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### Title

Voting and Registration in California: Demographic Differences

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# VOTING AND REGISTRATION IN CALIFORNIA

## DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

*Research to Support the Future of California Elections*

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## Key Findings

This report explores the characteristics of California's unregistered voters, comparing them to registered voters in the state and disaggregating the unregistered and registered populations by ethnorace<sup>1</sup>, class, age, and gender.<sup>2</sup> We find:

- Youth are less likely to be registered across all ethnoracial groups, but youth of color are especially unlikely.
- Voting-eligible Latinos and Asian Americans are less likely to register and vote, regardless of income.
- Women are more likely to be registered across all ethnoracial groups.
- Where Californians register to vote varies by ethnorace and age more than by income.

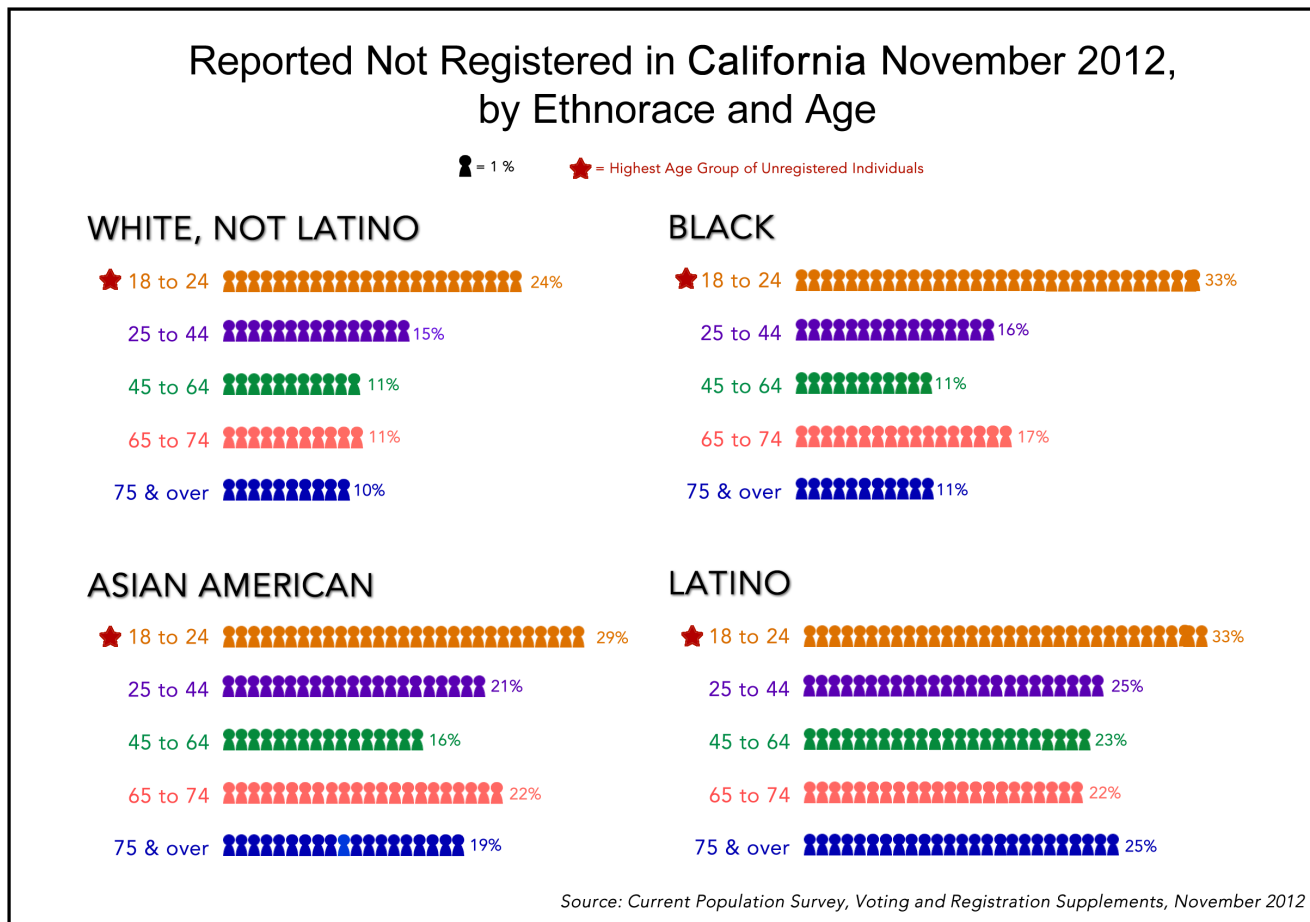
