

Ballot Positions, Contest Differences and Ballot Roll-Off: An Analysis of Voter Participation



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Abstract

Voter participation is a cornerstone of democratic systems, yet in many elections, a significant number of eligible voters fail to fill out their ballots. A factor that is contributing to lower voter turnout is voter fatigue, a phenomenon where voters experience diminished interest or energy in completing the ballot. Voter fatigue can manifest in various forms, such as skipping down-ballot races or disengaging from the voting process altogether. In this project we are examining how ballot order, specifically the arrangement of candidates and races on the ballot, influences voter participation.

Introduction

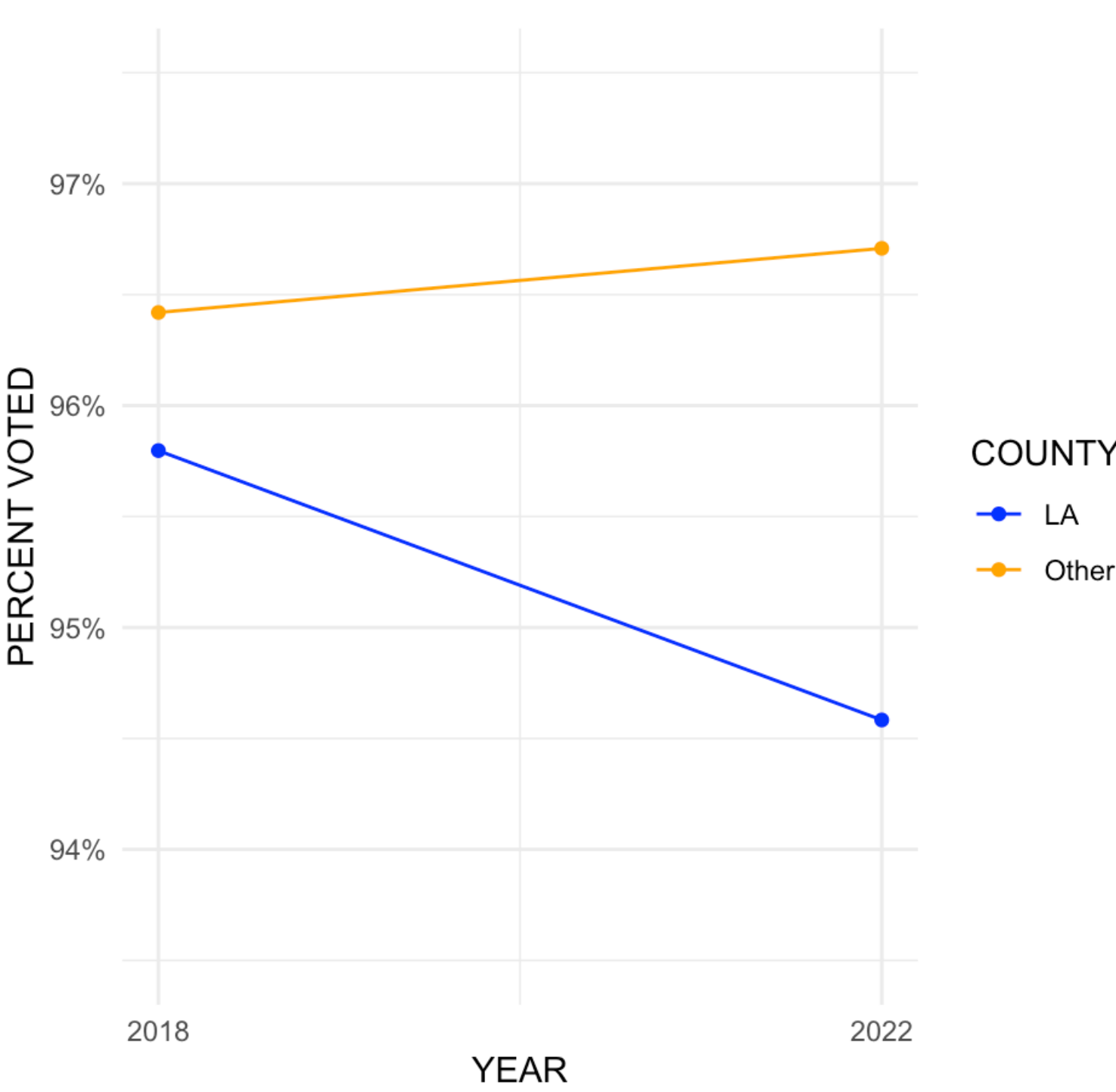
- The study explores existing research on ballot placement and its impact on voter participation.
- The aim of this study is to determine if voters are more likely to engage thoroughly or make quick decisions based on candidate order.
- The relationship between ballot order and voter fatigue is central to the study and understanding this relationship could improve ballot design.
- Enhancing voter engagement in future elections is a key implication of the findings.

