



Testing the Impact of On- Cycle Elections

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Outline

The Problem

Research on the Impact of On-Cycle Elections

Concerns about On-Cycle Elections

Current Reform Efforts

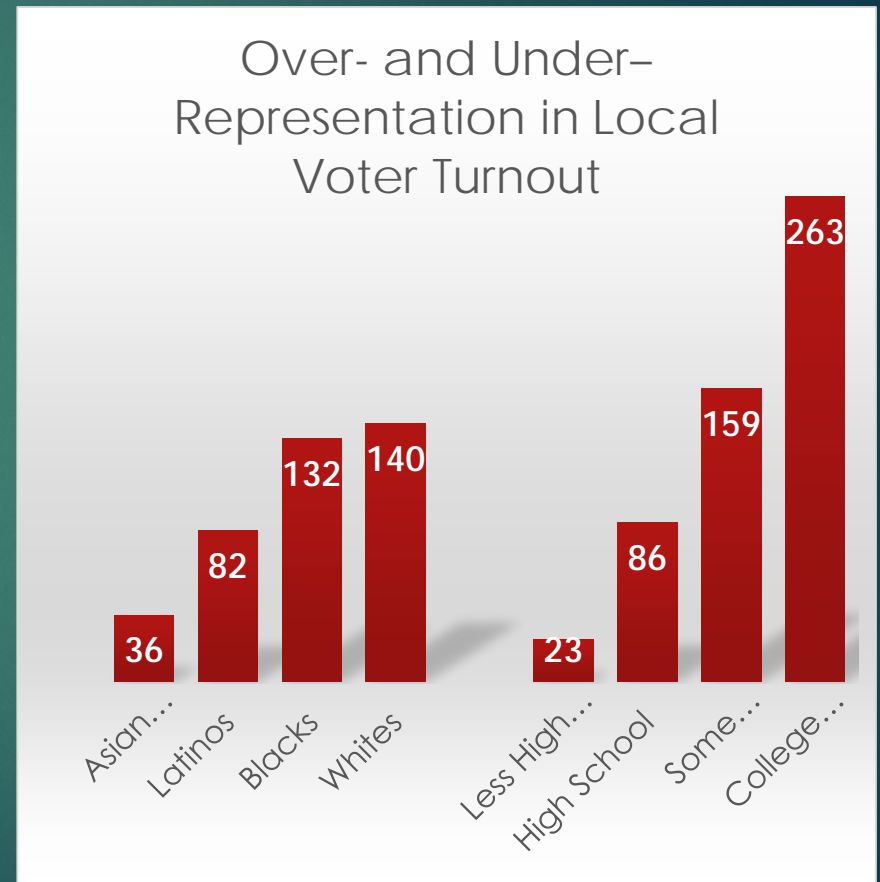
The Problem

Low Turnout

- ▶ Only 27 percent of residents turnout on average for city elections
 - ▶ Lower for county, school board and other offices
- ▶ It is getting worse over time

