

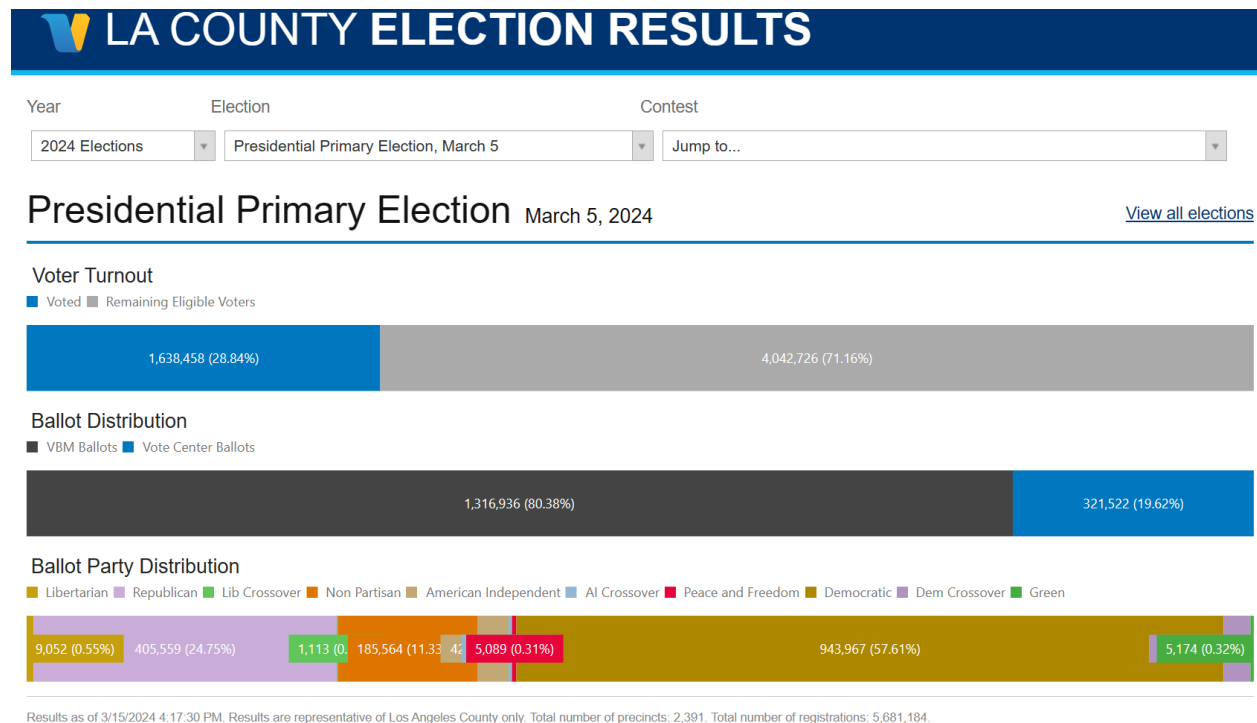
From: Commissioner Cynthia Dai
Date: March 18, 2024

Improving Election Results Reporting

After discussions on the Elections Commission in 2022 about [clarifying election results](#) in the wake of confusing or inaccurate media stories, the Department of Elections changed the way it provided preliminary election results. Key improvements such as reiterating at the top that results are in fact preliminary and noting the number and type of ballots left to count have helped considerably. However, there is always room for more improvement. With the presidential primary behind us and the November election ahead, I'm sharing some additional ideas to improve elections result reporting to assist the public's understanding. This memo will address possible enhancements of the current format, starting with the summary information at the top.

Summary Information

Visual charts aid the public by providing data in context. For example, see what LA County provides in the screenshot below. With additional simple bar charts, it is easy for anyone viewing LA County's website to tell at a glance what turnout looks like, the breakdown between VBM and Vote Center (in-person) ballots, and by party. While their graphics could also benefit from improvement (particularly the latter bar chart), this information is much easier for the average person to understand over raw data.



As seen in the screenshot below taken on March 14, the Department of Elections provides some key statistics, but the only visual graphic is the breakdown between VBM and provisional ballots left to count.

March 5, 2024 Preliminary Election Results


These results and turnout are preliminary and will change. The Department of Elections must still count many ballots, including all of the vote-by-mail ballots received on Election Day and those with valid postmarks delivered by mail by March 12. The Department will issue final results no later than April 4.

