



The Experience of Black Voters in California: 2020 General Election and Beyond

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The Experience of Black Voters in California: 2020 General Election and Beyond

Part of a Series of 2020 General Election Reports

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The Experience of Black Voters in California: 2020 General Election and Beyond

This report addresses the following four research questions:

1. What are the turnout characteristics of Black communities in the California 2020 general election?
2. What methods of voting did Black communities use in the 2020 general election?
3. What are the sources of election information for Black voters and what are their preferences for how they cast their ballots?
4. What are the opportunities for the engagement of Black voters in California?

Study Methodology

Available Data Sources

- California Vote File, California Secretary of State's office (state and sub-state level)
- Current Population Survey, U.S. Census (state level)

CID Data Sources

- CID California Voter Experience Survey (state level and LA County)
- CID Focus Groups with Black Voters (CA regions)

Data Limitations

CA Voter File

- Only data source that provides a person's voting behavior, ballot type, and whether their ballot, if they cast a vote-by-mail ballot, was rejected and for what reasons
- Race, and ethnicity information are not present for most voters in the CA voter file. Data that is available is not representative of California's total registered voter population (see op-ed in Calmatters)

= Researchers identify a voter's race and ethnicity from voter records using a combination of the registrant's surname name and neighborhood characteristics (geocoding)

Study Methodology

Geocoding (with census block/tract population data) is limited for identifying Black voters in most CA communities because of small proportional population size (6.7%)

Commonly used to identify Latinos and Asian Americans – but not reliable for research on other groups/subgroups in CA

= limits data analysis for Black voters in CA

California Black Eligible Turnout Overview

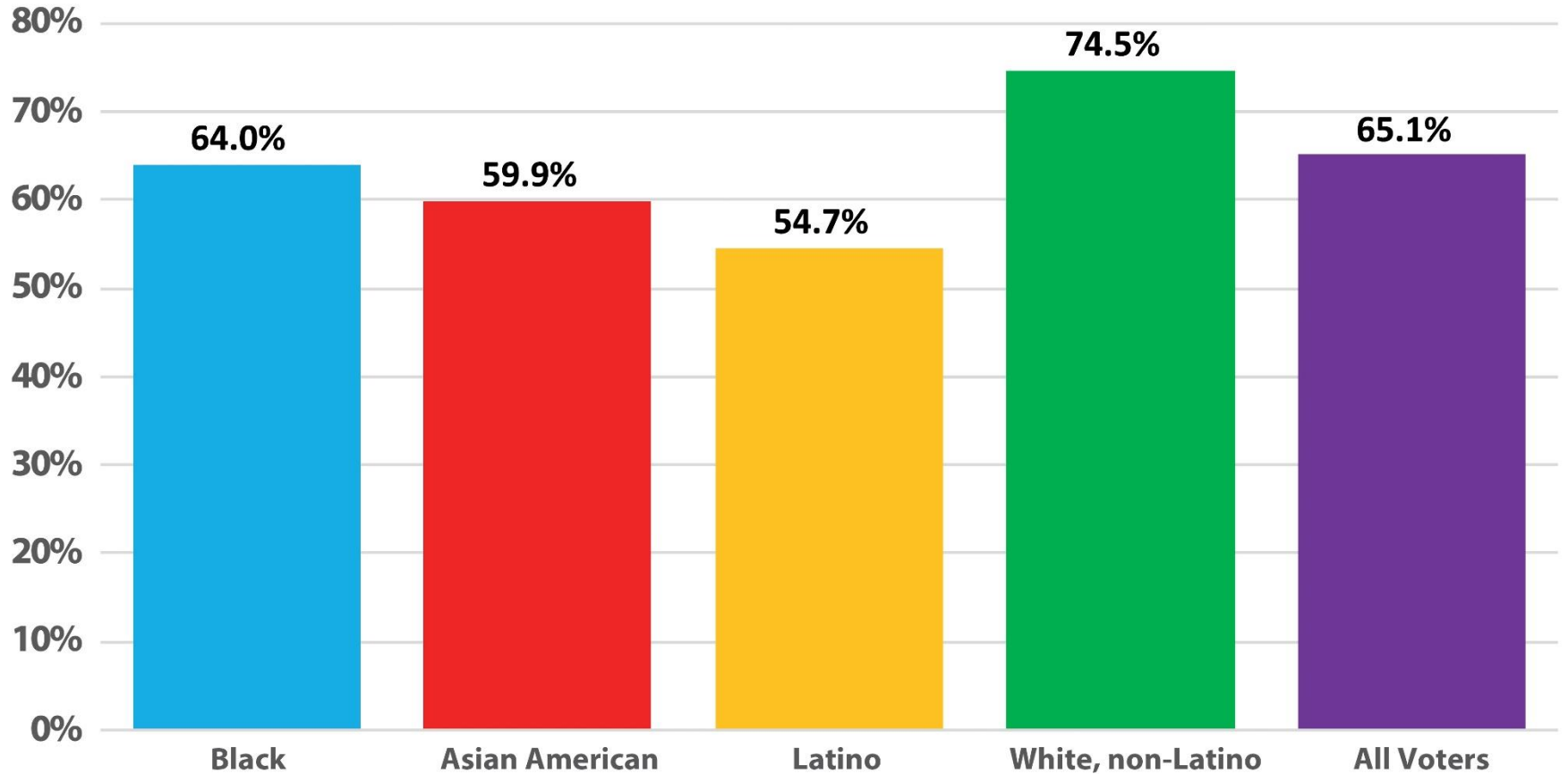
Turnout Gap Between Black and White, non-Latino Voters has been Widening in CA

