Can Institutional Reform Have A Lasting Impact on the Policy Agenda? Evidence from the 10-1 in Austin, TX

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Abstract: Local government agendas are largely formed by the external problems and pragmatic needs facing the city. The policy areas addressed may vary depending on the electoral system structuring city council, the main policymaking institution of local government. In 2015, a newly districted council was inaugurated after 90 years of an at-large system. Single-member district councils generally increase descriptive representation for historically underrepresented groups, but it is unclear whether they have a more diverse policy agenda. To examine the effects of this institutional reform on the city council's policy agenda by issue area and agenda size, I use a direct measure of the decade's agenda. The evidence suggests that institutional reform does result in a slightly more diverse policy agenda, but the institutional stickiness created by a relatively set jurisdiction, and the myriad problems in the political environment, may be too strong for institutional reforms to radically affect policy.

Can institutional reform change the political system at large? Political systems are "sticky" by design, change is often incremental and hard to come by. In Austin, Texas, referenda to reform the city council system from at-large to districts were on the ballot beginning in 1973, but were unsuccessful until 2012. The final plan and councilors were chosen in 2014, and the new single member district council was inaugurated in January 2015.

The reform was promoted as the means to modernize the city council, who's at-large structure was established in the Progressive Era, adhering to the values of the time. The at-large council was created to ensure transparency in elections, but eschewed representation for minorities, particularly communities of color. Despite its contemporary "weird" reputation, Austin is a southern city, and its government structure reflected entrenched white supremacist power structure for much longer than many cities, even among others in the South. The council remained at-large for 90 years, and was reformed in favor of a districted council which took office in 2015. For this reason, the selling point of single-member districts over the at-large council as representative for historically underrepresented groups was particularly strong. Districts have generally been more conducive to achieving descriptive representation for communities of color, but in this case, the reform's long-term tangible effects on policy are unclear (Hajnal 2010; Leland and Whisman 2014; Welch 1990).

Accommodating to small changes and reforms in order to preserve themselves, institutions are designed to be stable and difficult to revise, and become even more persistent the longer they are in place (Alexander 2001). An institution's resistance to change is known as its stickiness, which makes reforms increasingly difficult. The stickiness of institutions can be overwhelming to attempts at renovations to the agenda; institutions are resistant to change, and they experience built-up friction that makes policy change less likely as time goes on. Therefore,

I hypothesize institutional stickiness, or resistance to change, will overpower any abrupt, short-lived policy changes. Further, local government jurisdiction is largely captured by specific types of policy, and I expect that changing the policy areas council is able to pay attention to is difficult. Given time constraints, and the limitations of preemption at the state and national level, autonomy for local governments may be constrained to the policy areas already within local jurisdictions.

To explore the substantive policy effects of the 2014/2015 institutional reform to Austin's city council, I use a direct measure of its policy output. Since the reform was voted in November 2014 and the new council was inaugurated in January 2015, agenda items from 2015-2019 are compared to items from 2014 back to 2010. Looking to the council's meeting minutes, items are coded as observations for their policy substance, according to the Policy Agendas coding schema.

There are two sets of expectations for the effects of the institutional reform on the local agenda. First, I hypothesize that the reform had short-term impacts on the policy agenda, but that the effects were ultimately short-lived. Then, looking to categorized groups of subtopics, I hypothesize that the reform increased attention to neighborhood-oriented policies at the expense of growth-oriented and boosterism policies. Lastly, I expect that the reform allows emergent issues appears on the agenda, making it more diverse.

City Councils and Austin, TX

In the 19th century, cities were often incorporated with their local government organized into wards, which are similar to districts, though typically much smaller. Wards were represented by aldermen, popularly elected. A loyal stalwart to the ward system, Chicago maintains its 50-

wards, each represented by a single alderman (Gelfand 1975). Prior to the Progressive movement's reforms, local leaders wielded power through patronage and favors, often through relationships with the federal government (Rogowski 2016). The most infamous machine cities were New York's Tammany Hall, Chicago, and Memphis (Gelfand 1975; Trounstine 2008; Tucker 1980), led by powerful local bosses, who maintained power by bribing low-income immigrants and African Americans for their vote by paying people's poll taxes (Allard, Burns, and Gamm 1998; Key and Heard 1949). Although local leaders were often connected to leaders at higher levels, the hyper-local power wielded in cities like Chicago, just far enough away from the national government's power that a system of decentralized power flourished, through political machines.

Progressive era reforms sought to fight back against political machines that dominated cities. Reforms called for "good governance," which attempted to take power from machines and reform the city into a more administrative unit, typified in smaller city councils elected at-large in nonpartisan elections. At-large councils were celebrated by their proponents for fostering competition and boosterism in the cities, because voters chose the best from a larger pool of candidates instead stifling competition by districting an area and ensuring candidates come from a smaller area (MacCorkle 1973). At-large and ideologically similar (commission) systems were created in southern cities, urged by business groups that argued a municipality was essentially a business corporation, and should be run according to business principles (Davidson and Korbel 1981). At-large elections remained concentrated in southern and western cities through the 20th century. Western cities were typically incorporated much later than their eastern counterparts, and southern cities embraced the public-private partnerships the arrangement afforded (Bridges 1997; MacCorkle 1973; Stone 1989). Particularly for cities in the South, stamping out

representation for minorities had an added benefit (Key and Heard 1949; Welch 1990). In Texas, by the 1970s, all but 6 of its 158 cities were represented by an at-large council (Davidson and Korbel 1981).

Scholars of urban politics have consistently found that district representation is more effective for minorities in city councils to gain representation (Trounstine and Valdini 2008). Much of the impetus for reorganizing city councils to feature single-member districts over at-large members is to increase equity. Two-thirds of American cities still feature at least some at-large representation, but most major cities with populations over 200,000 have incorporated district representation as well (Moulder 2008).

