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**Voter Registration in California: 2020 General Election
December 2021**



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About the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID)

Celebrating its 10-year anniversary this year, the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID), formerly known as the California Civic Engagement Project, is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy and is based in Sacramento. CID conducts a range of national and multi-state research initiatives exploring voting behavior, civic engagement, electoral and economic research, the intersection of social justice and democracy, and more. Its non-partisan research informs and empowers a wide range of policy and organizing efforts aimed at eliminating disparities in social and economic well-being. To learn more about CID's research, visit: cid.usc.edu.

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Executive Summary

The Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) at the University of Southern California conducted a statewide analysis of voter registration, CVR, and provisional ballot use rates in the the 2020 general election.

The 2020 general election was the second election in which conditional voter registration (CVR), also commonly known as same-day registration, was available at all in-person voting locations in California, providing additional opportunities for voters to participate in the election. In addition to CVR, provisional ballots continued to be available at all California voting sites. Provisional ballots enable voters to cast a ballot when their registration status cannot be confirmed at the vote center or polling place. After a review process, the ballot is counted if the election officials find the voter is registered to vote and has not already voted.

1. Voter Registration

Highest registration rate in 80 years

In the 2020 general election, almost 87.9% of eligible voters (adult citizens) were registered to vote in California, the highest registration rate in 80 years, according to the California Secretary of State's office. The state's registration rate increased by almost 10 percentage points from the 2016 general election (78.0%). Some California demographic groups, however, did not experience the same growth in registration rates as seen in the general population. Asian Americans, Latinos, and young voters aged 18 to 24 experienced a smaller increase in registration rates between the 2016 and 2020 general elections.

Asian Americans, Latinos, and young voters were underrepresented in the electorate

Some California demographic groups were underrepresented in their share of registered voters compared to their share of the eligible voter population. In the 2020 general election, Asian Americans were 14.6% of the eligible voter population and 10.4% of the registered voter population, a representation gap of 4.2 percentage points. Latino voters were 30.9% of the eligible voter population but only 26.7% of registered voters – also a 4.2 percentage-point gap. Young voters aged 18 to 24 were 14.5% of the eligible voter population and 11.7% of registered voters, a gap of 2.8 percentage points.

2. Conditional Voter Registration

CVR use varied by demographic group

One percent of all voters in the 2020 general election used conditional voter registration, a more than three-fold increase from the 2018 general election (0.3%). CVR use varied by demographic group. Asian-American (1.1%), Latino (1.5%), youth (3.0%), and new (10.5%) voters, used CVR at higher rates than the general population. Additionally, young voters used CVR at higher rates than older voters, and foreign-born voters used CVR at higher rates than U.S.-born voters. Registered Republicans used CVR at higher rates than voters registered Democratic, while No Party Preference voters had the highest CVR use rate among the party affiliations.

3. Provisional Ballots

Provisional ballot use was relatively low, but was higher in certain demographic groups

Around 0.3% of ballots cast and counted in the 2020 general election were cast with provisional ballots, notably lower than provisional ballot use in the 2018 general election (6.7% of all ballots cast and counted). This large decrease coincides with the expansion of CVR to all voting locations in the state in the 2020 election cycle. In the 2020 general election, Latino voters (0.5%), new voters (0.8%), young voters (0.5%), and previous polling place voters (0.5%) used provisional ballots at higher rates than the general population. Registered Democrats (0.2%) used provisional ballots at lower rates than registered Republican voters (0.4%) and No Party Preference voters (0.4%).

Summary

In the 2020 general election, California voter registration rates were the highest in 80 years, with over 22 million voters registered. While registration rates increased by almost 10 percentage points since the 2016 general election, some demographic groups did not experience the same growth. Asian-American, Latino, and young voters aged 18 to 24 experienced slower registration rate growth compared to the general population. Additionally, these groups were underrepresented in their share of the registered voter population when compared to their share of the eligible voter population.

After the expansion of conditional voter registration to all voting locations throughout the state, CVR use rates increased from 0.3% of all ballots cast and counted in the 2018 general election to 1.0% in the 2020 general election. In contrast, provisional ballot use decreased from 6.7% of all ballots in the 2018 general election to only 0.3% in the 2020 general election.

CVR use was higher among some demographic groups than the general population, including Asian-American, Latino, and youth voters who also experienced slower growth in their registration rates. Provisional ballot use was higher among Latinos, new voters, young voters, and previous polling place voters than the general population.

Introduction

In 2020, a record number of Californians were registered to vote heading into the general election. The November 2020 election was the first in which conditional voter registration, also known as same day registration, was available at all voting locations in California. Previously only available in some counties and voting locations, California expanded conditional voter registration to all counties and voting locations in 2019. Conditional voter registration and provisional ballots are viewed as a safety net by providing voters opportunities to register to vote or update their registration after the registration window has closed, or to cast a provisional ballot when the voter's registration status is in question.

Given the expansion of conditional voter registration across all California counties and voting locations, policymakers and voting advocates have questioned how this expansion impacts registration rates, the demographic makeup of registered voters, and provisional ballot use compared to previous elections. In order to address these questions, CID conducted a statewide analysis of voters' behavior in the 2020 general election through an examination of California voter records. This report is the second in a series presenting findings from our analysis. It addresses the following related topics:

1. Voter registration rates
2. Conditional voter registration rates
3. Provisional ballot use

In each of the following sections of this report, we present findings on registration rates, conditional voter registration rates, and provisional ballot use broken out by race, ethnicity, age group, gender, nativity, party affiliation, new voters, and previous voting method.

Study Methodology

The data for this analysis were acquired from the California Secretary of State (VoteCal voter database system) and Political Data, Inc. (PDI).¹ The VoteCal data provided the registrant's date of birth (used to identify age), party affiliation, voting activity, registration date, type of ballot cast (conditional voter registration ballot, provisional ballot, VBM ballot, traditional in-person ballot), and total number of registered voters. Gender, race, and ethnicity data were not present for the majority of voters in these files.² Registered voters in California have the option to self-report their gender, race, and ethnicity data on the voter registration application, but this has historically been done by only a small percentage of registrants. The PDI data provided additional demographic identifiers, including race or ethnicity, gender, foreign-born status, and voting history.³ The resulting merged dataset varies slightly from the California Secretary of State's official election results. Eligible voter population data (adult citizens) were provided by the California Department of Finance.

Data Limitations in Identification of Voter Demographics

The commonly applied research method to identify a voter's gender, race, and ethnicity from state and county voter records uses a combination of the registrant's name (first name commonly associated with gender and surname for race/ethnicity) and neighborhood characteristics (geocoding with census tract data) to infer information. The PDI files used in this analysis provided voter data identified by gender, race, and ethnicity through surname matching and geocoding.⁴ As part of CID's data validation process, we compared PDI's gender, race and ethnicity estimates to our own analysis of these demographic characteristics from the merged voter file. We used an alternative but similar method that combines the U.S. Census' gender and surname lists with information from geocoded voter registration records (extension of the ecological inference model). We found consistency between the two approaches with regard to the frequency in the identification of Asian Americans and Latinos.

Matching a voter's first name to their gender is known to be generally very accurate in the identification of gender, although limited as non-binary and other genders cannot currently be identified in a voter file. The accuracy of surname matching and geocoding to identify a voter's race and ethnicity varies by group and population size. For this report, analysis of the voter file by race and ethnicity is limited to Latinos and Asian Americans as the method of using surname matching and geocoding for these groups has a high degree of accuracy (although to a somewhat lesser degree for

smaller Asian-American communities). Black and white voters cannot be reliably identified based on their last name (surname matching). For white and Black voters, geocoding can help produce some level of accuracy at the census tract level, especially for Black voters who are more likely than other groups to live in segregated neighborhoods.

For this report, however, geocoding is not reliable for Black voters at the county level due to this group's smaller proportion of California's population (5.5%) compared to some other states. This is especially true in many California counties where nearly every census tract has a small Black population and geocoding can erroneously assign Black voters to other racial and ethnic groups. Due to the difficulty in reliably identifying Black and white voters at the county level through geocoding, we do not provide a discussion of the data for these groups in the body of the report. We do, however, make their data available in the report's [online appendix](#) for information purposes. Geocoding for identifying other population groups, such as Asian-American subgroups and indigenous populations, is also not reliable at the county level in California.

Limited demographic information in county and state voter files hinder progress to improve the elections experience for all voters. We encourage elections officials, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss legal and accurate ways to gather more complete demographic data in California during and after the voter registration process.

2020 General Election Context

COVID-19 Pandemic Funding

The 2020 general election was held during the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting multiple challenges to conducting a safe and accessible election. In order to address the safety issues presented by COVID-19, the California State Legislature passed multiple bills providing additional funds for the election, and changing voting options to minimize the health risk of casting a vote in person.

Assembly Bill 89 and Assembly Bill 100 appropriated state and county funding for the 2020 general election consistent with California's requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19.⁵ This funding was in addition to funds allocated under state and local budget authority as part of the normal conduct of elections. A portion of the funding provided by the two bills was used for the following 2020 general election costs during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Increased costs related to all aspects of voting by mail
- Equipment needs for processing increased VBM ballots and meeting the in-person voting requirements
- Permanent and temporary staffing
- Additional security
- Specialized training of staff and election workers
- Cleaning and disinfection
- Personal protective equipment, polling locations, and election facilities
- Outreach and communication

Changes to Election Administration

To ensure a safe and accessible election, bills directing changes to how the 2020 general election was administered were passed by the California Legislature. Assembly Bill 860 made significant changes to vote-by-mail (VBM) access by requiring every county elections office to mail all of their registered voters a VBM ballot. Additionally, the bill expanded the window of acceptance for a VBM ballot by two additional weeks in response to delays that the USPS was experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, VBM ballots that were mailed were accepted if postmarked on or before Election Day and received by the county elections office no later than 17 days after Election Day. Senate Bill 423 allowed counties to adjust or partially waive the minimally required number, location, duration, and operational hours of vote centers, polling places, and ballot drop-off locations.⁶

Voter's Choice Act

In the 2020 election cycle, 15 California counties opted to conduct elections as prescribed by the Voter's Choice Act (VCA).⁷ These VCA counties comprised approximately half (49.6%) of California's registered voter population. The new voting model replaces neighborhood polling places with multi-service vote centers available up to ten days before Election Day. VCA counties send vote-by-mail ballots to all registered voters who can return them by mail, at a vote center, or at a secure ballot drop box. Voters may vote in person by completing a ballot at a vote center.

The following 15 counties opted to adopt the VCA for the 2020 election cycle: Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Tuolumne. Five counties (Sacramento, San Mateo, Madera, Napa, and Nevada) first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2018 election cycle. Eligible voters in these counties had therefore had additional exposure to the VCA model compared to eligible voters in the ten counties that adopted the voting model for the first time in the 2020 election cycle.

Due to Los Angeles County's large proportion of the total number of registered voters in California's VCA counties in the 2020 general election (52.8%), its voting data significantly influenced the overall findings for VCA counties presented in this report. Additionally, Los Angeles has historically had a higher rate of in-person voting when compared to other VCA counties. For this reason, we present data for VCA counties with and without the inclusion of Los Angeles County. Data for Los Angeles County (and all individual counties) are available in the [online appendix](#).

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) Expansion

CVR and provisional ballots are often viewed as a voter safety net, providing voters with opportunities to participate in the election even if they have not yet registered or their registration cannot be confirmed at the time of voting. Conditional voter registration allows voters to register to vote or change voter registration details leading up to and on Election Day. Voters who claim to be properly registered but whose qualifications cannot be immediately established upon examination of the list of registered voters for the precinct or the records on file with the county elections officials are entitled to cast a provisional ballot.

Prior to the 2020 election cycle, existing Laws permitted but did not require county elections officials to offer CVR at satellite and polling place voting locations. Starting with the 2020 election cycle, CVR was required at all in-person voting locations in California. Senate Bill 72, signed into law in 2019, specifically requires county elections officials to offer CVR at all voting locations.⁸

Voter Registration

Section Highlights

- 87.9% of eligible voters in California were registered to vote heading into the 2020 general election, the highest voter registration rate in the past 80 years.
- The registration rate in the 2020 general election increased by almost 10% from the registration rate in the 2016 general election.
- Latino, Asian-American, and youth voters did not experience the same registration rate growth experienced by the general population.
- Latino, Asian-American, and youth voters were underrepresented in their share of registered voters compared to their share of the eligible voter population.

At the time of the 2020 general election, 87.9% of eligible adult citizens in California were registered to vote according to the Secretary of State.⁹ Over 22 million Californians were registered to vote leading into the election, an increase of over 2.5 million registered voters from the 2016 general election. The official California registration rate (the percent of eligible adult citizens who are registered to vote) in November 2020 was the highest it has been in the past 80 years.¹⁰

Table 1 shows that California's official registration rate has seen an overall trend of gradually increased since 2004. The registration rate in the 2020 general election, however, showed a notable jump from the previous presidential election in 2016. The percent of adult citizens registered to vote increased by almost 10 percentage points between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, by far the highest increase since 2004.

Table 1. California Official Registration Rates: 2004- 2020 General Elections*

	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
California	68.9%	69.9%	74.6%	73.4%	76.7%	73.3%	78.0%	78.2%	87.9%
Non-VCA Counties**	68.4%	68.4%	72.8%	70.6%	74.2%	70.5%	75.6%	75.9%	85.2%
VCA Counties***	69.5%	69.5%	76.4%	76.3%	79.2%	76.2%	80.5%	80.6%	90.7%
VCA Counties w/o LA ****	73.7%	73.7%	78.4%	76.3%	78.7%	71.9%	76.5%	76.2%	86.5%

Data Source: California Secretary of State

*Registration rate defined as the percentage of adult citizens who are registered to vote

** Includes historical data for 43 counties not designated VCA in the 2020 general election. All counties were non-VCA prior to 2018 (between 2004 and 2016).

***Includes historical data for the 15 counties designated VCA in the 2020 general election. There were no VCA counties prior to 2018 (between 2004 and 2016). See page 8 for a list of VCA counties.

**** Los Angeles County became a VCA county in the 2018 election cycle. Prior to 2018, there were no VCA counties.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Based on CID's county-level analysis, counties that adopted the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) had higher registration rates than counties that had not adopted the new election system. Over 90% of eligible voters in VCA counties were registered to vote at the time of the 2020 general election, compared to 85.2% of eligible voters in non-VCA counties. VCA counties experienced slightly more growth in registration rates since the 2016 general election (10.2 percentage points) than non-VCA counties (9.6 percentage points).

When excluding Los Angeles County, the remaining 14 VCA counties still had a higher registration rate than non-VCA counties, although the gap was smaller. Around 86.5% of eligible voters in VCA counties excluding Los Angeles County were registered to vote in the 2020 general election, compared to 85.2% of eligible voters in non-VCA counties. VCA counties excluding Los Angeles County also had a lower registration rate than the state as a whole, an example of the large effect of Los Angeles' registration rate on the statewide rate.

Note: The VCA was first implemented in 2018. The 2016 numbers present historical data for the 15 counties designated VCA in the 2020 general election. This should be considered when comparing the 2016 and 2020 elections.

2016-2020 Voter Registration Rates: Latinos and Asian Americans

Historical registration rates are not available by race and ethnicity from the Secretary of State. In order to examine the change in registration rates among racial and ethnic groups from the 2016 to 2020 general elections, we used data provided by the Statewide Database at the University of California at Berkeley (the state's official redistricting database for the California State Legislature). The Statewide Database uses surname matching to identify the race and ethnicity of voters, a method which is limited to identifying Latinos and Asian Americans (data for white and Black voters are not provided by the statewide database due to data limitations).¹¹

It is important to note here that the registration rates for the overall population presented in this section differ from the official state numbers presented earlier in this report due to the different data source.

