

The Voters of California in 2003
Core, Swing, and Changing

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The Rose Institute of State and Local Government

CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE



Preface

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Executive Summary

This study by the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College involves a comprehensive investigation of voting trends in California between 1996 and 2002. Although confirming many of the predictions in the earlier “Heartland” study conducted for Mr. Murdoch, several findings will surprise many observers of California politics:

- Despite rapid population growth, the number of registrants is not increasing
- Low turnout elections no longer favor Republicans
- Democrats will not necessarily dominate California’s elections this decade
- Swing voters are the deciding factor in California elections
- Distinctly different voting dynamics are at work in six of the State’s major regions
- Latinos are an increasingly volatile portion of the electorate
- If Republicans win 30 percent of the Latino vote they will win most elections
- The next few elections will determine the voting loyalties of large numbers of “coming of age” new and immigrant voters
- The upcoming recall is a unique opportunity to examine emerging electoral trends that will decide elections for the rest of the decade

California’s Situation

The time range – 1996 to 2002 – covers a period of economic, demographic and political transition in California: aerospace industry employment hit its low point; rapid immigration continued; and property values rose rapidly. Interestingly, despite a 9.67 percent increase in population, the number of registered voters remained essentially unchanged.

Conventional wisdom currently holds that Democrats dominate California elections, and Republican candidates perform better in low-turnout elections. Both of these concepts are incorrect.

The behavior of the vital swing voters is driven by the candidates and campaigns involved. In particular, victory is decided by the impact of the candidates and campaigns on those regions and counties where swing voters of all types are found. These regions (the Heartland, San Francisco Bay Area, Coastal Counties, Los Angeles, and South Counties) each have different voting dynamics and stimuli.

Two factors indicate that population growth without registration growth is unlikely to continue. The first is immigration: new immigrants will eventually begin to gain citizenship. The voting tendencies of the recently-registered and soon-to-register Latino voters will heavily impact elections later this decade and beyond. The political debate today will largely determine these voters’ actions in future elections.

The second long-term factor is the slowing of the aerospace industry job exodus, which will reduce the flow of registered voters from California. These two changes will take time to impact the State's elections, but the political parties and others interested in election results are wise to look ahead and consider their impact.

Study Findings

The Rose Institute study found that California's voters display a variety of voting behaviors that can be categorized as:

1. Core Democrats
2. Core Republicans
3. Turnout Swing voters: loyal to one party, but low frequency voters
4. Ticket-Splitting Swing Democrats who occasionally swing Green
5. Ticket-Splitting Swing Republicans and Democrats who swing between the two parties

In California, core Democrats now outnumber core Republicans, giving Democrats the edge in low-turnout elections. The 2002 election, with its record low turnout levels, proved this point.

To win a statewide election and given this disadvantage in core voters, Republicans must win among the various swing voters. But the margin between core Democrats and core Republicans is small (3.5 percent), while 44 percent of voters are swing voters. Swing voters (of all types) outnumber the Democratic advantage in core voters by thirteen to one. The decisions (both whom to support and whether to vote at all) of the swing voters decide the winner in California statewide races.

The question remains: what drives voting decisions for swing voters? A significant part of that answer lies with the candidates and messages involved in a campaign – issues outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, we know from earlier studies that national security issues in times of war or crisis have a powerful effect on swing voters and their turnout: this fact may have particular significance in 2004. Identification of the voting behavior and motivation factors that drive elections certainly will be the key to achieving victory in future elections. Close study of the Hispanic vote, particularly its middle income segments and the generation just now entering the electorate, will be key to developing winning strategies for the future.

These key behaviors and motivations vary among regions. Our study concludes with a look at which types of voters are dominant in each region. Armed with this information, interested individuals and parties can focus their efforts to increase turnout among each of their supportive groups.

The Regions

- **The Heartland:** suburban and rural and heavily Republican. The Heartland in 2003 is just as Republican in registration as the South Counties region, and its Republican voters are more reliable at the polls.



- **Los Angeles:** massive voting strength requires attention from both parties. Rising power of turnout swing Latinos foreshadows potential battle for a much larger Latino voting block in coming years.
- **San Francisco Bay Area:** urban, rural, and liberal. Core Democratic strength challenged by rising Green party influence.
- **Coastal Counties:** restrictions on new housing and resulting spiraling property values have limited the diversity in this region where environmentalists face off against rural core Republicans of San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties.
- **South Counties:** The traditional base of Republican votes in California is rapidly changing under the influence of Latino immigrants and emigrants from Los Angeles County.

In short, Democrats' advantage in core voters and in the lowest-turnout groups give the state Democratic leanings in statewide elections. But the massive number of swing voters and high "other" party voter registration reveal a highly volatile electorate that offers victory to whichever campaign presents the right message to the right audiences.

Scope of Study

The Institute's research team reviewed election results for statewide general elections from 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2002. We also reviewed Census data from both the 2000 Census and annual population estimates for 1996, 1998, and 2002. The data were supplemented with voter registration by ethnicity data from the California Statewide Database, exit polls by the Los Angeles Times, and post-election surveys by the Field Poll.

One factor outside the scope of this study is voter drop-off: the situation where a voter casts a ballot for Governor and other top-of-ticket races, but leaves other statewide elections blank. The low occurrence of this behavior, the lack of exit polling information on it, and the expense involved in adding this relatively minor data point to this study all contributed to our decision to leave it outside the scope of this study.

In short, the Rose Institute reviewed all of the available data sources to identify the following:

1. Which groups of registered voters – by party and by ethnicity – fall into which voter behavior pattern.
2. Which patterns predominate in different counties in the State.
3. Which voter group(s) determine the winner in California statewide elections.

Population and Registration Trends

The demographics of California's voters are in a state of transition, as are the demographics of the entire State population. But the change among voters lags considerably behind the change in total population. From 1996 to 2002, California experienced a net growth of 3,097,199 people, or 9.67 percent. Yet voter registration over the same time frame actually declined by 358,606 voters, or 2.29 percent.

This difference is driven largely by the increasing share of California's population made up of immigrants. According to the most recent Census Bureau analysis, California experienced a net loss in domestic migration of over 700,000 people between 1996 and 2000. California's total population increased over that time period due to the arrival of immigrants from outside of the United States. Of course, those new arrivals are not yet eligible for citizenship and voter registration. The impact of new immigration is likely to take much longer than expected: of those eligible for amnesty in the early 1980s, only 20 percent have thus far applied for citizenship.