National trends have long influenced the two major local legislature reorganizations of Austin, TX's city council. The "good governance" policies touted by progressive reformers were all present in Austin by 1928; nonpartisan local elections to remove local party power, at-large city councils to reduce patronage, and appointed administrative city managers to alleviate corruption in elected officials. As a southwestern city, Austin's local government system has evolved since its incorporation in 1839, influenced by national political movements, and to accommodate growth in the city, which has been steady and at times rapid. The system began with popularly elected aldermen. From 1839-1910, two alderman each represented the wards of the city; at its height, the system had 11 wards splitting up the city's neighborhoods (MacCorkle 1973). In 1910, the at-large system began, and in 1928, influenced by Progressive Movement reforms, Austin enshrined the at-large city council with four councilors elected by voters in the entire city. During this reorganization, the city also created the city manager position, which endures. The manager works on depoliticized issues balancing budgets and economic issues

separate from city council, attending council meetings but in an autonomous office from the legislature.

Although the city's population grew substantially between 1909 and 2012 as it urbanized, the city council grew by only two. Over time, more than 80 percent of all city councilors and half its mayors were elected from the same two districts (in today's district map), which make up less than twenty percent of the city's area and one tenth of the city's population (Ballí 2013). In terms of spatial representation, the at-large system helped to perpetuate inequity.

Like many American cities, Austin has a historical legacy of racial oppression and segregation. Interstate 35 splits the city and long served as the racialized border, with African American and Latinx communities forcibly segregated to its east. Under the at-large council, the city charter was rewritten in 1928, enshrining the laws of segregation by assuring public services for communities of color if they lived on the city's east side. In 1951, the top five vote earners won places on the five-seat council. That year, Arthur DeWitty came in sixth place, narrowly losing. DeWitty was a Black man and president of the local NAACP. His near win prompted city leaders to reform the structure of city council, creating "seats," which required more than 50 percent of votes for each seat to win (Davidson and Korbel 1981). Seats ensured the council remained white.

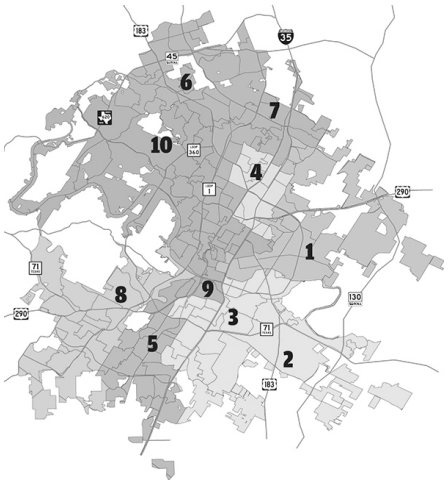
White supremacy maintained its grip on the city government throughout the next two decades. Following the tumult of the Civil Rights Movement, the seats system was altered to allow for representation of the city's minorities, but to be kept at a minority of the council. Known as the "gentlemen's agreement," racial representation was arranged on city council by the city's white leadership, ensuring a single seat for one African American and Latinx councilor each. The first Black councilor was elected in 1973, and the first Latinx in 1975. Ensuring

representation while guarding against majority for people of color, the gentlemen's agreement lasted until 2015, as no person of color won outside of the seat "reserved" for them.

In 2012, the city of Austin voted on a municipal bond to reorganize the city legislative institutional design, and was the seventh attempt to reorganize the local legislature since 1973 (Coppola 2012; Tretter 2016). In November 2014, voters chose the "10-1" plan, which divided the city into ten districts, all represented by a single councilor. The mayor, elected at-large, is the "1" in "10-1." The new councilors and mayor took office in January 2015. The 10-1 reorganization included moving local elections to even-year Novembers to coincide with state and national contests, and staggered elections for half of the council to run every other year. The 2014 election resulted in one incumbent, and the ten others including the mayor, were new to the council.

District representation was promoted as the means to expand representation for historically underrepresented and marginalized groups in Austin. At face value, the spatial make-up of the council certainly changed, but effects on policy are not as immediate. Whether districting council was the means to a more diverse agenda is the focus of this paper, as it is much more difficult to measure than the racial identities of the city's councilors.

Figure 1: Austin's 10 Council Districts Created in the 10-1 Plan



Urban Problems and Setting the Agenda

Agendas in districted councils have the potential to be more diverse, and to make room for more diverse policy. Robert Dahl's vision of agenda pluralism in city politics that eventually makes space for every significant issue (1961) is more realistically realized in a districted council rather than an at-large system, because districts not only allow space for interest group power, but for councilors to serve as advocates on behalf of a minority group. In his 1966 American Political Science Association presidential address on the role of cities in the future of democracy, Dahl identified the complexity of problems as the biggest impediment to democracy, particularly at the city level. "My private hunch is that the main obstacles to closure are in the problems themselves – in their extraordinary complexity" (Dahl 1967). To accommodate the complexity of issues that exist in the political environment and the demands of people for action (Baumgartner and Jones 2015), district representatives are less constrained by majoritarianism and have more ability to synthesize and advocate for policy solutions from within government.

District representatives have a smaller constituency than at-large councilors, thus responsiveness to problems in a district council is likely to diverge from responsiveness in the city at large. The policy agenda of government is what is prioritized by government, in other words, the issues under consideration (Cobb and Ross 1997). The agenda setting is an early stage of the policy process, the agenda is much more populous than the official policy output. An illustrative example of this at the national level is the significantly larger number of bills introduced to Congress than the number of laws passed into law. If institutional reform of government did affect the policy agenda in a substantive way, as the motivations for reform suggest, the level of attention issues prioritized by the council should change, and emergent issues should appear on the agenda for the first time.

