

DISTRICT AND ETHNIC LOYALTIES UNDER PROPORTIONAL  
REPRESENTATION IN WORCESTER, 1949-1959

Because PR allows people to vote for whomever they want, for whatever reason they want, the PR results reveal a lot about what's wrong with other systems, including districts.

If where a person lives is most important, then why do so many voters vote for someone who lives outside their district, when given a chance to do so? (To ask that question is not to endorse at-large voting, in which some geographic areas can so easily be completely left out, no matter how strong their residents' district allegiances.)

The large Italian populations in Wards 3 and 4 sent most of their votes to either Michael Favulli or Peter Tomaiolo, both of whom lived in a different residential area (Vernon Hill, which in today's map is Ward 6). And in five of the six PR elections, one or the other did win a seat on the City Council.

These are the results by ward of votes "finally counted" for Favulli, when he won in 1953:

| Ward | 1   | 2   | 3    | 4    | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  |
|------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|      | 308 | 690 | 1394 | 1364 | 282 | 527 | 382 | 184 | 263 | 283 |

Favulli's totals for both Wards 3 and 4 were higher than any other candidates'. He clearly could not have won without such strong support there. But neither could he have won without the support of people throughout the city - he actually received more total votes from outside his strong base than inside it. Most of those were obviously voting outside their own districts too.

We are so accustomed to the generalizations demanded by our plurality voting systems, that it is tempting to describe Wards 3 and 4 as being "Favulli's". But the other successful candidates combined earned 61% of the Ward 3 vote, and an even higher percentage in Ward 4. A look at the precinct totals for Favulli within a single ward, number 3, expose the presumption that voters within a ward, let alone a district, necessarily share the same political interests. It would be more accurate to say that some precincts voted heavily for Favulli, and some didn't seem to care for him very much at all.

| Ward 3<br>Precinct | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|                    | 319 | 417 | 196 | 265 | 62 | 36 | 22 | 28 | 22 | 27 |

So that we don't get too carried away with the idea that there is unanimity of opinion even within these "Favulli" precincts: even in Precinct 2 (the best Favulli location in the city), 145 other voters ultimately gave their vote to the other eight successful candidates, and not to Favulli.

These PR numbers should not surprise anyone. Everytime a district election aims to elect a single "representative" for all the people of the district, a certain number of people in the majority will be able to elect the winner, but another group of people, possibly as many as 49%, end up voting for the loser. Under PR, every voter has a chance to use his/her vote to successfully elect a representative of their own interests. No wonder that so many choose, when given the chance to do so, to look elsewhere than their own backyard.

But there is no denying that a large group of people within the district of Wards 3 and 4 did share a common political interest, and the end result, after the transfers had been completed, was electing Michael Favulli. Without having to force their preference on the other residents of the district, or risk not electing Favulli because their numbers were too small to form a majority in their own district, these PR voters were able to join their votes with a greater number of voters outside their district who shared that same interest.

While PR offers a candidate a chance to secure a strong ward or district base like Favulli did (even though it did not happen to be where he lived), all the evidence indicates that successful candidates draw from around the city, also like Favulli did. That should please at-large proponents, who argue that city-wide support is necessary for good city government. In the 1953 city council election, for example, no candidate earned less than 2.5% of his vote total from any of the ten wards (that low figure belongs to Paul Morgan in Ward 5; he also got 44% of his votes from wards 1 and 10 combined).

On the other hand, some candidates virtually split their support evenly across all ten wards. For James O'Brien, his city-wide support grew with successive PR elections. In 1953 O'Brien's count on first choice ballots was like this:

| Ward | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5    | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|      | 336 | 606 | 404 | 565 | 1253 | 706 | 705 | 496 | 453 | 416 |

These first choice ballots totaled 5,940, clearing the quota by 263 votes. By the 1957 election, O'Brien had more than doubled the quota of 5,897. His 12,071 first choice ballots represented 20.5% of all those cast, in a 27 person race. This is how they were distributed:

| Ward | 1    | 2    | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|      | 1024 | 1301 | 819 | 1312 | 1518 | 1131 | 1730 | 1117 | 1063 | 1056 |

The point of all this is not that people should or should not prefer candidates from their own areas; it's that given an open choice to elect someone they most prefer, some do, and some don't. PR allows for candidates from different geographic areas to marshal support from their area, and win, while at the same

time, giving other voters in that same area a chance to express a different preference.

