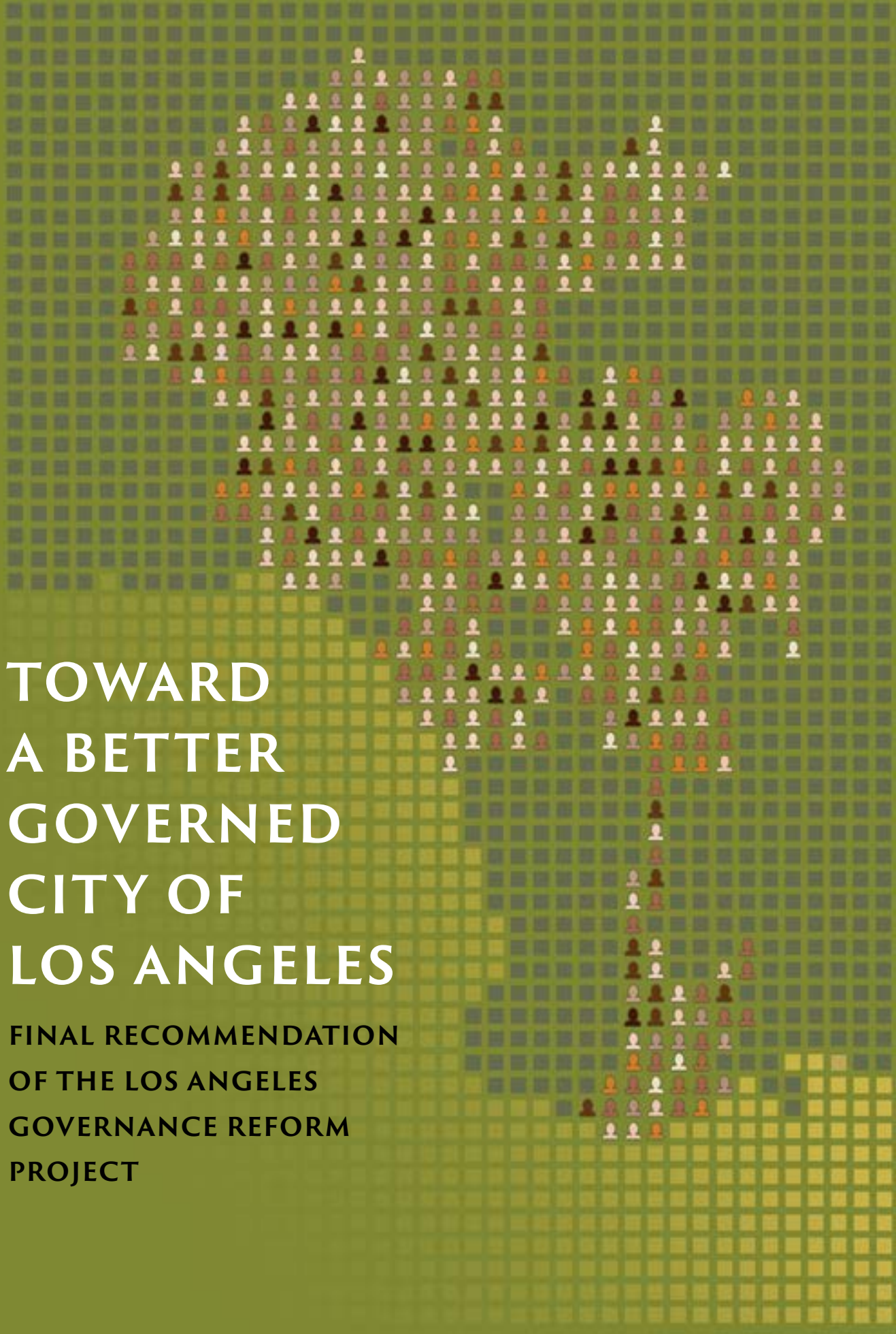

TOWARD A BETTER GOVERNED CITY OF LOS ANGELES

FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE LOS ANGELES GOVERNANCE REFORM PROJECT

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PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT

The Eli Broad and Edythe Broad Foundation, ECMC Foundation, the Weingart Foundation, and the California Community Foundation took the lead in reaching out to the academic community to convene university leaders to organize an independent process that would incorporate research on local government and on Los Angeles, and to provide an unbiased, independent set of recommendations for both the community and for the city council to consider. The Los Angeles Governance Reform Project was fiscally coordinated and sponsored by the California Community Foundation Community Initiatives Fund, and administered by the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at California State University, Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Governance Reform Project leadership team is grateful to all involved for their contributions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Corruption and scandals in Los Angeles City Hall have produced a crisis of confidence and public trust in local governing institutions. At the root of the problem are weak or ineffective governing institutions that threaten local democracy in myriad ways, causing Angelenos to have little confidence that the current structure of governance is capable of working in the public interest. To improve the design and representativeness of Los Angeles governance in the modern era, local philanthropy encouraged and funded an independent process to develop recommendations for institutional reforms.

In the fall of 2022, a group of six university-based scholars embarked on a year-long, independent project to develop a research-based set of recommendations to strengthen local governing institutions. With the support and contribution of a research team, the Los Angeles Governance Reform Project (LAGRP) identified three complementary areas of reform: **Creation of independent redistricting commissions for both the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)** to ensure fairness in the drawing of city council and school districts; **City council expansion** combined with election system changes to enhance representation; and **Strengthening the city's Ethics Commission** to articulate and enforce a strict code of conduct to root out corruption.

This report is based on analysis of the current state of governance in Los Angeles, the experiences of similarly situated cities and counties in both California and across the nation, academic literature, quantitative and qualitative research that we fielded, and ultimately the recommendations that were reached through the team's extensive deliberations. While the team reached a consensus on many recommendations, other recommendations were reached by majority vote, reflecting the challenging reality of governance in Los Angeles. That said, the LAGRP leadership team unanimously endorses the report we present here.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission

- **The City of Los Angeles should establish an independent redistricting commission** composed of 17 residents for the purpose of drawing city council district lines.
- **The Office of the City Clerk should be responsible for the administrative management** of the independent redistricting commission, including the call for applications and screening for residency and other selection criteria. Commissioner applications should be open to all adult residents of Los Angeles and sorted according to five regions to ensure geographical representation.
- **Members of the independent redistricting commission should be selected via a dual-step process** where the first ten members are randomly chosen from a list of pre-screened applicants, with two commissioners selected from each of the five regions. The first ten members chosen should then randomly select the remaining seven commissioners.
- To accomplish these new duties, **an augmented budget and staff should be provided to the Office of the City Clerk**.

Reduce the Size of Council Districts by Increasing Their Number

- **The Los Angeles City Council should increase to 25 members from the current 15**, with 20 members elected by districts and five elected from regional seats that are larger than individual council seats.
- **Cap the budget for city council operations at 0.5% of the general fund** of the total city budget.

Strengthen the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission

- **Require the Los Angeles City Council to consider draft legislation submitted by the Ethics Commission**. Before a final vote, the Ethics Commission must approve it by majority vote.
- **Provide the Ethics Commission with the power to place policy recommendations by supermajority vote directly on the ballot** for voter approval.
- **Increase the size of the Ethics Commission to seven members** from the current five, with the mayor and city council president each appointing one of the additional members.
- **Adopt the same criteria for selecting Ethics Commission members** as are used to select commissioners for the Independent Redistricting Commission.

Key Recommendations (continued)

- **Protect the Ethics Commission's budget** to ensure it has sufficient resources to fulfill its responsibilities.
- **Provide the Ethics Commission with the authority and resources** to hire independent legal counsel.

Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission for the LAUSD

- The City of Los Angeles should **establish an independent redistricting commission** composed of 17 residents for the purpose of drawing district lines **for the LAUSD**.
- **Adopt the same screening and selection criteria for the LAUSD commission as used for selecting the city commission**, with the exception that residence for the school district commission is required within the geographic boundaries of the LAUSD.
- **Conduct the redistricting process in tandem between the city and the LAUSD**, in a combined vetting process that allows residents to apply for either or both commissions.
- **Increase the size of the LAUSD School Board** to 11 members from the current seven.
- **Select at least two members from the LAUSD boundaries that fall outside the city of Los Angeles**.
- **Recommendations to increase the size of the board and the redistricting recommendations should appear on the ballot simultaneously**.
- **Apply the ethics recommendations** for the City of Los Angeles to the LAUSD.
- **The City of Los Angeles's ethics compliance guidelines should oversee the LAUSD**.

