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Examining San Mateo County's Adoption of the California Voter's Choice Act: 2020 Primary Election

OFFICE OF MARK CHURCH
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COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

This research was commissioned by the San Mateo County Elections Office and was independently conducted by the Center for Inclusive Democracy.

About the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID)

Celebrating its 10-year anniversary this year, the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID), formerly known as the California Civic Engagement Project, is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy and is based in Sacramento. CID conducts a range of national and multi-state research initiatives exploring voting behavior, civic engagement, electoral and economic research, the intersection of social justice and democracy, and more. Its non-partisan research informs and empowers a wide range of policy and organizing efforts aimed at eliminating disparities in social and economic wellbeing. To learn more about CID's research, visit: cid.usc.edu.

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Executive Summary

The 2020 primary election was the third election in San Mateo County held under the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA). Under the VCA, California counties adopting the voting model replace traditional polling places with vote centers offering a range of voter services including in-person voting, accessible voting options, language assistance, VBM ballot drop-off, and conditional voter registration. Additionally, vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots are automatically sent to all registered voters in the county. As of the 2020 primary election, fifteen California counties had adopted the VCA. San Mateo County adopted the VCA starting in the 2018 election cycle. This report provides an analysis of the impact of the VCA on San Mateo County voters in the 2020 primary election.

Key Findings from San Mateo County's VCA Implementation in the 2020 Primary Election

The majority of voters used vote-by-mail ballots and a quarter used vote center services

- 85.8% of San Mateo County voters used VBM ballots.
- 59.3% of all voters returned their vote-by-mail ballot through the mail, while 14.2% voted in person at a vote center.
- A quarter of voters used San Mateo County vote centers for services including voting in person, dropping off their VBM ballots, receiving language assistance, replacing damaged or lost ballots, and, if not registered, conditionally registering to vote and casting a ballot.
- Just over one percent of voters used conditional voter registration to cast a ballot.

Vote center use varied by group

- Youth and Latino voters used vote centers at higher rates than senior voters, Asian-American voters, and the general population.
- Voters who voted in person at a polling place or vote center in the last election they participated in used vote centers at much higher rates than the general population.

Vote center use (in-person voting and VBM drop off) in the 2020 San Mateo primary election

	Votes Cast at Vote Centers	Total Votes in Primary	% of Total Votes Cast at Vote Centers
Youth Voters (18 to 24)	4,265	13,582	31.4%
Senior Voters (65+)	12,123	70,315	17.2%
Asian-American Voters	9,712	41,208	23.6%
Latino Voters	9,272	26,741	34.7%
Previous In-Person Voters	3,014	6,016	50.1%
All Voters	57,708	223,720	25.8%

Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File, Political Data, Inc.

Voter turnout varied by demographic group

- 54.4% of registered voters and 44.5% of eligible voters in San Mateo County voted in the 2020 primary election.
- Asian-American and Latino voters continued to be underrepresented in the San Mateo County voting electorate, with notable gaps between their share of votes cast and their share of the eligible voter population.
- Asian-American, Latino, youth, previous in-person voters, and new voters had lower registered voter turnout rates than the general population. Asian-American and Latino voters had markedly lower eligible voter turnout than the general population rate.
- Young voters (aged 18 to 24) had lower eligible and registered voter turnout rates than older voters (aged 65 and over).
- Registered Democrats had higher registered voter turnout rates than registered Republicans.
- U.S.-born voters had higher registered voter turnout rates than foreign-born voters.

The majority of rejected VBM ballots were received late

- In the 2020 primary election, 1.9% of all VBM ballots cast were rejected.
- 46.8% of rejected VBM ballots were received late, while another 26.3% had non-matching signatures, and 19.6% were missing signatures.

VBM ballot rejection rates varied by demographic group

- Latino, Asian-American, youth, and new voters had higher VBM rejection rates than the general population.
- Young voters aged 18 to 24 had a VBM rejection rate six times that of older voters aged 65 and over.
- Registered Democrats had higher rates of VBM rejection than registered Republicans, while No Party Preference voters had the highest VBM rejection rate of the three party affiliation groups.

Voter experiences at vote centers were generally positive

An exit survey of vote center visitors revealed how voters experienced vote centers throughout San Mateo County.

- 77.3% of voters polled stated they were very satisfied with the process of casting their ballot at a vote center.
- The vote center characteristics most liked by voters were location (68.0%), hours (54.3%), and availability of parking (41.1%).
- Wait times and parking were the most commonly disliked aspect of vote centers, although these issues were noted by only a small percentage of visitors.
- Over half of voters surveyed stated they liked everything about the vote center they used.

Conclusion

In the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County, which took place just as public awareness of COVID-19 grew and approximately two-weeks before Governor Gavin Newsom issued a statewide stay at home order, voters overwhelmingly voted with VBM ballots. Vote centers continued to play a substantial role in the election process, with 25.8% of all voters utilizing vote center services. Variations occurred in voting methods, turnout rates, and VBM rejection rates across demographic groups. Latino, Asian-American, and young voters had lower turnout rates than the general population, while also having higher VBM rejection rates than the general population. Latino, previous in-person voters, and new voters voted in person at higher rates than the general population, while Asian-American voters voted by mail at higher rates than the general population.

The top reason VBM ballots were rejected was lateness, with almost 47% of VBM rejected ballots being received after the deadline. Another 45.9% of rejected ballots had signature issues (missing or non-matching signatures). Voter experiences at vote centers were generally positive, with the overwhelming majority of voters surveyed stating they were very satisfied with their voting experience. Wait times and parking availability were identified as the top aspects of vote centers that voters did not like.

Introduction

The 2020 primary election was the third election held in San Mateo County under the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA). Counties choosing to adopt the VCA are required to mail vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots to all registered voters. Additionally, counties adopting the VCA replace polling places with vote centers, which are distributed throughout the county and available to all voters up to ten days prior to Election Day.[1] Vote centers offer a range of voter services including in-person voting, accessible voting options, VBM ballot drop-off, and conditional voter registration (CVR). In the 2020 election cycle, fifteen California counties, consisting of approximately half the state's registered voter population, opted to adopt the VCA voting model. San Mateo County first implemented the VCA in the 2018 election cycle.

For many of its proponents, key goals of the VCA voting model include making the voting process more convenient, reducing the cost of elections, and possibly increasing voter turnout. This report provides quantitative analysis of the impact of the VCA on San Mateo County voters. We address four main research questions:

1. What method of voting did San Mateo County voters use to cast their ballots in the 2020 primary election?
2. What were the 2020 voter turnout rates in the San Mateo County primary election, and how did they vary by demographic group?
3. What were the vote-by-mail ballot rejection rates in the 2020 San Mateo County primary election, and what were the reasons for these ballot rejections?
4. What were San Mateo County voters' experiences when using vote centers?

About the Study

The goal of this research is to provide insight into the impacts of the VCA on voting methods, turnout, and VBM rejection rates in the San Mateo County 2020 primary election. Additionally, this research seeks to examine voters experiences at vote centers and attitudes towards the VCA voting model. This report follows CID's 2018 report, Examining San Mateo County's Adoption of the California Voter's Choice Act: 2018 Election Cycle. We address seven main research areas in the following voter categories: race, ethnicity, age, gender, foreign-born status, historical polling place voters, new voters, and political party affiliation.

1. Voting locations used;
2. Method of voting;
3. Conditional voter registration;
4. Voter turnout;
5. Vote-by-mail ballot rejection rates;
6. Reasons for Vote-by-mail ballot rejection; and
7. Voter experiences at vote centers.

This report utilizes 2020 primary election data from the San Mateo County voter registration database, commonly referred to as the "voter file." The file used in this analysis was provided by two sources: San Mateo County and Political Data, Inc. (PDI). San Mateo County provided extracts of its voter registration file from the primary election. Political Data, Inc. provided voter registration files with additional attributes identified, including age, gender, nativity, and party affiliation of the registrant.[2] The two data sets used in this analysis were merged and non-matching records were excluded to maintain a consistent and comparable registrant dataset for each demographic analysis. The resulting dataset for the primary election varies slightly from the official San Mateo County election records and there are small differences in our findings compared to the county's reported results.

Citizen voting-age population (CVAP) data at the state and county level was provided by the California Department of Finance. CVAP estimates for the general population and racial and ethnic groups are derived from the 2020 Decennial Census population counts, the most up to date data source available. CVAP for age groups, however, are still based on the 2010 Decennial Census population counts since needed data from the Census Bureau has not been released as of the publication of this report.

Race and Ethnicity Identification

Identifying the demographics of voters in California's voter records is challenging. Registered voters in California have the option to self-report their gender, race, and ethnicity data on the voter registration application, but this has historically been done by only a small percent of registrants. When identifying a voter's gender, race, and ethnicity, the commonly applied research method uses a combination of the registrant's name (first name commonly associated with gender and surname for race and ethnicity) and neighborhood characteristics (geocoding with census tract data) to infer the information.

CID identified registrant's race and ethnicity in the county voter files using the R package Who Are You (WRU), which uses the Bayes' Rule to compute the posterior probability of each racial category for registrants using surname, geolocation, and other characteristics, such as gender, political party affiliation, and age.[3] The package computes probabilities for all registrants for each racial and ethnic group, then sums probabilities to aggregate to the county level.[4]

In addition to identifying registrants' race and ethnicity, CID identified registrants' gender by using the R package gender, which infers gender categories from first names and birth year using historical name datasets. The gender predictions were then used to refine race and ethnicity probabilities using the WRU package. Matching a registrant's first name to their gender is known to be generally very accurate in the identification of gender, although limited as non-binary and other genders cannot currently be identified in a voter file.

The accuracy of surname matching and geocoding to identify a voter's race and ethnicity varies by group and population size. For this report, analysis of the voter file by race and ethnicity is limited to Latinos and Asian Americans as the method of using surname matching and geocoding for these groups has a high degree of accuracy (although to a somewhat lesser degree for Asian-American communities). Black and white voters cannot be reliably identified based on their last name (surname matching). For white and Black voters, geocoding can help produce some level of accuracy at the census tract level, especially for Black voters who are more likely than other groups to live in segregated neighborhoods.

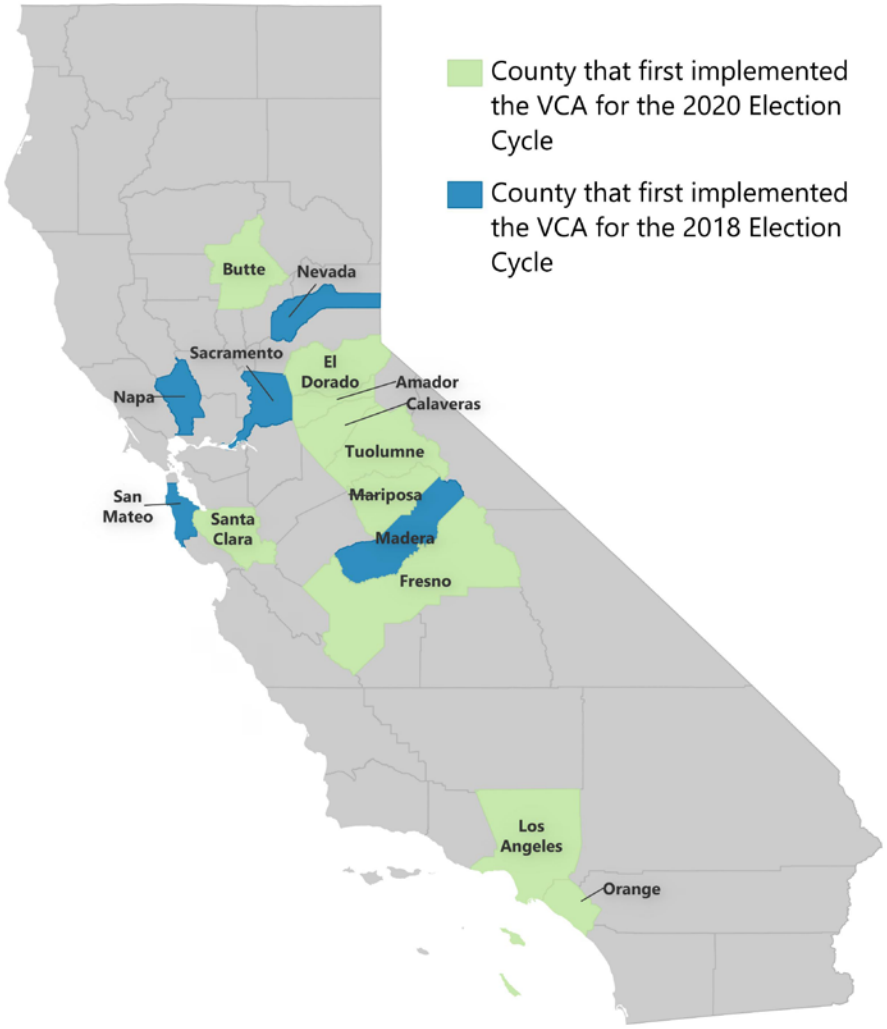
For this report, however, geocoding is not reliable for Black voters at the county level due to this group's smaller proportion of California's population (5.4%) compared to some other states. This is especially true in many California counties where nearly every census tract has a small Black population and geocoding can erroneously assign Black voters to other racial and ethnic groups. Due to the difficulty in reliably identifying Black and white voters at the county level through geocoding, we do not provide a discussion of the data for these groups in the body of the report. We do, however, make their data available in the appendix of this report for information purposes. Geocoding for identifying other populations, such as Asian-American subgroups and indigenous populations, is also not reliable at the county level in California.

Registrants' residence location data is necessary to complete the analysis in WRU. For this report, CID used longitude and latitude data provided by PDI to identifying census tracts for geocoding. Around 1.4% (5,968) of registrants did not have accompanying location data for analysis and could not have their race and ethnicities identified. These registrants were omitted from any analysis of racial and ethnic groups but were included in all other analyses throughout this report.

A Vote Center exit survey was conducted with a random sample of voters using randomly selected San Mateo County Vote Centers in the 2020 primary election. Data were weighted to ensure a representative sample by race/ethnicity and age.

The Voter's Choice Act

FIGURE 1



In 2016, Governor Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 450, which allows California counties to choose to adopt a voting model known as the Voter's Choice Act (VCA). Under the VCA, counties adopting the new voting model replace traditional polling places with vote centers offering a range of voter services. Additionally, vote-by-mail ballots are automatically sent to all registered voters in the county that adopted the VCA. Vote centers offer a variety of services including in-person voting, accessible voting options, language assistance, VBM ballot drop-off, and conditional voter registration. Vote centers are distributed throughout the county and are available to all voters for up to ten days before and on Election Day. Additionally, voters in VCA counties can cast a ballot at any vote center within their county.

Through the multiple VBM return options, the VCA provides opportunities to expand VBM while preserving in-person voting. In addition to returning VBM ballots through the mail and at vote centers, the VCA requires secure ballot drop boxes to voters, giving them additional opportunities to return their ballots.

In the 2020 election cycle, 15 of California's 58 California counties had adopted the VCA model. VCA counties included Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Tuolumne. The fifteen VCA counties contain approximately half of California's registered voters.

2020 Primary Election Context

The 2020 primary election was noteworthy for a number of contextual reasons, including the presence of a highly competitive Democratic primary race for U.S. president. This competitive context was enabled by the California's State Legislature's decision to move the state's primary election up three months to March 3rd (Super Tuesday) in order to provide California voters with greater influence over the early stages of the presidential primary.

In addition, the 2020 primary was held just as awareness of COVID-19 was growing among the public and approximately two weeks before the state entered the pandemic lockdown. This should be considered when reading this report, particularly the voter turnout and voting methods analysis.

County Demographics

Multiple factors can influence voting turnout and voting behaviors, including community demographics. In the following sections, CID details San Mateo County's demographic profile in order to give better context of the 2020 election cycle. The profile includes race, ethnicity, educational attainment, median income, limited English proficiency population, and the population with disabilities.

Race and Ethnicity

Table 1: Race and Ethnicity
San Mateo County

	San Mateo County	California
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.1%	0.4%
Asian American	29.8%	15.1%
Black	1.9%	5.4%
Latino	25.0%	39.4%
White, non-Latino	36.1%	34.7%
Other Pacific Islander	1.2%	0.3%
Other Race Alone	0.8%	0.6%
Two or More Races	5.1%	4.1%

Data Source: 2020 Decennial Census

San Mateo County has twice the share of residents who are Asian American as compared to California as a whole (Table 1). Nearly 30% of San Mateo County residents are Asian American, compared to 15.1% of Californian residents. White, non-Latino residents represent 36.1% of residents in San Mateo County, 1.4 percentage points higher than in California (34.7%). A quarter of San Mateo County residents are Latino, while nearly 40% of California residents are Latino. Less than 2% of residents in San Mateo County are Black, 3.4 percentage points below their share of California residents (5.4%).

Table 2: Asian American Subgroups
San Mateo County

	San Mateo County	California
Asian Indian	11.0%	13.9%
Bangladeshi	0.1%	0.2%
Bhutanese	0.0%	0.0%
Burmese	0.9%	0.3%
Cambodian	0.1%	1.6%
Chinese, except Taiwanese	39.6%	25.9%
Filipino	32.0%	22.0%
Hmong	0.2%	1.7%
Indonesian	0.2%	0.5%
Japanese	4.0%	4.5%
Korean	3.2%	8.1%
Laotian	0.0%	1.0%
Malaysian	0.1%	0.1%
Mongolian	0.1%	0.1%
Nepalese	0.3%	0.2%
Okinawan	0.0%	0.0%
Pakistani	0.5%	1.1%
Sri Lankan	0.1%	0.2%
Taiwanese	1.0%	1.5%
Thai	0.4%	0.9%
Vietnamese	2.1%	11.6%
Other Asian, specified	0.0%	0.4%
Other Asian, not specified	0.3%	0.5%
Two or more Asian	3.6%	3.7%

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

Almost three quarters of Asian Americans in San Mateo County are either Chinese of Filipino (Table 2). Among Asian-American subgroups, 39.6% of Asian Americans living in San Mateo County are Chinese and 32.0% are Filipino, higher shares than Asian Americans living in California as whole (25.9% and 22.0%, respectively). A little over 3% of Asian Americans in San Mateo County are Korean, less than half their share in California (8.1%) and 2.1% are Vietnamese, a fifth of their share in California (11.6%). Additionally, 4.0% of Asian Americans in San Mateo County are Japanese, similar to their share in California (4.5%).

Education Attainment

Table 3: Education Attainment 18 Years and Older San Mateo County		
	San Mateo County	California
Less than high school graduate	9.5%	15.4%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	16.0%	21.7%
Some college or associate's degree	25.0%	31.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	49.5%	31.9%

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

With nearly 50% of residents 18 years and older having a bachelor's degree or higher, San Mateo County is a highly educated county (Table 3). The share of adult residents who are college educated is 17.6 percentage points higher in San Mateo County than in California as a whole. A quarter of adult residents in San Mateo County have some college or an associate's degree, 6.1 percentage points lower than California (31.1%). Another 16.0% of adults in San Mateo County are high school graduates (or equivalent), compared to 21.7% in California. Lastly, less than 10% of adults in San Mateo county have less than a high school diploma, two-thirds the statewide rate (15.1%).

Household Income

Table 4: Median Income Households by Race and Ethnicity San Mateo County		
	San Mateo County	California
All Households	$128,091	$78,672
American Indian and Alaska Native	$96,458	$60,182
Asian American	$144,177	$101,380
Black	$80,529	$54,976
Latino	$81,839	$62,330
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	$96,731	$81,682
White, non-Latino	$145,836	$90,496
Other Race	$76,759	$59,287
Two or More Races	$108,256	$76,733

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

In 2020, the median household income in San Mateo County was more than 50% higher than the statewide median household income ($128,091 and $78,672, respectively). White, non-Latino householders had the highest median income ($145,836) in San Mateo County, while Asian-Americans had the second highest ($144,177). Latino householders ($81,839), Black householders ($80,529), and other race householders ($76,759) had the lowest median incomes in San Mateo County.

Table 5: Income Brackets Households San Mateo County		
	San Mateo County	California
Less than $10,000	2.6%	4.7%
$10,000 to $14,999	2.1%	3.9%
$15,000 to $24,999	4.0%	6.9%
$25,000 to $34,999	4.0%	7.1%
$35,000 to $49,999	6.0%	10.0%
$50,000 to $74,999	10.4%	15.3%
$75,000 to $99,999	10.4%	12.3%
$100,000 to $149,999	17.3%	17.1%
$150,000 to $199,999	13.1%	9.4%
$200,000 or more	30.1%	13.3%

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

Shown in Table 5, a large portion of San Mateo County households (30.1%) had an annual income above $200,000 in 2020, more than double the portion of California households earning $200,000 or more. Slightly over 13% of households in San Mateo County earned between $150,000 and $199,999, compared to 9.4% of all California households. The share of San Mateo County household earning between $100,000 and $149,999 in 2020 was similar to all California households (17.3% and 17.1%, respectively). San Mateo County consistently had lower shares of the population in income brackets below $100,000 than California as a whole. For example, the share of San Mateo County households earning between $25,000 and $34,999 (below the poverty line) was 4.0%, compared to 7.1% of all households in California.

Limited English Proficiency

Table 6: Population with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) San Mateo County						
	San Mateo County			California		
	LEP Population	Total Population	Percent LEP	LEP Population	Total Population	Percent LEP
Population 5 years old and over	121,629	722,535	16.8%	6,432,102	36,936,941	17.4%
Citizens 18 years old and over	63,448	505,583	12.5%	2,995,597	25,774,911	11.6%

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

In San Mateo County, 16.8% of the population aged 5 and over are limited English proficient (LEP), meaning they speak English less than "very well" (Table 6). For comparison, 17.4% of California residents are LEP. Among citizens aged 18 and over, 12.5% speak English less than "very well," compared to 11.6% of citizens aged 18 and over throughout California.

Table 7: Language Spoken at Home by Limited English Proficiency (LEP) San Mateo County				
	San Mateo County		California	
	Residents	Percent of LEP Population	Residents	Percent of LEP Population
LEP Spanish Speaking Population	52,182	42.9%	4,083,013	63.5%
LEP Asian and Pacific Island Language Speaking Population	55,700	45.8%	1,720,073	26.7%
LEP Other Indo-European Languages Speaking Population	11,815	9.7%	499,656	7.8%
LEP Other Language Speaking Population	1,932	1.6%	129,360	2.0%
Total LEP Population	121,629	-	6,432,102	-

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

As seen in Table 7, a larger proportion of San Mateo County's LEP population speaks Asian and Pacific Island languages at home and a smaller proportion speaks Spanish at home compared to California as a whole. In San Mateo County, 45.8% of the LEP population speaks Asian and Pacific Island languages at home, compared to 26.7% of California's LEP population. Nearly 43% of San Mateo County's LEP population speaks Spanish, while 63.5% of California's LEP population speaks Spanish at home. A little under 10% of San Mateo's LEP population speaks Indo-European languages at home, almost two percentage points more than California's LEP population (7.8%). See Appendix for individual language breakdown.

Population with Disabilities

Table 8: Population with Disability San Mateo County				
	San Mateo County		California	
	Population	Percent of Total Population	Population	Percent of Total Population
Population with One or More Disabilities	62,417	8.2%	4,146,951	10.7%
Hearing Difficulty	19,065	2.5%	1,147,500	3.0%
Vision Difficulty	10,500	1.4%	778,145	2.0%
Cognitive Difficulty	22,911	3.0%	1,585,969	4.1%
Ambulatory Difficulty	30,648	4.0%	2,118,765	5.5%
Self-Care Difficulty	14,141	1.9%	964,579	2.5%
Independent Living Difficulty	26,339	3.5%	1,654,210	4.3%
Total Civilian	11,815	9.7%	499,656	7.8%
Non-Institutionalized Population	761,683	-	38,838,726	-

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year 2016 to 2020

In San Mateo County, 8.2% of the population has one or more disabilities, which is 2.5 percentage points lower than the share of California's population with one or more disabilities (10.7%). Ambulatory difficulty is the most common disability in both San Mateo County (4.0%) and California (5.5%). Additionally, 3.5% of San Mateo County's population has independent living difficulty, 3.0% has cognitive difficulty, 2.5% has hearing difficulty, 1.9% has self-care difficulty, and 1.4% has vision difficulty.

Note: Some residents have more than one disability and are included in multiple individual disability counts.

About the San Mateo County 2020 Election Cycle

The 2020 primary election was the third election conducted by San Mateo County using the VCA voting model. San Mateo County first conducted elections using the VCA model during the 2018 election cycle. CID released a report examining voter turnout, methods, and other trends for the 2018 San Mateo County Election Cycle found here.

Following the requirements of the VCA, 42 vote centers were located throughout San Mateo County in the 2020 primary election, with at least one vote center in each municipality. Three vote centers were open 29 days prior to Election Day (February 3 to March 3). Another six vote centers were open 11 days prior to Election Day (February 29 to March 3). The remaining 33 vote centers were open 4 days prior to Election Day (February 29 to March 3). A mobile vote center was also available for voters by appointment throughout the early voting period and on Election Day.

During the early voting period of the 2020 primary election, vote centers were open from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Vote centers were open 7:00 am to 8:00 pm on Election Day. Thirty-three ballot drop box locations (term used by the county for internally and externally placed drop boxes) were also distributed throughout the county. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the locations of vote centers and ballot drop box locations in San Mateo County for the primary election. Figure 4 identifies the geographic and low-income distribution of the population in the county during the 2020 Election Cycle.

In addition, as mandated by the VCA, the San Mateo County Elections Office created an Election Administration Plan (EAP), Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC), and Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) for the 2020 primary election. Developed through a process of public input and public hearings, the EAP is required to describe how the county will administer elections under the VCA. San Mateo County VAAC and LAAC are made up of members of the community and advise on the implementation process. San Mateo County also continued the Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee (VEOAC) which was first established in the 2018 election cycle. All three of these committees worked with the county elections office to determine the locations of vote centers and ballot drop box locations as part of the creation of the county's Election Administration Plan (EAP).

The VCA also requires each adopting county to develop a Voter Education and Outreach Plan (part of the county's EAP) that informs voters about the services provided by the VCA. Stakeholders involved during the plan's development include community-based organizations, local elected officials, and interested individuals. Outreach and education events for the primary election was planned and advertised through an extensive media campaign that included direct postcard mailings, brochures, flyers, and posters printed in English, Spanish, and Chinese. For the primary, targeted advertisements were purchased in the Bay Area, including six radio stations, six television stations, 11 local newspapers, and one local magazine. San Mateo County voters were digitally targeted through six websites (YouTube, Facebook, KTVU, KCBS, Univision, and MercuryNews.com), 100,000 emails, and 517,192 mobile phone advertisements.

In addition, the VEOAC and its members conducted an extensive outreach campaign to reach San Mateo County voters, especially those from electorally underrepresented communities. Many of these efforts were unfunded, conducted by VEOAC members using resources donated by individuals and the organizations they represented.

San Mateo County Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee

At the request of community members, the San Mateo County Chief Elections Office established the Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee (VEOAC) prior to the 2018 primary election. The VEOAC is co-chaired by Thrive, The Alliance of Nonprofits for San Mateo County and San Francisco Peninsula People Power and consists of 20-30 members. The mission of the San Mateo County VEOAC is to advise and assist the Chief Elections Officer on matters relating to voter education and outreach and to enhance outreach opportunities and compliance with all federal, state, and local laws. The San Mateo County Elections office provided the community-based organizations $100,000 for community voter outreach and education during the 2020 primary election.

FIGURE 2

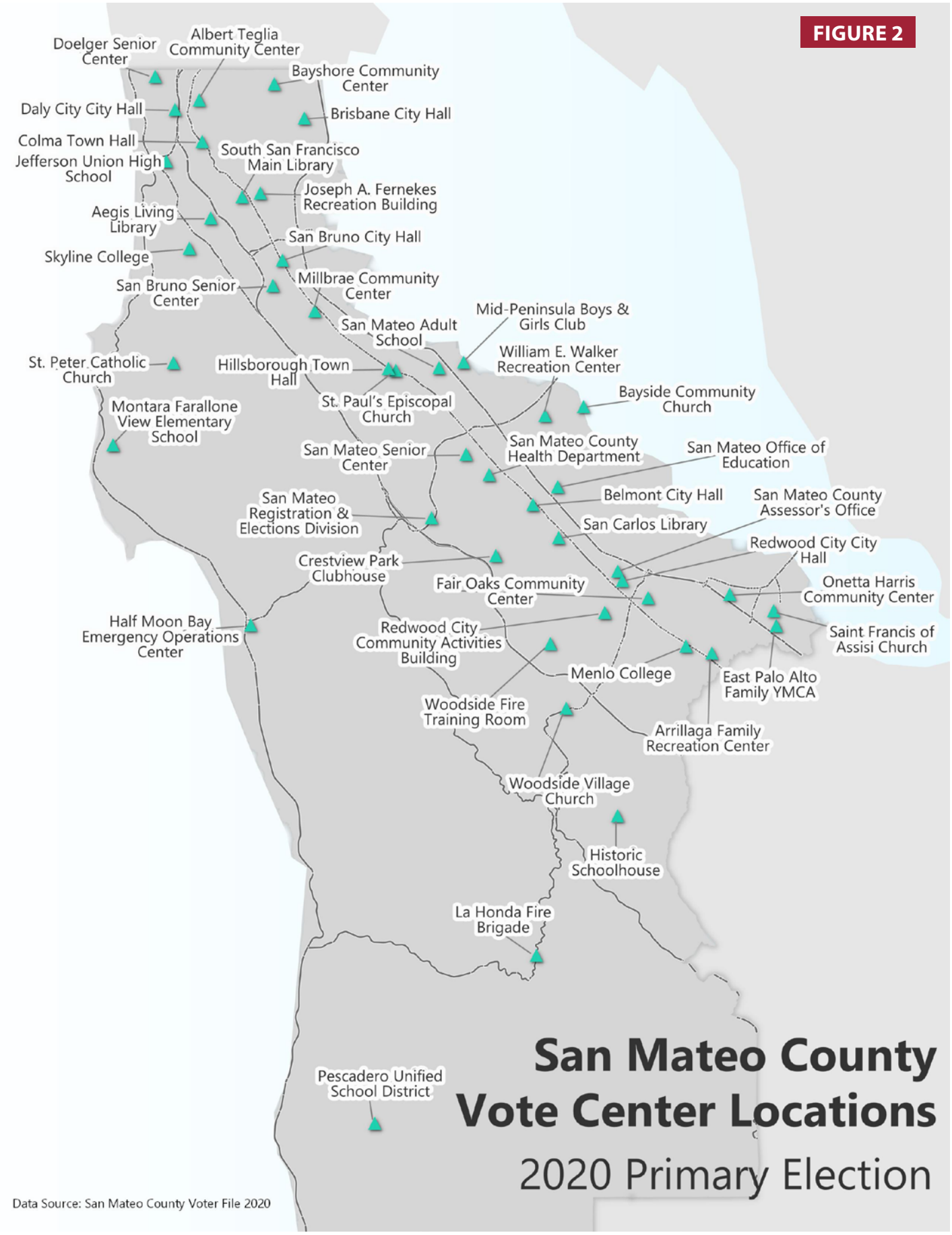

Doelger Senior Center
Albert Teglia Community Center
Bayshore Community Center
Daly City City Hall
Brisbane City Hall
Colma Town Hall
Jefferson Union High School
South San Francisco Main Library
Joseph A. Fernekes Recreation Building
Aegis Living Library
San Bruno City Hall
Skyline College
San Bruno Senior Center
Millbrae Community Center
Mid-Peninsula Boys & Girls Club
San Mateo Adult School
William E. Walker Recreation Center
St. Peter Catholic Church
Hillsborough Town Hall
Bayside Community Church
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Montara Farallone View Elementary School
San Mateo County Health Department
San Mateo Office of Education
San Mateo Senior Center
Belmont City Hall
San Mateo County Assessor's Office
San Mateo Registration & Elections Division
San Carlos Library
Redwood City City Hall
Crestview Park Clubhouse
Fair Oaks Community Center
Onetta Harris Community Center
Half Moon Bay Emergency Operations Center
Redwood City Community Activities Building
Saint Francis of Assisi Church
Menlo College
East Palo Alto Family YMCA
Woodside Fire Training Room
Arrillaga Family Recreation Center
Woodside Village Church
Historic Schoolhouse
La Honda Fire Brigade
Pescadero Unified School District
San Mateo County
Vote Center Locations
2020 Primary Election
Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File 2020

FIGURE 3

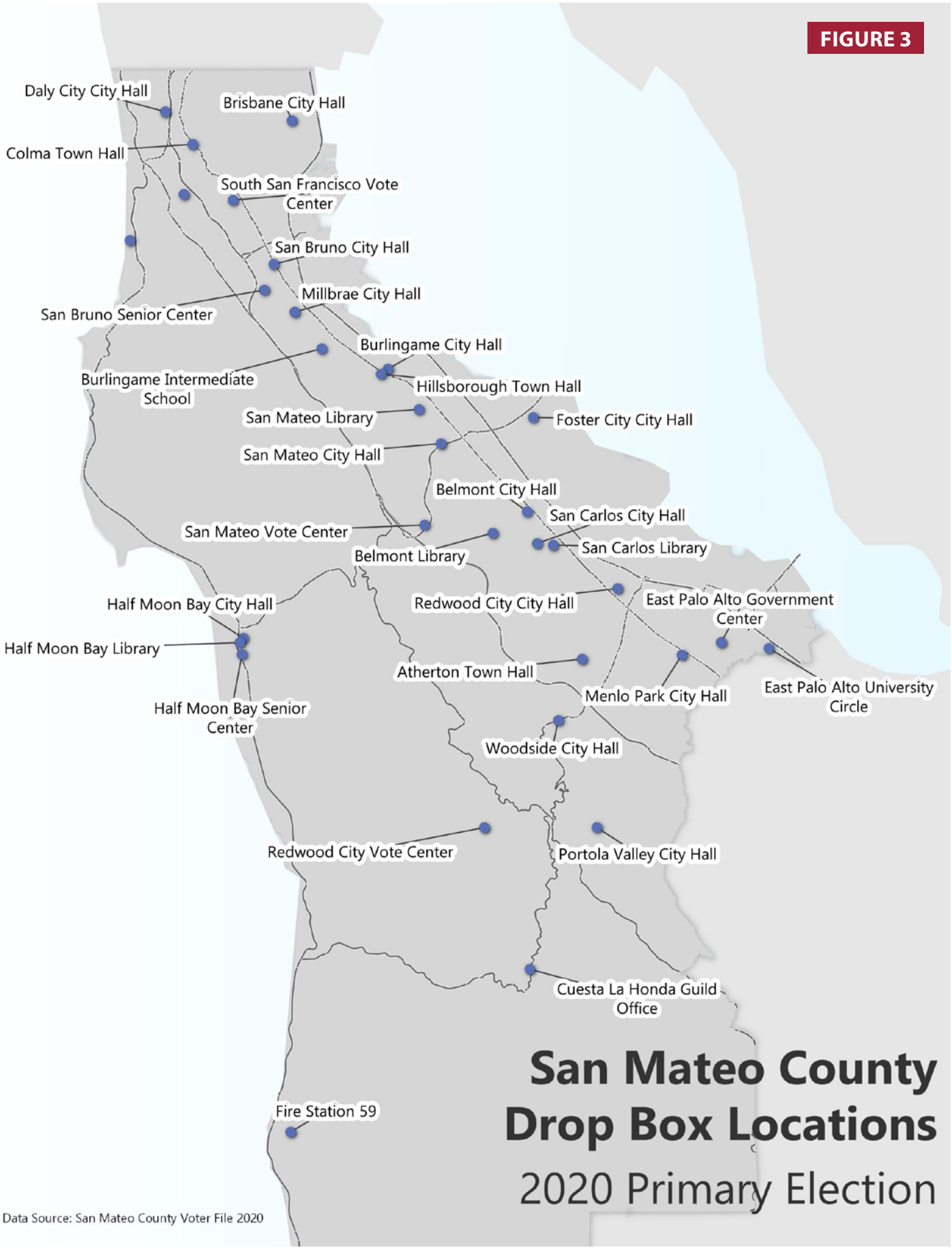
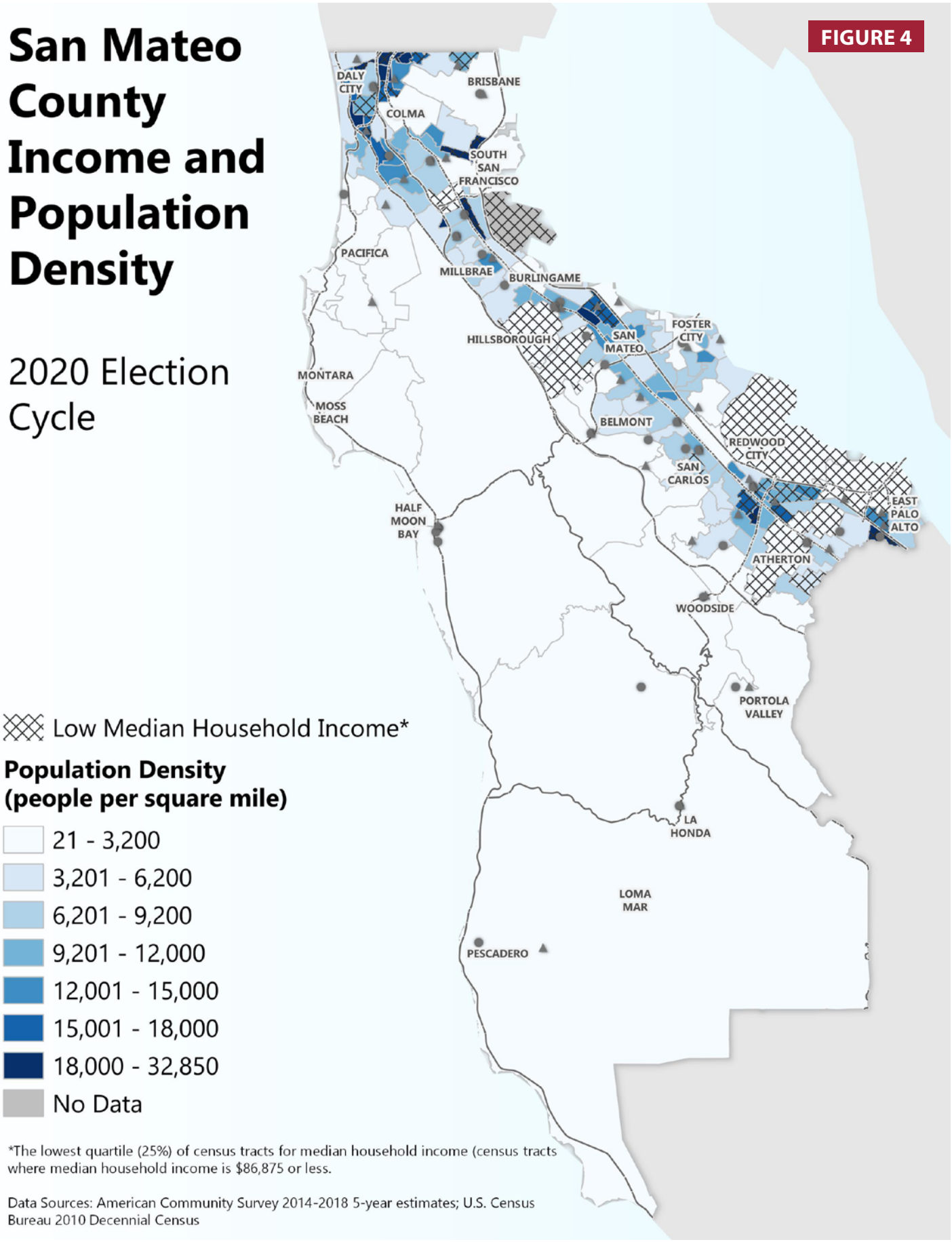

Daly City City Hall
Brisbane City Hall
Colma Town Hall
South San Francisco Vote Center
San Bruno City Hall
Millbrae City Hall
San Bruno Senior Center
Burlingame City Hall
Burlingame Intermediate School
Hillsborough Town Hall
San Mateo Library
Foster City City Hall
San Mateo City Hall
Belmont City Hall
San Carlos City Hall
San Mateo Vote Center
San Carlos Library
Belmont Library
Half Moon Bay City Hall
Redwood City City Hall
East Palo Alto Government Center
Half Moon Bay Library
Atherton Town Hall
East Palo Alto University Circle
Menlo Park City Hall
Half Moon Bay Senior Center
Woodside City Hall
Redwood City Vote Center
Portola Valley City Hall
Cuesta La Honda Guild Office
Fire Station 59
San Mateo County
Drop Box Locations
2020 Primary Election
Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File 2020

FIGURE 4

San Mateo County Income and Population Density

2020 Election Cycle



*The lowest quartile (25%) of census tracts for median household income (census tracts where median household income is $86,875 or less.

