

Partisanship and Racial Bias in Signature Matching: Explaining the Ballot Rejection Gap in California



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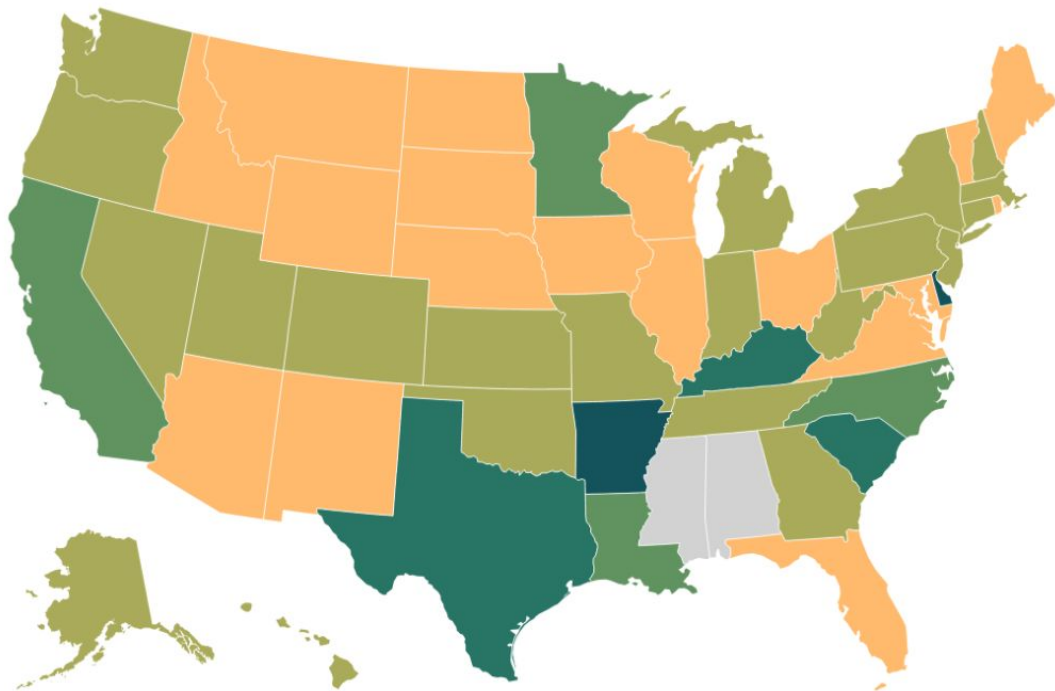
The Problem

- More than 500,000 ballots get rejected nationally during an election year.

Absentee/mail-in ballot rejection rates, 2022

Showing each state based on the number of rejected absentee/mail-in ballots as a percentage of all ballots returned.

■ <1% ■ 1-2% ■ 2-3% ■ 3-4% ■ >4%



Rejection rates for Alabama and Mississippi could not be calculated due to incomplete data.

Map: Ballotpedia • Source: Election Assistance Commission

BALLOTPEDIA

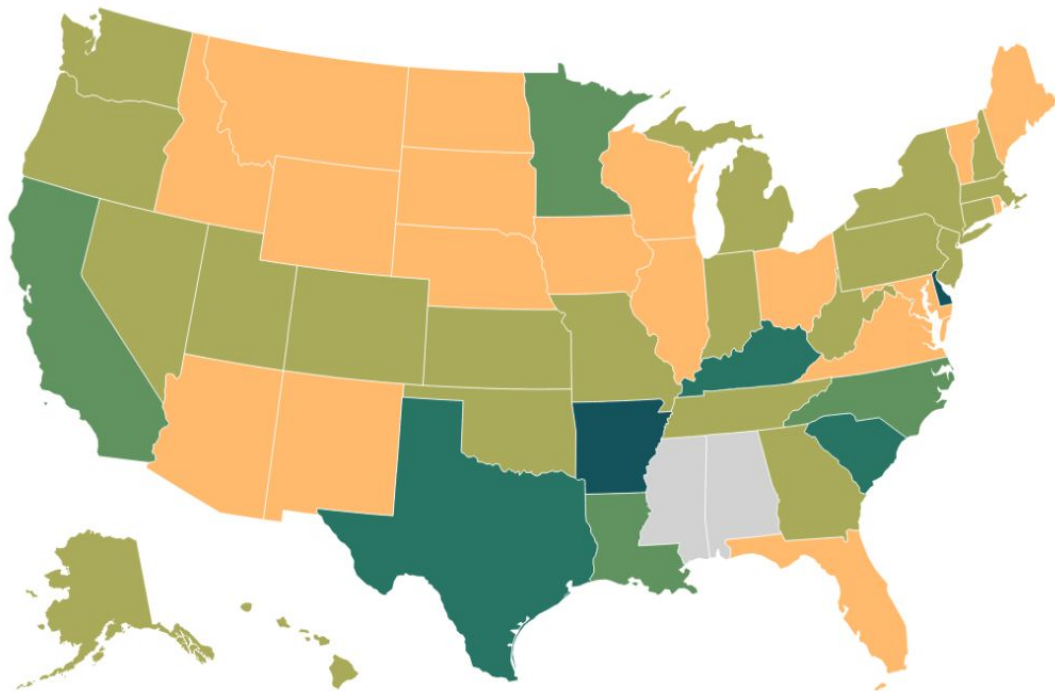
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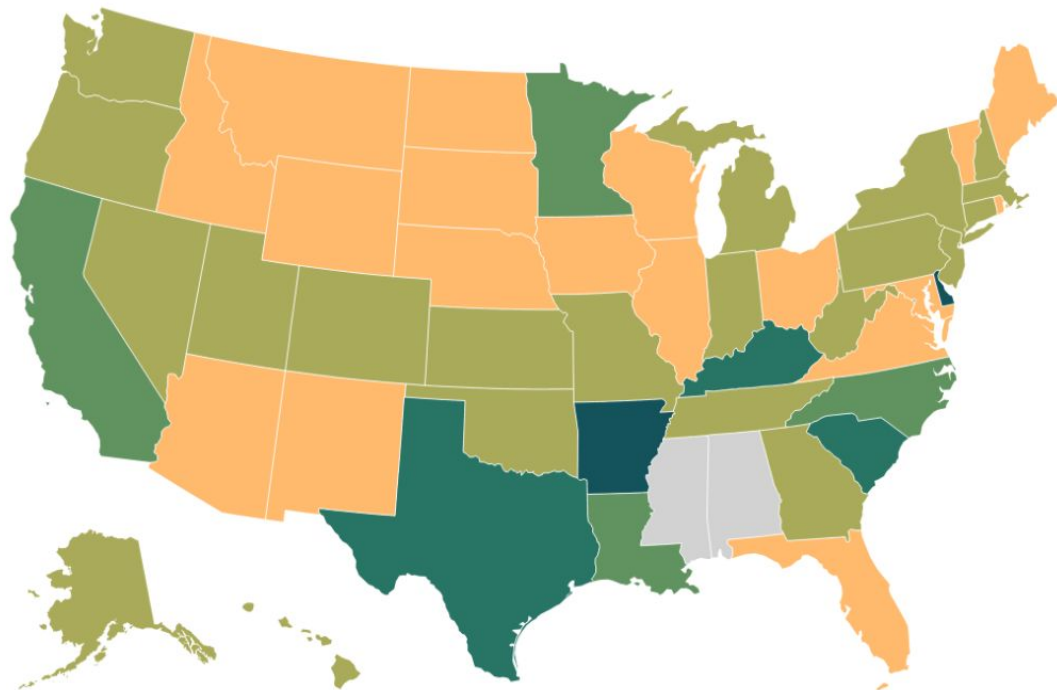
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- Signature verification is a **discretionary** process that looks different from state to state.

