

# California's 2020 Primary Election: Turnout Analysis

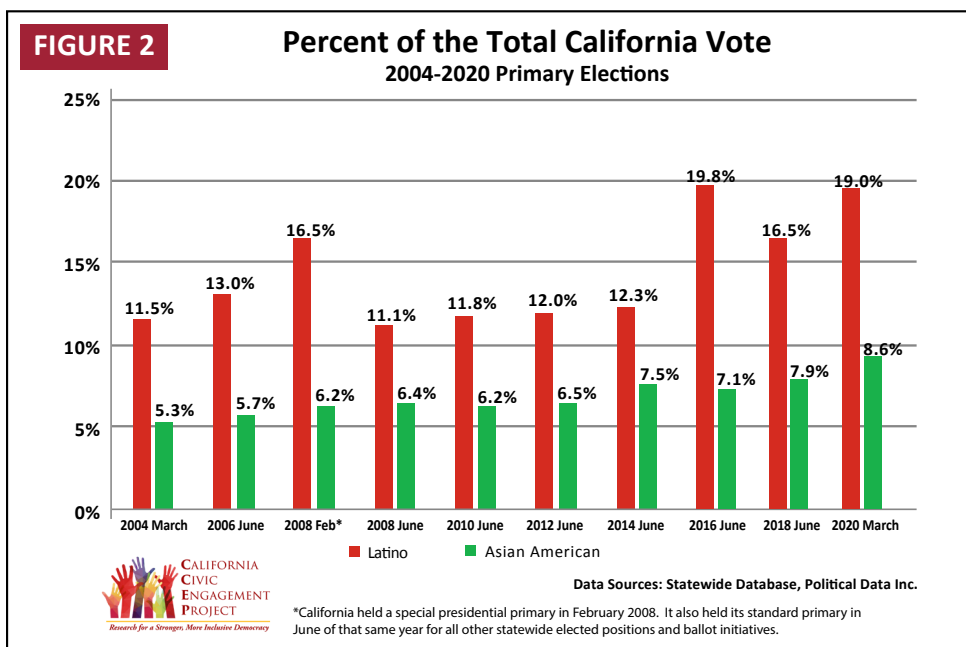
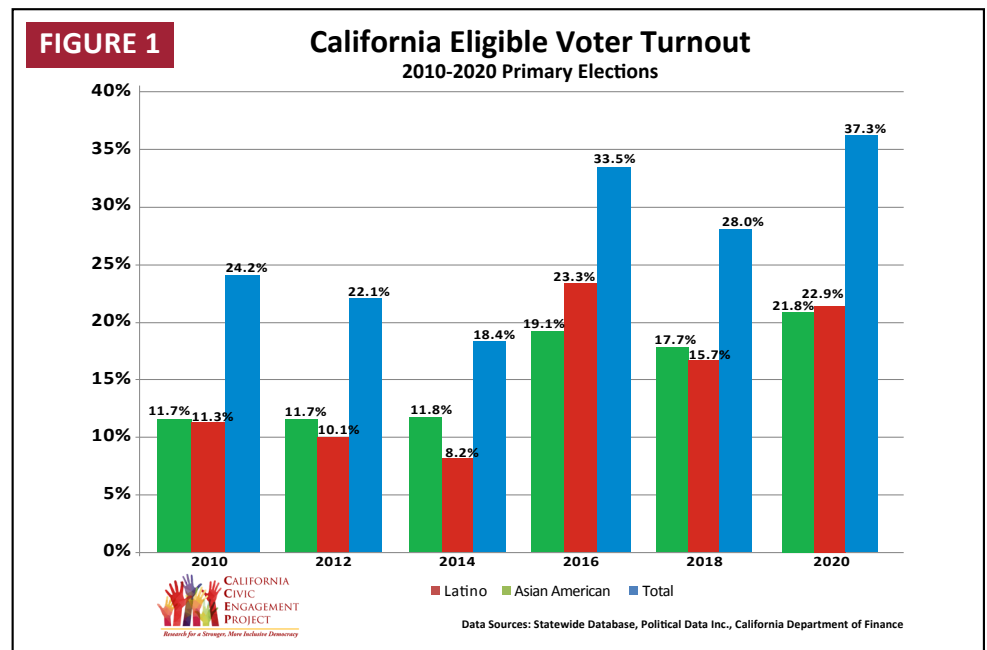


In 2020, California moved its presidential primary from June to March. The timing meant California voters could help select the Democratic nominee before the national primary race ceased to be competitive. Many analysts and voter advocacy groups hoped the timing and competitiveness of the election would help turnout California voters who usually do not take part in primaries, making the voting electorate more representative of the California population.

