

# Predator State: Corruption in a Council-Manager System – The Case of Bell, California

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## **Abstract**

This article<sup>1</sup> seeks to explain recent patterns of corruption in the City of Bell, California. After reviewing the literature on municipal corruption, Progressive reform, and political participation in immigrant communities, the article examines the Bell case study. It argues that the council-manager form of government contributes to civic disengagement in California's high-immigration cities. Insulated from civic accountability, Bell became effectively a 'predator state' as local officials exploited governmental power and resources for personal gain. Implications for political reform and local state-building in high immigration cities are discussed.

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## **Introduction**

In July 2010 reports of systemic political corruption began to emerge from the tiny Los Angeles suburb of Bell, California. Located in an industrial corridor south and east of downtown Los Angeles, the ‘Gateway Cities’ region had already developed a reputation for municipal corruption. In recent years, the cities of Maywood, Vernon, Bell Gardens, Compton, and South Gate have been plagued by rash of corruption scandals (Saltzstein 2004, Fulton 1997). The initial allegations in Bell focused on extraordinary salaries for city officials. City Manager Robert Rizzo was found to be earning \$1.5 million annually in combined pay and benefits, and was set to become California’s highest-paid future retiree at \$600,000 per year. Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia and Police Chief Randy Adams and four of Bell’s five city council members also were found to be earning salaries in the range of \$500,000 per year. Additional corrupt practices included illegal taxes and fees assessed to fund city employee pensions, illegal loans to city employees, and charges that Bell’s police department had targeted illegal immigrant drivers to generate exorbitant impound fees.

In March 2011 voters recalled all of the indicted council members and elected a new city council. But for nearly nine months, Bell languished as an interim city administrator, interim assistant city administrator, and interim city attorney—each appointed by the besieged City Council—ran day-to-day operations. In March 2013 five of six former council-members were convicted of misappropriation of public funds. Sentences ranged from home confinement for George Cole, to two years in prison for Teresa Jacobo. Rizzo, who had recently plead guilty to federal tax evasion charges, pleaded no contest to the corruption charges and was sentenced to 12 years in state prison and ordered to pay nearly \$9 million in restitution to the city. His assistant, Angela Spaccia, was sentenced to nearly 12 years in state prison and ordered to pay \$8 million in restitution (Knoll and Mather 2014).

Recent scandals in Bell and other Gateway Cities raise a number of important questions about the health of democracy in California’s high-immigration cities. The principal question for this paper is: How did such pervasive corruption emerge in a political system specifically designed to prevent corruption and produce good government? It is argued that reform structures intended to distance policymakers from corrupting influences instead insulated city officials from traditional forms of political accountability. In the context of the city’s rapid demographic and political transformation

during the late 1990s and 2000s, Bell effectively became a ‘predator state’ as officials exploited political power and community resources for personal gain. Implications for the practice and reform of municipal government in high immigration cities are explored.

### **Municipal Corruption and Progressive Reform**

The topic of municipal corruption harkens back to an older political science literature examining corrupt Machine Era governments and Progressive attempts to reform them. As the account goes, late 19th century southern and eastern Europeans used their organizational skills and growing numbers to create urban political “machines” in a number of important immigration portal cities. Using a variety of tactics, immigrants filled a power void in American municipal government to assemble and perpetuate political machines. According to Judd and Swanstrom (2002), “the major types of graft in American cities involved handing out lucrative franchises, setting highly profitable utility rates, authority over the city’s police power . . . , and the control of public works” (61). Neighborhoods that turned out to support the machine typically received the best services, jobs and contracts, while opponents were either ignored or punished. So-called ‘spoils systems’ operated in cities such as Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, and Philadelphia. Probably the most infamous was New York’s Tammany Hall – led by William M. “Boss” Tweed – that helped Irish immigrants consolidate political and economic power through the city’s powerful Democratic Party.

By the early 20th century urban middle-class Protestants mounted a counter-offensive, labeling machine rule as inherently corrupt and a threat to American democratic traditions. Organized under the general banner of Progressivism, this reform movement mobilized to change the rules of the game of American politics.<sup>2</sup> At the municipal level, the Progressive Movement sought to rein in machine corruption and institute businesslike efficiency to city government. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Progressive reformers were animated by a belief in the new science of public administration, drawing heavily from recently devised principles of business administration popularized by management theorists such as Frederick Taylor.

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<sup>2</sup> Progressive reformers operated at the national and state levels as well, ushering in a greater role for government in the areas of social and economic policy.

Their main rhetorical pitch was to take politics out of the governance of cities and the saying, “There is no Democratic or Republican way to pave a street,” became their mantra. Operating mostly at the level of their state governments where the influence of Progressives was greatest, reformers passed a number of state laws that undermined machine rule. For example, instead of strong elected mayors, cities in Progressive-reformed states would be run by professional, non-partisan bureaucrats known as city managers whose only ostensible goal would be to deliver the highest quality municipal services impartially and at the lowest cost. Under the theory that elected officials should look out for the good of the entire city rather than particular neighborhoods, Progressives also advocated for replacing district-based elections with at-large council elections. In practice, at-large council elections undermined immigrant political representation by denying immigrant communities a geographic power base, a charge that still resonates in California municipal politics today.<sup>3</sup>

In many parts of the country, Progressives also succeeded in establishing nonpartisan local elections, again, under the aegis that politics should be removed from the science of day-to-day service delivery. A principle effect of this reform was to deprive immigrant voters of the partisan cue that many relied upon to vote for the machine’s preferred candidate. Other reforms, such as the initiative, referendum, and recall, were intended to place decision-making authority directly in the hands of voters. Coupled with new Progressive-inspired residency and voter registration requirements, the new rules disproportionately empowered urban middle-class WASPs. Add to the list off-cycle elections, in which local elections were isolated from national and state elections, and civil service bureaucracies employing merit systems that favored educated WASPs, the Progressive movement fundamentally restructured the political game of American local government. Collectively known as the council-manager form of government, the new institutional arrangements were largely intended to release the Machines power grip on major American cities (Judd and Swanstrom 2002). Like many states during the early 20th century, particularly in the West and South, California’s state and local political institutions were heavily influenced by Progressive reforms (Debow and Syer 2009). In place for more than 100 years, these rules of Progressive municipal governance are now so well-entrenched that most of us are unaware that they were birthed primarily as a result of ethnic and religious conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> In recent years, numerous California Cites, including Palmdale, Anaheim, Escondito, Merced, Whittier, Compton, among others, have switched from at-large elections to district elections following challenges that the at-large system discriminates against immigrant communities in violation of the California Voting Rights Act.

What are the impacts of Progressive reforms today? Scholars debating the Progressive legacy generally agree that, collectively, Progressive reforms tend to depress immigrant turnout in municipal elections and shift political power toward native-born WASPs (Hajnal and Lewis 2003, Bridges 1997, Erie 1988). Nonpartisan elections are thought to deprive immigrants and low-information voters of partisan cues and depress turnout. At-large elections are thought to disenfranchise poor minorities and immigrants by limiting opportunities for representation. Off-cycle elections are thought to negatively impact immigrants and minorities by placing additional burdens on voter time and information gathering. Finally, civil service systems and city manager-run governments are said to favor educated Whites who can pass rigorous professional exams (Caren 2007, Hajnal and Lewis 2002, Elazar 1972, Bridges and Kronick 1999).

