Party Splits, not Progressives: The Origins of Proportional Representation in American Local

Government

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Abstract

The choice of proportional representation (PR) is rarely included in work on American local politics. Yet we have long known that 24 cities adopted the single transferable vote form of PR from 1915-48. Breaking with a machine-reform dichotomy that dominates the PR historiography, I investigate two partisan hypotheses about PR's origins. One concerns the emergence of third parties. A second involves splits in ruling parties. In at least 17 cases, PR choice involved an alliance of convenience between ruling-party defectors and local minority parties. Evidence includes narratives on the partisanship of elite PR backers, comparison of case history and precinct-level referendum outcomes for three similar cities, and aggregate data on big-city charter-change referenda from 1900-50. New in this paper is comparison of PR adopters to non-adopters. Party splits in places with sizable out-parties emerge as a distinctly American path to proportional electoral rules.[1]

Keywords: party splits, proportional representation, single transferable vote, ranked choice voting, local government.

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Introduction

Everyone knows that local elections happen at-large, in single-member districts, or some combination of the two. In the prevailing account, districts foster patronage, at-large represents middle-class reaction, and mixed systems exist for descriptive minority representation. A long line of work probes the consequences of these three basic formats.[2] A parallel line looks at choice among these rules, often in the context of municipal government form.[3] Yet these studies rarely if ever mention proportional representation (PR). Twenty-four cities had the single transferable vote (STV) form of PR between 1915 and 1961 (Figure 1).[4] This paper aims to understand why.

Existing work on American PR cannot say how its causes were different from those of other reforms. Because that work is descriptive and historical, it does not look at non-PR cases. The goal was to document PR's use, debunk blanket criticism thereof (Hermens, 1941), and identify whatever patterns were resonant at time of writing. For example, voting rights struggles surrounding *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) and the 1993 nomination of a PR advocate as Assistant Attorney General coincided with the most recent spate of interest. Yet the literature's main point is that PR simply existed.[5]

To the extent that historical studies offer explanations, they tend to use a machine-reformer paradigm (Childs, 1965, pp. 65-8; Banfield & Wilson, 1966, pp. 96-8, 307; L. Weaver, 1986; Barber, 1995b; Amy, 1993; Amy, 1996; Amy, 2002).[6] In practice, machine-reform poorly predicts both organizational behavior and institutional preferences. Machines practice favoritism, but so do many politicians. Machines are hierarchical, but so are many parties (Wolfinger, 1972). Hierarchy and favoritism have existed under many types of local government (Trounstine, 2006, 2008). Organizational interests clearly matter for institutional choice, but are machine and reform the right ones to trace?

This paper breaks with PR historiography in two ways. First, I build on partisan motive, not a machine-reform distinction. The presence of anti-party institutions does not imply parties are

dead. We have ample evidence that they survive reform of many kinds (Cohen, Karol, Noel, & Zaller, 2008; Masket, 2009, 2013; Masket & Shor, 2015; McGhee, Masket, Shor, Rogers, & McCarty, 2014). We also have evidence that reform itself can be a partisan project (Anzia, 2012).

Second, I take selection bias seriously. This is the first study of local PR choice to compare adoptions with negative cases: failed attempts to impose PR, then successful attempts to impose at-large plurality. The idea is to isolate a logic that classifies reform episodes.

I argue that PR emerged where the coalition for charter change was multi-party. I call this grouping a fragmented majority. Its goal is a voting rule promoting post-election coalition government. Fragmented majorities stand in contrast to cohesive majorities, which approximate pre-election legislative coalitions. All partners in a fragmented majority want to weaken the ruling party, but they opt for PR because none can dominate post-reform government alone.

With fragmented majorities in mind, the paper turns to theory and evidence. Section 2 considers the menu of possible reforms and explains why a fragmented majority would want the PR type. Section 3 lays out a strategy for discerning PR adoptions from failures and non-events. Section 4 uses case descriptions to show that party splits produced fragmented majorities in 17 of 19 well-documented PR adoptions. Section 5 compares three similar cities, showing that a party split separates the adoption from a failure and a non-event. Section 6 looks for circumstantial evidence of party splits in two samples: all charter reform episodes from 1900-50, then all STV referenda from 1900-56.

This is not a general account of charter change. My cases are reform episodes. A vast and inconclusive literature tries to understand why reform happens at all (see Choi, Bae, and Feiock (2013) for a review). Trounstine (2008, p. 173) summarizes: "the reasons for [regime] monopoly decline are highly context specific." Rather, I focus on rule choice after regimes have cracked.

Partisan paths to anti-party reform

Charter reform was frequent in the 20th century, but the choice of PR was rare (Childs, 1965). If the essence of PR is post-election coalition, this may have been a goal of reformers. If

that was reformers' goal, they must have reflected internal divisions. If they existed, those divisions were deep enough to prevent the choice of non-PR rules, which tend to promote pre-election coalition. Partisanship is one potential source of deep division. Party factionalism is another. I speculate here that pro-PR coalitions were at least multi-factional and potentially multi-party.

The first step in any reform is to weaken the dominant party. PR was part of a package meant to do just that. First, it came as part of a council-manger charter in 23 of 24 cities.[7] Council-manager government eliminates elected mayors and lodges hiring authority in a city manager, who serves at council's pleasure. The purpose is a firewall between elections and municipal hiring. That suggests at least some reformers wanted to weaken a patronage-based party. Second, except in three cities, PR came with fully at-large elections to councils of seven or nine.[8] The premium on city-wide electorates suggests opposition to ward-based party organization. This is consistent not only with an attack on patronage, but also with an attack on whatever party was best established in the city. Third, the application of nonpartisan ballots in all but one city is also consistent with attack on an established party.[9] Fourth, reformers opposed formal levers of nomination control in all 24 cities, since nomination in each was by petition. The totality of revealed preferences fits a classic model of revolt against the ruling party (Banfield & Wilson, 1966; Bridges & Kronick, 1999; Hofstadter, 1955).

Yet PR cities diverged from standard council-manager adopters in their use of the single transferable vote (STV). That was the only form of PR that ever gained traction in the United States. Among PR systems, nomination control and party cues are weakest under STV (Carey & Shugart, 1995, p. 428). This additional weakening of party influence may be one reason for STV's attractiveness. On that account, STV simply reinforced the nonpartisan ballot, at-large elections, and nomination by petition. The problem is that while the National Municipal League solely advocated STV from 1916-64, reformers in thousands of cities chose at-large plurality instead (Frederickson, Johnson, & Wood, 2004, p. 43). This was likely a conscious choice. What conditions led reformers to keep the PR part of the model charter?

It is likely that PR reform coalitions contained more than one party. Bridges (1997) argues that the council-manager movement effectively set up one-party regimes in the Southwest. The parties in those cases were "good-government" committees, which she terms non-partisan slating groups (NPSG). NPSG seized on a familiar property of at-large plurality: single factions find it easy to dominate these contests by presenting common slates (Calabrese, 2000). A long line of work probes the extent to which these factions were Republican or simply the local minority party (Choi et al., 2013; Schaffner, Streb, & Wright, 2007; Williams & Adrian, 1959). Yet reform coalitions with many distinct factions would have had reason to choose PR over plurality. The reason is straightforward. PR would have let diverse factions negotiate over post-election coalition arrangements (Lijphart, 1999; Powell, 2000).

