

Unpacking California Voter Registration and Turnout Trends:

Youth Representation in California's
Electorate

Mindy Romero and Jonathan Fox

Unpacking the principle of “one person, one vote”

- This principle of political equality was translated into binding legal principle in a 1964 Supreme Court decision
- Reynolds v Sims ruled (8-1) that state legislative districts had to be roughly equal in population.
- Yet if legislative districts of equal population have unequal rates of voter participation... the principle of one person, one vote is violated

Context for findings:

- Levels of voter turnout across social groups are well-known to closely correlate with income, age, and formal education, reflecting inequalities in society
- What's new in today's research findings?
- These data document how inequality in voter participation rates varies geographically within California
- This will allow practitioners to identify leading and lagging counties.

Today's Research Questions

- How do voter registration and turnout rates vary geographically within California?
- How do youth registrants differ politically from the rest of the California electorate in 2012?
- What impact did online voter registration have on the make-up of the state's registered voters?
- What institutional changes could increase youth representation in the state's electorate?

Definitions

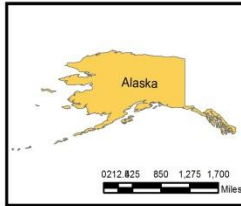
- Two common ways to define the youth voter age group:
Ages 18-29
Ages 18-24
- Two meaningful measures of the strength of the youth vote:
- **Youth registration rate** and **youth *eligible* voter turnout** rate.
- Youth registration rate = number of registered young people
divided by the number of eligible young people
- Youth eligible voter turnout rate = number of young voters
divided by the number of
eligible young people

U.S. Voter Turnout as Percentage of Those Eligible

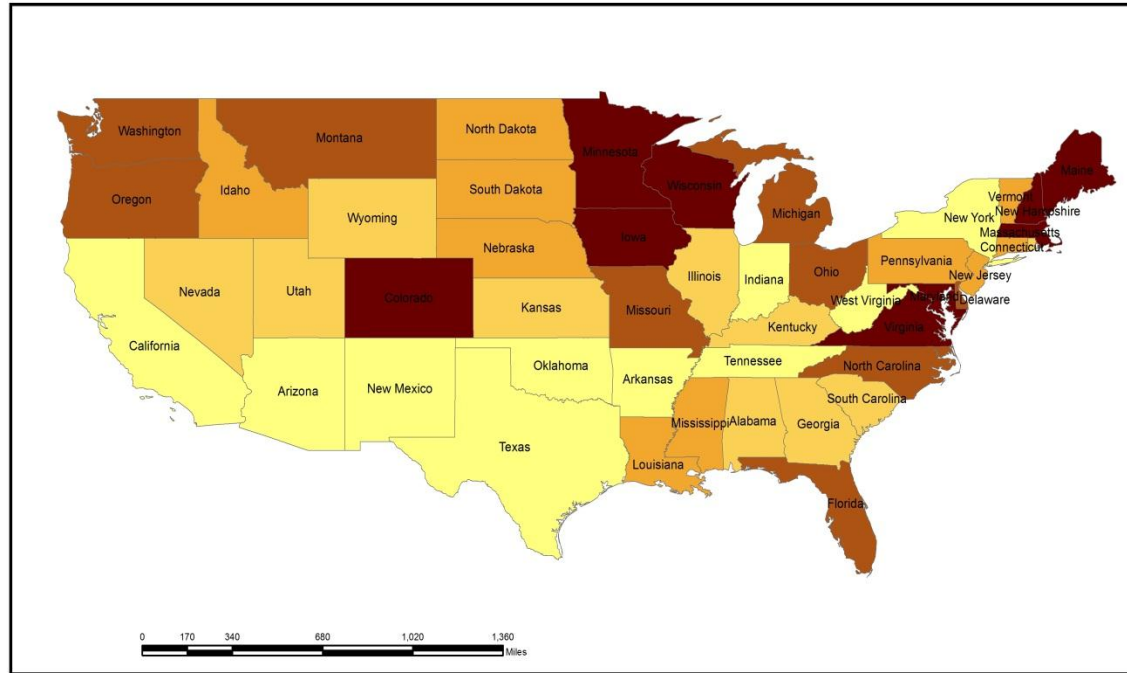
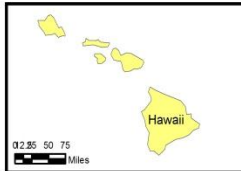
- 2012 U.S. General Eligible Turnout = **58.9%**
(United States Election Project)
- At **55.5%**, California's general eligible turnout rate is in the lowest 20% of U.S. states (United States Election Project)

U.S. Eligible Voter Turnout

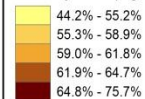
Alaska



Hawaii



Percent of eligible voters who voted by state (highest office)



2012 Eligible Voter Turnout: General Population United States

U.S. average 58.9%

Data source: 2012 Voter Turnout Rates
United States Elections Project
December 31, 2012

Map Created by Allison Ferrini, January 2013

2012 California Voter Registration Trends

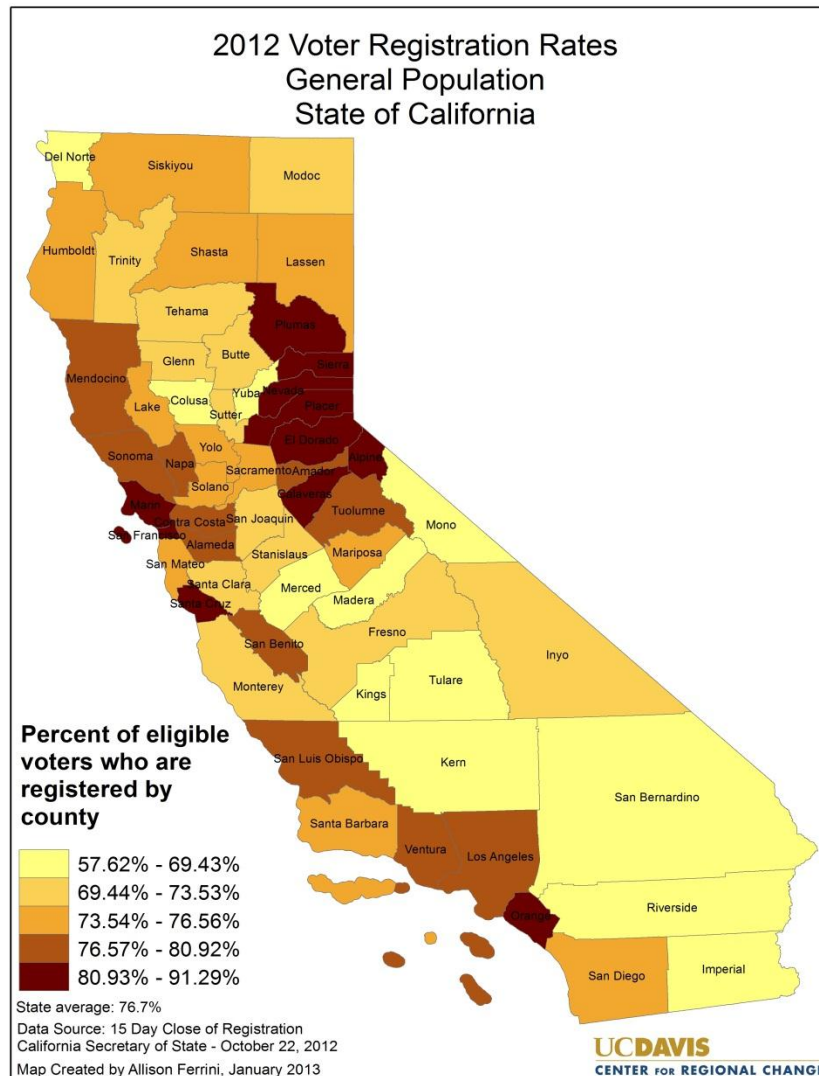
2002-2012 Voter Registration

- And growth over the last decade in the state's youth registered electorate also continued for the 2012 general election.
- Absolute numbers of registered youth have increased nearly 60% since the November 2002 general election.
- These increases have outpaced gains in the state's general registration.
- The youth percent of the 2012 electorate grew to 11.1%

