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MTCA Early Voting Survey Analysis

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MTCA Early Voting Survey Analysis

The detailed responses were downloaded, cleaned & loaded into Tableau's data visualization software for analysis. This data is available on-line at https://public.tableau.com/views/ClerkAnalysis-Prelim/ExecSum12?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:toolbar=no . There you can walk through tabs of information summarizing the results. Additionally, on the !Selection tab you can dynamically create your own subsets of data using factors like Community size, County, Tabulation Method, and Central Tabulation Facility.

Respondents
The survey represents completed responses from 252 communities representing 71.7% of Massachusetts' cities & towns.
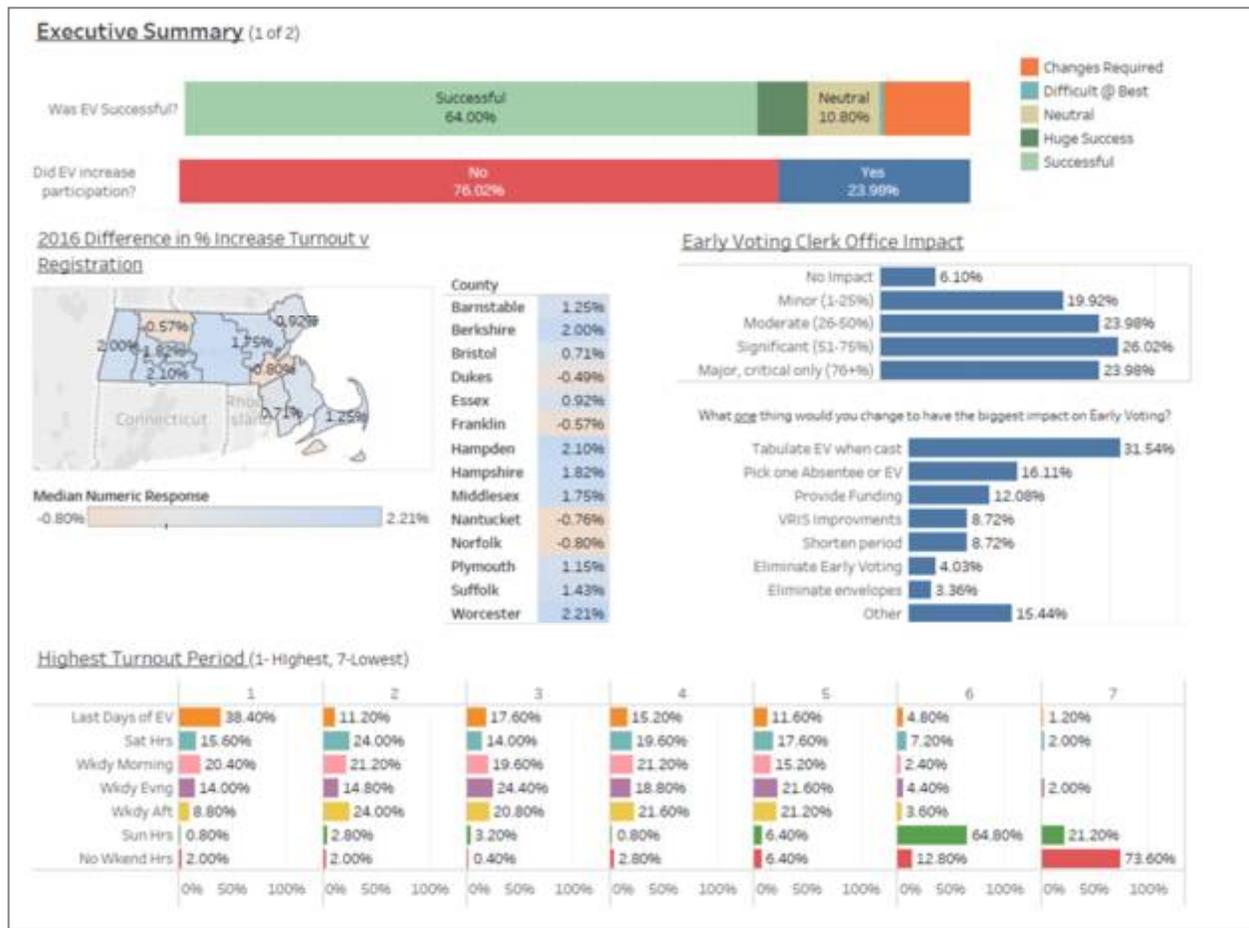
Response Profiles
When looking at the survey results many answers are consistent across communities. However, some answers were common to a certain size of community. I grouped communities into small, medium and large based upon reported registered voters.   This table provides a profile of each of these groups.

