



REPORT #4

STUDY OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN'S VOTER TURNOUT IN AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

PRESENTED BY ACC PROFESSOR STEFAN D. HAAG,
AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
ON BEHALF OF THE ACC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY
&
POLITICAL STUDIES

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ACC Center for Public Policy & Political Studies: Office of External Affairs
5930 Middle Fiskville Road, Suite 414 • Austin, TX 78752 • 512-223-7069 (O) • 512-223-7208 (F)

www.austincc.edu/cppps (Web site) cppps@austincc.edu (Email)

William "Peck" Young, Director

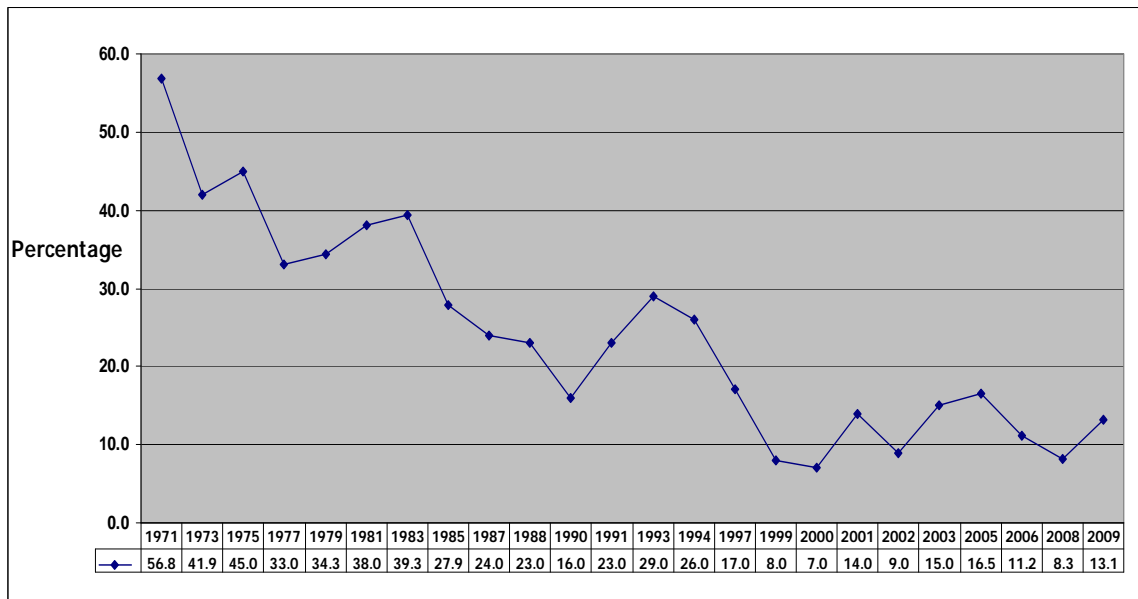
Voter Turnout in Austin City Council Elections

As noted in *ACC Center for Public Policy and Political Studies Report #2*, the number of voters in Austin mayoral elections has remained fairly constant since 1971. However, the number of registered voters in Austin increased from 93,597 to 450,715 between 1971 and 2009. Consequently, the voter turnout rate, measured as the percentage of registered voters who cast ballots, declined from 56.8 percent in 1971 to 13.1 percent in 2009. This research report attempts to explain the low voter turnout in Austin municipal elections (both mayoral and council elections), to analyze which areas of the city experience low voter turnout and which areas have high voter turnout, and to suggest changes that would increase voter turnout in future municipal elections in Austin.

Literature Review

Since 1979, voter turnout rates in major cities throughout the United States have declined by more than 20 percent (Caren 2007, 42). The decline in voter turnout in Austin is comparable (see Figure 1). There are many explanations for voter turnout rates generally and for turnout rates in municipal elections specifically.

Figure 1: Voter Turnout in Austin City Council Elections, 1971-2009



Source: City of Austin, Election History, <http://malford.ci.austin.tx.us/election/search.cfm>

Voter turnout is generally explained in terms of the costs and benefits of voting (Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Voter turnout can be represented in a calculus of voting formula (Streb 2008, 3-4):

$$R=PB+D-C$$

In the formula:

R is the reward from voting,

P is the probability that one's vote will determine the outcome of the election,

B is the benefits that one receives if his or her candidate wins,

D is the feeling that one has a duty to vote in a democracy (also known as a sense of civic duty), and

C is the cost of voting.

If the calculation of R produces a negative result, then a person will not vote. If, however, the R is positive, then the person will vote.

For some scholars, the costs of voting are the primary factors in voter turnout. The emphasis of these studies is on institutional arrangements—such as voter registration requirements and information costs—that serve as an impediment to voting (Piven and Cloward 2000). Despite these claims, as the costs of voting have been reduced through easier voter registration requirements and such practices as early voting, voter turnout has not increased significantly (Knack 1995; Highton and Wolfinger 1998; Stein 1998; Brown and Wedeking 2006; Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2008), leading some scholars (Fitzgerald 2005) to question the utility of costs of voting in explaining voter turnout. Among the factors that reduce the costs of voting, the most effective in increasing turnout are voting by mail (VBM) and same-day voter registration (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2008).

Other scholars argue that the benefits of voting are more important, stressing the factors that make the vote meaningful for voters (Teixeira 1992). These scholars emphasize the social background characteristics and political attitudes of potential voters (Wolfinger and Rosenstone

1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, and Weisberg 2008). These studies indicate that higher voter turnout is associated with higher levels of formal education, higher income, higher socio-economic status, membership in the majority ethnic group, and being older. Political attitudes associated with higher voter turnout include strong party affiliation, high interest in the election, membership in community organizations, and other variables that reflect an individual's connection to the community and to politics. However, a study of 332 mayoral elections in 38 cities between 1979 and 2003 indicated that the social background characteristics of the population explain little of the variation in voter turnout either among the municipalities or in a municipality from election to election (Caren 2007).

Most of the explanations for low voter turnout in municipal elections focus on the unique nature of those elections and the effects of Progressive era institutional reforms. For example, most cities elect their mayors and council members in nonpartisan elections. In addition, most mayors have less power than other executive officers, such as governors, since many cities employ city managers, who are responsible for the daily operation of the city and its departments. Furthermore, most city elections are held on an election day that includes no other elections. Finally, most municipal elections are at-large elections, which mean that every voter chooses the mayor and council members, and candidates must compete citywide.

Voter Turnout in Austin's City Council Elections

To understand low voter turnout in Austin's municipal elections, we first describe the City of Austin and its population and then consider how Austin conducts its municipal elections and how these factors influence participation in Austin's elections.

