Voter’s Edge assessment and learnings

August 28, 2015
Voter’s Edge Overview

About Voter’s Edge
MapLight’s online voter guide, Voter’s Edge, provides a “one-stop shop” for comprehensive, nonpartisan information about candidates and ballot measures, equipping voters with the information they need to understand candidate and ballot issues and positions and to vote in ways that reflect their own interests. For the 2014 election, Voter’s Edge covered federal and state-level candidates in all 50 states and statewide ballot measures in every state that has them, greatly simplifying pre-election research for voters across the country.

Key 2014 Successes

- Earned over 1.1 million unique visitors to Voter’s Edge through the general election in 2014.
- Of these, 728,000 were from California — 1 in 10 California voters.¹
- Expanded Voter’s Edge into the first national online voter guide to provide meaningful nonpartisan data on statewide ballot measures, state candidates, and federal candidates in all 50 states — making the site the most connected and comprehensive voter guide in the online civic information landscape.
- Built Voter’s Edge California into a visionary prototype guide, giving Californians one-stop access to more extensive data on their federal, state, and local contests through our partnership with the LWVC.
- Launched ‘Share My Ballot,’ a feature allowing citizens to mark their ballot choices as they peruse the site, share their choices over email and social media, and print them to take along to the polls.
- Integrated a drop-down menu to translate the entire Voter’s Edge site into Spanish.
- Reached 32 million people with Voter’s Edge data through the media, earning citations in the Wall Street Journal, the Huffington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, KCRA-TV, Ars Technica, and others.
- 23 partner groups used the Voter’s Edge API or widgets, including NBC Los Angeles, NBC San Diego, KQED, KCRW, KPCC, AsAmNews, New America Media, California Student Vote, Wisconsin Watch, and Seattle CityClub.
- Earned over a dozen endorsements as a go-to source for nonpartisan voter information, with shout-outs in the San Jose Mercury News, the U-T San Diego, the San Diego Free Press, the Visalia Times-Delta, and from Countable, the California Voter Foundation, and CA Forward.

¹ According to Google Analytics, 728,000 Californians visited Voter’s Edge in 2014. Seven and a half million ballots were cast in the 2014 general election in California, according to the California Secretary of State (http://vote2014.sos.ca.gov/returns/status/).
Project Assessment

One of our goals for this project was to learn which types of voter information are most useful to voters. Better data on this issue, based in real-world user demand and usage, will help MapLight and the field as a whole to apply our resources toward developing data and tools with the highest payoff. Among other questions, our research was designed to address:

- What types of data, from our existing data, are most frequently used by partner groups?
- What types of data that we do not currently have are most frequently requested?
- Who uses our data, both in terms of types of partner groups and in terms of user demographics based on Google Analytics?

We used four forms of data collection to address these questions from a variety of perspectives:

1. **Voter’s Edge web traffic and site behavior (Google Analytics):** Quantitative data about site visitors and site behavior gathered by Google Analytics enabled us to visualize how many people were using the site, for how long, and how many pages they accessed, along with demographics and other information.

2. **Widget and API usage and partner feedback (Google Analytics and feedback from partners):** Quantitative data about widgets and API usage from Google Analytics provided information about what data types were most in demand. Qualitative feedback from our partners added nuance to this data and will help us improve distribution for the next phase of Voter’s Edge.

3. **User demographics and feedback (online site surveys):** Quantitative data about user demographics and feedback on the site itself, gathered using pop-up surveys on the Voter’s Edge site, provided more detail on the backgrounds and voting behavior of site users, along with information about how Voter’s Edge impacted voting behavior, voting confidence, etc. Surveys were designed by market research consultant Jeni Sall, of Genesis Research Associates, with input from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

4. **Detailed user feedback on content and interface (in-depth user surveys):** Qualitative data about users’ experiences with the site itself, gathered via in-depth interviews, helped us to probe deeply into potential user interface and other issues with the site and to test possible solutions before implementing them live. The user testing process has also enabled us to more clearly identify additional changes for future iterations of Voter’s Edge, as well as providing more feedback about the information needs of voters for future elections. This research was designed by market research consultant Jeni Sall, of Genesis Research Associates.
Voter’s Edge Web Traffic and Site Behavior (Google Analytics)

Methodology
We tracked overall site usage data over the course of the year using Google Analytics. This powerful tool gave us access to data about how many people were using the site, for how long, and how many pages they accessed. We were also able to see demographic data and information about what devices people used to access Voter’s Edge.

Site usage data for segments of the total user base (such as for users of the California site only) is calculated by Google Analytics using sampling. As explained by Google Analytics, sampling “is the practice of selecting a subset of data from your traffic and reporting on the trends available in that sample set. Sampling is widely used in statistical analysis because analyzing a subset of data gives similar results to analyzing all of the data. In addition, sampling speeds up processing for reports when the volume of data is so large as to slow down report queries.”

Terminology
Sessions/Visits: The number of times the site was opened.

Users/Visitors: The number of unique visitors to the site. A user who visits the site more than once opens up a new session each time and, if visiting from the same device, is counted as a repeat visitor. If a user visited the site from multiple devices, that would count as multiple unique visitors.

Findings
Site traffic
In 2014, over 1.1 million users visited the Voter’s Edge site. Over 910,000 of these unique visitors used the site for the November election. The traffic that Voter’s Edge attracted this year, in particular the dramatic swell in the days preceding Election Day, far exceeded our predictions:

Voter’s Edge site traffic, October 28 – November 4, 2014

Source: Google Analytics.

Site traffic in 2014 far exceeded expectations, with over 1.1 million users visiting the Voter’s Edge site.
Usage overall and in California

Californians comprised the largest group of visitors to Voter’s Edge: 728,000 visits in 2014, or one in every 10 California voters. Californians made up 64% of total site visitors and 68% of total visits. Also-populous Texas and New York generated 60 times less traffic each, an indication that our coordinated outreach campaigns were effective at getting the California site into voters’ hands:

Top geographic sources of Voter’s Edge traffic, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Site Visits</th>
<th>% of Total Visits</th>
<th>Unique Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>1,034,513</td>
<td>67.63%</td>
<td>728,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>46,246</td>
<td>3.02%</td>
<td>38,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>34,938</td>
<td>2.28%</td>
<td>27,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>33,371</td>
<td>2.18%</td>
<td>27,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>27,047</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
<td>22,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>21,419</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>17,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>18,737</td>
<td>1.22%</td>
<td>16,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>17,620</td>
<td>1.15%</td>
<td>14,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>16,378</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
<td>13,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>14,929</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
<td>12,799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Google Analytics.