		Average	Small	Medium	Large
Registered Voters			1-10,000	10,001-25,000	>25,000
Number of Communities			132	88	30
Percent of Respondents			52%	35%	12%
Voting Location	Clerk's Office	58%	59%	31%	12%
	Same Building as Clerk	39%	40%	62%	71%
Equipment	Accuvote	60%	54%	68%	63%
	Imagecast	15%	18%	19%	13%
	Paper	13%	32%	1%	0%
Multiple Locations (business hours)		9%	6%	6%	33%
Early Voter List	Paper	62%	66%	63%	43%
	VRIS	23%	28%	20%	10%
	Poll Book/Pad	14%	5%	16%	46%
Central Tabulation		26%	8%	28%	20%

In the following sections I provide an Executive Summary of the key findings applicable across all communities either graphically or in bulleted form followed by sections identifying the findings that were common to communities based upon their size. Throughout the document I use the term Clerk this generally applies either to the Town / City Clerk or the community's Chief Election Official .
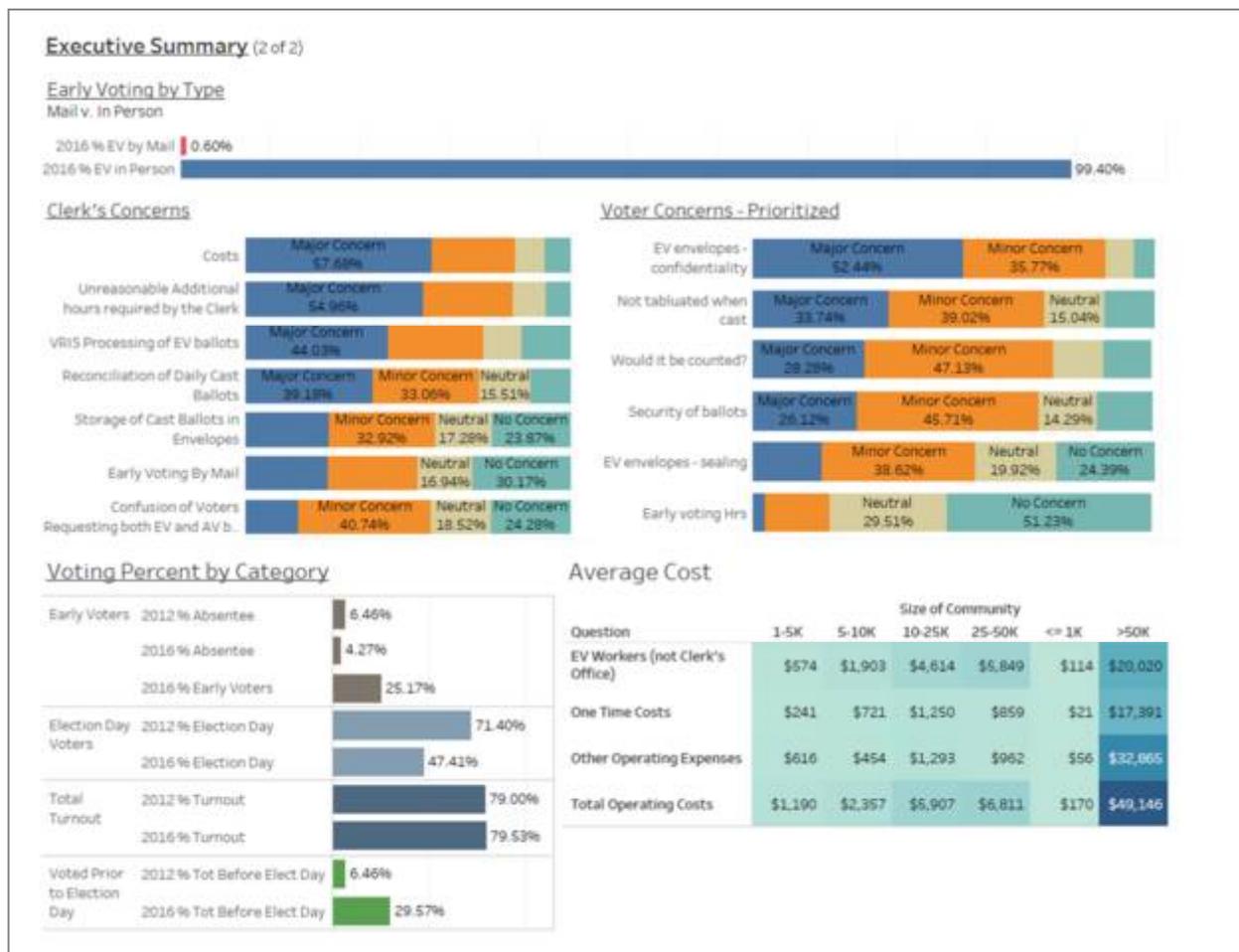
Executive Summary

