

VOTER TURNOUT IN THE CALIFORNIA RECALL

Where Did the Increase Come From?

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Prior to the 2003 California recall election, pundits and academics pondered how a host of factors—including the historic nature of the election and the unusual cast of characters on the ballot—would influence voter turnout. Here, we examine two questions to shed some light on the turnout dynamics of the election: How was the recall electorate different from its 2002 counterpart, and what explains the 10% increase in registered voter turnout compared to 2002? Using the statewide voter file, we find the recall produced a younger, less partisan, and less politically experienced electorate. Citizens who stayed home in 2002 but cast ballots in 2003 tended to be intermittent voters. Media attention appears to have helped boost turnout, confirming in a new context other studies that find that lowering the costs of voting affects most strongly those citizens with demographic characteristics somewhere between habitual voters and hard-core and nonvoters.

Keywords: *California recall; turnout; political participation; California governor; state politics; mobilization; information costs*

In the weeks leading up to the October 2003 California recall, pollsters, pundits, and journalists offered scores of predictions about the possibilities for voter turnout in the unprecedented election. Most speculation focused on two puzzles: How many people would show up on October 7, and who would those voters be? There was, it is safe to say, no shortage of opinion on what one consultant described as the election’s “X factor” (Wood, 2003b, p. 1).

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Huge—or even record—turnout was among the most popular predictions (Monteagudo, 2003; Roth, 2003a, 2003b; Walsh, 2003), with even meteorologists getting into the act (McDonald, 2003). At the same time, some observers were less effusive, pointing to the possibility that “recall fatigue” would produce low turnout, particularly as the related legal battles cast doubt on the date of the election itself (Murphy, 2003).

The potential makeup of the electorate was another area of intense interest. Analysts variously suggested the recall would mobilize Californians angry at Governor Gray Davis (Walsh, 2003; Wood, 2003b), independents attracted by the unusual cast of characters on the ballot (Simon, 2003a; Walsh, 2003), and young voters—perhaps even a “surfer dude” constituency (Sanchez, 2003, p. 3)—who might be starstruck by Arnold Schwarzenegger’s candidacy (Simon, 2003b; Walsh, 2003). Some observers noted that the presence on the ballot of Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante and Proposition 54, the racial privacy initiative, could turn out Latinos and other minority voters at unusually high rates (Schevitz, 2003; Walsh, 2003; Wood, 2003a, 2003b).

On election day, 61% of registered voters cast ballots. The figure surpassed turnout in every nonpresidential statewide election since 1982 and was 10 points higher than in the 2002 gubernatorial contest.¹ The predictions of presidential election year-like turnout (e.g., Simon, 2003a) were not realized, but the recall certainly brought more voters to the poll than a typical contest.

Still, despite the pre-election interest, little is known about the composition of the electorate—whence the turnout increase came and what kinds of voters were mobilized in 2003 after sitting out 2002. Did the recall in fact boost participation among independents, the young, or Latinos, as some analysts predicted? Did the election mobilize the politically alienated, as might be hoped by advocates of direct democracy (Schmidt, 1989; Zimmerman, 1986)? And critically, what accounts for the notable rise in the turnout rate?

In this article, we examine differences between the 2002 and 2003 electorates to provide some answers to these questions. Using data from the statewide voter file, we find that the recall brought younger, less partisan, and less politically experienced voters to the polls. The use of the recall, one of the tools of direct democracy (Cronin, 1989),

did not, however, generate what could be called a mass populist uprising. Participation appears to have increased not among habitual non-voters but instead among intermittent voters, which fits with recent research on turnout (Berinsky, Burns, & Traugott, 2001; Huang & Shields, 2000; Niven, 2001, 2004). The findings beg the question of why turnout increased at all, a phenomenon we argue—and find evidence to suggest—was produced by the substantial media attention to the election and the subsequent lowering of information costs for citizens.

These findings provide support for a recent series of studies that show that lowering barriers to voting affects citizens with demographic characteristics between habitual voters and hard-core nonvoters but extend this argument into a new context. Moving the analysis beyond the realm of administrative changes in voting (Berinsky et al., 2001; Huang & Shields, 2000; Karp & Banducci, 2000; Southwell & Burchett, 2000) and campaign mobilization efforts (Niven, 2001, 2004) helps demonstrate the existence of a group of hard-core nonvoters, a group that seems immune to efforts to bring them to the polls.

We begin by providing an overview of the relevant literature on turnout and then turn to a description of the data from the official California voter file, which contains demographic information and a voting history for each of the state's 15.4 million registered voters. Next, we present the results of the analyses of turnout in the 2002 and 2003 elections. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the possible explanations for the turnout increase, focusing on saturation coverage—both in the news and entertainment media—of the recall campaign.

TURNOUT AND THE COSTS OF VOTING

In any election, a citizen has two decisions to make. The second, for whom to vote, becomes necessary only if he or she makes it to the polling place at all. Rational choice scholars have conceptualized the decision of whether to vote as an equation in which an individual votes if the benefit of his or her favored candidate's victory, multiplied by the probability that one's vote will make the difference in winning or losing, is greater than the costs of casting a ballot (Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). And although the empirical prediction of this

model—that no one will vote—is consistently wrong, the logic works in the aggregate: Turnout rates are higher when the costs of voting, such as registration requirements, are lower (Highton, 1997; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

Because the cost of processing and acquiring information is key in the decision to vote, anything that lowers the cost tends to boost turnout. People with high levels of education, for instance, have the skills to efficiently acquire and process political information, lowering the barrier to participation on election day. As a result, the highly educated vote more frequently than less educated citizens (Leighley & Nagler, 1992; Teixeira, 1987; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Likewise, people who identify with a political party can use their affiliation as a shortcut to sift through candidates, which helps explain why partisans vote at higher rates than independents (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960).

