

How Greater Vote-by-Mail Influences California Voter Turnout

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Pandemic voting presents unprecedented challenges

- Voters risk virus transmission by voting in person
- Poll workers run same risks but encounter even more people
 - More likely to come from vulnerable populations for the virus
- Will be very difficult to staff the same number of in-person locations

Solutions involve less in-person voting

- Most states encouraging voting by mail to address pandemic
- California mailing every voter a vote-by-mail ballot
 - Many counties will limit in-person options
 - More drop boxes and early voting options
- What happens when a county shifts to this model?

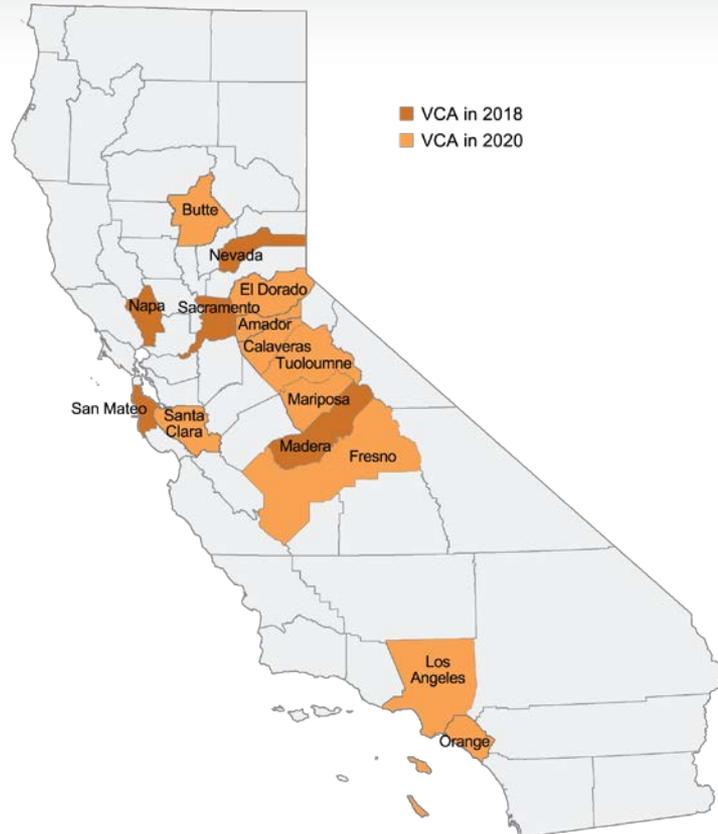
Outline

- Test case: the California Voter's Choice Act
- Who votes with higher vote by mail?
- When and how do voters vote?
- Conclusions and policy recommendations

