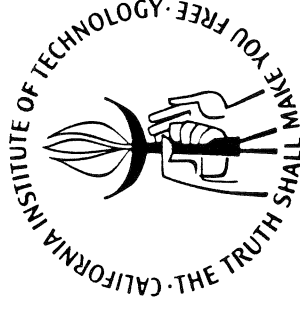


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THE EFFICACY OF REGISTRATION DRIVES

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## ABSTRACT

This paper compares the voting rates of those who are enrolled by registration drives in comparison to the rates of those who register themselves. The central question is whether the return from registration drives in terms of the number of voters they yield is worth the effort? In addition, the paper looks at the demographic profile of the group-registered voters to discover how they differ from self-registered individuals. The data set consists of 108,653 individuals in Los Angeles county who registered between the 1980 and 1982 elections. The results indicate that 41% of those registered by registration drives actually voted as compared to 57% of the self-registered. It also appears that the group-registered voters are younger and more frequently minority.

## THE EFFICACY OF REGISTRATION DRIVES

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Registration can be a formidable barrier to voting. When registering to vote is difficult, electoral participation tends to be low: when it is easy, electoral participation tends to be high (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). As compared with many European nations--where the government assumes the responsibility for keeping voters on the rolls--the practices of American states place a greater burden on the individual voter (Rose, 1974; Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978). As a consequence, there are many organizations in the United States that exist to help individuals register to vote. Some of them, like the Southwest Voter Registration Drive, are bipartisan or nonpartisan in orientation, but many are partisan, or specifically linked to a particular candidate. Little is known about the efficacy of their efforts. For example, are there any differences between the kinds of individuals who are enrolled by registration drives (group-registered) and those who register themselves (self-registered)? What percentage of group-registered individuals actually vote, and is the rate higher or lower than that of self-registered individuals? How do minorities compare with non-minorities in this regard?

In the past, it was nearly impossible to answer these questions. However, the computerization of electoral records and the collection of data for purging nonvoters from the electoral rolls now make such an

analysis feasible in certain areas of the country. The data analyzed in this study consist of 108,653 individuals in Los Angeles county who registered to vote in the period after the 1980 election and up to 54 days before the 1982 November election. The creation of this data set required three pieces of information: the registration number assigned to the application form of each new voter, the registered voter file and the purge file (i.e., the county's list of those who were registered to vote but who failed to do so in the November election).

A group undertaking registration drives in LA county is issued registration forms with affidavit numbers that fall within a given range. The affidavit number on the completed registration form identifies how the individual was registered and by whom. By matching this number with the registered voter file, it is possible to know the voter's age, marital status, sex, time of registration, surname and party registration. A comparison of the newly registered list with the purge list of nonvoters then generates the names of those who were newly registered but did not vote. Since the data set includes information about whether an individual was registered by a group or self-registered, we can compare the characteristics of the two kinds of registrants as well as their voting rates. In addition, by dividing the data into Spanish surnamed and non-Spanish surnamed, we can test for the effect of registration drives on an increasingly important minority group. Unfortunately, the registration tapes do not include such crucial information as the income, age and race of the registrant. Consequently, there is no attempt in this paper to present a well-

specified model of the differences between group and self-registered voters. We endeavor only to present some basic facts about the efficacy of registration drives.

#### DESCRIBING GROUP AND SELF-REGISTERED VOTERS

There were several significant voter registration drives in LA county during 1982, as reflected by the statistic that 58% of the new registrants in the county were group-registered. The largest of the registering groups was the Bradley campaign, which focused on the Black and Hispanic populations. Other major groups included the Baptist Minister's Conference, Viva Hispanic Democrat, the LA Republican party, Mexican-American Latino, Bader and Associates, and the Martinez campaign. For the purposes of this analysis, group registered individuals are defined as all those who were registered by organizations like those listed above and self-registered voters are defined as those who registered at a post office, city hall or the registrar recorder.

The first question is whether there appear to be any differences between the characteristics of group and self-registered voters. It is possible, of course, that registration drives simply enroll the sorts of individuals who would otherwise register themselves--in short, that they merely make it more convenient for some people to register. Another possibility, however, is that registration drives put individuals on the rolls who would normally be less inclined to participate. As is well known, younger, less well educated people and

minorities are less likely to vote. Are registration drives of particular assistance to them?