Other counties (2018 and 2022)	
LA (2018)	LA (2022)
State Offices	U.S. Senate
U.S. Senate	City Offices
... (Judicial, Other)	School District Offices
School District Offices	... (County, Judicial, Measures, Other)
... (County offices)	State Offices
City Offices	... (Other)
... (Other)	... (Ballot measures)
... (Measures)	... (Judicial)

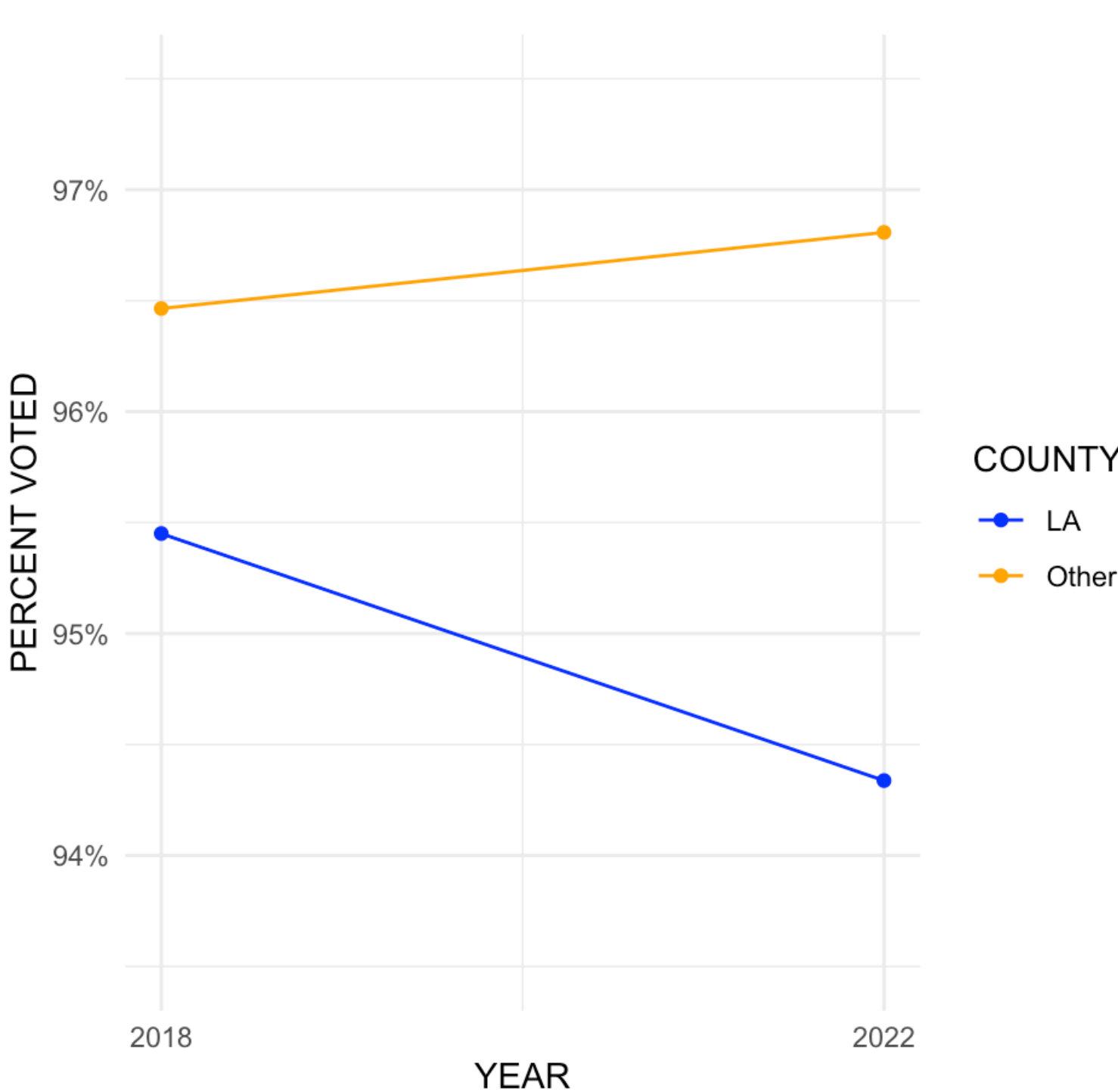
Table Showing The Difference in Ballot Order between LA and Other Counties

