SAN MATEO COUNTY

Report to the

State Legislature &
Secretary of State

November 3, 2015
All-Mailed Ballot Election

Consolidated Municipal, School & Special District All-Mailed Ballot Election

Vote by Mail

November 3, 2015

San Mateo County

SAN MATEO COUNTY HISTORY MUSEUM

Office of Mark Church
Chief Elections Officer & Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division
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COUNTY OF SAN MATEO · CALIFORNIA

555 County Center
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email mchurch@smcare.org
web www.smcare.org

Mark Church

Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder & Chief Elections Officer

May 3, 2016

HON. KEVIN DE LEÓN, Senate President pro Tempore
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

HON. ANTHONY RENDON, Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 94249-0063

HON. ALEX PADILLA, Secretary of State
1500 11th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: **Report to the State Legislature and Secretary of State on
San Mateo County's November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election
Assembly Bill No. 2028: All-Mailed Ballot Elections**

Dear President pro Tempore de León, Speaker Rendon and Secretary Padilla:

On November 3, 2015, San Mateo County became the first County in the State of
California to conduct a Local Consolidated Municipal, School and Special District Election,
"wholly by mail" as a pilot project, under the authority of Assembly Bill No. 2028 (Mullin).

As San Mateo County's Chief Elections Officer, I am pleased to submit to the State
Legislature and the Secretary of State, San Mateo County's November 3, 2015 All-Mailed
Ballot Election Report in accordance with the requirements of AB 2028. The November 3,
2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election went smoothly and was one of the most efficient and
successful Local Consolidated Municipal, School and Special District Elections ever held in
the history of San Mateo County. As with most elections, the November election also
generated its share of operational and administrative issues and challenges. Nonetheless,
as a pilot project, the All-Mailed Ballot Election served its intended purpose to provide
valuable insight and information to policymakers on the effectiveness of All-Mailed Ballot
Elections.

As background information, the November 2015 election was a large and complex
countywide election under the Uniform District Election Law (UDEL), with 40 jurisdictions
and 48 different ballot styles. The election generated enormous amounts of statistical and
operational data to be analyzed and synthesized into our report. Dr. Melissa R. Michelson,

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Professor of Political Science at Menlo College, was brought in to review this data and conduct an independent qualitative and quantitative analysis of the election. Additionally, Ms. Karin Mac Donald, Director of the Election Administration Research Center, University of California at Berkeley, and author of the Yolo County Report, was retained as a consultant and advisor to the County. Our sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Michelson and Ms. Mac Donald for their professional contributions and assistance in the analysis of the data generated by this election.

The November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election

The November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election has been referred to by many as "San Mateo County's All-Mailed Ballot Election Experiment." In many ways it was a real time "experiment" given that the election was the first of its kind in an urban County in the State of California. There was no manual or guidebook on how to proceed in conducting a successful All-Mailed Ballot Election for the jurisdictions and citizens of our County. Our community had to learn as we went along following the key principles of civic engagement, collaboration, outreach and education. In the final analysis, the "experiment" was a great success, however, it was not without its flaws, issues and challenges. In this light, we must keep in mind that the election was designed as a "pilot project" to gather important data for the State Legislature and policymakers to make informed decisions on the effectiveness of All-Mailed Ballot Elections. The following discussion highlights some of the major accomplishments and challenges of the November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election.

Passage of AB 2028

The commencement of the November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election began with the passage of AB 2028 on August 15, 2014. The adoption of this legislation set into motion a series of events at the local level that ultimately would help determine the future of All-Mailed Ballot Elections in the County. While there was a keen interest by many to conduct All-Mailed Ballot Elections in the County, the sentiment was not uniformly held by all jurisdictions and constituents. To address this concern, we developed a comprehensive AB 2028 Education and Outreach Plan to explain and gather support for the All-Mailed Ballot Election. Over 25 presentations were made to City Councils, School Boards and Special District Boards. Additionally, over 400 letters and countless emails were sent and numerous phone calls were made to policymakers. An outreach brochure, as set forth in Attachment A, was designed, printed and distributed throughout the County.

An additional challenge facing us was that the law required every jurisdiction holding an election on November 3, 2015, to adopt a resolution authorizing its participation in the All-Mailed Ballot Election by August 7, 2015 (E-88). This meant that one jurisdiction could stop the All-Mailed Ballot Election from being held for all jurisdictions. Two jurisdictions

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waited until the last week (i.e., the week of August 3rd) to adopt their resolutions creating additional uncertainty to the process.

This requirement in the legislation created a problematic hurdle for us to gather the required support from all jurisdictions with enough time to adequately prepare for the election. In anticipation that the type of election would not be decided upon until the very last day allowed by law, our office had to prepare two (2) Sample Ballot and Voter Information Pamphlets, one for the All-Mailed Ballot Election and one for a traditional polling place election. There would not have been sufficient time to create a new Sample Ballot and Voter Information Pamphlet after August 7 for the November 3, 2015 Election.

Our AB 2028 community outreach and education efforts were significant for our staff and a county our size. These efforts were vital to the successful implementation of the election. Our outreach efforts focused on (1) educating policymakers about All-Mailed Ballot Elections, and (2) informing the voting public that the November 3 Election would be a different type of election.

On the positive side, 40 jurisdictions adopted their AB 2028 resolutions allowing the All-Mailed Ballot Election to move forward. The amount of resources and staff time that went into community outreach and education as part of this process, was a collateral benefit to the election in that it heightened the awareness and support in the community for the November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election.

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout was perhaps one of the most positive and extraordinary outcomes of the November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election. The election resulted in the highest voter turnout for a comparable election in over 20 years. Voter turnout was 29.5%, which was an increase of 4% over the 25.4% turnout in the previous UDEL election held in 2013. The impressive increase in voter turnout was consistent throughout the County in all population and demographic groups, particularly amongst youth and minority voters. A total of 105,341 ballots were cast in this election, an increase of more than 14,000 ballots (15%) over the previous election held in 2013 when 91,335 ballots were cast. The increase in these numbers is particularly notable given the historical downward trend of voter participation in local elections statewide.

We believe the increase in voter turnout was the direct result of several factors. Those factors include the ease and convenience of voting by mail, the use of prepaid postage return envelopes for voted ballots, sustained voter outreach and education throughout the 29 day period of the election, and extensive networking with our jurisdictions and community partners. The qualitative analysis portion of the report lists our community

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partners and the quantitative analysis portion contains voluminous data and statistics on the voter turnout in this election.

Election Costs

When comparing election costs, it is important to realize that every election is unique, and comparisons between elections are difficult since there are numerous variables distinct to each election. For purposes of cost comparisons, it's important to distinguish between "full election costs" and "billable election costs."

Full Election Costs

Full election costs are those costs which include all of the expenditures incurred in an election. For example, they include the costs of sample ballots, official ballots, Vote by Mail (VBM) ballots, polling places, supplies, computer charges, voting equipment, labor, overhead and other miscellaneous charges. They are the pure unfiltered costs of an election.

The table below provides a full election cost comparison between the 2015 and 2013 UDEL elections. This table is helpful in providing an overview of the aggregate costs of the election, however, it does not provide the actual billable election costs charged to each jurisdiction and the corresponding percentage savings.

When comparing full election costs, the November 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election resulted in an overall savings of 14.57%, in the aggregate, to all jurisdictions (assuming outreach costs are excluded) over the previous 2013 UDEL election.

Full Election Cost Comparisons 2015 and 2013 UDEL Elections				
	2015	2013	Difference	Savings
Excluding Outreach Costs				
Total Election Cost	$1,788,348.31	$2,093,237.90	($304,889.59)	14.57%
Including Outreach Costs				
Total Election Cost	$2,127,772.36	$2,093,237.90	$34,534.46	(1.6%)

For purposes of comparing full election costs, we believe voter outreach expenses should be excluded since they are one-time costs incurred to educate policymakers and inform

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the public of a critical change in the type of election and, as such, are not typical, recurring election expenses.

If, however, these costs were to be included, the full election cost comparison would essentially be a "wash" with an increased expense over the 2013 UDEL election of approximately $34,500 or 1.6%.

Billable Election Costs

Billable election costs on the other hand deduct from full election costs those expenses which cannot be billed to the jurisdictions due to statutory restrictions, such as Elections Code Section 3024 requirements. Elections Code Section 3024 prohibits the counties from billing school districts for VBM costs relating to printing, postage, supplies and labor, when there are noneducation issues and elective offices on the ballot. Further, the Permanent Absentee Voter and Absentee Ballot mandated programs under SB 90 were suspended, thereby precluding reimbursement to the counties.

Billable election costs tell a more accurate story. When comparing billable election costs, the November 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election resulted in an overall savings of 30.5%, in the aggregate, to cities, school and special districts over the previous 2013 UDEL election as set forth in the table below.

Billable Election Expenses				
	2015	2013	Difference	Percentage Savings
Total Billable Costs	$1,262,397.57	$1,815,712.29	($553,314.72)	30.5%

The November 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election resulted in significant billable cost savings for cities, schools and special districts when compared to the 2013 UDEL Election. Cities had an average savings of 17%, special districts 15% and school districts 39%. A detailed summary of 2015 and 2013 billable election cost comparisons and cost savings by jurisdiction is included in Attachment B.

Universal Polling Places (UPP's)

The Universal Polling Places (UPP's) were an important feature of this election. UPP's function similar to Voting Centers except that they were only open on Election Day. In addition to the two Voting Centers that were open for 28 days prior to the Election, thirty-

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two (32) UPP's were deployed throughout the County on Election Day. UPP's were primarily used by voters to cast their ballots in-person, either on paper or eSlate voting machines. Voters also used the UPP's to obtain replacement envelopes, exchange spoiled ballots or drop off voted ballots.

All UPP's were connected to the Countywide Voter Registration Database which allowed voter eligibility issues to be decided in real time. Voters could vote at any UPP in the County and receive their specific ballot type. Consequently, the use of UPP's lead to a significant reduction in provisional ballots resulting in substantial labor savings. In the 2013 UDEL election, there were 2,222 provisional ballots cast at 209 polling places. In the 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election, there were only 163 provisional ballots cast at the 32 UPP's.

The availability of Disabled Access Units at the UPP's was essential for disabled persons to cast their ballots. Also, those UPP's that were easily accessible and located near transportation and housing centers were more heavily utilized.

It's important to note that UPP's were expensive to deploy and used by approximately 2% of the voting public on Election Day. The cost of the UPP's were more expensive than traditional polling places, in part, due to the expenses associated with setting up the technological infrastructure at each site, network connectivity, increased staff training, higher pay rates and increased onboarding requirements for UPP workers.

AB 2028 required at least one polling place in each of our 20 cities. More UPP's were allocated to those cities with larger populations and geographical areas. The five largest cities in the County (Daly City, San Mateo, Redwood City, South San Francisco and San Bruno) each received more than one Universal Polling Place.

As part of our efforts to reach out to the youth population, we established partnerships with local high schools and community colleges, resulting in the placement of one UPP at each of our three community college district campuses (Canada College in Redwood City, College of San Mateo and Skyline College in San Bruno).

Summary and Conclusion

From the perspective of the voting public and participating jurisdictions, the All-Mailed Ballot Election was a complete success. The election resulted in increased voter turnout, decreased costs to the jurisdictions, improved efficiencies and early results on Election Night. The election experienced the highest voter turnout in over 20 years, reversing a downward trend in voter participation locally and across the state. There were 14,000 more voters and a 15% increase in the number of voters participating in this election when compared to the last comparable election held in 2013. More than 10,000 voters became

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permanent vote by mail voters, increasing the total number of permanent vote by mail voters from 57% to over 60% of all registered voters. Of the total votes cast, approximately 97.5% were cast by mail and 2.5% were cast at Voting Centers and Universal Polling Places. The public's preference for voting by mail is clear and on the rise. The All-Mailed Ballot Pilot Project did, however, identify statutory flaws, as discussed previously, that will need to be addressed by the State moving forward.

In closing, the success of the November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election was the direct result of the hard work and support of our jurisdictions, community stakeholders and the voting public. Special acknowledgment must go to over 400 elected and appointed officials who approved and championed the All-Mailed Ballot Pilot Project in their respective communities. Credit must also be given to the tireless efforts of our elections staff, technicians and poll workers who put in thousands of hours to ensure the election went smoothly. Last but not least, tribute must go to the active participation and support of every San Mateo County voter who cast their ballot in this historic election. The All-Mailed Ballot Election was truly a collective effort that will have significant and lasting impacts on our community and communities throughout the state.

Sincerely,

MARK CHURCH
San Mateo County Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder and Chief Elections Officer

cc: Daniel Alvarez, Secretary of the Senate
    E. Dotson Wilson, Chief Clerk of the Assembly
    Honorable Members, San Mateo County U.S. Congressional Delegation
    Honorable Members, San Mateo County State Legislative Delegation
    Honorable Members, San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
    Honorable Members, All San Mateo County City Councils
    Honorable Members, All San Mateo County School Districts
    Honorable Members, All San Mateo County Special Districts
    John Maltbie, San Mateo County Manager
    Neal Kelley, President of California Association of Clerks & Election Officials (CACEO)

Attachments

Vote!

San Mateo County

Consolidated Municipal, School and Special District All-Mailed Ballot Election November 3, 2015

Consolidated Municipal, School & Special District All-Mailed Ballot Election

Vote by Mail

November 3, 2015

San Mateo County

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Everything You Need to Know about this All-Mailed Ballot Election
- Overview
- Purpose
- Your Voting Options
- Learn More

BROCHURE OF NOVEMBER 3, 2015 ALL-MAILED BALLOT ELECTION

Overview

New for November 2015

Assembly Bill 2028 (authored by Kevin Mullin, 22nd AD) was signed into law in 2014, allowing San Mateo County to conduct up to three local elections by All-Mailed Ballot before 2018. Under California's Vote by Mail pilot project, state and federal elections, such as the Presidential Elections in 2016, are not eligible.

Important Dates

- October 5, 2015 - Vote by Mail ballot mailing date. Please contact us if you do not receive it by October 16.

- October 19, 2015 - Voter Registration closes at midnight. Postmark your voter registration card or register at www.registertovote.ca.gov.

- Election Day, November 3, 2015 - Return your ballot by 8 p.m. Postmarked ballots on or before November 3 will be on time if received by November 6.

All-Mailed Ballot Election Voting Location

- Vote from home — Anytime!

- 2 Voting Centers will be open:

  - Monday through Friday, October 5 through November 2, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

  - Saturday, October 31, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

  - Election Day, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

- 32 Universal Polling Places will be open Election Day November 3, 2015, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Purpose

These pilot elections will provide information on how all-mailed ballot elections impact voter registration, voter participation, and election costs in an urban county. Our results here can shape the future of voting in the State of California.

BROCHURE OF NOVEMBER 3, 2015 ALL-MAILED BALLOT ELECTION

Your Voting Options

Vote by Mail—It's Easy!

- You will be mailed a Vote by Mail ballot with a postage paid return envelope. It's free to return your ballot by mail!

- Returned ballots postmarked on or before Election Day will be accepted if received by November 6.

Drop Off Your Voted Mail Ballot

Drop your ballot off at any of these locations in San Mateo County:

- 20 City or Town Halls,

- 32 Universal Polling Places,

- 2 Voting Centers, or

- 24-hour ballot drop box at 40 Tower Road in San Mateo will accept ballots until 8 p.m. on November 3, 2015.

Vote in Person

- Vote on an electronic eSlate voting machine at a Voting Center or Universal Polling Place.

- Our accessible voting machines allow anyone to vote privately and independently, and are compatible with adaptive devices.

- Trained staff will be at each location to help voters requesting assistance.

- You may go to any Voting Center or Universal Polling Place in San Mateo County and receive the proper ballot. No need to rush home to vote.

ATTACHMENT A

BROCHURE OF NOVEMBER 3, 2015 ALL-MAILED BALLOT ELECTION

Learn More

Voter Outreach & Education

Demonstrating our commitment to providing accurate and consistent information to every voter participating in this pilot election, we have formed a comprehensive outreach and education program (see below).

• Our official website www.shapethefuture.org optimized for desktop, tablet & mobile

• Community events, forums, presentations, fairs, festivals and neighborhood meetings. Call us to attend your event at 650.312.5222

• Newspapers, radio and television

• Billboards and public transit ads

• Follow us on Twitter @smcvote

• Available on our website: Community & Voter Outreach Plan, Public Communications Guide, List of Community Partners & Events, and Downloadable Outreach Tool Kit

SAMPLE BALLOT
& Official Voter Information Pamphlet

Consolidated Municipal, School
and Special District
All-Mailed Ballot Election

2015

Tuesday, November 3

The Sample Ballot & Official Voter Information Pamphlet
is available online at
www.shapethefuture.org/MyElectionMaterials
and is also mailed to voters beginning September 24.

