

Dr. Fernando Guerra, Chair  
June Lagmay, Vice-Chair

Members:  
Jeffery Daar  
Kathay Feng  
Rosalind Gold  
Stephen Kaufman  
Larry Levine  
Dolores Spears  
Delia de la Vara

# CITY OF LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA



ERIC GARCETTI  
MAYOR

City of Los Angeles  
Municipal Elections Reform  
Commission

c/o CITY CLERK  
ROOM 360, CITY HALL  
200 N. SPRING ST.  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012  
(213) 978-1020  
Fax: (213) 978-1027

## Report

of the

# City of Los Angeles Municipal Elections Reform Commission

Submitted June 5, 2014

### Commission Members

Dr. Fernando Guerra, Chair  
Jeffery Daar  
Delia de la Vara  
Kathay Feng  
Rosalind Gold  
Stephen Kaufman  
June Lagmay  
Larry Levine  
Dolores Spears

# Executive Summary

## ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS REFORM COMMISSION

Turnout for the March 2013 City of Los Angeles Primary Election was 20.8 percent of registered voters. For the May runoff election turnout was 23.3 percent.

The City of Los Angeles (“City”) has taken a number of actions to attempt to increase voter turnout in recent years, including the establishment of the Alternative Voting Methods Task Force which submitted its report to the Los Angeles City Council (“City Council”) on October 21, 2013.

On October 22, 2013, the City Council recognized the need to take a more broad-based approach to increase civic engagement by creating the City of Los Angeles Municipal Elections Reform Commission (“Commission”). This Commission is composed of nine members appointed respectively by the Mayor and the President of the City Council. Members have been directed to review various City laws for effectiveness, hold public hearings in different regions of the City, and recommend to the Mayor and City Council actions that might increase turnout and participation in municipal elections.

Members of the Commission bring a variety of backgrounds and expertise to the task, including the following areas: elections, marketing, outreach, neighborhood council leadership, polling places, and event management. The members include Dr. Fernando Guerra (Chair), Jeffery Daar, Delia de la Vara, Kathay Feng, Rosalind Gold, Stephen Kaufman, June Lagmay, Larry Levine, and Dolores Spears. The Commission makes the following recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

### I. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CITY ELECTION DATES

The Commission makes the following recommendations regarding the dates on which the City’s regular municipal elections are conducted:

#### **1. Primary Recommendation: June/November Even Year**

The Commission recommends the City Charter be amended to move the dates of the City’s regular primary and general municipal elections from the current schedule of March and May of

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<sup>1</sup> All recommendations were approved on June 5, 2014, by the nine members of the Commission with a unanimous vote, except the Primary Recommendation: June/November Even Year, which was approved with a majority vote (Ayes: Commissioners de la Vara, Feng, Gold, Guerra, Kaufman, Spears. Nays: Commissioners Daar, Lagmay, Levine). Commissioner Gold submitted a Concurring Statement entitled “Statement Regarding Recommendation to Move Los Angeles City Elections to June/November of Even Numbered Years,” *see* Attachment A. Commissioners Levine, Lagmay and Daar submitted a Minority Report entitled “In Opposition to the Recommendation to Move Los Angeles City Elections to June/November of Even Years,” *see* Attachment B. Commissioner Daar submitted a Minority Report entitled “Minority Report in Support of a Weekend Election for City Elections in Odd Numbered Years,” *see* Attachment C.

odd numbered years to a new schedule of June and November of even numbered years, provided that:

- a. The City’s municipal elections are consolidated together with the State primary and general elections conducted by the County of Los Angeles (“County”) in June and November of even numbered years, and the City not consider conducting its municipal elections as concurrent elections conducted by the City on those same dates;
- b. The City not change its municipal election dates to June and November of even numbered years unless, and until, the County has implemented a new voting system which can accommodate a ballot consolidated with the City’s municipal election, and that system is operational and has been tested;
- c. The City conduct a study of the costs of conducting municipal elections in June and November of even numbered years consolidated with the State primary and general election conducted by the County, including a comparison of those election costs with the costs of conducting municipal elections under the current schedule;
- d. The City conduct robust outreach for the elections in coordination with the County; and
- e. The City should invest additional resources toward voter outreach.

## **2. Alternate Recommendation: June/November Odd Year**

If the City Council and Mayor do not determine to move municipal election dates to June and November of even numbered years, the Commission recommends as an alternative that the City Charter be amended to move the dates of the City’s regular primary and general municipal elections from the current schedule of March and May of odd numbered years to a new schedule of June and November of odd numbered years, and also extend the official canvass period from 21 days to 28 days.

## **3. Second Alternate Recommendation: Spring Odd Year**

If the City Council and Mayor do not determine to move municipal election dates to either June and November of even numbered years or June and November of odd numbered years, the Commission recommends as a second alternative that the City Charter be amended to extend the time period between the City’s primary election and its general election and also extend the official canvass period from 21 days to 28 days.

## **II. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VOTER REGISTRATION AND MAINTENANCE OF VOTER FILES**

The Commission makes the following recommendations regarding voter registration and maintenance of voter files:

1. Voter registration applications should be placed on all public counters where City employees interact with the public.

2. The City should assess and target staff efforts on registering voters in neighborhoods with a large number of potential eligible voters but low voter registration rates. The City shall seek the support and assistance of the County in these efforts. In election years and as the deadline for registration nears, registration drives should expand to include the whole city.
3. The City should explore engaging Neighborhood Councils in voter registration activities.
4. The City should expand partnering with civic and service organizations to register and educate voters in malls, on high school and college campuses, and in other public places, and in the months leading up to each election.
5. The City should ask the County Registrar of Voters and/or the Secretary of State to do an “Address Correction Requested – Do Not Forward” mailer to all registered voters who have not voted in eight or more consecutive federal, state, or local primary and general/runoff elections to determine which of those non-participating voters have moved away and can potentially be removed from the registration rolls. Any efforts to remove such voters must be conducted in compliance with all applicable laws.
6. The City should ask the County Registrar of Voters to be more proactive in accurately identifying inactive voters, within all applicable rules.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EARLY VOTING, POLLING PLACES AND EASE OF VOTING**

The Commission makes the following recommendations regarding early voting, polling places and ease of voting:

1. The City Clerk should create a citywide network of early voting locations when it becomes practical.
2. The City Clerk should explore expanding polling locations to non-traditional venues such as shopping centers, malls, supermarkets and other public locations which fulfill all legal mandates and would provide more accessibility for voters. Until the new County voting system is operational, the City Clerk is urged to implement a pilot program and, where appropriate, to begin a transition to non-traditional voting locations.
3. The City Clerk should transition to a greater use of public locations as polling places.
4. The City Clerk and County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk should continue to utilize, to the greatest extent possible, the same facilities contained within their mutual boundaries for both County and City elections.

5. Once the new County voting system is fully implemented in conjunction with a statewide voter database, and if the City continues to administer its own elections, the City should consider asking voters to change the Charter to replace the current precinct-based election model with a system that enables voters to visit any voting center in the City on Election Day, allowing voters the opportunity to vote close to their homes, near their work locations, while picking up their groceries or dropping off or picking up children from school – regardless of where they reside. Before implementing such a voting center system, the City should assess the impact of the transition away from a current precinct-based election model to ensure that the new voting center system does not reduce the number of locations to vote or the accessibility of such locations in a manner that would impair the participation of the City’s voters.
6. The City Clerk should make sure all voter materials and messages are communicated simply using plain language.
7. The City Clerk should continue to enhance its efforts to fully comply with all state and federal requirements to provide language assistance to under-represented voters. The City Clerk should continue to enhance its efforts to provide such assistance to language minority voters not covered under such requirements where needed to ensure the full accessibility of City elections.
8. The City should enhance efforts to relax parking ticketing near polling places on Election Day.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING OUTREACH TO VOTERS, PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

The Commission makes the following recommendations regarding outreach to voters, public information and education:

1. In recognition of the diverse and changing demographics of the City of Los Angeles, the Commission believes all activities designed to increase voter registration and voter participation in municipal elections should be conducted with cognizance of the needs of the under-represented populations within the City.
2. The City should provide greater funding to the Office of the City Clerk for activities designed to enhance voter awareness of elections and promote a culture of voting.
3. The City should explore ways to involve the City’s workforce and Neighborhood Councils in promoting Election Day awareness and voter participation.

4. The City should implement and fund each of the 10 recommendations of the Alternative Voting Methods report as published by the City Clerk on October 21, 2013.
5. The City should develop voter outreach programs that include personalized messages and trusted messengers. These should include text messaging, media partners (particularly with ethnic media), and the use of public opinion and community leaders as spokespersons.
6. The City should expand use of video communications, in addition to Public Service Announcements (“PSAs”).
7. The City should continually explore the use of evolving technology, apps and social media as a component of voter outreach and engagement efforts.
8. In addition to the activities already performed by the City Clerk’s staff, the Commission recommends expanding technology to promote voter engagement as described in the Report of the Commission.
9. The City Clerk should act proactively and with plain language to address and dispel the myths regarding any perception of negative consequences of registering to vote, and promote the dissemination of existing Frequently Asked Questions (“FAQs”) to help voters learn and understand basics of voting and participation.
10. The City should formally request that the Los Angeles Unified School District restore civics education as a separate course requirement, especially at the 11th or 12th grade level.
11. The City should look for opportunities to collaborate with the Los Angeles Unified School District in conducting high school civic outreach activities.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ABSENTEE VOTING/VOTE-BY-MAIL**

The Commission makes the following recommendations regarding absentee voting/vote-by-mail (“VBM”):

1. The City should consider efforts to contact permanent absentee voters whose ballots are disallowed because of mismatched signatures to determine if the voter’s signature needs to be updated, or if there may be other irregularities.
2. Voting by mail and enrollment as a permanent vote-by-mail voter should be promoted.
3. City officials should support state legislation to allow election officials to accept vote-by-mail ballots that are postmarked no later than Election Day and received within three days of Election Day.

4. The Office of the City Clerk should consider and study the costs of providing return (prepaid) postage on vote-by-mail ballot envelopes that are sent to voters.
5. City election officials should work to clarify and simplify instructions provided with vote-by-mail materials to make the process as clear as possible to voters who may be unfamiliar with the process. This should include clarification of the deadline for returning vote-by-mail ballots in the mail and the fact that a voted VBM ballot can still be turned in at any polling place by 8:00 p.m. on Election Night.

These findings and recommendations are respectfully submitted to the Mayor and Council of the City of Los Angeles, on the fifth of June, 2014, in the City of Los Angeles:

Dr. Fernando Guerra  
Jeffery Daar  
Delia de la Vara  
Kathay Feng  
Rosalind Gold  
Stephen Kaufman  
June Lagmay  
Larry Levine  
Delores Spears

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# I. WHY PEOPLE DON'T VOTE

## A. Overview

There are many reasons offered up as to why people are voting in reduced numbers in elections at all levels of government and throughout most of the U.S. Most of the people we interviewed and reports we reviewed on this subject cited diminishing civic engagement as a primary reason. Many also spoke of other factors, including:

- voter fatigue, including long and complicated ballots
- too many elections,
- distrust of government and politicians,
- the belief that an individual vote won't matter,
- lack of familiarity with voting and registration procedures,
- lack of information about candidates and issues,
- other similar factors.

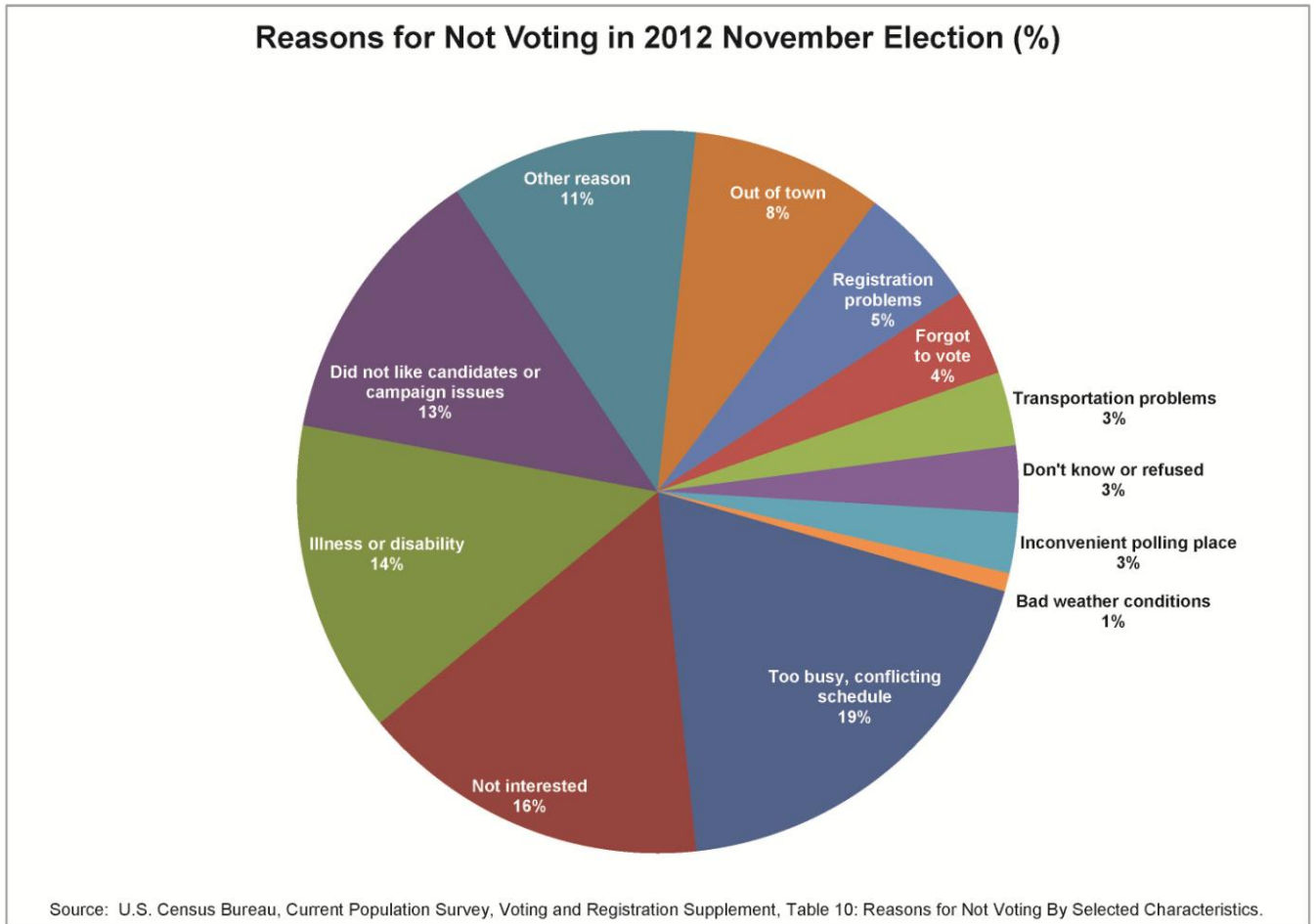
On October 21, 2013, the Los Angeles City Clerk's office issued a report and recommendations based on research and advice of the Alternative Voting Methods Working Group<sup>2</sup>. That report cited a study of registered non-voters in the November 2012 Presidential Election conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. In that study voters gave a variety of reasons why they did not vote including (in order of highest percentage):

- too busy and conflicting schedules (19%),
- lack of interest (16%),
- illness or disability (14%),
- did not like the candidate or the campaign issues (13%),
- other reasons (11%),
- out of town (8%),
- registration problems (5%),
- inconvenient polling place (3%),
- transportation problems (3%).

