

Are Fewer Elections Better Elections?

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Consolidation of State and Local Elections

Six states have moved to consolidate state and local elections, doubling the share of local offices that are elected on-cycle; a dozen more are considering or implementing consolidations.

Concerns that consolidation raises problems with the electoral process for voters and election officials, leading to a worse election experience.

Q: Does holding local elections concurrently with state and federal elections improve or harm America's democracy?

New Data on Election Timing and Outcomes

We draw on four primary datasets:

- An original state-level panel of election timing laws from 2014 to 2024.
- Municipal-level panel data on election timing for CA (2000-2022) and FL (2008-2018), aggregated to the county level
- Jurisdiction-level election date frequency from L2 nationwide voter file data (2014-2020) and manually from the 400 most populous counties (2014-2024)
- Election official views from 2019, 2020, and 2023 waves of EVIC's Survey of Local Election Officials
- Voter turnout, residual vote, reporting errors from Leip's turnout data (2000-2024); provisional and absentee ballot data from EAVS surveys (2004-2024); voter's experiences from 2014, 2016, 2020, 2022 waves of SPAE

Estimating the Effect of Consolidating Local Elections on the Electoral Experience

Difference-in-differences at the election jurisdiction level

On-Cycle Elections Mean Fewer Elections

Table 1:Effect of On-Cycle Elections on Number of Election Days

	Yearly Election Days			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
On-Cycle	-0.513 (0.242)	-0.383 (0.280)		
Percent On-Cycle			-1.525 (1.275)	-0.966 (0.494)
Jurisdictions	6295	6295	52	50
Years	7	7	7	5
Observations	44499	44499	364	250
Outcome Mean	2.51	2.51	2.57	2.92
Jurisdiction FEs	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coverage	National	National	CA	FL

Election Officials Prefer On-Cycle Elections

Table 2:Effect of On-Cycle Elections on Election Official Attitudes

	Workload reasonable (1)	Funding sufficient (2)	FTEs (3)	Sense of accomplish (4)	Job turnout (5)	Job dispar (6)	Support for consolidation (7)
On-Cycle	1.146 (0.343)	1.557 (0.277)	-1.504 (1.683)	1.346 (0.084)	1.292 (0.303)	0.537 (0.216)	1.461 (0.466)
Years	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Observations	2103	2106	2086	1889	1921	2086	2099
Outcome Mean	3.10	3.26	5.94	4.51	3.78	3.47	3.48
Jurisdiction FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

On-Cycle Elections Do Not Degrade Election Quality

Table 3:Effect of On-Cycle Elections on Election Quality

	Voter turnout (1)	Residual vote (2)	Provisional rate (3)	Absentee reject rate (4)	Reporting error (5)
<i>Panel A: National</i>					
On-Cycle	0.032 (0.009)	0.005 (0.005)	0.010 (0.009)	0.013 (0.007)	-0.032 (0.027)
Counties	2918	2514	2753	2937	2601
Years	6	6	6	6	6
Observations	13829	11225	15911	16582	12091
Outcome Mean	0.53	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
<i>Panel B: California</i>					
On-Cycle Percent	0.006 (0.006)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.013 (0.013)	-0.019 (0.016)	
Counties	52	52	52	52	
Years	12	12	8	10	
Observations	624	624	414	495	
Outcome Mean	0.45	0.02	0.04	0.02	
<i>Panel C: Florida</i>					
On-Cycle Percent	0.005 (0.009)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.011 (0.011)
Counties	50	50	50	50	50
Years	6	6	6	6	6
Observations	300	300	300	299	300
Outcome Mean	0.52	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
Jurisdiction FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

