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Voting and Registration in California: Geographic Differences

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VOTING AND REGISTRATION IN CALIFORNIA

GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Research to Support the Future of California Elections

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Key Findings

Registration Rates
• Whites tend to have the lowest rates of registration and voting in the Central Valley and southernmost parts of the state.
• Low performing registration zip codes for Latinos are located throughout the state and seem to be in those places with lower concentrations of Latino population.
• Asian American registration rates seem to be lower in the central and southern parts of the state, and also in areas with low concentrations of Asian American population.

Voting Rates
• Relative to whites, Latinos and Asian Americans underperform significantly in terms of their voting rates across the state, particularly in the Central Valley and Inland Empire.
• Although African Americans underperform, relative to whites, in terms of registration rates throughout the state, their voting rates largely met or exceeded those of whites in November 2012. This was likely a product of having an African American on the ballot for President and may not be true in November 2016.

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 how those characteristics might vary by geographic region. That is the purpose of this report.

We explore the state's unregistered voters by geography by examining whether particular jurisdictions over or under-perform in terms of rates. [1] We also explore whether this performance varies across California's ethnoracial [2] groups. [3] It is important to look at registration and voting rates across geographies because it is possible that certain jurisdictions, as a result of greater organizational density, proactive efforts on the parts of local registrars, a particular local history, or voter demography, vary in terms of their registration rates across particular ethnoracial populations.

> ## Why are *only* 77% of eligible voters in California registered to vote?

The following maps summarize this analysis, comparing registration rates (defined as percentage of eligible voters registered) across California zip codes. The first set of maps reports registration propensities by zip code. [4] The maps
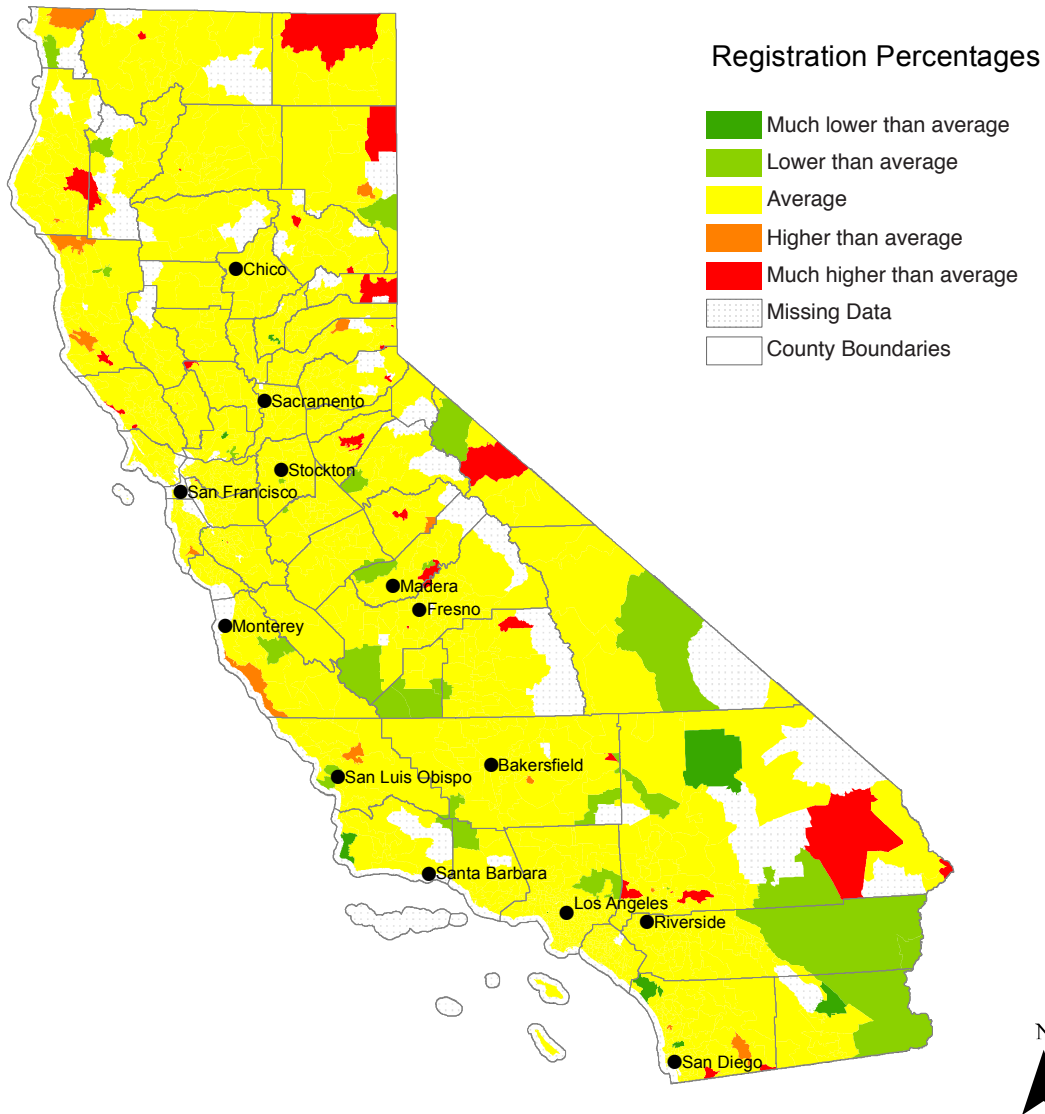
summarizes registration propensity for all California voters overall, for white voters compared to the state overall averages, and then Latino, Black, and Asian voters compared to the statewide averages for whites. A zip code is defined as over performing if it has a registration rate that is higher than the average rate for the comparison group. The opposite is true for areas defined as underperforming. The analysis only provides information for those zip codes where we had a large enough sample size for that ethnoracial group to make meaningful estimates. Zip codes with insufficient sample are labeled "missing data."

