The Insulation of Local Governance from Black Electoral Power: Northern Cities and the Great Migration

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December 6, 2023

Word Count: 13,977

Abstract

Why has America's democratization remained incomplete? Democratic institutions in the U.S. are decentralized, and lower level governments have the potential to counteract national democratization. We argue that, in response to the threat of growing Black electoral power resulting from the Great Migration, Northern cities moved to insulate governmental institutions from their diversifying electorates. Using a shift-share instrument, we find that greater migration of Black Americans from the South between 1940 and 1970 led cities to switch from mayor-council to city manager systems, shifting the administration of local government, including budgeting and bureaucratic hiring, to the office of an appointed manager. We illustrate how the Great Migration shaped the decision of city elites to switch to city manager government through a case study of Santa Monica, CA. Our findings show how, at a critical juncture in the course of the country's national democratization, local governments acted to stymie it.

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*For helpful discussions and guidance on data, we thank Ellora Derenoncourt, Jessica Trounstine, and Vesla Weaver. For outstanding research assistance, we thank Rachel Funk Fordham, Brian Leung, Ewan McCartney, and Ben Rex. We are grateful for the generous support of the Russell Sage Foundation (project grant G-2107-33329).
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Introduction

By nearly any formal definition of democracy (Dahl 1971), America's twentieth-century democratization was distinctive in two ways. First, it came relatively late—achieved only with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights Acts, which promised civil and voting rights for all Americans. Second, it reflected the unusual imprint of America's federal political system. While national level reforms promised political equality for all citizens, they did not erase enduring local practices of racial authoritarianism (Weaver and Prowse 2020; Hinton 2021). Indeed, the most striking gap between democracy's promise of political equality and its practice is found at the local level, where citizens interact most directly with the coercive apparatus of the state (i.e., police)—where they experience the uneven application of the rule of law on the basis of race and ethnicity.

Why has racial inequality in American democracy persisted despite national democratizing reforms? We provide an historical-institutionalist perspective to the problem. In particular, we propose an answer that is anchored in America's distinctive institutional path of democratization. America's late and incomplete democratization and its federal system meant that the most significant resistance to democratization often happened at the *local* level—not only in the U.S. South but also in the diversifying municipalities of the U.S. North. Our motivating proposition is that assessments of America's democracy must take into account not just state and national forces such as Jim Crow laws and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but also state governments, and—especially—local governments. Thus, this question is key: *why have local governments themselves over the 20th century adopted insulating institutional reforms that have made them less accountable to voters?*

Our argument begins by noting that, like elsewhere, America's transition to democracy was not conflict-free. As America has become more diverse *and* more democratic, efforts to secure key

democratic reforms have met the resistance of powerful actors who have sought to thwart, forestall, and even subvert democratic changes. Promises of political equality, when combined with the reality of greater ethnic diversity, have prompted pushback. As is true elsewhere, this pushback has meant that America's democratic transition has been incomplete, leaving traces of the past regime visible, where former incumbents carved out zones of continued influence (Valenzuela 1992). Put differently, we contend that, in response to democratizing impulses, incumbents effect a "clawing-back" of political power from emerging coalitions and their officeholders. This dynamic is familiar to scholars of democratization in other contexts. Democratic transitions often include efforts to provide outgoing incumbents with a leg-up to protect their interests. This was the case at the national level in Chile's transition in the 1980s, as well as those in Poland and South Africa in the 1990s (Albertus and Menaldo 2018). Likewise, democratic changes often bring with them the creation of independent or partly autonomous agencies—such as central banks and independent judiciaries—that sit "beyond the reach" of the new majorities (Starr 2019.) In the American context, these more general dynamics took a distinctive form because of its federal system: it was often *local* incumbents who pushed back, insulating institutional reforms to dilute the impact of growing ethnic diversity and a national context of greater civil rights.

In this paper, we focus on local pushback that came in a series of reforms to the structure of municipal governments—particularly the introduction of "city manager" models of governments in the twentieth century, which supplemented or replaced directly-elected mayors.[1] Strongly opposed by local Black political interests across mid-20th century cities, these reforms reduced voter turnout and weakened the link of accountability between voters and elected officials by transferring authority over budgeting and bureaucratic administration from a directly elected mayor to an appointed manager.

[1] About two-thirds of U.S. cities still use at-large elections for city council positions (Abott and Magazinnik 2020: 717).

To test whether local institutional insulation was the result of racial threat, we investigate whether the Great Migration of African Americans from the South led Northern cities to insulate their political institutions by switching to city manager systems. To address threats of endogeneity, we use a shift-share instrumental variable design to isolate exogenous variation in Black migration (Derenoncourt 2022). Consistent with our argument, we find that greater Black in-migration led Northern cities to switch to city manager systems. While the Great Migration of Black Americans out of Jim Crow states was a democratizing force for the U.S. overall, White responses to the Great Migration weakened local level democratization through the insulation of policymaking Northern cities' diversifying electorates. We illustrate the channels by which the Great Migration produced institutional insulation through a case study of Santa Monica, California.

Today, the incomplete nature of subnational democratization remains evident in other ways as well. For instance, Republican-controlled state legislatures, motivated by growing splits between Republican rural areas and Democratic-run cities, have recently weakened hundreds of local governments by preempting their lawmaking with state statutes (Briffault 2018). On scores of issues, from police reform (Su, Roy, and Davidson 2022) to public health, from education to election administration, state laws now block municipal and county governments from crafting their own policies, thereby weakening local democracy.

Choice of Municipal Governance

The United States is distinctive for the dynamic nature of its municipal level governance structures. This may be due in part to the Constitution's unusual silence on polities below the state level. Indeed, many of the country's some 7,500 cities—in those states that allow them the

option—adopt their own "little constitutions" (Davidson 2020; Stevenson 2009) in the form of city charters. Long-established cities continue to alter their formal structures (Svara and Watson 2010; Hassett and Watson 2007; Frederickson 2003).

Municipal structures—for scholars focused on national politics, akin to systems of inter-branch relations—establish frameworks within which the public official "sets the rules of participation, exercises authority by making and carrying out the law (statues, ordinances, or regulations), selects persons to politically represent all residents or some subset of residents, operates a permanent bureaucracy, provides services, and determine who will pay what in taxes" (Frederickson et al 2004: 321).

Over time, there have been just a few major such structures: a mayor-council system, a city manager (also known as "council-manager") system, a commission government, or—least common—New England's town meeting system. Until the onset of the twentieth century, the mayor-council system dominated. In this system, a popularly elected, "strong" mayor invested with substantial powers—usually including the power to veto decisions by a popularly elected (either via district or at-large elections) council—governed a town or city. The mayor-council system has always been very much a "separation of powers" structure in that executive and legislative functions remain separated (Newland 1985).

Claiming (and often sincerely preoccupied by) a desire to stamp out corruption, partyism, machine politics, and inefficient government, Progressive Era-reformers developed alternatives and campaigned successfully for them through impressive national networks of experts and other allies (Finegold 1995). Popular especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century was the commission system, whereby three to seven officials, usually chosen at-large via nonpartisan elections, each oversaw a particular policy domain—public safety, sanitation, education,

etc.—"while collectively they serve[d] as the policymaking council for the city" (Adrian 1955: 190; Rice 1977). A ceremonial office of mayor was usually popularly elected from among those candidates competing to serve as a commissioner. Commission governments avoided "separate institutions sharing powers" (Neustadt 1990: 29) and instead fused legislative and executive functions. Criticized for lacking a single, powerful chief policymaker, by 1950 fewer than 400 cities retained the commission system (Adrian 1955: 194).

Beginning in the early 1910's, the city manager system quickly overtook commission governance. Here, a city council, usually elected at-large, would hire a city manager, a professional who would centralize and then devise policy and oversee local bureaucracies within (often very broad) parameters set by the council. Like the commission, the city manager was not a separation-of-powers system, but it did feature a chief administrator. In other words, it centralized authority more effectively. In another departure from the commission system, the ceremonial post of mayor was usually chosen by the council from among its own number (Banfield and Wilson 1963: ch. 13).

The city manager—unconstrained by a delimited term in office and serving at the pleasure of the council—could not be removed by the voters. Capturing the enthusiasm at the time for the science of administration and the cult of business-like efficiency, advocates of this system viewed the manager as a professional able to engineer efficient policy outcomes, freed from the corrupting influence of party politics. In fact, nearly one-half of city managers surveyed in the 1930s had earned a B.A. in Engineering (Stillman 1974: 39). The discipline of political science mainly concurred. Early on, one scholar swooned, "Democracy need fear no setback through the introduction of this new form of administration; and efficiency, so long absent from the councils of democracy, can come into her own at last" (James 1914: 611-612). Four decades later, the discipline's preference

continued: “[f]or many years city managers and their form of government have been the darlings of political science professors from coast to coast” (Mathewson 1959: 183). Yet another political scientist claimed that the system “allows the best possible combination of democracy and efficiency in local government” (Alderfer 1956: 308). Banfield and Wilson (1963: ch. 13) show that much of the support for city manager governance was based on expectations—later dashed—that this system would result in lower tax burdens for middle- and upper-class residents.

