

# How the Voter's Choice Act Changed Turnout in California

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Eric McGhee, with research support from  
Jennifer Paluch



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# The Voter's Choice Act (VCA) is a key voting reform package

- All vote-by-mail
- Fewer, professionally-staffed “vote centers”
  - Each available to every county resident
- Drop boxes 28 days before election
- Early voting 10 days before, ramping up 3 days before
- Formal engagement with the community during the transition

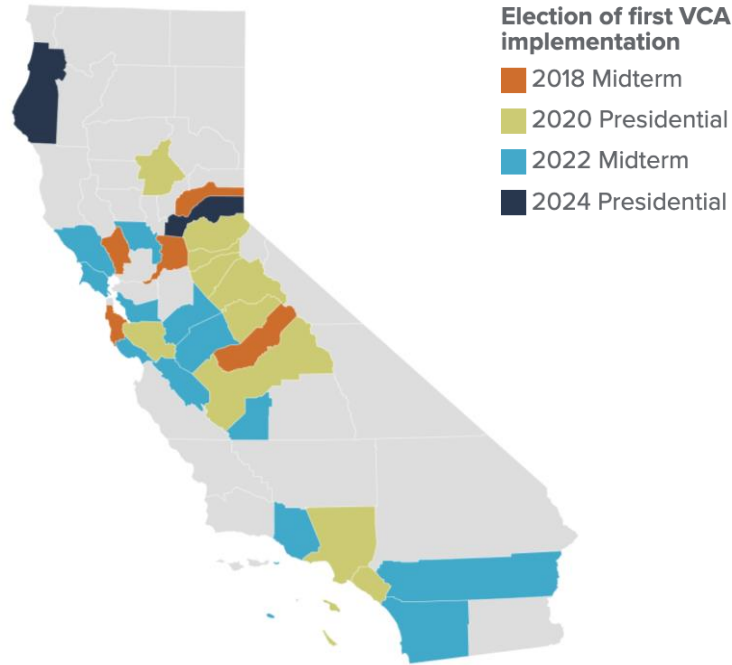
# VCA reduces in-person voting options and increases drop box density

- Traditional polling places: 1 per ~1000 registered voters
- Vote centers
  - 1 per 50K registered voters, 10 days prior
  - 1 per 10K registered voters, 3 days prior
- Drop box requirements for every jurisdiction
  - 1 per 30K registered voters or 2 total, whichever is larger
- Drop box requirements for VCA counties
  - 1 per 15K registered voters or 2 total, whichever is larger

# Counties decide whether to adopt the VCA

- All the changes must be adopted together
- Universal vote-by-mail in California no longer makes the VCA special
  - Since the pandemic, *everyone* gets a mail ballot
  - VCA is now about a different *in-person* voting experience

# VCA counties now cover most parts of the state and most voters



# What effects did the VCA have on turnout, and why?

- Has *overall* turnout increased or declined under the VCA?
- Has the VCA especially improved turnout for young voters and voters of color?
- Why do we see the patterns that we do?
  - Distance to voting
  - Disruption
  - Length of time with the VCA

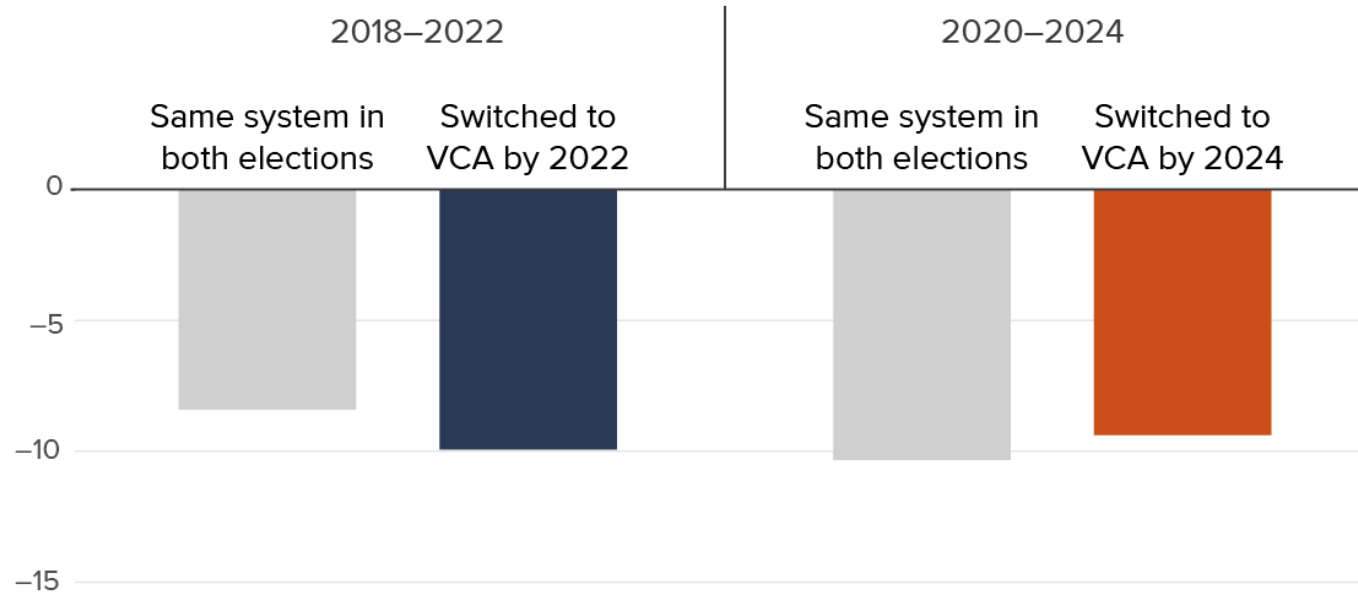
# What elections and groups do we look at?

