

Millions in Calif. fail to register to vote

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

Zyler Hartman of Sacramento was too young to participate, but he closely followed the campaigns of November 2012, especially the debate over Proposition 37, the ballot measure that would have imposed new labeling requirements on genetically engineered foods.

Hartman is 19 now and could vote in next month's primary election. But taking the first step – registering to vote – “is just the furthest thing from my mind at the moment,” he said last week near Sacramento City College, where he is taking a full load of classes.

When polls close next month, voter turnout will be the main benchmark of Californians' election engagement. But missing from the calculation will be millions of Californians who could have voted but did not register.

In a chronic phenomenon of under-enfranchisement in the Golden State, there are at least 6.4 million residents who are eligible to vote but were not on the registration rolls as of early April. California's registration rate is close to last in the United States, and its legions of eligible but unregistered voters make up a disproportionate share of the nationwide total.

Experts say there are multiple reasons for the shortfall, such as residents here moving more often, bureaucratic hurdles and uncompetitive statewide contests that fail to capture the public's attention. Whatever the causes, the result is the same: an electorate that is whiter, older and wealthier than the state as a whole and a large share of the population disengaged from the laws and representatives chosen in its

name.

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