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Voting statistics from past California elections and characteristics of the state's registered voters frame today's special election.

by Mark DiCamillo
Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

A look at the historical record of voting statistics from recent California elections as compiled by the California Secretary of State lends some perspective to today's special election. It documents the growth in the number of citizen-eligible adults and registered voters over the past twenty-five years, as well as the variable nature of voter turnout in state elections. It also reveals big changes in the way Californians are choosing to cast their ballots over the past two decades.

In addition, the report updates estimates of the demographic characteristics of the state's registered voter population, both overall and by party, based on results from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* of over 8,000 California registered voters completed one week before today's election.

IGS Co-Director G. Cristina Mora notes, "the important increase in the percentage of registered voters is likely related to California legislation passed a decade ago that eliminated "opt in" barriers to voting. This change made citizens' right to vote not different from other rights, like free speech and due process, which do not require "opt in" processes. Eliminating such voting barriers has increased voter participation and diversity, the effects of which we are witnessing now."

A record high number of citizen-eligible adults and registered voters are eligible to vote in today's special election

According to estimates published by the California Secretary of State, more than 27 million California adult citizens are now eligible to register to vote, of whom about 23 million are currently registered. Both the number and proportions of Californians eligible to register and who are currently on the voter rolls have been increasing over time. The share of eligible adults who are registered increased significantly in the decade of the 2020s, with greater than 80% of the state's citizen-eligible adults on the voter rolls in each of the state's last five general or special elections, up from lower levels in the decades preceding it.

The voting record also reveals that voting participation in California's general and special elections tends to be higher in presidential elections, when turnout typically exceeds 70% of the registered voters, than in gubernatorial or special elections. By contrast, turnout is lower and is more variable in recent gubernatorial and special elections, ranging from 42% in 2014 to 65% in the 2018 general election. Turnout in the last special election held in 2021, which featured the recall election of Governor Gavin Newsom, was 58.5%.

<i>Table 1</i> The numbers of California citizen-eligible adults, registered voters, and votes case in statewide general elections since 2000¹ (figures in thousands)						
Election year	<u>Eligible to vote</u>	<u>Registration</u>		<u>Voting participation</u>		
	Total citizen-eligible adults (in 000's)	Total registered (in 000's)	% of citizen-eligibles	Total votes cast (in 000's)	% of registered voters	% of citizen-eligibles
2025^{SP}	27,202	23,061	84.8	-----	-----	-----
2024 ^P	26,913	22,596	84.0	16,140	71.4	60.0
2022	26,877	21,940	81.6	11,147	50.8	41.5
2021 ^{SP}	24,820	22,057	88.9	12,893	58.5	51.9
2020 ^P	25,091	22,047	87.9	17,785	80.7	70.9
2018	25,200	19,696	78.2	12,713	64.6	50.4
2016 ^P	24,875	19,412	78.0	14,611	75.3	58.7
2014	24,288	17,804	73.3	7,514	42.4	30.9
2012 ^P	23,803	18,246	76.7	13,202	72.4	55.5
2010	23,552	17,286	73.7	10,300	59.6	43.7
2008 ^P	23,209	17,304	74.6	13,743	79.4	59.2
2006	22,652	15,837	69.9	8,899	56.2	39.3
2004 ^P	22,075	16,557	75.0	12,590	76.0	57.0
2003 ^{SP}	21,833	15,383	70.5	9,413	61.2	43.1
2002	21,466	15,303	71.3	7,739	50.6	36.1
2000 ^P	21,461	15,707	73.2	11,143	70.9	57.9

¹ September 2025 Report of Registration, California Secretary of State. All other figures come from official estimates reported by the California Secretary of State. Figures rounded.

^P Indicates Presidential election; ^{SP} Indicates special election; all others are gubernatorial elections.

Big changes in the way Californians are choosing to cast their ballots in state elections

According to statistics published by the California Secretary of State, the way Californians have cast their ballots in statewide elections has changed dramatically over the past two decades. For example, in 2008 nearly six in ten voters (58%) went to the polls on Election Day to cast their ballot by using voting machines located in local voting precincts around the state, while 42% voted by signing and returning an official ballot in the envelope forwarded to them by their local Registrar of Voters. By contrast, in each of the last four statewide general or special elections, greater than eight in ten have voted by signing and returning their official ballot by either mailing it in, dropping it off in an official drop box, or by returning it to a local voting center.

Given these historical trends, most observers expect that this will continue to be the case in this year's 2025 special election.

