

California's Missing Voters

Who Is Not Voting and Why

July 11, 2017

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California's voter turnout has been disappointing

- In the 2016 election, the state's voter registration rate and turnout climbed
- But most recent elections have had historically low turnout
 - Record low turnout in the primary and general elections of 2014
- What are the causes of low turnout? How do we turn it around?

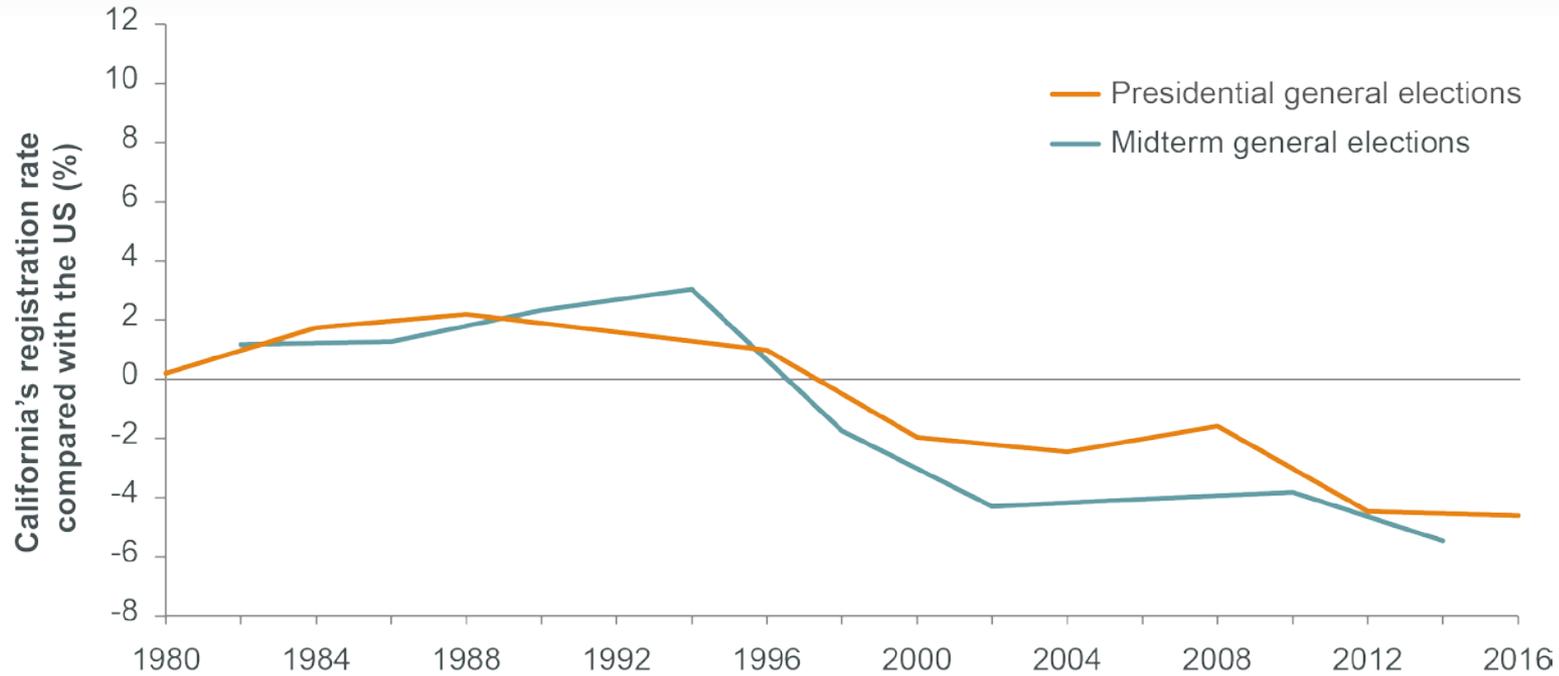