We conducted the same analysis for voting rates, again analyzing zip codes according to what proportion of eligible voters turned out to vote in November 2012. As with the registration maps, a zip code is defined as over performing if its voting rate was at least one standard deviation above the relevant average rate, which is the statewide average for all voters in Maps 6 and 7, and statewide averages for whites as a point of comparison for the three ethnoracial groups.

Looking at the maps, we see that registration rates vary across California's zip codes and that different ethnoracial groups can have higher or lower registration rates, relative to the averages, than other groups within the same zip code.
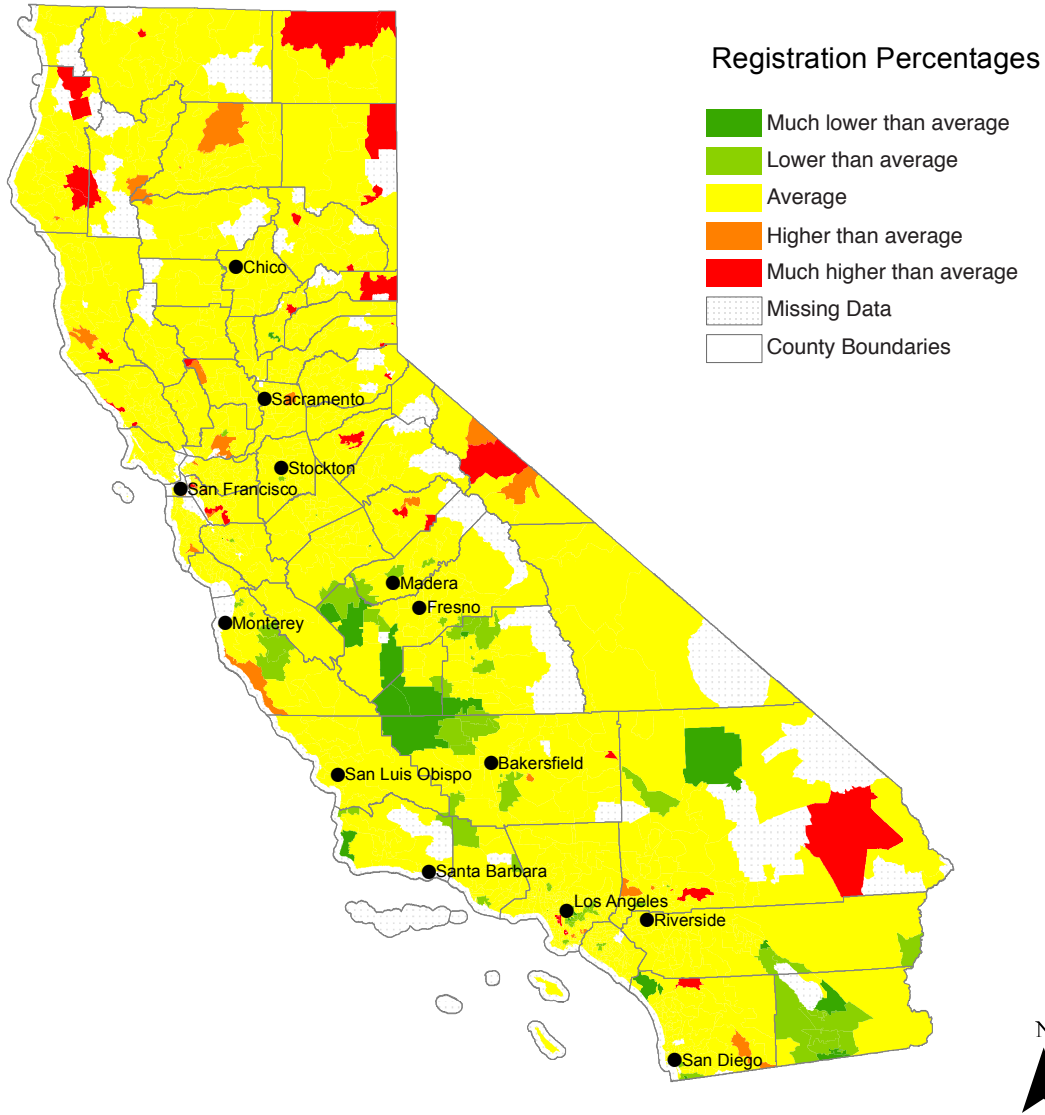
Registration Propensity by Zip Code