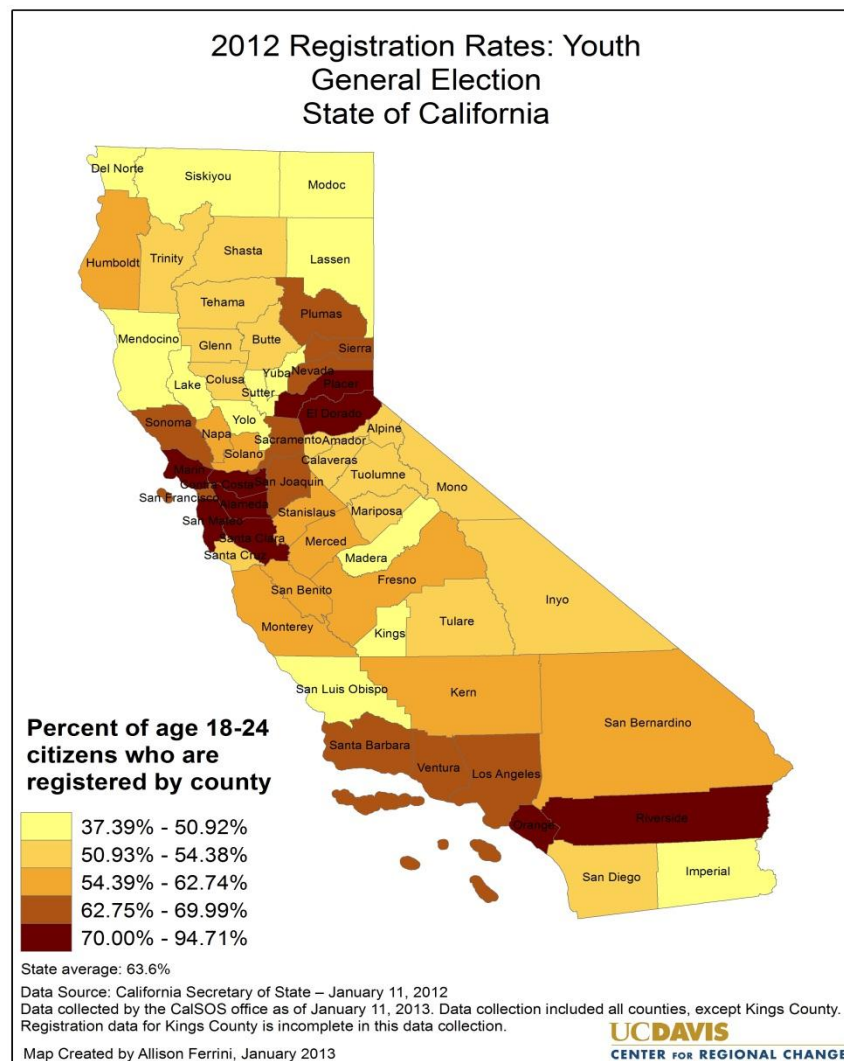
Dramatic geographic disparities in voter registration rates

- 2012 statewide general registration rate reached 76.7%
- 2012 statewide youth registration rate reached 66.6%.
- General registration rates range across counties
 - 34 percentage pts
- Youth registration rates range across counties
 - 57 percentage pts

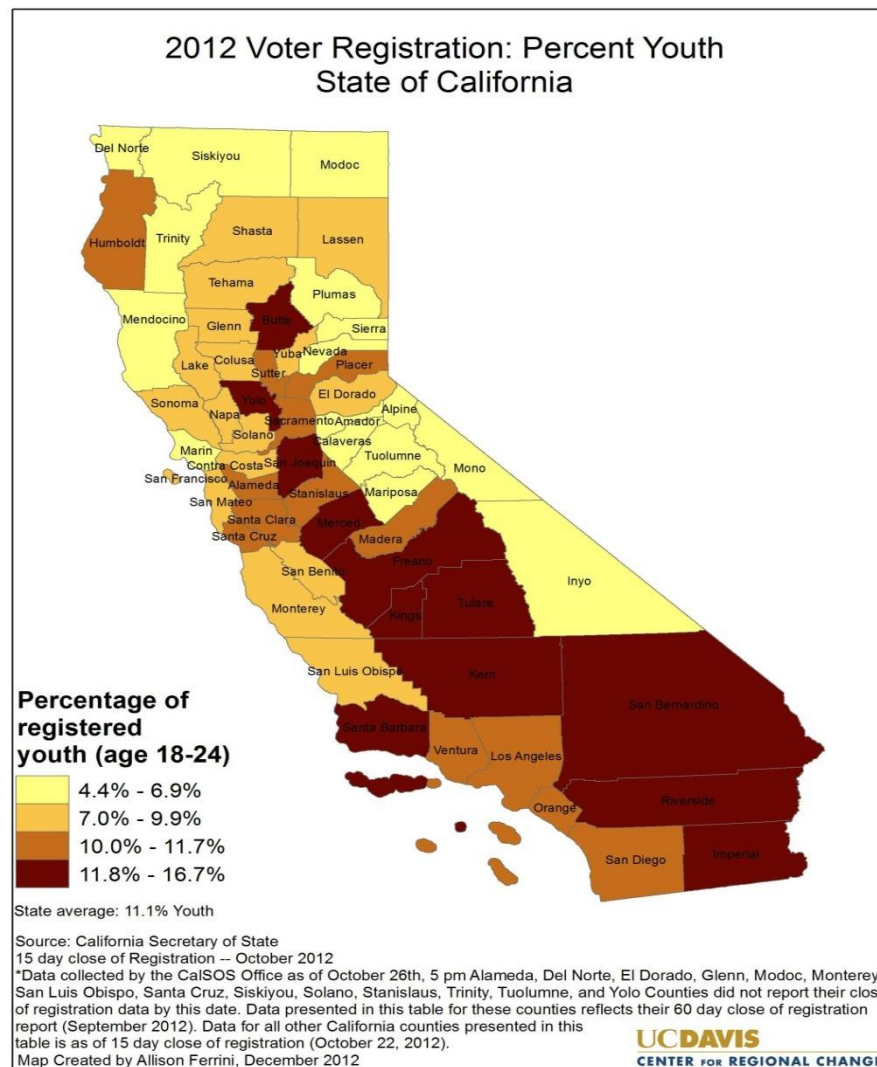
2012 Registration Rates – General Population