Outline

- Trends in voter participation
- Possible causes
- Policy implications

California faces two challenges in voter participation

- 1) Registration is falling relative to other states

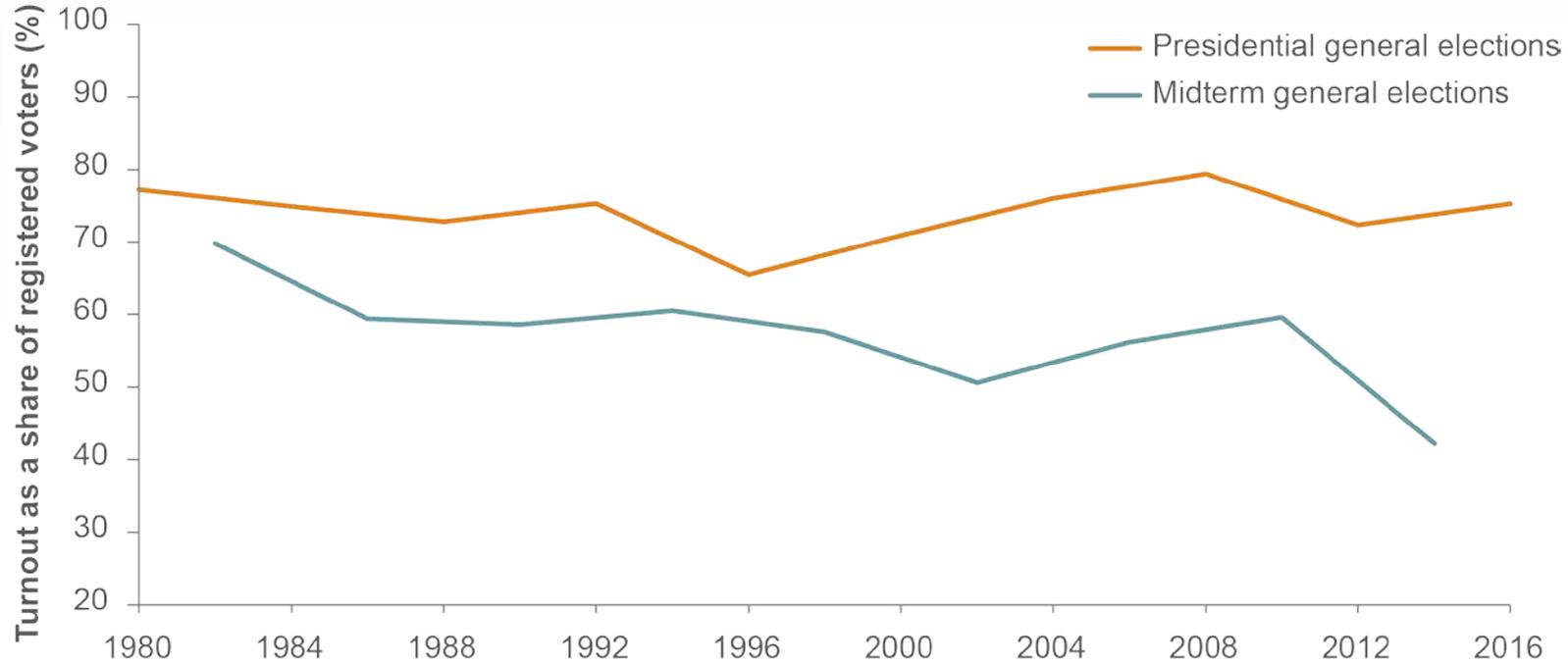
California's registration rate has declined compared to other states



California faces two challenges in voter participation

- 1) Registration is falling relative to other states
- 2) Turnout is falling, but only in midterm elections

