Democracy at Work? School Board Elections and Reform in St. Louis

David C. Kimball
University of Missouri-St. Louis
dkimball@umsl.edu

Lana Stein
University of Missouri-St. Louis
lstein@umsl.edu

Abstract

Debates over urban school reform have become voluminous and heated, and scholarly research has focused primarily on the impact of various reforms. Research should also trace the impact of conflicts over political reform on voting in school board elections. We examine three school board elections in St. Louis between 2003 and 2006. In each election, the mayor organized a supported a slate of reform candidates to enact significant reforms in the public school system. The slate won the first election and lost the next two elections. Common theories of voting in city elections fail to adequately explain voting in these elections. St. Louis is a city with a tradition of machine-style patronage politics, and we find evidence of class-based conflict over political reform. The reform cleavage played an increasing role in the city's school board elections as campaigns focused more on debates over reform versus politics as usual.

School board elections are the forums in which entire reform initiatives can be sustained or lost. . . . They are excellent platforms from which reform initiatives and their leaders can be destroyed.

Paul T. Hill (2004)

Reforming urban public schools has become a flashpoint for political debate and a rich subject for political science research in the United States. Many debates have focused on whether particular reforms work and who should be making decisions about school reforms. Much of the scholarly research examines the impact of school reforms (mainly on student performance), how to do it successfully, and whose interests are represented in school administration. But not much research has examined the ways in which divisions between reform advocates and opponents shape voting behavior in urban school board elections. Furthermore, most voting behavior research is based on national and state elections, and few scholars have tested voting theories on local elections. School board elections deserve some attention.

We examine three school board elections in St. Louis over a period of three years. A reform majority was elected in the first election and began implementing substantial changes in curriculum, contracting and other areas of the district. In the second election, the reform side was partially defeated but maintained a majority of seats on the school board. In the third election, an opposition slate won both seats and snatched majority control of the school board. We find that many traditional explanations of voting behavior are unable to account for the school board election results in St. Louis. While race continues to be an important factor in St. Louis elections, we also find that a cleavage associated with political reform helps us understand geographic voting patterns in school board elections.

Urban School Reform

Beginning in the 1990s, a number of America's cities took on the question of school reform. Largely populated by poor children, often minorities, urban schools were characterized by failing test scores and rising dropout rates. As cries for reform increased, alteration to traditional school governance was considered by a number of cities. Several cities considered or adopted a new oversight structure in which the mayor would take over the schools and appoint board members, replacing the elected school board.

Political scientists have looked at the question of urban public schools and possible reform. The generation of civic capacity has been the focus of a group led by Clarence Stone. According to Stone (1998), civic capacity necessitates the bringing in of outside actors from business, foundations, and community organizations to substantiate and enable the reform process much like the role business leaders played in urban renewal in the 1950s and ongoing community development. Stone and his colleagues have assessed community coalition building in a number of cities, with varying forms of school governance (Stone, et. al, 2004; Portz, Stein, and Jones, 1999; Henig, et. al, 1999; Orr, 1999). Boston, for one, showed slow but steady progress under mayoral control (Portz, Stein, and Jones, 1999).

Recently, a new debate has arisen about the tradeoff between enhanced achievement in a mayor-controlled school system and democracy via an elected school board. Stefanie Chambers (2006) interviewed parents and other community members in

the mayor-run cities of Chicago and Cleveland. Chambers found those surveyed in Cleveland to be less dissatisfied with their system than those in Chicago. She attributes this to the greater degree of descriptive representation exhibited by the Cleveland board (2006, 188). Chicago's board contained more members from the business community.

Attendance and graduation rates have gone up in Chicago and both Chicago and Cleveland have raised their test scores. However, Chambers (2006, 192-93) feels strongly that minority incorporation in policymaking has suffered.   There may be academic progress but "reducing democracy in the educational policy process can result in the alienation of those who are served by the schools (Chambers, 2006, 193). For Chambers (2006, 196), "democracy ought to be a top priority of public education." Shipp (2006) is also critical of Daley's takeover of the Chicago schools. She would like to see a greater role for parents and teachers, although she acknowledges that their interests are not always identical.

Chambers' work particularly points out the need to examine whether school board elections actually represent the democracy she attributes to them. We intend to look at this question in the context of school reform in St. Louis, a Midwestern industrial town with a school board elected at-large. Reform has been a hot topic in St. Louis for several years. Reform candidates faced the voters in 2003, 2005, and 2006. These elections provide an excellent backdrop for gauging who voted and for whom. They can also show some important influences on the electorate and whether parents of the largely poor and minority school population are more lightly to exercise their franchise. The elections can readily show stratification by race and class.

Reform and the St. Louis Public Schools

The St. Louis public schools have shared the characteristics of failing urban school districts. In addition, the personnel process for the St. Louis school system has often featured political overtones, and more generally the system was highly in-bred (Portz, Stein, and Jones, 1999; Monti 1999). For over two decades, the federal district court had supervised the area's voluntary desegregation program, making many decisions normally the prerogative of the school district. In turn, school administrators became very protective of their shrunken turf. Outside intervention was discouraged; no corporation adopted a school in St. Louis. The school bureaucracy was considered to be ineffectual. For example, textbooks arrived at classrooms months after the school year began. Many St. Louisans sent their children to private schools in this heavily Catholic metropolitan area. And, under the desegregation program, 13,000 city students traveled on buses to schools in adjoining St. Louis County. Many St. Louis parents have voted with their feet. The number of students enrolled in St. Louis public schools has dropped from around 45,000 in the mid-1990s to roughly 30,000 in 2007.

When Francis G. Slay was first elected mayor in 2001, he pledged to improve elementary and secondary education in the city. In St. Louis's weak mayor system, the mayor has very limited power over the school district: Each year he appoints an auditor for the district and he can fill vacancies on the school board that occur mid-term. Slay chose not to ask for additional power from the state legislature to control the school system. Instead, the mayor and his staff tried to achieve control of the school board through elections. The recent settlement to the desegregation program reduced the school

board from 11 to 7 members and four seats were up for grabs in the April 2003 general election.