Data Sources: American Community Survey 2014-2018 5-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Decennial Census

Method of Voting San Mateo County Voters Used to Cast Their Ballots in the 2020 Primary Election

Section Highlights

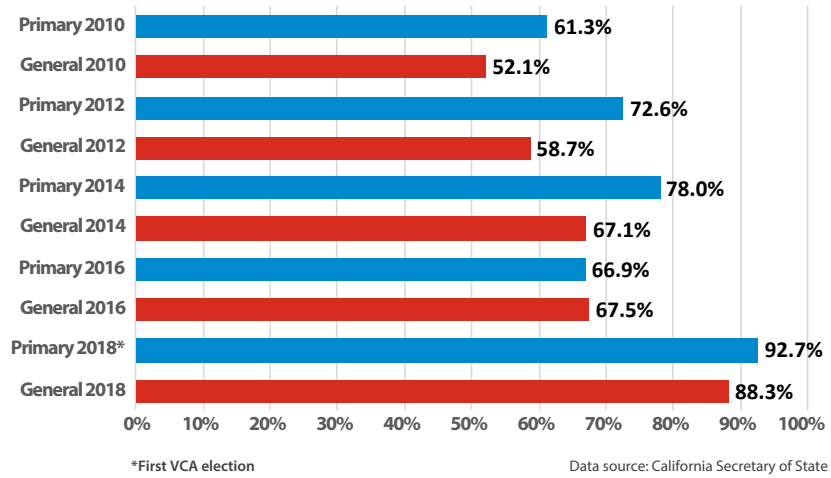
- In 2020 primary election, almost 86% of all voters used VBM ballots, while 14.2% voted in person at a vote center.
- The majority (59.3%) of voters returned their VBM ballot through the mail, while 14.9% returned their VBM ballot to a ballot drop box location and 11.6% dropped off their VBM ballot at a vote center.
- VBM ballots sent by mail were more likely to be received before Election Day than those dropped off at vote centers or in a ballot drop box.
- Latino, previous in-person voters, and new voters voted in person at vote centers at higher rates than the general population. Asian-American voters voted by mail at higher rates than the general population.
- Foreign-born voters returned their VBM ballots through the mail at higher rates than U.S.-born voters, while U.S.-born voters returned their ballots at drop boxes and vote center locations at higher rates than foreign-born voters.
- Young voters (aged 18 to 24) voted in person at more than twice the rate of older voters (aged 65 and over). Registered Democrats voted in person at higher rates than registered Republicans.
- Just over 1% of voters in San Mateo County used conditional voter registration.

In the 2020 primary election, San Mateo County voters had four main ways they could cast their ballot: by returning their VBM ballot through the mail, dropping their VBM ballot off at a ballot drop box location, dropping their VBM ballot off at a vote center, or voting in person at a vote center. The San Mateo County Elections Office provided postage-paid ballot return envelopes for voters to use when mailing in their VBM ballots. In addition, the VCA requires counties to offer the option of Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail (RAVBM).[5] With this option, voters with disabilities can request a ballot to be sent electronically to them that they can download, read and mark on their computer using their own accessible technology. Voters using RAVBM are then able to print and mail in their ballot.

Vote centers were utilized by voters during the early voting period and on Election Day for a range of services such as dropping off VBM ballots, receiving language assistance, replacing spoiled ballots (ballots upon which the voter made a mistake and wants a replacement), lost ballots or envelopes. If voters were not already registered or needed to update their voter registration, they were able to conditionally register to vote and cast a ballot.

Historically, San Mateo County voters were already using VBM ballots at rates above the state's average. As with other counties in California, VBM use is higher in primary elections than in general elections, but VBM use in San Mateo County (and the state as a whole) has been steadily increasing in both types of elections (Figure 5). In the 2016 primary and general elections, just over two thirds of ballots cast and counted in San Mateo County were VBM (mailed and dropped off combined). After the implementation of the VCA in the 2018 primary election, almost 93% of all counted votes in San Mateo County's primary election were cast with VBM ballots.

FIGURE 5



In the 2020 primary election, the overwhelming majority (85.8%, 191,948 ballots) of voters in San Mateo County used a VBM ballot (Table 1). Figure 6 shows that of the 223,720 ballots cast and counted in the primary election, over 59% (132,750 ballots) were returned through the mail. Another 11.6% (25,936 ballots) of voters returned their VBM ballots to a vote center and 14.9% (33,262 ballots) returned their VBM ballot to a ballot drop box location. A little over 14% (31,772) of votes cast and counted were cast in person at a vote center.

FIGURE 6

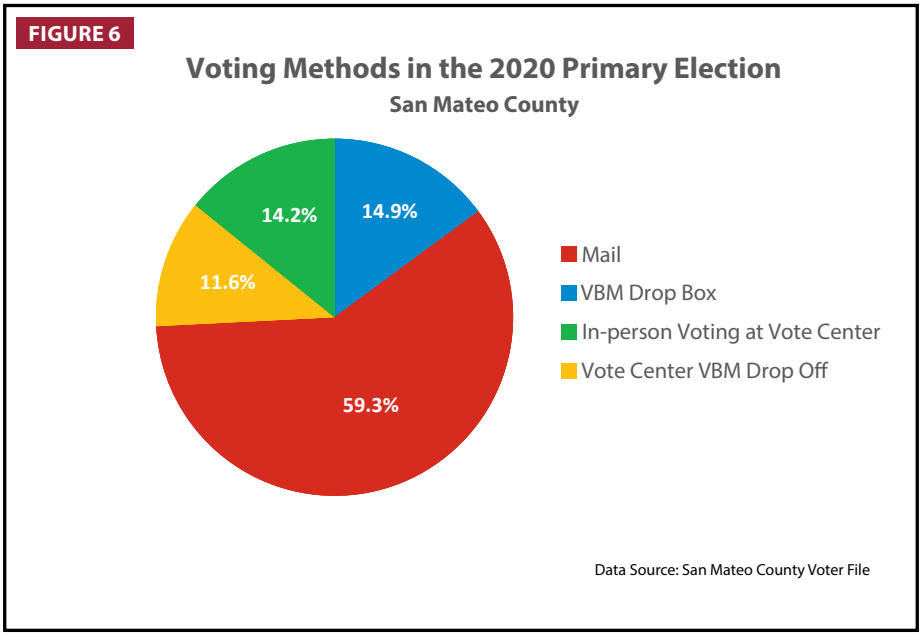


Table 1: San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election Overview				
Eligible Voters	**Registered Voters**	**In-Person Ballots**	**VBM Ballots**	**Total Ballots Cast**
503,379	**411,645**	**31,772**	**191,948**	**223,720**

San Mateo Voter File and Poltical Data Inc.

*Total Ballots number does not include the 190 voters with no method data

Of the 191,948 VBM ballots cast in the 2020 primary election, 57.0% (109,366 ballots) were received before election day (Table 2). The remaining 43.0% (82,535 ballots) were received on or within 3 days of Election Day. Note: 47 VBM ballots received in the mail did not have a return date.

Table 2: San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election VBM Ballots Counted				
	Returned to Vote Center	Returned to Drop Off Box	Mail	Total VBM
Before Election Day	5,766	11,269	92,331	109,366
Election Day and 3+ After	20,170	21,989	40,376	82,535
Counted VBM Ballot with No Return Date	n/a	n/a	47	47
Total VBM Ballots	25,936	33,258	132,754	191,948

Source: San Mateo Voter File and Political Data Inc.

2020 Primary San Mateo County Analysis

In the next sections, we examine which San Mateo County voters used each of the four methods of voting under the VCA and where these registrants lived. As discussed earlier in this report, data for this analysis as well as the subsequent sections of the report are from the San Mateo County voter registration files provided by the San Mateo County Elections Office and Political Data, Inc. (PDI). For research purposes, PDI data by race and ethnicity are limited to Latinos and Asian Americans (identification of Black and white voters is not available due to data restrictions).[6]

Defining Vote Methods

In the following sections, we provide an analysis of the ways in which people used the four voting options during the 2020 San Mateo County primary election. We refer to those options as vote methods. Table 3 provides a definition for each vote method:

Table 3: Definition of Voting Methods Used in the 2020 Primary Election	
Vote Method	Description
Mail	A Vote-by-Mail ballot that was returned using the mail.
Drop Box Location	A Vote-by-Mail ballot that was returned by dropping the ballot off at a drop box location (internally and externally placed).
Vote Center	A ballot that was cast in person at a vote center.
Vote Center Ballot Drop Off	A Vote-by-Mail ballot that was returned by dropping the ballot off at a vote center.

Vote Center and Ballot Drop-Off Use by Day and Location

In San Mateo County, vote centers and ballot drop box locations saw low numbers for in-person voting and voters dropping off VBM ballots during the initial phase of early voting prior to Election Day, with a sharp increase in participation during the final two to three days prior to Election Day and on Election Day (Figure 7).

Voters who mailed in their VBM ballots utilized early voting at greater rates than voters who used other methods. Figure 7 shows that 69.5% (92,332 ballots) of all mailed-in VBM ballots were received before Election Day (March 3rd), with an additional 29.6% (39,321 ballots) arriving in the mail on Election Day. The remaining mailed-in VBM ballots were received up to 3 days after Election Day.[6] In contrast, in-person voters were most likely to vote on Election Day itself. A full 80.6% of all in-person votes (23,592 ballots) were cast on Election Day. The remaining 19.4% (5,682) of in-person ballots were cast during the early voting period leading up to Election Day.

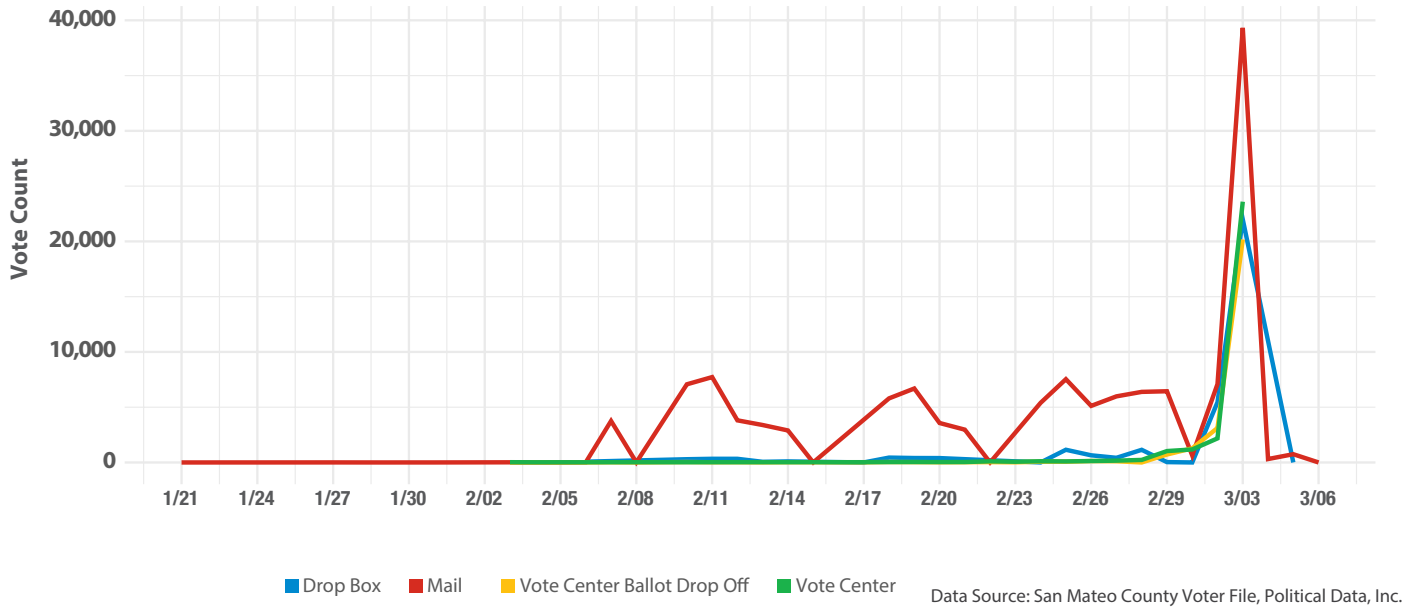
Voters who dropped off their VBM ballot were also more likely to do so on Election Day instead of during the weeks prior to March 3rd. Just over 66% (21,991) of all VBM ballots were returned to ballot drop box locations on Election Day, while 33.9% (11,269 ballots) were returned between February 6th and March 2nd. Similarly, the majority of VBM ballots returned to vote center locations were received on Election Day. Over 77% (20,121 VBM ballots) of VBM ballots returned to vote centers were received on March 3rd, while the remaining 22.4% (5,815 VBM ballots) were received at vote centers between February 3rd and March 2nd.

Note: The first ballots were received on January 21, 2020 (Figure 7). A small number of ballots were received between January 21st and February 5th (43 VBM ballots and 60 in person ballots).

FIGURE 7

Count of Ballots Received During the 2020 Primary Election

January 21, 2020 to March 6, 2020



Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File, Political Data, Inc.

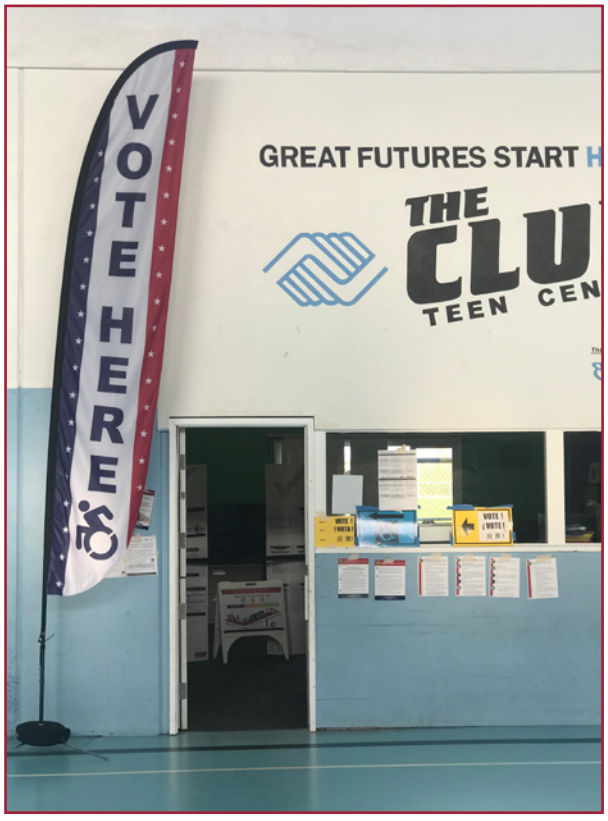
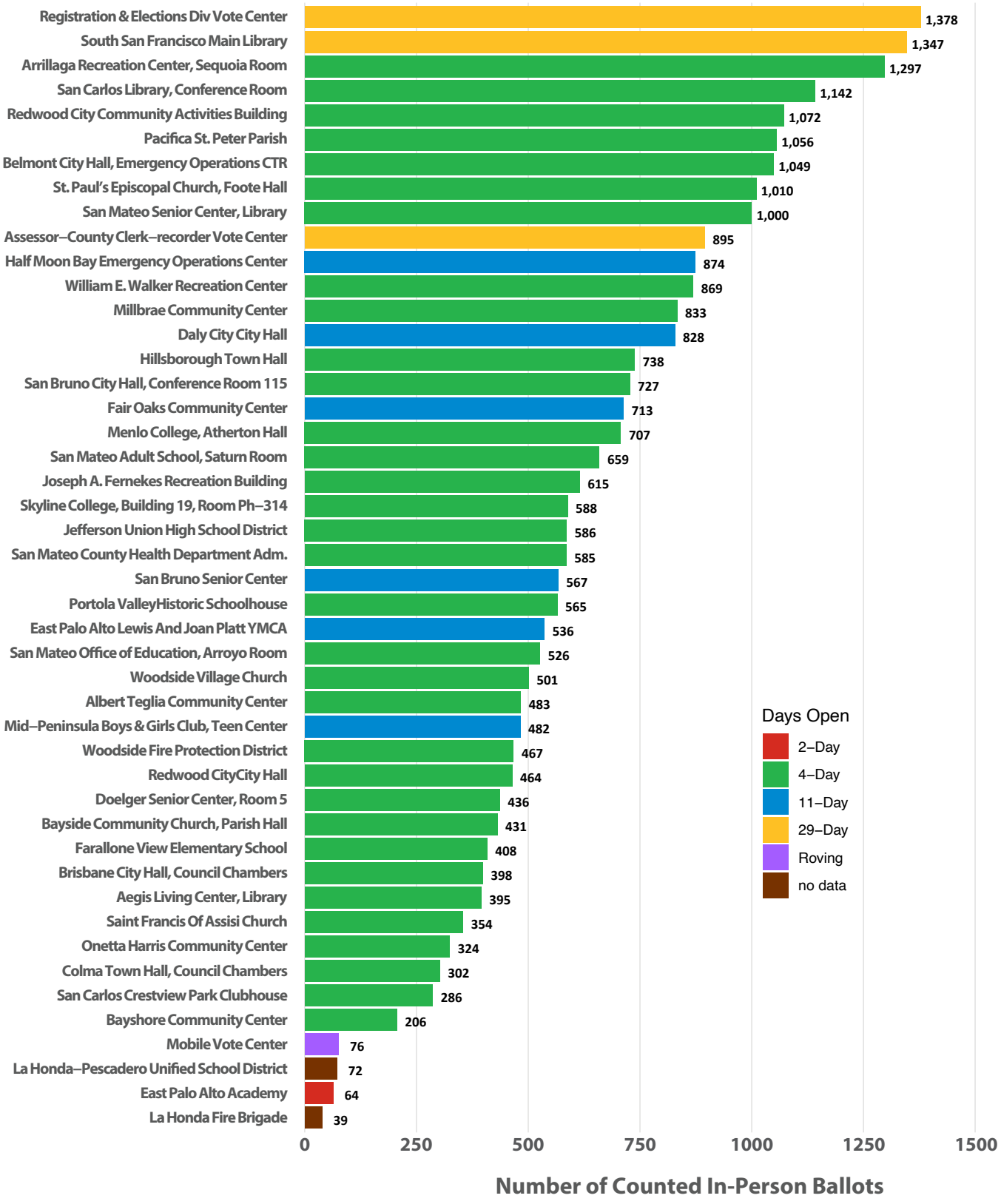


FIGURE 8

San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election: Total Ballots Cast by Vote Center



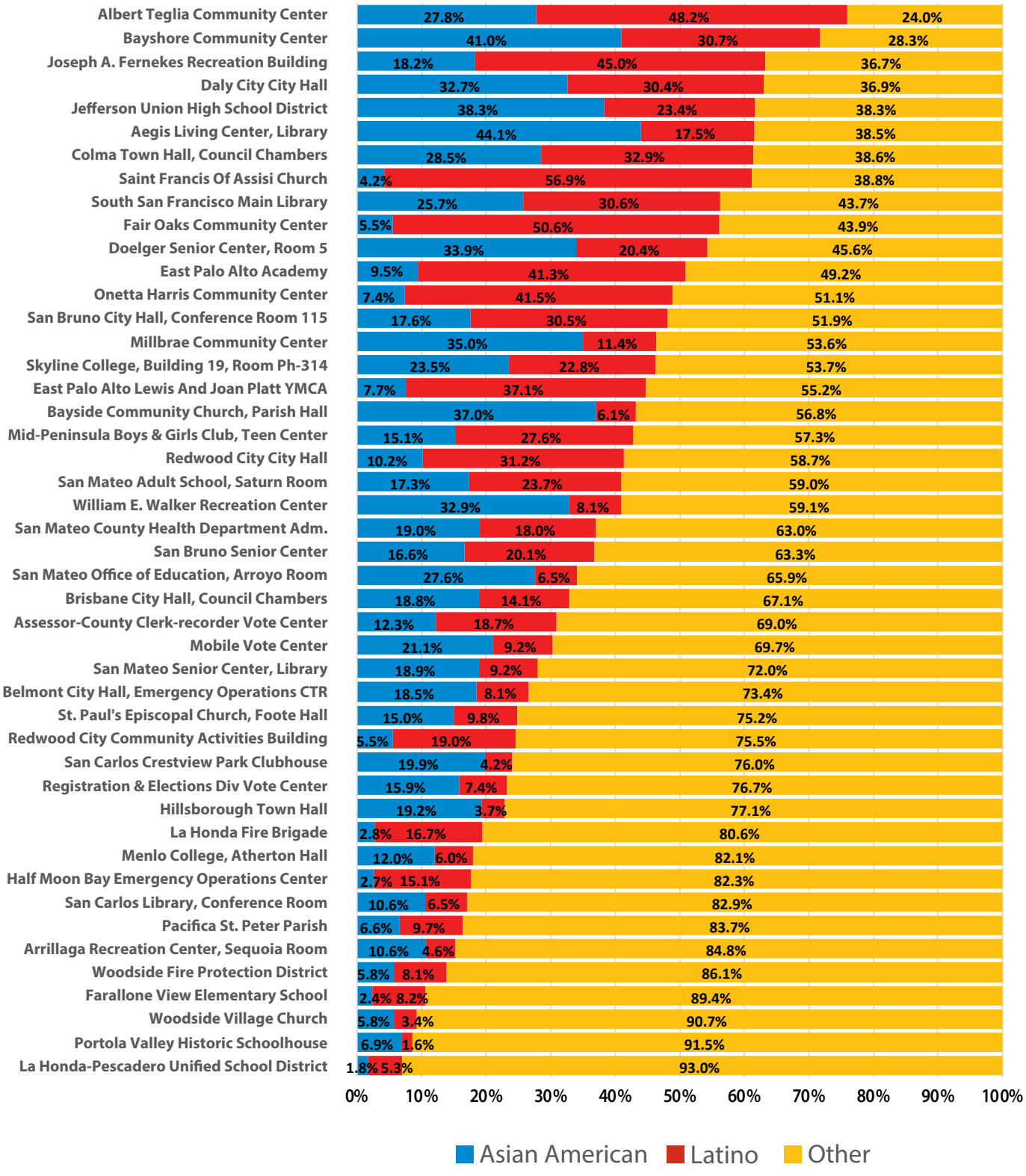
Data Source: San Mateo County Voter Files, California Secretary of State, and Political Data, Inc.

In the 2020 primary election, 31,772 voters voted in person at a vote center in San Mateo County. Figure 8 shows that the amount of activity at each vote center varied considerably. Two of the three vote centers open for the 29 days leading up to Election Day received the highest number of in-person votes (1,378 ballots at the Registration & Elections Division's vote center and 1,347 ballots at the South San Francisco Main Library). In contrast, Bayshore Community Center, which was open between February 29th and March 3rd, received only 206 ballots.

Note: This vote center location analysis is limited to in-person votes and does not include VBM ballots dropped off at each vote center. For the 2020 primary election, drop box locations were not available for analysis. Additionally, vote center location data was only available for 91.1% of in person votes (28,950 of 31,772 in-person votes).

FIGURE 9

San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election: Vote Center Ballots Share by Race and Ethnicity

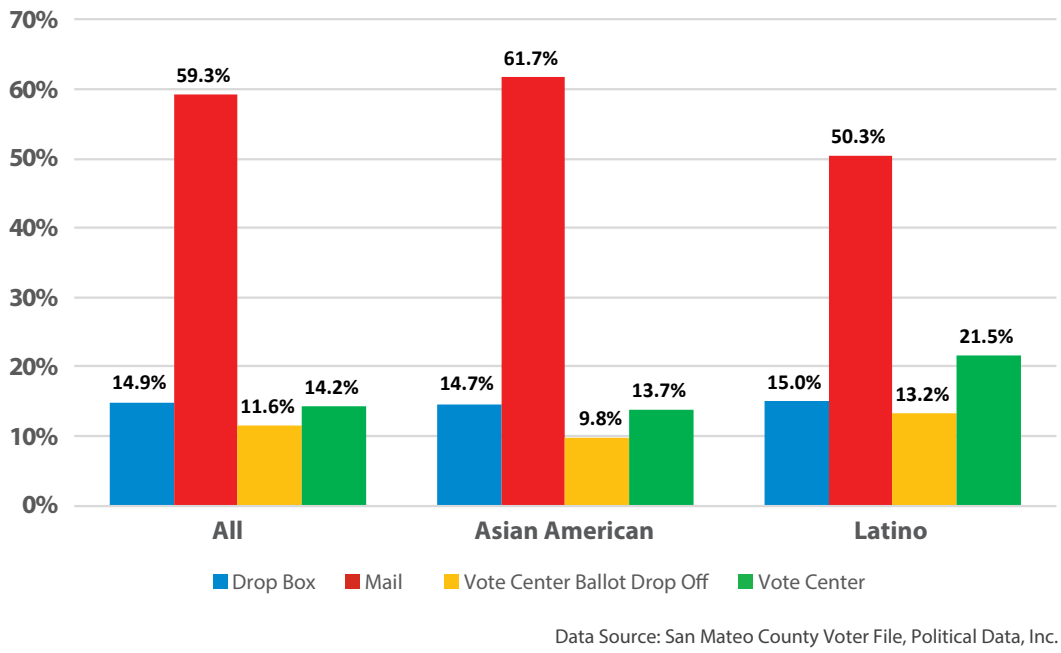


Data Source: San Mateo County Voter Files, California Secretary of State, and Political Data, Inc.

There was large variation in the race and ethnicity of voters using each vote center location in the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County. For example, Alberta Teglia Community Center had a relatively high share of Latino voters (48.2%) and Asian-American voters (27.8%), while Woodside Village Church, which had a similar number of ballots as Alberta Teglia Community Center, had a small share of Latino voters (3.4%) and Asian-American voters (5.8%).

Method of Voting by Race and Ethnicity

FIGURE 10



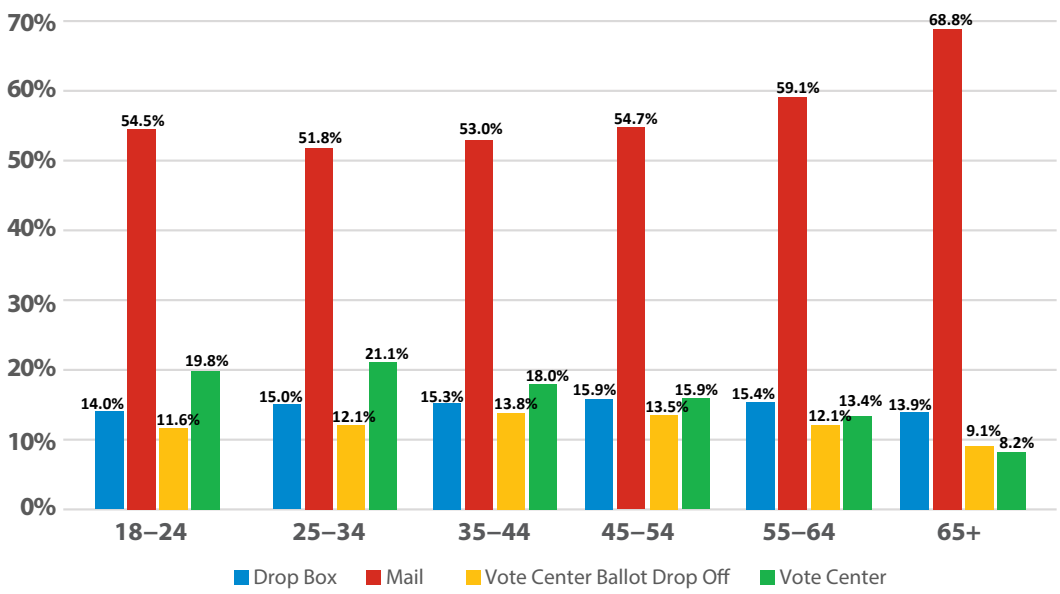
In the 2020 primary election, the majority of San Mateo County voters in each race and ethnicity group we examined returned their VBM ballot through the mail. There were, however, considerable differences in the use rates of the four voting methods when comparing the racial and ethnic groups. Asian-American voters returned their mail ballot through the mail at higher rates than Latino voters and the general population. Nearly 62% of Asian-American voters mailed in their VBM ballots, compared to 50.3% of Latino voters and 59.3% of all voters (Figure 10).

Conversely, Latino voters cast their ballots in person at a vote center at higher rates than any other group examined by this study. Around 21.5% of Latino voters cast their ballots in person, compared to 13.7% of Asian-American voters and 14.2% of the general population. Latinos also utilized the vote center ballot drop off option at a higher rate than other groups examined in the study. Over 13% of Latino voters dropped their VBM ballot off at a vote center, while 9.8% of Asian-American voters and 11.6% of the general population did the same. These findings are consistent with previous research by the CID that identified a historical pattern of lower VBM use by Latinos in San Mateo County and the state as a whole.[7]

Note: Due to missing location data used for the geocoding portion of identifying the race and ethnicities of registrants, 1.4% (5,968) of registrants' race and ethnicities could not be identified and were omitted from all race and ethnicity analyses. See the appendix for available data for Black and white, non-Latino voters. Also see page 7 of this report for a discussion of data limitations and identifying the race and ethnicity of voters.

Method of Voting by Age

FIGURE 11



Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File, Political Data, Inc.

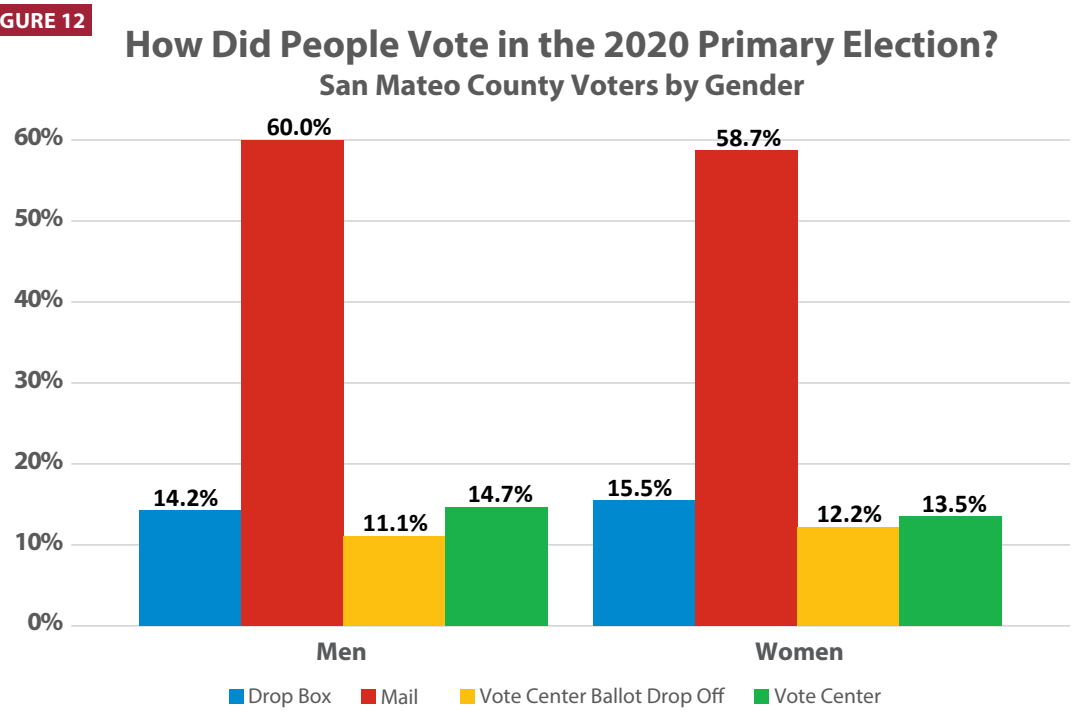
In the 2020 primary election, older voters in San Mateo County mailed their VBM ballots at higher rates than younger voters, while younger voters voted in person at higher rates than older voters. Voters under the age of 55 voted in person at nearly double the rates of those aged 65 and over. For instance, 21.1% of voters aged 25-34 (the age group with the highest rate) voted in person, compared to 8.2% for those aged 65 and over (Figure 11).

