



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on June 7, 2018

Newsom, Cox Top California's Jungle Primary in Race for Governor

Democrat Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom topped California's "jungle primary" on Tuesday night, and will advance to the November general election, along with Republican John Cox, a businessman from San Diego. Newsom's 34 percent of the vote allowed him to run first in the 27-candidate primary, with Cox's 26 percent pushing him into second place.



In most states, a primary election is held to select the candidate of a political party to compete in the general election against the nominees from the other political parties, and any independents. But in California, the "jungle primary" pits all candidates, regardless of party, on one primary ballot. If no candidate then garners a majority of the vote, the top two vote-getters then face off in a "general election."

Under this system, two members of the same political party could theoretically land in the general election. In fact, some originally thought that this could happen in California, a state now dominated by an extremely liberal Democratic Party. Gone are the days when a succession of Republican governors — Ronald Reagan, Pete Wilson, George Deukmejian, Jr. — won comfortable victories at the polls. With a rising tide of immigration (which Governor Wilson warned about years ago), Republicans now struggle to win contests at the state level, and have even lost ground in their numbers in the congressional delegation.

With control of the U.S. House of Representatives thought to be hanging in the balance, several congressional districts in California now held by Republicans are being coveted by the Democratic leaders, such as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi. This is why it was so important for a Republican to advance to the general election, instead of the contest being between two Democrats. If no Republican were on the state-wide ballot, this would likely depress the Republican turnout, leading to a possible flip of several congressional districts in the state from Republican to Democrat.

Cox's "victory" — placing second in the primary and landing a spot in the general election — is expected to generate more excitement and more votes for other Republican candidates in districts for the U.S. House and the state legislature.

But could Cox actually pull off what would be a major upset, and win himself? Interestingly, in a poll taken by the *Los Angeles Times* before the primary, John Cox was only scoring a mere 10 percent of the vote, but then wound up with 26 percent — a significant gain of 16 percentage points. Although he still finished behind Gavin Newsom (who had 34 percent), that is only an eight-point deficit. Additionally,



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Newsom went from 21 percent in the poll, a gain of 13 points — impressive, but still less than Cox's increase.

Newsom is a strong liberal who clearly prefers to face Cox, or any other Republican, in the general election, rather than a fellow Democrat. This is because the electorate in California is regarded as so far to the Left that Republican presidential candidates no longer even bother to campaign in the state. (Bush in 1988 was the last Republican presidential candidate to win in California.)

Cox seems to have overcome the fact that he did not vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, instead casting his ballot for Libertarian hopeful Gary Johnson. Yet President Trump jumped into the race in mid-May, throwing his support to Cox. "California finally deserves a great governor, one who understands borders, crime and lowering taxes. John Cox is the man," Trump said, "he'll be the best governor you've ever had.... Make California Great Again!"

For his part, Cox embraced both Trump's endorsement — publicly saying that his vote for Johnson was a mistake — and Trump's position on immigration, calling for an end to California's status as a "sanctuary state." And he issued ads heralding the Trump endorsement. While this no doubt helped coalesce the Republican vote in the jungle primary for Cox, it could prove problematic for Cox in the general election, since polls indicate that Trump's approval rating is under 30 percent among all voters.

Yet Cox is on the majority side in a poll of California voters, with 51 percent favoring the repeal of gas taxes and vehicle license fees, which Newsom supported along with term-limited Governor Jerry Brown's advocacy for the increased tax burden. With the repeal vote on the November ballot, this would appear to improve Cox's chances — whatever they may be — in the November face-off with Newsom.

Were Cox to actually win, the dynamics of presidential politics in 2020 would be dramatically altered.

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