

# The Mercury News

## What Bay Area voters are saying after they cast ballots in dramatic midterm election

The region sees a huge turnout at many polling places



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San Jose State University sophomore Kalani Wong, 18, center, fills out her ballot on Nov. 6, 2018, at MACLA, Latino art and culture gallery, in San Jose. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

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In one of the most fateful — and nerve-wracking — midterm elections in decades, charged-up Bay Area voters headed early Tuesday for their local polling places, casting ballots on issues ranging from choosing a new governor to grappling with epidemic homelessness to deciding how nicely to treat egg-laying chickens.

And hovering over the entire drama is the shadow of Donald Trump, the president who recently said “I’m not on the ticket, but I am on the ticket, because this is also a referendum about me.”

From Morgan Hill to Marin County, from the Outer Richmond to Warm Springs, the local electorate came out in full force despite the morning chill, a reflection of the voting-by-mail surge reported across the country in recent days. By this past weekend, more than 20 million Americans had voted early in 18 states, including California; that’s a higher rate than they did in 2014, although political analysts warn that those numbers can be misleading.

Within a half hour of the polls opening, there was a steady stream of voters casting their ballots at the African American Community Services Agency on North Sixth Street near downtown San Jose. For two of those voters, the Bay Area’s housing crisis was among the key issues on the ballot. Leval Walker, 59, of San Jose, said he was especially concerned about skyrocketing rents and housing for the homeless in Silicon Valley. He voted yes on state propositions 1 and 10 to support those efforts.

“I’ve got a house here, but I’m very fortunate,” Walker said. “I was able to inherit some property. If I didn’t have this property, and with the price of rent here, I don’t know where I would be living. Even though I have a fairly good job, at three grand a month, I don’t think I could afford it.”



SAN JOSE, CA – Nov. 6: San Jose State University students Geneca Licuanan, 19, left, Aljhecia Alolor, 19, center, and Lauryn Crawford, 19, right, wait in line to vote on Nov. 6, 2018, at MACLA, Latino art and culture gallery, in San Jose. For three of them, it’s their first time voting. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group) Skyrocketing rents were also a concern for 31-year-old Laura Black of San Jose, who works in public safety as a recruiter. Black, who described herself as a “longtime renter,” said she voted yes on Proposition 10.

“I’m all for rent control,” Black said. “I’m born and raised in Willow Glen, and I never in my life will be able to afford a house there. I probably could never afford a house here in San Jose, and I make good money. But if I’m going to be renting, I don’t want half of my paycheck going to rent every month.”

Black, who said she’s been voting since age 18, also was excited to vote in support of measures to support public safety workers, including state Proposition 11 (breaks for ambulance workers) and Measure T in San Jose. That’s an infrastructure bond measure that will include \$175 for upgrading and repairing the city’s police, fire and other emergency operations facilities.

The high-rent/housing theme was echoing all over the high-priced Bay Area. Take Kevin Nash, a 24-year-old college student who drove his 96-year-old great grandfather Otis Simonsen to his precinct at the Lafayette United Methodist Church in Lafayette. As he fiddled outside the polling place with his cell phone, Nash said that while he hadn’t voted in the last midterm election, he felt compelled to show up this time because of what he called “national politics.” But the local issue of rent control was just as much on his mind as the congressional races on his ballot.

“The rent control was a big one for me,” he said. “Rent around here is insane.”

It was a big one, too, for Brooklyn Sylve, who checked on how late her polling station in San Jose would be open so that she could drop her ballot after work. It’s her first time voting and, she said, “rent control is a big one for me. I’m 19 and I want to be able to live on my own.”



Kayla Ross, 23, center, is helped by precinct clerk Larry Makler, left, and precinct inspector Tim Williams, right, while voting at Taylor Elementary School in San Jose, California, on Tuesday, November 6, 2018. (LiPo Ching/Bay Area News Group)

The Lafayette precinct was busy as people streamed in and out of the church gymnasium to drop off mail-in ballots before heading to work. Or some waited in a line, like 32-year-old John Brown, a veteran and a police officer who said he voted for Trump in 2016, despite almost exclusively voting for Democrats in the past.

