California Voter Guides
June 2014 Primary
An analysis of all 58 counties

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About this project

This work is part of a project to learn how to give the right kind of information to potential voters at the right time, in the right place. While the problem of participation and engagement is larger than voter information, we can make voter information more effective, more inviting, and more useful.

Our research explores how voters (including new voters, registered non-voters and potential voters) find information about elections, and what works — and doesn't work — about their current sources.

To help us understand the current voter guides, we collected copies from all 58 California counties for the June 2014 primary, and analyzed them for the type of information included, how the guides are organized, and how the contents are presented.

Thank you to all the election officials who helped us with this collection.

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Goals of the analysis

■ Analyze the Sample Ballot/Voter Information Pamphlets for the June 2014 election

What are the common elements?

What elements are most often left out?

■ Uncover opportunities for improvement

How do the current voter guides compare to what voters find the most useful?

How well do the voter guides answer voters' questions?

What we learned

Although there was a lot of consistency for many elements of the guides, there was also wide variability. Few elements were included in every county guide.

Potentially important information was missing from some or most of the guides.

A well-tested template that includes the essential elements could help improve voter information across the state.

Methodology

Our approach

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Methodology

- We collected voter guides from all 58 counties in California for the June 2014 primary election in print or PDF format.

- We developed a coding template to objectively record guide elements, pages, and design features

  We did not code for the order in which topics were organized.

County breakdown

Counties were grouped by several variables for comparison:

- **Population size**

Overall population	Group
< 30,000	11 tiny
30,000 - 100,000	12 small
100,000 - 260,000	11 medium
260,000 - 800,000	11 large
> 800,000	13 super

- **Population density**

People/square mile

< 40	19 counties
40 -200	21 counties
> 200	18 counties

County breakdown (continued)

▪ Diversity

Percentage of white non-Hispanic

< 36%		11 high diversity
36%-50%	16	
50%-75%	16	
> 75%		15 low diversity

▪ Income

Median household income per year

< $48,000	19 counties
$48,000-$60,000	21 counties
> $60,000	18 counties

▪ Majority party

Based on 2012 Presidential election results

Democratic	29 counties
Republican	29 counties

How well do voter guides answer voters' questions?

An anlysis of the top 5 questions of voters found from previous research

Answering top voter questions

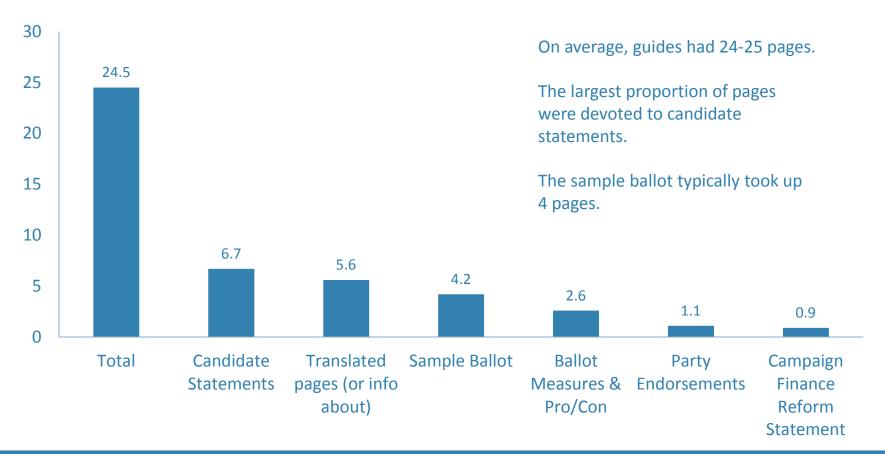These voter questions were uncovered in previous research

Question	Counties	Notes
What's the deadline to apply for an absentee ballot? When is my absentee ballot due? What do I have to do to get an absentee ballot?	55	Information about voting by mail and early voting
What's on the ballot?	54	Had a sample ballot that was an exact copy of the actual ballot
How do you vote (using voting system)?	53	
Where do I go to vote?	48	Out of 57 counties, one was an all mail election.
How do you register to vote?	11	

What information do the guides include?

