# Access and Aggregation: Formal Citizen Input Mechanisms and Mayoral Powers in Local Government Charters.

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ABSTRACT: Form of government research traditionally uses dichotomous representations of strong and weak mayors to attempt to explain policy output; conversely, citizen participation research often relies on variables such as city size and density along with other community characteristics, treating institutions transparently (Tavares & Carr, 2013). Both treatments of institutions limit the variation in the form of local governments and lead to theoretically incoherent empirical results. Crawford and Ostrom's (1995) "Institutional Grammar" provides a technique to develop a continuum of institutional arrangements representing form of government in a more theoretically satisfying manner. This paper employs the institutional grammar coding technique to provide a constitutional-statement level content analysis of the powers of mayors and citizens present in Florida city charters. This research seeks to better understand the role that these tradeoffs between the formal powers of citizens and mayors have on the degree of citizen input sought and utilized by the local government. Essentially we are asking the question: do city charters granting citizens higher levels of access to mayors and decision making have an impact on the degree of citizen input utilized in the local government? Understanding the role of institutional grammar can provide a richer environment to examine the different types of citizen input mechanisms and the variation of their effectiveness across different local government structural and cultural environments.

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**Keywords: Citizen participation; form of government; institutional analysis.**

## INTRODUCTION

There is a widely held normative assumption in public administration that citizen participation in governmental decision making is a necessity for democratic accountability. The American Society for Public Administration first noted the important role citizens must play in self-governance in its 1984 Code of Ethics, which stated a guideline for administrators to "bring citizens into work with the government as far as practical, and to respect the right of the public (through the media) to know what is going on in your agency," (Svara, 2014). Yet citizen participation as it is operationalized in the study of governance often blurs these two distinct processes of cooptation and information, and is under-developed in terms of establishing a coherent definition. Citizen involvement is often seen by both public administrators and the public has a dissatisfying and unproductive endeavor. Because the term, while having normative appeal, lacks objective conceptualization, its usefulness in exploring this phenomenon is limited. Throughout the history of the United States, municipal formation was pursued as a method not just to increase land values but to employ "mechanisms of disenfranchisement" by limiting citizenship and minority-group access to the polls (Burns, 1994). With the rise of home rule and municipal-reform, cities have adopted wide variation in their structures across and within states (Kemp, 1999). Citizen participation has morphed over the years from being considered the exercise of formal political power via direct democracy mechanisms, to including information exchange to and from local governments. This makes identifying, modeling, and advancing theories of citizen participation more difficult, typically because only one or two components of the broader definition of citizen participation have been examined. This paper builds upon an effort by Weible, Feiock, et al. (forthcoming), to utilize Crawford and Ostrom's "Institutional Grammar" to explore public participation mechanisms through analysis of the diversity of rules, norms, constraints and grants of authority within traditional "strong mayor" and "weak mayor" forms of city government. We examine the "formalization" of citizen participation as institutional statements embedded in 10 municipal charters. Specifically, we ask the question "what are the formal avenues of access that citizens are granted to participate by their local government's formal constitution-level rules, and how do they vary between different structures of executive and legislative authority" Here we identify a set of quantifiable mechanisms employed by local governments to grant citizens access, in the form of both influence and information, to impact the decision making of their elected officials.

Citizens grant sovereignty to government through the development and adoption of constitutional rules. In the case of cities, that authority is vested within the states, which since the late-1800s have delegated more autonomy generally to municipal governments in the form of home rule. City-level rules may take the form of charters which bestow power to elected and administrative officers, as well as providing channels for citizens to influence their decisions. Yet, scholars have long recognized that rules are not static, and the processes for changing them over time to add or delete duties or discretion represent a nested game whereby individuals with a stake in the outcome negotiate new divisions of governmental authority as well as checks on administrative and elected actors. Maser (1998) argues that the constitution-level electoral and information access-points of citizens are a nexus between the authority and delegation of decision making to government and the rights retained by the public.

These constitution-level citizen participation mechanisms present in city charters are a crucial -- but often transparently treated -- link between the public's attempts to gain information and influence governmental decision making and administrative perceptions of the value of such input. As such, we propose a definition for formal citizen input mechanisms as those access-points present in constitution-level documents that define citizen "rights" to direct or advise local government.

While public input can has historically focused on direct-democracy and spanned the gamut of mechanisms from the ballot box to the citizen-initiative petition, administrative scholars have tended to focus on participation that attempts to shape or inform the decisions of public managers and administrative processes. This narrower definition is in keeping with the tradition of administrative scholarship to focus on agency performance and management processes (Yang & Callahan, 2005). The literature broadly defines three categories for citizen participation: political, civil and administrative. Yet formal citizen input mechanisms as defined by constitution-level rules may further distinguish between decision-making and informational roles within the dimensional categories provided in the current literature. Citizen input mechanisms resulting in citizen involvement, lead to "buy in" of policy decisions, improved responsiveness of the citizenry, and trust in government (Berman, 1997; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). However, scholars have often struggled with the question of when to engage citizens in a meaningful way that contributes to public performance (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). This may be

because a set of participatory citizen input mechanisms may need to be supplemented with a form of advisory input mechanisms. We refer to these as information exchange that flows in both directions 'to and from' local governments. In addition, barriers to participation can relate to public-input mechanisms, be shaped by the form of government, and influenced by community size (Kweit & Kweit, 1980; Yang & Callahan, 2005). The effort to empirically analyze these barriers have often lacked large-N quantitative treatment, or failed to find significance despite the expectation that the size and structure of governments should influence the formal mechanisms for citizen input, and thus, the quality of such exchange. To remedy this failure, we suggest that these citizen input mechanisms be examined using constitution-level rules.

This paper aims to provide a "proof of concept" for the potential of utilizing the "Institutional Grammar" coding strategy developed by Sue Crawford and Elinor Ostrom (1995) to capture the institutional diversity within local government charters, and how such overlooked formal variation may influence the access-points and quality of citizen input on government actions.. Governmental forms at the city level are complex, with more overlapping grants and constraints on power than a simple, dichotomous treatment of cities can depict. Thus, a statement-level content analysis of city charters can provide a richer descriptive and inferential measure of citizens' role in government decision making than survey-based administrative perceptions alone. While this paper uses a small sample of 10 municipal charters, it does seem as though the three perspectives on citizen participation may not be a complete representation of powers available to citizens.

## CONCEPTUALIZING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation is often used in a manner that makes it interchangeable with public involvement, citizen engagement, citizen input and co-production. However, it can be argued that engagement, participation, involvement and input actually have their own independent definition. While there exists overlap, citizen participation can be seen as the all-encompassing term. What exactly this means has yet to be convincingly defined in the literature. Dougherty and Easton (2010) take the following perspective, "Public participation is essential to a functioning democracy, as rule by the people presumes citizens will take some responsibility for a properly

functioning society, even in cases where elected officials represent them". But, what does this translate to in terms of practical application of public participation? Municipal reform, the emergence of the strong-mayor form of government in the 1850s, the council-manager form decades later, and the re-writing of charters to include direct-democracy provisions are all structural advancements born from divergent interests: to take on new municipal service responsibilities; to hold elected and appointed officials more accountable; to create new distributions of benefits; and to engage in exclusionary tactics or serve political goals, all of which persist today (Ross & Levine, 2006). This diversity of motivations and means raises the practical question of how citizens should actively engage governments to establish a more functional democracy? But it also poses problems for researchers seeking to determine when citizen participation is serving its stated purpose. Dougherty and Easton (2010) allude to the fact that elected officials represent citizens; however their definition also suggests that citizens must take responsibility even when they are represented by an elected official. The question then becomes what does that responsibility look like?

