



ERIC GARCETTI  
MAYOR

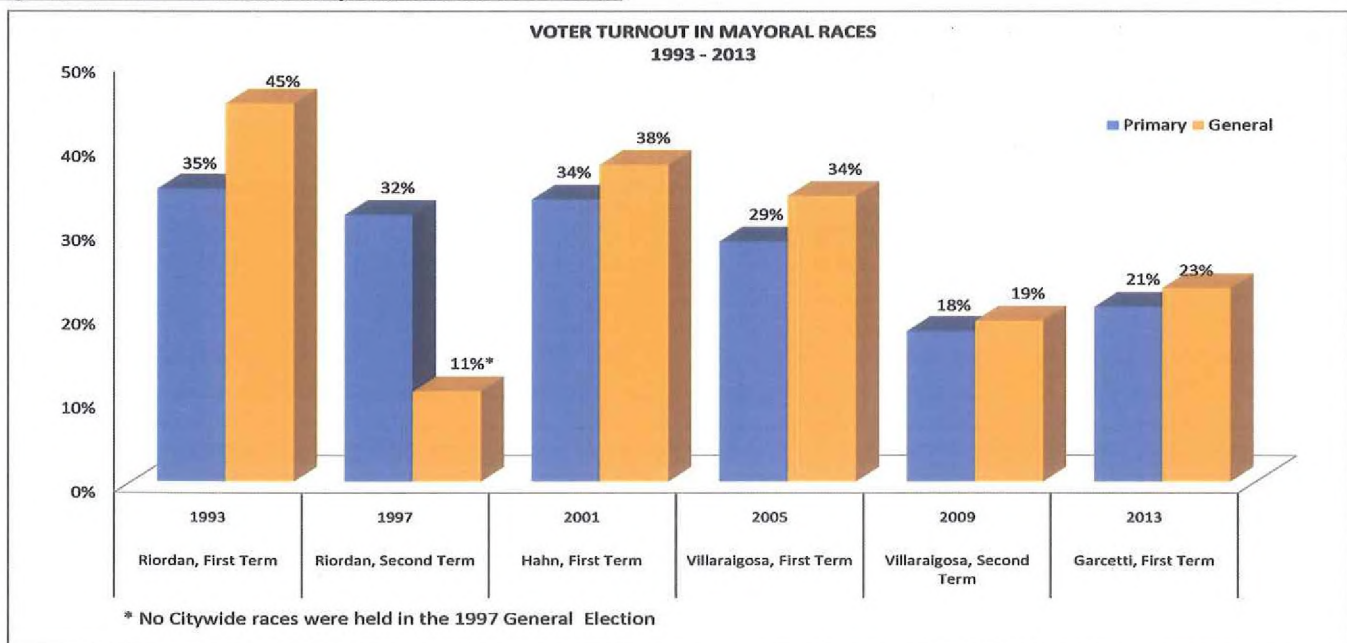
October 21, 2013

Honorable Members of the City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
Room 360, City Hall  
City of Los Angeles

**SUBJECT: INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT THROUGH ALTERNATIVE VOTING METHODS**

The 2013 municipal elections in the City of Los Angeles included a number of significant races and issues including three competitive citywide races, several open City Council seats, and a total of six measures. Despite this, only 20.8% of the City's registered voters cast ballots in the March Primary Election and 23.3% in the May General Election. As Figure 1 below illustrates, these levels are consistent with other City elections in our recent history. By comparison, at the County-run November 2012 federal and state elections 51.6% of Los Angeles County's registered voters cast a ballot.

*Figure 1. Voter Turnout in Mayoral Races, 1993-2013*



In light of this turnout trend, on February 5, 2013, the City Council instructed the Office of the City Clerk, in collaboration with our partners in the voter advocacy community, to analyze alternative voting methods and develop a list of achievable goals and recommendations with implementation timeframes (Council File 10-1649-S1), and to report back on our findings 90 days following the completion of our 2013 election cycle.

In response to this instruction, we convened an Alternative Voting Methods Working Group (Working Group) and conducted an analysis of voter turnout, ways to better use our outreach resources to educate voters and increase participation, methods to facilitate voting within our current system, and fundamentally different voting systems. We analyzed these methods in terms of what would be required for implementation in the City.

The analysis and recommendations presented in this report are the City Clerk's, but the participation of the entire Working Group was instrumental to our process. Although there was significant common ground reached during our discussions, we were not trying to develop a consensus or collective recommendations. We encourage our partners to raise alternative views to our findings and recommendations before the City Council.

As the administrator of the local elections, the City Clerk is focused on ensuring that all eligible Angelenos have an opportunity to participate in our elections, ensuring that all voters are provided the necessary information to make informed decisions about the matters before them, and preserving the integrity of the election so that voters can have confidence that their vote is counted. In order to achieve these goals, we constantly evaluate our practices and seek to improve them. In this report we have evaluated changes in our practices that could have a positive impact on voter turnout.

