> I won't make you read all of this but it's really important if you are working with local government to know where the power lies. Figure it out if you are doing that work.

5 Forms of Government
From Weak Mayors and Machines to the Beginnings of Reform

The oldest form of local government in the United States is the town or township meeting of all local voters, usually held annually. At these meetings, local officials are elected and laws and taxes are approved. This system, which dates from colonial times, operates only in some New England states and has become rare because few communities are small enough for it to function well, even though it remains an American ideal. When a town gets to be more than a village, more elaborate structures are usually adopted.

Since the days of the town meeting, U.S. communities have grown and developed, increasing in diversity and complexity. The forms of government they adopted also changed. Town meetings were gradually replaced by elected, representative government. In the early days of the republic, the weak mayor system predominated, and it still survives in some communities. But by the mid-nineteenth century, spurred by economic growth and immigration, corrupt political bosses and machines had subverted the weak mayor system and set in motion an urban reform movement. The initial result of reform was the strong mayor form of government, although by the turn of the century, reformers were ready to propose more radical change.

The Weak Mayor Form of Government

The oldest major form of local government in the United States is the weak mayor system, forged by the American Revolution. Having just overthrown an authoritarian monarch, Americans were unwilling to grant their own executive officers much power. At the national level, the Articles of Confederation set up a feeble government with virtually no executive. States and cities at least had governors and mayors, but their powers were strictly and elaborately limited by even more checks and balances than those that would appear in the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

The Mayor. The mayor in the **weak mayor system** is only a nominal chief executive. The city council (the local legislature) and other appointed or elected executive officers also hold substantial power. Initially, the mayor was appointed by the council from among its members and served mainly as a presiding officer. Some weak mayor cities still operate this way, although after 1820, many began to elect their mayors directly. The weakness of the office comes from limits on the traditional executive powers of appointment and administration.

Figure 5.1　**The Weak Mayor Form of Government**
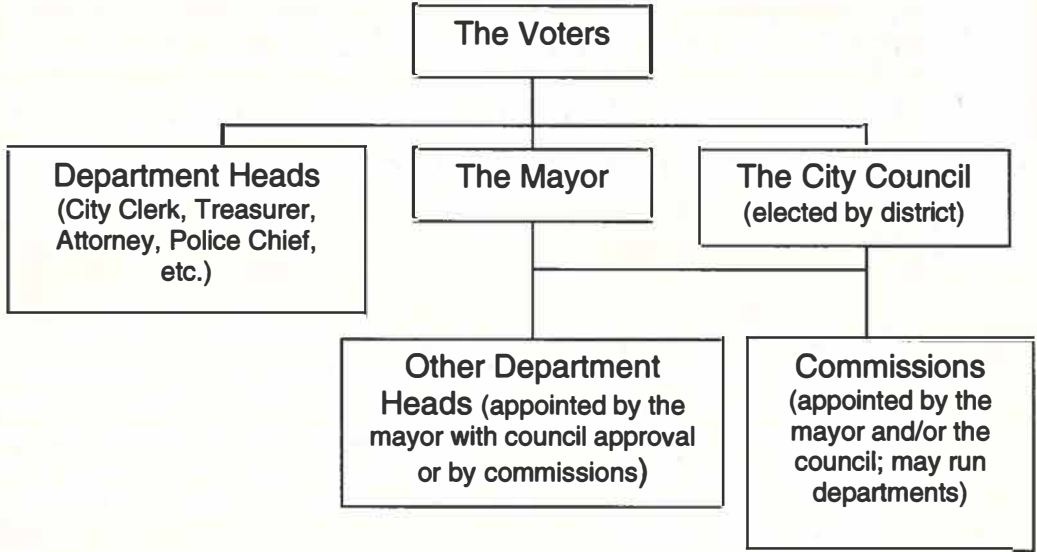
The Council. **City councils** in this form of government also reflect the democratic values of its founders. They tend to be large in size, numbering fifteen to fifty members, and are elected by wards or districts. Each district covers just a part of the city, ensuring every neighborhood its own council member, although in large districts members may represent several neighborhoods. Besides acting as the legislature, the city council in a weak mayor form of government plays a prominent part in the normally executive functions of appointment, administration, and budgeting. Council powers are enhanced by the inability of the mayor to veto or reject its actions. But power is not centralized in the council, either. As the demands on city government became too great for councils to handle, some responsibility was devolved to commissions or boards. Usually with around five members appointed by the council or mayor or both, or sometimes elected, these commissions run certain city departments.

The Long Ballot. In the 1830s, Jacksonian democracy brought the election of the mayor as well as other members of the executive branch, including the city attorney, city clerk, treasurer, and department heads such as the police chief (see Figure 5.1). The **long ballot** resulting from the election of so many officers is highly democratic, but it also fragments executive authority. Even where charters give mayors some responsibility for the operations of the city departments, their administrative powers are severely limited by having to deal with independently elected department heads with constituencies of their own. To compound the problem, other officers, boards, or commissions are appointed by the city council to run departments. The best a weak mayor can usually hope for is the power to appoint some of these officials, often subject to city council approval and rarely with the power to remove appointees from office.

The Weak Mayor System

The weak mayor system, with mayors denied the veto and with their administrative and hiring and firing powers severely constrained, accomplished the political goal of its post-Revolutionary framers, who wanted to avoid dictatorial executives. But the cities they wrote their charters for were small, and their electorates, confined to white male property owners, were smaller, with clearly shared interests. The weak mayor system probably worked well in such circumstances since all its participants were similar and easily agreed on city policy. But cities grew and became more diverse, with expanding populations demanding access to local offices and disagreeing more about what should be done. From the 1820s onward, the ideals of Jacksonian democracy gradually brought wider participation and more elected officials within the basic weak mayor system.

The goal of Jacksonian democracy was greater citizen participation, but unfortunately, the system didn't always function ideally. Power was fragmented, with authority widely distributed among a large number of officeholders, making it hard to get things done and often failing to deliver effective, efficient local government. Political leadership could not surmount this fragmentation because the office of mayor was, by the very nature of the system, little more than titular. No one person was clearly in charge.

Even the democratic values of the system were subverted by the absence of accountability—when things went wrong, the voters didn't know whom to blame. For example, if crime increased in a neighborhood, the voters could go to their district council member, who could claim to have raised the issue only to have been ignored by the police chief, the mayor, and the rest of the council. The police chief and the mayor, representing the same voters, might blame the problem on one another or on an ineffective council representative. Short of throwing them all out, which is difficult for a single neighborhood to achieve, the discontented constituents could only mutter among themselves and bolt their doors.

The weak mayor system works reasonably well in small, homogeneous cities where people are in general agreement and don't expect a lot from their government. When they need something done, informal, personal relationships can cut through the fragmentation. So the weak mayor form works best when local government doesn't need to do much, as was the case at the time of its creation. Industrialization, immigration, and growth put the system under strain, however. Diversity increased and social homogeneity was reduced. Disagreements and conflicts arose as new interests and groups wanted a piece of the action. The informal, personal contacts of small communities no longer function in big cities, where social relations are formal and impersonal. Growth also brings bigger problems, from sewage to traffic and crime, which need action and which a leaderless, fragmented government simply cannot solve. Local growth machine interests often feel that inefficient government is holding them back. For all these reasons, the weak mayor form of government today operates mostly in small, relatively homogeneous cities, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest.

Some large cities, including Atlanta and Chicago, stuck with the weak mayor

form of government longer than others, but over time these cities have given their mayors more power and abandoned the weak mayor form. Los Angeles, the second largest city in the United States, is a case in point. Until recently, the mayor of Los Angeles had a high profile, but limited power. Most of the city's sixteen departments, including police and fire, were run by independent commissions that hired the department heads and oversaw their budgets. Commissioners, who served five-year terms, were appointed by the mayor with council approval. In 1991, when the videotaped beating of a black citizen by police officers outraged the city, then-mayor Tom Bradley, an African American and former police officer, was unable to control the city's police department. Even with city council support, the mayor could not fire the city's controversial police chief, Daryl Gates, who had been appointed by the police commission rather than the mayor, and who enjoyed the added protection of civil service rules, a reform adaptation of the weak mayor system. "I cannot conceive of a city like Los Angeles where the mayor does not have the power to appoint or dismiss department heads," said Bradley. "It's a terrible system."[1] A bad situation turned worse in 1992 when the white officers who were videotaped doing the beating were found not guilty by a predominantly white jury and rioting broke out in Los Angeles and elsewhere. Only unrelenting political pressure finally forced the disgraced police chief to reluctantly resign.