Austin is the fourth largest city in Texas with a 2008 population estimate of 750,525 residents. In a series of articles in the *Austin American-Statesman* during 2002, reporters Bill Bishop and Mark Lisher (2002) described Austin as a "city of ideas," drawing on Richard Florida's thesis in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). Like the other nineteen cities that make up America's "ideopolises," Austin displayed the following characteristics: technology production

and patents per capita that exceed the national average, a population that grew rapidly from 1980 to 2000, a highly educated population (at least one-third of its residents have a college degree or higher, 40 percent above the national average), an ethnic diversity and a low percentage of Anglos¹, a high percentage of 20- to 34-year-olds and a low percentage of people over 65, a low percentage of people employed in manufacturing, and a high percentage of people in creative-class jobs.

By 2008, Austin residents were 49 percent Anglo, 36 percent Hispanic, 8 percent African American, and 6 percent Asian American. The site of the University of Texas at Austin, Austin's population is highly educated—42.9 percent of adults 25 years of age and older have a bachelors degree or higher. The median family income was \$69,100, and the poverty rate was 17.5 percent. The median age of Austin's residents is 31.4 years of age (Robinson 2008).

Municipal elections in Austin feature several characteristics. First, council elections are currently conducted on the second Saturday of May, when few, if any, other elections are conducted. This timing of the election places an additional burden on the potential voter, who must perceive a benefit in casting a vote in this one election. According to Caren's study of municipal elections, holding municipal elections concurrent with presidential elections increased turnout by 27 percent. Holding municipal elections concurrently with other state and federal elections increased turnout by 4 percent (2007, 21). Similarly, Hajnal and Lewis found that "presidential elections are associated with turnouts of registered voters in city elections that are 36% higher than off-cycle elections" (2003, 656).

Second, Austin elects its six council members and mayor in at-large, by-place elections. The at-large election system increases the cost of political campaigns, since candidates must run citywide, and lessens the perceived benefits of voting, especially for minorities when bloc voting by the majority occurs. Austin is the only large city in Texas that still employs an at-large election system.² Logically, an at-large election system would result in lower voter turnout than in a single-member district system. However, several studies note that cities with district elections

systems have lower turnout rates than cities with at-large electoral systems (Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch 2002; Hajnal and Lewis 2003).

Third, like larger cities in Texas, Austin's municipal government is the council-manager form, where the mayor and council make public policy for the city, but the management of the city and its departments is ceded to a professional administrator or city manager. Consequently, the mayor and council have little authority over, or responsibility for, the day-to-day operation of the city. There is little doubt that the council-manager form of government depresses voter turnout (Bridges 1997; Wood 2002; Hajnal and Lewis 2003). In addition, Carens notes that "cities with council managers have a turnout 7.5 percentage points lower than cities with strong mayors" (2007, 41). In El Paso, Texas, which changed from a strong mayor-council form of government to a council-manager form of government in 2004, voter turnout decreased from 17.1 percent in 2003 to 9.7 percent in 2009 (El Paso County, Elections Department).

Fourth, municipal elections in Austin, and throughout Texas, are nonpartisan elections. Thus, a principal voting cue is not available on the ballot, increasing the information costs associated with voting. The result is lower voter turnout (Karnig and Walter 1983; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001).

Fifth, Austin adopted term limits for the mayor and council members in 1994, limiting them to two successive terms. However, competition for mayor and council seats is not great. The limit was increased to three successive terms in 2006, but the change has had no apparent effect on voter turnout. When incumbents run, they rarely face serious challenges. Between 1999 and 2009, fifteen council members—two mayors and thirteen councilors—sought reelection. Only two incumbents were defeated, both of whom were councilors. The eleven incumbent councilors who won reelection won with an average of 65 percent of the vote; the two incumbent mayors who won reelection won with an average of 81 percent of the vote. Thus, the only truly competitive electoral contests occur when a council position or the election for mayor is an open-seat contest. Hajnal and Lewis (2003, 658-659) found that term limits have no direct effect on voter turnout, noting, however, that term limits may affect turnout indirectly by creating more competition.

Generally speaking, competition increases voter turnout but especially when the stakes are increased, which means that the position being contested has authority over citizens' lives and livelihood.

Finally, Austin established a strict limit on campaign contributions in 1997, which makes raising campaign funds more difficult and reduces the amount of money available for campaigns. As noted in *ACC Center for Public Policy and Political Studies Report #2*, this may be a factor in explaining low voter turnout in Austin's mayoral and council elections. Katherine Haenschen (2009), campaign manager for Place 1 candidate Chris Riley, indicated that she spent between \$180,000 and \$190,000 on the campaign. Limited by contribution limits and faced with high infrastructure costs associated with the campaign, she had to decide where and how to campaign. Because of these limits, she focused her efforts on those precincts where registered voters were most likely to vote and on groups that were active in local political campaigns. Her efforts included a large number of house parties or similar events that featured the candidate, walking blocks and distributing door hangers, contacting politically active community groups, and mailings. All of these tactics were tailored to persuade the "persuadable" voters, the undecided that were likely to vote. Raising the contribution limits and reducing the infrastructure costs of a campaign would allow more extensive campaigns with more voter outreach (see Castillo and McGrath 2001 for an analysis of Austin's contribution limits).

Analysis of the 2009 Vote for Austin's Mayor and Council

This section indicates, through a series of tables and precinct maps, where voter turnout in the 2009 Austin city council election was high and where it was low. The data involve the percentage of registered voters that voted in the May 9, 2009 municipal elections. The demographic data for the precincts was provided by Opinion Analysts, Inc., an Austin public opinion research firm. The analysis considers the effects of the demographic variables and political interest on voter turnout rates.

First, consider those precincts that had the highest voter turnout rates (see Table 1). Turnout ranged from 30.45 percent to 35.09 percent, nearly three times the overall turnout. The precincts

are characterized by an Anglo population that exceeds 90 percent, an African American population that is less than one percent, and an Hispanic population that is less than seven percent. In age, the population has few young people and a majority of registered voters who are over 45 years of age, typically the age category with the highest turnout rates. In terms of political interest, the population is highly interested, an average of 63 percent having voted in at least two of the last three city council elections.

