### Expanding Access to Voting

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Speakers

Emma Greenman directs CPD’s national Voting Rights and Democracy Program, working with state partners and national allies to protect and increase access to the ballot and strengthen the voice of the Rising American Electorate in our democracy. Emma has over 15 years of experience working on democracy and election law, campaign finance and voting rights issues as an attorney, a policy expert and a political advocate. Before joining CPD, Emma practiced law as a public defender and as a civil litigator at Maslon LLP where she also served as pro bono counsel to the ACLU-Minnesota on voting rights litigation. Emma has extensive experience working with elected officials, national non-profit organizations and unions to run progressive policy campaigns and has trained thousands of candidates and advocates as a Wellstone Action trainer. Emma holds a J.D. from UC Berkeley School of Law and a M.P.A. from Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She serves on the board of the American Constitution Society - Minneapolis-St. Paul Lawyer Chapter and recently served as a member of the Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board.

Jeff Narabrook is an elections administrator with the City of Minneapolis. He is in charge of poll worker training and voter outreach and education initiatives. Jeff previously served as Voter Outreach Director for the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State. He serves on the board of Nonprofit Vote, the managing organization of National Voter Registration Day. Jeff is proud of the state’s record of civic participation—Minnesota consistently leads the nation in voter turnout.

Rachel Rodriguez has been employed by the City of Madison, Wisconsin Clerk’s Office for nearly six years. She is active member of the City’s Racial Equity & Social Justice Initiative and is passionate about expanding access to voting. Prior to her work in the City Clerk’s Office, she worked for three years as a staff member in the Wisconsin State Assembly.

Mayor Kate Stewart is beginning her second term as Mayor of Takoma Park. She and her family have lived in Takoma Park for over 20 years. Mayor Stewart serves on the Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOG) Legislative Committee and was nominated and elected to serve as the Secretary-Treasurer for the MWCOG Board beginning in January 2017.
The Washington Post

Do voter identification laws suppress minority voting? Yes. We did the research.

By Zoltan L. Hajnal, Nazita Lajevardi and Lindsay Nielson
February 15, 2017

The Justice Department just got a new boss: Jeff Sessions. He is raising alarms in the civil rights community. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is concerned about his “record of hostility” toward the Voting Rights Act and the enforcement of civil rights. The NAACP-Legal Defense Fund lamented that it is “unimaginable that he could be entrusted to serve as the chief law enforcement officer for this nation’s civil rights laws.” No one knows for sure how Sessions will perform as attorney general — the former Republican senator from Alabama did, after all, once vote to renew the Voting Rights Act, in 2006 — but for many his record is deeply troubling.

Voter identification laws have spread rapidly in the past 10 years

What we do know is that voter identification laws are spreading rapidly around the country. Before 2006, no state required photo identification to vote on Election Day. Today 10 states have this requirement. All told, a total of 33 states — representing more than half the nation’s population — have some version of voter identification rules on the books.

As we detail below, our research shows that these laws lower minority turnout and benefit the Republican Party.

There is, of course, widespread debate about the merits of these new laws. Proponents claim that ID laws are necessary to reduce fraud and to restore trust in the democratic system. Critics claim that voter ID laws serve as effective barriers that limit the legitimate participation of racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

Who is right? Scholars have been able to show that racial and ethnic minorities have less access to photo IDs, and extensive analysis reveals almost no evidence of voter fraud of the type ostensibly prevented by these laws. But determining just how many Americans are prevented from actually voting is another question altogether. The key question is not whether there could be worrisome effects from these laws, but whether clear-cut shifts in electoral participation and outcomes have actually occurred. Do voter identification laws skew the electorate in favor of one set of interests over others?

Because these laws are so new, it has been almost impossible to assess their consequences. Most of the existing studies have looked at the effects of not-so-strict ID laws or have assessed the consequences of strict ID laws in only one state or one election. The results have been mixed.
Here's how we did our research

In our new study we are able to offer a more definitive assessment for several reasons.

First and most important, we have data from the nation’s most recent elections (2006-2014) and can single out and test the effect of the strict voter ID laws in multiple elections and multiple states. (We define states with “strict voter ID laws” as states where residents cannot vote without presenting valid identification during or after the voting process.)

Second, we have validated voting data so we know whether each of our respondents actually voted. Third, we have a huge sample — over a third of a million Americans from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study — which means that we can analyze the participation of racial and ethnic minorities in all states both before and after strict ID laws are implemented.

When we compare overall turnout in states with strict ID laws to turnout in states without these laws, we find no significant difference. That pattern matches with most existing studies. But when we dig deeper and look specifically at racial and ethnic minority turnout, we see a significant drop in minority participation when and where these laws are implemented.

Hispanics are affected the most: Turnout is 7.1 percentage points lower in general elections and 5.3 points lower in primaries in strict ID states than it is in other states. Strict ID laws mean lower African American, Asian American and multiracial American turnout as well. White turnout is largely unaffected.

These laws have a disproportionate effect on minorities, which is exactly what you would expect given that members of racial and ethnic minorities are less apt to have valid photo ID.

In the graph below, we display the turnout gap between whites and Latinos, Asian Americans and African Americans in states with and without strict voter ID laws. In general elections in non-strict states, for instance, the gap between white and Latino turnout is on average 4.9 points.

But in states with strict ID laws, that gap grows to a substantial 13.2 points. The gap between white turnout and Asian American and African American turnout also increases.

The right side of the figure shows that the same thing happens in primary elections — and more dramatically. For example, the white-black turnout gap grows from 2.5 to 11.6 when a state adds strict ID laws. The racial imbalance in U.S. voting expands.

These findings persist even when we take many other factors into account — including partisanship, demographic characteristics, election contexts and other state laws that encourage or discourage participation. Racial gaps persist even when we limit our analysis to Democrats or track shifts in turnout in the first election after strict rules are implemented. Definitively determining that the laws themselves are what lowers turnout is always difficult without an experiment, but however we look at it, strict voter ID laws suppress minority votes.
When a state has strict voter ID laws, those who do vote are more conservative

All of this, of course, has real political consequences. Because minority voters tend to be Democrats, strict voter ID laws tilt the primary electorate dramatically.

All else equal, when strict ID laws are instituted, the turnout gap between Republicans and Democrats in primary contests more than doubles from 4.3 points to 9.8 points. Likewise, the turnout gap between conservative and liberal voters more than doubles from 7.7 to 20.4 points.

By instituting strict voter ID laws, states can alter the electorate and shift outcomes toward those on the right. Where these laws are enacted, the influence of Democrats and liberals wanes and the power of Republicans grows. Unsurprisingly, these strict ID laws are passed almost exclusively by Republican legislatures.

What will Attorney General Jeff Sessions do?

Sessions has opposed core elements of the Voting Rights Act and other measures aimed at protect minority voting rights. Perhaps strong evidence that voter identification reduces minority voting will change his mind in this case.

We will know soon; the Justice Department’s case against Texas’s strict voter ID law will resume after a month-long delay requested by the new Trump-led department. Sessions will have to decide whether to continue the case.
Vulnerable Communities Lose Critical Documentation in Natural Disasters' Wake

TERESA MATHEW
SEP 1, 2017

Texas’s S.B. 5 voting ID law, struck down last week, could have had serious consequences for minority voters impacted by Tropical Storm Harvey.

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, people focus on recovering the bread-and-butter pieces of their lives: furniture, cars, clothing. Birth certificates usually are not top-of-mind. But obtaining any form of ID requires documentation, which is often lost in the wake of a severe storm. Even under normal circumstances, “When a minority loses an ID, it becomes more difficult to get a replacement,” says Gary Bledsoe, president of the Texas NAACP and an attorney with the Bledsoe Law Firm. That challenge is exacerbated when a disaster hits.

According to the Brookings Institution, already-vulnerable communities suffer the most in the wake of a natural disaster, in part because of the consequences of lost documentation. In Texas, poor communities are more likely to live in areas susceptible to flooding, where their driver’s licenses, birth certificates, and social security cards could be destroyed by rising waters.

Had U.S. District Judge Nelva Gonzalez Ramos not struck down a Texas voter ID law last week, the storm’s wreckage would have made it even more difficult for minority communities to vote. The law, S.B. 5, would have required voters to show particular forms of photo ID or complete an affidavit in order to cast a ballot. Though the policy would not have gone into effect until 2018, the widespread damage from Tropical Storm Harvey presents a sobering look at how natural disasters—combined with stringent voting regulations—could effectively disenfranchise a state’s poor communities of color.

In 2014, while ruling on S.B. 5’s predecessor, Ramos found that over 600,000 registered voters—a significant number of whom were minorities—did not possess one of the required forms of photo ID, such as a passport or handgun license. Opponents of S.B. 5 say the stiff penalties the affidavit enforced would have deterred many from voting. People were “worried that their reasoning [for not having an approved form of ID] would be seen as invalid,” says Myrna Pérez, Deputy Director of the Democracy Center at NYU Law School’s Brennan Center for Justice. These concerns would be heightened, she says, as “prosecutors in the state seem to want to go after people even if they do have a good excuse.”

“NAACP lawyers were saying ‘I can’t take [the affidavit] to people. I know the prosecutors around here, they’ll indict an African American for a mistake,’” Bledsoe recalls.
Even without weather coming into play, there are many reasons why someone might not have a photo ID. Obtaining one sometimes carries hidden expenses. A 2014 report from Harvard Law School’s Race and Justice Institute discovered that obtaining even a purportedly free form of ID can cost $75 to $175 due to travel and fees for required documentation like birth and marriage certificates. Once legal fees—which can run up to $1,500—are added to the mix, the expenses can simply be too much for many. The report found that these costs may be markedly greater than the poll taxes outlawed by the 24th amendment—taxes created specifically to disenfranchise poor and black voters.

Transportation is another hurdle, especially in Texas, where the nearest ID office for people in rural areas can be up to 170 miles away. As Harvey tears up infrastructure and floods major highways, it will be even harder for residents to make their way along necessary routes. “Many of the counties [in Texas] don’t have places you can go and get a driver’s license or a state ID, and in order to get that you had to have a birth certificate or social security card,” says Deuel Ross, an Assistant Council at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. “It was already very difficult to get those. Given the strain on the state right now, it’s only going to be more difficult.”

The law’s critics argue that it was baseless to begin with. “In Texas, there was never strong evidence [that] there was a problem that needed to be addressed by [S.B. 5],” says Pérez. No evidence has been found of mass voter impersonation. Senators from both political parties, as well as law enforcement officials, have refuted claims of voter fraud. Pérez believes that having focused on voter ID laws instead of passing infrastructure legislation and shoring up rescue services will not reflect well on Texan politicians. “When you have tragedies like [Harvey], it puts in voters’ mouths a bad taste for the tomfoolery of legislators.”

Although the Texas Department of Public Safety announced that it will offer no-cost replacement driver’s licenses and ID cards for those who live in counties that have received a disaster declaration, residents would still need to visit an office in-person. And Gary Bledsoe is skeptical of how this will be enforced. Bledsoe has found that minority voters often face discriminatory hurdles, and worries that black and Latino residents may not find it easy to obtain replacements.

Furthermore, in the storm’s wake, replacing forms of ID “is not the main thing people are worried about right now,” says Ross. “As the [midterm] election approaches in 2018 people may start to think about it, but may not have the months it takes in order to obtain the documentation.”

Though New Orleans’s municipal elections were severely disrupted after Hurricane Katrina—the city’s voting infrastructure was decimated by the hurricane—the state didn’t have to contend with the fallout from voting ID laws. Louisiana’s ID requirements are considered “non-strict.” Nearly anything issued with both a photo and some identifying information qualifies, and voters can simply sign an affidavit if they do not have an ID. Without a strict law, “you don’t have to add an accommodation for dealing with it in the face of a natural disaster,” says Pérez.

Ross, who has worked with families trying to rebuild their lives in the face of fire and flooding, is concerned by how the current political climate and escalating weather events could work in tandem to harm poor communities of color. “Communities affected the most are cities in the south, which are often poorer, more rural, [and predominantly] African American,” he says. “Given that this is now the second major storm here in the U.S. in the last 10 or so years, I’m very worried that this kind of thing could continue to happen, and continue to impact the communities most vulnerable and unable to deal with the burden of having everything in their lives destroyed.”
MAP OF THE MONTH: WHO VOTES FOR MAYOR?

BY CHRIS BOUSQUET • OCTOBER 31, 2017

What percentage of eligible residents would you guess voted in the most recent Dallas mayoral race? 50 percent? Maybe 40?

In fact, the number is 6.1 percent. This problem of poor turnout in mayoral races is not specific to Dallas, but affects many cities across the country. In State College, PA, turnout in the last election was 9 percent, in Palm Beach, FL it was 10 percent, and in New York City it was 14 percent. Across the 30 largest cities in the United States, the average turnout was around 20 percent.

Persistently abysmal voter turnout was the impetus for the “Who Votes for Mayor?” mapping project out of Portland State University, the most recent winner of Harvard’s Map of the Month. “About eight out of ten Americans live in metropolitan areas,” explained Assistant Professor of Urban Studies and Planning Jason Jurjevich, which means mayoral elections affect a huge proportion of Americans. And yet, “very few people are voting in local elections,” he said. The map greatly enhances understanding of this critical policy issue via rigorous data collection and a sleek UX, and for that reason was chosen as Map of the Month.

It was no secret that turnout in mayoral races is low, but Jurjevich wanted to fill in gaps in the existing data. “There’s not a lot of data on the geographic variability in mayoral voting and turnout tends to be selective in mayoral elections,” he explained. He hoped to gain a more accurate picture of voting behavior and better understand the distribution of voting across cities and demographics. “We wanted to answer questions like ‘Are voters representative of a city’s population?’ and ‘Which groups are over or under-represented at the ballot box?’” he explained.

In 2015, Jurjevich and Phil Keisling, Director of the Center for Public Service at Portland State University, received funding from the Knight Foundation to launch a pilot in four U.S. cities— Charlotte, NC, Detroit, Portland, OR, and St. Paul, MN—to begin answering these questions. A year later, the project expanded to include the 50 cities—the 30 largest cities in the United States and 20 cities supported by the Knight Foundation.

Jurjevich and Keisling headed a research team that worked with cities, counties, and states in order to collect voter records from the most recent mayoral election. They then geocoded this data by census tract, and mapped turnout on top of Census and American Community Survey demographic data using a MapBox platform. The result was a
census-tract level map of voter turnout that allows users to visualize variation in turnout based on geographic and demographic indicators.

The project was not only intended for Jurjevich and Keisling’s analysis, but was also an opportunity to put data in the hands of residents. “It wasn’t just about producing the data for a report, but also making a website to visualize data, and allow people to download and play with data,” Jurjevich explained. With this in mind, the researchers partnered with communications firm Brink Communications in order to design an attractive and accessible platform for users.

The resulting website allows users to visualize the geographic distribution of voter turnout in each city and compare this to demographic patterns. On one tab, users can see an overview of the city’s most recent election. For example, in New York City, 13.8 percent of eligible voters participated in the most recent election, which the site displays as a visualization out of one hundred residents for emphasis. This voting population is comprised mostly of older residents—30.7 percent of registered voters over the age of 65 voted, while only 7.6 percent of registered voters aged 18 to 34. Moreover, 7.6 percent of voting age residents in New York City live in a voting desert: a census tract where voter turnout among eligible citizens is less than 50 percent of the citywide average.

Percentage of residents voting in New York City's most recent elections

Moreover, users can compare factors of their choosing on an interactive map. For example, users can see that in Seattle, voter turnout tends to be higher in neighborhoods in the northern part of the city, which happen to be neighborhoods with higher education levels and fewer people of color.

The creators of the site hope that cities will use this data to examine voter turnout and voter outreach processes. For one, Jurjevich hoped to call attention to the shockingly low turnout across cities—in 18 of the 50 cities studied, turnout was below 15 percent.

According to Jurjevich, one of the likely causes of this poor turnout is the timing of elections. In a blog post written by Jurjevich and Keisling, the authors explain that in the Progressive era, many cities scheduled off-cycle mayoral elections—elections in odd-numbered years that do not align with elections to fill higher-profile posts such as governor, senator, or U.S. president—as a means of focusing citizen attention on municipal politics. However, this practice had the unintended consequence of reducing turnout: of the 18 cities with turnout below 15 percent, 14 held mayoral elections in non-national election years and 16 held elections on different dates than national elections. “We’re trying to call attention to the timing of elections,” said Jurjevich. “We hope that cities will reevaluate and look at timing mayoral elections with federal, regional, or state elections.”
Revising voter registration rules is another potential means of improving turnout. “In every state, except for North Dakota, you have to register to vote in mayoral elections,” Jurjevich explained. Pursuing interventions like automatic enrollment or “motor voter” laws—where residents register to vote when they apply for their driver’s license at the state Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)—can ensure that more voting age residents register to vote.

And finally, cities need to ensure that those registered to vote actually cast a ballot—in Dallas, for instance, only 7.3 percent of even registered voters voted. Jurjevich identified different means of ballot delivery as a potential solution to this problem. Oregon and Washington both have instituted vote by mail, where the state sends registered voters a ballot and residents send it back via mail.

Portland—which was number one in term of turnout in the study with 59.4 percent of eligible voters—demonstrates the potentially massive influence of these interventions. Portland has made conscious efforts to improve turnout: “We have vote by mail, elections in a presidential year, and a generally engaged constituency,” Jurjevich explained. “We didn’t set up a statistical analysis to determine the effects at play, but three times the average suggests something unique,” he continued.

Voter turnout across U.S. cities

In addition to inspiring interventions to improve voter turnout overall, the map creators hope cities will use this information to perform targeted outreach in areas with anemic voting patterns. “We also wanted to pinpoint voting deserts and oases—places with lower and higher than average turnout,” said Jurjevich. In Portland, Jurjevich explained, there was lower than average turnout in many areas of lower socioeconomic status and higher concentrations of underrepresented groups, emphasizing the need to improve outreach and voter education in these communities.

In the City of Austin, the Austin Eco Network—a news organization focused on educating Austin residents on local issues—has sought to do just that. The Eco Network recently launched a project called Civics 101, through which the organization informs residents on the importance of local government via a series of events with community members. As a part of this project, the organization has used the Who Votes for Mayor? map in order to emphasize the dire state of voter turnout in Austin, where only 13.3 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the last election.

According to Amy Stansbury, Editor-in-Chief of the Eco Network, the age disparities revealed by the map provided important insights on where to target outreach. “There’s a whole generation that didn’t vote in the last election,” she said. “A lot of millennials don’t follow local news. Some don’t even know who the Mayor is.” Indeed, only 7.8 percent of registered voters aged 18 to 34 voted in Austin’s latest election, compared to 29.7 percent of eligible voters over the age of 65, giving voters 65 and older seven times greater electoral clout than voters aged 18-34. And yet, Austin has the highest percentage of millenials for any U.S. metro area, making young voters a critical part of the electorate.

As a result, the Austin Eco Network has focused its efforts on the younger generation. “We have happy hour events with music and beer where people present on local government,” said Stansbury. “We’ll ask people, ‘What are the issues affecting your community?’ and explain the huge influence local government has in those areas.”

In order to stress the extreme need for more young voters, the Eco Network has also presented visualizations from Who Votes for Mayor? in unique ways. “We’ll use beer cans to present the information—like this number of beers cans represents the number of people under 30 in Austin, and then these cans are the percentage of those people that voted in the last election. We get some of the biggest reactions from this,” Stansbury continued. Seeing the massive age disparities in turnout tends to energize the younger attendees of these events.

