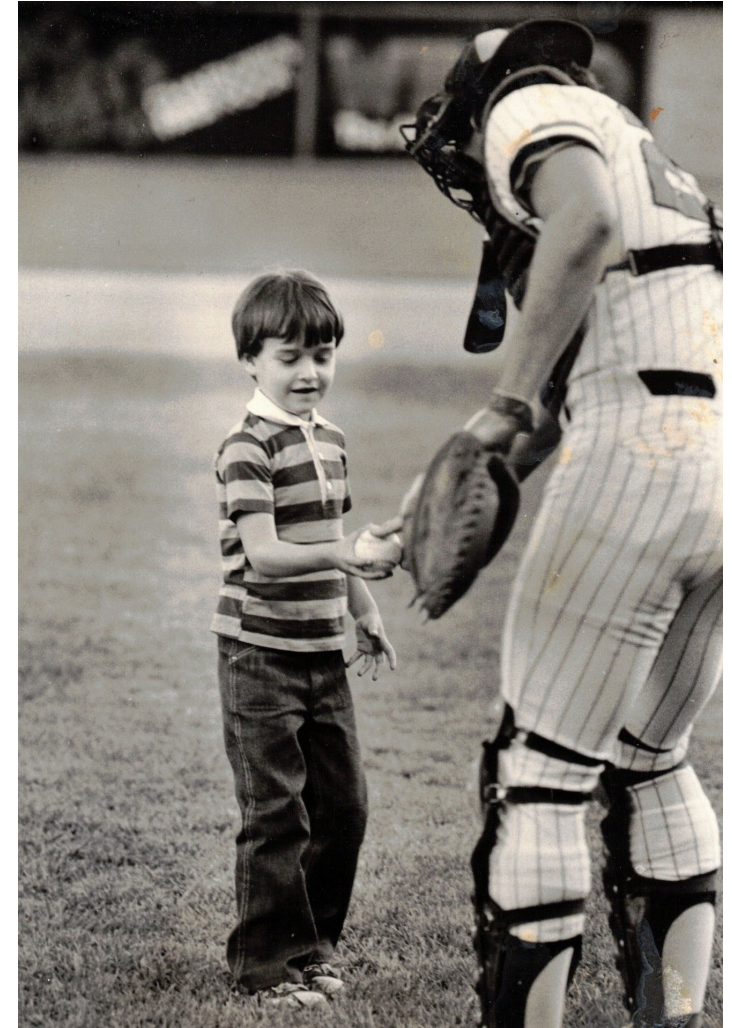
Clark Griffith (Crockett) Park, Charlotte, NC (1940-1985; 1985-1987)

Source: unknown

Modern Ballpark? *We just need a place to play*



Clark Griffith (Crockett) Park, Charlotte, NC (1940-1985; 1986-1987)
Source: unknown



Crockett Park, 1979
J.C. Bradbury (l) Dave Huppert (r)