Los Angeles voters then revised their charter to limit their police chief to a five-year term (subject to one reappointment by the mayor), and a new, black, community-oriented chief took office. Los Angeles, with urban problems of mind-boggling complexity and 3.7 million people of astonishingly diverse backgrounds (47 percent are Hispanic, 30 percent white/non-Hispanic, 11 percent African American, and 10 percent Asian), is a city that had clearly outgrown a weak mayor charter written by and for a white, business-dominated community in 1924. In 1999, Los Angeles voters approved a new charter increasing the mayor's power to fire department heads, along with some other reforms.

Many other cities, experiencing similar if less dramatic problems, have moved beyond the weak mayor system. But charter change is not the only solution to these problems. Political organization outside the formal structures of government can be an alternative way to make awkward systems work and, in most communities, such organizations preceded structural reform.

The Strong Mayor System

Soon the advocates of good government concluded that winning occasional elections was not enough. They needed to change not only the personnel of local govern-ment but also its structure. After all, the nation had moved beyond the Articles of Confederacy to stronger government barely a decade after the revolution. Many states had similarly reformed their governments. Now it was the cities' turn.

The **reform movement** was born, and its first product was the strong mayor form of government. The concepts of reform and strong mayor may seem contradictory since the reformers were fighting powerful bosses. But the strength of the bosses came from their command of the machines or party organizations, not the office of mayor. As noted, many bosses never held elective office. The idea of the reformers was to put enough power in the hands of a single, strong executive to get something done once they won an election.

The Short Ballot. Instead of a long ballot with several elected executive officers and department heads, under the strong mayor form of government only one executive, the mayor, is elected. On this **short ballot**, the city council is also usually smaller, so voters elect fewer officials and can more easily hold them accountable. As Figure 5.2 suggests, this much-simplified structure of city government revolves around the chief executive.

The Strong Mayor. In a **strong mayor system**, the office of mayor is modeled on that of the U.S. president. The mayor is elected for a four-year term and can be reelected for unlimited terms (term limits were introduced later in some cities). As chief executive, the mayor formulates the budget, recommends policy, and oversees the day-to-day administration of city programs. The mayor appoints and removes department heads, usually without the approval of the city council, although mayoral appointment of some officials, such as the city attorney and the city clerk, may require council approval or, in some cases, these may still be elected positions. Members of city boards and commissions are also appointed and removed by the mayor, but usually with council consent.

The Council. The city council in a strong mayor form of government is a more purely legislative body with less involvement in administration. Nevertheless, the council must approve the mayor's budget and programs and often some appointments. The mayor, however, may **veto** council actions, with a two-thirds vote by the council required to override the veto. While weak mayors usually preside over council meetings and vote with the council, strong mayors generally do not. As with the national government, the executive branch is clearly separate from the legislature.

The benefits of the strong mayor form of city government include leadership, clear accountability to the voters, and better-coordinated government more able to deal with complex urban problems. The fragmentation of the weak mayor form of government is resolved—government can govern. Political scientists generally advocate the system for these reasons. Mayors like it, too. But activists in many communities

Figure 5.2 **The Strong Mayor Form of Government**
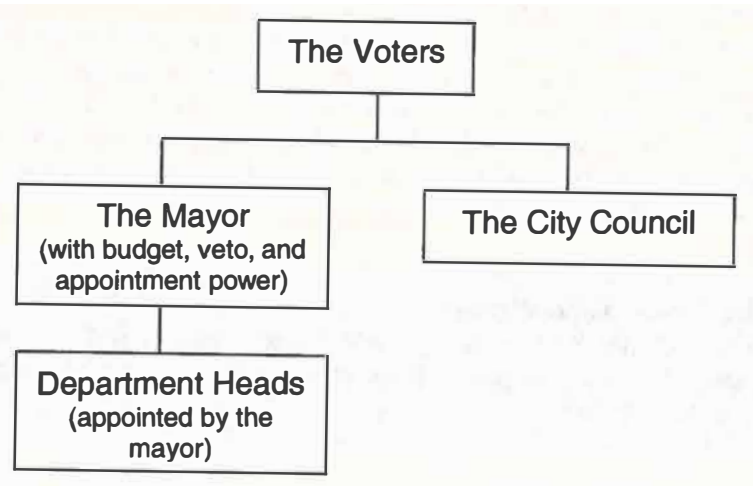
worry about a single individual having so much power (an issue that strangely arises for mayors but rarely for the far more powerful U.S. president). Checks and balances are provided by council approval of the mayor's budget and policy proposals, but some cities have modified the pure strong mayor form of government with additional checks, including term limits and council approval of selected appointments.

Another common concern about the strong mayor system has been that although the chief executive must be a skilled politician to get elected, there is no guarantee that he or she will have the management skills to run a highly complex administrative apparatus (another concern that doesn't seem to arise with the presidency). Mayors who want to stay in office or advance may also pay more attention to winning elections than to mundane matters of administration. To address this problem, most cities with strong mayors have changed their charters to allow the mayor (usually with council approval) to appoint a **chief administrative officer (CAO)**. The CAO is supposed to be a trained administrator, charged with overseeing the technical operations of the city, answerable to the mayor, and under the overall policy direction of the mayor and council. San Francisco introduced the CAO in 1931 and many cities have adopted it since then. Some, including New York and Los Angeles, have more than one of these officials and call them deputy mayors.

Overall, the strong mayor form of government is most commonly found in large cities, including Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and San Francisco, and mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, where big cities first emerged in the United States. Few cities, however, have systems as pure and simple as the one presented in Figure 5.2. Most have chosen to introduce at least modest limits on executive power. Such limits are the result of the chronic mistrust of executives in local government—a mistrust far greater than that of state and national executives. The bosses and machines created the distrust and went on justifying it, for if the strong mayor system made it easier for reformers to gain control of local government and get things done, it also made it easier for the

machines. Their slate making was simplified and their command of government was often more thorough thanks to this reform.

Efforts to make the office of mayor more powerful started in the 1880s and continued through the turn of the century, a time when enough of the social changes described previously had occurred to produce a reform movement but not to destroy the machines. Far from being vanquished, they survived and even thrived under the strong mayor form of government. Their frustrated opponents reacted by escalating their demands for reform.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Research the form of government of the largest city in your state. Compare and contrast its form of government with the weak mayor and strong mayor models described in this chapter.

Change and Reform

As we noted, U.S. cities emerged in the nineteenth century, burgeoning with growth brought about by industrialization and immigration. And this growth also brought political change. The old order, the WASP elites, lost control of local politics to the bosses and machines that skillfully organized and controlled the immigrant masses while cutting deals with business interests. Working-class and poor voters benefited from the machine in small, personal ways, but machines never really spoke for their class interests or advocated serious social reform. In fact, it was in the machine's interest to keep its supporters dependent. But change continued to happen, with an emerging urban middle class and, eventually, reduced immigration, the Depression, New Deal social welfare, and suburbanization. The base of the machine started to crumble and the reformers launched their challenge, first electorally and then structurally with the strong mayor form of government. Neither defeated the machine, which lived to fight another day, and often to win. But the reformers were not easily discouraged, and as we will see, history was on their side.

6 Reform Politics

The City-Manager Form of Government and Beyond

The reform movement that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s picked up steam at the turn of the century and won many victories through the 1920s, when it became less prominent, perhaps because much of its agenda had already been enacted and also because the Depression and World War II were more pressing concerns. But although reform has not occupied center stage in most communities since the 1920s, it does continue to play a part in local politics. Vestiges of reform organizations endure in many places, just as vestiges of machines survive in some, albeit as endangered species. The influence of the reformers also survives in the mind-set or culture of local politics. More significantly, however, the reform movement left in place governmental structures that shape politics in most communities today, nearly a century after they were first enacted. In some cases, these reform institutions had effects that were not intended; in others, the intended effects have frustrated elements of the communities and have been challenged by a new and different generation of reformers.

Reforming Elections: The Pursuit of the Common Good

The reform movement focused on changing municipal charters, the constitutions of local government discussed in chapter 4. In some cities, sweeping reform packages amounting to virtually new charters were proposed by blue-ribbon commissions dominated by the reformers themselves. In others, reforms were introduced piece by piece in individual charter amendments. In either case, the voters had to approve and usually did. Sometimes, however, the reformers took the battle to the state level, pushing through laws or constitutional amendments that imposed changes on every city in the state. These statewide changes usually concerned elections, while the structures of the local government themselves were left to be determined locally.

