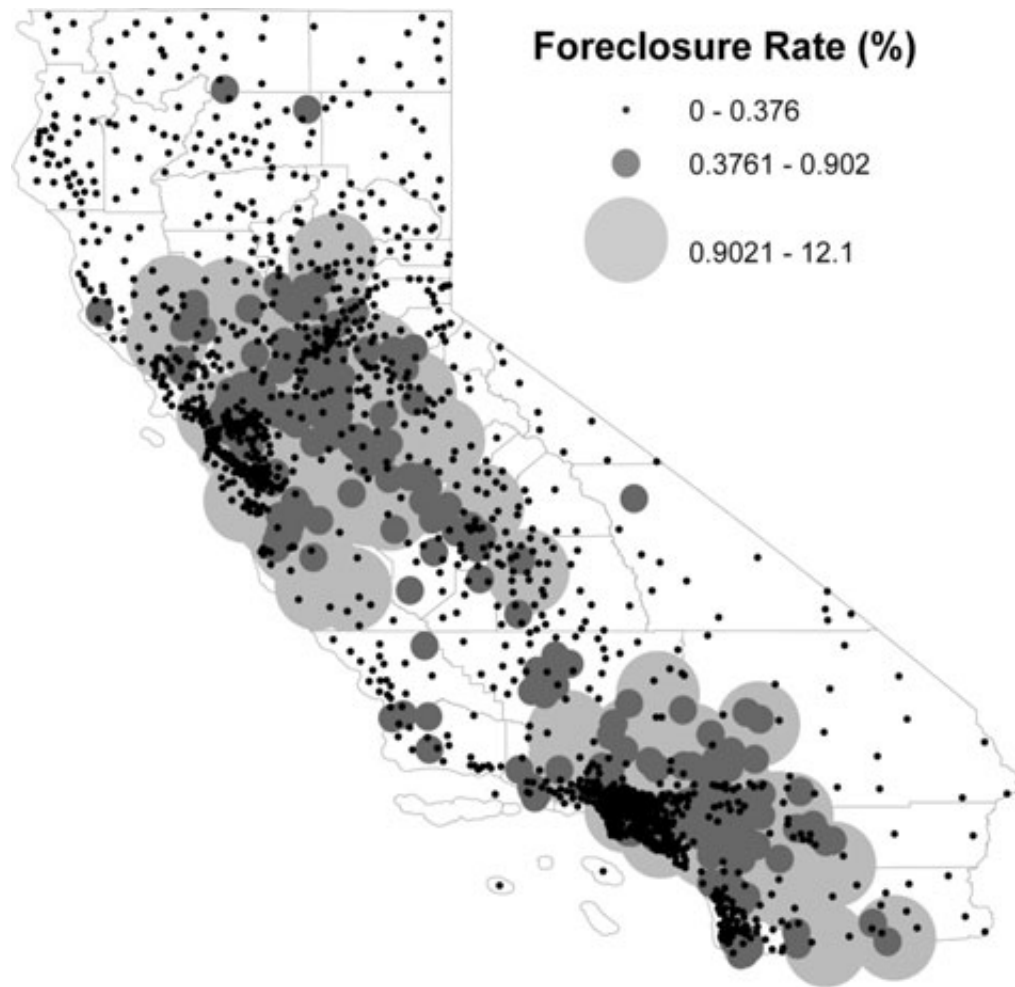


# Foreclosures impact California voter turnout

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California neighborhoods reeling from record foreclosures also experienced lower levels of voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election, according to researchers at the University of California,

Riverside.

Voters who lost their homes were not the only ones who appear to have been affected, [sociologist](#) Vanesa Estrada-Correa and [political scientist](#) Martin Johnson determined in a study believed to be the first to assess the effect of foreclosure on political participation. Voters who remained in neighborhoods impacted by foreclosure were less likely to vote than individuals in more stable communities, the researchers discovered.

The findings of Estrada-Correa and Johnson appear in "Foreclosure Depresses Voter Turnout: Neighborhood Disruption and the 2008 [Presidential Election](#) in California," published in the peer-reviewed journal *Social Science Quarterly* and available [online](#). The journal is published by the Southwestern Social Science Association.

Nationally more than 3.5 million families were dislocated by foreclosures in 2008. In California, nearly 641,000 homes were lost to foreclosure between the first quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2011. Communities in the Inland Empire in Southern California and the [Central Valley](#) were hit especially hard. People of color and low-income homeowners were more likely to experience foreclosure.

Estrada-Correa and Johnson examined foreclosure data and voter-turnout records by ZIP code, controlling for factors such as poverty, ethnicity and proportion of neighborhood residents with a four-year college degree. They found that in communities with a large proportion of residents displaced by foreclosure even the neighbors who remained in their homes were less likely to cast ballots.

"Neighborhoods affect the political participation of their residents," the scholars wrote. "Other things being equal, individuals are more likely to vote when they live in places where neighbors vigorously participate in politics, while individuals are less likely to vote when their neighbors are

less civically active. Given that foreclosure creates instability in communities, areas that experience higher levels of foreclosure have lower voter turnout."

A body of research on voter turnout has found that homeowners are more likely to go to the polls than renters, and people who have lived in their homes for longer periods of time have a much higher turnout rate than people who have only lived in their current residence for a short period of time. That trend holds true among residents of high- and low-income neighborhoods.

The issue is not only one of an involuntarily mobile electorate facing challenges of reregistering at a new address or with no address—courts have ruled that even a park bench can serve as a lawful address for voter registration, the researchers said, citing Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Foscarinis points out that "as a practical matter, registering, holding on to your documents and even focusing on your civic rights and duties may be impossible when basic survival needs are at stake."

Foreclosure disrupts neighborhoods both by removing invested members of the community, as well as exposing others who remain in the neighborhood to economic anxieties, Estrada-Correa and Johnson wrote. "These anxieties take the form of feelings of direct, personal exposure to foreclosure, as well as uncertainties about housing values in the neighborhood, which fall as homes empty and the loans supporting them revert to financial institutions and other lenders. The process depreciates trust."

Estrada-Correa and Johnson said they plan to continue their research beyond the 2008 general election to examine political engagement in other elections that occurred during the housing crisis. They also hope to examine the connection between declines in [voter turnout](#) due to

foreclosure and patterns of inequality in political disenfranchisement based on income, female-headed households, and race and ethnicity of borrowers and their exposure to subprime lending and home foreclosure.

"[Foreclosure](#) has been unequally distributed and is particularly high among populations already less likely to be politically active: young, minority, moderate-income families," they said.

"We expect the 2012 election will reveal even more about the cumulative impact of neighborhood change resulting from the past five years of economic crisis," Estrada-Correa said.

In the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, Johnson observed, "a great deal of attention has been paid to revisions to election laws such as requiring voters to have identification cards and reduced opportunities for voters in some states to cast early and absentee ballots. But more subtle economic and social processes may also introduce barriers to [political participation](#)."

Provided by University of California - Riverside

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