

Calif. voter turnout may be less than 50%

By Josh Richman and Julia Prodis Sulek, Inside Bay Area

California has tried to make casting a ballot as easy as ordering a pizza online.

We've scooped up potential voters when they come to the DMV to renew their driver's licenses. We've let Californians register to vote on smartphone apps. We've set up voting booths at city halls around the state weeks before Election Day. We've sent registered voters mail-in ballots every election.

But while 17.8 million Californians are now registered, more than for any other gubernatorial general election in the state's history, voting experts project that Tuesday's could be the first general election in which turnout falls below 50 percent. That's a far cry from the record 80 percent that cast ballots in 1958, when Democrat Pat Brown beat the GOP's William Knowland in a Republican-leaning state.

Yeah, this election has mostly been a snoozer – mostly because Pat Brown's son, Jerry, is expected to win a fourth term in a landslide. But the problem is bigger than one election. With the exception of slightly better turnouts in the last few general elections, the Golden State's voter participation has been slowly declining for half a century.

One big reason is the state's sweeping demographic changes. Simply put: White Californians tend to vote a lot more than other Californians. Although whites now make up only 39 percent of the state's population, they're 57 percent of voters who show up.

In the next quarter century, 8.3 million more Californians will become eligible to vote, 8 million of whom will be people

of color. So it will be a tougher task getting people to the polls, unless attitudes toward voting change.

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