The pandemic model has been tested

- The California “Voter’s Choice Act” (VCA) has been used in 15 counties

VCA implemented in 15 counties in 2 waves



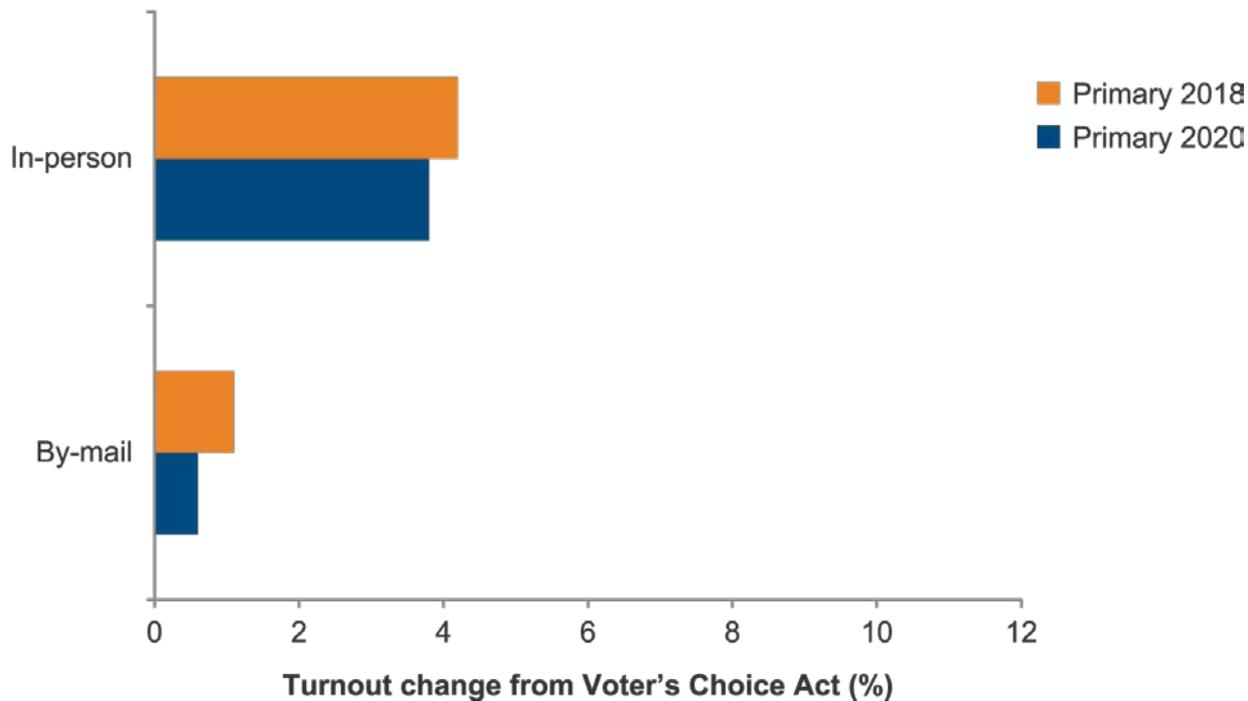
The pandemic model has been tested

- The California “Voter’s Choice Act” has been used in 15 counties
- The model
 - All voters receive a vote-by-mail ballot
 - “Vote centers” replace polling places
 - Some early voting and drop boxes must be available
- Closest comparison to voting this fall

