

California 2026 Report

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Introduction

California, the nation's most populous state, runs its elections almost entirely by mail, with every active registered voter sent a ballot and the large majority returning that ballot rather than voting in person—about nine in ten in the June 2026 primary, and 81% in the 2024 general election. The state counts more ballots, and counts them more slowly, than almost every other state, a pattern that has drawn national attention and [unsubstantiated claims of fraud](#), including following the 2026 primary.

This has prompted efforts to speed up the state's count; lawmakers enacted a bill in 2025 establishing a shorter post-election counting deadline ([Assembly Bill 5](#)) and [\\$40 million](#) to help counties process ballots faster, while a bill to build a statewide signature-curing system ([Assembly Bill 2604](#)) is currently being considered by the California Legislature. [Senate Bill 73](#) passed the Legislature in May 2026, restricting law enforcement's access to ballots and voter rolls. Finally, Californians will face [three election-related ballot measures](#) in November: Proposition 4, which would allow for public financing of state and local elections; Proposition 5, which would change how vacancies created by recalling an elected official are filled; and Proposition 39, which would institute a photo ID requirement for voting and citizen verification requirements for registering.

In November 2025, voters approved [Proposition 50](#), replacing California's congressional map with temporary lines drawn to favor Democrats. The measure was framed as a counter to Republican-led redistricting in Texas, and the U.S. Supreme Court [allowed the new map](#) to be used for the 2026 cycle. It was designed to net Democrats as many as five House seats. In the [40th District](#), where Republican incumbent Ken Calvert, whose own district was redrawn as heavily Democratic, opted to run against fellow Republican Young Kim—guaranteeing one loses.

Two other contests on the November ballot are open for reasons unrelated to the new map. Nancy Pelosi's [retirement](#) after nearly four decades opened her San Francisco seat, where two Democrats advanced from the primary. Term limits barred Governor Gavin Newsom from seeking a third term, and the open race to succeed him advanced Democrat Xavier Becerra and Republican Steve Hilton. Voters will also decide in November whether Democrats keep their two-thirds supermajorities in both chambers of the Legislature.

General Election Calendar

The dates and deadlines for the 2026 general election calendar are [set by the California Secretary of State](#).

- + Oct. 5, 2026: Deadline for county election officials to begin mailing ballots.
- + Oct. 6, 2026: Secure ballot drop-off locations open.
- + Oct. 19, 2026: Last day to register to vote in the Nov. 3, 2026 General Election.
- + Oct. 24, 2026: First vote centers open for early in-person voting in all [Voter's Choice Act counties](#).
- + Oct. 31, 2026: All in-person early voting locations open
- + Nov. 3, 2026: General election. Last day to vote in person or return a ballot by 8:00 p.m. Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Vote-by-mail ballots returned by mail must be postmarked no later than this day in order to be counted.
- + Nov. 10, 2026: [Deadline for county election officials](#) to receive mail ballots postmarked on or before Election Day. Ballots arriving after this date are not counted.

Data Availability

California provides statewide data on election results, voter registration, and turnout dating back to 1990, published by the Secretary of State. Precinct-level results are not published by the state, but compiled by the Statewide Database at UC Berkeley and by

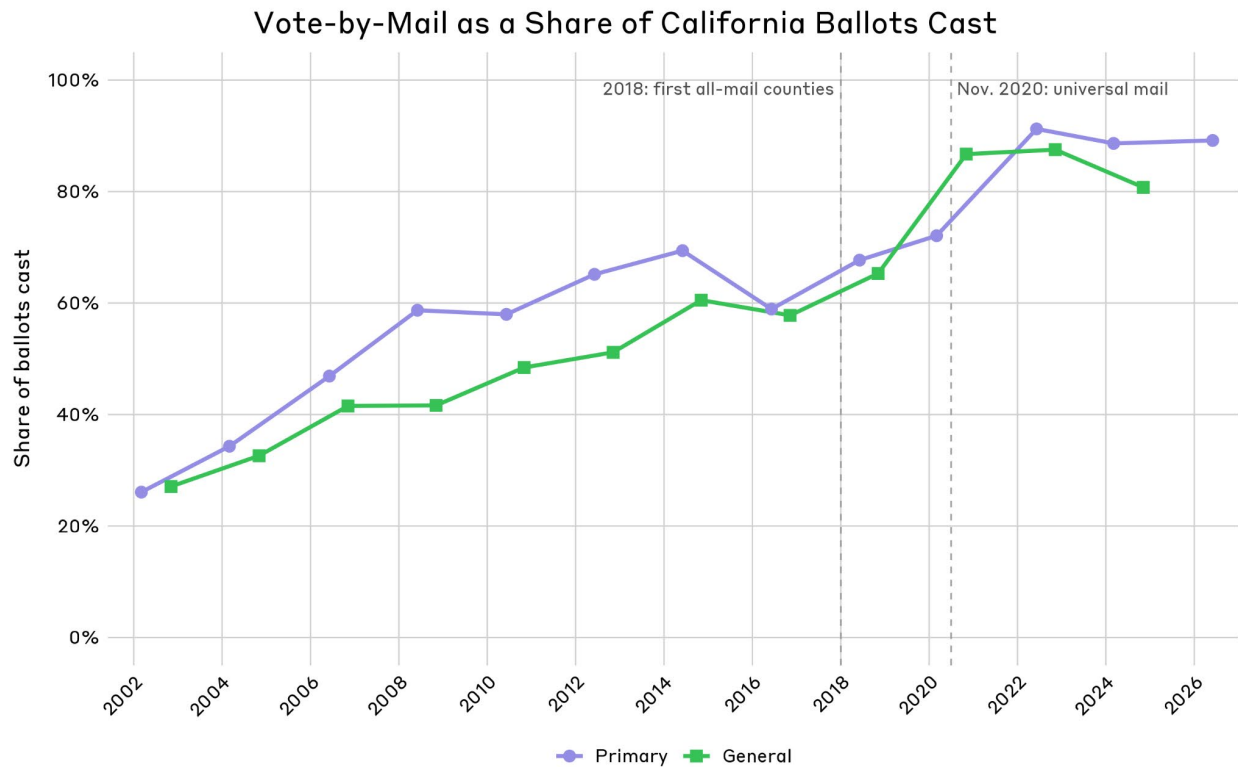
individual county election offices. Counties also publish their own precinct-level data on election results, early voting and vote-by-mail activity, voter registration, and turnout. The depth and format of available data varies significantly by county. More information on California's election data is provided in our [California Election Data Guide](#).

Election Administration Landscape

Vote Counting and Election Integrity

California counts more ballots, and counts them more slowly, than nearly any other state.¹ This has prompted criticism of the state's election administration as well as unsubstantiated claims of election fraud, most notably [by President Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson](#) after the 2026 Los Angeles mayoral primary. As a universal vote-by-mail (VBM) state, every active registered voter is mailed a ballot; as can be seen below, since the state implemented universal VBM, about nine in ten voters have chosen to cast that mailed ballot rather than voting in person.

¹ For a closer look at how election returns are counted and reported, see our [explainer](#).



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: California Secretary of State

The figure shows vote-by-mail as a share of California ballots cast in statewide primaries (purple) and generals (green), 2002–2026. The dashed gray lines mark the first election held under each rule change: the Voter's Choice Act, which put five counties on all-mail ballots in 2018, and universal vote-by-mail, in effect from the November 2020 general onward.

According to the [California Voter Foundation](#), the share of ballots counted within two days of Election Day has generally declined, from 81% in 2004 to 66% in 2024. With [roughly 23 million registered voters](#), one might conclude that the slow count is simply a function of the sheer volume of mail ballots. While this volume may explain the state's slow counting in part, it is not the whole story. Colorado, for instance, also [mails a ballot to every active registered voter](#) as California does and pre-processes ballots upon receipt (California begins processing ballots [from the day they are mailed](#), no later than 29 days before the election). Yet Colorado reports the bulk of its results [within days rather than weeks](#). Two differences between the states stand out: The first is how ballots arriving after Election Day are handled: Colorado requires ballots to be [received by 7](#)

[p.m. on Election Day](#), no matter when they were postmarked, while California counts any ballot [postmarked by Election Day and arriving up to seven days later](#). The second is the size of the pool of ballots that cannot be resolved on Election Day at all. California allows [22 days to cure](#) a signature problem, compared with [Colorado's eight](#), and it offers [conditional voter registration](#), which lets a voter register and vote through Election Day but requires officials to verify that registration before the ballot can count. Provisional and conditional-registration ballots, signature cures, and mail ballots arriving more than four days late are precisely the categories California [exempts from its new reporting deadline](#), giving counties 30 days to work through them—and by mid-June, provisional and conditional-registration ballots were more than half of everything the state had left to process.

Why so slow?

