

Inside Student Government: The Variable Quality of High School Student Councils

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Background/Context: *Student governments are the first direct experience that youth have of representative government. However, very little research has been done on student councils in spite of their ubiquity in American high schools and consistent references to their positive effects on the political socialization of youth.*

Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: *This article studies how student councils are variably organized across the nation to determine how and why better or worse quality experiences of representative government are being had by youth just before they enter adulthood and have the opportunity to be engaged in the nation's political system.*

Research Design: *The authors conducted interviews with student council sponsors, collected a nationally representative sample of student council constitutions, and then looked at the variance in student powers and faculty controls over council endeavors.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *The study finds that student councils are variably organized by school charters and by income levels and race of student populations. Elite public schools afford councils unprecedented powers and low faculty oversight, whereas impoverished schools and those with disadvantaged minorities tend to lack councils or merely have ones that perform social functions. By contrast, private religious schools have the most active councils engaged in a wide range of activities, but their decisions and memberships are constrained by a great deal of faculty oversight. Such variation in representative government has implications for political socialization and the types of citizens being developed in the United States.*

A growing body of research describes a decline in civic and political participation within the United States since the 1950s (Berman, 2001; National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1998; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Putnam, 2000). Whereas some scholars debate the existence of this trend (Paxton, 1999), others have turned their attention to political socialization processes to explore the mechanisms that increase or decrease civic engagement over time (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Hahn 1998; Merelman, 1972; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Yates & Youniss, 1998; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 2001). In particular, there is growing interest in the processes through which youth develop motives, capacities, and relationships that encourage adult civic engagement such as voting, running for office, contributing to campaigns, and attending city council meetings. Schools are implicated in these studies as key contexts for political socialization (Putnam; Verba et al.), and there is also a revived interest in the normative literature as to what the ends and means of political socialization in schools should be (i.e., what kind of citizens liberal democracies need to create and by what practices; Callan, 1988, 1997, 2004; Gutmann, 1987).

Early research on political socialization consistently found a story of reproduction: Students of wealthy and politically engaged parents were more politically engaged in their adult life (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Hanks, 1981). More recently, political scientists and sociologists have argued that, net of background characteristics and parental behaviors, certain key affiliations afford social learning opportunities that increase political participation (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1999; Verba et al., 1995). In these arguments, certain youth extracurricular clubs are seen as the decisive contexts of political socialization because they entail activities, topics, and networks of relations that are closely related to those in the adult political system (Stolle & Rochon, 2001).

A growing body of research on youth voluntary associations finds that student council participation in particular has sizeable positive effects on long-term civic involvement (Beck & Jennings, 1982). Verba and colleagues (Verba et al., 1995) reported that former service on student councils in high school predicts adult civic engagement, and, prospectively, Hanks and Eckland (1978) showed that student council (and other) activities predict civic engagement 15 years into the future. Similarly, McFarland and Thomas (2006) analyzed two national longitudinal datasets to illustrate that, more than most other affiliations (including government classes) and net of self-selection factors that lead students to become members of student councils to begin with, student council service significantly increases adult political participation 7-12 years later (+.2 standardized gain).. These scholars explained that student council has such an effect because its activities are the most direct correlate to adult forms of politics. At the very least, they provide youth with firsthand experiences and impressions of democratic citizenship and representative government. Initial experiences such as these are extremely important because inertia is widely considered the greatest predictor of young adults' political attitudes and behaviors (see Plutzer, 2002).

In spite of student government's resemblance to the adult political system and its positive effect on adult civic engagement, we know very little about what actually goes on in these important associations.¹ The identified effects only afford a "black box" depiction of student councils because they only assess the effect of being a member or not (dummy variable effects).² Such information ignores how student governments are variably organized, how vibrant participation is within them (or not), and if they vary in their power and influence from school to school. By identifying such internal variation across councils, we develop a greater understanding about how these contexts can become important catalysts of political socialization (Edwards, Foley, & Diani, 2001).

What we currently know about student governments stems from practitioner articles that describe how sponsors should conduct council affairs (Bolen, 1997; Cole & Proctor, 1994; McKown, 1942; Miklos & Miklos, 1971) and student council associations that offer training camps, guides, and sample constitutions that new organizations can adopt (National Association on Student Councils, 2001).³ To date, there have been no empirical studies of what councils do, on whether some councils are more active and influential than others, and on whether alternative forms of representative government are being created (e.g., so-called school or site councils that, in contrast with "student" councils, involve parents and a greater number of faculty and administration).

By collecting information on individual student councils, we can answer a variety of questions about how councils are organized and how they operate for different segments of the American population. Do councils vary by the socioeconomic background of their community or by the type of school charter? Which schools have councils and which do not? What purposes do they have? What forms of representative government are there? Which councils include more of the student body than others? Do some student councils engage in a wider variety of activities than others? What rights and powers do councils have? Do they really influence school policy decisions? What checks on council decisions do adults retain?

The research presented here merely attempts to describe the variable *quality* of representative government that student councils afford high school students. A variety of scholars have discussed the quality (Mill, 1861/2005) and forms of representative governments (Sartori, 1987, 1994), and we do not attempt to build on or revise such work. Our guiding notion of "quality" is couched less in theory than in common sense. By "quality," we mean the development of student governments that include and serve the student body's interests, that engage in a variety of activities and have significant influence over school policies, and that are somewhat unhindered by external constraints on who can run for office and what council decisions can be acted on. A representative government that does not serve its constituents' interests, has few duties or powers, and is externally constrained falls far short of most theoretical ideals (Mill) and those of most democratic citizens. Our focus on "quality" presumes that high-quality representative governments shape both the members' and the served population's perceptions as to whether their council (or government) is important and relevant to their lives, whether it is a means to reproducing adult mores, or whether it is an ineffectual organization that only serves the career interests of its representatives.

In the sections that follow, we relate this argument by presenting our study of student council constitutions: the data collection process, the coding and definition of variables, the sample characteristics, our explanatory models, and our interpretation of the statistical results. In the conclusion, we summarize our main findings and discuss their implications for further empirical inquiry.

METHODS

We study high school student council constitutions in an effort to examine how student governments are variably organized. Constitutions are written documents that relate the rules and principles by which an organization is governed. In the case of student councils, the constitution establishes the power and duties of the student government and its rights in relation to adult school officials. Student council constitutions entail a statement of purpose, a description of the council's framework, offices, and activities, and a listing of its powers, constraints, election procedures, impeachment processes, and amendments. Student council constitutions vary in length, most being several pages long, but some reach 100 pages. Figure 1 is a facsimile of a high school student council constitution that lists most of their generic features, albeit in a streamlined fashion.