For deeper analysis, we looked specifically at visitors who used the California portion of Voter’s Edge, regardless of their physical location. California site users comprised the most engaged group of Voter’s Edge visitors, indicating that the enhanced California candidate and ballot measure pages built in partnership with the LWVC met voters’ demand for more high-quality, comprehensive data on their ballot items. On average, California site users spent twice as long (00:05:52) on Voter’s Edge per session than the overall population of site users (00:02:55). In addition, they opened more pages on the site, with an average of 13 pages/session (as compared to the overall average of 7 pages/session). Voter’s Edge also attracted a higher percentage of returning visitors from California (31%, as compared to 20% overall).

Californians comprised the largest group of visitors to Voter’s Edge: 728,000 visits in 2014, or one in every 10 California voters. Users of the California site were also more engaged than users of other state Voter’s Edge sites, proof of concept for our enhanced California pilot site, built in partnership with the League of Women Voters.

Peak usage

Site usage peaked during the week before the general election (October 29–November 4); Voter’s Edge received 522,000 unique visitors during this week alone. 68% of those unique visitors visited Voter’s Edge California. The closer to the general election, the more deeply visitors engaged with the site: people spent more time on the site (00:06:24 for California pages and 00:4:57 for other pages) and accessed more pages per session (on average, 19 for California and 16 for other states) during this
A breakdown of these metrics reveals that deeper engagement was common: 15% of site visits during this period lasted over ten minutes, with 18% of visitors viewing at least 20 different pages.

Usage statistics confirm that visitors found Voter’s Edge an engaging and useful tool for preparing themselves to vote. Usage peaked around the election, with more traffic and more in-depth site usage.

User demographics

Users of Voter’s Edge, both in California and elsewhere, were evenly split by gender.

Usage of the site by age corresponded closely to actual voter turnout levels, with the following significant exceptions: voters aged 18–34 used the site significantly more than actual voter turnout levels would predict, and voters aged 65+ used the site significantly less than actual voter turnout levels would predict.

![Percentage of Voter’s Edge California users by age versus turnout in 2014 election](image)

The table above, which compares data on Voter’s Edge users with voter turnout numbers from 2014, demonstrates the disproportionate usage of Voter’s Edge by younger voters. Nationally, voter turnout

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2 2014 data from the UC Davis Center for Regional Change ([http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/cccp/CCEP%20Policy%20Brief%209%20Supportive%20Materials%20/Table-ge-14-california-eligible-voter-turnout-by-age-and-county-2014-general-election/view](http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/cccp/CCEP%20Policy%20Brief%209%20Supportive%20Materials%20/Table-ge-14-california-eligible-voter-turnout-by-age-and-county-2014-general-election/view)). Because Google Analytics provides age data in preset ranges (18–24, 25–34, etc.) that do not match the most common age ranges used to report voter turnout (18–29, etc.), the UC Davis Center for Regional Change is one of the few sources for turnout data that can be directly compared.
among voters aged 18–29 fell from 19% of the electorate in 2012 to 13% in 2014 due to lower youth participation in midterm elections.\(^3\)

Voters aged 18–34 were significantly overrepresented among Voter’s Edge users relative to their rate of voter turnout, and voters over 65 were significantly underrepresented.

**Devices**

Overall, nearly three-quarters (74%) of the sessions on Voter’s Edge were on PCs. About 17% of overall sessions were on mobile devices, and 9% were on tablets.

74% of Voter’s Edge traffic came from PCs, and 26% came from mobile devices and tablets.

**Sources of site traffic and reach**

37% of site traffic on Voter’s Edge came from web searches. Another 34% were referred to Voter’s Edge from other websites (see discussion of widgets beginning on page 11). The remaining site traffic was generated by paid searches, visitors going directly to the Voter’s Edge site, and social media and email.

In addition, Voter’s Edge succeeded in informing many more citizens beyond our site through the news. Our nonpartisan Voter’s Edge data on the 2014 elections generated 854 stories that reached over 32 million people.

Roughly 1/3 of Voter’s Edge traffic came from web searches, 1/3 came from referrals from other websites, and 1/3 came from other sources. Voter’s Edge data also reached over 32 million people through news coverage.

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Widgets and API Usage and Partner Feedback
(Google Analytics and feedback from partners)

Widget Usage by Partners

In 2014, we built a series of embeddable widgets enabling any organization, even without extensive technical resources or expertise, to easily integrate Voter’s Edge data into their existing site, a feature we had multiple requests for in 2012. A simple tool on the Voter’s Edge site allowed partner groups to build a customized widget focusing on a particular race or displaying the full Voter’s Edge site; the tool then generated a few lines of code to embed the widget anywhere on the web. 23 Voter’s Edge widgets were used by 21 outlets to integrate Voter’s Edge data into their sites. Of these, over half (14 widgets total, or 61%) were ‘Address Lookup’ widgets that allow users to enter their address and view their customized ballot choices from within an iFrame embedded on the partner’s site. For example:

Embedded ‘Address Lookup’ widget on the California Student Vote webpage.
Another 26% (6 widgets total) were proposition widgets that allowed users to view data about all propositions or a single proposition. For example:

Embedded proposition widget on the San Francisco Chronicle webpage.
9% of widgets (2 widgets total) were candidate widgets that allowed users to view data about all candidates in a given race. For example:

Embedded candidate widget on the AsAmNews webpage.
The ‘Address Lookup’ widget was by far the most popular with partner groups, making up over half of total widget usage.

API Usage by Partners

With support from the Hewlett Foundation, we launched the Voter’s Edge API (“application programming interface”), a live data feed that allows organizations with programming expertise to fully integrate our data into their projects, with enormous flexibility regarding how it is incorporated and displayed. Profiled by ProgrammableWeb, our API set the stage for partner groups to use the Voter’s Edge data platform as the base for new tools, or in conjunction with their own unique data, clearing the path for a wide variety of new voter information projects to meet differing voter needs without duplication of effort. In 2014, MapLight worked with three organizations to integrate data into their sites using the API.

