



# MISSING VOTERS PROJECT: California 2016

Elizabeth B. Pathak, PhD and Janelle Menard, PhD

## 10.5 MILLION CITIZENS IN CALIFORNIA did not vote on November 8, 2016



### DESCRIPTION OF MISSING VOTERS

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### REMARKS

Missing voters were last seen across California on the morning of November 8, 2016. These are civilian, non-military, non-institutionalized adults who were aged 18 years or older at the time of the election.

### DETAILS

The Women's Institute for Independent Social Enquiry (WiISE), a nonpartisan think tank, is issuing this report to alert the public to the millions of California voters missing from the November 2016 elections. Concerned individuals with an interest in locating these citizens and aiding their future participation in California elections are urged to share this alert widely.



### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals who have provided invaluable support to WiISE and the Missing Voters Project: Adam Guth, Amit Pathak, Beverly Ward, Camila Ozores Silva, Carles Muntaner, Didier Menard, Ellie Margolis, John Heimburg, Julie Rioux, Kim Wilson, Nina Basu, Phyllis Barnett, Rebecca Garcia, Robert Barnett, and Sarah Projansky.

### How to Cite This Report

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### About the Authors

**Elizabeth B. Pathak, PhD** is the President and Chair of the Board of WiISE. She is a population health scientist whose research focuses on geographic, socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in health outcomes in the United States. She is a passionate advocate for methodologically rigorous scholarship which seeks to uncover the power relations that perpetuate socioeconomic and health inequalities.

**Janelle Menard, PhD** is the Vice-President of WiISE. She is an applied anthropologist with expertise in mixed research methods and community-based participatory research strategies in social science and community health research. Dr. Menard advocates for a progressive, socio-ecological research approach to understanding and addressing issues that disproportionately affect disenfranchised groups.

### About WiISE

The Women's Institute for Independent Social Enquiry (WiISE) is a nonpartisan, progressive think tank whose mission is to foster a just society through independent social science, humanities, arts, and public policy research. We believe that rigorous evidence-based research, when effectively translated for a broad spectrum of audiences, can be a catalyst for transformational social change. We champion the ideas of women by cultivating and supporting women scholars and leaders.

### Connect with us!

We welcome your feedback and comments on the Missing Voters Project, as well as on other timely issues relevant to our mission. Please reach out to us online at <https://www.wiise-usa.org/connect>.



## Who Are California's Missing Voters?

Missing voters are voting age citizens who did not vote in November 2016. Missing voters reflect the diversity of California as a whole. They are men and women of all ages and races. Nonetheless, voting participation in California varies considerably across specific population groups. The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed description of the characteristics of missing voters in California and to inform the widespread grassroots efforts to increase voter participation in the 2018 mid-term elections and the 2020 presidential election.

## What is the Missing Voters Project?

We believe that civic disengagement represents a fundamental threat to the separation of powers in our government, and to American democracy itself. Unfortunately, low rates of voter participation have persisted in the United States for many years, and a culture of complacency has ossified around this political reality. We chose the design motif of an FBI Missing Persons poster for the Missing Voters Project with the goal of eliciting feelings of unease and alarm to fracture this culture of complacency.



The purpose of the Missing Voters Project (MVP) is to present rigorous, impartial data about the demographic characteristics of missing voters in a format that can be easily accessed and used by a wide range of educational, community-based, faith-based, and worker-friendly organizations in their efforts to increase civic engagement. Missing Voters Project reports for other states and the nation can be found on our website (<https://www.wiise-usa.org/mvp>).

## Data and Methods

The Missing Voters Project data are from a special supplement to the Current Population Survey, administered in November 2016 immediately following the election by the Bureau of the Census. This report includes statistically-weighted estimates of percentages and population counts derived from a California sample of over 7,100 adult respondents. Data in response categories for which the estimated California population was fewer than 75,000 citizens have been suppressed per Census Bureau recommendation.

Full technical details for the Missing Voters Project, links to the original census data, and other valuable resources are available at <https://www.wiise-usa.org/mvp>.

## Limitations

We recognize that there are important voting justice issues that can not be addressed directly through the data analyzed in our report. These issues include voter suppression and intimidation, purging of voter registration rolls, partisan gerrymandering, and other direct and indirect tactics that result in citizen disenfranchisement. Readers are encouraged to consult the Resources at the end of this report (pages 8-9) for links to organizations working directly on these issues.

