



California Target Book

MEDIA ADVISORY

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CALIFORNIA TARGET BOOK TURNOUT PROJECTION

California's massive electorate now casts its ballots in stages. Voting by mail has become so popular that more than 60 percent of the ballots cast in 2014 were Vote-By-Mail. That will probably be the case in the 2016 primary.

Political Data Inc. has been tallying Vote-By-Mail ballots from the first day they began arriving at the counties. As of Monday morning, some 2.7 million ballots had been received and catalogued by the counties, and most have been counted. This is the early vote and will be the first results released on Election Night. It is likely this vote will exceed the three million early ballots in November 2014.

Thanks to Political Data, we know a lot about this electorate. Almost 70 percent are over the age of 55; it is heavily white and black, (only 13 percent Latino) it is "regular" voters and is more conservative than the primary electorate as a whole.

In recent primaries this vote has been about 42 percent Democratic, 37 percent Republican. However, this year the breakdown is 49 percent Democratic and only 34 percent Republican. The Democratic percentage is likely to increase when Election Day and late voters are added in. This could be bad news for some Republican candidates hoping to make the "top two" for the fall election, as the Republican turnout thus far is well below its normal percent.

It is also possible to use these figures to give a sense of the overall turnout. The early ballots are running well ahead of the 2014 primary turnout, as would be expected given the hot presidential primary on the Democratic side. They are also running slightly ahead of the turnout for the general election in 2014.

Turnout in November 2014 was 7.5 million ballots cast, or 42 percent of registered voters. The newest voter registration figures show that there was a surge of additional registrants in the last six weeks of the campaign as California's registered voters rose from 17.3 million to 17.9 million.

Most new voters are Democrats, and there is the likelihood of an Election Day ground game for the Democratic presidential candidates.

So it is safe to assume that the turnout in the 2016 primary will be higher than the general election in 2014, but 2014 remains a decent benchmark for estimating 2016 turnout and a good guess is 46 to 50 percent of registered voters. That would mean a total turnout of between 8.2 million and 8.9 million ballots.

This compares with 57 percent turnout (9.1 million ballots) in the presidential primary in 2008. In that election, which took place in February 2008, Sens. Obama and Clinton were in a tight race; this year most analysts assume that Clinton has a sufficient number of delegates to be nominated. Also in 2008, there was a hot race on the Republican side between Sen. McCain and Gov. Romney; but this year the Republican race is over. The 2016 primary will come close but probably not exceed the 2008 presidential primary.

While all the indications are for a slightly lower turnout in 2016 than 2008, the turnout should be higher than it was for the presidential primary in 2012. President Obama was unopposed that year and Gov. Romney had already won the GOP nomination by the time California voted. That year, only 31 percent of registered voters, or 5.3 million ballots, were cast.

But there is an important factor in this year's election: it is probable that upwards of three million uncounted ballots will still be at the counties after Election Day. These are Vote by Mail ballots left off at the precinct on Election Day, ballots arriving on or after Election Day (they now need only be postmarked by Election Day to count), and provisional ballots. This will also include Vote by Mail ballots not yet counted.

These late ballots have traditionally been more Latino, younger and more Democratic than the early vote. That can be expected this year.

If the Clinton and Sanders race is extremely close on Election Night, these three million yet to be counted ballots could decide the winner. In June 2014, it took a month before the candidates in the Controller's race were decided. Making a prediction on the Democratic presidential primary could be very difficult given this massive number of ballots that won't be counted until after Election Day.