According to the Current Population Survey (CPS)

- In the 2020 general election, 64.0% of Black eligible voters (adult citizens) cast a ballot
- 74.5% of white, non-Latino eligible voters casting a ballot
- There was a 10.5 percentage point turnout gap between Black and white, non-Latino eligible voters. This turnout gap has increased in recent general elections

Eligible Voter Turnout - Race and Ethnicity

California 2020 General Elections



Data Source: Current Population Survey

Turnout in California Black Communities

(Data Source: VoteCal voter file)

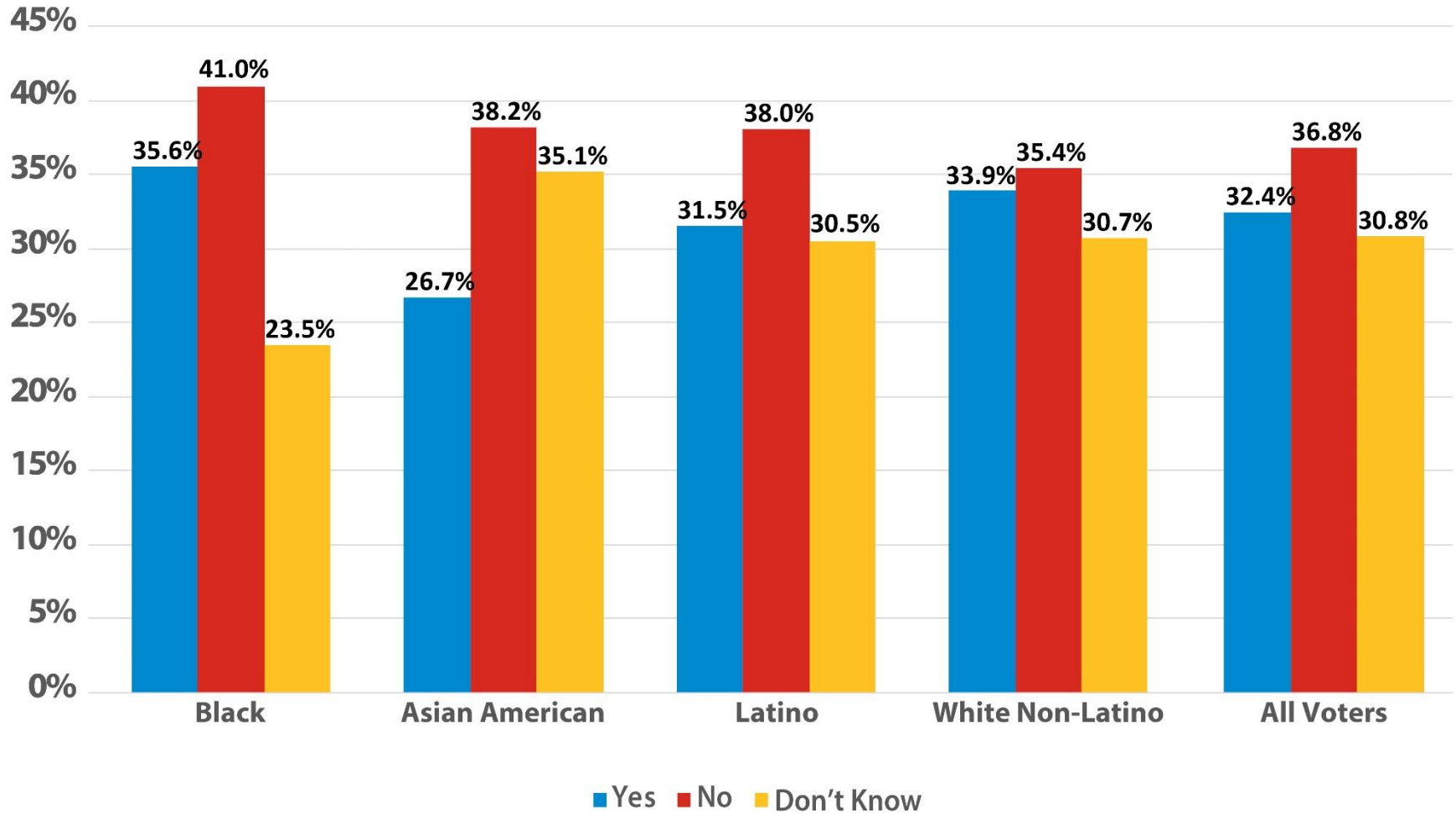
Census Tract Analysis: Highlights

1. Over Three-Quarters of Eligible Black Voters in Black Majority Census Tracts Cast a Ballot – higher turnout than all voters statewide
2. Black Majority Census Tracts Generally had Lower Total Eligible Voter Turnout when Compared to White, non-Latino Majority Census Tracts
3. Black Majority Census Tracts with High Voter Turnout had Lower Average Median Incomes than White, non-Latino Majority Census Tracts
4. Black Voters in Black Majority Census Tracts Utilized In-Person Voting Locations at Higher Rates than All Voters in All Census Tracts In Black majority census tracts, 17.9%
5. All Voters in Black Plurality Census Tracts Voted by Mail at Higher Rates than All Voters in Black Majority Census Tracts

Sources of Election Information for Black Voters and their Preferences for How They Cast Their ballots

CID Survey

Did your county change the options for how and where you could cast your ballot in the November 2020 general election?



Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

**Table 17: How did you hear about the new voting options in your county in the November 2020 general election?
Statewide**

