

Putting California's Voter Turnout in Context

March 2016

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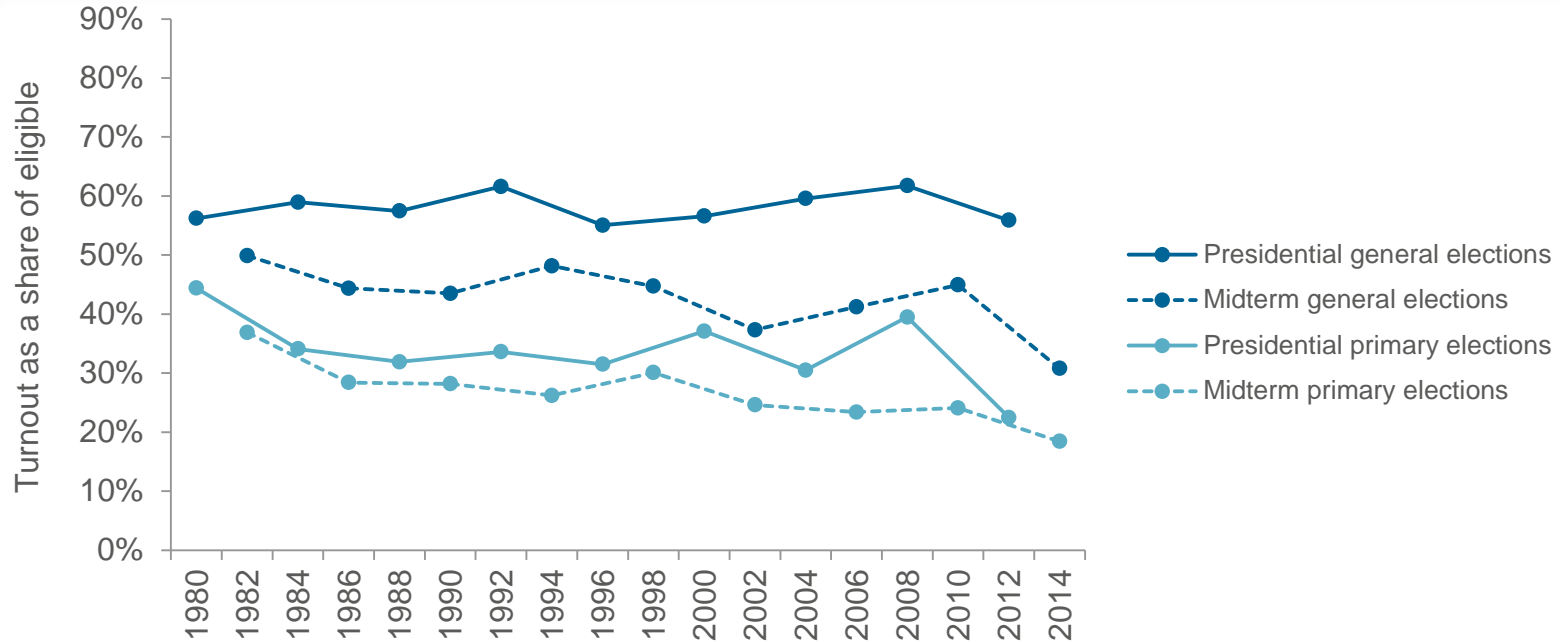
Understanding California's low turnout

- Record low turnout in 2014
 - 18% primary
 - 31% general
- Sudden, or long developing?
- Unique to California, or common to all states?
- What are some new reforms that could be tried?

