

In America, why does proportional voting have to attack political parties?

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Abstract

This chapter traces the early history of proportional-representation advocacy in the United States, asking why reformers embraced the single transferable vote (STV). This “ranked-choice” bargain was not easy to strike. Arriving at it appears to have involved resolving several disagreements: over the appropriateness of direct-democracy reforms, faddish interest in majority-preferential voting around the election of 1912, how much weight should be given to administrative factors (e.g., propensity for voter error), and whether proportional voting ought to permit parties to present themselves on ballots. Most of these issues came to a head in Los Angeles, where, in 1913, the United States’ first-ever referendum on proportional voting failed. The reform coalition fractured along class lines. By 1915, these issues were effectively resolved, with STV’s first passage and enshrinement in the Model City Charter.

Note to readers: subsequent chapters cover (a) the adoption of STV in 23 more cities, (b) how parties adapted to it, (c) and why it was repealed in all but one by 1962.

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Writing in 1939 for the *American Political Science Review*, Harold Gosnell had a sensible idea. Cities with proportional representation (PR), he argued, would be better off under his “list system with single candidate preference.” The ballot would contain party-written lists of candidates. The voter would vote by marking an “X” next to their favorite candidate. The sums of votes for parties would determine their shares of seats, and the sum of votes for each candidate would determine whether they got one of their party’s seats. According to Gosnell, this system would be easy on voters and election officials. No less important, by allowing party labels to appear on the ballot, it would acknowledge the reality of party organization. Today, many social scientists might approve of the Gosnell proposal (Masket 2016).

What we got instead was cognitively challenging, difficult to tabulate, and completely blind to parties: the single transferable vote (STV), otherwise known as “multi-winner ranked-choice voting.” Voters rank candidates in order of preference. The number of seats in a district determines the number of votes needed to win (the quota). First, count up the first-choice votes. Award one seat to the person with a quota, then distribute that winner’s surplus votes¹ to next-ranked candidates on ballots for that person. If no one has a quota, eliminate the last-placed candidate, and redistribute their ballots. Repeat this process until all seats are filled. Several cities used this rule at the time of Gosnell’s writing: Boulder, Cincinnati, Hamilton (OH), Toledo, Wheeling (WV), New York City, and Norris (TN). Five had just repealed it, and twelve more would adopt it.

Why did STV become the preferred PR method in America? Gosnell’s proposal was not

1. Which ballots are surplus? One can randomly draw a subset from the winner’s pile. Or one can transfer every ballot in that pile at a fraction of its full value.

unknown to reformers. Between 1893, with the founding of the PR League, and 1915, with the first STV adoption for public elections in America, there was vigorous debate over types of PR voting and how they might combine with other institutional reforms. Then, around 1912, a large part of the reform community became enthralled with single-winner, majority systems – “ranked-choice voting” in today’s language. This conversation appears to have stopped in 1914, with the National Municipal League’s endorsement of STV, via its inclusion in the Model City Charter (Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood 2004). A reform victory in 1915 vindicated that new charter.

This chapter tells the story of the early PR movement in America. The decision to promote STV was closely linked to developments in Los Angeles, where, in March 1913, PR voting faced its first referendum test. That referendum exposed a major cleavage in the movement: between Progressivism’s own left and right wings. STV resolved the cleavage by punting on the parties question.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I attempt to characterize the actors in the reform movement, 1893-1914, and their stances on parties’ role in government. Section 2 sketches the PR movement’s most popular reform options. Section 3 turns to Los Angeles, noting its importance to the movement, and exploring patterns in the referendum outcome. These new data, which are precinct-level results from 19 simultaneous ballot measures, offer one glaring case of the cleavage in Progressivism. Section 3 reflects on the STV compromise as it played out in Ashtabula (OH), which introduced that system in 1915.

1 The evolving PR movement

The PR League was born over the weekend of August 10-12, in the waning days of the Gilded-Age party system, amidst the economic Panic of 1893. Held alongside the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Proportional Representation Congress brought political scientists, social reformers, and international dignitaries together to share ideas and set direction. Today's foundation officers would call it a "convening." Professor John R. Commons shared his theory of representation. The journalist William D. McCrackan spoke of Ticino, a Swiss canton, where labor unrest had led to the adoption of list PR in 1890. Traveling from South Australia, Miss Catherine Spense of Adelaide introduced the single transferable vote. On Saturday morning, just before a resolution on the League's formation, McCrackan again took the podium, this time to make the case for initiative and referendum (Cooley 1893).

