TWO DECADES OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CITY COUNCILS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The men and women chosen by their fellow citizens to govern America's cities and towns play an essential role in ensuring that local governments are meeting community needs and in shaping the quality of the democratic process. Despite their important work at the frontlines of American democracy, we know relatively little about those who serve on America's city councils.

Who sits on city councils in this country? Why do they run for office? What are the problems and challenges city council members experience, and how do they assess their performance? In 2001, the National League of Cities commissioned a study to examine these and other questions about city councils in the United States and to determine how councils and their members have changed over the past two decades, drawing on earlier NLC surveys in 1979 and 1989.

The results of this study reveal that:

- City councils continue to grow more diverse in racial and ethnic terms with the percentage of people of color serving on city council doubling from 1979 to 2001 from 7 percent to 13 percent.
- Representation of women on America's city councils increased in all three city size categories (small: population 25,000-69,999; medium: population 70,000-199,999; and large: population 200,000 and up) between 1989 and 2001, although there was no more gender diversity among council members in 2001 than in 1979.
- Council members are a well educated group; three-quarters (75%) had a college degree in 2001, and two in five (40%) had a professional or graduate degree.
- As in previous surveys, council members reported that the personal costs of their service are high, both in expenses for campaigning and in the loss of time for family and other work.
- Council members typically receive little or only modest compensation for their work, and two out of three (66%) said they would welcome and increase in pay. Only 2 percent of council members from small cities (population: 25,000-69,999) and 7 percent of those from medium-sized cities (70,000-199,999) receive $20,000 or more in salary. Among those from large cities (200,000 and up), three-quarters of council (73%) members receive $20,000 or more.
- Large majorities of council members rated their own performance as good or excellent in 2001. Effectiveness ratings tended to be lower in large cities than in small and medium-sized cities.
- When asked what factors limit the effectiveness of city councils and create problems for city government, council members cited state and federal government controls, as well as polarization within their communities over various issues.

The 2001 study is based on a mail questionnaire completed by a random sample of 664 council members in cities with populations of 25,000 and higher. The results were compared with similar studies conducted by the National League of Cities in 1979 and 1989 to ascertain historical trends.

I. INTRODUCTION: METHOD AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

The foundation of democracy in the United States is the institutions of local government. The men and women chosen by their fellow citizens to govern among them and with them determine not only

what their governments do but also the shape the quality of the democratic process. It is important to know about the men and women who serve as legislators in the frontlines of American democracy, and how they think about the role they fill and the job they're doing. Who sits on city councils in the United States? Why do council members run for office, and whom do they represent? What are the problems that council members experience and how do they assess their performance? This study was undertaken to continue to add answers to questions such as these about city councils in the United States and to determine how council members have changed over the past two decades. In 1979, a survey of council members was undertaken by the National League of Cities, and that survey was replicated in 1989. In 2001, another survey was conducted. The purpose was to measure change and to examine new issues regarding the roles, relationships, and performance of councils in cities over 25,000 in population. The survey instrument incorporated many items from the earlier surveys. Some items that are now being well covered in other NLC surveys were omitted—particularly those that deal with policy issues, problems, and fiscal affairs—and questions from other questionnaires which have been used in studies of city government has been added. This report focuses on the items that have been covered in the previous reports, *A National Survey of City Council Members: Issues in Council Leadership* (1979) and *A Survey of America's City Councils: Continuity and Change* (1989).

The respondents are a cross-section of the members of councils in cities over 25,000 in population, the same population cutoff used in previous studies. Cities below this size were excluded on the grounds that the conditions in these cities are distinct and should be studied separately. In the analysis of the data, council members will be divided into three categories: 25,000-69,999; 70,000-199,999; and 200,000 and over. For simplicity, we shall refer to the three categories as small, medium, and large since these terms accurately label the relative size of the cities included in this study. It is recognized, however, that cities in the "small" category are quite sizeable in comparison with the vast majority of cities and towns that have less population. There are over three times as many cities in the 2,500 to 25,000 population range alone as there are cities over 25,000 in population.

Each of the studies has used a different approach to drawing a sample of council members to be surveyed using a mail questionnaire. In 1979, there was modest oversampling of cities in the larger size categories. In 1989, the same number of respondents was chosen in each of the three size categories and represented substantial oversampling of the larger cities. In 2001, a random sample of the council members in all cities over 25,000 was selected with no oversampling. The population range and number and percent of respondents in each of the surveys are as follows:

Respondents by City Size

	1979	1989	2001
Small: 25,000 - 69,999	58% (485)	31% (276)	69% (455)
Medium: 70,000 - 199,999	27% (226)	36% (325)	22% (144)
Large: 200,000 or larger	15% (125)	33% (296)	9% (56)
Unknown*		8	9
Total	836	905	664
Response rate	56%	44%	33%

*Cases with unreadable code numbers for which the population could not be determined.

Oversampling supports more extensive analysis of respondents within each of the three population categories but makes it more difficult to generalize about the characteristics, attitudes, and preferences of council members generally. Consequently, caution must be taken in comparing the total results from the three surveys. The reader will be alerted when the average response for all respondents in the previous surveys is misleading because there is considerable variation in results by size of city. To reiterate the point made earlier, the average responses in the 2001 survey reflect the average result for a random sample of all council members in cities over 25,000 in population. Further discussion of the methodology for the study is presented in Appendix 1.

Some attitudes and features of the experience of serving on the city council will be uniform in all types of cities, but others will vary with the size of the city and/or the form of government used. The following is the breakdown of respondents by form of government.

Respondents by Form of Government

Form	Number	Percent
Council-Manager	388	58%
Mayor-Council	251	38%
Other	28	4%
Total	664	100%

There are too few respondents from cities that use other forms of government to generalize about them, and they will be excluded when respondents are divided by form of government. The council members from other forms will be included, however, when variation is examined by size of city or when the characteristics of all elected officials are being considered.

The number of respondents from each of the two major forms of city government reflects that a higher proportion of cities over 25,000 in population use the council-manager form government. The use of the two major forms of government among study cities is not equal across regions in the United States. (See Table I.1) The council-manager form is widely used in the west in cities of all sizes. In the northeast, cities tend to use the mayor-council form, and the opposite tendency is found in the south. The Midwest is evenly divided between the two forms in small cities, but larger cities are more likely to use the mayor-council form. Thus, to some extent, when generalizing about mayor-council cities, the statements are also to some extent generalizations about coldbelt cities, since 77% of the mayor-council respondents are from the northeast and midwest. The generalizations about council-manager cities

cover a greater geographic area. They are less likely to be found in the northeast, since 92% of the council manager cities are in the Midwest, south, and west.

Table I.1: Respondents by Region, City Size, and Form of Government, 2001

	Total		Small		Medium		Large	
	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council
East	29	65	26	40	3	16	0	9
Midwest	100	129	82	89	14	27	4	13
South	179	42	63	25	14	10	2	7
West	176	17	108	9	54	3	14	5
Total	384	253	279	163	85	56	20	34
	n=637							

The respondents reflect the full array of city councils in cities over 25,000 in population that use the council-manager and mayor-council form of government.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

The composition of city councils reflects the interaction of two aspects of local elected leadership. On the one hand, council members resemble the characteristics of the community they serve and the diversity of groups in it. On the other hand, those who run for elected office are different from citizens generally because of their high level of interest in community affairs and their willingness to devote a considerable amount of time to working for their cities. As the leadership stratum, they are likely to be higher than average in measures of social class and in length of time in the city. This blend is evident in the profile of council characteristics. The profile of the council is affected somewhat by the size of the city, the form of government used, and nature of the council member's constituency, whether it is district or at-large.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The composition of councils continues to change, with slightly more women than in 1989 (although slightly less than in 1979), more African-Americans and other minorities, and a higher average age.

In general, the composition of councils becomes more diverse as the size of the city increases. The degree of diversity in cities related to the form of government, method of election, and region depends to some extent on which personal characteristic of members is examined. Council-manager governments have slightly more women and fewer racial minorities on the council than mayor-council cities. Council members elected from districts are more likely to be from minority groups and are slightly younger, on average, and are equally likely to be female as council members elected at-large. The proportion of female council members is highest in western cities although regional differences are slight. African-Americans are found most commonly among members in southern cities; and other minorities (Hispanics, Asians, etc.) have the largest share of council seats in western cities. Each of the

demographic categories—sex, race, and age—will be examined in more depth.

GENDER

The proportion of female respondents is presented in Table II.1. On the surface, it would appear that the extent of representation of women has dropped slightly from 1979 and increased since 1989. These results could be affected by the different approach to sampling in each survey. The best indication of the change in the representation of racial and ethic minorities[1] is to examine change within each city size category. In prior surveys, women were found in higher proportions on the council in large cities, and these cities were oversampled in the previous years. Although the results from the 1979 survey were not broken down by the size of the city, comparison is made between the 1989 and current results in Table II.1. In the 1989 survey, the proportion of female council members is 21% in small cities, 26% in medium-sized cities, and 33% in large cities. The proportion has increased in each size category in 2001. In small cities, 25% of the council members are female, and 36% are female in both of the larger city size categories.

As in previous surveys, the proportion of female respondents is slightly greater in council-manager than mayor-council cities. There was little difference based on form of government in the small cities but greater differences in the others.

There is no difference in the percentage of women elected from districts or at-large, whereas in 1989 a slightly lower proportion of women was elected from districts.

Comparing regions, the largest proportion of women is found in councils in the western states (32 percent). All the other regions have approximately the same percentage in 2001 (25-29%). This was essentially the same level as in 1989 in the south and the Midwest but represented a substantial increase in the northeast where in 1989 only 17% of the council members were women.

Table II.1: Gender and City Council Membership

	Male	**Female**
Total:		
1979	68.2%	31.8%
1989 [n=865]	73.6	26.4
2001 [n=664]	71.7	28.3
By City Size, 2001 [n=655]:		
Small, 1989	79.5	20.5
2001	75.0	25.0
Medium, 1989	74.3	25.7
2001	64.6	35.4
Large, 1998	67.5	32.5
2001	63.6	36.4
By Form of Government, 2001 [n=639]:		
Council-Manager	70.5	29.5
Mayor-Council	73.1	26.9
By Constituency, 2001[n=660]:		
Elected from District	71.6	28.4
Elected At-Large	71.7	28.3
By Region, 2001[n=655]:		
East	73.0	27.0

Midwest	78.4	25.2
South	70.9	29.1
West	68.2	31.8

RACE AND ETHNICITY

As in examining trends in gender representation, the best indication of the change in the representation of racial and ethic minorities[2] is to examine change within each city size category. Whereas the overall percentages of minority representation appear to be stable between over time when referring to the summary percentages for all cities, making comparisons within each city size category presents a different picture. As indicated in Table II.2, the proportion of African-American council members increased in small cities after no change between 1979 and 1989, and continued to increase in medium-sized cities. African-American representation remained essentially the same in large cities maintaining the gains from 1979 to 1989. The representation of minority groups other than African-Americans increased slightly in all sizes of cities. Hispanic representation increased substantially in medium and large cities, although the proportion of Asian-Americans on councils declined somewhat. Still, overall the percentage of minorities has increased in all three size categories in each study.

Table II.2: Racial and Ethnic Minorities on Councils by City Size, 1979-2001

	Small	**Medium**	**Large**
1979	4.7%	7.6%	16.3%
1989	6.1	11.1	25.7
2001	10.0	18.3	34.5

In each category of cities, the percentage of minorities has doubled over the two decades.

Regional differences are not pronounced but are present. More African-Americans are elected to city councils in the south and the northeast. More Hispanics and Asian-Americans are elected in the west. Approximately one in five council members in the south is from a minority group whereas the proportion is approximately one in eight in the other three regions.

The proportion of minority members of the city council is very similar in small and medium-sized council-manager and mayor-council cities with the former having a slightly higher proportion of minorities—11% in council-manager versus 8% in mayor-council in small cities and 20% and 17% respectively in medium-sized cities. In large cities, there are more minority members in mayor-council cities than in council-manager cities, 36% versus 30% (compared to 28% and 20% in 1989.) In large mayor-council cities, 21% of the council members are African-American compared to 15% in council-manager cities. The proportion of members from other minority groups is the same in the two types of cities.

As reported in previous studies, more minority council members are elected from districts than at-large—18% versus 11%. The difference is particularly great for African-Americans. Eleven percent of the council members elected from districts are African-American compared to 5% elected from at-large constituencies.

These differences in large cities can also be attributed to the greater use of district elections in mayor-council cities and the greater success that African-American candidates have in at-large elections in mayor-council cities. Overall, more African-Americans and other minorities are elected from districts

than at-large. Eighteen percent of the council members elected from districts are minorities, including 13% who are African-American. Among council members elected at-large, 11% are minorities and 7% are African-American.

This difference holds up in council-manager and mayor-council cities, although the differences are obscured by divergence in the approach to defining constituencies in the two forms of government. Two thirds of the respondents from council-manager cities are elected at-large, whereas three fifths of the mayor-council respondents are elected from districts. Still, the effects of the two constituency types are nearly identical regardless of the form of government. In fact, when district elections are used in council-manager cities, 21% of the council members are from minority groups compared to 15% minorities elected from districts in the mayor-council cities. Council members elected at-large in both forms of government are equally likely to be from minority groups. African-Americans are more successful in at-large elections in mayor-council cities, but larger proportions of other minorities are elected in council-manger cities. These results are as follows:

Table II.3: Racial and Ethnic Minorities on City Council by Form of Government and Election Type

Election Type	Council-Manager				Mayor-Council			
	African-American	Hispanic	Other	Total	African-American	Hispanic	Other	Total
District	14%	3%	4%	21%	9%	4%	2%	15%
At-Large	4	4	3	11	9	2	-	11
[n= 635]								

Thus, district elections increase the representation of minorities and this effect is even greater in council-manager than mayor-council cities. District elections are not used, however, as commonly in council-manager as they are in mayor-council cities.

Whites and African-Americans on city councils differ somewhat in their proportions of men and women. Among white council members, 28% are female (no change compared to 1989), whereas 43% of the African-American council members are female (compared to 18% in 1989).

AGE

The age of council members has shifted upward, as indicated in Table II.4. There are fewer council members under 40 and more council members 60 and over than ten years ago, although these changes have been largely confined to small and medium-sized cities as the following figures indicate:

Table II.4: Age of Council Members by City Size

	Small			Medium			Large		
	1979	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**
Under 40 years old	23%	12%	8%	29%	19%	9%	27%	17%	23%
Over 60 years old	17	28	35	15	24	33	18	22	25

It appears that in all cities, there was a move of younger persons onto city councils in the late seventies as the baby boom generation became politically active. By the late eighties, fewer young candidates were winning office and presumably more of those initially elected in the seventies had moved past the age of 40 and more from their age cohort were successfully seeking office. This trend continues in small and medium-sized cities, whereas in large cities the emergence of political activists from the under-40 segment of the population remains relatively constant.

There is a higher proportion of under-40 council members in mayor-council than council-manager cities—13 versus 7%. There is a slight tendency for younger council members to be elected from districts than in at-large contests—11 versus 8%.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The council members are a well-educated group as a whole. Overall, less than nine percent has not had at least some college education. Two in five have professional or graduate degrees beyond undergraduate college. The complete breakdown of the educational degrees is presented in Table II.5.

A comparison across two decades shows that substantial gains were made in the educational level of council members between 1979 and 1989. These gains have been maintained in 2001. In addition, the difference between council members from small and larger cities has been diminishing in each of the surveys since 1979. When comparisons are made in the proportion of council members in three broad groupings of educational level, the differences are slight. Forty percent or more of the council members in all three city-size categories have received professional or graduate degrees.

Table II.5: Education and City Council Membership by City Size

	Total		Small		Medium		Large	
	1989	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**
Less than HS	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
HS graduate	6.6	6.7	7.4	7.9	8.4	3.5	4.1	5.5
Technical school	2.3	2.1	3.0	2.8	2.6	0.0	1.4	1.8
Some college	17.4	13.7	18.5	14.4	17.4	11.1	16.2	14.5
2-year college degree	4.3	7.2	5.9	7.6	4.2	6.9	2.8	3.6
4-year college degree	29.5	27.7	31.1	24.2	29.4	37.5	28.3	30.9
MA or equivalent	22.6	26.8	19.3	27.9	22.2	25.0	26.2	21.8
JD or equivalent	10.2	9.0	6.7	7.4	9.3	11.1	14.5	16.4
PhD or equivalent	5.2	4.1	5.5	4.4	5.2	2.8	4.8	5.5
Other	1.4	2.4	2.5	2.8	1.0	2.1	1.0	0.0
	[n=870]	[n=657]						

Reflecting this educational background, council members are drawn heavily from business, management, and professional occupations. (See Table II.6.) Approximately one council member in five is retired (up from 14% in 1989), although only 10% are retired in large cities. There is little variation by size of city, form of government, or election by district versus at-large with one exception. A higher percentage of the council members in large cities have "other" employment—37% (up from 25% in 1989) versus 13% for all council members. Presumably, this indicates that the council office in these cities is more likely to be a full-time one taking the place of another job.

Table II.6: Occupation and City Council Membership by City Size

	Total		Small		Medium		Large	
	1989	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**
Owner of a business	23%	21%	21%	21%	24%	22%	24%	16%
Manager or professional	37	40	41	40	37	40	34	32
Blue collar worker	2	2	4	3	3	1	0	2

Clerical worker	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	2
Housespouse	5	3	3	3	5	3	7	2
Retired	14	21	16	22	15	20	11	10
Other	17	13	13	10	16	14	25	37
	[n=797]	[n=648]						

When one combines the council members who do not have a regular job and those for whom the council position is full-time, it is to be expected that some members of city councils will not have regular employment in addition to their council position. This is particularly true in large cities where half of the council members have no other employment, as Table II.6 indicates. Most council members have full-time jobs other than their council position in small (63%) and medium-sized cities (56%) and those without other jobs are usually retired.[3] In contrast, only 35% of the council members in large cities have other full-time jobs, and only 17 percent of those without other jobs are retired. For most council members in large cities, the council position is their full-time work.

These results are similar to results in the 1989 survey, although there is a slight shift away from full-time employment and toward council members having no other job. The proportion of council members who hold full-time jobs other than their council position continues to drop. It is still more common in council-manager cities where 45% of council members have other full-time employment compared to 31% in mayor-council cities.

This overall trend continues the apparent dramatic change from 1979. The question was not exactly the same, but the earlier study had found the council office was a full-time position for 36% of the respondents from large cities as opposed to seven to eight percent of the respondents from small and medium-sized cities.

RESIDENCE

The average number of years that council members have lived in the city they represent is 33, the same as in 1989. In the recent survey, the average length of residence is lower in small cities—an average of 32 years—compared to 36 years in the medium and large cities.