How then, in a system specifically designed to mitigate corruption and produce good governance, can widespread corruption take hold and flourish? Trounstine's *Political Monopolies in American Cities* (2008) offers some clues. Her study of machine Chicago and reformed San Jose questions the conventional machine (corrupt) vs. reform (not corrupt) dichotomy, essentially finding both to be alternative systems for "building political monopolies" (p. 217). Trounstine shows that political monopolies – defined as coordinated systems of bias that control resources necessary to maintain power – can emerge in both systems of government. Whether machine or reform, Trounstine writes, political "monopolies shape who is elected and appointed to office and when power is likely to be shared. They influence which residents are likely to participate in elections and whether or not participation affects political outcomes" (p. 5). For Trounstine, both machine and reform monopolies employ similar strategies and institutions that serve to maintain a regime's hold on power. "When politicians cease to worry about reelection," she writes, "they become free to pursue government policy that does not reflect constituent preferences. They acquire the ability to enrich themselves and their supporters" (p. 3).

Trounstine's study helps us understand how corruption could have emerged in Bell as it exposes the myth of the council manager system as an inherent bulwark against corruption. In the case of Bell, monopoly control over city government was enabled by a confluence of factors that began to take shape in the 1990s: declining voter participation, lack of media scrutiny, and community organization disengagement. Combined with a system originally designed to disenfranchise immigrants, these underlying factors allowed a predatory state to emerge. However, unlike Trounstine's political

monopolies, which over time served relatively narrow private interests within a city, corruption in Bell flourished in a city that was lacking in active and organized constituencies, and faced little or no outside scrutiny. As a result, a handful of corrupt Bell officials effectively became the city's only constituency.

### **Voter Participation: The Rules of the Game**

Most studies of the impact of Progressive reforms on voter turnout support the contention that Progressive governments produce comparatively low turnout. Wood's (2002) analysis of municipal turnout found no significant differences between voter participation in reformed and non-reformed cities. Wood found that the initiative, referendum, and recall in particular tend to increase voter turnout by giving voters direct decision-making authority over city policies. However, Wood's study did not independently examine high-immigration cities like Bell. Although more study is needed, the general scholarly consensus is that Progressive reforms reduce the slice of the electorate who regularly vote, disproportionately limiting voter participation among immigrants and minorities (Caren 2007, Hajnal and Lewis 2002, 2003, Alford and Lee 1968).

In one of the few studies of voter turnout in California municipal elections, Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch (2002) emphasized the importance of election timing. The authors found that, on average, presidential elections produced 36 percent higher turnout than off-cycle, "local only" elections typically held in the spring. As with previous studies, turnout in local elections was linked in part to higher socioeconomic status and ethnicity. "Even after controlling for socio-economic status," the authors wrote, "the Asian American and Latino share of the population are both tied to lower turnout among [voting age] adult residents" (Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch 2002, 45). However, they noted that, controlling for socio-economic factors *and citizenship*, Hispanics are not associated with lower than average turnout in California municipal elections. Hajnal and Trounstine (2005) found that lower turnout at the local level leads to political underrepresentation, particularly for Asian Americans and Latinos. Finally, Caren's (2007) study of electoral turnout in 38 large American cities linked higher turnout to election timing, political party activity, closeness of a race, and non-reformed political structures.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Overall, Caren found that between 1978 and 2003 average turnout among registered voters was 27 percent.

Scholarship examining the impact of other factors such as city size is more mixed. Kelleher and Lowry (2004, 2008) found that political participation was substantially similar—even slightly higher—in larger cities, raising questions about “presumed social, economic, and political advantages of smaller towns” (p. 721). In contrast, Oliver found that rates of voter participation tend to decline relative to an increase in a city’s population. However, for Oliver, more robust democracy in suburbs often comes at the expense of the greater social good: “suburbanization, by segregating the population is suppressing citizen involvement in community affairs, is depriving many localities and metropolitan areas other civic capacity and thus their ability to solve many contemporary social problems” (p. 7).

Finally, the voter participation literature also examines individual-level factors that motivate electoral participation. Over the years research has focused on salient *causes* of low voter turnout including incumbency, competitive elections, age, race, socio-economic status, and education (Jacobson 1983, Cox and Munger 1989). Scholars have also studied the *consequences* of low voter turnout, including distrust of government (Bobo and Gilliam 1990), lack of political efficacy (Finkel 1985), and the undermining of democratic legitimacy (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, Guinier 1994). On the positive side, Bennett and Resnick (1990) found that higher turnout tends to create a self-reinforcing dynamic that serves to engage residents in local politics.

As an important indicator of civic engagement, voter participation is a critical component in helping to hold elected officials accountable. Presumably, higher rates of voter participation can safeguard against corruption as active and engaged citizens watchdog the actions of local officials. In the case of Bell, although the city’s small size might in theory lend itself to political participation, the combination of Bell’s Progressive reformed structures, lack of media scrutiny, and rapid demographic change during the 1980s and 1990s together appear to have created a dynamic of civic disengagement in the city.

### **Southeast Los Angeles County: Corridor of Corruption**

Allegations of municipal corruption go back decades long the industrial corridor south of downtown Los Angeles between the 110 Freeway and 710 Long Beach Freeway. Quinones (2007) examined the political implications of economic, demographic, and political shifts in the city of South Gate during the 1990s and 2000s. Quinones’s tells the story of Albert Robles who, using “Mexican-style Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) tactics,” emerged as something of a Boss-like figure in the city in 2001.



Charged with threatening rival politicians in 2002, the South Gate City Council created for Robles the job of deputy city manager, leaving the city on the hook for his more than \$100,000 per year salary and substantial legal fees. Additional practices such as firing city department heads and – after doing away with civil service exams and replacing them with highly paid loyalists – left the city on the edge of bankruptcy. Serving as city treasurer, Robles was recalled by voters and convicted in 2005 of 30 federal counts of bribery, money laundering, and public corruption (Quinones 2007).

Quinones cited a number of factors to explain corruption in South Gate. For Quinones, “economic and demographic change, like a hurricane, had razed the traditions and institutions that maintain community life. These had not had time to grow back” (Quinones, 91). Quinones also cited expectations among recent immigrants that they would return to their home country and Mexican cultural biases that “all politics are corrupt” as reason for low rates of community participation. In addition, because of the lack of media coverage, negative political mailers and attack phone calls made up most of the information available to many voters. However, for Quinones, the scandal served to spark greater community awareness and engagement in city politics (Quinones 2007).

**<<<Insert Figure 1: Map of LA County ‘Gateway Cities’>>>**

Victor Valle’s (2009) history of the City of Industry tells the story of a municipality conceived in corruption. Seeking to circumvent a state law requiring incorporating communities to have 500 resident voters, Valle describes how city founders conspired to count 169 patients and 31 employees of a local mental hospital as resident voters, allowing the city’s 1957 incorporation to proceed. Armed with the requisite planning, financial, and police power, Valle labels Industry a “microstate” where capital interests “completely swallow the functions of citizenship” (74). During the 1980s Industry, which straddles the 60 Freeway east of downtown Los Angeles, witnessed a number of high-profile convictions for municipal corruption.

More recently, allegations of corruption have again emerged in the industrial city of Vernon. Incorporated in 1905, Vernon has operated as a quasi-fiefdom run by a handful of family members and cronies. In 2010, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the city had been paying unusually high annual salaries—in some cases more than \$1 million—to city employees and outside consultants. The city was also found to have paid its part-time city council members—three of whom have been in office since 1981—an annual salary of nearly \$70,000, far above state averages. Prior to 2006, the city had not had a



contested election in 25 years.

