

# San Diego County and City 9/7-8/04 Pre-Election Poll

By John Nienstedt

- \* **Mayor Murphy Leads but Race is Wide Open**
- \* **County's Prop A (TransNet Sales Tax Extension) Leads, but in Jeopardy of Missing 2/3<sup>rds</sup> Threshold**
- \* **City's Prop F (Strong Mayor) Leads, but Margin Depends on Wording**

## Interest in this Election is Extremely High

Presidential general elections are supposed to generate significantly more interest and this one appears headed towards a super-heated turnout. The survey finds that an incredible 90% of registered voters say they are "absolutely certain" they will cast a ballot in this election. This far surpasses the interest level shown in last year's super-charged California recall election when, using the same methodology, the KPBS/Competitive Edge Research poll found 70% were absolutely certain they would vote.

Higher turnout will generally produce an electorate with a higher percentage of younger voters, Democrats and ethnic minorities. In a close election, this could tip the results in favor of campaigns that rely on or that can leverage support from those groups.

## San Diego Mayor's Race

Incumbent Mayor Dick Murphy leads County Supervisor Ron Roberts by a substantial margin, but with so many undecided voters Murphy is not close to the magic 50% mark. Murphy gets 38% of the overall vote of which 21% say they are definitely voting to re-elect the Mayor. Ron Roberts gets 24% of the vote (13.5% definite).

The picture is a little different among the city's likeliest voters. Murphy gets only a 1% boost here, but Roberts, as he did in the primary election, gets a larger bump of 3%. A lower turnout should therefore help Roberts while the more likely scenario of a higher turnout should benefit Murphy.

As the incumbent, Murphy is the "known quantity" in this race. It is therefore open to debate whether he will now be able corral the lion's share of uncommitted voters who make up 39% of the electorate. Most of them could go to Roberts, but that depends on how well the respective campaigns can communicate with these undecided voters who, the survey shows, tend to be low to middle income moderate Democrats. The pool of undecided voters also tends to be disproportionately female. Since both candidates are male Republicans it is clear why these groups are more uncertain.

## Proposition A

Proposition A, the measure to extend the County's TransNet sales tax to fund transportation improvements, is currently ahead with 55% of the vote. It must receive at

least two-thirds support to be adopted and is now 12% below that level. On the other hand, just 21% are voting “no” on Prop A so the opposition must pick up 12% to scuttle it. With 24% unsure how they will vote, the measure would have to pick up slightly over half of the remaining uncommitted voters in order to pass. With a huge campaign promised by supporters and traffic regularly leading the list of important issues in the County, that goal seems possible, though daunting.

Prop A generates strong support from liberal voters as 63% support it. But the measure must somehow overcome a substantial slip in support among conservatives, especially those on the far right of the ideological spectrum. Among very conservative voters support stands at just 42% while opposition is at 40%. The fate of the measure may therefore lie in the hands of Presidential politics. If interest in this election continues to run at a fever pitch, this will boost Prop A’s chances of passage.

### **Proposition F**

San Diego city voters will have the chance to vote on Proposition F which seeks to alter the structure of city government. The issue may seem like “inside baseball,” but supporters and opponents view switching from a Council-Manager form of government to one in which the Mayor has more power as serious business. So serious, in fact, that opponents challenged the ballot language which was submitted by Assistant City Attorney Rick Duvernay. A judge ruled yesterday (9/8/04) that the initial wording was not impartial and must be changed. Our results strongly support Judge Charles Hayes’ assumptions. Here are the results of the two versions we tested.

#### *Initial Version*

Q. Proposition F on the City’s November ballot would amend the City Charter to provide a strong Mayor form of governance. It reads: shall the City Charter be amended to change from a *City Manager* structure of government to a Strong Mayor structure of government for a five year trial period starting January 1, 2006, *as a means to increase accountability of government and efficiency of services delivered to City residents*. If the election were held today would you vote “yes” or vote “no” on Proposition F?

Yes, Definitely	25.5%
Yes, Probably	20.0
No, Probably	8.0
No, Definitely	14.5
Unsure ( <i>Not read</i> )	32.0

*Revised Version*

Q. Proposition F on the City's November ballot would amend the City Charter to provide a strong Mayor form of governance. It reads: shall the City Charter be amended to change from a *Council*-Manager structure of government to a strong Mayor structure of government for a five year trial period starting January 1, 2006. If the election were held today would you vote "yes" or vote "no" on Proposition F?

Yes, Definitely	21.5%
Yes, Probably	16.5
No, Probably	14.0
No, Definitely	14.5
Unsure ( <i>Not read</i> )	33.5

The initial wording resulted in an "extra" 4% definite "yes" vote and an extra 7.5% on the "yes" side overall. On the other hand, just 22.5% opposed the measure with the initial wording compared to 28.5% opposed in the revised version. This shows the claim that the initial wording boosted the Prop F's prospects was very likely to be valid. In fact, deeper statistical analysis shows that there is less than a 5% chance that the differences seen here in the results could be due to chance alone.

One other note on wording, while the judge eliminated the last sentence in the measure, he did not change the word "City" to "Council" in the body of the text.

Now that we know the revised wording will be the version appearing on the ballot, it is clear that Proposition F is anything but a sure thing. Though it leads, it is not near the majority it needs to become law. Though Republicans tend to support Prop F, it has serious problems with Democrats, who are evenly split on it, and women, 41% of whom are unsure how they will vote.