One month later, abridged versions of the speeches appeared in the inaugural issue of the *Proportional Representation Review*. Also in that issue were two pieces of model legislation. Each would have imposed a form of list PR for elections to the House of Representatives. Figure 1 reproduces a sample ballot from the second issue of the *Review*, published in December (Foulke 1893: 50). In this version, the voter gets ten votes. If they choose only a party, the party gets all ten votes. Or they can vote for up to ten candidates. If they vote for fewer than ten candidates, and they choose a party, that party gets whatever votes they did not use. Votes would help candidates achieve quotas, a full one of which would be needed to win.

The early PR League had clearly Populist roots, at least in part. Beginning in January 1896 and continuing through October 1914, the *Review* was published under the auspices

THE APPLICATION.
Form of Ballot for the Free List System.
FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.

<input type="checkbox"/> DEMOCRATIC.	<input type="checkbox"/> REPUBLICAN.
<input type="checkbox"/> C. F. Crisp.	<input type="checkbox"/> Thos. B. Reed.
<input type="checkbox"/> W. L. Wilson.	<input type="checkbox"/> J. S. Morrill.
<input type="checkbox"/> W. D. Bynum.	<input type="checkbox"/> W. B. Allison.
<input type="checkbox"/> Wm. M. Springer.	<input type="checkbox"/> G. F. Hoar.
<input type="checkbox"/> Tom L. Johnson.	<input type="checkbox"/> N. W. Aldrich.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. G. Maguire.	<input type="checkbox"/> H. C. Lodge.
<input type="checkbox"/> W. B. Cockran.	<input type="checkbox"/> Eugene Hale.
<input type="checkbox"/> R. Q. Mills.	<input type="checkbox"/> M. S. Quay.
<input type="checkbox"/> D. W. Voorhees.	<input type="checkbox"/> W. B. Washburn.
<input type="checkbox"/> D. B. Hill.	<input type="checkbox"/> C. A. Boutelle.
<input type="checkbox"/> POPULIST.	<input type="checkbox"/> PROHIBITION.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. F. Weaver.	<input type="checkbox"/> John Bidwell.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. G. Field.	<input type="checkbox"/> J. P. St. John.
<input type="checkbox"/> Jesse Cox.	<input type="checkbox"/> J. B. Hobbs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Wm. A. Pepper.	<input type="checkbox"/> T. R. Carskadon.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. Simpson.	<input type="checkbox"/> T. M. Conpropst.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. Donnelly.	<input type="checkbox"/> S. W. Small.
<input type="checkbox"/> Lafe Pence.	<input type="checkbox"/> E. C. Moeller.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. H. Kyle.	<input type="checkbox"/> E. P. Auger.
<input type="checkbox"/> J. W. Allen.	<input type="checkbox"/> Walcott Hamlin.
<input type="checkbox"/> A. J. Streeter.	<input type="checkbox"/> John Russell.

Figure 1: Example ballot, “free list” system, 1893.

of the initiative-and-recall movement. First, this was as a section in Eltwed Pomeroy’s *Direct Legislation Record*. One of the *Record’s* repeat columnists was William Simon U’Ren, early advocate of direct presidential primaries, direct election of Senators, and the “single tax.” U’Ren had been Oregon lobbyist for several left-wing groups: the Knights of Labor, Federated Trades, Farmers’ Alliance, and the Grange (U’Ren 1896). In 1914, he would lead an unsuccessful referendum effort to adopt the single non-transferable vote statewide in Oregon.²

Later on, initiative-and-recall would become a sticking point for the PR League. From 1906 to 1914, the *PR Review* was published under the auspices of *Equity*, apparently a catch-all magazine for reformers, not unlike today’s *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*. All that ended in October 1914. Here is what Clarence G. Hoag, the *Review’s* editor, had to say about the divorce:

2. The entire state would have been one legislative district. All candidates would be present on the ballot, and every voter would get just one vote. The top 60 vote-getters – that is, the size of the lower chamber – would have won the seats. Today’s reformers might call this a “semi-proportional system.”