COUNCIL SERVICE

The average number of years of service on the city council is slightly greater than in 1989.[4] Furthermore, whereas length of serve was lower in small and medium-sized cities and higher in large cities in 1989, the situation is reversed in 2001 with longer tenure in smaller cities. The comparison in average years of service is as follows:

Table II.7: Average Years of Service on Council by City Size

Years of Service	**Total**			**Small**		**Medium**		**Large**	
	1979	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**
0-2 (%)	35	27	24	30	25	28	21	23	31
3-5 (%)	27	25	22	27	22	26	25	23	17
6-10 (%)	30	28	25	25	25	27	24	34	29
10+ (%)	8	19	29	19	29	19	30	20	23

Average	n.a	n.a.	8	6	7	6	8	7	7
		[n=870]	[n=632]						

Table II.7 breaks down length of service by categories. Small and medium sized-cities have approximately a quarter of members with less than two years experience, essentially the same as in 1989; and over half have more than five years experience, a slight increase since 1989. By contrast, large cities saw the percentage of council members with less than two years of experience increase between 1989 and 2001 (from 23 percent to 31 percent), while the percentage with more than five years of experience changed only slightly, declining from 54 percent to 52 percent. Despite impressions that turnover has increased in part because of term limits, the survey results do not support his impression.

As found in 1989, members of councils in mayor-council cities have served slightly longer—an average of 7.3 (1989) and 7.9 (2001)—than council members in council-manager cities—6.0 years (1989) and 7.2 (2001)—but the difference is decreasing.

COUNCIL COMPENSATION

Service on the council is still typically a position which receives little or only modest compensation, although the proposal receiving no or nominal salary is decreasing. The percent of small cities paying council members no salary or less than $1,000 dropped from 16% to 13%. In medium-sized cities the decline was 12% to 8%, and no large cities paid at this low level in 2001 compared to 4% in 1989. When a higher salary is provided, it has tended to increase. Stated differently, once the decision is made to provide more than a nominal salary, it tends to go up reflecting increases in cost-of-living at least. Whereas 30% of small cities paid more than $6,000 in 1989, over half paid this amount in 2001. Only 30% of the medium-sized cities paid over $10,000 in 1989 compared to almost half in 2001, and the percentage of large cities paying more than $20,000 increased from 45% to 73%. The complete breakdown of compensation levels for 2001 is provided in Table II.8.

There is extensive variation by form of government. Only 2% of council members from small cities and 7% from medium-sized cities receive $20,000 or more, whereas almost three quarters of the council members from large cities have a salary in this range.

Although increasing city size affects salaries, and the differential is especially high in large cities. There is also great variation by the form of government used. The average salary for each type of city broken down by population and form of government is as follows:

Table II.8: Council Salary by City Size and Form of Government

	Total		**Small**		**Medium**		**Large**		**Council-Manager**		**Mayor-Council**	
	1989	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**
None	5%	5%	7%	7%	6%	4%	2%	0%	10%	8%	1%	2%
< $1,000	5	5	9	6	6	4	2	0	8	7	3	2
$1,000-2,999	11	7	19	7	10	7	5	6	16	9	5	4
$3,000-5,999	19	21	34	25	17	14	6	2	19	21	18	20
$6,000-9,999	19	30	21	35	29	24	5	2	18	31	19	31

$10,000-14,999	13	15	5	13	18	25	14	8	11	13	15	17
$15,000-19,999	9	7	1	4	6	16	21	9	7	6	11	9
$20,000-29,999	4	5	-	2	2	6	11	25	2	3	7	8
$30,000-39,999	5	2	-	0	2	1	13	13	3	1	8	3
$40,000-49,999	5	1	2	0	2	0	12	9	3	1	8	0
≥$50,000	4	2	1	0	3	0	9	26	2	0	6	4
	[n=856]	[n=648]										

COUNCIL WORKLOAD

The job of council member continues to be a time-consuming one. The average number of hours spent on council-related matters in the three sizes of cities is 20, 25, and 42 hours per week respectively. The full breakdown and comparison to results in 1989 are given in Table II.9. Serving on the city council is a significant time commitment in a small or medium-sized city. It is, on average, a full-time job in large cities.

Table II.9: Hours spent on council-related matters

	Have another job?	Hours per week on council matters	Hours of constituent service	Constituent service %
Small	No	25	8	32%
	Part-time	21	8	38
	Full-time	16	5	31
Medium	No	32	11	36
	Part-time	32	14	43
	Full-time	20	7	33
Large	No	50	18	36
	Part-time	48	22	45
	Full-time	28	15	52

There had been an increase in the amount of time devoted to council matters between 1979 and 1989. The increase was modest in small cities, but in medium-sized and large cities, twice as many council members in 1989 compared to 1979 spent more than 30 hours per week on the job. The 1989 patterns are essentially maintained in 2001 with slight increases in the average hours in the small and large city categories, as indicated in Table II.9.

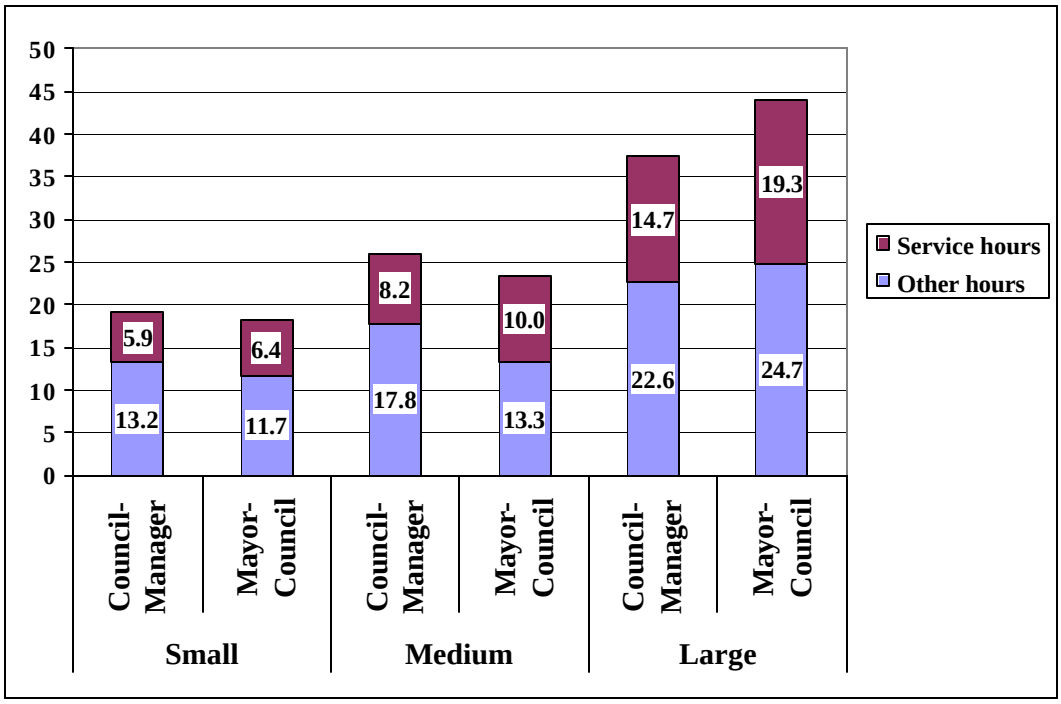
Council members spend part of their time doing services for people. This practice is sometimes called the "ombudsman" function. Examples are providing information, handling complaints, and

contacting an agency on behalf of the constituent. The time spent doing services takes up not only more hours but also a larger share of the time spent on the job of council member in medium-sized and large cities. Whereas an average of six hours and 33% of the time of council members in small cities is spent on constituency services, these activities account for nine hours and 36% of time in medium-sized cities and 18 hours and 42% of the schedules of council members in large cities. The time devoted to constituency service is slightly lower than in 1989. The emphasis on the ombudsman function may have leveled off and even receded slightly, but it is also clearly established as an important part of the total workload.

The workload varies with other employment commitments of council members. As one would expect, council members with no other position or a part-time job spend more time on the job overall and on constituency services than do those with full-time jobs in addition to their council position. In small and medium-sized cities, the council members without other full-time jobs also spend a larger percentage of their time on constituency service. In these cities, council members who have flexibility in their schedule devote a larger share of their time to doing services for constituents. In large cities, on the other hand, it is the council members with full-time jobs who spend a larger share of their more limited total number of hours on the ombudsman function. Whereas constituent service is the option if you have more time in smaller cities, it appears to be the expected area of emphasis to which more scarce hours will be devoted in large cities. One other difference between the large cities, on the one hand, and the smaller city categories, on the other, is the greater differential in time spent on the council office in the large cities. Whereas those with no other job spend just over 50% more time than those with other full-time jobs in the smaller cities, they spend 76% more time in the large cities.

The amount of time council members spend on their position differs slightly depending on the form of government, as indicated in Figure II.1. In the small and medium-sized cities, the council members devote more hours to the job in council-manager cites (18 and 27 hours, respectively) than they do in mayor-council cities (14 and 20 hours, respectively for small and medium-sized cities.) This difference was also found in 1989, although the differentials are smaller now. In the large cities, on the other hand, the difference in the amount of time council members spend (37 in council-manager and 44 in mayor-council cities) has increased since 1989. The members of councils in mayor-council cities spend slightly more time on constituency services than the members in council-manager cities, although the difference is very slight except in large cities.

Figure II.1: Total Hours and Time Spent on Constituent Service in Council-Manager and Mayor –Council Cities



III. ELECTIONS AND REPRESENTATION

Election systems in American cities are determined by the nature of the council members' constituency and by the presence or absence of party labels on the ballot. With regard to the first feature, there are two types of constituencies for city council members. All at-large members are elected to serve the same constituency—the population of the city as a whole. District elections select a single council member from a geographical section of the city. Some cities combine these two methods and elect some council members at-large and some from districts. The use of districts to elect at least part of the members of the council is now widespread and is the common method used in large cities. In cities between 25,000 and 199,999 population, 58% use at-large elections and 18% use the combination approach. One quarter use districts exclusively.[5] Among the cities from which respondents have come—broken down in the following table—, 49% and 44% of the small and medium-sized cities, respectively, have at-large elections, 25% combine district and at-large seats, and 26% and 31% use districts exclusively. In cities over 200,000 population, 49% use districts exclusively, 38% use a combination of district and at-large, and 13% use at-large elections.[6] This breakdown is very close to the percent of respondents from large cities that use each type of election.

Breakdown of types of elections in cities with respondents to NLC survey

	Small	Medium	Large	Average
At-Large	48.9%	43.7%	16.4%	45.0%
Combined	25.0	25.4	38.2	26.2
District	26.1	31.0	45.5	28.8
n=649	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

An individual council member will either occupy a district or at-large seat on the council. Among the

survey respondents, 57% were elected at-large and 43% from districts. The proportion of at-large members is 62% from small cities, 54% from medium-sized cities, and 27% from large cities.

Among respondents from council-manager cities, 33% were elected from districts and 67% at-large. In mayor-council cities, the breakdown is close to the reverse: 60% are elected from districts and 40% at-large.

Council members elected from both types of constituencies spend the same amount of time on council matters. Those elected from districts do spend a slightly higher percent of their time on constituency matters than those elected at-large. The former spend an average of 36% of their time, whereas the latter spend 32% of the time in responding to their constituents.

The second feature that defines how city councils are elected is the presence or absence of the party label on the ballot. In partisan elections, the party affiliation of the candidate is indicated on the ballot, whereas in nonpartisan elections it is not. In 2001, 77% of the American cities used nonpartisan elections. Among the survey respondents, 80% were chosen in nonpartisan elections, and 20% in partisan elections. The proportion chosen with nonpartisan ballots is 80% in small cities, 85% in medium-sized cities, and 71% in large cities. Also, this feature is more common in council-manager cities. Over ninety percent of the respondents from these cities were elected in nonpartisan elections, compared with 62% of those from mayor-council cities.

About one sixth of the respondents hold a leadership position on the council as mayor or council president, majority or minority leader of the council. The proportion is 20% and 13% in small and medium-sized cities, respectively, and 3% in large cities.[7]

REPRESENTATION AND REASONS FOR SEEKING OFFICE

Council members seek office for a variety of reasons. When examining the factors that had a **very important** influence on the decision to run for a council seat in Table III.1, most council members—81%—indicate a desire to serve the city as a whole as one factor. Serving the neighborhood is very important to approximately half of the council members in small and medium sized-cities, whereas two-thirds of the large city council members cite this as a major reason for running. A high level of concern about some specific issue prompted about a third of the council members to become candidates, and the percentage goes up as city size increases. This pattern is also present with a new factor added to the 2001 survey. From 20% in small cities to 37% in large cities indicated a strong interest in providing leadership for a particular constituency. In addition, a sizable minority in all cities—approximately one quarter—report that an enjoyment of politics and interest in a worthwhile activity influenced their decision. Thus, some are attracted to run for office because they enjoy the political process. Only 4% were persuaded to run by a political party organization. Even fewer saw the position as a stepping stone to some other political office when they originally decided to run, although the percentage is higher in large cities where 10% saw the council as a step top higher office. Almost no one claimed to see the potential for business contacts as a reason to run for office.

Table III.1 Factors that Influence Decisions to Run for Council Office (Percent who cite each factor as a very important influence on their decision to seek office).

	Total		Small		Medium		Large	
	1989	2001	1989	2001	1989	2001	1989	2001
To serve city as a whole	87.0%	80.5%	90.3%	82.7%	87.3%	78.2%	83.4%	67.9%
To serve my neighborhood	61.4	51.0	53.7	49.7	54.7	49.6	76.0	66.0

Strong concern about specific issues	61.4	31.6	51.8	29.5	62.5	35.3	69.4	40.4
Enjoy politics and looking for worthwhile activity	41.8	24.4	39.3	23.8	44.8	24.1	41.0	30.8
Persuaded by party organization	8.6	3.6	9.4	3.8	7.6	3.0	8.8	4.0
Stepping stone to other political office	6.2	3.0	5.1	2.6	6.2	1.5	7.2	10.2
Increase business contacts	3.3	1.3	4.0	1.2	3.0	2.3	2.0	0.0
Provide leadership for a particular constituency	n.a.	22.8	n.a.	20.3	n.a.	25.6	n.a.	36.5

Based on earlier research, membership on the council has been viewed as largely a community service.[8] This continues to be true; council members commonly seek to serve the city and rarely seek the office primarily for political advancement or business gain. The attitudes of council members indicate that this service orientation also includes a desire among some to help a neighborhood, to address issues, and/or to provide leadership for some group. Some also run because of an enjoyment of politics. This set of attitudes appears to reflect an activist-oriented sense of service. Council members not only want to serve in an apolitical sense but also because of a desire to solve problems, advance causes, and help particular groups.

When responses from 1989 and 2001 are compared, there is less intensity in the feelings about the reasons for seeking office expressed in the recent survey. In 1989, more factors were cited as being very important. There is a particularly large drop in those who list issue concerns and enjoying politics as factors. It is not that these factors are unimportant,[9] but issue commitment and attraction to the excitement of politics has decreased somewhat over the decade of the nineties.

The nature of the council members' constituency has an important effect on whether neighborhood representation was an important reason for seeking office. Two out of three council members elected from districts considered representing the neighborhood to be very important as opposed to two in five elected at-large. In attitudes about representing the city as a whole, there is less disparity. Although 86 % of the at-large council members consider this to be very important, the view is shared by 73% of those elected from districts.[10] There was no other reason for seeking office about which district and at-large council members differed appreciably.

If one sets aside those differences that can be attributed to district versus at-large elections, there were only two reasons for seeking office about which the council members from council-manager and mayor-council cities differed substantially. First, council members elected from districts in council-manager cities give greater emphasis to serving the entire city (82%) versus 65% in mayor-council cities.) Second, at-large members in mayor-council cities were more likely to be list enjoyment of politics as a very important reason for running (36% percent) than were the at-large council members from council-manager cities (18%). Whereas at-large candidates in council-manager cities may reflect more of a traditional service orientation, their counterparts in mayor-council cities have a stronger attraction to the political dimension of public office.

GROUPS REPRESENTED

Another perspective on council members' relationships with citizens is provided by their views of which constituencies and groups they represent in office. The attitudes of council members toward eleven groups or segments of the population were examined in the survey. Variations may reflect both the orientation of the council member about the relative importance of representing each group and also the size and activity of the group in a particular city. If a group is small and inactive, it is less likely that a

council member will try to represent it. In Table III.2, the groups have been listed in rank order based on the proportion of all council members who considered their representation of that group to be very important.

Table III.2 Attitudes towards Representing Groups in the City

	Total	Small		Medium		Large	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Realtors/developers	6.8%	11	7.0%	11	4.9%	12	9.1%
Labor unions	8.2	10	8.0	10	6.3	9	14.8
Municipal employees	17.4	7	18.9	8	14.8	10	12.7
Neighborhoods	63.3	1	61.7	1	62.9	1	76.8
Women	24.4	4	23.3	4	23.9	4	34.5
Racial minorities	26.1	3	23.9	3	26.6	2	42.6
Ethnic groups	21.4	5	20.0	5	22.5	5	29.1
Environmentalists	17.1	9	17.4	7	16.3	8	16.4
Business	20.5	6	19.7	6	21.7	6	24.1
Elderly	36.9	2	38.1	2	33.3	3	36.4
Political parties	4.2	12	3.7	12	2.8	11	10.9
Other	17.5	8	18.7	9	12.5	7	18.2

The top ranked "group" is one of those that council members often wished to serve in deciding to run for office—neighborhoods. The relative importance is greatest in the largest cities where over three quarters feel it is very important to represent neighborhoods, but over three fifths of the council members share this view in other size cities. The elderly and racial minorities are second and third in small and medium-sized cities, and the order is reversed for these two groups in the largest cities. The rank order of the next three groups is the same in cities of all sizes. The groups are women, ethnic groups, and business. Still, for all these groups, the degree of importance increases with greater population. The same is true for labor unions and political parties. Thus, In general, council members in the large cities are more likely to place great emphasis on the representation of more groups.

There has been a substantial decline in the number of council members who attach great importance to representing groups since 1989. Neighborhoods continue to receive almost as much support as previously. Whereas the elderly and businesses who were considered to be very important to over half of the council members in 1989, however, fewer attach that level of importance to them in 2001. Only 37% feel it is very important to represent the elderly, and businesses are very important to only one in five council members. Environmentalists have seen their highly committed representatives drop in half from one in three to one in six. Similarly, realtors and developers could count on one in five council members before and now have one in ten who feel it is very important to represent them. In a survey conducted in 1982 by Welch and Bledsoe, council members were more selective in the groups they considered to be very important to represent than were the respondents to the 1989 NCL survey.[11] The 2001 survey may indicate that the shift in opinion captured in the late eighties has receded. Council members are one again paying somewhat less attention to groups and not focusing on as wide a range of groups as they did previously.

Attitudes toward representation vary somewhat with the personal characteristics of the council member. Table III.3 presents those cases in which there is a sizeable difference, i.e., 10 percentage points or more, in the proportions of council members who consider representation of a group to be very important when they are divided by sex, race, and age.