While the demographic variables on the registration tapes are limited, we can at least get some preliminary indication on this point. For instance, various studies have shown that Hispanics are less inclined to register and to vote than non-Hispanics for both cultural and socio-economic reasons (Baird, 1977; Garcia and de la Garza, 1977; Levy and Kramer, 1977; de la Garza, 1977; McCloskey and Merrill, 1973; de la Garza and Brischetto, 1983 a,b). Were the Hispanics in our data set heavily dependent upon registration drives? The data clearly show that they were. As Table 1 demonstrates, 54% of the non-Hispanics were group-registered as compared to 73% of the Hispanics. No doubt, the particular circumstances of the 1982 election were partly responsible for this phenomenon. The 1981 California redistricting had created new opportunities for Hispanic candidates at both the Congressional and State legislature level, and this induced vigorous efforts to register Hispanic voters. The Martinez campaign, for instance, was particularly active in the relevant sections of the East San Gabriel valley, and Martinez was running in a seat that had been refashioned extensively in the 1981 redistricting. Whether Hispanics are typically as dependent upon registration campaigns is clearly a question that merits further exploration in the future.

[insert Table 1 here]

A related finding concerns the party affiliations of the new registrants. Given the Democratic leanings of most of the groups who registered voters in LA county during 1982, it is not surprising that 68% of the group-registered voters in our data set designated themselves as Democrats and only 22% as Republicans. The 68% figure is about 8 percentage points above the Democratic registration figure for the county as a whole. By comparison, 49% of the self-registered individuals were Democrats and 35% were Republicans. Assuming a typical socio-economic profile of Democrats and Republicans, the observed correlation of being registered by a group and registering with the Democratic party is consistent with the general proposition that group registrations tend to pick up younger, lower income and less well educated individuals.

[insert Table 2 here]

Allowing for the fact that Hispanics are typically more likely to register as Democrats, it does not appear that the Democratic bias of group-registration is any greater among Hispanics than among non-Hispanics: in both instances, group-registered voters were sixteen points more Democratic than the self-registered voters. However, given that 73% of the Hispanics were registered by groups and that 83% of them registered as Democrats, it is clear that registering a minority group like the Hispanics has significant benefits for the Democratic party.

A variable that has proven to be a crucial determinant of voting is age (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, pp. 144-47). Typically, younger voters have been less inclined to register, and even when registered, less inclined to cast their ballots. Some of the reasons that have been asserted to explain this are that younger voters have less stake in community issues, they also have less accumulated knowledge about politics, and being more mobile, they must re-register more often. Accordingly, we would expect that younger voters would be less inclined to register themselves than older voters. Indeed, we find that group-registered voters tend to be younger than self-registered ones. As Table 3 demonstrates, the percent of group-registered voters in the 18-24 and 24-29 categories, which constituted over half of all the group-registered individuals in 1982, exceeded the percent of self-registered voters in those age categories. In other words, the age distribution of the group-registered individuals is skewed more towards the younger end. When these figures are broken down by Hispanic and non-Hispanic, then we see that this is even more true for the Hispanic group registrants: 39% of them fell into the 19-23 age category as compared to 28% of the non-Hispanic group registrants. In part, this reflects the bias of the general age distribution of the LA Hispanic population, but at the same time, it underscores the importance of registration drives for bringing Hispanics into the electoral process for the first time.

[insert Table 3 here]

The last individual characteristic variable in the data set was sex/marital status (see Table 4). Our analyses indicated that there were no significant sexual differences in the composition of the self and group-registered categories. However, analysis of this relationship is complicated by the fact that there was a greater tendency for the group-registered forms to omit the new registrant's sex and marital status. For example, 44% of the group-registered forms designated none for marital status. Hence the conclusion that there are no sexual or marital differences in the group and self-registered categories rests on the assumption that the tendency not to designate sex or marital status on the form is evenly distributed across the population. This is possible, but it is equally plausible to think, for instance, that some women may be more hesitant than men to divulge their marital status in such situations. At any rate, there is reason to question the validity of the marital status variable.