Some say the perfect system for a city council, and especially for Worcester, is a majority of district councillors, and a lesser number of at-large. PR is a natural alternative that lets that shake-out by itself, without the wasted votes and non-representation that both other systems inevitably bring.

There were four PR elections in Worcester in which results were reported by wards. Three of them followed the same pattern: six councillors were elected with conspicuously strong ward/district bases, such as those described for Favulli and Morgan; and three councillors were elected with fairly even city-wide support, such as described for O'Brien. Only in 1955 did the pattern vary: in that election, seven councillors had strong local bases, while 2 spread their support more evenly across the city.

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Are today's districts more unified?

The 1991 results:

District 1 (Wards 1 and 2): Stephen Patton over John Harrity, 54% - 46%.

District 2 (Wards 3 and 4): Mary Scano over Richard Bonofiglio, 50.6% - 49.4%.

District 3 (Wards 5 and 6): Paul Clancy, Jr. over Anthony Aiello, Jr., 60% - 40%.

District 4 (Wards 8 and 10): Janice Nadeau, unopposed

District 5 (Wards 7 and 9): Wayne Griffin over Raymond McGrath, 50.05% - 49.95%.

#### ETHNIC VOTING

Many people have a love/hate feeling about "ethnic voting": loving it when they are able to help elect one of their own, and hating it when others do the same. "For me, it's a question of who's the best candidate; they just vote along ethnic lines, and that's not right!"

Obviously, one goal of district voting is to create good conditions for the election of a member of a certain ethnic group. As a strategy, one problem is that it is dependent on neighborhood segregation. And for every ethnic grouping that forms a majority within a ward or district, there is almost certainly another group or groups that are minorities there. If one city-wide minority happens to be largely dispersed throughout the city, they lose out altogether.



District elections are based not only on the idea that ethnic groups live near each other, but that most voting is along ethnic lines. That's not an unreasonable presumption, but it certainly doesn't tell the whole story. To tell the whole story is to respect the interests of the individual voter.

In this context, the PR results in Worcester show a remarkable process: Although the results of the voting show considerable ethnic balance (see accompanying chart to judge for yourself), the voting itself showed that the majority of people did not vote along strict ethnic lines. Freed to vote for whomever they wanted, for whatever reason they wanted, and knowing that their votes would be joined with others with similar interests anywhere in the city, Worcester voters defied ethnic chauvinism, but still ended up balancing each other out nicely in the end anyway.

We can tell all of this, not by exit polling, but by the transfer process. It can be summarized this way, studying both city council and school committee results in the five elections that are available: It was uncommon for more than 50% of all the votes transferred to go to remaining candidate(s) from the same ethnic group. Often, it was just 35% or 40%. Even in those situations where there were no remaining candidates from the same group, there was not a discernible increase in the number of exhausted ballots that listed no further choices, as might be expected if strict ethnic allegiances were the rule.

That's the general statement; in particular, some groups tended to higher transfer rates than others.

If the transfer rate was, say, 40% within one group, the remaining 60% always seemed to be spread out among several other groups. In other words, "ethnic voting" does stand out in a comparative sense when tracing a candidate's transfers, but is simply not as dominant as might be expected. (Of course, not all of a candidate's original voters were of the same ethnic group, but that just reinforces the same point.)

Voters will not necessarily continue the same ethnic pattern they have already begun, again indicating that other factors intrude on ethnic allegiances. For example, in the 1955 City Council race, Armand Jette transferred 49% of his votes to Rene Brassard and Emile Rousseau. When Brassard was defeated two counts later, only 20% went to Rousseau.

