

USC Price

Sol Price School of Public Policy



Vote-by-Mail Ballot Tracking: A Multi-State Analysis of Voter Turnout and Rejection Rates

Support for this project was provided by the Election Trust Initiative.

About the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID)

The Center for Inclusive Democracy's mission is to improve the social and economic quality of life in U.S. communities by producing non-partisan academic research that informs policy and on-the-ground organizing efforts through education and outreach for a more engaged, transparent, and representative democracy. CID conducts pioneering research that explores voting behavior, civic engagement, as well as electoral and economic issues at the intersection of social justice and democracy.

About the Elections & Voting Information Center (EVIC)

The Elections & Voting Information Center (EVIC) is a non-partisan academic research center with our research leads co-located at Reed College and Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. Led by founder and Director Paul Gronke, PhD, and Research Director Paul Manson, PhD, EVIC searches for common sense, non-partisan solutions to identified problems in election administration backed by solid empirical evidence.

Research Team

Mindy Romero, PhD | Director, Center of Inclusive Democracy (CID), PI
Research Assistant Professor | Sol Price School, University of Southern California

Paul Gronke, PhD | Director, Elections & Voting Information Center (EVIC),
Co-PI Professor of Political Science | Reed College

Lisa Bryant Ph.D. | Associate Professor of Political Science, Chair of the Political Science Department
California State University, Fresno

Anna Meier | Research Associate, Center of Inclusive Democracy (CID)
Research Associate | Sol Price School | University of Southern California

Michelle M. Shafer | Senior Program Advisor, Elections & Voting Information Center (EVIC)
Reed College

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Eric McGhee and Courtney Bailey for their review of this report. We also thank Eleanor Love, Duncan Law, and Saloni Mahajan for their assistance with this report.

We thank Jason Mendez at Snapshot Media for his graphic design services.

For more information about this report, contact Dr. Romero at msromero@usc.edu

October 2024

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Ballot Tracking Use Rates	7
Registered Voter Turnout by Ballot Tracking Use.....	10
Vote-by-Mail Rejection by BallotTrax Use	13
Ballot Tracking Survey	19
Conclusion	25

Introduction

In response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, vote-by-mail ballots were used by an unprecedented number of voters in the presidential election. In the same year, some states contracted with BallotTrax, a division of i3logix, Inc. based in Denver, Colorado, to introduce or expand a vote-by-mail ballot tracking tool to their counties. Two years after this expansion, the 2022 midterm election cycle continued to see large shares of voters in these states using vote-by-mail ballots. This report examines ballot tracking use in the 2022 general election in three states that adopted the tool in the previous election cycle - California, Colorado, and Georgia – to better understand who is using the tool, how their behaviors differ from those who don't, and what their preferences are.

Study Goals

Examining who is signed up to track their vote-by-mail ballot, what their voting behaviors are, and how they differ from those who do not use the ballot tracking tool can improve our understanding of how ballot tracking may be influencing voters' interactions with the electoral process. The Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) at the University of Southern California and the Elections and Voting Information Center (EVIC) at Reed College conducted a multi-state study examining ballot tracking use and voter behavior in California, Colorado, and Georgia. These states all contracted with BallotTrax to implement their ballot tracking tool in 2020 and vary in vote-by-mail ballot election policy, with California and Colorado automatically sending every registered voter a vote-by-mail ballot and Georgia requiring registered voters to request an absentee ballot.¹ The analysis was conducted via voter file analysis to examine ballot tracking use and voting behavior in the 2022 midterm election, as well as via a voter survey to gauge 2022 midterm voters' knowledge and views of ballot tracking. Our analysis seeks to answer the following questions broken out by racial/ethnic groups and age.

1. What share of registered, actual, and vote-by-mail voters were signed up for ballot tracking in the 2022 general election?
2. Why do voters choose to or choose not to sign up to track their ballot?
3. How does registered voter turnout differ between ballot tracking users and non-ballot tracking users?
4. How do vote-by-mail rejection rates differ between ballot tracking users and non-ballot tracking users and what were the rejection reasons?

Voter File Analysis Methodology

The voters files used in this analysis were provided by the California, Colorado, and Georgia Secretary of State offices. The voter files included the individual registrant's date of birth (used to identify age), party affiliation, voting activity, registration date, original registration date, and total number of registered voters. Once received, the data was anonymized to maintain confidentiality. For some states, gender, race, and ethnicity data were not present for the majority of voters. Race and ethnicity were identified using surname and location analysis. See page 5 for more information.

Ballot tracking data was provided by BallotTrax with permission from each state's Secretary of State office. The data files provided vote-by-mail ballot status history and final status, language preference, and message delivery preference. The BallotTrax files were merged with the voter file using unique registrant ID numbers. A small number of ballot tracking users were lost in the merging process for this report. In the California files, 49,767 (1.3%) registrant IDs in the BallotTrax file did not have a match in the voter files during the merge process. In the Colorado files, 3,088 (0.3%) registrant IDs in the BallotTrax file did not have a match in the voter files during the merge process. In the Georgia files, 3,858 (0.8%) registrant IDs in the BallotTrax file did not have a match in the voter files during the merge process. Voter file records are live files that capture active voters at the time of data generation and the voter file used in this analysis was generated a few months after the election, which may explain the lost cases. Some voters may have moved out of state at the time of the file generation, or some voters may have become inactive by the time the voter file was generated.

Ballot tracking users can be broken out into two categories: 1). Those who opt in to receive notifications via email, text, and/or voice calls; and 2). Those who do not receive notifications and instead log into the ballot tracking website to view their ballot status. The ballot tracking data used in this report only includes ballot tracking users who were actively signed up to received notifications via text, email, or voice calls. Registered voters who have an account to track their ballot but do not receive notifications were not included in the data used in this study.

Survey Methodology

International research data and analytics group YouGov administered opinion surveys of 2022 general voters in three states that currently offer ballot tracking - California, Colorado, and Georgia – in order to understand the informational and attitudinal impacts of the use of ballot tracking. The surveys included framing experiments to help local election officials understand what kind of appeals would be more likely to encourage more citizens to sign up for ballot tracking, as well as testing how much information is understood about the systems by both vote-by-mail users who have ballot tracking available to them and those who have not signed up for ballot tracking.

The survey used in this report in the field from October 24, 2023 through November 24, 2023. There were a total of 1,100 respondents in California, 500 respondents in Colorado, and 650 respondents in Georgia. The margin of error for the California survey was +/-2.95%, the margin of error for the Colorado survey was +/- 4.38%, and the margin of error for the Georgia survey was +/- 3.84%. Table 1 shows the respondent breakdown by party ID.

