

Political Reform in the American States and Cities

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Introduction

The structure of American government has been marked by substantial stability and periodic waves of reform over the decades and centuries of American political history. The stability is found on the federal level where the structure of the national political institutions has changed surprisingly little since the original constitution went into effect in the 1790s. However, on the state and local politics levels, change and reform has been a constant part of our subnational politics. This chapter will examine those patterns of changes on the subnational level from both a historical perspective and the prospects for change in the contemporary political environment. We will begin our analysis on the state level and then move to the state subunits, the various units of local government which for this study will be the municipalities and counties. The reader should remember that the United States has only two constitutional levels of government, i. e. the federal and states levels. City and county governments are sometimes called the third level of American federalism, but they are not an independent level since they are creatures of the states and have no existence without state government permission.

Reform in the States

Four waves of reform in American state government have been identified by Bowman and Kearny (1986). The first wave began in 1917 in Illinois and 25 other states followed its example in reorganizing their executive branches. Another dozen states reorganized their executive branch in the late 1930s and early 1940s to be followed by additional states in the third wave which occurred immediately after World War Two. The most recent wave of reform began in the mid-1960s and continues to the present day. Each of the first three waves was preceded by a prestigious commission (the Taft, Roosevelt and Hoover Commissions) recommending significant reforms. The latest reform movement had such intellectual guidance and its also has lasted far longer and been more comprehensive than its predecessors. The scope of the recent reforms have spread across all three branches of state government as incremental changes continue to spread across the states.

The goals of the successive waves of reform have remained constant over the decades: to provide state governments with "the resources and the capabilities to function as efficient, effective, accountable and responsive units of government" (Bowman and Kearny, p. 49). The battles for reform have always been difficult in the United States. Special interests, powerful on the state level, have been a major obstacle to reforms throughout this century. These groups have prospered with fragmented and weak state governments and they preferred the status quo over the

uncertainties of a new reformed government. But the selling of reform has been made more difficult by the traditional conservatism of the American voting public. This has been more true at the state level than on the local level. State government is more abstract to the common citizen and because of its similarity in general structure to the federal government, many voters have been reluctant to change its general style or power relationships.

However, in the postwar era, it soon became apparent that the weak and fragmented state governments were going to have great difficulties given the escalation in services demands. Three additional forces pressured the states to reform: an infusion of management techniques and systems from the private sector; a change in the style of leadership brought about from a "new breed" coming in from the private sector and public administration programs; and mandates and other pressures from the federal government (Bowman and Kearny, p. 49).

Reform in the American states is not an even process. Some states have usually been on the leading edges of reform movements; while others have usually been at the end of such movements or even completely avoided them on occasion. One example is the movement toward direct democracy as seen in terms of the initiatives, referenda and recall reform movement in the early half of this century. The movement originated in the West and was led by such Pacific Coast states as California, Oregon and Washington. It gradually spread eastward, but ran out of energy in the Midwest and failed to make much of an impact in the East where the powerful political party organizations managed to defeat it. The "reformer states" have usually been the big population and industrialized states such as New York and Wisconsin with competitive two party systems and the "reluctant states" have been the smaller population and more rural states such as such in the South and Mountain West. Many recent reforms have been promoted by inter-state professional organizations such as the National Governors Association or similar groups for legislatures and the courts.

Americans refer to the "laboratory of the states" and that is a good metaphor for how the spread of reform actually occurs. A progressive state will try a new reform and after a few years, it will be adopted by other progressive states — perhaps with modifications to correct some of the problems discovered in the pioneering state or to reflect differences among the states in terms of the problems to be addressed (Schlesinger, 1971, Garnett, 1980).

For example, one of the most significant reforms adopted by the states was the direct primary election adopted by Wisconsin in the first years of this century. Slowly, but inevitably the primary election has spread over the decades to become the dominant form of party candidate selection device in the United States. However, one must keep in mind that the state primary election comes in many different forms with the most important being open, closed and blanket primaries, but the reality is that nearly every state has developed a unique primary election system with rules different from any of the other 49 states. That is the reality of the laboratory of the states in terms of political reforms.