Table 2 Trend of how votes have been tallied in California general and special elections (2008-2024)					
Election	Total votes cast	# of votes tallied from mailed ballots	% of votes tallied from mailed ballots	# of votes tallied by voting machines	% of votes tallied by voting machines
November 2024 ^P	16,140,044	13,034,378	80.8	3,105,666	19.2
November 2022	11,146,629	9,755,198	87.5	1,391,431	12.5
September 2021 ^{SP}	12,892,578	11,733,429	91.0	1,159,149	9.0
November 2020 ^P	17,785,151	15,423,301	86.7	2,361,850	13.3
November 2018	12,712,542	8,302,488	65.3	4,410,054	34.7
November 2016 ^P	14,610,509	8,443,594	57.8	6,167,915	42.2
November 2014	7,513,972	4,547,705	60.5	2,966,267	39.5
November 2012 ^P	13,202,158	6,753,688	51.2	6,448,470	48.8
November 2010	10,300,392	4,989,852	48.4	5,310,540	51.6
November 2008 ^P	13,743,177	5,722,465	41.6	8,020,712	58.4

Source: California Secretary of State, Statement of Vote for California general and special elections 2008-2024.

Note: Estimates of how ballots were cast in years prior to 2028 not reported in those years' Statement of Vote.

^P Indicates Presidential election; ^{SP} Indicates special election; all others are gubernatorial elections

Demographic characteristics of the state's registered voters

Table 3a below updates estimates of the demographic characteristics of the state's registered voter population, both overall and by political party, based on the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll*.

This shows that slightly more than half of the state's registered voters are women (52%). Nearly half (47%) are age 50 or older. Slightly less than half are white non-Hispanic (46%). Another 29% identify as Hispanic or Latino. A majority (55%) include voters whose families have lived in the United States for three or more generations, while 18% are first generation Americans, and 22% are second generation Americans.

A 46% plurality are married. Slightly more than one in four (27%) are single and have never married, while another 9% report being unmarried but live together with a significant other.

Half of the electorate (50%) reports annual household incomes of less than \$100,000, while slightly less than half report living in households with incomes of more than \$100,000. About half have not graduated from college with a B.A. or comparable degree (51%), while 45% have. Homeowners account for about 47% of the electorate, while the remainder are renters or report another living arrangement.

Compared to their Republican counterparts, the state's registered Democrats include larger proportions of women and voters under age 40, although younger voters comprise an even larger share of the state's non-partisans. Democrats and non-partisan registrants also include proportionately more Latino and Black voters, and renters than their Republican counterparts. Republican voters skew older and are more likely than Democrats or non-partisan voters to include whites, married voters and homeowners.

<i>Table 3a</i> Demographic characteristics of California's current registered voter population overall and by party				
	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No party preference /other %
<i>Share of registrants statewide and by party</i>	100	45	25	30
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	52	57	47	48
Male	48	43	53	52
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	18	19	12	24
30-39	18	18	14	22
40-49	16	15	15	18
50-64	22	22	26	19
65 or older	25	26	33	17
<u>Race/ethnicity</u> ³				
White	46	45	52	42
Latino	29	29	25	31
Asian/Pacific Islander	13	14	11	15
Black	5	7	2	5
Other	3	2	5	3
Not reported	4	3	5	4
<u>Generational status in U.S.</u>				
First generation	18	20	16	18
Second generation	22	22	19	25
Third or more generation	55	54	62	50
Not reported	5	4	3	7
<u>Marital status</u>				
Married	46	43	57	40
Separate/divorced/widowed	15	15	17	14
Single/never married	27	28	19	32
Not married/live together	9	10	5	11
Not reported	3	4	2	3
<u>Annual household income</u>				
Less than \$40,000	20	20	17	21
\$40,000-\$99,999	30	28	34	31
\$100,000-\$199,999	27	28	28	26
\$200,000 or more	16	17	16	15
Not reported	7	7	5	7
<u>Educational attainment</u>				
High school graduate or less	16	16	15	17
Some college/trade school	35	30	44	34
College graduate (B.A.)	29	31	27	29
Post graduate degree	16	19	13	16
Not reported	4	4	1	4
<u>Tenure</u>				
Homeowner	47	45	60	41
Renter/other	49	52	37	54
Not reported	4	3	3	5

² Source: Berkeley IGS Poll of 8,141 California registered voters completed October 20-27, 2025.

³ Registered voter estimates by race are among white, Asian American, Black or other voters who are non-Hispanic.