Table 2. Registration Rate by Race and Ethnicity: 2016-2020 General Elections*

	2016 General Election			2020 General Election			Percentage Point Difference		
	All Voters	Asian-American	Latino	All Voters	Asian-American	Latino	All Voters	Asian-American	Latino
California	79.0%	55.7%	68.9%	85.7%	58.6%	73.9%	6.6	2.9	5.0
Non VCA Counties**	75.4%	54.1%	64.6%	83.2%	56.8%	72.0%	7.9	2.7	7.4
VCA Counties***	82.9%	56.8%	73.0%	88.2%	59.8%	75.8%	5.3	3.1	2.8
VCA Counties w/o LA****	78.0%	56.4%	65.4%	85.5%	62.3%	70.5%	7.5	6.0	5.1

Data Source: Statewide Database, California Department of Finance

*Registration rate defined as the percentage of adult citizens who are registered to vote.

** Includes historical data for 43 counties not designated VCA in the 2020 general election. All counties were non-VCA in 2016.

***Includes historical data for the 15 counties designated VCA in the 2020 general election. There were no VCA counties in 2016.

**** Los Angeles County became a VCA county in the 2018 election cycle. There were no VCA counties in 2016.

As shown in Table 2, neither Latinos nor Asian Americans experienced the same growth in registration rates between the 2016 and 2020 general elections seen in the general population. The Asian-American registration rate increased by 2.9 percentage points, less than half the growth experienced by all voters. Latino voters saw a 5 percentage-point increase in their registration rate from the 2016 general election to the 2020 general election.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Asian Americans in VCA counties saw higher growth in their registration rates between the 2016 and 2020 general elections than those in non-VCA counties. Registration rates among Asian Americans in VCA counties grew by 3.0 percentage points between 2016 and 2020, while registration rates among Asian Americans in non-VCA counties grew by 2.7 percentage points during the same time period. When excluding Los Angeles County, registration rates among Asian Americans in the remaining VCA counties increased by 5.9 percentage points.

Comparatively, Latinos saw less growth in registration rates in VCA counties than those in non-VCA counties. Registration rates among Latinos in VCA counties grew by 2.8 percentage points between 2016 and 2020, while registration rates among Latinos in non-VCA counties grew by 7.4 percentage points. When excluding Los Angeles County, registration rates among Latinos in the remaining VCA counties grew by 5.1 percentage points between the 2016 and 2020 general elections.

Note: The VCA was first implemented in 2018. The 2016 numbers present historical data for the 15 counties designated VCA in the 2020 general election. This should be considered when comparing the 2016 and 2020 elections.

2016-2020 Voter Registration Rates: Youth

As mentioned earlier, registration statistics from the Secretary of State are unavailable for some demographic groups. In order to examine the change in registration rates among young voters (ages 18 to 24), we used data provided by the Statewide Database.

Table 3. Registration Rate by Youth Voters: 2016-2020 General Elections*

	2016 General Election		2020 General Election		Percentage Point Difference	
	All Voters	18 to 24	All Voters	18 to 24	All Voters	18 to 24
California	79.0%	64.4%	85.7%	68.9%	6.6%	4.5%
Non VCA Counties	75.4%	59.8%	83.2%	66.4%	7.9%	6.5%
VCA Counties	82.9%	69.7%	88.2%	71.7%	5.3%	2.0%
VCA Counties w/o LA	78.0%	66.6%	85.5%	74.4%	7.5%	7.7%

Data Source: Statewide Database, California Department of Finance

*Registration rate defined as the percentage of adult citizens who are registered to vote

Table 3 shows that young voters, aged 18 to 24, did not experience the same growth in registration rates between the 2016 and 2020 general elections experienced by the general population. While all voters saw a 6.7 percentage-point increase in registration rates, young voters experienced a 4.5 percentage-point increase.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Young voters in VCA counties experienced slower growth in their registration rates than young voters living in non-VCA counties. Registration rates among young voters in VCA counties grew by 2.0 percentage points between the 2016 and 2020 general elections, compared to 6.6 percentage points among young voters in non-VCA counties. When excluding Los Angeles County, however, young voters in the remaining 14 VCA counties experienced a 7.8 percentage-point growth in registration rates between 2016 and 2020.

Note: In 2016, the VCA was not administered in any county. The 2016 numbers present historical data for the 15 counties designated VCA in the 2020 general election. This should be considered when comparing the 2016 and 2020 elections.

Registered Voter Demographics Analysis

In the remainder of this section, we provide a detailed examination of the demographic makeup of the registered voter population at the time of the 2020 general election. Please see report's methodology section for more information on the identification of voter demographics.

As mentioned earlier in this report, race and ethnicity data is limited to Asian Americans and Latinos due to the unreliability of identifying white and Black voters through current methods.

Registered Voter Demographics: Race and Ethnicity

Table 4. Share of Registered Voters by Race and Ethnicity: 2020 General Election

	Asian American	Latino	Other Race
California	10.4%	26.7%	62.9%
Non VCA Counties	7.9%	25.6%	66.4%
VCA Counties	13.0%	27.7%	59.3%
VCA Counties w/o LA	15.7%	19.7%	64.6%

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter File

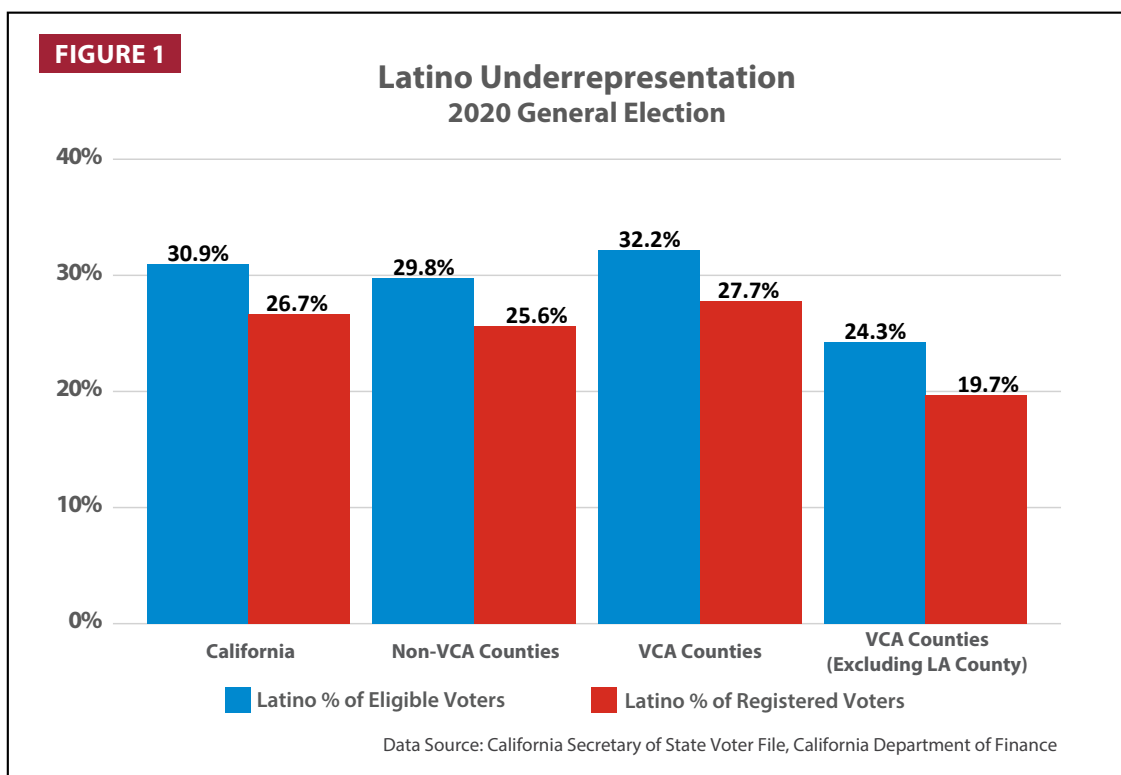
At the time of the 2020 general election, more than a quarter of registered voters in California were identified as Latino. A little over 10% of registered voters were identified as Asian-American. The remaining 62.9% of registered voters were neither Latino nor Asian American.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In the 2020 general election, VCA counties had higher proportions of their registered voters identified as Latino and Asian American than non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, 13.0% of registered voters were identified as Asian American and 27.7% were identified as Latino. The remaining 59.3% were neither Asian American nor Latino. In non-VCA counties, 7.9% of registered voters were identified as Asian American, 25.6% were identified as Latino, and 66.4% were neither Asian American nor Latino.

When excluding Los Angeles County, the share of Asian Americans among registered voters was higher in the remaining VCA counties, while the share of Latinos was lower. A little under 16% of registered voters in VCA counties, excluding Los Angeles County, were identified as Asian American, 19.7% were identified as Latino, and 64.6% were neither Asian American nor Latino.

Voter Representation of Latinos

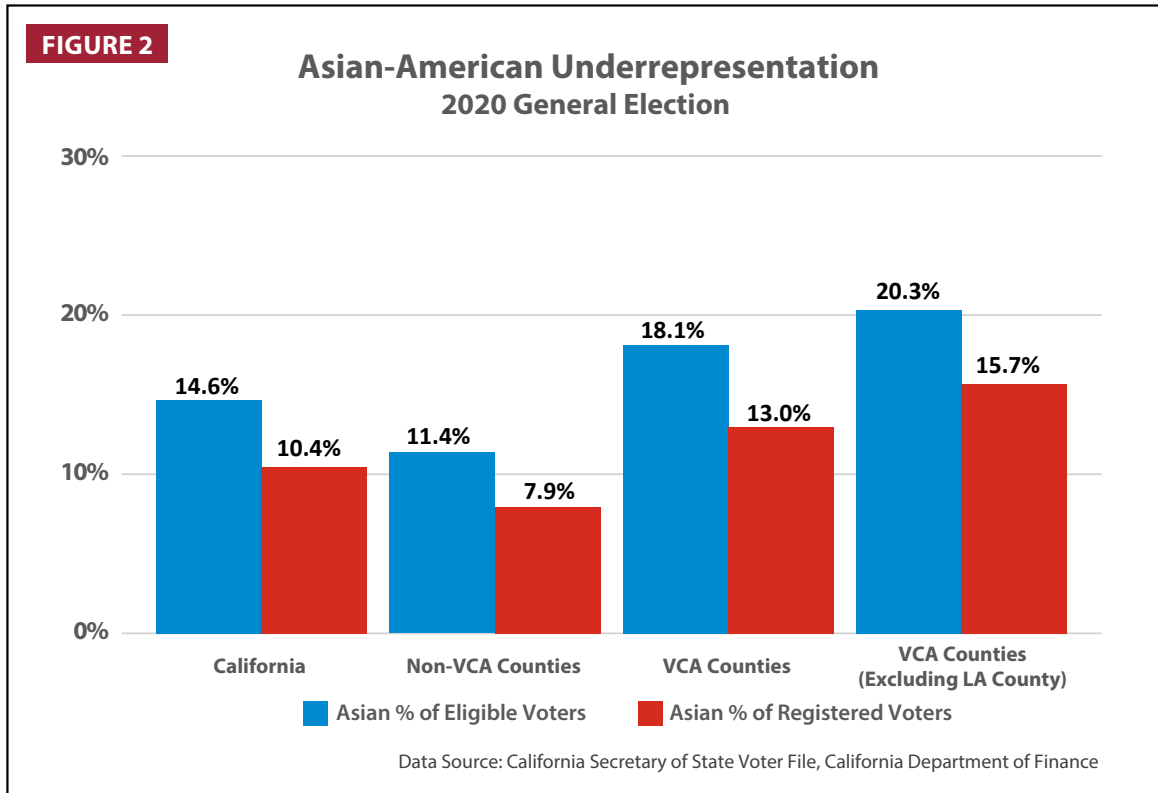


In California, Latinos represented over a quarter of registered voters (Figure 1). Their share of registered voters, however, was lower than their share of the eligible voter population. At the time of the 2020 general election, Latinos were 30.9% of eligible voters but only 26.7% of registered voters – a representation gap of 4.2 percentage points. (See [online appendix A](#) for registration rates by race/ethnicity and county).

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, Latinos were 32.2% of eligible voters and 27.7% of registered voters – a representation gap of 4.5 percentage points. In non-VCA counties, Latinos were 29.8% of eligible voters and 25.6% of registered voters – a representation gap of 4.2 percentage points. When excluding Los Angeles County, Latino's representation gap slightly increased in the remaining VCA counties. Latinos were 24.3% of eligible voters and 19.7% of registered voters – a representation gap of 4.6 percentage points.

Voter Representation of Asian Americans



In California, Asian Americans were 14.6% of the eligible voter population in 2020 (Figure 2). This share was not equally represented in the registered voter population, with only 10.4% of registered voters being identified as Asian American – a representation gap of 4.2 percentage points. (See [online appendix A](#) for registration rates by race/ethnicity and county).

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Asian Americans in VCA counties had a larger representation gap in their share of the eligible voter population and the registered voter population than Asian Americans in non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, Asian Americans were 18.1% of the eligible voter population and 13.0% of the registered voter population – a representation gap of 5.1 percentage points. In non-VCA counties, Asian Americans were 11.4% of the eligible voter population and 7.9% of the registered voter population – a representation gap of 3.5 percentage points.

When excluding Los Angeles County, Asian Americans were 20.3% of the eligible voter population and 15.7% of the registered voter population in the remaining VCA counties – a representation gap of 4.6 percentage points.

Registered Voters Demographics: Age Groups

Table 5. Share of Registered Voters by Age Group: 2020 General Election

	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 and over
California	11.7%	18.5%	16.1%	15.3%	16.5%	21.7%
Non VCA Counties	11.7%	18.0%	16.1%	15.1%	16.7%	22.3%
VCA Counties	11.6%	19.0%	16.2%	15.5%	16.4%	21.2%
VCA Counties w/o LA	11.7%	17.1%	15.4%	15.8%	17.2%	22.6%

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter File

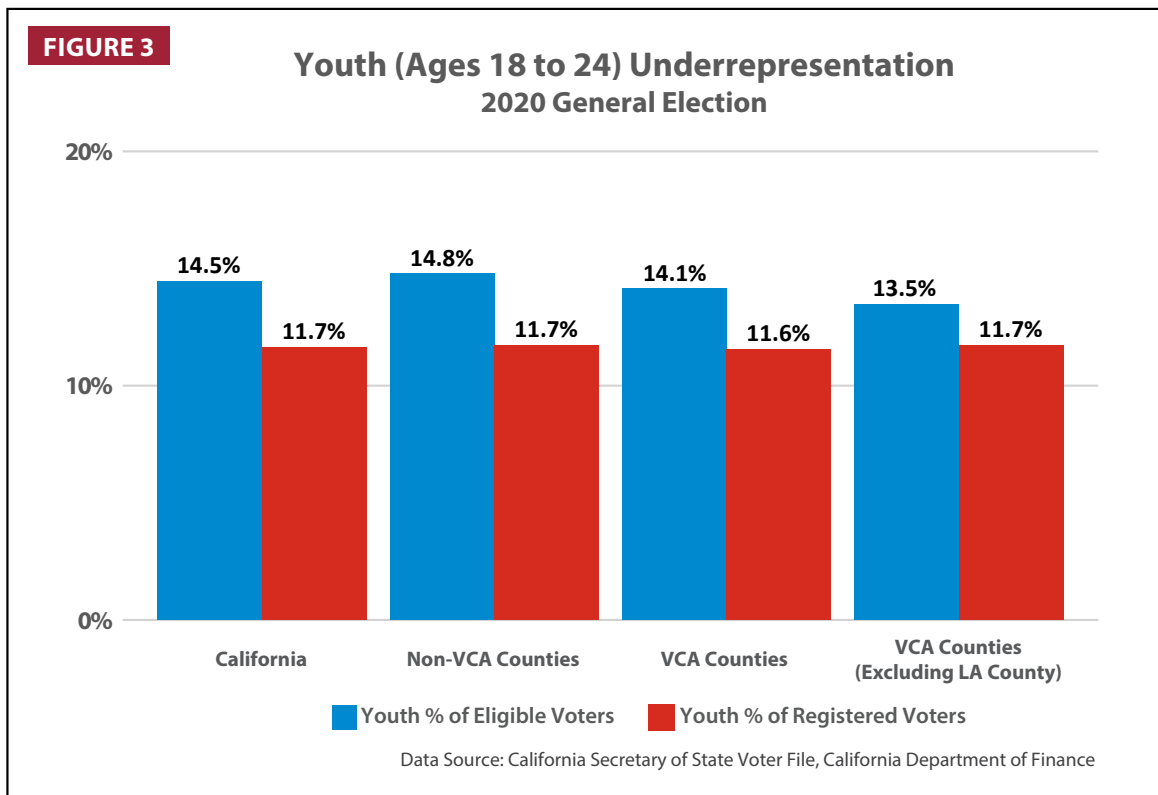
Voters aged 65 and over had the largest share of the registered voter population, with 21.7% of registered voters in that age group across California. Young voters had the lowest share of the registered voter population, with 11.7% of

registered voters aged 18 to 24.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Similar to statewide trends, older voters were the largest share of registered voters and young voters the smallest share in both VCA and non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, 11.6% of registered voters were aged 18 to 24, while 21.2% of registered voters were aged 65 and over. In non-VCA counties, 11.7% of registered voters were aged 18 to 24 and 22.3% were aged 65 and older. When excluding Los Angeles County, young voters were 11.7% of registered voters in the remaining 14 VCA counties and older voters were 22.6% of registered voters.