In recent years, numerous Vernon officials have been fined or charged with corruption. Former Mayor Leonis Malburg, grandson of Vernon's founder who served on the city council for five decades, was ordered to pay more than \$500,000 in fines to the city after being convicted of voter fraud and conspiracy.<sup>5</sup> In 2011 former Vernon City Administrator Bruce Malkenhorst plead guilty to misappropriation of public funds. Subsequently, the pension giant CalPERS slashed his \$500,000 per year state pension by one-fifth, an action Malkenhorst is currently fighting in court.

Corruption in Vernon has flourished amid some rather unique circumstances. As of 2008, the 5.2 square mile city had 1,800 businesses employing a daytime population of more than 60,000, but only 91 permanent residents, and 70 registered voters (Los Angeles County Registrar of Voters). In a 2000 special election, voters passed a measure extending council-members terms from four to five years. Critics note that this prevents the possibility of an opposition slate by ensuring that no more than one official would come up for re-election each year. All of Vernon's residents, many of whom are city employees, live in 23 city-owned and administered housing units, most of which are heavily subsidized by the city. For Valle (2009), the city's "indentured" voters are expected to vote for the city's preferred candidates and ballot measures in municipal elections. Critics point out that because of Vernon's housing monopoly, Vernon is a city where officials effectively select the voters, casting further doubt on Vernon's legitimacy as a democratic entity (Becerra, Allen, and Christensen 2010, Valle 2009).

In early 2011, California State Assembly Speaker John Perez joined a chorus of Vernon critics to sponsor a bill to forcibly disincorporate the city. In response, Vernon went on a lobbying offensive and media blitz to highlight the prospect of thousands of jobs fleeing the region if Vernon was shut down. It also hired former State Attorney General John Van De Kamp and longtime good-government reformer Robert Stern to examine the city's questionable practices and recommend ethics reforms, most of which have not yet been implemented. With help from the League of California Cities and the powerful business group Vernon Property Association, the city successfully beat back the proposal.

### **City of Bell: A Demographic and Political History**

The 2.6 square mile city of Bell is a swan-shaped municipality located several miles southeast of

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<sup>5</sup> A Los Angeles Superior Court judge cited Malburg's age and medical history as a reason not to incarcerate him.

downtown Los Angeles. As seen in Figure 2, the 710 freeway and the Los Angeles River form the city's eastern boundary with the exception of an industrial area in the northeastern portion of the city that is bisected by the freeway. Most of the city's residential neighborhoods lie between Randolph Street to the north and Florence Avenue to the south. Gage Avenue and Florence Avenue, both major east-west commercial thoroughfares, are lined by small mom-and-pop ethnic stores and markets, while national retail chain stores such as Starbucks and CVS anchor north-south Atlantic Avenue.

The city's 2010 population was 35,477, 91 percent of whom identified as Hispanic. Seventy-five percent of Hispanics in Bell reported Mexican descent. According to the 2013 American Community Survey, 48 percent of Bell residents identified themselves as foreign-born, 34 percent were noncitizens, and 89 percent spoke a language other than English at home. As seen in Figure 3, the White population in Bell declined dramatically from 76 percent in 1970, to 13 percent in 1980. By the 2010 Census, Whites made up roughly six percent of residents, with a sizeable number of Whites (37 percent) reporting Arab descent.<sup>6</sup> Those identifying with "two or more races" on the 2010 Census make up the next largest group, followed by small numbers of blacks, American Indians, and Asians/ Pacific Islanders.

**<<<Insert Figure 2: Map of the City of Bell and Surrounding Cities>>>**

In 2010, only 29 percent of the city's housing was classified as owner-occupied. Only four percent of Bell residents had a bachelor's degree or higher, and only 30 percent had a high school degree. Of adults 25 years and over, 35 percent reported less than a ninth-grade education. Most Bell residents were employed either in manufacturing, transportation, sales and office, or service-related professions. The 2013 per capita income in Bell was estimated to be \$12,076, making it one of the poorest communities in southern California (Census 2010, American Community Survey 2013).

During most of the 19th century, the area that would become the City of Bell was part of a former Spanish land-grant known as Rancho San Antonio. Following Anglo conquest, the area remained an important part of a large ranching and agricultural industry in southern California. By the 1920s, population growth brought a new economy: real estate speculation. Like much of southern California, Southeast Los Angeles became a preferred destination for white immigrants from the South and Midwest hoping to join the region's expanding industrial economy and suburban good life (Havener 1936, Nicolaidis 2002). During the 1950s and 1960s, the nearby communities of Bell Gardens, Cudahy,

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<sup>6</sup> Bell has a relatively large Lebanese population, including its current mayor Ali Saleh.

and Commerce incorporated cheaply as Lakewood Plan cities, helping to complete the existing political patchwork of southeast Los Angeles.

<<<Insert Figure 3: Ethnic Change in Bell, 1970-2010>>>

In his incisive analysis of Southeast Los Angeles County, William Fulton (1997) traced the region's economic and political transformation from blue-collar Anglo to blue-collar Latino. Fulton describes the bifurcation of the region's 1950s economy into industrial cities such as Vernon, Industry, and Commerce to the north, and working-and-middle-class residential communities of Huntington Park, South Gate, Bell, Bell Gardens, Maywood, and Cudahy, to the south. By virtue of its strategic location between important rail yards and the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, the region emerged as an important hub of industrial production in the pre-and-post-World War II period. General Motors, Bethlehem Steel, Firestone, Sampson Tire and Rubber, and a number of other large manufacturing companies formed the backbone of the region's employment. As early as 1935 Los Angeles was the largest industrial area west of Chicago, in part due to the region's well-known hostility to unionization.<sup>7</sup> By 1940, there were 900 factories within a two-mile radius of South Gate (Nicolaidis 2002).

During the 1970s, the strong industrial base that had supported the region's economy began to rapidly de-industrialize, earning the region the moniker "Los Angeles's Rust Belt."<sup>8</sup> In its place emerged a post-industrial economy that Fulton describes as primarily "extractive." In the new predatory economic order, wealth became concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of apartment owners, gambling operators, and recycling companies "designed to suck from a community whatever economic vitality might remain" (Fulton, 77).

As a result of deindustrialization, many longtime white Bell residents fled to retirement communities in Arizona and other parts of California (Fuetsch and Griego 1991). Simultaneously, the area attracted an influx of upwardly mobile Chicanos and new Latin American and Middle Eastern immigrants to fill jobs in the expanding service and transportation sectors. By 1990, the populations of Maywood, Huntington Park, Commerce, Cudahy, Bell Gardens, Bell, Pico Rivera, and South Gate were each at least 83 percent Latino. In the 1990 Census, 79 percent of Bell residents reported having

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<sup>7</sup> Nicolaidis describes the not-so-coincidental opening of General Motors' South Gate plant in 1936, the year autoworkers in Flint Michigan organized the "great sitdown strike."

<sup>8</sup> The best illustration of the region's economic restructuring is "The Citadel," a former tire plant located in the city of Commerce. During the 1990s, The Citadel was turned into an outlet shopping mall.

moved to the city since 1980—only 7 percent reported having lived in the city since 1960 (1990 U.S. Census).

Politically, Fulton described southeast Los Angeles as a laboratory for studying “how smoothly suburban political power can be transferred from one race to another” (Fulton 1997, 70). The pattern that emerged in most cities during the 1980s and 1990s saw city governments remaining in the hands of Whites by virtue of their regular participation in municipal elections. By the mid-1990s, the political mobilization of relatively modest numbers of Latinos began to overturn the region’s Anglo regimes in favor of a new generation of primarily Hispanic leadership. In a number of instances, the transition was anything but smooth. Fulton chronicled ethnic political succession in the City of Bell Gardens, where Latino activism led to the 1991 recall of four longtime white council members, only to see the national media descend on the town to cover high-profile scandals and infighting that ensued (Fulton 1997).