Table III.3 Variations in Attitudes toward Representation by Categories of Demographic Groups*

Race	**White**	**African-American**	**Hispanic**	**Other**
Representation of:				
Municipal employees	15%	35%	10%	40%
Neighborhoods	62	76	62	87
Women	20	54	38	47
Racial minorities	20	68	48	47
Ethnic groups	16	53	50	40
Political parties	2	13	14	14
Gender	**Male**	**Female**		
Women	19%	38%		
Racial minorities	22	35		
Age	**Under 40**	**40-59**	**60+**	
Business interests	8%	20%	24%	
Municipal employees	10	15	23	

*Groups in Table III.2 are included here when there is a difference of at least 10 percentage points in the responses of categories of the demographic group.

The responses suggest that African-American, Hispanic, and other minority council members are more sensitive to a wider variety of groups than are white council members. The differences are greatest in attitudes toward representing racial and ethnic groups, whose representation is far more commonly seen to be very important among minority than white council members. There is also more concern for representing the women, municipal employees, neighborhoods, and political parties among African-Americans, other minorities, and Hispanics (with the exception of municipal employees.) Representatives from minority groups, who may have faced more exclusion from politics, may feel a greater need to be inclusive in their attitudes toward representing other groups and to have a broader base of support.

Female council members in comparison to males are much more likely to view the representation of women and racial minorities as being very important.

Age differences are present only in two areas. Representation of municipal business interests and municipal employees increases with higher age. Age differences are not particularly salient to variations in representation, even when it comes to representing the elderly. An identical percentage of those under forty and over sixty—38%—expressed the opinion that representation of the elderly is very important to them.

Thus, when councils are more diverse with respect to the presence of racial minorities and women, there is somewhat more direct representation of the groups from which these council members come. It is also more likely that there will be greater indirect representation for a wider range of groups because racial minorities and women tend to define their constituencies more broadly than white male council members do.

INFLUENCE OF GROUPS

The presence of council members who are concerned about the interests of a group does not necessarily mean that the group has influence over council decisions and vice versa. For the same groups included in the previous table, respondents were asked to estimate the amount of influence each

group has on council decisions. To identify those groups with the greatest impact, we shall examine the proportion of council members who feel that the group named has "a great deal" of influence on city government. Some groups have more "representation" than impact. There are three groups—racial and ethnic minorities and the elderly—for which there is disparity of just over 10 percentage points between the proportion of council members who feel it is very important to speak for such groups and those who think that the group has a great deal of influence. In all three cases, the perceived influence is higher than the commitment to represent the group. For the other kinds of groups, commitment to represent and perceived influence are about the same level.

The influence of groups varies considerably. One type of group—neighborhoods—has extensive impact on decisions in all kinds of cities and others do not have much influence anywhere. Furthermore, some groups have a similar level of influence in cities of all sizes, and other groups have differing degrees of influence. Both kinds of information are presented in Table III.4. The table first presents the rank order for groups whose influence is fairly consistent and then for groups whose influence varies ten percentage points or more between the highest and lowest city size category. Among those with consistent influence, only neighborhoods are considered to have a great deal of influence by a majority of council members in each city size category. Among groups that vary in influence, business and development interests, racial minorities, municipal employees and political parties are all viewed as being much more influential in the largest cities. The influence of the elderly, on the other hand, is greater in small than in the larger cities.

Table III.4 Attitudes about Influence of Groups in the City (Percent who feel that group has a great deal of influence on council decisions.)

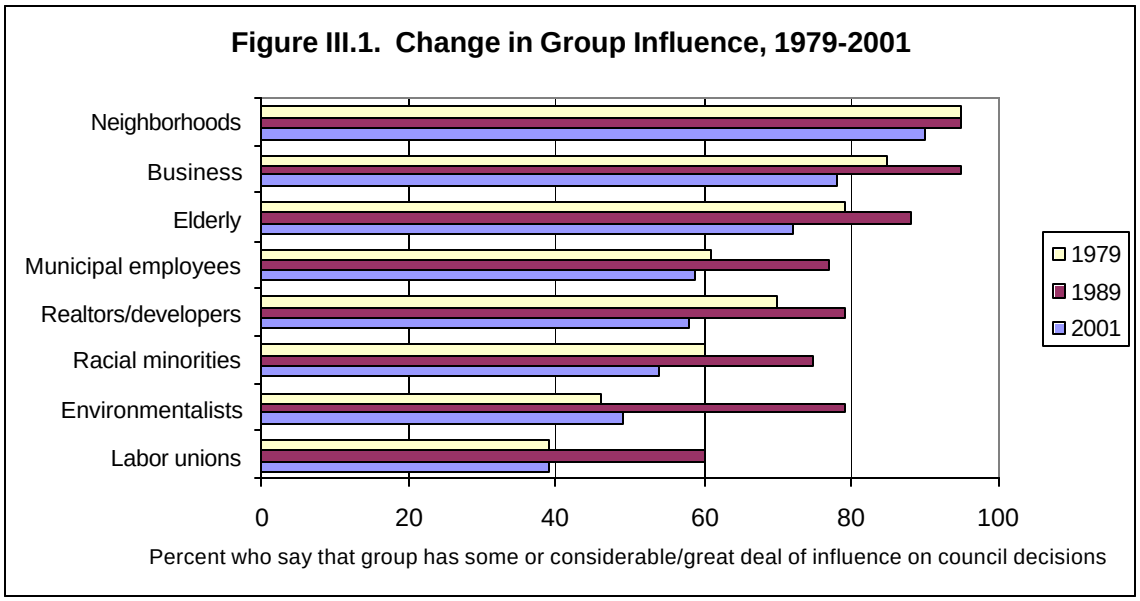
	Total	Small	Medium	Large
Influence similar across cities of all sizes:				
Neighborhoods	54%	51%	58%	60%
Municipal employees	14	13	13	17
Women	13	12	12	21
Environmentalists	10	9	13	10
Ethnic groups	9	8	10	17
Influence differs across cities size categories:				
Business interests	28%	26%	31%	37%
Elderly	24	26	21	16
Realtors/developers	16	13	19	29
Racial minorities	14	11	16	31
Labor unions	8	4	15	24
Political parties	7	5	10	19
Other	13	12	10	25

The impact of groups on council and city government decisions has contracted since 1989. Direct comparison is tricky because the measures of influence changed slightly, but when one compares the number of groups with “considerable” influence in 1989 and a “great deal” of influence in 2001, the

latter number is smaller. Furthermore, for each group, fewer council members put the group in the highest influence category.

Certain of the groups whose influence was measured were common to the 1979, 1989, and 2001 NLC surveys. When opinions about whether groups have **some** or **considerable** influence (in 1979 and 1989) and **some** and a **great deal** (in 2001) are compared, there is a general shift toward higher influence in 1989 and contraction in 2001 to the 1979 level or even lower. (The results were reported only with the categories of influence combined in 1979). Neighborhoods continue to be almost unanimously viewed as a group with some or considerable influence. The big gainers had been environmentalists and labor unions in 1989, as Figure III.1 indicates, but they fell back to their 1979 level. Almost all of the rest of the groups had slightly less influence in 2001 than in 1979 and, of course, much less influence than in 1989.

Figure III.1 Change in Group Influence, 1979-2001 (Percent who say the group has some/considerable/great deal of influence on council decisions)



Taken together, the opinions of council members regarding representation and group influence suggest that the change in the late eighties was temporary. Council members manifested greater sensitivity in 1989 to a wider array of groups than they had demonstrated in earlier surveys by the National League of Cities and by Welch and Bledsoe. In 2001, attitudes regarding groups reverted to

the levels found over twenty years ago. In the late eighties when at least moderate impact from a wide range of groups was found almost universally, elected officials were under more pressure to respond to the demands from more different kinds of people. Since some of these groups tend to oppose each other, the attempt to satisfy all group demands was bound to cause frustration. Council members were pulled in many directions when they felt that such a broad range of groups had considerable influence over their decisions. In 2001, council members seem to have reestablished a bit more distance between themselves and the constituent groups in the city population. Elected officials may still listen to a wide range of groups, but they are somewhat less likely to feel an obligation to speak for all these groups. In addition, they are not as likely to consider that as many groups have as much clout.

Still, when one examines the relative influence of groups in 2001 as presented in Figure III.1, neighborhoods, business interests, the elderly, realtors/developers, municipal employees, and racial minorities are considered to have some or more influence by at least half of the council members. Environmentalists and labor unions have lower but not insubstantial influence. The extent to which a wide range of groups has a lot of influence is most pronounced in large cities, although all councils are experiencing pressure from many groups in the public. The extent of this pressure does not appear to be as great as in 1989 but it is still present.

RE-ELECTION AND SEEKING HIGHER OFFICE

Council members are linked to citizens in part by the electoral process. Through campaigning, candidates interact extensively with citizens, and it is reasonable to expect that the closer the election contest, the more attentive candidates are to voter sentiments. It has long been recognized that incumbent council members have high success rates in elections. This favorable position is confirmed by the margin of victory reported by council members in their last campaign. Close to half the council members won by a large margin and another 19% were unopposed, similar to the findings in 1989. Almost a quarter was elected by a moderate margin. Only 11% experienced a close contest. The election prospects were essentially the same in cities of all sizes. The combination of unopposed candidates and large margin victors was 65% in council-manager cities and 62% in mayor-council cities.

A majority of council members plan to run for re-election when their current term of office is over, and 30% are uncertain about their plans. Only 16% do not intend to run again. Although the public sometimes has negative attitudes about elected officials who will make their decisions based on a desire for reelection, it is also important for accountability to citizens that council members intend to stand before the voters for a review of their performance. From this perspective, it is a positive sign that only one in six rules out re-election. For the rest, running for re-election will provide council members with an assessment from voters of their performance in office.

There is little overall change from 1979 and 1989 in the intentions of council members regarding running for reelection.

Percent that plan to run again

	1979	**1989**	**2001**
Small	51%	42%	57%
Medium	46	54	50
Large	66	66	66
		[n=858]	[n=658]

Council members in small cities are now more likely to plan on another campaign whereas half of those in medium-sized cities intend to seek re-election. There has been no change over the two decades in the high percentage of incumbents in large cities who plan to stand again. Overall, the willingness of council members to seek to remain in office is roughly constant.[12]

Approximately one third of the council members would like to run for a higher political office some day, and another third are uncertain about doing so.[13] This characteristic, like the desire for re-election, is viewed negatively by some and positively by others. For example, Koehler concluded that the "councilman politician" who sets his or her ambitions "higher than city hall" is "definitely an asset to [their] city."[14] The presence of council members with higher aspirations increases modestly from 27% and 26% in small and medium-sized cities, respectively, to 39% in large cities. Except for a drop from 34% in medium-sized cities, these are essentially the same intentions as were found in 1989.

The intention of council members for seeking reelection varies slightly with age, as indicated in Table III.5, whereas the desire to seek higher office is more strongly linked to age. Almost seven in ten of those in the under forty group intend to run again, as do over half of those aged 40 and over. When the choice involves seeking higher office, there is greater disparity, with 63% of the under forty council members indicating an intention to run compared to only 32% of those in the middle age category, and 12% of those over sixty. These results are very similar to those in 1989.

Table III.5 Plans for Reelection or Seeking Higher Office by Age and Length of Service

	Will Run Again	Will Seek Higher Office
Age		
Under 40	68%	63%
40-59	57	32
60+	53	12
Length of council service		
0-2 years	55%	33%
3-5 years	51	31
6-9 years	54	28
10+ years	63	23

Over half of the council members who have been in office less than ten years are likely to want to run again, and the proportion jumps to 63% among those with ten or more years of service. In 1989, there was a decline after five years of service in the proportion who planned to run again for office. Thus, there is higher willingness rather than higher reluctance among those with longer service to stay in office than was found previously. Unfortunately, the survey results do not include information about the presence of a limit on terms and the impact it has on intentions.

When the question is whether to seek higher office, the plans for moving up to higher office decline slightly with longer years of service. The relative uniformity in intentions, however, masks big differences in the degree of certainty about plans. The least experienced members are most likely to be uncertain (46%) about future plans—a finding in 1989 as well—, and those with over ten years service are far more likely to indicate that they will not seek higher office—49% took this position compared to 46% in 1989.

POLITICAL INTENTIONS AND COUNCIL CHARACTERISTICS

The measures of political intentions indicate that the composition of councils differs across cities

of different sizes. There may be corresponding differences in the "tone" of council deliberations. In 1989, the level of political ambitions increased in a stepwise fashion through the three categories of city size. In 2001, the small city and medium-sized cities have a similar profile: approximately half plan to seek reelection and running for higher office is confined to about one in four members. The change reflects a lowering of political aspirations in the medium-sized cities. In the large cities, two-thirds will run again and two in five may seek higher office. These results match the 1989 findings exactly. Just as more council members give greater emphasis to representing a wide range of groups as the size of the city increases, more council members have their political futures to consider as well when they speak and make decisions on the council. Neither situation is better or worse than the other, but recognition of the differing tendencies among councils may help city government officials understand their circumstances better and perform more effectively.

There may also be differences in the political intentions of those elected through different institutions or who serve in different forms of government. To test this possibility, the respondents have been divided in Table III.6 by the method of election, and within each method by the form of government for the city in which they serve. For each subgroup, the percent that wish to run for their current or another office is indicated.

Table III.6 Plans for Re-Election or Seeking Higher Office by Form of Government, Constituency, and Ballot Type

	Will Run Again	Will Seek Higher Office
Elected From		
District [Council-Manager] [Mayor-Council]	58% [51] [64]	30% [24] [34]
At-large [Council-Manager] [Mayor-Council]	55 [54] [57]	27 [24] [34]
Type of Ballot Used		
Partisan [Council-Manager] [Mayor-Council]	61 [61] [62]	33 [21] [37]
Nonpartisan [Council-Manager] [Mayor-Council]	54 [52] [60]	26 [23] [33]

The differences are similar but not as pronounced as in 1989. Council members elected from districts are slightly more likely and in partisan elections are modestly more likely to want to run for their position again and to want to seek another electoral office. There are often marked differences within this general pattern for council members in cities with different forms of government. In mayor-council cities, members with one exception manifest greater interest in future political pursuits. Council-manager governments, on the other hand, apparently reduce the desire for new electoral contests and/or the people who seek office to begin with are slightly less interested in political campaigning. The one exception is the desire for seeking election among candidates elected in partisan contests where there is no difference between council-manager and mayor-council cities.

The latter interpretation is supported by examining an attitudinal factor that is related to the intention to run for reelection or for higher office. The importance of enjoying politics as a reason for initially running for office has little impact on the intention to seek reelection for the current position.

Differences are present, however, in the intention to seek a higher office. For those for whom enjoyment of politics is very important, 39% would like to move up (compared to 44% in 1989). One third of those for whom enjoyment of politics is important plan to run for higher office, as do one quarter of those for whom it is moderately important. Finally, only 15% from the group who reject enjoyment of politics as a reason for initially seeking a seat on the council have higher political aspirations.

Membership on the city council is a service, and it is also an important channel of political activity and a step to other governmental positions. Some council members will stress one view to the exclusion of the other and some will combine the two orientations in their attitudes. Councils differ in the balance between the two perspectives. As we have noted, councils in smaller cities and in cities that use at-large elections and the council-manager form are likely to have more members with the service orientation, whereas larger cities and those with district elections and the mayor-council form have a stronger political orientation among members. Both perspectives are going to be present to some extent on all councils, however, and members need to understand and appreciate the differences in the service and the political orientation.

IDEOLOGY AND PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Council members differ in their ideological and partisan orientation, and these differences are related in part to the size of the city. In the survey, standard definitions of ideology were used: liberals were defined as those who favor a greater role for government in helping people, and conservatives as those who want to minimize the role of government so that people can get ahead on their own. Overall, council members are slightly more likely to be on the conservative than the liberal end of the scale with one quarter in the middle. (See Table III.7.) The ideological complexion of council members in cities of different sizes, however, deviates from these tendencies. Overall, half of the members of the small city council members are conservative, 28% are liberal, and one in five is moderate. The conservatives are down a bit and liberals up a bit from 1989, and there has been a drop in moderates from 33% to 22%. Medium-sized cities have a similar plurality of conservative council members as small cities, fewer liberals than small cities, and more moderates. The small and medium-sized cities are more alike than they were in 1989 when the small cities were clearly more conservative than the medium-sized. In the large cities, the liberals have a plurality with four in ten members compared to three in ten who are conservative and moderate. There are slightly more conservatives and slightly fewer moderates than in 1989 indicating that the large city council is somewhat more polarized ideologically that previously.

Table III.7 Ideological Orientation of Council Members

	Total		Small	Medium	Large
Very conservative	2.6%	47.4%	49.8%	46.5%	30.4%
Conservative	21.8				
Slightly conservative	23.0				
		24.2	21.7	29.9	30.4
Middle of the road	24.2				
Slightly liberal	12.4	28.3	28.5	23.6	39.3
Liberal	12.6				
Very liberal	3.3				

There is a similar pattern with regard to the political party identification of council members. This is a self-description rather than actual party registration and refers to personal partisan identification regardless of whether one is elected in a partisan or nonpartisan election. Although most cities use

nonpartisan elections, party identification is still an indicator of attitudes that may influence decisions that council members make. The variation across the cities is striking, as indicated in Table III.8. Democrats outnumber Republicans in all types of cities as found in 1989, but there is very close balance in the small cities, a small Democratic advantage in medium-sized cities, and a strong Democratic superiority in large cities. In small cities, the proportion of "independents," who are not identified with either party, has declined since 1989 and the number of Democrats has increased.

Table III.8 Party Identification of Council Members

	Total		**Small**	**Medium**	**Large**
Strong democrat	26.4%	38.3%	36.3%	39.3%	51.9%
Weak democrat	11.9				
Independent/leaning democrat	10.7	30.9	30.2	33.8	29.6
Independent	9.1				
Independent/leaning republican	11.1				
Weak republican	13.7	30.8	33.5	26.9	18.5
Strong republican	17.1				
[n=656]					

The medium-sized cities have fewer Republicans than the councils in small cities and more Democrats. These cities have the highest proportion of independents; the proportion of independents has grown whereas identifiers with both parties have declined somewhat since 1989. Elected officials in large cities reflect the same trend: a slight decrease in party identifiers and an increase in independents from 18% to 30% since 1989. The independents are now a significant swing group and Republicans are a small minority on these councils. Unlike 1989, it is no longer the case that partisan considerations are likely to be more strongly expressed as city size increases, although the Democratic Party weight still increases with city size.

Partisan orientation deviates from the overall breakdown for certain categories of council members but not for others. African-Americans and Hispanics are much more heavily Democratic than are whites on city councils. Among the African-Americans, 76% are strong or weak Democrats and only 6% are Republicans, and among Hispanics 62% are Democrats and 14% are Republican. In contrast, the breakdown among whites is an even split of 34% each. Women on city councils are somewhat more likely to be Democrat (46%) than men (35%) and much less likely to be Republican (19% versus 36%). Republican identification increases slightly with higher age, as the following figures indicate:

	Democrat	**Independent**	**Republican**	**Total**
Age				
Under 40	49%	22%	29%	100%
40-59	38	32	30	100

60 and over	34	34	33	100

Those over forty are more like to be independents.

