

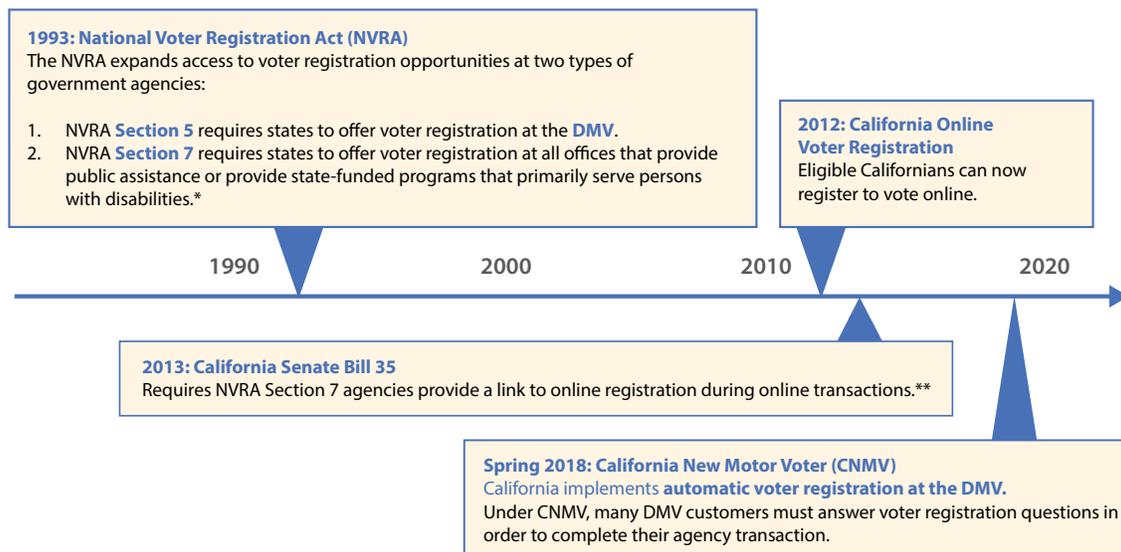
## Opportunities to Expand Automatic Voter Registration to Other NVRA Agencies

In spring 2018, California New Motor Voter (CNMV), a statewide automatic voter registration program, was launched at California’s Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Patterns of voter registration and voter turnout in general elections between 2018 and 2022 reveal that since CNMV was implemented, voter registration at the DMV has increased sharply but has not yet led to a parallel rise in voting. In addition, opportunities remain to possibly expand automatic voter registration through CNMV to other state agencies that already offer opportunities to register to vote through Section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), such as CalFresh and Medi-Cal. NVRA Section 7 agencies serve millions of California residents and have high levels of interaction with participants.

Current voter registration opportunities at NVRA Section 7 agencies are not considered automatic voter registration. Under an automatic voter registration system a voter is registered to vote automatically unless they actively decline. At an NVRA Section 7 agency, voters only need to be provided an opportunity to register to vote, either online or with a paper application. If NVRA Section 7 agency participants opt to register to vote, they must fill out the entire form, including information that they already have provided to the agency, such as name, address, date of birth, and social security number. CNMV expansion to these agencies may provide an opportunity to increase registration among groups historically and still underrepresented in California’s electorate, as well as capture potential registered voters who do not interact with the DMV.

### Key Laws Shaping Voter Registration in California

Recent voter registration patterns and opportunities to further expand registration access reflect the implementation of several policies that have expanded Californians’ options for registering to vote.