This fact sheet provides an overview of California voter turnout in the March 2020 Primary Election based on CCEP analysis of voter data from Political Data, Inc.

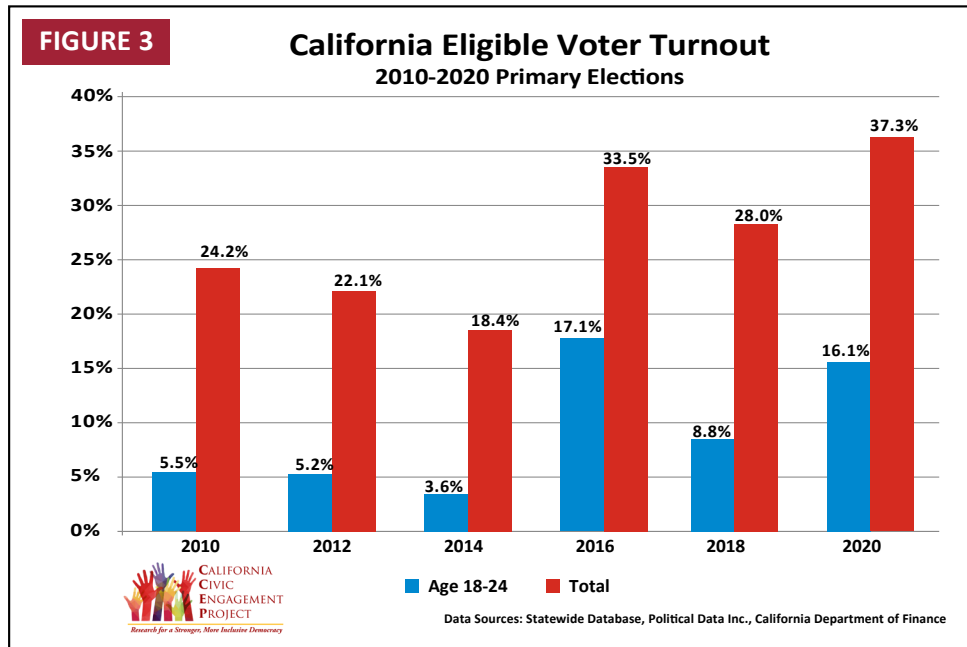
## California Presidential Primary Turnout: Race and Ethnicity

- Total eligible turnout (the percentage of adult citizens who voted) was 37.3%, up nearly 4 percentage points from the 2016 presidential primary.<sup>1</sup>
- Turnout of eligible Latino voters in California was 22.9%, down slightly from 2016 by about half a percentage point.<sup>2</sup>
- Asian-American turnout was 21.8%, up by nearly three percentage points.
- Turnout of all eligible voters who are not Latino or Asian American increased substantially from 42.5% to 49.5%.<sup>3</sup>
- The disparity in eligible turnout rates among voter groups grew from the 2016 to 2020 primaries.



- Lower turnout for Latinos and Asian Americans leads to their underrepresentation among those casting a ballot compared to their proportions of the overall population eligible to vote.
- Latinos comprise 30.9% of the state's eligible voter population, but only 19% cast primary ballots, a decrease from 19.8% in the 2016 primary.
- Asian Americans make up 14.6% of eligible voters and were a larger share of those casting ballots in the 2020 primary, 8.6% versus their share of 7.1% in 2016.
- Turnout of eligible voters who are not Latino or Asian American comprised 72.4% of those casting a ballot in the primary while they make up only 54.4% of all eligible voters.

