INTRODUCTION
A high level of citizen involvement improves the accountability of government and increases personal investment in community issues. The most traditional way for citizens to engage in civic activities is by voting. This action allows them to voice their opinions, which impacts the future at the local, state, and national levels in regards to elected officials, propositions, public works, taxation, etc. Because of this, it is important to look at the voter registration patterns and trends. This issue of Profiles will look at new voter registration in Orange County and the makeup of all registered voters by jurisdiction. Attention will be given to how new voter registration has fluctuated in recent years and how Orange County registrations compare to other Southern California counties. In addition, this issue will show new voter registration rises considerably during the year of a national presidential election in the United States and that the election cycles during this decade were no different.

TOTAL REGISTERED VOTERS
Orange County has historically been known as a predominately Republican county with 44.2% of its voters registering as Republican (Figure 1). Another third (31.9%) of County voters are registered as Democrats and one-fifth (20.0%) of registered voters declined to state their party affiliation during registration. The remaining 3.9% of voters are registered with various other political parties.

In Southern California, Riverside County shows a similar share of party registration with Republican being the dominant party affiliation at 41.9%, followed by Democrat at 36.7% and 17.1% declining to state. Democrats lead the shares of total registered voters in Imperial (52.6%) and Los Angeles (51.8%). San Bernardino County had an equal share of registered Republicans and Democrats, about 39% each. San Diego County had a similar occurrence where total registered voters for both parties were about 36% each. Voters declining to state their affiliation averaged about 20% for southern counties and on average about 4% are affiliated with other political parties.

NEW VOTER REGISTRATION: 2000-2008
Each year, new voters register to vote along with listing their party affiliation. Since 2000, there have been notable shifts in new voter registrations for Southern California counties. For the six counties, annual voter registration increased by 47.7% between 2000 and 2008 from 586,072 to 865,367. New registrations for Republicans stayed at about 200,000, dropping only 1.8% from 2000 to 2008. New Democratic registrations increased in Southern California by 61.1%, from 262,402 to 422,314. Those declining to state their party affiliation doubled from 99,138 to 198,287 and other party affiliations increased 108.5% from 21,765 to 45,377.

Figure 2 shows the shares of new registrations by Southern California counties for 2000 and 2008. Riverside (32.5%), Orange (31.4%) and San Diego (25.7%) counties reported the largest share of newly
registered Republicans. Los Angeles (58.9%), Imperial (52.4%) and San Bernardino (49.8%) reported the largest shares of new Democratic registrations.

Although Republican registrations as a percent of all new voter registrations dropped from 2000 to 2008 in all the counties, the raw numbers of new voter registrations increased for both Riverside and San Diego Counties, by 9,005 and 20,362, respectively. The numbers of individuals registering to vote as Democrats increased for all of the counties. Those registering with other parties or declining to state their affiliation increased by

![Figure 2](image_url)

**Figure 2**

Southern California New Voter Registration by County 2000 and 2008

![Figure 3](image_url)

**Figure 3**

Orange County New Voter Registration by Party, 2000-2008

In 2000, Orange County had 60,215 (46%) newly registered Republicans with Democrats having a new voter registration of 43,210 (33%). Only Riverside County had a higher percentage of registered Republicans than Orange County with 47% (22,381). Riverside and Orange were followed by San Diego County with 41.7% (26,771) newly registered Republicans. The county with the largest number of newly registered Democrats in 2000 was Los Angeles County with 156,122 (53.6%). Los Angeles was followed by San Bernardino and San Diego Counties with 21,328 (43.0%) and 22,732 (35.5%) respectively. All of the six Southern California counties had less than 20% of those who declined to state a party affiliation when registering. San Diego (18.8%), Los Angeles (17.5%) and Orange (17.2%) Counties had the largest percentage of voters who declined to state any party affiliation in 2000.

In 2008, Orange County had 51,623 (31%) new voters registered as Republicans and 64,254 (39.1%) registering as Democrats. Once again, Riverside County had a larger share of registered Republicans than Orange County with 32.5% (31,386). Riverside and Orange were followed by San Diego County with a 25.7% (47,133) share of newly registered Republicans. The county with the largest number of newly registered Democrats in 2008 was Los Angeles County with 197,473 (58.9%). Los Angeles was followed by San Bernardino and San Diego County with 77,414 (42.3%). In 2008, all six counties had increased shares, between 20% and 27%, of those who
declined to state a party affiliation when registering. San Diego (26.5%), Orange (24.6%), and Imperial (24.3%) Counties had the largest percentage of voters who declined to state any party affiliation in 2008.

ORANGE COUNTY

From 2000 to 2008, there were three years with presidential elections and six without. During this time, the average number of new voters registering in Orange County each year was 112,534. Figure 3 shows the annual new registration by political party, as well as the total number of new voters. The peaks in this figure show the total new voter registration in the County reaches its highest levels when there is a national election for the presidency: 2000, 2004 and 2008. In 2000, there were 130,780 newly registered voters; in 2004 that figure jumped to 225,332. The registration for 2008 (164,332) was a gain from the previous year but did not match levels of the prior election year (2004).

The Republican Party had the largest number of new registrants from 2000 to 2006. Then in 2007, registrations for Democrats increased and exceeded those for Republicans; this happened again in 2008. As with the other Southern California counties, Orange County has an increasing percentage of voters who declined to state their party affiliation.

For the most part, the shares of those who declined to state their party affiliation are consistently the third largest...
group of newly registered voters. This was the case until 2007 when those declining to state surpassed both Democratic and Republican newly registered voters.

**TOTAL CITY REGISTRATIONS**

The latest voter registration published in 2008 by the Orange County Registrar of Voters shows some standouts among the jurisdictions within Orange County. The city with the largest share of registered voters is Laguna Woods, a city known for having a large senior population. Laguna Woods (86.8%) is followed by Seal Beach (78%) and Laguna Beach (76.1%). Santa Ana, which has a large foreign-born population, has the smallest percentage of registered voters with 29.5%. The cities with the largest shares of registered Republicans are Villa Park (66.3%, Table 1), Yorba Linda (57.6%) and Newport Beach (56.2%). Santa Ana, which has a large Hispanic population, has the highest percentage of Democratic registration (48.9%) and is followed by Laguna Woods (41.3%) and Stanton (40.6%). Those cities with the highest percentage of those who declined to state any party affiliation are Irvine (27.2%), Aliso Viejo (23.5%), and Tustin (22.4%).

Figure 4 shows the majority registration by city; 30 of 34 cities have a majority of voters registered as Republican.

**CONCLUSION**

New voter registrations are driven in large part by demographic forces. These come from adult immigrants obtaining citizenship and registering in the United States to vote for the first time. Children go through a rite of passage when they reach the age of 18 and register to vote. People move to different counties and states and register to vote in their new hometowns. All of these contribute to changes in voter registrations. Registration patterns change annually. Political climates can have an effect on voter registrations, as people age, move, and become citizens, voter registrations will continue to be dynamic and of interest in the future.