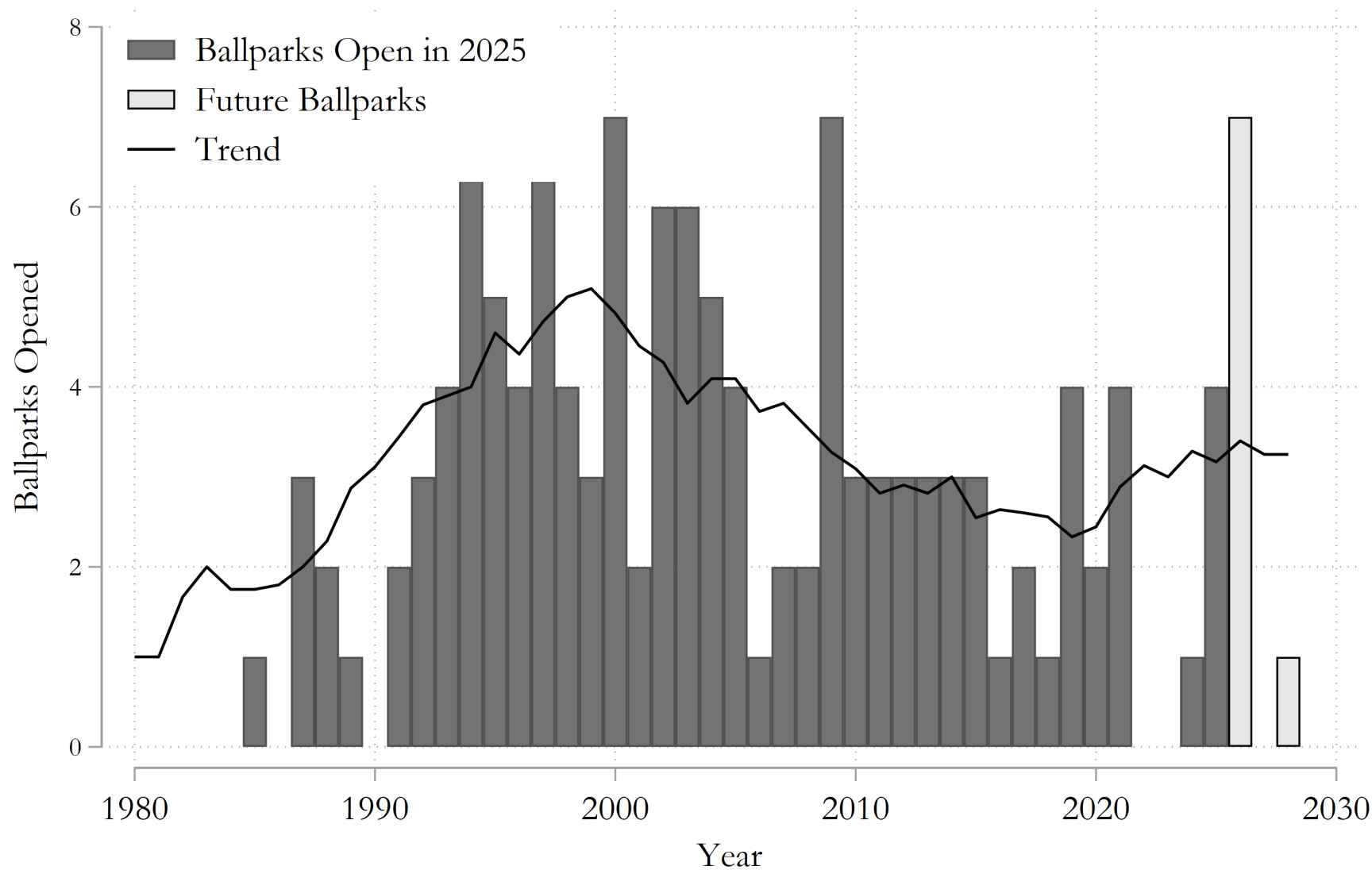
MiLB Ballpark Boom (1990s – 2000s)



Knights Stadium, Fort Mill, SC (1990-2013)

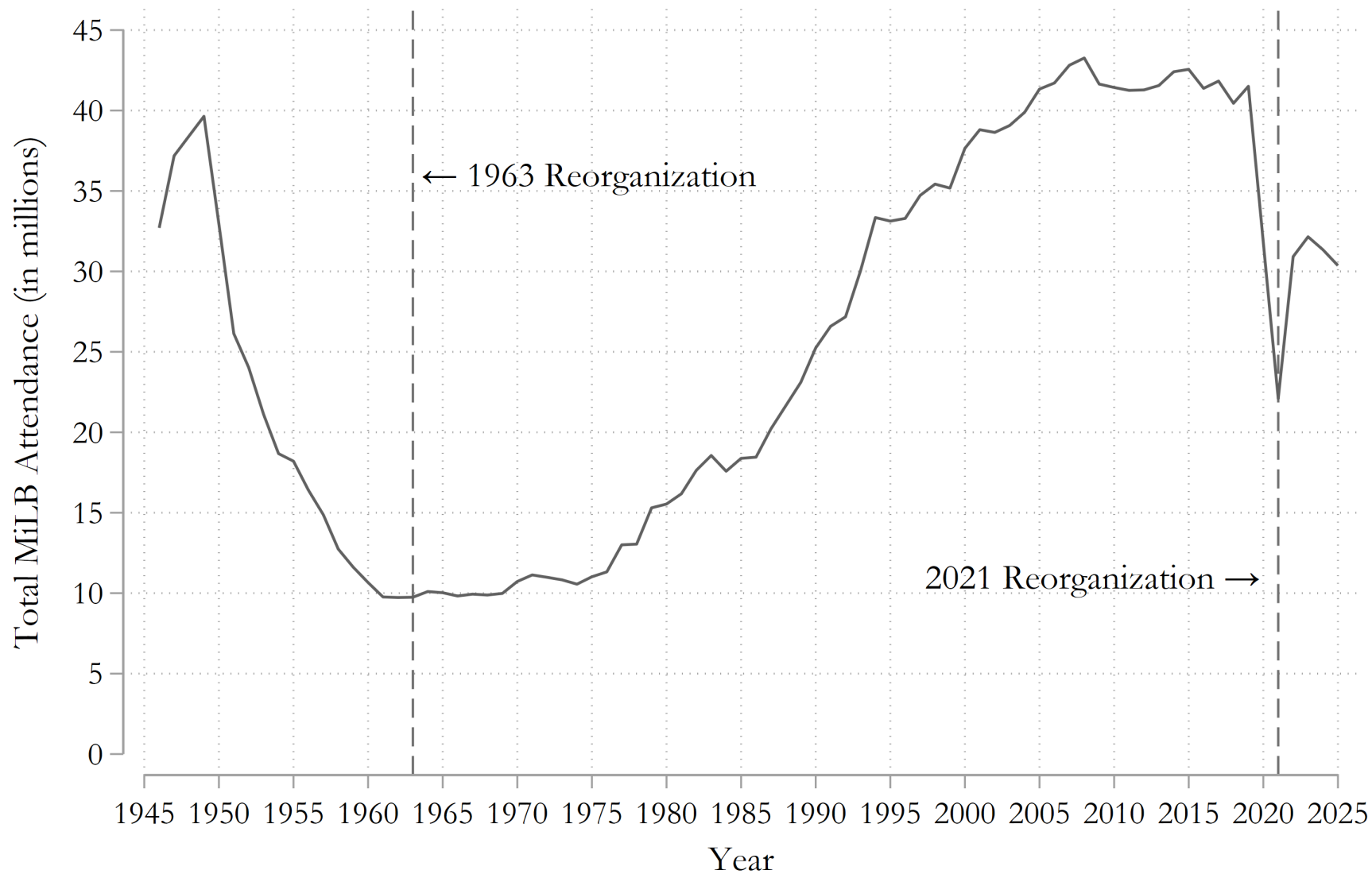
Source: [Michael Harris](#)