Soon after World War II, the city manager system became the country’s modal municipal structure (Adrian 1955: 197). Strong mayor systems dominated the country’s largest cities, while weaker mayor systems were more common in small-to-medium-sized cities (but see Choi et al 2013). Since the 1980s, while the city manager system remains most common, differences between the two dominant types of mayor-council and city manager have shrunk. Mayor-council cities have hired and further empowered more technocrats, while city manager systems have somewhat more powerful mayors and made other changes in the name of democratic accountability (Hassett and Watson 2007). Still, despite some scholars’ claims that the differences have narrowed so much that there is no longer a significant difference between them (Frederickson 2003), most view these two systems as importantly different (Svara and Watson 2010).

Regionally, strong (and partisan) mayor-council systems have predominated in the country’s northeast, as well as in the midwest (though more of these mayors are elected in nonpartisan elections). The commission system and, soon after, city manager systems have been most common in the South and West. Despite decades of research, efforts to explain variation in municipal structures have produced contradictory and inconclusive answers (Wei et al 2019; Choi et al 2013).

Historians and social scientists have generally argued that social class has best explained cities’ choices. Here, class has been critical either because of differences across classes in their

values or in their material interests (Hays 1964, 1974). The values or "ethos theory" (Banfield and Wilson 1963) holds that the native-born (especially Protestant) White middle class, stuck between the "private-regarding" ethos of working class European immigrants and the very wealthy, chose to adopt reforms that would destroy the corrupt and inefficient politics of party machines.[2] In addition, middle-class residents were demanding the efficient provision of local public goods in the areas of education, transport, public safety, public health, and so on. Middle-class activists led the call for structural reforms—and especially the city manager system—and their precincts strongly backed referenda to revise municipal structures. Meanwhile, European immigrants and working class voters and their allied organized interests, including labor unions, most strongly opposed the reform movement (Bridges and Kronick 1999, Bridges 1997a). But because pre-World War II American cities were "overwhelmingly working class" (Bridges and Kronick 1999: 693), efforts to explain variation in municipal institutions with a class theory were unsuccessful (Gordon 1968; Knoke 1982).

Bridges and Kronick (1999) rescue the class approach by emphasizing the undemocratic nature of much of the "reform" movement. They show that if scholars compare the class composition of local *electorates* rather than populations, they would recognize that reformers won in those cities—mainly in the South and West—where they succeeded first in rewriting rules to shrink working class turnout. This sequence reprised the strategy of conservative Democrats in the late 19th century South. There, Democrats first reduced Black and poor White turnout via statutes and only then drafted and ratified state constitutions that founded one-party, authoritarian enclave rule (Perman 2003; Kousser 1974; Mickey 2015: ch. 2). In 20th century cities, reformers triumphed in citywide referenda to choose a new municipal structure less by persuading a majority of voters than

[2] According to Banfield and Wilson (1963: 170), the "lower class . . . preferred favors, 'friendship,' and 'recognition' to the public-serving and self-denying virtues of efficiency, honesty, and impartiality."

by disarming their opponents and thereby "creating electorates more middle-class than the adult population as a whole" (Bridges and Kronick 1999: 703).

Many of the same White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant activists in the North's reform movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries also helped pass state and local measures restrict immigrants' access to the polls via long residency requirements, onerous new registration requirements, literacy tests, and nonpartisan ballots (Keyssar 2000: ch. 5; Banfield and Wilson 1963: 114). Western reform activists did the same with respect to Asian and Hispanic (and Mormon) voters (Bridges and Kronick 1999: 697-698). Usually, opponents in the largest cities were able to beat back reform by relying on the partisan nature of big-city machines.

The largest cities may have resisted the city manager system because, as larger and more heterogeneous with respect to culture and interests, their voters prized the greater "political management" that a strong mayor-council system offered (Kessel 1962; Bridges and Kronick 1999: 695). Similarly, residents of smaller and more socially homogeneous communities were believed to be more comfortable turning the keys of the city over to a city manager (Lineberry and Fowler 1967; but see Wolfinger and Field 1966).

Again, these claims assume municipal institutional choices were made in a democratic fashion and on the basis of persuasion. Big cities may have resisted reform because they could resist suffrage restrictions. Already partly incorporated into local party politics and often relying on public sector employment, the party allegiance of otherwise vulnerable working class and immigrant voters helped them avoid "strict enforcement of literacy testing or other disfranchising laws" (Bridges and Kronick 1999: 698). Bridges and Kronick (1999: 701) show that in cities where turnout was lower in 1908, the probability of a switch to city manager government by 1934 was much higher.

The assignment to various collective actors of preferences over municipal institutions must be approached with care. Municipal reform in the 20th century encompassed a bewildering array of reform ideas and movements and coalitions, and, at different moments and places, many coalition members defied expectations. For instance, while by the eve of World War I, the National Municipal League, the leader of the nationwide movement to reform the governance of America's cities, landed upon the city manager plan as its preferred system, for a time it offered a model city charter featuring a city council elected by proportional representation (Stewart 1950; Santucci 2022). In other moments, unions and other working class actors backed city manager systems and other structural reforms (Liazos 2020).

Still—as echoed in our Santa Monica case study below—advocates and opponents of reform agreed that efficiency and democracy were in tension or even outright conflict. working class opponents of reform "saw in [these] proposals new institutions that would be less responsive to them," while "[m]iddle-class voters found reform arguments persuasive because they saw their own interests aligned with the civic leaders proposing new charters." The latter "continued to support reform regimes as they delivered (for a time) growth, quality services, and low taxes" (Bridges and Kronick 1999: 694; Bridges 1997a, 1997b). Consistent with this line of thought, Carreri, Payson, and Thompson (2023) find that switches to city manager systems between 1901 and 1940 reduced voter turnout.

Building on Bridges (1997a, 1997b), Trounstine's (2008) landmark work urges scholars to abandon the machine/reform dichotomy and instead see proponents of one-party machines and their "good-government" reform opponents as united by a shared goal to establish political monopolies. As many have shown (Erie 1988; Shefter 1994), strong-mayor systems in the context of machine politics were, in numerous respects, highly undemocratic in their own right. But the insights of

Bridges and Trounstine help illuminate how many switches from mayor-council to city manager system were doubly undemocratic: a system of government less responsive to residents—especially working class residents and residents of color—was often forged by, in effect, democratic backsliding on voting rights and the administration of free and fair elections.

Preferences for and Consequences of City Manager Government

Is our outcome variable, the city manager system, a meaningful proxy for institutional insulation? It is conventional wisdom that directly elected officeholders are more responsive to the electorate than appointed ones, both theoretically and empirically in the case of the direct election of the U.S. Senate after the 17th Amendment, for instance (Gailmard and Jenkins 2009). But is this the case with respect to municipal institutions and in the context of 20th century U.S. racial politics?

In terms of group preferences over municipal institutions, the answer is clearly yes. African-American voices—at least those civic leaders and others given voice by Black newspapers—generally opposed city manager government, and on the same grounds that 'reformers' championed it. In the view of Black commentators, by separating city management from 'politics,' the system diluted emerging Black electoral influence. For example, when reformers sought to reinstate city manager governance in Depression-era Cleveland—defeated with the crucial help of Black voters in 1931 (Durham 1963: 235-236; Davis 1966)—the African-American *Cleveland Call and Post* (1935) framed these reformers as "anti-Negro." The paper assailed both the return of the centralization of policymaking authority in the hands of a manager as well as a move to at-large elections, which the *Call and Post* saw as "a means of eliminating [Cleveland's] three Negro councilmen."

Similarly, in 1940, when a "League for Efficient Government" sought to bring city manager governance to Atlantic City, the *Afro-American* described a tense meeting of Black and White civic leaders. One Black speaker suggested that the majority-black Third Ward would drop its opposition to the plan if provided assurances that the city's public accommodations would finally be desegregated. After he received no answer, another African-American speaker pressed the plan's main advocate to describe how much authority would be situated in the office of a city manager. She only stammered, "The colored man has . . . made his contribution to the cultural and economic life of the country, and now he must give himself as a citizen, forget self and race and work for the interest of the community as a whole." For the *Afro-American*, this answer confirmed Black suspicions of the consequences of city manager government.

Whereas the *ex ante* preferences of racial groups over city manager systems were clear, were these Black voices right about their effect on local democracy? It is difficult to tell. Certainly, case studies of city politics confirm the suspicion of Black communities that city manager government would weaken Black political power (e.g., Bridges 1999). Large-*n* analyses focusing on our time period of study have been rarer. Traditionally, the full reform package enacted by many mid-century cities combined council-manager governance with non-partisan and at-large council elections (Leland and Whisman 2014: 418). The fact that multiple institutional changes were made at once complicates efforts to divine their impact. This package is thought to have a larger, additive effect on political participation, the influence of various organized interests and social groups, and policy outcomes.

One consequence about which there is a strong consensus is that city manager cities feature lower levels of voter turnout (Carr 2015: 679; Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Carreri, Payson, and Thompson 2023). Indeed, it makes sense that a rational, policy-motivated voter would be less likely

to vote as the payoff of voting, influence over the behavior of the elected officeholder, becomes smaller as agency problems increase between the voter and the appointed officeholder. Moreover, lower turnout—especially in combination with at-large (Davidson and Korbel 1981; Davidson and Grofman 1994; Abott and Magazinnik 2020) and off-cycle elections—reduces the descriptive representation of racial minorities (Hajnal 2010; Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian 2022).