The citizen participation literature has a number of perspectives with respect to what a citizen's responsibility to effective democracy encompasses. The three dimensions taken in the literature, political, civil, and administrative, are a proposed answer to that question. Scholars suggest that volunteering is a part of the citizen responsibility (Caputo, 2009; Haddad, 2004; Jones, 2006; Paik and Navarre-Jackson, 2011; Stadelmann-Steffen and Freitag, 2011; Wollenbaek and Stromsnes 2008, Milward, 2005). This is included in the civil dimension of citizen participation. The civil dimension is not captured by the formal rules, because it is not a specified enumeration of a "right" and does not represent a delegation of power from the individual to government. But that does not mean the action, while informal, does not produce a public value. A subset of the volunteerism literature refers to civil participation as co-production, this is the process of using citizens to supplement the costs of producing public goods (Jakebson, 2012; Marschall 2004; Lelieveldt, Dekker, Volker, Torenvlied 2009; Martin, 2000; Parks and Oakerson, 2000; Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006). The co-production form of participation may be considered a formal citizen input mechanism depending on the definition selected by that study. Citizen participation has also been termed citizen input; this is the process where local governments involve citizens in the policymaking process (Hira, Huxtable, Leger, 2005; Berner, 2003; Berner, 2011; Askim and Hanssen, 2008; Koontz, 1999; Neshkova and Guo, 2011).

Citizen input has been discussed as a transfer of information from one party to another; this can be identified in the constitution-level rule analysis of the city charters. There are groups of the literature that refer to citizen participation as individuals deriving influence from being members of a group of stakeholders (Edelenbos, Steihn, and Klijn 2010; Burby 2003), coalitions (Wells, Feinberg, Alexander, Ward, 2009), neighborhood groups (Houston and Ong 2011; Brody, Godschalk and Burby 2003; Jun and Shiau 2011), or some other community oriented organization (Julian, Reschl, Carrick, and Katrenich 2007; Sullivan, Downe, Entwistle and Sweeting, 2006).

Within the management literature, scholars have employed differing functional definitions of citizen participation, the broadest of which encompasses the roles of citizens as: protestors and lobbyists; input seekers and deliverers through public meetings and surveys; voters and campaign-contributors and activists; as well as the obligatory roles of taxpayers and other civic chores (Langton, 1978). Others have defined citizen input more specifically as efforts to influence administrative decision making and implementation (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Frederickson, 1982; Timney, 1998). There has been a continuous effort to boil down citizen-input to its most "authentic" and thus utilitarian essence. Arnstein (1969) defines public participation as one category of citizen empowerment, a "redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens excluded from the political and economic processes to be deliberately included in the future." Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation lists three top rings of "citizen control, delegated power, and partnership" as the goal, while anything less – consultation, information, placation – are considered "tokenism." Moving up Arnstein's ladder of public participation is an admittedly normative goal of administrators, in minimizing to the extent possible the information advantages of the inculcated and embedded "haves" who set agendas.

It is possible that these are all different avenues for participation that can be encouraged, expected, accepted or dismissed at the local government level. More importantly, a variety of these mechanisms may be directly written into constitution-level rules guaranteeing citizens a particular set of rights. The citizen participation literature seems to study participation along three dimensions: political, civil, and administrative. This suggests that we can ask the question of what process and mechanisms of citizen participation are formally adopted by local governments.

Ostrom's classification of institutional statements (2005) attempts to capture the norms, rules, and strategic views of institutions through a syntax that codes how institutional statements prescribe, permit or advise actions or outcomes by actors. Management literature on citizen participation considers whether public input into decision making is authentic or symbolic and useless. How can citizens have appropriate avenues to provide meaningful input into decision making? Are those avenues inversely related to the concentration of decision making in the hands of public officials? Studying the relationship between the constitutional statements as "relational contracts" with citizens – and how such arrangements co-exist with centralization of authority and decision making with mayors – could provide a richer method for answering these daunting questions.

We follow the same methodology prescribed by Weible, et al., and utilize charters from 10 randomly selected Florida cities to code a broader range of constitutional-level governance arrangements in order to help illuminate the authority of institutional actors, authoritative relationships between and within institutional arrangements, and checks and balances on the authority of different positions.

Assessments of formal mechanisms for citizens to engage managers have only developed in recent years. Wang, in particular, developed an index of form citizen input (CI) mechanisms that include public hearings, advisory committees and surveys (Wang, 2001). But researchers have found mixed results when examining the role of community size and form of government on the types of input mechanisms. Some scholars have argued that smaller cities should have more CI because of closer-knit community ties and ease of access (Kelleher & Lowery, 2004), while others speculate that larger cities will have fewer formal mechanisms for input because heterogeneous populations with incentives to mobilize and influence government might turn to self-organizing efforts outside of government (Creighton, 1981; Deustsch, 1961). The evidence has been contradictory, with smaller cities (Oliver, 2000) and larger cities (Cole & Caputo, 1984) correlated with greater CI. Likewise, researchers have found contradictory evidence of mayor-council and strong mayor forms of government and positive effects or no effects on CI. More recently, Yang and Pandey (2011) have also found that a variety of input mechanisms have a positive relationship with CI, supporting previous findings that the relationship between mechanisms and citizen participation is contextual and specific mechanisms should be paired

with specific objectives of citizen input. But Yang and Pandey (2011) found no relationship between form of government and CI. This may be in part because the motivations behind formation of cities in the American context are divergent over different periods of history, and innovations in form of government have tended to blend together (Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014). While strong- and weak-mayor forms of government divide direct departmental control differently between executive and legislative branches, they may also vary widely in the degree of managerial control given to a public administrator within the "strong" mayor form (Frederickson, Logan, & Wood, 2003; Nelson & Svara, 2010).

One shortcoming of these previous studies is the treatment of Maser's (1998) "relational contract" through constitutions as a simple, often dichotomous or nominal variable for form of government as well as the correlation between city-size and form of government. Larger cities tend to be correlated with strong mayor forms of government. Although strong-mayor and weak-mayor or "reformed" council-manager governments have been found to have significant influence in some cases on CI, much of the urban political economy and institutional literatures acknowledges that such simple classification loses much of the variation within and between the forms of government (Frederickson & Johnson, 2001). This type of inconclusive result from research, suggests a failure in both conceptualization and quantification of the measure. Understanding the institutional diversity that determines the authority trade-offs between citizen's and government could help to resolve the discrepancies in the literature.