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Legend: <1% (lightest green), 1-2% (light green), 2-3% (medium green), 3-4% (dark green), >4% (darkest green)



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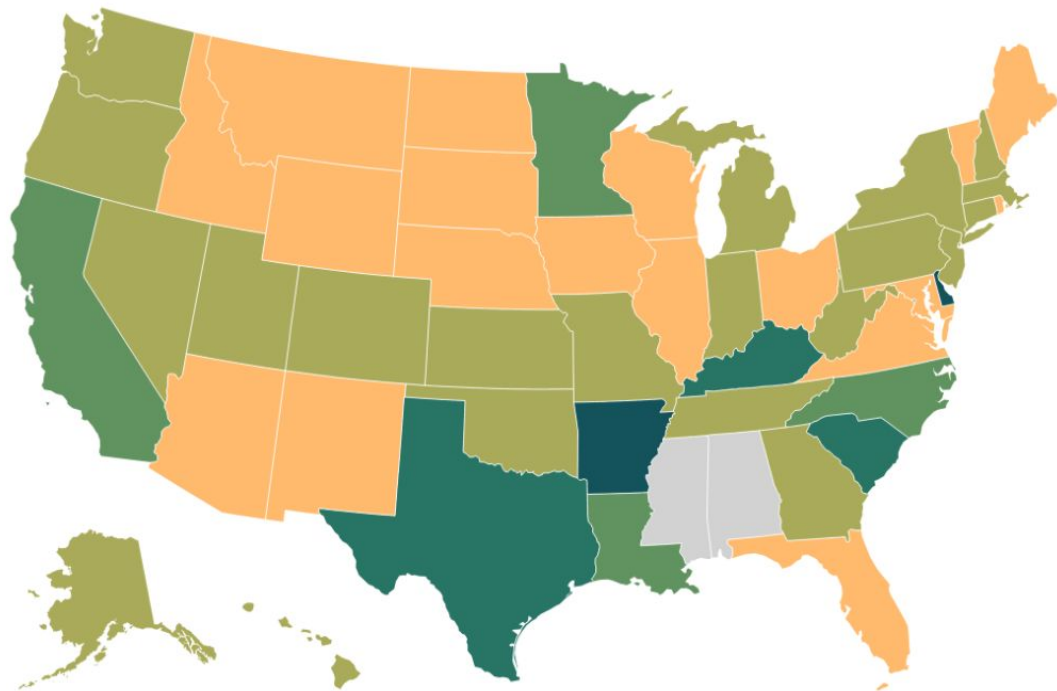
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- In 2020, the most common reason for a ballot being rejected was a “signature discrepancy”.
- Signature verification is a **discretionary** process that looks different from state to state.
- Discretion + vacuum of voting rights = **Racial disenfranchisement**

Absentee/mail-in ballot rejection rates, 2022

Showing each state based on the number of rejected absentee/mail-in ballots as a percentage of all ballots returned.

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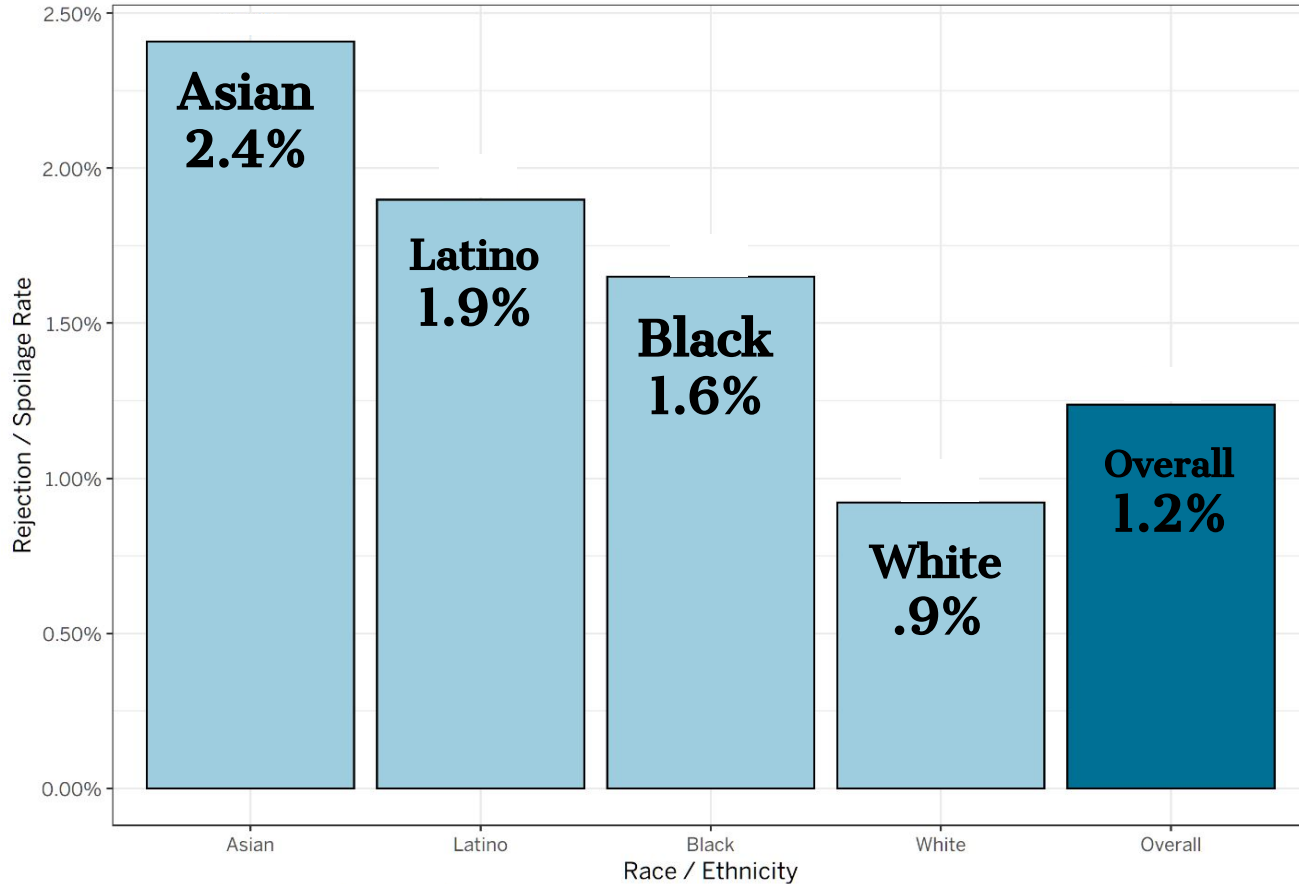
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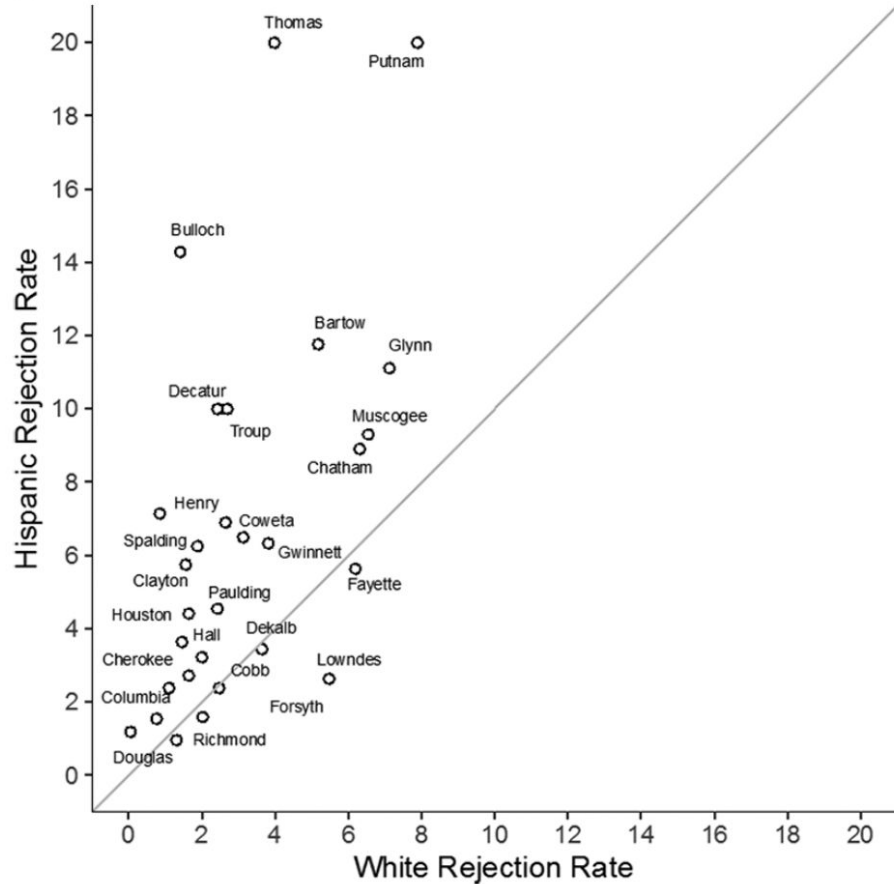
BALLOTPEDIA

