

# Expanding California's Electorate

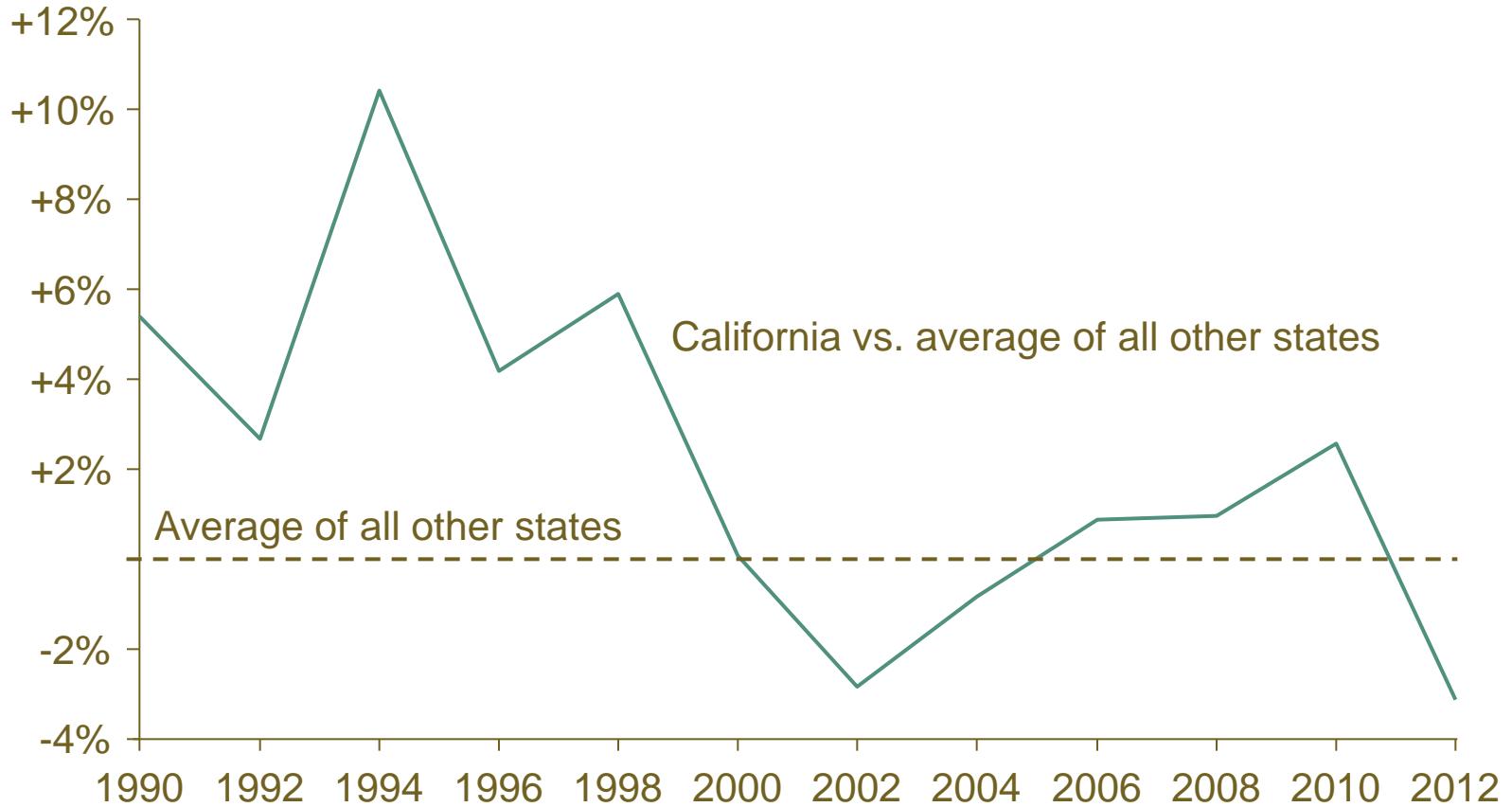
Eric McGhee

Supported with funding from the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

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# California's turnout problem



# California is at the forefront of reforms

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- Online registration
  - Passed in 2011
  - Implemented in September 2012
- “Conditional” registration
  - Passed in 2012 but not yet implemented
- Counting late vote-by-mail ballots
  - Under consideration (SB 29)



