

# 2004-2018 VOTER DATA TRENDS



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ORANGE COUNTY  
REGISTRAR OF VOTERS

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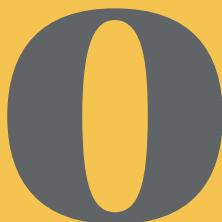
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Disclaimer: Charts and graphic information depicted in this report is only a representation of actual data collected.

## INTRODUCTION

from Registrar of Voters - Neal Kelley



range County voter demographics have shifted over the past 14 years, their voting tendencies and behaviors have changed as well. With the rise of technology in all facets of our lives, Orange County voters have come to expect more from government agencies to provide technological solutions that can resolve matters and retrieve information quickly. The voting experience is no exception.

Through data-driven solutions, we have implemented technological innovations to save Orange County taxpayers millions of dollars over the past 14 years and strive to provide a wide array of services that voters can receive at our office, or from their mobile device or computer. The Orange County Registrar of Voters has been at the forefront of pushing innovation in election management in the State of California and across the United States.

As we approach the 2020 Presidential Election, as well as the 2020 Census, we continue to seek innovative and cost-saving solutions to help Orange County voters have a better voting experience and gather data and compile reports for policymakers to base decisions on. We recognize that the 2020 Census will provide datasets that will change the election landscape in Orange County, specifically as it relates to district boundaries and federal language assistance mandates.

Despite tightening budgets and increasing voter demands and expectations, we remain committed to the themes mentioned in our "Seven Year Journey" report:

- Infrastructure technology
- New approaches to automation
- Strong local government relationships
- Digital connections
- Creating value from origination

As always, we are dedicated to our mission of providing the highest quality of election services to voters in Orange County and we are determined to continue searching for continuous improvement in the process of election management.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neal Kelley".

Neal Kelley  
Registrar of Voters  
Orange County, CA

Covering nearly 1,000 square miles, there are more voters in Orange County than in 18 other U.S. states.

U.S. Census

# 1.5 MILLION VOTERS

As the fifth largest county in the United States, the Orange County Registrar of Voters has the unique challenge of serving voters that speak over 100 languages and dialects in a territory spread across nearly 1,000 square miles. In addition, Orange County's voters political beliefs span the entire spectrum.

This inaugural 2018 Voter Data Trends Report presents several trends identified from voter and election data collected between 2004 and 2018. These trends show how Orange County has aligned with trends that are being observed across California and the United States.

Such trends include:

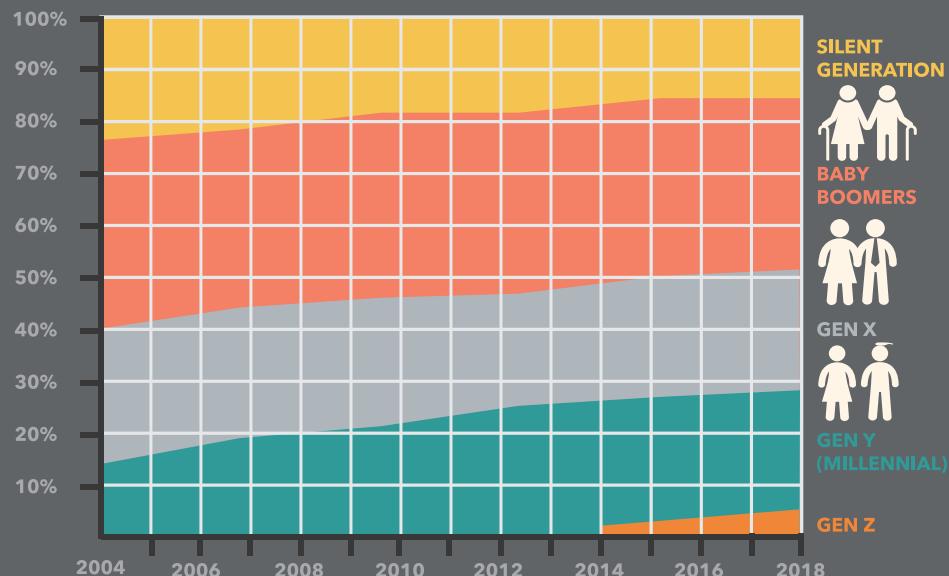
- Turnout in presidential elections is significantly higher than non-presidential elections
- Identifying as “No Party Preference” is increasing rather than choosing to identify with traditional political parties
- Voting-by-mail is an increasingly popular option compared to voting at polling places
- Provisional ballots serve as an effective voting method for voters who do not meet certain requirements on Election Day

Once considered a monolithic region, trends identified from voter data and election data show that Orange County is changing. Voter trends have significant implications for the future of Orange County that will impact all County residents, regardless of whether they vote or not.



