

Godshalk, Brent L.

110659

From: dasmith [dasmith@ufl.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, June 06, 2012 12:04 AM
To: Godshalk, Brent L.
Subject: Re: City of Gainesville Elections

Additional
Back-up

dear mr. godshalk

my apologies for not getting back to you earlier...

unfortunately, i will not be able to make it to the city commission meeting as i will be out of town.

generally speaking, we should expect considerable voter roll-off for "down ballot" municipal races in a general election. in addition to voter fatigue, these races are most often lower salience, with lower information conveyed to voters to help them make rational decisions (for example, no party cues (R) or (D) next to the names of candidates).

we also know that nonpartisanship races in general, such as our municipal elections, have lower turnout, and that those voters who do vote for municipal candidates tend to rely less on party and more on incumbency in their voting decisions. if municipal elections are held in november, the roll-off down down ballot likely will be considerable, as voters will not have party cues to help inform their decisions in these contests.

on the flip side, some registered voters -- especially racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and those with low education levels -- tend to vote less in off-year, desynchronized elections, such as our municipal elections held in the spring. as such, there is a clear bias in participation levels in these desynchronized local elections. holding municipal elections at the same time as general elections will likely shrink this participation bias, notwithstanding the likely down ballot roll-off for local races.

surprisingly, there are very few studies on the topic.

a 2003 article in Urban Affairs Review by zoltan hajnal and paul lewis, "Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections," assess the impact of five sets of institutions on voter turnout across municipal elections in california: (1) election timing, (2) service delivery arrangements, (3) direct democracy, (4) term limits, and (5) mayoral authority. they find that across more than 350 cities in california, when municipal elections are tied to presidential elections, turnout of registered voters is 36% higher than off-cycle elections, all else equal. when they are tied to midterm congressional elections, or presidential primaries, municipal turnout is 26% and 25% higher in terms of registered voters, respectively. As they conclude, "By scheduling local elections to occur on the dates of statewide general or primary elections (so-called concurrent or on-cycle elections), localities make it easier for voters participating in the statewide election to vote in local contests as well. In short, participation in local elections depends critically on the timing of those elections."

unfortunately, there is very little research on the roll-off effects down ballot for municipal races that are held concurrently with presidential and midterm elections, compared to when they were desynchronized.

again, i'm sorry for the very delayed response.

you may certainly convey my thoughts to the other commissioners and the mayor if you think this might be helpful.

best,

dan

daniel a. smith, ph.d.
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On 5/23/2012 12:28 PM, Godshalk, Brent L. wrote:
Thank you for the quick reply. I look forward to hearing from you.

Brent Godshalk
City Auditor
City of Gainesville, Florida
352-334-5020

From: Dasmith [<mailto:dasmith@ufl.edu>]
Sent: Wednesday, May 23, 2012 12:25 PM
To: Godshalk, Brent L.
Subject: Re: City of Gainesville Elections

Hi Mr. Godshalk
I am traveling but will be on touch with you shortly.
Best
Dan

daniel a. smith
sent from my iPhone

On May 23, 2012, at 11:41 AM, "Godshalk, Brent L." <godshalkbl@cityofgainesville.org> wrote:

Dr. Smith,

The City of Gainesville is considering a ballot initiative that, if approved by the voters, would change the time frame of holding City elections for Mayor and City Commissioner from every spring to the fall of even years. The main intent of this change is to increase voter participation by having City elections coincide with other local, state and federal elections typically held during the fall of even years.

During recent discussions of the benefits and challenges of this approach, City Commissioners discussed with the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections the fact that City races would likely fall near the end of sometimes lengthy ballots. Concern was raised regarding drop-off that might occur by voters who do not vote all of the way through the ballot. Mayor Pro Temp Lauren Poe mentioned your name during the discussion and requested that you be contacted to see if you have any empirical data from comparable communities making similar changes to fall elections or could provide the City with any insights you may have on the proposed change and how it might affect voter participation in future City elections.

The City Commission is currently scheduled to discuss this item at their next regular meeting, scheduled for June 6th. I'm certain the Commission would very much appreciate any input you would like to provide on the proposed changes to the City Charter. Your comments can be provided in writing and submitted as backup for this item or you can provided them in person at the meeting. Please let me know if and how you would be willing to participate in this process and I will help to facilitate your involvement in the process.

Thank you in advance for your assistance to the City of Gainesville.

Brent Godshalk

City Auditor
City of Gainesville, Florida
352-334-5020