ATTACHMENT A

BROCHURE OF NOVEMBER 3, 2015 ALL-MAILED BALLOT ELECTION

2 Voting Centers

- Office of the Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder at 555 County Center, 1st Floor, Redwood City
- San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division at 40 Tower Road, San Mateo

20 Ballot Drop Off Locations

Starting on October 6 during regular business hours at the following City/Town Halls:

Atherton	91 Ashfield Road
Belmont	1 Twin Pines Lane
Brisbane	50 Park Place
Burlingame	501 Primrose Road
Colma	1198 El Camino Real
Daly City	333 90th Street
East Palo Alto	2415 University Avenue
Foster City	610 Foster City Boulevard
Half Moon Bay	501 Main Street
Hillsborough	1600 Floribunda Avenue
Menlo Park	701 Laurel Street
Millbrae	621 Magnolia Avenue
Pacifica	170 Santa Maria Avenue
Portola Valley	765 Portola Road
Redwood City	1017 Middlefield Road
San Bruno	567 El Camino Real
San Carlos	600 Elm Street
San Mateo	330 W. 20th Avenue
South San Francisco	400 Grand Avenue
Woodside	2955 Woodside Road

BROCHURE OF NOVEMBER 3, 2015 ALL-MAILED BALLOT ELECTION

32 Universal Polling Places

Open on Election Day from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Atherton	Menlo College, Fireside Room, Student Union Building 1000 El Camino Real, Atherton
Belmont	Belmont City Hall, Emergency Operations Center, 2nd Floor 1 Twin Pines Lane, Belmont
Brisbane	Brisbane Community Center, Lower Level, Community Room 250 Visitacion Avenue, Brisbane
Broadmoor	Broadmoor Community Center, Enter Parking Area In Rear 501 87th St., Colma
Burlingame	Burlingame City Hall, Conference Room A 501 Primrose Road, Burlingame
Colma	Colma Community Center, Banquet Room, Side B 1520 Hillside Boulevard, Colma
Daly City	Daly City City Hall, Rotunda 333 90th Street, Daly City
	Westlake Community Center, Merced Room 145 Lake Merced Blvd., Daly City
	Gellert Park, Clubhouse 50 Wembley Drive, Daly City
	Lawson Hall 125 Accacia Street, Daly City
East Palo Alto	City of East Palo Alto, Community Room 2415 University Avenue, East Palo Alto
Foster City	Foster City Recreation Center, Gallery/Foyer 650 Shell Boulevard, Foster City
Half Moon Bay	Emergency Operations Center 537 Kelly Street, Half Moon Bay
Hillsborough	Hillsborough Town Hall, Community Room 1600 Floribunda Avenue, Hillsborough
Menlo Park	Arrillaga Family Recreation Center, Juniper Room 700 Alma Street, Menlo Park

BROCHURE OF NOVEMBER 3, 2015 ALL-MAILED BALLOT ELECTION

Millbrae	Millbrae Library, Community Rooms A & B 1 Library Ave, Millbrae
Pacifica	Pacifica Community Center, Game Room 540 Crespi Drive, Pacifica
Portola Valley	Historic School House, Town Chambers 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley
Redwood City	Redwood City City Hall, Lobby 1017 Middlefield Road, Redwood City
	Fair Oaks Community Center, Rooms 2 & 3 2600 Middlefield Road, Redwood City
	Veterans Memorial Senior Center, Goldstar Room 1455 Madison Avenue, Redwood City
	San Mateo County Office of Education, Arroyo Creek and Butano Creek Rooms 101 Twin Dolphin Drive, Redwood City
	Canada College, Building 9, Room 307 4200 Farm Hill Blvd., Redwood City
San Bruno	San Bruno City Hall, Conference Room 115 567 El Camino Real, San Bruno
	Skyline College, Building 1, Gallery 3300 College Drive, San Bruno
San Carlos	San Carlos Library, Conference Room, 2nd Floor 610 Elm Street, San Carlos
San Mateo	San Mateo City Library, Oak Room 55 W 3rd Avenue, San Mateo
	Fire Station #26, Apparatus Room 1500 Marina Court, San Mateo
	College of San Mateo, Bldg. 3, Theatre Lobby 1700 W. Hillsdale Blvd., San Mateo
South San Francisco	Municipal Services Building, Atrium 33 Arroyo Drive, South San Francisco
	South San Francisco City Hall, Foyer 400 Grand Ave., South San Francisco Enter on Miller
Woodside	Town of Woodside Independence Hall 2955 Woodside Road, Woodside

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Questions? Comments? Thoughts?

Our mission is to serve the voters of San Mateo County. We are here to answer your questions and we value your suggestions.

Reach us at:

OFFICE OF MARK CHURCH
Chief Elections Officer &
Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

REGISTRATION & ELECTIONS DIVISION
40 Tower Road
San Mateo, CA 94402
Phone: 650.312.5222
Fax: 650.312.5348
California relay Service: 711
Chinese/Spanish Assistance: 1.888.762.8683
Provisional Voter Assistance: 1.866.830.8683
Email: registrar@smcare.org
www.shapethefuture.org
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter @smcvote

ATTACHMENT B

SAN MATEO COUNTY SUMMARY OF ELECTION COSTS

ENTITIES	2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election	2013 Regular UDEL Election	2015 Savings	2015 Number Contests	2013 Number Contests
CITIES					
City of Belmont	$20,538.71	$26,896.99	-24%	3	1
City of Brisbane	3,429.72	5,726.99	-40%	1	2
City of Burlingame	22,189.27	28,124.13	-21%	1	1
City of Foster City	21,113.86	29,266.56	-28%	1	2
City of Millbrae	15,957.28	20,367.14	-22%	1	1
City of Redwood City	51,082.51	63,929.89	-20%	1	1
City of San Bruno	33,587.93	35,104.86	-4%	4	4
City of San Carlos	32,140.48	33,312.22	-4%	3	1
City of San Mateo	76,210.85	85,783.05	-11%	3	1
City of South San Francisco	53,608.07	49,149.46	9%	2	4
Town of Woodside	5,364.30	7,045.03	-24%	4	3
		Average:	-17%		
SCHOOL DISTRICTS *					
Belmont-Redwood Shores School District	$22,901.09	$43,549.51	-47%	1	2
Hillsborough City Elementary School District	7,294.16	11,969.96	-39%	2	1
Jefferson Elementary School District	33,759.89	55,809.31	-40%	1	1
Redwood City School District **	58,070.38	65,742.95	-12%	2	0
San Bruno Park School District	18,499.95	30,609.51	-40%	1	1
San Carlos School District	17,234.07	29,090.55	-41%	1	1
San Mateo Community College District	363,477.45	604,780.29	-40%	1	1
San Mateo Union High School District ***	120,860.32	226,744.02	-47%	1	0
San Mateo-Foster City School District	83,171.77	126,146.82	-34%	2	1
Sequoia Union High School District	127,342.43	212,954.45	-40%	1	1
Woodside Elementary School District	2,250.92	4,406.70	-49%	1	1
		Average:	-39%		
SPECIAL DISTRICTS					
Broadmoor Police Protection District **	$4,222.36	$4,786.92	-12%	1	0
Menlo Park Fire District	68,089.81	83,386.96	-18%	1	1
		Average:	-15%		
Notes:					
* Excludes VBM (Absentee) Costs for School Districts per Elections Code Section 3024					
** Last UDEL Election held in 2011					
*** Last UDEL Election held in 2009					

Report to State Legislature and Secretary of State

San Mateo County November 3, 2015 All-Mailed Ballot Election

Melissa R. Michelson
Professor of Political Science
Menlo College

William P. Marble
Political Science Graduate Student
Stanford University

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Executive Summary

Pursuant to AB 2028, authored by Kevin Mullin (D-SF), San Mateo County conducted an all-mailed ballot election on November 3, 2015. The election also featured early voting opportunities and Election Day Universal Polling Places (UPPs) and thus is best understood as a hybrid election. The San Mateo County Elections Office contracted with Dr. Melissa R. Michelson of Menlo College to perform an analysis of the election. Dr. Michelson hired William Marble, a graduate student at Stanford University, to assist in data collection and analysis.

This report focuses on effects on turnout of different populations including population categories of race, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, permanent vote-by-mail status, and political party affiliation. It also includes information on ballots not counted and why they were rejected and other challenges that arose during the election. The analysis of voter turnout incorporates comparisons to previous polling place elections in the county, in particular the Uniform District Election Law (UDEL) elections of 2013 and 2011. There were no issues of suspected fraud.

Overview

The 2015 UDEL election in San Mateo County, usually referred to as an all-mailed ballot election, offered voters many methods of participating. In addition to returning their ballots via the U.S. Postal Service, voters could also drop off their completed ballots during the 28 days before Election Day at drop boxes throughout the county, vote in person at one of two voting centers, or could vote using an eSlate voting machine on Election Day at one of the 32 UPPs or the two voting centers.

While in a traditional election voters must vote only at the polling place to which they are assigned, for this election any voter registered in the county could vote at any of the 32 UPPs. Thus, while the number of polling places was decreased from 209 to 32, which may be seen as making voting less convenient, that the neighborhood polling places were replaced by UPPs may be seen as making voting more convenient.

Ballots were sent with postage-paid return envelopes. In a regular election, absentee voters are required to supply their own postage in order to return their completed ballots. This made returning completed ballots more convenient, as well as less costly, for voters.

Challenges

As with any election, various challenges arose during the election period. Possibly the biggest challenge faced (and overcome) by Elections Office staff stemmed from a decision to change the design of the return envelope used by voters to send in their completed ballots. This change, combined with errors made by the U.S. Postal Service, resulted in some completed ballots being returned to voters, rather than being delivered to the Elections Office. Elections Office staff worked quickly to address the problem,

working in cooperation with the USPS. Overall, while 105 ballots were delivered back to voters, all were properly received in time to be processed; no votes were lost.

Turnout

Turnout in the all-mailed pilot election was slightly higher than in other recent UDEL elections. In 2015, the turnout rate was 29.5 percent of registered voters, compared to 25.4 percent in the 2013 UDEL election and 28.7 percent in 2011. Most voters voted by mail, and a significant number (about 10,000) converted to permanent vote-by-mail (PERM) voters. Only 157 provisional ballots were cast, a significant decrease compared to the 2013 UDEL (2,222 provisional ballots) and the 2011 UDEL (2,467 provisional ballots).

Turnout in 2015 was higher among whites, Asian Americans, and Latinos compared to the 2013 and 2011 UDEL elections. Among black voters, turnout was higher in 2015 compared to 2013, but lower than in 2011. Turnout was higher in every age group, for members of every political party (including decline-to-state voters), and for both men and women. There was not a dramatic change in turnout among disabled voters in 2015, and that turnout possibly increased compared to the two previous UDEL elections. Turnout was higher among non-VBM voters compared to 2013 and 2011, and higher among PERMs compared to 2013 but lower compared to 2011.

Cost Analysis

Overall, the estimated cost of the 2015 pilot election compared to the 2013 is a wash—there was neither a significant cost increase nor a significant cost savings. The 2013 UDEL cost $2,093,237.90, including $657,032.27 for labor. The 2015 pilot election, in contrast, incurred regular expenses of $1,788,348.31 overall, including $622,647.78 for labor. This equates to a cost savings of 5.23 percent for labor and 14.57 percent overall. Including the cost of the outreach conducted by the Elections Office to increase voter awareness of and information about the pilot election increases the overall cost of the 2015 election to $2,127,772.36, for a total cost increase of 1.6 percent compared to 2013.

Public Opinion Survey

A survey of registered voters was conducted for the 2015 pilot using a combination of exit polls at UPPs and the voting centers and a telephone survey of registered voters. Undergraduate students at Menlo College, under the supervision of Dr. Michelson and Mr. Marble, administered the surveys. A total of 1,071 surveys in five languages were completed between October 30 and November 8, including 291 exit polls and 780 telephone surveys.

A strong majority of respondents, 71.9 percent overall, said they support all elections being held by mail, and a vast majority of respondents (80.1 percent) said all-mailed ballot elections would not help any party over another. Respondents were also asked

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whether they agree with the statement, "I trust the United States Postal Service to deliver mail ballots securely and on time." About 72 percent of respondents expressed trust in the USPS. Respondents expressed less consensus on the issue of voter fraud. Only about half of respondents disagreed with the statement that "Conducting an all-mailed ballot election increases the risk of voter fraud," while about a third agreed. In sum, voters are strongly supportive of all-mailed ballot elections, and this support is broadly consistent across subgroups of ethnorace, age, and disability status.

1. <u>Absentee Voting Laws and AB2028</u>

Since January 1, 2002, California Election Law has allowed any registered voter to become a Permanent Vote-by-Mail Voter (PERM), also known as a No Excuse Absentee Voter. San Mateo County voters have been enthusiastic adopters of absentee voting; in the November 2014 general election, 67 percent of the county's voters used mail-in ballots, and prior to the 2015 pilot more than half (57 percent) of registered voters were permanent vote-by-mail (PERM) voters.

AB2028, approved by California Governor Jerry Brown on August 15, 2014, authorized the Elections Office of San Mateo County to conduct up to three pilot all-mailed ballot elections before January 1, 2018. This supplemented existing law (approved August 8, 2011) allowing for three pilot all-mailed ballot elections in Yolo County by December 31, 2017 (the first of which was conducted on March 5, 2013, see Mac Donald and McCue 2013). In either county, the pilot all-mailed ballot elections were required to also allow for in-person Election Day voting at a minimum of one location in each city, could not be used in a special election, in a statewide primary or general election, and required ballot drop-off locations to be available in every city for 28 days prior to Election Day.[1] The requirement to include in-person Election Day voting locations, or Universal Polling Places (UPPs) thus means that the 2015 pilot is best understood as a hybrid election rather than as a purely all-mail election.

2. <u>Previous Research on Mail Voting and Turnout</u>

Scholars have long debated whether voter turnout rates would rise if the costs of

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[1] Full text of the legislation is at
http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB2028

voting were reduced. Early research (Key 1949) considered tangible costs, such as poll taxes; later authors (Kelley, Ayres, and Bowen 1967; Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978) focused primarily on transaction costs, such as the inconvenience of registering to vote well in advance of an election. Subsequent years saw a revival of this line of research in the wake of policy innovations designed to make voting more convenient: Election Day registration (Brians and Grofman 2001; Demos 2006; Knack 2001), early voting (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum and Miller 2007; Stein 1998; Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997), voting by mail (Qvortrup 2001; Southwell and Burchett 2000), regional polling stations (Dyck and Gimpel 2005; Haspel and Knotts 2005), election day voting centers (Stein and Vonnahme 2008), and ballots that are translated into languages other than English (Hopkins 2011). Scholars also seized on research opportunities created when budget-conscious election administrators have changed voters' polling locations (McNulty, Dowling and Ariotti 2009; Brady and McNulty 2011) or forced them to vote by mail (Southwell 2004; Kousser and Mullin 2007; Bergman and Yates 2011; Meredith and Malhotra 2011).

Possibly the ultimate level of convenience voting – voting via the Internet – has not yet been tried in the United States, but has been implemented in some European countries (Estonia, Norway, and Switzerland) as well as in a number of Canadian municipalities. Initial analyses of European efforts have found that they have not increased participation (Alvarez, Hall & Trechsel 2009; Mendez 2010; Vassil & Weber 2011), while results from Canada were more encouraging (Goodman 2010).

Election Day Vote Centers (EDVCs), in contrast, have consistently been found to increase turnout, particularly among infrequent voters (Stein and Vonnhame 2008,

2012). As directed by AB2028, EDVCs were part of the pilot project in San Mateo County. Although generally referred to as an all-mailed ballot election, as noted above, the authorizing legislation also required in-person Election Day voting in at least one location in each city in the county, and the election is best understood as a hybrid election. The San Mateo County EDVCs, referred to here as Universal Polling Places (UPPs), allowed for any registered voter in the county to cast a ballot at any UPP, not necessarily at the one closest to their place of residence. Voters had the choice at these UPPs to vote using a paper ballot or using an accessible eSlate machine.

Although there is no doubt that poll taxes or extraordinary barriers to voter registration depress turnout (Merriam and Gosnell 1924), there is less scholarly consensus about the effects of making voting more convenient. The pioneering work of Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978) and Powell (1986) implied that the policy innovations of the 1980s and 1990s would substantially increase voter turnout, but subsequent evaluations have found these effects to be relatively small. For example, states that changed their registration requirements so that voters could register closer to (or on) Election Day saw relatively small gains in voter turnout (Knee and Green 2011), as did states that adopted early voting or no-fault absentee voting (Berinsky 2005; Gronke 2008). Costs matter, but there is a growing sense among those who study policy interventions that costs matter less than initially supposed.

The ability to vote by mail has expanded significantly in recent years due in part to the Help America Vote Act of 2002, which mandated the expansion of absentee voting processes, allowing individuals to request absentee ballots without providing a reason or excuse (Mann and Mayhew 2015). Vote-by-mail is currently used statewide in

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three states (Colorado, Oregon, and Washington) and partially in another 17 (Hale, Montjoy and Brown 2015). As no-excuse absentee voting expanded, reformers predicted widespread benefits, including increased turnout, increased citizen satisfaction, and cost savings (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2007). The latter two predictions are supported by subsequent research: voters say that they prefer the convenience of voting by mail (Southwell and Burchett 2000), and they are less expensive to administer (Cuciti and Wallis 2011). Below, we evaluate whether those two benefits of an all-mailed ballot election were also true for the hybrid San Mateo County pilot election.

