

## CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

## The California Civic Engagement Project

**CALIFORNIA'S 2012 YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT: DISPARATE GROWTH AND REMAINING CHALLENGES**

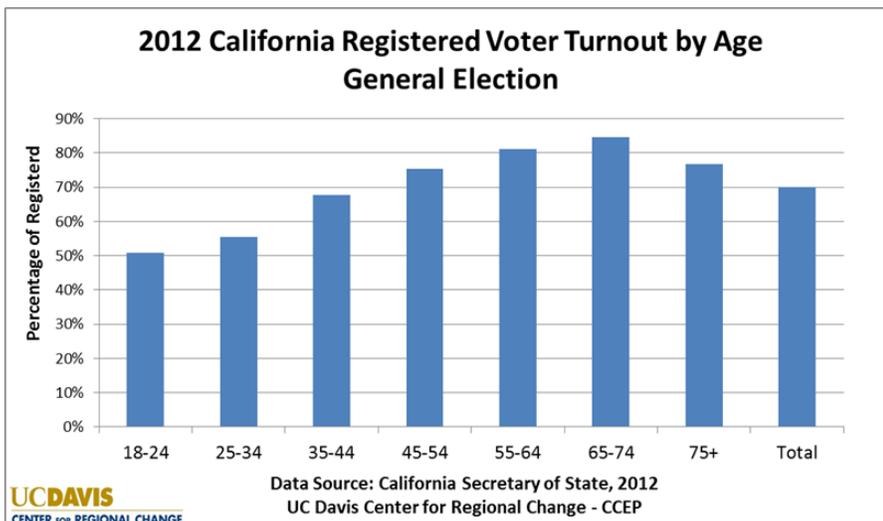
Boosted by online registration, the youth electorate (ages 18-24) in California grew significantly for the November 2012 election, dramatically outpacing growth in the state's general registration. While youth are now 11.1% of the state's registered electorate, research is needed to answer whether this increase translated into a strong turnout at the ballot box for youth, particularly in light of low turnout for the state's general population. At 55.5%, California's general eligible turnout rate was in the lowest 20% of U.S. states for the November 2012 election<sup>1</sup>. Since youth voter turnout has historically remained lower compared to other age groups, we examine the following questions regarding California's 2012 vote:

1. How did the 2012 youth vote differ from the rest of the electorate?
2. What impact did youth have on political party representation in California?
3. What are some of the challenges to increasing youth representation in California?

To address these questions, we utilized California's voter records to examine voter turnout rates, by age and party for the 2012 general election.<sup>2</sup>

**In This Brief:**

- 2012 youth registered voter turnout decreased over 2008 youth turnout.
- Despite large increases in voter registration, more than two-thirds of eligible youth failed to vote in the 2012 general election.
- Areas of lowest voter representation for youth tend to have the poorest social and economic outcomes.
- NPP and "other" party registrants turned out at low rates.

**1: HOW DID YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT DIFFER FROM THE REST OF THE 2012 ELECTORATE?****Dramatic disparities in voter turnout rates.**