There is circumstantial evidence that multiparty coalition was a goal of the reformers. Leaders had converged on a model PR-manager charter by 1913, but some still disagreed about nonpartisanship (Thompson, 1913). One year later, major-party backers of the Proportional Representation League (PRL) insisted on divorce from the initiative, referendum, and recall movement.[10] This reversed the explicitly anti-party stance of 1896: "direct legislation [initiative, referendum, and recall] tends to destroy party lines."[11] Dropping this stance coincided with immediate success. With financial support from league donors, Ashatabula (OH) became the first PR city in 1915.[12] The National Municipal League formally endorsed PR in 1916, and by 1932, it had merged with PRL. PRL leaders overseeing the merger included two sitting Senators, two ex-Senators, and two ex-Governors. Four were Republican, and two were Democrats.[13]

I argue that PR referendum majorities were distinctly multi-party. The question is where such a coalition originates. One possibility is that of new entrant. This would be consistent with accounts of PR adoption in other countries. Colomer (2005) finds that an increase in the effective number of parties tends to precede the choice of PR. Blais, Dobrzynska, and Indridason (2005) find that countries tended to adopt PR after an election under two-round runoff rules, which they take as a proxy for pre-PR multi-partism. Rokkan (1970) and Boix (1999) argue PR was a strategy for preventing new Socialist majorities.[14] Leeman and Mares (2014) find support for a

legislative-district version of this argument in roll-call votes of the 13th German *Reichstag*. Calvo (2009) shows that new party emergence produced seat-vote disproportionalities, which led old guards to favor a voting rule (PR) that Socialists also tended to favor.[15] Pilon (2013, Chapter 4) also argues the Socialist-old guard relationship was transactional in America, the former wanting PR and the latter wanting council-manager government. Yet American Socialists explicitly opposed nonpartisanship and tended to favor list systems (Sitton, 1995; Thompson, 1913). PR furthermore gained its greatest traction after the Progressive and Socialist parties had waned (Figure 1). Although unlikely, new-party emergence might have played a role.

A second possibility is that multi-party reform comes from splits in existing parties. In that model, defectors favor weak nomination control, out-parties favor proportionality, and both sides compromise on STV. This is a second partisan path to ostensibly anti-party reform. Its hallmark is an alliance of convenience, or a fragmented referendum majority. In a split-driven model, anti-party reformers make STV a concession to local minority parties.

There are two big differences between traditional models of PR choice and the split-driven model. One is whether change initiates in government. Ruling elites in traditional models promote PR. Change in the split-driven model comes from the outside. Disadvantaged minority parties and party factions use referenda to impose PR against the will of dominant, ruling-party factions.[16]

Another difference is the number of nominal parties involved. In traditional models, important new parties increase the likelihood of PR adoption. In a split-driven model, the nominal set of parties remains the same, but at least one of the parties factionalizes. This is not the same as defection from an existing party to a new party. Democrats do not turn into Socialists, for example. Yet factions of Democrats (or Republicans) go on to compete under PR *as if* they are separate parties. The distinction is not just semantic. A split-driven model shows how PR can arise long after suffrage expansion, within the shell of a two-party system.

Whether based on ruling-party splits or new-party entrants, an effort at city charter reform has four potential outcomes. Figure 2 summarizes them, given state law permits charter reform and a referendum majority is required. On path (a), there is no change; the extant majority retains

power. Path (b) is the textbook case of Progressive Era charter change; a new majority attacks the ruling party, implementing council-manager government with at-large elections. At the end of path (c), a fragmented majority enacts STV. Path (d) is minority-elected government without institutional change.[17]

Empirical strategy

Overall, we need to know how PR and at-large adoptions were different. The main task is to learn which parties and factions were involved in each. Non-partisan local elections are notoriously difficult to study (Marschall, Shah, & Ruhil, 2011), so I begin by focusing on the PR adopters alone. The first step in my analysis accordingly identifies PR coalition leaders' partisanship from case histories.

My second step begins to address selection bias. Relaxing the assumption that at-large adoptions were single-party-led, I compare three similar-city charter change episodes in depth. One produced STV, one failed to produce STV, and one produced at-large plurality. This comparison relies on narrative and precinct-level referendum results. Only in the STV adopter should we see persuasive evidence of bi- or multi-partisanship.

In the third step, I ask whether conclusions from the three case histories are likely to generalize across reform episodes. First I compare all reform charter adoptions in cities ever among the 100 largest, 1900-50, focusing on partisan balance in the respective counties. If party splits supplied the junior partners in pro-PR coalitions, PR ought to have emerged only in relatively balanced jurisdictions. Put differently, partisan balance is a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of a fragmented majority. Party-attacking reformers and minority parties would have needed each other's support only where either faction could not organize a majority alone.

The fourth step supplies more circumstantial evidence of multi-party PR coalitions. I compare vote shares in all referenda ever held on STV, 1900-56. I identify these referenda from the *Proportional Representation Review* and successor publications, 1893-1958. I stop in 1958

because the PR League declined by that point. Its monthly column in the *National Municipal Review* became irregular, and only three of 24 cities still had PR. If PR occurred in (a) balanced jurisdictions (b) with the cooperation of out-parties and a faction of the ruling party, those coalitions should be oversized.

The fifth section considers sources of splits in ruling parties. Here I consult the PR historiography for policy roots of local-party factionalism. This section was not part of the research design. Recall that there are two logical paths to a fragmented referendum majority. One involves new party entry. The other involves a ruling-party split. We will see that party splits account for the vast majority of PR adoptions. This penultimate section accordingly tries to give some sense of what produced those splits.

Party splits in STV historiography

If STV resulted from the action of fragmented majorities, the coalitions supporting it should reflect a few patterns. First, they should contain identifiers of former out-parties. Second, they should also contain identifiers of at least one other party; otherwise they would be cohesive majorities. Yet if they resulted from party splits, they should also contain identifiers of prior ruling parties.

I consult case histories to see which patterns hold (Figure 3 and Table 1). In particular, I focus on how authors identify the partisanship of elites involved in charter negotiation. The case descriptions are thin on numbers. We cannot know how many registered Republicans broke with a locally ruling Republican party to support STV, for example. Therefore, when Table 1 refers to "some Republicans," this means minimally that some elites defected from a ruling Republican party. When a party does not carry the qualifier "some," this means the formal party organization put its weight behind STV.

Information on the partisanship of elite coalitions for STV are overwhelmingly consistent with a split-driven reform pattern. Table 1 reports the frequencies of different coalition modes for all 24 STV-adopting cities. For five cities, I could not find either any history or a history giving

party affiliations. In two of the remaining 19 cases do narratives identify only ruling-party actors, consistent with paths (a) and (b). In 15 more cases, negotiators came exclusively from the ruling party and its main opposition. Two final cases involved elites from the ruling party and more than one former out-party. Overall, 17 of 19 documented cases correspond to path (c), or reform by fragmented majority. Because members of those fragmented majorities came from formerly ruling parties, we can infer that party splits produced those majorities.

Mixed-method evidence for party splits

If STV typically involved a party split, we expect to see most of the out-party(ies) and a substantial part of the outgoing majority party supporting it. Our confidence increases if we can connect these trends to the presence or absence, in descriptive records, of party leaders' posture toward reform. Contrasting STV wins with failures and non-events (i.e., at-large plurality adoptions) will draw out these differences.

On the quantitative side, I interpret the correlation of precinct-level support for charter reform with some indication of voters' partisanship. Precinct-level party registration rates are an obvious candidate, but many cities have discarded them, and registration may not capture turnout. Instead I use the vote in partisan mayoral races. In all but one city, mayoral voting occurred on the same day as the charter referendum.

On the descriptive side, I probe written sources for evidence of ruling-party disunity on the question of charter reform. The sources are secondary if available and helpful, local newspapers if not. I also consulted archives for one case. When consulting newspapers, I identified the dates of relevant elections, then read each issue for the week in advance of the relevant date. Newspapers are a good source of early-century political information. Many printed precinct-level election returns for primaries and causes, and politicians used them to communicate with voters.

