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Elected Political Leadership Versus Hired Professional Management: An analysis of local Government Structure in 20th Century America

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA



ELECTED POLITICAL LEADERSHIP VERSUS HIRED
PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICA

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

BY

BRAD M. GENGLER

GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA

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SECTION 1

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Within the Federal system of government in the United States there exists a nation of multiple governments within governments. Although Americans are governed by a single national government, what lies beneath the national level is a vast web of diversely structured and fragmented governmental units. According to the 1997 Census of Governments report conducted by the US Census Bureau, in addition to the Federal government and the fifty state governments, there were 87,453 “units of local government” in the United States in 1997 (see appendix A). The Census Bureau recognizes five basic types of local governmental units that fall within two main categories. Included in the first category – general purpose governments – are county, municipal, and township governments. The second category – special purpose governments – include public school districts and special districts. Special districts, depending on enabling state legislation, are commonly referred to as districts, authorities, boards and commissions.¹ According to the Census Bureau, there were 2,498 more units of local government in 1997 than there were in 1992, and a total of 4,287 more units in 1997 than in 1987.² The greatest increase occurred in the category of special district governments.

Even though there is a vast array of diversely structured sub-state governmental units in the country, the fifty state governments share many common characteristics. They are similar to one another in that they reflect the general structure of the federal

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"comprehensible neither to local citizens nor the professional analyst."³ The presence of
this complex diversity within our federal system of government, in and of itself, gives
ample reason to study the structure of the government that is closest to the people - local
government.

Throughout the United States there are five basic models of local government
used by incorporated municipalities: Mayor-Council; Council-Manager; Commission;
Town Meeting; and Representative Town Meeting. Although all five forms exist
throughout the nation, this study only focuses on the Mayor-Council and Council-
Manager structures. The Commission, Town Meeting, and Representative Town Meeting,
do not play an active role in the analysis. Although these forms are an important part of
the history of local government in the United States, their current isolated and infrequent

government

is unicameral instead of a bicameral. Differences can be seen from state to state in areas such as the State Insurance Commissioner, State Tax Commissioner, State Auditor, State Attorney General, State Tax Commissioner, State Auditor, State Insurance Commissioner. In many other states, on the other hand, these positions are appointed by the governor. The point here is that except for a few minor variations, the fifty state institutions of government closely mirror the structure of the national government. However, the diverse structures and types of local governments within the fifty states have been called a "crazy-quilt pattern" of organizations that is "comprehensible neither to local citizens nor the professional analyst."³ The presence of this complex diversity within our federal system of government, in and of itself, gives ample reason to study the structure of the government that is closest to the people - local government.

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term "Manager" or

government.

THE RESEARCH Q

Why do some communities completely abandon one particular form of local government and adopt another? Why do others modify their existing structures of municipal government and incorporate elements of other forms? The quest to shape and reshape the structure of local government in America has been an ongoing phenomenon throughout the 20th century and now into the 21st century. Incorporated municipalities of all sizes and regional locations continue to change, or attempt to change, their forms of government through “abandonment” and “adoption” campaigns and other organizational reform efforts. Berman noted that two out of every three municipalities have changed their form of government at least once since their incorporation.⁴ An example of a current abandonment campaign is happening in San Diego, California, the sixth largest city in the nation. There a group known as the San Diego Charter Change Committee is currently attempting to change the city’s form of government from the Council-Manager system to the Mayor-Council form.⁵ On the other hand, on May, 2, 2000, the citizens of Salisbury, Maryland, population 20,592, rejected at the polls a measure that would have changed its local government structure from the Mayor-Council to the Council-Manger form. The vote was 54% to 46% in favor of retaining the mayor system of government.⁶ These and other examples of reform efforts are discussed later in this study.

The reform campaigns in San Diego and Salisbury involve a formal change to city charter. However, an equally significant issue in the matter of restructuring local

government is when municipalities modify their organizational structures by incorporating elements of other forms, elements that are not germane to the existing form. For example, Mayor-Council cities may choose to add to their organizational structure the position of Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). A change such as this may not require a formal change to city charter, constitution, or law, but may nevertheless alter to varying degrees the functioning of the city government's administration. Council-Manager cities may also rearrange their existing structure by opting to elect the mayor at-large, rather than the city council appointing one of its members to the position. Changes made to existing forms of government without a formal change in form is becoming more common in communities throughout the nation. For example, research conducted by Ebdon and Brucato indicated that there is evidence of "convergence" among the mayor and manager forms of government throughout the 1980's and early 1990's.⁷

The significance of the reform efforts in San Diego and Salisbury, as well as in countless other communities over time, raises two important questions. First, why is the existing form of government called into question and what are the fundamental arguments for and against the two forms of government? Secondly, what will the change in form of government bring about? In other words, what do the proponents for change expect to achieve by doing away with an existing governmental structure and replacing it with another?

The goal of this study is not to attempt to identify a "one-best" form of local government, much like those from the Scientific Management school did in the early 1900's in their attempt to define a "one-best way" to organizational management in

government.⁸ Rather, the goal is to examine the history of local government in 20th Century America and trace the development of the formal governing institutions of the Mayor-Council and Council-Manager forms of government at the municipal level. The study identifies fundamental principles associated with each form of government and analyzes their impacts on abandonment and adoption campaigns of local government structures. Examples of communities where reform efforts have occurred are presented to provide examples of past abandonment and adoption campaigns of these forms of governments.