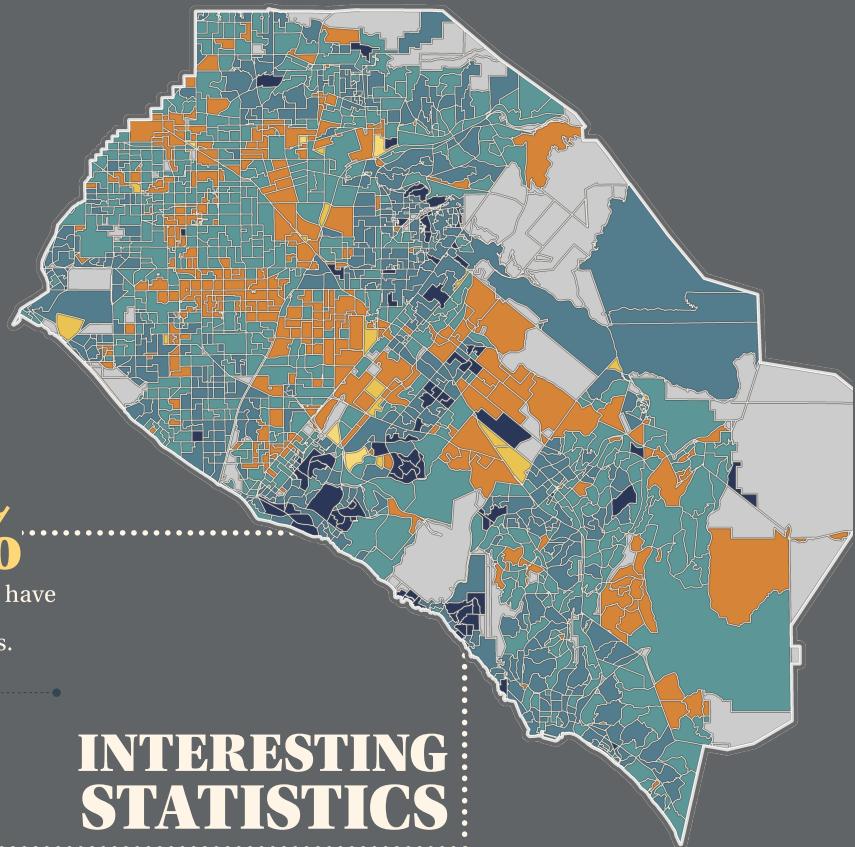
# Voter Turnout Trends:

The generational makeup of the electorate is impacting the general consensus of what voters expect and demand in a positive voting experience.



This graph shows each generation's share of Orange County voters from 2004 to 2018. For example, in 2004, the Silent Generation represented a quarter of all Orange County voters. In 2018, the Silent Generation now represents only approximately 12% of all Orange County voters.

Drawing from historical voting data, this map of Orange County displays aggregate participation by precinct with the average and highest number of elections in which voters have participated. The representative colors match this pie chart.



**I**n order to accurately determine voter turnout, it is important to maintain an accurate voter list. The Orange County Registrar of Voters utilizes several approaches in order to maintain a quality list maintenance program, including:

- 1) updates to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV),
- 2) National Change of Address (NCOA), 3) Secretary of State updates, and 4) secure third-party data.

Additionally, the implementation of VoteCal, a statewide voter registration database, helps to maintain more accurate voter registration rolls for every county in California, including Orange County. For example, when an Orange County voter moves to Los Angeles County and updates their voter registration record with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, the following occurs: the voter's update to the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk will automatically update Orange County's voter registration records due to VoteCal linking all voter registration records in the state.

In addition to voter turnout, voter registration data by generation shows several shifts that holds significant implications for Orange County. As Generation Z becomes of voting age, their voter registration numbers will grow and will impact the share of percentage of voters for the other generations.

## INTERESTING STATISTICS

Special Election turnouts are typically

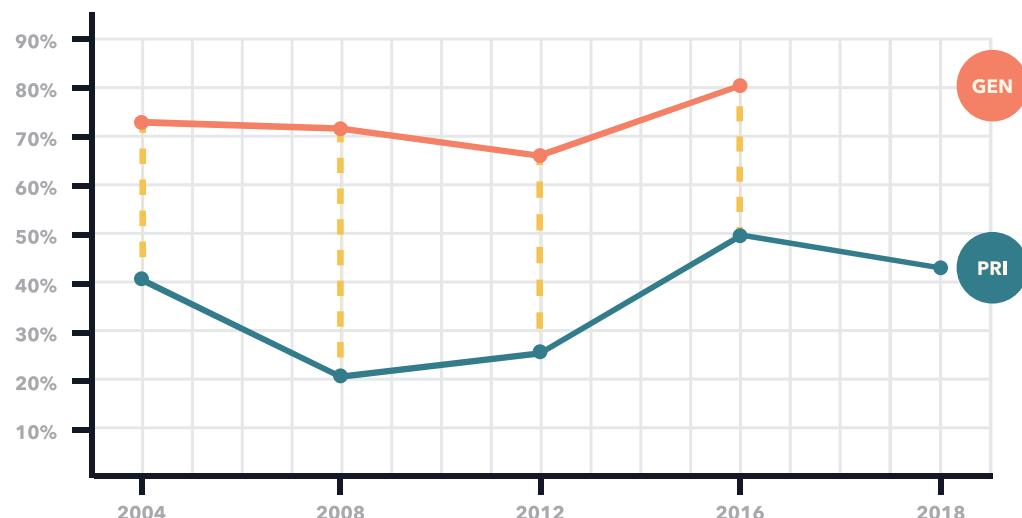
**7X less than**

Primary/General Election turnout

**Voter turnout has been much higher due to increased interest in candidates, ballot measures, and local issues.**

**In 2016, voter turnout was 80.7%**

- the highest it had been in 40 years.