The 2002 Election

Nationally, the 2002 election was an overwhelming sweep for Republicans. California was the polar opposite: Democrats swept the statewide offices from Governor to Superintendent of Education. California's 2002 election also presented a new phenomenon for political scientists: turnout was at a near-record low, and the voters who did turn out reliably voted for all candidates of a single party. This established, beyond the usual statistical estimations and guesses, the clear number of core voters in each party.

But the Democratic sweep does not indicate a sweep of the issues: Los Angeles County, the bastion of Democratic power in the state, approved term limits on county officers with over 60.58 percent of the vote.

Defining Core Voters

Core voters, also referred to as a party's "base" voters, are the heart and soul of a political party. These "core" voters reliably vote in every election, and reliably vote for every candidate of their chosen party on the ticket. Republicans traditionally are known as the party with the most reliable core voters. But in California, the Rose Institute analysis shows that Democratic core voters now outnumber Republican core voters. In the record low turnout election of 2002, these Democratic core voters drove their party's sweep in California.

The proportion of voters who fall into the "core" category has declined in recent decades, while independent¹ and "Decline to State" voter registration have risen and "party levers" on the ballot box have disappeared. Yet a majority of voters in low-turnout elections, and a substantial proportion of voters in all elections, remain core voters.

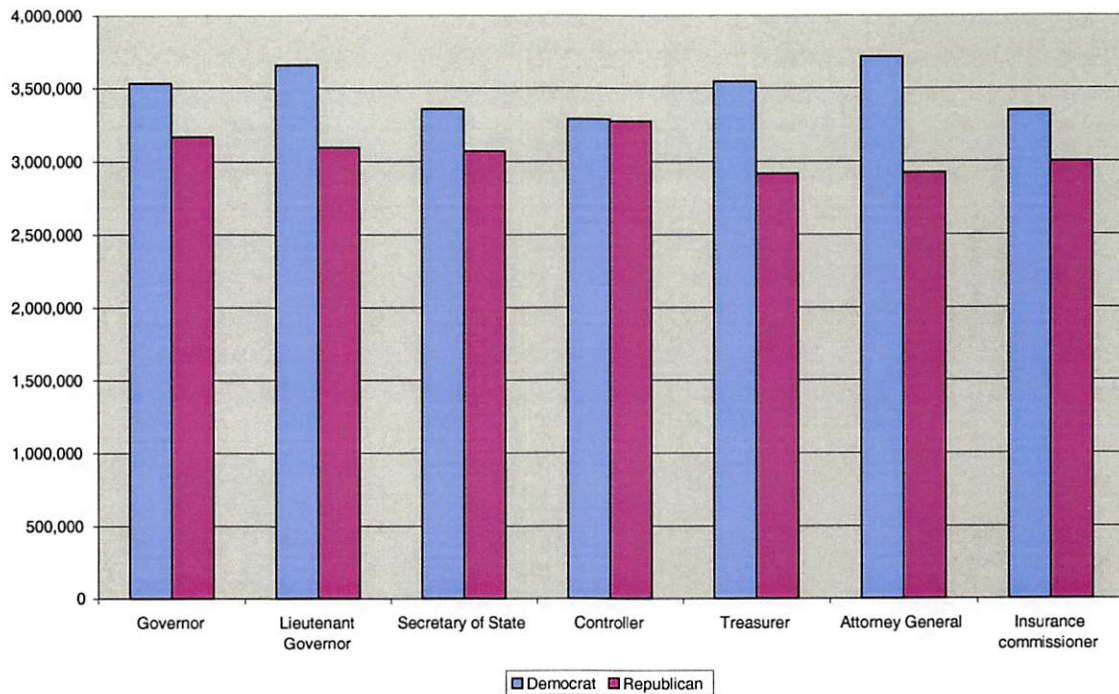
¹ "Independent" is the collection of all registrants other than Democrat, Republican, and Decline to State.

Measuring the Core Vote

Identifying core voters in theory or in a survey is relatively easy: contact those people who voted in every or almost every election, then ask if he or she voted for all candidates of one party in each election. But it is only easy in theory. Surveys encounter two problems: respondents claiming to have voted always outnumber the actual votes cast, and many people resist answering questions about who they supported in an election.

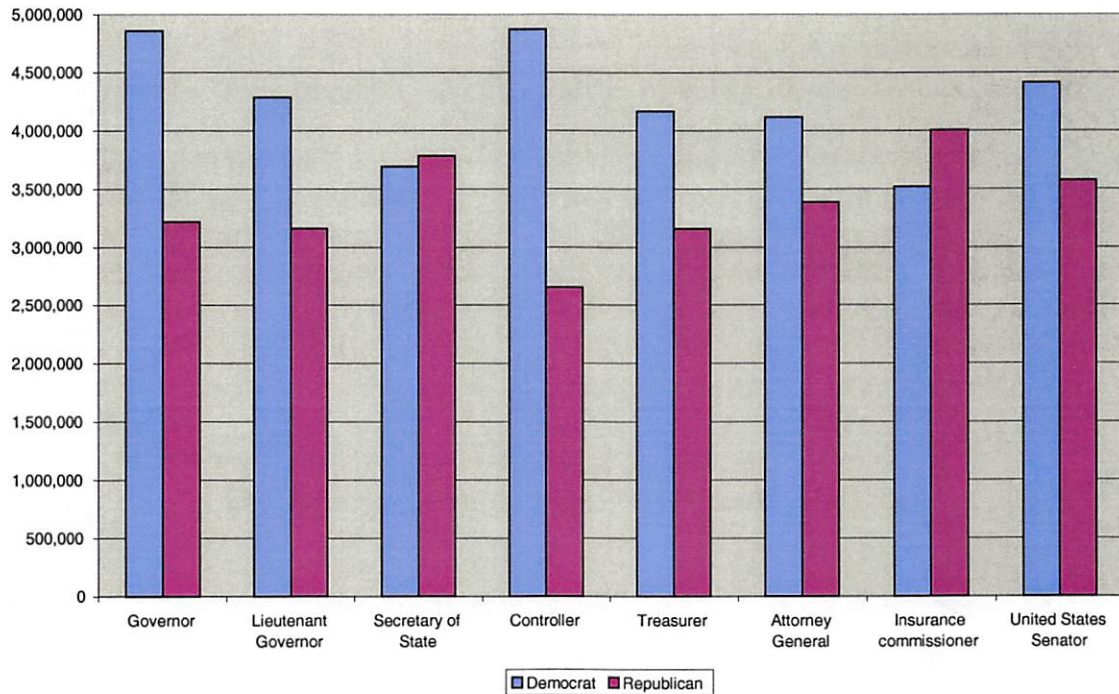
The 2002 election provided a detailed window into California's core voters without reliance on a detailed follow-up survey. The tiny five percent margin between the best-performing and worst-performing Republicans clearly showed that virtually all Republican votes were straight-ticket voters. Combined with the low turnout in this election, we see that virtually all the Republican voters were "core" Republicans. And the small margins between the Democratic candidates (though Green candidate swings made the margins larger than for the Republicans) also gave us a good measuring stick for core Democrats.