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<sup>2</sup> See [http://ens.lacity.org/cla/mec\\_importdoc/clamec\\_importdoc334786659\\_03172014.pdf](http://ens.lacity.org/cla/mec_importdoc/clamec_importdoc334786659_03172014.pdf). The City Council instructed the Office of the City Clerk, in collaboration with our partners in the voter advocacy community, to analyze alternative voting methods in order to increase voter turnout, and develop a list of achievable goals and recommendations with implementation timeframes (Council file No. 10-1649-S1).

The following pie chart illustrates the results from the 2012 national survey:



The **City Clerk’s** report observed:

*“These statistics (produced by that study) may explain why people do not vote, but they don’t explain the discrepancy from election to election in turnout rate. For the most part these factors impact all elections in the same way, meaning that each election has the same challenges with, for example, convenience, accessibility, or registration problems.”<sup>3</sup>*

It went on to comment:

*“... the one factor that does change dramatically between elections is the content of matters before the electorate, and their interest in it. ... High turnout is primarily*

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<sup>3</sup> The Commission notes that statements and content in quotation marks were provided or are published in writing.

*generated by motivations to vote, which could include partisan issues or controversial matters in which voters have a high level of interest.”*

At the first meeting of the Commission, Interim City Clerk **Holly Wolcott** said,  
*People will vote when they are interested.*

She added the drop in turnout is an  
*issue bigger than numbers; it's a matter of civic engagement.*

That theme was echoed by many of the people interviewed and in many of the reports and comments we received.

**Dean Logan**<sup>4</sup> said, people vote when they are motivated.

**Lorraine C. Minnite**<sup>5</sup> wrote:

*“Non-voting is understood simply as a function of individual voter motivation and access to the resources needed to participate.”*

**Nate Persily**<sup>6</sup> stated:

*Motivation and structural barriers are components determinative of turnout.*

## **B. Turnout in Los Angeles Mayoral Elections**

A review of the turnout in L.A. City Mayoral elections during the last 44 years suggest there is a relationship between voter participation and factors which increase the saliency of specific elections to voters.

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<sup>4</sup> Dean Logan is the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk for Los Angeles County. The Los Angeles County Registrar's Office is responsible for the registration of voters, maintenance of voter files, conduct of federal, state, local and special elections and the verification of initiative, referendum and recall petitions. Each year the Office participates in approximately 200 elections for schools, cities and special districts. There are approximately 4.1 million registered voters, and 5 thousand voting precincts established for countywide elections. [www.lavote.net](http://www.lavote.net).

<sup>5</sup> Professor Lorraine C. Minnite is a Professor of American and Urban Politics at Barnard University and author of “How to Think About Voter Participation” for the New York City Charter Revision Commission.

<sup>6</sup> Professor Nate Persily is a Professor of Election Policy and Administration at Stanford University Law School and Senior Research Director for the Presidential Commission on Election Reform.

**LOS ANGELES MAYORAL ELECTION TURNOUT – 1969 to 2013**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Primary Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Primary Turnout %</b>	<b>Runoff Ballots Cast</b>	<b>Runoff Turnout %</b>
1969	731,423	66.20%	856,175	75.95%
1973	674,555	56.97%	781,241	64.24%
1977	547,525	34.15%	No Runoff Election	
1981	472,989	37.20%	No Runoff Election	
1985	476,485	34.74%	No Runoff Election	
1989	334,764	24.33%	No Runoff Election	
1993	488,578	34.81%	582,696	45.00%
1997	424,653	31.70%	No Runoff Election	
2001	511,521	33.50%	579,408	37.70%
2005	420,570	28.50%	498,729	34.00%
2009	285,658	17.90%	271,717	*17.10%
2013	377,881	20.80%	419,592	23.30%

\* There was no mayoral runoff in 2009. Runoffs for other municipal offices were conducted at the same time as a statewide special election.

The Commission notes that the election campaigns of 1969 and 1973 contained elements unique to those two years. Tom Bradley was running as the first African-American candidate for mayor; the City had been the site of two civil unrests – the one that began in Watts in 1965 and the anti-war clash between demonstrators and police at Century City in 1967; and tensions were heightened by a campaign that included race-baiting and “Red” (communist)-baiting. Interest and motivation were high and those four elections – Primaries and runoffs – produced the four highest turnouts in the history of the City.

Turnout dropped from 1977 through 1989 as Mayor Tom Bradley won easy re-election four times without need of a runoff.

Turnout jumped 10 percent from the 1989 election to the first post-Bradley election in 1993. That election followed the 1991 civil unrest in the City and there was considerable public interest in the fact that Michael Woo was the first Chinese American candidate to run for mayor.

The number of ballots cast in the 2001 election, in which Antonio Villaraigosa sought to become the City’s first Latino mayor in modern history, was the highest since the first three Tom Bradley campaigns. The number of ballots cast increased in 2001; however, the percentage of turnout was lower. The Commission attributes this to the growth in the voter file. James Hahn defeated Mr. Villaraigosa in that election, but then lost a rematch in 2005 with fewer voters participating in the election.

There have been many reasons offered to explain the low turnout in the 2013 election, the leading ones being:

- voters didn't perceive much difference in the two candidates,
- there were no overriding, passionate issues to drive turnout as there had been in some of the higher turnout elections;
- factors concerning how the two candidates conducted their campaigns.

Along this line, **Ilya Shapiro**<sup>7</sup> commented:

*"If a country is in crisis and politics are foremost on every citizen's mind – Argentina, Venezuela – that probably is a bad thing, but voter turnout is astronomical. Conversely, if things are going great and/or government is in its proper role, there is less reason to turn out and that's a good thing. In short, the equation: higher turnout=better government/healthier polity is demonstrably false."*

Conversely, **Estelle Rogers**<sup>8</sup> wrote:

*"I can't imagine a scenario where low turnout would be good for society, though it might be good for a particular candidate or issue under particular circumstances."*

### **C. Perspectives on Los Angeles Turnout Issues**

To put the Los Angeles municipal election voter turnout in perspective **Professor Minnite's** report for the New York Charter Revision Commission in 2010 offered these observations:

*"From data on 332 mayor elections in 38 large American cities between 1979 and 2003, municipal turnout averaged 27% of the citizen voting-age population ... The average turnout decline was 20% during the 1980s and 1990s. (NOTE: these numbers are based on voting-age population, not voter registration. What is most relevant is the rate of decline.)"*

*"To be clear, the rules on their own do not produce turnout. Politics, ultimately, produces turnout."*

*"The (New York) Commission should focus its efforts at remediation on the part of the citizenry that regularly does not vote in municipal elections ..."*

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<sup>7</sup> Ilya Shapiro is a Senior Fellow in Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Estelle Rogers is the Legislative Director of Project Vote.

## **D. Civic Engagement**

**Jim Hayes**<sup>9</sup> was very emphatic regarding the role diminished civic engagement plays in declining voter turnout.

**Dean Logan** echoed this perspective when he said there was a time when people viewed voting as an obligation.

**Mr. Hayes** cited what he calls a diminished culture of voting, and said he believes, people do not think it (voting) is as important as they once may have. He cited a number of factors for his observations:

- 1) high schools dropped civics education after the University of California dropped civics as an admissions requirement in the 1980s,
- 2) the role of the print media has weakened and coverage of local elections has shrunk in the wake of diminished space and staffing,
- 3) TV and radio, which had fulltime political reporters and provided coverage of local politics in earlier decades, barely cover electoral politics today, and
- 4) post card registration and motor voter have brought a virtual end to voter registration tables in shopping malls and at super markets.

Each of these contributed to an ongoing awareness of the importance of the electoral process, Mr. Hayes said. Those foundations and constant reminders no longer exist. Students who finish high school with no awareness of why voting in municipal elections is important are far less likely to become municipal election voters in later years.

**Dr. Michael J. Hanmer**<sup>10</sup> in his book “Discount Voting: Voter Registration Reforms and Their Effects” wrote,

*“Those concerned about low voter turnout should take the long view and reform public school curricula to erect a strong foundation for civic education.”*

When asked at a Commission meeting about the possibility of restoring civics education at local high schools, a representative of the Los Angeles Unified School District said a shortened school day and other demands on the class schedules of students mean that restoring civics education is problematic.

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<sup>9</sup> Jim Hayes is the President of Political Data Inc. He acknowledges his perceptions are partly anecdotal. But they are based on more than 30 years of managing voter files, participating in election campaign field operations, and observing voter behavior up close.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Michael J. Hanmer is the Director at the Center for American Politics and Citizenship.

## **E. Barriers Affecting the Participation of Under-represented Groups**

Dean Logan, Holly Wolcott, and other municipal election officials provided testimony to the Commission about the specific barriers that confront under-represented groups when they attempt to participate in the electoral process. These include racial and ethnic under-represented groups and persons with disabilities. The issues they discussed were also raised by representatives of community-based organizations which conduct voter encouragement efforts in the City,<sup>11</sup> including:

- Many under-represented voters lack familiarity with basic registration and voting practices, such as the location of polling places, the voter registration process, and the use of voting technology;
- A significant number of under-represented voters are not yet fully proficient in the English language, which presents challenges for obtaining information about elections and navigating long and complicated ballots or other election material; and
- Campaigns and political parties focus mobilization efforts on voters who vote the most frequently; because a significant number of under-represented voters are not yet participating in the electoral process, they often are ignored by these mobilization efforts.

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<sup>11</sup> On April 10, 2014, the following organizations provided testimony about barriers faced by certain ethnic populations and offered recommendations on how to target low-propensity voters to get these populations out to vote. The organizations included: African American Voter Registration Education Participation Project, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project, and Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education Los Angeles.



## **II. ALTERNATE DATES FOR LOS ANGELES MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: JUNE AND NOVEMBER OF EVEN NUMBERED YEARS**

Without exception, every person interviewed and every report reviewed on this subject had the same conclusion: a move to November of even numbered years is the only structural change that would result in significant increase in voter turnout.

According to a 2002 Public Policy Institute of California study by **Zoltan Hajnal**<sup>12</sup> examining the election results of 350 California cities:

*“...[C]ity elections held on the same day as a presidential or gubernatorial election or a presidential primary—had turnouts that are substantially higher than off-cycle, or nonconcurrent, city elections. The turnout boost for cities holding concurrent elections was 11 to 23 percent among all adults, and 21 to 36 percent among registered voters (depending on whether the concurrent election was presidential, gubernatorial, or a statewide primary).”*

**Professor David Kimball**<sup>13</sup> said:

*This would have the biggest effect on turnout.*

**Professor Nate Persily** said:

*No structural change would make more of a turnout impact than consolidating with the November even year elections.*

**Professor Lorraine Minnite** cited the following:

*“By far the biggest factor in increasing voter turnout is election timing. Holding city elections on the same day as national or statewide contest could essentially double voter turnout over existing rates of off-cycle city elections. Thus, if expanded participation is the primary goal, the best tool for the job is peak-cycle elections.”*

- Zoltan Hajnal and Paul G. Lewis

**Dean Logan** said,

*November of the even numbered year is a higher turnout by default.*

**Antonio Gonzalez**<sup>14</sup> said:

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<sup>12</sup>Zoltan L. Hajnal, Paul G. Lewis, & Hugh Louch, “Municipal Elections in California: Turnout, Timing and Competition, [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R\\_302ZHR.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_302ZHR.pdf), P. 67 (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Professor David C. Kimball is a professor of political science at University of Missouri, St. Louis.

<sup>14</sup> Antonio Gonzalez is President of Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project. He presented to the Commission on April 10, 2014.

*We do believe that we have local elections captured in a low-turnout box by separating them from the election cycle in which voters culturally in America see themselves as casting votes, meaning the November election cycle. So we advocate moving Los Angeles municipal and school board elections from the spring to November. We are agnostic about this being even year or odd year. We think that doing so would create a culture of participation. We are, like everyone else, deeply concerned that local electoral turnout falls below the floor in which even high-propensity voters are not voting.*

**Eugene Lee**<sup>15</sup> said:

*We do think it would be prudent to think about a move in election dates to November of either even numbered or odd numbered years. We think that research should be done into this about the impact on drop-off rates for down ticket races. I think it is something that ought to be considered by the City and by this Commission. It would better align the City's election date with dates that voters are normally accustomed to. I would just point out here that other large cities have elections in November of either even numbered or odd numbered years. For example, Oakland, San Diego and San Jose have elections in even-numbered years. Boston, Houston, New York, San Francisco have elections in odd-numbered years in November. I think the one notable exception there is Chicago. But other than Chicago, generally you see large cities in the country having their elections in either odd numbered or even numbered years.*

**Paul Gronke**<sup>16</sup> wrote:

*“Coordinating municipal elections with Presidential elections should result in a substantial increase in turnout, but with tradeoffs that have been a topic that has been part of the political science literature for 50 years or longer: the electorate includes a large number of irregular voters who are drawn in by the excitement and interests of the Presidential contest. The reason some states and localities moved their elections off this cycle is precisely to avoid this. Turnout is low, but you get an electorate more predictably knowledgeable about local issues.”*

While there was unanimous agreement among all who addressed the subject that a move to November of even years would mean more voters attending the polls at the time of a municipal election, there were also serious concerns about such a move.