Overall

- Our overall recommendation is that **a package of governance reforms** that encompasses city council and school board expansion, independent redistricting and ethics reforms **be placed on the November 2024 ballot**.
- If the measure is approved, **a half-term commission should be convened** shortly thereafter **to begin the process for independent redistricting in 2028**, serving through the decade.

INTRODUCTION

On October 9, 2022, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on secret recordings of conversations that included racist comments by three members of the Los Angeles City Council and the leader of the County Federation of Labor. The firestorm that followed focused devastating attention on the Los Angeles government here and nationwide and had a host of local political consequences.[1]

With anger growing at City Hall, and with the possibility of intergroup conflict between and among the city's communities, a critical question emerged: Did Los Angeles's governance structure contribute to the problem? The Los Angeles Governance Reform Project (LAGRP), which came together to address this question, believes that it has. What follows is our report and recommendations for historic and necessary institutional reforms to the governance structure in Los Angeles, which, we argue, have contributed to the problems that underlie this most recent City Hall scandal.

Redistricting processes emerged at the cutting edge of the reform debate. Much of the secret recordings related to a crucial governance question in Los Angeles: who should draw the lines of city council districts? The leaders on the recordings were discussing the politics of redistricting and which individuals and groups should gain representation and which should not. At the time of the conversation, the city council was exercising its charter authority to draw lines after an advisory redistricting commission had presented its report.

The question of representation added to the debate about who should draw the lines, which quickly coalesced around calls for an independent redistricting commission not controlled by the city council. With a relatively small 15-member council in a city of nearly four million residents, with each member representing more than 260,000 people, would the diverse communities of Los Angeles be better represented with more council districts? For the first time since the secession movements of the 1990s, a wave of reform washed over the city, from City Hall to civic groups, to community organizations. Rather than creating a formal charter reform commission—last constituted in Los Angeles between 1997 and 1999[2]—the city council and various community leaders began to pursue reform on a number of paths.

1 Council president Nury Martinez (6th district) first stepped down as president and then resigned as councilmember. Gil Cedillo (1st district) who was termed out in 2022, remained in his seat until the november election. Kevin De Leon (14th district) remains in his seat despite pressure to force him to resign and is up for re-election in 2024. Labor leader Ron Herrera resigned as head of the County Federation of Labor.

2 In 1997, two competing charter reform commissions, one largely appointed by the city council and one elected with the mayor's support, worked in parallel for two years before agreeing on a unified charter that won voter support for the first comprehensive revision of the city charter since 1924.

Los Angeles is now in the midst of a wave of reform energy that rarely occurs, and that should not be taken for granted.

The city council created an Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform that explored a number of detailed reform issues and conducted a series of hearings throughout the community. It is quite unusual for the council to take such a proactive role in pursuing governance reforms and the Ad Hoc Committee has since developed its own set of recommendations for an independent redistricting commission.[3]

Long-time civic groups such as Common Cause and the League of Women Voters of Los Angeles developed and promoted ideas for governance reform. Progressive grassroots organizations came together in association with Catalyst California to form Organize, Unite, and Reform Los Angeles (Our LA), a reform coalition. Even the state of California weighed in, with legislative proposals to encourage and if necessary direct Los Angeles to adopt an independent redistricting commission.[4]

Popular discontent with the ethical performance of city government was clearly discernible in the opinion poll conducted by the LAGRP.[5] A huge majority (80%) of registered voters in Los Angeles felt that corruption in the City Council was either enough to raise concern (54%) or more than most government bodies (26%). Only 20% saw the council as largely unproblematic. The desire for reform is palpable.

How would you rate the LA City Council overall with respect to the levels of corruption?

	Weighted Frequency	Percent
Has had very few problems	318	20%
Has had enough corruption problems to raise concern	880	54%
Has more problems than most government bodies	427	26%
Weighted Base	**1,624**	**100%**

Source: ISA Final Report

Such a wave of reform energy does not occur very often. Sometimes decades pass between reform eras. Los Angeles is in the midst of one such moment now, and it is not to be taken for granted. Scholars of political institutions and comparative constitutional design have clearly demonstrated that conflict and cooperation in political systems are not merely accidents nor the result of individual attitudes. Rather, it is very clear that while some institutional arrangements facilitate cooperation,

3 Chief Legislative Analyst, (2023). Independent Redistricting Commission Program. https://clkrep.lacity.org/

4 Bills came from Senator Maria Elena Durazo, and a joint measure co-authored by Assembly-member Isaac Bryan and Senator Ben Allen. However, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed these bills on October 7, 2023.

5 See page 8 for details on the opinion poll.

The LAGRP Guiding Star: Create a city structure that is responsive, accountable, representative, and equitable.

others create incentives for conflict. This is clearly true in representational systems like our city council and beyond. Structural revisions, therefore, require a long view that builds on the call for change in the current environment but establishes more powerful incentives for good governance.

Most governance reforms of enduring significance will require an amendment to the city charter. Passed by the voters in 1924 and implemented in 1925, the Los Angeles city charter, as amended, has been the city's governing document for nearly a century. The charter can only be changed by a vote of the people. Charter amendments can be placed on the ballot by the city council or by an initiative based on the signatures of registered voters.

PROJECT PROCESS

The LAGRP began to meet regularly in December 2022 to review the issues involved in redistricting and council expansion. While the group did not intend to address a comprehensive set of issues, we remained open to the possibility of considering one or more additional topics.

Our guiding star was to contribute to the creation of a city structure that is responsive, accountable, representative, and equitable. These goals informed our research and our final recommendations. Ideally, these recommendations will foster accountability and good government; reduce corruption and enhance clean government; promote positive intergroup relations in a diverse city; and, improve the delivery of services in an effective and equitable manner.

The team's process involved review and analysis of existing research and reports, original studies by the research team, and thorough, open, and honest deliberation on each issue by the academic leaders. The recommendations that emerged earned broad support from this group of academics who have diverse experiences and perspectives and were willing to change their minds based on the evidence and the arguments presented.

Key Assumptions

- Experience and studies from other cities in California can provide models for Los Angeles governance reform.
- While Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest city, can be compared to other California cities, it is also part of the family of the largest cities across the nation.
- There are general research studies not specific to these reforms that may be relevant (such as the size of legislative bodies or of commissions in general).

- What is theoretically desirable is not always practical in a real-world setting, particularly in Los Angeles, where institutional structures are long-established.
- Moments of intense interest in reform are an opportunity to think outside the box and expand the realm of possible reforms that might not be seriously considered otherwise.

While the LAGRP has made a variety of recommendations to improve Los Angeles governance, it is not an exhaustive set of all possible improvements in governance. We hope that this process adds momentum to a longer-term commitment to governance reform in Los Angeles, with due consideration for a host of improvements that might make a difference. We fully expect additional reform proposals to emerge from the community.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The LAGRP proceeded in two phases. Phase One was concerned with the development of draft recommendations primarily regarding an independent redistricting commission and the expansion of the city council while leaving open the possibility of incorporating the LAUSD and the Ethics Commission into the reform conversation. In this first phase, we reviewed the work of other participants in the local reform process, such as a detailed and thorough report by the city's Chief Legislative Analyst,[6] several studies by Common Cause,[7] and reports of redistricting commissions such as the Los Angeles County Independent Redistricting Commission,[8] the LAUSD Advisory Redistricting Commission,[9] and the LA advisory city council redistricting commissions.[10] We monitored and stayed in touch with the various reform efforts and discussions happening around town, from the leaders at city hall to organizations such as Common Cause and Catalyst California. We have listened to the views of community-based organizations, new civic

6 Chief Legislative Analyst, (2023). Redistricting Report. https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=22-1196-S1

7 Nicolas Heidorn, *California Local Redistricting Commissions: Landscape, Considerations, and Best Practices.* (California Local Redistricting Project, updated 2017), https://www.localredistricting.org/research; Nicolas Heidorn, *The Promise of Fair Maps California's 2020 Local Redistricting Cycle: Lessons Learned and Future Reforms.* (California Local Redistricting Project, 2023), https://www.localredistricting.org/research

8 Los Angeles County Redistricting Commission, Final Report. (Dec. 15, 2021). https://redistricting.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/LA-County-CRC-Resolution-Adopting-Redistricting-Report.pdf

9 Los Angeles Unified School District, Report and Recommendations. (Oct. 29, 2021). https://redistricting2021.lacity.org/LAUSDRC/maps/draft/FinalRecommendation/LAUSD%20Redistricting%20Commission%20Final%20Report%20and%20Map%20Recommendation%20102921_reduced.pdf

10 Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission, *Report and Recommendations* (Oct. 29, 2021). https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0668-S7_misc_10-29-21.pdf

groups pursuing governance reform, and to thinkers and writers on local governance reform.