The pluralist society that eventually considers all significant policy issues sooner or later, as government solves problems by incrementally passing policy. The friction that builds in an unresponsive system results in punctuations that disrupt the political system in a rapid attempt to fix a since unresolved problem. Policymaking in punctuations is inefficient, as it precipitates long periods of inaction on problems, until they build and become impossible to ignore. Policy punctuations often result in government overcompensating with policy, passing laws that address a problem that is subsiding or has evolved. Crime policy of the 1980s is a useful example of a policy bubble, as the punctuation of policies passed led to dramatic increases in incarceration as the crime rate fell (Bryan D. Jones, Thomas, and Wolfe 2014). Although the agenda is packed and institutions are sticky in any government system, there are two potential effects of the institutional reform leading to a districted council. The first is in the differences between the at-large and districted council, the second is in the longevity of any changes.

Districts make representation for minorities possible, because for smaller groups, gaining influence in government depends on expanding the scope of government attention. Majoritarian politics is skewed to be deferential to a majority of the population at large, but districting city council gives more leverage to minority communities and smaller organized interest groups, skewing politics in favor of minorities, if they are concentrated (Schattschneider 1975). Expanding the agenda of government expands the conflict to include the perspectives of minorities, and makes novel or increased attention to issues that have been ignored, willfully or due to a crowded agenda, more probable than before.

Getting new issues on the city agenda is difficult because it is quite full already, and policymakers have limited time and attention. Much of policymaking is incremental change; in lieu of rebuilding anew with each new policy, or grabbing an issue from the root each time,

policy instead acts as a branch, modifying existing law (Lindblom 1959; Davis, Dempster, and Wildavsky 1966). The incremental view of policymaking has been disproven for most issues aside from budgetary policymaking; particularly for issues not yet considered on government's formal agenda but might linger and worsen,

The "formal agenda" is that of government; at the local level, the agenda is what is discussed, debated, and passed in city council meetings. The issues at hand on the formal agenda do not necessarily reflect the "societal agenda," the problems and demands of constituencies (Cobb and Elder 1983; Cobb and Elder 1971). It is unclear whether the formal agenda changes in the reform from at-large councils to districts, and whether the formal agenda is more congruent with the societal agenda following the reform.

It is difficult for policymakers and outside groups alike to succeed at getting new issues on the formal agenda. A policy window opens to allow attention to be paid to the problem in policy, ideally resulting in passage of a solution to address the problem (Kingdon 1995). Because the agenda is so full however, circumstances must arise that force the policy windows open and compel government to act. In Dahl's pluralist urbanism, interest groups advocate on behalf of issues, bringing them to the attention of council. Expanding the council and focusing individual councilors' attention to individual districts ought to diversify the agenda by opening policy windows to more issues, previously ignored.

Over time, the status quo of inaction builds up friction for the policy issues and problems not being addressed on the formal agenda. As pressure to address a problem mounts to a force impossible to ignore, policy is rapidly passed in a short time period, overcompensating in a policy punctuation (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). When councilors' primary constituencies shrink from the city at large to a single district within the city, outside pressure groups from the

district likely are able to affect their councilor's attention. Regardless of whether this increased attention leads to an immediate change in council's policy output, the policy agenda of the council is affected.

Sticky Institutions

Institutional stickiness is measured by whether it can respond directly to problems. Government responsiveness is not automatic; change is often slow as friction builds throughout the policy process, from agenda setting to passage into law (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Jones, Sulkin, and Larsen 2003). Even at the outset of the policy process, agenda space is severely limited and is outpaced by problems seeking policy solutions that compete for the attention of policymakers (Bryan D. Jones and Baumgartner 2005). The stickiness of institutions, due to an agenda largely determined by long-standing problems and the jurisdiction of the institution itself, combined with the cognitive costs of policymakers facing decisions on which make a radically different agenda unlikely in local governance.

Institutions may not respond to complex problems, particularly when the attention of government is elsewhere. Stickier institutions contain more friction when they feature a variety of veto points (Prindle 2012). Sticky institutions are slow to change, and are particularly resistant to institutional reform. Once the institution does get reformed, it is unclear whether the agenda is remains sticky. Of course, it is easier to affect the agenda than the policies passed further down the policy process since there are fewer institutional costs in the earlier stages, but status quo bias can make agenda access difficult for minorities at any stage of the policy process (Bryan D. Jones, Theriault, and Whyman 2019).

Legitimacy is built through continuity, the norms and rules that shape the rules of the game. The at-large council in Austin was 90 years old, which ensured a solidified and sticky

institution with long institutional memory. Friction in the political environment affects both policy fortunes and the longevity of reform by ensuring that councilors must "selectively attend to the elements that conform to previous beliefs and preferences" (Zahariadis 2016). Existing friction is bolstered in the political system by the packed agenda and the limited time and attention span of government leaders ensures difficulty in getting new issues on the agenda. Agenda access is difficult enough for issues, a structural reorganization of government's institutions is met with much more resistance.

Social science on both individual and organizational decision making processes show a dependence on heuristics, or shortcuts that reduce complexity in assessing probabilities and outcome predictions (Tversky and Kahneman 1975). Reliance on heuristics and the cognitive consequences of institutional stickiness, such as the policymakers and bureaucrats in the organization "identifying with the means," or emotionally and cognitively identifying with operating procedures of the institutions, makes the status quo even more difficult to break (Jones 2003). Built-up friction means that stickiness acts as heuristic, permitting a limited framework for changing the agenda, even for reforms to the institution.

The stickiness of institutions is not to be read as normatively negative; institutions were created and intended to be slow to change, methodical in information processing, and dependent on stability (Bryan D. Jones and Baumgartner 2005). However, the public-facing motivations for reforming local government systems often emphasize this friction as gridlock. The agenda is a direct source in order to explore the success of institutional reform in making agenda access more attainable for historically marginalized groups.

