

Changing Electorate: A 2020 Post Election Analysis of Voting Behavior



Mindy Romero and Anna Meier
University of Southern California, Center for Inclusive Democracy



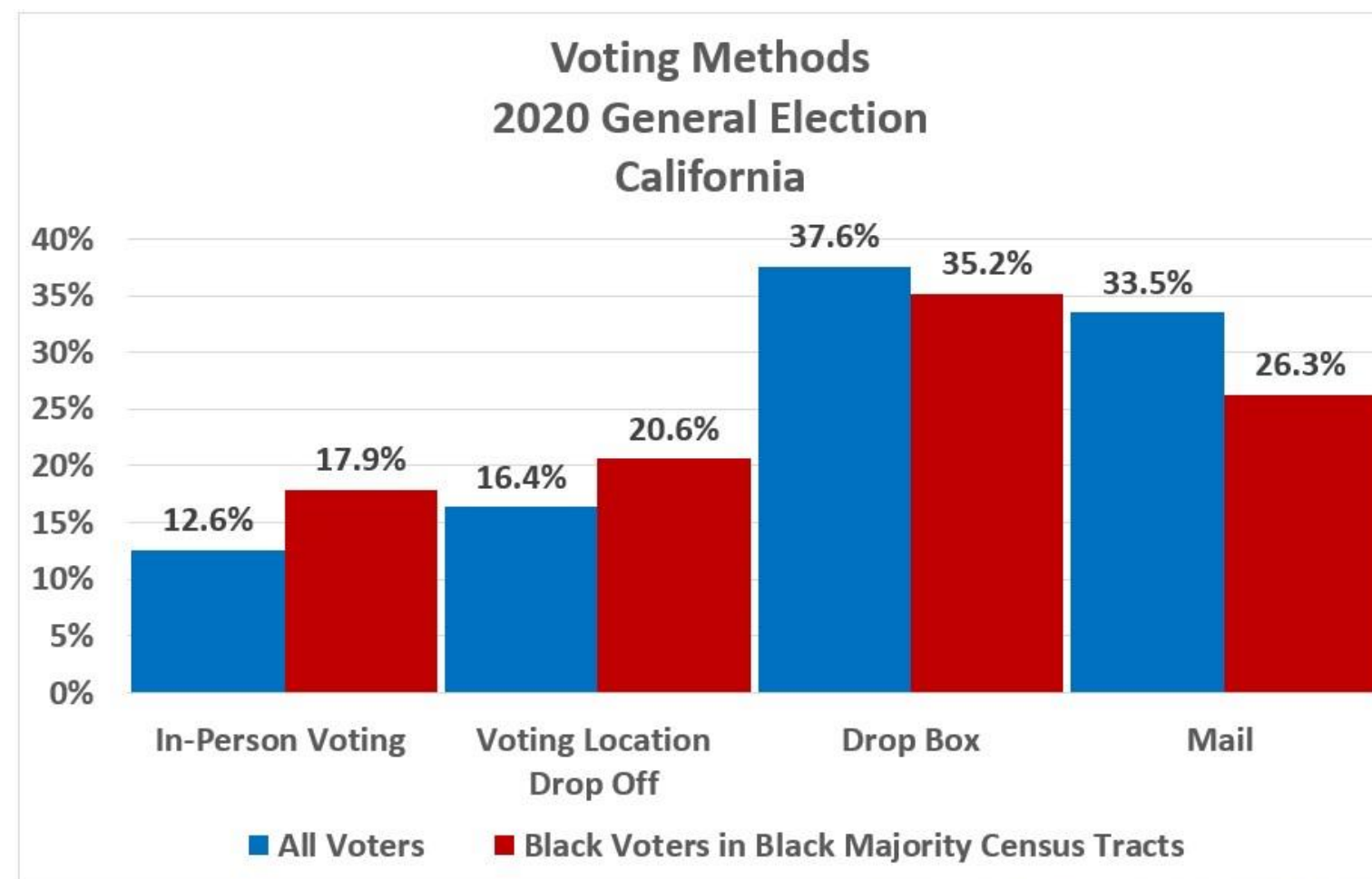
Introduction

- **Voting by mail has become increasingly common in California over the last eighteen years.**
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, California expanded the use of vote-by-mail in the 2020 presidential election by requiring county election offices to mail every active, registered voter a vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot.
- Given the expansion of VBM access in the 2020 general election, policymakers and voter advocates alike have questioned how voters' behavior may have changed from previous elections and if new preferences are likely to remain for future elections.

