

CALIFORNIA // EARLY READ // SIX KEY COUNTIES

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Signs of a Surge in the Early 2026 Data

An early read on California's changing electorate, from 13 million voters across six of the state's largest counties.

+12 pts

LATINO PRIMARY TURNOUT
JUMP, 2022→2026

−10 pts

DROP IN THE 65+ SHARE OF THE
ELECTORATE SINCE 2022

+7 to +12

PROP 50 TURNOUT OVER THE JUNE
2026 PRIMARY, EVERY COUNTY

Sources: 2026 primary turnout — Political Data Inc. (PDI) Ballot Tracker; 2022 primary & Nov 2025 Prop 50 — UC Berkeley Statewide Database / CA Secretary of State. Analysis by VoterForce.

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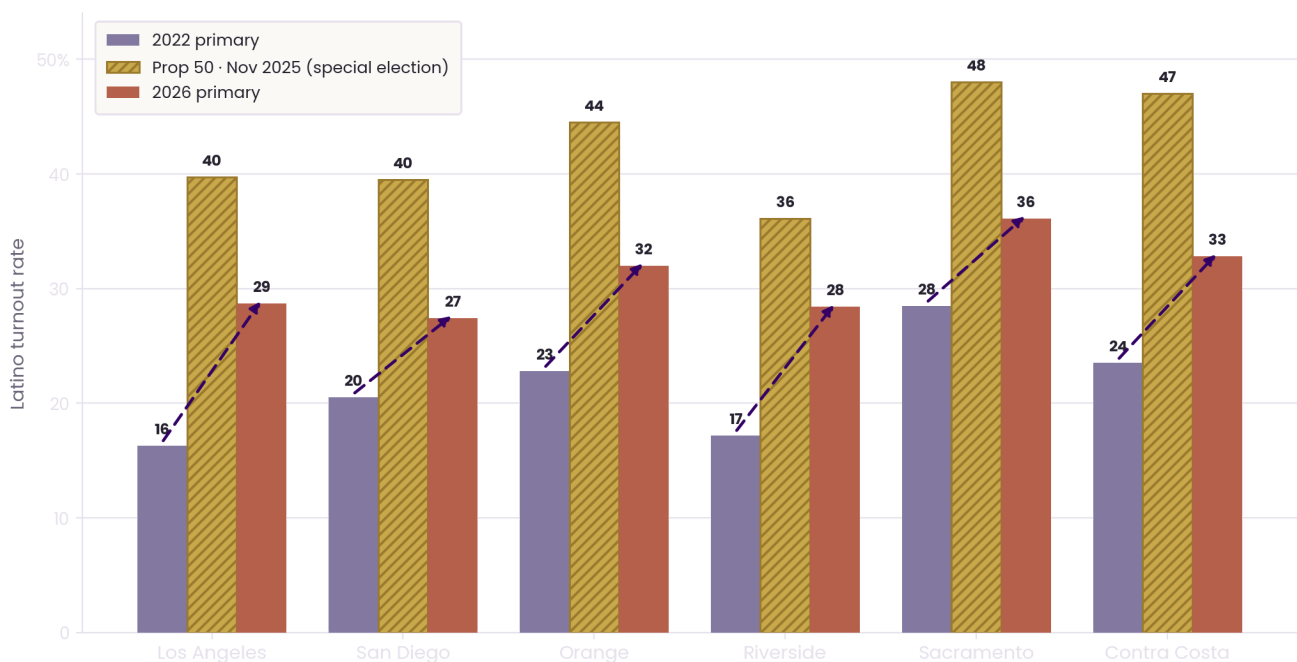
It's early. California's 2026 cycle is only beginning to produce hard numbers, and the full picture won't be clear for months. But the first data is now in from six counties we chose as a cross-section of the state — Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Sacramento, and Contra Costa: coastal and inland, urban and exurban, Democratic strongholds and the closest swing turf.

Together they are a strong read on where California is heading while we wait for the final results — and even these early returns show something moving.