Seattle CityClub

Our partnership with the public affairs nonprofit Seattle CityClub allowed them to integrate Voter’s Edge data into their community-generated Living Voters Guide, a fact-checked forum for citizens to discuss pros and cons of ballot items online. The Voter’s Edge API provided information to help voters make decisions on statewide ballot measures, including:

- the meaning of voting ‘yes’ or ‘no’
- the projected financial effects of the measure passing or failing
- campaign arguments for and against
- contact information for the official campaigns for and against
- endorsements for and against
- the latest news stories covering the ballot measures
- the latest editorials for and against

By including our comprehensive data, including top funders for and against, editorials and endorsements for and against, and the latest news coverage, on Washington state ballot measures alongside their discussion tools, Seattle CityClub provided their users with context and background information to support better-informed dialogue. This mutually beneficial partnership enabled the Voter’s Edge data to reach far more Washington voters than just those who visited our site. User feedback indicates that the campaign finance data was especially meaningful and relevant.

Ideas for future collaboration include expanding the data provided for candidates and providing the ability for Seattle CityClub to embed and test the data well in advance of the election, with the benefit of a longer timeline from API launch to Election Day.

KPCC

KPCC used our API to create their own voter guide, which they promoted to their listeners. Using API data, they generated a series of custom graphical “cards” for each proposition:
KQED: The California Report

Our API was used by KQED News: The California Report to include information on the top funders for and against statewide California ballot measures in their California Election Watch 2014 Election Guide pages. Our curated campaign finance data populated the election spending visuals on each of their ballot measure pages, informing thousands of California voters. KQED used the same graphics as KPCC for their pages.

Voter’s Edge API data included on KQED’s California Election Watch 2014 Election Guide webpage.

KQED provided feedback based on the emails and phone calls they received from users as well as from their reporters and editors. According to KQED, “the majority [of this feedback was] extremely positive.”

Suggestions for future collaboration and improvements included making improvements to load time in some instances, adding the ability to “pick” a candidate from that candidate’s individual page (see further discussion of ‘Pick Me’ functionality on page 40), optimizing the site for mobile devices, changes to printable voting choices interface, and providing the functionality to text candidate choices to a user’s phone.
User Demographics and Feedback
(online site surveys)

Methodology
In the month leading up to the election, we gathered information on Voter’s Edge users’ demographics and opinions of the site using an online survey software tool. Questions were developed in conjunction with Jeni Sall, of Genesis Research Associates, and the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), based out of Tufts University. CIRCLE also helped to verify some of our analyses of survey results.

Survey questions were divided across two site surveys (‘Demographics’ and ‘About Voter’s Edge’) to keep each survey brief in order to increase the completion rate, and visitors to Voter’s Edge were randomly directed to one or the other.

The purpose of the ‘Demographics’ survey was to learn more about the background of users of Voter’s Edge. We collected and analyzed results from 1,178 responses between 10/6/2014 and 12/10/2014. Upon completing the Demographics survey, users were given the option of responding to a few additional questions about the ballot initiative process in California, which were requested by our partner CA Forward.

The purpose of the ‘About Voter’s Edge’ survey was to measure the impact of Voter’s Edge on site users’ voting decisions. In the same survey, we also collected data on a few demographic questions in order to correlate responses on site usefulness with key demographic indicators. We received 585 responses, 322 of which were complete, between 10/6/2014 and 11/4/2014. We’ve included the 263 partial responses in our analysis of findings, but excluded responses from users experiencing technical difficulties on Voter’s Edge (17 responses), for an analysis of 568 responses total.

Over-representation of some demographics
The response rate to these online surveys, as with most online surveys, was quite low. When compared to the demographic data about site users gathered by Google Analytics (gender, age, and location), we found differences that indicate that the survey respondents may not be perfectly representative of Voter’s Edge users as a whole:

Gender
59% of our survey respondents were female, while our Google Analytics records over the same period show gender as evenly split (49% female). Feedback from market research consultant Jeni Sall, who conducted our user testing study, confirms that women are generally over-represented among respondents to online surveys.

Women were over-represented among survey respondents (59% of respondents vs. 49% of site users).
Age

Our survey respondents were, on average, older than our site users as a whole. In particular, users aged 25–34 were strongly under-represented, and users aged 55 and older were over-represented among survey respondents relative to their percentage of site users.

Percentage of Voter’s Edge site users by age versus respondents to demographic survey

Older users (55+) were over-represented among survey respondents, and younger users (25–34) were under-represented.

Location

90% of our survey respondents were from California, while our Google Analytics data records showed only 68% of traffic coming from California.
Self-reported state of residency of survey respondents

- California, 89.6%
- Hawaii, 0.2%
- Georgia, 0.5%
- Florida, 0.9%
- District of Columbia, 0.2%
- Idaho, 0.2%
- Colorado, 0.4%
- All Others, 8.1%

Source: Responses to Demographics survey.

Californians were over-represented among survey respondents (90% of respondents vs. 68% of site users).

Significance of these differences

Based on these discrepancies, it seems likely that there are significant differences between site users and survey respondents in other demographic areas. However, we are unable to measure the degree of difference in these areas because Google Analytics does not directly gather more detailed demographic data such as educational attainment, income, etc.

In the case of the ‘About Voter’s Edge’ survey, we have run statistical analyses on the findings to identify if there are correlations between any individual demographic indicator and any other result, and have noted where these exist. Where they do not exist, the demographic differences between survey respondents and site users as a whole should not impact the findings. We have discussed the implications of individual instances where they exist.

In the case of the ‘Demographics’ survey, we anticipate that the reported breakdown of various demographics based on survey results may differ significantly from site users as a whole based on the known differences noted above. We have noted where we have especially strong reason to believe that there is a significant difference in the case of demographic factors correlated with age, gender, and state, but other differences may also exist.

Based on the demographic discrepancies we can measure between survey respondents and site users, it seems likely that there are significant differences in other demographic areas that we do not have Google Analytics data for. The implications of these possible differences on the survey responses are noted below next to our findings where applicable.
Findings: Demographics

Voting frequency

94% of survey respondents were registered to vote. 2% were eligible but not registered, and 4% were not eligible to vote. Further survey data was only collected from registered voters.

77% of survey respondents reported that they vote in every election. A further 19% stated that they vote in ‘Nearly every election.’ Those who vote ‘Sometimes,’ ‘Seldom,’ or ‘Never,’ comprised the remaining 4%.

![Self-reported voting frequency of survey respondents](image-url)

Source: Responses to Demographics survey.

Predictably, more respondents reported voting in recent presidential election years (97% in 2012, up from 94% in 2008) than in recent midterm elections (90% in 2010, up from 82% in 2006). The increases over time may be due to younger respondents who have only recently become eligible to vote.

