

From Barriers to Ballots: Identifying and Reducing Voting Barriers for Young People

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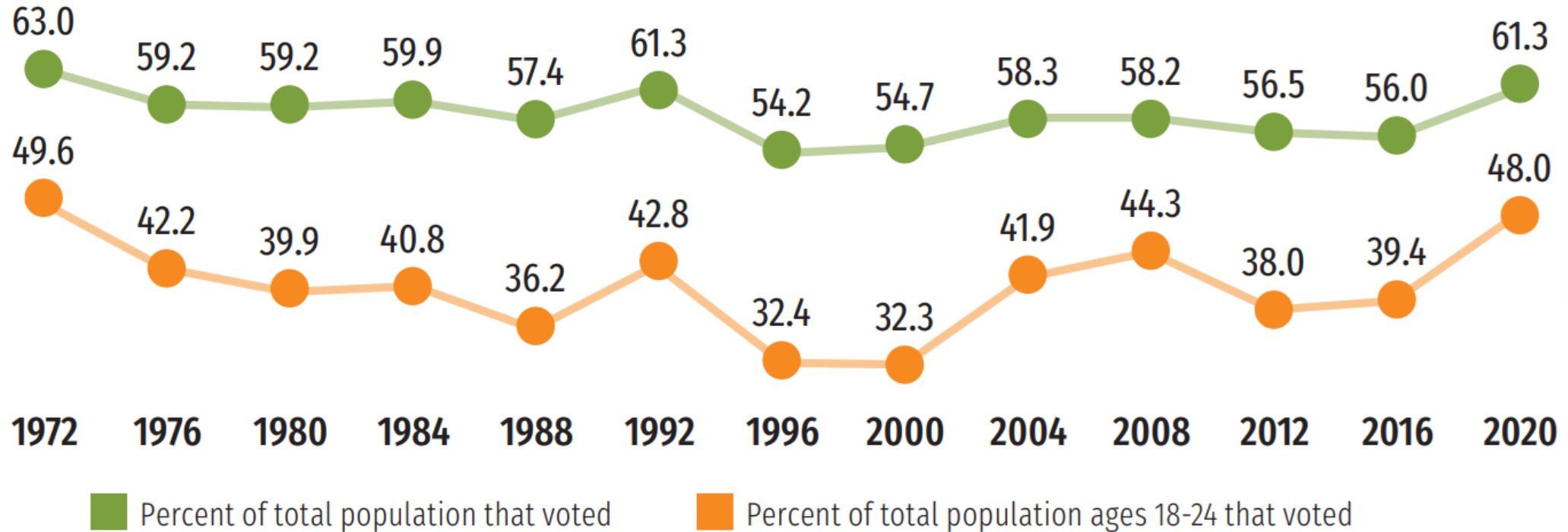