Reforming the State Executive Branch

Sabato has argued the primary objective of executive branch reformers has been to increase the powers of the governor (1993, p. 62). One of the significant sources of ideas for executive branch reforms came from the Committee on Economic Development (CED) which published its study of state government reforms entitled *Modernizing State Government* in 1967. Many of its recommendations became major reforms which have been adopted in many states including the short ballot (sharply reduce the number of independently elected executive branch public officials), additional powers to appoint and remove executive branch personnel, budget preparation powers, stronger veto powers and longer and less restricted terms in office (Bowman and Kearny, p. 52).

Of the various reforms noted above, the reduction in number of executive branch elected officials has been the least successful. The norm is still for most states to elect such offices as secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general, auditor, and sometimes even cabinet level positions. As of 1997, only a handful of states have adopted the pure governor as sole manager model. Two of the five such states which elect just the governor or governor plus one additional elected official are the two newest states of Alaska and Hawaii (Council of State Governments, 1996–97). Michigan on the other hand, still elects 35 independent executive branch officials plus another six agenda heads. North Dakota elects thirteen officials and 16 agency heads. This reform is unlikely to be very successful as it is fighting against American political tradition, inertia and powerful established relationships between interest groups and specific offices (Bowman and Kearny, p. 58). The major achievement of this reform effort has been to change the practices of electing the governor and Lt. governors. The number running as a pair increased from 7 in 1966 to 22 in 1980 and now stands at 31 in 1997. Part of the momentum for this successful reform was illustrated by the inability of then Democratic California Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. to work with his Republican Lt. Governor Mike Curb in 1980 as the former was attempting to win the Democratic party presidential nomination that year. Everytime the governor would leave the state to campaign, the “acting governor” would cause trouble and force him to quickly return to California to repair the damage.

Governors' appointment and removal powers have been significantly enhanced in many states in recent years. Sometimes this has been coupled with consolidation of departments or streamlining which has also increased governmental efficiency. One of the worst states in this aspect is Texas with more than 200 boards and commissions. Some states have been successful in streamlining such as Georgia under Governor Jimmy Carter and others have enacted “sunset legislation” which allows boards and commissions to die a natural death unless re-authorized by the legislature (Nice, p. 63). Additionally, governors have been successful in gaining control over new state agencies such as departments of natural resources (Beyle and Dalton, p. 5).

Gaining control over a state's budgetary formation process should be as easy as it was on the federal level. One aspect has been gaining the power to appoint the state budget director and the second aspect is gaining control over the process of

putting together the executive branch budget recommendations on expenditures and revenue. By the 1980s, only three governors (all in the South) did not have this level of power. The appointment of the budget director is of vital importance to the governor to insure the budget reflects his or her political priorities (Bowman and Kearny, p. 61). Still the Council of State Governments reports in 1997 that there are still 8 governors who must share the budget making role with other independent officials (1997).

The governor has also been a prime mover in the various budgetary process reforms which have swept the states during this century. The first formal budgetary process was adopted in Ohio almost a decade before it was adopted on the federal level in 1921. Especially in the 1960-1990 era, one budgetary "fad" (program budgeting, PPBS, zero based budgeting, and management by objectives plus the most recent movement of performance based budgeting evaluation) after another swept through state government and many were later adopted on the federal level.

Governors' terms in office have been extended to a standard four years in each of the fifty states. In 1940, half the states had two year gubernatorial terms and three of states which still retained the two year term in the mid-1980s were from the original thirteen colonies (New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). By 1997, only New Hampshire and Vermont had such restrictions. Also by the 1980s, about half of the states restricted their governors to two terms in office.