Effects on turnout are less clear. In part, this stems from the reliance on observational rather than experimental data. In other words, individuals are not randomly assigned either to vote by mail or to vote at a polling place; decisions are either made at the administrative level using some criteria (e.g. the number of registered voters in a precinct) or individuals opt-in to become absentee voters. Some scholars find that voting by mail reforms do increase turnout (Gerber, Huber and Hill 2013; Gronke et al. 2008; Karp and Banducci 2001), some find little or no effect on turnout (Fitzgerald 2005; Berinsky 2005; Hanmer and Traugott 2004; Berinsky, Burns, and Traugott 2001), and some find negative effects (Kousser and Mullin 2007).

Two caveats should be kept in mind when reviewing previous evaluations of the effect of mandatory vote-by-mail elections on voter turnout and how this might inform our analysis of the San Mateo County pilot. First, most of the studies have focused on just two states (Oregon and Washington), where registered voters did not have the additional option of local voting machines (UPPs, albeit to a lesser extent than in a

traditional election). As will be detailed below, concerns from local elected officials led to some cities in the county offering voters as many as six UPPs in a single city (Redwood City). It is also possible that there are some characteristics of those states (and of Colorado, where VBM has more recently been adopted) that are driving changes in turnout over time that are inaccurately being attributed to the shifts to VBM.

Oregon adopted VBM in 1995. Examining turnout from 1960-1998, Southwell and Burchett (2000) found a 10 percent increase in turnout. Gronke et al. (2007) find the effect in Oregon to be 4.7 percent, not 10 percent. Incorporating later elections, Southwell (2009) found increased turnout in Oregon to be restricted to low salience elections only (primaries and special elections). Gronke and Miller (2012) confirm this finding, and further find that while VBM has a "novelty effect" on the first few VBM elections, the effect decays over time and is only robust for special elections.

As noted by Stein, et al. (2015: 7): "the effect of VBM elections on voter turnout is not a well-identified or established relationship. Depending on the setting and research design used, estimates vary from a positive effect of up to 11 percent (Richey 2008) down to a negative effect of as much as -2.7 percent (Kousser and Mullin 2007)." Summing up these divergent results, Arceneaux et al. (2012) find that all-mailed ballot elections increase turnout in low salience primaries, special elections, and local elections, but can have null effects or decrease turnout in higher salience general elections.

Stein et al. (2015: 9) also note that VBM elections may decrease turnout among voters who do not consider voting by mail to be a desirable option, if no alternative methods of participating are available. "Voters who distrust the mail voting system,

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those who prefer voting with other people, and those who lack experience with voting by mail may prefer to cast their ballots in person at a polling place." Yet, all research on the impact of VBM elections has until recently been conducted in jurisdictions that did not offer an in-person voting option. Stein et al. (2015) note that while some of these elections have given voters the option of dropping off their completed ballots, none retained any form of in-person voting. Their study in Colorado, and the one presented here, are thus unique in that they allowed for EDVCs (UPPs) in addition to mail.

For the 2015 pilot, San Mateo County offered UPPs equipped with accessible electronic voting machines (eSlate). Individuals who chose not to mail in their completed ballots or to drop off their completed ballots at the countywide drop boxes could instead vote on Election Day on the same voting machine used in traditional polling place elections. Although few people made use of these machines (N=2,416) their availability may have further contributed to increased overall turnout by avoiding decreases in turnout among voters who are only willing to vote on a voting machine. Stein et al. note: "Casting a ballot on a machine or paper ballot at a polling location provides a different voting experience. This method does not provide an equal substitute for people who distrust voting by mail or like the social benefits of voting in-person" (2015:10). The 2014 Colorado election combined mailed ballots with Voter Service Centers (VSCs), similar to the implementation of the 2015 San Mateo County pilot. In addition, Colorado in 2014 adopted Election Day registration.

Vote-by-mail systems can also introduce challenges to voter participation. For example, errors made by voters such as incorrect or unclear vote choices are more possible, compared to in-person voting using machines that would alert the voter to

these problems. Burden and Gaines (2015) note that mail ballots are more likely to "leak" from the system or to not be counted; previous research in California has found that absentee ballots submitted by language-minority voters are less likely to be counted (Alvarez, Hall and Sinclair 2008). Using survey data, Burden and Gaines also find that voters are more likely to be concerned about voter fraud in states using VBM elections, comparing public opinion among Oregon and Washington voters to those in other states. In contrast, Beaulieu (2014) finds using a survey experiment that perceptions of fraud are more strongly predicted by partisanship than by electoral practices.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that pure VBM elections (without other voting options, such as UPPs), can lead to coerced voting, e.g. by individuals forced to vote a certain way by their spouse, religious leader, or community organization. Because absentee and mailed ballots are not secret, interested parties can ask voters to vote a certain way, and can visibly check whether those requests are successful, a practice sometimes referred to as "granny farming." As attorney Murray A. Greenberg told the *New York Times* in a 2012 article, people affiliated with political campaigns help people at senior citizen centers to complete their absentee ballots, "And help is in quotation marks."[2] That same article noted, "The problem is not limited to the elderly, of course. Absentee ballots also make it much easier to buy and sell votes."

On Sept. 19, 2005, the Commission on Federal Election Reform issued a report cosigned by former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of State James A.

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[2] http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/07/us/politics/as-more-vote-by-mail-faulty-ballots-could-impact-elections.html

Baker III that pointed to absentee voting as "the largest source of potential voter fraud"

(p. 46). They noted:

> Absentee balloting is vulnerable to abuse in several ways: Blank ballots mailed to the wrong address or to large residential buildings might get intercepted. Citizens who vote at home, at nursing homes, at the workplace, or in church are more susceptible to pressure, overt and subtle, or to intimidation. Vote buying schemes are far more difficult to detect when citizens vote by mail.[3]

Law Professor Justin Levitt testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee in September 2011 that fraud is a real and documented concern for absentee ballots, citing news reports of such coercion from elections in San Francisco and New York City.[4] A hybrid system, such as that now used in California and as used in San Mateo County in 2015, mitigates the danger of this sort of voter fraud by allowing individuals to choose to not vote by mail and to instead vote in person, i.e. at a UPP.

a. Theories of Voter Mobilization

Not all scholars agree that the best method of increasing turnout is making voting more convenient. Another productive line of research posits that it is motivation and mobilization that generates increased participation—that increasing the perceived benefits of voting (e.g. psychological rewards) is more effective than decreasing the costs.

Dale and Strauss (2009) introduce the Noticeable Reminder Theory (NRT) of

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[3] "Building Confidence in U.S. Elections: Report of the Commission on Federal Election Reform." 2005.
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj
rpsrNjonLAhUG3yYKHQebD3kQFggdMAA&url=httppercent3Apercent2Fpercent2Fwww.eac.govpercent2
Fassetspercent2F1percent2FAssetManagerpercent2FExhibitpercent2520M.PDF&usg=AFQjCNHTv09qyx
i3hbJG4D7UkKD2xmLALg&sig2=iBtUnawBpv3QsPrmNQowdA&bvm=bv.114733917,d.eWE
[4] http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/download/testimony-of-levitt-pdf. Anastasia Hendrix, City Workers: We
Were Told To Vote, Work for Newsom , S.F. CHRONICLE , Jan. 15, 2004; Matthew Purdy, 5 Bronx
School Officials Are Indicted in Absentee Ballot Fraud , N.Y. TIMES , Apr. 25, 1996.

voter mobilization, which posits that mobilization efforts that are highly noticeable and salient to potential voters, even if impersonal, can be successful. This is in contrast to Social Occasion Theory (SOT), which contends that voting is a social occasion, and therefore explains why personal mobilization strategies such as in-person contact (Gerber and Green 2000) and volunteer telephone calls (Nickerson 2006) tend to be effective while impersonal strategies such as direct mail (Gerber and Green 2000) and electronic mail (Nickerson 2007) are not. The main crux of Dale and Strauss's logic is that the weighing of costs and benefits is generally undertaken by citizens at the time of deciding whether to *register* to vote in an election, and that conditional on being registered, a voter simply needs to be reminded in a salient manner (not personally convinced) to vote. Conversely, SOT contends that social contact is necessary to boost the perceived benefits of voting and consequently the decision to participate.

The bulk of the field experimental literature on voter mobilization has forwarded the importance of social connectedness (Green and Gerber 2008; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008), relying on SOT. In an innovative experimental design, Dale and Strauss use text messages to directly test these two competing theories of voter mobilization. Like in-person contact and telephone calls, text messages are noticeable and salient. However, like direct and electronic mail, they are impersonal. Hence, if text messages significantly and substantially boost turnout at a level similar to that of personalized mobilization strategies, then it is the *noticeability* of the message (and not the *personalization* of the message) that promotes turnout. Conversely, if the effect of text messages is similar to the effect of direct and electronic mail, then SOT is supported. A follow-up text messaging experiment finds that "cold" text messages – messages sent

without prior personal contact or by request, in contrast to the "warm" text messages sent by Dale and Strauss – do increase turnout, particularly among habitual voters in a low-salience election, further supporting NRT (Malhotra et al. 2011).

Parallel work using email messages finds that email messages from the Registrar of Voters in San Mateo County also effectively increased turnout in low-salience elections, while similar email messages from another (non-trusted) source did not (Malhotra et al. 2012). This suggests that reminders to vote from the Registrar are particularly noticeable and are a powerful method of increasing turnout. AB2028 directs the Registrar to communicate with registered voters about the changed format (to VBM plus UPPs) of the targeted election; this constitutes a reminder to vote. Thus, we would expect individuals receiving informational postcards from the Elections Office to be more likely to vote, regardless of the format of the election.

b. Vote-by-Mail and Disabled Voters

Robust scholarship finds that members of the disability community vote at a lower rate than do other voters, but that they are more likely to vote by a mail ballot (Hall and Alvarez 2012; Alvarez, Levin and Sinclair 2012; Schur and Adya 2013; Schur and Kruse 2000; Schur et al. 2002; Schur, Shields and Schriner 2003, 2005). Survey evidence finds that significant proportions of absentee voters choose to vote by mail due to mobility impairment (Barreto et al. 2006), while electoral reforms that expand vote-by-mail options increase turnout in the disability population (Schur and Kruse 2014). Increasing the accessibility of polling places for voters with disability was an explicit goal of the 2002 Help America Vote Act (Ward, Baker, and Moon 2009), and

since the law was enacted there have been significant increases in polling place accessibility (USGAO 2009).

HAVA specifically aims to ensure access among individuals with vision impairments (Miller and Powell 2016). Schur, Ayda and Ameri (2015: 65) note that among potential measures to increase voter turnout among people with disabilities, voting by mail "is of most use to people with visual or mobility impairments," and they cite no-excuse and all-vote-by-mail systems as best practices. This allows individuals to access needed assistance in completing their ballots without having to disclose a disability on a public form, something that many members of the community are reluctant to do because of continuing stigma (*ibid*).

Miller and Powell (2016) find that voters with a disability are more likely to vote by mail than at traditional polling places. They provide separate estimates for subsets of the disability community, based on self reports of a) hearing impairment, b) vision impairment, c) cognitive impairment, d) mobility impairment, e) difficulty with self-care, and f) difficulty going outside alone. Overall, all disabilities other than hearing impairments are associated with lower rates of voter turnout. Individuals with visual impairments or mobility impairments were more likely to take advantage of early in-person voting opportunities, and individuals in four of the subsets, including vision impairment, mobility impairment, difficulty with self-care, and difficulty going outside alone, were all more likely to vote by mail compared to voters without a disability. Miller and Powell conclude that expanding absentee voting or converting to VBM elections will have little effect on the disability community because these voters in large part are already voting by mail.

c. Ballot Completion

Proponents of VBM posit that it may generate more complete ballots, as voters can take their time to research and fill in all sections of what are often complicated and lengthy ballots. The November 2016 California ballot, for example, is expected to include not just decisions on federal, state, and local elected officials, but as many as 20 statewide ballot propositions. At a traditional polling place, voters may find themselves unable or unwilling to complete their ballots due to a lack of information or sufficient time to consider all of their choices, particularly on down-ballot items that they were not aware of before showing up at their polling place. With a VBM ballot, in contrast, voters can step away from their ballots and gather more information about these decisions, e.g. by searching the Internet for information, before making their choices. The opportunity to do so should generate more complete ballots.

Previous research has found this to be exactly true. Marble (2015) examines data from Washington State from 1996 to 2012, taking advantage of the rolling implementation of that state's VBM system. He finds significant decreases in drop off for down-ballot races, ranging from 0.5 to 1.2 percentage-points. Using data from 2004 to 2014, Stein et al. (2015) find an increase in turnout and ballot completion in Colorado in 2014, when the state adopted a hybrid system including Election Day registration, VBM, and EDVCs. They also find that voters who used mailed ballots were more likely to fill out their ballots more completely, compared to voters who took advantage of in-person voting options.

Marble notes that increases in ballot completion due to a shift to VBM is less likely for jurisdictions with high previous rates of absentee voting. Recall that more than

half (57 percent) of San Mateo County voters were registered as permanent vote-by-mail (PERM) voters prior to the 2015 pilot. Thus, for most voters no increase in ballot completion is expected. Only for those voters compelled to vote by mail who previously had voted at a polling place should we see any decrease in roll-off. Marble also finds (as with VBM elections more generally) that this is not limited to a novelty effect: the decrease in roll-off continues in subsequent elections subsequent to the election where VBM is introduced.

d. Cost

A commonly cited advantage of VBM elections is that they are less expensive compared to traditional polling place elections (Hamilton 1988). Although mailed ballots incur increased printing and postage expenses, they also generate considerable savings due to the much smaller number of poll workers needed. Montjoy (2010) cautions that some of these savings can be offset by the need to raise wages in order to attract workers with more knowledge and skills. Lagmay (2009), in a report prepared for the Los Angeles City Council, notes that shifting to a VBM system would generate considerable savings if used for non-Citywide special elections. However, using VBM for citywide municipal elections would incur considerable increases in cost (and other challenges), mostly due to large staffing increases, unless the current manual process were fully automated, and if not supplemented with Neighborhood Voting Centers.

3. Qualitative Description

    a. *Narrative*

    AB 2028 required the Registrar of Voters to achieve approval from all covered jurisdictions in the county prior to launching a pilot VBM election. Several jurisdictions, including Redwood City, Woodside, and the Jefferson Elementary School District, expressed particular concern about the possible negative effect on local elections from a VBM election. AB 2028 required only one UPP per 100,000 voters, or per city, which would have meant a total of 20 UPPs. However, negotiations between elected officials in these jurisdictions and San Mateo County Registrar Mark Church led to agreements to provide additional UPPs in those areas, to 32, incurring significant cost increases, as noted below.[5]

    Prior to the 2015 pilot, San Mateo County Elections Office had conducted elections both using VBM only and using UPPs, consistent with existing election law. This allows the county to conduct a VBM election when the ballot includes only a county-level contest (e.g. to fill a vacancy on the Board of Supervisors in 2011) or by precinct if there are fewer than 250 registered voters in a precinct. An election in 2006 used only UPPs, including two voting centers and seven additional UPPs throughout the county. In that election, all voters participated using eSlate machines; due to a change in the certification process made by former California Secretary of State Debra Bowen, the 2015 pilot required all UPPs to have both eSlate machines and paper ballots available. This increased the cost of the election, but at the same time was a feature of