	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino	All Voters
Political campaigns/candidates	33.2%	22.9%	28.3%	29.5%	28.7%
Community groups	24.6%	19.3%	21.1%	19.4%	20.2%
My county elections office	22.3%	24.6%	22.3%	32.2%	27.7%
Media (newspapers or television news)	35.5%	38.5%	34.9%	42.8%	39.5%
Social media	38.7%	39.9%	41.2%	29.3%	34.5%
Friends or family	28.5%	35.1%	30.4%	29.3%	30.1%
Flyer in the mail	20.7%	24.6%	25.6%	27.2%	26.1%
Billboard	7.8%	7.9%	7.3%	7.3%	7.4%
Text message	14.5%	8.2%	10.8%	8.8%	9.7%
Email	16.0%	13.0%	10.9%	13.8%	13.0%
Phone call	8.6%	4.2%	5.1%	4.1%	4.8%
Not sure from whom	0.8%	4.2%	3.2%	5.2%	4.2%

Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

**Table 19: How did you specifically learn about the in-person location where you voted or dropped off your vote-by-mail ballot?
Statewide**

	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino	All Voters
County voter information guide	31.3%	28.7%	29.5%	41.8%	36.3%
County website	28.4%	32.2%	28.6%	26.9%	28.3%
Vote-by-mail packet	32.1%	28.1%	27.3%	27.5%	27.8%
Called my county elections office	6.2%	3.8%	7.5%	7.1%	6.7%
Advertisements in the media	12.3%	7.3%	9.5%	11.3%	10.3%
Social media	15.2%	12.6%	13.3%	14.0%	13.6%
Called by a community group	3.7%	3.5%	4.0%	5.8%	4.8%
Texted by a community group	9.1%	3.2%	4.2%	4.8%	4.8%
Emailed by a community group	7.0%	2.3%	4.5%	6.0%	5.2%
Visited by a community group	5.8%	3.2%	2.5%	4.2%	3.7%
Poster at old polling place	5.3%	2.3%	3.9%	4.0%	4.0%
Friends or family	11.1%	9.9%	15.2%	11.4%	12.3%
Saw signage outside location	2.9%	7.9%	7.3%	7.7%	7.3%
Other	1.6%	1.2%	2.1%	3.4%	2.7%

Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

**Table 20: How did you specifically learn about the in-person location where you voted or dropped off your vote-by-mail ballot?
Los Angeles County**