[insert Table 4 here]

#### THE VOTING RATES OF GROUP AND SELF-REGISTERED VOTERS

What is the return of having a registration drive? Given the lower socioeconomic profile of the group-registered individuals and taking into account the fact that some number of them might not have been sufficiently motivated to self-register, it is valuable to know how many of the group-registered individuals actually voted and how that compares with those who self-register.

Table 1 indicates that 41% of the group-registered voters voted in November versus 57% of the self-registered, but that there was no significant difference between the voting rates of Hispanics and non-Hispanics in either the self-registered or group-registered categories. Undoubtedly, voting rates varied across socio-economic levels--that is to say, upper income, better educated individuals probably voted at higher rates regardless of whether they were group or self-registered--but the data on the registration tapes did not include income or education variables.

There are several possible explanations as to why there was a difference in the voting rates of group and self-registered voters. One is that group registration drives tend to target lower income, less well educated individuals. Therefore, while assistance in registration increased their chances of voting, the probability that they would actually participate was still lower than that of the higher income, better educated people who self-registered. A second possible explanation is that self-registered individuals were more motivated to vote (since the act of registering oneself indicates a higher level of enthusiasm) than those who were assisted in registering. We can not say for the moment which explanation is best, but only that the lower rate of the group-registered voters was not unexpected for one or all of these reasons. It may be feasible in later studies to disentangle these two competing explanations by merging the registration data with census information.

A second observation is that the Republican group-registrants voted at a higher rate than Democratic group-registrants (see Table 2). Both self-registered and group-registered Republicans voted at higher rates than did their Democratic counterparts. Self-registered Democrats and Republicans voted at much more approximately equal rates than group-registered Democrats and Republicans. Whereas only 38% of the group registered Democrats voted, 53% of the group-registered Republicans did, which is only 10% less than the 63% rate for self-registered Republicans. While the Republicans got only 22% of the new group registrants, 53% of those 22% actually voted--i.e., 12%. The Democrats got 68% of the new group registrants, but only 38% voted--i.e., 25%. Thus, the ratio of Democrats to Republicans among new group registrants was 3:1, but among the group registrants who actually voted, it was 2:1.

The youth of the group-registered voters discussed earlier may also help to explain the lower voting rate of the group-registered voters. As Table 3 shows, the rate of voting increased with age for both the self-registered and group-registered individuals. Since a higher proportion of the group-registered individuals fell into the younger categories, this partly caused the voting rate disparity between self and group-registered voters. Still, age is not the complete explanation for this disparity, as Table 3 demonstrates, since the voting rate of group-registered voters was below that of self-registered voters in every age category. This would seem to imply that socio-economic or motivational factors were also responsible.

Table 1 revealed that the voting rates of group-registered Hispanics and non-Hispanics were virtually identical. Breaking this down by age uncovers some differences. Most importantly, group-registered Hispanics between 18 and 23 (i.e., the largest age category) voted at a higher rate (31%) in November 1983 than did their non-Hispanic counterparts (23%). This accounts for why the voting rates of the group-registered Hispanics and non-Hispanics were identical despite the large number of age 18-24 group-registered Hispanics. Group-registered Hispanics also out voted their non-Hispanic counterparts in the 42-47, 48-53, 54-59 and 60-65 categories.

Finally there is some empirical evidence that married women are more likely to vote, regardless of category, than unmarried women or men (see Table 4). However, this does not apply to Hispanic married women: indeed, married Hispanic women have the lowest turnout rate whereas unmarried Hispanic women vote at almost the same rate as the Hispanic men.

#### REGISTRATIONS AND THE POLITICAL CYCLE

The observations so far have dealt with the characteristics of voters--age, sex, ethnicity. However, registration drives occur in the context of the general political cycle of elections, and it is useful to ask whether group-registrations are more sensitive to this cycle than self-registrations. Figure 1a clearly shows that both group and self-registrations increased significantly with the proximity of the

November election: however, group-registrations were far more sensitive to the proximity of the June primary than self-registrations.

The data indicate that self-registrations substantially exceeded group registrations in the pre-1982 period. This is because a certain constant number of individuals will re-register when they change addresses, or register for the first time when they come of age, during off-year periods. Groups, on the other hand, do not make much of an effort to register voters during off-years. It also seems to be true that the prospect of a primary election did little to increase the number of self-registrations whereas it increased group-registrations significantly. Group-registrations dropped below self-registrations in the period right after the 29 day close and only began to pick up in July as the the November election neared.