## We're Listening

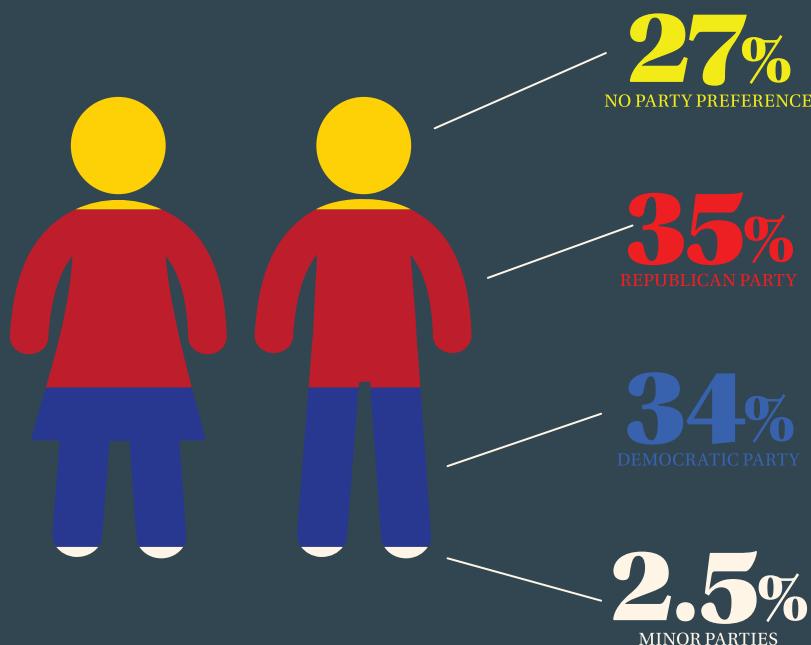
The Orange County Registrar of Voters believes a positive voting experience is likely to encourage voters to vote again in the future so we are always working to improve processes and meet the demands of the ever evolving voter.

*"Don't rush me!"*

Voters don't want to feel rushed when casting a ballot. They want the freedom to weigh their decisions and vote at their leisure. Voters who chose to vote-by-mail have up to 30 days before Election Day.

