

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES DATA AND INDICATORS PROJECT

Short Title: Voter registration and participation

Full Title: Percent of adults (18 years or older) who are registered voters; percent of adults who voted in general elections

1. **Healthy Community Framework:** Social relationships that are supportive and respectful
2. **What is our aspirational goal:** Robust social and civic engagement
3. **Why is this important to health?**

Description of significance and health connection

Political participation can be associated with the health of a community through two possible mechanisms: through the implementation of social policies or as an indirect measure of social capital. Disparities in political participation across socioeconomic groups can influence political outcomes and the resulting policies could have an impact on the opportunities available to the poor to live a healthy life. Lower representation of poorer voters could result in reductions of social programs aimed toward supporting disadvantaged groups. Although there is no direct evidentiary connection between voter registration or participation and health, there is evidence that populations with higher levels of political participation also have greater social capital. Social capital refers to the existence of trust and mutual aid among the members of a society and participation of its members in civic associations. There is evidence of a positive association between social capital and lower mortality rates and higher self-assessed health ratings.

Political participation is directly related to the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of individuals, with lower levels of participation observed in people with low income and low education levels. The most common reasons for non-participation in the 2008 elections included disapproval of candidate choices, busyness, illness, transportation, and registration/administrative problems. African Americans and Latinos were more likely than whites to cite transportation and registration/administrative problems (lack of I.D., difficulty finding the correct polling place, not receiving absentee ballots, waiting in long lines) while white voters were most likely to cite disapproval of candidate choices. The population eligible to register to vote in California includes residents who are U.S. citizens and 18 years of age or older on Election Day. People in prison, on parole, serving a state prison sentence in county jail or a sentence for a felony, on post release community supervision, or that have been found mentally incompetent by a court are not eligible to register to vote.

Summary of evidence

The evidence supporting a relationship between voter participation and health is largely indirect. The relationship appears to be mediated by social capital, for which there are multiple longitudinal community studies, including several from California, that show a positive association with health outcomes.

Key References

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- Berkman LF, Syme SL. Social networks, host resistance, and mortality: a nine-year follow-up study of Alameda county residents. *Am J Epidemiol.* 1979; 109(2): 186-204.
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- Gilbert KL, Quinn SC, Goodman RM, Butler J, Wallace J. A meta-analysis of social capital and health: a case for needed research. *J Health Psychol.* 2013; 18(11): 1385-1399.

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- Kawachi I. Social capital and community effects on population and individual health. *Ann N Y Acad Sci*. 1999; 896: 120-130.
- Alvarez RM, Ansolabehere S, Berinsky A, Lenz G, Stewart III C, Hall T. 2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections. <http://vote.caltech.edu/sites/default/files/Final%20report20090218.pdf>, Accessed June 2nd 2014
- California Secretary of State, Voter Registration, http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_vr.htm, Accessed May 5th 2014

4. What is the indicator?

Detailed Definitions: Two indicators are included 1) Percent of adults (18 years or older) who are registered voters among those eligible. 2) Percent of adults who voted in general elections among those who registered.

Stratification: Type of participation, registered of those eligible (registered/eligible) or voted of those registered (voted/registered).

Data Description

- Data sources: Statewide Database, University of California Berkeley Law, Center for Research, <http://statewidedatabase.org>. California Secretary of State, Elections Division, Reports of Registration, <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections>. California Department of Finance, Demographic Unit (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/data/race-ethnic/2000-2010/index.php>). U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2010 (<http://factfinder2.census.gov>).
- Years available: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 (general elections)
- Updated: every two years
- Geographies available: census tracts, cities/towns, counties, regions (derived), and state.

Estimates of the number of people who are eligible to vote were obtained from the Secretary of State's Reports of Registration (15 days prior to a general election) for counties and the state. Eligible population is obtained by subtracting from the total population counts published by the Department of Finance, the population that is 17 years or below, non-citizens, felons in prison, and supervised felon parolees. Complete enumeration data at the Census block level on the number of people 18 years and over who registered to vote and who voted in the general elections was obtained from the Statewide Database. Data was aggregated into Census tracts, cities/towns, counties, regions, and the state. Regional estimates of population eligible to vote were also obtained. Decile rankings of places and relative risk in relation to state average were calculated. Regions were based on counties of metropolitan transportation organizations (MPO) regions as reported in the [2010 California Regional Progress Report](#). Standard errors, relative standard errors, and 95% upper and lower confidence intervals were calculated. Information on the population 18 years and over or voting age population (VAP) for the state and counties was obtained from the Department of Finance for all years available and is included for those interested. Estimates of the VAP for cities/towns and Census tracts were obtained from the Census 2010.