SECTION 3

MAYOR-COUNCIL AND COUNCIL-MANAGER FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

This section of the study is a discussion of the current use of the Mayor-Council and Council-Manager forms of government found in the United States. Much of the current literature and data on their use throughout the nation comes from the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA). The association is a strong supporter of "professionalism" in government and is a leading advocate of the Council-Manager form of government. According to the ICMA, one of its primary goals is to, "support professional management in all forms of local government and specifically to encourage local governments in the United States and in other countries to adopt and retain the Council-Manager or the general management plan."⁹ Even though the ICMA is admittedly biased towards the council-manager plan, it nevertheless provides useful data in light of the absence of sufficient data sources on the distribution of the various forms of government in the United States. The ICMA and the US Census Bureau provide the bulk of data on the subject in this study.

Recent data published by the ICMA on the distribution of the basic models of local government structure (see appendix B) indicate that the Mayor-Council and Council-Manager forms of government are the most widely used forms of municipal government in communities with populations over 2,500. The numbers show that the use of the Council-Manager system has steadily increased since 1984, and the use of the Mayor-Council form has steadily decreased since that time. An average of sixty-three

municipalities per year, according to the ICMA, have adopted the Council-Manager form since 1984. This represents a gain of 1,012 manager cities and a loss of 698 mayor cities from 1984 to 2000.

This study does not doubt the accuracy or validity of the data contained in Appendix B. However, the reader should take note that the information in the table represents only the broad categories of the basic forms of local government. In other words, in order to assess the implications of the data it is important to first define each form in terms of its past and present structural arrangements. For example, the institutional arrangements of a council-manager city in the South may be quite different than a manager city in the Northwest. The idea that there not only is a difference *between* forms, but also *among* the same form, is a main theme in this study.

As indicated in Appendix B the most commonly used forms of local government are the mayor-council and council-manager forms in cities of 2,500 or greater. Although there exists many variations within each form, the two systems are distinguished apart from one another by certain institutional arrangements and principles of governing. The following is a brief discussion of the basic, or generic, models and the duties and responsibilities of the elected and appointed officials within each form.

Mayor-Council Form of Government

The mayor-council system represents a form of local government that is most easily compared to the institutional structure of the state governments and the federal government. The mayor in this system, like the fifty state governors and the president,

represents the executive branch of government. In a similar fashion the city council represents the legislative branch and parallels the structure and function of state legislatures and the US Congress. However, beyond the basic resemblance of legislative and executive separation of powers found at the state and national levels, the relationship between the two branches within the mayor-council system can take on a number of forms, each having direct implications on the role and function of each branch. One such variation within this system is whether the mayor is considered "weak" or "strong," depending on the statutory powers granted to the position through charter, constitution, or law.

Weak Mayor System

According to Kweit and Kweit , the weak mayor system is characterized by greater numbers of elected officials (the long ballot), a limited mayoral policy role, and in some cases the absence of mayoral veto power over council action.¹⁰ Also, weak mayor cities limit the mayor's power in hiring city employees by relying on civil service procedures instead of patronage or the spoils system.¹¹ These attributes of the weak mayor system place considerable limitations on the formal powers of the mayor and greatly increase the function of the council. The council in this system, in addition to its primary role as policy-maker, also deals with many administrative matters. This creates a situation where the weak mayor lacks administrative power over such things as organization, finance, and personnel, and leaves the weak mayor "doomed to the role of ceremonial head of the city."¹² Although still used today mainly in smaller cities, the

equal to the governor and president, regardless of whether the local governing system is weak or strong.

Strong mayor systems are generally found in the nation's largest cities where the mayor is elected at-large in partisan elections. The city council is usually unicameral and the members are elected through ward or district elections.¹⁸ Strong mayors are normally full-time officials, whereas the position in weak mayor and manager systems are generally part-time. Although the mayor system – both weak and strong – is found throughout the country, it is most prevalent in the Northeast.

Council-Manager Form of Government

The council-manager form of government in its basic form is characterized by a number of factors, which include:¹⁹

1. A small council, elected at-large on a nonpartisan ballot.
2. The mayor is often chosen by the council from its ranks, or sometimes elected directly by the public.
3. A professionally trained manager is appointed by and responsible to the city council.

In this system a professionally trained administrator – the manager – is given direct authority and control over city departments. The position of mayor in the council-manager system, unlike its counterpart in the strong-mayor system, is greatly limited by way of formal powers and most often is only responsible for ceremonial duties associated with the position. In this case the formal duties of the mayor in the council-manager system are similar to those of the weak mayor in the Mayor-Council form. As the ceremonial leader of the governing body, these two types of mayors do not possess the

same formal powers as the mayor in the strong mayor-council system. However, as pointed out later in this study, mayors in both the mayor and manager systems also possess informal powers that supplement their lack of formal authority over policy making, personnel administration, and local government in general. This is especially critical in the leadership styles of the weak mayor and the mayor in the manager system.

The council-manager form of government is generally found in the Southeast and Southwest regions of the United States and is most common in communities with a population of 500,000 or fewer.²⁰ The basic model of the manager system is characterized by a separation of the administrative and legislative functions of local government. This means that the elected body – the city council – performs the legislative duties of policy-making, and the hired professional – the city manager – carries out the policies of the council. This relationship in its purest form is known as the politics-administration dichotomy and is discussed later in the study.

Again, the fundamental difference between the mayor and manager systems is the difference between governance through an elected leader versus management through a trained professional. The mayor-council form is often referred to as the “political model” due to its emphasis on the political leadership of the mayor, especially in the strong mayor form. In this case the mayor is the chief executive officer and as a popularly elected official, is accountable to the entire electorate. Members of the city council are normally elected by wards or districts and are accountable to their respective constituents. This basic model of the mayor form represents a distinct separations of powers between the two branches.

On the contrary, accountability takes on a different role in the council-manager form. The manager in this system is normally the chief executive officer within local government and is given direct control over city departments.²¹ The manager is appointed by and responsible to the council. However, this is a major point of contention in the debate between the two forms of government. Proponents of the mayor system argue that city managers are not accountable to the electorate because they are appointed by the council, rather than elected by the people. Supporters of the manager form counter this allegation by asserting that the manager is indeed accountable to the electorate in that the position serves at the pleasure of the elected council and can be dismissed at the body's discretion. Therefore, the position of manager in the council-manager form, according to this argument, is accountable to the people through the powers of the elected city council.

