Understanding California’s Vote-by-Mail Ballots

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CCEP Issue Briefs


2. California’s Uncounted Vote-By-Mail Ballots: Identifying Variation in County Processing

3. Disparities in California's Uncounted Vote-by-Mail Ballots: Youth, Party and Language Preference
CCEP Vote-by-Mail Study

In collaboration with the Future of California Elections (FOCE)

regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ccep
Research Identified:

- The demographic composition of VBM voters
- The breakdown of reasons for ballot rejection
- The demographic composition of unsuccessful vote-by-mail voters
Demographic Composition of VBM Voters
Different Sub-Groups Use VBM at Different Rates
Disparities in VBM Use

By Age:

- 2012 - Youth voters – lowest VBM use rate of all age groups – 39%

By Race/Ethnicity:

- 2012 - Latino VBM proportional use rate – 37%
- 2012 – Asian VBM proportional use rate – 58%
Composition of VBM vs Poll Voter Populations
Breakdown of VBM Ballots

VBM Voters are:

- Older
- Less Latino
- More Asian
- Less Democratic
- Different Regional Patterns
Reasons for VBM Ballot Rejection
VBM Rejection Rates

VBM Ballot Rejection Rates
2010-2014 Election

Percentage of Received VBM Ballots Rejected

2014 Primary
2012 General
2012 Primary
2010 General
2010 Primary

Date Source: California Secretary of State, 2010-2014
Top Three Reasons for Rejection

Reasons for VBM Ballot Rejection
2012 General Election

Percentage of California Uncounted VBM Ballots

- Late: 50%
- No Signature: 20%
- Bad Signature: 10%
- Other: 0%

Date Source: California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) 2014 Statewide Survey
Demographic composition of unsuccessful vote-by-mail voters:

- Age
- Language Preference
- Military Status
Youth More Likely to Experience VBM Rejection

Rejected VBM Ballots: Overrepresentation of Young Voters
2012 General Election

Date Source: California County Election Offices Voter Registration File
Rejected Youth VBM Ballots are Late

Rejected VBM Ballots Reasons by Age Cohort
2012 General Election

Date Source: California County Election Offices Voter Registration File

Percentage of Rejected VBM Ballots

- Late
- Sig Non-Match
- No Signature
- Other
More Disparities in VBM Rejection

- More non-English language ballots are rejected
- Missing Signature a Major Reason for Rejection of Non-English Ballots
- Military and Overseas Ballots More Likely to be Rejected
Why do disparities in VBM use and rejection rates matter?

Impacts:

- Outreach and education to VBM voters and/or future VBM voters
- Services provided to VBM voters
- As some counties look to possibly reduce polling places – need to identify if there is disparate impact

= critical to utilize data in VBM policy discussions
Thank you

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Non-English Language Ballots More Likely to be Rejected

Rejected VBM Ballots by Language Preference
2012 General Election

Date Source: California County Election Offices Voter Registration File
Missing Signature a Major Reason for Rejection of Non-English Ballots

Rejected VBM Ballot Reasons by Language Preference
2012 General Election

Date Source: California County Election Offices Voter Registration File
Military and Overseas Ballots More Likely to be Rejected

Rejection Rate of PVM Ballots
2012 General Election

Percentage of All PVM Voters

- PVM Domestic
- PVM Military and Overseas
- PVM Total

Date Source: California County Election Offices Voter Registration File

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Military and Overseas Ballots are Late

Rejected VBM Ballots Reasons by PVM Status
2012 General Election

Percentage of Rejected VBM Ballots

Date Source: California County Election Offices Voter Registration File
Strong Growth in the VBM Use

California Vote by Mail Use: 2002-2012
General Elections

Percentage of Total Voters

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Data Sources: California Secretary of State, 2012
Older Voters Driving State’s 50% Use Rate

California Age Cohort Vote: Percent Vote by Mail
General Elections

- Age 18-23
- Age 24-33
- Age 34-43
- Age 44-53
- Age 54-63
- Age 64+

Percentage of Total Voters

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Data Sources: Statewide Database (SWDB)
Latinos and Asians: Disparities in VBM Use

California Latino and Asian Vote: Percent Vote by Mail
General Elections

Percentage of Total Voters

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Data Sources: Statewide Database (SWDB)
VBM: Greater Proportions of Older Voters
VBM Voters: Few Latinos and More Asians

2012 California Ballot Type: Percent Latino and Asian General Election

Percentage of Ballots

Latino
Asian
Non-Latino and Asian

VBM
Poll

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Data Sources: Statewide Database (SWDB)
VBM Voters: Few Latinos and More Asians

Locations of Received VBM Ballots
2012 General Election

- By Mail: 73%
- At polling place: 21%
- At election office: 3%
- At drop site: 3%

Date Source: California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) 2014 Statewide Survey
VBM: Regional Variation

2012 Regional Vote by Mail Use
General Election

Percentage of Total Voters

Northstate Area
Sacramento
SF Bay Area
San Joaquin Valley
Central Coast
LA Region
San Diego
State

Latino
Asian
Total

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Data Sources: California Secretary of State
Statewide Database (SWDB)
Latino VBM Use: County Variation

2012 Latino Voters: Percent Vote by Mail
General Election

Percent of Latino voters who used vote-by-mail ballots
- < 30%
- 30% - 39%
- 40% - 49%
- 50% - 59%
- 60% - 69%
- 70% - 79%
- > 80%

State average: 36.7%

The California Civic Engagement Project
Data Sources: Statewide Database (SWDB)

Note: Alpine and Sierra are designated all VBM counties

Map Created by Bidita J. Tihhi, July 2014
Asian VBM Use: County Variation

2012 Asian Voters: Percent Vote by Mail
General Election

Percent of Asian voters who used vote-by-mail ballots:
- 30% - 39%
- 40% - 49%
- 50% - 59%
- 60% - 69%
- 70% - 79%
- > 80%

The California Civic Engagement Project
Data Sources: Statewide Database (SWDB)
Note: Alpine and Sierra are designated as VBM counties
Map Created by Bicita J. Tith, July 2014

State average: 58%