Survey Respondents by State and Party Identification						
	California		Colorado		Georgia	
	Count	Share	Count	Share	Count	Share
Democrat	570	51.8%	183	36.6%	272	41.8%
Independent	239	21.7%	182	36.4%	164	25.2%
Republican	222	20.2%	112	22.4%	186	28.6%
Other	69	6.3%	23	4.6%	28	4.3%
N	1,100	-	500	-	650	-

Data Limitations

Current methods used to identify the race and ethnicity of voters are less reliable for some demographic groups, including Indigenous/Native and Asian-American subgroup populations. We identified registrants' race and ethnicity in county voter files with the R package Who Are You (WRU) and the WRU extension package zipWRUext2, which computes the probability of each racial category for registrants using surname, neighborhood demographics, and other characteristics, such as gender, party, and age. Ideally, this method is used on census block or tract levels of geography to identify neighborhood characteristics. In the Colorado and Georgia files, however, longitude and latitude were not provided and zip codes were the only geographic identifier for registrants. For this reason, the race and ethnicity of voters were imputed using the zip code for all three states. We do not report the racial and ethnic composition of Ballot tracking users and keep all groups separate to not skew results.

For this report, analysis of the voter file by race and ethnicity is limited to Latino, Asian- American, and Black registrants because the imputation for other racial and ethnic groups can have a high degree of inaccuracy. However, some error in measurement for all races and ethnicities, particularly for Black registrants, is present and caution is appropriate when interpreting small effects.

The analysis in this report primarily focuses on ballot tracking participation and voting behaviors across racial and ethnic groups and age groups. We are unable to examine Ballot tracking use rates and behaviors specific to voters who are limited English proficient or voters with disabilities.

Ballot Tracking Overview

Ballot tracking tools, such as the one BallotTrax offers, track the status of every vote-by-mail ballot and sends a series of notifications to voters informing them where their ballot is in the election process, starting from when the ballot is printed and ending with whether it was accepted or rejected. Ballot tracking tools tracks the vote-by-mail ballot through United States Postal Service barcodes and does not have access to the contents of the ballots.

All three states – California, Colorado, and Georgia – examined in this analysis began offering ballot tracking tools via BallotTrax to all counties in the state in the 2020 election cycle. Every registered voter in California and Georgia has the option to sign up for the tool. Registered voters are not automatically enrolled in these states. The Colorado Department of State enrolls every active registered voter with an email on file in addition to encouraging voters without emails to sign up for BallotTrax. Registered voters in Colorado who have been automatically enrolled into BallotTrax are also opted in to receive notifications via email. These registered voters can change their delivery method for notifications by signing in to their online BallotTrax account.

BallotTrax is customizable for message delivery preferences, when those notifications can be sent, and the language in which the messages are sent. For message delivery options, Ballot tracking users can choose one or a combination of voice, email, or text messages. BallotTrax notifications are available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Creole, Filipino, Thai, and Vietnamese.

At the time of this report's release, seven states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Utah) and the District of Columbia have contracts with BallotTrax. In an additional ten states (Oregon, Alaska, Arizona, Illinois, Ohio, Virginia, New Jersey, Maryland, Tennessee, Florida), BallotTrax is available in some counties.²

We note here that at the time of this report's release Georgia is not using BallotTrax as the vendor for its ballot tracking service in the 2024 general election.

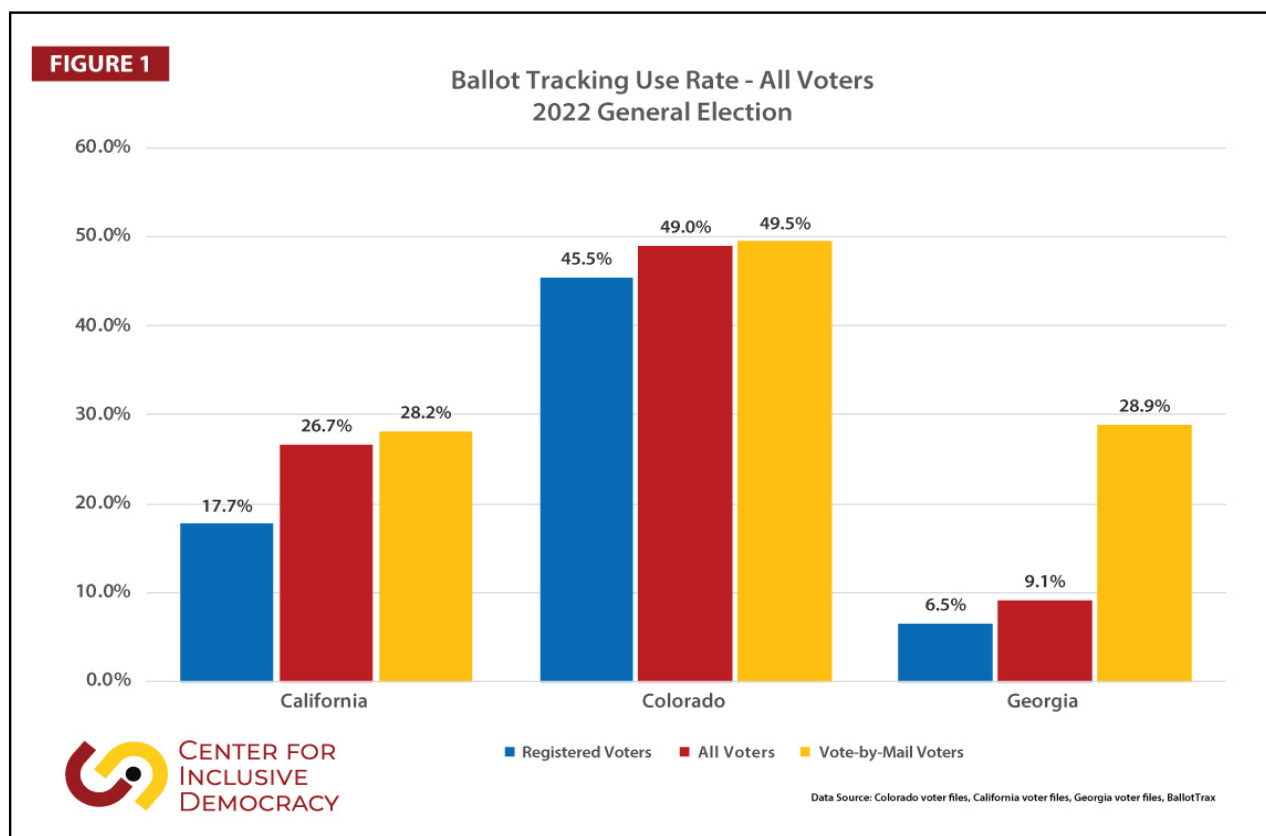
Ballot Tracking Use Rates

While all voters in the three states examined in this report can sign up for ballot tracking, it is an optional program that allows registered voters to sign up for the ability to track their ballot. Since participation is not automatic for every voter in the state, the ballot tracking use rate, or the share of voters who signed up for the ballot tracking system, varied across state and demographics in the 2022 general election.

