

Beyond Stereotypes:

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Modern Council-Manager Cities

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Abstract

The majority of literature on the council-manager form of government focuses on its performance versus the mayor-council form of government. This vein of research likely results from reformers' claims that the council-manager form of government is the superior form. Research on the topic therefore attempts to empirically test performance of one form versus the other using different assigned variables (e.g. efficiency, level of taxes, quality of life, etc.). These tests ask the question, "Is council-manager form of government better?"

Noticeably absent in the literature, however, is the question "Why does a city have council-manager form of government?" If one can assume from the first question that one form of government performs better than the other, it naturally follows to ask why that form is not universally adopted. Or better yet: if the normative question proves inconclusive, why do certain cities adopt one form and other cities another? And, what are the common characteristics or differences between those cities?

This paper examines the prevailing stereotypes surrounding the council-manager form of government, provides a literature review on the political development of those stereotypes, and then tests socioeconomic differences between the two forms of government through regression analysis.

The results find that council-manager cities are not dissimilar from the stereotypes commonly found 40 years ago: Council-manager cities remain young, mobile, and middle-class, but – given changing immigration and demographics especially in the Southwest – they are significantly more diverse than ever before.

Structure

The council-manager form of government is the most prevalent form of local government in the United States. Originally known by the term “city manager plan” (Staunton, 1954) the council-manager form of government, in its pure form, is composed of an elected governing body (i.e. the council) and a manager hired by the council through an employment contract. The council selects, from amongst its members, a mayor to serve as a ceremonial figurehead for the city. Although reformers such as Richard S. Childs insisted that a weak mayor chosen by and from the council be the defining factor of the council-manager form of government, others, such as the National Municipal League, in its *Model City Charter*, endorse hybrid and alternative systems such as those in which a strong mayor is elected from the city at-large and serves in a recognized leadership role (Cassella in Hirschhorn, 1997).

Today, variations and alternatives to the pure form as advocated by those of the “true faith,” as Childs called it, exist and are formally recognized by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) as council-manager local governments (ICMA, 2010). Cities also popularly elect mayors in conjunction with hiring appointed chief administrative officers who manage the city. One example of this system would be the City of Las Vegas, which earned ICMA recognition as a council-manager local government in 1934, yet maintains an influential mayor in addition to its city manager.

ICMA recognizes local governments as a council-manager form if the manager or administrator meets the following criteria:

- 1) *“The manager can be appointed by the majority vote of the council for a definite or indefinite term and must be subject to termination by a majority of the council at any time.*
 - 2) *The position (the manager) should have direct responsibility for policy formulation on overall problems.*
 - 3) *The manager should be designated by legislation as having responsibility for preparation of the budget, presentation to the council, and direct responsibility for the administration of the council-approved budget.*
 - 4) *Legislation should delegate full authority to the manager for the appointment and removal of at least most of the heads of the principal departments and functions of local government.*
 - 5) *The department heads the manager appoints should be designated by legislation as administratively responsible to the manager.*
 - 6) *Qualifications for the position should be based on the educational and administrative background of the candidates.”*
- (Criteria for Recognition of a Council-Manager Position. ICMA, 1989)*

The council, as the other half of the council-manager form of government, is responsible for setting the political agenda, approving the budget, establishing tax rates, and voting on public policy. The council’s size generally ranges from five to nine seats for a city and are elected at-large in nonpartisan races. (Franzel, 2006)

Alternatively, the mayor-council (also known as the “strong-mayor”) system is the older and more traditional form of government and consists of an elected council and a mayor serving as the chief executive. The mayor-council form of government most closely emulates the federal and state government systems with their elected chief executives and legislatures. In some cities, the council numbers as large as 40 seats; often these seats are ward or district based (Franzel, 2006). In the mayor-council form of government, the mayor’s power can include the day-to-day operation of departments, hiring and firing responsibilities, preparation and execution of the budget, and, in some instances, veto power over the council’s legislation. The legislature (i.e. the council) retains the responsibilities and duties of their council-manager counterparts. As with

the council-manager form of government, the mayor-council form of government can exist as a hybrid system. In some mayor-council cities, a professional administrator similar to a city manager is hired to assist with city operation; however, these positions lack the autonomy or responsibility granted to chief administrative officers in council-manager forms of government. For example, the District of Columbia government employs a “City Administrator” who reports directly to and is appointed by the mayor. Some departments, including the Department of Human Services, the Office of Risk Management, and Department of Motor Vehicles, report directly to the D.C. City Administrator (District of Columbia, 2010).

As of 2009, 49% of all local governments used some form of the council-manager system while 44% had mayor-council forms of government (ICMA, 2010). A third form, the commission form of government, governs most of the remaining communities and is generally used in jurisdictions of less than 2,500 people and usually confined to New England (DeSantis and Renner, 2002, p. 98). In the commission form of government, council members also serve as department heads. For example, one council member may oversee the public works department staff while another oversees parks and recreation.

Brief History

The rise of the council-manager form of government is a product of the reform movement in the United States. As America entered the industrial age, swelling urban populations –fueled by immigration – required unprecedented infrastructure (e.g. roads, sanitation, clean water, parks, public health, social services, etc). Political bosses

stepped in to provide these services on a mostly partisan basis through patronage and spoils. These party bosses controlled City Hall through their election to council seats representing specific wards. They used their power to provide special treatment and projects to their constituents. Although responsive to the needs of politicians' political bases, the spoils system proved over the years to be highly inefficient, often corrupt, and expensive. For example, a comparison in 1960 of the strong mayor cities of New York and Chicago with the council-manager cities of San Antonio and Phoenix showed that New York and Chicago spent nearly twice the amount per capita on "common functions" as San Antonio and Phoenix (Bridges, 1997, p. 161). Additionally, Phoenix and San Antonio employed nearly half the number of employees per 10,000 residents for "common functions" compared to the two mayor-council cities. The reformers of the late 19th and early 20th century, inspired by the gospel of scientific management, believed that government could and should be run more efficiently using the principles of business administration. To achieve these aims, reformers called for the separation and insulation of the task of governing from politics for "like the revolutionaries and the Jacksonians, the Progressives imagined a politics that, ultimately, pressed beyond representation altogether" (Morone, 1990, p. 112).

