

San Diego Mayoral Election: Faulconer Leads in Early Voting

Executive Summary

With eight days to go before Election Day, the National University System Institute for Policy Research (NUSIPR) projects an early lead for Councilmember Kevin Faulconer over Councilmember David Alvarez. Using election data from the Registrar of Voters and GIS mapping software, NUSIPR evaluated votes cast in the November 2013 mayoral election, as well as early returns for the February 11th runoff election.

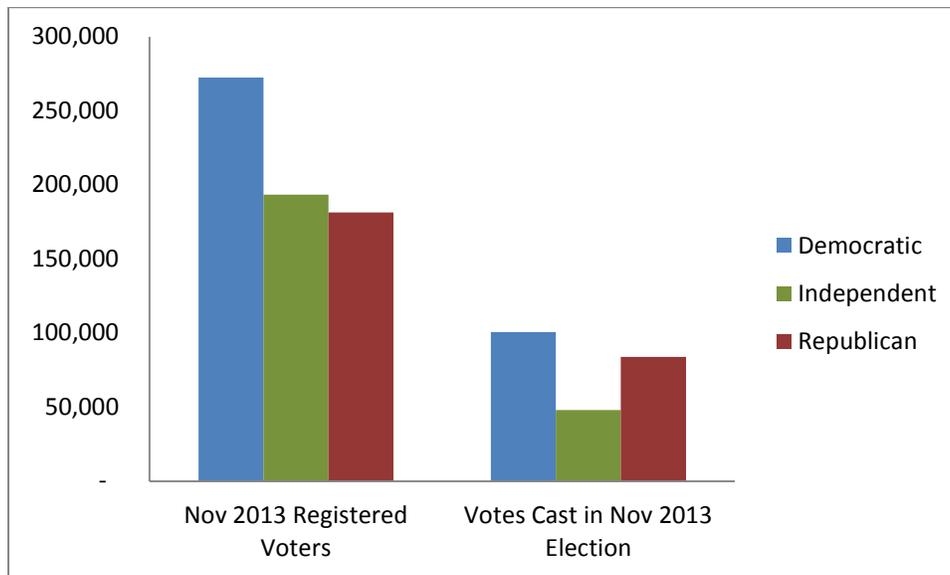
Overall, we found that:

- **The Interstate 8 was a clear dividing line for votes cast in the November mayoral election.** Faulconer won mostly coastal and suburban neighborhoods north of Interstate 8, while Alvarez won mostly urban and Latino neighborhoods south of Interstate 8.
- **Voter turnout will be higher for the February 2014 election than the November 2013 election.** Comparing the same point in time in early voting for the November 19th election, turnout is up by 28,500 votes. This suggests the February 11th election will have a higher overall turnout rate.
- **Early voters favor Faulconer over Alvarez.** Republican absentee ballots are being cast at a significantly higher rate than Democratic ballots. Turnout in voter precincts that favored Faulconer in last year's election is also higher than turnout in pro-Alvarez precincts.
- **Election Day votes are instrumental for an Alvarez victory.** Alvarez edged out former Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher's early absentee lead with poll voters to make the runoff election. He will need to generate a higher partisan turnout on Election Day in order to win.