Regional and political characteristics of the state's registered voters

One in four of the state's registered voters reside in Los Angeles County (25%), while 17% live along the state's South Coast that include Orange and San Diego counties. Another 12% live in the Inland Empire, east of Los Angeles.

About one in five (21%) live in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, while 17% live in the middle stretch of inland counties comprising the state's Central Valley. Another 7% live along the Central Coast, south of the Bay Area but north of Los Angeles County, while just 2% reside in the relatively large but unpopulated counties comprising the North Coast/Sierras region.

When California registered voters are asked to identify their political ideology, four in ten voters (40%) describe themselves as liberal in politics, 27% as conservative, while another 30% consider themselves politically moderate.

When the voting records of the state's registered voters are examined, just over four in ten (43%) can be considered "regular voters," by having voted in at least five of the last seven statewide general or special elections held since 2020. Another 17% can be termed "intermittent voters," whose voting records show that they voted in 3 or 4 of these elections, while 26% are more "infrequent voters," having voted in just 1 or 2 of the seven statewide general or special elections since 2020. About one in seven (14%) have not voted in any statewide election over this period.

More than twice as many of the state's registered Democrats (54%) reside in either Los Angeles County or the San Francisco Bay Area, while only about a quarter (24%) live in the inland regions of the Central Valley or Inland Empire. By contrast, more of the state's Republican registrants reside in the state's inland counties than in Los Angeles County or the Bay Area.

A strong correlate to a voter's party registration is their political ideology. Two-thirds of the state's registered Democrats (65%) describe themselves as liberal in politics, while just 6% are conservative, while among Republicans the reverse is true, with 70% identifying as political conservatives, while just 4% say they are liberals.

A somewhat larger proportion of registered Republicans (51%) than Democrats (44%) are regular voters, although just 33% of voters not affiliated with either major political party are regular voters.

Table 3b				
Regional and political characteristics of California's current registered voter population overall and by party				
	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No party preference /other %
Total registered voters	100	45	25	30
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	25	29	19	24
San Diego County	9	8	10	10
Orange County	8	6	11	8
Inland Empire	12	10	15	12
Central Coast	7	7	6	6
Central Valley	17	14	24	17
San Francisco Bay Area	21	25	12	21
North Coast/Sierras	2	1	3	2
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly liberal	21	36	1	16
Somewhat liberal	19	29	3	17
Moderate	30	26	24	42
Somewhat conservative	15	4	34	16
Strongly conservative	12	2	36	5
Not reported	3	3	2	4
<u>Voting frequency</u> ⁴				
Regular voter	43	44	51	33
Intermittent voter	17	17	17	16
Infrequent voter	26	25	23	31
Non-voter	14	14	9	20

Source: Berkeley IGS Poll of 8,141 California registered voters completed October 20-27, 2025.

⁴ "Regular voters" defined as registered voters whose voting record indicates that they voted in at least 5 of the last 7 statewide elections since 2020, "intermittent voters" are those who have voted in 3 or 4 of these elections, "infrequent voters" are those who voted in 1 or 2, while "non-voters" are those who have not voted in any of these elections

About the Berkeley IGS Poll's late-October 2025 survey

Estimates of the characteristics of registered voters in California in this report are based on the results from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was completed online in English and Spanish October 20-27, 2025, among 8,141 California registered voters, and included an unweighted sample of 4,243 registered Democrats, 1,924 registered Republicans and 1,974 No Party Preference or other registrants. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the poll's media partner, the *Los Angeles Times*.

Data collection for the poll was completed by distributing email and text message invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Each email or text invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminders were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further invitations.

Samples of the state's registered voters were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California, and were derived from information contained on

state and local voter registration rolls, which are public documents. The statewide sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, the personally identifiable information of each voter that was listed on their voting record was purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, after the completion of data collection, post-stratification weights were applied to the data file to align the overall sample to population characteristics of registered voters both statewide and within major regions of the state.

The sampling error associated with the survey results is difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings from the overall registered voter sample have an approximate sampling error of ± 1.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level and the approximate sampling error applicable to the characteristics of state's registered Democrats is ± 2 percentage points, while findings pertaining to the state registered Republicans and to No Party Preference/other registrants are subject to an approximate sampling ± 3 percentage points.

About the Institute of Governmental Studies

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication and public service. A component of the University of California system's flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS's co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Professor G. Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. Veteran pollster Mark DiCamillo serves as director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll*. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.