

Voter’s Choice Task Force Supplemental Report

November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election

Review of the Secretary of State’s VoteCal Data

Contact Information

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This report is also available online at www.sos.ca.gov

Alternative formats are available upon request.

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About the California Secretary of State

The California Office of the Secretary of State is committed to adhering to the highest standards of integrity and transparency, supporting businesses, strengthening democracy, protecting individual rights, preserving our state's history, delivering quality services, and providing accessible resources and trusted information.

The California Secretary of State's responsibilities include:

- Serving as the state's Chief Elections Officer
- Implementing electronic filing and Internet disclosure of campaign and lobbyist financial information
- Maintaining business filings
- Commissioning notaries public
- Operating the Safe at Home confidential address program
- Maintaining the Domestic Partners and Advance Health Care Directive Registries
- Safeguarding the State Archives
- Serving as a trustee of the California Museum

Special Note About This Report

Pursuant to California Elections Code Section 4008, the Secretary of State shall establish a taskforce that includes representative of all of the following:

- (1) County elections officials.
- (2) Individuals with demonstrated language accessibility experience for languages covered under the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- (3) The disability community and community organizations and individuals that advocate on behalf of, or provide services to, individuals with disabilities.
- (4) Experts with demonstrated experience in the field of elections.

This Task Force has been appointed by the California Secretary of State. The Task Force is currently comprised of 16 members. Beginning in 2025, the California Secretary of State's Voter's Choice Task Force is charged with reviewing elections conducted under the Voter's Choice Act and providing comments and recommendations to the California State Legislature within six months of the election.

As aggregated data from the state's VoteCal database, as well as data from university reports created through the Voting Rights Project, are made available to the Task Force, additional recommendations will be provided in a supplemental report.

Voter's Choice Task Force Appointees

1. Melvin E. Levey, Merced County ROV
2. Donna Linder, Stanislaus County ROV, Task Force Co-Chair
3. Dean Logan, L.A. County ROV
4. Evelyn Mendez, Sonoma County ROV
5. Matt Moreles, Santa Clara County ROV
6. Bob Page, Orange County ROV
7. Jesse Salinas, Yolo County ROV
8. Art Tinoco, Riverside County ROV
9. Petrina Branch, Attorney, Task Force Co-Chair
10. Camila Chavez, Executive Director of the Dolores Huerta Foundation
11. Leslie Hernandez, Civic Engagement Specialist, AltaMed Health Services
12. Deanna Kitamura, Managing Attorney, Asian Law Caucus
13. Ellen Nash, Chair/President of the San Diego Black American Political Association of California
14. Dora Rose, Deputy Director, League of Women Voters
15. Brittany Stonesifer, Senior Program Manager, Common Cause California
16. Gabriel Taylor, Senior Advocate, Disability Rights CA

Advisory Appointees

1. Carrie Cornwell, Staff Director, CA State Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee
2. Ethan Jones, Chief Consultant, CA State Assembly Elections Committee

Introduction

On April 29, 2026, California Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber issued a report to the legislature on the November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election with data collected from the California centralized voter registration database, VoteCal. The Secretary of State's office also issued a summary report comparing the 2025 data to three prior elections: the November 5, 2024, Presidential General Election; the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary Election, and the September 14, 2021, Gubernatorial Recall Election.

The report compiles data from all 58 California counties and provides a comparison of voter registration and participation trends between Voter's Choice Act (VCA) and non-VCA counties. As such, this data represents the most readily available evidence to measure the VCA's impact on voter participation and voter behavior in California.

It is important to note that, while voter turnout data can certainly aid analysis and provide a critical piece of the puzzle, it is often an imperfect measure of success for election

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administration. This is because there are a wide variety of external factors affecting voter turnout that fall outside the control of election administrators, from the specific candidates and contests on the ballot to the perceived competitiveness of races to the overall political atmosphere. These factors make comparisons of voter turnout rates across multiple elections over time challenging, since primary and general elections will have different participation patterns, as will gubernatorial years compared to presidential years. Even comparing similar election types across four-year cycles can be challenging, as the laws, regulations, technology, and best practices that govern elections can, and often do, change significantly in four years. Additionally, voter turnout can also vary significantly by location due to factors such as geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic differences. This can make comparisons between counties difficult even when looking at data from the same election.

The following represents the Task Force's analysis of the data presented in the Secretary of State's VoteCal report. The full report can be viewed on the Secretary of State's website:

[2025 Statewide Special Election Report](#)

[2025 Statewide Special Election Summary](#)

Voter Turnout Comparison of VCA and Non-VCA Counties

One of the central questions surrounding the Voter's Choice Act, as is the case with any new election model or significant change to the voting process, is how it impacts voter participation rates. Advocates of the VCA model hope that voter participation would be increased through the expansion of the number of days available for voting, the increased flexibility given to voters now able to vote at any vote center, making ballot drop-off locations more readily accessible, enhancing voter education and outreach, and providing more opportunities for public stakeholders to give community input to local election officials. Critics of the VCA worry that replacing traditional neighborhood polling places with a smaller number of vote centers, thereby increasing the distance that some voters must travel to reach a voting location, might make it more difficult for voters who prefer to cast their ballots in person, and thus potentially decrease turnout.