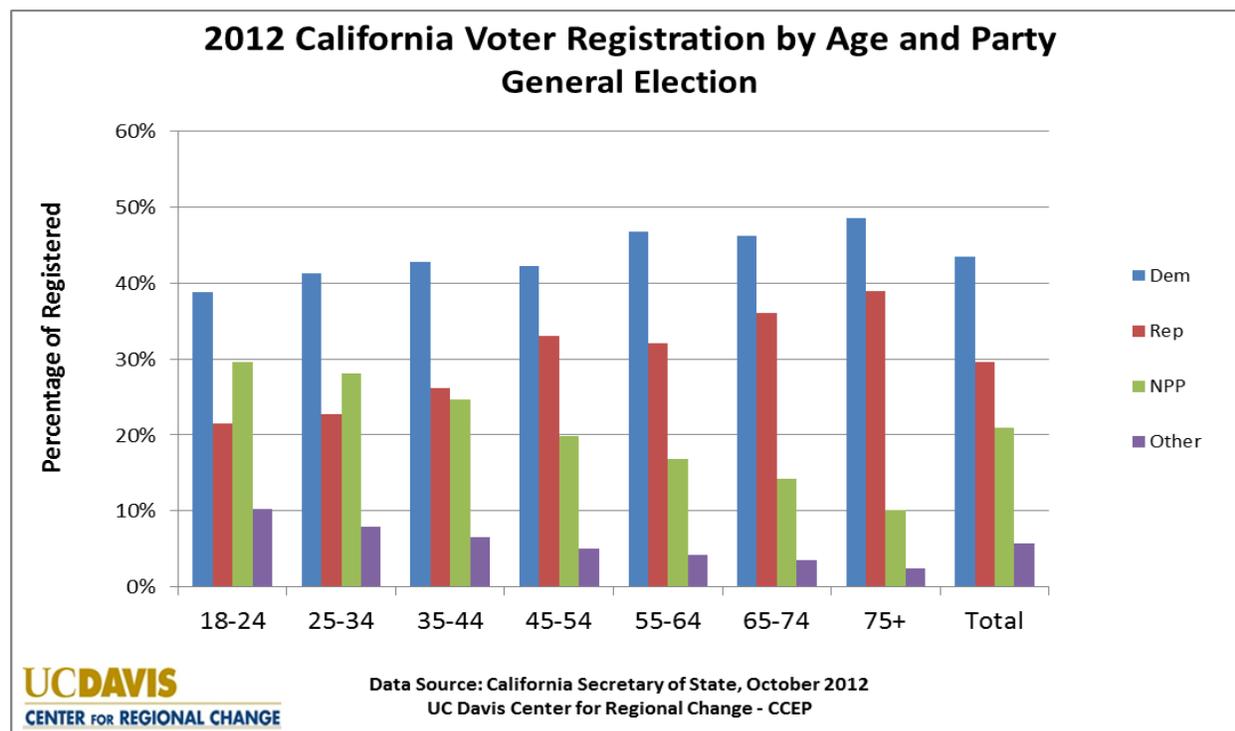
In the 2012 November election, 72.4% of California's registered voters turned out to vote; the lowest registered turnout for a presidential general election in the state since 2000.

Among all eligible voters, California turnout is only 55.5% for the same 2012 election – meaning almost half of the state's eligible voters did not vote.

Breaking down California's 2012 general vote, we found dramatic variation in turnout across the state's age groups, with youth (ages 18-24) experiencing the lowest rates of participation of any age. Only 50.8% of registered youth voted in November 2012 - 22 points lower than the registered voter turnout of the general electorate. However, turnout of eligible youth (defined here as citizens age 18-24) was even lower at an estimated 31.7% - translating to over two-thirds of California's eligible youth not voting in the state.<sup>3</sup>

Across the state's counties there is an even greater contrast in eligible youth turnout. Eligible youth turnout ranged forty percentage points - from a low of 17.6% (Imperial) to a high of 58% (Marin). The state turnout rate for eligible youth was lower than the lowest county turnout for the eligible general population.

## 2: WHAT IMPACT DID YOUTH HAVE ON POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATION IN CALIFORNIA?



### Youth are driving the general electorate’s decline in major party registration

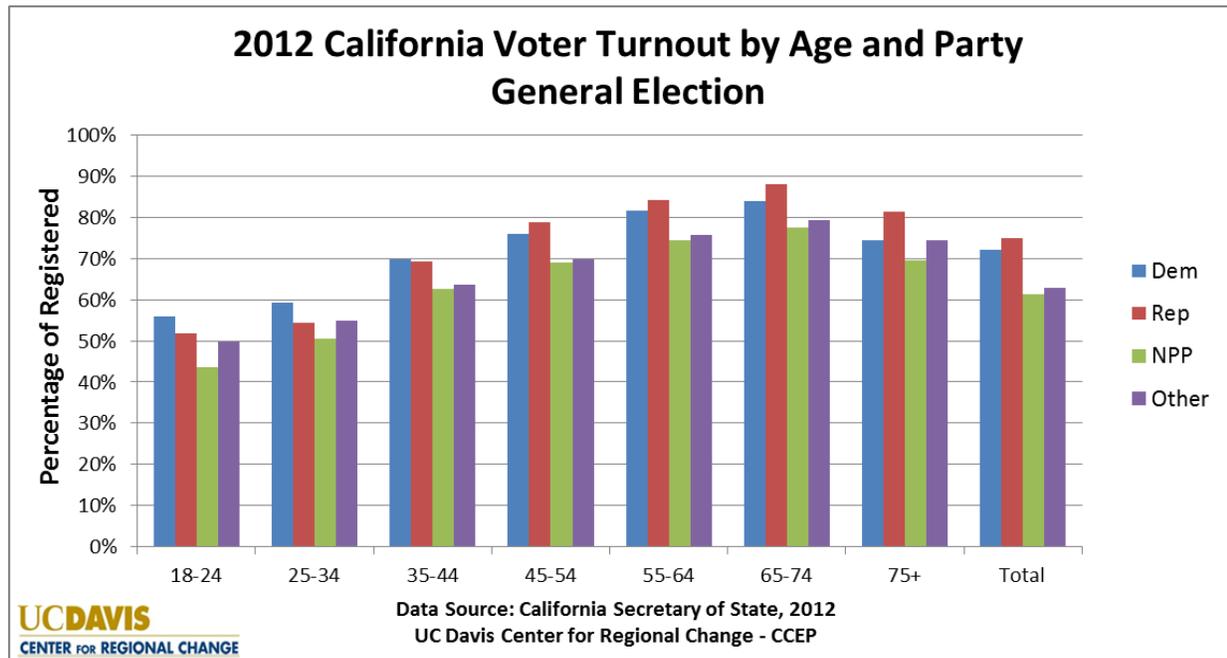
The youth (age 18-24) percent of the 2012 electorate grew to 11.1% (from 10.1% in the November 2008 general election). There are now two million youth registrants in the state, an increase of 13.9% in absolute numbers over the 2008 November election. General registration numbers increased only 4% over 2008 - meaning the state’s registration gap (between youth and the general population) narrowed. However, only 62.2% of eligible youth in California were registered to vote in the 2012 general election.

