



Voter's Choice Act Report

2020 Primary and
General Elections

Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.

California Secretary of State

LaKenya Jordan

Deputy Secretary of State



Contact information

For additional information about the Voter's Choice Act, contact us by email at voterschoice@sos.ca.gov

1500 11TH Street | Sacramento | CA | 95814

For questions regarding the contents of this report, please contact Joe Kocurek, Deputy Secretary for Communications, at 619.655.8330.

This report is also available online at www.sos.ca.gov | Alternative format reports available upon request

Abbreviations Used in This Report

BISG	Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding
Caltech	California Institute of Technology
CVAP	Citizen Voting Age Population
CVR	Conditional Voter Registration
EAP	Election Administration Plan
LAAC	Language Accessibility Advisory Committee
RAVBM	Remote Accessible Vote by Mail
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
USC	University of Southern California
VAAC	Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee
VCA	Voter's Choice Act

Table of Contents

About the Secretary of State.....	1
Special Note About This Report.....	1
Background.....	2
Executive Summary	4
Major Findings - VoteCal Data	6
Major Findings - Commissioned VCA Research.....	9
Secretary of State's Office Recommendations.....	13

[Appendix A: VoteCal Data on the March 2020 and November 2020 Elections](#)

[Appendix B1: University of California, Los Angeles, Voting Rights Project - California Voter's Choice Act: Language Access During the March 2020 Primary Election](#)

[Appendix B2: University of California, Los Angeles, Voting Rights Project - California Voter's Choice Act: Language Access During the November 2020 General Election](#)

[Appendix C: University of California, Los Angeles, Voting Rights Project - Utilizing Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding \(BISG\) to Improve Our Understanding of California Voter Demographics in Voter's Choice Act Counties](#)

[Appendix D1: California Institute of Technology - California Voter's Choice Act: Los Angeles County March Primary 2020 Evaluation](#)

[Appendix D2: California Institute of Technology - California Voter's Choice Act: Los Angeles County November General 2020 Evaluation](#)

[Appendix E1: University of Southern California, Center for Inclusive Democracy - Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election Voter Registration and Turnout](#)

[Appendix E2: University of Southern California, Center for Inclusive Democracy - Voter's Choice Act: 2020 General Election Voter Registration and Turnout](#)

[Appendix F1: University of Southern California, Center for Inclusive Democracy - California Voter's Choice Act 2020 Primary Election: Voter Outreach and Education](#)

[Appendix F2: University of Southern California, Center for Inclusive Democracy - California Voter's Choice Act 2020 General Election: Voter Outreach and Education](#)

[Appendix G1](#): University of California, Center for Inclusive Democracy -
*California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election Access for Voters with
Disabilities*

[Appendix G2](#): University of California, Center for Inclusive Democracy -
*California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election Access for Voters with
Disabilities*

[Appendix H](#): California Budget and Policy Center - *Voting in California*

About the Secretary of State

The 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 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

In April of 2021, preliminary research on the implementation of the Voter's Choice Act during the 2020 Primary and General Elections was presented to Secretary Weber for consideration and to the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) Task Force¹ for analysis. After careful consideration, the Secretary of State's Office determined that additional research would provide a more comprehensive picture of how implementation of VCA affected voter participation. Over the past several months, our office has worked with researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), the University of Southern California (USC), and the California Budget and Policy Center to obtain that additional research.

¹ See the legislative information website, available at: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450. Elections Code section 4008 required the Secretary of State to form a taskforce comprised of county elections officials, individuals with language accessibility experience for Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, members or representatives of the disability community, and elections experts. This code section sunset on December 31, 2021.

Background

The VCA was established by Senate Bill 450 (Allen, Hertzberg, et al.), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, with the aim of providing increased access to voting. The VCA reimagines elections by providing a voter-centered model that seeks to increase participation in the electoral process and provides more options for voters to engage in our democracy.