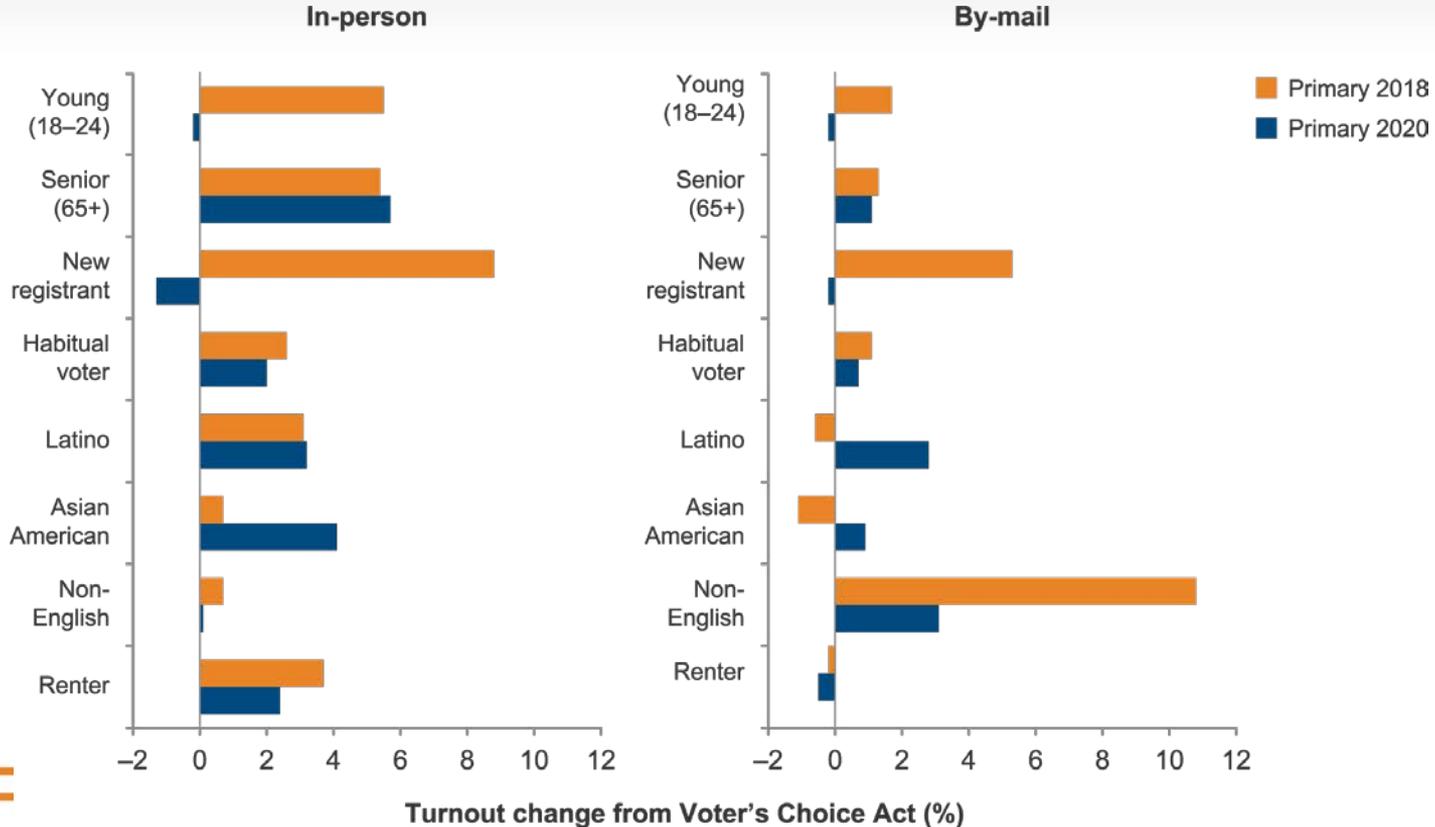
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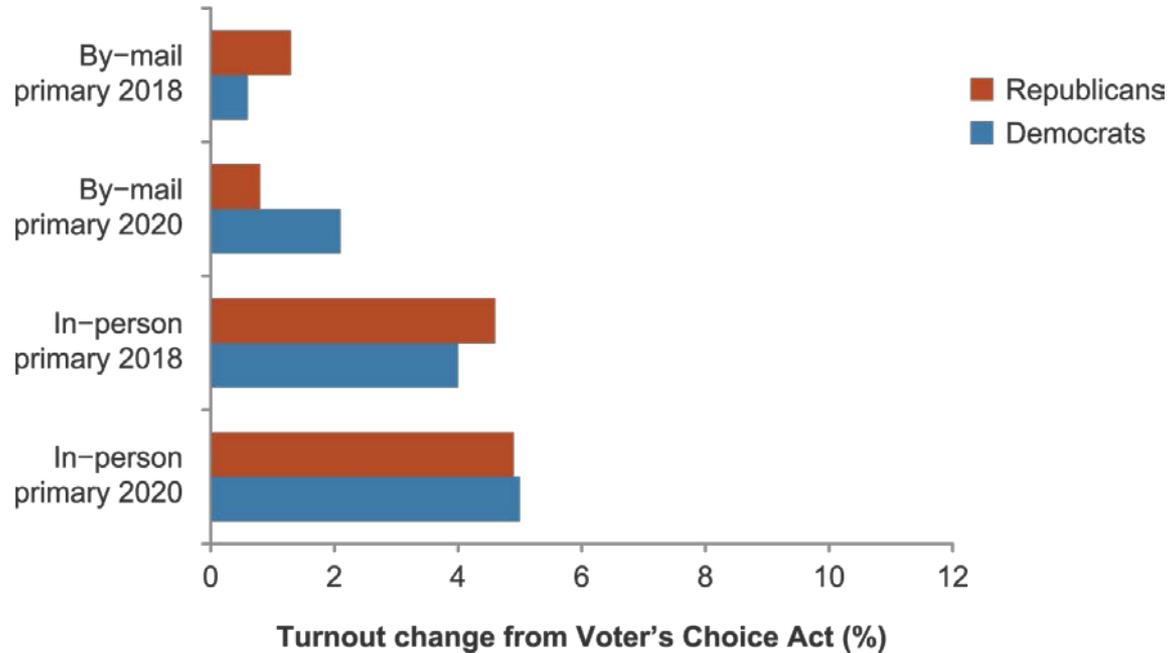
The VCA boosted turnout overall