Determinants of Structure

Although countless factors can be attributed to why certain forms exist where they do, Dye focused on six conditions that relate to the social, economic, and political forces that are associated with the selection of a community's form of government: size of city; political conflict; growth rate; social class; party competition; and region.²² These factors are used here for a discussion of the basic models.

The size of cities, at least on the surface level of the argument, has been a good indicator of the type of government used by municipalities. Generally, the mayor-council form is used in either very small or very large cities, while the manager system is most

common in medium-sized cities with populations between 25,000 and 250,000.²³ There are exceptions to this rule, however, in large cities such as San Diego, California, and Dallas, Texas, both with populations over one million.

The level of political conflict within communities can also be used as an indicator of structure. Dye notes that in large cities political conflict is heightened due to higher levels of competing interests which results in a demand for the political leadership provided by the mayor-council system.²⁴ Political leadership in large cities is seen as a better arbitrator between these interests than provided for in the manager system. The assumption here is that medium-sized cities have much less political conflict between competing interests and therefore do not require the strong political leadership offered by the mayor form.

The rate at which communities have grown can also be a predictor of form. This factor is interesting in that it associates structure with history. For example, compared to the West and South regions of the country, the mayor-council form is most common in Eastern and Midwestern communities that have been around much longer than their southern and western counterparts. A common argument found in much of the literature supporting the manager form is that the more rapidly growing, younger cities of the West and South have needs that are better met by the council-manager system.

Social class within communities is also used as a factor in predicting structure of local government. Dye notes that studies have shown that council-manager cities tend to be middle-class, while mayor cities tend to have large populations of working-class, low-income families with a high percentage of minority groups.²⁵

Another key factor in the distribution of the mayor and manager forms is the presence of political party competition. Cities with a high level of competitive party politics are more likely to have the mayor-council form, opposed to cities that operate within a nonpartisan environment.²⁶

The last determinant of structure discussed here is region. Of the determinants addressed thus far, region is thought to be the strongest indicator of form of government. Mayor-council governments with partisan elections are more common in the Northeast and Upper Midwest than the manager system. In the South and West, the manager system with nonpartisan elections is the predominant form used by municipalities.

SECTION 4

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The attributes of the strong mayor-council system show that it is a system of *political governance* through an elected leader – the mayor. On the contrary, the council-manager form of government is based on *professional management* by a hired professional administrator – the city manager. The division between the principles of political governance and the principles of professional management in government, is quite distinct and has deeply rooted advocates on both sides of the argument. These two opposing viewpoints provide the foundation this study uses to build on in order to analyze local government structure throughout the 20th century. From this point begins a discussion of the events and circumstances that have fostered a century-long debate between the mayor-council and council-manager forms of government.

Today's battle between the mayor-council and council-manager systems of government can be traced back to the late 1800's and early 1900's during a time known as the Progressive reform era. By this time in American history the mayor system of government was under heavy attack by those who sought to rid government of all its ills. East noted that, according to Andrew D. White, "Without the slightest exaggeration we may assert that, with very few exceptions, the city governments of the United States are the worst in Christendom – the most expensive, the most inefficient, and the most corrupt."²⁷ White's commentary conceptualizes the efforts of early reformers to cleanse municipal government of graft, corruption, and inefficiency.²⁸ Specifically targeted by

the Progressive reformers were the “political machines” that had emerged in communities throughout much of the nation. These “machines” flourished in a time when the nation was experiencing tremendous population growth from European immigration coupled with the increased industrialization of the nation. One of the most notable and notorious political machines was Tammany Hall, an organization that first began in New York City in the 1700’s. The machines, like Tammany Hall, dominated local governments by garnering the votes of the lower-class, immigrant population, through such tactics as offering immigrants patronage jobs, special favors, pay-offs, and other types of financial and personal rewards. East noted that:

To an American of a more simple and genteel past, the increasing growth and perfection of the machine was a shocking development; it represented the prostitution of the democratic process, for in return for the votes of the poor confused immigrant the machine returned a *quid pro quo* of personal “services.”²⁹

The reformers from the Progressive era tended to be middle and upper-class, white business-men, who supported the demise of the “political machine.” Through electoral reforms, early Progressive reformers sought to create a “depoliticized,” business-like government with improved administration, a neutral civil service system, and an emphasis on efficiency in government.³⁰

Prior to the onset of the Council-Manager system, the concept of a “business-like” government first took hold in Galveston, Texas, in 1901. The city had been devastated by a hurricane in 1900, killing an estimated 5,000 people. Following the disaster a task force was formed by a group of local business leaders that took charge of Galveston’s local government. This task force became the first Commission form of government, with each

of the five members being responsible for a specific area of city government. (e.g. housing, public safety, and finance). As a viable alternative to the long-established mayor system and the political machines of the day, the citizens of Galveston formally amended their city charter and adopted the Commission Plan. This new form of local government included a five-member commission – rather than a large council – with each member elected at-large in nonpartisan elections.³¹ By 1917 an estimated 500 cities had adopted the Commission form of government.³²

The Commission form was unique in that it successfully, at least for the time, broke the mold of the Mayor-Council system and laid the early foundations of the Council-Manager system. Most notable of the Commission Plan was the absence of the separation of powers, a principle of government that was the bedrock of the mayor system. The Commission functioned both as the legislative and executive branches of government. Furthermore, since its founders were prominent business leaders, the Commission Plan stressed efficiency in government through a business-like agenda. As Kweit and Kweit point out, the Commission form was attractive to business interests because of its “depoliticized” electoral format.³³ However, the authors also note that it shares many of the same faults as the weak-mayor system, as it lacks leadership, coordination, and professional managers.³⁴ In addition to these faults, the Commission, through its structural arrangements, often resulted in “logrolling,” where one commissioner supports another in return for support of his or her own agenda.³⁵ As indicated in Appendix B, the Commission form represents a small percentage of forms

used today. Although the Commission form has its faults, it nevertheless plays a significant role during the Progressive Reform Era.