There is significant variation in registration by party affiliation across age groups. Overall voter registration for the 2012 November election was 43.5% Democratic and 29.6% Republican—a 13.9 percentage point difference. There is a 17.3 percentage point gap between youth Democratic and Republican registration. Youth registered voters also identified less with each of the state’s two major parties, registering as No Party Preference (NPP) in comparably large numbers. At 38.5% Democratic, 18-24 year-olds are the only age cohort below 40% Democratic, and they are only 21% Republican. Youth also have significantly higher NPP registration, 29.6%, than Republican registration and register at rates that are nearly double “Other” party registrants as compared to the general registered population.<sup>4</sup>

### Youth party registration differs from the general electorate in many counties

Despite fewer registrants statewide, Republicans maintained their county by county edge over Democrats, holding the most general registered voters (all ages) in 30 counties (the remaining 28 counties are Democratic dominated). In contrast, across counties, registered youth also differ substantially in party identification versus the general registered population. In 19 counties, the highest percentage of youth registrants is in a party identification that is different from that county’s general registered population. NPP is the largest registration designation for youth in 15 (including Orange and San Diego) of these counties. *Note: For more discussion on California’s 2012 voter registration, please see: CCEP Policy Brief #3— “California’s 2012 Electorate: The Impact of Youth and Online Voter Registration.”*

## 2: WHAT IMPACT DID YOUTH HAVE ON POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATION IN CALIFORNIA? (CONTINUED)