MiLB Ballparks by Opening Year (2025)

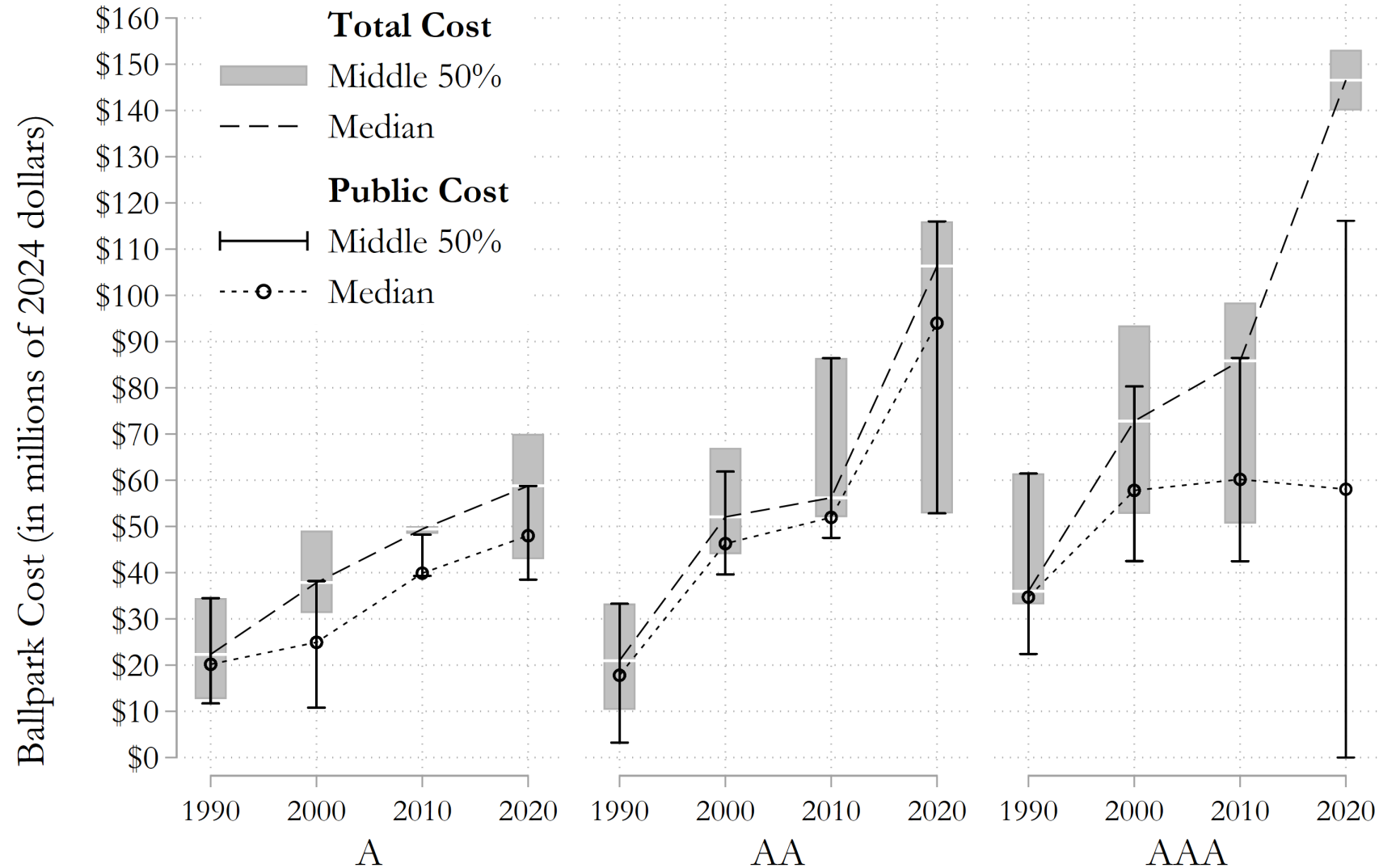


Note: 9 venues opened before 1980

MiLB Consumer Demand Surge



Average MiLB Ballpark Construction Costs (2025)