### **A. Is It Feasible?**

**Dean Logan** and **Holly Wolcott** each said to the Commission that existing County voting equipment cannot accommodate a move to November in even numbered years at this time for a consolidated election (as opposed to a concurrent election in which the City would conduct

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<sup>15</sup> Eugene Lee is the Project Director of the Democracy Project at Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles. He presented to the Commission on April 10, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Professor Paul Gronke is the Director or the Early Voting Information Center at Reed College.

voting for a municipal election at the same time that the County conducts voting for a separate statewide General Election, possibly at the same polling site).

**Mr. Logan** said his office is in the process of developing a new voting system that would be able to accommodate the additional offices and ballot measures that would result from moving City, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Los Angeles Community College District elections to the November even numbered year ballot. He anticipates the voting system will be operational by 2018.

Others raised questions about when the new County voting system would be fully operational. Several people believed 2018 is overly optimistic and something between 2020 and 2024 is more realistic. They point to history as a guide that indicates that during the implementation of any new voting systems election officials may encounter unanticipated challenges which take time to address.

**Holly Wolcott** said that she would want to see the County use its new system through at least one and maybe two election cycles before she would feel comfortable advising the City to use the County's new voting equipment for its elections.

In addition to the question of when the County's new system will be ready and when it will have been sufficiently "field tested" to encourage the City to move in that direction, the City also would need to schedule an election for the electorate to approve the required Charter changes, adopt implementing ordinances and make administrative preparations to move the elections to November of even numbered years, Ms. Wolcott said. Some rules governing who can serve as poll workers in City elections also would need to be changed.

She also told the Commission depending when the new election cycle was implemented, in order to align the terms of office, terms of officials elected during the transition period could be increased to a duration of 5 ½ years or decreased to a duration of 1 ½ years, until alignment occurs, when four-year terms would resume. Any Charter amendment placed on the ballot to move the elections to November of an even numbered year would also require that voters give concurrent approval to extend or decrease the terms of affected elected municipal officials.

## **B. Consolidated Elections Compared to Concurrent Elections**

The Commission discussed the possibility that the City could pass a Charter amendment to move to November even numbered year elections beginning in a specific year and the County might not be prepared to accommodate a consolidation with the City elections that year. A consolidated election would be an election conducted by the County of Los Angeles for the City. A concurrent election would involve the City conducting the municipal or other elections on the same day as the County independently conducting federal, state or other elections. A concurrent election would require voters to go to different poll sites or different tables within one poll site and cast separate ballots for each election.

Under those circumstances the City could be forced to hold an election concurrent with, but not consolidated with, the County-run election. This would involve the City Clerk conducting a municipal election on the same day as the County is running the statewide election.

**Holly Wolcott** told the Commission:

1. It would be virtually impossible to move municipal elections to November of the even numbered year unless the County runs the election.
2. If the City changes election dates to consolidate with the County and for some reason the election cannot be consolidated with the County, the City would legally have to conduct a concurrent election.
3. In the cases of a concurrent election, the City and County would be able to share some, but not all, polling places. In those shared locations voters would be required to sign in at two different tables and vote in two different polling booths – one for the County-administered statewide election and one for the municipal election.
4. In places where polling places could not be shared because of space consideration or for any other reason, voters would have to visit two different polling place locations on the same day to vote in both elections. Separate sample ballots would be mailed showing two different polling places.
5. It is questionable whether enough polling place workers could be recruited to run two separate but simultaneous elections – the one administered by the County and the one administered by the City.
6. The City now rents automated ballot booths and precinct ballot readers from the County. Those devices may not be available to the City if the County was running a separate election of its own.

**The City Clerk's Report** stated:

*“Conducting concurrent elections will likely lead to voter and poll worker confusion and higher costs. Concurrent elections would significantly increase costs and logistical challenges that may negatively impact voter turnout.”*

Long Beach City Clerk Larry Herrera told the Commission Long Beach conducts a Primary Election in April and then conducts the runoff concurrent with the statewide Primary Election in June. He described polling places at which voters had to sign in twice at different tables to vote in the two concurrent elections. He reported that participation in the municipal election runs up to 28% under these circumstances.

### **C. Cost of Campaigning, Fundraising Issues and Competition for Voters' Attention**

The turnout at a Presidential election is more than three times what it typically is at a Los Angeles municipal election. At a gubernatorial General Election turnout is more than double what it is in a typical municipal election.

That by itself would substantially increase the cost of campaigning for municipal office because candidates would have to communicate with more voters. In addition more competition for television and radio advertising would increase the costs of those forms of communication.

**Dean Logan** stated:

*Local candidates would be competing for attention with Presidential candidates, U.S. Senate candidates, legislative candidates and state ballot measures. The likelihood of prime time Mayoral debates on TV would decrease.*

**Heather Holt**<sup>17</sup> said:

*It will become more expensive to run for City office and that could impact the need for more matching funds as fundraising becomes more challenging, if elections are moved to November of the even numbered years.*

*There is uncertainty regarding the costs of campaigning and the competition for campaign funds, the cost of advertising time and space, campaign staff, etc.*

*If the challenges (of fundraising) were to become too great for candidates, spending by independent persons could increase to fill a perceived spending void. However, the challenges could also decrease independent spending because those spenders would also be competing for the same contributors, ad space and air space.*

*A change in the election schedule could make campaigns more expensive at the same time that raising dollars became more challenging. With more time between the primary election and the general election, the overall election cycle would be lengthened. This could mean that candidates would be required to engage in additional fundraising and spending in order to sustain their campaigns over a longer period of time.*

*If the election schedule were changed to coincide with state elections, fundraising could become more challenging because more candidates on more ballots would be competing for funding from the same pool of contributors. Candidates would also be competing for the same ad space, the same air space and the same campaign personnel. All of these factors could make it more difficult for City and LAUSD candidates to fund and run their campaigns.*

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<sup>17</sup> Heather Holt is the Executive Director of the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission.

**Jim Hayes** stated:

*Moving the Election Day doesn't increase interest. But the cost of campaigning (for municipal office) would become prohibitive.*

#### **D. Ballot Drop-Off and Other Factors**

Pursuant to State Election law, ballot order is pre-designated such that City offices/measures begin to appear on the 29th spot on the County's ballot, after Presidential, Federal, State and County offices and measures are listed.

**The City Clerk's report** listed the municipal election turnout (the percentage of voters who voted for City Council and other municipal offices) in several other cities where city elections were consolidated with Presidential or statewide elections, as reported by Common Cause for the following jurisdictions on the 2008 and 2012 Presidential election ballots:

	<b>2008</b> <b>Turnout</b> <b><u>Overall</u></b>	<b>2008</b> <b>turnout</b> <b><u>Drop-off</u></b>	<b>City Contest</b> <b><u>Turnout</u></b>
Alhambra	77.20%	27.20%	50.00%
Downey	87.50%	46.25%	41.25%
Pomona	76.30%	36.30%	40.00%
Santa Monica	86.25%	55.25%	31.00%

	<b>2012</b> <b>Turnout</b> <b><u>Overall</u></b>	<b>2012</b> <b>turnout</b> <b><u>Drop-off</u></b>	<b>City Contest</b> <b><u>Turnout</u></b>
Alhambra	67.36%	13.36%	54.00%
Downey	69.80%	11.80%	58.00%
Pomona	62.44%	13.44%	49.00%
Santa Monica	78.72%	29.72%	49.00%

**Dean Logan** advised:

*The length of the ballot (in a municipal election consolidated with the County in November of even numbered years) could create voter fatigue and add to drop off (people who stop voting as they go down the ballot). The length of time in line waiting to vote could discourage some voters and cause others to be more impatient once they get to the polling booth.*

**Jim Hayes** said:

*Most cities outside L.A. County vote in November of the even years. Because of the larger universe of voters in those elections the influence independent expenditures in candidate races and substantial expenditures in ballot measure campaigns is increased.*

## **E. Different Rules for Conducting Elections**

**Holly Wolcott** spoke to the Commission of the possible loss of independence and administrative control if the City turned the running of its elections over to the County. The City would also be completely dependent on the County's charges for the cost of the election and any future increases in cost. She also said the City has rules for conducting elections that differ from the County's rules.

The City Attorney explained poll workers in City elections must live in the City; the County has no such requirement. Among the other differences in the rules under which the City and County conduct elections are canvassing of the results, recounts, ballot language for propositions, and candidate filings. This would appear to similarly apply to a move to November of odd numbered years if the County were to run the election for the City.

### **III. ALTERNATE DATES FOR LOS ANGELES MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: JUNE AND NOVEMBER OF ODD NUMBERED YEARS**

No person and no report suggested a move of municipal elections to November of the odd numbered years would in and of itself result in a significant increase in turnout in City elections.

However, this was a proposed alternative discussed frequently during Commission meetings and with those interviewed.

#### **A. Is It Feasible?**

As with changing to elections in November of even years, the City would similarly need to schedule an election for the electorate to approve the required Charter changes, adopt implementing ordinances and make administrative preparations to move the elections to November of odd numbered years.

**Dean Logan** and **Holly Wolcott** each believe a move to November of odd years could be accomplished with virtually no significant challenges for the County's or City's voting systems and operations.

**Ms. Wolcott** noted the City's existing voting system could accommodate municipal runoff elections in November of odd years, with the primary sometime earlier. She also said if implemented in 2019, in order to align the terms of office, terms of officials elected during the transition period would need to be increased to a duration of 4 ½ years until alignment occurs, when four-year terms would resume. If implemented before 2019, in addition to officials elected during the transition period, the terms of officials already elected in 2013 must be extended to 4 ½ years. Any Charter amendment placed on the ballot to move the elections to November of an even numbered year would also require that voters give concurrent approval to extend or decrease the terms of affected elected municipal officials.

An election in November of the odd numbered year could be administered by either the Office of the City Clerk or the County Registrar of Voters. If the County were to run the November election, the Primary Election could be run by either the City Clerk or the Registrar of Voters.

#### **B. Uniform Adoption of Odd Year Elections by Local Governments Throughout L.A. County**

**Dean Logan** said he would like to try to get all local governments in the County, school districts, community college districts, etc., eventually to move their elections to November of the odd numbered year. Mr. Logan envisions cost savings to be realized for every jurisdiction involved. He believes a countywide day of local voting, with the County running all the elections, would make it easier for coalitions and community groups to effectively conduct outreach activities.



Since voters are accustomed to voting in November, Mr. Logan believes a move to countywide elections in November of odd numbered years could create a broader culture of voting in municipal elections that could possibly increase turnout countywide.

Most local governments in the County conduct their elections on a plurality basis – no runoffs, with the candidate getting the most votes in a single election being the winner. If all those local governments move to November of the odd numbered year, Los Angeles could hold its Primary Election some time earlier, with either the City or the County conducting the elections.

**Nate Persily** said he believes such a move might help voter turnout.

## IV. VOTER FILE ISSUES

### A. Questions About the Calculation of the Turnout Percentages

The Commission reviewed and discussed questions about the quality of information in the file of registered voters against which turnout in City of Los Angeles elections is measured.

First, to the extent the measure of the size of the pool of eligible voters by which turnout rates are calculated is inconsistent from election to election, challenges arise in gaining an accurate understanding of trends in participation. If the pool of eligible voters is increasing because of the retention of voters who may not in fact be eligible to vote because they no longer live at the address at which they are registered, or are deceased, then this may create an appearance that participation rates are declining more rapidly than is the actual case. If the public dialogue on trends in the City's turnout rate is not informed by accurate information, and the true turnout is not as low as that which is reported in the press, the public perception of serious declines in turnout may actually help perpetuate low turnout.

Second, if the City prepares and sends voting materials to persons who are not in fact eligible to vote by virtue of no longer living at the address at which they are registered, the City is expending resources which could otherwise be available for efforts to increase voter participation.

The Commission obtained information concerning active registered voters who have not participated in elections for various periods of time and those who are on "inactive" status on the voter file. The data that follows is on non-participating voters. National research by the **Brennan Center for Justice** suggests some undetermined percentage of non-participating voters may have moved away and may no longer be eligible to vote at the address at which they are registered. (The Brennan Center for Justice reported "recent movers" comprise some 43% of all non-voters in the one election they studied.) Similarly, it is not known what percentage of non-participating voters simply have chosen to not vote, a right to which they are legally entitled. The presentation of data on non-participating voters is not intended to advocate the removal of any voters from the registration rolls. Any removal needs to be done carefully and in strict compliance with applicable laws.

According to data obtained from Political Data, Inc.:

- 29.3% of the active voters registered in the City have not voted in any election since 2010. These voters have not voted in eight consecutive Primary and General/runoff elections, including the 2010 gubernatorial elections, the 2012 Presidential elections, and the 2011 and 2013 municipal elections.
- 21.7% of the active voters registered in the City have not voted in any election since 2008. These voters have not voted in 12 consecutive Primary and General/runoff elections, including the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections, the 2010 gubernatorial election, and the 2009, 2011, and 2013 municipal elections.

- 17.6% of the active voters registered in the City have not voted in any election since 2004. They have missed 20 consecutive Primary and General/runoff elections.

These non-voters do not include voters designated as “inactive” as described below.

The following chart shows the percentage of non-participating voters in each City Council district since 2004.

