Why California’s Record Low Voter Turnout Still Resulted in Democratic Victories in the 2014 Statewide Elections

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by
Mark DiCamillo,
Director, The Field Poll

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The 2014 election saw a broad-based Republican wave across the United States

House of Representatives

- Republicans picked up 12 seats, and now hold a 58-seat advantage in the House (246-188).

U.S. Senate

- Republicans picked up 9 seats to take control of that chamber, and now hold an 8-seat advantage in the Senate (54-46).

Governorships and State Houses

- Republicans picked up 2 governorships and now hold a 14-seat advantage among all U.S. Governors.
- Republicans won control of 10 state legislative chambers and now control 69 of the nation’s 99 legislative chambers.
- Republicans now control the governorship and both houses of the state legislature in 23 states, compared to just 7 for the Democrats.
Yet, California seemed largely unaffected by the Republican wave

- Democratic candidates swept all 7 of California’s statewide partisan elections, similar to its performance in the 2010 elections, and have won all 14 of the statewide partisan races over the past 4 years.

- Democrat Jerry Brown was reelected Governor by 20 points, defeating Republican Neel Kashkari 60% to 40%, bettering his 13-point win over Republican Meg Whitman in the 2010 election.

- Democrats picked up 1 House seat in California this cycle, and now hold a 39-14 advantage over the Republicans in the state’s 53 Congressional seats.

- Republicans did pick up 3 Assembly seats and 1 State Senate seat, reducing the Democratic majority marginally to 52-38 in the Assembly and 26-14 in the Senate.
One election outcome that the U.S. and California had in common in 2014 was historically low voter turnouts

**Graph 3**

**U.S. Turnout**
(\textit{as \% of total citizen-eligible adults})

- **35.9\%** voted
  - \textit{64.1\%} did not vote
  - \textit{81.7 million} votes

**California Turnout**
(\textit{as \% of total citizen-eligible adults})

- **30.9\%** voted
  - \textit{69.1\%} did not vote
  - \textit{7.5 million} votes

Despite low turnout, CA Democrats outnumbered Republicans at the polls; Not true nationally. CA independents were much more likely to have supported Democrats than independents nationally.

**Graph 4**

Despite low turnout, CA Democrats outnumbered Republicans at the polls; Not true nationally. CA independents were much more likely to have supported Democrats than independents nationally.

**Sources:** U.S. estimates based on 2014 Edison Media Research exit poll of U.S. House elections (excluding others/not reported). CA estimates based on late October 2014 Field Poll of likely voters across the six statewide partisan elections other than Governor (excluding undecided voters).
Graph 5

Both U.S. and CA ethnic voters heavily favored Democratic candidates; But, they represented a larger share of the CA vote; CA white non-Hispanics were less likely than U.S. whites to have supported Republican candidates

Sources: U.S. estimates based on 2014 Edison Media Research exit poll of U.S. House elections (excluding others/not reported). CA estimates based on late October 2014 Field Poll of likely voters across the six statewide partisan elections other than Governor (excluding undecided voters).
CA Coastal voters’ heavy support of Democratic candidates a big contributor to Democrat’s victories; Coastal whites much more inclined than Inland whites to have voted Democratic

Sources: Late October 2014 Field Poll based on average of the preferences of likely voters in six statewide partisan elections other than Governor (excluding undecided voters).