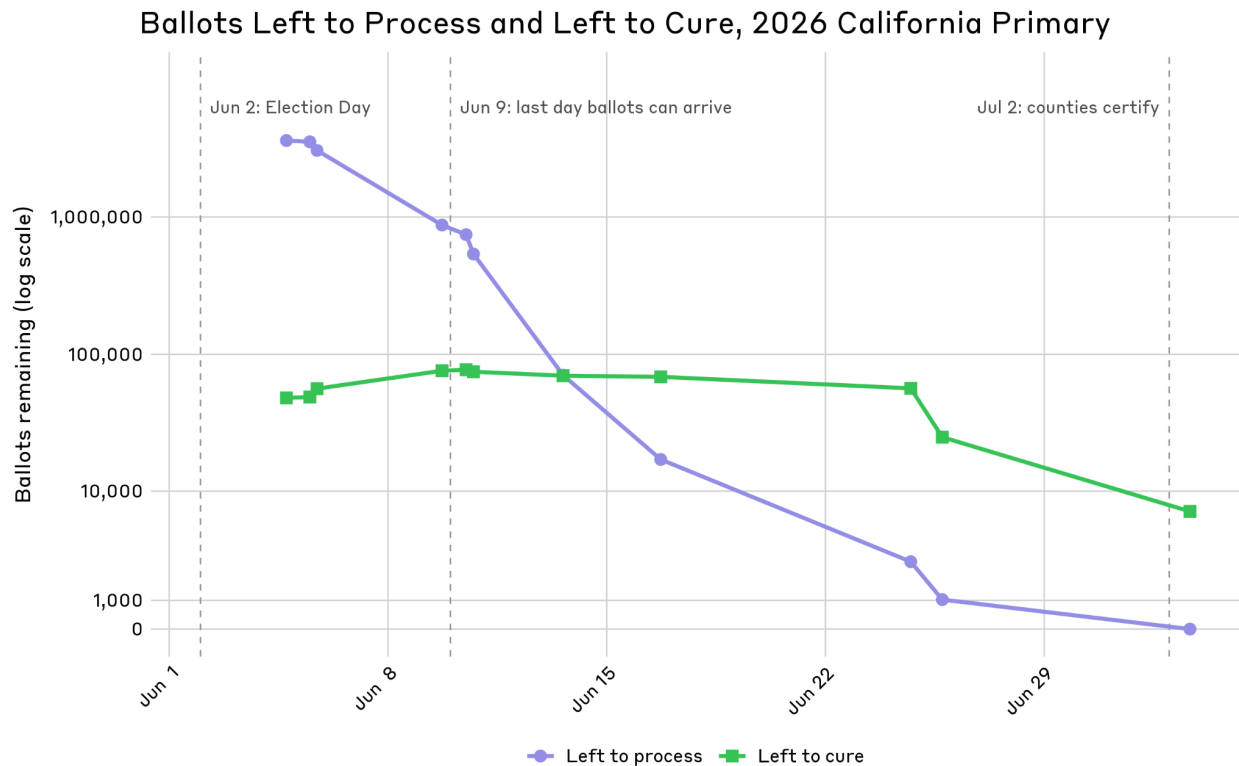
Before a mail ballot can be counted in California, officials confirm the voter's registration, verify the signature on the envelope, and check that the same person has not voted elsewhere. Election officials in the state [pre-process mail ballots](#) before Election Day, so unlike Pennsylvania or Wisconsin—where officials are barred from starting early—its slowness reflects when ballots arrive and how long the law gives officials to complete those checks, not when officials begin processing them.

Many voters [drop their ballots off on or just before Election Day](#), which pushes the bulk of the verification process after the election itself. State law also permits ballots postmarked by Election Day that arrive [up to seven days later](#) to be counted. In addition, it requires counties to notify voters whose ballots have problems, such as missing or mismatched signatures, and [allow them several weeks to fix, or “cure,” them](#) so their vote can be counted. This process [slows the reporting of the vote count](#) but is intended to ensure eligible ballots are not discarded. A voter who does not return a signature-verification statement within the 22-day window has their ballot rejected and never counted.

Counties rejected [148,241 of the 8,581,209 mail ballots returned in the June 2026 primary](#), a rate of 1.73%, up from 1.56% in each of the 2022 and 2024 primaries. Lateness accounted for 93,479 of those rejections, or 63%—surpassing signature problems, the leading reason in several prior cycles, which accounted for 43,977 mismatched and 8,335 missing signatures in the 2026 primary. [According to Kim Alexander](#), president of the California Voter Foundation, most late rejections stemmed from a postmark dated after Election Day rather than from slow delivery. The postmark can reflect the day a ballot reached a U.S. Postal Service sorting facility rather than the day a voter put it in the mail, so a ballot sent on time can still be rejected. The [Elections Performance Index](#), which counts rejected mail ballots as a share of all ballots cast rather than as a share of mail ballots returned, scores California eighth among the states for mail ballot rejection in the 2024 general election and first in 2022. Only seven states rejected a larger share in 2024, and none did in 2022—California sits near the top of that list, alongside other states where most voters cast a mail ballot.

The constraint at the end of a California canvass is not counting but ballot curing. By June 24, more than three weeks after the June 2 primary, counties had processed over 9.4 million ballots statewide but still listed roughly 57,000 ballots left to cure, compared to about 2,800 left to process. As shown in the figure below, by July 3 every ballot in the 2026 primary had been processed, yet about 7,000 remained in the curing pipeline. Secretary of State Shirley Weber [certified the results on July 10](#), five and a half weeks after Election Day, with over 9.4 million ballots cast and turnout at 34.7 percent of

eligible voters..



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: California Secretary of State

The figure shows ballots left to process (purple) and left to cure (green) statewide across the 2026 primary canvass, from counties' first required report on June 4 to the last on July 3. The dashed gray lines mark Election Day, the June 9 deadline for mail ballots to arrive, and the July 2 deadline for counties to certify. Note that the y-axis is logged.

Slow counts and claims of fraud

The slowness of the vote count became an issue in the Los Angeles mayoral primary, as the identity of the second-place finisher—and thus the second candidate to go on to the November general election—shifted as counting unfolded. At midnight on election night, with 48.8% of the vote counted, incumbent mayor Karen Bass, a Democrat, stood at 36.4% of the vote, followed by Republican Spencer Pratt at 29.1% and Democrat

Nithya Raman at 21.6%.² However, in the following days, Raman gained steadily on Pratt, while Bass's vote share remained steady. By [Saturday](#), Raman had overtaken Pratt. Once all the votes were counted, Bass had 34.3% of the vote, followed by Raman at 29.0% and Pratt at 25.5%.

This pattern in the reporting of election results was a variant of a phenomenon referred to as [the “red mirage” or “blue shift,”](#) although this particular example was unusual because it involved the choice of the second candidate to advance from a primary.

President Trump called the California primary [“rigged,”](#) citing the pace of the count and the fading Republican vote share as evidence. In the weeks following the election, the U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles [opened an investigation into vote centers](#). Despite claims that Pratt's decline in vote share compared to Raman pointed to fraud, the shift was a predictable result of which ballots were counted when, [not an indication of manipulation](#). Documented [mail ballot fraud is exceedingly rare](#)—on the order of [four cases per ten million ballots](#).

What could speed the count up

Two efforts in 2026 have taken direct aim at the pace of the count: a shorter statutory reporting deadline ([Assembly Bill 5](#)) and [\\$40 million allocated in the state budget](#) for county election offices. Neither is likely to considerably speed up the count come November—the new deadline exempts precisely the ballots that take the longest to process, and [registrars have said the money will arrive too late in the cycle to redeploy](#). See [Recent Policy and Law Changes](#) below for further discussion.

More immediate improvements in vote-counting speed may come from changes in how California counties administer elections. A [June 2026 report](#) for the California Voter

² The Los Angeles mayoral race is officially nonpartisan but candidates' party affiliations are widely known.

Foundation argues that the count can be shortened through ballot-processing practices some counties already use, without limiting voter access. It points to three bottlenecks—the crush of ballots returned on or just before Election Day, signature curing, and provisional and conditional-registration ballots—and to fixes some counties have piloted, including letting voters come in person to return and scan their mailed ballot on the spot ([see Placer County’s “Sign, Scan, and Go”](#)) and offering a secure text option to fix signature problems ([Contra Costa County’s “Text to Cure”](#)), alongside outreach encouraging earlier ballot return.

The Legislature is also moving to scale up curing itself. [Assembly Bill 2604](#), which passed the Assembly in May 2026 and is under consideration in the Senate, would direct the Secretary of State to build a secure text-message system letting voters fix a signature mismatch from their phones, make it available to every county, and publish county-level data on how often it is used. Because signature curing is the step that most often remains once counting is otherwise finished, expanding and standardizing it targets one of the count’s last bottlenecks—though, like [Assembly Bill 5](#), it would do nothing to shorten the statutory cure window itself.