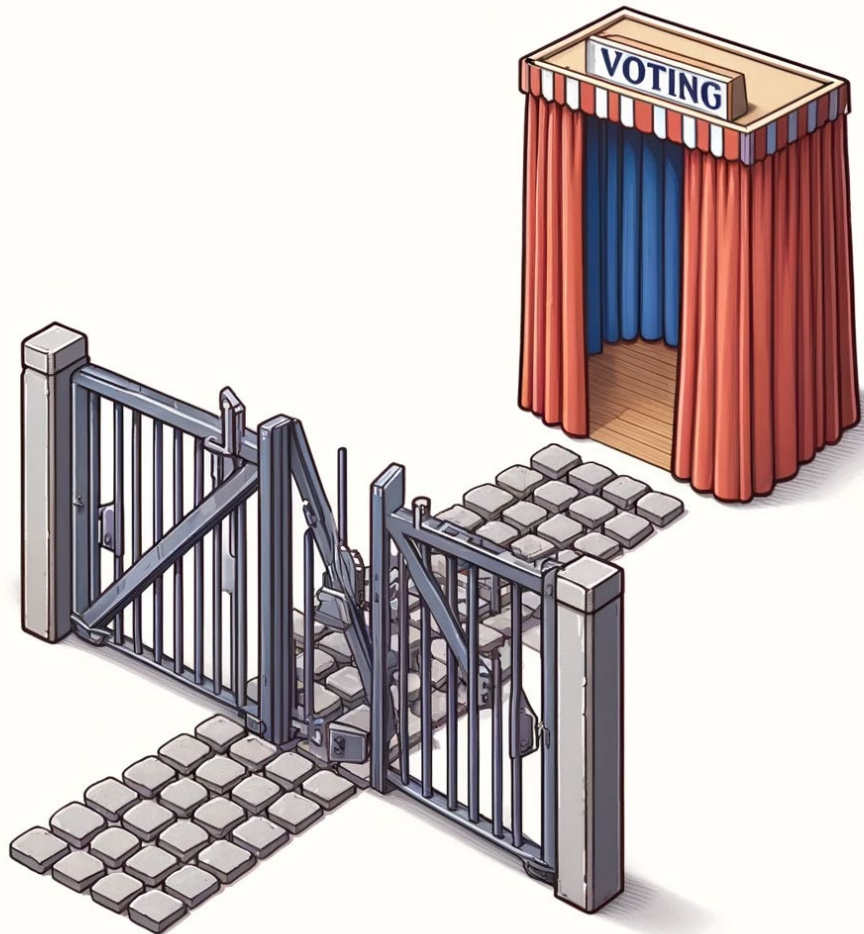
UC CENTER
SACRAMENTO



Luskin
Social Welfare

Percent of population that voted in presidential elections



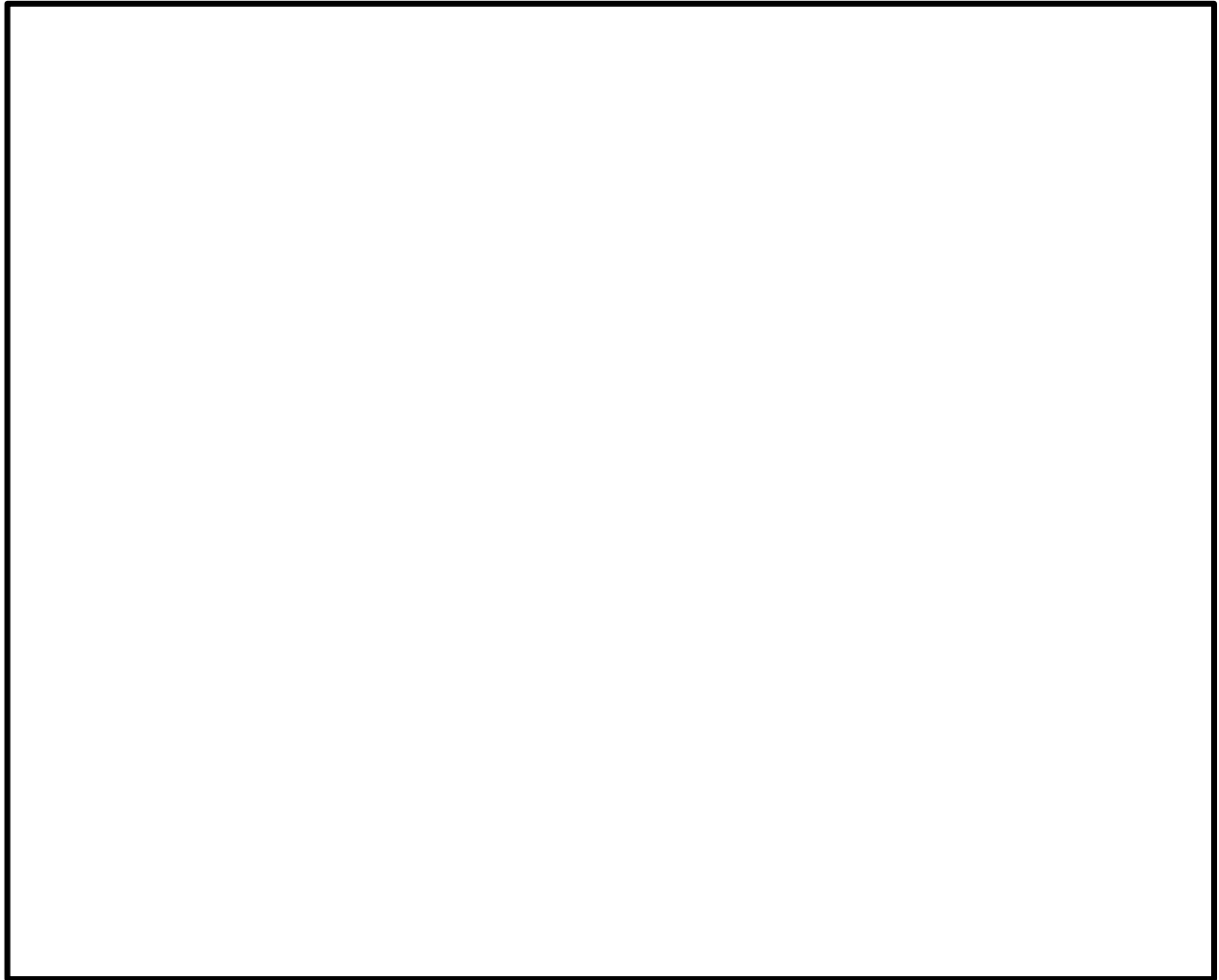


Structural barriers to voting:
Policies and practices that systematically disadvantage young people in electoral participation

Systematic review

Nationwide election survey

California policy analysis



Systematic review

Nationwide election survey

California policy analysis

- Followed the Rapid Systematic Review protocol (Featherstone et al., 2015)
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Explicit focus on barriers to youth voting
 - Written 2010 or later
 - Peer-reviewed articles and white papers
- 15 search terms systematically applied via Google Scholar
- 70 eligible papers were collected and examined

Systematic review

Nationwide election survey

California policy analysis

- Conducted the week following the 2020 election
- Sample statistics:
 - $n=866$ 18-25 year olds
 - 18% CA residents
 - 26% Asian, 23% White, 24% Black, 19% Latine
- Analyses:
 - Inductive and deductive qualitative analyses
 - Regression models, t -tests, chi square tests

Systematic review

Nationwide election survey

California policy analysis

- Examined California policies using a variety of data sources
 - CA Secretary of State
 - US Census
 - Cost of Voting Index

- 1. General barriers to registration and voting for youth**
- 2. California electoral policies in comparative context**
- 3. Policy recommendations to reduce structural barriers for youth**

- Disproportionate administrative burden

Annually moved to a new residence
18-24: **26.8%** Older adults: **12.9%**

Annually moved to a new state
18-24: **5.9%** Older adults: **2.5%**

(2020 Census data)

- Disenfranchisement of college students

Limitations enacted by local jurisdictions in FL, NC, NJ, NY

(D'Ercole, 2021; Michelson et al., 2024; Quinn et al., 2019; Richardson, 2022)

- Restrictive ID laws

Constraints on college IDs (D'Ercole, 2021)

Voter ID laws disproportionately affect non-college youth (CIRCLE, 2013)

“Some political leaders try to prevent young people from voting.”