Voter Representation of Youth



Young voters, aged 18 to 24, were underrepresented in the registered voter population compared to their share of the eligible voter population (Figure 3). In California, young voters were 14.5% of the eligible voter population but only 11.7% of the registered voter population – a representation gap of 2.8 percentage points. (See [online appendix A](#) for registration rates for all age groups by county).

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Young voters were underrepresented in the registered voter population compared to their share of the eligible voter population in both VCA and non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, young voters were 14.1% of the eligible voter population and 11.6% of the registered voter population – a 2.5 percentage-point gap. In non-VCA counties, young voters were 14.8% of the eligible population and 11.7% of the registered voter population – a 3.1 percentage-point gap.

When excluding Los Angeles County, young voters' gap between their share of the eligible and registered voter populations was smaller in the remaining 14 VCA counties. Young voters were 13.5% of the eligible voter population and 11.7% of the registered voter populations – a representation gap of 1.8 percentage points.

Registered Voters Demographics: Gender

Table 6. Share of Registered Voters by Gender: 2020 General Election

	Women	Men	No Gender Identified
California	50.0%	46.0%	4.0%
Non VCA Counties	50.2%	46.1%	3.7%
VCA Counties	49.8%	45.8%	4.4%
VCA Counties w/o LA	48.8%	45.7%	5.5%

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter File

Women represented a higher share of registered voters than men (Table 6). In California, 50.0% of registered voters were women, while 46.0% were men. An additional 4.0% of registered voters had no gender identified.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Women represented a higher share of registered voters in both VCA and non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, 49.8% of registered voters were women, 45.8% were men, and 4.4% had no gender identified. In non-VCA counties, 50.2% of registered voters were women, 46.1% were men, and 3.7% had no gender identified. When excluding Los Angeles County, 48.8% of registered voters in the remaining VCA counties were women, 45.7% were men, and 5.5% had no gender identified.

Registered Voters Demographics: Party Affiliations

Table 7. Share of Registered Voters by Party Affiliation: 2020 General Election

	Democratic	Republican	No Party Preference	Other Party
California	46.2%	24.2%	23.8%	5.8%
Non VCA Counties	44.7%	26.2%	23.1%	6.1%
VCA Counties	47.7%	22.3%	24.5%	5.5%
VCA Counties w/o LA	42.3%	27.9%	24.5%	5.4%

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter File

Registered Democrats were by far the most numerous party affiliation among registered voters (Table 7). In California, 46.2% of registered voters identified Democratic as their party affiliation, while 24.2% identified Republican as their party of choice and 23.8% were No Party Preference.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Democrats were a higher share of registered voters in VCA counties than in non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, 47.7% of registered voters were registered Democrats, compared to 44.7% of registered voters in non-VCA counties. A little over 22% of registered voters in VCA counties identified Republican as their party affiliation, compared to 26.2% of registered voters in non-VCA counties. Over 24% of registered voters in VCA counties marked No Party Preference when registering to vote, compared to 23.1% of registered voters in non-VCA counties.

When excluding Los Angeles County, the share of registered voters identifying Democratic as their party affiliation decreased in the remaining VCA counties. A little over 42% of registered voters marked Democratic when registering to vote, 27.9% marked Republican, and 24.5% marked No Party Preference.

Registered Voters Demographics: Nativity

Table 8. Share of Registered Voters by Party Affiliation: 2020 General Election

	Foreign-born	U.S.-born	Nativity Unknown
California	17.3%	69.8%	12.9%
Non VCA Counties	13.8%	72.6%	13.5%
VCA Counties	20.9%	66.9%	12.2%
VCA Counties w/o LA	18.9%	70.9%	10.2%

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter File

The majority of registered voters were born in the U.S. (Table 8). In California, 69.8% of registered voters were U.S.-born, 17.3% were foreign-born, and 12.9% did not have their nativity identified in the voter file.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Foreign-born voters were a higher share of the registered voter population in VCA counties than in non-VCA counties. In VCA counties, 20.9% of registered voters were foreign-born, compared to 13.8% of registered voters in non-VCA counties. Just under 67% of registered voters in VCA counties were U.S.-born and 72.6% of registered voters in non-VCA counties were U.S.-born. Over 12% of registered voters in VCA counties and 13.5% of registered voters in non-VCA counties did not have their nativity identified.

When excluding Los Angeles County, foreign-born voters were a smaller share of registered voters in the remaining 14 VCA counties than when looking at all VCA counties, but the share was still higher than in non-VCA counties. Just under 19% of registered voters in the remaining VCA counties were foreign-born, 70.9% were U.S.-born, and 10.2% did not have their nativity identified.

Conditional Voter Registration

Section Highlights

- 1.0% of California voters used conditional voter registration.
- Asian-American voters, Latino voters, new voters, and young voters used CVR at higher rates than the general population.
- Young voters used CVR at higher rates than older voters. Foreign-born voters used CVR at higher rates than U.S.-born voters.
- Republican voters used CVR at higher rates than Democratic voters, while No Party Preference voters had the highest CVR use rate among the party affiliations.

The 2020 election cycle held the first elections after conditional voter registration (CVR) was expanded to all voting locations throughout California. Previously available in only some counties and voting locations, CVR was an option for all voters in the California 2020 primary and general elections. CVR allows voters to register to vote or change voter registration details up to and on Election Day. This option allows voters who missed the traditional registration deadline to register and vote in the current election.¹² Before a CVR ballot is counted, county elections officials verify that the voter has not voted in another county and that the registration forms are complete. Some reasons for a rejected CVR ballot include: voter already voted, no voter signature, non-matching signature, and ballot missing from the envelope. In VCA counties, voters can vote CVR or provisional ballots at any vote center in their county. In traditional polling place counties, voters must go to their assigned polling place to vote a CVR or provisional ballot for their correct ballot type.

While CVR offers voters an opportunity to participate in an election in which they may not have been able to without the option to register or re-register to vote up to Election Day, it is important to note that CVR is only available for in-person voting. This is particularly important in the 2020 general election context, in which in-person voting was lower than in the past partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier in this report, significant changes were made regarding vote-by-mail (VBM) options in order to ensure a safe and accessible election. With every registered voter receiving a VBM ballot and voting options such as drop boxes becoming more available, the vast majority of voters (87.5%) in the 2020 general election cast their vote with VBM ballots. The Center for Inclusive Democracy released a full report on voting methods in the 2020 general election, which can be found [here](#).

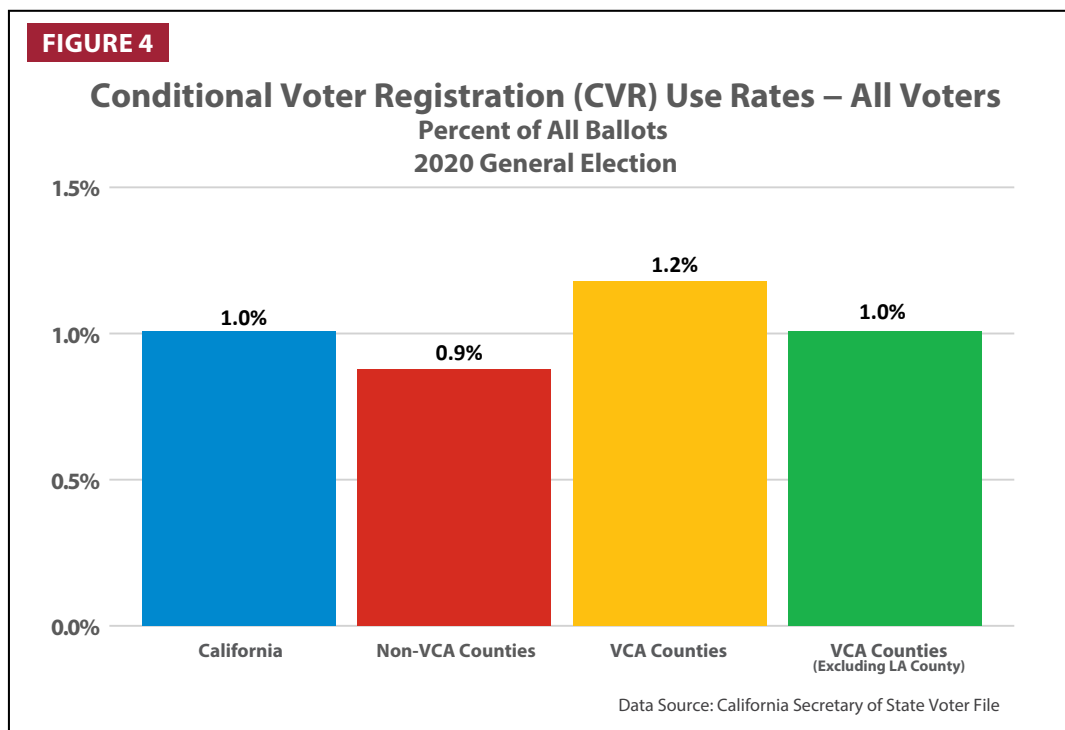


Table 9: Conditional Voter Registration Rates: 2018-2020 General Elections

	2018 General Election			2020 General Election			Percentage Point Difference
	Total Ballots	CVR Ballots	Percent CVR	Total Ballots	CVR Ballots	Percent CVR	
California	12,432,484	37,921	0.3%	17,236,963	176,854	1.0%	0.7%
Non VCA Counties	11,478,339	27,073	0.2%	8,774,266	77,130	0.9%	0.7%
VCA Counties	954,145	10,848	1.1%	8,462,697	99,724	1.2%	0.1%
VCA Counties w/o LA*	-	-	-	4,311,849	45,092	1.0%	-

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter Files

*In the 2018 general election, Los Angeles County was not a VCA county. There were 5 VCA counties in 2018 (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo)

In the 2020 general election, conditional voter registration rates were more than three times higher than in the 2018 general election, the last general election before CVR was expanded to all voting locations. As shown in Table 9, 1.0% (176,854 CVR ballots out of 17,236,963 counted votes) of voters used CVR, compared to 0.3% (37,921 CVR ballots out of 12,432,484 counted votes) in the 2018 general election. This large increase suggests that CVR expansion provided a large number of voters an opportunity to participate in the election when they otherwise may not have.

There was a wide range of CVR use among the individual counties. CVR use ranged from 0.0% (Alpine and Trinity) to 1.8% (Riverside). (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by county.)

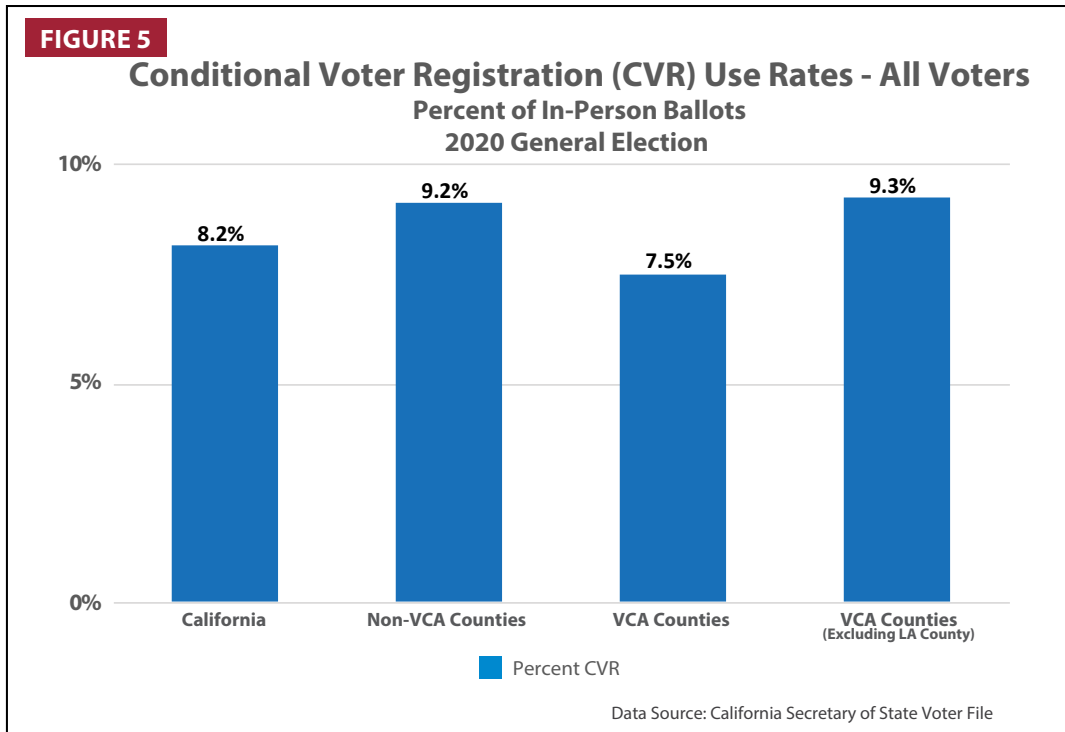
VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, 1.2% (99,724 CVR ballots of 8,462,697 counted votes) of voters used CVR, slightly higher than voters in all California counties. CVR use in VCA counties was slightly lower in the 2018 general election, with 1.1% (10,848 CVR ballots of 954,145 counted votes) of votes being cast with a CVR ballot.

In non-VCA counties, 0.9% (77,130 CVR ballots of 8,774,266 counted ballots) of voters used CVR. CVR use in the 2020 general election was more than four times the rate of CVR use in the 2018 general election (0.2% - 27,073 CVR ballots of 11,478,339 counted votes).

When excluding Los Angeles County, the CVR use rate for the remaining 14 VCA counties matched the statewide rate of 1.0% (45,092). Los Angeles County first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2020 election cycle and was not a VCA county in the 2018 general election.

Note: In 2018, there were only five VCA counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo). 2018 numbers represent CVR use rates for those five counties while 2020 numbers represent CVR use rates for the 15 counties that adopted the VCA model for the 2020 election cycle. This should be considered when comparing the two elections.



As mentioned earlier in this report, CVR is only available to voters voting in person at a vote center or polling place. Figure 5 shows the share of in-person ballots that were cast with CVR ballots in the 2020 general election. In California, 8.2% (176,854 CVR ballots out of 2,168,152 in-person ballots) of in-person votes were cast with CVR ballots. (See [online appendix B](#) for CVR ballot use among in-person voters for all demographic groups.)