Executive Summary (1 of 2)

Was EV Successful? — Successful 64.00% | Neutral 10.80% | (Changes Required)

Did EV increase participation? — No 76.02% | Yes 23.99%

Legend: Changes Required | Difficult @ Best | Neutral | Huge Success | Successful

2016 Difference in % Increase Turnout v Registration

County	
Barnstable	1.25%
Berkshire	2.00%
Bristol	0.71%
Dukes	-0.49%
Essex	0.92%
Franklin	-0.57%
Hampden	2.10%
Hampshire	1.82%
Middlesex	1.75%
Nantucket	-0.76%
Norfolk	-0.80%
Plymouth	1.15%
Suffolk	1.43%
Worcester	2.21%

Median Numeric Response: -0.80% to 2.21%

Early Voting Clerk Office Impact

Impact	%
No Impact	6.10%
Minor (1-25%)	19.92%
Moderate (26-50%)	23.98%
Significant (51-75%)	26.02%
Major, critical only (76+%)	23.98%

What one thing would you change to have the biggest impact on Early Voting?

Change	%
Tabulate EV when cast	31.54%
Pick one Absentee or EV	16.11%
Provide Funding	12.08%
VRIS Improvments	8.72%
Shorten period	8.72%
Eliminate Early Voting	4.03%
Eliminate envelopes	3.36%
Other	15.44%

Highest Turnout Period (1- Highest, 7-Lowest)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Last Days of EV	38.40%	11.20%	17.60%	15.20%	11.60%	4.80%	1.20%
Sat Hrs	15.60%	24.00%	14.00%	19.60%	17.60%	7.20%	2.00%
Wkdy Morning	20.40%	21.20%	19.60%	21.20%	15.20%	2.40%	
Wkdy Evng	14.00%	14.80%	24.40%	18.80%	21.60%	4.40%	2.00%
Wkdy Aft	8.80%	24.00%	20.80%	21.60%	21.20%	3.60%	
Sun Hrs	0.80%	2.80%	3.20%	0.80%	6.40%	64.80%	21.20%
No Wkend Hrs	2.00%	2.00%	0.40%	2.80%	6.40%	12.80%	73.60%

The data shows

- 70% of respondent believe Early Voting was successful
- Only 24% of respondents believed that it increase participation
- Reported voter turnout grew 0.99% over the rate of increase in voter registration. On a county basis the change ranged from -0.8% (Norfolk) to +2.21% (Worcester)
- Half of the clerks reported significant to major impacts to their operations reducing service by 50% or more
- The highest turnout periods reported were
  - Last days of early voting was the clear leader
  - Saturday and Weekday morning hours were very close for second & third

- When asked what one thing they would change to have the greatest impact on Early Voting (The Magic Wand question)
  - 31% said they would tabulate the early votes when cast with the associated benefits that accompany that including eliminating envelopes, check in/out, tabulation on Election Day
  - 16% want to standardize on either Absentee Voting or Early voting to reduce the confusion and work associated with two different methods
  - 12% want more funding to be provided to address issues

Executive Summary (2 of 2)

Early Voting by Type
Mail v. In Person

2016 % EV by Mail	0.60%
2016 % EV in Person	99.40%

Clerk's Concerns

Costs	Major Concern 57.68%
Unreasonable Additional hours required by the Clerk	Major Concern 54.96%
VRIS Processing of EV ballots	Major Concern 44.03%
Reconciliation of Daily Cast Ballots	Major Concern 39.18% / Minor Concern 33.06% / Neutral 15.51%
Storage of Cast Ballots in Envelopes	Minor Concern 32.92% / Neutral 17.28% / No Concern 23.87%
Early Voting By Mail	Neutral 16.94% / No Concern 30.17%
Confusion of Voters Requesting both EV and AV b..	Minor Concern 40.74% / Neutral 18.52% / No Concern 24.28%