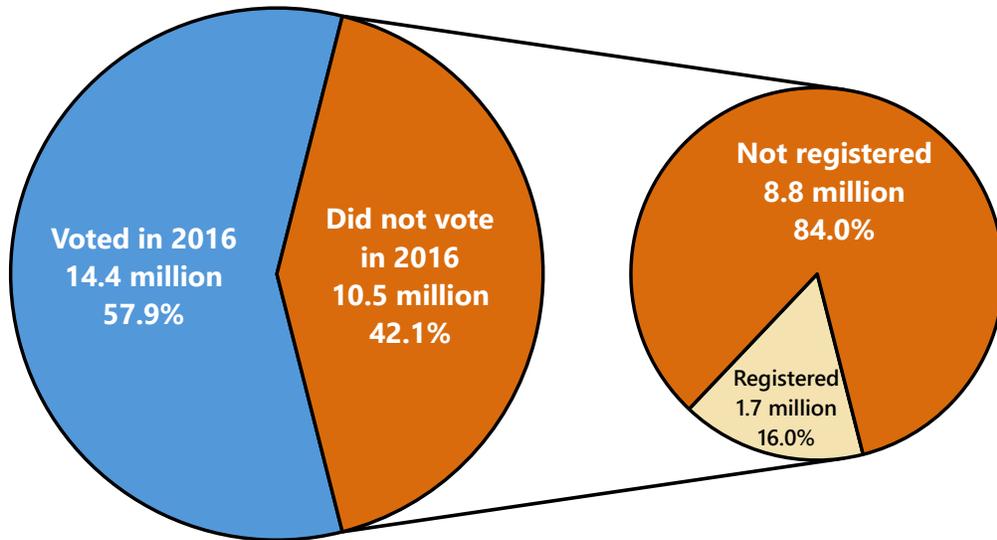
## How to Use This Report

Each page of this report has been designed with a dual purpose: as an integrated part of the whole report, and as a stand-alone "Fact Sheet." Organizations working to increase voter registration can pull out individual pages to reproduce and share. On our website (<https://www.wiise-usa.org/mvp>), readers can download the whole report, or choose to download single page fact sheets on their topics of interest.

### Figure 1: Voting in California

Citizens 18+ years old in 2016

Total = 24.9 million



#### California Voting in 2016

In 2016, there were an estimated 24.9 million civilian voting age citizens in California. The citizen population estimates shown in this report include only the *non-institutionalized* population. This means that prisoners, nursing home residents, and other institutionalized persons are not included in any of our reported statistics. However, voting age citizens who may be legally ineligible to vote in California are still included in the estimates in this report.

More than half (57.9%) of voting age citizens in California reported voting in November 2016. There were 10.5 million missing voters, 8.8 million (84.0%) of whom were not registered to vote before the election (Figure 1).

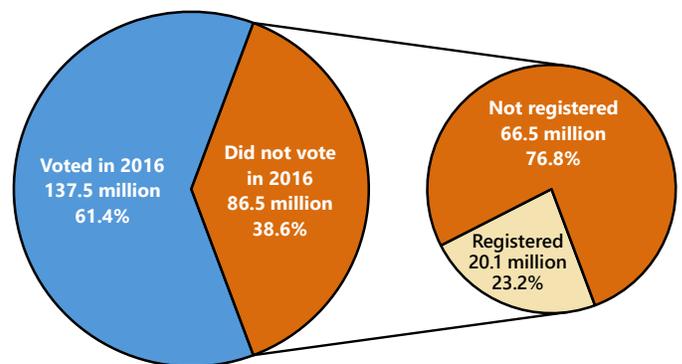
#### California’s Voting Rate Lower Than the National Average

Nationwide, 61.4% of adult citizens voted in 2016, compared with 57.9% of citizens in California (Figure 2). Only a minority of missing voters nationwide were registered to vote before the election (23.2%, Figure 2); in California the proportion who were registered (16.0%, Figure 1) was markedly lower than the national average.