The VCA modernizes elections in California by allowing counties to conduct elections utilizing a model that provides greater flexibility and convenience for voters by:

- Mailing every active, registered voter a ballot,
- Expanding in-person early voting up to 10 days,
- Allowing voters to cast a ballot at any vote center within their county, and
- Providing secure ballot drop box locations throughout the county.

The VCA also requires counties to develop an election administration plan (EAP) that provides voters with information about their voting options and county plans to educate and reach voters in various communities.

The VCA places an emphasis on community voter education and requires that county elections officials garner community input about the planning and administration of elections.

While the VCA is relatively new, county participation has quickly expanded in a few short years. The number of VCA counties tripled from five counties in 2018 to 15 counties in 2020. In the 2018 General Election, the five VCA counties represented 1,380,981 (7.0%) of California's registered voters, and by the 2020 March Primary Election, VCA counties represented 10,388,737 registered voters, over half (50.3%) of the voters in California. In the 2020 November General Election, VCA counties represented 11,020,222 voters (49.98% of California's voters). The 15 VCA counties in 2020 that are the subject of this report are: Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Tuolumne.

Elections Code section 4005(g)(1)(A)² requires the Secretary of State to submit a report to the Legislature within six months of each election conducted under the

² See the legislative information website at:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450.

Within six months of each election conducted pursuant to section 4005 or Section 4007, the Secretary of State shall report to the Legislature, to the extent possible, the categories listed by race, ethnicity, language preference, age, gender, disability, permanent vote by mail status,

VCA that provides detailed information about voter registration and participation, including:

- Voter turnout
- Voter registration
- Ballot rejection rates
- Reasons for ballot rejection
- Provisional ballot use
- Accessible vote by mail use
- Number of votes cast at a vote center
- Number of ballots returned at ballot drop off locations
- Number of ballots returned by mail
- Number of persons who registered to vote at a vote center
- Confirmed instances of voter fraud
- Any other problems that became known to the county elections official or SOS during the election or canvass.

historical polling place voters, political party affiliation, and language minorities as it relates to the languages required under subdivision (a) of Section 14201 and Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. Sec. 10101 et seq.).

Executive Summary

This report includes data and analysis from several sources, including the Secretary of State's centralized registration database, VoteCal, and reports commissioned on various topics from UCLA, USC, Caltech and the California Budget and Policy Center.

In general, data from the 2020 elections indicate that many VCA counties experienced a higher voter turnout compared to their non-VCA counterparts. However, while voter turnout increased overall, it did not increase at the same rate across all demographic groups. When comparing voter turnout in the 2020 General Election across racial demographic groups, White voters had a higher overall turnout than their non-White counterparts.

Voter turnout for Latino voters reflects a gap of 9.8 points. The voter turnout gap for Black voters was 5.2 points, and AAPI voters had a turnout gap of 4.3 points.³ More information on race and voter turnout in VCA counties can be found in Appendix C which contains the summary and full report from UCLA entitled *Utilizing Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG) to Improve Our Understanding of California Voter Demographics in Voter's Choice Act Counties*. The data and research provided by UCLA also provided other helpful insights including data reflecting that Black and AAPI voters turned out at similar rates as the VCA counties' average⁴ and that Latino voters used in-person voting most among all races and ethnicities.⁵

The data also demonstrate other benefits of the VCA, such as increased engagement with communities and the use of the multiple voting options provided by VCA—ballot drop boxes, early in-person voting, and vote-by-mail options. Voter accessibility advisory committees (VAACs) and language accessibility advisory committees (LAACs) are a requirement of the VCA and may be influential in engaging voters in these populations. However, other factors may have contributed to some of these participation trends, including COVID-19 and the emergency legislation providing all voters with a vote-by-mail ballot in the November 2020 General Election. The Secretary of State's office will

³ See Appendix C: Barreto, M., Frasure, L., Collingwood, L., Rios, M., Waknin, S. (March 2022). *Utilizing Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG) to Improve Our Understanding of California Voter Demographics in Voter's Choice Act Counties*. University of California, Los Angeles. (p.4)

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

continue to monitor the data after each election to better understand voting trends in VCA counties.