## A PLATFORM OF INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY

Crawford and Ostrom endeavored to overcome a classic problem for social scientists attempting to understand and predict social situations (2005). That is, actors have mostly been treated within models as rational constants, expected to pursue self-maximization within action situations. While rational choice theory has been found empirically to make accurate predictions in market-like environments where participants possess complete information, have formed transitive, ordered valuations for all potential outcomes, and make choices to maximize expected material net payoffs, these assumptions are often unmet outside of competitive markets. Unlike markets, social dilemmas often pit heterogeneous mixtures of actors whose internal motivations

differ along social norms. Some actors behave with economically rational preferences; others are animated more by trust, reciprocity and cooperation. In such scenarios, the structure of the situation, rather than the model of the individual, is associated with the outcomes observed. To overcome this limitation, the "Grammar of Institutions" was conceptualized to better enable researchers to analyze the interaction of actors within varied structural situations. Specifically, the "institutional grammar" approach confronts imperfect information scenarios. We expect that such an analysis gains leverage by quantifying the form and frequency of rules that control flows of information, set boundaries for participation, qualifications for formal positions, and aggregation of preferences.

Rules alone do not determine outcomes. Attributes of the biophysical world, such as environmental problems or other collective-action dilemma, influence how actors will prioritize their potential actions or the price of inaction. Community attributes such as ideology, population size or density of development patterns and ethnic makeup can also play a role shaping social norms that assist actors in evaluating the policy space of unique situations as well as the action-outcome linkages. The Institutional Grammar approach relaxes the rational assumptions regarding how individuals process information, value actions and outcomes, and selection processes.

In repeated selection scenarios with stable environments, individuals can optimize through a heuristic process that allows for more efficient selections over time. Rules help to inform how different individuals with diverse mental models learn through experiences within their environment because they shape the salience of situational attributes, thus how actors perceive situations and optimize utility in the face of high information costs (Frohlich & Oppenheimer, 2001). We posit that city charters can be treated as constitutional-level rules in use that assist individuals in complex situations process information and make decisions. The more stable the environment, the more individuals can learn from the attributes of the environment and achieve more efficient outcomes.

### *Constitutional-Level Analysis at the City Charter Level*

Managers like elected policymakers and citizens function within an environment structured by jointly agreed-to rules that constrain and permit types of action. Vincent Ostrom and others would describe the analysis of institutions within city charters as an analysis of "constitutional level rules" (V. Ostrom, 1982, pg. 12). Constitutional rules refer to the institutions that structure the fundamental components of a government (V. Ostrom, 1982, 1991). Analysis of constitutional rules can be applied to the study of an actual constitution of a government; but it can also apply to charters of cities, private companies, and nonprofits (V. Ostrom, 2008, pg. 5). Thus far, the management literature that explores structural components of administration decision making and citizens' role in those processes treat constitutional rules transparently.

Constitutional rules can vary functionally, and grant or constrain authority for a particular position. Constitutional rules might establish procedures describing how residents enter into a position as well as the credentials that qualify people for the position. Commonly, constitutional rules prescribe methods for citizens to amend rules, replace or repeal them. But, for example, they can also permit, require or implicitly forbid public-access in the form of public meetings. In so doing, they act to grant or constrain the flow of information available for citizens to develop informed opinions about public actions and to engage in their activities.

**Theoretical Expectations for Structuring the Analysis and Results**

We explore city charter structures and municipal governance by examining institutional statements within charters pertaining to citizen input or actions. As such, it builds upon research that has relied on the dichotomous forms of government that dominate the modern United States municipal landscape and date to the progressive reform movement of over a century ago. The mayor-council or strong-mayor form is based on separation of powers between an independently elected mayor and the council. A council-manager or weak mayor form consolidates governmental authority in the council which can hire or dismiss a manager. There are several alternative platforms such as a commission where each council member directly oversees a department or agency or a town meeting form, but these are few in number and generally confined to small communities. These forms of government provide the platform upon which the

other institutional components are built (Svara and Nelson, 2008). Like presidential and parliamentary systems at a national level, the important institutional variation is often within each form.

The approach is exploratory, but is framed by theoretical expectations related to citizen participation within and between forms of government. As such it borrows from the efforts of Weible, Carter, Feiock, et al, to code the institutional statements pertaining to mayors and augments them with statements pertaining to citizen input, expecting that:

1. *Institutions within strong mayor cities will have a greater number of citizen-participation mechanisms than weak mayor cities.* This is based on the expectation that institutions in city charters that structure strong mayor cities are more diverse than the institutions that structure weak mayor cities. Strong mayors emerged in U.S. governance as service-delivery demands increased and municipal populations diversified. It makes intuitive sense that mayors in these environments should play a larger role in municipal governance and have more authority than weak mayors in response to more heterogeneous populations, greater resources, and greater demands placed on government.

2. *Differences in citizen-input mechanisms will be greater between strong and weak mayor cities than within groups.* We expect that differences in institutions between strong and weak mayor city charters reflect divergent community interests which have organized to reform their governments in different ways. It follows that cities choosing to strengthen the hand of a mayor would also take steps to seek formal decision making and access points for citizens.

*3. Citizen-input mechanisms will be concentrated around the formal elector role of the resident*. City charters predominantly exist to establish boundaries for entry into public positions, to prescribe choices they may, must or must not make in the position, and the role of information and aggregation rules. The institutions within strong mayor city charters are distinct from the institutions within weak mayor city charters. Therefore, there should be discernible differences between strong and weak mayor cities in information and aggregation rules, but not the more universal role of the citizen as elector.

*4. Cities with greater community heterogeneity will have higher concentrations of rules.* Localities that have greater racial, ideological or population differences will likely have a greater

need for more complex rule structures in order to facilitate more diverse demands for public goods and overcome unique challenges to empowering some groups. Constitutional rules in this case could serve to formally define the roles of less political active enclaves of the population, reduce information costs, and ensure their access to governmental decision making.

## DATA & METHODS

This study consists of a comparative analysis of constitutional choice based on a sample of 10 city charters in Florida. The data sources and methods of coding are presented in this section.

### Case Selection

City selection followed a stratified random sample strategy. To control for state-level factors, city selection was limited to the state of Florida. Florida cities with populations between 5,000 and 500,000 were stratified according to the Florida League of Cities Database (http://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/findAPeerCity.aspx) identification of council-strong mayor and council-weak mayor structure, and five cities were randomly selected from within each stratum. The resulting sample of council-strong mayor case selections included West Palm Beach, Apopka, Sweetwater, Hialeah Gardens, and Tampa. Council-weak mayor case selections included Valparaiso, Okeechobee, Mascotte, Crestview, and Starke. Descriptive statistics are provided in the appendix.

### Coding Citizen Access in City Charters

The analytical approach in this study employs the deductive and inductive coding strategies outlined by Weible, et al (2013). The deductive elements employed an integrative institutional analysis of policy designs (Basurto et al., 2010; Siddiki et al., 2011; Siddiki et al., 2012), using concepts and methods from the IAD framework (Ostrom, 2005). The inductive element identified and categorized the substantive functional roles for citizens specified by charter statements. The approach is presented in the following three steps.

#### *Step 1. Identifying Institutional Statements Relating to Citizens*

City charters were analyzed to identify statements pertaining to citizens, residents, and electors. Most of the time, these statements are sentences within the city charters. These statements serve as the primary units for subdividing, coding, and analyzing the charters.