“It’s time for a change,” Brown said. “People are disappointed considering how things have been playing out. This time, the way things are going, we just need a change.”

And everywhere, it seemed, Trump was on voters’ minds. At Trace Elementary school in San Jose’s Rose Garden neighborhood, Chris Albanese, a Republican in the construction business, said voting in local elections was a meaningful distraction from “the whole Trump thing.

“The whole government has been a comedy hour,” said Albanese, 42. “No one agrees with anyone. To pay attention to that takes so much time and energy and I have no control over that.” He seemed to enjoy at least a temporary break from D.C. politics as he focused on his California ballot issues. “It’s nice that almost everything here is local,” he said of the voting experience, as a steady stream of voters came in and out of the polling place. “You feel part of your community.”

Another voter who showed up at Trace Elementary was Uber driver Gilbert Romero. The 56-year-old said that even though his district is not a battleground, he came to his polling place with a specific agenda in mind. “I wanted to get the Republicans out, get them out of Congress. They’re not for the people—they’re only for the rich people,” Romero said. “I voted for a lot of women candidates because the old boys’ club ain’t cutting it.”

Jamie Chreszczyk votes while his son Max ,3, runs under his voting booth at the FM Smith Recreation Center on Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2018, in Oakland, Calif. (Aric Crabb/Bay Area News Group)

At a busy polling place near Stanford University, there was plenty of anti-Trump fervor to go around. Several voters said their dislike of the president had motivated them to vote stock-and-barrel against all Republicans up and down the ballot. John and Susan Worley dressed in blue to show their political preference. Susan wore a “Resist Trump” T-shirt and a pink pussy cap.

“I’m actually an independent,” said Susan Worley, a 66-year-old artist. “But look how I’m dressed today.”

The couple are regular voters, but have been more involved in this election than any other. They’re upset by the divisive rhetoric and corruption coming from the White House. Said John Worley, 63, a professional musician and instructor at Stanford, “I’d like to see some change.”

Tim Froehlich, a 31-year old software engineer, cast a straight Democratic ballot. He’s a regular voter but has never followed an election as closely as this one.

“This year, I’m so incensed about everything,” he said. Froehlich was angry about the Republicans’ handling of the racial riots in Charlottesville, the Supreme Court nomination of Brett Kavanaugh and the president’s divisive rhetoric.

Oakland resident Michelle Epstein, 51, was outside her polling place Lincoln Square Recreation Center in Oakland’s Chinatown when she was asked about if she thought the midterms were a referendum against Trump. “Oh definitely,” said the Epstein, who works for the Sierra Club. “People have seen what has

transpired in the last two years.” And then in a reference to last week’s shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue, she added: “One of the things most troubling is the hate that is put out there in the world. A lot of people are seeing that our country is not going in the way it should. be.”

On a brighter note, Epstein said the most encouraging thing about the ballot this year, “not just in California but across the country, is that there is a lot strongly progressive candidates, especially women and people of color” running for positions. And while she said it is “kind of hard to envision Jerry Brown not being governor of California,” Epstein admitted that “change is good.” She believes former San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom will be elected governor and she said “Gavin has been around a long time and he is experienced in California politics”

Other voters also said they would punish Republicans on the ballot as a warning: stand up to Trump’s more outrageous behavior or we’ll vote you out. Casting his ballot at Parkmead Elementary School near downtown Walnut Creek, John Palme, 66, said he had never missed an election and has long considered himself to be a moderate Democrat who will vote for a Republican if he agrees with the candidate’s platform. But Palme said he felt it was necessary to vote a straight-party ticket this year to “send a message to Republicans” who won’t stand up to Trump.

“If the candidate is a Democrat, I’m for him,” Palme said. “No questions asked.”