58% of participants agreed

“I thought people were being intimidated at the polls.”

43% of participants agreed

“*Voting is no longer a private matter. It feels unsafe now.*”

One youth reported the biggest challenge to voting was “fear of being attacked based on my vote.”

“I didn’t realize my voting status was suspended due to moving... until days before registration closed, so I had to mail in my updated registration information and hoped it worked out.”

Registration is a primary obstacle for youth to voting

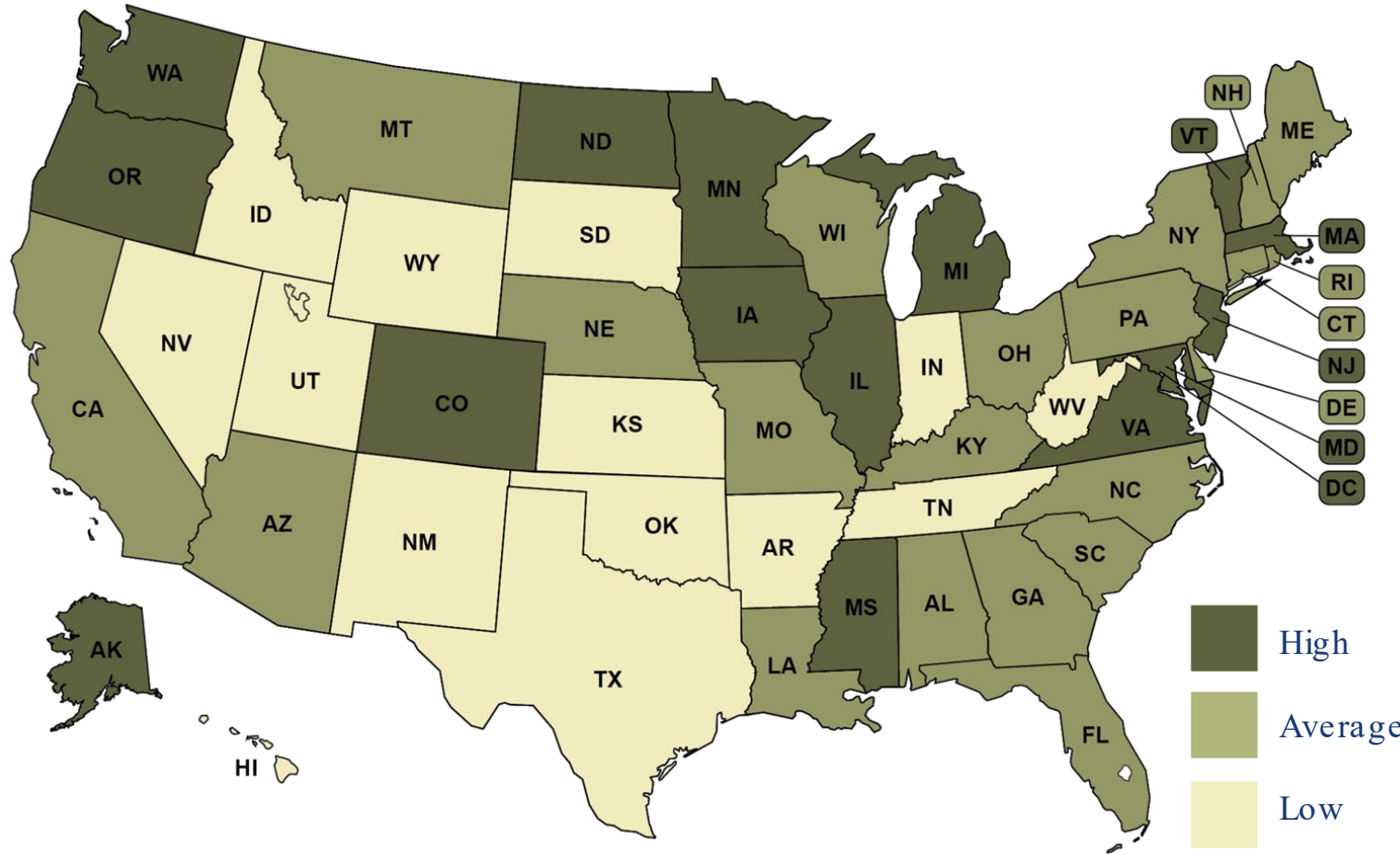
Percentage of eligible voters registered

	In the U.S.	In CA	
All adults	69%	67%	~20% lower
18-24 year olds	49%	48%	

(U.S. Census, 2022)

Registration

Youth registration rates in 2020



Range of youth registration rates

(% of eligible voters)

1. New Jersey (86.9%)

⋮

25. California (69.4%)

⋮

50. Nevada (41.9%)

(U.S. Census, 2021)

CA ranks high in voting rates but lower in registration rates
→Registration may be an obstacle particularly for CA Voters

Youth voting rates by states (% of eligible voters)

