INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

Applying Models of Legislative Size to LA City Council Expansion

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Core Question

The purpose of this brief is to review existing models for estimating the size of legislative bodies and apply them to the efforts to expand the LA City Council. Projected LA City Council sizes are presented using resident-to-representative ratios of other large US cities, models for US House expansion, and other CA cities.

Summary of Topline Findings

Leveraging other large cities' resident-to-representative ratios may work best for determining an ideal council size for LA. Other models examined function in reference to resident-to-representative ratios developed by the Founders, or are anchored to state populations, and translating and applying those models to the case of the LA City Council produce varying council sizes ranging from 7 to 158 seats.

Background & Information

Relative to other large cities, the LA City Council has a small council consisting of 15 members for a population of ~3.9 million. Below is a table with the council sizes of other large cities and their ratio of resident-per-district. The last column in the table shows how large the LA City Council would be if it followed the residents-per-district ratio of other large cities.

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

	Population	City	Council Size # District (# At Large)	Residents per council district	Resulting Council Size for LA
Cities Outside of California	8.5 million	NYC	51	166,666	23
	2.7 million	Chicago	50	54,000	71
	2.3 million	Houston	11 (5)	209,091	18
	1.6 million	Philadelphia	10 (7)	160,000	24
	1.6 million	Phoenix	8	200,000	19

	966,000	Jacksonville	14 (5)	69,000	56
Cities Within California	1.38 million	San Diego	9	155,000	24
	983,000	San Jose	10	98,300	39
	874,000	San Francisco	11	80,000	48
	542,000	Fresno	7	77,000	49

In 1989, NYC expanded its city council from 35 to 51 seats, with 55% voter approval.[1] NYC Council expanded to increase representation and did not follow any formulas to determine an appropriate size. In their assistance to the NYC charter revision efforts, Muzzio & Tompkins (1989) stated there were few, if any, empirical studies on the size of the legislature that could help them recommend an optimal size for NYC, rather the optimal size depended on the task at hand.[2] LA attempted to increase their city council a few times in the decades prior to 2000. The latest attempt to increase the council to 21 or 25 seats in 1999 failed.

7 Models to Expand the House

Making use of models to expand the size of the House of Representatives may provide useful insights. Overall, the models for House of Representative expansion Drutman et al. (2021) review would expand the House from 435 members to between 572 and 9,400 members.

The only model to readily appear in academic research (comparative politics) is the Cube Root Law. For the purposes of expanding the House of Representatives, academic literature favors the Cube Root Law (Ladewig & Jasinski 2008; Lijphart 1998; Lucas & MacDonald 2000). In general, the Cube Root Law is seen as the simplest method of managing population growth with the communication demands (i.e., efficiency and representation) inherent to a legislative body (Taagepera 1972). Additionally, this is the only model that is used to estimate/express the pattern of legislature size-to-population ratio found in the national assemblies of other advanced democracies (Ladewig & Jasinski 2008, pg. 99).

Of course, this literature focuses on national assemblies, not local city councils. Applying the cube root law of national assemblies to the LA City Council would yield a city council of 158

[1] https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/08/nyregion/1989-elections-charter-overhaul-new-york-city-charter-approved-polls-show.html

[2] Muzzio & Tompkins did cite limited research at the time on committee sizes recommending a range between 9-13 members.

members. Given the previous failure in expanding the council merely into the low- to mid-20s range, expansion to 158 would be out of the question.

The remaining models function in reference to constituent-to-representative ratios developed by the Founders, or are anchored to state populations, and translating and applying those models to the case of the LA City Council also produce varying council sizes ranging from 7 to 113 seats.

Model	Formula/Ratio	New House Size	Resulting Council Size for LA
Wyoming Rule	Anchored to population of least populous state	574	7
Deferred Maintenance Rule	Restoring seats lost at 1929 size cap	585	7
Cube Root Law	Cube root of population	693	158
Least Variation in District Size	364,000 – 326,000 per representative	909 - 1,014	11-12
Restore Original 1790 Ratio	35,000 per representative	9,400	113
Restore 1913 Ratio	211,000 per representative	1,600	19
James Madison Rule	50,000 per representative	6,500	79

Other Recommendations

1. 2021 LA City Council Redistricting Commission report recommends expanding to **a range of 22-26 seats.**[3] An Appendix of this commission report includes residents per district ratios of other CA cities. The first 4 columns below reproduce that report's table but has an added column with the implied LA City Council size if LA followed the ratios of other CA cities. Of course, the 2023 CLA report also provides a table with the residents per district the LA City Council would have for each council size from 15 to 25.

~ Population	City	Council Size	Residents per district	Resulting Council Size for LA
1.38 million	San Diego	9	155,000	26
1 million	San Jose	10	101,000	39
874,000	San Francisco	11	80,000	49
542,000	Fresno	7	77,000	51

2. A May 2022 UCLA MPP thesis (Schwartz et al. 2022) recommends an odd-numbered council size of **at least 23 seats.** This report also provides tables for different council

[3] 2021 Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission. "Report and Recommendations of the Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission." 2021 Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission. October 26, 2021. https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2020/20-0668-S7_misc_10-29-21.pdf

sizes and estimates for the annual cost (in both dollars and as percent of LA City budget) of expanding the city council to 21, 25, 30, and 50 seats.

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