Midterm turnout is down among registered Californians



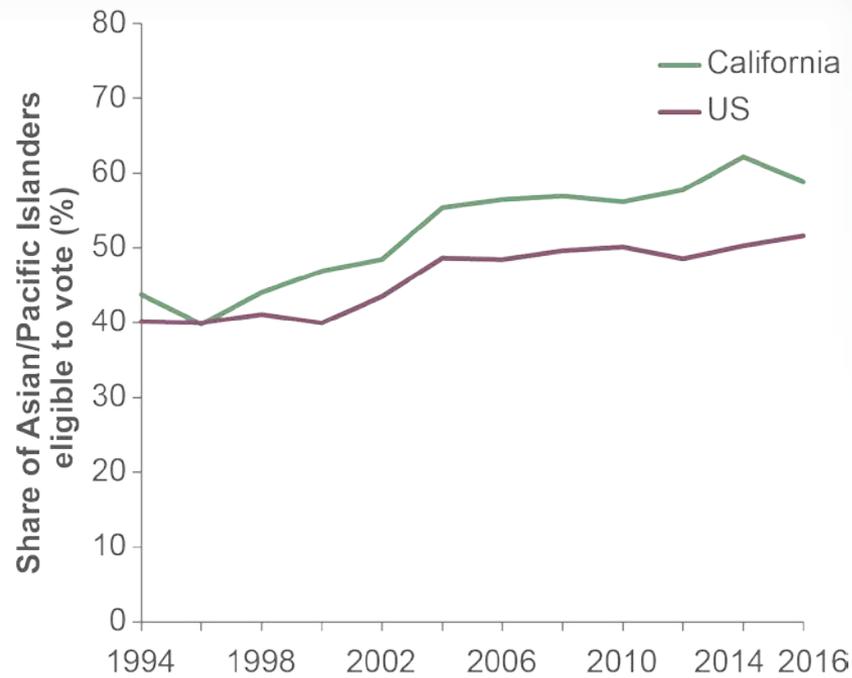
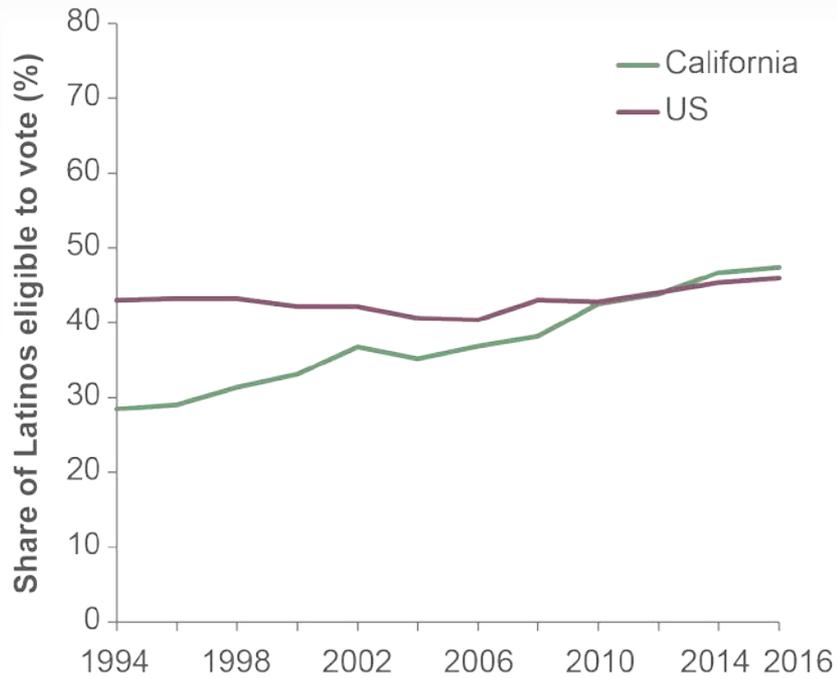
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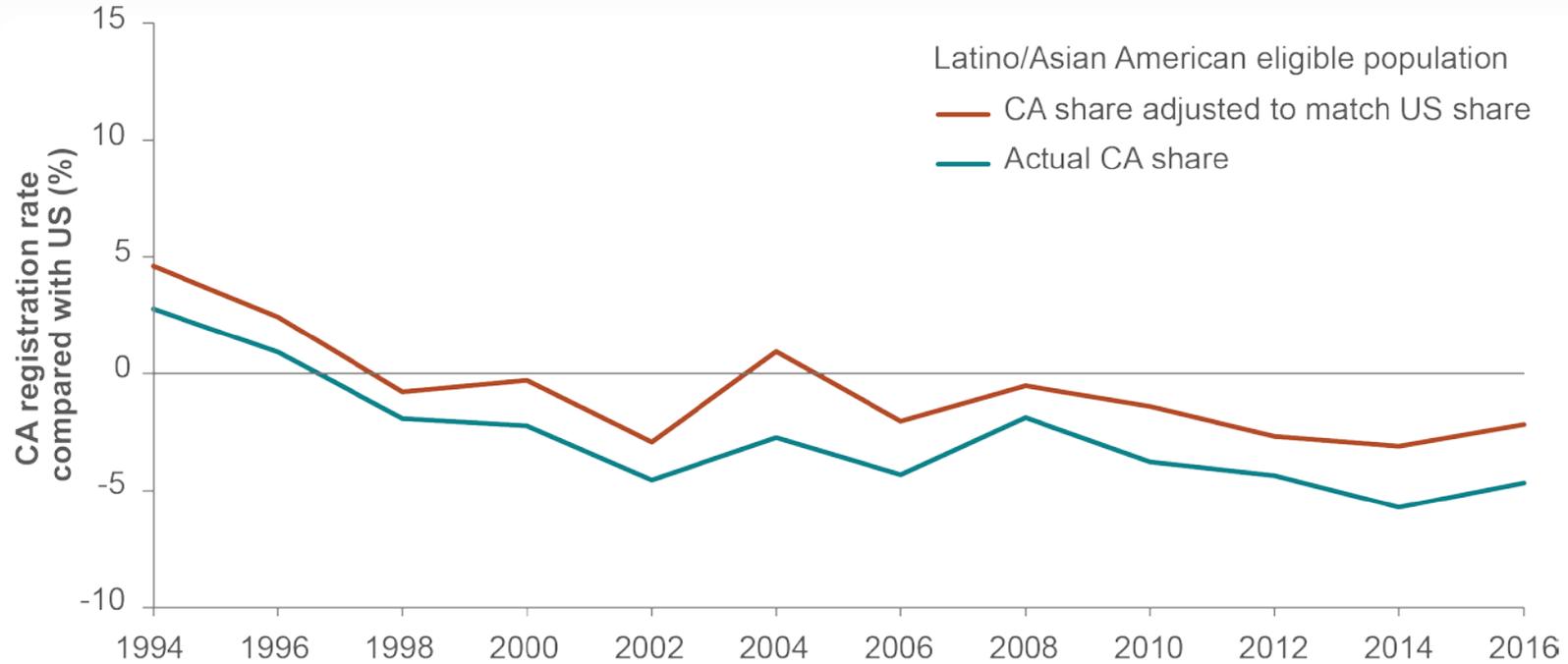
What are the dynamics behind these changes?