To distinguish individual institutional statements, all sentences in the charter that either explicitly or implicitly referred to citizens were further coded as either regulatory or constitutive. Regulatory statements were coded according to one of the following five syntactic categories (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995; 2005; Basurto et al., 2010; Siddiki, 2011). First, the entity with responsibility for taking action in a statement was coded as the "attribute." Individuals or bodies of individuals in organizations or groups can be attributes. Second, regulatory statements often show prescriptive force in the form of "must", "may", or "must not" phrases – these were coded within the "deontic" category. Third, the action word, almost always the verb of the sentence, was coded as the "aim". Fourth, the spatial, temporal, and procedural circumstances under which the statement applies were coded as the "condition". Finally, any sanctions or inducements that incentivize compliance with the statement were coded as an "or else".

For example, one statement from West Palm Beach's city charter is written: "Any person who is a resident of the City of West Palm Beach, who has qualified as an elector of the State of Florida and who registers in the manner prescribed by law shall be an elector of the City." In this sample statement "any person who is a resident," "who has qualified as an elector of the State of Florida" and "who registers in the manner prescribed by law" are the attributes, "shall" is the deontic, "be" is the aim, and "an elector of the City" is the condition. In this example, there is no explicit incentive for compliance like there may be in statements placing explicit limitations on positions within government.

Constitutive statements follow one of three syntactic arrangements (D'Andrade, 1984; Searle, 1969): "There shall be X", "X is Y", and "X is Y under [specified conditions]". An example of the first is "There shall be a distinct separation of legislative and executive powers."

***Step 2. Functional Classification of Citizen Institutional Statements***

The first step is intended to provide a reliable procedure for collecting charter institutional statements pertaining to citizens. This second step classifies these statements

according to its functional purpose based on the "rule typology" from the IAD framework (Ostrom, 2005).

*1. Rules that establish qualifications for citizens*

City charters set requirements for citizens to participate in elections and to hold positions in government. Institutional statements that specify these requirements are called "boundary rules" and delineate between members of the public allowed to engage in many forms of exchange with government and those that are not. For example, in Starke, the statement that "No elector who cannot read and write the English language shall be appointed inspector of election," is a boundary rule.

*2. Rules that structure information transmission to or from citizens*

Many charter statements specify the actions and choices that positions are required to make, may make, or are prohibited from making. Some institutional statements specify channels of communication, for example, "The budget must be adopted a publicly noticed meeting." Such statements that stipulate channels of communication, and require, allow, or prohibit the transmission of information, were coded as "information rules."

*3. Rules that target choices of the citizenry*

Other institutional statements target the actions or choices of citizens specific to their different duties or opportunities to influence government. These institutional statements were coded as "choice rules." As with information rules, choice rules also can be coded according to functional duties of the citizen.

*4. Exercising control over positions within the government*

Citizens play a central role in exercising control over the elected positions established within a city charter. The act of voting, when specified by the charter has a means of combining the preferences of a body of individuals among whom power is divided, is an example of an "aggregation rule."

*5. Granting or constraining action within formal positions*

Participants and actions are assigned to positions within the governance structure. These positions have a set of actions which are required, forbidden or allowed. Rules related to the actions of citizens that are allowable, mandatory or prohibited are classified as "choice rules."

***Step 3. Substantive Functional Duties of Citizens***

The third step takes an inductive approach to determine the functional duties of the citizens assigned in city charters, which can be found in the previously identified choice and information rules. Citizen duties can be considered responsibilities assigned to the public, but are also associated with increased access, as the more duties the citizen has, the greater the citizen's opportunities to influence the workings of the city government. Examples of these duties include voting, access to public meetings, and amending the charter through the initiative petition process.

To develop a citizen duty code list inductively, first the authors compiled the information and choice rules previously identified from across all charters and then combined them into a single list. Second, as some statements are the same across charters, we removed duplicate or repetitive charter statements from the list. As will be seen in the results section, the result was 14 codes representing the substantive functional roles of the citizenry across the ten selected charters. This third step of coding was completed by coding whether the charters contained institutional statements relative to substantive functional duties.

## RESULTS

Although this is not a study intended to generalize to other localities or institutions, the results largely conform to our depiction of city charters and the rules related to citizen input as a more complex phenomenon than is commonly conceived in research designs. Results are presented within the four theoretical expectations outlined above.

Expectation 1: *Institutions within strong mayor cities will have a greater diversity of citizen-participation mechanisms than weak mayor cities.*

This expectation was born from the thought that strong-mayor forms of government represent more hierarchical organizations but also have more diverse population and demands for resources, leading to more methods for meaningful citizen involvement. Measuring institutional diversity within city charters can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The simplest is by counting the number of institutional statements. Table 1 shows the counts of total statements in cities related to powers of the mayor and duties and powers of citizens, and the number of pages of the charter for each city in the sample. Overall, weak mayor cities averaged 30 institutional statements specifically for the mayor whereas the strong mayor cities average 63.

[Insert Table 1 about here ]

Weak mayor cities averaged 16.8 institutional statements pertaining to public functions while strong mayor cities averaged 29.4 statements. West Palm Beach was the strong mayor city with the most public statements (50) while Apopka had the least (19). Valparaiso had the most statements among weak mayor cities (38) while Okeechobee and Crestview had the least (4 each). Okeechobee may be an outlier in that a number of citizen-participation statements were removed from the city charter and inserted into ordinances in recent years, allowing them to be changed by city commissioners rather than voters.

Another way to examine institutional diversity is to compare the types of institutions associated with strong and weak mayor cities and the functions associated with those institutions. Figure 1 presents two pie charts summarizing the percentage of different types of institutions (Aggregation, Choice, Boundary, Position and Information) based on the coded statements within each city's charter. Within the sample, strong and weak mayors do share categories of statements, but strong mayors have a higher proportion of aggregation rules (21%) than weak mayor cities (11.9%) and a lower proportion of choice rules (7.5%) compared with weak mayor cities (14.3%). Conversely, weak mayor cities have a higher proportion of information rules (30%) than strong mayor cities (10%). This finding suggests strong mayor forms have greater formal avenues for constraining actions by official actors, as well as greater discretion on the part of citizens in their roles as electors. Weak mayor cities appear to place more restrictions on entrance by citizens into formal positions or arenas of influence. They also appear to place more emphasis on information rules, although it is unclear from the coding to date if the purpose of these rules is generally to constrain the flow of information between governmental and citizen

actors or to enhance it. This generally appears to conform with the theoretical expectation of greater diversity of citizen input rules within strong mayor cities.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Expectation 2: *Differences in citizen-input mechanisms will be greater between strong and weak mayor cities than within groups.*