Figure 1

Student Council Constitution of John Doe High School

Article I: Name

The name of this organization will be the student council of John Doe High School.

Article II: Purpose—The student council will

1. foster harmony and promote community spirit in the school.
2. organize student body activities and assemblies.

3. mediate concerns between faculty / administration and students.
4. make students aware of their rights and duties, teaching them how to participate in a democracy.
5. foster virtues of mutual respect and cooperation between students, and between students and faculty / administration.
6. give voice to students in school affairs and decisions.
7. promote community service.

Article III: Membership—The student council will consist of

1. an executive cabinet elected at large (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer).
2. a house of representatives with seven representatives and an alternate per class.
3. a faculty advisor appointed by the principal.

Article IV: Principal Veto

The principal of John Doe High School shall veto any council decision that may not be in the best interest of the school. In case of a veto, the Principal will have to submit a written explanation of the decision at the next council meeting.

Article V: Council Powers—The student council will

1. organize and schedule student activities.
2. conduct yearly fundraising activities and prepare a budget for the administration.
3. monitor elections.
4. approve the charters of clubs and associations.
5. make general recommendations concerning administrative, academic, or disciplinary issues.
6. have representation on the School Board.
7. in case of a veto by the principal, have the capacity to appeal to the superintendent by a two-thirds majority vote.

Article VI: Eligibility—All candidates must

1. write an essay explaining why they want to serve on student council.
2. file a petition with 20 signatures from their peers.
3. maintain at least a B average on their grades.
4. acquire one faculty recommendation.
5. show good disciplinary records.
6. the president and vice president must be seniors who have served on council at least one year.
7. the secretary and the treasurer must be juniors.

Article VII: Elections

1. Elections for the executive cabinet will take place in the last month of classes. Outgoing seniors will not vote.
2. In a special assembly, every presidential candidate will give a 10-minute speech, and candidates for Secretary and Treasurer will give 5-minute speeches.
3. Elections will take place that same day. The outgoing senior council members, with the supervision of the faculty advisor, will tally the votes.
4. The winners will be decided by a plurality vote unless there is a tie, in which case there will be a runoff. The second most voted presidential candidate will be the vice president.
5. Class representative elections will take place two weeks after the start of classes.
6. Candidates will give 3-minute speeches before their grade cohorts in a special assembly.
7. Seven representatives and an alternate will be selected by plurality votes from each grade level.

Article VIII: Removal of Student Council Members

1. All student council members must maintain eligibility and have no more than 3 unexcused absences at student council meetings.
2. If a member of the executive cabinet becomes ineligible, the president will appoint the second most voted candidate for the vacant office. In case of the president's removal, the vice president will assume office and appoint the best placed candidate after him as the new vice president.
6. In case of a representative's ineligibility, an alternate will assume the position, and the best placed candidate after that alternate will become the new alternate for the class.

Article IX: Duties of the Executive Cabinet

1. The president must:
 - a. preside over each council meeting.
 - b. call special meetings as necessary, with the approval of the faculty advisor.
 - c. meet regularly with the principal and represent the student body on the school board.
 - d. appoint committee chairpersons among elected representatives.
2. The vice president must:

- a. assume the duties and responsibilities of the president when absent.
 - b. assist the treasurer with counting all funds and making deposits at the central office.
3. The secretary must:
- a. take roll call at each meeting.
 - b. record the minutes at each meeting.
 - c. plan and write all proposals with the help of other committee members.
 - d. handle all correspondence pertaining to the student council.
4. The treasurer must:
- a. report the balance of the student council's account according to the print out provided by the Central Office Secretary.
 - b. with the supervision of the vice president, count all funds from vending machine and fundraisers, and make deposits at the central office.

Article X: Duties of Representatives

1. Representatives must represent their class at student council meetings.
2. Representatives must take notes during meetings and report all council activities to their homeroom.

Article XI: By-Laws

1. The student council will meet weekly.
2. Meetings will be held according to Robert's rules of parliamentary procedure.
3. Alternates will only vote in the absence of a representative.
4. Meetings will be open to all students.

Article XII: Amendments

1. Amendments may be submitted by any student council member.
 2. Amendments must be approved by an absolute majority of the student council.

Most high school student council constitutions have existed for over 30 years—well before student council associations began providing templates. Most constitutions resemble an altered, simplified version of the United States Constitution that omits articles and details deemed irrelevant to the student organization and youth concerns (e.g., military role, succession rights across many offices, and so on). They are also frequently amended over the years to change impeachment rules, voting standards, and access. Hence, the resultant constitution bears a loose resemblance to the national constitution but has been altered to appeal to the concerns of high school students embedded in schooling contexts.

A fundamental premise in our reasoning is that the constitution of any political institution stipulates what will be its *de jure* basic values and the particular distribution of power among participants that will regulate its ongoing operations in light of those values. This premise is supported by research in constitutional design in which scholars study how best to embody the values of justice and democracy in a basic legal framework that empowers citizens to advance those values (see Sunstein, 2001, for review). To be sure, some gaps may open between *de jure* norms and *de facto* practice in the operation of any institution, but *de jure* norms, especially when they have been worked out with some care and clarity, are at least strong *prima facie* evidence of actual practice.

In this sample, we find that constitutions have great prescriptive weight over student council procedures and activities. For example, most every constitution establishes detailed and systematic accounts of student powers and faculty controls. They also offer a list of dated amendments, which suggests that the constitution remains in constant regulatory interplay with actual practices. Many have a permanent constitutional commission that proposes amendments and demands that officers learn the contents of the constitution and pledge allegiance to it. More important, our observations of several councils and interviews with a random sample of 30 sponsors indicate that the specific constitutional regulations afford a very accurate depiction of how councils are organized and perform their duties (99% accuracy).⁴

Our collection of constitutions was limited to high schools that have at least 50 students because we believed that small schools (and primary schools) would lack a student council. Using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) database, we found that 21,535 high schools met these conditions and reflected our population of interest. Because of funding limitations, we could only contact some of these schools over the Internet and by federal mailings. We sampled schools in several cycles, trying to make our eventual sample resemble that of the national population of schools. In particular, we oversampled schools with lower income and disadvantaged populations because prior research suggested that they were less likely to respond and because we wanted to offset the high-SES bias that collection from the Internet would create.⁵ In addition, we oversampled private religious schools (Catholic and Protestant) because they were of focal interest in debates on social capital and political socialization (Galston, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Last, we oversampled local schools so as to have recourse to field observations.⁶ In

the end, we contacted 737 of the 21,535 schools (as many as we could afford) and acquired a sample of 362 responses, 83 of which said they lacked a constitution, and 279 of which said they had student council constitutions (see Table 1).