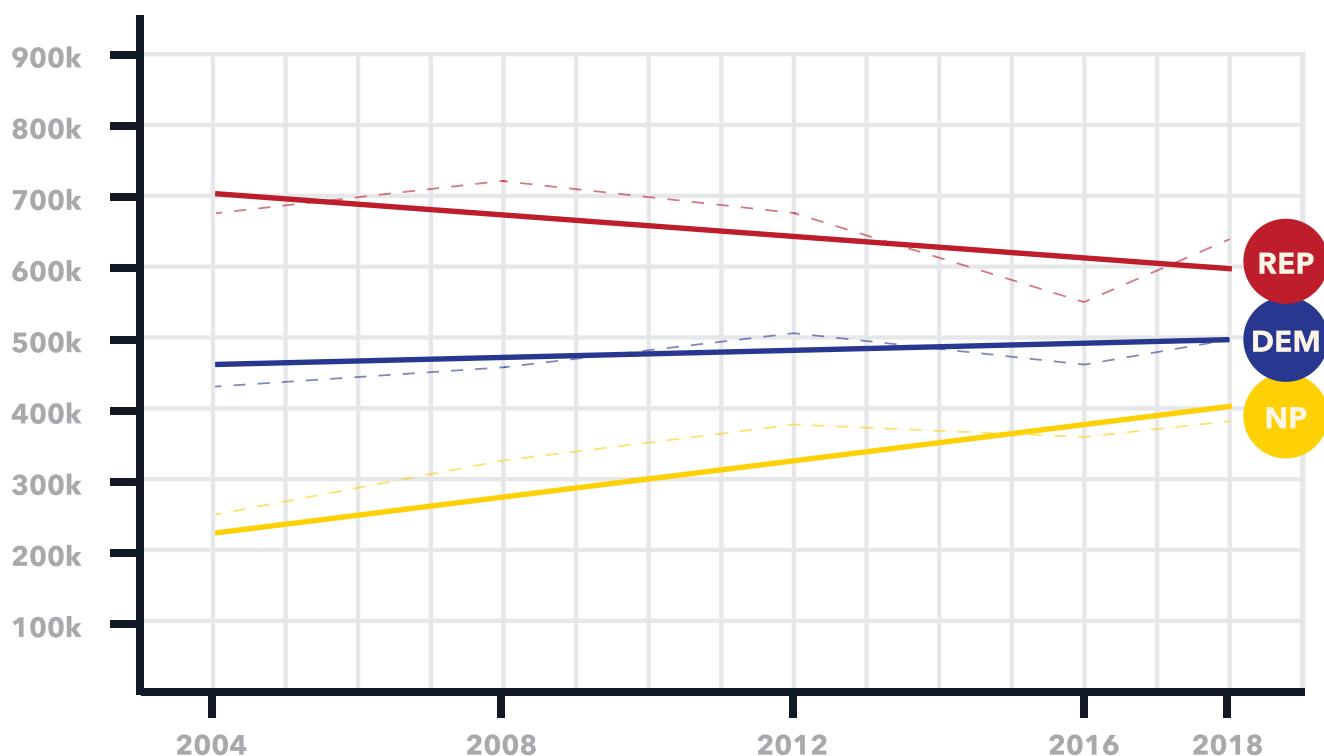
*"I want to choose!"*

Voters want to choose whether to vote at a local polling site on Election Day or simply enjoy the convenience of a vote-by-mail ballot delivered to their home.



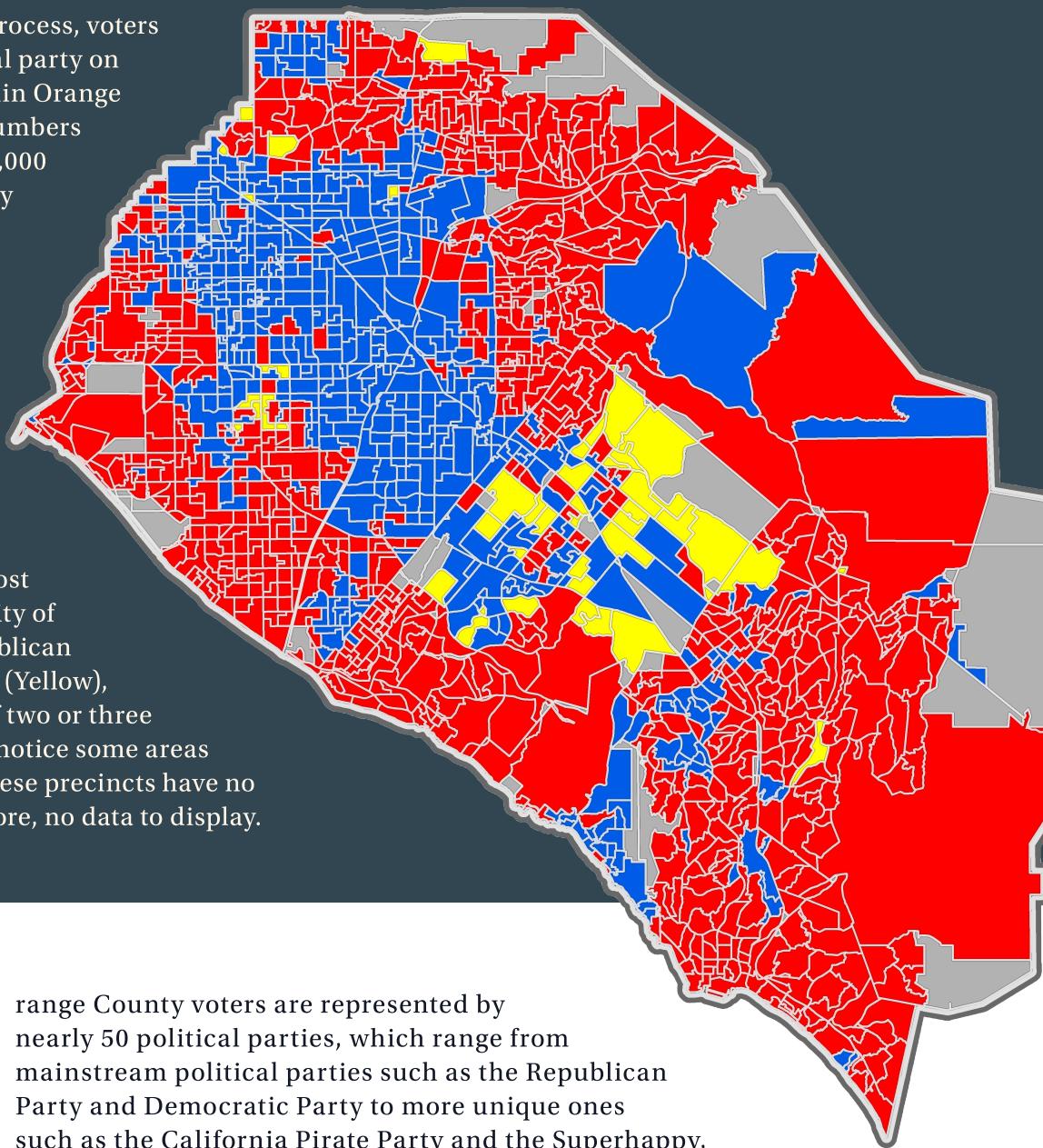
# POLITICAL <sup>NO</sup> PARTY

**NO PARTY PREFERENCE VOTERS  
HAVE GROWN BY 40% SINCE 2004**



As a part of the registration process, voters can select a preferred political party on their registration forms. Within Orange County, active registration numbers show 513,000 Democrats, 537,000 Republicans, 418,000 No Party Preference, and 64,000 other party designations (includes parties such as American Independent, Libertarian, Green, Peace and Freedom, and others).