Almost 69% of voters aged 65 and over returned their VBM ballots through the mail. In comparison, 51.8% of voters aged 25 to 34 (the age group with the lowest rate) returned their VBM ballot through the mail. VBM ballots returned to drop boxes and vote center drop off locations varied less between age groups. Drop box use rates ranged from 13.9% (65 and over) to 15.9% (45 to 54). Vote center ballot drop off use rates ranged from 9.1% (65 and over) to 13.8% (35 to 44).

Note: Age is identified by voters' birthdates. San Mateo County voter records with unreliable data for age were excluded. Excluded records include those that categorize the voter as being under 18 years of age or older than 100 years of age (145 votes total were excluded).

Method of Voting by Gender

FIGURE 12

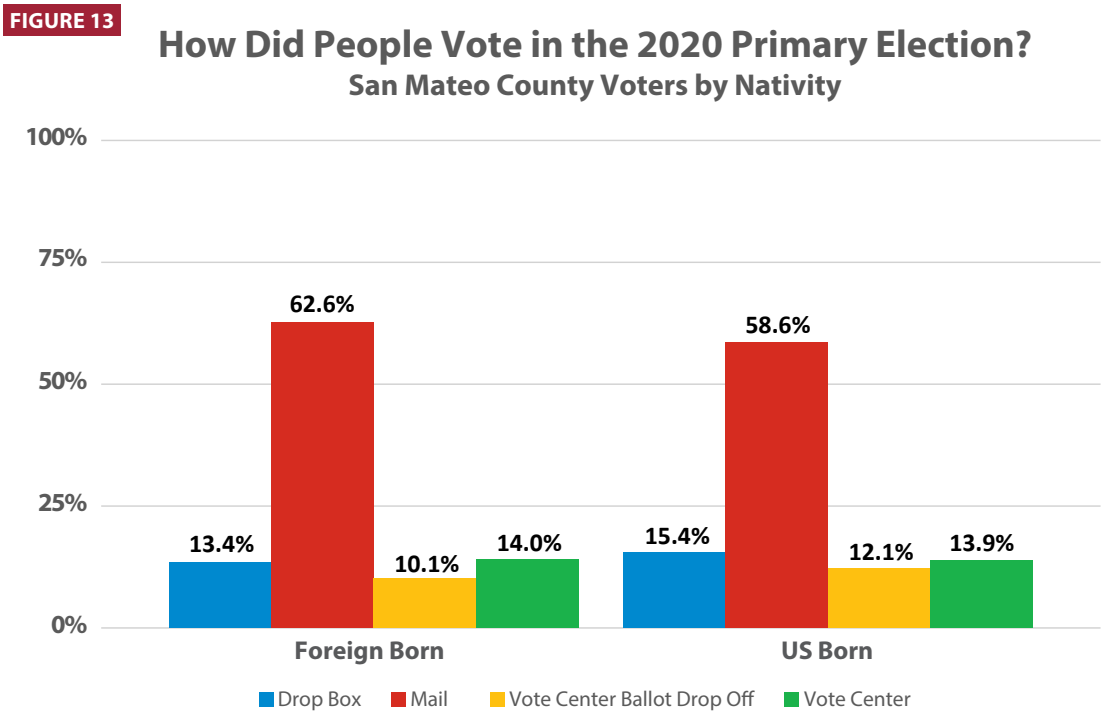


Overall, somewhat similar shares of men and women voters used each voting method in the 2020 primary election.[8] A slightly higher percentage of women dropped their VBM ballot off at a vote center or drop box than men, while men voted in person and through the mail at slightly higher rates than women (Figure 12). Around 15.5% of women and 14.2% of men returned their VBM ballot to a drop box. Around 12.2% of women and 11.1% of men returned their VBM ballot to a vote center ballot drop off location. A little under 59% of women voted through the mail, compared to 60.0% of men. Lastly, 13.5% of women and 14.7% of men voted in person at a vote center.

Note: For 6.7% of 2020 primary voters in San Mateo County there is no data available on gender (15,060 records out of 223,799).

Method of Voting by Nativity

FIGURE 13

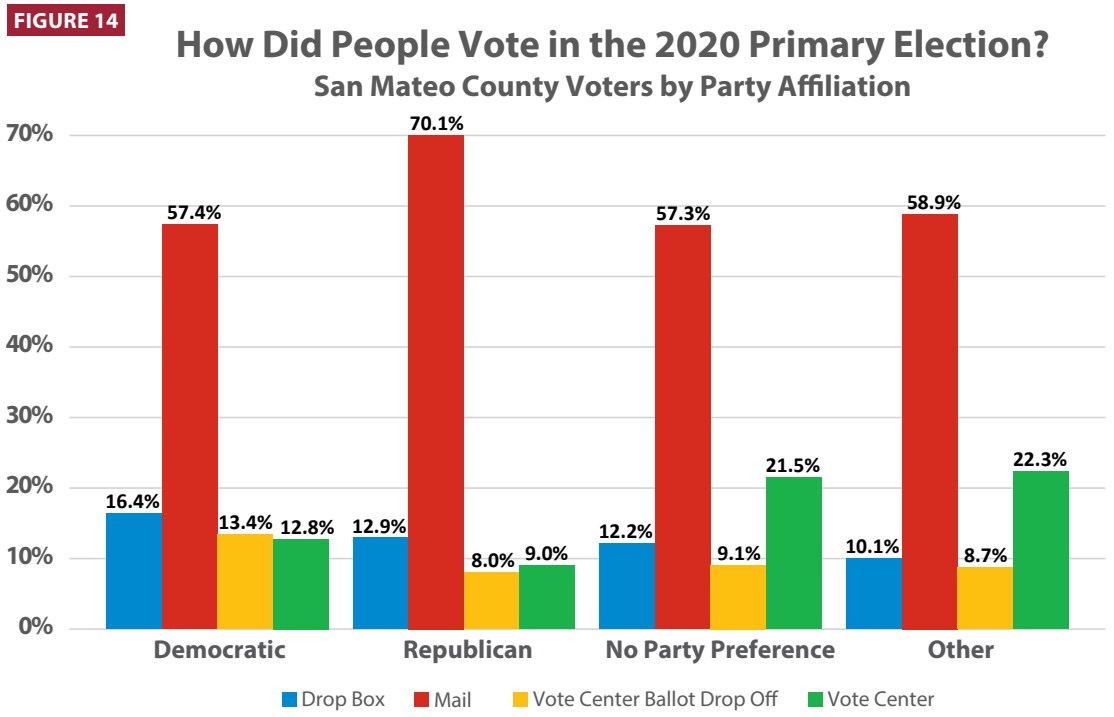


A higher percentage of foreign-born voters returned their VBM ballots through the mail than U.S.-born voters.[9] A little under 63% of foreign-born voters sent their ballots through the mail, compared to 58.6% of U.S.-born voters (Figure 13). Conversely, a higher percentage of U.S.-born voters returned their VBM ballots at a drop box or vote center ballot drop off location than foreign-born voters. Over 15% of U.S.-born voters and 13.4% of foreign-born voters voted via drop box. Just over 12% of U.S.-born voters returned their VBM ballot at a vote center ballot drop off location, compared to 10.1% of foreign-born voters. Foreign-born and U.S.-born voters voted in person at similar rates – 14.0% and 13.9%, respectively.

Note: For about 7.8% of all voters in the 2020 primary, there is no data available on nativity (17,528 records out of 223,799).

Method of Voting by Party Affiliation

FIGURE 14



Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File, Political Data, Inc.

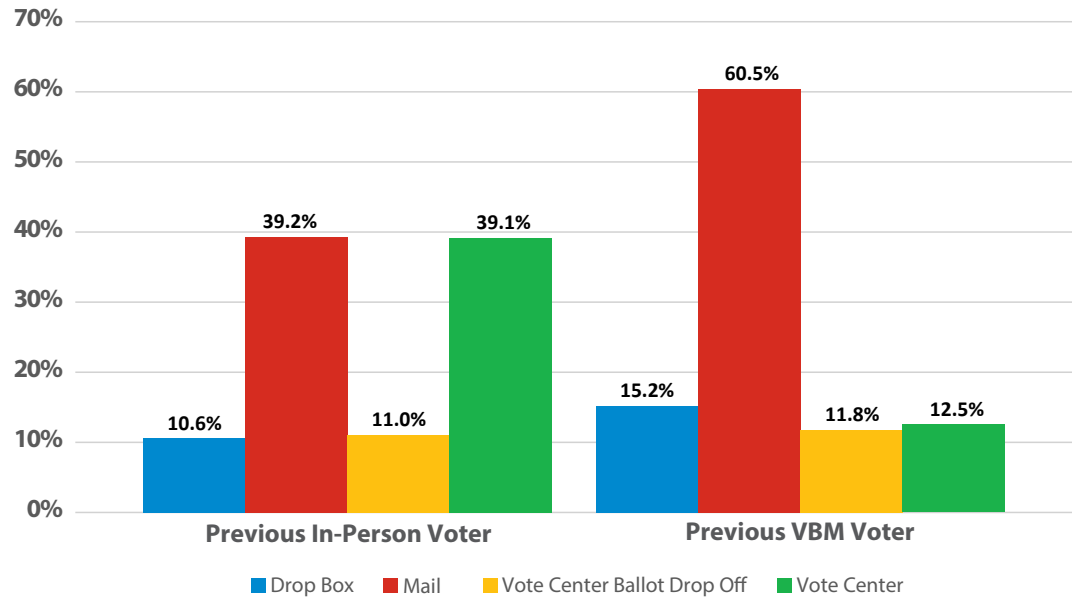
At the time of the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County, 54.0% of registered voters were registered as Democrats, 14.6% were registered as Republican, and 26.9% were registered as No Party Preference. The remaining 4.5% of registered voters were registered as other party affiliations.

In the 2020 primary election, Republican voters returned their VBM ballots through the mail at higher rates than any other party affiliation. Just over 70% of registered Republicans voted by mail compared to 57.4% of registered Democrats and 57.3% of No Party Preference voters (Figure 14).

Democratic voters voted in person and at drop off locations (both drop box and vote center drop off) at higher rates than Republican voters. Around 16% of Democrats, 12.9% of Republicans, and 12.2% of No Party Preference voters returned their VBM ballot at a drop box. Another 13.4% of Democrats returned their VBM ballots to a vote center ballot drop off, compared to 8.0% of Republicans and 9.1% of No Party Preference Voters. A little under 13% of Democrats and 9.0% of Republicans voted in person, while No Party Preference voters had the highest rate among the three party affiliations with 21.5% voting in person.

Method of Voting for Previous In-Person Voters

FIGURE 15



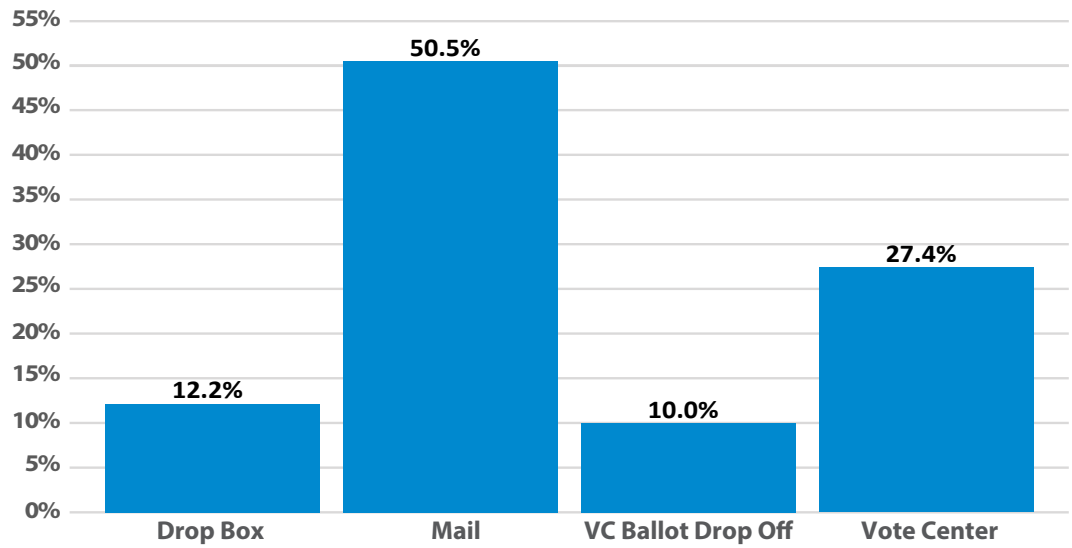
With the adoption of the VCA, every San Mateo County registered voter automatically receives a VBM ballot prior to an election and has multiple ways they can cast their ballot. To better understand how, if at all, the new voting options under the VCA changed voters' voting methods in the 2020 primary, we isolated the voting methods of previous in-person voters (polling place or vote center) from previous VBM voters. A previous in-person voter is defined as a registrant who voted at a polling place or vote center in the last election in which they voted. Similarly, a previous VBM voter is defined as a registrant who voted by mail in their last election experience. We applied these terms to voters whose most recent voting experience was in any election from 2010 to 2018.

Note: A voter who did not vote between 2010 and 2018, but who may have voted before 2010, was excluded from this analysis as voting methods from these elections less reliably indicate future voter use. Additionally, vote history is limited to California elections. Voters who may have voted between 2010 and 2018 in a different state are not included.

In the 2020 primary election, over 39% of previous in-person voters returned their ballot through the mail, compared to 60.5% of previous VBM voters (Figure 15). While 39.1% of previous in-person voters voted in person at a vote center, 12.5% of previous VBM voters did so in the 2020 primary. Previous VBM voters returned their VBM ballots to drop boxes at higher rates than previous in-person voters. Over 15% of previous VBM voters voted by drop box, compared to 10.6% of previous in-person voters. Previous VBM and previous in-person voters returned their VBM ballots to a vote center ballot drop off location at similar rates – 11.8% and 11.0%, respectively.

Method of Voting by New Voters

FIGURE 16



Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File, Political Data, Inc.

We also seek to understand how newly registered voters, those who have never cast a ballot (by any voting method), are using the voting options under the VCA. For Figure 16, CID defined new voters as those who registered to vote for the first time after the 2018 general election and who voted in the 2020 primary election. A total of 27,342 new registrants were identified in the voter file, 10,403 of whom were first-time voters in the 2020 primary election.

In the primary election, a higher percentage of new voters voted in person at a vote center than the general population. Over 27% of new voters voted in person, compared to 14.2% of all voters. New voters used VBM ballots at lower rates than the general population. Around 50.5% of new voters sent their VBM ballots through the mail, compared to 59.2% of the general population. Just over 12% of new voters and 14.9% of all voters returned their VBM ballots to a drop box. Around 10% of new voters returned their VBM ballots to a vote center ballot drop off location, while 11.6% of all voters did the same.

Mail Use Rates by Voting Precinct

During the 2020 primary election, over 59% of voters in San Mateo County returned their VBM ballots through the mail, although there was substantial variation in rates across cities and precincts. For instance, 68.4% of voters in Atherton, 65.7% of voters in Daly City, and 61.8% of voters in Pacifica returned their VBM ballots through the mail, while 42.1% of voters in East Palo Alto and 51.2% of voters in Belmont did the same.

When the mail use rate is examined by precinct of voter residence (Figure 17), it is clear that there is great variation across the county. There are precincts with particularly low mail use rates in East Palo Alto, Belmont, and Foster City and clusters of precincts with higher mail use rates in Atherton, Daly City, Pacifica, and San Carlos.

In-Person Vote Center Use Rates by Voting Precinct

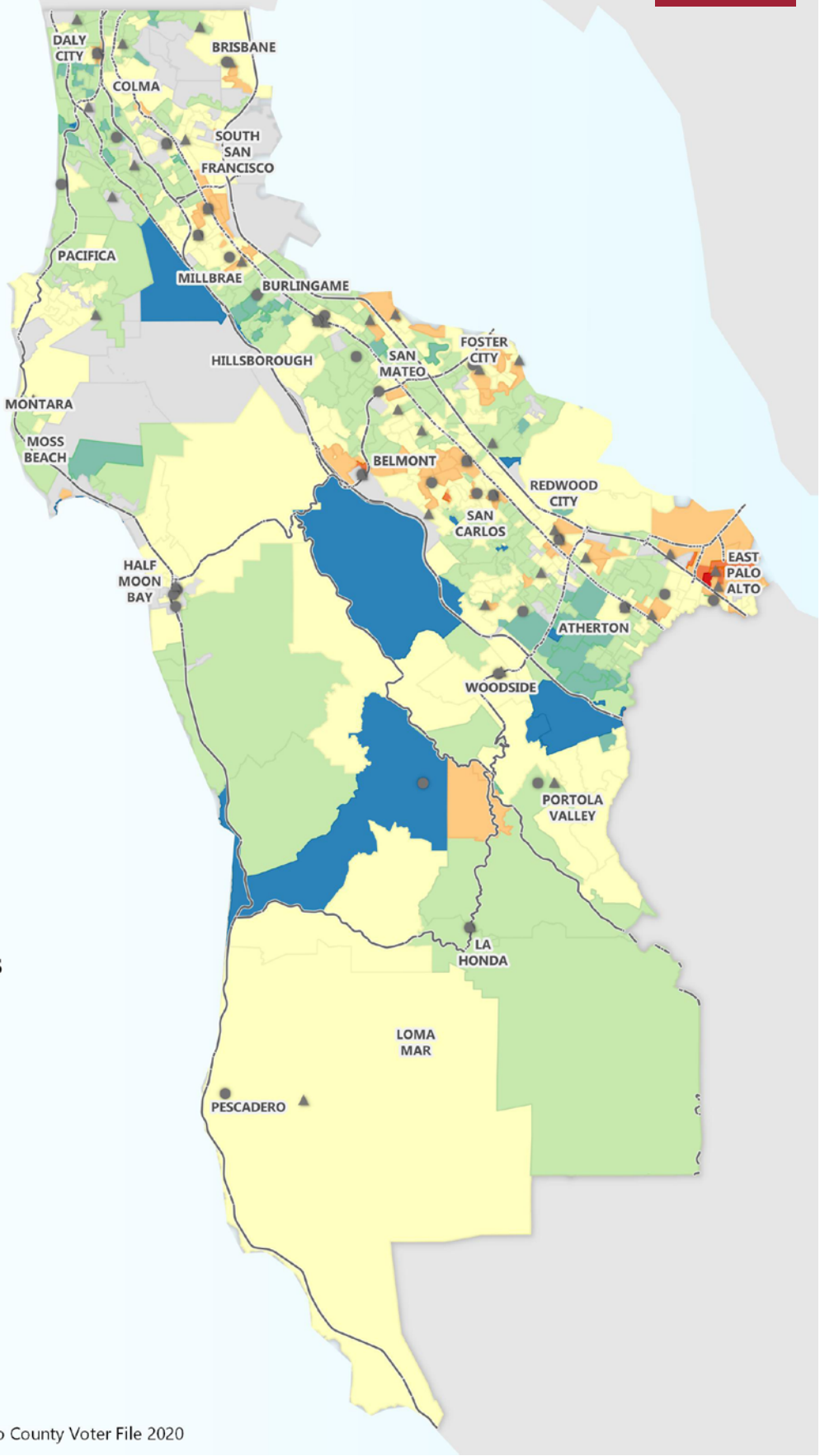
In the 2020 primary election, in-person voting also varied between San Mateo cities. For example, just under 15% of voters in Daly City voted in person, while almost 29% of voters in East Palo Alto voted in person. Figure 18 shows precincts with relatively high in-person voting were clustered around East Palo Alto, South San Francisco, and Brisbane. Precincts with relatively low in-person voting clustered around Daly City, San Carlos, and Foster City.

FIGURE 17

Voting Method in the 2020 Primary

By Precinct

Vote by Mail



Voting Sites

- Vote Center
- Drop Box

Percent of Total Voters Who Voted by Mail

- 20 - 29.9%
- 30 - 39.9%
- 40 - 49.9%
- 50 - 59.9%
- 60 - 69.9%
- 70 - 79.9%
- 80 - 100%
- No Data

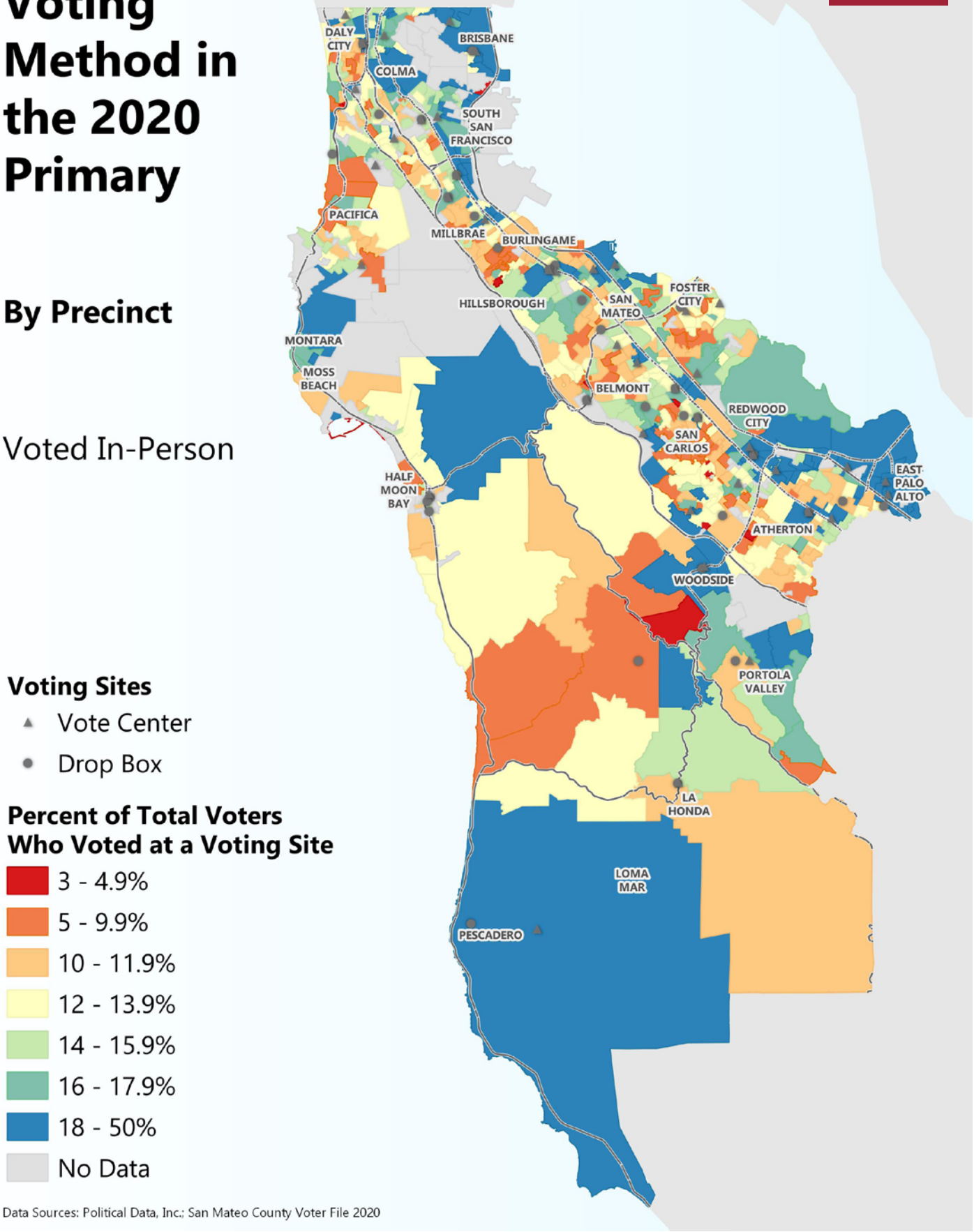
Data Sources: Political Data, Inc.; San Mateo County Voter File 2020

FIGURE 18

Voting Method in the 2020 Primary

By Precinct

Voted In-Person



Data Sources: Political Data, Inc.; San Mateo County Voter File 2020

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR)

Of all votes cast and counted in the 2020 primary election, 1.1% (2,449) were cast with conditional voter registration. CVR was disproportionately used by Latinos, Asian Americans, youth (age 18 to 24), new voters, and previous in-person voters. See Appendix for a breakdown of CVR use by demographic group.

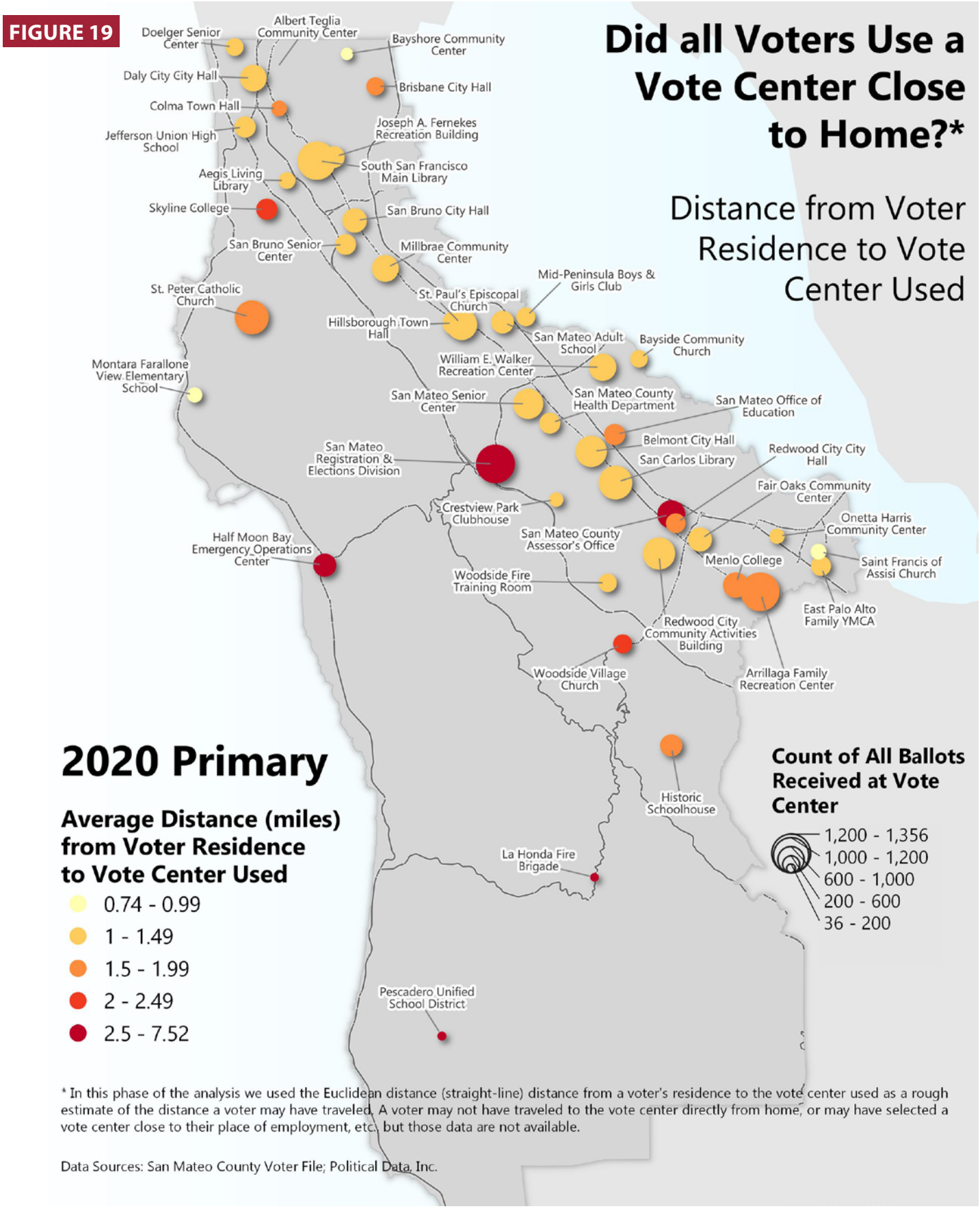
Voter Distance to Vote Center

A key consideration of county elections offices in the implementation of the VCA is how to select the locations for vote centers and ballot drop box locations in order to ensure they are geographically accessible to voters. Because the VCA allows voters to use any vote center in their county (to vote in person or drop off their VBM ballot), a 2020 primary election voter may have traveled to the vote center they used directly from home, or they may have selected a vote center close to their place of employment, shopping or other point of interest. However, data identifying each voter's travel patterns to a vote center are not available in the county voter registration file so for this report we limited our analysis to whether San Mateo County voters used a vote center close to their residence in the 2020 primary election. Specifically, we calculated the Euclidean (straight-line) distance from the voter's residence to the vote center they used. This only included voters who voted in person at a vote center. The distance was calculated only for voters for whom location of residence could be determined, as well as the vote center used.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the following analysis of distance between voters' homes and the vote center they voted at is limited due to missing vote center location data. Vote center location data was limited to voters who voted in person at a vote center and does not include voters who dropped off their VBM ballots at a vote center. In total, we had vote center location for 28,950 voters who voted in person (91.1% of the 31,772 in person votes). Additionally, the vote center location data was not supplied by San Mateo County and was instead supplied by the Secretary of State voter files.

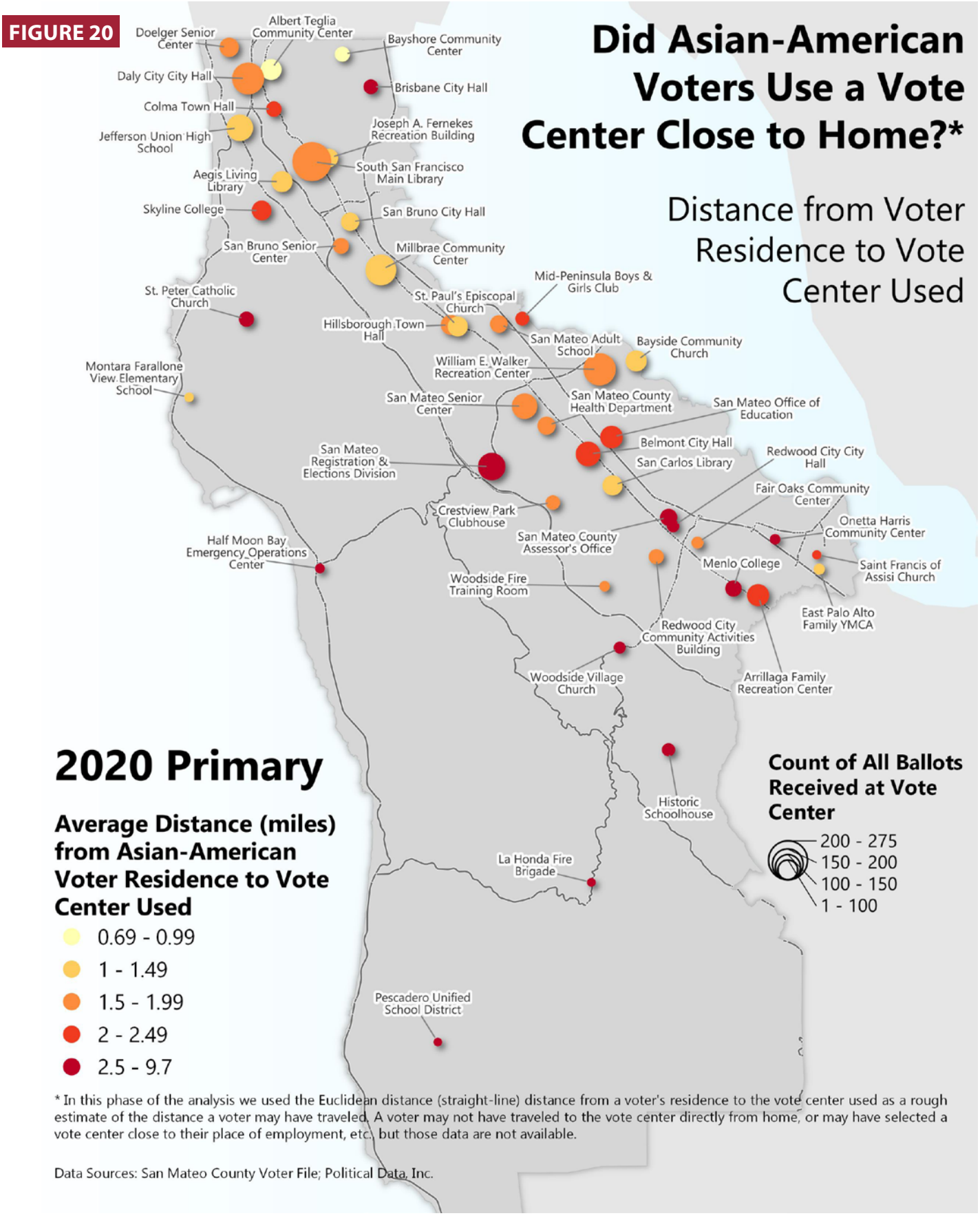
Note: For the 2020 primary election, drop box locations were not available for analysis. Additionally, race and ethnicity identifiers used in the distance to vote center analysis were provided by PDI and were not predicted through the WRU package.

FIGURE 19



In the 2020 primary election, we found that the average distance from a voter's residence to the vote center that they used (in-person voting) was 1.8 miles. Figure 19 shows that the average distance for each vote center varied. The average distance from voters' residents ranged from 0.74 miles to 7.52 miles.

FIGURE 20

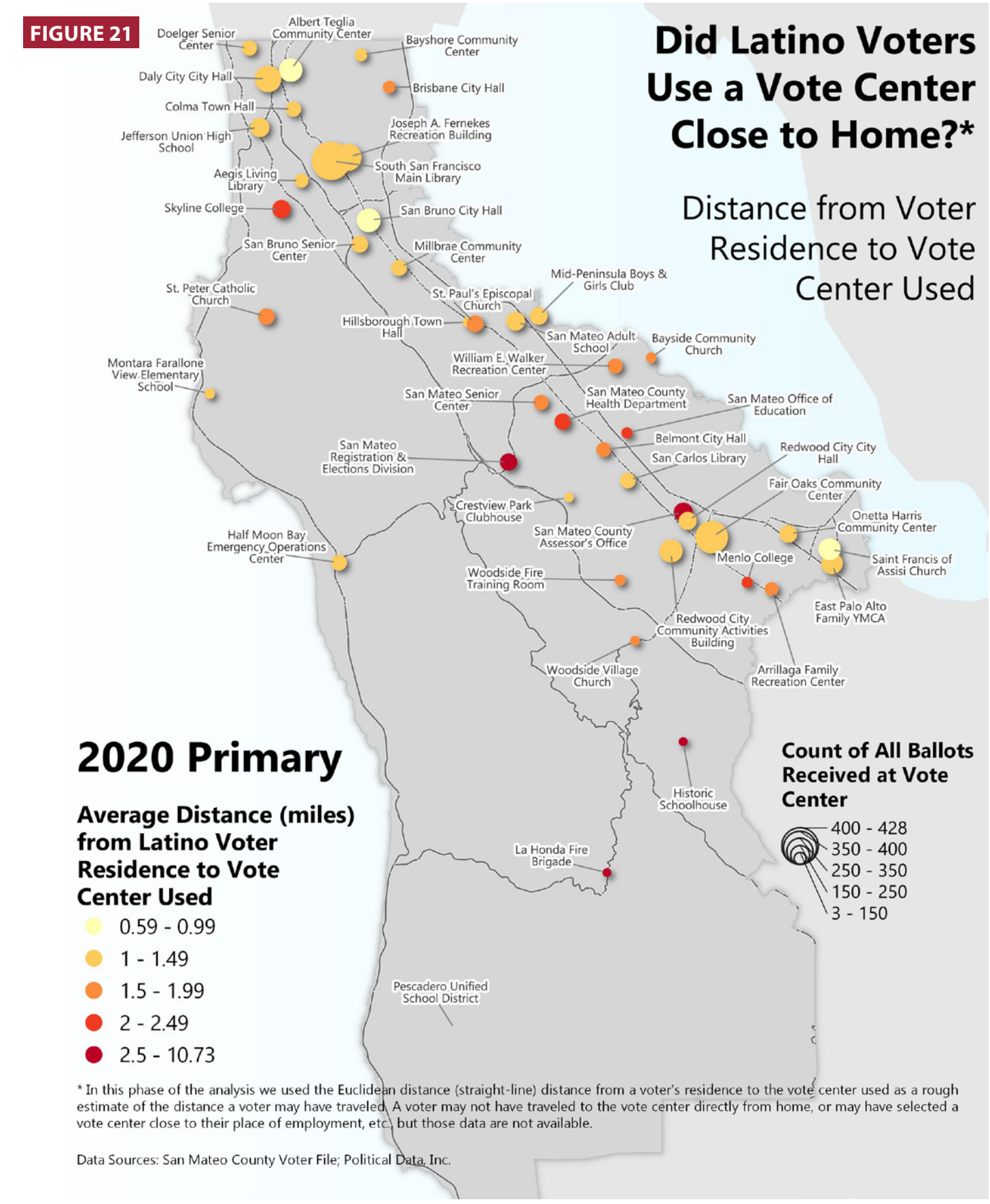


* In this phase of the analysis we used the Euclidean distance (straight-line) distance from a voter's residence to the vote center used as a rough estimate of the distance a voter may have traveled. A voter may not have traveled to the vote center directly from home, or may have selected a vote center close to their place of employment, etc., but those data are not available.

