

## **June 2016 Election: Presidential Contest Casts a Shadow Over Local Contests**

With early voting beginning today in the June 7<sup>th</sup> presidential primary election, the National University System Institute for Policy Research (NUSIPR) took a closer look at the local races and voter dynamics to watch for this election cycle in San Diego County. Using data from the San Diego Registrar of Voters and Political Data Inc., NUSIPR made a number of key findings:

### **Key Findings**

- **More than half (50-53%) of all registered voters countywide will cast a ballot.** High interest and enthusiasm in the presidential race, combined with local competitive races, will raise turnout on Election Day.
- **Voter registration has soared since January 1<sup>st</sup>.** These new voters are decidedly younger, more diverse, and more Democratic-leaning than the overall San Diego electorate.
- **New registrants may be a wild card in the San Diego City Attorney race.** The roughly 57,000+ new San Diego City voters may play a deciding factor in the San Diego City Attorney race if the margin of vote between Attorney Gil Cabrera and Port Commissioner Rafael Castellanos is close.
- **Most of the key races this election cycle are located in the City of San Diego.** NUSIPR is tracking half a dozen major local races which may require a November runoff election between the top two vote-getters.
- **More than 50% of ballots will be cast absentee this election cycle.** With younger voters and new voters comprising a larger share of the voting electorate, the rate of early voting will be significantly lower than in prior election cycles (65-73%).

## Voter Turnout

Of those presidential primaries in early states where Independent voters are eligible to cast ballots in the Democratic and Republican presidential contests, total statewide voter turnout has ranged from 44%-50%. However, most of those state ballots were limited to the presidential contest, or only included congressional district races. San Diego County, and voters statewide, will be casting ballots on additional local races and ballot measures, some of which will increase voter turnout due to competitive contests and campaigns spending resources on Get-Out-The-Vote operations.

With Senator Ted Cruz and Governor John Kasich dropping out of the Republican presidential contest, voter enthusiasm for the June 7<sup>th</sup> election is decidedly no longer at a bipartisan fever pitch. Still, there are large numbers of highly motivated voters eager to cast ballots in favor and against particular candidates. Unusual for a presidential primary election, both political parties have controversial, polarizing front runners (Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and businessman Donald Trump) with high unfavorable ratings nationally. This has helped sustain voter attention and strong opinions about which candidates to support and not support.

Furthermore, California voter registration has skyrocketed over the last few months, particularly among infrequent voter groups – young people, Latinos, and Independents. This is a good indicator of high voter turnout this election cycle. At this point in time, NUSIPR conservatively projects that more than half (50-53%) of all registered voters countywide will cast a ballot in the June 7<sup>th</sup> election. This range falls short of the countywide voter turnout for the February 2008 presidential primary (60.67%) but surpasses the 2012 turnout rate (37.43%).

Based on the most current countywide voter registration totals (April 30<sup>th</sup>), this would mean approximately 734,000 to 778,000 votes will be cast this election cycle.

**Table 1: San Diego County Voter Turnout Rate, By Presidential Primary Year**

Presidential Primary	Countywide Turnout Rate
Jun-12	37.43%
Feb-08	60.67%
Mar-04	46.50%
Mar-00	53.14%
Mar-96	42.65%
Jun-92	45%
Jun-88	43.65%
Jun-84	44.45%
Jun-80	59.65%

## Voter Registration

California is experiencing historic growth in new voter registrations; more than 850,000 voters have registered between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup> of this year. This registration figure is twice the total from January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> in 2012. As noted by elections analyst Paul Mitchell in *Capitol Weekly*, the last time the state voter rolls grew in the 18 months prior to a presidential primary election was in 1980.<sup>1</sup>

San Diego County is no exception – using registration reports from the San Diego County Registrar of Voters, we found countywide registration increased a net 50,977 voters from January 5<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>. Most of the net change in partisan registration was among Democratic voters, further increasing the small registration lead the Democratic Party has over the GOP in San Diego County.