In addition, party and interest group mobilization efforts lower the burden of collecting information during a campaign. Studies show that citizens encouraged to vote during a campaign are more likely to do so than those who are not encouraged (Gerber & Green, 2000; Green, Gerber, & Nickerson, 2003; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992; Leighley & Nagler, 1992; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Shaw, de la Garza, & Lee, 2000; Wielhouwer & Lockerbie, 1994; Wilcox & Sigelman, 2001). Competitiveness increases participation as well (Caldeira & Patterson, 1983; Cox & Munger, 1989), as candidates and the news media devote more resources to telling voters about the contest than in lopsided races (Gilliam, 1985; Jackson, 1996; Nicholson & Miller, 1997).

There is reason to believe, however, that lowering the costs of participation does not affect all citizens equally (Jackson, 1993). Habitual voters—those who tend to cast ballots in most elections regardless of the costs—are already committed to the enterprise. Thus, their participation rates are unlikely to respond to any reduction in the costs of voting. On the other end of the spectrum, where chronic nonvoters reside, such measures are likely to have only minimal effects. Individuals who never vote probably are so disengaged from politics that even the easement of voting laws or a massive mobilization effort will not transform such citizens from apathetic into involved. Rather, it is

among occasional or intermittent voters—the bulk of the population that drops in and out of the electorate from year to year (Sigelman & Jewell, 1986; Sigelman, Roeder, Jewell, & Baer, 1985)—where the greatest effects of lowered information costs might emerge.

Recent studies support this perspective. The easing of registration laws (Brians & Grofman, 1999, 2001; Huang & Shields, 2000), the simplification of voting procedures (Berinsky et al., 2001; Karp & Banducci, 2000; Southwell & Burchett, 2000), and mobilization efforts (Niven, 2001, 2004) appear to affect most strongly citizens at the middle levels of key demographic categories and political involvement.

In 2003, California voters were inundated with news about the recall, driven largely by the uniqueness of the recall and the presence of a blockbuster movie star on the ballot (Schechter, 2004). We suspect that the near ubiquity of political information reduced the cost of voting for citizens, leading some to be more likely to turnout. Given the unusual nature of the recall environment, we posit two hypotheses about the composition of the 2003 electorate.

First, in line with some of the pre-election predictions, we expect the 2003 electorate to be somewhat younger, less partisan, and less politically experienced than the 2002 electorate. Schwarzenegger's candidacy and the circus-like nature of the recall may have attracted some citizens not typically interested in politics (Deggans, 2003; Simon, 2003b; Walsh, 2003) and thus effected a shift in the composition of the electorate. Second, guided by the literature on the reduction of voting costs, we expect Californians who voted in 2003 but not 2002—those who were mobilized by the recall and thus accounted for the turnout increase—to have demographic characteristics and voting histories somewhere in between those of habitual voters and chronic nonvoters. Those who stayed home in 2002 but went to the polls in 2003, like any pool of potential voters, are likely to be younger, less partisan, and less experienced than habitual voters. But we do not expect them to be the youngest, least partisan, and least experienced citizens. These latter citizens tend to be habitual nonvoters and probably could not be spurred to action even by the unusual electoral environment. We turn now to describing the data we use to test these hypotheses.

DATA AND DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The statewide voter file, acquired from the California secretary of state, allows us to test these hypotheses by determining the composition of the California electorate. The file includes information about each voter's partisan registration, age, voting history, and date of registration. Although the data contain no information on ethnicity, we have merged the file with the U.S. Census Bureau's ethnic surname database to determine whether a voter has a Spanish or Asian last name (see the appendix for more information on data sources and variable creation).

The entire data set contains more than 15 million cases. To simplify the analysis (and to overcome various technological difficulties we encountered in analyzing a data set so large), we drew a random sample of 75,000 registered California voters.² Using these data, we can compare the composition of the electorate in November 2002, the last gubernatorial election, to the electorate of the October 2003 recall.³

THE 2002 AND 2003 ELECTORATES

We know the two electorates are different in their size: 51% of registered voters turned out in 2002, whereas 61% did in 2003. But more important, we are interested in the differences in their compositions. Table 1 presents data on the turnout rates among registered voters for each election.⁴

Looking first at the turnout rates split by party registration, it is evident that the recall mobilized voters across the political spectrum. Turnout rates for Democrats, Republicans, independents—in the voter file, those who declined to state a party affiliation—and third-party members all saw a boost in 2003 compared to 2002. But as expected, the largest increases came from independents and third-party members, whose respective turnout rates in the recall were 27.1% and 26.7% higher than a year earlier. In 2002, about 40% of each group turned out, whereas in 2003 more than half of the state's registered independents and third-party supporters went to the polls.

The 2003 electorate was also younger. Whereas slightly more than 26% of registrants between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in 2002, 38% did in the recall, which is a 44.4% turnout increase among the state's

TABLE 1
Turnout Rates Among Registered Voters for Selected Groups
in the 2002 and 2003 California Elections (in percentages)

	2002 General	2003 Recall	Difference ^a	Percentage Increase
Party registration				
Democrat	55.1	62.5	7.4	13.4
Republican	60.8	69.0	8.2	13.5
Independent	41.0	52.1	11.1	27.1
Third-party member	40.1	50.8	10.7	26.7
Age				
18 to 29	26.3	38.0	11.7	44.4
30 to 44	44.6	57.5	12.9	28.9
45 to 64	63.5	73.0	9.5	15.0
65+	73.4	74.7	1.3	1.8
Number of times voted prior to 2002 general election				
0	26.4	43.0	16.6	62.9
1	56.4	67.7	11.3	20.0
2	89.2	89.7	0.5	0.6
New registrants	45.4	61.3	15.9	35.0
Years since registration				
< 2	49.4	58.0	8.6	17.4
2 to 5	41.7	52.0	10.3	24.7
5 to 10	53.5	62.7	9.2	17.2
10+	68.0	75.6	7.6	11.2
Latino	42.3	51.4	9.1	21.5
Asian	48.2	56.1	7.9	16.4
Region				
Los Angeles	49.2	58.7	9.5	19.3
Southern California	54.6	62.5	7.9	14.5
Bay Area	56.7	64.7	8.0	14.1
Rest of state	56.5	64.0	7.5	13.3
Observations	60,704	69,477		

SOURCE: California voter file sample.

a. Difference is calculated by subtracting the 2002 turnout rate from the 2003 turnout rate.

youngest citizens. The largest absolute gains came from the 30-to-44 age group, which saw its participation rate climb nearly 13 percentage points in 2003. The increase proved costly for Davis. According to election day exit polling, 59% of voters in the 30-to-44 age cohort supported the recall and 48% cast replacement ballots for Schwarzenegger.⁵ This represented the most anti-Davis and pro-Schwarzenegger

group in the electorate and contributed substantially to the incumbent's decisive defeat and Schwarzenegger's victory. The participation rates of the two oldest age cohorts also went up but less than for younger voters.

