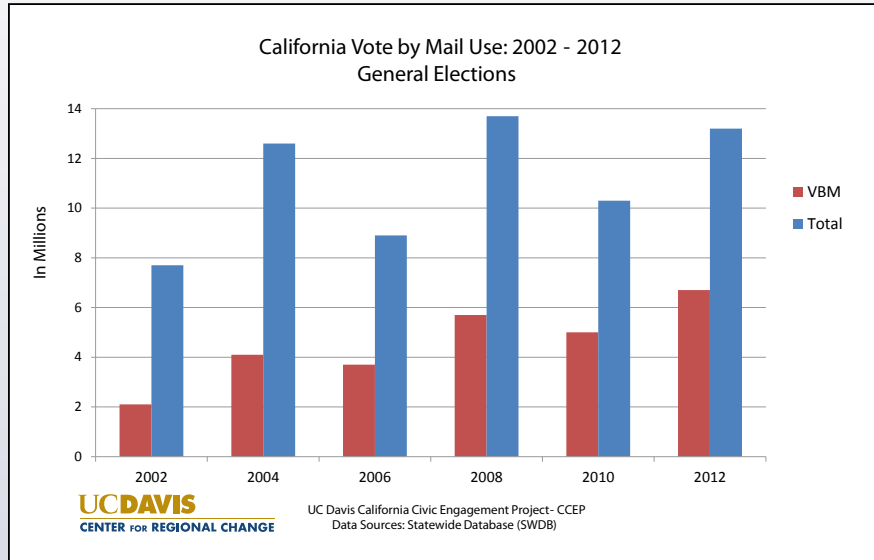


Disparities in California's Vote-by-Mail Use Changing Demographic Composition: 2002-2012

Increasing Proportions of Vote-by-Mail Ballots



California has steadily increased its use of vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots over the past decade. Aided by the expansion of the state's permanent vote-by-mail option and outreach by many county registrars, more Californians are choosing to cast VBM ballots. According to the California Secretary of State's Office, just over fifty percent (6.7 million ballots) of the state's total ballots cast were vote-by-mail (VBM ballots cast by mail or dropped off at an official location), up from 27% in 2002. Within this high rate of VBM use is a great degree of variation in the use of this method by age, race/ethnicity and political party affiliation. Understanding disparities in VBM use is critical to assessing its impact on California's electorate to date, and in the future. Through the California Civic Engagement Project's analysis of Statewide Database Data, this brief identifies disparities in: (1) VBM use rates by sub-group and (2) the overall make-up of the state's VBM and poll voter populations.¹

1. VBM Use Rates by Sub-Group

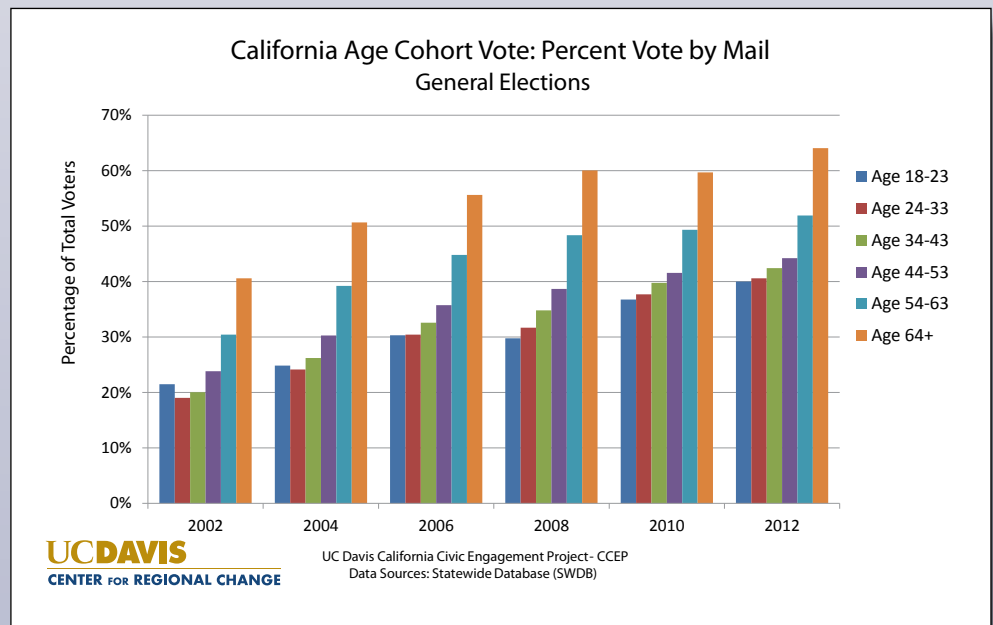
Youth and Older Voters: Disparities in VBM Use