### Figure 2: Voting in the United States

Citizens 18+ years old in 2016

Total = 224 million



#### Notes

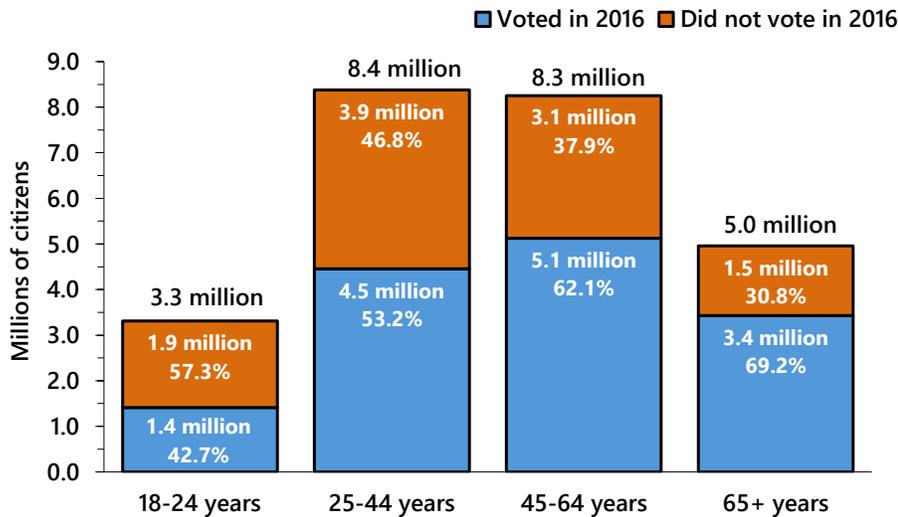
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### Young Adults Least Likely to Vote but Majority of Missing Voters were 25+ Years Old

Voting participation varied sharply by age in California in 2016. Fewer than half (42.7%) of young adult citizens voted, compared with 69.2% of senior citizens (Figure 3). Adults 25 to 44 years old were the largest group of voters (8.4 million) and the largest group of missing voters (3.9 million). For all ages, the great majority of missing voters were not registered to vote prior to the election (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Voting by Age**  
Citizens 18+ years old in California in 2016  
Total = 24.9 million



#### Young Adults

Fewer than half (42.7%) of the 3.3 million citizens aged 18 to 24 years in California voted in 2016 (Figure 3). There were 1.9 million missing voters, the great majority (87.1%) of whom were not registered to vote before the election (Figure 4).

#### Adults 25-44 Years

More than half (53.2%) of California's 8.4 million adults 25 to 44 years old voted in 2016 (Figure 3). There were 3.9 million missing voters, of whom only 19.2% were registered to vote before the election (Figure 4).

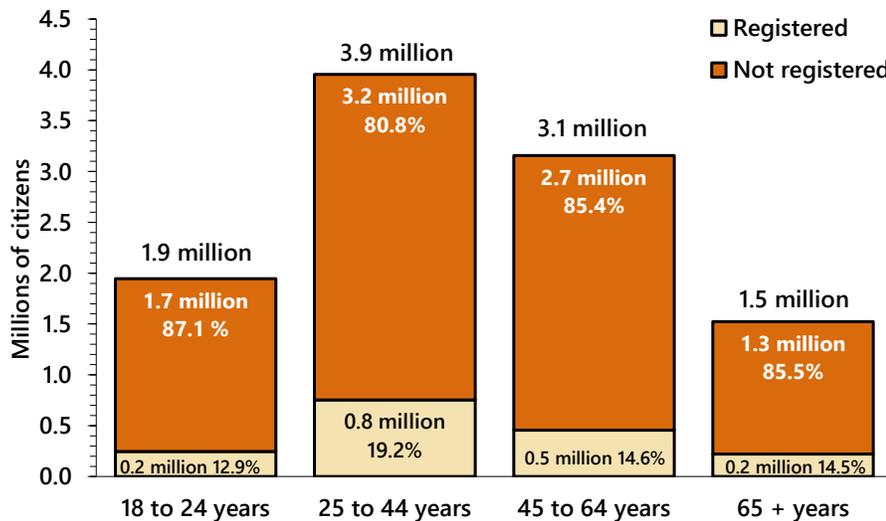
#### Middle-Aged Adults

There were 8.3 million middle-aged citizens in California and 62.1% reported voting in 2016 (Figure 3). There were 3.1 million missing voters 45 to 64 years old, the great majority (85.4%) of whom were not registered to vote before the election (Figure 4).

