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Voter's Choice Task Force Supplemental Report

November 4, 2025, Statewide Special Election

Review of the University Research Reports

Contact Information

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This report is also available online at www.sos.ca.gov

Alternative formats available upon request.

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About the California Secretary of State

The California Office of the Secretary of State is committed to adhering to the highest standards of integrity and transparency, supporting businesses, strengthening democracy, protecting individual rights, preserving our state's history, delivering quality services, and providing accessible resources and trusted information.

The California Secretary of State's responsibilities include:

- Serving as the state's Chief Elections Officer
- Implementing electronic filing and Internet disclosure of campaign and lobbyist financial information
- Maintaining business filings
- Commissioning notaries public
- Operating the Safe at Home confidential address program
- Maintaining the Domestic Partners and Advance Health Care Directive Registries
- Safeguarding the State Archives
- Serving as a trustee of the California Museum

Special Note About This Report

Pursuant to California Elections Code Section 4008, the Secretary of State shall establish a taskforce that includes representative of all of the following:

(1) County elections officials.
(2) Individuals with demonstrated language accessibility experience for languages covered under the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.
(3) The disability community and community organizations and individuals that advocate on behalf of, or provide services to, individuals with disabilities.
(4) Experts with demonstrated experience in the field of elections.

This Task Force has been appointed by the California Secretary of State. The Task Force is currently comprised of 16 members. Beginning in 2025, the California Secretary of State's Voter's Choice Task Force is charged with reviewing elections conducted under the Voter's Choice Act and providing comments and recommendations to the California State Legislature within six months of the election.

As aggregated data from the state's VoteCal database, as well as data from university reports created through the Voting Rights Project (VRP), are made available to the Task Force, additional recommendations will be provided in a supplemental report.

Voter's Choice Task Force Appointees

1. Melvin E. Levey, Merced County ROV
2. Donna Linder, Stanislaus County ROV, Task Force Co-Chair
3. Dean Logan, L.A. County ROV
4. Evelyn Mendez, Sonoma County ROV
5. Matt Moreles, Santa Clara County ROV
6. Bob Page, Orange County ROV
7. Jesse Salinas, Yolo County ROV
8. Art Tinoco, Riverside County ROV
9. Petrina Branch, Attorney, Task Force Co-Chair
10. Camila Chavez, Executive Director of the Dolores Huerta Foundation
11. Leslie Hernandez, Civic Engagement Specialist, AltaMed Health Services
12. Deanna Kitamura, Managing Attorney, Asian Law Caucus
13. Ellen Nash, Chair/President of the San Diego Black American Political Association of California
14. Dora Rose, Deputy Director, League of Women Voters
15. Brittany Stonesifer, Senior Program Manager, Common Cause California
16. Gabriel Taylor, Senior Advocate, Disability Rights CA

Advisory Appointees

1. Carrie Cornwell, Staff Director, CA State Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee
2. Ethan Jones, Chief Consultant, CA State Assembly Elections Committee

Introduction and Overview of the University Reports

UCLA VRP Report (Race/Ethnicity, Language, VBM Behavior) – The UCLA Voting Rights Project report examines the full voter file for the November 4, 2025 Statewide Special Election using BISG (Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding) to estimate race/ethnicity and language preference. It provides detailed statewide, Voter's Choice Act (VCA)-county, and non-VCA-county comparisons.

CSUS Special Election Report (Age & Method Focus) – The CSUS report focuses on age patterns, vote method usage, VCA participation, and demographic characteristics of who voted.

Age-Based Voting Trends

Ages among statewide registered voters (based on data from the VRP report) show a balanced distribution:

- **18–29:** 19.5%
- **30–49:** 33.7%
- **50–64:** 22.3%
- **65+:** 24.5%

VCA vs. Non-VCA counties turnout

Age distributions were extremely similar (within 1 percentage point) across VCA and non-VCA counties. Younger voters (18–29) made up 19.3% in VCA vs. 20.0% in non-VCA counties. This suggests county election-model differences do not affect the age composition of who is registered, but they *do* influence how different age groups participate. Below is the turnout by age group:

- **18–29:** 34.0%
- **30–49:** 40.1%
- **50–64:** 57.5%
- **65+:** 69.3%

Older voters (65+) were more than twice as likely to vote as the youngest group. Turnout for 18–29 year-old voters was higher in VCA counties (34.6%) vs. non-VCA (32.3%) while turnout for voters who are 65+ was higher in non-VCA counties (71.0%) vs. VCA (68.8%). The expanded convenience of vote centers and universal VBM under VCA may slightly increase youth turnout but also reduce engagement of older, traditionally in-person voters.

Vote Method by Age Group

The CSUS report and UCLA report agree strongly on patterns: vote by mail was the dominant method for all ages with 88.9% of all ballots statewide cast in that manner. Older voters disproportionately use VBM. Voters age 65+ accounted for 35.5% of all VBM ballots. Younger voters, on the other hand, were *much* more represented in in-person voting:

- VCA counties: 18.8% of in-person voters were 18–29, higher than their share of VBM voters.
- Polling place counties (non-VCA): 18.2% in-person voters were 18–29, also higher than their share of VBM voters.