Data Sources: San Mateo County Voter File; Political Data, Inc.

Asian-American voters, on average, had further distances between their residence and the vote center they used than the general population. The average distance from Asian-American voters' resident to the vote center they used was 2.5 miles. Figure 20 shows vote centers with fewer Asian-American votes were placed further away from their homes than those with more Asian-American votes.

FIGURE 21



* In this phase of the analysis we used the Euclidean distance (straight-line) distance from a voter's residence to the vote center used as a rough estimate of the distance a voter may have traveled. A voter may not have traveled to the vote center directly from home, or may have selected a vote center close to their place of employment, etc., but those data are not available.

Data Sources: San Mateo County Voter File; Political Data, Inc.

For Latino voters, the average distance from a voters' residence to the vote center they used was 1.9 miles, slightly further than the general population. Figure 21 shows there were only two vote centers (Woodside Village and San Mateo County Elections Office) with an average travel distance of 3.5 miles or more for Latino voters.

2020 Primary Election Voter Turnout Rates by Demographic Group in San Mateo County

Making a causal connection between any new election reform and voter turnout calls for caution. First, turnout is a difficult outcome to model because it is potentially influenced by a variety of factors, including the competitiveness of the individual races, characteristics of the candidates, as well as the greater electoral context. Additionally, turnout can be influenced by other factors specific to a county or other jurisdiction's electorate such as demographic and political composition as well as historical turnout trends, which makes it difficult to assess the specific impact of an individual election reform.

Specific to the 2020 primary election there were some additional potential impacts on voter turnout. Holding the primary on Super Tuesday meant the state garnered more attention from candidates and the media than in recent elections. At the same time, the primary took place within the context of a politically charged national environment where many voters felt a high degree of saliency regarding the presidential race. Lastly, the 2020 primary occurred as the national awareness of COVID-19 was increasing and two weeks before California entered the pandemic lockdown.

Section Highlights

- Just under 55% of registered voters and 44.5% of eligible voters in San Mateo County cast a ballot in the 2020 primary election.
- Asian-American and Latino voters continued to be underrepresented in the San Mateo County voting electorate with significant gaps between their share of votes cast and their share of the eligible voter population.
- Asian-American, Latino, youth, previous in-person, and new voters had lower registered voter turnout rates than the general population.
- Asian-American and Latino voters had significantly lower eligible voter turnout than the general population. Young voters (aged 18 to 24) had lower eligible voter turnout rates than older voters (aged 65 and over).
- Registered Democrats had higher registered voter turnout rates than registered Republicans. U.S.-born voters had higher registered voter turnout rates than foreign-born voters.

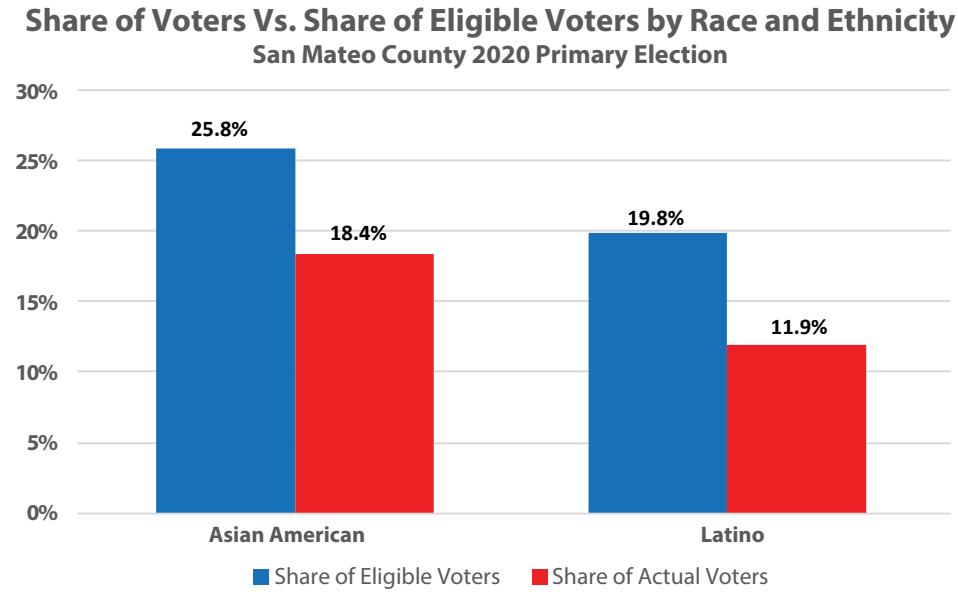
Voter turnout in the 2020 California primary election was historically high. The state saw an official eligible voter turnout (turnout of adult citizens) higher than in 2016 and the second highest eligible voter turnout in any of the state's primary elections in the past 38 years.[10] In San Mateo County, 54.4% of registered voters and 44.5% of eligible voters cast a ballot in the 2020 primary election. The following section details how registered voter turnout and eligible voter turnout varied across demographic groups.

Note: An analysis of the registered voter turnout and eligible voter turnout growth between the 2016 and 2020 primary elections is available in the appendix. The analysis utilizes data from the Statewide Database (the redistricting database for the state of California). The Statewide Database uses different methods to identify racial and ethnic groups and the 2020 primary election turnout rates differ, sometimes widely, from the turnout rates presented in the main portion of this report.

Voter Representation of Latinos and Asian Americans

In the San Mateo County 2020 primary election, both Latino and Asian-American voters were underrepresented in the voting electorate compared to their share of the eligible voting population. Asian Americans were 25.8% of the eligible voting population in San Mateo County, but only 18.4% of the voting electorate (Figure 22). Similarly, Latinos were 19.8% of the eligible voting population, but only 11.9% of the voting electorate.

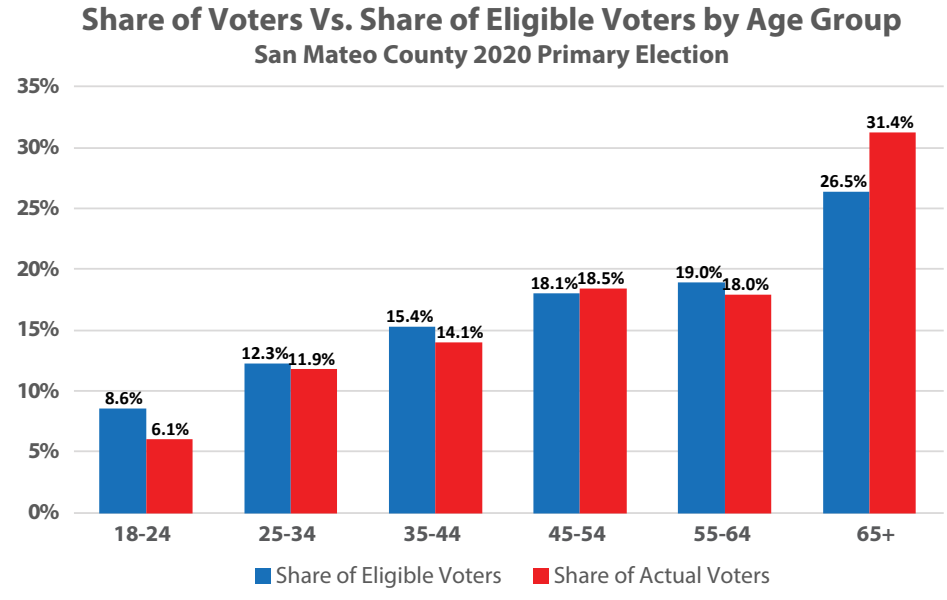
FIGURE 22



Voter Representation of Youth

Youth voters aged 18 to 24 were underrepresented in the voting electorate compared to their share of the eligible voting population. In the 2020 primary election, young voters were 8.6% of the eligible voting population but only 6.1% of the voting electorate in San Mateo County (Figure 23). In comparison, older voters aged 65 and over were overrepresented in the voting electorate. Older voters represented 26.5% of the eligible voting population and 31.4% of the voting electorate.

FIGURE 23



2020 Detailed Turnout Analysis: Introduction

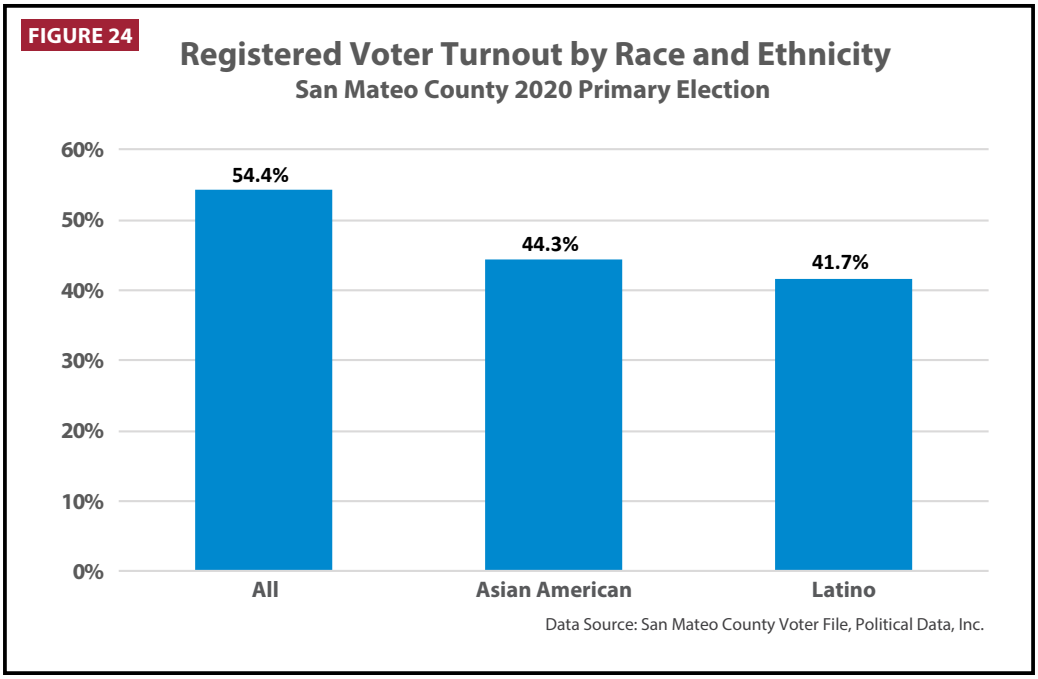
In the following sections, we provide a detailed examination of both registered and eligible voter turnout in San Mateo County's 2020 primary election as conducted under the VCA. Data for this detailed analysis of voter turnout, as well as the subsequent sections of the report, is derived from the official San Mateo County voter registration files provided by the San Mateo County Elections Office and Political Data, Inc. (PDI). Datasets were merged together and non-matching records were excluded to maintain a consistent and comparable registrant dataset for each demographic analysis. Voter registration files are live databases and thus, registrant totals fluctuate in each extracted voter file.[11] Datasets were merged together and non-matching records were excluded to maintain a consistent and comparable registrant dataset for each demographic analysis. The resulting primary election dataset varies slightly from official certified San Mateo County election records at 416,827 registrant records, resulting in some small differences in percentages compared with the certified results.

Registered Voter Turnout by Race and Ethnicity

In the 2020 primary election, registered voters in San Mateo County who were Latino or Asian-American had a noticeably lower registered voter turnout rate than the general population (Figure 24). Under 42% of registered Latinos and 44.3% of registered Asian Americans voted, compared to 54.4% of all registered voters.

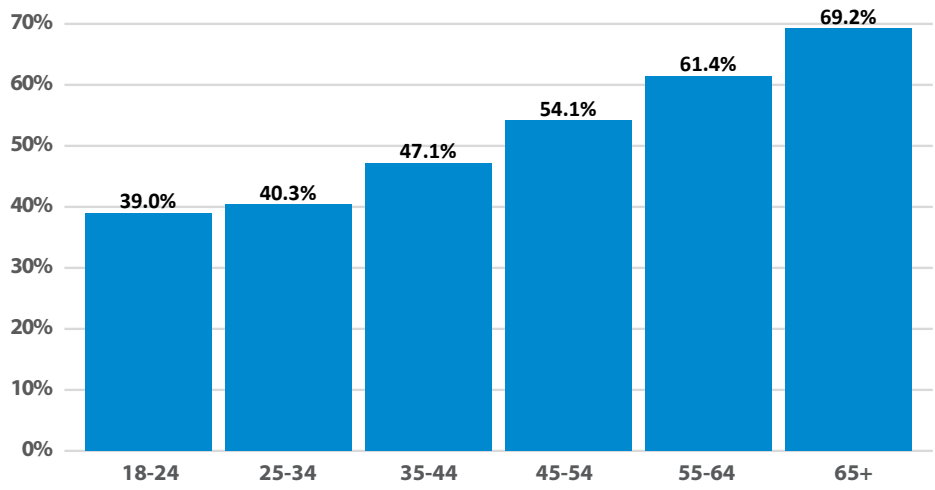
Note: Due to missing location data used for the geocoding portion of identifying the race and ethnicities of registrants, 1.4% (5,968) of registrants' race and ethnicities could not be identified and were omitted from all race and ethnicity analyses. Additionally, see the appendix for available data for Black and white, non-Latino voters. Also see page 7 of this report for a discussion of data limitations and further details about identifying the race and ethnicity of voters.

FIGURE 24



Registered Voter Turnout by Age

FIGURE 25

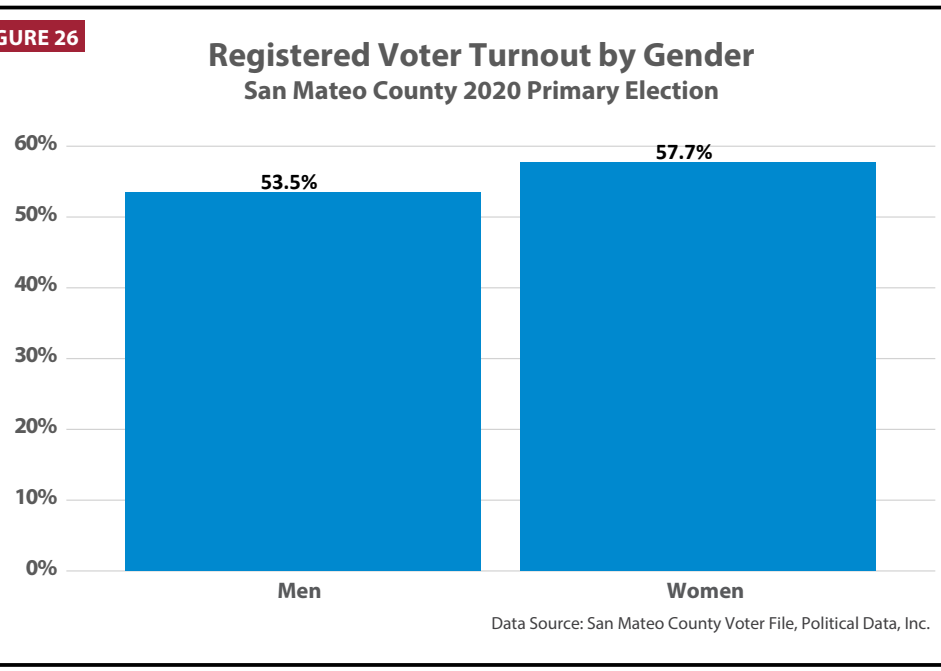


In the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County, registered voter turnout was considerably higher for older voters than for younger voters: 69.2% of registrants age 65 years and older voted, compared to 39.0% of registrants 18-24 years who voted (Figure 25).

Note: Age is identified by voters' birthdates. San Mateo County voter records with unreliable data for age were excluded. This includes records where the voter is categorized as being under 18 years of age or older than 100 years of age (358 registration records and 145 votes for the primary election).

Registered Voter Turnout by Gender

FIGURE 26



Women voters had a higher registered voter turnout rate than men voters.[12] Almost 58% of women and 53.5% of men cast a ballot in the 2020 primary election, a registered voter turnout gap of 4.2 percentage points (Figure 26).

Note: Data identifying gender was not available for 9.0% of primary election registrants in San Mateo County (36,855 registered voters out of 411, 645 records in the primary election did not have an identified gender).

Registered Voter Turnout by Nativity

FIGURE 27

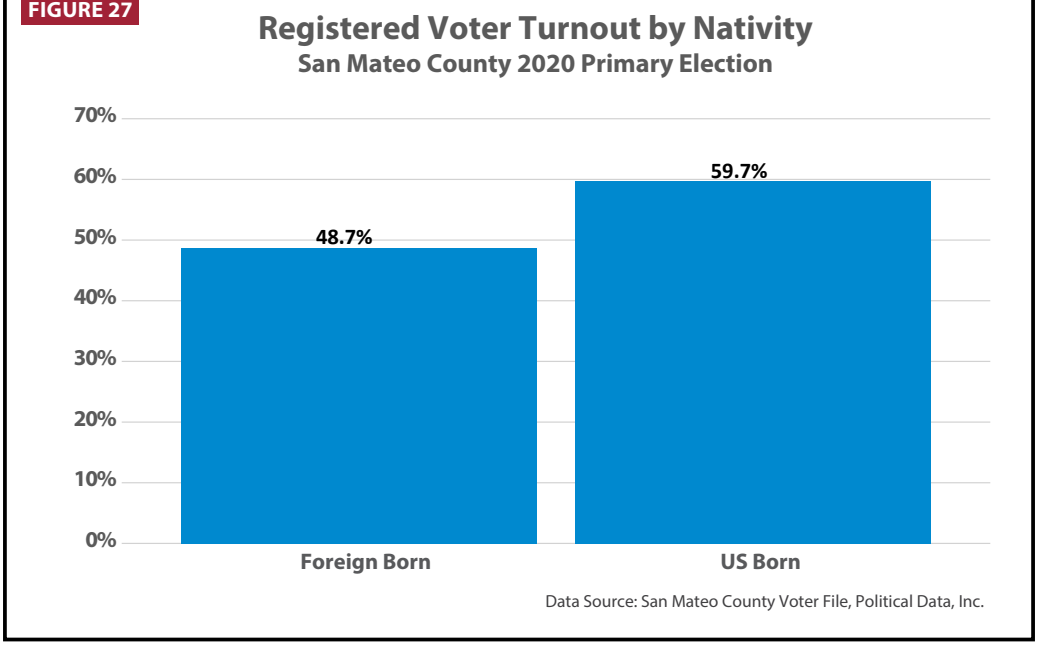
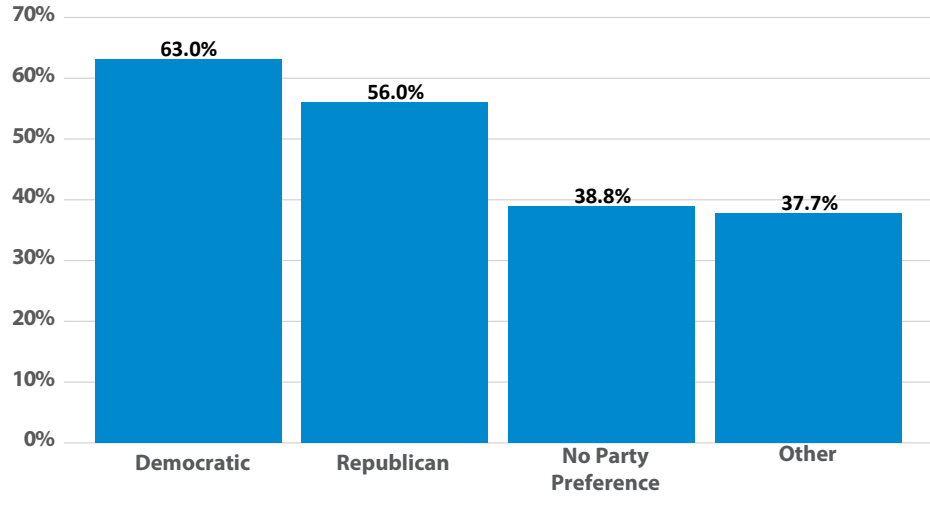


Figure 27 shows that registered voter turnout of U.S.-born citizens was 11 percentage points higher than the registered voter turnout of foreign-born citizens (59.7% and 48.7%, respectively).[13]

Note: In the primary election, data identifying nativity was not available for 11.8% of all county registrants (48,560 out of 411,645 records).

Registered Voter Turnout by Party Affiliation

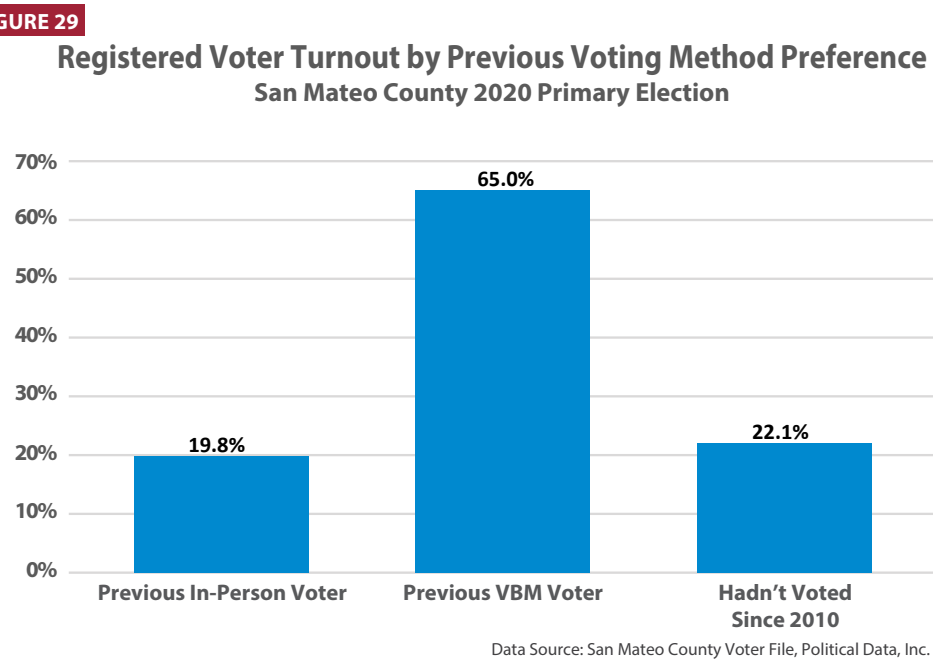
FIGURE 28



The registered voter turnout of registered Democrats was 7 percentage points higher than that of registered Republicans (63.0% and 56.0%, respectively). Just under 39% of No Party Preference voters turned out to vote in the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County. (Figure 28).

Registered Voter Turnout for Previous In-Person Voters

FIGURE 29

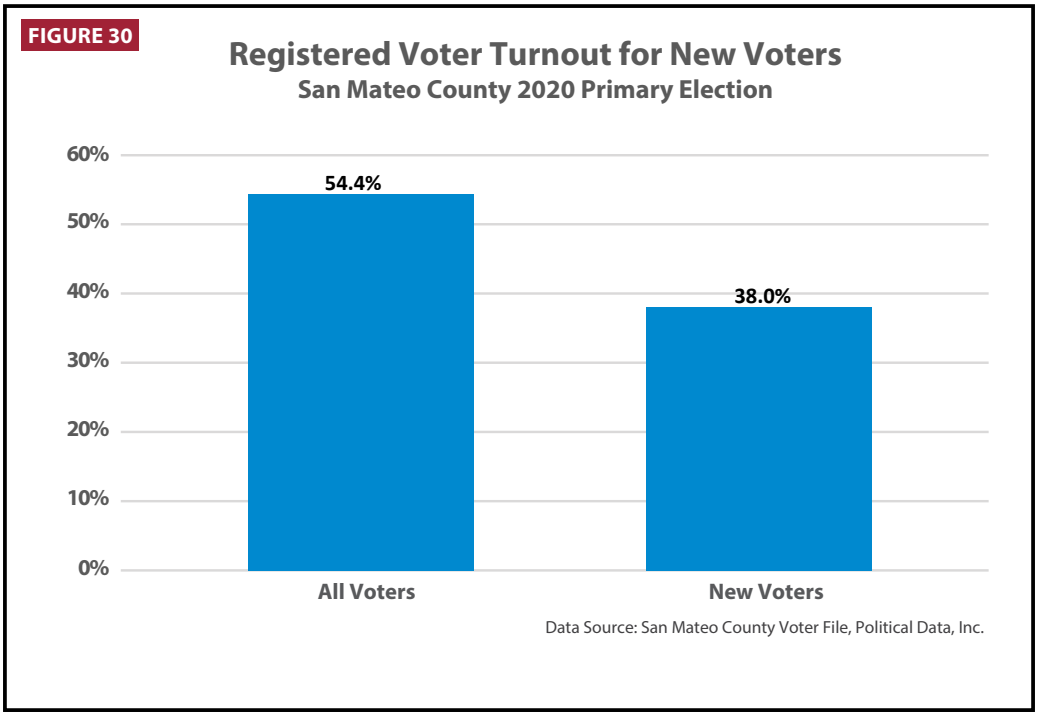


As discussed earlier in this report, a previous in-person voter is defined as a registrant who voted at a polling place or vote center in the last election in which they voted. Similarly, a previous VBM voter is defined as a registrant who voted by mail in their last election experience (Figure 29).

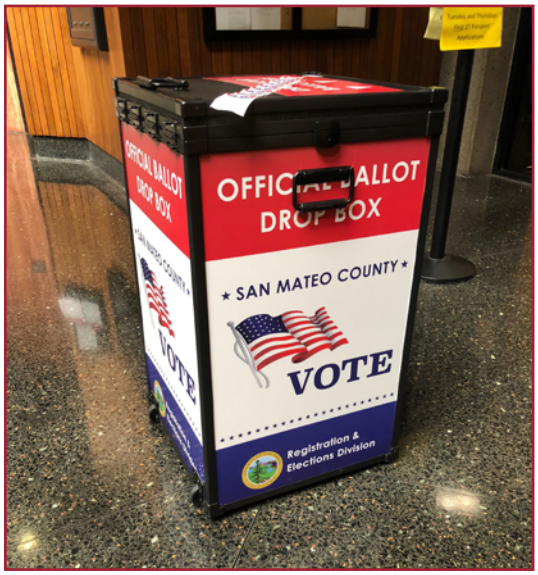
Previous VBM voters had a much higher turnout rate in the primary election than previous in-person voters. Around 65% of registrants who voted by mail in their last election experience voted in the 2020 primary, compared to 19.8% of previous in-person voters—a turnout gap of 45.2 percentage points (Figure 29). Additionally, 22.1% of voters who hadn't voted since 2010 (regardless of previous voting method) turned out to vote in the 2020 primary election.

Registered Voter Turnout by New Voters

FIGURE 30

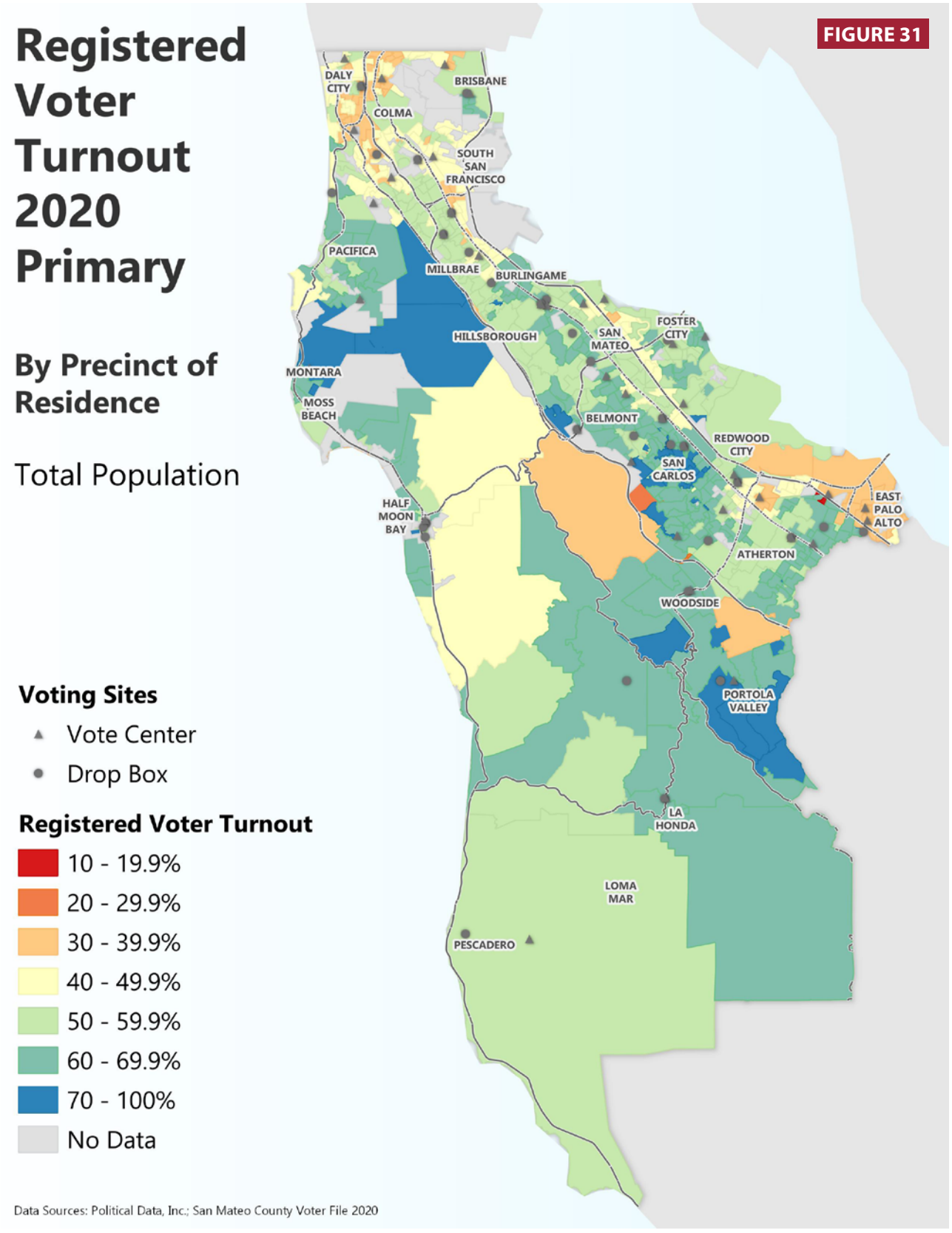


New voters had a lower registered voter turnout than the general population. Around 38% of new registrants cast a ballot that was counted, producing a turnout gap between the general registrant population (54.4%) and the new registrant population of 16.4 percentage points (Figure 30).

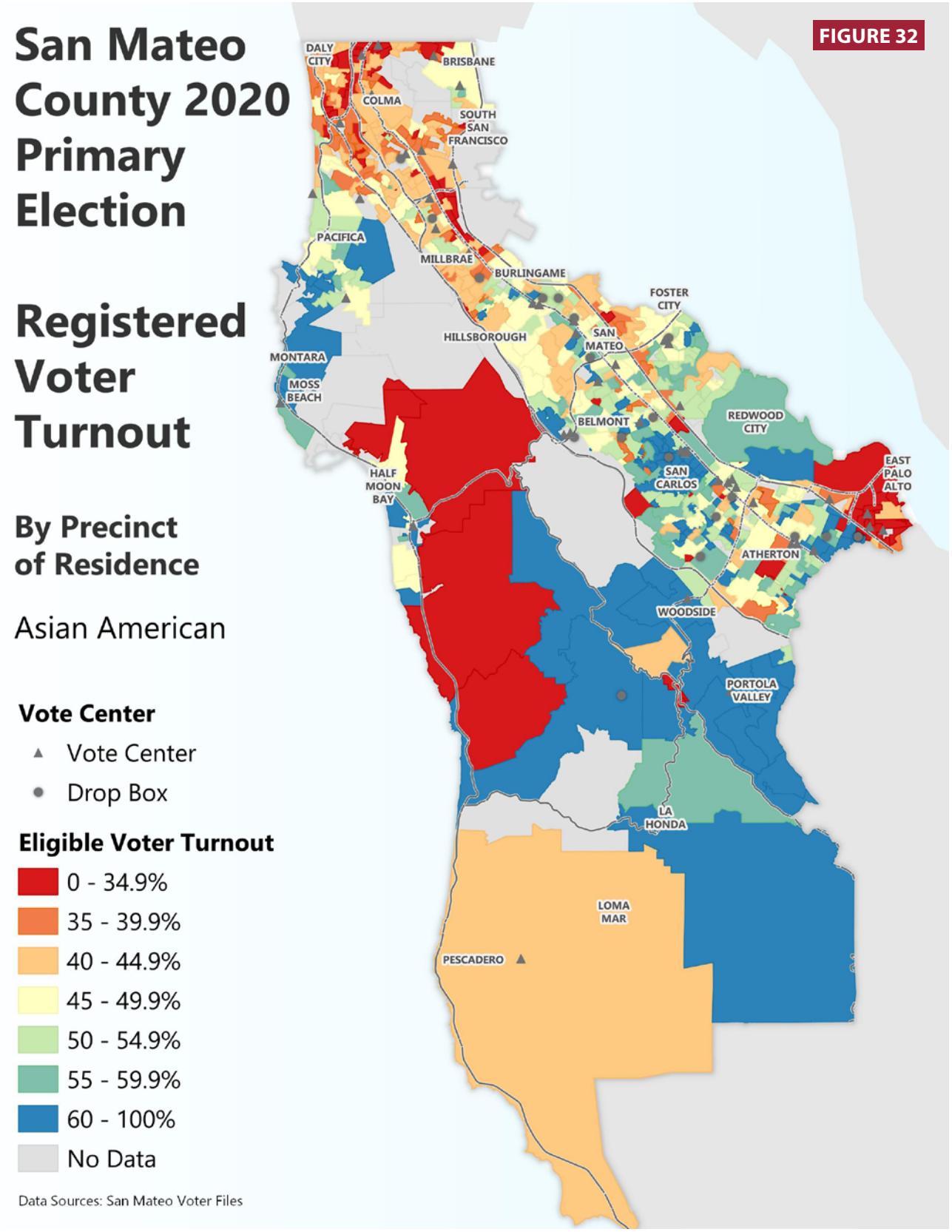


Registered Voter Turnout by Precinct of Residence

There was a high degree of variation in the registered voter turnout of the total population across San Mateo County precincts in the 2020 primary election. While the overall San Mateo County registered turnout rate was 54.4% in the primary, turnout by registrants' precinct of residence ranged from 11.8% to nearly 100%. Figure 31 shows precincts with higher turnout clustered around Portola Valley, Woodside, San Carlos, Montara, Hillsborough, and Millbrae. We see lower turnout rates in precincts around East Palo Alto and Daly City (see also Figure 4 for income and population density in San Mateo County).