Table 2 is another descriptive demonstration of the variation within forms of government and shows that strong mayor cities within the sample have larger standard deviations for aggregation and information rules, while weak mayor cities have larger deviations from the mean among boundary and choice rules. The average differences within city charters are smaller than between city charters conforming to our expectation. But the larger standard-deviations within strong mayor charters clearly conflict with this expectation and suggest a range of possible theoretical explanations that larger-N studies could explore, including: whether cities with more community heterogeneity in their populations produce more diverse bundles of institutional rules; whether differences between the biophysical/material environments of municipalities with similar constitutional forms of government are nonetheless associated with greater variation in rule types; and to what extent such variation is related to the perceived quality of citizen input by public administrators and policymakers.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Although the dichotomous treatment of form of municipal government fails to capture the diversity of institutional grammar, there are clear differences between strong and weak mayor cities. By and large, strong mayor cities have higher counts of most rules. There is an obvious explanation that larger cities are more likely to draft longer constitutional frameworks in order to accommodate broader cross-stitches of populations as well as greater number of urban goods expected to be delivered to taxpayers. In the appendix, we present descriptive statistics and a brief summary of the 10 cities sampled. Strong Mayor cities do have larger populations, and more racially/ethnic/income diverse populations. However, such generalizations do not uniformly hold, with Weak Mayor cities actually averaging longer charters and two of the lowest-population weak mayor cities (Starke and Valparaiso) enshrining more citizen-participation statements than 3 of the 5 strong mayor cities. It is impossible to make inferences

from such findings given the sample size, but as a "proof of concept" such observations provide a strong argument for researchers to pursue more in-depth and statistically inferential coding. Table 3 presents summary statistics for strong and weak mayor samples by rule classification.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Expectation 3: *Citizen-input mechanisms will be concentrated around the formal elector role of the resident.*

Figure 2 demonstrates the overlapping functional rules between strong and weak mayors. While the dichotomous coding of form of government would seem to retain some utility based on functional statements such as publication requirements or restrictions on entry into positions exclusive to strong or weak mayor cities in the sample, many critical functions of citizens are shared by both forms of government, including referendum, petition-initiative, and recall of elected officials. These more overlapping functions also center on the role of the citizen as the elector, which is logically a source of authority central to democratic governance. But the outsized presence of the citizen in charters as little more than an elector coupled with the relative lack of information rules in strong mayor charters suggests that charters could lack significant citizen-input methods for administrative decision making – along with one potential source of frustration with the lack of genuine public feedback and support.

The quality of citizen-input in aiding public managers and policymakers formulate and enact policies and programs is obviously a complex, interactive and dynamic environment, where influences may feedback upon one another, in the manner Maser and Ostrom both considered as "nested games" or "action situations" which occasionally repeat themselves and produce re-negotiated rule arrangements. While there are many mechanisms for soliciting a variety of feedback, structural limitations should be considered a part of the puzzle.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Expectation 4: *Cities with greater community heterogeneity will have higher concentrations of information rules.*

To explore how the cities and community attributes might be associated, we performed an agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis using the R software package. Such analysis

utilizes a similarity matrix to produce a hierarchical classification of data via a series of partitions that may feature a single cluster containing all *n* observations, to *n* clusters each containing a single observation (Everitt & Hothorn, 2011). Fusions of observations based on their similarity, or closeness in Euclidian distance, are represented hierarchically by a two-dimensional dendrogram. Cluster analyses can be useful in examining the variances of data by creating more homogenous groups, but can also be subject to "garbage in, garbage out" faulty conclusions when variables are used without supportable theoretical justifications for inclusion.

[Insert Figure 3 About Here ]

Of the three cluster analyses performed, fusing information and race appears the provide the most useful description of the data. Two clear clusters of cities strongly suggests the presence of two different groups for information rules influenced by the percentage of the city population that was African-American in the 2010 U.S. Census. While the small sample size prevents inferential statements, the exploratory analysis suggests that such variables typically thought of as proxy controls for socio-economic conditions in cities may also possess some explanatory power when it comes to rule configurations. This would seem to support the theoretical expectation that more heterogeneous communities possess greater concentrations of information rules because they will have greater need for formal channels of sharing in order reduce information costs.

Cluster analyses for information rules and political ideology and population density were also conducted and are present in Figure 4. However, they are less informative because they suffer from chaining, or the incorporation of intermediate points between clusters that produce "straggly" clusters and present less useful data.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Citizens grant sovereignty to government through constitutional rules. In the case of cities, these rules have often taken the form of charters, and it is logical to assume there is some quantifiable nexus between the authority and delegation of decision making to government and the rights retained by the public. Research into citizen participation mechanisms has relied

simplified variables for institutional structure and form of government. This paper and the emerging research agenda organized around Crawford and Ostrom's (2005) Institutional Grammar demonstrates that governmental forms are more complex, with more overlapping grants and constraints on power than simple, dichotomous treatment of cities can depict. Further, simply delineating between civil, administrative and political functions of citizens may continue to suffer from criticisms of the classic administrative-political dichotomization of research in the field. Measuring the structural access and control points citizens have throughout the policy process via clearly agreed-to definitions and coding methodology should be a paramount goal of researchers attempting to ascertain why or why not citizens are engaging in efficacious engagement with their government.

This research has a number of limitations. The first is the time-commitment for coding municipal charters. Coding each of these documents is time intensive, therefore having an automated coding process would allow researchers to leverage institutional variance without exorbitant time costs. However, the IG coding process is quite involved and open to interpretation. There should exist some consensus with respect to how IG can be coded in an automated manner without losing interpretability.

One way to draw boundaries of usefulness of automated IG coding may be along the lines of which steps can be automated. The first step is to dissect charters and identify the statement relating to the subject of the study. For instance, we focused on the role of the citizen in the City Charter. We came up with rules for statement inclusion, the statements included those that preceded or followed direct mentions to the citizen. We used the terms "citizen," "public," "resident," "voter," and "elector." However, the coding process was slightly more complex in that it was followed by statements using pronouns to reference the previous term. Thus, a simple search of a document does not provide accurate statement counts. Machine learning algorithms, however, could be trained to do so. The second step of the coding procedure is to generate classifications of the statements. This is reasonably easy to automate, so long as we train the program to identify the preceding and following pronouns. Part of this step also requires breaking down the statements into grammar parts such as attributes, deontics, aims, and conditions. This is harder to train, as sentence structure never remains the same, and computers have a more difficult time identifying aspects of the grammar. One alternative approach would

be to determine a set of exhaustive traits that fell into each of these categories or rules that fit a large percentage of scenarios.

There are many questions that require answers of automated IG. These include but are not limited to: how we handle implicit attributes; how we break sentences apart when there are multiple statements; how we create inclusive lists of attributes, aims, deontics, and conditions; and whether we should be taking holistic approaches to examining attributes in a city charter. The benefits of large-N institutional grammar coding certainly outweigh the costs if we can streamline an automated coding process for the grammar.

However, automated coding can also provide us with insight into the structure of a document that we may not have previously been able to glean from our reading of the documents. Figure 4 represents a cluster map created in QDA Miner using the city charters included in this analysis. These are the sets of the most frequently used terms and how tightly they are linked with other words in the city charter. This cluster mapping demonstrates the terms used in relation to the mayor. In addition, it demonstrates that there are some highly independent sections of the city charter. The cluster mapping also depicts that citizens are not central to how the mayor is viewed in the city charter. Only one of the five roles that we examined for the citizen, Electors, is present in the cluster mapping of the term mayor.