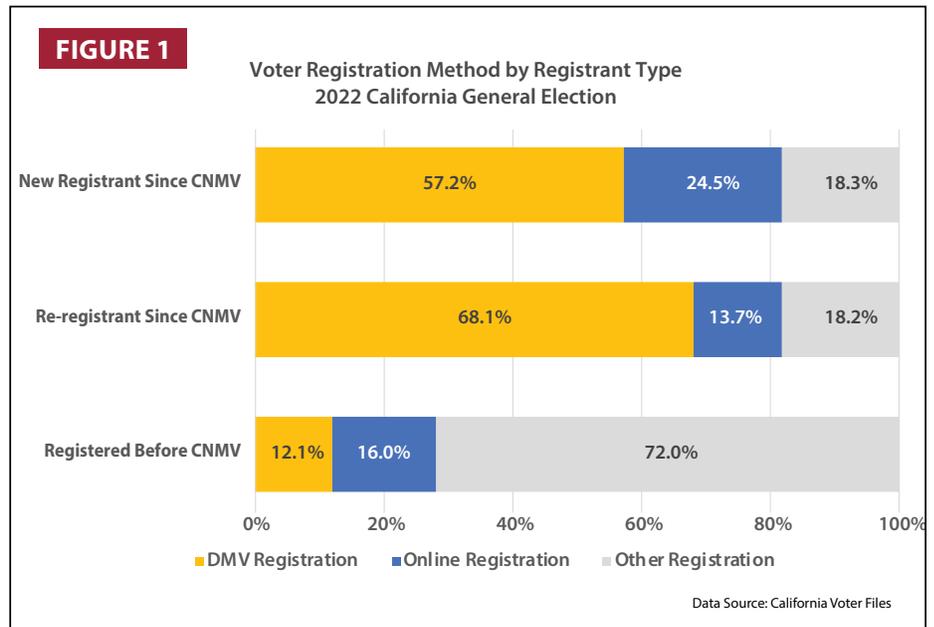
\*The equal assistance clause of NVRA Section 7 requires agencies to assist each applicant with completing voter registration forms to the same degree provided by the office with regard to agency forms, unless the applicant refuses such assistance.<sup>1</sup>

\*\*Implemented in 2013, Senate Bill 35 requires the California Secretary of State to translate the online registration system tool into languages that counties across the state are required to offer under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act, requires NVRA Section 7 agencies to provide a link to online registration during online transactions, and authorized NVRA Section 7 agencies to transfer information entered electronically into the agency’s application to the electronic voter registration affidavit, but so far none have done so.

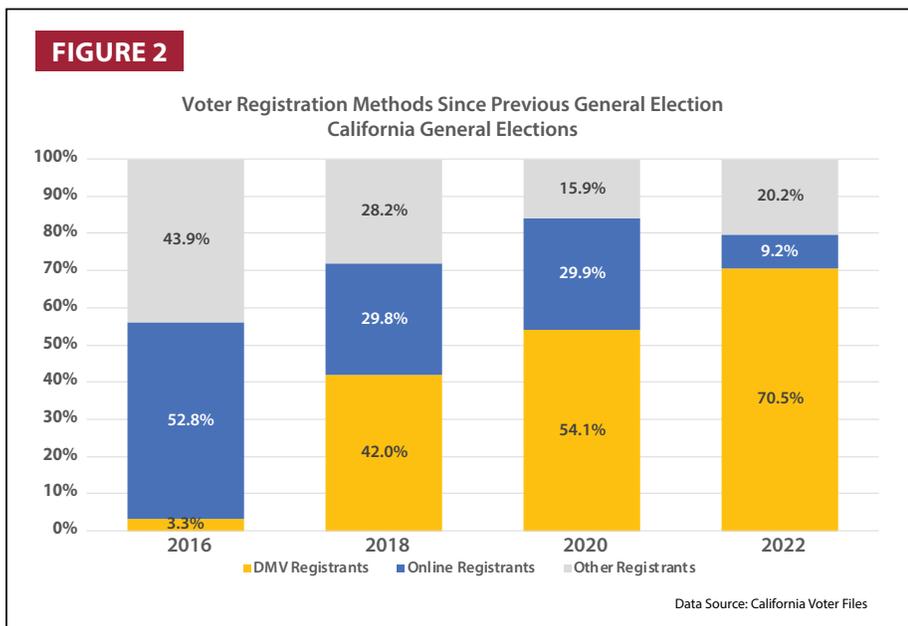
## Recent Changes in Voter Registration Method and Voter Turnout

Automatic Registration at the DMV has become the most common voter registration method.

With California New Motor Voter (CNMV) in place, Californians now most commonly register to vote at the DMV. By the 2022 general election, over 57% of all new registrants had registered to vote at the DMV, as had over 68% of all registered voters who updated their information (re-registered) since CNMV implementation in spring 2018. In contrast, among those who registered to vote prior to CNMV implementation, only about 12% did so at the DMV, when registration was entirely optional and required customers to complete a separate registration form.