Only voters age 55 and older use VBM at a rate greater than 50%. For voters age 64 and older, 64% (2 million) cast VBM ballots in 2012. It is the higher proportional use rate of these voters (along with their higher turnout rates) that is driving California's total 50% VBM use.²

In contrast, youth voters (defined here as age 18-23) had the lowest use rate for VBM ballots of all age groups in 2012 – 39% (340,000 VBM ballots). The number of youth actually casting VBM ballots has increased 61% since 2004 (comparing presidential elections) resulting in a 13 percentage point increase in the proportion of youth using VBM since 2004. However, this increase in the percent use of VBM was the lowest of all

age cohorts in California. Over the past decade, every other age cohort experienced an increase in their use rate of 20 percentage points or higher – meaning that youth are increasing their proportional use of VBM more slowly than the rest of the state's voters.

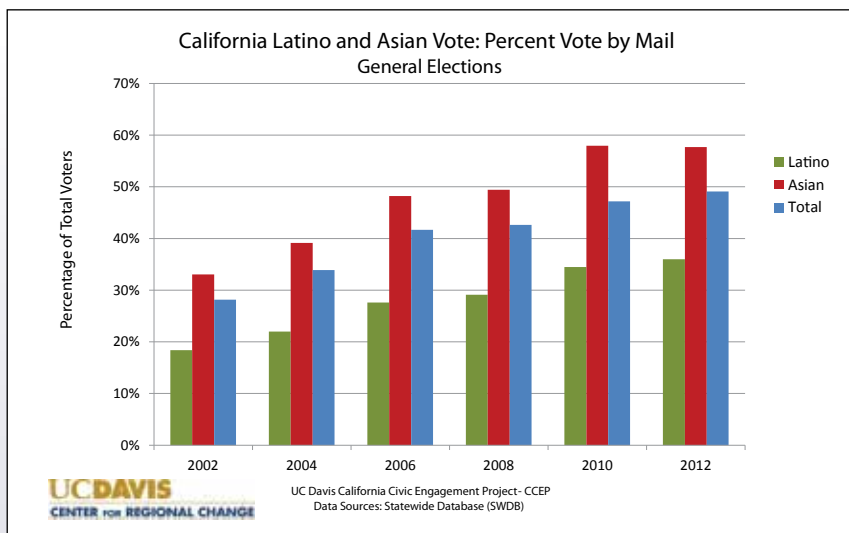
Note: The Statewide Database's 2002-2012 voter data files posted on their website are currently mislabeled by age. SWDB's voter file data is actually calculated for the following age groups: ages 18-23, 24-33, 34-43, 44-53, 54-63 and 64+.



Latinos and Asian VBM Disparities

Since 2004, Latinos more than doubled their number of actual VBM ballots cast (to 0.9 million), and increased their proportional use rate by 14 percentage points from 18.4% to nearly 37% in 2012. The number of Latino poll voters still increased by 8%. However, this proportional use rate is far below the state's total VBM use rate of 49.2% (using comparable Statewide Database data). The increase experienced by Latinos in their proportional use of VBM is lower than the increase experienced by Asians, as well as the rest of the non-Latino voting electorate.³

Asian voters in California are utilizing VBM at higher rates than Latinos and the general voting electorate. In 2012, 58% of all ballots cast by Asians were VBM. The actual number of Asian VBM voters in the state increased 79% (to 0.5 million) over the last decade. The number of Asian poll voters actually decreased by 15.7% (to 0.4 million). Asian use of VBM increased by over 19 percentage points, up from 39% in 2004. The gap between the Latino and Asian proportional use of VBM has grown over the decade – from 14.7 percentage points in 2002 to over 21 percentage points in 2012.