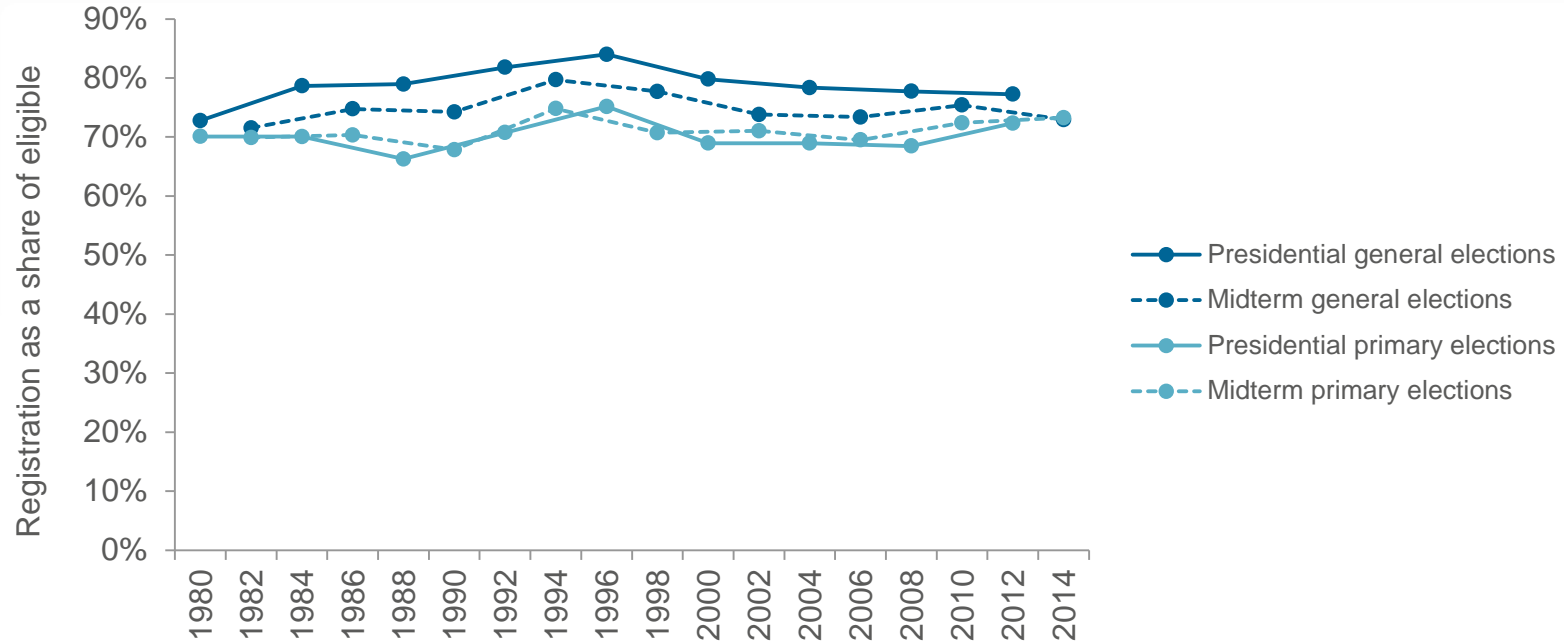
Outline

- California trends
- Trends in relation to other states
- Lessons and reform efforts

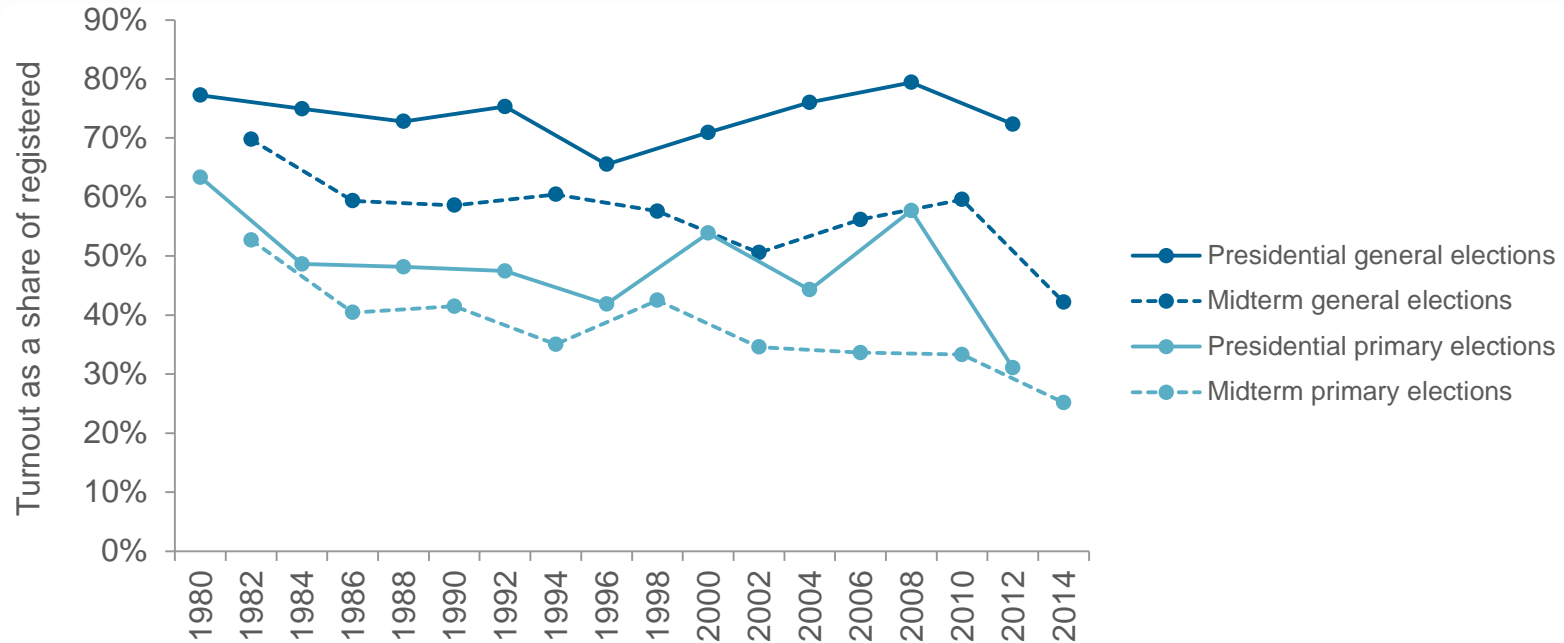
California's presidential turnout has not declined