GEORGIA

Percent of Returned Mail Ballots Rejected / Spoiled

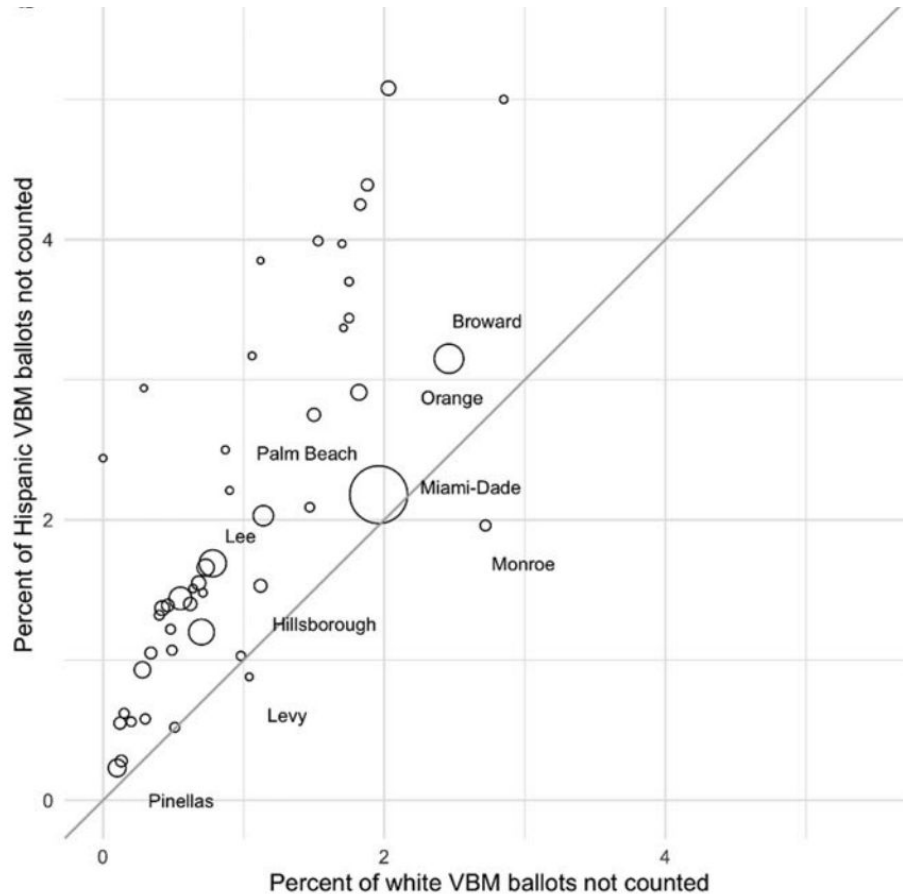


White vs. Hispanic Rejection in Georgia 2018 General Election



Enrijeta Shino, Mara Suttmann-Lea, and Daniel A. Smith (2022)

White vs. Hispanic Ballot Rejection in Florida 2018 General Election

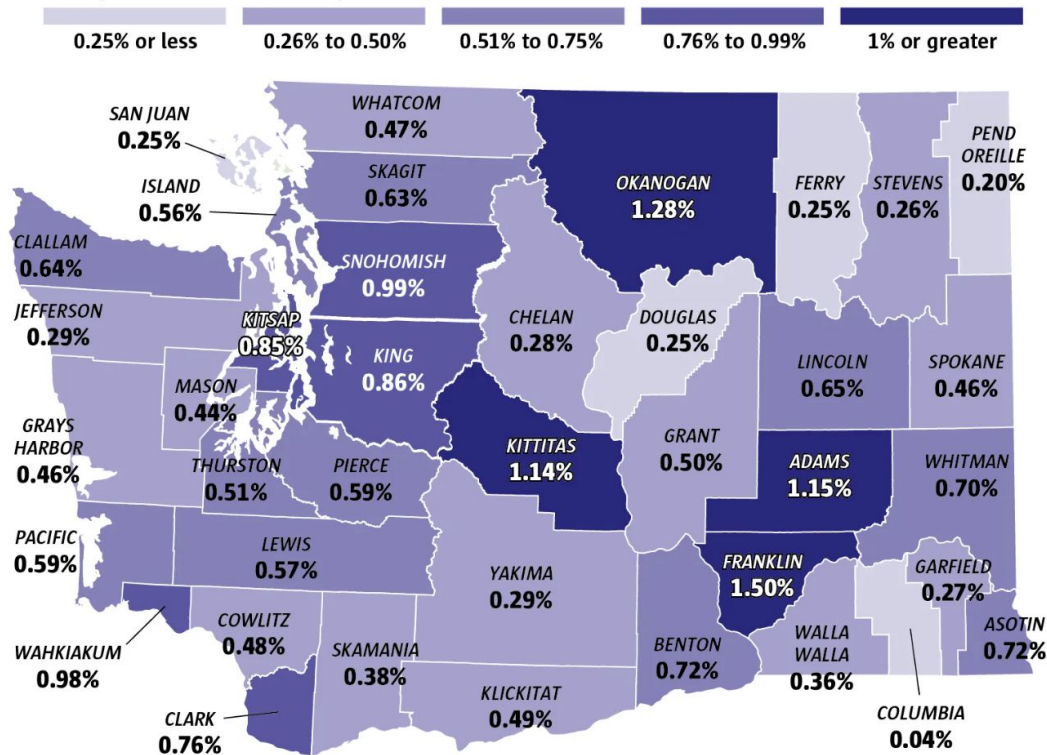


Anna
Baringer,
Michael C.
Herron, and
Daniel A.
Smith
(2020)

Whose ballots get rejected in Washington due to signature mismatches?