MiLB Ballpark Leases

Historically

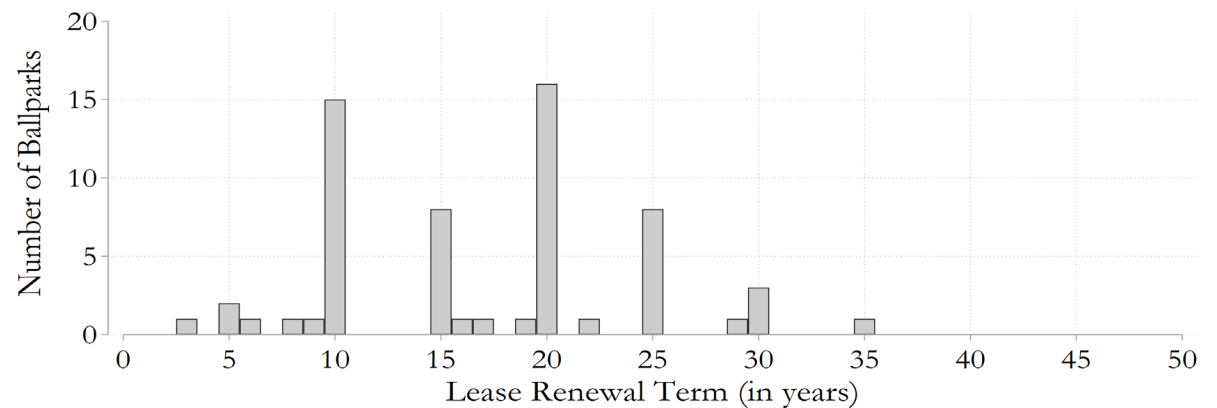
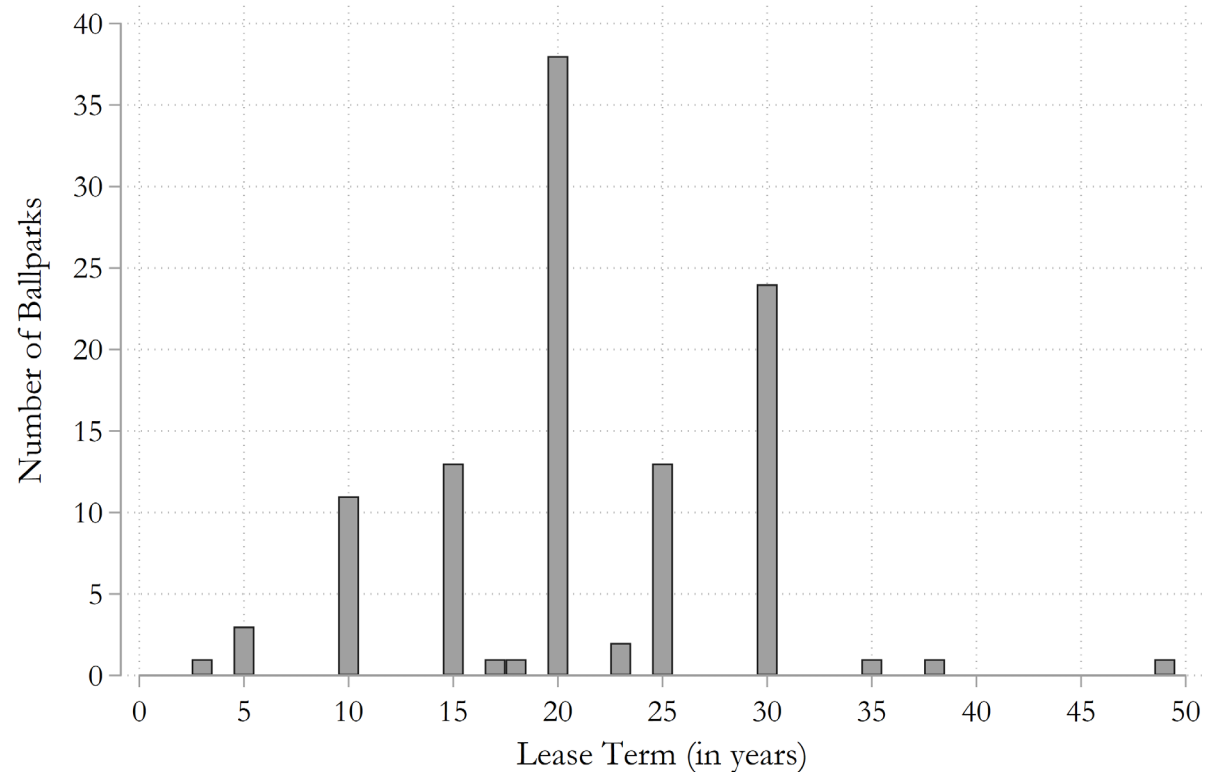
- 1989: 72% teams had lease terms ≤ 5 years