November 2013 Mayoral Election

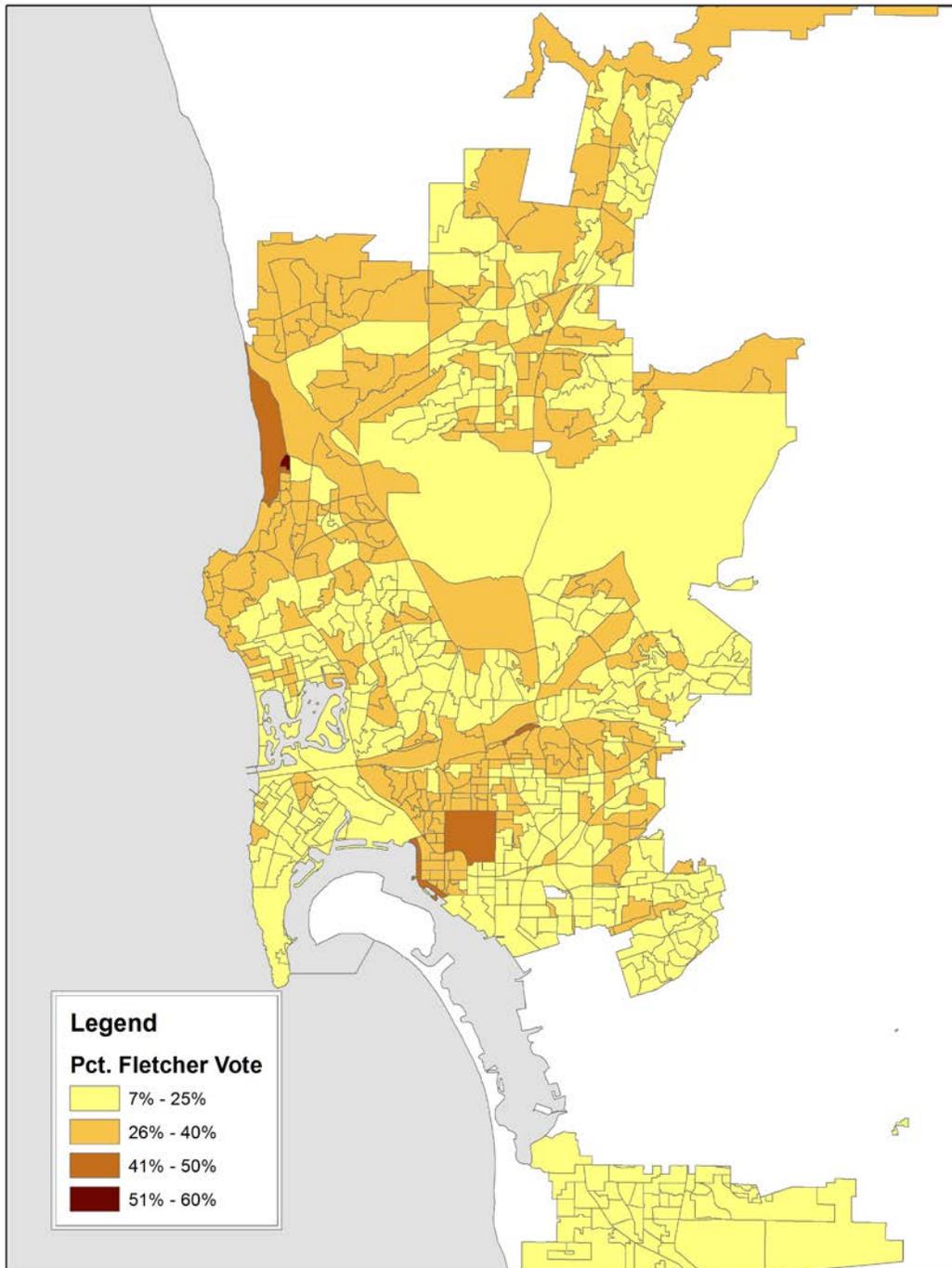
Overall, voter turnout was low in the November 19th mayoral special election. According to the San Diego Registrar of Voters, 242,747 voters out of 683,370 voters cast ballots in the contest, generating a 35.5% turnout rate. Most votes were cast by Democratic voters (42%), followed by Republicans (35%) and Independents (20%). As illustrated in the following chart, high Republican voter turnout dampened the Democratic Party's registration advantage. Despite a 91,000 voter registration advantage, Democratic voters led Republicans in turnout by only 17,000 votes. Decline to State voters also dropped from 2nd place in registration to 3rd place in turnout.