Sampling follows a most-similar logic. I chose three cities with common structural traits: Brockton (MA), which adopted at-large plurality in 1955; Waterbury (CT), which rejected PR in 1939; and Worcester (MA), which adopted PR in 1947. All are within 150 miles' drive, witnessed

reform attempts at mid-century, were among the 100 largest US cities at the time, had similar demographic profiles, had similar economic bases, and underwent industrial decline at mid-century. Each involved an attempted departure from the mayor-council form of government. Each had direct primaries at the time of the referendum, and each had a Democratic administration. Table 2 presents all available characteristics of each city at the time of its referendum. Measures are from the *City Data Book* (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1978).

STV non-event: Brockton's 1955 at-large plurality vote

Brockton (MA) adopted a seven-seat council-manager charter with plurality elections in 1955.[18] The prior mayor-council system had been in place since 1888. Change was a Republican effort to dislodge the Democratic Party.

Republicans consolidated control of city government following a move to biennial elections in 1921. The party thereafter built a precinct-based organization robust enough to help it survive five corruption indictments in 1925 and a series of divisive primaries in 1935. Every Mayor during the period was Republican. Then the tide turned.[19]

Consistent with partisan trends in wider New England, Democrats won eight of eleven mayoral elections from 1935-55. But rising Republican strength in the late 1940s and early 1950s meant an opportunity to retake control.

Brockton's 1955 referendum on at-large plurality elections had overwhelmingly Republican support (Figure 4). Graph tokens reflect the actual data, and the diagonal line segment is represents the fit of a least-squares regression ($\beta = 0.62$, $\sigma = 0.05$). The more Republican the precinct, the more it supported charter change.

The Brockton Republicans that orchestrated charter change furthermore behaved as a cohesive unit. Brockton's journal of record, the *Enterprise*, contains no evidence of Republican disunity on the question of charter reform. Nor was there evidence of nomination conflict. The paper did report primary and caucus results in earlier cycles, but it included no such coverage in

advance of this cycle. All this suggests that there were not any prominent nomination conflicts nor any significant intra-party opposition to the new charter.

In sum, Brockton is a path (b) case. A new, cohesive majority adopted an at-large plurality charter with little other-party help.

STV failure: Waterbury's 1939 vote

If Brockton chose plurality along party lines, Waterbury (CT) rejected STV along party lines. Its charter failed in 1939 because Democrats restored internal unity in advance of the referendum.

Waterbury entered the 1920s under Democratic control, direct mayoral elections, and a 15-member council elected from five three-seat plurality districts. The 1929-39 reign of Democratic Mayor T. Frank Hayes remains a a local legend. Leading Hayes' opposition was William J. Pape, owner of two of three local newspapers. Hayes and Pape sparred throughout the 1930s, with Pape typically backing Republican mayoral challengers (Monti, 2011).

Division in Democratic ranks gave Pape and Republicans an opportunity to pursue charter reform. The first internal challenge came in 1937, when Democratic State Senator George T. Culhane ran against Hayes on a Republican-Independent Democratic fusion ticket. Then, in 1939, the Democrats verged on collapse after a jury convicted twenty-three Hayes associates of fraud and conspiracy. A power struggle ensued with Hayes' resignation. While Culhane organized his 1939 Democratic primary campaign, party regulars searched for a nominee.[20]

Republicans and anti-organization Democrats made overtures to Democratic rank-and-file. They courted Southern and Eastern European immigrants, relative latecomers to the city, arguing that the Democratic Party was an Irish-run, Irish-serving machine (Monti, 2011, p. 53).[21] The "no" campaign featured appearances by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, who himself himself had won on a GOP-led fusion ticket before backing the 1936 STV campaign in New York City (Prosterman, 2013).[22]

Days before the charter vote on October 3, 1939, Democrats averted a split, uniting in

public opposition to STV. The front page of the October 2 *Democrat* carried two letters-to-the-editor opposing charter reform. (Front pages are atypical locations for readers' letters.) That page also featured the following headlines: "Culhane Predicts Defeat of Charter" and "Culhane Leads Valiant Fight - State Senator Opposed Plan From Start; Organized Wide Opposition." On the morning of the referendum, the *Democrat* ran a front-page photograph of Culhane voting. The headline read, "Registering his 'No.'"

Figure 5 presents precinct-level charter support on October 3 by support for the Republican mayoral candidate a month later. Unfortunately there are no proximate, pre-referendum indicators of precinct-level city partisanship. A 2005 flood at city hall destroyed most of the Hayes-era records.[23] Yet it is reasonable to believe the October 3 electorate was the same as that in the mayoral election. Waterbury then held local elections a week after the November general. The off-cycle character of both votes means turnout would have been limited to the most attentive voters (Anzia, 2014).

The fit between Republican vote share and referendum support is striking ($\beta = 1.28$, $\sigma = 0.1$). Again, tokens reflect the actual data, and the diagonal segment is the least-squares best fit.

In maintaining the allegiance of the Culhane faction, Waterbury Democrats averted a party split, defeating STV. Waterbury (1939) therefore conforms to the path (a) prediction: same cohesive majority, no rules-change.

STV win: Worcester's 1947 vote

No such last-minute coordination prevented the 1947 STV win in Worcester (MA). Republicans and defecting Democrats in the mid-1940s formed a neighborhood group opposing Democratic Mayor Charles F. Jeff Sullivan (Binstock, 1960, pp. II-1). It later became the Citizens' Plan E Association (CEA), which led the effort for an STV charter.[24] Though members claimed that "there is no Democratic or Republican way to pave a street," partisan concerns were not far off. Some in the CEA complained that Republican voters were too dispersed among the

city's ten three-seat wards to win office in proportion to their numbers (Edwards, 1972, p. 3), and the group used GOP cars and headquarters in the 1947 referendum campaign.[25] Worcester's charter passed with bipartisan support by nearly two-to-one (Figure 6).

Nomination conflict in Worcester's ruling Democratic Party is also linked to referendum support. Figure 7 presents precinct-level support for the STV charter in November by fractionalization of the Democratic Aldermanic primary vote in October. The line of best fit is based on a linear regression including only those precincts that saw contested primaries ($\beta = 0.18$, $\sigma = 0.1$). The fractionalization measure is from Rae (1968).[26] It represents the probability that two randomly chosen primary voters from the same precinct voted for different Democratic candidates. Charter support is highest in two kinds of precincts: uncontested, then those with the most evenly contested Democratic primaries.

The ward-by-ward results (graph tokens in Figure 6) are consistent with typical patterns of ethnic and socioeconomic strain on machine-style party organization. Binstock's (1960: I-23) descriptions of Worcester's wards contextualize the data. Wards 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 were ethnically diverse but traditionally represented by Irish-Americans. Erie (1988) tells us that non-Irish immigrants became restive machine opponents as patronage dried up in cities like New York and Boston. Ward 5 was Worcester's manufacturing core, so its middling reform support and party disunity are unsurprising. Wards 1 and 10 were Republican strongholds, so their interest in ousting the Democratic administration is predictable.

Ward 8 had a special role in the STV fight. This was the seat of Clark University. Jones-D'Agostino (2004) reports that Clark and Worcester Polytechnic administrators were leaders in the campaign. The CEA board's minutes for 1947 also refer to presentations by Morris Cohen, a Clark University political scientist who advised the group on its STV campaign.[27]

Overall, then, the locations of each precinct-by-ward in the plot are consistent with a model in which most of the out-party (Republicans) joins forces with a faction of the ruling party (Democrats).

Ecological inference (EI)

As a robustness check on the preceding vignettes, table 2 presents EI estimates of party support for charter change in each of the three New England cases. I use the state-of-the-art approach in ecological inference: a Bayesian multinomial-Dirichlet model (King, 1997; Rosen, Jiang, King, & Tanner, 2001). Lau, Moore, and Kellermann (2007) implement this for R in `eiPack`. The data include actual row and column frequencies, not proportions, and I include votes for "none" when available. For each model, I use default priors, 250,000 iterations, a burn-in of 100,000 iterations, and a thinning interval of 10. Convergence diagnostics are available on request.

