

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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A RECORD TURNOUT OF 8.9 MILLION VOTERS EXPECTED FOR TODAY'S PRIMARY ELECTION.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

After all the votes have been counted, which for this election may take several days if not weeks, *The Field Poll* estimates that about 8.9 million Californians will have cast ballots in today's election.

This number of voters is the largest ever for a presidential primary election in California and should exceed the turnout of any of the other twenty-three states holding a primary election or caucus today.

Voter interest in this year's presidential nomination races is at a historical high. This is the first time since 1952 where no incumbent president or vice president is in the running, and this situation has brought forth an unusually large field of candidates in both parties. The race has been underway for more than a year and it has featured extensive free media coverage, as well as huge sums of campaign money spent by the candidates and other organizations.

In previous presidential election years, voting in this state occurred late in the national primary election schedule – either in March or June. As a result, voter interest here was diminished because it was usually the case that the nomination contests had effectively been already settled before Californians had their chance to vote.

Now, California with its largest-in-the-nation lode of convention delegates has become the focus of interest in the free media, as well as in paid campaign efforts.

Another factor contributing to this record turnout, apart from the state's population increase, is the ease and flexibility of voting by mail. This option is being used by an ever-growing number of California voters. Another factor adding to the increase in this year's primary election voting is that non-partisans can be allowed to vote in the Democratic primary, if they choose.

Turn-out trends

According to official state estimates, there are almost 23 million citizen-eligible adults living in California, of whom about 15.7 million are currently on the voter registration rolls. *The Field Poll's* estimate of 8.9 million voters turning out in the February 5 primary election would represent about 56.6% of all registered voters and 38.8% of all citizen-eligible adults.

The largest number voting in a previous presidential primary in California occurred in 2000, when almost 7.9 million cast ballots. That number declined sharply in the 2004 presidential primary election, when not quite 6.7 million Californians voted.

Table 1
Estimates of California population, eligible to vote and registration totals, and turnout and participation rates in statewide primary elections from 1946 to 2008 (figures in thousands)

Primary Elections	Population		Registration		Voting		
	Total ¹	Citizen-Eligible Adults ²	Official Registration Total	Percent of Citizen-Eligibles	Number Voting	Percent of Official Registration	Percent of Citizen-Eligibles ("Participation rate")
2008 ^P	37,771	22,948	15,713	68.5%	8,900*	56.6%*	38.8%*
2006	37,172	22,543	15,668	69.5	5,269	33.6	23.4
2004 ^P	35,934	21,843	15,091	69.1	6,684	44.3	30.5
2002	35,802	21,507	15,281	71.1	5,286	34.6	24.6
2000 ^P	34,336	21,221	14,632	69.3	7,883	53.9	37.2
1998	33,230	20,653	14,606	70.7	6,207	42.5	30.1
1996 ^P	32,344	19,326	14,523	75.2	6,082	41.9	31.5
1994	31,961	18,946	14,171	74.8	4,967	35.0	26.2
1992 ^P	30,500	19,180	13,569	70.8	6,440	47.5	33.6
1990	29,600	19,133	12,981	70.2	5,387	41.5	29.1
1988 ^P	28,390	18,917	12,537	70.3	6,037	48.2	33.9
1986	26,334	17,357	12,207	71.2	4,938	40.5	28.8
1984 ^P	25,550	16,457	11,530	70.1	5,609	48.6	34.1
1982	24,500	15,859	11,087	69.9	5,846	52.7	36.9
1980 ^P	23,669	15,258	10,695	70.1	6,774	63.3	44.4
1978	22,314	14,659	9,935	67.8	6,843	68.9	46.7
1976 ^P	21,550	14,093	8,711	61.8	6,324	72.6	44.9
1974	20,915	13,624	9,499	69.7	5,128	54.0	37.6
1972 ^P	20,447	13,084	9,105	69.6	6,460	71.0	49.4
1970	19,971	12,105	8,053	66.5	5,012	62.2	41.4
1968 ^P	19,143	11,737	7,926	67.5	5,723	72.2	48.8
1966	18,550	11,346	7,855	69.2	5,080	64.7	44.8
1964 ^P	17,708	10,823	7,123	65.8	5,124	71.9	47.3
1962	16,579	10,155	7,052	69.4	4,480	63.5	44.1
1960 ^P	15,567	9,446	6,375	67.5	4,004	62.8	42.4
1958	14,284	8,763	6,280	71.7	4,125	65.7	47.1
1956 ^P	13,431	8,074	5,489	68.0	3,657	66.6	45.3
1954	12,544	7,454	5,665	76.0	3,185	56.2	42.7
1952 ^P	11,682	6,913	5,384	77.9	3,652	67.8	52.8
1950	10,586	6,385	4,925	77.1	3,140	63.8	49.2
1948 ^P	9,900	6,042	4,623	76.5	2,539	54.8	42.0
1946	9,150	5,722	4,114	71.9	2,089	50.8	36.5