Working closely with the Black Leadership Roundtable, the publisher of the leading black weekly newspaper, business executives, and some community leaders, the mayor's office organized a slate of four candidates: two running for three-year terms on the board and two running for four-year terms. Each of these candidates ran one's own campaign. However, a special campaign committee, the St. Louis Education Coalition, ran an independent campaign for the slate as a whole and was funded by Civic Progress, the organization representing the largest businesses operating in the St. Louis area. There were two black candidates on this slate (Darnetta Clinkscale and Ron Jackson), both veterans of the Leadership Roundtable. The two white candidates included a former three-term mayor (Vince Schoemehl) and the president of the Missouri Historical Society (Bob Archibald).

Although several other candidates ran in the 2003 school board election, there was no organized slate opposing the mayor's team of candidates. Local 420, the St. Louis chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, endorsed three of the four candidates on the mayor's slate. The results of each of the last three school board elections are summarized in Table 2. In a normally low turnout election (city offices are decided in the Democratic primary in this almost exclusively one party town), only 17 percent of registered voters participated in 2003. The mayor's slate was victorious: all four candidates won easily and control of the school board was assured.

The new board majority assumed their seats almost immediately after the election. Their goal was to have concrete accomplishments within 12 months. The system

superintendent had proffered his resignation weeks before the school board election. It was considered too late to hire an academic superintendent for the new school year. Instead, the board turned to a turnaround firm to repair the very ineffectual bureaucracy. They chose Alvarez and Marsal and its partner, William Roberti, became the acting superintendent. The cost of all services from the firm would be $5 million. The price tag raised eyebrows and teachers questioned having a non-educator in charge of the school district. Turnaround firms were known for cutbacks to staff and that aroused some fear among district employees.

Immediately after the hiring of Alvarez and Marsal, the board announced that there would be a budget deficit totaling $90 million (at least twice what was expected), which would necessitate school closings and layoffs. Teachers Union 420 long had a presence at school board meetings. With this news, they packed the meetings, along with a few parents and long-time activists. Board reports were greeted with boos and catcalls and the protests dominated TV and newspaper coverage. One board member compared protesters to storm troopers; these comments engendered much negative publicity. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* did not dwell on the administrative failings of the past. Its articles all mentioned the $5 million turnaround team and protesters from the community. Protest spokespersons included radio host Lizz Brown and George Cotton, both of whom had contracts with the district that had been terminated.

When school began in September, a protest march from school board headquarters to city hall took place and children lying in coffins were placed by each building. In spite of the boycott, school attendance on the first day was up. Roberti and the board majority closed some schools and privatized custodial and food services. When

several children at a school became ill after eating lunch, the protesters attacked the privatization. Board meetings continued to be acrimonious. Organized opposition to the board majority coalesced around Local 420 and activists who regularly attended school board meetings. The main opposition theme was that schools should be governed by local interests (neighborhood parents and teachers) and not ruled by an out-of-town firm or St. Louis political elites.

The search for an academic superintendent took place without much publicity. A job offer went to Rudy Crew, the former New York City chief. In May of 2004, he decided to go to Dade County-Miami instead. An interim superintendent from existing personnel was named. He retired a few months later under strong criticism and another interim was selected. Finally, in March 2005, the board hired an African-American candidate, Creg Williams, a protégé of William Vallas, former CEO of the Chicago and Philadelphia schools.

The other three seats on the school board were up for election in the spring of 2005. Mayor Slay again backed a racially diverse slate of candidates who supported the reform majority on the school board. Three candidates were identified with his reform effort—Flint Fowler, Joe Keaveny, Joe Moramarco—and their campaigns were funded by Civic Progress. Campaign literature pictured the three candidates with the mayor. Fowler was a leader in the black community and is executive director of the Herbert Hoover Boys and Girls Club. Keaveny was committeeman of the 28th ward, but not well known outside his ward. Moramarco was relatively unknown. Keaveny and Moramarco are white.

Three strenuous opponents of reform also ran as a team in 2005: Veronica O'Brien, Bill Purdy, and Peter Downs. O'Brien was an incumbent already serving on the board. She had been appointed by the mayor a year before and quickly became an opponent of the reform majority on the board (Mayor Slay has stated publicly that he regrets appointing O'Brien to the board). Purdy had served on the board for 12 years and had been a principal and teacher in the system before that. Downs wrote a newsletter on St. Louis public schools read by many teachers and parents. O'Brien is black, while Downs and Purdy are white. The three opponents received campaign help from Local 420.

Despite the growing debate over the direction of the St. Louis public schools, voter turnout in the 2005 election was even lower than in 2003. The opponents of school reform won two of the three seats in the 2005 election, with O'Brien and Purdy the top vote-getters in the election. Fowler edged out Downs for the third seat, salvaging a small victory for reformers. The overall result was a foreshadowing of things to come.

Despite losing the 2005 election, the reformers maintained a majority on the school board. In 2005, Superintendent Creg Williams continued to make curricular reforms that were supported by the board majority but opposed by Purdy and O'Brien. Animosity between the two coalitions on the board continued. In November, former mayor Schoemehl resigned from the board and James Buford, the longtime head of the St. Louis Urban League, was named by the mayor to replace him.

Two seats on the board (held by Buford and Clinkscale) were contested in the 2006 election. Majority control of the school board would be at stake. Clinkscale and Buford ran as a slate with the backing of Civic Progress and Mayor Slay. Local 420

supported an opposing slate of Peter Downs and a parent, Donna Jones. A few other minor candidates also ran, but they would not factor in the outcome.