- Three possibilities:
 - 1) Everyone has become less likely to register or to vote in midterms
 - 2) Groups with lower registration or turnout are a growing share of the electorate
 - 3) Certain groups are falling further behind in registration or turnout over time
- Registration decline → #2
- Midterm turnout decline → #3

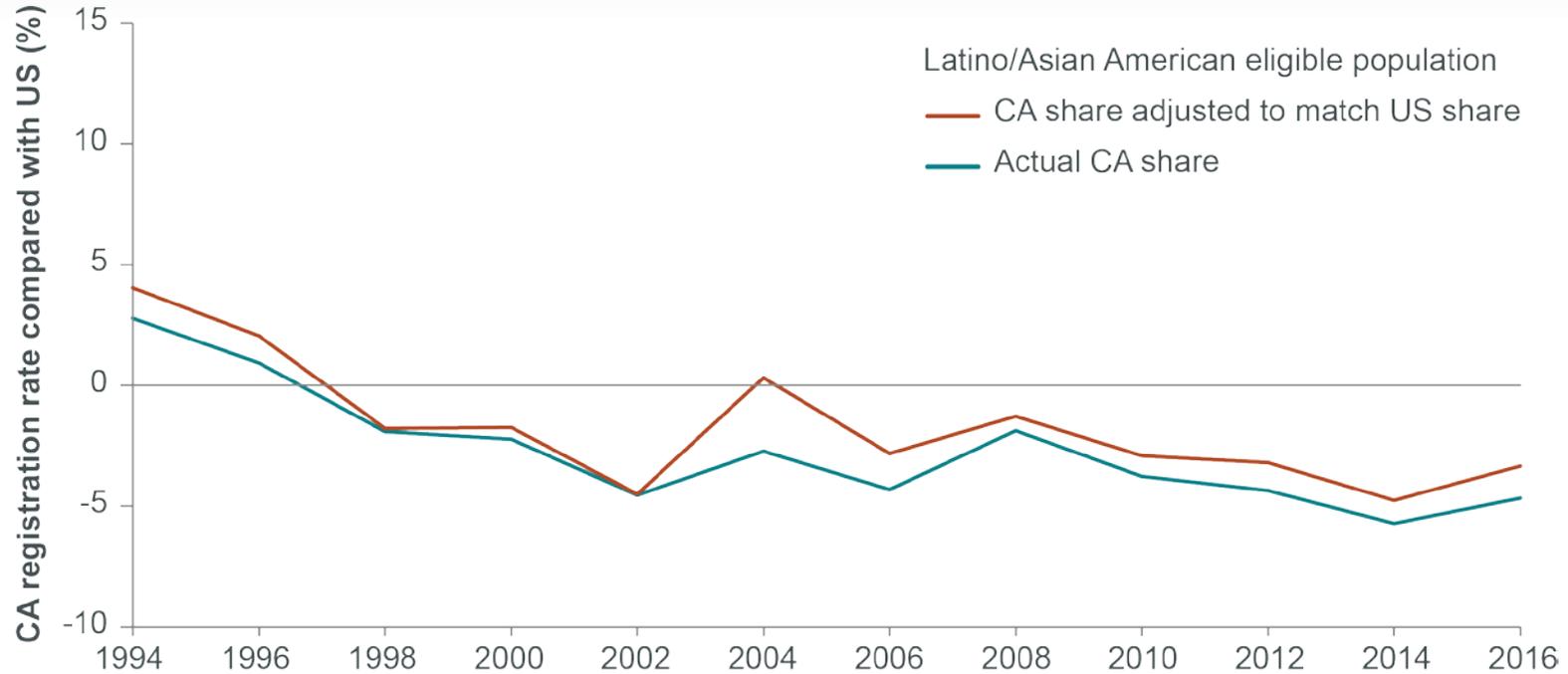
Latinos and Asian Americans in California are becoming eligible to vote faster