2012 Registration Rates – Youth

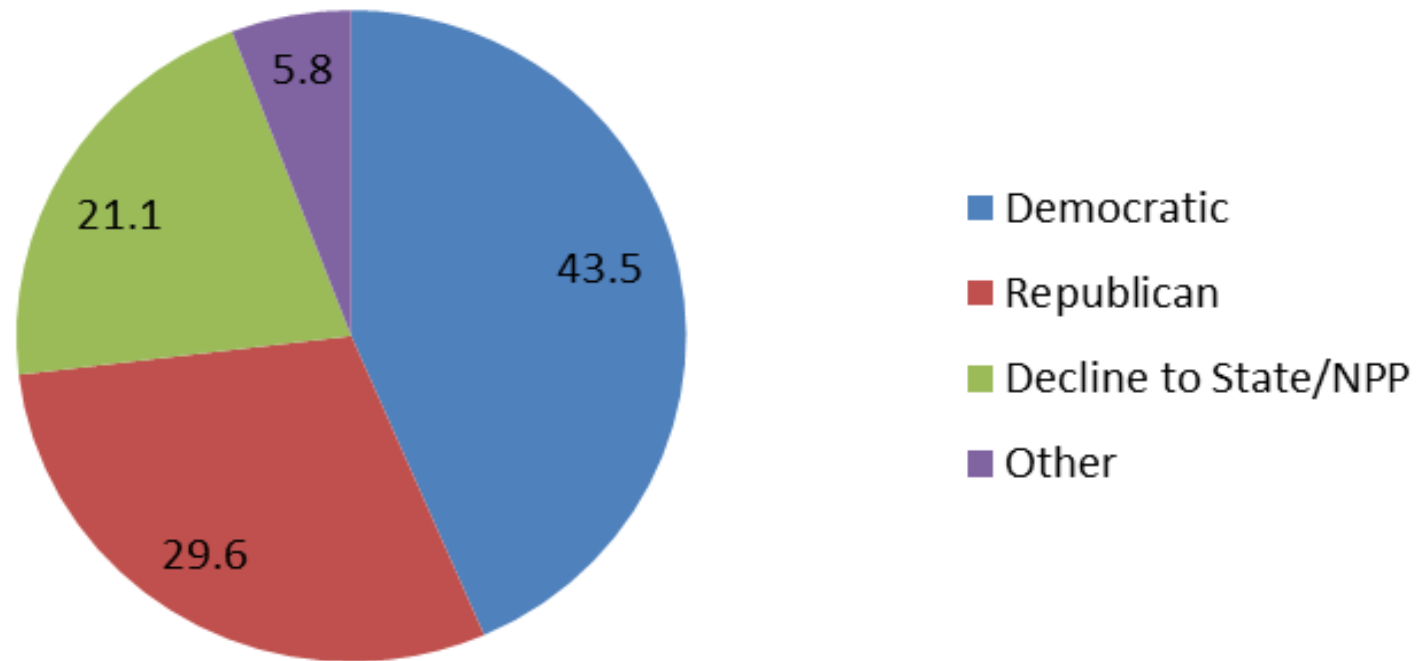


2012 Youth Percent of Registered Voters



How did the youth vote differ politically from the rest of the 2012 electorate?

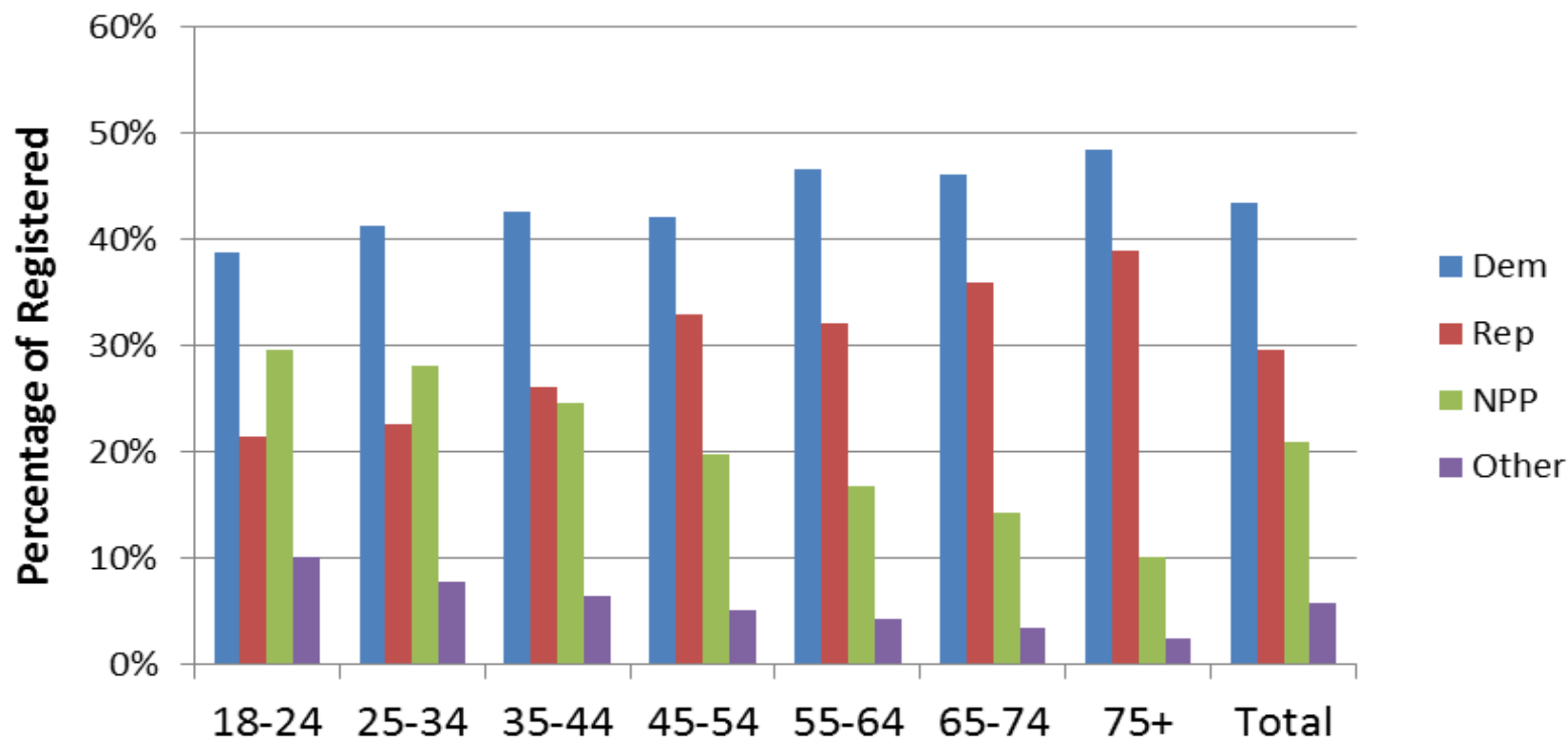
2012 California Voter Registration by Party: General Election



Data Source: California Secretary of State, October 2012
UC Davis California Civic Engagement Project - CCEP

How did the youth vote differ politically from the rest of the 2012 electorate?

2012 California Voter Registration by Age General Election



Youth Partisanship Varies Geographically

- Registered youth differ substantially across counties from the general electorate in their party identification.
- In 15 counties more youth register as “No Party Preference” than for either of the two leading parties.

What impact did online voter registration have on the make-up of the state's registered electorate?

Online registration increased general registration rates modestly.

Online registration contributed significantly to an increase in 2012 youth registrants.

With online registration, the youth percent of registered voters increased to 11.1% (would have been 10.5%).

Youth comprised 30% of online registrants.