[ Figure 4 goes about here ]

Automated content analysis, for the purpose of IG coding needs to be considered on a large scale by those most familiar with the IG work. We believe that the benefits to putting in the effort to devise a strategic plan for automated coding will generate a much better understanding of the institutional structure and variability that shapes city government and policy implementation.

As previously mentioned, this study also suffers from the dichotomous treatment of cities by only selecting based on variation in the classification of mayoral powers, not in managerial authority or other administrative capacities. Variation in the ability of a city manger to direct departments, draft budgets, and oversee personnel should be expected to have some influence over the ability of average citizens – typically considered a less-organized, diffuse constituency relative to business groups – to access government.

A next step for this research will be to code statements pertaining to the powers of the mayor and citizens for a larger sample of strong and weak mayor cities as well as variation in managerial roles and identify how correlated choice rules on the part of mayors and mangers are with aggregation and information rules on the part of citizens. Aggregation rules are checks on the power of formal positions in government. It would seem logical to conclude that the greater the choice rules and discretion vested in governmental positions such as the mayor, the greater the aggregation rules that will evolve over time to provide a check on that power. Likewise, manager-council forms of government are often viewed – particularly in larger cities – as less responsive to diffuse community interest-groups, part of the reason many larger cities returned to "strong mayor" forms of government in the 1960s and 1970s (Ross & Levine, 2006). The presence or absence of information rules embedded within charters in manager-council forms of government may play a larger marginal role in aggregating group preferences. Of course, a countervailing theoretical assumption might be that greater aggregation rules in city charters will be negatively correlated with formal methods for citizens to access and influence governmental actions. Either way, this level of institutional analysis has never been empirically explored at the level of detail envisioned by this research agenda.

Yet another avenue is the development of more interval-level explanatory variables for survey-based management research into citizen input than as heretofore been achieved. While management scholars like Yang and Pandey (2011) have substantially improved our understanding of the dimensions and contextual nature of formal citizen input mechanisms, they have been limited to operationalizing form of government as nominal scales for strong mayor, weak mayor, commission only and town manager cities. The IAD framework allows for the construction of additive indexes or interval-level variables generated from ratios of choice rules divided by all rules, for example. This paper, as well as the conceptual work that has come before and hopefully following it, holds the potential to unlock a far richer and more illustrative opportunity for examining how formal institutional rules mediate citizen-engagement in governmental performance.

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## Appendix: Descriptions of Cities Sampled

This descriptive section was derived from compiling 39 economic, demographic and electoral variables from the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau's state and county dataset and the Florida Division of Elections' 2012 voter registration database.

There are considerable demographic differences between the two groups of cities, the largest being the size of the population born outside of the U.S. and the percentage of households that speak a language other than English at home. The mean foreign-born population for the Strong-Mayor group is 40 percent, compared to 8.9 percent for the Weak-Mayor cities. Households that speak a language other than English at home were 54.7 percent on the Strong group and 15.7 percent in the Weak group. And Hispanic/Latino origin had a mean of 52.3 percent in the Strong group and 17.7 percent in the Weak. Of the five strong-mayor selections, Sweetwater in Miami-Dade County is home to the largest concentration of Nicaraguans in the U.S., giving the town its moniker of "Little Managua." Hialeah Gardens is also in Miami-Dade and a slight majority of its population is comprised of Cuban residents. Both cities are over 94 percent Hispanic/Latino. West Palm Beach is a third city from the group located in South Florida, and its minority population is comprised of an African-American population of 32.5 percent which is more than double the state average of 16 percent. As shown in Table 1B, Tampa

is the largest city in the sample at 346,037 residents. Tampa is also the most reflective of Florida's overall demographic snapshot wih race/ethnic and other variables such as household income, employment, and travel-time to work at or near the statewide mean. The general forms of government of the cities are split between mayor, council and mayor, commission without a clear pattern between strong and weak mayor cities.

With regards to voting patterns, while there is considerable within-group variation based on 2012 voter registration data, the between-group differences are not as striking. The Strong-Mayor group has Republican/Democrat voter-registration split of 34.7 percent Republican to 37.7 percent Democrat. Statewide, the party split is 35.5 percent Republican and 40 percent Democrat. The Weak-Mayor group is tilted slightly more Republican by registration at 42 percent Republican and 39.2 percent Democrat, which is not surprising given the rural characteristics of the cities. There are larger deviations from the mean within the Weak-Mayor group. Crestview, situated in the conservative Florida Panhandle in a region near Air Force and Navy bases and with a high number of retired military veterans, was 55.1 percent Republican by registration as of the book-closing for the 2012 general election and 24.3 percent Democrat. Valparaiso, a smaller city located within the same Panhandle county of Okaloosa, has a GOP registration advantage of 59.9/20.6 percent, the highest such edge in the sample. Conversely, the Weak-Mayor group city of Okeechobee nestled on the edge of the Everglades and a hub for Florida's sugar industry, was 56.4 percent Democratic and 27.6 registered Republican.

In terms of geography, there is some stratification between groups. Three of the five Strong cities are located in South Florida, while the Weak Group has one city in the region, on the rural outskirts. Among the Weak cities, only Mascotte is located within the growing and politically significant "Interstate 4 corridor" connecting the Tampa Bay and Orlando

metropolitan areas. Mascotte is in Lake County, located near a sprawling, three-county-wide planned community called The Villages which caters to retirees and is a GOP political hub with many unique, privatized government service-delivery arrangements. Three of the five Weak cities – Crestview, Okeechobee and Starke -- are in the Panhandle and "Iron Triangle" regions of North Central Florida with the slowest population growth.

| | Cities | Mayor Council or Mayor Commission | Populations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Weak Mayor Cities | Starke | Mayor, Commission | 5,389 |
| | Valparaiso | Mayor, Commission | 5,094 |
| | Mascotte | Mayor, Council | 5,175 |
| | Okeechobee | Mayor, Council | 5,641 |
| | Crestview | Mayor, Council | 21,284 |
| Strong Mayor Cities | Apopka | Mayor Council | 42,467 |
| | Hialeah Gardens | Mayor, Council | 22,257 |
| | Sweetwater | Mayor, Council | 20,424 |
| | West Palm Beach | Mayor, Commission | 101,043 |
| | Tampa | Mayor, Council | 346,037 |

## Tables and Figures

**Table 1**: Institutional Diversity of Citizen Statements in City Charters

| City | Mayor Form | Number of Mayoral Statements | Number of Public Statements | Number of Pages in Charter |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Starke | Weak | 9 | 31 | 63 |
| Valparaiso | Weak | 38 | 38 | 61 |
| Mascotte | Weak | 19 | 7 | 15 |
| Okeechobee | Weak | 41 | 4 | 18 |
| Crestview | Weak | 42 | 4 | 21 |
| Apopka | Strong | 31 | 19 | 10 |
| Hialeah Gardens | Strong | 58 | 44 | 24 |
| Sweetwater | Strong | 67 | 18 | 20 |
| West Palm Beach | Strong | 81 | 50 | 27 |
| Tampa | Strong | 80 | 16 | 22 |

**Figure 1: Summarizing the percentage of different types of institutions based on the coded statements within each city's charter.**