Variables	Nation		All Replies		w/Constitution	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>School Traits</i>						
School Size ¹	.71	(.69)	.97	(.84)	1.08	(.87)
Rurality	4.77	(2.54)	4.13	(2.56)	4.15	(2.48)
% Minority	.21	(.28)	.26	(.29)	.23	(.26)
% Disadvantaged ²	.31	(.22)	.20	(.25)	.18	(.22)
<i>School Types</i>						
Public	.75		.74		.76	
Magnet	.02		.08		.08	
Charter	.03		.05		.01	
Other public	.71		.60		.67	
Private	.25		.25		.24	
Catholic	.05		.09		.10	
Protestant	.14		.14		.13	
Secular	.05		.02		.01	
<i>N</i> observations	21535		362		279	

¹ Size is in increments of 1,000.

² Percent disadvantaged is the proportion on free or reduced lunch.

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Table 1. Characteristics of Responding Schools and Schools With Constitutions in Comparison to the Population of High Schools in the Nation (*N* > 50)

Table 1 illustrates how the eventual sample of constitutions compares with demographic characteristics of the national sample of high schools in NCEES. Comparing this sample to that of the nation’s high schools, there are some notable biases. Our sample entails schools that are larger, more urban, and wealthier than the national average. That said, our sample does include a representative set of private Protestant and Catholic schools and those with large proportions of disadvantaged populations. However, when the sample is broken down further, one sees that charter schools and secular private schools were not selectively surveyed, so we lack sufficient numbers for group comparisons. It was decided that these types of schools should be overlooked and that a focus on Catholic and Protestant schools in comparison with wealthy and impoverished public schools was more desirable because it was related in the literature most often (Galston, 2001).⁷

The resultant sample is neither perfectly representative nor exhaustively characteristic of every group, but it does afford information about student council variation in the nation, and it acquires enough information on councils in private religious schools (*n* = 30) to ascertain how they compare and contrast with councils in other types of American high schools.

CODING CONSTITUTIONS AND CONSTRUCTING VARIABLES

We coded constitutions in an iterative, inductive fashion, looking for features that were systematically related across them. Constitutions were coded for their (1) stated *purposes*, (2) listed *governmental structures*, and (3) *quality of student representation and government* that they afford. This third feature depended on a variety of dimensions—for example, the number of representatives relative to school size, range of council activities, council powers in school affairs, faculty constraints on access to candidacy, and faculty constraints on student council decisions (see Table 2).

Independent Variables	Variable Definition	M	SD	Min	Max
School Type					
<i>Catholic</i>	Catholic school	.10	.	0	1
<i>Protestant</i>	Protestant school	.13	.	0	1
<i>Poor Public</i>	Public schools with above average percentages of disadvantaged students (see % Disadvantaged).	.39	.	0	1
Other—baseline comparison	All other schools (wealthy public schools with below average proportions of disadvantaged students and a few secular private schools) (1,0).	.38	.	0	1
School Traits					
<i>School Size</i>	Number of students / 1,000.	1.08	.87	.06	4.15
<i>Rurality</i>	Large Central City = 1; Mid-Size City = 2; Urban Fringe of Large City = 3; Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City = 4; Large Town = 5; Small Town = 6; Rural Inside MSA = 7; Rural Outside MSA = 8	4.15	2.48	1	8
<i>% Minority</i>	Percentage of students who are Hispanic, Black, or Native American	.21	.25	0	1.00
<i>% Disadvantaged</i>	Percentage of students receiving free lunch/reduced lunch, and designated immigrant population (NCES). Note: None of the private schools lets this information, so it primarily differentiates public schools (see <i>Poor Public</i>).	.18	.21	0	1.06
Council Purpose					
<i>Moral Exemplars</i>		.30	.	0	1
<i>Organizing Social Activities</i>		.56	.	0	1
<i>Civic Education</i>		.50	.	0	1
Government Structure					
<i>Government with Executive Branch</i>	Standard system with executive, council, and /or class governments	.84	.	0	1
Other - baseline comparison	Nonstandard forms of government, such as bicameral system, judicial branches, or club system	.16	.	0	1
Controls for Constitutional Definition					
<i>Posted on Internet</i>	Constitution was found on the Internet (1,0).	.43	.50	0	1
<i>Estimated Page Length</i>	Approximate page length of constitution (adjusted by font size and density). Counts of font characters were done on 50 constitutions and were found highly correlated with estimated page lengths (.98).	8.09	7.29	1	100

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Dependent Variables		M	SD	Min	Max
<i>Council Exclusivity</i>	Ratio of students per representative	34.26	35.09	3.20	384.60
<i>Council Exclusivity (started logit)</i>	Log (ratio of students per representative + 1)	3.28	.72	1.44	5.95
Council Activity (composite)					
Hold frequent meetings	Conducts weekly meetings (or more)	.24	.	0	1
Perform community service	Conducts community service	.23	.	0	1
Raise funds	Conducts fundraising events	.38	.	0	1
Organize school activities	Organizes student body activities	.51	.	0	1
Engage in school policy decisions	Engages in school decisions (e.g., makes recommendations to admin/faculty/student body concerning policies outside the council)	.49	.	0	1
Council Influence (composite)					
Recommend general	Capacity to voice general concerns to administration	.26	.	0	1
Board membership	Hold representation on school board/advisory board	.16	.	0	1
Recommend curriculum	Capacity to make recommendations on curriculum	.07	.	0	1
Recommend discipline	Capacity for student intervention in disciplinary issues	.04	.	0	1
Capacity to appeal veto	Capacity to appeal principal/faculty veto to higher authority	.04	.	0	1
Capacity to override veto	Capacity to override principal/faculty veto with special majority	.02	.	0	1
Constrained Access (composite)					
Candidate essay / petition	Access to candidacy requires petition or essay.	.55	.	0	1
Candidate discipline	Access to candidacy requires good disciplinary record.	.33	.	0	1
Candidate minimum GPA	Access to candidacy requires minimum GPA	.71	.	0	1
Faculty recommendation	Access to candidacy requires faculty recommendations.	.35	.	0	1
Other access constraints	Students required to attend leadership course or attend summer training sessions, and so on.	.28	.	0	1
Constrained Practice (composite)					
Active faculty sponsor	Active sponsor involved in council affairs.	.77	.	0	1
Faculty review council decisions	Faculty can review/approve council decisions.	.18	.	0	1
Faculty can veto council decisions	Faculty can veto council decisions with or without justification.	.28	.	0	1
Other practice constraints	Faculty/principal approve elected officials, faculty can vote, principal can remove members and amend council decisions at will, and so on.	.19	.	0	1