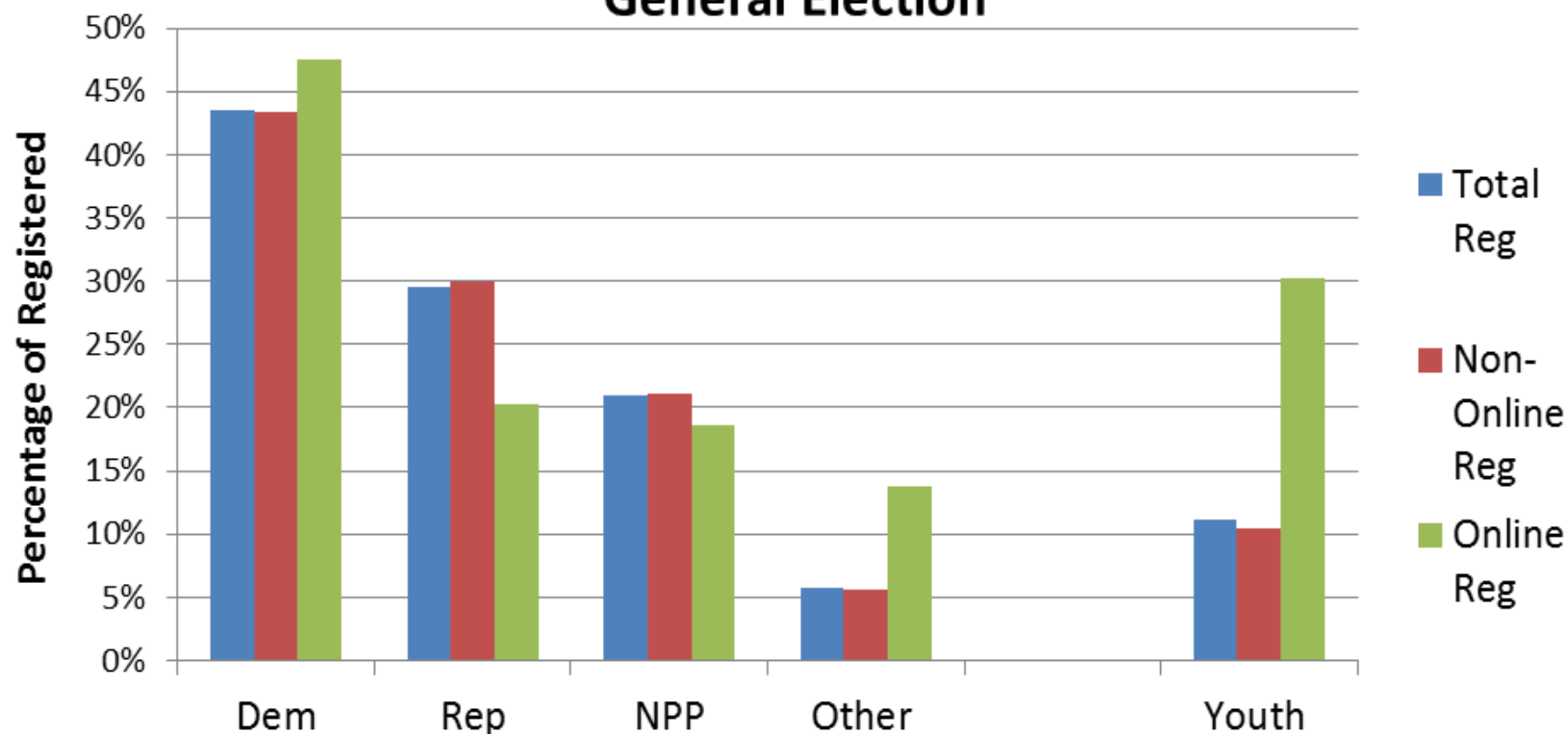
Half of those who registered after Sept 19 did so online

Post Sept 19th registration - 49.8% of general registrants and 49.5% of youth registrants registered online

—meaning that online became the dominant method of registration (versus all non-online methods) for Californians, once implemented.

2012 Youth Voter Registration and Party Affiliation

2012 California Voter Registration by Party General Election



2012 California Voter Turnout Trends

Dramatic geographic disparities in voter turnout rates

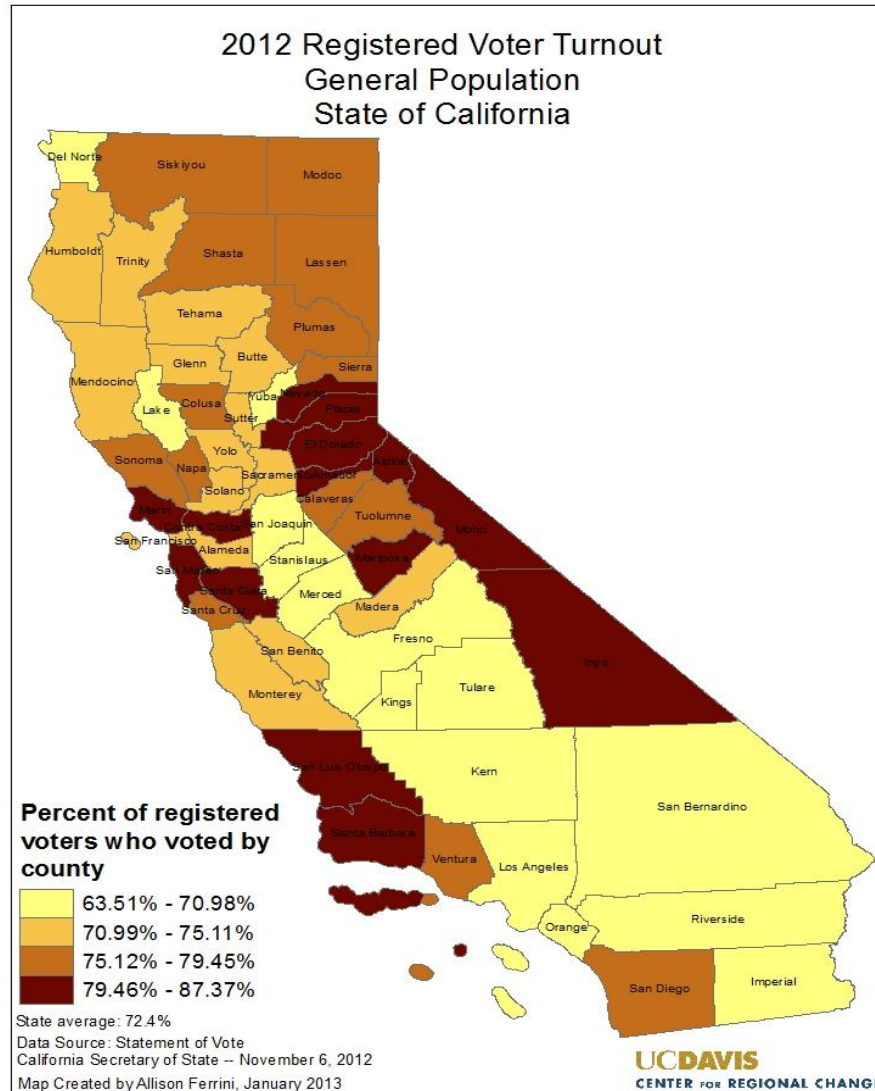
General Registered Voter Turnout – 72.4%

General Eligible Voter Turnout – 55.5%

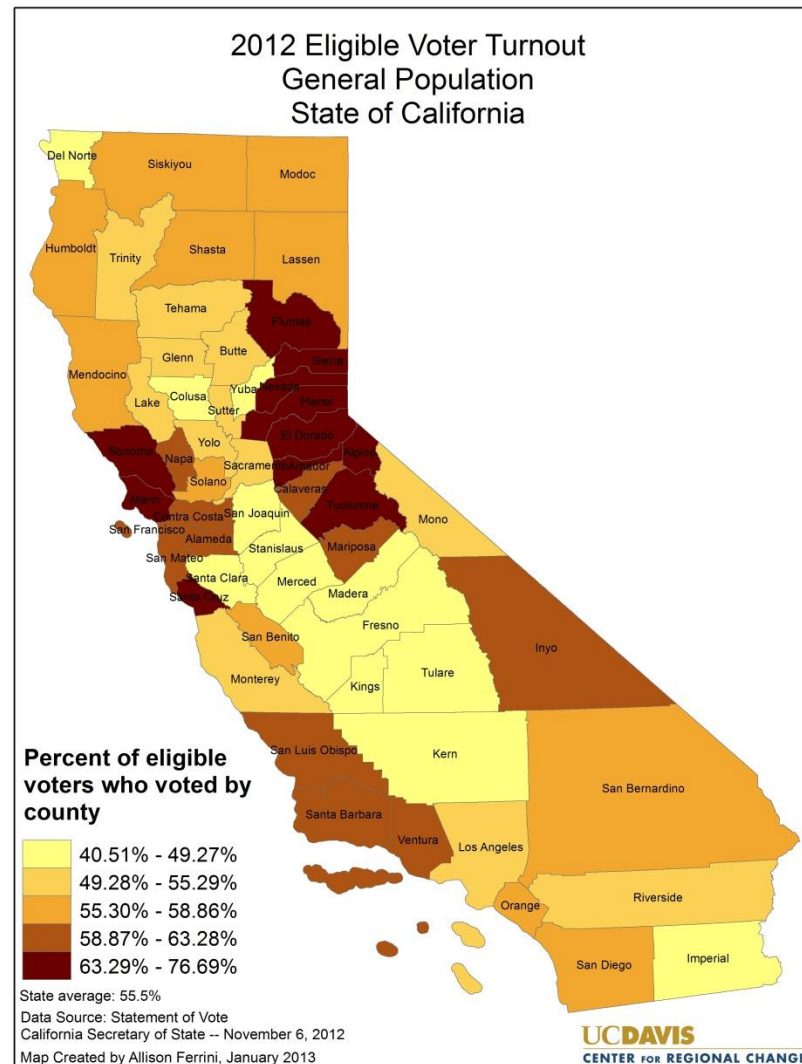
General *registered* turnout range across counties
– 24 percentage pts