(insert Figures 1a and 1b here)

In Figure 2a, the monthly trend is divided into Hispanic and non-Hispanic group registered categories, and this reveals another plausible finding: namely, the number of Hispanics registered by groups before the primary election was almost as great as the number registered before the November election whereas this was not true for the non-Hispanics. This is plausible because the seats with the highest concentrations of Hispanic voters in LA county were highly safe seats in which the primary was more important than the November election. The one exception, as mentioned earlier, was the Martinez-Rousselot race for the 30th CD. Most of the November races for

Hispanic seats were lopsided affairs whereas several of the primary races in these seats were hotly contested--for instance, the highly publicized primary election for the state senate between Art Torres and Alex Garcia.

[insert Figures 2a and 2b here]

Was there any relationship between the time of registration and the voting rate? The answer seems to be that self-registered voters were more likely to vote the later they registered whereas group-registered voters displayed no clear pattern (see figure 1b). It makes sense that the voting rates of self-registered individuals increased with the proximity of the time of their registration to the election. Presumably, those who took the initiative to register themselves just before the election were more likely to have had the upcoming election on their minds: it is less likely that their registrations were the automatic acts of those who had just moved into the neighborhood, and more likely the conscious choices of those who registered because they wanted to vote in the upcoming election. Since group-registration is less indicative of an individual's inherent interest in the upcoming race (because it is a more passive, less costly action), it displays less (although some) of the correlation between voting rate and election proximity. Breaking the group-registered pattern down by ethnicity shows that the lack of correlation between proximity to the election and voting rate is particularly evident among the Hispanics (see figure 2b). Whether this has anything to do with the relative

importance of primaries or November elections to the Hispanic population is difficult to discern.

#### CONCLUSION

Our analysis of new registrants has uncovered several findings. First, it is clear that registration drives are a crucial means of drawing Hispanics into the electoral process. Our data indicate that almost three quarters of the new Hispanic registrants in LA county in 1982 were registered by groups. The implication of this is that registration efforts are very important if a high level of Hispanic participation is to be achieved. Secondly, both Democrats and Republicans can benefit from registration drives although in somewhat different ways. The majority of those picked up in registration drives register as Democrats, but those who register as Republicans have a higher tendency to vote. The Democratic party may have an easier time registering Democrats, but the Republicans get a higher return in terms of participation from those they actually register. Finally, it would appear from the data that registration drives pick up more voters the closer the registration date is to the election date whereas the pattern of self-registration is more uniform.



TABLE 1

TYPE OF REGISTRATION BY ETHNICITY		Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Total
I.	<u>Composition</u>			
	Group-Registered	54%	73%	58%
	Self-Registered	46%	27%	42%
II.	<u>Voting Rates</u>			
	Group-Registered	40%	41%	41%
	Self-Registered	57%	55%	56%
		86,524	22,129	108,653

TABLE 2

	TYPE OF REGISTRATION BY				VOTING RATES BY			
	PARTY AND ETHNICITY				PARTY AND ETHNICITY			
	Dem.	Rep.	Other	Decline To State	Dem.	Rep.	Decline To State	Decline To State
I.	<u>Whole Sample</u>							
	68%	22%	3%	7%	38%	53%	34%	34%
	49%	35%	4%	12%	58%	63%	41%	41%
	<u>Group-Regis.</u>							
	<u>Self-Regis.</u>							
II.	<u>Non-Hispanics</u>							
	62%	27%	3%	8%	36%	54%	34%	34%
	46%	38%	4%	12%	58%	63%	41%	41%
	<u>Group-Regis.</u>							
	<u>Self-Regis.</u>							
III.	<u>Hispanics</u>							
	83%	10%	2%	5%	42%	41%	33%	33%
	67%	19%	3%	11%	57%	56%	41%	41%
	<u>Group-Regis.</u>							
	<u>Self-Regis.</u>							