Methods

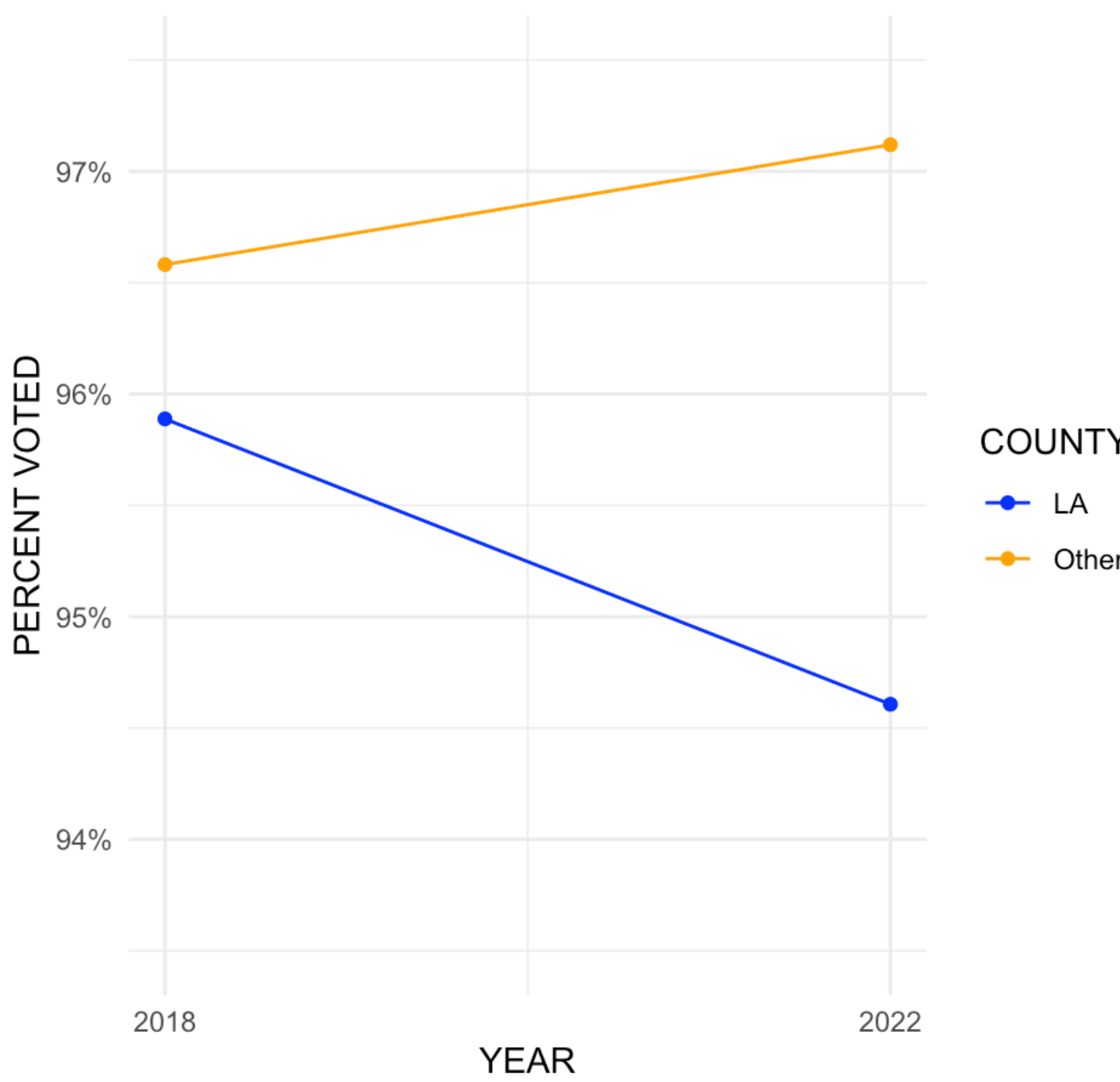
- We analyzed voter participation data across two elections using R to study the relationship between ballot order and voter fatigue.
- Los Angeles County, as required by state law, changed the order of candidates on the ballot to reduce voter fatigue and increase participation.
- The goal of this study was to determine if shifting the order encouraged voters to cast ballots in races further down the list.
- We collected comprehensive data from Los Angeles and other California counties to build a broad dataset for analysis and then ran extensive R code to filter data, focusing on voter turnout and behavior related to ballot order.
- Cross-compared voting patterns in Los Angeles County with other counties to assess the impact of ballot order changes, particularly in low-participation races.