Current MiLB Ballparks

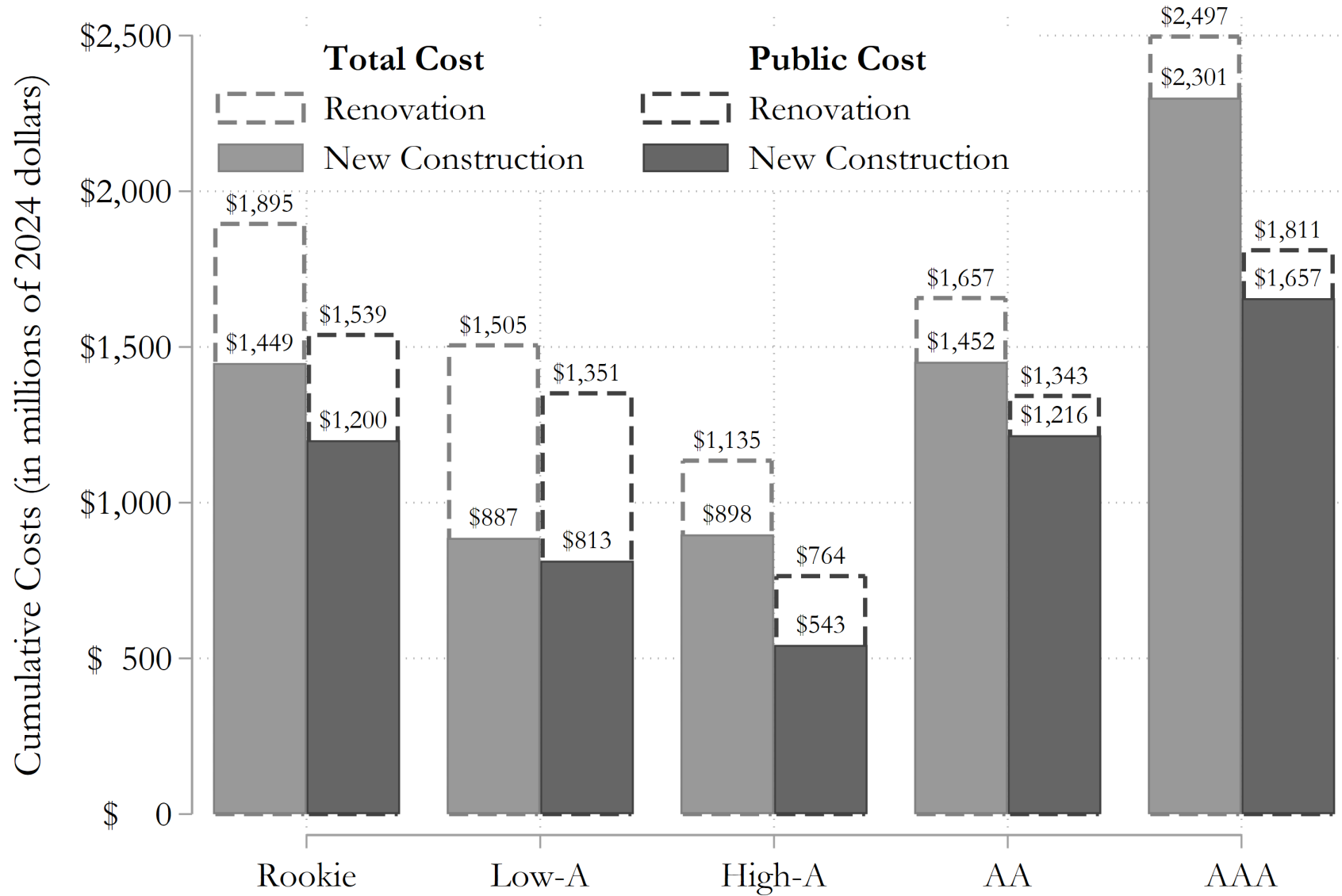
- Mode: 20 years
- Range: 10 – 30 years

Lease renewals common

- 10 – 20 years
- Renewed multiple times
- Team concessions often granted in return



MiLB Ballpark Construction/Renovation Costs (2025)