The full extent of the reform package is outlined in Table 6.1, with the structures and institutions that preceded reform listed in the middle column and those that were part of the reform in the column on the right. The most ardent reform cities enacted the full reform package; others adopted only selected elements; and those most resistant to reform accepted only what the states imposed. Table 6.1 can be seen as a sort of menu from which cities make choices, suiting their own needs and tastes—but not necessarily in any particular order. The components of the reform package were conceived at different times (some as early as the 1890s, some as much as two decades later), so many cities proceeded with reform bit by bit. Only after about 1910 could they contemplate the full package, and many did.

Table 6.1 **The Municipal Reform Package**

	Before reform	After reform
Elections	Caucus or Convention	Primaries, Runoffs
	Partisan	Nonpartisan
	District	At-large
	Long ballot	Short ballot
	Concurrent	Isolated
	Representative Democracy	Direct Democracy
Executive	Mayor	Manager
Personnel	Patronage (spoils)	Civil service
Contracts	Patronage (spoils)	Competitive bidding

Taking Politics out of Government: The City-Manager System

As we saw in the last chapter, the early reformers endeavored to replace the weak mayor form of government with the strong mayor system and the shortened ballot. But when they saw the bosses and machines taking advantage of that modification, they sought more fundamental change.

The Commission Form of Government

When the city government of Galveston, Texas, seemed incompetent to guide rebuilding after a catastrophic hurricane hit the city in 1900, a group of business leaders more or less took over. They persuaded their state legislature to approve a new charter with a radically different form of government for Galveston. Instead of a traditional executive and legislature, Galveston combined both functions in one body—a commission. Voters elected just five commissioners; together they acted as the city council, but each also headed a specific department, such as public safety, public works, parks and libraries, or finance. This streamlined system worked well for Galveston and was soon adopted elsewhere. Before 1920, nearly five hundred cities adopted the **commission form of government**, usually along with at-large, nonpartisan elections and direct democracy.

But the disadvantages of the commission form soon became apparent. Some commissioners proved better at getting elected than at administering their departments. Commissioners tended to compete with one another and to protect the interests of their own departments, but the system provided no leadership to overcome these tendencies. Because of these problems, it soon lost popularity. Houston gave it up in 1942; San Antonio in 1951. Even Galveston gave it up. Today, commissions govern less than 2 percent of U.S. cities. Most of these cities are small. The largest city still using the commission form of government is Portland, Oregon, where it has been adapted to include a mayor. In 2003, voters in Sioux City, Iowa, rejected reverting to a commission system. In 2005, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, switched from the commission system to a council-manager form of government.

The Council-Manager Form of Government

The commission form of government may also have fallen into disfavor because another new system was even more appealing—the council-manager form of government. First introduced in Sumter, South Carolina, in 1912, by 1920, the new system had been adopted by more than a hundred cities, and today it is the most popular form of city government. The **council-manager form of government** was modeled on modern business practices, with the voters equivalent to corporate stockholders, the council to the board of directors, and a professional manager responsible for operations (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2). This innovative arrangement couldn't have suited the reform mentality better.

The City Council

On the ultimate short ballot, with nonpartisan, at-large, isolated elections, voters choose only a small **city council**, usually numbering five to seven members. Initially, the system had no mayor at all, but now mayors are elected or chosen by the council from among its members in most council-manager cities. The mayor's role, however, consists largely of presiding over council meetings. Council members are expected to serve only part-time, linking the public to its government and defining broad policies that the city manager and administration implement. The most important task of the council is appointing the city manager to oversee the operations of the city. The council may also appoint the city attorney, who gives the council legal advice; the clerk, who keeps its records; and the auditor, who checks city finances. With nonpartisan, at-large elections and administration in the hands of a professional manager, the influence of parties and the parochial interests of neighborhoods or ethnic groups are as far removed from government as possible, and the pursuit of the "public interest" proceeds unhindered. In the ideal council-manager system, politics stop with the council, although reform electoral structures limit politics even there.

The City Manager

Based on the reform theory that the business of local government is to provide basic services of a technical nature and should therefore not be political, the council-manager system is at the heart of the reform effort to take politics out of government. The political element of the system, the council, hires and fires the manager, usually by majority vote. In doing so, the council is expected to make its decisions on the basis of the technical, administrative competence of the candidates, not on their political views or connections. **City managers** are expected to be neutral, skilled professionals—experts in administration who can efficiently carry out policies set by the council. Unlike political leaders, managers can come from outside the community. In fact, outsiders are often preferred since their lack of local connections would enhance their objectivity.

Where are such individuals to be found? When the system was first introduced and on into the 1920s and 1930s, the pool of professional candidates was small. Communities often subverted the system by hiring locals. Many of the first city managers were engineers, but eventually a national pool of professional administrators grew. Council-manager cities now advertise job openings widely and get appli-

Figure 6.1   **The Council-Manager Form of Government**
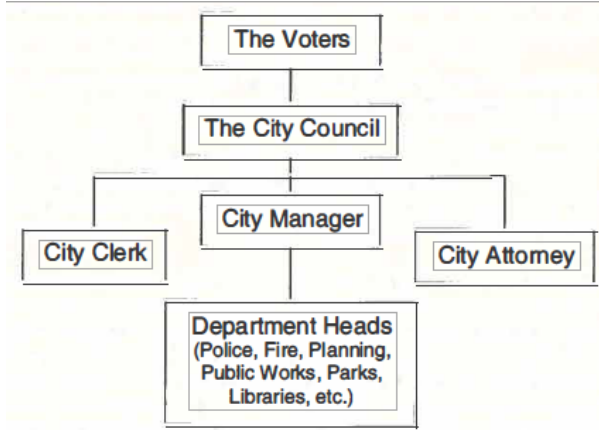
cations from all over the country. To hire locally is considered bad form (with political overtones), and professional managers advance their careers by moving from city to city, with the largest council-manager cities at the top of the ladder.

As chief executive, the manager appoints department heads, including police, fire, public works, planning, parks and recreation, and others. The department heads, under policy directives from the council and supervision by the manager, oversee the delivery of city services. The council plays no formal part in hiring, firing, or disciplining department heads and may be forbidden from communicating with them except through the manager, to whom they answer. The manager is also responsible for the budget, a crucial role in shaping city services, although the council must approve the manager's budget proposals.

The council-manager system, so modern sounding and so consistent with reform theory, spread quickly. California's reformers made it that state's general law form of government, and it still operates in all but a few of its 477 cities. In Virginia, state law requires the council-manager form of government for all cities. Almost half of the cities in the United States with a population of more than 25,000 now use the system, but the only large cities that employ it are Dallas, Phoenix, San Antonio, and San Jose.

Like all reform nostrums, the manager plan has its drawbacks, tending to insulate government from the public and to prevent the expression of legitimate differences of opinion. Nor does it truly remove politics from government since administrators have views and biases of their own and may still be susceptible to some political influence, usually that of business elites. More alarming for the reformers, machines adapted even to this innovation. The Pendergast machine continued in Kansas City,[3] for example, and in Asheville, North Carolina, the local boss merely had himself appointed manager.

The Distribution of Forms of Government

The institutions of local government have evolved over two centuries of history and change, through industrialization, immigration, urbanization, suburbanization, and the move to the Sunbelt, from the mayor-council form of government to reform and the council-manager system and beyond. Some cities have gone through all these changes; others have experienced only a few. This variation accounts, in part, for the current use of different forms of government by different cities today, although other factors also shape the **distribution of forms of government**. Historical develop-ment, region, size, and demography all play a part.

Table 6.2

Distribution of Forms of City Government

Size of city	Number of cities	Mayor-council (%)	Council-manager (%)	Commission (%)	Town meeting (%)
Over 1,000,000	4	50	50	0/0	0/0
5,000–1,000,000	8	88	13	0/0	0/0
250,000–499,999	23	52	48	0/0	0/0
100,000–249,999	104	28	72	0/0	0/0
50,000–99,999	226	27	71	1	1
25,000–49,999	487	34	62	*	3
10,000–24,999	996	33	56	2	7
0–9,999	2,395	42	47	1	8
By region					
Frostbelt (Northeast)	2,337	44	41	2	12
Sunbelt (South and West)	1,907	31	68	*	*

Source: *The Municipal Year Book* (Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association, 2003).
Note: Data are based on a survey of cities. Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding and cities not responding.
*Denotes less than 0.5 percent.