Not surprising the younger 2003 electorate was also less politically experienced and less residentially stable. More than 40% of those who had voted in neither of the two races before the 2002 general election cast ballots in the recall, compared to 26.4% who did so in 2002, which is a remarkable increase of almost 63% among previous nonvoters.⁶ The turnout rate among new registrants was 15.9 percentage points higher than in 2002. The patterns for "years since registration" are less clear. Turnout rates increased for all groups but increased less sharply for those registered for more than 10 years. But the expected pattern of higher turnout rates as the number of years since registration declines—which we interpret as residential stability—is not seen.

Coming into the recall, some political observers expected minorities to prove decisive in the election. And although the turnout rates among Latinos and Asians indeed climbed—9.1% and 7.9%, respectively—they "were not the crucial swing vote that many had anticipated" (Barreto & Ramirez, 2004, p. 13). Finally, the turnout increases among voters in California's various regions were similar, demonstrating that mobilization occurred relatively evenly across the state.

A MODEL OF TURNOUT IN CALIFORNIA

In general, the data in Table 1 provide an initial confirmation of our first hypothesis: The 2003 electorate was slightly younger, less partisan, and less experienced than the 2002 electorate. But to offer a more rigorous explanation of the differences between the two, we turn to a multivariate analysis to control for a variety of factors. To do so, we create two logistic regression models, one for each of the two electorates under study. In each model, the dependent variable is coded 1 if the registrant voted in the election under analysis and 0 otherwise. Because the same factors (age, voting history, partisanship, etc.)

should influence voters in both elections, we are concerned primarily with the differences in the magnitude of the effects of the variables between the two elections. The multivariate analysis is based on the same random sample of 75,000 California voters used in Table 1.

Our independent variables fall into four categories (all of which are described in the appendix), beginning with partisanship. Turnout rates are known to differ between partisans and nonpartisans (Campbell et al., 1960), and close observers of California politics know that Republicans turn out at higher rates than Democrats. Furthermore, Republicans angry with Gray Davis might be more likely to show up on election day, whereas Democrats frustrated with the governor might be less likely to vote. Alternatively, Democrats could turn out in higher numbers, angered by what they saw as a partisan attack on the governor they had elected. To test the impact of partisanship on turnout in the two elections, we include dummy variables for Republican registrants, independents, and third-party members, with Democrats as the reference category.

Our second group of independent variables taps a voter's political history. We include a variable for the number of times in the two statewide elections prior to 2002 that each individual voted. Voting is habitual, and we thus expect a strong positive relationship between the number of times voted previously and turnout in 2002 and 2003 (Gerber, Green, & Shachar, 2003; Plutzer, 2002). We also include a dummy variable for new registrants before each election.

Ethnicity is our third category of variables. Scholars have documented variation in turnout across ethnic groups, finding Hispanic voters less likely to turn out and turnout rates of Black voters lower than those of Whites (Timpone, 1998). To account for these potential differences, we include variables for voters with Latino surnames and for voters with Asian surnames.⁷

Our fourth category of independent variables captures several demographic characteristics of voters. We include age, because older citizens are more likely to vote, and age squared to capture the lower probability of turnout among the most senior cohorts. We include a variable for gender, with male coded 1. We also include a variable for years since registration. This variable estimates residential stability for individual voters, because those who remain at the same address

do not need to re-register to vote.⁸ With a stronger connection to their community, we expect stable individuals to vote more often (Teixeira, 1992; Wattenberg, 2002).⁹

MULTIVARIATE RESULTS

The multivariate results presented in Table 2 show that although the same factors brought voters to the polls in the 2002 general election and in the 2003 recall, some differences exist between the two electorates. To provide some substantive interpretation of the logit coefficients, we estimate the effect of each of these variables by calculating the proportional change in the probability of turnout for individual voters while holding all other covariates at their means. These results are shown in the third and fifth columns of Table 2.¹⁰

Examining these changes in probability demonstrates the importance of habitual voting on the decision to vote: In both elections, previous voting has a strong and positive impact on turnout. And because of its accurate information on voting history, our models dampen the effect of other variables that explain political participation. From a statistical standpoint, the 2003 electorate was less experienced than the 2002 electorate, because the coefficients are 15 standard errors apart from each other.¹¹ But the effect column in Table 2 reveals that the substantive impact of these two variables is nearly the same, although the impact of previous voting is slightly greater in 2002.

Despite pre-election speculation that the recall would mobilize previously disaffected voters into the electorate, our analysis shows those who registered between that election and the recall were actually less likely, by a small margin, to vote in the recall than those who registered between the 2000 general election and the 2002 general election.¹² And despite claims that direct democracy will attract individuals to the polls who normally shun the political system, those who did register in the months leading up to the election were not more likely to turn out in 2003 than in 2002, suggesting that the recall was not a device that brought dissatisfied citizens to the polls for the first time.