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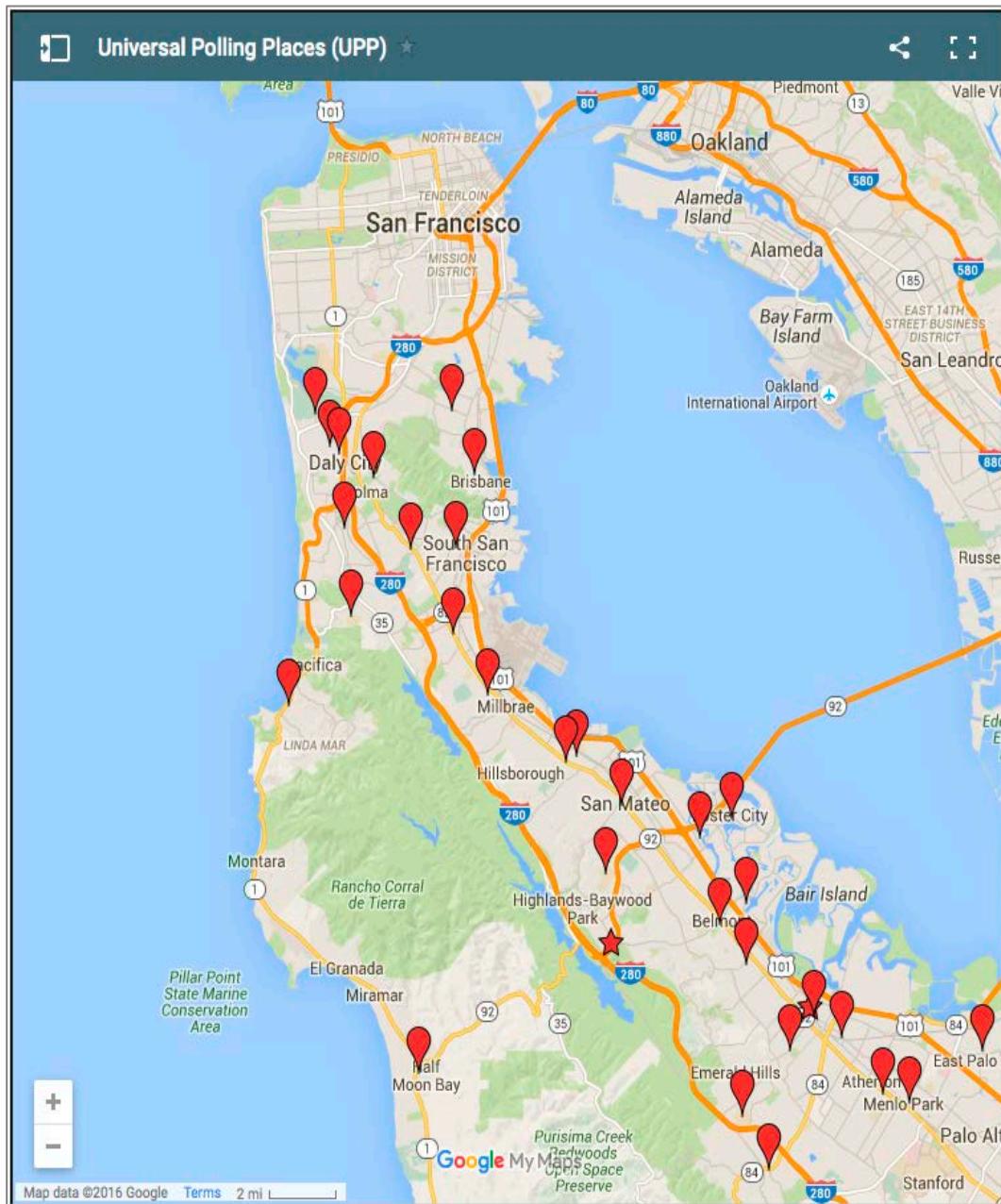
[5] Church has already recommended to lawmakers that a legislative fix be applied to this issue, reducing the threshold of approval from unanimous consent of included jurisdictions to a simple majority. In addition, reflecting the low use of the UPPs, he has recommended more strict limits on how many must be made available.

the pilot that reassured many jurisdictions as they were deciding whether to agree to participate.

The paper ballots available to voters were preprinted, requiring preparation of 40,950 paper ballots in order to properly supply all UPPs with all types of ballots that might be requested by voters. Current technology exists to create print-on-demand ballots, but the machines from the vendor used by San Mateo County had not been certified by the Secretary of State in time to be used for this election. If UPPs are adopted as a permanent feature, election administration costs over time could be reduced through purchase of these on-demand ballot printers, and more so if the number of UPPs (and printers) is limited to one per jurisdiction or city, or per 100,000 voters, as was the basic structure authorized by AB 2028. However, as noted above, AB 2028 also required all jurisdictions to opt in to the pilot, and negotiations between San Mateo County Registrar Mark Church and elected officials whose support was needed led to agreements to increase the number of UPPs in several areas, increasing the total overall number from 20 to 32. A map indicating the location of each UPP is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Map of Universal Polling Places for 2015 Hybrid Election

Pursuant to AB 2028, this was the first hybrid election conducted in the county, using a combination of UPPs and VBM ballots. The most notable way in which this

differed from previous elections is that appropriate ballots for all voters needed to be made available at every UPP, in contrast to the previous elections using vote centers where there was a uniform ballot across the county. This required upgrading the UPP technology using laptops linked to the Elections Office, to allow for the correct ballot to be generated and to confirm whether each voter had already cast a vote elsewhere or by mail. This also required increased training of Election Day poll workers and support from information technology (IT) professionals.

Elections Office staff invested significant time and effort educating the public about the changed election format, using both paid and earned media. This outreach campaign paid particular attention to the needs of potential voters who had never registered, never voted by mail, for whom English was a second language, for individuals with special needs or disabilities, for homeless individuals, and for residents of low-participation communities.

Particular attention was given to the needs of older and disabled voters. In July 2015, the Elections Office formed a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) to represent those communities and review registration and election policies and practices. This included working with senior citizen centers, nursing homes, community organizations, and city-sponsored shuttles to assist members of the disability community who prefer to vote by mail or who prefer to vote with accessible eSlate voting machines. Members of the VAAC were also consulted in the design of the survey of voters conducted by the evaluation team, as described below. The two voting centers and the 32 UPPs all met or exceeded the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Help America Vote Act, including accessible eSlate voting

machines. These machines are compatible with a number of adaptive devices, including headphones, sip and puff devices, and tactile input switches.

Assistance was also provided to voters who are homebound, who live in assisted living facilities or nursing homes or are hospitalized, or who are certified to use Redi-Wheels paratransit. To aid in the participation of homebound voters, Elections Office staff visited homes of voters needing assistance; this assistance sometimes included just picking up a completed ballot and sometimes included helping the voter to mark their ballot. The Elections Office partnered with social workers and activity directors at nursing homes and assisted living centers to ensure that individuals at those facilities were registered and completed their ballots. As noted above, educational outreach efforts included staff presentations at those facilities; staff also assisted individuals filling out voter registration cards and picked up completed ballots from the facilities. The Elections Office also notified San Mateo County Paratransit to the likely increase in demand for Redi-Wheels transportation during the voting period.

To assist voters with limited English proficiency, the Elections Office provided in-language materials, and also sent bilingual staff to local events such as neighborhood festivals, senior centers, and citizenship classes. Hard-to-reach populations were targeted through partnerships with community groups and local churches. Outreach to younger voters included partnerships with high schools and community colleges, including the placement of three UPPs on those college campuses. Partnering with relevant community organizations was part of a concerted effort on the part of the Elections Office to maximize participation among communities with low rates of voter participation, including communities of color and non-native English speakers. A full list

of the 58 community events where Elections Office staff conducted outreach is provided in Table 1, and the timeline is illustrated in Figure 2. Table 2 provides a list of community partners that Elections Office staff worked with to educate voters about the 2015 pilot election.

Table 1. Voter Outreach Events

Monday, January 19, 2015	MLK Celebration in East Palo Alto
Sunday, January 25, 2015	AACI Walk Together in East Palo Alto
Saturday, February 07, 2015	Black History Month Celebration in Daly City
Saturday, February 21, 2015	Midpeninsula African American History Month Celebration in East Palo Alto
Sunday, February 22, 2015	Chinese New Year Celebration in Foster City
Saturday, February 28, 2015	Millbrae Lunar New Year Festival
Saturday, May 02, 2015	Foster City Polynesian Festival
Saturday, May 02, 2015	Streets Alive! Parks Alive! In South City
Saturday, May 16, 2015	5th Annual Reading Bonanza in the Park in EPA
Saturday, June 13, 2015	LGBTQ Pride Celebration in San Mateo
Saturday, June 20, 2015	Dad & Me at the Park in San Mateo
Sunday, June 21, 2015	San Mateo Street Festival
Wednesday, June 24, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Snap Jackson)
Wednesday, July 01, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Sinister Dexter)
Saturday, July 04, 2015	PCA Independence Day in Redwood City
Wednesday, July 08, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Lost Dog Friend)
Wednesday, July 15, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Andre Thierry)
Wednesday, July 22, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Lara Price)
Wednesday, July 29, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (The Famous)
Wednesday, August 05, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Native Elements)
Saturday, August 08, 2015	EPA Blockfest
Saturday, August 08, 2015	OCA San Mateo Summer Picnic
Wednesday, August 12, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Houston Jones)
Saturday, August 15, 2015	Pescadero Arts & Fun Festival
Sunday, August 16, 2015	Pescadero Arts & Fun Festival
Sunday, August 16, 2015	North Fair Oaks Festival
Wednesday, August 19, 2015	RWC - Music in the Park (Top Shelf)

Saturday, September 05, 2015	Millbrae Arts & Wine Festival
Sunday, September 06, 2015	Millbrae Arts & Wine Festival
Tuesday, September 15, 2015	Aragon HS Outreach
Wednesday, September 16, 2015	Fiestas Patrias in RWC
Thursday, September 17, 2015	Burlingame HS Outreach
Thursday, September 17, 2015	International Institute of the Bay Area Class
Friday, September 18, 2015	Oceana HS Outreach
Saturday, September 19, 2015	Redwood Shores Clean-up
Monday, September 21, 2015	San Mateo HS Outreach
Monday, September 21, 2015	Woodside HS Outreach Day 1
Tuesday, September 22, 2015	NVRA Day Library Drive
Tuesday, September 22, 2015	Woodside HS Outreach Day 2
Wednesday, September 23, 2015	Redwood HS Outreach
Wednesday, September 23, 2015	Brisbane Candidate Forum
Wednesday, September 23, 2015	Sequoia Union High School District Candidate Forum
Thursday, September 24, 2015	RWC Candidate Forum
Thursday, September 24, 2015	Burlingame Candidate Forum
Thursday, September 24, 2015	Sequoia HS Outreach
Thursday, September 24, 2015	Carlomont HS Outreach
Friday, September 25, 2015	Pescadero HS Outreach
Saturday, September 26, 2015	Disability Unity Festival (SF)
Saturday, September 26, 2015	RWC Salsa Festival
Sunday, September 27, 2015	Autumn Moon in Central Park
Tuesday, September 29, 2015	East Palo Alto Senior Center
Saturday, October 03, 2015	Family, Fun and Resource Expo
Sunday, October 4, 2015	Millbrae Japanese Culture Festival
Thursday, October 08, 2015	Innovate Schools RWC Election Forum
Saturday, October 10, 2015	Transition to Independence Fair @ Hillsdale HS
Saturday, October 17, 2015	Half Moon Bay Pumpkin Festival
Sunday, October 18, 2015	Half Moon Bay Pumpkin Festival
Thursday, October 29, 2015	Homeless Connect Event in EPA

Table 2. Community Partners

Government/Public Agencies

City of Atherton	Portola Valley School District
City of Belmont	Ravenswood City School District
City of Brisbane	Redwood City School District
City of Burlingame	San Bruno Park School District
City of Colma	San Carlos School District
City of Daly City	San Mateo-Foster City School District
City of East Palo Alto	Woodside Elementary School District
City of Foster City	Jefferson Union High School District
City of Half Moon Bay	San Mateo Union High School District
City of Hillsborough	Sequoia Union High School District
City of Menlo Park	Cabrillo Unified School District
City of Millbrae	La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District
City of Pacifica	South San Francisco Unified School District
City of Portola Valley	San Mateo County Community College District
City of Redwood City	Bayshore Sanitary District
City of San Bruno	Broadmoor Police District
City of San Carlos	Coastside County Water District
City of San Mateo	Coastside Fire Protection District
City of South San Francisco	East Palo Alto Sanitary District
Town of Portola Valley	Granada Community Services District
Town of Woodside	Highlands Recreation District
San Mateo County Legislative Delegation	Ladera Recreation District
to the State Assembly and Senate	Menlo park Fire Protection District
San Carlos Airport Day	Mid-Peninsula Water District
San Mateo County Office of Education	Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
SamTrans Paratransit Redi-Wheels	Montana Water and Sanitary District
Bay Area Outreach Committee	North Coast County Water District
San Mateo County Public Library	Peninsula Health Care District
South San Francisco Library	San Mateo County Harbor District
Fair Oaks Community Center	Sequoia Healthcare District
East Palo Alto Senior Advisory Committee	West Bay Sanitary District
Pescadero Municipal Advisory County	Westborough Water District
Bayshore Elementary School District	Woodside Fire Protection District
Belmont Redwood Shores School District	22nd Assembly District
Brisbane School District	Oceana High School
Burlingame School District	Aragon High School
Hillsborough City School District	Pescadero High School
Jefferson Elementary School District	San Mateo High School
Las Lomitas Elementary School District	Woodside High School
Menlo Park City School District	Redwood High School
Millbrae School District	Burlingame High School
Pacifica School District	

Non-Profits and Community Groups

Innovate Schools

Daly City Partnership

Project We-Hope – East Palo Alto

San Mateo County League of Women Voters

San Mateo County Central Labor Council

National Voter Registration Day

International Institute of the Bay Area

Peninsula Celebration Association

One East Palo Alto

Live in peace

Self-Help for the Elderly

Social Vocational Services, Inc

American GI Forum

Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto

North East Medical Services

Silicon Valley Independent Living Center

Computers for Everyone

Stanford Alumni – Beyond the Farm

Ecumenical Hunger Program

Ravenswood Family Health Center

Fair Oaks Beautification Association

Daly City Council of Homeowners and Residents Associations

Midpeninsula Media Center

Other Partnerships

Univision Local Media

CBS Radio

Fox Venue Inc

The Daily Journal

Embarcadero Media

San Francisco Media Group

Sing Tao Chinese Radio Bay Area

Telemundo de la Bahia

The San Francisco Examiner

The Daily Post

Pacifica Tribune – Bay Area News Group

El Ravenswood

Figure 3. Sample Newspaper Advertisement (*East Palo Alto Today*)

Figure 4. Sample Advertisement, BART and magazines

Figure 5. Sample Billboard

Elections Office voter outreach included messages distributed via traditional media, including newspapers, radio, and billboard and public transit advertisements (Figures 3-5). Paid advertising included a mix of radio and television advertisements, including 30-second spots on Spanish-language radio stations. Messages were also disseminated via social media including Facebook and Twitter, and the Elections Office website was updated for ease of reading and navigation. All of these messages emphasized the message of how to vote in the pilot all-mailed ballot election. A full list of traditional media outlets included in the outreach campaign is provided in Table 3, and the timeline is illustrated in Figure 6.

Table 3. Traditional Media Outreach

Newspapers/Magazines
- The Almanac
- Bay City News Services
- Redwood City-based News
- Daily News Group, San Mateo County
- Daily Post
- East Palo Alto Today
- El Mensajero (Spanish Language)
- Half Moon Bay Review Managing
- News for Chinese (Chinese Language)
- Pacifica Tribune
- San Francisco Chronicle
- San Francisco Examiner
- San Jose Mercury News
- The San Mateo County Times
- Reporter: Josh Melvin
- The San Mateo Daily Journal
- San Mateo County
- Sing Tao Daily (Chinese Language)
- The Spectrum
- El Ravenswood

Blogs

- Coastsider.com
- The Daily Fetch
- InMenlo.com
- Montara Fog
- Pacifica Riptide
- Peninsula Public Policy Examiner
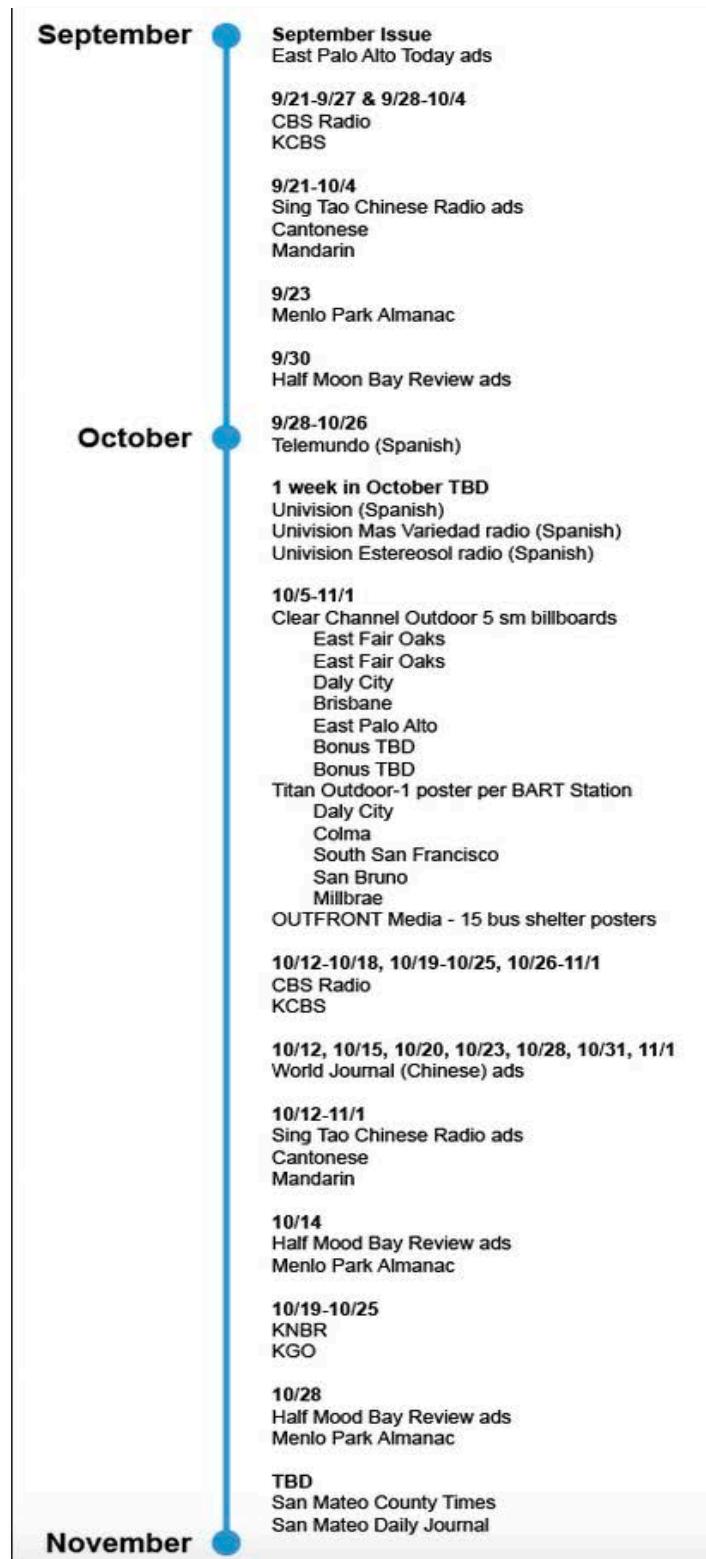
Television