### **Methodology**

Our research into alternative voting methods included multiple sources. Our first and best source was the Working Group, which was comprised of local voter advocacy organizations. The Working Group met on five separate occasions for approximately two hours each time. Any organization that was interested in participating was welcome to do so. We first invited all organizations that had appeared before the City Council on this matter at the February 5, 2013 meeting in which the instruction to report back was given to the City Clerk. We also invited all members of our Los Angeles Votes Committee, which is our standing committee to discuss matters related to local election administration. In addition to attending meetings, participants were invited to submit comments and materials for the entire group to review and discuss. The following organizations participated in one or more meetings:

- Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Los Angeles
- California Association of Non-Profits
- League of Women Voters Los Angeles
- Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (County)
- Los Angeles Voters for Instant Runoff Elections

- California Common Cause
- Disability Rights California
- Empowerment Congress Southwest Neighborhood Council
- Future of California Elections
- Filipino American Service Group, Inc.
- National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund
- Office of Council Member Jan Perry, 9<sup>th</sup> District
- Office of Council Member Paul Koretz, 5<sup>th</sup> District
- Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education
- Thai Community Development Corporation

The topics discussed, by meeting, were as follows:

- At the first meeting, we had an open-ended, brainstorming session to identify the broadest possible range of alternative voting methods and practice changes.
- At the second meeting, we discussed why people choose not to vote and ways that our voter outreach and education programs could be improved – changes that we could for the most part implement either by shifting our current efforts, or requesting minimal additional resources.
- At the third meeting, we discussed ways to improve the accessibility and usefulness of our election materials, ways to increase the levels of voter registration, potential changes to our polling place operations, and the possibility of holding all vote-by-mail elections.
- At the fourth meeting we discussed ranked choice voting and changing the Election Day to allow for consolidation on the County's elections.
- In the final meeting, we discussed early voting, mobile voting, systems enhancements such as the use of "ballot-on-demand" and electronic poll books, and options for altering the procedures for single district special elections.

Many of the methods that we considered have been studied by voter advocates, academics, and other experts in the field of election administration. Therefore, to supplement our meetings we also reviewed articles, reports, and academic studies from a variety of sources including the United States Election Assistance Commission, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, and data provided by Working Group participants. These and other sources addressed the methods and questions under consideration, as well as the causes that contribute to or reduce voter participation, accessibility for voters with disabilities, elements of effective voter outreach programs, impacts and best practices for early voting, ranked choice voting, and voting by mail.

Finally, in order to better understand the impacts of the alternative voting methods we considered and how they have been implemented elsewhere, we studied the use of these methods in other jurisdictions and contacted those election administrators to learn from their experiences. In seeking to learn from similar cases, we focused on California jurisdictions since they operate under similar laws as the City.

### **Conclusions**

Through our analysis (Attachment A), we have drawn several conclusions. In short, although there are significant medium-term constraints to implementation of many of the alternative voting methods discussed, the recommendations below are the key opportunities we have identified to improve voter turnout in the City. Our specific conclusions are as follows:

- For the most part, the data on the impact of alternative election methods on voter turnout is not definitive, except that it does appear clear that consolidating City elections with the County would increase turnout at least in general elections held in November. This increase in turnout would be the result of taking advantage of higher levels of interest in national and statewide races and not necessarily a sign of an increase in the level of Angelenos' engagement with City government.
- Early voting at established polling places is not certain to increase turnout, but would provide voters with a third option for voting in addition to voting by mail before Election Day and voting at the polls on Election Day. Increasing the early vote could also reduce the workload on poll workers on Election Day, allowing them more time to assist voters. Thus, once fully implemented it should make voter participation more convenient and it is recommended for implementation upon the completion of the County's new voting system. When early voting has been coupled with same-day voter registration it has been shown to have the greatest impact on overall turnout.
- Most of the alternative methods identified require Charter changes that must be approved by the voters and, for the sake of consistency, should also apply to LAUSD elections and be approved by LAUSD voters. Two alternative voting methods discussed that do not require a Charter change are early voting and the proposed 10-point plan for enhancing existing outreach, education, accessibility, and registration efforts.
- Most of the alternative methods discussed are anticipated to be much easier to implement once the new County voting system is completed. Methods, including all vote-by-mail elections, early voting, and ranked choice voting would pose logistical challenges or barriers in the absence of the new system and are not recommended for implementation until that system is completed. The County is unlikely to consider a request to consolidate City elections with theirs prior to completion of the new system.
- It is not advisable to implement temporary changes or pilot programs for a single election since any change requires significant outreach and education efforts, and frequent changes will cause voter confusion if voting methods change from election to election.

- Ranked choice voting and all vote-by-mail elections pose significant hurdles in terms of voter education and are inconclusive in terms of impacts on turnout. Therefore, they are not recommended for implementation at this time.

### **Recommendations**

1. Instruct the City Clerk to implement the 10-point plan for enhancing existing election outreach, education, accessibility, and registration efforts described in this report in order to improve voter turnout in advance of the 2015 municipal elections and include any cost impacts of these elements for consideration as part of the Proposed Fiscal Year 2014-15 Budget.
2. Instruct the City Clerk to monitor the development of the County's new election system and report back to the Mayor and Council on the feasibility of consolidating City Municipal Elections on the County's even-numbered years' elections with the new system including an analysis of such a consolidation including its impacts, costs, and any implementation issues.
3. Instruct the City Clerk to begin development of an early voting implementation plan and to report back with the details of that plan if consolidation on the County's elections is not feasible or advisable but the County's new voting system will support early voting.

### **Fiscal Impact Statement**

There is no immediate impact from adopting the recommendations in this report. Minor costs associated with the ten-point plan will be included in the City Clerk's Proposed Fiscal Year 2014-15 Budget. Costs associated with consolidation of City elections on the County elections and early voting will be presented and analyzed prior to the decision as to whether to proceed.

If you have any questions regarding these proposed amendments, please contact me directly at (213) 978-1023.

Sincerely,



Holly L. Wolcott  
Interim City Clerk

Enclosure - Attachment A