5. Limitations

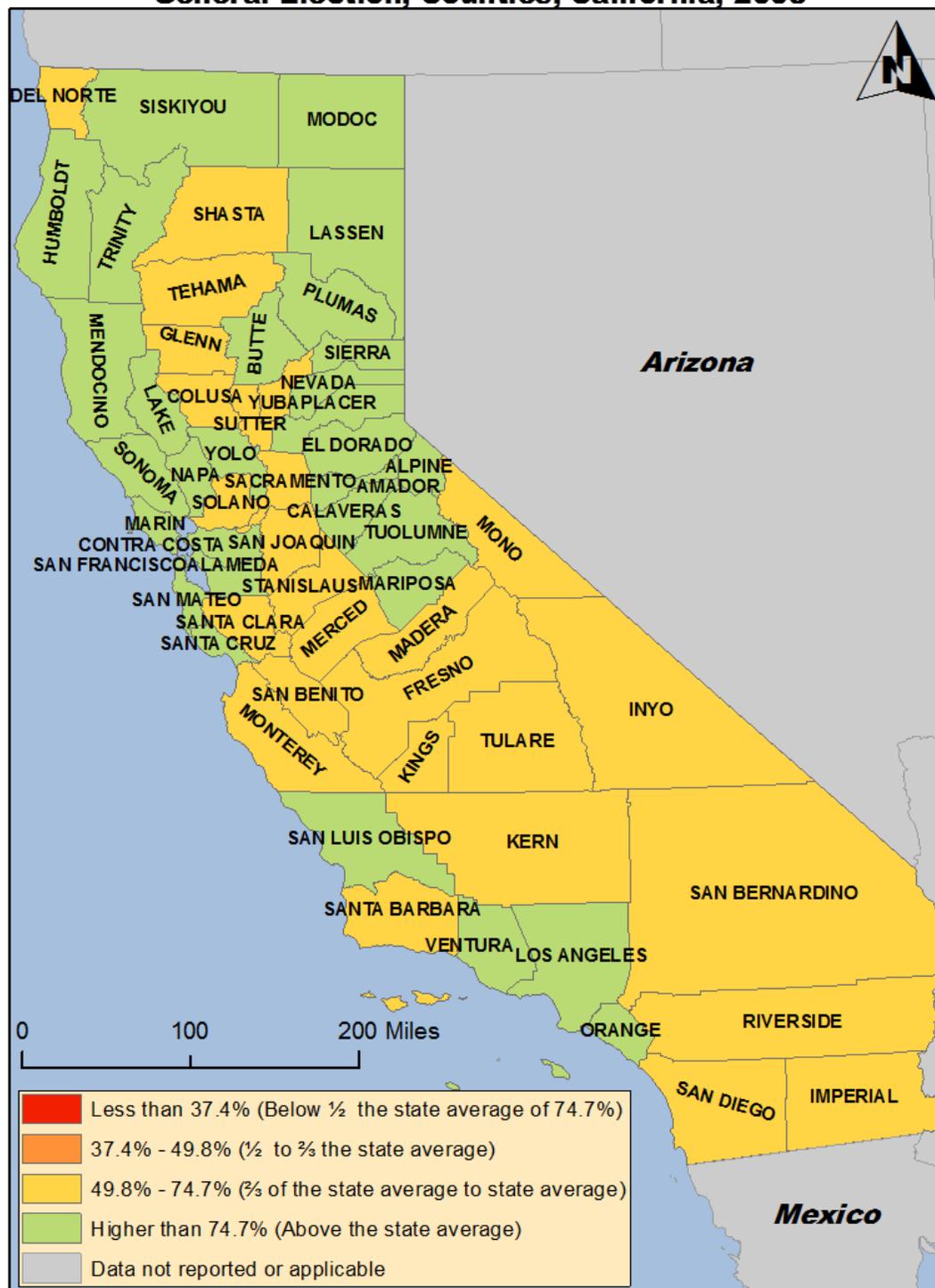
No race/ethnicity information is available for this indicator. Eligible population data is only available at the county and state levels. Registration and voting are only indirect measures of social capital, which has been found more directly associated with health status.