An anlysis of types of information and specific elements

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How pages in the guides are used

Analysis of a few elements for which we recorded the number of pages. Some pages are multi-purpose so may be counted more than once

On average, guides had 24-25 pages.

The largest proportion of pages were devoted to candidate statements.

The sample ballot typically took up 4 pages.

Category	Value
Total	24.5
Candidate Statements	6.7
Translated pages (or info about)	5.6
Sample Ballot	4.2
Ballot Measures & Pro/Con	2.6
Party Endorsements	1.1
Campaign Finance Reform Statement	0.9

Common elements in most guides

These elements were in 50 or more guides

- Most county guides contained "nuts and bolts" information for the upcoming election

- *Only* candidate statements were included in *all* 58 guides

Listed in descending frequency
- Date
- Type of election
- Elections office contact information
- Vote by Mail information
- Sample ballots
- Candidate statements
- Party endorsements
- Web address
- Top two primary information
- How to vote/mark ballot

Most counties included the most important elements

These elements were in 35-49 guides

- Many important elements were usually included but were missing with a high enough frequency to merit attention

Listed in descending frequency

- Deadlines
- Address of polling place
- Campaign finance reform statement
- Vote by Mail application
- Permanent Vote by Mail Info for voters with disabilities
- Ballot measures and pro/con arguments

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Rare elements

- These elements were in fewer than 35 guides

- Elements not commonly found in the voter guides included informaton about the overall elections process
- This list includes only the most frequent items in this group

Listed in descending frequency
- Early Voting
- Update voter registration
- Do I need to show ID?
- Letter from the elections office
- Guide to party and non-party ballots
- Voter Bill of Rights
- Purpose of guide
- Table of contents

Elements of the Guides

What are the features of the guides?

Number of pages

Overall number of pages

Mean: 24

Median: 20

Highest: 58 (San Bernardino)

By county size

Small (9 counties):   < 13
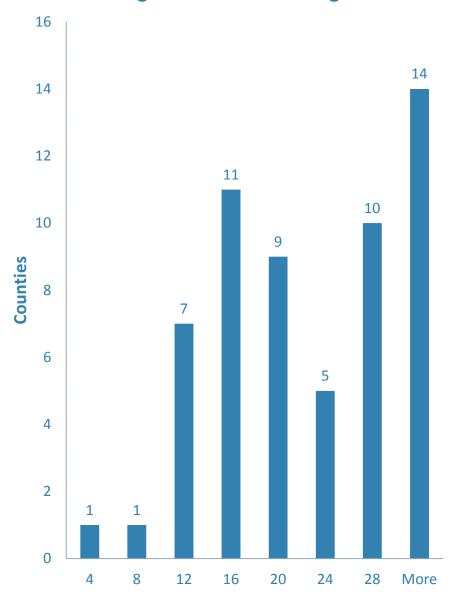
Medium (22):   13-23

Large (13):   24-28

Super (14):   > 28

Digital guides did not always have a number of pages divisible by 4.