**Votes Cast For Republican and Democratic Candidates
For Statewide Office in the 2002 General Election**



For comparison, the Democratic margin in 1998 was 14.17 percent and the Republican margin was 16.72 percent:

Votes Cast For Republican and Democratic Candidates For Statewide Office in the 1998 General Election



From this analysis of elections from 1996 to 2002, California has 2,917,445 core Republicans and 3,289,839 core Democrats. In low-turnout off-year elections like 2002, the Democratic advantage will win based on this core voter advantage as long as the swing voters stay home. In high-turnout Presidential elections such as 2000, the swing voters' views more than outweigh the Democratic advantage among core voters.

Defining Swing Voters

Swing voters are a diverse group in California. There are many traditional swing voters: Democrats and Republicans who split their ballots between the two parties. Most of the nearly twenty percent of voters registered as "decline to state" or with minor parties also belong in this category. These groups of swing voters can be either high-turnout or low-turnout voters.

Then there is a separate group of registered Democrats and Green party members who "swing" between the Democratic and Green parties.

Another group of swing voters are "turnout swing" voters. Their loyalties are heavily with one party or the other, but they do not vote in every election. African-American voters are the clearest example of non-traditional swing voters who are loyal to one party or the other, but who swing between voting and not voting at all: in 1996 and 2002, African-Americans overwhelmingly voted for Democratic candidates (87 percent for Clinton in 1996 and 79 percent for Davis in 2002). Yet African-Americans were seven

percent of all voters in 1996 and only four percent of all voters in 2002. Over 400,000 turnout swing African-Americans decided not to vote in 2002.

Measuring the Swing Vote

Turnout Swing

The first step in our study of swing voters focuses on the “turnout swing” voters. We categorized the four elections in question into “high Presidential,” “low Presidential,” “high off-year,” and “low off-year.”

Total Turnout

Type of Election	Year	Total Turnout	Increase
Low Turnout Off-Year	2002	7,738,821	N/A
High Turnout Off-Year	1998	8,621,121	882,300
Low Turnout Presidential Year	1996	10,263,490	1,642,369
High Turnout Presidential Year	2000	11,142,843	879,353

In total, there is a significant population that stayed home in 2002 and 2000, but turned out in 1998 and 1996 – almost 900,000 voters. These voters turnout when motivated in Presidential years and in off-years; and they stay home when not motivated.

An even larger population, about 1.6 million people by this analysis, are driven less by the motivation of a campaign and more by the increased attention and stakes that come with a Presidential election year.

We then compared the turnout levels by party in each of these years to identify “turnout swing” voters in each party.

Turnout of Democrats *

Type of Election	Year	Democrat Turnout	Increase
Low Turnout Off-Year	2002	3,559,858	N/A
High Turnout Off-Year	1998	4,138,138	578,280
Low Turnout Presidential Year	1996	4,618,571	480,432
High Turnout Presidential Year	2000	5,348,565	729,994

Turnout of Republicans *

Type of Election	Year	Republican Turnout	Increase
Low Turnout Off-Year	2002	3,095,528	N/A
High Turnout Off-Year	1998	3,362,237	266,709
Low Turnout Presidential Year	1996	3,900,126	537,889
High Turnout Presidential Year	2000	4,011,423	111,297

* Party by party registration calculated based on Los Angeles Times exit poll data. Numbers do not equal total registration due to the 3 to 5 percent of exit poll respondents who decline to state their party affiliation each year.

The Democratic party clearly benefits the most from the increased turnout in “high turnout” years. But in opposition to conventional wisdom, Democrats start with an advantage at even the lowest-turnout elections. Where conventional wisdom remains accurate is that more of the registered Republicans are high frequency voters than the registered Democrats. As a result, the Democratic turnout advantage is smallest in low-turnout elections: in 2002, the Democratic turnout advantage was only 15 percent, increasing to 18 percent in 1996 (the low turnout Presidential year), 23 percent in 1998 (high turnout off-year), and 33 percent in 2000 (high turnout Presidential year).

In an election with only Republican and Democratic voters, Republicans are at a significant disadvantage. Republican winners in the years studied had to make up this advantage with support from “other” voters:

Turnout of “Other” Voters *

Type of Election	Year	Independent Turnout	Increase
Low Turnout Off-Year	2002	773,882	N/A
High Turnout Off-Year	1998	689,690	-84,192
Low Turnout Presidential Year	1996	1,436,889	747,199
High Turnout Presidential Year	2000	1,337,141	-99,747

At first glance the negative figures in the “Increase” column seem counter-intuitive: turnout goes down in what should be higher-turnout years. The difference between 2002 and 1998 reflects the growth in registered “other” voters over that time period, and the difference between 1996 and 2000 reflects increased mobilization of “other” voters by the campaigns in 1996. In fact, turnout levels of “Other” voters correspond to our four categories of elections except for the 2000 election:

Turnout Percentage Among “Other” Voters

Type of Election	Year	Pct of ‘Other’ Voters Turning Out
Low Turnout Off-Year	2002	25 %
High Turnout Off-Year	1998	26 %
Low Turnout Presidential Year	1996	56 %
High Turnout Presidential Year	2000	43 %

This leads to the Republican conundrum: their turnout disadvantage is lowest in low-turnout elections, however those are the very elections when the other-party voters they need are least likely to turn out and vote. The number of “other” party voters that Republicans need to match the Democrats’ two-party match-up advantage is determined by another swing population: the ticket-splitting swing voters.

