

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

Field Research Corporation

601 California Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94108-2814
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com
www.field.com/fieldpollonline

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ABOUT 9.5 MILLION CALIFORNIANS EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN TODAY'S ELECTION. MORE THAN HALF WILL BE VOTING BY MAIL, A FIRST FOR A GENERAL ELECTION IN THIS STATE.

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

For the first time in California's history more than one-half of the votes cast in today's statewide general election will be by mail rather than at the precincts.

The *Field Poll* estimates that after all ballots are counted, approximately 9.5 million Californians will vote. Of that number about 5.2 million or 55% will be by mail using an absentee ballot. Those voting in person at the precincts will account for the other 4.3 million representing 45% of the total.

A turnout of 9.5 million would be a small increase of about six hundred thousand voters over the vote count in 2006, the last gubernatorial election. However, at that time there were about 1.5 million fewer registered voters in the state.

Historically, many more citizens vote in presidential election years than in non-presidential elections. For example, if today's total count is around 9.5 million it would be represent a decline of more than 4 million voters than the 13.7 million who participated in the 2008 presidential contest.

Expected turnout in today's election

There are currently about 23.4 million citizen adults in California eligible to register and vote. Of these, 17.3 million or 73.7% are actually on the registration rolls.

A turnout of 9.5 million voters would represent 55% of the state's registered voters and 40.6% of all citizen-eligible adults.

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Table 1
Estimates of California population, eligible to vote and registration totals,
and turnout and participation rates in statewide general elections –
1960 – 2010 (figures in thousands)

November General Elections	Population		Registration		Voting		
	Total	Eligible to Vote ¹	Number Registered	Percent of Citizen- Eligibles	Number Voting	Percent of Registration	Percent of Citizen- Eligibles ("Participation rate")
2010	38,648	23,454	17,286	73.7	9,515 ³	55.0 ³	40.6 ³
2008 ^P	38,049	23,209	17,304	74.6	13,743	79.4	59.2
2006	37,172	22,652	15,837	69.9	8,899	56.2	39.3
2005 ^{SE}	36,810	22,488	15,891	70.7	7,969	50.1	35.4
2004 ^P	35,394	22,075	16,557	75.0	12,590	76.0	57.0
2003 ^{SE}	35,591	21,833	15,381	70.5	9,413	61.2	43.1
2002	35,301	21,466	15,303	71.3	7,739	50.6	36.1
2000 ^P	34,336	21,461	15,707	73.2	11,143	70.9	57.9
1998	33,252	20,806	14,969	71.9	8,618	57.6	41.4
1996 ^P	32,344	19,527	15,602	80.2	10,260	65.6	52.5
1994	32,000	18,496 ⁴	14,724	77.7	8,901	60.5	47.0
1992 ^P	31,000	20,864	15,101	72.6	11,374	75.3	54.5
1990	29,800	19,245	13,478	70.0	7,899	58.6	41.0
1988 ^P	28,592	19,052	14,005	73.5	10,200	72.8	53.5
1986	26,444	17,561	12,834	73.1	7,617	59.4	43.4
1984 ^P	25,550	16,582	13,074	78.8	9,796	74.9	59.1
1982	24,500	15,984	11,559	72.3	8,064	69.8	50.4
1980 ^P	23,669	15,384	11,362	73.9	8,775	77.2	57.0
1978	22,314	14,781	10,130	68.5	7,132	70.4	48.2
1976 ^P	21,550	14,196	9,980	70.3	8,137	81.5	57.3
1974	20,915	13,703	9,928	72.5	6,395	64.1	46.5
1972 ^P	20,447	13,322 ²	10,466	78.6	8,596	82.1	64.5
1970	19,971	12,182	8,706	71.5	6,633	76.2	54.4
1968 ^P	19,143	11,813	8,588	72.7	7,364	85.7	62.3
1966	18,550	11,448	8,341	72.9	6,606	79.2	57.7
1964 ^P	17,708	10,959	8,184	74.7	7,233	88.4	66.0
1962	16,579	10,305	7,531	73.1	5,930	78.7	57.5
1960 ^P	15,567	9,587	7,465	77.9	6,593	88.3	68.8

NOTE: ¹ Eligible voting population estimates are based on projections of the U.S. Census made by the California Department of Finance.

² Prior to 1972, minimum voting age was 21. Since 1972, it has been 18.

³ Field Poll estimates.

⁴ The computation of the number of citizen-eligibles by the California Department of Finance in 1994 was done using a different methodology than in previous years. Thus, the apparent decline in citizen-eligibles may be a result of this change in methodology rather than a real decline in the citizen-eligible population.

^P Indicates Presidential election year, all others are gubernatorial election years.