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Table 2. Variable Names, Definition, and Descriptive Statistics

The opening paragraphs of nearly every constitution explicitly state the *purposes* and objectives of the student council. We identified and coded a variety of listed purposes: for example, integration (e.g., fostering harmony and community spirit), mediation (between students and administration/faculty), community service (outside school), giving voice to students in school affairs (representation in decisions), producing technical leaders (leadership skills), *organizing social activities*, providing *civic education* (creating citizens with an awareness of their rights and duties), and generating *moral exemplars* (persons of character, who set a positive example). We analyzed all of these purposes for systematic variation, but only the latter three correspond with different types of schools and student populations (italicized above), so we focus attention there.

Constitutions also consistently describe a common *structure of student government*. One frame of government is present in most high schools and represents the standard form: *councils with an executive branch* (~ 84%). It consists of an executive cabinet and an assembly of representatives often organized into committees. The executive officers are the student body

president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer (and sometimes others, such as the parliamentarian, sergeant at arms, or publicity chair). The representatives are generally drawn from each grade cohort (often around five to seven persons per grade), but sometimes they are drawn from homerooms. Then there are standing committees and/or class governments that manage certain tasks, like prom, homecoming, and senior gifts. Around 16% of the councils depart from the standard structure by having a bicameral system (e.g., “senators and representatives”), three branches of government (e.g., executive, legislative, and judicial), or some other form (e.g., traditional club council in which student government results from the articulation of different school clubs). Because none of these alternative forms was observed in great numbers ($n < 20$), all of them were lumped into a single composite labeled “alternative” government structures, and we attempt to identify what kinds of schools and populations favor the standard form of student government over alternative ones.

Constitutions were also coded for characteristics reflecting the *quality of student representation* within each council. The quality of a student council has many dimensions: its numerical inclusiveness (in numerical proportion the council represents the student body; the council’s range of listed activities), from the organization of social events to community service; the council’s powers to affect school policy; the constraints faculty place on who can be a candidate (access); and the constraints faculty place on council decisions. All these dimensions are part of a larger picture concerning the quality of representative government and must be viewed as interrelated.

These multiple dimensions, however, can be operationalized as distinct measures. A measure of numerical inclusiveness/exclusiveness is derived from the ratio of students per representative. This ratio is essentially an indication of *membership exclusivity* (noninclusiveness). Some councils are small, elite clubs, whereas others involve a large proportion of the student body, thereby increasing their likelihood of being more representative and extending experiences of political socialization to more students. Analyses therefore seek to determine which kinds of schools encourage greater numerical representation.

Constitutions also define the range of council activities and powers afforded members. Not all councils do the same activities, and some do a wider variety, and more often, than others; they may meet weekly (or more), raise their own funds, manage a sizeable budget, organize and schedule student body activities, conduct their own elections, and even get involved in school policy decisions (i.e., making recommendations to faculty). These activities are summed for a composite score, *range of activity* (see Table 2).⁸

Councils also have general powers that make them influential in school affairs, such as having the right to make general recommendations to the administration, or the right to make specific recommendations on curriculum and discipline issues. Some councils even have a seat on the school board (or advisory board/board of trustees) and have the capacity to either appeal to a higher power in case of a faculty veto (school board, secretary of education) or override it with a qualified majority. These powers are summed for a composite score, *council powers* (see Table 2).⁹

Faculty control over student access to the council and council decisions is also a topic commonly remarked on in student council constitutions.¹⁰ Faculty can regulate who gets on the council by demanding that candidates complete a nomination form, write an essay, submit speeches, lack disciplinary problems (or histories), and meet minimum GPA requirements. Access is further constrained when candidates must acquire faculty recommendations for eligibility. Some schools even require candidates to publicly profess and demonstrate their religious faith. These constraints are summed into a composite score, *access constraints*.¹¹

Constitutions also list ways in which council practices can be constrained by faculty. Councils supervised by more than one active faculty member are more likely to have their internal affairs informally constrained. The exercise of council powers can also be undermined when faculty approval of decisions is required or when decisions can be vetoed, sometimes even without justification. A variety of other efforts at council regulation can arise, such as requiring members to attend a yearlong leadership course or training camp (see Table 2). Some constitutions even allow faculty to remove council members at any time for any reason. These regulations are summed for a composite score, *practice constraints*.¹²

As control variables, we consider whether the visibility of constitutions and their length explains why some have certain listed purposes, governmental structures, and quality of representation. After all, it may be that constitutions have more of the above characteristics simply by virtue of being publicly displayed and being more detailed. It is reasonable to believe that publicly displayed documents are altered so as to reflect certain externally legitimate understandings of what a student council is and should be, and private documents depart from these institutional scripts (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Some of the constitutions in this sample can be located and viewed on the Internet by the wider public. We created a dummy variable to denote these Internet documents. By including the variable in our models, we remove any mediating effects of external pressures and identify the kinds of constitutional characteristics frequently “hidden” from public view. We believe that hidden topics will be more controversial ones and lack public consensus (e.g., the council’s moral purpose and access constraints on membership) in comparison with common, publicly displayed attributes (e.g., purpose of organizing social activities).

A second control variable concerns constitution length. Similar to prior research (Hammons, 1999), we count the number of pages in each document, but we adjust the score by the font size and density of words (spacing). To assess the accuracy of this estimated count, we take a subsample of 50 constitutions and enter them in a word processor to count the number of characters per document. The character count was correlated with estimated page length at .98, suggesting that our estimate of council length is very accurate. We believe longer documents will be associated with the frequent listing of various council purposes, powers, and constraints. Therefore, we include it as a control that will identify if significant statistical associations arise net of estimated page lengths.