The share of voter registration taking place at the DMV increased twenty-one-fold between 2016 and 2022.



In the 2016 general election (prior to CNMV), fewer than 4% of voters who had registered for the first time or re-registered since the previous general election had done so at the DMV. In the 2018 general election, held just over six months after CNMV implementation, DMV new registrations and re-registrations since the previous election jumped to 42%. About two years after CNMV implementation, over half of new and re-registrations in the 2020 general election were taking place at the DMV, which jumped to over 70% four years after implementation in the 2022 general election.

Note: There are multiple ways in which Californians can register to vote through the DMV, including through the internet change of address (ICA) option on the DMV website. In recent years, the DMV expanded the eligibility of those who can use the ICA.

**FIGURE 3**

Voter Registration Methods Since Previous General Election by Race and Ethnicity  
California General Elections



Data Source: California Voter Files

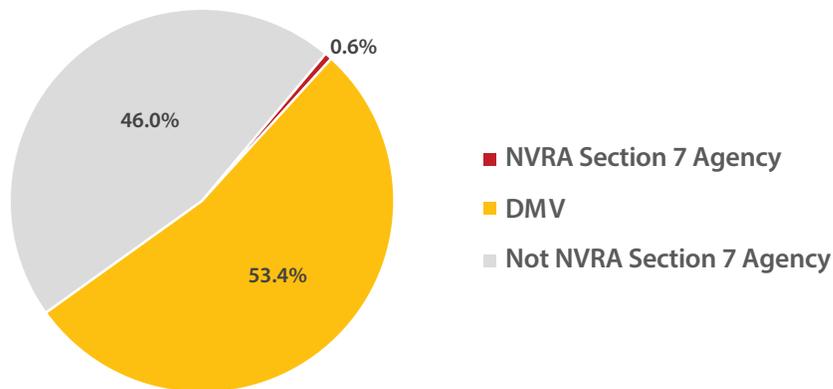
CNMV has made the DMV the most widely used registration source for Asian-American, Black, and Latino new and re-registrations as well. For all racial and ethnic groups observed, the share of new and re-registrants since the previous general election who did so at the DMV increased from under 3% in 2016 to over 70% in 2022.

**NVRA Section 7 agencies have accounted for a very small proportion of recent voter registrations.**

Less than one percent of registered voters in the 2022 general election had registered to vote at NVRA Section 7 agencies. In contrast, voter registration through the DMV accounted for nearly 54% of all voter registrations, many of which occurred after CNMV implementation, a 15 percentage point jump from the 2020 general election. While NVRA Section 7 agencies offer participants the option of completing voter registration forms, CNMV requires DMV customers to answer voter registration questions during their transaction and applicants may choose to opt out of registration. If they do not opt out of registration, the DMV uses information provided by customers during their DMV transactions to register or update voter registrations.