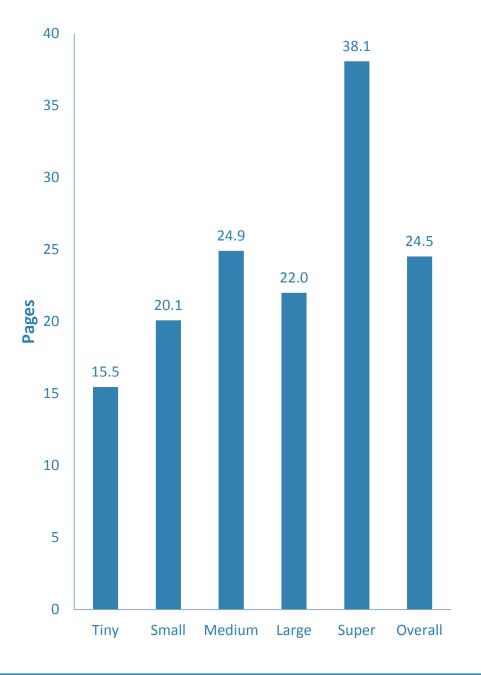**Histogram: Number of Pages**

Counties

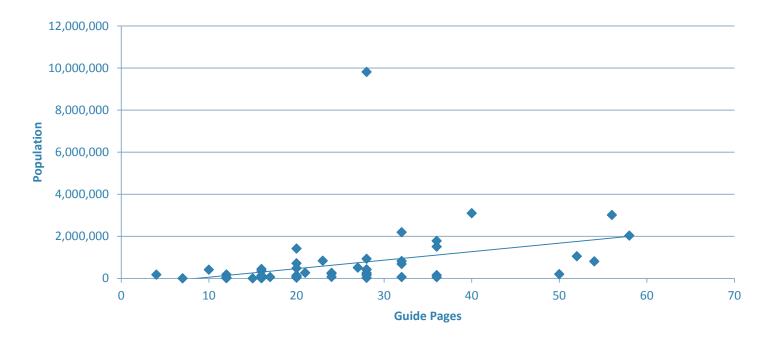| 4 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 20 | 24 | 28 | More |
| 1 | 1 | 7 | 11 | 9 | 5 | 10 | 14 |

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Number of pages by county size

Counties with larger populations tended to have more pages in the guide.

The next slide shows another illustration of these data

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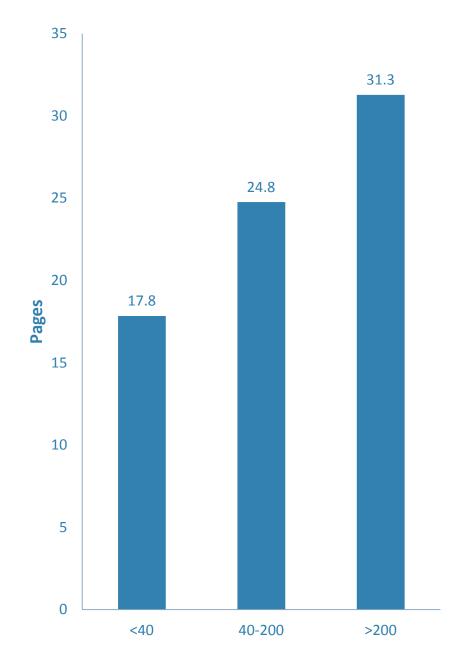
Number of pages by population

- There was strong correlation between the number of pages and the county population (r = 0.348, p < .008)
  Los Angeles is an outlier, with the relationship predicting more pages in the guide

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Number of pages by population density

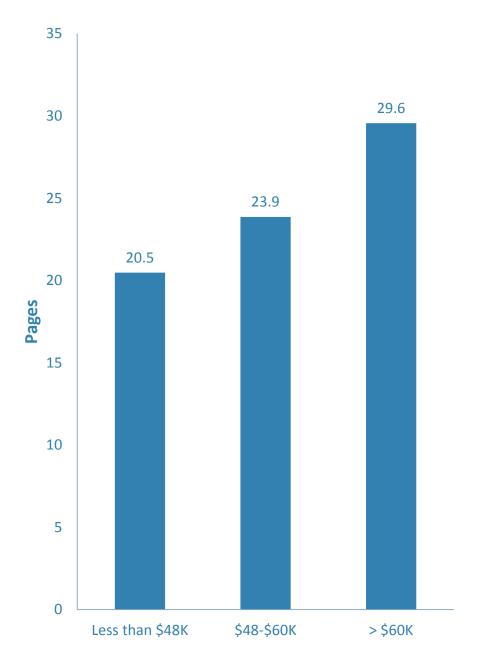Counties with greater population density tended to have more pages in the guide.