Controlling the Agenda

Government's policy agenda is not only crowded and difficult to alter, but the local agenda is fairly set by jurisdiction control. Local government's power originates from the state, and power of city councils and other local legislatures are dependent on the state charter classifying cities by population and taxes (Leland and Whisman 2014). The forces determining which issues available for policymakers' consideration are institutional, cultural, and symbolic (Cobb and Ross 1997). The power of issue avoidance, to deny an issue agenda space, is held by the state over local governance, as well as forces at the local level; issue opponents in an at-large council have more issue avoidance power since the at-large councils are typically smaller in number, and each councilor contends with the entire city (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Crenson 1972).

The power to keep issues off the formal agenda, or the power of negative agenda control, consistently through the city's business community. The influence of business leaders in city politics is not endemic solely to Austin, but the obscuring of lines delineating the public and private is a feature of most cities' political systems (Pierre and Peters 2012; Schattschneider 1960; Stone 1989). Typically, the business community prefer at-large council systems, because the influence commanded by corporate wealth is less important in districts that may have different social strata and concentrated wealth (Banfield and Wilson 1963). If districting does prompt a shift in policy or substantive representation, there should be a perceptible decline in the influence of business interests following the reform.

Reforming city councils from at-large to district representation are typically proposed to increase opportunities for representation for historically marginalized groups, such as women and communities of color, although the effects in substantive policy changes are conflicting (Preuhs 2006; Trounstine and Valdini 2008). Districts increase the potential for emergent

policies to appear on the formal agenda, since the issues important to historically underrepresented groups can exist in the political environment for years without making it. Descriptive representation traditionally refers to people of color, women, and other historically underrepresented communities being represented in government by members of their community (Preuhs 2006). The concepts of descriptive and substantive representation are distinct and should not be conflated; descriptive representation refers to the characteristics of the representative themselves, and whether they reflect the district's constituency. Substantive representation is the policy output of the representative, and whether the policies they sponsor and support reflect the interests of the district (Swain 1993; Tate 2003).

Change to the political structure is rare, enduring change is even more uncommon. The electoral system can affect city's politics, so efforts to reform the electoral system represent the desire to change distribution of power (Banfield and Wilson 1963). As previously discussed, districting the city council from an-large system widens the dispersal of power and perspective, which should decrease unanimity in council votes, and increase the policy areas addressed. Ideally, once the council is reformed in favor of more diversity, so too do the issues considered by the government. However, policy effects on the formal agenda resulting from institutional reform are not inevitable due to the powerful buildup of stickiness that work to constrain which organizational changes are possible, and limit the actions of individuals.

Data

Austin, Texas is a reform city chosen as the agenda for this study due to its history as a reform city. The 10-1 reorganization provides an opportunity for a natural experiment to examine how policy is affected. For this, I use a direct measure of the council agenda, items from each

city council meeting's minutes, and code them for policy substance. Each coded item is an observation in the dataset, which allows me to study the before-and-after effects of institutional reform on policy.

The city council minutes were coded by each agenda item according to the Policy Agendas Project coding scheme. Since 2016, the Austin Agendas Project has been coding each city council meeting in the city's 150-year history. The project's codebook was adapted from the Policy Agendas Project national codebook and the Danish Agendas Project, the local project's counterpart from Denmark. The codebook features the original codebook's 20 major topics, in addition to a cultural policy topic, which includes subtopics on music venues and festivals, museums, theatres, and general cultural events in the city. Within the major topics, 200 more fine-grained subtopics offer much more specific substantive value in categorizing policy content.

The 10-1 reform was implemented in January 2015 when the new councilors and mayor were inaugurated. Each item on the council agenda was collected and coded for its policy substance. The entirety of the agenda grew slightly in the five-year period following the 10-1, the total items grew by 816, and 163 on average. In terms of agenda size, the two largest years are 2015 and 2016, the two immediately following the reform, and the next largest are 2013 and 2014, which both precede the reform and follow the initial 2012 decision to change the city's electoral system. While not necessary a massive transformation, the substance of the policy discussed in these items may reveal otherwise.

Figure 2: Total Agenda Items by Year, 2010-2019

2010	2,642	*2015*	3,447
2011	2,513	*2016*	3,455
2012	2,889	*2017*	2,632
2013	3,227	*2018*	2,749
2014	3,191	*2019*	2,995

Pre- 10-1 Totals	14,462
Avg.	2892.4
After 10-1 Totals	15,278
Avg.	3055.6

Methods

The complete agenda shifted moderately following the 10-1 reform, and may have increased in preparation of the shift as well. The complete agenda of council includes all policy topics, including items with no policy content, largely from the citizen communication period held during regular meetings when residents are able to present to the council for a short time on the topic of their choice. The complete city agenda is substantially comprised of policy on urban and housing policy and government operations (50%), a second class of major topics including transportation, public lands and parks, environment, and energy; and finally, policy areas that if considered on the formal agenda at all, appear sporadically or in consistently low number. This last class includes science and technology, defense, social policy, and education.

To focus on the most important policy issues facing the city, I first extracted the observations into subtopics from major topic. Then, relevant subtopics were categorized to show the scope and breadth of the local agenda. The most populated categories are city governance, neighborhood-oriented policies, and utilities, revealing the scope of local government's jurisdiction. Subtopics are from divergent major topics; neighborhood-oriented policy is essential for local governance, and its relevant issues encompass policy reflecting housing, transportation, and public lands in the original codebook. Since local government priorities deviate from typical national government jurisdiction, categorization spanning several major topics is possible.

