

City Caesars?:
An Examination of Mayoral Power in California

By

Bruce E. Cain
University of California, Berkeley
bruce@cain.berkeley.edu

Megan Mullin
University of California, Berkeley
mmullin@socrates.berkeley.edu

Gillian Peele
Lady Margaret Hall
Oxford University
gillian.peele@lady-margaret-hall.oxford.ac.uk

Paper prepared for presentation at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 29 to September 2, San Francisco.

In the past twenty years, several large California cities have adopted charter reforms that enhanced the formal authority of the mayor's office. San Jose started the trend in 1985 by increasing the mayor's powers within its existing council-manager form of government. In 1993, Fresno decided to abandon the council-manager system altogether, and its mayor became the chief executive officer. Oakland voters rejected proposals in 1984 and 1996 to shift from a council-manager structure to a system with a much stronger mayor, but they reconsidered in 1998 and approved such a measure overwhelmingly. Even San Francisco and Los Angeles, cities that already provided for strong executives, opted to strengthen their top posts. Now San Diego is considering stepping away from its weak-mayor system. Since the council-manager form of government is still predominant for most small and medium sized California cities, this counter-trend in the largest cities—increasing the formal powers of elected mayors over professional city managers and elected city councils—is a puzzle. Why would large cities evolve in a different direction from small and mid-sized cities?

Understanding the effectiveness of mayors under different structures requires an appreciation of the interaction between structural and personal factors. Structural reform of government has long been a major concern at the state and local level of politics in the United States (see for example Cain and Noll 1985; Lineberry and Fowler 1967; Morgan and Pelissero 1980; Welch and Bledsoe 1988). At the same time, scholars have recognized the importance of leadership style for making governmental systems work (Jones 1989; Neustadt 1990). The literature on leadership style has yielded important insights for city government as much as for national government (Bowers and Rich 2000; Ferman 1985; Kotter and Lawrence 1974; Pressman 1972; Stone 1989; Svara 1987; Yates 1977). In this project we examine the interaction

between structural change and leadership style, focusing on mayors in large California cities. Mayors vary in the ambition of their goals and the types of political and management strategies they bring to their jobs. More ambitious mayors might compensate for relatively weak formal powers by skillfully building political coalitions with the city council or establishing an effective collaboration with the city manager. Less ambitious or skillful mayors might squander the opportunities that the formal powers in a city charter potentially bestow. In general, however, one would expect stronger formal advantages to go hand in hand with more ambitious mayoral agendas and weaker with less ambitious ones. When the two are not in harmony, it might create a kind of tension that results in efforts to create structural change.

In addition, the observation that larger as opposed to smaller and medium sized California cities seem to be following different structural paths raises interesting questions about whether and why the governance needs of cities vary. California's larger cities tend to be ethnically and racially diverse, and they have faced serious economic challenges as businesses have abandoned traditional urban settings for safer, cheaper suburban and rural locations. This has heightened the need for more diverse representation in city government and for more proactive steps to re-vitalize the urban cores. Have these developments contributed to the divergent trend we observe in larger cities?

In this exploratory paper, we examine the formal and informal aspects of mayoral power in a sample of California cities. First, we consider the overall trends in more detail, and then we consider the many strategies that mayors employ to cope with formal power constraints. In particular, we explore the power commensurability hypothesis: i.e. if city electorates hold big city mayors responsible for a city's successes and failures, then mayors may seek commensurate

power to help them overcome the institutional constraints that impede them from achieving their goals. They may turn to charter reform to increase their formal authority.

This study examines both quantitative and qualitative data in order to answer these questions. The former comes from the International City/County Management Association's form of government survey and is used to examine both the overall structural trends in California cities and to explore in a preliminary fashion some factors that might account for them. In addition, we have conducted interviews in three large cities—Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose—in order to analyze more carefully the coping strategies of mayors and the tensions that arise between the mayor's powers and those of the city manager and city council. Our future research agenda on this topic involves more work on both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the project: we plan to construct a more elaborate model of the factors contributing to a change in mayoral authority, and we will expand our case studies to include samples of small- and medium-sized cities in addition to the large cities that we have examined here.

Trends in City Structure

In order to track the trends in city forms of government and to examine relationships among structural characteristics in a city, we have used data from the four most recent Municipal Form of Government surveys conducted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).¹ ICMA has conducted this survey since 1971; the data we use in this analysis was collected every five years between 1981 and 1996. The surveys all explore the same topics of city structure, election procedures, and characteristics of incumbent elected officials. Unfortunately, ambiguities in question wording, reporting errors by respondents, and

Table 1. City Forms of Government.

	1981	1986	1991	1996
Mayor-council	10% (34)	4% (14)	7% (24)	2% (6)
Council-manager	90% (304)	96% (319)	93% (319)	92% (286)
Commission	0% (0)	0% (1)	0% (0)	1% (2)
Don't know	not offered	not offered	not offered	5% (17)
n	338	334	343	311

non-responses to the mail-in survey create some complications in analyzing the data over time. In addition, the data does not capture the most recent structural changes among California's largest cities. Despite these drawbacks, the surveys provide a reasonable overview of trends in city structure through the mid-1990s.

Most analyses of city structural forms rely on a fairly strict categorization of systems as either mayor-council or council-manager. In the mayor-council system, the legislature and the executive are separately elected and have distinct powers. The council typically sets policy, while the mayor's authority varies across cities, including in some cases full responsibility for the city's operations. Under the council-manager form of government, the mayor sits on the council. Aside from leading the council's activities, the mayor's duties are chiefly ceremonial. The council appoints a city manager to implement council policy and direct the city's administration. The commission system, in which members of the legislative body each direct an administrative department, has been used rarely in California, chiefly in the smallest municipalities. No California cities employ the town meeting form.

¹ In 1996 the National Civic League cosponsored the survey with ICMA.

Table 2. Forms of Government by Population.

	1981		1986		1991		1996*	
	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager
Under 25,000	17% (26)	83% (127)	7% (11)	92% (142)	9% (15)	91% (151)	1% (2)	94% (150)
25,000 – 99,999	3% (4)	97% (142)	0% (0)	100% (142)	4% (6)	96% (135)	2% (2)	90% (109)
100,000 – 499,000	6% (2)	94% (34)	3% (1)	97% (33)	3% (1)	97% (33)	0% (0)	93% (26)
Over 500,000	67% (2)	33% (1)	50% (2)	50% (2)	100% (2)	0% (0)	67% (2)	33% (1)

* Percentages do not total 100 due to “don’t know” responses.

Consistent with the state’s progressive tradition, California cities have long embraced the council-manager form of government and its promise of non-partisan, professional city administration. As can be seen in Table 1, the dominance of council-manager systems continues today. In all four surveys at least 90 percent of responding cities reported a council-manager system. The predominance of this system might be growing, but missing data and the introduction in 1996 of the “don’t know” option on the form of government question make it difficult to determine whether or not that is the case. The percentage of cities using the mayor-council form of government has declined throughout the 1980s and 1990s, at least among respondents to the ICMA survey. By 1996, only six respondents were confident that their cities operated on a mayor-council system.

Table 2 displays the form of government responses by city population size. Evidently, the smallest cities are actually moving away from the mayor-council system. In 1981, seventeen percent of cities with populations less than 25,000 used a mayor-council system.² That percentage dropped by half for the next two surveys, and then dropped down to one percent in

² We have based all analyses on 1990 population figures, so movement between categories cannot be explained by growth in individual cities.

1996. In fact, only four of the 26 cities in the lowest population category that reported a mayor-council system in 1981 continued to report a mayor-council system across all surveys to which they responded. The trend among the smallest cities away from mayor-council systems to council-manager has only reinforced the overall predominance of the council-manager system in California cities with populations between 25,000 and 500,000. By comparison, the state's largest few cities are split between mayor-council and council-manager systems.