Note on representation: Older users are overrepresented among survey respondents, and are also more likely to vote frequently, so voting frequency rates reported here may be higher than for site users as a whole.

The high proportion of respondents who vote in ‘Every’ or ‘Nearly every’ election is likely due in part to the fact that those who vote infrequently or never are less likely to seek out voting information, but is also likely somewhat higher than for site users as a whole.

Political views

Nearly half of all respondents (49%) identified as ‘Liberal’ or ‘Very liberal.’ Another 31% identified as Moderate, and 14% as ‘Conservative’ or ‘Very conservative.’ 6% did not identify with this political spectrum.
Compared to California voters as a whole, survey respondents are much more liberal and much less conservative.

Party affiliation

43% of respondents identified as ‘Democrat’ or ‘Strong Democrat,’ while 32% self-identified as ‘Independent.’ Only 13% of our respondents identified as ‘Republican’ or ‘Strong Republican,’ while another 13% reported no affiliation with the listed parties.

Compared to California voters as a whole, survey respondents are much more likely to identify as ‘Independent/Other,’ and much less likely to identify as ‘Republican’ or ‘Strong Republican.’

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5 Ibid.
Educational attainment

Our sample of survey respondents skewed toward higher levels of education than voters as a whole. 8% of respondents reported having an Associate’s degree, while 30% reported they had a Bachelor’s. 37% reported having a graduate or professional degree. 19% reported having attended ‘Some college, no degree.’ Only about 4% reported having a high school degree or less.

Compared to California voters as a whole, our respondents were much less likely to have a high school degree or less, and much more likely to have an advanced degree.

![Self-reported educational attainment of survey respondents vs. California voters (2014)](image)

Source: Responses to Demographics survey and California exit polls conducted by NBC.

**Note on representation:** The educational attainment skew of our respondents is likely due in part to the age skew of respondents relative to site users as a whole, with older users more likely to have attained a graduate degree. In addition, we theorize but cannot confirm that the unknown factors causing our older respondents to be over-represented among survey respondents may also cause highly-educated respondents to be over-represented. One piece of evidence for this theory, suggested by CIRCLE, comes from an analysis of data collected by HelpMeVote, a Greek voting advice application, and the analysis of data collected by the corresponding exit survey, which found that more highly-educated voters were more likely to respond to exit surveys. However, without more data, we are unable to identify how much of the difference is due to differing response rates among survey respondents compared to site users as a whole and how much is due to over-representation of highly-educated users among site users as a whole.

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Highly-educated users are over-represented among survey respondents. This may be due in part to higher survey response rates among highly-educated site users, based on a study of response rates for a Greek voter information site as well as possibly correlated differences in age and underlying unknown factors.

**Income**

Our sample of survey respondents skewed towards higher levels of income than voters as a whole. 28% of respondents reported a household income under $50,000; 16% reported a household income between $50,000 - $74,000; 15% reported a household income between $75,000 - $99,999; 19% reported a household income between $100,000 - $149,000; and 23% reported a household income over $150,000.

![Self-reported household income of survey respondents vs. U.S. voters (2014)](chart.png)

Source: Responses to Demographics survey and analysis of data from Census.gov. 

Note on representation: The income skew of our respondents is likely due in part to the age skew of respondents relative to site users as a whole, with older users more likely to have higher incomes. In addition, we theorize but cannot confirm that the unknown factors causing our older respondents to be over-represented among survey respondents may also cause higher-income respondents to be over-represented. However, without more data, we are unable to identify how much of the difference is due to differing response rates among survey respondents compared to site users as a whole and how much is due to over-representation of high-income users among site users as a whole.

Higher-income users are over-represented among survey respondents. This may be due in part to higher survey response rates among higher-income site users, based on possibly correlated differences in age and unknown underlying factors.

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Voter information sources
Most respondents reported getting information about elections from ‘Official State and/or County ballot pamphlets’ (73%), ‘News stories and/or editorials’ (72%), ‘Endorsements’ by trusted organizations (69%), and the ‘Opinions of friends/family/other trusted individuals’ (58%). 57% reported getting information from voter information sites and blogs besides Voter’s Edge; 41% reported getting information from Voter’s Edge.

The most common sources of voter information for survey respondents was official ballot pamphlets from the state/county, followed closely by news story/editorials and endorsements by trusted organizations.

Race/Ethnicity
Survey respondents were of a roughly similar racial makeup to voters as a whole (according to 2014 midterm turnout statistics). 77% of respondents identified as ‘White/Caucasian.’ 5% identified as ‘Black/African American’ and 4% as ‘Asian or Pacific Islander.’ About 1% identified as ‘American Indian or Alaska Native,’ and 13% as ‘Other.’

Self-reported race of survey respondents vs. U.S. voters (2014)

Source: Responses to Demographics survey and analysis of data from Census.gov. Census.gov data did not include options for ‘American Indian or Alaska Native’ or ‘Other,’ which may cause slight differences in responses that should be noted in comparing the results.

About 12% considered themselves ‘Hispanic’ (any race), while 88% did not. The rate of respondents who self-identified as Hispanic is almost double the percentage of 2014 voters who self-identified as ‘Hispanic’ (any race)’ (about 7%).

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Self-reported identification as Hispanic among survey respondents vs. 2014 voters

Source: Responses to Demographics survey and analysis of data from Census.gov. 10

Notes on representation: The over-representation of Hispanics among survey respondents is almost certainly due to the higher percentage of Hispanic voters in California (about 19% of voters in 2014).11

Survey respondents were of a roughly similar racial makeup to voters as a whole, with Hispanics overrepresented relative to voters as a whole, almost certainly due to the fact that most respondents were from California.

Findings: Opinions of ballot initiative process in California

In a second part of the demographic survey, using questions provided by CA Forward, we asked users their opinions about various aspects of the ballot initiative process. Respondents could choose whether or not to complete this portion. Our results demonstrate a strong need for clear, nonpartisan information about ballot measures, some of which—in particular, providing information about each measure in plain and simple language—could be fulfilled by Voter’s Edge.

- Nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents (73%) agreed that they would feel more confident about information on ballot measures in the official State Voter Guide if they knew it were written by an entity not affiliated with any political party.


67% of respondents said they would have more trust in the ballot initiative process if they knew that signatures to place measures on the ballots were collected by volunteers rather than paid signature gatherers.

80% believed they would be more likely to vote on ballot measures if they were provided with information about each measure in plain and simple language beforehand.