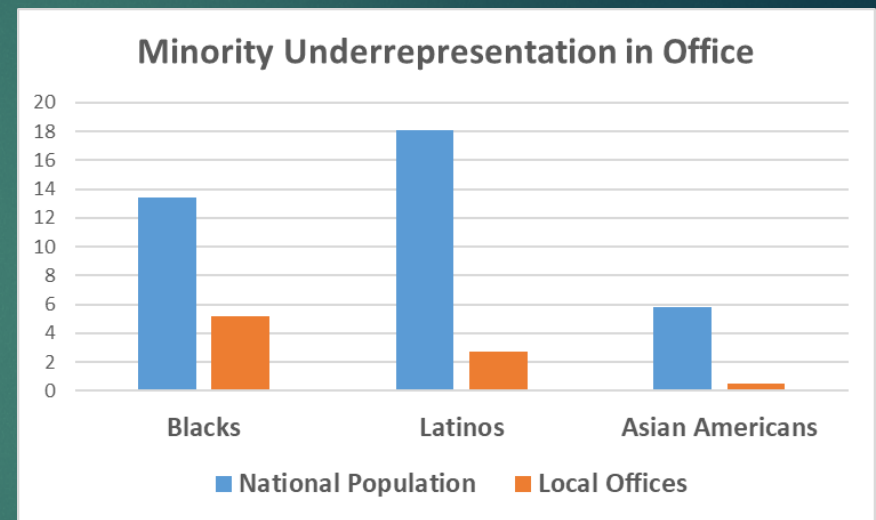
The Problem

- ▶ **Uneven turnout**
 - ▶ Turnout is skewed by race, class, and age



The Problem

- ▶ **Uneven representation**
 - ▶ Whites hold about 90 percent of offices
 - ▶ The working class is also greatly underrepresented