Progressives called for a series of reforms including the elimination of ward-based, partisan elections, the short ballot, and - perhaps the crown jewel of the reform movement - the hiring of trained administrators rather than partisan legislators to govern cities (Morone, 1990). Progressive Theodore Roosevelt also supported the separation of politics from municipal management arguing, "the worst evils that affect

our local government arise from and are the inevitable result of the mixing up of city affairs with the party politics of the nation and state” (Bridges, 1997, p. 59).

Progressives thought they found their reform darling in the commission form when Galveston, Texas adopted it in its new charter in 1901 (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 65). The commission system achieved many of the aims they sought, including centralization and consolidation of the legislative and administrative authorities with at large elections. The commission form of government offered “conspicuous responsibility – and hence accountability of all elected officials to the people” and by 1911, the National Municipal League recommended commission forms of government for cities of 100,000 or less (with the potential to be used in larger cities) (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 66). Some 500 cities adopted the commission form of government by 1918, almost two decades after its creation.

Always eager to promote their reforms’ businesslike efficiency, Progressives claimed the commission form mirrored “a corporation with its board of directors” (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 69) However, their comparison was flawed, as Childs, the founder of the council-manager form of government, quickly pointed out: “No, there would have to be a manager put under that board to make it resemble a corporation!” (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 69)

Childs remedied the separation of powers question by establishing an appointed executive to manage city administration. Hoping to capitalize on the momentum already gained by the commission form of government, Childs called his new form of government “the commission-manager plan.” However, that name quickly proved

unnecessary as the invention and subsequent rise of the council-manager form of government decreased the commission form's popularity to the point of irrelevancy. By 1958, only 320 cities used the commission form of government, and today, only three of the 100 most populous cities use it and only 143 cities with over 2,500 citizens use it in total (Schnore and Robert, 1958).

Despite the council-manager form of government's impressive rise from reform movement innovation to the most prevalent form of local government in the United States, the growth has not been linear. The council-manager form of government saw a large increase in popularity from its creation in 1908 until 1934. And "[b]etween 1918 and 1923 alone, the period of its most rapid spread, more than 150 cities adopted the council-manager plan" (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 74). After the Great Depression, the percentage of cities with council-manager form of government leveled off to around 18 percent of all cities at the end of the Second World War (Frederickson, Logan and Wood 2003, Figure 1). This period of plateaued growth coincided with changes in the polity on the national scale, including the strengthening of labor unions rights and the expansion of government welfare. Council-manager form of government opponents of that time compared the unelected city managers to fascist Hitler, painted businesslike administration of government as a threat to the collective bargaining interests of civil employees and claimed that "American democracy is a challenge to the primary claims made for the city manager system" (Bridges, 1997, p. 109). During the interwar period, calls for reform often went unanswered (Bridges, 1997, p. 98).

However, the interwar period of stagnated growth of the council-manager form of government was quite short lived. From 1947 to 1977, the council-manager form of government grew from 20 percent of all cities to approximately 55 percent (Frederickson, Logan, and Wood, 2003, Figure 1). As further evidence of just how common the council-manager form of government became, 1972 represented the first year that the council-manager form overtook the mayor-council form as the most prevalent form of local government in the United States. The tremendous growth in council-manager form of government resulted from the concentrated and renewed efforts for reform and charter revision. Business leaders believed that council-manager form of government offered the most effective and efficient means to meet the challenges presented by postwar growth – especially in the southwest where migrant populations and wartime industry fueled growth – and founded civic and commerce groups which pursued pro-growth policies, including the adoption of a city manager.

During the 1960s, the growth of the council-manager form of local government slowed and in the 1970s reversed path. From approximately 1980 through 1985, spurred by voting reforms and a desire for more activist government, the mayor-council form of government returned as the most prevalent form of government. The literature suggests that increased suffrage (such as the appeal of Arizona’s literacy-test in 1972 and the abolition of the poll tax in 1966) empowered ethnic minorities, often underrepresented in council-manager cities, to vote in elections and seek representation through popularly elected mayors (Bridges, 1997, p. 182). Further, some Anglo and middle-class voters who had been the primary supporters of reform became increasingly dissatisfied with the sparse offerings of “efficient” local government and became more sympathetic to the

War on Poverty and other activist programs (Bridges, 1997, p. 176). Whereas business leaders, land owners, and developers supported the council-manager form of government for its perceived efficiency in delivering services such as water, electricity, and roads (the infrastructure needed to grow cities) over the delivery of social services such as welfare and education, voters during the 1970's abandoned the pro-growth incumbents in favor of limited or "management growth policies." For example, the working poor, African-Americans, and Mexican Americans in San Antonio denounced the Good Government League as a "machine" no better than the political machine it claimed to have replaced with businesslike administration a half century earlier (Bridges, 1997, p. 178). Attacks like these, led some cities to return their form of government to mayor-council or produce hybrid forms, which attempted to "reform the reform" (Hansell, 1999). Many unreformed cities hired chief administrative officers under the title of City Administrator, rather than that of a City Manager, to assist the mayor with the administration of the city but retained most of the formal powers in the mayor and council. Reformed cities attempted to increase representation (especially of ethnic minorities) through the implementation of district rather than at-large elections.