6. Projects using this indicator

1. California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP), Center for Regional Change, UC Davis. <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/ucdavis-ccep>
2. Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, Vital Signs 10, Jacob France Institute. <http://www.bnaijfi.org/>

7. Examples of Maps, Figures, and Tables

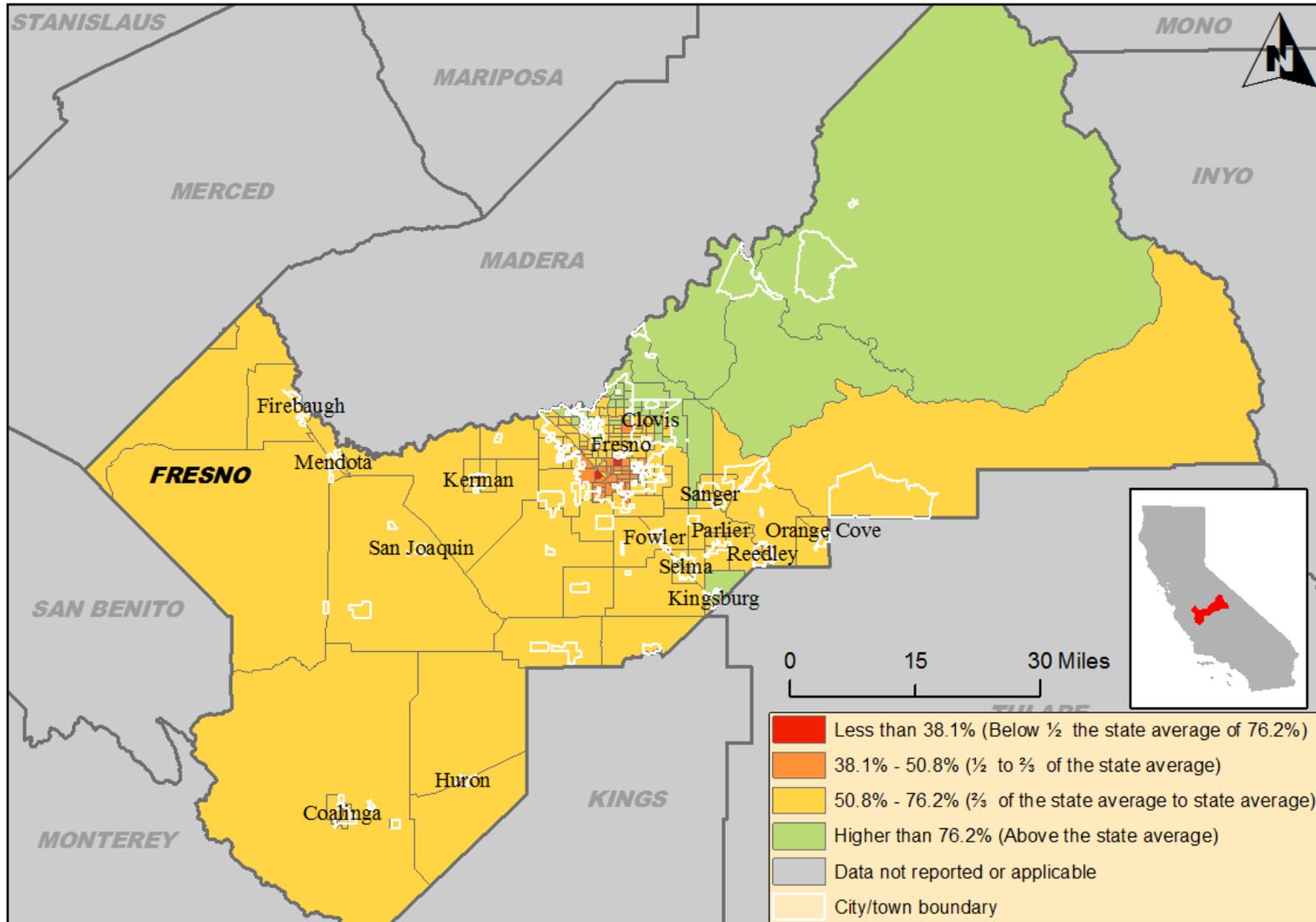
Map 1: Percent of Eligible Adults who Registered to Vote in the General Election, Counties, California, 2008