68% stated that they would be more likely to vote if they could ask a nonpartisan expert to answer their questions about ballot measures in advance of voting.

58% reported that they would feel more confident about voting for an initiative if they knew that the Legislature had reviewed and given feedback on the proposal in advance. 24% were neutral, and 16% disagreed. About 2% did not know.

Opinions were split more evenly with regard to whether respondents would be more inclined to support a ballot measure if they knew the Legislature could amend the law later. 43% agreed, 25% were neutral, and 28% disagreed (5% didn’t know).

Almost every reform to the ballot measure process was supported by a majority of respondents. The most popular reform, supported by 80% of respondents, was providing information about each measure in plain and simple language before voting—a function that could be fulfilled by Voter’s Edge.

Findings: About Voter’s Edge

Site usefulness

Overall, 57%—well over half of all survey respondents—found Voter’s Edge to be ‘Very’ or ‘Extremely’ useful and another 30% found it ‘Somewhat’ useful. Only 13% found it ‘Not at all’ useful.

Furthermore, evaluations of site usefulness increased in the days approaching the election. During this same period, more people accessed the site and spent a longer time on it. When we focused on the responses collected during this peak usage period, which coincides with the window during which Voter’s Edge was functioning optimally, the percentage of respondents who found the site ‘Not at all useful’ dropped from 13% to 8%, and the percentage who found the site ‘Very’ or ‘Extremely’ useful increased from 57% to 63%.
Question: How useful would you say the Voter’s Edge website was overall?

57% — well over half of all survey respondents — found Voter’s Edge to be ‘Very’ or ‘Extremely’ useful and another 30% found it ‘Somewhat’ useful. These numbers improved in the days approaching the election; during the peak usage period, the percentage who found the site ‘Very’ or ‘Extremely’ useful increased from 57% to 63%.

Impact on voter confidence

Overall, 72% of respondents felt more confident about their choices after using the site. 73% reported feeling more knowledgeable about candidates and ballot measures.

During the peak usage period, more respondents reported feeling more confident about their choices after using the site. The percentage of respondents who felt ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ confident increased from 72% overall to 80% in the two days before the election, while those who reported ‘No Change’ or feeling ‘Less’ or ‘Much less’ confident dropped from 28% to 20%. Similar trends were seen in how knowledgeable they felt about candidates and/or ballot initiatives.
Question: Did visiting Voter’s Edge make you feel more or less confident about making the right choices on Election Day?

72% of respondents felt more confident about their choices after using Voter’s Edge. 73% reported feeling more knowledgeable about candidates and ballot measures. These numbers improved in the days approaching the election; the percentage of respondents who felt ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ confident increased from 72% overall to 80% in the two days before the election.

Impact on discussing and sharing voting choices

50%—half of all respondents—stated that they would be ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ likely to discuss their voting choices with others after using the site.

Only 25% of respondents claimed that sharing their voting choices helped them feel more connected to the democratic process, while 45% felt that it did not. 25% were neutral about sharing and 5% did not know how they felt about it. See discussion of this feedback on page 47.

Impact on voting behavior

36% of respondents said they were ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ likely to actually cast a vote on Election Day because of information they found on Voter’s Edge.

39% reported that they were considering making a different choice on one or more ballot initiatives after finding information on Voter’s Edge. 30% reported that they were considering different candidates for state or local offices.

52%—more than half of all respondents—claimed they would vote for more offices and leave fewer blank choices on their ballot because of Voter’s Edge.
39% reported that they were considering different issues or criteria in their voting decisions after using the site.

45% of users felt they had a better idea of the candidates’ values in relation to their own, and 42% stated that they felt more knowledgeable about what the Congressional candidates really stood for.

14% of respondents—1 in 7—reported that they were considering switching their votes on U.S. Congressional candidates. This is greater than the margin of victory in 20% of House races in 2012.12

For significant numbers of users, the Voter’s Edge guide increased the likelihood of voting, making different choices on ballot initiatives and state or local candidates, and voting for more offices. Many users also reported considering different criteria in their voting decisions, having a better idea of the candidates’ values, and feeling more knowledgeable about what candidates stood for.

Findings: Differences among site users

We found statistically significant relationships (p < 0.05) between several of the variables we tested. Location, voting frequency, and level of educational attainment had the largest impact on users’ impressions of Voter’s Edge and are discussed in more detail below.

No impact based on partisan affiliation

We appear to have succeeded in our goal of presenting nonpartisan information. Although our sample pool skewed heavily towards the liberal/Democrat end of the political spectrum (likely due in part to the preponderance of Californians), with a significant number of moderates/Independents as well, we found no correlation between political views, party affiliation, and impressions of the site.

Although fewer conservatives/Republicans used the site, they found it just as useful and were influenced by the information to much the same extent as the other groups, based on survey responses.

Impact of location on voter confidence and knowledgeability

We found statistically significant relationships between where respondents were located, how confident they felt about their voting choices, and how knowledgeable they felt about candidates and/or ballot initiatives after using Voter’s Edge.

Californians were more likely to feel ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ confident or knowledgeable than respondents from other states. The non-Californians, by contrast, were far more likely to report ‘No change’ in their levels of confidence and knowledgeability. They were also somewhat more likely to feel ‘Less’ or ‘Much less’ confident or knowledgeable.

Question: Did visiting Voter’s Edge make you feel more or less confident about making the right choices on Election Day?

Source: Responses to About Voter’s Edge survey.

Question: Did visiting Voter’s Edge make you feel more or less knowledgeable about the candidates and/or ballot initiatives that you viewed on the website?

Source: Responses to About Voter’s Edge survey.
Although non-Californians were more likely to report ‘No change,’ or feeling ‘Less’ or ‘Much less’ confident or knowledgeable than Californians, many of them did react positively to using the site. 34% of non-Californians felt ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ confident and ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ knowledgeable.

The greater utility of Voter’s Edge for California voters is likely due to the greater comprehensiveness of our California pilot site. Thanks to our partnership with the LWVC, we had far more detailed data for local California races than for local races elsewhere in the country.

Californians were more likely to feel ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ confident (76%) or knowledgeable (78%) than respondents from other states (34%).

**Impact of voting frequency on influencing the decision to vote**

Overall, Voter’s Edge seems to have persuaded many people who may have been undecided about voting this year to cast a vote on Election Day.