"Under the present system," argued proponents of districts in Phoenix, "City council candidates must influence hundreds of thousands of voters citywide. This encourages mass media campaigns instead of personal contacts. Special interests who can make large campaign contributions are assured access to the City Council, while individual citizens and neighborhoods are excluded." (Bridges, 1997, p. 196)

However, abandonments of the council-manager form of government did not occur evenly across all cities. Greg J. Protasel found that during the period of 1970 to 1981 (the period of council-manager form of government's decline) cities with populations 5,000 to 9,999 had the highest rates of abandoning the council-manager

form of government, while no city over 250,000 reported abandonment (Protasel, 1988). This finding contradicts the prevailing myth that mayor-council governments are more suited for larger cities, while council-manager form of government is more effective in mid-to-smaller communities. As further proof that the council-manager form of government is not limited to smaller-to-mid sized cities, over the last decade the number of council-manager cities with over 500,000 residents doubled from 5 to 10 while mayor-council cities over 500,000 only increased from 20 to 21 total (ICMA Municipal Yearbook, 1998 and 2008). This is likely a result of mid-sized cities with managers growing into large cities and not necessarily because large, formerly mayor-council cities have adopted the council-manager form of government.

In fact, El Paso, with a population of 581,000, was the only large city since 1998 to adopt the council-manager form. (Okubo, 2005). The next largest municipality was Cedar Rapids, IA , with 122,206 residents. Meanwhile, the cities that abandoned council-manager in order to adopt mayor-council during that the past decade include Oakland, CA; Miami, FL; Richmond, VA; Spokane, WA; and San Diego, CA. (San Diego has a population of nearly 1.3 million people, Oakland and Miami are around 400,000, and Richmond and Spokane both have populations of about 200,000. Over the past ten years, only one of the largest 100 cities by population adopted council-manager form of government while three abandoned the form. So, although the council-manager form of government governs more large cities than ever before, the form of government's growth is primarily due to population growth in mid-to-large sized cities that already employ city managers and not because large mayor-council cities have switched. In fact, the only

city to ever change form of government with a population of over one million people adopted mayor-council (San Diego).

The number of cities under council-manager form of government versus mayor-council is in constant fluctuation. Although two cities might adopt council-manager government, a third might abandon the form in order to adopt a strong mayor system. Thus, when ICMA says that council-manager form of government is the fastest growing form of government in the United States, the statement must account for the staggered nature of the growth. So far in 2010, ICMA has provided thousands of dollars in matching contributions for six local campaigns in support of adopting or retaining council-manager as the city or town's form of government. Among the municipalities that received monies from ICMA's Fund for Professional Management, League City, TX (pop. 71,222), and Bridgewater, MA (pop. 25,774), adopted the council-manager form of government while Effingham, IL (pop. 12,489) retained its commission system. Pueblo, CO (pop. 104,951) and Seatac, WA (pop. 25,840) retained their council-manager forms while Pensacola, FL (pop. 53,820) abandoned its 78 years under council-manager form of government in favor of a strong mayor with veto power over council decisions (ICMA, 2010). However, these were elections with already existing, well organized, pro-council-manager form of government, civic groups in which ICMA invested matching funds. A basic review of newspaper stories on form of government campaigns over the past year suggests that the council-manager form of government has fared worse than the two-thirds success rate of ICMA supported campaigns. It appears, at least to this author, that city councils have chosen not to fill vacant city manager positions or eliminated the positions altogether in order to save funds in this economic recession. Further, in cities

such as Sacramento, California, newly elected mayors have pushed for strong mayor initiatives as a means for achieving their agendas.

Today, the council-manager form of government is found in 3,520 of the 7,194 total cities with populations over 2,500 residents (ICMA Municipal Yearbook, 2008). Over the past 30 years, the council-manager form of government has been “the fastest growing form of government in the United States” (ICMA). Table 1 shows the percentage of cities with each form of government:

Table 1
Percentage of Municipalities with Council-Manager Form of Govt (2,500 and over)

	1978	1988	1998	2008
Council-Manager	34%	35%	44%	49%
Mayor-Council	56%	55%	48%	44%
Commission	3%	3%	2%	2%

Sources: ICMA, *The Municipal Yearbook*, 1978, 1988, 1998, 2008 (Washington, DC)

Previous Academic Work

There is an abundance of scholarly work on the topic of professional management in cities. The majority of literature available on the council-manager form of government examines either its rise as a product of the reform movement in the United States or its advantages versus disadvantages as contrasted with the mayor-council form of government. The two areas of focus are linked by the fact that reformers of the late 19th and early 20th century promoted the creation of a city manager as a tool to improve the service of local governments. Inherent in reformers’ desire to professionalize public management and implement the tools of business administration in government is the

belief that such a system of government (i.e. the council-manager form of government) is more efficient than the existing mayor-council form. The reformers hoped, and modern council-manager advocates believe, that separating the administrative duties of a city from the political process better serves the public.

As explained in a campaign commercial produced by advocates for council-manager form of government's adoption in Bainbridge Island, Washington:

Here's the accountability flaw: the mayor answers to the voters; the council answers to the voters. But the mayor does not have to carry out policy or actually do what the council agrees on. There is no performance accountability. They need to work together to make the city effective. But instead this system sets up a finger-pointing blame cycle. Both sides blame each other and appeal to the voters. There is no effective way for them to work it out because accountability is running in two circles... city services suffer... the structure creates or sustains the conflict.