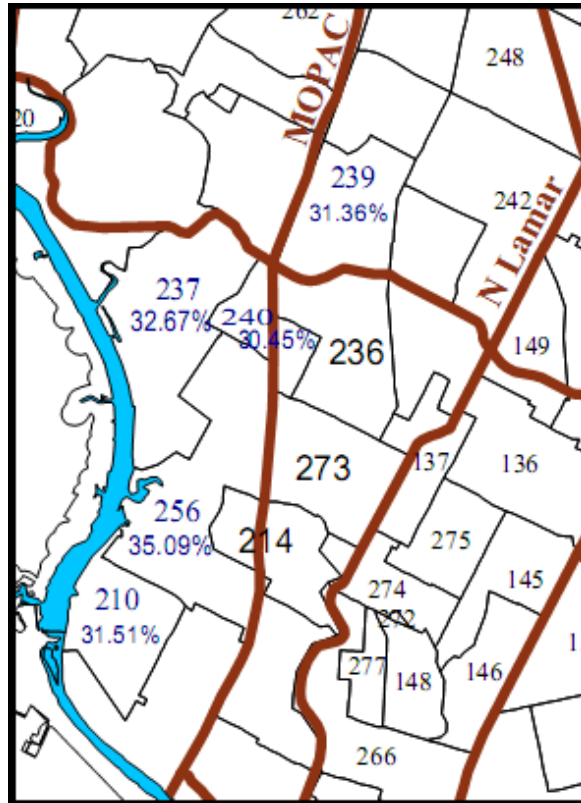
Table 1: High Voter Turnout Precincts, 2009 Municipal Elections

Pct	Votes	RV	TO %	His	African Am	Asian Am	Anglo	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65+	Political Interest
210	546	1,733	31.51%	6.0%	0.4%	2.1%	91.5%	8.7%	14.7%	22.6%	38.4%	15.4%	59.5%
237	677	2,072	32.67%	4.0%	0.6%	1.9%	93.5%	8.4%	9.8%	15.8%	42.3%	23.5%	64.4%
239	746	2,379	31.36%	6.7%	0.5%	1.2%	91.6%	8.1%	13.5%	22.2%	37.5%	18.4%	65.1%
240	292	959	30.45%	6.2%	0.5%	1.6%	91.7%	8.6%	17.9%	23.4%	35.5%	14.3%	66.1%
256	900	2,565	35.09%	4.7%	0.3%	1.5%	93.5%	8.6%	10.6%	19.4%	38.6%	22.5%	58.7%
AVE	632	1,942	32.56%	5.5%	0.5%	1.7%	92.4%	8.5%	13.3%	20.7%	38.5%	18.8%	62.8%

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Opinion Analysts, Inc.

All of these precincts are located in northwest Austin, and most are west of MOPAC (Loop 1). The lone exception is precinct 239, which is north of E. Koenig Lane and just east of MOPAC. (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Map of High Voter Turnout Precincts, 2009 Municipal Elections



Source: <http://www.cityofaustin.org/demographics/>

Next, consider the medium high turnout precincts, in which turnout ranged from 20 to 29.1 percent (see Table 2). In almost every demographic characteristic, the medium high turnout precincts are similar to the high turnout precincts. In ethnicity, the precincts are overwhelmingly Anglo with very small percentages of African Americans and Asian Americans. The Hispanic population is a slightly larger percentage of the population, approaching eight percent of the precinct's population. In age, the percentage of registered voters 45 years of age and older is also a majority of the population. However, a smaller percentage of the population is between 35 and 44 years old. Also, a larger percentage of the population is 25 to 34 years of age. Political interest is slightly lower, but the average for the precincts is still nearly 60 percent.

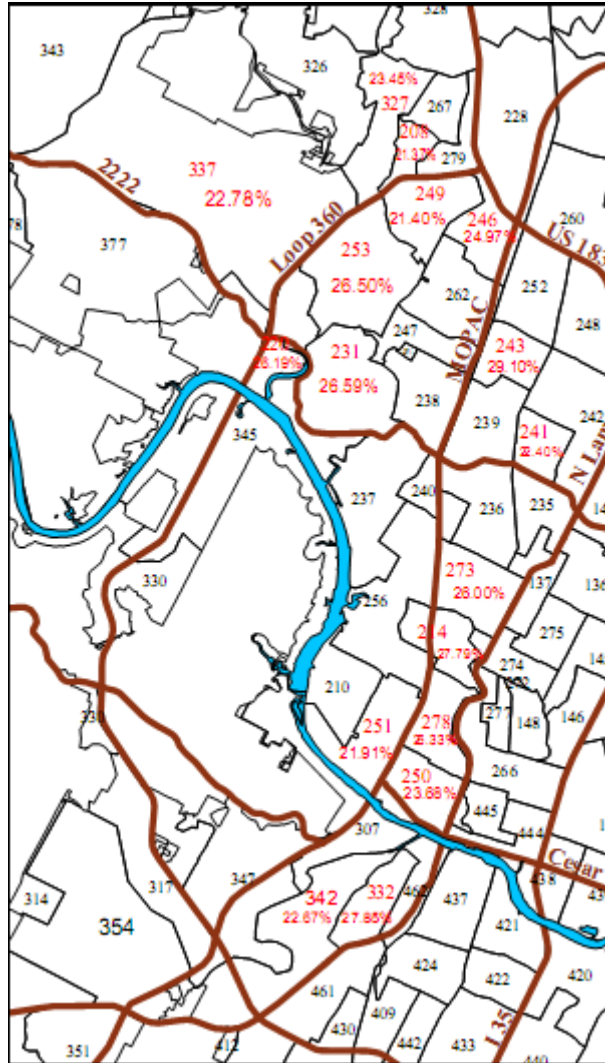
Table 2: Medium High Voter Turnout Precincts, 2009 Austin Municipal Elections

Pct	Votes	RV	TO %	His	African Am	Asian Am	Anglo	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65+	Political Interest
208	128	599	21.37%	6.9%	1.8%	3.9%	87.4%	7.8%	12.0%	18.4%	42.1%	19.5%	56.3%
214	510	1,835	27.79%	6.4%	0.3%	2.1%	91.2%	8.0%	18.7%	24.5%	36.3%	12.3%	58.0%
220	450	1,718	26.19%	7.1%	0.3%	1.8%	90.8%	7.0%	10.2%	16.4%	47.0%	19.2%	57.3%
231	740	2,783	26.59%	5.7%	0.5%	4.9%	88.9%	7.9%	10.7%	15.6%	42.9%	22.6%	62.8%
236	759	2,856	26.58%	7.3%	1.2%	2.1%	89.4%	7.5%	22.4%	21.7%	31.9%	16.3%	56.8%
241	383	1,710	22.40%	11.9%	0.4%	1.9%	85.8%	6.8%	22.0%	24.8%	32.7%	13.6%	59.8%
243	488	1,677	29.10%	8.7%	1.1%	1.6%	88.6%	6.4%	15.8%	20.5%	33.7%	23.4%	59.1%
246	465	1,862	24.97%	6.7%	0.4%	2.3%	90.6%	7.2%	16.1%	14.7%	33.1%	28.6%	59.2%
249	634	2,963	21.40%	7.4%	0.9%	2.8%	88.9%	7.9%	17.6%	16.6%	34.2%	23.4%	62.7%
250	592	2,500	23.68%	8.6%	1.1%	1.9%	88.4%	10.2%	34.9%	17.7%	29.1%	8.0%	53.1%
251	701	3,199	21.91%	8.3%	0.7%	1.8%	89.2%	10.8%	28.1%	19.7%	31.7%	9.6%	52.1%
253	775	2,924	26.50%	5.1%	0.9%	2.8%	91.2%	7.8%	11.1%	16.2%	39.6%	25.1%	61.6%
273	627	2,412	26.00%	6.9%	0.4%	1.7%	91.0%	8.5%	20.6%	20.8%	32.0%	17.8%	61.5%
278	694	2,636	26.33%	6.4%	0.5%	1.3%	91.8%	11.4%	26.4%	18.3%	33.3%	10.4%	52.0%
327	506	2,158	23.45%	6.9%	1.2%	6.9%	85.0%	8.6%	12.2%	18.9%	44.0%	16.1%	59.1%
332	757	2,718	27.85%	9.4%	0.7%	1.5%	88.4%	6.9%	24.7%	22.5%	36.4%	9.4%	57.7%
337	696	3,055	22.78%	5.8%	1.4%	4.5%	88.3%	8.0%	12.2%	19.0%	46.6%	14.0%	57.3%
342	1,148	5,064	22.67%	10.4%	0.8%	1.0%	87.8%	8.1%	26.2%	19.3%	30.4%	15.7%	57.4%
AVE	614	2,482	24.86%	7.6%	0.8%	2.6%	89.0%	8.2%	19.0%	19.2%	36.5%	16.9%	58.0%