Along path (b), or reform by cohesive majority, charter change should have overwhelming support from the prior out-party. At the end of path (c), or reform by fragmented majority, there should be substantial support from both the prior ruling party and nearly all of the out-party(ies).

In sum, we should see little former majority party support when STV fails (Waterbury) and when the charter includes at-large plurality (Brockton). We should see much more former majority party support for winning charters with STV (Worcester). Finally, we should see high rates of out-party support in all three cases. EI estimates meet these expectations. Out-party voters overwhelmingly supported charter change in each city. Yet only in Worcester, which actually adopted STV, did a large share of former majority party voters support change: an estimated 40 percent.

Likelihood of split-plus-out-party elsewhere

Section 3 showed that 17 of 19 documented STV adoptions involved ruling-party splits. Section 4 vignettes showed how party splits might determine the fate of STV referenda. They also showed how an at-large plurality adoption had little involvement from the main opposing party. Making these points depended on interpreting large amounts of newspaper coverage and processing difficult-to-get election results. This section looks for circumstantial evidence of party splits in a wider universe of cases.

Charter change episodes and county partisanship

The analysis so far shows that PR resulted from an alliance of convenience between out-parties and ruling party defectors. The object of conflict in those charter fights was partisan control of city council. If both of these points are true, successful charter change episodes should reflect the following patterns:

1. Reform episodes should not vary randomly with the partisan competitiveness of the respective jurisdiction. If they do, some factor other than party explains the preference for PR over at-large plurality.

2. No city should adopt PR where one party is hegemonic. One-party jurisdictions lack the additional parties to give rise to a pro-PR coalition.

3. PR adoption should be weakly related to partisan competitiveness. Multiple parties are necessary for PR adoption, but their presence does not guarantee one will split. Two outcomes are possible in multi-party jurisdictions: at-large plurality to the advantage of a single party (e.g., following Brockton) and PR to the advantage of a multi-party alliance of convenience (e.g., following Worcester).

To explore the party parity hypotheses, I sample all council-manager adoption episodes, 1900-1950, in cities ever among the 100 largest during the 20th century. This follows the approach of Trounstine (2008). The list of episodes comes from annual editions of the *Municipal Year Book*, 1934-50, by way of Choi et al. (2013). Cities that repealed council-manager charters prior to 1934, though, do not appear in those volumes. To identify these cases, I consult the *City Manager Yearbook* (1921 and 1922) and quarterly *Proportional Representation Review* (1893-1932). The *Municipal Year Book* and its predecessors document the dates that new charters took effect, but these were often a year or more after adoption. To determine adoption dates, I searched newspapers, case histories, and trade journals on Google Scholar, Google Books, and Google News. I could not find dates for nine episodes. For these cases, I subtracted two years

from the charter effective date to construct a plausible adoption year. The sample comprises 61

charter reform episodes, nine of which resulted in STV.

I measure partisanship from county-level gubernatorial returns because results from a large

number of cities' historic elections are prohibitively difficult to collect (Marschall et al., 2011).

The same is true of city-level results to state and national elections. Readily available are

county-level returns to presidential and gubernatorial elections. I assume that city partisanship

roughly tracks gubernatorial partisanship. This assumption rests on Gimpel (1996) and studies

documenting links between state and local parties (Erie, 1988; Golway, 2014; Trounstine, 2008).

Figure 8 gives the distance from gubernatorial two-party parity for all charter reform

episodes in the sample. The axes represent the Republican and Democratic proportions,

respectively, of the county-level gubernatorial vote immediately preceding a charter referendum.

The data come from Walter Dean Burnham

(Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1999). I lag gubernatorial

partisanship in order to reduce concerns about reverse causation. Selecting an appropriate lag

required determining exactly when each charter referendum occurred. When I could not find this

date, I subtracted two years from the charter effective date.[28] The northeast-southwest diagonal

represents the expected relationship between these vote shares if the parties were at parity. The

northwest-southeast diagonal is where a city would appear if no minor party polled votes.

Patterns in the plot are consistent with the expectations above. First, PR and non-PR

outcomes are not randomly distributed. No city adopts PR with a two-party division more

lopsided than 60-40. This suggests that party was indeed a motivating factor. Second, no city

adopts PR where one party is hegemonic (top-left and bottom-right). Hegemonic-party

jurisdictions could not supply the multiple parties needed for a pro-PR coalition. Third,

competitiveness does not guarantee PR adoption. We see both PR and non-PR cases in the center

of the plot, for example, where Republicans and Democrats are at parity. We can accordingly

infer that party splits separate most PR and non-PR cases in these balanced, two-party

jurisdictions. I further investigate the party-split inference below.

Oversized reform coalitions

If PR cities were divided in their partisanship, and if successful coalitions for PR usually

included most of one party and a faction of the other, we would expect lopsided outcomes when it

won at referendum. Figure 9 presents box-and-whisker plots of the proportion of voters

supporting PR in winning and losing referenda. There were 59 such referenda from 1900 to 1956,

with vote shares available for 50.[29] Consistent with a split-driven model of PR choice, coalitions

were larger when referenda passed. In other words, PR seldom won in *other than* a landslide.

What split the ruling parties?

A complete account of party splits is beyond the scope of this paper. My goal has been to

compare the party systems involved in PR and non-PR charter reform episodes. The sources of

party splits are obviously interesting and potentially relevant to contemporary politics. A

distillation of case histories makes it possible to state some research directions.

The desire of organized labor for independent bargaining power on city councils is one big

candidate. Unions supported PR in four of five Ohio cities: Ashtabula (1915), Cleveland (1921),

Cincinnati (1924), and Hamilton (1926) (Busch, 1995, p. 91; Barber, 1995a, p. 122; Kolesar,

1995, p. 168; L. Weaver & Blount, 1995, p. 214). Only in Toledo did unions oppose PR, and that

was on a basis of opposition to at-large elections of any type (Anderson, 1995, p. 244). Organized

labor figured prominently into the 1936 New York City adoption, here under the guise of the

Roosevelt-supported Labor Party (McCaffrey, 1939; Prosterman, 2013). Non-Federation unions

also supported PR in Worcester.[30] The negative case of Waterbury reinforces these observations.

Monti (2011, pp. 172-3) finds that labor leaders threatened to back PR there in 1939, in order to

extract concessions from the local Democratic Party. That some unions wanted to play kingmaker

in local politics is not surprising. Labor leaders could be found in both parties in the early part of

the 20th century, and their incorporation into the Democratic Party only really *began* in the late

1930s (Schlozman, 2015).

Racial and ethnic diversity also appear to have intersected with class in ways that split some

local parties. In Cincinnati, for example, poorer African Americans remained loyal Republicans in the 1924 PR referendum, but the local black newspaper and the United Negro Improvement Association did not. Burnham (1997) finds evidence that African Americans who supported PR also opposed what they saw as a patronizing relationship to the local Republican organization. Some Jewish Republicans were prominent PR supporters both here and in Cleveland (Barber, 1995a, pp. 148-9). At least some white-collar Jewish identifiers played a similar role two decades later in Worcester (MA), breaking with a predominantly Irish-American and working-class Democratic Party (Banfield & Wilson, 1966, p. 97; Binstock, 1960, pp. II-41).[31]

We also have evidence that social scientists and college students were PR supporters in some cities. The study of Worcester above named Morris Cohen, a Clark University political scientist heavily involved in the adoption campaign. In Cambridge (MA), Harvard Law School Dean and prominent New Deal Democrat James M. Landis chaired an adoption campaign to oust the regular Democratic administration.[32] Finally, the gift of the 1934 University of Toledo graduating class was support for the PR campaign there, under the direction of political scientist O. Garfield Jones.[33]

Last, the women's movement was a frequent PR supporter. Barber (1995b) and coauthors give evidence of their role in four of five Ohio PR cities. The League of Women Voters in New York City and female members of the City Charter Committee in Cincinnati both earn mention for get-out-the-vote work in advance of the respective referenda (Burnham, 1997; Kolesar, 1995; McCaffrey, 1939).