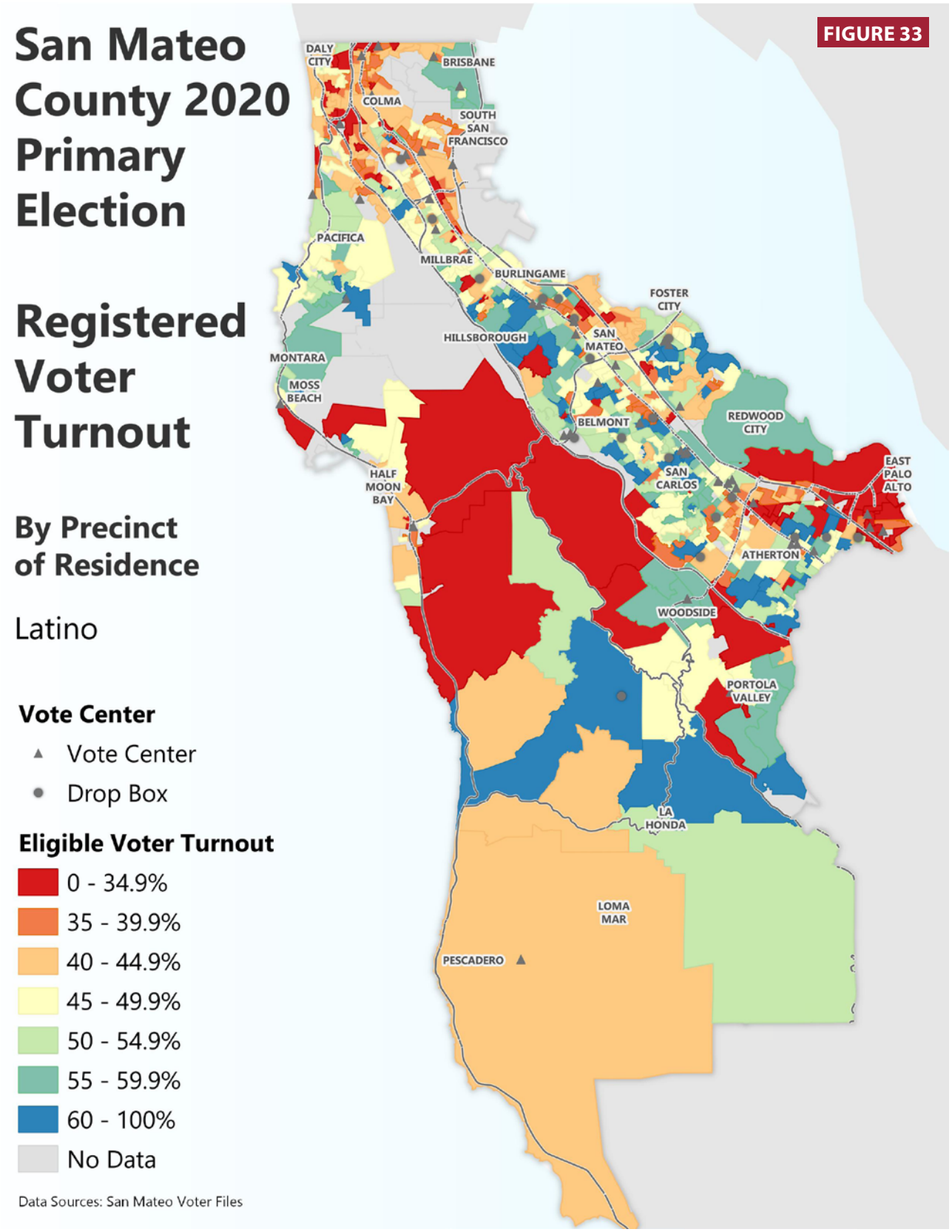


Countywide, registered voter turnout for Asian Americans was 44.3% in the 2020 primary election. When Asian-American turnout is examined by precinct, we see clusters of precincts with generally high turnout around Half Moon Bay, Pacifica, Montara, Portola Valley, Woodside, San Carlos, and Redwood City (Figure 32). Precincts with lower registered voter turnout for Asian Americans are clustered in the northernmost region of the county—in particular around Daly City, South San Francisco, and East Palo Alto.



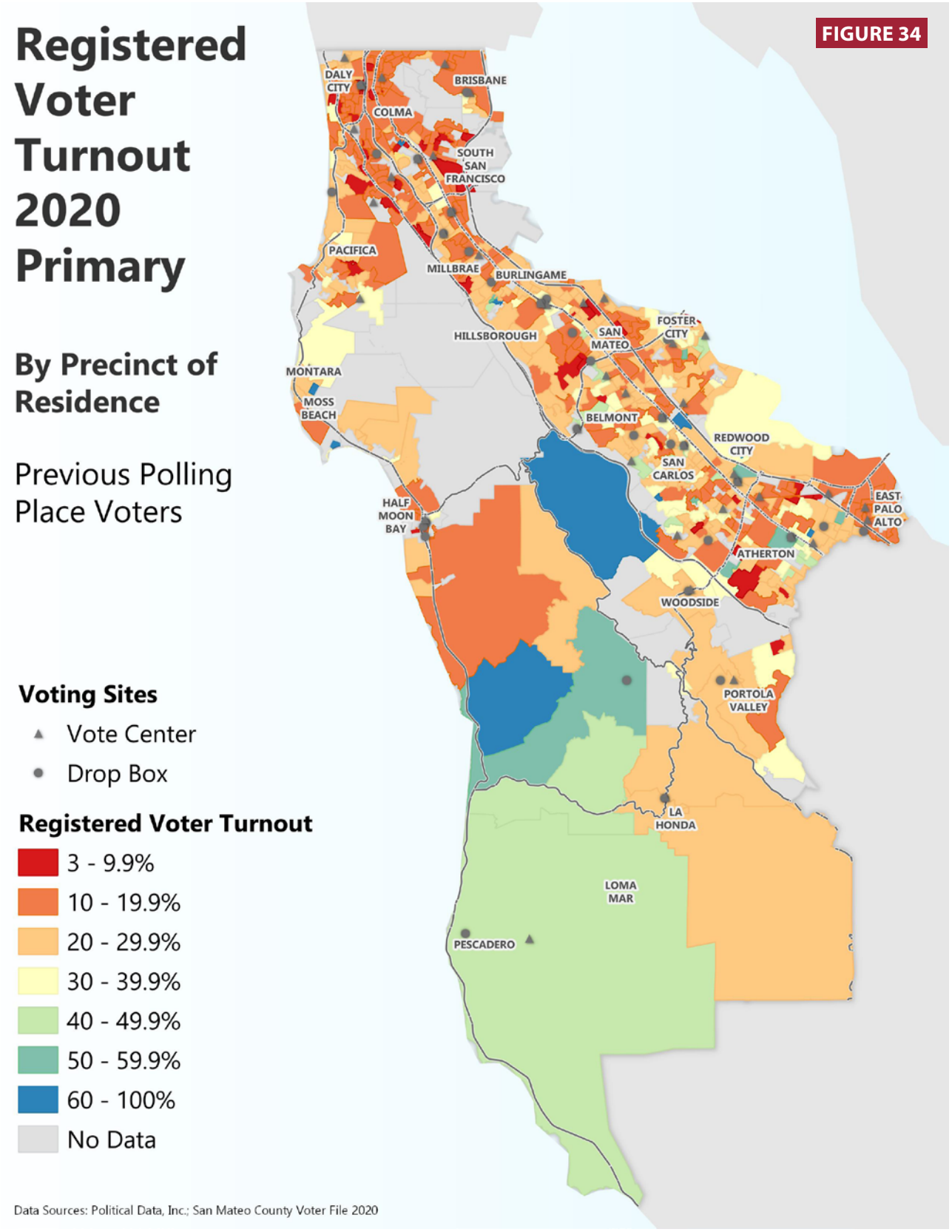
The countywide registered voter turnout rate for Latinos was 41.7% in the primary election. Precincts with higher registered voter turnout for Latinos are clustered in Hillsborough, Redwood City, Portola Valley, Woodside, La Honda, and parts of Atherton (Figure 33). There are clusters of precincts with lower Latino registered voter turnout around East Palo Alto, Daly City, Half Moon Bay, and South San Francisco.

FIGURE 33



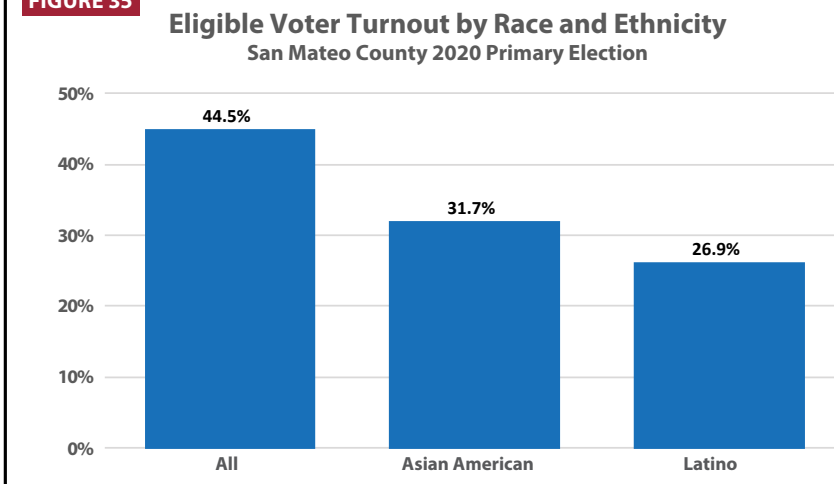
Registered Voter Turnout for Previous In-Person Voters

In San Mateo County, the 2020 primary election turnout of previous in-person voters was 19.8%, but turnout varied by precinct. Low turnout of previous in-person voters was concentrated in precincts around Daly City, South San Francisco, San Mateo, and East Palo Alto (Figure 34).



Eligible Voter Turnout by Race and Ethnicity

FIGURE 35

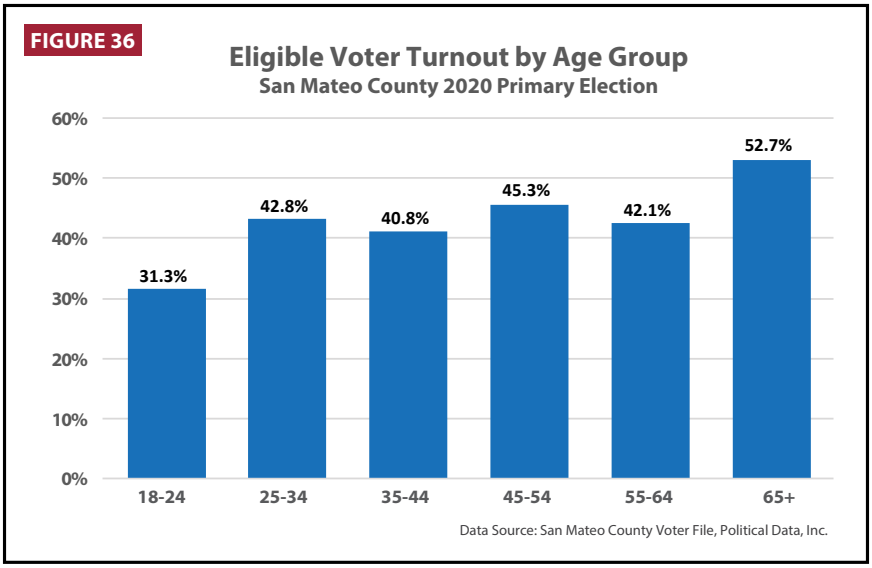


Disparities in voter participation are much larger when looking at eligible voter turnout rates (turnout of adult citizens) compared with registered voter turnout. This is due to disparities in existing voter registration rates (percent of adult citizens who are registered) in San Mateo County (see online appendix for 2020 registration rates). Over 44% of all eligible voters (adult citizens whether registered or not) in San Mateo County voted in the 2020 primary election (Figure 35). In contrast, only 26.9% of eligible Latinos voted and 31.7% of eligible Asian Americans voted in the primary election.

Note: Due to missing location data used for the geocoding portion of identifying the race and ethnicities of registrants, 1.4% (5,968) of registrants' race and ethnicities could not be identified and were omitted from all race and ethnicity analyses. Additionally, see the appendix for available data for Black and white, non-Latino voters. Also see page 7 of this report for a discussion of data limitations and identifying the race and ethnicity of voters.

Eligible Voter Turnout by Age

FIGURE 36



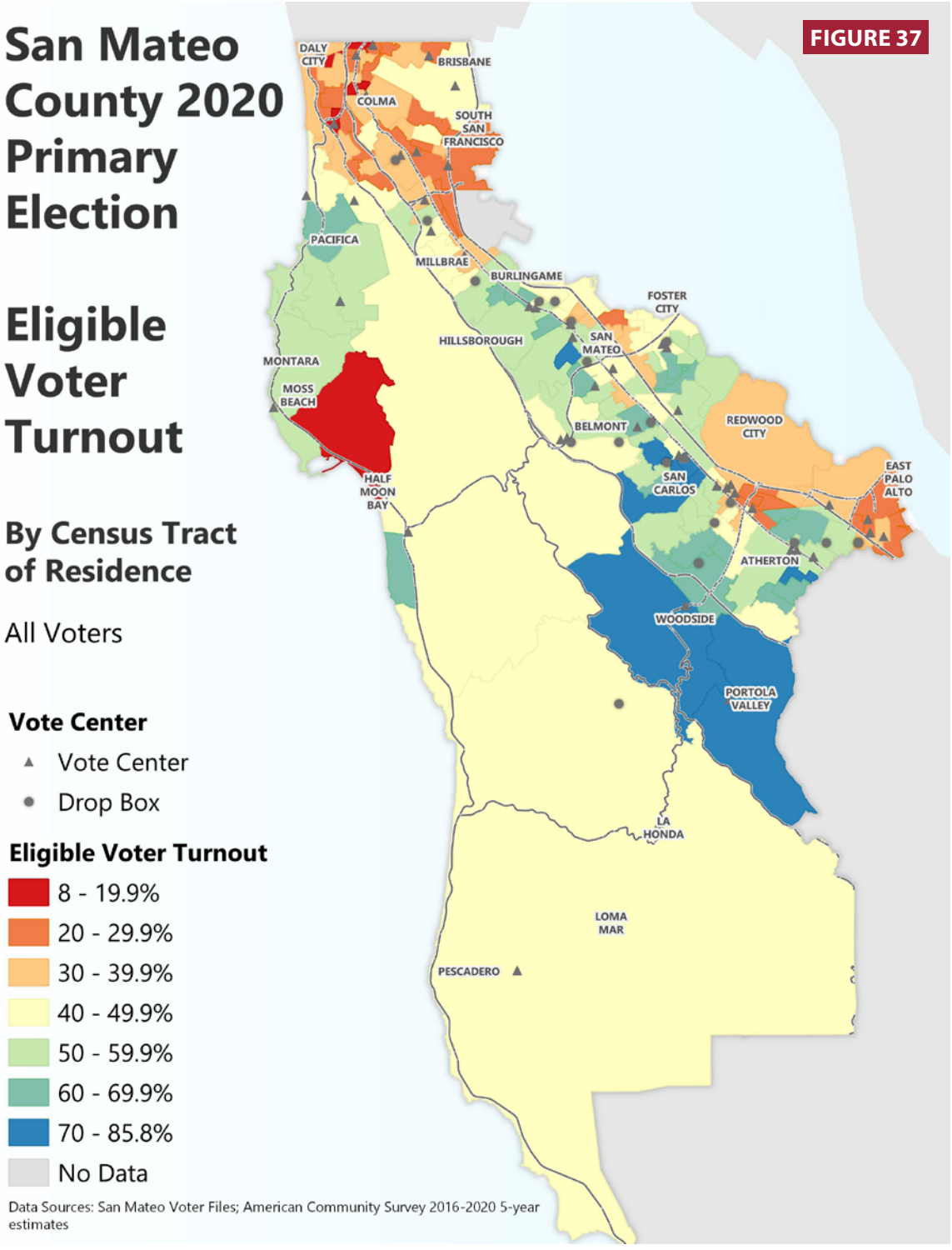
Eligible voter turnout was higher for older voters than for younger voters. Nearly 53% of eligible voters 65 years and older voted, compared to 31.3% of eligible voters 18-24 years old voted.

Note: The citizen voting-age population (CVAP) estimates used in eligible voter turnout analysis for age groups are derived from the 2010 Decennial Census. Necessary data from the Census Bureau needed to update CVAP estimates based on the 2020 Decennial Census was not yet released at the time of this report's publication.

Eligible Voter Turnout by Census Tract of Residence

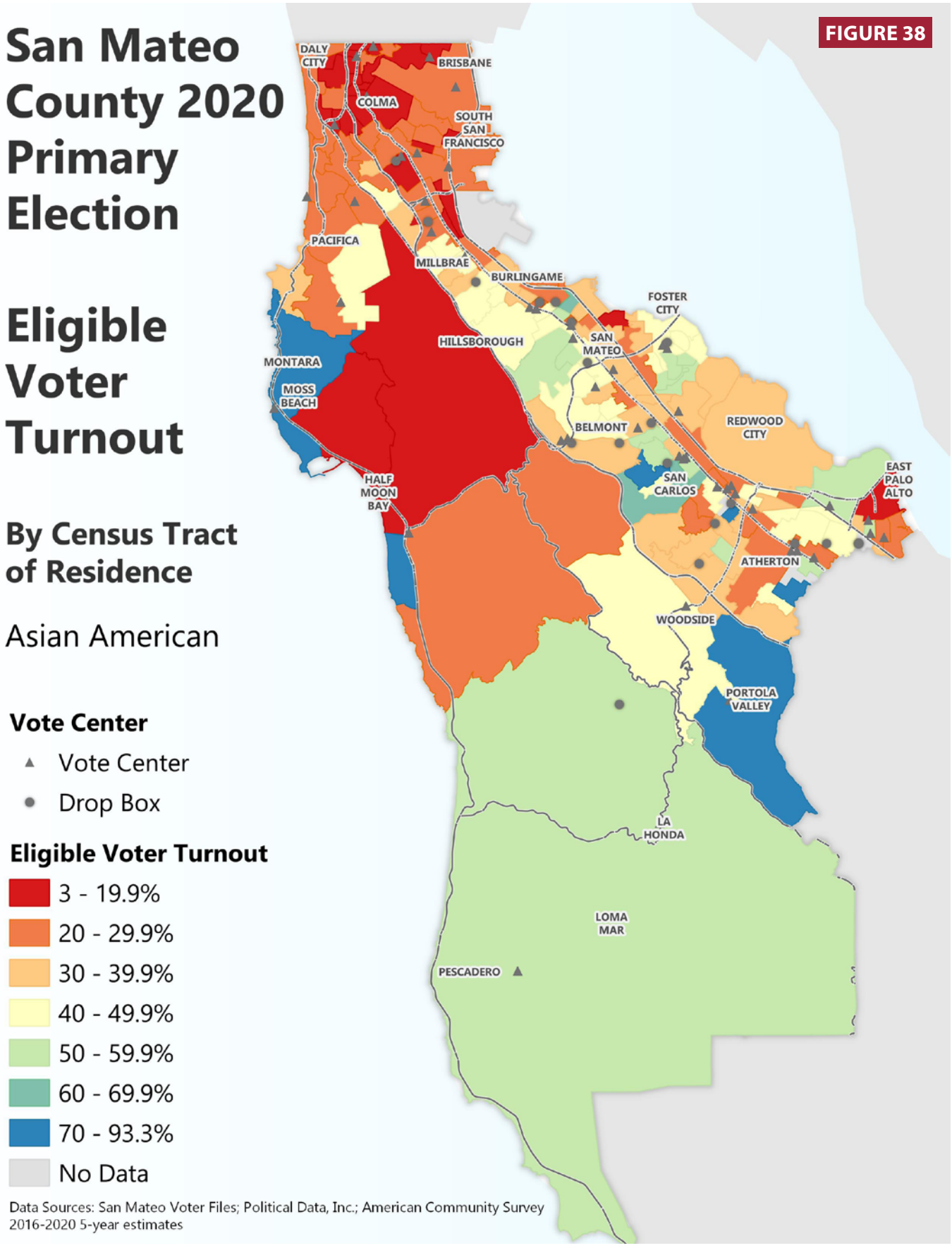
In order to examine the geographic variation of eligible voter turnout in San Mateo County, we calculated eligible voter turnout at the census tract level. We used American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019) for the citizen voting-age population (CVAP), and assigned voters to census tracts using the geographic coordinates of their home addresses.

In the 2020 primary election, the overall voter turnout was relatively higher in the areas around Portola Valley, Atherton, Woodside, and San Carlos, and lower eligible voter turnout in East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, Daly City, and South San Francisco (Figure 37).



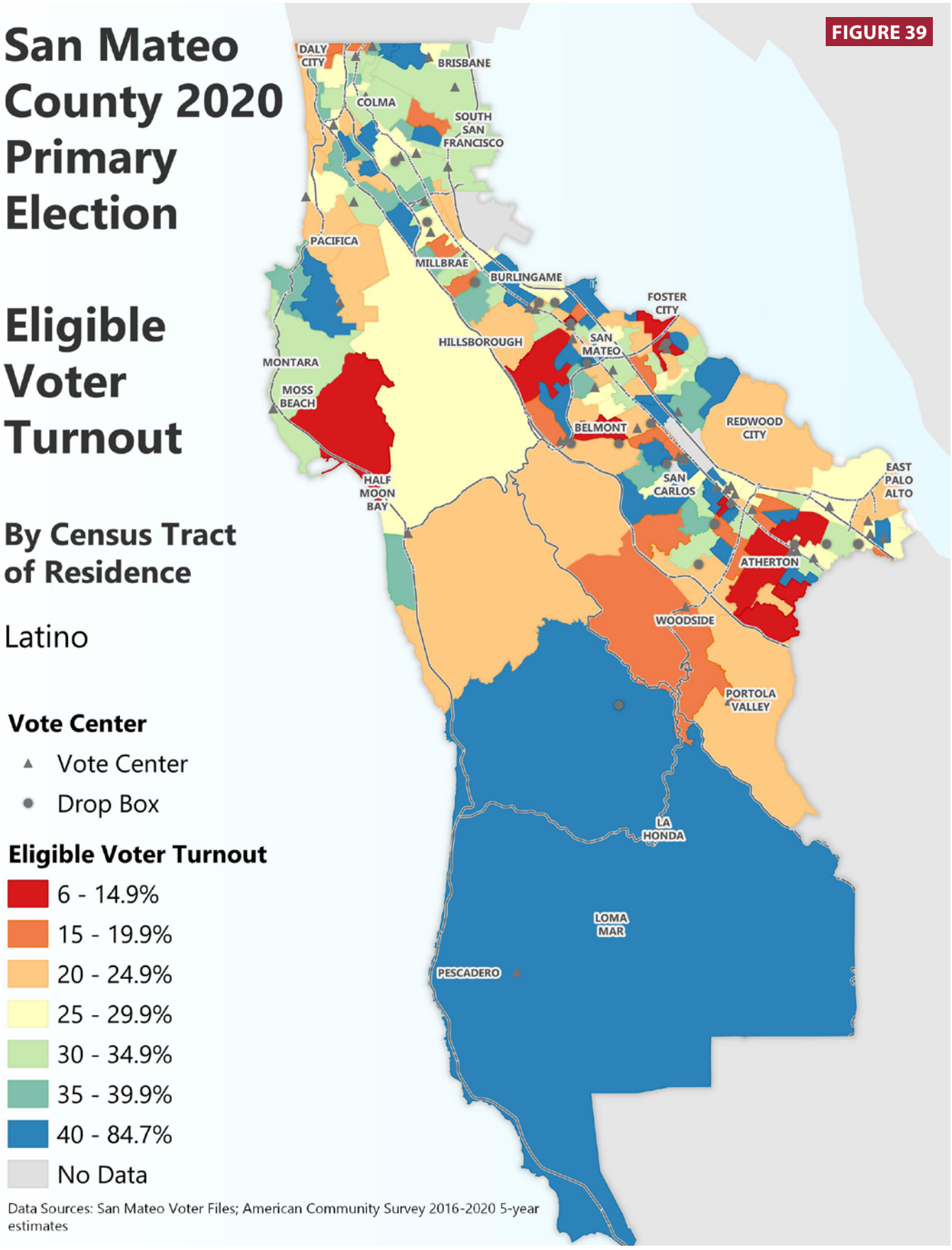
Looking at eligible voter turnout for Asian Americans in the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County, we see census tracts with higher turnout around Montara, Moss Beach, Portola Valley, and San Carlos, and tracts with lower turnout around Daly City, Colma, South San Francisco, San Mateo, Half Moon Bay, East Palo Alto, and Atherton (Figure 38).

FIGURE 38



Eligible voter turnout for Latinos in the 2020 primary was relatively high in some census tracts in Burlingame, San Carlos, La Honda, and Pescadero. Many census tracts had relatively low eligible voter turnout rates for Latinos, including tracts around Daly City, Foster City, Atherton, Woodside, and Half Moon Bay (Figure 39).

FIGURE 39



2020 Primary Election Vote-by-Mail Rejection Rates and Reasons for Rejection

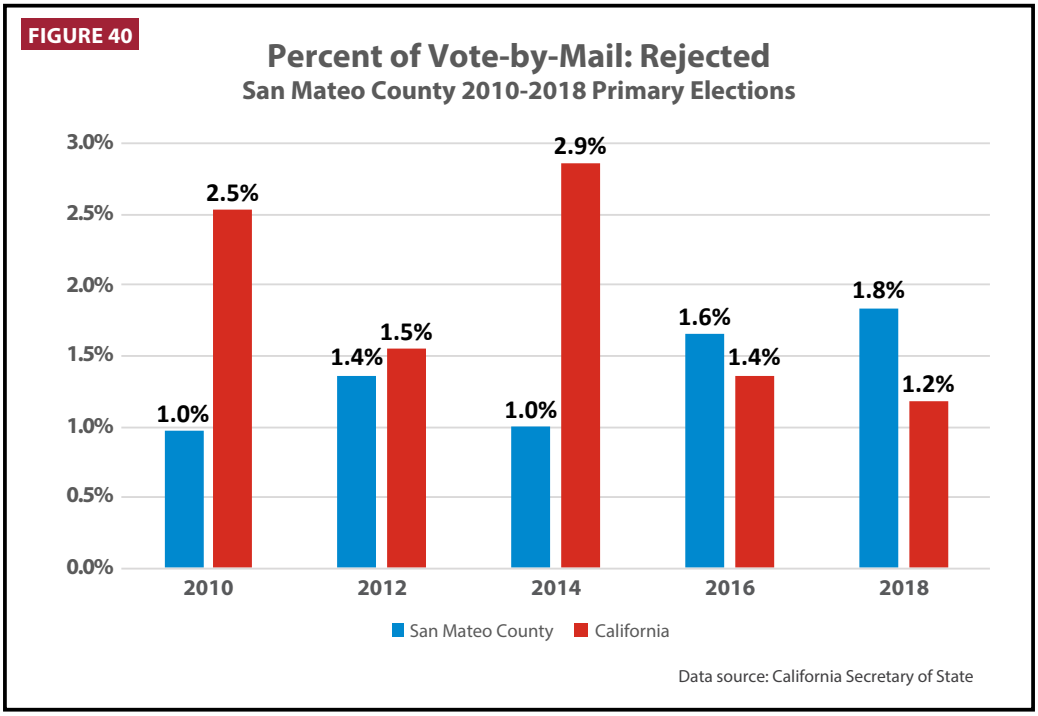
Section Highlights

- In the 2020 primary election, 1.9% of all VBM ballots cast were rejected.
- Lateness was the number one reason for rejected VBM ballots. Almost 47% of rejected VBM ballots were received late, while another 26.3% had non-matching signatures and 19.6% were missing signatures.
- VBM ballots sent through the mail had higher VBM rejection rates than those returned to ballot drop box locations or vote centers.
- Latino, Asian-American, youth, and new voters had higher VBM rejection rates than the general population.
- Young voters aged 18 to 24 had a VBM rejection rate six times that of older voters aged 65 and over.
- Registered Democrats had higher VBM rejection rates than registered Republicans, while No Party Preference voters had the highest rejection rate of the three party affiliation groups.

In the following sections, we examine the VBM ballot rejection rates for the 2020 primary election. The VBM ballot rejection rate is the percent of all VBM ballots cast (both accepted and rejected) that were rejected and uncounted. This includes all VBM ballots that were returned through the mail, dropped off at a ballot drop box location, or dropped off at a vote center.

Between 2010 and 2014, San Mateo County often had lower VBM ballot rejection rates than the statewide rates in primary elections, as seen in Figure 47. In recent years, however, San Mateo County has had slightly higher VBM rejection rates than the statewide rejection rate.[14]

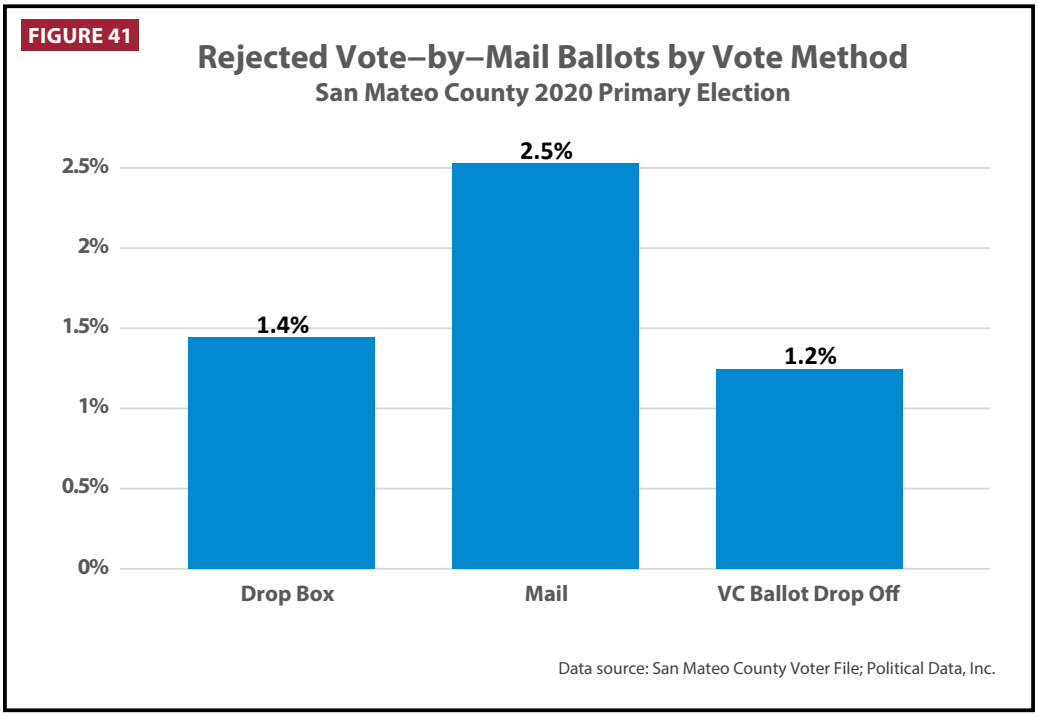
FIGURE 40



In the 2020 primary election, San Mateo County continued to have a higher VBM rejection rate than California as a whole. Our analysis found of the 228,056 VBM ballots cast, 1.9% (4,257 VBM ballots) were rejected in the 2020 primary election. In California, around 1.5% of VBM ballots cast in the 2020 primary election were rejected.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Vote Method

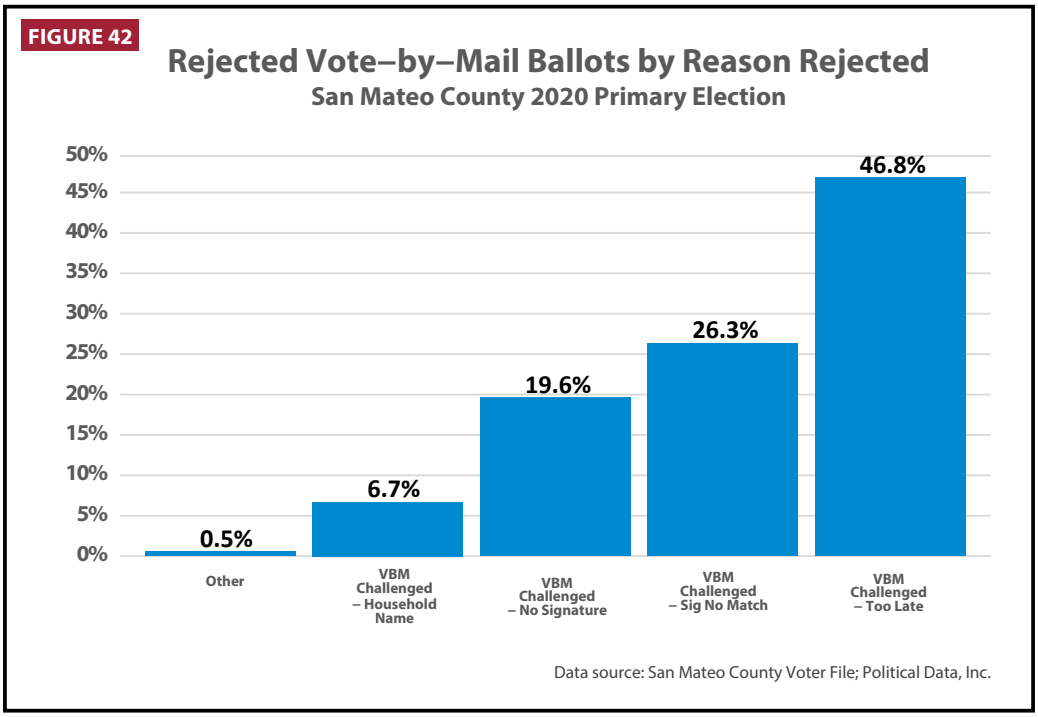
FIGURE 41



Our analysis found that 1.9% of all VBM ballots were rejected in the San Mateo County 2020 primary election. Breaking out the analysis by voting method, we see notable differences in the likelihood of rejection (Figure 41). Of all VBM ballots returned through the mail, 2.5% were rejected, compared to 1.4% of all VBM ballots returned to a drop box and 1.2% of all ballots returned to a vote center location drop off.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Reason Rejected

FIGURE 42

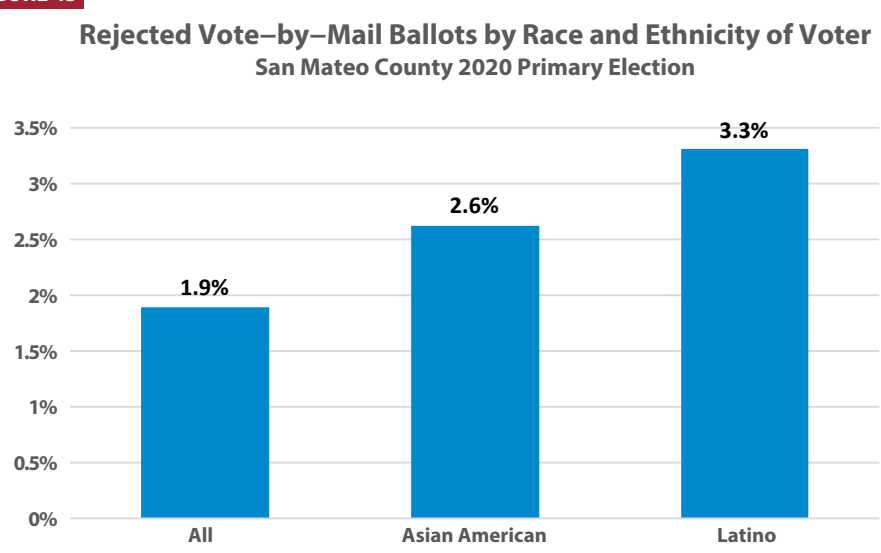


Out of all 4,257 rejected VBM ballots (whether mailed, dropped off at a ballot drop box location or vote center) in the 2020 primary election, 46.8% (1,994 ballots) were rejected because they were received too late—arriving more than three days after

the election (the statutory limit when postmarked by Election Day). Over 26% (1,120) of rejected VBM ballots had non-matching signatures and 19.6% (835) were rejected due to a missing signature (Figure 42).