(In a council-manager form of government) the council hires a professional city manager to manage the staff to run the city... In its most basic description we can see the key benefits of council-manager: more accountability, better information flow, professional management (Bainbridge Votes Council-Manager, 2009).

The argument that the council-manager form of government produces better governance is not new. Reformers made the same arguments for increased accountability and efficiency around the turn of the twentieth century in response to the political bosses and party machines that ran city services. But whereas Progressive Movement reformers focused more on aspects of corruption, graft, and nepotism when attacking mayor-council systems, modern advocates for the council-manager form focus primarily on perceived increases to efficiency, accountability, (perceived) lower taxes, and equality in service delivery. However, the legacy of New York City's Tammany Hall and Kansas City's Pendergrast machine are not lost on strong-mayor opponents such as

those in Sacramento who labeled the June 8th, 2010 vote to adopt mayor-council form of government the “Boss Mayor Initiative” (Democratic Party, 2010).

Several scholars have attempted to examine the claims that council-manager form of government produces better governance than the mayor-council system through quantitative analysis. These analyses seek to empirically test statements by council-manager proponents that link level of citizen satisfaction and municipal success with a particular form of government. Examples of these types of statements include the following from two of ICMA’s Executive Directors:

...Highly trained, appropriately educated, and experienced local government managers share a set of values, skills, and practices which... lead to the success and high quality of life the communities they serve (O’Neill, 2007).

The presence of a professional manager in 3,741 US communities has significantly improved service delivery and enhanced the effectiveness of local democracy (Hansell, 2000).

Recent analyses of ICMA and U.S. housing data examined quality of life indicators and their comparative scores in council-manager versus mayor-council forms of government. The study found that respondents who lived in council-manager cities of 100,000 to 8,000,000 reported a higher percentage of being satisfied with their police protection, with neighborhood public transportation, and with neighborhood shopping than those living in mayor-council city. Council-manager form of government also rated higher for the “% of respondents who rated their neighborhood at least an 8 out of 10 as a place to live,” lower (i.e. better) for “% of respondents who knew of a serious crime having occurred in their neighborhood in the previous 12 months, and lower as a percentage of those believing neighborhood roads needed major or minor repair.

However, the mayor-council form of government performed better than the council-manager form in response to access to open and green spaces and provision of community services (Franzel and Chavez, 2010).

Other studies I encountered ignore indicators and asked citizens directly about the perceived improvements gained from council-manager form of government. For example, an early survey of community leaders in St. Joseph, Missouri found that 97 percent of respondents believed the then called “city-manager plan of government” gave “citizens more efficient service than they received under the old plan” (Woodruff, 1928).

The vast majority of literature on council-manager form of government thus focuses on empirically testing the assumption of original reformers: that the council-manager form of government is the preferred form. Other examples of research that attempt to answer the normative question regarding form of government include studies on which form of government produces greater innovation (Franzel, 2005) and another on which form of government is more efficient based on police, fire, and trash coverage in relation to expenses (Hayes and Chang, 1990). Other strains of empirically based research not related to the question of efficiency focus on leadership roles in cities with mayors and managers (Morgan and Watson, 1992), and city size’s effect on the abandonment of council-manager form of government (Protasel, 1988).

Other important works on the subject of council-manager form of government view Progressive reforms through an American political development (APD) paradigm. The preeminent piece on council-manager APD is Amy Bridges’s *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest* (1997). Bridges presents the rise of council-

manager form of government as a product of power struggles between ethnic and class divisions. She outlines how business interests, championed by affluent, Anglos (WASPs), rewrote the rules of politics under the veil of reform (e.g. city managers, the short ballot, the Australian ballot, at-large districts) to promote their prerogatives at the expense of ethnic minorities and the working-poor.

Bridges offers the most compressive examination of why cities adopt one form of government over another. However, her research does not include a statistical analysis of her data. She includes statistics on voter turnout [Table 4-1], social characteristics (including income, education, and % foreign born) [Table 6-2], and ethnic composition [Table 8-4]) to advance her argument for why big cities in the Southwest adopted council-manager forms of government, but she does not attempt any regression or advanced statistical analysis to identify which characteristics correlate best with each form of government. She quotes only one study that attempted to correlate characteristics with form of government: “[O]ne can do a much better job of predicting a city’s political forms by knowing what part of the country it is in than by knowing anything about the composition of the population” (Wolfinger and Field, 1966 in Bridges, 1997).

Of all the literature I reviewed, only one journal article systematically addressed whether socioeconomic characteristics of municipalities partly determine their forms of government (Schnore and Alford, 1963). However, this study intentionally focused only on suburban communities. Schnore and Alford tested theoretical assumptions (such as those identified by Bridges) regarding why one community adopted council-manager

form of government while others did not. For example, Adrian generalized in a prior study that “the upper-middle class suburbs which are the homes of metropolitan businessmen are characteristically administered by a manager” (Alford, 1955). The authors found, among other things, that suburbs with council-manager forms of government have smaller percentages of minority populations, higher percentages of white collar workers, higher percentages of high school educated citizens, and a greater median family income. Suburban communities under the council-manager form of government also experienced greater rates of growth (1950-60), a higher average percentage of home ownership, and a smaller percentage of elderly residents. Schnore and Alford’s findings are limited by the fact that they only provide median scores and not regression analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics. Therefore, the literature contains mostly general observations about the differences between council-manager and mayor-council cities (e.g. “Cities with a manager have a higher average median household income”). But the question of whether socioeconomic, regional, or demographic characteristics affect the likelihood of a city having a particular form of government the other remains unanswered.