California's registration rate has been flat



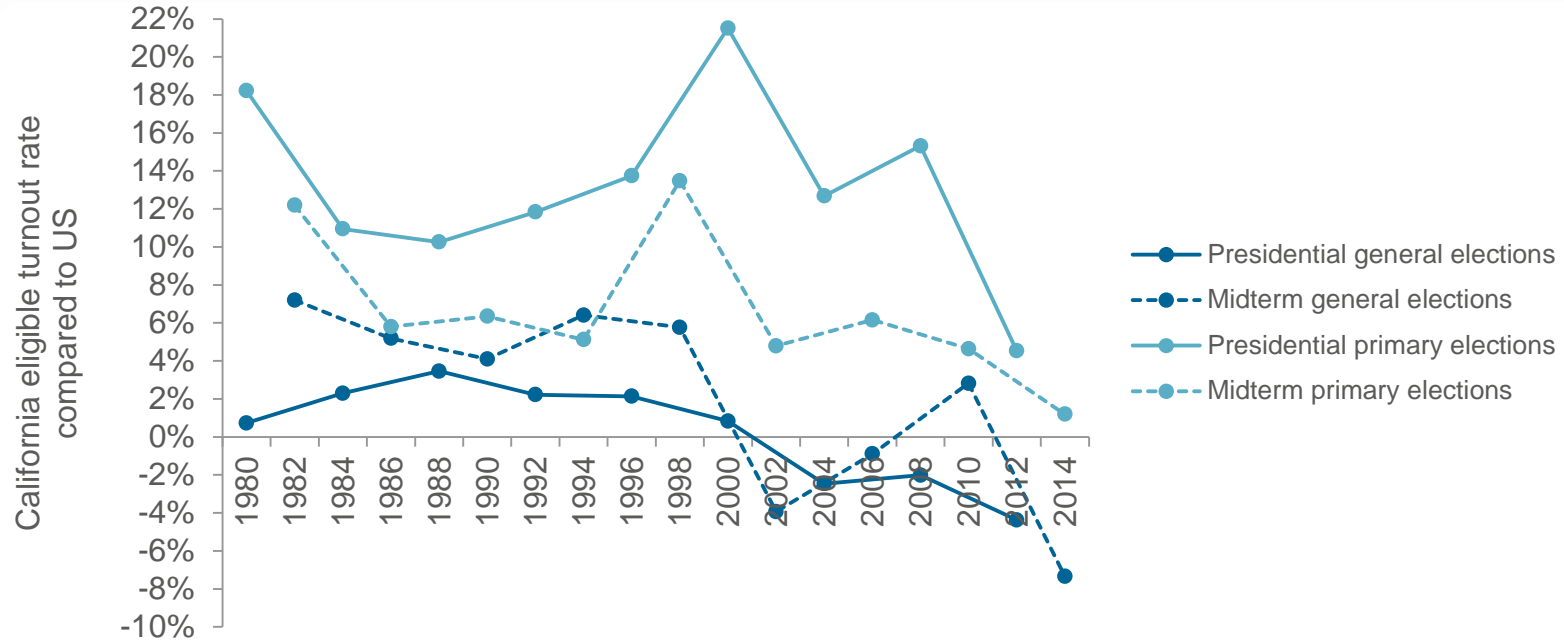
Turnout among registered voters has fallen