The more strongly council members are identified with a political party, the more likely they are to feel that representing party interests is important. Among those who classify themselves as "strong" Democrats and Republicans, 63% and 53%, respectively, consider representing parties to be at least somewhat important,[15] whereas this view is expressed by only one third of those who are "weak" Democrats and Republicans. Only 27% of the independents, on the other hand, consider representing parties to be somewhat or very important. Even among those strongly identified with a party, however, relatively few feel that representing parties is very important; only 9% of the strong Democrats and 4% of the strong Republicans express this view.

There is a long-standing debate about whether nonpartisan elections affect the partisan makeup of the city council in a way that deviates from the typical division in outcomes when a partisan ballot is used, e.g., in state legislative races. One position is that nonpartisan elections produce higher Republican representation, a "Republican bias," whereas other research indicates that this deviation is unlikely to occur especially when district elections are used.[16] The present study cannot make the comparison between the party identification of council members and the "normal" party division in voting in other elections. Therefore, partisan bias cannot be measured directly.

There are several differences in the councils elected by the two ballot forms, however, which are illuminated by the recent survey and were also indicated in the 1989 results. First, as indicated in Table III.9, there is a substantially higher proportion of Democrats elected in cities of all sizes that use partisan rather than nonpartisan elections. In small and medium-sized cities, there are also more Republicans elected with partisan elections. In medium-sized and large cities, the proportion of Republicans is higher in cities with nonpartisan than in those with partisan elections. For cities of all sizes combined, there is no difference.

Table III.9 Party Identification of Council Members and Ballot Type of Elections

	% Democrat		**% Independent**		**% Republican**	
Ballot Type	**NP**	**P**	**NP**	**P**	**NP**	**P**
Size of city:						
Small	33.4	47.8	34.2	14.1	32.2	38.0
Medium	34.1	68.2	36.6	18.2	29.3	13.6
Large	42.1	75.0	36.8	12.5	21.1	12.5
All	34.2	54.6	35.0	14.6	30.8	30.8
	% Strong Democrats		**% Strong Republicans**		**Combined % of Strong Party Identifiers**	
Ballot Type	**NP**	**P**	**NP**	**P**	**NP**	**P**
Size of city:						
Small	21.1	44.6	16.4	28.3	37.5	72.9
Medium	16.3	50.0	13.8	9.1	30.1	59.1
Large	34.2	68.8	13.2	12.5	47.4	81.3
All	20.9	48.5	15.6	23.1	36.5	71.6

Second, there are far more independents elected in nonpartisan elections in cities of all sizes.

The difference is approximately 20 percentage points more independents in cities of all sizes.

Third, the intensity of partisan identification is less in nonpartisan elections. When the proportion of council members who strongly identify with either the Democratic or Republican Party is combined, there is a gap of roughly thirty percentage points in cities of all sizes. There are approximately half as many council members who strongly identify with either party in nonpartisan as compared to partisan elections. The difference is much greater among Democrats. Small cities are a partial exception: there are more strong Republicans when the council is elected on a nonpartisan ballot.

In sum, partisan elections favor Democrats and attract strong party supporters from both parties. Nonpartisan elections provide a much more conducive climate for independents. They are much more highly represented in councils elected by nonpartisan than partisan elections.[17]

The nonpartisan ballot has no consistent impact on the Republican share of council seats but lowers the Democratic share of council seats. It reduces the proportion of officials with a strong sense of partisanship. Nonpartisan elections lead to higher proportions of independents and persons weakly identified with a political party, whereas partisan elections enhance the election of persons who feel a strong sense of partisanship. Partisan elections result in the selection of more council members who identify with a political party and more members who have a strong sense of party identification than does the general population in this era of declining party loyalty. Nonpartisan elections, on the other hand, produced in 2001 a distribution that was very close to that of the population as a whole. The percentage of Democrats is the same—34%. The population is 40% independent whereas 35% of the council members are independent; and the Republican share of 30% on the council is higher than the 24% in the population.[18] In sum, the type of ballot has an impact on partisan representation. Whether one agrees with the ways that it is skewed under partisan or nonpartisan ballot will vary with point of view and perhaps with one's partisan inclinations.

In sum, city council members express the interests of many groups and are influenced by many groups. They may be concerned about their own reelection or other campaigns, and they may reflect the attitudes of a political party. All these forces tend to be slightly more powerful in medium-sized cities compared to small cities, and in large cities compared to medium-sized. The evidence suggests that the pressures and cross-pressures on council members increase as the city population size rises, although the differences between small and medium-sized cities are not as great as in 1989. Still, in all sizes of cities, the concern that council members have for representing a wider variety of groups and the number of groups that have impact on the council appears to have decreased over the past decade to return to the levels found in the late seventies.

IV. COUNCIL ORGANIZATION AND PROCESS

The way that councils conduct their operations and organize themselves varies with the size of the city. This was also the case in 1979 and 1989. A decade ago, there was already a trend toward greater "institutionalization" of the city council in all cities, and the differences across cities were generally less than they were ten years ago. The trend has leveled off in 2001. Approximately the same number of councils in cities uses committees and has staff as was the case ten years ago.

COUNCIL COMMITTEES

City councils increasingly include committees in their organization. Whereas 61% of the council members reported that committees were used to consider policy questions in 1979, 84% of the council members indicated that committees are used in 1989.[19] The level of committee usage continued in

2001.

Percent of Councils that Use Committees

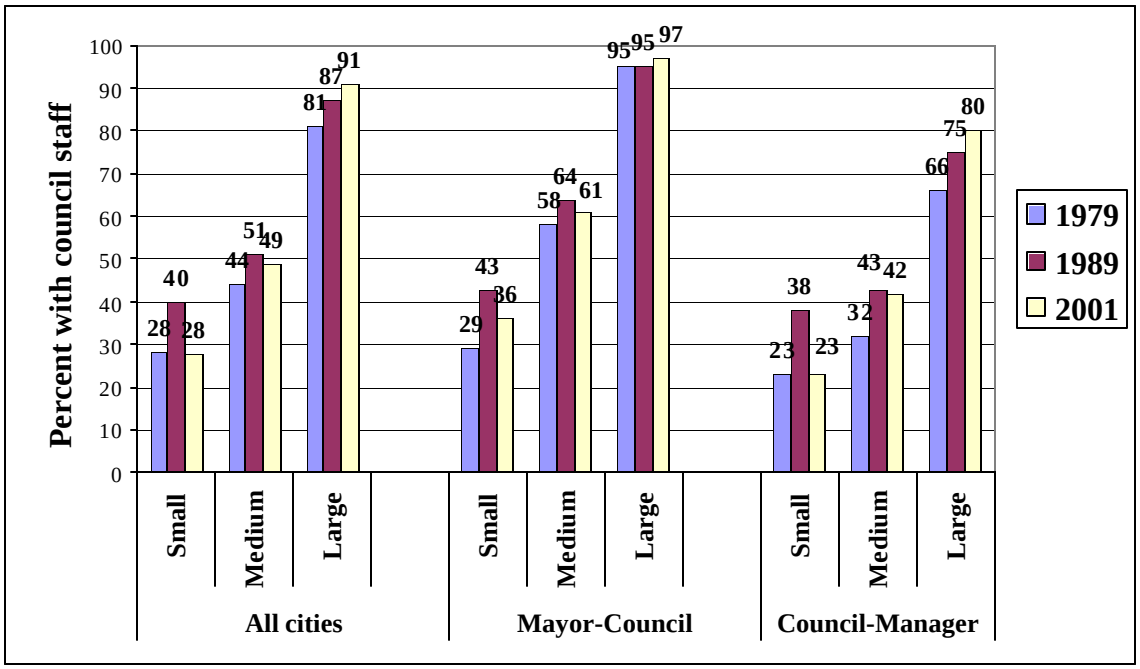
	1979	1989	2001
Small	55%	72%	71%
Medium	61	81	76
Large	83	92	91

Committee use continues to be somewhat less common in council-manager than in mayor-council cities; 64% versus 85% of the council members, respectively in cities with the two forms of government, report using committees. Furthermore, usage is more common in mayor-council cities of all sizes. In council-manager cities, 62% of the small cities, 70% of the medium-sized cities, and 90% of the large cities use committees.

COUNCIL STAFF

The assignment of staff[20] to work with the city council was a practice most commonly found in large cities and mayor-council cities in the past. These tendencies are still the same, but it is becoming a more common practice in medium-sized cities and remains at a very high level in large cities, as indicated in Figure IV.1. There has been a drop in the proportion of council members in small cities who report having council staff. In most cases, the level has reverted to that of 1979 with the exception of small mayor-council cities that are below the 1989 level but above the 1979 level in use of committees. Council-manager cities are still less likely to have staff than mayor-council. In these cities, some take the view that the city manager and assistants can provide the staff needs of the council, and this is commonly the case in small council-manager cities. In medium-sized cities staff use is common, and it is typically found in large council-manager cities. In mayor-council cities where the council does not naturally look to the mayor to provide staff support, councils are more likely to have their own staff in cities of all sizes.

Figure IV.1 Percent of Council Members who Report Having Council Staff by City Size and Form of Government



In assessing the need for staff, it is helpful to separate the council members who have staff and those who do not. For members of councils with **no staff**, the most common opinion is that staff support is not needed. The exception is council members in large cities most of whom feel that they need more staff. (See Table IV.1.) The overall response is similar from council members in council-manager and mayor-council cities and those elected from districts and at-large.

When councils **have staff**, there is majority sentiment in small and medium-sized cities that the staffing is adequate in relation to the council's needs. (See Table IV.1.) A plurality of the council members from large cities, on the other hand, feels that the staff is too small. Few council members feel that the staff is too large although this view is held by about one in twelve council members. There is a somewhat larger proportion of council members from mayor-council cities who consider the staff resources to be too small. A modestly higher proportion of council members elected from districts would like more staff although the disparity in views is not as great as it had been in 1989. The extent of support for adding council staff appears to be receding somewhat.

Table IV.1 Need for Staff Support

	Total	Small	Medium	Large	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	District	At-large
No staff are assigned:								
More staff needed	21%	19%	28%	80%	21%	22%	23%	20%
Council has no staff & needs no staff	78	81	71	20	79	76	77	79
Less staff needed	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	1
Staff are assigned:								
More staff needed	24	15	27	43	21	27	27	21
Right number of staff	69	79	66	49	71	66	67	72
Less staff needed	7	7	7	8	7	7	7	7

V. CITIZEN RELATIONS AND PUBLIC IMAGE

The linkages between constituents and council members are part of an ongoing relationship between citizens and city government. In ways not covered in previous studies, the 2001 survey examined a number of indicators of how citizen are involved in city government. In addition, the survey asks again how council members assess their image with the public.

RELATIONS WITH AND RECEPTIVITY TO THE PUBLIC

Council members were given the opportunity to assess the quality of their city's public relations effort with citizen and how receptive the government is to citizen input. In a separate question, they could rate the level of citizen participation. Most council members rate the city's public relations efforts as very good or good, as indicated in Table V.1. Almost three quarters of the council members in small and medium-sized cities provide a good or better rating, although a rating at this level is given by 63% of the large city representatives. Council members in council-manager cities are more likely to rate the quality of public relations as very good, although there is less difference between the combined good and very good ratings. Similarly, at-large council members are somewhat more positive than district members, and this difference cannot be attributed simply to the greater use of districts in larger cities. For example, 80% of the at-large members in large cities rate public relations as good or better versus 59% of the district members. Those who are physically close to all their constituents in districts appear to have a greater sense that city is not doing enough to relate to citizens.

Table V.1 Quality of City's Public Relations Effort with Citizens

	Total	Small	Medium	Large	Form of Government		Election Type	
					Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	District	At-Large
Very good	25%	26%	27%	18%	30%	18%	22%	28%
Good	47	47	47	45	45	51	48	46
Fair	22	21	21	31	20	25	24	20
Poor	6	6	5	5	5	7	6	5

The assessment of how receptive the city government is to citizen input is also positive. Presumably the standard of performance would be a high level of receptivity. As indicated in Table V.2, over half the council members in cities of all sizes consider the city to be very receptive, and approximately three in ten rate the city as moderately receptive. Council-manager cities are viewed as very receptive by 62% of the council members compared to 44% of the mayor-council representatives. There is no difference based on district versus at-large constituency in assessment.

Table V.2 Level of Receptivity of the Government to Citizen Input

	Total	Small	Medium	Large	Form of Government		Election Type	
					Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	District	At-Large
Very receptive	55%	54%	58%	53%	62%	44%	54%	56%
Moderately receptive	31	32	28	31	27	36	32	31
Somewhat receptive	11	10	11	15	9	14	10	10

Not very receptive	4	4	3	2	2	6	4	3

A final dimension of citizen participation is assessing the level and quality of citizens' engagement; that is, how active are citizens in participating in the public life of your city. Overall, 44% consider citizen participation to be very high or high, as indicated in Table V.3. Two in five also rate participation as moderate, and just less than one in five consider it to be low. There is little consistent variation by city size or type of constituency. Almost half of the council-manager representative rate participation as high compared to 37% of those from mayor-council cities.

Table V.3 How Active the Citizens are in Participating in the Public Life of the City

	Total	**Small**	**Medium**	**Large**	**Form of Government**		**Election Type**	
					Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	District	At-Large
High	44%	43%	44%	49%	48%	37%	42%	45%
Moderate	38	37	40	35	35	42	37	39
Low	19	20	16	16	17	19	22	16

The interaction among these indicators of citizen involvement by government and participation by citizens is quite high. The quality of efforts to relate to citizens is linked somewhat to the level of citizen participation. In Table V.4a, it is clear that high participation declines as the quality of public relations drops, and the number of cities with low participation increases. Even with poor public relations efforts, however, three cities in ten have a high level of participation. More citizens participate when the city actively relates to citizens, but in a fair number of cities, citizens will participate anyway. The level of receptiveness, however, has a much stronger effect, as indicated in Table V.4b. When the city government is very receptive, 61% of the cities have a high level of participation. With moderate receptivity, high participation drops to 29% of the cities and, when city government is not very receptive, only 4% of the council members report high participation. With limited receptivity, approximately half the council members report low citizen participation. One could argue that this relationship runs in both directions. When citizens are more active, government may feel inclined or compelled to do more to relate to citizens and to listen to what they have to save. The difference in the impact of the two indicators, however, suggests that activities and orientation of the government may have a greater impact on participation than vice versa. Citizens are more likely to participate in spite of poor public relations efforts than they are to overcome the failure to acknowledge. When citizens feel that no one is listening, it is hard to find the motivation to take part.

Table V.4 Quality of Public Relations and Receptiveness of City Government

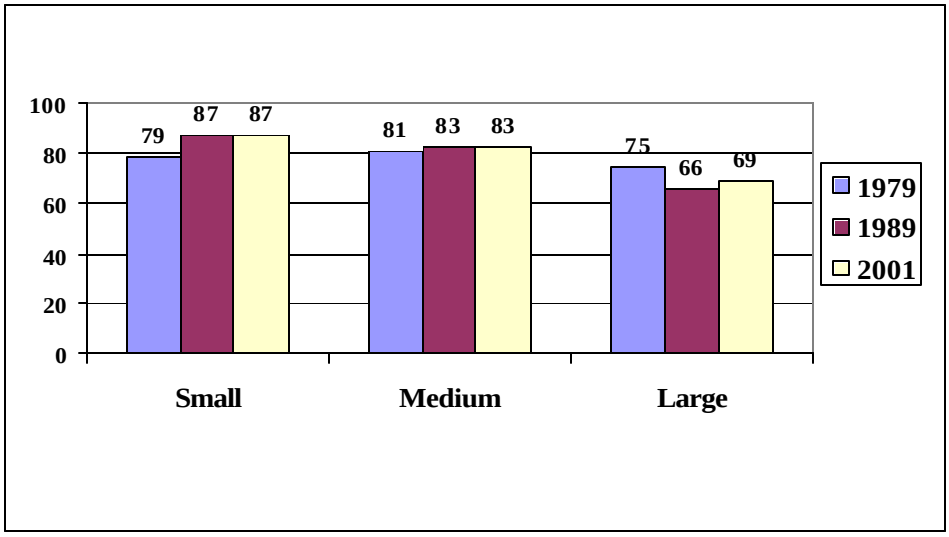
A. Quality of Public Relations					
Level of Citizen Participation	**Very good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**	**Total**
High	60.7%	44.1%	26.2%	31.6%	43.7%
Moderate	32.1	40.2	41.4	28.9	37.8
Low	7.1	15.8	32.4	39.5	18.6
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Gamma = .389, signif .00 (n=662)					
B. Receptiveness of City Government					
Level of Citizen Participation	**Very receptive**	**Moderately receptive**	**Somewhat receptive**	**Not very receptive**	**Total**

High	60.6%	28.6%	11.6%	4.3%	43.6%
Moderate	30.3	49.5	42.0	39.1	37.8
Low	9.1	21.8	46.4	56.5	18.6
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Gamma = .598, signif .00 (n=661)					

COUNCIL IMAGE

Council members generally feel that the public's image of the city council is positive, although large city council members do not share this view to quite the same extent as their counterparts in smaller cities. In the small and medium-sized cities, the estimate of the image of the city council was higher in 1989 than in 1979, whereas it declined in large cities. As Figure V.1 indicates, the assessments of image remain at almost the same levels in 2001 as in 1989. The large city council members are slightly more likely to feel that they have a positive image than in 1989 but they still slightly below the 1979 level. Still, almost two-thirds of the large city elected officials think their work is viewed positively by the public.

Figure V.1 Change in Public Image of City Council (Percent who say that image is very or generally positive)



As was observed in examining the level of citizen participation, the quality of the city's public relations with citizens and its receptivity are strongly related to the public image of the city council. As indicated in Table V.5, the image of the council drops dramatically as the quality of efforts to relate to citizens and receptiveness decline. Council members perceive that citizens have a more negative view of them when city government has a weaker record in citizen participation matters.

Table V.5 Quality of Public Relations, Receptiveness of City Government, and Image of City Council

A. Quality of Public Relations and Image of City Council						
		Quality of Public Relations				Total
		Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	

Public Image	Very positive	41.7%	8.1%	3.5%		15.2%
	Generally positive	54.8%	81.9%	67.4%	36.8%	69.2%
	Negative	2.4%	9.0%	26.4%	57.9%	13.9%
	Very negative	1.2%	1.0%	2.8%	5.3%	1.7%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Gamma = .711, signif .00 (n=660)						

B. Receptiveness of city government and Image of City Council						
		Receptiveness of Council				**Total**
		Very receptive	**Moderately receptive**	**Somewhat receptive**	**Not very receptive**	
Public Image	Very positive	22.7%	7.8%	2.9		15.2%
	Generally positive	68.0	77.7	63.2	30.4	69.2
	Generally negative	7.7	14.1	30.9	60.9	14.0
	Very negative	1.7	.5	2.9	8.7	1.7
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Gamma = .536, signif .00 (n=659)						

VI. PROBLEMS AND ISSUES OF COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Council members have differing opinions about the experience of serving in public office. A majority of council members in all cities feel that their experience on the council has improved over their tenure on the council. Large city council members are twice as likely, however, to say that it has gotten worse than those in small cities—21 versus 10 percent. The council members in medium-sized cities fall in between but closer to the large city council members at 18%.