- KGO-TV Channel 7 ABC
- KNTV NBC
- KPIX-TV CBS
- KRON-TV
- KTSF 26
- KTVU FOX 2
- Peninsula Television
- Univision 14, KDTV (Spanish Language)
- Midpeninsula Media Center

Radio Stations

- KCBS 740 AM Radio
- KLIV Silicon Valley News 1590 AM Radio

Figure 6. Traditional Media Campaign Timeline

September

September Issue
East Palo Alto Today ads

9/21-9/27 & 9/28-10/4
CBS Radio
KCBS

9/21-10/4
Sing Tao Chinese Radio ads
Cantonese
Mandarin

9/23
Menlo Park Almanac

9/30
Half Moon Bay Review ads

October

9/28-10/26
Telemundo (Spanish)

1 week in October TBD
Univision (Spanish)
Univision Mas Variedad radio (Spanish)
Univision Estereosol radio (Spanish)

10/5-11/1
Clear Channel Outdoor 5 sm billboards
   East Fair Oaks
   East Fair Oaks
   Daly City
   Brisbane
   East Palo Alto
   Bonus TBD
   Bonus TBD
Titan Outdoor-1 poster per BART Station
   Daly City
   Colma
   South San Francisco
   San Bruno
   Millbrae
OUTFRONT Media - 15 bus shelter posters

10/12-10/18, 10/19-10/25, 10/26-11/1
CBS Radio
KCBS

10/12, 10/15, 10/20, 10/23, 10/28, 10/31, 11/1
World Journal (Chinese) ads

10/12-11/1
Sing Tao Chinese Radio ads
Cantonese
Mandarin

10/14
Half Mood Bay Review ads
Menlo Park Almanac

10/19-10/25
KNBR
KGO

10/28
Half Mood Bay Review ads
Menlo Park Almanac

TBD
San Mateo County Times
San Mateo Daily Journal

November

The Elections Office also worked to increase participation in the all-mailed ballot pilot election through official mailings to registered voters. Based on their voter registration status and whether they returned a valid ballot prior to October 30, 2015, registered voters received between three and six pieces of mail from the Elections Office in September and October. The timeline for these mailings is detailed in Table 4 and the mailings themselves are shown in Figures 7-9.
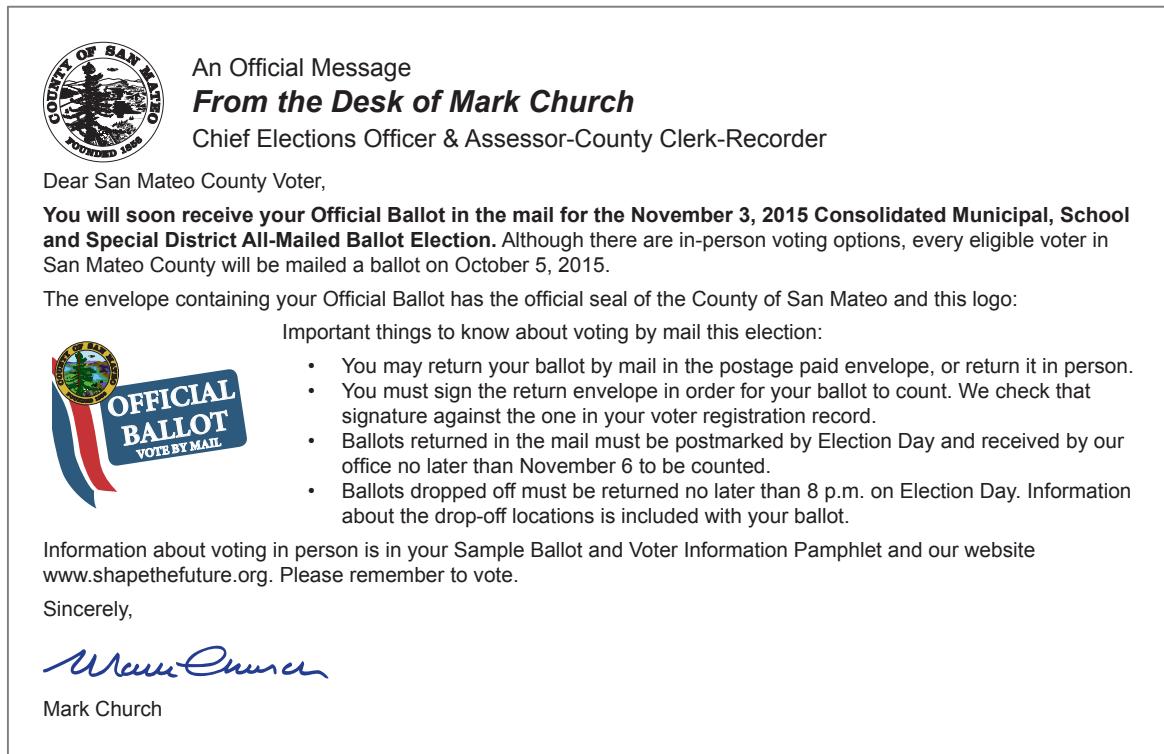
Table 4. Official Mailings to Registered Voters

Date	Title & Purpose	Quantity	Recipients
9/25	*Postcard 1* Notify all voters of All-Mailed Ballot Election	352,856	All registered voters
9/24-10/2	Sample Ballot & Official Voter Information Pamphlet	352,856	All registered voters
10/5	Official Ballot Mailing	352,856	All registered voters
10/8	*Postcard Mailing 2* Ballot Mailing Alert	150,780	Non-permanent absentee voters (non-PERMs)
10/26-10/28	*Postcard Mailing 3* Outreach to Voters Who Haven't Mailed in their Ballot	322,210	Voters who have not yet voted
10/12-11/4	Cure Letters to voters who had returned ballots that were challenged due to missing or non-matching signatures	not tracked	VBM challenges

Figure 7. Postcard 1 (English)

An Official Message
From the Desk of Mark Church
Chief Elections Officer & Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

Dear San Mateo County Voter,

I'm pleased to announce that the upcoming November 3, 2015 Consolidated Municipal, School and Special District Election will be an All-Mailed Ballot Election. This is the first such election in the history of the State of California to be conducted primarily by mail.

Please watch for official election materials that will be sent to you over the next few weeks.

Important things to know about this election:

- You will be mailed a ballot on October 5, 2015.
- You can vote in person or pick up a ballot at the two Voting Centers starting October 5, 2015.
- You can drop off your voted ballot at any of the 20 City or Town Halls throughout the county.
- You can vote at any of the 32 Polling Places in the County on Election Day November 3, 2015.

Please carefully look at your Sample Ballot and Voter Information Pamphlet which you will be receiving shortly. You may also go to our website www.shapethefuture.org for location addresses and hours of operation.

Since we will mail you your Official Ballot and then verify your signature on your returned Vote by Mail ballot envelope, it is critical your voter registration information is accurate.

If you have changed your name, address or signature please update your registration by going to www.registertovote.ca.gov or picking up a voter registration card at any library, city hall or post office.

Sincerely,

Mark Church

Figure 8. Postcard 2 (English)

An Official Message
From the Desk of Mark Church
Chief Elections Officer & Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

Dear San Mateo County Voter,

You will soon receive your Official Ballot in the mail for the November 3, 2015 Consolidated Municipal, School and Special District All-Mailed Ballot Election. Although there are in-person voting options, every eligible voter in San Mateo County will be mailed a ballot on October 5, 2015.

The envelope containing your Official Ballot has the official seal of the County of San Mateo and this logo:

Important things to know about voting by mail this election:

- You may return your ballot by mail in the postage paid envelope, or return it in person.
- You must sign the return envelope in order for your ballot to count. We check that signature against the one in your voter registration record.
- Ballots returned in the mail must be postmarked by Election Day and received by our office no later than November 6 to be counted.
- Ballots dropped off must be returned no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day. Information about the drop-off locations is included with your ballot.

Information about voting in person is in your Sample Ballot and Voter Information Pamphlet and our website www.shapethefuture.org. Please remember to vote.

Sincerely,

Mark Church

Figure 9. Postcard 3 (English)

The first piece was a postcard announcing the all-mailed ballot format of the election, mailed September 25, 2015. This information was reemphasized in the sample ballot and voter information pamphlet sent Sept. 24-Oct. 2. These first two pieces of mail went to all 352,856 registered voters in San Mateo County.

A supplemental second postcard was sent on October 8, 2015 to all 150,780 registered voters who were not Permanent Vote by Mail (PERM) voters. This was sent to counter the possible danger of voters not familiar with the VBM process throwing away their official ballots. Prior to the pilot, 57 percent of voters in the county were registered as PERM voters; these voters had experience voting by mail and would know to watch for their official ballots.

Ballots went out to all registered voters on October 5. In late October, individuals who had not returned their ballot by October 26 were sent yet another postcard; overall, between October 25 and October 28, 2015, this third mailer was sent to 322,210 individuals. Finally, a warning letter was sent to voters on October 30 if they had returned a ballot that had for some reason been disqualified, e.g. if the signature was missing or did not match the signature on file; this gave those voters time to sign again or to vote in person. Election Office staff did not track the quantity of these mailings.

Previous research, as noted above, has found that reminders to vote from the San Mateo County Registrar are effective at increasing turnout (Malhotra et al. 2012). Additional work by political scientists in other jurisdictions confirms that mailers encouraging participation are especially effective when they resemble those sent in this election: mostly black and white text, and in language (Spanish or Chinese) as appropriate.

Voters had many available methods of participating in the election. In addition to returning their ballots via the U.S. Postal Service, voters could also drop off their completed ballots during the 28 days before Election Day at drop boxes throughout the county, vote in person at one of two voting centers, or could vote using an eSlate voting machine on Election Day at one of the 32 UPPs or the two voting centers in Redwood City and San Mateo. While in a traditional election voters must vote only at the polling place to which they are assigned, for this election any voter registered in the county could vote at any of the 32 UPPs. Thus, while the number of polling places was decreased from 209 to 32, which may be seen as making voting less convenient,

replacing neighborhood polling places with UPPs may be seen as making voting more convenient.

One additional aspect of the implementation of the 2015 pilot is notable. As required by AB2028, the ballots were sent with postage-paid return envelopes. In a regular election, absentee voters are required to supply their own postage in order to return their completed ballots. This made returning completed ballots more convenient, as well as less costly, for voters. Although previous experimental research on the power of providing postage-paid return envelopes to voters in San Mateo County was inconclusive (see Michelson et al. 2012), there is strong theoretical basis for the expectation that providing such envelopes will increase participation.

b. Challenges

As with any election, various challenges arose during the election period. One arose from the fact that sample ballots had to be approved by August 7, 2015, before Elections Office staff were sure that all San Mateo County jurisdictions would agree to cooperate with the all-mailed ballot pilot. This meant Elections Office staff had to prepare two sets of sample ballots: one as if it were conducting a traditional election, and a second set for the hybrid pilot.
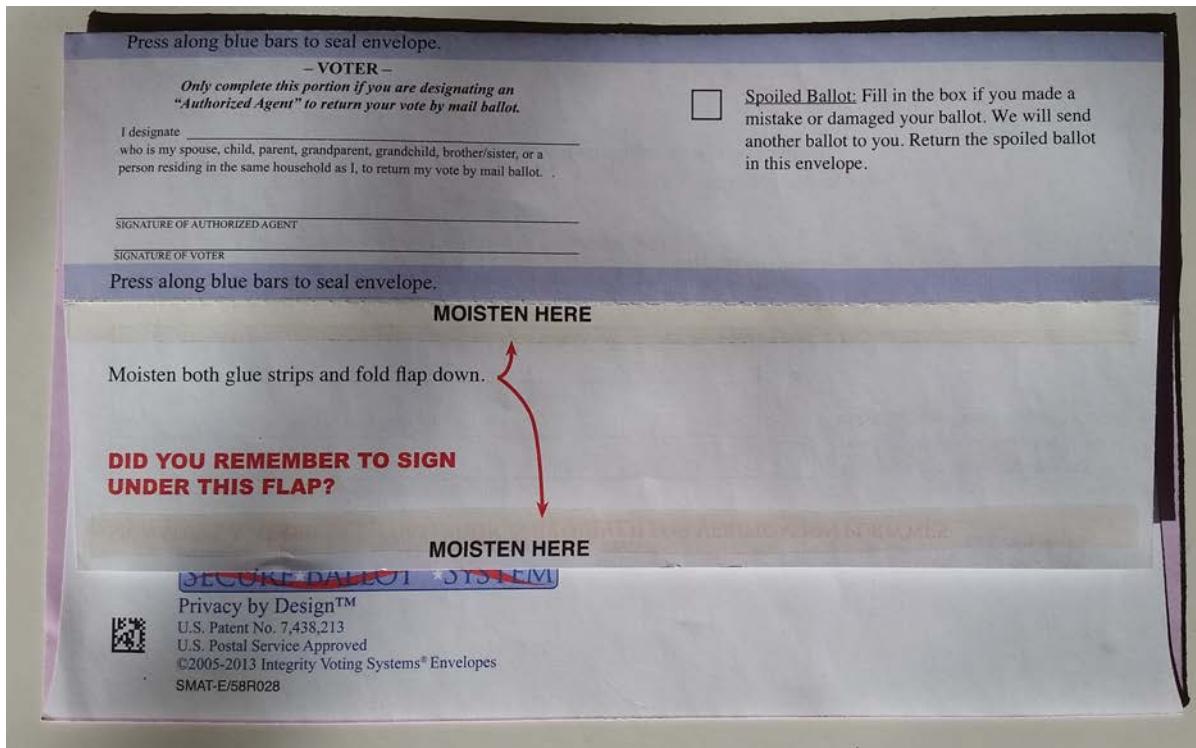
Another challenge arose the day after Election Day, when the server used for the UPPs failed and could not be brought back online for about six hours. Were this to have occurred just a day earlier, during Election Day, it could have been a disaster; this points to the need for Elections Offices using networked UPPs to have a backup system

in place for their servers, to either mitigate the impact of a similar problem occurring during the election.
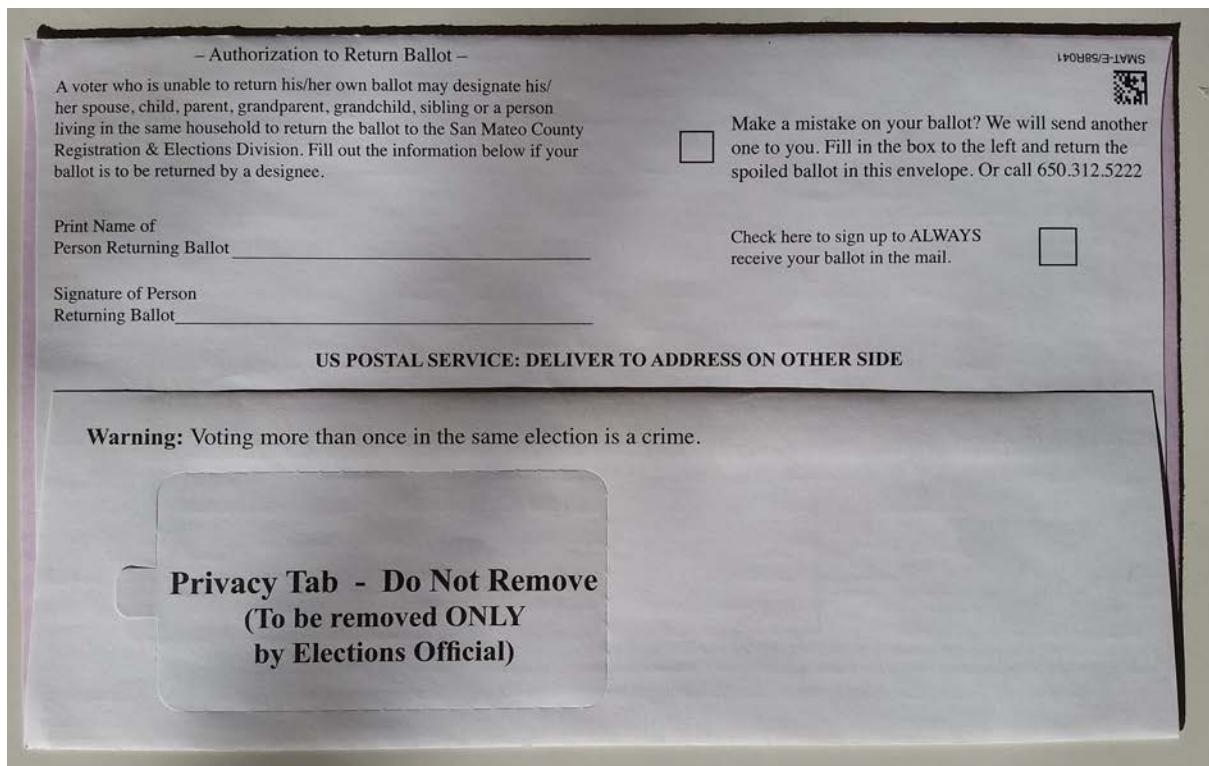
Possibly the biggest challenge faced (and overcome) by Elections Office staff stemmed from a decision to change the design of the return envelope used by voters to send in their completed ballots. In prior elections, VBM voters had used an envelope with a flap on the reverse side; after providing their home address in the space provided on the back of the envelope, the flap would be folded up and sealed in order to conceal it. When planning for the 2015 pilot, Elections officials chose to simplify the envelope to minimize confusion among voters new to VBM.