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Opinion Analysts, Inc.

These precincts are located in northwest Austin, west of North Lamar and mainly between Ranch Road 2222 and US 183 North, and southwest Austin, between MOPAC and South Lamar (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Map of Medium High Voter Turnout Precincts, 2009 Municipal Elections



Source: <http://www.cityofaustin.org/demographics/>

Finally, consider the 21 precincts with low voter turnout.³ In these precincts, turnout of registered voters was less than five percent. The precincts feature a high percentage of minorities—Hispanics and African Americans especially—and large percentages of young people (see Table 3). The percentage of Anglos varies greatly, but rarely do Anglos exceed 70 percent of the registered voters. Political interest is also low, averaging less than 30 percent.

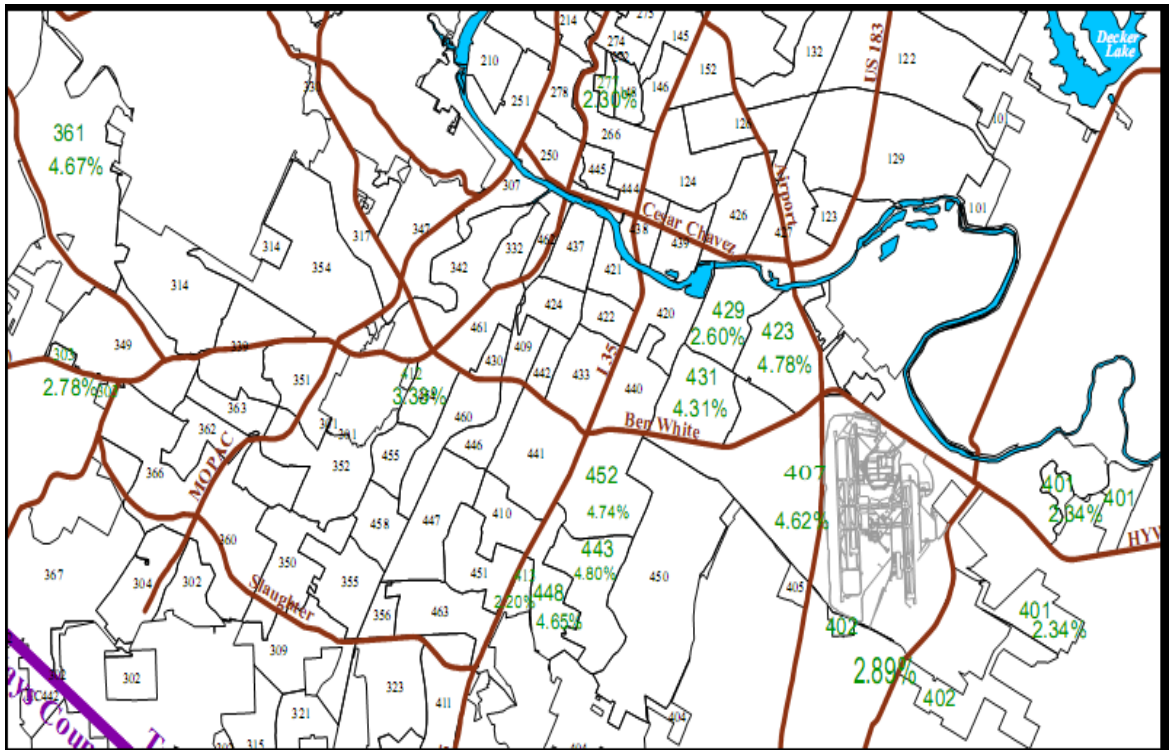
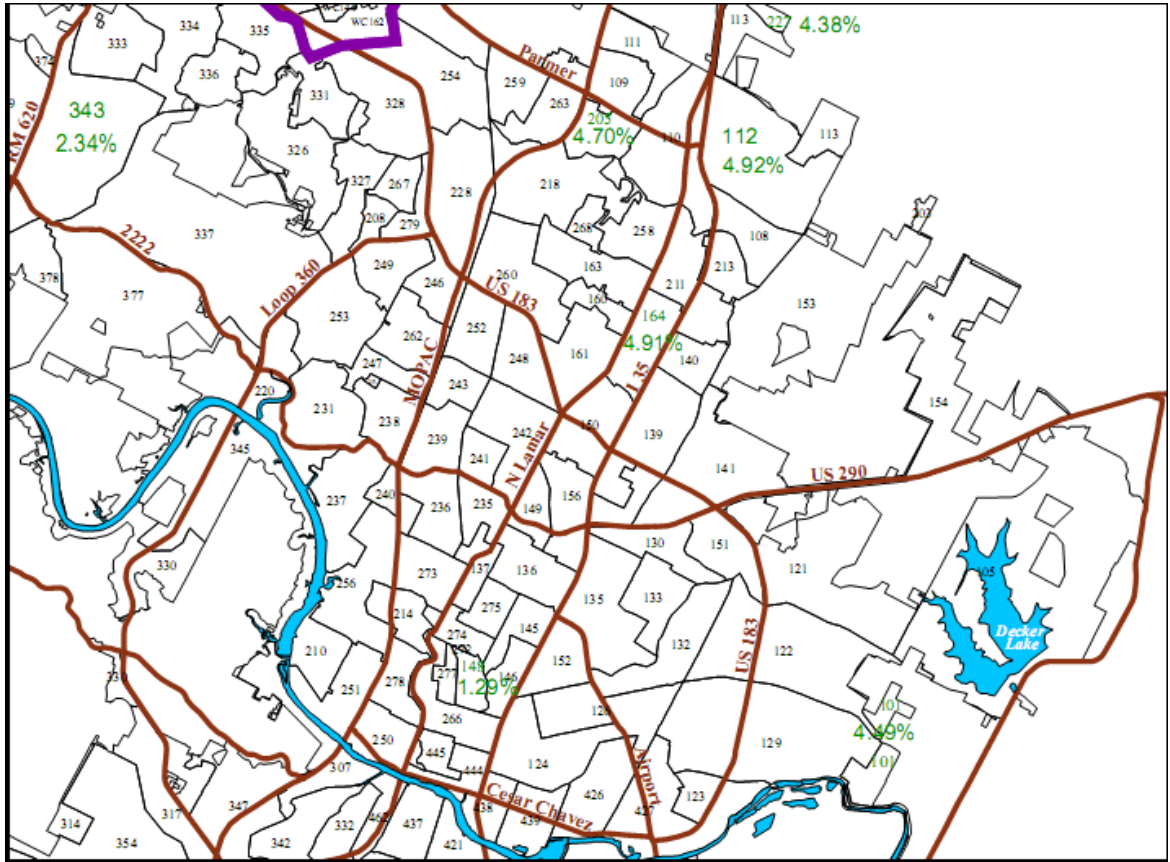
Table 3: Low Voter Turnout Precincts, 2009 Austin Municipal Elections