Figure 3: Categories of the Local Agenda

Category	Subtopics/ Content		
City Governance	Regulation and control of local governments, local administration, city council, government operations, intergovernmental relations, civil service, nominations and appointments, contracts, public buildings, elections and campaigns	*Law & Crime*	Courts, police and fire department, family questions
Race	Racial discrimination, ethnic/racial celebrations and commemoration	*Education*	Libraries, public schools, higher education
Neighborhood	Neighborhood plans and associations, paths and sidewalks, rental properties and tenants' rights, parks and recreation department, historical places, and cemeteries, water resources, affordable housing	*Utilities*	Environment, drinking water, wastewater, recycling, animal and plant protection, energy, electricity, alternative and renewables, energy conservation, air pollution and climate change, gas and oil
Growth	Budget, macroeconomics, homeowners' market, purchase and sale of property, urban housing, urban and housing	*Culture*	Culture, music venues, museums, cinemas, theaters
Connectivity	Transportation, public transit, roads, airports, truck and automobiles, tech and communications, telecommunication, computer industry	*Local Business*	Business, recovery and disaster, sports and games, regulation of local trade
Care	Health and human services, public health, social work and voluntary associations, childcare, homelessness		

Using the categorized policy areas, I then tested agenda diversity. To do so, I used two common entropy scores, Shannon's H and the Herfindahl index. Both were normalized to a scale from 0 to 1. Shannon's H was developed to study taxonomy and diversity of species of flora and fauna in the hard sciences, while the Herfindahl index is regularly utilized in economics to show market competitiveness. From the two diversity tests, we can deduce the variation by major topics the city council focuses on through items discussed in meetings.

Shannon's H is used to test homogeneity and diversity, often in taxonomy and natural sciences. For the index, the higher the proportion, the higher the homogeneity; lower values indicate more diversity and higher values indicate more homogeneity (Ramezani 2012). The Herfindahl index is inverted to reflect the same relationship as Shannon's H. Although this index is most often used to describe markets in economics, Herfindahl's index can be used to study

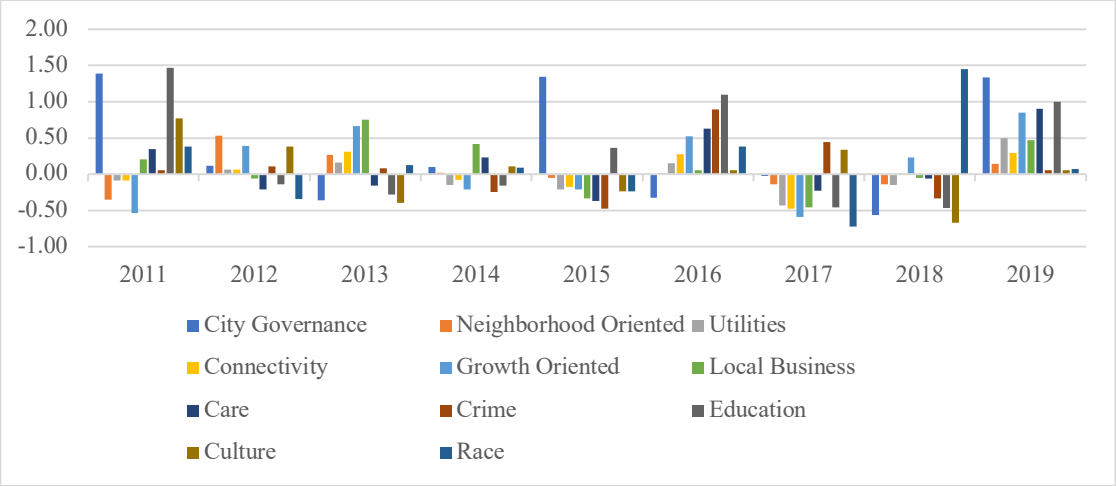
grouping in political science, particularly useful in studying concentrated power and elections (Boydstun, Bevan, and Thomas 2014). Since the two indices measure diversity in opposing scales, they were normalized as a validity test to mirror each other in analyses.

Results

Each policy area is represented by council throughout the decade, and most follow a consistent level and share of attention. The district council representatives were inaugurated in the first meeting of 2015, so the beginning of the year is considered the shift in agenda control. Instead of representing a turning point in the agenda, 2015 shows an overwhelming spike in city governance policy, which siphoned attention from the rest of the agenda. The only other category that increased in the new council was education, a policy area that is considered consistently by local government, though sharing its jurisdiction with the state and national government.

In 2015, city governance policy, which includes much of the administration of local government institutions, including city council itself, intergovernmental relations, and items that denote the necessary administrative shifts in a reorganization, such as nominations and appointments of new bureaucrats across the government. In 2015, attention to city governance increased by 134%. The following year, however, attention to city governance policy declined until 2019. At the expense of nearly every other policy category, the city council spent much of its attention on government reorganization. Instead of representing a sea change in the agenda of local government, 2015 shows a year with a profound level of attention on government institutions, instead of policy affecting the rest of the city.

Figure 4: Percent Change in Policy Attention to Issue Area, 2010-2019



This reform year was anomalous, however. In the at-large period preceding the 2015 reform, the agenda is more varied in the changes to each policy area. Following 2105, changes for each policy area are mostly positive or negative for the year, with a few exceptions. The exception areas, education in 2015, crime and culture in 2017, and growth and race in 2018, are the lowest four categories in terms of attention level by council. Whereas city governance issues are considered at least 200 times per year in the sample, the most any of these four issues was considered was crime in 2017 (104 observations).[1] Following the district reform in council, the agenda may be more diverse, but changes to attention become more radical year to year, which may be detrimental for problems in these areas and the communities that must wait years for them to make the local agenda.