The reasons for issuing the *Review* separately again, as it was issued from its founding in 1893 until 1896, are chiefly two. In the first place those members of the League who do not favor the Initiative, the Referendum, and the Recall, or any one of the three, do not like to have the official organ of the League published in such a way as to suggest that the League as a body, or proportionalists as such, necessarily support also the three political devices mentioned (Hoag 1914b: 1).

A simultaneous move was going on with respect to the League position on electoral reform. Consider its founding mission statement (Cooley 1893: 117):

The object of the society is to promote the reform of legislative assemblies by abandoning the present system of electing single representatives from limited territorial districts by a majority or plurality vote, and by substituting the following:

1. All representatives shall be elected at large, on a general ticket, either without district divisions or in districts as large as practicable.
2. The election shall be in such form that the respective **parties, or political groups**, shall secure representation in proportion to the number of votes cast by them, respectively.

That mission statement remained unchanged through late 1913, when the following proposal circulated among League members:

Its object shall be to secure the adoption of proportional representation for state legislatures, city councils, and other deliberative or policy-determining bodies.

The plan of proportional representation to be recommended by either of the

League's secretaries in any particular case shall be **that which seems to him most suitable for the case**, provided always that it embodies the principle of a single vote in a multiple-membered district.

This proposal led to immediate protest from one Carl D. Thompson of Chicago:

... the old article is much clearer and more consistent. Your amended article cuts the heart out of the idea of proportional representation and makes your League *absurd*. [Emphasis in original.] Proportional representation presupposes political parties and party grouping as provided by article II, section 2, of your original constitution ...

To which Hoag, now Secretary-Treasurer of the PR League, replied:

I am aware that you, as a Socialist, believe that party lines, such as have hitherto prevailed in this country, are the only reasonable basis for a system of representation. Though you may be right in that view, there is no question, I think, but that proportional representation is entirely feasible without such party lines as we have been accustomed to (Hoag 1914a).

Thompson, it turns out, was Director of the Bureau of Information for the Socialist Party. Formerly a city clerk under Milwaukee's Socialist mayor, Emil Seidel, Thompson had led the party's study of the commission form of local government. Late in 1913, he published a scathing critique of Hoag's "representative council plan," which the latter had begun promoting as a compromise reform package (Hoag 1913c). While Thompson agreed with many of its features, he had two objections to the Hoag plan. First, it called for ballots

“without insignia, emblem, or designation [...] of the source of candidacy.” Without such markers, Thompson argued, voters’ choices would reflect “the power and influence of the [...] banks, railroads, and great daily newspapers” (Thompson 1913: 421-2). If recall must be an option, he preferred that all council members be subject at the same time. Otherwise, he argued, a majority party could single out individual members for removal (419).

With his “representative council plan,” Hoag had been trying to bridge several divides at once: between proponents and opponents of initiative-and-recall, those who did and did not want responsible executives,³ those who wanted list PR and those who opposed parties, and, now in 1913, a new thing known as “the preferential ballot for insuring election by a majority” – what today goes by the name of “single-winner ranked-choice voting” (Taylor 1913).

The conversation about preferential-majority voting was a world unto itself. Just as today’s reformers vigorously debate instant-runoff, Condorcet, approval voting, etc., there were partisans of this or that single-winner method – all working independently of the larger PR movement. One thing clearly propelled single-winner reform into the spotlight: the 1912 presidential election, a classic case of the “spoiler effect.” In splitting the Republican Party and running on his own, Theodore Roosevelt effectively denied the presidency to William Howard Taft, ushering in the first and only Democratic presidency between 1896 and 1932. Educated readers across the land discovered electoral systems. Those who dug deeper could find precedent for use. Bucklin voting, a variant of preferential-majority voting, had been in use in more than 30 cities, as an effort to frustrate log rolling under the commission form

3. At the time, the reigning “reform charter” was the commission plan of city government. Under this system, five or so commissioners would be elected by plurality. Each commissioner then would be solely responsible for some public function. While commissions would set budgets collectively, they could not, as a whole, dictate the work of one commissioner (Rice 1977).

of government. This Bucklin-based “Grand Junction Plan” captured many imaginations (Bucklin 1911) – but not those of Socialists. Thompson (1913:420) argued that, by “compelling a *majority* election” (emphasis in original), majority-preferential voting would beget partially representative outcomes at best.