Ballot tracking use was high in states where the majority of voters cast a vote-by-mail ballot. As seen in Figure 1, ballot tracking use was highest in Colorado, a state in which over 95% of voters used vote-by-mail ballots in the 2022 general election. Over 45% of registered voters and nearly half of voters who cast a ballot in Colorado were signed up to track their vote-by-mail ballot. In California, where nearly 88% of voters cast a vote-by-mail ballot in 2022, almost 18% of registered voters and over one-quarter of those who voted were signed up for the ballot tracking tool. In contrast, ballot tracking use among registered voters in Georgia, a state where voters must request a vote-by-mail ballot³ and nearly 94% of voters voted in person in 2022, was notably lower (6.5%) than both California and Colorado, states where every registered voter is sent a vote-by-mail ballot automatically.⁴

Among vote-by-mail voters, however, Georgia had a slightly higher ballot tracking use rate (28.9%) than California (28.2%), demonstrating a usage rate among VBM voters that is comparable across the two states (Figure 1). While California and Georgia had similar ballot tracking use rates among vote-by-mail voters, 49.5% Colorado vote-by-mail voters used the tracking tool, a rate 75% higher than the other two states.

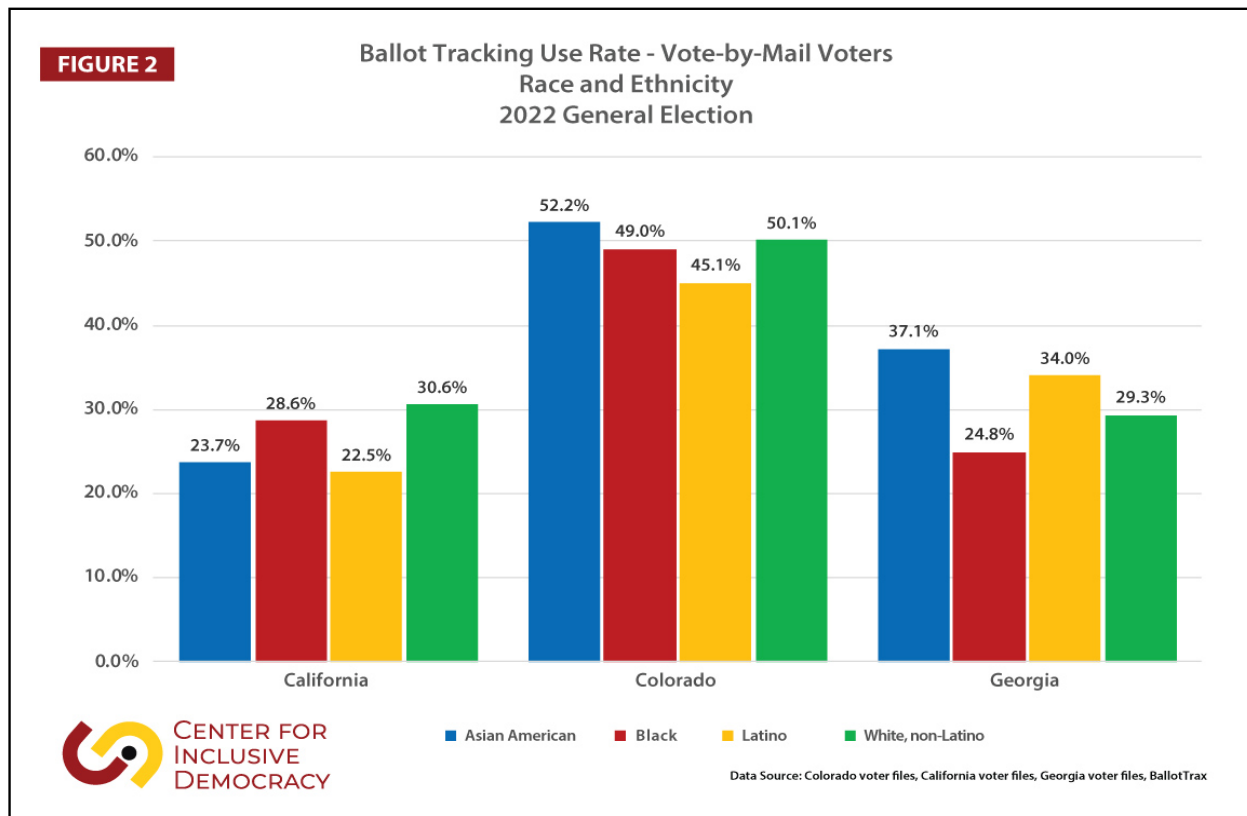
Note: In 2022, Colorado's official ballot tracking use rate was 52% (44% of their registered voters were enrolled automatically and 8% signed up them on their own). For voting method by BallotTrax use, see online appendix.



Ballot Tracking Use Rates – Race and Ethnicity

Ballot tracking use by race and ethnicity varied by state, with some having higher use rates among voters of color than others. As seen in Figure 2, Asian-American vote-by-mail voters used ballot tracking at the highest rates in Colorado and Georgia, while white, non-Latino vote-by-mail voters used the tool at the highest rate in California. Over 52% of Asian Americans in Colorado used ballot tracking, two percentage points higher than white, non-Latinos, three percentage points higher than Blacks, and seven percentage points higher than Latinos. In Georgia, 37.1% of Asian-American vote-by-mail voters used the tool, nearly eight percentage points higher than white, non-Latinos and over twelve percentage points higher than Black vote-by-mail voters. In contrast, Asian Americans in California had the second lowest use rate (23.7%), just behind Latino vote-by-mail voters (22.5%). Instead, Black (28.6%) and white, non-Latino (30.6%) vote-by-mail voters used the tool at the highest rates in California.

Note: For ballot tracking use rates among registered voters and votes cast by race/ethnicity, see online appendix.



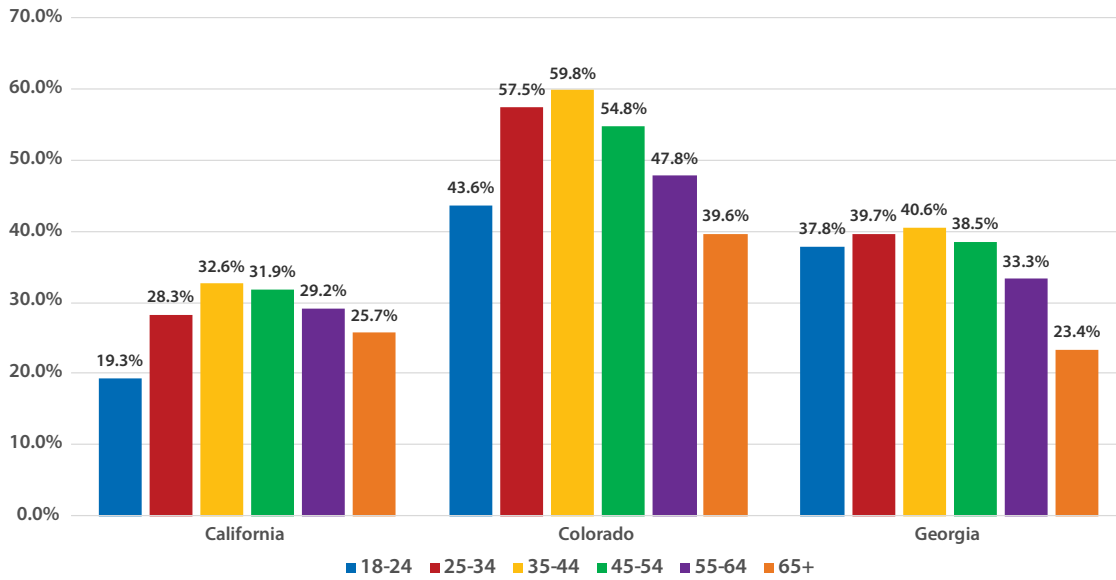
Ballot Tracking Use Rates – Age Groups

In all three states, ballot tracking use was highest among middle aged vote-by-mail voters. As seen in Figure 3, vote-by-mail voters between 35 and 44 had the highest use rates in California (32.6%), Colorado (59.8%), and Georgia (40.6%), while young and older vote-by-mail voters had some of the lowest use rates. In California, for example, less than one-fifth of vote-by-mail voters aged 18 to 24 were signed up for the tool, compared over 28% of those aged 25 to 34. Less than one-quarter of vote-by-mail voters aged 65 and over in Georgia were signed up to track their ballot in the 2022 general, nearly ten percentage points lower than those aged 55 to 64.