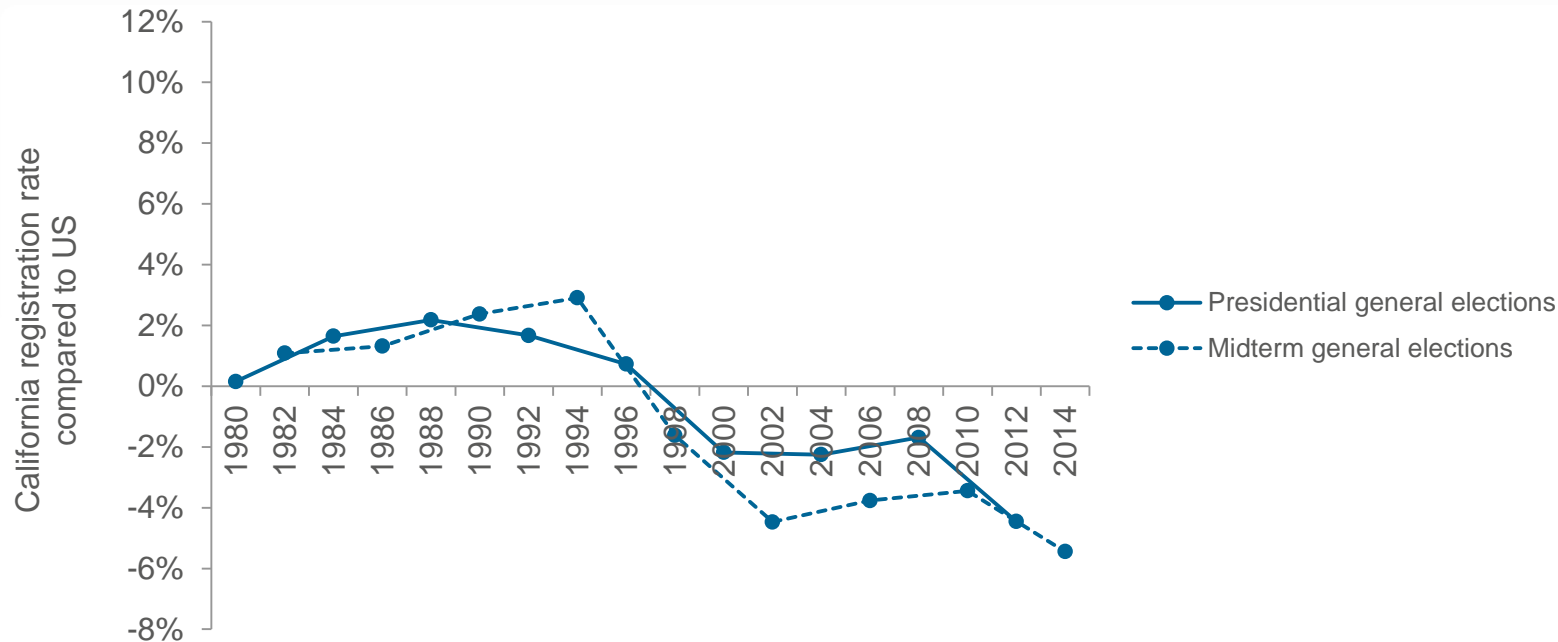
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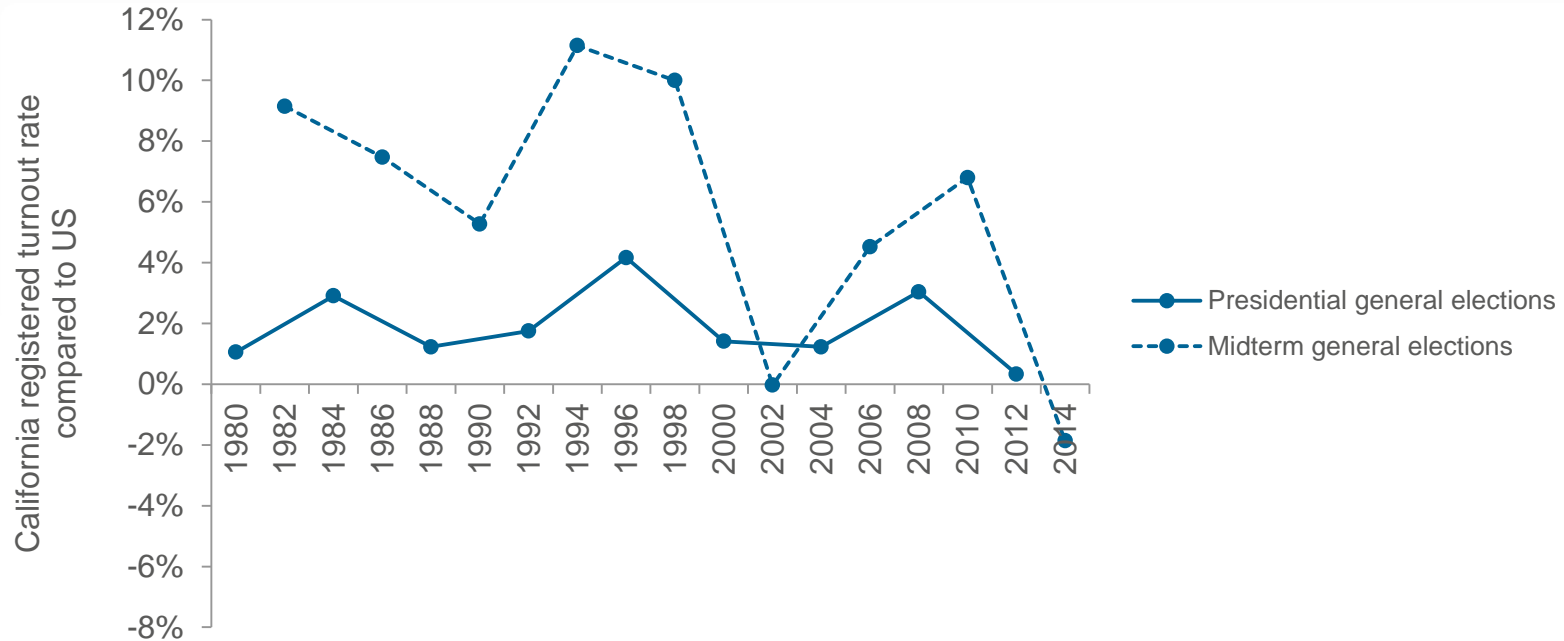
Turnout relative to other states has fallen in all elections