Based on insights from the map, the Eco Network has also made an effort to work particularly closely with traditionally underrepresented communities. One of the largest voting deserts is in East Austin, an area where the voting age population is about 75 percent minority. Stansbury said the Eco Network has focused on this eastern part of the city, “reaching out to very different groups to find a common bond.” The goal is to emphasize that in these communities—which are experiencing rapid gentrification and growing inequality—participation in local elections is more important than ever.
East Austin includes both one of the city's largest voting deserts and one of the highest percentages of minority residents.

To some, the picture of mayoral voting painted by Who Votes for Mayor? may seem like an insurmountable challenge. And yet, Stansbury explained that with efforts to galvanize voting, “it doesn’t take much to get the ball rolling.” “People vote because their friends vote,” she said, which means that convincing one person to vote can have reverberating effects throughout a community. Using resources like the Who Votes for Mayor? map to identify areas and groups with low turnout, cities can effectively target outreach efforts and watch natural social forces amplify their effects.

Like many of the other maps we have featured, Who Votes for Mayor? illustrates the power of place-based visualizations to target interventions in the areas in greatest need. However, this particular map is also a reminder of the salience of even non-geographic visualizations—like the jarring infographics that show voter turnout out of 100 people. In addition to providing valuable insight to inform interventions, data visualization can make problems more apparent and inspire a sense of urgency among residents and policymakers.
DEEPENING OUR DEMOCRACY
How Localities Can Expand Voting Rights
Executive Summary

American democracy is at a crossroads. To deliver on the promise of a representative, inclusive democracy, our electoral system must provide every American the opportunity to meaningfully participate and make their voice heard in our democracy. That starts by guaranteeing that every eligible person has the ability to register and cast a ballot that is counted. However, more than a decade of attacks on voting rights and democratic participation—from *Shelby County v. Holder*¹ to restrictive state voter ID laws—have undermined these core principles of representative democracy and have eroded the political participation of ordinary citizens and the Rising American Electorate.²

While these attacks are part of a longstanding conservative agenda to restrict access to the ballot and blunt the political power of communities of color, the Trump administration has further emboldened efforts to limit democratic participation. Shortly after taking office, Trump launched the “Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity” to vindicate his widely-rebuked and self-serving lie that he lost the national popular vote in the 2016 election because of more than three million people who he claimed (without evidence) “voted illegally.”³ Since the election, there has also been an acceleration of proposed state voter restrictions including new voter ID laws, restrictions on early voting, and attempts to purge voter registration rolls.⁴

In the face of attacks at the state and federal level, protecting and strengthening our democracy and voter participation must be a local imperative. With a majority of the US population living in cities and urban counties,⁵ local proactive reforms have the potential to expand access to voter registration and voting for millions of people. Moreover, reforms that expand voter registration at the local level are crucial for increasing voter turnout and for extending the geographic reach of proactive voting reforms to reduce barriers to registration nationwide. Expanding access to voter registration is also particularly important for ensuring representation of low-income communities, communities of color, and young people. Families with annual incomes below $30,000, voters of color, and naturalized citizens, have lower voter registration and voting rates compared to their counterparts.⁶ Young people are also less likely to be registered and less likely to turn out to vote.⁷

This report suggest some of the strongest measures localities can take on their own. Local jurisdictions can expand voter registration to eligible residents through the following policies:

- **Local Agency Registration: Expanding Voter Registration Access to Underrepresented Communities**
  Under this reform, local government agencies actively register people to vote. City and county agencies are strategic targets because they administer public services, benefits, and programs that serve primarily low-income communities and disproportionately reach communities of color. These agencies include, for example, those that administer human and social services, affordable housing, and health programs. National Voter Registration Act data confirms that low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to be registered to vote at public assistance offices than wealthier and white voters.⁸

- **High School Voter Registration: Building a New Generation of Active Voters**
  High school registration programs register eligible students who will turn 18 by the next election. With high school registration reforms, election administrators are responsible for distributing registration forms to schools and processing the forms when they are returned. Schools are responsible for distributing forms to students, verifying that students have fulfilled the requirement, and submitting the forms to election administrators.⁹ Over time, a high school registration program could significantly increase the number of registered voters citywide and
create a generation of active voters. When young people learn about and participate in the voting process, they are more likely to continue to participate over their lifetime.10

Pre-Registration of 16- and 17-Year-Olds: Early Engagement of the Next Generation of Voters
Like high school registration, targeted youth outreach and pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds could lead to significant increases in voter registration and voter participation over a lifetime.11 This reform works by expanding access to state rules allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, automatically adding them to the voting rolls when they turn 18 and are eligible to vote. Local expansion of pre-registration in applicable states is promising because it is low-cost and does not require any additional databases—new voters are simply entered under a “pending” status in the existing state system until they turn 18.12

Exploring Additional Opportunities to Innovate at the Local Level
Cities and counties are promising laboratories for democracy. These jurisdictions can lead the way by developing innovative strategies for expanding access to the ballot in their communities where legally feasible and politically plausible. For instance, Madison, Wisconsin and East Lansing, Michigan, have adopted ordinances requiring landlords to provide their tenants with voter registration forms in order to make registration more accessible.13 New York City and Seattle have reduced the outsized influence of wealthy campaign contributors by democratizing campaign funding through public financing.14 Phoenix, Arizona, is considering a robust voter reform package that includes adding registered city residents to the Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL).

Two local-level voter registration reforms provide useful models for replication. Both New York City and Fairfax County, Virginia, have implemented versions of local government agency registration policies. New York City was the first jurisdiction to adopt a comprehensive municipal voter registration program in 2000, and now requires more than 25 city agencies to register eligible residents they serve to vote. In 2016, Fairfax County successfully expanded electronic voter registration to county agencies. The county now provides access to the online voter registration portal at targeted social service agencies county-wide.15

This report explores a set of high-impact voter registration reforms that could be pursued at the local level. We focus our analysis on a set of cities where there is potential for local reform and where there is need for reforms to counteract the recent history of hostility to voting rights at the state level. This report assesses the following cities: Phoenix, Miami, Jacksonville, Tampa, Orlando, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, and Milwaukee. In each city, our analysis estimates the size of the population eligible for each reform and, where possible, estimates the number of people able to be registered to vote under the policy. The cities included in this analysis are just a starting point for exploration—there are likely a number of additional cities, counties, school districts and other municipalities where local registration reforms are both legally feasible and impactful.

Local jurisdictions have an increasingly important role to play in protecting and expanding the democratic participation of their residents. Through innovative local reforms, cities, counties, and school districts can increase voter participation and reduce the registration and participation disparities of communities of color, low-income communities and young people. In the face of ongoing attacks on voting rights and democracy at the state and national level, cities and counties have an obligation to protect voters and democratic participation.
In the United States, more than one in four potential voters—30 percent of the eligible voting-age population—are not registered to vote. With a registration rate of just 70 percent, the US lags behind comparable democratic countries around the world. For example, a 2009 Brennan Center study found that Canada had a registration rate of 93 percent, Great Britain had a registration rate of 97 percent, and Australia had a registration rate of 92 percent.

Registration and voting rates are disproportionately lower among low-income and communities of color. Families with annual incomes below $30,000, people of color, and naturalized citizens have lower registration and voting rates compared to their counterparts. Our current registration system has left 43 percent of eligible Latinxs and 44 percent of eligible Asian Americans unregistered to vote. Just over 30 percent of eligible Black people are unregistered to vote, which closely mirrors low overall rates of registration across the country.

Young people are also less likely to be registered and less likely to turn out to vote. In the 2016 general election, 45 percent of citizens aged 18 to 24 were not registered to vote and 57 percent did not vote. By contrast, 30 percent of the total population was not registered to vote and 39 percent did not vote.

Reducing Barriers to Registration and Increasing Voter Participation

The data shows that those who are registered to vote, turn out to vote. In 2016, 87 percent of registered voters cast a ballot, compared to 61 percent of the total eligible voting age population. As such, breaking down barriers to registration is a critical strategy for increasing overall rates of voter turnout. Research shows that state policies eliminating registration deadlines and reducing registration hurdles lead to increased rates of voter turnout in those states. For example, states with Same-Day Registration (SDR)—where eligible residents can register at the same time they show up to cast their ballot—lead the nation in voter turnout. In the 2012 presidential election, average voter turnout was over 10 percentage points higher in SDR states than in other states. One study found that making registration portable—in other words, automatically updating the address of a registered voter if she moves within the state, rather than requiring her to re-register with every change of address—increases turnout rates by more than two percent. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) increases voter participation by increasing voter registration, lowering procedural obstacles, reducing administrative errors, and expanding the reach of voter education and mobilization efforts. In 2016, Oregon added 272,000 people to the rolls after it implemented AVR, more than 98,000 of whom were new voters in the 2016 election. While turnout was up across the country in the 2016 election cycle, Oregon experienced the largest increase of any state (a 4.1 point increase from 2012).

Increasing access to registration at public agencies is important for improving access to registration and participation in the election process, particularly among voters of color. Census data shows...
that Black voters are three times more likely than white voters to register to vote at state public assistance agencies, and Hispanic/Latinx voters are over four times as likely as white voters to do the same. Registration at public agencies is also vital for citizens with disabilities and individuals with limited English proficiency, both of whom are more likely to be living in poverty than their able-bodied and/or English proficient counterparts. Well-administered voter registration programs established at state public assistance agencies pursuant to federal law have registered 15 to 20 percent of agency applicants.

Democracy-expanding reforms are also important for reaching young voters, who comprise a significant proportion of the electorate. Forty-six million young people between 18 and 29 were eligible to vote in 2016, versus 39 million seniors. Millennials are also the most racially diverse generation—over 44 percent of millennials are people of color, compared to nearly 39 percent of those aged 35 to 64, and 25 percent of those 55 and older. Encouraging voter registration among this age group demands new strategies. For instance, research shows that millennials are less likely to obtain drivers licenses and are therefore less likely to register to vote through the DMV than their older counterparts. By enacting policies specific to this age group—for example pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds and high school registration—local jurisdictions can bolster voter registration and turnout rates among youth while also working to build a more racially diverse base of active voters.

Opportunities to Expand Voter Registration at the Local Level

When it comes to registration and voting, cities and counties are where the rubber hits the road—where voters are registered, election machinery is operated, and ballots are cast. Cities and big counties are where most people live; 62.7 percent of the US population lives in cities, even though cities comprise just 3.5 percent of land area. Half of the US population is clustered in the 146 biggest counties out of over 3,000 counties. Improved registration and voting policies at the local level, and particularly in urban areas, have the potential to expand access to voter registration and voting for millions of people.

Proactively expanding voter registration at the local level is critical for strengthening the right to vote in cities and counties across the country. Moreover, local elected officials, advocates, and community groups can expand access to the ballot at the local level to offset efforts at the state level to curtail democratic participation. In localities affected by state-level barriers to registration, local officials, advocates, and community groups can—and should—use their power to protect and expand voter access for their residents. Local reforms provide an opportunity to increase voter outreach, registration, and turnout in local jurisdictions.
Recommended local policy reforms include the following:

- **Local Agency Registration: Expanding Voter Registration Access to Underrepresented Communities**

  One promising method for increasing voter registration, particularly among underrepresented communities, is expanding voter registration to local public agencies. As noted above, National Voter Registration Act data shows that low-income and communities of color are more likely to be registered to vote at public assistance offices, with Black and Latinx voters three and four times more likely to register to vote at state public agencies than white voters, respectively. Local agencies—including those that provide human and social services, affordable housing, and health programming, among others—are strategic targets because they administer the public services, benefits, and programs that serve primarily low-income communities and disproportionately reach communities of color.

  With local agency-based voter registration, city or county agencies would be required to offer voter registration as part of their regular interaction with the local resident. Agency staff would be trained to support the voter registration of all eligible persons submitting applications or renewals for agency services or change of address materials relating to such services. As mentioned, well-administered voter registration programs established at state public assistance agencies pursuant to federal law have registered 15 to 20 percent of agency applicants. Given these results at state agencies, it is likely that well-administered agency registration at the county and city level could produce similar outcomes.

- **High School Registration: Building a Generation of Active Voters**

  Localities can do more to get young people registered. They can design high school registration programs to reach and register every eligible high school student that will be 18 years old before the next election through existing school infrastructure. Schools can engage students through assemblies, classroom registration drives, and other methods to encourage registration, distribute and collect registration forms, ensure that forms are properly completed, and return the forms to election administrators. Election administrators are responsible for distributing registration forms to schools, processing forms upon completion, and ensuring that high schools meets the requirements of the program. Ideally, high school registration programs are coupled with voter education programs aimed at encouraging participation and turnout amongst new high school voters.

  Over time, a high school registration program could significantly increase the number of registered voters citywide, helping to build a generation of engaged, active voters. When young people learn about and participate in the voting process, they are more likely to continue to vote over their lifetime.

- **Pre-registration of 16- and 17-Year-Olds: Early Engagement of the Next Generation of Voters**

  Building on and strengthening high school registration programs, reforms that expand registration to 16- and 17-year-olds (“pre-registration”) and include targeted outreach to youth, have the potential to increase voter registration and voter participation over a lifetime. In states that allow for pre-registration, eligible 16- and 17-year-olds can pre-register to vote and then are automatically added to the registration rolls when they turn 18. New voters are automatically added to the state registration system, and ideally, receive information in the mail about how to vote upon turning 18 and the timing of the first election for which they are eligible. In states with pre-registration, local programs expanding the impact of pre-registration can help to reach brand new registrants while they are still in school. It is low-cost and does not require any additional databases; since pre-registered voters are simply entered into an existing state system under a “pending” status until they turn 18. Fourteen states, plus the District of Columbia, allow or have enacted legislation
allowing 16- or 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, even if they will not turn 18 before Election Day: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah.62

**Additional Opportunities to Innovate at the Local Level**

Cities and counties are promising laboratories for democracy. Local jurisdictions can lead the way by developing innovative strategies for expanding the vote based on what is legally feasible and politically plausible.

- **Renter Registration**: Renter registration ordinances aim to make registration more widely accessible by legally requiring landlords to provide their tenants with voter registration forms. These laws, recently adopted in Madison, Wisconsin and East Lansing, Michigan, are particularly valuable because renters are disproportionately more mobile, lower income and/or people of color.64 These laws also help to reach these cities’ large student populations, many of whom live off campus in rental housing, to get registered and stay registered to vote.

- **Public Financing of Local Elections**: Cities and states cannot ban political spending, but they can democratize campaign funding and reduce the outsized influence of wealthy contributors through public financing of local elections. In New York City, candidates for mayor and city council receive $6 in matching funds for every $1 that they raise from city residents (with a limit of $175 per resident).65 Candidates who participate in the program commit to limiting their total spending. The program reduces the influence of moneyed interests, permits middle-class candidates to run competitively (and win), and engages a broader segment of the population in the electoral process.66 In 2015, Seattle passed an innovative “democracy voucher” system, which is in effect for the 2017 election cycle. Each resident who is eligible to vote receives four $25 coupons to contribute to their preferred local candidates.67 In return for accepting democracy vouchers, candidates agree to contribution and spending limits, as well as reporting guidelines.68 Initial analysis shows that voucher users are more representative of the city’s population than traditional donors.69 In the first election since the program has been implemented, it is enabling participating candidates to compete successfully with a privately financed opponent, giving Seattle residents a stake in their local democracy.70

- **Permanent Early Voting**: Phoenix, Arizona is currently considering a robust voter expansion reform package, including a policy that would add every registered city resident to the Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL) unless they decline to be added. All voters on the PEVL receive a ballot by mail several weeks in advance of any election in which they are eligible to vote. Not only does this make voting easier, but it also gives voters ample time to consider relevant issues and research the politicians involved in an election. Voters on the PEVL list are still given the option of voting in person.71 Additional reforms to increase rates of voter registration in Phoenix include the following: offering voter registration at city government service agencies, encouraging apartment complexes to include voter registration materials in their welcome packets, and increasing the number of city polling locations. Eventually, the city plans to add a voter protection wing inside Phoenix’s city clerk department.

**Lessons from the Field**

Local voter expansion efforts is a relatively new and innovative area of policy reform. However, a handful of jurisdictions have successfully implemented local registration policies and offer important lessons to other localities considering similar reform. To fully realize the potential of proactive voter
registration expansion at the local level, cities and counties should draw from the experience of jurisdictions that are already implementing registration expansion reforms.

In addition to getting the policy right, expanding access to the ballot requires educating the public, encouraging buy-in from public agency staff, and creating a foundation of political support for the policy reform. It also requires developing local leadership to advance and implement policy reforms. Importantly, advocates and lawmakers cannot focus just on getting good laws on the books; they must also prioritize robust implementation strategies and plans for ensuring full compliance. The following examples from New York City and Fairfax County illustrate the need for effective implementation and ongoing compliance efforts in order to ensure that registration programs have maximum impact.

**Case Study: Lessons from New York City**

New York City was the first jurisdiction to adopt a comprehensive municipal voter registration program. While over a decade of lax and ineffective implementation limited the impact of the program, city reforms in the last three years have accelerated implementation and agency compliance, leading to a substantial increase in the number of New York City residents being added to the rolls through this program.

In 2000, New York City passed Local Law 29, known as the Pro-Voter Law, requiring 19 city agencies—including, for example, the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Department of Small Business Services, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene—to implement and administer a voter registration program, in which public agency staff are required to register eligible voters when they apply for or renew city services. For example, at the Department of Small Business Services, eligible New Yorkers that come through the agency to apply for business licenses are offered the opportunity to register to vote. In 2014, a coalition of organizations including the Center for Popular Democracy, the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, the Citizens Union of the City of New York, and the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), released a report titled “Broken Promise: Agency-Based Voter Registration in New York City.” The report found significant non-compliance with the Pro-Voter Law, revealing, for instance, that city agencies had failed to offer registration information in 84 percent of client interactions. The coalition also found that agencies failed to comply with language access requirements and training requirements of agency staff.

On the basis of this report, and thanks to local advocacy efforts, the New York City Council passed new legislation in 2014 designed to increase compliance and expand the impact of the Pro-Voter Law. Under this legislation, the city added seven new agencies to the law and required all participating agencies to report their progress on a semi-annual basis.

Since 2015, New York City has made promising gains in its effort to register voters through city agencies, more than tripling the number of voter registrations at designated city agencies within the first six months of 2016 (14,300 registrations, compared to 5,900 registrations in the first six months of 2015). In the six month period that data is most recently available, city agencies sent more than 18,000 registration applications to the board of elections. Based on the city’s reported progress with implementation, this number is likely to rise.

The city has also made significant progress toward improving language access. Voter registration applications have been translated into a number of additional languages: Arabic, French, Haitian Creole, Russian, Urdu, Albanian, Greek, Tagalog, Polish, Yiddish, and Albanian. As a result, over 90 percent of limited English proficient New Yorkers who are eligible to vote can now complete voter registration forms in their native language.
New York City’s voter registration expansion efforts still face several challenges. For example, each city agency distributes voter registration forms differently and few agencies are physically integrating voter registration forms into their city intake forms and applications for city services, as required by the law. There is still work to do to realize the full potential of this reform to reach eligible voters through existing city services.81

**Case Study: Lessons from Fairfax County, Virginia**

In 2016, the Fairfax County Votes Initiative successfully worked with Fairfax County to expand electronic voter registration through administrative action at the county level. This was part of a successful two-pronged strategy at the state and county level to modernize electronic voter registration systems and increase access to registration through county agencies.