Note: For ballot tracking use rates among registered voters and votes cast by age group, see online appendix.

FIGURE 3

Ballot Tracking Use Rate - Vote-by-Mail Voters Age Groups 2022 General Election



Data Source: Colorado voter files, California voter files, Georgia voter files, BallotTrax

Registered Voter Turnout by Ballot Tracking Use

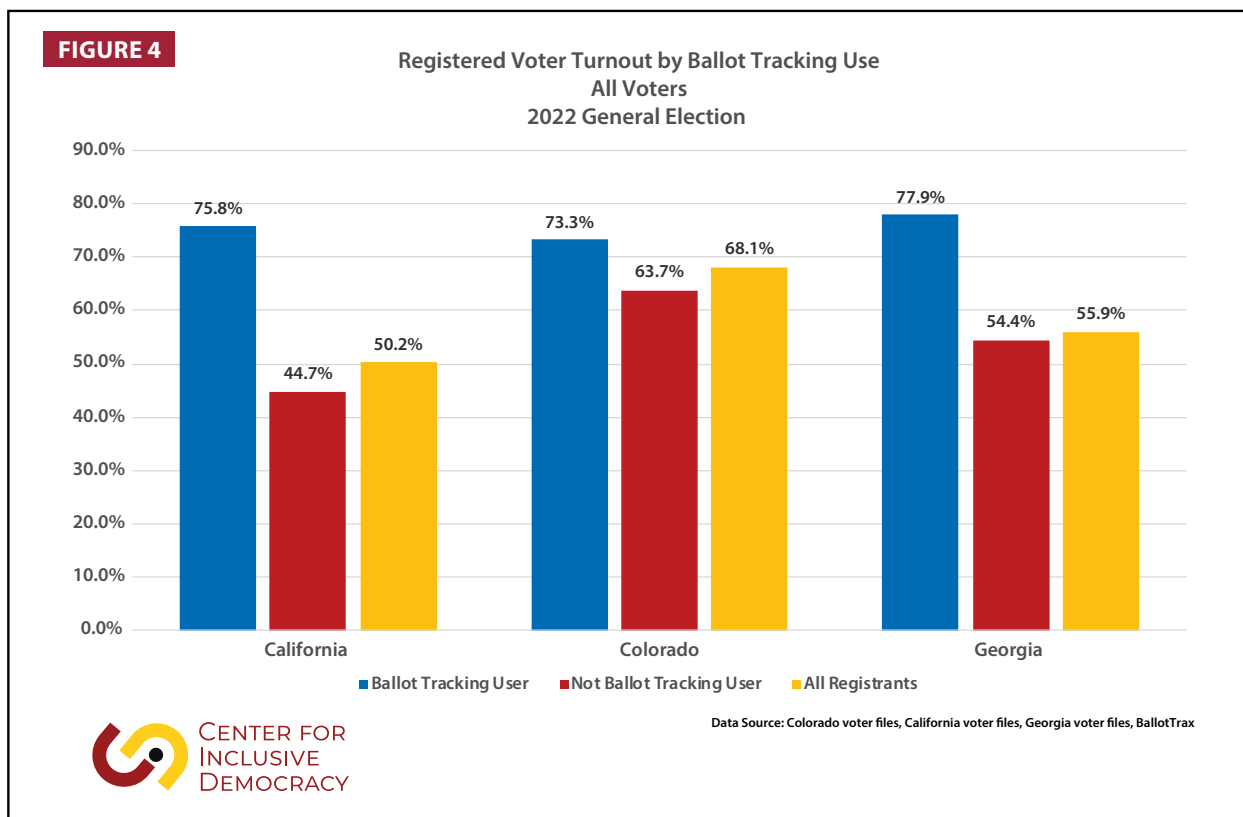
Registered voter turnout rates among voters using ballot tracking across all racial, ethnic, and age groups examined were notably higher than among their counterparts not using the ballot tracking tool in the 2022 general election. By examining registered voter turnout differences between ballot tracking use and non-use, the following section can provide insight into how ballot tracking may correlate with voter participation, particularly among groups historically underrepresented in the voting electorate.⁵

Many factors influence registered voter turnout, such as election type (presidential vs. midterm), competitiveness of an election, political climate, and candidate quality. Our analysis examines only the descriptive relationship between ballot tracking use and registered voter turnout and does not demonstrate causality. In other words, while signing up for ballot tracking possibly encourages people to vote, there is also the possibility of high propensity voters being more likely to sign up for the ballot tracking tool. We present voter turnout of only the registered voter population in order to examine turnout differences between voters who were and were not signed up to track their vote-by-mail ballot.

Note: Because Colorado automatically enrolls all registered voters (with an email address on file) in BallotTrax, the possibility of a self-selection bias in the state's registered voter turnout rates would likely be reduced. We also note here that comparisons of turnout across groups using registered voter data can obscure inequities in voter registration.