Overview of Theory

In this section, I outline the prevailing theories and generalizations regarding which and how different city characteristics influence the adoption of council-manager form of government. These stereotypes of council-manager form of government (e.g. the claim that council-manager form of government is best suited for small-mid sized cities) may have been more applicable in the early years of the reform movement but are still

found in today's literature. Each of the generalizations is essentially a testable hypothesis, of which, unfortunately, few tests exist.

Race: It is impossible to examine the rise of city managers – or any aspect of the American polity for that matter – without accounting for the politics of race. The Progressive movement is married to the unfortunate legacy of racism, eugenics, and nativism through the reform tools of voter registration, literary tests, extended residency requirements and poll taxes (Bridges, 1997, p. 8). As Banfield and Wilson (in Bridges, 1997, p.8) stated:

Making local government 'businesslike' meant 'getting rid of politics,' which in turn meant curtailing the representation of low-status minorities. In its early years the [council-manager] plan appealed to a good many people as a convenient means of putting the Catholics, the Irish, the Italians, the labor unions, and all other 'underdogs' in their places. (Banfield and Wilson, 1966, p. 171)

Other scholars also address differences in ethnic demographics in one form of government compared to the other. Morone wrote that the Reformers envisioned an “idealized civilization” that was suspicious of, if not outright hostile towards, immigrants, populist farmers, blacks, and poor whites (Morone, 1998, p. 114). However such sentiments may have been a reaction to the disproportional political power that ethnic minorities wielded under the spoils system.

[These] new immigrants needed help getting settled. They naturally got much help from ethnic neighborhoods, where, for example, a family from Poland would find people who spoke Polish, restaurants that served Polish food, and stores and churches with links to the old country. Politicians dealt with these ethnic neighborhoods. If the neighborhood voted to provide victory for particular candidates for mayor and city council, then jobs and services would be provided. Political machines were built on these quid pro quo arrangements. The bosses of those

machines were either elected officials or people who controlled the elected officials (O’Conner and Sabato, 1997, p.133 in Franzel, 2005).

In addition to centralizing control of New York’s political machine and plundering the public coffers, Boss Tweed built patriarchal schools, orphanages, and hospitals with government “donations.” “Of this money, nearly three quarters went to Catholic institutions at a time of widespread anti-Catholic feeling” (Bridges, 1997, p. 93).

Progressives advocated for new political rules that guaranteed their descriptive representation rather than the substantive representation Tweed and other politicians used to build diverse ethnic coalitions. These reformers found their greatest success in the Southwestern United States where they held larger majorities and the existing political machines were newer and weaker than those established in the Northeast.

Table 2
Ethnic Composition of Selected Cities in 1960

	% Foreign Born
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Council-Manager	
Dallas	1.9%
Phoenix	4.4%
San Diego	7.0%
Mayor-Council	
Chicago	12.3%
New Haven	13.2%
New York	20.0%

Sources: Bridges, Amy. *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Using the same 1960 U.S. Bureau of Census data as Bridges, Schnore and Alford examine ethnic demographic differences between the three forms of government in 300 American suburbs:

Table 3
Ethnic Composition of Suburbs by Form of Government

	% Foreign Born	Nonwhite
Council-Manager	8.0%	4.3%
Mayor-Council	9.3%	5.1%
Commission	9.5%	10.3%

Sources: Schnore, Leo F. and Robert A. Alford, "Forms of Government and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Suburbs." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (June 1963): pp. 12.

These socioeconomic differences were further exacerbated by the restrictive voting practices placed on minorities. Because of poll taxes, literary tests (especially in Arizona and Texas), and early required registration, reformed big cities of the Southwest had substantially less election turnout than the machine cities of the Northeast. Voter turnout in the council-manager form of government cities of Phoenix, Albuquerque, and Dallas averaged below 20 percent of voting adults between 1946 to 1963 while the mayor-council, strong machine, cities: New York, Chicago, and New Haven averaged 43.6 percent, 54.3 percent, and 57.3 respectively (Bridges, 1997, p. 132). Nonpartisan elections – a staple of reformed cities – also served to depress turnout.

Further, where there was lower turnout, those that did vote were almost uniformly homogeneous in their political views and socioeconomic characteristics. Rosenstone and Hansen demonstrated that literary tests reduced the probability African-Americans would vote by 16 percent, poll taxes reduced that number by 10.2 percent, and periodic registration by 11.6 vis-à-vis participation in Presidential elections

between 1956 through 1988 (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993, p. 54). Bridges found that these voting discrepancies lead to less competitive races in council-manager cities in which affluent residents could essentially dictate the political agenda. For example, although Austin's affluent represented only 15 percent of total population in 1960, they equaled 26.8 percent of those that turned out to vote, and they voted overwhelming for the winning candidate (70 percent) (Bridges, 1997, p. 146).

It's important to understand the racial demographics of early council-manager cities because, as a referendum item, the issue of adopting council-manager form of government required support from the voting population. Cities that were more heterogeneous, especially in their voting behavior, were more likely to have council-manager forms of government.