Population density was also correlated with population

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Number of pages by median income

Counties with higher median incomes also tended to have more pages in the guide.

Population density was also positively correlated with median income

Pages

35

30 — 29.6

25 — 23.9

20 — 20.5

15

10

5

0

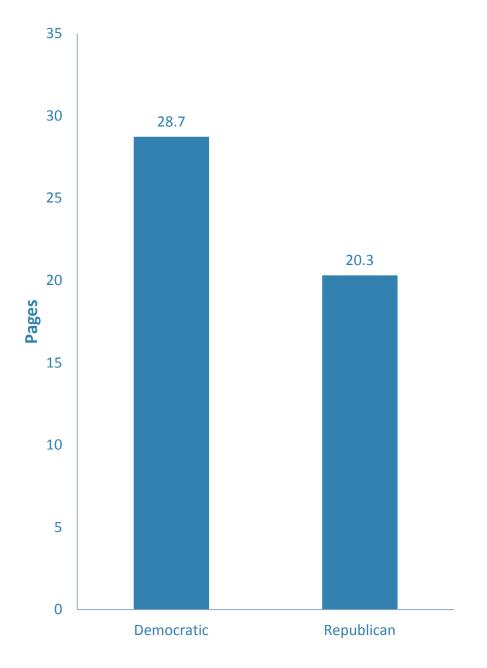Less than $48K $48-$60K   > $60K

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Number of pages by majority party

On average, counties with a majority of Democrats had more pages than Republican counties

Medians

Democratic: 28

Republican: 16

Critical information

Information necessary to be able to vote

Information	Counties	Notes
Election date and type	57	
Contact phone number and address	55	Sierra had just a phone number
Web address	51	12 had QR code to site or elections app
Deadlines for registration and vote by mail	49	1 county held an all vote-by-mail election 1 only on printed copy (not digital PDF)
Address of polling place	46	2 only on printed copy (not digital PDF), 1 all mail election Primarily missing from Large and Super counties

Additional information

Information that is important, but not critical to being able to vote

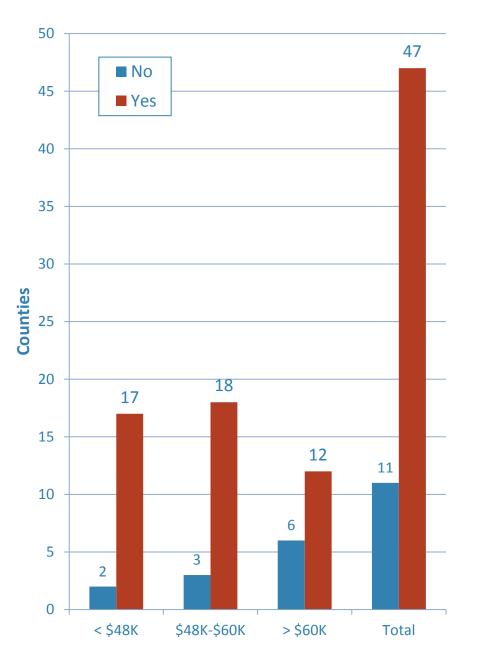| Information	Counties	Notes
Top two primary information	52	Found to be a confusing concept in usability testing
Campaign finance reform statement	49	All but 1 fit this information on a single page
Changes in elections (e.g., districts, rules, system)	10	It is not known how many of the counties actually *had* changes Primarily found in Large and Super population groups
District map or list	10	7 were from the 10 with changes in elections Primarily found with lower population density and income

Voting information

Information about the voting process

Information	Counties	Notes
Vote by Mail (VBM)	55	
VBM application	47	
Permanent VBM option	47	Missing primarily in high income counties
How to vote/mark ballot	53	36 on a single page, 16 on 2 pages, 1 (Sutter) on 3 pages
Info for voters w/disabilities	49	
Early voting	20	
Voter preferences form	3	

