



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 5, 2018

“Ballot Harvesting” Gave Close California House Races to Democrats

Democrats captured 46 of California’s 53 House seats in the recent midterm congressional election. Even in Orange County, long seen as a conservative Republican stronghold, every House seat went to a Democrat.

While these losses for the GOP in California can be attributed to several factors (read, [“Why Orange County Went Blue”](#)) the most significant of them may be a previously little-known practice called “ballot harvesting.”



“California just defies logic to me,” said House Speaker Paul Ryan at a *Washington Post* live event. “We were only down 26 seats the night of the election, and three weeks later, we lost basically every California contested race. This election system they have — I can’t begin to understand what ‘ballot harvesting’ is.”

Ballot harvesting was facilitated by the passage of AB1921, signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in 2016, which altered the procedure for vote-by-mail ballots. Under the previous law, a voter who was unable to return his ballot by mail could designate a family member living in the same household to return the ballot. AB 1921, however, authorized the designation of *any person* to return a vote by mail. Even paid political campaign workers could collect and return ballots, though the bill prohibits compensation based on the number of ballots returned.

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Six Republican candidates had a winning margin after polls closed, only to see that margin whittled away during subsequent days as late-arriving Democratic votes were counted.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that in Orange County alone, “the number of Election Day vote-by-mail dropoffs was unprecedented — over 250,000.”

Democrats proved to take advantage of ballot harvesting more than did Republicans. A young party worker showed up at one home to collect ballots and told the resident that she was providing a “new service” for “like, people who are supporting the Democratic Party.”

Dale Neugebauer, a veteran Republican consultant, described one Orange County household in which both the husband and wife were registered Republicans. Democratic volunteers came by the house four times, each time asking to speak only with their 18-year-old daughter, a no-party-preference voter, and asking if she wanted them to pick up her signed and completed ballot.

Obviously, if the Republican Party wants to survive in California, it must take some lessons from Democrats and improve its “ballot harvesting” skills.

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