Table 1: City Manager System as Institutional Insulation

Premise	*Explanation*
Appointed offices less responsive to the electorate	e.g., 17th Amendment makes US Senate more responsive (Gailmard and Jenkins 2009)
City manager system reduces turnout (Carreri et al 2022)	Consistent with rational voting model in which agency loss reduces policy payoff of voting
Ex ante Black preferences opposed to switching to city manager	Ecological inference of racial voting in 20th century lawsuits; qualitative evidence from local newsmedia

It is worth noting that research suggests a convergence between city manager and mayor-council systems since the 1980s in terms of both institutional design and political outcomes. Mayor-council systems have begun employing professional administrators in an effort to increase their efficiency, while city manager cities have undertaken some reforms to enhance their democratic responsiveness by, for example, strengthening their mayoral offices (Frederickson et al 2003). In the contemporary period, these kinds of cities appear equally responsive to local aggregate public opinion (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014). That said, other research on contemporary cities finds that city manager governments with at-large elections were least likely to feature at least one incumbent losing reelection. Moreover, for cities of almost any size, city-manager governments with district elections were less likely to have a loser incumbent than mayor-council governments (Oliver et al 2012: 129). While city manager governments conduct less spending has been contradicted more

recently (Hajnal and Trounstine 2010; Carr 2015; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016: 1136), mayor-council systems generate more "targeted redistribution" through public sector employment (Enikolopov 2014). Furthermore, since the financial crisis, council-manager cities, "insulated from the demands of voters," had more solvent budgets than their mayoral counterparts (Jimenez 2020: 126) and implemented greater austerity measures than council-mayor cities (Aguado 2018).[3]

The Great Migration and Urban Institutional Choice

The Great Migration occurred in two large waves. In the first, from 1910 to 1930, about 1.25 million African Americans departed the former member-states of the Confederacy for the North and West. In the second, from 1940 to 1970, more than double this number—3.37 million—left the South. All told, across these decades, about 5 million African Americans and nearly 12 million Whites (about one-half of whom later returned) departed the region. In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, they were joined by more than one-half million Hispanic Americans, who streamed out of the southern countryside for western cities (Gregory 2005: 15, Table 1.2, and 16).[4]

Several forces fueled the first wave, including the pull of better-paying jobs, which was prompted by the sudden demand in Northern cities for industrial labor in support of the Great War, combined with the war's halting of European immigrants (Wilkerson 2010; Tolnay 2003; Collins 2021). Even after the war's end, chain migration momentum, growing recruitment by Northern employers and Black media, continued repression within the authoritarian South, and agricultural

[3] Most scholars, finding higher quality data in the contemporary period, focus their attention only after this blurring had occurred. Thus, it may be that advocates and opponents of city manager governance were correct about its consequences. Case study research concludes that, where reformers won, "off-year elections, at-large districts, [and] council-manager forms of government . . effectively depressed participation among minority groups and lower-income, poorly educated voters" (Erie and Kogan 2016: 314).

[4] While the second wave is typically dated as 1940-1970, it is worth noting that during the 1970s, more African-Americans left the South (1.55 million) than in any other decade, and another 2.66 million Whites also departed (Gregory 2005: 15, table 1.2).

hardship continued the stream of migrants, three-fifths of whom settled in just five cities: New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Philadelphia (Boustan 2017: 9). By 1930, the share of all African Americans who lived outside the South had increased from ten percent in 1910 to twenty-five percent; a majority did so by 1970 (Tabellini 2020: 8).

While African Americans continued to move north during the 1930s, the second wave began in earnest in 1940. Its causes were the "push" of the economic devastation wrought by the Great Depression, the unintended consequences of the New Deal's cotton subsidies (which weakened planters' demand for farm labor (Whatley 1983)), continued political repression at home, and the increasing pull of recruitment from Black networks and communities in the North. Most important was the onset of World War II. While the South quickly became the year-round training ground for the military (Kryder 2000), the North and the West became home to military production. The federal government's rapid expenditure of more than $3 *trillion* (in 2018 dollars) in military supply contracts and related investments (Rhode, et al 2018: 145) meant a massive demand to fill relatively high-paying jobs.

Most importantly, the Great Migration transformed the demographics of the North and West. On the eve of the Great Migration in 1910, less than 2 percent of the non-southern U.S. population was African American.[5] While the typical non-southern city was 5 percent Black in 1940, by 1970 the African American share reached 22 percent (Boustan 2017: 1). This demographic shift, even during the smaller first wave, meant a sharp rise in interracial contact, tensions, and crowd violence, especially at the boundaries of racially demarcated neighborhoods, biracial public housing projects, and in public leisure settings (Elkins 2018; Hirsch 1995; Sugrue 1995). This shift also accelerated

[5] Among larger Northern cities, Philadelphia had the largest Black population share, but that share was less than six percent. Smaller Northern cities--St. Louis, Cincinnati, Columbus, Indianapolis, Kansas City--had more sizeable shares, but none reached even ten percent of those cities' populations (Collins 2021: 11 and fn. 28).

already existing segregation,[6] resulting in the consolidation of the "ghetto." While in 1890, the typical African American city dweller lived in a neighborhood that was 27 percent Black, by 1940 that share had risen to 43 percent, and by 1970 to 68 percent (Cutler et al 1999: 456).

Unsurprisingly, White residents and their local politicians in cities with even tiny Black populations were responsive to racial demographics well before the Great Migration. Recent research illustrates actions by both cities and White consumers that produced "White flight" as early as 1910, before the first wave (Shertzer and Walsh 2018). And as early as the 1920s, cities in the North and West used zoning to incentivize high-density construction in Black neighborhoods, thereby contributing further to future residential segregation (Shertzer, Twinam, and Walsh 2019; also see Trounstine 2018). Besides increasing levels of segregation, White responses to the Great Migration served to shrink non-southern cities, as "each Black arrival encouraged more than one White departure from the central city" (Boustan 2017: 94). Another recent study finds that influxes of Black residents from the Great Migration reduced the perceived intergroup distance between European immigrants and native-born Whites in Northern cities, generating assimilation into a broader White American ethnicity. In other words, the new presence of African Americans helped fuse a pan-ethnic White identity (Alba 1990), often to the detriment of African Americans, who now faced off against a more unified adversary.

Besides remaking the racial demographics of the non-South (and the South, for that matter (Gregory 2005)),[7] White consumers' responses to the Great Migration had important fiscal and

[6] Drawing on their innovative new measure, Logan and Parman (2017) report much higher levels of segregation--in both urban *and* rural settings, within the South and beyond it--much earlier than previously thought.

[7] Southern cities were major destinations for African Americans streaming out of the southern countryside (Gregory 2005: 32). Many of these cities experienced similar shifts to city manager systems in response to growing Black and interracial working class power in local politics, especially after the abolition of the Whites-only primary in the 1940s (which motivated African Americans to register and vote in non-partisan municipal elections as well as Democratic primaries). During the 1950s in Little Rock, Arkansas, the expanding influence of Black and labor-affiliated voters in mayoral elections prompted the "old guard" coalition of wealthy families and segregationists to champion a switch to the city manager system. As historian Michael Pierce (2019: 168) concludes, "[t]he adoption of Little Rock's city manager

political consequences. Noting that more than ninety percent of municipal revenues came from local property taxes (Fisher 1996), Tabellini (2020) finds that, all else equal, the Great Migration substantially reduced public spending and therefore public goods provision during the first wave. Further, he finds that this decline was due not to a reduction in tax rates, but to a sharp fall in assessed property values brought about by White residents' refusing to purchase homes in Black or liminal neighborhoods. Tellingly, he finds no change in the allocation of spending across budget categories, which he would not have found had reductions in spending been driven by White residents' (or authorities') resistance to spending that they considered redistributive or otherwise benefiting African Americans. Tabellini also argues that cities receiving more migrants during the first wave were more likely to fragment their local jurisdictions via suburbs (Alesina et al 2004) and special districts (Burns 1994), and more likely to resist annexation (Danielson 1976).

Political Consequences of the Great Migration

The Great Migration is now viewed as a key engine of the country's democratization. As Black Americans moved from Jim Crow states that enforced mass disenfranchisement to Northern states with secure voting rights, the growing Northern Black electorate became a force within state level Democratic parties and presidential elections and then pushed Northern politicians to support landmark national civil rights legislation (Schickler 2016; Grant 2020). Particularly in the Great Migration's second wave, Black migrants broke through White unions. They helped pull the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to the racial left, thereby contributing to the development of the ideology of racial liberalism, another motor of race reform agitation within the Democratic Party (Schickler 2016: ch. 3; Zieger 1995; Korstad and Lichtenstein 1988; also see Frymer and

system curtailed a biracial working class insurgency, ensured that real political power remained firmly in the hands of the economic elite, and was helped along by virulent racists who worked to separate Whites and Blacks in public life."

Grumbach 2021). The Great Migration also contributed to building a new Black militancy, particularly during World War II. Besides helping forge immediate gains on fair employment at the national (Kryder 2000) and state (Chen 2009) levels, these southern migrants used higher war incomes to produce a seven hundred percent increase in the number of NAACP branches nationally, as well as a boost to a broader and growing movement structure (e.g., Meier and Rudwick 1973). As Sugrue (2008: ch. 5) shows, African-American activists not only battled to destroy Northern cities' Jim Crow regulation of public accommodations, but became indispensable partners and resources to the southern movement.