Governors also steadily enhanced their veto powers during this century. Governors have two types of vetoes: whole bill and item. North Carolina was the last state to give its governor the whole bill veto; most states allow some form item veto with about one-quarter allowing governors to reduce dollar amounts without killing the item (Bowman and Kearny, p. 63). Still by 1997, seven states including Florida have governors without item vetoes.

By 1997, slightly over half of governors have the power to reorganize their executive branches with sometimes a legislative approval required. Either by constitution or by statute, governors have the power to issue executive orders in all fifty states and these can be used to restructure government. Some governors have gone to what Bodman and Garry called the "three tiered cabinet structure (1982). The first tier is the cabinet similar to that found on the federal level; the second tier of sub-cabinet agencies are grouped together by functional areas such as social services; and the third tier is made up by informal groups such as task groups and other ad hoc groups assigned to make recommendations on specific issue areas. This three tiered system is most often based on executive authority as used through executive orders by the governor. The size and importance of the governors' cabinets vary greatly. In some states the cabinet is set into the constitution or established by statute; in other it is based on tradition or custom. Today, cabinets in New York state are just seven members as they are in Georgia; while there are over 28 members in Alabama, Ohio and Washington state (Council of State Governments). The personal staff of governors also varies greatly: from a high of 264 in Florida to a low of 7 in Wyoming.

It should also be mentioned that the state bureaucracies have also been the

object of reformers (Lynch). Bowman and Kearny note that the American state bureaucracy is "younger, better educated and better trained than even before (p. 67). Most administrators have pursued graduate level work and about one-quarter had earned Ph. D. or J. D. degrees. This is part of the professionalization of the sub-national government. Other indicators of professional licensing and job mobility have contributed to the professionalization.

One area of concern has been the demographics of the state level bureaucracy. By the 1970s, affirmative action programs set a goal of a demographically correct bureaucracy. President Clinton largely achieved this goal in his cabinet and subcabinet appointments in his first and second terms. The proportions of women, blacks, Hispanics and Asians were just about the same as these group's proportions in the general population. Progress in this area in the states has been spotty, but certainly progress has been made in recent decades.

Much of the energy for reforming the state executive branch has been focused on the state governors and the top level administrators they select to run the state bureaucracies. Similar to the reform movement which advocated "freeing the state legislatures" to do their job in the post-World War Two era, another group of reformers wanted to free state governors from their constitutional restrictions. Early in American history, governors were almost unbelievably weak — a condition which well suited citizens of many states who feared a return of the autocratic British governors of the colonial era. The new American governors were "reduced to figure-heads with little influence in the making of governmental decisions (Kaufman, 1956, p. 1058). In these early years of the American republic, a majority of governors were elected by the legislatures; often to just one year terms in office; and only a single governor had a veto. Thus, these governors were subordinate to legislatures in every facet of their jobs (Kaufman). Later in the 1830–40 era, governors were weakened even more by voters electing a wide range of state executive personnel. By electing many such officials, governing authority was diluted and the state executive branch was left fundamentally leaderless (Hill, 178). Later in the 1870s, another period of reform in an effort to reduce corruption further reduced the governor's power by the creation of many independent commissions and boards. The result was clear — the governor did not govern state government — dozens of independent political figures all had executive branch power and the governor was just one of many such actors.

Civil Service Reform

Perhaps the greatest state and local government reform which occurred in the United States was the largely successful movement to take the personnel of the governmental bureaucracy on all levels of American politics "out of politics." This effort involved the application of "the merit principle" in public personnel administration in an effort to produce most honest and efficient government. The concept of merit simply means that governmental employees should be hired on their ability to do the job and not because of their political party identities or which powerful politician they or their family knows. What came out of the drive for merit hiring was the concept of the clearly defined position or job with clearly set out hiring

requirements, duties, responsibilities, and qualifications. The governmental administration which was established to manage these hiring and managing tasks was called the civil service and its norms demanded that the managing process be neutral in terms of politics; based on merit and insulated from outside political pressures.