#### The Case of Favulli and Tomaiolo, Again

The situation with Michael Favulli and Peter Tomaiolo shows this dual strain with PR, producing ethnically balanced results without demanding strict ethnic voting in the process.

Clearly, Favulli and Tomaiolo shared the favor of largely

Italian precincts in Wards 3 and 4. They competed directly in 1953 and 1959. When Tomaiolo won in 1959, Favulli was an incumbent councillor.

The standard argument for PR (STV) goes like this: As long as there are enough votes for a one-ninth constituency to win a seat, it doesn't matter how many candidates compete for votes within it. The vote can't be "split", causing all of them to lose. Voters vote their preferences, and if their number 1 doesn't make it, they'll just transfer it to number 2; and so on, until the ethnic group has completed a mini-primary to see who among their candidates shall win their seat.

As two strong candidates competing in the same ethnic constituency, STV should work just that way for Favulli and Tomaiolo. It did.

Of course, transfer rates of only 40% would alter that simple scenario... except if a group gets back from others whatever it loses to them.

In 1953, the quota was set at 5,677. Favulli (2,698) and Tomaiolo (2,473) had 5,171 first count votes between them. Add in the 487 from Mr. Del Signore, and it's eerily close to quota, at 5,658. If a Mr. Agbay is included, it climbs to 7,450.

Favulli started out ahead, and was still ahead after the 30th count. That's when Tomaiolo was defeated, and on the final count (yes, the final count), he transferred enough votes (897) to Favulli for him to make quota and be elected. Because he met quota, it's impossible to say how many more would have gone to Favulli had he needed them, but 60% of Tomaiolo's votes did then end up going to other candidates who were also elected at that time. Previously, on the 21st count, Del Signore had transferred 49% combined to Favulli and Tomaiolo. Only 3% went to Agbay, although Agbay then turned around and transferred 48% to Favulli and Tomaiolo in the 28th count.

Tomaiolo won in 1959 (note: Favulli had moved to the West side of town after winning in 1957). Tomaiolo (2,981) and Favulli (2,202) had a combined first count total of 5,183, compared to a quota of 6,406. (There does not seem to be any other competitor within their constituency, either by Italian name, or predominant transfers made.) When Favulli was defeated in the 21st (of 24) counts, he transferred 32% of his votes to Tomaiolo. Daigle received 4%; Grigaitis, 9%; Katz, 16%; Kelly, 6%; Payson, 7%; Shea, 12%; and 14% were exhausted. By the end, 37% of Tomaiolo's votes had come from transfers from non-Italian candidates; he received 20% of Kelly's votes in the last count, but he ended up being elected still 31 votes shy of quota. Before the last count, he was ahead of Kelly 5,331 to 5,185. The 32% transfer rate from Favulli was not overwhelming, but it was a sufficient "ethnic vote" to allow Tomaiolo to triumph over Kelly, thus preserving the one "Italian seat" on the council that was

gained in almost all of the PR elections.

The two candidates, Michael Favulli and Peter Tomaiolo, may have been from Vernon Hill, but Italians from all over the city helped elect an Italian in five of the six PR council elections held. They had decent enough combined numbers on the first count, and the single transferable vote worked substantially as advertised; but these numbers, just like all the others, show that these Italian candidates needed a little help from their friends to make it happen, just like Italian voters gave a little help back to others as well.

The net result of six elections of Proportional Representation in Worcester? Ethnically balanced results without district lines or rigid ethnic voting.

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Postscript: Days before the 1960 repeal vote on PR, the Telegram published a projection done by a supposedly neutral group, showing how the 1959 candidates would have fared under a 9X plurality system. They calculated that Peter Tomaiolo, ninth in the actual PR count, would have ended up in 15th place if the election had been at-large..

The East Side voted heavily against PR, with some precincts checking in at four to one. PR lost in the city 61% to 39%.

No Italian was elected to the at-large city council in at least the next few elections following the vote to repeal PR.