Chart 1: Voter Registration and Turnout in the November 2013 Mayoral Election, by Partisan Affiliation



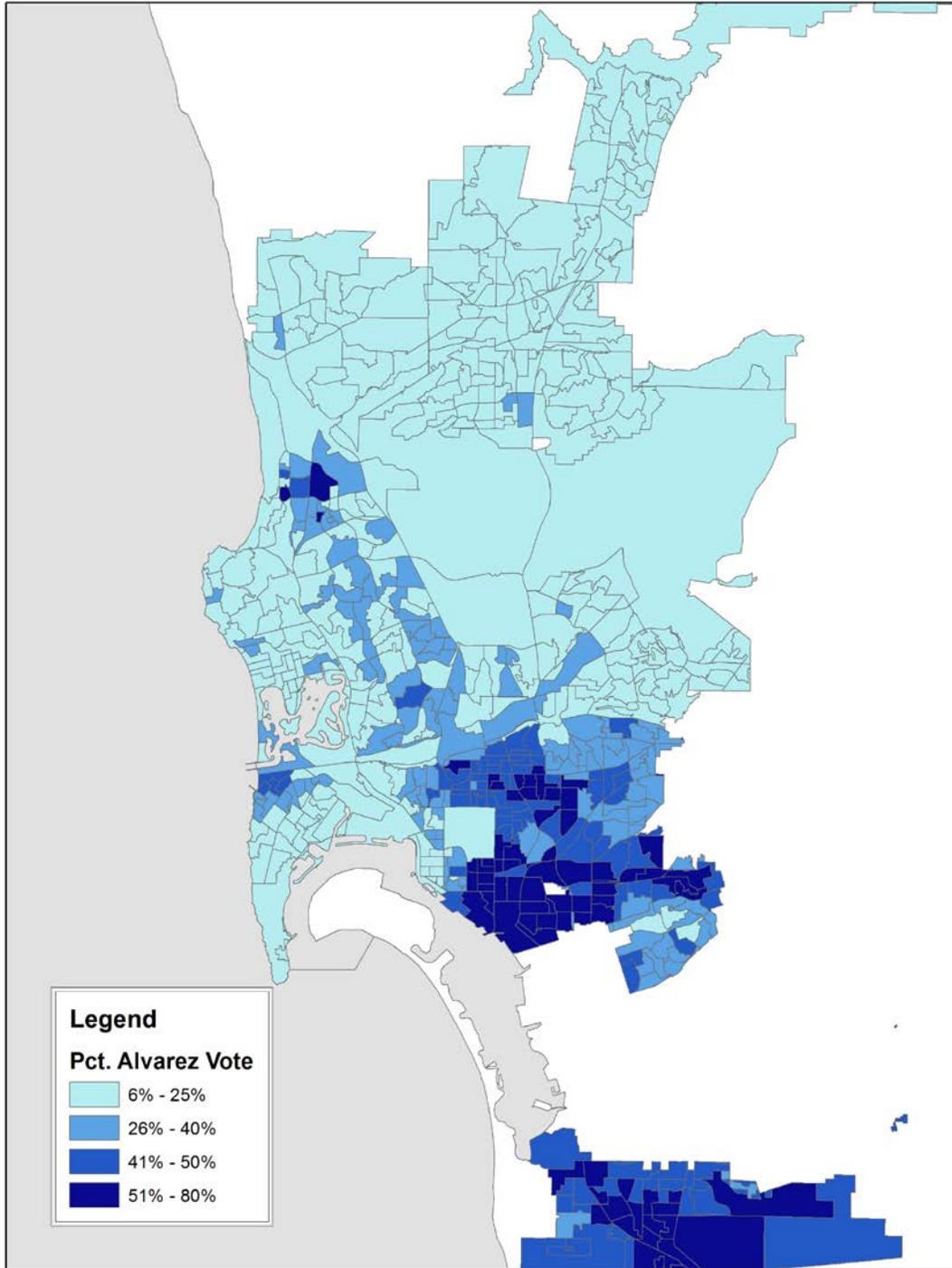
Looking at returns by voter precincts, some clear trends emerge for the major candidates in the race. Former Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher had broad support citywide, but he lacked a geographic base among voters. Fletcher won the majority of votes in a single precinct, located on the UCSD campus. Overall, he did best in the Uptown, Downtown, and the La Jolla-UTC-Torrey Pines corridor. Looking at Council Districts, Fletcher performed best in Council District 1 (28%).