**B. Report Of Voter Registration And History Of Non-Participating Voters In The City Of Los Angeles**

Council District	Feb. 2014 Registration	% No vote since 2004	% No vote since 2006	% No vote since 2008	% No vote since 2010
1	83,103	21.5	24.3	25.2	34.1
2	122,947	16.8	19.3	20.1	29.0
3	128,585	15.8	18.4	19.0	27.3
4	155,063	12.5	14.9	15.5	23.8
5	159,432	12.0	14.8	15.4	24.0
6	90,673	21.0	23.8	24.6	33.6
7	109,983	17.8	20.7	21.7	30.9
8	124,700	24.4	26.8	27.5	35.6
9	78,935	31.7	34.3	35.0	43.7
10	115,154	19.6	22.1	22.8	31.2
11	160,739	10.1	12.3	12.8	20.3
12	152,855	13.4	15.9	16.6	24.6
13	106,674	19.2	21.9	22.5	31.1
14	108,574	19.9	22.7	23.6	32.6
15	111,091	22.6	25.3	26.0	34.1
Citywide	1,808,508	17.6	20.2	20.9	29.3

*(From data provided by Political Data Inc. Voter registration data obtained from the Los Angeles County Registrar of Voters.)*

Of the 1,808,508 registered active voters eligible to have voted in the municipal runoff election of May 2013, Political Data, Inc. lists 8.4% as verifiably deceased or having moved away from the address at which they are registered and thus are not eligible to vote at that address.

Since the County Registrar of Voters and Political Data Inc. use the same methods for identifying moved voters, the fact that the County continues to maintain large number of voters on the registration file that Political Data, Inc. shows as having moved away was a matter of interest.

However, Political Data, Inc. and the County do not access death information from the same sources, so those differences there may be more understandable.

**Dean Logan** said the County matches the voter file to the U.S. Postal Service National Change of Address database twice a year. Mr. Logan said the County receives death information second hand from the County health department. If someone dies outside the County, it is hit-and-miss whether the Registrar's office receives the information, he said. Political Data Inc. reports it draws its information about deaths from the Social Security Death Master File and the national death registry.

**Jim Hayes** said some of the differences in the files regarding deceased voters may result from the inability of the County to do an exact match, which is required before a voter can be removed from the voter registration files. The cause of this likely stems from the fact that until 1976 there was no place on the voter registration form for a voter to list his or her year of birth. When defining an exact match, the year of birth often is used as identification when two people have the same name. Without the year of birth, the County may not be able to know which "John Jones" has died and cannot remove the voter.

### **C. Inactive Voters Defined**

Under the law a voter may be placed on inactive status if:

1. his or her official election mail is returned as undeliverable; or
2. elections officials send mail to the voter for the purpose of verifying his or her residency and that mail is returned.

There currently are 576,060 registered voters in the City of Los Angeles who are on the inactive file.

**Dean Logan** said his Office places voters on inactive status when official election mail – sample ballots, permanent absentee ballots, etc. – is returned by the U.S. Postal Service as not deliverable. Voters are not moved to the inactive file for missing federal elections and no mail is sent for the specific purpose of identifying non-voters who may have moved away.

**Holly Wolcott** told the Commission the Office of the City Clerk does not mail election material to the 576,060 inactive voters on the registration file. Those names, however, appear on the books at polling places on Election Day. If an inactive voter shows up at a polling place he or she is permitted to vote and is removed from the "inactive" file.

Ms. Wolcott also told the Commission her Office does not include inactive voters in the calculation of voter turnout at municipal elections.

## V. EARLY VOTING, EASE OF VOTING

### **The City Clerk's Report** said:

*"Early voting at established polling places is not certain to increase turnout but would provide voters with a third option for voting in addition to vote-by-mail before Election Day and voting at the polls on Election Day. Increasing the early vote could also reduce the workload on poll workers on Election Day, allowing them more time to assist voters. Thus, once fully implemented, it should make voter participation more convenient, and it is recommended for implementation upon the completion of the County's new voting system."*

*"An early voting program (at multiple locations throughout the City) will also increase the number of as-needed election staff, poll workers, poll worker trainings, polling place supplies, and time spent in postelection processing, all increasing costs accordingly."*

*"It would be impractical to implement an early voting program (at multiple locations) without a new voting system in place."*

*"Prior research indicated that early voting is becoming a popular voting alternative among high propensity voters, but not necessarily attracting new voters."*

### **Nate Persily** said:

*Early voting doesn't seem to increase turnout. Some believe it may depress turnout.*

*Early voting beyond 10 days before the election seems to make no difference. There is a huge diminishing return to early voting the further out you get from Election Day.*

*Florida data shows churches can mobilize early voting.*

*Weekend early voting may change the composition of the electorate but not necessarily increase turnout.*

### **Dean Logan** said:

*There are many things to consider in increasing the number of early voting sites.*

*There's a difference between augmenting polling places and replacing polling places.*

### **David Kimball** said:

*Early voting doesn't improve turnout; it simply gives the same people who vote regularly a different time to cast their ballots.*

He suggests voting centers on Election Day or for early voting should be decentralized, where people could drop in at shopping centers, malls, etc.

## **A. Implementing an Early Voting System**

As Angelenos' lives become more complex, confining voting to a single 13-hour period on Election Day is simply not reflective of how most voters live. Allowing voters to cast their ballots in person before Election Day gives voters the convenience and flexibility that match the demands of modern life. Research shows that the key benefits of early in person voting are:

1. Greater access to voting and increased voter satisfaction;
2. Reduced stress on the voting system on Election Day;
3. Shorter lines on Election Day;
4. Improved poll worker performance; and
5. Early identification and correction of registration errors and voting system glitches.

Thus, a successful early voting system will provide a better voting experience both for early voters and for those voting at the polls on Election Day. In order for an early voting system to be truly effective, however, it must be available to voters in all communities and it must reach significant voting populations. Therefore, we recommend an early voting system that places early voting centers in centrally-located population centers within each Council District, such as shopping centers, malls, supermarkets and transportation hubs. In order to accomplish this, we encourage the City Clerk and the County to pursue public-private partnerships with property owners and businesses to identify and maintain early voting locations throughout the City. We could also foresee the City or County maintaining roving voting centers that could target particular shopping areas and recreation centers on weekends.

If the City of Los Angeles were to implement an early in-person voting program, the following practices will help maximize its effectiveness:

### **Setting an Early Vote schedule**

- Begin early in-person voting at least two-weeks prior to Election Day
- Include hours during the work week outside of regular business hours (e.g. evening hours)
- Provide weekend voting, including the Saturday and Sunday before Election Day

### **Selecting polling locations**

- Require that the number of early vote centers be proportional to the size and density of each Council district
- Select both private and public facilities
- Ensure that early vote centers are accessible to voters with disabilities
- As the popularity of early voting develops, provide adequate numbers of ballot stations to meet the anticipated turnout and avoid long lines at early vote centers
- Assure that early vote centers are placed in lower income and minority neighborhoods and neighborhoods in which private transportation is limited

### **Conducting voter education & outreach**

- Initiate effective notice procedures, such as public service announcements and mailings about availability of early voting.
- Work with surrounding businesses and communities to publicize and celebrate the presence of early voting centers.
- Frequently post and publish rosters of voters who have cast their ballots early, at least every 48 hours, to assist civic organizations and campaigns in carrying out Get Out the Vote campaigns.

### **B. Replace City's Precinct Model with Voting Centers**

Once the County's new voting system is fully implemented in conjunction with a statewide voter database, and if the City continues to administer its own elections, the City could consider asking voters to change the Charter to replace the City's current precinct-based election model altogether. If approved, voters would be able to visit any voting center placed across the City on Election Day, allowing them to vote close to their homes, close to their work locations, while picking up their groceries or dropping off or picking up their children from school – regardless of where they reside. Just as with early voting, Election Day voting at voting centers would necessitate that all ballot styles be available at all voting locations.

### **C. Easier Access To Vote-By-Mail ("VBM") Ballots**

As discussed in this report, the Commission received testimony from elections officials and other voting experts suggesting that exclusively vote-by-mail elections are not a practical option for elections in the City of Los Angeles. Nonetheless, according to the City Clerk, the number of VBM ballots cast in municipal elections has increased dramatically over the last three municipal election cycles, and turnout by VBM voters approaches that of regular voters. Thus, the impact of VBM voting on turnout cannot be ignored. However, this trend may not be sustainable over the long run, as younger people (and, therefore, future voters) seem to be moving away from using traditional mail as their primary form of communication.

The City Clerk presented statistics from the May 2013 City Mayoral election showing that 64% of voters who requested VBM ballots for that specific election returned their ballots. In addition, 35% of voters who received ballots as Permanent VBM voters within in the City of Los Angeles cast ballots that were counted in the May 2013 election. Therefore, for the present time, VBM voting should be encouraged, and efforts should be made to promote VBM ballots and make them as accessible as possible to voters seeking to cast their ballots through the VBM process.

#### ***1. Accepting VBM ballots postmarked by Election Day***

City election officials currently cannot accept VBM ballots that arrive after Election Day. Currently, VBM ballots must be received no later than the close of polls on Election Day. According to the City Clerk, 2,180 VBM ballots were not counted in the May 2013 City election

because they were received by the Clerk's office after Election Day. There may be other VBM voters who failed to return their ballots once they realized it was too late to mail the ballot back in time to be received by Election Day and who did not exercise the option of dropping off their voted VBM ballot at a polling place by 8:00p.m. on Election Day.

## ***2. Prepaid postage***

The Office of the City Clerk currently does not provide return (prepaid) postage on the VBM ballot envelopes that are sent to voters. If this was provided, this convenience may provide an additional incentive to VBM voters to timely return ballots to election officials.

## ***3. Clarify VBM instructions***

Third, election officials could work to clarify and simplify instructions provided with VBM voting materials to make the process as clear as possible to voters who may be unfamiliar with VBM voting. This would help clarify the deadline for returning VBM ballots, and also help reduce the number of invalid or incomplete ballots returned by voters. In the May 2013 election, 5,263 VBM ballots were not included in the final tally because they were returned too late, lacked a signature, had voter registration issues, or suffered from other irregularities.

## **D. Efficiencies in Vote Counting**

The City's elections administrators concur that the City's ballot counting equipment is decades obsolete. Pursuant to a Request for Proposals completed in 2008, the City Clerk reported that there were no vendors who satisfied all the election needs of the City and County. Thus, the City opted to piggyback onto the efforts of the County Registrar, who was developing, and continues to develop, a new, state of the art, comprehensive voting system which the City could then share.

Currently the City is responsible for transporting ballots on election night from the furthest reaches of the City, sorting and collating those ballots, and tabulating several hundred thousand paper ballots within the span of a few hours to yield results that are eagerly – sometimes impatiently – being clamored for by campaigns, the media, and the larger electorate. Concurrent with the time urgency, the City's election administrators must take all steps to maintain an accurate tally and conduct the tabulation in such a way that protects the integrity of the election.

Many of the issues that lead to inefficiencies in counting ballots can be resolved once the County implements a new voting system. Until then, however, the most efficient way to improve the vote counting system would be to buy more modern ballot-counting equipment, and hire and train additional staff to transport and process ballots, safeguard chain of custody, and examine ballots for accuracy. The costs associated with these temporary improvements may not warrant the outlay of City funds given that most of those changes will be superseded by the implementation of a new voting system developed by the County for elections in the future.



## **VI. OUTREACH, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

The question has been raised about how Los Angeles City can improve voter participation through increased and smart outreach efforts.

### **A. What Does the City of Los Angeles Currently do to Outreach to Voters?**

In order to make recommendations about what the City of LA can do differently or better, it is important to know and acknowledge two realities:

- 1) Across major American cities, voter participation is decreasing, though Los Angeles is certainly on the lower end of that voter participation range.<sup>18</sup>
- 2) The City of Los Angeles City Clerk's staff is very dedicated to reaching out to voters, but their task, to connect with almost 2 million registered voters, and potentially millions more eligible voters, is a daunting one.

What does the Office of the City Clerk do already? According to the City Clerk:

*"We provide election information to voters in an accessible and timely manner and offer a wide variety of outreach services that are designed to inform voters of the upcoming election, incorporate community voices in the election administration process, and increase the transparency of elections." To do this, they have two major programs: the Los Angeles Votes Committee and the "L.A. City Votes!" Voter Outreach and Education Campaign.*

The following are some of the specific activities:

- Partner with community organizations that help to disseminate election information to their communities of interest.
- Seek free advertisement including posters on bus stops, donated billboard space, and the occasional off-hour running of one of their public service announcements.
- Organize press events, public service announcements. (In 2013, the Office of the City Clerk organized 6 press conferences and distributed 72 press releases.)
- Use paid advertisements and social media sites to further promote the brand.
- During the election season, attend community events, fairs, and festivals throughout the City. (In 2013, the Office of the Clerk participated in over 180 events.)
- Conduct a limited number of voter education presentations at local community colleges, senior care facilities, and to local groups that request them.

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<sup>18</sup> The City Clerk's Alternative Voting Methods Report notes: "Los Angeles is not the only jurisdiction facing low turnouts. Studies indicate that the average voter turnout for mayoral elections in large cities across the nation is between 27% and 34%" citing Wood, Curtis. "Voter Turnout in City Elections." *Urban Affairs Review*. 38. 2002. Pp. 209-231 and Caren, Neal. "Big City, Big Turnout? Electoral Participation in American Cities." *Journal of Urban Affairs*. 1. 2007. Pp. 31-46. See also, LA Times, March 6, 2013, reporting that Los Angeles had a median turnout of 26%, compared to 48% in Chicago, 44% in Philadelphia and 41% in San Francisco. <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/06/local/la-me-turnout-20130307>.

- Maintain a City Clerk website with voter materials in multiple languages. Also, maintain Facebook, twitter, and the City Clerk’s YouTube channel
- Participate in events at which they are likely to reach voters that require language services and be able to recruit bilingual pollworkers.
- Spend \$36,563 for advertisements in small local newspapers seeking poll workers and providing voting reminders.
- Create City Clerk PSAs, including closed-captioning and translated messages on topics such as Quick Steps to Voting and Vote-By-Mail voting. They have also created very creative PSA’s on voting, including a Bollywood-style music video.
- Establish media partnerships with the major media outlets in English and other languages.

The City Clerk’s outreach budget for 2013 was \$484,250, 30% of which was dedicated to expenses such as advertising. Through its Alternative Voting Methods report, the City Clerk identified at least 10 recommendations that they were ready to embark on – all were related to improved outreach:

1. Target outreach events to areas of the City that experience the lowest turnout rates.
2. Implement a new inmate voting program.
3. Review all election materials and revise them with a focus on plain language and ease of use.
4. Partner with local voter advocacy groups to develop creative messaging to try to catch voters’ attention.
5. Expand the use of social media and partnerships with local businesses and other City departments.
6. Submit a budget package for consideration by the Mayor and Council to increase their presence in traditional media.
7. Increase focus on voter education and expand education curriculum to include a civics component.
8. Partner with the Department on Disability to perform a thorough review of election processes to support the mission of administering accessible elections.
9. Increase registration activities both during the election season and during off years.
10. Actively seek to implement same-day registration for City elections once it is permitted in California.

