Race and Representation in Local Legislative Politics

Evidence from the Great Migration in Chicago and Cleveland

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Data and analyses are preliminary; please do not circulate without permission

Abstract

Black Americans have faced substantial barriers to legislative representation throughout American history. In this paper, we draw from two unique contexts – the Chicago and Cleveland City Councils during the first wave of the Great Migration – to explore whether legislative institutions are used as a means to reduce or elevate Black influence in the policy-making process. Drawing on fine-grained ward- and alderperson-level data, we show that on average greater Black populations at the ward level do not affect the likelihood of that ward's alderperson serving as a committee chair or the overall quality of their committee portfolio. We find some limited evidence that this is only the case when Black-ward alderpersons are in the majority, however; when in the minority party, we find a negative relationship between Black population share and committee chair service. Qualitative evidence from Cleveland suggests that local party organizations provided a vehicle for Black inclusion in local politics. Our analyses provide rich new evidence for the nature of local legislative politics amidst the demographic upheaval of the First Great Migration.

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In 1920, the *Chicago Defender*, one of the nation's most influential Black newspapers, urged Black Americans to leave the South, stating, "Leave for all quarters of the globe. Get out of the South. Your being there in the numbers in which you are gives the southern politician too strong a hold on your progress..." (Scott 1920). This call encouraged Black Americans to seek freedom and opportunity in the North, offering an alternative to the Jim Crow restrictions of the South and prompting significant white resistance (Boustan 2016). The following was expressed at a meeting for residents of Kenwood and Hyde Park by a white homeowner in Chicago: "[t]here are men who proclaim to the world and ourselves that the destiny of the black man and the white man is one. I do not believe it; I cannot believe it" (on Race Relations 1922). The conditions for Black Americans in the North were not kind; the growing Black population in northern and western cities often intensified racial hostility and efforts to isolate Black communities economically, socially, and residentially (Derenoncourt 2022; Gregory 2006). White backlash to an increasing Black population played a significant role in shaping the challenges faced by those who moved north during this period to parties.

In this paper, we explore the consequences of the racial demographic shift induced by the first wave of the Great Migration in the context of local legislative institutions. The history of the United States is studded with creative efforts to dilute and suppress Black political participation and representation via electoral institutions: racial gerrymandering designed to "pack" Black voters into few lopsided districts (Kousser 1999, 26), transitioning offices from elected to appointed (Komisarchik N.D.; Grumbach, Mickey, and Ziblatt N.D.), the use of at-large, rather than district-based, local elections (Abott and Magazinnik 2020), and more.[1] In this paper, we ask whether legislative organization is another method through which Black political power is eroded. White majorities being threatened by the expansion of Black power might have resulted in attempts to further suppress Black political agency within legislative bodies. On the other hand, Black Americans were a potentially crucial voting bloc in the tightly matched local

[1]See Kousser (1999) for an excellent overview of different methods of Black vote dilution.

politics of the early-to-mid twentieth century, which may have resulted in their disproportionate incorporation into and elevation within partisan structures in legislative politics. As Grant (2020) writes in a recent study on the politics of the Great Migration, "a large influx of potential new voters could lead to change in a political environment" (5), suggesting that parties may have actively competed to capture the Black vote.

To test this argument, we examine the politics of the Chicago and Cleveland City Councils during the First Great Migration. During this period, Chicago's population went from less than two percent Black in 1900 (Gosnell 1933, 330) to approximately eight percent Black by 1940, with more than a quarter million African Americans living in the city by that time (Manning 2005). Similarly, Cleveland witnessed massive Black population expansion between 1910 and 1940, rising from around 10,000 before the First World War to 34,451 by 1920 and more than 85,000 by 1940.[2] Black Southern newcomers overwhelmingly settled in concentrated areas of these cities; combined with white flight, this in-migration resulted in Black Americans rapidly becoming a plurality or majority of the population in some electoral districts (Shertzer and Walsh 2019).

To measure legislative organization and influence, we use committee assignments. In these city councils, as in most legislatures, committee chairs and powerful committee assignments were coveted positions that both conveyed and conferred a legislator's institutional standing. The political contexts in Chicago and Cleveland are uniquely well-suited for exploring the potential for discrimination through legislative institutions. Not only was the Black population growing substantially over this period, but both councils feature institutional innovations such as non-partisan elections and multi-member districts that plausibly shaped the potential for Black incorporation into or exclusion from the halls of power.

By combining granular data on ward-level racial composition with a rich array of original legislator-level data, we find that African Americans were not systematically barred from these

[2]John J. Grabowski, "Immigration and Migration," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 2024.

halls of power within the Chicago and Cleveland City Councils, but that this pattern is conditional on key features of the political environment. After accounting for alderpersons' seniority, party, majority status, district population, and year-level characteristics, legislators from mostly-Black wards were similarly likely to hold a committee chair and had similarly valuable committee portfolios as those from the whitest areas. We do find, however, that when majority parties offered chair positions to members of the minority, representatives of African American wards were often excluded. Combining our quantitative findings with qualitative evidence from our Cleveland case, we find reason to believe that party machines provided a vehicle for Black incorporation into politics at both the mass and elite level.

These findings contribute to a number of different strands of literature in American politics and beyond. Most directly, this paper provides compelling new evidence for a previously underexplored lever of institutional discrimination: access to privileged positions within the legislature. As noted above, a rich literature examines Black disfranchisement in American history and its consequences (Kousser 1974; Olson N.D.; Cascio and Washington 2014). In this paper, we extend this exploration to examine whether *legislative* institutions further dilute the political power of minority groups (Griffin and Keane 2011). Second, our work contributes to the literature on committee assignments in American legislatures. Committees are one of, if not the, most important legislative institutions: they are where, in many respects, the work of a legislature is actually done (Gamm and Shepsle 1989). A rich literature, focused primarily on Congress, has explored the importance of committees for policymaking (Berry and Fowler 2016; Curry 2019; Ellis and Wilson 2013), legislators' valuations of committees (Groseclose and Stewart 1998; Krehbiel and Wiseman 2001), and the relationship between constituency and legislator characteristics and committee assignments (Fenno 1973). We expand on this by exploring how constituency characteristics can engender discrimination in the committee assignment process, as opposed to a demand-side portrait of committee assignments (Shepsle 1978). Further, we offer new data and insights into city council committee politics in some of the United States' most important cities.

Finally, this study builds on rich social, economic, and political histories to offer new insight into the political consequences of the First Great Migration.

Black Political Power in the Legislature

There are various reasons to expect that African Americans may be either negatively or positively discriminated against in local legislative politics. First, a variety of factors, including but not limited to affective racism, may contribute to a deliberate effort to dilute Black political power; contrastingly, local political organization may be used to appeal to and elevate the Black community in an effort to capture their vote. Black legislative representation is important for not only within-legislative body power dynamics, but also for subsequent representation of Black constituents. Minority legislative representation at the local level results in policies and politics that are more representative of minority political interests (McBrayer 2020; Meier and England 1984; Tate 2004). Though our analysis does not emphasize the role of descriptive or substantive representation on legislative outcomes (Hayes and Hibbing 2017; Pitkin 2023), the levers available to city councilors have downstream effects that result in better or worse representation for constituents. In short, committee assignments matter for the American public, and this is the relationship we seek to explore.

Sources of Negative Discrimination Historically, Black Americans have faced political exclusion – even when able to vote, American political institutions undermine Black representation. While a legislator can effectively represent a district without holding a privileged institutional position, such a position can significantly benefit constituents. As Griffin and Keane (2011) note, "securing preferred committee assignments and election or appointment to party leadership positions, sponsoring legislation, and working to have legislation passed are important elements of legislative life and can substantially affect the ability of legislators to represent the policy desires

of their constituents and ultimately constituents' well-being" (146). We focus on committee assignments, which previous research suggests can improve outcomes for legislators' districts (e.g. Berry and Fowler 2016; Adler and Lapinski 1997).[3]

Discrimination in committee organization against representatives of Black constituents may stem from racial hostility toward Black constituents, regardless of whether they are represented by a white legislator. Research has shown that legislatures— and by extension, legislators—discriminate against Black constituents (Cascio and Washington 2014), particularly in contexts where those legislators have diminished voting rights and influence. For instance, Button and Hedge (1996) find that state legislators in the early 1990s reported significantly less perceived discrimination in the committee system when representing majority-white districts compared to majority-Black districts, suggesting that the race of constituents may play an independent role beyond the race of the legislator (Grose 2011). Additionally, Peay (2021) found that bills of particular interest to the Congressional Black Caucus are disproportionately winnowed in congressional committees, highlighting the potential role of the committee system in disadvantaging Black constituencies.

It may also be that more-Black districts are more likely to be represented by Black representatives, and that these representatives are then discriminated against. Haynie (2002) shows that legislative elites in the modern North Carolina General Assembly perceive African American legislators as less effective and influential. The formation of Black legislative caucuses in Congress (e.g. Barnett 1975) and state legislatures (e.g. Clark 2019, Ch. 3) can be seen as a response to these institutional barriers and as a source of emotional support in a potentially hostile environment (Clark 2019, 52). Discrimination within the committee system can have significant consequences for constituents: Ellis and Wilson (2013) found that minority committee chairs

[3] An important possibility, however, is that African American constituents are simply interested in different types of representation than white constituents, perhaps one that involves less pursuit of legislative influence or effectiveness (Griffin and Flavin 2011). Of course, these contemporary patterns may themselves "be a legacy of lawmaking practices that have often ignored and worked against African Americans' interests" (Griffin and Keane 2011, 146). While it is possible that Black constituents may be uniquely interested in different policy areas than white constituents, we nevertheless expect both groups to be similarly interested in the perquisites that come with having influential representation.

lead to greater attention being paid to issues important to minority constituencies.

Party politics may also contribute to discrimination against Black constituents. Political parties may neglect or take Black voters for granted, leading to less responsiveness to their policy preferences (Frymer 2011). Parties may also be slow to recognize African Americans as key constituents (Schickler 2016) and risk alienating voters by adopting racially progressive positions (Kuziemko and Washington 2018; Lienesch 2022). Racially polarized parties and race-conscious redistricting often place African Americans in less competitive districts (Kousser 1999), which can reduce the quality of their representation. Competitive districts usually drive greater legislative effort (Fouirnaies and Hall 2022), better ideological alignment (Griffin 2006), and increased attention to district concerns (Finocchiaro and MacKenzie 2018). As a result, African Americans may receive less effective representation due to the competitiveness of their districts (Griffin and Flavin 2011).

At-large and ward systems may also produce unique results for our cities of analysis. In its current stage, the scope of this paper includes two northern cities – Chicago and Cleveland – both of which face distinct electoral contexts. At-large electoral systems constitute 64% of U.S. cities (Clark and Krebs 2012). The evidence on the effectiveness of at-large electoral systems for minority representation is mixed; as noted by Abott and Magazinnik (2020), "[s]ince the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, at-large districts around the country have come under legal attack on the grounds of minority vote dilution" (720). Davidson and Korbel (1981) argue that at-large systems, as opposed to ward-based systems, likely disadvantage Black Americans through vote dilution and making it harder for Black representatives to be elected. Cleveland, in particular, shifts between single-member and large multi-member districts during the period we study, potentially shaping the opportunities for Black constituents to make their voices heard.