A state audit found the rate of ballots rejected for supposed signature mismatches in the 2020 general election varied widely by county, and that people of color, younger persons and men had ballots challenged at disproportionately higher rates.

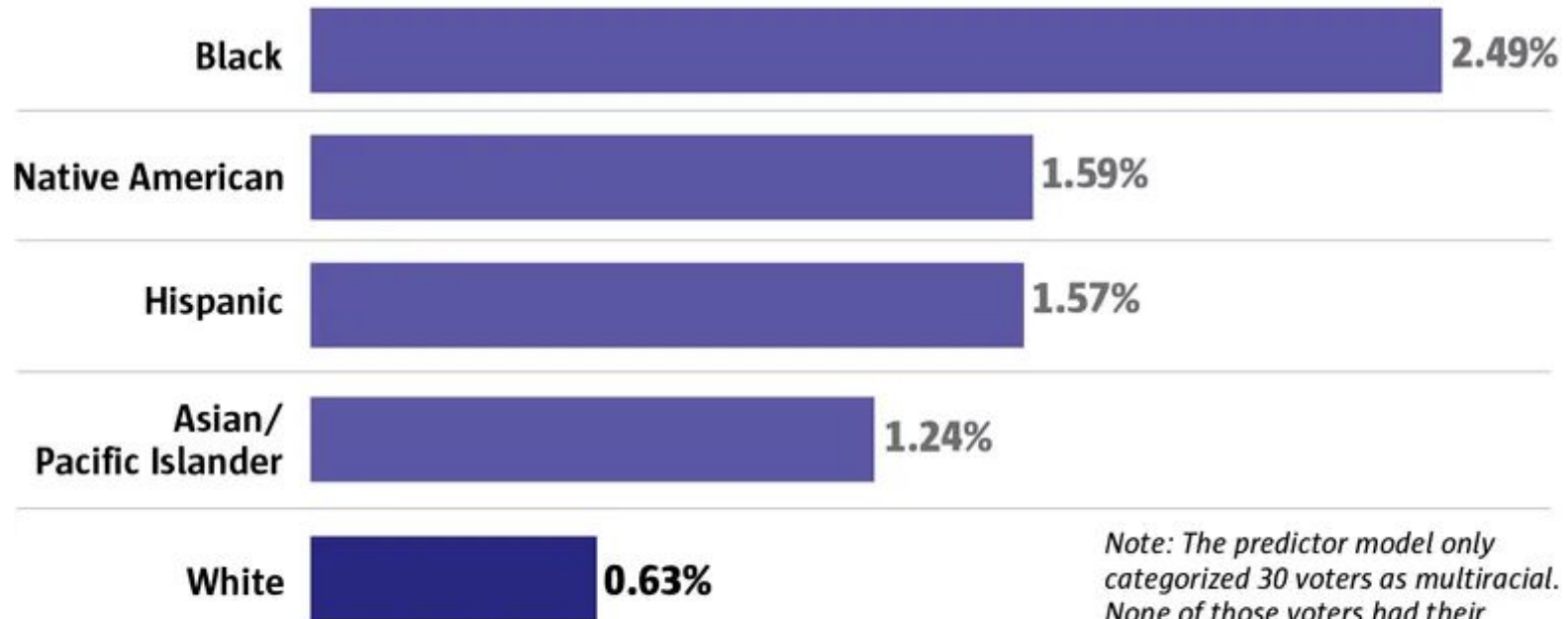
2020 general election ballot rejection rate



WASHINGTON

Ballot rejection rate by ethnic group and race

A state audit found the rate of ballots rejected from white voters was lower than for those of all other racial or ethnic groups in the 2020 general election.



Note: The predictor model only categorized 30 voters as multiracial. None of those voters had their ballots rejected.

Research Question

- Can local **context** explain the spatial variation in **overall ballot rejection** or **signature rejection**?



Research Question

- Can local **context** explain the spatial variation in **overall ballot rejection** or **signature rejection**?
- Local partisanship?
- Political competitiveness?
- Some other contextual factor?



How Can Racial Bias Be Facilitated/Managed Across Partisan Lines?

- Training materials (or lack thereof)
 - Republican led counties plausibly have training materials that:
 - Emphasize fraud
 - Do not mention the role of implicit bias

- Hiring practices
 - Republican led counties plausibly hire/appoint election officials with ulterior motives
 - Poll workers
 - Election Judges/Observers
 - Canvassing Review Board

How Partisan is Signature Matching?

POLITICS

Wisconsin Elections Commission member Robert Spindell blasted for voting comments

A Republican appointee to the Wisconsin Elections Commission board who was a fake elector in the 2020 presidential vote bragged about GOP efforts in 2022 to suppress voters in Milwaukee, particularly in areas with Black and Hispanic populations.

Associated Press

January 11, 2023

“A substantial & very effective Republican Coordinated Election Integrity program resulting with lots of Republican paid Election Judges & trained Observers & extremely significant continued Court Litigation.”

California as a Case Study

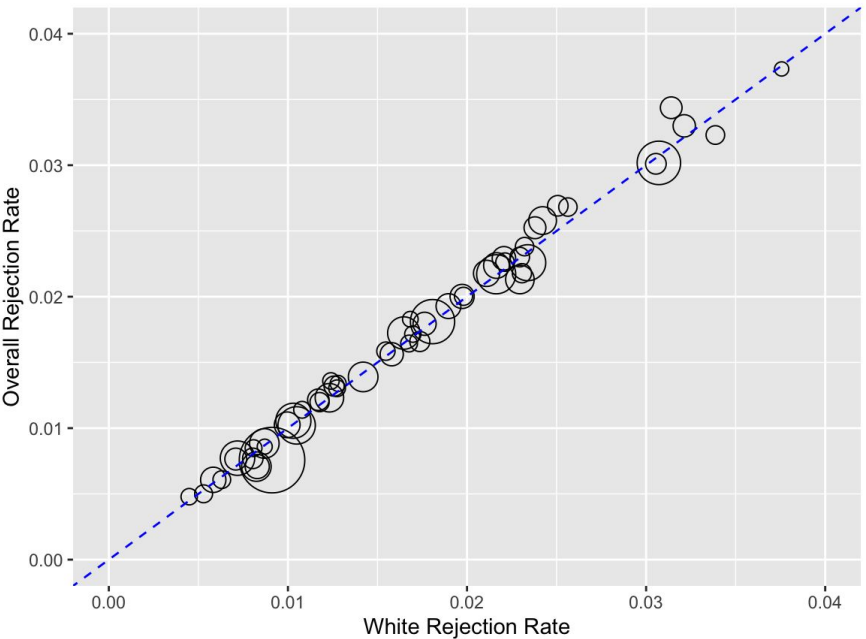
Data: California voter file from Nov. 2022 including ballot rejection information.

- Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding was used to estimate race/ethnicity of voters.
- Racial estimates were collapsed/summed at the county level to calculate ballot rejection rates for each racial group.

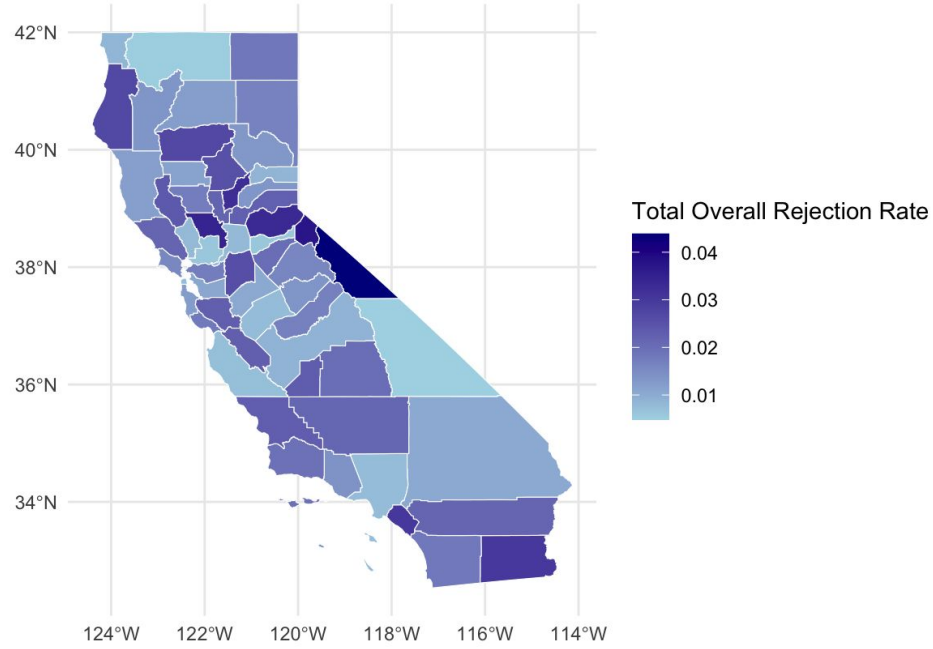
Data to merge: Election results, partisanship of local election officials, other institutional contexts.

Ballot Rejection in California - Total Overall Rejection Rate

White and Overall Rejection Rates by County

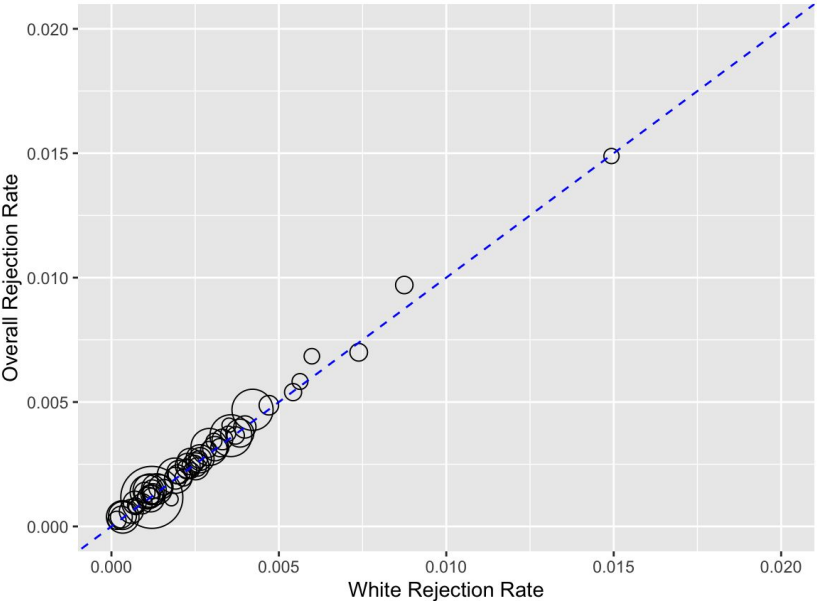


Total Overall Rejection Rate by County in California (2022)

