

CVF's Close Count Transparency Project

Report #1:

Post-Election Night Report

November 6, 2024



Project Overview

Since Election Night on Tuesday, November 5th, the California Voter Foundation (CVF) has launched the [Close Count Transparency Project](#) to monitor close California congressional and legislative contests. The goal of this project is to give the public and media a clear picture of how close the margin is in undecided contests and how many ballots remain to be counted in the counties that comprise those contested districts.

CVF has created a [tracking sheet](#) and is updating the unofficial vote counts and margins in these contests continuously until the certification deadline on December 5th. Statewide vote counts and turnout so far is also being tracked daily.

A [template that can be used to track other contests](#) is available to the public and media to download as well.

Close Contests

Ten California congressional districts identified by the [Cook Political Report](#) as among the nation's 52 most competitive are included in CVF's tracking sheet. The outcome of these contests will help determine which political party controls the House of Representatives in the next term.

The Associated Press' [Congressional Elections Live Updates page](#) provides a nationwide perspective on House election results. Races "called" by the AP are noted on CVF's tracking sheet.

Additional contests that appear in the Secretary of State's list of [Close Contests](#), which are [defined as](#) "all contests in which there is less than a 2 percent difference between first and second place for candidates," are being added to CVF's tracking sheet.

The close congressional contests CVF is currently tracking are:

- **CD 3:** Incumbent Kevin Kiley (R) vs. Jessica Morse (D)
Region: From the California-Nevada border to the suburbs of Sacramento (Alpine, El Dorado, Inyo, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Sierra, and Yuba counties)
Status: With an initial wide margin of 8.8 percent favoring Kiley that rose to 15.1 percent by the next morning, The AP [called this race](#) for the Republican incumbent on 11/6.
- **CD 9:** Incumbent Josh Harder (D) vs. Kevin Lincoln (R)
Region: Central Valley (Contra Costa, San Joaquin, and Stanislaus counties)
Status: Harder had a strong lead on Election Night with a 4.2 percent margin that narrowed to 1.4 percent by the next morning.

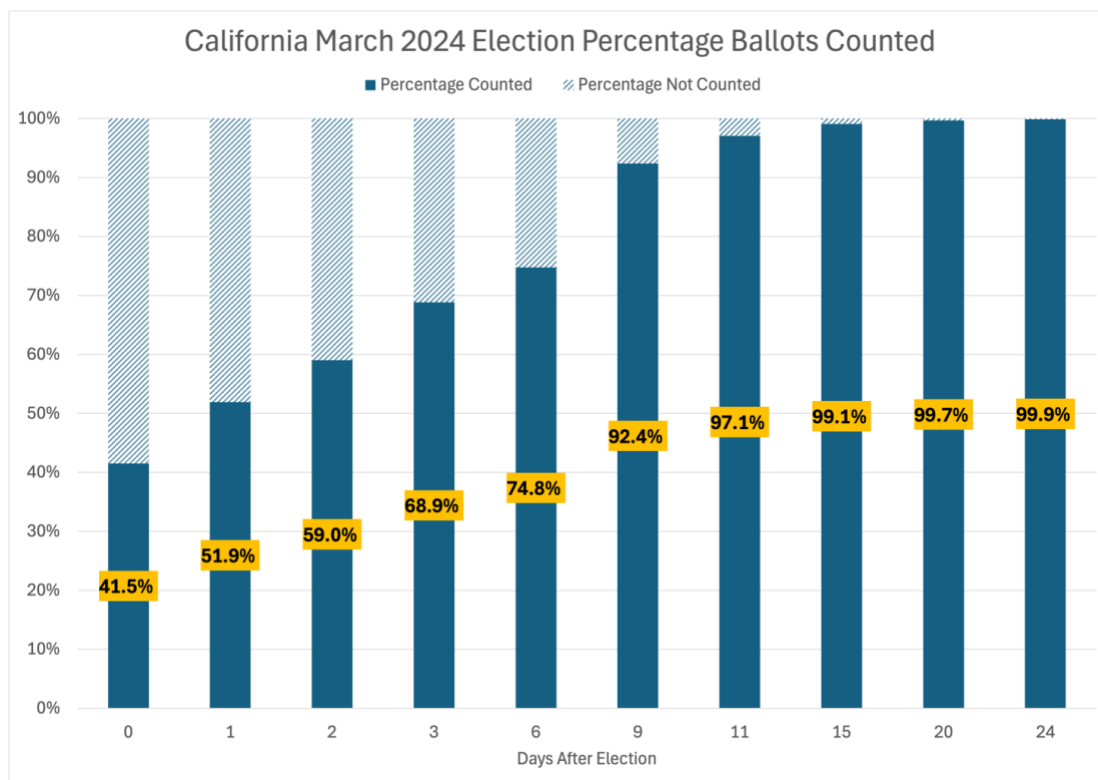
- **CD 13:** Incumbent John Duarte (R) vs. Adam Gray (D)
Region: Central Valley (Fresno, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, and Stanislaus counties)
Status: The margin between the candidates in this race was just 1.1 percent on Election Night but widened to 2.9 percent to favor Duarte by the next morning.
- **CD 21:** Incumbent Jim Costa (D) vs. Michael Maher (R)
Region: Central Valley (Fresno and Tulare counties)
Status: Not initially included in the Cook Political Report list of competitive seats, this contest was added to the Secretary of State's Close Contests list on Nov. 6 and added to CVF's tracking sheet. The incumbent Democrat has a narrow lead over his Republican challenger, with a 0.9 percent vote difference margin.
- **CD 22:** Incumbent David Valadao (R) vs. Rudy Salas (D)
Region: Central Valley (Kern, Kings, and Tulare)
Status: Valadao's 7.9 percent lead over Salas was high on Election Night and further increased by the next morning, with a 10.1 percent margin favoring the Republican incumbent.
- **CD 27:** Incumbent Mike Garcia (R) vs. George Whitesides (D)
Region: Southern California (Los Angeles County)
Status: A narrow, 0.1 percent margin on Election Night favoring Garcia widened by the next morning to 2.4 percent.
- **CD 40:** Incumbent Young Kim (R) vs. Joe Kerr (D)
Region: Southern California (Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties)
Status: The margin favoring the Republican incumbent widened from 9 percent in Election Night to 13.7 percent by the next morning.
- **CD 41:** Incumbent Ken Calvert (R) vs. Will Rollins (D)
Region: Southern California (Riverside County)
Status: Election Night results showed the Democratic challenger ahead in this contest with a 3.8 percent margin but the results flipped overnight with the Republican incumbent taking the lead, with a very close 1 percent margin.
- **CD 45:** Incumbent Michelle Steel (R) vs. Derek Tran (D)
Region: Southern California (Los Angeles and Orange counties)
Status: The incumbent Republican's initial close margin on Election Night of 1.5 percent widened overnight to 5.1 percent by the next morning.
- **CD 47:** Open Seat - Scott Baugh (R) vs. Dave Min (D)
Region: Southern California (Orange County)
Status: With a narrow Election Night margin of 1.3 percent, the Democratic candidate in this open seat was ahead, but the results flipped overnight to favor the Republican with a close margin of 1.2 percent by the next morning.
- **CD 49:** Incumbent Mike Levin (D) vs. Matt Gunderson (R)
Region: Southern California (Orange and San Diego counties)
Status: Initially showing a 5.4 percent margin favoring the Democratic incumbent on Election Night, the vote count in this contest narrowed overnight and reduced that margin to 1.9 percent.