Conditional Voter Registration skewed extremely young with 63.1% of provisional CVR voters in the age 18-29 group. Diving deeper, the data shows that, in VCA counties, the 18-29 cohort was responsible for 64.1% of provisional CVRs versus 59.0% in non-VCA counties. Here is the full breakdown by age groups:

Provisional CVR Usage by Age Group and Election Model

	VCA Counties	Non-VCA Counties
18-29 age group	64.1%	59.0%
30-49 age group	19.8%	22.7%
50-64 age group	9.1%	10.7%
65+ age group	6.9%	7.6%

Looking at individual counties, we can see that the highest use of provisional CVR was in Yolo County, with roughly 2.1% of ballots cast in that manner. Next on the list was San Luis Obispo, Alameda, Santa Cruz, and Merced. All five counties have significant universities and large populations of college student voters. Four of those five counties are also VCA counties. The expanded vote center network and flexible in-person options are likely to encourage younger voters to turn out even if they need to register and vote closer to Election Day. This can also present operational challenges to the counties that serve these voters as this method is the most resource intensive to staff and process. As the VoteCal data previously showed, vote center usage from E-10 to E-4 is extremely low, though some data suggests that usage may be increasing slightly each election cycle. This trend of low usage is even more pronounced for college student CVR voters. Additional research and study of vote center usage on days E-10 to E-4 should be conducted to better understand not only the overall volume, but the specifics of who is voting at vote centers on those early days. Special attention should be given to understanding how voters with disabilities, voters with transportation challenges or inflexible work schedules, and voters of color are using vote centers on days E-10 to E-4. This research could inform policies governing the resources allocated towards those early days at the vote centers to determine if more are

needed or if they are better redirected towards in-person voting on days E-3 to Election Day when lines are longest and CVR activity is heaviest.

Race and Ethnicity Voting Trends

Statewide registered voter race/ethnicity (UCLA):

- **White:** 41.8%
- **Latino:** 30.7%
- **Asian:** 15.8%
- **Black:** 5.8%
- **Other:** 5.9%

VCA counties have higher Asian representation (16.7% vs. 12.5%) while non-VCA counties have higher Latino representation (32.4% vs. 30.2%). These baseline differences matter, because ethnicity turnout gaps interact with county-level election models.
Statewide turnout rates:

- **White:** 60.9%
- **Black:** 44.9%
- **Asian:** 43.6%
- **Other:** 47.5%
- **Latino:** 39.8%

White turnout exceeds Latino turnout by 21 percentage points, continuing historically documented racial turnout gaps.

VCA vs. Non-VCA counties

The turnout differences between election models were modest but meaningful. Latino turnout is higher in VCA counties (40.3%) than in non-VCA counties (38.1%). Asian turnout is slightly higher in non-VCA counties (44.6%) than in VCA counties (43.4%). It may be that vote center accessibility may strengthen turnout among Latino populations, which prefer in-person and drop-off options more heavily than other groups. Asian communities display more mixed patterns depending on subgroup and county.

This data reflects one election. The Public Policy Institute of California, in a 2025 report, noted that during the 2022 midterms Latino voters with a history of voting in person were less likely to vote in that election in a county that recently adopted the VCA model[1]. Conversely, Asian American and Latino voters with a history of voting in person were

[1] How the Voter's Choice Act Changed Turnout in California - Public Policy Institute of California.

somewhat more likely to vote in 2024 in counties that adopted the VCA, while Black voters with a more irregular turnout history were less likely to vote in those counties. Thus, while the turnout trends are mixed for counties making the switch to VCA, now that most VCA counties have conducted multiple elections using the model, the data from 2025 indicates higher turnout rates amongst Latinos in VCA counties versus non-VCA counties. Overall, PPIC concluded that the VCA has generally fallen short of its goal of increasing turnout and creating a more representative electorate, highlighting the need for further research into the experiences of different communities.

Vote Method by Race

All groups relied primarily on VBM, but differences were substantial. Among White, Black, and Asian voters, a majority returned ballots via traditional mail (50–54%). Latino and "Other" voters, however, used mail at a substantially lower rate (43%). These communities displayed a greater reliance on drop boxes, vote centers, and other in-person return options.