Leading up to our June 2023 interim report, our researchers created "informational briefs" on specific topics to assist the leadership team in their deliberations, such as the size and structure of legislative bodies, geographies of Los Angeles, commissioner eligibility criteria, and ethics reforms. We publicly released the interim report and all of our informational briefs to date in early June for feedback to mark the end of Phase One.

Phase Two of the project was dedicated to seeking additional public input by fielding a survey, conducting focus groups, and holding stakeholder meetings around the proposals to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each. We engaged Interviewing Service of America (ISA) to conduct a quantitative survey of Los Angeles registered voters and we engaged Ebony Marketing Systems (EMS) to conduct qualitative focus groups of Los Angeles registered voters to assess public opinion on our recommendations. ISA collected quantitative survey data between October 6, 2023 and October 20, 2023, for a total sample size of 1,624 Los Angeles city residents. EMS conducted 12 focus groups between September 5, 2023 and October 4, 2023 of Los Angeles residents who identified as Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), Black, White, Latinx, Indigenous, and gender non-binary. Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data contributed immensely to the deliberations on the final recommendations.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The LAGRP began with a focus on two principal reforms: designing an independent redistricting process and reducing the size of city council districts. In the course of our work, we came to believe that an essential aspect of local governance reform must be ethics reform.[11] Any reform for public consideration has to be relevant to public concern about ethics at City Hall, and the need to upgrade the charter provisions that were instituted by the voters in 1991. As a result, our final report covers three topics: **implementing an independent redistricting process for the city council and the LAUSD**, **reducing the size of districts by expanding the size of the city council and the LAUSD board**, and **strengthening the ethics apparatus the city utilizes to hold elected officials accountable**.

Our recommendations reflect vigorous debate over a long series of challenging questions and our assessment of the relevant research, ultimately leading to consensus on the group adoption of many recommendations and majority preference on others. The quantitative and qualitative research we conducted equally informed our deliberations and ultimate adoption of recommendations. We present below the crucial issues that need to be addressed regarding the reform process for redistricting, city council and LAUSD board expansion, and the Ethics Commission. Each recommendation below is accompanied by a short discussion of the relevant quantitative and qualitative findings and the rationale that led to group adoption.

These final recommendations represent our best thinking, research, and analysis over the full year of our activity. We present them with the goal of informing the conversations around proposals and final ballot language for placement on the November 2024 ballot.

11 A series of ethics scandals have rocked city hall in recent years.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Los Angeles City Council

Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission for the Council

For most of Los Angeles's history, the drawing of district lines for both the city council and the LAUSD Board of Education was the sole prerogative of the city council. The 1999 charter revision created an advisory commission for redistricting the city council and a second advisory commission to draw school board lines. The idea was that an advisory appointed commission would draw maps that would be more independent of the city council and that the council would give considerable weight to the advice of the commissions.[12]

While the first iteration of this model worked well in 2001, the record was mixed in the next two rounds, in 2011 and 2021. The council exerted great control over the process in 2011. In 2021 the release of the advisory commission's maps and the council's changes to them generated ill will that lingered well beyond the end of the redistricting process.

The LAGRP recommends that:

- The City of Los Angeles should establish an independent redistricting commission composed of **17 residents** for the purpose of drawing Los Angeles city council district lines (named "The Los Angeles City Independent Redistricting Commission" (IRC)).
- The Office of the City Clerk should be responsible for the administrative management of the independent redistricting commission, including the call for applications and screening for residency and other selection criteria. Whether the City Clerk or the City Ethics Commission should spearhead this role was an area of substantial deliberation among the academic team, with a majority selecting the City Clerk.
- To accomplish these new duties, an augmented budget and staff should be provided to the Office of the City Clerk.
- To implement the new process prior to the 2030 Census, an implementation IRC will be created after the 2024 election's adoption of this proposal to redistrict the city in time for qualification for the 2028 city-wide elections.

A 17-member commission is based on combining two important goals: fostering wide representation and supporting effective and collegial decision-making.[13] Commissions, especially of a temporary nature, experience different dynamics than legislative bodies. A council,

12 These provisions can be found in Charter sections 204 and 802.

13 See Muzzio & Tompkins (1989).

legislature, or congressional branch can organize for collective action a fairly large number of representatives through party or other caucus structures, both formal and informal. As permanent bodies, they are rarely called upon to complete a complicated task in a relatively short time.

The California Independent Redistricting Commission, for example, is limited to 14 members, despite the large task of drawing both legislative and congressional districts. The two charter reform commissions that performed a comprehensive revision of the city charter from 1997–1999 were composed of 15 and 21 members. The Los Angeles County independent redistricting commission has 14 members.

Studies of committee size note the need to be large enough to ensure the representation of diverse communities but small enough to foster effective deliberation.[14] Our choice of 17 members is derived from a focus on effective deliberation joined to the wide diversity of the Los Angeles community.

To derive a sense of community sentiment about an independent redistricting commission, we hired Interviewing Services of America (ISA) to conduct a survey of the city residents. This survey of 1,624 Angelenos indicated that 76% of the public support the idea that drawing district lines should be handled by an independent redistricting commission. This high level of support is matched by a nearly identical percentage of Angelenos (75%) who would support the *establishment* of an independent redistricting commission.[15]

Because closed-ended opinion surveys might leave out much of the nuance in residents' attitudes and feelings about specific policy proposals, we also hired Ebony Marketing Systems (EMS) to conduct a series of focus groups among the following major groups in Los Angeles split by gender: Latinx, African Americans, Asian American Pacific Islanders, Whites, and Indigenous. EMS conducted two additional focus groups: one conducted in Spanish for Spanish-speaking Latinx, and one for a gender non-binary group. Altogether, EMS conducted 12 focus groups. The results of these conversations also supported the establishment of an independent redistricting commission but had questions about how to ensure its independence and representativeness. Some groups suggested that it be elected, not appointed, while others supported the idea that people from outside Los Angeles be appointed to make it truly independent.[16]

14 See Oliver, Hollingworth, Briner, Swann, Hinds, & Roche (2018) for a review of optimal committee sizes ranging from 6-12 members that balances between diverse representation and deliberative efficiency. Properly accounting for the population and diversity of Los Angeles yields an optimal commission size in the upper range

15 ISA, *Los Angeles Governance Reform Project Report* (2023), p. 14.

16 EMS, *Los Angeles Governance Reform Project* (2023), pp. 8-14.

Commissioner Selection Process

- Upon voter approval in 2024, implementation should include a half-term commission that is first convened shortly thereafter to begin the process for 2028, serving through the remainder of the decade. A new commission should then be selected according to the dual-step process outlined below.
- The process begins no later than the fall of years ending in 9. If circumstances call for an earlier redistricting, that would be allowable under the charter and the timeline would be accelerated.
- Applications are invited from any eligible person (see list below). After the deadline, applications are screened by the City Clerk for meeting residency and other requirements.
- Applications are sorted into five regions for geographical representation. We explored a number of geographies that could support the selection process, including area planning commissions, community planning areas, and city administrative department divisions.[17] We recommend utilizing a grouping of community planning areas, which are relatively close in population numbers and are recognized within communities. In years ending in 8, the city should retain a demographer to upgrade these boundaries for purposes of applicant selection.
- The first ten members of the commission are randomly selected from the list of pre-screened applicants, two selected from each region.
- The first ten commissioners will then select the remaining commissioners with an eye toward redressing any representational shortcomings apparent in the first ten members.
- The commission is seated in January of years ending in 0.