Turnout has increased for many but not all groups



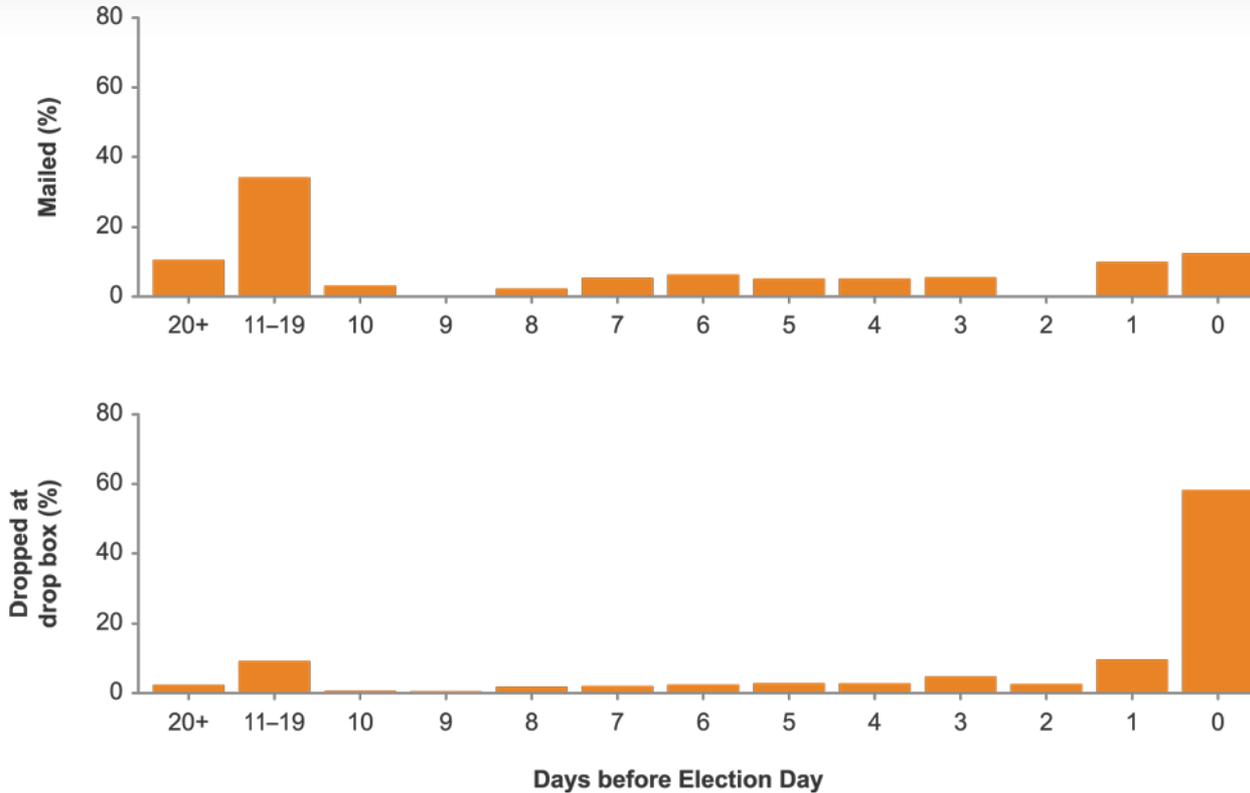
Partisan differences in turnout change are small