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Race and Ethnicity

FIGURE 43

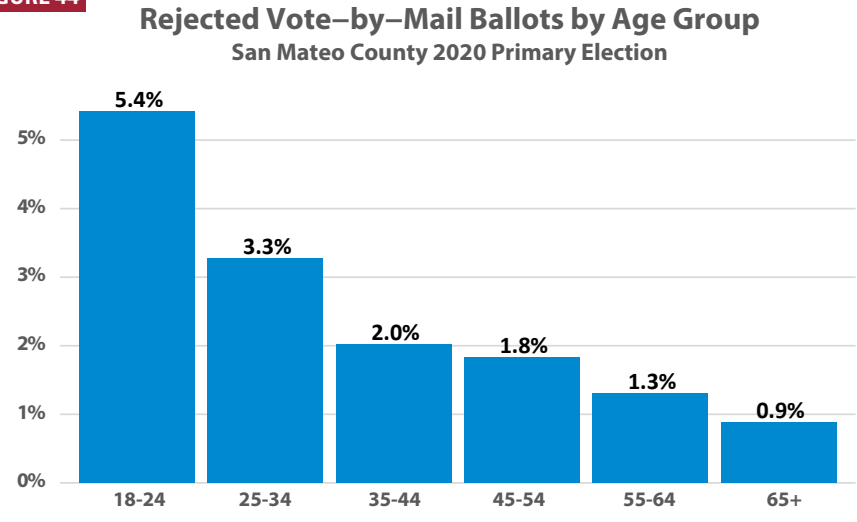


Latino VBM voters experienced the highest VBM ballot rejection rate of all racial or ethnic groups examined. Around 3.3% of Latino VBM ballots were rejected compared to a rejection rate of 1.9% for the general population (Figure 43). Asian Americans also experienced a higher VBM rejection rate than the general voter population at 2.6% in the primary election.

Note: Due to missing location data used for the geocoding portion of identifying the race and ethnicities of registrants, 1.4% (5,968) of registrants' race and ethnicities could not be identified and were omitted from all race and ethnicity analyses. Additionally, see the appendix for available data for Black and white, non-Latino voters. Also see page 7 of this report for a discussion of data limitations and identifying the race and ethnicity of voters.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Age

FIGURE 44

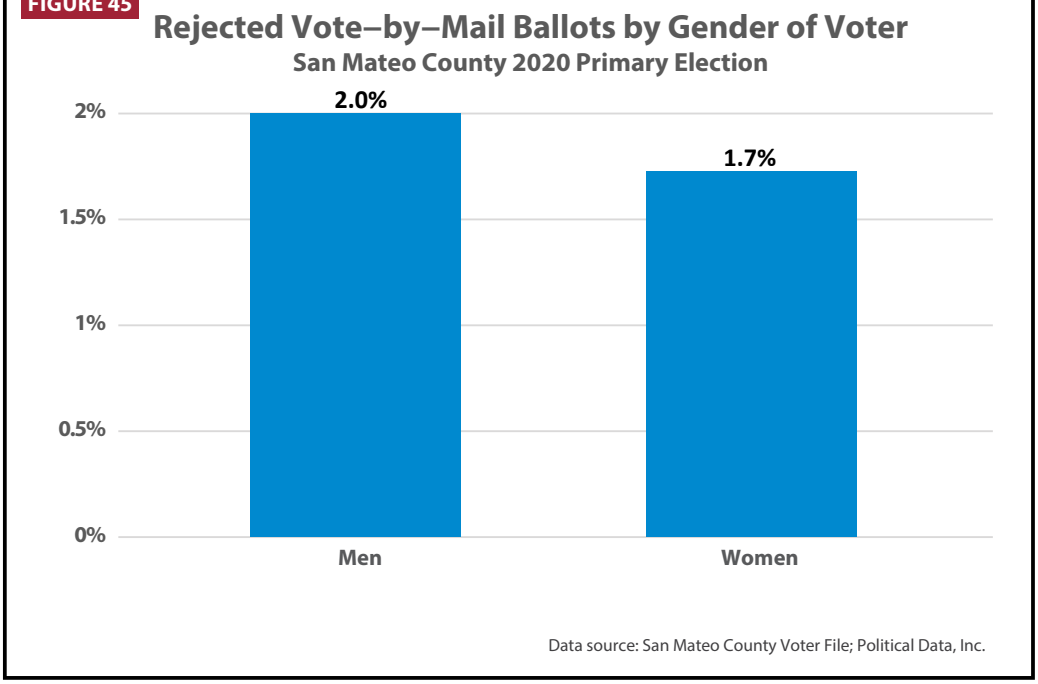


VBM ballot rejection rates were lower for older voters and relatively higher for younger voters. Youth VBM voters aged 18-24 years experienced the highest VBM rejection rates. Around 5.4% of youth experienced VBM rejection, 3.5 percentage points higher than the VBM ballot rejection rate of the general population (Figure 44). Voters aged 65 years and over had the lowest VBM ballot rejection rate of 0.9% in the primary election.

Note: Age is identified by voters' birthdates. San Mateo County voter records with unreliable data for age were excluded. This includes records where the voter is categorized as being under 18 years of age or older than 100 years of age (145 votes total for the primary). The VBM ballot rejection rate for these voters was 2.7%.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Gender

FIGURE 45

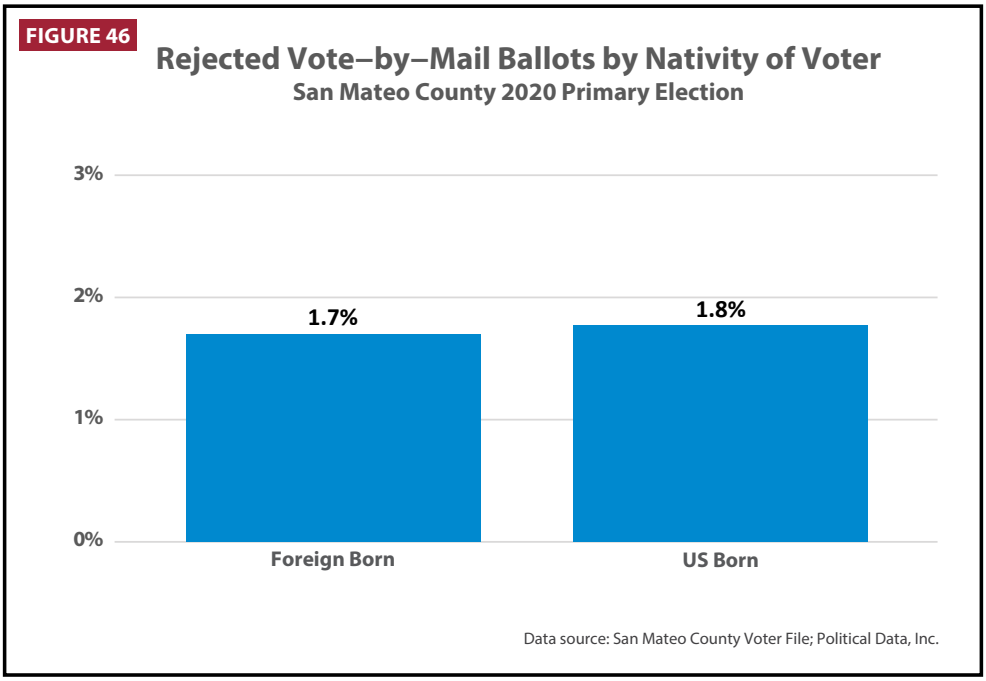


In the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County, women had lower VBM ballot rejection rates than men.[15] Roughly 1.7% of VBM ballots cast by women were rejected, while 2.0% of VBM ballots cast by men were rejected (Figure 45).

Note: In the primary election, about 6.8% of all VBM voter records have no identified gender in the data (15,414 voters out of 228,056). The VBM ballot rejection rate for these voters was 2.3%.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Nativity

FIGURE 46

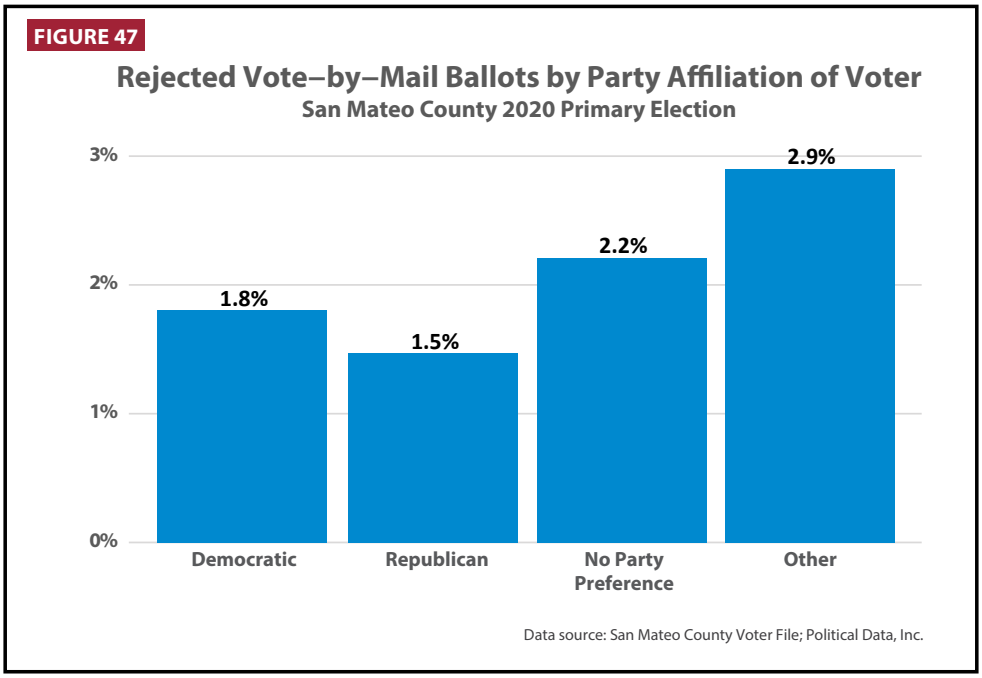


In the 2020 primary election in San Mateo County, U.S.-born and foreign-born VBM voters had similar VBM ballot rejection rates of 1.8% and 1.7%, respectively (Figure 46).[16]

Note: In the primary election, approximately 7.9% of VBM voter records had no identified nativity status (18,096 voters out of 228,056). The VBM ballot rejection rate for these voters was 3.1%.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Party Affiliation

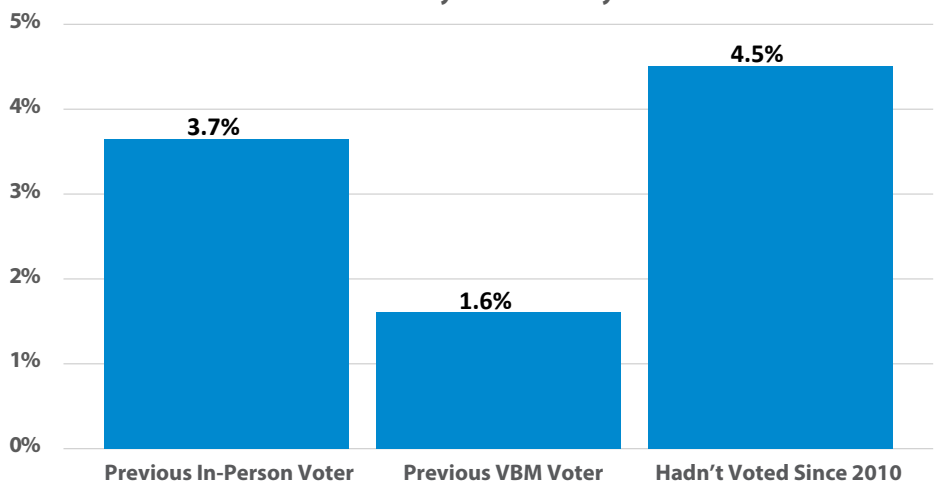
FIGURE 47



Both registered Democrats and registered Republicans had lower VBM rejection rates than the general population. Around 1.8% of VBM ballot cast by Democrats and 1.5% of VBM ballots cast by Republicans were rejected in the 2020 primary election, compared to 1.9% of all voters (Figure 47). VBM voters with no party preference experienced higher VBM ballot rejection rates than Democratic or Republican VBM voters at 2.2% in the primary election.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate for Previous In-Person Voters

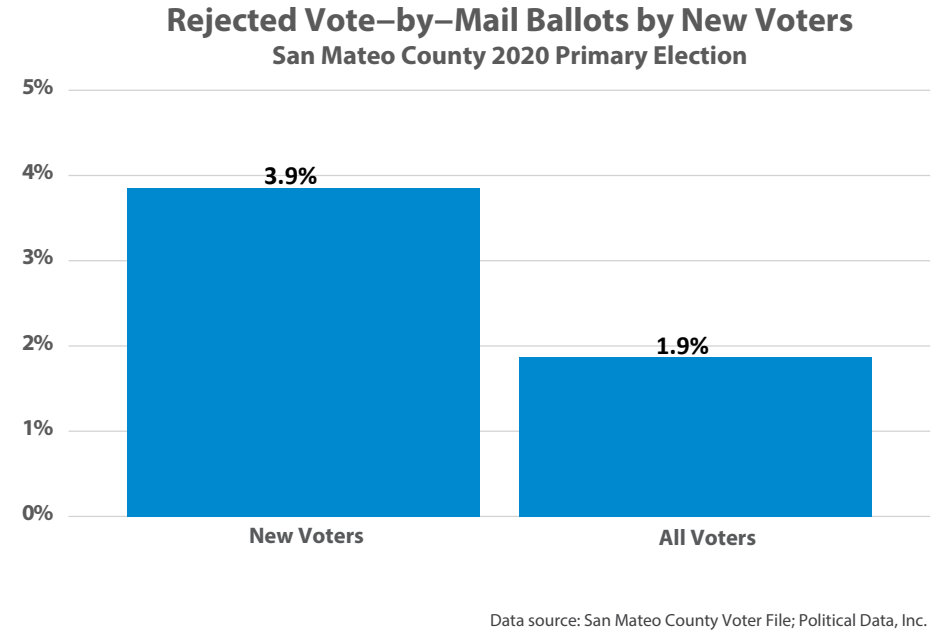
FIGURE 48



Voters who voted at a polling place or vote center in the last election they participated in had a more than double VBM rejection rate than voters who voted with a VBM ballot in the last election they participated in (Figure 48). Previous in-person voters had a VBM rejection rate of 3.7%, compared to 1.6% for previous VBM voters.

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by New Voters

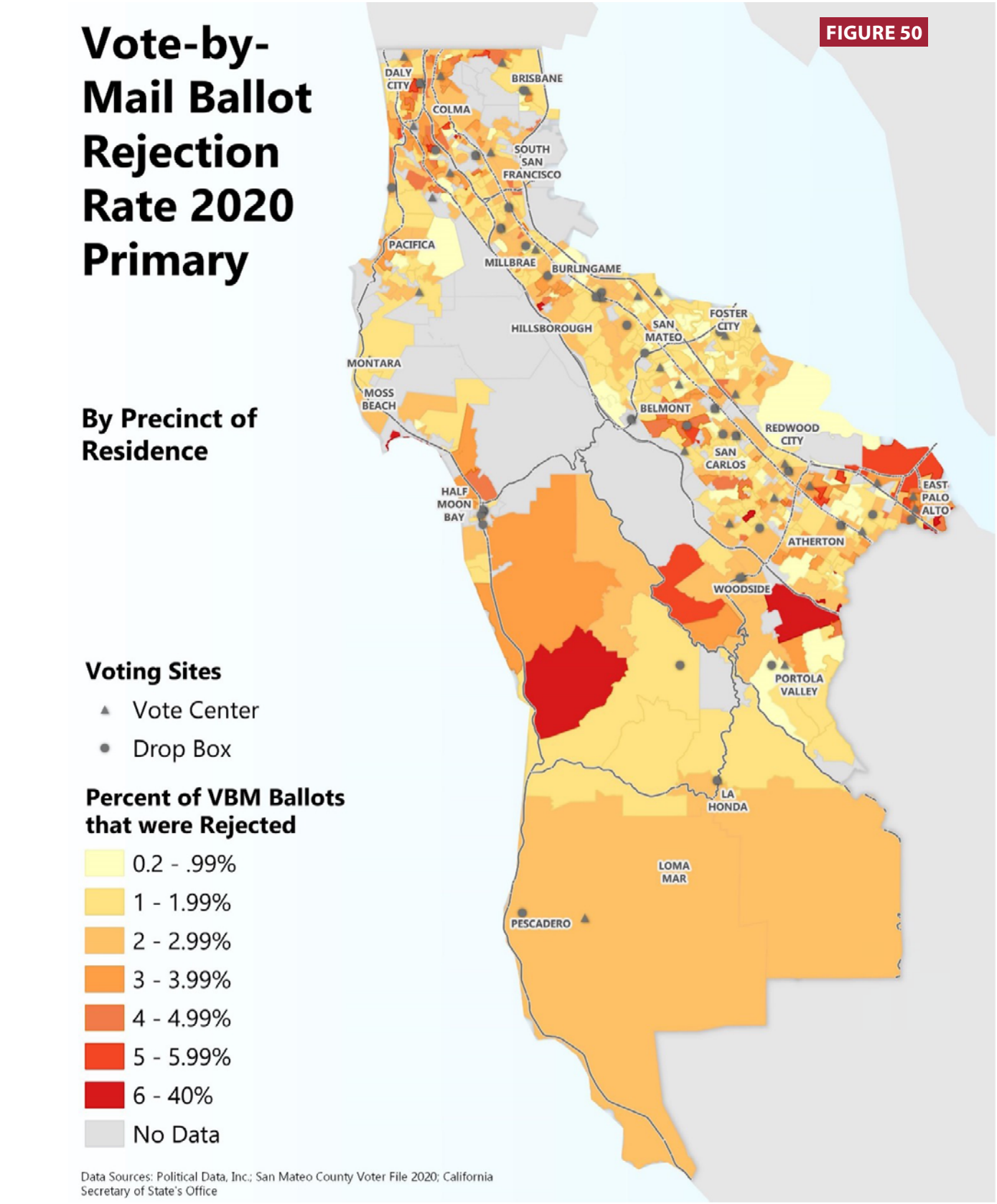
FIGURE 49



In the 2020 primary election, new voters' VBM rejection rate was more than double that of the general population. Almost 4% of VBM ballots cast by new voters were rejected in San Mateo County, compared to 1.9% of VBM ballots cast by all voters (Figure 49).

VBM Ballot Rejection Rate by Precinct of Residence

In the 2020 primary election, when examining the VBM ballot rejection rate by precinct of voter residence, we see that there are clusters of precincts with rejection rates higher than the county rate (1.9%) around East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, and Daly City. We also see precincts with rejection rates lower than the county rate clustered around San Mateo, Redwood City and Burlingame (Figure 50).

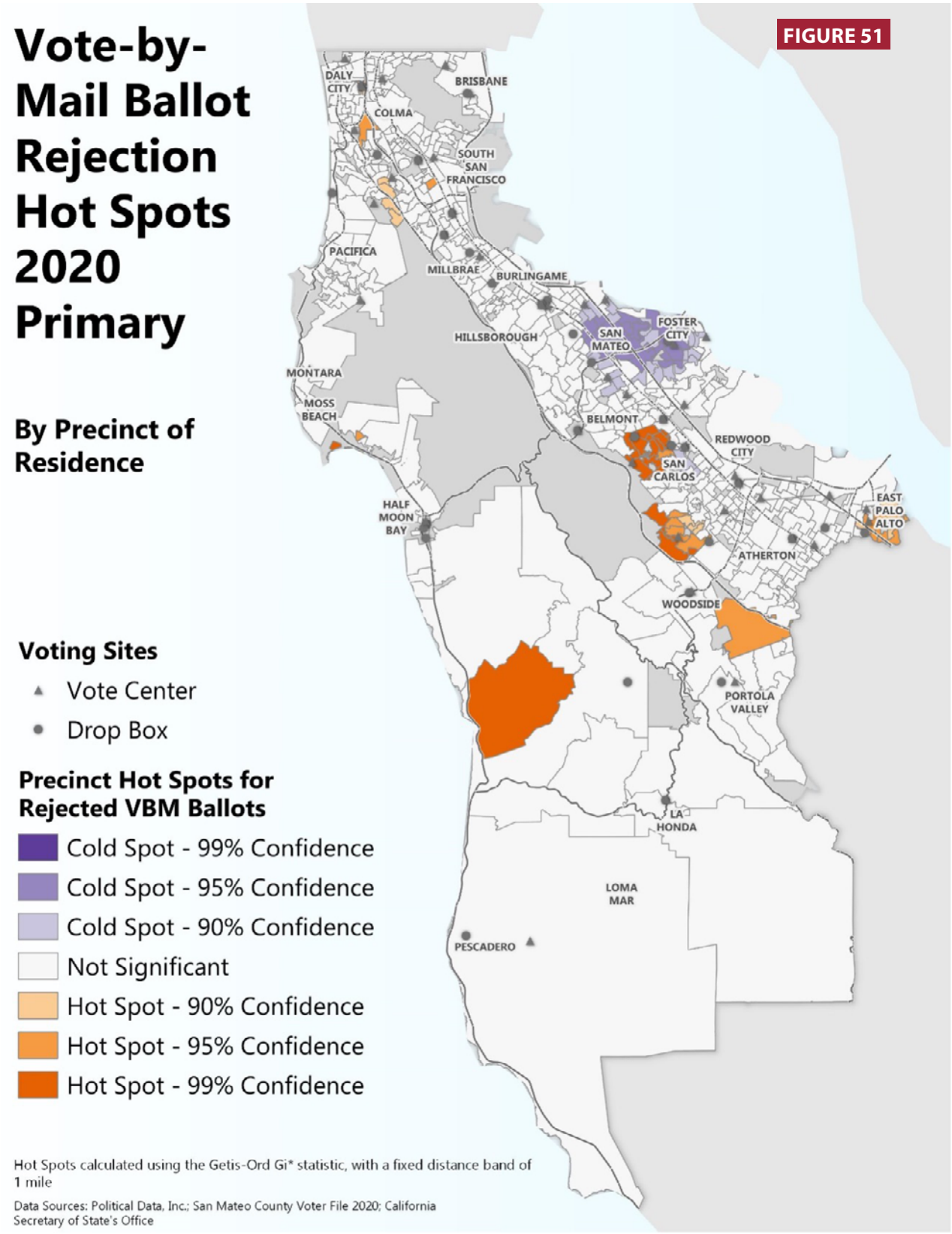


VBM Ballot Rejection Rate Hot Spots

In a hot spot analysis of the VBM rejection rates in the primary election, we see statistically significant clusters of high VBM rejection rates in East Palo Alto, San Carlos, and Daly City (Figure 51). We also see statistically significant clusters of low VBM rejection rates in San Mateo and Foster City.

Note: The method used in this analysis is the Getis-Ord Gi* statistic, with a fixed distance band of 1 mile.[17]

FIGURE 51



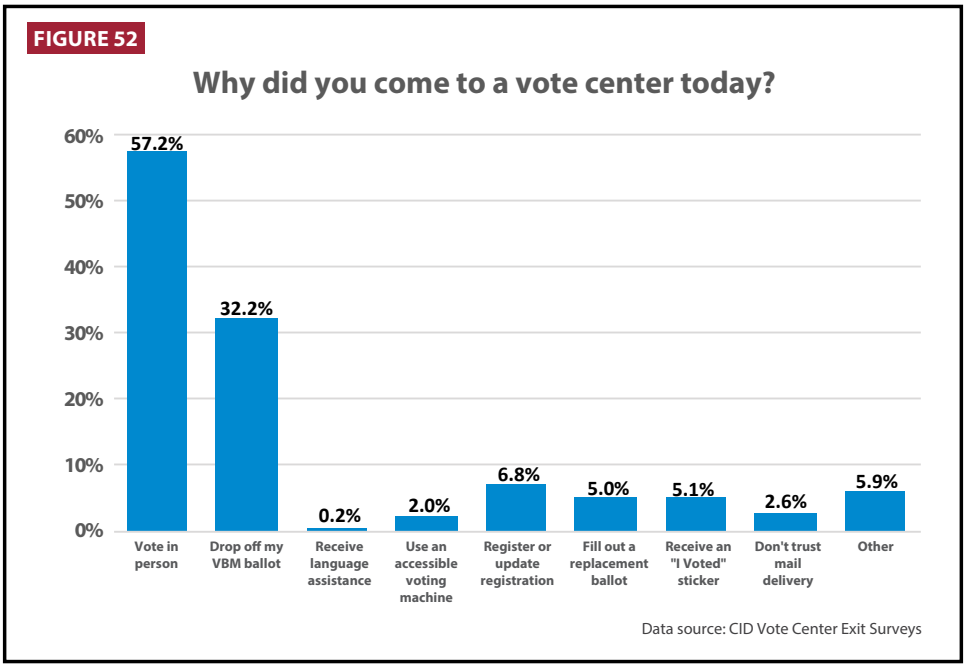
San Mateo County Voters' Experiences Using Vote Centers in the 2020 Primary Election

Section Highlights

- Almost 90% of voters who participated in the exit survey stated they came to the vote center to cast a ballot (either in person or to drop off their VBM ballot).
- Voters also utilized vote centers for resources including registering to vote, replacing a lost/soiled/unusable VBM ballot, and using an accessible voting machine.
- Voter experiences were generally positive, with over two-thirds stating they were very satisfied with the process of casting their ballot.
- Wait times and parking availability were identified as the top aspects voters did not like about the vote centers.
- The majority of voters stated they learned about their vote center location directly from at least one material produced by their county elections office.
- Nearly half of voters had not heard of, nor were aware of, the new vote center model prior to using the vote center.

Vote Center Experience

FIGURE 52



Vote center users taking the survey were asked why they chose to visit a vote center that day. Respondents could choose multiple answers that applied to them. The majority of voters (57.2%) indicated they visited to vote in person (Figure 52). The second highest reason to visit a vote center was to drop off their VBM ballot (32.2%). Another 6.8% indicated they visited the vote center to register to vote or update their registration details.

Some respondents visited a vote center for resources that are provided there (through the VCA). Two percent indicated they visited to use an accessible voting machine and another 6.8% intended to update their registration or to register to vote (using conditional voter registration). Another 5.0% of respondents said they were using a vote center in order to fill out a replacement ballot.

It is important to note that respondents' answers indicated their initial intentions for their visit. It is entirely possible that some respondents either were not able to fulfill these intentions during their visit or they had conducted additional business at a vote center than what they initially had planned. Some respondents might also not be fully aware of the available resources at vote center given that they offer more services than typical polling locations. This could be the case for voters who might have received language assistance at a vote center. There were only three respondents to the survey who indicated they chose to go to a vote center in order to receive language assistance. However, many more may have received language assistance during their actual visit.

FIGURE 53

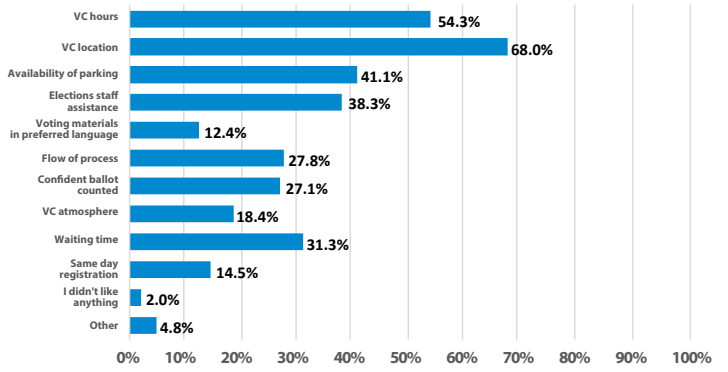
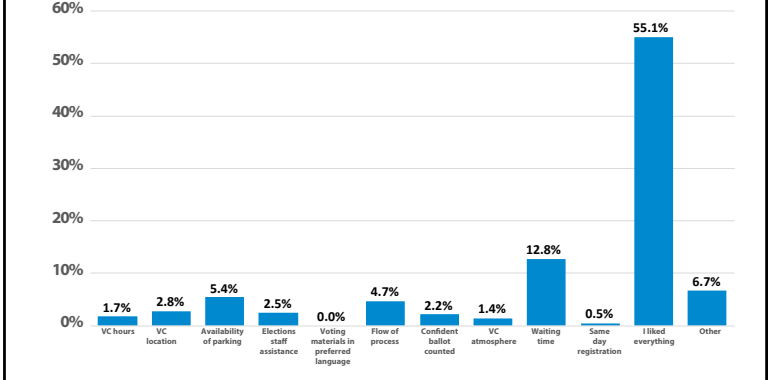


FIGURE 54



We also asked respondents to identify which aspects of a vote center they liked, if any, (whether or not they initially intended to experience these) on their visit. Respondents could choose multiple answers that apply (see online appendix for detailed survey findings by voter demographic group). The location (68.0%), hours of operation (54.3%), availability of parking (41.1%), and election staff assistance (38.3%) were the most frequently cited aspects that respondents liked about vote centers (Figure 53). Only 2.0% of respondents said they did not like any aspect of a vote center.

We then asked all respondents to identify what aspects of a vote center they did not like, if any. Respondents could choose multiple answers that applied to them. The most cited dislikes of respondents were their waiting time (12.8%), availability of parking (5.4%), and flow of the voting process (4.7%). Just over 55% reported they liked everything at a vote center (Figure 54).

FIGURE 55

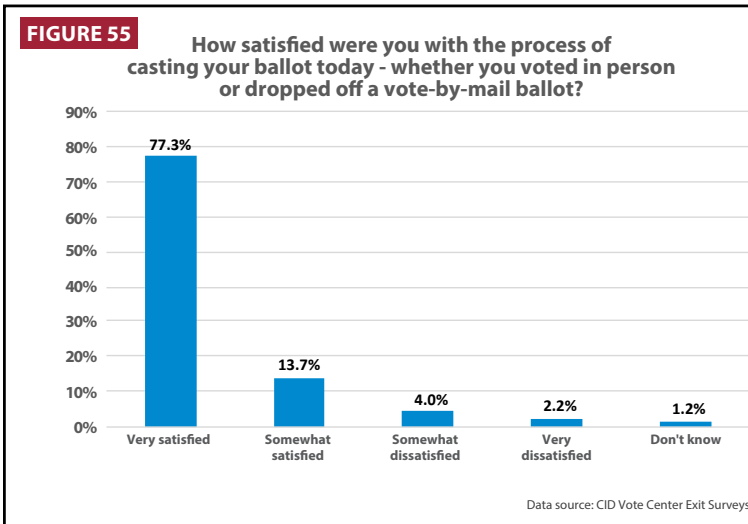
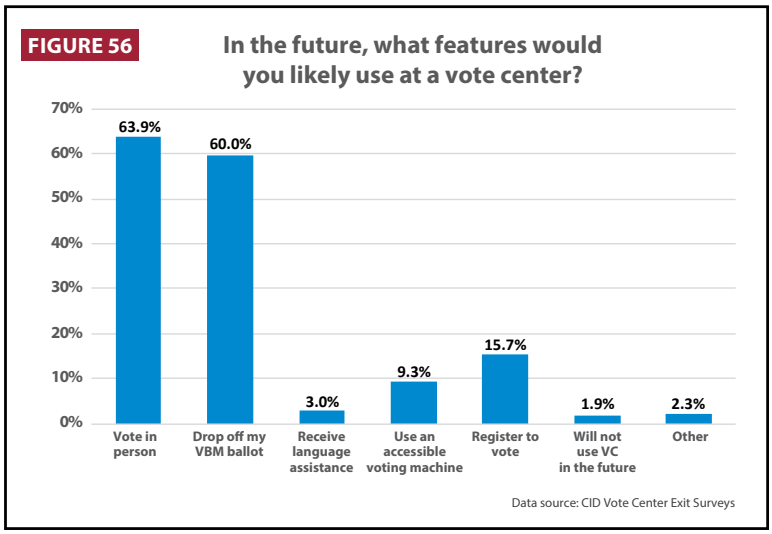


FIGURE 56



Overall, 77.3% of respondents were very satisfied with the voting process at vote centers and 13.7% were somewhat satisfied, while 6.2% expressed being very or somewhat dissatisfied (Figure 55).

For future elections, Figure 56 shows that voters indicated they would likely use a vote center for the following purposes: voting in person (63.9%) or dropping off their VBM ballot (60.0%), registering to vote (15.7%), and using an accessible voting machine (9.3%). Another 3.0% reported they would likely use a vote center in the future to receive language assistance. Just under 2% of respondents said they would not use a vote center in the future. Respondents could choose multiple answers that applied to them.

Vote Center Location and Distance

FIGURE 57

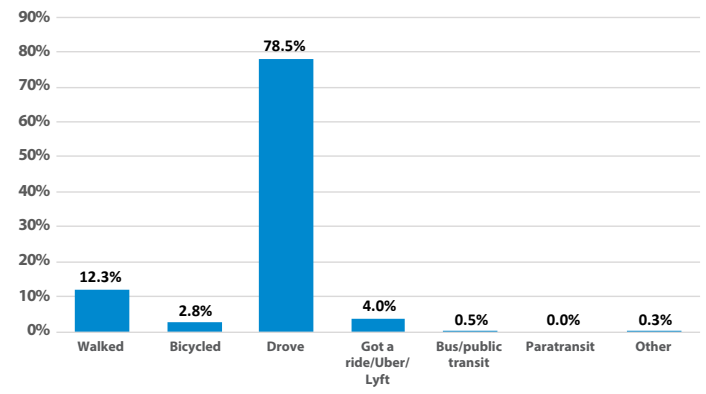
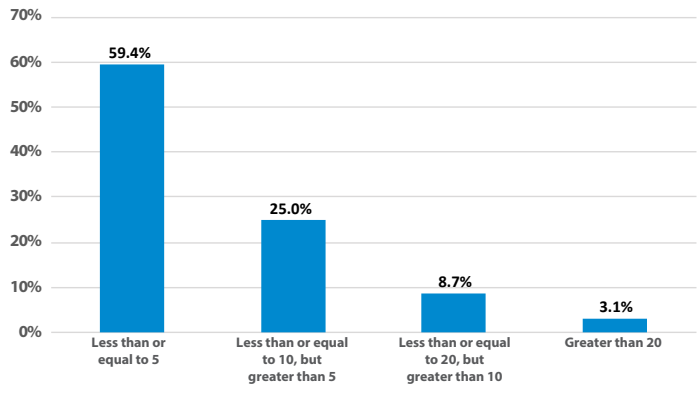


FIGURE 58



Vote center users taking the survey were asked why they chose the specific vote center they visited and how far they traveled. Figure 57 shows that the majority of respondents said they traveled to the vote center by car (78.5%), with 15.1% of voters walking or bicycling. Over half the voters (59.4%) arrived within five minutes, with 25.0% arriving after five minutes but within ten, and 11.8% traveled for more than ten minutes (Figure 58).