1 • The Latino surge is real — and accelerating

For a decade, the story of California's June primaries was decline, and Latino voters were the most underrepresented piece of it. The early 2026 data points the other way.

Across all six counties, Latino primary turnout rose 7 to 12 points between 2022 and 2026. Then the November 2025 Prop 50 special pushed it 8 to 15 points higher still. The three-cycle arc for a single rate is striking:

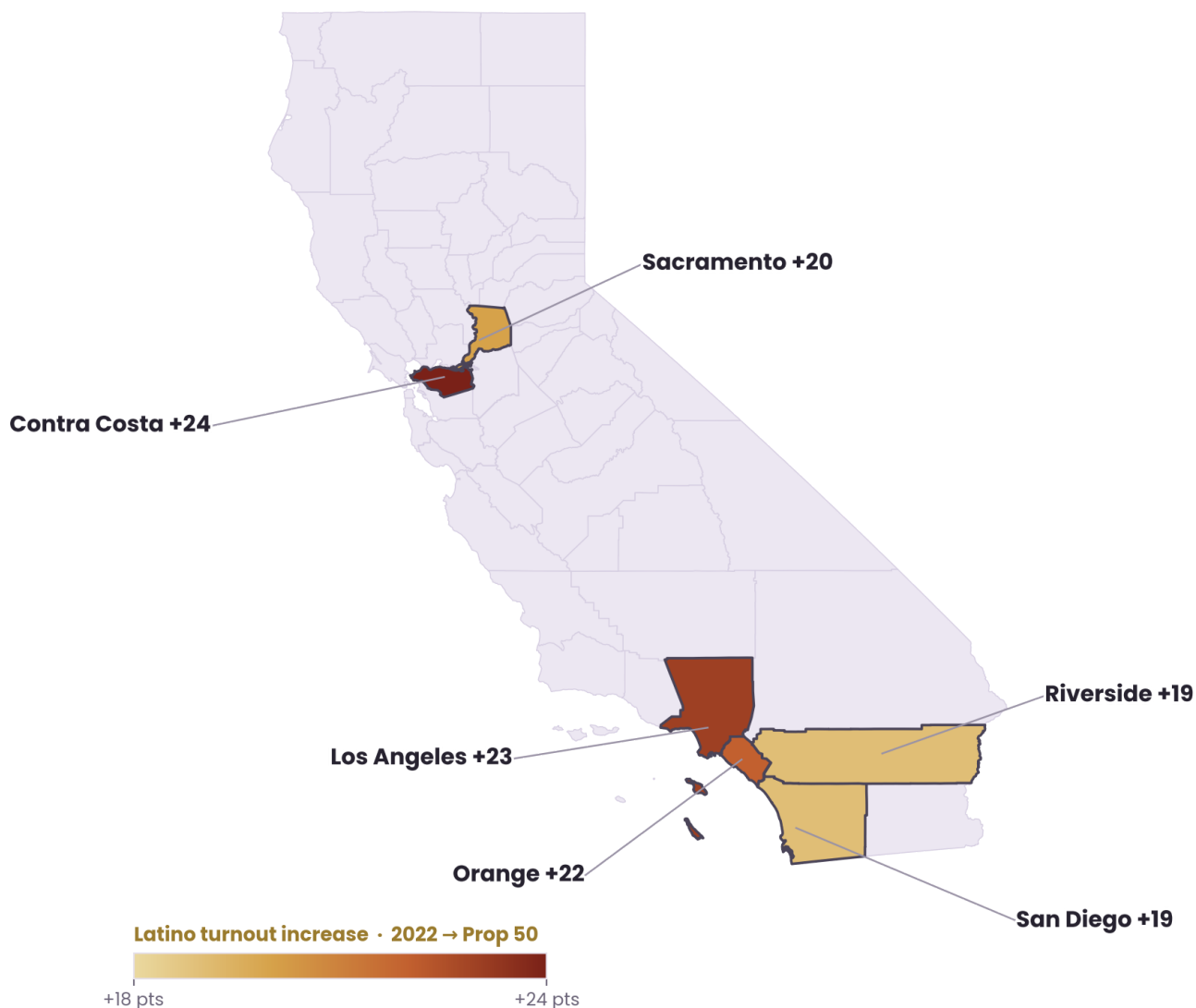


Dashed arrows trace each county's 2022 → 2026 primary climb; the Prop 50 special (Nov 2025) spikes between the primaries.