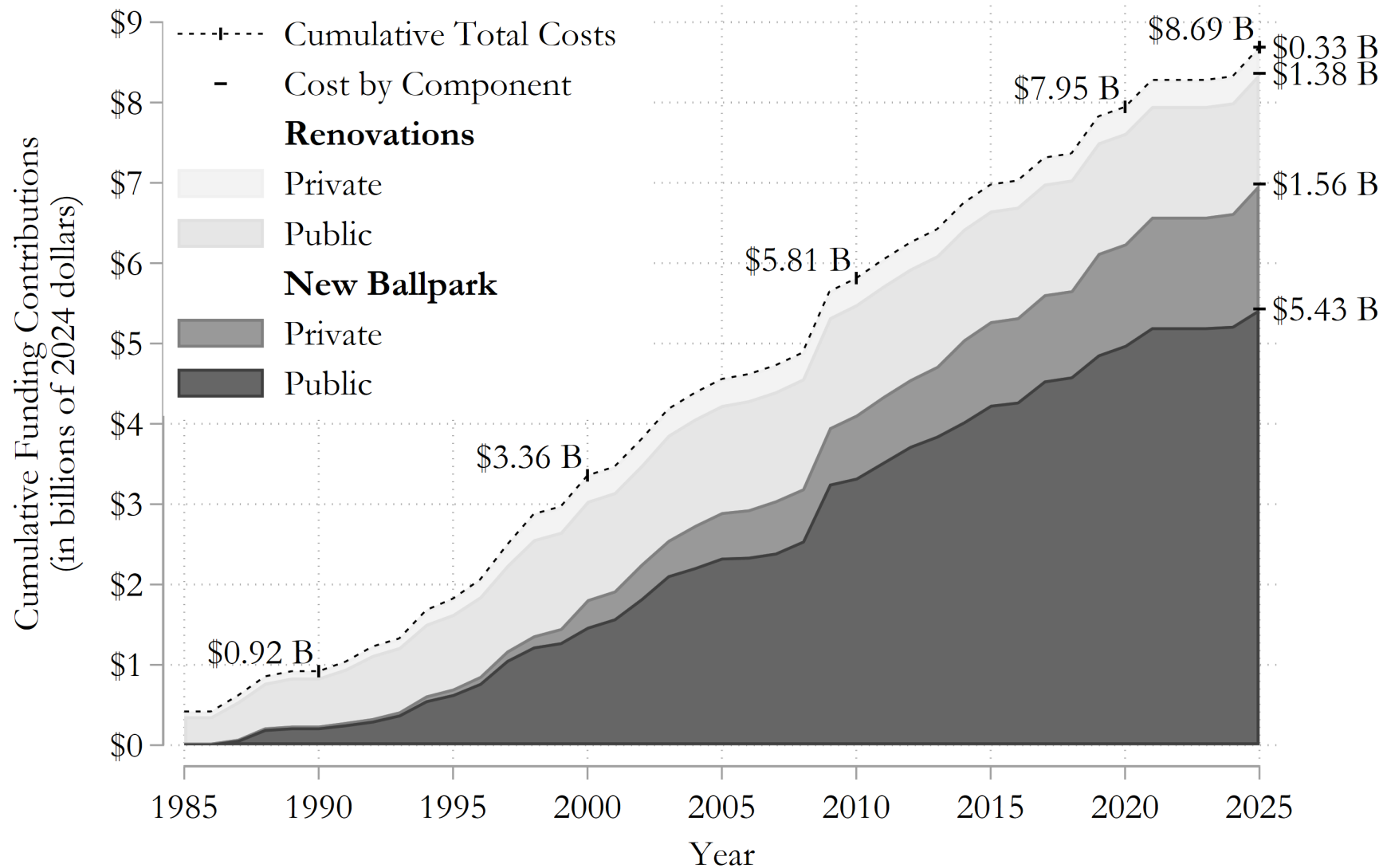


MiLB Reorganization and Ballpark Improvements Since 2019

MiLB Classification	MiLB Status (2019)			Ballpark Improvements (2025)	
	Promoted	Demoted	Removed	Renovations	New Venues
Rookie Advanced	0	0	18	--	--
A–Short Season	9	0	13	--	--
Rookie	0	0	0	2	0
Low-A	19	0	6	6	4*
High-A	0	24	4	9	5
AA	1	0	2	11	8
AAA	0	3	0	9	2
Total	29	27	43	37	19

*Counts two substantial renovations as effective replacements.

Cumulative MiLB Ballpark Construction Costs (2025)



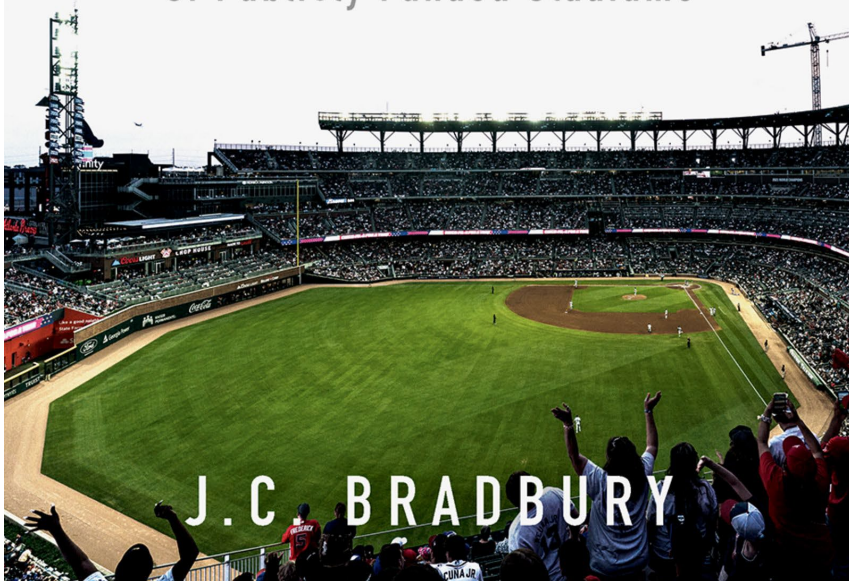
- Total
 - \$8.7 billion
- Public
 - \$6.8 billion
 - 78%

Summary

- Ballparks have grown more expensive
- Shorter lifespans
- Public subsidies incentivize replacement and opulence
- Trends extend from major to minor league facilities
- 30-year stadium replacement cycle → wave of replacements/renovations

THIS ONE WILL BE DIFFERENT

False Promises and Fiscal Realities
of Publicly Funded Stadiums



- Oxford University Press
- 30% Discount Code
- AUFLY30

Public Cost of MLB Ballparks (2024 dollars)