As a result of a coalition effort led by New Virginia Majority Education Fund, Planned Parenthood of Virginia, Virginia Civic Engagement Table, SEIU Virginia 512, ProgressVA Education Fund and the League of Women Voters, and national partners Center for Popular Democracy, Center for Secure and Modern Election and Planned Parenthood, the county successfully expanded registration access to Fairfax County residents. Together, the coalition worked with Fairfax County to provide residents access to the state online voter registration portal at designated county social service agencies. These agencies include the Community Services Board, the Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services, the Department of Family Services, and the Health Department. Online voter registration was available to county residents before the 2016 voter registration deadline. The coalition also worked to identify, and advocate for, administrative strategies at the state and county level for implementing the data collection and electronic registration technology infrastructure necessary to expand online registration, to implement portability, and to prepare for additional modernization and security reforms in the future.

This effort has created a foundation for advancing local voter registration reforms in other cities and counties in Virginia, including Richmond and Charlottesville. The organizing work also builds a base of support for advancing further proactive voter reforms across the state.83

**Example: High School Registration in Harris County, Texas**

The community-based Texas Organizing Project Education Fund (TOPEF) is currently partnering with the Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) to enforce state-mandated high school registration obligations and implement systematic voter registration programs in Harris County High Schools.82 The effort aims to ensure compliance by streamlining and enforcing existing high school registration requirements; compelling the Secretary of State to properly notify high school administrators of their legal obligations to register students; working with superintendents to increase compliance; and creating a standard mechanism to track high school registration.

**The Impact of Local Reforms in Key States**

The following analysis provides an entry point for further exploration by illustrating the potential reach and impact of local voter registration reforms in a given set of representative cities. The analysis estimates the size of the population eligible for each reform and, where possible, estimates the maximum number of people that could be registered to vote under the policy.
What Can Cities Do to Increase Voter Turnout in Local and Mayoral Elections?

By Jason Jurjevich and Phil Keisling

Voter turnout is a foundational aspect of American democracy. In the 2012 Presidential election, less than 60 percent of the Voting Eligible Population (VEP) cast a ballot. In the 2014 Midterm election, the figures were even lower; just 36.7 percent of individuals turned out to vote, which is the lowest voter turnout rate since 1942. In party primary elections, which are now viewed as “determinative” in the vast majority of Congressional and state legislative contests, voter turnout averages around 15 percent of the eligible population.

Unfortunately, low voter turnout is also prevalent in mayoral elections in the nation’s largest cities. Our analysis reveals that among the nation’s 30 largest cities, only 20 percent of voting age citizens punched their ballots at the ballot box. In many cities, fewer than 15 percent of eligible citizens vote in local elections.

Given the implications for democracy, as well as social justice—when too few people elect leaders, more attention is paid to the interests of small groups of people rather than to community-wide, pressing issues of equity and good governance—the challenge of how to boost electoral participation remains one of the most important political issues of the day.

When it comes to Mayoral elections specifically, our research team found four general ideas that we argue, are worthy of additional discussion and possible action:

1. **Timing of Elections.** With more than two-thirds of the 50 largest U.S. cities holding their mayoral contests “off-cycle”—that is, in odd-numbered years as “stand alone” contests separate from even-year elections to fill higher-profile posts such as Governor, U.S. Congress, or U.S. President—the timing of mayoral elections appears to play a significant role in who votes—and who does not—in these contests.

2. **Voter Registration.** In every state except North Dakota, state law requires that legally eligible, citizens of voting age must separately register to vote before they can receive a ballot. According to Dr. Michael McDonald at the U.S. Election Project, over 227 million Americans were eligible to cast ballots (as of November 2014). Yet, state voter registration rolls show only about 190 million total registered voters, and just 175 million of these are classified by their states as “active.” In other words, about 50 million Voting Age Citizens,
who are technically eligible to vote, currently are unable to vote until they officially register as voters.

3. **Ballot Delivery.** Getting more registered voters on the rolls does not necessarily guarantee that more individuals will vote. Indeed, the only city in our study with voter turnout exceeding 50 percent was Portland, Oregon. Oregon’s “vote at home” system, in part explains why the state routinely posts one of the highest rates of voter turnout across the U.S.

4. **Campaign Finance Reform.** In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision, campaign contribution limits have largely disappeared for major U.S. political contests, including mayoral races. Wealthy donors—be they individuals, corporations, unions, or special “Super PACs”—are now seen by vast numbers of Americans as having far more influence over elections than average citizens. This perspective—and the discouragement and apathy it can help spawn—in turn leads to further disengagement from the political process, and lower voter turnout.

**Timing of Elections.** The history of “off-cycle” elections has its roots in the Progressive era as a reform to help focus citizen attention on municipal politics. A number of studies now suggest that the low voter turnout rates found in many cities in our study (and others), particularly among younger and minority voters, are exacerbated by this approach. A March 2016 study, funded by Pew and conducted by Rice University’s Center for Local Elections in American Politics (LEAP), found that California cities whose mayoral elections were aligned with regular midterm elections—and especially Presidential elections—had far higher voter turnout.

In response, some states, most notably California in 2015, approved legislation that forces localities with especially low voter turnout to merge their elections with statewide contests. Elsewhere, cities have changed their city charters to address low voter turnout. Baltimore, for example, moved its mayor’s race to 2016, and Los Angeles voters approved a similar change in 2015. It’s likely other jurisdictions will also examine this approach, though in most cities any election date change will require a change in the City’s Charter, which only a majority of voters can approve.

**Voter Registration.** Voter registration laws have been liberalized in recent decades. For example, in addition to making it significantly harder to remove voters due to inactivity, now more than 30 states allow voters to register online, and roughly 15 states allow “Election Day Registration”. The latter allows eligible citizens to register to vote, or update existing registration, at a polling station or a local election office all the way through Election Day. While these systems show promising results in Presidential elections, their impact is less pronounced for midterm and local municipal elections.

A potentially more powerful change would simply “reverse the polarity” of existing state laws about registration, and instead of requiring citizens to take action to register, require government to take action to register its citizens. Numerous studies show that the non-registered tend to be poorer, far younger, and more likely to be a member of a minority group compared to registered voters. Put another way, the share of a Voting Age Citizen population that is not yet even registered will tend to be significantly higher in large and mid-sized U.S. cities, given the younger, more diverse nature of their populations compared to rural and suburban areas.
In 2015, Oregon became the first state to essentially adopt a system that automatically registers citizens deemed to be eligible to vote (e.g. when qualifying for a driver’s license) through the state’s “Motor Voter Act” (http://sos.oregon.gov/voting/Pages/motor-voter-faq.aspx). Newly registered voters can “opt out” if they choose, but Oregon officials estimate this will add another 300,000 individuals to the voting rolls. California advocates put the number at 6 million, when its legislature several months later adopted a similar bill. Vermont and West Virginia have also adopted similar legislation. Although voter registration laws are made at the state level, city leaders could certainly advocate for similar changes in their states.

**Ballot Delivery.** The single biggest factor underlying Portland’s high voter turnout is that Portland is one of a handful of cities that holds its Mayoral election in concert with the Presidential election cycle. Portland’s voters, though, do have another distinction. In almost every other city in this study, except for Seattle beginning in 2012, and Denver starting in 2014, voters must either go to the polls on Election Day (or during an early voting period) or apply and qualify for, ahead of time, an absentee ballot. Since 2000, all Oregon registered voters automatically receive their ballots in the mail roughly two weeks prior to Election Day. Oregon’s “Vote at Home” system allows voters to fill out their ballots at a time and place of their choosing—most do so at home—and then choose how to return their ballots. Traditionally, most voters mailed them back to their county’s election office, though in recent years the proliferation of hundreds of official “ballot drop sites” across the state has led to most voters returning their ballots in person.

Even some of the strongest skeptics of Oregon’s system concede that it seems to significantly improve voter turnout in local elections, especially those held separate from regular Midterm and Presidential contests. The next cycle of mayoral elections in Seattle, Washington, and Denver, Colorado will follow Oregon’s lead in sanctioning the Vote at Home system of ballot delivery. In several other states, state law now allows local officials to make the decision as to whether to conduct their elections in this way. In November 2015, for example, California’s San Mateo County became the largest local government to conduct such an election, with the result being significantly lower costs and much higher voter turnout, especially among traditionally low-turnout minority voters.

City officials can urge state elected officials to either adopt Vote at Home laws outright—as Oregon, Washington, and Colorado have done—or enact “local option” laws that let local officials decide their method of ballot delivery. Since election costs are largely the responsibility of local governments, and not state lawmakers, advocates can also invoke the cause of fiscal responsibility, as well as higher voter turnout.

**Campaign Finance Reform.** While prospects for campaign finance reform at the national level see dim in the short term, some promising initiatives have emerged at state and local levels. For example, New York City has long operated a system by which small donations to a candidate can be matched, on a ratio of up to 6:1, with public funds. San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Miami recently have adopted similar systems, which advocates say help empower a broader diversity of candidates to run for office, and help average citizens feel they have more say in the process.
There wasn’t even a line. Voter turnout was so low, at 14 percent, in New York City’s Democratic primary in September that I simply walked into my Brooklyn polling station at 8:30 a.m. on a Tuesday morning — rush hour for voting — and was handed a ballot almost immediately.

“Lots of cyclists out to vote today,” the woman at the polling center said, pointing at my helmet when I asked her about the turnout. “But mostly quiet here.”

It’s no secret that voter turnout is regularly dismal in non-presidential elections. According to the Pew Research Center, “voter turnout regularly drops in midterm elections, and has done so since the 1840s.” In 2008, when Barack Obama was first elected president of the United States, voter turnout was at 57.1 percent. It dropped to 36.9 percent for the 2010 midterms and shot back up to 53.7 percent for Obama’s 2012 reelection. And even though local elections — both at the congressional and municipal level — have a far more direct and measurable effect on constituents’ lives, Americans continue to stay home.

“I think fundamentally, people don’t understand what a powerful impact city government has on their day-to-day lives,” Helen Rosenthal, New York City council member and co-chairwoman of the City Council’s Women’s Caucus, says. “If you don’t realize that the person who fills this job truly makes a difference whether or not they have the capacity to deal with quality-of-life issues, past legislation, funding. Those are incredibly important things, and the electorate doesn’t realize it.”

Voter turnout is low in local elections across the country, but New York City’s election turnout woes are, some feel, thanks to a flawed primary and voting system. The city’s primaries are closed — you can’t vote in the party primary unless you’re registered as a member. Independents, or those who don’t want to commit on paper to a party, have no voice and no vote.

New York isn’t alone. They’re one of 15 states with closed primaries. But it’s the city’s deadlines for registering (or changing party affiliation) that are comically stringent. To vote in next summer’s primary, New York voters had to register by Oct. 13. Nearly a year in advance.

It’s disenfranchisement by paperwork. “It’s systemic,” says Juan Antigua, NYC political director for the Working Families Party. “And that keeps people from voting.”

Renée Paradis, of the New York City Democratic Socialists of America (NYC DSA) agrees. “I think a huge factor in lowering turnout in the primary is New York’s unfair, undemocratic and frankly unconscionable party affiliation change deadline,” she says. “Anyone who registered as an unaffiliated voter would have had to change their party registration in October 2016 in order to be eligible to vote in a party’s primary in September 2017.”
Daniel Altschuler, managing director of Make the Road Action, an organization that works with working-class Latino communities, put a fine point on it: “I think contextually it’s really important to understand low participation in New York state is because we also just have terrible voting laws.”

However, even if without real system changes — something even Rosenthal feels is a long shot in the current legislative climate — advocates working on increasing voter turnout say there are ways to get more residents to cast ballots.

First and foremost is education.

“Most people don’t know that the elections are happening here,” Antigua says. “The more people that know, the more people are going to vote.”

But it’s not simply about canvassing and knocking down doors. Then you just end up with what Altschuler called “a vicious cycle in which people who have not been engaged before are, again, not engaged and remain outside the ranks of those who are voting frequently.” It’s about canvassing and knocking down the right doors. Campaigns, cities and organizations like Make the Road have to work to target everyone — particularly those without a voice.

It’s less about mass canvassing and more about neighborhood-by-neighborhood efforts. “We specialize in engaging people in immigrant and Latino communities,” Altschuler says. “And I think where we’ve been most effective is that the folks that are knocking on people’s doors are members from those communities who speak the language of those communities and are able to engage in culturally competent ways.”

Altschuler says the approach has proven effective in getting out the vote. And it’s something he has found, through his work at Make the Road, can be replicated in communities across the country.

“The ideal is to have neighbors knocking on neighbor’s doors,” he says, “and that type of work where people know one another in their communities and they’re saying, ‘Well, I’m going out to vote and I want to make sure you are, too.’ That’s the most effective way to do this work.”

Rosenthal has had success with a different and far younger voting base: high-schoolers. In 2015, she organized the first-ever Student Voter Registration Day. At 25 schools across the five boroughs, over 2,000 students registered to vote. Last year, in the lead up to the presidential election, over 8,500 students registered to vote.

Rosenthal found out that students were mailed a voter registration card along with their diploma. But she wanted to ensure new voters got on the rolls and understood their civic duty. It was such a success in the first year that, according to DNA Info, Rosenthal lobbied her fellow council members to include it as a 2016 budget item. The program received $200,000 in funding last year.

“We started this initiative to connect nonpartisan groups to high schools, and go in and give our conversation about why you register to vote, why it’s important, and why choosing a party matters in New York City, and trying to get kids to register,” she says.

It wasn’t solely registering people to vote. It was a day for civic education, informing kids — even those who are not eligible to vote based on immigration status — how they can get involved, from participatory budgeting to workshops that serve as crash courses in New York City government. (I most definitely did not know what a community board was at 18.)

Yet, despite these helpful efforts, until the primaries are open and the registration deadlines are shorter, there’s no amount of canvassing that can overcome the system.

“Because of all the hurdles that are systemic, it doesn’t matter how much education we do, turnout is going to be low,” Rosenthal says. “The only way to consistently increase turnout is with structural reforms.”
Increasing Turnout in City Elections: Is Timing Everything?

In 2001, a strong and diverse field of candidates ran for mayor of Los Angeles, and surveys indicated that the race was too close to call. Yet only about one-third of the city’s registered voters cast ballots in the primary nominating election and runoff. This sort of turnout has raised concerns about declining civic participation and its potential consequences. One such concern is that low turnout can lead to unrepresentative city government: If nonvoters and voters differ systematically in their political preferences and needs, local priorities and policies are less likely to represent the views of all citizens. Another concern is that nonparticipation is associated with a host of negative attitudes about government and politics. If unchecked, declining civic engagement and turnout could compromise the legitimacy of government.

In Municipal Elections in California: Turnout, Timing, and Competition, Zoltan Hajnal, Paul Lewis, and Hugh Louch address these issues by documenting voter turnout in California’s municipal elections and investigating the causes of turnout differences. To assess the political vibrancy of municipal elections, they also examine the degree of competition for and turnover in municipal offices. Drawing most of their data from a questionnaire completed by 350 city clerks in California, the authors calculate that less than half of all registered voters living in cities cast ballots in the most recent municipal elections. However, the authors also point out that overall turnout in city elections could be increased substantially simply by rescheduling more of them to coincide with state and national contests.

Turnout Varies Greatly, Depends on Election Timing

The data indicate that the average turnout was 48 percent of registered voters for city council elections and 44 percent for mayoral races. However, these averages mask dramatic differences in voting rates across California’s communities, where turnout ranged from a low of 10 percent to a high of 89 percent. To account for this variation, the authors considered several factors—election timing, institutional structures, and the local political context—while controlling for city-level demographic characteristics that are known to affect turnout.

Their analysis indicates that about half of the difference in turnout among California cities can be explained by election timing. Ever since the Progressive Era of a century ago, many California cities have scheduled off-cycle or “local-only” elections, most of which occur in spring. However, local contests that coincided with presidential elections drew 36 percent more turnout than these off-cycle elections. Similarly, local contests that ran concurrently with gubernatorial races and presidential primaries drew 26 and 21 percent more registered voters, respectively (see figure below).

Controlling for other factors, municipal contests that coincide with presidential or gubernatorial elections experience significantly higher turnout of registered voters than do off-cycle elections.
Cities that provide more services with their own staff—as opposed to those that contract out to firms or make arrangements with other local governments—also drew a larger share of voters to the polls. The authors speculate that city governments that provide services directly have more control over basic issues that affect city residents’ quality of life. They also note that municipal employees tend to be a well-mobilized segment of the local electorate. By contrast, distinctions between charter cities and general-law cities, and those between cities with and without term limits, had no direct relationship with local turnout.

The political context of the municipal election was also related to turnout. When at least one proposition appeared on the municipal ballot, cities tended to draw about 4 percent more registered voters to the polls. Similarly, the degree of competition for an office—as measured by the number of candidates—was positively related to turnout.

**Election Timing, Incumbent Success, and Competition for Office**

Noting that more than one-third of the state’s cities continue to hold off-cycle or odd-year elections, the authors maintain that a move to concurrent elections has the greatest potential to expand voter participation in California’s local political arena. Their data also indicate that more than 40 percent of cities have rescheduled municipal elections recently, in most cases switching from off-cycle to on-cycle elections. The reason for the rescheduling was often budgetary; city governments pay a smaller share of election costs when their elections are held concurrently with statewide contests.

In considering a timing change, policymakers may wish to consider the unintended consequences that may arise from election rescheduling. For example, there is mild evidence that on-cycle elections favored incumbents over challengers. Although the vast majority of incumbents win regardless of election timing, city council incumbents were 4 percent more likely to be reelected in cities with concurrent elections. Large cities also tended to have higher reelection rates and lower turnout rates. However, cities with citizen initiatives on the ballot—a possible reflection of community controversy—had significantly lower reelection rates for incumbents.

The data bring out other patterns of political competition at the municipal level as well. Predictably, the presence of an incumbent council member or mayor seemed to dissuade potential competitors from entering local races; but where independent and third-party voters constituted a larger share of the registered voting public, more candidates sought city office, even though party labels do not appear on the ballot in California’s local elections. Finally, more candidates ran for mayor where full-time salaries and longer terms came with the office.

**How Important Is Increasing Local Turnout?**

The authors estimate that if all municipal elections in the state had coincided with a presidential election, 1.7 million more Californians would have voted in their most recent city council contest. They also note, however, that even this measure would probably fail to increase voter participation beyond the relatively low levels already found in statewide and national contests. Also, higher turnout may not translate into higher interest in local politics or broader participation in community affairs. Finally, on-cycle elections may make it slightly more difficult for challengers to defeat incumbents. The authors conclude, however, that increasing voter participation at the local level remains an important way to enhance democracy in a diverse state with powerful city governments.