FIGURE 59

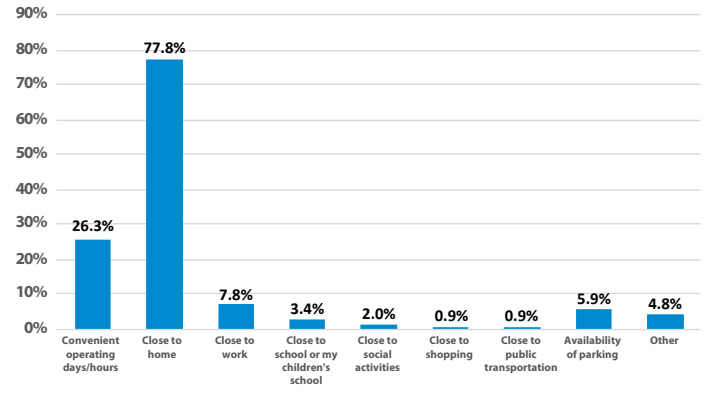


FIGURE 60

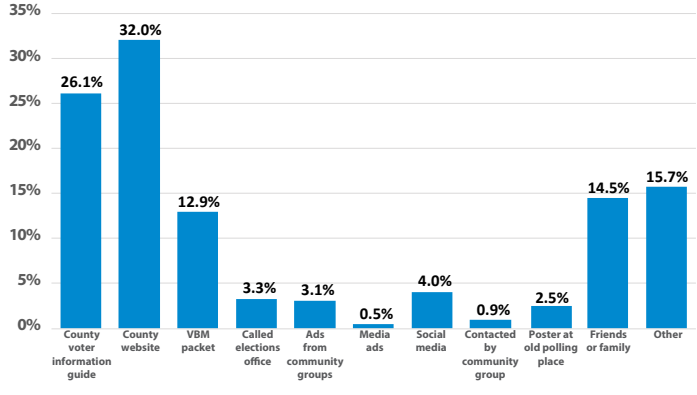


Figure 59 shows respondents' answers to why they chose to use a specific vote center. Respondents could indicate multiple answers that applied. Voters overwhelmingly chose their specific vote center due to its close proximity to their home (77.8%) compared to choosing based on its close proximity to their work (7.8%), with 26.3% of voters choosing a vote center because of convenient operating days and hours.

Figure 60 shows the many ways that voters learned of vote center locations. Respondents could choose multiple answers that applied to them. Many respondents identified county produced materials as their source of information. The county website served as the most common way (32.0%) voters learned about locations, followed by their County Voter Information Guide (26.1%) or the VBM packet mailed to them (12.9%). Additionally, over 14% heard from friends or family and 4.0% through social media.

Combined, 71.0% of all vote center users learned about their location directly from at least one material produced by their county elections office. This demonstrates the continued influence of county-produced voter education materials and thus, the importance of ensuring these materials are accessible, clear and in plain language for all voters.

Perspectives on the Vote Center Model

FIGURE 61

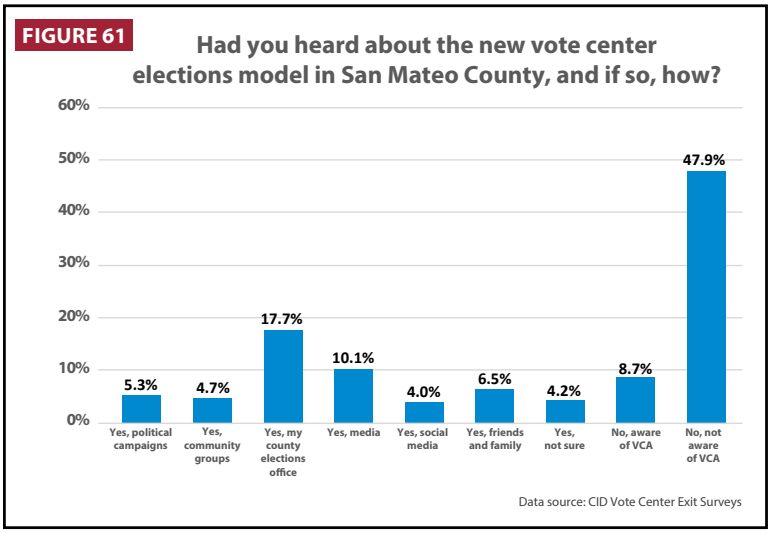
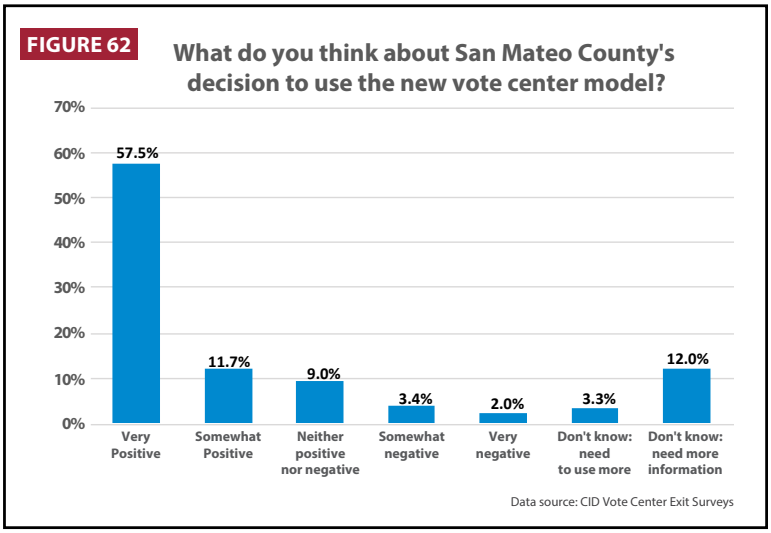


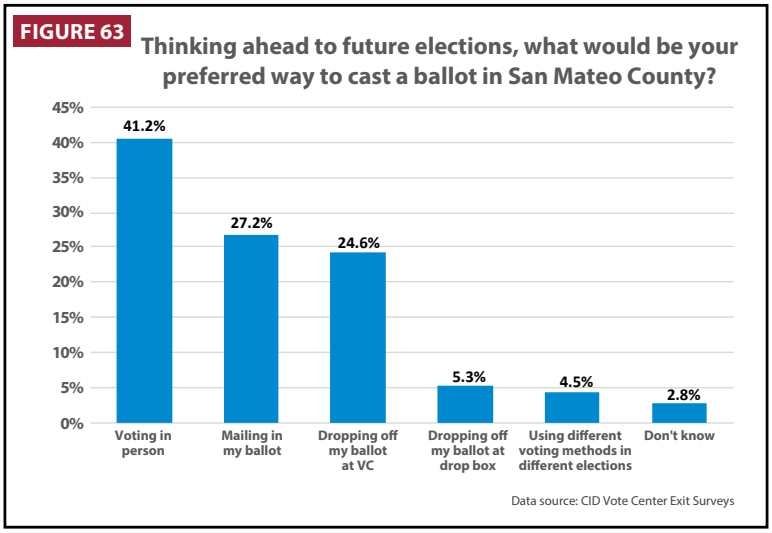
FIGURE 62



Just under 18% of vote center users heard of the vote center model from their county elections office, 10.1% from media, and 6.5% from friends and family (Figure 61). Only 5.3% of survey respondents heard about the new model from a political campaign. However, almost 50% of survey respondents had not heard of, nor were aware of the new vote center model prior to using a vote center.

Over half (57.5%) of voters reported feeling “very positive” about San Mateo County’s decision to use the new model after using the vote center, with 11.7% feeling “somewhat positive” and 12.0% indicating they did not know and required more information (Figure 62).

FIGURE 63



We also asked respondents what would be their preferred way to cast a ballot in San Mateo County (Figure 63). Overall, 41.2% of survey respondents indicated they preferred to vote in person in San Mateo County, compared to 27.2% who preferred to mail in their ballot (Figure 63). Another 29.9% of voters preferred to drop off their ballot (whether at a vote center or drop box location). Another 4.5% preferred to use different voting methods in different elections.

Vote Center Exit Survey Summary

A key element of the successful implementation of the VCA in San Mateo County is how voters experienced vote centers. While the overwhelming majority of visitors who went to a vote center did so to vote in person or drop off their ballot, vote centers in San Mateo County were also utilized for a variety of reasons and services, including using an accessible voting machine and to register to vote or update one's registration.

Over 78% of visitors traveled to a vote center by car and, for nearly 60% of visitors, their trip was less than 5 minutes. Survey results tell us that many people liked the location, hours, availability of parking, and staff assistance. We also know that over two-thirds of visitors learned about the location of the vote center they used from materials produced by the county elections office, but almost half hadn't heard of the new voting model itself prior to using a vote center.

Overall, an overwhelmingly majority of voters visiting a vote center were satisfied with the process of casting their ballot. Vote center users were also very positive about the county's decision to use the new vote center model. However, at the same time, there were voters who didn't like, among other things, the waiting time and lack of available parking, and who were not satisfied with the voting process they experienced. In particular, Election Day vote center visitors registered more concerns about these elements than pre-Election day visitors.

Conclusion

In the 2020 primary election, San Mateo County voters overwhelmingly (85.8%) used VBM ballots. The majority of primary voters voted by returning their VBM ballot through the mail. Just over 14% of all voters voted in-person at a vote center, while 11.6% dropped off their VBM ballots at a vote center and 14.9% returned their VBM ballot to a ballot drop box location.

Voters who voted by mail utilized early voting at higher rates than voters who voted by any other method. Almost 70% of mailed VBM ballots were received before Election Day. In contrast, voters electing to vote in person at a vote center were more likely to vote on Election Day as opposed to early voting. Over 80% of in-person votes were cast on Election Day.

While VBM was the most common voting method for all demographic groups, voting method rate variations were still prevalent. Latino voters, young voters (aged 18 to 24), previous in-person voters, and new voters voted in-person at higher rates than the general population. Asian-American voters and foreign-born voters sent their VBM ballots through the mail at higher rates than the general population. Registered Republicans voted by mail at higher rates than registered Democrats, while registered Democrats voted in person, by drop box, and vote center drop off at higher rates than registered Republicans. Around 1.1% of all voters in San Mateo County used conditional voter registration. Latinos, Asian Americans, young voters, new voters, and previous in-person voters had higher CVR use rates than the general population.

Over 44% of eligible voters and 54.4% of registered voters in San Mateo County cast a ballot in the 2020 primary election. Some demographic groups, however, had lower turnout rates than others. Latinos, Asian Americans, and youth voters had lower eligible and registered voter turnout rates than the general population. Registered voter turnout among previous in-person voters was less than one-third the rate among previous VBM voters. New voters had lower registered voter turnout than all voters. Registered Democratic voters had the highest registered voter turnout rate of all party affiliations.

Just under 2% of all VBM ballots cast were rejected in San Mateo County, which was slightly higher than California's official statewide rejection rate of 1.5%. Some demographic groups, however, had higher rejection rates. Latino, Asian-American, and new voters had higher rejection rates than the county's general population. Young voters (aged 18 to 24) had six times the rejection rate of older voters (aged 65 and over). The top reason for VBM ballots being rejected was for being received late. Almost 47% of rejected VBM ballots were received late, while another 45.9% had signature issues (either missing signatures or non-matching signatures). VBM ballots returned through the mail had higher rejection rates than those returned at a ballot drop box location or vote center.

The overall experiences at vote centers were positive, with over 77% of voters polled stating they were very satisfied with the process of casting their ballot. While the majority of voters had positive experiences at vote centers, voters most commonly identified wait times and availability of parking as the characteristics that they did not like about the vote centers. The majority of voters surveyed at vote centers stated their reason for coming to a vote center was to vote (57.2% to vote in person and 32.2% to drop off their VBM ballot). Voters did, however, utilize the various resources provided by vote centers, with 6.8% stating they came to the vote center to register to vote, 5.0% to replace their ballot, and 2.0% to use an accessible voting machine.

The 2020 primary election was the third election held in San Mateo County under the VCA voting model. While over two-thirds of voters felt very positive or somewhat positive about the county's decision to adopt the VCA after using a vote center, nearly half of survey respondents were not aware of the new vote center model prior to using a vote center in the 2020 primary election. Of vote center users previously aware of the VCA, just under 18% learned of the vote center model from their county elections office.

Notes

1. For more information on the California Voter's Choice Act, see: http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450
2. Political Data, Inc. provided the San Mateo County voter registration file extracts from July 2020 with the following additional voter attributes identified: race and ethnicity, age, gender and nativity. These data are the actual registration records and not representative samples. Because of this, the level of confidence in the data is not susceptible to estimates as are survey or exit poll results. Latinos and Asians are distinguished in the registration data from the general population primarily by using Spanish and Asian surname lists which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish and Asian surnames. The Passel-Word Spanish surname list, published by the U.S. Census Bureau, was utilized to identify Latinos. For Asians, the U.S. Census Bureau's surname lists for six major Asian-American ethnic groups were utilized: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, and Vietnamese. In addition, ballot language designation and birthplace also inform the identification race and ethnicity. Surname matching for research purposes is not reliable for white, non-Hispanic, and African-American populations, and thus, registration data is not examined by this study for these groups. White, non-Latinos and African Americans are 48.2% and 3.2% of the San Mateo County eligible (adult citizen) voter population, respectively. Note: Some additional Latinos and Asians may be registered to vote and not flagged by the surname databases.
3. For more information on the R package Who Are You? (WRU), see: https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/wru/wru.pdf
4. See Imai and Khanna (2016) "Improving Ecological Inference by Predicting Individual Ethnicity from Voter Registration Methods." : https://imai.fas.harvard.edu/research/files/race.pdf
5. The Voter's Choice Act requires counties to offer the option of Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail (RAVBM). Voters with disabilities are sent a ballot electronically that they can download. They then can read and mark the ballot on their computer using their own accessible technology. They then print and mail in the ballot. For more information see California Senate Bill 450: http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450
6. According to California law, Vote-by-Mail ballots that are returned by mail must be postmarked on or before Election Day, and received by county elections officials no later than three days after the election. See Senate Bill 29: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB29
7. See: California Civic Engagement Project: Disparities in California's Vote-by-Mail Use, Changing Demographic Composition: 2002-2012 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57b8c7ce15d5dbf599fb46ab/t/58e58499e4fcb5fc935614c6/1491436758841/VBM+Issue+Brief+Revised.pdf
8. Gender is identified by Political Data, Inc. in the voter registration file by using gender name lists provided by the U.S. Census.
9. Nativity is identified by Political Data, Inc. in the voter registration file by a registrant's report of birthplace in their voter registration application.
10. See the California Secretary of State's Voter Participation Statistics by County: https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/sov/2020-primary/sov/03-voter-participation-stats-by-county.pdf
11. See the California Secretary of State's Report of Registration as of February 18, 2020: https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ror/15day-presprim-2020/county.pdf
12. Gender is identified by Political Data, Inc. in the voter registration file by using gender name lists provided by the U.S. Census.
13. Nativity is identified by Political Data, Inc. in the voter registration file by a registrant's report of birthplace in their voter registration application.
14. See: California Secretary of State. 2016. "Historical Vote-By-Mail (Absentee) Ballot." http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/historical-absentee/.
15. Gender is identified by Political Data, Inc. in the voter registration file by using gender name lists provided by the U.S. Census.
16. Nativity is identified by Political Data, Inc. in the voter registration file by a registrant's report of birthplace in their voter registration application.
17. For more information on this methodology, see ESRI Resources: http://resources.esri.com/help/9.3/arcgisengine/java/gp_toolref/spatial_statistics_tools/how_hot_spot_analysis_colon_getis_ord_gi_star_spatial_statistics_works.htm

Appendix

Language Spoken at Home by Limted English Proficiency for Population 5 years and Over* San Mateo County				
	San Mateo County		California	
Language	LEP Population by Language	Percent of Total LEP Population	LEP Population by Language	Percent of Total LEP Population
Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages	52	0.0%	29,452	0.5%
Arabic	1,920	1.6%	68,876	1.1%
Armenian	92	0.1%	85,752	1.3%
Bengali	237	0.2%	10,367	0.2%
Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)	28,699	23.7%	670,510	10.6%
French (incl. Cajun)	590	0.5%	14,099	0.2%
German	265	0.2%	9,205	0.1%
Greek	847	0.7%	5,138	0.1%
Gujarati	284	0.2%	11,351	0.2%
Haitian	0	0.0%	2,295	0.0%
Hebrew	125	0.1%	4,576	0.1%
Hindi	1,967	1.6%	38,701	0.6%
Hmong	0	0.0%	25,961	0.4%
Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages	720	0.6%	37,356	0.6%
Italian	411	0.3%	8,372	0.1%
Japanese	2,866	2.4%	54,509	0.9%
Khmer	618	0.5%	30,780	0.5%
Korean	1,496	1.2%	195,113	3.1%
Malayalam, Kannada, or other Dravidian languages	0	0.0%	3,535	0.1%
Navajo	0	0.0%	180	0.0%
Nepali, Marathi, or other Indic languages	1,538	1.3%	12,129	0.2%
Persian (incl. Farsi, Dari)	447	0.4%	85,064	1.3%
Polish	0	0.0%	6,485	0.1%
Portuguese	2,390	2.0%	25,542	0.4%
Punjabi	155	0.1%	60,470	1.0%
Russian	2,733	2.3%	64,170	1.0%
Serbo-Croatian	75	0.1%	3,325	0.1%
Spanish	52,722	43.6%	4,038,453	63.6%
Swahili or other languages of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa	0	0.0%	6,171	0.1%
Tagalog (incl. Filipino)	14,326	11.8%	249,455	3.9%
Tamil	143	0.1%	8,116	0.1%
Telugu	367	0.3%	10,655	0.2%
Thai, Lao, or other Tai-Kadai languages	294	0.2%	40,384	0.6%
Ukrainian or other Slavic languages	121	0.1%	13,645	0.2%
Urdu	293	0.2%	13,897	0.2%
Vietnamese	1,361	1.1%	336,865	5.3%
Yiddish, Pennsylvania Dutch or other West Germanic languages	0	0.0%	3,209	0.1%
Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, or other languages of Western Africa	0	0.0%	4,484	0.1%
Other and unspecified languages	132	0.1%	14,403	0.2%
Other Indo-European languages	122	0.1%	17,897	0.3%
Other languages of Asia	2,540	2.1%	27,726	0.4%
Other Native languages of North America	0	0.0%	1,231	0.0%
Total LEP Population	120,948	-	6,349,904	-

Data Source: American Community Survey 1-year 2015 to 2019
*Some languages listed have a large margin of error. This should be considered when reviewing this table, especially for language groups with small populations.

Vote Methods Black and White Voters San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election						
	Returned to Vote Center			Returned to Drop Off Box		
Method	Method Count	Total Votes	Percent Method	Method Count	Total Votes	Percent Method
Drop Box	1,409	9,361	15.1%	21,083	140,497	15.0%
Mail	5,182	9,361	55.4%	85,110	140,497	60.6%
VC Ballot Drop Off	1,198	9,361	12.8%	16,390	140,497	11.7%
Vote Center	1,563	9,361	16.7%	17,821	140,497	12.7%

Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File

Note: These data identifying white and Black voters in the California voter file are not reliable for research purposes. Exercise strong caution when reviewing this data table

Conditional Voter Registration Black and White Voters San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election					
Black Voters			White Voters		
CVR Ballots Counted	Total Votes	Percent CVR	CVR Ballots Counted	Total Votes	Percent CVR
151	9,361	1.6%	1,116	140,497	0.8%

Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File

Note: These data identifying white and Black voters in the California voter file are not reliable for research purposes. Exercise strong caution when reviewing this data table

Registered Voter Turnout Black and White Voters San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election					
Black Voters			White Voters		
Votes Counted	Total Registered	Registered Voter Turnout	Votes Counted	Total Registered	Registered Voter Turnout
9,361	17,140	54.6%	140,497	225,881	62.2%

Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File

Note: These data identifying white and Black voters in the California voter file are not reliable for research purposes. Exercise strong caution when reviewing this data table

Vote-by-Mail Rejected Rates Black and White Voters San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election					
Black Voters			White Voters		
Rejected VBM Ballots	Total VBM Ballots Cast	Percent VBM Rejected	Rejected VBM Ballots	Total VBM Ballots Cast	Percent VBM Rejected
192	7,789	2.5%	2,303	122,583	1.9%

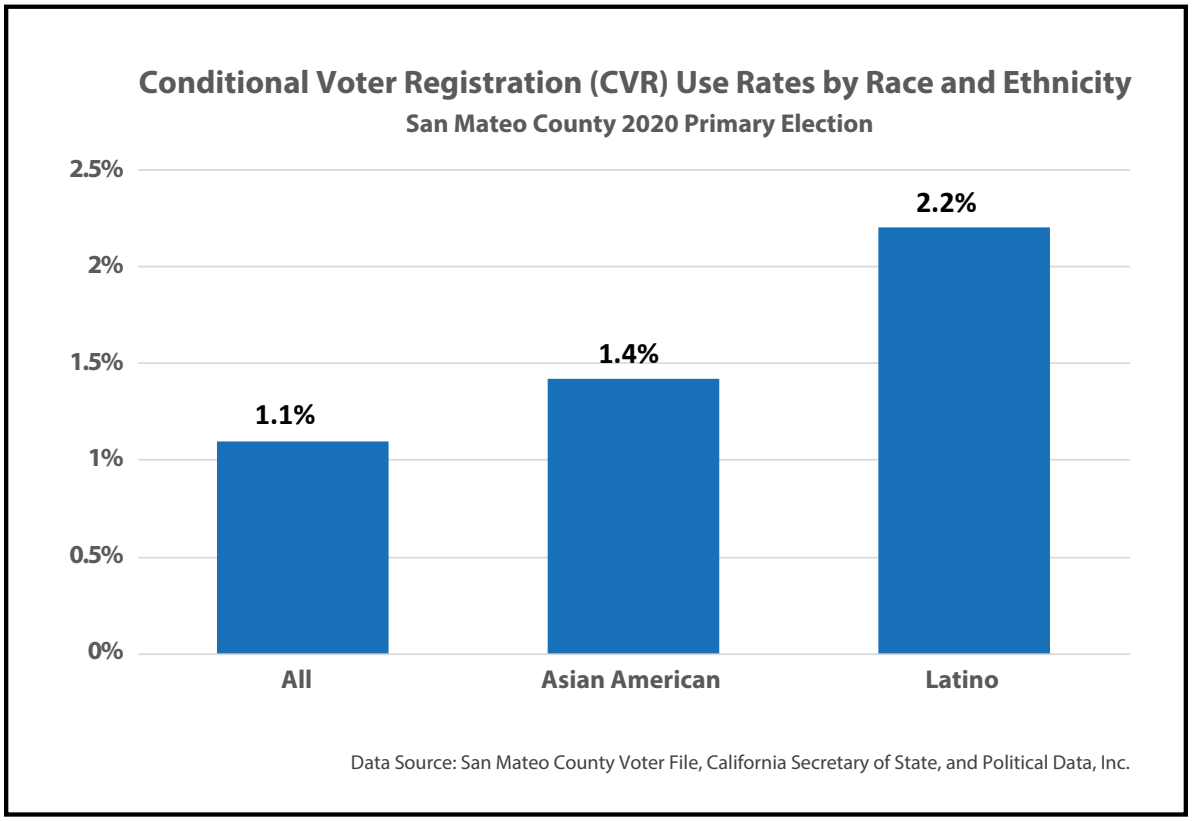
Data Source: San Mateo County Voter File, Political Data, Inc.

Note: The data Identifying white and Black voters in the California voter file are not reliable for research purposes. Exercise strong caution when reviewing this data table.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR)

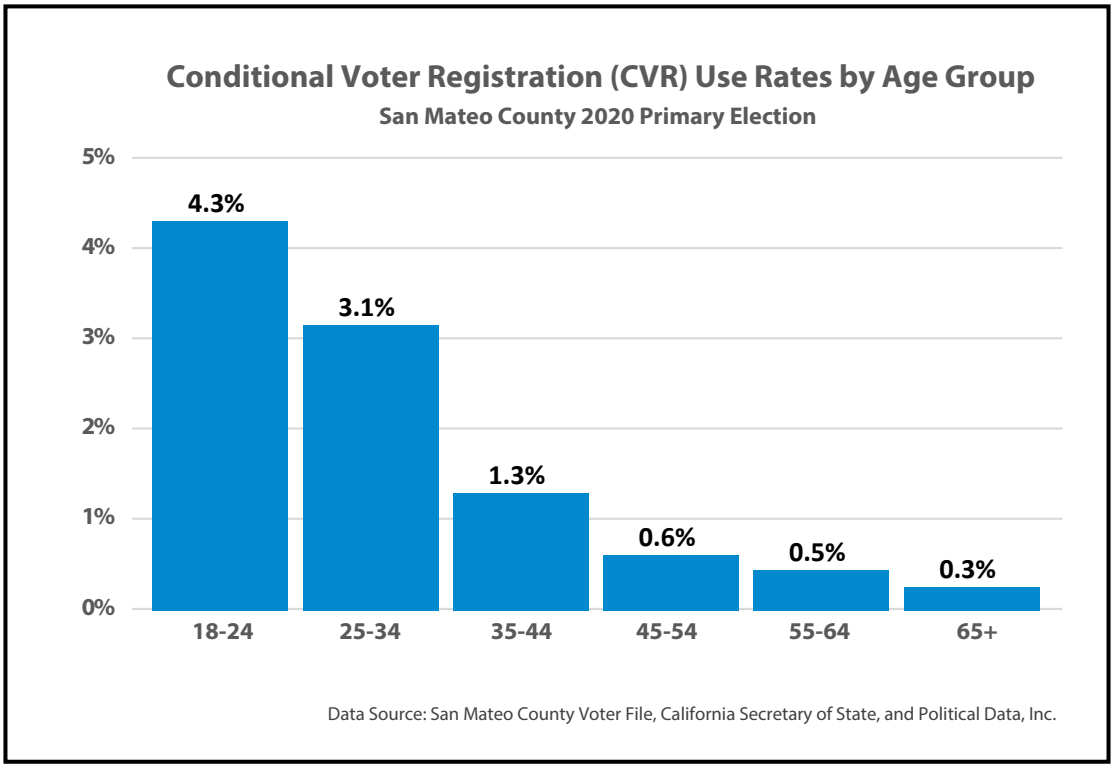
Conditional voter registrations (CVR) allows voters to register to vote or change their voter registration details up to and on Election Day. This option allows voters who missed the traditional registration deadline to participate in the current election. Of all votes cast and counted in the 2020 primary election, 1.1% (2,449) were cast with conditional voter registration. CVR was disproportionately used by Latinos, Asian Americans, youth (age 18 to 24), new voters, and previous in-person voters.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Race and Ethnicity



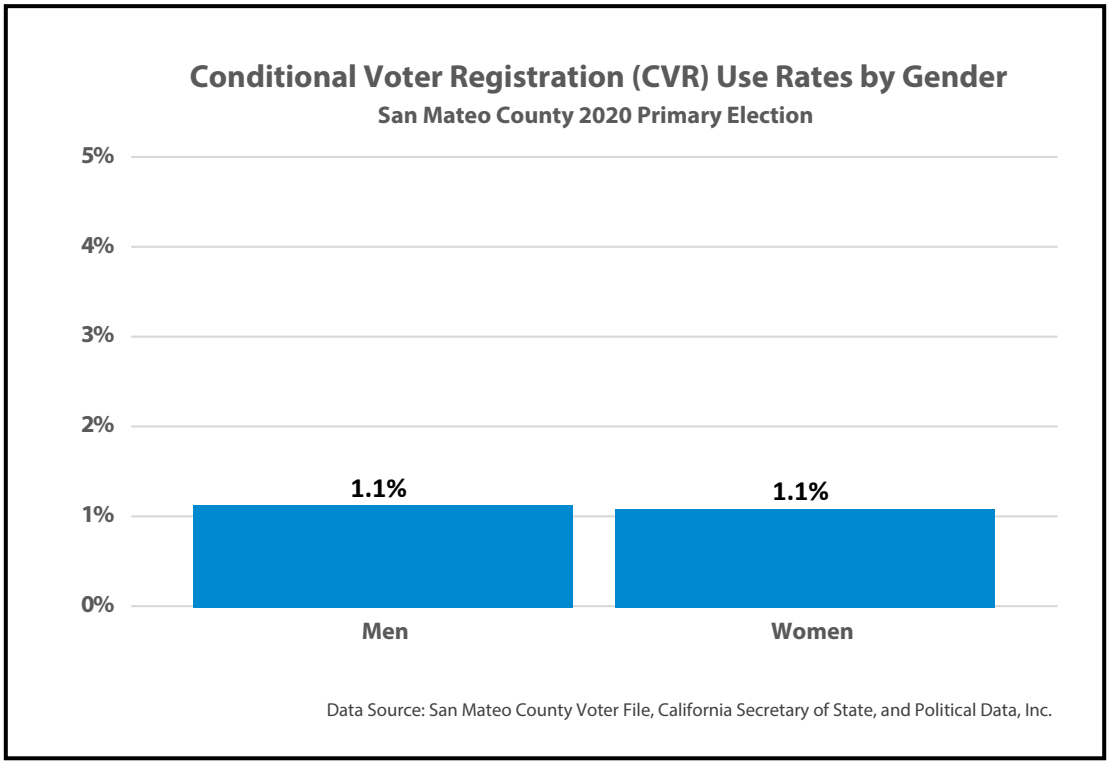
Latino voters in San Mateo County used CVR at higher rates than the general population. Specifically, 2.2% of Latino voters used conditional voter registration, compared to 1.1% of all voters. Asian-American voters in San Mateo County also used CVR at higher rates than the general population, but at lower rates than Latino voters. Around 1.4% of Asian-American voters used conditional voter registration.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Age Group



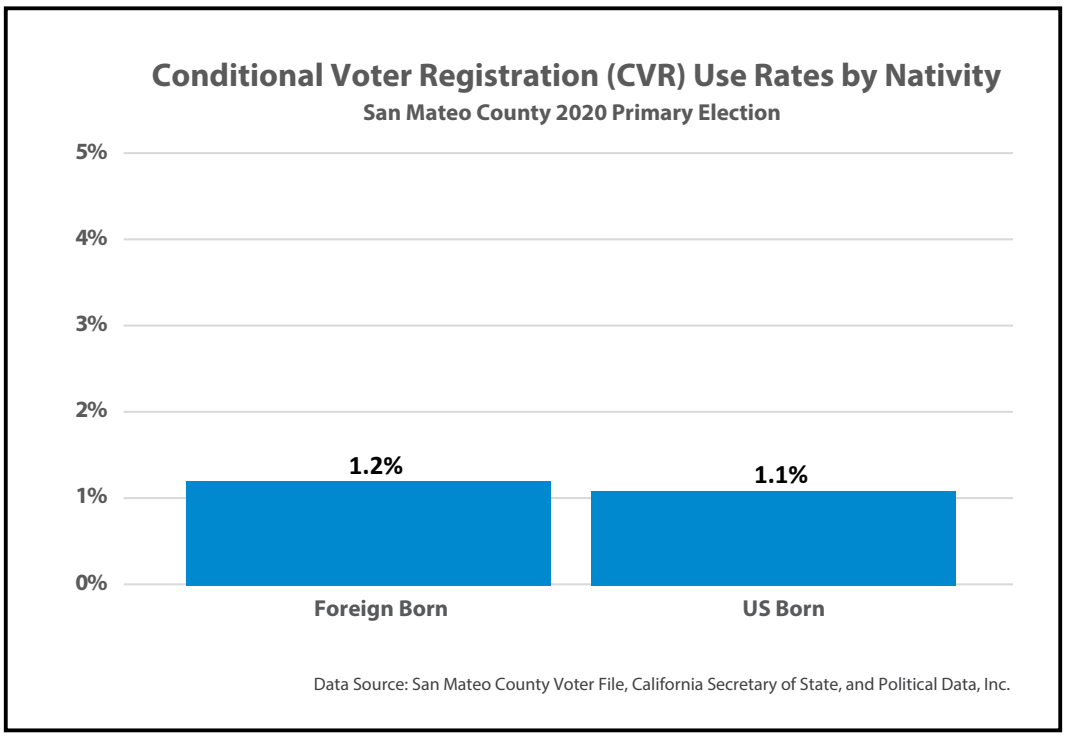
In the 2020 primary election, young voters used CVR at higher rates than older voters. Youth voters aged 18 to 24 used conditional voter registration at higher rates than any other age group. Around 4.3% of youth voters used CVR, compared to 0.3% of older voters aged 65 and over.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Gender



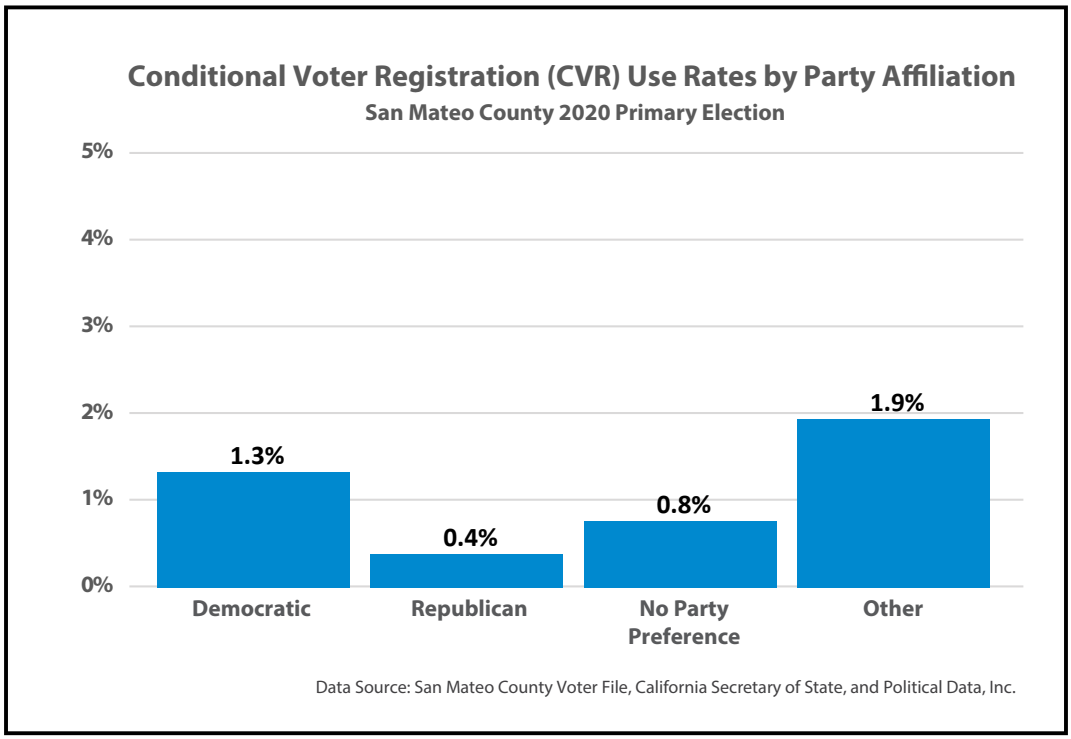
Men and women used conditional voter registration at the same rate – 1.1%.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Nativity



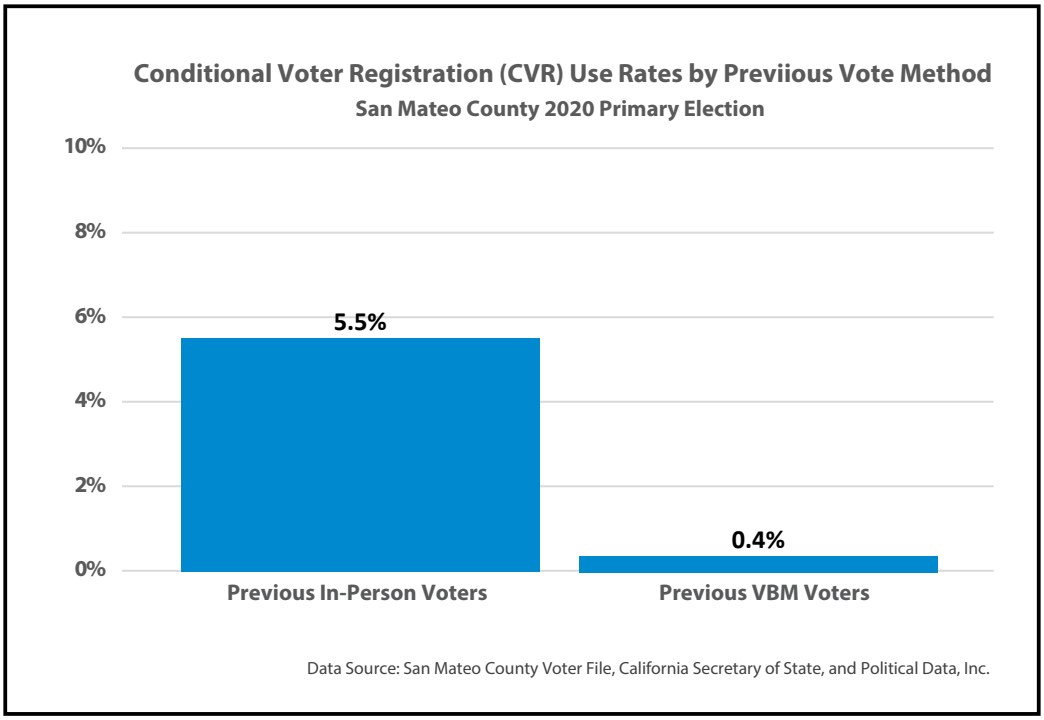
Foreign-born voters used conditional voter registration at slightly higher rates than U.S.-born voters. Around 1.2% of foreign-born voters used CVR, while 1.1% of U.S.-born voters used CVR.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Party Affiliation