With the future of school reform in St. Louis depending on the election outcome, voter turnout continued to drop in the 2006 election. With just 12.5 percent of registered voters participating in the election, the opposition pulled off an upset and defeated the two incumbents by a fairly comfortable margin. Despite a number of campaign advantages (such as fundraising and name recognition), the reform candidates lost and the opposition gained majority control of the school board. Many of the existing theories of voting in city elections fall short in explaining why the reformers could not sustain an electoral majority in the latter two elections. Conflict over political reform itself seems to be a significant factor.

Voting in City Elections

City elections are an intriguing research topic because voting behavior differs from what is observed in national elections, and some of the usual predictors of voting in national elections do not always apply to local elections. For example, in many city elections partisanship is not an obvious cue, because most contests are nonpartisan (Wood 2002) and the main competition for partisan offices occurs in primary elections. This likely applies to St. Louis school board elections, which are nonpartisan. In addition, St. Louis is a heavily Democratic city – Democratic candidates typically receive between 75 and 80 percent of the St. Louis vote in national and statewide elections. Thus, many elections in the city are contests between different elements of the Democratic coalition.

Many studies of city elections examine racial and ethnic divisions among voters (e.g., Carsey 1995; Hajnal 2001; Kaufman 2004). A common argument is that in the absence of partisan cues, racial and ethnic cues are powerful in city elections (e.g., Sonenshein 1993; Kaufman 2004; Lieske and Hillard 1984). Some studies of school board elections have noted racial or ethnic voting cleavages (Kohfeld and Sprague 2002; Engstrom and Barrilleaux 1991; Arrington and Watts 1991). Racial divisions have been a defining feature of St. Louis elections for decades (Kohfeld and Stein 1991; Stein 2002; Kohfeld and Sprague 2002), a factor that we examine in this study.

Another approach to city elections examines Key's (1949) "friends and neighbors" hypothesis. Thus, candidates may receive a higher vote share in or near their home neighborhood (Baybeck, Stein and Wiedlocher 2007). Similarly, Oliver and Ha (2007) find that name recognition is a predictor of vote choice in city council elections. This is a factor we would like to examine more closely in the future.

Some studies indicate that incumbent advantages and campaign spending are potent predictors of voting in city elections (Krebs 1998; Arrington and Ingalls 1984). Others point to the importance of newspaper and slate endorsements (Davidson and Fraga 1984; Stein and Fleischmann 1987; Ansolabehere, Lessem and Snyder 2006). However, these explanations do not get us very far in explaining recent school board elections in St. Louis. In the three elections we study, only three incumbents ran for re-election – one won and the other two lost. In addition, the reform slates backed by Mayor Slay enjoyed huge fundraising advantages due to support from Civic Progress in each of the three elections (Drebes 2006). Furthermore, the reform slates were endorsed by the major daily newspaper (the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) and the main African-American weekly

newspaper (the *St. Louis American*) in all three elections. Despite all of these advantages, the reform slate only won one of the three elections.

Recent studies find evidence of retrospective voting in local elections (Oliver and Ha 2007; Berry and Howell 2007). Berry and Howell (2007) argue that there is retrospective voting in school board elections, with voters evaluating incumbents based on changes in school performance as measured by standardized test scores. In St. Louis, it seems clear that the 2005 and 2006 school board elections were referenda on the performance of the reform slate elected in 2003. Some voters were clearly upset with turnaround firm and the budget cuts and contract changes made by the school board. The opposition slates in the latter two elections pledged to reverse some of the major reforms enacted by the school board. However, applying the test score version of retrospective voting to recent school board elections in St. Louis is problematic. Standardized test scores have been habitually low in St. Louis and students have been steadily leaving the public schools for years. Voters, parents, and teachers all agree that St. Louis public schools have been performing poorly (Jones et al. 2006). The dispute is over what to do about it. In addition, test scores for elementary students (the main focus of curriculum changes by the school board reformers) showed some improvement between 2003 and 2005, yet the reformers lost the 2005 and 2006 elections.

We believe that the St. Louis school board elections partly reflected a political reform cleavage that has appeared in previous elections. Supporters of school board reforms advocated a more efficient operation focused on improving results (student test scores). Reform supporters were comfortable with the mayor taking a more active role in public school governance and with an outside firm assuming control of the district in

order to change politics as usual. In contrast, opponents of reform resented the mayor's intrusion into school board politics and vigorously protested the loss of accountability and political power that came with the hiring of the turnaround firm. In St. Louis, reformers rarely win elections (Stein 2002; Salisbury 1961).

The Reform Cleavage in Urban Politics

In many cities, local elites have supported movements for charter change since the Progressive Era. The Progressives—led by wealthy, native-born Protestants (Hays 1984)--spearheaded the fight to eliminate machine politics by changing government structures. Many city newspapers joined with the elite partisans of reform. For example, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* gave considerable coverage to a proposed reform charter (Finegold 1995, 110), and many city newspapers have supported municipal research bureaus that promote reform of city government (Schiesl, 1977, 120). Many observers of city politics have noted that reform versus machine debates tend to split along class lines, with working class voters supporting machine interests and wealthier professional classes supporting reform (Merton 1957; Salisbury 1961; Banfield and Wilson 1963; Schiesl 1977).

St. Louis has had many political fights over government reform, usually won by the defenders of machine politics. Salisbury (1961) observed a class cleavage in the city's political reform battles. He divided the city into "newspaper wards" populated by middle class and independent voters that favored reform. In contrast, "delivery wards," populated by less affluent voters and governed by strong machine organizations, typically voted

against reform. The reform-delivery divide applied to a number of elections to change the city charter, but not as well to mayoral contests (Stein 2002).