SOURCES OF FRUSTRATION

There are a number of conditions that potentially could produce frustration among council members regarding their service in public office. A comparison of how many council members considered each to be serious problems in the three surveys provides insights into the nature of the office. The views became more strongly negative in the middle survey and then moved toward the preexisting levels in the 2001 survey. The items in Table VI.1 are listed in the order of the seriousness of the problem in 1979. It is evident that the frustrations and pressures of serving on the city council increased dramatically during the eighties, but they have receded during the nineties although not necessarily to the 1979 level.

Table VI.1 Sources of Frustration to Council Members, 1979, 1989, 2001

	Total			Small			Medium			Large		
	1979	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2**
Council member conflict	33%	55%	43%	36%	52%	43%	33%	55%	43%	23%	57%	3
Interest group pressure	33	46	31	35	47	28	31	47	43	28	45	
Long hours	26	43	22	22	35	20	33	43	26	31	50	
Time away from family	24	46	27	23	35	24	23	46	32	26	56	
Inadequate staff	24	36	15	22	21	12	25	39	19	29	48	
Low salary	n.a.	43	27	n.a.	34	24	n.a.	43	32	n.a.	52	
Too much reading	19	40	21	17	40	18	19	35	25	27	44	
Media coverage	19	36	32	18	36	30	19	34	39	20	38	
Too many meetings	18	35	20	16	37	17	20	31	27	20	39	
Private income loss	14	34	19	12	31	17	17	34	23	15	38	
Campaign costs	13	49	24	12	37	23	13	50	22	21	59	
Open meeting laws	12	20	21	13	24	23	12	18	19	9	18	
Constituent calls	12	17	7	12	13	6	12	19	7	12	20	
Written paperwork	9	19	8	8	11	7	9	15	10	9	32	
Office space	7	23	11	6	14	10	8	24	8	10	31	
Public disclosure	7	9	9	5	8	9	10	9	11	5	9	

The number of problems and the extent of frustration have moved up and back down. Whereas two problems in 1979—conflict on the council (33%) and interest group pressure (33%)—were reported by thirty percent or more of the council members, ten problems affected that proportion of the council or more in 1989 as did an additional factor not included in the earlier survey—the level of salary for council members. In 2001, on the other hand, only three problems were identified by thirty percent or more of the council members—conflict on the council (43%), interest group pressure (31%), and media coverage (32%). There were two problems at this level in small cities compared to 11 in 1989; there were two problems in medium-sized cities compared to 10 in 1989; and there were seven commonly cited problems in large cities compared to 13 in 1989.

There are two problems that are the same level in 1989 and 2001 and higher than the 1979 level—media coverage and open meeting laws. A number of problems are more commonly experienced in 2001 than in 1979 but less commonly than in 1989. For example, the biggest increase in complaints in 1989 concerned a campaign cost which was the second ranking problem, and a concern of over one third of the council members in small cities, one half in medium-sized cities, and three fifths in large cities. In 2001, only one quarter of the small and medium-sized city members mention it as a

source of frustration as do 36% in large cities. Others that are lower than in 1989 but higher than in 1979 are council member conflict, low salary, private income loss, and office space.

Six problems now cause the same level of frustration as in 1979. These are interest group pressure, long hours, time away from family, too much reading, too many meetings, and written paperwork. Public disclosure as a source of frustration has not changed over the three survey. Finally, two factors are less important in 2001 than in 1979: inadequate staff and constituent calls.

In 2001, the degree of consistency in frustration level across cities of different sizes varies depending on the condition. In seven areas—council conflict, low salary, amount of reading, media coverage, constituent calls, written paperwork, and public disclosure—, the concern is uniform across cities of all sizes. Open meeting laws are a greater source of frustration in small cities than the others, and council members in medium-sized cities are more like to complain about interest group pressure and too many meetings. Some of the problems are worse as city size increases and are most often a source of frustration in large cities. These are hours on the job, time away from family, inadequate staff, private income loss, campaign costs, and office space. These comparisons do not indicate that a problem is absolutely worse in the type of city in which it is more prominent as a frustration. Large cities have the greatest amount of interest group activity and pressure, but the lowest proportion of council members identify this as a source of frustration, presumably because interest group pressure is expected. The elected officials in medium-sized cities may expect the less stressful atmosphere of small cities, and more of them find that the level of interest group activity they experience to be stressful. Open meeting laws apply equally to all cities but they are an irritant to more small city council members.

Thus, many council members experience considerable frustration in public service, although not as much as their predecessors did in 1989. The problems are less commonly experienced than twelve years ago although most still produce greater frustration than 22 years ago. Large city council members still have greater difficulty with more problems, but some factors that are integral to the council process like conflict among council members cause the same level of frustration in all cities.

VARIATION BY INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Reaction to the nature of the council position is affected to some extent by the individual characteristics of the members. The reactions of men and women, whites and African-Americans, and those who work full-time, part-time, or have no job other than their council position are presented in Table VI.2.

Table VI.2 Elections Type, Job Status and Race and Sources of Frustration (Percent who feel condition is a serious problem.)

	Sex		Election Type		Other Employment			Race		
	Male	**Female**	**District**	**At-Large**	**No**	**Part-time**	**Full-time**	**White**	**Afro-American**	**Oth**
Council member conflict	41%	47%	38%	46%	45%	48%	41%	42%	43%	44
Interest group pressure	28	37	29	32	30	**41**	29	**32**	22	**3**
Long hours	20	29	23	21	19	26	23	22	20	1
Time away from family	29	23	29	26	21	25	31	28	20	**3**
Inadequate staff	14	18	17	13	17	16	14	14	**26**	1
Low salary	25	32	30	24	23	**41**	26	25	**41**	**4**
Too much reading	18	27	23	19	28	21	17	21	20	2
Media coverage	30	37	30	34	37	**40**	29	32	33	**4**
Too many meetings	20	21	23	18	22	18	20	21	14	1
Private income loss	19	20	22	17	8	**33**	22	19	24	**3**
Open meeting laws	22	18	16	25	26	**28**	18	**23**	16	3
Campaign costs	24	24	21	26	26	26	23	23	28	2

Constituent calls	6	7	9	5	8	4	6	6	**14**	3
Written paperwork	6	11	7	8	12	6	6	8	14	6
Office space	11	11	13	9	13	16	8	9	**24**	**25**
Public disclosure	11	6	8	10	9	13	9	10	4	8

On most of the items, men and women react essentially the same. There are no items over which the proportion of women who experience frustration is ten percentage points different than among men. Three almost reach this threshold. Female members are more concerned about interest group pressure, long hours, and too much reading. In 1989, there was a ten percent gap for these items (as well as inadequate staff support).

District and at-large members of councils also respond similarly to conditions. The only item that approaches a ten percent difference is council member conflict. It is a greater source of frustration among at-large members.

When council members are divided by their employment status, there are a number of areas of divergence in response to conditions encountered in public office. Both those who work full-time and part-time more commonly experience the same problem of private income loss, and those who work part-time are frustrated with low salaries for the council position. The concern with salary is shared by almost half of those with full-time jobs in large cities. Full-time jobholders are more likely to be frustrated because of time away from family. Part-time job holders report higher frustration with interest group pressure, media coverage, and, in a view almost shared by those with no other employment, open-meeting laws. The council members with part-time jobs are more likely to complain about long hours than those with a full-time job. Although the overall differences in frustration level are not as great as is true of some other factors, when city size is taken into account, the differences are substantial. In medium-size cities, 36% of those with part-time jobs compared to 26% who work full-time and 22% with no other job complain about time demands. In large cities, 63% with part-time jobs have this frustration compared with 32% and 26% of those with full-time and no jobs, respectively. Those who work full-time may ration their time better and have more realistic expectations, since they would go into the position realizing that they are likely to experience great time pressures. For these or other reasons, it is not the council member with another full-time job who is the most frustrated over council workload and support but rather those who work part-time. Similar conditions were found in 1989.

Divergence in assessment based on the race of the council member is also present. There are seven factors over which white, African-American, and other minority council members diverge by ten percentage points or more. African-American and other minority members are more highly concerned about low salary—about which the greatest disparity in views is expressed—and inadequate office space than white members. African-Americans are more concerned than the others about inadequate staff assistance and constituent calls. Other minorities are more concerned about media coverage and time away from family. White and other minority members are more concerned about interest group pressure. Finally, white members are more concerned about open-meeting laws.

VARIATION BY FORM OF GOVERNMENT

There is little overall variation in the prevalence of these frustrations in cities with different forms of government. Only one item produces a different of ten percentage points or greater between council members in the two forms of government and it is a relatively low level frustration; open meetings are a source of frustration to 25% in council-manager cities versus 13% in mayor-council cities. When city size is considered as well, however, there are a number of problems that have differing impact as sources of frustration. The results presented in Table VI.3 are only those comparisons in which there is substantial difference. Council members in larger mayor-council cities report much higher levels of

frustration with council member conflict and time away from family. Council members in certain council-manager cities have greater frustration with low salary, media coverage, income loss—the factor about which there is greatest disparity—, open meeting laws, and reading workload.

Table VI.3 Form of Government, City Size, and Sources of Frustration

	City Size	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council
Council member conflict	Large	25%	41%
Time away from family	Medium	24	43
Time away from family	Large	30	44
Low salary	Small	28	18
Low salary	Large	40	26
Media coverage	Large	40	29
Private income loss	Large	45	18
Open meeting laws	Small	26	15
Open meeting laws	Large	20	9
Too much reading	Medium	29	16

The relative differences among cities of different size and form do not alter the basic change that has occurred in the past ten years. Council members find public office to be less frustrating than before. In the last report, it was suggested that the high frustration levels found in 1989 indicate that efforts might be taken to foster greater teamwork, instill greater joy of political service, and create a more realistic expectation about the nature of the council position. In view of the finding that there is less frustration with council member and interest group pressure, either these conditions have been somewhat less common or council members have become more tolerant of them.

COUNCIL PRACTICES AND FRUSTRATIONS

There are some apparent remedies to certain sources of frustration, and in two areas it is possible to test whether the differences in practice have an impact on the perception of problems. These are staff support and salary level. One might expect that the presence of staff would lessen complaints about the adequacy of staff support and that higher salaries might reduce the concern over several frustrations related to cost and compensation for council service.

The presence of council staff by itself does not diminish by very much the frustration over the amount of staff support. Among those with staff, 16% identified staff support as a frustration, compared to 15% of those without staff. When council members who consider the staffing level to adequate (regardless of whether they have staff) are considered, among those with no staff, only 4% are dissatisfied, and among those with staff, only 8% are dissatisfied. If the council members have staff but the council member considers it to be inadequate, 41% are frustrated with inadequate staff support. If there is no staff support and this is considered to be inadequate, 62% identify staffing as a source of frustration. Thus, council members respond not to the presence or absence of staff per se but rather to how well the staffing level matches their assessment of need. Providing some staff if support is perceived to be needed reduces frustration slightly, but it takes "adequate" support to make the frustration go away.

The actual salary received has a mixed effect on the frustration with the level of salary, loss of private income, and campaign costs, as indicated in Table VI.4. More pay helps to relieve frustration over salary as the level moves from no or nominal pay to compensation in the range of $6,000 to $19,999. In this middle range there is slightly less dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction rises to the highest

level—39%—when the salary is high but not necessarily an acceptable full-time salary. As salary increases still more, dissatisfaction declines to a low of 5% among those who receive over $40,000. Another indicator of the connection between salary level and frustration is the preferred change in the amount of salary. Among those who do not report that low salary is a source of frustration, there is a preference for increasing the salary of council members by an average of $4559. Among those who are frustrated with salary level, the preferred salary is $10,256 more than the current amount.[21]

Table VI.4 Council Salary and Economic Aspects of Council Membership (Percent who feel condition is a serious problem)

	Low Salary	Loss of Income	Campaign Costs
Council Salary:			
Under 2000	30%	21%	23%
2000-5999	29	16	18
6000-9999	26	16	23
10-19,999	25	24	30
20-39,999	37	27	29
40,000+	5	32	37
[n=646]			

There is a similar pattern with regard to frustration over loss of income due to council service. In this case, however, the variation in attitude is less pronounced. The level of frustration declines irregularly from 21% among those with less than $2,000 salary to 16% among those in the middle salary group--frustration level then rises despite higher council salary.

The relationship of campaign costs to salary is very weak through most of the salary range but the tendency is the reverse of what was seen in the two other areas. Frustration is consistently higher at salary levels above $10,000 and highest in the top salary group. In part, this reflects the greater concern generally with campaign costs in large cities where salaries also tend to be higher. Greater frustration, however, may also indicate that as salary goes up, so too do the stakes in the campaign and the cost of running for office.

These results suggest that measures to remedy frustration may have unpredictable effects. Increasing salary above the minimal level is associated with fewer complaints about pay, but council members with moderately high salaries may be more frustrated than those with less salary. Similarly, providing staff to council members does not necessarily reduce dissatisfaction with staff support unless the level of support is deemed to be adequate. In both respects, these conclusions match those reached based on analysis of the 1989 survey.

VII. EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL PERFORMANCE

In both the last and the current surveys, council members were asked to assess how good a job they are doing overall. They differ in their self-assessment to some extent by city size, but the range of variation is lower than it was in 1989. Members of small city councils give themselves the same rating they did earlier, but whereas the 29% offering an excellent rating was almost twice as high as their counterparts in larger cities, the ratings in the other cities has improved. Over one quarter of the medium-sized city council members view their effectiveness as excellent, as do 22% of the council

members in large cities. Average and poor ratings follow the same pattern. They are lowest (18%) in small cities, compared to 23% in medium-sized cities and 26% in large cities. The large city council members are somewhat more likely to rate their performance as only average. Only four percent of the council members in all cities consider that their performance is poor, as the following figures indicate:

Rating of Council Performance

	Total		**Small**		**Medium**		**Large**	
	1989	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**
Excellent	20.1%	28.1%	29.4%	29.2%	16.2%	26.9%	15.7%	22.2%
Good	56.7	52.2	51.7	53.1	62.9	49.7	54.5	51.9
Average	19.2	16.3	15.2	14.4	16.2	20.0	26.2	22.2
Poor	4.0	3.4	3.7	3.3	4.7	3.4	3.5	3.7
	[n=876]	[n=651]						

Officials in council-manager cities give themselves an excellent rating more often than do council members in mayor-council cities (35 versus 18 percent). When excellent and good ratings are combined the scores are closer: 84% versus 74% assess their council's effectiveness as excellent or good in council-manager and mayor-council cities, respectively.

PERFORMING COUNCIL FUNCTIONS

When effectiveness of the city council in performing nine specific functions is examined, a more detailed assessment of performance can be offered. A change in the rating scale between the 1989 and 2001 surveys makes direct comparison of ratings impossible. To simplify the presentation of the data, only the proportion who rate effectiveness as excellent or good is presented in Table VII.1 for the nine functions; the fair and poor ratings are omitted. The function that the council handles best is responding to constituent needs and demands. Most rate their effectiveness as high, i.e., excellent or good, in cities of all sizes. Reviewing the budget received the next highest rating with four fifths of all council members assessing their effectiveness as high in this activity; this is the function with the highest excellent rating given by 43% of the council members overall. The effectiveness score is highest in small cities (84%) and is given a high rating by seven in ten council members in the medium-sized and large cities. The third highest effectiveness score was given to resolving complaints from citizens. Increasingly, as noted previously, council members handle an "ombudsman" function that involves assisting citizens in working through disagreements they have with city government. Three quarters of council members view their performance as high in this area, and the scores vary little across the city size categories.

Table VII.1 Council Effectiveness in Handling Major Functions (Percent who rate their council's effectiveness as excellent or good)

	Total	**Small**	**Medium**	**Large**
Responding to constituent demands	83%	83%	81%	87%
Reviewing and approving the budget	80	84	71	72

Resolving complaints	76	76	78	70
Addressing the city's real problems	67	69	63	59
Establishing objectives and priorities	66	69	64	52
Establishing vision	64	66	62	52
Establishing long-term goals	62	65	57	48
Overseeing administrative performance	57	60	45	48
Overseeing program effectiveness	54	59	39	50

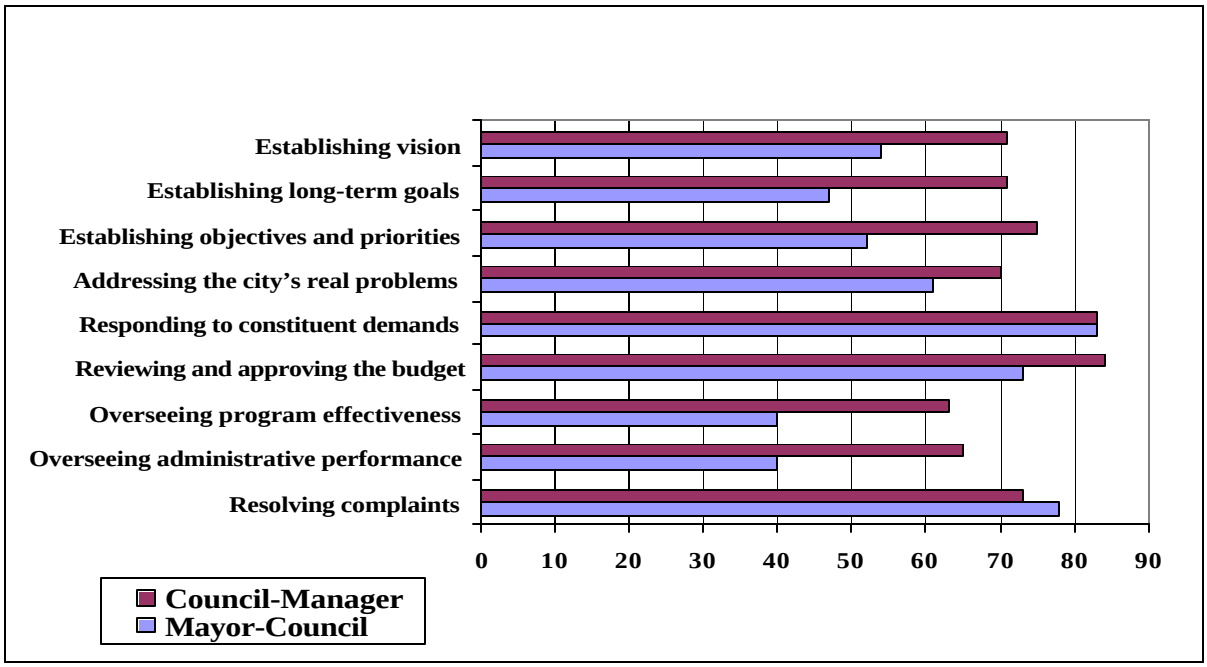
The next group of effectiveness ratings with high effectiveness scores from 62-67% of council members involves identifying problems and setting goals and objectives. In the first three areas, effectiveness is highest in small cities and drops as city size increases. The gap between highest and lowest ratings is fairly great for these functions. The function receiving the highest rating in this group is addressing the city's real problems, in which performance is rated as highly effective by two thirds of the council members and performance is somewhat more consistent across the categories of city size.