General *eligible* turnout range across counties
– 36 percentage pts

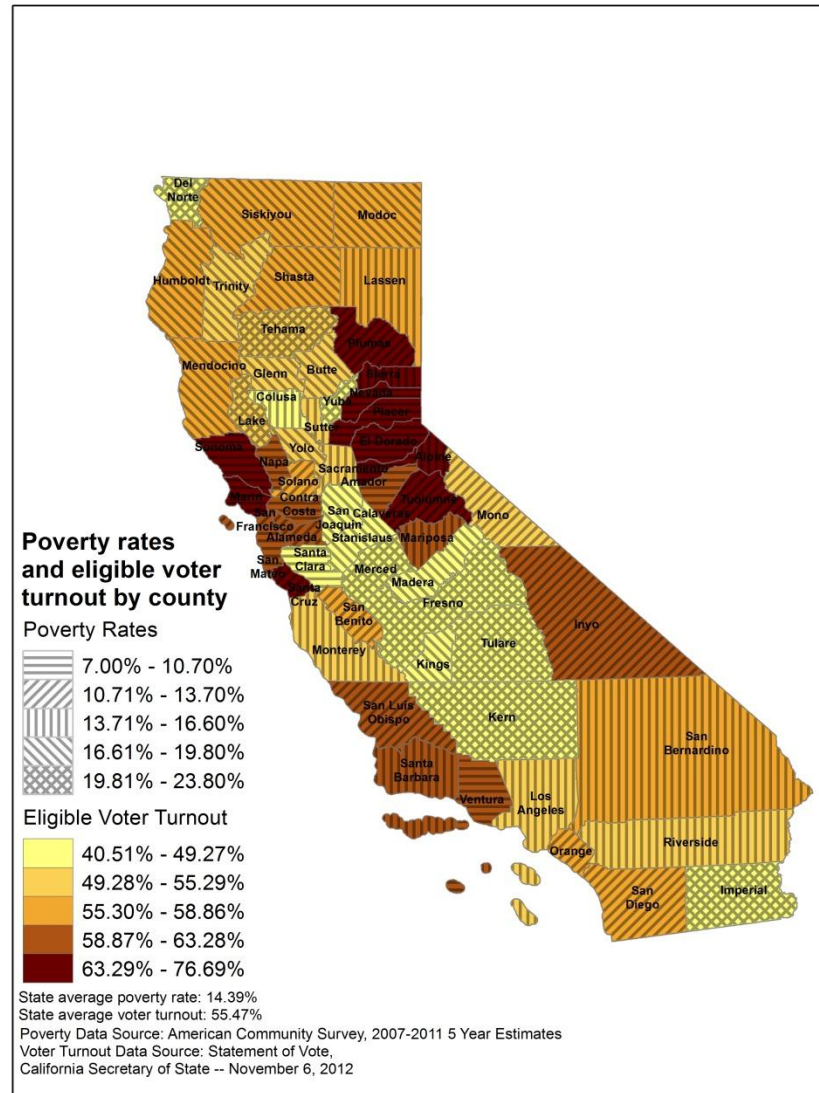
2012 Voter Turnout as Percentage of those Registered



2012 Voter Turnout as Percentage of those Eligible



Turnout and Outcomes: Poverty Rates



2012 California Youth Voter Turnout Trends

Youth turnout still lags dramatically

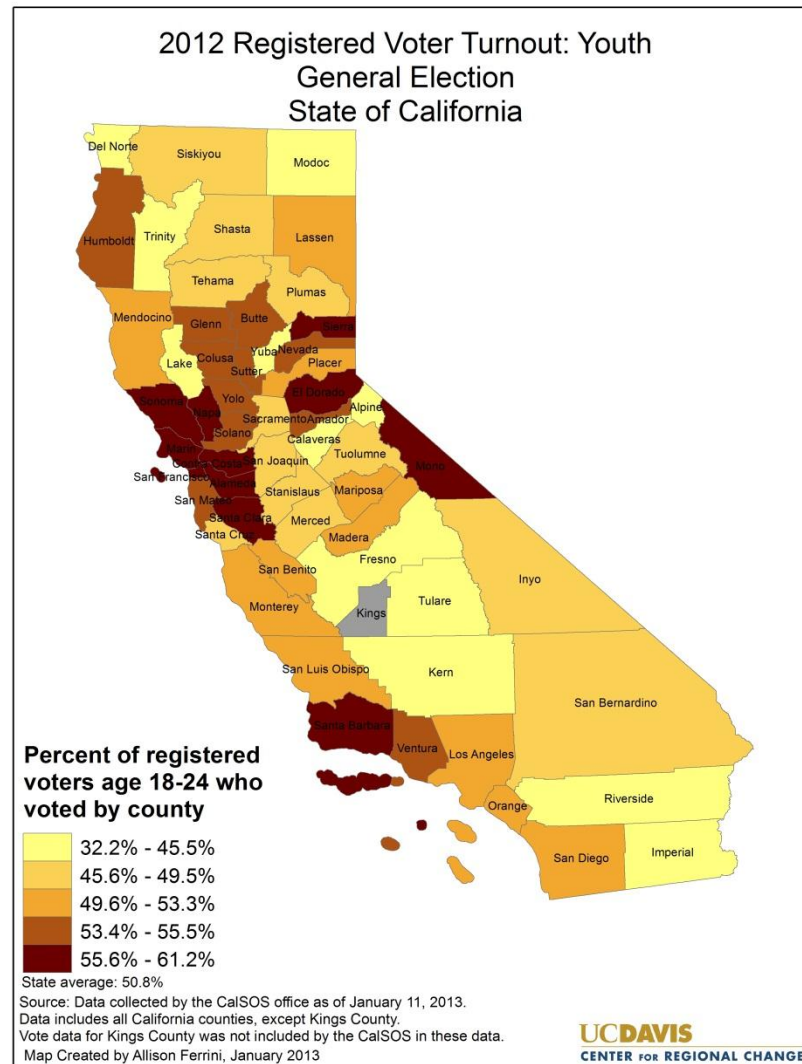
Youth Registered Voter Turnout – 50.8% (22 points lower than general registered turnout)

Youth Eligible Voter Turnout – 32.3% (23 points lower than general eligible turnout)