The vast majority of all survey respondents—77%—claimed that they vote in ‘Every’ election. 31% of that group claimed that they were ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ likely to actually vote on Election Day because of information they found on Voter’s Edge. Another 19% stated that they vote in ‘Nearly every’ election. Of that group, 55% stated that they were ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ likely to vote on Election Day. Although only a very small proportion of respondents (4%) stated that they ‘Sometimes,’ ‘Seldom,’ or ‘Never’ vote, in that group, 66%—two-thirds—claimed that they were ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ likely to vote.

**Question:** Are you more or less likely to actually cast a vote on Election Day because of the information you found on the Voter’s Edge website?

Source: Responses to About Voter’s Edge survey.
**Impact of representation:** Because older voters were over-represented among survey respondents and are also generally more likely to vote more frequently, it is possible that a larger percentage of overall site users are less frequent voters. If so, a larger percentage of site users than shown in these survey results may have been persuaded to cast a vote on Election Day.

Voter’s Edge seems to have persuaded many people who may have been undecided about voting this year to cast a vote on Election Day, with the percentage of people swayed increasing as the rate of reported voting frequency decreased.

**Impact of voting frequency on influencing the decision to discuss voting choices**

The impact of Voter’s Edge in boosting respondents’ likelihood of discussing voting choices seems to have increased as their reported voting frequency decreased. Among those who vote in ‘Every’ election (77% of the overall sample), 50% reported that they were more likely to engage in discussions about voting choices after using Voter’s Edge. That proportion increased slightly to 52% among those who vote in ‘Nearly every’ election (19% of the sample), and increased dramatically to 83% among those who ‘Sometimes,’ ‘Seldom,’ or ‘Never’ vote (although at 4% of the sample, this last group was small).

**Question:** Now that you have seen the information on the Voter’s Edge website, are you more or less likely to discuss voting choices with anyone?

![Data chart showing the percentage of respondents who are more or less likely to discuss voting choices with others, based on their reported voting frequency.]

**Source:** Responses to About Voter’s Edge survey.

**Impact of representation:** Because older voters were over-represented among survey respondents and are also generally more likely to vote more frequently, it is possible that a larger percentage of overall site users are less frequent voters. If so, a larger percentage of site users than shown in these survey results may have been persuaded to discuss their voting choices with others.

Voter’s Edge seems to have persuaded many people to discuss their voting choices with others, with the percentage of people swayed increasing as their reported voting frequency decreased.
Impact of voting frequency on persuading voters to consider different ballot measure choices, candidates, and issues

We found statistically significant relationships between voting frequency and the likelihood of respondents to consider different choices on ballot measures, candidates, and issues after using Voter’s Edge.

Among survey respondents who reported voting in ‘Every’ election, 40% stated that they would consider different choices on ballot measures; 25% reported that they would not—indicating that Voter’s Edge may have reinforced their choices. The proportion of respondents willing to consider different choices increased slightly to 42% among respondents voting in ‘Nearly every’ election, and increased dramatically to 54% in the small group of respondents who ‘Sometimes,’ ‘Seldom,’ or ‘Never’ vote. Percentages of respondents with no opinion on the matter steadily increased as voting frequency decreased, from 35% to 40% to 46%. Meanwhile, we observed that the less frequently people voted, the less likely it was for Voter’s Edge to reinforce their original choices on ballot measures; 25% of voters in ‘Every’ election dropped to 18% in voters in ‘Nearly every’ election.

Question: Based on information I found on Voter’s Edge, I am considering making a different choice on one or more ballot initiatives.

We also observed a relationship between reported frequency of voting and how likely a respondent was to consider different issues or criteria in their voting decisions after using Voter’s Edge. 36% of respondents who claimed to vote in ‘Every election’ said they would consider different issues; that percentage jumped to 51%—more than half—of respondents voting in ‘Nearly every’ election. It jumped yet again to 83% among the small group of occasional voters and non-voters.

Source: Responses to About Voter’s Edge survey.
Question: Based on information I found on Voter’s Edge, I am considering different issues or criteria in my voting decisions.

One potential hypothesis for the influence of voting frequency on survey respondents is that those who vote in ‘Every election’ were more informed and/or more confident in their choices going in than those who do not vote in every election. Voter’s Edge might thus have provided more new information to people who were less informed or less confident in their choices (in addition to being less likely to vote).

Impact of representation: Because older voters were over-represented among survey respondents and are also generally more likely to vote more frequently, it is possible that a larger percentage of overall site users are less frequent voters. If so, a larger percentage of site users than shown in these survey results may have been persuaded to consider different ballot measure choices, candidates, and issues.

Impact of educational attainment on persuading voters to consider different ballot measure choices, candidates, and issues

Education levels were also correlated with how likely respondents were to consider different choices after using Voter’s Edge, to a statistically significant degree. In general, higher levels of education correlated with being slightly less likely to consider different choices on ballot initiatives as well as on state and local offices.

Voting frequency correlated with how likely respondents were to consider different choices after using Voter’s Edge to a statistically significant degree. In general, greater voting frequency correlated with being slightly less likely to consider different choices on ballot initiatives as well as on state and local offices.
As education levels increased, the percentage of respondents at each level who were considering making different choices on ballot measures dropped from **50%** (‘Some high school/High school graduate’) to **47%** (‘Some college, no degree’) to **43%** (‘Associate degree’) to **36%** (Bachelor’s degree), before climbing back up to **42%** for those with ‘Graduate/professional’ degrees. **2%** of survey respondents preferred not to report their level of education; their responses were left out of this analysis.

**Question: Based on information I found on Voter’s Edge, I am considering making a different choice on one or more ballot initiatives.**

![Graph showing percentage of respondents considering different choices on ballot initiatives by education level.]

As education levels increased, the percentage of respondents at each level who were considering making different choices on state or local offices dropped from **46%** (‘Some high school/High school graduate’) to **36%** (‘Some college, no degree’), before jumping back to **40%** (‘Associate degree’) and down to **32%** (‘Bachelor’s degree’ & ‘Graduate/Professional degree’). **2%** of survey respondents preferred not to report their level of education; their responses were left out of this analysis. The ‘Some college, no degree’ group may have included students currently attending college, which might explain the increase in percentage from ‘Some college, no degree’ to ‘Associate degree.’

Source: Responses to About Voter’s Edge survey.
Question: Based on information I found on Voter’s Edge, I am considering different candidates for state or local office(s).

One possible explanation for this trend is that more educated voters may have been better-informed and more confident about their choices before using Voter’s Edge, in which case the site would not have had as much of an impact on their decisions.