### NPP and other party registrants turned out at lower rates than major party affiliates

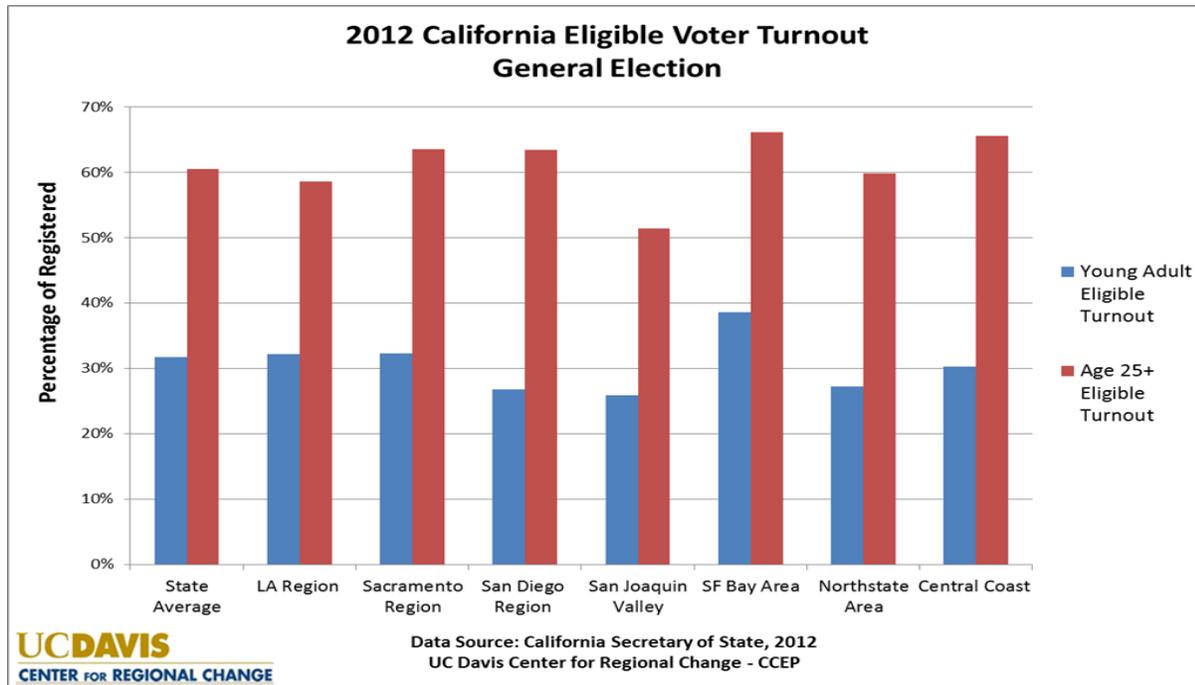
For the general electorate, turnout of registered Republicans was 74.9%, Democratic was 72.2% and turnout of NPP registrants was 61.2% - a 14 percentage point gap between Republican and NPP turnout. We see variation by age in party voter turnout that widens significantly for registrants under age 45. Party turnout of youth was far lower than the rest of the registered electorate, with youth Democratic turnout at 55.9%, Republican at 51.9% and youth NPP registrants at only 43.5% (“Other” party turnout was 49.8%). This lower turnout for youth NPP registrants is striking considering the high numbers of youth who were registered as NPP in 2012. However, voters in both the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups had higher Democratic turnout compared to Republicans of the same ages, unlike the pattern in older age groupings which favors Republican turnout.

### Turnout of online voter registrants by age and political party affiliation

It should be noted that registrants who utilized California’s online voter registration system exhibited different 2012 voter turnout patterns than those who did not register online (all other methods). Online registrants turned out to vote 8 percentage points higher than voters who registered using other methods. This difference in turnout by registration method was much larger for younger voters. Seventy percent of 18-24 year-olds that registered online turned out to vote—25 percentage points higher than those ages 18-24 that did not register online. These turnout rates mean there is a much smaller age gap in voter turnout for online registrants compared to the large age difference in turnout for non-online registrants. Given that 30% of online registrants were youth, online registration may provide another pathway to increasing their influence on the political make-up of the electorate.

Voter turnout was also higher for online registrants by each type of party affiliation and there was a much smaller difference in turnout rates across parties for online registrants versus the general electorate. Online registrants that affiliated as Democratic and Republican turned out at essentially the same rates (79%), very different than for non-online registrants. NPP and “Other” party registrants turned out at much higher rates than non-online registrants with the same affiliation. *Note: A complete discussion of these online registration findings and data sources are presented in the CCEP Policy Brief #4.*

*The low voter turnout for NPP registrants is striking considering the high numbers of youth who registered as this affiliation. If more youth continue to register no party preference over the state's major parties, additional strategies will need to be utilized to directly address the lower turnout of this large proportion of the youth electorate.*



### Geographic disparities in youth voter turnout

By and large, California counties with the lowest eligible youth turnout are geographically clustered together, creating regional patterns of underrepresentation for youth. Overall, the San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles and the Northstate regions have the lowest eligible youth turnout rates (46.2%, 53.9%, and 56%, respectively).<sup>5</sup> In these regions, youth have significantly less representation among the state's voters. By contrast, youth of the Sacramento and the Bay Area regions are voting in higher rates than youth in the rest of the state. Further, there are dramatic geographic disparities in voter turnout for eligible youth versus the rest of the adult citizen population, with San Diego, Central Coast and the Northstate regions experiencing the highest turnout gaps. Conversely, Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley regions show the smallest gaps in eligible turnout between youth and the rest of the adult population—although in these regions, turnout is lower all around, for all age groups.

### Underrepresented regions have the poorest outcomes

Regions with the greatest disparity in eligible youth turnout also have some of the poorest social and economic outcomes for their youth. For instance, the Los Angeles, Northstate and the San Joaquin Valley regions all have the highest poverty levels (14.8%, 18.5% and 20.8%, respectively), as well as some of the lowest high school graduation rates in California. Youth in these regions have less of a voice in the resource and policy decisions that impact their life outcomes.

