

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 #2097

Release Date: **Tuesday, October 7, 2003**

ESTIMATE THAT TEN MILLION WILL BE VOTING TODAY. BIG INCREASE OVER 2002 TURNOUT. EXPECT 2.6 MILLION TO HAVE VOTED BY ABSENTEE.

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

In today's historic recall election *The Field Poll* estimates that as many as ten million California voters will be participating in the decision as to who they want as Governor for the next three years. A turnout of this magnitude would represent a 30% increase over the 7.7 million voters who participated in the 2002 gubernatorial election and would be larger than any previous non-presidential contest in state history.

The special election, caused by a successful signature-gathering effort to recall Democrat Governor Gray Davis, has generated extensive public attention and heavy media coverage rivaling those of contested presidential elections.

The Secretary of State's office last Friday reported that there are currently 15,380,536 registered voters in the state, representing 70.5% of the state's 21.5 million citizen-eligible adults, similar to the 15.3 million on the rolls in the last general election.

If ten million voters cast ballots in today's election it will mean that about two-thirds (65.0%) of all registered voters will be voting. This would be a big increase from the 50.6% of registrants who cast ballots in the November 2002 gubernatorial election.

The following table shows the state's current population totals, the number of citizen-adults eligible to vote, and the number of registered voters as well as the total vote in all general elections going back to 1960.

Table 1
Estimates of California population, eligible to vote and registration totals,
and turnout and participation rates in statewide general elections —
1960 – 2003 (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")
1960 ^P	15,567	9,587	7,465	77.9	6,593	88.3	68.8
1962	16,579	10,305	7,531	73.1	5,930	78.7	57.5
1964 ^P	17,708	10,959	8,184	74.7	7,233	88.4	66.0
1966	18,550	11,448	8,341	72.9	6,606	79.2	57.7
1968 ^P	19,143	11,813	8,588	72.7	7,364	85.7	62.3
1970	19,971	12,182	8,706	71.5	6,633	76.2	54.4
1972 ^P	20,447	13,322 ²	10,466	78.6	8,596	82.1	64.5
1974	20,915	13,703	9,928	72.5	6,395	64.1	46.5
1976 ^P	21,550	14,196	9,980	70.3	8,137	81.5	57.3
1978	22,314	14,781	10,130	68.5	7,132	70.4	48.2
1980 ^P	23,669	15,384	11,362	73.9	8,775	77.2	57.0
1982	24,500	15,984	11,559	72.3	8,064	69.8	50.4
1984 ^P	25,550	16,582	13,074	78.8	9,796	74.9	59.1
1986	26,444	17,561	12,834	73.1	7,617	59.4	43.4
1988 ^P	28,592	19,052	14,005	73.5	10,200	72.8	53.5
1990	29,800	19,245	13,478	70.0	7,899	58.6	41.0
1992 ^P	31,000	20,864	15,101	72.6	11,374	75.3	54.5
1994	32,000	18,496 ⁴	14,724	77.7	8,901	60.5	47.0
1996 ^P	32,344	19,527	15,602	80.2	10,260	65.6	52.5
1998	33,252	20,806	14,969	71.9	8,618	57.6	41.4
2000 ^P	34,336	21,461	15,707	73.2	11,143	70.9	57.9
2002	35,301	21,466	15,303	71.3	7,739	50.6	36.1
2003 ^{SE}	35,591	21,833	15,381	70.5	10,000	65.0	46.6

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.

^{SE} Indicates Special Election

The Field Poll bases its estimate of a high turnout in part on its pre-election surveys, in which a higher than usual proportion of voters indicated that they were likely to vote. Another factor is that over 3.1 million voters have requested absentee ballots for this election, considerably higher than what was observed in the 2002 general election.

Large absentee vote

While not all of those who request an absentee ballot actually turn one in, based on previous history The Field Poll estimates that about 85% or 2.6 million of those requesting a ballot will vote that way.

California’s rules for voting absentee were relaxed in 1978, and since that time with each new election an increasing proportion of Californians have utilized that method when voting. For example, in 1978 just 314, 258 (4.4%) of the state’s voters cast absentee ballots. The record for absentee voting in a gubernatorial election occurred in 1998, when about 2.1 million Californians voted that way. That should be exceeded in this year’s voting by about one-half million votes.

Table 3
Precinct and Absentee Ballot Voting
in California Gubernatorial Elections since 1978

	<u>Total votes cast</u>	<u>Precinct voters</u>		<u>Absentee/mail voters</u>
2003	10,000,000*	7,400,000	(74.0%)*	2,600,000 (26.0%)*
2002	7,738,821	5,642,727	(72.9%)	2,096,094 (27.1%)
1998	8,617,649	6,486,187	(75.3%)	2,131,462 (24.7%)
1994	8,900,593	6,937,749	(78.0%)	1,962,844 (22.0%)
1990	7,888,131	6,446,992	(81.6%)	1,452,139 (18.4%)
1986	7,617,142	6,931,802	(91.0%)	685,340 (9.0%)
1982	8,064,314	7,539,128	(93.5%)	525,186 (6.5%)
1978	7,132,210	6,817,952	(95.6%)	314,258 (4.4%)

* Field Poll estimate, all other figures are from the California Secretary of State.