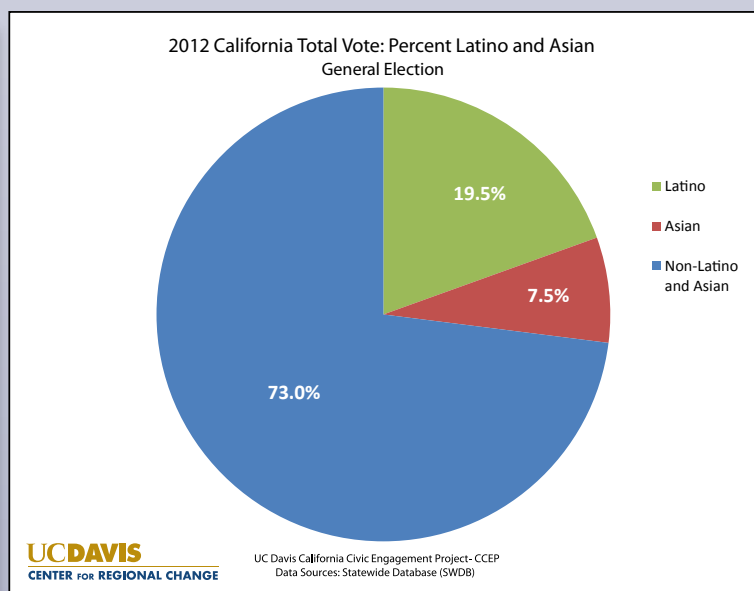
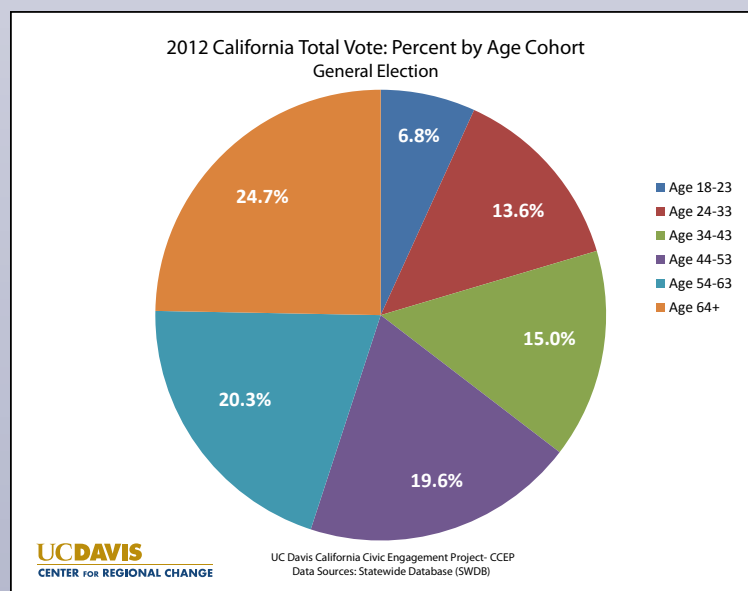


Political Party Affiliation: Higher Republican Use

In 2012, Republicans used VBM in somewhat greater proportions than poll voting - 53% compared with 48%. Voters affiliated as No Party Preference (NPP) used VBM at about the same rate as Democrats. Democrats increased their proportional use of VBM by 15 percentage points and NPP votes increased by 18 percentage points, where as Republicans increased their use by 14 points since 2004. As the VBM use rates for Republicans and Democrats have increased over the past decade, the gap between their rates has stayed very similar (declined by only a percentage point).