This map depicts the majority party of all the precincts in Orange County, as selected by voters during registration. Most of the precincts have a majority of either Democrat (Blue), Republican (Red), or No Party Preference (Yellow), but a few have an even mix of two or three party designations. You may notice some areas do not have color symbols; these precincts have no registered voters, and, therefore, no data to display.



Orange County voters are represented by nearly 50 political parties, which range from mainstream political parties such as the Republican Party and Democratic Party to more unique ones such as the California Pirate Party and the Superhappy, Evolution and Neuroscience Party.

Voters who registered to vote without a political party preference are known as No Party Preference (NPP) voters. NPP voters were formerly known as “decline-to-state” or “DTS” voters.

Although not technically an organized political party, there has been a large shift of voters that identify as NPP voters and are also considered to be swing voters that are targeted by the two largest mainstream political parties, the Republican Party and Democratic Party.

While the share of NPP voters has grown, voters that identify as either Republican or Democrat have steadily decreased since 2004. While this has impacted registration numbers for both the Republican and Democratic parties, there has been a greater reduction in the number of voters who identify with the Republican Party.

# Voting Methodology

## Vote-By-Mail: Voting Experience Evolves

The voting experience for many voters is no longer voting at their neighborhood polling place on Election Day. Instead, a majority of voters opt to receive vote-by-mail ballots to vote from the convenience of their home. These voters can then take their time to go over the various contests starting nearly a month before Election Day. Orange County voters are increasingly opting to vote-by-mail across voters of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2012, for the first time in an Orange County presidential general election, the percentage of vote-by-mail voters exceeded the number of polling place voters.

This trend is not isolated to Orange County. Election officials across the United States have reported that there is a growing preference across all voters of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to vote-by-mail. Some jurisdictions have opted to conduct all-mail elections as a response to the popularity of the vote-by-mail voting method.

In 2010, for the first time in an Orange County general election, the percentage of vote-by-mail voters exceeded the number of voters at polling places. Voting trends began to shift in 2002 as permanent vote-by-mail laws went into effect. The increase in vote-by-mail balloting has necessitated a move away from the decades old practices of preparing vote-by-mail ballots for mailing and tabulation. By utilizing technology to open and extract vote-by-mail ballots for the tabulation process, the Orange County Registrar of Voters has reduced the number of individuals needed to prepare ballots for scanning and reduced costs for conducting elections.



### INTERESTING STATISTICS

**61%**

of Orange County voters have chosen to permanently vote-by-mail.

Sometimes, voters have no choice but to become a vote-by-mail voter. Precincts that have fewer than 250 or fewer voters serve as mail ballot precincts in which no polling places are set up – all voters residing in that precinct must cast vote-by-mail ballots.

Whether by voter option or mandate, the number of people voting-by-mail is increasing. Available evidence shows that all vote-by-mail elections decrease costs even if the savings are minimal. It is possible that all vote-by-mail elections continue to grow in popularity as more jurisdictions look for ways to deal with increasing budget constraints.

# UOCAVA Return Rates on the Rise

Additionally, the Orange County Registrar of Voters complies with the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), which allows citizens serving in the military and civilians who live overseas to participate in elections. The Orange County Registrar of Voters allows three methods of ballot delivery for UOCAVA voters:

1. Delivery through the mail
2. Secure online voting portal
3. Facsimile (fax)

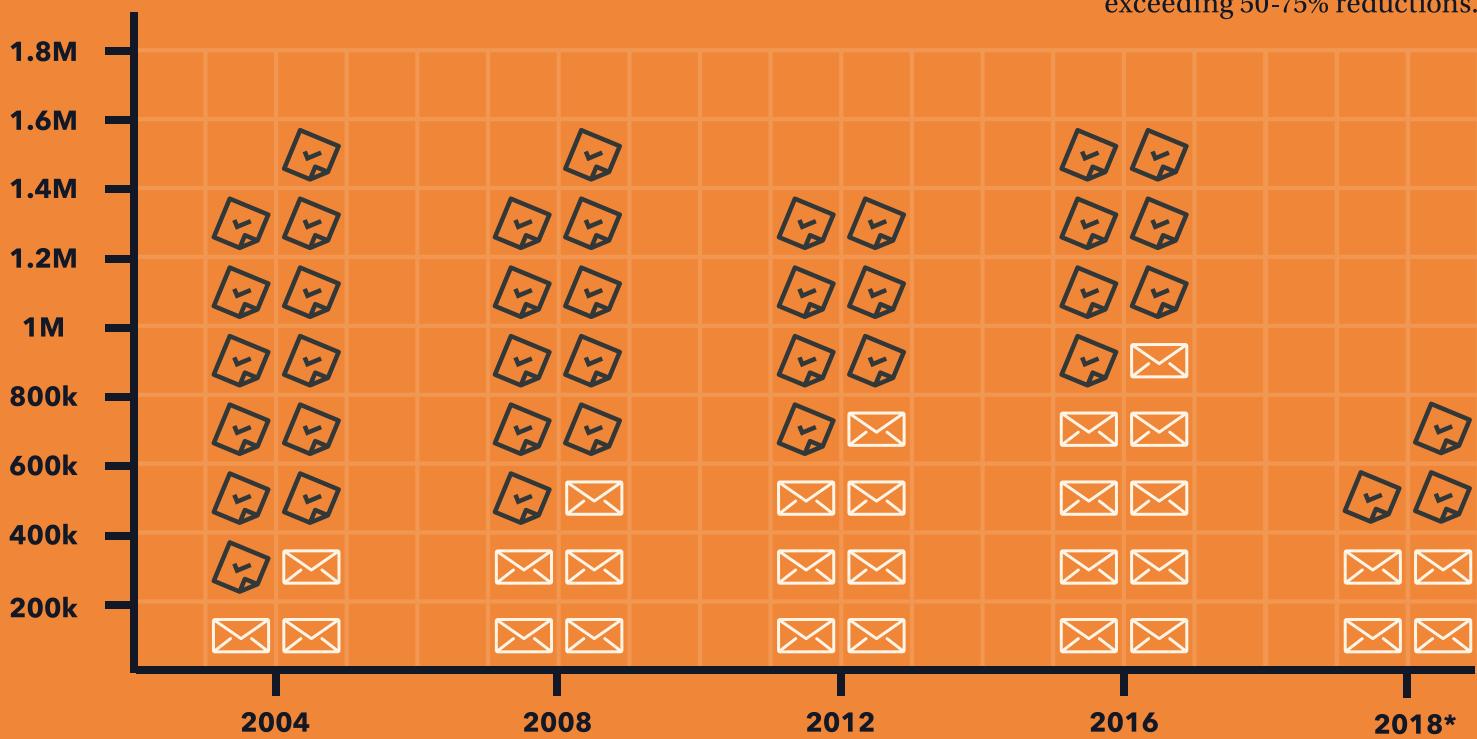
Consistent with voter trends for non-UOCAVA voters, voter turnout and interest is significantly higher for general elections over primary elections and may explain the discrepancy in the success rate between primary and general elections.

Several efforts are underway to increase the number and return rate of UOCAVA ballots such as the implementation of VoteCal, the statewide voter registration database, and proactive efforts by the Orange County Registrar of Voters to contact UOCAVA voters.

	2012	2018	PRIMARY
12.6%	8.8%		
RETURNED	RETURNED		
	2012	2016	GENERAL
44.1%	47.6%		
RETURNED	RETURNED		

## Vote-By-Mail vs. Polling Place Voting

The number of voters casting ballots at polling places has dropped an average of 20% since 2004. Some regions within the County are exceeding 50-75% reductions.



\*primary election data only.

# The Provisional Ballot Epidemic

The number of voters who vote at the wrong polling place has consistently risen since 2004. This occurs either because the voter has recently moved out of their assigned precinct, has not yet updated their registration, or simply because a voter just happens to be in the area on Election Day. A voter showing up to the wrong polling place must either vote using a provisional ballot or go to their assigned polling place, which depending on the circumstances, may be very inconvenient for voters.

Also, when voting provisionally, voters might vote on ballots which do not include contests that would normally appear on assigned ballot types if they had instead voted at their assigned polling place, or simply voted-by-mail.

California's provisional voting laws compliment the National Voter Registration Act's "fail safe" protections and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) provisional voting statutes, with which the Orange County Registrar of Voters complies with both state and federal laws.

Although provisional ballots are

processed normally, provisional ballots are carefully reviewed to determine whether or not the voter casting the ballot is registered, eligible to vote, and if they have already voted.