Registration Propensity by Zip Code, Overall

Registration Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
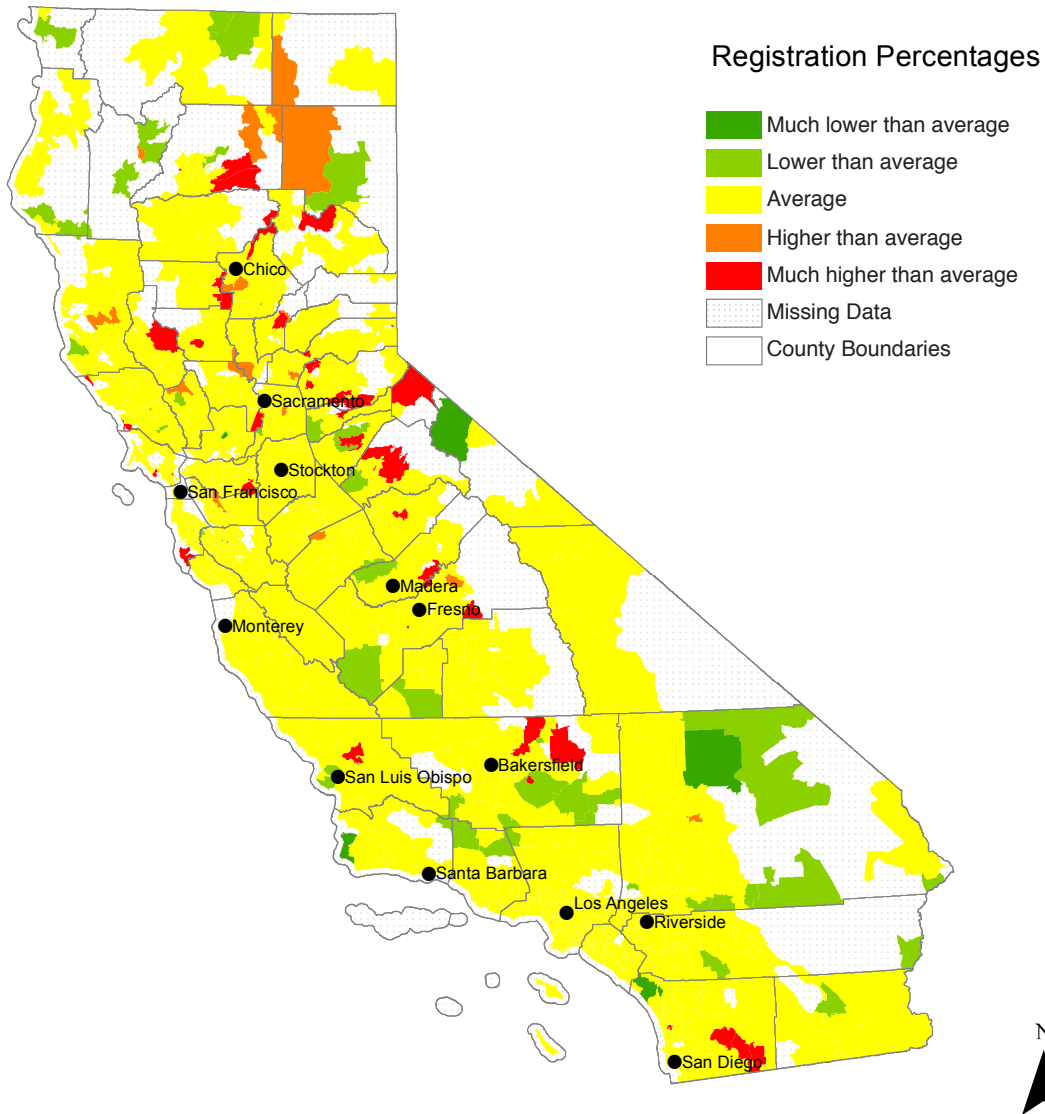- Much higher than average
- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Registration Propensity by Zip Code, Whites

Registration Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Chico
Sacramento
Stockton
San Francisco
Madera
Fresno
Monterey
San Luis Obispo
Bakersfield
Santa Barbara
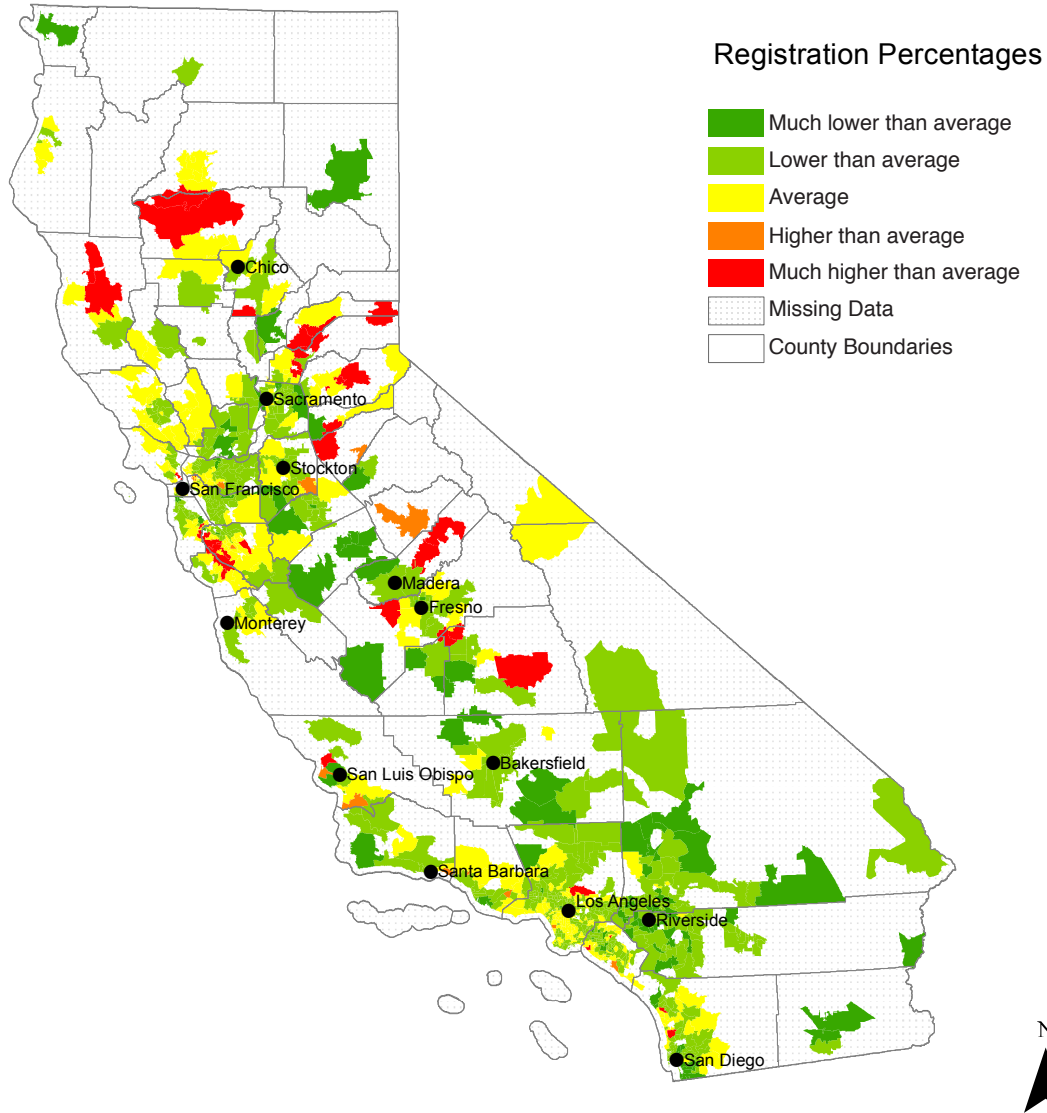Los Angeles
Riverside
San Diego

