



*Research for a Stronger, More Inclusive Democracy*

# Looking at the Data of the First Voter's Choice Act Elections

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# VCA Expectations

- More efficient elections
- More convenient elections
- Cost reductions
- Increased voter turnout
- Concerns about access to VCs and disparities in VBM use
- Voter education and outreach needs

# LA County Differences

- Size and diversity
- Voters use their neighborhood polling places much more than those in the northern counties that have already made the switch
- Won't automatically send out vote-by-mail ballots but only to voters who request them
- Putting a tremendous effort into informing voters of this change and soliciting broad input on the location of the new vote centers

# VCA Research

Voter Turnout Study – [neweletorateproject.org](http://neweletorateproject.org)

VCA Implementation Study – [ccep.usc.edu](http://ccep.usc.edu)

# Voter Turnout Research

## New Electorate Study

# Voter Turnout Research

- Eric McGhee, Public Policy Institute of California
- Mindy Romero, California Civic Engagement Project at University of Southern California
- Laura Daly, California Civic Engagement Project at University of Southern California
- Thad Kousser, University of California, San Diego



[newelectorate.org](http://newelectorate.org)

# How Did the Voter's Choice Act Affect Turnout in 2018?

How did this reform affect the turnout of groups of Californians?

– young voters, Latinos, and Asian Americans– who have often participated in elections at lower rates than others?

# California Eligible Voter Turnout

## 2018 November Election

Total Population – 50.0% (49.0%)

Latinos – 35.9% (38.7%)

Asian Americans – 33.0% (31.6%)

Youth (age 18-24) – 27.5% (30.1%)



# VCA County Eligible Voter Turnout

- VCA counties: 57%
- Non-VCA counties: 52%
- VCA counties saw big 2018 increase
  - 18 percentage point increase over 2014

## **1. *Long-term turnout patterns***

- On average, the counties that adopted the VCA in 2018 have had higher turnout rates than the rest of the state

## **2. *Higher 2018 turnout everywhere***

- Historically high levels of voter engagement
- Every county saw a significant increase

## **3. *Campaign and election dynamics***

Instead, we need to compare a county's rise in participation to the overall state trend

**Table 1. General Election Turnout of Eligible Voters**

	Increase in General Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018
Average Increase in Counties Adopting the VCA	18.0
Average Increase in All Other Counties	15.0
<b>Counties Adopting the VCA</b>	
Madera	11.6
Napa	19.5
Nevada	18.3
Sacramento	17.2
San Mateo	23.6

Estimated Boost  
in Turnout:  
3.0 percentage  
points

**Table 3. Turnout of Young Voters**

	Increase in General Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018	Increase in Primary Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018
Average Increase in Counties Adopting the VCA	17.3	6.1
Average Increase in All Other Counties	10.5	3.5
Estimated Boost in Turnout	6.8	2.6

**Table 4. Turnout of Latino Voters**

	Increase in General Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018	Increase in Primary Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018
Average Increase in Counties Adopting the VCA	16.1	7.2
Average Increase in All Other Counties	12.3	4.9
Estimated Boost in Turnout	3.8	2.3

**Table 5. Turnout of Asian-American Voters**

	Increase in General Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018	Increase in Primary Election Turnout, 2014 to 2018
Average Increase in Counties Adopting the VCA	11.5	4.4
Average Increase in All Other Counties	7.0	3.9
Estimated Boost in Turnout	4.0	0.5

# Conclusions

- Voter's Choice Act (VCA) increased turnout overall about 3-4%
- VCA effect for key subgroups varied
  - Solid (2%-7%) effect for young people
  - Modest (2%-4%) effect for Latinos
  - Some effect for Asian-Americans in general

Same findings as a statistical analysis that considers historical trends since 2002 as well as the level of electoral competition in each county

- No evidence of a *negative* effect

# California Voter's Choice Act: Key Considerations for Implementation



# The VCA Implementation Study

Extensive study of how the VCA was implemented in 2018

Goal of informing VCA implementation in 2020 and beyond

Available online at:

[ccep.usc.edu](http://ccep.usc.edu)