Review of the data and research also revealed opportunities to improve the delivery of the VCA in California, namely, stronger, more inclusive education and outreach. Understanding the needs of different demographic voting groups in each county and providing targeted outreach to these communities is key to improving voter registration rates and engaging voters in the electoral process. Specifically, voters and eligible voters in particular communities require specialized outreach and education. The data show that young voters (aged 18-24), voters with limited-English proficiency, voters in hard-to-reach communities (as defined by the 2020 Census, which considers factors such as language, housing, employment rates, access to technology, race, and age) require targeted outreach to improve awareness, engagement, voter registration, and voter participation.

VAACs are comprised of community members who work with the county and are essential resources for learning about and engaging voters with disabilities. Their efforts help county election officials to improve accessibility for voter registration and voting options during elections.

Ballot rejection rates are decreasing, and this trend can be further assisted by more education about signatures on ballots, especially to younger new voters who may be unfamiliar with voting requirements. Use of vote-by-mail ballots was the primary choice of voting in the 2020 elections. However, more voters chose to return their ballot by drop box than by mail. Strong strategic partnerships with community-based organizations, businesses, local chambers of commerce, colleges and universities also support many of these outreach and education efforts, as community leaders, advocacy groups and community-based organizations act as trusted messengers to hard-to-reach populations. The SOS will work with VCA counties to standardize data collection and reporting about county outreach and education efforts to better inform future efforts.

The following sections of this report include major findings from VoteCal and research commissioned from UCLA, USC, Caltech, and the California Budget and Policy Center, along with recommendations from the Secretary of State's Office. The complete data tables for each of the statutorily required reporting categories can be found in Appendix A. Also included in this report is the research commissioned from UCLA, USC, Caltech and California Budget and Policy Center. Research from these institutions include data from surveys of counties, voters, community organizations, as well as an analysis of the VoteCal data to answer specific research questions. We provide a summary of each

report, along with a copy of the full analysis from each research institution in Appendices B-H.

Major Findings - VoteCal Data

Below are highlights of the 2020 Primary and General Elections in VCA counties using data from VoteCal.

- 1. Voter Registration:** The 15 VCA counties accounted for approximately 50% of the state's registered voters in both elections—10,388,737 voters in the March 2020 Primary Election and 11,020,222 voters in the November 2020 General Election. VCA counties had higher voter registration rates, 85% in the Primary Election and 91% in the General Election, than other counties in the rest of the state, which had 79% in the Primary Election and 85% in General Election.

In VCA counties, language minority voters, which include voters with limited-English proficiency and voters with a ballot language preference other than English, make up approximately 5% of registered voters. Voters with a Spanish ballot preference alone account for 3% of registered voters.

- 2. Voter Turnout:** Turnout of eligible voters in VCA counties (excluding Los Angeles), 51% in the Primary Election and 74% in the General Election, was higher than the state average of 47% in the Primary Election and 71% in the General Election.

Although voter turnout in Los Angeles County was lower than the state average, the turnout of registered voters in Los Angeles County nearly doubled from 38.6% in the Primary Election to 74.8% in the General Election.

Language minority voters participated at a lower rate in the elections than English-speaking voters—1.69 percentage points less in the General Election and nearly 10 percentage points less in the Primary Election. Voters with a Vietnamese ballot language preference made up the second largest share of voters with a ballot language preference other than English in VCA counties.

- 3. Ballot Rejection Rates:** The number of ballot rejections, defined as VBM or provisional ballots cast and not counted, decreased from the Primary to the General Election. Furthermore, the ballot rejection rate also decreased from 1.56% in the Primary Election to 0.61% in the General Election. Generally, VBM ballot rejection rates in VCA counties were similar to VBM ballot rejections statewide.

Voters aged 18-25 had the highest ballot rejection rate—3.61% in the Primary Election and 1.26% in the General Election. Ballot rejection rates decreased as voter age increased in VCA counties.

- 4. Reasons for Ballot Rejection:** The top three reasons for VBM ballot rejections in the Primary and General Elections were “no voter signatures,” “non-matching signature,” and ballot “not received on time.”