The mayor-council system is most common in the Northeast and Midwest, where cities developed in the nineteenth century when that form of government predominated. Table 6.2 reveals that larger cities, whether in the Frostbelt or the Sunbelt, use the mayor-council form, not just because they are older cities but because of the need for political leadership in such diverse places. Note that the table does not distinguish between weak mayor and strong mayor systems. At least one study has demonstrated that cities with large ethnic minority and working-class populations are more likely to use the mayor-council form.[16] Large cities in the Frostbelt incline to the strong mayor form, and big Sunbelt cities tend to restrict mayoral authority. Surprisingly, a majority of cities with a population of less than 10,000 also use the mayor-council form. Mostly in older, Frostbelt states (except New England), they seem content with their original weak mayor systems. Unlike large, diverse cities, these small, homogeneous communities experience less political conflict and few complex problems, so they can get by without strong mayoral leadership and executive authority.

The council-manager form is most common in cities that matured after the turn of the century, especially in the Sunbelt and most of all in the western United States, where the reform movement was strongest and where political parties were, and remain, weakest. Suburbs, again especially those in the Sunbelt, also incline strongly to the council-manager system. Reflecting this, a substantial majority of middle-sized cities use the manager form (see Table 6.2). These communities tend to be

Table 6.3

Method of Election of City Councils

City size	Percent at-large	Percent district	Percent mixed
Over 500,000	33.0	44.0	22.0
250,000–499,999	20.0	28.0	52.0
100,000–249,999	40.2	22.0	37.9
50,000–99,999	48.6	13.9	37.5
25,000–49,999	53.9	16.8	29.2
10,000–24,999	59.6	16.1	24.5
0–9,999	65.0	17.0	18.0
All cities	60.9	16.8	22.3

Source: *The Municipal Year Book* (Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association, 1998).
Note: Data are based on a survey of cities.

relatively homogeneous, so political consensus is easy to reach and fewer people feel left out by the majority-oriented reform system. When reform cities grow, they become more diverse and political conflict increases. Professional administrators such as city managers are often unable or unwilling to respond to the increasing demands placed on them. As a result, most large Sunbelt cities have strengthened their mayors and altered other institutions as well.

Besides the basic forms of government, associated structures and institutions are similarly distributed. District elections, for example, are more likely to be found in larger cities and in the older cities of the Northeast and Midwest, while at-large council representation is more common in smaller and middle-sized cities and in the Sunbelt and suburbia (see Table 6.3). The regional pattern is also evident in use of nonpartisan elections, with only 21 percent of northeastern cities as compared to 94 percent of western cities requiring nonpartisan elections.[17] Although the number of cities adopting the council-manager system with its associated reform structures has risen steadily since it was first introduced, as cities grow, they generally find that increasing diversity and conflict necessitate stronger leadership and broader representation, and adapt accordingly.

As a consequence, fewer and fewer cities can easily be categorized as weak mayor, strong mayor, council manager, reformed, unreformed, or re-reformed. Most have adapted their systems to particular needs at particular times, picking and choosing the electoral or governmental structures that suit them and that satisfy the political forces of the moment. Each form and institution has advantages and disadvantages; none is best in the abstract. Mayoral systems, for example, bring better leadership and accountability and are more democratic. They probably work best in large, diverse cities with conflictual politics and a need for leadership and conciliation. But a manager system seems to work well in small or middle-sized homogeneous cities with clear, consensual majorities. The manager form is also thought to be best for professionalism and efficiency, although at least one statistical study found "no ap-

parent difference in the efficiency levels of the two [major types of] municipal structures."[18] In many council-manager cities where counterreformers or others have expressed the need for stronger and more accountable leadership, mayors have been increasingly empowered so that the system is best thought of as **mayor-council-manager**, a sort of hybrid of the council-manager and mayor-council systems.

In fact, such hybrids have already become the dominant form of city government in America today. According to H. George Frederickson and colleagues,

> Beginning in the 1950s, the most prominent features of council-manager government such as a professional executive and merit civil service, were being widely adopted in mayor-council cities. The most prominent features of mayor-council government, such as a directly elected mayor and some council elected by districts, were being widely adopted in council-manager cities. By the 1990s, the fusion of these two models had resulted in the dominant form of American local government: the adapted city.[19]

For Frederickson and his colleagues, communities using the council-manager system are "administrative cities" and those using the mayor-council system are "political cities." But as the former seek to be more responsive to citizens and the latter strive to function more efficiently and professionally, they adopt components of each other's systems—adapting to changing populations, needs, and conditions. "Most American cities are now best described as adapted," they write.[20]

We'll discuss the **adapted city** further in the next chapter but for now it's a useful concept to remind us that no particular form of government is "best." Rather, the needs of each city determine which form of government is best for that city. By mixing elements of the different systems, cities can refine their forms of governments to their own needs. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the different forms are never neutral. Those who have power at a particular time choose the form of government that gives them advantages. Others may feel unrepresented and ignored, but if they organize and increase their own power, they may challenge and sometimes change the system.

Counties, School Districts, and Other Local Governments

Most of our discussion in this and the preceding chapter has focused on forms of city government. Government in counties, schools, and special districts varies much less and has changed less over time.

While city government has gone through the changes described earlier, county government has mostly remained as it began, something like the weak mayor form of government without the mayor (see Figure 6.3). Typically, a three- to five-member legislative body called the **county commission** or **board of supervisors** is elected by districts on a long ballot that includes from three to over a dozen department heads. The county commission or board appoints additional department heads. The legislative body dominates and, as with the weak mayor form of government, the county system tends to result in fragmented government and unclear account-

Figure 6.3 **County Government**
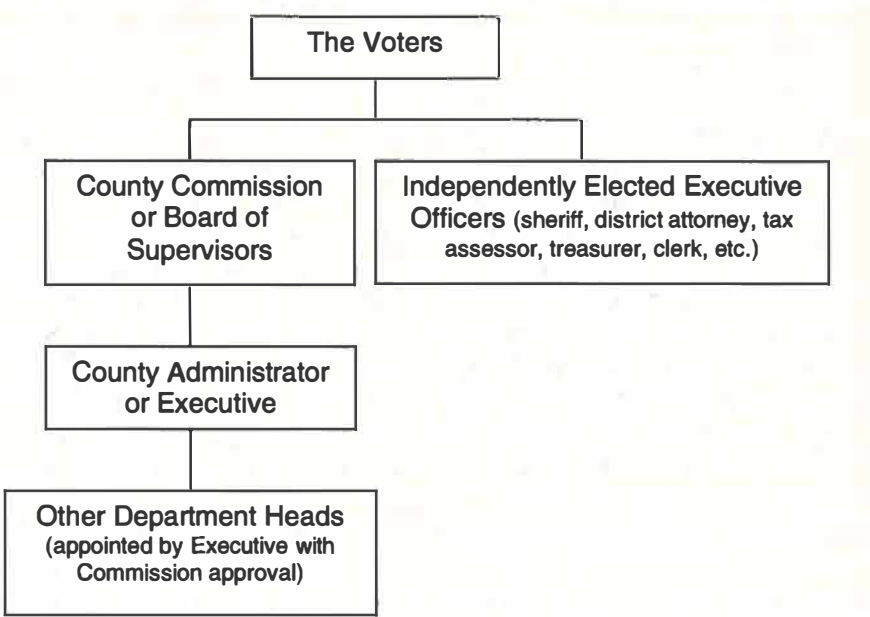
ability for the voters, especially when the number of directly elected executive officers is great. Even where only a few executives are elected, the multiple membership of the county board or commission can result in conflict and deadlock rather than leadership.

This anachronistic system survives because, as we learned in chapter 4, counties, even more than cities, are creatures of the state. Unlike cities, they function as administrative agencies of the state, carrying out its programs and policies. As such, the states keep tighter control, in most cases dictating the structure of county government through general law charters applying to all the counties in the state equally. Only about 5 percent of counties across the country have been granted home rule charters through which they can adapt their government structures to their own needs.[21] As administrative agencies of the state, home rule is probably less urgent, however, than in big cities, and fragmentation is less of a problem. Moreover, in many states, counties are primarily responsible for local government in rural areas with homogeneous populations that make few demands—a little like the cities of the early United States, when the weak mayor form of government worked well enough.

Bosses and machines ruled counties just as they ruled cities. In fact, rural counties with few immigrants may have had the strongest and most ruthless machines of all. The reform movement rarely gained momentum in the counties, however, perhaps because of the power of their machines, but more likely because of the absence of a middle-class constituency for reform. Some reforms were introduced, but with counties so closely controlled by the states, the battleground was usually the state legislature rather than the county government.