^{SE} Indicates Special Election

Precinct vs. mail ballot voting

Over the past twenty years, each regularly scheduled gubernatorial election has shown a steady uninterrupted increase in mail balloting. For example, 1990 mail voting accounted for only 18.4% of the total. If today’s estimate of mail ballots reaches 55%, it would mean a tripling of that form of voting in just two decades.

Table 2a
Precinct and Absentee Ballot Voting
in California General Elections since 1978

	Precinct voters		Absentee/mail voters		Total votes cast
2010	4,282,000*	(45.4%)	5,233,000*	(55.0%)	9,515,000*
2008 ^(P)	8,020,712	(58.4%)	5,722,465	(41.6%)	13,743,124
2006	5,202,119	(58.5%)	3,696,940	(41.5%)	8,899,059
2005 ^(SE)	4,785,143	(60.0%)	3,183,614	(40.0%)	7,968,757
2004 ^(P)	8,484,504	(67.4%)	4,105,179	(32.6%)	12,589,683
2003 ^(SE)	6,637,592	(70.5%)	2,775,785	(29.5%)	9,413,377
2002	5,642,727	(72.9%)	2,096,094	(27.1%)	7,738,821
2000 ^(P)	8,403,688	(75.4%)	2,739,155	(24.6%)	11,142,843
1998	6,486,187	(75.3%)	2,131,462	(24.7%)	8,617,649
1996 ^(P)	8,185,425	(79.8%)	2,078,065	(20.2%)	10,263,490
1994	6,937,749	(78.0%)	1,962,844	(22.0%)	8,900,593
1992 ^(P)	9,424,005	(82.8%)	1,950,179	(17.2%)	11,374,184
1990	6,446,992	(81.6%)	1,452,139	(18.4%)	7,888,131
1988 ^(P)	8,759,686	(85.9%)	1,434,853	(14.1%)	10,194,539
1986	6,931,802	(91.0%)	685,340	(9.0%)	7,617,142
1984 ^(P)	8,882,801	(90.7%)	913,574	(9.3%)	9,796,375
1982	7,539,128	(93.5%)	525,186	(6.5%)	8,064,314
1980 ^(P)	8,226,382	(93.7%)	549,077	(6.3%)	8,775,459
1978	6,817,952	(95.6%)	314,258	(4.4%)	7,132,210
1976 ^(P)	7,770,508	(95.5%)	366,694	(4.5%)	8,137,202

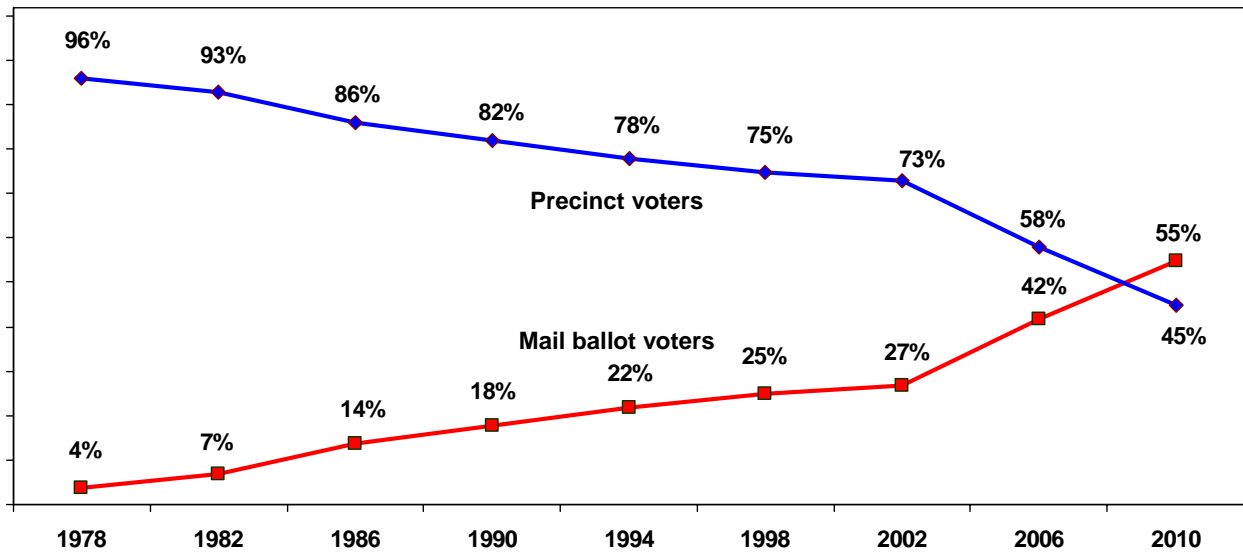
(P) indicates Presidential election, all others are gubernatorial elections

(SE) special election

** Field Poll estimates*

All other figures are from the California Secretary of State.