N

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Registration Propensity by Zip Code,
Latinos Relative to Whites

Registration Percentages

- ■ Much lower than average
- ■ Lower than average
- ■ Average
- ■ Higher than average
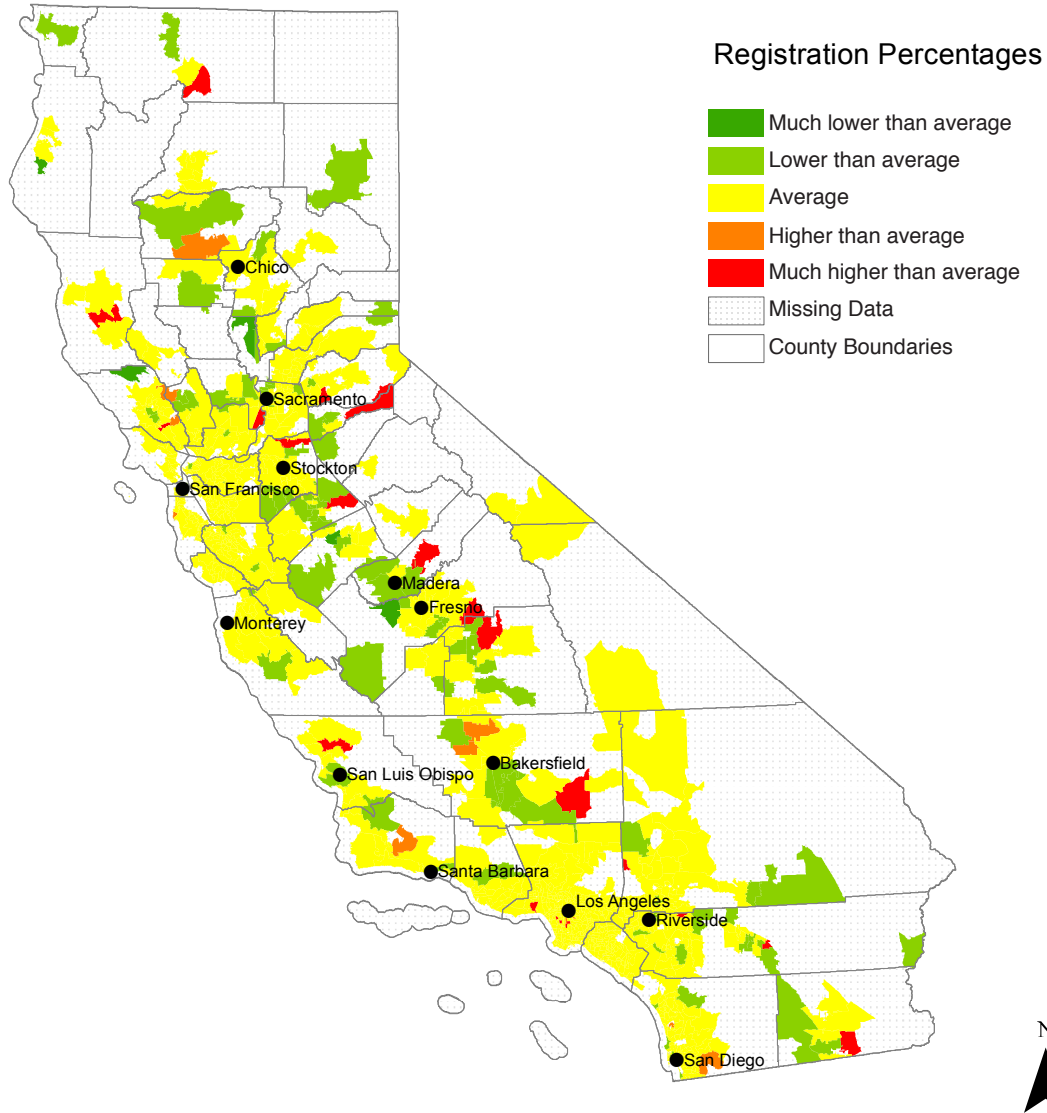- ■ Much higher than average
- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages for whites, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Registration Propensity by Zip Code,
African Americans Relative to Whites