The movement for an American civil services began on the federal level and later spread to the states and local governments. The first such law was the Civil Service Act of 1883, popularly known as the Pendleton Act, and it dominated the federal level civil service until the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act was passed by Congress. Gradually, the states and local governments adopted elements of the federal model, but not all of it or even the spirit of it in many cases. Henry notes that by 1975, 34 states had statewide merit systems and the rest had some type of partial system. By the 1980s, all large American cities had a form of civil service system. Even smaller cities (populations over 50,000) had such systems (Henry, 1980, p. 257).

The reasons behind the spread of the civil service systems to the states and cities were rooted in the tremendous growth of employment on the sub-national level. In the period from 1970 to 1990, state and local employment increased from 4 million employees to over 12 million; while the employment totals at the federal level have remained relatively constant and even slightly declined in numbers during the first Clinton administration. A second force also promoted such reforms — the need for ever more skilled governmental employees as the regulatory and management tasks of governments escalated in recent decades. Quite simply, the old type of political party patronage workers could not perform in many of the jobs which have been added to the sub-national governments employment rolls.

There are those critics of the civil service movement on the subnational level who argue that it is not as effective as thought in professionalizing the bureaucracy and that it promotes the establishment of a bureaucracy which has no effective political supervision. The first point is usually argued in terms of the insulation of the county level of government from real civil service implementation.

On the state and local levels, since the 1970s there have been several reform efforts to the civil service system. One of these efforts was an attempt to give governmental employees more political freedom in their personal lives. The Hatch Act reform in 1940 prohibited state and local government employees from running for public office, campaigning for other candidates, soliciting contributions for parties and holding offices in political parties. Some liberalization of these restrictions occurred in 1974 in Amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act and the Hatch Act was even repealed by Congress in 1976, but President Ford vetoed it. This is an important area of reform since governmental employment constitutes such a higher percentage of the American voting population. In some states, federal employees account over one-fifth the voting age population (Henry, 265). The states often adopted their own versions of the Hatch Act, often called Little Hatch Acts, and the restrictions have been replicated on the lower levels of governments as well.

A second reform involved efforts to change the types of people hired by these governments. There was a strong effort to apply affirmative action guidelines and

goals to the hiring practices of state and local government in order to overcome past patterns of discrimination in hiring. The federal laws which supported the affirmative action efforts were based on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 which forced state and local governments under the provisions of the Civil Rights Act. A number of affirmative action employment programs were initiated in the 1970s and 1980s, but growing public resentment of perceived excesses resulted in a counter movement and the 1996 California initiative which made such efforts illegal may be the beginning of the end for quota and goal oriented employment programs on the state level. A New York Times poll in December, 1997 indicated the American public supported the concept of assisting minorities and women in their efforts to secure fair employment opportunities, but rejected the use of goals and quotas to achieve these objectives (*New York Times*, 1997). However, in November, 1997, a major Texas city's electorate voted to keep its affirmative action program. One outcome of the reform movement has been a sharp increase in the number of female and minority employees in many cities, country and state governments during the 1980s and early 1990s.

The final reform challenge was the opening of subnational governments to union representation (Henry, p. 264). While labor union membership has sharply declined in general in the United States since its peak in the 1950s, one area of substantial growth has been in the state and local governments. The National Federation of State, Municipal and County Employees (AFSCME) has become one of the nation's most powerful labor unions and its president rose to become the president of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial organizations (AFL-CIO) in the 1990s. Clearly, the unionization of state and local government employees has had a profound impact on politics on these levels and those governmental employees which are not unionized (such as university professors working for state universities) are at a serious disadvantage in terms of resource allocation made by state governments.

Reforming the State Legislatures

Reform in the 50 state legislatures largely occurred following World War Two as state governments acquired their current role as a major provider of governmental services to the nation's citizens. In 1945, the various state legislatures were clearly unable to cope with the political and administrative demands being placed upon them. Almost all were part time institutions with extremely limited resources for policy making tasks. Often, a typical state legislature would meet for several weeks every other year and was filled with farmers, ranchers and retired persons who desired such a service opportunity. The legislative salaries were very low encouraging either a very high turnover among the best qualified or the large numbers of very low qualified legislators.