It is common practice across many California counties (e.g., Los Angeles, Sacramento, Fresno, Kern, Riverside, Santa Barbara, and San Diego) as well as at the state level to select redistricting commissioners through a dual-step process. The second step in the selection process can aim to ensure the commissioners are representative of their jurisdiction. In many California cities and counties that use independent commissions, race/ethnicity is added as a consideration alongside others such as gender, class, and sexual orientation, but all retain geography as the predominant factor. The Sacramento Superior Court's 2012 decision on this matter established that a selection process aiming to be representative of the diversity of a given jurisdiction does not equate to engaging

17 See Steve Graves. (2023). *Commissioner Selection Geography.* Informational Brief.

in the prohibited behaviors under Proposition 209, so long as race is not the predominant factor guiding the commissioner selection process.[18] In line with common practice, the independent redistricting commissioners for Los Angeles should be selected through the dual-step screening process outlined above.

Commissioner Qualification Criteria for the Los Angeles City Independent Redistricting Commission

Objective Criteria

- Adults over age 18.
- Residents of the City of Los Angeles at the time of service and for the preceding three years, continuously.
- Disclosure of political donations within the city at or exceeding $100.

Subjective Criteria

- Letters of recommendation or other evidence of community engagement.
- Excluded candidates for commission appointments:
  - Current elected office holders.
  - Former elected office holders.
  - Former candidates for public office.
  - City employees, non-exempt. Civil servants can serve, appointees are not eligible.
  - Political appointees by mayor, council member, or any other L.A. City elected official.
  - Registered lobbyists.
  - Campaign staffers (paid).
  - Spouse or close relative of any of the above.

Should Commissioner Eligibility be Open to All Adults?

We recommend a commissioner application process open to any adults over the age of 18 who have been residents of Los Angeles for the last three preceding years. Our research found that commission memberships are increasingly open to noncitizens and there are no apparent legal obstacles to doing so.[19] There is plenty of controversy in allowing noncitizens to vote in elections, particularly since the practice of allowing noncitizens to vote in federal elections ended in the 1920s when states amended their constitutions to prohibit it.[20] However, little to no controversial precedent exists with regard to service on boards and commissions. In the last several years, California cities such as

18 Proposition 209 is a 1996 voter-approved California initiative barring discrimination and preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, education, and contracting. See Francisco Jasso. (2023). *Race as a Consideration in the Commissioner Selection Process*. Informational Brief.

19 See Francisco Jasso & Jason Morin. (2023). *Commission Selection and NonCitizen Participation*. Informational Brief.

20 See Richmond, Chattha, & Earnest (2014).

San Francisco, Costa Mesa, Santa Ana, Chula Vista, the state of California through SB 225, and Denton, Texas, have moved to allow noncitizens to serve on boards and commissions on the basis of greater representation and inclusion.[21]

While such an open process may be out of step with popular opinion (our survey finds only 15% of survey respondents indicated support for allowing "all adults living in Los Angeles" to serve as commissioners on the independent redistricting commission), our overall objective of increasing the representation, inclusion, and empowerment of Angelenos leads us to criteria that casts a wide net of eligible Angelenos. This will not guarantee that noncitizens become commissioners; it merely creates the possibility for their participation in the application process. Inclusion in this process can represent a site for many residents of Los Angeles to engage in civic practice.

Because noncitizens are counted for purposes of drawing electoral districts, it would not be inconsistent for them to have a voice in the redistricting process. The participation of noncitizen residents should be reflected in municipalities with large foreign-born populations. Foreign-born residents represent a third of the Los Angeles population, with over three-fourths claiming legal status.[22] Moreover, noncitizens have a clear political stake in the redistricting process both as residents and as taxpayers. Noncitizens contribute to the economic, social, and political fabric of their respective communities.[23] As taxpayers, noncitizens play an important role in financing state and local policy programs through property and sales taxes. "In 2018," for example, "immigrants paid $492.4 billion in taxes nationwide, of which state and local taxes comprise $161.7 billion."[24] Broadening eligibility beyond the traditional citizenship and voter registration criteria would open an avenue for civic participation to noncitizens participating in formal governmental processes.

Staff Support

The Commission will initially receive staff support from the City Clerk, City Ethics Commission staff, and legal support from the Office of the City Attorney. The Commission should, after seating, be provided resources to secure independent staff support, independent legal counsel, and office space sufficient to the needs of the commission and its staff and counsel in a location separate from City Hall.

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21 See Francisco Jasso & Jason Morin. (2023). *Commission Selection and NonCitizen Participation*. Informational Brief.

22 See Marisol Cuellar Mejia, Cesar Alesi Perez, and Hans Johnson. (January 2024). *Immigrants in California.* Public Policy Institute of California. https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/

23 See USC Equity Research Institute. *Looking Forward: Immigrant Contributions Reports.* https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/publications/looking-forward-immigrant-contributions/

24 See Emily Jacobson. (November 6, 2022). *Expand Non-Citizen Voting Rights in Local Elections.* Berkeley Public Policy Journal. https://bppj.berkeley.edu/2022/11/06/expand-non-citizen-voting-rights-in-local-elections/

Per Diem Compensation

Service on such a commission is time-consuming and intensive. To assure that a wide range of residents are able to participate as commissioners, fair compensation is required. Commissioners will be paid on a per diem basis not to exceed an amount to be set by ordinance. Charter practice generally frowns on placing specific dollar amounts in the governing document, given the long-term nature of the redistricting reform proposals. The provision of per diem compensation for redistricting commissioners follows the practice of the state redistricting commission. Some California counties (e.g., Sacramento, Fresno, Kern, Riverside) entrust the board of supervisors with the provision of reasonable funding and staffing for the commission.

Training

Upon appointment and seating, commissioners shall receive training on the legal and operational aspects of redistricting and related processes. Full training will occur after all 17 members are selected and seated; the first set of commissioners should not receive advance training ahead of the remaining commissioners.

Duration of Service

Commissioners will serve through the adoption of district lines for the next decennium and then adjourn, *sine die*.[25] Given the often-lengthy nature of redistricting-related legal claims such as voting rights grievances, commissioners should serve a term of ten years until the next redistricting commission is selected, should there be any reason why the city needs to revisit the redistricting maps. Failure to keep the commissioners for the full decade could potentially result in ceding power to the courts and an appointed special master to conduct a redraw of district lines.

Post-Service Restrictions

Service on the redistricting commission should disqualify individuals from running for elected city office for the term of ten years, so that commissioners do not draw districts that may advantage themselves. Restrictions of this sort are also common practice in many California jurisdictions as they are a way of preventing potential conflicts of interest.[26] Unlike the state commission, it is advisable that the Los Angeles City Independent Redistricting Commission take on a role during the intervening years, such as commissioning a report on city-wide voter engagement or coordinating with decennial census outreach efforts such that the commission can provide additional value to the city throughout the remainder of their term.

25 *Sine die* means with no appointed date for resumption of activites.

26 See Nicolas Heidorn, *California Local Redistricting Commissions: Landscape, Considerations, and Best Practices*. (California Local Redistricting Project, updated 2017), https://www.localredistricting.org/research

Ensuring Independence

To be truly independent of the city council, commissioners should have no *ex parte* communications[27] on redistricting matters with the city council.[28] We recommend that office space for the commissioners and their staff to conduct their work be found outside of Los Angeles City Hall to limit unintended interference from council members and other elected officials. Commissioners shall adhere to the provisions of the Brown Act, limiting communications among commissioners to ensure a transparent process that is available to the public.