#### Seniors

There were 5.0 million senior citizens in California in 2016 and 69.2% of them voted (Figure 3). Of the 1.5 million missing voters, the great majority (85.5%) were not registered to vote prior to the 2016 election (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Missing Voters by Age**  
Citizens 18+ years old who did not vote in California in 2016  
Total = 10.5 million



**Notes**

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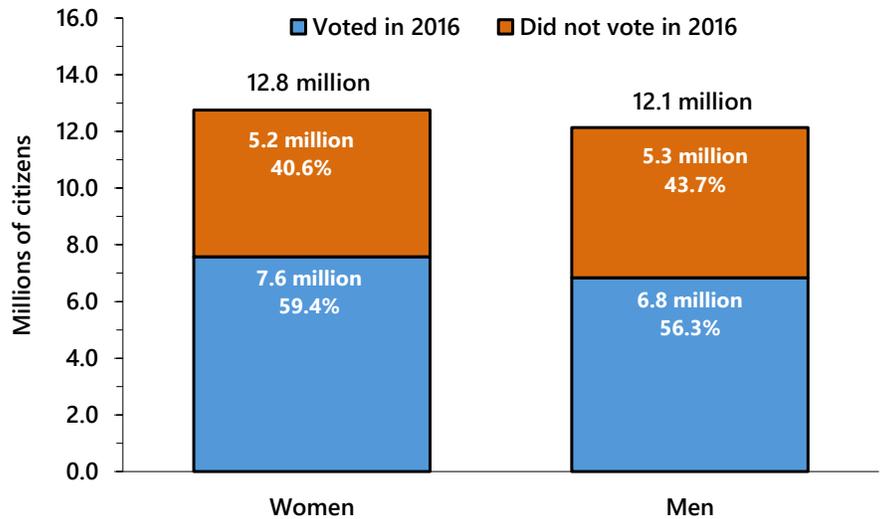
### California Women were Larger Share of Electorate and More Likely to Vote

In 2016, there were more voting age women than men in California (12.8 million vs. 12.1 million). Voting rates were higher among women (59.4%) compared with men (56.3%). The number of missing voters was slightly higher for men (5.3 million) than for women (5.2 million). The majority of both women and men missing voters were not registered before the election (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Voting by Gender**  
Citizens 18+ years old in California in 2016  
Total = 24.9 million

#### Women

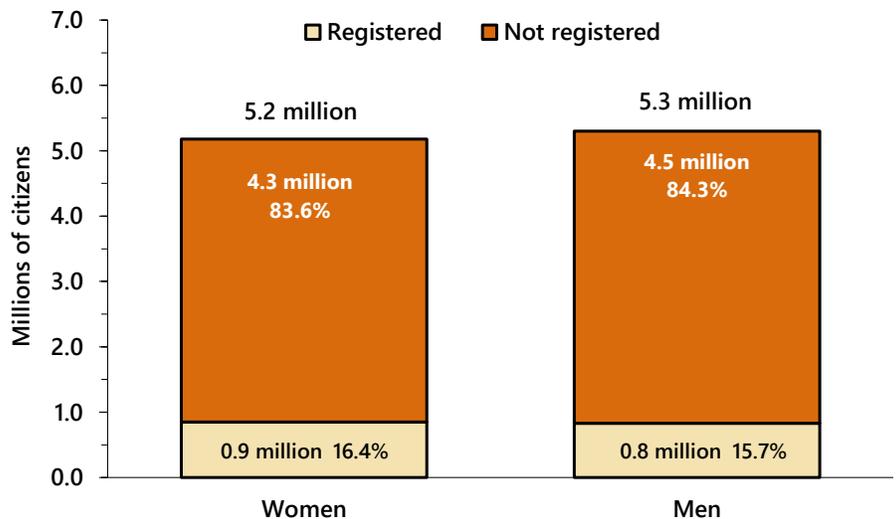
There were 12.8 million voting age women citizens in California in 2016. More than half (59.4%) of them voted (Figure 5). There were 5.2 million missing women voters, and the great majority (83.6%) were not registered before the election (Figure 6). There were 0.9 million women who reported being registered but who did not vote.



#### Men

There were 12.1 million voting age men citizens in California in 2016, and more than half (56.3%) voted (Figure 5). There were 5.3 million missing men voters, and 84.3% (4.5 million) of them were not registered to vote before the election (Figure 6). There were 0.8 million men who reported being registered but who did not vote.