## **B. Voter registration – Can We Do Better Outreach?**

Eighty percent of California’s eligible population is registered to vote, which means 20% of people who are eligible are not registered. In the City of Los Angeles, only 1.8 million people were registered to vote in the 2013 general election. Through targeted programs aimed at increasing voter registration, Los Angeles has the opportunity to register hundreds of thousands of eligible voters before the 2015 municipal elections.

### *1. Could the City conduct voter registration drives?*

**Quick Answer: Yes. In non-election years, the City could assess and target staff efforts on registering voters from neighborhoods with a large number of potentially eligible voters but low voter registration rates. In election years and as the deadline for registration comes up, voter drives could expand to include the whole City so as not to suggest any unfair advantage by targeting one region or area over another.**

In the non-election years, when allocating limited resources, it makes sense to invest most heavily into communities with the greatest need. These resources can be allocated strategically building off successful practices in other jurisdictions. For example, at the beginning of each new election cycle Orange County produces a marketing plan that outlines a series of events to promote voter registration and participation. These events range from small scale community gatherings to larger programs at concerts and festivals. In Santa Clara, voter registration drives are typically targeted toward communities with large population of emerging minorities.

### *2. Could the City Outreach to High Schools?*

**Quick Answer: Yes. When you consider that the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has over 100 high schools, the large majority of which are in the City of Los Angeles, and some 43,000 are high school seniors about to turn 18 each year, there is a tremendous opportunity to engage young voters and develop a culture of civic participation.**

The City of Los Angeles can develop a collaboration with the LAUSD and high schools in the City based on work done in other parts of California. For instance, Orange County Registrar of Voters runs a MyBallot program<sup>19</sup> that is a unique combination of in-class lessons, field trips, and practical exercises on how to build a ballot. This program helps pre-register 16 and 17 year olds so that they are more likely to vote once they turn 18, recruits young people to become poll workers, and promote civic engagement generally. Upon completing the program, about 10% of participants register to vote.<sup>20</sup> LA City could look for additional opportunities to collaborate with LA County and LAUSD on high school outreach activities.

### *3. How can the City Create Effective Messages, Dispel Myths?*

**Quick Answer: The City can use plain language, address the myths that serve as barriers to voter registration and participation, and promote the dissemination of existing FAQs to help voters learn and understand basics of voting and participation.**

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ocvote.com/myballot>.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Neal Kelley, Orange County Registrar of Voters.

The City Clerk could make sure all of the voter materials and messages are communicated simply using plain language. Voters typically have a short attention span so short phrases and bullet points are preferable over lengthy paragraphs full of content.

Additionally, the City Clerk could educate voters about common myths and misinformation, incorporating the actual facts into their materials, their training of other messengers (other City departments and community partners), and to the media. These common myths and misinformation about voting continue to serve as barriers to registering and voting. Some of these myths have permeated the voting public and have been repeated so much that they are perceived as truth. We have listed some of the myths and the quick factual responses.

#### Jury Duty

Myth: I don't want to register to vote because I will be called for Jury Duty.

Fact: Jury Services use a variety of sources to identify potential jurors, including active and canceled voter files, as well as DMV licensed and registered drivers.

#### Language Support

Myth: I can't vote because I do not understand English.

Fact: A voter can request materials in up to 9 different languages in the City of Los Angeles, and at many poll sites there are bilingual pollworkers. Voters may also bring someone to assist them to vote at a poll site or request a ballot to vote at home.

#### Voting and the Criminal Justice System

Myth: An ex-felon cannot vote.

Fact: An ex-felon may register and vote if he/she is not currently in prison or on parole for a felony conviction. If one is in jail, but has not yet been convicted, serving time for a traffic or misdemeanor offense, or are serving time in jail as a condition of probation are eligible to vote.

**Source: LA County Register Recorder web site.**

Myth: I can't vote because I have a warrant or unpaid parking tickets - undercover cops will be waiting to arrest at the polls.

Fact: This is not true. This was a malicious rumor that began circulating circa 2008, primarily directed at the African American community, in hopes of suppressing the vote.

**Source: News One**

#### Voting Abroad

Myth: I can't vote because no longer have a U.S. address.

Fact: Regardless of how long one has lived outside the U.S., one always retains the right to vote in federal elections.

Myth: I cannot vote because I have not registered for the upcoming election.

Fact: Voters living abroad do not need to re-register for each election, but they do need to mail in a ballot request every Federal Election year.

*Source: Vote From Abroad.org*

It is important for the City Clerk to focus on some of the myths that are in common circulation to remove potential barriers for non-participation.

### **C. How Can the City Better Educate Voters or Get Voters Out to Vote?**

Research and analysis from years of voter mobilization experiments offer data driven models for increasing voter turnout. The Commission heard the testimony of several experts and practitioners, and also conducted independent research.

#### ***1. Can the City use media to reach voters?***

**Quick answer: Yes. The diverse levels of income, education and access suggest that the City to could continue using media partnerships with media outlets (TV, Radio, and Newspaper) to help boost turn out.**

Radio, television and newspaper are all capable of reaching a large number of voters at once and making information accessible to a broad and diverse community. Research shows that nonpartisan public service announcements can mildly boost voter turnout.<sup>21</sup> Nonpartisan public service radio announcement are an even less expensive way to increase turnout (\$10 per additional vote).<sup>22</sup> Half or full-page newspaper ads are the most cost competitive way to turnout voters (\$5 per additional vote).<sup>23</sup>

The James Irvine Foundation commissioned a survey of 3,500 California voters to learn how, in the current media landscape, voters are learning about government and politics, as well as the extent of their interest in these topics. The study, conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz and Associates (FM3), and its accompanying infographic provide useful insights into the consumption of public policy news by California voters, especially among our state's diverse communities of color. For instance, they found:

- 51% of Latinos
- 46% of Asians/Pacific Islanders
- 46% of African Americans

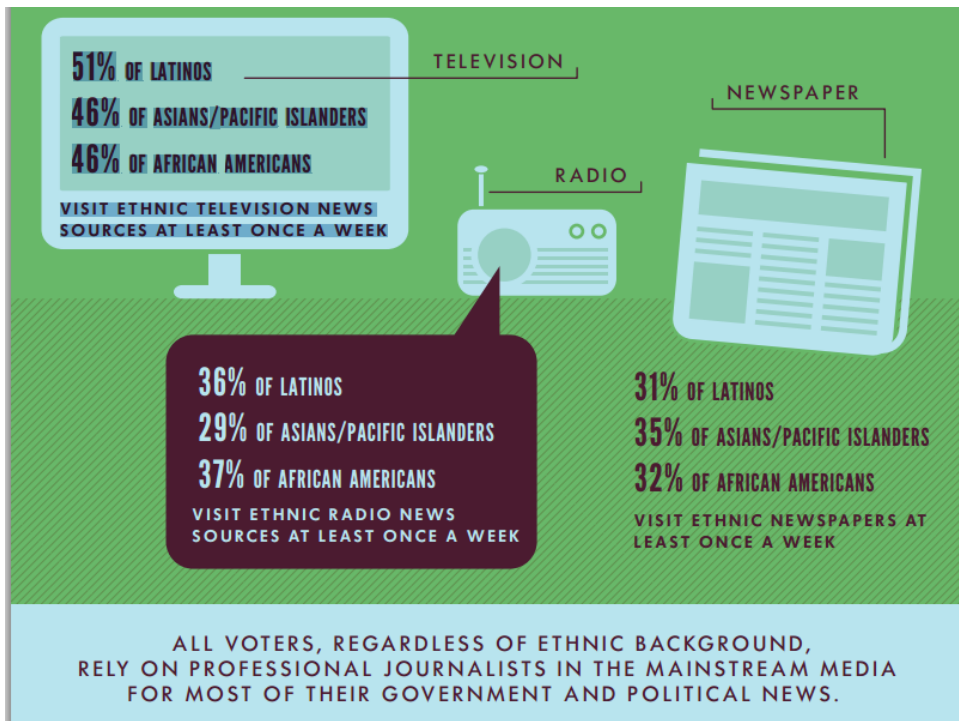
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<sup>21</sup> "Assessing the Turnout Effects of Rock the Vote's 2004 Television Commercials: a Randomized Field Experiment," Donald Green and Lynn Vavreck. Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association (April 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Green and Panagopoulos (2006).

<sup>23</sup> Panagopoulos (2006).

visit ethnic television news sources at least once a week. The numbers are also high for usage of ethnic radio and papers.<sup>24</sup>



In addition to the activity already performed by the City Clerk’s staff, the Commission would offer additional ideas for consideration in expanding Media Outreach to promote voter engagement:

- Seek out key media partner(s), particularly with ethnic media targeting the 9 languages in which the City translates and identify celebrity/influencer spokesperson for each language (similar to what is done for the Census).
- Expand video communications and use for more than PSAs. Think about video for process guides, marketing materials (“Did you know...”, testimonials from famous LA residents/voters, “Behind the scenes on election day”, “Day in the life of a poll workers,” etc.)
- Neighborhood Council communications tools can also support media/promotions for promoting engagement and participation.
- Work with ethnic media outlets.

A last thought to consider in terms of media partnerships and outreach is to think about conducting an assessment of outreach and promotions activities to evaluate if they are relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century methods of engagement considering the fast-paced change in communications, as well as the longer “shelf life” and accessibility of tools/information for an extended period of time.

<sup>24</sup> [http://irvine.org/images/stories/pdf/grantmaking/infographic\\_full.pdf](http://irvine.org/images/stories/pdf/grantmaking/infographic_full.pdf).

## 2. *Can the City use new technologies or social media to enhance its reach?*

**Quick Answer: Yes. Social networks and interpersonal influence can be powerful mobilizing forces. As the City moves forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it would be a mistake not to include technology and social media as a strong component of voter outreach and engagement efforts.**

According to a study published in Nature by **James Fowler et al.**<sup>25</sup> on the impact of a single Facebook social message, this message led directly to an additional 60,000 votes in 2010, with those users sharing friend-to-friend via the social network adding another 280,000, for a total of around 340,000 additional voters, or four for every one who was directly mobilized.

*“Voter turnout is incredibly important to the democratic process. Without voters, there’s no democracy. Our study suggests that social influence may be the best way to increase voter turnout. Just as important, we show that what happens online matters a lot for the ‘real world.’”*

*Social influence made all of the difference in political mobilization. It’s not the “I Voted” button, or the lapel sticker we’ve all seen, that gets out the vote. It’s the person attached to it.*

*If you only look at the people you target, you miss the whole story. Behaviors changed not only because people were directly affected, but also because their friends (and friends of friends) were affected.”*

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<sup>25</sup> Fowler, James, Robert M. Bond, Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, and Jaime E. Settle . (2012). “A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization.” Nature.

## Today is Election Day

What's this? • close



Find your polling place on the U.S. Politics Page and click the "I Voted" button to tell your friends you voted.

I Voted

01155376

People on Facebook Voted



Jaime Settle, Jason Jones, and 18 other friends have voted.

Media and technology are deeply intertwined. You simply cannot think of one without the other. The challenge is to look at what is the most effective and impactful use of your time and resources in order to reach the intended goals and objectives. Technology can be a tremendous resource to guide people through a process, but also to curate an experience for the voter/visitor that motivates him/her to participate in the voting process. The only caution the Commission raises is that technology is still limited in its reach and accessibility. While it may be cost effective, the Commission does not recommend that outreach via technology be a dominant segment of outreach efforts, rather a necessary component that will see an increase in importance over the years.

In addition to the activity already performed by the City Clerk's staff, the Commission would offer additional ideas for consideration in expanding technology to promote voter engagement:

- Review and ensure the website is reflective of the way individuals seek out information and is user-friendly. Consider mirroring relevant information on City Clerk and County Registrar sites; let visitors sign up for updates, new posts, etc.
- Seek out key partner(s) to support translation of website/text/app in to the 9 languages in which the City of LA translates; maybe partner with a trusted app or website that already accesses a community to share information.
- Social media is also a relatively new cost-effective tool to promote and share key dates and points of information, but also to create an experience. You can quickly encourage people to share what matters to them about voting in local elections, the changes they see come about as part of the municipal elections, or rally folks.
- Develop an app to support and promote various efforts around voting, elections deadlines, pollworker opportunities, location of poll sites, confirmation of voter registration, and other key communications for the voter experience. The City of Long Beach developed an app for the 2014 election cycle and a combination of technology efforts support their efforts to keep voters engaged in elections and year-round.
- Collaborate with partners to create or use apps that drive voter participation. For example, the Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE)



and many Neighborhood Councils use “NextDoor” to drive engaged voters to vote. The City of Long Beach has created an app that has an Election Day countdown clock and a quick way to see real time election results. The Irvine Foundation has launched the Voter Outreach & Technology (VOTE) Initiative, where nine organizations (many based in Los Angeles) are conducting field experiments across eight counties, using targeted data analysis and new mobilization strategies, enabled by technology, to encourage voters from traditionally underrepresented populations to vote – this initiative may produce best practices and technologies that are worth adopting.<sup>26</sup>

- Develop relevant LISTSERVS, both in the City and with related/like-minded entities (around civic participation, focused on geographic and target communities where voter engagement has been more challenging (proportional to the areas/populations groups where there has been low voter turnout)
- Consider activities like blogs, where voters can share a meaningful local voting experience – helping someone get to the poll, being a pollworker, etc. Media and audience interact in ways unknown before to engage and connect in a way advertising can’t always reach.
- Leverage use of high traffic City service websites (Library, LADWP, small business, DONE)

### ***3. Can the City coordinate better internally and with the County to serve voters?***

**Quick Answer: Yes. With as many 47,000 people working for the City of Los Angeles, City staff are an underutilized, yet highly valuable asset in promoting voter participation. In the workplace, messages from supervisors/trusted mentors as well as among peers are highly influential. Additionally, a simple sticker or button promoting Election Day worn by all staff that interface with the public (from librarians to park staff) can be a unique outreach opportunity.**

Former Secretary of State Bill Jones started a massive voter registration and education campaign, which included City, County and State employee outreach. The premise of the campaign was to encourage employees of these governmental entities to register and then vote. A meeting was held with representatives from local government, unions and other organizations that interacted with employees, which on a given day, an email would go out to all employees, encouraging employees to register to vote. They were to also encourage their friends and family to register. The next phase was to send a same-day email, reminding employees to vote on Election Day. This kind of inter-departmental coordination can be a relatively inexpensive way to reach out to the many communities that City staff already touch.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://irvine.org/grantmaking/our-programs/californiademocracy/1442>. The Irvine Foundation has launched Voter Outreach & Technology (VOTE) Initiative, a set of field experiments across eight counties, conducted by nine organizations. These organizations will use targeted data analysis and new mobilization strategies, enabled by technology, to encourage voters from traditionally underrepresented populations to make their voices heard.