Sources of Positive Discrimination Another possibility is that political parties actively competed for the Black vote, resulting in positive discrimination towards representatives of majority

Black districts. The extant literature suggests that party competition influences electoral outcomes (Crotty 1971). Historically, Black Americans have voted as a unified bloc—first for Republicans until the early 1900s (Carmines and Stimson 2020), then for Democrats after the 1960s (Dawson 1995). This study, however, examines a period of transition where the Black vote may have been more contested, with both parties actively competing for it. Party competition may *positively* influence the relationship between the percentage of Black constituents in a district and legislative influence. Since the Black vote has long been a vital base for elected officials, competition to secure Black political interests could lead to unexpected outcomes— such as the assignment of representatives from majority-Black districts to key committees. Historically, both Republican and Democratic officials have competed for the Black vote through strategic political messaging, with Republicans being the dominant party in promoting "race-friendly" policies prior to the 1940s (Carmines and Stimson 2020).

Additionally, broader partisan and electoral structures can shape representational outcomes through dynamics observed at the aggregate level (Gay 2001).[4] Partisan machinery also proved to be largely influential in potentially securing the African American vote. As Grant (2020) writes about all cities experiencing Black population increases during the later stages of the Great Migration, "[i]n addition to influencing their participation, location also shaped migrants' first party affiliations: they usually aligned with the dominant political machines in their new cities. Where there was a strong Democratic presence (in such cities as New York and Chicago); Black migrants participated as Democrats; in places where the Republican Party was dominant (such as Philadelphia), Black migrants often participated as Republicans" (25). The Black political networks that emerged during the First Great Migration may have been strategically leveraged by parties to sway Black voters at a time when the Black voting bloc was particularly appealing. Ramanathan (N.D.) notes that local electoral institutions were highly influential in determining how

[4]While both cities we explore used formally nonpartisan elections during at least part of the period under study, party organizations remained an influential feature of local politics throughout. Figures 2 and 8 below detail the partisan and electoral contexts in these two cities, respectively.

responsive national coalitions were in incorporating Black voters. While this trend became more prominent during the Civil Rights era as racial liberalism achieved higher political importance, it began to gain momentum in the 1930s, aligning with the period of our analysis.

The First Great Migration

In this paper, we focus on the period known as the "First" Great Migration, which lasted from approximately 1910 to 1940. While it did not represent the bulk of Black migration to the North, which increased during the "Second" Great Migration (1940-1970), it did represent the first major step in changing the racial demographics of the United States's northern cities. Particularly important as a driver of migration during this period was the First World War, which depleted the labor forces of northern manufacturing enterprises, necessitating a search for an alternative labor force. During the war, northern manufacturers actually recruited and sponsored African American migration, although such support ended, sometimes abruptly, after the war's end (Giffin 2005, 11-13). This initial burst of migration during the mid-to-late-1910s opened channels and created linkages that facilitated future migration (Boustan 2010; Derenoncourt 2022; Shi et al. 2022) and created the nascent Black ghettos in the urban north that would expand and develop as the twentieth century progressed (Shertzer and Walsh 2019). During the First Great Migration, approximately 1.5 million African Americans migrated (Shi et al. 2022, 2): while "In 1890 nine of the cities with the largest black populations were found in the South," by 1940 "New York (458,000) and Chicago (277,000) were now the cities with the largest black populations" (Logan, Zhang, and Chunyu 2015, 1067).

The quest northward represented both opportunity, but more importantly, freedom (Trotter 1991). The incorporation of Black Americans into white northern cities, however, was not immediately welcomed by white northerners. Derenoncourt (2022) writes that Black Southerners "...sought better lives for themselves and their children, and for many decades, the North ap-

peared to deliver on this promise" (374). But the realities faced by Black individuals who had migrated north suggest that this promise began and ended with appearances. Previous research details the specific challenges faced by Black migrants during this period, including stunted Black upward mobility (Derenoncourt 2022), overcrowding due to housing shortages (Drake and Cayton 1945; Grossman 2011), and a fundamental shift in Black social networks (Du Bois 1899). Granted, these circumstances may have been preferential to the mounting educational inequality, system of Jim Crow, and racialized violence (Tolnay 2003), but Black migrants often fared poorly due to dominant white majorities. Barriers to assimilation and inclusion may be an expected outcome of expanding labor opportunities that only arose due to the beginning of World War I and more restrictive immigration policies (Tolnay 2003).

For our purposes, the First Great Migration offers both a significant moment in American social and political history that is worth understanding more, and also a unique case of rapid and substantial increase in the local presence of a racial out-group. While the subsequent, post-WWII wave of Black migration to the North involved greater numbers of migrants, the First Great Migration brought, for the first time, meaningful numbers of African Americans into otherwise white northern spaces. It therefore provides a unique opportunity to understand whether and how racial out-groups are incorporated into the local political environment.

Data and Empirical Strategy

To explore the relationship between the racial composition of legislative districts and the influence afforded to Chicago and Cleveland alderpersons, we draw on a variety of newly created and assembled data sources that directly measure these quantities of interest in these two cities during the First Great Migration. We then use these data in an econometric model that controls for a variety of both observable and unobservable potential confounders in an effort to isolate the relationship between district race and influence in the city council committee system. These

models also offer additional insight into other legislator and ward characteristics associated with influence in the committee system.

Measuring Racial Composition of Aldermanic Wards

Our main independent variable is a time-varying measure of the proportion of each legislative district's population that is Black. While such data is readily available for more contemporary settings or higher-level offices, creating such a measure poses a unique challenge in the context of historical local government. While some censuses in this period report race data at the ward level for some years, intercensal redistricting and annexation of surrounding territory make simple imputation across censuses insufficient for accurately measuring ward-level Black population over the period of study. Instead, our approach is to aggregate existing spatial data at the Census enumeration district level to the ward level. We begin with shapefiles and associated data on population and race of Census enumeration districts for each decennial Census from the *Urban Transition Project*.[5] We then intersect these shapefiles with ward shapefiles to determine which enumeration districts lie in each ward. Ward shapefiles for Chicago were taken from the National Bureau of Economic Research (1900 - 1930)[6] and the University of Illinois-Chicago (1931).[7] These ward maps provide an accurate picture of the shape of Chicago's wards for any given year during the period under study.[8] We created ward shapefiles for Cleveland using scans of physical ward maps from 1920 and 1930 from the Cleveland Public Library;[9] for the period when the city used four large multi-member districts, we created a shapefile based on textual descriptions in

[5] "Northern Cities, 1900 - 1930" and "Map and Data Resources." *Urban Transition Historical GIS Project*.
[6] "Chicago Ward Boundaries." *Union Army Data – Historical Urban Ecological*. 2024.
[7] "Chicago Historic Ward Files." *University of Illinois Chicago University Library*. May 22, 2023.
[8] Redistricting occurred in 1901, 1912, 1923, and 1931.
[9] According to a ward redistricting history assembled by the Cleveland Public Administration Library, districts in these two years should capture the two redistricting plans in use between 1914 and 1940. Wards adopted prior to 1914 Charter were kept in use after its adoption until redistricting in 1921, which produced 32 wards. A thirty-third ward was subsequently added in 1923 when the City of West Park was annexed into Cleveland. A referendum to approve a redistricting plan in 1933 failed, and so the previous (1921-23) wards were retained until 1947. Becuase we use only these two maps, we likely miss some areas annexed after 1930 when creating maps for later years.

the amended Cleveland City Charter. Having matched enumeration districts to wards, we simply sum up the total population and total Black population in each ward at each census,[10] and then linearly impute between censuses to create an annualized measure of ward-level Black population share.

Measuring Influence in City Council Committee Systems

We pair our measure of ward-level Black population share with two primary dependent variables that capture each alderperson's standing in the council's committee system: whether they serve as a committee chair, and the overall "quality" of the portfolio of committees on which they serve. The starting point for both measures is assembling a complete collection of committee assignments for the city council for the period under study. Chicago City Council journals were primarily accessed through the Newberry Library's collections, made available at Internet Archive, while Cleveland City Council committee assignments were scanned from physical journals at the Cleveland City Council Archive. Committee assignments were generally found in either the journal index or in an early meeting of the council when initial assignments were announced. Along with which committees each member served on, we also noted which member served as chair of each committee;[11] we use this information to create a simple indicator variable cataloging whether a particular member served as a committee chair in a particular session. This is our preferred measure, as it is comparable over the period under study, a clear signal of influence, and has relatively low levels of missingness or ambiguity. Moreover, the relatively high number of committees relative to number of alderpersons means that a reasonably high share of legislators in each session were chairs, providing substantial variation while also clearly indicating which legislators were more highly regarded by the powers-that-be.

[10] While enumeration districts were generally nested within wards, shapefile imperfections and occasional deviations mean that the match is in practice not one-to-one. We assume an even distribution of race across enumeration districts and simply weight enumeration districts according to the proportion of them falling into a given ward.

[11] While this is often explicitly indicated, we otherwise assumed that the first-listed legislator on the committee was the chair.

Our second measure is an estimate of the total value of each alderperson's "committee portfolio." To create this measure, we use transitions between committees to calculate "Grosewart" estimates of committee value (Groseclose and Stewart 1998), which are then summed to create estimates of the value of each alderperson's committee portfolio in a given legislative session. Grosewart scores rely on the intuition that legislators are likely to transition to more valuable committees, and away from less valuable committees, over the course of their careers. By finding these transitions and using Groseclose and Stewart's (1998) proposed estimator, the procedure calculates a cardinal estimate of each committees' value over the period under study.[12] As we show below, these estimates of committee value are, due to short careers and frequent committee system change, relatively noisy – although facially reasonably – for our time period.

Empirical Strategy

For both Chicago and Cleveland, we create a nearly complete panel dataset at the alderperson-session[13] level for the period that we study, with unique identifiers for each alderperson, their name, and the ward they represented.[14] In addition to our main independent and dependent variables described above, we also create a variety of control variables: party or factional member-

[12]This procedure generates a number of researcher choices. First, we must determine which committees in a given session represent the continuation of committees from previous sessions; generally speaking if names were identical or nearly identical they were treated as the same committee; if names involved some reorganization or reordering of substantive topics we again generally treated them as the same committee. More challenging are committees with insufficient transfers to be included in the estimator. While some special or ephemeral committees are considered to be completely aside from the committee system, others are used to calculate transfers but do not receive their own estimate.

[13]For our analyses, we limit our focus to a single observation per session; Chicago featured annual sessions for part of the study period and biennial for the remainder, while Cleveland had biennial sessions throughout. We use annual data for Cleveland when available for calculating committee transfers.

[14]Chicago City Council Rosters for 1900 through 1935 were drawn from a "Centennial List" of public officials compiled by the city's Municipal Reference Library in 1937 (*Centennial List of Mayors, City Clerks, City Attorneys, City Treasurers, and Aldermen, Elected by the People of the City of Chicago, From the Incorporation of the City on March 4, 1837 to March 4, 1937, Arranged in Alphabetical Order, Showing the Years During which each Official Held Office*, ed. by Frederick Rex, 1937.); the roster for 1939 was collected from the Chicago Tribune. ("The New City Council." *The Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, IL. April 5, 1939, p. 2.). The Cleveland roster was compiled from the annual rosters reported in legislative journals, and supplemented with a catalog of members from the Cleveland City Council Archive.

ship,[15] membership in the chamber's majority party, seniority, and total district population. We incorporate these measures into our models to help account for a variety of potential factors that might influence both a legislator's committee assignments and their relationship to district demographics.[16] All models also include session fixed effects, which account for time period-specific shocks common to all units – for example, an overall increase in the city's Black population share or a change in the set of committees available to alderpersons.