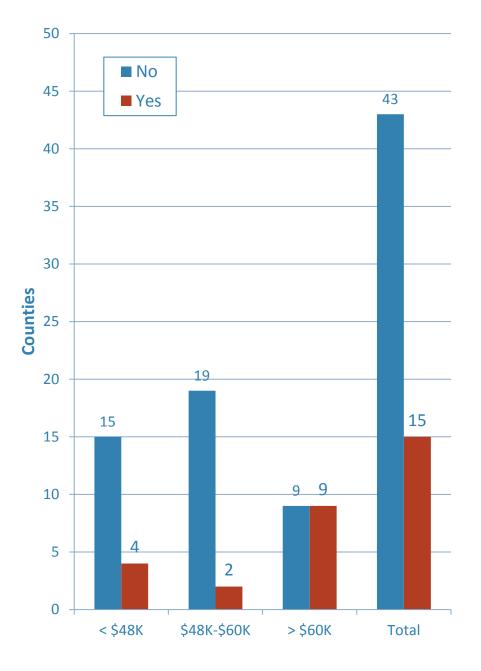Center for Civic Design

Vote by mail application by income

The higher the median income, the less likely the county was to offer a Vote by Mail application in the guide

Results for Permanent Vote by Mail Option were identical

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Update voter registration by income

Counties with the highest median incomes were more likely to offer the ability to update voter registration

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Additional voting information

Less common information provided about voting

Information	Counties	Notes
Call for poll workers	20	Primarily in counties with higher populations
Update voter registration	15	Primarily in counties with higher populations
How to register	11	
Do I need to show ID?	4	Mariposa, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus
Suggest a polling place	3	
Ballot worksheet	1	San Francisco

Guide information

Information about the voter guide itself

Information	Counties	Notes
Letter from the elections office	13	Primarily found in counties with larger populations and in larger guides
Guide to party & non-party ballots	12	
Voter Bill of Rights	11	
Purpose of the guide	7	Primarily found in counties with a majority of Democrats

More guide information

Rarely included guide elements

Information	Counties*	Notes
Table of contents	2	San Bernadino, San Mateo 1 with page numbers
FAQ	2	Marin, San Francisco
Committees or other lists of names	2	Alameda, San Francisco
Glossary of elections / political information	1	San Francisco

Languages

The use of Spanish, Chinese and other languages

Access to language information

Information	Counties	Notes
Candidate statements translated	26	
Translations or information about translations in guide	25	Some guides contained actual translation while others provided information about where translations could be found
Information about language support at the polls	15	
Guides in additional languages	15	

Additional language information

Information	Counties*	Notes
Separate booklets for the other languages	15	Santa Cruz had English and Spanish in the same but other languages in separate booklets
Announced each language in language	13	2 more announced them in English
Phone number for each language	10	

* Out of 31 counties with guides in languages other than English

Languages

All counties with any alternate languages included Spanish.

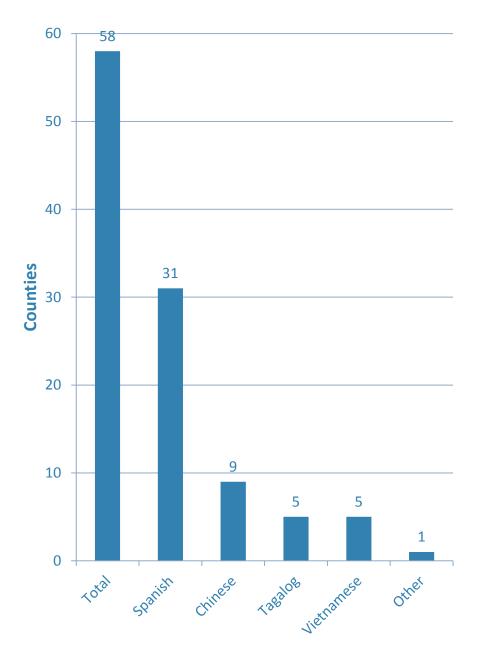Los Angeles was the only county to include:
- Hindi
- Japanese
- Khmer
- Thai