Of course, White urban residents responded to these trends, often in offsetting ways. Calderon, Fouka, and Tabellini (2023) find that the Great Migration generally benefited the Democratic Party, congressional civil rights legislation, and civil rights activism in the North, in part through liberalizing White racial attitudes (but see Sahn 2023). That said, White residents also sparked crowd violence against fellow Black residents, especially during World War II (Kryder 2000; Herman 2005). As Sugrue (1996) and Hirsch (1983) show, for instance, Detroit and Chicago were both sites of "massive resistance" to a range of violations of the color line by Black residents, many of them newly arrived. These cities thereby became key cogs in the liberalization of the national Democratic Party, especially through their organized interests, their impact on state Democratic parties, and congressional representatives (Ogorzalek 2018; Grant 2020), but significantly ambiguous ones.

While Black migrants to the North earned better incomes, Derenoncourt (2022) finds that the historical legacies of the Great Migration were much grimmer: all else equal, Northern cities that received more Black migrants during the Great Migration produced lower rates of upward mobility for Black children born in the 1980s.[8] Perhaps relatedly, these same cities spent less per capita on

[8] There was no such effect from white migration from the South on Northern cities.

education, and more on policing, than other cities (2022: 405). And Eriksson (2019) shows that the Great Migration is responsible for a substantial increase in Black incarceration rates before World War II. Thus, somewhat parallel to the work of political historians, economists trace from the Great Migration contradictory legacies, many of which now serve as transmission belts of continuing racial inequality in social and economic outcomes (Sharkey 2013).

Expectations for the Great Migration and Urban Institutional Choice

Based on this discussion, we expect cities "treated" by the Great Migration to be more likely to act to insulate their political decisionmaking and administration from diversifying electorates, especially (but not only) via a switch to a city manager system. Consistent with the work of Alesina et al (1999), Alesina et al (2004), Alesina and Glaeser (2004), and Alesina and Tabellini (2023), on average we expect White voters *and* elites both to oppose sharing public goods with new African American and Hispanic residents.

A quick glance at the policy domain of policing supports this expectation. Black residents and organizations acting on their behalf held views on policing and state violence at mid-century that differed greatly from those of most local authorities (Francis 2014). In particular, these residents and organizations sought to reduce rampant police brutality, a problem so severe that President Hoover's own commission on law enforcement devoted an entire volume to "lawlessness in law enforcement" (Wickersham 1931: vol. 13; Elkins 2018: ch. 2). They also sought to reduce crime and improve police-community relations, in part through the hiring of Black police—a policy demand with important fiscal and coalitional ratifications given the place of public sector employment in the maintenance of urban coalitions. For example, Chicago's NAACP focused a great deal on policing

during the Great Migration. However, the city machine's reliance on a highly politicized police force frustrated the ability of Black voters and organizations to make and secure their policy demands (Balto 2019; Krinitsky 2017). This fact points again to the importance of municipal level formal institutions, as well as structures of local electoral coalitions, in mediating how—and how successfully—new residents could secure change through democratic channels.

Given that suffrage restriction by midcentury was more difficult to engineer, especially outside the South (Keyssar 2000), weakening the potential electoral influence of non-White voters to avoid paying for these public goods would require either a vote dilution device (such as at-large election districts for council seats) or a greater reliance on policymakers out of the direct reach of these voters. Relatedly, research on American political development also suggests that the addition of non-White voters would trigger an institutional response by urban incumbent elites. While many Northern states refused to reenfranchise (after a Jacksonian era wave of disfranchisement (Bateman 2018; Masur 2021)) Black voters after the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment in the long run succeeded in safeguarding *non*-southern voting rights. We could imagine that their own racism, their own perception of having different policy preferences than African Americans, or their own concerns for the impact of Black voters on their own governing coalitions might have motivated them to frustrate the electoral participation and political influence of non-White voters.

But it is significant that, in the latter half of the 19th century, the reentry of Black voters into Northern elections bore few costs for political incumbents precisely because there were so few such voters (Walton et al 2012; Davis 2011). The Great Migration could thus alter those calculations. In other words, we imagine that the Great Migration raised the prospect of the long-delayed potential costs of Black reenfranchisement for local authorities. In the 20th century, a new wave of suffrage restrictions might have been opposed by a diverse set of actors; thus, insulating municipal

policymaking from non-White voters may have been a common response to a rapidly diversifying electorate.

There are multiple pathways to effect such insulation. As we have discussed, switching from district to at-large elections would dilute the electoral power of minority groups in cities; indeed, Sahn (2023, Appendix Section D) finds that the Great Migration reduced the average number of seats on city councils and increased the percentage of city council seats chosen by an at-large electorate. Other city authorities intentionally transferred policymaking bodies involving policing, economic planning, and other matters to non-profits more easily controlled by incumbent elites and out of reach of the city's voters as Black voters grew more numerous, as was the case in Oakland, CA (Rhomberg 2004: ch. 7). At the limit, political elites use their influence in state legislatures—some of them so gerrymandered as to be classified as "countermajoritarian" bodies (Seifter 2021)—in effect to override democratically elected authorities through the state level appointment of emergency managers (Berman 2019: ch. 7). This corrosion of local democracy is much more likely in areas with larger African-American populations (Seamster 2018; Nickels, Clark, and Wood 2020). However, the most common pathway for municipal authorities, was, and remains, the city manager system.

Data and Methods

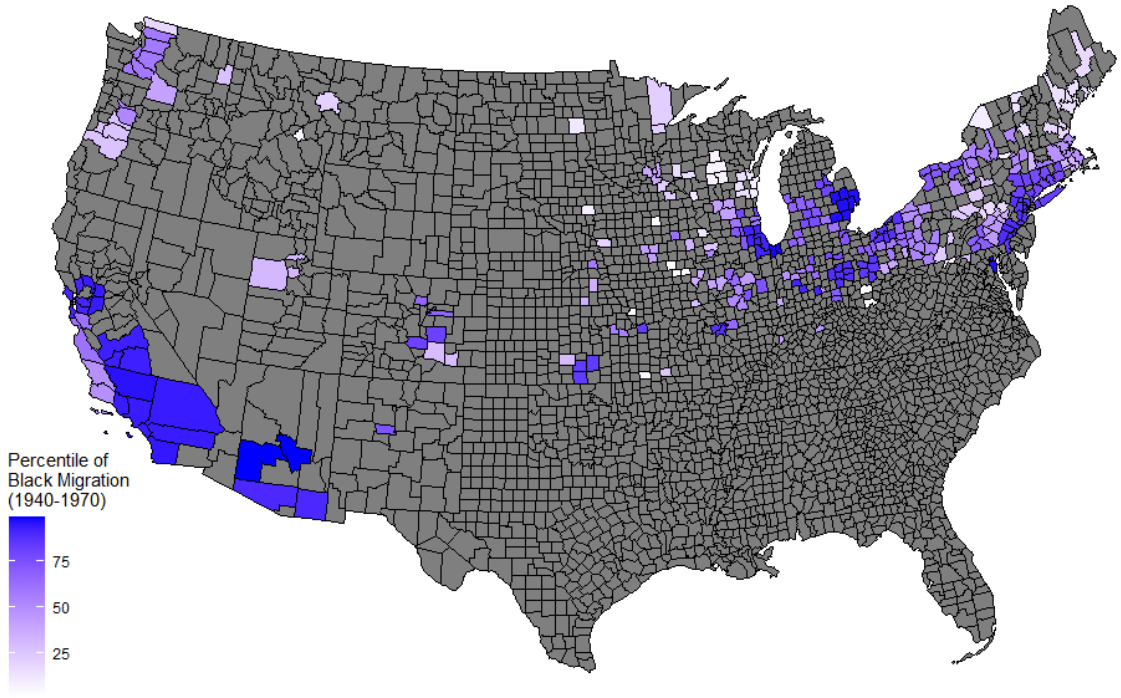
Great Migration Instrument

We use the Great Migration shift-share instrument developed by Derenoncourt (2022). Building on a Great Migration shift-share instrument from Boustan (2017), Derenoncourt uses the complete count 1940 Census microdata on the entire population of Black southern migrants into

Northern cities to create a dataset of all possible dyads of southern counties and Northern commuting zones (CZs). Importantly, Boustan (2017) and Derenoncourt (2022) find that, in general, even nearby southern counties had very distinct patterns of Black migration to Northern cities. Derenoncourt (2022) then uses machine learning to predict inflows and outflows of African Americans between these dyads based on many characteristics of local economies and societies. For instance, she finds that domestic World War II spending was especially helpful for explaining differences in outmigration from high-military spending areas in Virginia, where many Black residents moved to Baltimore, in contrast to Alabama, where many Black residents moved to Detroit after negative shocks to the cotton economy (2022: 379-380).