Looking at changes over time at the individual city level, we see support for the aggregate trend. City structural change can be drawn from the ICMA data in two ways. In every survey, ICMA asks about attempts over the previous five years to change the municipality's form of government.³ We are fairly confident about the accuracy of responses to this series of questions, but it is likely that these responses do not capture all the form of government changes. Therefore we also tracked changes in the responses of individual cities to the form of government question over time.⁴ We cannot be confident that these implied changes always reflect actual change in city structures, but this method may capture some of the changes that were not reported in the responses to questions about structural change.

Fortunately, both sets of data support the same conclusion: that the majority of changes in form of government among California cities are smallest cities moving from mayor-council to council-manager systems. Thirteen cities with populations under 25,000 formally reported a successful form of government change from mayor-council to council-manager, and four additional cities reported adopting a council-manager system from a commission or an unspecified structure. One small city reported changing from a commission to a mayor-council

³ In 1981, the survey asked about attempts over the previous ten years.

⁴ We did not include one-time changes in forms of government (e.g., a city reports a council-manager form in one survey, a mayor-council in the next, and then a return to the council-manager form) unless they were supported by reported changes in response to the question on form of government change.

structure, and one fairly large city (population 110,658) reported moving from a council-manager to a mayor-council system. Some additional evidence of movement from council-manager to mayor-council can be inferred from changing responses on the form of government question; i.e. one small and three medium-sized cities may have also shifted in that direction.

Interestingly, of the six medium-sized cities that indicated a change in form of government, there is a distinct split by population size that is consistent with the overall pattern. The three cities that changed their survey responses from mayor-council to council-manager are relatively small (i.e. populations less than 28,000). The three that seemed to move to mayor-council are larger, with populations ranging from 39,000 to 42,000. This is consistent with the general trend of the smallest cities being most likely to move towards adoption of the council-manager system and some of the larger cities moving, or considering a move, back to a mayor-council form.

The traditional categorization of city forms of government masks, however, a great diversity within each category. The instability in many cities' responses to the ICMA form of government question and the fact that five percent of city administrators who responded to the 1996 survey could not even identify their city's form of government indicate that many cities find it hard to place themselves neatly in either the council-manager or the mayor-council categories. Although the data reveal that the largest California cities are more likely to classify themselves as mayor-council systems than the small and mid-sized cities, it is not entirely clear what that label means when the power arrangements are inspected more closely. The exact distribution of authority over budgets, legislation, appointment and management of department heads, and the manner in which council vacancies are filled, vary significantly across cities within each form. Council election systems, mayor selection processes, and term limits on the

mayor and/or the council also complicate the balance of powers within a city. City structures in California today do not fit a neat typology; in fact they more resemble a multidimensional spectrum.

Even a more textured understanding of the formal distribution of authority in a city does not fully capture the mayor's power. Mayors can use their leadership skills and a variety of political and management strategies to exert informal power where they lack formal authority. Morgan and Watson (1996) have found that mayors have more formal authority in cities with mayor-council systems, but that informal mayoral powers are comparable across structural forms. Strong mayors exist in council-manager cities, and weak mayors can occupy the top slot in a mayor-council system. A mayor's ability to shift the city in his or her preferred direction can have more to do with political skills and operating style than institutional authority. In order to find out how mayors coped with the structural constraints imposed by their city charters, we interviewed a number of people who had direct recent experience with city government in California.⁵ The three cities where we chose to start our interviews display a diversity of constitutional structures and political contexts, and we examined in particular the tensions that arise when a mayor's ambitions exceed his or her formal authority.

Coping with Divided Government

Traditionally, Californian mayors have not been strong in terms of formal powers, and they operate in the state's distinctive political environment with its Progressive era legacies of nominally non-partisan elections, strong and independent city managers, and direct democracy.

⁵ We interviewed a total of twenty people in April 2001, including former mayors and members of their staffs, current and former city administrators and city council members, political consultants, and journalists. In this paper we have protected the anonymity of all but the mayors commenting on their own experiences.

But mayors inevitably are the symbolic leaders of their cities, even if the formal powers they possess are less than the public imagines.

According to the League of California Cities, only 105 of the state's 476 cities are chartered, and the rest are governed by state general law. The state's largest cities tend to be chartered, including the three case studies we examine here. Individualized city charters provide cities with more flexibility for determining their governance structures. Our three case studies reflect this structural diversity. Under their current charters, San Jose employs a council-manager form of government, San Francisco uses a mayor-council system, and Oakland falls somewhere between these two standard categories. As we have already emphasized, however, these labels and categories mask a wide variety of formal powers within each structure, and at least one former mayor of San Jose argues that that city's charter provides for a stronger mayor than any other city in California other than San Francisco, including mayor-council cities such as Los Angeles.⁶ All three of the cities we examined amended their charters within the past twenty years in order to strengthen the mayoralty. San Francisco and San Jose increased the authority of the mayor within their existing forms of government, and Oakland shifted from a council-manager system to a temporary, unique structure that involves both a strong mayor and a powerful city manager.

San Francisco is a city of economic affluence with a heterogeneous ethnic mix, and a political culture where newer concerns with the environment, personal identity and life style overlay an older Democratic tradition based on blue-collar votes and union power (Barone and Ujifusa 2000; see also DeLeon 1992). Prior to recent reforms, power in San Francisco traditionally was fragmented within a cumbersome form of government. It was, in the words of one commentator, a unique system that melded "elements of strong mayor, city manager and

commission systems of government into a strange hybrid” (DeLeon 1992, 21). Although the city’s prominence gave the mayor a high political profile and some mayors (such as Dianne Feinstein and Joe Alioto) were able to wield enormous personal influence under this system, the commissions significantly limited the mayor’s authority. The commissioners hired department heads and approved departmental budgets; the mayor had the authority only to cut commission-approved budget items. Mayors could not count on their appointment authority to influence commissions, as most commissioners served fixed terms. As a deputy to one former mayor described, for the mayor of San Francisco “the buck stops at your office, yet the power was diffused throughout the city.”

Significant strengthening of the mayor’s office occurred in 1996 when new mayor Willie Brown inherited a charter amendment that increased his budget authority and gave him the power to choose department heads from a list of finalists assembled by the commissions. Proposition E, passed in the same election that brought Brown to office, further enhanced the office by replacing the chief administrative officer with a city administrator who reports to the mayor. The chief administrative officer had been created in 1932 to be independent of both the mayor and the Board of Supervisors in order to keep city administration free from political corruption. The recent charter changes allow the mayor to determine the scope of the city administrator’s jurisdiction, effectively giving the mayor responsibility for departments such as public works that previously had been outside of the mayor’s control. San Francisco maintains its mayor-council form of government, but Proposition E significantly strengthened the mayor’s ability carry out a policy agenda.

Oakland had long operated with a council-manager system in which the city manager exercised extensive power that was not checked by either the mayor or the council. Indeed the

⁶ Authors’ interview with Tom McEnery, 10 April 2001, San Jose, CA.

mayor had no authority over the city manager at all since his appointment and tenure were at the pleasure of the council. The mayor possessed only one of five council votes that were needed in order to provide any direction to the city manager, and bypassing the manager was not an option. Under the non-interference clause of Oakland's charter, it constituted a misdemeanor offense for the mayor or any other council member to "give orders to any subordinate of the City under the jurisdiction of the City Manager." The city manager's control over the budget and city departments allowed him to maintain the support of a majority on the council through the distribution of projects and programs to individual council districts.

The council-manager structure had long frustrated Oakland mayors, who felt that their ability to carry out a policy agenda or even to improve service delivery was constrained by limitations on the authority of the office. Mayor Elihu Harris tried to secure reforms through the ambitious Measure F in 1996, which would have eliminated the city manager position and shifted all of its responsibilities to the mayor. The mayor would have been authorized to hire a chief administrative officer, but that position would have been administrative rather than substantive. Under Measure F, the mayor would have taken control of all the powers that previously had been held by the manager, including executing and enforcing all laws and ordinances, controlling and administering the city's financial affairs, supervising purchasing and the preparation of contracts, hiring department heads with council approval, and preparing and submitting to the council the annual budget. The only duty of the city manager that would not have been transferred to the mayor was the duty "to attend all meetings of the Council."