As noted earlier, the underlying goal of reformers during this period was to oust the political machines that had flourished during the days of the weak-mayor system and establish business-like principles of governance. The following is a partial list of specific principles reformers developed in their efforts to improve local government and assist in the decline of the political machine:

1. Using the ballot to elect reform candidates to enforce laws against graft and corruption, election frauds, and the misappropriation of public funds.
2. Adopting civil service regulations to cut off the supply of patronage jobs.
3. Replacing party nominating conventions with direct primaries to reduce the influence of the boss within the party and make it easier to nominate reform candidates.
4. Promoting the adoption of the initiative, referendum, and recall to insure greater popular control over the operation of city government.
5. Instituting nonpartisan elections to be held at different times from state and national elections.³⁶

In addition to these reform efforts, reformers also showed considerable support for the "short ballot" principle. Originally spearheaded by Richard S. Childs, the Short Ballot Movement coincided with the general efforts to reform municipal government in the early 1900's. Although Childs is often referred to as the "father" of the manager plan,³⁷ his initial contribution to the municipal reform movement was realized through the short ballot movement. Quite literally the short ballot was an electoral reform intended to reduce the number of elected officials, thereby reducing the overwhelming political

influence wielded by the political machines. As cited by East, in 1911 Childs wrote in his *Civic Victories: The Story of an Unfinished Revolution*:

I entered a polling booth and unfolded my first ballot. I found to my dismay that I was hopelessly unprepared. There near the top were the four principle candidates.. .. but there were fifteen other officers to be elected ... On these latter ... I had no information ... With mortification I voted blindly for the word 'Republican' in each of the fifteen contests and thereby, of course, accepted without scrutiny the offerings of the party leaders, as they knew I would.³⁸

Childs' observations clearly explained the frustration of the long ballot and how easily voters could be manipulated by an extensive list of officials to choose from. He further commented that, "The long ballot is the politician's ballot; the short ballot is the people's ballot!"³⁹ Childs' short ballot principle represented an effort to make government more democratic and was formally adopted as part of a reform package by the National Municipal League in 1915.⁴⁰

While Childs and other municipal reformers were busy establishing the manager form of government, those in the Scientific Management school were also at work on a parallel track in reforming government during the late 1800's and well into the 1900's. Scientific Management, a term first coined by Fredrick Taylor, was a school of thought that Taylor initially applied to the private sector. He developed "time-motion" studies that involved, "the detailed measurement and analysis of physical characteristics of the workplace, such as the placement of tools and machinery in relation to the worker and the movements and time that the worker had to devote to using them."⁴¹ Taylor's work focused on making organizations more efficient. Often referred to as the "one-best way," Taylor's theory depicted the role of management as one that gathers and analyzes the necessary information on all work processes, and then creates the rules and guidelines

that provide for the most efficient way to conduct the work.⁴² Workers, on the other hand, were than trained on the specific work tasks in order to obtain the maximum levels of output, quality, and personal earnings.⁴³ Taylor also felt that management should provide monetary rewards to workers for "efficient production" so that their well-being would be increased through productivity.⁴⁴

Although the Scientific Management school began in the private sector, it soon moved into the public sector reform agenda. Specifically, the school addressed many issues relating to the field of public administration. The "one-best way" approach dealt with public administration through scientific methods. As noted by Wing-yee Lee, Scientific Management and public administration are connected in terms of:

1. the method of science for the discovery of universal, objective law.
2. the aim of science allowing for the prediction and control of objective social processes.
3. the role of scientists (or managers as scientists) as objective bearers of scientific knowledge if not engineers of social processes.
4. the establishment of science as the institution of governance and the centralization of power in the hands of scientists
5. the social significance of science as the legitimate basis of public authority and as solutions to problems of value conflicts.⁴⁵

The above list represents the philosophical base the Scientific Management school followed in establishing the reform of government through science. However, as a management style, the theories of "Taylorism" and the Scientific Management school are not without their critics. Since "Taylorism" so heavily stressed the concept of efficiency in the workplace, the rigidity and routinization of the work process treated workers as robot-like. Rainey noted that in later years, "critics attacked his work for its apparent inhumanity and its underestimation of psychological and social influences on worker

morale and productivity.”⁴⁶ In any case, the impact of Scientific Management during the Progressive Reform Era has shown to be a valuable part of not only the reform movement, but more importantly it has strong roots in the field of public administration and the rise of the administrative state.

SECTION 5

THE POLITICS-ADMINISTRATION DICHOTOMY

While the structural reformers and those from the Scientific Management school were advancing their reform agendas, important steps were being taken by others who were focusing their attention specifically on the administration of government. Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth president of the United States, was one such figure that played an integral role in the municipal reform movement and the Progressive Reform Era in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Much of his attention was placed on the division between politics and the administration of government. This division, the Politics-Administration Dichotomy, was the catalyst that sparked a century-long debate and remains to be an issue in the study and practice of public administration in local government. Although Wilson's contributions to the reform era extend well beyond the Politics-Administration Dichotomy, this paper focuses on the dichotomy due to its strong influence on the debate over forms of local government and public administration in general. Unless otherwise noted, the term "dichotomy" is used here to refer to the Politics-Administration Dichotomy.