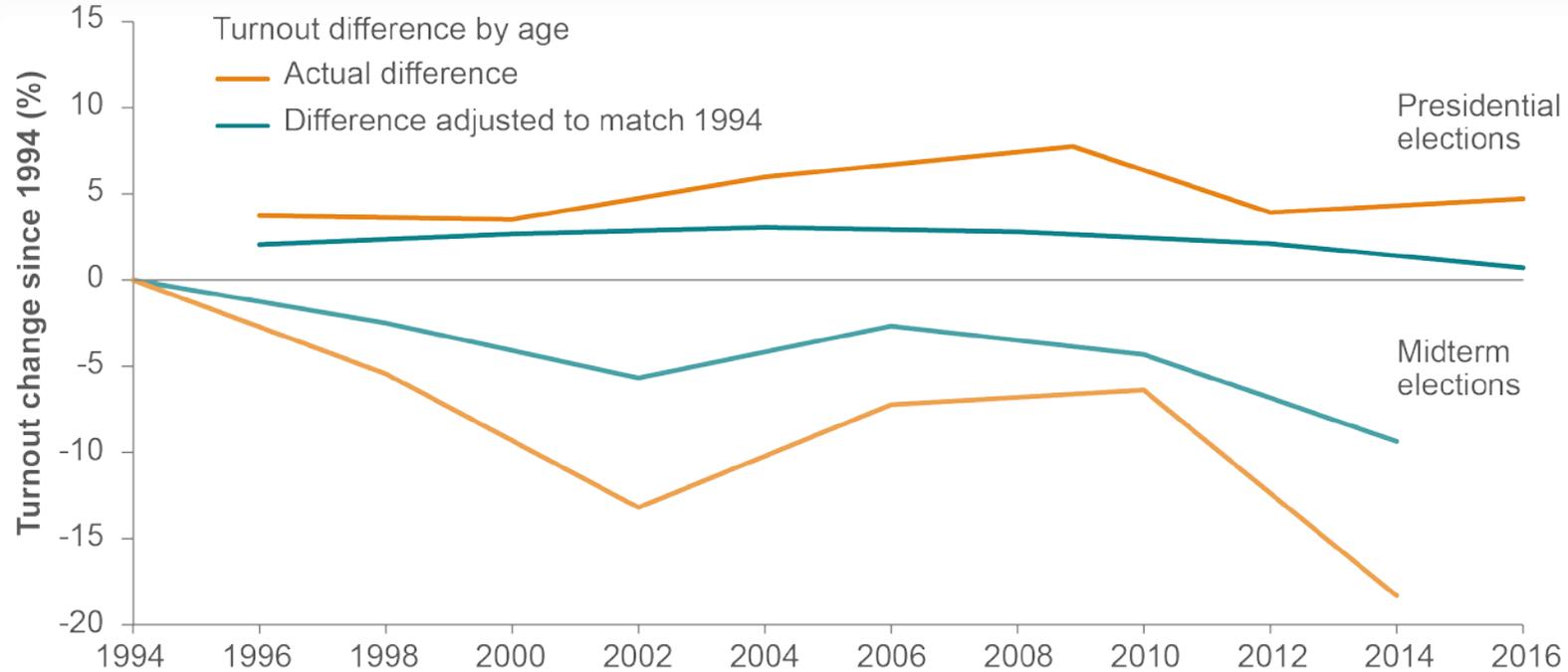
Growing Latino and Asian American populations explain much of the registration decline