Oakland voters rejected Measure F in 1996, but in 1998 they overwhelmingly approved another charter change measure, Measure X, which was written by mayor-elect Jerry Brown. Indeed, Measure X was tailor-made for Brown since it expires after six years if voters do not

renew it. This measure moved Oakland away from the council-manager system it had had since 1930 without fully embracing the strong mayor system envisioned in Measure F. The charter reform strengthened the mayor simply by placing the city manager under his or her direct control. Measure X gave the mayor authority to appoint the manager, subject to confirmation by the council, and more importantly to remove the manager without council approval. The city manager retains all of the responsibilities of the office, but he or she serves at the pleasure of the mayor. The ballot measure also removed the non-interference prohibition on the mayor, allowing the mayor to direct all city employees. In an effort to insulate the mayor from council pressures, the mayor's place on the council was eliminated, although the mayor retained the power to break tie votes.

In contrast with Oakland, San Jose amended its charter in 1985 to strengthen the position of the mayor without abandoning the council-manager system. Measure J was developed in response to the city's loss of \$60 million in bad bond investments (see Christensen 1997). City bureaucrats acting in violation of council policy had caused the financial crisis, but the public looked to the mayor to solve the problem. As then-mayor Tom McEnery recalls, "I decided then that if I was gonna have all the responsibility, then I was gonna have the power. That's only fair."⁷ Charter reform gave the mayor what one interviewee calls "'bracket authority' with regard to the budget; that is, he writes messages on the front and back ends." The mayor's new role in preparing the budget for submission to the council was a significant increase in the office's authority. In addition, the 1985 charter amendment gave the mayor the ability to nominate candidates for the city manager position and created an office of public information under the mayor, enhancing the mayor's role as spokesperson for the city. Since Measure J also included provisions that strengthened the role of the council—most importantly in the areas of

the budget and selection of department heads—the effect of the reforms was to strengthen the mayor’s authority primarily relative to the city manager, who continued to direct the administration of the city but did not build an independent power base as seemed to be the case in Oakland.

From this brief review of the charter changes that occurred in our three case study cities, it is apparent that the mayor’s formal authority cannot be inferred easily from a city’s particular form of government. Within the two cities that neatly fit a single form of government category, there have been charter reforms that have affected the division of authority among the mayor, the city’s legislative body, and the city manager. Oakland is more complex, moving from a pure council-manager system to a structure that cannot be characterized as either council-manager or mayor-council. A more careful examination across mayoral administrations within each of these cities reveals even more complexity. We find that even within a constant form of government, different mayors have used their political and leadership skills to acquire informal power where they lack formal authority.

Among California charter cities, relying on simple descriptions of city structures is not sufficient to shed light on a mayor’s authority and ability to carry out a governing agenda. Structure influences the actions of mayors, but it does not necessarily constrict or empower them. Mayors employ a variety of informal strategies to cope with formally divided government and to pursue their policy goals. Avoiding rigid categories that might obscure as much as they enlighten, the question is whether there are any patterns or regularities in the personal styles of mayoral governance.

We draw a distinction between a mayor’s goals and strategies, and between political strategies and management styles. By “political strategies” we mean the repertoire of tactics that

⁷ Authors’ interview with McEnergy.

a mayor might use to advance his or her goals or simply to cope with the process of governing. Political strategies usually involve a mayor's relationship with the public, his or her electoral coalition, the city's legislative body, or other political actors. By "management styles" we mean the mode of operation in, and interaction with, the administration of the city. Different sorts of goals would *prima facie* suggest the use of different sorts of political strategies and management styles. But this is not necessarily so. There is no automatic link between a given set of goals and either a particular political strategy or a particular management style. A mayor may not realize that there is a link between goals and strategies; or the mayor may be unable to adopt a particular strategy because of personal, political or structural impediments. He or she may be deflected from the use of a certain strategy due to crises or routine considerations. Equally, the link between political goals and strategies on the one hand and management style on the other is not rigid and neatly demarcated: they merge into one another. Nevertheless, the separation of political and management strategies is helpful.

Political Goals

We found that mayors came to office with a variety of different goals; and some goals were more clearly articulated than others. Broadly speaking, this means the reasons for wanting the mayoral and having an agenda. Interviewing after the event inevitably involves some risk that individual mayors (and/or his or her associates) may alter their account of the initial goals to justify their conduct in office. This problem (if it exists) can be corrected to some degree by more extensive interviewing.

Some mayors were obviously activists, entering office with clear and ambitious agendas. Some were *issue activists*. Thus the liberal Art Agnos brought to San Francisco's City Hall an

identified range of policy areas where he wanted to make a difference. He ran for office at the urging of neighborhood and community associations who were unhappy with Dianne Feinstein's designated heir apparent and with the city's pro-growth policies. Agnos' mayoral campaign reflected his issue-oriented agenda: he published a book, *Getting Things Done: Visions and Goals for San Francisco* (with a series of issue by issue analyses), and during the campaign put up signs encouraging voters to "Read My Book."

By contrast with the issue activism of Agnos we observe the *entrepreneurial activism* of San Jose mayor Tom McEnery and San Francisco mayor Dianne Feinstein. McEnery's family had a long history of civic activism in San Jose: his father had been a Democratic leader and his grandfather had been a council member (see McEnery 1994). San Jose had boomed in the decades leading up to McEnery's election as mayor, and he aimed to build up the city's infrastructure and services in order to support its rapidly expanding population. McEnery lived in the downtown area, and he hoped to build up the downtown in order to create a focal point for the sprawling city.

Feinstein's entrepreneurial activism was of a different character. The same day that she announced to reporters that she would soon depart from her career in San Francisco city government, she inherited the office of mayor after the assassination of mayor George Moscone and supervisor Harvey Milk (see Roberts 1994; Shilts 1982). The manner in which she became mayor profoundly affected her goals, since she initially saw herself as a healer who needed to rebuild and bind the community. At the same time, her policy goals were aimed at strengthening the economic position of San Francisco. She sought to recruit new companies to the city and promote trade with the Pacific Rim. Her centrist pro-growth position attracted the opposition of

an expanding coalition of anti-growth environmentalists who succeeded in 1986 in passing Proposition M, a broad anti-development initiative.

By contrast with the *issue activists* and *entrepreneurial activists*, we found that other mayors have goals that are more oriented towards stability and *maintenance*. This broad category includes mayors (such as San Francisco's Frank Jordan and San Jose's Ron Gonzales) who explicitly embrace as their goals the improvement of basic services, such as street cleaning and transport, and the sound management of city finances. It also includes those mayors who want to continue the agenda of their predecessor and broaden it in modest ways. San Jose's Susan Hammer is a good example. Finally, the category includes mayors such as Oakland's Elihu Harris who might once have had broad ambitions for city government, but who in office articulate those goals ineffectively. Harris, for example, recalled that he had developed abstract ideas about city improvement during his period of service in Sacramento:

In Sacramento, even after working as a staff member, and after working in Washington for a Congresswoman, I came back with lots of theories and certainly ideas that I thought could solve the problems of economics, of social [de]generation, of lack of quality education, lack of housing and the like and ran for mayor on a platform called "New Ways"...[by which] we were going to approach old problems with new ways, thinking outside the box. Being more strategic, developing long term plans rather than just to deal with quick fixes.⁸

Once in office, Harris grew frustrated with his lack of formal authority under the Oakland city charter and appeared to give up his broader ambitions. He seemed to embrace maintenance as an overriding goal.

A final group of mayors see their goals for the office as part of a longer-term career path. Although traditionally the office of mayor has not been seen as a stepping stone to higher office, this has changed to some extent by new opportunities for turning city government into a national platform and by term limits in city government and the state legislature. Many observers

perceived that Jerry Brown had statewide and/or national ambitions when he became mayor of Oakland. Why else, it was frequently asked, would such a high profile politician (who had been a two-term governor of California and a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination) want to become mayor of a struggling city except as an opportunity to prove his management credentials and to reinvent himself as a moderate before running for another office? This view of Oakland as a “spot on his resume” in part explains the recurring clashes that Jerry Brown has had with community activists and critics on the city council who do not share the mayor’s agenda. Willie Brown ran for mayor of San Francisco after being termed out of a 31-year career in the state Assembly, including fifteen years as Speaker of the Assembly. He brought to the mayoralty a formidable reputation in state politics, and many observers believed that his interest in the office had more to do with a lack of other opportunities for political office than with a passion for city government. Indeed, it now appears that mayor Brown may be preparing for a re-entry into state legislative office.