Putting these various components together yields the following estimating equation:

$$Y_{idt} = \beta Pct.\ Black_{dt} + \boldsymbol{\gamma}\mathbf{X}_{it} + \tau_t + \epsilon_{idt}$$

where Y represents either an indicator for serving as a committee chair or a measure of a legislator's committee portfolio value, $Pct.\ Black$ is the ward-level Black population share, $\mathbf{X}$ is a vector of primarily legislator-level time-varying covariates, and τ is a session fixed effect. All inference is based on ward-clustered standard errors, with wards defined within redistricting cycles. We conduct our analysis entirely separately by city.

Chicago

African Americans who pursued new opportunities outside the South moved to a variety of new locations shaped by, in part, "the stability of train routes and community networks" (Boustan 2010, 425). Tolnay (2003) notes that, over the course of the Great Migration, "Southern black migrants settled in virtually all areas of the North and West" (216). He notes, however, that "western states did not become a common destination for black migrants until after 1940," whereas "Throughout the Great Migration, large metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Mid-

[15] Legislators' party affiliations were collected from newspaper accounts; whenever possible year-specific party affiliations were used, but in their absence affiliations were assumed to persist across sessions.

[16] Some of these covariates, such as a legislators' party affiliation, are likely post-treatment to district Black population share. While the inclusion of such post-treatment variables can unpredictably bias estimates (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016), we always present both conditional and unconditional estimates.

west were especially popular destinations, with the influx of southern migrants causing massive growth in the black populations of cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia" (Tolnay 2003, 216). Chicago was therefore a significant but also not atypical destination for many of these migrants during the First Great Migration. One way in which Chicago was somewhat distinctive was in the role of perhaps the flagship Black paper in the nation at the time, the *Chicago Defender*, which actively campaigned for southern African Americans to leave the South (Bitner 1985; Grossman 1985; DeSantis 1998). Similarly, according to Reed (2018), "the city's strategic spatial presence as the nation's major economic transfer center, along with its reputation as a humanitarian anchorage, were magnetic forces" that drew migrants to the city. Like in many other northern cities, African Americans tended to live in particular concentrated areas of the city, though this phenomenon was also shaped by white out-migration (Shertzer and Walsh 2019). This area of the city developed notoriety as one of the epicenters of Black commerce in the United States: "The South Side [of Chicago], famous for its burgeoning district of black-owned businesses, hosted some of the most successful black insurance companies. This area – called 'Bronzeville' – was, at the time, frequently acclaimed by journalists and social scientists as the hub of black entrepreneurship in the United States" (Boyd 2011, 1067). Figure 1 maps our main independent variable, Black population share, at the ward level, over our period of study. The growth of the city's Black population on the near-South Side is clearly visible in this figure.

Politically, Chicago's Great Migration has a number of salient features. First, and unsurprisingly, all existing Chicagoans did not welcome the Black migrants with open arms. The most striking example of this was the significant race riot that wracked the city in the summer of 1919 (Sandburg 2013) in which twenty-three African Americans and fifteen whites were killed (Jones N.d.). Second, the geographic concentration of the city's Black population – undoubtedly a product of both African Americans' residential and social preferences as well as discrimination by existing white residents – clearly facilitated African Americans' political isolation in a small number of wards (Paul 2017). Finally, African American migration represented an injection of

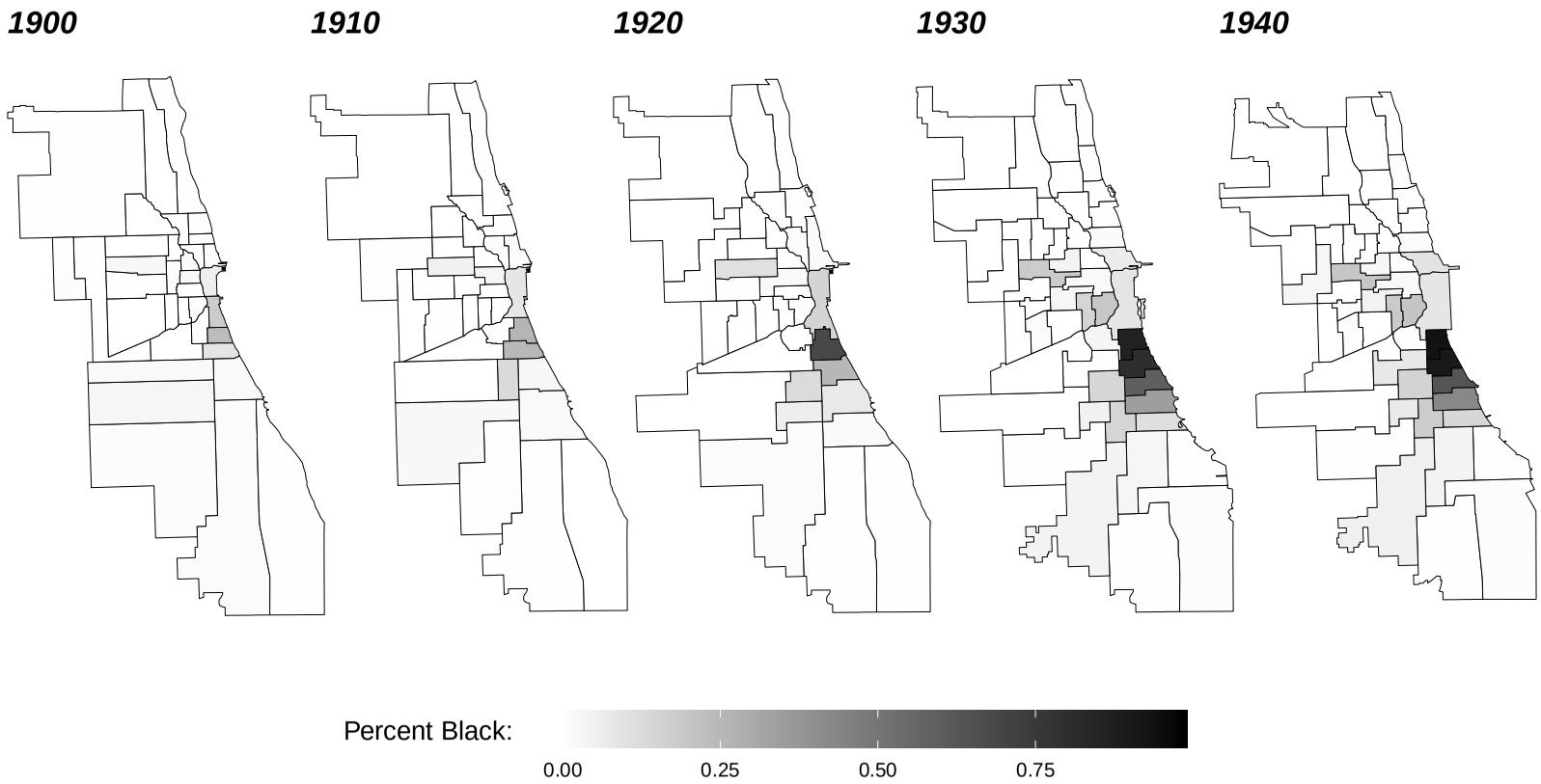


FIGURE 1: Black Population in Chicago's Wards, 1900-1940

Note: Figure plots Black population share in Chicago City Council wards using data from decennial U.S. Censuses and wards as they were in the given year. Additional intercensal redistricting did occur, such that these are not a comprehensive set of districts for the period 1900-1940.

Republican voters into the city's relatively competitive political environment. The city's growing "black electorate became an important cog in Republican Party politics" (Reed 2018), later developing into an important swing bloc as the Democrats became a more appealing option during the Great Depression (e.g. Grant 2020; Schickler 2016). Perhaps most important, unlike in the South at this time, African Americans were able to participate more or less fully in the political process. Gosnell (1933), reporting on African Americans' political participation in Chicago in the midst of the First Great Migration, stated that "[m]aking allowance for the factor of mobility, the Negroes in Chicago have shown a higher participation in elections than have the whites" (331) and specifically contrasted Black participation in Chicago with the claims of "[t]he politician-apologist for the virtual disfranchisement of the Negro in the South" who "usually states that the Negroes do not vote because they have lost interest in politics" (331). A simple analysis by Gosnell (1933) dispelled those claims, showing that "these new Chicago voters came largely from rural districts where they had few opportunities for voting experience" (332-33), arguing that "[w]hile some of the migrants may have been timid about starting to vote, their political education proceeded rapidly... Of course, the great interest in voting which the new migrants display is partly the result of efficient political organization, but the background and experiences of the migrants make them responsive to the appeals of the party-workers" (333). In short, while African Americans continued to face myriad challenges after moving to Chicago, barriers at the ballot box were sharply reduced and they largely became active participants in politics.

The Chicago City Council

Chicago's city council adopted ward-based representation with the city's municipal charter in 1837 (Mayfield 2005). The growth of the city led to an increase in size until the council was comprised of seventy members elected from thirty-five wards, its size at the start of our study period in 1900. During this period, half of the council's members were elected each April in a partisan election to a two-year term, such that elections were single-winner but wards were

each represented by two members. Between 1920 and 1923, the chamber transitioned first to the use of non-partisan elections – with a preliminary election in February and a top-two runoff, if necessary, in April – and then in 1923 to the use of fifty single-member wards with biennial elections.[17] Because of the dramatic change in structure during this period, particularly the size and timing change in 1923, we split our analyses below to examine separately the period before and after this change. Politically, control of the chamber changes a number of times over our period of study, with Republicans generally more-dominant earlier in the period and Democrats dominant during and after the onset of the New Deal.[18] Figure 2 summarizes the institutional and political transitions that occured in Chicago during this period.

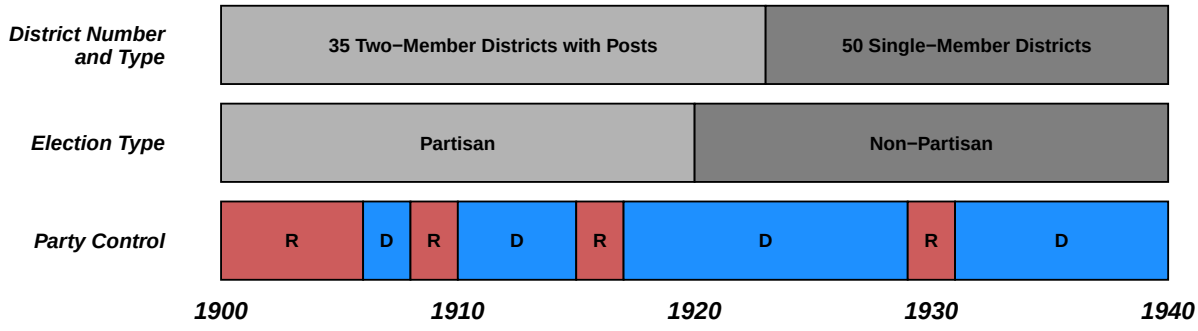


FIGURE 2: Political Timeline of the Chicago City Council, 1900 – 1940

Non-Partisan Influence in Committee Assignments In spite of the partisan battles over control of the chamber over this four-decade period, a key feature of the Chicago City Council during the period of study is the significant influence of non-partisan "good government" forces, particularly the "Municipal Voters' League" (MVL). The MVL was "launched in 1897" in order "to keep the public informed of the workings of the 'greywolves' [corrupt aldermen] in the city council."[19] While the MVL declined in importance over our study period – particularly after

[17] With the exception of a transition to four-year terms in 1935, this is more or less the same structure that the council retains today.