Recent Policy and Law Changes

Redistricting

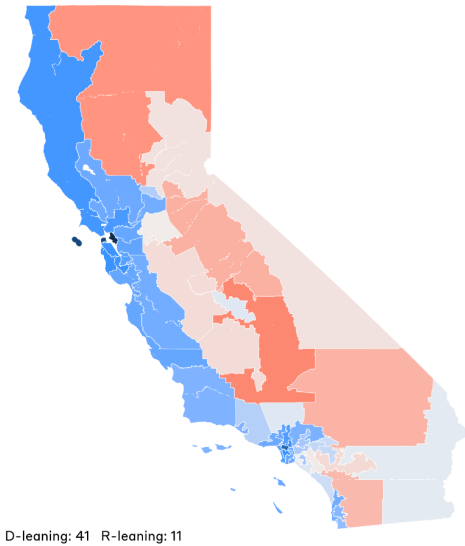
In November 2025, California voters passed [Proposition 50](#), which established new, temporary boundaries for many of California’s 52 congressional districts. Proposition 50 was placed on voters’ ballots through legislative referral in August 2025 following [public statements by Gov. Gavin Newsom](#) that the state would redraw its maps in an attempt to counter successful [redistricting efforts in Texas led by Republicans](#). Newsom’s efforts culminated in both Assembly Speaker Rivas and Senate President McGuire proposing the constitutional amendment ([Assembly Constitutional Amendment 8](#) [ACA 8]) and supporting legislation ([Assembly Bill 604](#) and [Senate Bill 280](#)) that established the

redistricting maps and authorized a November special election in 2025 for Californians to vote on ACA 8. Both chambers approved the legislative package along party lines. Since passage, Republicans have filed several lawsuits and appeals in an attempt to strike down the new maps, but the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) turned down an opportunity to review a lower court ruling allowing the new maps to be used, which means they will be used for the 2026 general election.

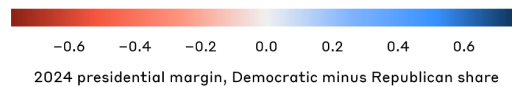
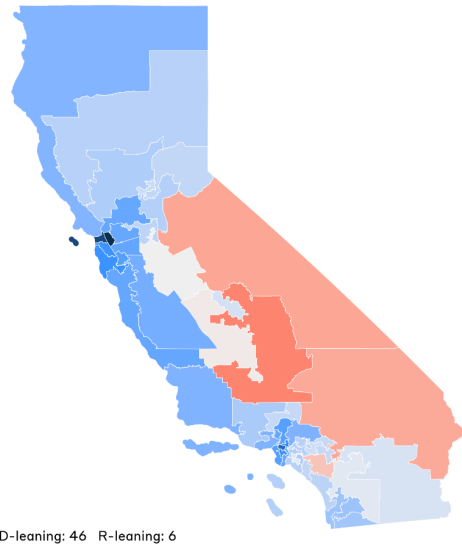
The congressional maps approved through Proposition 50 are anticipated to have significant impacts on districts in the northern and southernmost parts of the state. CA-1, which covered the northeastern part of the state including Chico and Redding, was shifted further south toward Marin County outside of San Francisco. Based on vote share from the 2024 general election, this shifted the district's Democratic lean from around 37% to 56% (see figure below). CA-41 lost a significant number of Republican-leaning voters in Riverside County and picked up more Democratic-leaning voters in Los Angeles County. Similar changes in CA-48, formerly covering voters in San Diego and the Temecula Valley, resulted in the district shifting further northeast, also gaining more Democratic leaning voters.

California Congressional Districts by 2024 Presidential Vote Lean

Before redistricting



After redistricting

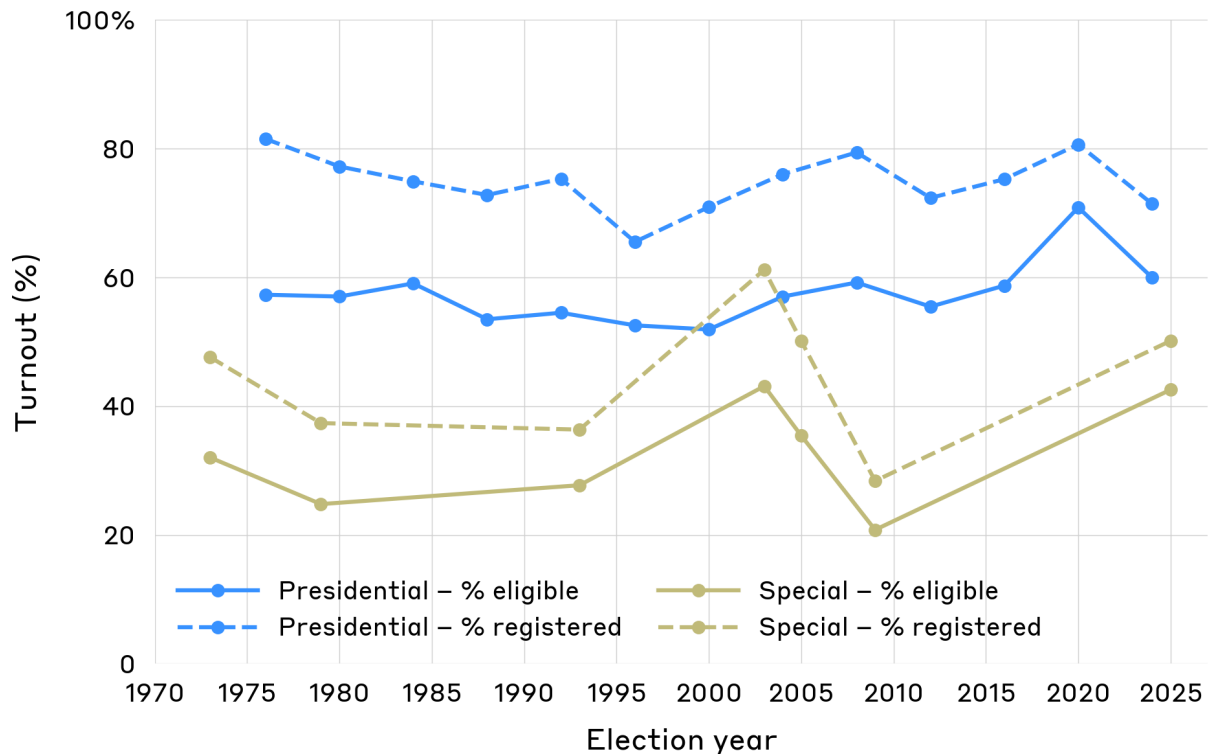


Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: Redistricting Data Hub

The map above depicts changes in California congressional district maps prior to (left) and following (right) approval of Proposition 50 in November 2025. Districts are shaded by their partisan leaning: red for Republican districts and blue for Democratic districts. The new district maps diluted heavily Democratic districts in favor of more districts with a modest Democratic lean. Shapefile and precinct-level data provided by the [Redistricting Data Hub](#).

When it was put before voters, Proposition 50 was approved by an overwhelming margin and garnered strong voter turnout compared to previous statewide special elections. Certified official results from the election show that the Proposition [received 7,453,339 votes](#), constituting 64% of the total vote share. Turnout stood at 50% of registered voters compared to 2009, the last time Californians voted in a statewide non-recall special election. These differences may reflect the ability of redistricting matters to mobilize voters. Turnout among registered voters in 2025 was second only to the 2003 statewide special election (which was the state's [first-ever gubernatorial recall](#) election).

Voter Turnout by Election Type, 1973-2025



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
 Data source: California Secretary of State, Historical Voter Registration and Participation

The figure shows turnout in California's presidential general elections (blue) and statewide special elections (gold), 1973–2025. Solid lines show turnout as a share of the eligible population; dashed lines show it as a share of registered voters. Special-election turnout has varied widely, from 21% of eligible voters in 2009 to 43% in the 2003 recall; the November 2025 special ranks second on that measure. Turnout data are from the [California Secretary of State](#).

California Voting Rights Act of 2026

In February 2026, Senator Sabrina Cervantes (D-Riverside) introduced [Senate Bill 1164](#) and [Senate Bill 1360](#) in the California legislature, collectively termed the California Voting Rights Act of 2026 (CVRA 2026). These bills seek to build upon the state's

[Voting Rights Act of 2001](#) and, according to [Cervantes](#), “bolster defenses against voter suppression and improve access to the ballot by ensuring more California voters can access election materials in their native languages.”

As proposed, [Senate Bill 1360](#) would [strengthen language assistance requirements](#) in the state by ensuring voters have access to ballots and election materials in their native language, and by simplifying how language groups can demonstrate that they qualify for in-language assistance when voting. [Senate Bill 1164](#) would institute prohibitions against discriminatory barriers to the ballot, protections against district maps targeting communities of color, and legal pathways to enforce voting rights.

At the time of the June 2 primary, both bills were still being considered in the California legislature. They were passed by the Senate in May and have made steady progress through the Assembly. If enacted, they would have significant implications for voting access among minority voters in one of the nation’s most diverse states.