Lynne Underwood, 80, of Walnut Creek, said she had never missed voting in an election since she was first old enough to cast a ballot. She said she felt disheartened by the Trump presidency, but has long voted Democrat anyway. “I’m a Democrat all the way,” she said.



SAN JOSE, CA – Nov. 6: Tiffany Martinez, 23, of San Jose fills out her ballot on Nov. 6, 2018, at MACLA, Latino art and culture gallery, in San Jose. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

But even in the deep-blue Bay Area, where Hillary Clinton in 2016 won the San Francisco metropolitan area (which includes Oakland and Hayward) by a whopping 76.7 percent, there were plenty of voters who have stuck with Trump. And in many places around the region on Tuesday, polling places were a backdrop for those opposing views. At the polls at Oakland's Montclair Presbyterian Church, some voters were adamant about their reasons why they voted, even as they claimed differing reasons for their opinions.

"I just want to be sure the Republicans get back in," said Janet Herscu, of Oakland. "With all the make-or-break issues, it's the downfall of our country if things don't get right today."

In contrast, Oakland resident Ron Shuman left no mistake about why he was voting.

"More than anything else, it's a repudiation of what Trump's reign has done to the discourse we have about politics in this country," Shuman said. "I'm not a particularly politically active person, although I always vote. But I'm voting with a different spirit today because I'm so distressed and appalled by what this individual has brought. I know there have been arguments in my family about politics for as long as I can remember. But this isn't arguing. This is combat. And it's because we have a gargoyle in the role of president, and we're expected to respect that personage because he occupies that position. But he doesn't deserve that."

In West Oakland, Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church was bustling with early-morning voters — all six of the booths were full and voters had to wait their turn.

It was 22-year-old Josefina Garcia's second time voting in an election. Trips out of town and other commitments had kept her from voting in the past, but this year Garcia wanted to make sure to come out and cast a ballot in favor of Cat Brooks for Oakland mayor. She hasn't been impressed with the job incumbent Libby Schaaf has done so far. "I think we need a different face," Garcia said.

For Garcia, who has lived in Oakland her whole life, Tuesday was all about the local races, and housing. She voted yes on Propositions 1, to authorize an affordable housing bond, and 5, to make it easier for home owners to transfer their low property tax rates when they move. Garcia lives with her mother while working as a barista and studying psychology at Laney College, but she's hoping to save enough money to buy her own home. She's appalled by how quickly rents have risen in her neighborhood, and the economic disparity that has caused.

"This is not the Oakland I grew up in," Garcia said. "This is not the city I look forward to continue to be in."



From foreground, Elizabeth Crapo, 31, and Doug Slater, 69, vote at Taylor Elementary School in San Jose, California, on Tuesday, November 6, 2018. (LiPo Ching/Bay Area News Group)

California voters face a smorgasbord of choices, many of them tough ones, on the ballot. For the Golden State's next governor, would it be Lieutenant Gov. Gavin Newsom or his Republic rival, businessman John Cox? Would Democratic voters here join a nationwide "blue wave" that gives their party control of the House of Representatives, probably with their own Nancy Pelosi once again the chamber's speaker? And how will the 12 statewide propositions fare? Will voters authorize \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for affordable housing programs for low-income residents, veterans and others? Will they favor amending Prop.13 by approving Prop. 5 and allowing homeowners 55 and older to transfer their property-tax adjustments from their prior home to their new home, no matter where it's located? And might they do away with last year's measure that raised fees on gas and vehicle registration to pay for road repairs, putting \$5 billion back into drivers' savings accounts?

At the Saratoga Country Club on Prospect Road, Brian Bitney's motorcycle stood out in a parking lot dotted with Teslas and BMWs. A Bay Area resident since 1953, Bitney, 67, grew up in Cupertino and works as a concrete pourer. In the last election, a job kept him out late after the polls closed and he didn't get a chance to vote, he said.

This election, "I don't get to be complicit in the undoing of America," he said, as he left the polling station shortly after 8:00 a.m.