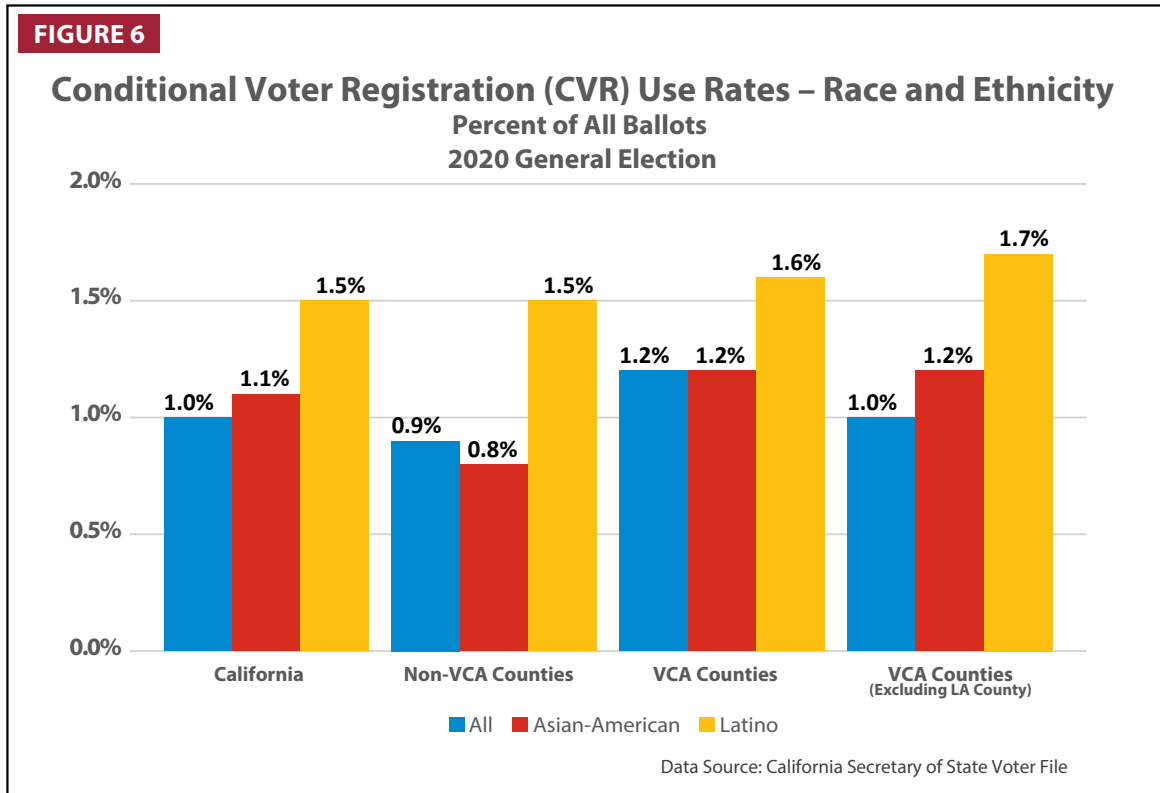
There was a wide range of the share of in-person votes cast with CVR ballots among the individual counties. CVR use ranged from 0.0% (Alpine) to 100.0% (Plumas and Sierra). Plumas and Sierra had low numbers of in-person ballots (19 and one respectively). (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of in-person votes cast with conditional voter registration by county.)

Note: In-person ballot numbers include ballots cast with a paper ballot at a vote center or polling place. They do not include VBM ballots dropped off at a vote center or polling place.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, 7.5% (99,724 CVR ballots out of 1,325,371 in-person ballots) of in-person votes were cast with a CVR ballot. Non-VCA counties had a higher share of in-person CVR ballots, with 9.2% (77,130 CVR ballots out of 842,781 in-person ballots) of in-person ballots cast with a CVR ballot. When excluding Los Angeles County, however, the remaining 14 VCA counties had a higher share of in-person CVR ballots (9.3% - 45,092 CVR ballots out of 486,720 in-person ballots) than non-VCA counties.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Race and Ethnicity



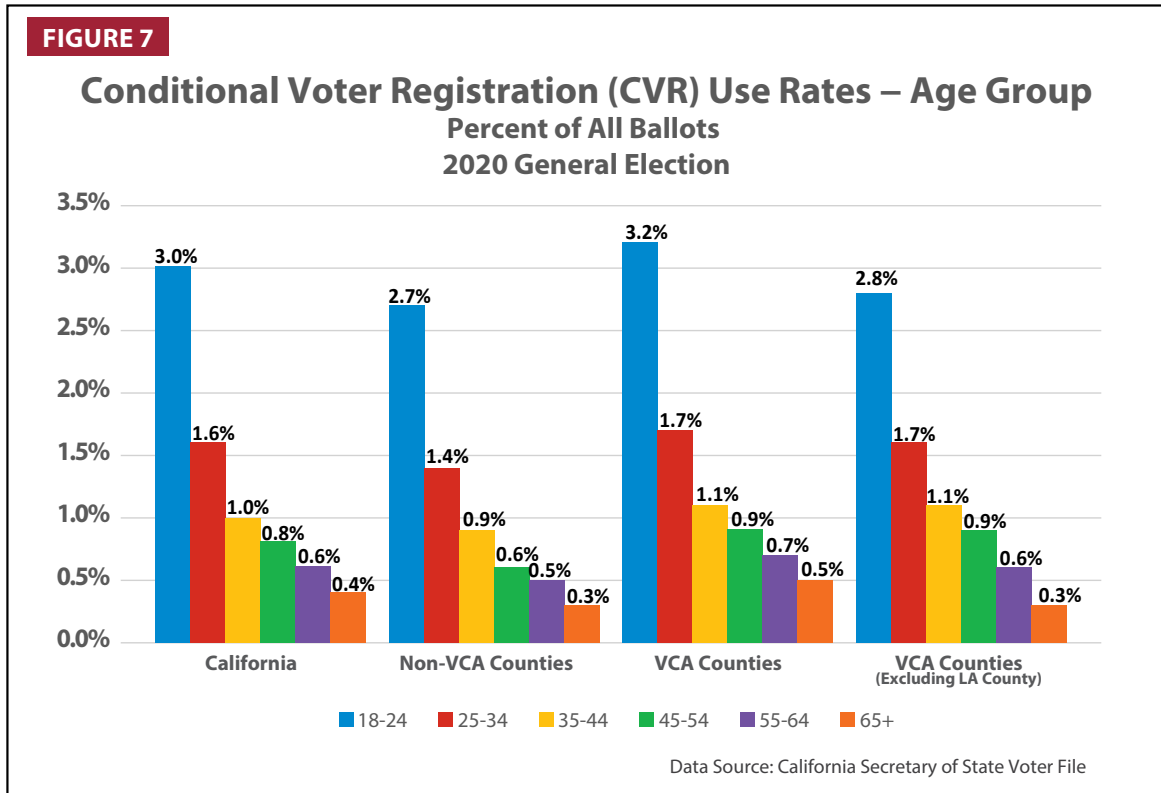
Asian-American and Latino voters used CVR at higher rates than the general population (Figure 6). In California, 1.1% of ballots cast by Asian-American voters and 1.5% of ballots cast by Latino voters were CVR.

Counties with the highest CVR use rate among Asian-American voters included Siskiyou County (1.9%), Tehama County (2.6%), and Colusa County (3.2%). Ten counties had a 0.0% CVR use rate for Asian-American voters. Nevada County (2.5%), Riverside County (2.5%), and Tehama County (2.8%) had the highest CVR use rates among Latino voters. Four counties had a 0.0% CVR use rate for Latino voters. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by race/ethnicity and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, 1.6% of votes cast by Latino voters were CVR, while the Asian-American CVR use rate matched the general population rate of 1.2%. In non-VCA counties, too, Latino voters (1.5%) used CVR at higher rates than the general population (0.9%). Asian-American voters, however, had a lower CVR use rate (0.8%) than the general population. In VCA counties excluding Los Angeles County, both Latino (1.7%) and Asian-American (1.2%) voters had higher CVR use rates than the general population (1.0%).

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Age Group



In the 2020 general election, young voters aged 18 to 24 had substantially higher CVR use rates than older voters (Figure 7). In California, 3.0% of young voters used CVR, compared to 0.4% of voters aged 65 and over. CVR use rates for the remaining age groups ranged from 0.6% (55 to 64) to 1.6% (25 to 34).

CVR use increased in the 2020 general election from the 2018 general election among all age groups. Young voters used CVR in the 2020 general election at a rate three times higher than in the 2018 general election. In 2018, 1.0% of ballots cast and counted by young voters were CVR ballots, compared to 3.0% in the 2020 general election. Similarly, older voters used CVR at higher rates in the 2020 general election than in the 2018 general election. In 2018, 0.1% of ballots cast and counted by older voters were CVR ballots, compared to 0.4% in the 2020 general election. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by age group and county in the 2018 and 2020 general elections.)

Looking at individual counties, younger voters continued to use CVR at higher rates than older voters in the 2020 general election. Inyo County (4.6%), Tehama County (4.6%), and Kings County (4.9%) had the highest rates of CVR use by young voters. Colusa County (0.5%), Los Angeles County (0.6%), and Riverside County (0.6%) had the highest rates of CVR use by older voters.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

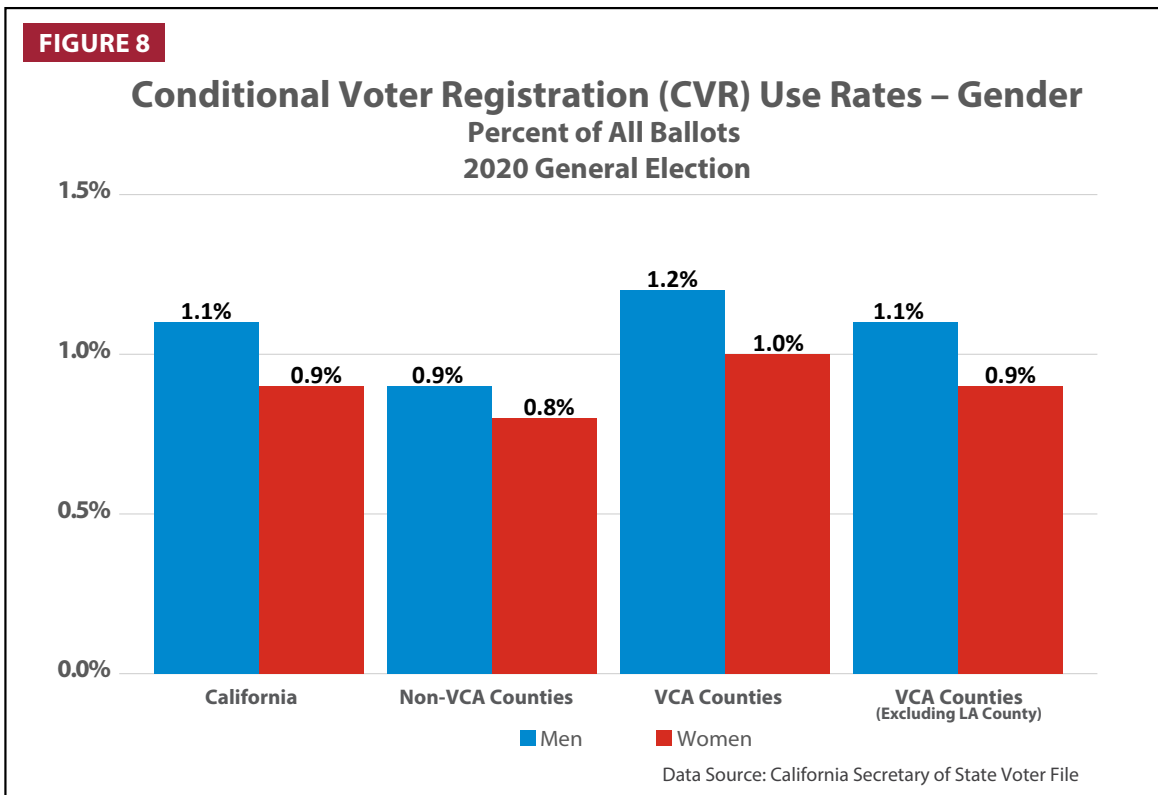
In VCA counties, all age groups had higher CVR use rates than the statewide rate for each age range. Young voters had markedly higher CVR use rates at 3.2%, compared to 0.5% of voters aged 65 and older. CVR use among young voters in VCA counties decreased between the 2018 and 2020 general elections. In 2018, 3.8% of ballots cast and counted by young voters were CVR, compared to 3.2% in 2020.

In non-VCA counties, nearly not the 25-34 year old age group though -- they had higher CVR than the CA rate and the same as the VCA rate and VCA rates. Around 2.8% of young voters in non-VCA counties used CVR, while 0.3% of voters aged 65 and over used CVR. CVR use among young voters in non-VCA counties more than tripled since the 2018 general election. In 2018, 0.8% of ballots cast by young voters were CVR, compared to 2.7% in the 2020 general election.

Note: In 2018, there were only five VCA counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo). 2018 numbers represent CVR use rates for those five counties while 2020 numbers represent CVR use rates for the 15 counties that adopted the VCA model for the 2020 election cycle. This should be considered when comparing the two elections.

When excluding Los Angeles County, 2.8% of young voters and 0.3% of 65 and over voters in the remaining VCA counties used CVR. The CVR use rates for the remaining age groups ranged from 0.6% (55 to 64) to 1.7% (25 to 34). Los Angeles County first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2020 election cycle and was not a VCA county in the 2018 general election.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Gender



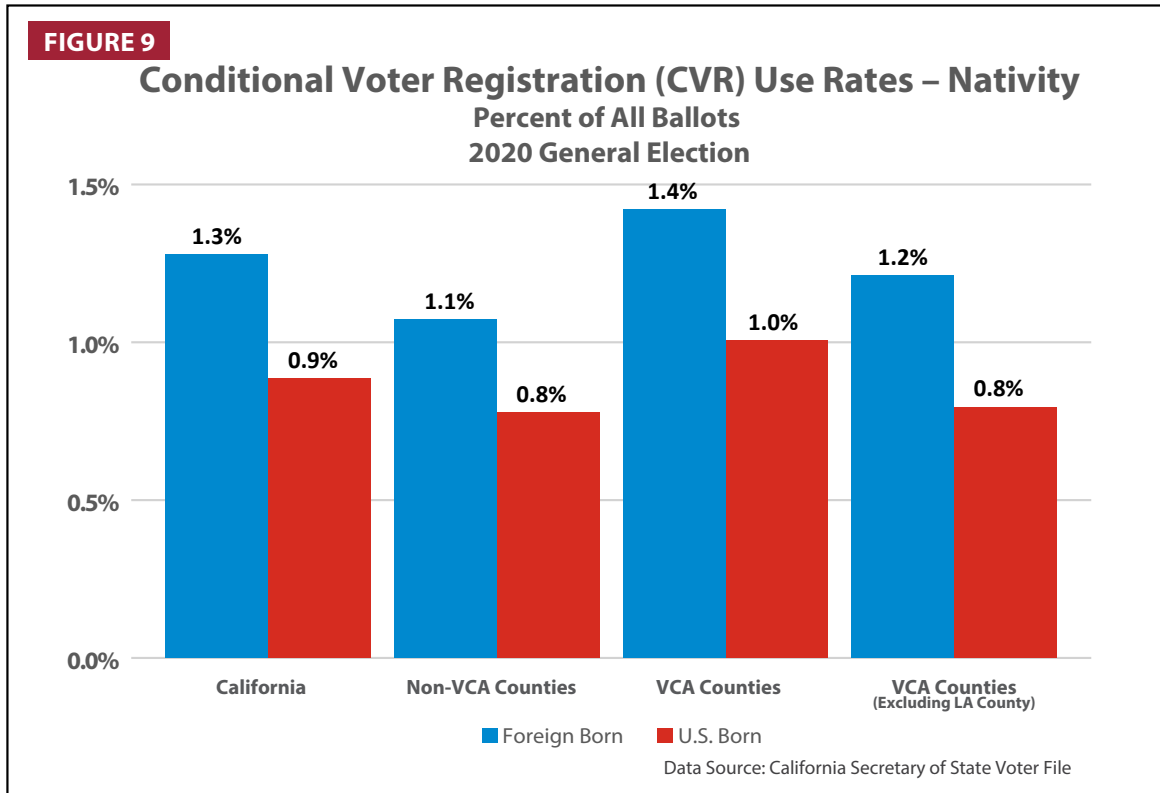
Men used CVR at higher rates than women in the 2020 general election (Figure 8). In California, 1.1% of ballots cast by men and 0.9% of ballots cast by women were CVR ballots.