**FIGURE 4**

Voter Registration by Registration Source  
2022 General Election



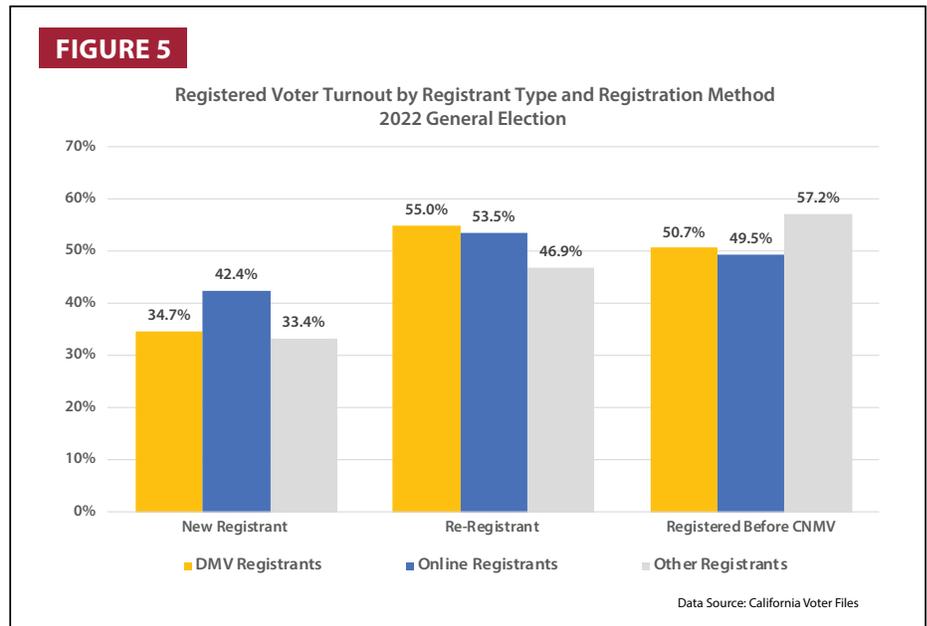
Data Source: California Voter Files

Expanding automatic voter registration (similar to the DMV system) to all NVRA agencies could increase voter registration at these agencies. This possibility is further explored later in this report brief.

## Equity in voter turnout among DMV registrants has shown some signs of improvement since CNMV implementation.

Patterns of voter turnout have not matched the patterns of voter registration. Despite the gains in voter registration after the implementation of CNMV, new DMV registrants have voted at notably lower rates than those who chose to register online. In the 2022 general election, fewer than 35% of new DMV registrants cast a ballot, compared to upwards of 42% of new online registrants. The voter turnout gap between new DMV registrants and new online registrants was particularly large among Asian Americans and the youngest voters, exceeding ten percentage points (not shown).

At the same time, equity in voter turnout by age and race/ethnicity has shown signs of improvement since CNMV implementation. Young registrants (ages 18-24) experienced the largest increase in registered voter turnout from 2016 to 2020 across all age groups. In addition, the registered voter turnout gap between DMV registrants of color and all registrants narrowed from 2016 to 2020. These findings are covered in detail in the CID report, *California New Motor Voter Law: Changing the State's Voter Registration Landscape*.



## Considerations About Expanding Registration at NVRA Section 7 Agencies

With the CNMV law, implementing automatic voter registration (AVR) greatly expanded the number of registrations taking place at the DMV. However, there still were nearly five million eligible voters in California who were not registered to vote at the time of the 2022 general election, leaving opportunities for other government agencies to expand registration numbers even more. Although NVRA Section 7 agencies currently account for a very small percentage of voter registrations, they could potentially reach more eligible voters by adopting a similar automatic voter registration process. Other states across the country have expanded their AVR process to NVRA Section 7 agencies. At least 10 states and the District of Columbia have already expanded or are in the process of implementing an AVR process at NVRA Section 7 agencies or state offices other than their DMV.<sup>2</sup>

AVR expansion to NVRA Section 7 agencies does have some challenges, including technology limitations. Many state agencies operate with older technology for data collection, storage, and transmission. Prior to CNMV implementation, the DMV made some technological upgrades to their system in order to fulfill the requirements. There are numerous NVRA Section 7 agencies using a range of systems for daily operations. Weak technological infrastructure and lack of resources to upgrade these systems at NVRA Section 7 agencies can be a barrier to AVR implementation.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, there are concerns that AVR expansion to NVRA Section 7 agencies, such as social services agencies, could inadvertently register some non-citizens to vote, especially at agencies that do not otherwise ask about citizenship in their applications. With CNMV, state law prohibits the DMV from sending information for AB 60 applicants (undocumented driver's license applicants) to the California Secretary of State's office.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, California state election code 2150 requires all people registering to vote, including at NVRA Section 7 agencies, to affirm their eligibility under perjury of law.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the potential challenges, AVR expansion to NVRA Section 7 agencies may provide opportunities to engage with more eligible voters in California. Data on the populations agencies serve and the voter registrations they currently provide offers insights about potential expansion of CNMV to NVRA Section 7 agencies in California.