The reformers concentrated on a series of structural reforms to allow state legislatures to perform the policy making tasks forced upon them (Straayer, 98-101). One important change came via the U. S. Supreme Court which ordered fair re-

apportionment in the early 1960s overturning the rural political dominance which was the norm in many of the states (*Baker v. Carr* (1962) and *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964)). With the reapportionments which happened after 1971 in most states, the suburban legislators came to prominence and the policy issue focus changed drastically.

Rosenthal noted that most states attempted to deal with nine specific reforms: 1. Elimination of many of the constitutional restrictions on legislatures; 2. Allowing legislatures to meet more frequently and for longer sessions; 3. Smaller legislatures; 4. Providing more compensation for legislative service; 5. Regulation of lobbying and establishment of ethics codes for legislators; 6. Upgrading research staff and information support processes including computers and policy staff analysts; 7. Improving the legislative bill processing procedures; 8. Improving the roles of standing committees; and 9. Improving the legislative personal staff (Rosenthal, 1971, pp. 3-4). Many of these proposed reforms were enacted in the states since the 1970s, but there is a very wide variance among the states ranging from the large, heavily populated states such as California or New York and rural states such as Wyoming, Utah, Montana (Pound, 1986).

There is still significant resistance to the reform concept of professionalization of state legislatures. Some argue that the old style amateur, poorly paid, part time legislatures should be kept as the ideal of form of American sub-national democracy. Others argue for the frugality of such amateur bodies which spend little in their own support and tend to spend relatively little of the taxpayers' money in public policies. They also point to the "friends and neighbors" style of representation in such bodies as compared to the heavy representation of lawyers and professional politicians in the reformed legislatures. Still, what has been the general evaluation of the impact of these reforms? Thompson argues that they have improved the competence of the bodies (1986). Others suggest that too many of the legislatures are still living in the 19th Century and that the reforms have been largely concentrated in the big states and only some were adopted in the smaller states. One can place state legislatures into four groups based on their degree of reform and professionalization: 9 Professional Legislatures (full time and annual sessions with proportional salaries); 6 Quasi-professional Legislatures (annual sessions; about half to two-thirds of year in session and low salaries); 28 Citizen or Nonprofessional Legislatures (meet annually for only a relatively short time of several months with very low salaries); and 7 Citizen Nonprofessional Legislatures (meet only every other year, part time during that year with very low salaries) (Hill, 1992, pp. 160-61). Ironically, one of these "citizen legislatures with a session every other year is Texas, one of the mega-states. Salaries in the citizen legislatures can be very low. In Alabama, the legislative salary is \$ 10 per day; Rhode Island's is \$ 5 per day. On the other end of the continuum is California's \$ 72 per day salary and a lot of special allowances which make a seat in the state legislature almost as well paid as a seat in Congress. Still, 17 legislatures provide no staff for individual members (Utah provides for student interns from the University of Utah to act as staff!).

The Politics of Judicial Reform

Most citizens have very little understanding or interest in the state level judicial branch. It is the “lost world” of state government — largely because most of those whose support is necessary for substantial reforms in the branch either have little or no direct contact with the state courts or are happy with their current state. Generalizations are quite difficult to make in the area of state courts since each state has a unique court system and sets of criminal and civil laws. No matter what the names, each state now has a set of trial courts and at least one level of appellate courts. The state supreme courts are the final state site for constitutional questions and they may accept cases directly through original jurisdictions or an appeal from lower courts.

By the 1960s, it also had become clear that the state courts also needed important reforms to operate in the much more demanding and complex contemporary environment (Straayer, pp. 195–196). There has been a tremendous increase in the volume of litigation brought to state courts and the number of criminal cases has also exploded since the 1950s. With the heavy case load, many also noted that state court management was non-existent in too many states. Bowman and Kearny called the result, “judicial chaos” (p. 98).