**Impact of representation:** Because older voters were over-represented among survey respondents and are also generally more likely to be more highly educated, it is possible that a larger percentage of overall site users are less highly-educated. If so, a larger percentage of site users than shown in these survey results may have been persuaded to consider different ballot measure choices, candidates, and issues.

Education levels correlated with how likely respondents were to consider different choices after using Voter’s Edge to a statistically significant degree. In general, higher levels of education correlated with being slightly less likely to consider different choices on ballot initiatives as well as on state and local offices.
Detailed User Feedback on Content and User Interface  
(in-depth user interviews)

Methodology

In-depth user testing interviews are used to probe deeply into potential problems (such as navigation challenges, user-interface flaws, etc.) with a website, uncovering the biggest obstacles and testing possible solutions in order to build a better site. For Voter’s Edge, we worked with market research consultant Jeni Sall to execute two sets of user testing interviews, one on 10/20/14 and another on 10/23/14. Jeni has over 25 years of marketing and market research experience through her company, Genesis Research Associates, where she has conducted hundreds of qualitative and quantitative research projects. She drew on her expertise to conduct interviews that explored the user experience of Voter’s Edge in real time, giving us insight into how to make Voter’s Edge even more user friendly and intuitive.

Participants in our trials were recruited through the San Diego branch of Plaza Research, a network of focus group facilities. Potential interviewees were screened by age, gender, and party affiliation to ensure a diverse sample. To qualify, potential interviewees also had to meet the criteria of being registered, frequent voters who sought out election information online. Through this screening process, we were able to recruit 12 participants representing a broad cross-section of society (see the charts below).

Interviews were conducted at the Plaza Research San Diego facility and were recorded (both audio and screen sharing). Interviewees met one-on-one with Jeni, who conducted the discussion in two parts. First, she asked them several questions about their voting behavior; then, she gathered their impressions as they walked her through their experience of the Voter’s Edge site, focusing in particular on areas we identified as possible problems. Users interviewed on the first day (10/20/14) were asked to give more general reactions. The interviews on the second day (10/23/14) were focused on testing specific solutions identified from that initial feedback, giving us the opportunity to test mockups for immediate improvement and for future directions for the site.

After processing our findings, we were able to implement several changes to Voter’s Edge, greatly enhancing the accessibility and navigability of Voter’s Edge, just in time for peak site usage in the days surrounding the election. Moreover, the user testing process has enabled us to more clearly identify more complex changes for future iterations of Voter’s Edge, along with more feedback about the information needs of voters for future elections.

Participants

We interviewed 12 participants: 7 female and 5 male.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Affiliation</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
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<td>8%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every election</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost every election</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting Information Sources</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political information websites on the Internet</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official ballot pamphlets</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/campaign ads in the mail</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions with friends or family members</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV news shows or commentators</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news programs or talk radio</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings: Landing Page**

**User feedback**

When participants arrived at the Voter’s Edge landing page, many were initially uncertain about what type of website it was or what it had to offer. As a result, they were concerned about entering their address. Privacy was a major issue; they wanted to know whether and how their personal information would be stored or shared.

Moreover, because of the way the address form was designed, some users were confused about whether they should enter their email or their street address until they noticed the directions in small print at the bottom.

Once they were told that the website would give them voting information, many reacted positively to the design of the page, which they thought looked credible and authoritative.
Changes implemented

In response, we acted immediately to make the landing page more informative and intuitive, enabling new visitors to the site to immediately identify its function and understand why and how to input their address. We did so by:

1. Modifying the site logo to include a tagline clearly explaining the site’s purpose and use.

2. Adding a link to our privacy policy right on the homepage, along with text on the homepage stating that “Your address will be kept private and never sold or shared.”

3. Revising the address form’s design and instructions to make it clearer that it was requesting a physical address and to provide context for how that address would be used (i.e., to generate “personalized election information”).

These changes were well-received by users during the second day of testing and seemed to resolve the issues of confusion and privacy concerns.
Revised Voter’s Edge landing page.

Findings: ‘My Ballot’ Page

User feedback

After entering their street address, participants arrived at the ‘My Ballot’ home page. This page displayed their polling location, as well as a complete list of their state and local-level races and ballot propositions (comprehensive information made available for our California pilot), with all of the candidates on their official ballot displayed.

Participants reacted very positively to seeing their official polling location accurately displayed at the top of the screen, with many stating that it made Voter’s Edge seem very credible—especially when coupled with the co-branding of Voter’s Edge California with the LWVC’s SmartVoter site, a name many recognized and trusted. Most also appreciated seeing photos of the candidates, which they felt gave the guide a more personal touch than the official ballot.

For each race, candidates’ names and photos were displayed, along with a checkbox option to ‘Pick Me.’ Ballot propositions were listed with the option to “Vote ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’” These checkbox features often generated confusion, with many users not understanding that they constituted a way to record their choices as a printable resource to bring to the polls on Election Day. Users often initially checked
‘Pick Me’ in an attempt to view more information before clicking on the tile directly. Some users shared concerns that Voter’s Edge was collecting their ballot choices.

Aside from their confusion about the function of the ‘My Ballot’ page, many users expressed appreciation for the fact that we presented their full ballot, down to local-level races for judges and school board trustees.

Top of an original ‘My Ballot’ page (as of 10/23/14).
Changes implemented

To address these concerns, we:

1. Added text at the top of the ‘My Ballot’ page with clear directions for accessing more information and using the checkbox feature.

2. Added an explicit statement that we would keep users’ choices private and anonymous.

Both of these solutions were positively received in the second day of testing, clearing up previous user concerns.
Findings: Candidate and Proposition Pages

User feedback
Participants were encouraged to click on candidates and propositions that they wanted to learn more about. This would take them to the detailed information page for that candidate or proposition. Many users stated that the ‘Pick Me’ checkbox function would be more useful if it were displayed on these pages — one possibility for a future feature.

Interviewees were impressed by the quantity and quality of the information displayed. Voter’s Edge showed funding information for each candidate and ballot measure as well as a drop-down menu of summary information. The most frequently requested addition for future data was to add candidates’ voting records for those who had previously held office.

Many participants also expressed curiosity about the sources of information provided. We had initially indicated sources through a hover-over button; however, users felt that each item of information should be listed with its source so that they could determine which data was provided by candidates and which by neutral third parties.

Overall, our testers found the candidate and proposition pages to be credible and nonpartisan, an impression helped by the fact that we presented a balanced and standardized quantity of information for each side.