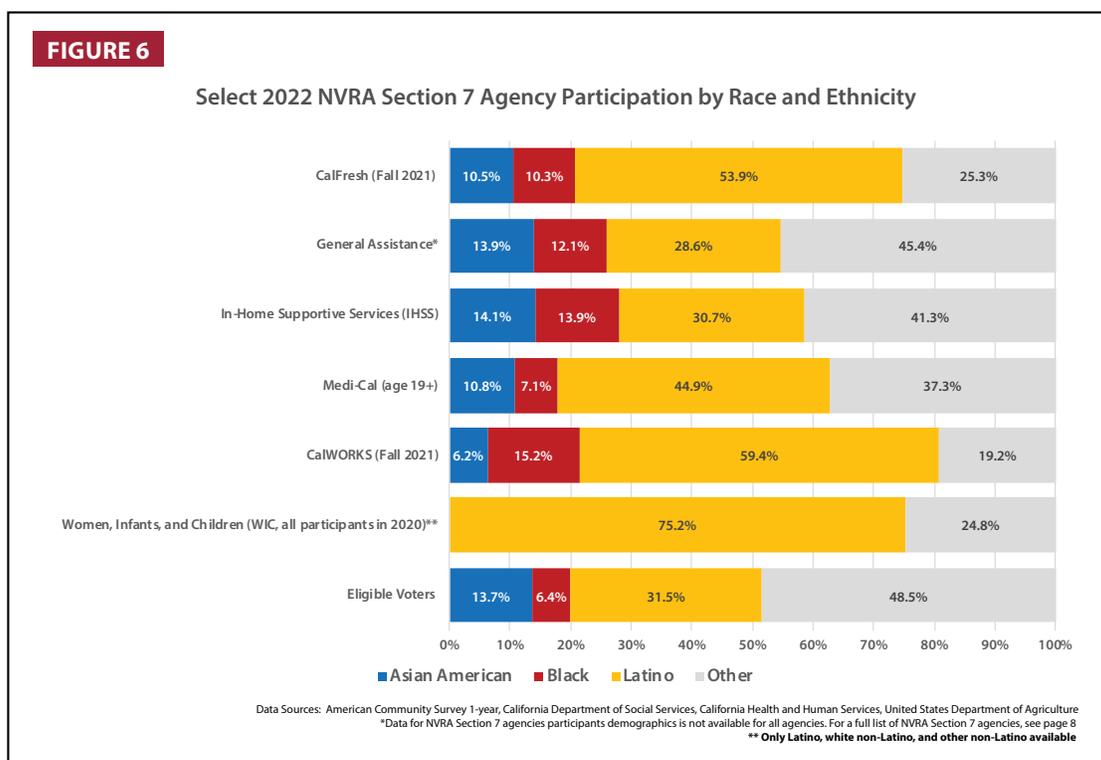
Note: The following sections detail the share of registration that occur at NVRA Section 7 agencies. CID does not have data detailing how many participants were asked to register to vote and how many people declined to register to vote in each agency.

### NVRA Section 7 agencies serve millions of Californians.

A large portion of California eligible voters interact with NVRA Section 7 agencies. In 2022, around one-third of California adults (over 8 million) were enrolled in Medi-Cal, and more than 10 percent (nearly 3 million) were enrolled in CalFresh in 2020, the two NVRA Section 7 agencies with the largest enrollments.<sup>6</sup>

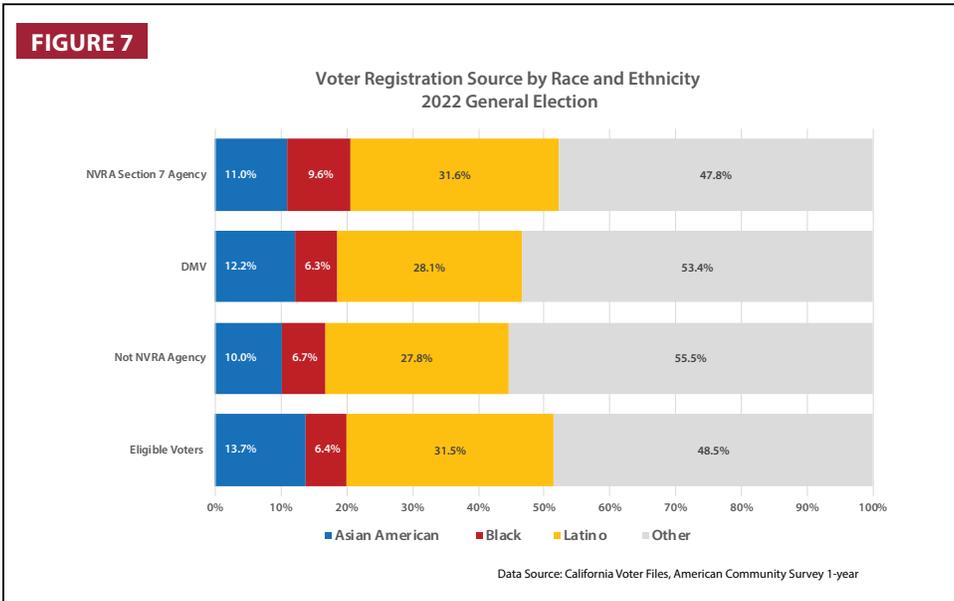
### Expanding registration at NVRA Section 7 agencies could particularly increase Latino and Black voter registration.