Ticket Splitting Swing

Once a party gets its voters to the ballot box (or to complete an absentee ballot), it still needs to convince the voters to support the party’s candidates. These voters – who may vote for one party’s candidate for governor and another party’s candidate for another

office – are ticket-splitting voters. Because we cannot review each individual’s ballot, these are the most difficult to identify and analyze.

Our analysis follows a traditional political science approach: identify how many votes a candidate received, how many votes were cast by members of that candidate’s party, and the difference is the number of ticket splitting voters supporting that candidate. This approach assumes that all the voters registered to a given party vote for a candidate before counting any Decline to State voters or voters from the other party support that candidate. Clearly that is not 100 percent accurate; however, it is sufficient for the needs of this review. This approach identifies those candidates who successfully attracted support from outside of their party, and those who failed to hold the support of their own party’s voters.

The key questions addressed by this analysis are the following:

1. Did the candidate keep the support of the non-core voters from his party?
2. Did the candidate attract the support of “other” party voters and / or swing voters from the other party?

Each candidate keeps the support of his core voters (by the definition of “core” voters this is no surprise). On question one, the candidates in yellow failed, as their vote totals were lower than the number of votes cast by members of their own party. Dole and Lungren lost moderate Republicans to their opponents, while Davis and Westly lost Democratic voters to Green party candidates.

The “Ticket-Splitting Swing Votes” columns below measure a candidate’s success among ticket-splitting swing voters. Thus we arrive at one goal of our analysis: isolating the measurement of the candidate’s success with ticket-splitting swing voters:

	Year	Candidate	Votes Received	Voter Totals for Candidate's Party	Turnout Swing Votes	Ticket-Splitting Swing Votes
Presidential Election Years	1996	Dole-R	3,828,380	3,900,126	804,598	106,337
		Clinton-D	5,119,835	4,618,571	1,058,713	771,283
		Nader-G	237,016	13,313		
	2000	Bush-R	4,567,429	4,011,423	1,667,429	734,089
		Gore-D	5,861,203	5,348,565	1,788,707	782,657
		Nader-G	418,707	16,648		
Non-Presidential Election Years	1998	Davis-D	4,860,702	4,138,138	578,280	992,583
		Lungren-R	3,218,030	3,362,237	266,709	33,876
		Quackenbush-R	4,006,762	3,362,237	266,709	822,608
		Martinez-D	3,518,178	4,138,138	578,280	-349,941
	2002	Simon-R	3,169,801	3,095,528	Low year	252,356
		Davis-D	3,533,490	3,559,858	Low year	243,651
		Carnejo-G	393,036	15,595		
		McClintock-R	3,273,028	3,095,528	Low year	355,583
		Westly-D	3,289,839	3,559,858	Low year	0

In 2002, the lowest-turnout year of those we are reviewing, there is no turnout swing. Steve Westly, as the low Democrat vote-getter in the years studied, is the measuring post for the count of core Democrats, thus the 0 for him among ticket-splitting swing voters.

Davis's success in 1998 is clearly indicated by his dominance of the ticket-splitting voters, while his lowered appeal in 2002 led to a nearly 50-50 split of swing voters between Simon and Davis. Republican Quackenbush's showing in 1998, however, shows that Republicans are equally capable of attracting ticket-splitting voters with the right issues and candidate.

Note that both Davis and Westly still prevailed in 2002 – so few swing voters turned out that their advantage in core voters overcame their weakness among the swing voters.

In 2000, these figures show that Bush and Gore vary narrowly split the turnout swing and ticket-splitting swing voters: Gore's victory in California came on the support of core voters.

The percentage of a candidate's votes beyond among turnout swing voters is a result of two key factors:

1. The year in which a candidate runs (Presidential year versus off year) and
2. The success of the top-ticket election at turning out the vote.

It is very difficult for a campaign other than the top of the ticket to have any significant impact on turnout.

Statewide Results

Voter Registration

Statewide population growth in this time frame has not resulted in statewide registration growth – at least, not yet. And Democratic success at the polls is not reflected in Democratic party registration: statewide Democratic registration declined from 47.17 percent to 44.60 percent from 1996 to 2002. Meanwhile Republican registration declined only one percent from 36.42 percent in 1996 to 35.21 percent in 2002.

Perhaps the most-discussed trend in California voter registration has been the increase in “decline to state” registrants. These independent voters reached 20.19 percent of California registrants in 2002, with particular concentrations in Alpine County (28.14 percent) and San Francisco County (31.83 percent). They remain a highly unreliable voting block: a Los Angeles Times exit poll found that only 10 percent of 2002 voters were Decline to State or other party registered voters – a turnout rate about half of Democratic and Republican voters.

The unexpected growth has been among Green Party registrants. The presence of Ralph Nader on the Presidential ballot and Peter Camejo in the 2002 Governor’s race has rallied Green Party loyalists, and registration is up 60,862 between 1996 to 2002 – a 64 percent increase.

The Green Party growth takes on even more importance due to its regional focus: virtually all in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. Conventional wisdom prior to 2002 held that Green Party voters only desert the Democrats in “sure win” elections. Nader’s showing in the 2000 Presidential election shows that this wisdom is no longer true. The Green Party manifests a growing leftward pull on the Democratic party – a dangerous threat to Democratic strength in a time of population transition and rising Hispanic voting power.

Voting Results

Despite a reduced lead in registration, Democrats won every statewide seat in 2002 – an election dominated by reliable core voters. But the swing voters still decide most California elections. Numbering 4,935,559 million, they represent 13 times the margin between core Democrats and core Republicans. Their decision to vote, and their decision for whom to vote, remains the decisive factor in California elections.

The question remains: what drives voting decisions for swing voters? A significant part of that answer lies with the candidates and messages involved in a campaign – issues outside the scope of this study. Another part of the analysis, however, lies in what parts of the State – primarily what counties – are dominated by what types of voters. Armed with this information, interested individuals and parties can focus their efforts to increase turnout among each of the target groups. The following sections of this report review and present this information.