Figure 1: Percentage of Votes Cast For Nathan Fletcher, By Voter Precinct



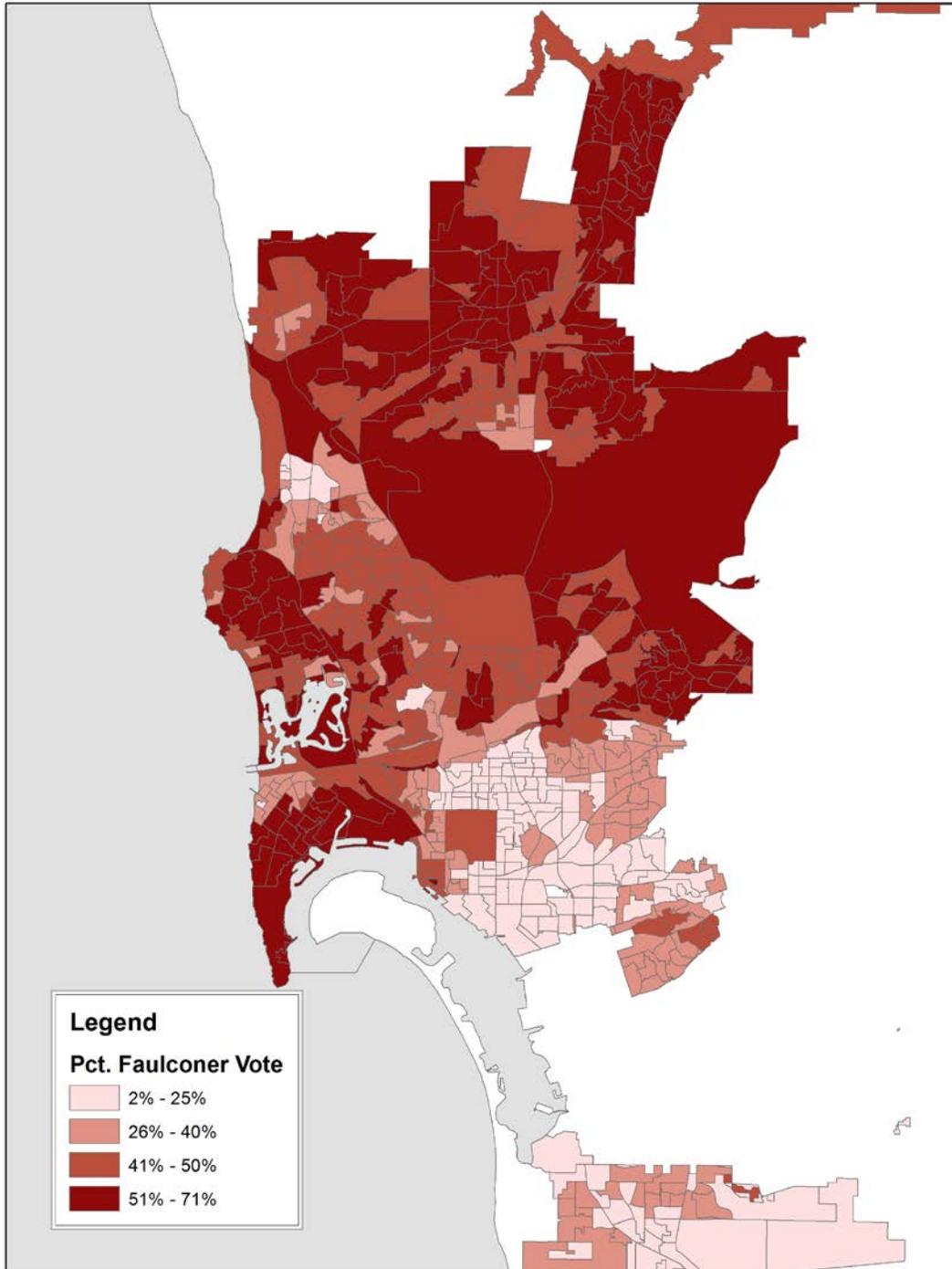
Councilmember David Alvarez performed best in older, diverse neighborhoods south of Interstate 8. He won the majority (56%) of the votes in his 8th District. Alvarez performed exceptionally well in the Latino neighborhoods of Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, San Ysidro, Shelltown and Grant Hill.