### Identifying eligible non-voters

Addressing sub-state geographic disparities is key to increasing youth representation in California's voting electorate. As we might expect, the largest numerical concentration of eligible youth non-voters in the state is in Los Angeles county. These data have also shown the San Joaquin Valley as having the highest percentage of eligible non-voters, followed by Los Angeles and the Northstate regions. Within these regions, there is also substantial variation in turnout across counties (and communities) creating disparate impact for youth.

*Please see the CCEP website for 2012 voter turnout data by California county.*

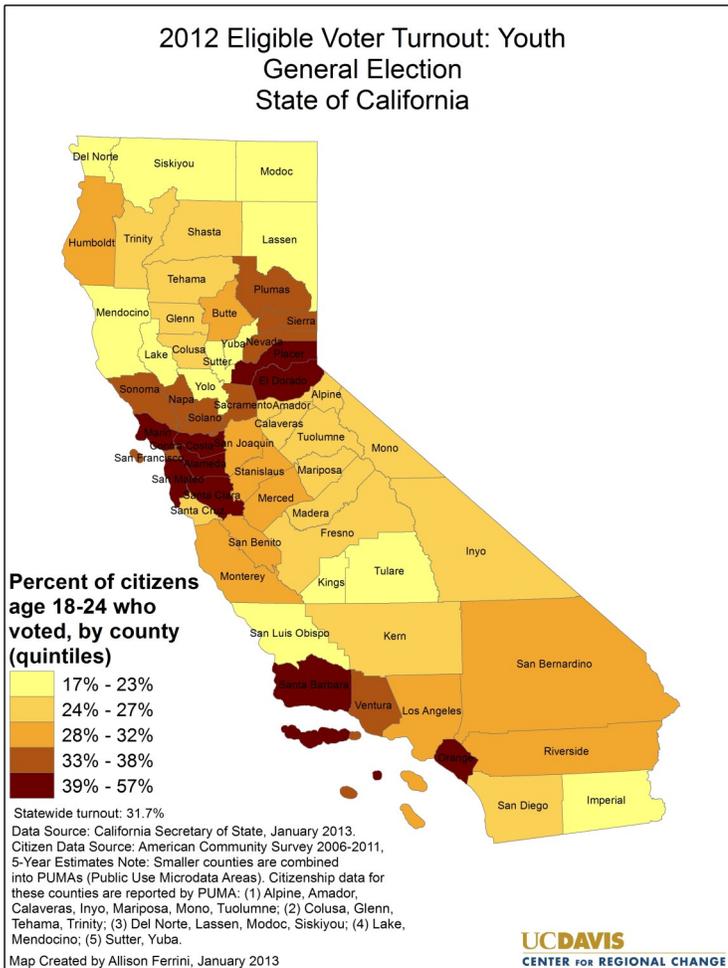
### 3: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES TO INCREASING YOUTH REPRESENTATION?

#### Disparate impacts within the youth population

In 2012 – Almost half (44.5%) of the general eligible population did not vote. Despite significant increases in youth registration, more than two-thirds of the eligible youth population also did not vote— an estimated 2 million.

Youth also remain underrepresented among voters compared to their share of the state's population. In 2010, youth made up 14.2% of the general eligible citizen population, but only 8.1% of the 2012 November vote.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, non-voting youth throughout the state are more likely to be demographically different in terms of level of education and income than those youth that do vote. We know from national level research that non-voting youth in 2012 are more likely to not have college experience and be of lower income (See CIRCLE Fact Sheet: Young Voters in the 2012 Presidential Election).<sup>7</sup> Since youth of color typically have lower levels of education and income, they are also overrepresented among youth that don't vote.



Even with the recent successful implementation of online voter registration, which appears to have helped boost youth registration during the 2012 election, California's electoral system is still challenging for many youth to access. While the total number of youth registrants increased nearly 14% over 2008, a preliminary comparative analysis shows 2012 youth registered turnout actually decreased 10 percentage points in 2012 from the 2008 registered turnout of youth (the number of youth voters did not increase and stayed the same).