**Figure 6: Missing Voters by Gender**  
Citizens 18+ years old who did not vote in California in 2016  
Total = 10.5 million



#### Notes

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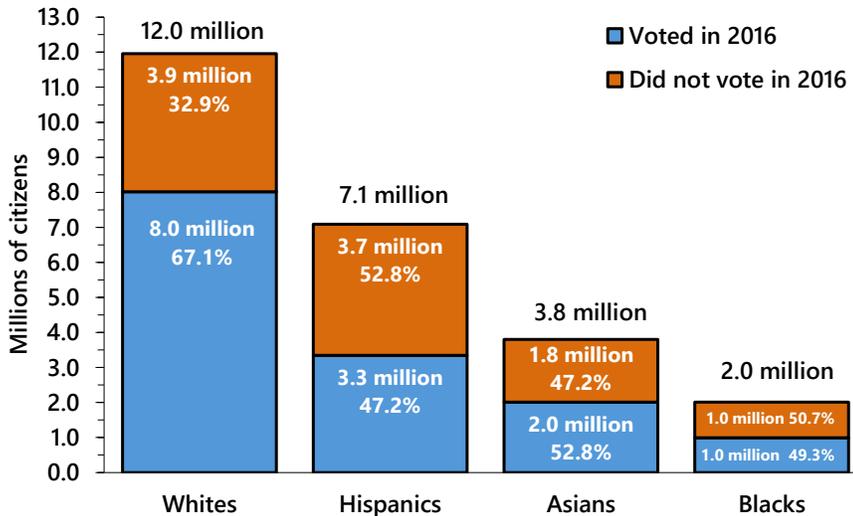


## California Hispanics Least Likely to Vote; Majority of Missing Voters were Non-White

Voting participation varied sharply by race and Hispanic origin in California in 2016. Non-Hispanic whites had the highest rate of voting (67.1%) (Figure 7). Only 52.8% of Asians, 49.3% of Blacks, and 47.2% of Hispanics voted. The majority of missing voters were either Hispanic (3.7 million), Asian (1.8 million), or Black (1.0 million). For all groups, the majority of missing voters were not registered to vote before the election (Figure 8).

**Figure 7: Voting by Race and Hispanic Origin**

Citizens 18+ years old in California in 2016  
Total = 24.9 million



### Whites

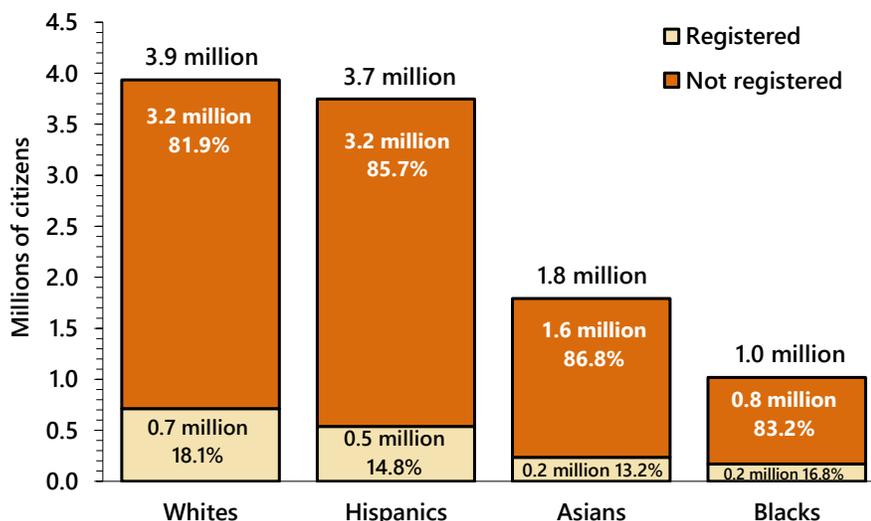
Non-Hispanic whites were the largest group of citizens in California (12.0 million) and the majority (67.1%) voted in 2016 (Figure 7). There were 3.9 million missing voters, including 3.2 million (81.9%) who were not registered to vote prior to the election (Figure 8).

### Hispanics

Fewer than half (47.2%) of California's 7.1 million Hispanics voted in 2016 (Figure 7). Almost all (85.7%) of the 3.7 million Hispanic missing voters were not registered to vote before the 2016 election (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Missing Voters by Race and Hispanic Origin**

Citizens 18+ years old who did not vote in California in 2016  
Total = 10.5 million



### Asians

Slightly more than half (52.8%) of California's 3.8 million Asian citizens voted in 2016 (Figure 7). Almost all (86.8%) of the 1.8 million Asian missing voters were not registered to vote before the 2016 election (Figure 8).