The latest engagement in the government reform battle in St. Louis occurred in 2004, when four amendments to the city charter were placed on the November ballot. St. Louis has a weak-mayor form of government and the charter amendments (produced by a stakeholder assembly that excluded all elected officials) were designed to strengthen the mayor's authority. Among the most significant changes, the charter amendments would have eliminated the city's estimate board and put fiscal authority under the mayor's control, eliminated 7 of the elected "county" offices, and reduced the size of the board of aldermen from 28 to 15. Overall, the charter changes would reduce from 41 to 18 the number of city officials elected by voters. The amendments were endorsed by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *St. Louis American*, and Civic Progress spent roughly $700,000 on the campaign to get the four amendments passed. Mayor Slay publicly supported three of the four amendments (all except the proposal to reduce the board of aldermen).

Many of those actively involved in the city's political life reacted strongly and negatively to the charter amendments. Not allowed to take part in the drafting process, the vast majority of aldermen and elected citywide officials opposed the charter reforms. Most ward organizations saw the charter amendments as a threat to their political power. Opponents criticized the charter amendments as an attempt by the mayor and outsider elites to usurp power. They decried the perceived diminution of checks and balances and spoke against a loss of accountability. African-American politicians were especially active in the opposition, fearing a reduction in political power if authority were to be

consolidated in the office of the white mayor. "Protect Your Right to Vote" was a campaign theme for opponents.

To examine voting patterns in St. Louis school board elections, we have gathered election returns and census data for city voting precincts. Since the city's population has not increased significantly, St. Louis precinct boundaries have not changed since redistricting in 2001, with one exception. In preparing to buy new voting equipment, election officials reduced the number of precincts in 2004 from 353 to 203 by simply merging two or three precincts from the same ward into one new precinct. For elections before 2004, we aggregate results to the current precinct boundaries. This allows us to compare election results over several years within the same geographic boundaries (the current voting precincts).

All charter amendments were handily defeated in the 2004 election. Figure 1 shows voter support for the 2004 charter amendments by precinct. The geographic patterns of support for charter reform illustrate the reform versus machine divisions that are familiar to St. Louis (Kimball and Stein 2006). The heavily African-American precincts in the northern part of the city came out strongly against the reforms, and majority-white precincts populated by older and poorer-than-average residents in south St. Louis also voted against the charter amendments. Most support for charter reform came from the city's central corridor and a strip of middle class bedroom communities stretching to the southwest corner of the city. These areas tend to be home to the city's economic and political elites. Residents of the central corridor are above average in education and income and tend to value their proximity to the city's cultural attractions which dot the central corridor. Many of them have come to St. Louis from somewhere

else and thus have no historical or family ties to the city's tradition of machine politics. The geographic pattern of support for charter reform in 2004 is similar to that described by Salisbury (1961).

More importantly, the charter amendments of 2004 re-energized the reform cleavage in St. Louis and provided a convenient frame for opponents of school reforms. Led by leaders of Local 420, school reform critics charged that Mayor Slay and a group of outsiders were trying to take over the city schools, just like they tried to do with city government. They argued that any school reforms meant less input on governance in local schools from parents and teachers. The 2005 and 2006 elections were pitched as a fight for political power pitting elite reformers and outsiders against local interests.

The increasing relevance of the political reform cleavage in St. Louis school board elections can be seen first by examining maps of voting returns for candidate pairs in the first and last school board elections. Figure 2 shows voter support for Vince Schoemehl (left panel) and Darnetta Clinkscale (right panel), the reform team that successfully ran for the two three-year seats on the school board in 2003. Even though both candidates ran on the same slate and were both endorsed by Mayor Slay, their voting support tends to come from different parts of the city. Schoemehl (who is white) receives heavier support in the majority-white precincts in the southern portion of the city. In contrast, Clinkscale (who is black) tends to receive a higher share of the vote in majority-black precincts on the city's north side. After three terms as mayor, Schoemehl had alienated many African-American politicians in St. Louis and his lowest levels of voter support came in largely African-American precincts in the northern half of the city.

Even though voter support for both candidates overlaps in and around the central corridor, the results for neither candidate looks very similar to charter reform results in Figure 1. Since the future school reforms were unknown in 2003, political reform does not appear to be a big factor in that school board election. Rather, because of the racial differences among the two candidates the geographic pattern of results looks like they were running against one another rather than on the same slate. There is a slight negative correlation between precinct vote share for Schoemehl and for Clinkscale ($r = -.11$). This is common in St. Louis candidate elections, where race is a strong predictor. Since Schoemehl and Clinkscale had stature and name recognition and faced weak candidates, both were able to win.

By comparison, Figure 3 shows the voting results for Peter Downs (left panel) and Donna Jones (right panel), the pair opposing the reform slate in the 2006 school board election. Since Downs is white and Jones is black, under the race theory one would expect Downs to get more voter support from the south side and Jones to get more support from the north side. But that did not happen. Both opposition candidates tend to receive the heaviest voter support from the same precincts. Vote share for Downs is highly correlated with vote share for Jones in city precincts ($r = .82$).

Both Downs and Jones receive strong support in many African-American precincts on the north side, even though they were running against two black candidates on the reform slate. In addition, both Downs and Jones ran well in the white working class precincts of the central-south region. Both candidates received low or below average support in the central corridor and in the residential neighborhoods stretching to the southwest corner of the city, the elite precincts where support for political reform is

typically strongest. In short, the 2006 election appears to be structured more by the city's

reform cleavage than by race.

Regression Analysis

We use ordinary least squares regression to model group conflict in the school board elections. The dependent variable is the percent of the vote in a precinct for a particular candidate. We estimate a separate regression equation for each reform candidate in each election. Using census data, we have been able to measure demographic and economic factors at the precinct level as independent variables. To measure the impact of racial conflict, we calculate the percentage of African-American residents in each precinct. We expect less support for white school board candidates in precincts with larger concentrations of African-American residents.