[18] While the chamber became formally non-partisan with the 1920 election, newspapers generally continued to report the party affiliation of elected alderpersons after that date.

[19] "Melting Pot." *Chicago Eagle* (Chicago, IL). January 31, 1939. Page 2.

the chamber became formally non-partisan – it was an influential organization in early twentieth century Chicago politics. Its endorsements – and denouncements – were published on the eve of council elections, and it facilitated non-partisan organization of the council chamber.

Particularly important for our purposes is that the MVL, through its influence on council organization, shaped committee assignments even when the chamber had partisan elections. Responding to attacks on its influence on the eve of the 1920 council year, the MVL put out a statement clarifying its role in organizing the chamber, offering significant insight into the mechanisms of committee assignments in the council:

> "That the Municipal Voters' league organizes the chamber is simply not true. What actually happens is this: The Municipal Voters' league invites the reputable aldermen to meet in a caucus for the purposes of organizing the council on the basis of honesty and fitness... The caucus then divides into six groups – each group selecting by ballot one of its number to act as a member of the committee on committees. The practice has been to elect one Republican and one Democrat each from the north, west, and south sides. The committee on committees, having before it the names of all seventy aldermen and the list of committee places, numbering more than 250, proceeds to make nominations for membership on the eighteen standing committees, and each member of the council receives three or four committee assignments."[20]

The MVL clearly played an important, if not central, role in chamber organization for much fo the period under consideration. Nevertheless, party was not a completely moot consideration. In some years there were pushes to resume partisan organization of the chamber,[21,22], and newspaper reports suggest that party was at least intermittently a salient consideration in committee assignment decisions.[23] Finally, Gable (1953) reports that by the 1950s that "struggles within

[20] "M.V.L Denies It Rules Council; Gives Report." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). April 3, 1920. Page 5.
[21] "Woodhull May Head Finance Committee." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). March 25, 1920. Page 1.
[22] "Democrats Gain Council Control by Majority of 12." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). April 5, 1911. Page 1.
[23] "Aldermen Back; Slate Complete." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). April 22, 1912. Page 1.

the dominant [Democratic] Party" were perhaps the most salient consideration when allocating committee assignments (100), with the minority Republicans afforded quite few chair positions (101).

Committees were clearly an important feature of Chicago City Council politics. Extensive newspaper coverage detailed the work of the committee on committees;[24] included in these reports were clear indications that 1) committees were differentially valuable and 2) members cared about their committee assignments. For example, William Strand of the Chicago Tribune reported on the eve of council assignments in 1939 that "the list of committee memberships will not be made public until it is introduced on the council floor tonight. This strategy is designed to prevent dissatisfied aldermen from laying plans to reject the report. The assignments seldom satisfy more than the few council members who get seats on such working groups as finance, local transportation, and utilities committees."[25] In Figure 3, we plot our more systematic effort to measure the value of different committees on the Chicago City Council for the period 1900-1939. As this suggests, there is substantial variation in the estimated value of committees, and most of these estimates correspond well to qualitative assessments of committees' value: Finance, for example, is quite precisely estimated as the second highest-ranked committee. These estimates form the basis of our legislator-level *Committee Portfolio Value* measure.

In addition to different committees having different values, we note that committee chairs were a particularly important position that largely structured power in the council chamber. Simpson (2001) states that between the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 and the onset of the Great Depression, "power was split between powerful committee chairmen" (46); he also notes that "During the 1939 council period...By sharing influential positions such as committee chairmanships with Republican aldermen....Mayor Kelly and [Finance Committee Chairman and Kelly's

[24]Strand, William. "Form New Group to Handle City's Lease Problems." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). April 10, 1939. Page 8.

[25]Strand, William. "Kelly to Take Third Oath As Mayor Tonight." *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). April 12, 1939. Page 15.

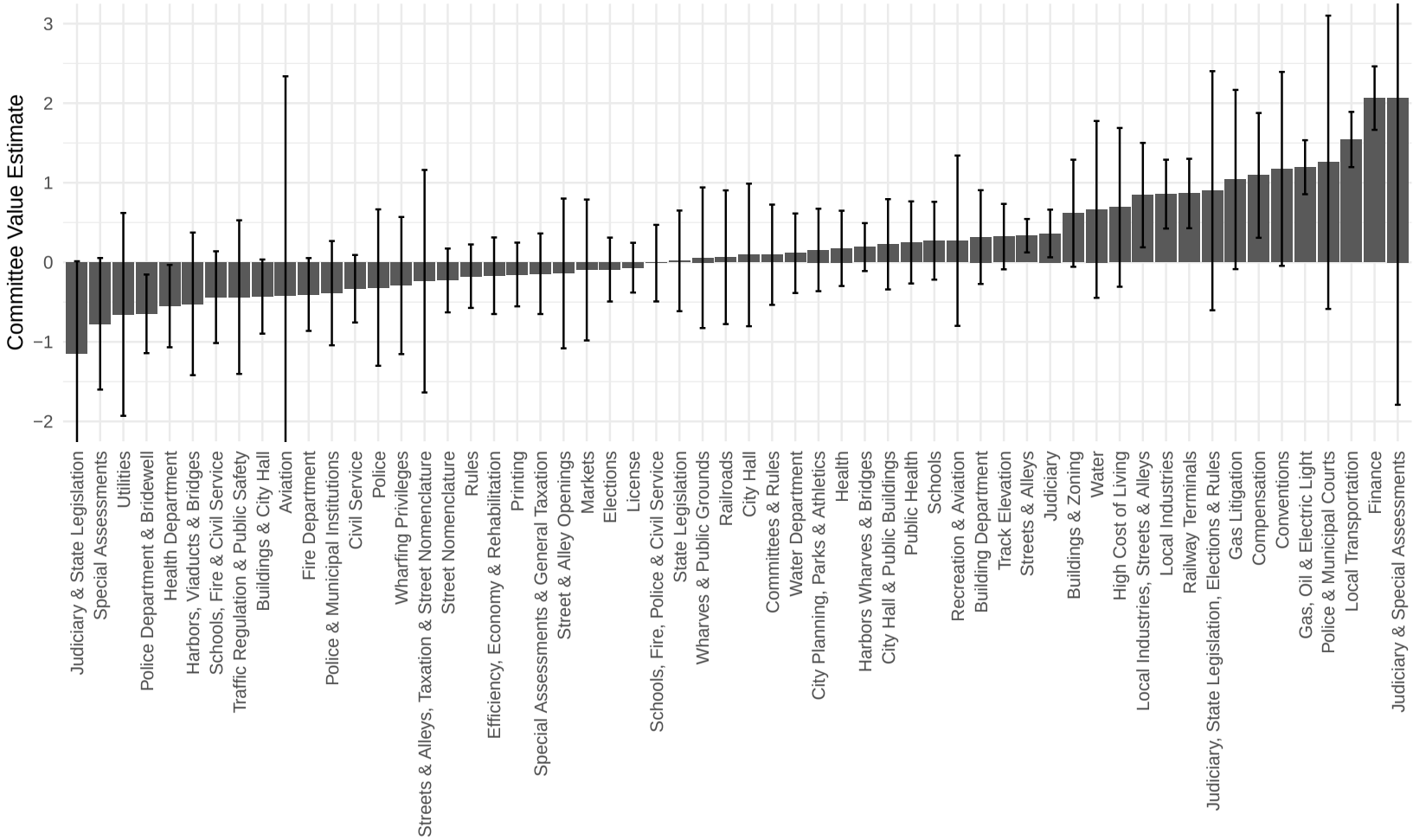


FIGURE 3: Estimated Committee Values, Chicago City Council 1900-1939

Note: Figure plots estimates of committee values, based on method proposed by Groseclose and Stewart (1998), with 90% confidence intervals.

Floor Leader] Alderman Arvey gained their support for the mayor's legislation" (98), suggesting both the importance of chair positions and the continued prevalance of at least some of them being shared with the council minority. While some chair positions, notably Finance (Gable 1953, 39), were clearly more powerful than others, it is clear that committee chairs in general played an outsized role in the politics of the Chicago City Council.

Results

We begin our exploration of the relationship between district racial composition and influence in the committee system by simply visualizing the bivariate relationship between district Black population share and our two outcome variables of interest. These relationships are presented in Figure 4. The figure suggests that the relationship between ward racial composition and committee influence is quite different across the two measures. While for committee chairs the relationship is relatively stable across low-to-middling levels of Black population share, and then declines for the most-Black wards, those same wards actually have the highest expected committee portfolio values. While the relationship between committee portfolio values and Black population is relatively flat, it certainly does not echo the clear negative pattern suggested by the left panel.

Now we turn to more formally estimating these relationships, drawing on the empirical specification described above. These results are presented in Table 1. The table presents results from a variety of different models. In Panel A, we present results for the full time period of analysis, including data from sessions beginning between and inclusive of 1900 and 1939. This period spans from clearly before the Great Migration to approximately the end of the "First" Great Migration, at the advent of the Second World War. In Panel B we restrict our attention to approximately the first half of this time period, ending in 1921. While this period generally features lower Black population shares, it does cover World War I, which precipitated some of the first major inflows of African Americans from the American South to northern cities. More press-

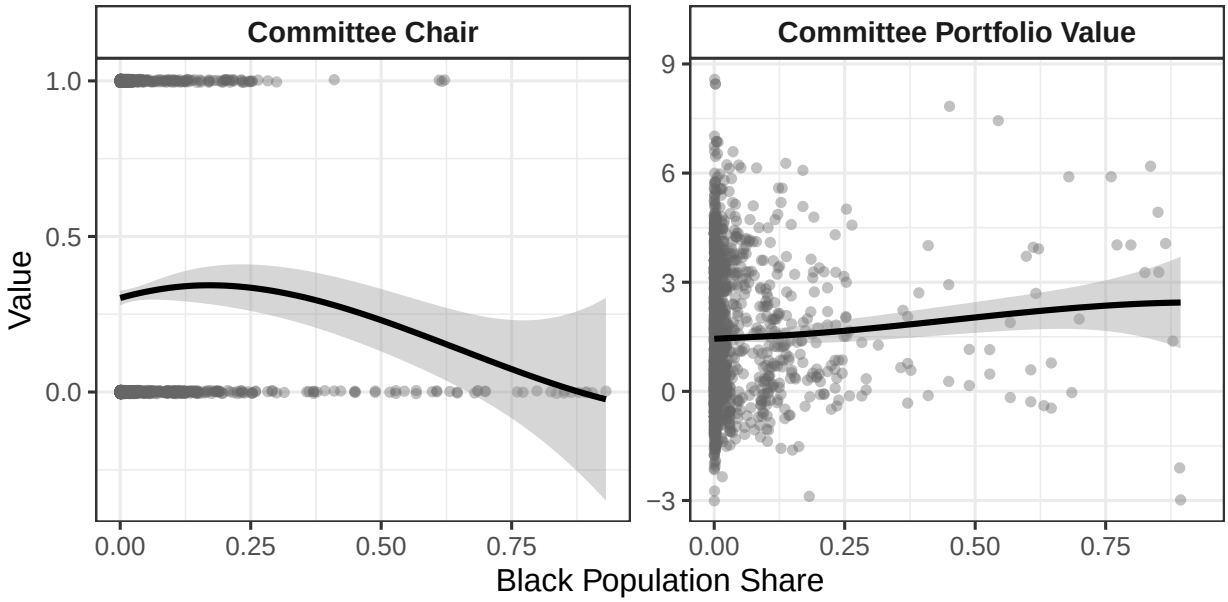


FIGURE 4: Ward-Level Black Population Share and Committee Influence

Note: Points are jittered for presentational clarity. Smooth loess fit is included.

ingly, it also reflects the first major institutional regime in the period of study, characterized by multi-member districts, annual elections, annual sessions (with new committee organization each time), and partisan elections (before 1920). In Panel C, we consider the later half of the sample period, from the 1923 through the 1939 sessions. This period features first biennial, and then quadrennial non-partisan elections, but generally higher Black populations as the city's Black wards continued to grow. For each of these panels, we present four models: two each for each of our two outcomes, with one model omitting all time-varying control variables and another including all of those controls.