Voter Populations

From all of these calculations, we can measure the size of each population: core, turnout swing, and ticket-splitting swing:

All Voters

Category	Basis	Number	Pct
Total Voters	Based on 2000 Presidential Election	11,142,843	73 %
Core voters	Democrat and Republican	6,207,284	56 %
Turnout Swing Voters	Total Turnout Bonuses	3,404,022	31 %
Ticket-Splitting Swing Voters	Remainder	1,531,537	14 %

Each of these groups can also be identified by party registration, though by definition “other” voters are not core voters:

Democratic Voters

Category	Basis	Number	Pct
Total Voters	Based on 2000 Presidential Election	5,348,565	78 %
Core voters	Democrat	3,289,839	62 %
Turnout Swing Voters	Total Turnout Bonuses	1,788,707	33 %
Ticket-Splitting Swing Voters	Remainder	270,019	5 %

Republican Voters

Category	Basis	Number	Pct
Total Voters	Based on 2000 Presidential Election	4,011,423	74 %
Core voters	Republican	2,917,445	73 %
Turnout Swing Voters	Total Turnout Bonuses	915,895	23 %
Ticket-Splitting Swing Voters	Remainder	178,083	4 %

“Other” Voters

Category	Basis	Number	Pct
Total Voters	Based on 2000 Presidential Election	1,337,141	43 %
Core voters	n/a	0	0 %
Turnout Swing Voters	Total Turnout Bonuses	563,259	42 %
Ticket-Splitting Swing Voters	Remainder	773,882	58 %

These figures reveal how the conventional wisdom on low-turnout elections changes in California: 72 percent of Republican voters are core voters – considerably higher than the 61 percent of Democratic voters who are core. The 2002 election showed that the conventional wisdom regarding Republican advantages in low-turnout elections are wrong, however, because the 61 percent of over five million active Democrats means more voters at the polls than the 72 percent of four million active Republicans.

County Impact

California's traditional north-south divisions have, in the 1990s and into the current decade, greatly declined in importance. The conclusion of battles over water between Southern California and Northern California environmentalists is largely responsible for this decline, as are population trends within each region. As coastal and urban housing becomes more expensive in both parts of California, an urban / coastal versus suburban / rural division has replaced the north-south division in importance.

Population growth varies considerably across California: Modoc County actually declined in population from 1996 to 2000, while Placer County increased by 29.7 percent. Voter registration levels, though generally stable statewide, also varied widely from county to county. San Bernardino County increased the number of registered voters by 30.32 percent, while Santa Barbara County declined by 17.93 percent.

Top 10 Fastest Growing Counties by Population between 1996 and 2002

County	Percent Change in Population: 1996-2002	Numerical Change in Population:
Placer	29.70 %	63,783
San Benito	26.65 %	11,769
Riverside	21.91 %	305,380
San Joaquin	17.09 %	89,645
Kings	17.01 %	19,632
Yolo	16.41 %	25,497
Stanislaus	16.21 %	67,281
Merced	15.70 %	30,579
Madera	15.13 %	17,122
Monterey	14.13 %	51,193

Top 10 Fastest Growing Counties by Registration between 1996 and 2002

County	Percent Change in Registration: 1996-2002	Numerical Change in Registration:
San Bernardino	30.32 %	143,427
San Benito	29.95 %	6,199
Merced	28.83 %	21,626
Placer	18.21 %	23,743
Stanislaus	13.70 %	25,622
Imperial	13.21 %	5,981
Mariposa	8.53 %	903
Calaveras	7.11 %	1,657
Lassen	6.90 %	941
Kings	6.72 %	2,888

The counties varied in both total registration and in registration by party. For example, former Republican stronghold Orange County saw Republican registration decrease in total numbers, and the percentage of Republicans in the county declined from 51.58 percent to 48.46 percent. Yet that is not a statewide trend, as noted above.

Most Heavily Concentrated Republican Counties in 2002

County	Republican Percentage of Total Registration	Number of Republicans Registered
Placer	51.77 %	79,800
Sutter	50.70 %	18,757
Madera	50.02 %	21,526
Orange	48.86 %	634,672
Shasta	48.79 %	41,432
Riverside	48.56 %	315,451
Inyo	48.14 %	5,000
Tulare	48.11 %	61,114
Modoc	48.01 %	2,460
Kern	47.86 %	124,323
El Dorado	47.62 %	42,684

Most Heavily Concentrated Democratic Counties in 2002

County	Democrat Percentage of Total Registration	Number of Democrats Registered
Alameda	55.78 %	369,434
San Francisco	55.16 %	247,883
Imperial	54.49 %	27,936
Los Angeles	52.32 %	2,080,329
Santa Cruz	51.42 %	69,697
San Mateo	50.24 %	166,843
Sonoma	50.19 %	116,845
Solano	50.17 %	88,205
Marin	50.08 %	70,310
Contra Costa	49.02 %	237,561
Merced	48.51 %	46,879

Most Heavily Concentrated "Other" Counties in 2002

County	Other Percentage of Total Registered	Number of Other Registered
San Francisco	31.83 %	143,041
Alpine	28.14 %	233
Humboldt	26.91 %	20,591
Mendocino	26.88 %	12,560
Mono	25.75 %	1,494
Santa Cruz	25.52 %	34,600
Sierra	25.44 %	584
Alameda	24.58 %	162,822
Santa Clara	24.23 %	177,307
Marin	23.75 %	33,349
San Diego	23.47 %	331,330

Regional Analysis

The great variety among counties reflects the new regions in California. Immigrant-driven growth in Los Angeles County; increasing diversity and the continuing suburban growth in Ventura, Orange and San Diego counties; economic boom and bust in the San Francisco Bay Area; the environmentalist-dominated coastal counties; and the rapidly-growing Heartland counties.

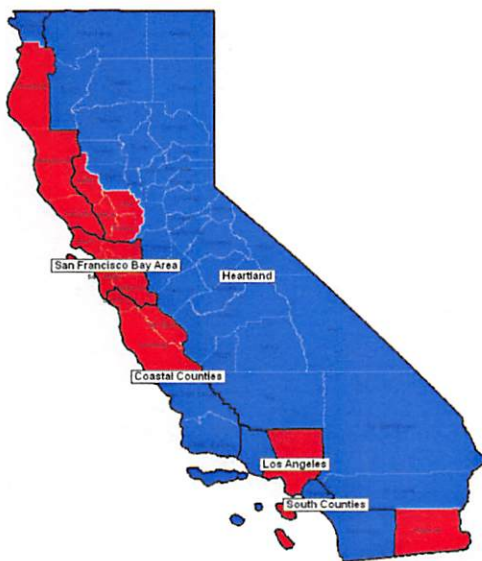


Immigration and the continuing move to the suburbs are at the heart of these regional shifts. Political differences both influence and result from these changes. The growth in the San Bernardino / Riverside “Inland Empire,” the demographic shift in Orange and San Diego Counties, and migration between the San Francisco bay area and the Stockton / Sacramento area all contributed to the new divide in California between coastal and inland regions.