Conclusion

All government is by coalition. Proportional representation raises the odds that coalitions will form after, not before, elections. The adoption of specifically proportional electoral systems in American cities reflects a distinct logic in which ruling-party defectors form an alliance of convenience with one or more out-parties in order to produce post-election coalition government.

My main forms of evidence are information on parties from existing historiography,

comparison of three similar cities with different reform outcomes, aggregate partisanship on all big-city reform episodes from 1900-50, and vote shares in all referenda held on PR up to 1956.

This paper makes two wholly new contributions to the literature on PR in America. First, I compare PR adopters to two sets of non-adopters: cities that chose at-large plurality, then cities that failed to adopt PR. Second, I build my account on parties, not Progressives.

PR was not a randomly distributed reform outcome, chosen wherever the idea "caught on" with the local "Progressive reformers." It was a product of partisan machination. Everywhere in the United States for half a century, the National Municipal League told cities to include PR in council-manager charters. The vast majority chose plurality at-large. In cities that did not, there was substantively more than one party. Ruling parties factionalized irreparably in 19 of these cities. In 17 of them, party factions made common cause with one or more local minority parties.

What magnitude of defection is needed to arrive at PR? Part of this question is numerical. Benoit (2004) notes the importance of fiat power to impose change. This was a referendum majority in all PR cases. Assuming the out-party is willing to cooperate in imposing PR, ruling-party defection needs to supply the rest of that referendum majority. Defectors also need to calculate that they stand to gain seats. Otherwise they may stand to gain more by allegiance. In a typical PR city, the threshold for one seat was 10-13 percent of votes. This suggests an absolute minimum of 10-13 percent defection, given the model charter of seven-to-nine seats. If any sufficient level of defection exists, it probably is much higher. A group of defectors this small should only defect if it expects its single representative to be pivotal in a post-election coalition.

Governmental veto points also complicate matters. The willingness of Connecticut to tolerate PR in its cities varied with conditions in its legislature. This body permitted the Waterbury referendum in 1939, but in 1923, it outlawed West Hartford's use of PR. Courts were also a factor. We likely would have seen more PR in California and Michigan if courts had not banned it in test cases.[34]

The magnitude-of-defection question also has a policy dimension. Those who defect need to want something from government. It is not surprising that histories name unions, former

suffragists, and targets of ethnic and racial discrimination. Organized groups like these tend to make clear demands, and they tend to command the necessary votes. Not less than a third of Worcester's ruling Democrats broke with their party to support PR. If all they wanted was to punish the incumbent party, they would not have supported its mayoral candidate at the same election.

Why do we not see PR adoptions today? Several reasons come to mind. First, the nature of advocacy has changed. Two conditions precede any interest in election reform: knowledge of the reform itself, then its connection to some widely perceived problem (Blais et al., 2005; R. K. Weaver, 2003). The National Municipal League has not seriously advanced proportional systems since 1964. Second, Democrats now dominate most medium-to-large cities. Third, unions, most racial and ethnic minorities, and the feminist movement have secured what appear to be durable levels of bargaining power in the Democratic coalition. This means there is less need today to collude with the other party to thwart conservative interests within one's own party. None of these conditions is necessarily permanent.

Footnotes

[1]Acknowledgements: Benjamin Balough, Hunter Books, and David J. McRae provided research assistance. Dennis Pilon provided most pre-1932 editions of the *Proportional Representation Review*. Doug Amy provided Leon Weaver's collected papers on PR. Jungah Bae, Cheong Geun Choi, Richard Feiock, and Jessica Trounstine shared data. Josep Colomer, Paul Gronke, Dan Hopkins, Rob Richie, and Kent Weaver gave helpful advice. For comments on earlier drafts, thanks go to Hans Noel, Dennis Pilon, and an unknown number of anonymous reviewers.

[2]A non-exhaustive list includes Brace, Grofman, Handley, and Niemi (1988), Brouthers (1983), Bullock and MacManus (1990, 1991), Engstrom and McDonald (1981), Grofman and Handley (1989), Karnig (1976), Karnig and Welch (1982), Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier (2004), Mladenka (1989), Robinson and Dye (1978), Rule (1992), Sloan (1969), Trounstine and Valdini (2008), Welch (1990), Welch and Bledsoe (1988), Welch and Karnig (1979). Notable exceptions are Gerber, Morton, and Rietz (1998), who look at the effects of cumulative voting, then Brockington, Donovan, Bowler, and Brischetto (1998) and Bowler, Donovan, and Brockington (2003), who look at the effects of both limited and cumulative voting.

[3]Examples here are Bridges (1997), Bridges and Kronick (1999), Choi et al. (2013), Gimpel (1993), Knoke (1982), Lineberry and Fowler (1967), Rice (1977), Svara and Watson (2010). Exceptions are Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina

(2008), who study rules-choice separately from municipal form of government.

[4]STV is a candidate-based form of PR wherein a candidate must earn a Droop quota of votes to win a seat. In this it is similar to open-list forms of PR. The Droop quota is equal to total valid votes divided by one plus district magnitude, plus one vote. STV differs from open-list PR in two ways. First, candidates typically do not appear on ballots as party-grouped, although they can. Second, voters rank candidates instead of checking them off. Ballots for candidates with vote totals in excess of quota are transferred to next-ranked candidates on those ballots. If this process of surplus transfer does not produce the needed number of winners, candidates are sequentially eliminated, and ballots for them are transferred to next-ranked candidates.

[5]In addition to the comparative works cited below, there is some single-case descriptive literature. Examples include Prosterman (2013), Straetz (1958), Zeller and Bone (1948).

[6]Exceptions are Guinier (1992), Guinier and Torres (2003), who advocate PR as an alternative to benevolent gerrymandering.

[7]New York is the exception, but even it reformed the civil service.

[8]The exceptions are Cleveland and West Hartford, which combined at-large elections with one or a few small multi-seat districts, then New York City, where seats were apportioned to each borough in proportion to voter turnout, the Boulder, which staggered eletctions. Each of these cities nonetheless reduced the size of its council and increased the magnitude of legislative districts.

[9]New York City is the exception, but even here, written party names replaced logos.

[10]*Proportional Representation Review*, October 1914, p. 25.

[11]*Direct Legislation Review*, December 1896, p. 49

[12]*Proportional Representation Review*, October 1915, p. 15.

[13]*Proportional Representation Review*, January 1932, p. 3.

[14]Ahmed (2012) makes a similar argument, through she focuses on the 1842 adoption of single-member Congressional districts.

[15]Andrews and Jackman (2005) show how advantage from seat-vote distortion can explain largest-party positions on PR in a manner consistent with the seat-maximizing model of Benoit (2004).

[16]Such an alliance might form inside government following Calvo (2009), but only in West Hartford (CT) did PR come from within government (Gallup, 1921).

[17]A path (d) example is Bridgeport (CT) in 1933, when the Socialist ticket beat both Democrats and Republicans on a minority of votes. See Associated Press, "Bridgeport Picks Socialist Mayor," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 8, 1933.

[18]Gildea v. Ellershaw, 363 Mass. 800.

[19]The *Brockton Enterprise*, late October and early November issues, on microfilm at the Brockton Public Library.

[20]The *Waterbury Democrat*, late October and early November issues, on microfilm at Silas Bronson Library. See also Monti (2011).

