



REPORT #2

**STUDY OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN'S
VOTER TURNOUT IN MAYORAL ELECTIONS, 1971-2006**

**PRESENTED BY ACC PROFESSOR LARRY WILLOUGHBY
ON BEHALF OF THE ACC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY
&
POLITICAL STUDIES**

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William "Peck" Young, Director



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STUDY OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN'S VOTER TURNOUT IN MAYORAL ELECTIONS, 1971-2006

FOCUS OF STUDY

This statistical study is an analysis of the turnout and vote for mayor in Austin city elections starting when Austin began electing its mayor in 1971, through the most recent mayoral election in 2006. The Austin Community College Center for Public Policy and Political Studies (the Center) sponsored this study because of the upcoming Austin city elections this year, and because we believe that understanding past trends might be informative to those preparing for future elections.

METHODOLOGY

There have been sixteen mayoral elections from 1971 to 2006. The Center used voter registration and turnout data from mayoral elections listed on the Austin City Clerk website. Data from mayoral elections was used because they generally yielded higher turnout. This occurred before and after the elections were separated out from other elections in 1988. Population data was obtained from other city sources.

Associate Professor of History Larry Willoughby supervised all work with the assistance of administrative assistant Tyshun Robinson.

Professor Willoughby and the Center's Director oversaw the data analysis.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- I. From 1971 until 2006, Austin grew from a population of 251,808 to 690,252 or 2.74 times. In those same thirty-five years, voter registration grew from 93,597 to 553,934 or 5.9 times. However, the total number of votes cast change from 53,140 in 1971 to 62,016 in 2006 or by only 1.16 times. **In fact, when the sixteen elections where Austin has elected a mayor are averaged together, the average vote for the 35 years is 60,699.** 2006 topped this average by only 1317 votes. Further, 10 of the 16 elections' turnouts vary from the average by 1-9% or an average 4.5% In short, while population and voter registration has grown these past 35 years, turnout in Austin has been relatively **unchanged**.
- II. However, turnout has varied in size over time and the largest number of votes did not occur in the most recent elections. The three biggest total votes cast were in April 5, 1975, 72,623; May 4, 1985, 72,285; and on May 2, 1981, 67,728. The lowest turnouts by total votes were May 6, 2000, 38,166; June 4, 1994, 52,414; and April 3, 1971 53,140. In fact, in 2000 when the smallest number of voters participated, there were over half a million (513,071) registered voters in Austin. The 2000 turnout was so small that it must be considered an aberration for the period analyzed.



- III. Turnout percentages tell a different story than total vote. The only time turnout percentages broke 50% was in 1971 when it hit 56.7%. This was a watershed election in Austin that saw the emergence of the UT student vote and was characterized by the editorial page in the Statesman as the “Hippies Are Taking Over” election. The next highest turnout percentages were in 1975 (45%), 1973 (42%) and 1981(36%). The lowest turnout percentage elections were 2000 (7.4%) and 2006 (11.2%), both years when voter registration was much higher than in the ‘70s and ‘80s.

- IV. On November 4, 1997, 61,382 Austin voters overwhelmingly approved the “Little Less Corruption Ordinance” which limited how much money City Council candidates and incumbents could raise and spend in their campaigns. Our analysis of pre and post legislation data shows that turnout, in both real numbers and percentages, **has never reached the level it was prior to passage of this ordinance**. In May 1997, the turnout was 62,840 or 17.1%. This was only 233 votes off of the average of 62,607 for the 26 years from 1971-1997. The following data reveals the numbers for the next four elections:

Election Date	Votes	Turnout %
May 6, 2000	38166	7.4
Nov. 6, 2001	59794	14
May 3, 2003	59929	15
May 13, 2006	62016	11.2

In nine years, **voting has never regained** pre-May 1997 levels. We cannot definitively quantify a direct relationship between the integrity of the City Council and the passage of the 1997 ordinance, but we think the data clearly demonstrates how these changes contributed to less voter participation.

- V. A final interesting question is to discover which mayors have received the most votes in their successful bid for election. The analysis of the data show the following top vote getters:
 - a. Roy Butler, 1973: 43,753
 - b. Will Wynn, 2006: 41,505
 - c. Carole McClellan(now Strayhorn), 1979: 41,319
 - d. Jeff Friedman ,1975: 39,316
 - e. Frank Cooksey, 1985: 38,307

Our Center is very interested in monitoring the turnout in both the City election this year, and the City Election in 2009 that will include a mayoral election. However, if 35 years of history is any guide to future behavior, then we should all expect a voter turnout in both elections of approximately 60,699 voters plus or minus 4.5%.

AUSTIN POPULATION FROM 1970-2005

1970 - 251,808

1980 - 345,496

1990 - 472,020

2000 - 656,562

2005 - 690,252

2010 - ?