Lower registration is mostly related to Latino and Asian American immigrant communities



Declining midterm turnout is largely due to the changing behavior of young voters



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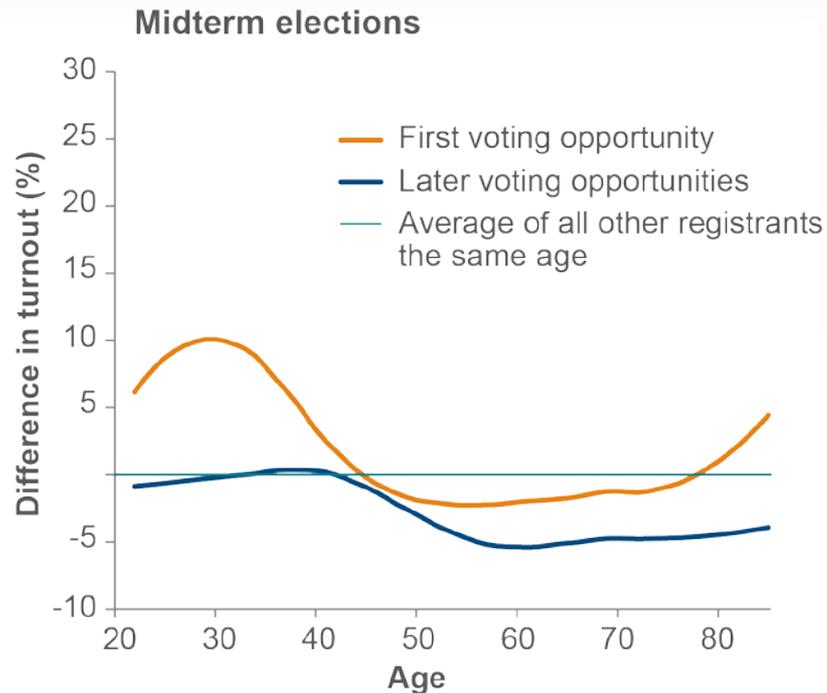
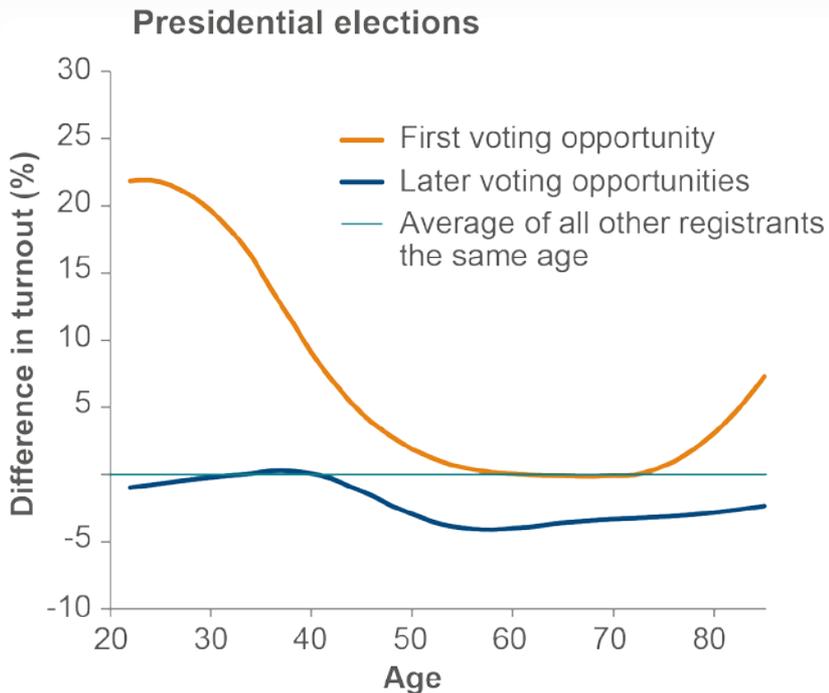
Thinking beyond registration

- California has passed many laws to ease registration
 - Online registration
 - Pre-registration
 - Conditional registration
 - Automated voter registration
- Lower registration among Latinos and Asian Americans may largely disappear
 - But low registration likely reflects low engagement
 - Goal moving forward: mobilization