Latino turnout rate by county. Dashed arrows trace each county's 2022 → 2026 primary climb; the Prop 50 special (Nov 2025) spikes between the two primaries.

In Los Angeles, the Latino turnout rate has 2.4x'd in three cycles. And it wasn't just participation — it had direction: in precincts where Latinos are a majority of residents, the net shift toward the Prop 50 redistricting measure was roughly 25

points. The community that used to sit out the off-year is starting to show up, and showing up with intent.

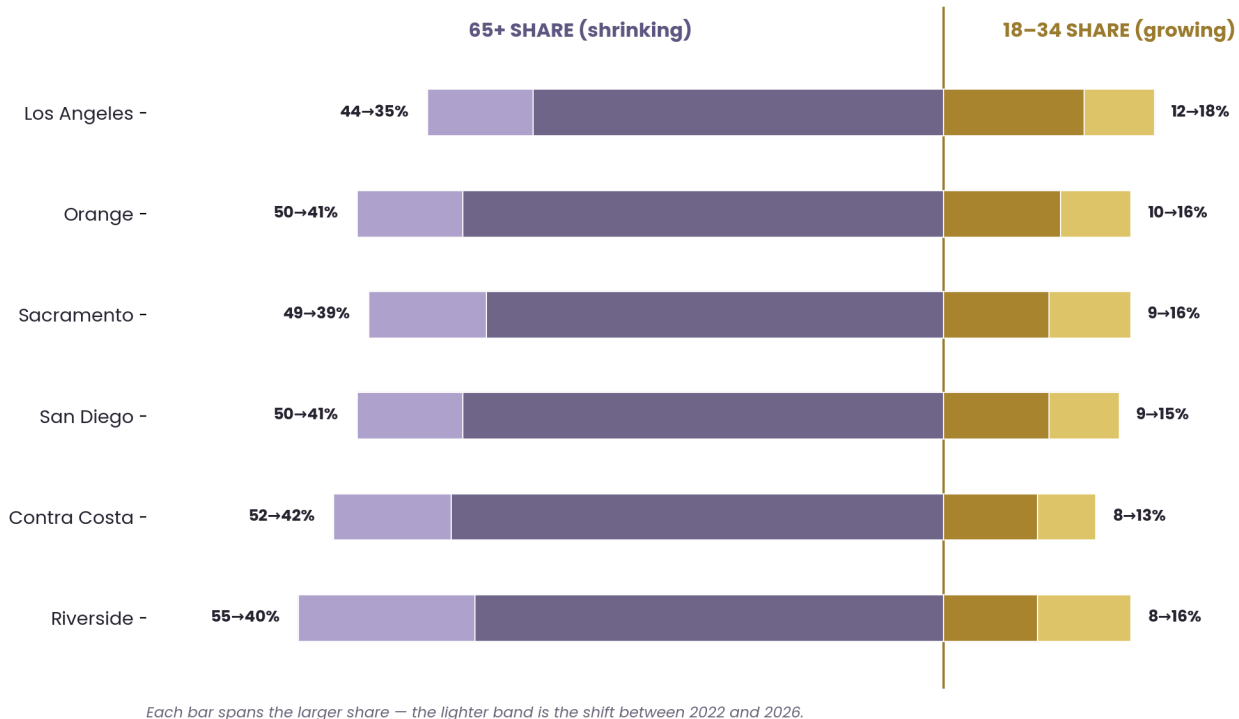


And it's geographically broad — the increase in Latino turnout (2022 → Prop 50) shows up across the sample, from the Bay Area to the southern border.

The Latino voters who were the largest “shadow electorate” in 2022 are stepping out of the shadows. The early question for November isn’t whether they engage — it’s who reaches them first.