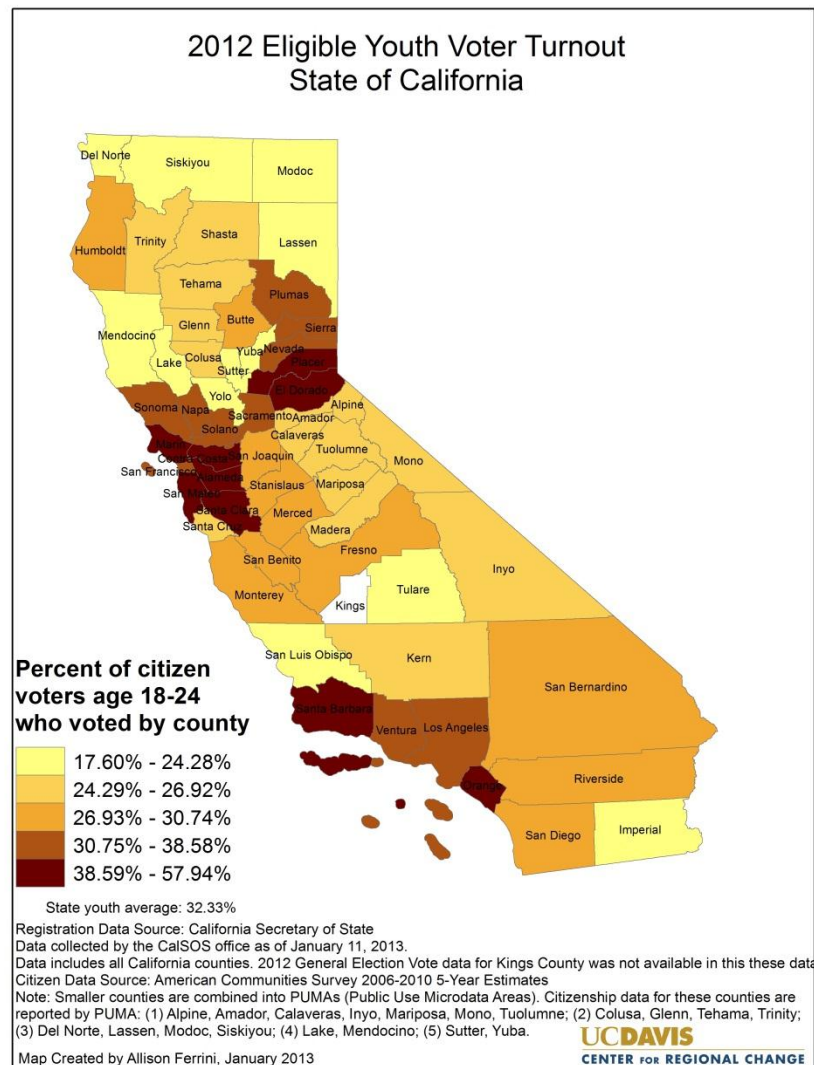
Youth registered turnout ranges across counties
– 29 percentage pts

Youth eligible turnout ranges across counties
– 40 percentage pts

2012 Youth Registered Voter Turnout

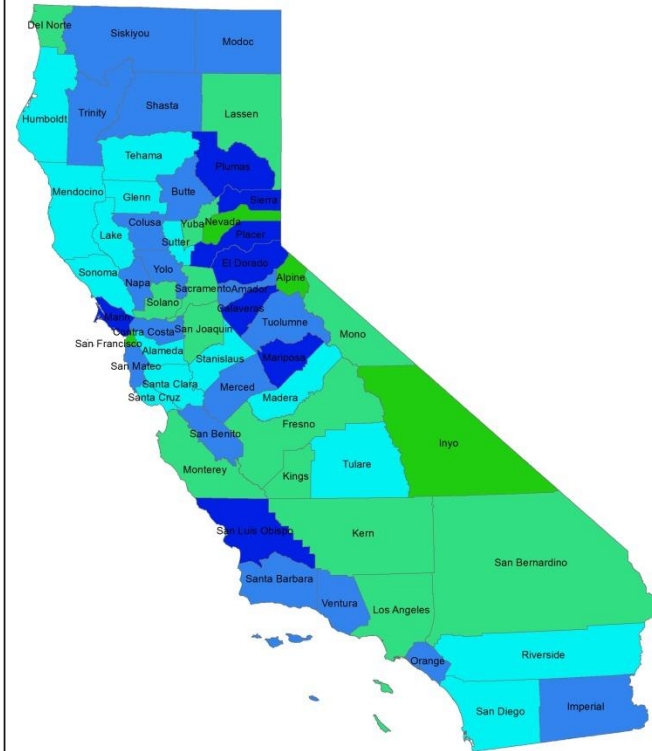


2012 Youth Eligible Voter Turnout

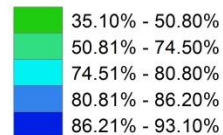


Turnout and Outcomes: Graduation Rates

2010-2011 High School Graduation Rates:
State of California



Percentage of student cohort
earning a high school degree



The state average is 75.3%.

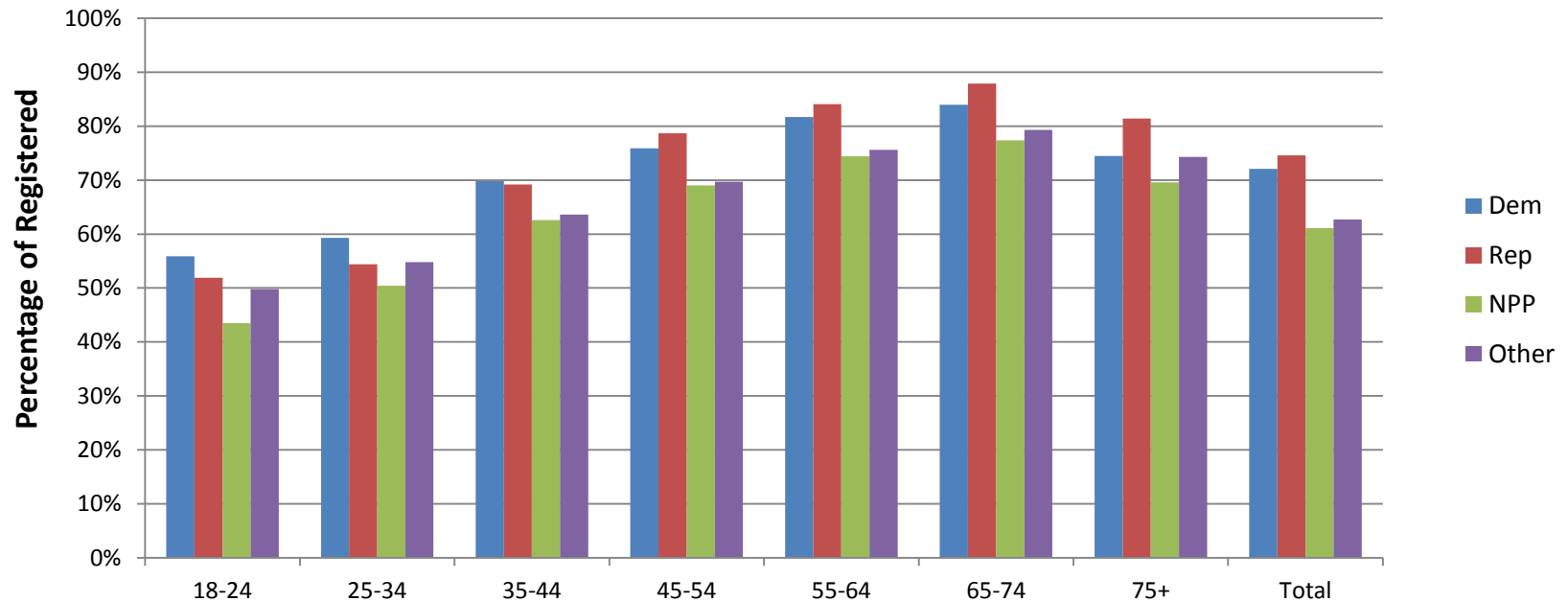
The four-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students in the 4-year adjusted cohort who graduate in four years or less with either a traditional high school diploma, an adult education high school diploma, or have passed the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE) by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for that graduating class.