Registration Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages for whites, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
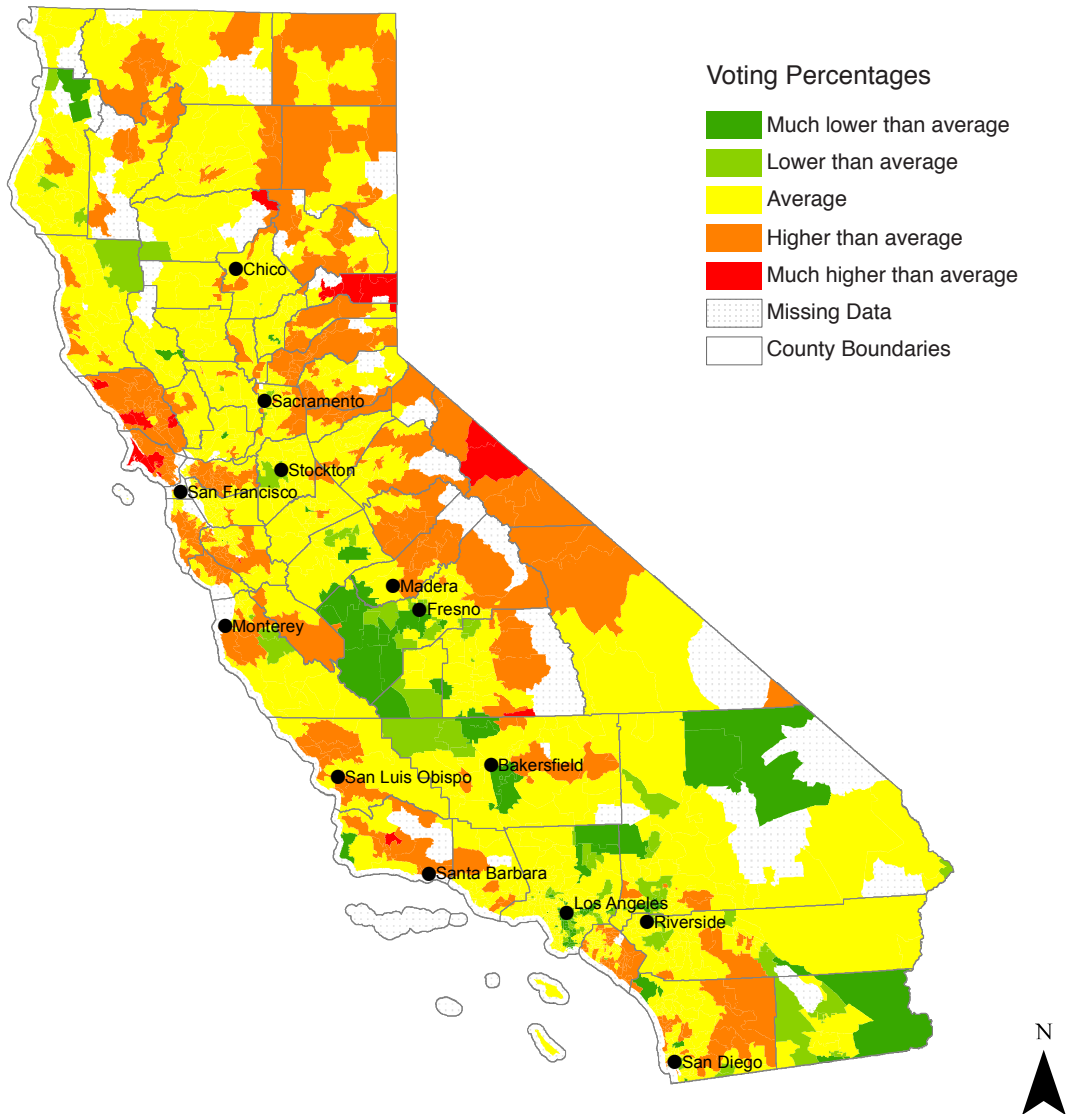
Registration Propensity by Zip Code,
Asians Relative to Whites