Above all, Hoag was managing a fractious coalition of Progressives (and possibly old Populists), now including the Socialist Party (Lippmann 1913 [1975]). In the end, his representative-council plan won out. This called for STV elections to a council of seven or nine members, who then would choose a city manager. Ballots would list only the candidates’ names, and candidates would be nominated by petition. In contrast to the commission form of government, which was popular at the time, all executive departments would be responsible to a council majority. Finally, there would not be provision for elected figures’ recall. Hoag and Thompson agreed on these last two points.

2 The menu of reforms

Preferential-majority systems notwithstanding, the PR League considered three proportional systems (Gove 1894). At the heart of each was election via quota: number of votes cast, divided by the number of seats to fill (i.e., district magnitude). Also at the heart of each was a preferential list. This list would determine the order in which *ineffective* votes would flow to other candidates. A vote becomes ineffective if (a) a candidate does not need it because they already have a quota or (b) mathematically, that candidate cannot win.

In developing the PR methods, reformers’ reference point was the “general ticket” or *scrutin de liste*, not the single-member plurality district. Other terms for this might be

“at-large voting,” the block vote, or multiple non-transferable vote. Colomer (2007) has shown, in fact, that early innovations in electoral-system design were indeed reactions to this general-ticket system. Therefore, when reformers were using the word “list” in reference to an electoral system, it was not in the way that we would use the term (e.g., the only conceivable list system is one in which the party makes the list).

The first of the available PR systems was STV, then known as the “Hare system.” As advocates pointed out, this would give the voter full control, via their rank-ordering of candidates, of whom their vote would help elect. The voter would make their own list.

A second, known as the Gove system, would let each candidate make their own list. A vote cast for that candidate would flow in the order specified by the candidate.⁴ There could be as many lists as there were candidates. If a party so chose, and if it were able to discipline its candidates, it could cause there to be just one list for all its candidates – dictating the order of their election.

Finally there was the ironically named (to us) “free list,” which would let parties set the order of preference flow. One version of this would have come close to what we call closed-list PR. From the voter’s perspective, a vote for Party X would amount to saying, “give my vote to your top candidate. If he or she does not need it, give it to your next-preferred candidate.”

A second version of the free list was Gosnell’s system, which we know as open-list PR with a single vote. A vote for Candidate Y in Party X would amount to saying, “I want my vote to count for Candidate Y. Use it to raise their position on your list.”

If these system descriptions sound confusing, they should. We usually describe PR as

4. Alternatively, the order of flow could be determined by number of votes cast for each candidate. For example, a ballot cast for me counts first toward my election. But, if I do not need that vote, it flows to the candidate who got the most overall votes. And if they do not need it, it flows to the candidate who got the second-most overall votes, and so on.

a method for apportioning seats among parties. Within a party, list type then determines who gets to decide who gets those seats: the party or the voter. In the 1890s and early 1900s, however, that is not how people thought about electoral systems. The central issue was who controlled the fate of a vote if (a) a candidate did not need it to win or (b) the most-preferred candidate ended up being hopeless (Spense 1893; Commons 1896).

It is worth noting that the League was cognizant of several potential defects in STV, all of which appear today in the reform debate. Gove (1894: 47) lists the following three:

1. “The one which appears to strike its advocates most forcibly is the necessity of transporting the ballots to one place to be counted, with the inconvenience and risk attendant thereon.” In modern language, this is precinct non-summability. You cannot find the winners by aggregating precinct totals. Every ballot needs to go downtown.
2. “Another serious objection is that a heavy additional burden is imposed on the voter by requiring him to indicate several names in the order of his preference instead of indicating but one choice, as in the other systems. This burden the voter would be very loth to assume, since it is with difficulty that voters are induced to discharge the duties already imposed upon them.” In modern language, this refers to risks of (a) ballot spoilage and (b) politically nonsensical rank-orderings of candidates.
3. “Finally the system admits of manipulation of the ballots in the process of counting, which may affect the result. This may occur not merely in the transfer of the surplus votes of those candidates who receive more than quota” – i.e., which ballots are selected as surplus – “but in the transfer of votes cast for those who receive too few votes to be elected” – i.e., the order of candidate elimination. Fractional transfer methods such as

Weighted Inclusive Gregory, now used in Minneapolis, remedy these problems.