Complying with the Fair Maps Act

The commissioners should be required to follow the redistricting criteria set forth in the Fair Maps Act. These include:

- Equal population of each district required;
- Federal Voting Rights Act and California Voting Rights Act must be followed;
- Population is adjusted to count incarcerated people at their home address, not their prison address;
- Then the following in order of priority:
    1. Geographic Contiguity to the extent practicable. Areas that meet only at the points of adjoining corners are not contiguous. Areas that are separated by water and not connected by a bridge, tunnel, or regular ferry service are not contiguous.
    2. Communities of Interest Preservation to the extent practicable. A Community of Interest is a population that shares common social or economic interests that should be included within a single supervisorial district for purposes of its effective and fair representation.
    3. Geographic Integrity of a city or census-designated place shall be respected to the extent practicable.
    4. Geographic Compactness should be encouraged to the extent practicable, where it doesn't conflict with previous criteria, and in a manner to ensure that nearby areas of population are not bypassed in favor of more distant populations.
    5. Easily Identifiable by Residents to the extent practicable, districts shall be bounded by natural and artificial barriers, including streets.
    6. Prohibit Favoritism. No partisan favoritism or discrimination.[29]

27 *Ex parte* communications refers to communication outside of an official public meeting between any redistricting commissioner and any elected City officer or their staff regarding a matter pending before the redistricting commission

28 See Jason Morin. (2023). *Ex Parte Communications*. Informational Brief. for a discussion on the number and timing of *ex parte* communications.

29 CA Election Code, sections 21500, 21601, and 21621.

Reduce the Size of Council Districts

The L.A. City Council has had 15 members, elected by district, since 1925. As the city's population has grown, the size of council districts has grown as well. Today, each council member represents around 260,000 residents.

The Los Angeles City Council is perhaps America's most influential council in a mayor-council system. The stability of the council structure has led to a culture in which individual members bear great responsibility and power over decisions that in other cities might be held by citywide officials.[30] Residents also rely on council members as the major access points to city hall. Los Angeles residents are accustomed to and expect a high level of constituent service from their council members.

Voters have been asked three times to expand the council, in 1970, 1985, and 1999. All failed to win voter support. In 1999, the revised charter passed easily but two measures to increase the size of the council, to 21 or 25, were handily defeated. Opposition to the measures was prevalent, and it did not pass in any of the 15 council districts.[31]

The last two such elections took place in the traditional, low-turnout odd-year elections that were replaced by the voters in 2015 with even-year elections. A larger, more diverse electorate with elections held in even-numbered years may increase the odds that voters support council expansion, giving a boost to calls for more effective representation on the city council. However, public support may also depend on additional reforms that make voters comfortable with increasing the number of elected officials in city government.

The LAGRP recommends that:

- The Los Angeles city council should increase to **25 members**, with 20 members elected by districts and five elected from regional seats that are larger than individual council seats (nested), elected in staggered years.
- The budget for city council operations should be capped at 0.5% of the general fund of the total city budget.

30 See Burnett, C. M., & Kogan, V. (2014). "Local logrolling? Assessing the impact of legislative districting in Los Angeles." *Urban Affairs Review, 50*(5), 648-671.

31 See Raphael J. Sonenshein. 2006. *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform and the Battle for Los Angeles*. Princeton, NJ Princeton U. Press, for a geographic analysis of the vote on council expansion, pages 198-203.

Increasing the council to 25 members would place Los Angeles in the upper range relative to the councils of other large cities, but well below New York City (51) and Chicago (50).[32]

We turned to the practices of other large cities as potential guides for an ideal council size for Los Angeles. Table 1 below shows the residents-per-district ratios of other large cities across the U.S. followed by the resulting council size if Los Angeles were to adopt their residents-per-district ratios. Given the wide range of resulting council sizes, no clear guide emerges from the practices of other large cities.

Table 1: Resulting Council Size for Los Angeles Using Residents-per-District Ratios of Other Large Cities

	City	Population	Council Size # of Districts (# At-Large)	Residents per council district	Resulting Council Size for LA
Cities Outside of California	New York City	8.5 million	51	166,666	23
	Chicago	2.7 million	50	54,000	71
	Houston	2.3 million	11 (5)	209,091	18
	Philadelphia	1.6 million	10 (7)	160,000	24
	Phoenix	1.6 million	8	200,000	19
	Jacksonville	966,000	14 (5)	69,000	56
Cities Within California	San Diego	1.38 million	9	155,000	24
	San Jose	983,000	10	98,300	39
	San Francisco	874,000	11	80,000	48
	Fresno	542,000	7	77,000	49

Source: Francisco Jasso. (2023). *Applying Models for Legislative Size to L.A. City Council Expansion.* Informational Brief.

The same rationale of balancing between representation and effective deliberation at the core of our recommendation for an independent redistricting commission applies in our recommendation for the expansion of the city council. In our desire to maximize representation, properly accounting for the diversity of Los Angeles necessarily leads us to a reduction in the size of council districts.

Our recommendation of a 25-member city council is additionally informed by our quantitative and qualitative research gauging public support for council expansion to 21, 25, and 30 or more seats. According

32 A main problem with a far larger council is the difficulty of recasting the mayor's role. In New York City and Chicago, two cities with exceptionally large councils, the mayor is the dominant figure in city government. It would be a very large change for the L.A. mayor to meet the expectations that 100 years of mayor-council balance have not brought to the fore. The L.A. mayor has neither the staff nor the fiscal capacity to exercise power at the level of a New York or Chicago mayor. While reformers have long sought to enhance the power of the mayor, this would be too difficult to accomplish in one stroke.

to the focus group report produced by EMS, there was strong support for increasing the number of council districts to 25. Respondents suggested that lowering the ratio of councilors to constituents would be good for representation because it would bind councilors more tightly to the people they represent. Focus group respondents also expressed concerns about where the money would come from to support an enlarged city council, and whether term limits on councilors would accompany this reform.[33]

Support for increasing the number of council districts to 25 was echoed in the ISA survey results, where 57% of respondents reported that the current population of each council district is too large, a result that did not vary much by subgroup. As to the preferred number of seats, 76% of survey respondents favored an increase to 21 council seats, while nearly 90% of this group of supporters (87% of the initial 76% favoring 21) favored increasing the number of council seats to 25. In short, almost two-thirds of the survey respondents (over 66%) favored increasing the number of council seats to 25. Interestingly, 70% of those who thought the population size of council districts is about right (43%), did not change their views when they were provided with information about other cities indicating much lower population numbers for council districts elsewhere. All-in-all, there is robust public support for increasing the size of the Los Angeles City Council, thereby reducing the number of people represented by each city councilor.[34]

Reducing the size of council districts should generate important benefits. District election campaigns may be less costly. The nonlegislative services[35] that councillors provide to their constituents as well as representation for traditionally underrepresented communities can be improved.[36] Our research shows that communities with a likelihood of gaining representation include those of Korean, Filipino, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran origin.[37]

Nested Regional Seats

From the outset of this project, we were motivated by a desire to change the dynamics of the city council and the ability of council members to address citywide concerns. This led us to consider the impact of including at-large seats, whereby a certain number of councilors would be elected citywide just like the mayor, city attorney, and city controller, to go along with increasing the number of council districts.

33 EMS, *Los Angeles Governance Reform Project* (2023), pp. 22-25.

34 ISA, *Los Angeles Governance Reform Project Report* (2023), p. 11.

35 Examples of nonlegislative services include getting potholes fixed or replacing streetlights more quickly.

36 See Steve Graves. (2023). *District Count.* Informational Brief.

37 Ibid.

The addition of at-large seats, in what would become a mixed system of representation, would be a significant structural change in the Los Angeles city council. A larger council alone would provide greater representation, but seats at a level larger than a district might also affect the council's internal dynamics in a positive way. Indeed, the electoral base of the at-large members would encourage the formation of citywide coalitions that could help councilors address citywide policy and oversight challenges more effectively. And although the only research study on L.A. City Council policymaking indicates that some of the "district-only" reputation of the council is undeserved, so-called council prerogative where councilors control policy decisions unique to their districts, still plays an important role in policy areas like economic development, land use, and homelessness and housing policy.[38]

At the same time, there are significant drawbacks to at-large seats, the most important of which are voting rights concerns that focus on the dilution of minority representation.[39] Indeed, research on at-large council seats is dominated by the long debate between at-large city councils and those elected by districts. Clearly, if the choice is between all at-large and all district elections the movement is toward district elections, especially in considering voting rights issues at the federal level and in California.[40] Numerous lawsuits, and the fear of lawsuits, have led to the transformation of at-large councils into district-based ones. However, there is little evidence of voting rights challenges to mixed systems. Mixed systems are especially resilient when the district portion of the system clearly outweighs the at-large.[41]

The LAGRP's June report recommended adding a small number of at-large seats to accompany districts. However, after considerable debate during the ensuing five months over what a mixed system would mean for Los Angeles, and after weighing the pros and cons based on academic findings and our own survey and focus group results, the team settled on a novel plan of including five "regional" seats to accompany the 20 district seats recommended in this report.