The final two functions involve council "oversight"—program review and assessment of administrative performance. They receive the lowest effectiveness ratings, although over half of the council members view performance as excellent or good. The scores are highest in small cities but effectiveness is not simply related to size; the large city council members rate their performance higher than those in medium-sized cities in both functions.

In general, most council members see their council as highly effective at handling functions directly related to citizens—responding to demands and resolving complaints—and at reviewing the budget, a function over which the council have charter authority. Over six in ten view the council as effective at handling the tasks of determining direction, setting priorities, and addressing problems. Finally, about half of the council members feel that the council is effective as reviewing program effectiveness and administrative performance. There is substantial variation in self-assessment by the size of the city from which council members come. With the exception of responding to citizens, the council members from small cities rate their effectiveness higher than the others. Those from medium-sized cities in turn give themselves higher rating than those in large cities in establishing goals and priorities and addressing the problems of the city. The greater scale and complexity of problems as cities get larger make it harder in large cities to achieve the same level of effectiveness that is achieved in smaller cities. Still, council members in the large cities rate their effectiveness at higher levels than those in medium-sized city regarding the oversight functions.

Council members from cities with different form of government diverge in some areas in their self-assessments, as indicated in Figure VII.1. Mayor-council councils have a higher effectiveness score in resolving citizen complaints, there is no difference in the ratings for responding to constituent demands, and the council-manager councils have slightly higher ratings for approving the budget and addressing the problems of the city. In the remaining council functions that involve goal setting and oversight, there are substantially higher ratings in council-manager than mayor-council cities. Although the councils in the two forms perform similarly with regard to representational functions, the council-manager city councils are more effective at governance functions.

Figure VII.1 Council Effectiveness in Handling Major Functions by Form of Government (Percent with self-assessment of good or excellent)



CHANGE IN EFFECTIVENESS

Council members were asked to assess the council's effectiveness as a policy making body today compared to its performance five years ago in all three surveys. In 1979, almost half—48 percent—of the council members thought the council was more effective, 37% thought it was about the same as before, and only 15% thought it was less effective. The large city council members were particularly positive about the trend; 58% considered themselves to be more effective. On the other hand, the 1989, as indicated in the following figures, the overall results were similar, but the view of change was not as positive in medium-sized and large cities:

Effectiveness Today Compared to Five Years Ago by City Size

	Total		**Small**		**Medium**		**Large**	
	1989	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**	**1989**	**2001**
More effective	45.1%	56.5%	47.7%	58.4%	44.2%	53.8%	43.7%	48.1%
About the same	41.7	32.4	41.7	31.2	46.4	33.1	42.0	40.4
Less effective	11.4	11.1	10.5	10.5	9.5	13.1	14.3	11.5
	[n=869]	[n=622]						

The results in 2001 reflect a turnaround in attitude about council effectiveness. A clear majority overall feel that the council's performance has improved in the previous five years, and this view is held by 58% of the small city council members. In medium and large cites a majority and clear plurality, respectively, feel that effectiveness has increased. Just as the sources of frustration have declined in importance, more council members think that performance is improving or remaining constant. The council members from large cities no longer stand out as either more positive or more negative than the rest, but neither are they appreciably more negative.

In 1989, the proportion who feels that the council is a more effective body is the same in council-manager and mayor-council cities (45 percent). In 2001, on the other hand, the assessment of

change in cities divided by form of government is as follows:

Effectiveness Today Compared to Five Years Ago by Form of Government

	Form of Government	
	Council-Manager	**Mayor-Council**
More effective	61.1%	48.4%
About the same	29.4	36.8
Less effective	9.5	14.8
[n=622]		

The view of change is much more positive in council-manager cities.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT EFFECTIVENESS

The prevailing view that council performance is getting better or remaining at the same level does not necessarily mean that the characteristics of the council and conditions in the city are stable or improving. Council members were asked about a number of factors could have an impact on their effectiveness. This question was asked differently in 1989 and comparison of responses is not possible. To simplify presentation of the sixteen factors, the responses have been converted to a 100-point scale on which zero means that the factor has had no negative effect and 100 means that effectiveness has been negatively affected to a very great extent. The problems in rank order by average index score are as follows:

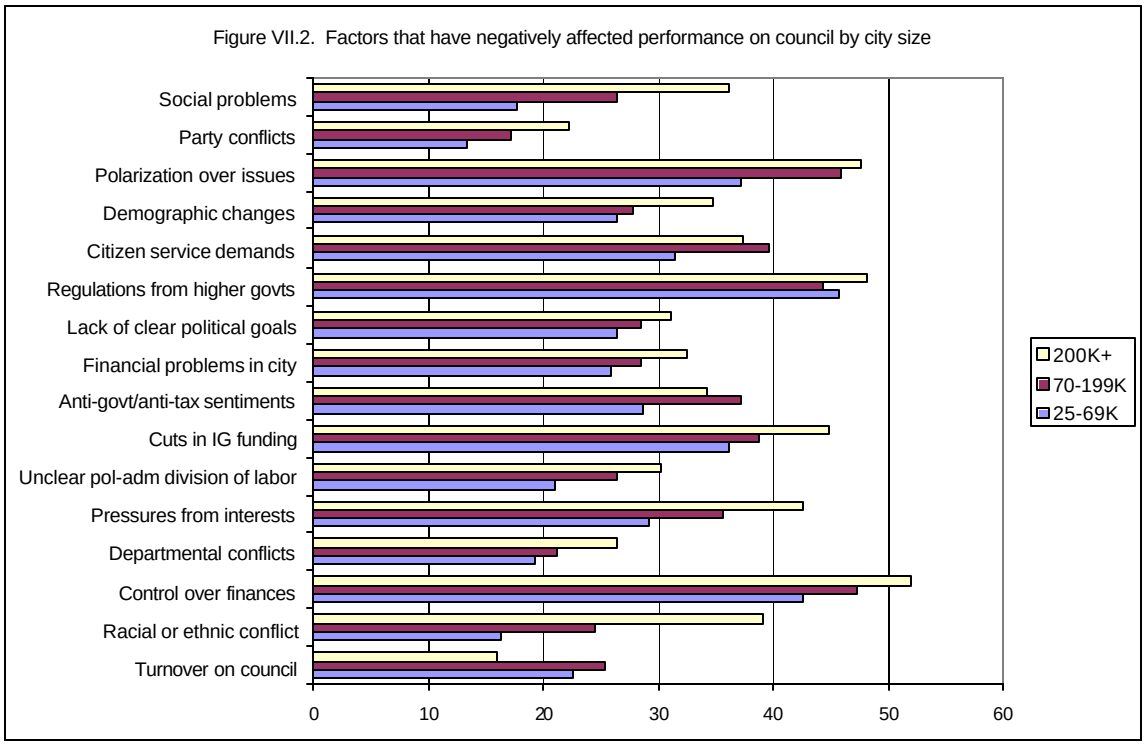
1. Regulations from higher governments 45.5
2. Control over finances 44.4
3. Polarization over issues 39.7
4. Cuts in IG funding 37.5
5. Citizen service demands 33.8
6. Pressures from interests 31.5
7. Anti-government/anti-tax sentiments 31.0
8. Lack of clear political goals 27.3
9. Demographic changes 27.3
10. Financial problems in city 27.1
11. Unclear political-administrative division of labor 22.9
12. Turnover on council 22.7
13. Social problems 21.3
14. Departmental conflicts 20.2
15. Racial or ethnic conflict 20.1
16. Party conflicts 15.1

The index score of 45.5 for regulations from higher level government reflects this combination of responses: 30% felt that this had a very great or great negative impact, 30% perceived some impact, and 40% not much or no negative impact. Three of the top four problems involve intergovernmental relations in general and specifically regulations imposed on local governments, external control of finances, and cuts in funding. The third ranked problem and those in ranks five through seven, nine and ten involve pressures from citizens and community conditions. Finally, the eighth and eleventh deal with the internal governmental process, i.e., the clarity of goals set by politicians and coordination of elected officials and administrators. It is interesting to note that turnover on the council and certain internal and

external conflicts are not perceived as having a negative impact by many council members.

Figure VII.2 presents the average score for cities divided by size. Most of the problems become more serious as city size increases. Social problems, pressures from interests, racial and ethnic conflicts, and polarization of groups over issues are much more serious in large cities, but also prevalent in medium sized cities.

Figure VII.2 Factors that have negatively affected performance on council by city size



Many of the factors that can negatively impact city council performance are beyond the immediate control of city officials. Two factors that are particularly important in their relationship to performance are ones that are internal to the governmental process and can be affected by the actions and decisions of officials themselves.[22] As indicated in Table VII.2, when poor coordination between elected officials and administrators has a great impact, the effectiveness level of the council is lower, i.e., only 49% give the council an excellent or good rating. When coordination is not a problem, on the other hand, 87% of the council members rate effectiveness as excellent or good. Similarly, the proportion given a good or excellent rating increases from 39% when there are not clear political goals to 90% when there are clear goals. Attention to the working relationship between officials and goal setting can have payoffs in the council's effectiveness.

Table VII.2 Impact of Unclear Division of Labor and Unclear Goals on Effectiveness of City Council

		Negative impact of unclear division of labor between elected officials and administrators			
		Great	**Some**	**Little-none**	**Total**
Overall effectiveness of city council [n=642]	**Excellent**	6%	16%	34%	28%
	Good	43	57	53	52
	Average	38	23	12	16
	Poor	13	4	2	3

	Total	100	100	100	100
		Negative impact of unclear political goals			
		Great	**Some**	**Little-none**	**Total**
Overall effectiveness of city council [n=639]	**Excellent**	--	16%	38%	28%
	Good	39	59	52	52
	Average	48	23	8	16
	Poor	13	3	2	3
	Total	100	100	100	100

Considering the forces at work that could impede performance, council members appear to be holding their own. They feel that they are maintaining or increasing their effectiveness and most rate effectiveness as high. They cannot control many of the factors that impact their performance, e.g., the policies and actions of higher level governments and the behavior of groups in their cities. Still, if cities that are having problems with coordination and goal setting could find ways to improve in these areas, they might be able to achieve the higher level of effectiveness reported by council members in cities that organize the governmental process well.

SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE

Council members rely upon a number of resources when they need assistance and want information from outside their city government. The utilization of outside resources has increased from 1979 to 1989 to 2001, as indicated in Table VII.3. Use of the resources of the National League of Cities has increased overall and remains at the high 1989 level in large cities, and there is also expansion of contact with the other national organizations, universities, and councils of governments. City governments are engaged in more extensive interactions with a wider variety of information sources than they were in the earlier surveys. The internet, a relatively new source, has come to be extensively used, and the 2001 survey, checking on magazine use for the first, finds that most use magazines extensively or occasionally for information. For reasons that are not clear, the use of state municipal leagues, consultants, and other cities as sources of information declined in 2001 below the 1979 level.

Table VII.3 Sources of Assistance for Council Members (Percent who make extensive or occasional use of each source)

	Total			**Small**			**Medium**			**Large**		
	1979	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**
National League of Cities	44%	64%	75%	41%	60%	77%	47%	61%	71%	56%	72%	73%
State League	69	74	48	71	81	44	72	75	51	60	65	75
Other national organizations	n.a.	46	88	n.a.	34	90	n.a.	45	88	n.a.	57	72
Council of governments	43	49	70	42	48	69	43	49	68	48	49	83
Local universities	42	65	77	35	56	78	45	63	74	63	75	78
Other cities	69	88	54	68	91	52	70	85	56	69	88	70
Private consultants	87	86	50	85	87	50	87	86	47	89	84	63
Internet	n.a.	39	70	n.a.	27	72	n.a.	37	69	n.a.	51	56

Magazines	n.a.	n.a.	81	n.a.	n.a.	83	n.a.	n.a.	79	n.a.	n.a.	76

ASSESSMENT OF COUNCIL EXPERIENCE

In view of the findings regarding frustrations of the job that are not as great as previously but still prevalent and the number of factors that would make it harder for the council to be effective, one might whether council members are overwhelmed by the position. Most actually express a positive view in the sense that the experience of being a council member has improved over their tenure on the council. Three quarters of the council members from small cities take this position compared to three in five members of councils in larger cities. On the other hand, 10% of the small city council members report that the experience has gotten worse versus 18% in medium-sized cities and 21% in large cities who have this opinion. The experience is assessed similarly in cities with different forms of government; 72% in council-manager cities and 66% in mayor-council cities report that conditions have improved while in office.

As one would expect, there are differing views among those who assess the experience differently about the prevalence of conditions that adversely affect performance. As Table VII.4 indicates, those who feel that their experience has stayed the same or gotten worse during their tenure perceive a greater negative impact of certain factors that those whose experience has improved. Those whose experience has improved a lot see relatively little turnover on council, pressures from interests, unclear political-administrative division of labor, lack of clear political goals, or polarization in the community over issues. On the other hand, the council members whose experience has gotten worse see some negative impact from all of these factors.

Table VII.4 Assessment of the extent of impact of potentially negative factors based on change in council experience

	Degree of negative impact on council performance*				
Change in experience on council during tenure	**Turnover on council**	**Pressures from interests**	**Unclear political-administrative division of labor**	**Lack of clear political goals**	**Polarization over issues**
Improved a great deal	18	26	16	17	33
Improved some	21	32	21	28	38
Stayed the same	25	34	26	32	41
Gotten worse	40	40	39	44	51
Total	23	31	23	27	40

*Impact is measured on a 100-point scale: zero = no impact / 100 = very great negative impact.

Council members are generally positive about their experience, but the cumulative effect of internal and external forces can turn their time in office into a negative experience. Improving the council experience for the minority who feel that it has gotten worse may come from addressing the factors that have a negative impact on governmental performance. It may also be useful to improve the orientation given to candidates for office to give them a more realistic idea of what to expect when serving on the council in local government.

VIII. ROLE PERFORMANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

City council members in the representational role link the public to the governmental process in a number of ways as they express the views of constituents and respond to their demands and their

needs and as they help citizens deal with governmental agencies. In the governance role, they make decisions about the policies and programs, and they review the work of the executive through oversight.[23]

City councils in council-manager cities also fill a third major role as the hirer and supervisor of the city manager, who serves as the executive in this form of government. The council controls the selection and continuation in office of the manager. In mayor-council cities, the executive is chosen by the voters for a fixed term, and the council and mayor have offsetting powers. In this sense, they are equals. It is important to examine how councils perform their roles and how the council and executive relate to each other in council-manager and mayor-council cities. In what ways does the form of government make the council experience different and in what respects are all council members alike?

COUNCIL ROLES

The respondents in the 1989 and 2001 surveys were presented a number of statements designed to measure their performance in activities related to their roles. They were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement based on how things were in their city at the time of the survey. The results are presented in Table VIII.1 arranged by the size of the city and the form of government used.

Table VIII.1 Assessment of Role of Performance by Council Members (Percent who agree with each statement*)

	Small				Medium				Large			
	Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Counci	
	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01
Assistance with Services:												
Council members devote too much time to providing citizen services.	25	12	21	14	26	18	26	24	30	20	40	4
Council members encourage citizens to refer complaints directly to staff rather than going through the council.	73	53	55	44	52	52	50	35	49	45	45	5
Intervention by a council member is necessary to get adequate staff response to citizen complaints.	33	33	49	48	39	36	69	46	59	42	63	6
Council members try to get special services and benefits for their constituents.	31	30	60	47	43	41	69	57	55	65	68	5
Governance Role:												
The council provides sufficient direction and overall leadership to city government.	80	79	74	61	73	68	60	55	74	65	60	4
The council focuses too much on short-term problems and gives too little attention to long-term concerns.	58	41	61	54	64	52	65	60	66	53	76	8
The council does not have time enough to deal effectively with important policy issues.	42	34	53	43	61	37	56	44	64	40	63	7
The council is more a reviewing and vetoing agency than a leader in policy making.	34	26	52	46	31	31	52	56	41	35	49	4
The council deals with too many administrative matters and not enough policy issues.	41	25	47	37	48	34	44	47	55	50	61	5
Political-Administrative Relationships:												
The council and city manager or city administrator have a good working relationship.	84	90	n/a	79	83	89	n/a	47	74	85	n/a	8

The council's appraisal of the city manager's administrative performance is adequate in depth and frequency.	70	77	n/a	n/a	63	70	n/a	n/a	48	63	n/a	n/
Mayoral Activities:												
The council and mayor have a good working relationship.	n/a	81	n/a	68	n/a	82	n/a	66	n/a	80	n/a	4

*Respondents were asked if they agree completely, agree more than they disagree, disagree completely or disagree more than they agree.

ASSISTANCE WITH SERVICES

Virtually all council members in all types of cities agree that a major part of the council member's job is doing services for people. When council members act as an ombudsman, e.g., providing information, handling citizen complaints, and helping resolve disagreements over receipt of services, they offer a bridge between citizens and government. As noted earlier, council members in the two types of cities spend roughly the same number of hours per week providing information and services to citizens in council-manager and mayor-council cities. Most council members do not feel that they devote too much time to services in all types of cities, although there is slightly more dissent as city size increases and in large mayor-council cities in particular. Generally, council members are less likely in 2001 than in 1989 to feel that too much time is devoted to services, again with the same exception. In 2001, 42% of the large city mayor-council respondents agree that they do spend much time on services, a level up slightly from 1989. These council members who average almost twenty hours per week on constituency services are fairly likely to feel that this commitment has become too great.

Council members can provide assistance and services either directly by acting on behalf of constituents or indirectly by referring them to the appropriate administrative office. In 1989, council members are roughly evenly split in how they handle citizen complaints. Those in council-manager cities are slightly more likely to refer citizens to staff in medium-sized and large cities, and much more so in small cities. In 2001, sentiment shifted toward council member assistance with complaints in small cities and in medium-sized mayor-council cities. There was little change among council members in large council-manager cities, and a shift toward more reliance on staff in large mayor-council cities.