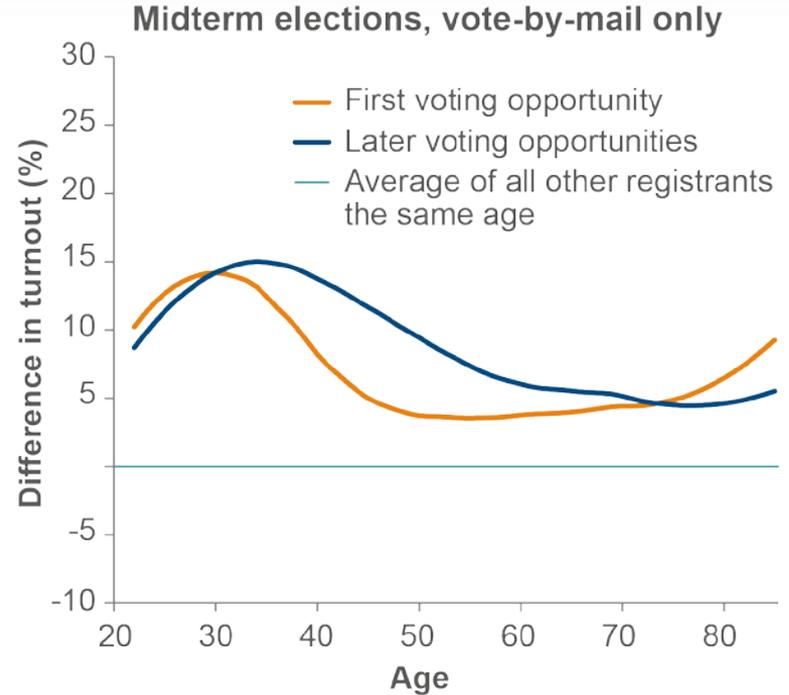
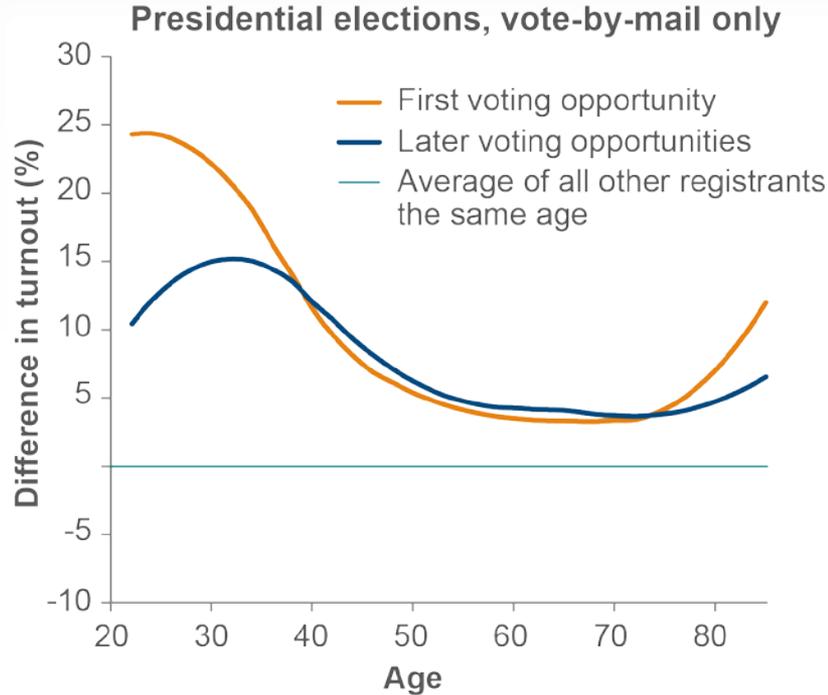
Promoting consistent turnout

- Young people are still voting, but not consistently
 - Participation in a presidential election leads to midterm apathy
- Some evidence points to more consistent voting among vote-by-mail registrants

Turnout is higher in voters' first election than in later elections of the same type



Turnout remains higher for vote-by-mail registrants



Promoting consistent turnout

- Young people are still voting, but not consistently
 - Participation in a presidential election leads to midterm apathy
- Some evidence points to more consistent voting among vote-by-mail registrants
- California is experimenting with an all vote-by-mail system
 - SB 450: default vote-by-mail plus vote centers
 - Might make a difference; a handful of counties will be test cases

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Notes on the use of these slides

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.