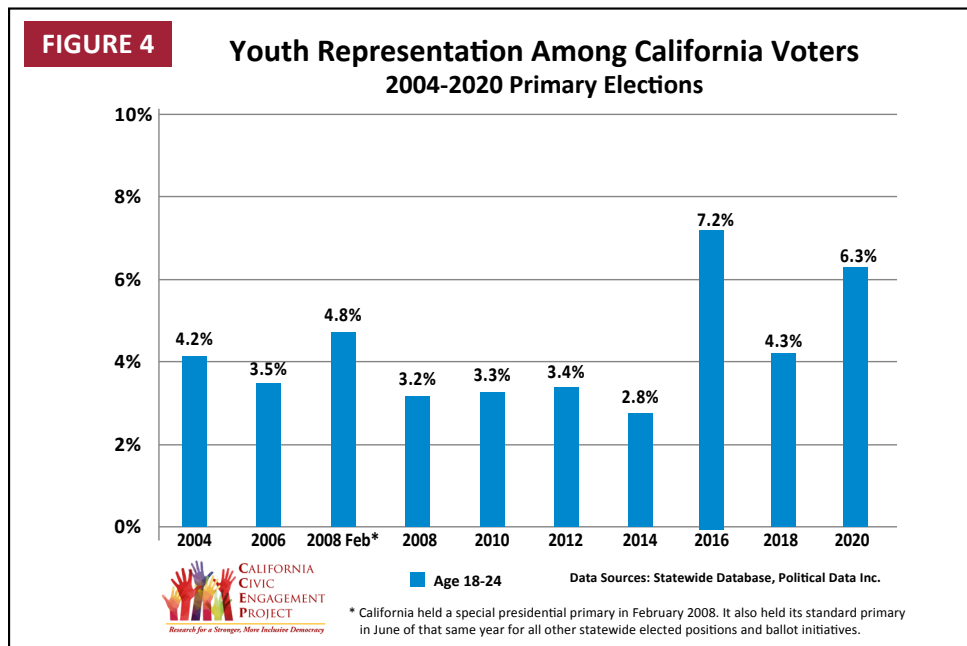
## California Youth Presidential Primary Turnout



- Voter turnout of youth continues to be much lower than turnout of the total population eligible to vote.
- Eligible voter turnout of those aged 18-24 was 16.1%, down from 17.1% in the 2016 primary.
- In comparison, turnout of eligible voters age 65 and over was 56.2% in the 2020 primary.
- Youth made up 14.5% of the population eligible to vote, but only 6.3% of those who actually voted, down from 7.2% in the 2016 primary.
- Youth remain significantly underrepresented at the ballot box.

### Registration Rates: 2020 Primary

A key factor in low eligible voter turnout of Latino and Asian Americans is low registration rates (percent registered of adult citizens). Historically, registration rates for California Latinos and Asian Americans have run at levels much lower than that of the general population. This is still true in 2020. In our analysis, the general population registration rate for the primary was 79.4%.<sup>4</sup> The Latino registration rate was more than 12 percentage points lower at 67.0% and the Asian-American rate was lower still, at 53.9%. In contrast, the registration rate of those not Latino and not Asian American was 93.3%. The registration rate for youth (age 18-24) was 51.7%.



### Summary

Latinos and youth did not see the increase in eligible turnout that many analysts and advocates had expected. Our analysis shows that the overall turnout increase California saw in the 2020 primary was driven by older voters who are not Latino or Asian American. Once again, Californians will be voting on a slate of candidates and issues this November that were selected by a voting electorate that does not fully represent them.

### About the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP)

The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy in Sacramento. The CCEP conducts research to inform policy and on-the-ground efforts for a more engaged and representative democracy, improving the social and economic quality of life in communities. The CCEP is engaging in pioneering research to identify disparities in civic participation across place and population. Its research informs and empowers a wide range of policy and organizing efforts aimed at reducing disparities in state and regional patterns of well-being and opportunity. To learn about the CCEP, visit our website at <https://ccep.usc.edu>

1. The California Secretary of State reports the official state eligible voter turnout in the 2020 primary at 38.4%.
2. Latinos and Asian Americans are distinguished in the voter data from the general population by a Spanish and Asian-American surname analysis which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish and Asian surnames.
3. A breakdown of voter data specifically for whites and African Americans is not available. This population is 84% white in California.
4. The official state registration rate reported by the California Secretary of State as of February 18, 2020 was 81.8%.

Data sources: Statewide Database, Political Data, Inc., California Department of Finance.

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