Regional seats that represent larger geographic areas than districts yet smaller than the entire city are appealing because they reduce the voting rights concerns that come with citywide, at-large seats, while preserving the goal of bringing a broader perspective to city council policy making. The geographic scope and complexity of Los Angeles,

38 See Burnett, C. M., & Kogan, V. (2014). Local logrolling? Assessing the impact of legislative districting in Los Angeles. *Urban Affairs Review*, 50(5), 648-671.

39 See Abott & Magazinnik 2020, Davidson & Korbel 1981, Trounstine & Valdini 2014, Welch 1990.

40 See Collingwood & Long 2021, Hertz 2023.

41 See Timothy Krebs. (2023). *Demographic Breakdown of City Councils in Cities with Mixed Systems*. Informational Brief; Francisco Jasso & Timothy Krebs. (2023). *Hybrid City Council Election Systems*. Informational Brief.

with its two main parts separated by a mountain range, combined with its socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity limits the ability of any city councilor to effectively represent the entire city.[42]

Given Los Angeles' unique characteristics, a compromise in the form of regional seats, modeling community planning regions, was presented and agreed to. While no other large city in America has such a system, Article 21 Section 2 of the California State Constitution establishes the legal framework for drawing districts in a nested manner. The 2008 voter-approved Proposition 11 added language to the state Constitution ranking state redistricting criteria in order of priority (equal population size, compliance with the Voting Rights Act, geographic contiguity, district compactness) and included as its lowest ranked criterion the nesting of two Assembly districts into one Senate district and ten Senate districts into one Board of Equalization district:

> *"To the extent practicable, and where this does not conflict with the criteria above, each Senate district shall be comprised of two whole, complete, and adjacent Assembly districts, and each Board of Equalization district shall be comprised of 10 whole, complete, and adjacent Senate districts."*[43]

Tension between the ranked criteria may arise, albeit more in theory than in practice, but perfect nesting is not expected nor required given prioritization of higher ranked criteria.[44] The 2010 and 2020 state redistricting cycles drew their maps with varying degrees of nesting.[45] This precedent informed the team's recommendation of nesting district and regional seats for the Los Angeles City Council.

Nested regional seats would address the scope of representation and policymaking identified above. And although regional seats would potentially generate higher-cost election campaigns relative to district ones, they would also tap into widespread voter interest and participation. New and diverse candidates will have greater opportunities to run and compete. With even-numbered elections, one could imagine that a more diverse pool of candidates can win regionwide, as happened in the 2022 citywide offices.

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42 Although mayors represent the entire city, they have staff and executive resources, along with a command of media adequate to the task, which are unlikely to be available to councilors.

43 See CA Constitution Article XXI §2: https://law.justia.com/constitution/california/article-xxi/section-2/

44 For more discussion on nesting, tension in criteria, and scholarly references, see Francisco Jasso & Timothy Krebs. (2023). *Hybrid City Council Election Systems*. Informational Brief.

45 See, p. 25 of the "State of California Citizens Redistricting Commission Final Report on 2011 Redistricting:" https://wedrawthelines.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2011/08/crc_20110815_2final_report.pdf; p. 49 of the "California Citizens Redistricting Commission 2021 Report on Final Maps:" https://wedrawthelines.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2023/01/Final-Maps-Report-with-Appendices-12.26.21-230-PM-1.pdf

Importantly, the addition of regional seats breaks the representational monopoly held today by current members of the council. Each Angeleno would have two, rather than one, point of representation in the city's legislature. The importance of this extends beyond mere voice and representation, though this is critically important. Rather, the justification for current council norms of deference to single-district representatives, particularly over land use decisions, has the effect of giving each member of the council a powerful veto. This veto can be, and often is, justified by each council member's position as the unique individual with familiarity with the issues in any given geographic portion of the city. How can someone from Boyle Heights speak with authority regarding the needs of the community in Northridge, for example. However, the nested nature of the districts would mean that more than one member of the council would have formal responsibility for representing each geographic part of the city. One member could not claim unique authority, and therefore not expect to exercise veto. In this respect, overarching regional seats will discourage corruption and encourage transparency.

The public is supportive of this idea. The ISA survey found 61% of registered voters favored having at least some seats elected at-large.[46] And when pressed whether they preferred pure at-large to regional seats composed of groups of four or five districts, 44% preferred the regional nested approach, compared with 29% who preferred only having city-wide seats. The remaining 27% preferred to have no seats elected in either of these ways.

Reducing the Cost of Council Expansion

A main voter concern in expanding the size of the council will be cost. Some costs are one-time, such as reconstruction and new offices. There are also ongoing costs, which are more likely to impact voter attitudes. The most important focus should be on the overall share of the city budget that is dedicated to the city council. Our research shows that it is a very small share of overall spending, well below 1% of the city budget.[47] A cap of 0.5% of the general fund of the total city budget that goes to the council (including member and staff salaries, and offices at city hall and in the field) and the council's operations should be part of the ballot measure. As such, there should not be a pro-rated reduction in council salaries.

Costs were mentioned by focus group participants as a concern associated with enlargement. And most were pleased to hear of the idea of capping

46 ISA, *Los Angeles Governance Reform Project Report* (2023), p. 12.

47 See Kendrick Roberson. (2023). *Preliminary Presentation of LA Council Expansion Associated Costs*. Informational Brief; Shelby Dunagan. (2023). *Budget Implications of Council Expansion*.

the total costs. Our survey supported this trend. An overwhelming majority of registered voters—85%—said that costs were important in their consideration. However, when the idea of capping the total expenditure below 1% was offered as a guarantee on cost control, 65% said that this would make them more likely to support Council expansion.

Our own research on council costs was reassuring in this regard. First, expanding the council to 25 members, even growing the size of their staff and offices proportionate to the number of members, yields a total council expense below 0.5% (one-half of one percent) of the City's budget.[48] This cost is consistent with—and usually lower than—comparable costs in other large American cities.[49]

48 See Kendrick Roberson. (2023). *Preliminary Presentation of LA Council Expansion Associated Costs.* Informational Brief.

49 See Shelby Dunagan. (2023). *Budget Implications of Council Expansion.* Informational Brief.

Toward a Stronger Ethics System

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 2:

Toward a Stronger Ethics System

In the course of our research and analysis, we determined that if voters are asked to expand the size of the council, it is critical to ensure the cleanest possible governance system. We took these findings seriously and conducted qualitative research interviews with staff, former staff and other experts to develop a broad set of ethics system reform recommendations. This review is timely because the Ethics Commission has submitted a list of proposed charter reforms that are currently being considered by the city council and its committees.[50] The City Ethics Commission was established by the voters in 1991 (Measure H) and currently can be found in Article VII of the city charter. This detailed measure was designed in negotiations between civic reformers and the city council for ultimate placement on the ballot by the city council. It is one of the most significant ethics reforms in any American city. Based on our research, the most similar structure for a comparable city is the city/county of San Francisco, which was established in 1993.[51] Unlike most other city commissions in Los Angeles, which are appointed by the mayor with the concurrence of the council, members of the Ethics Commission are appointed by multiple appointing authorities: the mayor, the council president, the controller, and the city attorney. The commission currently has five appointed commissioner slots.

The commission has significant power to propose rules and regulations for the ethics system. The charter requires the council to consider such proposals "without amendment" and then to send them on to the mayor. When it comes to ordinances, however, there is no formal requirement that the Ethics Commission proposals be considered by the city council without amendment. The council also has the lead role in charter amendments that expand or limit ethics reforms. Placing the council in this powerful role regarding ordinances on ethics reform raises a similar question to that of redistricting: should the council be the sole decision point to make ordinances regarding its own ethics rules, without being required to consider the role of a relatively independent ethics commission? Our polling and focus group research suggest that many Angelenos are concerned about corruption and want to ensure cleaner government going forward.