As shown in Figure 10, the old envelope concealed the return address of permanent VBM voters, for whom addresses were printed on the upper portion of the envelope. For one-time absentee voters, labels with their addresses were attached to the lower portion of the back of the envelope, and were thus still visible after the flap was sealed. In the new design, as shown in Figure 11, all return envelopes had the name and address of the voter visible on the bottom of the back of the envelope. This new design was approved by the U.S. Postal Service in consultation with the Elections Office prior to their use.

Figure 10. Old VBM Envelope (Used in previous elections)

Press along blue bars to seal envelope.

– VOTER –

Only complete this portion if you are designating an "Authorized Agent" to return your vote by mail ballot.

I designate _____
who is my spouse, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, brother/sister, or a person residing in the same household as I, to return my vote by mail ballot.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED AGENT _____

SIGNATURE OF VOTER _____

Press along blue bars to seal envelope.

MOISTEN HERE

Moisten both glue strips and fold flap down.

DID YOU REMEMBER TO SIGN UNDER THIS FLAP?

MOISTEN HERE

SECURE BALLOT SYSTEM
Privacy by Design™
U.S. Patent No. 7,438,213
U.S. Postal Service Approved
©2005-2013 Integrity Voting Systems® Envelopes
SMAT-E/58R028

☐ Spoiled Ballot: Fill in the box if you made a mistake or damaged your ballot. We will send another ballot to you. Return the spoiled ballot in this envelope.

Figure 11. New VBM Envelope (Used in 2015 Pilot)

– Authorization to Return Ballot –

SMAT-E/58R041

A voter who is unable to return his/her own ballot may designate his/her spouse, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling or a person living in the same household to return the ballot to the San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division. Fill out the information below if your ballot is to be returned by a designee.

Print Name of
Person Returning Ballot _____

Signature of Person
Returning Ballot _____

☐ Make a mistake on your ballot? We will send another one to you. Fill in the box to the left and return the spoiled ballot in this envelope. Or call 650.312.5222

Check here to sign up to ALWAYS ☐
receive your ballot in the mail.

US POSTAL SERVICE: DELIVER TO ADDRESS ON OTHER SIDE

Warning: Voting more than once in the same election is a crime.

Privacy Tab - Do Not Remove
(To be removed ONLY
by Elections Official)

Thus, for the 2015 pilot election the address of the voter returning her ballot was still visible on one side of the envelope. Although the envelope indicated that it should be delivered to the addressee on the other side (the Elections Office), both in the text printed on the envelope and coded into the barcode read by automatic sorting machines, some ballots were mistakenly returned to the voters. Just days after ballots were mailed on Oct. 5, five voters reported receiving their completed ballots back in their mailboxes. This only happened when postal workers made two related errors. The first error, in the initial sorting of incoming mail, occurred if a postal worker placed the envelope in the *odd*-size envelope bin, rather than in the bin for standard-size envelopes. The second error, in the sorting of items in the odd-size envelopes, occurred if the postal worker hand-loading the envelope into the sorter placed that envelope in the sorter backwards, indicating that it should be sent to the address on the wrong side. In order for a completed ballot to be incorrectly returned to the voter, postal workers needed to make two errors with the same envelope. This was relatively rare; however, it did happen repeatedly.

Elections Office staff worked quickly to address the problem, working in cooperation with the USPS to ensure that ballots were treated as "hot mail" and placed carefully into mail sorting machinery. Some ballots were picked up from individual voters' homes. On Election Day evening, a van with a sheriffs' escort picked up about 15,000 ballots from the San Francisco USPS warehouse and took them directly to the Elections Office. In addition, some completed ballots were picked up by Elections Office staff from individual voters' homes (after being accidentally mailed back). Overall, while

105 ballots were misdelivered back to voters, all were properly received in time to be processed; no votes were lost. In future elections, coordination with USPS staff prior to when ballots are mailed should mitigate such problems from reoccurring. In addition, designing an envelope with IMB codes on both sides of the envelope that indicate that the mail should be delivered to the Elections Office will prevent misdeliveries even if similar human error were to occur.

An additional challenge related to voters trying to participate by going to their traditional community polling place location, rather than to one of the 32 UPPs. Elections Staff posted signage at these locations, but some calls did come in on Election Day noting that voters were confused about where to vote. This also added to the cost of the election, in that staff had to go to all of these locations in order to post (and remove) signage.

Finally, there was political pressure. Because this was a pilot designed to provide feedback to the California State Legislature, Elections Office staff in San Mateo County knew that all eyes were on them, and that they were expected to deliver high turnout. Media attention was much higher than usual. Thus, while it is quite likely that completed ballots were mistakenly returned to voters by the U.S. Postal Service in prior elections, only for the 2015 pilot did these ballots come to the attention of the media and make front-page news on the local newspaper.

4. Quantitative Analysis

    a. *Turnout*

    Overall, turnout in the election was 29.5 percent. Most voters (97.5 percent) chose to vote using their mailed ballots (including ballots returned via the USPS and those dropped off at drop boxes). In addition, 213 voters chose to vote at one of the two voting centers, and 2,416 voters participated at one of the 32 UPPs. This was a slightly higher rate of participation than in the two previous UDEL elections: in 2013, turnout was 25.4 percent, and in 2011 turnout was 28.7 percent.

    A significant number of voters (about 10,000) converted to permanent vote-by-mail (PERM) voters. Prior to the pilot, 57 percent of registered voters in the county were registered as PERMs; after the pilot, that percentage increased to 64 percent. This suggests that many voters prefer to vote by mail once they have tried it, consistent with other research (Meredith and Endter 2015). Prior research finds that PERMs are more likely to turnout than non-PERMs. This pattern holds true in San Mateo County. In the traditional-format 2013 UDEL election, 33 percent of PERMs and 10 percent of non-PERMs voted. In contrast, in the 2015 pilot, 38 percent of PERMs and 17 percent of non-PERMs voted.

    Logistically, this eases the Election Day burden on Elections Office staff; ten days prior to Election Day they began to open and process ballots returned by mail. Although law provides for a 30-day certification process, there is always considerable pressure from candidates and local jurisdictions for the Elections Office to certify results as soon as possible. On the other hand, California law allows for ballots that are postmarked by Election Day and arrive at the Elections Office up to three days later to

be counted. This facet of election law, combined with the perennial crush of last-minute ballots mailed by voters, creates pressure on Elections Office staff to process ballots quickly.

Elections Staff also spend time as ballots are returned dealing with envelope signature issues. If a voter has mailed back an unsigned ballot, they can contact that voter and ask them to come in to sign it until Election Day. If a voter has returned a ballot with a signature that does not match the signature on file, they can contact that voter and ask them to come in to confirm their signature until the results are certified. In many of the latter cases, the registered voter has aged since signing their voter registration card, and over time their signature has changed.

Another quantitative difference in the 2015 pilot was the dramatic decrease in the number of provisional ballots cast. In 2015, only 157 provisional ballots were cast, most by individuals who were not registered to vote. This is a much smaller number of provisional ballots cast than in previous UDEL elections conducted with traditional polling places. In the 2013 UDEL, 2,222 provisional ballots were cast; in the 2011 UDEL, 2,467 provisional ballots were cast. The majority of this decrease can be attributed to the use of UPPs rather than traditional neighborhood polling places, and the ability of UPP staff to look up the voter registration status and correct ballot for any voter requesting to participate. In other words, most voters directed to cast provisional ballots in 2011 and 2013 were eligible voters who were appearing at the incorrect polling place; this type of provisional voting is not necessary when using UPPs.

b. Turnout subgroup analysis

To assess the all-mailed ballot pilot's impact on turnout across subgroups, we compared individual voting data from the county voter file to turnout in previous comparable elections, including the 2011 and 2013 consolidated elections. Using this voter file data, we compare turnout trends across a number of groups, including ethnoracial groups, age groups, party registration, and VBM status.

A key question in any change of election administration is whether the reform disproportionately impacts racial and ethnic minorities. It is difficult, however, to directly answer this question because the San Mateo County voter file does not include comprehensive information on the ethnoracial identity of voters. To overcome this limitation, we implement a predictive model that combines voters' surnames and their location to estimate their ethnorace. In particular, the model takes as an input the voters' surname and the Census tract of their address in the voter file.[6] It then combines information on the distribution of ethnorace by surname and demographic information of the voters' Census tract to compute a probability distribution for each voter over ethnoracial categories.[7] For example, a given voter might have a 90 percent probability of being white, a 4 percent probability of being Latino, a 4 percent probability of being Asian American, and a 2 percent probability of being a member of another ethnoracial group. In our analysis, we assume that a voter is a given ethnorace if there is at least a 75 percent probability of the voter belonging to that ethnorace. While this method is

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[6] We use the Census Bureau's geocoding API to match voters' addresses with Census tracts. Details available at http://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/geocoder.html.
[7] We implement this model using the "wru" package in the R statistical program (Imai and Khanna forthcoming), which uses the U.S. Census 2000 Surname List and Spanish Surname List.

imperfect, it is a substantial improvement over aggregate-level data because it enables examination of individual-level ethnoracial data as it relates to turnout.
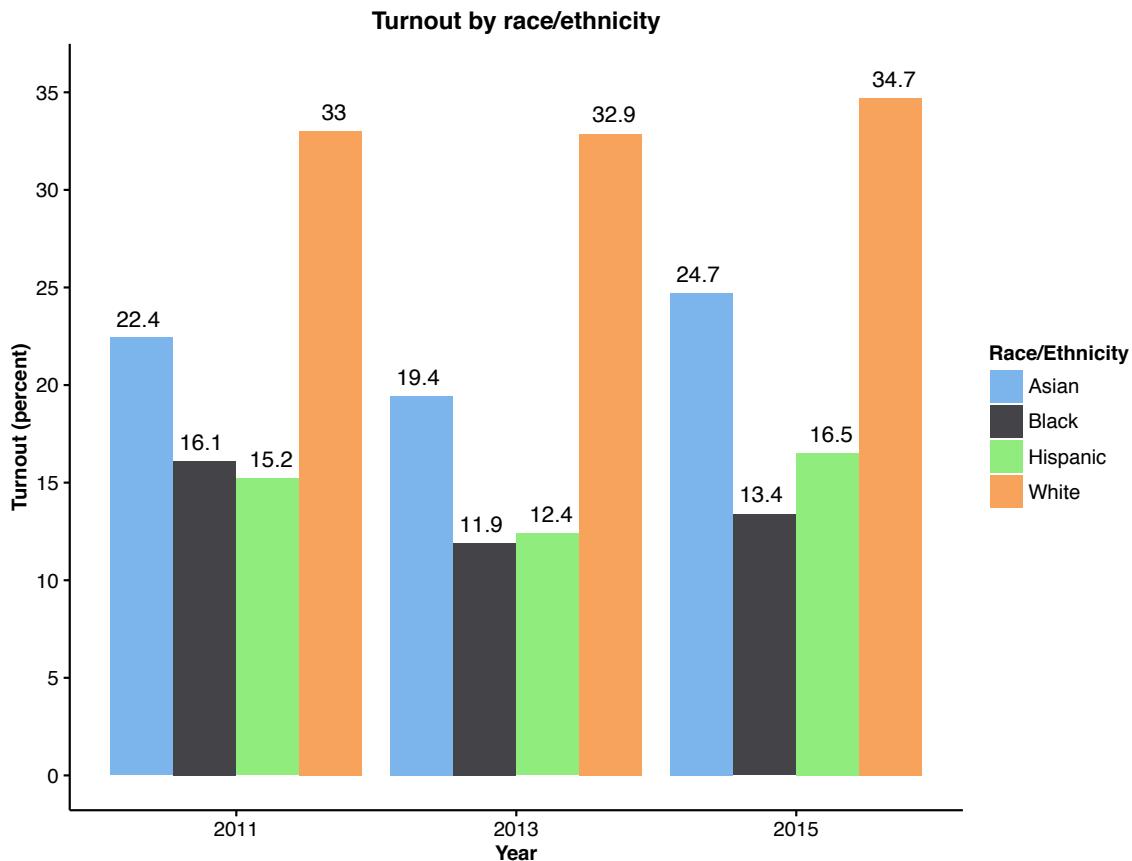
Figure 12 presents the turnout rate in the past three UDEL elections, broken down by ethnorace.[8] Consistently across elections, turnout differs substantially by ethnoracial group, with whites consistently most likely to vote. More notably for the purposes of this report, turnout was higher among whites, Asian Americans, and Latinos in 2015 compared to the 2011 and 2013 UDEL elections. Among black voters, turnout was higher in 2015 compared to 2013, but lower than in 2011.

Among whites, turnout was 34.7 percent in 2015, 32.9 percent in 2013, and 33 percent in 2011. Asian American turnout was 24.7 percent in 2015, 19.4 percent in 2013, and 22.4 percent in 2011. Latino turnout was 16.5 percent in 2015, 12.4 percent in 2013, and 15.2 percent in 2011. Black turnout was 13.4 percent in 2015, 11.9 percent in 2013, and 16.1 percent in 2011.

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[8] We exclude the "other" race category because there were very few voters with at least a 75percent probability of being in the "other" category.

Figure 12. Turnout by Race and Ethnicity, UDEL 2011, 2013 and 2015
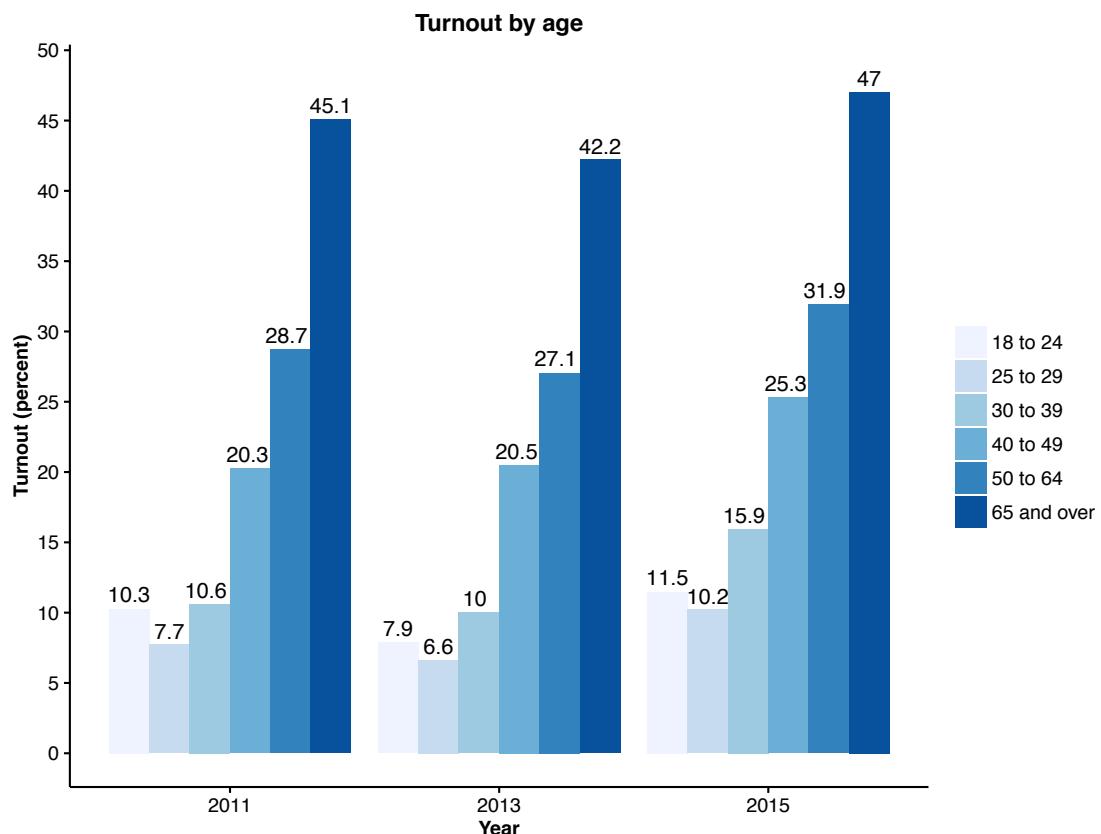
Note: Turnout as a percentage of registered voters in 2011, 2013, and 2015. Race/ethnicity is imputed using a model based on surname and location.