•
•
•
15. California (53.6%)
•
•
•

Youth registration rates by states (% of eligible voters)

•
•
•
25. California (69.4%)
•
•
•

(U.S. Census, 2021)

- **Same-day registration** (“conditional voter registration”)

- Implemented in CA in 2017
- Youth were more likely to use same-day registration in 2020 than other age groups in CA

- **Online voter registration**

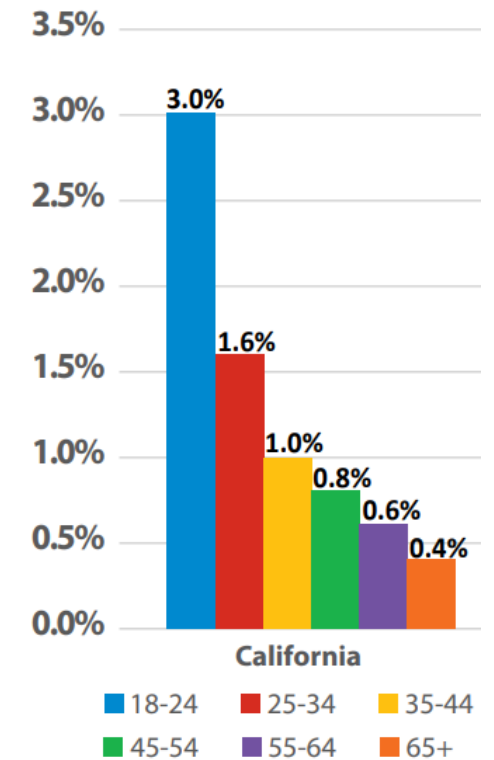
- Implemented in CA in 2012
- Linked to 2% increase in registration rate for young people
- Higher rejection rate in CA

CA rejection rate: **11.4%**

National rejection rate: **6.2%**

(Elections Performance Index, 2024)

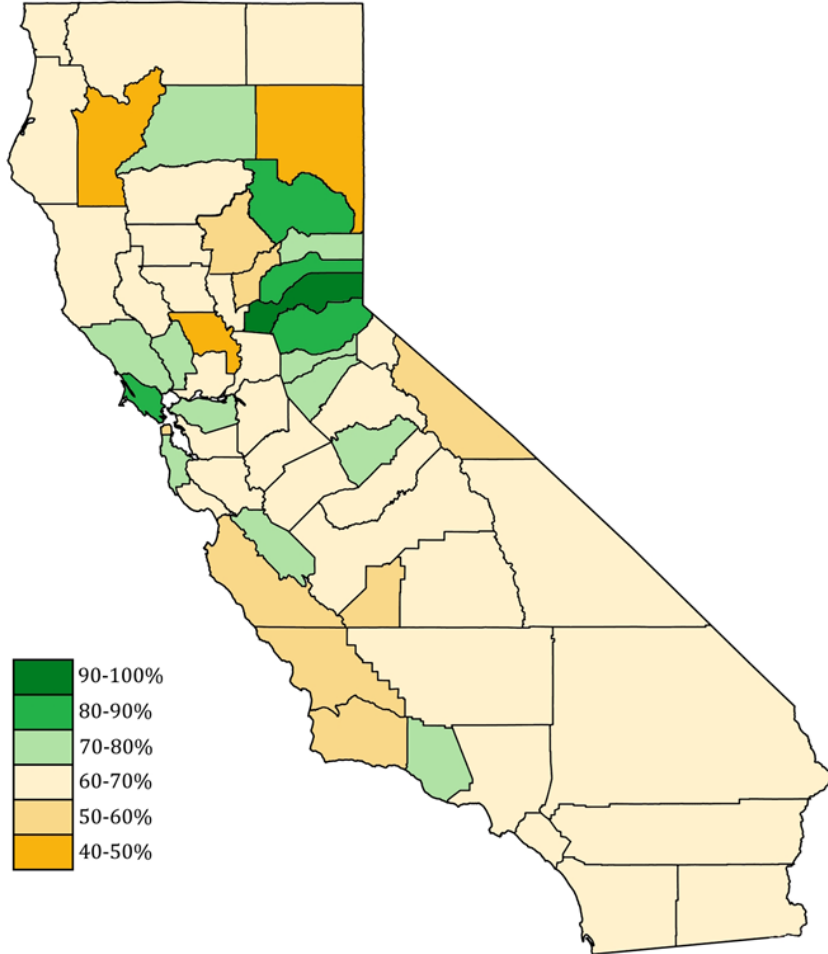
CVR by age group, in CA



(Romero & Meier, 2021)

Registration

County-level variations in registration



(Calculated from CA Secretary of State
and U.S. Census data)