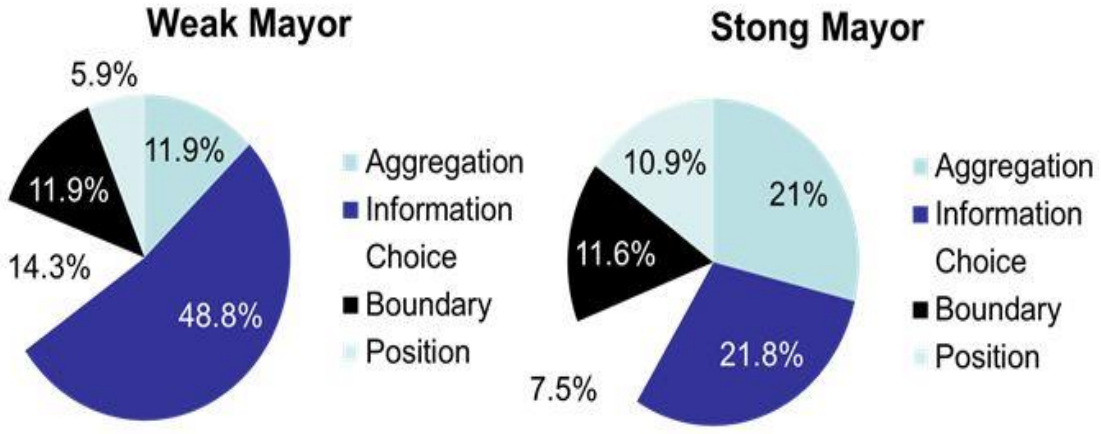



**Table 2**: Standard Deviations in Count of Institutional Statements and Average Difference between Forms

| | Standard Deviation within Strong Mayor City Charters | Standard Deviation within Weak Mayor City Charters | Average Difference between Strong and Weak City Charters |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aggregation Rules | 4.037 | 2.864 | 1.174 |
| Boundary Rules | 1.64 | 5.941 | 4.298 |
| Choice Rules | 3.71 | 2.49 | 1.225 |
| Information Rules | 6.457 | 7.092 | 0.635 |
| Position Rules | 0.894 | 2,683 | 1.789 |

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics for Rule Classification By Mayoral Form

| **Strong Mayor Cities** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rule Type | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. |
| Position | 2.4 | 0.89 | 1 | 3 |
| Boundary | 2.2 | 1.64 | 0 | 4 |
| Choice | 3.6 | 3.72 | 1 | 9 |
| Aggregation | 5.6 | 4.04 | 1 | 12 |
| Information | 10.8 | 6.45 | 3 | 20 |
| Payoff | 0.2 | 0.45 | 0 | 1 |
| Scope | 3.4 | 3.05 | 1 | 8 |
| **Weak Mayor Cities** | | | | |
| Rule Type | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. |
| Position | 1.2 | 2.68 | 0 | 6 |
| Boundary | 3.6 | 5.94 | 0 | 14 |
| Choice | 1.8 | 2.49 | 0 | 5 |
| Aggregation | 3.2 | 2.86 | 0 | 7 |
| Information | 5.6 | 7.09 | 0 | 18 |
| Payoff | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Scope | 1 | 1.73 | 0 | 4 |

**Figure 2: Overlapping Citizen Functional Statements between Strong and Weak Mayors**

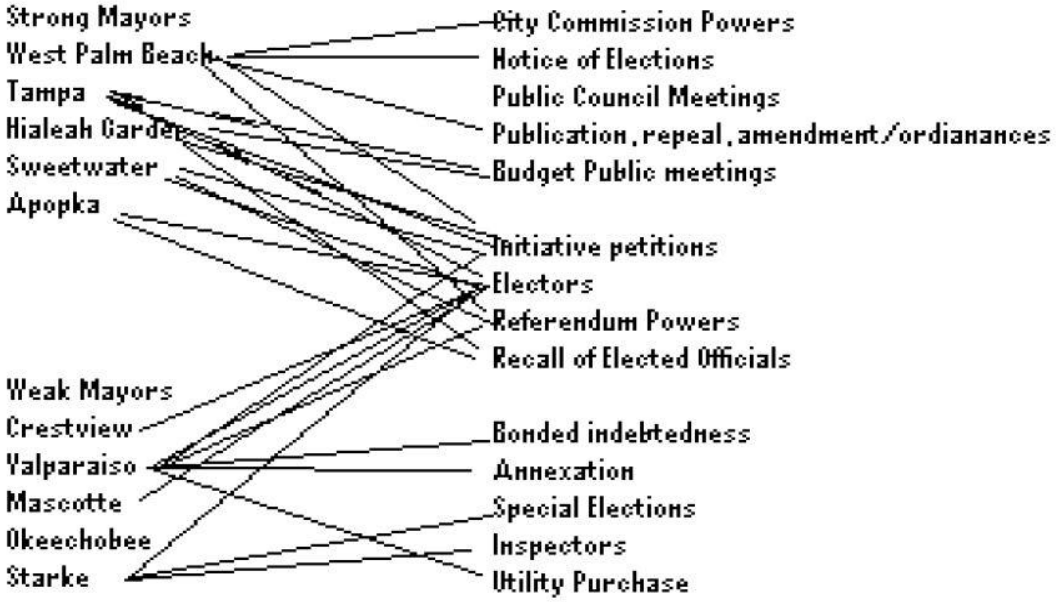
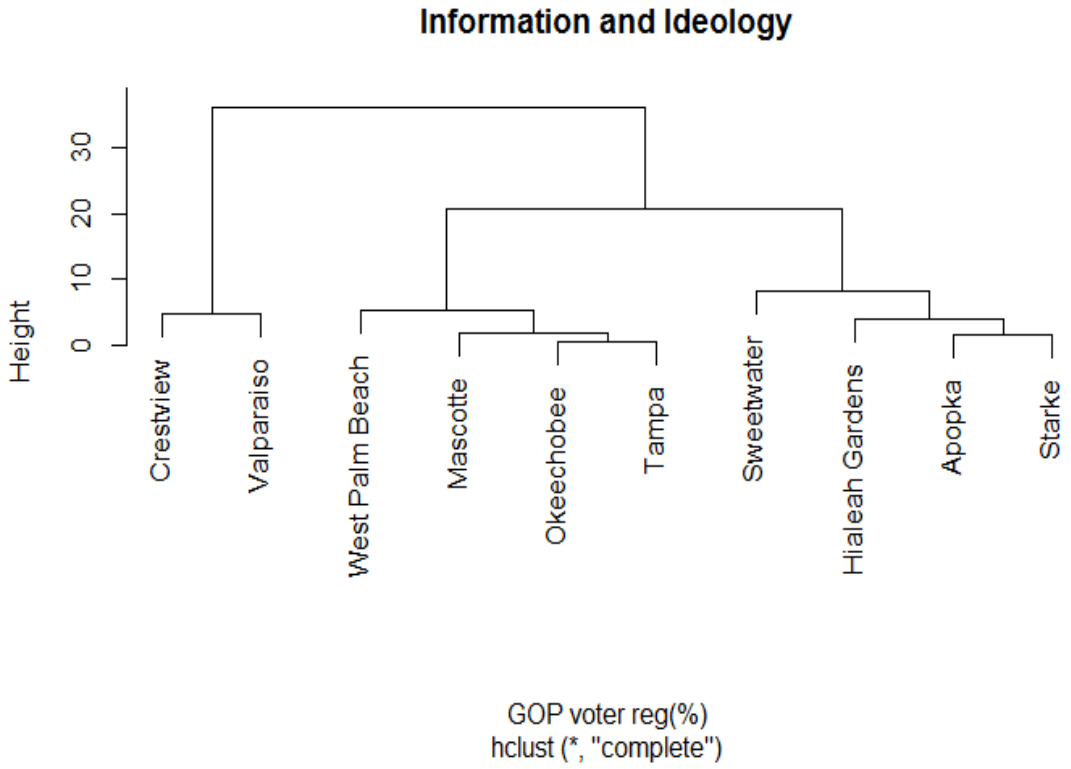
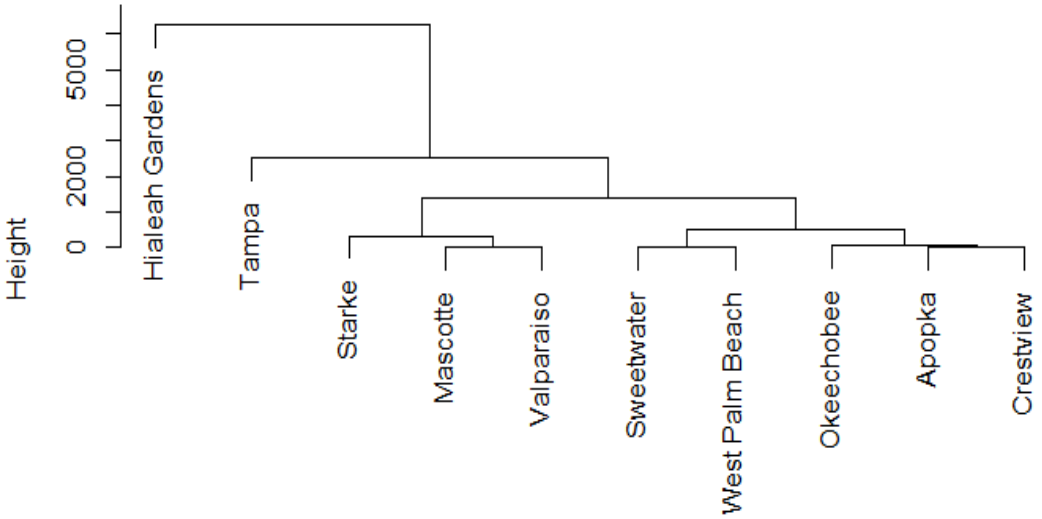