LAGRP's poll of registered voters in Los Angeles uncovered wide consensus across demographic groups and geography about the city

50 See Los Angeles Ethics Commission. (2019). "Ethics Commission Approves Sweeping Reforms." Press Release: https://ethics.lacity.org/news/ethics-commission-approves-sweeping-reforms/

51 See Francisco Jasso. (2023). *Exploring Areas for Ethics Reform in Los Angeles*. Informational Brief.

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council's corruption problems. Eight of ten voters surveyed concurred that the level of corruption in the Los Angeles City Council should at a minimum raise concern or is greater than most government bodies. Nearly 9 in 10 voters (89%) polled believe that ethics rules should be made stronger (either a bit (42%) or much stronger (47%)). In a similar vein, focus group members from across the city of Los Angeles (and all 15 council districts) concurred that ethics reform was necessary; they focused on enhanced enforcement of the existing code of ethics.

Based on this strong consensus the LAGRP proposes several reforms to the ethics commission's appointment process, size, and ability to function with independence. We have focused our attention on several structural reforms that would enhance the role of the Ethics Commission and protect its independence without impeding the role that the city council plays in ordinances.

The LAGRP recommends that:

- The City Council must consider draft legislation submitted by the Ethics Commission. Before a final vote, the Ethics Commission must approve it by majority vote. Indeed, all council legislation on ethics must provide such a requirement for the Ethics Commission to approve. Currently, rules and regulations proposed by the Ethics Commission must be addressed by the council without amendment (Charter Section 703). This does not apply to ethics legislation (ordinances).
- The Ethics Commission should be authorized to place policy recommendations by supermajority vote directly on the ballot as a voter-approved ordinance. The San Francisco Ethics Commission has such a process in its charter if four of the commission's five members vote for it. If passed by the voters, the measure could be written so that revisions can be made to the ordinance by a vote of the city council, but only after the Ethics Commission approves the changes by a supermajority vote. It would not be necessary to return to the ballot. While the L.A. City Council should still have the authority to pass ordinances regarding ethics, the council should not have the exclusive, unshared authority to do so. Ethics reform in Los Angeles will require ensuring that the Ethics Commission has a seat at the table.
- Criteria for the mayoral appointment of ethics commissioners should be the same as that of commissioners on the independent redistricting commission. The only existing qualification for L.A. City Ethics Commissioners is voter registration in the city. Other restrictions such as holding public office, contributing to a campaign or candidate, and being a lobbyist apply only during service on the

Toward a Stronger Ethics System

commission with no "cooling off" period prior to service. Ethics Commission appointees are currently subject to confirmation by the city council and we propose a continuation of such a process.

- The Ethics Commission should increase to seven members from the current five, with the mayor and council president each appointing one of the additional members. Almost all of the ethics commissions of the jurisdictions we examined were commissions of either five or seven members.[52] Appointment power of the additional commissioners should be shared and balanced between the executive and legislative figures.
- The Ethics Commission's budget should be protected to ensure it has sufficient resources to fulfill its responsibilities. This would include protection from receiving unfunded mandates. Research shows that many of the challenges of the ethics bodies of other cities have been exacerbated, if not precipitated, by inadequate funding.[53]
- The Ethics Commission should have the authority and resources to hire independent legal counsel. Existing charter language designates the City Attorney as the legal advisor to the Commission but allows the Ethics Commission to request a special prosecutor if the City Attorney has a conflict of interest. Three cities in our research (New York City, Philadelphia, San Diego) allow for legal counsel independent of the City Attorney.[54] We propose that the Commission be empowered to retain its own legal counsel without the constraint that the City Attorney should first have a conflict of interest.
- Currently, the mayor can remove any commissioner for non-performance with the council's concurrence, and the council may remove a commissioner with a two-thirds vote (Charter section 700e). Once the above recommendations are implemented, LAGRP recommends a review of current recusal/withdrawal/dismissal policies to ensure consistency and clarity across all parts of the ethics ecosystem, including the city council, city attorney, and ethics commission.

52 See Francisco Jasso. (2023). Exploring Areas for Ethics Reform in Los Angeles. Informational Brief.

53 Ibid. See also, Wechsler (2013).

54 Ibid.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Los Angeles Unified School District

Establish an Independent Redistricting Commission for the LAUSD

The Los Angeles city charter controls elections for both the City of Los Angeles and the LAUSD Board of Education. As a result, school board redistricting falls within the charter's purview. Under state law, a charter city has the authority to direct a school district to create an independent redistricting commission as long as the school district is in the charter. While school redistricting authority is ultimately exercised by city councils, Oakland and Pasadena are among the sole cities who redistrict their school systems through independent commissions.[55] Table 2 on page 28 shows how some California school systems approach redistricting.

The LAGRP recommends that:

- The City of Los Angeles should establish an independent redistricting commission composed of **17 residents** for the purpose of drawing district lines for the Los Angeles Unified School District (named "The LAUSD Independent Redistricting Commission").
- The screening criteria for the LAUSD commission should be identical to those for the city commission, with the exception that residence for the school district commission is required in the geographic boundaries of the LAUSD.
- The redistricting process should be conducted in tandem between the city and the LAUSD, in a combined vetting process that allows residents to apply for either or both commissions.

The city could choose to not exercise its charter authority or could propose removing the district from the charter. In our view, these are not the best choices and we do not recommend the removal of the LAUSD from the city charter. The region is on the verge of having a highly consistent independent redistricting system, which could facilitate cooperation and best practices across the county (which already has an independent commission created by state law), the City of Los Angeles, and the LAUSD.

In recent redistricting cycles, the city has shared the costs of the two commissions on a 50-50 basis.[56] This should continue as is. We recommend that the city and the school district meet to consider and implement shared administration of the process. That process could be conducted

55 See Francisco Jasso & Nick Perloff-Giles. (2023). *LAUSD Redistricting.* Informational Brief.

56 2011 Chief Legislative Analyst's Report on redistricting. https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlineddocs/2011/11-0187_RPT_CLA_03-18-11.pdf; Office of the Inspector General Los Angeles Unified School District Special Review of LAUSD Redistricting Commission Reimbursement of Expenses. https://my.lausd.net/webcenter/wccproxy/d?dID=125074.

Table 2. How Some California Jurisdictions Redistrict their School System

Jurisdiction	School Redistricting
Los Angeles	City charter creates an advisory commission to recommend districts for LAUSD but the City Council has final authority. Commission of 15 members: one appointed by each Board member, four by Mayor, and four by Council President. The Mayor and Council President must each select someone from outside the City limits.
San Diego	San Diego Board of Education forms a committee to redistrict (the Redistricting Engagement Committee) that proposes a plan for Board approval.
Fresno	The Board of Trustees is responsible for redrawing trustee areas. Under the state Education Code, community college districts such as West Hills and State Center that are multi-county must have their trustee boundary lines reviewed and approved by the Fresno County Committee on School District Organization.
Sacramento	Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) completed the process to transition from at-large to by-trustee area elections following voter approval in November 2006. SCUSD has seven trustee areas. The Board of Education has the final decision.
Long Beach	School board sends a proposal to the City Council for approval.
Oakland	The Oakland Redistricting Commission adopts new district maps for the city council and school districts. Oakland's City Council and school board share the same seven district boundaries, but the relationship between Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) school board directors and their constituents is a bit more complicated than the City Council's. OUSD directors, like council members, are elected by the residents of their districts—but because OUSD has open enrollment and students aren't limited to their neighborhood schools, families living in one district may have children who attend schools in another.
Pasadena	Because city charters, with voter approval, can establish how school board members are elected, Pasadena established an independent redistricting commission for the Pasadena School District in the Pasadena City Charter.

Source: Francisco Jasso & Nick Perloff-Giles. (2023). *LAUSD Redistricting.* Informational Brief.

in tandem between the city and the LAUSD, in a combined vetting process that allows residents to apply for either or both commissions.

To save money and to encourage collaboration, the requirements for LAUSD commission would be mostly identical to those for the city commission. The sole difference in requirements for the LAUSD would be that residence for the school district commission be required in the

geographic boundaries of the LAUSD. The geographic representation plan proposed above for the city commission would have to be adapted to the larger LAUSD geography. The two commissions could search together for office space outside City Hall and the LAUSD District headquarters. Their staff can compare notes and best practices as problems arise and are resolved.