The measures of partisanship indicate that the new voters were concentrated among independents and third-party members. The probability that an independent voted in the recall is .0371 higher than the probability that he or she voted in 2002, whereas the probability for

TABLE 2
Turnout in the 2002 and 2003 California Gubernatorial Elections

	2002 General	2002 Effect	2003 Recall	2003 Effect
Partisanship				
Republican	0.240*** (0.022)	+.0587 (0.029)	0.294*** (0.027)	+.0635 (0.027)
Independent	-.0174*** (0.029)	-.0430 (0.044)	-.0027 -.0452	-.0059 (0.040)
Third-party member	-.0210*** (0.044)	—	-.0088***	-.0194
Political history				
Number of times voted before 2002	1.527*** (0.016)	+.2834 (0.029)	1.135*** 1.317*** (0.011) (0.029)	+.2762 +.2285
New registrant	1.102*** (0.029)	+.2478	—	—
Ethnicity				
Latino	-.247*** (0.027)	-.0613 (0.033)	-.264*** -.262*** (0.031)	-.0596 -.0594
Asian	-.220*** (0.033)	-.0546	—	—
Demographics				
Gender	0.029 (0.017)	+.0040 (0.003)	-.0024 0.083*** (.0351)	(0.016) -.0032 (.0028)
Age	0.083*** (0.00030)	+.3351	0.083*** -.000072*** (0.00030)	+.3129 -.2170
Age squared	-.000056*** (0.00030)	-.2454	—	(.0014)
Years since registration	0.012*** (0.0015)	+.0254	-.0058	-.0102
Constant	-3.981*** (0.083)	—	-3.083*** (0.069)	—
Observations	60,704	69,497	—	—
Log likelihood	-32,053	-35,489	—	—
Pseudo R^2	.2341	.2280	—	—
Percentage correctly predicted	73.60	75.73	—	—

NOTE: Standard errors in parentheses. Effect columns represent the predicted changes in probability for each variable while holding all other values constant at their mean. For dichotomous variables, the percentage change represents the increase or decrease in the probability of voting based on a move from the 0 category to the 1 category. For continuous variables, the percentage change is the increase or decrease in probability based on a move from one-half standard deviation below the mean to one-half standard deviation above.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

third-party members increased by .0258. The data suggest that the anti-establishment quality of the recall attracted independents and third-party members. The measures of ethnicity indicate that Latinos were only slightly more likely to vote in the recall than in 2002, whereas Asians were less likely to do so, *ceteris paribus*.¹³

Several other variables have important effects in explaining the differences between the two electorates. Older voters were much more likely to vote in both elections, because age is the variable that has the single greatest impact in both models. But, as expected, the impact of age is less important in 2003, indicating a slightly younger electorate. Also, the “years since registration” variable indicates that the recall attracted voters to the polls who had moved more recently.

EXAMINING WHOM THE RECALL MOBILIZED

The data in Tables 1 and 2 provide some confirmation of our first hypothesis: The compositions of the 2002 and 2003 electorates were different, most important in their age, partisanship, and political experience. But this begs another question, which speaks to our second hypothesis: Who were the voters who showed up in 2003 but not 2002? Put another way, whence came the turnout increase in the recall?

We believe this increase came from voters with demographic characteristics and voting experience somewhere in between habitual voters and nonvoters. As Table 1 indicates, the pool of potential voters who could be added to the electorate in 2003 tended to be younger, less partisan, and less politically experienced than those who regularly vote. We believe that among this group of potential voters, the reduction in information costs produced by the recall attracted older, more partisan, and more politically experienced citizens.

Table 3 reports descriptive data on three different groups in the voter file—those who voted in both November 2002 and October 2003 (“double voters”), those who voted only in the recall (“recall-only voters”), and registrants who voted in neither election (“nonvoters”), among those voters whose registration date shows they were eligible to vote in both elections.¹⁴ By our estimates, 46.8% of California registrants cast ballots in both elections, 15.8% voted only in the

TABLE 3
Selected Characteristics of California Voters Based on
Participation in the 2002 and 2003 Elections (in percentages)

	Voted In		
	<i>Both</i>	<i>2003 Only</i>	<i>Neither</i>
Party registration			
Democrat	44.5	42.7	44.1
Republican	41.0	35.1	28.0
Independent	10.4	16.3	19.0
Third-party member	3.9	5.9	7.0
Age			
18 to 29	6.0	15.2	29.9
30 to 44	22.4	34.1	34.3
45 to 64	46.2	40.2	25.5
65+	25.4	10.5	10.3
Mean	54.4	46.0	41.6
Median	53.4	45.2	38.7
Number of times voted prior to 2002 general election			
0	14.9	39.1	65.8
1	39.8	48.5	31.4
2	45.2	12.3	2.8
Years since registration			
< 2	10.6	11.8	15.1
2 to 5	21.5	31.1	39.9
5 to 10	25.7	27.0	26.2
10+	41.2	30.1	18.8
Mean	9.8	7.3	5.6
Median	7.0	5.0	3.3
Ethnicity			
Latino	11.6	17.4	21.7
Asian	8.4	9.5	11.8
Median income in zip code (in dollars)	60,011	57,389	52,283
College graduates in zip code (in percentages)	27.3	25.2	22.8
Observations	28,102	9,543	17,916

SOURCE: California voter file sample.

NOTE: Some categories may not add to 100% because of rounding.

recall, and 29.8% stayed home for both elections.¹⁵ The data provide consistent evidence that across our key variables, the characteristics of recall-only voters were somewhere in between double voters and nonvoters.

Turning first to partisanship, recall-only voters were more likely to be Republican than those who voted in neither election (35.1% to 28%) but less likely to be independents (16.3% to 19%) or third-party

members (5.9% to 7%). Compared to double voters, however, those who voted only in the recall were less likely to be members of the two major parties and more likely to be independents or third-party supporters.

The data reveal a similar relationship for age, as recall-only voters are younger than double voters (with median ages of 45.2 and 53.4, respectively) but older than nonvoters (median age of 38.7). Not only do the mean and median for the three groups of voters fall in line with our hypothesis but so do the size of the age cohorts. Among double voters, the largest age groups are the two oldest (45 to 64 and 64+), whereas the largest cohorts among recall-only voters are the two in the middle (30 to 44 and 45 to 64). And the distribution among nonvoters is, predictably, heaviest in the youngest age groups (18 to 29 and 30 to 44).