Note: 1 Population estimates from the California Department of Finance
 2 Eligible voting population estimates and official registration totals from the California Secretary of State's office.
 * Field Poll estimates. All other voting statistics from the California Secretary of State.
 P Indicates Presidential election year.

Mail vs. precinct voting

Voting by mail has become increasingly popular in California and in other states. Not too long ago the proportion of residents opting to vote by mail was in single digits. In both presidential and off-year elections, there has been a steady increase in the proportion and numbers of Californians voting by mail.

The Field Poll estimates that of the 8.9 million total votes cast, mail ballots will account for 4.1 million, the largest number for any previous California primary election.

Table 2
1978 – 2008 trend of voting in primary elections precinct vs. absentee ballot voting

		<u>Total votes cast</u>	<u>Precinct vote</u>		<u>Absentee votes</u>	
February	2008 ^P	8,900,000*	4,800,000*	(54%)	4,100,000*	(46%)
June	2006	5,269,142	2,797,784	(53%)	2,471,358	(47%)
March	2004 ^P	6,684,421	4,391,100	(66%)	2,293,321	(34%)
March	2002	5,286,204	3,912,409	(74%)	1,373,795	(26%)
March	2000 ^P	7,883,385	6,065,469	(77%)	1,842,891	(23%)
June	1998	6,206,618	4,639,736	(75%)	1,566,882	(25%)
March	1996 ^P	6,081,777	4,666,601	(77%)	1,415,176	(23%)
June	1994	4,966,827	3,955,264	(80%)	1,011,563	(20%)
June	1992 ^P	6,439,629	5,366,562	(83%)	1,073,067	(17%)
June	1990	5,386,537	4,577,699	(85%)	808,838	(15%)
June	1988 ^P	6,037,468	5,465,411	(91%)	572,057	(9%)
June	1986	4,937,936	4,511,803	(91%)	426,133	(9%)
June	1984 ^P	5,609,063	5,190,954	(93%)	418,109	(7%)
June	1982	5,846,026	5,519,813	(94%)	326,213	(6%)
June	1980 ^P	6,774,184	6,430,309	(95%)	343,875	(5%)
June	1978	6,843,001	6,517,483	(95%)	325,518	(5%)

^P Indicates Presidential election year

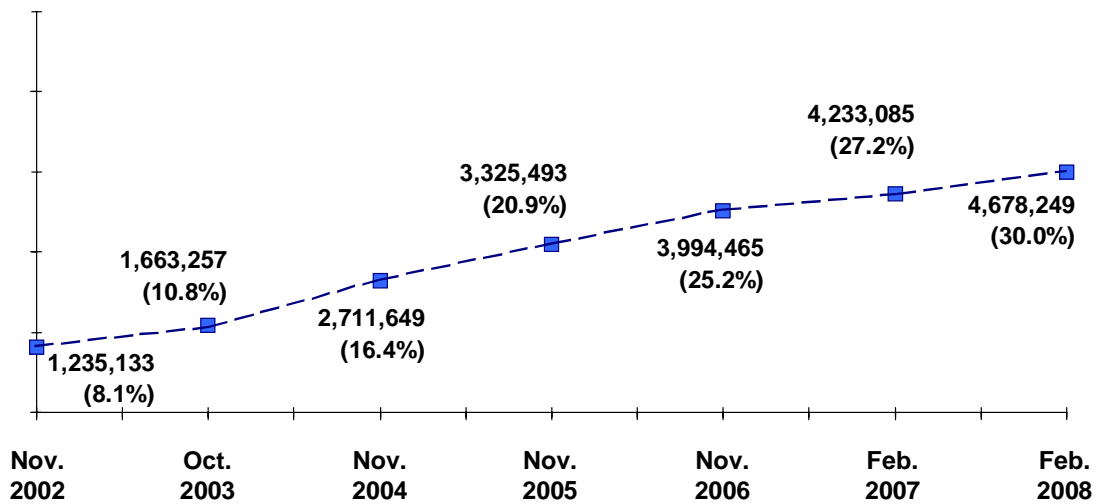
* Field Poll estimates. All other figures from the California Secretary of State.