Pct	Votes	RV	TO %	His	African Amer	Asian Amer	Anglo	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65+	Political Interest
101	7	156	4.49%	23.3%	11.0%	2.5%	63.2%	12.9%	37.0%	22.0%	23.4%	4.5%	28.6%
112	150	3,046	4.92%	17.9%	7.8%	17.7%	56.6%	12.7%	28.1%	23.0%	31.7%	4.3%	31.3%
148	79	6,120	1.29%	18.1%	1.1%	8.3%	72.5%	96.0%	3.1%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	5.1%
164	121	2,464	4.91%	35.2%	4.4%	3.6%	56.8%	12.4%	20.2%	20.2%	37.6%	9.3%	41.2%
205	103	2,190	4.70%	19.2%	3.0%	3.9%	73.9%	16.1%	38.9%	18.0%	22.7%	3.9%	29.4%
227	6	137	4.38%	20.0%	4.1%	5.0%	71.9%	4.1%	34.1%	30.8%	23.3%	7.5%	20.0%
277	128	5,564	2.30%	8.9%	0.5%	6.8%	83.8%	80.8%	12.9%	3.9%	1.7%	0.4%	9.5%
303	1	36	2.78%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	86.7%	13.3%	3.3%	13.3%	66.7%	3.3%	0.0%
343	73	3,117	2.34%	11.7%	3.7%	1.1%	83.5%	16.2%	40.5%	18.5%	20.0%	4.1%	18.1%
361	38	814	4.67%	10.9%	0.6%	1.9%	86.6%	10.8%	27.9%	19.0%	32.6%	9.5%	44.4%
401	23	984	2.34%	41.0%	7.4%	1.0%	51.6%	13.7%	29.4%	28.7%	25.6%	2.4%	30.4%
402	32	1,108	2.89%	49.9%	11.9%	1.3%	36.9%	12.8%	27.5%	30.8%	25.4%	3.3%	32.3%
407	78	1,687	4.62%	43.7%	6.3%	0.7%	49.3%	12.5%	23.9%	19.4%	32.0%	11.9%	25.3%
412	3	90	3.33%	32.3%	5.6%	1.4%	60.7%	4.2%	33.8%	16.9%	38.0%	7.0%	66.7%
413	11	499	2.20%	32.0%	2.1%	1.3%	64.6%	18.9%	42.1%	14.1%	21.6%	3.2%	9.1%
423	194	4,062	4.78%	62.1%	8.4%	0.6%	28.9%	11.1%	21.4%	18.8%	31.1%	17.4%	29.0%
429	122	4,685	2.60%	32.9%	2.0%	3.7%	61.4%	76.0%	14.8%	3.1%	5.4%	0.6%	28.1%
431	149	3,460	4.31%	26.8%	2.2%	2.8%	68.2%	28.9%	38.6%	13.7%	23.5%	2.3%	34.2%
443	203	4,230	4.80%	57.4%	5.5%	0.7%	36.4%	14.0%	22.5%	19.2%	35.3%	8.8%	44.7%
448	140	3,013	4.65%	43.4%	4.0%	1.5%	55.1%	16.1%	27.8%	18.0%	36.6%	7.1%	36.0%
452	102	2,236	4.56%	52.7%	6.8%	1.4%	39.1%	15.1%	24.6%	18.2%	33.4%	8.5%	43.7%
AVE	96	2,765	3.61%	33.0%	4.7%	3.7%	58.9%	26.4%	27.1%	17.4%	24.3%	5.3%	29.9%

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Opinion Analysts, Inc.

The low voter turnout precincts are located in far north, far west, far south, and southeast Austin, with the exception of a cluster of precincts just south of Lady Bird Lake and in the Montopolis area of south Austin (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Map of Low Voter Turnout Precincts, 2009 Austin Municipal Elections



In analyzing the data from low voter turnout precincts and high voter turnout precincts, a basic question involves whether the voters' preferences differed between high voter turnout precincts and low voter turnout precincts. That is, did the choice of candidates in high voter turnout precincts differ significantly from the choice in low voter turnout precincts in the 2009 mayoral and Place 1 council races? In the mayoral race, three candidates were well-known to Austin voters: Lee Leffingwell was in his second term on the city council, Brewster McCracken was completing his second term, and Carole Keeton Strayhorn had served as Austin's mayor before holding several statewide offices and running for Texas governor in 2006. Two other candidates—David Buttross and Josiah James Ingalls—were also vying for Austin mayor, but most political observers considered their chances of making a runoff election remote, if not impossible. In Place 1, Chris Riley and Perla Cavazos were the only contestants. Both were considered experienced and well qualified to serve on the city council.

Tables 4, 5, and 6 display the vote results from the three categories of precincts. Clearly, Leffingwell and Riley benefited from support in the high turnout precincts. Only in precinct 240 was Cavazos competitive.

Table 4: Vote Results from High Turnout Precincts

Precinct	Leffingwell	Strayhorn	McCracken	Riley	Cavazos
210	54.8%	20.7%	24.5%	78.0%	22.0%
237	49.4%	19.8%	30.8%	76.5%	23.5%
239	58.4%	14.5%	27.1%	67.6%	32.4%
240	58.2%	20.2%	21.6%	51.4%	48.6%
256	41.1%	28.0%	31.0%	79.0%	21.0%
Average	52.4%	20.6%	27.0%	70.5%	29.5%

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Percentages for the mayoral candidates are the percentage of the total vote for Leffingwell, Strayhorn, and McCracken.

Leffingwell's advantage in the medium high turnout precincts was only slightly smaller than in the high turnout precincts. McCracken did only slightly better in these precincts. Riley's advantage over Cavazos was not significantly different from his advantage in the high turnout precincts. Riley received less than 60 percent of the vote in only two of the eighteen precincts.