These findings show that while it's a needed first step, increasing youth voter registration rates does not alone automatically translate into increased representation for youth at the polls. Further analysis of how youth are engaging with key tools in our electoral system, including voter information materials, vote by mail ballots, as well as their continued use of online voter registration will be critical in helping to identify ways to reduce institutional barriers to youth participation (see CCEP Policy Brief #2 for more discussion on barriers).<sup>8</sup> Additionally, outreach to increase youth participation needs to account for the disparities *within* the youth population and include targeted efforts toward underrepresented youth sub-groups. As California grows in diversity, doing so will be a critical way to increase the representation of all youth across the state's political landscape.

#### NEXT BRIEF

*Changing Political Tides: Demographics and the 2012 California Latino Vote*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Data from the United States Election Project. See [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2012G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2012G.html), Accessed Feb. 26, 2012.
- <sup>2</sup> Detailed registration records (15 day close of registration, October 22, 2012) were acquired from the California Secretary of State's Office (SOS) and aggregated to the county and state level. These data are the actual registration records and not representative samples. Because of this, the level of confidence in the data is not susceptible to estimates as are survey or exit poll results. Registration data collected by the Cal SOS office as of October 26th, 5PM.
- <sup>3</sup> The California SOS calculates eligible turnout utilizing citizen population data from the Census and California Department of Finance, as well as felony population rates from the California Department of Corrections. The California SOS does not publish eligible population counts by age. In order to calculate the percent registered of the youth eligible population we utilized 18-24 Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) data from the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2006-2010). These data are 5 year (2007-2011) estimates and are the only published source of current CVAP data at a county (and below) level. Citizenship data by age is only available through ACS' Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files and presented by Census Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA) designations. Due to smaller population size in some counties, multiple contiguous counties were aggregated by the ACS to create one PUMA. Because these counties share the same PUMA, values presented are for these counties combined. For more information on the limitations of these data and PUMA composition, please see: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/resources/voter-registration-data>. *Due to the differences in how the eligible population is calculated for the general and youth populations, some caution should be utilized when directly comparing eligible turnout for these groups.*
- <sup>4</sup> No Party Preference (NPP) includes all registrants identified in California Secretary of State's registration records as decline to state or no party preference. Other Party include all registrants identified in California Secretary of State's registration records as any of the following party affiliations: American Independent Party, American Elect Party, Green Party, Libertarian Party, Peace and Freedom Party and Other.
- <sup>5</sup> Regions defined to include the following counties. Sacramento Region: Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer, Sutter, Yolo, Yuba; San Francisco Region: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin; Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma; LA Region: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura; San Joaquin Valley: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Kern, Tulare; North State: Butte, Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Siskiyou, Humboldt, Shasta; Central Coast: Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara; San Diego: San Diego.
- <sup>6</sup> Percent youth of the state's eligible general population is measured using general population and 18-24 Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2006-2010).
- <sup>7</sup> Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Voter Registration Among Young People in 2008, November. Please see: <http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2012-Exit-Poll-by-Ed-Attainment-Final.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> For a discussion of barriers to voter registration that are present within California's voter registration system, see: "Future of California Elections", James Irvine Foundation (2012). Please also see CIRCLE Fact Sheet State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout, 2009 at [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State\\_law\\_and\\_youth\\_turnout\\_Final.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State_law_and_youth_turnout_Final.pdf).

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*Acknowledgments: Much appreciation to Jonathan Fox, Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies at UC Santa Cruz and CCEP Advisory Committee Member, for his generous collaboration and expertise in the development of this policy brief.*

*The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a new nonpartisan data repository and research initiative for the state of California housed at the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. The CCEP seeks to address the limited quality and quantity of publicly available civic engagement data. Its mission is to collect and curate civic engagement data from a broad range of sources, making them a publicly available resource to all interested audiences, including political researchers, public officials, advocacy groups and communities themselves. A key focus of data analysis is identifying disparities in participation across place and population. The CCEP's research is intended to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in California and across its metropolitan and rural regions. The CCEP invites research and outreach partnerships from interested audiences.*

*For more information about the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, Project Director, at 530-665-3010 or [msromero@ucdavis.edu](mailto:msromero@ucdavis.edu). Visit our website at: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-civic-engagement-project-ccep>.*

*Launched in 2007, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change is dedicated to producing research that informs the building of healthy, equitable, prosperous, and sustainable regions in California. To accomplish this, the CRC builds two kinds of bridges. One set is on campus between faculty and students from different disciplines and departments; the other between the campus and regions throughout the state. These bridges allow us to bring together faculty, students and communities to collaborate on innovative action research that identifies and directs resources to communities struggling with the most challenging environmental and social conditions.*