Source: California Secretary of State Elections Division. Statewide Database, U.C. Berkeley, Law Center for Research

Analysis by CDPH and UCSF

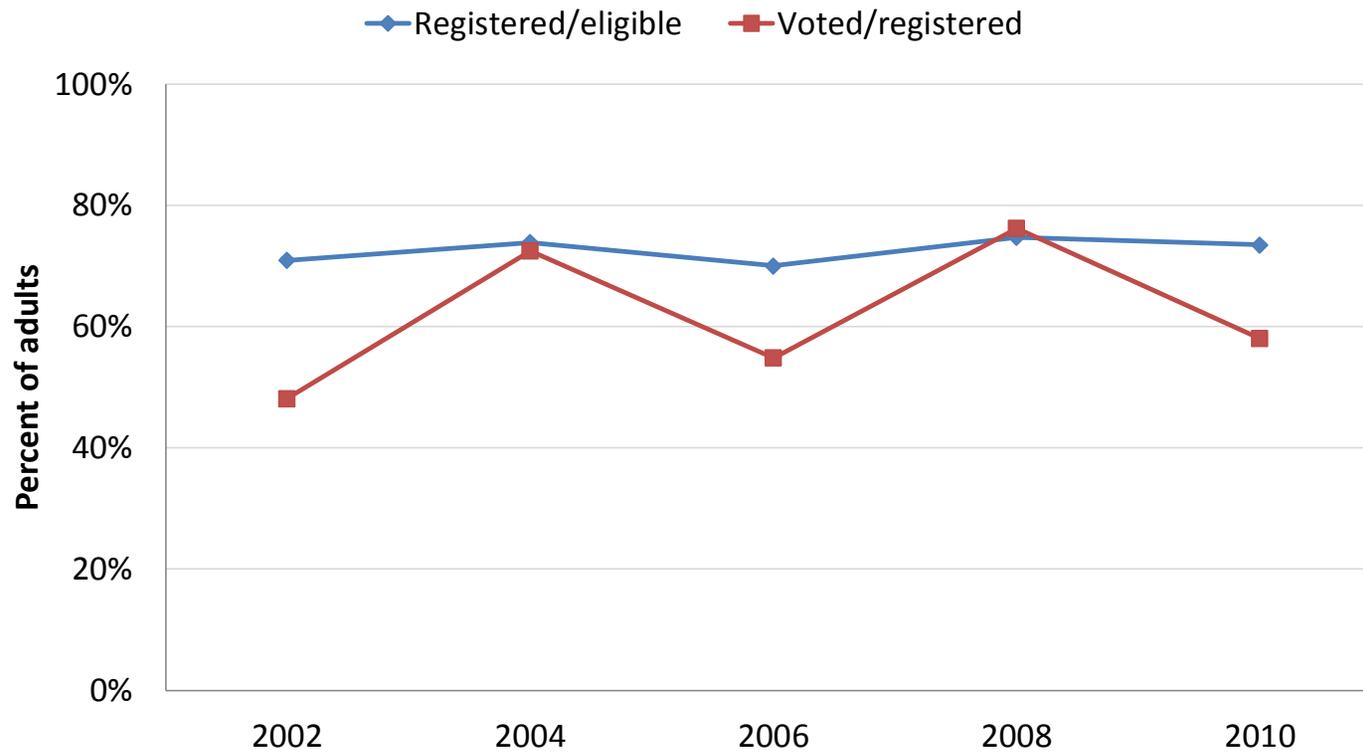
**Map 2: Percent of Registered Adults who Voted in the General Election
Census Tracts, Fresno County, California, 2008**