During the Primary Election, VBM ballots were mainly rejected (69.3%) due to not being received on time. However, during the General Election, VBM ballots were mainly rejected due to non-matching signatures (56.09%). By the General Election, VBM rejections due to ballots being received late was significantly reduced to just 16.2% of all VBM ballot rejections. In the General Election, the deadline for vote-by-mail ballots was extended from 3 days past Election Day to 17 days past election day.

- 5. Provisional Ballot Use:** Provisional ballot use decreased significantly between the Primary (25,369 ballots) and General (4,981 ballots) Elections. Voters that preferred a Spanish language ballot and voters in the age group of 18-25 were the largest users of provisional ballots.

- 6. Accessible Vote by Mail Use:** Remote accessible vote by mail (RAVBM) systems allow voters with disabilities, who may often rely on others to assist them in reading and marking their ballot, to cast their vote privately and independently in their homes. Use of the RAVBM option increased slightly from 3,071 RAVBM ballots in the Primary Election to 3,581 RAVBM ballots in the General Election—a 16.6% increase. Legislation enacted in 2020 made use of RAVBM permissible statewide,⁶ which may have contributed to the increased use of RAVBM in VCA counties.

- 7. Vote Center Use:** A total of 1,261,329 ballots were cast in person at vote centers in the Primary Election, and 1,302,159 ballots were cast in person at vote centers in the General Election. Voters in VCA counties cast a ballot in person at a higher rate than voters in non-VCA counties in the General Election, 55.1%, than in the Primary Election, 46.6%.

In the Primary Election, 3.08% of voters who voted in person used vote centers that were open between 10 and 5 days prior to Election Day (11-day vote centers). Voters who voted in person before Election Day and

⁶ AB 860 (Chapter 4, Statutes of 2020) amended Elections Code section 3016.7 to allow, "...For the statewide general election to be held on November 3, 2020, the county elections official shall permit any voter to cast a ballot using a certified remote accessible vote by mail system, regardless of whether the voter is a voter with disabilities or a military or overseas voter."

after the opening of vote centers 4 days prior to Election Day (4-day vote centers) made up 15.07%. In the General Election, 11.90% of voters who voted in person used 11-day vote centers, and 48.73% of voters who voted in person used 4-day vote centers.

Notably, the rate of vote center use dropped by more than 12 percentage points in VCA counties, between the Primary and General Election (from 27.32% to 14.89%). More voters chose to mail or drop off their ballots at drop box locations during the General Election, which may have been influenced by health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the availability of vote-by-mail options for all voters.

In the General Election, voters aged 46-55 voted in person most compared to all other age groups. In both the Primary and General Elections, voters aged 66+ voted in-person least.

- 8. Ballot Drop Box Use:** Nearly 5 million voters returned their ballots using a ballot drop box during the 2020 General Election, accounting for 55.28% of turnout. In the Primary Election, 1,203,277 (26.06% of) voters used ballot drop boxes.

Use of drop boxes decreased with age after the age of 45 in the Primary Election and age 35 in the General Election.

- 9. Ballots Returned by Mail:** Most vote-by-mail ballots were returned by mail in the 2020 Primary Election (2,044,940, 44.29%) with the second most used option as ballot drop box locations. Conversely, in the 2020 General Election, ballot drop box became the most used option in VCA counties. In the General Election, use of mailed ballots decreased to 27.92% of turnout (2,441,221 ballots).

Both English-speaking (27.30%) and language minority voters (30.53%) in VCA counties chose to vote by mail at similar rates in the General Election. In the Primary Election, language minority voters (51.06%) opted to vote by mail nearly seven percentage points more than English-speaking voters (44.01%).

- 10. Conditional Voter Registration Use:** Conditional voter registrations (CVR) is a method used by voters who wish to register and vote on the same day. CVR use increased by 80% from the Primary Election to the General Election (77,415 to 139,444). Of those, non-provisional CVR ballots, or instant CVR ballots, saw an increase of 558% from the Primary to General Election (760 to 5,005 ballots).