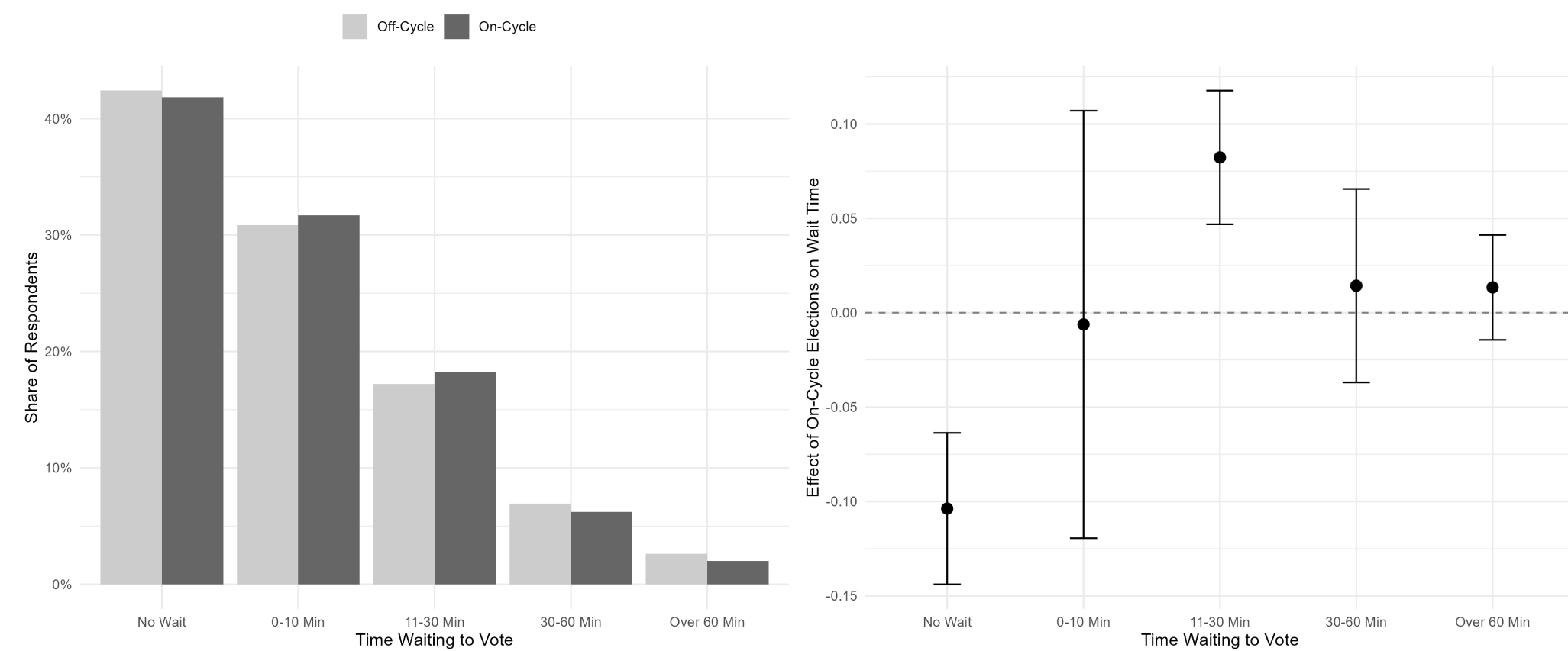
On-Cycle Elections Do Not Degrade the Voting Experience

Table 4:Effect of On-Cycle Elections on Voter Experiences

	Problem (1)	Wait (min) (2)	Voter Confidence	
			Own (3)	Nation (4)
On-Cycle	-0.000 (0.009)	3.467 (2.373)	-0.043 (0.046)	0.075 (0.041)
Years	4	4	4	4
Observations	47968	27891	41717	45861
Outcome Mean	0.04	9.89	0.71	0.34
County FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

But Marginally Increase Wait Times

Figure 1: On-Cycle Elections May Modestly Increase Wait Times. The left panel presents the distribution of wait times in jurisdictions and years with on-cycle elections compared to those with off-cycle elections. Only jurisdictions in states with all off-cycle or all on-cycle state and local elections are included. The right panel presents estimates of the effect of on-cycle elections on the probability a resident experiences a given wait time at the polls. The estimates in the right panel come from separate regressions of a dummy variable for each category of wait time on jurisdiction and year fixed effects and individual-level age, gender, race, education, income, and party identification controls. Both plots rely on data from the 2014, 2016, 2020, and 2022 waves of the Survey of the Performance of American Elections.



Takeaways

- Moving local elections on-cycle **reduces the number of election days** by 15-59%.
- Election officials **report lower workloads, greater job satisfaction, and stronger support for consolidation** after experiencing on-cycle elections firsthand.
- On-cycle elections **does not degrade election quality**: no increase in residual vote, provisional vote, absentee ballot rejection, and reporting errors. It may actually modestly increase voter turnout.
- Voters themselves do not report more problems or less confidence once elections are consolidated. **Slightly longer wait times can be addressed** by reinvesting cost savings from consolidation in poll workers, equipment, and early voting access.