### Blacks

Fewer than half (49.3%) of California's 2.0 million Black citizens voted in 2016 (Figure 7). There were 1.0 million missing Black voters, the majority (83.2%) of whom were not registered prior to the 2016 election (Figure 8).

### Notes

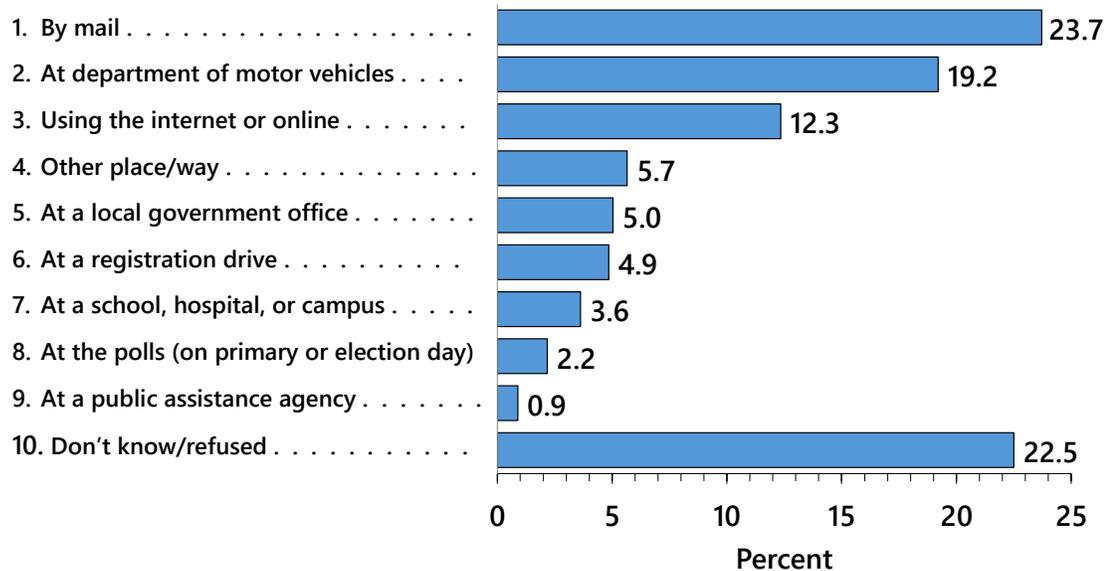
Whites are non-Hispanic, and Hispanics may be of any race. Blacks and Asians include multiracial individuals. Data are not shown for American Indians who were 3% of California's citizen population. Please note that some numbers may appear not to add up correctly due to rounding. Voting data are from the Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey (November 2016). This report includes statistically-weighted estimates of percentages and population counts derived from a California sample of over 7,100 adult respondents. Data in response categories for which the estimated California population was fewer than 75,000 citizens have been suppressed per Census Bureau recommendation. Full technical details for the Missing Voters Project, links to the original census data, and other valuable resources are available at <https://www.wiise-usa.org/mvp>.



## Figure 9: Where did Citizens Register to Vote?

Citizens 18+ years old who were registered to vote in California, 2016

Total = 16.1 million



### What Does this Chart Show About Where Citizens Registered to Vote?

Respondents to the Voting Supplement of the Current Population Survey were asked in November 2016 about the method and location of their most recent registration to vote. Only people who said that they were currently registered were asked this question. More than one-fifth (22.5%) of registered citizens in California did not know or remember how they had registered to vote (Figure 9). It is possible that citizens who had been continuously registered at the same residential address for several years were less likely to remember their method of registration.

#### Remote Registration

Taken together, registration by mail (23.7%) or by internet (12.3%) accounted for 36.0% of voter registrations in California in 2016 (Figure 9).

#### Local Government Offices

Taken together, registration at department of motor vehicles (19.2%), local government offices (5.0%) and public assistance agencies (0.9%) accounted for 25.1% of voter registrations in California in 2016 (Figure 9).