The California Electorate

In November 2012, California's total population of voters continued to increase in diversity. Latinos are now nearly 20% (2.5 million) of all participating voters in the state. Asian voters increased to 7.5% (950,000) of the state's vote and the voting electorate continued to get a little older; increasing its proportion of those age 64 and older. Youth voters made up 6.8% of California's voters.⁴

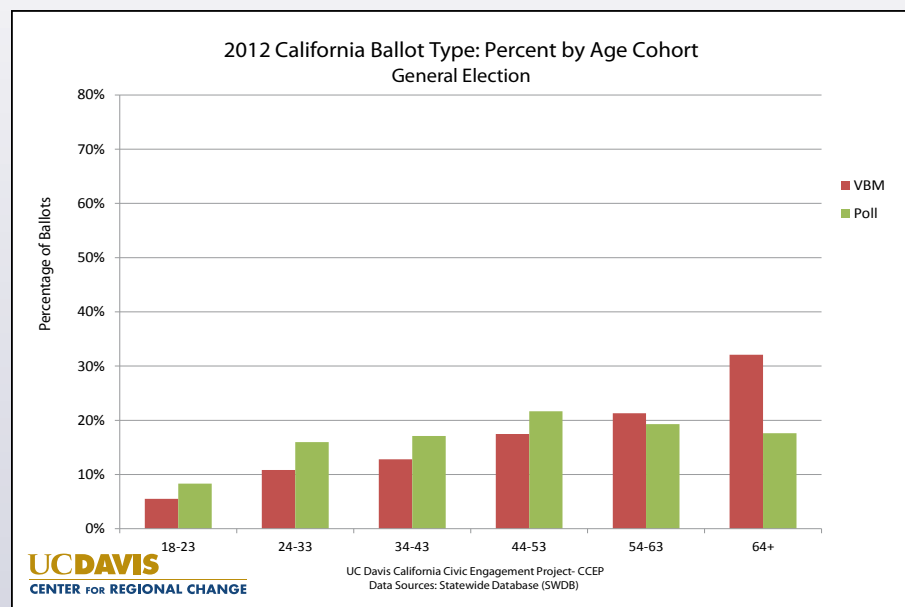


2. Composition of the State's VBM vs. Poll Ballots

Vote-by-Mail Impact on the Make-Up of California's Voters

Breaking down the state's voter population, California's voting sub-groups have very different proportional VBM use rates. The demographic make-up of the state's VBM voters differs compared to its poll voters. Overall, the VBM voter population can be summarized as older, less Latino, more Asian and less Democratic than poll voters.

VBM: Greater Proportions of Older Voters



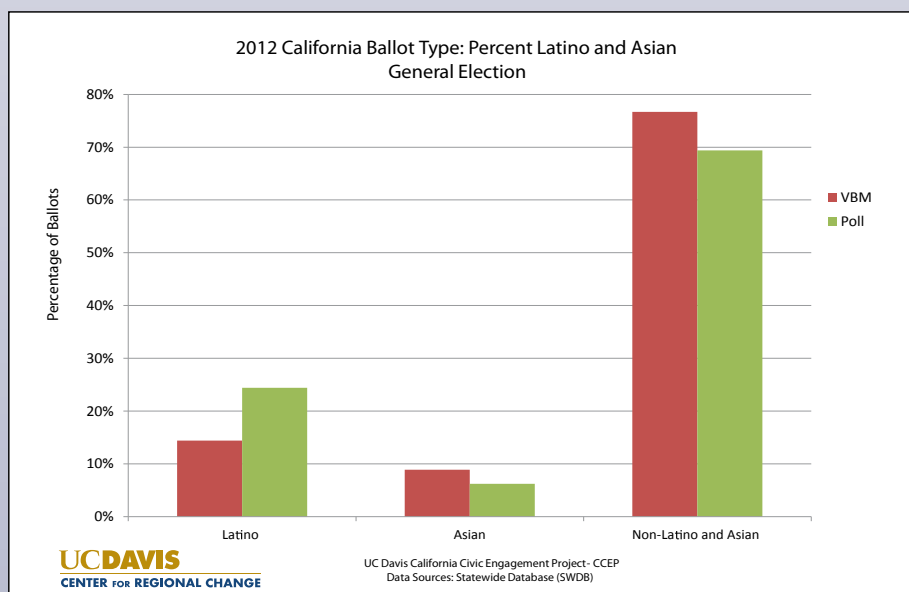
In 2012, 71% of VBM voters were age 44 and older, compared to only 58.5% of poll ballots. As with the state's overall voter population, voters age 64 and older hold the largest proportion of VBM ballots. In contrast, it is those age 44-53 who hold the largest proportion of poll voters – 21.7% (slightly decreased since in 2004).