People particularly appreciated the comparative view of arguments ‘For’ and ‘Against’ ballot initiatives on the proposition pages. This led us to test a mockup of a side-by-side view of candidate pages, which would allow users to compare the information provided for all candidates in a race at a glance. Participants were very receptive to this idea, which indicates that it would be a valuable direction to pursue in the future.
Example of an original candidate page (as of 10/23/14).
Mockup of side-by-side candidate view for potential future development.
Findings: Navigation

User feedback
Most participants encountered navigation issues over the course of their time on Voter’s Edge. For instance, they would use the ‘Prev’ and ‘Next’ buttons to try to return to the ‘My Ballot’ home page from a candidate’s page, when those buttons were designed to navigate to the next race. Most did not realize that the ‘My Ballot’ button at the top of their page would return them to that home page.

Changes implemented
We modified the ‘My Ballot’ navigation button to read ‘Home,’ which intuitively indicated to site users that it would take them back to the main ballot page.

Findings: Sharing

User feedback
In partnership with CA Forward, we implemented a ‘Share My Ballot’ feature on Voter’s Edge, which allowed people to click on a button to share, print, or email their choices after they marked them on the ‘My Ballot’ page. Interestingly, this feature seemed to make many users uncomfortable. Some users, when questioned, attributed this discomfort to a mistrust of privacy settings on social media platforms. While many of them indicated that they would be interested in printing or emailing their choices, nearly all were deterred by the ‘Share’ language on the button.

This observation matches up with a finding from our Demographics site survey: Respondents in that survey were asked to agree or disagree with the statement that “Sharing my voting choices with my network (via social media or email) helps me feel more connected to the democratic process.” Of the 764 responses to that prompt, only 25% agreed or strongly agreed, while 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Question: Sharing my voting choices with my network (via social media or email) helps me feel more connected to the democratic process.

Source: Responses to Demographics survey.

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MapLight – August 28, 2015
Key Takeaways

Site Traffic
Site traffic in 2014 far exceeded expectations, with over 1.1 million users visiting the Voter’s Edge site. Usage statistics confirm that visitors found Voter’s Edge an engaging and useful tool for preparing themselves to vote: Usage peaked around the election, with more traffic and more in-depth site usage in the week before the election.

Californians comprised the largest group of visitors to Voter’s Edge: 728,000 visits in 2014, or one in every 10 California voters. Users of the California site were also more engaged than users of other state Voter’s Edge sites. The increased usage of the California site provides proof of concept for our enhanced California pilot site, built in partnership with the League of Women Voters. Going forward, providing detailed data about local races seems likely to provide the greatest value to users.

User Demographics
We gathered data about the demographics of Voter’s Edge site users using a pop-up survey on the Voter’s Edge site. The following groups were over- and underrepresented among survey respondents relative to their rate of voter turnout:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overrepresented</th>
<th>Underrepresented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Voters aged 18–34</td>
<td>• Voters over 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Californians</td>
<td>• Users from other states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-identified “Liberals”</td>
<td>• Self-identified “Conservatives”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-identified “Independents”</td>
<td>• Self-identified “Republicans”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highly-educated users</td>
<td>• Users with a high school education or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Users with an income over $150,000</td>
<td>• Users with an income less than $75,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When compared to the demographic data about site users gathered by Google Analytics (gender, age, and location), we found that women, older users, and Californians were over-represented among survey respondents, indicating that the survey respondents may not be perfectly representative of Voter’s Edge users as a whole. We have noted the implications of these discrepancies where relevant in the report. Where these differences seem likely to reflect actual differences in site usage, this data provides a roadmap for where to focus our outreach in future elections.

Impact on Voting Behavior

• 57% — well over half of all survey respondents — found Voter’s Edge to be ‘Very’ or ‘Extremely’ useful and another 30% found it ‘Somewhat’ useful. These numbers improved in the days approaching the election; during the peak usage period, the percentage who found the site ‘Very’ or ‘Extremely’ useful increased from 57% to 63%.
• 72% of respondents felt more confident about their choices after using Voter’s Edge. 73% reported feeling more knowledgeable about candidates and ballot measures. These numbers improved significantly in the days approaching the election.

• Half of all respondents stated that they would be ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ likely to discuss their voting choices with others after using the site.

• Californians were more likely to feel ‘More’ or ‘Much more’ confident (76%) or knowledgeable (78%) than respondents from other states (34%).

• Although fewer conservatives/Republicans used the site, they found it just as useful and were influenced by the information to much the same extent as the other groups, based on survey responses.

• Voter’s Edge seems to have persuaded many people who may have been undecided about voting this year to cast a vote on Election Day, with the percentage of people swayed increasing as the rate of reported voting frequency decreased. The site also seems to have persuaded many people to discuss their voting choices with others, with the percentage of people swayed increasing as their reported voting frequency decreased.

• Voting frequency also correlated to a statistically significant degree with how likely respondents were to consider different choices after using Voter’s Edge, as did education levels. In general, greater voting frequency correlated with being slightly less likely to consider different choices on ballot initiatives as well as on state and local offices. Higher levels of education also correlated with being slightly less likely to consider different choices on ballot initiatives as well as on state and local offices.

Overall, Voter’s Edge made a positive impression on survey respondents and appears to have had a significant impact on their voting decisions. For significant numbers of users, the Voter’s Edge guide increased the likelihood of voting, making different choices on ballot initiatives and state or local candidates, and voting for more offices. Many users also reported considering different criteria in their voting decisions, having a better idea of the candidates’ values, and feeling more knowledgeable about what candidates stood for. These positive impacts were, in many cases, most prevalent among voters with lower levels of education and among less frequent voters, an encouraging sign that the Voter’s Edge model is succeeding at increasing civic engagement in certain underrepresented groups.

**User Feedback on Content and Interface**

User feedback on site navigation, user interface, sharing options, and site content provided valuable feedback that guided changes to the site for the 2014 elections and provides a roadmap for future site improvements. Feedback on the site’s social media sharing options identified that these features raised privacy concerns for many site visitors. As social media sharing also represents an extremely valuable potential distribution strategy, this is an area for further user testing to determine the right approach.
Conclusion

Overall, our research indicated that Voter’s Edge is a useful tool for voters, and its high usage and positive reception far exceeded our expectations. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, this assessment built a nuanced understanding of real-world user demand and site usage, enabling us to pinpoint the strengths of Voter’s Edge and to identify directions for improvement. Using this data, we will be able to broaden the usefulness of the site and make future iterations even more intuitive and informative in response to voter needs.