Registered Voter Turnout – All Registrants

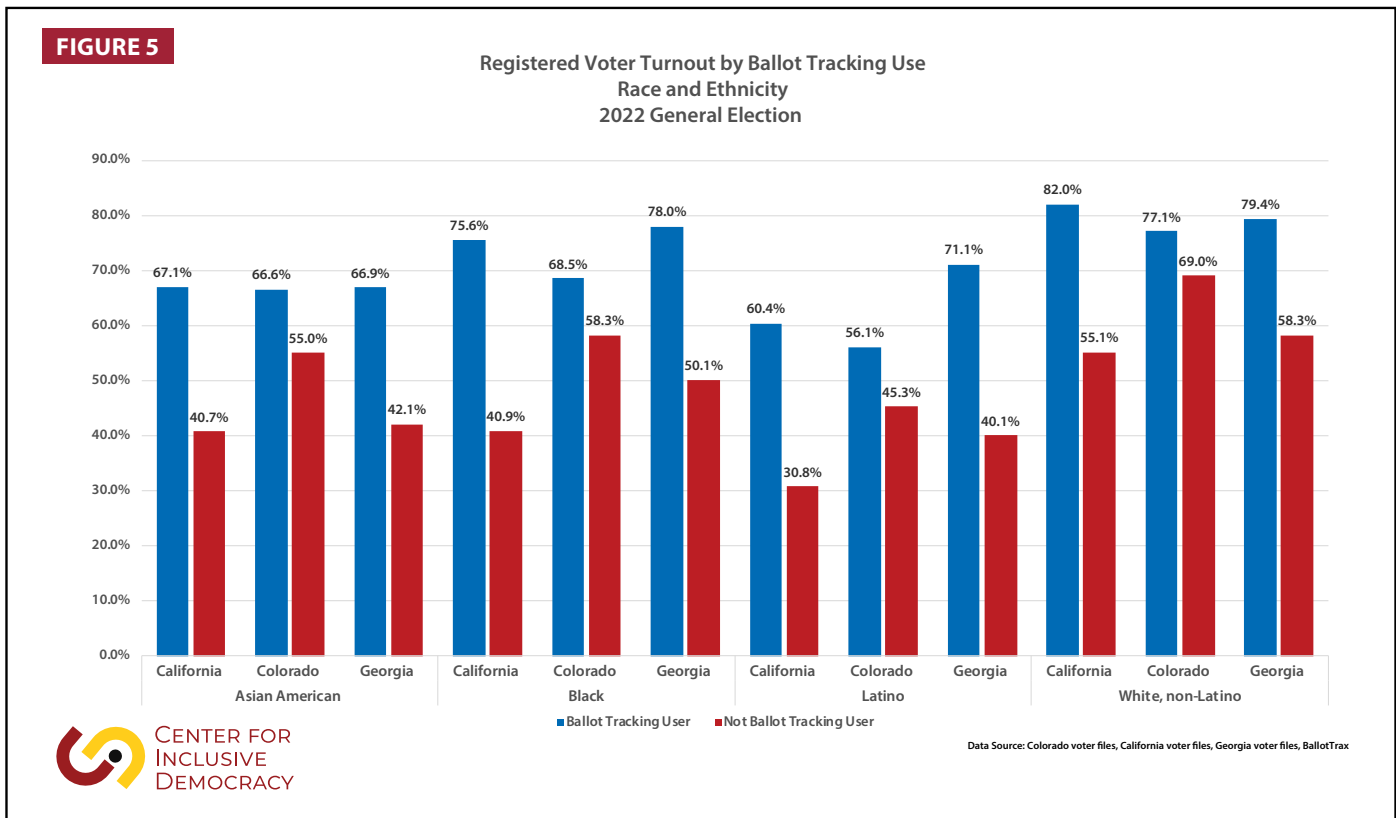
Ballot tracking users had notably higher turnout rates than those not using the tool in all three states examined. Around three-quarters of registered voters who were signed up for the ballot tracking tool cast a ballot in the 2022 general election, with some states having registered over turnout among ballot tracking users exceeding or nearing 50% higher than non-ballot tracking users (Figure 4). In California, for example, nearly 76% of registered voters who were signed up to track their ballot voted, compared to just 44.7% of those who were not signed up. Georgia also had notably higher turnout rates among ballot tracking users (77.9%) versus non-ballot tracking users (54.4%). While there was a narrower turnout gap between Colorado’s ballot tracking users and non-ballot tracking users, it neared ten percentage points (73.3% and 63.7%, respectively).



Registered Voter Turnout by Ballot Tracking Use – Race and Ethnicity

Historical turnout gaps between voters of color and white, non-Latino voters were narrower among ballot tracking users compared to those not using the ballot tracking tool. While voters of color continued to have lower registered voter turnout rates than white, non-Latinos in all three states, ballot tracking users of color narrowed this gap (Figure 5). In California, for example, there was a 21.6 percentage point turnout gap between Latino ballot tracking users (60.4%) and white, non-Latinos ballot tracking users (82.0%), but a 24.3 percentage point turnout gap among those not using the tool. In Georgia, 78.0% of Black ballot tracking users cast a ballot, only 1.4 percentage points lower than white, non-Latino ballot tracking users (79.4%). Among non-ballot tracking users in Georgia, however, Black registered voter turnout (50.2%) was 8.1 percentage points lower than white, non-Latino registered voter turnout (58.3%). Two-thirds of Asian-American ballot tracking users in Colorado cast a ballot in 2022, 10.5 percentage points lower than white, non-Latino ballot tracking users, while there was a fourteen-percentage point turnout gap among non-ballot tracking users (55.0% and 69.0%, respectively).

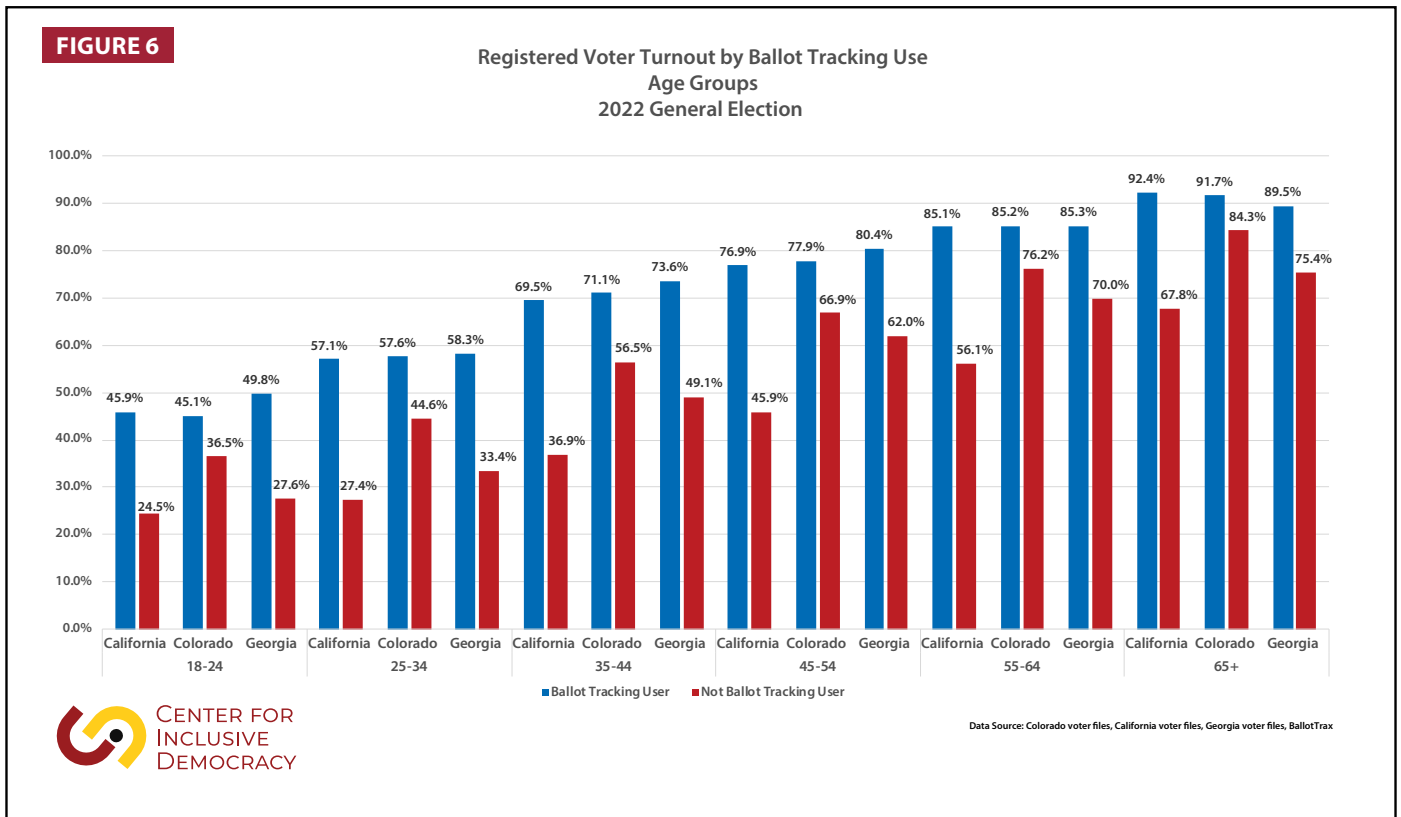
Asian Americans in California were the only racial group examined with a larger turnout gap from white, non-Latinos among ballot tracking users (67.1% and 81.0%, respectively) compared to non-ballot tracking users (40.7% and 55.1%, respectively), although the gaps were similar (14.9 percentage points versus 14.4 percentage points).