Over the past decade, the VBM and poll voter populations in California have both increased in their proportions of older voters. In 2012, the age 64 and older proportion of California's VBM voters was 32.1%, up from 28.9% in 2004. Although the gap between youth VBM voters and those age 64 and older has decreased since 2004 (6 percentage points), there remains a 27 percentage point gap between the youth and 64 and older proportion of all VBM voters. In contrast, there is just a 9 percentage point gap between the youth and 64 and older proportion of the poll vote.

VBM Voters: Fewer Latinos and More Asians

Among VBM voters, Latinos are underrepresented and Asians are overrepresented compared to their proportions of California's total vote. In November 2012, Latinos made up 14.4% of VBM ballots, but 24.4% of poll voters (they are 19.5 % of California's total 13 million voters in 2012). Since 2004, Latino increases in the proportion of the poll vote have slightly outpaced increases in their share of VBM voters; 5.8 percentage points compared to 4.2 percentage points. Asians make up 9% of VBM ballot versus just over 6% of poll voters (compared to 7.5% of all California voters). Since 2004, Asians have increased their proportion of VBM voters slightly by a 1.3 percentage point, while staying consistent in their share of the poll vote during the same time period. Given the projected large increases in Latino voters over the next 30 years, if lower VBM use by Latinos (and higher poll use) continues then a strong impact could be seen on the state's overall VBM use rates.

Note: African-Americans were not examined in this analysis due to limitations in the data. See Notes.



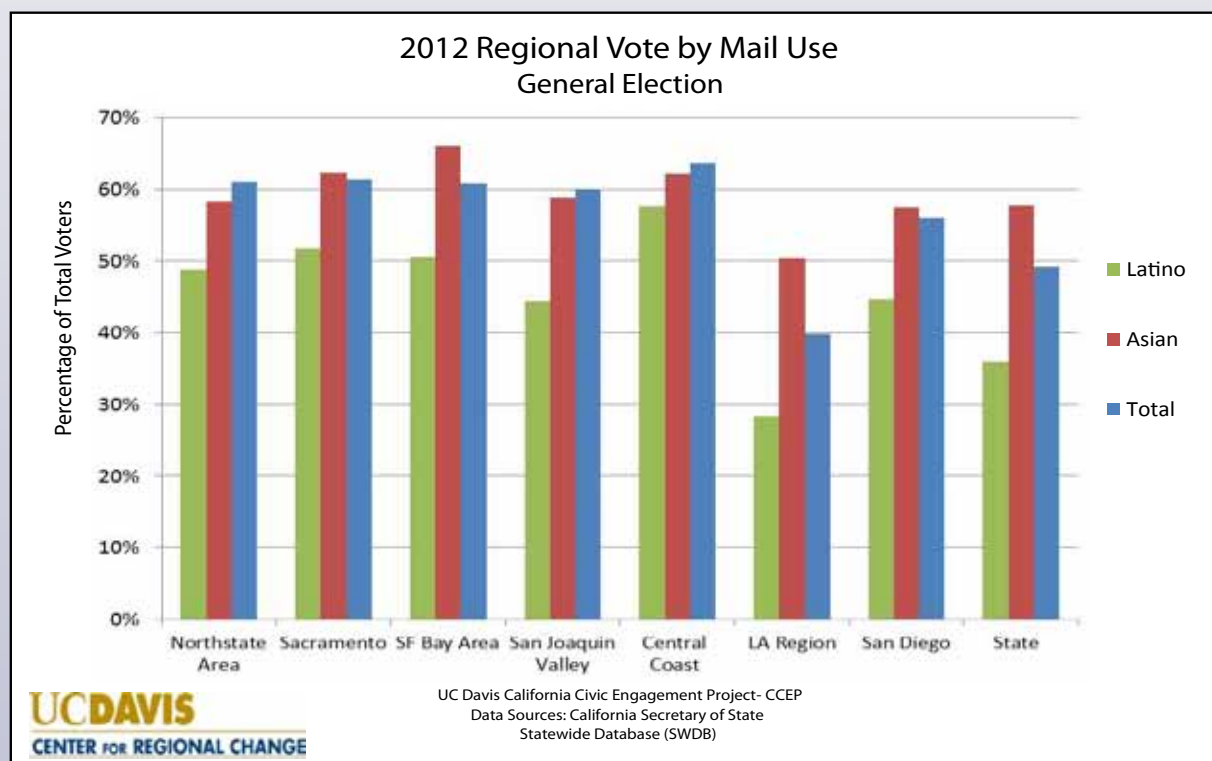
VBM Voters: Higher Proportion Democrat than Poll Voters.