[21]Tensions between immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and Irish-dominated party organizations were common in Northeastern cities. See Erie (1988), especially Chapter 4, Shefter (1986), and Gamm (1989).

[22]The *Waterbury Republican* and *Waterbury American*, late October and early November issues, on microfilm at the Silas Bronson Library.

[23]"Records from corrupt Waterbury mayors in city's hands," *Waterbury Republican-American*, April 5, 2010.

[24]Plan E was the state-authorized charter format including STV.

[25]See clippings titled "Daley Resignation Leaves Plan E Group Undisturbed" and "Plan E Committee Votes Expansion; Two Break Away," circa 1948, in the Plan E/CEA Collection, unsorted, at the Worcester Historical Museum.

[26]Fractionalization equals one minus the sum of squared candidate vote shares.

[27]See handwritten minutes of the CEA Board of Directors for 1947 in the Plan E/Proportional Representation Collection (unsorted), Worcester Historical Museum.

[28]For the California gubernatorial election of 1918, I manually recoded one independent and one fusion candidacy as Democratic and Republican, respectively. The independent was Theodore Arlington Bell, a Democratic candidate in 1906, 1910, and 1918. The fusion candidacy appeared on the ballot as Republican, Prohibition, and Progressive. No other Democratic, Republican, Prohibition, or Progressive lines appeared on that ballot.

[29]Data come from quarterly issues of the *Proportional Representation Review*, 1893-1932, then from monthly issues of the *National Municipal Review*, 1933-1957.

[30]"Proportional Representation," *National Municipal Review*, October 1954, p. 422.

[31]My own fieldwork turned up living memories of anti-semitism in the mid-century Democratic Party. One example involved a regular Democratic council member taunting a Jewish CEA member who changed his surname from "Cohen" to "Casdin."

[32]"Proportional Representation," *National Municipal Review*, October 1941, p. 609.

[33]"Proportional Representation," *National Municipal Review*, July 1934, pp. 398-9.

[34]These cases involved Sacramento and Kalamazoo (L. Weaver, 1986, p. 141).

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City	State	Year	Ruling party	Elite STV supporters	Source
Ashtabula	OH	1915	Rep	some Rep, Dem, Socialist	Busch (1995, p. 90)
Kalamazoo	MI	1918	Rep	some Rep, Socialist	Hatton (1918), Sealander (1988)
Boulder	CO	1917	Rep	None named	Winter (1982)
West Hartford	CT	1920	Rep	None named	Gallup (1921)
Sacramento	CA	1920	None named	None named	Engler (1921)
Cleveland	OH	1921	Rep	some Rep, Dem	Barber (1995a, pp. 118-9)
Cincinnati	OH	1924	Rep	some Rep, Dem	Reed, Reed, and Straetz (1957), Seasongood (1933)
Hamilton	OH	1926	Dem	some Dem, Rep	L. Weaver and Blount (1995, p. 213)
Toledo	OH	1934	Rep	some Rep, Dem	Anderson (1995, p. 242)
Wheeling	WV	1935	Rep	some Rep, Dem	Hallett (1935)
New York	NY	1936	Dem	some Dem, Rep, Fusion, Am. Labor	Prosterman (2013)
Norris	TN	1936	Dem	None named	Inferred; creature of Congress.
Yonkers	NY	1938	Rep	some Rep, Dem	Haynes (2001, pp. 35, 162-8)
Cambridge	MA	1940	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Spalding (1987a, 1987b)
Lowell	MA	1942	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Dobrusin (1955)
Long Beach	NY	1943	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Miller (2007)
Marshfield	OR	1944	None named	None named	
Saugus	MA	1947	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Dobrusin (1955)
Worcester	MA	1947	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Binstock (1960), Dobrusin (1955), Edwards (1972)
Quincy	MA	1947	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Dobrusin (1955)
Medford	MA	1947	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Dobrusin (1955)
Revere	MA	1947	Dem	some Dem, Rep	Dobrusin (1955)
Hopkins	MN	1947	None named	None named	Vesely (1970)
Oak Ridge	TN	1948	Dem	None named	Inferred; creature of Congress.

Table 1

How authors identify the party affiliations of pro-change elites for the 24 cities that adopted STV.

Variable	Brockton (MA)	Worcester (MA)	Waterbury (CT)
Reform outcome	At-large plurality (path B)	PR win (path C)	PR failure (path A)
Referendum year	1955	1947	1939
Prior partisan control	Democratic	Democratic	Democratic
Had direct primaries at time of referendum	Yes	Yes	Yes
Population	62,860	203,486	99,314
Percent black	1.5%	1.1%	2.1%
Percent of population employed	40.6%	38.8%	41.6%
Percent manufacturing production workers	32.6%	48.0%	47.1%
Percent retail workers	16.7%	17.4%	11.5%
Manufacturing establishments per capita	3.5%	0.3%	0.2%
Occupied housing units per capita	30.4%	27.0%	25.6%
Average monthly rent	$26.82	$30.97	$28.31

Table 2

Structural characteristics of the three cities. Data are from the City Data Books (CDB) for 1942, 1948, 1950, and 1955. All variables except reform outcome, referendum year, prior partisan control, and presence of direct primaries come from the most proximate CDB. "Percent black" for Waterbury is percent non-white, following the 1942 CDB, which uses a 1940 U.S. Census estimate.

Case type	Case name	Ruling party	Est. support	Out-party(ies)	Est. support
Path (c): STV win	Worcester, MA (1947)	Democratic	0.40 (0.04)	Republican	0.94 (0.04)
Path (b): A-L plurality win	Brockton, MA (1955)	Democratic	0.14 (0.06)	Republican	0.79 (0.04)
Path (a): STV loss	Waterbury, CT (1939)	Democratic	0.08 (0.04)	Republican	0.80 (0.09)
				Socialist	0.31 (0.14)

Table 3

Proportion supporting charter reform by support for each party's mayoral candidate. Estimates are means and standard deviations from posterior distributions.
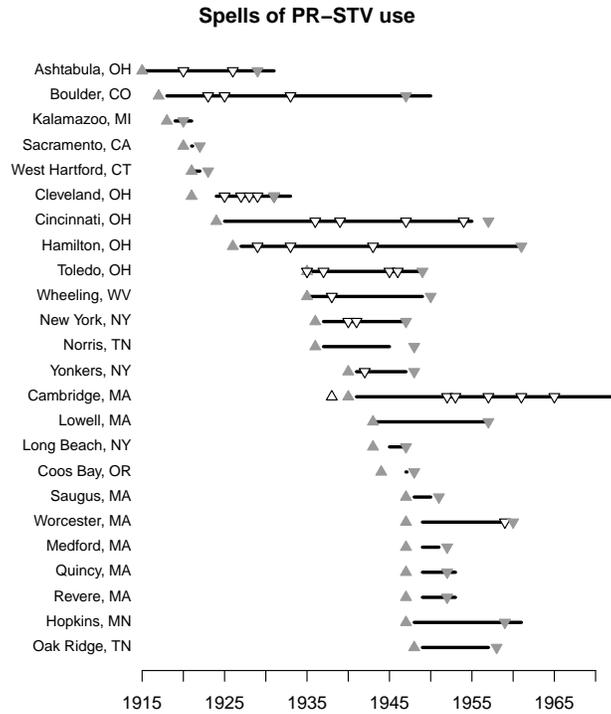
Figure 1. Solid, upward triangles denote successful adoptions. Solid, downward triangles denote successful repeals. Empty triangles denote unsuccessful adoptions or repeals. Bars denote years in which PR was in effect. Data are from Childs (1965), L. Weaver (1986); quarterly issues of the *Proportional Representation Review*, 1893-1932; then monthly issues of the *National Municipal Review*, 1932-1958.
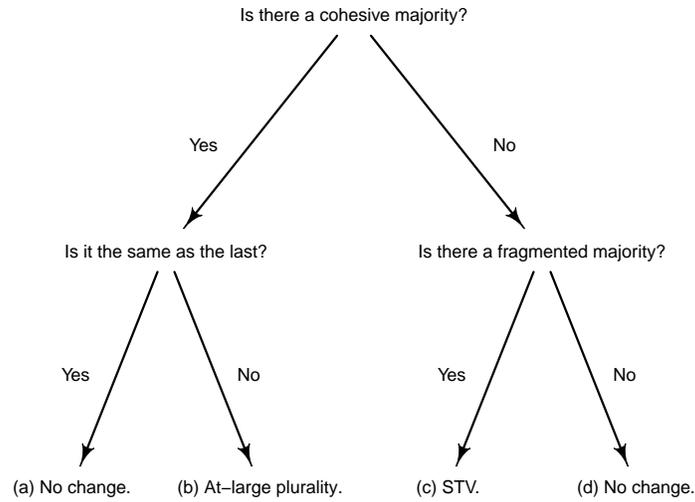
Schematic of the argument

Is there a cohesive majority?