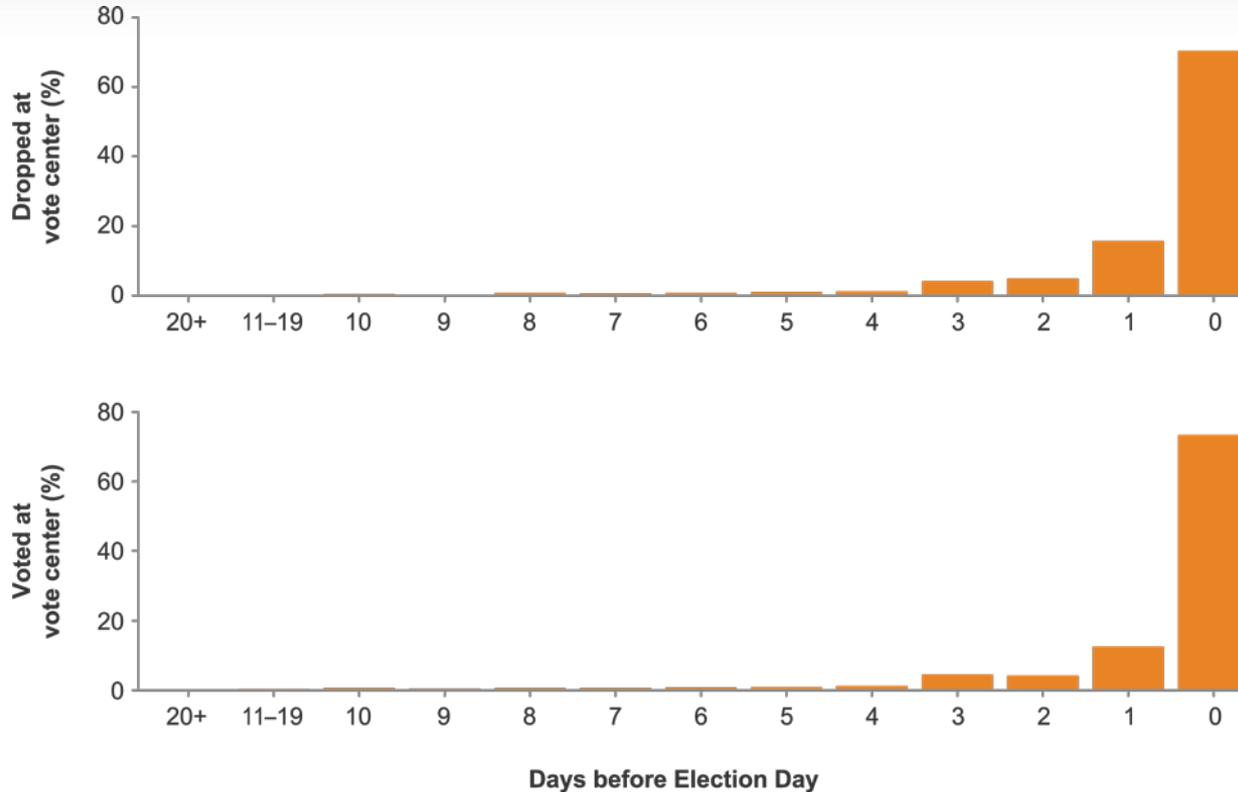
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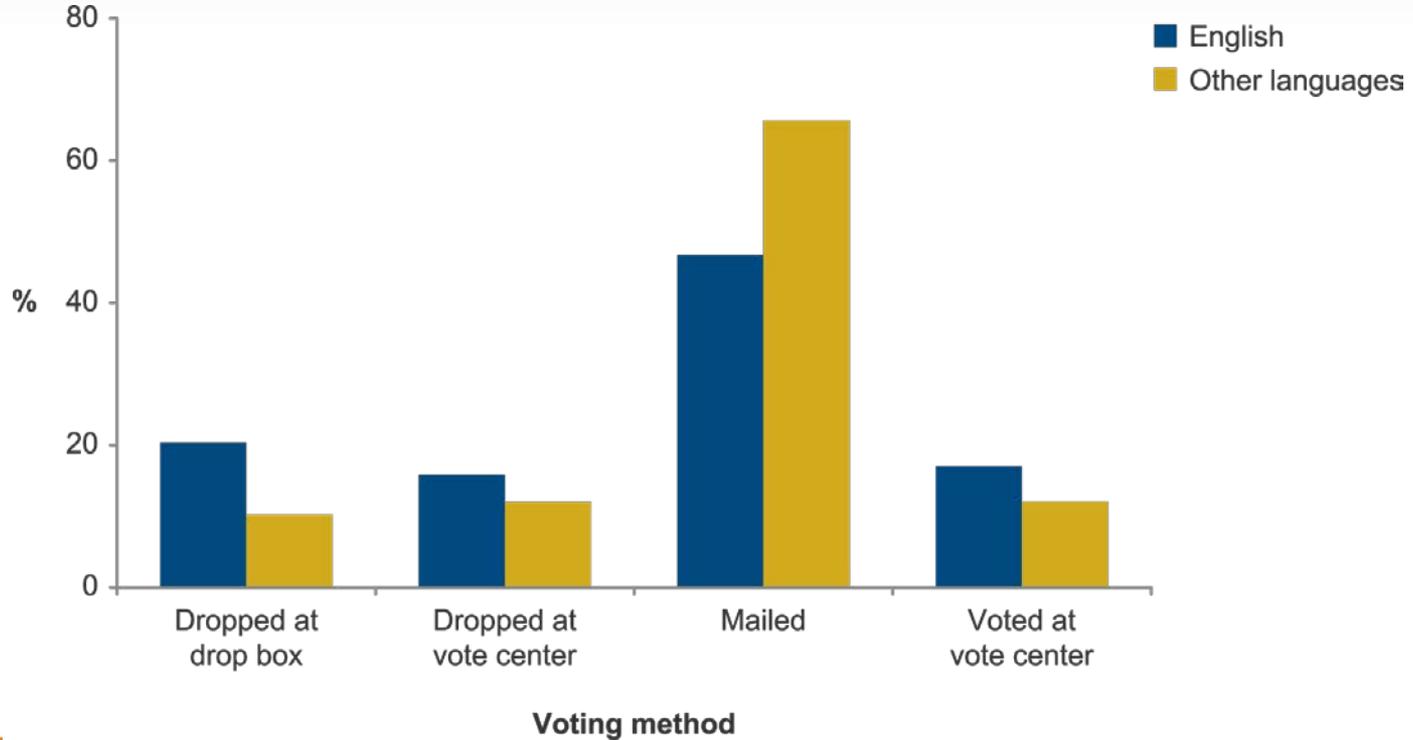
Return of mailed ballots is spread out over time