Growing number of permanent mail ballot voters

One of the reasons behind the growing number of votes cast by mail in recent elections relates to the recent rapid growth in the number of registered voters who have signed up as permanent mail ballot registrants. Since this alternative first became available to voters in 2001, nearly 4.7 million Californians now automatically receive their election ballots sent to them by mail before each election.

The Field Poll estimates that about 3.5 million of the permanent mail ballot registrants will return a ballot in this year's primary. They will be joined by another 600,000 voters who will likely return their ballots by mail after requesting one for this specific election or because they live in a precinct or county where only mail ballot voting is allowed.

Table 3
The growth of California registered voters
who are permanent mail ballot registrants



Percentages represents proportion of the state's total registered voters in each year.

Sources: 2002-2006 figures are from the California Secretary of State, while February 2007 figures are from Voter Contact Service's California voter file.

Demographic comparisons of precinct and mail ballot voters

Of the overall 8.9 million expected to vote, approximately 45% or about 4 million are expected to be registered Democrats. Thirty-seven percent or approximately 3.3 million will likely be Republicans. Non-partisans and others should comprise 18%, approximately 1.6 million of the total. It is expected that about half of the non-partisans participating in the February 5th election will vote in the Democratic primary. Democrats will likely comprise a greater share of the precinct votes cast than will Republicans (47% vs. 34%). Each party will account for nearly equivalent shares of the mail ballots cast.

A little less than one-quarter of the vote will likely come from Los Angeles County (24%), while nearly as much will be cast in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (22%). There are likely to be big differences between the two regions, however, in their manner of voting. Los Angeles County voters will largely vote at their local voting precincts, and will likely represent one-third (34%) of all precinct votes cast statewide. By contrast, L.A. is expected to comprise just 12% of all mail ballots cast statewide.

The reverse is true for the San Francisco Bay Area, whose voters more frequently vote by mail. Bay Area voters are expected to comprise just 16% of all precinct ballots cast in California on Election Day, but will likely account for 30% of all mail ballots cast statewide.

Overall, 70% of California's primary voters are expected to be white non-Hispanics, 17% Latino, 6% Black/African-American, and 7% Asian/other. Ethnic voters will comprise a large share of precinct voters (36%) than mail ballot voters (25%), while white non-Hispanics will account for a greater share of mail ballot voters (75%) than precinct voters (64%).

There should be the approximate distribution of voters by age groups – 13% in the 18-29 age group; 15% in the 30-39 group, 20% in the 40-49 group; 30% in the 50-64 group, and 22% in the 65 or older group. Voters age 65 or older will account for a larger share of the mail ballots (28%) than of the precinct votes (16%).

	Total likely voters	Precinct voters	Absentee voters
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrat	45%	47%	44%
Republican	37	34	43
Non-partisan/Other	18	19	13
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	24%	34%	12%
Orange/San Diego	18	18	19
Other Southern California	14	13	14
Central Valley	17	15	18
San Francisco Bay Area	22	16	30
Other Northern California	5	4	7
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	47%	44%	49%
Female	53	56	51
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	70%	64%	75%
Latino	17	21	13
Black/African-American	6	7	5
Asian	7	8	7
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	13%	13%	13%
30-39	15	18	13
40-49	20	24	15
50-64	30	29	31
65 or older	22	16	28

Note: Estimates derived from the late-January 2008 Field Poll.