# Study Advisory Committee Members

- **Courtney Bailey-Kanelos**, Sacramento County Registrar of Voters
- **Elba Gonzalez-Mares**, Executive Director, Community Health Initiative (CHI)
- **Joe Holland**, Santa Barbara County Clerk, Recorder, Assessor and Registrar of Voters
- **Jim Izzary**, San Mateo County Assistant Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder and Chief Elections Officer
- **Dean Logan**, Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
- **Rebecca Martinez**, Madera County Clerk, Recorder, and Registrar of Voters
- **Astrid Ochoa**, Executive Director, Future of California Elections
- **Fred Nisen**, Supervising Attorney for Voting Rights, Disability Rights California
- **James Schwab**, Chief Deputy Secretary of State, California Secretary of State Alex Padilla
- **Cha Vang**, Executive Director, Hmong in Politics (HIP)
- **James Woodson**, Manager of Policy and Strategic Projects, California Calls

# Methodology

## 40 confidential in-depth interviews with:

- *election officials from VCA and non-VCA adopting counties*
- *statewide voter advocacy groups*
- *community groups*
- *other stakeholders involved in implementing the VCA in 2018*

Six focus groups

Social media analysis

Survey

Gathered public education and outreach materials

# Study Advisory Committee Members

- Key Considerations of Implementation – released
- Collaboration on Implementation – June 13th
- EAP Process
- Vote Center Siting Process
- Outreach and Education
- Factors Involved in Successful Implementation

# Key Considerations of Implementation

1<sup>st</sup> brief is from the perspectives of election administrators

## Research questions:

1. How do election officials define successful implementation of the VCA?
2. **Which factors should county election officials consider when deciding to adopt the VCA?**

# Which Factors Should County Election Officials Consider when Deciding to Adopt the VCA?

**Election officials provided a number of suggestions for their colleagues, including:**

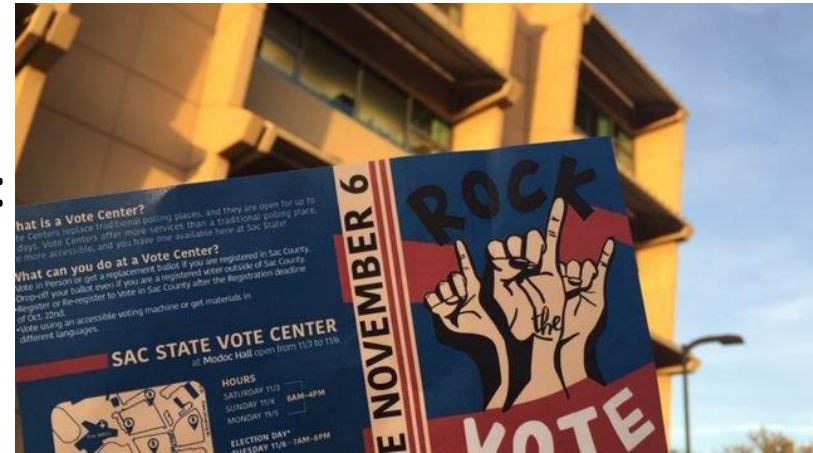
- Significant investment of time and resources
- Preparation of election operations
- Collaboration with stakeholders – EAP and outreach
- Understanding voter experiences

# Significant Investment of Time and Resources

Time it takes to involve community partners in the implementation process, as required by the VCA

Includes community engagement in both:

- planning phase of implementation
- voter outreach phase



One VCA election official advised other counties to have

“a clear expectation of the time and resources that are needed to do the level of stakeholder engagement that is both required in the VCA....[and] what's necessary specific to your particular community.”

# Collaboration with Stakeholders

Every election official from VCA counties identified the benefits of robust engagement with community groups and other stakeholders,

Beyond only meeting the requirements for engagement present in the VCA, such as the creation of a LAAC and a VAAC.



# Collaboration with Stakeholders

One election official described the benefits to working effectively with community and advocacy groups, advising others to...

“make sure they get everybody on board that they can, whether it's advocacy groups or agencies out there that can help them. Whatever it is, get them on board because they'll help advertise. They'll help get the word out that this is how we're doing elections now, and that will help make it successful.”

# Collaboration with Stakeholders

The level of engagement required by the VCA is typically new

Gaining the skills to do this engagement requires a strong commitment by election officials, one that extends beyond time and resources alone

One election official noted that colleagues considering implementation need to be open to a much higher level of engagement, particularly around working with their communities on voter education

# Understanding the Voter Experience

Several election officials noted their concern over the long lines at some vote centers on both Primary and General Election Days

Improvements to be made to vote center operations so that long lines do not discourage would-be voters from voting

Could also be dependent on their expectations around the voting process – use on election day



# Understanding the Voter Experience

“The issue is again managing voter expectations and voter use of the vote centers... It's successful that we have long lines, unfortunately. It would be nice if we could manage the success by getting some of those people earlier into the process.”

