



California Target Book

MEDIA ADVISORY

May 23, 2016

Contacts:

Rob Pyers, Research Director: rpyers@gmail.com (424) 242-4705

Tony Quinn, Editor: taquinn@att.net (916) 422-8505

Darry Sragow, Publisher: (310) 968-7725

CAUTION: CALIFORNIA VOTER REGISTRATION IS SURGING AND SHIFTING. OR IT'S NOT

In the run up to California's June Presidential Primary, a leading source of voter data in the state, Political Data, Inc. (PDI) has reported a significant shift in the composition of our electorate. For more than 20 years, the California Target Book has been a limited subscription encyclopedia of California campaign activity and our editors believe we are obliged to issue this caution regarding the significance of currently available registration statistics.

The Secretary of State's recent release of April voter registration figures has produced numbers at wide variance with the figures being released by Political Data and we believe it is critical that consumers of this data understand what they are seeing.

To illustrate, it is constructive to compare the figures provided by the Secretary of State (specifically, the 154-Day Report of Voter Registration¹ as of January 5, 2016 and the 60-Day Report of Voter Registration² as of April 8, 2016) with the numbers collected by Political Data, Inc³ (data showing the increased voter registration based on their records between January 1, 2016 and April 1, 2016)

In the 49th Congressional District, for example, both PDI and the official numbers started January in essentially the same place, with PDI showing 343,561 voters and the Secretary of State reporting 343,170. PDI reported April numbers jumping up by nearly 27,000 voters to 370,509. In sharp contrast, however, the Secretary of State reported a net decrease of 455 voters to bring the rolls down to 342,715 after voter file maintenance.

In the competitive 25th Congressional District, where Republican Steve Knight is attempting to defend his seat against Democrats Lou Vince and Bryan Caforio, PDI showed voter rolls swelling by 13,891 voters from 355,858 in January to 369,749 in April. When the Secretary of State released its figures, however, the 367,259 voters registered in January had shrunk by 11,019 to 356,240 by April.

In Orange County's 37th Senate District, PDI reported robust voter registration activity and projected a 29,660-voter increase from 463,825 in January to 493,485 in April. The Secretary of State's figures were a near-mirror image, showing a 31,038-voter decrease from 494,863 in January to 463,825 in April.

Data provided by the Secretary of State leads to a clear conclusion that the heightened interest in this year's Presidential election has not yet translated into a swelling of the voter rolls, standing in sharp contrast to the last open Presidential election. Democratic support levels remain constant while support for Republicans continues to drop.

Between January and April of 2008, interest in the election soared and California's voter rolls saw a net increase of 358,896 voters, with Democratic registration numbers increasing by 284,257 (although it should be noted that California held a separate Presidential Primary that took place much earlier in the cycle on February 5th of that year which likely spurred the early voter registration surge). This year, the net increase in registered voters from January is just 9,420, or around a 5 hundredths of a percent statistical blip. Democrats have seen their numbers increase by just 98,657. Furthermore, that increase is accompanied by the net decrease of 73,339 among No Party Preference and left-leaning 3rd parties, suggesting more a re-arranging of the deck chairs than a sharp tilt in the composition of the electorate. At this stage in 2008, the number of net voters had increased by 213,584 over the previous year's February figures. This year, there are nearly half a million fewer voters on the rolls than in February of 2015. Democrats need to register 107,861 additional voters to climb back to their February 2015 position. Despite this, Democratic voter registration as a percentage of the electorate has remained fairly steady in recent years, ranging from 42.52% in 2007 to its high-water mark of 44.4% as voting got underway in November of 2008. It has since remained mostly in stasis in the 43% range.

The same cannot be said of California's Republicans, who have little to celebrate in this most recent round of statistics. GOP voter registration as a percentage of the electorate has declined consistently in recent years. From the 34.19% it commanded in 2007, each passing year has brought a further erosion and time has now withered Republican registration to a new low of 27.52%. Even the prospect of California holding a competitive GOP Presidential Primary did little to galvanize support, and Republicans saw their numbers decline by 14,996 from January to April. There are currently 205,932 fewer Republicans than there were in the February, 2015 figures.

While this year's figures have so far proven to be underwhelming on the net number of voters, voter registration efforts have historically only kicked into gear in earnest in the final months leading up to the November election. In 2008, of the 1.4M net increase in voters between April and November, 1.1M were added between September and November. In 2012, 986,290 of the 1.2M were from the same time frame.

Whether developments in the Presidential race this year result in a sustained voter registration surge or a significant shift in California partisan alignment remains to be seen. But those who are focused on outcomes, particularly the campaign professionals running Congressional, legislative, and ballot measure efforts, should take note that in the late stages of the June primaries, the lay of the land, at least according to the Secretary of State, is little changed.

To understand the discrepancy between current PDI and Secretary of State numbers, it is important to understand what consumers of this data are seeing. The figures provided by the Secretary of State are NET numbers, meaning that to the database that existed at the beginning of the year, county registrars have ADDED new registrants and SUBTRACTED inactive voters who are being purged from the voter files.

The numbers provided by PDI represent data pulled from the registration cards filled out by new registrants. PDI is reporting the number of new registrants only, those ADDED by the county registrars. It is not SUBTRACTING inactive voters.

The critical point is that the significance of the NEW registrations accounted for by the Secretary of State and explicitly reported by PDI requires scrutiny. Some observers have been concerned that many new registrants are simply previous registrants who moved from one residence to another. But for genuinely first time California voters, it is difficult to draw conclusions without knowing the ways in which they differ from the entire electorate or, more specifically, the voters who are being purged.

The conclusion? As always, when it comes to data, know what you're seeing.

¹<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/upcoming-elections/june-7-2016-presidential-primary-election/154day-presprim-16/>

²<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/report-registration/60day-primary-2016/>

³<http://politicaldata.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CA-Surge-by-District-4.24.1.pdf>