The most important structural reform has been the creation of appellate courts between the trial courts and the states’ supreme courts. By 1982, 32 states had established appellate courts and by 1997 the number was 38 (Council of State Governments). Some state even created a pair of such appellate courts — one for criminal cases and another for civil cases. Kagan claims this reform allows the state supreme courts to perform the function of policy maker since their caseload is more manageable with the appellate courts taking many of the simpler appeals (Kagan, 1978).

Broader reforms also included better management for the state courts and that usually required the establishment of administrative staffs. All fifty states have such offices and most of them were the result of federal encouragement with the 1972 Law Enforcement Assistance Administration grants. One aspect of the reform is to make the state supreme court and usually its chief justice the administrative head of the entire state court system. Finally, state courts have an administrator, although the degree of management vary greatly from state to state. Some states have adopted the unified court system approach where the supreme court manages the entire state’s courts and personnel.

A major and very significant reform involves improved education for members of the judicial branch. Many states have instituted educational programs especially designed to improve the judicial skills of lower level courts. Some of these judges are popularly elected and do not have to be lawyers and thus such judicial seminars and annual updates are of great value to such judges.

Perhaps the most important personnel reform has been an attempt to depoliticize the judge selection process. This reform is called the “Missouri Plan” and provides for new judges to be recommended by a special committee made up of judges, lawyers and lay persons which submits at least three names to the governor for se-

lection. The process also usually has a provision for new judges to face the voters after a fixed period of time and to be retained by an affirmative vote of the electorate. About one-third the states have adopted the Missouri plan, but the rest use a wide variety of selection plans including non-partisan elections, partisan elections, governor selection and legislative selection. Seven states including Texas still have partisan election of state judges and another twelve hold nonpartisan judicial elections (Council of State Government).

One area the states have never really been able to effectively reform is judicial discipline. The old solution for illegal or unacceptable judicial behavior was and is impeachment, but this happens so infrequently, it is not a serious threat. Other states have provisions for popular recall of such judges or decision by the state legislature. None of these are effective. The Missouri Plan's use of periodic elections is not an effective check either since even the "worst" judges are almost always retained in the elections. Among the reforms proposed and adopted have been mandatory retirement ages (usually 70); disciplinary committees and even a special court to discipline other courts (California) (Bowman and Kearny, pp. 102).

The continuing crisis of the state judiciary system is too many cases and not enough resources. Some states have turned to trained arbiters to settle civil cases pending before state appellate courts. But as long as the courts have to rely on frugal state legislatures for their funding, scarce resources will continue to be a reoccurring problem.

Local Government Reform in the United States

There has been a long tradition of reform in American local government. One can trace it back to the 1860s when the New York Times began its crusade against the infamous Tammany Hall Democratic party urban machine. The reform movement has had as its goals the elimination of corruption and the creation of a more efficient service provider. The tools of the reformers were a package of changes which included a non-partisan style of local government, a manager style of decision making, the elimination of wards or single seat council district and the promotion of at large constituencies, the promotion of local government merit systems and the promotion of home rule laws which would allow local governments the right to make the changes they want without getting permission from the state legislatures for every detail in any proposed future reforms (Dye, p. 300).

The "machines" were powerful party organizations which controlled large American cities in the Northeast, South and Midwest during the latter half of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century (Herson, pp. 55-70). The machines traded political favors to immigrants and powerful business interests in exchange for the immigrants' votes and money from businesses. The word "machine" implies a smooth operating powerful mechanical force and that is what the machines were. They easily supplied the energy to keep their political machine functioning — money and votes — for the products of government such as aid to the poor, jobs and a wide variety of governmental services to the business world.