Registration Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages for whites, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
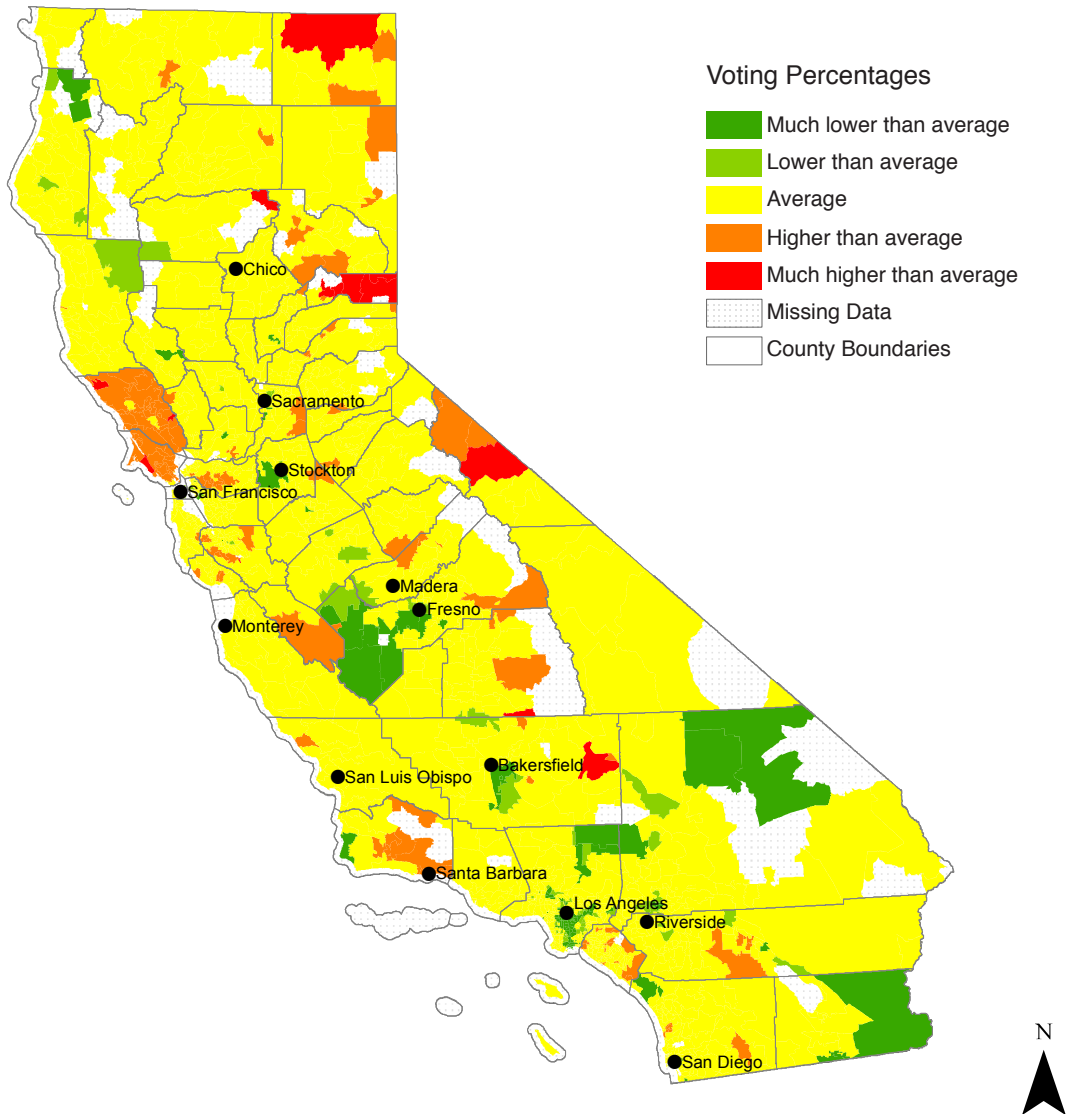
Voting Propensity by Zip Code

Voting Propensity by Zip Code, Overall

Voting Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
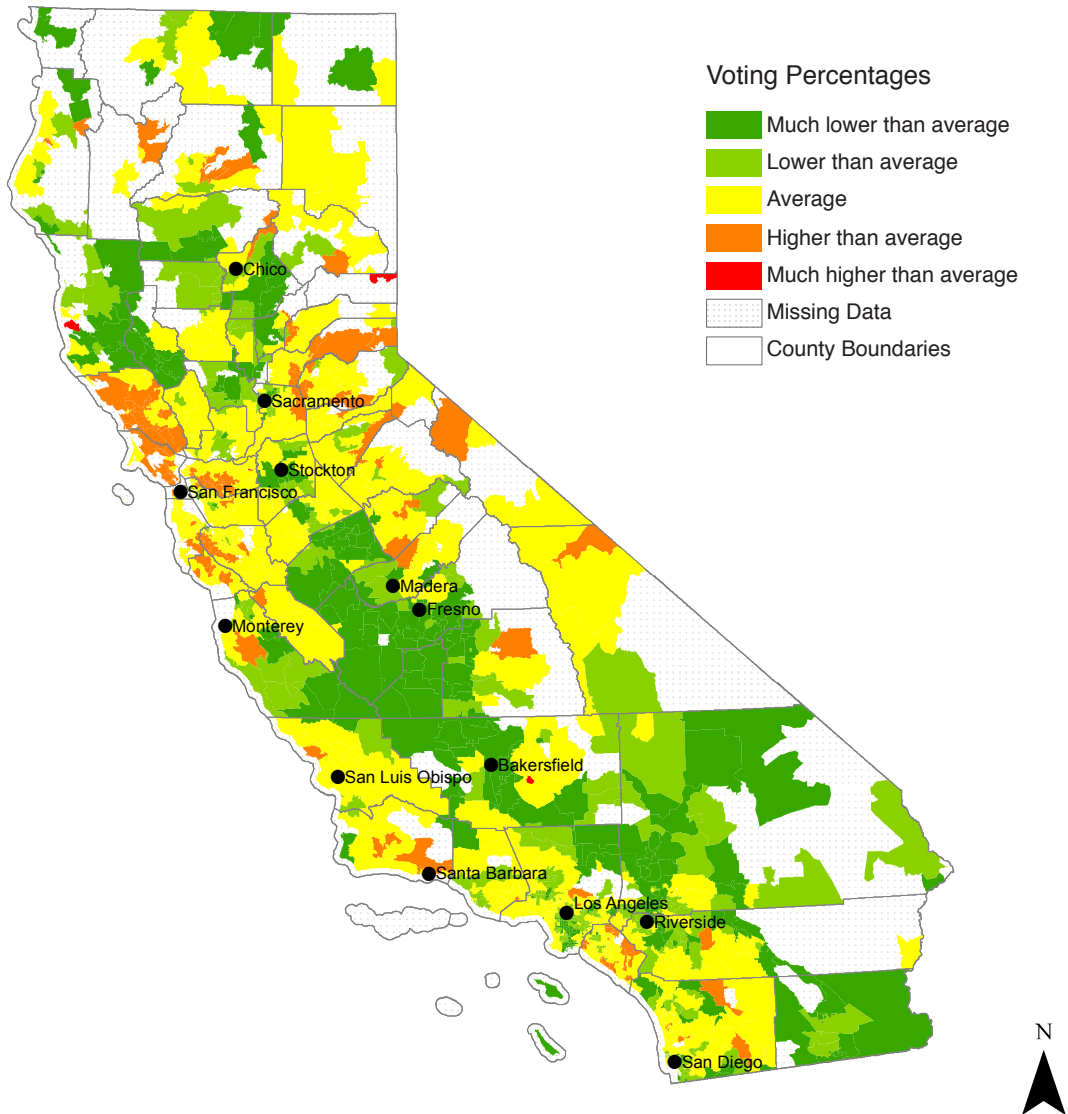- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Voting Propensity by Zip Code, Whites