Registered Voter Turnout by Ballot Tracking Use – Age Groups

Registered voter turnout differences between ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users were larger among age groups with higher ballot tracking use rates. While ballot tracking users had higher turnout rates than their counterparts not signed up for the tool, the differences were largest among those aged between 25 and 54 (Figure 6), the groups with the largest ballot tracking use rates (see page 9). In Colorado, for example, there was a 14.6 percentage point difference in turnout between ballot tracking users (71.1%) and non-ballot tracking users (56.5%) aged 35 to 44, the age group with the highest ballot tracking use rate in the state. In contrast, turnout among ballot tracking users aged 65 and older, the group with the lowest ballot tracking use among voters in the state, was only 7.4 percentage points higher than non-ballot tracking users. Similar trends are seen in California, with ballot tracking users aged 18 to 24 having the smallest turnout difference compared to non-ballot tracking users and the lowest use rate among voters.

In Georgia, however, turnout rate differences between ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users were narrower among those with higher use rates among voters. Georgia does, however, have a very small share of voters using vote-by-mail ballots and the turnout rate differences are largest among those with higher ballot tracking use rates among vote-by-mail voters. For example, Georgians aged 65 and older, the age group with the highest ballot tracking use rate among voters and the lowest ballot tracking use rate among vote-by-mail voters, had a 14.1 percentage point turnout difference between ballot tracking and non-Ballot tracking users.

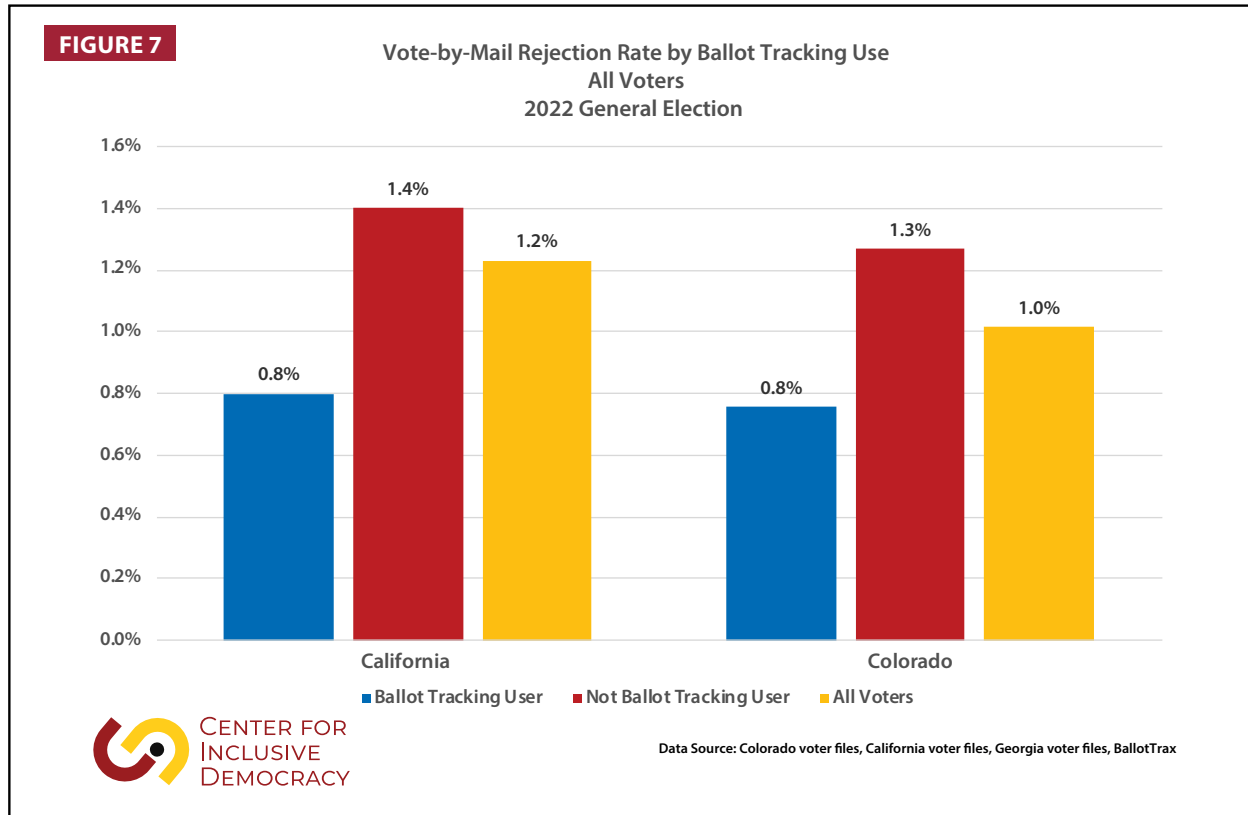


Vote-by-Mail Rejection by BallotTrax Use

In addition to tracking vote-by-mail ballots' progress through the mail system, ballot tracking tools also notify its users if there is an issue with their ballot such a signature discrepancy. When notified that their vote-by-mail ballot is rejected yet curable, voters have the opportunity to correct these issues in order for their vote to be counted. Despite this feature, some vote-by-mail ballots are still rejected and are not counted.

The following analysis compares vote-by-mail rejection rates between ballot tracking users and non-users in the 2022 general election. While the preceding sections examined three states (California, Colorado, and Georgia), vote-by-mail rejection status was only available in data provided by California and Colorado. Examining differences in vote-by-mail rejection is an important analysis that can offer insights into the potential benefits of ballot tracking and for this reason, we present findings for the two states where data was available.