In its most simplest terms, the dichotomy represents a distinct separation between two spheres of government: the legislature and the administration. This separation has a direct influence over the administration of government. Wilson wrote in his "The Study of Administration" in 1887, that:

The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics ... Administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions.⁴⁷

What Wilson was referring to, and what Goodnow later expanded on, was the idea that functions of the legislature should be kept apart from those of the administration. For example, the primary role of the legislature is to formulate policies and programs. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the administration to carry out the policies and programs. Goodnow referred to this separation as, "the expression of popular will through legislation and the execution of that will through administration."⁴⁸ The idea that administration of government should be kept apart, or shielded, from the politics of government was a primary tenet of the Progressive Reform Era. It was also a key element in the early years of the creation of the Council-Manager form of government.

The concept of keeping politics out of administration, or vice versa, has posed a theoretical dilemma over the years. Even the mere definition and origin of the dichotomy has been questioned. Svara argued that the origins of the dichotomy cannot be traced back to the municipal reform movement. Rather, he asserted that the dichotomy emerged after the creation of the Council-Manager form and it actually deviated from the ideas of the early public administrationists.⁴⁹ In his view the early reformers - Wilson and Goodnow - attempted to define public administration and, "defend public administrators from interference by elected officials and party organizations."⁵⁰ Their view of government, according to Svara, differed from that of the features of the Politics-Administration Dichotomy. Efforts by political reformers, before and after the creation of the Council-Manager form, called for strong legislative oversight and the acceptance of an active policy role for the manager. The idea that the administration should be shielded from council interference did not appear until the twenties.⁵¹ In other words, Svara

suggested that the literal interpretation of the dichotomy was not intended for the Council-Manager plan, and that the administrative sphere should play an active policy role along side the legislative sphere. Montjoy and Watson also questioned the validity and utility of the original dichotomy. They felt that the traditional dichotomy wrongly assumes that administration could and should be separate from politics and it is, "neither practical nor desirable in Council-Manager government."⁵² Instead, the authors view the dichotomy as a professional standard for Council-Manager government, rather than a description of behavior.⁵³

In any case, the role of the dichotomy continues to be a factor in the debate over local government. The role of the manager or administrator as a neutral expert has become clouded over the years. Normative values embedded in the dichotomy pose difficult questions. Can administrators be free from political interference from elected officials? Can political leaders be free from the influence of professional administrators in the policy-making process of the legislative branch? These questions are difficult to answer because it simply is not a question of the ability to keep the two institutions separate. Rather, it is the question of whether or not the two *should* be separated in the first place. Whether we speak of the Manager form or the Mayor form with a CAO, professional administrators in local government are firmly placed in an undeniable gray area left behind by the Politics-Administration Dichotomy.

SECTION 6

EXAMPLES OF REFORM EFFORTS

The notion that there may never be a “one-best” structure of local government in America is supported by the fact that municipalities from around the country continue to attempt to alter their existing governments. Evidence of countless past and present reform efforts suggest that, at least for some individuals and groups within communities, the structure of local government must matter. Therefore, if structure does matter, what are the implications? Gray and Eisinger note that the structure of local government has been the subject of debate since the 19th century. They assert that, “... different structures – say, whether city council representatives are elected by ward or at-large, or whether the city’s chief executive is an elected mayor or a hired manager – may help certain groups in the city and hurt others in their respective efforts to influence government.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, the authors state that structure is not merely a subject of academic interest, it is also important because the structure may influence who holds the power and representation in communities and how responsive the leaders are to the public.⁵⁵

Thus, the particular structure of local government, at least to some, has a direct impact on a community for a vast number of reasons and raises many issues that sometime result in a drive to change the existing form of government. A good example of the various reasons and issues raised in the struggle to change an existing form is currently happening in the City of San Diego, California. (At the time this paper was written, the situation in San Diego had not yet been resolved). As previously noted in this

study, an organization known as the San Diego Charter Change Committee is currently in the process of attempting to change the structure of the city's local government from the Council-Manager form to the Mayor-Council. The situation in San Diego provides a solid base for a discussion of the many issues involved in the struggle over forms of local government.

Currently San Diego operates under the Council-Manager system. However, the structure of its Manager form differs slightly from the generic Council-Manager form. The differences include a city council that is elected by districts rather than at-large, and a mayor that is elected citywide, rather than chosen by the council from its ranks. Other than these two variations from the basic Manager model, San Diego's governing system closely follows the "reformed" model established during the Progressive Reform Era. Its Mayor is not the Chief Executive Officer. This title is formally given to the City Manager as established in Section 27 of the city's charter. The City Manager is chosen by and responsible to the Council and can only be dismissed by a majority vote. Other duties of the Manager include: prepare and propose the city budget; nominate the Police and Fire Chiefs, but nominations must be approved by Council; and dismiss the Police and Fire Chiefs without Council approval. These duties and many others of the City Manager in San Diego closely fit the basic Council-Manager structure.

On the other hand, the Mayor presides at City Council meetings and is recognized as the official head of the city for ceremonial purposes only. The Mayor has no veto power, but does have a vote as a member of the Council. By charter design the Mayor of

branches are combined into one, which, in turn, shifts many of the executive powers to the “politically neutral” manager who is hired by the council – not elected by the people. This is precisely the problem that the Charter Change Committee has with the current system in San Diego. The Committee asserts that a system of government that places constitutional authority over city government in the hands of a non-elected Manager, cannot be deemed a democratic government.⁵⁸ They also suggest that the current system is not accountable or responsive to the citizens for two important reasons. First, the “non-elected” Manager has direct control over the city budget, and the Mayor and Council lack the necessary research tools to study the budget.⁵⁹ Second, the current city charter forbids elected officials from having direct contact with city departments and agencies in order to obtain information on city operations. Instead, the officials must go through the City Manager’s office. This according to the Committee, leaves city government without a system of checks and balances because the Manager can control the information requested by the elected officials.⁶⁰

On the other side of the debate in San Diego, supporters of the Council-Manager system argue strongly against a change to the Mayor system. Jack McGrory, a San Diego Padres executive, and former city attorney, John Witt, state that professional city management avoids the “boss mayor” structure and the “political corruption” associated with the strong-mayor form of government.⁶¹ The conflict between the two sides in San Diego appears to be embedded in a struggle over values. Box found that this type of struggle is primarily between values of rational administration and values of citizen access and influence over the governing process.⁶² In the case of San Diego, the value of

rational administration is associated with the existing Manager system, as stressed by McGrory and Witt,⁶³ whereas the Charter Change Committee has stressed the importance of citizen access and influence that the current system lacks. This same value conflict over form of government can also be found in a recent reform effort in Salisbury, Maryland. However, in the case of Salisbury, the Mayor system is under attack.

