



Newsom Signs Umberg's Same Day Voter Registration Bill

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Yeah, this happened a week ago, but it's actually good news, and there hasn't been a lot of that lately. Yes, kids, Governor Gavin Newsom has signed [SB 72](#), authored by state Senator [Tom Umberg](#) (D-Santa Ana) which finally allows eligible California residents to register to vote and vote at all polling place on Election Day. And while we've given Umberg a lot of grief in the past ([especially for the militaristic drug war work he did during the Clinton Administration and the corporate lobbying he did immediately after](#)), we have to give him credit here: this bill strengthens California's democracy at a time when President Donald Trump and the Republican Party are trashing democratic laws, values and institutions at every turn.

"This simply enfranchises more people to vote," said Umberg in an Oct. 9 press release sent out by his office. "The presidential race is one thing, but this is going to make an even bigger difference in turnout for local races. This bill makes it possible for same-day registration at polling places as well as voting centers California is catching up with so many other states by making our elections as accessible as possible. No one should have to travel long distances, and wait in lines for many hours to exercise their right to vote."

Good government advocates applauded the bill. Raul Macias, an attorney with the [ACLU's California chapter](#), said SB 72 "will strengthen our democracy." Dora Rose, the deputy director of the [League of Women Voters of California](#), said the bill will make "our democracy more inclusive."

The bill will do so by making it easier for eligible residents who are currently unregistered to register, as well as vote (of the state's 5.3 million unregistered by eligible residents, nearly 500,000 reside in Orange County, according to [this table from the California Secretary of State's office](#)). According to Umberg's office, "a [disproportionate number](#) of eligible, unregistered voters are younger, lower-income, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, or people of color."

This is just demographic reality. California, the whole nation—this is the future. Trump can blubber nonsense about stolen elections and send ICE to terrorize immigrants (documented and undocumented) coming from Central and South America, but openly embracing white supremacy just makes more people flee the Republican Party. This is, after all, what happened to California itself, as [this excerpt from a great Aug. 8, 2019 essay by Geoffrey Kabaservice of the Niskanen Center](#) makes crystal clear:

In 1994, the California Republican Party and its incumbent governor, Pete Wilson, backed Proposition 187, an initiative to deny all public services to immigrants in the state without legal permission and force state employees to report individuals suspected of illegal residence or entry to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for deportation. California Hispanics, who previously had split their votes between the two parties, recoiled from the GOP. Forty-six percent of Hispanic voters supported the Republican candidate for governor in 1986, and 47 percent in 1990. But starting in 1994, Hispanics voted heavily for Democrats and (with the exception of Arnold Schwarzenegger's gubernatorial campaigns) have continued to do so ever since. Proposition 187 also galvanized greater numbers of Hispanics to become naturalized, to get engaged in politics, and to vote than had been the case before. The GOP's continuing turn toward reactionary politics also alienated Asian American and younger white voters. In a 2016 paper for the Cato Institute, Alex Nowrasteh reviewed the California Republican Party's turn toward nativism in the 1990s and concluded that its decision to represent the anti-immigration wing of the electorate had "destroyed that state's GOP for at least a generation." (In fairness to Wilson, some political observers believe that the California Republican Party's downfall had as much to do with its rightward turn on other issues, such as abortion, as with Proposition 187.)

In any case, while California had a form of same-day registration before SB 72, it was confusing and difficult for most residents, according to Umberg's office. "In reality, only a tiny percentage of Californians could access this Election Day registration in 2018 because most counties across the state – including populous counties like Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange – only offered it at a single site: the county elections office," states the news release from Umberg's office. "In fact, 21.3 million (85%) of the state's 25.2 million eligible voters lived in a county that provided same day registration exclusively at their county elections office on Election Day in November 2018."