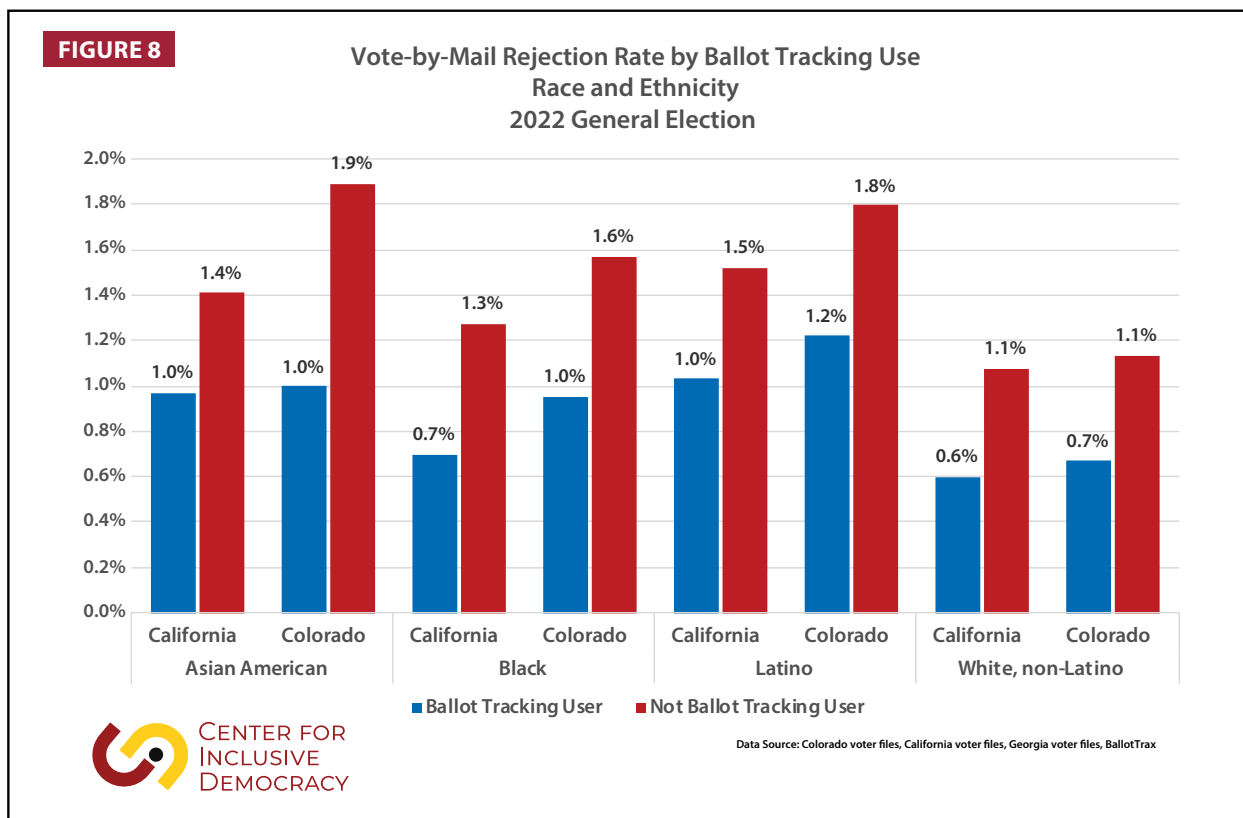
Ballot tracking users had notably lower vote-by-mail rejection rates than non-ballot tracking users in the 2022 general election. In California, only 0.8% of vote-by-mail ballots cast by ballot tracking users were rejected, nearly half the rate seen among non-ballot tracking users (Figure 7). In Colorado, non-ballot tracking users had a rejection rate more than 50% higher than those who were signed up for the tool (1.3% versus 0.8%).



Vote-by-Mail Rejection by Ballot Tracking Use – Race and Ethnicity

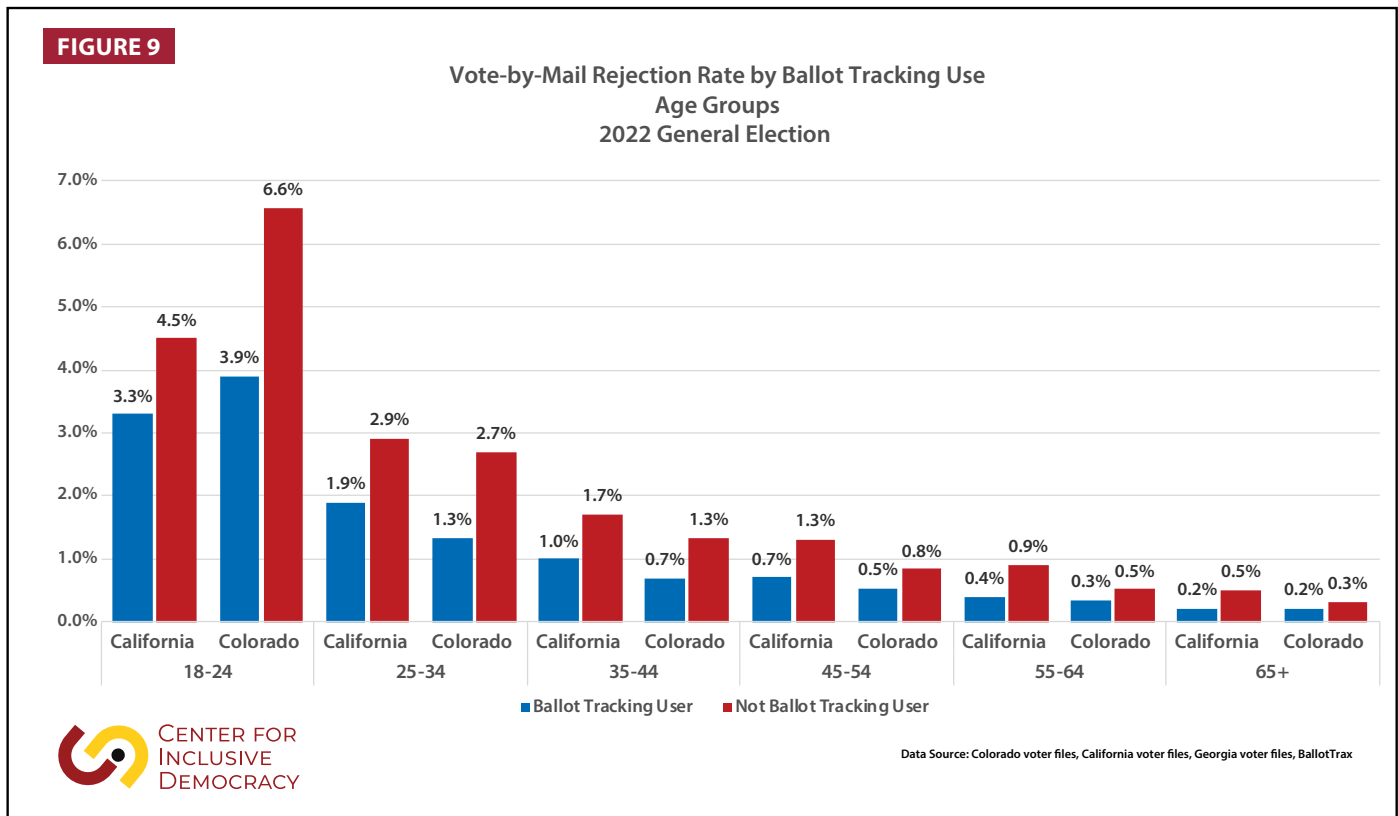
Among many voters of color, vote-by-mail rejection gaps with white, non-Latinos were narrower among ballot tracking users compared to non-ballot tracking users. Historically, voters of color have had higher vote-by-mail rejections rates compared to the general population and white, non-Latinos. This gap, however, was often slightly narrower among ballot tracking users than non-ballot tracking users (Figure 8). In Colorado, for example, the vote-by-mail rejection rates among Latino ballot tracking users was 0.5 percentage point above that of white, non-Latinos, while there was a 0.7 percentage point gap between Latino and white, non-Latino voters who were not signed up to track their ballot. Black ballot tracking users’ vote-by-mail rejection rates were slightly closer to white, non-Latino rates in both California (0.1 percentage point gap) and Colorado (0.3 percentage point gap) compared to non-ballot tracking users (0.2 percentage point gap and 0.4 percentage point gap, respectively).