On May 2, 2000, by a margin of 54% to 46%, the citizens of Salisbury rejected a formal change to its form of government from the Mayor-Council to the Council-Manager system. According to the ICMA, prior to a city-wide vote the Salisbury city council approved a recommendation by the Salisbury Charter Review Committee that called for the adoption of the Manager system.⁶⁴ In a report submitted to the Salisbury city council in March, 1999, the Committee laid out a detailed recommendation as to why the Manager system was the most appropriate form of government for the city. The Committee noted that the Manager form would provide more "efficient" and "less costly administration" for the city and identified three specific benefits of adopting the Council-Manager form:

1. Removing elected officials from the day-to-day administrative duties and details of city management, thereby allowing citizens who cannot devote full-time to public office to serve effectively.
2. Placing a buffer between elected officials and persons who demand special services or treatment as a reward for political support or campaign contributions provided to elected officials.
3. Allows for administration of the city to be supervised by a professional manager who is not selected by the elective process, thereby protecting both competence and continuity in management.⁶⁵

Ironically, the governing principles set forth by the Salisbury Committee are the same principles that the Committee in San Diego is attempting to abolish. The Salisbury Committee looks negatively upon its current Strong-Mayor's administrative authority, budget authority, and veto power over legislative acts.⁶⁶ However, these duties of the Mayor in Salisbury are the same duties that the San Diego Committee insists that the San Diego Mayor must obtain in order to achieve the best form of government for its city.

SECTION 7

CONVERGING FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

Thus far this paper has focused primarily on the "pure" forms of the Mayor and Manager systems, and discussed examples of communities that have attempted to completely abandon one form and adopt another. However, equally important to the discussion of form change is the growing presence of communities that modify their existing governmental structures without formally changing their particular form of government. Many communities have created, and are still creating, these "hybrid" governing structures that are comprised of elements that were once used only by one particular form or the other. Although the hybrid forms exist in all sizes of cities, one particular study focused on the prevalence of hybrid structures in the nation's largest communities. The results of the study indicated that there is some evidence that forms are "converging" in some of the country's largest cities.⁶⁷

Ebdon and Brucato examined changes in form of government and other structural elements in cities with a 1990 population of 100,000 or greater.⁶⁸ Their study focused on a fifteen year period (1980-1994) and included 193 cities located throughout the nation. The researchers used a telephone survey to obtain data pertaining to the existing form of government of each city and any changes in form or structure in each city since 1980. All cities selected for the study responded to the survey.

Three basic forms of government were identified among the cities in the study: Mayor-Council, Council-Manager, and Commission. Of the 193 cities, eleven completely

changed their forms of government during the fifteen years. Four cities changed from the Commission form to the Mayor-Council, and one Commission adopted the Council-Manager. One Mayor-Council changed to Council-Manager and five Council-Manager cities changed to Mayor-Council systems. The authors note that five of the eleven cities that changed their form of government were located in the South. Below is a list of the eleven cities that changed their form.⁶⁹

City	New Form	Old Form	Region
Jackson, MS	Mayor-Council	Commission	South
Mobile, AL	Mayor-Council	Commission	South
Chattanooga, TN	Mayor-Council	Commission	South
Topeka, KS	Mayor-Council	Commission	N. Central
Toledo, OH	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	N. Central
St. Petersburg, FL	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	South
Rochester, NY	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Northeast
Yonkers, NY	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Northeast
El Monte, CA	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	West
Kansas City, KS	Council-Manager	Commission	N. Central
Laredo, TX	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	South

Ebdon and Brucato suggest that neither of the two models often used to explain change in form of government are supported in the findings of their study. The two models are the "Political Development" model and the "Institutional" model. The Political Development model suggests that small towns that use the Mayor form will eventually adopt the Manager form when they become middle-sized cities. According to this theory, population growth brings with it, "critical resource management problems which require the professional skills of full-time managers."⁷⁰ However, as these mid-sized cities continue to grow over time, the increased heterogeneity causes a great deal of

In addition to changes in form of government, Ebdon and Brucato also focused on changes made to existing structures of government.⁷⁴ They noted that previous research and literature suggest that the Council-Manager and Mayor-Council forms are “converging” with each other in three primary areas: the direct election of mayors in Council-Manager cities; Council-Manager cities are electing council members by district, rather than at-large; and Mayor-Council cities are increasingly appointing Chief Administrative Officers (CAO) who carry out the day-to-day operations of city government.⁷⁵ “These adaptations,” according to the authors, “may affect the willingness of some cities to retain their current form.”⁷⁶ Each of the three structural changes represent values that are found in both the Mayor and Manager systems. The blending of these values among the two forms allows cities to create a form of government that best suits the needs of the community.