- Election comparisons
  - 2018 midterm to 2022 midterm
  - 2020 presidential to 2024 presidential
- Types of counties
  - VCA-switching: those that changed to VCA between elections
  - Control: any county that did not switch
- Types of voters
  - Continuing: registered in two separate election years
  - Young: 18- to 19-year-olds who are new to voting

# Overall effects for continuing voters

# Turnout struggled under the VCA in 2022 but not 2024

Turnout change (%)

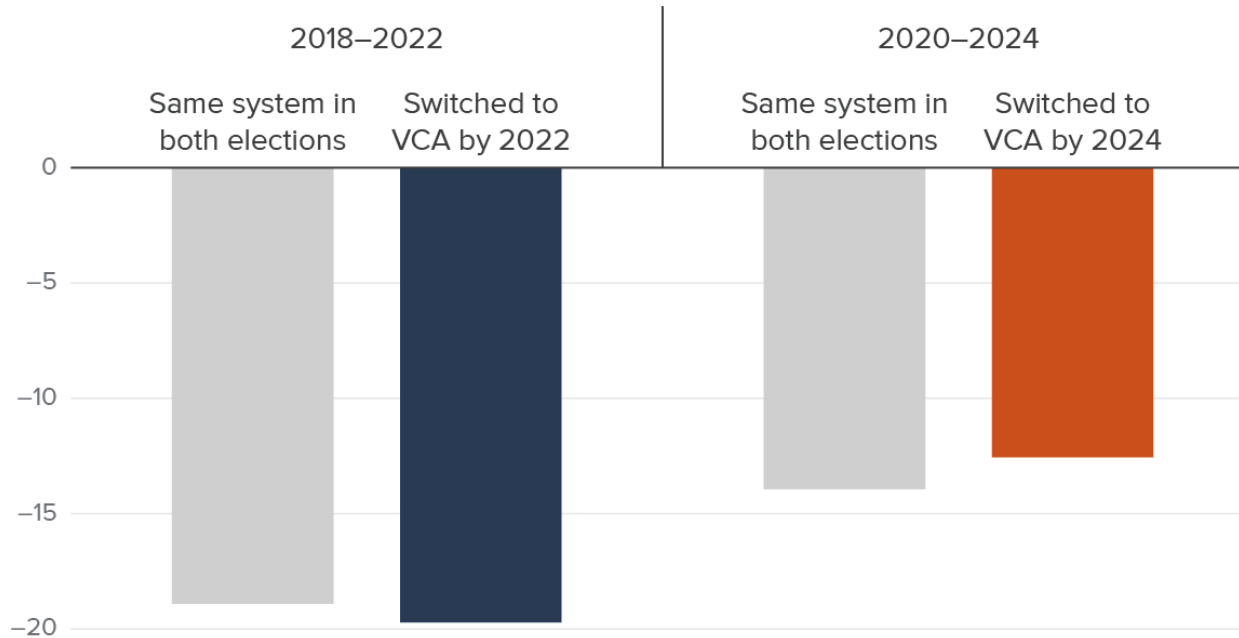


# Overall effects for young voters



# Young voter turnout struggled under the VCA in 2022 but not 2024

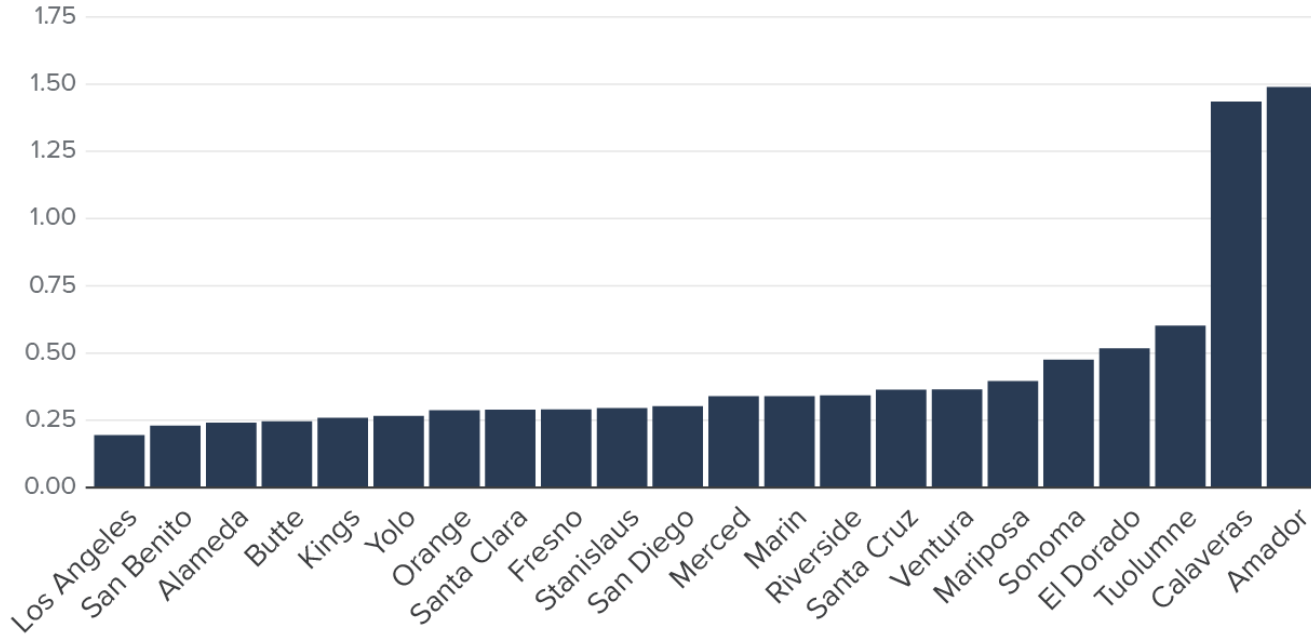
Turnout change (%)



**Does distance explain the change in turnout for continuing voters?**

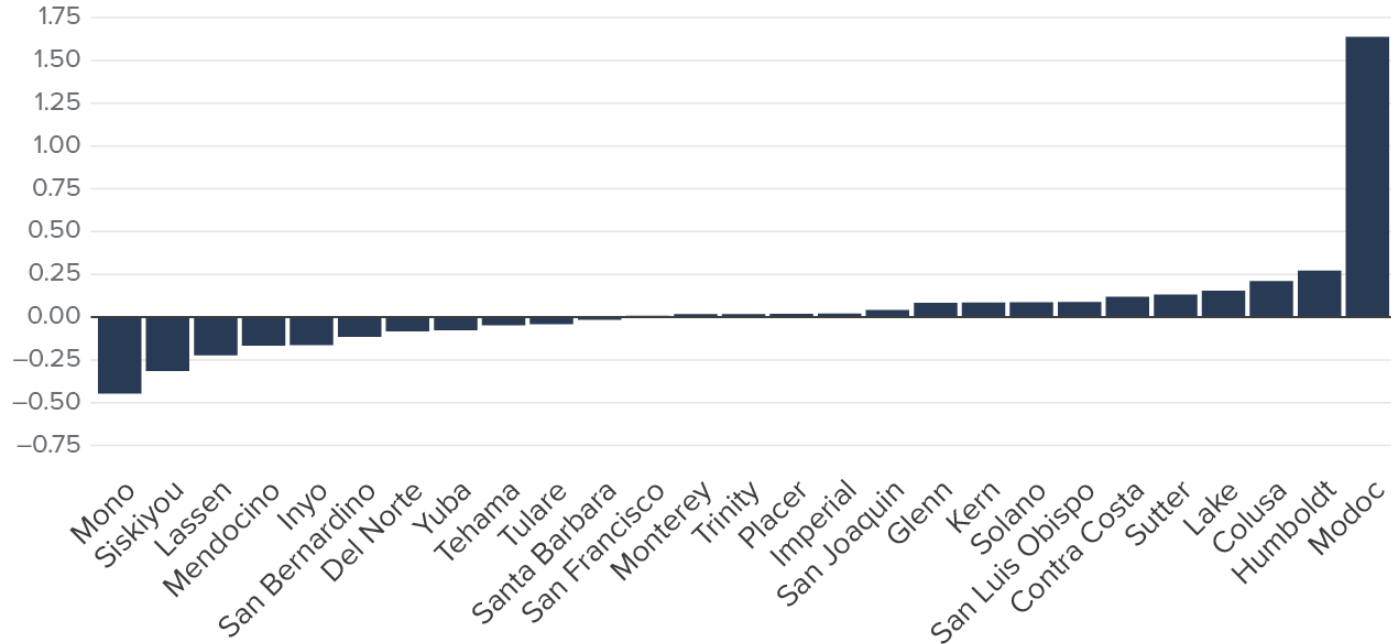
# The VCA increases typical distance to voting