The voter turnout data presented in the Secretary of State's report shows that, overall, voter participation rates are slightly higher for VCA counties when compared to non-VCA counties. During the November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election, the turnout rate for VCA counties was 50.24%, compared to 49.79% for non-VCA counties. This was also true during the November 5, 2024, Presidential General Election, where VCA counties had 71.7% turnout, compared to 70.39% in non-VCA counties.

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Interestingly, the Secretary of State's summary report notes that this data reverses the trend seen during the September 14, 2021, Gubernatorial Recall Election, when VCA counties had a lower turnout rate, 57.4%, as compared to 59.44% for non-VCA counties. The report suggests that this may be due, in part, to voters becoming more familiar with the VCA model over time. This is a reasonable conclusion, as voter understanding and confidence in any new election process would be expected to increase as voters gain more experience with it.

It also seems noteworthy, however, that the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary Election data also shows a lower turnout rate for VCA counties, 34.92%, as compared to 35.15% for non-VCA counties. This means that, in the same year, VCA counties had a higher turnout rate in the general election but a lower turnout rate in the primary election. There are, of course, myriad potential explanations for this, and it may be premature to try to draw too many conclusions from this single occurrence. However, if the trend holds whereby VCA counties' participation rates are higher than non-VCA counties during general elections, but lower than during primaries, it could suggest that the VCA model is more impactful on participation for lower propensity voters who are more likely to show up in a general election but sit out the primary. It may also suggest that the VCA model has less impact on high propensity voters who are more likely to participate consistently in every election no matter what is on the ballot. If that is the case, VCA could still prove to be an important tool in mobilizing more voters to go to the polls consistently.

Impact on In-Person Voting

While the clear trend across California, in both VCA and non-VCA counties, is for most voters to cast a vote by mail ballot, in-person voting locations still serve a critical role in providing enhanced level of services and one-on-one assistance for voters. Often, voters who show up in-person at a voting location are those most in need of specialized services such as language assistance, accessible voting, and conditional voter registration.

For the November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election, both VCA and non-VCA counties saw 11% of their ballots cast in-person at a voting location, while 89% of voters cast vote by mail ballots, whether returned by mail or at a drop-off location. However, in both the 2024 Presidential Primary and Presidential General Elections, VCA counties saw higher in-person turnout rates. In the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary Election, VCA counties saw 11% of ballots voted in-person compared to 10% for non-VCA. During the November 5, 2024, Presidential General Election, the difference was even more pronounced with 19% voting in-person in VCA counties, as compared to 16% for non-VCA counties. The September 14, 2021 Gubernatorial Recall Election also saw a higher in-person turnout rate in VCA counties, at 11%, as compared to 7% for non-VCA counties.

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This trend could suggest that the VCA vote center model may be more conducive to in-person voting than traditional polling places and promote higher utilization rates on in-person voting locations. At the very least, this data does not show any basis to critics' concerns that moving from polling places to vote centers might lead to lower utilization of in-person voting.

It's also interesting to note that, even for voters who cast a vote by mail ballot, the data shows VCA may have an impact in how those ballots are returned. During the November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election, VCA counties saw 44.71% of ballots returned through drop-off locations, as compared to 39.35% in non-VCA counties. In fact, VCA counties saw more vote by mail ballots returned through drop-off locations than through the mail (44.71% drop-off versus 44.02% mailed). These trends were consistent in both the 2024 Presidential Primary and Presidential General Elections as well.

The data suggests that the ballot drop-off location requirements established by VCA are meeting a need, and that more voters are likely to utilize drop-off locations under the VCA model. This is especially significant given the concerns that some voters have due to recent changes to the United States Postal Service postmarking policy whereby pieces of mail, including ballots, may see a delay in when a postmark is applied. It may also factor in when considering the pending case before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Watson v. Republican National Committee*, that may curb the practice of allowing vote by mail ballots to be counted if they arrive up to seven days after Election Day, provided they are postmarked on or before Election Day. The ballot drop-off location service levels established by VCA can provide an important alternative to voters who want extra confidence that their ballot will be delivered directly and securely into their local election official's custody.

Impact on Voter Turnout by Language Preference

Focusing on voters who have registered with a language preference other than English, the data in the Secretary of State's report shows that overall, VCA counties had higher turnout rates than non-VCA counties. By subtracting the English language preference data from the Secretary of State's "Voter Turnout by Language" data, voters in VCA counties in all other languages cast 370,705 ballots out of 940,492 registered voters, for a turnout rate of 39.42%. For non-VCA counties, voters with non-English language preferences cast 83,875 ballots out of 225,940 registered voters, for a turnout rate of 37.12%.