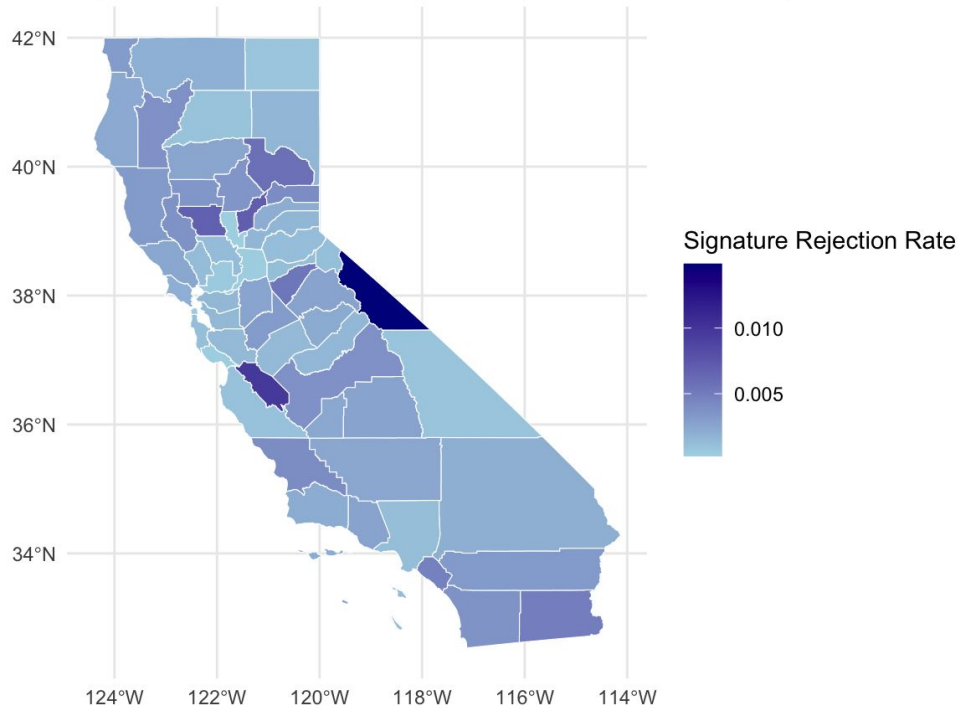


Ballot Rejection in California - Signature Rejection Rate

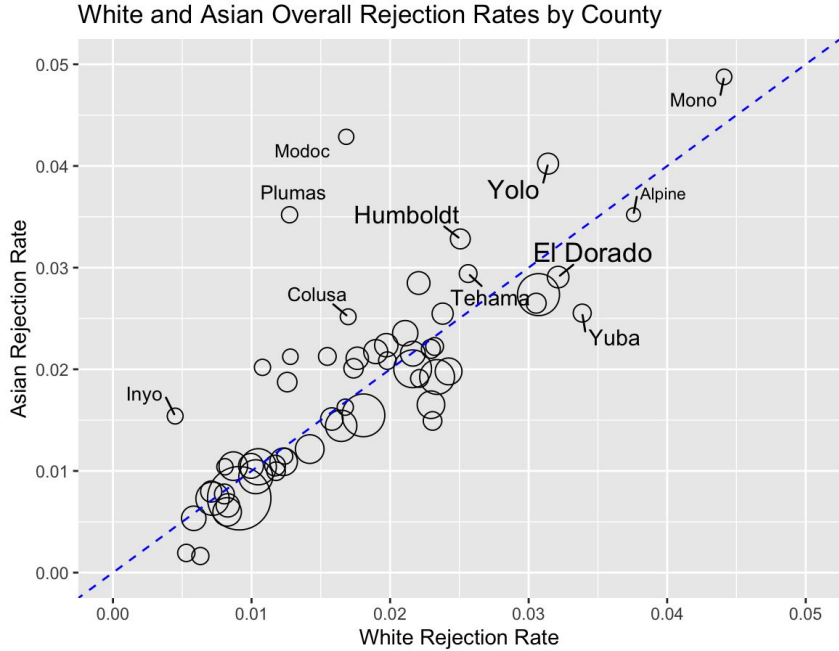
White and Overall Signature Rejection Rates by County



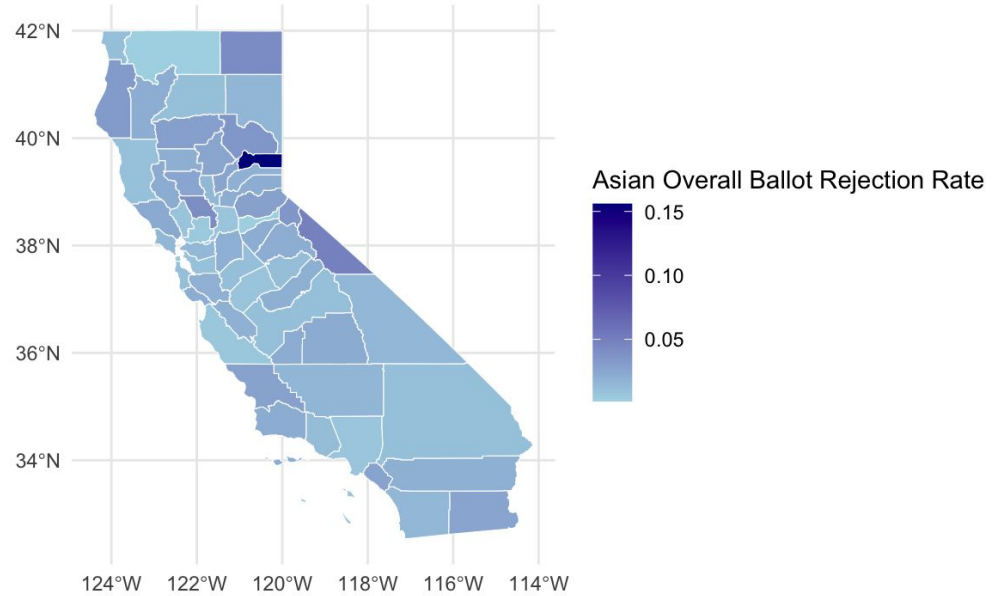
Signature Rejection Rate by County in California (2022)



Asian-American Ballot Rejection in California - Overall Rejection Rate

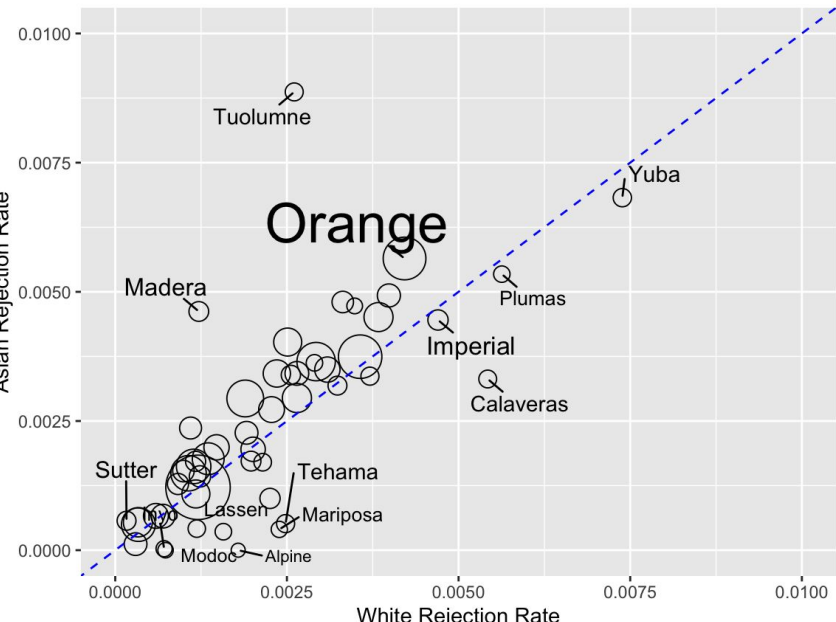


Asian Overall Ballot Rejection Rate by County in California
Based on BISG probabilities



