

Getting to 100: How Moving Elections to Even Years Increased Voter Participation in Local Elections October 2020

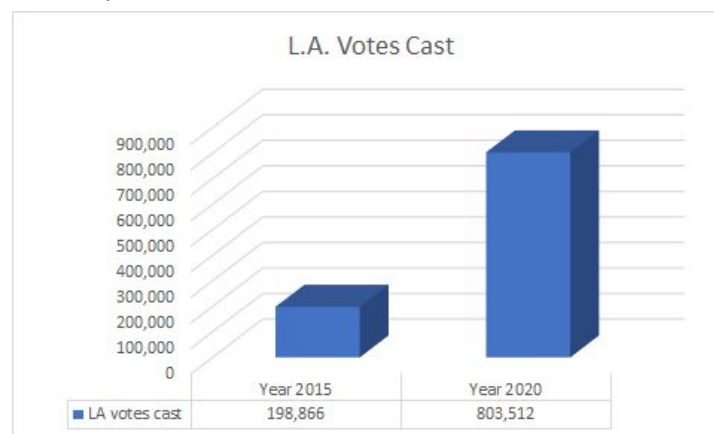
By Sean McMorris and Kathay Feng

In 2015, Los Angeles voters [overwhelmingly voted to move City elections from odd to even-numbered years](#) to coincide with presidential and gubernatorial elections, something CA Common Cause had long advocated for. [Prior research shows](#) a significant increase in voter turnout in California cities when local elections are held in even-numbered years. In 2020, the first year that the City of Los Angeles moved its city elections from odd years to even years, our analysis shows this conclusion holds true for the City of Los Angeles.

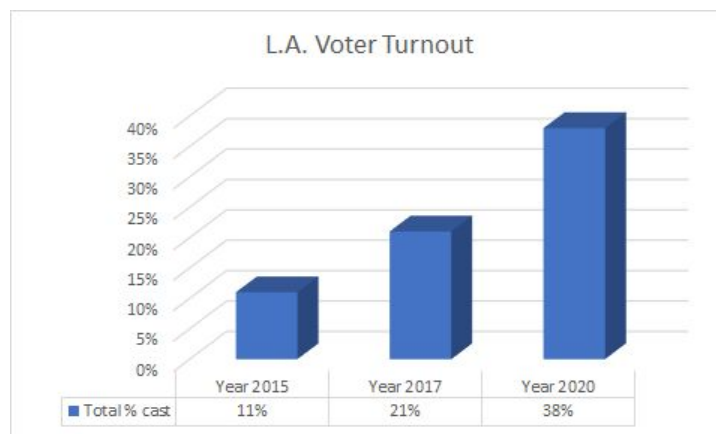
While the sample size for Los Angeles Elections is small (5 years and one local election held on an even-numbered year since 2015), available data shows a substantial increase in voter turnout in the 2020 LA City elections compared to City elections in 2017 and 2015.

There are key takeaways from L.A.'s 2020 primary elections (the City's first even-numbered local election year).

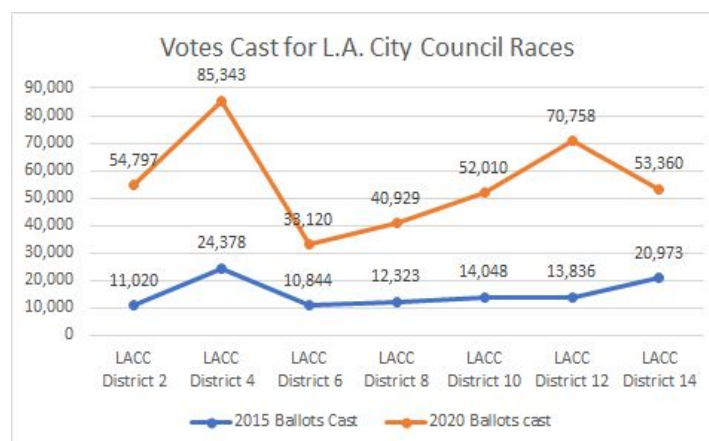
- **The City of Los Angeles experienced a 400% increase in voters casting a ballot for elections in March 2020 compared to March 2015.** In the 2020 primary elections, over 604,000 more people cast ballots in city races compared to city primaries in 2015. Even as voter registration increased by 14% (roughly 307,000 more people registered to vote) from 2015 to 2020 across the City, the jump in voter participation outpaced growth in new voters. In 2015, the number of voters casting ballots in LA City elections was 198,866 compared to 803,512 in the 2020 primary elections. Even numbered City Council Districts (CCDs 2, 4, 6, 8, 20, 12, 14) were up for election in 2015 and 2020.



- L.A. City Council races saw a remarkable increase in voter turnout within districts from 2015 to 2020, or an increase of 27 percentage points.** Comparing voter turnout (percentage of votes cast divided by registered voters) across three years, in 2015, the voter turnout was 11%, in 2017 it was 21%, and in 2020 it was 38%. There was a 45% increase in votes cast (177,545 additional votes) in L.A. City Council races from 2017 to 2020, and a 72% increase in votes cast (282,895 additional votes) in L.A. City Council races from 2015 to 2020. Even numbered City Council Districts (CCDs 2, 4, 6, 8, 20, 12, 14) were up for election in 2015 and 2020. Odd numbered districts (CCDs 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13) were up in 2017.



- The number of ballots cast in each City Council District in 2020 was dramatically higher than the votes cast in the same districts in 2015.** In City Council District 12 (largely centered in San Fernando Valley), in 2015, the number of votes cast was low—just 13,836 votes cast—compared to other council districts. In 2020, the number of votes cast in CCD 12 grew to 70,758, or nearly 57,000 additional ballots cast than in 2015. Even City Council District 6, which had the lowest number of votes cast in 2020 (33,120) for a City Council race had more voters participating than any City Council District in 2015.



To be sure, the data set is small and there are other variables that may play a role in voter turnout in L.A. City elections, including the fact that many more people are now registered, some of the races are hotly contested, and each district's demographics are changing. Yet, even with our small sample size, the raw data suggests that moving L.A. City elections to even-numbered years has significantly increased voter turnout across the City in general and in each City Council race in particular. Furthermore, the increase is significant enough that it would likely overcome the role of other variables that typically have an impact on voter turnout.

Note

Common Cause used voter turnout data from the L.A. County Register-Recorder's Office and the L.A. City Clerk's Office. Before 2017, L.A. City conducted elections, compiling and storing local election results. Since 2017, when Los Angeles city aligned its elections with state and national elections in even years, L.A. County has conducted the elections and compiled and stored election results for City of Los Angeles. Thus, data from two different sources were used in this analysis. Of note, voter data for the 2015 Los Angeles elections does not provide a breakdown of registered voters per L.A. City Council District (just the City as a whole), whereas L.A. County does provide this data for the 2017 and 2020 L.A. City elections. Thus, votes cast per district were used when analyzing voter trends across years and Council districts while City-wide voter registration data was analyzed across the same City election years.

Sources

Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder's Office

<https://lavote.net/home/voting-elections/current-elections/election-results/past-election-results>

Los Angeles City Clerk's Office

<https://clerk.lacity.org/elections/election-archives>