

Factors Influencing Voter Turnout

A summary of the scientific
literature
May 2014

Literature Review

- **Factors that impact voter turnout:**
 - Early voting
 - Voting by mail
 - Outreach to voters
 - Negative campaign mail
 - Diversity of candidates
 - Timing of elections

Early Voting

- **Many jurisdictions nationally offer early voting**
 - **Implemented 10-20 years ago in some jurisdictions**
- **Numerous studies of municipal, state, and federal elections**

Reducing the Costs of Participation

Are States Getting a Return on Early Voting?

Joseph D. Giammo

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Brian J. Brox

Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

- Turnout increases 2%-5% in the first election
 - Disappears by the second election
- Reforms “merely offer additional convenience for those already likely to vote.”

Early Voting and Turnout

by

Paul Gronke,

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“In brief, our research indicates that only one early voting reform— voting by mail — has a positive impact on turnout. Most other reforms have a negligible, and at times negative, impact on turnout.”

Voting by Mail

- **Many states mail ballots to voters**
 - **Especially common in western states**
 - **Rural populations**
- **Research concentrated on West Coast**
 - **Mailed ballots more prevalent**
 - **System in place longer**

Voting by Mail and Turnout: A Replication and Extension¹

Paul Gronke and Peter A. M. Miller

Reed College and Early Voting Information Center

- Oregon: earlier study found 10% increase in turnout when switched to voting by mail
 - No discernible longer term impact of voting by mail on turnout
- Washington: voter turnout increased by 4.5%

Does Voting by Mail Increase Participation? Using Matching to Analyze a Natural Experiment

California: some communities switched to voting by mail; other municipalities in same county continued in person voting

Voter turnout was 1.5%-2.7% lower with mailed ballots

Voter Outreach

- Voters can be contacted by political campaigns or non-partisan organizations
 - Potential role for the City
- Outreach: in person (door knocking), phone calls, or direct mail
 - Canvassing has highest returns

Does canvassing increase voter turnout? A field experiment

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Institution for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University, 77 Prospect Street, P.O. Box 208209, New Haven, CT 06520-8209

Edited by Richard D. McKelvey, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA, and approved July 8, 1999 (received for review June 4, 1999)

6.3% increase in voter turnout

***The Mobilization Solution? Face-to-Face Contact and
Voter Turnout in a Municipal Election***

David Niven
Florida Atlantic University

5% increase in voter turnout

*Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections: Results from
Six Door-to-Door Canvassing Experiments*

Donald P. Green
Alan S. Gerber
David W. Nickerson
Yale University

7.1% increase in voter turnout

Most effective for seldom voters

Negative Campaign Mail

A Field Experiment on the Effects of Negative Campaign Mail on Voter Turnout in a Municipal Election

DAVID NIVEN, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

**6% increase in voter turnout due to perception of
competitive race**

Diverse Candidates

HOW BLACK CANDIDATES AFFECT VOTER TURNOUT*

EBONYA WASHINGTON

2-3% increase in voter turnout for each African American candidate on the ballot.

Increased turnout among black and white voters.

*Where Turnout Matters: The Consequences of Uneven
Turnout in City Politics*

Zoltan Hajnal

University of California, San Diego

Jessica Trounstine

Princeton University

“By focusing on city elections we find that lower turnout leads to substantial reductions in the representation of Latinos and Asian Americans on city councils and in the mayor’s office. For African Americans district elections and off-cycle local elections are more important barriers to representation.”

Election Timing

The Timing of Elections

Christopher R. Berry† & Jacob E. Gersent††

- Study of 2,785 municipal elections in California between 1996 and 2004
- 23% increase in average voter turnout for elections held in November in even years vs. November of odd years

MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS AND VOTER TURNOUT IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

“Moving local elections to coincide with the dates of national elections would have by far the largest impact on voter turnout.”

Municipal turnout increases by 26% when coincides with mid-term congressional elections.

Municipal elections held with presidential elections have 36% higher turnout than odd-year elections.