But while a majority of the nation's counties continue to operate with the traditional elected board or commission and an assortment of elected department heads, fully 40 percent of the 3,069 counties have moved away from that traditional form by providing for an elected or appointed executive.[22] Among those that elect executives, including Denver, San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York, several are consolidated city and county governments, but some traditional counties have also seen the need for an executive leader chosen by election. The states of Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee now mandate elected executives for their counties, although other states, like Texas, provide no such option. A more common change in county systems—especially in urban counties—has been the addition of a professional **county administrator** or executive similar to a city manager.[23] Often recruited from the same pool as city managers, they are appointed by the county commission or board of supervisors and bring technical and management expertise to the increasingly complex business of county government. Like city managers, they have difficulty when political conflict is great and leadership is needed. With the addition of county administrators, we can see that counties are also adapting their form of government to a changing world.

School districts adapted somewhat less. Most are governed by elected or sometimes appointed boards of five to seven members who hire a professional manager or superintendent of schools to oversee school operations. The system is similar to a council-manager form of government, but school superintendents tend to be even more powerful than city managers because school board members are often less professionally knowledgeable or politically astute than council members and rarely have as much time to devote to their duties. When disagreement arises, the most common response is to replace the administrator, although sometimes the governing boards are replaced instead, either by recall or through normal elections.

Special districts operate in a similar fashion, with powerful administrators and often amateur, part-time board members. Their boards, however, are usually appointed by governors, mayors, or other elected officials, so they are not subject to regular elections or recall. The public thus has little control over these agencies—and most citizens don't even know they exist.

Filling the Forms

The structure of local government is influenced and sometimes dictated by state law as well as by the changing characteristics of the communities themselves. Those who have power mold the structures which, in turn, shape access to government as well as public policy. But while institutional structures have their biases, nothing is absolute in politics. Within any of these forms of government, the balance of power among mayors, managers, city councils, bureaucracies, and voters may change, altering not only the form of government, but also the way it works. Moreover, real people occupy the positions and offices we've discussed. The way they are chosen affects the sort of people they are, and who they are affects what they do, as we will see in the next chapter.

7 Legislators and Executives
The Balance of Power

The forms of government discussed in the preceding chapters substantially determine how local governments operate and what sorts of people gain positions of power. In each form, power is shared. In city halls and county courthouses across the nation, legislators and executives grapple for control of programs and policies, sometimes cooperating, sometimes in confrontation, sometimes even in gridlock. Formal authority, such as the veto or power of appointment, gives the protagonists advantages or disadvantages and is therefore itself sometimes the subject of power struggles. But most of the time, legislators and executives play by the rules of the game, using whatever political resources they command. These include not only the formal powers granted to them in charters, but also calling on allies, manipulating the media, or rallying the public to their personal causes, if they have any (most are content to maintain the status quo). Their own personalities and political styles also affect their power and how they play their roles. Go to a meeting of your city council or county commission and see for yourself.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY
Go to at least two meetings of your city council and write a short essay on your observations, testing some of the generalizations made in this book. Consider the roles played by council members, administrators, citizens, and interest groups as well as relationships among the council members themselves. Does anyone seem to dominate the process? Are decisions made at council meetings after careful deliberation or do they appear to have been made in advance? Why?

Legislators and executives are not the only players, however. Bureaucrats are significant participants, as are committees and commissions appointed by councils and mayors to advise them and sometimes to exercise independent authority. Voters, interest groups, and powerful individuals outside government also greatly influence what happens in city hall. All these may be allies for legislators or executives in their power struggles, while the division of power within local governments gives these other elements a way around a resistant council, mayor, or manager.

Besides the clash of policies and personalities, local politics is also about the way governments operate and the values they emphasize. In the first half of the twentieth century, the reform ideals of professionalism and efficiency predominated, but since

the 1960s, the counterreform goals of responsiveness, accountability, representativeness, and leadership have come to the fore. These two sets of values are not mutually exclusive, of course, and both are desirable. Communities must seek their own balance between them, but this process itself injects another layer of tension in local governments, for the outcome of the contest can subtly or substantially shift the balance of power.

Local Legislators: Representation Without Power?

Today's **city councils** tend to be small, part-time, poorly paid, and dependent on the executive branch for information and guidance. This hasn't always been the case, however, and in many communities, councils have become more assertive in recent years, gaining greater influence, although still at a disadvantage in relation to the executive.

For much of the nineteenth century, councils dominated city politics. City charters gave them substantial budgetary and appointment powers and kept the executive branch feeble and fragmented under the weak mayor form of government. Early councils were large, numbering fifty or more members in some big cities, and many were bicameral, with an upper and lower house like the U.S. Congress. With **district elections** and small constituencies, representation and responsiveness were ensured, but these unwieldy bodies were not strong on leadership, much less on efficiency or professionalism. Bosses and machines solved some of these problems by amassing the diffuse powers of the weak mayor system so that action was possible, although the city councils often remained the focal point of local politics. Decisions were made by **logrolling**: you support my boondoggle and I'll support yours. Brokerage politics—making deals—was a way of life. Those who supported the machine were assured representation, responsiveness, accountability, and leadership. Those not aligned with the machine were left out, however, and professionalism and efficiency were beyond the pale.

Many of the reforms that followed focused on city councils. Bicameralism was eliminated, and councils were reduced in size to an average of just five to seven members chosen in at-large, nonpartisan elections. The reformers also took away some logrolling resources by introducing civil service hiring and competitive bidding and shifted the balance of power toward the executive, with the strong mayor and council-manager forms of government. As part of their quest to get politics out of local government, they restricted the powers of what they saw as its most political element, the legislature. City council members were expected to serve part-time, providing policy guidance and leaving administration to experts. The reforms increased efficiency and professionalism but often at the expense of representation, responsiveness, and accountability.

Council Dependence

Whether elected by district or at-large, councils are weak in relation to the executive branch. Although at-large council members represent the entire city, their precise constituency is vague and may be defined to suit a council member's own interests and ambitions. At-large members, for example, may pay attention only to some neighborhoods or interest groups or only to those that will help them advance to higher office. On the other hand, when a city has both an at-large council and an elected mayor, council members are not easily intimidated by the mayor since they are elected by the whole city, too.

District council members have more clearly defined constituencies to hold them accountable. This is a source of strength, but their narrow viewpoints and the fact that they represent only part of the city usually mean more power for the city executive. City managers can play district council members off one another, pleasing just enough of them to retain majority support. Mayors can do the same, with the added advantage of being the only citywide elected official, so they get more media attention and can claim to speak for all of the city, not just part.

Both at-large and district representatives, however, experience **council dependence** on executives and bureaucracies for information. In a council-manager system, the council is supposed to make policy and leave implementation to the manager and bureaucracy. In a mayor-council system, the council shares policy-making responsibilities with the mayor, who also oversees implementation. But the council needs information to make policy, and although citizens and interest groups provide some information, most comes from the city administration, whether headed by a mayor or a manager. This is a major source of power for the executive since information can be manipulated or even withheld. Study any council agenda or listen attentively at any meeting—executive control of information is obvious.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

How are your city council members elected? What sorts of people are on your city council? Are they representative of your community? Check the records on council members for the past ten years or more at your city clerk's office. Check their backgrounds online, in newspaper archives, or at the library if these are not available at the clerk's office. Then compare these to census data on your community (available online or at the library). Has representation changed over time?

The Council Member's Job

Despite recent improvements in council representation, the vast majority of council members in the United States are middle class and middle aged and most are white males. As of 2001, 87.5 percent were white (down from 93.6 percent in 1986) and 77.8 percent were male (down from 84.5 percent in 1986).[18] As noted, most are paid little and must make professional and personal sacrifices to serve. Although in most communities the job is intended to be part-time, many council members, especially in larger cities, find themselves spending forty to seventy hours a week on city business. Besides their weekly council meetings, much time is taken up in committees and meetings with constituents and lobbyists. Preparing for these weekly council meetings often requires the assimilation of masses of reading material and reports with little assistance. The people they represent also expect council members to help with their problems, so much time is devoted to constituent service. Such efforts help with reelection (another demand on council members' time), so constituent service is usually taken on willingly and even eagerly. In addition to all this, effective council members need to "**work the halls**," talking to colleagues, administrators, and executives to pick up support for their pet issues. They must be careful about this, however, since city charters often forbid direct contact between council members and administrators other than the manager and mayor, and most states have **open meeting laws** that require public access to any gathering of a majority of council members except when they are discussing legal or personnel matters.

With so many demands on their time—plus the private jobs part-time council members must retain—many feel lucky just to keep up with the press of city business. For the most part, this means that they react to proposals and policies put forward by the executive, the bureaucracy, or businesses and interest groups, rather than initiating programs on their own. In other words, they tend to be followers rather than leaders.