3 A party-based system gets its test

In 1913, PR faced its first referendum test in Los Angeles. Lessons learned here would set the movement's direction for years, particularly with respect to (a) how to build a reform coalition and (b) what sort of PR to promote.

Los Angeles was important to reformers in the early 1910s. It had been seat of the initiative-referendum-recall movement since 1895, led by John Randolph Haynes' Direct Legislation League. The National Municipal League (NML) selected Los Angeles as the site of its 1912 conference, the primary job of which would be to rewrite that group's charter. One year later, on the heels of the NML convening, L.A. would hold this country's first vote on whether to adopt PR (Stevens 2003).

Schiesl (1975: 46) notes the split within the city's reform faction: "To prominent reformers who felt that political progressivism was capable of blunting the cutting edge of lower-class radicalism, the defeat of the Socialists [in the 1911 mayoral election] was a vindication of the new politics." Even Theodore Roosevelt weighed in: "true progressives must stand against brutal wrongdoing on the part of labor." Labor had been implicated in a 1910 bombing of the *Los Angeles Times*. On the political front, Eugene Debs' old running mate, Job Harriman, nearly became mayor in 1911. Going into the reform process, the optics were not good.

From one perspective, the reform process was indeed a big-tent effort. L.A.'s PR initiative came from what might be called a coalition of the left and center. Included were: the Socialist Party, affiliated clubs, the Southern California Civic League, the local Good Government

Organization, the Central Labor Council, at least one sitting freeholder, at least two woman activists, and one African American. Haynes of the Direct Legislation League led this group, known formally as the People's Charter Conference (PCC).

Yet there were some key omissions. Not invited to the late-1912 reform deliberations were: the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association, local Chamber of Commerce, and local Realty Board. These groups joined with the *Los Angeles Times* and *Los Angeles Examiner* to oppose the PCC, branded as the "Goo-Goo-Socialist Coalition." The right-wing reform caucus called itself the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand (CC) (Sitton 1995: 352-7).

An authoritative description of the PCC's proportional-voting amendment is difficult to find, but all accounts agree on the prominence of party labels. According to Sitton (1995: 355), there were to be two stages: a primary and a general. Nomination was to be by petition, and the candidate could declare a party label. The voter would vote for a party, then rank candidates regardless of party lines. In the primary round, party-level quotas would determine how many of a party's candidates proceeded to the general (two per quota). Rankings would determine which of a party's candidates those would be (via an STV counting procedure). In the general election, party votes would determine seat shares, and rankings would determine which people got those seats. In the simplest possible terms, this was to be like open-list PR – fundamentally a contest among parties, with chance for the voter to affect who represents a party. From a party-organization perspective, it was not far from Gosnell's plan: party list, candidate vote.

To counter the PCC proposal, the CC offered up a system similar to one now used in many cities: 15 single-member districts, six seats citywide, all filled by plurality. Either

proposal would have replaced the ward system in use.

Beyond the election-reform proposals, each side presented a range of competing charter amendments. Depending on the source one consults, either the first eight or ten proposals came from the PCC, while the final eight came from the CC (Sitton 1995:355; Stevens 2003: 35). Two proposals from the sitting administration would have (a) fixed bonds of city officers and (b) provided for independent regulation of the city's harbor and adjacent lands, with salaries of the board members set by city council (The Editors 1913b). Also on the ballot was an ordinance to regulate the city's dance halls, apparently originating with a group of woman activists (The Editors 1913c).