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This research brief summarizes a report by Zoltan L. Hajnal, Paul G. Lewis, and Hugh Louch, Municipal Elections in California: Turnout, Timing, and Competition (2002, 124 pp., $12.00, ISBN 1-58213-041-8). The report may be ordered by phone at (800) 232-5343 [U.S. mainland] or (415) 291-4400 [Canada, Hawaii, overseas]. A copy of the full text is also available on the Internet (www.ppic.org). The Public Policy Institute of California is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to independent, objective, nonpartisan research on economic, social, and political issues affecting California.
Tenant Notification of Voter Registration (TNVR) ordinance goes into effect in March

If you own rental property in Minneapolis, a new requirement to be aware of will be going into effect March 1, 2016. As of that date, property owners in the city will be required to provide all new tenants with information about how to register to vote at the time they move in. This is the result of an ordinance passed by the City Council last September, which added the following language to the required duties of licensees found in Section 244.2000 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances:

(f) Beginning March 1, 2016, and continuing thereafter, the owner of any dwelling which is required to be licensed by this chapter shall provide information about how a voter may register in the State of Minnesota, in a manner approved by the City, to all tenants aged eighteen (18) or older at the time of first occupancy.

An initial letter informing all licensed property owners of the ordinance change was sent out in January, and was followed up by a second mailing with printed copies of the required information the second week of February. This includes a voter registration application and an accompanying informational sheet to provide to all new tenants. These materials can be provided to tenants in either printed copy or as electronic documents. The electronic documents are posted on this website and available for sharing or downloading, in English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. Additional printed copies of materials can also be requested and will be provided by Elections & Voter Services at no cost to property owners and managers.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TNVR

Why is the City doing this?

- Voter registration is the necessary first step to participating in elections.
- Registration stands as one of the biggest barriers to participation, and disproportionately negatively impacts young and first time voters, highly mobile voters (including students and military families), lower income voters, and voters of color.
• Voters must update their registration every time they move.
• More than 50 percent of Minneapolis residents are renters, with a higher rate of mobility than homeowners.
• Including information about registering to vote in the information provided to tenants when moving into a property is a low cost, high impact mechanism to target voters who will need to register or update a registration.
• More voters pre-registered will mean shorter lines for everyone in polling places on Election Day.

What is required of property owners or managers?

• Beginning March 1, a property owner or manager will be required to provide voter registration information - consisting of an information sheet and a voter registration application - to new tenants at the time they first move in to a property.
• This requirement does not apply to existing tenants, only new tenants moving in on or after March 1, 2016.
• All materials are being provided at no cost to property owners and managers by Elections & Voter Services, and will be available in both hard copy and electronic versions.
• A sample of the materials will be sent to every registered property manager the week of Feb. 15, along with instructions for how to request additional free materials.
• The goal is to make this process as easy as possible for property owners by providing all required information in a choice of formats and at no cost.
• The required information will also be available in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish initially.

Providing information about registering to vote has a low threshold of burden on the owners of rental property, and offers a significant return in ensuring access to information about a key process affecting city residents at a point in time when it is highly relevant to those residents. Property owners and managers can expect the initial materials being mailed to them to arrive by mid-February, and they are also be posted on this site for access and downloading as well.
Chapter 46, §1057-a: Agency based voter registration

Each agency designated as a participating agency under the provisions of this section shall implement and administer a program of distribution of voter registration forms pursuant to the provisions of this section. The following offices are hereby designated as participating voter registration agencies: The administration for children's services, the business integrity commission, the city clerk, the civilian complaint review board, the commission on human rights, community boards, the department of small business services, the department for the aging, the department of citywide administrative services, the department of city planning, the department of consumer affairs, the department of correction, the department of cultural affairs, the department of environmental protection, the department of finance, the department of health and mental hygiene, the department of homeless services, the department of housing preservation and development, the department of parks and recreation, the department of probation, the department of records and information services, the taxi and limousine commission, the department of transportation, the department of youth and community development, the fire department, and the human resources administration. Participating agencies shall include a mandate in all new or renewed agreements with those subcontractors having regular contact with the public in the daily administration of their business to follow the guidelines of this section. Such participating agencies shall be required to offer voter registration forms to all persons together with written applications for services, renewal or recertification for services and change of address relating to such services, in the same language as such application, renewal, recertification or change of address form where practicable; provided however that this section shall not apply to services that must be provided to prevent actual or potential danger to the life, health, or safety of any individual or of the public. Participating agencies shall provide assistance to applicants in completing voter registration forms, and in cases in which such an agency would provide assistance with its own form, such agency shall provide the same degree of assistance with regard to the voter registration form as is provided with regard to the completion of its own form, if so requested. Such agencies shall also receive and transmit the completed application form from any applicants who request to have such form transmitted to the board of elections for the city of New York.

1. Participating agencies shall adopt such rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement this section. The campaign finance board shall prepare and distribute to participating agencies written advisory agency guidelines as to the implementation of this section and may establish training programs for employees of participating agencies; provided that any guidelines promulgated by the voter assistance commission prior to the effective date of this clause shall remain in effect unless further amended or repealed by the board. Participating agencies may consider such advisory agency guidelines in the promulgation of their rules and regulations.

2. Participating agencies shall provide and distribute voter registration forms to all persons together with written applications for services, renewal or recertification for services and change of address relating to such services, in the same language as such application, renewal, recertification or change of address form where practicable; provided however that this section shall not apply to services that must be provided to prevent actual or potential danger to life, health or safety of any individual or of the public. Participating agency staff shall provide assistance in completing these distributed voter registration forms, and in cases in which such an agency would provide assistance with its own form, such agency shall provide the same degree of assistance with regard to the voter registration form as is provided with regard to the completion of its own form, if so requested. Participating agencies shall also include a voter registration form with any agency communication sent through the United States mail for the purpose of supplying clients with application, renewal or recertification for services and change of address relating to such services materials. Participating agencies shall also incorporate an opportunity to
request a voter registration application into any application for services, renewal or recertification for services and change of address relating to such services provided on computer terminals, the World Wide Web or the Internet. Any person indicating that they wish to be sent a voter registration form, via computer terminals, the World Wide Web or the Internet shall be sent such a form by the participating agency, or directed to a bank on that system where such a form may be downloaded.

3. Participating agencies shall also:

a. by December 1, 2015, or at the next regularly scheduled printing of their forms, whichever is earlier, physically incorporate the voter registration forms with their own application forms in a manner that permits the voter registration portion to be detached therefrom. Until such time when the agency amends its form, each agency should affix or include a postage paid board of elections for the city of New York voter registration form to or with its application, renewal, recertification and change of address forms;

b. use voter registration forms that contain a code assigned by the board of elections of the city of New York which designate such forms as originating from participating agencies; and

c. transmit any completed forms collected by such agency to the board of elections of the city of New York within two weeks of the receipt of such completed forms at the participating agency. If a completed form is collected within five days before the last day for registration to vote in a citywide election, such completed form shall be transmitted by the participating agency to the board of elections of the city of New York not later than five days after the date of acceptance, provided, however, that notwithstanding any other provision of this section, any agency subject to the requirements of section 5-211 of the election law shall be governed only by the timeframes for transmission of such forms to the board of elections set forth in such section.

4. All persons seeking voter registration forms and information shall be advised in writing together with other written materials provided by agencies or by appropriate publicity that government services are not conditioned on being registered to vote. No statement shall be made nor any action taken by an agency employee to discourage the applicant from registering to vote or to enroll in any particular political party.

5. The completion of the voter registration form by an applicant is voluntary.

6. Employees of a participating agency who provide voter registration assistance shall not: a. seek to influence an applicant’s political preference or party designation; b. display any political preference or party allegiance; c. make any statement to an applicant or take any action the purpose or effect of which is to discourage the applicant from registering to vote; or d. make any statement to an applicant or take any action the purpose or effect of which is to lead the applicant to believe that a decision to register or not to register has any bearing on the availability of services or benefits.

7. Each participating agency, department, division and office that makes available voter registration forms shall prominently display promotional materials designed and approved by the board of elections for the city of New York or state board of elections for use in state agency programs.

8. Each participating agency, other than community boards and the city clerk, shall submit semi-annual reports on their implementation of this section to the mayor’s office of operations. Such reports shall include the number of registration forms distributed, the number of registration forms completed at an agency office to the extent readily ascertainable, and the number of registration forms transmitted to the board of elections. Such reports shall be submitted to the mayor’s office of operations by January 15 and July 15 of each year, with the first reports due by July 15, 2015. The mayor’s office of operations shall compile such reports into a single report that disaggregates such data by agency, and shall deliver such compiled report to the speaker by February 15 and August 15 of each year, with the first such report due by August 15, 2015.
East Lansing City Council: Landlords must provide voter registration information and forms to new tenants

By Lauren Gibbons | lgibbon2@mlive.com on February 06, 2013 at 1:00 AM, updated February 06, 2013 at 2:38 PM

EAST LANSING, MI — When future MSU students make the jump from on- to off-campus housing, two additional items will be provided to them — a voter registration form and voter information sheet.

A newly-minted ordinance passed by the East Lansing City Council Tuesday evening will require all city landlords to provide this information to incoming tenants in the hopes of encouraging more students to register and get out to the polls.

Backed by Mayor Pro Tem Nathan Triplett, the measure is meant to increase voter participation among off-campus student residents, whose voter registration and turnout numbers have been historically lower than their on-campus counterparts. The ordinance passed in a 4-1 vote with dissent from Councilmember Vic Loomis.

Under the ordinance, landlords will be required to distribute voting information to all new tenants. The cost of printing all materials will be incurred by the city. A landlord's consequence for not complying with the ordinance will be a civil infraction charge, amended from the original misdemeanor punishment at the meeting after many protests.

Besides putting pertinent voter information directly in the hands of all off-campus students in East Lansing, the ordinance could remind more registered students to change their old addresses after moving from one city residence to another, City Clerk Marie McKenna said.

McKenna said during the Nov. 2012 election, city officials had hundreds of instances where students had to complete a longer process because their addresses were not updated, and 20 provisional ballots were unable to be counted.
"We have many voters who may believe they’re correctly registered to vote, but they’re not," she said. "This was a huge issue for us in the last election."

Triplett said he believed the ordinance to be a "no-brainer," but Loomis and several of the city's landlords thought otherwise, vocalizing their dissent throughout the public hearing on the issue.

Many landlords said they are willing to pass out the information voluntarily, but were uncomfortable with the requirement aspect of the ordinance, claiming voter registration had nothing to do with the ins and outs of running a rental business.

"What does voter registration have to do with our relationship to our residents?" DTN president Tom Kuschinski asked the council. "I'm more than happy to put that information in a folder or something, but what do we (landlords) have to do with voter registration?"

Loomis said he was opposed to "singling a single industry out" to charge with the responsibility of voter form distribution when voting is a public sector task. Although he supports more voter registration of all residents, he said a voluntary plan created with the help and support of landlords would have been more appealing.

"I think this ordinance is way off base," he said.

Triplett said any potential burdens incurred by the ordinance likely would be outweighed by the benefits of making voter registration information available to more residents.

MSU students and East Lansing student groups were largely in support of the ordinance, with representatives of ASMSU and the University Student Commission announcing unanimous support.

Stephen Wooden, an MSU student currently serving on the East Lansing Planning Commission, also expressed full support of the change, calling the move a necessary update to the city's voting process.

"All too often, students who wish to participate in voting fall through the cracks," Wooden said. "It's important to include as many people as possible."

McKenna likely will start work soon on making the ordinance requirements a reality, creating the information sheets, printing forms and preparing a viable distribution strategy to all the city's landlords.
In Houston, Taco Trucks Serve Up Voter Registration

LINDA POON | SEP 28, 2016

Texas joins the growing movement to get food-truck customers to vote.

A few weeks ago, when the founder of the group called Latinos for Trump went on MSNBC to warn of a deliciously dystopian future in which immigrant-staffed taco trucks would invade every corner of the nation, many Americans leaped on this unusual convergence of carne asada and national politics as an opportunity to wonder whether voting and tacos can go hand-in-hand. As CityLab reported, one county official in Idaho came up with a food-truck-inspired mobile polling scheme. Now taco trucks in Houston are registering voters.

On Tuesday, which doubled as Taco Tuesday and National Voter Registration Day, local design firm Rigsby Hull teamed up with the nonprofit Mi Familia Vota (MFV) to send out a fleet of eight taco trucks that will also serve as registration booths. The campaign, which emerged in response to Marcos Gutierrez’s comments, runs until October 11, the last day for voters to register.

“The Latino community and immigrants in general have a lot to contribute,” says Carlos Duarte, Texas state director at MFV, “not only our gastronomy but also our civic participation.”

This is an issue of particular urgency in Texas, which has had one of the nation’s worst voter turnout in past years, ranking second to last during the primaries, after Louisiana. When Duarte visited the Tierra Caliente truck, he got a hint of why: While most white and black patrons said they were already registered, many in the Latino community weren’t. Some took forms for themselves, others lacked citizenship but grabbed one for a family member. And still others simply claimed they just weren’t going to vote this year—“believe it or not,” he says.
The staff at MFV has been training owners on how to engage their customers. And while the organization can’t send volunteers to every site, Duarte says they try to stop by a few trucks during peak hours to answer questions about the voting process. “Even if not everybody who comes needs to be registered, or is eligible, the conversation that civic engagement is so important is also part of our message,” he says.

It’s not just Houston that’s taking advantage of America’s reignited passion for #tacotrucksoneverycorner. Earlier in September, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce launched the “Guac the Vote” campaign to get taco truck owners to register customers to vote as a collective response to Gutierrez’s alarm. From Detroit to New York to Austin, the responses have been gaining momentum. The campaign also urged owners to then park their trucks at polling places on Election Day as a symbolic gesture. Thomas Hull, principal designer of Rigsby Hull, told Houston Public Media that registering people is only half the battle, he said. “The other half is getting folks to the polls.”

Consider the taco you buy afterwards as a reward—a pat on the back, if you will—for fulfilling your own patriotic responsibility.
In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV) in Satellite Locations in the City of Madison

**Background.** City of Madison issued 66,834 absentee ballots in the 2016 General Election, truly shattering all previous records. The November 2016 election saw over twice the number of issued and returned absentee ballots as any previous election. The number of pre-registered voters prior to Election Day was also at a record high. That these numbers occurred in the context of Wisconsin’s strict photo ID law is more remarkable, but this would not have been the case without In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV) occurring at satellite locations across the City of Madison. Of the 66,834 total absentee ballots, 51,053 (or 76%) were issued at satellite IPAV locations, with an additional 6,207 being issued at the downtown City Clerk’s Office. The thirteen off-site locations included City of Madison public libraries, a municipal engineering office and locations on the UW-Madison and Edgewood College campuses.

The Clerk’s Office took advantage of the strategic locations of Madison’s nine public libraries, and where a library was not conveniently located, the Madison’s eastside engineering department hosted absentee voting. The Clerk’s Office harnessed the existing geographic landscape of municipal libraries, but also the library mission of providing access to information and encouraging community involvement. The relationship is a natural one. The same is true for hosting absentee voting at UW-Madison’s Student Activity Center and at Union South. Implementing IPAV at satellite locations is not without its challenges. However, the alleviation of the intense bottle-necking at the City Clerk’s Office, the convenience and accessibility for voters and the vast expansion of voter education and outreach far outweigh the challenges.

Finally, in reviewing voter turnout in the November 2016 election between Wisconsin’s largest two cities, Milwaukee and Madison, an argument can be made that the robust IPAV program facilitated higher turnout in the City of Madison.

**November Implementation.** The roll out of IPAV satellite sites for the November 2016 election was rapid. The Clerk’s Office had only a two week time period to prepare for it.

- **Volunteers.** The satellite IPAV locations relied on volunteers (special registration deputies, members of the League of Women Voters and members of the Friends of Madison Public Libraries) who were further trained and deputized on behalf of the Clerk’s Office.
- **MyVote Wisconsin.** It also relied on the MyVote Wisconsin website which can verify a voter’s registration and appropriate ward in order for the correct ballot to be issued. If voters were not registered or needed to update their registration, they could register and then immediately vote in-person. These IPAV volunteers had access to a dedicated phone number
in the Clerk’s Office, which was answered by clerk staff immediately, so that questions can be answered and issues resolved on the spot.

- **Courier System.** IPAV concluded 30 minutes prior to the library closing for the day and a courier (either a clerk staff person or a volunteer poll worker) would pick up all materials – registration forms, absentee ballots – and secure them in tamper-evident bags and deliver them to the City Clerk’s Office.

### Challenges and Changes.

- **Volunteers → Hiring Staff.** Building on the experience from November election, the Clerk’s Office hired chief inspectors for the 2017 spring elections to be trained on WisVote, the official registration system. Staffing 12 satellite locations cost $16,000. This change produced tremendous benefit, in that chief inspectors know exactly what is required for an absentee ballot to be processed and counted at the polls.

- **MyVote Wisconsin → WisVote.** MyVote is a public-facing website and while it will display the information needed to carry out IPAV, its searching capability is not robust and a data entry error could result in the staffer not being able to locate valuable information. Having chief inspectors trained in voter registration and absentee ballot functions of WisVote allowed for more accurate on-site processing. The voter’s record in WisVote was immediately updated upon a voter voting an IPAV ballot at a satellite location.

Conducting IPAV at satellite locations is a large undertaking. The courier system must occur every evening for every satellite location in order to securely store election materials. All ballot styles are ideally available at all locations, so that if a person votes at the library near his or her place of work, daycare center or home, the appropriate ballot is available. Accessible voting devices, such as the AutoMARK or ExpressVote, should also be available at these locations. The Clerk’s Office staff must be immediately available for questions by phone. But this voter activity, which is now spread out geographically, is alleviating the occurrence of acute bottlenecking from thousands of people coming to a single location of in-person absentee voting located in a downtown office building as well as voter lines at the polls on Election Day.

### Benefits and Stories.

Libraries are open in the evenings and on the weekends. They have Wi-Fi to facilitate electronic proof of residence documents (for the purposes of registering) and to operate WisVote on certified laptops. Libraries are accessible buildings, and because they are usually places of convenience, if a voter did not have accessible photo ID or a proof of residence document, they can more easily return to the library to complete the IPAV process than a single downtown location. In-person voter education and outreach was readily available to residents all across the city for the weeks prior to the election. Many comments from the staff at libraries repeatedly stressed this aspect of voter education.
Feedback from library staff and chief inspectors has been overwhelmingly positive. Stories from the frontlines include assisting the blind, hard of hearing and persons with other disabilities in the voting process.

Most voters told me they were so happy we were offering [IPAV], especially because getting out to the polling location was hard to access and the lines were long.

We had so many elderly come in because it was easier parking and getting into our location than it was at their polling location.

A man last voted in 1983 was able to vote again. He had difficulty writing and had low vision which made filling out the voter registration and ballot itself a challenge. He was extremely happy and excited to be able to participate once again in an election.

Many times we became the one stop shop – someone would register, vote and get a library card. Other times someone would vote and checkout materials or pick up a hold. So many variations occurred through the 6 week process.

We were even able to help even non-Madison residents by telling them where they could vote and the hours available.

**UW-Madison IPAV.** Hosting two satellite IPAV sites on the UW-Madison campus was beneficial in an additional manner. Because the UW-Madison student ID does not meet the requirements of photo ID for purposes of voting, the university will issue a separate compliant card (with the student signature and expiration date two years from issuance) upon student request. While 989 voting compliant ID cards were issued on November 8, Election Day, an additional 6,356 compliant IDs had been issued during the period of IPAV. Having two campus satellite IPAV sites – Student Activity Center and Union South, which combined issued 9,023 IPAV ballots – contributed to the voter education specific to students: the requirement of compliant photo IDs and how to obtain one.