Data Source: California Department of Education
Map Created by Teri Greenfield, October 2012

UC DAVIS
CENTER for REGIONAL CHANGE

2012 Youth Voter Turnout and Party Affiliation

2012 California Voter Turnout by Age and Party General Election



Data Source: California Secretary of State, 2012
UC Davis Center for Regional Change - CCEP

Voter Turnout Trends Among Online Registrants

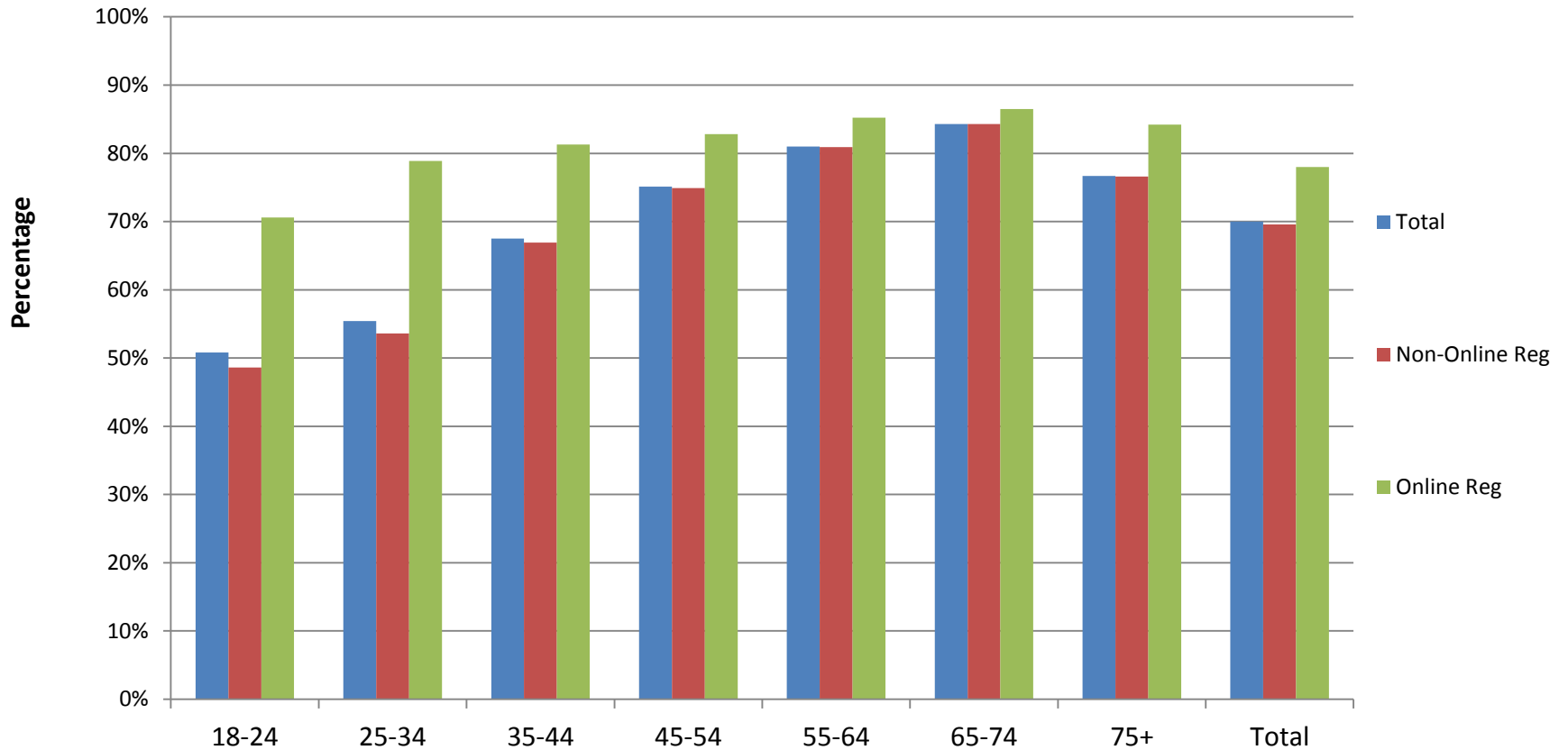
Did online registrants turnout to vote differently than the rest of the electorate?

Online registrants turned out to vote at higher levels than non-online registrants - 78%

Youth had the largest difference in turnout between those who registered online and those that didn't - 22 percentage pts.

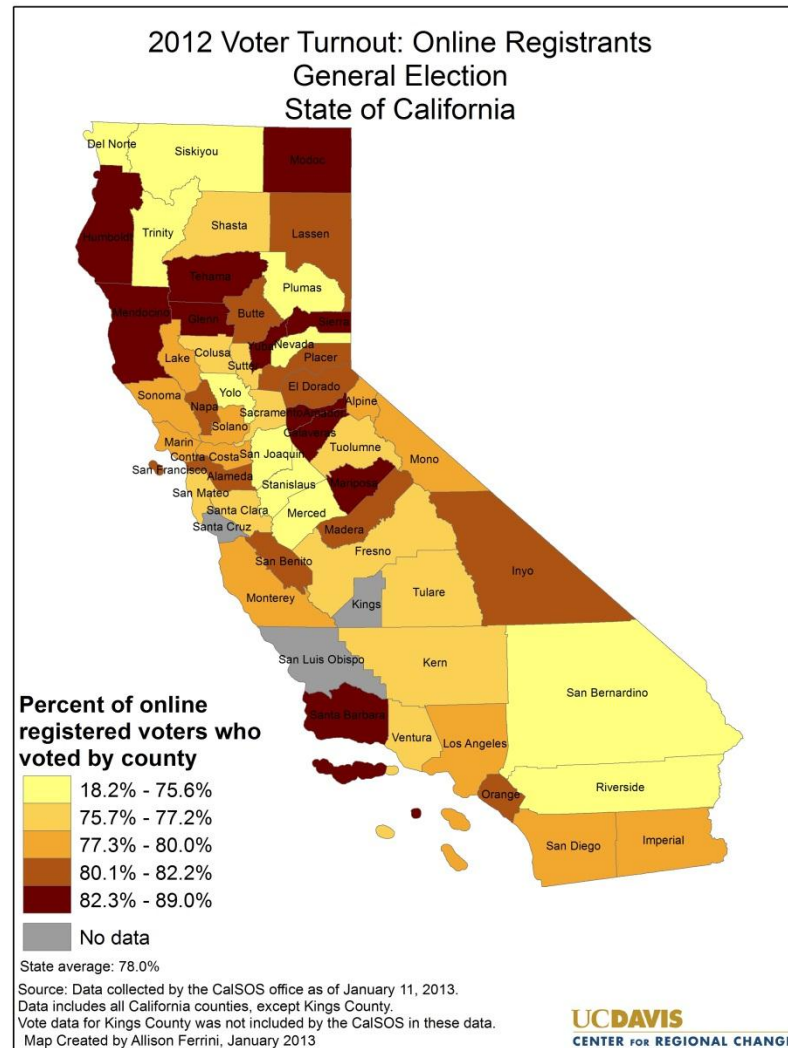
Turnout Among Online Registrants by County

2012 California Online Registered Voter Turnout by Age General Election



Data Source: California Secretary of State, 2012
UC Davis Center for Regional Change - CCEP

Online Voter Turnout by County



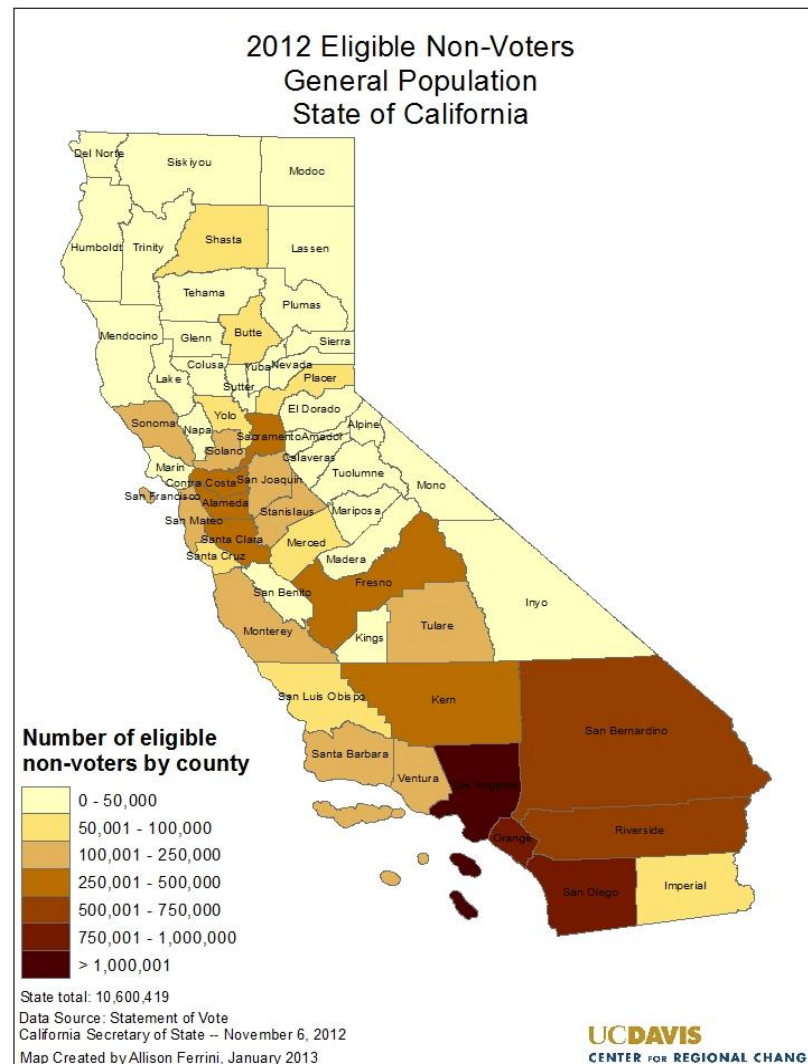
Where are the eligible non-voters?