How did the newspapers line up in this fight? On Sunday, March 23, two days before the referendum, the *Los Angeles Times*' published the CC's full-page "sample ballot," instructing voters to oppose all but the eight CC amendments, including the dance-hall ordinance (The Editors 1913a). The *Times* itself endorsed all eight CC proposals, urged "no" votes on the eight obvious PCC proposals, opposed the PCC/administration harbor proposal, and gave no clear instruction on the administration bonding proposal. It did not mention the dance-hall ordinance at all (The Editors 1913b).

Table 1 shows how each amendment fared.⁵ While both election provisions failed, several features of what would become the model charter passed. These included powers to regulate public utilities, many of which were privately owned at the time (e.g., water, gas); municipal home rule; and executive responsibility to city council. Each of these had been a point of agreement between L.A.'s reform coalition and Thompson's 1913 comment on Hoag's

5. The vote in favor is calculated as (yes vote)/[(yes vote)+(no vote)]. There were 455 precincts. The original broadsheets report "yes" and "no" votes for each initiative. The data are available from the Los Angeles City Archives, Erwin C. Piper Technical Center, *Records of Election Returns*, December 5, 1904 to December 9, 1920, Vol. 1, pp. 166-181.

emerging “representative council plan.”⁶ Finally, while the right-wing election reforms had failed, PR had lost by less than two points.

Proposal (initiating party)	Yes %
Sale of land along aqueduct (CC)	81.9
Pension and insurance - firemen (CC)	76.3
Pension and insurance - police (CC)	73.5
Remove incumbent government (PCC)	64.3
LA River bed - regulate use and condemnations in (PCC)	62.6
Regulate private utilities (PCC)	62.1
Municipal ownership of utilities (PCC)	61.8
Apply state home-rule law to LA (PCC)	61.6
Prohibit municipally-owned newspaper (CC)	60.5
Exec. agencies responsible to council (PCC)	59.5
Set city-council salaries (PCC)	57.4
Fix bonds of city officers (Admin)	52.2
Appointed harbor commission, council sets salaries (Admin)	51.9
List-proportional voting (PCC)	48.2
Private biz in city parks, commission fixes salaries (CC)	46.8
Elected harbor commission, railroad, fixed salaries (CC)	39.9
Districts plus at-large (CC)	39.9
Raise electeds’ salaries (CC)	37.3
Regulate the dance halls (Other)	26.3

Table 1: Yes vote for each charter amendment, Los Angeles, March 24, 1913

The most popular PCC proposal was a measure to recall the sitting government. One might view it as the main point of consensus in the PCC coalition. Later on, when other cities’ voters successfully reformed their charters, measures like this one would be built in *de facto*. That is because, after Ashtabula, every PR system came as part of an entirely new form of city government: the council-manager charter. At this early stage in L.A., however, reformers were considering issues in one-by-one fashion, not as a package.

Also worth noting is that PR was the least popular PCC amendment. Each of the others

6. The executive-responsibility provision had been a reaction to corruption under the commission form of government – the main plan of municipal reform before Hoag would popularize the council-manager system. In theory, each member of a city commission would be exclusively responsible for decisions in some policy domain. In practice, however, there would be distributive log-rolling, and this had been one reason for the pre-1912 turn to single-winner Bucklin voting (Bucklin 1911).

passed.

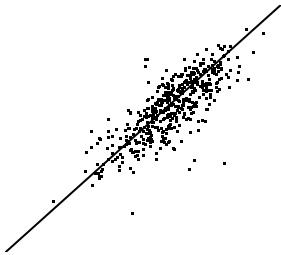
What happened in L.A. was that the reform coalition had split. The CC and *Los Angeles Times* had framed the entire PCC package as a series of “Socialist designs” (The Editors 1913b). The *Times* was especially critical of PR:

Amendment No. 8 seeks to set up a theoretical form of government under a proportional representation which does away with majority rule upon which the very foundation of our government is based. It is a grotesque scheme of the Socialists to secure control of the city. It is un-American and un-representative. Its adoption will destroy the credit of the city, and plunge it into debt and endless litigation. It provides for a government by parties. . .