Asian-American Ballot Rejection in California - Signature Rejection Rate

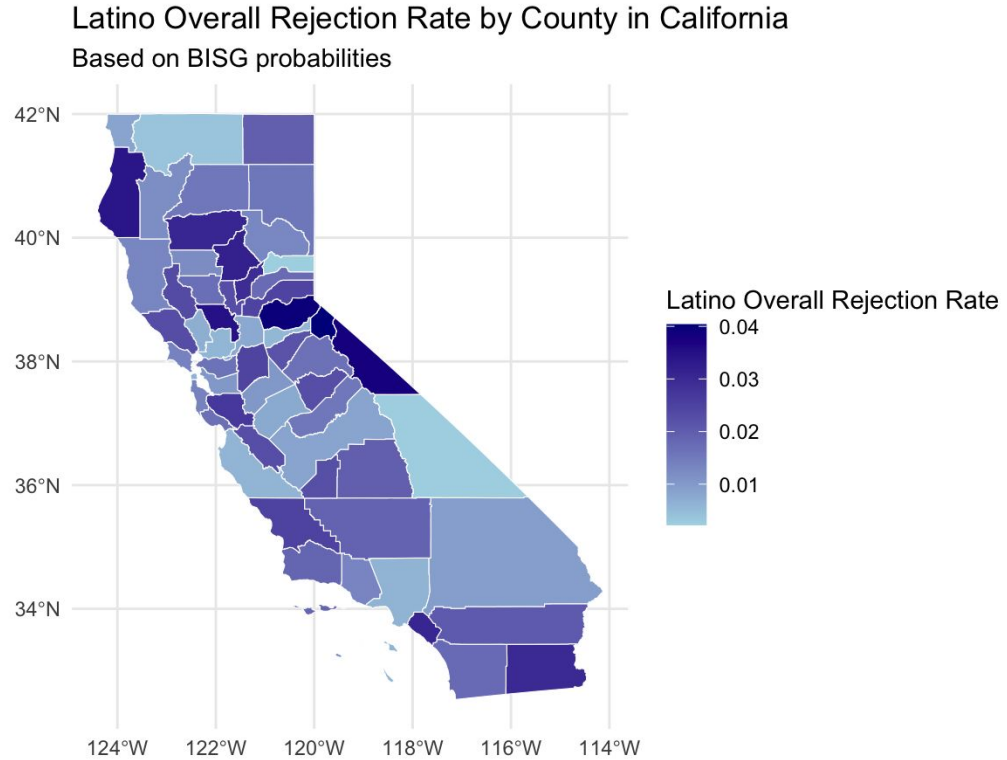
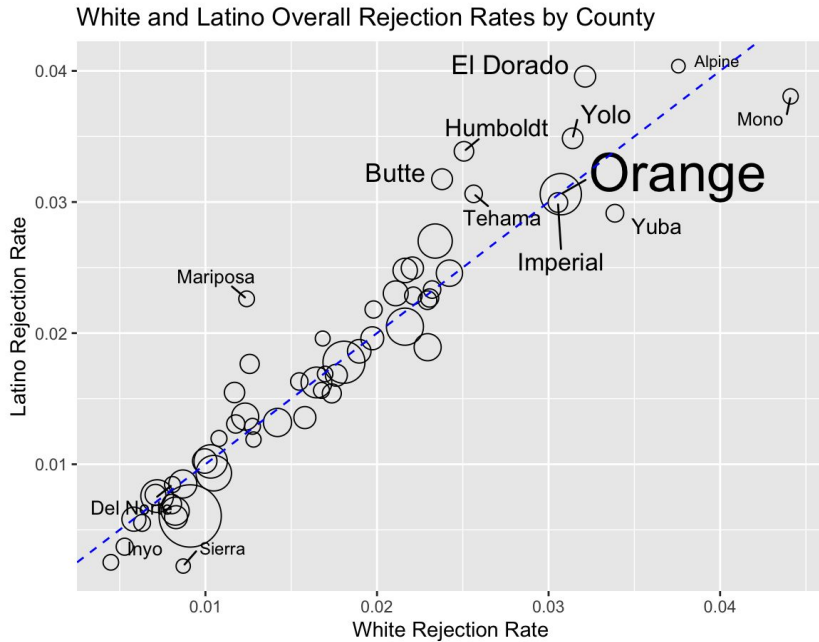
White and Asian Signature Rejection Rates by County



Asian Signature Rejection Rate by County in California
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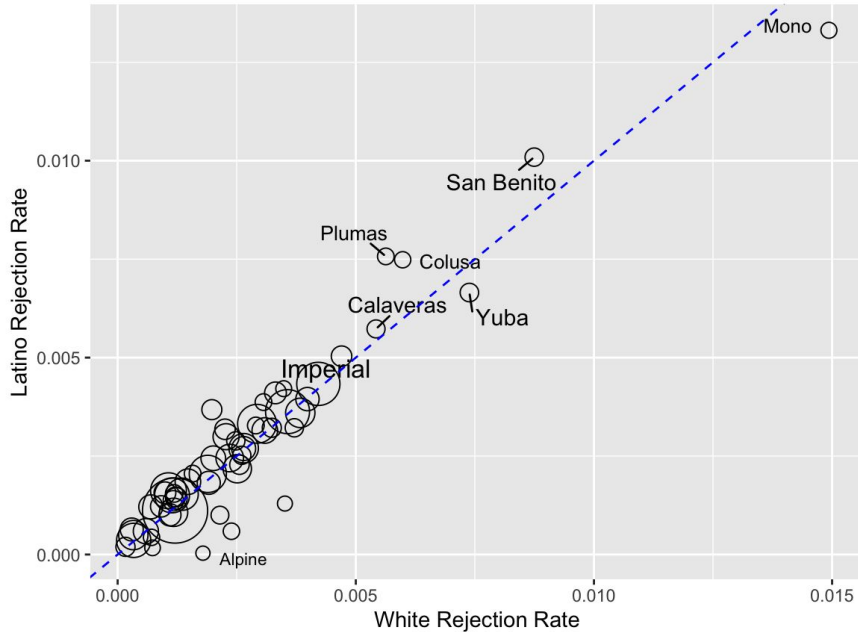