Rank	Stadium	Team	Year	Public Cost	Total Cost	Public %
1	Olympic Stadium	Montreal Expos	1976	\$1,488	\$2,970	50%
2	T-Mobile Park	Seattle Mariners	1999	\$735	\$972	76%
3	LoanDepot Park	Miami Marlins	2012	\$704	\$869	81%
4	Nationals Park	Washington Nationals	2008	\$647	\$765	85%
5	Globe Life Field	Texas Rangers	2020	\$605	\$1,452	42%
6	Petco Park	San Diego Padres	2004	\$579	\$802	72%
7	Citizens Bank Park	Philadelphia Phillies	2004	\$535	\$760	70%
8	American Family Field	Milwaukee Brewers	2001	\$513	\$694	74%
9	Rogers Centre	Toronto Blue Jays	1989	\$491	\$1,045	47%
10	Chase Field	Arizona Diamondbacks	1998	\$486	\$680	71%
11	Riverfront Stadium	Cincinnati Reds	1970	\$452	\$452	100%
12	Three Rivers Stadium	Pittsburgh Pirates	1970	\$444	\$444	100%
13	Yankee Stadium	New York Yankees	2009	\$428	\$1,910	22%
14	Great American Ballpark	Cincinnati Reds	2003	\$425	\$476	89%
15	Truist Park	Atlanta Braves	2017	\$384	\$860	45%
16	Busch Stadium	St. Louis Cardinals	2006	\$382	\$569	67%
17	New Athletics Stadium	The Athletics	2028	\$380	\$2,000	19%