Santa Clara included a place to request materials in:
- Hindi
- Japanese
- Khmer

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Sample Ballot

Elements & presentation

Sample ballot information

Information about scaled or exact replicas of the ballot itself

Information	Counties	Notes
Candidate statements	58	
Party endorsements	57	
Sample ballot	54	All but one was an exact copy of the ballot 28 of these were scaled, with the other 26 full size Average was 4 pages
Opt in/out form	22	Ability to opt in or out from receiving the sample ballot

Measure information

Information	Counties	Notes
Ballot measures and pro/con arguments	48	Not all counties had measures in June, though state of California had propositions Primarily missing from counties with smaller populations 27 were in the sample ballot (25 single-page) 21 were in the text of the regular guide (average of 5.8 pages) 18 had the legal text of the measures
Glossary of terms in the measures	1	San Francisco

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Guide and sample ballot pages

- Not surprisingly, the number of pages in the overall guide and the sample ballot are strongly correlated. (r = 0.558, p < .001)
- Orange County was the most interesting outlier, with the relationship predicting fewer pages (about 10) in the sample ballot
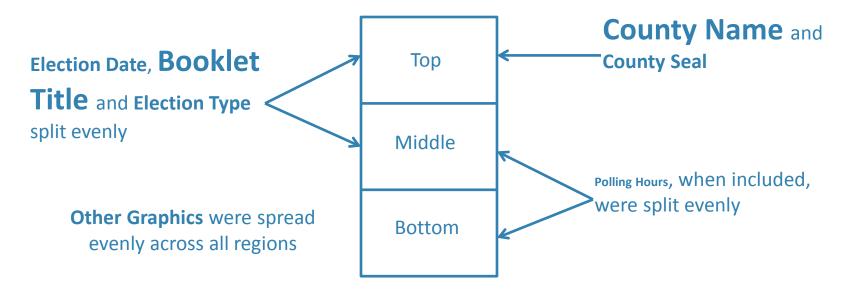
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The Covers

What is on the cover, and how is it arranged?

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Cover information

Information	Counties	Notes
Election date	56	
Election type	56	
Title of booklet	56	
County name	53	
County seal	45	
Polling hours	42	
Other graphics	24	
More than 1 language	21	
Early voting deadlines	6	

* Out of 56 total, 1 no cover in downloadable version and 1 went straight into sample ballot

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Location of information on the cover

Election Date, **Booklet Title** and **Election Type** split evenly

County Name and **County Seal**

Top
Middle
Bottom

Polling Hours, when included, were split evenly

Other Graphics were spread evenly across all regions

The number of different type sizes on the cover ranged from 1 (just 1 county) to 10 (also 1 county) with most using 4 or 5

The number of **different fonts** on the cover ranged from 1 (4 counties) to 8 (1 one county) with most using between 2 and 4

The **Address**, **Clerk**, **Polling Hours** and **Registrar** were often in the smallest type

Design Elements

How the information is presented

Design elements

Element	Counties	Notes
More than 1 column organization	58	Average of 13 pages
Illustrations	53	Used on range of 1 to 9 pages Average of 3 pages
Step-by-Step instructions	49	39 counties on just one page
Color	47	8 counties used color on 1 page 38 counties used color on 2 pages San Bernardino used color on 4 pages
Photos	13	8 counties used photos on 1 page 2 counties used photos on 2 pages 3 counties used photos on 3 pages

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The top 6 guides

These guides did the best jobs answering the voters questions

The top 6 guides

- Several guides are provided as examples of doing the best jobs answering voters' questions

- These guides tended to come from larger, more affluent counties, most likely indicating greater resources.