Council members differ sharply between the two types of cities over the need for council intervention to secure adequate staff response to citizen complaints in both 1989 and 2001. Council members in mayor-council cities are much more likely to agree that their intervention is necessary. Although there was little difference in the large cities in 1989, a strong difference appeared in 2001 with 66% of council members in large mayor-council cities versus 42% in council-manager cities agreeing that council intervention is necessary. These responses suggest that council members feel a greater need to deal directly with staff when they do not work through a city manager who is accountable to them. It is also possible that council members in mayor-council cities more often seek to secure support by acting directly on behalf of a constituent in resolving a complaint.[24] Despite the difference between large cities based on form of government, it is apparent that council members feel that staff members are less responsive in large cities.

This tendency is also manifested by the more common attempts of council members in mayor-council cities to get special services and benefits for their constituents, although there is no difference in large cities. Thus, population size also affects attitudes on this matter. Council members in the medium-sized and large council-manager cities are more likely than their counterparts in small council-manager cities to stress getting services for constituents, but less so than those in the mayor-council cities except in large cities. By a substantial margin, council members in mayor-council cities are more likely to agree that their intervention is needed is order to get adequate staff response to citizen complaints. Council members in mayor-council cities may act in this way to develop constituency

support and also to obtain allies in case of disagreements with the mayor. The greater support for intervening on behalf of constituents and securing benefits in larger cities regardless of form of government may also reflect the greater interest group and representational pressures in these cities which were noted earlier as well as the more prevalent desire among these council members for reelection and running for higher office.[25]

Council members elected from districts are also slightly more likely to agree that council members secure special benefits for constituents. Among district members, 45% took this position, compared to 36% of the at-large council members who have a larger and more diverse constituency. Form of government has a partial effect on this attitude as well. In council-manager cities, 39% of those elected from districts agree that council members try to get services whereas 33% of those elected at-large take this position. In mayor-council cities, support is higher and more uniform: half of both the district and at-large representatives agree that council members try to get special benefits for constituents.

GOVERNANCE ROLE

In the governance role, the differences between councils based on form of government are present but not always great. In 1989, there was some inconsistency in characteristics, but in 2001 the differences are uniformly consistent with the generalization the council-manager elected officials devote more attention to the governance role and are less involved in administrative details than mayor-council cities. Examining the specific indicators, council members in council-manager cities are somewhat more likely to feel that the council provides sufficient direction and overall leadership in city government. Fewer council members in council-manager cities feel that the council focuses too much on short-term problems and gives too little attention of long-range concerns. Council members in council-manager cities are less likely to feel that the council does not have enough time to deal with policy issues. Similarly they are less likely to see themselves as a reviewing and vetoing agency in city government rather than a leader in policy making. Fewer council-manager elected officials agree that the council deals with too many administrative matters and not enough policy issues.

POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN COUNCIL-MANAGER CITIES

Generally, respondents agree that the council and the city manager or city administrator, if one is present in a mayor-council city, have a good working relationship. The exception, however, is medium-sized cities where 89% of the council-manager officials versus 47% of those in mayor- council cities consider that the working relationship is good. The elected officials in council-manager cities are generally positive about their appraisal of the manager's administrative performance, although the perceived adequacy of appraisal declines in larger cities.

MAYORAL RELATIONSHIPS

In 2001, an indicator was included in the questionnaire concerning the mayors' relationship with the council. The assessment was generally positive in both types of cities although consistently higher in council-manager governments. The structural position of the mayor differs greatly in two forms of government. Whereas the mayor is the chair of the council in council-manager cities, he or she is an independent executive with some separate powers from those exercised by the council in the mayor-council form. This separation of powers can lead to conflicts over the extent of the authority of the mayor and council vis-à-vis each other. It is not surprising, therefore, that more agree that the relationship between mayor and council is positive in council-manager cities. Four out of five council members in these cities agree that the relationship is positive, whereas about two thirds of the council members in small and medium-sized mayor-council cities take this position. In large mayor-council cities, just under half of the council members view the working relationship as positive.

Thus, the picture that emerges even more clearly in 2001 than 1989 is that of councils in council-manager cities that emphasize the governance role—setting goals, approving policy, and staying out of administrative matters although not uninvolved in constituency service—, and emphasis on the representational role including a strong constituency orientation with somewhat less effective governance activity by councils in mayor-council cities. The council members in cities with a city manager are slightly less likely to intervene in complaint handling or seek special benefits for citizens, and slightly more likely to provide policy leadership, have positive dealings with the executive, and appraise the executive's performance. The council in mayor-council cities is more actively engaged in constituency relations but the attitudes of elected officials in council-manager cities is shifting toward a strong constituency orientation as well.

IX. POLICY PROCESS

City councils are central to policy making, and the policy process involves the efforts of various other officials and groups as well. The relative contributions of these actors is affected by specific factors such as the characteristics of individuals and the circumstances in a particular city as well as general factors such as the form of government used.

SOURCES OF POLICY LEADERSHIP

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of sources of policy initiation for their city. The following table presents the percentage of council members who indicated that the official or group was a **very important** source.[26] In Table IX.1, the results from 1989 and 2001 are broken down by the form of government and the population size of the city. Overall, respondents in the recent survey were more restrained in classifying any official as being very important.

Table IX.1 Sources of Policy Initiation (Percent who rate each official or group as a very important source of policy initiation)

	Total				Small				Medium				Large			
	Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Counci	
	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	0
Mayor	45	37	81	57	44	38	74	56	45	32	83	62	44	47	84	5
Council	73	55	72	51	74	55	66	51	74	59	73	51	69	47	75	5
City administrator	72	52	13	18	75	52	27	20	72	53	10	16	68	32	6	6
Administrative staff	38	16	26	12	35	16	45	14	38	16	21	13	43	6	19	6
Boards and commissions	30	15	22	13	30	17	29	14	34	9	27	10	22	6	14	9
Interest groups	17	4	14	7	15	4	15	6	18	5	10	6	21	12	15	1
Other	20	13	24	5	28	13	29	4	13	15	23	0	17	0	23	3

Regardless of form of government, the city council has the final authority to approve decisions to create new public policy in their cities. Over half of the council members in all cities regardless of size or form of government (except large council-manager cities in which the proportion is 47%) also feel that the city council is a very important source of policy initiation, not just its approval. When very important and important are combined, the result is 92% in council-manager cities and 88% in mayor-council cities.

The relative importance of the mayor is naturally related to the form of government used. When the mayor is the elected executive in the mayor-council form, it is very likely that the mayor will be a very important source of policy ideas. Indeed, 57% of the mayor-council respondents consider their mayor to be a very important source of policy initiation, and another 33% view the mayor as an important source. The mayor in the council-manager form can also provide significant leadership of a facilitative nature, including guidance in policy making.[27] Almost two fifths of the council members in these cities consider the mayor to be a very important source of policy initiation, and another 36% view the mayor as an important source. In contrast to other combinations of size and form in which the proportion is lower in the 2001 survey than in 1989, 47% of the council members in large council-manager cities identify the mayor as very important in policy initiation.

The manager's or administrator's position is structured very differently in the two major forms of government. The city manager is a key official who may act visibly or behind the scenes as a policy adviser to the council. The mayor-council city may not have a chief administrative officer (or an equivalent official with a different title) and, even if present, this official may be viewed as part of the mayor's office rather than a separate policy actor. The opinions of council members substantiate this difference. Over half of the council members in council-manager cities overall consider the city manager to be a very important initiator in the policy process, although only 32% of the council members in large council-manager cities take this position. In all council-manager cities, another 38% see the manager as an important source of initiation. Despite the commonly expressed view of the city manager as only an administrative agent of the council who has no policy activity, the manager is widely perceived to be an important policy initiator by city council members. This represents not so much a change in the role of the city manager but rather recognition of the manager's contributions to the policy decisions of the council which have always been made.[28]

The city administrator in mayor-council cities is not viewed in the same way since the administrator may be considered to be an extension of the mayor’s office. In actuality, 18% consider the administrator to be an important policy initiator, and another 38% see the administrator as an important source of initiation. The situation is different in large cities in which only 6% of the council members rate and administrator as very important and 11% as important. In these cities, the administrator apparently does operate within the shadow of the mayor.

The professional staff who occupies the administrative positions in government and the boards and commissions are viewed as very important policy initiators by one in six to one in eight council members. The importance of both is less in large cities.

Among officials, then, we see that the mayor and council are generally regarded as very important actors in mayor-council cities with others usually viewed as being less active in policy. In council-manager cities, on the other hand, the council and the manager are generally viewed as very important, with the mayor (whose contributions are also channeled through the council as a whole) and the staff quite often regarded as important as well.

Interest groups outside of city government are not commonly major contributors to policy initiation. Interest groups may have impact over which policy alternative is chosen or how programs are implemented, but only about one council member in twenty in all cities considers them to be very important initiators of policy. The exception is large cities where 12% in both council-manager and mayor-council cities consider interest groups to be very important.

Respondents were also asked to pick the **one** source that is the **most** important policy initiator. The results, presented in Table IX.2, are consistent with those just discussed. The mayor-council mayor is rated as most important by 48% overall, whereas the council-manager mayor is viewed in this way by 10% of the council members. A major change in large council-manager cities, however, is the

increase to 29% of the council members who rate the mayor as most important compared to only 8% in 1989. The council receives the most important rating in almost half of the council–manager cities and in 34% of the mayor-council cities. The manager and staff together are most important to 36% of the council members in council-manager cities in contrast to 13% in mayor-council cities. The large cities are an exception in both forms of government; only 6% and 3% see the top administrator and staff as the most important policy initiators in council-manager and mayor-council cities, respectively. The other actors inside and outside government are rarely rated as the most important policy contributors. An interesting exception, however, are large mayor-council cities in which 10% identify interest groups as most important source of policy initiation.

Table IX.2 Most Important Sources of Policy Initiation

	Total				Small				Medium				Large			
	Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Counc	
	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	(
Mayor	7	10	52	48	5	9	44	42	8	10	57	60	8	29	54	5
Council	42	48	37	34	38	47	39	36	44	47	31	27	44	59	39	3
City administrator	33	31	3	6	40	32	6	8	29	32	3	2	31	6	1	
Administrative staff	10	5	5	7	8	6	9	10	11	6	6	4	12	0	2	
Boards and commissions	4	4	2	3	3	5	3	4	5	1	2	2	2	6	-	
Interest groups	3	2	-	3	5	1	-	1	2	3	1	4	2	0	2	1
Other	1	1	1	0	1	0	-	0	1	1	-	0	-	1	1	

This same question was asked in the two previous NLC council surveys. The ratings of the most important policy initiator are presented in Table IX.3. The mayor's rating in mayor-council cities has dropped, and the council's and administrator's identification as most important have increased. In council-manager cities, the mayor and council ratings have increased somewhat, and the manager and staff rating increased in 1989 and than dropped slightly below the 1979 level in 2001. In both types of cities, the influence of the other actors has declined somewhat compared to 1979.

Table IX.3 Most Important Policy Initiator

	Council-Manager			Mayor-Council		
	1979	**1989**	**2001**	**1979**	**1989**	**2001**
Mayor	7%	7%	10%	58%	52%	48%
Council	41	42	48	25	37	33
Manager and staff*	38	44	36	7	8	14
All other	14	8	6	10	3	6

* Manager was not listed separately in 1979. 1989 figures for manager and staff have been combined in this table.

EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE

The council and executive—mayor or manager—each make substantial contributions to the policy making process. They may do so in such a way that their separate efforts reinforce and support each other. On the other hand, each may sometimes counter the other or fail to cooperate, e.g., providing less information than the other would prefer to have when making a decision. As noted in the last chapter, the working relationship between the council and the city manager is almost always viewed as positive. Coordination of effort is likely to occur because of the manager's direct accountability to the council. The council and mayor in mayor-council cities, on the other hand, have separate and offsetting powers. At times, they will pursue different approaches which put them at odds with each other. Still, a majority of council members view the relationship with the mayor as positive.

The dynamics of the relationship between council and executive are illuminated further by the council's assessment of the performance of the executive in policy making, implementation, and management of the organization. The activities included in Table IX.4 indicate how well the executive—either the mayor in mayor-council cities or the city manager in council-manager cities—takes direction from the council, provides the council with information, and runs the municipal organization to the satisfaction of the council. In each activity, council members rated performance as very good, good, satisfactory, or poor. These ratings reflect only the council's view of executive performance; the executive might assess his or her own performance very differently. Furthermore, the city manager is the employee of the council, whereas the mayor in the mayor-council city is another elected official who is accountable to voters as are the council members. Still, the responses provide an indication of how council members view the official with whom they interact extensively and, therefore, provide insight into how council members will do their jobs.

Table IX.4 Council Rating of Executive Performance (Percent who rate performance of executive very good or good for each activity*)

	Total				Small				Medium				Large			
	Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Mayor-Council	
	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01	89	01
Provides the council with sufficient alternatives for making policy decisions.	72	75	36	41	80	75	51	40	69	76	38	46	65	70	27	41
Accomplishes the goals established by the council.	86	80	53	42	87	79	60	42	87	84	60	42	79	70	44	45
Provides the council with sufficient information to assess the effectiveness of programs and services.	72	74	40	41	81	76	61	44	71	73	42	30	59	65	25	45
Insures that city government is open to participation of all groups in the community.	77	76	60	64	85	76	63	66	77	76	68	62	67	80	54	55
Maintains high standards of personal conduct for self and staff.	87	90	67	61	87	91	74	64	90	87	72	60	82	95	60	52
Seeks to improve efficiency of city government.	83	86	61	61	85	88	66	64	87	84	68	54	73	70	53	59

*Remainder satisfactory or poor.

The city manager and executive mayor approach the job and their relationship to the council

differently. In the first three measures, the city manager emerges as an official who works for the council and supports its functions. Although there are critics of "bureaucratic government" who portray the city manager as aloof, most council members see the manager as accountable and forthcoming with alternatives and information. The ratings overall have increased slight since 1989 with three quarters of the council members offering positive assessments. The mayor in mayor-council cities, who occupies a position with separate powers, is seen by many council members as independent in pursuing goals and less open in providing information to the council. Only two fifths of the council members overall give the mayor positive ratings on providing sufficient policy alternatives, seeking to accomplish the goals of the council, and providing information to support assessment of programs. The ratings have gone down compared to 1989 in small cities regarding providing policy alternatives and in small and medium-sized cities regarding accomplishing council goals and providing information for assessment in medium-sized cities. They have gone up regarding providing policy alternative and providing information for assessment in large cities.

The mayor is a major force in policy initiation in mayor-council cities, as we have noted, but these ratings suggest that the mayor is somewhat distant from the council. As the council seeks more information about policy alternatives or program performance—as these results indicate they might do—, there may be tension with the mayor even if they are largely in agreement about policy objectives. The results indicate that the mayor's ratings are more consistent across cities of different sizes than in 1989. Although the assessment of the mayor's performance in providing policy alternatives and information for program assessment are particularly low in large cities in 1989, those ratings have either gone up or remained the same and the ratings in other size cities have dropped to the same level as found in the large cities.

There is greater similarity in ratings of the ways that the executive relates to the public and the organization, although the assessment of the city manager is consistently higher and these ratings match those received in 1989. Three quarters of the council members give the manager good ratings for insuring that city government is open to the participation of all groups in the community. Over three fifths of the council members in mayor-council cities give this rating to their mayor. City managers are overwhelmingly credited with maintaining high standards of conduct and seeking to improve the efficiency of city government, as are most mayors although the ratings have dropped for mayors in certain settings. The ratings on promoting efficiency are somewhat lower for both mayors and managers in large cities.

The ratings for the two kinds of city government executives are not intended to suggest that they can or should be identical. The executive mayor can not be under the control of the city council any more than the city manager can have independent powers like the veto that could be used to check the council. Rather, these measures illuminate the contrasting circumstances of the city council as it seeks to fill its service and governance roles. Since the council in the council-manager city has a complementary relationship with its executive, it can seek to expand its own effectiveness with the expectation of support from the city manager. On the other hand, since the council in the mayor-council city has a potentially adversarial relationship with the mayor whom it cannot control, it may be inclined to seek ways to expand its capacity to compete with the mayor or secure greater independence from the mayor.[29] This is a natural inclination, but the approach may not be productive. Councils and mayors in mayor-council cities need to find ways to advance their shared interests in improved performance without abandoning their separate official interests. A minority of officials in council-manager cities may need to recognize the bases for cooperation that are built into their form of government and look for ways to enhance interaction. In 1989, there was also evidence in council-manager cities, especially the large ones, that some council members view the city manager with distrust, although in general the assessments are positive and manager ratings of performance have tended to go up in 2001.

MAYOR'S PERFORMANCE

It is possible to compare the mayor's performance in activities common to both forms of government based on indicators in the 2001 survey. In one of the measures, council members were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement: the mayor is a visionary person who constantly initiates new projects and policies for the city. Among council members in mayor-council cities, 57% agreed with the statement compared to 42% in council-manager cities. These overall differences were reflected in all of the city size categories with one exception. Only 34% agree in medium-sized council-manager cities. Visionary leadership by the mayor has been the focus of increased attention in recent years, and it is being provided by over half of the mayors in mayor-council cities and less than half in small and large council-manager cities and one third in medium-sized council-manager cities.

There are two other aspects of the mayor's job common to all cities. These are relating to other governments in the region and with state and federal government and promoting economic development of the city. Mayors are usually seen as ambassadors for their city and promoters-in-chief. The comparative performance indicated by the percent who rate the mayor's performance as very good or good is as follows:

	Total		**Small**		**Medium**		**Large**	
	Council-Manager	**Mayor-Council**	**Council-Manager**	**Mayor-Council**	**Council-Manager**	**Mayor-Council**	**Council-Manager**	**Mayor-Council**
Interacting with other governments and the federal and state government.	66%	70%	65%	73%	65%	62%	75%	66%
Promoting economic development of the city.	58	68	57	71	58	56	60	76

The ratings for handling intergovernmental relations are similar between the types of cities and over cities of difference sizes. Mayors in mayor-council cities have a higher overall rating based on their higher scores in small cities, but the council-manager mayors have higher ratings in medium-sized and large cities. Regarding economic development, the mayor-council mayors get higher marks in small and large cities whereas the order is reversed in medium-sized cities. Mayors in mayor-council governments who are elected to be the executives in their governments are more like to be visionary leaders and to be more effective at economic development and, to a lesser extent, intergovernmental relations. Many mayors in council-manager cities offer visionary leadership as well and have achieved strong records in aspects of the position that involve representing the city and seeking to advance its interests.

X. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Much is similar or only slightly different in the characteristics and conditions of American city council members over the past two decades. Council members have gotten progressively (but only slightly) better educated and councils keep getting slightly more diverse in racial and ethic terms although there is no more gender diversity than in 1979. Those interviewed in 2001 have the same experience on

the council (but more than in 1979) and the same occupational profile as those interviewed in 1989 although fewer of them have full-time jobs in addition to their council position. They feel that their image in the eyes of the public is as good as it was ten years ago or, in large cities, slightly better. Council members continue to plan to run for another term on the council at the same or slightly higher rate than before. They have the same level of ambition to seek higher office.