Once constitution codes were constructed, they were linked to school demographic data drawn from NCES, which has information on most every school's location (whether rural or urban), its size and type (private, magnet, charter, public), student to faculty ratio, number of free/reduced lunches, number of immigrant students, and racial composition. By linking the constitution data to the school demographic data, it is possible to describe how organizational features of student councils differ across various types of schools and student populations in the nation (see Table 2).¹³

CONSTITUTIONS AND REALITY OF COUNCIL PRACTICES

Some readers may believe our coding of constitutions inaccurately reflects the organizational features of student councils. As noted earlier, a special effort was made to interview sponsors and make sure the codes reflected actual organizational practices. Phone interviews were conducted with a random subsample of 30 student council sponsors. In the interviews, every item was discussed, and respondents were asked to identify where and when there were discrepancies between constitutional codes and actual council organization. Several discrepancies were found: (1) one sponsor reported that even though the constitution lists a grade requirement, this had been supplanted by sponsor approval; (2) another sponsor argued that there was no need for faculty approval even though the constitution listed it; and (3) 6 of the 30 interviewed sponsors argued that this study's deduced number of representatives was slightly off. Our tabulated estimates generate a measure of council exclusivity that explains 81% of the variance in the confirmed reports (.9 correlation). The first two discrepancies represent two errors out of 150 coded items, so the accuracy of our composites for constrained access remains excellent (~ .99 correlation). The measure of inclusiveness has the most error, but even there, the measure greatly reflects the council feature it was intended to identify. Interviews revealed no other discrepancies and suggest that the measures accurately capture designated organizational features.

MODELS

To explain the differences among student councils in American high schools, a variety of dependent variables are used to reflect the qualities of student governments: (1) constitutional charter (having a constitution or not), (2) expressed council purposes (moral exemplars, organization of social activity, and civic education), (3) governmental format (standard versus other), (4) membership exclusivity (ratio of representatives per student), (5) student empowerment (range of council activities and council powers), and (6) faculty controls (access constraints and practice constraints). Analyses assess whether these council characteristics vary by school size, rural-urban location, minority racial composition, and socioeconomic status, as well as school charters, like Catholic, Protestant, and public (see Table 2). In addition, analyses assess whether these effects hold net of control variables concerning public display (Internet) and constitution length (# pages).

Logistic regression and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression are used to identify which types of schools, school populations, and electoral/government systems are associated with various organizational features of student councils. In the case of membership exclusivity, the composite variable is skewed and required transformation, started $\text{logit} = y = \log(y + 1)$, so that random residuals and accurate standard errors would be acquired (Freund & Littell, 1991). Logistic regression is also used to predict whether schools have a constitutional charter, various purposes, and government format. Every model conforms to OLS assumptions (Allison, 1999; Freund & Littell).¹⁴ In logits, odds ratios are presented, $\exp(B)$, and in OLS models, both standardized and raw coefficients are presented. We also identify results associated with a more liberal test for significance ($p < .10$) because some of the cell sizes are relatively small (i.e., each school type ~ 30 cases).

RESULTS

Analyses assess qualities of student councils on six dimensions: (1) whether they have a constitutional charter, (2) their various purposes, (3) form of government, (4) membership exclusivity, (5) student empowerment, and (6) faculty control. The first quantitative results identify factors associated with having a constitutional charter. When schools were asked for their constitutions, some replied that they lacked a constitutional document and even a student council. Of the 362 schools responding, 279 sent a constitution back, and 83 said they lacked one altogether.¹⁵ The lack of a constitution and/or a council signals the school's divestment in student government and its failure to socialize students into practices of citizenship and governance that a school with a constitution and/or council would.

	Odds	SE
<u>School Type</u>		
Catholic	1.96	(.61)
Protestant	.93	(.46)
Poor Public	.51	(.38) †
Other (wealthy public)	---	
<u>School Traits</u>		
School Size	4.51	(.29) ***
Ruralness	1.12	(.08)
% Minority	.12	(.59) ***
Intercept	1.45	(.59)
<u>Model Fitness</u>		
Max-rescaled R-square	.25	
Wald Chi-square	45.43	***
Hosmer Lemeshow Test	4.99	ns

Source: Student Council Study.

Note: 279 of 362 responding schools had a constitution.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. † $p < .10$.

Table 3. Constitutional Charter: Logistic Regression Identifying Schools With Constitutions

Table 3 presents results from logistic regressions that identify school traits associated with having a constitution. The findings on the presence of a constitutional charter suggest that larger schools are far more likely to have a constitution than small schools.¹⁶ For every 1,000 additional students, schools are 4.51 times more likely to have a constitution. Schools with high percentages of minorities are less likely to have a constitution when compared with predominantly White schools. A 10% increase in minorities results in an 8.8% lessened chance of having a constitutional charter.¹⁷ Last, poor public schools are half as likely as their wealthier counterparts to have a constitution (odds = .51).

Supplemental analyses (not presented) show that many of these schools have diminishing grade cohort sizes, and reports on the Internet list many of the schools' and districts' graduation rates as relatively low (i.e., residential information for potential homeowners). As such, it is possible that racial and socioeconomically disadvantaged schools have fewer councils and constitutions because of chronic dropout and attendance rates that limit the eligible candidates. Other hypotheses are plausible, but there is insufficient information to test them here. For example, these schools may have other more urgent concerns that inhibit extracurricular participation (or simply a lack resources and motivated teachers). It is also possible that their school communities are not sufficiently cohesive or participatory. Last, cultural and class cleavages between students and teachers may lead administrators to prohibit students from having their own government and an influence on school policy.

	<i>Council Purpose</i>						<i>Gov't Format</i>	
	<i>Moral Exemplars</i>		<i>Organize Activities</i>		<i>Civic Education</i>		<i>Council with Executive Branch</i>	
	Odds ^a	SE	Odds	SE	Odds	SE	Odds	SE
<i>School Type</i>								
Catholic	11.12	(.59)	***	.99	(.50)		1.81	(.49)
Protestant	11.06	(.60)	***	.57	(.50)		.42	(.54)
Poor Public	1.32	(.41)		3.93	(.35)	***	1.47	(.32)
Other (wealthy public)	---			---			---	
<i>School Traits</i>								
School Size	.84	(.26)		.86	(.21)		1.43	(.20) †
Ruralness	1.10	(.10)		.82	(.08)	*	1.13	(.07)
% Minority	.64	(.78)		.43	(.67)		1.64	(.63)
<i>Control Variables</i>								
Posted on Internet	.27	(.35)	***	1.27	(.29)		.85	(.28)
#Pages	1.03	(.02)		1.12	(.04)	**	1.01	(.02)
Intercept	.21	(.76)	*	1.02	(.62)		.33	(.60) †
<i>Variance Explained</i>								
Max-rescaled R-square	.35			.16			.12	
<i>Model Fitness^b</i>								
Wald Fitness Test	59.24	***		28.63	***		22.08	**
Hosmer Lemeshow Test	3.09	ns		6.05	ns		5.97	ns
n Observations	81			151			138	
							235	

Source: Student council study (N = 279)

^a 95% confidence interval results for odds ratios are available upon request.