Preventing Polling Place Interference and Voter Intimidation

Amid growing national concern regarding the [U.S. Department of Justice’s \(DoJ\) demands for state election records](#), the California legislature enacted [Senate Bill 73](#)—aimed at preventing potential election interference—in May 2026. The bill prohibits law enforcement from taking ballots from the custody of election officials, and prevents law enforcement officials, including federal officials, from accessing voter rolls or voting systems without a court order. Recent [events in Riverside County, California](#) fueled efforts to pass this legislation. In February 2026, Riverside County Sheriff and Republican gubernatorial candidate Chad Bianco seized over 600,000 ballots from the registrar of voters to conduct a recount and check for proof of fraudulent voting.³ The

³ The California Supreme Court [ordered](#) Bianco to stop reviewing the ballots and preserve the seized materials while the cases challenging the seizure are pending. The court has [ordered](#) a hearing on two related matters, scheduling oral argument for August 24, 2026. They will hear two related cases back-to-back: *Cervantes v. Bianco*, brought by Riverside County voters seeking return of the ballots to the

new law makes it illegal for a county registrar to surrender ballots or voting equipment to law enforcement officials such as Bianco.

[Senate Bill 73](#) also has direct implications for the voting process, as it prohibits election observers from challenging a vote-by-mail ballot on the basis that the signature on a return envelope does not match the one that appears in the voters' registration records. Under [California law](#), election officials must notify voters of an issue with the signature provided on their ballot envelope and give them an opportunity to fix the issue by the required deadline. [Senate Bill 73](#) does not change these practices, but rather prevents election observers—members of the public authorized to view ballot processing activities—from making these challenges. According [to the Secretary of State's office](#), election law did not previously expressly prohibit election observers from making these challenges. The provisions of the bill went into immediate effect upon passage, just a week before the June 2 primary.

Funding to Support Vote Counting

In an effort to speed up election results for the November election, state lawmakers allocated \$40 million of the [2026-27 state budget](#) to county election offices to support vote counting processes. Election officials in California have long drawn criticism for slow counting speeds resulting from the sheer volume of mail ballots received, ballot receipt deadlines, and the verification process and timeline for these ballots. [According to Jesse Salinas](#), president of the [California Association of Clerks and Election Officials](#), the historical lack of predictable funding to help counties mitigate these factors has limited the ability of small and midsize counties to make long-term improvements to ballot processing.

registrar, and *Attorney General of California v. Bianco*, concerning Attorney General Rob Bonta's authority to order Sheriff Bianco to end the investigation and the validity of the warrants.

The [largest earmark for elections](#) in the recent funding bill—\$29 million—was allocated to support “increased staffing, technology and equipment upgrades and purchases for counties to speed up counting.” An additional \$10 million was allocated to support voter outreach and education at both the state and county levels, with \$750,000 also devoted to “support statewide efforts to combat mis- and disinformation.” Salinas has long [advocated for investments in voter education](#) in order to combat bottlenecks in the voting process by encouraging voters to drop off their ballots before Election Day. This would allow counties to begin processing those ballots prior to Election Day.

Registrars throughout the state, however, have expressed reservations about the ability of these funds to facilitate significant change come November. Many view the funds as a much-needed investment, but registrars such as Matt Moreles of Santa Clara County [have stated that](#), given the proximity of the November election, “it is unlikely that major changes to our processes will be possible in time to be fully implemented and thoroughly tested before we need to begin training staff and ramping up operations.”

Shortened Window for Ballot Processing

Funding allocated in the state budget was intended to support election officials in implementing the expedited ballot processing timelines that were approved by the legislature in October 2025 for the June 2 primary and fall general election. In October, the California legislature also enacted [Assembly Bill 5](#), which requires counties to release vote counts for ballots by the thirteenth day after the election, down from 30 days in previous statewide elections. Exceptions are provided for certain ballots, including provisional ballots, conditional voter registration ballots, and those requiring signature verification. Election officials unable to meet this deadline must file a notice of extension with the Secretary of State.

Registrars throughout the state [have expressed doubts](#) regarding whether the change will meaningfully speed up ballot processing and the finalization of election results. As enacted, [Assembly Bill 5](#) contains carve-outs for processing ballots that often take the

most time to count. The bill did not modify the sections of state law that provide extended timelines for these ballots to be counted. For example, [California election law](#) provides a period of 22 days following the election for voters to cure a signature that is either missing from their ballot envelope or does not match the signature on file for that voter. Counties often experience significant backlogs in processing these ballots (see figure titled “Ballots Left to Process and Left to Cure, 2026 California Primary” in the section on vote counting above) and must wait to submit final ballot totals until their processing is complete. Considered alongside the short timelines for counties to expend funds from the [2026-27 budget](#), these measures are unlikely to meaningfully accelerate the finalization of election results by the general election in November.

Restricting Private Payments for Voter Registration

In October 2025, Governor Newsom signed [Senate Bill 398](#), titled “Criminalizing Lotteries for Voter Registration,” making it a crime to pay or offer to pay money or “other valuable consideration” to an individual in return for voting or registering to vote. These actions were previously criminalized under federal law; however, a lottery offered by Elon Musk and his America PAC during the 2024 general election highlighted a legal “[gray area](#)” that authors of the bill sought to close. As defined in Senate Bill 398, “other valuable consideration” includes “[a chance to win a lottery or similar prize-drawing contest](#)”—terminology used by Musk and his lawyers when defending the 2024 payments in court.

Public Campaign Financing and Proposition 4

[Senate Bill 398](#) was signed into law in 2025 alongside its companion bill, [Senate Bill 42](#), which placed a measure on the November 2026 ballot to lift California’s ban on public financing of elections. If approved, the measure, also known as [Proposition 4](#), would allow all cities and counties in the state to establish their own publicly funded campaign programs. Currently, [only charter cities](#) such as Los Angeles, Berkeley, and San Francisco have the authority to do so. Proponents of the measure [view its provisions as an effective counterweight](#) to wealthy donors’ influence on state and local elections,

while opponents have criticized it as [potentially diverting public funding](#) from other issues.

Loss of the Federal Fax Service for Military and Overseas Voters

Effective August 1, 2025, the [Federal Voting Assistance Program \(FVAP\)](#) within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) discontinued its fax service, known as the Electronic Transmission Service (ETS), for [military and overseas \(UOCAVA\) voters](#). Using the fax service, UOCAVA voters could email FVAP with attached election materials or ballots to be forwarded to localities by fax. Under [California law](#), UOCAVA voters can return their voted ballot by fax, provided it reaches the county by the time polls close and that they sign an oath waiving their right to a secret ballot.

Shortly after FVAP's announcement regarding the ETS, the California Secretary of State's office removed references to the service from its dedicated UOCAVA webpages and directed county elections officials to "[remove all references to the DoD faxing service from all websites, ballot return instructions, and any other materials that refer to that service.](#)" FVAP has not issued an official statement explaining why the ETS was discontinued; however, high fax volumes and limited staff have strained their ability to effectively administer the service in recent years.

Any changes to federal services offered to military and overseas citizens have an outsized impact on California voters given its sizable UOCAVA population. According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's [Election Administration and Voting Survey \(EAVS\)](#), California was home to around 165,000 UOCAVA voters in 2024—the third-largest UOCAVA population of any U.S. state. For the first time in over two decades, military and overseas citizens from California who wish to fax their ballots will be limited to finding their own fax machine and sending their ballots directly to their county.

California also leans on fax more heavily than any other state. In the 2024 general election, according to [EAVS](#) data, 29,552 (around 33.6%) of the 88,081 UOCAVA ballots

returned by California voters came back by fax. This is more than twice the share of the next-closest state, Florida, at 15.8%. California alone accounted for roughly 64% of every fax-returned UOCAVA ballot in the country.

The state permits fax return but not return by email or an online portal, so for a Californian abroad who cannot rely on the mail, fax is the only electronic return method available. Most states that allow any electronic return allow email as well, which is why fax use elsewhere is rare. San Diego County, a major military hub, received 75% of its UOCAVA ballots by fax in 2024 (though it is worth noting that 80% of California's UOCAVA registrants are overseas civilians rather than service members, and civilians cast 88% of the state's fax-returned ballots).

2026 Primary Election Analysis

Notable Results and Contests

California held its primary on June 2, 2026, under the state's [top-two \(“jungle”\) primary system](#), in which all candidates⁴ for a voter-nominated office appear on a single ballot, regardless of party, and the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes advance to the November general election. The Secretary of State [certified statewide contests](#) on July 10, 2026.

The 2026 cycle has been shaped by a mid-decade [redistricting](#) fight. As discussed above, in November 2025, California voters approved [Proposition 50](#), a Democrat-backed measure enabling the state legislature to [redraw the state’s congressional map](#) for the remainder of the decade. Proponents framed it as [a response to Republican-led redistricting in Texas](#). The new lines could allow Democrats to gain [as many as five U.S. House seats](#) in the November general election.

