

## Catalano, Soria too close to call in Fresno council District 1 race

By George  
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Annalisa Perea, sister of Henry T. Perea, works at attaching campaign signs inside Pinot Wine Bar & Bistro about an hour before the gathering for both Esmeralda Soria and Henry T. Perea on election night in the Tower District on Tuesday, November 4, 2014 in Fresno, Calif. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

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Businessman Cary Catalano had a 20-vote lead over lawyer Esmeralda Soria on Tuesday night in their Fresno City Council District 1 race with 37 of 37 precincts reporting.

Catalano had 3,803 votes, Soria 3,783.

Everyone expected a nail-biter. They were right.

The returns include some absentee ballots. Late absentees and provisional ballots will decide this one.

Catalano said it's always good to be in front.

"I'm a registered Democrat with bipartisan support," Catalano said. "Fresno is not used to seeing that."



Soria said she thinks momentum will swing to her side.

“We did our work,” Soria said. “We reached out to people all across the district and got their support.”

Catalano and Soria were virtually tied in the crowded primary with nearly 34% of the vote each. Catalano finished with a 30-vote advantage, but Soria was closing fast at the end. That’s what she meant Tuesday by a momentum shift.

Both held election night parties at restaurants in the Tower District. Both places were packed with supporters in the first hours after the polls closed at 8 p.m.

Both candidates praised their respective team’s year-long effort, in particular the closing weeks’ “ground game.” That’s political lingo for getting out the vote.

Tuesday’s election could have been a donnybrook for City Hall. The year began with four council seats up for grabs. Everyone knew District 1 incumbent Blong Xiong would be termed out in 12 months. Oliver Baines (District 3), Sal Quintero (District 5) and Clint Olivier (District 7) were running for second terms.

But the June primary was one big wet blanket for those seeking fall drama. The three incumbents rolled to victories, with no one even bothering to challenge Quintero.

District 1 was all by itself Tuesday.

In the shorthand of politics, the district is little more than the Tower District. In reality, the district includes only a portion of that area. A big chunk of the relatively new growth west of Highway 99 and well-established west-central neighborhoods all the way to Shaw Avenue are District 1, too.

Soria and Catalano sounded like broken records during their run-off. Both are fans of cops and firefighters. Both want more good-paying jobs in the city. Both support stable neighborhoods, strong schools and non-partisan teamwork on the council dais. Both promise to faithfully serve everyone.

Yet, the race had sparkle. The candidates’ personal stories transcended issues.

Soria is a woman. There are no women on the council. She wasn’t shy about reminding voters of the non-secret.

Soria is Hispanic. So is Quintero, so she couldn’t claim to be shattering that ceiling. But Hispanics, Fresno’s largest ethnic group, aren’t represented on the dais in proportion to overall population. Shyness didn’t get in Soria’s way on this fact, either.

Catalano is a business-owner in a city desperate to expand its private sector. He hires people and pays them with money earned from his own effort, not from tax proceeds. He let plenty of voters know this.

Catalano on Tuesday afternoon explained what he tells voters if they ask. Yes, he said, he is gay. Yes, he said, he has a partner. Yes, he said, he has a detailed blueprint to make Fresno better and can talk for hours about its value.

All that is background to the bottom line — no love is lost between Soria and Catalano.

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