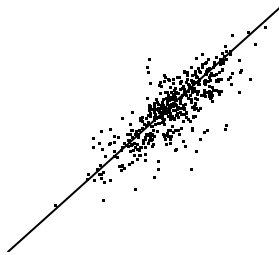
How effective was this strategy in defeating PR voting? One way to find out is to examine the returns. Treating the recall proposal as a point of reference, and comparing the PR outcome to outcomes on the other measures, we can get a sense of how the PCC had split on PR voting.

Figure 2 gives scatter plots for each PCC proposal. In each case, precinct-level “yes” shares for the recall proposal are on the y-axis, and “yes” shares for the other proposal are on the x-axis. In each plot, the diagonal line segment represents a one-to-one relationship. If people who approved of the recall proposal (the most popular PCC proposal) also tended to approve of the other proposal, dots would cluster around the one-to-one line. That is true in five of seven cases. The PCC proposal on city-council salaries was somewhat unpopular, with many dots below the line. By far the least popular with pro-recall voters, however, was the PR amendment.

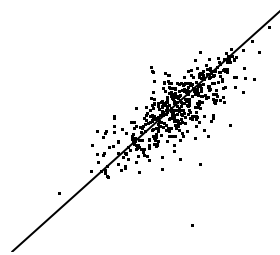
**Municipal ownership
of utilities (PCC)**



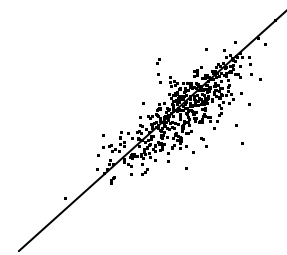
**Regulate private utilities
(PCC)**



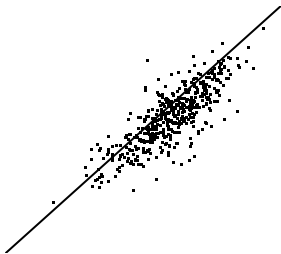
**LA River bed – regulate use
and condemnations in (PCC)**



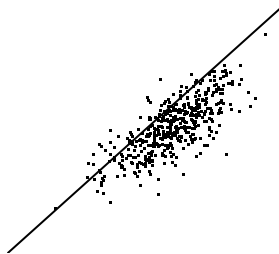
**Apply state home-rule law
to LA (PCC)**



**Exec. agencies responsible
to council (PCC)**



**Set city-council
salaries (PCC)**



**List-proportional voting
(PCC)**

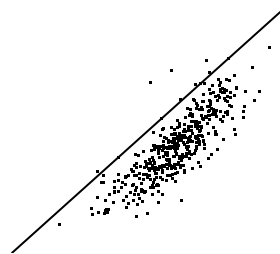


Figure 2: Scatter plots of all People's Charter Conference amendment proposals, with recall proposal on the y-axis. Los Angeles, March 24, 1913.

Hoag wasted no time in framing the L.A. outcome. Writing for *Equity* in April 1913, he published a series of “excerpts from letters from Mr. Fred Wheeler, leading Socialist the city and an active worker for proportional representation there.” Wheeler emphasized the politics involved in navigating the newspapers (Hoag 1913a). But he also suggested a generally favorable view of the PR idea: while the CC’s districts-plus-at-large proposal had lost in a landslide, PR had lost by only two points. And the very next column described Hoag’s efforts to promote the “representative council plan” in Ohio, where a 1912 constitution had just established municipal home rule. Finally, he wrote:

The information bureau of the National Socialist Party is commending the Hare plan [i.e., STV] to the attention of all Socialists seeking information on the revision of city charters (Hoag 1913b).

It was time to take the parties out of proportional voting. The first place that would happen was Ashtabula (OH).

The Ashtabula compromise

In January 1916, a political scientist from the Case Western Reserve University announced “the latest step in municipal organization” – a city-manager charter with STV elections (Hatton 1916). This new “Ashtabula plan” got full expression in August 1915, when STV was added to the charter passed one year earlier. Reformers could identify two ways in which this plan improved on the alternatives.

Versus the commission form of government, the Ashtabula plan lodged all executive authority in a single city manager, responsible to a city council majority. The popularity

of this reform had been one lesson from Los Angeles. In other words, the Ashtabula plan called for *parliamentary* government: the council chooses a manager, and the manager runs city government at council's pleasure.