Methodology

- Analyzed individual voter records to gather voting behavior by ballot type, and whether their vote-by-mail ballot was rejected and for what reason. Voter files were provided by the California Secretary of State (VoteCal) and Political Data, Inc. (PDI).
- Identified Black voters in Black majority census tracts using surname matching and geocoding via R package "Who are you? (WRU)" developed by Princeton University political methodologists Kosuke Imai and Kabir Khanna.
- Conducted a representative survey examining the experiences of eligible voters in California.
- The survey's total sample was 11,423 eligible voters and was conducted in both English and Spanish. The margin of error for the total survey sample is +/-2.7%.

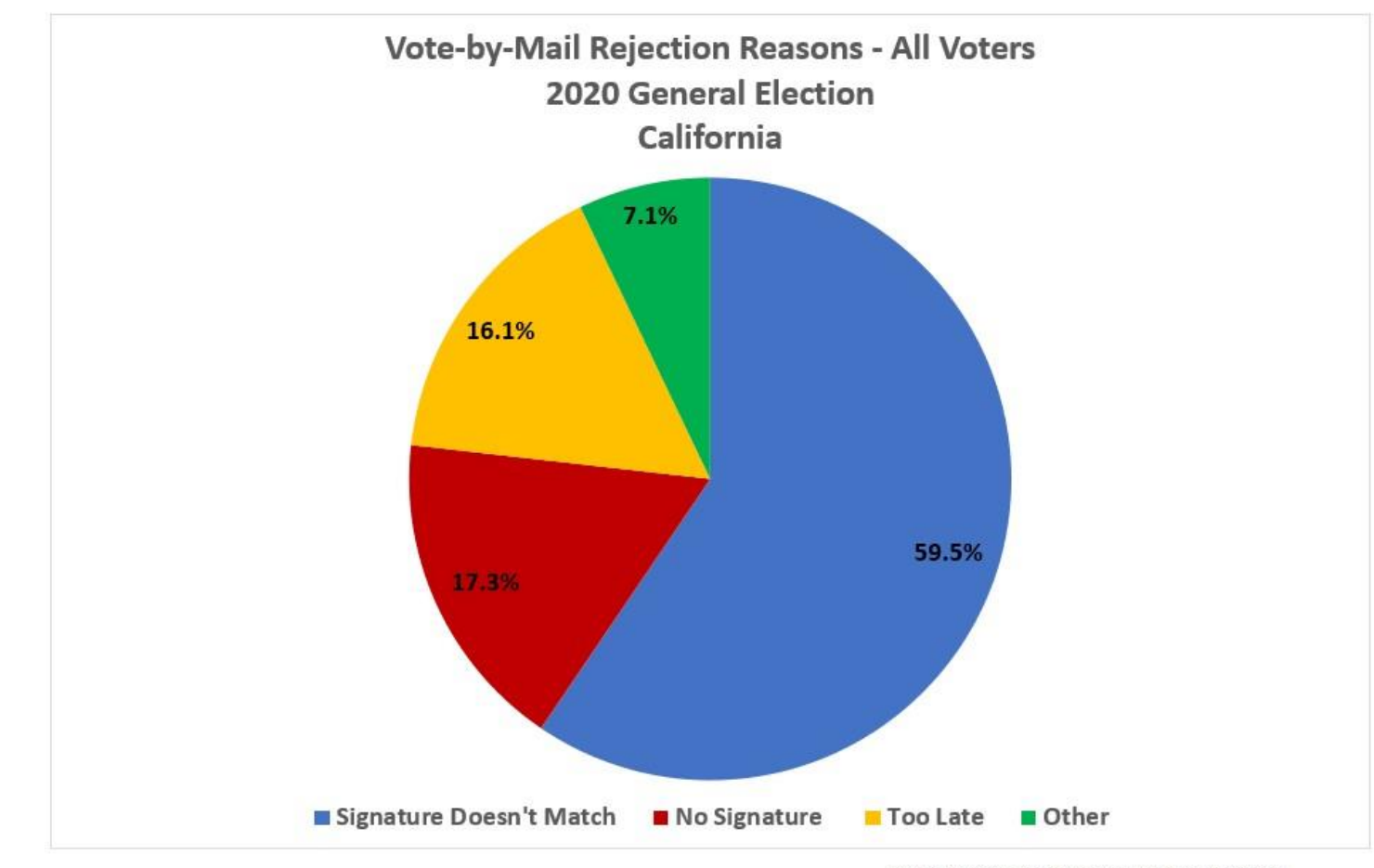
Voting Methods



- A large majority of California voters – **87.5%** - used **VBM ballots** in the 2020 general election, a 20-percentage point increase from the 2018 general election (67.1%) and a 17-percentage point increase from the 2020 primary election (70.4%).
- The most used method of voting in the 2020 general election was **returning a VBM ballot to a drop box (37.6%)**.
- **Black voters in Black majority census tracts voted in person (17.9%) at a higher rate** than the general population throughout the state (12.6%).
- **Latino, young voters (age 18 to 24), new voters, and previous in person voters had higher rates of in-person voting compared to the general population.**

VBM Ballot Rejection Reasons

- **0.5%** of VBM ballots cast in the 2020 general election were rejected.
- **The majority (76.8%) of rejected ballots were rejected due to signature issues.** Over 59% were rejected due to non-matching signatures, while another 17.3% were missing signatures.
- **Black voters in Black majority census tracts had slightly higher rejection rate (0.6%)** than the general population statewide.
- Asian-American and Latino voters had higher rates of ballots with missing signatures than the general population, while young voters aged 18 to 24 had higher rates of non-matching signatures than older voters aged 65 and over.