11. Instances of Voter Fraud: While at the time of this report, there were no confirmed instances of voter fraud for either the 2020 Primary or the General Election, the SOS does take all reports of potential instances of voter fraud seriously. A small number of potential instances (approximately 8 potential instances) have been found to warrant referral to local law enforcement for further investigation.

12. Problems During the Election or Canvass: Three main issues were identified in the Primary Election, including technology issues, poll worker problems and voters needing clarity about voting locations that met their preference of availability. By November 2020, most of the challenges associated with elections administration in VCA counties were unrelated to VCA-specific policies or requirements. Additional education is still needed around hours of operation and signage directing voters to vote center entrances.

Major Findings - Commissioned VCA Research

Below is a summary of the research and major findings from the four institutions commissioned to study the impact of VCA during the 2020 elections. The full research from each institution can be found in the appendix section of this report.

The **University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) - Voting Rights Project's** research on language access in the elections found that turnout among language minority voters lags behind English-speaking voters. Similar ballot rejection rates exist between language minority voters and English-speaking voters, and use of vote by mail by language minority voters increased compared to English-speaking voters in the General Election.⁷ In 11 of the 15 VCA counties profiled, limited-English voter turnout was lower than English-speaking voter turnout by anywhere between seven and 30 percent. The report concludes with a recommendation that all VCA counties increase their efforts to engage limited-English proficient voters.

The **University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)- Voting Rights Project** in connection with the Ralph A. Bunche Center also conducted research on race

⁷ See Appendix B: Barreto, M., Waknin, S., Rios, M., Venzor, V., Friedman, A., Vivian, A., Cohen, M., Hansen, N., Acevedo, M. (2021). *California Voter's Choice Act: Language Access During the March 2020 Primary Election*. University of California, Los Angeles, Voting Rights Project; Barreto, M., Waknin, S., Venzor, V., Alejandre, A., Rios, M., (2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: Language Access During the November 2020 General Election*. University of California, Los Angeles, Voting Rights Project.

and ethnicity of voters in VCA counties using a method called Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG). There are some disparities in voter turnout rates with respect to race, and the disparity is higher among some demographic groups than others. Voter turnout between White and Latino voters reflected a gap of 9.8 points. White and Black voters reflected a turnout gap of 5.2 points, and White and AAPI voters reflected a turnout of 4.3 points.⁸ Black and AAPI voters turned out at similar rates as the VCA counties' average.⁹ Latino voters used in-person voting most among all races and ethnicities.¹⁰

Caltech's Monitoring the Election Project and the Caltech/Massachusetts Institute of Technology Voting Technology (Caltech) Project's research encompassed Los Angeles County's performance in each election.

Caltech's March 2020 Primary Election report highlights the following:¹¹

- Voter registration among eligible voters in Los Angeles County is higher than the state. However, voter turnout is lower than the state average for both elections.
- Conditional voter registration use in Los Angeles County was higher than other VCA counties and was used most among young voters.
- Technical issues with electronic poll pads increased the need for provisional voting.
- Ballot rejections decreased from previous elections with higher ballot rejections among younger voters and voters unaffiliated with the Democratic or Republican parties.

Caltech's November 2020 General Election report highlights the following:¹²

- Los Angeles County voters reported positive experiences in the November 2020 election.

⁸ See Appendix C: Barreto, M., Frasure, L., Collingwood, L., Rios, M., Waknin, S. (March 2022). *Utilizing Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG) to Improve Our Understanding of California Voter Demographics in Voter's Choice Act Counties*. University of California, Los Angeles. (p.4)

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ See Appendix D1: Alvarez, R.M., Cao, J., Ebanks, D., Guth, D., Li, Y. (2021, January 14). *California Voter's Choice Act: Los Angeles County March Primary 2020 Evaluation*. California Institute of Technology.

¹² See Appendix D2: Alvarez, R.M., Cao, J., Ebanks, D., Li, Y. (2021, June 23). *California Voter's Choice Act: Los Angeles County November General 2020 Evaluation*. California Institute of Technology.