San Bernardino County (1.2%), Kings County (1.4%), and Riverside County (1.7%) had the highest CVR use rates for women. San Bernardino, Sacramento, and Stanislaus County (1.4%), Kings County (1.5%), and Riverside County (1.8%) also had the highest CVR use rates for men. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by gender and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties compared to statewide, men’s CVR use rate was higher at 1.2% and women’s CVR use rate was higher at 1.0%. In non-VCA counties, men (0.9%) also had a higher CVR use rate than women (0.8%). When excluding Los Angeles, 1.1% of men in the remaining 14 VCA counties used CVR, compared to 0.9% of women.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Nativity



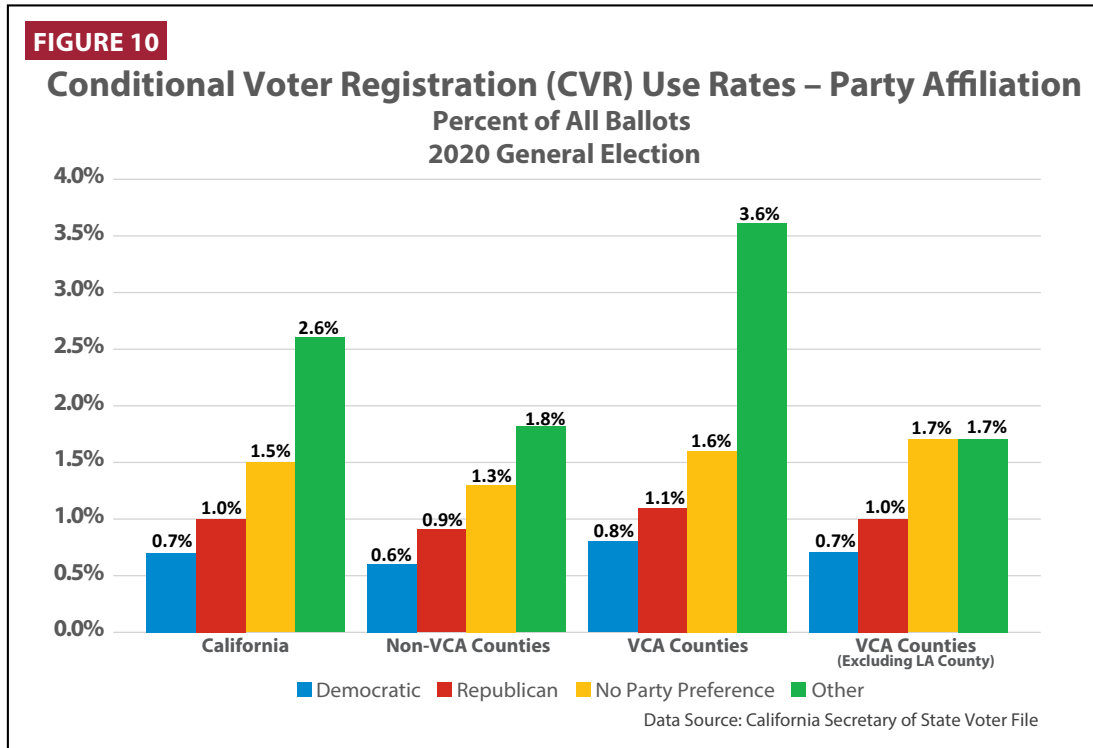
Foreign-born voters used CVR at higher rates than U.S.-born voters (Figure 9). Around 1.3% of all foreign-born voters in California used CVR, compared to 0.9% of U.S.-born voters.

Foreign-born voters used CVR at higher rates than U.S.-born voters when looking at individual counties throughout the state. Riverside County (2.0%), Sacramento County (2.1%), and Mono County (2.3%) had the highest CVR use rates among foreign-born voters. Siskiyou County (1.3%), Stanislaus County (1.4%), and Riverside County (1.6%) had the highest CVR use rates among U.S.-born voters. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by nativity and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, the foreign-born CVR use rate was higher than the statewide rate at 1.4% and the U.S.-born CVR use rate was higher at 1.0%. Non-VCA counties had lower CVR use rates for both foreign-born (1.1%) and U.S.-born (0.8%) voters than the statewide rates. In VCA counties excluding Los Angeles County, foreign-born voters' CVR use rate (1.2%) was lower than the statewide rate for foreign-born voters but higher than the non-VCA rate. The U.S.-born CVR use rate (0.8%) matched the non-VCA CVR rate for U.S.-born voters but was lower than the statewide rate for U.S.-born voters.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Party Affiliation



Republicans used CVR at higher rates than Democratic voters, while No Party Preference voters used CVR at the highest rates among party affiliations (Figure 10). In California, 0.7% of Democrats, 1.0% of Republicans, and 1.5% of No Party Preference voters used CVR.

Republicans saw the largest increase in CVR use among the party affiliations from the 2018 general election. In 2018, 0.2% of ballots cast and counted by Republicans were CVR, compared to 1.0% in the general election (a five-fold increase). Additionally, 0.3% of ballots cast and counted by Democrats and 0.4% of ballots cast and counted by No Party Preference voters were CVR in the 2018 general election.

Counties with the highest CVR use rates among Democrats included Riverside County (1.2%) and Kings County (1.5%). Sacramento County (1.5%) and Riverside County (1.6%) had the highest CVR use rates among Republicans. Orange County (2.5%) and Riverside County (3.3%) had the highest CVR use rates among No Party Preference voters. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by party and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

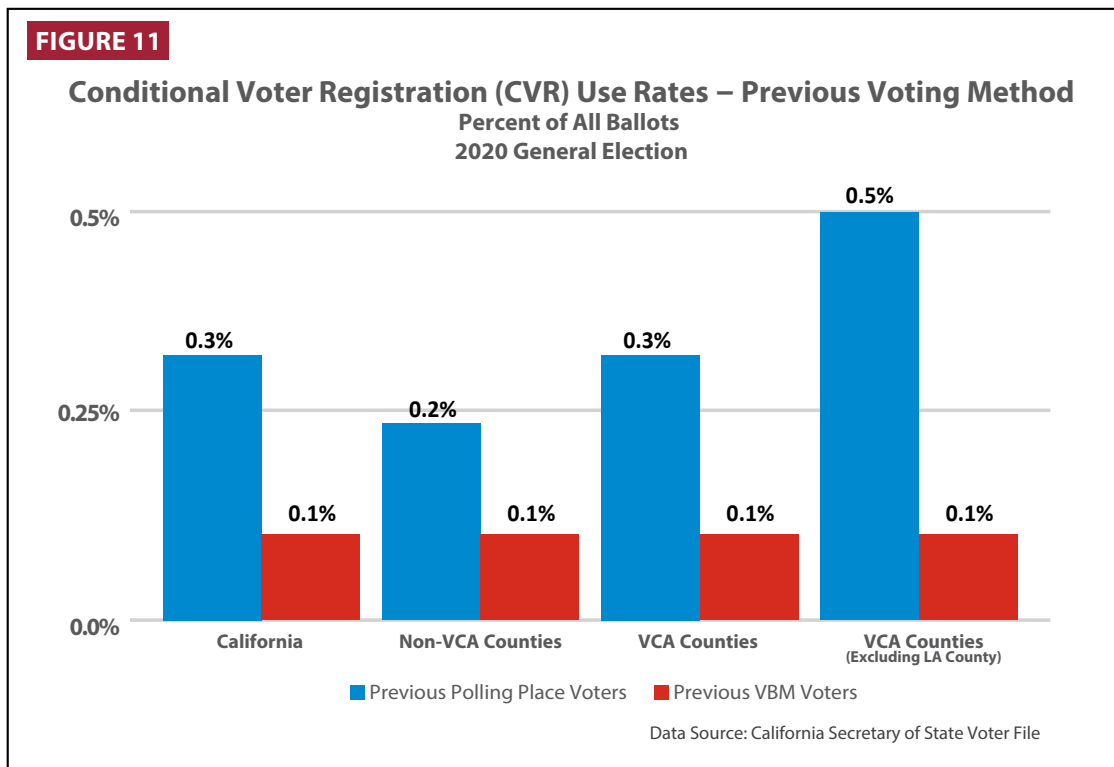
In VCA counties, all party affiliations had higher CVR use rates than the statewide rates for each party, with 0.8% of Democrats, 1.1% of Republicans, and 1.6% of No Party Preference voters using CVR. Republican and No Party Preference voters experienced increases in their CVR use rates from the 2018 general election, while Democratic voters saw a decrease. Democratic voters' CVR use decreased from 1.2% in the 2018 general to 0.8% in the 2020 general. Republican voters' CVR use increased from 0.7% in the 2018 general election to 1.1% in the 2020 general. No Party Preference voters' CVR use increased from 1.3% in the 2018 general to 1.6% in the 2020 general.

In non-VCA counties, all party affiliations had lower CVR use rates than the statewide rates for each party, with 0.6% of Democrats, 0.9% of Republicans, and 1.3% of No Party Preference voters using CVR. All party affiliation voters in non-VCA counties experienced growth in the CVR use rates from the 2018 general election. Democratic voters' CVR use doubled from 0.3% in the 2018 general to 0.6% in the 2020 general. Republican voters' CVR use increased from 0.1% in the 2018 general election to 0.9% in the 2020 general. No Party Preference voters' CVR use increased from 0.3% in the 2018 general to 1.3% in the 2020 general.

Note: In 2018, there were only five VCA counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo). 2018 numbers represent CVR use rates for those five counties while 2020 numbers represent CVR use rates for the 15 counties that adopted the VCA model for the 2020 election cycle. This should be considered when comparing the two elections.

When excluding Los Angeles County, Republicans and Democrats in the remaining 14 VCA counties had the same CVR use rates as the statewide rates (1.0% and 0.7% respectively). No Party Preference voters, however, had higher CVR use rates (1.7%) than the rate for No Party Preference voters statewide. Los Angeles County first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2020 election cycle and was not a VCA county in the 2018 general election.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Previous Voting Method



For the following section, we define “previous polling place voters” as registrants who voted in person at a polling place or vote center in the last election in which they voted. Similarly, a “previous VBM voter” is defined as a registrant who cast a VBM ballot in the last election in which they voted. We applied these definitions to voters whose most recent voting experience was in any election from 2010 to 2020 (primary election). A voter who did not vote between 2010 and 2020 but who may have voted before 2010, was excluded from this analysis as voting methods from these elections may less reliably indicate future voter behavior. Additionally, voters who may have voted since 2010 but not in the state of California were excluded from this analysis. Previous polling place voters had higher CVR use rates than previous VBM voters (Figure 11). In California, 0.3% of previous polling place voters used CVR, compared to 0.1% of previous VBM voters.

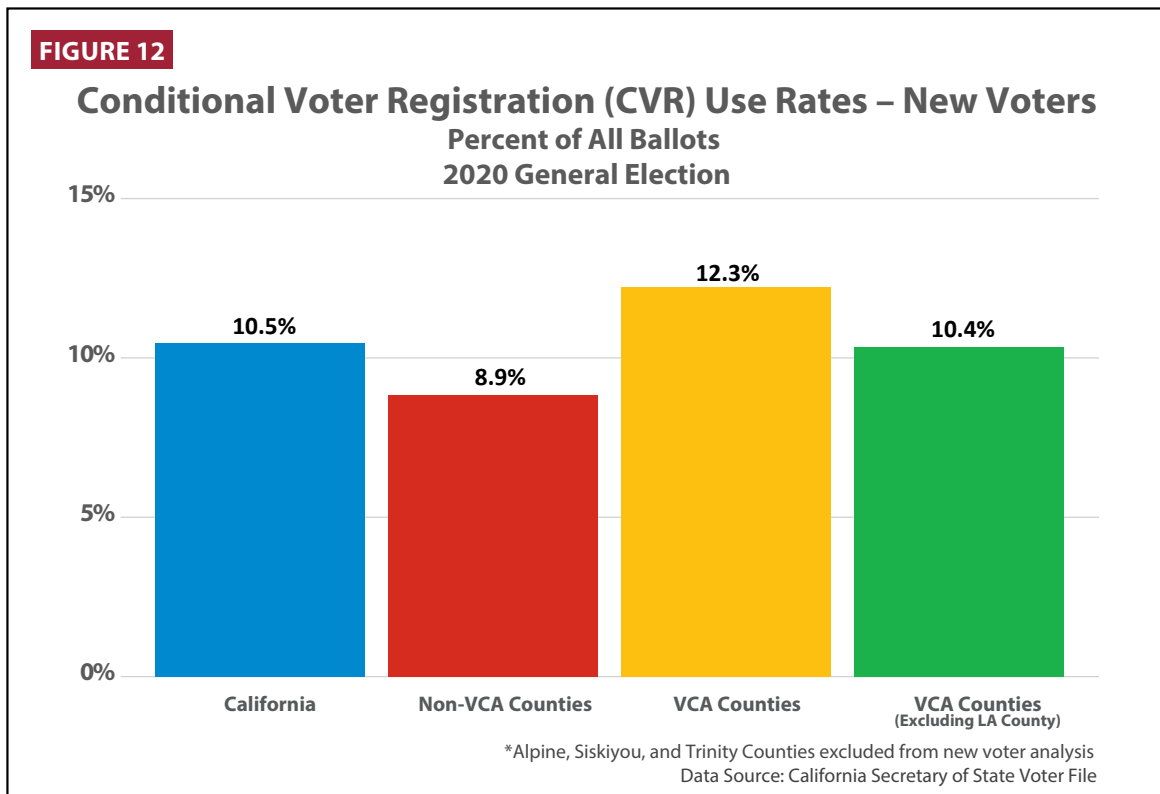
Note: Figure 11 does not include new voters, as they do not have a history of voting. New voters typically use CVR at higher rates compared to returning voters.

Looking at individual counties, previous polling place voters had a larger upper range of CVR use than previous VBM voters. Riverside County (0.9%) and Sacramento County (1.1%) had the highest CVR use rates among previous polling place voters. The same two counties, Sacramento County (0.2%) and Riverside County (0.3%), had the highest CVR use rates among previous VBM voters, although the rates were much lower than previous polling place voters. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by previous voting method and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, the rates for both previous polling place voters and previous VBM voters matched the statewide rates. In non-VCA counties, previous polling place voters' CVR use dropped to 0.2% while previous VBM voters' CVR use stayed the same at 0.1%. In VCA counties excluding Los Angeles, 0.5% of previous polling place voters and 0.1% of previous VBM voters used CVR.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by New Voters



For the following section, we define “new voters” as those who registered to vote in California for the first time after the 2020 primary election and who voted in the 2020 general election. A new voter may have voted in a state other than California in previous elections.

In the 2020 general election, new voters used CVR at notably higher rates than the general population (Figure 12). Around 10.5% of all new voters in California used CVR compared to 1.0% of all voters.

Kings County (12.9%), Nevada County (12.9%), Stanislaus County (13.6%), and Los Angeles County (14.2%) had the highest CVR use rates among new voters while Modoc County (0.0%) and Sierra County (0.0%) had the lowest rates. (See [online appendix B](#) for a full list of conditional voter registration use by new voters and county.)