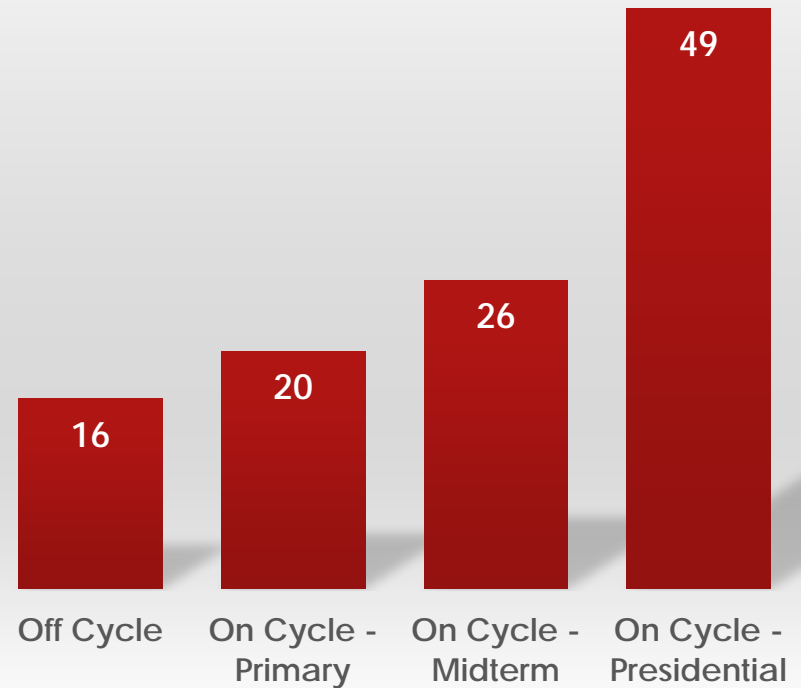


Research on the Impact of On-Cycle Elections

Timing Impacts Turnout

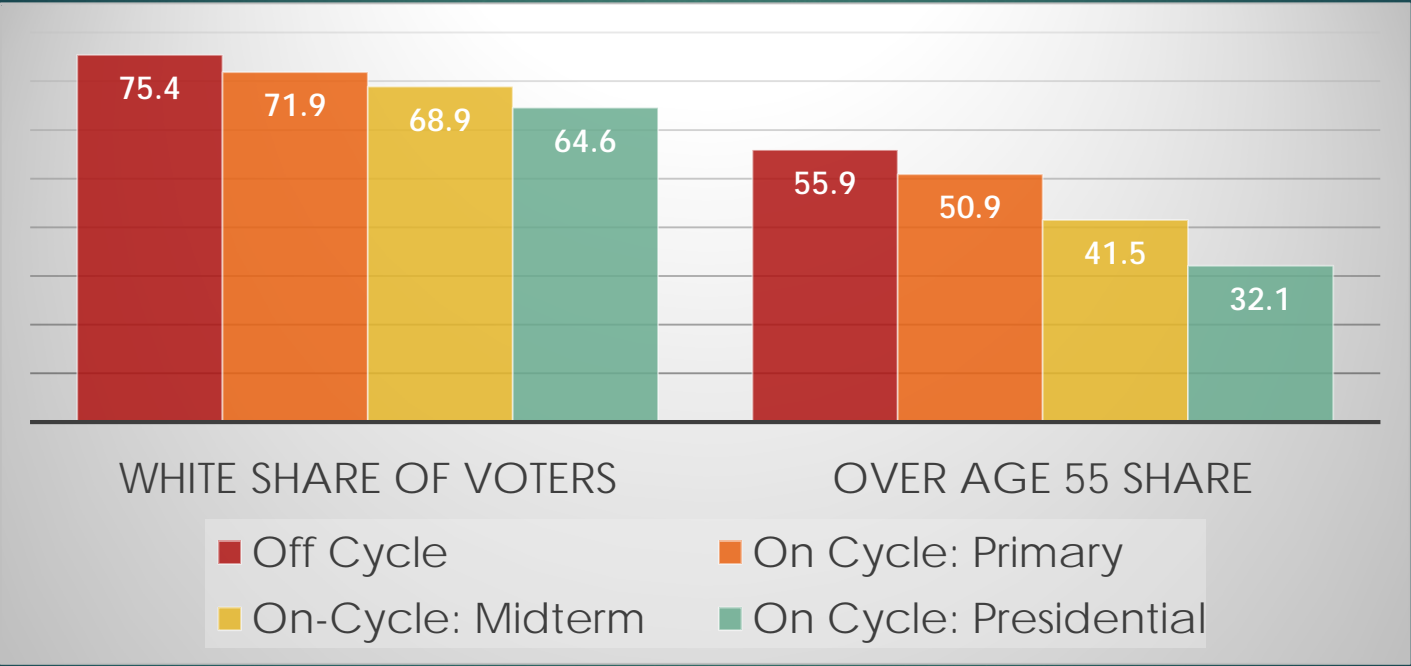
- ▶ All 8 published studies find that on-cycle elections double local voter turnout
- ▶ Turnout jumps in cities that switch to on-cycle elections
 - ▶ From 13 to 60 percent in Baltimore

Timing and Voter Turnout:
CA Study





Voters in On-Cycle Elections are More Representative (CA)



On-cycle
elections are
more
representative
in other ways

- ▶ Increases the lower-class vote share by 3%
- ▶ Increases the liberal vote share by 4%
- ▶ Increases the Democratic vote share by 4%
- ▶ NOTE: effects vary by city/context

Other More Tentative Effects:

WHICH CANDIDATES WIN

- Minority representation on city councils increases by 25% in high turnout cities

WHICH POLICIES ARE PASSED

- Welfare spending increases by almost 25% in high turnout cities



Potential Concerns

Will Residents Object?


- ▶ **Americans overwhelmingly favor on-cycle elections**
- ▶ 70% nationwide
- ▶ 73% of Democrats nationwide
- ▶ 61% of Republicans nationwide
- ▶ Roughly three-quarters of voters have voted for on-cycle elections in every city I have examined

Will people pay less attention to local politics?

- ▶ There is little hard data on this question
- ▶ But twice as many people will be voting and paying at least some attention
- ▶ One study shows that the vote in on-cycle elections reflects government outcomes more
- ▶ One study found no significant differences in local knowledge in on vs off-cycle elections


What about Ballot Drop-Off?

- ▶ The number of voters who drop off the ballot in on-cycle elections is tiny compared to the dramatic gains in voters participating in local contests
 - ▶ The research only counts as voters those that actually vote in local elections (e.g. after drop-off)



Will ballots be
more
complicated?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ But it will still be easier for citizens than voting on multiple days



Will there be
administrative
headaches?

- ▶ Moving to on-cycle elections has worked seamlessly in the past

Current Reform

- ▶ California, Arizona, and Iowa recently passed laws requiring some on-cycle elections
 - ▶ The California law is being challenged in the courts
- ▶ Los Angeles, Baltimore, Scottsdale, Takoma Park and many other cities have switched

- ▶ 10 states mandate on-cycle
- ▶ 18 states mandate off-cycle
- ▶ 22 states let cities decide

Questions?

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