Why do they do it? Surveys of council members report that the main motivation is community service and the spirit of volunteerism.[19] Most actually want to do good for their cities. Some are propelled by concerns about particular issues, such as growth or neighborhood or minority problems. Most get an ego boost out of being a local VIP and many enjoy the exercise of power—or at least the illusion thereof. Some may expect to further their personal careers, although not usually in politics. Except for big city mayors, most local politicians do not advance to higher office. They may, however, enhance their law practices or get better jobs through the connections they make as council members, perhaps as consultants or lobbyists or with developers. For the vast majority, however, being a council member brings little personal reward and remains primarily a way to serve their communities in the great American tradition of volunteerism.

Managers: Authority Without Accountability?

In contrast to council members, city managers are among the most powerful and least visible actors in local politics. Although the average manager may sit quietly, perhaps even wordlessly, through a city council meeting, virtually every item on the agenda will have been put there by the manager and his or her staff and virtually every decision will follow their recommendations. Sometimes a city manager takes a higher profile, lecturing the council and behaving more like a mayor than a manager, but although such publicly domineering managers were once rather common, they are now rare. Most modern managers work behind the scenes, prudently letting the council take the lead in public.

The Council-Manager System

That's more or less what the reformers who created the council-manager form of government intended. The council is to be the political element of local government, providing policy guidelines, representation, and accountability. (We've already seen that the reformers' part-time councils, elected at-large, have difficulty achieving these goals except in homogeneous cities, where representation and agreement on policy are easy.) The **city manager**, appointed by the council, is to be the objective, professional administrator, overseeing the city bureaucracy as it carries out council programs competently and efficiently. Most council-manager cities have a mayor, but unlike the executive mayor in the mayor-council form of government, the mayor in a council-manager system is basically a presiding officer who sits and votes with the council and has no separate powers.

In theory, the council-manager system concentrates power in the city council, with no checks and balances or separation of power. Although the manager is in charge of administration, the council provides policy guidance and, more importantly exercises the ultimate power to hire and fire the manager. Political scientist James Svara concludes that "the council ultimately wins all battles with the manager."[20] Battles, however, are not common in council-manager governments, where cooperation is the norm. Most issues are resolved before they ever reach the coun-

cil, perhaps because its wishes are anticipated or because contemporary city managers are so skillful at building consensus. Then again, cooperation and consensus are common in the small and middle-sized communities that most frequently use the council-manager form of government. These communities tend to be homogeneous; even if they are not, reform electoral structures ensure a council that reflects the dominant majority, manufacturing consensus by suppressing disagreement and discord.

Table 7.1

Salaries of City Officials, 2005

City	Council	Mayor	City manager	Police chief	Population in 2000
Austin	$45,000	$53,000	$188,989	$136,011	681,804
Beverly Hills, CA	$7,858	$7,858	$240,000	$165,000	35,088
Boston	$75,000	$152,885	—	$160,000	569,165
Chicago	$85,000	$192,100	—	$104,208	2,862,244
Dallas	$37,500	$60,000	$263,027	$138,623	1,210,393
Honolulu	$43,350	$112,200	$107,100	$110,200	377,260
Los Angeles	$143,837	$186,989	—	$256,155	3,845,541
Miami	$58,200	$97,000	$239,144	$188,989	379,724
Oklahoma City	$12,000	$24,000	$133,500	$115,508	528,042
Philadelphia	$98,000	$144,009	—	$140,000	1,470,151
Raleigh, NC	$12,000	$15,000	$163,250	$128,494	326,653
San Diego	$75,386	$133,100	$223,527	$171,280	1,263,756

Hiring the Manager

City councils in manager cities now hire mostly from among these professionals, announcing job vacancies and selecting from a pool of applicants, often supplemented by professional headhunters employed by councils to seek applicants. Current city employees hoping for promotion may also be included. The council reviews the resumes of the job seekers, interviews a few, and finally agrees on one. The choice is perhaps the most important decision a council makes and reflects its priorities. Councils that hire outsiders are usually pushing for administrative change, James Svara argues, while those that hire from within the city government hope to consolidate existing arrangements.[26]

Traditionally, the **hiring of managers** was open ended, subject to termination at the pleasure of the council. In the early days of the system, some managers stayed on

for decades, but today, the average tenure is about seven years. Managers in cities with less than 10,000 people have the shortest tenure, but most move to advance their careers, not because they are fired or because the local politics in such places is too hot to handle. Only 3 percent report leaving their positions involuntarily.[27] Rather than being fired, most resign when troubles arise. Nowadays, many managers are employed under a contract with a fixed term of years. Some managers feel that a contract secures their rights and at least guarantees pay for a specified period, while some councils like contracts because they provide a fixed date to review the manager's performance and a way to get rid of an unwanted manager gracefully. Outright firing can look too political, getting the council in local political trouble and giving it a bad national reputation among professional managers.

Managers at Work

The basic job of the manager is to implement council policy and oversee the operations of the city. Most substantial among a **manager's powers** are hiring and firing department heads and developing and administering the budget. With these tools, a manager can shape city government and set its agenda. The manager is usually also responsible for putting together the agenda for council meetings, including staff recommendations on various items, and, of course, the manager and his or her staff are present at the meeting to advise the council and take its direction. According to the ideals of this form of government, the manager is strictly subservient to the council, providing information, carrying out its decisions, and remaining neutral on policy and politics, especially elections.

Most managers and council members, however, readily acknowledge that such subservience and neutrality are little more than fantasy. Studies of managers and council members show that most expect the manager to play a part in policy making. In one such survey, 37 percent of managers said they initiated policies and 75 percent reported participating in policy formulation.[28] This shouldn't come as a surprise since managers are experts who employ other experts. As such, they provide information to the council, and they usually accompany their information with a policy recommendation that the council almost always approves. Of course, shrewd managers consult council members before major decisions, and most know their councils well enough to anticipate reactions to recommendations without consultation. The reformers' idealized line between policy and administration is pretty fuzzy in practice.

Managers and Councils

When councils and managers disagree, the council usually wins due to its power to hire and fire the manager, although in rare cases managers have taken their cases to the voters and survived. But such direct confrontations are unusual in the cooperative culture of the council-manager system, with its clear council majorities reflecting clear community majorities. Managers usually have no trouble discerning what is expected and delivering it. In the process, however, they may exercise consider-

able influence, and, in subtle ways, their power may be greater than that of the council —or the voters.

According to the ideals of the council-manager system, policy and administration are supposed to be separate. Policy is the council's realm; administration is the manager's. But James Svara, the leading authority on local government in America, writes that "there is not [and cannot be] a complete separation of policy administration as the discredited but tenaciously surviving model has held."[29]

Managers have substantial formal authority. Their administrative command of the city bureaucracy is virtually unhindered by the council, which is usually prohibited from even talking to city staff except through the manager. Department heads can be hired and fired by the manager without council consent. Managers generally calculate the council's reaction, knowing that if the members don't like an appointment, they can fire the manager, but getting together a majority for such an action is difficult. Usually the council views few department heads as absolutely crucial, and they may also be afraid that voters will see their intervention as political meddling. The manager's budget power is a little more constrained, with formal council approval required; yet even there, councils are limited in time and expertise.

These, along with their professionalism, are the primary **political resources of city managers**. While the council is part-time and amateur, with only general knowledge, the manager and the bureaucracy he or she commands are full-time and impressively expert. Managers and their staffs are the primary source of information for council members. They can dazzle the council with information presented in such a way as to justify their recommendations. Many council members lack the time and expertise to read staff reports critically; most don't bother, putting their trust in the professionals. The public and interest groups are competing sources of information, but they are tainted by amateurism and bias, as compared to the purported professional objectivity of city staff. Besides, the manager and staff will have presented their reports and proposals to the council in advance of meetings and so have a head start on the public and often on lobbyists as well.

Council agendas are composed almost entirely of items from the city manager's office, including reports and recommendations. The council almost always unanimously approves whatever the staff recommends. The same process applies to the budget, the council's most important annual decision. The manager and a full-time staff work on it through the year, presenting a bulky document to the council about a month before the deadline for approval. The council pokes at the document, holds public hearings, shuffles a little money around, and then approves.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Check out the agenda for a city council meeting in your community, either online or in the city clerk's office. The source for each item on the agenda should be designated. Where do most items come from? The city manager? Department heads or staff? The mayor? Council members? The community?