⁴ With the exception of [“candidates running for U.S. President, county central committees, or local offices.”](#)

U.S. House Races

As of July 2026, Republicans control the U.S. House of Representatives with 218 Republicans, 212 Democrats, one independent,⁵ and four vacancies. Democrats hope to retake the U.S. House majority following the party's push to [net more seats](#) through the Proposition 50 map. The five districts targeted by Proposition 50 (CA-1, CA-3, CA-22, CA-41, and CA-48) are all currently held by Republicans, except for Kevin Kiley, who has switched affiliation from Republican to independent. According to the [Cook Partisan Voting Index](#) as of July 2026, three out of these five districts (CA-1, CA-3, CA-41) are now considered “solidly Democratic districts,” while CA-48 “leans” Democratic and CA-22 remains a toss-up. If all five of these seats went to Democrats and no other Democrat-held seats flip, then the number of seats in the House of Representatives held by California Democrats would expand from 43 to 48.

CA-22: The Sole “Toss-Up” Congressional Race

California's 22nd Congressional District is the only district in California that is classified as a [“toss-up” race](#) in the 2026 midterms: incumbent Rep. David Valadao (R) will face off against educator and activist Randy Villegas (D) in the general election. Before the passage of Proposition 50, CA-22 [leaned Republican \(R+1\)](#). The new map [narrowed and extended CA-22](#) to include more Democratic voters and [reduced the portion](#) of Valadao's hometown, Hanford, that falls within the district.

Valadao was first elected to CA-21 in 2012 and held the seat until he [lost his re-election bid](#) to TJ Cox (D) in 2018. He faced Cox again in 2020 and [won](#) his seat back, then [ran in CA-22 in 2022](#) after redistricting changes made CA-21 [more favorable to Democrats](#). He won despite [voting to impeach President Trump after January 6th](#)—one of only ten Republican House members to do so. Now the two-term incumbent in CA-22, Valadao

⁵ Rep. Kevin Kiley of pre-Prop 50 CA-3 was a Republican until 2026.

is seeking to retain his seat amidst the recent redistricting changes that have made his district more Democratic-leaning.

Valadao's Democratic challenger, Randy Villegas, is a [college professor, school board trustee, and progressive Democrat](#). [Somewhat unexpectedly](#), Villegas came in second in the primary, beating State Assemblywoman Jasmeet Bains (D) for a spot on the general election ballot. Villegas's victory came despite Democratic-aligned PACs spending [\\$2.2 million](#) on advertisements opposing Villegas.

Incumbent Collision in CA-40

An illustration of redistricting's consequences came in the redrawn 40th Congressional District where two sitting Republican representatives were [redistricted into competing for the same seat](#). Current CA-40 representative Young Kim [announced her re-election bid](#) after Proposition 50 passed. Representative Ken Calvert, whose 41st District was [redrawn as a solidly Democratic seat](#), opted to challenge Kim in the neighboring 40th District, where Republicans retain an electoral edge. Calvert's old district [represents around 51%](#) of the redrawn CA-40's territory compared [to Kim's 35%](#), and the seat is around [10 percentage points more Republican](#) than the old CA-40, based on 2024 presidential results.

Eight candidates entered the CA-40 primary: two Republicans (Kim and Calvert), five Democrats, and one candidate without a party preference. Calvert led the field [with 34.9% of the vote to Kim's 20.6%](#), meaning that both Republicans will face off in the general election. Esther Kim-Varet, the strongest Democratic contender, [drew 16.6%](#) and placed third.

Both Republican candidates raised and spent millions on their campaigns over the course of the primary. Kim reported having [raised over \\$8.2 million, and Calvert over \\$5.7 million](#), through mid-May. Their campaigns centered on who was more closely

aligned with President Trump. Though Trump declined to endorse a candidate in the primary, one way to distinguish them is by whether they voted to certify the 2020 presidential election. Calvert supported efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election by [voting against certifying](#) the Electoral College votes for Arizona and Pennsylvania on January 6 and 7, 2021, while Kim [voted to certify](#) the Electoral College votes for Pennsylvania after missing the Arizona vote.

Filling Former Speaker Pelosi's Shoes in CA-11

The [retirement announcement](#) of former Speaker Nancy Pelosi after nearly four decades [opened a rare competitive race](#) for the CA-11 seat, which is centered on San Francisco. Tech entrepreneur and former chief of staff to Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14), Saikat Chakrabarti, had originally [launched a primary challenge](#) against Pelosi. However, once the 86-year-old Speaker Emerita announced she would not seek re-election, Chakrabarti was joined by a larger field of Democrats who emerged to vie for the seat.

State Senator Scott Wiener [emerged as the front-runner](#) and advanced alongside San Francisco Supervisor Connie Chan, who secured the second general election slot after [Pelosi endorsed her](#) in the closing weeks of the primary. Pelosi's endorsement appeared to [move meaningful support toward Chan](#) in the campaign's final stretch. Wiener led the field with 40.7%, followed by Chan at 29.7%; both advanced to the November general election in a Democrat versus Democrat matchup. Chakrabarti ended in third place, at 17.9%, while the two Republicans in the contest drew a combined 5.8%.

Statewide Offices

Governor

[The open race](#) to succeed Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, who was [barred from seeking a third term](#) by term limits, was a highly anticipated contest. The open seat drew a large primary field: 24 Democrats, 12 Republicans, 2 third-party candidates, and

23 unaffiliated candidates, according to the [official certified candidate list](#) released by the Secretary of State. This field was more than double the size of the last open-seat gubernatorial primary. In June 2018, when Newsom first won the office, 27 candidates qualified: 12 Democrats, 5 Republicans, 5 third-party, and 5 unaffiliated candidates. Much of the increase from 27 to 61 came from unaffiliated candidates, who rose from 5 to 23; the Democratic field doubled, and the Republican field more than doubled.

The Democratic field was [crowded with established figures](#), including former Representative Katie Porter, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, and San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan. Former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra [saw a considerable surge in support](#) after frontrunner Eric Swalwell [suspended his campaign](#) in April amid sexual misconduct [allegations he denied](#). Billionaire Tom Steyer also drew attention for self-funding his race [with \\$215 million](#), making it [the most expensive primary campaign](#) in state history. On the Republican side, former Fox News commentator Steve Hilton emerged as a frontrunner after [Trump's endorsement](#), consolidating Republican support behind him to the detriment of Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco.

Newsom [declined to endorse](#) a candidate for governor, though he [backed candidates in other contests](#), including lieutenant governor, state treasurer, and Los Angeles mayor. Democrats expressed concern that a large and divided field would [split the party's vote](#) and allow two Republicans to claim both general election slots. However, after Swalwell's exit, Democratic support consolidated behind Becerra, and Trump's endorsement of Hilton united Republicans behind their party's frontrunner.

Ultimately, one Democrat and one Republican advanced from the primary: Becerra finished [first with 28% of the vote](#), and Hilton second with 24.6%. Though Hilton is aligned with and endorsed by President Trump, [he has publicly rebuked](#) Trump's claims of fraud in the state's primary election and stated that his own campaign had [found no](#)

[evidence of fraud](#). Despite Steyer's [record-breaking campaign spending](#), he placed third with 22.8% of the vote and so failed to advance to the general election. The feared vote split never materialized; despite a field more than twice as large as the 2018 gubernatorial primary, the partisan division of the vote was nearly identical. Democratic candidates in total drew 62.4% of the gubernatorial vote in 2026 and 62.5% in 2018, and Republicans drew 35.9% this year compared to 36.2% eight years earlier. Nor did the larger field significantly split the vote—the top four candidates took a combined 86% in 2026 compared to 82% in 2018. What sets 2026 apart is the absence of a clear front-runner: in 2018 Newsom led with 33.7%, more than eight points above runner-up Republican John Cox (25.4%), whereas in 2026 the top three finished within roughly five points of one another.

Other Statewide Offices

California voters also weighed in on the state's other constitutional offices, all conducted under the same top-two rules. In the lieutenant governor's race (open because [Democrat Eleni Kounalakis](#) was termed out), state Treasurer Fiona Ma led the field and advanced alongside Republican former state senator Gloria Romero, with [Ma taking 19.1% of the vote to Romero's 17.8%](#). Kounalakis, in turn, advanced in the race for Ma's soon-to-be-vacated Treasurer seat, [leading with 36.7%](#). Two other Democratic incumbents led their respective races: Attorney General Rob Bonta [took 56.6%](#) and will face Republican Michael Gates in November, and Secretary of State Shirley Weber [led with 58.7%](#) against Republican Orange County Supervisor Don Wagner.

