

It's official — Valley turnout for general election was beyond dismal

By John
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Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth

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Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth on Tuesday certified the county's election results, so now it's official: turnout was beyond dismal in last month's general election.

It was 39.24%.

Solid numbers aren't easy to come by in Fresno County's long history, but it is safe to say the final turnout total was at or near a historic low for a general election. It is absolutely certain that it was the lowest general election turnout in the past 25 years, far surpassing even the 2002 general election, when 47.38% of voters cast ballots. That turnout number turned heads because it was below 50%.

Counties have until Friday to certify their vote count with the state, but as of now it looks like California's turnout will be around 41%, so Fresno County is well below that, too.

Tulare, Kings and Madera counties fared better than Fresno, and the state, but even their turnout totals were at or near historic lows. In Kings, it was 47.16%. In Tulare, it was 45.7%. Madera County had the highest turnout in the central San Joaquin Valley at 52.1%, but the total is still its lowest in 25 years, if not ever.

None of this is a surprise, as pundits predicted a low turnout. And as the election got close, their predictions became more dire. Voters didn't disappoint, staying home in droves. Still, the sheer volume of voters who took a pass on the election tripped up even the most seasoned experts. It's one of the major reasons races such as the 16th Congressional District clash between incumbent Fresno Democrat Jim Costa and Republican challenger Johnny Tacherra was so close, yet nobody saw it coming

Going back to 1990, the only general election that stands out like last month's is the 2002 contest, which featured the gubernatorial race between Democrat Gray Davis and Republican Bill Simon as the featured attraction. Besides Fresno County's poor showing, Kings that year had a 47.54% turnout, and Tulare 50.3%. Madera's low-water mark of the past 25 years — besides this one — was 1990, when 57.79% of voters cast ballots.

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