Voting Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
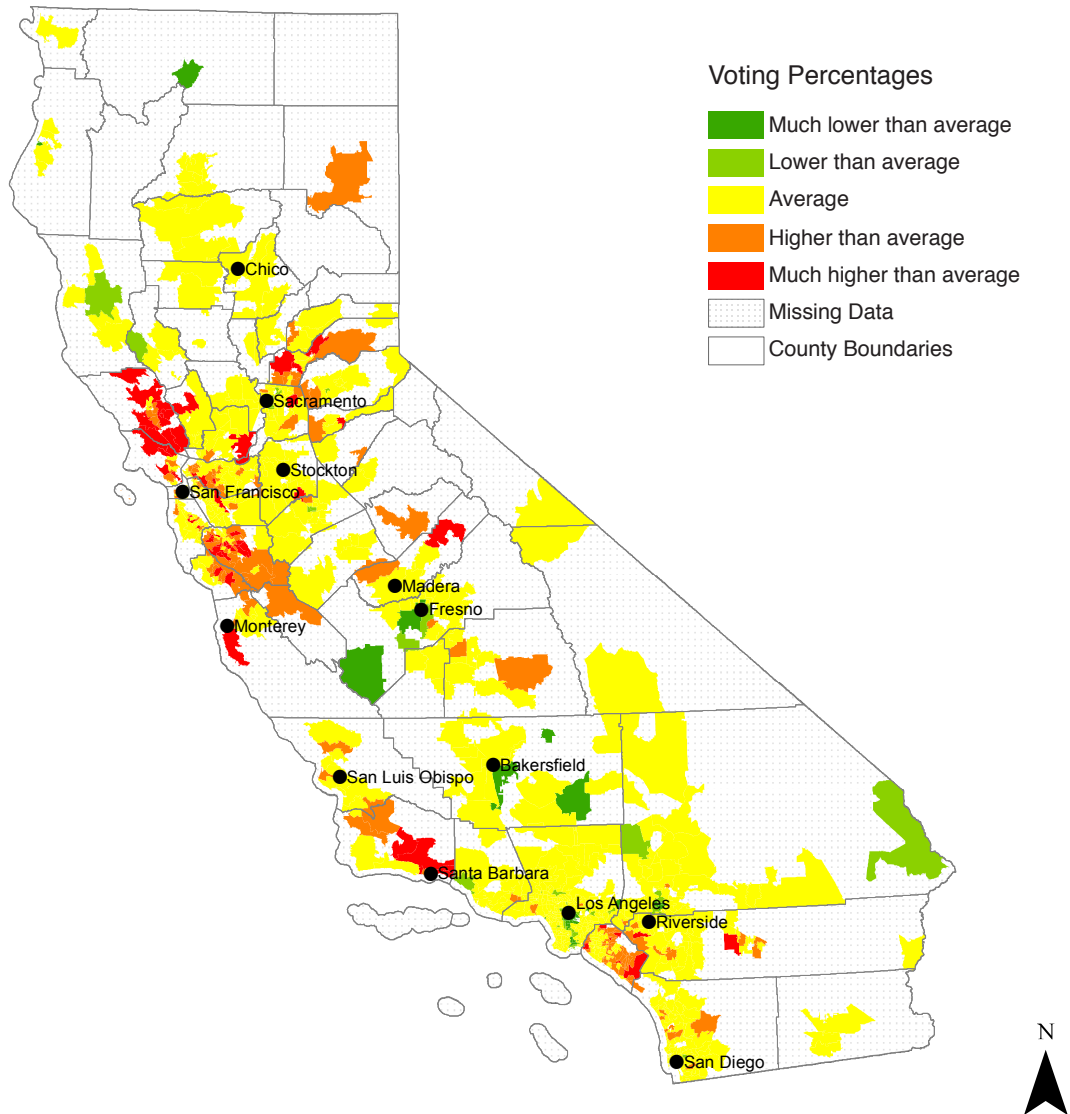- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Voting Propensity by Zip Code, Latinos Relative to Whites