Ballot Drop Off

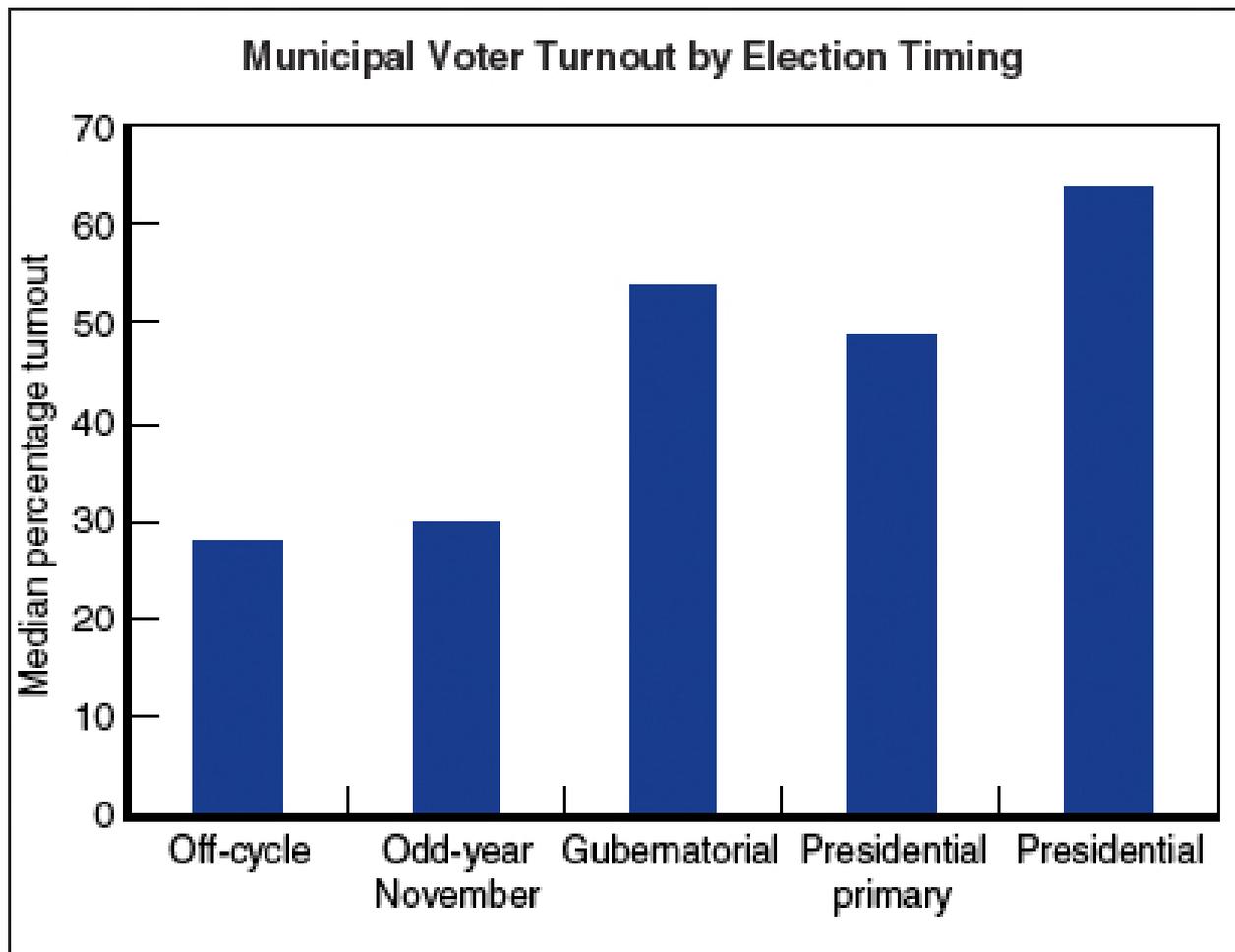
Too Far to the Bottom?

Exploring the Phenomenon of Voter Roll-Off

Allyson L Clark, University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire

Geoffrey D. Peterson, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

- **Not every voter who votes for a presidential candidate will complete their ballot**
- **Less frequent voters turn out for “big race” and leave lower level races blank**



Controlling for other factors, municipal contests that coincide with presidential or gubernatorial elections experience significantly higher turnouts of registered voters than do off-cycle elections.

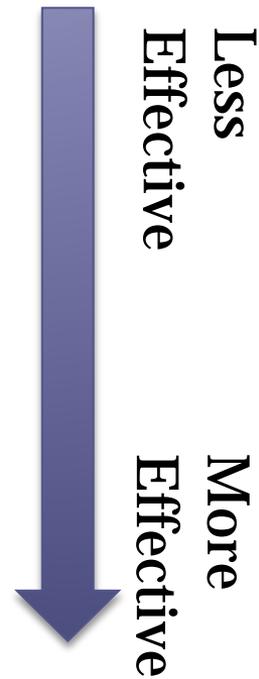
The Timing of Elections

Christopher R. Berry† & Jacob E. Gersen††

“Not only will turnout drop as participation costs rise, but the substantive political preferences of actual voters are likely to diverge from the political preferences of nonvoters in the jurisdiction.”

Summary

- **Factors that impact voter turnout:**
 - Voting by mail: mixed results
 - Diversity of candidates: 2-3% increase
 - Early voting: 2-5% increase
 - Negative campaign mail: 6% increase
 - Outreach to voters: 5-7% increase
 - **Timing of elections: 23-36% increase**
 - **Coincide with presidential election**



Future Projections

~2,000 additional voters

