

Postcard Reminders Cause Voters to Return Vote-By-Mail Ballots Earlier

Research by UC San Diego's **Center for Transparent and Trusted Elections**, conducted in partnership with the San Joaquin County Registrar of Voters, the California Voter Foundation, and Protect Democracy.

Contact: sjhill@ucsd.edu, see elections.ucsd.edu

What you need to know: Postcard reminders can help voters to return vote-by-mail ballots earlier in the election period. Voters who received two "Don't Delay, Vote Today!" postcards from the San Joaquin County Registrar's office returned ballots earlier than similar voters who did not receive postcards. Vitally, these voters were more likely to return their ballots by the recommended deadline listed on the postcards, which allowed the county to verify and count these ballots by election night. Receiving these postcards did not significantly impact turnout, demonstrating that a public communications campaign like this can speed up voting without altering the composition of the electorate. A more comprehensive communications campaign, supported by funding allocated for this purpose in California's 2026-27 budget, could yield even larger impacts.

How we learned this: We partnered with Registrar Olivia Hale to conduct a rigorous scientific field experiment in San Joaquin County before the June 2, 2026 primary election in California. Our population was active, registered voters from November 2024 who returned mail ballots in the last week before Election Day. We randomly assigned 34,346 registrants to receive two identical postcards, timed to arrive around May 7 and May 14, and then matched the registrants to their post-election administrative records. Examples of the postcard sent to them are on the following page.

Results:

Outcome	No Postcard Average	Postcard Average	Difference
Days before Election Day that ballot was received	3.9 days	4.3 days	0.4 days*
Percentage of ballots received by postcard-recommended deadline, May 30	14.5%	16.5%	2.0 points*
Returned ballot by drop box	36.6%	37.9%	1.3 points*
Voted in the June 2026 primary	45.7%	46.2%	0.5 points
* Denotes a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$), indicating the result is unlikely to be due to chance			

How can election officials act on these findings? Targeted postcard reminders are a practical way to encourage earlier vote-by-mail ballot return. Officials who want faster ballot returns can use postcards to remind voters when and how to return their ballots in order to see them included in the count on election night, and encourage voters to make a plan for when they will return their ballots.



Statewide Direct Primary Election June 2, 2026

Don't Delay, Vote Today!

See faster election results!

Get your ballot in *early*
and see it in the Election Night count—here's how:

Ballot
Drop Box
Locations



sjcrov.org

→ Mail it by **Tuesday, May 26**

→ Drop it in an official San Joaquin County Ballot Drop Box by **Saturday, May 30**

→ Drop it off at the Registrar of Voters office by **Saturday, May 30**

44 N. San Joaquin St. Suite 350, Stockton



Your vote. Your voice.

Make a plan to vote and put this postcard on your fridge:

I will return my ballot on May _____



Elección Primaria Directa a Nivel Estatal 2 de junio de 2026

¡No se Demore, Vote Hoy Mismo!

¡Vea los resultados electorales más rápido!

Entregue su boleta temprano
y véala contada la noche de la elección; así es como puede hacerlo:

Ubicaciones
de buzones
de boletas



sjcrov.org

→ Envíela por correo a más tardar **el martes 26 de mayo**

→ Depósitela en un Buzón Oficial de Boletas del Condado de San Joaquín
a más tardar **el sábado 30 de mayo**

→ Entréguela en la oficina del Registro de Votantes a más tardar **el sábado 30 de mayo**

44 N. San Joaquin St. Suite 350, Stockton



Su voto. Su voz.

Haga un plan para votar y ponga esta tarjeta postal en su
refrigerador: *Devolveré mi boleta el _____ de mayo.*