

THE FIELD POLL

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

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Release #2220

**WITH FIFTH STATEWIDE ELECTION IN
FIVE YEARS, DECLINE SEEN IN MID-
TERM VOTER PARTICIPATION.
ABSENTEE VOTING CLIMBS TO 45%.**

Release Date: **Tuesday, November 7, 2006**

IMPORTANT: Contract for this service is subject
to revocation if publication or broadcast takes
place before release date. (ISSN 0195-4520)

by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

With signs of citizen involvement declining and perhaps voter fatigue setting in, for the fifth time in five years Californians are being asked to participate in another statewide general election.

In the past five years Californians have been asked to vote in the 2002 gubernatorial election, a statewide recall election in 2003, a presidential election in 2004, and a special election in 2005. This year voters will be deciding elections for governor, other state constitutional offices, the U.S. Senate, 53 house seats, numerous state senate and assembly seats, as well as a wide array of state ballot propositions.

The number of citizens eligible to register is now at an all time high – 22.6 million. However, *The Field Poll* estimates that the number of Californians who will be marking a ballot in today's election will only include about 8.16 million of those eligible adults. This number would represent 51.5% of the state's total registered voters and 36.0% of its citizen-eligibles exercising the franchise.

While this would be slightly higher than the 50.6% of registered voters who cast ballots in the last gubernatorial election in 2002, it is slightly lower than the 36.1% of citizen-eligibles participating in the last gubernatorial election and would represent a continuation of a long-term decline in voting participation in California mid-term elections over the past forty years.

California has experienced an almost uninterrupted increase in its population and number of citizens eligible to vote over this period. Yet the proportion of citizens who choose to register has not kept pace. For example, in the 1994 mid-term elections there were 18.5 million adult citizens eligible to register, of whom 14.7 million, or 77%, did so. Now, while the number of citizen-eligible to vote has grown by more than 4 million, the number of registered voters in the state has increased only a little more than 1 million to 15.8 million, or just 69.9% of all those eligible.

Table 1
Estimates of California population, eligible to vote and registration totals,
and turnout and participation rates in statewide general elections –
1960 – 2006 (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")
2006	37,172	22,652	15,837	69.9	8,162 ³	51.5 ³	36.0 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.

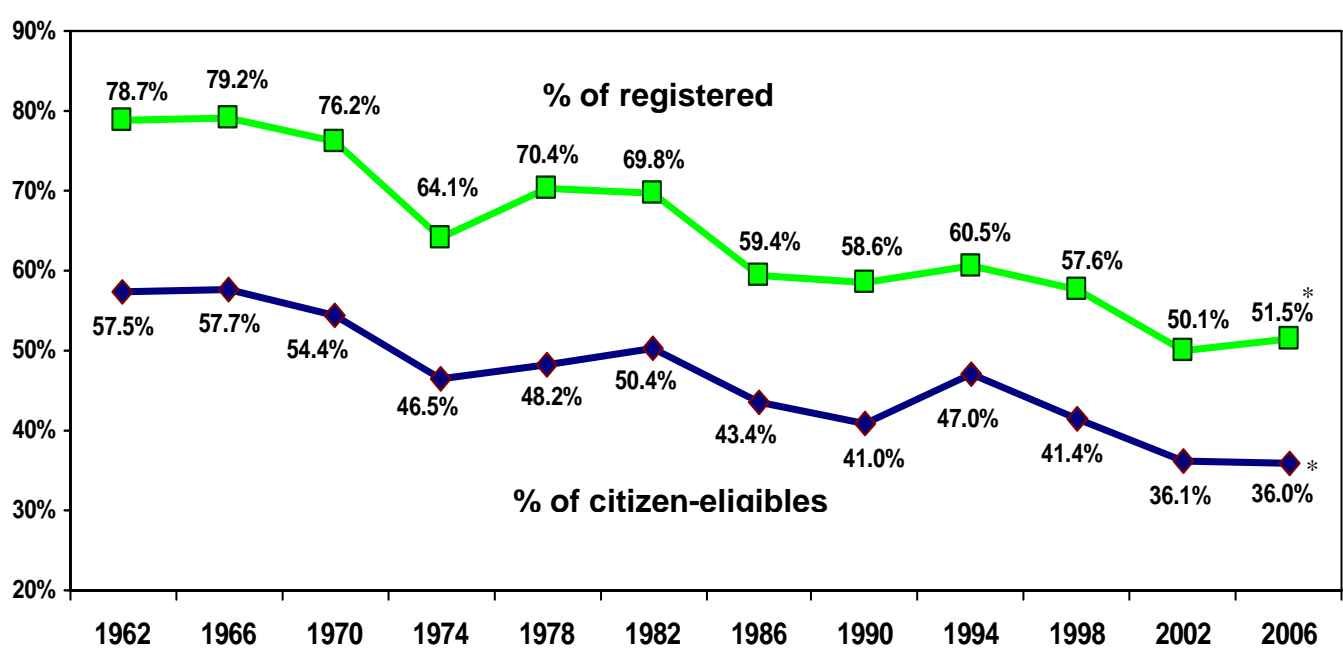
³ Field Poll estimates.