Table 5: Vote Results from Medium High Turnout Precincts

Precinct	Leffingwell	Strayhorn	McCracken	Riley	Cavazos
208	41.8%	21.3%	36.9%	78.8%	21.2%
214	47.7%	18.0%	34.2%	76.0%	24.0%
220	47.1%	19.5%	33.4%	73.3%	26.7%
231	40.6%	23.1%	36.3%	71.8%	28.2%
236	60.2%	11.2%	28.6%	67.3%	32.7%
241	56.9%	16.4%	26.7%	58.3%	41.7%
243	51.5%	19.5%	29.0%	66.4%	33.6%
246	45.1%	23.5%	31.4%	78.3%	21.7%
249	41.9%	27.0%	31.1%	74.3%	25.7%
250	63.0%	9.7%	27.3%	68.0%	32.0%
251	55.2%	15.0%	29.8%	70.8%	29.2%
253	41.6%	23.6%	34.7%	79.6%	20.4%
273	62.8%	9.8%	27.4%	68.3%	31.7%
278	47.4%	18.8%	33.7%	75.6%	24.4%
327	42.8%	23.5%	33.7%	74.3%	25.7%
332	72.4%	9.9%	17.7%	59.8%	40.2%
337	44.4%	22.8%	32.7%	71.3%	28.7%
342	61.3%	13.9%	24.9%	62.7%	37.3%
AVERAGE	51.3%	18.1%	30.5%	70.8%	29.2%

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Percentages for the mayoral candidates are the percentage of the total vote for Leffingwell, Strayhorn, and McCracken.

In the low voter turnout precincts, Strayhorn received greater support than in the high voter turnout precincts and the medium high voter turnout precincts, averaging almost 35 percent of the vote and winning precinct 227, although only six voters participated, with 83 percent of the vote. Leffingwell's average percentage in these precincts dropped nearly ten percentage points from his average in the high turnout precincts. Similarly, Cavazos was much more competitive in the low turnout precincts, winning ten of the twenty-one precincts. Overall, she averaged nearly 48 percent of the vote in these precincts.

Table 6: Vote Results from Low Turnout Precincts

Precinct	Leffingwell	Strayhorn	McCracken	Riley	Cavazos
101	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%	14.3%	85.7%
112	45.7%	30.0%	24.3%	54.3%	45.7%
148	45.5%	20.8%	33.8%	79.7%	20.3%
164	42.7%	40.0%	17.3%	54.1%	45.9%
205	46.4%	25.8%	27.8%	51.2%	48.8%
227	16.7%	83.3%	0.0%	60.0%	40.0%
277	38.8%	14.9%	46.3%	65.1%	34.9%
303	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

343	34.8%	33.3%	31.8%	58.8%	41.2%
361	33.3%	38.9%	27.8%	67.7%	32.3%
401	35.0%	30.0%	35.0%	39.1%	60.9%
402	20.7%	48.3%	31.0%	46.9%	53.1%
407	37.5%	51.4%	11.1%	40.3%	59.7%
412	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%
413	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	54.5%	45.5%
423	43.6%	32.4%	24.0%	36.6%	63.4%
429	67.5%	12.3%	20.2%	57.9%	42.1%
431	50.0%	23.6%	26.4%	46.0%	54.0%
443	35.1%	41.5%	23.4%	46.7%	53.3%
448	34.6%	45.7%	19.7%	39.5%	60.5%
452	37.8%	37.8%	24.5%	40.0%	60.0%
Average	42.9%	34.9%	22.2%	52.5%	47.5%

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Percentages for the mayoral candidates are the percentage of the total vote for Leffingwell, Strayhorn, and McCracken.

Undoubtedly, voter preferences were different in the high and medium high voter turnout precincts from voter preferences in the low voter turnout precincts. A T-test of differences in voter preferences between high turnout precincts and low voter turnout precincts was significant at the .05 level of confidence for Riley (t stat=2.80) and Cavazos (t stat=-2.80), and at the .01 level of confidence for Strayhorn (t stat=-3.43). However, the T-test was not significant for Leffingwell and McCracken, indicating that there was not a statistically significant difference in support for the two candidates between high voter turnout precincts and low voter turnout precincts.

Another question of importance is: Which demographic factors are correlated with high voter turnout rates by registered voters? Combining the data from low, medium high, and high voter turnout precincts and adding data from the twenty precincts with the largest total votes cast in the 2009 Austin municipal election, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation for each demographic factor and political interest can be calculated (see Table 7).

The strongest correlation is with political interest. As political interest increases, voter turnout rate also increases. Very high correlations also exist for the percentage of Anglos, percentage of Hispanics, and percentage of people aged 65 years of age and older. The larger the percentage of Anglos and persons 65 years of age and older in the precinct, the higher the voter turnout

rate. Also significant is the percentage of African Americans in the precinct. For percentages of Hispanics and African Americans in the precincts, the correlation is inverse—the larger the percentage of Hispanics and African Americans, the lower the voter turnout rate. This contradicts, in the case of African Americans and Hispanics, Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch's findings that the percentage of African Americans in a California city was not associated with low voter turnout by registered voters (2002, 45). Also, whereas Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch found that large Hispanic and Asian American populations in California cities is associated with low voter turnout, the correlation between the percentage of registered Asian Americans in an Austin precinct and the precinct's voter turnout rate is not statistically significant. Of course, the fact that Hajnal *et al.* were using data at the city level rather than precinct level may explain the difference.

In municipal elections, voter turnout is also related to age distribution of the population. Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch found that "cities with high shares of senior citizens have higher turnout rates. The proportion of young adults in the population, however, appears unrelated to city turnout rates" (2002, 46). In Austin, the percentage of the population in almost every age category was correlated with voter turnout, with percentage of seniors having the strongest correlation.