Change in median distance (miles)



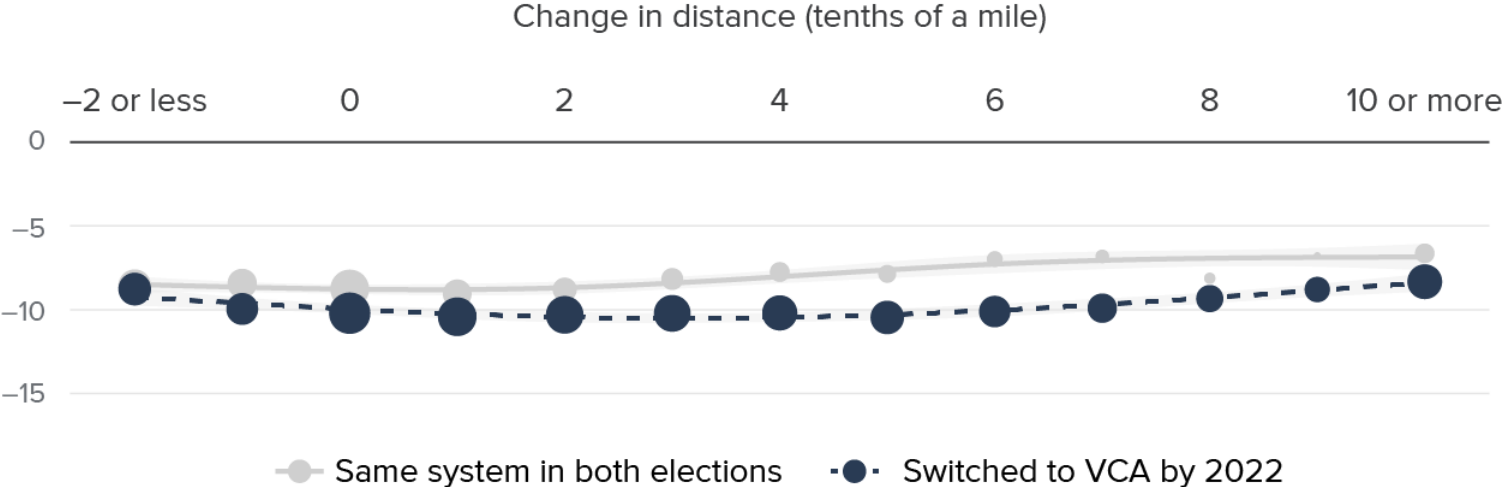
# Without the VCA, distances don't change much

Change in median distance (miles)