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

Table 1b
Voting participation in mid-term elections in California since 1962



* Field Poll estimates.

Absentee voting accounts for 45% of ballots cast

In its final round of pre-election polling, *The Field Poll* found that 45% of likely voters said they intended to vote or already had voted by means of an absentee ballot, while 55% intended to cast their vote at their local precinct. If these estimates are borne out, this would represent another new record in the proportion of absentee ballot voting in a statewide general election.

Since 1978, when state laws were changed to allow any voter the right to vote by absentee ballot for any reason, each election has seen a steady increase in the rate of absentee voting. In 1978 the proportion of all voters choosing to vote using an absentee ballot was just 4.4%. By 1990 the proportion of voters using absentee ballots had grown to 18.1%. With each succeeding statewide election the percentage has risen. In the 2002 gubernatorial election 27.1% of voters voted using this method. In the 2004 presidential election the proportion was 32.6%, while in last year's special election 40.0% voted absentee.

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

	Precinct voters		Absentee/mail voters		Total votes cast
2006	4,489,100*	(55.0%)	3,672,900*	(45.0%)	8,162,000*
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

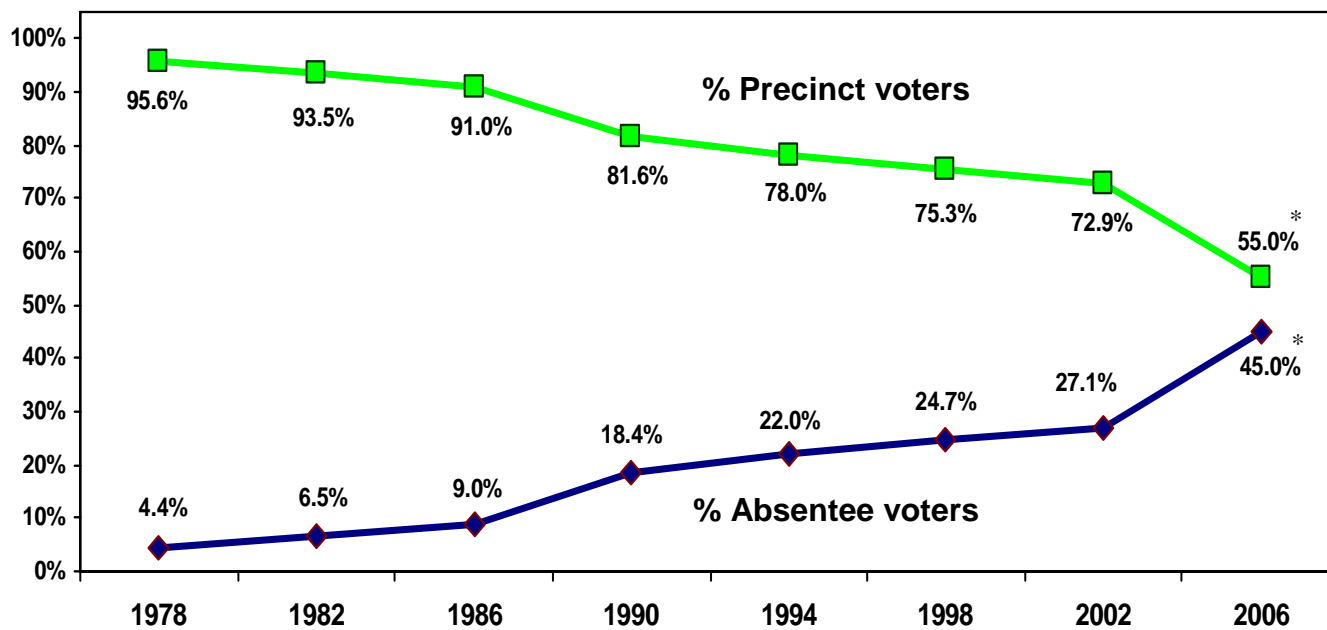
(P) indicates Presidential election, all others are gubernatorial elections