Figure 5: Attention to Bottom Four Policy Areas, 2016-2019

	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Crime	72	104	69	73	*774*
Education	63	34	18	36	*324*
Culture	41	55	18	19	*431*
Race	40	11	27	29	*231*
Total Obs.	*2992*	*2285*	*1685*	*2590*	*25197*

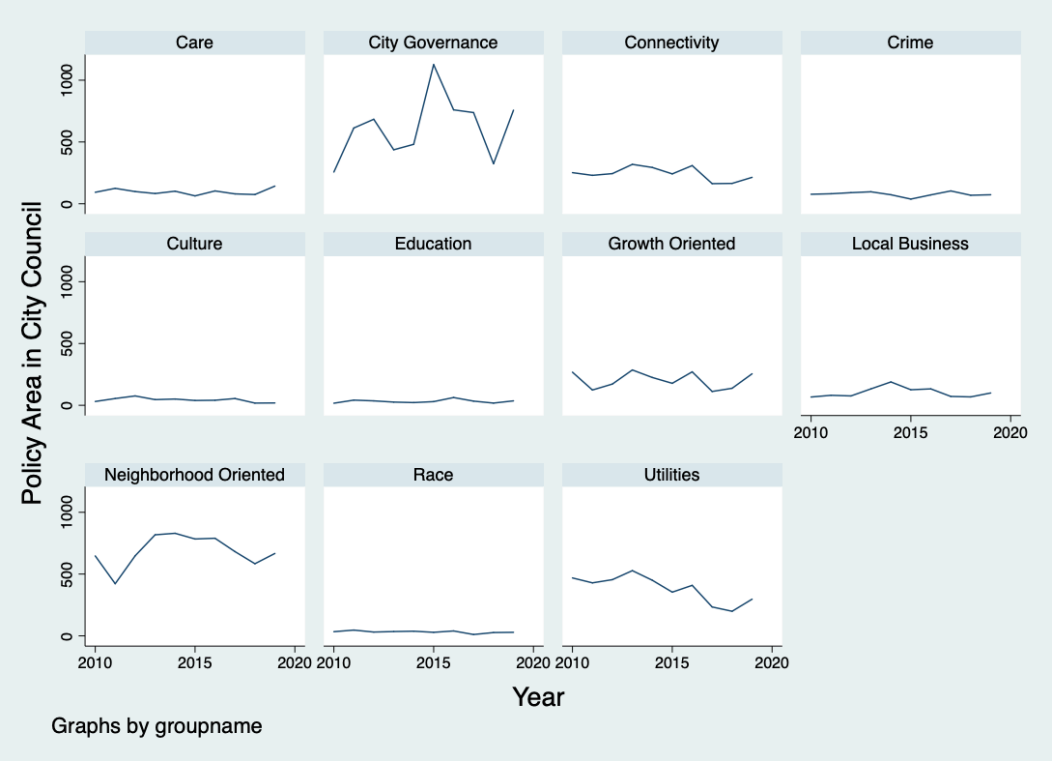
[1] See Figures A and B for full observation counts and policy area percent change by year.

Questions of neighborhood-oriented policies, city governance, and utility policy emerge as the most prioritized policy areas on the agenda. Reforming the city's electoral system certainly consumed much of the council's attention until 2015. The outgoing at-large council set up institutions to assist in the change, and the new council needed to formalize its structure and various offices, including appointing community leaders and officials to a variety of local boards and commissions. However, the most important issue throughout was in neighborhood-oriented politics. This includes policies on renting, including tenant protections and short-term rentals, affordable housing, district plans, as well as parks and pools.

As discussed above, the policy areas with the smallest attention levels are education, culture, and race. The policy areas of education and race are among the strongest indicators of studying the policy effects of descriptive representation at face-value, as these areas are closely associated with resource redistribution. However, these areas are not significantly different from the pre-reform at-large council.

Visually, city governance is a striking category. There is a clear distinction in pre and post-reform in council prioritizing policy on the city government itself. It is the only category with such a clear distinction between and following the reform, since the electoral system itself was the focus. However, the 10-1 districting plan was intended to have downstream consequences, and the clear delineation in city governance is not observable in the other categories on the policy agenda.