#### Voter Outreach Efforts

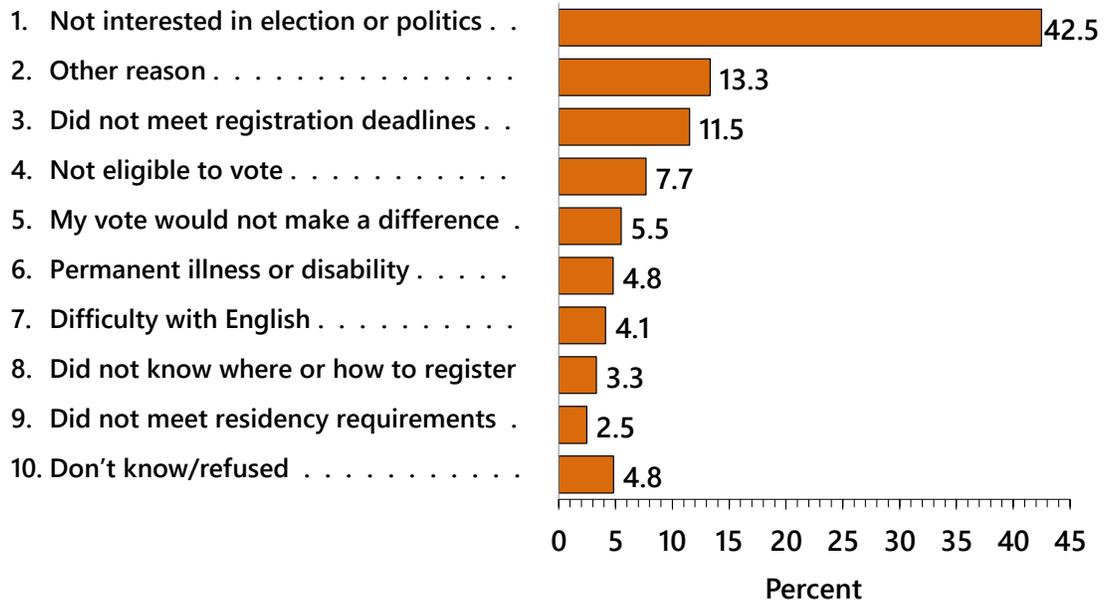
As a result of voter outreach efforts, 8.5% of California citizens in 2016 reported registering at either a registration drive (4.9%) or a school, hospital, or campus (3.6%) (Figure 9).

#### Notes

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**Figure 10: Reasons for Not Registering to Vote**  
 Citizens 18+ years old who were not registered in California, 2016  
 Total = 4.4 million



### What Does this Chart Show About Reasons for Not Registering to Vote?

Non-voting respondents to the November 2016 Current Population Survey were asked if they had registered to vote. Respondents who replied "no" were asked their reason for not registering. Self-reported reasons are shown in descending order by frequency in Figure 10.

Readers should be aware that respondents who refused to state whether or not they had registered were not asked about their reasons. Therefore, the respondent universe for this question (4.4 million adults) is smaller than the total number who were not registered (8.8 million) as shown in Figure 1. We classified people who refused to say whether or not they were registered as unregistered citizens.

### Lack of Interest

The single largest reason (42.5%) that citizens in California stated for not registering was that they were *not interested in the election or they were not involved in politics* (Figure 10).

### Barriers

The 6 reasons for not registering that can be considered logistical barriers together accounted for 33.9% of citizens not registering to vote (Figure 10). These reasons were: *did not meet registration deadlines* (11.5%), *not eligible to vote* (7.7%), *permanent illness or disability* (4.8%), *difficulty with English* (4.1%), *did not know where or how to register* (3.3%), and *did not meet residency requirements* (2.5%).

### Beliefs

A notable minority (5.5%) of citizens stated that they did not register to vote because they believed that their *vote would not make a difference* to the outcome of the election (Figure 10).

### Notes

Please note that some numbers may appear not to add up correctly due to rounding. Voting data are from the Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey (November 2016). This report includes statistically-weighted estimates of percentages and population counts derived from a California sample of over 7,100 adult respondents. Data in response categories for which the estimated California population was fewer than 75,000 citizens have been suppressed per Census Bureau recommendation. Full technical details for the Missing Voters Project, links to the original census data, and other valuable resources are available at <https://www.wiise-usa.org/mvp>.



Community-based, faith-based, and worker-friendly local organizations can use the resources listed below to aid in efforts to motivate citizen involvement, expand voter registration, combat voter suppression, eliminate election day logistical barriers to voting, and monitor local election procedures.

The webpage links in the listings below were active as of October 2018. Please visit our website for an expanded resources list with current links: <https://www.wiise-usa.org/mvp-resources>.

## California Voting Rights Organizations

### *American Civil Liberties Union of California*

<https://www.acluca.org>

There are three ACLU affiliates in California which defend the civil rights and civil liberties of all Californians: The ACLU of Northern California: <https://www.aclunc.org>, the ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties: <https://www.aclusandiego.org>, and the ACLU of Southern California: <https://www.aclusocal.org>.