We measure the reform coalition in St. Louis by calculating the average vote percentage for the four charter amendments in 2004. Voting on the charter amendments was highly correlated – the reliability coefficient for the amendments is .997. We expect that precincts supporting the charter amendments are most receptive to a reform agenda for the public schools and most likely to support Mayor Slay's slate of school board candidates. Finally, we include two demographic controls: age and the percentage of households with a single female head and children as a surrogate measure for income.[1]

---

[1] Since the school reform debate in St. Louis featured organized labor on one side, perhaps precincts with more Republican voters would also be more supportive of the school board reform slate. However, when we include partisanship (measured by vote percentage for President Bush in the 2004 election) it is not a significant predictor of school board voting. Excluding partisanship does not alter the other results.

Results

The regression results are displayed in Table 2, and they suggest that a reform cleavage is present in St. Louis school board elections. Voter support for the charter amendments is a positive and statistically significant predictor of support for each reform candidate in each school board election, even after controlling for race. In addition, the reform factor is weakest in the 2003 election when there was no organized anti-reform slate challenging the mayor's candidates. The reform factor appears strongest in the 2006 election, when the reform and opposition positions were clearest and when control of the school board hung in the balance. The direct effect of the charter vote is even larger than the effect of race in 2006, although race is a component of the reform cleavage in St. Louis with African-American precincts occupying a disproportionate share of the anti-reform coalition.

Table 2 indicates that yet again race is a potent factor in St. Louis elections. The African-American share of the population is positively associated with support for black school board candidates and negatively associated with the vote for white candidates even when candidates of both races are part of the same slate promoting the same school reform agenda. Finally, the other two demographic measures do not appear to be reliable predictors of voting in St. Louis school board elections.

Conclusion

Debates over the scope and direction of urban public school reforms undoubtedly will continue. As a result, it makes sense to examine whether conflict over reform influences voting in school board elections. Group conflict is a common feature of city elections. In addition to racial and ethnic conflicts that are common in city elections, we argue that there are class-inflected conflicts between forces for reform and forces defending machine politics. Pro-reform coalitions tend to be dominated by business and political elites and supported by neighborhoods with large concentrations of highly educated middle-class professionals. In St. Louis, anti-reform coalitions are dominated by ward organizations and local politicians who fear a loss of power, and these coalitions are supported by precincts with larger shares of working-class, elderly and African-American residents (Kimball and Stein 2006).

We find evidence of a reform cleavage in St. Louis that helps shape voting in school board elections. The reform factor explains a greater share of the variance in St. Louis school board elections as debates over reform sharpen and assume a bigger role in school board campaigns. This doomed the reform forces because machine forces still know how to win low turnout municipal elections in St. Louis. Some may feel that urban political machines died years ago. However, some elements of machines (such as ward organizations, political families, municipal employment, and patronage) remain in many cities. These elements may be at odds with the professional class of younger, educated outsiders moving into American cities. Since most cities are heavily Democratic in their orientation to national politics, the division between middle-class professionals and

working class laborers is an important cleavage within the Democratic Party that deserves more attention.

Postscript

After the 2006 election, turmoil continued in St. Louis public schools. In the summer of 2006, the newly elected anti-reform majority fired Superintendent Creg Williams and replaced him with Diana Bourisaw, a white former superintendent of a suburban school district. The new board majority also fired a popular boy's basketball coach at one of the city high schools over alleged financial wrongdoing. These moves set off another round of protests. Meanwhile, Mayor Slay asked the state government to step in and take over the city school system. In 2007, the state board of education declared the city school district failed the state accreditation criteria and created an interim board to take over the St. Louis schools. The three-person board is appointed (one by the governor, one by the mayor and one by the president of the bard of aldermen). The appointed board now runs the district, although there are ongoing legal battles between the appointed and elected boards over the authority held by each institution.

References

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Rebecca Lessem, and James M. Snyder. 2006. "The Orientation of Newspaper Endorsements in U.S. Elections, 1940-2002." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1:123-141.

Arrington, Theodore S., and Gerald L. Ingalls. 1984. "Effects of Campaign Spending on Local Elections: The Charlotte Case." *American Politics Quarterly* 12:117-127.

Arrington, Theodore S., and Thomas Gill Watts. 1991. "The Election of Blacks to School Boards in North Carolina." *Western Political Quarterly* 44:1099-1105.

Banfield, Edward C., and James Q. Wilson. 1963. *City Politics.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Baybeck, Brady, Lana Stein, and Laura Wiedlocher. 2007. "The Political Geography of Low-Information Urban Elections." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 2007.

Berry, Christopher R., and William G. Howell. 2007. "Accountability and Local Elections: Rethinking Retrospective Voting." *Journal of Politics* 69:844-8858.

Carsey, Thomas M. 1995. "The Contextual Effects of Race on White Voter Behavior: The 1989 New York City Mayoral Election." *Journal of Politics* 57:221-28.

Chambers, Stefanie. 2006. *Mayors and Schools*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Davidson, Chandler and Luis R. Fraga. 1984. "Nonpartisan Slating Groups in an At-Large Setting." In *Minority Vote Dilution*, Chandler Davidson, ed. 119-143.

Drebes, Dave. 2006. "What Happened? Grassroots Underdogs Capsize Large $$ Incumbent Campaign." *Arch City Chronicle* 4(April 18 – May 2):1, 15.

Engstrom, Richard L., and Charles J. Barrilleaux. 1991. "Native Americans and Cumulative Voting: The Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux." *Social Science Quarterly* 72:388-393.

Finegold, Kenneth. 1995. *Experts and Politicians: Reform Challenges to Machine Politics in New York, Cleveland, and Chicago*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hajnal, Zoltan L. 2001. "White Residents, Black Incumbents and a Declining Racial Divide." *American Political Science Review* 95:603-618.

Hajnal, Zoltan L., and Paul G. Lewis. 2003. "Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections." *Urban Affairs Review* 38:645-668.

Hays, Samuel P. 1984. "The Politics of Reform in the Progressive Era." In *Readings in Urban Politics*. 2nd ed., ed. Harlan Hahn and Charles H. Levine. New York: Longman.