Nicolaides (2002) examined the cultural history of the “Hub Cities” region between 1920 and 1965, focusing on the blue-collar community of South Gate. Nicolaides described the emergence of South Gate as a quintessential “working class suburbia” where residents sought to create enclaves of economic security from the vagaries of industrial life. During the golden years of the 1950s and ’60s, the region’s industrial expansion bolstered family incomes and housing values such that aggregate wealth in cities such as Huntington Park, South Gate, Lynnwood, and Bell rivaled, and in some cases exceeded, more high status cities such as Santa Monica, Pasadena, Redondo Beach, and Torrance.

The Midwestern and Southern immigrants who settled Los Angeles’s working class suburbias brought conservative political and social traditions, particularly with respect to religion and race. During the 1940s and ’50s, the encroachment by black communities to the city’s west became an ever present threat. Nicolaides describes political support for the use of racial covenants to help create a nearly all-white South Gate in the 1930s, with Alameda Street, a north-south thoroughfare then known as the “cotton corridor,” serving as the unofficial social barrier separating overwhelmingly White cities from growing Black populations in Watts and South Central (Davis 1990). Nicolaides describes how conflicts over housing and school integration<sup>9</sup> were perceived by Whites as battles for “working-class survival.” By the late 1960s, the combination of civil rights, the 1965 Watts riot, and de-industrialization triggered massive white flight from the region (Nicolaides 2002).

The City of Bell closely followed this general economic and social pattern. Compared to some of its

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolaides describes that, in the early 1960s, South Gate high school was 97 percent White, while Jordan high school, a few miles away, was 99 percent Black. Currently, South Gate High School is more than 95 percent Latino.

more industrial neighbors, Bell boasted relatively large retail and small business sectors as well as quintessential single-family neighborhoods (Nicolaidis 2002). The city's 1960s annexation of 313 acres that included the former Cheli Air Force Base allowed it to expand manufacturing and warehousing in the northeastern section of the city (Romo 1987). Currently, Bell's northeastern portion includes a railroad yard, a large homeless shelter, a number of large warehouses and manufacturing operations, and a number of parcels owned by the Los Angeles Unified School District (Interview, Carlos Chacon). De-industrialization and the 1993 closure of California Bell Club, a large poker parlor that had contributed roughly \$2 million in annual revenue, dealt a severe blow to the city's fortunes. In addition, the local newspaper, the *Industrial Post*, which had covered local politics since 1924 also folded. And by the mid-1990s, membership in longstanding community organizations such as Chamber of Commerce, Qantas Club, Rotary Club, and the Masonic and Moose lodges had significantly declined or was nonexistent (Goffard 2010).

Amid the sweeping economic and demographic changes, Robert Rizzo was hired in 1993 as Bell's city manager, reportedly for the modest annual sum of \$78,000. During the 1990s, Rizzo earned a reputation both for competence and thrift, initiating layoffs and contracting services to private firms in order to save money (Goffard 2010). In the 1994 general municipal election, two Hispanics, City Clerk George Mirabal<sup>10</sup> and Alfonso Rios were elected to the city council. But by 1997, Mirabal was again the only Latino on the city council. In March 2003 a critical power shift took place as two members who had served on the city council since the 1980s, George Bass and Rolf Janssen, retired. In an uncontested election, Victor Bello, Oscar Hernandez, and George Mirabal were appointed by Rizzo, forming the first Hispanic majority on the city council in Bell's history.

In 2005, an important but little-noticed structural reform was made to Bell city government. Amid almost no public discussion, the city council called a special election for November 29, 2005 to transform Bell, which had operated as a general law city since 1927, into a home rule city.<sup>11</sup> Measure A,<sup>12</sup> as it was called, passed with 84 percent approval but only 336 yes votes, and a turnout rate of 4 percent of registered voters and .02 percent of voting age adults (see Figure 5). In addition, the election resulted

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<sup>10</sup> Mirabal was appointed by the Bell City Council as city clerk in 1992 in an uncontested election.

<sup>11</sup> Cities in California fall into two types: general law and home rule charter cities. Although California cities have witnessed an erosion of their home rule authority in recent decades (see Hogen- Esch 2011; Saxton, Hoene, and Erie 2002), home rule offer cities greater autonomy with respect to elections, governmental structure, and employee salaries.

<sup>12</sup> The text of Measure A curiously read: "Shall the voters of the City of Bell approve a City Charter, which allows The People of Bell to manage the business of the City of Bell?"

in an unusually high number of absentee ballots (61 percent), leading to speculation that city officials had orchestrated the result from behind the scenes. It is thought that Bell officials sought to use its home rule status to circumvent recently passed state laws limiting compensation for councilmember service on city boards and commissions. Within a year, city officials' salaries again began to dramatically climb.

### **A Scandal Erupts**

In the summer of 2010, two *Los Angeles Times* reporters began examining allegations of corruption in the nearby City of Maywood. Their initial investigation then led the *Times* to track down reports of salary irregularities in Bell, including nearly \$800,000 in annual salary for City Manager Robert Rizzo and unusually high salaries for Police Chief Randy Adams (\$457,000), and Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia (\$376,000). The *Times* also revealed that Rizzo was the highest paid future retiree in California's pension system, set to earn \$600,000 annually for life. In addition, four of Bell's five city council members were earning nearly \$100,000 per year, mostly to sit on obscure city boards and commissions that seldom or never met. The compensation was far above the typical \$8,000 annual salary for part-time city council members in California<sup>13</sup> (Knoll 2010).

Within days, Rizzo, Spaccia, and Adams resigned. Over the ensuing weeks and months, the embattled city council appointed an interim city manager, an interim city attorney, and a new assistant city manager. However, with its besieged city council, Bell became stuck in political limbo, unable to conduct regular business in the 5 months between October 2010 and April 2011 (Becerra, Gottlieb, and Winton, 2010).<sup>14</sup>

Over the ensuing weeks, more allegations emerged. The *Times* reported that, in addition to his nearly \$800,000 per year salary, City Manager Rizzo had negotiated a lucrative benefits agreement, making his total yearly compensation package greater than \$1.5 million. Rizzo reportedly also arranged for nearly \$900,000 in loans to various city employees over the last several years. And an agreement between Rizzo and new Bell Police Chief Randy Adams surfaced declaring Adams to be officially disabled, a designation that would allow him to avoid paying taxes on half of his anticipated \$400,000

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<sup>13</sup> One Bell council member, Lorenzo Velez, who had been earning the normal salary of \$8,000, was reportedly unaware of his colleagues' higher levels of compensation.

<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to avoid total paralysis, the idea of having the scandal-tinged city council members appoint their own replacements was actually considered.



annual retirement pension (Pringle 2010).<sup>15</sup>

By August 2010, allegations in Bell had ignited a media firestorm and the city emerged as a national poster child for government corruption. Four separate investigations unfolded. The U.S. Department of Justice began investigating civil rights allegations that Bell officials had orchestrated a scheme to boost city revenues by aggressively towing the cars of unlicensed immigrants, and charging triple the going rate to retrieve their automobiles. In recent years the city had been impounding between 2,000 and 2,500 cars per year, a scheme that netted roughly \$800,000 in annual revenues. The Justice Department also began investigating complaints of illegal code enforcement and parking violations in order to generate exorbitant fees for the city (Winton, Esquivel, and Vives 2010).