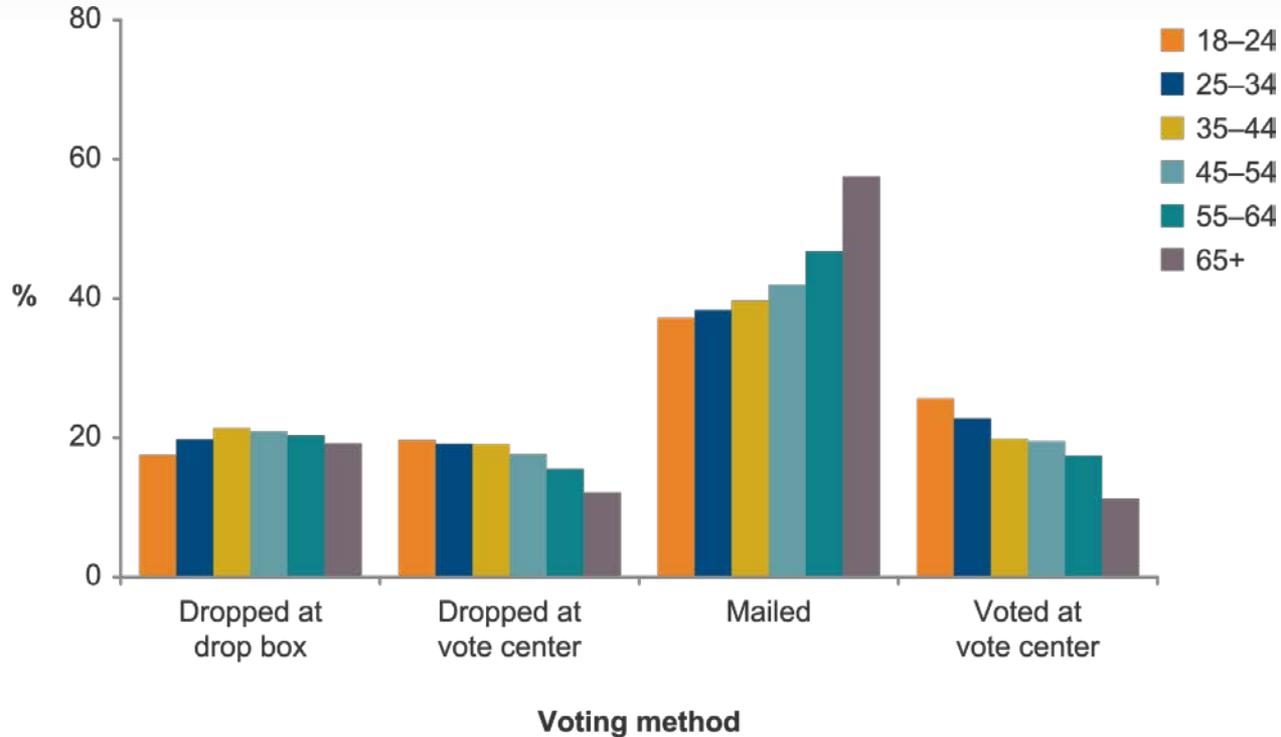
Vote center ballots are concentrated near Election Day