Democratic accountability is an underlying value associated with the “converging” of the two forms. Accountability is a cornerstone principle of American government. We elect members of society to conduct the business of the people and demand that these officials be accountable to the electorate. Regardless of position or branch of government (the mayor, the president, or in some cases even the local dog catcher), at all levels of government Americans place both praise and blame towards those who are elected to public office. When Council-Manager cities move to a directly elected mayor, rather than a mayor appointed by the Council, they are instilling a sense of accountability in their governing structure. On the same note, the value of citizen representation is also achieved by electing a mayor that is responsible to the entire

electorate. Also, Manager cities can increase the level of citizen representation by electing some or all of their council members by districts. Thus, all areas of the city are represented equally by their elected official(s), rather than being represented as a whole through the at-large election of the city council.

In addition to the increased accountability and representation in Manager cities, Mayor cities are also blending with the values of the Manager system by hiring a CAO to conduct the administrative function of local government. The concept of professional management in government has always been associated with the Manager system's pursuit of efficiency in government. However, by incorporating the CAO into its structure, Mayor systems can move closer to a middle-ground between the pure Mayor form and the pure Manager form.

The results of Ebdon and Brucato's study showed that by 1994, over one-half of the Council-Manager cities had adopted district elections for their city councils, and 87% of the Manager cities had directly elected mayors. By 1994 only 10% of the Council-Manager cities still used the "reform" methods of electing the council at-large and appointing the mayor from among the ranks of the city council.⁷⁷ One-third of the Mayor-Council cities in the study, as of 1994, had incorporated the CAO into their existing structures. Although the data indicates visible shifts in election methods within Manager cities and the use of CAO's in Mayor cities, the authors note that there is still "large disparities" between the two forms in the use of nonpartisan elections, mayoral voting power, and the size of city councils.⁷⁸ However, their findings are significant in that they show a blending of the values of representation and efficiency, which may lead

to better city governments through the use of the values represented in both forms of government.

Structural Changes in Two North Dakota Cities

In 1996 the City of Dickinson, North Dakota, began to make changes to its existing structure without abandoning its form of government. As a Commission form of government, Dickinson had operated for many years under the standard organizational format of the Commission Plan. The governing body was comprised of, and still is today, four Commissioners elected at-large and a Commission president, commonly referred to as the Mayor. The Mayor is also elected at-large and presides over Commission meetings and is recognized as the ceremonial head of the city. Each official was assigned a portfolio and was responsible for the individual departments within each area. The Commission performed both the legislative and executive functions of local government. However, in 1996 the Commission implemented two changes that modified its standard Commission form. The first change the Commission made was a step towards "blending" its existing form with the Manager system by creating the position of City Administrator. This position was established as the Chief Administrative Officer of the city and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of city government. This brought the "efficiency" aspect of the Manager system into Dickinson's Commission form.

The second important structural change the Commission made was the elimination of the portfolio system. By doing so, the Commission as a whole became responsible for all city departments. A move such as this prevents, or at least inhibits,

members of the Commission from “logrolling” and other political trade-offs associated with the Commission Plan. Thus, the value of accountability was established within the governing body through the shared responsibility of all departments and city services. According to Mayor Fred Gengler, the reason why the Commission chose to eliminate the portfolio system was that, “Portfolios can result in a turf war among the Commissioners with each fighting to better their own department.”⁷⁹ Also, during the budgeting process, according to Gengler, “What happened too many times was that you give into everybody. I think it was too costly.”⁸⁰ Gengler also indicated that many of the duties carried out by the Commissioners under the portfolio system could be delegated to the City Administrator and the city department heads.⁸¹

The structural changes the Commission made were based on the principles of accountability and professional management. However, the Commission’s new governing philosophy implemented through the structural changes was not without its critics. In an article in the *Dickinson Press*, the newspaper’s editorial board expressed its discontent with the Commission’s actions. According to the board, “By not having portfolios, these duties will become the responsibility of the administrator. Clearly the results of this will be a city administrator that is quite knowledgeable and a city commission reliant primarily on that knowledge base.”⁸² This view clearly indicates a distrust of professional management in government and contradicts the views of the Commission. On the one hand, the Commission firmly upheld the principles of professionalism in government administration by investing a great deal of responsibility in the position of City Administrator. The Commission felt that it was the right thing to do. The critics, on the

other hand, felt it was the wrong thing to do. Whether right or wrong, the importance of the argument is that it represents a century-long debate over the normative values of governance. Both sides of the argument have beliefs and values about how government *should* function, and both sides are equally important in shaping a community's governing structure. Ultimately, though, the argument between the two sides in Dickinson drew little public involvement overall. A number of critics suggested that the modifications made to the structure of the Commission amounted to a formal change in city government, and therefore required a vote of the people. However, the Commission upheld its decisions and maintained that the changes made to its structure were within the scope of the City's Home Rule Charter and State Law. At the writing of this paper, the structure of Dickinson's government remains the same and no attempts have been made to challenge the changes made in 1996.

Another example of a North Dakota community that altered its existing structure of government is the City of Grand Forks. In a special election held in February, 2000, the voters of Grand Forks approved a measure that would change the overall makeup of its Mayor-Council form of government. The measure called for a reduction in the size of the city council from fourteen members to seven. A similar measure was also included on the ballot that called for a reduction to ten members, however the seven-member council option was chosen by the voters. Currently the city elects two representatives from each of its seven wards. The new seven-member council, when implemented in 2002, will still be elected from the existing seven wards.

The idea of reducing the size of the city council was formally recommended to the Grand Forks City Council by the City Government Structure Review Committee. The Committee was established by the council and charged with the task of studying possible changes to local government in Grand Forks. The Committee's final recommendations adopted September 28, 1999, included a recommendation that the size of the council be reduced to eight members.⁸³ Under this proposal, the seven existing wards would be reduced to four, each having two representatives on the council. Even though the Committee's recommendation differed from the measure approved by the voters in the special election, the importance here is the call to dramatically reduce the size of the city council. Similar to the "short-ballot" movement and its push for smaller governing bodies, the reduction in the size of the Grand Forks City Council is reminiscent of early municipal reform efforts during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Also, in addition to the reduction in council size, the Committee recommended that the city council create the position of city administrator. Following this recommendation, the city council created a city administrator position that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of city government.