State Legislative Primaries

Half of the California State Senate's 40 seats (all even-numbered districts) [are on the ballot in 2026](#), and all 80 State Assembly seats [are up for election](#) for two-year terms. Currently, Democrats [hold a supermajority](#) in each chamber (30 of 40 seats in the Senate and 60 of 80 in the Assembly).. This makes California [one of eight state legislatures](#) where one party holds a two-thirds majority in both chambers. While most bills pass on a simple majority and a Democrat-controlled legislature is unlikely to be vetoed by a Democratic governor, high-leverage actions such as raising taxes or putting

constitutional amendments before voters [require a two-thirds vote](#). Democrats are [expected to maintain](#) their supermajority in both chambers.

Registration and Primary Outcomes

Because of California's top-two primary system, it is possible for the leading candidate in a primary not to be from the party with the most registered voters in the district, typically because of vote-splitting by candidates from the largest (plurality) party. Indeed, it is possible for none of the plurality party's candidates to make it to the general election. While the latter result did not occur, the non-plurality party candidate was the primary vote-leader in two state senate districts: SD-4 and SD-16. In SD-4, where Republicans had a 39.5% vs. 32.6% registration advantage, Democratic candidate Jaron Brandon led the pack with 41.3% of the vote, followed by 32.1% for Republican candidate Alexandra Duarte. In SD-16, where Democrats held a 38.9% vs. 29.7% registration advantage, Republican candidate Guillermo Asuncion Gonzalez received 45.2% of the vote, with the runner-up incumbent, Democrat Melissa Hurtado, receiving 35.6%. It should be noted, however, that in these districts, as in every state senate district on the ballot but one, the party whose candidates received the most votes in total was the party that held a plurality of registrations in the district. The exception was SD-40, where Democrats hold a registration plurality of less than a point but two Republicans together outpolled the sole Democrat, 52.1% to 47.9%.

As with the state's Senate races, the outcomes of state Assembly races followed the voter registration rates closely in each district. As shown in the figure below, both parties receive a share of votes generally consistent with the share of their registered voters in the district, indicated by the clustering of points around the diagonal line. The outliers are districts where the leading party did not match the registration party, and vote share fell below what registration would predict. This mismatch happened more frequently in districts with a Democratic registration plurality.



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
 Data source: California Secretary of State, certified Statement of Vote and Report of Registration

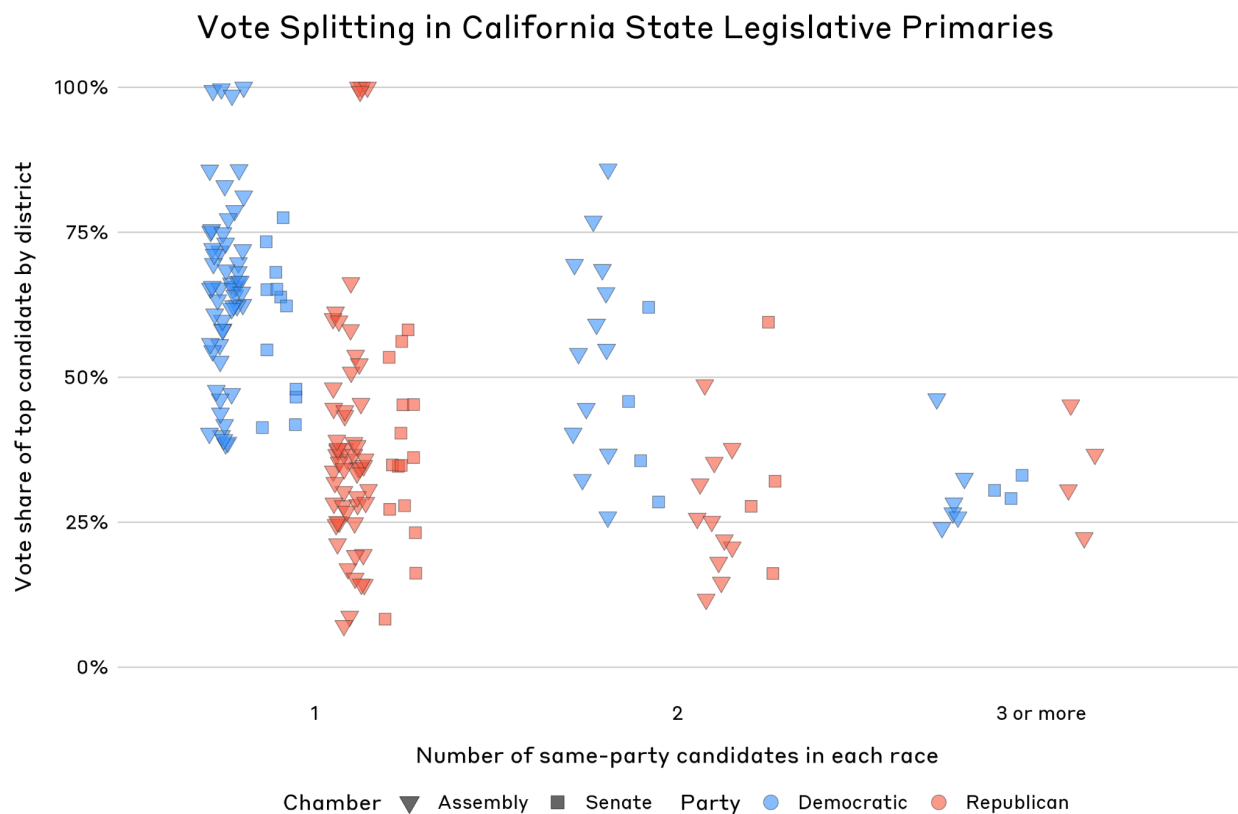
The figure shows the share of the two-party vote won by Democratic primary candidates plotted against the corresponding Democratic share of two-party registrants in a given State Assembly district. The diagonal line demarcates where a district with perfect correspondence between party registration share and party vote share would fall. Marker color indicates the party of the leading candidates and filled markers indicate districts in which the top two finishers came from

the same party. The clustering around the diagonal line shows a party's vote share was generally consistent with its registration share in that district. Boxed districts are those in which the leading candidate's party is not the party holding a plurality of registrations in the district, which, notably, occurred more frequently in districts with a Democratic registration plurality than in districts with a Republican plurality. The vast majority of races saw both a Democrat and Republican advance to the general election.

Across the eight Assembly districts where the leading candidate's party differed from the plurality registration party, six were Democrat-plurality districts; the reasons for that outcome varied. In the 7th State Assembly District (AD-7), Republican incumbent Josh Hoover came in just above a majority with [50.9% of the vote compared to Democratic challenger Amy Slavensky's 47.2%](#). With party registration about [4 percentage points apart](#) and slightly Democratic-favored, the seat is considered competitive heading into the general election. Hoover cleared a majority against a single Democratic opponent; his first-place finish reflects Republican strength in a district that has a plurality of Democratic registration, rather than a divided opposing field. The Democrat-held 27th State Assembly District also saw a Republican candidate in the lead. Incumbent [Esmeralda Soria vacated her seat to run](#) for the 14th State Senate District. Republican Mike Murphy led the [primary for her open seat with 43.4%](#) to Democrat Brian Pacheco's 40.3%, while Japjeet Singh Uppal (also a Democrat) took 16.3%. Despite Murphy's first-place finish, the two Democrats' combined 56.6% could make this a seat Democrats are favored to win in the narrowed general election field, especially considering Democrats have a registration edge in this district of [40% to 29%](#); in other words, Murphy led the primary not because Republicans outperformed their registration numbers, but because Democratic support was divided between two candidates.

Vote Splitting

Vote splitting occurs when multiple candidates from a single party divide its voters' support rather than consolidating behind a single candidate, and was [particularly notable](#) in this year's gubernatorial primary. The concern draws the most attention in federal races with multiple strong candidates from the same party, but the same arithmetic operates further down the ballot. The figure below shows how vote splitting played out in the 2026 state legislative primaries.



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: California Secretary of State, certified Statement of Vote

The figure shows the leading candidate for a given party's share of all votes cast in the district, grouped by how many candidates that party had on the ballot. Each point is one party's showing in one district—State Assembly races as triangles and State Senate races as squares, Democratic candidates in blue and Republican in red. The more candidates a party ran, the smaller the share its leading candidate tended to receive.