Source: Statewide Database, U.C. Berkeley, Law Center for Research

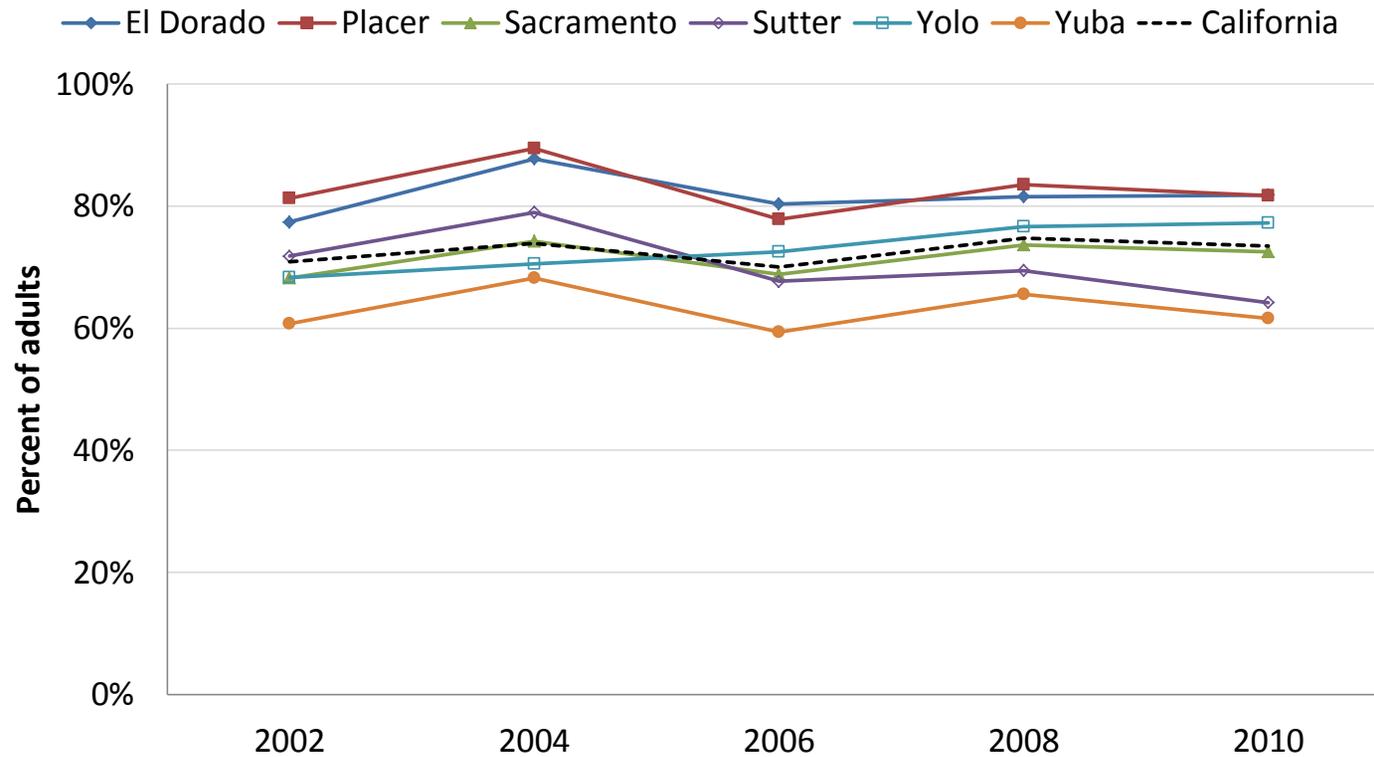
Analysis by CDPH and UCSF

Percent of Eligible Adults who Registered to Vote and Percent of Registered Adults who Voted in the General Elections, California, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010