Henig, Jeffrey R. 1999. *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Henig, Jeffrey R., and Wilbur C. Rich, eds. 2003. *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race, and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hill, Paul T. 2004. "How Business and Civic Leaders Can Make a Big Difference in Public Education." Briefing paper prepared for CEOs for Cities, April.

Jones, E. Terrence, Gerstein-Agne Strategic Communications, and Vector Communications. 2006. "Research Findings: Public Opinion Regarding St. Louis Public Schools." Report presented to the Greater St. Louis Community Foundation, December 13.

Kauffman, Karen M. 2004. *The Urban Voter: Group Conflict and Mayoral Voting Behavior in American Cities*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Key, V.O., Jr. 1949 (1977). *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.

Kimball, David C., and Lana Stein. 2006. "African-American Voters and Charter Reform: Findings from St. Louis and Dallas." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 2006.

Kohfeld, Carol W., and John Sprague. 2002. "Race, Space, and Turnout." *Political Geography* 21:175-193.

Kohfeld, Carol W., and Lana Stein. 1991. "St. Louis' Black-White Elections: Products of Machine Factionalism and Polarization." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 27:227-248.

Krebs, Timothy B. 1998. "The Determinants of Candidates' Vote Share and the Advantage of Incumbency in City Council Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 42:921-935.

Lieske, Joel. 1989. "The Political Dynamics of Urban Voting Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 33:150-174.

Lieske, Joel, and Jan William Hillard. 1984. "The Racial Factor in Urban Elections." *Western Political Quarterly* 37:545-563.

Merton, Robert K. 1957. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Monti, Daniel J. 1999. *The American City: A Social and Cultural History*. London: Blackwell.

Oliver, J. Eric, and Shang E. Ha. 2007. "Vote Choice in Suburban Elections." *American Political Science Review* 101:393-408.

Orr, Marion. 1999. *Black Social Capital: The Politics of School Reform in Baltimore*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Portz, John, Lana Stein, and Robin R. Jones. 1999. *City Schools and City Politics: Institutions and Leadership in Pittsburgh, Boston and St. Louis*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Salisbury, Robert H. 1961. "The Dynamics of Reform: Charter Politics in St. Louis." *Midwest Journal of Politics* 5:262-275.

Schiesl, Martin J. 1977. *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1800-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shipps, Dorothy. 2006. School *Reform, Corporate Style: Chicago, 1880-2000*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Sonenshein, Raphael J. 1993. *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stein, Lana. 2002. *St. Louis Politics: The Triumph of Tradition*. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press.

Stein, Lana and Arnold Fleischmann. 1987. "Newspaper and Business Endorsements in Municipal Elections: A Test of the Conventional Wisdom." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 9:325-336.

Stone, Clarence N., ed. 1998. *Changing Urban Education*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Stone, Clarence N., Jeffrey R. Henig, Bryan D. Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi. 2001. *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Wood, Curtis. 2002. "Voter Turnout in City Elections." *Urban Affairs Review* 38:209-231.

Figure 1: Mean Vote for Four Charter Reforms in St. Louis Precincts, November 2004