Former Arlington, Virginia County Manager, and current ICMA Chief Operating Officer, Ron Carlee offered a compelling explanation that builds off of the idea that there may be demographic factors that could rationally lead to one form of government over another. He suggested that more diverse communities (whether diverse in ethnic, race, economic, or political composition) may require the sort of visionary leadership that is more appropriate and natural from a mayor in a mayor-council system. Because city managers are barred from taking that type of role, a leadership vacuum may exist in a diverse or conflicted council-manager city – this is especially true if there is no ceremonial mayor or if the mayor is selected on a rotating basis from amongst the council. Protasel examined this same “leadership gap in the council-manager plan” in his study on

why cities abandon the form in favor of mayor-council (Protasel, 1988). Carlee said that political leadership may be needed to “create a harmonious environment needed to sell the vision” (Carlee, personal interview, June 15, 2010). One could reasonably expect to find mayor-council forms of government in large cities that tend to be more economically and ethnically diverse.

Population: Council-manager form of government is associated primarily with small to medium sized cities. This association probably originated from the fact that the National Municipal League originally recommended the form explicitly for cities under 100,000 with the caveat that it may also be appropriate for larger cities. The association has stuck (see Protasel, 1988). Smaller and newer cities that sprung up in the Southwest, by virtue of their infancy, had less established political machines and served as incubators for the Progressives reforms. However, growth in the Sunbelt states over the past century turned Western frontier towns like Phoenix (1900 population: 5,544) into thriving metropolises rivaling the cities of the East (2000 population: 1,567,294) (US Census). Still, as late as 1994, political scientists claimed that the council-manager form of government is “rarely instituted in the big cities” (Judd and Swanson, 1994, p. 97). The council-manager form of government is, as a proportion of forms of government, the more likely form of government in cities under 250,000 but today, it exists in cities of all sizes.

Table 4

Percentage of Municipalities with Council-Manager Form of Government by Population (or Over) in Thousands (2009)

	5+	25+	50+	100+	250+	500+	1,000+
Council-Manager	53%	63%	62%	58%	40%	31%	33%
Mayor-Council	39%	34%	36%	40%	57%	66%	66%
Commission	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	0%

Sources: ICMA, *The Municipal Yearbook*, 2009 (Washington, DC)

Business: Business interests also play a prominent role in the political development of council-manager cities. Scholars have called council-manager cities “the habitat of the upper middle class” (Protasel, 1988) Many business leaders, believing that the council-manager form of government created a more favorable environment to do business, founded civic groups to promote the form’s adoption. The *National Municipal Review* endorsed this connection writing, “the purpose of enlightened municipal government is to make a city a safe place in which to do business” (Toulmin, 1917, in Bridges, 1997).

In one extreme example, Beaufort, South Carolina, local businessmen paid half the city manager’s salary (Weinstein, 1962). The very structure of the council-manager form of government makes comparisons to business inevitable. Within the council-manager form, the council acts as a board of directors and hires a chief executive officer (i.e. the city manager) to administer the city’s business, which in council-manager cities, according to Bridges, meant ensuring fiscal frugality, requiring efficiency, providing infrastructure and policies that promote growth, and lowering taxes (Bridges, 1997, p. 52). Intentionally absent from Bridges’s list are values associated with supporting the poor, proving

welfare, or guaranteeing rights. This trade off was not lost on Socialists, Democrats, and Prohibitionists who opposed the council-manager plan in Dayton, Ohio (the first city of substantive size to adopt the form). Together, those groups produced and issued a pamphlet entitled *Dayton's Commission Manager Plan: Why Big Manufactures, Bond Holders, and Public Franchise Grabbers Favor It, and Workingmen and Common People Oppose* (Weinstein, 1962).

Schnore and Alford's demographic study seems to support this theory. They found that council-manager suburban communities tended to be on average more affluent, educated, professionalized, and white. These characteristics may have been or may currently be self-reinforcing:

"Migration patterns have reinforced the effects of this ideological realignment. Americans, especially relatively affluent, college-educated Americans, are increasingly choosing where to live on the basis of lifestyle preferences that are strongly related to political attitudes."
(Abramowitz, 2010)

Table 5
Socioeconomic Characteristics of Suburban Communities by Form of Government (1960)

	Commission	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager
In White-Collar Occupations	47.4%	48.2%	55.6%
Completed High School	42.1%	45.6%	56.0%
Dwelling Occupied by Owner	56.9%	64.7%	65.7%
Moved Since 1958	19.6%	19.6%	25.5%
Median family income	\$6816	\$7379	\$7977

Source: Schnore, Leo F. and Robert A. Alford, "Forms of Government and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Suburbs." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (June 1963): pp. 12.

Question of Research

The primary question I hope to answer is: What socioeconomic characteristics increase the likelihood that council-manager form of government governs a city? Essentially, do the stereotypes and generalizations that I examined earlier regarding council-manager form of government hold true today?

Using the 100 largest cities by population in the United States as my data set, I identify differences between those cities with council-manager forms of government and those cities with mayor-council. (I understand that additional insights might be found in analysis of town, borough, or county chief administrative officers; however, I focus solely on the cities because Progressives originally focused their efforts on urban reform and because the 100 most populous cities are almost evenly divided between forms of government, making it a convenient sample). Of the 100 cities in my data set, 48 use the council-manager form of government, 49 use the mayor-council form, and 3 use the commission form. I use ICMA's designation when assigning cities a form of government (ICMA, 2010). Due to the limited number of cities (3) and the fact that Logistic Distribution Models require binary dependent variables, I have excluded the commission form of government from my study and labeled the mayor-council form of government 0 and the council-manager form of government 1. The logistic distribution model defines the continuous distribution as the probability a city adopted the council-manager form of government on a scale of 0 to 1 with 1 equaling a 100 percent probability. The paper examines the one hundred most populous cities as they are today using the most recent data available, in some cases this data is current and in others up

to 10 years old (from the 2000 census). I labeled cities that changed their form of governments within the past decade, such as San Diego and El Paso, using their current form because the data for each characteristic is as current as possible.