- Connectivity issues affecting the March 2020 Primary Election were resolved for the General Election.
- The county successfully handled challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **University of Southern California (USC) - Center for Inclusive Democracy's** research focused on three main areas, each with a corresponding report: voter education and outreach, access to the polls for voters with disabilities, and voter registration and turnout. Three reports were prepared for the 2020 March Primary Election, and an additional three reports were prepared for the 2020 November General Election.

USC's voter education and outreach reports highlights the following:¹³

- VCA counties attempted to reach voters through multiple outreach methods, and community groups helped to inform their efforts.
- VCA counties want increased participation from language minority community members and sited vote centers around voters' needs.
- Community groups recommend targeted outreach and additional county resources.
- Less than half of eligible voters surveyed were aware of changes in voting options and learned of those options in various ways, with county voter information guides, county websites or vote-by-mail packets being the most informative resources in the 2020 Primary Election.

Findings from USC's reports on access for voters with disabilities include:¹⁴

- Voter accessibility advisory committees were actively engaged.
- VCA counties used a variety of methods to reach voters with disabilities and trained vote center staff to be supportive.
- VCA counties made efforts to site vote centers serving voters with disabilities.

¹³ See Appendix F: Romero, M., Chami, B., (March 2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election Voter Outreach and Education*. University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy; Romero, M., Chami, B., (March 2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 General Election Voter Outreach and Education*. University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy.

¹⁴ See Appendix G: Romero, M., Chami, B., (March 2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election Election Access for Voters with Disabilities*. University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy; Romero, M., Chami, B., (March 2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 General Election Election Access for Voters with Disabilities*. University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy.

- Remote accessible vote by mail use varied widely from +500 to –20 across VCA counties.
- Voters with disabilities were more aware than other voters of new voting options and heard from media, social media and political campaigns.

Findings from USC's reports on voter registration and turnout include:¹⁵

- Most voters in VCA counties voted by mail.
- Vote-by-mail ballots were rejected disproportionately in some populations and most rejections came from late ballots in the 2020 Primary Election and signature issues in the 2020 General Election.
- VCA counties had higher voter registration rates compared to the state.
- VCA counties had a higher use of conditional voter registration than other counties in the state.
- Lower use of provisional voting in VCA counties than the state in the General Election.

The **California Budget and Policy Center's** research used the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey data to cross reference voter participation in VCA counties. The purpose was to provide reference data for future use in VCA counties that might inform future outreach and education needs in various census tracts within VCA counties and the characteristics of California's citizen voting age population (CVAP) and voters. Their research¹⁶ finds that:

- Latino (30% of the CVAP) and Asian Americans (14% of the CVAP) are underrepresented in the registered voters of California.
- Individuals aged 18-24 make up 10% of the state's population and, overall, are less likely to vote in the United States.
- Income, education, homeownership, employment and access to technology are factors that influence a voter's likelihood of participating in an election.

¹⁵ See Appendix E: Romero, M., Meier, A., Pavia, E., (March 2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election Voter Registration and Turnout*. University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy; Romero, M., Meier, A., Pavia, E., (March 2022). *California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 General Election Voter Registration and Turnout*. University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy

¹⁶ See Appendix H: Schumacher, K., Yee, J. (September 2021). *Voting in California: Memo for the Secretary of State's Office*. California Budget and Policy Center.

- Fewer voters with disabilities voted in the 2020 General Election compared to voters without disabilities—potentially because of access barriers.
- 35% of the CVAP speak a non-English language at home.

Secretary of State's Office Recommendations

Review of VoteCal data and the analyses provided by the commissioned research reaffirms the strengths and benefits of the VCA and highlights opportunities to improve access and participation.