2 · The electorate is getting younger — by composition, not just rate

Here's the counterintuitive part. Senior turnout rates went up. But the 65+ share of the electorate fell about 10 points in every county between 2022 and 2026 — because everyone younger surged faster.



Share of the electorate by county, 2022 vs 2026. Each bar spans the larger share; the lighter band marks the shift between the two cycles.

The primary electorate that political models were built on — older, higher-propensity — is being diluted as we watch. Voters 18–34 nearly doubled their share in several counties. Any 2026 plan calibrated to 2022 turnout patterns is now structurally over-weighting seniors and under-weighting the voters who are actually growing.

3 · Prop 50 is the marker — the best early read on the November midterm

If you want a single data point for how engaged this electorate is heading into November, it's this: a single-measure off-cycle special election outdrew the regular June primary — by 7 to 12 points in every county.

Sacramento went from 44% (primary) to 55% (Prop 50). San Diego, 41% to 52%. Contra Costa, 45% to 56%. That is not normal off-year behavior. Prop 50 was the closest thing we have to a dress rehearsal for a charged 2026 midterm, and the early read is clear: the November electorate will be larger, younger, and more diverse than any primary model would predict.

4 · The NPP question — the bloc that decides November

No-Party-Preference voters are the mirror image of the Latino story: the lowest-turnout tier in every county and every election we measured. California's open top-two primary lets them participate fully — they are not shut out — but they turn out at the lowest rate, so models that lean on past primary voters under-weight them. The trend line is the tell: NPP turnout climbed across all three cycles, and in the November 2025 special it reached 39–45% in the most competitive districts — far above its primary baseline.

NPP voters now make up 20–24% of registration in California's swing legislative seats, and they are a far larger share of a November general electorate than of any primary. When the salience is high enough, they show. The campaigns that treat NPP as persuadable and mobilizable, rather than writing them off as low-propensity, will own the November margin.

What it means for November 2026

It's still early — but three forces are already pointing the same direction: Latino turnout is surging, the electorate is getting younger, and the high-salience NPP

bloc is activating. Prop 50 showed all three can show up at once. For campaigns, that reshuffles the board:

Don't model on 2022.

The senior-heavy, low-turnout primary electorate is not the November electorate. Re-weight toward Latino, youth, and NPP — the segments that are growing, not the ones that are most reliable.

The “shadow electorate” is becoming the actual electorate.

The voters who showed up for Prop 50 but skip primaries are reachable, and we can name them precinct by precinct.

Turnout alone isn't a strategy.

A surging, younger, more independent electorate is also a more persuadable one. The winning programs pair mobilization of the new voters with persuasion of the ones already showing up.

These are early days, and we'll keep reading the data as more of it lands. But the first signs from California's key counties all say the same thing: the electorate that's coming in November is not the one that used to show up. The campaigns built for it have a head start.

VoterForce maps this electorate at the precinct level — identifying, segmenting, and making reachable the specific voter communities that decide outcomes. We can show you the surge, the shadow electorate, and the targets in your district.

Get the full analysis → shane@theregional.io · theregional.io

METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

Turnout figures are drawn from VoterForce analysis of six California counties — Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Sacramento, and Contra Costa — covering roughly 13 million registered voters. 2026 primary turnout is sourced from the Political Data Inc. (PDI) ballot tracker; 2022 primary and November 2025 Proposition 50 turnout from the UC Berkeley Statewide Database (SWDB) and California Secretary of State returns. **Latino identification:** for the 2022 and 2026 primaries, Latino voters are identified using PDI's surname matching; for the November 2025 Prop 50 special, these figures are augmented with the UC Berkeley SWDB, per the SWDB's own surname-based methodology. Surname-based identification estimates Latino identity from the voter file and carries the usual limitations — it can miss Latino voters without Spanish surnames and misclassify others. Any reference to precincts “where Latinos are a majority of residents” reflects ACS resident composition — a geographic measure, distinct from the surname-based voter counts above. Age-cohort shares are estimated from voter-file modeling matched to ACS demographic composition. These are early-cycle reads on partial returns, not final results or forecasts; figures will be revised as additional county data is certified.

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