The data tell a similar story for age, as shown in Figure 13. While there are major differences in turnout across age groups, previous differences held steady in the 2015 all-mail election. In particular, voters ages 65 and older are much more likely to turn out in UDEL elections than are members of all other age groups. More importantly for assessing the impact of the all-mailed ballot pilot, turnout was higher in every age group compared to 2013 and 2011. Among the youngest voters, age 18-24, turnout was 11.5 percent in 2015, compared to 7.9 percent in 2013 and 10.3 percent in 2011. Turnout among 25-29-year olds was 10.2 percent in 2015, 6.6 percent in 2013, and 7.7 percent

in 2011. Turnout among 30-39-year olds was 15.9 percent in 2015, 10 percent in 2013, and 10.6 percent in 2011. Turnout among 40-49-year olds was 25.3 percent in 2015, 20.5 percent in 2013, and 20.3 percent in 2011. Turnout among 50-64-year olds was 31.9 percent in 2015, 27.1 percent in 2013, and 28.7 percent in 2011. Turnout among voters aged 65 and older was 47 percent in 2015, 42.2 percent in 2013, and 45.1 percent in 2011.

Figure 13. Turnout by Age Group, UDEL 2011, 2013, 2015
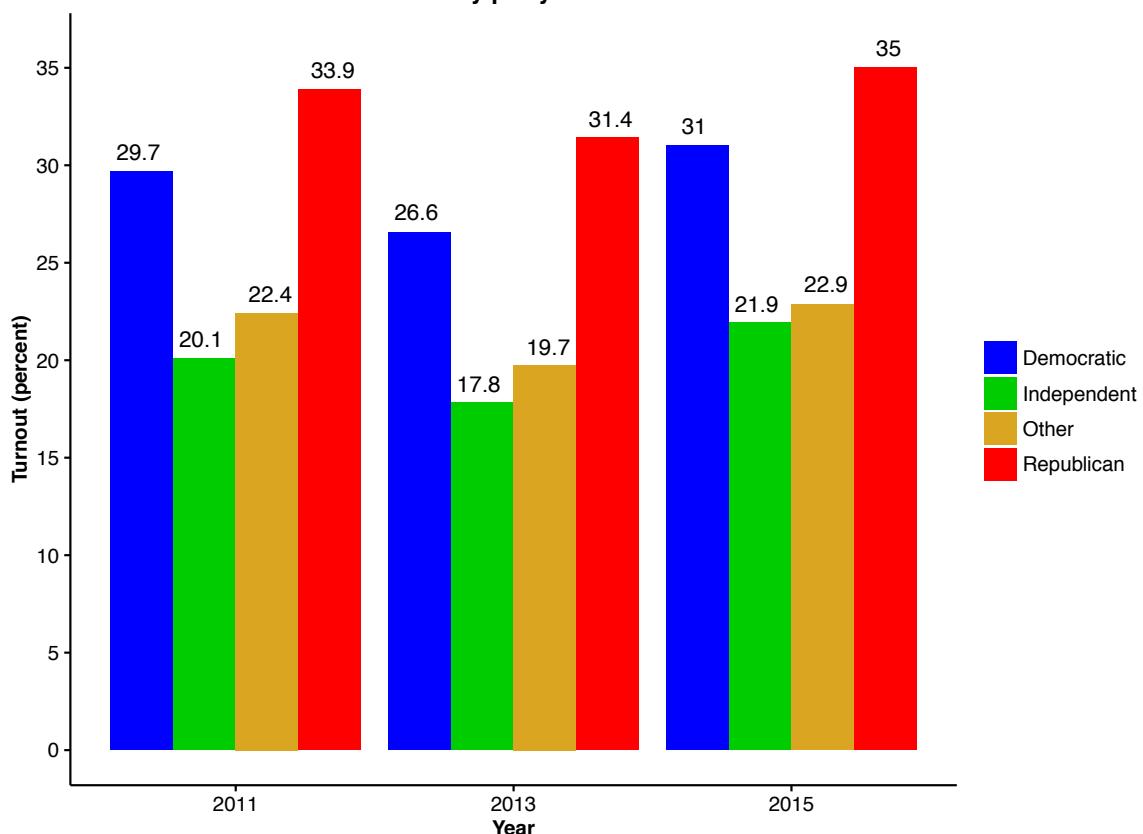
Note: Turnout as a percentage of registered voters in 2011, 2013, and 2015, by age group.

As reflected in Figure 14, turnout across party registrants also remained steady, with more voters of every political party (including decline-to-state voters) turning out at
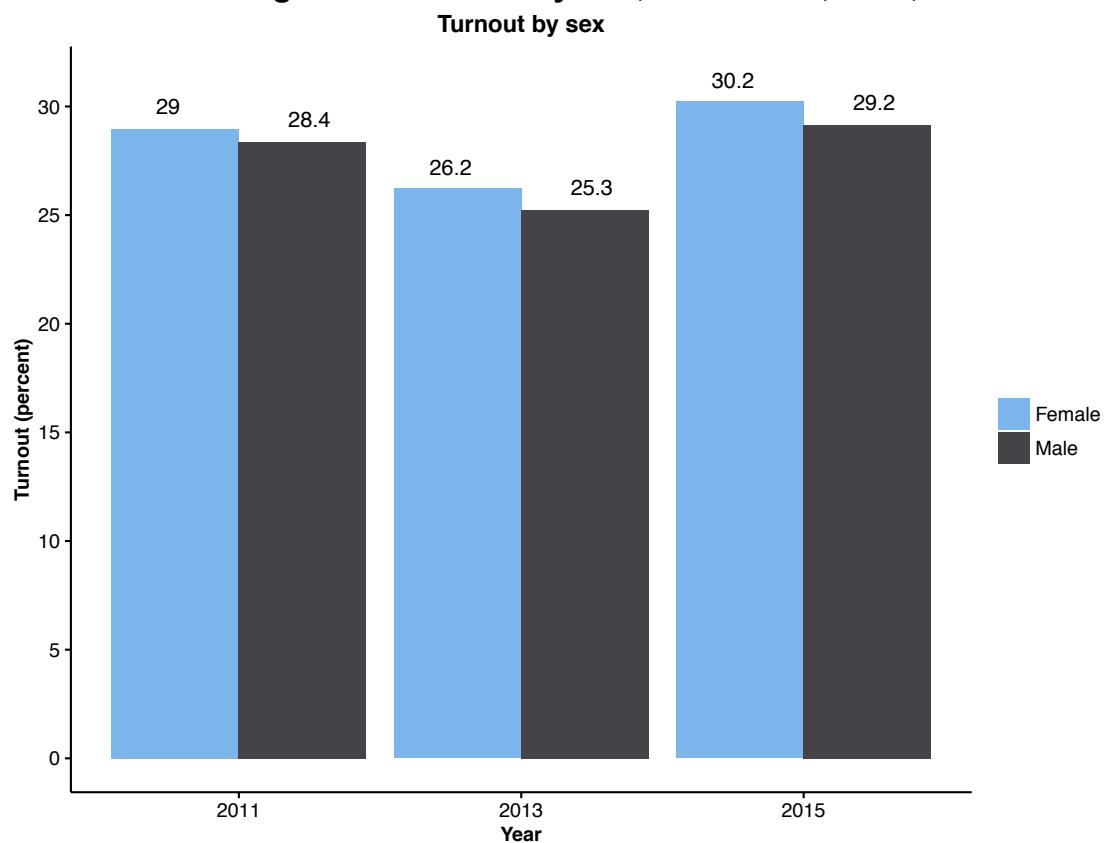
levels slightly higher than in previous elections. Turnout among Democrats was 31

percent, compared to 26.6 percent in 2013 and 29.7 percent in 2011. Turnout among

Republicans was 35 percent in 2015, 31.4 percent in 2013, and 33.9 percent in 2011.

Turnout among those registered with other political parties was 22.9 percent in 2015,

19.7 percent in 2013, and 22.4 percent in 2011. Turnout among decline-to-state voters

was 21.9 percent in 2015, 17.8 percent in 2013, and 20.1 percent in 2011.

Figure 14. Turnout by Party Registration, UDEL 2011, 2013, 2015

Turnout by party affiliation

Figure 15. Turnout by Sex, UDEL 2011, 2013, 2015

Turnout by sex

Turnout rates by gender are shown in Figure 15.[9] Both men and women were more likely to vote in 2015 than in the 2013 and 2011 elections, with women consistently more likely to vote than men. Turnout among women was 30.2 percent in 2015, compared to 26.2 percent in 2013 and 29 percent in 2011. Turnout among men was 29.2 percent in 2015, 25.3 percent in 2013, and 28.4 in 2011.
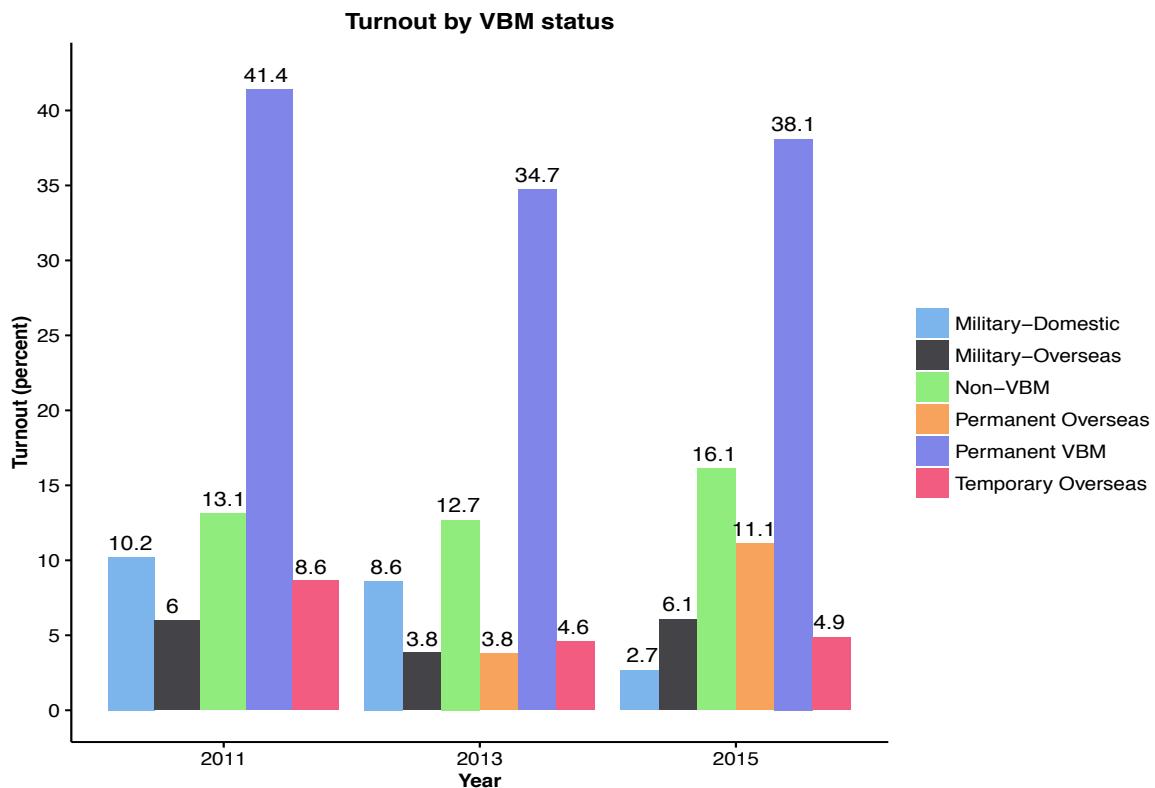
Next, we examine the impact on turnout among those in the disability community. The voter file does not report whether voters have a disability, so for this section we rely on survey data in which respondents self-identified as members of the disability

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[9] Many voters in the voter file do not have information on gender. To fill in missing data, we match voters' first names and year of birth with gender distribution data maintained by the Social Security Administration. This procedure is implemented by the "gender" package in the R statistical program (Blevins and Mullen 2015).

community.[10] This process results in a very small sample size of 84 registered voters, so we present these results with caution. Among these respondents, 81 percent turned out to vote in 2015. In 2013, about 65 percent of those respondents turned out, and in 2011 turnout was about 70 percent. These estimates are much higher than general turnout because, as detailed in the next section, our survey sample contained relatively few nonvoters. Given the limitations of the data, it is difficult to make any strong conclusion about how the all-mail election affected turnout among those in the disability community. We cautiously conclude that there was not a dramatic change in turnout among disabled voters in 2015, and that turnout possibly increased compared to the two previous UDEL elections.

Figure 16. Turnout by VBM Program Status, UDEL 2011, 2013, 2015

Turnout by VBM status

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[10] The details of the survey are available in the next section.
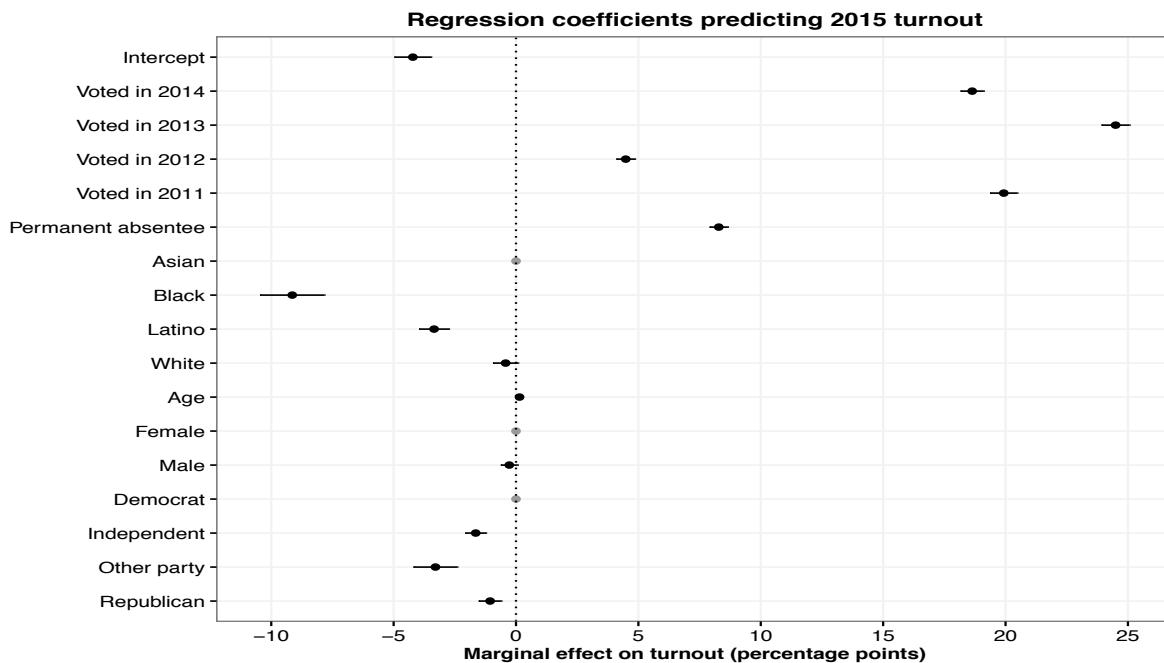
Finally, we examine differences in turnout by vote-by-mail (VBM) program status, including individuals registered as overseas and military voters, and as permanent VBM voters (PERMs). Note that PERMs and non-VBM voters constitute over 99 percent of registered voters in San Mateo County. In a traditional election (as in 2013 and 2011), non-VBM voters are those who would vote at community polling places or via in-person early voting. The observed turnout differences for other VBM groups, while occasionally large in terms of percentage-point differences, represent very small numbers of voters, and are not statistically significant.