**IPAV and Increased Voter Turnout.** While this memo cannot assert an exact causal relationship between satellite IPAV sites and turnout, there is evidence that IPAV supports a higher overall turnout. This is clear when reviewing Madison and Milwaukee’s voter turnout in the 2012 and 2016 November elections. In the 2012 presidential election, the Cities of Madison and Milwaukee had a turnout of 78% and 66%, respectively. This was with no photo ID laws in effect. Conversely, in the 2016 presidential election, now with photo ID requirements fully enforced, Madison saw a slight depression in turnout at 75%, while Milwaukee’s turnout dropped ten percentage points to 56.4%. There could be a variety of reasons for this difference in turnout, but the widespread use of satellite IPAV sites by Madison is very likely one of them.

Durham voters can get to the polls for free via public transit on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 7.

The city council voted to make it a fare-free day at the request of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People. Ricky Hart from the Durham Committee proposed the idea to the city council during its work session Oct. 19.

Hart asked for free Election Day public transit while the polls are open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., but the council agreed to more, giving riders a half-hour buffer for travel time. The free fare hours last from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Nov. 7.

Council member Don Moffitt said it was a great idea and said the cost – $6,300 – was a drop in the bucket compared to the larger costs of holding an election. Mayor Pro Tem Cora Cole-McFadden said that while nothing is free, the reduction in GoDurham revenue was worth it.

Voters will choose between Farad Ali and Steve Schewel for mayor and three council ward seats. Cole-McFadden is seeking re-election to her Ward 1 seat against DeDreana Freeman. Ward 2 candidates are Mark-Anthony Middleton and John Rooks Jr. Ward 3 candidates are Vernetta Alston and Shelia Ann Huggins.

City residents can look up their Election Day polling place at https://vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup/. Look up GoDurham bus maps and schedules here: godurhamtransit.org/.
ELECTION INTEGRITY: A PRO-VOTER AGENDA

By Myrna Pérez
Online Registration. States should create a secure and accessible online registration portal. The online system would prompt all information needed to complete a registration — the same information voters currently provide on paper. Registered voters could also use the portal to view and update their records and find polling locations, making it a full-service, one-stop shop for everything a citizen needs to cast a ballot that counts. Online registration has some integrity-enhancing features that paper-based registration systems lack. First, online registration avoids the errors associated with deciphering handwriting when entering data from paper forms. Second, online registration can also minimize duplicate registrations by flagging a matching record already in the database, and then prompting the voter to enter any address change, correction, or missing information, such as party affiliation. Tammy Patrick, a former election official and a past commissioner of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA), notes a further advantage: officials can track where online registrations are coming from (e.g., particular IP addresses), and how quickly they arrive, which permits monitoring for fraudulent activities.\(^50\) With paper-based registration, election officials and third-party registration groups can get thousands of forms dropped off at once, making tracking of sources more burdensome. As of January 31, 2017, at least 39 states plus the District of Columbia allow or will soon allow certain voters to register online.\(^51\)

Election Day Fail-Safe. Eligible voters should have secure, fail-safe procedures to correct mistaken information at the polls. Even with the best and most modern list-building practices, some errors are inevitable and some voter registrations will fall through the cracks. No eligible American should lose the right to vote because of errors or omissions. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia offer or will soon offer same-day registration at the polls or an election official’s office.\(^52\) Permitting voters to correct information on Election Day is one more method for ensuring that registration rolls are accurate. In fact, one political scientist has estimated that 25 percent of the people who benefit from Election Day registration are voters who have moved.\(^53\) Election Day registration also appears to boost turnout. In the 2016 election, the six states with the highest turn-out offered citizens the opportunity to register and vote on the same day.\(^54\)

Two: Ensure Security and Reliability of Our Voting Machines

The hanging chads in the 2000 election Florida recount prompted a national debate about voting technology. Using $2 billion supplied by the 2002 Help America Vote Act,\(^55\) states replaced outdated mechanical machines with computer-based voting systems. New devices proliferated. Some were precinct count optical scans, in which ballots are marked by hand and then fed into a machine.\(^56\) Others were direct-recording electronic systems (DREs) with paper trails: Voters mark their choice on the machine and also receive a paper record of their selections.\(^57\) Some were DREs without paper records.\(^58\) In addition, central counters are used to tally mail-in ballots.\(^59\) These new machines were projected to be more accurate than their predecessors.\(^60\) But before long the reliability of the new voting systems was being called into question. A 2008 *New York Times* report on touch-screen machines noted that “in hundreds of instances” they “fail unpredictably, and in extremely strange ways; voters report that their choices ‘flip’ from one candidate to another before their eyes; machines crash or begin to count backwards; votes simply vanish.”\(^61\)
More recently, in the early voting period before Election Day 2016, voters in Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas reported vote flipping problems. On Election Day, Detroit notably had discrepancies between machine ballot counts and numbers of voters in the poll books in nearly 400 precincts, according to reports, and one county in Utah had nearly 75 percent of its machines fail.

These malfunctions are troubling and undermine public confidence in elections. In today’s highly partisan political climate, where accusations of “rigging” abound, dysfunctional voting machines breed mistrust and cynicism.

Of even greater direct concern: Although altering the outcome of a U.S. presidential election would require breaching numerous different voting systems in a country with thousands of election jurisdictions, today’s generation of voting machines remains vulnerable to deliberate manipulation. In 2016, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation released a joint analysis report linking malicious cyber activity to Russia, an unprecedented finding for such a report.

A decade ago, the Brennan Center convened a task force of the nation’s leading experts on voting technology and computer security. They concluded that all of the new systems “have significant security and reliability vulnerabilities, which pose a real danger to the integrity of national, state, and local elections.” In an era when corporate and government databases are hacked routinely — with as many as 150 million people affected in a single theft — it may be only a matter of time before voting systems are penetrated. And the small number of people required to perform such a task would make Boss Tweed envious. “One attacker,” the Brennan Center task force found, “need not know much about the particulars of the election or about local ballots to create an effective attack program.”

Stanford University computer science professor David Dill argues that today’s voting machine technology is susceptible to two significant risks. First, as technology becomes more complex and sophisticated it becomes harder to know when it is operating securely. More secure technology is harder to use, more difficult to understand, and might prevent officials from verifying that it has not been compromised. Second, no computer software can guarantee protection against insider attacks by those who produce or run the technology.

Compounding the security and reliability problems is the age of voting machines. Electronic voting machines have shorter lifespans than mechanical ones, and machines purchased a decade ago are simply wearing out. For instance, no one expects a laptop to last 10 years. In 2014, the bipartisan PCEA, chaired by former Romney campaign counsel Benjamin Ginsberg and former Obama White House Counsel Robert Bauer, called aging voting technology an “impending crisis.” Because of the Help America Vote Act, many states purchased new machines at roughly the same time. Now, many are reaching the end of their useful lives. In 2015 the Brennan Center consulted more than 100 election officials and several dozen technology experts and published an alarming study, America’s Voting Machines at Risk, finding that the majority of states are relying on aging and outdated voting machines. Specifically:
• 42 states are using some machines that are at least 10 years old. In most of these states, the majority of election districts are using machines that are at least 10 years old.

• In 13 states, machines are 15 or more years old.

• Nearly every state is using some machines that are no longer manufactured.

Election officials must try to maintain these machines. Some resort to cribbing parts from eBay. And even when parts can be found, the fact that they come from another era is obvious. “When we purchased new Zip Disks in 2012, they had a coupon in the package that expired in 1999,” an Ohio election official told the Brennan Center.

To compound the problem, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the independent, bipartisan federal agency responsible for developing voting-system standards, has not updated certification standards since 2005. Without updated standards, jurisdictions wishing to purchase new machines are limited to EAC-certified models built with decade-old technology. In response to this problem, the bipartisan PCEA called on the EAC to update its certification process and allow jurisdictions to adopt modern and more accessible voting machines.

Unfortunately, as state and local governments grapple with strapped budgets, replacing these machines has not been a legislative priority. Thus far Congress has not provided federal dollars for the task.

Nonetheless, there are measures that should be taken that can make voting systems more secure and reliable:

**Validate and Verify Machine Accuracy and Security Before Election Day.** Voting machines, including hardware and software, should be tested under conditions that mirror those on Election Day. These tests can detect problems such as software bugs and perhaps catch malicious programming. They are especially important in jurisdictions that do not provide the kinds of records that make meaningful audits possible after Election Day. Election Day inspections should also be conducted. Machines themselves should be designed so that an audit would accurately detect a malfunction.

**Require Post-Election Audits.** Many machines now issue a paper record of a voter’s selection. But these records are of little security value without audits to ensure that vote tallies recorded by a particular machine match any paper records. Despite near universal expert agreement on the need for audits, some vendors have vigorously
opposed these paper trails, contending that they increase costs and slow the voting process. Security experts also recommend that states pass laws for effective “risk-limiting audits.” These require examination of a large enough sample of ballots to provide statistically “strong evidence that the reported election outcome was correct — if it was.” Also, the audit process should not rely on any one individual who might be in a position to manipulate either the voting machine or the recount device. According to experts, these insider attacks are the most difficult to stop. Voting technology experts also say machines must be “software independent,” which is technically defined as when “an (undetected) change or error in its software cannot cause an undetectable change or error in an election outcome.” But practically speaking, this means that the election results can be captured independently of the machine’s own software. Auditors should be assigned randomly to further ensure the process is not being gamed. Finally, audits should be as transparent as possible. This not only is essential to garnering public confidence, but can show a defeated candidate that she lost the election in a contest that was free and fair.

**Recounts and Audits.**

Recounts and audits are related in that both seek to ensure the election process is working as it should. Recounts, like those Green Party candidate Jill Stein pursued in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania in 2016, repeat the process of tabulating the votes cast to determine whether the initial count was accurate, and generally only occur when the outcome of an election contest is close. Audits seek to validate and verify the accuracy of the election process. But unlike recounts, audits do not require a candidate or voter to initiate the process. Audits are also much less expensive than recounts, as they involve regularly reviewing a smaller sample of ballots from a randomly selected precinct. While some states require regular post-election audits, many states, including Michigan, do not. In some states, including Pennsylvania, older voting machines do not have paper trails, complicating audit efforts. Even in states that do require regular post-election audits, like Wisconsin, these processes could be much more robust.

**Have Plans to Cope With Election Day Machine Failures.** Any audit, test, or inspection would be of limited value if there is no agreed upon way to respond quickly if a problem is identified. Each jurisdiction should have a contingency plan in place to cope with machine problems on Election Day.

**Create a National Clearinghouse of Voting Machine Issues.** The EAC is responsible for certifying voting machines. It has recently taken several steps to publicize information about voting system malfunctions, like an unresponsive touch screen or errors with a machine’s security system, for example, particularly for EAC-certified voting systems. However, the EAC did not certify its first voting machine until 2009, well after many jurisdictions had purchased new machines. Many of the machines reaching the end of their lives are not EAC-certified. A repository of data on machine problems, including those of non-EAC-certified voting systems, could be critical in preventing the same problem from occurring in multiple jurisdictions. The EAC should modify its procedures so that voting system malfunctions are disclosed as soon as they are reported, making clear that the report is under investigation.
A current and comprehensive database of machine problems would provide election officials
with the information they need to correct problems before an election. By keeping a log of
problems, such a clearinghouse would aid officials looking to purchase new systems.

**Provide Funding to Replace Unreliable Voting Machines.** There appears to be little political
will at the state or federal level to replace voting machines nearing the end of their life. In fact,
election officials in 22 states have told the Brennan Center they want to purchase new machines
by 2020, but lack the funds to pay for them. The Brennan Center estimates the cost of replacing
the nation’s aging voting equipment may exceed $1 billion. With such investments looming,
new machine purchases should be planned properly and include important considerations such
as maintenance. If money is not allocated to replace the aging voting infrastructure, the risk that
Election Day failures can affect election outcomes only grows.

**Three: Do Not Implement Internet Voting Systems Until Security is Proven**

In recent years lawmakers in more than 30 states have introduced legislation to use some
form of Internet voting. Voting by Internet is seductive because of its convenience, and fits
neatly alongside all the other activities now done online such as shopping, banking, travel
reservations, or even finding a partner. And it seems intuitively obvious that Internet voting
would boost turnout.

Yet, some of the biggest skeptics of Internet voting are computer security experts. Jeremy
Epstein, senior computer scientist at SRI International (a nonprofit technical research institute),
has testified at a congressional forum that the “vast majority of computer scientists, including
nearly all computer security experts, are of the opinion that internet voting cannot be done
securely at this time, and probably not for another decade or more.” Existing technology, as
well as some of the limitations in the very architecture of the Internet, makes online voting a
dubious prospect. Whatever the problems of today’s voting machines, they are not networked
or connected to each other. By contrast, the central element of the Internet is precisely its
networking capability. While this characteristic makes the Internet immensely powerful, it
also makes it astonishingly vulnerable from an election integrity standpoint.

Proponents argue that Internet voting would be useful for military personnel overseas, would help disabled voters, and is potentially cheaper than traditional methods. They also point to studies indicating it might increase participation. Some note that Estonia, with a population about the size of New Hampshire’s, uses Internet voting. And some even propose a system of “televoting” that would use webcams to allow voters and election officials to monitor each other. Most conspicuously, proponents note that the Internet is already used for numerous governmental and private transactions requiring security, from banking to health care to air traffic control.

But the security required for voting online is higher than for buying a book from Amazon. The privacy of each voter must be protected and each vote must be counted accurately. The recent high-profile cyberattacks on Sony Pictures, Target, insurer Anthem Health, internet company Dyn, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, voter registration databases in Illinois and Arizona, and others underscore the fact that private sector and major federal agency computer networks, which have many more resources than local election administrators, are far from invulnerable.
Internet fraud is already a large problem. Online retailers alone lost an estimated $3.5 billion in revenue from fraud in 2012, which was up 30 percent from 2010. Less spectacularly, banks regularly replenish funds lost to online fraud in order to maintain public confidence.

If jurisdictions were to switch to Internet voting, election integrity concerns in the United States could take on an international dimension. In 2010, the District of Columbia ran a pilot project in which the public was invited to attack a proposed Internet voting system. The system was quickly hacked by a team led by University of Michigan professor J. Alex Halderman. The group found it could change ballots and violate voters’ secret ballot rights. They also had control of the system’s network, allowing them to watch how the system was configured and tested. The penetration was so complete they even tapped into security cameras to watch system operators. Perhaps most troubling, the Michigan team found evidence of attempted break-ins that appeared to be from China and Iran. It was unclear if these attempts specifically targeted the D.C. system, but it was a chilling demonstration of the vulnerabilities of Internet voting.

David Jefferson, a computer scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, a federal research facility, warns against some of the predictable — and not necessarily easy to prevent — lines of attack on Internet voting systems:

- Readily available and customizable malware can penetrate voters’ home computers, tablets, and cellphones, and steal or manipulate votes.

- Denial of service attacks can shut down the entire system or target specific areas, preventing large groups of voters from voting for an extended time. Even if the system was fortified to protect against the manipulation of individual ballots, an attacker could simply delete them. These attacks allow hackers to access all documents available on a computer’s server. Jefferson adds that these sorts of attacks are hard to prevent and can go undetected.

Moreover, current resources are often inadequate to guard against increasingly sophisticated threats. Attacks can take place from anywhere in the world, making detection and punishment more difficult. These computer system attack techniques are constantly evolving, and current technology has limited capability in guarding against unknown threats. More than 430 million new unique pieces of malware were discovered in 2015 alone, up 36 percent from the year before, according to a study by Symantec, a cybersecurity company. The Conficker worm is but one example of a virus that has successfully infiltrated millions of computers. Conficker was particularly pernicious because infected computers were readily available to carry out instructions that a hacker could send remotely. New exploitable weaknesses are discovered regularly on the Internet.

Finally, system vulnerabilities imperil voter privacy and ballot integrity. Hackers can make “receipts” pop up on the voter’s screen that appear to reflect a voter’s true preference while still transmitting a different vote. Accuracy notwithstanding, any receipt that recorded a citizen’s vote could be used to verify that somebody voted the way they promised, enabling schemes to buy, track, or influence votes.
Technologists generally agree that the following conditions should be met before implementing any Internet voting system:

All Internet Voting Systems Should Allow Voters to Check that Their Vote Was Properly Cast, Recorded, and Tallied. According to computer science experts convened by the U.S. Vote Foundation in 2015, “[n]o existing commercial Internet voting system is open to public review. Independent parties cannot verify that these systems function and count correctly, nor can they audit and verify election results.” Security experts stress that Internet systems should be “end-to-end verifiable” (E2E-V), which means that voters and auditors can see that voter choices were recorded and counted properly. It is called “end-to-end” because the goal is to protect the integrity throughout the entire process from the beginning point — the voter’s intended selection — to the endpoint — the final tally. One advantage of E2E-V is that it allows the public at large to independently verify vote counts while concealing the identities of individual voters through complex encryption technology. While E2E-V shows promise, it is not ready to be deployed. Further research is needed to improve certain aspects of E2E-V, including anonymity protection and usability. Guaranteeing voter anonymity — while enabling voters to track their own votes — poses a unique challenge that has not yet been fully overcome. Of course, any E2E-V system should also be auditable, offering verification methods clear enough that they can serve as court-admissible evidence if needed for disputed elections. While a self-interested vendor may claim to offer a secure and verifiable E2E-V system, only an expert in cryptographic voting can support or debunk the vendor’s assertion.

Internet Voting Systems Should Not Be Unveiled for the First Time in a High-Turnout Election. There should be widespread testing, and those tests need to be in real-world environments, but real-world risks need to be managed. This can be facilitated by studying vulnerabilities from previous Internet voting tests and convening election officials, independent security experts, and technologists for advice on the feasibility of creating secure systems, risks, and needed countermeasures before rolling out such systems. The experts should be comfortable that any particular proposed Internet voting system is free of glaring security vulnerabilities. The tests should be designed with as much transparency as practicable so that others beyond officials and testing labs have the opportunity to demonstrate weaknesses. This calls for publicizing the system’s code, and for numerous public and live tests.

Internet Voting Systems Must Be Tested Rigorously and Continuously Because Threats Are Constant and Evolving. No amount of testing can prove a system is secure against any and all attacks. Election officials should be clear as to the limits of conclusions that can be drawn from any one evaluation or test. Even if a well-designed test shows that a system lacks certain vulnerabilities, “the lack of evidence of problems is not strong evidence that a system is safe,” notes professor J. Alex Halderman, whose team, as discussed, successfully hacked the D.C. Internet voting system. Nevertheless, experts have recommendations on what testing should probe and how it should occur. What to explore in testing is relatively straightforward: the usability of the system, the ability to detect and recover from attacks, and the nature of the evidence the system can provide to verify the accuracy of a vote. The test should include clear guidelines about what constitutes “success” before a trial starts.
Internet Voting Systems Should Be Usable and Accessible. The usability of Internet voting systems remains a major problem. E2E-V systems, while the most promising among Internet voting options, can add complexity to the voting process, reducing usability. By way of illustration, a 2014 study of E2E-V systems found “that a significant number of voters failed to cast a ballot with each of these three systems, rendering them ineffective. Many of those voters thought they had successfully cast a ballot, only to discover that the process had failed them.” Usability is a prerequisite for voters, but systems must also be comprehensible for election officials. Usability issues arise in part because of the difficulty of effectively explaining to voters and election officials the complex encryption technology that makes the systems work. A useable system allows problems to be better identified and unsubstantiated fears about inaccurate votes to be better assuaged.