Voting Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
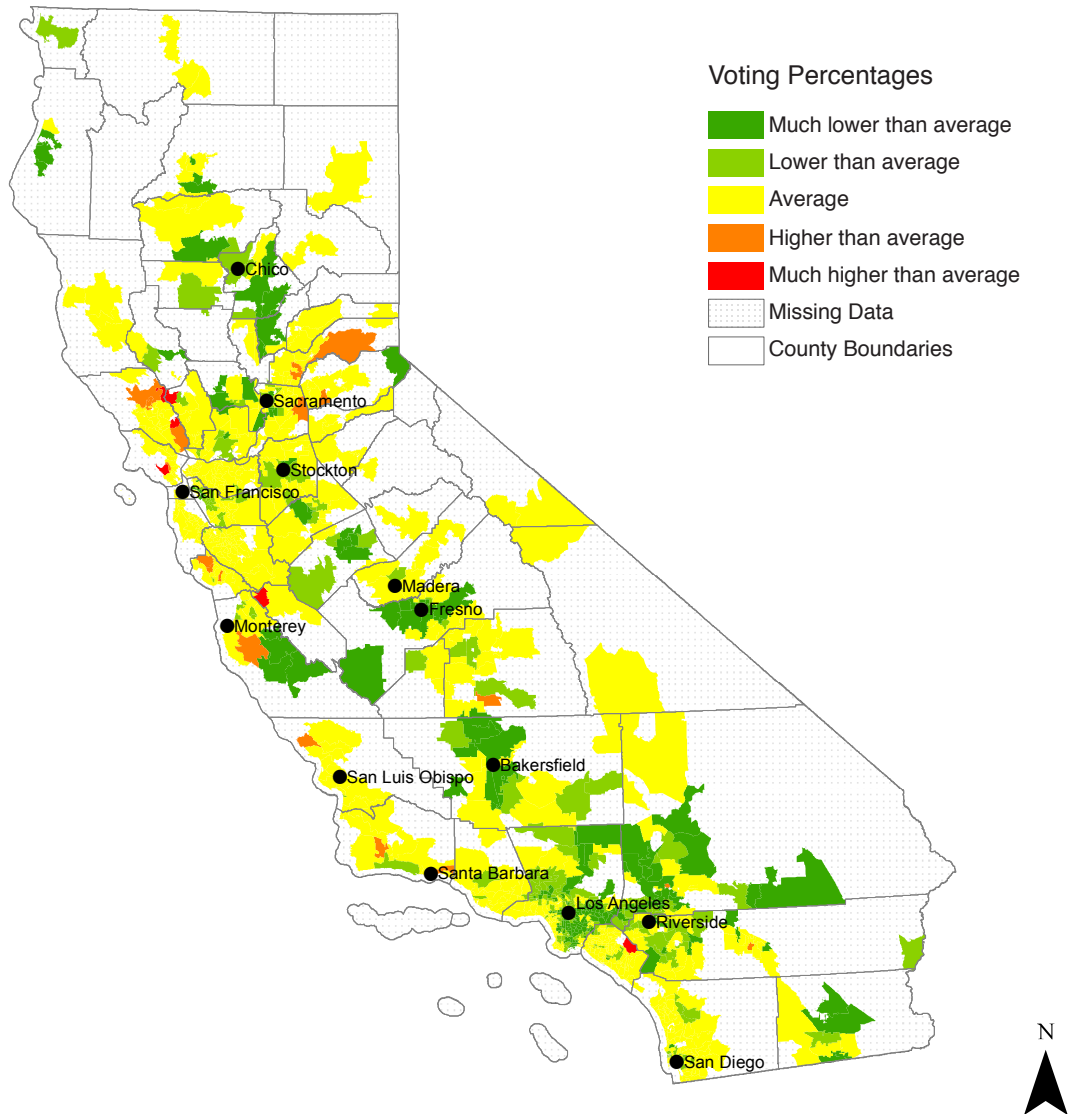- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages for whites, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Voting Propensity by Zip Code, African Americans Relative to Whites

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages for whites, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Voting Propensity by Zip Code, Asians Relative to Whites

Voting Percentages

- Much lower than average
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Much higher than average
- Missing Data
- County Boundaries

Notes: (a) Data are presented for CA Zips. (b) A hot spot is defined as an area that is overperforming relative to state averages for whites, whereas a cold spot reflects an underperforming area. In the legend, much higher than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations above the norm; higher than average = more than 1 standard deviations above the norm; average = at the mean level and under 1 standard deviation above or below the state average; lower than average = 1 to 1.5 standard deviations below the norm; and much lower than average = more than 1.5 standard deviations below the norm. 1.96 standard deviations are inapplicable because the categories do not conform to the 0-100% range. Source: Registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by Political Data Incorporated (download date June 1, 2014) and on 2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Policy Recommendations

- The Secretary of State needs to take an affirmative approach to electoral inclusion, working proactively to ensure all eligible voters have a voice in our democracy.

- County registrars should examine this zip code information in order to ascertain trends within their jurisdictions and proactively work to include all eligible voters in the electorate.

- Advocates and community organizations should use this information to pinpoint those zip codes (and ethnoracial groups within them) in need of voter education, registration, and outreach.

Conclusion

In November 2014, fewer than thirty percent of California's eligible voters cast a ballot. Those few that did vote did not represent the state's population as a whole. Our democratic decisions cannot be seen as legitimate if they are made by a small, unrepresentative slice of the electorate. Ideally this analysis can help policymakers and advocates identify those areas of the state most in need of electoral intervention and support. Our electorate is not "natural" – it is a product of our history and politics. Therefore, changing it will require targeted intervention from our political institutions and civil society.

ENDNOTES

[1] Our statewide maps for voter registration propensities are based on registrars' data aggregated by PDI (download date June 1, 2014) and on the American Community Survey (ACS). We calculate registration rates by zip using PDI's count of the number of registered voters compared to the citizen voting age population (CVAP), which we obtained from ACS data. Our within-county maps for early voter propensities, presented by regions in California, also use zip-level data. Since some zips cross county boundaries, we use a conversion process to assign (portions) of zips to the counties to which they belong in order to obtain usable estimates. For some geographical units, the number of registrants exceeded the CVAP number. Here, we assigned the zip to the highest category of participation (i.e., a "hot spot") rather than apportioning these units to missing data. Also note that zips with fewer than 20 registered voters were assigned to missing data. Early voters only comprise a portion of registered voters and early voter maps were produced without assigning zips to missing data: the reader should examine these maps for general patterns with the caveat that there may be few cases in some geographical units of analysis.

[2] 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.

[3] This report's findings are based on our analysis of the Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplements, November 2012. This survey relies on self-reported data, which may therefore include some over reporting of things like voting rates. However, it does comprise the most comprehensive survey of registration and voting patterns in the United States and has a sample size large enough to disaggregate across and within groups, which we do in the maps provided here.