Not surprising, a consistent relationship exists between voting history and voting in 2002 and 2003. Those who voted in neither of the two contests prior to the 2002 general election made up 39.1% of recall-only voters, which is more than the percentage of double voters (14.9%) but less than the percentage of nonvoters (65.8%). We see the opposite pattern for those who voted in both previous elections. Those who voted in both made up a larger percentage of double voters than recall-only voters (45.2% to 12.3%) but were a tiny fraction of nonvoters (2.8%). Not surprising, a plurality of recall-only voters had cast ballots in only one of the two statewide elections held prior to 2002. That recall-only voters had an intermittent pattern of voting provides further evidence that the recall mobilized voters in the middle.

The “years since registration” variable provides further evidence that recall-only voters had characteristics somewhere in between habitual voters and nonvoters. In three of the four age categories, the percentage of recall-only voters is in between the percentage of those who voted in both 2002 and 2003 and the percentage of those who stayed home for both elections. Furthermore, the median number of years since recall-only voters had registered (5.0) is less than the median number for double voters (7.0), but greater than the median for those who did not vote (3.3). The same pattern appears within the ethnicity variables as well as in income and education data based on a voter’s zip code of residence.¹⁶

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

To provide a multivariate test of our hypothesis, we ran two separate logistic regressions. In both, recall-only voters are coded as 1. The first regression compares these voters to those who voted in neither the recall nor the 2002 general election. The second regression compares those who voted only in the recall to those who voted in both elections.¹⁷ Because we expect the recall to mobilize voters in the middle of our demographic variables, we should see opposite signs on the coefficients for the two equations.

Table 4 provides evidence that this hypothesis is correct, especially concerning the importance of previous voting. We find a similarly strong but divergent relationship for the voting history variable in both equations. Those who voted only in the recall had more political experience than voters who stayed home but less than those who cast ballots in both elections. The effect columns demonstrate that voting history has a very significant impact in both equations.

Examining the relationship between recall-only voters and nonvoters shows the specific kinds of voters that the recall election and the attending hoopla brought into the electorate. As shown in the third column of Table 4, Republicans were more likely to be mobilized by the recall, indicating that the attraction of booting Davis out of office or the excitement of replacing him with Schwarzenegger had a strong pull among Grand Old Party registrants. The data also show that those whom the recall mobilized were more likely to be experienced voters and less likely to be Latino or Asian. This column also demonstrates the strong impact of age on voting in 2003. A move from one-half standard deviation below the mean to one-half standard deviation above (from 34 years old to 50) increases the probability of voting in the recall by .3753.

On the other hand, although the coefficients for age are signed correctly, age is not a significant variable in the equation featuring double voters and recall-only voters, despite nearly 39,000 cases. Part of the explanation is that our model does not include those who registered after the 2002 election.¹⁸ A more powerful explanation, however, is the importance of vote history as a predictor of turnout. The fifth column of Table 4 demonstrates that the recall attracted voters who had voted previously but who had stayed home in November 2002. So

TABLE 4
Comparison of Recall-Only Voters to Double Voters and Nonvoters

	<i>Recall-Only Voters Versus Nonvoters</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Recall-Only Voters Versus Double Voters</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Partisanship				
Republican	0.312*** (0.031)	+.0703	-0.105** (0.029)	-0.0176
Independent	0.012 (0.038)	+.0026	0.198*** (0.039)	+.0346
Third-party member	-0.078 (0.056)	-.0170	0.199* (0.059)	+.0350
Political history				
Number of times voted before 2002	0.875*** (0.022)	+.1178	-0.994** (0.019)	-.1238
Ethnicity				
Latino	-0.171** (0.035)	-.0372	0.256** (0.036)	+.0451
Asian	-0.275*** (0.045)	-.0586	0.117 (0.044)	+.0200
Demographics				
Gender	-0.047* (0.023)	-.0061	-0.034 (0.022)	-0.032
Age	0.108*** (0.004)	+.3753	-0.0085 (0.0046)	-.0225
Age squared	-0.0010** (0.00043)	-.3518	-0.00016*** (0.00044)	-.0474
Years since registration	0.0080** (0.002)	+.0116	0.016** (0.002)	+.230
Constant	-3.780*** (0.106)	—	0.575** (0.115)	—
Observations	27,738	38,909	—	—
Log likelihood	-16,336	-19,145	.1212	.1212
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.0882	69.13	75.60	75.60
Percentage correctly predicted				

NOTE: Standard errors in parentheses. Effect columns represent the predicted changes in probability for each variable while holding all other values constant at their mean. For dichotomous variables, the percentage change represents the increase or decrease in the probability of voting based on a move from the 0 category to the 1 category. For continuous variables, the percentage change is the increase or decrease in probability based on a move from one-half standard deviation below the mean to one-half standard deviation above.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

what the recall did not do was energize a new set of voters attracted by the opportunity to fire Gray Davis, the unusual set of candidates in the replacement election, or those who wanted to vote for an action-hero governor. Instead, the recall reenergized those with some prior political experience who chose not to vote in 2002.

WHY DID TURNOUT INCREASE?

Although the data presented here support much of our two hypotheses, the transformation of the electorate begs a causal question: Why did turnout go up? Research has offered, broadly, three major explanations for variation in turnout rates across time and electoral contexts: demographic, structural, and informational. First, differences in the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of a population can cause participation rates to vary (e.g., Bennett & Bennett, 1986; Conway, 1991; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady 1995). Second, structural factors, such as registration procedures and the type of election, can influence turnout (Oliver, 1996; Rosenstone & Wolfinger, 1978; Wattenberg, 2002). And third, the amount of information available to voters, which can vary with candidate, party, or interest group mobilization efforts or media coverage (e.g., Gerber & Green, 2000; Niven, 2001, 2004; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993), can affect participation rates.