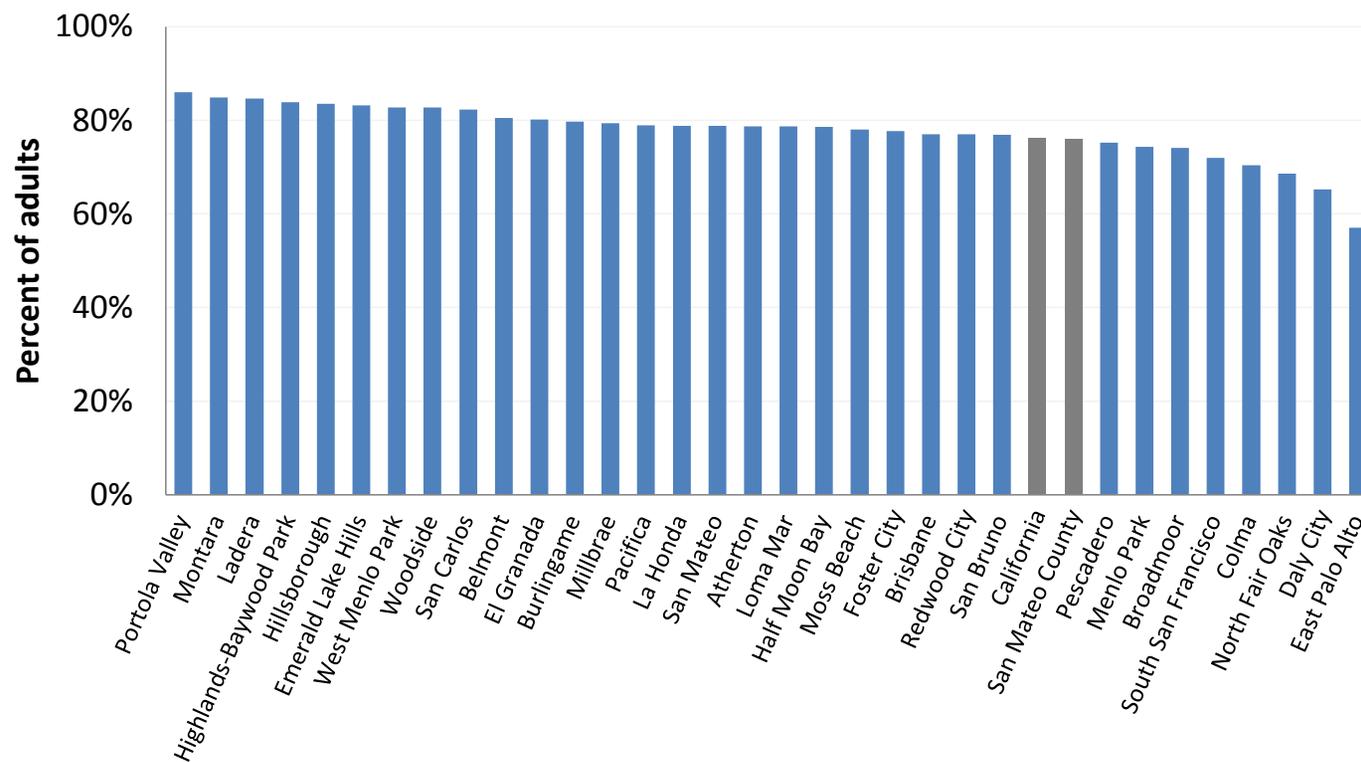
Sources: California Secretary of State, Elections Division. Statewide Database, U.C. Berkeley Law, Center for Research.

Percent of Eligible Adults who Registered to Vote in the General Elections, Counties in the Sacramento Area, California, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010



Sources: California Secretary of State, Elections Division. Statewide Database, U.C. Berkeley Law, Center for Research.

Percent of Registered Adults who Voted in the General Election Cities/towns, San Mateo County, California, 2008



Sources: California Secretary of State, Elections Division. Statewide Database, U.C. Berkeley Law, Center for Research.

Table 1. Percent of Eligible Adults who Registered to Vote and Percent of Registered Adults who Voted in the General Elections, Regions of California, 2008

Region	Eligible (N)	Registered (N)	Voted (N)	Percent registered of those eligible (%)	Percent that voted of those registered (%)
Bay Area	4,762,751	3,641,264	2,981,648	76	82
Butte	159,670	121,933	96,778	76	79
Central/Southeast Sierra	137,395	110,880	91,949	81	83
Monterey Bay	446,946	323,529	264,856	72	82
North Coast	236,990	185,953	143,159	78	77
Northeast Sierra	151,221	126,367	106,277	84	84
Northern Sacramento Valley	72,432	51,886	41,219	72	79
Sacramento Area	1,534,967	1,161,553	926,629	76	80
San Diego	2,052,145	1,503,798	1,220,099	73	81
San Joaquin Valley	2,287,976	1,535,118	1,087,900	67	71
San Luis Obispo	193,800	162,976	133,885	84	82
Santa Barbara	277,157	203,662	172,408	73	85
Shasta	131,621	96,699	80,761	73	84
Southern California	10,763,639	8,110,724	5,865,252	75	72
California	23,208,710	17,339,970	13,212,846	75	76

Source: California Secretary of State, Elections Division. Statewide Database, U.C. Berkeley Law, Center for Research.