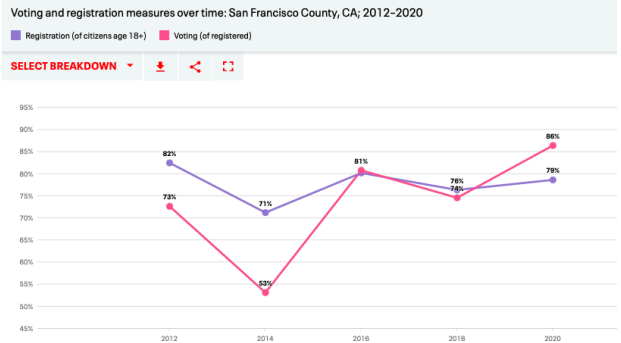


Robin Stone
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Voter Registration Policy
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Inequality in Voter Roll Representation

Voter participation in San Francisco is unrepresentative of its diverse population. Although this issue expands beyond San Francisco, California researchers cite ongoing concern with trends in the Bay Area. Importantly, amongst the nine Bay Area counties, San Francisco ranks second to last in *voting rate* of eligible citizens (18+), at 68%, and ranks the lowest in *registration rate of eligible citizens*, at 79%.¹ While voting rates of registered have steadily grown since 2016, registration has remained fairly constant.



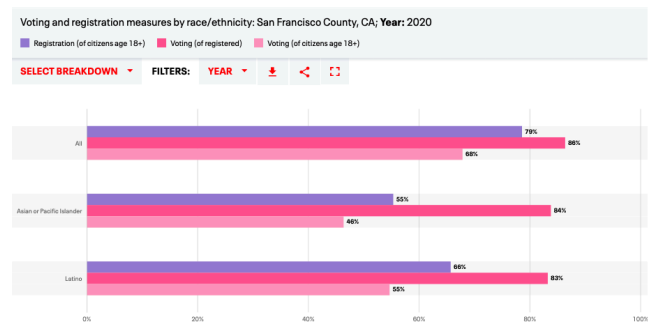
“We have consistently found in our polling that there are significant gaps between the make-up of the population and the numbers in participation by race and ethnicity and income groups,” said Mark Baldassare, President and CEO of the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), a nonpartisan policy research organization.²

The AAPI, Latinx, limited-English speaking, low-income communities, and young people disproportionately over-index for low participation in San Francisco elections. Unfortunately, data pertaining to voting and registration rates for Black San Franciscans is significantly lacking and must be cultivated.

A few relevant data points:

Latinx & AAPI Communities

The participation rates of the Latinx and AAPI communities are of particular concern, with voting rates of eligible AAPI at 46% and Latinx at 55%, significantly below the overall population (68%).



¹ [Bay Area Equity Atlas](#)

² [Many Groups Continue to be Underrepresented in Voter Rolls Despite Voter Boom](#)

Limited English-Speaking Constituents

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, more than 90% of voters receive English-language materials, followed by Chinese at 6% (both Mandarin and Cantonese), and fewer than 2% of voters receive Spanish-language materials.³ English is the default, but voters can opt to receive materials in another language during registration or change their language preference after the fact.

When assessing registration of eligible San Franciscans, neighborhoods with limited-English speaking constituents also reflect the districts with some of the lowest registration rates.

Young People

In the last several elections, older San Franciscans were much more likely to vote compared with young people, with turnout in the youngest age group (18 -29) the lowest amongst all voters.⁴

Notably, in Power California & Latino Decisions California Youth of Color Survey from 2020, young have confidence in vote by mail, especially amongst the AAPI community and white population.⁵ Latinx and Black young voters are significantly less likely to prefer this method. Young people of color also aspire to expand voting rights for 16-year-olds, especially Latinx (64%), Black (68%) and AAPI (67%) voters. There are many ongoing, state-wide efforts to expand ballot access for 16-year-olds.

Ample research analyzing and developing solutions for San Francisco’s participation gap has been produced over the years, including from a graduate student at UC Berkeley’s Goldman School of Public Policy, a research analyst from the San Francisco Local Agency Formation Commission, the San Francisco Chronicle, PPIC, and others. Other think tanks and research institutions such as USC’s Center for Inclusive Democracy and PolicyLink have developed research and toolkits on tactics that successfully engage and increase participation in communities of color and low-turnout districts.

Director Arntz and the Department of Elections have continued to invest in meaningful outreach initiatives. With the 2024 election season on the horizon, I believe continued investment in voter registration and participation – including capturing and sharing more data with the public – should continue to be a primary focus area for the Elections Commission and Department of

Turnout by election material language

Of voters requesting election materials in each language, the percentage who voted in each of the last three citywide elections

| Language | Sep. 2021 | Feb. 2022 | June 2022 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Chinese | 59% | 47% | 48% |
| Tagalog | 68% | 41% | 47% |
| Japanese | 67% | 40% | 50% |
| English | 68% | 36% | 47% |
| Thai | 58% | 31% | 39% |
| Spanish | 62% | 26% | 34% |
| Vietnamese | 51% | 24% | 31% |
| Korean | 49% | 22% | 31% |
| Overall turnout | 68% | 36% | 46% |

Source: San Francisco Department of Elections

Table only shows languages with at least 100 voters requesting materials in that language.

³ [Who’s actually voting in San Francisco? These charts show detailed data on 500,000 voters](#) (July 2022)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ [California Youth of Color Poll Summary Results](#)

Elections. Together, I believe the two bodies can work toward real solutions that level the participation playing field in San Francisco elections.

Potential Tactics

- Assess data on imbalance in voter registration and participation and collaborate on new engagement efforts. For example, the Department can consider:
 - o Other programs such as Go Green!
 - o Social engagement & targeting
 - o Opt-out vs opt-in for alternative language materials
 - o Soliciting and documenting formal feedback (e.g., via surveys) from community groups on most effective tactics specific to their constituents
- Incorporate data on registration rates⁶ and outreach events in monthly Director's report, which could include but is not limited to:
 - o Total new registrations
 - o New registrations by supervisory districts
 - o Tactics employed (outreach, community engagement, grant funding, etc.), and in which districts
 - o Tactics employed by districts

The Commission can and should support and amplify efforts to make progress around this policy priority, including:

- Cultivating relationships with agencies, other institutions, and community groups that can inform registration data, educate the public, and bolster community-specific, successful outreach tactics.
- Soliciting community input on creative ways to engage voters from diverse, multi-racial, multi-ethnic backgrounds.
- Identifying state legislation to support, for example AB-1206.

⁶ For context, the California Secretary of State is required by law to produce a Report of Registration detailing voter registration levels throughout California at specific times prior to each statewide election and once during odd numbered years.