Since we have seen that the opportunities available for mayors to exercise formal power vary significantly across cities, we might expect the scope of a mayor’s goals to be consistent with the strength of the office. In fact, we find do not find a clear relationship between structure and mayoral ambition. Mayors such as San Jose’s McEnery and Oakland’s Harris enter office with far-reaching agendas that require more than their own formal authority to succeed. In the case of McEnery, confidence in his own persuasive skills convinced him that he could achieve his goals within the constraints of the office. Harris, on the other hand, to some extent seems to have been unaware of the limited power of Oakland’s mayoralty. When a mayor’s ability to achieve his or her goals runs up against the formal constraints of the office, however, we see a consistent pattern of mayors attempting to expand the authority of the mayoralty. Harris decided

⁸ Authors’ interview with Elihu Harris, 4 April 2001, Oakland, CA.

that he could not achieve his goals without a charter change to increase the power of the office, and he dedicated much of his energy to two unsuccessful efforts to pass a strong-mayor proposal. McEnergy carried out his agenda mostly through persuasion and popularity, but he backed charter reform when he found that his lack of budget authority made it difficult to implement change as quickly as he would like.⁹ Jerry Brown would find it difficult to enhance his own stature and build his management credentials within a structure dominated by the city manager, so he crafted a successful charter reform proposal before he even entered office. Thus in San Jose and Oakland we see that conflict between a mayor's goals and the structural limitations of the office can cause a mayor to seek to strengthen the office.

San Francisco's 1995 charter reform was not as closely associated with a single mayor as were the proposals in our other two case studies. There is some evidence, however, that the reform can still be attributed to conflict between the goals of a mayor and structural constraints. One reason that Agnos made limited progress on his ambitious issue activist agenda was the city's fragmented structure that empowered commissions and the chief administrative officer, at the cost of the mayor. According a member of Agnos' staff, observers recognized the limitations imposed on Agnos' flexibility as mayor: "one of our legacies, I think, is the fact that we drew attention to the fact that the existing system had to be changed and that we had to go to a stronger mayor system." In 1993, two years after Agnos was voted out of office, voters approved Proposition N, which required the Board of Supervisors to conduct a charter review. By 1995 the Board had prepared a reform proposal, and voters approved Proposition E in the same election that they elected Willie Brown to the mayor's office.

Goals are important because they provide mayors with a compass. However, they only take mayors so far. As we have seen, constraints on the office may pose an obstacle to the

⁹ Authors' interview with McEnergy.

achievement of a mayor's goals. Even more important than structural impediments are the natural, fiscal, and political emergencies that arise during a mayor's tenure. As Agnos points out, it is the "things you don't count on" that often dominate a mayoral administration.¹⁰ These unanticipated events demand flexibility and strategic versatility. Mayors employ a variety of strategies to overcome constraints and achieve their goals, and the informal authority they exercise through political strategies and management style is most important when they face the least expected challenges.

Political Strategies

Mayors in large California cities operate in a fragmented and variable political environment that greatly influences their ability to carry out a policy agenda and deliver city services. Across all structural forms, mayors compete for decision-making authority with the city's legislative body and with top administrative officials whose positions are protected from the mayor's influence through the city manager and/or the civil service system. The power of city employees' unions further limits mayors' administrative flexibility, especially since these unions play an important role in many mayors' election campaigns. Mayors must maintain the support of their electoral coalition and the wider public both to secure a future term in office and to build leverage over the council and the departments. Their ability to mobilize resources and respond to the problems of their city is sharply limited by state and federal policy, and a change in administration at the gubernatorial or presidential level can do much to influence a city's fortunes. They are further constrained by the need to cooperate with surrounding cities on regional issues such as transportation and the environment while competing with those cities for valuable economic development. Mayors also have to deal with changing political dynamics

¹⁰ Authors' interview with Art Agnos, 20 April 2001, Berkeley, CA.

within their own cities, complicated by term limits and shifts from at-large to district council elections.

Even within the city structures that provide for the greatest amount of executive authority, mayors cannot expect other political actors to simply abide by their will. They need to employ a variety of political strategies in order to maintain the support of important constituencies and maximize resources for their priorities. Perhaps the most effective political strategy is *strong executive leadership*. With this strategy mayors exercise their own energy and focus in an attempt to mobilize the different elements of their city government. They use the formal authority of their office and the instruments in their power to set the city agenda, to push their priorities through and to stop policies that they oppose. Budgetary authority is an especially important tool for exercising executive leadership. Thus San Jose mayor Susan Hammer declares, “It’s the mayor who sets the agenda for the city, every single year, through the budget.”¹¹ While every city council has the formal authority to adjust budget figures and approve the final document, mayors with the power to prepare the budget initially can use that opportunity to lay out their own priorities and set the agenda for discussion.

Formal instruments of power help a mayor to exercise executive leadership, but they need to be supplemented with a mayor’s political skills. In fact, executive leadership strategies can take the place of formal tools that a mayor lacks. Although Hammer had no veto power, she did not suffer for the lack of it because if there was something she “needed to kill,” she and her staff “would have done the work earlier and it would never have gotten to the council.”¹² Indeed when formal authority is limited, mayors can use the force of their personality to demonstrate leadership. McEnery provides a good example. When he took office in San Jose, the formal

¹¹ Authors’ interview with Susan Hammer, 18 April 2001, Berkeley, CA.

¹² Authors’ interview with Hammer.

powers of the mayor had not changed since 1916, when Progressive distrust of executive leadership was at its height. As McEnery notes:

You had only one vote on a ten-member district council, your powers were solely *ex cathedra*, you had no budget powers, you had no personnel powers, you had nothing more...than the force of your own personality, and your own ideas, and obviously the ability to make other people...like the direction you were going in.¹³

Not all politicians have the personality demanded by a strong executive leadership strategy. Thus Ron Gonzales, in the opinion of at least one observer, has been too timid in his handling of the office, and has not been sufficiently activist: “He has the mentality of a middle manager. He’s not in a hurry.” The executive leadership strategy further benefits from a strong level of public support. Mayors including McEnery and Jerry Brown have used the perception of a mandate from voters to win over other political actors. As with the formal tools of office, making use of popularity requires political skill. Oakland mayor Elihu Harris won both of his elections with overwhelming majorities, but he was never able to use those victories to create the perception of a mandate.

A good indicator of executive leadership is the loyalty of a mayor’s appointees to the mayor’s agenda. Both Agnos and Jordan had difficulty with some of their term appointments to San Francisco’s commissions. Once appointed, their commissioners would vote against the mayor on important city policies. Willie Brown has been able to use his leadership skills to maintain a higher degree of loyalty to his positions. Charter authority, political planning and good timing combined to grant Brown the opportunity to make three appointments to fill vacancies on the Board of Supervisors within the first few months of his mayoralty, and his ability to maintain the allegiance of his appointees provided him with a solid majority on the Board throughout his first term. His Board appointments did not serve at his pleasure; instead he

was able to use his political skills and the force of his personality to keep his appointees in line. One observer notes that even when Agnos had the formal authority to maintain loyalty, he did not take advantage of it: “Art, you know, people didn’t get kicked off the commission if they seemed to not always follow the mayor’s direction. Willie, you kick people off the commission if they don’t follow your direction.”