The criteria I look at when identifying differences between the forms of government are similar, although not identical, to the socioeconomic characteristics Schnore and Alford examined in suburbs.

Like Schnore and Alford's study, this paper is limited by the fact that I am using data from the most recent year available and not the year that the city adopted council-manager form of government. Thus, the results do not support conclusions about which conditions make the adoption of council-manager form of government more likely. My findings support claims such as "cities that are governed by the council-manager form of government are more likely to have a higher percentage of (variable X) than cities that use mayor-council". But any causal relationship or hypothesis, such as white collar workers are more likely to support the adoption of professional management because they themselves are professionals, is purely speculative. However, I believe there is still value in this sort of analysis because cities can potentially change from one form to another. Therefore, it is valuable to know how the socioeconomic characteristics of San Diego differ from San Jose because both cities adopted the council-manager form of government around the same time, yet San Diego abandoned council-manager form of government in 2005 while San Jose did not.

Additionally, this study is more than a revision of Schnore and Alford's work. Their paper identified differences in the average score for each variable, which I do as

well, but failed to quantify whether the differences were statistically significant. Through regression analysis, I hope to show how each variable affects the probability that a city adopted the council-manager form of government and the strength of its relationship.

Findings

Table 6

Median Socioeconomic Characteristics of 100 Most Populous Cities by Form

	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager
<u>Population and Age</u>		
Year Incorporated	1847 <i>CE</i>	1881 <i>CE</i>
Population	413,201	327,207
Population Change (2000-07)	2.4%	6.8%
Persons Under 18	24.8%	27.3%
Persons Over 65	11.3%	9.3%
Persons per Household	2.41%	2.66%
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
White Persons	60.2%	66.15%
Black Persons	26.6%	9.25%
Hispanic/Latino Persons	7.3%	21.3%
Person Reporting 2 or More Races	2.6%	3.6%
Foreign Born	7.7%	14.8%
Language other than English Spoken at Home	13.6%	25.5%
<u>Housing</u>		
Homeownership Rate	50.3%	58.4%
Living in Same House in 1995 and 2000	49.5%	44.25%
Mean travel times to work (minutes)	23.3	24.1
Median Value of Owner Occupied House	\$104,100	\$122,650
<u>Education and Socioeconomic Status</u>		
High School Degree (Age 25+)	78.9%	80.3%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	27.4%	24.3%

	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager
Graduate or Professional Degree	9.3%	8.3%
Persons Below Poverty	18.5%	14.2%
Median Household Income	\$36,689	\$42,168
Per Capita Income	\$20,450	\$20,324
<u>Workforce</u>		
Ethnic Minority Owned Firms	24.1%	19.1%
Women Owned Firms	29.6%	28.4%
Unemployment	4.7%	3.8%
White Collar Occupations	63.3%	61.85%
Retail Sales per Capita	\$11,055	\$11,426

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau: *State and County QuickFacts*. Data derived from Population Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, County Business Patterns, 2002 (Quickfacts.Census.gov)

These findings from the median statistics for council-manager cities seemingly support some assumptions, or generalizations, regarding the form while rejecting others. First, Schnore and Alford’s finding that “the council-manager city is the more likely, to be newer and to have a young, mobile, white, middleclass population that is growing rapidly” still appears to hold true (Schnore and Alford, 1963). Today, as in 1963, council-manager governments exist in newer cities (based on median year incorporated), have larger percentages of people under 18 and fewer over 65, are less diverse (as a percentage of White persons), earn higher household incomes, and experienced higher rates of population growth when compared to the mayor-council form of government.

However, not all of the characteristics Schnore and Alford identified in the council-manager form of government exist today. In contrast to 1963, cities with council-manager form of government now have twice as high a percentage of foreign

born residents as mayor-council cities. This growth is largely due to changes in immigration patterns. Most immigrants today come from countries south of the American border and settle in the Southwestern states; whereas, a hundred years ago, European immigrants traveled to America through and settled in New York City or other mayor-council cities in the Northeast. To provide an example of how impactful this growth is: In 1900, New York City had ten times a higher percentage of foreign born residents as Dallas. Today the gap is only a multiple of one and a half.

Increased immigration also led to increased diversity for council-manager cities. Although black persons are underrepresented by 4 points in the median council-manager city compared to the national average, Hispanics (or those of Latino origin) are overrepresented by 6.5 points as a percentage of national population in council-manager cities and are 7.5 points below their national average in mayor-council cities. So, although the white majority is still larger in the median council-manager city, it is impossible to claim that the council-manager form of government is less diverse - it has a higher median percent of foreign born citizens, higher percent of households in which a language other than English is spoken, and a slightly higher rate of bi-or-multi-racial persons.

Interestingly, the demographic differences in each form of government's workforce appear inconsequential. Contrary to prevailing theories, business interests (as measured by those with Bachelor's degree or higher, graduate or professional degree, or percentage in white collar occupations) are actually a smaller percentage of the population in council-manager cities. Schnore and Alford found the opposite to be true in 1963 suburban communities - they theorized that white collar workers with

professional degrees would more readily support the adoption of and live in cities with a professional city manager with an advanced degree. It is impossible to say whether demographic changes over the past 40 years caused the switch or whether it is simply a function of our two different data sets: cities and suburbs.

Additional differences between the two forms exist in terms of median household income, median home price, and homeownership rates.