Four: Adopt Only Common-Sense Voter Identification Proposals

Many words have been used — on the floors of state legislatures, in news accounts, and legal briefs — on the issue of strict new voter identification policies. “Strict” means having a very narrow list of accepted identity documents that millions of eligible Americans do not have. In 2010, only two states had these laws. Between 2011 and 2014, nine states passed strict photo ID laws, and four more limited the number of IDs a voter could show before being given a regular ballot. As of mid-January 2017, 16 states were considering strict voter ID legislation — with likely more to come.

Perhaps strict voter ID laws would not be so controversial if they were merely ineffective yet benign. But they are not. In fact, strict voter ID laws place barriers in front of the ballot box for many eligible Americans. A Brennan Center survey showed that up to 11 percent of eligible voters — more than 21 million citizens — do not have the kind of identification required by these strict laws. Additionally, many of these strict ID laws impose burdens that fall hardest on minorities, the poor, and the elderly.

Given the stakes, it is no surprise that strict photo ID laws have been challenged in court. In the months preceding the 2016 general election, there were high-profile cases in three states. Federal judges blocked Texas and North Carolina from enforcing their strict photo ID requirements as enacted. As a result, North Carolina did not require voters to present ID at the polls in November, while Texas offered an alternative option for those without the required ID. Wisconsin’s requirement remained largely intact with some court-ordered remedies for students with expired IDs and people that could not get free voter IDs. The Texas law — the strictest in the nation when passed — has now been struck down by four courts, including a district court that found that more than 608,000 actual registered voters lacked the required identification.
Expanding Voting Rights

THE PROBLEM

Civic participation in the United States remains dismal compared to other advanced democracies. Low turnout, plus the denial of voting rights to youth, non-citizens, and many ex-felons, means that only 57.5% of eligible voters voted in the 2012 presidential election, 93 million eligible voters did not, and another 96 million residents were ineligible to vote. Furthermore, voter turnout is dramatically lower in non-presidential elections. Mayors are often elected with single-digit turnout and scholars estimate that local elections generate an average turnout of approximately 25-30% of the voting age population.

The economic dimension of this problem is significant: in 2010, “only 40% of those whose family income was less than $50,000 turned out, compared to 60% of those from households earning more than $75,000.” This gap in voting is aggravated by the influence of corporate lobbying and spending on elections and has profound consequences for public policy. A recent study of Congressional votes “reported that legislators were three times more responsive to high-income constituents than middle-income constituents and were the least responsive to the needs of low-income constituents.”

THE SOLUTIONS

A wide array of policies to increase voter participation should be adopted by state governments, including universal voter registration, expansion of no-fault absentee and vote by mail statutes, voter registration modernization, and same-day registration. But cities and counties have a key – and underappreciated – role to play in this movement. Innovative local leaders can adopt reforms that will facilitate increased civic participation, strengthen the responsiveness of local government to community needs, and provide models for state and federal reform. The following represent some examples of creative solutions that cities have adopted:

FACILITATE VOTER REGISTRATION: Cities and counties can make voter registration easier. Madison, WI and East Lansing, MI recently adopted ordinances requiring landlords to provide their tenants with voter registration forms. These laws will help the cities’ large number of college students register and stay registered to vote. Such requirements are also valuable because renters are disproportionately lower-income and/or people of color.

Local governments can also play a key role in ensuring that high school students register to vote when they become eligible. For example, in Broward County, FL, the Supervisor of Elections conducts an annual high school registration drive, which in 2012 registered approximately 12,000 students. Local elected officials can help coordinate programs between the local boards of election and school districts to ensure that all eligible students are registered to vote.

Cities should also ensure that voters are given the opportunity to register at public libraries, community centers, police stations, housing departments, and the other places where citizens interact with municipal government.

EXPAND THE FRANCHISE TO NEW VOTERS: In some states, municipalities have the legal authority to set voter eligibility requirements for local elections.

Youth Voting: Fifteen states and Washington, D.C. permit 16- and/or 17-year olds to preregister to vote, so that they will be eligible to vote at the first election after they turn 18. Where possible, cities should move further and fully enfranchise youth, as Takoma Park, MD recently did. Research shows that voting is habitual and that norms related to political participation in high school have lasting impacts.
so that promoting participation among 16- and 17-year-olds will increase turnout for years to come.

*Noncitizen Voting:* In the United States, “non-citizens voted in local, state, and even national elections in 22 states and federal territories from the nation’s founding until the 1920s.”

It was only with the rise of racist anti-immigrant sentiment at the turn of the 20th century that states began to eliminate alien suffrage. It is time to return to a democratic system in which all residents have the right to participate in self-governance.

Through a referendum, *Takoma Park* enfranchised non-citizen residents in 1992. In 2010, ballot initiatives were very narrowly defeated *Portland*, ME and *San Francisco*. In *New York City*, a broad coalition of advocacy groups, unions, scholars, and elected officials are now advancing a proposal to enfranchise the 1.2 million lawfully-present residents. The legislation is supported by a majority of the City Council.

*Restoring Voting Rights for Felons:* Approximately 5.3 million Americans in 48 states are denied the right to vote because of a past felony conviction. Many of these policies were adopted after the Civil War with the explicit purpose of disenfranchising ex-slaves. These laws continue to have a tremendously harmful impact: 13% of black men are disenfranchised – 7 times the national average.

*Takoma Park* recently granted all previously incarcerated felons the right to vote once they complete the prison sentence. In Minnesota, ex-felons may vote after completing probation or parole and *Minneapolis* adopted a “Restore Your Voice” initiative to “inform disenfranchised ex-felons of their voting rights.” *Lexington*’s City Council voted unanimously to support a state law that would restore voting rights to ex-felons.

**PUBLIC FINANCING OF LOCAL ELECTIONS:** The overwhelming evidence is that our system of campaigns funded by private dollars skews public policy in favor of the wealthy and forces elected officials to spend time raising money instead of focusing on governing.

Cities and states cannot ban political spending, but they can reduce the outsized influence of wealthy contributors and democratize campaign funding through public financing.

In *New York City*, candidates for mayor and city council receive $6 in matching funds for every $1 that they raise from a city resident (up to a limit of $175 per resident). Candidates who participate in the program commit to a limitation on their total spending, which ensures that money will not determine the outcome of the race. The program reduces the influence of moneyed interests, permits middle-class candidates to run competitive races and win, and engages a broader segment of the population in the electoral process.

**LANDSCAPE AND RESOURCES**

The Brennan Center, The Pew Charitable Trusts Elections Initiative, and Demos have excellent resources on voter registration modernization and campaign finance reform. CIRCLE has valuable information on youth participation. The Center for Popular Democracy and the Leadership Center for the Common Good work with base-building organizations around the country to advance voting rights at the city and state levels.

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**Notes**

8. Letter to Takoma Park Mayor Bruce Williams from The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (March 25, 2013).
The Immigrant Voting Rights Task Force (“the Task Force”) is pleased to present this report of recommendations to the Office of the Mayor of Seattle. The mayor’s office convened the Task Force over a year ago to identify, analyze, and address the issues that affect civic and political participation by immigrant communities. Even though Seattle’s foreign-born population has grown each year and is currently around 18 percent of the City of Seattle’s (City) population, including over 57,000 naturalized citizens, members of immigrant communities do not participate in civic life at the same rates as other Seattleites.

Even though Seattle’s foreign-born population has grown each year and is currently around 18 percent, including over 57,000 naturalized citizens, members of immigrant communities do not participate in civic life at the same rates as other Seattleites.

The Task Force has identified many obstacles that keep immigrant communities from participating in Seattle’s civic and political life. They identified five general areas of concern and developed a series of practical recommendations that the mayor’s office can embrace to help address these barriers, which taken together can be implemented through a coordinated citywide Seattle Votes campaign with clear benchmarks and metrics associated with each of the following recommendations over the next three years. All of these recommendations assume compliance with federal, state, county and city laws, including but not limited to public gifts of funds.
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<tr>
<th>FINDINGS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>There is not enough civics education targeting immigrant communities, and there is a tremendous need for targeted outreach regarding elections and policy issues that affect immigrant communities. Not enough information about civics, elections, and voting is translated into languages other than English.</td>
<td>- Improve and expand data collection relating to electoral participation and language needs of immigrant communities.</td>
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<td>- Develop and implement the Seattle Votes campaign, a comprehensive civic engagement strategy that includes funding for focused voter registration, civic education, multilingual training and information, and voter registration of young voters in coordination with the Seattle School District.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2] The technology gap between immigrant communities and the rest of the City limits access to important information about elections and voting.</td>
<td>Address the language needs of new American voters.</td>
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<td>The information technology used by local governments is outdated and uses platforms that are not commonly used by immigrant communities. The technology gap prevents immigrant communities from accessing important information about elections, which negatively impacts their voting rates and civic participation.</td>
<td>- The City should partner with community-based organizations and King County Elections to provide information and assistance in non-English languages to immigrant voters, including languages not mandated by Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act.</td>
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<td>- The City should develop translation standards for voting information produced for limited English proficient (LEP) voters, and adopt the translation industry’s best practices for simplicity and reading level comprehension.</td>
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<td>- The City should ensure that non-English voting information is available on its website. The non-English information should be both easy to find, and all of the links to non-English information should be optimized for access over multiple platforms (e.g., mobile phones).</td>
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<td>- The City should establish a multilingual voter hotline to provide assistance to limited English proficient (LEP) voters.</td>
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<td>3] More ballot drop boxes should be located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants.</td>
<td>Ensure that neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants have readily accessible ballot drop boxes.</td>
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<td>The location of ballot drop boxes makes it difficult for members of immigrant communities to vote.</td>
<td>- The City should ask King County Elections to place permanent ballot drop boxes in neighborhoods with large concentrations of immigrant voters.</td>
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<td>- The City should encourage King County Elections to use permanent drop boxes rather than mobile election vans.</td>
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<td>4] Immigrant communities face legal obstacles to civic and political participation.</td>
<td>Advocate on behalf of immigrant communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The failure of comprehensive immigration reform and other electoral structural obstacles such as multi-member electoral districts prevent immigrants from full participation in civic and political activities.</td>
<td>- Local policy makers should actively support legislation on the local, state, and federal level designed to increase immigrant civic and political participation.</td>
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<td>- The City should conduct outreach to immigrant ex-felons in order to educate them on the process of restoring their voting rights.</td>
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<td>- The City should encourage the state legislature, and particularly Seattle’s delegation to Olympia, to pass the Washington Voting Rights Act.</td>
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<td>- The City should encourage Washington State’s delegation to Congress to support comprehensive immigration reform legislation with a pathway to citizenship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5] Significant resources are needed to assist eligible immigrants who want to naturalize. The existing resources are not coordinated to enable as many people as possible to receive assistance.</td>
<td>Develop and fund comprehensive civic education for new Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are not enough resources to help Seattle residents who want to become citizens complete the complex process and existing resources have not been effectively coordinated.</td>
<td>- The City should increase funding for the New Citizen Program, and expand eligibility for program services up to 200% of the poverty level.</td>
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The Seattle Votes Campaign

The Task Force envisions the City of Seattle launching a comprehensive Seattle Votes campaign to significantly increase civic engagement among immigrant, refugee, and communities of color in Seattle. Taking into consideration important shifts in our electoral processes in Seattle elections, particularly district elections, the Task Force recommends that the City use this opportunity to significantly strengthen the civic engagement of New Americans and immigrant communities in Seattle through the inter-related strategies drawn from the recommendations in this report.

The Seattle Votes campaign should be a City of Seattle multilayered and branded public education campaign with a goal of educating key communities about how to better engage in the political process through voter registration, voter participation, and advocacy. The campaign should be cohesive to include the above elements, and broadly speaking should include: direct and personal outreach to key communities through earned, paid, and new media; engagement and participation of City agencies, elected leaders, and stakeholders; as well as the participation and leadership of grassroots and community groups. Some specific recommendations for the Seattle Votes campaign are:

- Establish new requirements for City agencies to gather data on civic engagement (naturalization, voter registration, and voting rates) of specific populations: communities of color, immigrant communities, and LEP communities that comprise two and a half percent of the city’s total population or a total of 5,000 residents, and gather this data by voter district. Data gathering efforts should also focus on other under-represented communities, such as re-enfranchised ex-felons, voters younger than 25 years of age, as well as low-income and homeless people.

- Enlist City agencies, like Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, to make regular communications to City residents about voter registration and voting in Seattle.

- Invest new resources and leverage existing matching fund dollars to support voter registration, voter engagement and participation efforts. This includes language identification and translated civic education efforts by community-based organizations to reach LEP and other targeted populations. Funds should be used to test, implement and expand best practices, like in-language ballot parties, in-language phone calls, community forums on civic participation and civics education, as well as electronic and in-person outreach to key populations.

- Enlist the support of other local public agencies, including King County Elections and Seattle Public Schools, as well as King County Metro, to support civic engagement activities and civic education in public forums and spaces.

- Advocate for the removal of barriers to civic participation described in this report, including increased data collection, translation of information, location and availability of drop boxes, and important policy changes.

- Use an earned, paid, and new media effort launched through ethnic media outlets that reach key populations in Seattle.
Low voter participation by New American voters can be improved by dedicating resources for focused civic engagement programs.

Electoral participation rates of New Americans lags behind other groups. In response, the City should dedicate the resources necessary to inform, encourage, and educate members of immigrant communities about how and why to vote and participate in Seattle’s civic life. Implementing the Seattle Votes campaign will focus the necessary resources on targeted efforts to increase voter participation of all Seattle residents.

Seattle can spearhead creative and community-based solutions to increase voter participation and civic engagement of its residents. The Task Force identified several creative solutions that it recommends to City policy makers.

The Task Force also researched strategies that can increase youth voter registration. The Task Force concluded that high schools in Seattle should play a greater role in registering youth voters as permitted by state law.6

Additionally, the City of Seattle should advocate for reform of state law to allow pre-registration of 16 and 17 year old voters when they are obtaining their driver’s licenses, because this is one of the few interactions that voter registration officials will have to engage youth.

Policy makers need better data about New American voters.

There isn’t enough information about New American voters. As a result, policy makers cannot create informed public policy to eliminate barriers that impede greater electoral participation and civic engagement. The Task Force was surprised to find that King County Elections does not use demographic data to target outreach efforts to LEP communities. The City, together with partners at King County and the State of Washington, should dedicate resources to collecting information about New American voters. Better information about New American voters will result in better policies that will increase voter participation and civic engagement.

The Task Force found that securing data such as the numbers of naturalized citizens, as well as data that groups New Americans by language community, citizens of voting age, and limited English proficiency, is difficult. However, the Task Force also found that it is not impossible to collect these data, either from existing programs (e.g., the U.S. Census) or from new programs developed by the City or King County.
Presently there is insufficient data about:

■ The language needs of eligible voters living in Seattle.
■ The literacy levels of eligible LEP voters in Seattle.
■ The use of ballot drop boxes in their past and current locations.
■ The number of eligible LEP voters.
■ LEP voter turnout.

Improved data will help the City evaluate the success of the Seattle Votes campaign. The data will allow comparison over time to show the campaign’s impact on New American voting and civic engagement.

Many language-minority citizens would also benefit from targeted outreach efforts in their native language. But without the data needed to accurately measure the impacts of policies designed to increase New American voting and civic engagement patterns, there is no way to effectively measure success or improve efforts. The only way to assure that outreach efforts are appropriately targeted is to evaluate progress using reliable data.

Recommendations

Short-Term (actions that can be implemented within one year):

■ Improve and expand data collection and reporting to obtain information about:
  ■ The language needs of Seattle’s voting age population.
  ■ The identity of New American voters eligible but not currently registered to vote.

■ Implement the Seattle Votes campaign:
  ■ Use voting data about New Americans to conduct the Seattle Votes campaign’s focused voter outreach and civic engagement plan, as well as to evaluate the performance of civic engagement strategies.
  ■ Dedicate resources to help organize ballot parties that enhance the civic education of New American voters.
  ■ Work with partners to support local efforts to eliminate barriers for disenfranchised ex-felons, homeless and other vulnerable people.
  ■ Set aside a percentage of matching fund dollars available through City departments to support voter registration, engagement and participation efforts.

Compliance with Section 203 of the Federal Voting Rights Act in King County

Under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, state and local elections officials must provide voting information in languages other than English where there are more than 10,000 or over five percent of the total voting age citizens in a County who are members of a single minority language group, have depressed literacy rates, and do not speak English very well.

In King County, Section 203 requires voting information to be provided in Chinese and Vietnamese.
Encourage and facilitate youth voter participation by supporting policies that pre-register 16 and 17 year olds.

Include voter registration information with Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities bills.

Use robocall and phone technology to target populations who rely on oral traditions to communicate.

**Medium-Term (actions that can be implemented within three years):**

- Evaluate the Seattle Votes campaign and other civic engagement strategies using New American voter information.

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**Seattle should adopt legislation that expands the voting rights protection of language minority communities provided by Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act.**

Local governments around the country have responded to the challenges facing language minorities and immigrant communities by enacting stronger local language access policies for election information. The City of Seattle should follow suit by adopting an ordinance that expands the availability of election information in a greater number of non-English languages.

The exemplary case of San Francisco’s LEP voter outreach and translation services can serve as a model for Seattle. The Language Access Ordinance (LAO) of the City/County of San Francisco goes beyond the requirements of Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act by providing for translation of information into languages not otherwise mandated by federal law.

Seattle should embrace a similar model. Specifically, Seattle should commit to providing translated information for “emerging language populations,” defined as those language minorities that comprise at least two and a half percent of the city’s total population or 5,000 city residents who speak a language other than English.

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**Recommendations**

**Medium-Term (actions that can be implemented within three years):**

- Adopt a City ordinance that lowers the threshold for providing translation of elections information for language minorities that comprise either two and a half percent of the City’s total population or 5,000 total City residents.

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**The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) was authorized by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to provide technical support in the development of voting system guidelines.**

The NIST found the use of “plain language” ballots improved voting accuracy, especially for voters with lower educational levels, and created guidelines for drafting a plain language ballot. The NIST also found that unclear voter instructions on a ballot leads to mistakes that invalidate ballots or intimidation that inhibits voting. Based on these findings, the NIST created guidelines for creating clear ballot instructions.

As a best practice for ballot design, the NIST has also advocated for the use of familiar and common words rather than technical and specialized words that voters are less likely to understand.
Expanding the Franchise and Removing Legal Barriers to Voting

Ensure easy access and remove barriers to voting.

Purging voter registration rolls of “inactive” voters disproportionately disenfranchises New American voters. Preserving New Americans’ right to vote requires maintaining accurate national voter registration rolls. Washington State’s participation in the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) program is a positive step toward preventing voter disenfranchisement. ERIC’s purpose is to improve the accuracy of voter rolls and increase access to voter registration. ERIC identifies errors in the voting rolls and submits reports to county auditors and election officials who address problematic registrations. The City should encourage the use of services such as ERIC to protect Seattle residents from being disenfranchised due to bureaucratic errors.