St. Louis precincts

Mean Vote for Charter Reform

Less than 24%

Between 24% and 47%

More than 47%

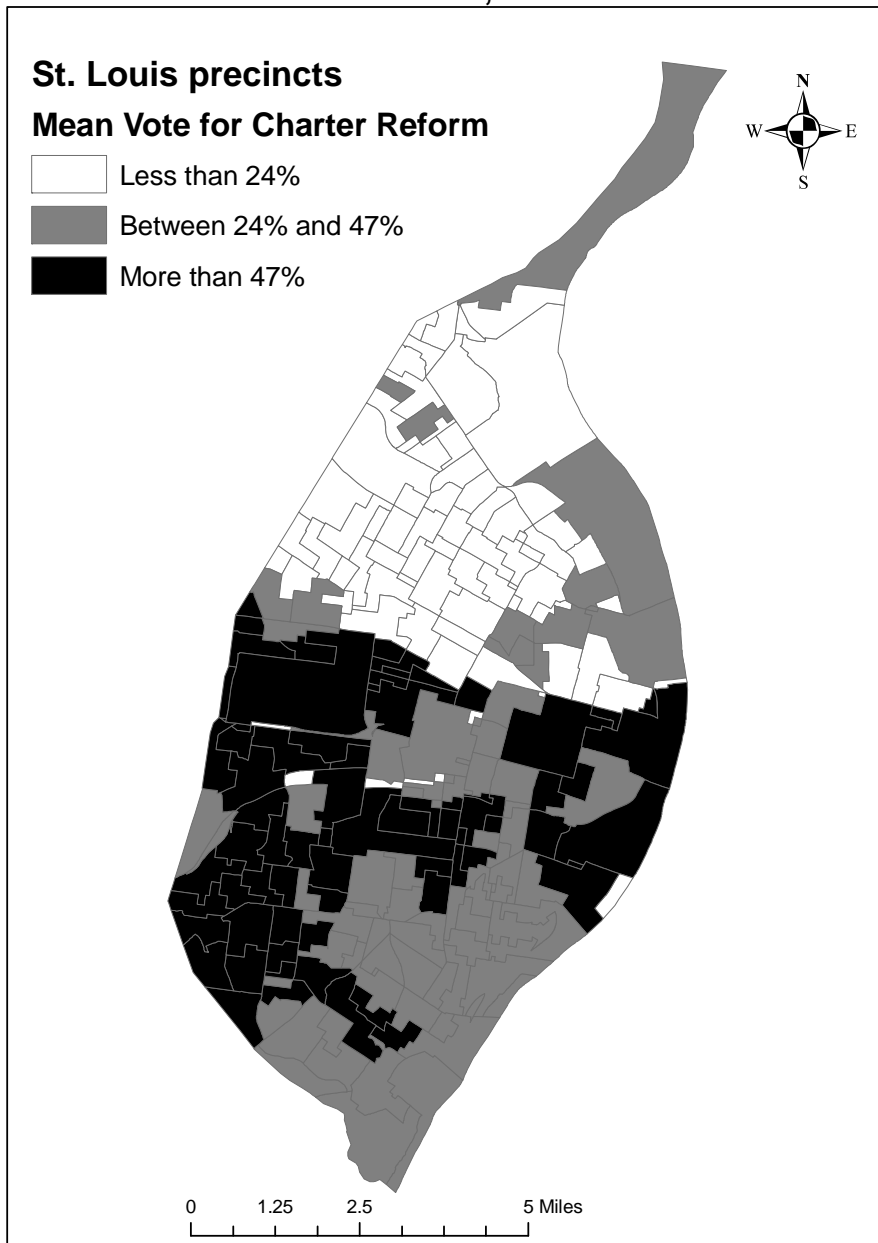0   1.25   2.5   5 Miles

Figure 2: School Board Vote for Vince Schoemehl and Darnetta Clinkscale
St. Louis Precincts, April 2003
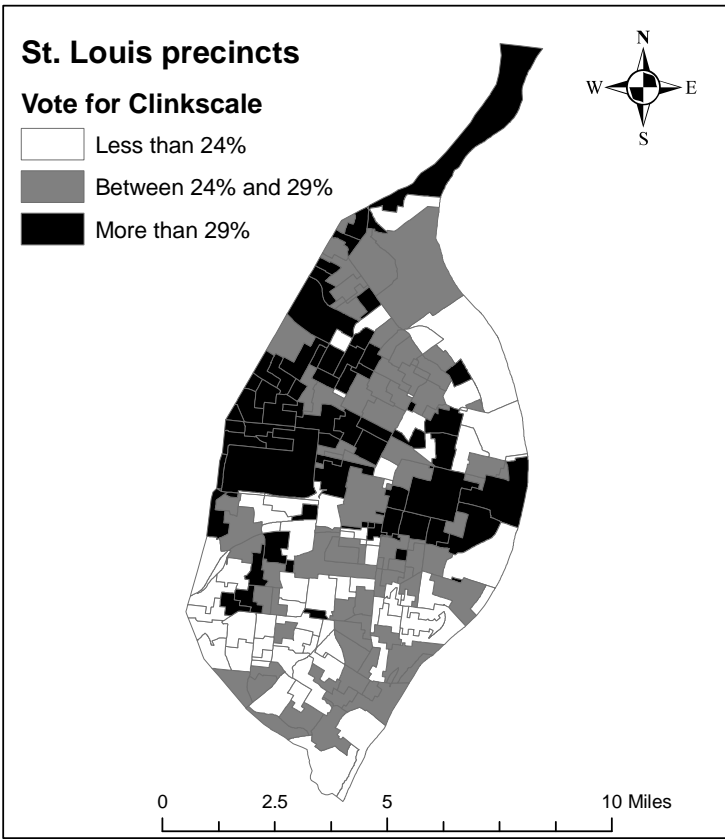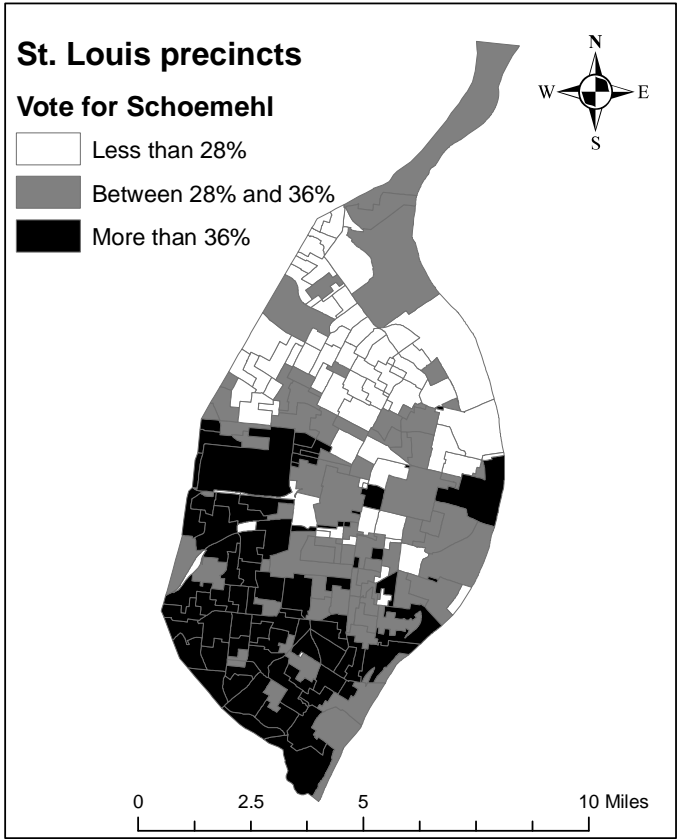
Figure 3: School Board Vote for Peter Downs and Donna Jones
St. Louis Precincts, April 2006