Prior to the special election in February, 2000, Council members and other concerned citizens expressed their views about downsizing the Grand Forks City Council. In an editorial article in the *Grand Forks Herald*, former city council member, Anne Sande, expressed her concerns over reducing the number of representatives. Her first concern was that a smaller council would be overwhelmed with the workload carried by its members through various committee assignments and other obligations.⁸⁴ According

to Sande, the increased demand on council members would result in longer meetings, with less attention paid to specific agenda items.⁸⁵ Furthermore, she asserted that, due to less attention paid to the agenda items, "...the council can turn more decisions over to city staff – something I know will make citizens unhappy."⁸⁶ Although Sande's comments may not be generalizable to the "citizens" of Grand Forks, her assumptions nevertheless raise important issues in the debate over local government structure. Most importantly is the principle of accountability, where in this case, would be jeopardized if "non-elected" city staff were given authority to make decisions that were once reserved for the elected officials. Similar to the example in Dickinson, the struggle over local government reform in Grand Forks involved a general distrust and apprehension towards "professionals" in local government. In the same article Sande also raised the issue of representation. She noted that a reduced council size could result in an increased ability for "interest groups" and "factions" to control the council by electing members of their groups to the council.⁸⁷ In this view, a smaller council would require fewer members in order to form a majority vote on the council. This, in turn, upsets the balance of proper democratic representation in local government.

Proponents of a downsized council in Grand Forks, on the other hand, argued that a smaller council would have a positive impact on the local governing process. According to council member Bob Brooks, a seven-member council would create a, "cost-effective, efficient and streamlined city government."⁸⁸ This view places greater emphasis on "efficiency," rather than representation. The incorporation of "efficiency" into Grand Forks local government was also supported by the editorial board of the *Grand Forks*

Herald. According to Tom Dennis, a member of the board, a smaller city council coupled with the delegation of authority to city staff, would "boost the responsiveness and efficiency of Grand Forks City Hall."⁸⁹ The reduction of the council, Dennis noted, would reduce the number of committee assignments and other obligations that the fourteen-member council must deal with. Furthermore, with the creation of a city administrator position, council members would be able to direct more time to their primary role of policy-making, and let the professionally managed city staff carry out the execution of those policies.⁹⁰ Dennis' suggestion raises the issue of the proper separation of powers present in the Mayor-Council form of government. Although this separation exists in city government in Grand Forks, the city operates under a weak-mayor format, which often clouds the true separation of powers due to the lack of formal powers vested in the office of mayor. In other words, the council is better able to control both the executive and legislative functions of government. By incorporating the position of city administrator into the governing structure, the Mayor is given an additional tool he or she can use to maintain control of the executive branch. Thus, the argument for professional administration in local government, along with a smaller governing body, asserts that government can operate more efficiently and effectively.

In summary, the examples of the two North Dakota communities presented in this paper represent common themes found in the debate over local government. Dickinson experienced a shift from the standard Commission Plan to a structure that stressed professional administration and the increased accountability of its elected officials. Grand Forks, in a similar fashion, chose to incorporate professional management into its existing

structure. The city also chose to sacrifice a certain degree of representation in order to achieve a more "efficient" and "effective" council through a reduction in its members. In many respects the two cities are comparable in their reform efforts and can be compared to many other communities throughout the nation that have implemented structural changes to their local governments. However, the City of Grand Forks is rather unique in comparison to most of these cities in that the changes it adopted in February, 2000, came just a few short years after a devastating flood in 1997. The flood left the community in disarray, which forced the city government to take on roles and responsibilities that most local governments rarely have to deal with. Therefore, the City of Grand Forks provides a unique environment for further research. The overall impact of the flood on the community is difficult to assess, which makes the community worthy of future studies that attempt to measure the influence that natural disasters have on a community's socio-political stability.

In 1967 Lineberry and Fowler suggested that "reformed" governments tax and spend less than "unreformed,"⁹¹ which supports research conducted by Booms in 1966.⁹² However, more recent literature on the relative efficiency of taxing and spending between the Manager and Mayor systems suggests that there is little or no difference between the two forms. For example, in a 1980 study, Morgan and Palissero found that changes in form of government had almost no impact on changes in taxing and spending levels.⁹³ Deno and Mehay, in a similar study conducted in 1986, found no statistically significant evidence that expenditure levels differed between the Council-Manager and Mayor-Council forms.⁹⁴ Lastly, in 1990 Hayes and Chang confirmed the findings of the Morgan-Palissero and Deno-Mehay studies. The authors found no difference in the efficiency levels between the two forms of government.⁹⁵ Therefore, without hard evidence and consistent research findings, neither form of government can legitimately claim to be more efficient than the other.

Communities will more than likely continue to struggle with the values of efficiency versus the values of representation, regardless of their size or geographic location. However, as the values and principles of political leadership and professional management continue to merge, communities are now better able to create a governing structure that combines selected characteristics of the Mayor-Council and Council-Manager forms of government. Where public interests and demands are sufficiently sparked, or where special interests provide a strong enough force, communities will continue to meet at the ballot box in pursuit of a local government structure that best suits their needs and wants.

1997 CENSUS OF GOVERNMENTS REPORT

1997 Total Units of Local Government	87,453
General Purpose Local Governments	39,044
County	3,043
Subcounty	36,001
Municipal	19,372
Town and Township	16,629
Special Purpose Local Governments	48,409
School District	13,726
Special District	34,683

Source: Adapted from the US Bureau of the Census. *Census of Governments*. Washington, D.C.: 1997

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