But the Ashtabula plan also aimed for *coalition* government. On August 12, 1913, Dayton (OH) became the first major city to adopt a manager charter. Its council was to be small, elections citywide, ballots without party labels, and winners by plurality. Dayton gave Hoag a frame for pitching his representative-council plan: “a council elected at large in the usual way,” writes Hatton (1916:58), “would probably represent only one party, and that this was not desirable if the council was to choose the manager.” This point Hoag had made to Ashtabula's charter commission.

Ashtabula initially went with Dayton's plan. Sometime between that decision and the switch to STV, the National Municipal League wrote STV into its model charter (Childs 1965:65). Hoag's “representative council plan” – and the “Ashtabula plan” – had become the national reform template. Whether Ashtabula drove the model charter or vice-versa is unclear.

Why did Ashtabula end up adopting STV? Several possibilities come to mind. First, it may have been the national consensus behind the new model charter. Developments in the city make it difficult to say. Efforts to add PR to the local council-manager system appear to have been going on at the same time that the National Municipal League was deliberating STV. It is worth noting that, in the same year that the L.A. business community beat back the “Goo-Goo-Socialist coalition,” a similar coalition faced similar opposition in proposing STV for Dayton (Barber 1995:50). One year later, in August 1914, the Municipal League had come out unambiguously for STV.

A second possibility is that reformers did not *alienate* the business community. Although the Socialists did want PR in Ashtabula, Hoag had worked primarily with one William Boynton, a former city council president and railroad engineer (Hatton 1916: 58). Boynton had secured endorsement from the local Chamber of Commerce (Busch 1995: 92). While that had not been sufficient to secure PR in the initial round of charter negotiations, PR did pass one year later in what the *Akron Beacon Journal* called “the smallest vote ever cast in the city” (The Editors 1915). Further, our best account of the newspapers suggests much less vociferous opposition than there had been in Los Angeles. According to Hatton (1916: 62), “the two daily papers were inclined to look askance at the new system.” This hardly sounds like an endorsement, but it also does not sound like a full-page “sample ballot” that calls the plan a radical plot.

Finally, notes Busch (1995: 90-4), the local party system had been fractious. According to one contemporary observer, the incumbent Republican government faced criticism for its inaction on the prohibition issue (Bloomfield 1926). In the end, according to Busch, three groups put PR over the top: Ashtabula’s out-of-power Socialist and Democratic Parties, then a group of “disgruntled Republicans.” It may be that prohibition split the incumbent party, letting the city’s minority parties peel off some support. By contrast, in Los Angeles, we get no indication that the sitting Republican Party faced such disunity. Instead, and with the help of the papers, it split the reformers along class lines.

Implications

With PR voting again on the agenda in this country (Gehl and Porter 2017), we hear many of the same points that were made a century ago. The single transferable vote confuses voters. Elections under STV are difficult to count. Finally, and echoing Gosnell, we need strong political parties, and STV attacks them. Therefore, if we are to have PR, it must be with party lists.

History suggests that it is difficult to get list PR. Generally speaking, list systems have found favor where sitting politicians are on the defensive. The usual mode of adoption has been where new parties threaten old ones. When incumbent lawmakers fear for their survival, and when they see PR as a solution, they enact PR from within government.⁷ Similarly, when party leaders in an already-existing multi-party system have trouble disciplining their legislators, they may turn to list PR. This gives them more control of nominations, which in turn can be used to discipline one's deputies (Cox, Smith, and Fiva, Forthcoming). In either case, the logic is defensive.

Until such time as new-party entry sufficiently threatens incumbent lawmakers, those who want PR in the United States are stuck with the initiative process. That means an effort to pass PR will be subject to campaign dynamics. How actors portray themselves – and how they media portray them – will determine whether they can win the votes they need to change the system. As with all coalitions that hope to win something (Schwartz 1989; Aldrich 1995), people in successful reform coalitions have found ways to set aside their differences. In the past, punting on the parties question was a way to do that.

7. See, e.g., Boix (1999), Calvo (2009), Ahmed (2012), and Leeman and Mares (2014).

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