	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino	All Voters
County voter information guide	35.6%	21.8%	30.0%	41.6%	35.6%
County website	31.7%	31.0%	28.5%	31.2%	30.7%
Vote-by-mail packet	27.7%	31.0%	26.3%	26.5%	27.1%
Called my county elections office	9.9%	5.7%	8.5%	9.8%	8.9%
Advertisements in the media	13.9%	9.2%	10.4%	16.5%	13.4%
Social media online	15.8%	12.6%	13.7%	21.2%	17.2%
Called by a community group	3.0%	3.4%	3.3%	8.8%	5.9%
Texted by a community group	12.9%	4.6%	4.8%	9.8%	8.1%
Emailed by a community group	7.9%	2.3%	4.8%	9.3%	7.0%
Visited by a community group	8.9%	1.1%	2.2%	7.9%	5.5%
Poster at old polling place	4.0%	2.3%	4.1%	4.4%	4.1%
Friends or family	12.9%	4.6%	14.8%	11.9%	12.2%
Saw signage outside location	3.0%	8.0%	5.9%	5.8%	5.9%
Other	2.0%	1.1%	1.9%	1.4%	1.7%

Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

**Table 21: How did you get to the in-person voting location where you voted or dropped off your vote-by-mail ballot in the November 2020 general election?
Statewide**

	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino	All Voters
Walked/bicycled	14.8%	15.5%	10.1%	15.3%	13.9%
Drove	64.2%	70.8%	73.0%	70.3%	70.5%
Got a ride/Uber/Lyft	8.2%	8.8%	10.3%	6.9%	8.1%
Public transit	10.3%	4.1%	5.4%	5.4%	5.6%
Paratransit	1.6%	0.9%	0.7%	0.4%	0.7%
Other	0.8%	0.0%	0.5%	1.7%	1.2%

Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

**Table 23: Why did you vote in person at a voting location in the November 2020 general election?
Statewide**

	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino	All Voters
To receive language assistance	12.7%	8.4%	8.0%	13.7%	11.3%
To use an accessible voting machine for voters with disabilities	17.8%	12.3%	10.6%	14.6%	13.3%
To register to vote or update an existing registration record	21.0%	20.7%	19.9%	24.3%	22.2%
To fill out a replacement ballot for the one I received in the mail	14.0%	12.3%	9.6%	16.1%	13.7%
To receive an "I Voted" sticker	33.8%	34.6%	31.9%	24.1%	28.3%
To be seen representing my community	24.8%	16.2%	21.1%	20.0%	20.6%
I don't trust the mail to deliver my ballot	21.0%	28.5%	27.9%	30.1%	28.7%
Other	6.4%	6.1%	5.8%	11.8%	9.0%

Data Source: CID Voter Experience Survey

**Table 27: Thinking ahead to future elections, what would be your most preferred way to cast a ballot?
Statewide**

	Black	Asian American	Latino	White Non-Latino	All Voters
Voting at an in-person voting location on Election Day	20.0%	18.3%	23.5%	24.0%	22.8%
Voting early at an in-person voting location sometime in the three days before Election Day	11.1%	9.5%	9.9%	7.3%	8.7%
Voting early at an in-person voting location sometime in the ten days before Election Day	28.5%	32.6%	26.7%	38.2%	33.3%
Mailing in a ballot that was sent to my home a month before Election Day	12.2%	11.8%	11.8%	8.2%	10.1%
Dropping off my vote-by-mail ballot at an in-person voting location, after having that ballot mailed to my home a month before Election Day	8.3%	11.3%	7.8%	10.8%	9.8%
Dropping off my vote-by-mail ballot in a ballot drop-off box, after having that ballot mailed to my home a month before Election Day	2.6%	2.4%	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%
Using different voting methods in different elections	6.0%	4.3%	6.2%	3.3%	4.5%
None	3.6%	4.0%	4.9%	2.1%	3.4%
Don't Know	7.6%	5.8%	6.7%	3.8%	5.2%

Table 31: Specific Outreach and Targeted Communications Efforts in the 2020 General Election

Black Voters	County
-	Amador County
-	Butte County
-	Calaveras County
-	El Dorado County
Yes	Fresno County
Yes	Los Angeles County
-	Madera County
-	Mariposa County
-	Napa County
-	Nevada County
Yes	Orange County
Yes	Sacramento County
-	San Mateo County
-	Santa Clara County
-	Tuolumne County
4/15	Total

Data Source: CID County Elections Office Survey

Table was created from the responses to the open-ended question, "Did your office specifically targeted communications efforts to Black, indigenous, or formerly incarcerated voters?"