### *League of Women Voters of California*

<https://lwc.org>

The League of Women Voters of California is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization which builds citizen participation in the democratic process and engages communities through education and advocacy.

### *California Common Cause*

<https://www.commoncause.org/california/about-us/>

California Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy organization that works to preserve democracy through protecting voter rights, educating voters, and holding governments accountable.

### *Future of California Elections (FoCE)*

<http://futureofcaelections.org/about/>

The Future of California Elections is a community-based collaboration comprised of California election officials and voter advocacy organizations as project of Community Partners, a nonprofit organization. The FoCE is dedicated to increasing voter participation and improving the electoral process in California.

## FREE Resources for Local Organizations

### *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*

<https://naacp.org/campaigns/fighting-for-democracy/>

The NAACP's Civic Engagement focus, Turn Out 2018, is a voter registration and mobilization program designed to reach voters and convey the message "Defeat Hate. Vote!" Extensive FREE resources for local organizations and individuals are available for download.

### *Vote411.org*

<http://www.vote411.org/>

VOTE411.org is a FREE "one-stop-shop" for election related information. It provides state-specific nonpartisan information to the public. An important and very popular component of VOTE411.org is the polling place locator, which enables users to type in their street address and retrieve their poll location.

## National Voting Rights Organizations

### *Advancement Project*

<https://advancementproject.org/issues/voting-rights/>

Advancement Project is a next generation, multi-racial civil rights organization. Advancement Project is deeply involved in movement-based work aimed at blocking barriers to the ballot for voters of color and expanding access to the vote before Election Day.

### *Common Cause*

<https://www.commoncause.org>

Common Cause is a nonpartisan grassroots organization with chapters in 35 states that works to promote government transparency, equal voting opportunities and fair representation in the political process.

### *Demos*

<https://www.demos.org/issue/voting-rights-voter-registration>

Demos ("the people") is a public policy organization working to reduce political and economic inequality and to guarantee the freedom to vote, through research, advocacy, litigation, and strategic communications.



**Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)**

<https://www.splcenter.org/our-issues/voting-rights>

The SPLC is dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society, using litigation, education, and other forms of advocacy for equal opportunity.

**UNIDOS US**

<https://www.unidosus.org/issues/voting/>

UNIDOS US (formerly National Council of La Raza) and its network of nearly 300 affiliates serve the Hispanic community through research, policy analysis, and state and national advocacy, and community programs.

**Voter Participation Center**

<https://www.voterparticipation.org/>

The Voter Participation Center's mission is to increase civic engagement among the Rising American Electorate: unmarried women, people of color, and millennials.

**Voto Latino**

<http://votolatino.org/election-center/election-center/>

Voto Latino is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to civic engagement, issue advocacy, and leadership development. They provide extensive resources to promote voter participation among young Latinos.

**Youth Organizations****Alliance for Youth Action**

<https://www.allianceforyouthaction.org/campaign/democracy-done-right/>

Alliance for Youth Action is a nationwide network of organizations building political power of young people. The Democracy Done Right campaign supports automatic voter registration for all citizens.

**March for Our Lives**

<https://marchforourlives.com/vote-for-our-lives/>

Created by, inspired by, and led by the students of Parkland High School, the mission of March For Our Lives is to assure that no special interest group or political agenda is more critical than the timely passage of legislation to effectively address the gun violence issues that are rampant in our country.

**Rock the Vote**

<https://www.rockthevote.org/voting-information/>

Rock the Vote is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to using pop culture, music, art, and technology to engage young people in politics. They provide extensive state-level information on voting requirements.

**Disability Organizations****The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)**

<https://www.aapd.com/advocacy/voting/>

The AAPD advocates for policies that allow people with disabilities to fully participate in the political process, including accessibility of polling locations and voting technology.

**National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)**

<http://www.ndrn.org/en/public-policy/voting.html>

The NDRN provides legal advocacy services for individuals with disabilities including access to voting, through the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy Systems and the Client Assistance Programs.

**Education Organizations****American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**

<https://www.aft.org>

The AFT is a union of professionals who champion fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for students, their families and communities.

**National Education Association (NEA) Education Votes**

<https://educationvotes.nea.org/who-we-are/>

The NEA's Education Votes informs public education advocates on the issues, and supports the mission of providing every student—regardless of their ZIP code—with the strong public schools they need to succeed.