# Distance to in-person voting effects are small

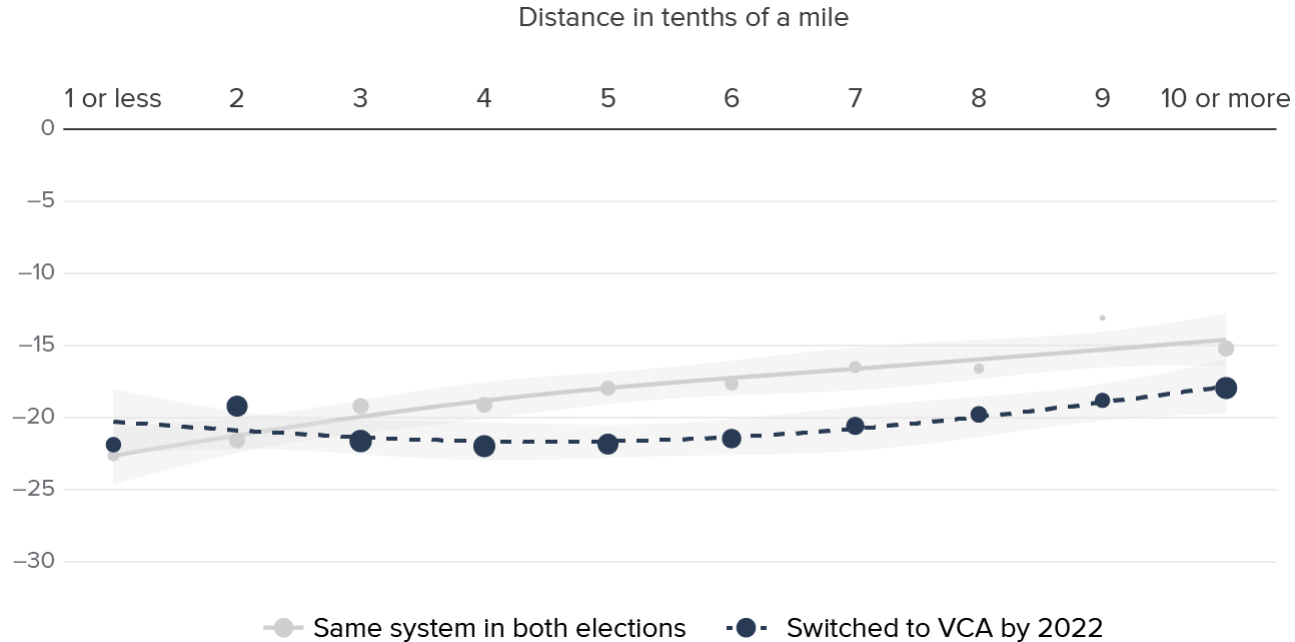
Turnout change, 2022–2018 (%)



**Does distance explain the difference  
in turnout among young voters?**

# Distance to voting had small effects on young voters

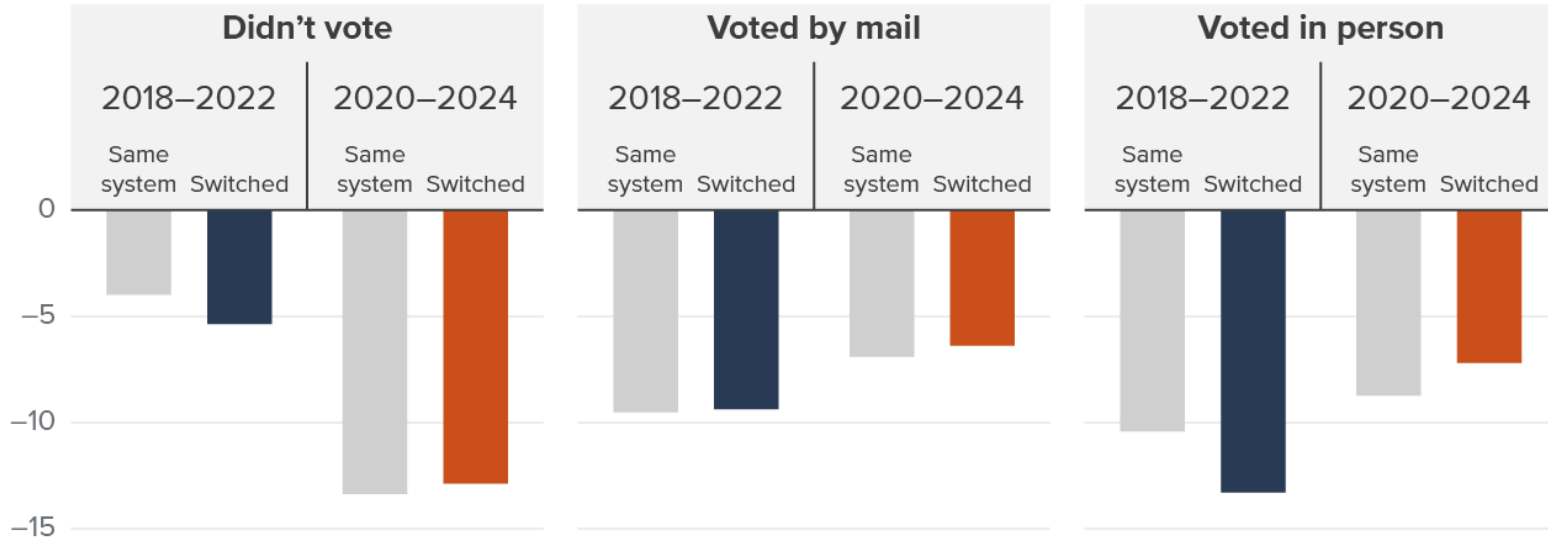
Turnout change, 2022–2018 (%)