Last Update: March 14, 2024 4:08 PM
Next Update: March 15, 2024 4:00 PM
Current number of ballots counted: 229,227
Voter registration total: 500,856
Current voter turnout: 45.77%
Approximate number of ballots left to count: 3,240
Precincts that have reported in-person results: 514 of 514 (100.00%)

XML 

Breakdown of Approximate Number of Ballots Left to Count by Type



 Vote-by-mail ballots returned by mail with valid postmarks, dropped off at polling places and drop boxes, and cast at the City Hall Voting Center.

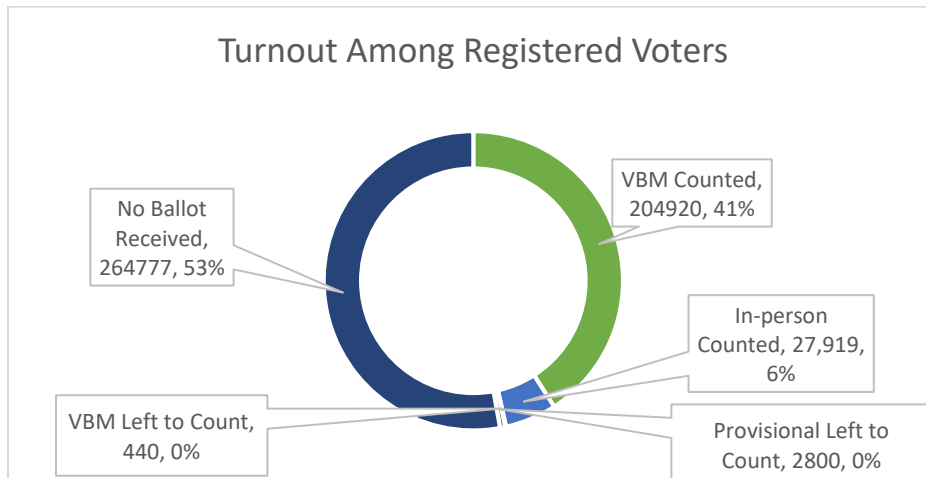
 Provisional ballots cast at polling places on Election Day.

Select a contest to jump to 

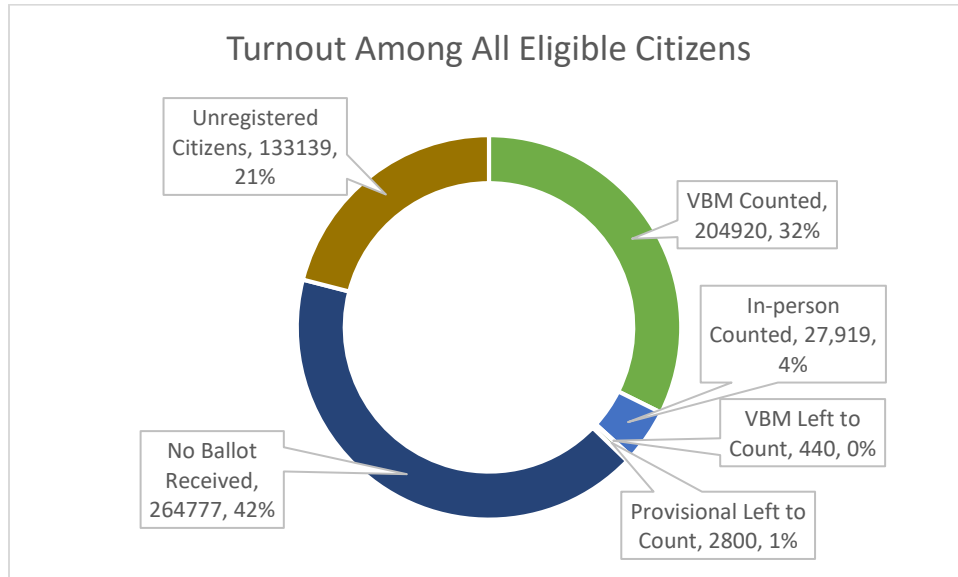
Turnout and Ballots Left to Count

While we didn't see much misreporting on turnout figures in the media this time, "**Current voter turnout**" is bit misleading. What was actually reported were the *currently counted ballots* divided by registered voters, so initially the preliminary results on Election night showed just over 20% despite ballots received representing 40+% of registered voters. What I think most people are interested in **actual turnout**. Even if the Department has not yet counted the ballots, it can minimally show "**Estimated voter turnout**", updating the total number of ballots *received* for each report.