Note: New voters could not be identified for Alpine, Siskiyou, and Trinity Counties.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

New voters in VCA counties had an even higher CVR use rate at 12.3%. In non-VCA counties, new voters' CVR use rate decreased to 8.9%, but was still well above the 0.9% rate for the general population. When excluding Los Angeles County, the remaining VCA counties had a slightly lower CVR use rate for new voters (10.4%) than the statewide rate for new voters.

Provisional Ballots

Section Highlights

- 0.3% of ballots cast and counted in the 2020 general election were cast with provisional ballots.
- Latino voters, new voters, young voters, and previous polling place voters used provisional ballots at higher rates than the general population.
- Young voters used provisional ballots at higher rates than older voters.
- Democratic voters had lower provisional ballot use rates than Republican and No Party Preference voters.
- VCA counties had markedly lower provisional ballot use than non-VCA counties. VCA counties had virtually 0% provisional ballot use (3,727 ballots), while non-VCA counties had a 0.6% (50,960 ballots) provisional ballot use rate.

Since 1984, California election law permits any voter claiming to be properly registered, but whose qualifications cannot be immediately confirmed upon examination of the list of registered voters for the precinct or the records on file with the county election official, to cast a provisional ballot. As noted earlier in this report, voters in VCA counties can vote CVR or provisional ballots at any vote center in their county. In traditional polling place counties, voters must go to their assigned polling place to vote a CVR or provisional ballot for their correct ballot type.¹³

Provisional ballots are considered one part of the voter safety net, ensuring every registered voter's ability to participate in an election. Similar to CVR, provisional ballots are only available to voters casting a ballot in person. Provisional ballots can include ballots cast by voters who:

- Believe they are registered to vote even though their names are not on the official voter registration list at the polling place or vote center, or
- Vote by mail and instead want to vote at their polling place or a vote center, but they did not receive their ballot or do not have their ballot with them (and the elections official is unable to verify that they have not returned their vote-by-mail ballot).

All provisional ballots are checked by county elections officials to confirm that the person who voted provisionally is both registered and that they did not cast a ballot by mail or at another voting location. Since provisional ballots include additional human review and verification, they are counted after Election Day.

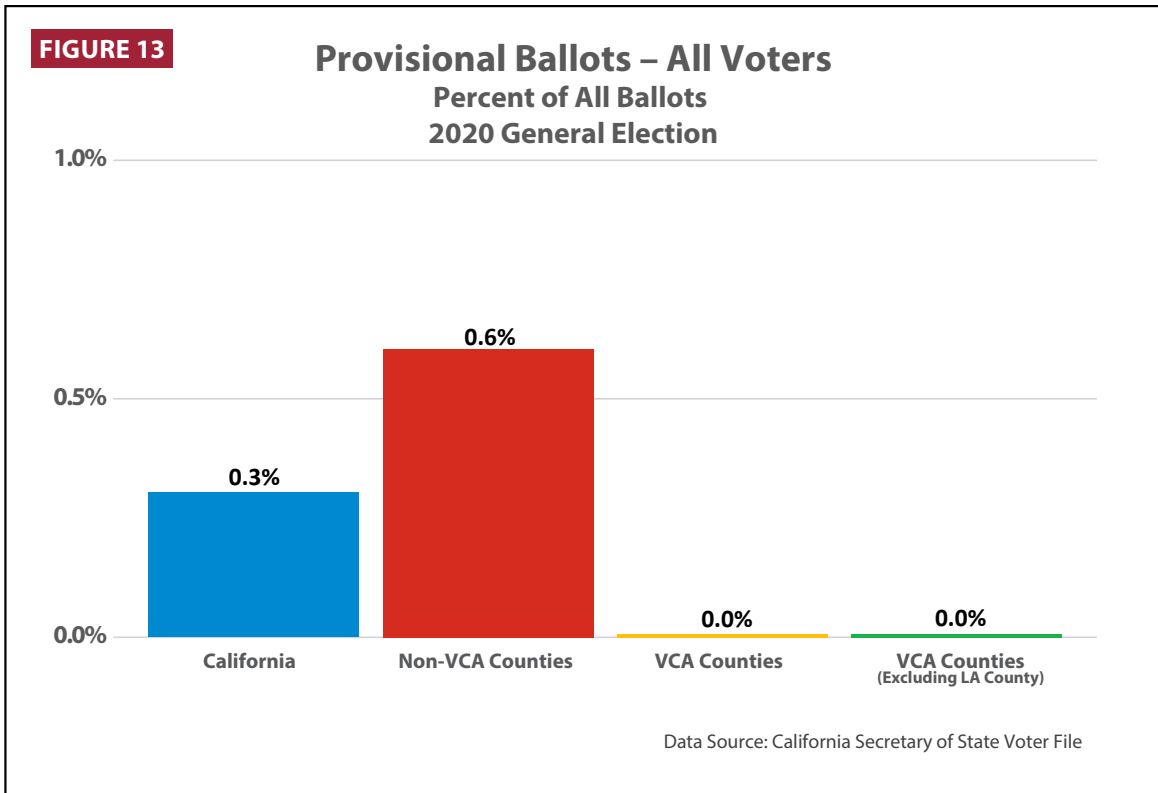
Table 10 shows that provisional ballot use decreased in the 2020 general election compared to the 2018 general election. In California, provisional ballot use decreased from 6.7% of all ballots in 2018 to 0.3% of all ballots in 2020. This large decrease in provisional ballot use coincides with the expansion of CVR to all voting locations in the state, suggesting many potential provisional ballot voters may have used CVR instead.

Table 10: Provisional Ballot Use: 2018-2020 General Elections

	2018 General Election			2020 General Election			Percentage Point Difference
	Votes	Provisional Ballots	Percent Provisional	Votes	Provisional Ballots	Percent Provisional	
California	12,432,484	832,162	6.7%	17,236,963	54,687	0.3%	-6.4%
Non-VCA Counties	11,478,339	832,073	7.2%	8,774,266	50,960	0.6%	-6.6%
VCA Counties	954,145	89	0.0%	8,462,697	3,727	0.0%	0.0%
VCA Counties (Excluding LA County)*	NA	NA	NA	4,311,849	974	0.0%	NA

Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter Files

*In the 2018 general election, Los Angeles County was not a VCA county. There were 5 VCA counties in 2018 (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo)



In the 2020 general election, 0.3% (54,687 provisional ballots of 17,236,963 counted votes) of ballots cast and counted were provisional (Figure 13). Provisional ballot use was noticeably lower in the 2020 general election than in the 2018 general election in which the statewide rate was 6.7% (832,162 provisional ballots of 12,432,484 counted votes). Table 11 shows provisional ballot use decreased by 6.4 percentage points from the 2018 general to the 2020 general.

There are several possible explanations for the sharp decrease in provisional ballot use in the 2020 general election. The expanded availability of CVR and the ability to void outstanding VBM ballots provided alternative options to provisional ballots. Additionally, every registered voter received a VBM ballot due to the COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing the number of voters voting in person at a vote center or polling place.

Note: In 2018, there were only five VCA counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo). 2018 numbers represent provisional ballot use rates for those five counties while 2020 numbers represent provisional ballot use rates for the 15 counties that adopted the VCA model for the 2020 election cycle. This should be considered when comparing the two elections.

Twenty-five of California's fifty-eight counties had 0.0% provisional ballot use rates. Kern County (6.6%), Imperial County (7.5%), and Lake County (8.2%) had the highest provisional ballot use rates throughout California. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by county.)

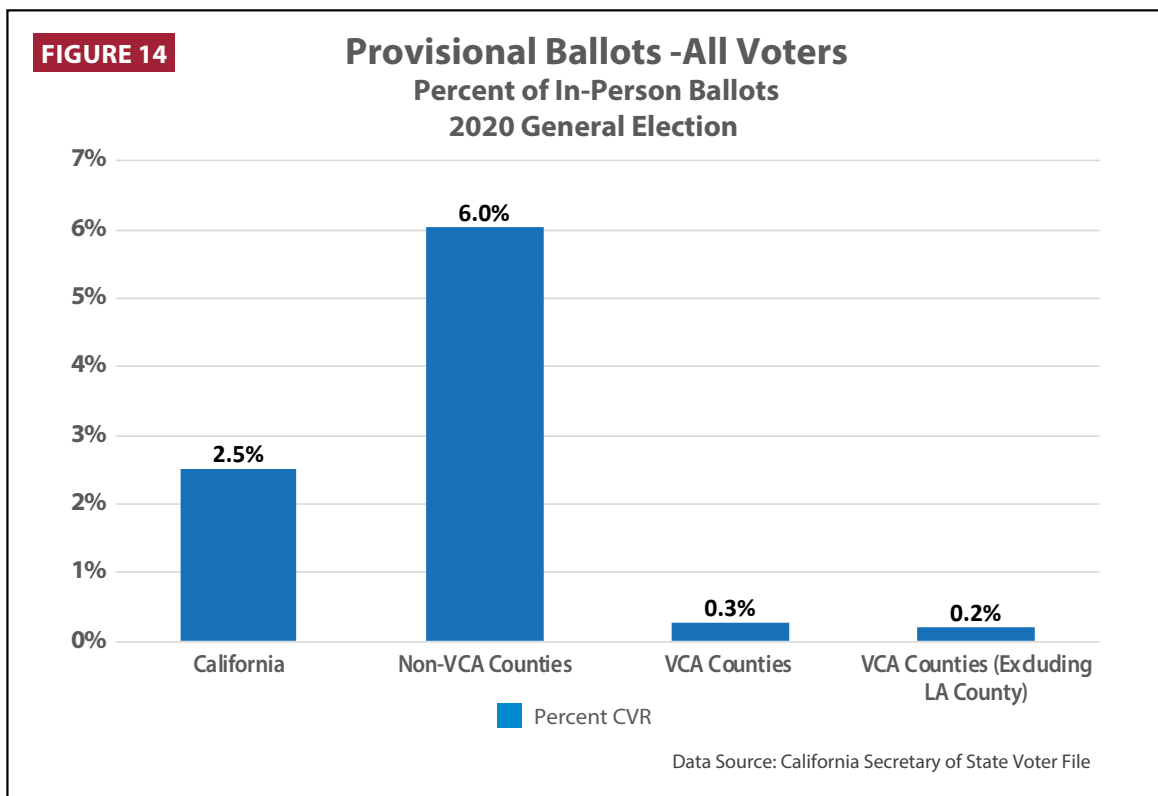
VCA and Non-VCA Counties

VCA counties had substantially lower provisional ballot use than the state as a whole. In VCA counties, 3,727 provisional ballots were cast and counted, virtually 0.0% of ballots. Provisional ballot use in VCA counties was also virtually 0.0% in the 2018 general election.

Note: In 2018, there were only 5 VCA counties, including Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo.

In non-VCA counties, 6.0% (50,960 ballots) of ballots cast and counted in the 2020 general were provisional ballots. This is a significant decrease from the 2018 general election in which 7.2% of ballots were provisional. When excluding Los Angeles County, provisional ballot use continues to be virtually 0.0% with 974 provisional ballots cast. Los Angeles County first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2020 election cycle and was not a VCA county in the 2018 general election.

Note: In our provisional ballot analysis, ballot totals includes all ballots that were cast and counted. Rejected ballots are not included in the vote totals.



Provisional ballots are only available to voters voting in person at a vote center or a polling place. Figure 14 shows the share of in-person votes that were cast with provisional ballots in the 2020 general election. In California, 2.5% (54,687 provisional ballots out of 2,168,152 in-person ballots) of votes cast in in person were provisional ballots. (See [online appendix C](#) for provisional ballot use among in-person voters for all demographic groups.)

Eleven of California's fifty-eight counties had 0.0% of in-person ballots cast with provisional ballots. Mendocino County (72.1%), Lake County (72.6%), and Alpine County (96.4%) had the highest shares of in-person votes cast with provisional ballots. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of in-person votes cast with provisional ballots by county.)

Note: In-person ballot numbers include ballots cast with a paper ballot at a vote center or polling place. They do not include VBM ballots dropped off at a vote center or polling place.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, 0.3% (3,727 provisional ballots out of 1,325,371 in-person ballots) of in-person votes were cast with provisional ballots. Non-VCA counties had a noticeably higher share of in-person ballots cast with provisional ballots (6.0%-50,960 provisional ballots out of 842,781 in-person ballots). When excluding Los Angeles County, the remaining 14 VCA counties had a lower share of in-person votes that were cast with provisional ballots (0.2% - 974 provisional ballots out of 486,720 in-person ballots) than all fifteen VCA counties.

Table 11 shows the percentage of provisional ballots and conditional registration ballots cast that were rejected in the 2020 general election. In California, provisional ballots had a 4.9% rejection rate and conditional voter registration ballots had a 1.4% rejection rate.

Table 11. Conditional Voter Registration and Provisional Ballots Rejection Rates: 2020 General Election

	CVR Cast	CVR Counted	CVR Rejected	% CVR Rejected	Provisional Ballots Cast	Provisional Ballots Counted	Provisional Ballots Rejected	% Provisional Ballots Rejected
California	259,883	256,301	3,582	1.4%	71,624	68,079	3,545	4.9%
Non VCA Counties	118,622	116,883	1,739	1.5%	65,214	63,101	2,113	3.2%
VCA Counties	141,261	139,418	1,843	1.3%	6,410	4,978	1,432	22.3%
VCA Counties w/o LA	61,139	60,759	380	0.6%	1,911	1,311	600	31.4%

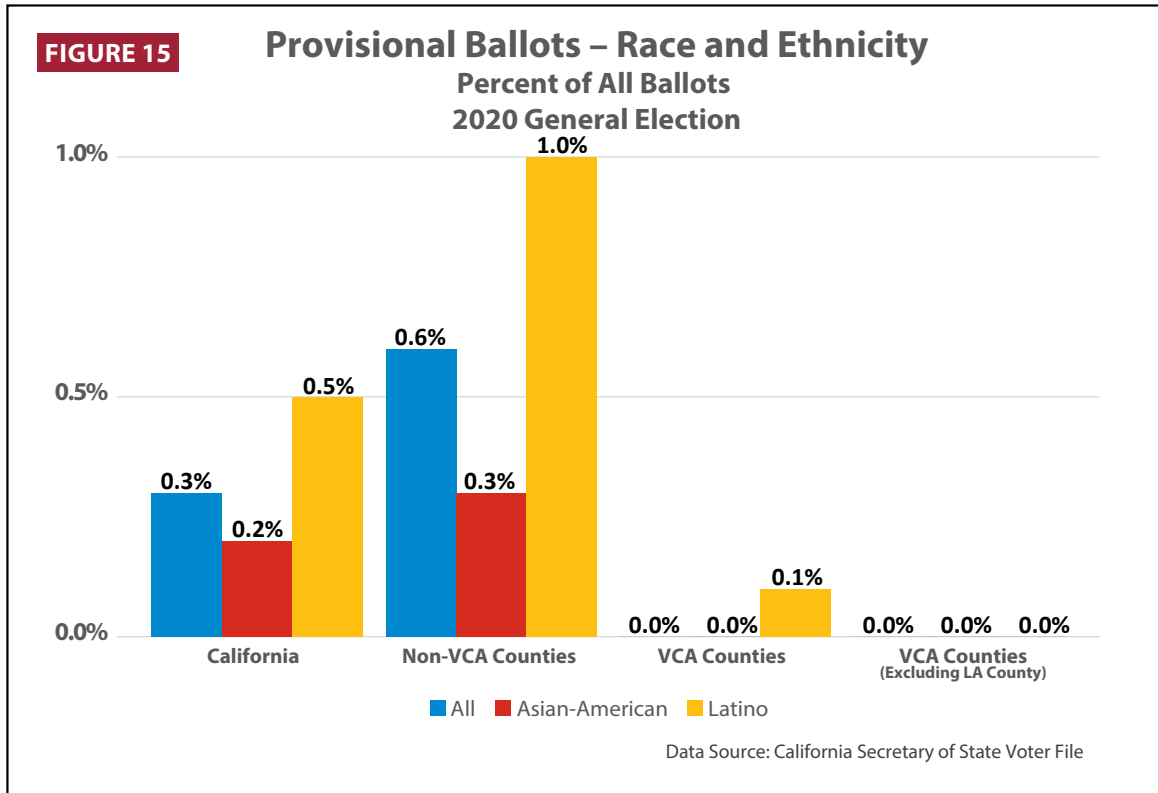
Data Source: California Secretary of State Voter File

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, 1.3% of CVR ballots were rejected, slightly lower than 1.5% of CVR ballots in non-VCA counties. When excluding Los Angeles County, however, the remaining 14 VCA counties had a CVR rejection rate of 0.6%, less than half the rejection rate of non-VCA counties. VCA counties had a noticeably higher rejection rate for provisional ballots (22.3%) when compared to non-VCA counties (3.2%). VCA counties, excluding Los Angeles County, had an even higher provisional ballot rejection rate at 31.4%.