Figure 6: City Agenda by Topic Groups, 2010-2019

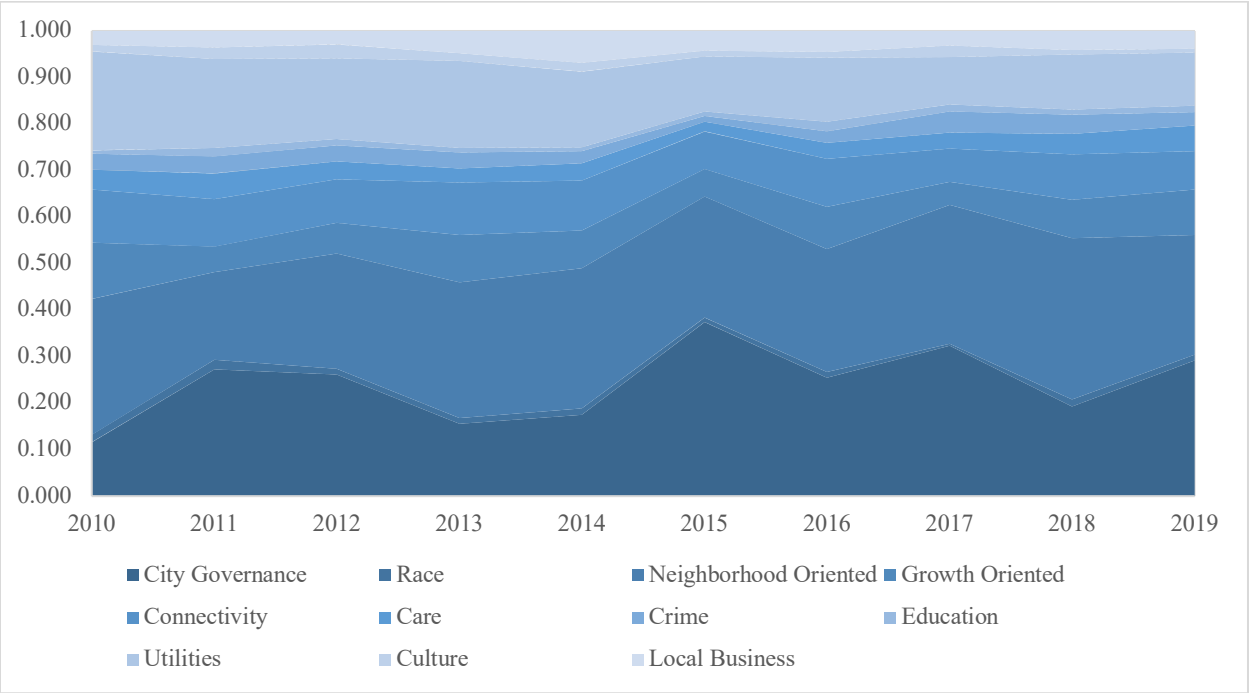


Growth-oriented policies, including policies on macroeconomic policies, the market for homeowners such as property taxes, and general urban/housing policies. Growth-oriented policies focus on fiscal plans for addressing growth. Population growth was positive throughout the decade, total population grew at least 1 percent from the year before, representing thousands of new residents in the city. Growth-oriented and local business policy, though imperative for a city experiencing growth in population and economic indicators like median new-home cost, do not overwhelm the council's attention on the traditional policy areas that comprise neighborhood-focused policies.

Growth and business policies are endemic to at-large councils, since the influence of business leaders is typically much more concentrated in an at-large council where each councilor is concerned with the well-being of the city as a whole. In a reform, we expect growth and business policies to decline in attention, and for this decline to become the norm in a districted council. These policy areas do decrease initially in 2015 due to city governance policy

consuming a third of the entire agenda, but rebound the year after, and are not consistent following trends in politics and acting in accordance with the sticky institutions of city council.

Figure 7: Proportions of City Agenda by Policy Group, 2010-2019



Measures of agenda diversity show the variation in what council talks about each year. I used normalized measures of Shannon's H and Herfindahl. Shannon's H shows a highly diverse agenda with smaller units, closest to 0. An agenda of 1 in the normalized scale reveals a completely homogenous agenda. Conversely, for the normalized Herfindahl index, a homogenous agenda returns a value of 1, and a completely heterogenous diverse agenda is a 0.

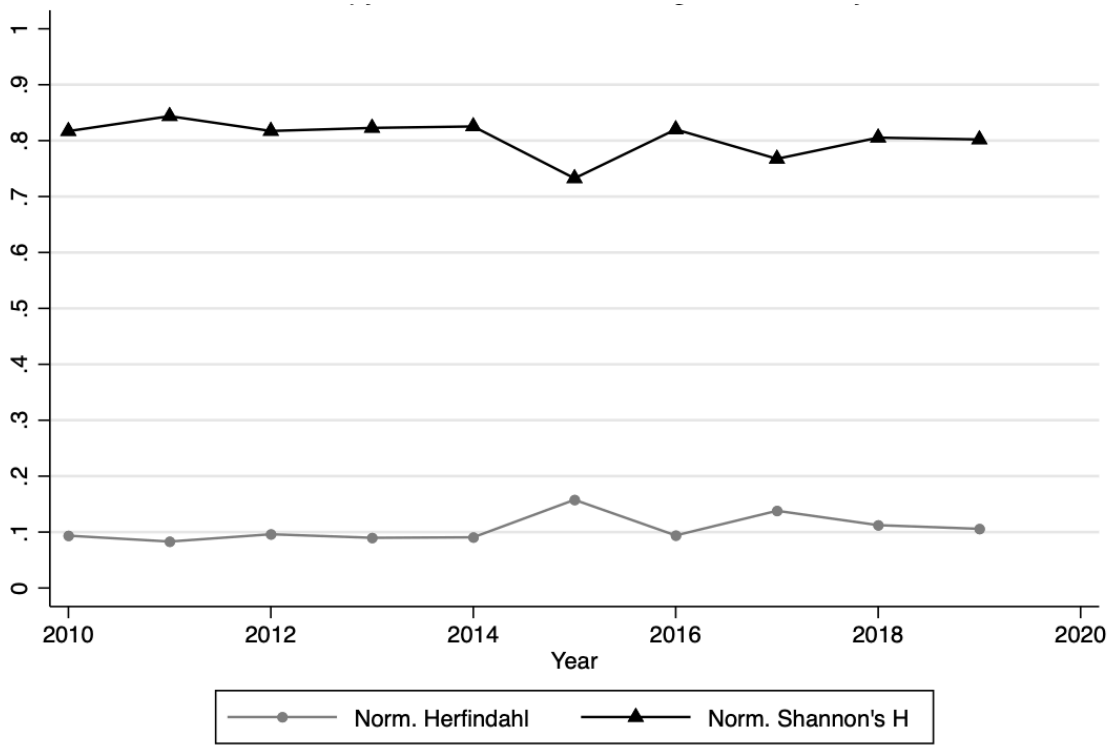
The pre-reform at-large council's agenda was on average more homogenous than the districted agenda, but only slightly[2]. The average Shannon's H score for the at-large council is 0.7627, and .7400 for the districted council. Similarly, the Herfindahl index shows a lower

[2] See Appendix Figure C for full figure of agenda diversity results.

number for the at-large council at 0.911, indicating a more diverse agenda following the reforms at 0.1192. Measures of agenda diversity follow the face-value observations made from counts of observations in each policy category, as well as changes to the categories' proportions of the agenda.