California State Controller John Chiang produced three reports alleging that the city had illegally collected more than \$5.6 million in local taxes. According to one of the Controller's reports, Bell had illegally increased assessments<sup>16</sup> on sewer fees and raised its business license taxes by more than 50 percent during the previous decade. Bell's property tax rate of 1.55 percent was found to be significantly higher than the countywide average of 1.16 percent. Chiang also discovered that monies were being collected specifically as a "retirement tax" to fund city employee pensions (State Controller 2010). And Los Angeles County District Attorney Steve Cooley opened a separate investigation into allegations of misappropriation of public funds, falsification of documents, and voter fraud by six former city council members and the city manager and assistant city manager.

In late summer, a community group known as Bell Association to Stop the Abus, or BASTA, (Spanish for "Enough") formed to raise funds and collect signatures to trigger a recall of the city council. At the March 8 Special Election, four members of the tainted council were formally recalled and replaced by new council members. Lorenzo Velez, the only member of the city council not charged with a crime or targeted for recall, lost his reelection bid.

### **Voter Participation in Bell**

The recent corruption scandal in Bell raises a number of important issues with respect to political participation, government structure, and democratic accountability. In an attempt to explain the

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<sup>15</sup> Adams had never claimed to be disabled when serving previously as police chief for the much larger City of Glendale, where he reportedly earned \$225,000 per year.

<sup>16</sup> Under Proposition 13, property in California is taxed statewide at 1 percent of assessed value. Any additional taxes or special assessments levied by local governments require two-thirds voter approval.



emergence of institutional corruption in Bell, this section compares voter participation rates in Bell, Los Angeles County, and the State of California from 1980-2014.

Following Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch (2002), this section measures voter turnout using *percent registered voters* and *percent voting age adults* to analyze voter participation in national, state, and local elections in Bell since 1980. Voter turnout in Bell is then compared to voter turnout in Los Angeles County and statewide among both *registered voters* and *voting age adults* since 1980. The figures for percent registered voters were obtained from the Los Angeles County Registrar, the California Secretary of State, and the Bell City Clerk. Voting age population data from the previous census was used instead of the number of eligible voters (see Caren 2007) in order to highlight obstacles to participation for noncitizens in Bell.

### **General and Primary Elections, 1980–2010**

Data from state and national general and primary elections in Bell between 1980-2010 – when the scandal hit – reveal voter participation rates that were significantly, though not dramatically, lower than voter participation figures from Los Angeles County and statewide. As seen in Figure 4, the overall average rate of participation in state primary and general elections among Bell registered voters between 1980 and 2010 was 41 percent, compared to 52 percent in Los Angeles County and 55 percent statewide. Between 1980 and 1990, average participation in primary and general elections in Bell was 49 percent, compared to 58 percent in Los Angeles County and 59 percent statewide. Between 1997 and 2010, the major period of ethnic political succession in Bell, average voter turnout among registered voters was 37 percent—a 4 percent decline. Turnout among registered voters over the same period in Los Angeles County remained the same, 49 percent, while turnout of registered voters statewide declined 5 percent to 54 percent.

Comparison of voter turnout in the City of Bell from 1980–2010 among voting age adults reveals an overall 13 percent average turnout, compared to 31 percent in Los Angeles County and 37 percent statewide. Between 1980 and 1990, average turnout among voting age adults in Bell was 18 percent, compared to 36 percent in Los Angeles County and 43 percent statewide. From 1997–2010, again, the major period of ethnic political succession, average voter turnout in Bell dropped six percentage points to 12 percent. In Los Angeles County, average turnout among voting age residents between 1997 and 2010 was 28 percent, a drop of 8 percentage points, and 34 percent statewide, a 9 percent decline.

**<<<Insert Figure 4: Turnout Registered Voters (RV) and Voting Age (VA) Population Bell, LA County, and California, 1980-2014>>>**

On average, turnout among voting age Bell residents between 1980 and 2010 in state and national elections was roughly half that of Los Angeles County, and one-third participation rates statewide. Though significant, relatively lower voter participation in Bell between 1980 and 2010 can be substantially explained by the city's large population of noncitizens, low income, highly transient population, among many other factors (Jacobson 1983, Cox and Munger 1989). And recent declines in participation rates in Bell, Los Angeles County, and statewide are all consistent with a general trend toward a decline in voter participation nationally. Though comparatively low, adjusting for demographic factors, participation rates in Bell since 1980 were not abnormally low, at least with respect to turnout in state and national elections.

**Turnout in Bell Municipal Elections, 1980–2010**

Data from Bell municipal elections from 1980–2010 suggest a different conclusion. Between 1980 and 2010, average turnout among registered voters was 29 percent. Among voting age adults, the average was 9 percent. Between 1980 and 1990, no municipal election in Bell received less than 20 percent turnout among registered voters, and all elections were contested. During that timeframe, the average turnout in city elections among registered voters was 40 percent, including a particularly spirited 1982 election that attracted 88 percent turnout.

Between 1980 and 2010, average turnout in Bell elections among voting age adults was 9 percent. Between 1980 and 1990 no election received more than 28 percent turnout and average turnout was 12 percent. The large gap between the average turnout among registered voters (40 percent) and voting age adults (12 percent) is almost certainly due to the demographic transformation that took place in Bell during the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1990, it appears that a relatively small portion of relatively active residents (older and white) made up a disproportionately large share of the city electorate.

**<<<Insert Figure 5: Turnout in Bell Municipal Elections, 1980-2010>>>**

Between 1997 and 2010, however, there was a marked decline in participation in Bell municipal elections. As seen in Figure 5, no municipal election between 1997 and 2010 received more than 24 percent turnout among registered voters. Average turnout over that timeframe was 16 percent. Among voting age adults over the same time period, no municipal election in the city received more than 10 percent participation, while average turnout was 4 percent. In particular, the November 29, 2005 Special Election stands out with only 4 percent of registered voters and .02 percent of voting age adults casting ballots on a measure to create a home rule charter. Over that time, three of the city's seven municipal elections were uncontested, resulting in appointments to vacant seats on the council. It is likely that the lack of competitive elections was both a cause as well as an effect of a climate of political apathy in the city. As Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch note, "uncontested elections are bad news for voter participation in city elections" (2000, 42).

### **Linking Corruption and Civic Engagement in Bell**

How and why did egregious corruption emerge in a council-manager system, a structure of government specifically designed by reformers to prevent corruption? In a prior article (Hogen-Esch 2011) I argued that, by the early 2000s, the combination of declining voter participation, inadequate media coverage, and interest group disengagement caused Bell to devolve into the municipal equivalent of a 'failed state.' The central elements of that argument remain valid. However, my previous analysis of the scandal seemed to place insufficient responsibility on the individuals involved in perpetrating the corruption, and on the system itself. In this paper I have highlighted the role of the council-manager system in hindering civic engagement and insulating officials from accountability.

As a product of ethnic conflict between native-born WASPs and late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrants, the council-manager system retains in its political DNA biases against participation that negatively impact immigrant communities. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Progressive reformers dismantled corrupt machine institutions and created nonpartisan, professionally administered city government. Still today, the vast majority of California city governments employ council-manager government. Although scholars have examined the effect of reform structures on political participation generally (Caren 2007, Hajnal and Lewis 2002, 2003, Alford and Lee 1968), surprisingly little attention has been paid to issues of participation and corruption specifically in high immigration cities. In conceptualizing reform regimes as substantially similar to machine systems—as "political monopolies"—Trounstine (2008)

offers insight as to how and why a political system designed to prevent corruption could itself become so corrupt. In Bell, reform structures intended to distance policymakers from politics instead insulated officials from traditional forms of political accountability. At the very least, recent patterns of corruption in Bell and other southeast Los Angeles cities serve to undermine the council-manager government's purported benefits in preventing corruption. As Trounstein (2008) implies, under the right circumstances, corruption can flourish in any political structure.