Note: The numbers of provisional and conditional registration ballots in Table 11 were derived from the voter files from the Secretary of State VoteCal system. These numbers differ slightly from the merged data file used in the provisional and conditional registration ballot sections of this report.

Provisional Ballots by Race and Ethnicity



Provisional ballot use between race and ethnicity groups varied greatly. As seen in Figure 15, Latino voters had higher provisional ballot use rates than the general population, while Asian-American voters had lower provisional ballot use rates than the general population. In California, 0.5% of ballots cast and counted from Latino voters were cast with provisional ballots, while 0.3% of all voters used provisional ballots. Around 0.2% of ballots cast and counted from Asian-American voters were cast with provisional ballots.

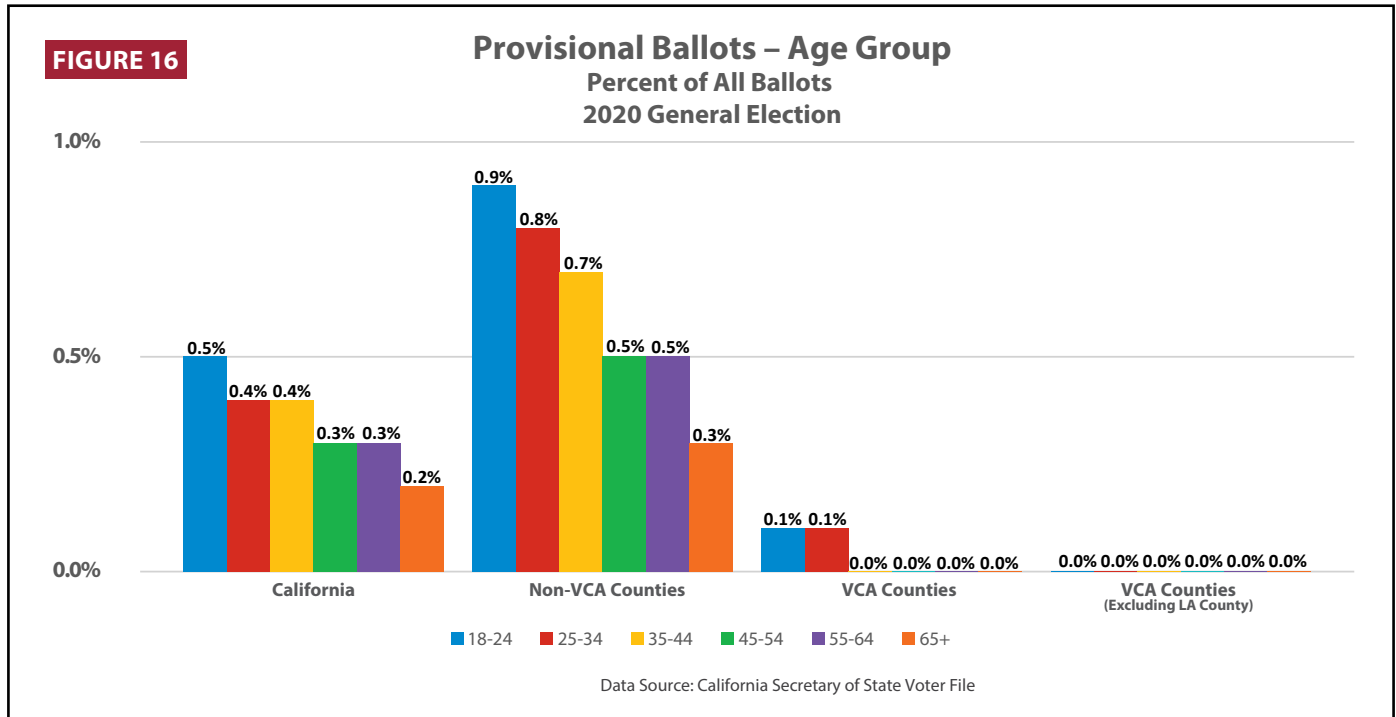
Alpine County had by far the highest provisional ballot use rate for Asian Americans, with 20% of ballots cast by Asian Americans being provisional ballots. It's important to note, however, that Alpine County only had five counted votes and one provisional ballot cast by Asian Americans. Lake County had the second highest provisional ballot use rate among Asian Americans at 8.2%. Lake County had the highest provisional ballot use rate for Latino voters, with 9.9% of counted votes being cast with a provisional ballot. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by race/ethnicity and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

VCA counties had low provisional ballot use for both Asian-American and Latino voters. Around 0.1% of Latino voters used provisional ballots, while virtually 0.0% of Asian-American voters did the same. In non-VCA counties, 1.0% of Latino voters used provisional ballots, compared to 0.6% of all voters. Asian-American voters (0.3%) used provisional ballots at a lower rate than the general population.

In VCA counties, excluding Los Angeles County, provisional ballot use rates among Asian-American and Latino voters were virtually 0.0%, matching the general population rate.

Provisional Ballots by Age Group



Young voters used provisional ballots at higher rates than older voters. In California, 0.5% of voters aged 18 to 24 used provisional ballots, compared to 0.2% of voters aged 65 and older (Figure 16). Provisional ballot use decreased among all age groups from the 2018 general. Young voters had the biggest decrease from the 2018 general, in which 14.7% of ballots cast and counted by young voters were provisional.

Counties with the highest provisional ballot use by young voters included Lake County (11.4%) and Alpine County (15.2%). Counties with the highest provisional ballot use by older voters included Imperial County (5.0%) and Lake County (6.1%). (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by age group and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

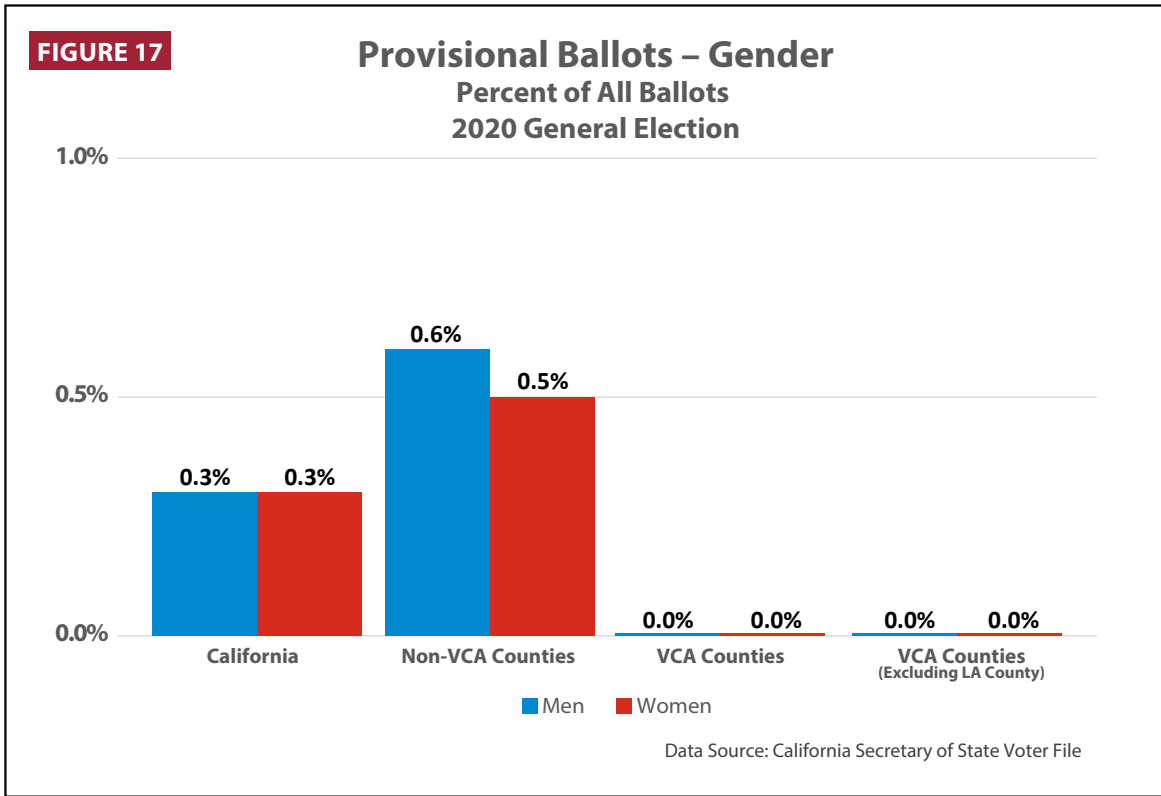
In VCA counties, young voters (0.1%) and voters aged 25 to 34 (0.1%) were the only age groups to register a provisional ballot use above 0.0%. This is similar to provisional ballot use in VCA counties in the 2018 general election, in which all age groups had virtually 0.0% provisional ballots use.

In non-VCA counties, 0.9% of young voters used provisional ballots, compared to 15.6% of young voters in the 2018 general election. Among voters aged 65 and over, 0.3% used provisional ballots in the 2020 general election. In the 2018 general election, 3.0% of older voters used provisional ballots.

Note: In 2018, there were only five VCA counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo). 2018 numbers represent provisional ballot use rates for those five counties while 2020 numbers represent provisional ballot use rates for the 15 counties that adopted the VCA model for the 2020 election cycle. This should be considered when comparing the two elections.

When excluding Los Angeles County, all age groups in the remaining VCA counties had a 0% provisional ballot use rate. Los Angeles County first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2020 election cycle and was not a VCA county in the 2018 general election.

Provisional Ballots by Gender

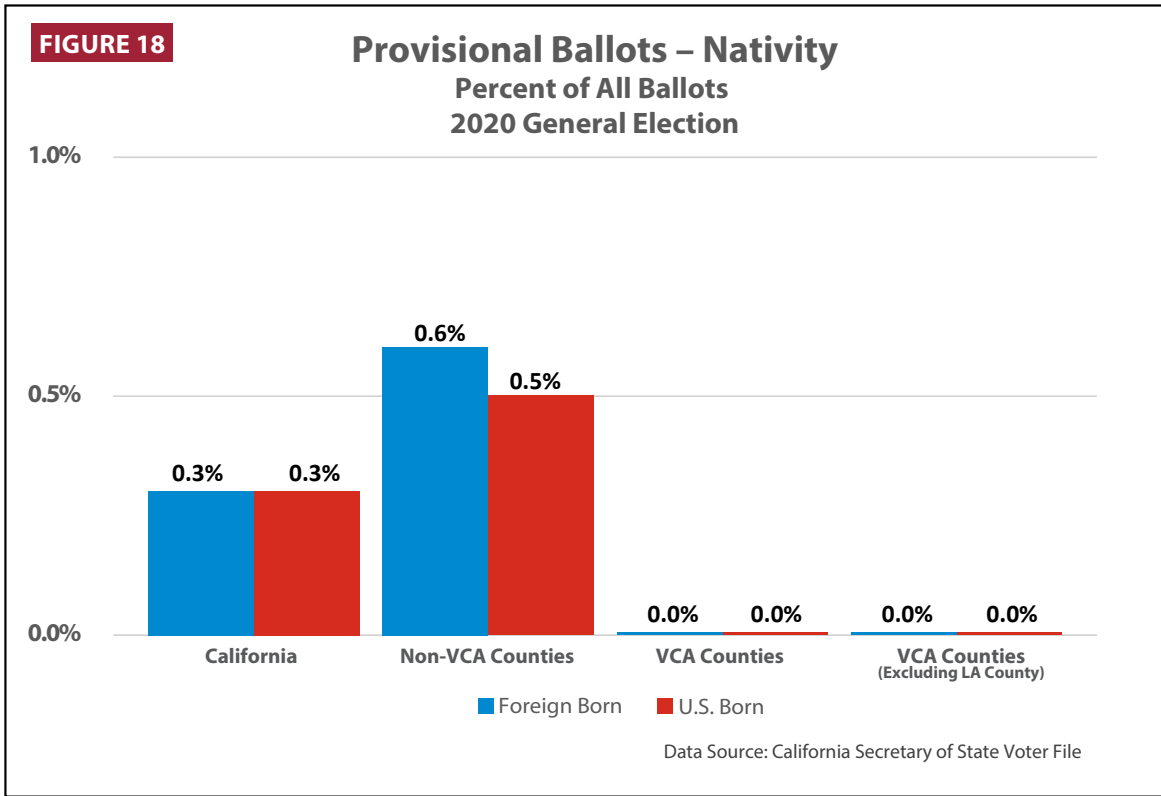


As seen in Figure 17, men and women had the same provisional ballot use rate of 0.3% in California. Looking at individual counties, Lake County and Imperial County had the highest provisional ballot use rates for both men and women, with 9.3% and 8.2% for men and 7.3% and 7.1% for women, respectively. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by gender and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties (including and excluding Los Angeles County), both men and women had a 0.0% provisional ballot use rate. In non-VCA counties, men (0.6%) used provisional ballots at a higher rate than women (0.5%).

Provisional Ballots by Nativity

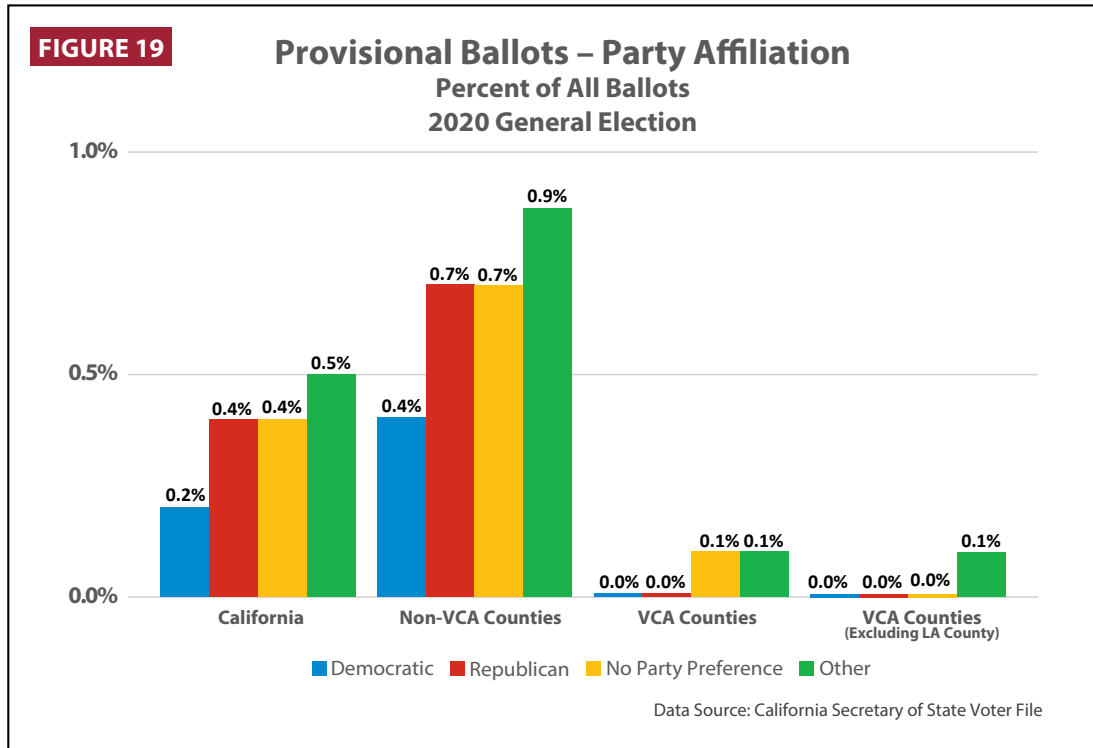


In California, foreign-born and U.S.-born voters had matching provisional ballot use rates of 0.3% (Figure 18). Imperial and Lake Counties had the highest provisional ballot use rates among both foreign-born and U.S.-born voters, with 8.0% and 7.8% for foreign-born voters and 8.0% and 8.2% for U.S.-born voters, respectively. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by nativity and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties (including and excluding Los Angeles County), both nativity groups had a 0.0% provisional ballot use. In non-VCA counties, foreign-born voters had a higher provisional ballot use rate of 0.6%, while 0.5% of U.S.-born voters used provisional ballots.

