Equity in Voter Turnout after Pandemic Election Policy Changes

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Pandemic policy: more mail and less in-person voting

- Reduce risk of exposure
- Reduce number of in-person locations
- Reduce pressure on in-person locations
Did the changes affect voting equity?

- Key reform goal: ending the “exclusive electorate” by closing the “turnout gap”
- Evidence: All vote-by-mail raises total turnout
  - In-person consolidation is more mixed
- Question: Does it improve the turnout gap?
  - Voters of color
  - Young people
Equity in three different contexts

- 2020 general election: universal vote-by-mail
- 2020 LA primary: universal vote-by-mail
- 2020 general election: in-person consolidation
The pandemic and voting-by-mail

Results: universal vote-by-mail and equity

Results: in-person voting options and equity

Conclusions and recommendations
States relaxed access to mail ballots

- 9 states removed restrictions on signing up
- 15 states mailed every voter an *application*
- 7 states and DC mailed every voter a *ballot*
  - California was one of these states
Many states changed access to mail ballots for 2020
California took a varied approach to the pandemic...

- Mailed ballots to all active voters in all counties
  - Will continue under AB 37

- One of five approaches to in-person voting
  - Traditional polling place system (16)
  - Consolidated polling places accessible to neighborhood (7)
  - Consolidated polling places accessible to anyone in county (17)
  - Voter’s Choice Act (15)
  - All vote-by-mail with no polling places (3)
...across counties
• The pandemic and voting-by-mail
• Results: universal vote-by-mail and equity
• Results: in-person voting options and equity
• Conclusions and recommendations
Universal VBM was good for youth, mostly good for people of color
Mail ballots in LA 2020 primary usually hurt turnout gap

Sending ballots always increased turnout, but increased it more for seniors and non-Hispanic whites

![Effect of sending mail ballots (pp)](chart)
• The pandemic and voting-by-mail
• Results: universal vote-by-mail and equity
• Results: in-person voting options and equity
• Conclusions and recommendations
Changing in-person options often worsened turnout gap for VBM registrants...
...and in-person registrants
- The pandemic and voting-by-mail
- Results: universal vote-by-mail and equity
- Results: in-person voting options and equity
- Conclusions and recommendations
Conclusions/recommendations

- Universal VBM: modest improvement in fall elections
  - Primary elections more complicated

- Consolidating in-person: some worsened equity
  - Includes Voter’s Choice Act consolidation

- Recommendations
  - More outreach to underrepresented groups in primaries
  - More outreach to underrepresented groups about in-person voting
  - Possible rethinking of in-person consolidation
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.