Serving in the legislature may not be the best background for strong executive leadership, which often involves taking risks in order to build support for an agenda. Risk-taking, for instance, was a fundamental tactic for McEnery, who says, “My idea about popularity is you don’t save it for some future election, you use it for things that you think are gonna make the city better and then you let the chips fall where they may.”¹⁴ For Harris, though, his long experience as a state legislator and as a state and congressional legislative staff member seemed to make him unable or unwilling to set direction for the city council. One interviewee explains:

The mayor’s position should be clear when any issue comes up. The mayor should be staking out, sort of pushing the boundary and then trimming back to compromise with the legislative body or whoever the compromises are with. But the mayor should be clear...an observer should be walking into the council meeting saying, “Did the mayor get the votes for what he or she wants?” Instead with Elihu, it was, “Where’s the mayor on this issue?” Because he was still operating in the legislative mode, where you get the most from holding your cards for as long as you can, and then everyone has to bid to you in order to fill out their hand...The problem that creates is, the dynamic developed under such a structure is [that] after a while everybody knows you can’t count on the mayor for a vote so the pledge of a vote becomes useless.

Thus while strong executive leadership is a highly effective strategy for building and maintaining political support, it requires personal skills that a mayor might not have and a willingness to take risks and expose oneself to criticism and potential failure. Experience in the closed body of a legislature may not adequately prepare a mayor for that kind of risk-taking.

¹³ Authors’ interview with McEnery.

¹⁴ Authors’ interview with McEnery.

A second political strategy that may be used is that of *bartering and brokerage*. Mayors who use this strategy recognize that they are not always in a command situation but seek to advance their objectives by the explicit or implicit use of such resources as budgetary power, patronage, campaign endorsements and access to information. Mayors use their position to secure trade-offs and compromises between different elements of the government and between factions within it.

Budgetary power is potentially the most important tool a mayor can use to secure compliance, but the extent to which the mayor can exploit it depends on both the formal power at his or her disposal and the leeway within the budget. Before the passage of Measure J in San Jose and Measure X in Oakland, neither city's mayor had formal authority to influence the budget. Now both cities provide the opportunity for the mayor to prepare a budget for submission to the council. Hammer recalls her use of the budget document to influence council members: "You're a good soldier, and you are cooperative, and I'll support your programs, but when push comes to shove—you don't articulate this—they knew they were going to get a million dollars for park improvement in their districts but they weren't gonna get it if they pissed me off."¹⁵ However, when a city is in financial crisis, even a mayor with budget authority may not have the slack resources necessary to employ this strategy. A member of Agnos' staff recalls that during Agnos' tenure, so much of the city budget was tied up by law into wage formulas and other commitments that "about 90 percent of the city budget was already locked up before you even opened up the budget discussions." Agnos consequently did not find the budget to be an important bargaining tool.

As one city manager observes, a mayor's bartering resources may not be limited only to the budget. In many cities, the mayor is the appointing authority for boards, commissions,

intergovernmental groups, and other bodies that can build the political resumé of an ambitious council member. The mayor often has the opportunity to select council members to go to conferences or on overseas trading trips. Furthermore, the mayor may have exclusive access to information: “Pick your issue, [the mayor’s] office is likely to be the first place to know. Well...who he shares that with...becomes very powerful informally. So having a good relationship with the mayor is important to you as a council member, it’s important to your district, on the best days it’s important to the city.” A popular mayor might also use campaign endorsements as a bartering resource. One critic argues that this is Jerry Brown’s strategy for maintaining support on the council: the council is “all sort of scared of Jerry, because he’s so popular. And they’re all running for something and they want his support here or there or wherever, and so they won’t stand up to him.” Bartering and brokerage with endorsements is likely to be most effective in a city with council term limits, where there is greater incentive for council members to seek support for higher elected office.

The bartering and brokerage strategy requires active involvement, a willingness to use hardball tactics and a shrewd sense of the self-interest of other players. After Jerry Brown became mayor, he encouraged election opponent Ignacio de la Fuente to run for president of the city council, which lacked a leader after the Measure X reforms. Rather than compete with de la Fuente for control of city government, he gave him responsibility for building a majority coalition on the council in support of Brown’s agenda. Brown astutely predicted that de la Fuente would embrace the council leader role, removing a potential opponent and at the same time securing support on the council for his governing agenda.

A more collective version of the bartering and brokerage strategy we call *inclusive decision-making*. This strategy requires the mayor to build relationships with political actors and

¹⁵ Authors’ interview with Hammer.

important constituencies to try to forge a governing coalition. Its focus is on long-term cooperation, and it requires the mayor shares the agenda-setting role with others. Hammer made a concerted effort to nurture personal relationships with city council members (“asking how their grandchildren were”¹⁶) and found that the effort paid substantial dividends in terms of keeping council members generally supportive of her plans and agenda. Other mayors who do not build relationships through social courtesies may find their overall objectives impeded. Observers note that Feinstein was highly attentive to the personal needs of those around her. Agnos, her successor, by comparison neglected these relationships: “It took people some getting used to. Feinstein...while being a tough person...was kind of genteel and rather reserved. Then you get this Greek guy coming in as mayor who didn’t try to coopt people...and he sometimes wasn’t as diplomatic as he could have been in trying to bring people along.” As a consequence, Agnos found his relationships with many Board members strained. Frank Jordan, the ex-police chief who defeated Agnos to become mayor in 1991, apparently did not learn from the mistakes of his predecessor. Jordan did not massage his relationships with the Board and apparently found it difficult to forget political attacks, leading to the Board “legislating over him,” according to one observer.

Mayors who do employ inclusive decision-making as a political strategy often find their freedom of action limited by other political actors who interpret the mayors’ detachment as arrogance. These mayors may be able to advance their agenda based solely on policy agreement or political alliances, but if their majority coalition falters on an issue they will not enjoy the underlying confidence of other actors in order to test ideas or create compromises. Mayors also use the strategy of inclusion to maintain the support of important constituencies, consulting with key interest groups on policy decisions and forging agreement between competing interests. The

¹⁶ Authors’ interview with Hammer.

importance of inclusive decision-making with these external actors depends on the fragility of the mayor's political base and, to some extent, on the city's election system. Where council members are elected by district, the mayor's role in bringing together diverse constituencies may be more visible and important than it is when council members share a citywide electorate.

A fourth political strategy is the well-known presidential tactic of *going public* (see for example Kernell 1997). Here the mayor attempts to bypass structural impediments to his or her policies by appealing over the heads of other administrative and political institutions to the general public. This strategy requires the exploitation of celebrity or personal popularity, and it depends on the ability of the mayor to maintain the media's interest. Sometimes routine decision-making in City Hall is not the stuff of good media stories, and mayors who use this strategy may find themselves tempted to ignite controversy in order to produce publicity. The going public strategy may not necessarily deliver support from the council, but it strengthens the mayor ability to shape the terms of debate. It is a technique Jerry Brown uses regularly, both to enhance his own image and to accomplish his policy goals. One interviewee notes:

If you want to get things done, you want to make sure you've covered your bases and talked to the key legislators. If your goal, however, is your image, then can you be a reformer and will the public know you're reforming anything if nobody is screaming? Jerry believes...you can do good things as a reformer, but you've got to have the public, and you can't have the public unless you've stepped on somebody's toes because if you don't step on somebody's toes, the press isn't going to report it.

The going public strategy risks jeopardizing relationships with council members and other officials who resent being disregarded by the mayor. Jerry Brown's unique oversight of the city manager allows him to pursue many priorities without the endorsement of the council, but mayors with weaker formal authority take a greater risk by circumventing their legislative

body. They may use other political strategies like bargaining and brokerage or inclusive decision making to maintain the support of the council while pursuing a going public strategy.

At the local level a particular and extreme form of the going public strategy is the resort to a *direct appeal to the voters* on a policy issue by putting an initiative on the ballot. California cities are required to win approval from voters for a specific policy or project if it involves bond financing, but occasionally a mayor will choose to turn to the ballot as a means for implementing legislation that he or she cannot pass through the city council. Jordan made extensive use of this strategy when it became clear that the Board of Supervisors would not back most of his public safety agenda. The Board perceived Jordan as ideologically misaligned with the public, and Jordan did not maintain good relationships with individual Board members that would predispose them to work with the mayor towards a compromise. Consequently, Jordan turned to voters to overcome Board opposition. Jordan met with mixed results using this strategy, winning support for his proposals to ban aggressive panhandling near banking machines and to require that welfare recipients be fingerprinted and spend most of their checks on rent, but failing to pass initiatives that would have imposed a youth curfew and banned sitting or sleeping on public sidewalks.