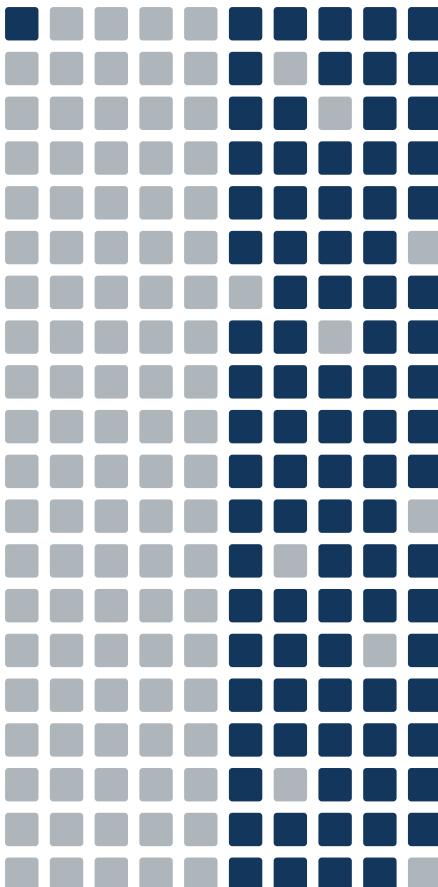
Even though provisional ballots serve as a method of capturing voters who might otherwise be unable to vote, the additional time and resources needed to process provisional ballots may delay the final vote tally. Reducing the number of provisional ballots is a goal of the Orange County Registrar of Voters to ensure the voting experience is streamlined and that the operation of elections is efficient and secure.



To ensure the voting experience is streamlined and operations of elections are efficient and secure, the Orange County Registrar of Voters is working to reduce the number of provisional ballots.

**THEN**  
2004 Election  
**1 in 100**  
voted provisionally

**NOW**  
2018 Election  
**1 in 10**  
voted provisionally



## INTERESTING STATISTICS

Vote-by-mail  
provisional ballots make up  
**45%**  
of all provisional ballots.

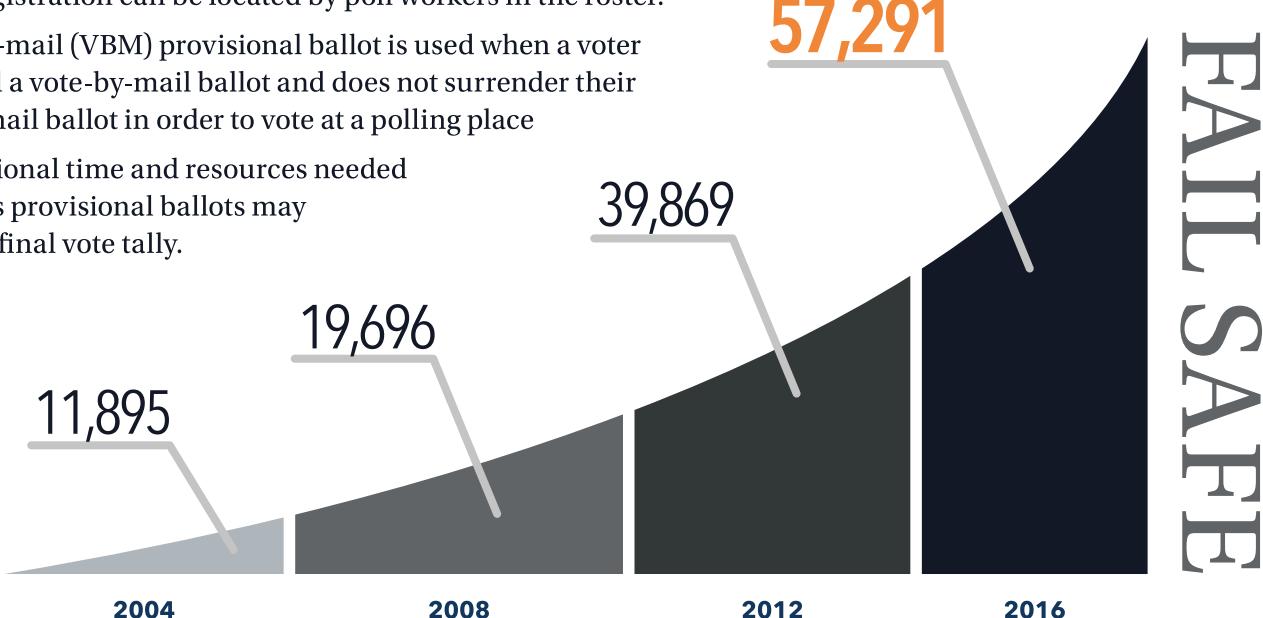
In reviewing provisional ballot data, several cities consistently appear as one of the top cities with the highest numbers of provisional ballots cast in an election.

	2008	2012	2016	2018*
ANAHEIM	5,737	2,756	13,914	4,128
FULLERTON	2,617	1,186	6,199	2,385
GARDEN GROVE	2,758	1,123	6,232	1,816
HUNTINGTON BEACH	3,979	1,772	8,100	3,977
IRVINE	5,273	2,277	9,501	4,073
SANTA ANA	6,080	2,158	12,392	3,117

\* represent primary election data only.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- A **fail-safe provisional ballot** is used when no record of a voter's registration can be located by poll workers in the roster.
- A vote-by-mail (VBM) provisional ballot is used when a voter requested a vote-by-mail ballot and does not surrender their vote-by-mail ballot in order to vote at a polling place
- The additional time and resources needed to process provisional ballots may delay the final vote tally.