Voter Concerns - Prioritized

EV envelopes - confidentiality	Major Concern 52.44% / Minor Concern 35.77%
Not tabluated when cast	Major Concern 33.74% / Minor Concern 39.02% / Neutral 15.04%
Would it be counted?	Major Concern 28.28% / Minor Concern 47.13%
Security of ballots	Major Concern 26.12% / Minor Concern 45.71% / Neutral 14.29%
EV envelopes - sealing	Minor Concern 38.62% / Neutral 19.92% / No Concern 24.39%
Early voting Hrs	Neutral 29.51% / No Concern 51.23%

Voting Percent by Category

Early Voters	2012 % Absentee	6.46%
	2016 % Absentee	4.27%
	2016 % Early Voters	25.17%
Election Day Voters	2012 % Election Day	71.40%
	2016 % Election Day	47.41%
Total Turnout	2012 % Turnout	79.00%
	2016 % Turnout	79.53%
Voted Prior to Election Day	2012 % Tot Before Elect Day	6.46%
	2016 % Tot Before Elect Day	29.57%

Average Cost

			Size of Community			
Question	1-5K	5-10K	10-25K	25-50K	<= 1K	>50K
EV Workers (not Clerk's Office)	$574	$1,903	$4,614	$5,849	$114	$20,020
One Time Costs	$241	$721	$1,250	$859	$21	$17,391
Other Operating Expenses	$616	$454	$1,293	$962	$56	$32,865
Total Operating Costs	$1,190	$2,357	$5,907	$6,811	$170	$49,146

The data also showed

- Early Voting by mail was not utilized (0.60%). In the detailed questions 96.81% felt that it <u>did not</u> play an important part and should be eliminated (82.93%)
- Clerks' <u>major concerns</u> were
  - Cost (57.68%) and the
  - Unreasonable extra hours required (54.96%)
  - Also significant were the overhead of processing EV ballots in VRIS (44.03%) and the daily reconciliation of cast ballots (39.18%).
- They reported that Voters were primarily concerned about
  - Confidentiality of the envelopes containing their votes (52.44)
  - That their votes weren't tabulated when completed (33.74%)
- Early voting was a lot of work and cost for little direct benefit
  - The increase in turnout was negligible
  - The reduction on election day was offset by increase in complexity and work to process the ballots of early voters
  - Absentee ballots reduced by a third probably confirming that many people previously treated absentee voting as early voting

Other Common Responses

Several other themes that were common across most communities regardless of size were:

- Almost 2/3 of all communities experienced Frequent or Major problems with folded ballots
  - Only 20% of those communities felt the issues were due to volume of folded ballots
- The majority of Clerks were happy with their choices for
  - Early Voting Hours and
  - Central Tabulation
  - They don't plan on making significant changes in the future
- Many communities would embrace electronic Poll Books / Pads but the two biggest obstacles are
  - Lack of a VRIS interface
  - Lack of funding
- Voters primarily liked the convenience of Early Voting

- Task Force questions
  - Early Voting is <u>not</u> supported for other elections (58%) with a large number of negative comments to be added to that total.
    - For local elections the comments also highlighted the cost burdens without substantial benefit. Several noted that "we already have Absentee Voting for this."
  - Same Day Voter Registration was more mixed, with a large number of comments raising questions / issues about how it would work and how you could prevent fraudulent voting
  - Standardizing early voting hours had a 24%/38%, Yes/No split, with the majority of the comments highlighting issues identifying communities' unique needs as well as financial and staffing restrictions

Small Sized Community Themes

Several of the themes common among small communities are:

- Operations
  - Excessive hours (53.97%) was a larger concern than Cost (48.80%) to these Clerks
  - The majority pf Clerks would like the ability to either delay the start or stop early voting earlier than the close of their normal business day to provide the necessary time for EV processing
    - End early (40%)
    - Start Late (20%)
  - Staff time was a problem
    - 50% of Clerks in these communities reported 21+ hours of overtime
    - 30% have no staff to help
    - Of the 70% with staff, 42% of their staff worked less than 10 hours. (I suspect this may be primarily due to budget restrictions.)
- They are less likely to be electronic Poll Book users in the future (40% No v. 30 No % for all respondents). Primarily due to
  - Funding (44%)
  - Lack of Need (36%)
- Costs
  - Their average cost to run early voting was between $1-2,000 with another $250-700 in one-time costs

Medium Sized Community Themes

For communities with between 10,000-25,000 registered voters we found the following unique themes.