Mayors who find their city structures substantially blocking their capacity to govern can, of course, attempt to implement *charter reform* to make the city structure more manageable. However, there are problems with direct attempts at charter reform. Stronger mayors probably do not need it; weaker mayors arouse suspicion and opposition. When Harris tried in 1992 and 1996 to win approval for broad charter changes, the press took the opportunity presented by the charter reform campaign to publicly criticize the mayor and his inability or unwillingness to exercise leadership under the existing system (see for example Stinnett 1996a; Stinnett 1996b;

“Vote No” 1996). The charter reform efforts also focused attention on Harris’ irresolute style. As observers noted, Harris used the cover of a citizen committee for his first reform proposal so that when reporters asked if he knew anything about the initiative, he could “place distance between himself and the proposal” and deny his involvement, despite the fact that the committee was composed of people who had worked on his election campaign and backed him financially. The press were not fooled, because it was “classic Elihu...send out your trial balloon, see what happens. If it doesn’t work, run away from it.” The same vacillation came through during the campaign for Measure F, according to one participant:

He was very much of approach-avoidance on this issue. He felt that he was controversial, or he felt that it would look like a power grab if he was too close to the measure, so he would stay away from the measure. But then he would see the campaign going sideways and he would then step up and he would try to help it and he would help insofar as to get something started...and then just backed off.

The disorganization of the Measure F campaign not only affected its chance of success, but it reinforced the impression among political insiders that Harris was distracted and indecisive.

Charter reform was a more successful strategy for Jerry Brown, not least because of the difference in timing between his and Harris’ efforts. Few political insiders were willing to risk their relationship with the new mayor before he had even begun his term. Previous opponents of charter reform backed off because of Brown’s electoral mandate:

There were eleven candidates for mayor and he won outright, with 58 percent. That’s a fairly strong mandate. So people kind of laid back, including myself. While I was in opposition [to the measure], I didn’t really fight it too much because I was going to be working with the mayor and I didn’t want to be out there antagonizing him...I knew it was going to pass overwhelmingly, as it did.

Furthermore, Brown improved the chances for Measure X’s success by including a number of electorally popular reforms: a two-term limit on the mayor, an elected city attorney, and a requirement that all city council pay raises be approved by the voters, in addition to the sunset on

the provisions strengthening the mayor. Although some saw Measure X as “a sloppy cut-and-paste,” the measure’s catch-all nature helped secure passage: “He put into it everything that he though would be popular with the electorate...He hit all the hot buttons.” In addition, Jerry Brown used political strategies such as strong executive leadership, inclusive decision-making, and going public in his campaign to support Measure X.

As mayor, Brown has continued to promote structural change in Oakland. In 2000 he persuaded the electorate to pass his educational reform package, which included new powers for the mayor to appoint three members of the school board. However, even a popular mayor takes a risk when proposing charter change to strengthen his or her own position. In 1996, voters overwhelmingly rejected Proposition E, Willie Brown’s effort to replace the Civil Service Commission with a mayor-appointed board and shift over 350 civil service management jobs to the control of the mayor’s office, even as Brown’s approval ratings showed 59 percent support for his performance as mayor (Johnson and King 1996). Brown’s attempt to expand his appointment authority was widely viewed as “a major power grab” (“Prop E” 1996), and the proposal attracted unwanted attention to the patronage system he had built.

Beyond the level of city government a mayor may try the strategy of *mobilizing federalism*, appealing to the state and federal levels of government for support. The success of this sort of strategy will depend to a large extent on partisan considerations and on the overall financial circumstances of the state and federal governments. Throughout much of the past two decades the federal and the state levels of government were out of sympathy with the predominantly Democratic cities of San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. California cities had a particularly difficult time during Governor Pete Wilson’s two terms, as his administration coped with the state’s recession largely by cutting back state support for local programs and services.

All our interviewees agree that their cities have an easier time when Democrats occupy the top seats in Sacramento and Washington, in terms of both overall funding and responsiveness to a city's specific needs.

When the conditions are right, mayors take advantage of personal and political connections in the state and federal governments in order to advance their own agenda. In some cases the goal is to enhance the profile of the mayor or the city: for example, Feinstein was said to be "Carter's favorite mayor" and he was instrumental in getting the 1984 Democratic Convention to San Francisco. In other cases, a mayor uses the mobilizing federalism strategy to achieve goals that are impeded at the local level. Jerry Brown, a skilled lobbyist, used his political connections to win state Board of Education support for a military charter school after both Oakland and Alameda County had refused to approve the proposal. Like going public, mobilizing federalism involves the risk of alienating relationships at the local level if it is perceived that the mayor is circumventing due process. In addition, state and federal officials may be hesitant to interfere in local politics. Used sparingly and alongside other political strategies, however, mobilizing federalism is an important tactic for coping with the structural constraints on a mayor's authority.

Management Styles

The internal management of a city presents a rather different range of styles from the broad political strategies we have so far described. The management challenges faced by a mayor are even more shaped by the structural variation across cities than the political challenges. No matter how extensive their formal authority, all mayors must maintain some level of support on their city council and among the public in order to be able to advance their agenda. The

political strategies discussed above might be used in any structural context to win the support, or at least the acquiescence, of other political actors. The constraints on a mayor's management of his or her administration are more strongly influenced by the city's constitutional structure. Formal lines of authority are an important consideration in a mayor's interactions with the management and personnel of city departments. Council-appointed city managers, civil service and labor laws, and charter clauses that prohibit mayoral interference with department activities all sharply constrain a mayor's ability to manage the delivery of city services. The management skills and style that the mayor brings to the job will do much to determine whether or not the mayor is able to overcome structural constraints on his or her administrative authority. In terms of management style we distinguish among three types: *partnership and cooperation*, *interventionism*, and *politicization*.

In the *partnership and cooperation* model, the mayor, the legislative body, and the city administrator try to develop some sort of functional division of labor. It may not be the precise division of powers envisioned by the charter but its parameters are understood. A mutual understanding of dependence helps to minimize conflict among the different elements of the city administration. This management style depends heavily on the particular personalities involved, and the skills and ambitions of the different political actors. In Oakland, the partnership between Jerry Brown and city manager Robert Bobb is widely recognized and acknowledged. Brown brought to the mayoralty a broad policy vision and widespread political influence, but also a reputation for being unable to follow through on his plans. Bobb's hands-on management expertise allows Brown to ignore the details of implementation. One observer notes that the relationship works because it capitalizes on the skills and needs of both players:

They recognize they need each other...beside the obvious that Robert needs Jerry because if Jerry says goodbye, then Robert's gone. But Jerry needs Robert in that

a lot of [what] Jerry wants to accomplish upsets the status quo, and since the status quo here in Oakland for twenty years has been dominated by one particular segment of the African-American bourgeoisie in the city, he needed—he was lucky to find—easily one of the ten best managers in the country, sitting here waiting for him new, without having a lot of scars, ready to go... This is a big opportunity for Robert because [he]...is able to leverage Jerry's celebrity into getting a lot of things done. He's never had the opportunity to have a mayor with such a high national profile as Jerry so it's a lot of fun for him.

While Brown supervises Bobb, he recognizes that the city manager is crucial to helping the mayor achieve his goals. In fact, Brown's commitment to retaining Bobb as city manager after the Measure X reforms helped to win support for the proposal; both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Oakland Tribune* mentioned the promise in their editorials endorsing the measure. Brown has upheld the commitment and the two act as partners, with Brown even choosing to share Bobb's staff.