^b Models are fit if the Wald fitness is significant and the Hosmer Lemeshow test is nonsignificant.

*** p < .001. ** p < .01. * p < .05. † p < .10.

[click to enlarge](#)

Table 4. Logit Models for Listed Council Purposes and Government Format

Table 4 presents results from multiple logistic regressions that identify school and community factors associated with various council purposes and forms of government. The first model identifies types of schools and populations associated with councils aiming to develop moral exemplars. This purpose is uncommon in most high schools, with the average one having a 1 in 5 chance of relating this purpose (odds = .21). However, Catholic and Protestant councils are 11 times (+1100%) more likely than public school councils to list this purpose. This moral purpose is common in private Christian schools in which student council members are asked to profess their faith and not engage in immoral behavior. Such a moral objective, however, is seldom posted in online constitutions (27% chance, or 1/4 as likely) and suggests that moral purpose is something privately related in private religious schools.

The second model reveals that long constitutions, urban schools, and poor publics are the most likely to list their student council's purpose as organizing social activities. The third model shows that larger high schools are the most likely to promote civic education in their student councils. Hence, there seems to be some evidence that particularistic council objectives of a moral nature are being promoted in private religious schools, whereas universalistic council objectives of social organizing and civic education are being visibly promoted in larger, poorer public schools.

The final model in Table 4 identifies types of schools and populations associated with different structures of student governance. The standard form of representatives with an executive branch is very common (average school is 20 times more likely than not), but its odds are lower in large schools and those with high proportions of minorities. These types of schools and populations tend to deviate from the standard form, adopting alternative forms of governance to handle large student bodies (e.g., adding a judicial branch) or by seldom altering the council's structure and thereby retaining an older form of student government begun in the early 20th century (e.g., club-based representation)

School Type	Membership Exclusivity*			Student Empowerment						Faculty Control					
	b	B	SE	Range of Activity		Council Powers		Access Constraints		Practice Constraints		Practice Constraints			
	b	B	SE	b	B	SE	b	B	SE	b	B	SE	b	B	SE
Catholic	.02	-.04	(.13)	.19	.77	(.29) **	-.13	-.37	(.20) †	.09	.40	(.30)	.17	.52	(.22) *
Protestant	.00	-.01	(.12)	.15	.55	(.28) *	-.13	-.33	(.19) †	.14	.55	(.29) †	.10	.28	(.21)
Poor Public	.01	.02	(.08)	.03	.07	(.18)	.16	-.27	(.13) *	.17	.45	(.19) *	.22	.42	(.14) **
Other (wealthy public)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
School Traits															
School Size	.68	.57	(.05) ***	.11	.15	(.11)	.02	.02	(.08)	.01	.01	(.12)	.01	-.01	(.09)
Ruralness	.09	-.03	(.02)	.04	.02	(.04)	.10	.03	(.03)	.22	-.12	(.04) **	.13	-.05	(.03)
% Minority	.00	-.01	(.16)	.04	-.21	(.36)	.09	-.30	(.25)	.17	-.86	(.37) *	.19	-.70	(.27) *
Control Variables															
Posted on Internet	.05	.07	(.07)	.11	-.28	(.16) †	.09	-.15	(.11)	.14	-.38	(.16) *	.05	-.10	(.12)
# Pages	.09	-.01	(.00) *	.22	.04	(.01) ***	.17	.02	(.01) **	.13	.02	(.01) *	.06	.01	(.01)
Intercept	.00	2.82	(.15) ***	.00	1.30	(.33) ***	.00	.58	(.23) *	.00	2.57	(.35) ***	.00	1.52	(.25) ***
Variance Explained															
R-square		.49		.11			.08			.13			.08		
Adjusted R-square		.47		.08			.05			.10			.05		
Model Fitness															
F test		31.19	***	4.07	***		2.86	**		4.91	***		2.74	**	

Source: Student council study (N = 279)
 ***p < .001. **p < .01. *p < .05. †p < .10.
 * Uses started logit. Raw coefficient can be calculated by (exp(B)-1).
 b = Standardized coefficient, B = Raw coefficient

[click to enlarge](#)

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regressions Concerning Council Quality

Table 5 presents results from linear regressions that identify factors associated with the quality of student councils. The first column identifies factors associated with greater and lesser degrees of membership exclusivity. Results show that councils become more of an exclusive club when they are situated in large high schools. A one-unit increase in school size (~ 1,000 students; see Table 1) results in a .57 increase in exclusivity, or nearly three quarters of a standard deviation increase in council size (b = .68). This matters because council size is relatively consistent across schools. Both large and small high schools have councils of around 36 persons. As a result, large schools tend to have less inclusive councils because they do not draw in the same proportion of students as councils at small schools.¹⁸ Net of size, the longer the constitution, the more open and less exclusive membership becomes. Why this is the case is unclear. Large student councils may have a greater need for additional organizational regulations to manage their affairs.

The second column identifies factors associated with the range of activity that councils perform. Results show that Catholic and Protestant schools are engaged in a broader array of activities than public schools. On average, they are engaged in nearly one additional activity (.77 and .55 respectively) than their public school counterparts. Constitution length is also related to council activity. Simply put, longer constitutions list more activities. What is important here is not the effect of page length itself, which one would expect to be related to each composite variable, but the effect of other variables net of it. Hence, Catholic and Protestant student councils engage in a wider array of activities than do those at other schools, and net of the detail with which their constitution is articulated.

The third column identifies factors associated with greater council powers (i.e., general and specific school policy recommendations, school board membership, and capacity to appeal or override vetoes). Results illustrate that private and poor public schools are less likely to have heightened powers than are wealthy public schools. In particular, Catholic schools and Protestant schools are 13% less empowered (b = -.13), and poor public schools are 16% less empowered than wealthy public counterparts (b = -.16). Last, the length of constitutions is strongly associated with the rights and powers that councils afford. Well-articulated constitutions have more opportunity to list a wider variety of council activities and powers than do ill-defined ones. What is interesting here is that net of the constitution's length, school types have the greatest association with council influence. Council empowerment seems to be a function of the schools' charters and the socioeconomic standing of their populations.