Additional factors contributed to the corruption in Bell. Global economic restructuring helps explain the area's rapid transformation from blue-collar White in the 1960s to post-industrial immigrant Latino by the 1980s, creating conditions that allowed "extractive" (Fulton 1997) industries and politicians to prey upon recent arrivals. Community complacency was also a contributor. According to former Bell City Councilman Rolf Janssen, during the late 1990s a rising economy, lower crime rates, and improvements in the city's physical infrastructure led to a collective apathy about city politics: "Things were going well in the late '90s and early 2000s. People just stopped asking questions" (Interview, April 8, 2011). And a veteran reporter with the *Los Angeles Wave* commented that the ethnic homogeneity of the city council also contributed to the complacency: "there was a certain level of trust in having an all-Latino City Council. Now people feel a sense of betrayal" (Interview, Arnold Adler, April 14, 2011). Finally, Bell's large numbers of undocumented residents and recent arrivals clearly played a role in the lack of engagement in city affairs. Lewis, Ramakrishnan, and Patel (2004) note that all "immigrants occupy a somewhat uncertain role in local civic affairs . . . they are often recent arrivals; a high proportion either cannot or do not vote; and they are often not well connected to associations and interest groups that are important in local affairs" (iii).

Above all, cases of political corruption in Bell and other high immigration cities underscore the pressing need for political reform to invigorate local democracy in communities with large numbers of recent immigrants. Even in the highly charged aftermath of Bell's political corruption scandal, only 34 percent of registered voters turned out for the March, 2011 recall election. Only 18 percent of registered voters showed up for the March 2013 election. Moreover, the scandal has not significantly increased voter registration in the city. As of June 2010, a month before the scandal broke, registration in Bell stood at 9,929 voters. At the March 2011 recall election, registration had increased by 10 percent. At the November 2014 election, the number of registered voters had increased to 11,306. Turnout in state and federal elections since the 2010 scandal has generally lagged slightly behind county and statewide turnout rates (see Figure 4). Although an improvement, these figures suggest that the corruption scandal will not be

sufficient to jumpstart community participation in the city, particularly as residents become further removed from the crisis with the passage of time.

### **Reform Alternatives in Bell and Beyond**

Recent scandals in Bell and other cities highlight the need for political reforms that strengthen the fabric of local democracy to better incorporate longtime residents and newcomers into the political process. Since the election of a new city council in 2011, a number of reforms have been made. In 2005, City Administrator Rizzo instituted a five-year budget cycle which many observers believe was done to further discourage outside scrutiny on the city's revenue and spending practices. In 2011 Bell returned to producing an annual budget. As any city's most important policy document, regular discussion about budgetary matters is critical in promoting public participation. The new city council has also sought to add greater transparency by devoting more resources to providing relevant and user-friendly information concerning expenditures, revenues, meetings, and links to election results and other documents relating to elections on the city's website. Certainly, increasing "sunlight" can go a long way toward deterring public corruption and restoring faith in city government.

This section highlights reform alternatives available to cities confronting municipal corruption:

**1. Increase Voter Participation.** In order to increase voter participation and democratic accountability, cities facing corruption should consider aligning its municipal elections with higher turnout state primary and general elections in March and June. Based on average turnout among Bell voters in state elections from 1995–2010, an increase of about 10 percent turnout among registered voters (from 16 percent to 25 percent) can be expected. Although the anticipated benefit appears relatively small, a 9-point increase would amount to a 56 percent upswing—probably the single most effective way to increase local voter turnout (Hajnal and Lewis 2003).

The downsides of adding municipal elections to the state ballot include the potential for voter confusion, fatigue, and higher rates of incumbency (Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch, 2002). However, what cities may lose in voter fatigue, confusion, and incumbency could be made up in greater political participation and civic legitimacy. In addition, because of space limitations, cities in California are not always guaranteed a place on primary and general election ballots. Finally, to the extent that the scandal in Bell increases interest by prospective candidates in running for city office, interest and participation in

local affairs is likely to increase.

**2. State and Professional Oversight.** The auditing authority of California State Controller should be expanded to include greater oversight over municipal finances. State laws limiting compensation for service on city boards and commissions in California's charter cities should also be instituted. In addition, improved oversight from professional organizations such as ICMA and Municipal Finance Associates should be exercised to ensure that established accounting practices and standards are followed by city administrators and staff. Members of the Bell city council are now expected to sign a 'personal code of conduct' statement, an attempt to change the culture of city government.

**3. Media Coverage.** Improving media coverage of local politics is a critical element in rebuilding democracy in Bell and similar cities. Because of recent media consolidation and cutbacks in local reporting among established media outlets, voters simply do not have access to the same breadth and depth of political coverage of local politics as in past decades. Improved communication over the Internet by city government, citizen journalists and bloggers, and traditional and ethnic media may hold promise for improved coverage of local affairs. Above all, the Bell case underscores the critical importance of local media presence, both in uncovering political corruption after the fact as well as in deterring future corruption.

**4. Community Engagement.** If corruption is to be prevented, all residents, including recent immigrants, need to participate in politics. New organizations that are indigenous to and appropriate for each community must be created and integrated into the local political system. Local 'Hometown Associations,' typically created for the purposes of assisting family members and friends in the home country, are one example. Broadening the function of Hometown Associations, common throughout Southern California, to foster participation in California local governments could help fill the institutional gap that currently exists between policymakers and local residents.

**5. Disincorporation.** Residents of chronically corrupt municipalities may also consider disincorporation of their municipality in favor of county governance. Although this reform might seem drastic, it holds promise for preventing corruption by creating Madisonian-style competition among various factions in a larger political entity. Unlike the scandal-plagued the City of Vernon, where state lawmakers briefly considered a unilateral disincorporation, state statutes permit community residents to petition for a citywide vote on disincorporation. Following a series of corruption scandals, residents of the City of Cabazon voted in 1972 for disincorporation (see Knox and Hutchinson, 2009).

## The Need for Municipal State-Building in California

Despite recent media hoopla surround the corruption scandal, Bell remains a fairly unremarkable city. Its streets are relatively safe, and many of its quiet, tree-lined neighborhoods and commercial thoroughfares look much like suburbs elsewhere in Southern California. This paper has examined the link between corruption in Bell and another seemingly unremarkable part of the story: the council-manager system of government. How did corruption emerge in a system intentionally designed to produce good government and prevent corruption? Trounstein (2008) reminds us that council-manager government is less about preventing corruption than it is simply an alternate power arrangement – its own form of “political monopoly.” As a system whose *raison d’etre* was to limit political power and participation of early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrants, the system seems particularly ill-suited to the governance of 21<sup>st</sup> century municipalities with large numbers of recent immigrants.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, active political parties and competition among ethnic groups drew new immigrants into American local politics. In contrast, most new immigrants to California’s Progressive reformed cities land in a political dead-zone nearly devoid of political parties, media, or community organizations designed to help assimilate newcomers into the local body politic. And due to ethnic clustering, economic segregation, and political geography—Latinos make up more than 90 percent of the population in many of the small cities of southeast Los Angeles—there is little of the kind of conflict and cooperation among ethnic groups characteristic of American urban politics at the turn of the 20th century.