Not everyone in Oakland is happy with this close relationship between city manager and mayor, because it creates automatic tension between the mayor and the council and marginalizes the council's policy-making role. Thus far council president de la Fuente has managed to maintain a majority in support of the mayor's activities, but critics on the council argue that Brown and Bobb are acting outside the boundaries of their authority. According to one interviewee, the problem systematically is that

the mayor is supposed to be an implementer in this strong mayor system. And instead what's happening is that the mayor is making policy and the council is making policy. The mayor's policy is getting more attention from the city manager because [the mayor] oversees the city manager and [the council] no longer [does].

Brown's partnership and cooperation with Bobb is effective in terms of inducing city administration to work in pursuit of his policy goals, but it may pose problems if the council feels that its voice is being ignored.

Partnership and cooperation also seems to be characteristic of the relationship between the current mayor and city manager in San Jose. This relationship has a different dynamic, since the San Jose city manager answers to the council and not the mayor alone. While many mayors might view the city manager as an obstacle to their direction of the city administration, the chemistry between Gonzales and manager Del Borgsdorf is such that they seem to fall into their own roles easily, with the mayor taking care of the politics of an issue and the manager directing implementation. There was a danger that Gonzales' business management background might lead him to intervene in matters that were properly for the city manager, but this generally has not happened, according to the city manager:

That [management background] cuts both ways. He [Gonzales] has a good knowledge of what it takes to get work done...that's the good news. The bad news is...he has something to say about how it gets done. So he's more likely to jump in my stuff than I am in his...just by his instincts and background. The chemistry is such that he takes the path of advice and comment to me, as opposed to directing the organization...[he is] very respectful of the notion that at the end of the day, it's my job to determine what the resource allocation is and who's in those positions and that kind of stuff.

The relationship is clearly much more of an equal partnership reflecting an implicit functional division of powers than that between Brown and Bobb. Observers agree that Bobb is able to exert influence on the mayor, but since he serves at the mayor's pleasure he cannot stray far from Brown's agenda. In San Jose the city manager answers to the full council, which gives him his own constituency to balance against the mayor's. He views the structure as both a constraint and an opportunity:

I think Bobb by nature and by both intellect and force of personality influences where Jerry's going, but it's where Jerry's going that then becomes what gets implemented. That's not true here. We have ten district council members to whom I am accountable and if six of them team up, I get to find another way to make a living. If all of the council teams up [in Oakland] Robert Bobb's still employed, until Jerry Brown says you're not employed.

In general, though, questions of structure do not play a role in the San Jose partnership: “It’s not who’s in charge; he’s the mayor. It’s not who’s getting the work done; I’m the city manager. It’s not a conversation we have.” With two actors who agree on priorities and their own responsibility for carrying out the work, partnership and cooperation is the logical approach to governing the city.

By comparison with mayors who recognise a *de facto* division of powers between themselves and the key administrative official, some mayors have practiced *interventionism* in their approach to management, although the extent of their interventionism varies. At one end of the spectrum are mayors who are selectively interventionist concentrating on policy rather than administrative detail; at the other end of the spectrum there are mayors who have been very much hands-on managers.

Experience in Oakland and San Jose shows that a good relationship between the mayor and city manager is not automatic. In a traditional council-manager system where the manager is accountable to the council, it is natural that competition might arise for influence over the city’s administration. As Hammer describes, frequently the manager has the advantage in this competition:

Knowledge is power and for years in San Jose the city manager ran the show and there was not a lot of information sharing...I was fortunate, I had a good relationship with the two city managers that I worked with as mayor, and there was sharing of information, number one, but number two I had a staff that was on top of everything.¹⁷

Hammer was selective in her intervention, however, and allowed the city manager to retain a zone of influence. Thus, although the San Jose charter change required the mayor and council to approve the city manager’s department head selections, Hammer did not reject any manager’s choices or try to influence the selection process. Hammer did not tell department heads what to

do or try to direct them but worked through the city manager; she consulted directly with department heads on an information basis only. Although Hammer's managerial style was selectively interventionist, she took a more positive view of the role of managers than did her predecessor, Tom McEnery. He viewed the city manager's job as basically that of a CAO: "City managers are not people who really know a lot about the people of the city. They're managers. They're not big on the vision thing, but they're not supposed to be. They're supposed to be good efficient managers who aren't afraid to make decisions."¹⁸

When mayors start to intervene in the finer details of personnel management or policy design, they risk impeding their ability to carry out their executive duties. Agnos' concentration on the fine print of policy for the homeless in San Francisco kept him too far out of the public's view and interfered with his ability to project an image of his administration. A member of his administration recalls: "Art, frankly, was busy trying to solve the homeless problem...I kept telling him, 'get your butt out in the coffee shops. Schmooze. Let people see you. Be the mayor, that's part of what they want in this city.' Except he's locked up behind the door with the social services people designing his homeless plan." While Agnos was negotiating the details of housing policy, he expected his seven deputy mayors to carry out the day-to-day interactions with the public and the city departments and commissions within their areas of emphasis. He envisioned a presidential-style cabinet system with the deputy mayors serving as top advisers and strategic planners, but community groups and the media soon grew frustrated with the deputies' lack of formal authority over city departments, and the department heads did not like their reduced access to the mayor. Most importantly, the cabinet became a political problem as Agnos' critics and the press attacked the titles and salaries of the deputy mayors. Thus Agnos'

¹⁷ Authors' interview with Hammer.

¹⁸ Authors' interview with McEnery.

management strategy created a communications problem, because the public expected the mayor to spend his time as a public figure, not as a policy designer:

I appointed the most diverse group of people, coming from every neighborhood in the city, and I expected them to be my links to the neighborhood. But what I learned is, that's not a substitute for me. The mayor is the person, and there cannot be any surrogates over a sustained period.¹⁹

Although management style has largely to do with directing the city's administration, its political consequences cannot be ignored.

Mayors in systems with city managers constantly negotiate the boundaries of their own influence, but in a mayor-council system there are fewer limits on their management authority. Since ultimately they will be held responsible for the performance of city government, some mayors will have a tendency to become overinvolved in day-to-day management decisions.

Feinstein was regarded by many observers as having too pronounced an interest in the detail of administration. While some have accused her of micro-management, the more consensual view appears to be that she had a hands-on approach to management. A member of her staff explains:

Dianne was, and is, a person who is a meticulous administrator; some say she over-manages—it's not quite that but...having been on the Board of Supervisors, having schooled herself in administration, she knew the workings of the departments, she took an interest if the buses didn't run on time, if police did not respond in a certain few minutes. She insisted on weekly meetings with all department heads, big and small, bigger department heads could come in any time. She had a very hands-on style.

While some argue that her involvement with the details of management was more appropriate for a chief of staff, unlike Agnos there is little evidence that she neglected the political aspects of the job.

The use of staff by the mayor is clearly an important variable in a mayor's ability to intervene effectively both in policy and management. The circumstances of Feinstein's

¹⁹ Authors' interview with Agnos.

appointment as mayor and the restrictive fiscal backdrop to her mayoralty (which included the impact of Proposition 13 and the federal cutbacks of the Reagan administration) demanded effective staff work especially on budget matters. Feinstein, although a demanding boss, used staff efficiently and purposefully: “The responsibilities were defined and responsibilities delineated so there was a sense of accountability. There was a truly structured staff that worked well.” Department heads tolerated Feinstein’s close management style because of her power to set the city agenda and because they appreciated her interest in their concerns:

She was not a person who tolerated sycophants. She wanted people to come to her and tell her what the situation [was]. So...department heads felt at least they had a willing ear and her attention and could get results. And also because the mayor’s principal executive power is that he or she prepares the annual city budget and that of course sets the priorities. So department heads are very conscious of where dollars come from or at least originate.

Feinstein’s hands-on management style, even if some might call it overly interventionist, seems to have worked for her in San Francisco. It is not a strategy that could work in a council-manager system, however, and even in Oakland it would require an extremely passive city manager. Moreover, Feinstein’s personal skills seem an essential element to the success of her management style. A less personable mayor would surely have a more difficult time retaining the loyalty of his or her administration with such an interventionist management style.