Figure 2: Percentage of Votes Cast For David Alvarez, By Voter Precinct



Councilmember Kevin Faulconer performed best in the coastal communities of Point Loma and La Jolla, as well as suburban neighborhoods north of Interstate 8 – Rancho Bernardo, Carmel Valley, and San Carlos. He won the majority (50%) of votes in his District 2, as well as the majority (56%) of votes in Republican-leaning District 5.

Figure 3: Percentage of Votes Cast For Kevin Faulconer, By Voter Precinct



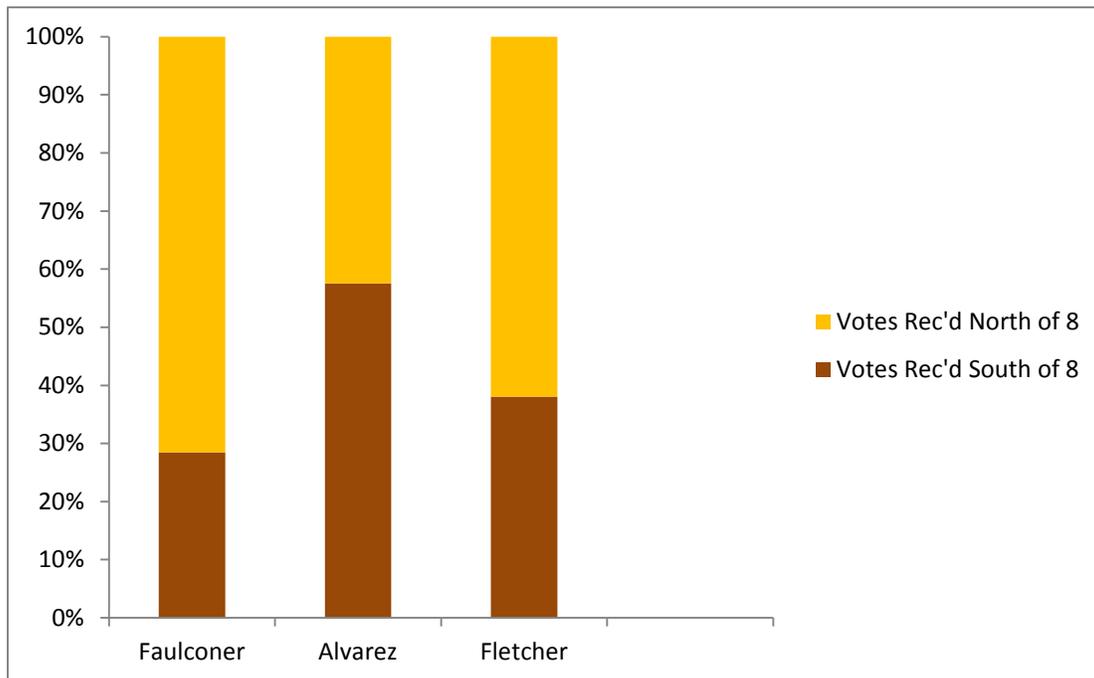
Looking at votes cast by geography, six out of ten votes were cast north of Interstate 8. Northern voter turnout (39%) exceeded the citywide average (35.5%). Turnout south of I-8 however lagged (32%) the citywide average.

Table 1: Voter Registration & Turnout in the November 2013 Mayoral Election, by Geographic Region

	Total Reg. Voters	Voted	Turnout	Pct. Registered Voters	Pct. Votes Cast
North of 8	372,631	145,826	39%	55%	60%
South of 8	301,362	95,946	32%	45%	40%

NUSIPR also found geographic voting patterns in the last mayoral election. Faulconer voters live mostly north of Interstate 8, while Alvarez voters live mostly south of the 8. This underscores the partisan groupings we find in the City of San Diego – Republican voters and elected officials are concentrated in the north, while Democratic voters and elected officials are more concentrated in the south.