Range of youth (18 -25) registration rates

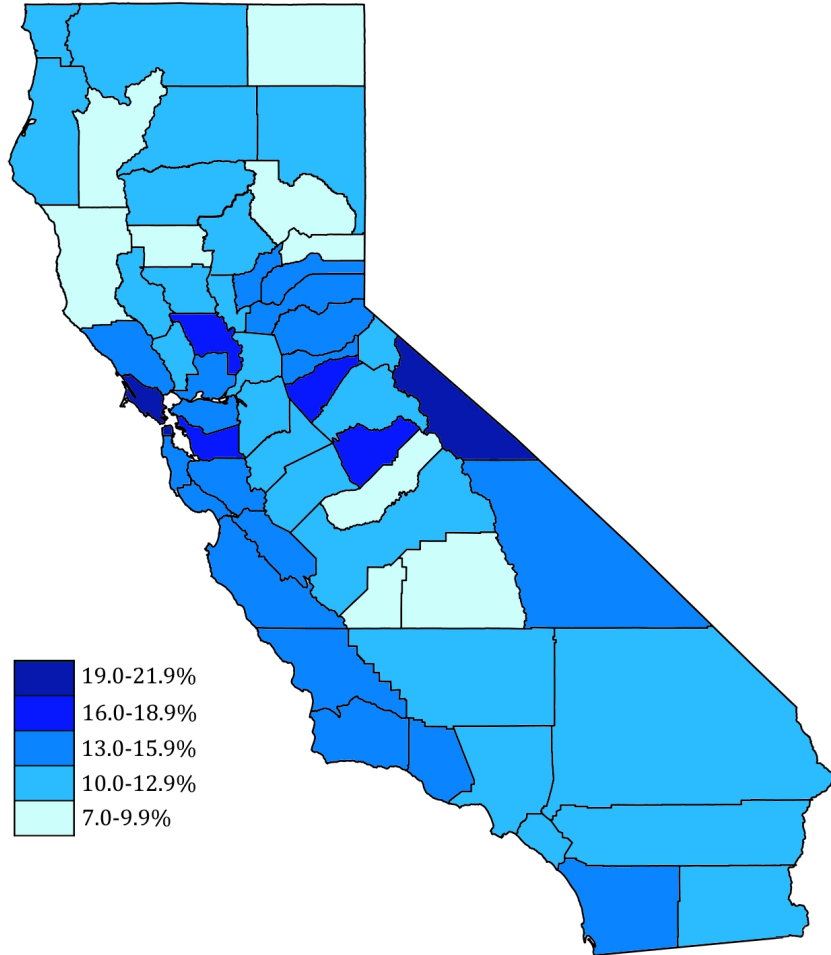
(% of all youth)

1. Placer County (94.3%)
- ⋮
22. Sacramento (67.9%)
- ⋮
24. Los Angeles (66.8%)
- ⋮
58. Trinity County (40.0%)

**Barriers may be uneven
across counties**

Registration

County-level variations in pre-registration



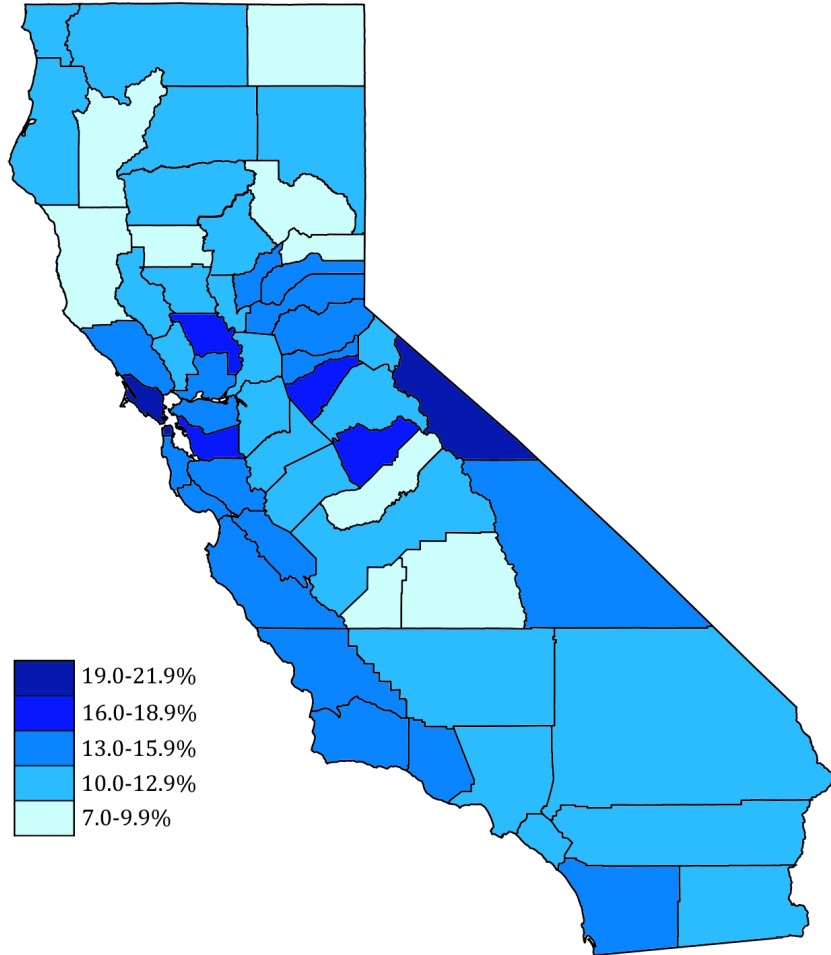
(The Civics Center, 2023)

Range of youth (16 -17) pre-registration rates (% of all eligible youth)

1. Marin (21.4%)
- ...
34. Sacramento (12.4%)
- ...
41. Los Angeles (11.4%)
- ...
58. Modoc (7.2%)

Registration

Low pre-registration rate state-wide



(The Civics Center, 2023)

Overall youth (16 -17) pre-registration rate

(% of all eligible youth)