**Figure 3**: Cluster Analysis of Information Rules and Ideology, Population and Race

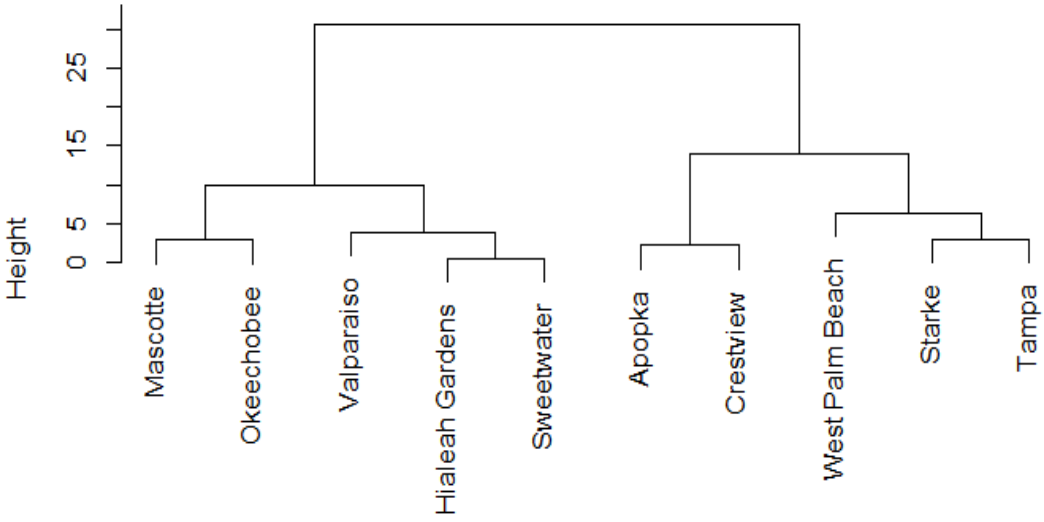


## Information and Population




population pre square mile
hclust (*, "complete")

## Information and Race




2010 Black Pop (%)
hclust (*, "complete")

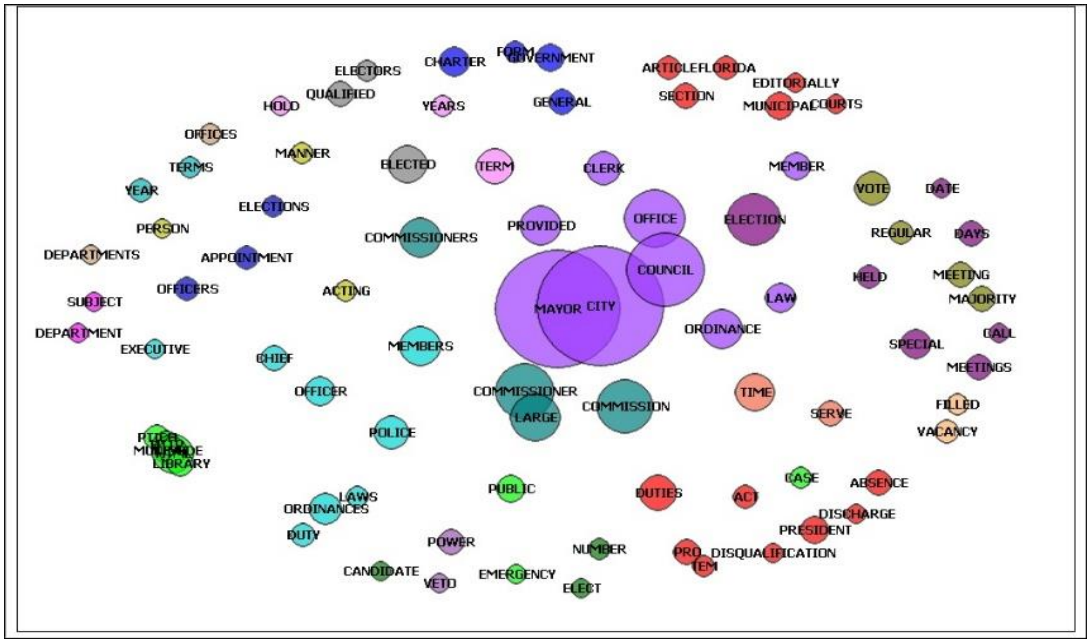



**Figure 4**: Cluster map of terms in city charter related to the Mayor.