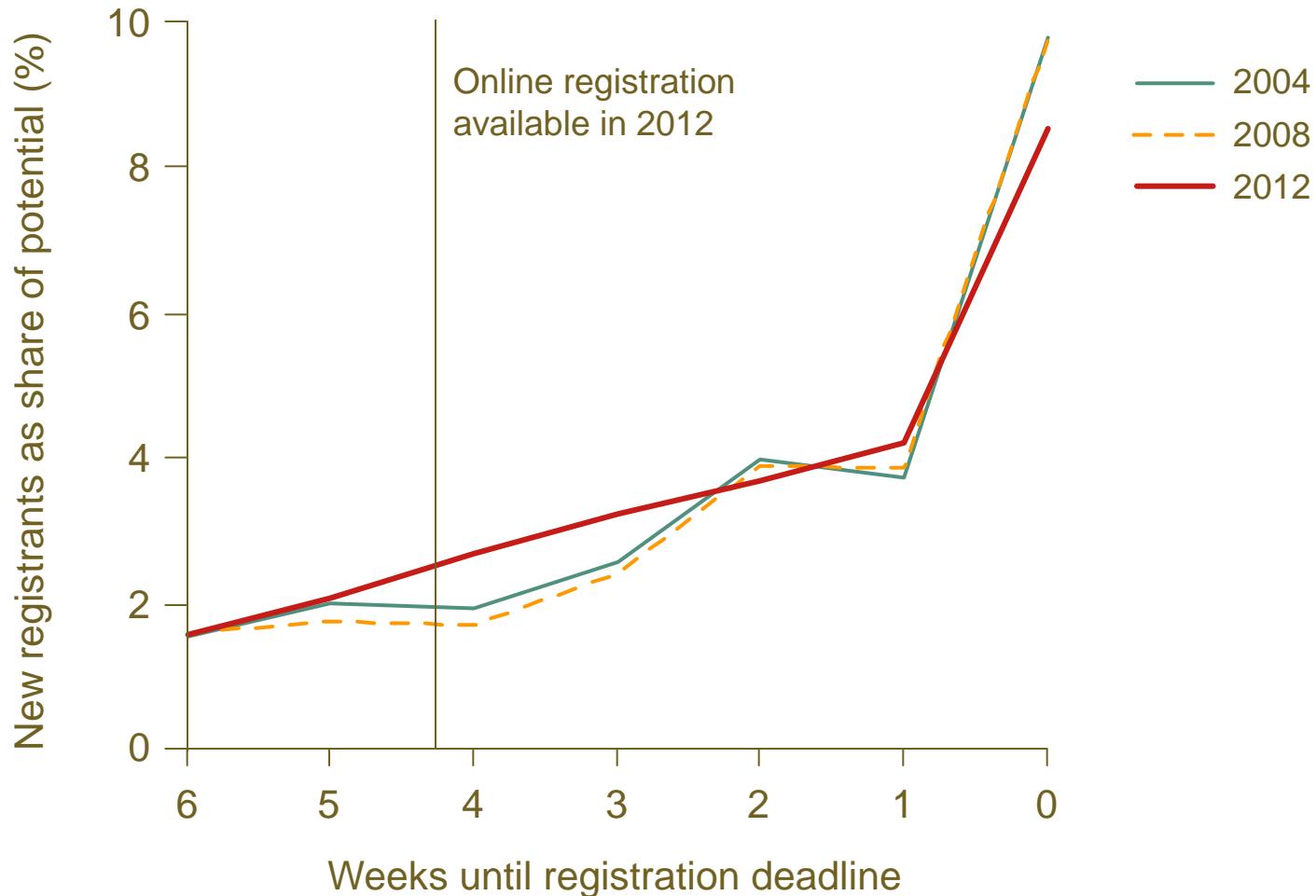
# Online registration

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- Registrants can conduct the entire process online
- More than 50% used it in 2012
- Lower cost, higher accuracy
  - AZ study: 1/28 the cost of paper registration
- Registration effect: number small, timing big



# Many voters registered earlier in 2012



# Conditional registration

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- Allows voters who miss the 15-day deadline to register *and* vote at the same time
  - Ballots are “conditional” (must be verified)
- Likely to have modest effects on turnout
- May add to administrative burden



# States with similar systems have a lot of late registrants

Late registrants as a share of all voters

	Iowa	Minnesota	Montana
2000		19%	
2002		15%	
2004		21%	
2006		13%	
2008	3%	19%	4%
2010		11%	
2012	4%	18%	4%

LA County comparison:

3% = 97,101 late registrants

21% = 679,707 late registrants



# Counting late vote-by-mail ballots

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- SB 29 (Correa): count ballots postmarked by election day and arriving less than 4 days late
- Puts polling-place and VBM voters on more equal footing
- Likely to affect less than 1% of total VBM ballots
- But would keep legitimate votes from being tossed out



# Conclusions

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- Online registration
  - Turnout effects: nonexistent to small (so far)
  - Administrative effects: large and positive
- Conditional registration
  - Turnout effects: small to modest
  - Administrative effects: large and potentially negative
- Counting late VBM ballots
  - Turnout effects: tiny share of all ballots, but large share of uncounted ballots
  - Administrative effects: small



# Policy suggestions

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- Adopt automatic registration
  - Would register citizens who engage with any government agency (e.g., DMV, Covered CA)
  - Voters could opt out instead of having to opt in
  - Could smooth out the “boom and bust” of conditional registration
- Shift from *facilitating* to *mobilizing*
  - California’s election administration laws are about as liberal as they can be
  - Need aggressive outreach to hard-to-reach communities



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# Notes on the use of these slides

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These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.

