Moving Municipal Elections in Minneapolis to Even-Numbered Years to Improve Voter Turnout

A Report by Dylan Adams
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Voter turnout goes down dramatically in non-presidential years, especially for municipal elections.

Policy solution: Will moving municipal elections to even years encourage more participation?
Background

- Minneapolis has the power to change its elections under state law.
- Other cities and states are moving toward conducting elections only in even years.
  - California (if turnout drops below a threshold)
  - New Brighton, MN
  - Bills being considered in Kentucky and Phoenix, AZ.
- What does turnout look like at the top of the ballot versus down the ballot?

Image from wired.com.
Methodology

- Create a sample of cities with which to compare Minneapolis.
- When city data is not available, use county.
- Two different ways of choosing sample:
  - Cities of similar size (by population)
  - Cities of similar characteristics in the Midwest
    - Most potential for bias
- Find turnout for top of the ballot and compare to down-ballot races
- ASSUMPTIONS
  - Counties vote in similar ways to cities.
  - All down-ballot races can be treated the same.
The Cities and Counties for Comparison

- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)
- Dane County, WI (Madison)
- Denver, CO
- Douglas County, NE (Omaha)
- El Paso County, TX
- Fresno County, CA
- Fulton County, GA (Atlanta)
- Kansas City, MO
- King County, WA (Seattle)

- Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)
- Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)
- Miami-Dade County, FL
- Milwaukee, WI
- Multnomah County, OR (Portland)
- Oakland, CA
- Polk County, IA (Des Moines)
- Sacramento County, CA
- Tulsa County, OK (Tulsa)
- Wake County, NC (Raleigh)
- Washington, DC
## The Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/County</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th># of Registered Voters</th>
<th>Turnout for Governor/Senator/President</th>
<th>Turnout Percent (Top)</th>
<th>Turnout for Mayor (or other local office)</th>
<th>Turnout Percent (Bottom)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Local Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>373,169</td>
<td>140,686</td>
<td>37.70</td>
<td>115,675</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>District Judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>389,335</td>
<td>239,454</td>
<td>61.50</td>
<td>234,055</td>
<td>60.12</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>383,702</td>
<td>158,840</td>
<td>41.40</td>
<td>131,212</td>
<td>34.20</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>Sheriff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>415,536</td>
<td>274,429</td>
<td>66.04</td>
<td>210,101</td>
<td>50.56</td>
<td>15.48</td>
<td>Sheriff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>886,098</td>
<td>336,769</td>
<td>38.01</td>
<td>330,185</td>
<td>37.26</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>County Executive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average difference in turnout of 8.31 percentage points. Range of about 0 to 32 points.
# Voter Turnout in 2014 vs. 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimum</strong></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td><strong>Minimum</strong></td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum</strong></td>
<td>22.63</td>
<td><strong>Maximum</strong></td>
<td>32.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voter Turnout Considering Just Mayors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/County</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Relaxing assumption all local races are equal.
- Average difference is 1.17 percentage points.
### Voter Turnout Among the Midwest Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/County</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>26.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dane County, WI (Madison)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dane County, WI (Madison)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>12.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas County, NE (Omaha)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas County, NE (Omaha)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>10.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster County, NE (Lincoln)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion County, IN (Indianapolis)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polk County, IA (Des Moines)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>18.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polk County, IA (Des Moines)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Midwest cities share a lot of common demographics, culture, geography, economics, etc.
- Average difference is 6.96.
- The range is still fairly high, being between nearly 0 and almost 27 percentage points.
Other Considerations: Financial

- Elections Department has 6 full-time employees.
- Operating costs and contractual obligations in 2017 were close to $2 million... for the whole Clerk's office.
- Savings are not that great in comparison to other parts of the City budget.
- The money could still fund new ideas.
Other Considerations: Political

- Changing elections will result in changing terms of current politicians.
- There will likely be changes in amount of money given to local campaigns.
  - There is no research that I can find to get an estimate.
- Different timings of elections could mean different political strategies for campaigns.

Minneapolis City Council. Image from City of Minneapolis.
Case Study: Oakland, CA

- Oakland uses Ranked Choice Voting
- In 2014 and 2016, RCV was active at the same time as traditional races.
- Drop-off in turnout was minimal.
- Characteristics are similar to Minneapolis
  - Population of about 410,000
  - Percentage of population that identifies as white or black are about the same.
  - Progressive tradition
- Key differences
  - More foreign-born persons in Oakland
  - Geography and economy
  - Cost of living

Image from City of Oakland, CA
Case Study: Washington, DC

- Washington does not have representation in Congress nor a governor.
- Drop-off in turnout was minimal.
- Turnout was still very high given lack of top-ballot races.
- Characteristics are similar to Minneapolis
  - Similar rates of education
  - Progressive tradition
- Key differences
  - Population is higher in DC
  - Greater diversity among population
  - Cost of living
Why Does the Move Matter?

More participation

Equity concerns
- People of color
- Non-English speakers
- Students

More engagement
- Some evidence that people pay more attention overall in even years
Special thanks to Aaron Grossman for his help drawing turnout maps.

Special thanks to Casey Carl, Barry Clegg, and Doug Chapin for their guidance.
Questions? Thank you!