There's nothing wrong with this if the manager's recommendations are objective and reflect the wishes of the council and the community, as they usually do. Managers who overtly thwart the will of the council and community don't last long. Yet managers exercise great power and do not necessarily do so neutrally. Every recommendation they make to the city council is a choice. The manager's own biases (and those of her or his chosen staff) influence these choices. After all, managers are human. Some are liberal, others conservative; some are racist, sexist, or punctiliously politically correct. These attitudes may show in their recommendations and actions. "Despite professional norms that deny such influences," one study concluded, "the political ideology of city managers plays a significant role in influencing council policy."[30] But other biases come from the profession of city management itself. Perhaps because of its roots in the reform movement and the early engineer-managers, the profession tends to see local government functions as limited and physical rather than social. It also apotheosizes expertise and quantifiable facts over intuition and sometimes-unquantifiable social values. Moving traffic, for example, may be given a higher priority than preserving the social fabric of neighborhoods. The former can easily be counted; the latter cannot. Managers and their minions sometimes show contempt for citizens and even council members who may instinctively know what is right but are unable to provide charts and data.

Nor do managers stay as scrupulously out of politics as the reformers expected. In one survey, managers said they spent 17 percent of their time on politics.[31] Most keep a low profile during elections (supporting losers is fatal), but may nevertheless provide incumbent council members with crucial information or defer controversial decisions until after the election. More commonly, managers meet with community groups, give speeches, and confer with newspaper editorial boards to sell their proposals. "If you view your job the way we used to do it, shuffling papers and having meetings, you miss the boat," said Camille Barnett, a former city manager of Austin, Texas. Barnett considered herself a negotiator and facilitator, bringing together diverse groups to reach consensus. Reformers would have assumed this was the city council's role, but Barnett's council, far from being upset, took credit for the change. "We [were] always telling the manager to bring all the interest groups together in a room and work something out," said one Austin council member.[32]

Other managers acknowledge their growing role as political brokers, balancing not only members of the council, but also community groups. The bottom line for managers, however, is keeping a majority of the city council happy. "I run for re-election every time the city council meets," managers often say. In a way, this is another source of power, for managers can play different council members against each other to prevent them from banding together to form a majority in favor of firing. If those who wish to get rid of the manager have different reasons, the manager can make concessions to one or two and stay in office. Community groups are trickier for managers to keep happy because managers are professional administrators, not politicians. Except for a few, most managers prefer to keep their heads down and confine their political maneuvering to the city council. This may exacerbate the frustration of community groups that feel the manager and city government are not responding to their demands. These groups may grow angrier when they

learn they have no way to hold the manager accountable. Since the manager is not elected, she or he cannot be recalled. Only the council can remove the manager, and it is difficult, if not impossible, for community groups to persuade a majority of the council to do so. Those who seek to dismiss a manager are often seen as one-issue groups acting on their own narrow interests or they are written off as political fanatics, while the manager enjoys the protective cloak of his or her purportedly neutral professionalism.

Mayors: Leadership Without Authority?

Mayors are more difficult to generalize about than other city officials because the powers of the office vary so much from city to city and the personality and skills of particular officeholders count for so much. We can, however, distinguish between the sort of nonexecutive mayors found in the council-manager form of government and the weak and strong mayors found in the mayor-council systems.

Nonexecutive Mayors

Mayors in council-manager cities are members of the city council who preside over meetings and represent the city on ceremonial occasions. Although over half of all council-manager cities directly elect their mayors, in the remainder the mayor is chosen by the council from among its members, rotating the position every year or two. In a few cities, the mayor is the top vote winner on the council.

Mayors in council-manager cities lack executive authority to hire and fire or propose a budget, and only 11 percent may veto acts of the council.[37] The power of such **nonexecutive mayors** comes almost entirely from their title and from being the focus of attention. Beyond that, it's up to individuals to make the most of their positions. This is difficult but not impossible. The **title of mayor** really means some-

thing to most Americans, whatever the formal authority of the office. Out of ignorance or idealism, most people assume mayors are important. This assumption actually gives mayors power, even if it is only symbolic. The public respects and focuses on the mayor. So do the media, which reinforces the public bias, although media concentration on the mayor is probably less out of ignorance than convenience. After all, it is easier to interview one mayor than several council members and the media don't have to explain the role of the mayor (as opposed to that of a city manager or council member).

Surprisingly, the symbolic power of the title of mayor carries over to council colleagues who know better. Although in many cities council members are the mayor's equal, council members often look to mayors for at least some leadership, giving mayors the first opportunity to take the initiative on policies, and often expect the mayor to help steer them through controversial issues. Just by **presiding over meetings**, for example, mayors have some control over the meeting's agenda, not so much as to whether an issue is heard as to how and when it is considered and how it is resolved. The mayor may recommend referral to administration or to a committee or force a vote. As presiding officer, the mayor also calls on speakers and so can choose those who will say what she or he wants said or make the motion the mayor wants at the appropriate time.

Like council members and the public, administrators also look to mayors for at least some leadership even though few answer to the mayor alone. Managers and department heads work closely with mayors on the agendas of public meetings and rely on mayors to move programs through the council, to communicate with the public, and sometimes to mediate. In return, the mayors expect to see their priorities reflected by the administration. **Partnerships between mayors and managers** are not unusual, especially in the larger cities using the council-manager form of government. "This awkward arrangement can work remarkably well," writes Alan Ehrenhalt, "in the presence of a charismatic mayor and a detail-minded, self-effacing city manager, as was the case in San Antonio for most of the 1980s with Mayor Henry Cisneros and manager Louis J. Fox."[38]

James Svara, an authority on local leadership, observes that nonexecutive mayors assert influence by facilitating and coordinating the actions of others, including the city administration, council, and community groups. "The council-manager mayor," Svara writes, "is not limited in his or her leadership but rather is different in the kinds of leadership provided."[39] Instead of being the dominant power, this sort of mayor is first among equals, a potential facilitator with a chance to guide programs and policies. "Although these mayors lack formal powers over other officials," Svara writes, "they occupy a strategic location in the communication channels with the council, the manager, and the public."[40] Playing such a role, however, takes more than a title. Considerable skill is required, so the real power of a mayor in a council-manager system is very much dependent on the personality of the mayor.

Nonexecutive mayors can easily lose when there are conflicts. Council members can outvote them. City managers can go around them to the rest of the council or even to the public; they can also slow down the process, manipulate information, and delay implementation. When such conflicts arise, however, they are far more

apocalyptic than these tactics imply. If the mayor is no pushover, the result may be gridlock or the factions may take their fight to the public, sometimes to be resolved in elections. Public esteem for their title gives mayors an advantage in these confrontations, at least in comparison to the commonly held stereotypes of bickering council members and bureaucratic managers. But again, the personality and skills of the individual mayor are crucial for success.

Maximizing the Power of Nonexecutive Mayors

In pursuit of leadership, some council-manager cities have strengthened the office of mayor. Sometimes such change is sought by community organizations frustrated by unresponsive managers or by business interests that want a mayor who can sell the city to investors. More often, the instigators are frustrated mayors themselves. If they are sufficiently popular, greater power may be their reward, although the public, despite its expectations of mayors, is usually reluctant to increase executive authority.

In most council-manager cities, strengthening the mayor starts with **direct election** rather than selection by the city council. Election gives the mayor no added authority, but it makes public support clear and may indicate a mandate. It also ensures that the mayor is the center of media and public attention and raises expectations, since candidates universally promise to get things done rather than admitting that without executive authority the mayor is only a member of a team.

In accordance with the basic premises of the council-manager form of government, most nonexecutive mayors are expected to work only part-time and are paid accordingly. San Antonio, for example, pays its mayor $3,000 a year; the mayor of Raleigh, North Carolina, earns $15,000 per year, and the mayor of Oklahoma City gets $24,000 (see Table 7.1). Some council-manager cities, however, pay something closer to a full-time salary: Phoenix pays $62,800 per year, while Cincinnati pays $121,291, and the mayor of San Jose, California, gets $105,500. Overall, about 25 percent of cities pay their mayors less than $5,000 per year and about 25 percent pay over $48,000; salaries in the rest fall in between these figures.[41] As with council pay, more money means the mayor spends less time earning a living elsewhere and more time on public duties, which can translate into power.

The stature of some mayors has also been enhanced by authority to hire and fire their own personal aides rather than working with city staff through the manager. Nonexecutive mayors in small and middle-sized cities usually have no staff except a civil service secretary, but in larger cities, mayors employ one or more aides. The **mayor's staff** in these cities may include a press officer, budget analyst, and policy specialists.