The 2002 election vividly demonstrated this division:

Counties voting for the Republican are shown in blue, Democrat in red:

Davis vs. Simon

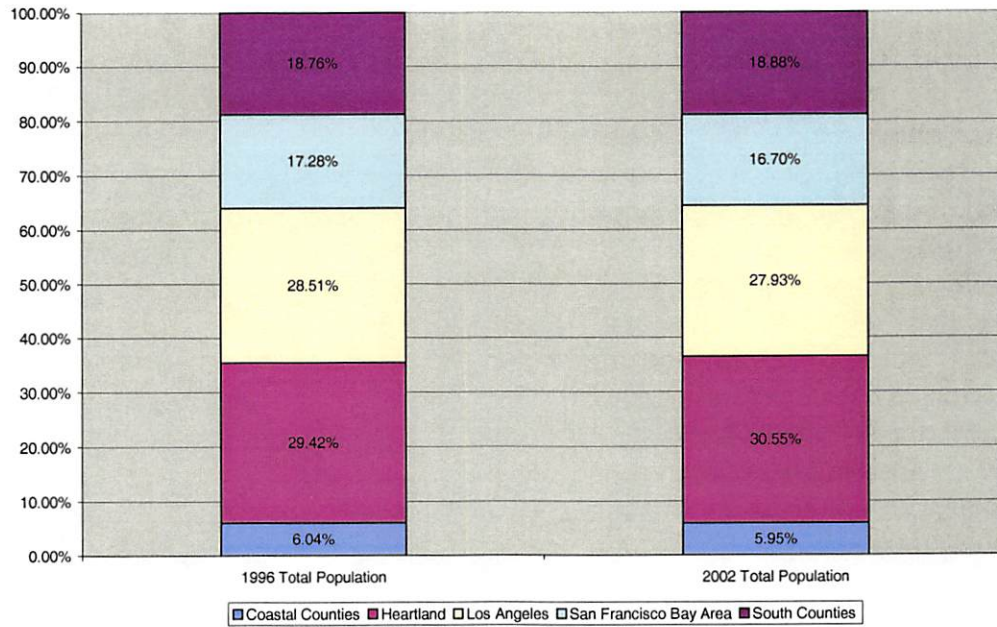


Westly vs. McClintock



The populations and voter registration vary greatly by region, from the relatively small Coastal Counties, up to the roughly equal Heartland and Los Angeles regions:

California Statewide Population by Region

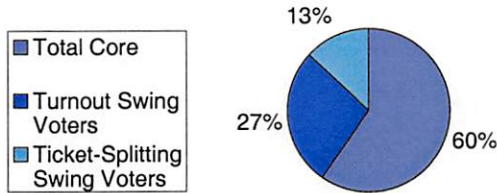


California Statewide Registration by Region: 1996 and 2002



The Heartland

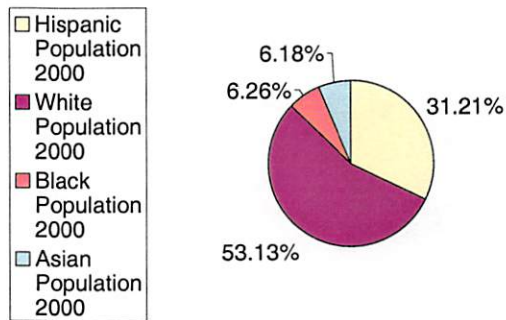
The Heartland Core, Swing, and Split Votes



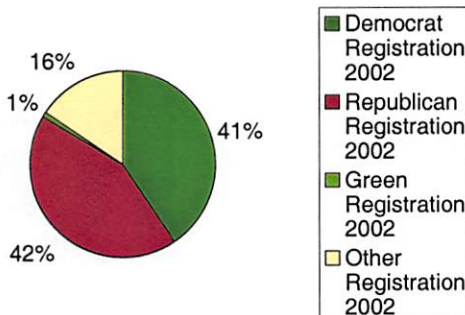
Heavily Republican, the Heartland has fewer swing voters (of either type) than other regions.

Its current demographics are similar to the South Counties in percentages and rate of change. But unlike the state, the Heartland's growth is accompanied by significant voter registration gains.

The Heartland Population by Ethnicity



The Heartland Registration by Party

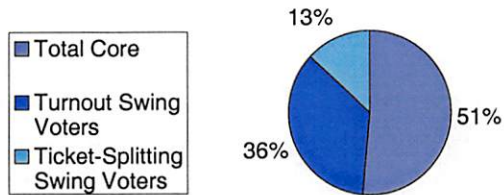


Led by San Bernardino's amazing 30 percent growth in registered voters, and as predicted in our prior study of voting in California, the Heartland's political role in the State is increasing.

Democratic do have opportunities for growth in the Heartland. There are many immigrants who are not yet registered and active. In addition, not all of the people moving to this region's lower-priced housing are Republicans. But its rapidly growing populations of people and registered voters are predominately motivated by a desire for new housing. And most left the high cost of living (and the politics) of Los Angeles and San Francisco. These trends make the Heartland a new center of Republican strength that rivals the South Counties, and growth trends make the Heartland more important each year.

Los Angeles

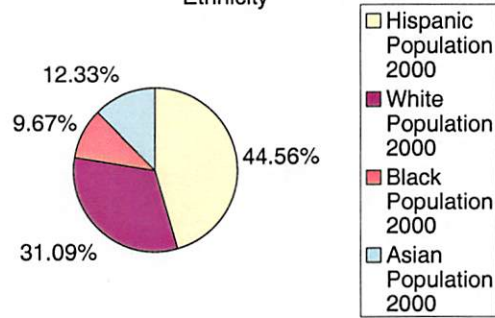
Los Angeles County Core, Swing, and Split Votes



Thanks to its size, Los Angeles County is home to many core Republicans, the heart of core Democrats, and swing voters of all kinds. While core Republicans are only 29.5 percent of Los Angeles County voters, there are still 526,641 of them. And core Democrats are a much lower percentage of LA County voters, yet still number 896,132 (27.2 percent of all core Democrats in California).