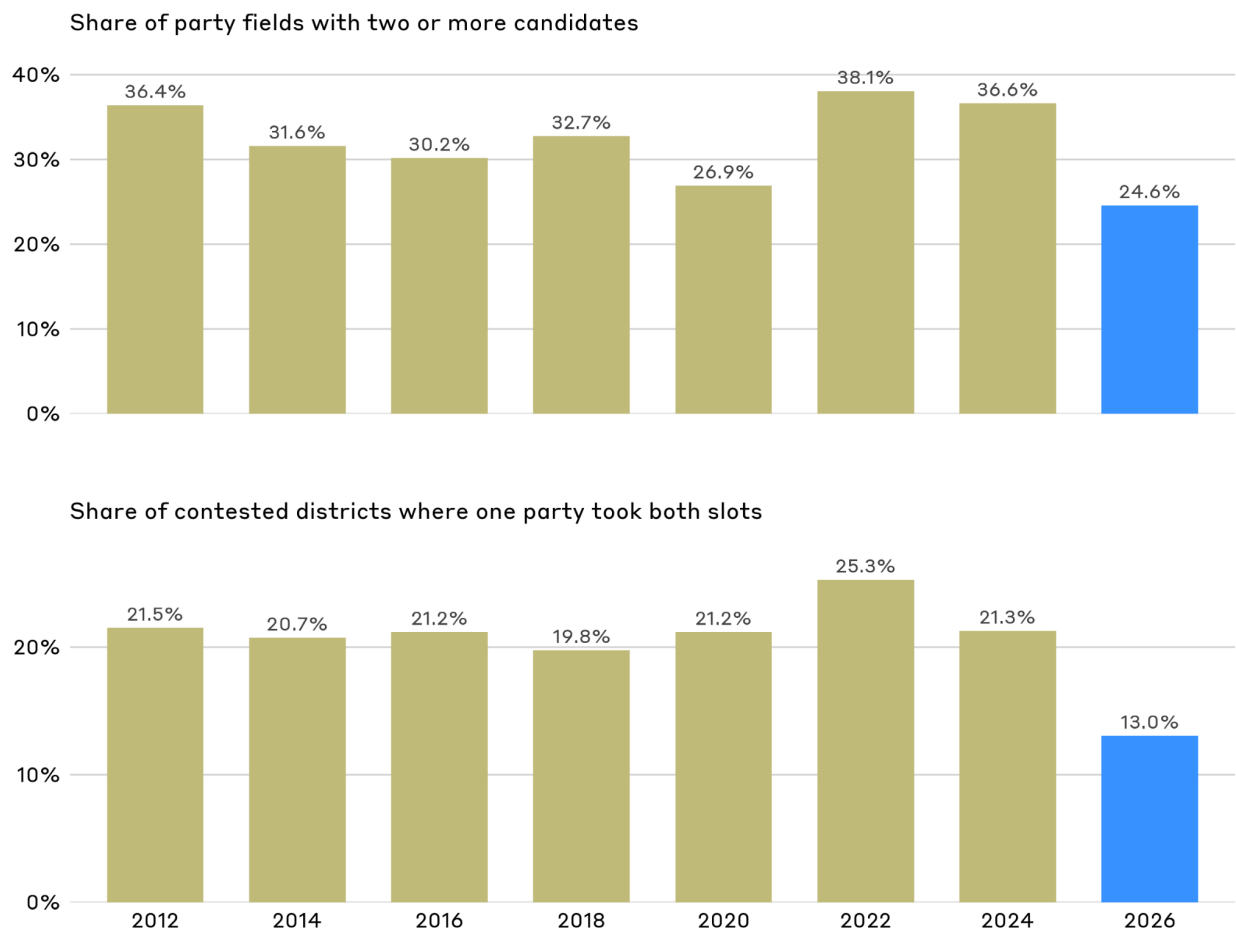
Crowded fields were the exception rather than the rule. In most cases, a party fielded a single candidate in a district, leaving nothing to divide; that was true in 138 of the 183 party-district pairings on the 2026 legislative ballot. Where a party did run several candidates, its leading candidate took a smaller slice of the district's total vote: an average of 41.0% in two-candidate fields and 31.6% where three or more ran, against 51.1% where the party ran a single candidate.

Splitting rarely changed which parties advanced. Democrats took both general election slots in the [two largest fields](#) of the cycle: SD-24, where all seven candidates were Democrats, and SD-26, where six of seven were. Across the 92 contested state legislative districts (meaning those with more than one candidate on the ballot, regardless of party), a single party captured both slots in 12 districts, eleven of which were Democratic and one Republican. An exception was the 10th State Senate District, where five Democratic candidates [split 77% of the vote](#) and Republican Linda Price took the second slot, finishing runner-up to Democrat Scott Sakakihara with 23.2% to his 29.1%. Two State Assembly districts also showed a pattern of divided party vote share; in the 67th State Assembly District, Democrats [held 60%](#) of the two-party registration and [took 62% of the vote](#), but four Democratic candidates divided that vote; Republican Paulo Morales [finished first with 32%](#) against the top Democrat Mark [Pulido's 26%](#). The 34th Assembly District saw the same scenario occur in reverse: while Democrats [held only 44%](#) of the two-party registration, the single Democrat on the ballot, Randall Putz, [led the primary field \(with 39% of the vote\)](#). The three Republicans on the ballot [divided the remaining 61%](#); the highest, Charles Frederick Hughes, [finished with 37%](#). In both cases, the district's partisan balance was reflected in the aggregate vote, and obscured in the ordering of individual candidates.

Compared to previous cycles, 2026 saw [unusually little same-party competition](#). The figure below shows the share of state legislative primaries from 2012 to 2026 with two or more same-party candidates, as well as where candidates of the same party took the top

two slots in the primary, advancing to a faceoff in the general election. In each primary from 2012 through 2024, one party took both general election slots in roughly 20% of contested state legislative districts. In 2026, that figure was 13%, the lowest of the eight regularly scheduled primaries California has held under the top-two system. Crowded fields themselves were also less common than in earlier cycles. Two-candidate fields split about as they have since 2012. The leading candidate has taken between 38% and 47% of the district vote in every cycle, and 41% in 2026. What declined in 2026 was the number of crowded contests, rather than more vote splitting occurring.

Same-Party Competition in California Legislative Primaries, 2012-2026



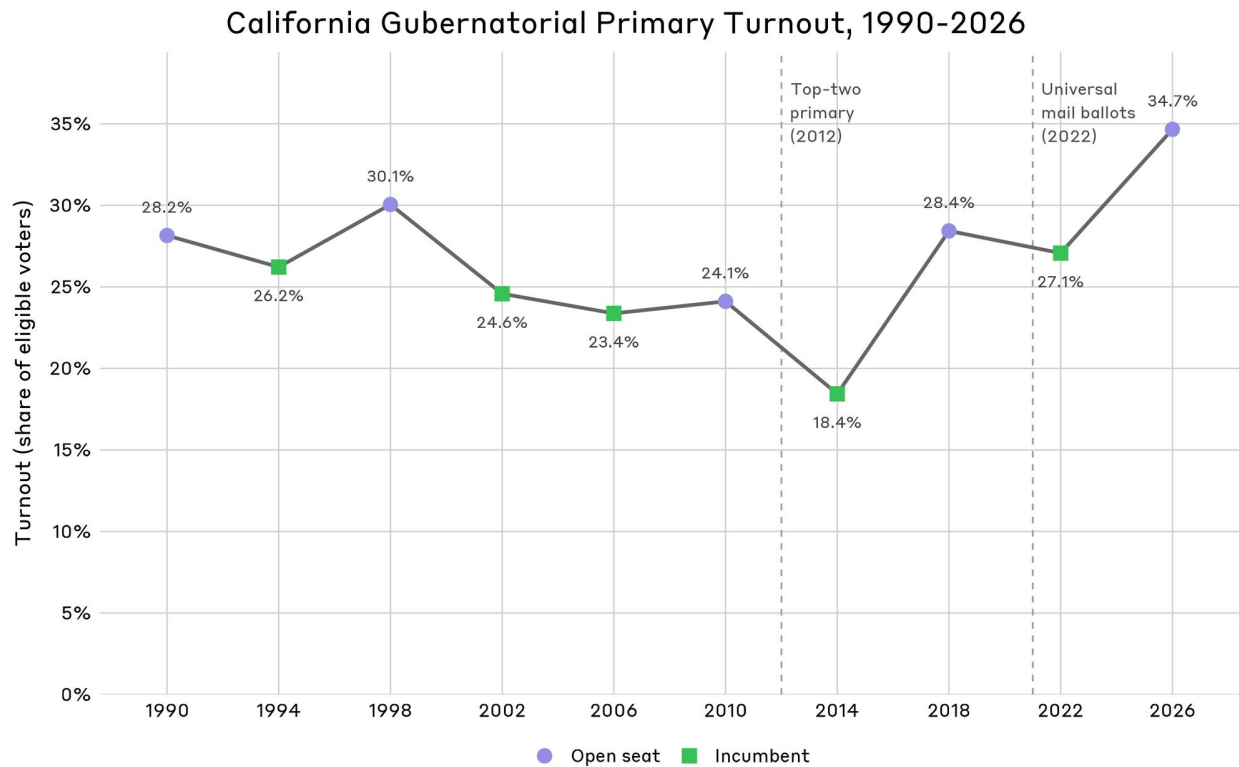
Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: California Secretary of State, certified Statements of Vote

The figure shows how often a party ran more than one candidate in a district (top), and how often that left one party holding both general election slots (bottom). The series starts with 2012, [the first major election under California's top-two primary system](#). Note that the two panels use different vertical scales. Same-party lockouts held near a fifth of contested districts through 2024, then fell to 13% in 2026.