And yet in the effort to build local civic capacity, a small city’s size may also be one of its primary strengths. One of the long-standing ironies of California local democracy is that although relatively few groups participate in local affairs, those that do receive a disproportionate share of the benefits. Compared to larger cities, small towns do offer a scale and familiarity that lend easily to democratic participation (Oliver 2000). In Southeast Los Angeles and elsewhere, small-scale politics may yet offer avenues for building local political institutions that both deter corruption and focus on the core service needs of residents. Among the many questions the case of Bell raises is whether local democracy can be considered legitimate when half or more of the voting age population in a city are not able to register their policy preferences at the ballot box. Although this article does not address federal immigration reform initiatives, it is clear that the presence of large numbers of residents in American cities unable to



select their local representatives is a factor that undermines public trust in local democracy.

Political scientists Ron Hayduk (2006) has argued that noncitizens should be once again allowed to vote in American elections, noting that citizenship was not tied to voting in most American states until Progressive reforms made citizenship a prerequisite for voting. He argues that voting systems in the United States has always been politicized in ways that benefit powerful groups at the expense of the less powerful, citing the historical exclusion of non-propertied White men, African-Americans and women. And recent efforts by numerous state governments to pass voter ID laws following the U.S. Supreme Court's *Shelby* (2012) decision – which invalidated portions of the 1965 Voting Right Act<sup>17</sup> – underscore the larger point that political institutions can be crafted in ways to make voting more or less difficult. Although a full consideration of these arguments is not possible here, it is nonetheless important to note the long history of systemic attempts to limit voter enfranchisement in the U.S.

Hayduk notes that noncitizens have recently been allowed to vote in six cities in Maryland, in school district elections in Chicago, and in so-called “parent trigger” elections to create charter schools in California. Other jurisdictions, such as New York City, Washington DC, and Burlington, Vermont are all seriously considering allowing noncitizens to voting local elections (Hayduk 2014). Perhaps it is time to consider a similar approach in California. Certainly, if one were to design a system of local government to intentionally produce consistently low civic engagement – particularly in high immigration cities like Bell – one could hardly do better than the council-manager form of government.

Fortunately, awareness of the problems of civic engagement is on the rise. Following one of the lowest turnouts for a mayoral election (23% of registered voters in May 2013) in the city's history, the City of Los Angeles convened a special commission to examine ways to increase turnout. The committee's recommendations resulted in the City Council placing Charter Amendments 1 and 2 on the March 5, 2015 municipal ballot. Starting in 2020, the amendments would consolidate LA City and Los Angeles Unified School District elections with state and federal elections in the hope of increasing interest and turnout. And although there are clear potential downsides in terms of further crowding an already long ballot and increased campaign costs, supporters argue the potential benefits make this change a worthwhile experiment in election reform.<sup>18</sup> And in recent years, numerous California cities – notably Anaheim and Palmdale – have scrapped citywide elections for Council in favor of district

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<sup>17</sup> The provisions that were struck down had previously required nine southern states with histories of voter discrimination to ‘pre-clear’ changes to their elections laws with the U.S. Justice Department.

<sup>18</sup> Politically, it might be a tough sell to some voters as current officials' terms in office would be extended by roughly 1 1/2 years to accommodate the new system.

elections under pressure from civil rights and immigrant advocacy groups. What has been often lost in the conversation over these issues, however, is the larger historical picture about biases inherent to the council-manager system that disproportionately impact immigrant communities.

The case of the Bell scandal represents far more than another spectacle of government corruption in southeast Los Angeles. Above all, abuses in Bell and other California cities should be viewed as a larger failure of local political systems to incorporate new immigrants. As the political consequences of recent immigration continue to unfold in the coming decades, it is likely that the conditions that led to predatory politics in Bell either currently exist or will emerge in cities across California and the United States. Failure to recognize and reform the underlying conditions that perpetuate corruption risks a further erosion of civic engagement and legitimacy in local government.

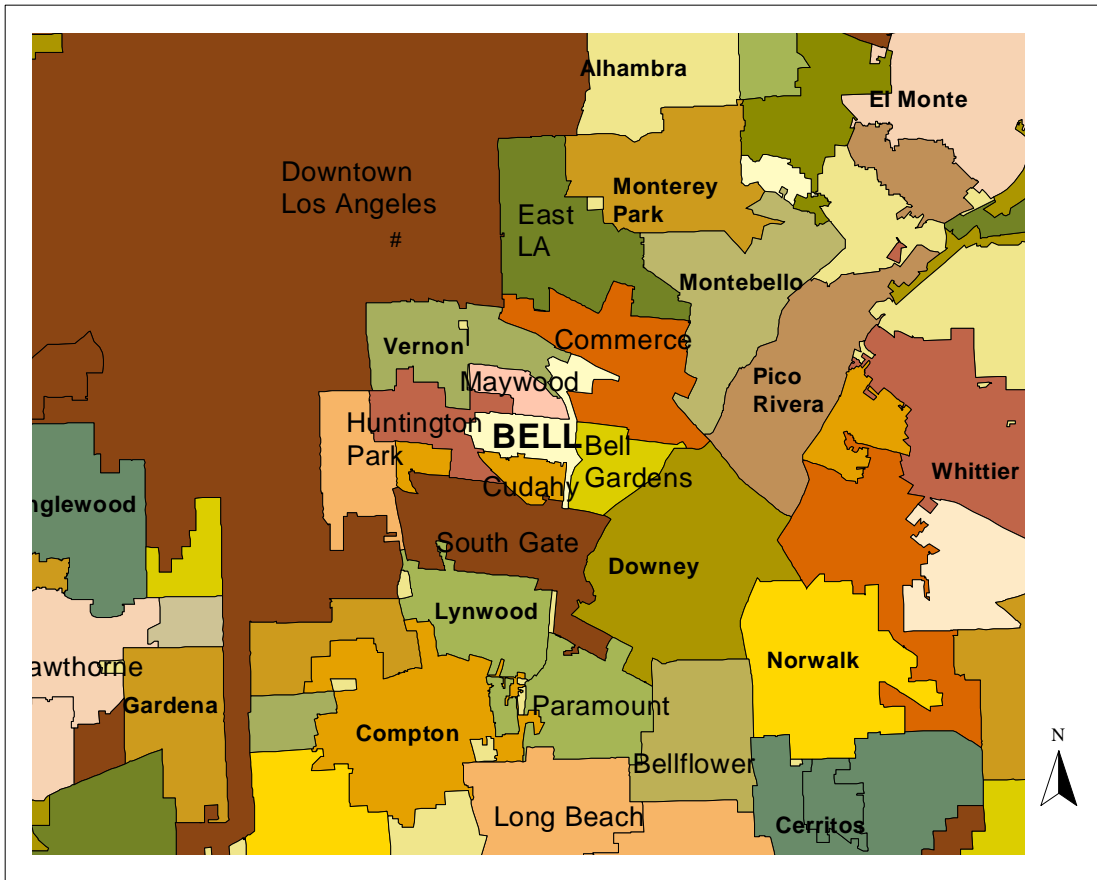
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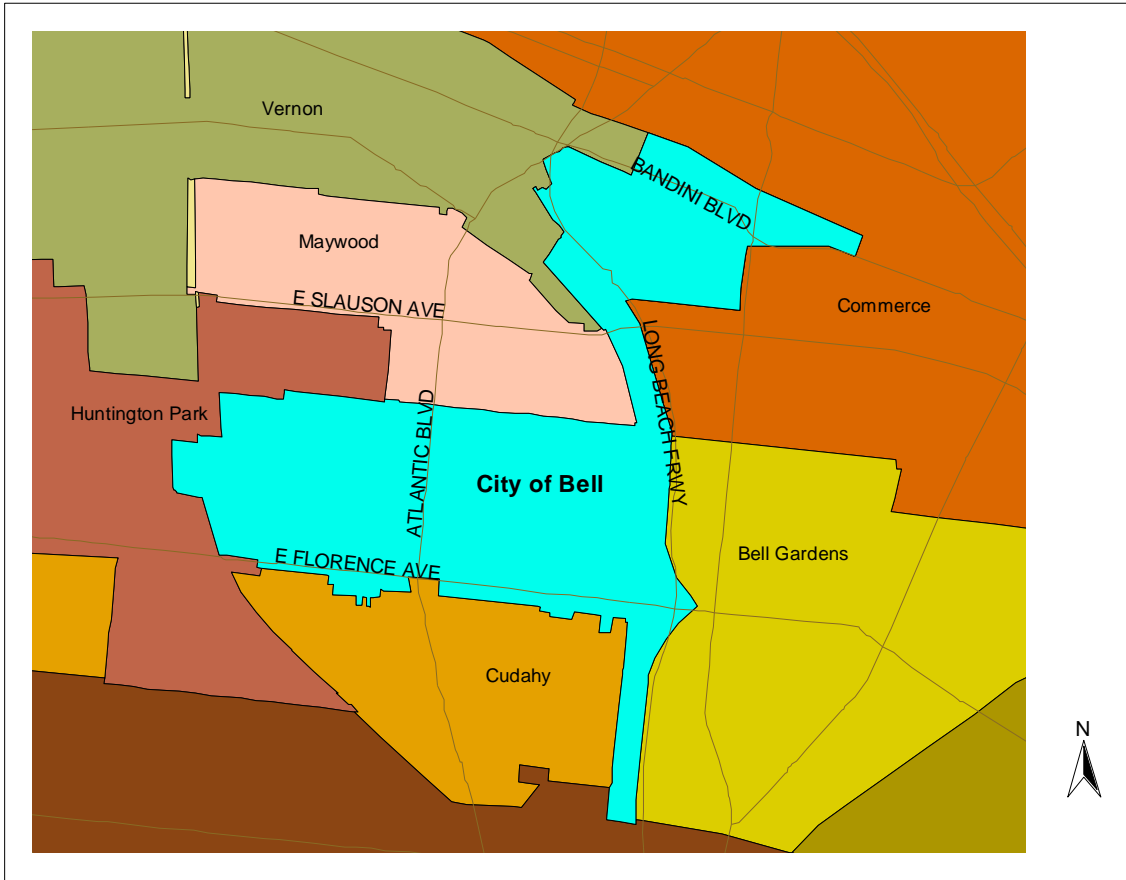
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**Figure 1:**  
**Los Angeles Gateway Cities, Including City of Bell**