There are many conditions that are substantially different. Council members are getting older. In 1979 when the baby boom generation was entering public service in large numbers, 26% were under 40 and only 14% were over sixty years in age. In 2001, only 9% were under 40 and 34% were over 60. As the baby boomers pass the sixty year mark in this decade, the proportion over 60 is likely to increase.

In the report on the 1989 survey, the conclusion was stated that "council office in city government has become to a greater extent than before a 'pressure cooker.'" In 2001, the extraordinary pushes, pulls, and strains evident in the late eighties seem to have been replaced with the level of pressures found in the late seventies. Two key elements shaped the especially high level of pressure in 1989: strain from trying to represent a large number of groups and constituencies and a high level and widespread level of frustration. Both have changed.

First, council members in 1989 saw themselves as actively representing a wider range of groups some of which were bound to be at odds with each other. They perceived more sources of influence and higher levels of pressure in policy making. Now, council members appear to have "space" and a greater degree of autonomy vis-à-vis groups in the community. A timeless debate over the nature of representation has revolved around the tensions between acting in terms of one's own sense of what is best for the community and acting as the delegate of constituents who does what they instruct the council member to do. In 2001, council members seem to have shifted a bit away from the delegate role and to have reestablished a bit more distance between themselves and the constituent groups in the city population. Elected officials may still listen to a wide range of groups and they are more actively involved in providing services to constituents, but they are somewhat less likely to feel an obligation to speak for as many groups. A wide range of groups have a lot of influence, especially in large cities, but the extent of this pressure does not appear to be as great as in 1989.

Second, in 1989 council members perceived many problems with the council position and experienced a very high level of frustration over most aspects of the job. The frustration level has receded. In 1979, only two problems had been identified as a source of frustration by 30% or more of the council members. In 1989, eleven problems affected that proportion of the council. In 2001, only three problems were identified by 30% or more of the council members—conflict on the council (43%), interest group pressure (31%), and media coverage (32%), and only two of these substantially affected small and medium-sized cities. There were seven commonly cited problems in large cities compared to 13 in 1989.

In 2001, the job of being a council member is not a picnic but the level of stress and strain has moderated substantially. Still, in certain respects it is still more difficult and frustrating than in 1979. In 1989 as now, the personal "costs" of council service are high, both expenses for campaigning and the loss of time for family and work, but there was a more acute feeling that they are not adequately compensated for their work nor supported in doing it. Council members are receiving somewhat more salary in 2001, and 39% do not prefer any additional salary. Approximately three quarters of the council members feel that the existing level of staff support is adequate (including those who have no staff). Change is preferred by others especially in salary. Two thirds would like an increase in council

pay, and one in four would like to have additional staff support.

Another change is that the council's level of performance is perceived to be better than previously. The proportion giving the council an excellent or good effectiveness rating has increased slightly since 1989. In addition, 57% in 2001 compared to 45% in 1989 feel that council's effectiveness has improved in the five years before the survey. In addition, 72% feel that the city does an excellent or good job at relating to citizens and involving them in government, and 55% feel that the city government is very receptive and 31% moderately receptive to citizen participation. There are no data from earlier surveys to compare to these results.

At the same time, however, challenges remain. Although direct comparison between 1989 and 2001 is not possible, the most important factors that limit the effectiveness of councils and create problems for city government are the same as in 1989—strains caused by state and federal government and pressures from the community. Cities are adversely affected by forces in the intergovernmental system—external control over finances, imposition of regulations, and reduction in funding from higher level governments. These factors impact cities of all sizes in a fairly uniform way. Within the city, polarization over issues, citizen demands, pressures from groups and other interests, and racial and/or ethnic conflict also can impede effectiveness. These city-level sources of strain become more intense as the population in the city increases.

This study once again examines the similarities and differences among councils related to the form of government used in the city. These generalizations from 1989 still hold. Council members in both mayor-council and council-manager cities are committed to providing services to citizens. The council members in the mayor-council cities, however, are more inclined to intervene with staff on behalf of their constituents (in part because they are more likely to feel that the staff will not respond otherwise) and to seek special benefits for their constituents. These council members who work with an elected executive mayor are less likely to feel that they are effective and less likely to have a positive working relationship with the executive. They credit the mayor with being the greatest source of policy initiation in the city although the mayor's preeminence is not as great as in 1989. A solid majority agree that the mayor is a visionary and innovative leader who is generally effective at representing the city in intergovernmental relations and promoting economic development. Still, they are somewhat critical of the mayor's provision of policy alternatives and information to assess programs to the council.

The council members in council-manager cities generally report a cooperative relationship with the city manager and rate their own effectiveness higher than their counterparts in the mayor-council cities. The manager is recognized as an important contributor to policy development and is given high marks for presenting adequate alternatives when making policy proposals. The manager as an executive also is more highly rated than the elected executive mayor in supporting oversight, opening up the governmental process, and maintaining high personal standards and efficient operations. The mayor in the council-manager form of government, who can be a facilitator of effective action by the council and the manager, is viewed as a very important source of policy leadership by almost 40% (versus 45% in 1989) of the council members, and 42% see the mayor as a visionary and innovative leader. These mayors get marks as high as their mayor-council counterpart on handling intergovernmental relations (except in small cities) but their rating is lower in economic development (except in medium-sized cities). Still approximately three in five rate the mayor's performance as good or excellent in these areas.

Another observation is that the relatively small (population 25,000-69,999) and medium-sized (population 70,000-200,000) cities are more alike than they were in 1989. They still diverge in certain characteristics, e.g., the number of influential interest groups, but in other respects there are more

similar, e.g., in the ideological makeup of council members. Whereas previously the small cities were simpler, had fewer problems, and had a higher sense of effectiveness than the medium-sized cities, the conditions of larger places seem to be extending to smaller places as well.

There are many implications of these findings. It appears that councils have found ways to improve the experience of being a council member and increase the effectiveness of city councils. Still, it seems that the five recommendations offered in the previous report are still appropriate. City government officials will be able to suggest other possible actions for themselves guided by their own assessment of how their circumstances match the generalizations reported here.

1. Councils need to improve their performance in the key governance tasks of goal setting, program approval, and oversight. Decisions in the first two areas determine the purpose and policies of city government and careful oversight helps to insure that objectives are being met effectively and that the city government organization is operating productively. Council members rate their effectiveness in the first two areas somewhat lower than in constituency-oriented activities and in oversight they rate themselves much lower. Councils should review their practices and consider whether new approaches are in order.

The opinion that councils spend too much time on short-range concerns is not as pervasive as it was in 1989 but it is still widespread. More efforts should be made to devote additional time to matters of determining purpose and achieving high performance in accomplishing goals. For example, many councils hold a retreat at the beginning of the budget cycle to set goals and priorities for the upcoming year. Feedback is provided through periodic reports throughout the year on the progress being made to meet goals. Oversight can be strengthened through providing time in meetings on a regular basis for departmental performance reports to the council that focus on results in accomplishing the city's goals.

Council members from cities that are having problems with goal setting report lower levels of council effectiveness. If the city government can increase the clarity of the goals toward which they are working, they may be able to achieve the higher level of effectiveness reported by council members in cities with a stronger goal setting process.

2. Council members may benefit from more training and technical assistance. The job is increasingly demanding and a higher level of competence and understanding may be helpful. Information and skill building in performing council tasks, such as goal setting and oversight, is needed. Help may also be beneficial for council members in dealing with challenges of council service, such as how to handle the pressures of the position and how to maintain balance between being a good representative and being a good governor of the city. Attention can also be given to council process and relationships through training sessions on topics such as effective group process, team building, and relating to the executive.

Council members may need assistance in handling external relationships as well. They seek to be responsive to a wide range of groups and individuals who may have widely differing policy agendas. Improved conflict resolution and negotiating skills may be important for council members. In addition, they may benefit from improved skills in media relations. Topics such as these can be covered at informational sessions for individual councils or training workshops set up by state and national organizations and universities.

3. Council procedures and workload might be streamlined. The total demands of the job remain high even if the level of pressure and frustration has moderated. More attention might be given to increasing the "efficiency" of the council process without sacrificing deliberation, citizen participation, and the quality of decisions. It appears that the demands of the position make it more difficult to combine council service with regular employment. As it is, from 37% (up from 30%) to 65% (up from 60%) of council members, depending on the size of the city, do not have full-time work other than filling their council position. Those who combine part-time work with council service have higher levels of frustration with a number of aspects of the job than either those with full-time or no positions. The value of these members who do not have other full-time positions is not at issue. Rather, an increasingly important question in progressively smaller cities is whether the "citizen-council member" who combines regular employment with council service is being driven away from the council because of the demands of the position.

Council members may also need to devote more attention to increasing the constructiveness of their interactions with each other. Over two decades, the most persistent condition offered as a source of frustration is conflict among council members. Conflict cannot and should not be eliminated. Politics involves important differences, and conflict is not only a natural part of the governmental process but also a signal that something important is going on. Still, councils can consider "ground rules" that help insure that differences are fully expressed but do not take the form of personal attacks on each other.

Council members now appear to have a better grasp of what they are getting into, but it may also be useful to give potential candidates for the council more realistic expectations about what it means to serve on the council before running for office through an orientation for prospective candidates.

4. The council-executive relationship needs to be monitored and adjusted when the conditions warrant doing so. Both the council and the executive need to look at how their own performance affects the ability of the other to meet their responsibilities. In council-manager cities, councils and city managers should periodically discuss how they can work together more effectively. The need to do this appears to be especially great in large council-manager cities. Although the assessment of the manager's performance is generally higher than in 1989 in large cities, the importance of the city manager as an initiator of policy is shrinking. Council members are generally satisfied with the adequacy of the appraisal process for city managers although satisfaction declines in larger cities. If a formal council appraisal of the manager is not done on a regular basis, it may be needed. The mayor can play a key role in monitoring the relationship and helping the council and manager identify steps to improve it.

In mayor-council cities, the relationship between the mayor and the council is positive in a majority of cases but the potential exists for taking divergent paths. Offsetting powers in the city charter can impede an effective working relationship between the mayor and the council. If the council seeks to expand its power to deal with the mayor (or vice versa), the approach may not be productive. Councils and mayors in mayor-council cities need to find ways to advance their shared interests in improved performance without abandoning their separate official interests. Determining how to help the "other side" do its job without weakening one's own position may require both creativity and willingness to take risks on each side.

Just as improving the goal setting process can increase effectiveness, it appears that relieving

problems in the coordination between the council and the executive and administrative staff can have a beneficial impact on effectiveness as well.

5. Cities need to continue to examine what kind of compensation is fair for members of the city council. Whereas the last report contained a broader recommendation to provide more support to councils and individual members to help them accomplish their responsibilities, it appears that additional resources such as staff assistance and office space are no longer important concerns. These resources were mentioned by only 15% and 11%, respectively, as sources of frustration, compared to 36% and 23% in 1989. Low council salary and losses of private income while serving on the council are greater sources of dissatisfaction, and they are more pronounced among minority members of city councils. For council service to be open to all and for it be appropriately compensated, an increase in salary should be considered in many cities. As noted above, 66% of council members would prefer to have a higher salary.

In conclusion, city council members are key officials in local government who link citizens to government, speak for the public in determining public policies in their community, and provide oversight to insure that policies are carried out with effectiveness and productive use of resources. They are both governors of their cities and representatives of the citizens in their communities. They must grapple with the timeless challenge of balancing these two aspects of their position. It appears that a decade ago council members were somewhat more concerned than they had been previously with providing voice to a wide range of groups and were more dissatisfied with their effectiveness as a governing body. Now they are shifting back somewhat toward the governance role and are more satisfied with their performance of governmental functions. Still, the council members and their cities are encountering great problems and suffering from limited resources. Local officials and the organizations that work with them should make renewed efforts to strengthen representative democracy and to improve the performance of city government.

Appendix 1.

The persons interviewed were a random sample of 2,000 elected officials from cities over 25,000 in population.

The survey was distributed in March, 2001. One month after sending the questionnaire, a postcard reminder was sent. Approximately three months after the initial mailing, a second questionnaire was mailed to those council members who had not responded.

The overall number of responses was 670 or 32.7% response rate. The number of responses and response rate can be broken down as follows for the three groups of cities divided by population size:

	Sampled	**Responded**	**Response Rate**	**Percent of Respondents**
Small: 25,000-69,999	1389	459	33.0%	68.5%
Medium: 70,000-199,999	440	143	32.5%	21.3%
Large: 200,000+	202	55	27.2%	8.2%
Missing	17	13		1.9%
Total	2048	670	32.7%	100.0%

With this response rate, it can be expected with a 95% degree of confidence (i.e., in 95 out of 100 random samples surveys) that the answers to the survey questions from another random sample of municipal officials would be within four percentage points (+/- 4) of the results of this survey.

This rate was lower than hoped for and may be accounted for by the length of the questionnaire and the heavy workload of council members. The response rate in 1989 was 44% of 2072 interviewed or 905 respondents; and the response rate in 1979 was 56% of 1573 persons surveyed or 836.

ENDNOTES

[1] Race and ethnicity were measured using the methods employed in the 2000 census. A question was asked to determine whether the respondent was Hispanic. A separate question was asked about the respondent's race, and multiple choices could be provided. In coding the responses, the category "white" includes those who chose white and are not Hispanic. Those who chose Hispanic or Latino were coded as Hispanic regardless of the racial choice. Only three respondents provided a two racial choices—all chose both white and native-American—, and they were coded native-American.

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[3] In small cities, 76% of those with no other job are retired; in medium-sized cities, 67% are retired.

[4] The respondents in 1989 generally served in office longer than those in 1979. Whereas 62 percent had four years of experience or less in 1979, half or more of the 1989 group in each city size category had five or more years of experience. Those with more than ten years on the council almost doubled.

5. Calculations from the ICMA 2001 Form of Government Survey. The small city category uses at-large elections slightly more (59% versus 54%) and district elections slightly less 24% versus 27%) than the medium-sized cities, but the differences are not great.

6. Among the cities over 200,000, responses were received from 68 of the 72 cities. Because the coverage of this group of cities is so nearly complete, these data are used rather than those in The Municipal Year Book.

[7] The proportion of persons who responded in 1989 who held leadership positions was one third. It is not clear why the percentage was so much lower in the 2001 survey.

8. Kenneth Prewitt, The Recruitment of Political Leaders (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), p. 86.

[9] When those who consider the factor to be either important or very important, the percentage is 56% who indicate that strong concern about an issue and 53% who indicate than enjoyment of politics is at least an important reason for seeking office.

10. Susan Welch and Timothy Bledsoe, Urban Reform and Its Consequences: A Study in Representation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 63-67, report similar findings.

11. The survey conducted by Welch and Bledsoe was distributed to all members of city councils (up to ten) in cities between 50,000 and one million in population that use district and mixed election systems and two-thirds of the cities in this population range which use at-large elections. See their Urban Reform, pp. 18-19. The exact match in groups listed in the surveys is limited and the samples for the two surveys were different, but a few examples illustrate both continuity and change. Most council members (79 percent in both surveys) considered it very important to represent the city as a whole and

a similar small minority feel this way about speaking for political parties (11 and 15 percent in 1982 and 1989, respectively). The proportion who stress neighborhood representation increased from 47 percent to 74 percent, and those who consider it very important to represent business, increased from 13 percent to 52 percent. Less that 10 percent stressed representing unions and municipal employees (one category) in 1982, whereas 21 and 30 percent emphasized labor unions and municipal employees, respectively, in 1989.

12. Prewitt, Recruitment of Political Leaders, p. 176, reports that 53% of Bay Area council members surveyed planned to seek another term in the mid-sixties.

13. Prewitt, Recruitment of Political Leaders, p. 176, reports that 29 percent would like to run for higher office.

14. Kortus T. Koehler, "Policy Development and Legislative Oversight in Council Manager Cities: An Information and Communication Analysis," Public Administration Review, 33 (September/October, 1973), p. 440.

[15] This is the same breakdown as in 1989. The proportion, however, who consider representing parties to be very important dropped from 25% to 9% among strong Democrats and from 16% to 4% among strong Republicans.

16. For the former position, see Willis D. Hawley, Nonpartisan Elections and the Case for Party Politics (New York: Wiley, 1973). The latter position is reported by Welch and Bledsoe, Urban Reform, pp. 46-50.

[17] There is no relationship between constituency type and the number of partisan elected to the council. In 1989, there was a modest effect. Council members elected from districts were slightly more likely to identify with political parties in both partisan and nonpartisan elections, but that was not found in 2001.

[18] Data on party identification in 2000 are from the National Election Studies Guide to Public Opinion and Election Behavior at http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/toptable/tab2a_1.htm (read 6.27.2002).

19. The question used in 1989 was slightly different. Respondents were asked simply whether committees were used, regardless of purpose. Particular purposes or functions performed were covered in follow-up questions.

20. It would be helpful to be able to describe with more precision what is meant by "staff." The survey left the definition to the respondent by simply asking, "Does the city council have its own staff?"

[21] The preferred increase among those who are frustrated with salaries is $7872 in small cities versus $4517 for those who are not frustrated with current salary, $11,869 in medium-sized cities versus $6051, and $22,553 in large cities versus $3546.

[22] When the factors are correlated with the effectiveness ratings, the strongest correlations are with clear goals (.487) and division of labor (.351). The next highest correlation is polarization over issues (.321).

All are significant at .01 level.

23. For a complete discussion of council roles, see James H. Svara, Official Leadership in the City: Patterns of Conflict and Cooperation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), ch. 5.

24. See Glenn Abney and Thomas P. Lauth, The Politics of State and Local Administration (Albany: State University of New York), ch. 7, for evidence in support of the argument that council members in cities with mayor-council form place greater emphasis on building support from constituents through their actions.

25. See Bruce Cain et al., The Personal Vote (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), for discussion of performing services as the basis for reelection to Congress.

[26] When ratings of very important and important are combined, the results are similar for many officials. Focusing on the very important rating highlights distinctions that would not be apparent otherwise.

27. Svara, Official Leadership in the City, ch. 4.

28. The original formulation of the council-manager plan included in the second Model City Charter by the National Municipal League in 1919 provided for strong policy leadership from the city manager. For example, the commentary asserted that the manager must "show himself to be a leader, formulating policies and urging their adoption by the council." Clinton Rogers Woodruff, Ed., A New Municipal Program (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1919), p. 130. Every empirical study of the council-manager plan has determined that managers are active in this area. For a review, see James H. Svara, "Policy and Administration: Managers as Comprehensive Professional Leaders," in H. George Frederickson, Ed., Ideal and Practice in City Management (Washington: International City Management Association, 1989), pp. 70-93.

29. In the NLC Council Leadership Program in the late seventies, the participating councils from mayor-council cities usually took the approach of reorganizing in order to "compete more effectively with the mayor and the executive branch for influence in the city's policy making process." Stephen W. Burks and James F. Wolf, Council Leadership Skills (Washington: National League of Cities, 1981), p. 8. The council-manager councils, on the other hand, emphasized improving council decision making and interpersonal communications among the members and with the staff.