TABLE 3

ANALYSIS BY AGE AND ETHNICITY

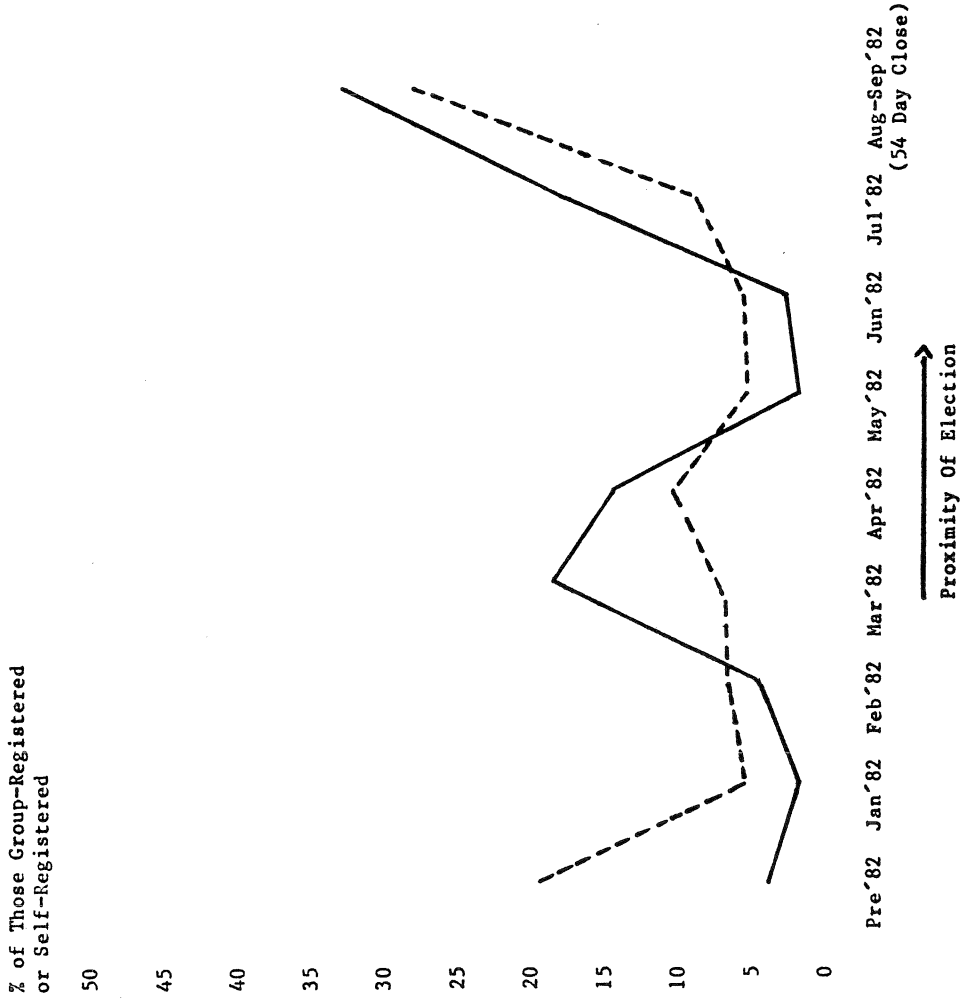
Type of Registration	Age Group							60-65	66+
	18-23	24-29	30-35	36-41	42-47	48-53	54-59		
<u>I. Whole Sample</u>									
Group-Regis.	31%	23%	16%	9%	6%	4%	2%	5%	
Self-Regis.	23%	22%	17%	10%	7%	5%	4%	7%	
<u>II. Non-Hispanics</u>									
Group-Regis.	28%	23%	17%	10%	6%	4%	3%	4%	
Self-Regis.	22%	22%	17%	10%	7%	5%	4%	8%	
<u>III. Hispanics</u>									
Group-Regis.	39%	22%	13%	8%	5%	4%	2%	3%	
Self-Regis.	29%	22%	16%	9%	6%	4%	3%	6%	
<u>Voting Rates</u>									
<u>I. Whole Sample</u>									
Group-Regis.	26%	34%	45%	50%	55%	61%	67%	59%	
Self-Regis.	39%	53%	61%	62%	67%	69%	75%	70%	
<u>II. Non-Hispanics</u>									
Group-Regis.	23%	34%	45%	49%	54%	61%	66%	67%	
Self-Regis.	38%	53%	61%	62%	67%	68%	75%	71%	
<u>III. Hispanics</u>									
Group-Regis.	31%	35%	44%	55%	57%	60%	69%	62%	
Self-Regis.	42%	48%	61%	61%	64%	70%	75%	65%	