In 2012, despite their somewhat lower VBM use rates than Republicans (and because of their overall greater numbers in the electorate), over 43% of VBM voters were affiliated as Democratic, 33.8% were Republican and 17.8% NPP. In contrast, 46% of poll voters were affiliated as Democratic, with 29.6% Republican and 18.8% NPP. Democratic proportions for both voter groups have remained steady since 2002. Over the last decade, Republican proportions have declined slightly more for VBMs than poll voters. No Party Preference (NPP) proportions have increased slightly for VBM compared with poll voters.

2012 Regional VBM Variation

There are large geographic differences in the use of VBM across California. In 2012, most of the state's regions actually exceeded California's overall VBM use rate. Every region except Los Angeles and San Diego had 60% or higher VBM use. With a VBM use rate of only 32.9%, the Los Angeles Region, and its large population of voters, is driving California's overall VBM rate lower. Considering the significant demographic differences across California's regions, differing regional VBM use rates translate into varying impacts on the state's VBM participation by race/ethnicity and age.⁵

Greater Variation in Regional VBM use for Latinos and Asians



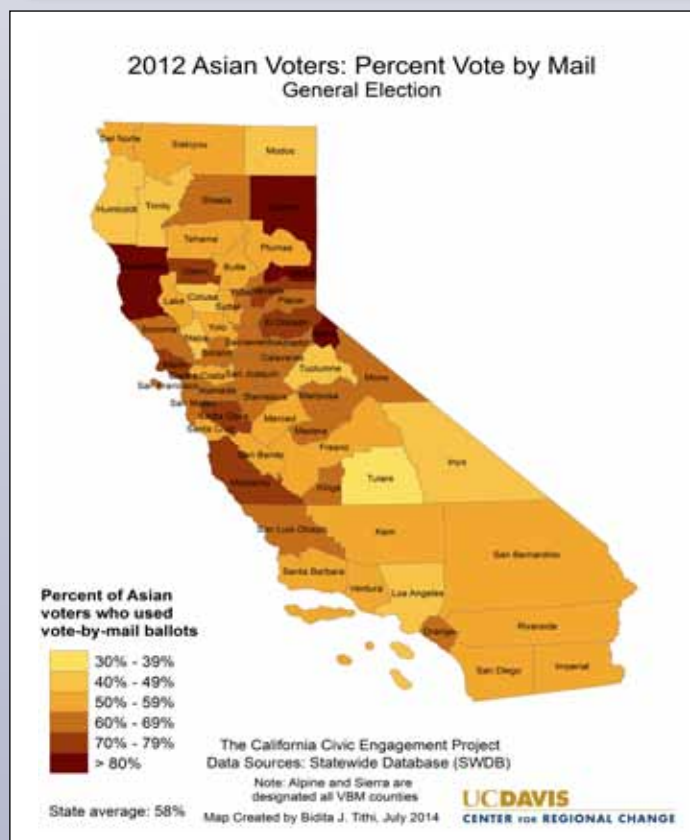
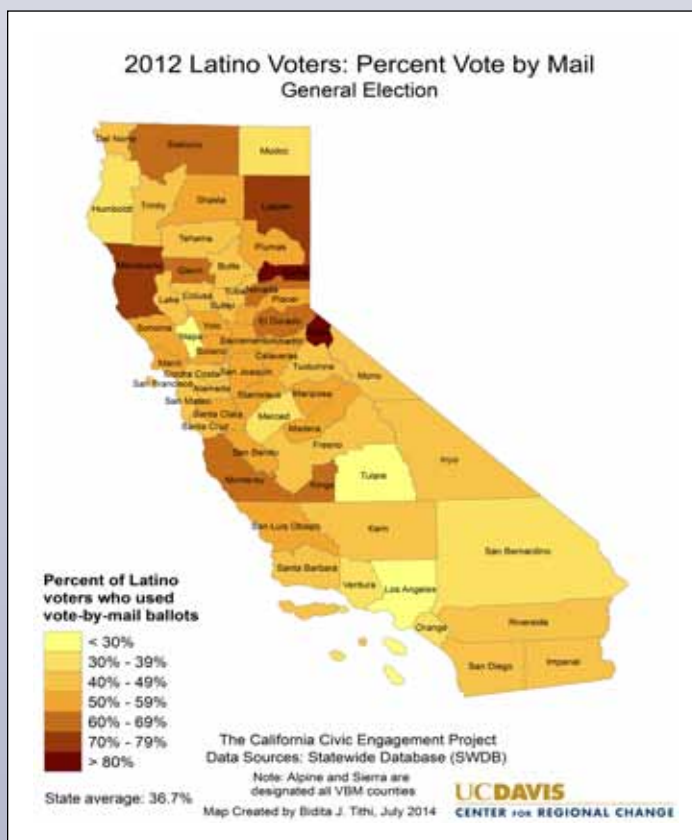
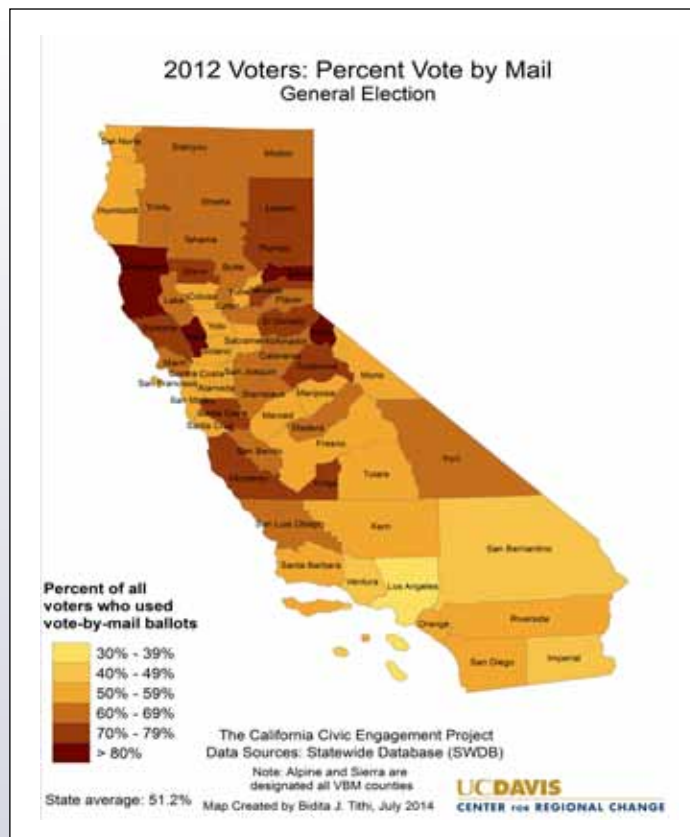
Latinos and Asians experienced greater regional variation in their VBM use than the general public, leading to wider gaps in some regions between the Latino and Asian VBM use rate and the VBM use rate of the total electorate. Further, regions with the highest regional VBM use rates varied for Latinos and Asians compared with the total voting population. For Latinos, their highest proportional use of VBM was in the Central Coast region (57.6%). The lowest regional VBM use rates for Latinos were in the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles Region - both high

population centers for Latinos. Asians in the San Francisco Bay Area utilized VBM at the highest rate (66%) in the state and have higher use rates than the total population use in 4 out of 7 regions. At 52.2%, youth in the Sacramento region experienced the highest proportional use of VBM compared with other regions in the state. Further, within regions, VBM use can vary even more significantly - from a total use rate of 30% in Los Angeles County to nearly 90% in Napa County (Alpine and Sierra counties both have all VBM elections).