One issue was that the media were reporting results despite the fact that less than half of the ballots had been counted. While we cannot control the media's desire to "scoop", we can state more precisely than "many ballots" and show it visually. The simple pie diagram below compares how many **ballots are left to count** by type with those counted by type, thus providing **turnout** information as well.



Given the Commission’s policy priority on voter registration, it would be useful to show this number compared to all eligible voters.



I like the link to historical turnout, but it appears later under the “Number of Ballots Cast Total” table. To put it in context, I would also suggest comparing turnout to the past 3 *similar* elections, i.e. for this past election, show “**Average turnout for the past 3 presidential primaries**” rather than making the public figure out the relevant elections. This would help journalists and the public quickly understand if the turnout is “low” or “typical” for this type of election.

Another helpful fact to include instead of just stating “many ballots” still need to be counted might be an average, say of all elections conducted in the past 3 years, “**X% of ballots were counted by election night.**” For this election, that figure would have only been about 43%.

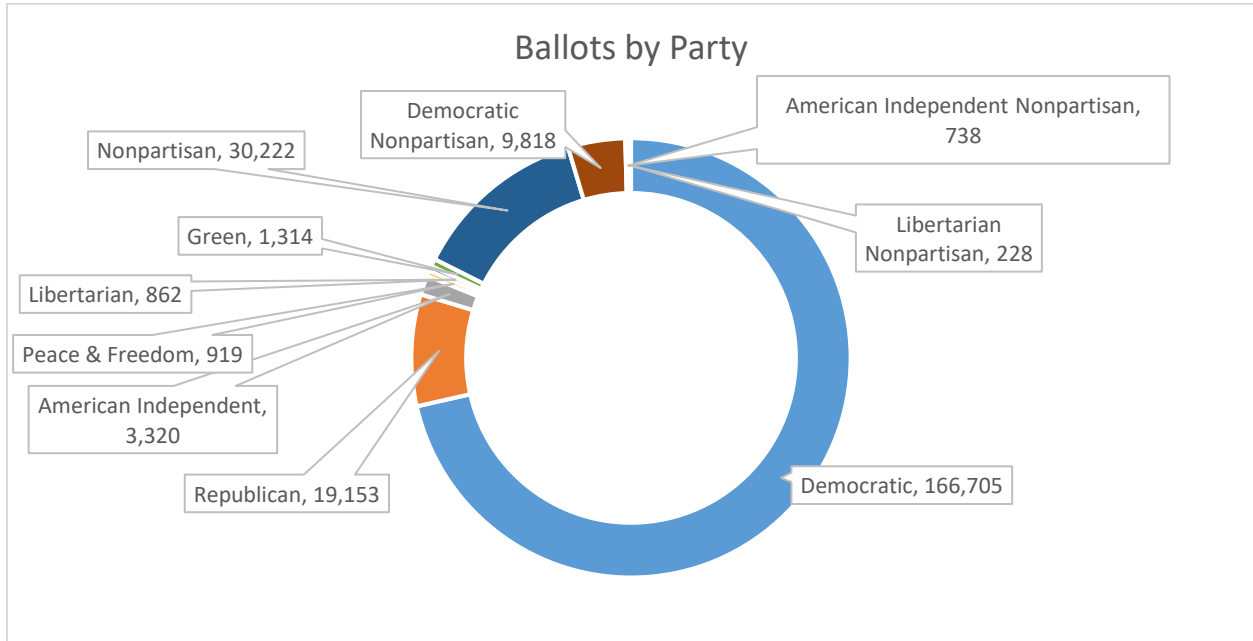
Ballots Cast Total

Currently this information is presented in a table, while it would be easier to understand as a simple graphic, as shown in LA County’s second bar chart. The table is actually showing “**Ballots cast by type**” or “Ballot Distribution” (in LA County’s parlance). Even in the table, it would make more sense to show that in-person ballots were 11.97% vs. 88.03% VBM, totaling 100%. Providing the percentage of registered voters for each category isn’t intuitive.