In addition to presiding over meetings and controlling agendas, nonexecutive mayors have gained power as **leaders of the council**. In the 1970s and 1980s mayors of San Diego and San Jose, California, organized their city councils into committees to specialize on various subjects and took the power to appoint the committees and their chairs for themselves as mayor, thus gaining a modest set of rewards for council allies as well as a little more influence over policy. Mayoral powers in some cities have also been expanded to include appointment of advisory committees and com-

missions, again adding a little more patronage and a little more influence over policy. The shift to district council elections in some cities also enhanced the stature and leadership role of the mayor as the only citywide elected official.

Executive Mayors

In rare cases, council-manager mayors actually gain powers beyond these. San Jose's mayor, for example, is directly elected, earns a good salary, hires a large personal staff, presides over a districted city council, and appoints its committees. But the voters of San Jose also approved a charter amendment giving the mayor power to propose the budget and nominate the city manager. Perhaps San Jose's mayor is now more like the mayor in a weak mayor form of government rather than the traditional nonexecutive mayor in council-manager systems. San Jose's system of government is probably best described now as mayor-council-manager rather than council-manager or as an "adapted administrative city" to use the terminology of Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood.[42] Kansas City, Missouri, is another example of an adapted administrative city.

The powers of mayors vary by degree, however. In earlier chapters we distinguished between the weak and strong mayor forms of government, and in this chapter, we have considered nonexecutive mayors. While these distinctions are useful for grasping the differences among forms of government, mayoral powers vary so much that once the basic forms are understood, we almost need to look at particular cities. Figure 7.1 presents a **hierarchy of mayoral powers**, ranging from the purely titular to the substantial authority of the executive mayor, culminating with the powers of appointment, budget, and veto. Council-manager mayors have the first few powers listed, but beginning with salary and staff, mayors become more executive, gradually shading from weak to strong depending on how completely the different powers are held by the mayor. We should remember, however, that while executive mayors have greater official power, their personalities still count.

Like most of their nonexecutive counterparts, **executive mayors** gain prestige from the title of mayor and credibility from being elected. Unlike most council-manager mayors, however, they are expected to work full-time and are paid accordingly. As of 2005, the salaries of executive mayors in large cities ranged from $96,507 in Seattle to $192,100 in Chicago (see Table 7.1). These mayors also employ sizable personal staffs. But three other powers are essential for the making of an executive mayor: **appointment, budget, and veto**. A strong mayor has the authority to hire and fire department heads and often a chief administrative officer as well as to appoint members of boards and commissions. The mayor, supported by an extensive staff, proposes the budget, which must be approved by the council. The mayor may veto council action subject to override only by a two-thirds vote of the council, which may be hard to attain. Additionally, the mayor may issue executive orders, reorganize city departments, and make appointments to fill vacancies when elected offices fall vacant. Some mayors have special powers over agencies that are associated with the city but are somewhat independent, such as redevelopment, housing authorities, or even school boards in the case of Chicago and New York City.

Figure 7.1

Hierarchy of Mayoral Powers
Suggested by Susan Ronder, City College of San Francisco

Weak to strong	Specific powers
Strongest mayor (Executive mayor)	
	Veto
	Budget
	Appointment of department heads
	Appointment of commissions and boards
	Appointment of council committees
	Personal staff
	Full-time salary
	Direct election
	Control of council agenda
	Presiding at council meetings
Weakest mayor (Nonexecutive)	Title of mayor

Strong mayors, by definition, have all these powers, but they are diluted in a weak mayor form of government (remember this is distinct from nonexecutive mayors in council-manager systems). Weak mayors may appoint some city officials, but budget authority is shared with the council and other executives, and the veto is usually denied. However, the powers of a weak mayor are still greater than those of most council-manager mayors.

These powers make it clear that the executive mayor is an administrator, not just a political leader. Overseeing the day-to-day operations of city government, choosing department heads, putting together a budget, and proposing programs all require considerable management skills, yet most mayors get their jobs through their political rather than administrative ability. This suits a city's need for political leadership, but may fall short on the effective and efficient management of a large organization. A few cities, including Cincinnati and Oakland, have adopted strong mayor forms of government while retaining the office of city manager. In such cases the manager is appointed by the mayor and works under the mayor's direction.

More commonly, cities try to balance the need for both leadership and management skills through the use of a **chief administrative officer (CAO)** or by deputy mayors appointed by the mayor (sometimes with council approval) specifically for their management skills. An increasing number of cities seem to be moving in this direction, seeking to balance political leadership with professional management [43] Like city managers, CAOs oversee the daily operations of local governments and often assemble budget proposals, but while managers answer to councils, CAOs answer to mayors. Unlike managers, they do not appoint department heads and they play a lesser role in policy making, deferring to mayoral leadership on both. Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood designate mayor-council cities that have retained

a manager or added a CAO as "adapted political cities." Whereas council-manager (administrative) cities adapt by enhancing representation and leadership, mayor-council cities adapt by augmenting professional management. Other examples of adapted political (or mayor-council) cities include Atlanta, Buffalo, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, and Tampa. Today over half of all mayor-council cities function with a CAO, while only 24 percent had a CAO in 1972.[44]

Executive mayors are also distinguished from nonexecutives in their relations with the city council. Executive mayors are separate from city councils; they do not preside over and rarely even attend council meetings. Instead, the council chooses its own presiding officer, and the relationship between the two branches of local government is often more antagonistic. Mayors lose some control of agendas and meetings, although they still shape what happens by the proposals they pass along to the council, and any loss of influence is compensated for by budgetary and veto powers. The council, like legislative bodies elsewhere, spends most of its time reacting to executive proposals, while mayors, like city managers, benefit from their control over city staff and information. A singular executive—whether mayor or manager—always has the advantage of being one while multimember councils are inherently prone to disunity.

Whether executive or nonexecutive, mayors use their political skills and resources to win council approval of their programs. They lobby council members and give their allies electoral support, including endorsements and fundraising. Moreover, executive mayors even more than other sorts of mayors have the advantage of being in the media spotlight. An effective mayor uses that spotlight to further his or her program with the council.

Essential Terms

weak mayor system
city councils
long ballot
slates
machines
patronage
boss
ward heelers

assimilation
muckrakers
reform movement
short ballot
strong mayor system
veto
chief administrative officer (CAO)

Essential Terms

reform movement
social reform
Progressive movement
limits on immigration
scientific management
direct primary
nonpartisan elections
runoff election
at-large elections
short ballots
concurrent elections
isolated elections
direct democracy
initiative
referendum
recall
commission form of government

council-manager form of government
city council
city managers
civil service
competitive bidding
bias of reform
counterreform
district elections
empowering councils
stronger mayors
controlling the bureaucracy
term limits
distribution of forms of government
mayor-council-manager
adapted city
county commission or board of supervisors
county administrator

On the Internet

- The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) (www.icma.org) is a national organization for professional local government administrators.
- Check individual city websites (including your own) for information about elected officials, government structures (charters), census data, and so on.
- The Eagleton Institute of Politics (Rutgers University) (www.eagleton.rutgers.edu/e-gov/e-politicalarchive-Progressive.htm) has information on women's role in the reform movement.
- The League of Women Voters (www.lwv.org) is a nonpartisan reform group; check for state and local chapters.
- The American Immigration Home Page (www.bergen.org/AAST/Projects/Immigration/) has a history of immigration to America.
- The U.S. Bureau of the Census website, at www.census.gov, provides online access to current and past census data on immigration.
- The Geostat Center, at www.fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/, has population and economic information for U.S. states and counties from 1790 to 1960.
- Try Googling "bosses and machines" or "Tammany Hall" (the name for the New York City machine).

Notes

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Essential Terms

city councils
district elections
logrolling
at-large elections
trustees
delegates
politicos
council dependence
council pay
council staff

council committees
professionalized council
term limits
work the halls
open meeting laws
city manager
profession of city management
hiring of managers
manager's powers

political resources of city managers
abandonment of the council-manager form
nonexecutive mayors
title of mayor
presiding over meetings
partnerships between mayors and managers
direct election
mayor's staff
leaders of the council
hierarchy of mayoral powers

executive mayors
appointment, budget, and veto
chief administrative officer (CAO)
minority mayors
mayoral styles
expectations of mayors
converging forms
the adapted city

On the Internet

- The National League of Cities (www.nlc.org) is a national organization for cities focusing on public policy and lobbying.
- The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) (www.icma.org) is a national organization for professional local government administrators.
- The U.S. Conference of Mayors (www.usmayors.org) is a national organization for public policy and lobbying for mayors of cities over 30,000 in population.
- Check individual city websites (including your own) for information about elected officials, government structures (charters), census data, and so on.
- The Center for American Women and Politics (www.cawp.rutgers.edu) has information on women elected officials.

Notes

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