San Mateo

Included

Table of Contents (page numbers)

Deadlines

Address of polling place

Early voting information

Vote by Mail information

How to vote/mark ballot

Sample Ballot

San Mateo Stats

Population: Large (718,451)

Population Density: > 200 (969.6)

Median Income: > $60K ($87,633)

Majority Party for 2012 Presidential Election: Democratic (72%)

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San Bernadino

Included

Table of Contents

Deadlines

Early voting information

Vote by Mail information

Sample Ballot

Voter Bill of Rights
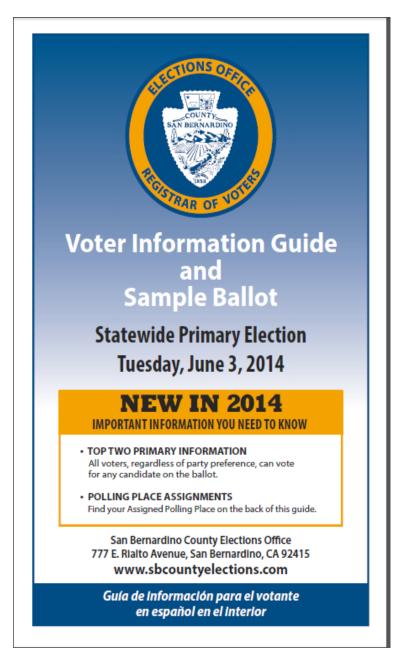
San Bernardino Stats

Population: Super (2,035,210)

Population Density: 40-200 (101.2)

Median Income: $48-60K ($55,853)

Majority Party for 2012 Presidential Election: Democratic (52%)

Santa Clara

Included

Deadlines

Address of polling place

Early Voting

Vote by Mail

How to vote and mark ballot

Sample Ballot

Update voter registration

Do I need to show ID?

Voter Bill of Rights

Santa Clara Stats

Population: Super (1,781,642)

Population Density: >200 (1366.2)

Median Income: >60K ($89,064)

Majority Party for 2012 Presidential Election: Democratic (70%)

074S

THE COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA

BOLETA DE MUESTRA
y Folleto de Información del Votante

3 DE JUNIO DE 2014
ELECCIÓN PRIMARIA

★ Su puesto de votación podría haber cambiado. Por favor vea la contraportada para información actualizada sobre su ubicación.

★ Los puestos de votación abren de 7:00 a.m. a 8:00 p.m.

★ VOTE utilizando una de las tres maneras prácticas: Por Correo, Tempranamente o en las Urnas el Día de la Elección. Consulte el interior para más información.

Registrar of Voters
1555 Berger Drive, Building 2
San Jose, CA 95112

1-408-299-VOTE (8683) o
Sin Cargo al 1-866-430-VOTE (8683)

Los votantes ahora tienen la opción de recibir electrónicamente la Boleta de Muestra y Folleto de Información del Votante completando el formulario de EXCLUSIÓN dentro del folleto o en www.sccvote.org.

CONDADO DE SANTA CLARA
ELECCIÓN PRIMARIA DEL 2014

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Santa Barbara

Included
Deadlines
Address of polling place
Vote by Mail information
How to vote/mark ballot
Sample Ballot
Update voter registration
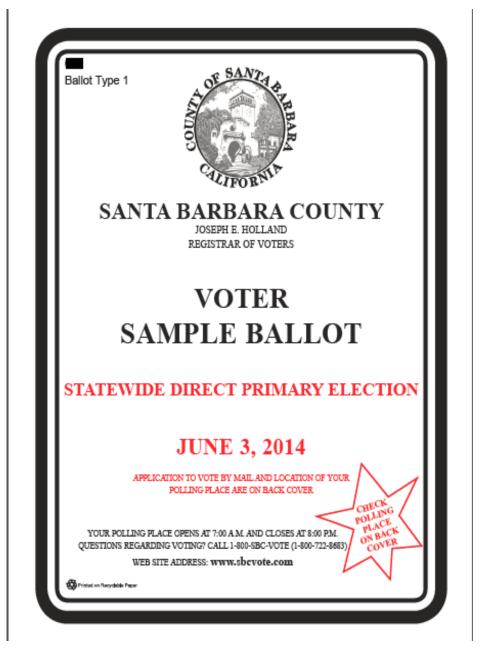Do I need to show ID?