Public Cost of MLB Ballparks (2024 dollars)

Rank	Stadium	Team	Year	Public Cost	Total Cost	Public %
18	Astrodome	Houston Astros	1965	\$378	\$378	100%
19	Target Field	Minnesota Twins	2010	\$374	\$626	60%
20	Veterans Stadium	Philadelphia Phillies	1971	\$372	\$372	100%
21	Kingdome	Seattle Mariners	1976	\$369	\$369	100%
22	Rate Field	Chicago White Sox	1991	\$361	\$430	84%
23	Tropicana Field	Tampa Bay Rays	1990	\$355	\$389	91%
24	PNC Park	Pittsburgh Pirates	2001	\$347	\$480	72%
25	Daikin Park	Houston Astros	2000	\$328	\$482	68%
26	Coors Field	Colorado Rockies	1995	\$297	\$406	73%
27	Oakland Coliseum	Oakland Athletics	1966	\$290	\$290	100%
28	Globe Life Park	Texas Rangers	1994	\$286	\$312	92%
29	Jack Murphy Stadium	San Diego Padres	1967	\$263	\$263	100%
30	Shea Stadium	New York Mets	1964	\$243	\$243	100%
31	Comerica Park	Detroit Tigers	2000	\$242	\$564	43%
32	Angel Stadium	Los Angeles Angels	1966	\$232	\$242	96%
33	RFK Stadium	Washington Senators	1961	\$231	\$231	100%
34	Oriole Park at Camden Yards	Baltimore Orioles	1992	\$217	\$237	92%



Public Cost of MLB Ballparks (2024 dollars)

Rank	Stadium	Team	Year	Public Cost	Total Cost	Public %
35	The Metrodome	Minnesota Twins	1982	\$208	\$231	90%
36	Citi Field	New York Mets	2009	\$206	\$840	25%
37	Kauffman Stadium	Kansas City Royals	1973	\$198	\$262	76%
38	Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium	Atlanta Braves	1965	\$189	\$189	100%
39	Progressive Field	Cleveland Guardians	1994	\$178	\$373	48%
40	Candlestick Park	San Francisco Giants	1960	\$117	\$117	100%
41	Metropolitan Stadium	Minnesota Twins	1956	\$104	\$104	100%
42	Exhibition Stadium	Toronto Blue Jays	1976	\$99	\$99	100%
43	Cleveland Municipal Stadium	Cleveland Indians	1932	\$92	\$92	100%
44	Dodger Stadium	Los Angeles Dodgers	1962	\$73	\$281	26%
45	Memorial Stadium	Baltimore Orioles	1953	\$70	\$70	100%
46	Milwaukee County Stadium	Milwaukee Braves & Brewers	1953	\$59	\$59	100%
47	Busch Memorial Stadium	St. Louis Cardinals	1966	\$58	\$252	23%
48	Oracle Park	San Francisco Giants	2000	\$27	\$590	5%
49	Arlington Stadium	Texas Rangers	1965	\$20	\$20	100%
50	Comiskey Park	Chicago White Sox	1910	\$0	\$22	0%
51	Ebbets Field	Brooklyn Dodgers	1913	\$0	\$24	0%



Public Cost of MLB Ballparks (2024 dollars)

Rank	Stadium	Team	Year	Public Cost	Total Cost	Public %
52	Fenway Park	Boston Red Sox	1912	\$0	\$21	0%
53	Crosley Field	Cincinnati Reds	1912	\$0	\$7	0%
54	Yankee Stadium	New York Yankees	1923	\$0	\$46	0%
55	Forbes Field	Pittsburgh Pirates	1909	\$0	\$63	0%
56	Hard Rock Stadium	Florida Marlins	1987	\$0	\$317	0%
57	Braves Field	Boston Braves	1915	\$0	\$19	0%
58	Tiger Stadium	Detroit Tigers	1912	\$0	\$16	0%
59	Shibe Park	Philadelphia Athletics & Phillies	1909	\$0	\$10	0%
60	Turner Field	Atlanta Braves	1997	\$0	\$474	0%
61	Wrigley Field	Chicago Cubs	1914	\$0	\$8	0%
62	Municipal Stadium	Kansas City Athletics	1923	\$0	\$7	0%
63	Griffith Stadium	Washington Senators	1911			
64	Sportsman's Park	St. Louis Browns & Cardinals	1909			
65	Polo Grounds	New York Giants & Yankees	1911			
66	League Park	Cleveland Indians	1910			



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