The fourth column presents results from linear regressions that identify factors associated with membership access constraints. As such, the models identify those factors associated with greater preselection of candidates. Councils with regulated access will likely have members whose values and practices are more consistent with those espoused by school adults than peer constituents and thereby are a diminished form of representative government. Results show that constitutions posted on the Internet list fewer access constraints, whereas longer constitutions entail more. Net of these controls, Protestant (b = .14) and impoverished public schools (b = .17) are especially likely to establish rules about who can be a candidate. On average, they demand that candidates meet nearly half an additional requirement (or B = .45-.55) than what is required of students at

wealthier public schools (whether it is an application, good behavioral record, good grades, faculty recommendations, or a profession of faith). In addition, the ruralness of school locations is negatively associated with access constraints ($b = -.17$). Further exploration of nonlinear associations finds that ruralness has a polynomial relation with access constraints. The strongest effect is for the lowest values of rurality—that is, urban locations. And this association diminishes to no relation as more rural locations are reached. Hence, urban schools are the most likely to have rules constraining who can run for office. This relation is therefore further evidence that some schools (disadvantaged publics and religious privates) are more concerned with controlling who gets elected than are other schools. When poor urban schools actually have a council, adults heavily preselect the small pool of candidates and allocate the council only limited powers.

The final column relates which councils have more practice constraints. Councils with more external controls over their practices cannot represent the student body as autonomously as councils that are less mediated by adults. Results show that Catholic schools significantly constrain council activities more so than other types of schools. On average, they add an additional .52 constraints ($B = .52$) in comparison with other schools by invoking vetoes, reviewing decisions, or having faculty inputs and votes on council decisions. Poor public schools also place greater constraints on council decisions, but this relation is milder ($B = .42$).

It is worth noting that, net of other factors, schools with higher proportions of minorities are less likely to put controls on student council access and decisions. This result is perhaps the opposite of what some would expect and requires further exploration than performed here. One must keep in mind that schools with large minority and economically disadvantaged populations are the least likely to have a council or constitution to begin with (see Table 3). So this result concerns a subset of schools with large minority populations that have a constitution. Supplemental models reveal that these councils arise in better off schools. Hence, they place fewer constraints on the councils probably because the populations are studious and engaged and because political engagement may be seen as an important activity for elites of these racial groups (African Americans more so than Asians; see McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Hence, the unequal management of student councils is more associated with school charters and socioeconomic class than racial disparities. Racial and economic disparities likely play a stronger role in the existence proof of councils and constitutions.

DISCUSSION

A growing body of evidence finds that student councils positively influence future civic engagement (Hanks & Eckland, 1978; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Verba et al., 1995). However, such work analyzes student councils as “black boxes” devoid of the content that would help explain the connection between firsthand youth experiences of representative government and ensuing perceptions of politics and government that last into adulthood.¹⁹ The research presented here examines the formal organization of high school student governments and finds compounding evidence that American students are being exposed to different forms of representative government that vary in quality.

Two stories emerge from these results and frame our discussion of research implications. On the one hand, student councils at private religious schools afford students greater representation and engagement in a wider range of activities than public counterparts, but they also have diminished powers and heightened faculty regulation over membership access and council practices. This matches the focused charter of most private religious schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Meyer, 1970; Peshkin, 1986). The implication, however, is that students moving through religious schools might receive a more controlled experience of citizenship and representative government. Private religious schools may be producing youth who are moral exemplars in that they follow church doctrine, but they may also be creating ideologically controlled citizens. Such an implication is wrong if adult controls are seldom used or remain mild, and critical reflection and dissent are encouraged. If not, private religious schools may be falling short of creating reflective and autonomous citizens who, by thinking beyond the material interests of their social class and/or the beliefs of their religious community, learn to build the bridging social capital (Woolcock, 1998) that is so necessary to promote integration and social justice amid the moral and socioeconomical cleavages of contemporary American society.

On the other hand, if impoverished public schools have a student government at all, they frequently lack constitutional charters, are weakly institutionalized, and are more faculty regulated than wealthier public schools. The implications of this result are dire: Whenever impoverished schools afford forms of student government, they may be regarded as irrelevant and adult controlled, thereby failing to adequately promote the skills and sense of political efficacy that underserved youth would need as adults to be civically active against the social inequities that affect them so directly. In contrast, students of well-to-do public schools may experience more active and empowered forms of government. This will likely provide them with better skills for collective action and a stronger belief in the impact of civic engagement.

This is not to say that student councils at wealthier public schools are ideal. Because of the greater size of these schools, their councils tend to be more exclusive than their private school counterparts. As a result, they probably foster political engagement in a reduced proportion of the student body. This hypothesis is reinforced by the finding that these councils perform a narrower range of activities than do councils at private religious schools. Student councils at wealthy public schools

seem to specialize in school policy at the cost of fostering the integration of the student body and performing community service. One could argue that students who get access to these exclusive councils may learn routes of social influence but without acquiring a stronger sense of communal commitment. Moreover, the racially and socioeconomically segregated profile of public American high schools may be failing to create an environment of political socialization in which youth from different backgrounds learn reflective and autonomous ways of living together that, as adults, could help them at the civic task of bridging their differences and building a more just society.

It is clear that American youth are having different initial experiences of citizenship and representative government. Whenever impoverished public schools afford councils, they are unlikely to promote civic engagement and a sense of political efficacy, for they tend to be irrelevant and controlled; empowered councils in wealthy public schools may lead youth to believe that political participation makes sense, but possibly more so for a select few who are disconnected from their constituents; and the more inclusive and active but socially controlled councils of private religious schools may lead future citizens to be especially participatory, although perhaps in a fixated defense of the beliefs and interests of their specific communities.

In spite of such dire implications, this study shows that student councils, independent of their school traits, charters, and so forth, could still be redesigned in ways that improve the political socialization of youth. In the facsimile of a council constitution, there is a list of exemplary powers by which councils can increase the scope of their activity, and their responsibility in the government of school affairs. Properly designed student councils might effectively help students develop capacities for autonomy and social cooperation by giving them greater opportunity to organize their own activities, serve the neighboring community, and participate in the government of their own school. We hope that this study precipitates further research and normative theorizing on student governments as an important voluntary association that is specifically tailored to political socialization and the creation of citizens. Future work will benefit from expanding the scope of this research by conducting not only more detailed analyses of student experiences but also longitudinal analyses of how such experiences shape adult civic engagement. In this fashion, perhaps a deeper understanding of student governments' potential will be acquired so that schools can transform "irrelevant popularity clubs" into vibrant and responsible associations in which youth learn to become autonomous and cooperative participants in the political system they will inherit.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by a Spencer Research Training Grant (No. 2001000087) and benefited from the support of the John Gardner Center at Stanford University. David Diehl and Jim Sirianni provided valuable assistance throughout this project. Earlier drafts of this work benefited from discussions with Eamonn Callan, Dave Campbell, James G. March, and participants at Stanford's Workshop on Community and Youth Development. Please direct all correspondence to Daniel McFarland (mcfarland@stanford.edu) at 485 Lasuen Mall, Stanford, CA 94305.