Table 7: Correlates of High Voter Turnout

Precinct	TO %	Hispanic	African American	Asian American	Anglo	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65+	Political Interest
101	4.49%	23.3%	11.0%	2.5%	63.2%	12.9%	37.0%	22.0%	23.4%	4.5%	28.6%
112	4.92%	17.9%	7.8%	17.7%	56.6%	12.7%	28.1%	23.0%	31.7%	4.3%	31.3%
136	14.33%	11.0%	0.4%	2.2%	86.4%	24.5%	34.3%	17.6%	18.8%	4.7%	44.0%
148	1.29%	18.1%	1.1%	8.3%	72.5%	96.0%	3.1%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	5.1%
152	19.94%	12.1%	6.2%	1.9%	79.8%	12.6%	32.1%	21.3%	24.6%	9.3%	50.3%
164	4.91%	35.2%	4.4%	3.6%	56.8%	12.4%	20.2%	20.2%	37.6%	9.3%	41.2%
205	4.70%	19.2%	3.0%	3.9%	73.9%	16.1%	38.9%	18.0%	22.7%	3.9%	29.4%
208	21.37%	6.9%	1.8%	3.9%	87.4%	7.8%	12.0%	18.4%	42.1%	19.5%	56.3%
210	31.51%	6.0%	0.4%	2.1%	91.5%	8.7%	14.7%	22.6%	38.4%	15.4%	59.5%
214	27.79%	6.4%	0.3%	2.1%	91.2%	8.0%	18.7%	24.5%	36.3%	12.3%	58.0%
220	26.19%	7.1%	0.3%	1.8%	90.8%	7.0%	10.2%	16.4%	47.0%	19.2%	57.3%
227	4.38%	20.0%	4.1%	5.0%	71.9%	4.1%	34.1%	30.8%	23.3%	7.5%	20.0%
231	26.59%	5.7%	0.5%	4.9%	88.9%	7.9%	10.7%	15.6%	42.9%	22.6%	62.8%
236	26.58%	7.3%	1.2%	2.1%	89.4%	7.5%	22.4%	21.7%	31.9%	16.3%	56.8%
237	32.67%	4.0%	0.6%	1.9%	93.5%	8.4%	9.8%	15.8%	42.3%	23.5%	64.4%
239	31.36%	6.7%	0.5%	1.2%	91.6%	8.1%	13.5%	22.2%	37.5%	18.4%	65.1%
240	30.45%	6.2%	0.5%	1.6%	91.7%	8.6%	17.9%	23.4%	35.5%	14.3%	66.1%
241	22.40%	11.9%	0.4%	1.9%	85.8%	6.8%	22.0%	24.8%	32.7%	13.6%	59.8%
242	19.10%	12.7%	0.9%	1.6%	84.8%	7.3%	24.6%	23.3%	29.9%	14.7%	52.8%
243	29.10%	8.7%	1.1%	1.6%	88.6%	6.4%	15.8%	20.5%	33.7%	23.4%	59.1%
246	24.97%	6.7%	0.4%	2.3%	90.6%	7.2%	16.1%	14.7%	33.1%	28.6%	59.2%
249	21.40%	7.4%	0.9%	2.8%	88.9%	7.9%	17.6%	16.6%	34.2%	23.4%	62.7%
250	23.68%	8.6%	1.1%	1.9%	88.4%	10.2%	34.9%	17.7%	29.1%	8.0%	53.1%
251	21.91%	8.3%	0.7%	1.8%	89.2%	10.8%	28.1%	19.7%	31.7%	9.6%	52.1%
253	26.50%	5.1%	0.9%	2.8%	91.2%	7.8%	11.1%	16.2%	39.6%	25.1%	61.6%
256	35.09%	4.7%	0.3%	1.5%	93.5%	8.6%	10.6%	19.4%	38.6%	22.5%	58.7%
262	22.03%	7.8%	0.9%	3.0%	88.3%	13.1%	18.2%	11.6%	30.3%	26.6%	56.1%
273	26.00%	6.9%	0.4%	1.7%	91.0%	8.5%	20.6%	20.8%	32.0%	17.8%	61.5%
277	2.30%	8.9%	0.5%	6.8%	83.8%	80.8%	12.9%	3.9%	1.7%	0.4%	9.5%
278	26.33%	6.4%	0.5%	1.3%	91.8%	11.4%	26.4%	18.3%	33.3%	10.4%	52.0%
303	2.78%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	86.7%	13.3%	3.3%	13.3%	66.7%	3.3%	0.0%
327	23.45%	6.9%	1.2%	6.9%	85.0%	8.6%	12.2%	18.9%	44.0%	16.1%	59.1%
328	14.41%	9.9%	1.0%	3.7%	85.4%	9.2%	22.0%	18.4%	35.2%	15.0%	49.1%

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332	27.85%	9.4%	0.7%	1.5%	88.4%	6.9%	24.7%	22.5%	36.4%	9.4%	57.7%
337	22.78%	5.8%	1.4%	4.5%	88.3%	8.0%	12.2%	19.0%	46.6%	14.0%	57.3%
342	22.67%	10.4%	0.8%	1.0%	87.8%	8.1%	26.2%	19.3%	30.4%	15.7%	57.4%
343	2.34%	11.7%	3.7%	1.1%	83.5%	16.2%	40.5%	18.5%	20.0%	4.1%	18.1%
347	18.97%	8.1%	0.3%	2.5%	89.1%	14.1%	24.4%	15.0%	34.5%	11.8%	47.2%
354	18.65%	9.3%	0.3%	2.6%	87.8%	8.3%	18.8%	22.2%	36.4%	14.0%	56.0%
361	4.67%	10.9%	0.6%	1.9%	86.6%	10.8%	27.9%	19.0%	32.6%	9.5%	44.4%
366	14.77%	13.7%	1.4%	5.0%	79.9%	7.3%	18.8%	31.2%	35.5%	7.0%	47.7%
367	14.18%	11.9%	1.1%	4.6%	82.4%	6.6%	15.7%	33.3%	35.7%	8.4%	41.8%
401	2.34%	41.0%	7.4%	1.0%	51.6%	13.7%	29.4%	28.7%	25.6%	2.4%	30.4%
402	2.89%	49.9%	11.9%	1.3%	36.9%	12.8%	27.5%	30.8%	25.4%	3.3%	32.3%
407	4.62%	43.7%	6.3%	0.7%	49.3%	12.5%	23.9%	19.4%	32.0%	11.9%	25.3%
412	3.33%	32.3%	5.6%	1.4%	60.7%	4.2%	33.8%	16.9%	38.0%	7.0%	66.7%
413	2.20%	32.0%	2.1%	1.3%	64.6%	18.9%	42.1%	14.1%	21.6%	3.2%	9.1%
423	4.78%	62.1%	8.4%	0.6%	28.9%	11.1%	21.4%	18.8%	31.1%	17.4%	29.0%
429	2.60%	32.9%	2.0%	3.7%	61.4%	76.0%	14.8%	3.1%	5.4%	0.6%	28.1%
431	4.31%	26.8%	2.2%	2.8%	68.2%	28.9%	38.6%	13.7%	23.5%	2.3%	34.2%
443	4.80%	57.4%	5.5%	0.7%	36.4%	14.0%	22.5%	19.2%	35.3%	8.8%	44.7%
448	4.65%	43.4%	4.0%	1.5%	55.1%	16.1%	27.8%	18.0%	36.6%	7.1%	36.0%
452	4.74%	52.7%	6.8%	1.4%	39.1%	15.1%	24.6%	18.2%	33.4%	8.5%	43.7%

Pearson r -0.706*** -0.599*** -0.169 0.744*** -0.428** -0.422** 0.159 0.437** 0.762*** 0.825***

Source: Clerk, City of Austin, Official Results, Canvass Report, May 20, 2009; Opinion Analysts, Inc.; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Increasing Voter Turnout in Austin