Based on these machine learning predictions, *predicted* Great Migration patterns serve as an instrument for *actual* migration patterns of the Great Migration. The instrument isolates exogenous variation in Black migration to Northern cities by estimating the amount of migration that is above or beyond what the model would predict based on observed local characteristics. For example, some cities were very high on both predicted and actual Great Migration influxes, such as Gary, Indiana. Other cities, such as Burlington, Vermont, had low predicted and actual Great Migration influxes. By contrast, some cities like San Diego, California had low predicted but high actual Black in-migration, while other cities, such as nearby Santa Barbara, had real Great Migration influxes that were far smaller than the shift-share instrument would predict.

Figure 1: Destinations for the Great Migration of Black Americans, 1940-1970



Note: Figure 3 shows the distribution of Black migration (1940-1970) to US counties in non-southern states (Derenoncourt 2022). Migration is measured at the commuting zone level; commuting zones are clusters of counties.

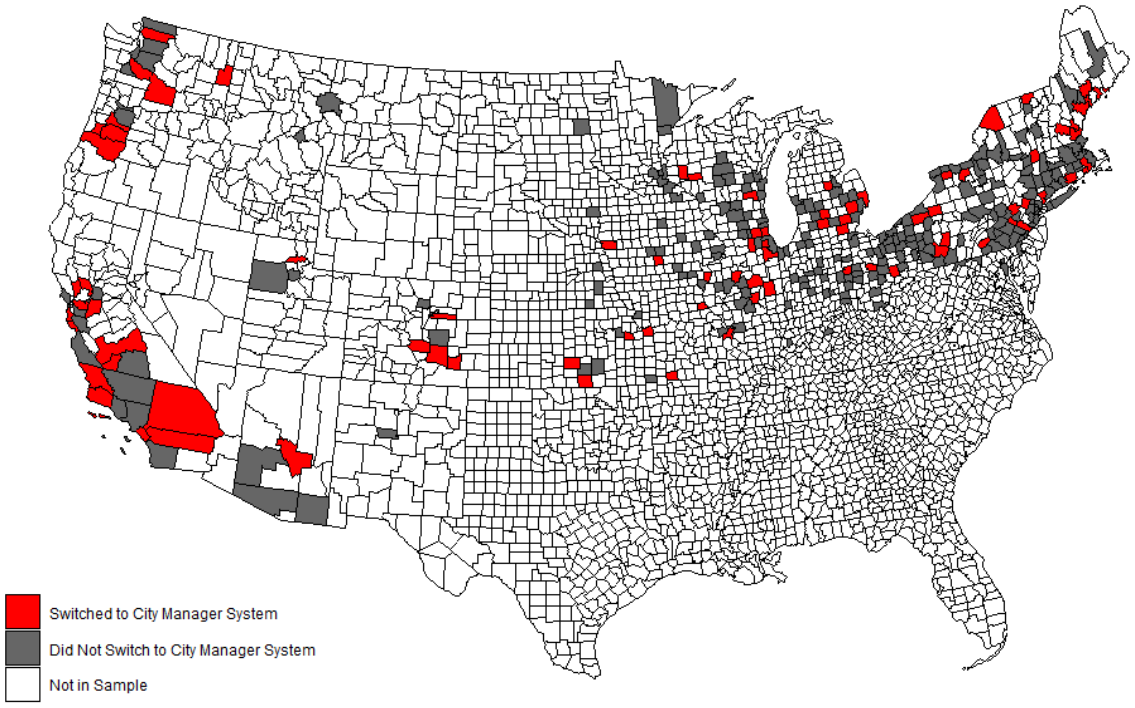
The final sample of Great Migration destinations for our main analyses includes commuting zones in states that, on net, increased their Black populations between 1940 and 1970: states in the northeastern, midwestern, and western Census regions, as well as Maryland and Delaware.[9]

[9] The cities of Boise City, ID; East Providence, RI; Huntington Park, CA; West Haven, CT; and Warwick, RI were not included due to missing historical Black population data.

Local Political Institutions

Our data on cities' political institutions come from historical issues of the *Municipal Yearbook* (published by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA)). Research assistants scanned physical copies of *Municipal Yearbook* tables and cleaned the digitized datasets for errors in optical character recognition. *Municipal Yearbook* data has been used in major studies of political competition in urban regimes (Trounstine 2008), enforcement of the Voting Rights Act (Ang 2019), proportional representation in local government (Santucci 2022), race and municipal employment (McClain 1993), and land zoning (Sahn 2023). However, we believe that ours is the first study to use a measure of switches to city manager systems over this time period.

Figure 2: Switches to City Manager System, 1940-1972



Note: Figure 4 shows Great Migration destination counties in our sample in which no municipalities switched to a city manager system (gray), or at least one municipality switched to a city manager system (red).

In 1940, 15 percent of cities in our sample featured city manager systems. By 1972, that number had grown to 42 percent, a 27 percentage-point increase. Of the 167 cities in our sample that switched to city manager government between 1940 and 1972, 125 switched from a mayor-council system. Three switched from town meeting systems, and 39 from town commissions.

Table 2: Switches to City Manager System, 1940-1972

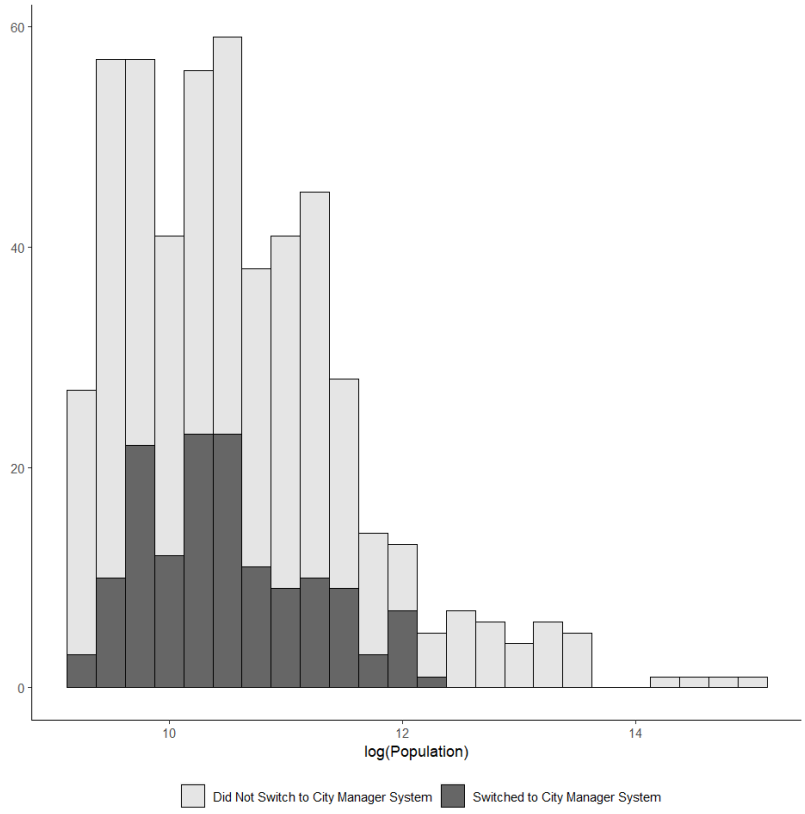
City	1940	1972	City	1940	1972	City	1940	1972
Globe, AZ	MC	CM	DeKalb, IL	MC	CM	Lodi, NJ	MC	CM
Albany, CA	MC	CM	Downers Grove, IL	CO	CM	Ridgewood, NJ	CO	CM
Martinez, CA	MC	CM	Glen Ellyn, IL	MC	CM	Newton, NJ	TM	CM
Fresno, CA	CO	CM	Hinsdale, IL	MC	CM	Batavia, NY	MC	CM
Hanford, CA	MC	CM	Lombard, IL	MC	CM	Long Beach, NY	MC	CM
Arcadia, CA	MC	CM	Naperville, IL	CO	CM	Geneva, NY	MC	CM
Bell, CA	MC	CM	Villa Park, IL	MC	CM	Troy, NY	MC	CM
Bev. Hills, CA	MC	CM	Wheaton, IL	CO	CM	Ogdensburg, NY	MC	CM
Culver City, CA	MC	CM	Elgin, IL	CO	CM	Bronxville, NY	MC	CM
Hunt. Park., CA	MC	CM	Highland Park, IL	CO	CM	Hastings, NY	MC	CM
Inglewood, CA	MC	CM	Decatur, IL	CO	CM	Mount Kisco, NY	MC	CM
Lynwood, CA	MC	CM	Wood River, IL	MC	CM	Ossining, NY	CO	CM
Monrovia, CA	MC	CM	Centralia, IL	CO	CM	Peekskill, NY	MC	CM
Montebello, CA	MC	CM	Woodstock, IL	MC	CM	Rye, NY	MC	CM
S. Fernando, CA	MC	CM	Bloomington, IL	MC	CM	Delaware, OH	MC	CM
San Gabriel, CA	MC	CM	Normal, IL	MC	CM	Zanesville, OH	MC	CM
S. Monica, CA	CO	CM	Peoria, IL	MC	CM	Sidney, OH	MC	CM
Torrance, CA	MC	CM	Joliet, IL	CO	CM	Corvallis, OR	MC	CM
Whittier, CA	MC	CM	Burlington, IA	CO	CM	Eugene, OR	MC	CM
Napa, CA	MC	CM	Des Moines, IA	CO	CM	Albany, OR	MC	CM
Anaheim, CA	MC	CM	Sioux City, IA	CO	CM	Salem, OR	MC	CM
Fullerton, CA	MC	CM	Lawrence, KS	MC	CM	Dormont, PA	MC	CM
Santa Ana, CA	MC	CM	Hutchinson, KS	CO	CM	Oakmont, PA	MC	CM
Corona, CA	MC	CM	Wellington, KS	CO	CM	Wilkinsburg, PA	MC	CM
Riverside, CA	MC	CM	Brunswick, ME	TM	CM	Hollidaysburg, PA	MC	CM
Colton, CA	MC	CM	Augusta, ME	MC	CM	Bristol, PA	MC	CM
Ontario, CA	MC	CM	Gardiner, ME	MC	CM	Lehighton, PA	MC	CM
Redlands, CA	MC	CM	Rockland, ME	MC	CM	West Chester, PA	MC	CM
Natl. City, CA	MC	CM	Bath, ME	MC	CM	Meadville, PA	CO	CM
Lodi, CA	MC	CM	Gloucester, MA	CO	CM	Mechanicsburg, PA	MC	CM
S. Luis Ob., CA	MC	CM	Concord, MA	TM	CM	Middletown, PA	MC	CM
Burlingame, CA	MC	CM	Lowell, MA	MC	CM	Indiana, PA	MC	CM
Daly City, CA	MC	CM	Medford, MA	MC	CM	Allentown, PA	CO	CM
S. Barbara, CA	MC	CM	Worcester, MA	MC	CM	East Stroudsburg, PA	MC	CM
Santa Maria, CA	MC	CM	Albion, MI	MC	CM	Stroudsburg, PA	MC	CM
Santa Clara, CA	MC	CM	Battle Creek, MI	CO	CM	Pottstown, PA	MC	CM
Santa Cruz, CA	CO	CM	Marshall, MI	MC	CM	Tamaqua, PA	MC	CM
Santa Paula, CA	MC	CM	Charlotte, MI	MC	CM	Oil City, PA	CO	CM
Woodland, CA	MC	CM	Adrian, MI	CO	CM	Warren, PA	MC	CM
Englewood, CO	MC	CM	Roseville, MI	CO	CM	Latrobe, PA	MC	CM
Longmont, CO	MC	CM	Midland, MI	MC	CM	Barrington, RI	MC	CM
Canon City, CO	MC	CM	Berkley, MI	CO	CM	Newport, RI	MC	CM
La Junta, CO	MC	CM	Holland, MI	MC	CM	East Providence, RI	MC	CM
Pueblo, CO	CO	CM	Port Huron, MI	CO	CM	Ogden, UT	CO	CM