The estimates presented in Table 1 generally accord well with the insights from Figure 4 above. For the full study period (Panel A) and the period after and including 1923 (Panel C), we find evidence that greater ward Black population shares are associated with a lower likelihood of that district's representative(s) serving as a committee chair. Specifically, these models suggest that an all-Black ward would have approximately a twenty to forty percentage point lower likelihood of having its representative serve as a committee chair, relative to an all-white ward. The

TABLE 1: Race and Committee Assignments in the Chicago City Council

	Committee Chair		Portfolio Value	
Panel A: 1900 - 1939				
Percent Black	−0.223*	−0.188	−0.032	−0.037
	(0.131)	(0.137)	(0.734)	(0.643)
ln(Seniority)		0.153**		0.972**
		(0.030)		(0.131)
Democrat		−0.010		−0.117
		(0.040)		(0.132)
Majority		0.036		0.039
		(0.027)		(0.087)
ln(District Population)		0.227**		1.260**
		(0.076)		(0.272)
Observations	1,935	1,908	1,822	1,798
Panel B: 1900 - 1921				
Percent Black	−0.081	0.155	−1.137	−0.268
	(0.119)	(0.264)	(0.895)	(0.761)
ln(Seniority)		0.148**		1.003**
		(0.031)		(0.118)
Democrat		0.074*		0.240*
		(0.044)		(0.125)
Majority		0.031		−0.009
		(0.028)		(0.078)
Municipal Voters' League		0.276**		1.256**
		(0.039)		(0.134)
ln(District Population)		0.248**		1.245**
		(0.082)		(0.254)
Observations	1,535	1,455	1,471	1,397
Panel C: 1923 - 1939				
Percent Black	−0.329**	−0.364**	0.830	0.679
	(0.132)	(0.143)	(0.714)	(0.718)
ln(Seniority)		0.232**		1.242**
		(0.046)		(0.178)
Democrat		0.095		0.341
		(0.083)		(0.346)
Majority		−0.055		−0.034
		(0.056)		(0.269)
ln(District Population)		0.077		0.571
		(0.118)		(0.438)
Observations	400	374	351	327

Note: Entries are from linear models with year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered by ward, are in parentheses. Observations are at the legislator-session level. **p<0.05, *p<0.10 (two-tailed).

main results are quite consistent within time period regardless of whether time-varying covariates are included. These results also contrast with the early period results (Panel B), where we find little evidence of a relationship in either direction between ward racial composition and the likelihood of a legislator serving as committee chair. This result must be interpreted, however, with respect to the relative lack of largely Black districts at this time – only a single district in a single redistricting cycle, the 2nd Ward after 1912, was majority Black during this portion of the study. Generally speaking, across all models, the results for the control variables are consistent with expectations. Seniority is consistently associated with a greater likelihood of serving as a chair, as is district population. While majority party status is perhaps unexpectedly not associated with a greater likelihood, being a Democrat is, and so too, in the earlier period, is endorsement by the Municipal Voters' League. As newspapers at the time were keen to note the commitment of that organization to non-partisan organization of the chamber, these results do in a sense accord with expectations.

The two rightmost columns, on the other hand, explore the relationship between ward Black population share and committee portfolio value. While this measure has considerably greater missingness,[26] it nevertheless does appear to capture meaningful variation in the quality of legislators' committee assignments. As with the committee chair measure, seniority,[27] being a Democrat, being endorsed by the MVL, and district population are all positively associated with a higher committee portfolio value. As suggested by Figure 4, however, ward Black population share is not consistently associated with portfolio value. Somewhat flipped from the chair results, there is no significant relationship in the aggregate or the later period – indeed, if anything, a *positive* relationship – while in the early period we find a (noisily estimated) negative relationship. Overall, the models provide little indication that alderpersons who represented more-Black

[26]This variable was coded as missing for council members who served on a committee for which, due to a lack of transfers, we could not produce a Grosewart estimate.

[27]Seniority is likely mechanically associated with the measure since over-career transitions are used to calculate the Grosewart scores.

wards were systematically discriminated against in the portfolio of committees to which they were assigned.

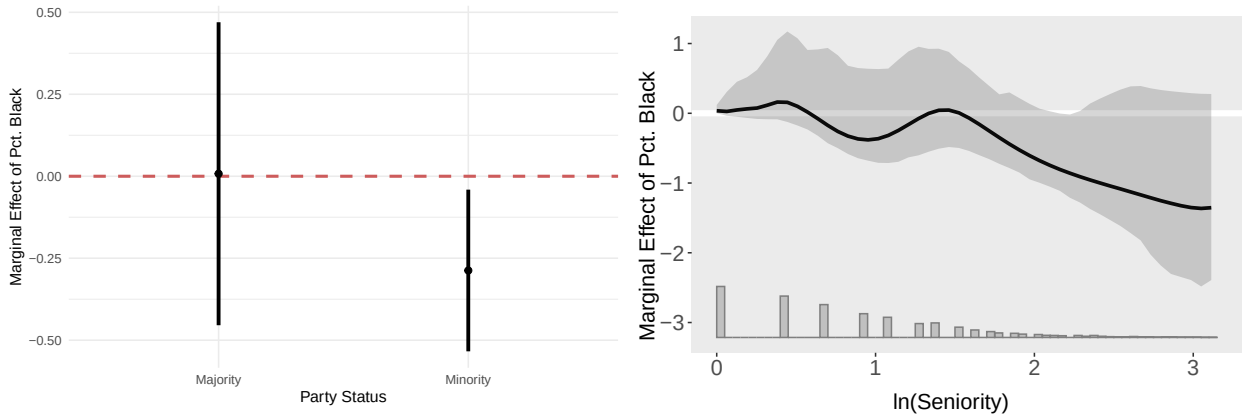
We also explore heterogeneity in the effect of Black population share on committee influence along two dimensions that help us speak, albeit indirectly, to our theoretical expectations around parties as a vehicle for minority incorporation into local politics. For both of these analyses we focus on our attention on our *Committee Chair* outcome measure.

First, we explore whether there is variation with respect to a legislator's majority or minority party status. If party politics are a method for Black incorporation into politics, we might expect that the party in a stronger position to guide committee assignments in the chamber would ensure that representatives of Black districts get influential positions. When representatives of such areas are in the minority, however, the majority may have no such incentives and may allow other discriminatory considerations to guide these choices. Two features of the committee assignment process are particularly important to consider in these analyses. First, we note above – and our main results bear out – that committee assignments were often made on a non-partisan basis, with majority and minority party members having approximately the same likelihood of serving as chair in a given session. As a result, it is not unreasonable to expect minority party members to be considered and ultimately serve as chairs. Second, we nevertheless expect parties to be able to exert some influence in the process, even if only in the selection of steering committee members. Figure 5a presents our estimates of the relationship between a ward's Black population share and serving as a committee chair, separately by an alderperson's majority or minority party status.[28] As the figure shows, while Black population share has little relationship with committee chairships when alderpersons are in the majority party, when in the minority there is a significant negative relationship. This is consistent with the theoretical account above.

Though it is less directly connected to our main theoretical expectations, we also explore het-

[28] Estimates are based on the model specification in column 2 of Table 1, with an additional interaction between *Majority* and *Percent Black*.

erogeneity in the effect of ward Black population share across levels of seniority. If African Americans are negatively discriminated against, we might suspect that their representatives would have to accrue more seniority before being elevated to committee chair positions. As Figure 5b indicates, we find the opposite – we instead find no evidence of a negative effect early in legislators' careers, but a large effect later. We are cautious to over-interpret this negative finding since the right-hand side of the figure represent few legislators and especially few from wards with meaningfully large Black populations.



(a) Party Status **(b)** Seniority

FIGURE 5: Heterogeneous Effects of Black Population Share, Chicago City Council

Note: Both figures are based on linear regression models and include control variables/base terms for (logged) seniority, party, majority status, and (logged) district population. 95% confidence intervals based on ward-clustered standard errors. Right-most figure presents a flexible kernel-based estimate of the marginal effect of Percent Black*, created using the* interflex *package in* R.

Finally, we ask whether those representatives of Black wards who are elevated to chair positions in Chicago receive those positions for similarly desirable committees as representatives of more-white wards. To do so, we simply merge our Grosewart committee value estimates into a dataset of chairs, and plot the distribution of Grosewart estimates separately for legislators who did and did not represent majority-Black wards. To the extent that there is bias or discrimination in ascent to chair positions to begin with, this analysis should bias against finding differences. The results are presented in Figure 6. While we strongly caution about the very few observations

in this figure for the majority Black wards – only three observations – we note that those three chair-years all represented notably undesirable committees. This provides further evidence of one way in which African Americans may have been disadvantaged in the Chicago City Council.