Bitney doesn't see himself as fitting neatly into one political party. "I don't know if liberal describes who I am, but I'm open minded, and I'm certainly not a conservative," he said.

Bitney sees this election as a response to President Trump's first two years in office. "I think his term is going to be short-lived," he said.

The slew of ballot initiatives, some of them downright confounding in their descriptions, nevertheless resonated with many voters who had a personal connection with the issue under consideration. Prop. 8, for example, presented a conundrum for San Jose resident Angela Crissey and her friends because, she said, kidney dialysis is “essentially life support.” Would centers actually close if their profits were limited?

“My friends and I have been talking about Prop 8 for a while,” with even a nurse-practitioner friend of hers wavering between yes and no. Props 8 and 11 “were both basically labor disagreements,” Crissey, a registered Democrat, said. “We shouldn’t even be voting on labor issues.”

Prop. 6 was among the ballot measures most important to Kathy and Bob Braun, who live within walking distance of their polling place at Martinez City Hall. They voted “no,” which meant keeping in place the fuel and vehicle taxes to pay for highway and road maintenance repairs. And it was another indication that all politics, on some level, are personal.

“I think that it’s crazy that people will pay money to fix their cars, but they won’t pay money to fix the streets,” said Bob Braun, 73, a retired programmer with Wells Fargo Bank.

The couple said the language of the measure wasn’t clear.

“(Prop.) 6 was confusing; you had to pay attention,” said Kathy Braun, a 62-year-old pediatric medical assistant.

“The wording was strange on several of the propositions, which seems to be the way they’re written in California,” she said. “If you’re not a real informed voter, if you don’t read the propositions, if you don’t listen to the real reasons that they’re written, you can be fooled easily. The corporations or whose ever behind these propositions write them for that reason.”

Just as in the South Bay and Peninsula, Brentwood saw a steady flow of voters. Outside the Church Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, two friends were waiting for a third to finish voting. Jordan Renfro, 24, of Manteca, had already cast her ballot by mail thanks to the 2016 presidential election which she says transformed her from a “not very political” person into someone who now pays attention. In this election, which she says she hopes will turn into a referendum on Trump and his policies, Renfro was most interested in the propositions on the ballot, especially Prop 8, which aims to limit the profits of dialysis providers. As is common in politics, her engagement in the issue was personal for Renfro, who’s grandmother had been on dialysis.

With her was another politically-engaged Millennial named Brandon Price, a seasoned voter at the tender age of 23. He and his friends defy the stereotype of disengaged Millennials. “I feel it’s important to support the people and causes that you choose,” said Price. “It’s important to be proactive” because of the focus on getting younger voters to the polls this election. “We might not be as far along in life, we might not own a house yet and that sort of thing, but it’s important to have a say in the future,” Price said. “We are the future.”



SAN JOSE, CA – Nov. 6: A pedestrian walks by a sign directing to a polling place at MACLA, Latino art and culture gallery, in San Jose, on Nov. 6, 2018. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

In San Jose, near the Fruitvale Station, Jasmine and Mark Anat celebrated their first time voting together as a married couple by taking a smile-filled selfie outside their polling place.

“We’re so proud,” she started, as he finished, “to exercise our civic duty to vote.”

Outside the Piedmont Gardens voting station in Oakland, voter Roberta Ventura, 70, described herself as a “bleeding heart liberal” who voted straight Democrat. Despite the party’s dominance in the state, Ventura said she took a “you never can tell” attitude to supporting her party – especially this year. She voted against the repeal of the gas tax, and she wasn’t concerned that one party dominates state politics.

“If it was all Republican,” she said, “then I’d be concerned.”

An elderly man voting at the same polling place was getting help from a poll worker. The voter told the worker that he couldn’t fill out his own ballot. But he said he didn’t want to know the candidates’ names, just the offices.

“Governor,” the poll worker said.

“Democrat,” the man replied.

“Treasurer?”

“Democrat.”

“Attorney General?”

“Democrat.”