Hartford, CT	MC	CM	Ann Arbor, MI	MC	CM	Saint Albans C., VT	MC	CM
Norwich, CT	MC	CM	Ypsilanti, MI	MC	CM	Puyallup, WA	MC	CM
Champaign, IL	CO	CM	G. Pointe Pk., MI	MC	CM	Tacoma, WA	CO	CM
Brookfield, IL	MC	CM	Springfield, MO	CO	CM	Anacortes, WA	MC	CM
Elmwood Prk, IL	MC	CM	Independence, MO	MC	CM	Spokane, WA	CO	CM
Evanston, IL	MC	CM	Joplin, MO	CO	CM	Yakima, WA	CO	CM
La Grange, IL	MC	CM	Clayton, MO	MC	CM	Menomonie, WI	CO	CM
Maywood, IL	MC	CM	W. Groves, MO	CO	CM	Eau Claire, WI	CO	CM
Oak Park, IL	MC	CM	Concord, NH	MC	CM	Fond du Lac, WI	CO	CM
Park Ridge, IL	MC	CM	Portsmouth, NH	MC	CM	Whitefish Bay, WI	MC	CM
Skokie, IL	MC	CM	Dover, NH	MC	CM	Oshkosh, WI	MC	CM
DeKalb, IL	MC	CM	Fair Lawn, NJ	MC	CM			

In summary, our treatment variable is a measure of Black migration at the commuting zone level, and our outcome measure, switching to a city manager system, is measured at the municipality level clustered within commuting zones.

Not all kinds of cities tend to have or switch to city manager systems during the 20th century. City manager systems are mostly concentrated among smaller and midsize cities rather than the U.S.'s largest metropolises. It is worth noting that in 1950, a majority of Americans inhabiting cities lived beyond the one hundred largest cities (authors' calculations, 1950 Census). Comparing cities that do and do not switch to city manager government between 1940 and 1972, the median populations are similar: 32,263 for cities that switch to city manager, and 35,862 for cities that do not. However, the country's largest metropolises, virtually all of which retain mayor-council government, produce more distinct *mean* populations: about 46,500 for cities that switch to city manager, and 126,000 for those that do not. (In our sample overall, the mean city population as of 1972 is about 104,000, and the median is about 33,500.) This is apparent in Figure 3 below, where we plot the distribution of city populations of cities that do and do not switch to city manager. As we describe in more detail in later sections, the fact that no large U.S. metropolis switches to a city manager system prompts us to perform additional empirical analyses that focus on smaller and midsize cities.

Figure 3: Switches to City Manager System by Population



Estimation Strategy

We implement our instrumental variables design with traditional two-stage least squares models, which provide our main results of the effect of the Great Migration on municipal institutions. Our preferred specification uses a binary indicator of city manager status in 1972 as the dependent variable and adjusts for 1940 city manager status (a lagged dependent variable) to estimate the effect of the Great Migration on *change* to a city manager system.[10] We also follow Derenoncourt (2022) in our main specification by adjusting for Census region fixed effects and pretreatment (as of 1940) educational upward mobility, the share of the labor force in manufacturing

[10] Robustness checks in the Appendix instead use a "change score" that takes on a value of 1 if a city changes to a city manager system between 1940 and 1972.

in commuting zones, and Black in-migration. We show in Appendix Table A3 that these pretreatment covariates are relatively balanced across cities that do and do not switch to city manager systems.

We cluster standard errors at the commuting zone level in all specifications because this is the geographic level at which the Great Migration instrument is assigned. For the main two-stage least squares estimates, we report both traditional cluster-robust (CR1) standard errors and bootstrapped standard errors based on the cluster bootstrap-t procedure in Cameron, Gelbach, and Miller (2008).

Table 3: First Stage

	Model 1	Model 2
City Manager (1940)	8.1336	7.1832
	(3.1663)	(2.1899)
$\hat{GM}$	0.7160	0.2846
	(0.0875)	(0.0877)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes
F statistic	47.8394	59.9200
Num. obs.	593	593
Num. clusters	129	129

Note: Table 2 presents the first stage regression for predicted Great Migration as an instrument for the actual Great Migration. Robust standard errors clustered on commuting zone are in parentheses.

Table 3 shows the results for the first stage of the two-stage least squares estimator. As expected, predicted Great Migration flows are strongly and significantly correlated with real education flows. The F-statistic in this first-stage regression, which helps us understand the strength of the instrument (Bound, Jaeger, and Baker 1995), is 47.8 for the specification without controls and

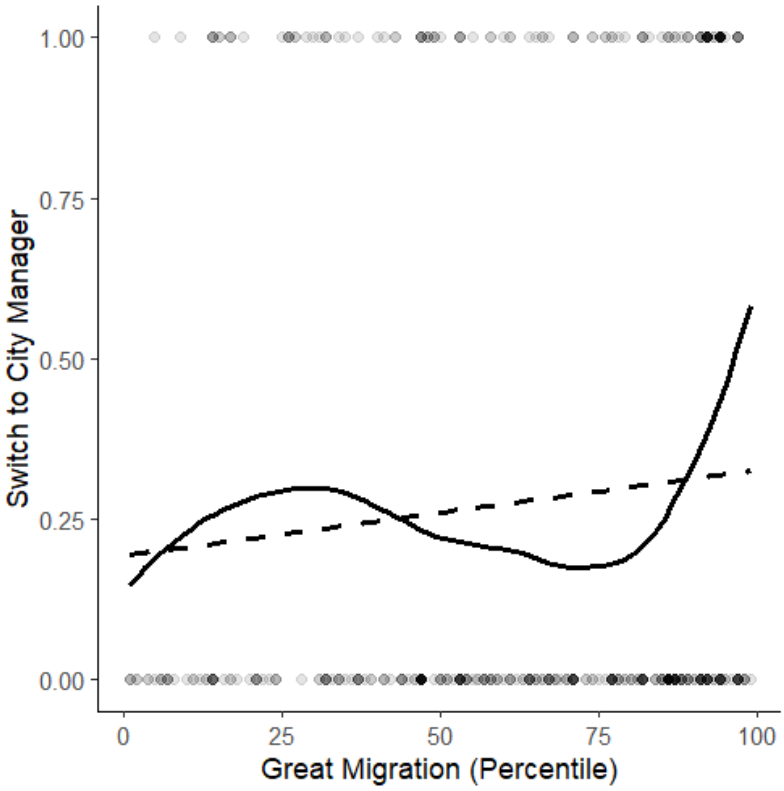
59.9 for the specification with controls, suggesting that the Great Migration instrument is reasonably strong. Table 4 provides the results of a placebo test. Following Derenoncourt (2022), we show that there is no relationship between the instrument and the dependent variable as measured in 1940, before the migration of Black Americans that we study in this paper.