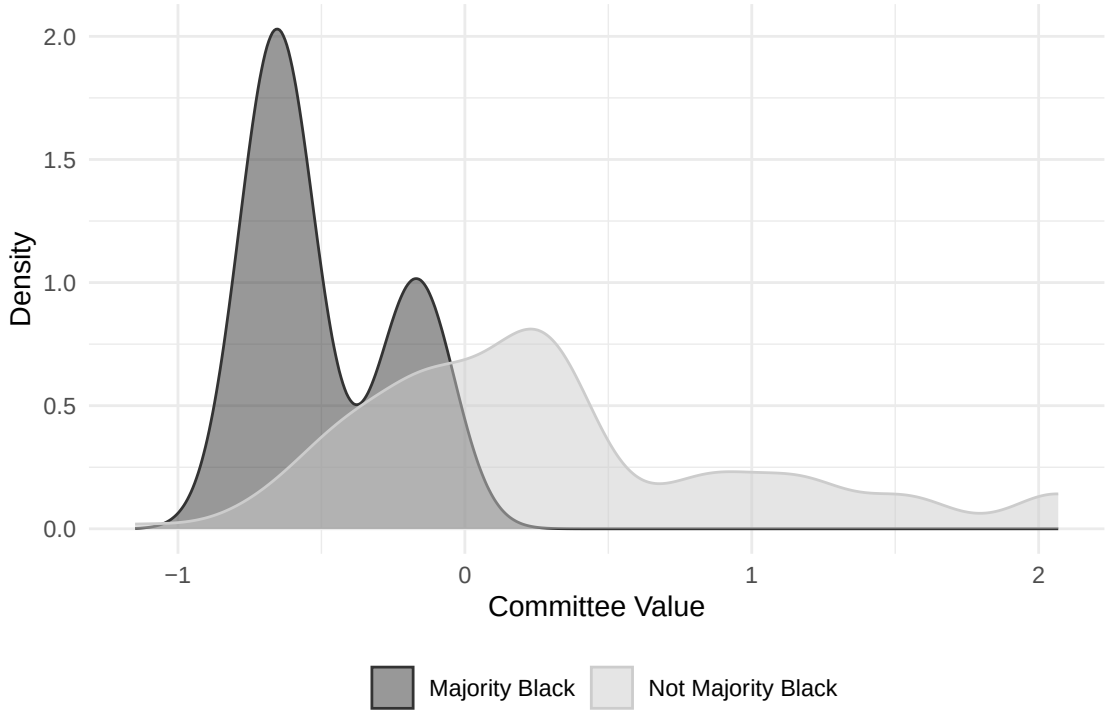


FIGURE 6: Distribution of Committee Values among Chairs in Chicago, by Ward Racial Composition

Cleveland

Cleveland's history closely parallels that of Chicago during the Great Migration (Galford 1957). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) quickly became a powerful force in the city, amassing significant support via Black political mobilization (Cuban 1967). This branch confronted the city's escalating racism with a two-pronged strategy: aggressively pursuing legal action against discriminatory establishments and subtly pressuring white business owners to abandon exclusionary practices. From the late 1920s to the mid-1940s,

Black Clevelanders experienced significant political change (Swiderski 2013). Despite the slowdown in Southern migration during the 1930s, the Black population had grown enough to enhance its political influence. In 1927, three Black council members were elected, holding the balance of power in a nearly evenly split council. Throughout the 1930s, Black Clevelanders predominantly supported Republicans locally, not backing a Democratic mayor until 1943. However, nationally, the New Deal's relief policies triggered a decisive shift toward the Democratic Party after 1932, a trend solidified by President Truman's strong civil rights agenda post-World War II (Kusmer 2024).

As Phillips (1996) writes, "[t]he availability of jobs in Cleveland made it attractive to blacks leaving the South to find work. By the beginning of the Great Migration in 1915, Cleveland possessed a diverse industrial base with a large metals processing section" (394). Instead of recruiting white women or European immigrants to work, employers began hiring Black workers in droves to fill the number of expanding jobs (Ross 1994). Cleveland was recognized as a "hub" for Black employment– its Black population grew 308% between 1910 and 1920, totaling 34,000 Black residents and placing it second behind Detroit for the largest percentage Black population growth. Phillips (1996) continues, writing that "[c]ontemporary observers and historians have documented settlement of African Americans in the city between 1915 and 1929, noting their confinement to the Central Area. With the rapid growth of the city's population after 1915, black neighborhoods expanded northward between Central and Euclid Avenues and to the south and east along Scovill and Woodland Avenues" (397). Figure 7 plots this growth in Cleveland's Black population by showing the first and last years in our sample.

Cleveland City Council

As in Chicago, the Cleveland City Council was a hotbed of reform during the late Progressive Era. Granted the ability to implement home rule by a 1912 change to the Ohio Constitution, the city adopted a new charter that took effect in January 1914 that created a twenty-six mem-

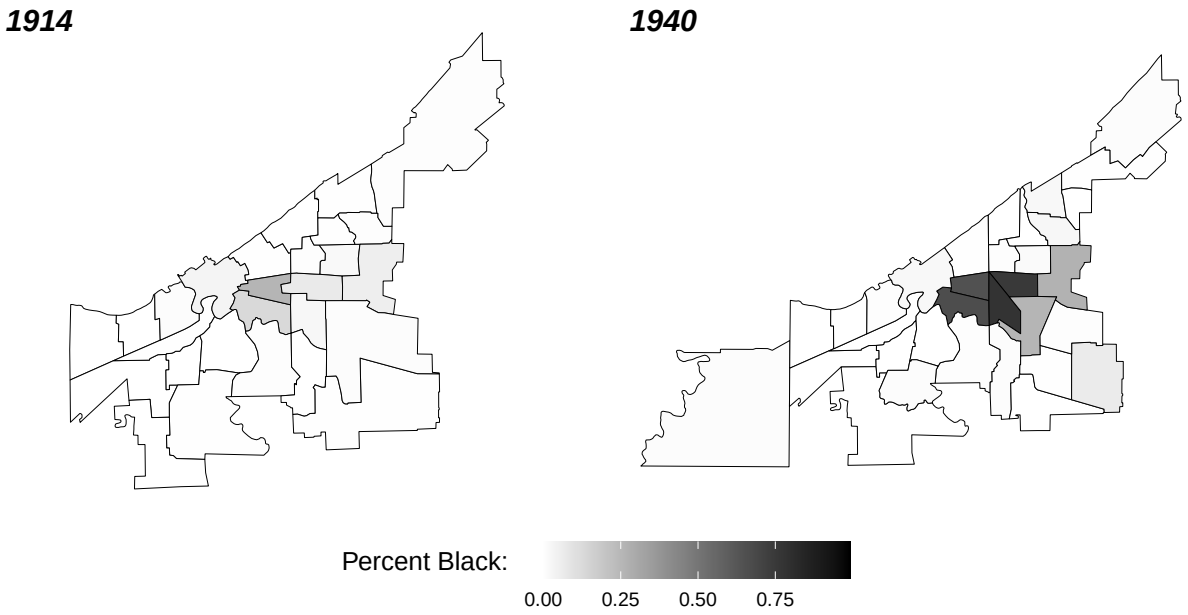


FIGURE 7: Black Population in Cleveland's Wards, 1914-1940

ber city council, with members elected from single-member wards in nonpartisan ranked-choice elections ("Home Rule" 2024). In 1924, the city created the role of city manager to replace their mayor. In the same year, the city was divided into four large districts from which councilors were selected via proportional representation.[29] This adjustment only lasted a decade, reverting to mayoral elections and the original ward-based system in the 1930s (Higgs 2020). These changes are summarized in Figure 8. As this demonstrates, the chamber was elected through non-partisan elections over the full period of study, though as we discuss below partisanship played an important role in the chamber. Unlike in Chicago, the Republican Party generally held the upper hand in the council over the period we study, though politics in the city remained competitive throughout.

Partisanship in a Non-Partisan Chamber While Chicago in many respects appears to have been *de jure* partisan but *de facto* non-partisan for much of the period we study, Cleveland seems

[29]We create shapefiles for the multi-member districts using textual descriptions of the district boundaries from the city charter, as amended to implement the city manager/multi-member district plan, in 1923.

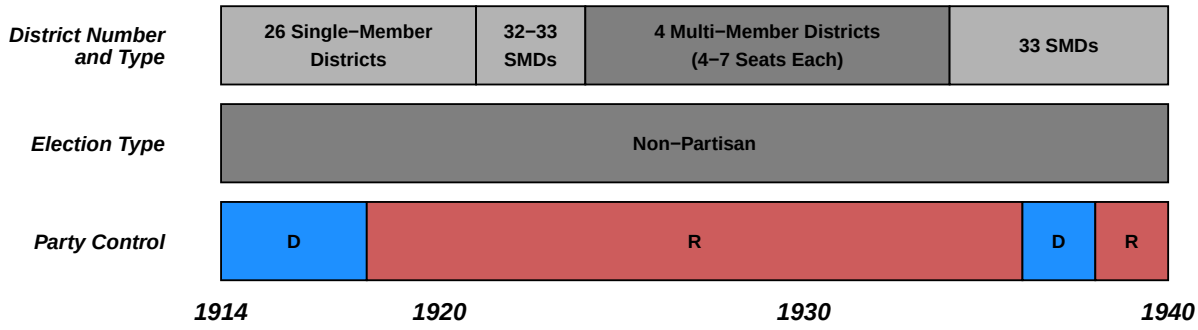


FIGURE 8: Political Timeline of the Cleveland City Council, 1914 – 1940

to have been the opposite: in spite of its formal non-partisanness, party politics seems to have been a central organizing feature of city government. City council politics were dominated by Republicans after 1918; only a brief interruption during part of the 1936-37 session returned Democrats to council leadership. Organization of the legislative chamber was routinely described in the newspaper in partisan terms. In 1916, for example, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* described the organization of the chamber as "a victory for the Democratic majority,"[30] and party caucuses are reported to have met in advance of initial council meetings to plan strategy, choose candidates for key offices, and whip votes.[31]

Perhaps the clearest consequence of the chamber's non-partisan elections was the relatively high success rates of candidates who were either formally independent or at least independent in action, causing intermittent turmoil in council organization. In 1938, for example, despite having a numeric seventeen to sixteen majority, Democrats failed to elect one of their own as council president; instead, "the defection of Jack T. Dunn, elected as a Democrat from Ward 8, upset the calculations of the party managers and made [Republican Alexander Louis] De Maioribus' reelection certain."[32] While one explanation for this defection involved "an alleged agreement with the administration on patronage" the *Plain Dealer* also reported that even with-

[30] "Majority, in Test, Elects Own Officers." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). January 4, 1916. Page 1.
[31] "Democrats Will Depend on Reed." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). January 3, 1936. Page 4.
[32] "Party Cohesion Wins." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). January 5, 1938. Page 8.

out Dunn's defection "the evidence indicates that the Democrats could not have elected one of their own number to the Council presidency" due to factional infighting, quipping that "Cleveland Democrats, under their present leadership, seem to be that way."[33] Intra-party turmoil was not, however, limited to the Democrats – following the November 1929 Council elections, the *Plain Dealer* reported that while "Maurice Maschke and his Republican organization will have majority of the new City Council" it was nevertheless the case that "It is likely to be found at times that councilmen like Bohn, Michell, and Marshall...will not consider that their having run as Republican indorsees puts them under any obligation to do the bidding of the organization."[34] The result, accordingly, was "a paper majority with a mind for mischief if the party leaders press their demands too far."[35] Rather than producing a truly non-partisan body in the way that the MVL managed to do in Chicago, non-partisan elections in Cleveland seem to have produced an intermittently fragile and disorganized version of partisanship in its council.