Chart 2: Percentage of Votes Cast For Candidates, by Geographic Region



Absentee Returns

The November 2013 election was dominated by early voting; more than 7 out of 10 (71%) voters cast absentee ballots. NUSIPR originally projected 67% of ballots cast would be absentee.

While absentee voting is the dominant form of voting in local elections, “poll voters” on Election Day are still important to the outcome of elections. Among the major candidates, Alvarez had the largest proportion of votes coming from Election Day poll voters. In fact, as the following table illustrates, Councilmember Alvarez overcame Fletcher’s early lead in the absentee ballot count with a higher turnout of poll voters on Election Day.

Table 2: Votes Cast By Candidate & By Type, November 2013 Mayoral Election

	Absentee Votes	% Absentee	Poll Votes	% Poll	Total
Faulconer	71,685	70%	30,268	30%	101,953
Fletcher	41,057	70%	17,298	30%	58,355
Alvarez	40,436	62%	25,304	38%	65,740

NUSIPR sought to compare absentee turnout for this election, compared to the November 2013 contest. Using absentee return data from the Registrar of Voters, we compared total returns at the same point in time – eleven days before the election. As of Friday, January 31st, 133,044 absentee ballots have been returned to the Registrar of Voter’s office, generating a 37.4% absentee turnout rate. Compared to the same time in early returns for the November 19th mayoral election, turnout is up by 28,500 votes. This trend suggests that the overall election turnout rate will be higher than the last mayoral contest (35.5%).

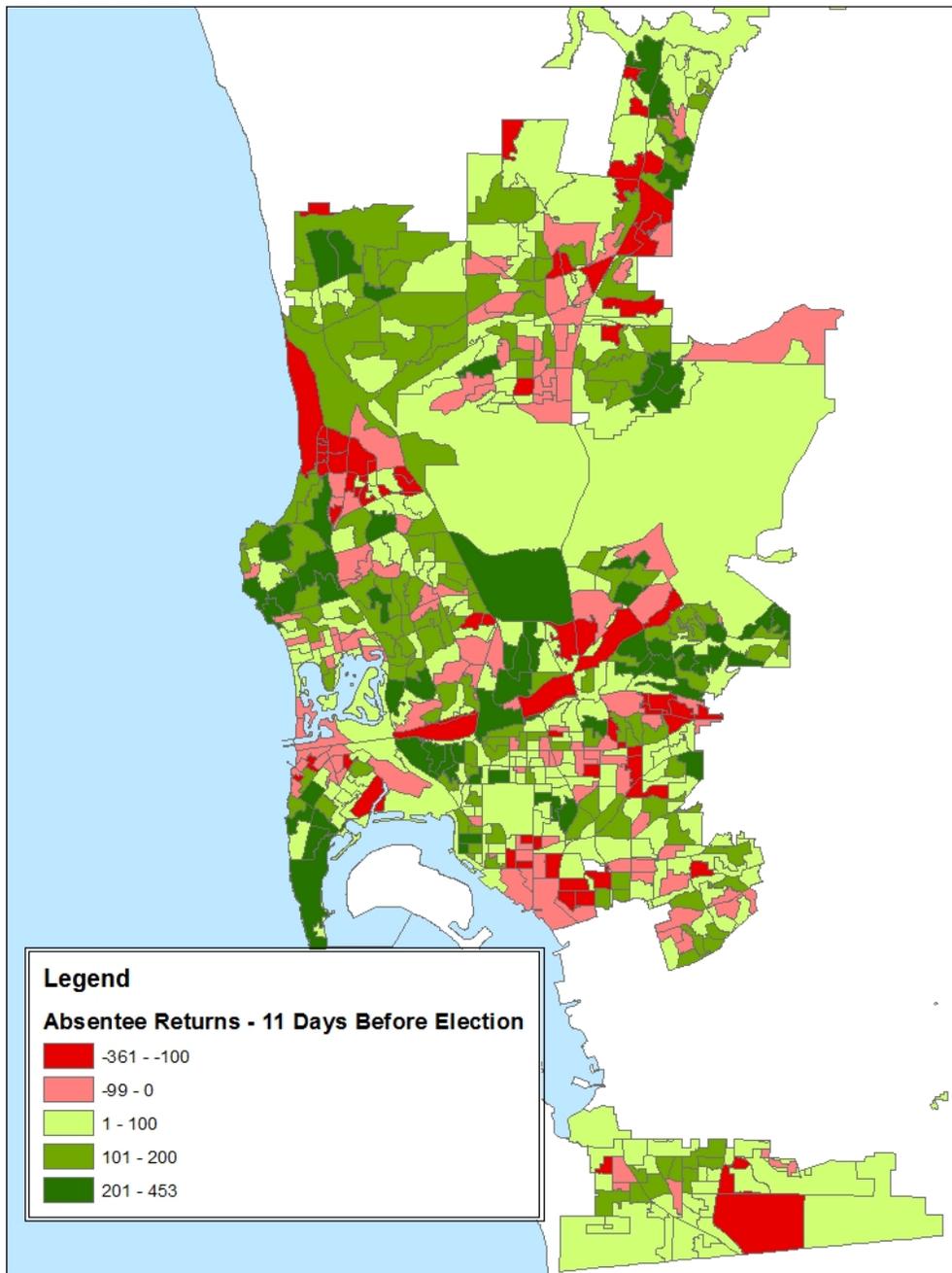
We also found that clear partisan voting patterns have emerged in early returns. As of Friday, January 31st, Republican voter turnout is significantly higher than Democratic turnout. The Democratic Party now narrowly leads the early ballot count.