Latino Ballot Rejection in California - Overall Rejection Rate

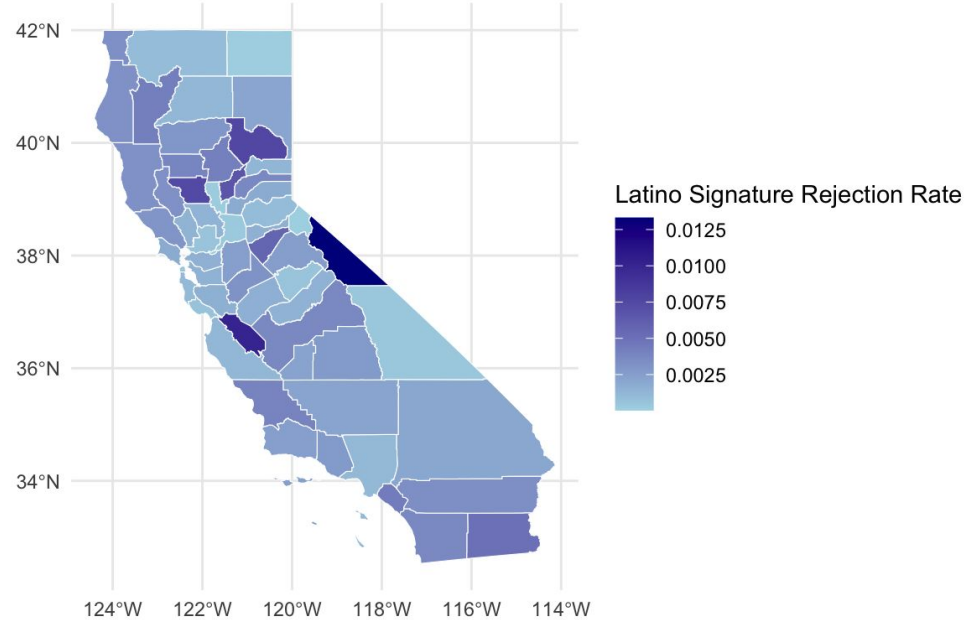


Latino Ballot Rejection in California - Signature Rejection Rate

White and Latino Signature Rejection Rates by County

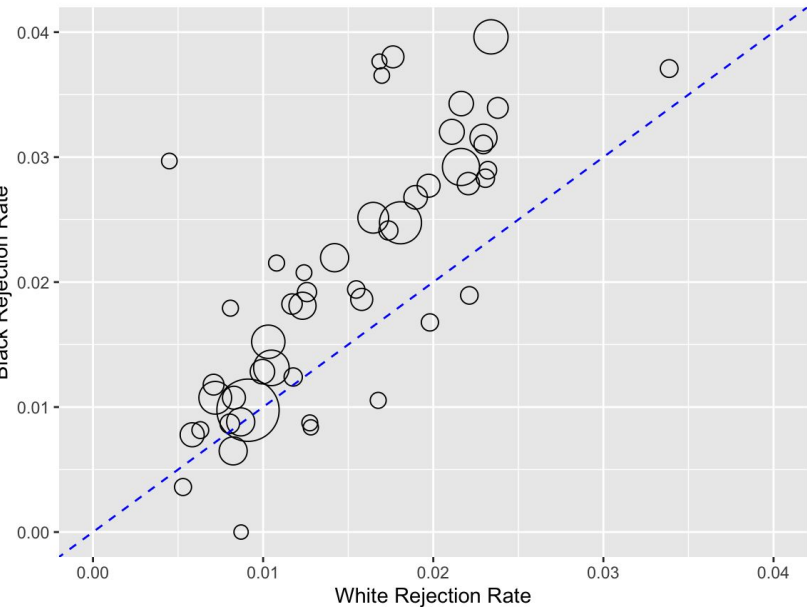


Latino Signature Rejection Rate by County in California
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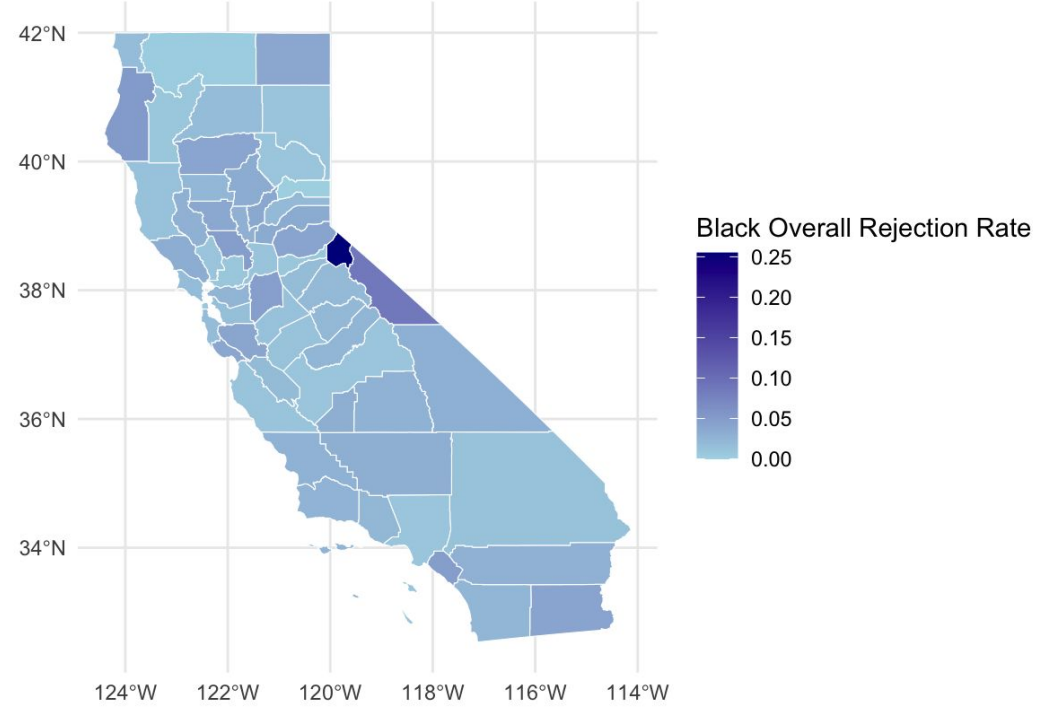


Black Ballot Rejection in California - Overall Rejection Rate

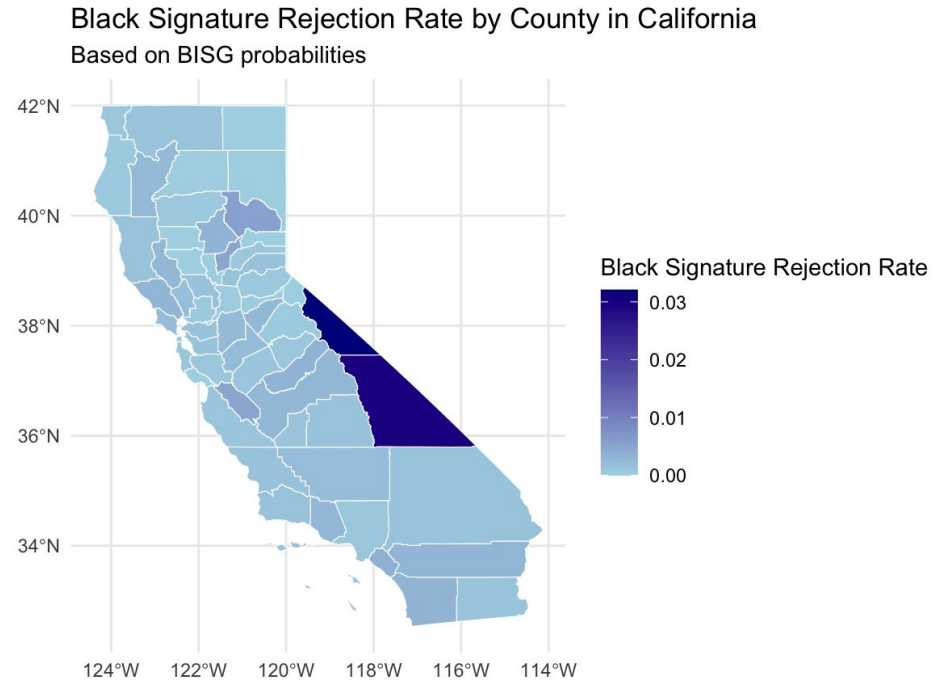
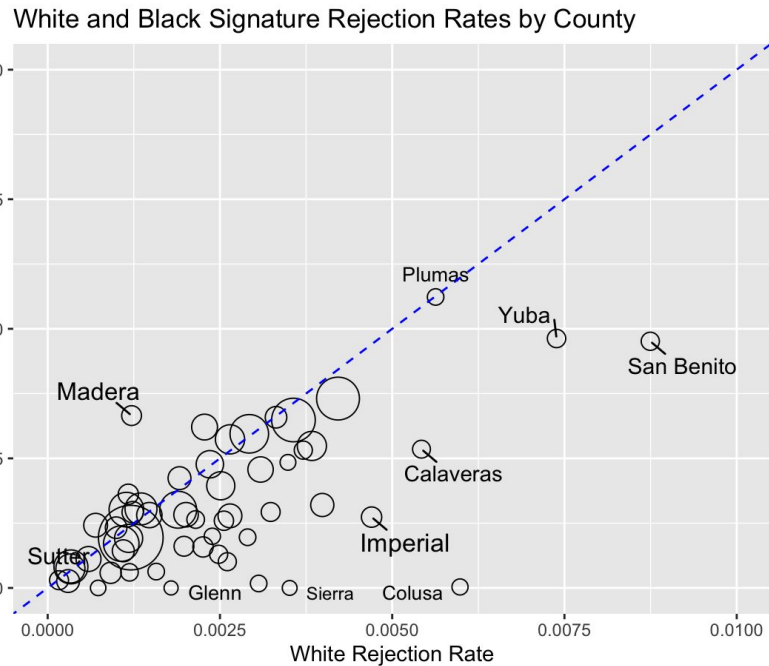
White and Black Overall Rejection Rates by County



Black Overall Rejection Rate by County in California
Based on BISG probabilities



Black Ballot Rejection in California - Signature Rejection Rate



*What makes California different from Florida, Georgia,
and Washington?*

- Experience with VBM systems?
- California Elections Code?

Thank you!

Michael Herndon

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