The war against the machines and demands for metropolitan reforms which began in the 1860s was won largely in the immediate post-World War Two era, but the final victories had to wait until the 1960s and 1970s in the last bastion of party machines, the Democratic party Chicago machine of Mayor Richard Daley. What reforms killed the machines? Certainly, civil service reforms contributed in many cities, but their impact differed greatly from city to city. In Chicago, for example, the old style patronage system is still somewhat intact, while reforms were quite successful in cities such as Cleveland and Detroit. Other reforms such as the open primary took nominations out of the hands of the party bosses. Structural reforms dealing with the organization of the city governments were also important and they will be discussed in the following pages. However, the reforms which really killed the machines were largely out of the hands of local government "good government types". Broad social, political and economic forces undermined the foundations of the machines and slowly eliminated their reason for existence (Herson, 63-65). First the Great Depression which began in 1929 and was a major economic force all through the 1930s and the early 1940s until World War Two jump started the worlds' economies undercut the social services base of the machines. When the New Deal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt began programs of welfare, unemployment insurance, and public works employment, the smaller scale ad hoc efforts of the machines were obsolete. When millions of Americans moved around the country (and the world) during the war, many realized that a different style of corruption free politics was normal in other parts of the nation. When they came home they demanded better politics and better government. The growing prosperity and the rise of the middle class based on the post war economic boom in American and better educated electorate (partly a result of the GI Bill support of higher education for millions of veterans) also acquired middle class political values which supported the reformers in number sufficient to destroy the once powerful organizations.

Since the 1860s, the reform proposals were largely aimed at restructuring local government to make it more efficient and accountable. One basic reform package was to offer several different forms of local governments: the city manager, the commission and the strong mayor forms. The city manager option was based on a fundamental principle of the reform movement: that the business of local government should be based on business principles and not political decision making. The cry was "Take politics out of local government!" The hiring of a professional city manager to administer the businesses of the city seemed to fit this objective perfectly. The city manager form swept across the nation in small and middle sized cities, but never had a major impact on the largest cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

The commission form caught on and became the most common form of county government. The typical county commission has 3 to 5 elected commissioners and each administers a set of county services such as parks and recreation or police and fire protection. The commission meets together to make policy and approve budgets and taxes. The great disadvantage of the commission form of county government is the lack of a real county leader or executive and this has been the central focus of

contemporary reform efforts on this level as a county executive or manager is often the proposed reform. However, the movement to a county executive form has stalled in recent years. In 1997, the county commission of Salt Lake County proposed going to a form of county executive but it never generated sufficient political support to make it to the ballot and it died in commission.

Metropolitan government once seemed to be the wave of the future in the 1960s and 1970s (Straayer, pp. 167–169). The idea was the creation of a super government in a metropolitan area by the elimination of the dozens of local cities, towns and unincorporated county and the formation of one giant metropolitan government. One common designation was the merger of the major city with the surrounding country with Indianapolis and Honolulu being the best examples. However, this reform has almost completely disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s. The Reagan years attacked the concept of big government and the metropolitan reform was big government in its very closest form to the voters. It is a reform which has apparently run its course — at least for the current era.

Local Government Reform in the 1990s

The steam has run out on the reform movements on both the state and local levels of American politics. Today, many of the so-called reforms being discussed on the city or local level of politics center around efforts to roll back some of the successes of earlier reform movements. There still exists a core of support for continuing reform, but the numbers of such adherents are rather small and running contrary to the prevailing winds of political preference. Dye describes the traditional battle lines on reform in most American cities as pitting the upper class liberals and minority groups against the working class whites and ethnic voters (p. 301). However, in today's politics, the liberal-minorities coalition may be often tattered with the latter groups opposing changing which may dilute their political power (Bingham, p. 232). The courts, for example, have promoted the adoption of single seat districts as a way of representing minority interests, but the liberal agenda still supports the at large districts as a way of promoting the broader interests of the city over the narrower interests of particular neighborhoods.

There are still political problems associated with even reformed governments, but there are still many unreformed local governments which draw the reformers' attention. The continuing problems include the contemporary style of patronage which center around construction contracts and insurance bids, printing and office supplies, court appointments and zoning decision making. These "opportunities" for modern local politicians and especially mayors have allowed the construction of "personalized mayoral machines" (Dye, p. 301).