Santa Barbara Stats
Population: Large (423,895)
Population Density: 40-200 (111.9)
Median Income: >$60K ($61,896)
Majority Party for 2012 Presidential
Election: Democratic (57%)

Ballot Type 1

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
CALIFORNIA

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
JOSEPH E. HOLLAND
REGISTRAR OF VOTERS

VOTER
SAMPLE BALLOT

STATEWIDE DIRECT PRIMARY ELECTION

JUNE 3, 2014

APPLICATION TO VOTE BY MAIL AND LOCATION OF YOUR
POLLING PLACE ARE ON BACK COVER

CHECK POLLING PLACE ON BACK COVER

YOUR POLLING PLACE OPENS AT 7:00 A.M. AND CLOSES AT 8:00 P.M.
QUESTIONS REGARDING VOTING? CALL 1-800-SBC-VOTE (1-800-722-8683)

WEB SITE ADDRESS: www.sbcvote.com

Printed on Recyclable Paper

Placer

Included

Deadlines for registration

Address of polling place

Early Voting information

Vote by Mail information

How to vote/mark ballot

Sample Ballot

Update voter registration

Placer Stats

Population: Large (348.432)

Population Density: >200 (231.9)

Median Income: >$60K ($74,645)

Majority Party for 2012 Presidential Election: Republican (58%)

Siskiyou

Included
Deadlines
Address of polling place
Vote by Mail information
How to vote/mark ballot
Sample Ballot
Voter Bill of Rights

Most complete tiny or small county

San Bernadino Stats
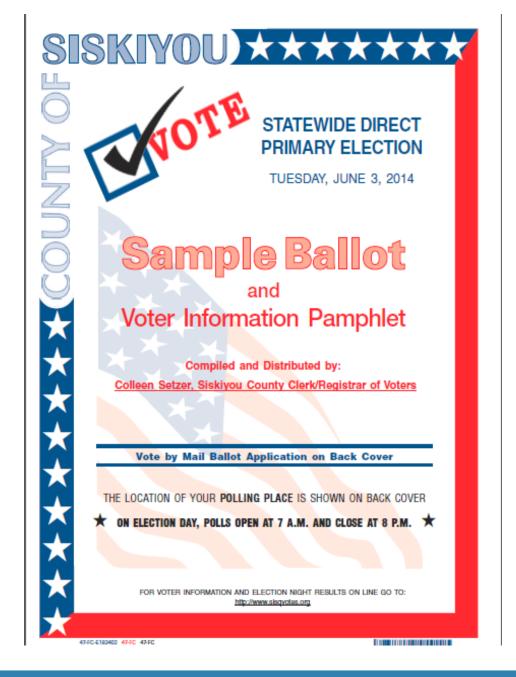Population: Small (44,900)
Population Density: <40 (7.1)
Median Income: <$48K ($37,865)
Majority Party for 2012 Presidential Election: Republican (55%)

Thanks

This work is part of project for the [Future of California Elections](#). FOCE a is a collaboration between election officials, civil rights organizations and election reform advocates to examine and address the unique challenges facing the State of California's election system. Our project on how voters get information is in collaboration with [League of Women Voters of California Education Fund](#)

This project is supported by a generous grant from the [James Irvine Foundation](#).

Find the complete report, scans of all the guides we analyzed for this study, and more at the project website:

http://centerforcivicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/

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