

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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**GROWING NUMBER OF CALIFORNIA
VOTERS ARE “PERMANENT MAIL
BALLOT REGISTRANTS.” THEY DIFFER
FROM THE STATE’S OVERALL
ELECTORATE IN MANY RESPECTS.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The number of California registered voters who have chosen to permanently receive their voting ballots by mail has grown in each year since this alternative first became widely available in 2002. During its inaugural year, slightly more than 1.2 million voters had signed up to permanently receive their voting ballots by mail prior to the November 2002 election. That number has grown each year since then, and as of February of this year included over 4.2 million Californians.

The expanding number of permanent mail ballot registrants is a major contributor to the growing share of mail ballot votes cast in California primary elections over the past five years. The proportion of votes cast by mail in statewide primary elections has doubled from 23% in 2000, prior to the change in state law allowing for this new registration alternative, to 47% in the state’s last primary in 2006. This proportion is expected to continue to grow in California’s 2008 presidential primary, with the expanding mail ballot vote and could have a greater impact on each party’s primary election than ever before.

Mail ballots will begin to be sent out to California’s permanent mail ballot registrants on January 7, four days after the Iowa caucuses, the nation’s first presidential delegate selection contest, and the day before the New Hampshire primary, the nation’s first presidential primary. Because of this, California’s permanent mail ballot registrants will have the opportunity to vote well in advance of the state’s February 5th primary, and ahead of many other important presidential primary contests in Nevada, South Carolina, Michigan, Florida and Maine.

The demographic characteristics of California’s permanent mail ballot registrants differ markedly from the state’s overall registered voter population. Compared to the overall electorate, permanent mail ballot registrants are more likely to be Republican, live in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, are older, and include more white non-Hispanics and homeowners.

These findings come from a compilation of *Field Poll* surveys conducted over the past year with 4,523 registered voters in California, of whom 1,374 were permanent mail ballot registrants.

Some of the specific findings from this analysis include these:

- Republicans outnumber Democrats among permanent mail ballot registrants 41% to 40%, while 19% are registered as declined to state or with another party. This compares to the state's overall party registration, which is 42% Democratic, 34% Republican and 24% declined to state or other party.
- 29% of the state's permanent mail ballot registrants live in the Bay Area compared to just 10% in Los Angeles County. By contrast, 25% of the state's overall electorate live in Los Angeles County, while just 21% live in the Bay Area. Because Democrats outnumber Republicans nearly two to one on the registration rolls in Los Angeles County, the significantly smaller share of the state's permanent mail ballot registrants living in Los Angeles County is a major factor contributing to there being fewer Democrats than Republicans among California's permanent mail ballot registrants.
- Nearly a third (31%) of permanent mail ballot registrants are age 65 or older compared to 19% among the state's total registered voter population.
- Three in four permanent mail ballot registrants (75%) are white non-Hispanics, while just 13% are Latino. In the state's overall electorate, 66% are white non-Hispanic and 21% are Latino.
- 75% of the state's permanent mail ballot registrants are homeowners, compared to a smaller proportion (68%) in the overall electorate.

Similar to the overall population of permanent mail ballot registrants, Republicans who are permanent mail ballot registrants also tend to be older, and include more white non-Hispanics and homeowners than the overall GOP electorate. However, as a group, they are more likely than the party's overall rank-and-file to consider themselves strongly conservative in politics and live in Northern California or the Central Valley.

Democrats who are permanent mail ballot registrants are also more likely to be older, are homeowners, include more white non-Hispanics, and live in the San Francisco Bay Area than the state's overall Democratic electorate.

Note to Editors: See attached California Opinion Index report for a more detailed accounting of the data referenced in this report.

Information About The Surveys

Sample Details

The findings in this report come from a compilation of statewide surveys of California registered voters conducted by *The Field Poll*. All interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between the period of December 2006 – October 2007. Over this period interviews were conducted with a total of 4,523 registered voters, of whom 1,374 were permanent mail ballot registrants. In each survey, up to eight attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during each interviewing period.

The samples of each survey were developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected from a statewide list of registered voters in California. The sample list itself indicates the voter's name, party registration, county of residence and whether or not the voter is a permanent mail ballot registrant.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample sizes. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall statewide sample of 4,523 registered voters are subject to a sampling error of +/- 1.5 percentage points, while findings from the statewide sample of permanent mail ballot registrants have a sampling error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.