Much of the difference comes down to how many seats were open. Districts with no incumbent on the ballot draw crowded same-party fields about three times as often as districts with one—61% versus 21% across cycles since 2012. Only 21 of California's 100 legislative districts were [open in 2026](#), against an average of 30 in earlier cycles and 40 in 2022, when new district maps left an unusually large number of seats without a sitting member. This accounts for around two-fifths of the decline. The rest is a drop in same-party competition within both kinds of district: open seats drew multiple same-party candidates 55% of the time, compared to 61% previously.

Voter Turnout

The 2026 primary drew unusually strong turnout. 34.7% of eligible voters cast a ballot, the highest of any California gubernatorial primary since at least 1990, and up from 27.1% in 2022 and 28.4% in 2018.



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: CA Secretary of State

The figure shows turnout in California's gubernatorial primaries from 1990 to 2026 as a share of eligible voters, using the Secretary of State's own estimate of the eligible-voter population. Turnout has generally run higher in open-seat cycles (purple circles), with no incumbent governor on the ballot, than in cycles where an incumbent sought re-election (green squares); 2026's 34.7% is the highest in the period shown. The dashed gray lines mark the first primary held under each structural change: the top-two ("jungle") primary in 2012 and universal vote-by-mail in 2022.

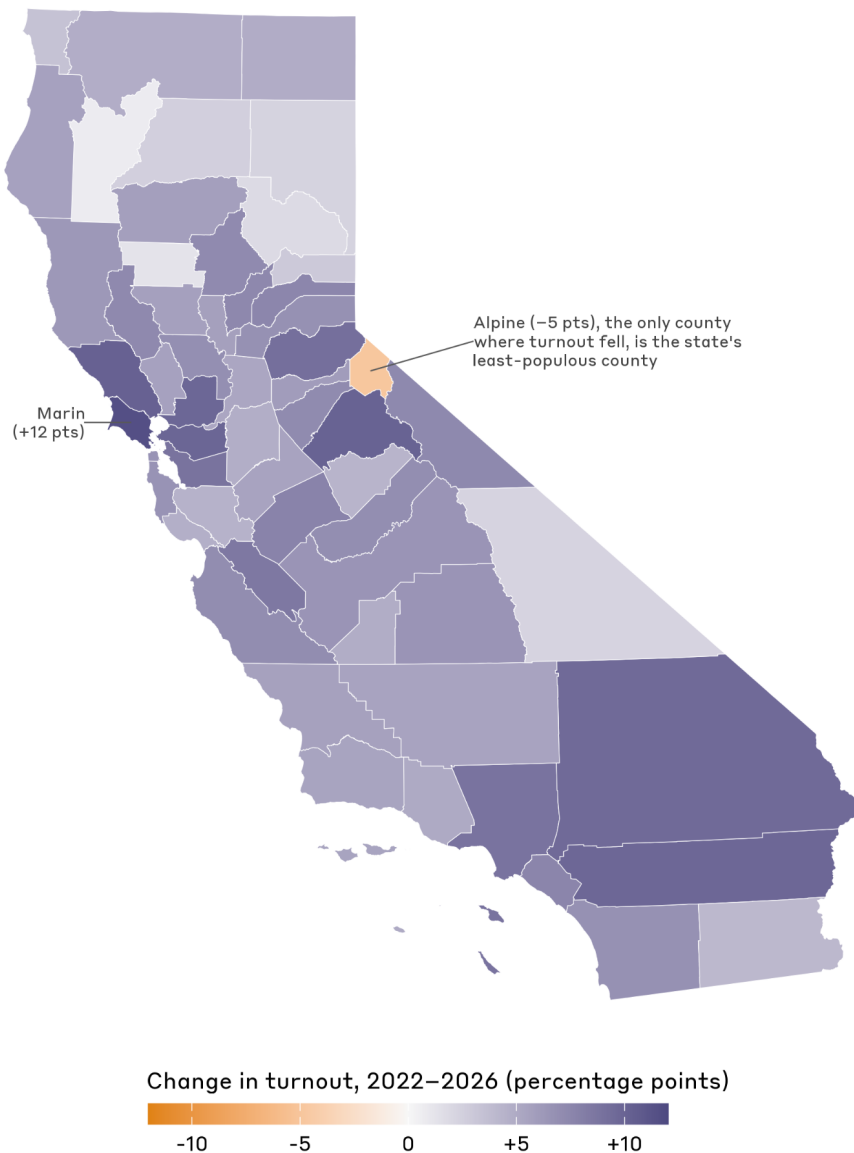
Ballots cast and eligible voters are from the [California Secretary of State](#).

The increase largely reflects the pull of a competitive, open contest; 2026 was the first open-seat race for governor since 2018. As the figure above shows, turnout has generally been higher when the governorship was open: open-seat cycles hold the top of the range, while the clearest incumbent contest, Governor Jerry Brown's 2014 re-election, drew the modern low of 18.4%.

The two recent structural changes to the primary complicate but do not appear to drive this pattern. Universal vote-by-mail may have raised the baseline, in that the 2022 primary drew the highest incumbent-cycle turnout in the series despite an incumbent governor on the ballot, though it still ran below open-seat 2018. It cannot explain the 2026 surge, which occurred with the mail rules unchanged from 2022. The nearly eight-point jump from 2022 to 2026 instead points to the competitive, wide-open race at the top of the ticket. That pattern does not depend on how turnout is measured: 2026 is the highest in the series and 2014 the lowest whether the denominator is eligible voters, the voting-age population, or the voting-eligible population estimated by the [University of Florida Election Lab](#).

The increase was also geographically broad. Turnout rose in 57 of California's 58 counties between the 2022 and 2026 primaries, with the largest gains in the Bay Area, inland Southern California, and the Sierra foothills. The lone exception was Alpine County, the state's least populous county with roughly a thousand eligible voters, where a swing of a few dozen ballots produced a small decline.

Change in California Primary Turnout by County, 2022–2026



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: CA Secretary of State

The map shows the change in each county's primary turnout between the 2022 and 2026 primaries, in percentage points of eligible voters. Turnout rose in all but one of California's 58 counties. Darker purple marks larger gains, concentrated in the Bay Area, inland Southern California, and the Sierra foothills. Marin posted the largest increase, nearly 12 points, to 56.9%; Alpine, the state's least populous county, was the only decline. Ballots cast and eligible

voters are from the California Secretary of State's certified voter participation statistics for the [2022](#) and [2026](#) primaries.

The largest percentage point increase came in Marin County, where turnout climbed nearly 12 points to 56.9%, the largest gain of any county. Marin, home to roughly 185,000 eligible voters, was already among the state's highest-turnout counties. Several features of its [2026 ballot](#) may explain the increase in Marin County. Along with the open race for governor, Marin voters faced an unusually crowded slate of open contests: an open state senate seat, a six-candidate open state Assembly race, an open county supervisor seat, and four local tax measures. The open legislative seats were the product of term limits: termed-out state Senator Mike McGuire vacated Senate District 2 to run for the U.S. House in CA-1, which drew Assemblymember Damon Connolly into the race for the open seat and left his own Assembly District 12 open in turn.

Election Reporting Timelines

Election Day:⁶

Time	Description
7 am	Polling places and vote centers open.
8 pm - 8:30 pm	Results from preprocessed vote-by-mail and early in-person ballots begin to be posted.
8:30 pm - Midnight+	Election Day results are reported as counties tally them.

⁶ Based on the [November 3, 2026, General Election Calendar](#) and the [vote counting process](#) described by the California Secretary of State.

*** **After election night:**

- + **November 5:** Counties provide an [initial report](#) estimating how many ballots remain to be processed and the [official canvass](#) begins.
- + **November 5 to December 3:** Counties [post updates](#) at least twice by the Thursday following Election Day and at least twice a week thereafter.
- + **November 10:** [Final day](#) for mail ballots postmarked on or before Election Day to arrive and be counted.
- + **November 16:** Counties [must finish counting or else file an extension](#) and release the vote count for all ballots except:
 - Ballots needing duplication
 - Ballots forwarded from another county
 - Provisional ballots
 - Conditional voter registration ballots
 - Mail ballots in the signature cure process
 - Any ballot received after November 10
- + **November 17, 5 pm:** Deadline for counties to [notify voters](#) whose ballot envelope signature is missing or does not match the signature on file.
- + **November 25, 5 pm:** Deadline for voters to [return a signature verification statement or unsigned identification envelope statement](#) so their ballot can be counted. Voters may return it by mail, email, fax, or in person at their county elections office.
- + **December 3, 5 pm:** Counties must complete the official canvass, certify the results, and submit to their board of supervisors. The final unprocessed ballots report is also due.
- + **December 4:** Counties send returns to the Secretary of State with a [report on mail ballot rejections](#).
- + **December 11:** Secretary of State [certifies](#) the statement of the vote and issues certificates of election.