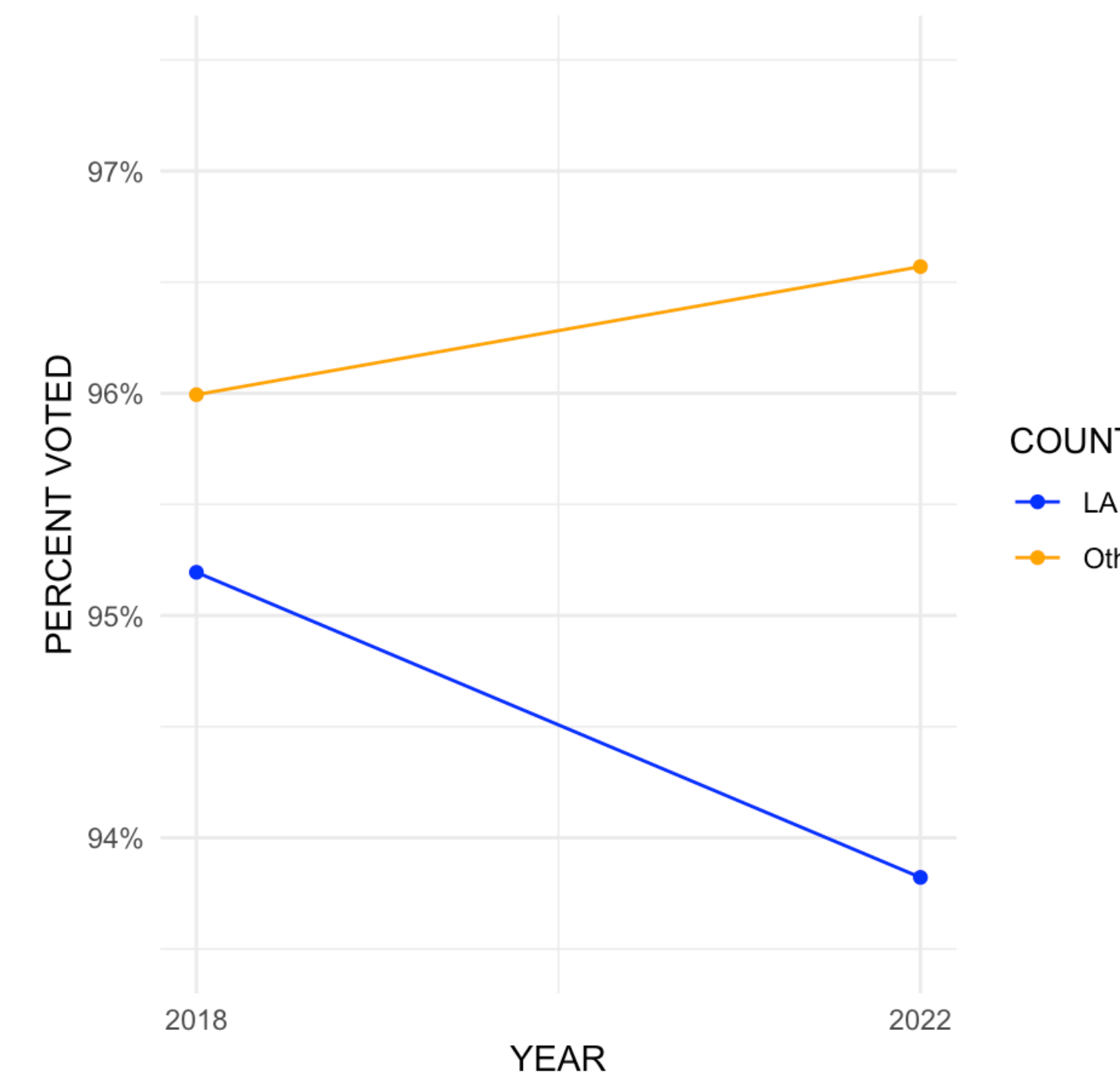
Attorney General Race (State-Wide)