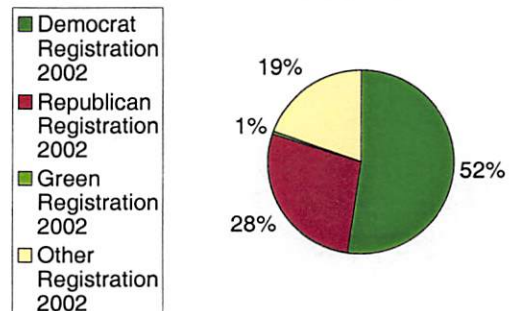
LA County is also the center of the immigrant-driven demographic changes underway in California. With the departure of most of its aerospace workers in the early and mid 1990s, and the continuing influx of immigrants driving population growth, LA County is the leading edge of the demographic transition in California as a whole. In addition, at 44.56 percent Latino, LA County is also the center of the increasing role of Latinos in Democratic political power. LA County's Latinos have shown little support for Republican candidates, yet few of those candidates have hailed from the LA area. The Republican party has done little outreach to LA County Latinos, with the notable exception of current gubernatorial candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger. His long-term involvement in East LA youth activities, and the East LA headquarters for his 2002 after-schools initiative, gained him considerable support among Latino voters. Latino voters – especially Latino voters in LA County – are likely to be a determining factor in the 2003 gubernatorial recall election.

Los Angeles County Population by Ethnicity



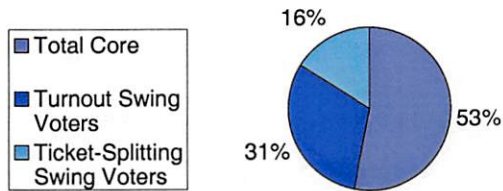
Latinos are going to become a larger and larger political force, especially in LA County as they gain citizenship and register to vote. Their rapidly growing population (10.4 percent from 1996 to 2000) will eventually translate into growing numbers of active voters. Latinos are going to become a larger and larger political force, especially in LA County. Republican political fortunes in California are likely to depend heavily on the party's ability to make inroads with these voters, just as the Democratic party's ability to repeat its 2002 success will be more and more dependent on holding Latino voters' loyalties.

Los Angeles County Registration by Party



San Francisco Bay Area

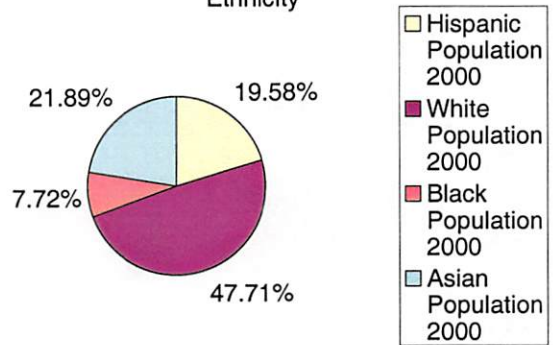
San Francisco Bay Counties Core, Swing, and Split Votes



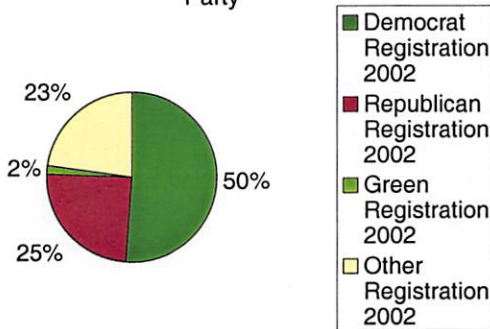
This bastion of Democratic voters is also the center of the rapidly rising Green Party. These former core Democrats lead the new version of ticket-splitters, dividing their votes not between Republicans and Democrats, but between Democrats and Greens.

Steve Westly's relatively close win in the 2002 Controller's election was largely attributable to his relative weakness in this area: while Bill Lockyer received 890,097 votes in 2002 in this region, Westly received only 763,553.

San Francisco Bay Area Population by Ethnicity



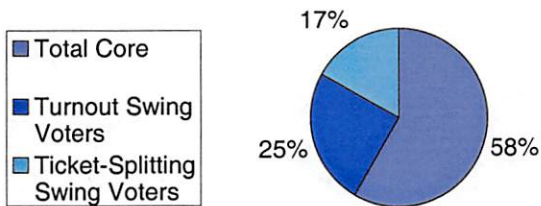
San Francisco Bay Area Registration by Party



The end of the dot-com boom deeply impacted this area. The area's share of the state's population and the area's share of the state's registered voters both declined from 1996 to 2002. While both of these trends directly impact Democratic strength in this region, neither has benefited Republican candidates, and the area remains a source of Republican donors but not votes.

Coastal Counties

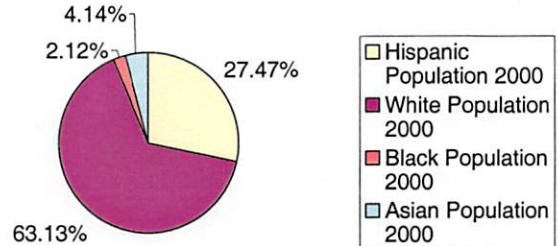
Coastal Counties Core, Swing, and Split Votes



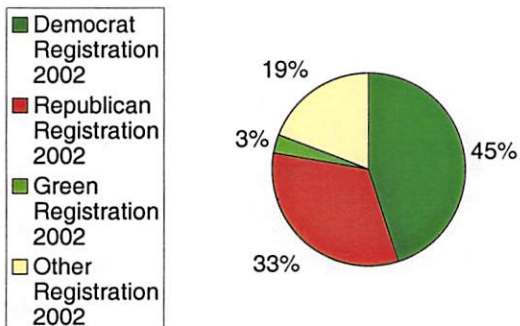
The coastal counties are a hotbed of environmental activism, but their political power is balanced by the core Republican farmers and ranchers of San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties.

Property values and restrictions on housing construction have risen together in this region. A side effect of this situation is that the rising diversity found in every other region in California is largely absent in the coastal counties. The region is the least diverse in the State at 63 percent Non-Hispanic White.