With many NVRA agency enrollees being Asian American, Latino, and Black, expanding a CNMV-like process to NVRA Section 7 agencies provides the opportunity to further narrow the historical voter registration gap. Automatic voter registration at NVRA Section 7 agencies could particularly benefit Latino residents, who comprise 45% of Medi-Cal participants, over 30% of in-home supportive services, over 75% of Women Infants and Children (WIC) participants, and over 50% of CalFresh and CalWORKS participants.\*

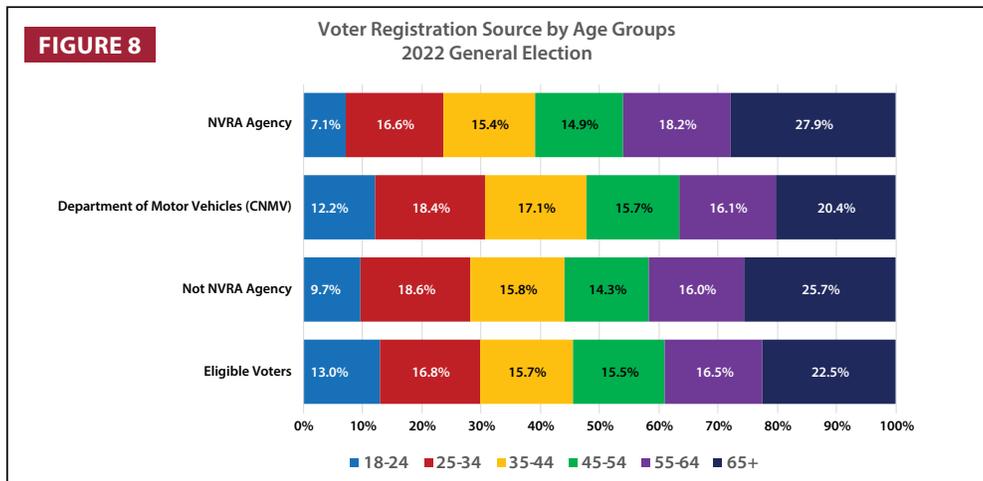


In addition, voters who have registered through NVRA Section 7 agencies are more likely to be Black or Latino than voters who registered through other sources. At the time of the 2022 election, Black NVRA Section 7 registrants accounted for nearly 10 percent of all NVRA Section 7 registrations, higher than their share of other registration sources and their share of eligible voters. Similarly, 32% of NVRA Section 7 registrants were Latino, closer to their share of eligible voters than DMV registrants and non-NVRA registrants.

\*Data for NVRA Section 7 agencies participants demographics is not available for all agencies. For a full list of NVRA Section 7 agencies, see page 8



NVRA Section 7 agencies also registered larger shares of older registrants (55 and older) compared to other registration sources at the time of the 2022 general election.



County Social Services agencies account for the largest share of NVRA Section 7 agencies, but there is room to expand.

Among the Californians who registered to vote through NVRA Section 7 agencies by the 2022 California general election, 43.7% registered through county health, social, human, family, and in-home services agencies—a far higher percentage than other types of agencies. This category includes Medi-Cal, which provided services to roughly 8 million Californians in 2022. Despite county health, social, human, family, and in-home services agencies registering high shares of NVRA Section 7 registrants, the total number of registered voters from these agencies is just shy of fifty thousand. With expanded registration options, these agencies could potentially enroll a larger share of their caseload.