Voter Preferences

Thinking ahead to future elections, what would be your most preferred way to cast a ballot?

Statewide	Total	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino
Voting at an in-person voting location on Election Day	22.8%	20.0%	18.3%	23.5%	24.0%
Voting early at an in-person voting location sometime in the three days before Election Day	8.7%	11.1%	9.5%	9.9%	7.3%
Voting early at an in-person voting location sometime in the ten days before Election Day	33.3%	28.5%	32.6%	26.7%	38.2%
Mailing in a ballot that was sent to my home a month before Election Day	10.1%	12.2%	11.8%	11.8%	8.2%
Dropping off my vote-by-mail ballot at an in-person voting location, after having that ballot mailed to my home a month before Election Day	9.8%	8.3%	11.3%	7.8%	10.8%
Dropping off my vote-by-mail ballot in a ballot drop-off box, after having that ballot mailed to my home a month before Election Day	2.4%	2.6%	2.4%	2.4%	2.3%
Using different voting methods in different elections	4.5%	6.0%	4.3%	6.2%	3.3%
None	3.4%	3.6%	4.0%	4.9%	2.1%
Don't Know	5.2%	7.6%	5.8%	6.7%	3.8%

Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

- **The majority of eligible voters (including those who didn't vote in 2020) said their preferred way to cast a ballot in future elections would be early voting in-person at a voting location sometime in the ten days before the election.**
- Early voting in-person was the most common method selected for Black, Asian-American, Latino, white, non-Latino eligible voters, eligible voters with disabilities, and young voters aged 18 to 24.
- When asked which in-person services they would likely use in the future, greater percentages of younger eligible voters said they would use language assistance or register to vote compared to those aged 55 and older. Eligible voters of color identified accessible voting machines and language assistance as in-person services they would likely use in the future.



Scan for voting behavior report



Scan for Black voter experience report