(SE) special election

** Field Poll estimates*

All other figures are from the California Secretary of State.

Table 2b
Comparing precinct and absentee voting in California
mid-term elections since 1976



* Field Poll estimates

Absentee voters differ from precinct voters

The final pre-election *Field Poll* also examined the political and demographic characteristics of voters intending to vote by means of absentee ballots to precinct voters. The results show that absentee voters differ in many ways from those voting at their local precinct polling places. For example...

Republicans will outnumber Democrats among absentee voters 45% to 41%, while among precinct voters Democrats will account for 49% of all ballots cast and Republicans just 34%.

Among absentee voters nearly twice as many voters will be conservatives (39%) as liberals (20%). By contrast, the political ideology of precinct voters will be in near parity, with 31% identifying as conservative and 30% liberal.

Greater than three in four absentee ballot voters will be white non-Hispanics (78%), 12% will be Latino, 4% black and 6% Asian or other race. Precinct voters, on the other hand, will include larger proportions of ethnic voters, with 18% Latino, 8% black and 5% Asian or other, and just 69% being white non-Hispanics.

Absentee voters will be significantly older than precinct voters. About two in three absentee voters (65%) will be age 50 or older, while only about half of precinct voters (53%) will be in this age category.

Just one in four absentee voters (24%) will be parents of children under age 18. Among precinct voters 34% will be.

Table 3
A Comparison of the Demographic Differences
Between Likely Precinct and Absentee Ballot Voters
in the 2006 Gubernatorial Election in California

	Total likely voters	Precinct voters	Absentee voters
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrat	45%	49%	41%
Republican	39	34	45
Other	16	17	14
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	35%	31%	39%
Middle-of-the-road	40	39	41
Liberal	25	30	20
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	48%	49%	47%
Female	52	51	53
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	73%	69%	78%
Latino	15	18	12
Black/African-American	6	8	4
Asian/other	6	5	6
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	9%	11%	7%
30-39	13	16	10
40-49	19	20	18
50-59	24	24	23
60 or older	35	29	42
<u>Marital status</u>			
Married	65%	66%	58%
Living together	5	4	7
Separated/divorced/widowed	16	14	23
Single/never married	14	16	12
<u>Parent of child under 18</u>			
Yes	30%	34%	24%
No	70	66	76
<u>Union affiliation</u>			
Union household	24%	23%	26%
Non-union	76	77	74
<u>Education</u>			
High school or less	18%	17%	18%
Some college/trade school	33	31	35
College graduate	25	28	23
Post-graduate work	24	24	24
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	42%	40%	45%
Catholic	24	24	24
Other	16	21	19
No preference	18	15	12
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	26%	24%	28%
No	74	76	72

Source: The Field Poll conducted October 23-30 among a random sample of 795 Californians likely to vote in the November general election.