# Understanding the Voter Experience

CVR on Election Day was one cause of long lines at vote centers

To begin to address how to help reduce long lines at vote centers and elections offices in future elections, the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials (CACEO) recently established the **Line Busting Committee (LBC)**

As one election official said,

“If there are [lines] happening at a vote center, then that's not a success... It's for vote center and non-VCA counties to figure out how we can, for that Monday and Tuesday, handle the potentially huge number of voters that either want to change their registration or want to newly register to vote.”

# Key Theme: Voter Experience

## A positive voter experience entails:

- Efficient vote center operational logistics
- The reduction of long lines
- Robust voter outreach efforts



.... to help increase voters' awareness and ensure successful use of vote center services that are available to them before Election Day

Collaborating with community groups was vital for communicating with voters about the changes occurring from the VCA

# Key Theme: Voter Experience

The importance of the voter experience under the VCA

While the VCA was intended to positively enhance voters' experiences through more voting choices and services...

It also has the potential to inconvenience some voters, such as with lines or a lack of understanding in how the new system works

A commitment by election offices to invest in a realistic and sufficient allocation of resources for both the VCA's administrative and collaborative outreach components is...

Critical for positive voter experiences under the new system

# California Voter's Choice Act: Key Collaboration on Implementation



# Collaboration on Implementation

2nd brief is from the perspectives of election administrators and community advocates

## Research questions:

- 1. How did collaboration among various stakeholders influence the VCA implementation process?**
2. What are the key challenges to collaborating under the VCA?

# Community Advocates Leverage their Combined Resources and Relationships

# Community Advocates Leverage their Combined Resources and Relationships

Members of community groups interviewed as part of this study suggested a number of elements that helped make county VCA coalitions impactful during implementation.

## These include the following factors:

- Relationship Building
- Logistical and Creative Improvements
- Leveraging Resources and Expertise of Voter's Choice California

# Relationship Building

- Stronger relationships = broader range of voter education and outreach efforts and reach a more diverse audience
- Coalitions brought together organizations that did not necessarily work on voting issues in the past - helped members build their capacity for voter education and outreach in their work

# Relationship Building

As one member described,

“We had something absolutely wonderful that came out of the coalition and will still be coming out of this coalition, and that is working with our communities, with our different skills, our different needs, working together in, I think, a way that we've never been able to do before.”

# Relationship Building

Saw important benefits from community collaboration efforts:

- closer coordination of outreach efforts with administrative work
- faster turnaround on materials to share and translate in their outreach effort
- An infusion of community-level expertise into outreach efforts, particularly for non-English speaking populations

# Logistical and Creative Improvements

Through collaboration with each other, community advocates were able to:

- share creative ideas
- create better educational materials
- avoid logistical redundancies
- leverage the resources and expertise of higher-level agencies and organizations

# Logistical and Creative Improvements

The diversity of the coalition members also enabled community efforts to tailor their campaign effectively to specific populations.

As one community advocate stated,

“Just having a team where you can call up the right person for the right issue, and speaking with that authority...made all the difference.”



# Logistical and Creative Improvements

The coalitions were also able to leverage their collective power to quickly address issues:

“Monitoring this as a collective, rather than individuals, made all the difference so we could learn about issues that arose as quickly as possible. And then, instead of addressing it as individuals coming to the county offices, we could go through it as a group. If need be, we could go to the board of supervisors and try to get them involved. That made all the impact, when they have that kind of show of force from a diverse range of voices.”

# Outcomes of Collaboration between Community Advocates and Election Officials

# Outcomes of Collaboration between Community Advocates and Election Officials

Of the coalition members interviewed, most asserted that they were able to have influence, to varying degrees, over the following elements of a county's VCA implementation process as a result of working together:

- Influence on Education and Outreach
- Influence on Vote Center and Drop Box Administration
- Oversight of County's Overall Implementation Process

# Influence on Education and Outreach

Collaborating with their county elections office and with fellow members led to improved voter outreach materials so that they would more closely meet the local community's needs

# Oversight of County's Overall Implementation Process

Community coalitions, often in partnership with members of the VCC, worked to stay on top of county implementation plans, contacting county offices to address gaps or discrepancies

# Oversight of County's Overall Implementation Process

As one community coalition interviewee noted,

“I think it's all about strength in numbers. The non-profit industry is a big footprint in terms of the people we serve [and] also our staff and what we contribute locally, and so I think we were really able to influence the way that...the plan was developed and ultimately the way the election was administered.”

# Thank you!

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