# Does disruption to voting explain changes among continuing voters?

# VCA disruption to voting mattered for midterm turnout

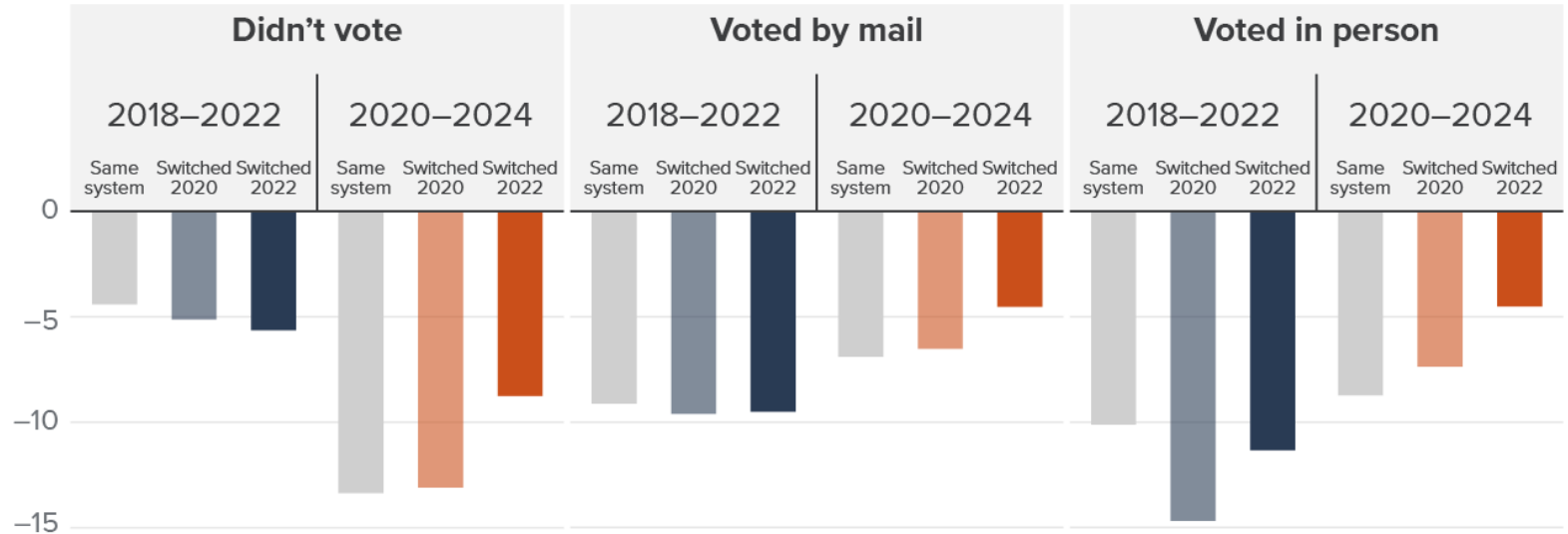
Turnout change (%)



**How does time with the VCA affect turnout among continuing voters?**

# Longer experience with the VCA did not improve turnout

Turnout change (%)



# Conclusions and recommendations

# Conclusions

- Mixed effects
  - ↓ midterm; ↑ presidential; small overall
- Some negative effects for Latino and Black voters
- Possible explanations
  - **Distance to voting:** small effects
  - **Disruption:** sometimes large effects
  - **Time with reform:** maybe opposite of expected

# Recommendations

- More/better outreach to voters who prefer voting in person
- Better understanding of VCA voter experience
  - Especially for Latino and Black voters
- More in-person voting locations may not help with turnout in an all vote-by-mail state
- Local context may color these patterns
  - Lots of county variation besides the VCA

## 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:

Eric McGhee ([mcghee@ppic.org](mailto:mcghee@ppic.org))

Thank you for your interest in this work.