Why Do Differences in the Make-Up of VBM vs. Poll Voters Matter?

California has two different sets of voters who each have different demographic and political compositions: VBM and poll voters. Understanding variation in VBM use rates for California's electorate is important to those efforts aimed at increasing the overall participation of California's electorate. Outreach, education and services to VBM voters, or future VBM voters, need to be targeted to reflect the different group use rates. For instance, given the high use of vote-by-mail by Asians in California, we may need to further examine whether the non-English speaking segment of these voters could benefit from specific outreach when having to utilize English language VBM ballots. As discussions occur involving the possible expansion of the use of VBM ballots (including proposals to consolidate, reduce, or eliminate polling places), it will be critical to utilize current data to identify any possible disparate impacts on the electorate, particularly at a county and community level.

Please see CCEP website for detailed data tables and maps by county and region. See notes for discussion of county level data.



This research is designed and conducted as a collaboration between the Future of California Elections (FOCE) and the UC Davis California Civic Engagement Project.

**About the Future of California Elections (FOCE):**

The Future of California Elections (FOCE) is a collaboration between election officials, civil rights organizations and election reform advocates to examine and address the unique challenges facing the State of California's election system. FOCE was formed in late 2011 to examine and address the unique challenges facing the State of California's election system. In 2013 and beyond, FOCE will be focused on building on this foundation of consensus and success.

About the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP):

To address the critical lack of publically accessible data to inform the public dialogue on governance in California, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change established the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) in 2011. 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 public officials, advocacy groups, non-partisan organizations and communities themselves. The CCEP also supports research that explores non-traditional measures of civic engagement, particularly those that may be more likely experienced by disadvantaged or disconnected groups. The CCEP's efforts towards democratizing data and informing the growth of a diverse civically engaged population strongly supports the development of equitable and effective governance in the state.

Author: Mindy Romero — Founding Director, California Civic Engagement Project

This project is supported through a grant from The James Irvine Foundation.

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. Visit the Center's website at <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu>.

NOTES

¹ Data for California's 2012 total VBM use rates were acquired from the California Secretary of State. See: http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_u.htm

² Voter data by demographic breakdown were acquired from the Statewide Database. These data are actual voter records and not representative samples. SWDB Data for Modoc, Napa, Sutter, Trinity, Tulare, and Tuolumne counties may be conservative estimates compared with published California Secretary of State data. Due to differences in data collection methods, caution should be utilized when directly comparing California Secretary of State voter data publications with SWDB data. The CCEP adjusted data estimates for Calaveras and Mariposa counties. Latinos and Asians are distinguished in the statewide database voter data from the general population by the use of Spanish and Asian surname lists which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish and Asian surnames. Surname matching is not reliable for white, non-Hispanic, and African-American populations, and thus, voter data is not available for these groups. Please note that historically some counties have reported forced mail ballots in these data as absentee, while other counties have allocated them to the poll vote. For more information on methodology and limitations, please see: <http://swdb.berkeley.edu/d10/Creating%20CA%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf>. Note: The Statewide Database's 2002-2012 voter data files posted on their website are currently mislabeled by age. SWDB's voter file data is actually calculated for the following age groups: ages 18-23, 24-33, 34-43, 44-53, 54-63 and 64+.

³ Comparisons between racial, ethnic and age groups and the total population should be made using the same data source: Statewide Database data. These data show the statewide 2012 general election VBM use rate at 49.2%.

⁴ California Civic Engagement Project's Policy Brief 6: Changing Political Tides: Demographics and The Rising California Latino Vote.

⁵ 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.

For more information about this research study and the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, CCEP Director, at 530-665-3010 or msromero@ucdavis.edu. Visit our website at: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-civic-engagement-project-ccep>.