Statewide: 13%

- **Reliance on DMV may hinder pre -registering**
 - 16 y/o getting driver's license dropped from 43.1% in 1996 to 25.3% in 2021
(Department of Transportation, 2021)
- **Pre-registration should be utilized more**
 - Linked to 2% ↑ in registration rates
(Fowler, 2017)

Range of youth voting rates

(% of eligible voters, 18-24)

1. New Jersey (75.3%)

⋮

15. California (53.6%)

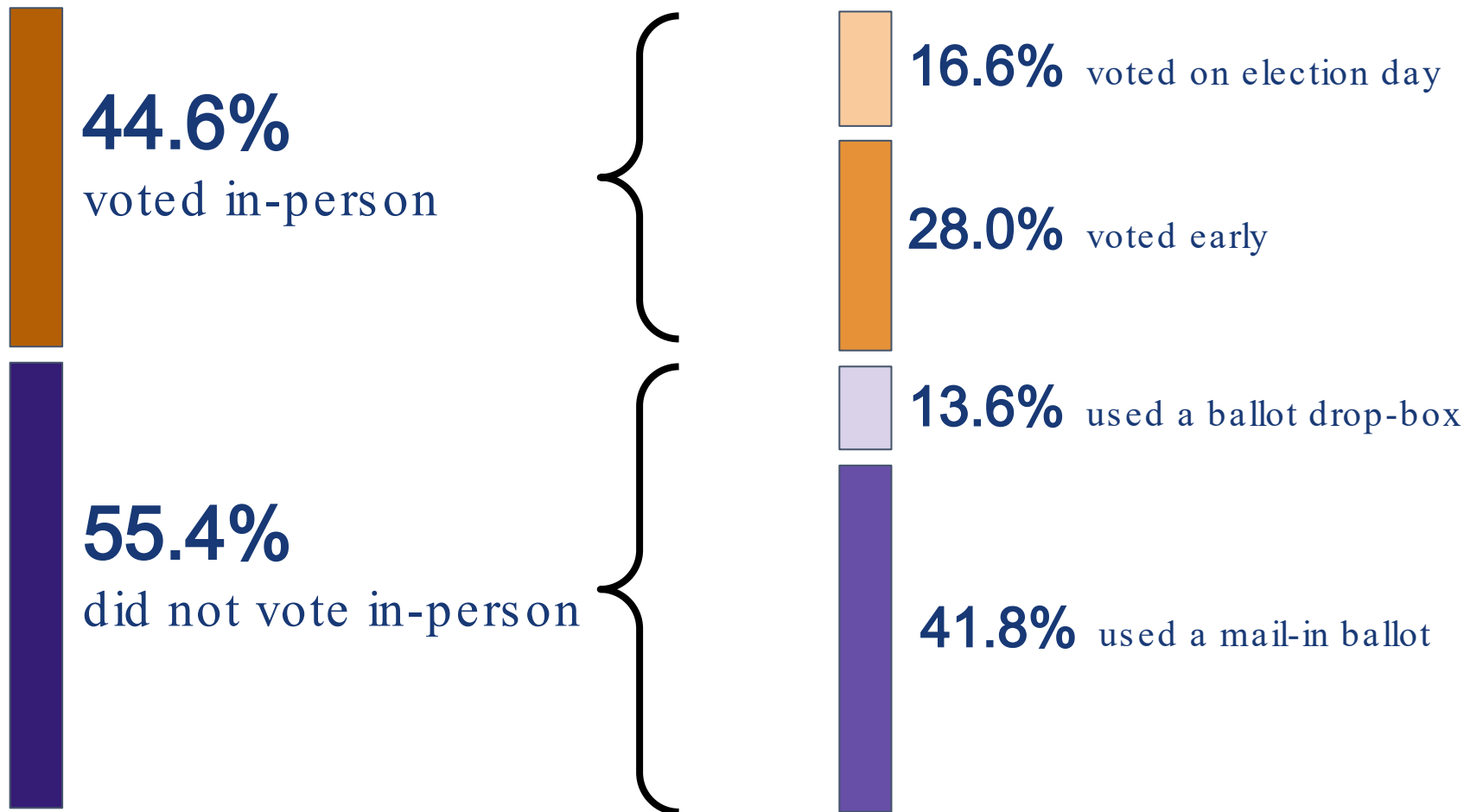
⋮

50. Oklahoma (30.5%)

(U.S. Census, 2021)

California is more conducive to youth voting compared to most states

From our data of CA youth...



Voting by mail is a powerful strategy to reduce structural barriers

LA Study: 3% increase of voting rates

(in those who haven't used mail-in)

(Alvarez & Li, 2021)