Notes

1. Arguably, we know very little about what goes on in many of the voluntary youth associations taking place in American communities, but we know something about many of the adult organizations (Putnam, 2000).
2. Student respondents are often identified through random samples within schools and districts (see National Educational Longitudinal Study [NELS], High School and Beyond [HS&B]). Student responses may miss members and therefore make the existence of a council impossible to assess.
3. It is important to note at the outset that most councils adopted a constitution independent of this association and basically were established over 50 years prior. Many of the constitutions resemble the U.S. Constitution but have been altered repeatedly over the years. This study is cross-sectional, but a worthwhile follow-up would concern the change in student council constitutions over the years to determine what templates were used at adoption and when and why innovations occurred.
4. It is true that many sponsors and council members are not familiar with their constitution's details. In fact, many pick it up only when there are disputes on the council. However, the constitution's regulations accurately relate what councils do, their powers, and how they make decisions. As such, they reflect real procedures handed down year after year through student council practices. The written constitution and its articles are therefore important tacit rules that guide action and of which members become acutely aware when normal council functioning is questioned.
5. In reality, our collection is a combination of convenience sampling (Internet) and stratified random sampling of certain income classes and types of school to correct for any bias in the Internet sample. We also tested whether the inclusion of the Internet constitutions altered our statistical models (as a dummy variable), and it never did.
6. The full sample spans 49 states and Washington, D.C.
7. Twenty-one constitutions were collected from magnet schools. However, the subsample was small, and no significant relationship was found between magnet schools and the dependent variables. Therefore, this dummy variable was omitted from analyses.
8. Tetrachoric correlations were performed on these binary variables and then used for factor analysis. A single factor composed of these five positively loaded variables stands out in terms of eigenvalues and on scree plots, and it explains 29% of the variance in responses. Such a low percentage is common when using dichotomous variables, but the evidence is still strong

for one positively loaded factor that dominates the data (and same for the other dependent variables). Hence, there is empirical support for the use of our theoretically constructed composite, *range of activity*. Future research on a larger sample of constitutions may better measure the degree of student council activity via a Rasch scale.

9. As before, tetrachoric correlations were performed on these binary variables and then used for factor analysis. A single factor composed of these six positively loaded variables stands out in terms of eigenvalue and on scree plots. The factor explains 45% of the variance in responses. Hence, there is empirical evidence that our composite of council powers corresponds with the pattern of student responses.

10. Student powers and faculty controls vary in influence. Therefore, weights for each item were explored and were found to increase the overall fitness of models and the strength of the article's argument. However, others may not agree with such weighting, so the most conservative measures and models are presented. Future versions using Rasch scales may afford a more objective weighting of items in composite scales, but a larger sample is needed.

11. This fourth composite consists of five positively correlated variables. As before, we use tetrachoric correlations for input in factor analyses and find that a single factor stands out from the rest in terms of eigenvalue and scree plots. A single factor consisting of the five variables explains 38% of their variance. This suggests that our theoretical composite for access constraints is consistent with the dominant factor.

12. The composite for practice constraints consists of four positively correlated variables. Using tetrachoric correlations and factor analysis, we find that a single factor stands out in terms of eigenvalues and on scree plots. This factor explains 38% of the variance in responses on these items and gives empirical credibility to our theoretically-guided construct.

13. We also perform Heckman sample selection tests to assess whether response-bias influences our model estimates (Heckman, 1979; Schlozman et al., 1999). We find that there is a response bias: Larger schools and those with higher percentages of Whites tend to respond more to our mailing than small schools and those with high proportions of minorities. That said, the introduction of lambda coefficients for response bias does not alter the pattern of significant results in our models and fails to change the article's core story. Moreover, sample selection models and tests seem to be of tangential importance to a study that lacks a large, random sample and that is exploratory in nature. Hence, out of interest of parsimony, we omit these models from our presentation.

14. No variables were collinear according to VIF and TOL options in SAS. Moreover, the residuals of every presented model had a normal distribution without any discernible nonrandom pattern.

15. Around 32 said that they had a council and no constitution, 27 said that they lacked a council and constitution, and 21 lacked a constitution but made it unclear as to whether they had a council. Hence, all these responses are collapsed and are considered schools that lack a constitution.

16. Further analyses find that charter schools, in spite of being more likely to respond to our mail solicitation, are less likely to have a constitution. Many of these charter schools lack a council altogether. Charter schools likely lack student councils because they are new schools whose extra-curriculum is not fully formed. However, it may be an institutional distinction. One principal thought it obvious: "We don't have a student council, we're a charter school."

17. The table shows that a 100% increase in minority students is associated with a 12% chance of having a constitution. However, few schools experience such an increase. Thus, we divided the 88% decline by 10 to relate how a 10% increase in minority students is associated with an 8.8% lesser chance of having a constitution.

18. The size of an organization is generally seen as a structural obstacle that reduces the possibilities of democratic self-government. This is a classic problem in the theory of democracy (Sartori, 1987, 1994), which was also emphasized by theorists of mass societies (Kornhauser, 1960).

19. Our random sample of interviews with council sponsors is small ($N = 30$), but we asked them their perspective on more immediate forms of political socialization. We find suggestive evidence that sponsors in impoverished racial minority schools view the student body as uninterested in the student council (-.23 correlation with council importance) and believe they would be unfazed by its dissolution (-.21). Moreover, sponsors in these schools regard their council members as less committed than those in other schools (-.18 correlation). Similarly, we find that faculty-controlled councils have less committed council members (-.25), and the student body is less likely to be angered by the council's dissolution (-.19). Last, we find the longer a council's constitution, the more it lacks member commitment (-.28 correlation) and importance to the student body (-.37). This could be because an important proportion of constitutions with good articulation may have regulations that are more constraining and bureaucratizing than empowering, thereby eroding the participatory motivation of students. Increased student power is the only factor positively correlated with council commitment (+.14) and importance to the student body (+.06). Few of these correlations are significant at the $p < .05$ level, but this can readily be attributed to sample size. All the correlation signs and t -test values are consistent with the argument presented in this article.

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Cite This Article as: *Teachers College Record* Volume 111 Number 1, 2009, p. -
<http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 15173, Date Accessed: 5/1/2008 5:03:06 PM

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