Ballots Cast by Type	Ballots Counted	Percentage
In-person ballots cast on Election Day	27,919	11.97%
Vote-by-mail ballots	205,360	88.03%
Total	233,279	100.00%

Party Distribution

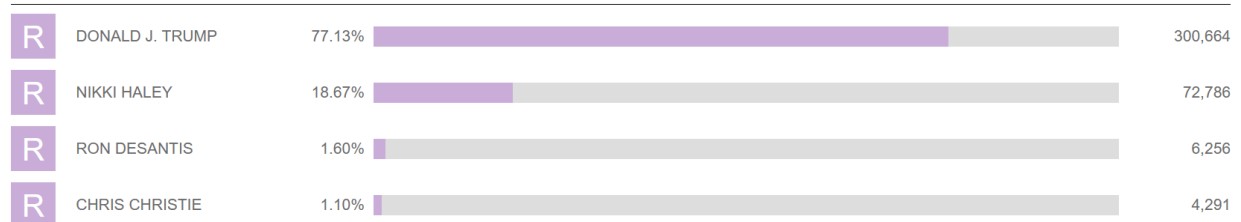
I think this is interesting but secondary information. I found myself skipping over it to get to the actual contests. (I like the ability to jump to a specific race up top.) I think a simple pie chart showing the distribution would summarize this information in a lot less space. (LA County's 3rd bar chart is an alternative, but the presentation is confusing due to the overlapping labels.) The breakdown between in-person and VBM by party could be details one could click on.



Single Candidate Contests and Ballot Measures

Showing which candidate is winning by indicating the leader in green is good start. However, this may present a problem for people who are colorblind or visually impaired. More visual cues, such as a bar chart like LA County shows below would be helpful, as well as **bolding** the names of leading candidates.

PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE - REPUBLICAN







A way to distinguish between a *leading* candidate vs. one that has definitely *won* might be to add a **checkmark**, as shown below in sample output of the 2018 Open Source Voting Technical Advisory Committee's (OSVTAC) [Results Reporter demo](#). This presentation also avoids the challenge for people who might require high contrast to distinguish the bars.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES Presidential Preference (Democratic)

Vote for One

609 of 609 Precincts Reporting (100%) [\[Detailed results\]](#) [\[CA State results =>\]](#)

	Votes	Percent	
BERNIE SANDERS ✓	89,217	34.38%	
JOSEPH R. BIDEN	62,299	24.01%	
ELIZABETH WARREN	58,730	22.63%	
MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG	28,933	11.15%	

Multi-Seat Contests

This election featured races for Democratic and Republican Central Committee seats, allowing voters to select up to 10, 12, 13 or 14 candidates depending on party and Assembly district. Many voters either don't understand or don't care about these races so do not vote for all candidates or any at all. As a result, the leading candidates—particularly at the tail of the pack—changed a lot during the vote counting. Those who do care about these races probably want to monitor the **leading candidates**. The same issue with only using green text applies. One possible solution is to provide a box or even a thick line under the **possible number of seats** so it's easy to see who is in contention as shown below.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY COUNTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE, ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 19 (10 SEATS)

	Ballots Counted	Percentage
CATHERINE STEFANI	36,161	8.34%
MICHELA ALIOTO-PIER	26,926	6.21%
MARJAN PHILHOUR	24,605	5.68%
PARAG GUPTA	24,457	5.64%
MIKE CHEN	23,548	5.43%
CONNIE CHAN	23,379	5.39%
JADE TU	23,257	5.37%
LANIER COLES	21,745	5.02%
GORDON MAR	21,576	4.98%
DAN CALAMUCI	21,386	4.93%
BRIAN QUAN	21,240	4.9%
SARA BARZ	20,808	4.8%
NATALIE GEE	19,695	4.54%
MANO RAJU	18,552	4.28%

Another issue is that the ballot **percentage** looks artificially low because it is reported as a percentage of *possible* total votes. For example, Catherine Stefani received 36,161 votes, which shows up as 8.34%.

But actually she received a much higher percentage of those who voted in this race because the “total votes” show all possible votes, i.e. 10 seats per ballot. I believe the percentage that the public really wants to know is **the percent of voters voting in the contest who voted for each candidate**, i.e. percentage of voters, not votes.

This brings up a related issue of what “**Under Votes**” and “**Over Votes**” mean in the context of multiple seats since voters are not required to vote for all seats. It would be helpful here and also for single candidate and measures to provide a clickable “(i)” to the definitions and the consequences.

Irrelevant races

If it’s possible to suppress the tables showing (East Bay) contests with **zero votes**, it would also clean up the results reporting.