Committee Assignments in the Cleveland City Council While in Chicago committee assignments were in at least many years delegated to a committee on committees, itself shaped by the public's and the MVL's demands for non-partisanship in chamber organization, in Cleveland committee assignments were far more centralized under the auspices of the Council's leadership. In 1916, for example, a member of the Republican minority proposed "that council delegate appointment of committees to a separate committee consisting of two majority and two minority members instead of leaving it with the chair."[36] The failure of this proposal was followed by the "announcement of President W. F. Thompson of committees appointed for the next two years, the Democratic majority retaining control of all the important committees."[37] This does not mean, of course, that the council president's whims were the only guiding factor in committee

[33] *Ibid*.
[34] "Gains and Losses." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). November 6, 1929. Page 14.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] "Republicans Lose Council Rule War." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). January 11, 1916. Page 1.
[37] *Ibid*.

appointments; seniority, for example, was also deferred to.[38] Even as the *Plain Delaer* noted the importance of seniority, however, it nevertheless noted that "The committee plums are to be for organization Republicans alone–with one exception."[39] As in Chicago, qualitative accounts clearly suggest that some committees were more valuable than others. One account, for example, highlighted the Judiciary, Utilities, Street Railway, and Finance committees as especially valuable.[40] These committees, and particularly Finance and Street Railways, jump out as being valuable in Figure 9, which plots our Grosewart estimates for Cleveland committees.

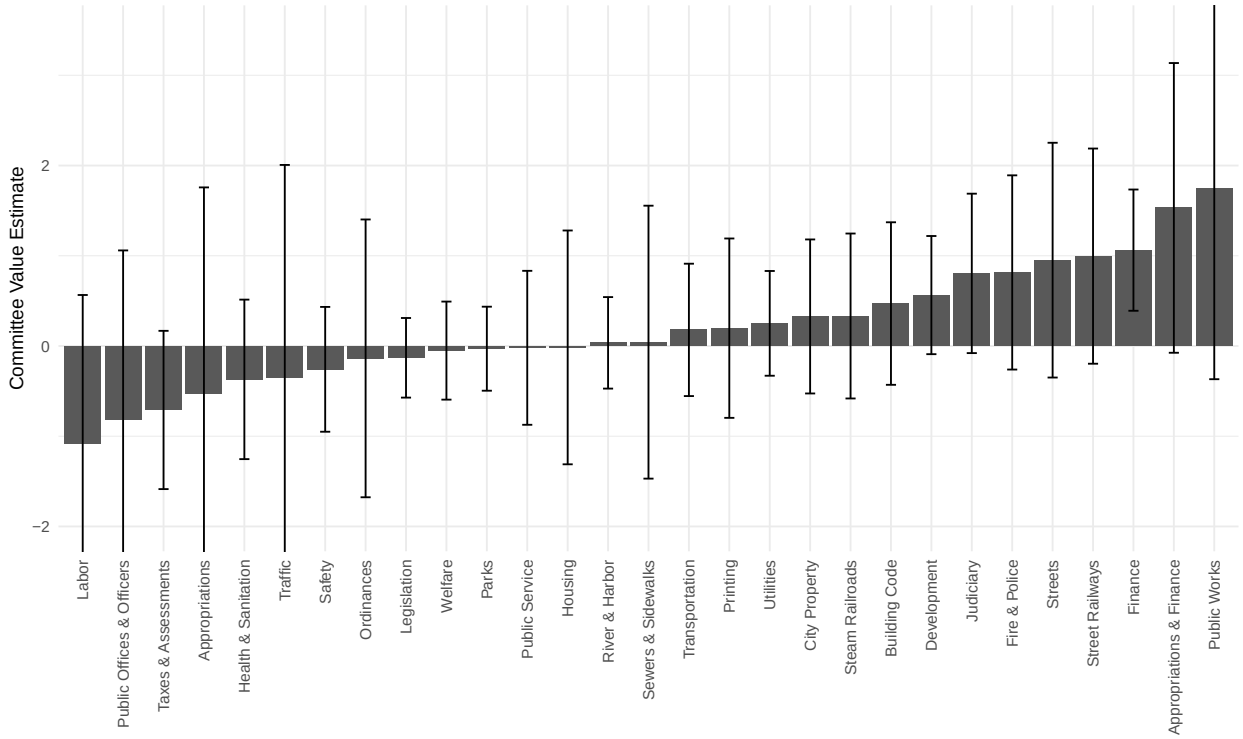


FIGURE 9: Estimated Committee Values, Cleveland City Council 1914-1940

Note: Figure plots estimates of committee values, based on method proposed by Groseclose and Stewart (1998), with 90% confidence intervals.

[38] "Organization Men Get Council Jobs." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). January 3, 1922. Page 3.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *Ibid*.

Results

In Figure 10, we plot the relationship between ward-level Black population share and our two measures of committee system influence. Both panels follow roughly the same pattern: an increase in influence from low to moderate levels of Black population, followed by a decrease as one moves to the highest levels of Black population share. Inspecting the data further reveals that the ascent of the two curves is almost entirely induced by only two city councillors – Thomas W. Fleming and Herman H. Finkle – who account for all of the points between thirty and fifty percent Black along the x-axis. These two council members represent two of the most prominent politicians in Cleveland during this time. Fleming became the first Black member of the council and was active and influential in Republican politics in the city ("Fleming, Thomas W." 2024). Herman Finkle, on the other hand, was a long-serving member who was "considered a ruthless, corrupt sergeant of the Republican machine" ("Finkle, Herman" 2024). The significant influence of these men – who were, importantly, elected from largely Black constituencies – does not necessarily undercut the relationship between district race and influence more generally, but does offer important context for the patterns documented in Figure 10.

We next turn to assessing the relationship between district race and committee influence more formally. In Table 2 we present models analogous to those above for Chicago – the only significant differences are that we have swapped a "Republican" indicator for a "Democrat" one, given Republicans' typical majority status, and that we have no measure analogous to the MVL indicator for Chicago's earlier period. Our results are relatively similar to those for Chicago above. We find in our two unconditional models a positive relationship between ward Black population share and serving as a committee chair and getting high-quality committee assignments. Once we control for seniority, partisanship, majority status, and district population, however, we find no such positive relationship for committee chairs, and a substantially attenuated one for portfolio value. Our covariates are generally related to the outcome as expected. Seniority is positively associated with both chair positions and committee portfolio value, and unlike in Chicago we

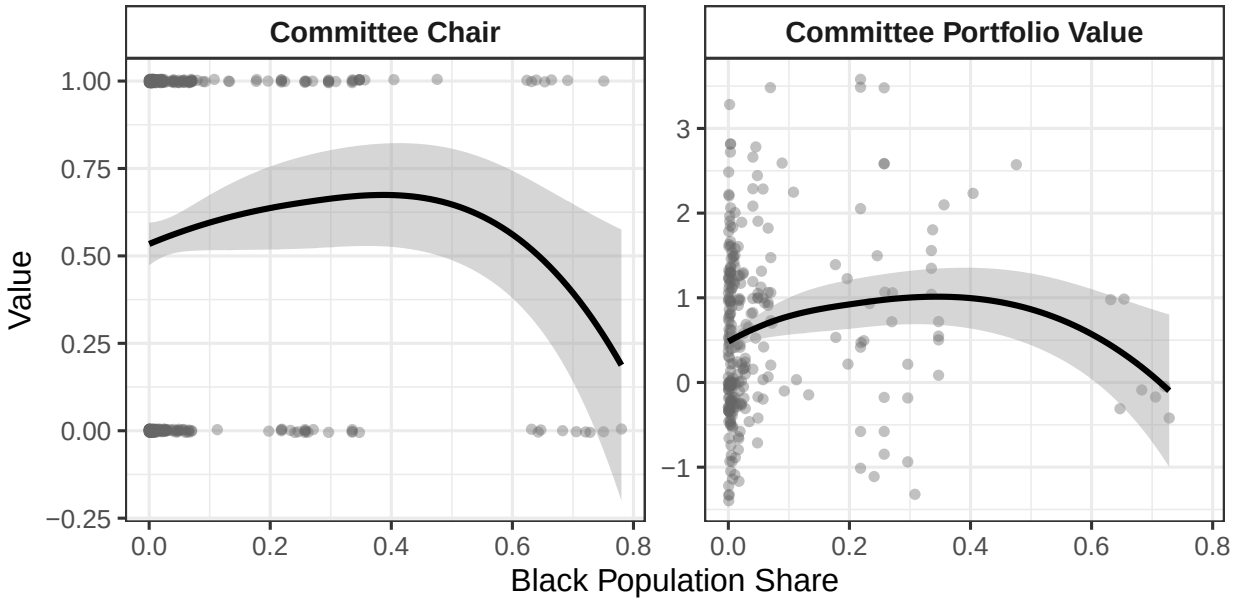


FIGURE 10: Ward-Level Black Population Share and Committee Influence, Cleveland

Note: Points are jittered for presentational clarity. Smooth loess fit is included.

find that being in the majority is associated with dramatically higher influence in the chamber. The sharp contrast in the effects of majority status in the two cities potentially speaks to the differing importance of party as an organizing factor for the chamber.

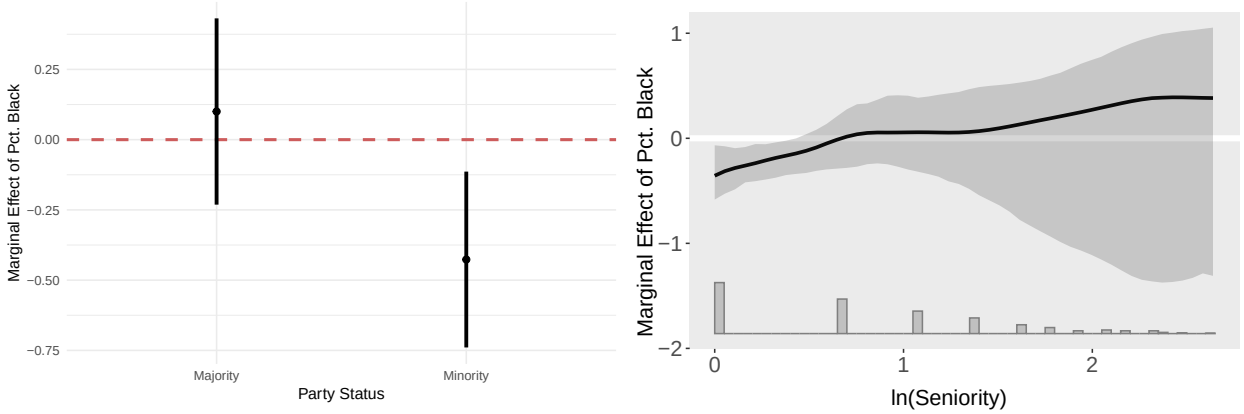
TABLE 2: Race and Committee Assignments in the Cleveland City Council

	Committee Chair		Portfolio Value	
Percent Black	0.263	−0.042	0.686	0.194
	(0.169)	(0.147)	(0.426)	(0.342)
ln(Seniority)		0.166**		0.533**
		(0.032)		(0.088)
Republican		0.049		−0.090
		(0.049)		(0.192)
Majority		0.322**		0.487**
		(0.047)		(0.189)
ln(District Population)		0.051		−0.155
		(0.084)		(0.193)
Observations	387	381	276	272

Note: Entries are from linear models with year fixed effects. Observations are at the legislator-session level. Standard errors are clustered by ward. **p<0.05, *p<0.10 (two-tailed).