This trend is not consistent across all language preferences, as for some individual languages, the turnout rates are higher in non-VCA counties than VCA counties. Of the five languages with the most registered voters, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean had higher turnout rates in VCA counties, while Chinese and Tagalog had higher rates in non-VCA counties. This is something to be aware of and to review following future elections to identify trends, should they become apparent. Though the VCA seems to encourage overall

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higher participation for voters with a language preference other than English, it is important to look at the experience of all individual language communities and understand that each community may have its own unique needs and challenges. Moving forward, monitoring this data may point to opportunities to improve support for these communities under the VCA model.

That said, the data presented shows that the VCA may have a net positive effect on participation among voters with a language preference other than English. Further, this data does not substantiate concerns that VCA might discourage voters who need translated ballot materials and language assistance from voting.

Impact on Voter Turnout by Age

The Secretary of State's summary notes that voter turnout rates usually increase with voter age, meaning that older voters traditionally have participated in higher rates than younger voters. This tends to be true across jurisdictions and election systems, and in California, the data shows this to be true for both VCA and non-VCA counties alike.

However, the data for the November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election shows that, for all age ranges up to 55, VCA counties had higher participation rates than non-VCA counties. Further, the difference is more pronounced for the younger age ranges. For voters aged 46-55, VCA counties had a slightly higher turnout rate of 51.46%, as compared to 51.10% for non-VCA counties, a difference of 0.36%. For voters aged 18-25, VCA counties had a 35.96% turnout rate, as compared to 33.24% for non-VCA counties, growing the difference to 2.72%. For age ranges above 55, the trend reversed, and non-VCA counties had higher rates than VCA counties. For voters age 66+, VCA counties had 69.26% turnout compared to 71.54% for non-VCA counties.

The data suggests that the convenience and flexibility provided by the VCA model could help engage and empower both younger voters and working voters to participate at higher rates. This data showing a greater propensity for younger voters to participate under the VCA model is significant as election officials and voting rights advocates nationwide grapple with the question of how to increase historically lower voter participation rates among younger voters. However, it is also important to be aware of the lower turnout rates among older voters under the VCA model and find opportunities to better meet the challenges faced by aging voters.

Additional Observations

The Secretary of State's summary report notes that in the November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election, VCA counties had a lower ballot rejection rate, 1.52%, as compared to

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1.78% for non-VCA counties, and that this trend was consistent for both the 2024 Presidential Primary and Presidential General Elections, as well as the September 14, 2021, Gubernatorial Recall Election. While the VCA vote center model would not inherently impact rejection rates, the summary report notes that this effect could possibly be a result of the increased voter education and outreach required under the VCA model. This seems to be a reasonable conclusion, as a robust and comprehensive voter education program that leverages community partnerships and input is beneficial to the success of any election system.

The summary report also presents data showing a clear and consistent trend across all elections conducted under the VCA that vote center utilization is extremely low for the first week of operation through E-4 (the Friday before the election). According to the report, vote center utilization only starts to pick up in any meaningful way on E-3 (the Saturday before the election, but still remains under 5% even on the day before the election. While the data shows that there is some desire among voters to be able to vote early, the vast majority of voters who vote in-person do prefer to vote on or close to Election Day. As such, this data suggests that giving local election officials flexibility to allocate resources to expand and enhance voter center offerings close to Election Day may be a more impactful solution to address lines and wait times on Election Night.

Conclusions

The data compiled and presented by the Secretary of State shows that VCA counties have a higher overall voter turnout rate than non-VCA counties, as well as generally higher rates of participation for in-person voting, ballot drop-off locations, voters with a language preference other than English, and voters under the age of 55. While this data may not be a perfect measurement of the success of the Voter's Choice Act, it does suggest that, overall, the VCA model is likely having a positive impact on those counties that have adopted it.

The data also suggests opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the VCA model at promoting higher voter turnout through increasing and enhancing voter education and outreach, especially efforts to encourage voters to cast their ballots earlier and educate voters about curing signature issues to further reduce ballot rejection rates. As counties across the state face mounting budget challenges, increased funding for voter education and outreach at the state level would help ensure that local election officials have the resources necessary to implement robust and comprehensive programs.

Finally, while the data provided in the Secretary of State's reports was valuable, there are other data points that would have been helpful in aiding the Task Force's analysis. Understanding that there may be technical and logistical obstacles to providing these data points, the Secretary of State's office is encouraged to work with local election officials to

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find ways to include in future elections' reports data showing how voter turnout may vary by race and ethnicity, data showing how voter turnout may vary by other socioeconomic factors, and data showing voter wait times to gauge whether the VCA has any impact, either positive or negative, on long lines at the polls.