Table 4: Placebo Test

	DV = CM in 1940	DV = CM in 1940
$\hat{GM}$ (1940-1970)	0.0006	−0.0003
	(0.0008)	(0.0013)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes
Num. obs.	601	601
Num. clusters	129	129

Figure 4 provides a descriptive snapshot of the data, with raw Great Migration influxes on the x-axis and switching to city manager between 1940 and 1972 on the y-axis. In addition to the scatterplot, the figure includes a linear regression line (the dashed line), as well as a LOESS fit (the solid line), to summarize the relationship between the two variables. The linear relationship shows a modest positive slope, whereas the LOESS fit shows that cities within commuting zones with the highest Great Migration percentiles tend to be driving the positive relationship. The commuting zones with Great Migration influxes above the 90th percentile and with cities that switch to city manager systems at the highest rates during this period include the Detroit-Flint, MI commuting zone, the Fresno-Visalia-Tulare-Parterville, CA commuting zone, and the Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA commuting zone.

Figure 4: Correlation between Great Migration and Switch to City Manager



Results

Table 5 presents our main results of the effect of the Great Migration on switching to a city manager system. As a reminder, the OLS results are from a regression of city manager system on a city's Great Migration percentile; the reduced form (RF) results are from a regression of city manager system on predicted Great Migration; and our IV specifications are from a two-stage least square model using predicted Great Migration as an instrument for actual Great Migration patterns with city manager system as the outcome.

In our main IV results, we find that a one-percentile increase of in-migration of Black Americans to a city's commuting zone increases a city's likelihood of switching to a city manager

system by between 0.23 (no controls) and 0.75 (controls) percentage-points.[11] In other words, an exogenous increase in Black migration that is equivalent to the difference in Black migration to the Lancaster-Reading-Harrisburg-Lebanon-Carlisle commuting zone (44th percentile of Great Migration destinations) on the one hand, and the Philadelphia-Vineland-Millville-Bridgeton commuting zone (89th percentile of Great Migration destinations), on the other, would translate to a 10 to 34 percentage-point increase in the probability of switching to a city manager system. We believe this effect size is substantial. For context, recall that 27 percent of cities in our sample switch to city manager systems during this time. The OLS estimates are smaller; this downward bias is likely due to the fact that African Americans moved to Northern cities based on factors that are negatively correlated with switching to a city manager system. For instance, many have moved to cities where they expected more public sector jobs to be available; these cities, in turn, were more likely to feature machines that could resist calls to switch to city manager government (see Appendix for a further discussion).

[11] We do not include stars for significance, but the p-values for these treatment effect estimates are 0.088 and 0.039, respectively.

Table 5: Effect of Great Migration on City Manager System

	OLS	OLS	RF	RF	IV	IV
City Manager (1940)	0.5239	0.5149	0.5343	0.5328	0.5156	0.4789
	(0.0590)	(0.0584)	(0.0532)	(0.0532)	(0.0593)	(0.0668)
GM	0.0012	0.0021				
	(0.0011)	(0.0013)				
$\hat{GM}$			0.0016	0.0021	0.0023	0.0075
			(0.0010)	(0.0009)	(0.0013)	(0.0036)
Bootstrap SE					(0.0015)	(0.0031)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Num. obs.	593	593	593	593	593	593
Num. clusters	129	129	129	129	129	129

Note: Table 3 presents OLS, reduced form (RF), and instrumental variables (IV) estimates for the effect of the Great Migration (1940-1970) on switching to a city manager system (1940-1972). Robust standard errors clustered on commuting zone are in parentheses. We provide additional cluster bootstrap standard errors for the IV models.

As discussed earlier and presented in Figure 3, smaller and midsize cities are those that tend to switch to city manager systems. If large metropolises have virtually zero probability of switching they would make problematic comparison cases. We therefore run our models on a restricted sample, eliminating cities that have 1972 populations above 654,153—the population level of the largest US city with a city manager system as of 1972 (San Antonio, TX).[12] Table 6 presents these results, which are very similar to our main results in Table 5. In general, the magnitude of the estimates and the standard errors are very slightly larger using the restricted sample in Table 6.

[12] This restricted sample eliminates the following cities (in descending order of 1972 population): New York, NY; Chicago, IL; Los Angeles, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Detroit, MI; Baltimore, MD; Cleveland, OH; Indianapolis, IN; Milwaukee, WI; San Francisco, CA; San Diego, CA; Boston, MA; and St. Louis, MO.

Table 6: Effect of Great Migration on City Manager System (Excluding Large Cities)

	OLS	OLS	RF	RF	IV	IV
City Manager (1940)	0.5133	0.5050	0.5287	0.5264	0.5043	0.4686
	(0.0649)	(0.0636)	(0.0585)	(0.0587)	(0.0649)	(0.0728)
GM	0.0017	0.0023				
	(0.0012)	(0.0013)				
$\hat{GM}$			0.0020	0.0021	0.0028	0.0077
			(0.0010)	(0.0010)	(0.0014)	(0.0040)
Bootstrap SE					(0.0016)	(0.0032)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Num. obs.	505	505	505	505	505	505
Num. clusters	127	127	127	127	127	127
First Stage F-Stat.					51.0529	67.5691

Note: Table 4 presents OLS, reduced form (RF), and instrumental variables (IV) estimates for the effect of the Great Migration (1940-1970) on switching to a city manager system (1940-1972) on a sample of cities with 1972 populations below 654,153. Robust standard errors clustered on commuting zone are in parentheses. We provide additional cluster bootstrap standard errors for the IV models.

Taken together, the results show a robust relationship: exogenous influxes of Black residents increased the likelihood that Northern cities switched to city manager systems. Next, we delve into the possible mechanisms behind this relationship with a case study of Santa Monica, CA.

The Case of Santa Monica, California

Santa Monica, California illustrates these dynamics well.[13] This might seem surprising given its reputation as a haven for the New Left and racial liberalism, and its status as the political base of

[13] This case study benefits from many years of litigation concerning the city's likely violation of the California Voting Rights Act (Greenwood and Stephanopoulos 2023). This has yielded vast amounts of material in the form of amicus briefs and, most importantly, the expert testimony of Morgan Kousser (2018). The California Supreme Court ruled on this case last week (Aug. 24, 2023) largely in favor of the plaintiffs.

Tom Hayden's highly successful rent control movement (Kann 1986). However, as we show here, White elites' concerns about the political consequences of the Great Migration sparked an overhaul of the city's political system in 1946 that insulated policymaking from residents of color and organized labor.

In 1906, Santa Monica, like most California cities, adopted a city charter providing for a strong mayor (with the power to veto council-approved ordinances) and a seven-member city council whose members were elected via districts. As efforts to spread commission government increased, in 1914 it switched to a commission system. Each of three commissioners, elected at large, would supervise one of three domains: public safety, public works, and finance. The Public Safety Commissioner was also *ex officio* Mayor and Commission chair (Kousser 2018: 6; Santa Monica City Council 2021). In the citywide referendum on the new charter, the only opposition came from the city's poorest precincts (Kousser 2018: 52-53).

By the early 1920s, national discussions pointed out several flaws with commission government. In particular, critics considered the division of policy areas—one per commission member—as discouraging city administrators from seeing the city and its interrelated problems as one whole. National networks of reformers soon coordinated on their preference for centralizing political authority in a single city manager (Rice 1977; Stewart 1950).

As World War II drew to a close, Santa Monica's elites, led by the Chamber of Commerce and encouraged by the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, the city's dominant (and right-wing) newspaper, formed a "citywide" Citizens Charter Committee. This Committee called for elections to a "Board of Freeholders" that would draft a new charter. All fifteen freeholders elected were White; 14 lived in the town's wealthiest area, and 13 received the endorsement of the *Evening Outlook* (*Pico Neighborhood Association v. Santa Monica* 2020: 3; Kousser 2018: 6). The freeholders

proposed a switch from a commission to a city manager system. Rather than three commissioners, voters would elect seven city councilors, all at-large. As with most city manager governments, Santa Monica would retain a mayor, but the merely ceremonial office would be chosen and filled by a member of the city council (Santa Monica City Council 2021).

Critiques of commission governance were old hat by 1920; why did Santa Monica wait until 1946 to consider seriously a switch to a city manager system? Perceptions of the city's demographic changes clearly provide part of the answer. The town had long been home to a large non-Hispanic White majority, a small Hispanic minority, as well as smaller communities of Asian- and African-Americans. However, Santa Monica grew sharply during the war. This growth was spurred by the Douglas (later McDonnell-Douglas) Corporation's military transport aircraft factory, which itself employed more individuals (43,000) than lived in the town in 1930 (about 37,000) (Parker 2013: ch. 2). The city had grown by 44% from 1930 to 1940, to 53,500. Six years later, Santa Monica's population had grown another 26%, to more than 67,000. While the share of non-Anglos remained small, the *Evening Outlook* repeatedly discussed the city's non-White population. Segregated in a small area, it had grown by 69% in just six years, more than half of that growth driven by an influx of African-Americans (Kousser 2018: 54, 191). Moreover, more than *six thousand* African-Americans moved to neighboring Los Angeles each month in 1943; 200,000 arrived in the 1940s alone (Sides 2003: 43).