Yes   No

Is it the same as the last?   Is there a fragmented majority?

Yes   No   Yes   No

(a) No change.   (b) At–large plurality.   (c) STV.   (d) No change.

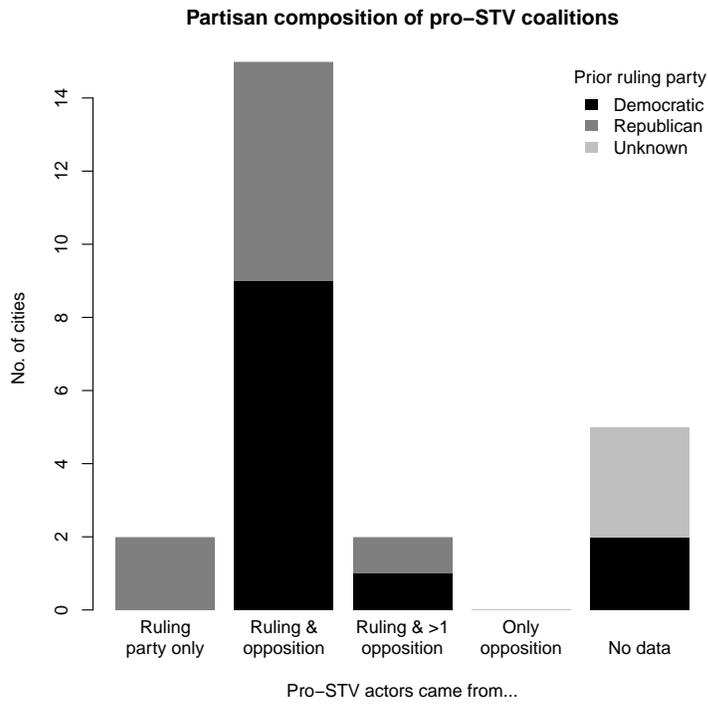*Figure 2*. STV results when a fragmented majority advances charter reform.

Figure 3. STV typically resulted after a split in the ruling party. In no case do authors write that the reform coalition was without elites from the prior ruling party.
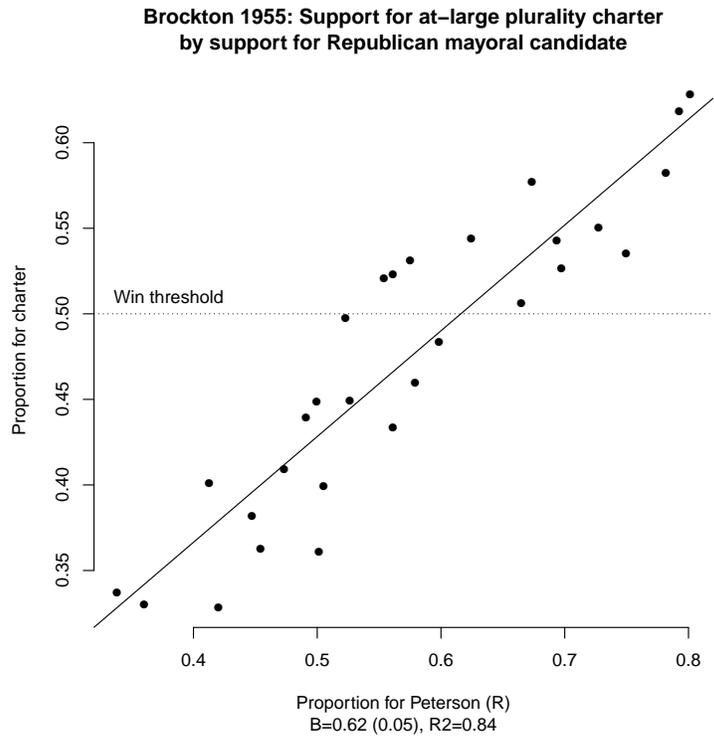
Brockton 1955: Support for at–large plurality charter
by support for Republican mayoral candidate

Figure 4. Brockton's adoption of at-large plurality is virtually party-line. Observations are precincts.

**Waterbury 1939: Support for PR charter
by support for Republican mayoral candidate**

Proportion for charter

Win threshold

Proportion for Foster (R)
B=1.28 (0.1), R2=0.86
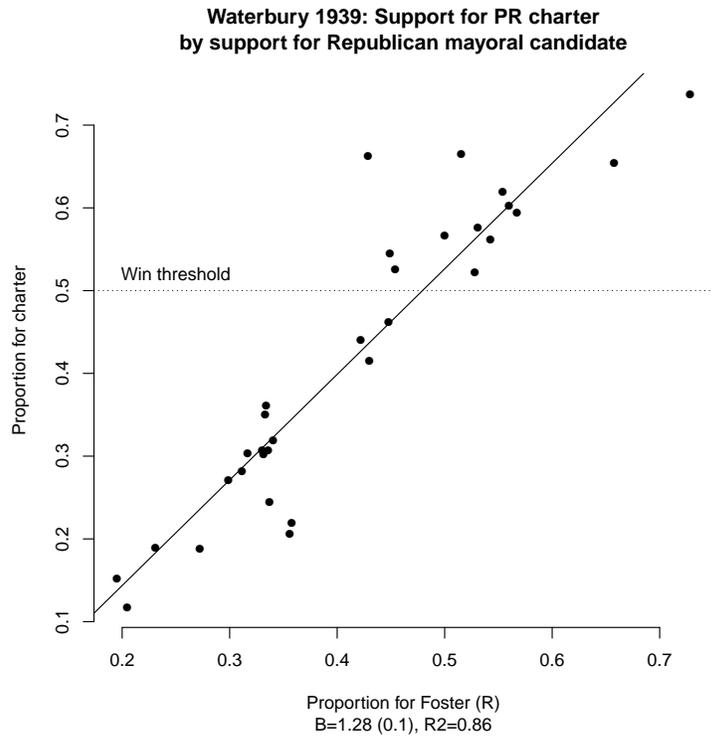
Figure 5. Waterbury referendum vote by Republican mayoral vote. Observations are precincts.

STV failure is virtually party-line.