Coastal Counties Population by Ethnicity



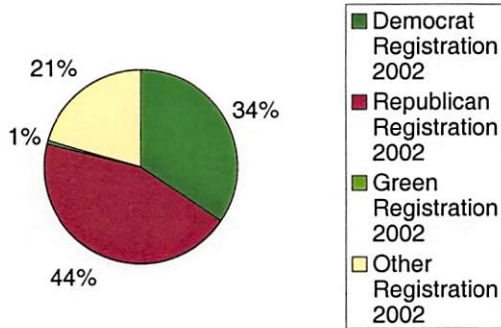
Coastal Counties Registration 2002



This region's strong environmental activists are likely to be on the front lines of a potential intraparty Democratic dispute between environmentalists and Hispanics wishing to increase opportunities for home ownership. Fears of Green party inroads in this region (in loyalty, if not registration) are likely to concern Democrats considering support for increased home building.

South Counties

South Counties Registration by Party

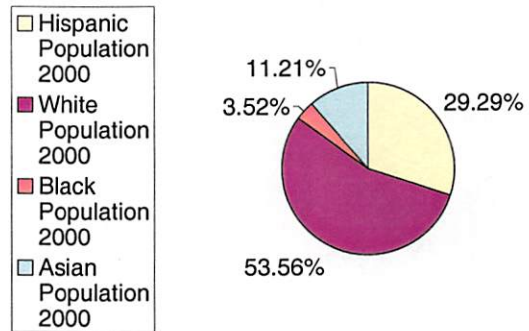


The South Counties remain Republican bastion, though the margin between the two parties is significantly reduced in recent years. Immigration and the exodus of non-Hispanic Whites are currently reducing the Republican advantage here.

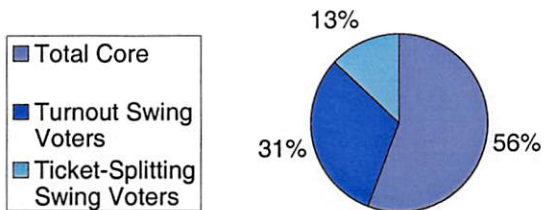
In just four years, from 1996 to 2000, Hispanic population increased 17.7 percent, while the non-Hispanic White population declined by 3.1 percent.

The changing voter registration is accompanied by a change in voting behavior. Voters in the South Counties are now less reliable than the Heartland – fewer voters are core voters, and more are swing voters.

South Counties Population by Ethnicity



South Counties Core, Swing, and Split Votes



Overall, the South Counties remain a center of Republican strength, but their ability to offset Democratic advantages in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area is decreasing. Fueled by new registrants, primarily Latinos, Democratic candidates are making inroads into the South Counties – especially in the larger cities such as San Diego and Santa Ana.

To win statewide, Republicans must hold their core South County voters. To win in the long term, Republicans must expand their appeal to the new voters in the South Counties, and slow or reverse the eroding Republican party advantage in this area. Democratic candidates are not dependent on votes from the South Counties; however continued gains in this region greatly simplify their need for winning margins elsewhere in California.

Conclusions

California Electoral Leanings

Democratic candidates' strength in core voters gives them an advantage going into an election. Yet just under five million California voters remain swing voters, and their decisions (including a decision to stay home on election day) decide California elections:

- The 45 percent of California voters who fall into the swing voter categories determine the outcome. If they decide to stay home, such as in 2002, the Democratic core voters drive the results and Democratic candidates win.
- The unusual division in California between ticket-splitting swing voters and turnout swing voters makes every candidate's campaign more difficult: an appeal to the centrist ticket-splitting swing voters threatens to lose votes of turnout swing voters (and, for Democrats, of Green / Democrat ticket-splitters).
- Regional variations in demographics, voter registration, and voter behavior require candidates to have different strategies for each region.

Given the differences in regional loyalties and behaviors, a Republican candidate must focus on motivating swing voters in the Heartland and South Counties while maintaining support among the core voters elsewhere. A Democratic candidate must maintain the Democratic core and turnout swing voters in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, and appeal to the ticket-splitting swing voters in the South Counties and Heartland.

Latinos are one example of a group of voters with both turnout swing voters and ticket-splitting swing voters:

- A Republican who wins 30 percent of the Latino vote while motivating other core and turnout swing Republicans is likely to win with a significant margin.
- Alternatively, if a Democrat holds 85 percent of the Latino vote while motivating his or her other own core and turnout swing voters, he or she is almost sure to win.

Latino Population and Voters Rising

Latinos are growing rapidly as a percentage of California's population, but their voter registration lags significantly behind their population growth rate. As immigrants gain citizenship and register to vote, Latinos will play a much larger role in California elections than they currently play. Will Democrats maintain the loyalty of a majority of Hispanic voters, or will conflict between Hispanics trying to buy homes and environmentalists aiming to limit development lead to dissension? A recent poll shows dissension growing nationally, with the percentage of Latinos identifying with the Democratic party declining from 55 percent in 2001 to 40 percent in 2003.²

Will the Republican party's lack of success among non-White voters in California lead to declining influence as California's recent immigrants achieve citizenship and start voting,

² Sacramento Bee, "J.Lo, Bustamante tops in Latino poll." August 21, 2003.

or will the party be able to recruit the new voters into its ranks? Many commentators consider Latinos solidly Democratic voters, yet 30 percent of Latinos supported Proposition 187 and an August 21, 2003 survey shows 24 percent of Latino adults in California support Schwarzenegger in a Schwarzenegger – Bustamante match up, with 58 percent for Bustamante and the remainder undecided. The same survey found 45 percent support the recall compared to 43.5 percent opposed.³

- Latinos' increasing economic prosperity, especially their home ownership, will bring many Latinos to a decision point regarding their self-interest and, therefore, their political loyalties.
- Such questioning of political loyalties by a group that constitutes an increasing share of California's registered voters has potential earthquake significance for California politics.
- Especially important will be the way in which contemporary politics (the War against Terrorism, the State's fiscal crisis, the Schwarzenegger candidacy) affect future voters in the emerging generation of Latino registrants. Today's debate will shape their views and behavior when they register and vote later this decade.

Recall Opportunity

The recall election presents a rare opportunity to analyze a combination of traditionally primary election factors along with general election factors. The recall results will provide detailed breakdowns of political views within each of the voting groups covered in this study (core, turnout swing, and ticket-splitting swing), in each region of the State. In particular, a close review of the vote for Schwarzenegger will provide insight into what could prove to be a new governing coalition.

³ Ibid.