Interracial tensions were also growing, as was inflammatory rhetoric among White elites about California's demographic transition. This transition, and the growing support among Democrats and some Republicans (including Republican Governor Earl Warren) for state level actions to reduce racial discrimination, increased the political salience of race relations and anxieties about demographic change (Chen, Mickey, and Van Houweling 2008; HoSang 2010).

In a series of editorials in favor of the switch to city manager government, the *Evening Outlook* argued that the city "can and should develop into a remarkably homogeneous community. . . The cry that 'minorities must be represented' " should be rejected. The Freeholders "s hould not allow special groups to write any part of the charter for them." Moreover, the "interests of minorities is always best protected by a system which favors the election of liberal-minded persons who are not compelled to play peanut politics," a mode of politics made much more likely in the absence of the centralization of authority in a city manager and in a world without at-large elections (Kousser 2018: 7, 60).

Opponents of the new charter agreed that district elections would help elect African-American, Hispanic, and pro-labor candidates. More importantly for our purposes, they echoed charges across the country by working class interests that the centralization of authority in unelected (and unrecallable) managers was undemocratic, even—in the words of labor spokesmen in Houston—a system fit for "Hitler" (Bridges 1997a: 113). As Santa Monica's "Anti-Charter Committee" argued,

> [w]ith seven councilmen elected at-large . . . and a city manager responsible to the seven councilmen plus a dictatorship that has so long ruled Santa Monica (without regard to minorities) where will these people be? The proposed ruling groups control the chief of police . . . and through him the police force . . . and the city attorney, the personnel director, the health officer, etc. Where will the laboring man go? Where will the Jewish, colored, or Mexican go for aid in his special problems? . . . The proposed charter is not fair -- it is not democratic. It is a power grab (quoted in Kousser 2018: 61).

Proposition 11, a statewide ballot referendum appearing on the same November, 1946 ballot as a referendum to accept or reject the city's switch to city manager government, called for California to establish fairly robust anti-discrimination regulation of workplaces through a state level Fair Employment Practices Committee (Chen, Mickey, and Van Houweling 2008). Ecological

analysis of voting returns for Proposition 11—which failed by more than a two-to-one margin—makes clear two important dynamics. First, Republican precincts throughout the state were highly opposed to Proposition 11, despite backing from party leadership; this held true for Santa Monica's political leaders (as evidenced by the *Evening Outlook*) as well (Kousser 2018: 58). Meanwhile, Democratic Party-aligned organized interests, party leaders, and voters strongly backed the measure.

Second, in Santa Monica, support for the new charter and opposition to a state level FEPC were highly correlated: about 85% of residents who opposed the FEPC backed the new charter, while more than two-thirds of those who supported the FEPC opposed the charter (Kousser 2018: 63-65). Given the usefulness of the Proposition 11 referendum as a window onto racial attitudes (Chen, Mickey, and Van Houweling 2008; HoSang 2010), these high correlations suggest a strong racial dimension to voters' preferences over municipal governance. Further, they corroborate our view that racial demographic change motivated efforts to insulate municipal policymaking from more racially diverse electorates.

The effects of the change in Santa Monica's governance have continued to reverberate for decades. In the 1950s and 1960s, the all-white, elite-dominated city government implemented "urban renewal" and freeway construction that decimated Hispanic and African-American neighborhoods and dispersed thousands of their residents, many of them outside of the city (Kousser 2018: 67). Municipal elections remain highly polarized by race, with Hispanics, now about 13% of the population, "usually quite cohesive in their voting behavior," and non-Hispanic whites "sufficiently cohesive as to insure that Latino candidates usually lost." In the sixty years since the switch to an at-large, city manager system, fifteen of sixteen Hispanic candidates have failed to capture a local office (Kousser 2018: 32). Indeed, the self-styled racial liberals running the city since the late 1970s

(Kann 1986) have continued to block changes to the city's political structure, in large part because their 'party'—Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights—has benefited from slate nominations that benefit from the continued use of at-large elections (Kousser 2018: 91-92, 94). As Morgan Kousser told a journalist, in light of Santa Monica, Los Angeles, and other cities' experiences, "we've realized California is not all that different from the South" (Kramer 1992; Kousser 1999: ch. 2).

Conclusion

The conventional story of democratization in the 20th century United States highlights the triumph of national democratic reforms over the subnational authoritarianism of Jim Crow states. More recently, scholars have highlighted a counter-narrative that stresses the incompleteness of this democratization on the ground, with its manifestations in racially authoritarian policing (Soss and Weaver 2017) and persistent and even expanding *de facto* segregation in housing and education (Massey and Denton 1989). Additional research has documented how many state governments, enabled by Supreme Court decisions, have rolled back democratization through extreme gerrymandering and voter suppression laws in recent decades (Grumbach 2022). Importantly, much of this research on America's incomplete democratization, especially research on policing and mass incarceration, has focused on the local level.

Yet even as we have learned much about the local manifestations of unequal democracy and the role of state governments in weakening democratic institutions, we know much less about the role of formal *local institutions* in the incomplete democratization of the U.S. These local institutions are key because they mediate the relationship between political inputs, such as the political preferences and participation of local residents, and outputs, such as the rise of authoritarian policing

(Gonzalez 2020) and mass incarceration. Here, we consider the effect of the Great Migration on local institutions. The Great Migration expanded Black electorates in northern cities, creating new incentives for politicians to respond to the concerns of Black Americans and increasing the presence of Black elected officials. But why did this diversifying democracy in northern cities fail to create a more racially egalitarian democracy?

We argue that one answer to this question is that, in response to the Great Migration, Northern cities moved to *insulate* their political institutions from their increasingly Black electorates. We study this question quantitatively using a shift-share instrument that isolates exogenous influxes of Black Americans to northern cities. We find that greater influxes of Black migrants caused northern cities to switch to city manager systems, which insulate municipal administration from voters. Our finding helps make sense of incomplete political incorporation and continuing political inequality (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 2003a, 2003b; Mollenkopf 1991) brought about by disempowering city council members, mayors, and their Black supporters in local electorates. Relatedly, our study helps to make sense of other findings in the political economy literature, such as the finding that the Great Migration led to an increase in police spending per capita but not education per capita at the local level (Derenoncourt 2022), and intensified efforts to displace residents of color via "urban renewal" (Shi et al 2022).

Our inquiry opens up paths for further research on democratic institutions at the local level. In comparative view, America's democratization was shaped to an unusual degree by its distinctive federal system. We thus see a need to study the links between municipal institutions and downstream outcomes related to local policy and bureaucratic responsiveness to constituents, as well as outcomes related to civil rights and liberties in practice. Nowhere is this more urgent than in the area of policing, where, despite nominal democratic equality in law, policing remains highly authoritarian

and unresponsive to race-class subjugated communities. What is the relationship between municipal institutional structure and racially authoritarian policing?

Reflecting on an analysis of a century of efforts to build political monopolies at the local level, Jessica Trounstine (2009: 93) concludes, "[T]hose in power can be expected to build defenses against durable shifts in governing authority, and when they succeed, as both machine and reform coalitions did, portions of the population are likely to suffer." We believe that Trounstine's conclusion has broad implications for American democratization as a whole. The decentralized system of American federalism means that any assessment of American democracy must account for the state of democracy at the national, state, and local levels, as well as feedbacks among these levels. Despite increased scholarly attention on the role of the state level in American democracy, literature on local democracy has been relatively isolated from mainstream literature on American democracy as a whole. We argue that this has obscured how changes at the local level served to corrode many of the gains of national democracy reforms in the 20th century.

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Appendix for
"The Insulation of Local Governance from Black Electoral Power: Northern Cities and the Great Migration"

Robustness Checks

Table A1: First Stage (Alternate Specification)

	Model 1	Model 2
$\hat{GM}$	0.7140	0.2793
	(0.0913)	(0.0936)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes
F statistic	33.07	58.66
Num. obs.	590	590
Num. clusters	129	129

Note: Table A1 presents the first stage regression for predicted Great Migration as an instrument for the Great Migration. In contrast to the main specifications in Table 2, Model 1 and Model 2 do not control for 1940 municipal government type. Robust standard errors clustered on commuting zone are in parentheses.

Table A2: Main Results (Alternate Specifications)

	OLS	OLS	RF	RF	IV	IV
GM	0.0006	0.0004				
	(0.0012)	(0.0012)				
$\hat{GM}$			0.0018	0.0025	0.0025	0.0089
			(0.0010)	(0.0009)	(0.0015)	(0.0049)
Bootstrap SE					(0.0016)	(0.0046)
Region FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Num. obs.	590	590	590	590	590	590
Num. clusters	129	129	129	129	129	129

Note: Table A2 presents OLS, reduced form (RF), and instrumental variables (IV) estimates for the effect of the Great Migration (1940-1970) on switching to a city manager system (1940-1972). In contrast to the main specifications in Table 3, these models use change to a city manager system as the dependent variable and therefore do not control for 1940 municipal government type. Robust standard errors clustered on commuting zone are in parentheses. We provide additional cluster bootstrap standard errors for the IV models.

Table A3: Balance on Pretreatment Covariates

Treatment	Black Migration (1935-1940)	Upward Mobility (1940)	Manufacturing Share (1940)
Switched *from* city manager system	0.03	56.13	20.69
Did not switch	0.13	54.25	25.47
Switched *to* city manager system	0.15	55.11	22.21