41.8% used a mail-in ballot

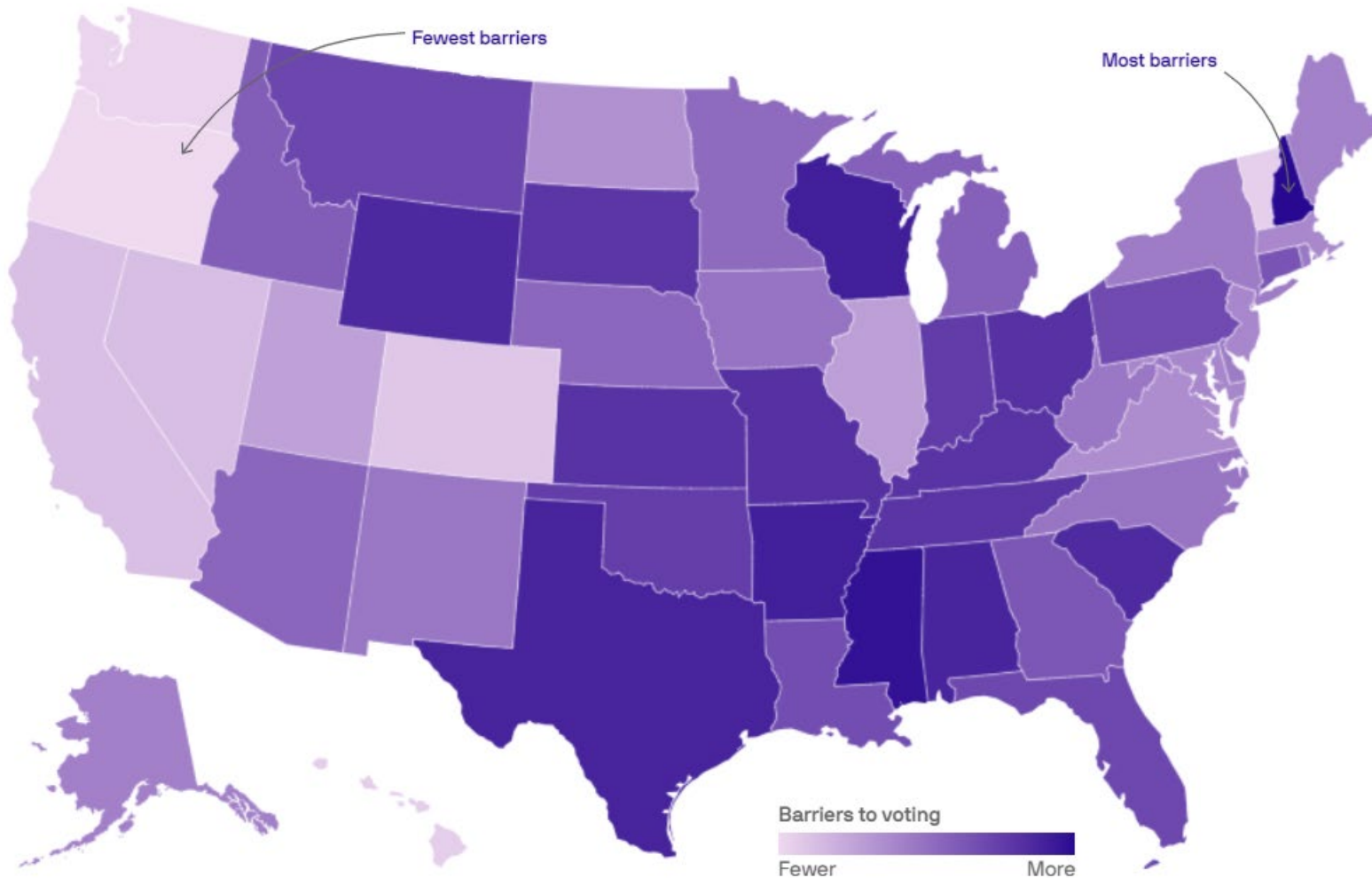
No partisan difference in increase

(In a study including CA voters)

(Thompson et al., 2021)

Cumulative Costs

Cost of Voting Index (COVI) in 2022



Higher total policy barriers have a larger negative effect on youth than other age groups

(Juelich & Coll, 2020)

California has the 6th lowest COVI score in the nation

(Pomante, Schraufnagel, & Li, 2023)

Strengths

- Student IDs can be used
- Youth pre-registration
- Automatic registration at DMV
- All-mail voting
- Early voting and ballot drop-off



Weaknesses

- Automatic registration at agencies other than DMV
- Back-end secure automatic registration
- Primary voting for 17-year-olds
- State holiday for election day



Policy Recommendations

Maintain Promotive Policies

- VCA should be equally implemented across counties
- VCA impacts should be further studied

Voter's Choice Act of 2016

- ✓ Mailing every voter a ballot
- ✓ Expanding in-person early voting
- ✓ Allowing voters to cast a ballot at any vote center in their county
- ✓ Providing secure ballot drop off locations throughout county

Policy Recommendations

Allow 17 -year-old Primary Voting

- Would require a constitutional amendment
- Modest step toward encouraging youth voting

Proposition 18 2020 Results



Policy Recommendations

Implement Secure Automatic Voter Registration

- Boosts registration & turnout
- Our recommendation: Include high schools as official voter registration sites

Senate Bill 299

- ✓ Would require DMV to automatically pre-register or register eligible individuals
- ✓ Expands voter registration agencies, as determined by Secretary of State

Policy Recommendations

Fund Schools to Support Voter Registration

- Our recommendation: Expand funding to all public high schools & mandate voter registration efforts

Assembly Bill 2627

- ✓ Would establish a Civic Learning, Outreach, and Engagement Fund
- ✓ Schools would apply for funds to support voter (pre-)registration & civic education initiatives