Reforms in the 1990s: Downsizing and Privatizing

Strangely, much of the pressure for municipal reform in the 1980s and 1990s has come from conservatives, who in past reform era have been largely opposed to reforms unless they clearly saved the business community money in the form of lower taxes. The conservative reformers seek to carry out the old mandate of taking

politics out of local government to the point of trying to eliminate many of the functions of local government. They seek to transfer many governmental functions to the private sector under the battlecries of tax savings, choice and efficiency. An important part of the movement is called "loadsharing" which argues that some traditional local governmental roles as building sports stadiums, airports, and public housing should be left to the private sector to provide. Other activities of local government can be contracted out to private companies or the use of franchises, grants, vouchers or agreements. Some cities have contracted out very traditional services such as waste removal, street lights, traffic signals, street maintenance and even airports. A few cities using the concept of "cost sharing" have even turned to the private sector for jails and tax collecting (Dye, p. 308) .

The core of the broader demands for reforms in local government is found in its unrelenting attacks on the governmental bureaucracies. They have become too big; too powerful; too rigid; too liberal; and too unresponsive. The greatest growth in trade union membership over the past several decades has been in the public sector and especially among school districts, municipal, county and state governments. As the public employee unions grow in power, the public's attitude toward them and their governments has turned increasingly hostile. The conservatives assert they have the answer and that answer is consistent — cut the size and scope of local government. Many believe that as local governmental budgets have ballooned in recent decades that the quality of services has dropped. One recent author argues that the issue is not more or less government, but better government (Osborne). Osborne's influential book, *Reinventing Government*, calls for the politics of reinvention and one of the early supporters of that concept was the then governor of Arkansas, William Jefferson Clinton, one of the leaders of the neo-liberal political tradition of re-sizing government but keeping the functions intact. The anti-bureaucracy crusade can also be seen in the public's policy positions regarding the huge local government public education establishment. Several of the popular movements in the education field include vouchers for choice of site for education and the home education phenomenon where parents take their children out of the public schools and teach them at home. The latter movement has impacted hundreds of thousands of students in its rejection of the traditional educational bureaucracies.

Berman notes that one of the problems of the early waves of reforms was the creation of governmental structures which have not been responsive to the demands of various constituencies (Berman, pp. 304–305). That should not be a surprise since the goal of the reforms was to take politics out of local government. The unreformed cities are much more political and thus much more responsive to political demands. The difference in terms of real power in the cities lies in understanding the concept of the New Metropolitan Political Machine. Where the old machines were based on the structure of the local political party and its desire to remain in power and share among themselves the wealth of the city, the new machines are based on the organization of the public employee unions and their desire to protect their positions. Ted Lowi noted this problem in 1969; it is more serious in the 1990s (Lowi, 1969, p. 201).

The new wave of municipal reform seeks to attack these powerful bureaucracies

and their supporting unions. There are repeated demands for decentralization which allow government and the governed citizens to be closer to each other. One set of reforms involves the creation of community councils to voice the demands and concerns of each of the neighborhoods within a city. This has several advantages in that it is very cheap to initiate and maintain and has wonderful symbolic democratic aspects. Another such step is to decentralize with "Little City Halls" the administration of some local governmental services such as welfare and police. In many American cities, the Japanese style local mini-police stations have been tried to re-connect the police to the people.

Reform on the local level has largely been abandoned in its traditional forms. The new proposed reforms aim at cutting costs and reducing the role of government at a time when the problems of American cities have continued to be at very high levels. Reforms come in cycles and the current era may be one of the lower points along the reform patterns of cycles. The last major cycle was in the 1960s and the next cycle may emerge in the new century. In general, major reforms at the state and local levels have taken the form of a political crusade which the current anti-government movement clearly lacks. We may have to wait for that next wave of crusade and reform to generate its own supporting base.

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