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.
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
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:
    - < 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 analysis of the top 5 questions of voters found from previous research
## Answering top voter questions

These voter questions were uncovered in previous research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Information about voting by mail and early voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s on the ballot?</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Had a sample ballot that was an exact copy of the actual ballot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you vote (using voting system)?</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do I go to vote?</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Out of 57 counties, one was an all mail election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you register to vote?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What information do the guides include?

An analysis of types of information and specific elements
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Statements</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translated pages (or info about)</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Ballot</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot Measures &amp; Pro/Con</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Endorsements</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Finance Reform Statement</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Center for Civic Design
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
Rare elements

- These elements were in fewer than 35 guides

- Elements not commonly found in the voter guides included information 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.
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.
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.
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
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.
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

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

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

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

Information about the voting process

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

Counties with the highest median incomes were more likely to offer the ability to update voter registration.
## Additional voting information

Less common information provided about voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call for poll workers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Primarily in counties with higher populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update voter registration</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primarily in counties with higher populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to register</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I need to show ID?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mariposa, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggest a polling place</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot worksheet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Guide information

Information about the voter guide itself

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter from the elections office</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Primarily found in counties with larger populations and in larger guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide to party &amp; non-party ballots</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter Bill of Rights</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the guide</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Primarily found in counties with a majority of Democrats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# More guide information

Rarely included guide elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties*</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>San Bernadino, San Mateo 1 with page numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQ</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Marin, San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committees or other lists of names</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alameda, San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary of elections / political information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Languages

The use of Spanish, Chinese and other languages
# Access to language information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate statements translated</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translations or information about translations in guide</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Some guides contained actual translation while others provided information about where translations could be found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about language support at the polls</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides in additional languages</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Additional language information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties*</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate booklets for the other languages</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Santa Cruz had English and Spanish in the same but other languages in separate booklets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announced each language in language</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2 more announced them in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone number for each language</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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
Sample Ballot

Elements & presentation
Sample ballot information
Information about scaled or exact replicas of the ballot itself

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballot measures and pro/con arguments</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary of terms in the measures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- 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.
The Covers

What is on the cover, and how is it arranged?
## Cover information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election date</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election type</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of booklet</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County name</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County seal</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling hours</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other graphics</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 language</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early voting deadlines</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- **Top**: Election Date, **Booklet**, Title and Election Type split evenly
- **Middle**: County Name and County Seal
- **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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 column organization</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Average of 13 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Used on range of 1 to 9 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of 3 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-by-Step instructions</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>39 counties on just one page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8 counties used color on 1 page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38 counties used color on 2 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>San Bernardino used color on 4 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8 counties used photos on 1 page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 counties used photos on 2 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 counties used photos on 3 pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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%)
San Bernadino

Included
Table of Contents
Deadlines
Early voting information
Vote by Mail information
Sample Ballot
Voter Bill of Rights

San Bernadino 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%)
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%)
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:  