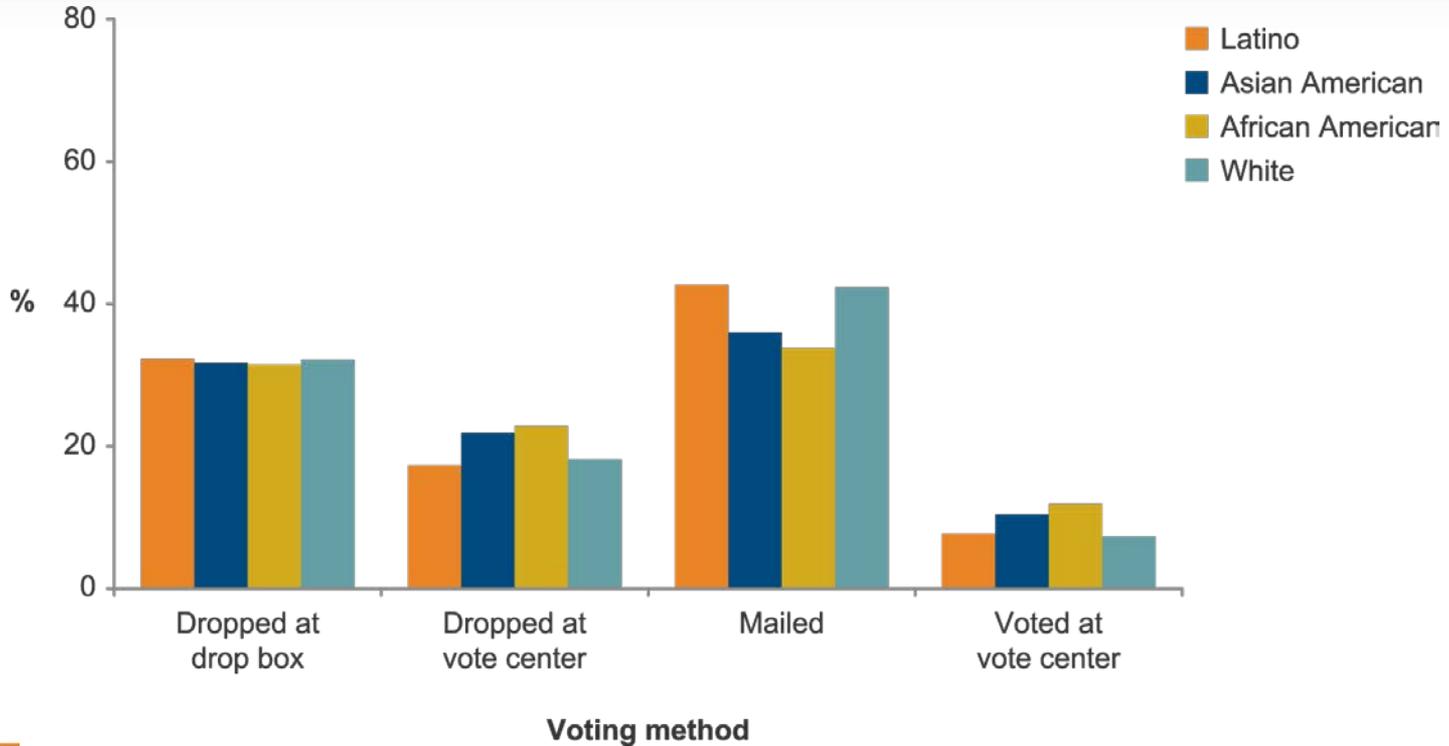
Foreign language voters are more likely to mail ballots



Seniors are more likely to mail ballots



Racial/ethnic differences in voting method are small



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Conclusions and policy recommendations

- Higher turnout under VCA is promising, but doesn't guarantee fall outcome
- Certain groups have shown signs of needing extra outreach
 - In-person foreign language, by-mail renters in both primaries
 - New and young registrants in 2020 primary
 - Best method and content of outreach depends on group
- Mail voting tends to be very spread out
 - In-person and drop box more concentrated near Election Day
 - May need to encourage early voting to reduce risk

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.