Language-Based Voting Trends

Only 5.05% of registered voters requested non-English materials. Most of these (3.28% of statewide registered voters) were Spanish language voters. Census data, however, indicates nearly 20% of California adults speak English less than "very well," meaning that many limited-English proficient voters are not requesting materials in other languages. In fact, many voters may not know what language resources are available to them. Despite this data limitation, we can review the data available. Turnout was substantially lower among non-English language voters (50.6% for English-language vs 38.8% by non-English language voters). Among the non-English language voters, turnout was as follows:

- **Spanish:** 39.8%
- **Chinese:** 33.8%
- **Vietnamese:** 42.2%
- **Korean:** 35.7%
- **Tagalog:** 39.3%
- **Japanese:** 40.0%
- **Thai:** 35.2%
- **Hindi:** 34.2%
- **Khmer:** 25.2%
- **Other:** 34.7%

Overall, non-English language voter turnout was higher in VCA counties (39.3%) than in non-VCA counties (36.9%). The VCA model may benefit language-minority groups more

than non-VCA counties because of the vote center and drop box network and increased outreach and language support requirements, though the comparison is not perfect due to geographic and demographic differences that may be a factor. As a result, we cannot definitively draw a line between VCA and higher turnout for language-minority groups, but we can say that overall VCA counties saw higher turnout for those groups. Additional data would be helpful. One recommendation for that data would be to inform voters at the point of registration that language resources are available and they can request materials in languages other than English. In this way, we could begin to get a fuller picture of voters who are part of language-minority groups.

Vote Method Comparisons Between VCA and Non-VCA Counties

Statewide, 88.94% of voters used vote by mail to cast their ballot. Amongst VCA counties, that figure was 88.81%, nearly identical to non-VCA counties at 89.38%. The real difference was in how voters returned their vote by mail ballot to their local election officials. In VCA counties, 39.51% of ballots were returned via drop boxes as compared to 27.1% in non-VCA counties. Ballots returned through the USPS were much more common for non-VCA counties, which saw 55.88% of ballots returned through the mail as compared to 49.56% in VCA counties. The infrastructure required by each election model matters. VCA counties, with their increased requirements to place accessible drop boxes throughout their jurisdictions, are increasingly providing voters with alternatives to the USPS. Given the recent policy changes at the USPS and continued public discussion of the role of USPS and mail ballots, USPS usage for ballot return could be an important and interesting element to monitor in future elections.

These alternatives matter due to the trends seen in late arriving ballots. Ballots rejected for lateness are one category of rejected ballots. VCA counties rejected 1.5% of mail ballots cast for reasons such as lateness, signatures that did not compare, and other reasons. Non-VCA counties rejected 1.7% of all mail ballots cast. Overall, 44.5% of the vote by mail ballots rejected statewide were given that status for being late. The distribution between VCA and non-VCA counties was not equal. In VCA counties, 41.3% of rejected ballots were classified as late (0.63% of all mail ballots cast), while in non-VCA counties that figure jumped to 54.5% (0.95% of all mail ballots cast). This is not to say that all non-VCA counties had higher rates of late ballots. In fact, some of the counties with the highest rates of ballots rejected for being late were VCA counties. New USPS policies are impacting mail ballot postmarking and delivery, making proximity to regional distribution centers a major factor in mail deliveries. Given this reality, the ability to deploy a network of drop boxes to provide alternative options to voters has never been more critical. VCA counties are doing this, and it appears to have a positive impact.

In addition, the reports note that rejected ballots are more likely to impact voters who are young or Latino. Age significantly influences ballot rejection rates. As the age groups become younger, the rejection rates increase, peaking at 4.5% among voters aged 18-29. Latino voters saw a 2.2% rejected ballot rate, the highest of all groups. For reference, White voters had a 1.3% rate of rejection.

Findings and Conclusion

Reviewing the UCLA Voting Right Project Report and the CSU Sacramento Special Election Survey Report for the November 4, 2025 Statewide Special Election reveals that VCA counties see modestly higher turnout, when compared to non-VCA counties, among young voters (age 18-29), Latino, non-English speaking, and American Indian/tribal voters while non-VCA counties saw slightly higher turnout among older voters (age 65+) and among some Asian subgroups (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean). As the CSUS report noted, VCA counties had higher satisfaction with convenience and early voting.

Latino and "other" race voters prefer drop boxes and vote centers for mail ballot return, while White and Asian voters utilize USPS more often than other methods. This is consistent with community attitudes and trust towards dedicated election infrastructure versus the USPS.

Both reports indicate that:

- Turnout among Latino, younger, non-English-speaking, and tribal voters was generally higher in VCA counties than in non-VCA counties during this election, although these differences cannot necessarily be attributed to the VCA itself.
- Racial turnout gaps remain large statewide, especially when comparing Whites and Latinos.
- Age remains the single strongest turnout predictor, and VCA does not fully overcome this, but the usage of provisional CVR does make some impact.
- Provisional CVR usage is the heaviest in communities with universities and that usage is nearly all in the last four days of the voting period.
- Language-based turnout gaps suggest the need for enhanced outreach.
- Ballot rejection disproportionately affects young and Latino voters.
- VBM was overwhelmingly dominant in all counties, but return behavior differed sharply between VCA and non-VCA counties with VCA counties seeing a much larger percentage of returns via drop boxes (39.51%) than non-VCA Counties (27.1%), while non-VCA counties saw most mail ballots returned through the USPS, a significantly higher rate than VCA counties.
- The VCA system appears particularly aligned to communities who rely more heavily on in-person assistance, flexible return options, or late registration.