**Steve Belhumeur**, of the African American Voter Registration Education Participation Project (AAVREP), recommended the City Clerk:

*Utilize existing City assets including bus stops and benches in Council Districts, City vehicles such as sanitation trucks, which already deliver advertising into neighborhoods, and notices in Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) Bills.*<sup>27</sup>

Los Angeles City could enhance its voter engagement efforts through:

- **City Employee Social Networking.** One low-cost method of spreading GOTV messages online would be to ask City employees to share the message with their networks. This message would then be shared by people who know each other to their broader networks, potentially reaching the majority of eligible voters.
- **Election Day reminders on trash trucks and other City service vehicles.** Information reminding people to register and vote can be placed on City and County vehicle signage. Many jurisdictions including Orange County Registrar partner with waste and recycling haulers to distribute small promotional items notifying residents about Election Day, the registration deadline, and opportunities to get more involved locally.
- **Election Day reminders in LADWP and other City service mailing.** Information reminding people to register and vote can be placed LADWP bills and other City service mail (or printed on the outer envelope as Election season gears up). In Santa Clara, the City partners with the local newspaper and utility company to include voter information inserts in newspapers and utility bills.<sup>28</sup>
- **Voter registration applications should be placed in all public counters** where employees interact with the public. After a transaction is complete, employees can remind the public that applications are available.
- **Integrated websites and widgets.** The City Clerk should provide a widget for other City sites to host that states the upcoming Election Day and links to the City Clerk's site. The City Clerk's website should be designed from the perspective of the voter with simple language and starting with basic information for the most commonly asked questions. There should be an effort to utilize plain language, which is accessible to the widest possible audience. A user-friendly website would cut down on calls to the City Clerk and County Registrar's Office. Some voters use the Registrar's website, while others use the City Clerk's website. Both entities should have links to needed information.
- **Don't ticket voters.** Many polling places have limited parking. The City and County should work together to relax parking ticketing on Election Day.

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<sup>27</sup> April 10, 2014 Testimony to Commission.

[http://ens.lacity.org/cla/mec\\_importdoc/clamec\\_importdoc334787141\\_04172014.pdf](http://ens.lacity.org/cla/mec_importdoc/clamec_importdoc334787141_04172014.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Rod Diridon, Jr., Santa Clara City Clerk/City Auditor.

#### ***4. Can the City engage in direct voter canvassing or calling?***

**Quick Answer: Canvassing and personal calls have been shown to raise voter turnout by several percentage points; however, these methods can be time and resource-intensive to reach all 2 million City voters.**

Studies consistently show that more personalized messages are more effective in mobilizing voters.<sup>29</sup> Further, in the testimony received from several organizations that are dedicated to reaching and mobilizing infrequent and minority voters to vote, including Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles, African American Voter Registration and Education Project (“AAVREP”), National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (“NALEO”) Educational Fund, and Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education Los Angeles (“SCOPE”), all agreed that having individuals knock on voters’ doors or call them to remind them to vote was the most effective way of increasing turnout by a few points.

In fact, in 2006, the Irvine Foundation<sup>30</sup> supported in-field voter outreach and measured the relative success of various methods of voter contact in increasing participation and found that having actual live volunteers calling voters twice could produce double-digit increases in voter turnout.

A NALEO Educational Fund review of voter engagement academic research study found: “door canvassing has demonstrated to be the most effective method of outreach for voter turnout.” Some of the studies reviewed found turnout effect more than doubled for households with two or more voters and the effect of door knocking more than doubled for Latino infrequent voters.<sup>31</sup>

In collaboration with several scholars, NALEO Educational Fund and other community-based organizations participated in several studies of live telephoning and reports “several treatment-controlled experiments demonstrate a bilingual, live call has positive impact and greater voter turnout.” The NALEO Educational Fund also reports, “A California-based experiment on Asian-Americans demonstrated that: one call has an increase turnout by approximately four percentage points. Additionally, a follow-up can increase turnout by approximately 13 percentage points.”<sup>32</sup>

**David Kimball** said:

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<sup>29</sup> *Get Out the Vote!: A Guide for Candidates and Campaigns* (2004).

<sup>30</sup> <http://irvine.org/images/stories/pdf/grantmaking/cavotesreportfinal.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Mattland, Richard E., and Gregg R. Murray. (2012). “An Experimental Test of Mobilization Effects in a Latino Community.” *Political Research Quarterly*. Vol. 65, No. 1, pp 192-205 <http://prq.sagepub.com/content/65/1/192>.

<sup>32</sup> Ramírez, Ricardo, Alan Gerber, and Donald Green. (2004). “Evaluation of NALEO’s 2002 “Voces del Pueblo” Voter Mobilization Campaign”. NALEO Educational Fund.

*Research (using groups not involved in campaigns) shows greater mobilization – knocking on doors, phoning – increases turnout.*

Nonetheless, although door-to-door canvassing and live calls just before Election Day would be the most consistently effective and efficient method of voter mobilization, this is likely not a feasible activity for the City to engage in because of the sheer number they would have to reach (at least 2 million registered voters) in a timely and cost-effective way. Additionally, the City cannot engage in a targeted Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaign so close to an election, because there would be significant concerns about fairness and not wanting to impact the outcome of any race.

One lesson learned is that City of Los Angeles should consider developing voter outreach programs that come with a personalized message or use trusted messengers to make contact with potential voters. Personalized messages have proven to be effective when delivered in a conversational manner over the phone<sup>33</sup> or through online social networks.<sup>34</sup>

### ***5. Can the City use mass direct communications (texts, Robo-calls, mail) to reach voters?***

**Quick Answer: The City may want to consider additional means of mass direct communication – such as text messages – which have been shown to result in a mild boost of voter turnout when developed with a trusted or familiar source to the intended recipient.**

There is a conventional wisdom among professional political consultants that the more contacts there are with a household during a campaign the more likely it is the voters in that household will participate in the election. This includes a total package of contacts by mail, precinct walking, telephones, and in some cases paid advertising.

Text message and postcard mailer campaigns have been reported to have a mild positive impact on voter participation. Successful campaigns include an active exchanges of information (i.e. text your zip code to find out the polling locations near you), or include a familiar or trusted spokesperson to deliver the message (i.e. celebrity, community leader).

Robo-call programs are systems that allow a person to record a message that is then loaded to an automated system that calls voters and plays the recorded messages for voters. When they originally appeared on the scene some 30 years ago, the messages were left only on answering machines and never played for live voters. For a variety of reasons this has changed and it is common now for the recorded message to be played for voicemails, answering machines and live voters who answer the phone.

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<sup>33</sup> Nickerson (2006); Arceneaux (2006); Arceneaux and Nickers(2006).

<sup>34</sup> James Fowler, UC San Diego professor of political science.  
[http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/facebook\\_fuels\\_the\\_friend\\_vote](http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/facebook_fuels_the_friend_vote)

The NALEO Educational Fund research review found studies indicating Robo-calls to be “an ineffective method for turnout, with less than one-tenth of a percentage point impact.”<sup>35</sup>

The Los Angeles City Clerk currently sends mail to voters before elections in the form of sample ballots, permanent absentee ballots, and ballot books when there are measures on the ballot. In other jurisdictions, such as Dallas County, Texas where election officials do not send sample ballots and other similar material to voters, the turnout is substantially lower than that which is experienced in Los Angeles.

A NALEO Educational Fund experiment conducted in California, Colorado and New Mexico in 2002 found mailers by themselves proved “to be an unreliable tactic” in increasing turnout.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ramírez, Ricardo. (2005) “Giving Voice to Latino Voters: A Field Experiment on the Effectiveness of a National Nonpartisan Mobilization Effort.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 601, The Science of Voter Mobilization. pp 66-84, <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/25046125?uid=3739560&uid=2&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21103823695061>.

<sup>36</sup> Ramírez, Ricardo, Alan Gerber, and Donald Green. (2004) “Evaluation of NALEO’s 2002 “Voces del Pueblo” Voter Mobilization Campaign”. NALEO Educational Fund.

## **VII. LOCATION OF AND ACCESS TO POLLING PLACES**

Voting represents most people's only direct connection to our political process. Yet, for many, accessing their polling place still remains a challenge. In a technologically advanced society where individuals can conduct their banking at ATM machines in office lobbies and even on their smartphones, it seems inconceivable that voters still cite obstacles such as difficult to find or inconvenient polling places.

A nationwide survey of registered non-voters conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau following the November 2012 election showed that the number one reason given by respondents for not voting was "Too busy, conflicting schedule" (19%). Another 3% of non-voters cited "inconvenient polling place," while an additional 3% cited "transportation problems". If we make access to voting locations more convenient, we may be able to capture some of these voters.

### ***1. Location of Polling Places***

While excitement about certain candidates and interest in a particular measure remain the most significant motivations for voter turnout, we believe that government continues to have an obligation to make voting as easy as possible and remove any potential or real impediments to voting for those who want to participate. Thus, we believe that voters will be more inclined to participate if polling places are not only conveniently located and easily accessible, but placed in locations more meaningful to voters in our modern era. This could make voting more pleasant, which in turn would make people feel better about their democracy and, ultimately, more inclined to participate in elections on a consistent basis.

There are over one thousand polling places located throughout the City of Los Angeles each Election Day. Many of these polling places are located in private residences, churches, schools, libraries and other public buildings.

The current criteria for selection and operation of polling places on Election Day is shaped by certain restraints: adherence to the City's Election Code; mandates from the Secretary of State and State election laws; court precedent; compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and Federal laws, and best practices (access to restrooms, proximity to major transportation arteries, adequate parking, protection from the elements, etc). The selection of polling places is also dependent on a location's willingness to participate and whether the site can be secured at little or no cost to the City.

While we appreciate the challenges faced by elections officials in identifying adequate polling places, the types of polling places historically relied upon by the City Clerk and the County Registrar may be outdated or irrelevant.

## ***2. Non-traditional poll venues***

As a first step toward making polling places more relevant, the City Clerk can expand polling locations to non-traditional venues such as shopping centers, malls and supermarkets which fulfill the previously referenced legal mandates but which would provide more enticement and choice for voters. These types of locations tend to be centrally located, close to transportation hubs, and generally provide easy parking for voters.

The benefits of these non-traditional polling locations may not be fully realized until after the County of Los Angeles launches its new voting system and the State implements a statewide voter database that would be accessible at each polling location. Until then, the City Clerk can implement a pilot program and, where appropriate, begin a transition to non-traditional voting locations.

In order to accomplish this, the City and the County can engage in public-private partnerships with property owners and businesses to identify and maintain polling places, work out logistics, liability and respective responsibilities, and provide for the safety of voters, resulting in an improved overall voting experience.

With respect to private homes as polling places, these residences are often hard to locate, may be subject to parking restrictions, and may not be equipped to handle the advanced technology and communications requisites of modern voting systems. The City can consider minimizing the use of private homes as polling places.

## ***3. Consistency of polling location***

As a further step toward making voting more convenient and accessible, the City and County can continue to utilize, to the greatest extent possible, the same facilities contained within their mutual boundaries for both County and City elections so that more voters use the same polling place from election to election, be it a City or County election. Consistency should eliminate some of the confusion that no doubt keeps some voters away from the polls each election.

## VIII. RANKED CHOICE OR INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING

**David Kimball** said he likes the instant runoff election but doesn't claim it increases turnout.

**The City Clerk's Report** said:

Ranked choice voting poses significant hurdles in terms of voter education and is inconclusive in terms of impact on turnout. *"Therefore, it is not recommended for implementation at this time."*

Regarding turnout reports from San Francisco and Alameda Counties, where ranked choice has been used: *"Considering numerous factors, such as the effect of the high-profile Presidential election and a pre-existing tendency (of those two counties) to vote at higher rates than other jurisdiction, it is difficult to conclude that this increase in turnout was due solely to ranked choice voting."*

*"The current primary/runoff election process may be valuable to voters in identifying and differentiating between candidates and their platforms."*

**Dean Logan** said he doesn't think ranked choice makes a difference in turnout.

**Lorraine C. Minnite** wrote:

Based on a study of a 2009 election in Minneapolis, *"Turnout does not appear to be affected by ranked choice voting and there were an unusually high number of spoiled ballots – 4% in 2009 election as compared to 1% in 2005 election conducted without ranked choice voting."*

**The League of Voter of Los Angeles** wrote:

*"The adoption of Ranked Choice Voting by the City of Los Angeles would eliminate the need for a separate runoff election as it permits offices to be filled by a single-round, majority vote method. The consolidation of two elections into one would save money on election administration by the City, thereby freeing up funds that could be directed towards voter outreach to encourage greater participation."*



## **IX. WEEKEND VOTING**

Regarding the option of moving the City Election Day to a weekend from the current Tuesday Election Day, a weekend election could be on both Saturday and Sunday (two days) or Saturday or Sunday (one day). The notion of holding elections on a weekend presents potential issues in a city as religiously and culturally diverse as Los Angeles.

In California, the standard election date is on a Tuesday. The tradition of Tuesday voting in the United States goes back to an act of Congress in 1845, when the country was an agrarian society. Tuesday apparently was the day landowners were routinely in the towns and was a court holiday.

Municipalities in Delaware, Louisiana and Texas currently have weekend voting with the election on a Saturday. In 2012 Republicans had Primary Elections for President on a Saturday in South Carolina and Louisiana. Both states had record turnouts for the Saturday elections.