Maintain Promotive Policies

such as VCA

Allow 17 -Year-Old Primary Voting

resurrect Prop 18 of 2020

Implement Automatic Secure Voter Registration

such as SB 299

Fund Schools to Support Voter Registration

such as an expanded version of AB 2627

Conclusion

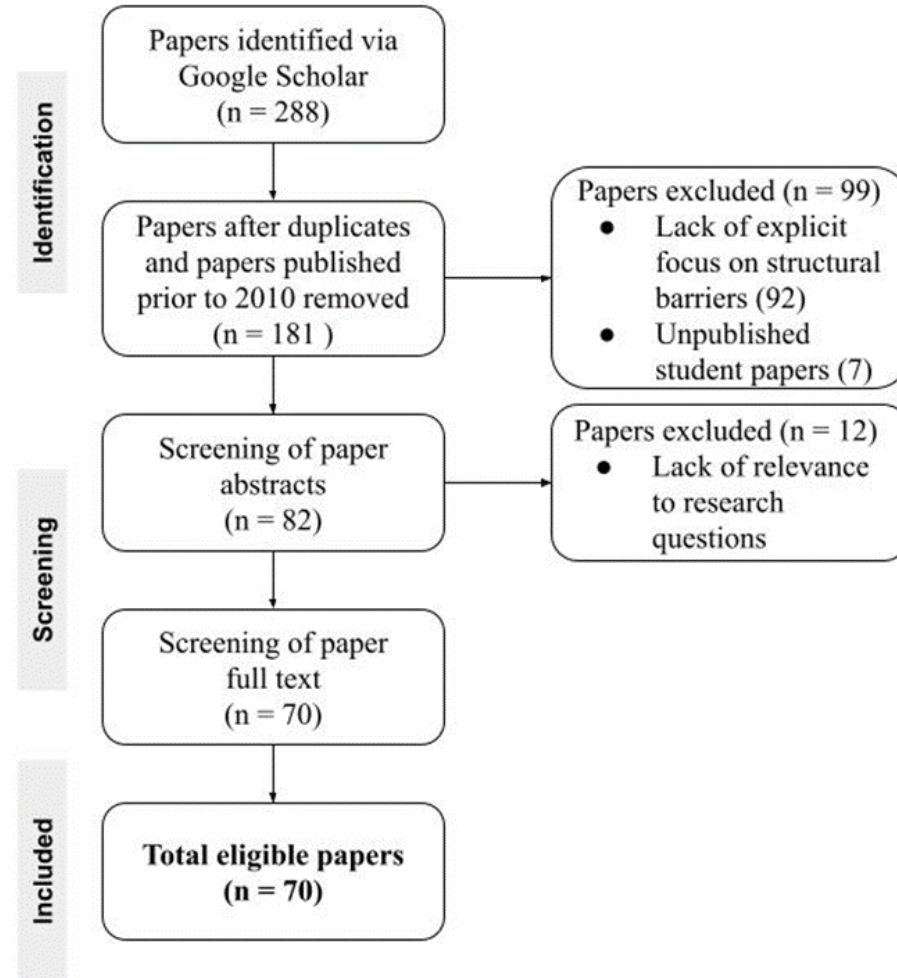


.....
The right of citizens of the United States, who are
eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not
be denied or abridged by the United States or by
any State on account of age

.....
26th Amendment

Thank you!

Appendices



Survey : Descriptive statistics of study sample

	Full sample <i>N (%) / M (SD)</i>
Age	21.61(2.22)
California resident	157(18.2%)
Race/ethnicity	
White	199(23.0%)
Black or African American	205(23.7%)
Hispanic or Latine	164(18.9%)
Asian American	149(26.3%)
More than one race/ethnicity	68(7.9%)
Other	2(0.2%)
Gender	
Female	451(52.1%)
Male	386(44.6%)
Nonbinary	29(3.4%)
Sexual orientation	
Hetero	588(67.9%)
Non-Hetero	278(32.1%)
<i>N</i>	866

	Full sample <i>N (%) / M (SD)</i>
Education level	
College degree	314(36.4%)
No college degree	549(63.6%)
Parent education level	
Either parent has a college degree	472(55.5%)
Neither parent has a college degree	549(63.6%)
Political party	
Democrats	492(59.6%)
Republicans	91(11.0%)
Others	243(29.4%)
Born in the US	839(97.1%)
Both parents born in the US	419(48.4%)
Reported a disability	145(17.7%)
Voted	722(83.4%)
Registered	784(90.5%)
<i>N</i>	866

Survey : Reported barriers to registration and voting

		Registration, open-ended only	Voting, open-ended only	Voting, open and closed items
Category	Examples	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)	<i>N</i> (%)
Procedural barriers	Did not request or receive absentee ballot in time, did not have transportation to the polls	298 (34.4%)	298 (34.4%)	518 (59.8%)
Health and safety concerns	Voting felt physically unsafe, family member at risk for COVID-19	79 (9.1%)	135 (15.6%)	469 (54.2%)
Competing demands and other priorities	Work, school, or family commitments	79 (9.1%)	69 (8.0%)	431 (49.8%)
Political alienation	Not interested in voting, didn't think vote would matter	32 (3.7%)	75 (8.7%)	390 (45.0%)
Lack of procedural knowledge	Unable to find polling place, couldn't figure out how to vote	90 (10.4%)	78 (9.0%)	247 (28.5%)
Lack of political knowledge	Not informed about candidates or issues	20 (2.3%)	59 (6.8%)	197 (22.7%)
Unexpected constraints	Inclement weather	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (3.3%)
Other		17 (2.0%)	26 (3.0%)	131 (15.1%)
No barriers		0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<i>N</i>		866	866	866