A dash (-) indicates a county answered no or answer wasn't in that survey category.

What are opportunities for the Engagement of Black Voters in California?

Focus Groups with Black Voters

Focus Groups

CID conducted seven focus groups with Black California voters, constructed with a range of participant age groups, income levels, educational attainment, gender, ballot type use, and voting frequency

6 to 10 participants each

Conducted virtually with participants in the Bay Area, Sacramento, San Diego, the Central Valley, and the Los Angeles area.

1. Reasons for Participating in the Voting Process
2. Reasons for Voting Method Selection
3. Factors Involved in Voting Method Change

Reasons for Participating in the Voting Process

Focus group participants had diverse reasons for why they vote in elections. Across Black demographic groups and voting methods, the most commonly shared reasons for participating in the voting process were:

- Recognition of U.S. History of Black Voter Suppression
- Make an Impact
- Policy Preferences

Recognition of U.S. History of Black Voter Suppression

Overwhelming majority of participants either cited previous generations or Black voting history in the U.S. as one of the main reasons they voted, regardless of voting method.

As one Central Valley voter stated, “I vote because I feel like it’s an obligation based on history, this country and everything that Black people have gone through. And I feel like it’s my responsibility to vote.”

Another voter said, “I feel like I have a duty and obligation to my ancestors who fought for my right to vote.”

Voting was described as an act of responsibility to one’s community, including specifically the Black community.

Some voters further described that they vote in person so they can be seen representing the Black community while voting.

Make an Impact

Most focus group participants also expressed a goal of wanting their vote to generally make an impact in the world without specifically citing a policy or historical connection.

For these voters, the act of voting itself made them feel empowered that they could make an impact. As a Los Angeles County voter explained,

“[M]y parents taught me that voting does make the difference. But I think I thought at the time, I’m just one person, what difference can it make. But as I’ve gotten older, I see evidence now even though I’m just one person [...] I want to try to help make my voice make a difference.”

Reasons for Voting Method Selection

The most common reasons shared by focus group participants for using a particular voting method when they cast their ballot in the 2020 general election were:

- Convenience
- Benefits of Social Interactions
- Ballot Security

Convenience

Most focus group participants said they chose the method of voting they used in the 2020 general election due to convenience, but how these voters defined convenience varied greatly, with some voters preferring to mail or drop off a VBM ballot and other's utilizing a polling location in an easily accessible, conveniently sited location.

VBM voters discussed several conveniences of voting at home, including being able to consult reference materials, their schedules, and not needing to travel anywhere

Benefits of Social Interactions

Focus group participants who voted in person frequently cited the social rewards they experience from interacting with others at their voting location

Rewards were connected to being a member of their community, the positive feeling of in-person voting, or for a first-time voter, getting the full experience:

[Voting in person] is a good way for me to meet my neighbors, because when I go the polling place [...] they had people from the neighborhood there so I got to meet my neighbors. They also really thanked me and made me feel really good about voting. They were very appreciative. So it was a pleasant experience. Plus, I got the little sticker that said “I voted” that I was able to put on as well.

Ballot Security

Leading up to the 2020 general election, there was notable news coverage and social media commentary regarding delays Americans were experiencing with USPS deliveries

Postmaster General was receiving criticism for structural changes being made to mail processing

Some critics and analysts charged USPS with deliberately attempting to impact the timely delivery of mail ballots and, thus, potentially the outcome of the presidential race

These concerns were echoed directly from some focus group participants who described how their lack of trust in USPS delivery or USPS employee tampering influenced their switch to a different method of voting in 2020

Ballot Security

One Bay Area voter summed up his concern about USPS reliability,

“I received my ballot in the mail like everybody in California, but I completed it and I returned it to the Registrar of Voters office. With everything going on last year, I wasn’t confident in the mail system. So I did drive it down there and put it in the Dropbox.”

Another voter explained a similar fear, “I was concerned a little [...] with the people who are running for president. So I decided to walk it and put it in [drop off at voting location]. So that there would be no excuses that it would be counted.”

Other focus group participants, the concern with mail delivery was not about the USPS capability in delivering ballots but rather they feared the highly polarized political context of the 2020 general election might incentivize mail ballot tampering by USPS employees

Factors Involved in Voting Method Change

Focus group participants cited multiple reasons for why they changed their method of voting in the 2020 general election. Across demographic groups, the most commonly shared reasons for changing the voting method were:

- Voting Location Changed
- Avoid Voting Lines
- Problem with Ballot or Lack of Voting Information
- Avoid Contracting COVID-19

Thank you

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