MAYORAL ELECTIONS: VOTER REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

April 3, 1971 - Registered Voters 93,597

Ballots Cast 53,140

% 56.7

April 7, 1973 – Registered Voters 151,368

Ballots Cast 63,478

% 42

April 5, 1975 – Registered Voters 161,524

Ballots Cast 72,623

% 45

April 2, 1977 – Registered Voters 184,243

Ballots Cast 61,538

% 33.4

April 7, 1979 - Registered Voters 161,803

Ballots Cast 55,415

% 34.25

May 2, 1981 - Registered Voters 188,000

Ballots Cast 67,728

% 36

April 2, 1983 - Registered Voters 194,276

Ballots Cast 76,252

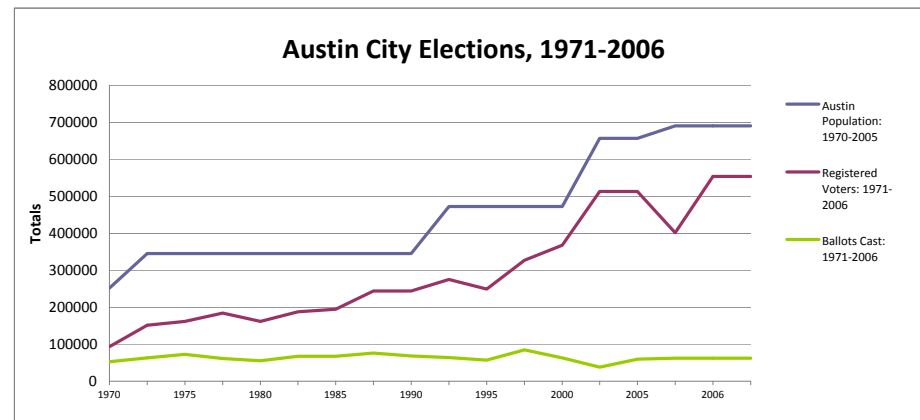
% 39.25

April 6, 1985 - Registered Voters	244,111
Ballots Cast	68,181
%	27.93
May 7, 1988 - Registered Voters	275,435
Ballots Cast	63,841
%	23.2
May 4, 1991 - Registered Voters	249,357
Ballots Cast	57,098
%	22.9
May 7, 1994 - Registered Voters	326,996
Ballots Cast	85,028
%	26
May 3, 1997 - Registered Voters	367,709
Ballots Cast	62,840
%	17.1
May 6, 2000 - Registered Voters	513,072
Ballots Cast	38,166
%	7.4
May 3, 2003 - Registered Voters	401,271
Ballots Cast	59,929
%	15
May 13, 2006 - Registered Voters	553,934
Ballots Cast	62,016
%	11.2

Austin City Elections, 1971 - 2006

Austin Population: 1970-2005
Registered Voters: 1971-2006
Ballots Cast: 1971-2006

1970		1975		1980		1985		1990		1995		2000		2005		2006
251,808	345,496	345,496	345,496	345,496	345,496	345,496	345,496	345,496	472,020	472,020	472,020	472,020	656,562	656,562	690,252	690,252
93,597	151,368	161,524	184,243	161,803	188,000	194,276	244,111	244,111	275,435	249,357	326,996	367,709	513,072	513,072	401,271	553,934
53,140	63,478	72,623	61,538	55,415	67,728	67,728	76,252	68,181	63,841	57,098	85,028	62,840	38,166	59,929	62,016	62,016



Mayor Election Analysis by Total Vote

Date of Mayor Election	Total Vote	Turn Out by Percentage	Difference from Average	Percentage Difference from Average
April 5, 1975	72,623	45.0	11,924	0.20
May 4, 1985	72,285	30.0	11,586	0.19
May 2, 1981	67,728	36.0	7,029	0.12
April 30, 1983	65,209	33.0	4,510	0.07
April 30, 1977	64,497	35.0	3,798	0.06
May 28, 1988	63,874	23.0	3,175	0.05
April 7, 1973	63,478	42.0	2,779	0.05
May 3, 1997	62,840	17.1	2,141	0.04
May 13, 2006	62,016	11.2	1,317	0.02
May 3, 2003	59,929	15.0	-770	-0.01
November 6, 2001	59,794	14.0	-905	-0.01
May 18, 1991	57,781	22.0	-2,918	-0.05
April 7, 1979	55,415	34.3	-5,284	-0.09
April 3, 1971	53,140	56.7	-7,559	-0.12
June 4, 1994	52,414	16.0	-8,285	-0.14
May 6, 2000	38,166	7.4	-22,533	-0.37
	971,189			

60,699 - Average Number of Votes

Mayor Election Analysis by Percentage

Date of Mayor Election	Total Vote	Turn Out by Percentage
April 3, 1971	53,140	56.7
April 5, 1975	72,623	45.0
April 7, 1973	63,478	42.0
May 2, 1981	67,728	36.0
April 30, 1977	64,497	35.0
April 7, 1979	55,415	34.3
April 30, 1983	65,209	33.0
May 4, 1985	72,285	30.0
May 28, 1988	63,874	23.0
May 18, 1991	57,781	22.0
May 3, 1997	62,840	17.1
June 4, 1994	52,414	16.0
May 3, 2003	59,929	15.0
November 6, 2001	59,794	14.0
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April 30, 1983	65,209	33.0
May 4, 1985	72,285	30.0
May 28, 1988	63,874	23.0
May 18, 1991	57,781	22.0
June 4, 1994	52,414	16.0
May 3, 1997	62,840	17.1

After Passage of Ordinance

May 6, 2000	38,166	7.4
November 6, 2001	59,794	14.0
May 3, 2003	59,929	15.0
May 13, 2006	62,016	11.2

About CPPPS

The Center for Public Policy & Political Studies (CPPPS) is a non-partisan, non-profit center dedicated to expanding knowledge of, and participation in political processes and public policy for ACC students and their communities. We are committed to education, civic engagement, informed decision-making and understanding across cultures.

Mission

The Center's mission is to enable and empower ACC students to gain knowledge and experience of, and to actively participate in varied political and policy processes that govern our city, our state and our nation.

Objective

The Center will enable ACC's students to develop a broad range of analytical and decision-making skills that they will use to understand issues of public concern. With these skills, students can pursue civic leadership and professional positions at public, non-profit, and private organizations.

Questions?

For more information, to contribute, and/or participate, please contact the Center's Director, Peck Young at:

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