Washington State’s participation in the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) program is a positive step toward preventing voter disenfranchisement.

At-large electoral districts tend to marginalize minority groups, including immigrant communities. The recent federal court decision against the City of Yakima illustrates how some at-large election systems operate as structural barriers to minority voters. When at-large elections operate to deny race and language minorities an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice, those electoral systems should be changed. The City should support state legislation, such as the Washington Voting Rights Act, that facilitates challenges to at-large election systems.

Recent efforts in other states to disenfranchise voters through state level legislation that imposes unnecessary identification requirements for voters, prohibits voting by citizens with criminal records, and imposes strict residency requirements, disproportionately affecting New American voters.

Seattle must take a stand against restrictive voter registration laws and other policies restricting voting rights across the country by adopting policies that counter voter disenfranchisement. The City should encourage the adoption of expansive voting rights legislation at every level of government.

Explore how the City may expand the franchise to all residents.

In community dialogues the Task Force learned that there was significant interest in creating new mechanisms that would allow all Seattle residents the right to vote in municipal elections regardless of citizenship status. At this time we view this as an aspirational goal, but one fraught with significant legal administrative and political obstacles. Other municipalities have permitted non-citizen residents to vote for school boards, local candidates, and ballot measures. However, at this time the City is not in a position to permit non-citizen residents to vote in municipal elections even if they are long-time residents devoted to Seattle.

Non citizens are important stakeholders in Seattle, regardless of their legal ability to vote. For years many non citizens in Seattle lived and worked under temporary non-immigrant status for major companies, or have invested and started job-creating businesses. Others are married to U.S. citizens or have children attending school in Seattle. Some have sought asylum or refuge from countries where they faced persecution or other trauma. Many Seattleites reside here as permanent residents with “green cards,” while others lack clear documentation establishing a basis for residing in the United States.

Like citizen residents, non-citizen residents have a stake in the City’s governance. Granting non-citizen residents the ability to vote in municipal elections would expand the spectrum of
voices and preferences, ideas and ideals, heard by the public and City government, and offering non-citizen residents the unique opportunity for civic engagement by voting would undoubtedly enrich the fabric of our city.

Presently there are substantial legal obstacles to non-citizen voting. The Washington State Constitution restricts voting to state and county residents who are citizens of the United States:

All persons of the age of eighteen years or over who are citizens of the United States and who have lived in the state, county, and precinct thirty days immediately preceding the election at which they offer to vote, except those disqualified by Article VI, section 3 of this Constitution, shall be entitled to vote at all elections. (Wa. Const. art. VI, § 1)

According to the relevant statutes in the Revised Code of Washington, only citizens of the United States can register to vote. Regulations under the Washington Administrative Code echo the U.S. citizenship requirement for voter registration.

Seattle Home Rule Charter. Assuming Seattle could overcome or circumvent the voter registration issue, Seattle’s “Home Rule Charter,” viewed within the confines of the state constitution, may afford some opportunity for non-citizen voting on a very limited basis. Seattle operates under a municipal charter. The Seattle City Charter adopted by Seattle voters as prescribed by the Washington State Constitution, embodies the fundamental principles of the City, defines the City’s powers and duties, and provides for some rights of self-governance over actions not specifically prohibited by the State Constitution or state law. However, home rule charters are subject to and controlled by preemptions in the State Constitution and the general laws of the State.

The Washington State Constitution prohibits local government to alter the election process for certain offices: the prosecuting attorney, the county superintendent of schools, the judges of the superior court, and the justices of the peace. But the constitution remains silent on elections for school boards, local offices, and local ballot measures. Because of its home rule charter, Seattle is not expressly prohibited from permitting non-citizen voting on those local offices and issues. Nevertheless, assuming Seattle moved to adopt a measure for non-citizen voting, it could be subject to costly challenges based on the state constitution, statutes, and regulations.

Non-citizen Voting Experience in Other Cities. Few cities in the United States have implemented non-citizen voting. Chicago has allowed all residents to vote on school board elections since 1988. New York City permitted non-citizen voting in school board elections until 2002 when the school boards were eliminated through centralization.

Cambridge and Amherst, Massachusetts have passed legislation granting non-citizens voting rights in elections, but state enabling legislation is required for implementation and has not been forthcoming. Six towns in Maryland have succeeded in permitting resident, non-citizen voting for local office: Takoma Park, Barnesville, Martin’s Additions, Somerset, Garrett Park, and Chevy Chase.

Having a home rule charter can provide a legal basis for amending local regulations to give non-citizens the right to vote based on governance by home rule jurisdictions. However, this principle does not entirely negate the ability to challenge home rule charter rights. For example, in San Francisco and Portland, Maine, both charter cities, ballot propositions would have enfranchised non-citizens with the right to vote in local school board elections. Both propositions were narrowly defeated. In San Francisco, a constitutional challenge was threatened, though the defeat at the ballot box rendered the challenge moot.

Recommendations

Short-Term (actions that can be implemented within one year):

- Conduct outreach to ex-felons to educate them on the process of restoring their voting rights.
- Encourage the legislature to pass the Washington Voting Rights Act.
- Encourage the legislature to pass legislation that permits Election Day voter registration.
- Encourage the legislature to pass legislation that permits portable voter registration.
- Encourage the legislature to pass legislation or an administrative rule that permits pre-registration of sixteen and seventeen year olds when they apply for a Washington State driver’s license.
- The Mayor and City of Seattle should not promote expansion of voting in municipal elections to non-citizen Seattle residents at this time.
- The City of Seattle should support comprehensive immigration reform that provides opportunities for non-citizen residents to become permanent residents of the United States through the federal immigration process and subsequently become U.S. citizens.
- The City of Seattle should expand the availability of high-quality citizenship preparation services for non-citizen residents of Seattle who are permanent residents of the United States through the federal immigration process.
YOUNG VOICES
AT THE BALLOT BOX

LOWERING THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS IN 2017 AND BEYOND

Most would agree that American democracy needs a shot in the arm. Around 60 percent of eligible citizens usually vote for president, fewer than 25 percent vote in most Mayoral elections, and public trust in government is at an historic low.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Youth activists and local elected officials have pursued this idea in a number of cities for over a decade. Takoma Park, Maryland broke through in 2013 as the first American city to allow 16-year-olds to vote in local elections, and its neighbor Hyattsville followed suit in 2015. At the end of 2015, Generation Citizen launched the Vote16USA campaign to help support local efforts and promote the idea nationally, hoping to serve as a clearinghouse for those interested in, and already working on, the issue.

In the 14 months since, despite the initial skepticism that many demonstrate over the idea, lowering the voting age has been solidified as a serious policy proposal worthy of mainstream consideration. More than 75 media outlets have covered the issue since Vote16USA’s launch, including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Vox, and Rolling Stone. Most importantly, the issue was put before voters for the first time as ballot measures in San Francisco and Berkeley, California.

In Berkeley, 70 percent of voters voted yes to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for the city’s school board elections. The goal in San Francisco was more ambitious – lowering the voting age to 16 for all municipal elections. An early poll in April pegged the measure at 36 percent support, well below the 50 percent threshold needed to pass. Typically, ballot measures that pass begin with approximately 60%, to hold the inevitable backlash.

Over the next several months, however, youth leaders significantly swayed public opinion with a message focused on increasing voter turnout in the long run by building habitual voters at a young age. Nearly every elected official in the city supported the campaign, and in November it ultimately earned over 172,000 votes to finish just two percent shy of passing.

The youth-led ballot measure campaigns in Berkeley and San Francisco prove that lowering the local voting age is a viable policy solution that the public is ready to consider. These measures provide us a playbook for how to approach future campaigns in cities around the country. There is now more interest in this policy than ever, from youth, voters and state and local elected officials around the country.

The landscape around lowering the voting age has changed dramatically since the 2015 publication of Vote16USA’s first white paper, “Young Voices at the Ballot Box,” necessitating this update. This paper presents the same core research and arguments with updates to reflect the past year’s progress. The paper also lays out updated, concrete next steps to advance the cause, and includes an updated legal feasibility study.
Often, at first glance, the idea of lowering the voting age to 16 provokes skepticism from the public. Why should we lower the voting age if so many 18-year-olds do not even vote in the first place? And aren’t 16-year-olds just kids?

A longer glance reveals that extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in local elections is an opportune and strategic way to strengthen our overall democracy. While further evaluation is needed to more comprehensively determine the potential effects of lowering the voting age, research does exist, from this country and others, to suggest that lowering the voting age can improve voter participation and overall civic engagement, while the potential downsides are minimal.

**REASON #1: WE NEED TO ENCOURAGE EFFECTIVE AND RELEVANT CIVIC LEARNING**

Lowering the voting age on the local level can drive demand for effective civics education in schools, reviving a discipline that has been pushed to the side as schools focus on achieving accountability metrics in other subjects.

Enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds, even in a limited capacity, has the power to invigorate civics education in high schools. In all subjects, students learn best when the material presented is relevant to their lives. But, for many students, it can be difficult to feel a connection between the political process described in textbooks and the issues that affect them every day. Civics class risks falling short by teaching young people how government works without any ability to actually participate in it. This disconnect may provide one of the reasons that Americans struggle at understanding how our government works. For example, only approximately one third of American adults can name the three branches of government, and a third can’t even name a single branch.¹ Letting 16- and 17-year-olds vote will bring much-needed relevance to civics classes, which can help address this lack of civic knowledge amongst the public.

In addition to motivating students to engage with civics classes, lowering the voting age can lead schools to focus more attention on effective civics education. When students are able to vote in local elections before leaving high school, it becomes harder for districts to ignore this crucial discipline. The high school classroom is the ideal place to teach and engage young people about important local issues, and lowering the voting age can inspire schools to take advantage of this opportunity.

This held true in San Francisco in 2016. The Board of Education voted unanimously to endorse the Vote16SF campaign, and simultaneously passed a resolution that committed to bolstering the district’s civics education curriculum to ensure 16- and 17-year-olds would be ready to approach the ballot if Prop F passed.

As we call for lowering the voting age in local elections, significant initiatives (including funding for civic learning in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and state mandates for a civics education class) are simultaneously underway to strengthen civics education nationwide. These efforts naturally go hand in hand with the push to lower the voting age, and in tandem they have the potential to create a virtuous cycle that dramatically boosts civic engagement. Lowering the voting age can catalyze demand for stronger civics education, which even further cultivates an engaged and active citizenry.

Research shows that people who attend high schools with a strong culture of civic engagement have higher turnout rates in their 30’s, regardless of their individual opinions on the importance of voting.² Expanding voting to 16- and 17-year-olds can inspire both students and schools to renew their focus on civics, creating the potential for long-lasting, positive societal impact.

**REASON #2: WE NEED TO MAKE VOTING A HABIT**

Government performs best with strong participation from the public, and the best way citizens can participate in government is by voting. Lowering the voting age can lead to a long-term increase in voter turnout, bringing more citizens in touch with their government and pushing the government to better serve its people. Increased turnout is especially important in local elections, where turnout has been plummeting in...
recent years and some cities are struggling to get even 20 percent of voters to the polls.\(^3\)

First and foremost, voting is a habit—a path-dependent process—and a person’s first election is critical to establishing that habit.\(^4\) Evidence from Takoma Park, Maryland, and European countries that have lowered the voting age supports the argument that the age of 16 is a better time to start the habit of voting than 18.

In Takoma Park, the turnout rate for 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded any other demographic in the city’s 2013 elections.\(^5\) Evidence from Europe is also favorable. Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all of the country’s elections in 2008, and turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than for older first time voters.\(^6\) In the 2011 local elections in Norway, 21 municipalities used a voting age of 16 as a trial, and 16- and 17-year-old turnout was much higher than turnout among regular first-time voters (aged 18-21).\(^7\)

Furthermore, research indicates that voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election by over 50 percent, and shows that early voting experiences are an important determinant of future voting behavior.\(^8\) Young people start forming voting habits when they reach the voting age and confront their first election.

While some Americans vote in the first election they are eligible for and become habitual voters, the majority of the electorate does not vote upon initial eligibility. Statistically, these individuals become habitual nonvoters for at least the next few elections, until they pick up the habit later in life. This helps explains why turnout for voters younger than 30 is worse than for any other age group.

Importantly, the overall voter turnout rate has dropped since the national voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971, through a constitutional amendment that was passed to align the voting age with the age for
Why Should We Lower the Voting Age to 16?

Military service. The drop in turnout is not necessarily because people younger than 21 are less inclined to vote, but rather, because 18- and 19-year-olds are at a traditionally unstable point in life. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), the main reason why young people claim they do not vote is because they are too busy. At the age of 18, this “busy” quotient, may be the highest, as people are adjusting to new responsibilities for the first time and may also struggle to determine the logistics of voting in a new location, without guidance from family or educators.

It is clear that since most 18-year-olds are in the midst of major life transitions, this age is a particularly problematic time to establish the habit of voting. Sixteen-year-olds, however, are in a much better position to confront their first elections.

Lowering the voting age to 16 for local elections would ensure that each new voter experiences at least one election while in high school (assuming two year election cycles in each locality). This allows them to establish the habit of voting in a stable environment. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds can absorb their parents’ beliefs that voting is important, and schools can help students understand the logistics and establish voting as an accepted norm. If a person casts a ballot in the first election they are eligible for at age 16 or 17, it is statistically more likely that they will continue to participate in subsequent elections. The resulting higher turnout can lead to a more representative and higher performing government.

Research also shows that political participation is a social act, and citizens’ social circles heavily influence turnout. Social networks based on high schools and family life are more likely to encourage voting than the brand-new networks 18-year-olds join after they leave the parental nest.

As researchers from Denmark conclude, “Today when voters become eligible at 18 years of age, most young voters have had none or few participatory opportunities before leaving home. A younger voting age would create more opportunities for acquiring the habit of voting before leaving home.” Helping 16- and 17-year-olds establish this important habit is a key step to increasing long-term voter turnout, and thus creating a more effective and accountable government. Lowering the voting age has shown to be effective at increasing turnout among first-time voters, and research demonstrates that once someone casts their first ballot they are likely to continue the habit of voting for years to come. Lowering the voting age can effectively help young people create the habit of voting, increasing overall turnout in the long run.

Reason #3: Sixteen- and 17-Year-Olds Have a Stake in the Game, and Politicians Must Pay Attention to Them

Youth are affected by local political issues, including education funding, school board decisions, employment initiatives, police programs, and public works projects. They work without limits on hours and pay taxes on their income, can drive in most states, and in some cases, are tried in adult courts. Fifty-eight percent of youth participate in volunteer activities, and many 16- and 17-year olds have been living in their communities for years and feel a deep connection to local issues. They deserve the right to vote on issues that affect them on the local level.

Age 16 is a Better Time to Start the Habit of Voting Than Age 18

*16- and 17-year-old data is for the 20 municipalities that lowered the voting age as a trial. 18-21 year-old data is for all municipalities in Norway.

**Although Austria lowered the voting age nationally, it is difficult to get reliable data on national turnout on age group due to data privacy laws. Data presented here, from regional elections, come from official electoral lists. See Zaglovits and Aichholzer, 2014.
The most reliable way for ordinary citizens to influence the government is through their votes, but those under 18 are excluded from the electorate. Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in municipal elections would force local politicians to listen to their voices and address their concerns.

**REASON #4: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS ARE READY TO VOTE**

Furthermore, research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds are equivalent to 18-year-olds in their capacities to function as citizens and vote responsibly. On average, 16-year-olds possess the same level of civic knowledge as older young adults, and they also demonstrate equal levels of self-reported political skill and political efficacy. This does not mean that 16-year-olds have the same political acumen as 30- or 40-year-olds. But they do statistically have the same knowledge and skills as 21-year-olds. Therefore, it seems that they have the knowledge and acumen necessary to vote. Additionally, their voting choices on the aggregate were not substantially different from young adults.

Research also demonstrates that 16- and 17-year-olds are both neurologically and socially mature enough to vote. Not only do they have requisite civic knowledge and skills, but they have the mental reasoning ability necessary to make informed choices.

It is important to note that this study did show that adolescents under the age of 16 seem to have less political acumen. Sixteen seems to be the specific age to which lowering the voting age makes sense according to their political acumen.

Additionally, a study on the quality of vote choices among Austrian 16- and 17-year-olds concluded that 16- and 17-year-olds’ vote choices reflected their political preferences just as well as older voters’ choices. This evidence strongly indicates that 16- and 17-year-olds are ready to vote as 18-year olds, and denying them that right is an arbitrary policy.

**WHY SIXTEEN?**

As efforts to lower the voting age in the U.S. have emerged in the past few years, most individuals and groups involved have advocated for lowering the age to 16. Some groups have targeted the age of 17, while a few commentators have argued for even lower ages, like 12.

Takoma Park and Hyattsville successfully lowered their municipal voting ages to 16, and the efforts in San Francisco and Berkeley were also focused on the age 16. The unsuccessful effort in Lowell, Massachusetts targeted 17, largely because organizers thought it was a more winnable proposition than 16.

As these efforts continue to grow and expand into a cohesive movement, it is important that relevant stakeholders utilize the same specific goal of lowering the voting age to 16 for municipal elections. Turning 16 is a significant milestone in our society; sixteen-year-olds can drive in most states, work and pay taxes on their income, and potentially be tried as an adult in court. Lowering the voting age to 16 also ensures that every high school student experiences one election before graduating (assuming two year cycles). Lastly, research shows there is a difference between 16-year-olds and younger teenagers when it comes to abilities.
Like any new, bold idea, lowering the voting age faces an array of counterarguments, and these deserve adequate consideration. Ultimately, most counterarguments come down to claims surrounding the maturity and ability of 16- and 17-year olds. Youth is a nebulous concept, and, in reality, legal age-based distinctions in our society are arbitrary and based on what is deemed best for society at large, as judged at a certain point in time. Lowering the voting age to 16 is in the best interests of our democracy, and arguments against doing so are only myths. Some of the most relevant specific counterarguments are addressed as follows:

**MYTH #1: 16-YEAR-OLDS ARE NOT MATURE ENOUGH TO VOTE**

This gut reaction is misguided. It is true that research exists showing 16-year-olds’ brains are still developing and they do not perform as well as older adults in impulse-driven situations in which emotions run high. However, the decision-making process for voting does not fall into this impulse-driven category. Rather, it depends on “cold cognition,” a thought out decision-making process in which 16-year-olds perform just as well as adults. Research shows that 16-year-olds are indeed ready to vote. We need to work to get past this initial gut reaction, especially since an initial, negative response usually does not even begin to consider how lowering the voting age can improve our democracy as a whole.

**MYTH #2: SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLDS AREN’T REALLY ADULTS**

Sixteen-year-olds play an important role in our society, and the age has special significance in our culture. Sixteen-year-olds can drive in most states, work without any restriction on hours, pay taxes, and in some cases be tried for crimes as adults. Also, high school students volunteer at twice the rate of adults, which shows a commitment to their communities that is deserving of a vote in local elections. The legal definition linking adulthood to the age of 18 should not affect voter eligibility.

It is also important to emphasize that these efforts are to lower only the voting age to 16. All other legal age limits should be set in accordance to what is best for each individual issue. Our country has set the driving age, in most states, at 16, and the drinking age at 21. For this specific issue, the voting age should be 16.