Before discussing how to increase voter turnout in Austin's mayoral and council elections, we must first address the question: Does voter turnout matter? Numerous studies of national and even statewide elections indicate that the voting and public policy preferences of nonvoters are not significantly different from voters (Bennett and Resnick 1990; Elcessor and Leighley 2001; Gant and Lyons 1993; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). If this is true for local elections as well, then increasing voter turnout is not really important. However, local elections are different from national elections: *Voter turnout does matter* (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005, Hajnal 2009). Lower voter turnout by Hispanics and African Americans leads "to their systematic underrepresentation on local governing boards" and "regularly affects who wins and loses" (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005, 531). Furthermore, electoral institutions affect representation of African Americans: "Moving from at-large to district elections and moving dates of local elections to coincide with national contests could substantially reduce black representation at the local level" (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005, 531). However, single-member district elections are more likely to result in the election of a more diverse city council only under certain conditions: "Single-member district systems can increase diversity only when underrepresented groups are highly concentrated and compose moderate portions of the population. These factors are most important in an arena where polarized voting predominates and where groups leverage their population size to achieve descriptive representation. In addition, the effect of the electoral system is not constant across all people of color, nor is it constant across both genders; race and gender interact to produce different results" (Trounstine and Valdini 2008, 567). Furthermore, African Americans are most likely to be the losers in mayoral elections, although Hispanics fare almost as poorly as African Americans. According to Hajnal, "The fact that. . . blacks are consistently more likely to end up losers raises concerns about equity in American democracy" (46). Thus, if voter turnout is important in winning elections and consequently, equity in American democracy, increasing voter turnout is an important goal. Because Austin is a fast-growing, large city inhabited by a

considerable number of young people, increasing voter turnout will not be easy, but that does not mean that the attempt should not be made.

To increase voter turnout requires changing the institutional arrangements for electing Austin council members and increasing interest in Austin's council elections. The greatest increase in voter turnout could be achieved by scheduling Austin's council elections to coincide with presidential elections. However, this change would require either a change in the state's election code, which requires cities with a population of more than 450,000 and elects all of its council members through an at-large election to conduct its council elections on the uniform spring election date⁴, or a charter change from an at-large election system to a single-member or mixed election system. Between 1973 and 2002, Austin voters have rejected six proposals to adopt an election system involving either single-member districts for council members and at-large election for mayor or a mixed system, involving the at-large election of the mayor and some council members and single-member districts for most council members. In 1984, a proposal to elect eight council members from single-member districts and to elect the mayor in an at-large election barely failed on a 52 percent to 48 percent vote. Without abandoning at-large elections, Austin could adopt cumulative voting, which allows each voter to distribute their votes as they wish among candidates for the city council. For example, if three positions on the city council are being selected, a voter could award one vote to each of three candidates, split the three votes between two candidates, or award all three votes to one candidate. According to Bowler, Brockington, and Donovan (2001, 912), cumulative voting results in voter turnout that is four to five percentage points higher than in at-large elections, and cumulative voting also increases descriptive representation. The adoption of cumulative voting, however, would also require a change in the Texas Election Code, which requires cities with a population of 200,000 or more to elect its council members "by place" if more than one member is elected from the same set of candidates (Texas Election Code, Title 16, Chapter 275, Section 275.003).

Turnout could also be increased by changing the form of Austin's municipal government from the council-manager form to the strong mayor-council form, thereby increasing the power of the

mayor and his or her authority over city departments. Currently, only one major city in Texas—Houston—feature a strong mayor-council form of government. Attempts to adopt the strong mayor-council form in Dallas failed twice in 2005.

Voter turnout could also be increased by changing the nomination of city officials from a nonpartisan process to a partisan process. The Texas Election Code permits home-rule cities to adopt a partisan nomination of candidates for city offices through its charter or by ordinance authorized by the charter (Texas Election Code, Title 9, Section 143.003). Currently, candidates for Austin's mayor and council run as independents, neither nominated nor endorsed by political parties. Candidates for mayor or council gain positions on the ballot either through payment of a filing fee or by collecting signatures on petitions.

If all of the preceding institutional changes were made, voter turnout could increase by as much as 45 percent. Despite the importance of these methods of increasing voter turnout, other efforts to increase interest in mayoral and city council elections, contact and inform voters, and make municipal elections more salient to voters can also increase voter turnout. During an interview, Haenshen (2009) commented that few voters knew much about the city council, its functions, and how its decisions affect Austin residents' lives.

Both traditional and new media and candidates could enhance turnout by educating Austin residents about the council's functions, the election, and the candidates in the contest. Several activities by candidates—canvassing, phone calls, mailings—increase voter awareness and turnout, with door-to-door canvassing being the most effective (Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Michelson 2003; Nickerson 2006; Niven 2004). With increased contribution limits and candidate awareness of the efficacy of door-to-door canvassing, voter turnout could be increased about five percentage points. In Green, Gerber, and Nickerson's study (2003, 1094), twelve successful face-to-face contacts resulted in one additional vote. Although the costs for each additional vote are high (about \$15 per vote), the benefits are great in increased voter turnout and in promoting equity in Austin's democracy.

A final initiative could create a partnership involving Austin nonprofits in a program to increase voter turnout. According to Pillsbury and Rivera (2004), BostonVOTE offers a model for increasing voter turnout in municipal elections. Based on a year-round infrastructure for nonprofit-led voter mobilization, BostonVOTE increased voter turnout in 110 targeted precincts every year from 1999 to 2003 by a much greater percentage than non-targeted precincts. Partnering local nonprofits agreed to three activities: (1) integrated voter registration, education, and get-out-the-vote activities; (2) use BostonVOTE materials and conduct training sessions; and (3) assignment of a staff liaison for voter work. Several foundations provided funding for BostonVOTE.

What was learned from the BostonVOTE initiative? The lessons included: (1) having a central "VOTE organization" that is separate from the action organizations is valuable; (2) voter education is important to voter turnout; (3) flexibility is important to increasing voter turnout; (4) partnerships with nonprofits multiply the results in increasing voter turnout; (5) linking voting to issues makes the vote meaningful and important; (6) politics is essential to ensure that a city's public policies reflect the public interest. There is no reason that an AustinVOTE cannot be just as successful as BostonVOTE in educating and mobilizing voters in local elections.

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ENDNOTES

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Stefan D. Haag
Professor, Government
Austin Community College

- ¹ Anglo is the term used for non-Hispanic whites.
- ² Austin's election of its mayor and council in an at-large election will be the subject of a future Center report.
- ³ Twelve precincts in which either no registered voters voted or there were few or no registered voters in the precinct were excluded from the analysis. The precincts were 105, 203, 215, 216, 224, 225, 271, 272, 312, 324, 374, and 405.
- ⁴ This provision of the Texas Election Code, Title 4, Chapter 41, Section 41.0053, was added in 1997.