Provisional Ballots by Party Affiliation



Democratic voters had lower provisional ballot use rates than Republican and No Party Preference voters. Throughout the state, 0.2% of Democratic voters used provisional ballots, while 0.4% of both Republican and No Party Preference voters used provisional ballots (Figure 19).

In the 2020 general election, all party affiliations saw a decrease in provisional ballot use when compared to the 2018 general election. In the 2018 general election, 6.8% of ballots cast by Democrats, 4.5% of ballots cast by Republicans, and 8.8% of ballots cast by No Party Preference voters were provisional.

Kern, Imperial, and Lake Counties had the highest provisional ballot use rates among all party affiliations. In Kern County, 5.8% of Democrats, 6.4% of Republicans, and 7.9% of No Party Preference voters used provisional ballots. In Imperial County, 6.2% of Democrats, 9.1% of Republicans, and 7.7% of No Party Preference voters used provisional ballots. In Lake County, 6.2% of Democrats, 10.3% of Republicans, and 8.5% of No Party Preference voters used provisional ballots. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by party affiliation and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, No Party Preference voters (0.1%) were the only party affiliation to have a provisional ballot use rate above zero percent. In comparison, all party affiliations had a virtually 0.0% provisional ballot use rate in the 2018 general election.

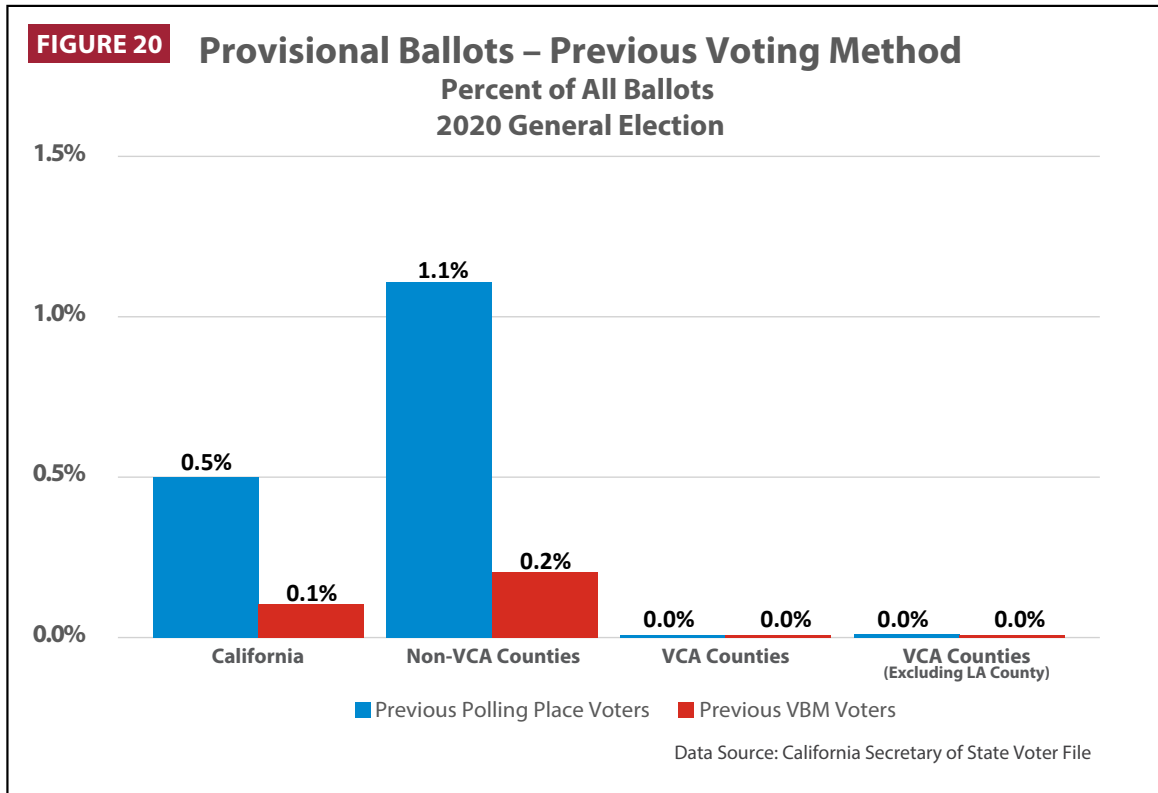
In non-VCA counties, 0.4% of Democratic voters used provisional ballots, compared to 0.7% of both Republican and No Party Preference voters. Compared to the 2018 general election, all party affiliations in non-VCA counties used provisional ballots at lower rates in the 2020 general election. In the 2018 general election, 7.4% of Democratic voters, 4.8% of Republican voters, 9.5% of No Party Preference voters cast provisional ballots.

Note: In 2018, there were only five VCA counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo). 2018 numbers represent provisional ballot use rates for those five counties while 2020 numbers represent provisional ballot use rates for the 15 counties that adopted the VCA model for the 2020 election cycle. This should be considered when comparing the two elections.

When excluding Los Angeles, Democratic, Republican, and No Party Preference voters in the remaining VCA counties

all had a virtually 0.0% provisional ballot use rate. Los Angeles County first adopted the VCA voting model in the 2020 election cycle and was not a VCA county in the 2018 general election.

Provisional Ballots by Previous Voting Method



For the following section, we define “previous polling place voters” as registrants who voted in person at a polling place or vote center in the last election in which they voted. Similarly, a “previous VBM voter” is defined as a registrant who cast a VBM ballot in the last election in which they voted. We applied these definitions to voters whose most recent voting experience was in any election from 2010 to 2020 (primary election). A voter who did not vote between 2010 and 2020, but who may have voted before 2010, was excluded from this analysis as voting methods from these elections may less reliably indicate future voter behavior.

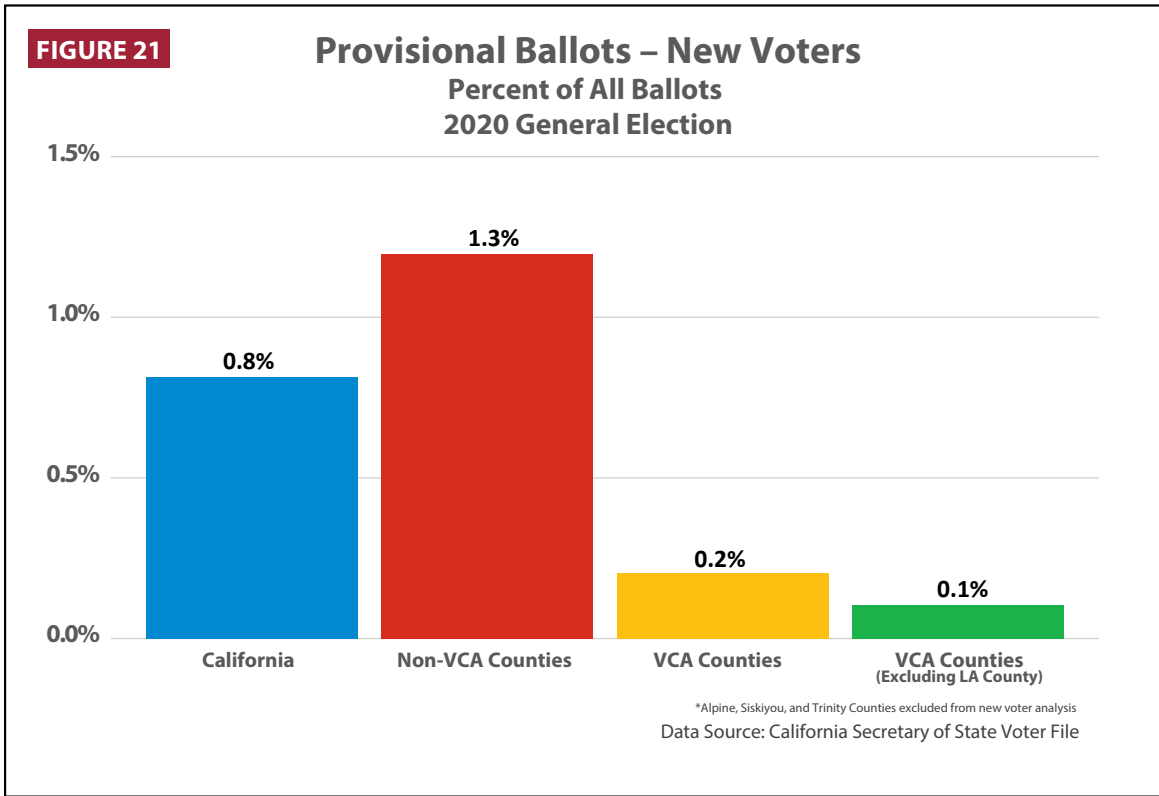
Previous polling place voters used provisional ballots at higher rates than previous VBM voters. In California, 0.5% of previous polling place voters used provisional ballots, compared to 0.1% of previous VBM voters (Figure 20).

Mendocino County (10.0%), Monterey County (11.1%), Kern County (13.1%), Imperial County (14.0%), and Lake County (22.4%) had the highest provisional ballot use rates among previous polling place voters. These five counties had particularly high provisional ballot use rates among previous polling place voters, with the next highest rate being in Colusa County at 2.9%. In comparison, Kern County (2.1%), Lake County (2.1%), and Imperial County (2.3%) had the highest provisional ballot use rates among previous VBM voters. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by previous voting method and county.)

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

VCA counties (including and excluding Los Angeles County) had virtually 0.0% provisional ballot use from both previous VBM and previous polling place voters. Previous polling place voters (1.1%) in non-VCA counties had markedly higher provisional ballot use than previous VBM voters (0.2%).

Provisional Ballots by New Voters



For the following section, we define “new voters” as those who registered to vote in California for the first time after the 2020 primary election and who voted in the 2020 general election. A new voter may have voted in a state other than California in previous elections.

New voters used provisional ballots at higher rates than the general population. In California, 0.8% of new voters used provisional ballots, compared to 0.3% across all voters (Figure 21). Imperial County (11.4%), Solano County (7.5%), and Kern County (7.4%) had the highest provisional ballot use rates among new voters. (See [online appendix C](#) for a full list of provisional ballot use by new voters and county.)

Note: New voters could not be identified for Alpine, Siskiyou, and Trinity Counties.

VCA and Non-VCA Counties

In VCA counties, 0.2% of new voters used provisional ballots, while virtually 0.0% of all voters used provisional ballots. Around 1.3% of new voters in non-VCA counties cast their ballot with a provisional ballot. Looking at VCA counties excluding Los Angeles County, 0.1% of new voters used provisional ballots, compared to 0.0% of the general population.

Conclusion

In the 2020 general election, over 22 million Californians were registered to vote. At 87.9%, the state's registration rate (percent of eligible voters registered to vote) increased by almost 10 percentage points from the 2016 general election and was the highest registration rate in 80 years. Latino, Asian-American, and young voters aged 18 to 24 did not experience the same growth in registration rate seen by the general population. Latino, Asian-American, and young voters were also underrepresented in their share of registered voters when compared to their share of the eligible voter population.

The 2020 presidential election was the first general election in which conditional voter registration was available at all voting locations throughout California. Around 1.0% of all ballots cast and counted were conditional voter registration ballots, a more than three-fold increase from the 2018 general election (0.3%). As CVR use increased after its expansion, provisional ballot use decreased from 6.7% of all votes in the 2018 general election to only 0.3% in the 2020 general election.

Some demographic groups, particularly those who experienced slower growth in registration rates between 2016 and 2020, used CVR at higher rates than the general population. Asian-American, Latino, young, and new voters had higher CVR use rates than the general population. Additionally, foreign-born voters used CVR at higher rates than U.S.-born voters. Registered Republican voters used CVR at higher rates than Democratic voters, while No Party Preference voters had the highest CVR use rates among the party affiliations.

Provisional ballot use rates were higher among some groups when compared to the general population, including Latino voters, new voters, young voters, and previous polling place voters. Comparatively, Asian-American voters, older voters (aged 65 and over), and previous VBM voters had lower provisional ballot use rates than the general population. Democratic voters had lower provisional ballot use rates than Republican and No Party Preference voters.

Notes

1. For information on the VoteCal system, see <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/votecal-project>
2. Because the California Election Code does not require registered voters to identify their race or ethnicity, the California voter file provides an incomplete flag for this information. While self-reported ethnicity data is generally reliable as an identifier, low self-reporting rates result in an incomplete VoteCal dataset. Further, the voting behavior and demographic characteristics of California registrants who answered this question are different than the ones who don't (self-selection bias), resulting in an unrepresentative sample of the total electorate.
3. Political Data, Inc. provided county voter registration file extracts for the 2020 Primary Election. These data are the actual registration records and not representative samples. Because of this, the level of confidence in the data is not susceptible to estimates as are survey or exit poll results. Latinos and Asian Americans are distinguished in the registration data from the general population primarily by using Spanish and Asian surname lists which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish and Asian surnames. The Passel-Word Spanish surname list, published by the U.S. Census Bureau, was utilized to identify Latinos. For Asian Americans, the U.S. Census Bureau's surname lists for six major Asian-American ethnic groups were utilized: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, and Vietnamese. In addition, ballot language designation and birthplace also inform the identification of race and ethnicity. Surname matching for research purposes is not reliable for white, non-Hispanic, and Black populations, and thus, registration data is not examined by this study for these groups. Whites and Blacks are 37.5% and 5.5% of the California population, respectively. Note: Some additional Latinos and Asian Americans may be registered to vote and not flagged by the surname databases.
4. The most common method for identifying the race or ethnicity of registered voters in the California voter file (and for most other states that were not subject to VRA registration requirements) is by surname matching. This method entails matching surnames on voter registration cards to ethnic surname lists. Surname analysis infers race/ethnicity from surnames that research has found are distinctive to particular racial and ethnic groups. This method is more reliable for some races and ethnicities than others.
5. For information on Assembly Bill 89 and Assembly Bill 100, see: <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>
6. For information on Assembly Bill 860 and Senate Bill 423, see: <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>
7. For more information on the California Voter's Choice Act, see: http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450
8. For information on Senate Bill 72, see: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB72
9. See California Secretary of State Registration statistics by county: <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ror/15day-gen-2020/county.pdf>
10. For more information on the Secretary of State's registration rate, see: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/news-releases-and-advisories/2020-news-releases-and-advisories/ap20108>
11. For information on the Statewide Database's methodology and data limitations for the identification of race and ethnicity, please see their technical documentation at: <https://statewidedatabase.org/d10/Creating%20CA%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf>
12. For more information about conditional voter registration in California, visit the California Secretary of State's website at: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations/current-regulations/elections/conditional-voter-registration>
13. For more information about provisional voting in California visit the California Secretary of State's website at: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/nvra/laws-standards/nvra-manual/chap-5>