In 2003, only the reduction of information costs seems a likely candidate to explain the turnout increase. The demographic explanation, first of all, cannot account for the turnout increase between elections held just 11 months apart. Although the state did grow 1.7% from July 2002 to July 2003 (State of California, 2004), its demographic composition simply could not have changed enough to effect a 10-point increase in registered voter turnout.

Furthermore, structural factors seem likely to have driven participation down, not up. For one thing, California statewide special elections have historically drawn fewer voters to the polls than have regularly scheduled contests.¹⁹ And in 2003, not only were voters faced with an entirely new type of election, one with which they had no experience, but they were not given a simple two-way choice between major-party candidates for governor. Instead, Californians were asked

to weigh in first on the recall question and then cast a vote for the person they would like to see become governor if the recall measure passed. Davis's supporters could not, however, vote for him as a replacement candidate, and every potential voter was faced with choosing among the 135 candidates on the ballot. Moreover, the campaign period was much shorter than in a normal gubernatorial election, and the legal fights over the efficacy of the state's voting systems disrupted the race just weeks before election day (Murphy, 2003). In short, the somewhat confusing nature of the election and the abbreviated campaign might be expected *a priori* to have suppressed, not increased, turnout, which some observers actually expected come election day (Chorneau, 2003).

That leaves information as a factor, and the one we believe holds the most explanatory power for the turnout question. If Californians were exposed to a substantially richer information environment in 2003 than in 2002, their costs of gathering political information would be reduced. Thus, California voters, particularly those who were not acutely interested in politics, would face a lower barrier to voting (Downs, 1957). Guided by the literature on the lowering of voting costs (Berinsky et al., 2001; Brians & Grofman, 1999, 2001; Huang & Shields, 2000; Karp & Banducci, 2000; Niven, 2001, 2004; Southwell & Burchett, 2000), we argue that a rise in the amount of media attention paid to the recall would have contributed to an increase in turnout, particularly among those with demographic characteristics and political experience somewhere in between those of habitual voters and chronic nonvoters, as shown by the data presented above.

Although we cannot explicitly test this hypothesis at the individual level with the data at hand, an examination of media attention to the 2002 and 2003 campaigns reveals evidence consistent with the argument. The top half of Table 5 shows that California's newspapers devoted about twice as much coverage to the 2003 campaign as they did to the gubernatorial contest a year earlier. The state's largest circulation newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, published 58% more stories about the recall in the last month of the campaign than it did in the last month of the 2002 contest.²⁰ In the second- and third-largest newspapers—the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Diego Union-Tribune*—stories about the recall outpaced 2002 election news by a

TABLE 5
Media Attention to the 2002 and 2003 Gubernatorial Elections

	Number of Campaign Stories	
	2002 General	2003 Recall
News media outlets		
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	88	139
<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	81	188
<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>	63	127
Local California newspapers	314	608
Total	546	1,062
Entertainment media outlets		
<i>Inside Edition</i>	1	21
<i>Entertainment Tonight</i>	0	10
<i>Extra</i>	0	5
Total	1	36

SOURCE: Lexis-Nexis; <http://www.latimes.com>; <http://www.insideedition.com>; <http://www.etonline.com>; <http://www.extratv.com>.

NOTE: Cell entries for news media represent the number of stories that mentioned both major candidates—Gray Davis and Bill Simon in 2002, Davis and Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2003—during the last month of the campaign (October 5 to November 5, 2002 and September 7 to October 7, 2003). Cell entries for entertainment media represent the number of stories about the 2002 or 2003 campaigns in the two months before election day.

margin of at least 2 to 1. The same is true for 21 local California papers.²¹

Television news followed suit. In the 4 weeks leading up to the election, the California recall ranked in the top four stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly newscasts, as measured by the number of minutes devoted to the story (Tyndall, 2003). During the week of the election, it was the most important story in the nation, according to the networks (Tyndall, 2003). And at the local level, one analyst noted that by mid-August, the state's TV news stations probably had aired "more coverage of this gubernatorial race than either of the last two put together" (Kaplan, quoted in Marketplace, 2003).²² To be sure, much of the increased media attention can be attributed to two factors: the novelty of the recall itself and the unusual cast of characters on the ballot, most important Schwarzenegger.

Schwarzenegger also created a mini-political revolution in the entertainment media. In announcing his bid for governor on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* on August 6, the movie star offered a pre-

view of just how prominently the entertainment media would factor into the campaign. Besides hosting Schwarzenegger's announcement, Leno invited onto his show each of the other 134 candidates who qualified for the ballot, many of whom showed up in the audience during a broadcast in September (Dotinga, 2003).

Schwarzenegger and his gubernatorial aspirations also made appearances on numerous entertainment programs (Deggans, 2003; Internet Movie Database Online, 2003; Schechter, 2004). As shown in the bottom half of Table 5, between the August 6 announcement and election day, several "soft news" shows spent considerable time telling their viewers about the election. *Inside Edition* ran a remarkable 21 stories about the recall, *Entertainment Tonight* aired 10, and *Extra* ran five.²³ By contrast, in 2002, only *Inside Edition* mentioned California politics in the run-up to the November election, and their October 28 story focused on Schwarzenegger's efforts to promote an after-school-programs initiative, not the governor's race between Davis and Simon. The quality of information emanating from these entertainment sources is a source of debate (see Baum, 2003a, 2003b; Prior, 2003), but the coverage probably exposed a fair number of politically inattentive people to news about the recall. The development prompted some pundits to suggest that the race might transform political attitudes and behavior (Deggans, 2003), a theme that has begun to emerge in recent research on soft news (Baum, 2003a). In any case, by election day it would have been particularly difficult for a Californian, even one only mildly interested in politics, not to have known something about the recall and its major players.

One alternative to this argument is that candidate, party, and interest group outreach efforts, rather than media coverage, might explain the turnout increase. If the major political players in the state boosted their advertising efforts during the recall campaign, this would undermine the media hypothesis and suggest elite mobilization as a more powerful factor in the turnout increase. For this to be true, we would expect to see paid media spending for the recall outpace that of the 2002 campaign.²⁴ Data from the California Secretary of State's Office, however, indicate that spending was higher in 2002 than in 2003.

