

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--



TO: Members of the City Commission
City Manager, Peter Iglesias

FROM: Commissioner Melissa Castro

DATE: September 7, 2023

SUBJECT: Changing Elections to November Supports Overdevelopment in Coral Gables

Changing Elections to November Supports Overdevelopment in Coral Gables

The decision to change the timing of elections in Coral Gables, particularly the shift from April to November, carries significant psychological implications, especially concerning campaign funding and its impact on voter decision-making. In this article, we delve deeper into the psychological factors at play and how they can influence the behavior of voters in Coral Gables.

The Psychology Behind Changing Coral Gables Elections: Implications of Campaign Funding on Voter Behavior

In a presidential election year candidates will need substantial funding not to get lost within all nationwide candidates. Most candidates would have to raise more than half a million dollars just to get their message through. The problem is that a candidate is going to have to seek contributions from developers and special interest entities that are not in the best interest of the city. One of the fundamental aspects of electoral psychology is the undeniable influence of campaign funding. In electoral races, candidates with more financial backing tend to have a psychological advantage over their less-funded counterparts. Here's why:

- **By changing the election from April to November:** Money from the outside of Coral Gables pouring into Coral Gables election with the intention of establishing a foothold in our city to buy influence and generate a return on their investment.
- **Developer and Lobbyist Influence:** Coral Gables faces pressing issues like overdevelopment. Candidates funded by developers, lobbyists, and special interest groups

might be more likely to advocate for policies aligned with those interests, potentially undermining the democratic process by prioritizing certain groups over community needs.

- **Familiarity and Recognition:** The "mere exposure effect" suggests that individuals tend to develop a preference for things they encounter more frequently. In the context of elections, candidates with substantial funding can afford to run more advertisements, send out mailers, and appear across various media platforms. This increased visibility naturally leads to greater familiarity among voters.
- **Inequality in Representation:** The influx of money into campaigns may lead to a skewed representation of community interests. Candidates relying on grassroots support or focusing on localized concerns may find themselves overshadowed by those who align with powerful interest groups.
- **Cognitive Ease:** Voters often gravitate towards candidates whose names they recognize because familiarity creates a sense of cognitive ease. Recognizable names require less mental effort to process, leading voters to feel more comfortable voting for them.
- **Perceived Legitimacy:** Candidates with substantial campaign funds might be perceived as more legitimate and capable simply because they have the resources to mount a visible campaign. Voters could associate financial backing with a candidate's ability to manage complex issues.
- **Reduced Platform Communication:** Limited funding can hinder a candidate's ability to effectively communicate their platforms, vision, and plans for the community. This lack of communication might prevent voters from understanding the depth of a candidate's qualifications and ideas.

In conclusion, the decision to change the election timing from April to November in a city grappling with contentious issues like overdevelopment introduces complex psychological dynamics. While it may increase exposure to a multitude of candidates and issues, it can also make it challenging for local candidates with limited funding to gain visibility and communicate effectively. This situation might inadvertently favor candidates backed by powerful interest groups, potentially affecting the overall representation of community interests and the democratic integrity of the election.

The role of campaign funding in elections is undeniably significant, and its psychological impact on voters cannot be underestimated. As Coral Gables navigates this transition, it's crucial to consider the potential consequences and strive for a balanced electoral landscape that truly represents the community's interests.

References:

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