Unpacking California Voter Registration and Turnout Trends: Youth Representation in California’s Electorate

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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
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

2012 Eligible Voter Turnout: General Population
United States

U.S. average 58.6%

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 Voter Registration Rates
General Population
State of California

Percent of eligible voters who are registered by county:
- 57.62% - 69.43%
- 69.44% - 73.53%
- 73.54% - 76.56%
- 76.57% - 80.92%
- 80.93% - 91.29%

State average: 76.7%
Data Source: 15 Day Close of Registration
California Secretary of State - October 22, 2012
Map Created by Allison Ferrini, January 2013
2012 Youth Percent of Registered Voters

2012 Voter Registration: Percent Youth
State of California

Percentage of registered youth (age 18-24)
- 4.4% - 6.9%
- 7.0% - 9.9%
- 10.0% - 11.7%
- 11.8% - 16.7%

State average: 11.1% Youth

Source: California Secretary of State
15 day close of Registration – October 2012
*Data collected by the CalSOS Office as of October 26th, 5 pm Alameda, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Modoc, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Siskiyou, Solano, Stanislaus, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Yolo Counties did not report their close of registration data by this date. Data presented in this table for these counties reflects their 60 day close of registration report (September 2012). Data for all other California counties presented in this table is as of 15 day close of registration (October 22, 2012).
Map Created by Allison Ferrini, December 2012
How did the youth vote differ politically from the rest of the 2012 electorate?

2012 California Voter Registration by Party: General Election

- Democratic: 43.5%
- Republican: 29.6%
- Decline to State/NPP: 21.1%
- Other: 5.8%

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

Data Source: California Secretary of State, October 2012
UC Davis Center for Regional Change - CCEP
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. 19\textsuperscript{th} 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 California Voter Registration by Party General Election

Data Source: California Secretary of State, October 2012
UC Davis Center for Regional Change - CCEP
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 Registered Voter Turnout
General Population
State of California

Percent of registered voters who voted by county:
- 63.51% - 70.98%
- 70.99% - 75.11%
- 75.12% - 79.45%
- 79.46% - 87.37%

State average: 72.4%

Data Source: Statement of Vote
California Secretary of State — November 6, 2012
Map Created by Allison Ferini, January 2013
2012 Voter Turnout as Percentage of those Eligible

2012 Eligible Voter Turnout
General Population
State of California

Percent of eligible voters who voted by county:
- 40.51% - 49.27%
- 49.28% - 55.29%
- 55.30% - 58.86%
- 58.87% - 63.28%
- 63.29% - 76.66%

State average: 59.5%
Data Source: Statement of Vote
California Secretary of State — November 6, 2012
Map Created by Allison Ferrini, January 2013
Turnout and Outcomes: Poverty Rates

Poverty rates and eligible voter turnout by county

Poverty Rates
- 7.00% - 10.70%
- 10.71% - 13.70%
- 13.71% - 16.60%
- 16.61% - 19.80%
- 19.81% - 23.80%

Eligible Voter Turnout
- 40.51% - 49.27%
- 49.28% - 55.29%
- 55.30% - 58.86%
- 58.87% - 63.28%
- 63.29% - 76.69%

State average poverty rate: 14.39%
State average voter turnout: 55.47%

Poverty Data Source: American Community Survey, 2007-2011 5 Year Estimates
Voter Turnout Data Source: Statement of Vote
California Secretary of State -- November 6, 2012
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 Registered Voter Turnout: Youth General Election State of California

Percent of registered voters age 18-24 who voted by county:
- 32.2% - 45.5%
- 45.6% - 49.5%
- 49.6% - 53.3%
- 53.4% - 55.5%
- 55.6% - 61.2%

State average: 50.8%

Source: Data collected by the CalSOS office as of January 11, 2013.
Data includes all California counties, except Kings County.
Vote data for Kings County was not included by the CalSOS in these data.
Map Created by Allison Ferrini, January 2013
2012 Youth Eligible Voter Turnout

2012 Eligible Youth Voter Turnout State of California

Percent of citizen voters age 18-24 who voted by county

- 17.60% - 24.28%
- 24.29% - 26.92%
- 26.93% - 30.74%
- 30.75% - 38.58%
- 38.59% - 57.94%

State youth average: 32.33%

Registration Data Source: California Secretary of State
Data collected by the CalSSS office as of January 11, 2013.
Data includes all California counties. 2012 General Election Vote data for Kings County was not available in this these data.
Citizen Data Source: American Communities Survey 2006-2010 5-Year Estimates.
Note: Smaller counties are combined into PUMAs (Public Use Microdata Areas). Citizenship data for these counties are reported by PUMA: (1) Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, Tuolumne; (2) Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, Trinity; (3) Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Siskiyou; (4) Lake, Mendocino; (5) Sutter, Yuba.

Map Created by Allison Ferrini, January 2013
Turnout and Outcomes: Graduation Rates

2010-2011 High School Graduation Rates:
State of California

Percentage of student cohort earning a high school degree

- 35.10% - 50.80%
- 50.81% - 74.50%
- 74.51% - 80.80%
- 80.81% - 86.20%
- 86.21% - 93.10%

The state average is 76.9%.

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 Ten Greenfield, October 2012
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

2012 Voter Turnout: Online Registrants
General Election
State of California

Percent of online registered voters who voted by county:
- 18.2% - 75.6%
- 75.7% - 77.2%
- 77.3% - 80.0%
- 80.1% - 82.2%
- 82.3% - 89.0%

State average: 78.0%

Source: Data collected by the CalSOS office as of January 11, 2013.
Data includes all California counties, except Kings County.
Vote data for Kings County was not included by the CalSOS in these data.
Map Created by Allison Fenni, January 2013
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

Number of citizen non-voters age 18-24 by county

Vote Data Source: California Secretary of State – January 11, 2013
Citizen Data Source: American Community Survey 2008-2011, 5-Year Estimates

Data collection included all counties, except Kings County. Vote data for King County was not included by the CalSOS in these data.

Note: Smaller counties are combined into PUMAs (Public Use Microdata Areas). Citizenship data for these counties are reported by PUMA: (1) Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, Tuolumne; (2) Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, Trinity; (3) Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Siskiyou; (4) Lake, Mendocino, Sutter, Yuba.

Map Created by Allison Ferrini, January 2013
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

Citizens plus legal residents eligible for citizenship
Eligible voters
Registered voters
Actual voters

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