St. Louis precincts

Vote for Downs

  Less than 21%

  Between 21% and 27%

  More than 27%

N
W   E
S

0   2.5   5   10 Miles

St. Louis precincts

Vote for Jones

  Less than 21%

  Between 21% and 27%

  More than 27%

N
W   E
S

0   2.5   5   10 Miles
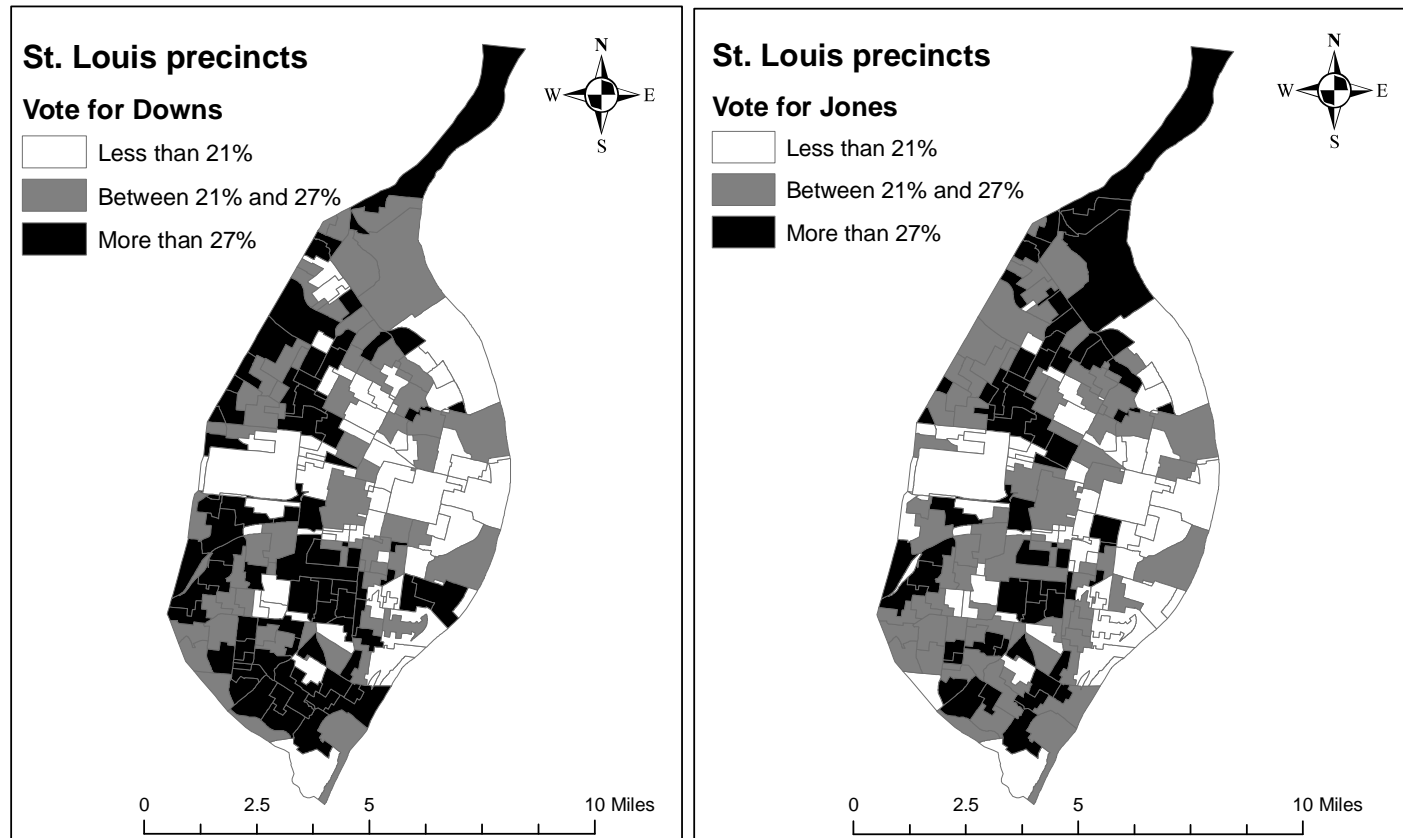
Table 1
Descriptive Data on St. Louis School Board Elections, 2003-06

Election	Number of Seats	Vote for Mayor's Slate	Vote for Main Opposition	Voter Turnout
April 8, 2003 (3-year term)	2	59.8% (won both seats)	20.5%	33,012
April 8, 2003 (4-year term)	2	47.1% (won both seats)	23.1%	33,012
April 5, 2005	3	38.0% (won one seat)	48.2% (won two seats)	26,298
April 4, 2006	2	41.7%	49.4% (won both seats)	24,633

Table 2
Multivariate Analysis of Voter Support for Reform
Candidates to the St. Louis School Board

Year	2003		2003		2005			2006	
Independent Variable	Schoemehl (white)	Clinkscale (black)	Jackson (black)	Archibald (white)	Fowler (black)	Keaveny (white)	Moramarco (white)	Clinkscale (black)	Buford (black)
Percent Vote for Charter Amendments	.08** (.03)	.12** (.04)	.20** (.03)	.17** (.04)	.20** (.03)	.14** (.02)	.08** (.02)	.34** (.03)	.32** (.03)
Percent Black	-.11** (.01)	.14** (.02)	.16** (.02)	-.07** (.02)	.06** (.02)	-.08** (.01)	-.12** (.01)	.09** (.01)	.11** (.01)
Percent Single Female Head of House w/Children	.04 (.06)	-.27** (.08)	-.26** (.06)	-.07 (.07)	.07 (.07)	.03 (.04)	.13** (.04)	.13* (.06)	.04 (.06)
Percent 65 and Older	.10* (.04)	.04 (.07)	.10 (.06)	.02 (.06)	.01 (.05)	.02 (.03)	.08* (.03)	.11* (.06)	.15* (.06)
Constant	32.54** (1.84)	17.93** (2.91)	9.27** (2.27)	20.26** (2.80)	3.54 (2.21)	8.10** (1.50)	10.61** (1.41)	-0.64 (2.60)	0.42 (2.43)
Number of Cases (precincts)	202	202	202	202	201	201	202	202	202
Root MSE	3.42	4.04	3.80	3.77	3.43	2.48	2.58	4.07	3.83
R^2	.72	.33	.40	.71	.25	.80	.79	.40	.40

The dependent variable is the percentage voting for the candidate at the top of the column (candidate race is listed in parentheses). Cell entries are regression coefficients with robust Huber/White standard errors in parentheses. Each observation (precinct) is weighted by the number of ballots cast in the election.
**$p < .01$, two-tailed t test
*$p < .05$, two-tailed t test