More than 20 countries have their federal elections on a Sunday, some on a Saturday, and some on both days.

The persons who discussed weekend voting generally were of the view that there could be a small increase in voter turnout by moving the elections to a weekend.

**Holly Wolcott** said:

*The City could physically do Saturday and/or Sunday voting right now. Schools might be more available as polling places on a weekend as compared to a Tuesday. The decision now is left to individual principals and many don't want outsiders having access to the campus for safety and security reasons. Schools work better when voters have direct access to the polling place from the sidewalk or parking lot without having to wander through the campus. A directive from the central administration could be sought.*

*Poll workers would be needed for two days instead of one if the election was held on both weekend days. It might be difficult to recruit poll workers for two days. An option would be to change poll workers from one day to the next, but that is not the best situation. The cost of poll workers would double.*

**Jim Hayes** said:

*It's easy to vote now. Moving the day won't increase interest and that's the key to greater voter participation. The question is how to engage a person who isn't interested.*

*It's possible if all elections went to Saturday it might help. But that would just change the voting day. I don't think it would matter. It may add some new voters but also might lose Tuesday voters. There's no way to know.*

*There is the issue of observant Jews being precluded from voting in a Saturday-only election.*

**David Kimball** said:

*Other countries use weekend voting more. It might provide some bump in turnout.*

**Nate Persily** said:

*A change to weekend voting might have some small effect. It's questionable how many who don't vote Tuesday because of work would vote Saturday.*

*A move to Saturday may present some difficulties – polling places, poll workers, people doing errands or recreation, observant Jews.*

**Dean Logan** said:

*Weekend polling place hours would cause budget increases for poll workers and possibly for polling places. It could cause confusion at first if Los Angeles does it and no one else does. Recruitment of poll workers for two days could be a problem. Polling places at churches may not be available on Sundays. There could be an extra cost for custodial and other staff at schools on weekends.*

**Toni Pippins-Poole**, who administers elections in Dallas County, Texas, said Dallas municipal non-partisan elections are conducted on a Saturday, with early voting opportunities. Partisan elections are held separately and are on Tuesdays. She commented that voters prefer voting on Saturdays. While she had no empirical data to share, she stated her observation was that more people are available to vote on a Saturday instead of a Tuesday, that voting on a Saturday is more consistent throughout the day than it is on Tuesday, when there is a rush of people voting before and after work. Ms. Pippins-Poole commented she believes more voters in predominantly minority areas of Dallas County voted on Saturdays compared to voting on Tuesday. Dallas County turnout on Saturdays usually is between 5% and 11%, depending on what is on the ballot.

She noted that Dallas County does not send any information, notices, sample ballots or other materials to voters ahead of an election unless a polling place has been moved from a previous election. In addition some municipalities have just one polling place. There are 29 jurisdictions in the County with upcoming Saturday elections and there are a total of 39 early voting locations in the whole County. More people are voting early but it hasn't increased participation.

## **X. TIME BETWEEN PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTIONS**

Several people discussed the matter of real and potential problems created by the short time between the March Primary Election and the May runoff.

1. There are 10 weeks between the Primary and the runoff;
2. The City Clerk has three weeks to process and count all the ballots, conduct audits where required and certify the results;
3. In the 2013 municipal Primary Election there were three City Council races in which the election night results left open the question of whether or not there would need to be a runoff;
4. This effectively shortened the campaign time from ten to seven weeks if there was a need for a runoff election;
5. In a seven-week campaign an incumbent office holder would be expected to have an easier time raising funds than a challenger;
6. If the result was close enough to require a recount, the time available for campaigning would be even shorter;
7. If the recount were for a citywide race, the procedure could be lengthy;
8. If the identity of the first place finisher was clear, but the recount was for second place, the first place finisher could begin raising funds and campaigning while the other two were waiting to see which one was going to be in the runoff;
9. If delay involved the mayor's race, the negative publicity would further erode public confidence in the elections.

**Jim Hayes** said:

*When the City went from an April-June election cycle to March-May, I saw a difference in how campaigns and consultants dealt with the electoral process. The campaign started to flow right out of the elections of the previous November, and voter contact operations – precinct walking, mail, etc. – began right after January 1. Though not enough data exist to draw firm conclusions, I sensed a drop in interest and a drop in turnout following that move.*

## **XI. ALL VOTE-BY-MAIL ELECTIONS**

**Dean Logan** said:

*Vote-by-mail is maximized to the extent it can be. A move to exclusive vote-by-mail elections is not sustainable.*

**David Kimball** said:

*All vote-by-mail elections raise the issues of postal reliability and chain of custody of ballot (did the ballot get to the intended voter). Mistakes in vote-by-mail ballots may not be caught as dependably as they are onsite voting.*

**Gregory Huber** wrote:

*“Current estimates of the effect of all-mail elections on turnout are ambiguous.”*

**The City Clerk’s Report** said:

*“Over the last 10 years the number of vote-by-mail ballots mailed has increased by nearly 400% in Los Angeles Municipal Elections. The vote-by-mail return rate has decreased.*

*“Voters who request ballots for a specific election return their ballots at a much higher rate than permanent absentee voters.*

*“Mandatory imposition of vote-by-mail may negatively impact voter turnout, particularly among minority and urban voters, according to a study published in Election Law Journal in 2011.”*

**Paul Gronke** said:

*The reform I think would result in a substantial increase in turnout but for which we do not have systematic research is a fully vote-by-mail system.*

**Gregory Huber** wrote:

*“We estimate all mail elections affect about 2 to 4 points, with some evidence that it attracts less regular voters.”*

The City of Los Angeles reports statistics for the entire jurisdiction for which it runs elections, including the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Community College District and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The **Office of the City Clerk** reports:

*“Vote-by-mail ballots mailed (for municipal elections) increased from 279,775 in the 2009 Primary Election to 746,491 in the 2013 General Election, which was up from 675,623 from 2013 Primary.”*

For the larger jurisdiction including the City and areas outside of the City, the City Clerk reports 4% of the absentee ballots mailed for the May 2013 election were returned as

undeliverable. 27% of those who received absentee ballots as permanent absentee voters returned their ballots to the City Clerk by the deadline. 64% of those who requested absentee ballots for the specific May 2013 election (those who are not permanent absentee voters) returned their ballots to the City Clerk by the deadline.

2,180 absentee ballots were not counted for the May 2013 election because they were received by the City Clerk after the deadline, which is the close of polling on Election Day as dictated by the Secretary of State's guidelines.

5,263 ballots were returned by the deadline but not counted for reasons including: not signed by the voter, incorrect voter address, mismatched signatures, more than one ballot in the same envelope.

260 of those uncounted ballots were ruled to have signatures that did not match that on file for the voter. No attempt was made to contact these voters to learn if there was a valid reason why the signature did not match, or whether fraud may have been committed.

When considering only voters in the City of Los Angeles, 509,619 people received absentee ballots for the 2013 General election, either as permanent absentee voters or because they requested an absentee ballot for that election, and did not vote. Turnout among these absentees was 35% compared with 23% overall.

In its March 2014 Issue Brief, the University of California, Davis' California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) found many disparities in vote-by-mail use in the 2002 through 2012 General Elections by different sub-groups of California voters. While the CCEP found an overall steady increase in the use of vote-by-mail in the state, the CCEP's research also revealed the following disparities:

- Older voters tend to use vote-by-mail more frequently than youth voters. For example in 2012, 64% of voters age 64 and older cast vote-by-mail ballots compared to 39% of voters age 18-23. In general the higher vote-by-mail ballot usage of older voters combined with their higher turnout rates, has driven the overall increase in the use of vote-by-mail in California.
- While the use of vote-by-mail by Latinos has increased over the last decade, Latinos still tend to use vote-by-mail less frequently than Asian Americans and the state's electorate as a whole. For example in 2012 nearly 37% of Latinos used vote-by-mail to cast ballots, compared to 49% of the state's total population and 58% of Asian Americans.

### **A. City of Los Angeles Permanent Absentee Voting**

The data below show an estimated 35% of the currently registered permanent absentee voters in the City of Los Angeles cast ballots that were counted for the May 2013 runoff election. Some notable facts within the data:

1. Every group of permanent absentee voters counted in the chart below, except for voters under 35 years of age, voted in percentages greater than the overall turnout.
2. The single biggest block of registered voters by age group are those under 35 years of age. They comprise 30.2% of the latest registration file. They also comprise 29.1% of the total registered permanent absentee voters. Yet, they made up just 12.5% of the permanent absentee ballots counted for the May 2013 election.
3. The highest turnout of permanent absentee voters based on ballots counted of any group in the May 2013 election was voters 65 years or older. They comprise 20.3% of total registration and 26.7% of the registered permanent absentee voters. 61.5% of this group cast ballots that were counted in the May 2013 election.
4. Spanish surnamed voters comprise 29.6% of the total registrations and 24.4% of the registered permanent absentee voters. 26.4% of this group cast ballots that were counted in the May 2013 election. While this percentage is higher than the overall percentage of turnout, it is the lowest among the ethnic groups counted in this sample.
5. African-Americans, Chinese, Japanese, other Asians, Jewish and foreign born registered permanent absentee voters all voted in percentages notably higher than the overall turnout.

**B. Analysis of Permanent Absentee Voter Turnout In City Of Los Angeles Election of May 2013**

*(Data provided by Political Data, Inc.)*

	A	B	C	D	E
TOTAL	1,801,282		513,439	100%	35.40%
Democrat	998,934	55.50%	287,975	56.10%	38.00%
Republican	276,488	15.30%	86,254	16.80%	43.80%
Decline to State/No Party Preference	435,650	24.20%	114,894	22.40%	23.80%
Other	90,210	5.00%	24,316	4.70%	26.50%
Male	810,404	45.00%	214,532	41.80%	35.90%
Female	920,817	51.10%	279,045	54.30%	36.20%
65+	365,45	20.30%	136,967	26.70%	61.50%
55-64	281,202	15.60%	78,485	15.30%	47.00%
45-54	301,766	16.80%	73,210	14.30%	33.80%
35-44	308,743	17.10%	75,417	14.70%	22.90%
<35	544,206	30.20%	149,373	29.10%	12.50%
African Am	171,712	9.50%	40,901	8.00%	41.10%
Armenian	34,513	2.00%	13,535	2.60%	31.30%
Chinese	21,332	1.20%	6,701	1.30%	32.30%
Japanese	14,847	0.80%	5,993	1.20%	51.30%
Other Asian	114,891	6.40%	40,452	7.90%	36.30%
Jewish	83,165	4.60%	28,506	5.50%	50.30%
Latino	533,103	29.60%	125,067	24.40%	26.40%
Foreign Born	487,348	27.10%	139,872	27.20%	34.60%

A = Total Registration as of May 25, 2014

B = Percent of total registration

C = Permanent Absentee Voter registration as of May 25, 2014

D = Percent of total Permanent Absentee Voter registration as of May 25, 2014

E = Percent of Permanent Absentee Voters whose ballots were counted for the May 2013 election

NOTE: There is a difference between the data shown here and what was reported earlier by the Office of the City Clerk at 27% participation by permanent absentee voters in the May 2013 election. The percentage reported by the City Clerk is for the total election, including areas in the Los Angeles Unified School District and Los Angeles Community College District. The percentage above is for the City of Los Angeles only.

NOTE: Identification of ethnic voters is based on surname dictionaries. Though accepted in common political practice, these dictionaries are not 100% accurate.

### **C. Burbank All-Mail Voting 2013**

The City of Burbank has conducted its last two municipal elections using an all-mail ballot system in which a vote-by-mail ballot was mailed to every registered voter.

Burbank Total Voter Registration (5/25/14)	60,370	
May 2013 Ballots Cast	4,684	7.8%
(Burbank Permanent Absentee Registration	18,038)	



## **XII. ATTACHMENT A**

### **STATEMENT REGARDING RECOMMENDATION TO MOVE LOS ANGELES CITY ELECTIONS TO JUNE/NOVEMBER OF EVEN NUMBERED YEARS**

Submitted by:  
Commissioner Rosalind Gold

June 5, 2014

The Commission reviewed several research reports, discussions with researchers, community organizations, election officials and other stakeholders (including their formal testimony to the Commission), and the input of community members at community meetings. Based on the foregoing, it is clear that there are several reasonable concerns regarding moving the City of Los Angeles' elections to June/November of even-numbered years. These concerns include the "drop-off" of voters who vote only for federal or state offices, and fail to vote for City elected offices; and the possibility that public debate and dialogue about municipal candidates and issues would have to compete for the public's attention with the comparable dialogues about federal and state matters.

However, based on the research, discussion and testimony reviewed by the Commission, I believe that if properly implemented, moving the City's elections to even-numbered years has the greater potential for increasing voter turnout and engagement in municipal elections than the other election date changes considered by the Commission. It should be emphasized that changing the City's election dates is not a panacea for its challenges with low voter turnout, and merely changing those dates without implementation of the other recommendations of the Commission could prove to be ineffective.

A change in election dates must be accompanied by significant enhancements in voter outreach and education, particularly with respect to the City's diverse and under-represented population groups; and changes in the accessibility of polling locations and early voting to provide citizens with a wider variety of options to vote at a place and a time that is convenient for them. These recommendations would both help ameliorate the concerns raised by those who do not favor a change to even-year municipal elections, and help ensure that the change results in a significant increase in participation and engagement. Should the Mayor and City Council move forward to provide the public with the opportunity to amend the City Charter to change municipal election dates to June and November of even-years, it is critical that this action be accompanied by vigorous efforts to work with Los Angeles County, other public officials, and election stakeholders to implement the Commission's other relevant recommendations.

## **XIII. ATTACHMENT B**

### **IN OPPOSITION TO THE RECOMMENDATION TO MOVE LOS ANGELES CITY ELECTIONS TO JUNE/NOVEMBER OF EVEN NUMBERED YEARS**

Submitted by:  
Commissioner Larry Levine  
Commissioner June Lagmay  
Commissioner Jeffery Daar

June 5, 2014

The purpose of this Minority Report is to present issues the Mayor and City Council should consider in reviewing the Municipal Election Reform Commission's Recommendation that the City of Los Angeles move its municipal elections to June/November of even numbered years. This Minority Report presents significant factors to be considered when reviewing this recommendation. We respectfully urge the Mayor and City Council not to change City of Los Angeles elections to November of even numbered years.