TABLE 4

TYPE OF REGISTRATION BY STATUS AND ETHNICITY	VOTING RATES BY MARITAL STATUS AND ETHNICITY					
	Mr.			Mrs.		
	Mr.	Mrs.	Miss	Ms.	None	None
<u>I. Whole Sample</u>						
Group-Regis.	27%	13%	8%	8%	44%	35%
Self-Regis.	33%	17%	7%	10%	33%	52%
<u>II. Non-Hispanic</u>						
Group-Regis.	28%	13%	8%	8%	44%	34%
Self-Regis.	33%	17%	7%	10%	33%	54%
<u>III. Hispanic</u>						
Group-Regis.	24%	12%	9%	6%	49%	36%
Self-Regis.	32%	18%	10%	8%	32%	46%

FIGURE 1a

REGISTRATION BY MONTH

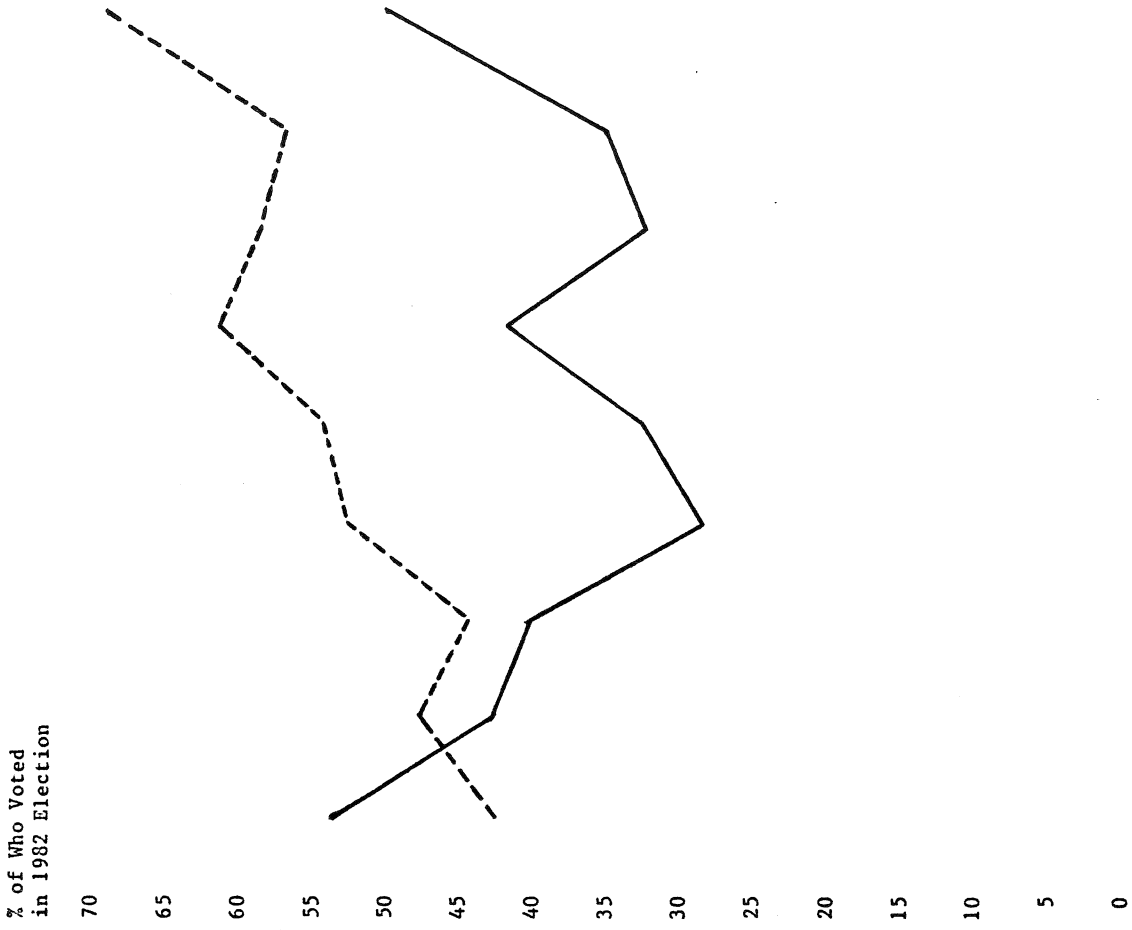


Group-Registered  
 Self-Registered

Proximity Of Election →

FIGURE 1b

VOTING RATES BY MONTH OF REGISTRATION