**Table 2: Change in Countywide Voter Registration, January 5<sup>th</sup> 2016 to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2016**

	Democratic	Republican	Decline to State	Other	Total
January 5 <sup>th</sup>	490,159	462,417	388,125	76,177	1,416,878
April 30 <sup>th</sup>	526,483	479,948	385,471	75,953	1,467,855
Net Change	36,324	17,531	(2,654)	(224)	50,977

These net figures only show part of the dynamic undercurrent in voter registration changes; in this same time period, some countywide voters have re-registered elsewhere, moved out of state, or have been deemed “inactive” and thus removed from the registration rolls. To evaluate the true increase in new voter registrations, NUSIPR searched voter records using Political Data Inc.’s online voter database software.

Overall, we found that from January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 18<sup>th</sup>, 122,701 new registrations were added to the county voter rolls. These new voters are younger, more diverse, and more Democratic-leaning than the overall San Diego electorate. Slightly more than half (51%) are Millennials, and four out of ten (42%) registered with the Democratic Party. NUSIPR also identified an uptick in Latino voter registration. We would note that voter registration will continue to soar until the final deadline of May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, Paul. “CA120: The voter surge is now.” *Capitol Weekly*. April 21, 2016. Accessed May 1, 2016. <<http://capitolweekly.net/ca120-voter-surge-now-california/>>.

**Table 3: New Voter Registrants vs. All Other Registrants, San Diego County**

	<b>New Registrants</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>All Other Registrants</b>	<b>% Total</b>
<b>Democratic</b>	51,977	42%	467,481	35%
<b>Republican</b>	28,396	23%	446,657	34%
<b>Decline to State</b>	34,785	28%	347,983	26%
<b>18-34 years old</b>	62,242	51%	301,856	23%
<b>Latino</b>	29,345	24%	253,908	19%
<b>TOTAL</b>	122,701		1,332,098	

Nearly half (47%) of these new registrants reside in the City of San Diego, which may introduce a wild card into the race for San Diego City Attorney. Conventional political wisdom suggests that Republican and Deputy District Attorney Robert Hickey will advance to the general election between either Port Commissioner Rafael Castellanos or Attorney Gil Cabrera, both Democratic. If polling shows a close race between Castellanos and Cabrera for 2<sup>nd</sup> place, these new voters, which are largely motivated by the presidential contest, may be the deciding factor between defeat and victory on Election Day.

We find the election dynamics in the City Attorney race similar to the November 2013 San Diego mayoral special election, where former Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher squared off against City Councilman David Alvarez for the Democratic votes to face then-City Councilman Kevin Faulconer in the runoff election. Alvarez edged out Fletcher by 7,385 votes, or the difference between roughly 3,700 votes that were cast. The voter coalitions and political networks each candidates have built in the City Attorney’s race arguably match or overlap those of the former mayoral candidates. With new voters added to the rolls, and a significantly higher voter turnout projected for this June than the 2013 race (35%), the outcome of the City Attorney’s race is difficult to project absent polling data.

**Other Races to Watch**

- In the 52<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District, Attorney Denise Gitsham is likely to advance to face incumbent Congressman Scott Peters in the fall general election.
- In San Diego County Supervisorial District 3, we anticipate incumbent Supervisor Dave Roberts will fall short of earning the majority of votes, and will instead have to face a challenger in the general election. We rate the run-off contest between Escondido Mayor Sam Abed and Encinitas Mayor Kristin Gaspar to face Roberts a toss-up.
- In the City of San Diego mayoral race, incumbent Mayor Kevin Faulconer is heavily favored to win outright in June against San Diego lifeguard Sergeant Ed Harris and community college teacher Lori Saldana.
- In the City of San Diego District 1 race, among the five contestants we project high-tech entrepreneur Barbara Bry and community volunteer Ray Ellis will both win in June and square off for a head-to-head matchup in November.
- In the City of San Diego District 3 race, Senate chief of staff Chris Ward is the favorite to win outright in a competitive race with City Council representative Anthony Bernal.

- In the City of San Diego District 9 race, chief of staff Ricardo Flores is favored to win the plurality of votes in the June contest against nonprofit executive Georgette Gomez, attorney Araceli Martinez, and policy director Sarah Saez. This race may push on to a runoff in November.

### **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.