## Introduction

According to the California Secretary of State's office, 18,245,970 eligible voters registered to vote for the November 2012 election. Yet, the Secretary of State estimates that 23,802,577 Californians were eligible to vote in that election. That results in a registration rate of about 77 percent and an unregistered voter population of 5,556,607 individuals. That number is larger than the population of thirty U.S. states. Given the scale of the problem in California, it is important to learn more about the characteristics of the state's unregistered population and the reasons why have not registered to vote. That is the purpose of this brief.

## Youth Less Likely to be Registered across all Ethnoracial Groups, but Youth of Color Are Especially Unlikely

Figure 1 summarizes registration rates by age and ethnoracial group. In this figure we see:

- Latino and Black voter eligible youth are 38% less likely to report being registered as eligible white youth.
- Asian American voter eligible youth are 21% less likely to report being registered as eligible white youth.



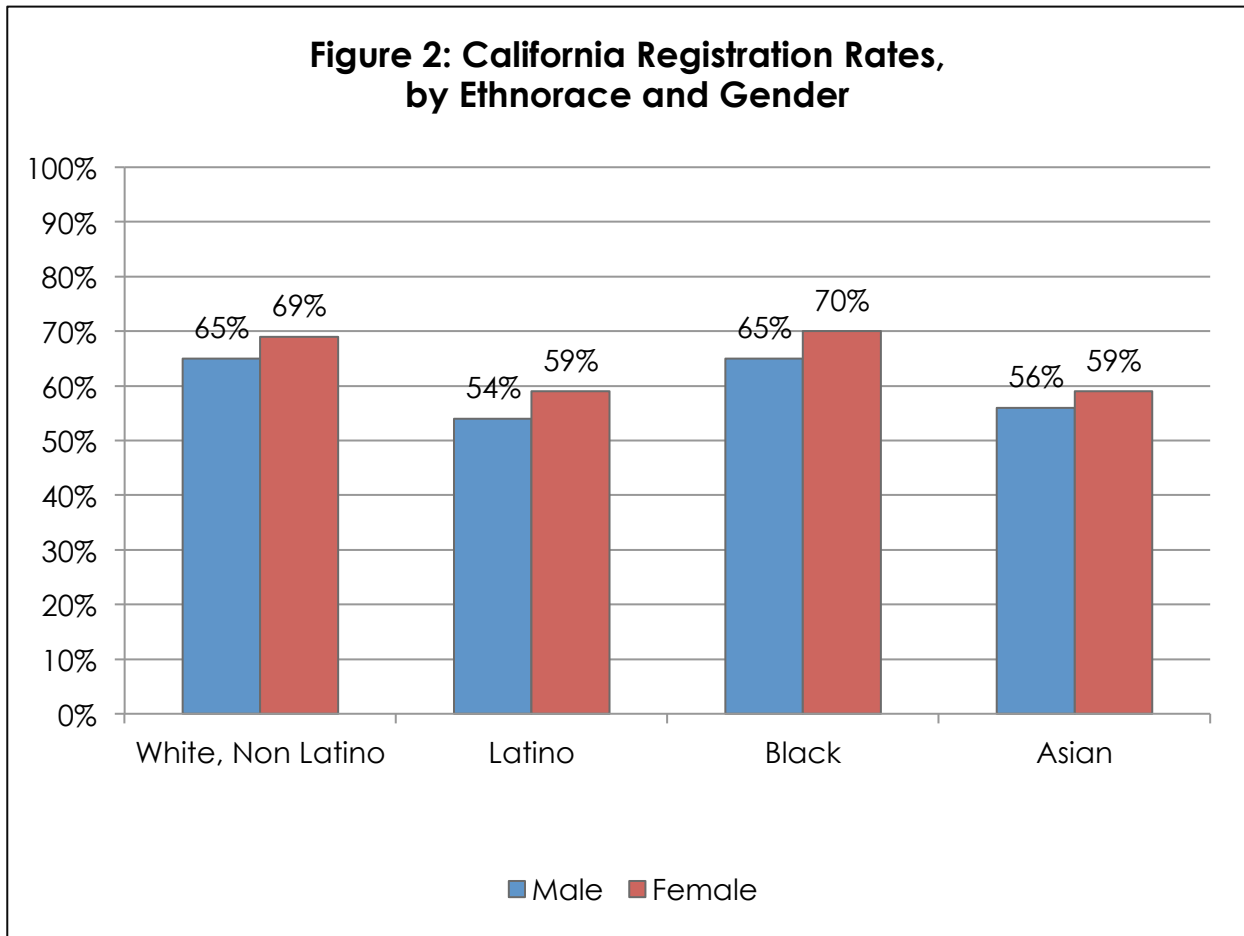
## Latinos and Asians Less Likely to Register and Vote, Regardless of Income