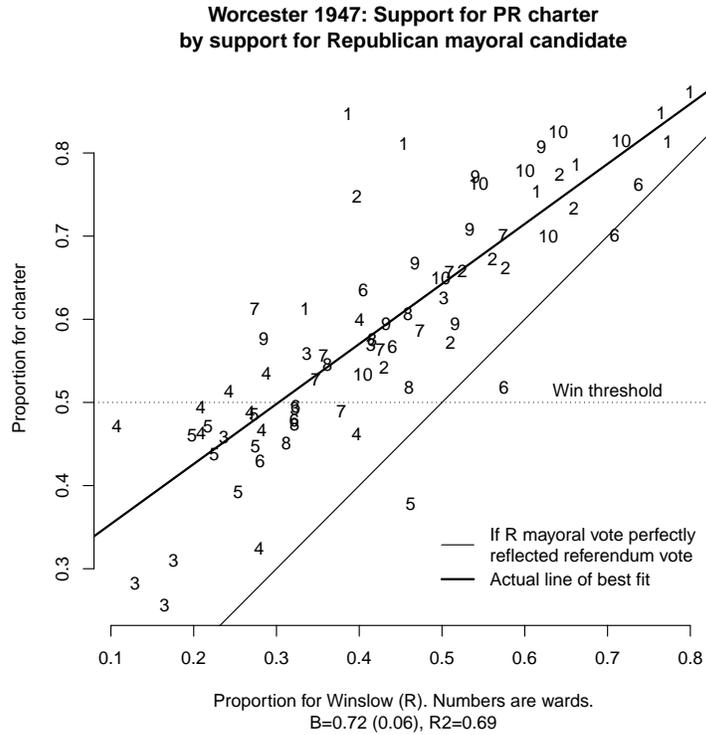**Worcester 1947: Support for PR charter
by support for Republican mayoral candidate**

Figure 6. Worcester referendum vote by Republican mayoral vote. Observations are precincts.

The thinner line represents the fit we would observe if the Republican vote predicted the

referendum vote in one-to-one fashion, and the heavier line represents the best fit from an

ordinary least squares regression. The distances between corresponding points on the lines

indicate that a substantial number of voters supported both charter change and the Democratic

mayoral candidate. Data points are given by corresponding ward numbers so that results can be

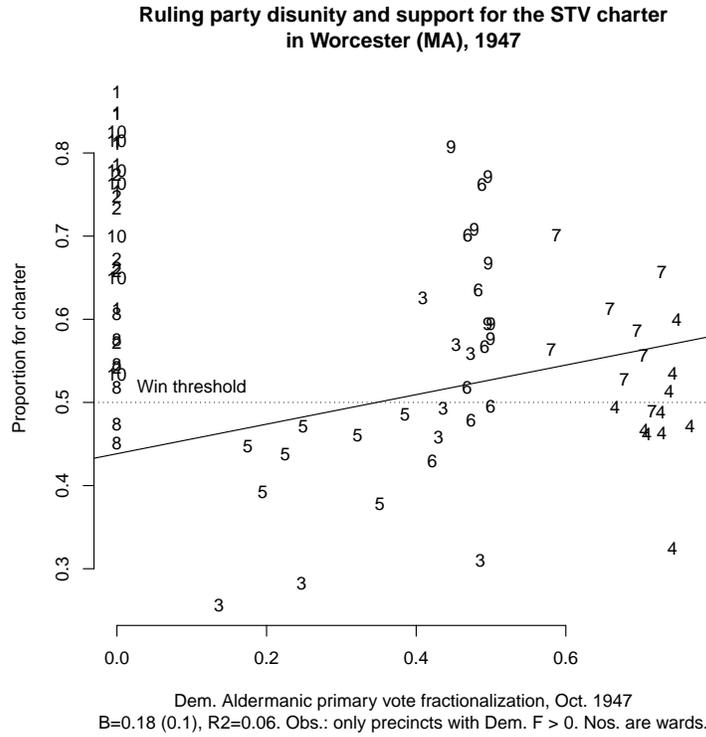compared to the ward descriptions in Binstock (1960) below.

**Ruling party disunity and support for the STV charter
in Worcester (MA), 1947**

Figure 7. Democratic Aldermanic primary vote fractionalization predicts precinct-level

referendum support. Data points are given by corresponding ward numbers so that results can be

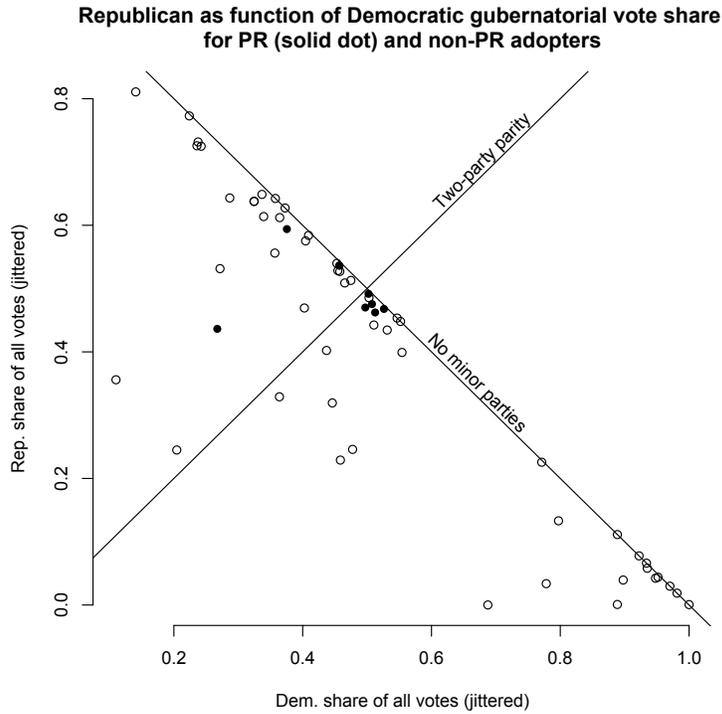compared to the ward descriptions in Binstock (1960) below.

Republican as function of Democratic gubernatorial vote share for PR (solid dot) and non-PR adopters

Figure 8. Electoral-rule outcomes for all 61 big-city charter reform episodes, 1900-50, by partisanship of the respective county. Solid graph tokens reflect PR adoption. "Jittered" means a random perturbation has been added to both values for the respective data point in order to minimize overlap in the plot. This perturbation is not greater than one-fifth of the smallest distance between adjacent data points on a given dimension.
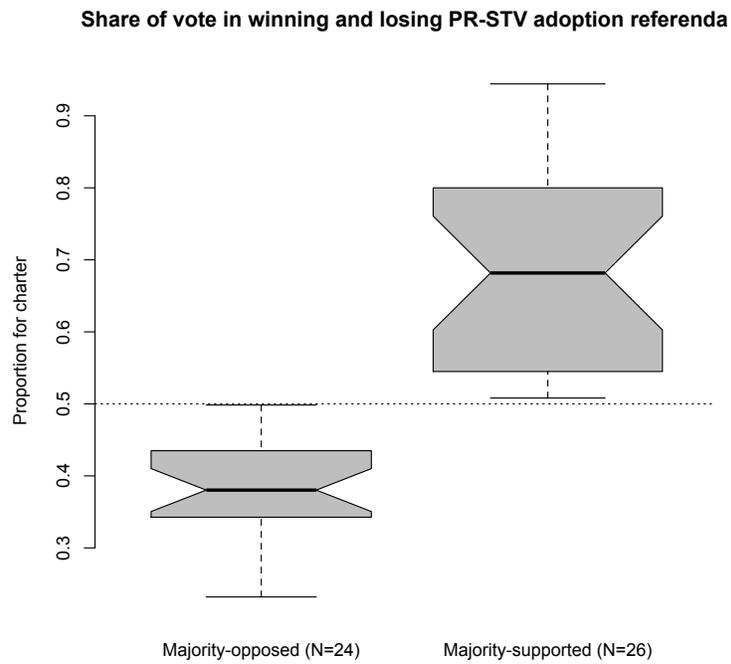
Figure 9. Oversized coalitions for adoption are consistent with with party splits in balanced jurisdictions. Whiskers include extreme values. Non-overlapping notches indicate that the medians of the underlying distributions are also non-overlapping. The difference of means between pro-side shares for adopters and non-adopters is significant with greater than 99 percent confidence in a two-way t-test.