LAUSD School Board Expansion

LAUSD Board of Education (LAUSD BOE) districts are among the largest local districts by population when compared to all other regional, local governments in the United States. There are only a few exceptions: for instance, where representatives are elected "at-large" like Los Angeles Community College District board members. LAUSD is so large that their districts are larger than over 90% of state legislative districts in the country with only two state legislatures, California State Senate districts representing about 988,000 people;[57] and Texas State Senate districts representing about 940,000 people,[58] being larger.

The average district size in terms of population in LAUSD is approximately 671,428 people. By comparison, the state of Wyoming has a total population of 576,851 and Vermont has a population of 643,077.[59] This means that two United States governors and four United States senators represent constituencies smaller than a LAUSD board member. More locally, LAUSD BOE districts include populations 2½ times larger than Los Angeles City Council districts.

Table 3 (page 30) shows the top school districts by population in the U.S. and their average district population size. While the size of the LAUSD Board is consistent with the sizes of most other large school districts, the size of LAUSD's average district population is dramatically larger than all others. To bring the average district population size of LAUSD closer in line with other school districts, the LAUSD board would need to double in size.

The LAGRP recommends that:

- The size of the LAUSD School Board should be increased to **11 members** from the current seven.
- LAUSD school board districts should remain single-member.
- At least two members should be selected using the LAUSD boundary that falls outside the city of Los Angeles.
- Recommendations to increase the size of the board and the redistricting recommendations should appear on the ballot simultaneously.

57 See the 2020 Citizens Redistricting Commission report on final maps for CA congressional and state senate population figures: https://wedrawthelines.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2023/01/Final-Maps-Report-with-Appendices-12.26.21-230-PM-1.pdf

58 For the ideal population sizes for the Texas state senate: https://redistricting.capitol.texas.gov/apportionment

59 For state populations: https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state.html

Table 3: Top 10 (Elected) School Districts by Population Size, United States

District[1]	# of Board Members	Estimated # of Students Served	Population in Service Area	Estimated Average District Size
LAUSD	7	435,953	4.7m	671,428
Miami-Dade County	9	328,589	2.7m	300,000
Clark County	7	315,787	2.2m	314,285
Broward County	9	256,037	1.9m	211,111
Hillsborough County	7	224,146	1.4m	200,000
Orange County (FL)	7	203,224	1.4m	200,000
Houston Independent	9	194,607	1.5m	166,667
Palm Beach	7	187,943	1.5m	214,286
Gwinnett County	5	179,581	913k	182,600
Fairfax County	12	178,479	1.1m	182,600

Note: New York is not included here as their leadership is appointed as opposed to elected by district.[2] Additionally, Chicago Public Schools will move into the number two spot. They are currently transitioning from appointed to elected and the board is expected to be completely elected by November 2026.[3]

1 See https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_215.30.asp

2 See New York City Department of Education, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City_Department_of_Education

3 See https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2023/11/15/23962730/chicagoans-elect-school-board-for-first-time-primer

With a total 4.7-million-person population in LAUSD, to create districts with approximately 188,000 people per district would leave us with a LAUSD BOE with 25 seats. In an effort to reduce district size to approximately 160,000 people, LAUSD BOE would be made up of 29 seats. We are not proposing either size.

In addition to the lack of academic research on optimal school board size, we have also not found political support for either size during the course of our exploration. Our survey and focus group data saw diminishing support for expansion as the number of Board seats grew. Our conversations with elected officials and institutional decision makers reflected that same disinterest in a School Board of that size. When asked whether they'd favor increasing the size of the board from seven to at least 11, nearly three-quarters (71%) of participants in our survey responded in the affirmative. Of that group, eight of ten respondents indicated that they would be in favor of increasing the size to 15 School Board members, and almost eight in ten of those also favor an increase to *more than* 15 members. Among those respondents in support of expanding to more than 15 LAUSD Board members, the median number of members desired is 20.

Ultimately, we propose that LAUSD BOE districts be drawn so they are no larger, by population, than California state assembly districts (about 494,000 people). In order to meet this goal, we propose that the School Board expand to 11 members. With a board size of 11 members, each district would represent about 427,000 people. Moreover, at least two members should be selected using the LAUSD boundary that falls outside the city of Los Angeles. Recommendations to increase the size of the board and the redistricting recommendations should appear on the ballot simultaneously.

Applying Ethics Rules to LAUSD Board

The LAGRP recommends that:

- Ethics recommendations for the City of L.A. should apply to the LAUSD.
- The City of L.A.'s ethics compliance guidelines should oversee the LAUSD.

We propose that every ethics reform proposal that can be applied to LAUSD, is applied to LAUSD. When appropriate, additional reforms that can be applicable, should apply.

CONCLUSION

Our overall recommendation is that a package of governance reforms that encompasses independent redistricting, council and school board expansion, and ethics reforms be placed on the November 2024 ballot. This is the best opportunity for voter input from a diverse community. When city elections were moved from odd-numbered to even-numbered years by a vote of the people in 2015, the scope of inclusion in the voting process was altered dramatically. Research has shown a highly significant increase in overall participation, as well as a restructuring of the electorate to be younger, more diverse, and more reflective of renters than the electorate had been previously. In a presidential year, we can anticipate the largest possible turnout.[60] While the 2024 primary ballot is available for a reform package, the turnout is likely to be quite a bit lower and to be less engaging overall.[61] As seen below, the gain in turnout from an even-numbered primary is far less than from the general election.

60 See Anzia (2013) and Hajnal, Lewis, & Louch (2002) for a discussion on the impact of election timing on turnout levels.

61 It is well documented that turnout drops when a local election does not coincide with a presidential election. Off-cycle elections also lower the representativeness of the electorate, skewing the policy agenda in favor of organized groups. See Anzia (2013).

Table 4. Los Angeles City Voter Turnout, Pre- and Post-Governance Reform (odd to even election years)

Example of Council District 4 (concurrent with Presidential race)[1]

Year	No. of ballots cast for CD 4 out of the no. of registered voters	Percentage of voter turnout – General (Winning percentage of elected candidate)
2015	24,408 ballots cast for CD 4 of 153,037 registered voters	15.94% (Elected: David Ryu – 55%)
2020	132,999 ballots cast for CD 4 of 181,357 registered voters	73.3% (Elected: Nithya Raman – 53%)

For city-wide (concurrent with Governor race)[2]

Year	No. of ballots cast out of the no. of registered voters	Percentage of voter turnout – Primary
2017	431,896 ballots cast of 2,030,173 registered voters	21.27%
2022	662,514 ballots cast of 2,150,902 registered voters	30.8%

1 See the turnout for Council District 4 in the 2015 City of Los Angeles Municipal Election Official Results: http://ens.lacity.org/clk/elections/clkelections338598382_09102015.pdf; See the turnout for Council District 4 in the 2020 Election Results: https://www.lavote.gov/docs/rrcc/svc/4193_FINAL_SVC_Precinct_ZBC.pdf?v=3 (p. 119)

2 See the turnout from the 2017 Consolidated Municipal and Special Elections: https://www.lavote.gov/documents/SVC/3577_Community.pdf, p.49; See the turnout from the 2022 Statewide Direct Primary Election Results: https://content.lavote.gov/docs/rrcc/svc/4269_final_community.pdf, p.97

Our survey and focus group findings unequivocally demonstrate a crisis in governance that requires a multipronged solution. A vast majority of Angelenos, eight in ten, feel the level of corruption at city hall is either greater than most government bodies or significant enough to raise serious concern. A large share (45%) of Angelenos find city government to be ineffective and only one in four Angelenos feel their views are carefully considered by city officials. To strengthen confidence and trust in the city council's ability to work in the public interest, holding a package of reforms in the November 2024 ballot would allow Angelenos to vote on a variety of changes that our survey and focus group results show they support. Angelenos have voiced their frustrations with the state of their local governing institutions and while singular reform is a necessary step to rebuild trust, it is insufficient to meaningfully address the scope of their frustrations. To this end, the LAGRP offers a package of complementary reforms intended as an interdependent set of solutions designed to maximize Angelenos' hope for achieving long-overdue governance reform.

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