**MYTH #3: LOWERING THE VOTING AGE IS A PROGRESSIVE POWER GRAB**

The perception that young voters favor Democrats is often overstated—in a 2014 Pew survey, 50 percent of millennials self-identified as political independents, and longitudinal polling data on political ideology shows that millennials are trending conservatively. Accordingly, many political strategists believe the millennial generation is up for grabs.

Moreover, the effort to lower the voting age transcends party lines. The main goal of the effort is to invigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens. A more lively political discourse— in classrooms and in the broader public sphere—can stimulate ideas from across the political spectrum. The effort to lower the voting age is based on increasing participation in democracy, not promoting any one ideology.

**MYTH #4: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS WILL COPY THEIR PARENTS’ VOTE**

Data from the 2014 Scottish independence referendum suggests this claim is untrue. A survey conducted prior to the referendum found that over 40 percent of young people had different voting intentions than a parent interviewed. This claim will need to be studied more in the United States, but given the data on youth political preferences, it seems that young people demonstrate and express political beliefs independent from those of their parents.
SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

I. Takoma Park and Hyattsville, MD
Takoma Park became the first American cities to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for local elections in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Both cities are suburbs of Washington, D.C. with populations around 18,000. Maryland’s legal structure made it relatively simple for the cities to lower the voting age—the city councils only needed to vote in favor of a charter amendment and they could implement the change. In Takoma Park, the proposal was passed in the context of a larger effort to expand voting rights through several reforms, including same-day voter registration. In Hyattsville, the reform passed as a standalone measure. One council member proposed the idea, and a grassroots effort convinced other members of the proposal’s merits. The Maryland-based organization FairVote, which studies and promotes a number of election reforms, supported the efforts in both cities.

In Takoma Park’s 2013 elections, the first after the change, 44 percent of registered 16- and 17-year-olds voted, the highest rate among any age group. For a more detailed examination of how these cities lowered the local voting age and what the initial effects have been, see Vote16USA’s report: “Lowering the Voting Age for Local Elections in Takoma Park and Hyattsville: A Case Study.”

RECENT AND ONGOING CAMPAIGNS

I. San Francisco
In 2016, San Francisco made history as the first city in the United States to put the question of lowering the voting age for all elections before voters as a ballot measure. More than 172,000 citizens voted in favor of the proposal, which finished just two percentage points shy of passing, a tremendous achievement for a youth-led campaign on the ballot for the first time.

The effort began in 2014, when high school students in the city were struck by the fact that they and their peers were significantly impacted by local elections but had no voice in the process. Youth leaders brought a proposal to lower the local voting age to the San Francisco Youth Commission, where the Vote16SF campaign was born. In less than two years, students working on the campaign earned the support of nearly every elected official and political club in the city. The Board of Education unanimously endorsed the proposal, and the Board of Supervisors voted 9-2 to put it on the ballot at the November 2016 election.

Initial polling showed just 36% of voters would support the measure, but youth pressed forward, and earned 48% of the vote after months of campaigning. This dramatic increase demonstrates that public education efforts can substantially shift public opinion on the issue, especially when young voices are at the center. This campaign proves that lowering the voting age on the local level is a viable policy idea that voters are ready to seriously consider. Campaign leaders expect to bring the issue back to the ballot and win in 2018 or 2020.

For more on the historic San Francisco campaign and its keys to success, see Vote16USA’s case study report.

II. Berkeley
Berkeley, CA joined its neighbor San Francisco in making history in 2016. Youth leaders in the city successfully advocated for a ballot measure that would lower the voting age for school board elections in Berkeley to 16. The city council voted to put the measure on the ballot, and it passed with an overwhelming 70 percent of the vote. The city council still must vote to implement the change, and is expected to do so in early 2017. This is an historic success that again proves voters are ready to give 16-year-olds the right to participate in local elections.

"IN A PLACE WHERE YOU ALREADY FELT SO CONNECTED TO THE CITY, IT MADE YOU FEEL THAT MUCH MORE CONNECTED TO POLITICAL CANDIDATES. LOWERING THE VOTING AGE AND SHOWING YOUNG PEOPLE THAT THEIR VOTE COUNTS IS THE FIRST STEP IN SHOWING YOUNG PEOPLE THAT THEY HAVE TO BE INVOLVED."

– Amaliz Perez, Takoma Park
III. Washington, D.C.
In 2015, a city council member introduced the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2015, which would extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for all D.C. elections. The legislation gained multiple co-sponsors but did not advance beyond committee. The legislation will be reintroduced in 2017. It only needs a majority city council vote to become law – no referendum is required. Local youth-serving organizations are organizing students to lead advocacy efforts, following the strategies that worked well in San Francisco.

IV. Colorado
Multiple efforts are underway to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in Colorado. Students in Boulder are advocating for a lower voting age in municipal elections, while a coalition called Student Voice Student Vote is organizing around a state bill that would lower the voting age for school board elections statewide.

V. New Mexico
Efforts to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in New Mexico are emerging in early 2017. On the city level, young people in Albuquerque are organizing to advocate for lowering the voting age in municipal elections. On the state level, Rep. Javier Martinez has introduced legislation that would lower the voting age for school board elections statewide. Rep. Martinez introduced similar legislation in 2015; it garnered 16 co-sponsors but did not advance beyond committee.

VI. Illinois
Students in Illinois are exploring possibilities for lowering the voting age on the city level in Chicago, Evanston, and Downers Grove, while also pursuing state level legislation that would make it easier for cities to implement 16-year-old voting once approved.

PAST EFFORTS

I. Lowell, MA
In 2009, a group organized by the United Teen Equality Center convinced the Lowell city council to vote in favor of drafting a home rule petition to send to the state legislature. Had the petition cleared the legislature, it would have allowed the city to hold a referendum, which, if successful, would have lowered the voting age for local elections to 17. The petition gained bipartisan support at the State House and passed in the Senate, but stalled in the House.

II. Cambridge, MA
High school students in Cambridge led an initiative to lower the voting age to 17 for municipal elections in 2002. Per Massachusetts law, the city council had to vote to send a home rule petition to the state legislature. The council voted in favor of the initiative 8-1, but the petition did not advance at the State House. The council continued to express its support in subsequent years, and once sent a petition to the state seeking to lower the voting age for only School Committee elections, but did not succeed on the state level.

III. Other
Initiatives in 2015 in the cities of Brattleboro, VT and North Andover, MA, were also unsuccessful. In both cases, proposals to lower the voting age were voted down at town meetings. Organizers in Brattleboro plan to bring up the issue again. In both cases, if the votes on the town level were successful, the measures would have required approval by the state legislature.

State Representatives and State Senators in several states have introduced bills over the past 15 years that would lower the voting age for either all of the states’ elections or just school board elections in the state. None of these bills have passed, and very few made it out of committee. These bills include:

» 2003 – Texas
» 2004 – California
» 2004 - Iowa
» 2005 - Washington
» 2008 - Illinois
» 2008 - Michigan
» 2009 - Wisconsin
» 2011 - Washington
» 2014 - Missouri
» 2015 - Minnesota
» 2015 - New Mexico
» 2015 - Arizona
» 2015 - Hawaii
The case for allowing 16-year-olds to vote

By Zachary Crockett | @zzcrockett | zachary.crockett@vox.com | Nov 7, 2016, 9:00am EST

A measure in San Francisco proposes lowering the voting age to 16. Should other cites do the same?

Two years ago on election night, Oliver York, then a 15-year-old sophomore at Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, sat at home brooding.

“More than half of all the San Francisco ballot measures directly affected young people like me,” he recalls. “But we had no say.”

York decided to try to change that.

He solicited the help of San Francisco Youth Commission, a body of young leaders who advise city officials on youth issues. He organized meetings with the city school board, local officials, and state senators. And by January 2015, he’d launched a full-fledged campaign to fight for youth voter rights.

Two years later, York’s efforts have resulted in Proposition F — an initiative that calls to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections. It’s been endorsed by the likes of Congress member Nancy Pelosi, state Sen. Mark Leno, and the San Francisco School Board, and a recent poll indicated it has earned the support of 49 percent of voters. (It needs 51 percent to win.)

If the bill passes, it will make San Francisco the first major city in the United States to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. And chances are, it would increase civic engagement among a demographic that is fully capable of choosing who ought to represent them.

Youth voter turnout is at an all-time low

Before we touch on the rationale of lowering the voting age to 16 for local elections, it is important to step back and take a look at the current climate of civic engagement among young voters in the United States.

The 2014 midterm election saw the lowest turnout rate ever recorded: a mere 19.9 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds voted. Even worse, only 46.7 percent of these voters registered — the lowest figure since the 26th Amendment was passed in 1971, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18.

Local elections tell a similar story. In an analysis of Gallup data from 26 major US cities, Aaron Weinschenk, a professor at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay, found that local election turnout among young voters, aged 18-24, was only 39 percent in 2014.
among 18- to 24-year-olds is half that of voters ages 25 and older. (Note: This data was self-reported and, as such, is likely inflated — but it’s the best local election data on youth voters available.)

Hundreds of studies have offered explanations for why youth voter turnout is flailing, and scholars have proposed many temporary or long-term solutions to boost civic engagement, ranging from making voting registration easier to offering more preregistration programs.

Lowering local election voting age to 16 in major cities, in conjunction with the integration of civics classes in school, has been gaining support as a tenable way to boost turnout.

Here’s why.

**16-year-olds are mature enough to make informed decisions**

In America, 16-year-olds work without limits on their hours and pay income tax on their earnings. They drive motor vehicles. When they commit crimes, they are tried as adults in our court system. Yet, when it comes to allowing them to vote in local elections, we draw the line.

The main argument against allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote is that they are not mentally developed enough — that their brains are still developing and they do not perform as well as older adults in impulse-driven situations, where emotions run high.

In addressing what motivates decision making, social psychologists identify two drivers: “hot” cognition, and “cold” cognition. Choices motivated by hot cognition are entirely emotional in nature; there is little reasoning or rationality involved. Cold cognition, in contrast, is independent of emotional involvement. Voting, in its ideal form, should be a cold cognition task: We would hope our voters are able to make decisions based on facts and evidence rather than emotion.

Philip Zelazo, a professor at the University of Minnesota’s Institute of Child Development, had people of varying ages perform two tasks that measure executive function abilities — the Eriksen Flanker Task and the Dimensional Change Card Sort. His research suggests that by age 16, cold cognition skills are near fully developed.

“Executive function skills are the brain-based attentional skills required for goal-directed problem solving [like voting],” says Zelazo.

While these skills generally continue to improve until the mid-20s, the biggest leap occurs from age 10 to 12. As Zelazo’s research shows, the ability to make informed decisions is formed well before the age of 18.

Further research has shown that 16-year-olds “possess the same level of civic knowledge as older young adults” (those ages 18 to 25). While their knowledge is not up to par with that of, say, a 40-year-old voter, there is no statistical discrepancy between them and 18-year-old voters who already have the right to vote.
16-year-olds are eager to get civically involved

Though Proposition F would make San Francisco the first major US city to lower the voting age to 16, two much smaller municipalities in Maryland have already adopted such measures. In these locales, 16- and 17-year-olds are voting at rates nearly quadruple those of older voters.

In 2013, Takoma Park — a small, progressive enclave in a suburb of Washington, DC — became the first city in the US to lower its local election voting age to 16. Two years later, nearby Hyattsville followed suit. “We have many 16- and 17-year-olds in our community who care deeply about this place,” council member Tim Male, who initiated the measure, told the Washington Post.

The data proves that to be true: In Takoma Park, the turnout rate for 16- and 17-year-olds not only exceeded that of every other demographic in the city’s 2013 and 2015 elections, but nearly quadrupled the overall average:

Further data can be drawn upon outside of the United States.

Internationally, at least 20 countries allow citizens under the age of 18 to vote. In Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, and Nicaragua, 16-year-olds regularly contribute to the electoral process. In Greece and Indonesia, 17-year-olds can vote in national elections, and in Israel they have the right to vote in municipal contests. Recently, 16-year-olds in the Scotland election had a 75 percent turnout rate — higher than voters three times their age.

But two European countries — Norway and Austria — present a particularly interesting case.

In 2011, Norway officials decided to test out allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote. The result: 58 percent showed up to the polls — more than first-time voters ages 18 to 21. After lowering its voting age to 16, Austria saw a similar trend: 16- and 17-year-olds voted at higher rates than other young voters:

Admittedly, voting turnout among all young voters (25 and under) is lower than turnout among older voters. But in a University of Austria at Vienna study, researchers found that turnout rates among 16- and 17-year-olds in the country deviated the least from the mean:

These latter studies, which show a higher turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds than 18- to 21-year-olds, are indicative of a larger point: 18 is a terrible age to vote.

16 is a better age at which to form habits than 18

On July 1, 1971, the 26th Amendment of the United States Constitution was ratified, lowering the national voting age from 21 to 18. The act was largely fueled by young Vietnam protesters, frustrated that citizens could serve in the military at 18 but not vote.

The rationale for selecting the age of 18 was entirely based on the military service age — there was little information, in the form of rational discourse, as to what the ideal voting age was when considering habit formation.

At 18, most young Americans are going through major life changes: They’re entering the workforce. They’re exploring their entry into adulthood. They’re moving off to college — oftentimes, across state lines. These major changes are not beneficial to youth voter turnout: In a Center for Information and
Research on Civic Learning & Engagement report, 18-year-olds cited being “too busy” as a predominant rationale for not voting. Furthermore, most of our rudimentary habits are formed prior to this final phase of adolescence, when we are living at home. A Brown University analysis of the Learning Habit Study (a dataset of 21,145 parent respondents) revealed that there is not much variance in routines and habits among children after the age of 9.

“While still in high school and at home, a teenager’s bad habit[s] can be moderated by parents,” psychologist Carl E. Pickhardt writes in Psychology Today.

“Away from family at college, however, and without this parental support, the young person is at the mercy of his own bad habit. It can be easier to install regular habits when still under the shelter of family than when one has moved out and there are more demands and distractions of independence to contend with.” Voting, by measure of hundreds of studies, is a habitual act. Voting in one election increases the likelihood of voting in subsequent elections by 25 percent. As Peter Levine, a professor of citizenship and public affairs at Tufts University, says, “if you voted in a past election, you tend to vote again.” Likewise, voters who skip their first election — typically at age 18 — are far more inclined to become habitual nonvoters.

Entrenched both in familial and institutional support groups, 16-year-olds are in a better place to form long-lasting voting habits than 18-year-olds — but only if the right to vote is accompanied by a robust civics education.

The right to vote means nothing without a basic knowledge of civics

In general, Americans of all ages possess a pitiful knowledge of civic affairs. Only 36 percent of us, for instance, can identify the three branches of US Government (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial).

Sixteen-year-olds are no exception. Though they are cognitively and habitually primed to vote, they often lack a deeper knowledge — or interest, for that matter — in the foundations of civic engagement. Should they get the vote in local elections, it is absolutely crucial that that new right comes in tandem with an educational support system.

Civics courses, designed to educate youth on the workings of both local and federal governments, have been proven to boost voter turnout. One study found that a year of such coursework can boost voter turnout for more than a decade after graduation.

Should Proposition F pass, the San Francisco Board of Education has committed to implementing a plan to give 16- and 17-year-olds the resources they need to be better informed citizens in an election.
“The entire school board is unanimously in support of this,” Matt Haney, president of the San Francisco School Board, tells me. “We can see a huge benefit for our school system and local government to have the perspective and voices of young people.”

Shortly after the proposition hit San Francisco’s ballot, an organization called Vote16USA — a subsidiary of the much larger nonprofit, Generation Citizen — offered its support in designing a curriculum.

“We’re entirely focused on getting young people civically engaged in the classroom,” says Scott Warren, the founder of Generation Citizen. “Kids going through our program know who their local leaders are — school board members, mayors, state senators. It’s a driver’s ed course for democracy.”

Unlike a typical government high school class, Generation Citizen’s curriculum asks students to identify local issues in their communities, then work together — and with community members — to find solutions. They canvass neighborhoods, make phone calls, and meet with local politicians.

Over six years, Generation Citizen has worked with over 30,000 students in eight states, and reports dramatically improved rates of civic engagement.

**San Francisco’s 16-year-olds: old enough to vote**

Perhaps the most compelling argument for allowing San Francisco’s 16- and 17-year-olds to vote is that Proposition F was entirely spearheaded by those under the age of 18.

After then-high school sophomore Oliver York formulated his plan, he brought it to district supervisor John Avalos, who helped draft it into a ballot measure. From there, an intrepid group of teens brought it before the Board of Supervisors, where it passed nine votes to two. A small army of 100 youth showed up to the Board of Education and presented a case so compelling that it convinced officials to unilaterally endorse the measure.

York, 17, who laments not being able to go to endorsement meetings held at bars, says that youngsters have led the entire effort to get the voting age lowered.
“We’ve have students meeting with legislators. We’ve had students going out and knocking on doors. And we have students leading conversations at their high schools about why voting really matters,” he says.

Among them is Lorelei Vaisse, a 16-year-old at Lowell High School.

“When people see me — a 16-year-old — civically engaged, they think, ‘Well, you’re probably an exception,’” she says. “But I’m not! There are so many 16- and 17-year-olds who are excited about voting.”

Neither York nor Vaisse will be eligible to vote on the measure Tuesday. Instead, they’ll be on the streets on San Francisco, handing out fliers.

“We may be teenagers who do things that frustrate our parents,” says York. “But we’re also people who care about our city. And we’re thinking about solutions that will make it a better place — not just for us, but for everyone.”
Press release
February 11, 2016

Over 11,900 Students Registered to Vote in the 2016 High School Voter Registration Drive (HSVR)

Broward County, FL – The High School Voter Registration Drive (HSVR) is an annual effort between the Broward County Supervisor of Elections Office and, with the cooperation and significant support of the Broward County Public Schools and numerous Private and Charter Schools. The week long drive was held January 19-22. The goal of 10,000 was significantly surpassed by a total of 11,946 pre-registered and registered students.

Staff from the election office visited 67 local high schools in January. The staff from the election office was on hand to assist the high school students and school staff as they conducted their voter registration drives. The schools with the most registered students will be recognized at their school’s annual awards ceremony. They will receive the coveted championship trophy, banners, and certificates.

The Supervisor of Elections Office would like to congratulate all participating students for their outstanding hard work and commitment to becoming registered voters during the High School Voter Registration Week. The schools that registered the most students within their category are listed below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School Size</th>
<th>Winning High School</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Total Registrations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>Somerset Academy</td>
<td>Pembroke Pines</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>Dave Thomas Education</td>
<td>Coconut Creek</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>Pompano Beach High School</td>
<td>Pompano Beach</td>
<td>216</td>
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<tr>
<td>4A</td>
<td>Pembroke Pines Charter</td>
<td>Pembroke Pines</td>
<td>497</td>
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<td>5A</td>
<td>West Broward High School</td>
<td>Pembroke Pines</td>
<td>561</td>
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<tr>
<td>6A</td>
<td>Stoneman Douglas High School</td>
<td>Coral Springs</td>
<td>729</td>
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Complete 2016 HSVR results can be found on the Broward County Supervisor of Elections office website, Twitter and Facebook pages.

For further information, contact Gino Herring, Voter Education Director, or Tonya Edwards, Public Information/Voter Education Coordinator at (954)712-1303, or log on to the Elections website at: www.browardsoe.org.

Dr. Brenda C. Snipes, Supervisor of Elections