Controller Race (State-Wide)



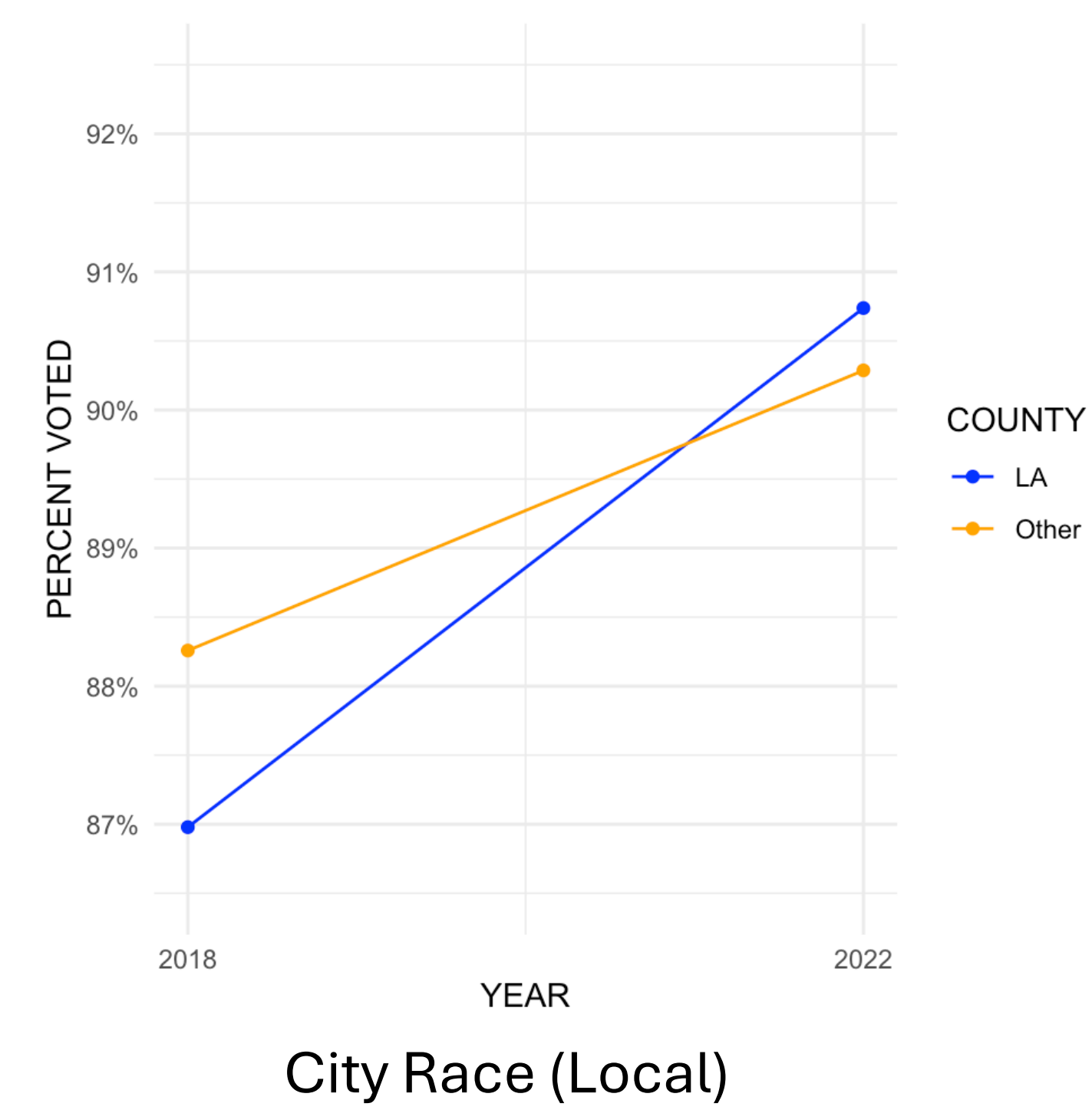
Secretary of State Race (State-Wide)