Relative registration rate has declined in both midterms and presidential elections



Relative turnout among the registered has only declined in midterm elections



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Lessons from recent trends

- Participation in fall presidential elections is holding steady
 - Suggests that political motivation is playing a role
- Registration rate is flat, but probably should have climbed
 - Drag on relative turnout in all elections
- Midterm elections are greatest cause for concern
 - Decline in primaries and general elections
 - Decline in absolute terms and relative to other states
- Presidential primary turnout is not yet a clear problem

Recent reforms

- Online registration (fall 2012)
- Pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds (likely summer 2016)
- “Conditional” registration (likely January 2017)
 - Register and vote at the same time after the traditional registration deadline
- Automated registration (2017)
 - Default registration when getting driver’s license

Possible reforms: Vote centers

- “Colorado” voting model (proposed: SB 450)
 - Everyone gets a vote-by-mail ballot
 - Precincts replaced by larger “vote centers”
- Research suggests possible modest increase in turnout, significant cost savings
 - Distance likely not a problem for voters within 5–10 miles

Possible reforms: Civic education

- Acculturate young people earlier and more aggressively
- California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning
 - Led by Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye
- Best civic education connects voting to volunteering and activism among young people
- Some studies have found notable increases, though randomized trials are rare

The path forward

- Need to identify and reach out to segments of the electorate with the greatest turnout deficit
- Mobilization will be key, despite (or perhaps because of) aggressive reforms

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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.