#### **ISSUE NUMBER 1: A move to a June/November of even numbered years could result in a decrease in participation in municipal elections.**

We can quote selectively from books and cite data selectively from abstract studies and academic theory. But there is one unarguable fact: had the City of Los Angeles municipal election been consolidated with the June 3, 2014, statewide Primary Election, turnout and participation in the municipal election would have been far lower than it was for the 2013 Mayoral Primary or runoff elections.

In addition to the example of the June 3, 2014, statewide Primary Election, there is another recent warning flag that argues against consolidation with statewide elections.

The City's runoff election in May 2009 was consolidated with a statewide special election. The ballot contained six highly controversial initiative measures that were placed on the ballot and financed by then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Tens of millions of dollars were spent for and against those measures in a highly visible campaign. Turnout in the city of Los Angeles was 19.11 %.

That same ballot contained a vigorously contested runoff for Los Angeles city attorney, runoffs for two seats on the Los Angeles Community College District Board of Trustees citywide, special elections for one congressional seat and one state senate seat, and a runoff in council district five.

Drop-off from the total turnout to participation in the first municipal item on the ballot – the City Attorney race – was 10.7%. Drop-off to the community college races was 23.6%.

In the June 3, 2014 statewide Primary, Election turnout in Los Angeles County was 13.19%. Had the Los Angeles City municipal election been consolidated with the statewide primary as is called for in this recommendation, and if the same drop-off factor of 10.6% applied, participation in the municipal election would have been 11.79% - about half of what it was in the May 2013 Mayoral runoff election and about 42% lower than it was in the March 2013 Mayoral Primary Election. Even allowing for an increase in the percentage of participation in the June 3, 2014, statewide Primary Election after late absentee and provisional ballots are counted, the turnout will be far below what it was for the 2013 municipal election.

An additional factor to consider is that there were only six items on the ballot ahead of the municipal election in most of the city in the May 2009 special consolidated election and there would have been 32 items on the ballot ahead of the municipal offices in the June 3, 2014, election had the City election been consolidated with the statewide primary. The length of the ballot and the possibility of voter fatigue could well have created an even greater drop-off.

**ISSUE NUMBER 2: A move to November of the even numbered years has the demonstrable potential to disadvantage the under-represented community.**

Turnout in statewide elections is driven mostly by partisan races. In the June 3, 2014, statewide Primary Election, the heaviest campaign activity in the City and County was on the west side and west San Fernando Valley – Congressional District 33, Assembly District 26, and County Supervisorial District 3. These three districts overlap each other to a significant extent. The turnout in Congressional District 33 and Assembly District 26 significantly exceeded the countywide turnout and the turnout in Supervisorial District 3 surpassed the turnout in Supervisorial District 1 by some 34.5%.

Had there been a mayoral election consolidated with the June 3, 2014, statewide Primary Election, the turnout would have tipped heavily toward the west side communities in these three districts and overwhelmed the far lower turnout in many of the under-represented communities of the City.

**ISSUE NUMBER 3: The cost of campaigning for city, school district and community college offices would increase sharply.**

There are several factors that will drive up the cost of running for local office if the elections are moved to November of the even numbered years.

**MORE VOTERS WITH WHOM TO COMMUNICATE** – A larger universe of potential voters will mean campaigns will need to communicate with more voters to reach the smaller number who might vote in the municipal election. That would necessitate production of larger quantities

of voter mail and handout material, and higher costs for phone banking and precinct walking programs as well as virtually all other direct voter contact activities.

#### INCREASED COSTS FOR SOME IMPORTANT METHODS OF COMMUNICATING WITH VOTERS AND POSSIBLE LOSS OF SOME OF THOSE METHODS OF

COMMUNICATION – In busy election seasons the cost of radio and television advertising time is far greater than when air time is not in such great demand. There frequently are times when radio and television stations will not accept advertising for “down ballot” races during a busy statewide General Election season. Statewide and local campaigns for and against ballot measures pay top rates for radio and television commercial time. Stations would rather sell time to those campaigns than accept the lower rates that apply to candidate campaigns.

#### THE NEED FOR PAID COMMUNICATIONS WITH VOTERS WILL INTENSIFY –

Newspapers and radio and television stations pay scant attention to local elections as it is. That coverage is even lower when there is no Mayoral election or a Mayor is seen to be facing an easy re-election campaign. With the pressures to provide coverage for high visibility offices such as President, Governor, or U.S. Senate and to highly contentious statewide ballot measures, coverage of local elections will decrease even further if not vanish completely. This will further increase the need for local campaigns to rely on paid methods of communicating with voters.

**ISSUE NUMBER 4: It will be more difficult to raise funds for campaigns for city, school district and community college district offices and those candidates will have a more difficult time being heard above the din of a busy election season. As a result, voters will have a more difficult time hearing the messages that can inform their voting in municipal elections.**

A move to November of the even numbered year would mean candidates for City, school district and community college offices would be competing for funds with Presidential, U.S. Senatorial, or Gubernatorial candidates, candidates for other statewide constitutional offices, State Senate and Assembly candidates, candidates for U.S. House of Representatives, candidates for countywide or county supervisorial offices, and judicial candidates.

As discussed above, the press pays scant attention to local electoral politics at the present time. Only campaigns for Mayor receive any meaningful news coverage, and even that is slight. It is of concern that local media – already short of staff and space – would not devote much, if any, time to things like debates in campaigns for Mayor, City Attorney and City Controller, much less offer any meaningful coverage of City Council, school board and community college candidates.

As a result of the increased cost of campaign, the greater difficulty in raising campaign funds and the likely reduction of media coverage of municipal races, voters would find it more difficult to become informed about the candidates and issues involved in city, school district and community college elections.

The City’s campaign contribution limits would present a significant hurdle if the number of contributors to local campaigns were to shrink. With candidates having greater difficulty in

funding their own campaigns, the influence of independent expenditure campaigns is likely to increase. This would present an even further decrease in the quality of the information voters receive about local candidates and issues.

Finally, incumbent office holders generally have an easier time raising funds than do challengers. There would be an incumbent protection aspect to moving the election to November of even numbered years.

**ISSUE NUMBER 5: The City of Los Angeles would benefit from a more isolated debate of city issues by having an election separate from the state and federal election.**

As one of the major cities of the world, the City of Los Angeles deserves and would be better served by having an election that is not consolidated with the state and federal election. City elections in the odd years would promote a more vibrant debate and sense of community than if debate over City elections is conducted at the same time as debate for state and federal offices and issues. While consolidating the City's elections with the state and federal elections may in some instances increase voter turnout in City elections, it may also decrease civic engagement and attention to city issues.

## **XIV. ATTACHMENT C**

### **MINORITY REPORT IN SUPPORT OF A WEEKEND ELECTION FOR CITY ELECTIONS IN ODD NUMBERED YEARS**

Submitted by:  
Commissioner Jeffery Daar

The purpose of this Minority Report is to discuss what the Mayor and the City Council should consider in reviewing the Municipal Election Reform Commission's Report and Recommendations. This Minority Report presents the reasons why the Commission should have recommended that in odd numbered years the election date should be moved to a weekend. The Mayor and City Council should support changing the election date for City elections to a weekend (both Saturday and Sunday), from the current Tuesday, for City of Los Angeles elections in odd numbered years to increase voter turnout and participation.

In California, the standard election date is on a Tuesday. The tradition of Tuesday voting in the United States goes back to an Act of Congress in 1845, when the country was an agrarian society. Back then, Tuesday was a convenient date for farmers to come into town to vote.

Our society has completely changed since 1845. Even with early voting, holding an election date on a Tuesday makes it very difficult for the average Angelino to find time in their hectic weekday to visit a polling location. Most Angelinos have work, school and/or family demands on a Tuesday. U.S. Census data shows that most Americans do not vote because it is inconvenient.<sup>37</sup> The City of Los Angeles can, on its own, hold its election date on a Saturday and Sunday, so that busy Angelinos would have a chance to vote without squeezing another errand into their hectic Tuesday.

There is little doubt that changing the election date from a Tuesday to a weekend would result in an increase in voter turnout. While it is not clear what would be the size of the increase, any increase in voter participation would be a positive gain for the City. There is also little doubt that by changing the election date to a weekend there would not be any decrease in voter turnout. Combining early voting with a weekend election is a good idea, whose time has come.

Los Angeles would not be the first municipality to have a weekend election date. Municipalities in Delaware, Louisiana and Texas currently have weekend voting, with the election on a Saturday. In 2012, Republicans had their primary elections for President on a Saturday in South Carolina and Louisiana. Both of those states had record turnouts for their Saturday elections.

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<sup>37</sup> 146 million people reported that they were registered to vote, but 15 million (10 %) did not vote in the 2008 presidential election. "Of these registered nonvoters, 18 percent reported that they did not vote because they were too busy or had conflicting work or school schedules." (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf>)

Citizens in other countries in the world vote in higher numbers and it would appear that some of that increase is due to when they hold their elections. More than 20 countries have their elections on a Sunday, some on a Saturday, and some on both days. As a major international city, Los Angeles could begin changing the tradition of Tuesday elections to match much of the rest of the world so that elections are on weekends.

While there may be concerns as to locating sufficient polling places for two days, as well as poll workers, the City should be able to overcome any such issues. For example, holding elections on Tuesdays often does not permit schools to be made available as polling locations. Weekend elections would not conflict with school instruction days. Similarly, currently holding elections on Tuesdays requires the recruitment of poll workers for a weekday. By having the election date on a weekend, the City could recruit a new generation of civic-minded citizens. In addition, there are persons who would welcome the additional income provided by being a poll worker on a weekend to supplement their regular income.

The City of Los Angeles should make voting easier and more convenient for its citizens. Changing the election date to a weekend would make voting more convenient. It is time for the City of Los Angeles to take the easy, bold innovative step of changing its election date to make it easier for its citizens to be engaged and participate in the direction of the City.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In order to produce findings and recommendations within its short tenure, the Commission divided into three committees: Research, Operations and Outreach.

The Research Committee consisted of Commissioners Jeffery Daar, Rosalind Gold and Larry Levine. The Operations Committee consisted of Commissioners Dr. Fernando Guerra, Stephen Kaufman, and June Lagmay. The Outreach Committee consisted of Commissioners Delia de la Vara, Kathay Feng, and Dolores Spears.

The Los Angeles Municipal Elections Reform Commission wishes to thank Andrew Westall and the staff of Los Angeles City Council President Herb Wesson, Holly Wolcott and the Office of the City Clerk, and Harit Trivedi and the Office of the City Attorney for the hours of support, expert guidance, and work they put in to support the Commission. We also acknowledge the Offices of the Chief Legislative Analyst and City Administrative Officer for their assistance.

## **CONTRIBUTING SOURCES**

The Commission heard testimony from, interviewed, reviewed reports from, and received comments from the following individuals and organizations:

**Elsa Barboza** - Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)

**Steve Belhumeur** - African American Voter Registration Education Participation Project (AAVREP)

**The Brennan Center for Justice**

**Kate Brown** – Head of Electoral Services for the Manchester England City Council

**Rod Diridon, Jr.** - Santa Clara City Clerk/City Auditor

**Christopher Garcia** - Project Coordinator, Los Angeles City Clerk- Elections Division

**Dr. Edelmira Patty Garcia** – Data and Campaigns Analyst, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund

**Maria de la Luz Garcia** – Sr. Project Coordinator, Los Angeles City Clerk-Elections Division

**Antonio Gonzalez** – President, Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project

**Professor Paul Gronke** – Director, Early Voting Information Center at Reed College



**Zoltan Hajnal** – University of California, San Diego and **Paul G. Lewis** – Public Policy Institute of California – authors of “Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections” published in Urban Affairs Review

**Dr. Michael J. Hanmer** – Director at the Center for American Politics and Citizenship, and author of “Discount Voting: Voter Registration Reforms

**Jim Hayes** – Founding President, Political Data Inc.

**Larry Herrera**, – City Clerk, City of Long Beach

**Heather Holt** – Executive Director, Los Angeles City Ethics Commission

**David A. Holtzman** – Past President, L.A. League of Women Voters and Founder and Executive Director of Los Angeles Voters for Instant Runoff Elections

**Yvonne Horton** – City Clerk, City of Inglewood

**Gregory Huber** – Professor, Department of Political Science, Yale University, and Resident Fellow, Institution for Social and Policy Studies and Center for the Study of American Politics Associate Editor, Quarterly Journal of Political Science

**Ardy Kassakhian** – City Clerk, City of Glendale

**Neal Kelley**, Registrar of Voters, Orange County

**Professor David C. Kimball** – Professor of Political Science, University of Missouri, St. Louis

**Eugene Lee** – Project Director, Democracy Project, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles

**Grayce Liu** – General Manager, Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE)

**Dean Logan** – Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, Los Angeles County

**Professor Lorraine C. Minnite** – Professor of American and Urban Politics at Barnard University and author of “How to Think About Voter Participation” for the New York City Charter Revision Commission

**Jinny Pak** – Elections Chief, Los Angeles City Clerk-Elections Division

**Leila Pedersen** – State Policy Coordinator, California Common Cause

**Professor Nate Persily** –Professor of Election Policy and Administration at Stanford University Law School and Senior Research Director for the Presidential Commission on

Election Reform

**Toni Pippins-Poole** – Elections Administrator, Dallas County, Texas

**Political Data, Inc.**

**Rob Richie** – Executive Director, Fair Vote of Takoma Park, MD

**Elizabeth Rigby** – George Washington University Scholars Strategy Network

**Estelle Rogers** – Legislative Director, Project Vote

**Jon Roland** – Title Founder, Constitution Society of Austin, TX

**Ilya Shapiro** – Senior Fellow in Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute

**Holly Wolcott** – Interim Los Angeles City Clerk

**Rani Woods** – National Association of Latino and Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)  
Educational Fund

Each of the above provided valuable input for consideration in addition to documents and testimony received from staff and various witnesses, who made presentations at public meetings of the Commission.

While not all of the above are quoted directly in this report, the Commission wishes to acknowledge each as having contributed to the formation of the perspectives, conclusions and recommendations contained in this report.