Table 3: Absentee Ballots Issued & Returned in the February 2014 Mayoral Election, by Partisan Affiliation

	Ballots Issued	Ballots Returned	Percentage Returned
Democratic	141,341	51,147	36%
Republican	99,480	48,419	49%
Independent	92,542	26,066	28%

NUSIPR also took a look at absentee returns by voter precinct. As illustrated in the two following maps, most of the rise in early voting (shaded in green) has emerged from precincts that voted heavily for Kevin Faulconer in the November election. Exceptions to this trend are in Uptown and Centre City, where Nathan Fletcher performed well. Shaded in red are precincts that are now lagging their November turnout at this same point in time.

Figure 4: Comparison of Absentee Turnout 11 Days before Election Day by Voter Precinct, November 19th Election vs. February 11th Election



NUSIPR also conducted a comparison of absentee ballots returns in the top 50 precincts where each major candidate (Faulconer, Fletcher, Alvarez) gained the most raw absentee votes. We saw a similar pattern of returns as seen in the precinct map. For Faulconer precincts, turnout is up by 10,266 votes. Turnout is slightly higher in Fletcher's top 50; 10,319 additional votes have been cast. In the top 50 Alvarez precincts, turnout is up by 6,793 votes.

Conclusion

Election Day is fast approaching, but thousands of votes still remain to be cast in the mayoral contest. Given the absentee trends, it would appear that the Alvarez campaign and the Democratic Party will have to generate a higher partisan turnout on Election Day to increase the candidate's chances of success. In the November election, more Democratic votes were cast at polling booths on Election Day than Republican votes (approx. 29,519 vs. 24,063, respectively). It is worthwhile to note however that the returns showed no difference in voting patterns by political party. Each voted by absentee and polling location at the same rate (71% absentee, 29% poll). Barring anything happening in the next few days, we can expect a similar pattern for this election.

For many voters, this will be the first time they cast a ballot for either Alvarez or Faulconer. In the November 2013 mayoral election, three out of ten (30.6%) voters cast their ballots for candidates other than Faulconer or Alvarez. Whether these voters will support either candidates will depend on how effective their voter outreach efforts are. For now, it appears that Faulconer has the lead coming into Election Day.

About the National University System Institute for Policy Research

The National University System Institute for Policy Research (NUSIPR) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that formulates and promotes high quality economic policy, and public opinion research so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local governments in San Diego County and to improve the quality of life enjoyed by the region's residents.

NUSIPR publishes regular independent research and analysis for the public on a range of topics, including unemployment, business growth, and the San Diego housing market. The Institute also works collaboratively with clients to develop high quality research products that are tailored to their policy needs.