Turnout was higher among non-VBM voters, military (overseas), and permanent overseas voters, lower among military (domestic) and temporary overseas voters, and higher among PERMs compared to 2013 but lower compared to 2011. Turnout among PERMs was 38.1 percent in 2015, compared to 34.7 percent in 2013 and 41.4 percent in 2011. Turnout among non-VBM voters was 16.1 percent in 2015, 12.7 percent in 2013, and 13.1 percent in 2011. Turnout among military (domestic) voters was 2.7 percent in 2015, 8.6 percent in 2013, and 10.2 percent in 2011. Turnout among military (overseas) voters was 6.1 percent in 2015, 3.8 percent in 2013, and 6 percent in 2011. Turnout among permanent overseas voters was 11.1 percent in 2015 and 3.8 percent in 2013 (there are no permanent overseas voters in the 2011 voter history file). Turnout among temporary overseas voters was 4.9 percent in 2015, 4.6 percent in 2013, and 8.6 percent in 2011.

To further investigate which factors were independently associated with voting in the 2015 election, we conduct a multiple regression analysis of turnout on several covariates. The results of this analysis give a sense of the probability of an individual

voter turning out, holding all other variables constant. Covariates include ethnorace, party registration, age, gender, permanent absentee status, and voter history in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. Results are shown in Figure 17, which illustrates the coefficients and robust 95 percent confidence intervals from a linear probability model predicting turnout in 2015. The coefficient value should be interpreted as the change in probability of voting in 2015 associated with each variable, holding all others constant. The coefficients on the ethnorace variables should be interpreted with reference to Asian voters, and the variables for party registration should be interpreted in reference to Democrats.[11]

Figure 17: Predictors of Voter Turnout, 2015 Pilot Election

Regression coefficients predicting 2015 turnout

Note: Results from a linear probability model predicting 2015 turnout. The dots show coefficient point estimate and the bars show robust 95% confidence intervals. The reference category for race is Asian, for sex is female, and for party registration is Democrat (all reference categories shown as gray dots at 0). Sample is confined to voters for whom we have at least 75% confidence in their race. *N* = 199,017. Adjusted R-squared: 0.345

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[11] The comparisons must be made with respect to a reference group (in this case, Asians and Democrats) for technical reasons. However, it is possible to visually compare the average turnout of any two groups — for instance, Republicans and Independents — on the graph.

The results show that many variables were related to turnout in 2015. Unsurprisingly, by far the strongest predictor of turnout is recent voting history in non-presidential elections. Holding all else equal, people who voted in 2013 were about 24 percentage-points more likely to vote in 2015 than people who did not vote in 2013.

The ethnoracial group variables are also strong predictors of turnout, though much less important than voter history. Blacks were about 9 percentage-points less likely to turn out than Asians; Latinos were about 3 percentage-points less likely to vote than Asians. Whites and Asians turned out at about the same rate — holding all else equal. The coefficient on the age variable indicates that, on average, being one year older increased the probability of voting by about 0.1 percentage-points. For example, a 65-year old is 4 percentage-points more likely to vote than an otherwise identical 25-year old (in terms of the other variables in the model).

While there are large turnout differences between men and women, this difference disappears after controlling for other factors in the model. This indicates that men, on average, vote at nearly the same rate as otherwise similar women. Finally, the party variables show that after accounting for other covariates, Democrats were slightly more likely to vote than Republicans, and both Democrats and Republicans were more likely to vote than decline-to-state voters and individuals registered with other political parties.

All of these results are in line with previous research into voter turnout (for example, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). White voters, older voters, and partisans are more likely to turn out to vote in general, and the 2015 pilot election was no exception. Examining the time-series trends for the past three UDEL elections shows

that despite the differential turnout rates across groups, there is no evidence that the hybrid election increased these disparities. Overall, the electorate in 2015 looked very similar to the electorates in 2011 and 2013.

c. *UPP Use*

Individuals voting at UPPs were asked to complete a form indicating their reason for choosing to use a UPP rather than completing their vote-by-mail ballot. Overall, of 2,416 UPP voters, the most common response was that the voter preferred voting at the polling place (N=1,012, 41.9 percent of responses). In addition, 12.7 percent (N=307) said that they had lost their VBM ballot, 11.1 percent (N=268) said that they had not received their VBM ballot, 10.4 percent (N=251) said that they had left their ballot at home, 1.6 percent (N=38) had destroyed their ballot and 1.2 percent (N=29) surrendered their spoiled ballot. A small proportion of voters did not choose any of the offered categories, checking "other" (6.0 percent, N=146), while 15.1 percent of UPP voters (N=365) declined to complete the form.

e. *Cost Analysis*

Overall, the estimated cost of the 2015 pilot election compared to the 2013 is a wash—there was neither a significant cost increase nor a significant cost savings. Exactly how the cost of the two elections compares depends on which expenses are included in the calculations, and there are legitimate arguments for excluding some of those costs. Specifically, this includes costs of educating the public about the hybrid election, mostly via paid media and a series of postcards. These costs would not necessarily be incurred if hybrid elections were standard, and thus should be kept in

mind by those looking for evidence of the long-term cost implications of such a shift. Previous research has shown that failing to clearly communicate changes in how an election is being administered can generate significant voter concern and confusion (Michelson et al. 2012). The voter education and awareness campaign conducted by the San Mateo County Elections Office likely minimized those potential challenges. At the same time, including those expenses offsets the cost savings incurred by the use of far fewer polling places and poll workers.

The 2013 UDEL cost $2,093,237.90, including $657,032.27 for labor. The 2015 hybrid election, in contrast, incurred regular expenses of $1,788,348.31 overall, including $622,647.78 for labor. This equates to a cost savings of 5.23 percent for labor and 14.57 percent overall, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Cost Comparisons, 2015 Pilot Election and 2013 UDEL

	2015	2013	Difference (2015-2013)	Savings
Traditional Election Expenses				
Labor	622,647.78	657,032.27	(34,384.49)	5.23%
Total Election Cost	1,788,348.31	2,093,237.90	(304,889.59)	14.57%
Including Outreach Costs (see Table 6)				
Total Election Cost	2,127,772.36	2,093,237.90	34,534.46	(1.6%)

Table 6: Cost of 2015 Pilot Election Voter Education and Outreach

Paid Media	
4Imprint	$1,365.07
AM1400 Sing Tao Chinese Radio	5,616.00
AM1710 KHMB	350.00
AA Galaxy Intl	200.00

Accuracy International	1,235.40
Almanac	1,686.00
Clear Channel	9,025
Copy Copies	4,128.34
Cumulus	13,000.00
Daily Journal	2,507.92
Daily Post	1,400.0
East Palo Alto Today	445.00
Half Moon Bay Review	1,602.00
Intersection	3,757.87
KCBS Radio	9,675.00
KQED	18,980.00
KTVU	24,800.00
La Opinion	3,187.86
Magenic	4,532.50
Miramar Events	4,250.00
National Cinemedia	15,774.30
NBC Bay Area	18,575.00
News for Chinese	1,300.00
Sara O'Brien	9,429.40
Pacifica Tribune	510.00
Philippines Today	600.00
Precise Printing and Mailing	459.43
San Francisco Media	3,000.00
San Mateo County Times	3,255.00
Silicon Valley Independent	225.00
Silicon Valley Community	325.00
Sound of Hope Radio Network	1,500.00
Spectrum	550.00
Spotlight	2,100.00
Telemundo	5,748.75
Univision	14,460.00
Weld Media	6,400.00
World Journal	2,095.20
TOTAL	$198,041.34

Postcards			
	Production Cost	**Postage**	**Total Cost**
Postcard 1 – AB 2028 Announcement	$22,076.31	$35,549.06	$57,625.37
Postcard 2 – Ballot alert to non-PERMs	$10,415.94	$14,974.88	$25,390.82

Postcard 3 – Election reminder to not-Voteds	25,485.04	$32,880.48	$58,366.52
TOTAL	$57,978.29	$83,404.42	$141,382.71
Grand Total			**$339,424.14**

Note: Production costs include printing, data processing, and non-permit postage.

Not included in those calculations is the cost of the outreach conducted by the Elections Office to increase voter awareness of and information about the pilot election, as detailed above. This outreach likely increased voter turnout and minimized voter confusion about the pilot election, contributing to its success. However, without a randomized experiment, the extent to which the outreach mattered cannot be precisely estimated. These costs include $198,041.34 on paid media and other outreach materials, and another $141,382.71 on the set of three postcards sent to voters, including printing, data-processing, and postage costs (see Table 6). Adding these expenses to the overall cost of the 2015 election increases that figure to $2,127,772.36, for a total cost increase of 1.6 percent compared to 2013 (see Table 5).

While the 2015 pilot required fewer poll workers, due to the use of a small number of UPPs instead of the usual large number of traditional neighborhood polling places, labor costs were relatively unchanged due to several factors, including the increased cost of polling place personnel from the usual rate of $8/hour to a minimum of $17/hour. Additional personnel costs were incurred due the need for additional training of the UPP staff, and to onboard them as county personnel, and for the services of two IT professionals.

5. <u>Public Opinion Data</u>

   Part of the success of an electoral system lies in the public's support for the system. To this end, we conducted a survey of registered voters, in addition to the data analysis required by AB 2028, to gauge the public's opinion on the all-mailed ballot election. The survey was conducted using a combination of exit polls at UPPs and a telephone survey of registered voters.

   Exit surveys (offered in English, Spanish, and Chinese) were collected from Friday, October 30 through Tuesday, November 3 from voters at UPPs. Telephone surveys (conducted in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Russian) were collected from Wednesday, November 4 through Sunday, November 8. A total of 1,071 surveys were completed, including 291 exit polls and 780 telephone surveys. Exit surveys were completed by voters; telephone surveys were completed with paper forms by trained undergraduate students from Menlo College. All surveys were then double-entered into a spreadsheet and crosschecked for accuracy. Not surprisingly, surveys were heavily skewed to represent voters: 82 percent of telephone respondents voted in the election.

   Responses were mostly completed in English (97 percent). About half were from male respondents (49.7 percent) and half from female respondents (50.3 percent). Respondent partisanship leaned Democratic (56.7 percent) and also included 14.2 percent Republicans, 5.1 percent American Independent Party, 0.6 percent Green Party, 1.5 percent Libertarian Party, and 0.2 percent Peace and Freedom Party; another 21.7 percent of respondents declined to give a party affiliation. Among those providing

their ethnoracial identity, 70.4 percent identified as white, 12.9 percent as Latino, 13.7 as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 3.0 percent as black.

To allow for conclusions that can be generalized to the entire San Mateo County population, the survey was weighted to match county population statistics by age, ethnorace, and gender, using data collected by the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The discussion of our findings uses these weighted results.

Table 7: Exit Poll and Post-Election Survey Responses, 2015 SMC Pilot Election

	(1) Support All-Mailed Elections	(2) Doesn't Support All-Mailed Elections	(3) Trust USPS	(4) Doesn't Trust USPS	(5) Increases risk of fraud	(6) Doesn't increase risk of fraud
Overall (1,071)	71.9%	24.8%	77.6%	12.0%	30.5%	46.4%
White (669)	70.1	29.9	80.9	13.1	28.6	50.0
Asian (106)	78.9	21.1	88.2	7.46	26.8	48.2
Black (24)	72.4	27.6	72.6	17.1	32.9	39.8
Other (21)	49.7	50.3	56.0	25.8	44.9	39.0
Two or more races (27)	64.5	35.5	84.4	9.9	27.6	45.2
Hispanic/Latino (127)	76.6	23.4	79.1	8.7	31.8	49.0
Non-Hispanic/Latino (944)	70.3	29.7	77.1	13.2	30.1	45.6
Non-disability (894)	72.0	28.0	80.6	11.9	30.1	48.8
Disability (101)	70.2	29.8	71.9	14.5	40.6	36.8

Note: Responses to selected survey questions, by demographic group. Numbers in parentheses report the unweighted sample size in each subgroup. Results not reported for subgroups with fewer than 20 respondents (Respondents also included 12 individuals who identified as Pacific Islander and 5 respondents who identified as American Indian). Percentages may not sum to 100 due to nonresponse. In Columns 3-6, respondents could also answer "neither agree nor disagree" (not shown). Results for groups with fewer than 20 respondents not reported.

The survey questions were designed to measure overall support for mail elections, as well as to address some commonly cited benefits and drawbacks to voting by mail. Respondents were asked whether they support California holding all of its elections by mail. A strong majority answered affirmatively — 71.9 percent saying they support all elections being held by mail, compared to 24.8 percent answering no. Importantly, there are no significant differences across ethnoracial groups in support for all-mailed elections (see columns 1 and 2 of Table 7). With the exception of two categories, at least 70 percent of every group supports all-mailed ballot elections. The exceptions are people who identified their race as "other" or "two or more races" — members of these groups report lower support for all-mail elections. However, the small sample sizes in these groups creates considerable uncertainty: there is not a statistically significant difference in support across the groups. Similarly, people who identify as members of the disability community support all-mail elections at the same rate as people who do not identify as members of the disability community. Finally, these results do not vary across age groups. Overall, then, there is a universal high

degree of support among registered voters in San Mateo County for California holding all of its elections by mail.

Respondents were also asked whether they agree with the statement, "I trust the United States Postal Service to deliver mail ballots securely and on time." Unsurprisingly, given the high level of support for all-mail elections, most respondents expressed trust in the USPS. About 72 percent of respondents said they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement, while about 25 percent said they "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Again, with the possible exception of people who identified their race as "other," the results are uniform across racial, ethnic, and disability groups (see columns 3 and 4 of Table 7), and again, the differences are not statistically significant. Respondents expressed less consensus on the issue of voter fraud. Only about half of respondents disagreed with the statement that "Conducting an all-mailed ballot election increases the risk of voter fraud," while about a third agreed. While there is not overwhelming concern about voter fraud, these results do point to a potential challenge in garnering support for and trust in an expanded all-mailed ballot system.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they thought all-mailed ballot elections would favor one party over any other party. The purpose of this question was to assess any perceived partisan favoritism in implementing mail elections. There is little evidence to support this hypothesis: a vast majority of respondents (80.1 percent) say all-mailed ballot elections would not help any party over another. About 12 percent said mail elections would help the Democratic Party; about 6 percent said they would help the Republican Party; other responses were scattered across the other parties.

In sum, voters are strongly supportive of all-mailed ballot elections, and this support is broadly consistent across subgroups of ethnorace, age, and disability status. The primary cautionary finding for election administrators is a significant minority of voters who feel that all-mailed ballot elections may increase the risk of voting fraud.

6. Conclusion

Previous research has concluded that VBM elections offer benefits in terms of increased convenience and decreased cost. Voters don't have to wait in line or travel to polling places in order to participate, and can take their time completing their ballots, possibly decreasing ballot roll-off. Decreased costs are expected due to the reduced number of polling places requiring staff and equipment. Evidence from the 2015 San Mateo County pilot election provides some support for these theories.

Overall, in terms voter turnout, the 2015 pilot was a success. The combination of postage-paid mailed ballots and UPPs generated a strong level of turnout among all sectors of the electorate. Compared to the traditional UDEL election in 2013, turnout was higher among all ethnoracial groups, all age groups, members of all political parties (including decline-to-state voters), both men and women, and both PERM and non-PERM voters. Given previous research on voter turnout and election administration, these increases are likely due to the combination of increased convenience and increased mobilization by the Elections Office, especially the mailed postcards. The degree to which these increases in turnout can be attributed to each of these factors is uncertain, however, as the pilot did not include an experimental component. Future pilot elections, perhaps with embedded experimental components, will help clarify the degree to which Elections Office outreach affects participation.

The overall cost of the election was basically unchanged compared to the 2013

UDEL. While significant cost savings were achieved through the reduction in polling

places from 209 traditional polling places to 32 UPPs, additional costs were incurred in

order to educate and inform voters of the changed election format. This suggests that a

permanent shift to all-mailed ballot elections would be less expensive, as continued

voter outreach and education would not be necessary. Voters would become

accustomed to the change. Future all-VBM election costs would also be effected by

decisions about the use of postage-paid return envelopes, as was used in the 2015

pilot, investment in on-demand ballot printing machines, or simply by using a smaller

number of UPPs.

Several important lessons were learned during administration of the 2015 pilot.

As noted above, adding additional UPPs in some jurisdictions was necessary to obtain

buy-in from local elections officials. Yet, increasing the number of UPPs from the 20

required by AB 2028 to 32 reduced the potential cost savings of the election, and in

retrospect these additional UPPs were likely unnecessary: very few voters (about 2

percent) chose to cast their ballots this way, opting instead to return their mailed ballots.

A second important lesson learned was about the design of the return envelopes. As

noted above, careful attention must be paid to the placement of IMB codes and voter

addresses in order to ensure that completed ballots are correctly delivered to the

Elections Office rather than returned to the voter.

Voter satisfaction with the all-mailed ballot election was high. Strong majorities of

respondents to the exit poll and telephone survey said that they supported all elections

being held using only mailed ballots, that they trusted the USPS to deliver their ballots,

and that they did not think that an all-mailed ballot election benefited any particular

political party. Voters were less sanguine about the possible effect on voter fraud.

Overall, however, voter support was strong and consistent across various demographic

subgroups.

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