Group-Registered  
 Self-Registered

Proximity Of Election →

FIGURE 2a

GROUP REGISTRATION BY MONTH AND ETHNICITY

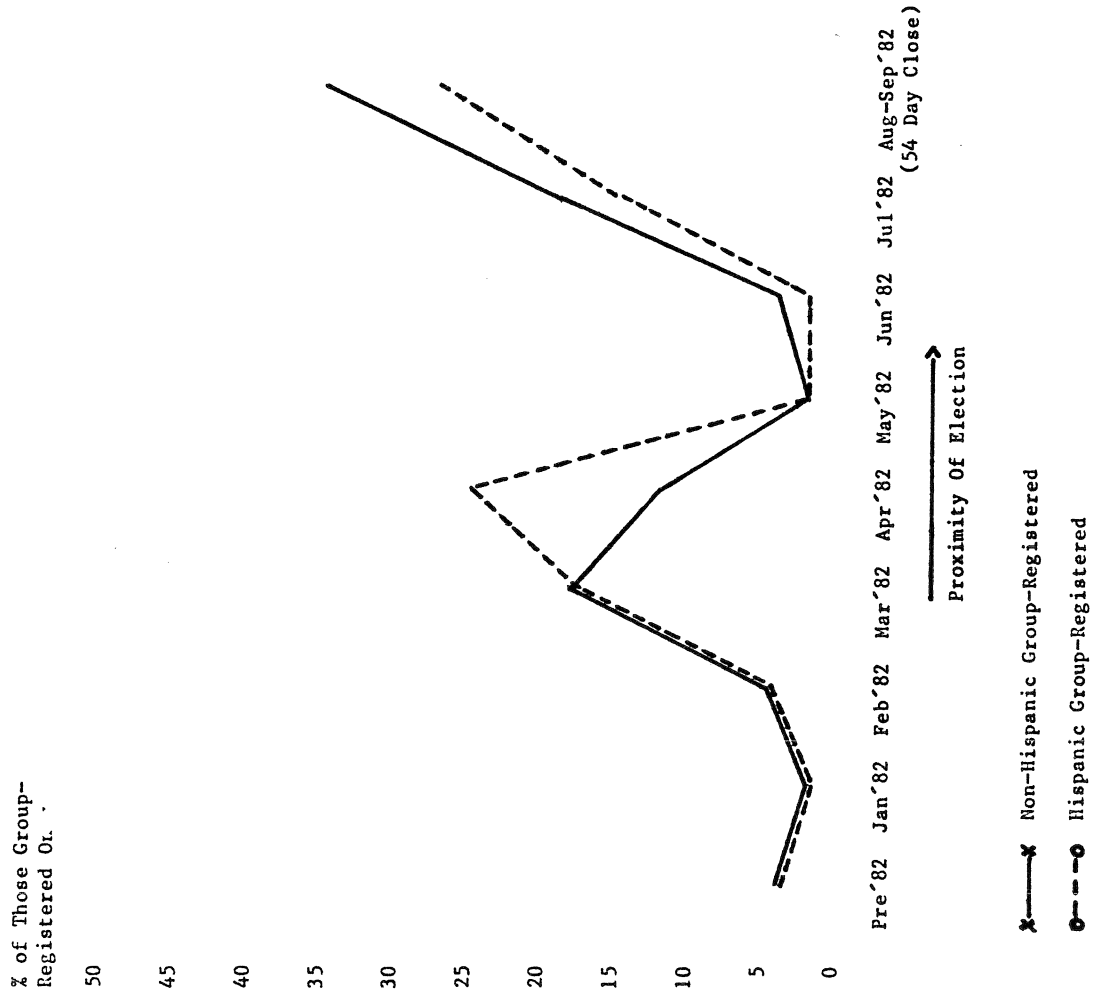
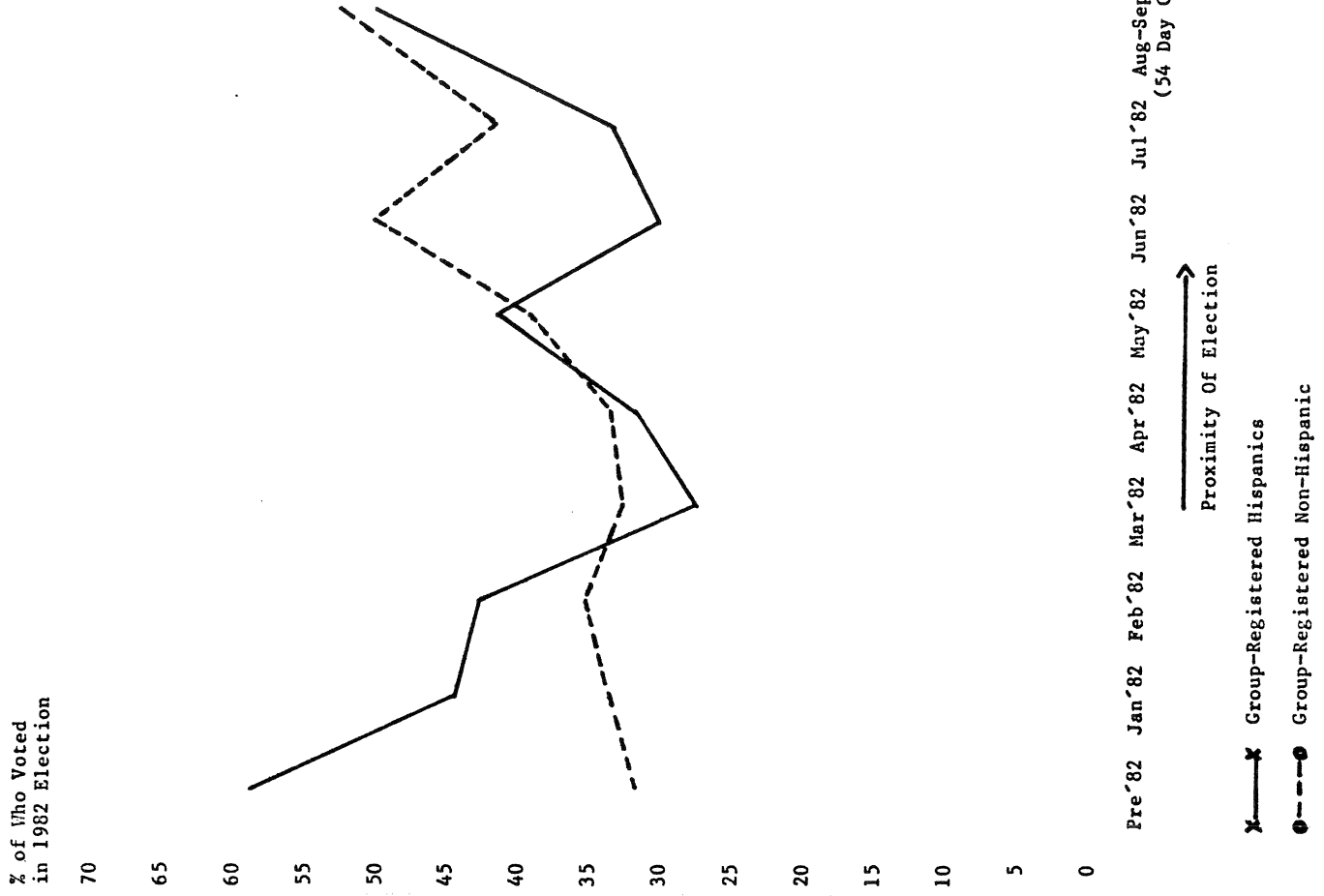


FIGURE 2b

VOTING RATES BY MONTH OF REGISTRATION AND ETHNICITY



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