For some mayors the distinction between management and political strategy is non-existent. The administrative structure of the city is a source of political strength because of the possibilities of patronage. Conversely political strategies are used to exert control over the administration. Willie Brown’s style as mayor exhibits this *management as politics* approach to management. As Speaker of the state Assembly, Willie Brown had maintained his power largely through extensive use of machine and patronage politics, rewarding political friends and punishing his enemies. Much of this legislative style carried over to San Francisco’s City Hall,

with mixed results. Brown's political approach to management creates a loyal staff structure with a unified message and agenda, but he is widely criticized for appointing unqualified people to top management positions. One critic notes, "When he first became mayor...all his appointments were made on the basis of loyalty, which is the conventional, sort of political basis upon which one makes appointments...[but] it's not enough to have an audacious, charismatic personality, you've got to be able to manage." Critics charge that the inexperience of many of his top managers, combined with Brown's lack of interest in directing the activities of his departments, creates an absence of leadership in much of the city's administration. The management as politics strategy also carries political risk, as some charge that Brown's willingness to use his position to reward his friends borders on corruption. Brown is further criticized for using generous contracts to maintain the electoral support of the city's unions, another element in his management as politics approach.

Although Brown's approach invites charges of cronyism, especially in a city with a vocal contingent of progressive, good-government reformers, his supporters argue that the scale of political appointments in the city administration is relatively small. Far from being an "army of patronage," a former department manager under Brown calls the appointments "the bare minimum necessary to even start to shift departmental attitudes and policies based on the new administration coming in." San Francisco's unions and civil service system are both very strong, and new mayors face a substantial challenge in moving the city's administration to their priorities. When mayors cannot maintain the loyalty of their own appointees, they have an even more difficult time.

Frank Jordan, by comparison with Willie Brown, ran into trouble for not being political enough in his management style. Jordan brought together on his staff people who had no

common ideological bond or loyalty to Jordan personally, resulting in continual conflict within the ranks and inconsistent messages being sent to the public: “Frank had this diverse group, all of whom seemed to have pipelines to the newspapers.” The staff was willing to leak inner administration details to the press and jeopardize Jordan’s reputation in order to advance their own interests. Jordan did not contain this because he “didn’t feel comfortable having people feel unheard,” and he had a difficult time choosing sides and brokering disagreements. Jordan cycled through staff personnel, and he appointed commissioners who often voted against his own position. Jordan thus failed to gain control of his administration. One observer notes, “He really was not a political animal, and I think some people thought he could be manipulated to their advantage.” Had Jordan been more willing to use political tactics in his management strategy, he might have been able to command more loyalty from staff and deliver a unified message about the goals of his administration.

Conclusion

Mayoral power is a function of formal structure and informal strategies. An ineffective personal style can squander the opportunities of a strong formal situation, and a politically savvy mayor might be able to overcome the deficiencies of a highly constrained situation. But while structure is not everything, it does matter. Several of the most ambitious Mayors we examined—Willie Brown, Jerry Brown and Tom McEnery—sought for and won charter changes that gave them more power. Why? Most likely, the reason is that it made their job easier and increased the odds that they would get their way. Relying heavily on personal resources in a context of weak institutional power is more “expensive” in the sense that mayors in these situations must constantly work to preserve their personal political power or become ineffective.

It is also riskier, because equally skilled opponents are at no disadvantage, and hence, the prospect of failure is real for even the most skilled mayor. For these reasons, it is logical that ambitious, effective mayors will seek to get more formal institutional advantage.

But if this is true for large city mayors, then why not small and medium sized cities as well. This is a subject for future research, but we will offer a speculation based on the evidence we have so far. The key difference may be the public salience of the big city mayor, which creates the need for power that is commensurate with the perceived public responsibility. Given the nature of media markets, big city mayors get far more coverage than small and medium sized city mayors. This attracts more ambitious political figures that hope that their record in office will propel them to the next political level. Since they are judged in the media by their ability to deliver their agenda, they need to have the power to execute that agenda. In short, the electoral incentives of big city mayors cause them to want to have more management control. This motivates them to push for charter changes that wrest control from the hands of city managers, commission and the city council.

Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, for instance, benefits from the complementary skills of his city manager, but the charter changes he won for himself left no question about who had ultimate control. Mayor Brown might have been able to establish a cooperative relationship with the city manager even without the power to fire him, but it would have been less likely (e.g. the experiences of his predecessor Elihu Harris) and would have certainly required more effort and compromise on his part. Structural change in this case was a guarantee of more responsiveness and cooperation from the city manager's office. In short, the higher ambitions of big city mayors in the context of greater media coverage may account for why the trend in big cities runs counter to that of other types of cities in California.

Bibliography

- Agnos, Art. 1987. *Getting Things Done: Visions & Goals for San Francisco*. San Francisco: Art Agnos for Mayor Campaign.
- Barone, Michael and Grant Ujifusa. 1999. *Almanac of American Politics 2000*. Washington, DC: National Journal.
- Bowers, James R. and Wilbur C. Rich, eds. 2000. *Governing Middle-Sized Cities: Studies in Mayoral Leadership*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Cain, Bruce E. and Roger G. Noll, eds. 1995. *Constitutional Reform in California: Making State Government More Effective and Responsive*. Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies Press.
- Christensen, Terry. 1997. "San Jose Becomes the Capital of Silicon Valley." In *San Jose: A City for All Seasons*. Judith Henderson, ed. Encinitas, CA: Heritage Press. Supplemented excerpt at http://www.polisci.sjsu.edu/faculty/christen/SJ_1970.html.
- DeLeon, Richard Edward. 1992. *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991*. Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas.
- Ferman, Barbara. 1985. *Governing the Ungovernable City: Political Skill, Leadership, and the Modern Mayor*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Johnson, Clarence and John King. 1996. "S.F. Voters Give Mayor High Marks." *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 21), A1.
- Jones, Bryan D. 1989. *Leadership and Politics: New Perspectives in Political Science*. Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas.
- Kernell, Samuel. 1997. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. 3rd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Kotter, John P. and Paul R. Lawrence. 1974. *Mayors in Action: Five Approaches to Urban Governance*. New York: Wiley.
- Lineberry, Robert L. and Edmund P. Fowler. 1967. "Reformism and Public Policies in American Cities." *American Political Science Review* 61, 701-16.
- McEnery, Tom. 1994. *The New City-State: Change and Renewal in America's Cities*. Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart.
- Morgan, David R. and John P. Pelissero. 1980. "Urban Policy: Does Political Structure Matter?" *American Political Science Review* 74, 999-1006.

- Morgan, David R. and Sheilah S. Watson. 1996. "Mayors of American Cities: An Analysis of Powers and Responsibilities." *American Review of Public Administration* 26.
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan.
- "Oakland's X Factor." 1998. [Editorial.] *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 26), A16.
- Pressman, Jeffrey L. 1972. "Preconditions of Mayoral Leadership." *American Political Science Review* 66, 511-24.
- "Prop E Is a Bag of Worms and Poor Public Policy." 1996. [Editorial.] *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 27), 10.
- Roberts, Jerry. 1994. *Dianne Feinstein: Never Let Them See You Cry*. San Francisco: HarperCollinsWest.
- Shilts, Randy. 1982. *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Stinnett, Peggy. 1996a. "Following your tax money in the proposed new charter." [Column.] *Oakland Tribune* (August 28).
- Stinnett, Peggy. 1996b. "Why not a strong City Council instead of a strong mayor?" [Column.] *Oakland Tribune* (June 21).
- Stone, Clarence N. 1989. *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas.
- Svara, James H. 1987. "Mayoral Leadership in Council-Manager Cities: Preconditions versus Preconceptions." *Journal of Politics* 49, 207-27.
- "Vote No on Measure F." 1996. [Editorial.] *Oakland Tribune* (October 20).
- "Vote yes on Measure X." 1998. [Editorial.] *Oakland Tribune* (October 29).
- Welch, Susan and Timothy Bledsoe. 1988. *Urban Reform and Its Consequences: A Study in Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yates, Douglas. 1977. *The Ungovernable City: The Politics of Urban Problems and Policy Making*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.