Overall, Latinos and Asian Americans in California who are eligible to vote register and vote at lower rates than whites or African Americans. To explore the root causes of this, we ran a set of predicted probabilities – analyses that show the probability a person with a certain set of characteristics has of registering or voting, holding all other things constant. With this analysis, we found important differences in registration and voting rates across groups even after controlling for age and income levels.

- Asian Americans earning \$50,000 to \$100,000 annually are 15% less likely to report being registered as whites earning the same income.
- Latinos earning \$50,000 to \$100,000 annually are 10% less likely to report having voted in November 2012 as whites earning the same income.

## Women More Likely to be Registered across all Ethnoracial Groups

Across all ethnoracial groups in California, women are about 5 percentage points more likely to be registered to vote than men. It is surprising to find this difference among Asian Americans because for the past two decades Asians have been the only ethnoracial group not to have a significant gender gap in registration and voting. This suggests that may be changing.

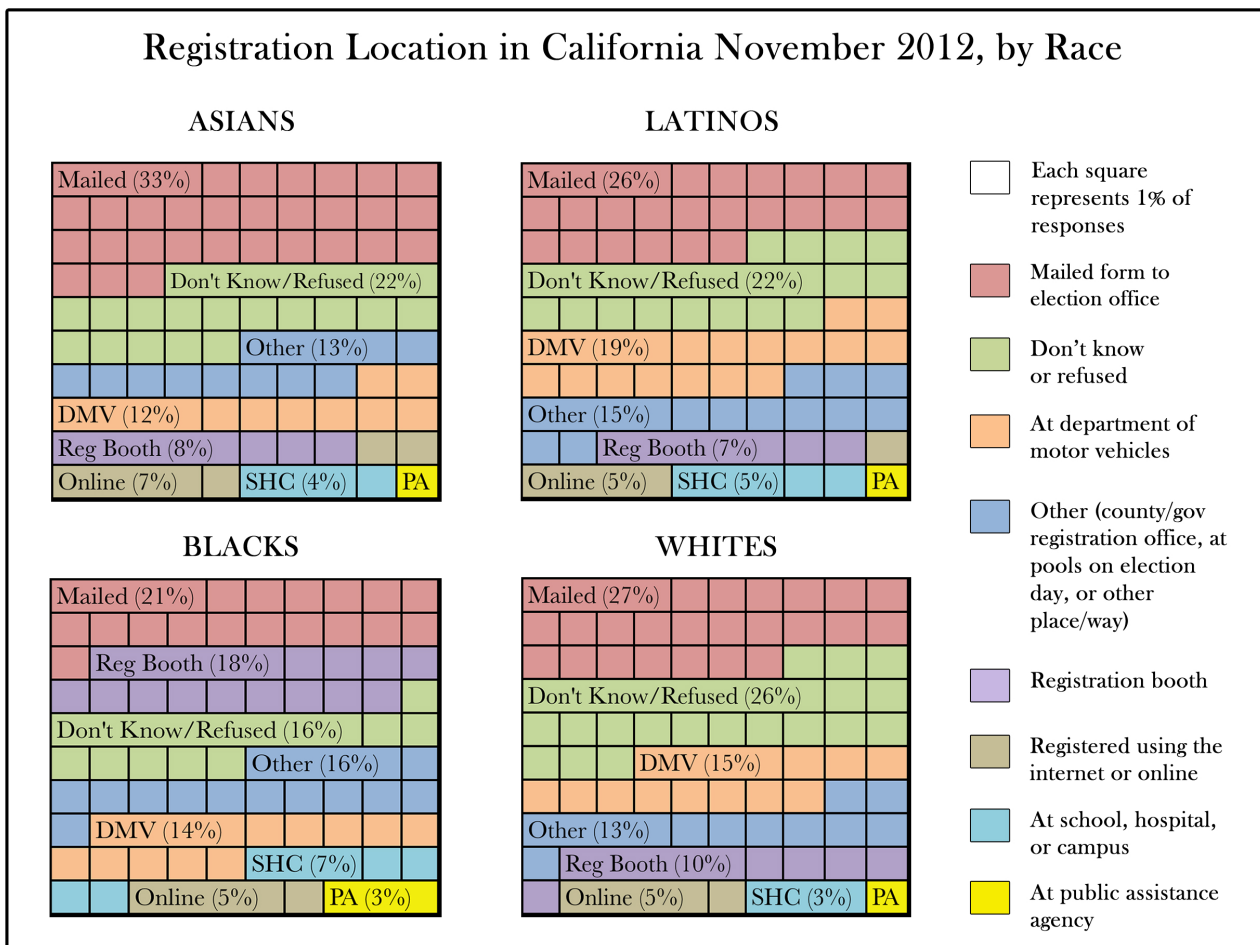


SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplements, November 2012

## Where Californians Register Varies by Ethnorace and Age More than Income

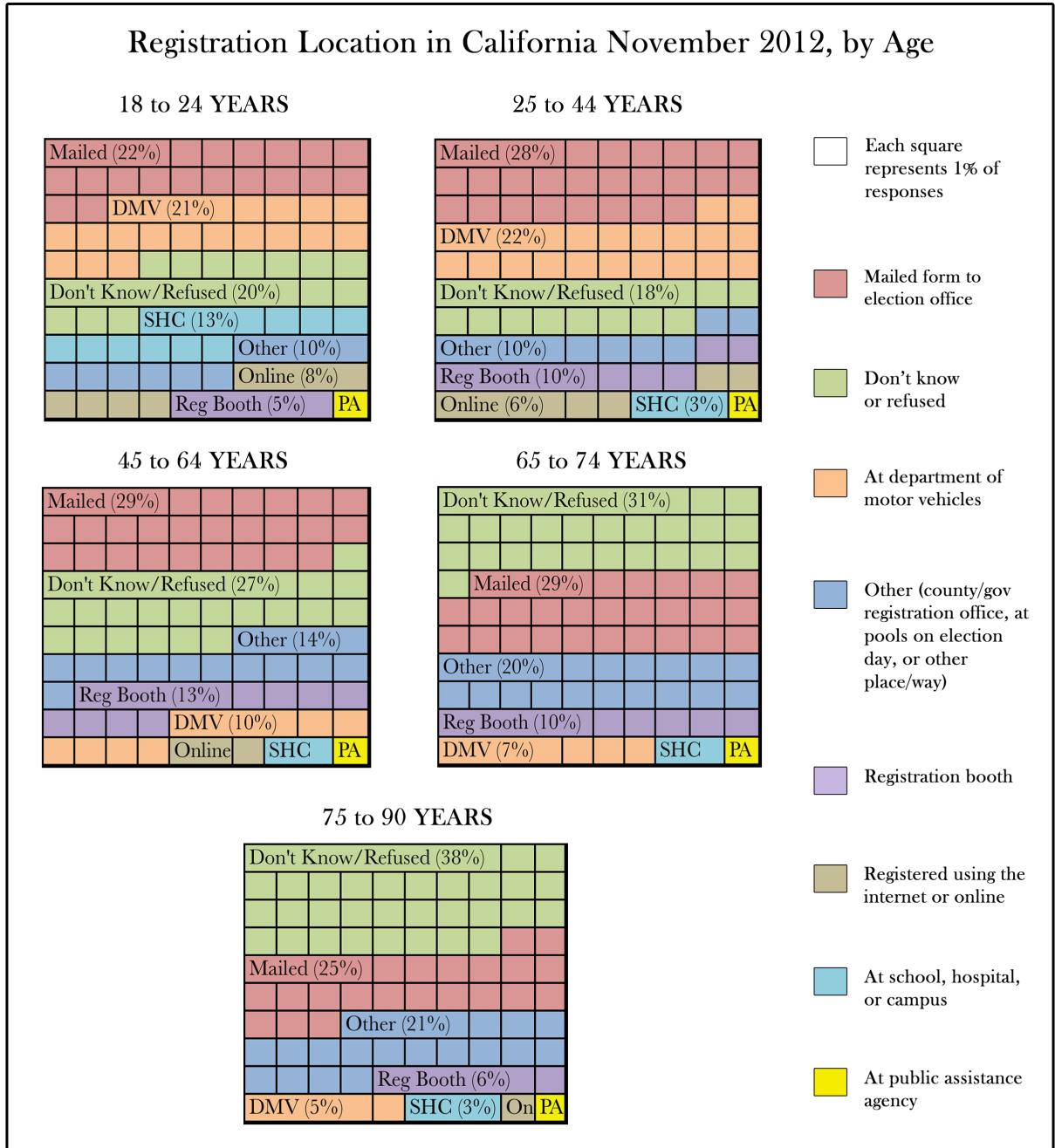
### Ethnoracial Differences:

- Asian Americans were the most likely to report registering online.
- Latinos were most likely to report registering at the DMV.
- African Americans were more likely than any group to report having registered at a school, hospital, or campus.
- African Americans were more than twice as likely as any other group to report having registered at a registration booth.
- African Americans were three times more likely to have registered at a public service agency than Asians or Latinos.



Age Differences:

- Eligible voters under age 45 were most likely to report registering online or at the DMV.
- Voters 18 to 24 were at least four times as likely as any other age group to report registering at a school, hospital, or campus.
- Voters aged 44 to 64 were the most likely to report registering at a registration booth.



## Top Three Reasons California Voters Didn't Register in November 2012

**Top Three** Reasons Why California Voters Didn't Register in November 2012

1. Not interested in politics
2. Did not meet the registration deadline
3. Not eligible to vote

### **Political Disinterest**

California respondents across the board were more likely to say there were not interested in politics in November 2012 than voters nationally. Among different California ethnoracial groups, male and female Asian American eligible voters were the most likely to give this response, and white male and female respondents the second most likely. African American and Latino eligible voters in California expressed similar levels of disinterest in the election and politics, with just over 30 percent of eligible voters from each of these groups giving this as their reason for not registering.

### **Registration Deadline**

About 15 percent of California voters stated this as the reason for not registering; more than 20 percent of African American women identified the

registration deadline as a barrier to their registration. Another 5 percent or more of each group reported not knowing how to register, indicating that about 1 in 5 eligible California voters is confused about the process of registering or was not able to complete the paperwork before the registration deadline. This strongly suggests that implementing same day registration in California, combined with a broad-based public information campaign informing eligible voters of its existence, would have a significant impact on these eligible voters' ability to exercise the franchise on Election Day.

Implementing same day registration and education programs about voting eligibility will encourage Californians of all ages, races, and income levels to register and vote.

### **Perceived Ineligibility**

The Current Population Survey only asked the registration question of respondents who said, in answer to previous questions, that they were 18 years old and citizens. In California, Latinos are the most likely group to say that they are not eligible to



vote. But, almost ten percent of voters from all groups said they did not register because they were not eligible. In addition to the confusion caused by felony disenfranchisement among eligible voters, it is possible that the many efforts at immigrant voter suppression that took place over the past few election cycles have taken their toll. At a minimum, these findings suggest the need to educate all eligible voters about their voting eligibility and rights in order to encourage them to register and vote.

### **Permanent Illness/Disability**

Having a permanent illness or disability was an important barrier to registration for African American males, in particular. At the national level, African American males were twice as likely as any other group to report this as an issue for their voter registration; African American males in California were at least six times as likely, compared to other groups, to state this as a barrier to their registration. This highlights the importance of insuring that registration opportunities and polling places are sensitive to the needs of disabled eligible voters.

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## **Policy Recommendations**

- Implement same day registration as soon as possible, understanding that a proactive education campaign will be necessary for its success
  - Focus voter education about same day registration on youth, particularly youth of color
  - Focus registration education efforts within Latino and Asian American communities, regardless of their income status
- Engage in public education about voter eligibility and the importance of an engaged electorate
- Make certain election information and polling places are accessible to all voters in terms of language access for non-English dominant voters and physical access for disabled voters.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term “ethnorace” to describe these groups in order to capture the intersection between race and ethnicity. Scholars have long debated which is the more appropriate term to describe group experiences. The word race presupposes a common biological or genealogical ancestry among people. Ethnicity places more of an emphasis on cultural practices than on common genetic traits. Many scholars use the terms race/ethnicity or ethnorace to describe the ways in which factors often attributed to culture, such as language, can be racialized. In other words, ascriptive attributions can be based on linguistic or cultural practices that are not “racial” (or biological), but still can have racialized consequences. Because we believe the lived experiences of the populations discussed in this brief include both racialized and ethnic/cultural traits, we describe them as ethnoracial groups.

<sup>2</sup> This report's findings are based on analysis of the Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplements, November 2012.