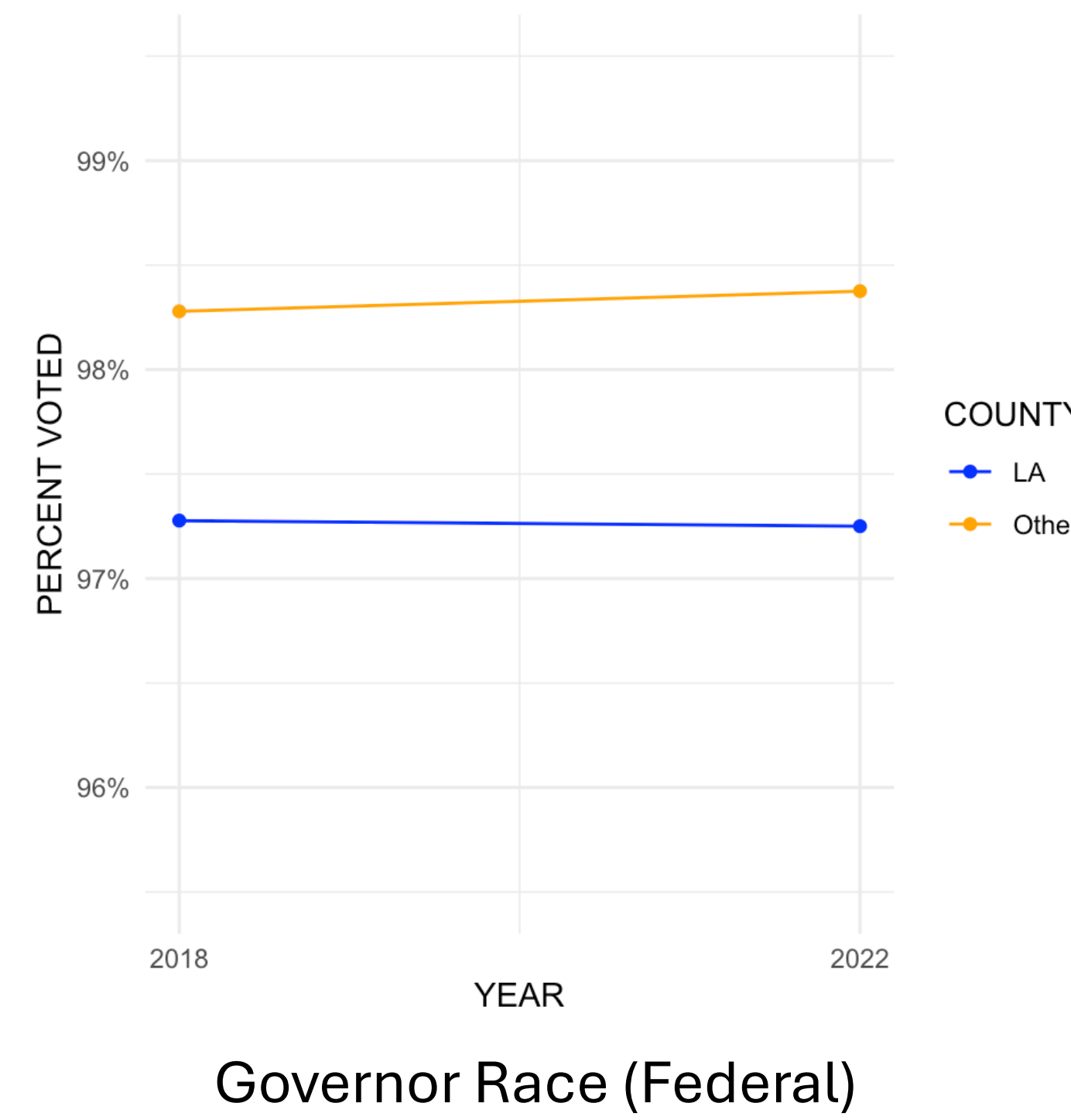
Treasurer Race (State-Wide)

Results

- Data analysis showed a noticeable change in voter participation in all races except the gubernatorial race.
- Reordering the ballot by placing state-wide elections lower and local elections first led to a dramatic yet consistent shift in participation rates.
- Voter participation in state-wide elections dropped by nearly 2%.
- Voter participation in local elections increased by about 3%.
- The shift in participation levels correlated directly with ballot position, providing strong evidence of its impact on voting behavior.



City Race (Local)



Governor Race (Federal)

Conclusion

- These results highlighted the real impact of voter fatigue. Voter participation decreased as the elections were positioned further down the ballot, confirming the hypothesis that voters will lose interest or energy as they move down the list.
- This is particularly disturbing for lower-level elections, such as local elections, that already suffer from low turnout. Such findings call for a re-examination of the election system in the United States and suggest that strategies to limit voter fatigue need to take high priority if voter turnout in all types of races is to be improved.

References

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