- Staffing issues were more significant
    - Clerks
        - Only 27% of the Clerks reported less than 30 hours over overtime
        - 37% of Clerks worked between 30-50 hours of overtime
        - 35% of Clerks worked <u>more than 50 hours</u> of overtime
    - Of their staff
        - Only 27% worked less than 20 hours of overtime
        - 25% of their staffs worked between 20-40 hours of overtime
- Operations
    - VRIS
        - VRIS processing and daily reconciliation was about 5% higher than the survey average
        - Their answer to what one thing would have the biggest impact (The Magic Wand questions)
            - VRIS was about 4% points higher than the survey average
            - Standardizing on only Absentee Voting or Early Voting was 5% lower
    - Electronic Poll Books
        - 68% would use electronic poll books in the future, though funding is their largest issue (65%)
    - Central Tabulation Facility
        - There was a 50/50 split on using a central tabulation facility
        - Of those that didn't have a CTF, almost 45% had dedicated staff for processing EV ballots
- Voter Concerns
    - Voters were more concerned on average (44% v. 33% survey average) that their ballots weren't being tabulated when cast
- Costs
    - The average cost for early voting was almost $6,000, with an additional $1,250 in one-time costs

Large Sized Communities

Large size communities have special characteristics and issues based upon their size. Some their common themes include the following:

- Hours
  - Saturday hours were almost universal .
  - They are more likely to have multiple locations during business hours (35%)
- Concerns
  - VRIS Processing was the Clerk's #2 Major Concern (65%)
  - Addressing voter issues was their #2 issue (40% rated #2, 20% #1)
  - Unreasonable extra hours remained at the survey average of 55%, VRIS processing just surpassed that threshold
  - Impact on Clerk's office was significantly lower (36% v. average of 50%)
- Operations
  - Almost 40% would like to start Early Voting later than the start of office hours
  - 50% had a Central Tabulation Facility, all were separate from the polls
  - Largest group of electronic Poll Book users (40%)
    - 46% want to use them in the future if there was a VRIS interface
    - 66% cite funding as their largest obstacle
- Costs
  - Total staff overtime was substantially higher probably due to the number of registered voters, with 45% reporting 100+ hours
  - Costs scale with the community size
    - Operating Cost averaged $6,800 for 25-50K, $49,000 for >50K
    - One-time Costs averaged $850 for 25-50K, $17,000 >50K
- Voters
  - Security of ballots was voters' #1 concern (46%) compared to average of (26%)
  - Confidentiality at 46% was similar to the survey average of 52%
  - However, concerns about their ballot being counted was substantially higher (41% v. survey average of 28%)
- Magic Wand
  - Shortening the EV period was the #1 issue for large communities (23%)
  - The survey-wide #1 issue of tabulating early votes when cast was second (18%) but tied with Picking one either Absentee or Early Voting

Survey Limitations

Care should be applied when using the survey results. Participation in the survey was voluntary, so the results may not be totally representative of all clerks. However, that is probably diminished by the 71% participation rate of communities covering the entire spectrum of community based upon size and geographic location. However, be aware, that:

- Many of the questions asked for subjective opinions, rather than discrete data, leading to less precise answers.
- While many questions allowed for alternative answers, several questions did not have that option, so the summary may not totally match the respondent's opinion.
- I encountered some data integrity issues. With the time available I attempted to correct the obvious issues
  - Sometimes fundamental issues like incorrect calculations were encountered. When the source data was available I generated new calculations using that data rather than trusting the user's math
  - When we encountered issues like +100% voter turnout, we omitted those responses from the survey results
  - It appears that due to the length of the survey it appears that respondents became tired as the survey progressed and the accuracy of their responses decreased
- The format of possible responses sometimes combined data answering two related, but different questions. In the time available I tried to untangle these in the analysis, but it adds some imprecision to the answers of those questions. This is especially true in the Task Force questions where the comments will have to read, categorized, and tallied with the results being adjusted.