Table 2b
Trend of precinct and early or mail ballot voting in California gubernatorial elections (1978 – present)



Note: 2010 figures are Field Poll estimates. All other percentages are official estimates provided by the California Secretary of State.

Comparing characteristics of all registered voters to likely voters in this year's election

Last week, Secretary of State Debra Bowen reported that there are 17.3 million Californians currently on the official voter rolls. Of these, 44.1% are registered with the Democratic Party and 31.0% with the Republican Party. Another 4.6% of voters are registered with a minor party, while those classified as decline-to-state or non-partisan account for the remaining 20.3%, a record high for this group.

In its final pre-election survey completed last week, *The Field Poll* found that about 44% of likely voters in today's election will be Democrats and 39% Republican and 17% will be non-partisans or registered with a minor party. Thus, the Poll is forecasting a considerably higher voter turnout among this state's Republican registrants, which if borne out would narrow the Democrat's overall thirteen-point registration advantage in this state to just five points in this year's gubernatorial election.

There are other differences between the state's overall registered voter population and those who are likely to participate in today's election.

- Likely voters will be significantly older than the overall registered voter pool. For example, greater than six in ten likely voters (62%) are expected to be age 50 or older, and just 38% will be under age 50. Among all registered voters, these two groups split 51% age 50 or older and 49% under age 50.

- Likely voters will include a larger proportion of white non-Hispanic voters (71%) than are present in the overall registered voter population (64%). Ethnic voters, who comprise 36% of all registered voters in California, will likely comprise just 29% of voters in today’s election.
- A slightly larger proportion of voters in today’s election will be college graduates (52%) than are found in the overall registered voter pool (47%).

Table 3
Differences between California’s overall registered voter population and likely voters in the 2010 general election

	Total registered voters	Likely voters
<u>Party</u>		
Democrat	44%	44%
Republican	31	39
Non-partisan/other	25	17
<u>Region</u>		
Los Angeles County	26%	24%
Other Southern California	32	32
San Francisco Bay Area	21	22
Central Valley	16	17
Other Northern California	5	5
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	47%	49%
Female	53	51
<u>Age</u>		
18 – 49	51%	38%
50 – 64	27	35
65 or older	22	27
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>		
White non-Hispanic	64%	71%
Latino	22	16
African-American	6	5
Asian/other	8	8
<u>Education</u>		
High school or less	22%	18%
Some college/trade school	31	30
College graduate	25	27
Post-graduate work	22	25

Source: Party registration and regional percentages of registered voters come from the California Secretary of State. All other percentages are Field Poll estimates based on its late-October 2010 survey.

Differences between mail ballot and precinct voters

Not too long ago, there were big partisan differences between the characteristics of Californians voting by mail from those who vote at their local precincts, with proportionately more Republicans than Democrats utilizing mail ballots. That difference has been narrowing in recent elections.

In today's election, *Field Poll* indicates that there will be virtually no difference in the partisan composition of mail ballot and precinct voters.

Other regional and demographic differences between the two types of voters remain. For example, significantly fewer of the state's mail ballot voters live in Los Angeles County, while they account for a larger share of the state's precinct voters.

Among women, 55% are likely to vote by mail and 45% will vote at their precinct. The pattern is reversed with men -- 45% will be voting by mail and 55% at their local precinct.

Mail ballot voters continue to be a somewhat older population than precinct voters. About one-third (32%) of all mail ballot voters will be cast by those age 65 or older. That age group represents 21% of the precinct voters.

A somewhat larger proportion of mail ballot voters than precinct voters will include white non-Hispanics. Among Latinos the pattern is reversed, with proportionately fewer voting by mail and more at the local precinct.

Table 4
Differences between mail ballot voters and precinct voters
in California's 2010 general election

	Mail ballot voters	Precinct voters
<u>Region</u>		
Los Angeles County	15%	35%
Other Southern California	34	30
San Francisco Bay Area	27	15
Central Valley	16	18
Other Northern California	8	2
<u>Party</u>		
Democrat	45%	43%
Republican	40	38
Non-partisan/other	15	19
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	45%	55%
Female	55	45
<u>Age</u>		
18 – 49	34%	44%
50 – 64	33	37
65 or older	32	21
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>		
White non-Hispanic	74%	67%
Latino	13	20
African-American	4	6
Asian/other	9	7
<u>Education</u>		
High School or less	18%	19%
Some college/trade school	29	31
College graduate	27	26
Post-graduate work	26	24

Source: Field Poll estimates from its late-October 2010 survey of likely voters.