Note: The Black and Latino proportion of registrations in Section 7 agencies are lower (especially for Latinos) than the proportion of customers in those agencies who are Black and Latino (see Figure 6).

Note: Public assistance programs whose applications are accepted at county health/social/human/family/in-home services offices, including Medi-Cal, CalFresh, CalWORKS, In-Home Supportive Services, and General Assistance are included in the County Health/ Social/ Human/ Family/ In-Home Services category.

NVRA Section 7 Registration by Agency* 2022 California General Election		
NVRA Agency	Registered Total	Registered Share
California Department of Tax and Fee Administration	623	0.6%
California Health Benefit Exchange**	2,533	2.3%
CDSS CalFresh Program***	1,939	1.7%
County Health/ Social/ Human/ Family/ In-Home Services	49,168	43.7%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Services	51	0.0%
Department of Public Social Services****	10,668	9.5%
Department of Rehabilitation	109	0.1%
Franchise Tax Board	113	0.1%
Independent Living Center	52	0.0%
Mental Health Services	391	0.3%
Other Public Assistance Agency not listed above	42,817	38.1%
Regional Center*****	208	0.2%
Other State-assisted Disability Service Organizations*****	1,734	1.5%
Women, Infants, and Children	1,990	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>112,396</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\* NVRA Section 7 agency categories presented in this table are consistent with how agency registration data are categorized in the California voter file. Detailed data on the specific agency composition of large categories were not available at the time of this report.

\*\* California Health Benefit Exchange is present in the California voter file under two names; "California Health Benefit Exchange Email" and "California Health Benefit Exchange Website", which were combined to create one category.

\*\*\* CDSS CalFresh Program category does not include people who enroll in CalFresh at county social services offices. It does include people who registered to vote when enrolling through private entities contracted with the CDSS CalFresh Outreach program.

\*\*\*\* Los Angeles and Riverside counties call their county welfare offices "Department of Public Social Services" while other counties include these registration in the County Health/ Social/ Human/ Family/ In-Home Services category.

\*\*\*\*\*Regional centers provide assessments, determine eligibility for services, and offer case management services for Californians with developmental disabilities. See page 8 for more information.

\*\*\*\*\* In the California vote file, this category is labeled "State-assisted Disability Service Organizations" which is used for Disability Service Organizations that do not fit into one of the other source codes available for organizations that serve people with disabilities. These organizations include the state College and University Offices for Students with Disabilities and the Department of Social Services, Office of Services to the Blind, Assistance Dog Special Allowance Program. "Other" was added in the table for clarity.

Data Source: California Voter Files

## Concluding Thoughts

Many U.S. states have enacted automatic voter registration reforms to reduce barriers to voting by offering registration without residents having to actively seek it out. Since California's implementation of automatic voter registration at the DMV through CNMV, voter registration at that agency has risen steeply, including among Californians of color.

The CNMV program does not eliminate the need for sustained and effective voter outreach and engagement efforts, especially for groups historically underrepresented at the ballot box. Expanded voter registration in California has not yet translated into a comparable increase in voting. The rise in voter registration at the DMV suggests that expanding the automatic voter registration process could boost registration through NVRA Section 7 agencies. These agencies serve millions of Californians and high proportions of Californians of color, providing opportunities to reach groups that are historically underrepresented among voters.