Large eligible population that does not vote – in the state and across its counties.

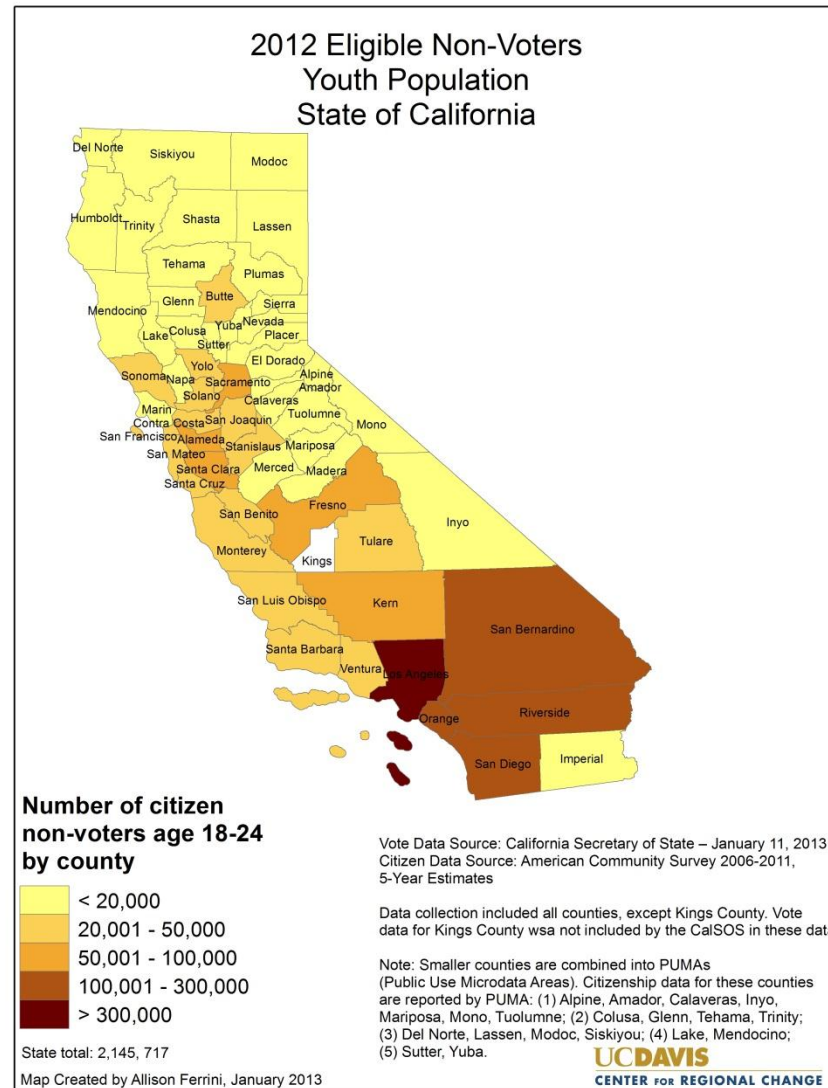
In 2012 – Almost half (44.5%) of the general eligible population did not vote.

- More than two-thirds (68%) of the eligible youth population did not vote = 2.1 million

2012 General Eligible Non-Voter Population



2012 Youth Eligible Non-Voter Population



Opportunities to Expand the Electorate

Can institutional change strategies make a difference?

- The shift to online registration did appear to encourage young adult electoral participation.
- What other institutional change strategies can encourage other young adults to vote?

What about high school-based registration?

- A 2010 League of Women Voters action-research project yielded a useful “best practices” manual entitled “Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow”
- Yet LWV volunteers were only allowed to organize registration visits in less than half of the high schools contacted...
- LWV volunteers collected registration forms from only one third of students encountered in their classroom visits (they did not encourage 17-year-olds to preregister)

Lessons from volunteer experiences?

- Few high school authorities have prioritized registering their students
- In 2011-12, many stakeholders thought that 17-year-old pre-registration was blocked until the statewide voter database is completed
- Yet pre-registration is already legal. AB 30's first line reads: "Existing law authorizes a person who will be 18 years of age at the time of the next election to register to vote by executing an affidavit of registration."
- Current implementation of 17-year-old preregistration is ad hoc and varies widely by county.

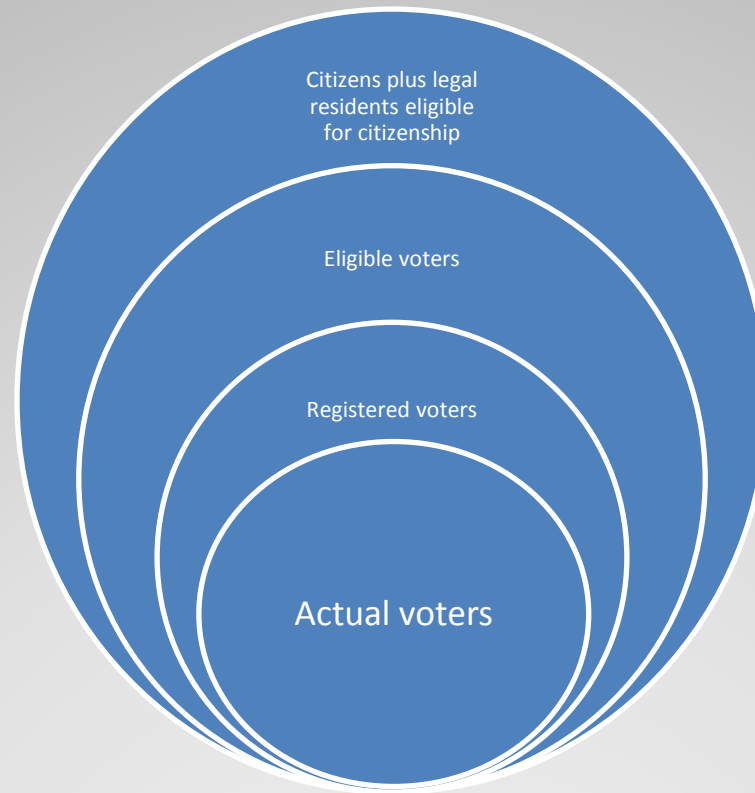
Preliminary findings from field research on school-based voting

- 2012 classroom research in Santa Clara and Monterey counties found that many Government classes do not teach students how or why to vote
- Few HS principals actively promote student registration
- Student governments can play an important role, though continuity is a challenge
- Only some county election authorities dedicate staff to young adult voter outreach

Rethinking school-based registration:

- Responsibility for school-based voter registration falls between the cracks
- Whose job should it be?
- What kinds of partnerships would be most effective?
- Which institutional entry points would be most effective at encouraging such partnerships?

Visualizing the actual vs potential electorate



Today's maps show that the relative sizes of these circles vary greatly by county....

Thank you

Discussion