Regression Analysis

Next, I wanted to see how well each socioeconomic variable corresponded to the probability of a city having council-manager form of government. The data in Table 6 suggests that the following variables correspond to a higher likelihood of encountering the council-manager form of government within a city: a smaller percentage of black persons, fewer ethnically owned minority firms, a higher median household income and household value, a lower poverty rate, a greater number of foreign born residents, a larger percentage of Hispanic/Latino persons, a faster rate of population growth, and the larger the young population in a city. The other independent variables show too little differentiation between their dependent variables for me to make an observation at this time.

In order to perform the logistic regression, I narrowed the list of my original 37 variables pulled from the US Census down to 13 variables. This consolidation was necessary to avoid repeating data from variables highly correlated with one another. For example, the variables “bachelor degree or higher” and “graduate or professional degree” are so highly correlated that they prevent an accurate reading of the data.

The variables I included are: population (cpop), population growth (popgrowth), percentage of population under 18 (undereight~n), percentage white (whites), percentage black (blacks), percentage of Hispanic or Latino origin (latinos), percentage living in the same house in 1995 and 2000 (i.e. a measure of mobility) (samehouse), percentage with at least a bachelor's degree (college), percentage that own their residence (homeown), median income (income), unemployment rate (unemployed), year that the city incorporated (year), and percentage of firms or companies owned by minorities (minorityfirm).

Model

The formula for the logistic distribution model:

$$\text{Probability of City having} = \frac{1}{1+e^{-z}}, \text{where}$$

$$\text{Council-Manager Form of Government} = 1$$

$$Z = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_{13} X_{13}$$

Table 7
Logistic Regression of Socioeconomic Variables in Cities by Form of Government

form	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
cpop	-5.83e-06	1.56e-06	-3.74	0.000	-8.88e-06	-2.78e-06
popgrowth	-.0338098	.0384159	-0.88	0.379	-.1091037	.041484
undereight~n	.7683998	.3010085	2.55	0.011	.1784339	1.358366
whites	-.229176	.0990301	-2.31	0.021	-.4232714	-.0350805
blacks	.0919737	.0705477	1.30	0.192	-.0462973	.2302446
latinos	.269368	.0903151	2.98	0.003	.0923537	.4463823
samehouse	-.3884989	.1182584	-3.29	0.001	-.6202811	-.1567168
college	-.0310489	.08941	-0.35	0.728	-.2062892	.1441914
homeown	.1669049	.1161428	1.44	0.151	-.0607307	.3945406
income	.0001072	.0001291	0.83	0.406	-.0001458	.0003603
unemployed	-2.696107	.8324936	-3.24	0.001	-4.327765	-1.06445
year	-.0095538	.0097656	-0.98	0.328	-.028694	.0095864
minorityfirm	-.2297988	.0983388	-2.34	0.019	-.4225394	-.0370582
_cons	30.9261	24.2073	1.28	0.201	-16.51934	78.37154

Note: 2 failures and 2 successes completely determined.

In this model, a positive coefficient implies an increase in the likelihood of a city having council-manager form of government. For example, every one point increase in the percentage of Hispanics/Latinos in a city results in an increased probability that the city has council-manager form of government. The regression is performed with robust standard errors to combat heteroskedasticity.

Results

Of the 13 variables, seven proved statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence interval and their presence, as a percentage, in cities correlates to the likelihood of one form of government over the other. The most significant (as measured by $P > |z|$) is city size, which is negatively correlated with council-manager form of government. As predicted in the literature, the larger the city, the more likely it is to have mayor-council form of government. The fact that the median council-manager city is growing at three times the rate of the median mayor-council city is irrelevant, as the rate of population growth proved statistically insignificant. For form of government, size matters but population growth doesn't. However, Schnore and Alford's conclusion that council-manager residents are "mobile" is supported by the negative correlation between the form and the percentage of people living in the same house for five years. Residents in mayor-council cities tend to be more established.

Race also plays a significant role in predicting a city's form of government. Cities with high percentages of Hispanics or Latinos are statistically more likely to have council-manager forms of government while every unit increase in the percentage of white residents actually decreases the probability that the city employs a manager.

However, just because a city is racially diverse does not necessarily mean political power and income distribution is equally diverse. For example, an increase in the percentage of minority owned firms decreases the likelihood of council-manager form of government.

Two variables that showed large variation in the medians of each form of government listed in Table 6, income and homeownership, showed little correlation to a particular form; unemployment did, though. Higher rates of unemployment predict a lower likelihood of council-manager form of government.

It appears that, as in 1962, the larger a city's youth population (as a percentage of residents under the age of 18) the more likely it is to be council-manager.

Using these findings, one can more accurately predict the form of government which governs a city based on known variables. However, it is impossible to predict future government forms (i.e. one can not say that the larger the Latino or Hispanic population, the more likely a city is to adopt council-manager form of government; only that the larger the Latino or Hispanic population, the more likely one is to encounter council-manager form of government within that city). This paper remains an early foray into the study of how socioeconomic conditions affect form of government (the notable pioneers being Bridges, Schnore, and Alford). Future work could focus on how a city's socioeconomic characteristics affect the adoption, abandonment, retention, or rejection of council-manager form of government. For example, a study that examines Miami or El Paso (or other city that recently transitioned its form of government) within the framework of this paper's model would be of particular interest.

Today's council-manager cities do not look too dissimilar from the suburbs Schnore and Alford examine years ago: They remain, young, mobile, and middle-class, but they are significantly more diverse – especially when considering their Hispanic populations – than Schnore and Alford's study found. The changing demographics of council-manager cities are but a small sample of the changes affecting American cities en masse. Just as European migration in the late 1800s changed the landscape of Northeastern cities and urban politics, this study shows how a new era of immigrants, setting roots in the Southwest have already done the same.

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