## CONCLUSION

# Solutions that meet the demands of today's voter

**W**ith technology constantly advancing, the traditional polling place model has fallen behind the needs and expectations of Orange County voters. Multiple polling places in a single neighborhood cause confusion with local voters and leave them uncertain about where to vote, and eventually lead to more provisional ballots. In addition, the narrow timeframe of Election Day is becoming increasingly difficult for voters to work around.

At this rate, in just a few years, we will see 90% of voters in permanent vote-by-mail status while only 20% of ballots are cast at the polling place. More than 1,000 polling places would stand nearly empty on Election Day, expending County resources and taxpayer dollars to provide a service that 80% of constituents are not using.

With the passage of SB 450 (Voter's Choice Act (VCA)), there is a new option for counties to conduct elections under a new model which provides greater flexibility and



convenience for voters. In VCA counties, voters can choose how, when, and where to cast their ballot. Every voter receives a vote-by-mail ballot, in-person early voting is expanded, and voters are allowed to cast a ballot at any vote center within the county.

Five of the fourteen eligible counties adopted the VCA model in 2018: Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo. As the largest of the five counties, Sacramento County serves as a case study for other large urban counties that are considering the transition to the VCA model.

Turnout by Party	June 2014	June 2016	June 2018
Total	29.3%	46.7%	41.6%
GOP	33.9%	48.6%	48.4%
DEM	31.7%	54.6%	45.5%

*Sacramento County Election Data*

In evaluating results from the June 2018 Primary Election, there is not substantial evidence that turnout of any particular political party was significantly impacted by the

transition to VCA. In addition, no candidates of a political party were more likely to receive a plurality or majority of votes due to the transition to VCA in Sacramento County.

*Percentage of Candidates with Plurality or Majority by Party*

June 2014		June 2016		June 2018	
GOP	DEM	GOP	DEM	GOP	DEM
42%	58%	50%	50%	50%	50%

*Sacramento County Election Data*

The Registrar of Voters piloted Early Vote Centers in the November 2016 General Election, and the June 2018 Primary Election, to gain insight into the VCA implementation process. Multiple sites were selected and operated, according to VCA requirements (Anaheim, Irvine, Mission Viejo, Costa Mesa, Westminster, Santa Ana, Huntington Beach, Fullerton, and San Juan Capistrano). In addition, the Registrar of Voters conducted voter surveys to obtain direct feedback from voters who cast a ballot in a Vote Center as well as voters who dropped off their VBM



*Registrar of Voters Community Engagement Events*

ballot before Election Day. 96.4% of survey respondents answered that they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their experience at a Vote Center and 90.4% answered that they were “very likely” or “likely” to use a Vote Center over a polling place in the future.

The June 2018 Primary Election, the Registrar of Voters operated eight Early Vote Centers according to VCA requirements (Anaheim, Irvine, Mission Viejo, Costa Mesa, Santa Ana, Huntington Beach, Fullerton, and San Juan Capistrano). All were located in public agency offices and four offered drive-thru ballot drop-off.

For the November 2018 General Election, the Registrar of Voters plans to operate eight sites according to VCA requirements (Anaheim, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, Costa Mesa, Irvine, Mission Viejo, San Juan Capistrano, and Santa Ana). Two sites will operate in a retail location in Huntington Beach and San Juan Capistrano and there will be four drive-thru ballot drop-off locations. The Registrar of Voters plans to collect survey data to analyze and compare to survey data collected in the November 2016 General Election to determine if voters are aware of these resources and the satisfaction rate of voters that utilize early voting services.

We recognize that voter behavior and preferences change with time and our office continuously seeks innovative approaches and sources of information to better serve voters. As always, we are dedicated to our mission of providing the highest quality of election services to voters in Orange County and we are determined to continue searching for continuous improvement in the process of election management.

*Early Vote Center Voting  
2016 General Election*

Generation	Age	%
Millenials	18-35	24%
Gen X	36-51	28%
Baby Boomers	52-70	39%
Silent Generation	71+	10%

Party	%
American Independent	2%
Democratic	44%
Green	0%
Libertarian	1%
No Party Preference	24%
Other	0%
Peace and Freedom	0%
Reform Party of California	0%
Republican	29%

*Early Vote Center Voting  
2018 Primary Election*

Generation	Age	%
Millenials	18-35	16%
Gen X	36-51	21%
Baby Boomers	52-70	48%
Silent Generation	71+	15%

Party	%
American Independent	2%
Democratic	47%
Green	0%
Libertarian	0%
No Party Preference	19%
Other	0%
Peace and Freedom	0%
Reform Party of California	0%
Republican	31%

*Orange County Election Data*

**MISSION STATEMENT**

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**To provide election services for the citizens of Orange County to ensure equal access to the election process, protect the integrity of votes, and maintain a transparent, accurate and fair process.**



**ORANGE COUNTY  
REGISTRAR OF VOTERS**