NVRA Section 7 Agencies	
CalFresh	The California implementation of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp program, which provides financial assistance for purchasing food to low-income California residents.
California Community Colleges (CCC) offices for students with disabilities	The California Community Colleges is a postsecondary education system in the U.S. state of California. CCC offices that provide services to students with disabilities are NVRA Section 7 agencies.
California Department of Tax and Fee Administration offices	Charged with assessing and collecting sales and use taxes, as well as a variety of excise fees and taxes, for the U.S. state of California.
California State University (CSU) offices for students with disabilities	The California State University is a public university system in California. CSU offices that provide services to students with disabilities are NVRA Section 7 agencies.
CalWORKS	Provides states and territories with flexibility in operating programs designed to help low-income families with children achieve economic self-sufficiency. States use TANF to fund monthly cash assistance payments to low-income families with children, as well as a wide range of services.
Covered California	California's health insurance marketplace established under the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The exchange enables eligible individuals and small businesses to purchase private health insurance coverage at federally subsidized rates.
Department of Rehab Vocational Services	Provides services and advocacy resulting in employment, independent living, and equality for individuals with disabilities.
Franchise Tax Board offices	Administers and collects state personal income tax and corporate franchise and income tax of California.
General Assistance	Provides relief and support to indigent adults who are not supported by their own means, other public funds, or assistance programs.
Independent Living Centers	Provides various services for people with any kind of disability to support independent living. Services include independent living skills, housing, personal assistance services, assistive technology, peer counseling, and advocacy.
In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)	Provides those with limited income who are disabled, blind or over the age of 65 with in-home care services to help them remain safely at home.
Medi-Cal	California's Medicaid health care program. This program pays for a variety of medical services for children and adults with limited income and resources.
Office of Deaf Access	Provides communication services, advocacy services, job development and placement, counseling, and independent living skills instruction for deaf and hard of hearing children, adults, and families.
Regional Centers	Department of Developmental Services oversees the coordination and delivery of services for Californians with developmental disabilities through a statewide network of 21 community-based, non-profit agencies known as regional centers. Regional centers provide assessments, determine eligibility for services, and offer case management services. Regional centers also develop, purchase, and coordinate the services in each person's Individual Program Plan.
State and County Mental Health Providers	Provides various mental health programs for Children and Youth, Adults and Older Adults.
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	Provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food.
The California Student Aid Commission	Administers financial aid programs for students attending public and private universities, colleges, and vocational schools in California.
University of California (UC) offices for students with disabilities	The University of California is a public land-grant research university system in the U.S. state of California. UC offices that provide services to students with disabilities are NVRA Section 7 agencies.
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care.

Data sources: United States Department of Agriculture, California Department of Healthcare Services, California Department of Social Services, California Department of Health and Human Services, Franchise Tax Board, California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, California Student Aid Commission, Department of Rehabilitation, Covered California, University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges

NVRA Section 7 agencies include: 1).public assistance agencies, such as county welfare offices that accept applications and administer benefits for the CalFresh Program, CalWORKS, Medi-Cal, and Women Infants and Children (WIC); 2). State-funded agencies primarily serving persons with disabilities, such as county departments that accept applications and administer benefits for in-home support services program, vocational rehabilitation services, independent living centers, regional centers, and offices for students with disabilities at the University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges; and 3). Other agencies, including the Franchise Tax Board offices and California Department of Tax and Fee Administration offices that provide services to the public.

Participation data by demographics, such as race and ethnicity, are not readily available for all NVRA Section 7 agencies (See Figure 6 for select demographic data for NVRA Section 7 agency participants). While there is demographic data available for students at the University of California, California State University, and California community colleges, a small segment of students uses the disability offices and total student demographics may not accurately represent those using the NVRA Section 7 agency.

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### Research Team

Anna Meier, Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID), Research Associate, Quantitative Methods Lead  
Mindy Romero, Ph.D., Director, Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID)  
Eric McGhee, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)

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### About the Study

To look at the effects of the California New Motor Voter (CNMV) law, the Center for Inclusive Democracy conducted a statewide analysis of registration and voting behavior in the 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 general elections. We compared all new voter registrations and re-registrations by registration method, registration source, age, and race/ethnicity to examine how the law has changed the voter registration landscape and whether it shows evidence of increasing voter participation, particularly among underrepresented groups. Registration data was provided by the California Secretary of State's office.

For details about the study's research methodology, please see pages 6 through 8 of CID's research report, "[California's New Motor Voter Law: Changing the State's Voter Registration Landscape.](#)"

### About the Center for Inclusive Democracy

The Center for Inclusive Democracy's mission is to improve the social and economic quality of life in U.S. communities by producing non-partisan academic research that informs policy and on-the-ground organizing efforts through education and outreach for a more engaged, transparent, and representative democracy. CID conducts pioneering research that explores voting behavior, civic engagement, as well as electoral and economic issues at the intersection of social justice and democracy.

**For more information about this report, contact Dr. Romero at [msromero@usc.edu](mailto:msromero@usc.edu).**