“Known Unknowns”

The biggest “known unknown” at this point in time is the number of ballots that counties have yet to process. The statewide Unprocessed Ballot Status report is not published online until the Thursday after Election Day.

In recent elections, only about 50 percent of all the ballots cast were counted within a day or two of the election. In the March 2024 Primary, only 41.5 percent of ballots were counted on Election Night and 59 percent within two days of Election Day, with nearly 90 percent of ballots cast as vote-by-mail ballots. By comparison, twenty years ago, in the November 2004 election, only 32 percent of ballots were cast as vote-by-mail ballots, and 81 percent of all ballots cast were counted within two days of Election Day.

CVF preserved March Primary 2024 vote count totals from the Secretary of State’s County Reporting Status reports throughout the post-election period and used that data to later determine what percentage of all the ballots cast were counted in the days and weeks following Election Day. The chart below shows that on March 5, Primary Election Night, only 41.5 percent of all ballots cast were counted. Within two days, 59 percent had been counted. The chart below may help predict the timeline for ballot counting after the November 5th election and help observers estimate how many ballots remain to be processed and counted while awaiting publication of the Secretary of State’s [Unprocessed Ballots Report](#).



The graph above shows the percentage of ballots counted by number of days following Election Day in 4th March 5th, 2024 Primary Election.

Some counties are already publishing their number of ballots remaining to be counted on their web sites. For example, Orange County, home to several of the close contests, [reported this morning](#) online that it has an estimated 324,890 ballots remaining to count and just over 1 million ballots counted so far.

It is important to note that unprocessed ballot numbers are estimates and are subject to change as ballots postmarked by Election Day and received by November 12th are added to the count. In addition, a small percentage of ballots cast will be removed from the count if they are challenged and rejected due to lateness, signature issues, or other reasons.

Vote-by-mail ballots take longer to process than in-person ballots. Election officials must check for duplicates before counting them, and voters' signatures must be verified before the envelope is opened. Ballots must be flattened and sometimes remade if damaged or if there are stray marks that will prevent a ballot from being accurately scanned.

See CVF's [Close Count Transparency Project homepage](#) and [news release](#) for additional information about this project and California's vote counting process.