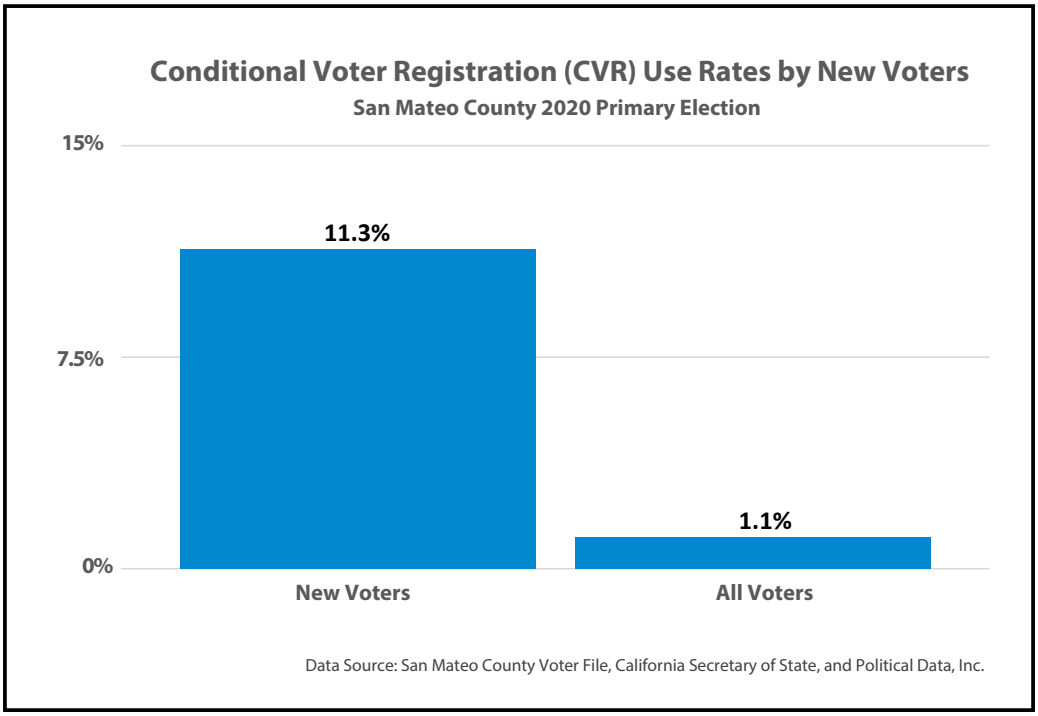
Registered Democrats used conditional voter registration at higher rates than both registered Republicans and No Party Preference voters. Around 1.3% of Democrats used CVR, while 0.4% of Republicans and 0.8% of No Party Preference voters did the same.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by Previous Method

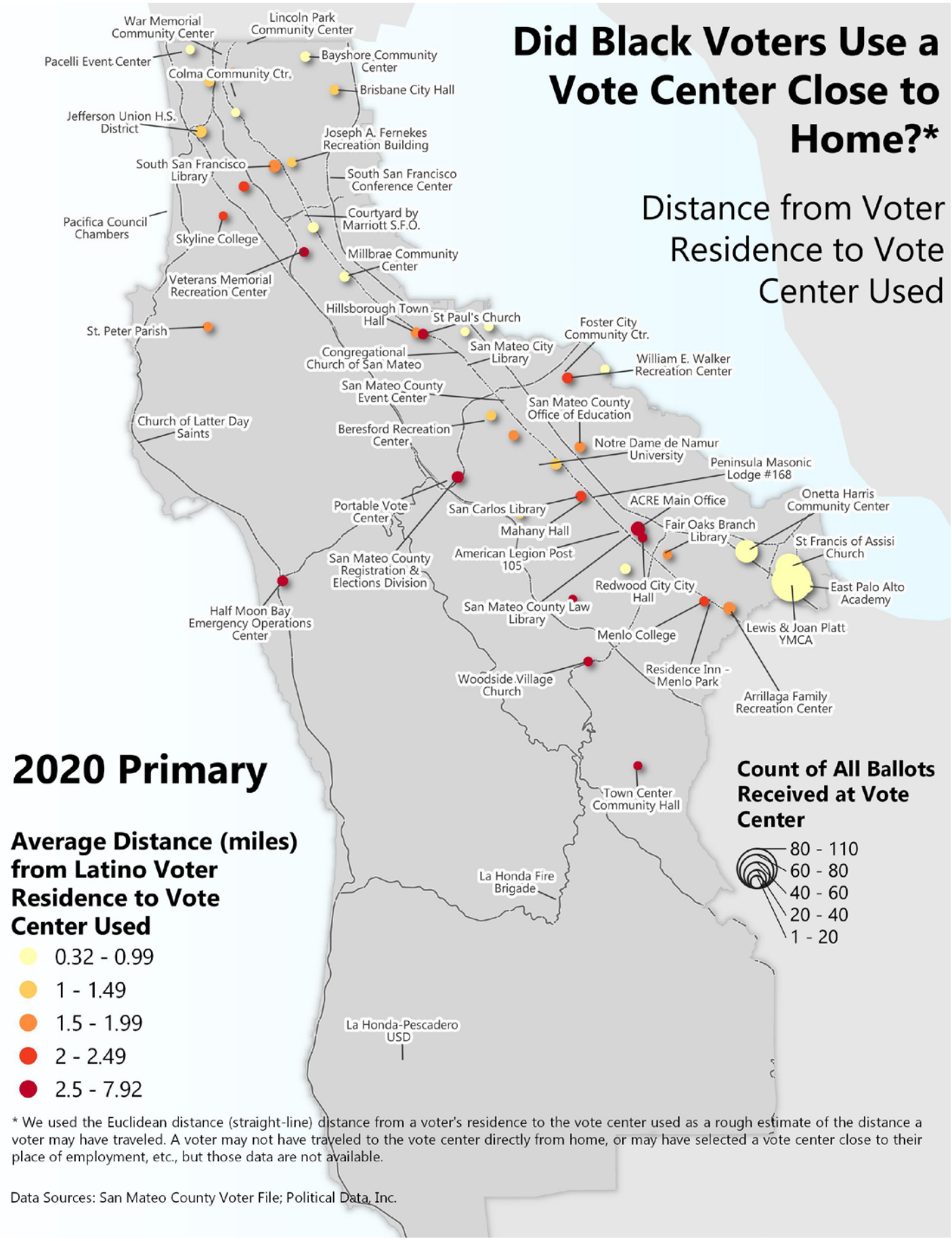


Voters who voted at a polling place or vote center in their last election used conditional voter registration at much higher rates than voters who voted with VBM ballots in their previous election. Around 5.5% of previous in-person voters used CVR, compared to only 0.4% of previous VBM voters.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) by New Voters



New voters used conditional voter registration at about ten times the rate of the general population. Nearly 11.3% of new voters used CVR, compared to 1.1% of all voters.



* We used the Euclidean distance (straight-line) distance from a voter's residence to the vote center used as a rough estimate of the distance a voter may have traveled. A voter may not have traveled to the vote center directly from home, or may have selected a vote center close to their place of employment, etc., but those data are not available.

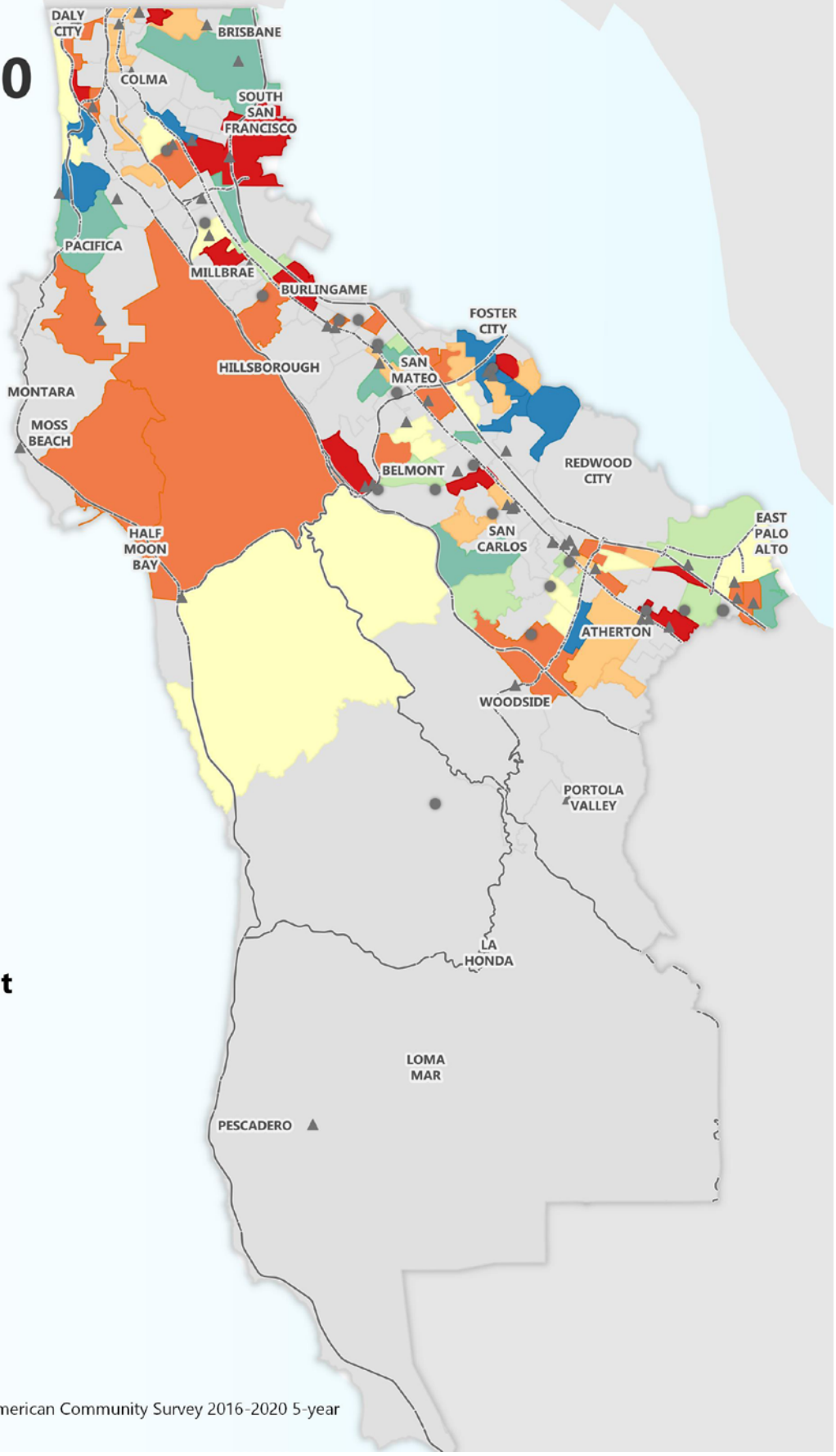
Data Sources: San Mateo County Voter File; Political Data, Inc.

San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election

Eligible Voter Turnout

By Census Tract of Residence

Black



Vote Center

- Vote Center
- Drop Box

Eligible Voter Turnout

- 12 - 29.9%
- 30 - 39.9%
- 40 - 49.9%
- 50 - 59.9%
- 60 - 69.9%
- 70 - 79.9%
- 80 - 100%
- No Data

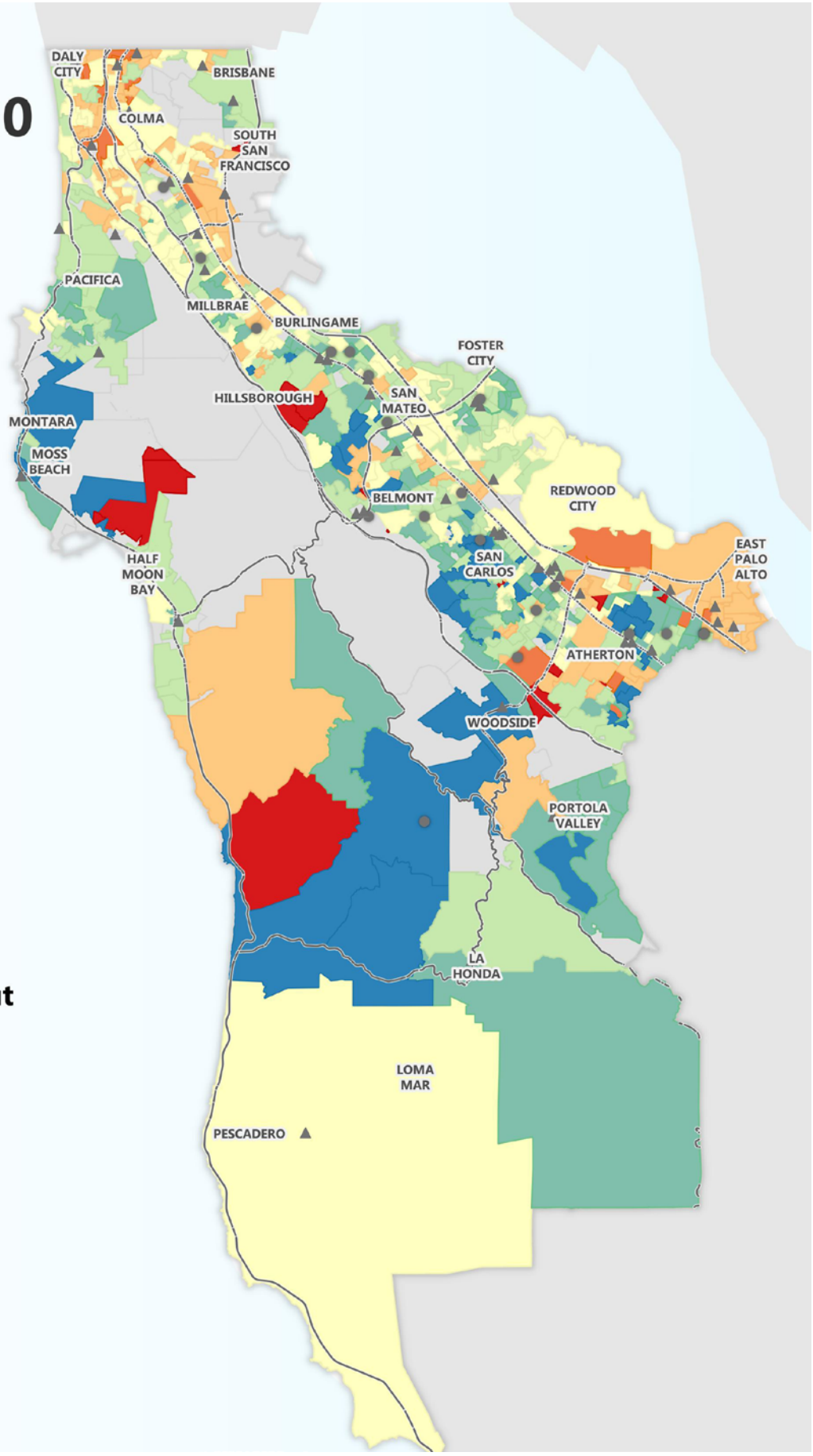
Data Sources: San Mateo Voter Files; American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-year estimates

San Mateo County 2020 Primary Election

Registered Voter Turnout

By Precinct of Residence

Black



Vote Center

- ▲ Vote Center
- ● Drop Box

Eligible Voter Turnout

- 0 - 29.9%
- 30 - 39.9%
- 40 - 49.9%
- 50 - 59.9%
- 60 - 69.9%
- 70 - 79.9%
- 80 - 100%
- No Data

Data Sources: San Mateo Voter Files

Turnout Change: 2016 to 2020 Primary Elections

Utilizing data from the Statewide Database (the redistricting database for the state of California), San Mateo County experienced higher registered voter turnout and eligible voter turnout rates in the 2020 primary election than the 2016 primary election (Table 4 and Table 5). San Mateo County saw an increase of 3 percentage points in registered voter turnout (increased from 50.6% in the 2016 primary to 53.6 % in the 2020 primary) and 6.8 percentage points in eligible voter turnout (increased from 37.5% in the 2016 primary to 44.3% in the 2020 primary).

Note: The Statewide Database uses different methods for identifying racial and ethnic groups and the 2020 primary election turnout rates differ, sometimes widely, from the turnout rates presented in the main portion of this report.

2020 Primary Election Registered Voter Turnout: VCA Counties by Race and Ethnicity

As previously noted, the race and ethnicity of every voter is not available from county voter registration files. In order to examine the change in voter turnout of racial and ethnic groups in the 2020 primary election compared with the 2016 primary election, we used data provided by the Statewide Database (the redistricting database for the state of California) at UC Berkeley.[1] Data by race and ethnicity from the Statewide Database is limited to Latinos and Asian Americans (data for Black and white voters are not provided by the Statewide Database due to data limitations).[2] Note that due to the live nature of county voter registration files, the voter counts for the total population available from the Statewide Database vary slightly from the official certified San Mateo County election results. When comparing across voter sub-groups and over time, the same data source with a consistently applied methodology should be employed.

Data from the Statewide Database show that 41.7% of registered Latinos and 43.8% of registered Asian Americans voted in San Mateo County in the 2020 primary election, compared to 53.6% of all registered voters (Table 4). When looking at registered voter turnout growth between 2016 and 2020 primary elections, Asian-American voters in San Mateo County saw a larger increase in registered voter turnout than the general population, increasing by 3.8%. Latino voters did not experience the same growth, with their registered voter turnout rates decreasing by 0.9% from the 2016 primary election to the 2020 primary election.

Table 4: Registered Voter Turnout by Race and Ethnicity: 2016-2020 Primary Elections*
Voter's Choice Act Counties

	2016 All Voters	2016 Asian American	2016 Latino	2020 All Voters	2020 Asian American	2020 Latino	All Voters Percentage Point Change	Asian American Percentage Point Change	Latino Percentage Point Change
Amador County	58.2%	61.0%	46.9%	65.4%	67.2%	50.5%	+7.2	+6.2	+3.6
Butte County	52.4%	42.6%	38.8%	56.9%	46.4%	40.8%	+4.5	+3.7	+2.0
Calaveras County	55.8%	51.1%	48.0%	62.8%	60.6%	52.1%	+7.0	+9.5	+4.2
El Dorado County	57.0%	48.0%	46.4%	59.8%	50.5%	46.9%	+2.8	+2.6	+0.5
Fresno County	39.4%	32.6%	31.2%	40.4%	34.1%	30.1%	+1.0	+1.5	-1.1
Los Angeles County	38.9%	30.2%	36.7%	37.4%	32.6%	29.8%	-1.5	+2.4	-6.9
Madera County	49.3%	45.2%	35.1%	49.4%	40.0%	32.7%	+0.1	-5.2	-2.3
Mariposa County	60.2%	65.9%	50.3%	63.2%	58.5%	51.3%	+3.1	-7.4	+1.0
Napa County	59.0%	48.0%	46.4%	57.7%	44.3%	41.0%	-1.4	-3.7	-5.5
Nevada County	65.9%	62.8%	56.3%	66.4%	64.6%	54.8%	+0.4	+1.9	-1.5
Orange County	48.5%	40.6%	43.8%	49.5%	41.8%	37.5%	+1.0	+1.2	-6.3
Sacramento County	48.1%	40.4%	42.1%	48.9%	39.8%	39.8%	+0.8	-0.6	-2.3
San Mateo County	50.6%	39.9%	42.6%	53.6%	43.8%	41.7%	+3.0	+3.8	-0.9
Santa Clara County	54.1%	47.4%	47.6%	50.6%	43.5%	40.5%	-3.5	-3.8	-7.1
Tuolumne County	58.6%	53.2%	50.0%	63.6%	60.2%	53.1%	+5.1	+7.0	+3.1
VCA Counties Combined	43.9%	36.9%	38.3%	43.4%	38.0%	32.4%	-0.6	+1.1	-5.9
Non VCA Counties Combined	48.9%	41.1%	38.5%	48.0%	40.4%	33.4%	-0.9	-0.7	-5.1
State Total	46.4%	38.5%	38.4%	45.7%	38.9%	32.9%	-0.7	+0.4	-5.5

Source: Statewide Database

*Registered voter turnout defined as the percent of registered voters who voted.

2020 Primary Election Eligible Voter Turnout: VCA Counties by Race and Ethnicity

Due to disparities by race and ethnicity that are continually present in voter registration rates in California and the U.S., it is important to examine voter turnout rates for those who are eligible to vote (adult citizens) whether registered or not.[3] Table 5 shows the eligible voter turnout for Latinos, Asian Americans, and the general population in all VCA counties in the 2016 and 2020 primary elections. When examining turnout for the eligible Latino and Asian-American voter populations we see patterns of disparate participation in all counties, including in San Mateo County.

In San Mateo County's 2020 primary election, 30.0% of eligible Latinos voted and 24.7% of eligible Asian Americans voted, compared to 44.3% of all eligible voters (Table 5). Asian Americans experienced an 7.2 percentage point increase over their eligible turnout rates in the 2016 primary election. Again, Latino voters did not experience the same turnout growth seen in other demographics, with a 2.1 percentage point increase in eligible voter turnout in the 2020 primary election from the 2016 primary election.

Table 5: Eligible Voter Turnout by Race and Ethnicity: 2016-2020 Primary Elections*
Voter's Choice Act Counties

	2016 All Voters	2016 Asian American	2016 Latino	2020 All Voters	2020 Asian American	2020 Latino	All Voters Percentage Point Change	Asian American Percentage Point Change	Latino Percentage Point Change
Amador County	39.8%	64.8%	17.9%	46.3%	75.9%	20.6%	+6.5	+11.1	+2.7
Butte County	36.3%	13.9%	21.0%	40.8%	17.0%	25.7%	+4.5	+3.1	+4.7
Calaveras County	42.4%	44.3%	28.3%	51.2%	57.2%	35.8%	+8.8	+12.9	+7.5
El Dorado County	43.7%	27.5%	23.8%	50.6%	37.1%	27.0%	+6.9	+9.6	+3.2
Fresno County	28.5%	12.3%	19.2%	30.8%	15.2%	19.6%	+2.3	+2.9	+0.4
Los Angeles County	30.2%	13.9%	24.1%	32.5%	18.0%	21.9%	+2.3	+4.1	- 2.2
Madera County	29.8%	31.7%	17.2%	32.2%	33.9%	18.4%	+2.4	+2.2	+1.2
Mariposa County	44.4%	60.4%	27.1%	50.2%	58.0%	31.8%	+5.8	-2.4	+4.7
Napa County	44.6%	19.2%	27.4%	49.0%	22.4%	28.4%	+4.4	+3.2	+1.0
Nevada County	51.8%	61.0%	30.2%	54.2%	64.6%	32.1%	+2.4	+3.6	+1.9
Orange County	33.5%	19.7%	23.7%	39.2%	26.0%	24.0%	+5.7	+6.3	+0.3
Sacramento County	32.5%	16.4%	23.3%	36.6%	20.1%	25.3%	+4.1	+3.7	+2.0
San Mateo County	37.5%	17.5%	27.9%	44.3%	24.7%	30.0%	+6.8	+7.2	+2.1
Santa Clara County	36.4%	23.7%	25.1%	40.0%	27.9%	24.7%	+3.6	+4.2	-0.4
Tuolumne County	37.5%	49.8%	19.9%	45.5%	53.9%	25.8%	+8.0	+4.1	+5.9
VCA Counties	32.4%	17.2%	23.8%	35.8%	21.9%	22.7%	+3.4	+4.7	-1.1
Non-VCA Counties	33.2%	18.0%	21.2%	36.9%	22.1%	22.4%	+3.7	+4.1	+1.2
California	32.8%	17.5%	22.5%	36.4%	22.0%	22.5%	+3.6	+4.5	0.0

Data Source: Statewide Database, Department of Finance
*Eligible voter turnout defined as the percent of adult citizens who voted

2020 Primary Election Registered Voter Turnout: VCA Counties for Youth

According to the Statewide Database, 36.5% of registered youth voted in San Mateo County in the 2020 primary election, compared to 53.6% of all registered voters (see Table 6). Registered voter turnout for youth decreased by 2.6 percentage points over the 2016 primary election.

Table 6: Registered Voter Turnout by Age Group: 2016-2020 Primary Elections*
Voter's Choice Act Counties

	2016 18-24	2016 25-34	2016 35-44	2016 45-54	2016 55-64	2016 65+	2020 18-24	2020 25-34	2020 35-44	2020 45-54	2020 55-64	2020 65+	Percentage Point Change 18-24	Percentage Point Change 25-34	Percentage Point Change 35-44	Percentage Point Change 45-54	Percentage Point Change 55-64	Percentage Point Change 65+
Amador County	28.0%	28.4%	37.6%	47.3%	63.8%	75.4%	28.5%	35.9%	49.2%	58.8%	70.6%	82.0%	+0.5	+7.5	+11.5	+11.5	+6.8	+6.6
Butte County	28.7%	31.9%	40.3%	48.2%	62.8%	74.2%	30.7%	37.0%	48.1%	55.3%	67.1%	78.6%	+2.0	+5.1	+7.8	+7.1	+4.3	+4.5
Calaveras County	31.4%	27.8%	32.7%	44.8%	62.0%	74.3%	32.7%	34.1%	43.7%	55.5%	70.4%	80.0%	+1.3	+6.2	+11.0	+10.7	+8.4	+5.7
El Dorado County	34.4%	31.4%	39.9%	50.9%	64.2%	76.9%	34.6%	33.6%	44.8%	54.8%	68.6%	79.1%	+0.2	+2.2	+4.9	+4.0	+4.3	+2.2
Fresno County	24.2%	21.7%	28.1%	38.0%	53.2%	64.8%	22.9%	22.9%	29.8%	40.6%	53.7%	65.7%	-1.4	+1.2	+1.7	+2.6	+0.5	+0.9
Los Angeles County	31.4%	28.0%	31.7%	38.5%	47.0%	53.0%	26.3%	27.7%	31.8%	37.7%	44.8%	51.3%	-5.1	-0.3	+0.1	-0.8	-2.2	-1.7
Madera County	27.0%	28.1%	32.6%	43.4%	60.8%	72.8%	22.6%	26.0%	36.8%	47.3%	62.9%	75.0%	-4.4	-2.1	+4.2	+3.9	+2.1	+2.2
Mariposa County	30.5%	36.6%	42.1%	50.8%	65.1%	76.8%	31.6%	35.9%	51.1%	55.5%	69.1%	78.6%	+1.1	-0.8	+8.9	+4.7	+4.0	+1.8
Napa County	40.6%	38.9%	47.9%	53.3%	66.8%	76.2%	34.4%	36.9%	47.3%	56.4%	66.0%	75.8%	-6.2	-1.9	-0.6	+3.1	-0.8	-0.5
Nevada County	41.3%	45.6%	55.0%	58.3%	72.0%	79.0%	37.1%	40.3%	51.6%	60.0%	73.3%	82.4%	-4.2	-5.3	-3.4	+1.8	+1.3	+3.4
Orange County	36.5%	34.0%	36.4%	44.1%	56.3%	68.3%	32.5%	33.2%	38.9%	47.0%	59.3%	71.2%	-4.1	-0.8	+2.5	+3.0	+3.0	+3.0
Sacramento County	32.8%	31.4%	37.0%	44.8%	58.7%	70.6%	28.9%	31.6%	39.6%	47.7%	60.3%	71.5%	-3.9	+0.2	+2.6	+2.9	+1.6	+1.0
San Mateo County	39.1%	36.5%	41.5%	47.2%	57.9%	66.5%	36.5%	39.5%	46.9%	54.0%	61.4%	68.2%	-2.6	+3.0	+5.4	+6.8	+3.4	+1.8
Santa Clara County	40.7%	42.0%	44.5%	51.3%	61.7%	71.6%	34.1%	37.2%	43.2%	50.2%	59.5%	67.8%	-6.6	-4.7	-1.3	-1.1	-2.2	-3.8
Tuolumne County	32.6%	29.5%	37.0%	48.1%	63.9%	76.3%	32.1%	37.9%	47.6%	58.1%	69.1%	79.8%	-0.5	+8.4	+10.6	+10.1	+5.1	v3.5
VCA Counties Combined	33.1%	30.3%	34.5%	42.1%	52.8%	61.5%	28.7%	30.0%	35.6%	43.0%	52.5%	61.2%	-4.4	-0.3	+1.0	0.9	-0.3	-0.3
Non VCA Counties Combined	32.1%	32.7%	38.0%	45.8%	58.7%	69.7%	27.8%	30.9%	39.2%	47.2%	58.6%	69.5%	-4.4	-1.8	+1.1	1.4	-0.2	-0.3
State Total	32.6%	31.4%	36.2%	43.9%	55.8%	65.7%	28.2%	30.4%	37.3%	45.1%	55.5%	65.4%	-4.4	-1.0	+1.1	1.1	-0.2	-0.3

Source: Statewide Database

*Registered voter turnout defined as the percent of registered voters who voted.

2020 Primary Election Eligible Voter Turnout: VCA Counties for Youth

It is important to examine voter turnout rates for those who are eligible to vote (adult citizens), whether registered or not, due to disparities that are continually present in voter registration rates by age. Table 7 shows that youth eligible voter (citizens age 18-24) turnout is consistently lower than the general population in all counties, including San Mateo County (see online appendix for 2020 registration rates and eligible turnout rates for all California counties).

In San Mateo County's 2020 primary election, 31.3% of eligible youth voted, compared to 40.0% of all eligible voters (see Table 7). Youth experienced a 9.2 percentage point increase in their eligible turnout rate from the 2016 primary election to the 2020 primary election.

Note: The citizen voting-age population (CVAP) estimates used in eligible voter turnout analysis for age groups are derived from the 2010 Decennial Census. Necessary data from the Census Bureau needed to update CVAP estimates based on the 2020 Decennial Census was not yet released at the time of this report's publication.

Table 7: Eligible Voter Turnout by Age Group: 2016-2020 Primary Elections*
Voter's Choice Act Counties

	2016 18-24	2016 25-34	2016 35-44	2016 45-54	2016 55-64	2016 65+	2020 18-24	2020 25-34	2020 35-44	2020 45-54	2020 55-64	2020 65+	Percentage Point Change 18-24	Percentage Point Change 25-34	Percentage Point Change 35-44	Percentage Point Change 45-54	Percentage Point Change 55-64	Percentage Point Change 65+
Amador County	12.6%	19.4%	20.6%	27.2%	47.7%	64.6%	13.6%	18.1%	29.6%	39.3%	66.2%	74.7%	+1.0	-1.3	+9.0	+12.1	+18.5	+10.1
Butte County	12.0%	23.3%	27.8%	34.0%	50.0%	62.4%	12.9%	29.2%	36.2%	42.0%	54.5%	57.9%	0.9	+5.9	+8.4	+8.0	+4.5	-4.5
Calaveras County	12.1%	25.1%	22.1%	30.7%	47.4%	64.0%	16.6%	21.6%	39.5%	51.5%	66.6%	67.9%	+4.5	-3.5	+17.4	+20.8	+19.2	+3.9
El Dorado County	13.6%	21.0%	28.6%	39.4%	52.5%	68.9%	19.5%	20.2%	49.4%	53.7%	59.8%	68.1%	+5.9	-0.8	+20.8	+14.3	+7.3	-0.8
Fresno County	12.6%	17.3%	20.1%	26.0%	39.8%	52.4%	12.2%	19.2%	25.0%	29.3%	40.9%	54.4%	-0.4	+1.9	+4.9	+3.3	+1.1	+2.0
Los Angeles County	17.9%	24.5%	27.0%	31.9%	39.1%	45.7%	16.2%	31.0%	29.8%	31.7%	37.8%	42.3%	-1.7	+6.5	+2.8	-0.2	-1.3	-3.4
Madera County	12.4%	13.0%	15.2%	22.3%	40.9%	56.4%	14.3%	13.7%	21.7%	28.3%	47.6%	56.4%	+1.9	+0.7	+6.5	+6.0	+6.7	0.0
Mariposa County	12.9%	28.7%	24.2%	33.6%	47.1%	61.4%	14.2%	20.4%	39.3%	46.5%	61.3%	61.8%	+1.3	-8.3	+15.1	+12.9	+14.2	+0.4
Napa County	20.3%	32.3%	36.6%	38.9%	54.6%	67.3%	23.3%	31.4%	44.1%	42.6%	59.6%	69.1%	+3.0	-0.9	+7.5	+3.7	+5.0	+1.8
Nevada County	18.4%	39.5%	39.9%	42.6%	59.7%	74.8%	20.0%	26.0%	55.0%	54.6%	67.3%	74.5%	+1.6	-13.5	+15.1	+12.0	+7.6	-0.3
Orange County	21.7%	22.1%	24.7%	31.1%	42.7%	56.6%	22.5%	30.6%	31.8%	36.3%	47.2%	55.6%	+0.8	+8.5	+7.1	+5.2	+4.5	-1.0
Sacramento County	16.7%	21.3%	24.6%	32.5%	44.1%	56.9%	16.4%	27.6%	29.6%	35.9%	47.8%	58.0%	-0.3	+6.3	+5.0	+3.4	+3.7	+1.1
San Mateo County	22.1%	32.3%	29.7%	35.9%	45.4%	56.0%	31.3%	43.1%	40.8%	41.6%	46.8%	51.2%	+9.2	+10.8	+11.1	+5.7	+1.4	-4.8
Santa Clara County	25.1%	29.4%	28.3%	35.4%	45.1%	57.4%	23.0%	38.0%	36.0%	39.1%	46.7%	51.3%	-2.1	+8.6	+7.7	+3.7	+1.6	-6.1
Tuolumne County	12.2%	16.3%	20.4%	26.5%	45.5%	63.5%	16.3%	20.6%	31.8%	45.2%	62.0%	68.8%	+4.1	+4.3	+11.4	+18.7	+16.5	+5.3
VCA Counties	18.6%	24.0%	26.3%	32.2%	41.9%	51.9%	17.9%	30.4%	31.3%	34.6%	43.0%	49.3%	-0.7	+6.4	+5.0	+2.4	+1.1	-2.6
Non-VCA Counties	15.8%	21.8%	24.8%	31.9%	43.9%	56.7%	15.9%	24.7%	31.2%	37.3%	47.5%	56.5%	+0.1	+2.9	+6.4	+5.4	+3.6	-0.2
California	17.1%	2290.0%	25.5%	32.1%	42.9%	54.4%	16.9%	27.4%	31.3%	35.9%	45.3%	53.0%	-0.2	-2262.6	+5.8	+3.8	+2.4	-1.4

Data Source: Statewide Database, Department of Finance
*Eligible voter turnout defined as the percent of adult citizens who voted

Appendix Notes

1. Voter data by demographic breakdown were acquired from the statewide database. These data are actual voter records and not representative samples. Due to differences in data collection methods, caution should be utilized when directly comparing California Secretary of State voter data publications with statewide database data. Latinos and Asians are distinguished in the statewide database voter data from the general population by the use of Spanish and Asian surname lists which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish and Asian surnames. Surname matching is not reliable for white, non-Hispanic, and African- American populations, and thus, voter data is not available for these groups. For more information on methodology and limitations, please see: http://swdb. berkeley.edu/ d10/Creating%20CA%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf
2. For information on the statewide database's methodology and data limitations for the identification of race and ethnicity, please see their technical documentation at: https://statewidedatabase.org/d10/Creating%20CA%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf
3. We define eligible voters as those who are adult citizens (whether registered to vote or not). These data were provided by the California Department of Finance.