

CVF's Close Count Transparency Project

Report #2:

Discovering a "Known Unknown" – Release of the Unprocessed Ballots Report

November 8, 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.

Changes between Wednesday and Thursday

Of the eleven congressional races CVF is tracking, some margins tightened, some grew and two races (CD 3 and CD 40) have been called. See below for more details. In the six legislative races CVF is tracking, four margins widened and two remain incredible narrow.

Release of the Unprocessed Ballots Report

A big "known unknown" in the vote counting process was unveiled Thursday evening, November 7th, shortly after 6 p.m., when California Secretary of State Dr. Shirley Weber issued a [news release](#) announcing the publication of the [Unprocessed Ballots Status Report](#) which estimates that 5,472,423 ballots remain to be counted. This report is updated continuously and shows when counties plan to report their next updates.

A new feature of this report is the "Ballots Left to Cure" column, showing that 127,586 ballots are presently being challenged. Voters whose signatures don't sufficiently compare to their registration signature on file or forgot to sign their vote-by-mail envelope have until December 1st to correct or "cure" their signature so their ballot can be counted. Challenged ballots can potentially become the focus of post-election voter outreach efforts by campaigns hoping to win close contests.

The new "known unknown": ballots remaining to be counted in specific districts

Below is a summary of the contests CVF is currently tracking. While we now know the estimated total number of ballots remaining to be counted in the counties that are home to these districts, observers must grapple with a new "known unknown": the number of ballots that remain to be counted in closely-watched districts. Unlike in the past when voters voted primarily in precincts, vote-by-mail ballots are returned county-wide, depriving observers of the ability to make informed guesses about who the ballots remaining to be counted might favor.

Close Contests (in order of narrowest margins):

- **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 Wednesday. As of Thursday, Baugh was still in the lead but the margin has shrunk to just 0.2 percent with 616 votes separating the two candidates and an estimated 364K ballots remaining to count in Orange County.

- **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, which grew slightly from 0.9 to 1.1 percent between Wednesday and Thursday and an estimated 138K ballots remaining to be processed in the two counties where this district resides.

- **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 Wednesday to 2.4 percent but shrunk to 1.4 percent by Thursday. CD 27 is one of 17 congressional districts located in Los Angeles County, which has nearly 1 million ballots remaining to process.

- **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 Wednesday and remained at 1.4 percent with very few votes added to the count Thursday. The counties included in this district have a combined estimated 370K ballots remaining to process.

- **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 Wednesday and reduced that margin to 1.9 percent. Thursday's results showed Levin's margin growing to 2.2 percent. Over 858K ballots remain to be processed in the counties that are home to this district.

- **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 with Gray ahead, but widened to 2.9 percent to favor Duarte by Wednesday; his lead shrunk slightly to 2.8 percent on Thursday after a few thousand additional ballots were counted. The counties that are home to this district have a combined estimated total of about 344K ballots remaining to process.

- **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 by a 3.8 percent margin but the results flipped overnight with the Republican incumbent taking the lead on Wednesday by a one percent margin, which widened to three percent by Thursday, and 350K ballots

remaining to count in Riverside.

- **CD 45:** Incumbent Michelle Steel (R) vs. Derek Tran (D)

Region: Southern California (Los Angeles and Orange counties)

Status: The Republican incumbent's initial close margin on Election Night of 1.5 percent widened to 5.1 percent on Wednesday then decreased to 3.8 percent on Thursday. The two counties that are home to this district have a combined estimated total of 1.3 million ballots left to process.

- **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 that held steady at 10.1 percent Thursday after a few thousand more ballots were counted. Approximately 186K ballots remain to be processed in the counties that are home to this district.

- **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 on Election Night to 13.7 percent by Wednesday morning. Though it dipped to 12.8 percent Thursday, it was considered wide enough for the AP to [call this race](#) for Kim on Nov. 7.

- **CD 3:** Incumbent Kevin Kiley (R) vs. Jessica Morse (D)

The AP [called this race](#) for the Republican incumbent on 11/6.

Legislative Races

In the six legislative races CVF is tracking, four margins widened and two remain incredible narrow - Senate District 5, with a 0.3 percent margin and Assembly District 47 with a 0.4 percent margin. In Senate District 37, Democratic incumbent State Senator Josh Newman is currently behind his Republican challenger Steve Choi, who is up by 3.4 percent.

Additional Close Contests Resources

See the [Cook Political Report](#) for more information on nation's 52 most competitive congressional contests which includes ten of the eleven CVF is tracking. 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. California races "called" by the AP are noted on CVF's tracking sheet.

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