If the agenda were to radically change, there ought to be years of disruption as many emergent issues appear on the council agenda. Emergent issues would become incorporated and overtake the old agenda items, to become institutionalized over the next few years. The reforms were implemented in 2015, which indeed had the most diverse agenda in the decadal sample. Given the changes to policy area proportions that year, it is clear that the reform to the government's electoral system caused a significant change to the policy agenda. However, long-term changes following the 2015 reform are less evident.

Figure 8: Diversity Indices of Agenda, 2010-2019



Each two agenda diversity measures mirrors the other at opposing ends of the scale. Both show the seismic shift in 2015, immediately following the 10-1 reform. The return to a more homogenous agenda is swift; the 2016 agenda is at similar levels to the at-large council, and the years following are consistent. Measures of agenda diversity show more evidence that the reform had a significant impact on the 2015 agenda in its immediate wake, but long-term changes are much less clear.

The constraints of local government are shaped by national and state government and the immediate needs of service provision. These constraints are what cause sticky institutions, and further restrict the types of policies local government can engage with. Therefore, it is possible that the institutions reflect stickiness using these measures, but require a more fine-grained look to find true changes in policy direction and resource redistribution within the policy areas, which would signal true policy change as well. In terms of the issues addressed by council, the effects did not stick, because the institution itself and its set jurisdiction is so powerful.

Conclusions and Discussion

Reforming the local electoral system from at-large to districts on city council were intended to expand representation for the whole city. The district representatives have a dual responsibility; councilors make policy for the whole city while representing the needs of their district constituents as well. Reforming council's structure should affect not only the spatial representation of council or the racial and gender demographics depending on district populations, but there ought to be impacts on the formal agenda of council. I find that the effects on the agenda are quite small, and largely limited to the reform year.

Overall, the potential for emergent issues to emerge is better in a single-member district system, because the agenda becomes slightly more diverse after the district reform. The changes to the policy agenda are short lived and comprised mostly of increased attention to city governance policy, which is mostly internal. Further, the jurisdiction of local government is set, and the agenda of local policymakers is full. The issues local governments can address are often restricted by the state, and emergent policy areas must contend with immediate needs of land use and utility policy. The agenda became slightly more diverse following the 2015 reform, but the trends in attention change became more consolidated.

Further research is needed for a more fine-grained look into the local government agenda. Within areas of neighborhood-oriented, utilities, growth, and local business policy, there are questions of direction that deserve a longer look. Although government may continue its focus on these issues within the set jurisdiction that has endured throughout the previous electoral system, the new districted council may make long-term changes within its set agenda. For example, at-large councils have a reputation for allowing excessive influence of business leaders, and pass policies that focus on central business districts and wealthy areas at the expense of others. In districted councils, attention is much more spatially dispersed, but this does not reflexively convey that districted councils pay less attention to these policy areas, simply that resources afforded are more dispersed between the city's districts.

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Appendix

Figure A: Categories of Local Governmental Agenda, 2010-2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
City Governance	257	613	684	437	481	1126	760	738	324	757	*6177*
Neighborhood Oriented	647	422	648	818	830	784	790	682	584	667	*6872*
Utilities	469	429	455	528	450	354	409	234	199	297	*3824*
Connectivity	252	230	244	319	294	242	309	163	165	214	*2432*
Growth Oriented	268	124	172	286	225	178	271	112	138	255	*2029*
Local Business	67	81	76	133	189	126	133	72	68	100	*1045*
Care	93	125	99	83	102	64	104	80	75	143	*968*
Crime	77	81	90	97	73	38	72	104	69	73	*774*
Education	17	42	36	26	22	30	63	34	18	36	*324*
Culture	31	55	76	46	51	39	41	55	18	19	*431*
Race	34	47	31	35	38	29	40	11	27	29	*231*
Total	*2212*	*2249*	*2611*	*2808*	*2755*	*3010*	*2992*	*2285*	*1685*	*2590*	*25197*

Figure B: Percent Change of Local Government Agenda, 2010-2019

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
City Governance	1.39	0.12	-0.36	0.10	1.34	-0.33	-0.03	-0.56	1.34
Neighborhood Oriented	-0.35	0.54	0.26	0.01	-0.06	0.01	-0.14	-0.14	0.14
Utilities	-0.09	0.06	0.16	-0.15	-0.21	0.16	-0.43	-0.15	0.49
Connectivity	-0.09	0.06	0.31	-0.08	-0.18	0.28	-0.47	0.01	0.30
Growth Oriented	-0.54	0.39	0.66	-0.21	-0.21	0.52	-0.59	0.23	0.85
Local Business	0.21	-0.06	0.75	0.42	-0.33	0.06	-0.46	-0.06	0.47
Care	0.34	-0.21	-0.16	0.23	-0.37	0.63	-0.23	-0.06	0.91
Crime	0.05	0.11	0.08	-0.25	-0.48	0.89	0.44	-0.34	0.06
Education	1.47	-0.14	-0.28	-0.15	0.36	1.10	-0.46	-0.47	1.00
Culture	0.77	0.38	-0.39	0.11	-0.24	0.05	0.34	-0.67	0.06
Race	0.38	-0.34	0.13	0.09	-0.24	0.38	-0.73	1.45	0.07

Figure C: Diversity Indices for the City Council Agenda, 2011-2019

	Year	*Normalized Shannon's H*	*Normalized Herfindahl Index*
At-large	2010	.7693	.0930
	2011	.7901	.0823
	2012	.7637	.0987
	2013	.7507	.0920
	2014	.7399	.0894
SMD	2015	.6763	.1553
	2016	.7514	.0979
	2017	.7237	.1347
	2018	.7587	.1025
	2019	.7901	.1058