

Clean and Open Elections Task Force

Meeting Notes April 12, 2018

I. Participation

In attendance

Joe Beckmann, Nate Clauser, Vishal Doshi, Ariel Horowitz, Andrew Levine, Sara Oaklander, Nick Salerno, Eric Weisman

Not in attendance

Annie Connor, Josh Rosmarin, J.T. Scott,

II. Status Update on Potential Election Consolidation Recommendation

Conversation to capture where we are and what information we still need in order to frame, make, and defend recommendation on election consolidation

- Framing
 - Recommendation would support municipal elections at the same time as state elections, rather than specifying presidential elections
- Benefits
 - Evidence to support that it increases participation
- Concerns
 - Do you lose advantages of holding elections every year and organizing people? Do people still know enough to vote on the local issues?
 - Concern people may not be informed enough to feel like they can make an informed vote for local candidates should municipal elections be at the same time as state elections
 - Could be more expensive for local candidates if they're competing for air time with state/federal campaigns
 - Public bandwidth – issues could get swallowed up
 - Logistical concern – Only so many campaign staff and removes part of political industry (those who work on local elections)
 - Nationalization of local politics could be more prevalent in a system like this
- Remaining Questions
 - What have been the results in places that have adopted this system?
 - If other places made a switch, what were the results?
 - Would this change require a constitutional amendment?
 - Is is constitutional mandated that municipal elections be held in odd years?
(no)
- Logistical Issues from Nick
 - MA elections held differently – we run elections under the discretion of the legislature and can't do much beyond that

- Would a home rule petition to consolidate elections make it through the home rule petition process? Would the Secretary of the Commonwealth allow it?
- Is it possible to think about how to approach change without being completely limited by obstacles?
- Needing more volunteers is difficult
- So how do we feel?
 - Necessary to look at what's happened in other municipalities? Help that guide our thought process on this.
 - Perhaps talk to officials in Rhode Island on their experience
 - When things are wrong, the fact that people don't want to go for it isn't enough of a reason to say not to push for it (e.g., school desegregation) – Shouldn't keep us from these solutions
 - Are we conceding that we can't make local elections more compelling/ find other ways to get people to the polls?
- *Straw poll – 4 yes, 1 maybe, depending on research*

III. Other Disenfranchised Populations

Notes to capture themes and questions – see handout

Suffrage for Minors

- Constitution doesn't prevent states or municipal bodies from voting at age younger than 18
- Only 18 year olds can vote in MA
- Would need
 - Change in state law or
 - Home rule petition or
 - State legislation allowing municipalities to let under 18 vote
- Examples in Maryland and internationally
- Not a lot of research about turnout or if kids who get to vote earlier become better voters
- Could do mock elections for students in different ways
- History – voting age was 21, and moved to 18 at time of Vietnam War – idea being you shouldn't have to go to war if you can't vote on that war
 - General idea of 18 as time for general responsibilities
 - Legal questions around that – age of majority
- Andrew a big fan of Vote from Birth – will send around an article about it that he finds persuasive (<https://newrepublic.com/article/89090/elections-voting-age-limits-democracy>)

Suffrage for Incarcerated

- MA does not extend voting rights to incarcerated persons

- Would need to change through one of the above measures
- Maine and Vermont – vote in place that was your residence – like absentee voting from jail – easier to administer
- Talked about felons before
- Recent story about a woman who didn't know that under parole she could not vote – sentenced to five years of prison for voter fraud
 - In MA, you can vote as long as you're not presently incarcerated
 - Felons can vote

IV. Overall Questions

- Is it worth it to make recommendations that are more logistically difficult to enact? We are willing to make such recommendations and note they are aspirational
 - Important to note what would make an especially large impact, even if may be politically difficult
- Are we overstating amount to which people are motivated to vote even on national issues? People vote for many reasons.
- Turnout of contested v. uncontested elections – in the competitive wards, turnout more than doubled in 2017
- Are we interested in expanded suffrage? Could be a package we support

V. Next Steps

- Ariel will reach out to cities that have done this to learn more about the process
- Andrew can look at other municipal consolidation outcomes
- Longer meeting for discussion of recommendations, 4/24, 6-9 pm, with food
- Sara to ask Josh to come prepared to unpack the data a bit more for us at that time.