Gray Davis and Bill Simon spent a total of \$64.9 million on media costs during the 2002 campaign—\$47 million by Davis and \$17.9 by Simon—whereas in 2003 the major candidates and interest groups

spent \$33.5 million on the recall. Schwarzenegger was the biggest spender, reporting \$11 million in media costs. Davis's group fighting the recall spent about \$9.9 million, slightly more than Bustamante's \$9.6 million and considerably more than the \$1.8 million reported by the interest groups supporting Davis's ouster. Although the candidates and groups involved in the recall pumped considerable resources into the air war, the patterns of spending between 2002 and 2003 do not seem to undermine our initial thesis. News and entertainment media coverage of the recall, and the commensurate reduction in information costs for California citizens, remain the best explanation for the turnout increase.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have shown that the recall increased the size of the electorate in ways predicted by some of the pre-election punditry. Compared to the previous gubernatorial election, the recall brought to the polls a younger, less partisan, and less politically experienced group of voters. And those who sat out the election in 2002 but showed up for the recall—the group that was mobilized in 2003—had characteristics somewhere in between those of habitual voters and chronic nonvoters. The data on news and entertainment coverage of the election point to the media's role in reducing the information costs associated with voting and contributing to the turnout increase.

These findings provide more support for an existing argument about turnout but in an entirely new context. Previous research of this kind has focused largely on administrative changes in the cost of voting, such as vote-by-mail (Berinsky et al., 2001; Karp & Banducci, 2000; Southwell & Burchett, 2000) and registration laws (Brians & Grofman, 1999; Huang & Shields, 2000), and on personal contacting efforts (Niven, 2001, 2004). Unlike these studies, however, our analysis found the same effects driven by a different stimulus—an explosion of media coverage. The turnout increase appears to have had little to do with changes in election laws or candidate outreach efforts and more to do with the ease of acquiring political information through the media.

Many efforts to increase turnout, whether for partisan or altruistic reasons, do work, but the empirical evidence makes clear that mobilizing those least disposed to participate is a Herculean task. Some citizens can be nudged into political action, as they were during the recall, but many were unmoved even in the face of ceaseless media coverage of “the most bizarre campaign California ha[d] ever seen” (Marelius, 2003, p. A1). Although nearly 1.7 million more Californians cast ballots in 2003 than in 2002, some 6 million of the state’s registered voters stayed home. And millions more never bothered to register.

Promoting higher levels of political involvement is a laudable goal, but the barriers to massive increases in participation are formidable. Just as the recall mobilized voters who were somewhere in between habitual voters and nonvoters, our analysis suggests that most efforts to boost participation are likely to yield results somewhere in between the status quo and full participation.

APPENDIX Variable Coding

Unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is a random sample of 75,000 of the some 15.4 million registered voters in California. Data on individual voters are from the California voter file, which we obtained from the California Secretary of State’s Office.

Voted November 2002, voted recall. The dependent variable in the logit model in Table 2 is coded 1 if the registrant voted in the election under study and 0 otherwise.

Double voter, recall-only voter, nonvoter. In the two logit models in Table 4, voters are classified based on their voting history in the November 2002 and October 2003 elections. Voters who cast ballots in both elections are identified as double voters. Recall-only voters are those who voted in the recall but not in the 2002 general election. And those who voted in neither are categorized as nonvoters. Data on turnout come from the California voter file.

Latino, Asian. These are coded 1 if the voter’s last name is included in either the U.S. Census Bureau’s Spanish Surname Database or Asian Surname Database.

Republican, independent, third-party member. Data come from the partisan registration of individual voters on the California voter file. In California, those who do not wish to register with one of the political parties check the “decline to state” box on the

registration form. (We refer to these voters as *independents*.) We pooled the registrants of California's eight third parties into a single category. In the multivariate models, Democrats are the reference category.

N of times voted before 2002. This is the number of times an individual voted in the two statewide elections prior to November 2002—the 2000 general election and the 2002 primary contests. Because of data limitations, we cannot reliably extend the variable any further back. Data come from the California voter file.

New registrant. This is a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the voter registered between the previous statewide general election and the election under study. For the November 2002 general election, those who registered between the November 2000 election and the close of registration 15 days before the November 7, 2002, election are coded as new registrants. For the recall, those who registered after the close of 2002 registration are new registrants. Data come from the California voter file.

Gender, age, age squared, years since registering to vote. Data come from the California voter file. The variable for years since registering to vote is scaled differently in each model, from the date of each of the two elections.

NOTES

1. Data on statewide turnout come from the California Secretary of State's Web site: <http://www.ss.ca.gov>. Although it is convention to use the voting-age or voting-eligible population in discussing turnout rates, we refer to registered voters simply to maintain consistency with the subsequent analyses in the paper, which are based on the state's file of registered voters. If one calculates turnout based on the voting-eligible population (VEP), the rates are 43% in 2003 and 36% in 2002. By contrast, 52% of the VEP and 71% of registrants turned out in the 2000 presidential election.

2. The size of the sample is generally in line with other research using statewide voter registration databases (e.g., Sigelman & Jewell, 1986). Still, we have taken steps to verify that our sample is representative of the entire universe of registered voters, comparing it to available data from the California Secretary of State's Web site. On key measures, our sample appears representative of the entire voter file. For example, the actual turnout rate for the recall was 61.2% among all registered voters, and 60.9% within our sample. California voters are 43.7% registered Democratic, 35.3% Republican, and 16.0% independent; our sample is 43.4% Democratic, 35.3% Republican, and 15.5% independent.

3. Unfortunately, we cannot examine any elections prior to these two. First, we do not have consistent statewide data on previous voting before the 2000 general election, restricting our ability to do proper analysis. Second, voter files decay rapidly, as voters move into and out of the state, die, attain the age of eligibility, or are mobilized for the first time. Because of this, we do not analyze other elections.