- 1. Voter registration:** Identify and share best practices from counties that have high voter registration rates with counties that have lower registration rates.
- 2. Ballot rejections:** Continue to reduce ballot rejection rates through increased voter education about how to properly complete a VBM ballot, including signature requirements.
- 3. Vote center/ballot drop box use:** Ensure clear signage for voters to locate ballot drop boxes and enter vote centers. Continue to work with counties to ensure drop box locations are accessible and convenient to the public.
- 4. Outreach and education about the availability of vote centers:** Increase outreach and education about early in-person voting and other voting options available in VCA counties. Highlight the availability of 11-day and 4-day vote centers prior to each election and other features at vote centers such as provisional voting and same day voter registration. To assist counties with messaging to voters, the Secretary of State's Office has begun a statewide voter education and outreach effort entitled "More Days and More Ways to Vote." This effort provides social media messages, standard external signage at vote centers, and other messaging materials to support voter awareness of the voting options in VCA counties.
- 5. Vote by mail:** State law now requires that every voter receive a vote-by-mail ballot 30 days prior to an election in every county. Encouraging voters to regularly check and update their voter registration status will be essential in future elections and will help ensure each voter receives their ballot in the mail on time. Therefore, it is recommended that voters check the SOS' [My Voter Status](#) website and update their registration to ensure they receive their ballots in the mail.
- 6. Funding for outreach and education:** Dedicated funding will be required for each county to implement and improve voter outreach and

education in all counties. VCA counties require additional funding to fully execute the specific and additional outreach required by Elections Code 4005.

- 7. Language accessibility for limited-English proficient voters:** Serve voters with limited-English speaking proficiency through engagement with the language advisory and accessibility committees (LAACs) in each county and the state-level LAAC. Utilize community-based organizations and trusted messengers to help create culturally considerate messaging about voter registration and engagement in the electoral process.
- 8. Voting accessibility:** Increase accessibility efforts for voters with disabilities to register to vote and cast their ballots. Encourage engagement with VAACs.
- 9. Outreach and engagement:** Voters participate in elections for various reasons, and targeted outreach could provide much needed election information to encourage voter participation.
 - a. Increase targeted outreach efforts to engage young voters (18-25) in the electoral process.
 - b. Use census tract data to identify the needs of voters and increase engagement with hard-to-reach communities.
 - c. Encourage the continued use of multiple media outlets (such as social media, television, radio, and virtual events) and outreach methods to reach voters of different demographics.
- 10. Community partnerships to engage voters in hard-to-reach communities as defined by the 2020 U.S. Census:** Engage local partners that serve and may be able to connect with voters in hard-to-reach communities, including businesses, community leaders, advocacy groups and community-based organizations.
- 11. Future VCA reports:** Work with VCA counties to standardize data collection and reporting about county outreach and education efforts.

Acknowledgements

The Secretary of State's Office acknowledges the 15 VCA counties and their Registrars of Voters who have worked hard to implement the VCA over the past several years. The county's efforts, along with advocates from the voting rights communities throughout the state, including Disability Rights California, the League of Women Voters, the American Civil Liberties Union, Common Cause, and the Black Power Network, helped to expand the number of counties that initially participated in the VCA, from five counties in 2018 to 15 VCA counties in 2020. By the November 2022 General Election, 28 counties statewide will conduct elections under the VCA. These collective efforts continue to contribute to the increase in voter turnout and voter registration in the state of California.

Additionally, the Secretary of State thanks the University of California, Los Angeles Voting Rights Project; the University of California, Los Angeles Ralph A. Bunche Center; the California Institute of Technology Monitoring the Election Project and the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project; the University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy, and the California Budget and Policy Center for their contributions to research and data analyses that were used to inform this report. These institutions analyzed unique aspects of the 2020 elections in VCA counties to provide a comprehensive understanding of the VCA's impact on voter participation.

The Secretary of State's Office also thanks the VCA Task Force members for providing guidance and feedback about the implementation of the VCA in California, the 2020 VCA reports, and the development of the election administration plans developed by county Registrars of Voters in VCA Counties.

Moreover, the Secretary of State's Office acknowledges the many staff and executive staff members for their collaboration and contributions to the development of this report and for their continued commitment to this office and the VCA.