**Figure 2:  
City of Bell and Surrounding Cities**



**Figure 3: Ethnic Change in Bell, 1970-2010**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>White</b>	16,669 (76%)	3,345 (13%)	3,663 (11%)	2,132 (6%)	1,728 (5%)
<b>Hispanic</b>	4,476* (21%)	16,028 (63%)	29,483 (86%)	33,328 (91%)	33,028 (93%)
<b>Black</b>	28 (.01%)	91 (.03%)	274 (.08%)	468 (1.5%)	214 (.6%)
<b>Asian/PI</b>	394 (.02%)	410 (.02%)	470 (1.4%)	533 (1.5%)	231 (.7%)
<b>Native American</b>	263 (.01%)	335 (.01%)	287 (.08%)	604 (1.6%)	64 (.06%)
<b>Two or More Races**</b>	NA	NA	NA	1,751 (4.8%)	143 (.4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,830</b>	<b>25,449</b>	<b>34,221</b>	<b>36,664</b>	<b>35,477</b>

Source: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 U.S. Census.

\* The 1970 Census used the term “Spanish” to denote individuals from Latin America.

\*\*This category applies only to 2000 and 2010.



**Figure 4:  
Turnout Registered Voters (RV)  
and Voting Age (VA) Population,  
Bell, LA County, and California, 1980-2014**

Election	Bell RV	Bell VA	LA	LA	CA RV	CA VA
			County RV	County VA		
11/14 GG	21%	10%	31%	20%	42%	27%
6/14 GP	17%	8%	17%	11%	25%	16%
11/12 PG	62%	28%	68%	44%	77%	16%
6/12 PP	47%	21%	22%	13%	31%	19%
11/10 GG	47%	20%	54%	35%	60%	42%
6/10 GP	16%	6%	23%	15%	33%	23%
11/08 PG	75%	29%	82%	49%	79%	56%
6/08 GP	9%	3%	20%	12%	28%	18%
2/08 PP	16%	8%	55%	32%	58%	37%
11/06 GG	41%	14%	52%	30%	56%	36%
6/06 GP	19%	6%	27%	15%	34%	21%
11/04 PG	61%	20%	79%	45%	76%	51%
3/04 PP	23%	7%	38%	20%	44%	31%
11/02 GG	38%	13%	45%	26%	51%	31%
3/02 GP	17%	6%	26%	16%	35%	21%
11/00 PG	56%	19%	68%	40%	71%	45%
3/00 PP	40%	8%	48%	27%	54%	32%
11/98 GG	42%	13%	53%	32%	58%	39%
6/98 GP	34%	11%	38%	23%	42%	28%
11/96 PG	56%	16%	65%	39%	66%	47%
3/96 PP	25%	6%	37%	21%	42%	28%
11/94 GG	47%	11%	59%	43%	61%	40%
6/94 GP	24%	5%	32%	18%	35%	23%
11/92 PG	55%	13%	76%	44%	75%	52%
6/92 PP	33%	7%	48%	20%	47%	29%
11/90 GG	38%	8%	55%	35%	59%	36%
6/90 GP	27%	6%	38%	24%	41%	24%
11/88 PG	58%	21%	73%	50%	73%	59%
6/88 PP	40%	12%	46%	29%	48%	35%
11/86 GG	49%	17%	60%	39%	59%	44%
6/86 GP	31%	10%	39%	24%	40%	29%
11/84 PG	62%	24%	74%	50%	75%	57%
6/84 PP	46%	15%	49%	29%	49%	32%
11/82 GG	62%	21%	70%	42%	70%	47%
6/82 GP	49%	16%	53%	30%	53%	34%
11/80 PG	69%	25%	77%	46%	77%	51%
6/80 PP	58%	20%	64%	35%	63%	39%
<b>Ave.</b>						
<b>Turnout</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>35%</b>

Source: Los Angeles County Registrar of Voters; California Secretary of State; 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 U.S. Census

PP=Presidential Primary; GP=Gubernatorial Primary; PG=Presidential General; GG=Gubernatorial General

**Figure 5:  
Turnout Municipal Elections  
City of Bell, 1980-2013**

<b>Election Date</b>	<b>Reg. Voters</b>	<b>Voting-age Adults</b>
March 5, 2013	18%	8%
March 8, 2011**	34%	12%
March 3, 2009	24%	6%
March 6, 2007	6%	2%
November 29, 2005	4%	.02%
March 8, 2005*	--	--
November 4, 2003	10%	4%
March 4, 2003*	--	--
March 6, 2001*	--	--
August 26, 1997	13%	4%
March 4, 1997	36%	10%
April 12, 1994	51%	11%
April 14, 1992*	--	--
April 10, 1990	20%	4%
April 12, 1988	39%	12%
April 8, 1986	26%	9%
April 10, 1984	34%	11%
April 13, 1982	88%	28%
April 8, 1980	30%	10%
<b>Ave. Turnout</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>9%</b>

Source: City Clerk, City of Bell; LA County Registrar  
\*Uncontested Election; \*\*Recall Election