4. Tables 1 and 2 include only voters who were eligible to vote in the election under study. Thus, there are fewer observations for 2002 than for 2003, as the 2002 electorate does not include voters who registered after the close of registration for that election.

5. These data come from exit polls conducted by Edison Media Research/Mitofsky International for the National Election Pool.

6. Unfortunately, the data available in the voter file do not consistently go back any further than the two elections prior to the 2002 general election. Although some counties do provide data that go back six elections, several key counties—most notably, Los Angeles County—have data that go back only two elections. Thus, we are restricted to using data on the 2000 general and 2002 primary elections as a measure of previous voting history. Although it would be desirable to have validated turnout data over a longer time frame, the measure is certainly better than no voting history at all.

7. Because there are no dictionaries of either White or African American names, we cannot determine if individual voters belong to one of these two ethnic groups.

8. Certainly, new registrants may represent hard core nonvoters or young voters who register for the first time. But the most common reason people register to vote (or re-register, in this case) is because they have moved. Thus, we interpret the variable “years since registration” as a proxy for residential stability.

9. Notable omissions in our model are controls for education, income, and a variable for black registrants. Because that information is not included in the voter file, we do not have individual-level data on these measures. It is possible to assign individuals a value based on the median income, percentage of college graduates, or percentage of African American residents in their zip code using U.S. Census Bureau data (see Baretto, Segura, & Woods, 2004, for more information on this procedure). But because such a model creates problems associated with using data at different levels of aggregation, we elect not to include these variables. Based on an analysis of a model that imputes three zip code-level variables (median family income, probability college graduate, and probability African American) and one city-level variable (probability Republican vote, based on the Bush vote in 2000) onto individuals in our analysis, we find that little difference exists in the impact of our variables of interest. As such, we elect not to include these variables in the models presented in this article.

10. To do this, we use Scott Long’s Spost estimation program (available on his Web site, www.indiana.edu/jslsoc). This program estimates the impact of a change in a single variable on the dependent variable while holding all other independent variables at their means. For dichotomous variables, the percentage change represents the increase or decrease in the probability of voting based on a move from the 0 category to the 1 category. For continuous variables, the percentage change is the increase or decrease in probability based on a move from one-half standard deviation below the mean to one-half standard deviation above. So for age, a move from 40.34 years (the mean value of 48.84 minus 8.50, which is half of the standard deviation of 16.99) to 57.34 years increased the probability of voting in the 2002 general election by .3351. Negative values represent a decrease in the probability for that independent variable. See Long (2001) for more details on this procedure.

11. In comparison, 7 of the 11 variables in the equation are no more than two standard errors apart from each other.

12. Registration in California closes 15 days before each election.

13. This finding is perhaps surprising given speculation that Schwarzenegger’s action-hero appeal would bring young Latinos to the polls (Alter & Breslau, 2003).

14. In the analysis for Tables 3 and 4, we excluded all voters who registered after the close of registration for the November 2002 election. Doing so allows us to examine only those who could have voted in both elections, which provides a comparable model across the two elections.

15. By our estimates, 7.5% of registered voters cast ballots in the 2002 general election but not the recall.

16. We use data from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the median family income and the percentage of college graduates in a voter's zip code. Although these two variables are not individual-level measures, as we use for our other variables, civic communities can have a large effect on the participation of individuals. Because of this, we feel confident that our data at least provide some valid insight into the voting rates of individuals who live in communities with high, moderate, and low levels of income and education.

17. We choose to use two logit models as opposed to a multinomial logit to simplify interpretation of the results. Functionally, our approach works the same as using a multinomial logit.

18. By removing new registrants from our model, we remove a large set of younger voters from the group of recall-only voters. Although recall-only voters in our model have a median age of 45.3, recall-only voters who registered after the 2002 general election had a median age of 38.8.

19. In the three statewide special elections prior to the recall, turnout among registered voters never rose higher than 48%, according to data from the California Secretary of State's Office.

20. The figures shown in Table 5 represent the number of stories in each news source that included mentions of the two major candidates—Gray Davis and Bill Simon in 2002, and Davis and Arnold Schwarzenegger—during the last month of each campaign. Although the data confirm our suspicions, this is actually a conservative measure of attention to the recall. Although most campaign stories in 2002 were likely to mention both candidates, our search scheme does not include recall stories that did not mention both Davis and Schwarzenegger. For example, when we widened the search to those stories in the *Los Angeles Times* that mentioned Davis or Simon in 2002, the total number was 323 (203 for Davis, 120 for Simon). This pales in comparison to the 891 stories in 2003 that mentioned Davis or Schwarzenegger (492 for Davis, 399 for Schwarzenegger). Furthermore, this does not account for stories about the other 134 candidates on the ballot that did not also mention Davis or Schwarzenegger. The same pattern emerges for the *Chronicle*, *Union-Tribune*, and the local newspapers.

21. These figures come from searches of Lexis-Nexis and the Web site of the *Los Angeles Times* (whose archives were not available through Lexis-Nexis) for the month before the 2002 election (October 5 through November 5) and the 2003 recall (September 7 through October 7). The local newspapers include 21 sources available from the "California News Sources" section of Lexis-Nexis: *Alameda Times-Star*, *The Argus*, *The Business Press/California*, City News Service, *Daily News of Los Angeles*, *The Daily Review*, *East Bay Express*, *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, *LA Weekly*, *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, *Marin Independent Journal*, *New Times Los Angeles*, *The Oakland Tribune*, *The Pasadena Star-News*, *The Press Enterprise*, *San Bernardino Sun*, *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *San Mateo County Times*, *SF Weekly*, and *Tri-Valley Herald*.

22. We have not, however, identified any studies that have subjected this claim to quantitative scrutiny.

23. These numbers were compiled by searching each program's online archives. *Access Hollywood*, another "soft news" show that featured Schwarzenegger, does not post archives or provide a search function on its Web site.

24. Campaign disclosure laws in California require campaigns to include an expenditure code for each campaign expenditure. When describing "media spending," we use only the expenditures coded as "TV or cable airtime and production costs" and do not include other types of expenditures.

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