While these results suggest a broadly null relationship between Black population share and committee system influence, we also emphasize that the more-positive unconditional model – that does not control for councillors' party memberships – is important as well. In part, this is because the party of a ward's council member is itself a function of a ward's racial composition, and is therefore "post-treatment" (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016); in part, it is because it pools across Democrats and Republicans and majority and minority party legislators. As with Chicago, we again explore heterogeneity in the effect of wards' Black population share with respect to both party status and seniority. In the case of Cleveland, the reasons to expect party status effects are even more magnified as in Chicago, as our qualitative accounts suggest that party played a greater role in committee assignments in Cleveland relative to Chicago, though we find that approximately a third of committee chairs are nevertheless drawn from minority party ranks. Our results, presented in Figure 11a, indicate that in Cleveland, as in Chicago, Black population share has a significant negative effect on alderpersons' likelihood of serving as a committee chair when in the minority. This effect is, importantly, likely to be driven by the few sessions at the beginning of our sample period when Democrats held an outright majority of the chamber. In Figure 11b, we find a pattern opposite of that for Chicago but more in line with our expectations: district racial composition appears to matter in a negative sense early in alderpersons' careers, but this negative effect fades as their careers progress.

Finally, we again explore whether the chair positions that were given to representatives of majority-Black wards in Cleveland were systematically less or more valuable than those given to representatives of majority-white wards. We again plot the distribution of Grosewart scores among chairs for the committees they chair; this is presented in Figure 12. Unlike in Chicago, we find that Black ward representatives represent similarly good or even better committees on average than white ward representatives. As we discuss in the next section, this is consistent with a pattern of Black inclusion and elevation in Cleveland City Council politics through the machinery of the Republican Party.



(a) Party Status **(b)** Seniority

FIGURE 11: Heterogeneous Effects of Black Population Share, Cleveland City Council

Note: Both figures are based on linear regression models and include control variables/base terms for (logged) seniority, party, majority status, and (logged) district population. 95% confidence intervals based on ward-clustered standard errors. Right-most figure presents a flexible kernel-based estimate of the marginal effect of Percent Black*, created using the* interflex *package in* R.

African Americans and the Republican Party in Cleveland

Our results are consistent with qualitative evidence that suggests that the Republican Party provided a meaningful vehicle for African Americans to enter into local politics. At the mass level, for example, Republican clubs provided an opportunity for Black participation: "Political clubs are about as old as social clubs. However, it has been only in the past few years here in Cleveland, that these political clubs have taken on real significance for racial groups. One of the outstanding political clubs in Cleveland, is the 11th Ward Republican Club. Councilman Lawrence O. Payne is president of this organization."[41] Such activities were associated with a real sense of Black political power, albeit one under threat. William O. Walker, writing in his column "Down the Big Road" in 1935 in the African American *Cleveland Call and Post*, wrote that,

"The present council has three Negro members. They are from the 11th, 17th, and

[41] "11th Ward Republican Club Keeps Records as Accurate as a Bank." *The Cleveland Call and Post* (Cleveland, OH). Thursday, September 5, 1935. Page 1.

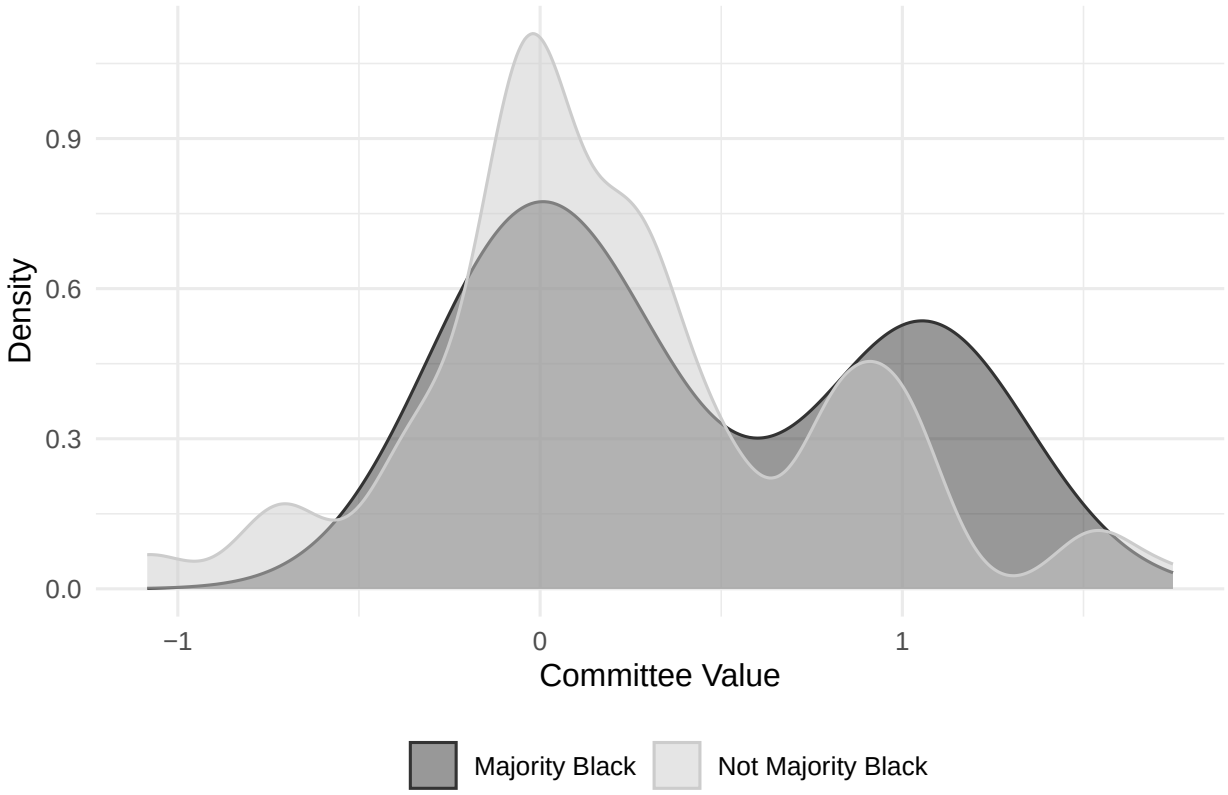


FIGURE 12: Distribution of Committee Values among Chairs in Cleveland, by Ward Racial Composition

> 18th wards. Our votes also elect the councilman from the 12th ward. We are the balance of power in the 16th and 19th wards. In the 24th and 30th wards our votes are big factors in Republican triumphs. If either Ray Miller or Harold Burton are elected mayor, you may look for a revival of the agitation for a return to the city manager form of government with a small council, either elected at large or on a redistricting plan...There are many people here who do not like it at all because the Negro voters play such an important part in local politics. They want, most of all, to find some way to reduce, if not eliminate, this influence. During the past three years a number of charter amendments have been proposed, all of which have had as their objective, the gerrymandering of the wards where Negroes live."[42]

[42] Walker, William O. "Down the Big Road." *The Cleveland Call and Post*. September 19, 1935. Page 6.

This editorial clearly suggests both the degree of Black influence in local areas of Cleveland at this time as well as the perceived threats to it that loomed on the horizon.

A few months later, Walker commented on the fruits of this Black electoral labor, emphasizing the impressive standing of African Americans in the council chamber:

> "More of our citizens ought to visit the sessions of council. They will see many things that will inspire them. Under [Council President] Mr. DeMaioribus both Councilmen Payne and Hubbard have presided over the sessions. Another awe-inspiring scene is to see Dr. Bundy either tangle council up with his parliamentary procedure or, with his commanding logic, untangle it. He is a master at either. Another thing that makes you feel proud is to see Assistant Clerk Harvey B. Atkins going about his duties. At some meetings Clerk Fred Thomas turns over the duties of clerkship to Mr. Atkins who always performs them well. I think if more citizens would go down and see these things, they would feel better rewarded for the votes they cast for our councilmen. We do not appreciate enough the honor our cuncilman (sic) bring to us through their conduct in the council chamber."

While Walker is only one political observer at one particular moment in time, his insights are not consistent with African Americans being shut out of city council politics: quite the contrary, they suggest that African Americans in the council are given significant opportunities, albeit perhaps token ones. The laudatory tone with which Council President De Maioribus is referenced in Walker's column lies in sharp contrast to that used in the *Plain Dealer* upon his selection as president in early 1934. At that time, that publication described the selections of DeMaioribus as president and of the aforementioned Herman Finkle (of the 12th Ward) and Leroy N. Bundy (African American, of the 11th) as Chairs of the Finance and Utilities Committees, respectively, as "indefensible on any other ground than that of partisan expedience" and stated that "the elevation of the three to the three most influential posts in the council is a conjunction of evils."[43]

[43] "Politics Rampant." *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH). January 22, 1934. Page 8.

This contrast seems less than coincidental. In fact, it may have been that the very partisan politics that Progressives sought to eliminate through non-partisan elections, the use of a city manager, and other innovative institutional solutions was the very vehicle through which African Americans were incorporated into local politics at both the mass and elite level.

Discussion and Conclusion

Black Americans have faced incessant barriers to representation throughout American history. From formal disenfranchisement (Bateman 2018; Kousser 1974) to party capture (Frymer 2011), political institutions have historically worked against African Americans' pursuits of their interests through the political process. This paper provides new evidence, building on previous work at the Congressional level by Griffin and Keane (2011), Peay (2021) and others, for the use of legislative institutions to disadvantage Black constituents. Furthermore, this paper highlights an unexplored area of the Great Migration – local legislative politics. Not only did the aftermath of migration leave Black Southerners excluded socially and residentially, but they faced barriers to political inclusion. In this paper, we illustrate the potential for Black political exclusion via legislative power, but also for their inclusion via party politics.

To do so, we draw on two substantively important contexts: the Chicago City Council and Cleveland City Councils amidst the first wave of the Great Migration. By migrating *en masse* from the South to northern cities, Black Americans pursued economic opportunities while also gaining new political rights. By examining committee assignments in the Chicago and Clevelvand City Councils, we are able to uniquely focus on an essential legislative institution in the legislative branch of two of the Great Migration's, and the United States', most important cities. Empirically, these contexts allow us to take advantage of cross-sectional and temporal variation in Black population to identify the effects of changing district demographics on committee assignments. Our results suggest that, in the aggregate, representatives of Black wards were not

systematically discriminated against in the allocation of committee chairs and that they received committee portfolios of roughly similar quality to those representing more-white wards. Deeper investigation suggests that, at least in Cleveland, Republican Party politics may have facilitated African Americans' incorporation into local politics on a relatively equal footing, and that under some conditions African American wards may have been disadvantaged in the committee system.

In future work, we will expand this analysis to an additional city context: St. Louis, another city that experienced dramatic increases in Black population share during this period, and which somewhat uniquely employed city-wide elections to select ward-level representatives during the period under study. Exploring the relationship between local Black population and legislative organization in a context where ward representatives are more or less unaccountable to their ward specifically will help us further contextualize the importance of district racial composition for institutional discrimination in local legislative politics. Additionally, we have begun data collection for the race of city councilors in Chicago. This data has been made available via the University of Illinois Press, which houses the *The Negro in Illinois* journal. In future iterations of our Chicago section, we intend to expand our analysis to incorporate individual-level race information to examine the relationship between legislative council positions and district-level discrimination. By broadening our scope to include St. Louis and individual-level race data for Chicago, our future work will offer a deeper understanding of how district racial composition and representation influence institutional discrimination in local legislative politics.

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