Asian Americans had the opposite pattern in California and Colorado. While in California the vote-by-mail rejection rate gap was larger among Asian-American Ballot tracking users than non-ballot tracking users, Asian-American ballot tracking users in Colorado had the largest improvement of their vote-by-mail rejection gap (0.3 percentage points among Ballot tracking users and 0.8 percentage points among non-Ballot tracking users).



Vote-by-Mail Rejection by Ballot Tracking Use – Age Groups

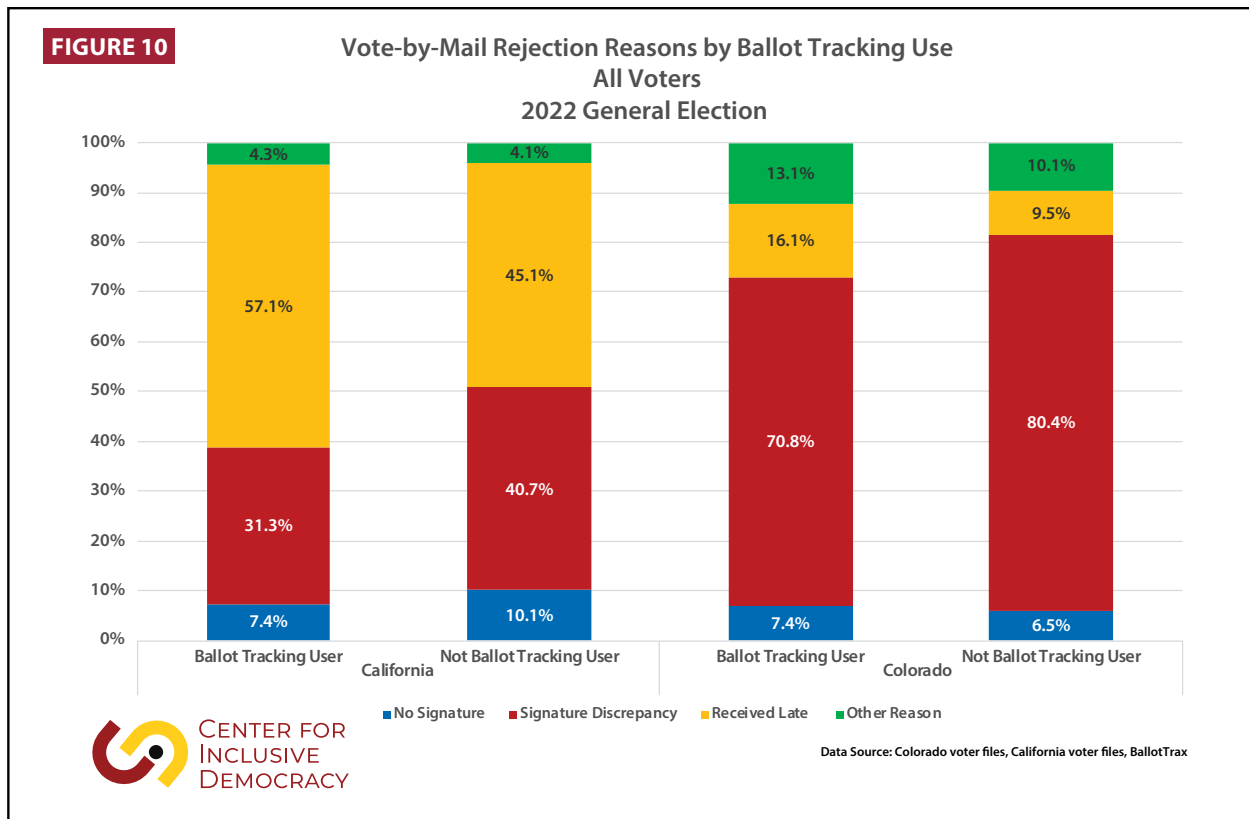
Ballot tracking users aged 18 to 24 had a smaller difference in vote-by-mail rejection rates from ballot tracking users aged 65 and older compared to non-ballot tracking users. Vote-by-mail rejection rates are often correlated with age, resulting in younger voters having vote-by-mail rejection rates notably higher than older voters. While this trend continues regardless of ballot tracking use, the difference was narrower among those who were signed up to track their ballot (Figure 9). In California, for example, 3.3% of vote-by-mail ballots cast by ballot tracking users aged 18 to 24 were rejected, 3.1 percentage points higher than those aged 65 and older (0.2%). Among non-ballot tracking users, the difference in vote-by-mail ballots is four percentage points (4.5% versus 0.5%). Similarly in Colorado, there was a 3.7 percentage point difference in vote-by-mail rejection rates between young (3.9%) and older (0.2%) ballot tracking users and a notably large 6.3 percentage point difference among non-ballot tracking users (6.6% versus 0.3%, respectively).



Note: Colorado's higher youth ballot rejection rates compared to California may be impacted by the implementation of the state's online voter registration (OVR) system. Colorado allows people to register through OVR with their social security number (without supplying a signature for the voter file). These registrants are disproportionately young and also less likely to have their signature on file through a previous registration.

Vote-by-Mail Rejection Reasons by Ballot Tracking Use – All Voters

Rejected ballots cast by ballot tracking users had lower rates of signature issues compared to those cast by non-ballot tracking users. As seen in Figure 10, the rates of signature discrepancies, or non-matching signatures, were nearly ten percentage points lower among ballot tracking users compared to non-ballot tracking users in both California (31.3% versus 40.7%, respectively) and Colorado (70.8% versus 80.4%). Instead, ballot tracking users had higher shares of ballots that were received late compared to those who were not signed up for the tool, with over 57% of rejected ballots in California and 16.1% in Colorado being received after the deadline.



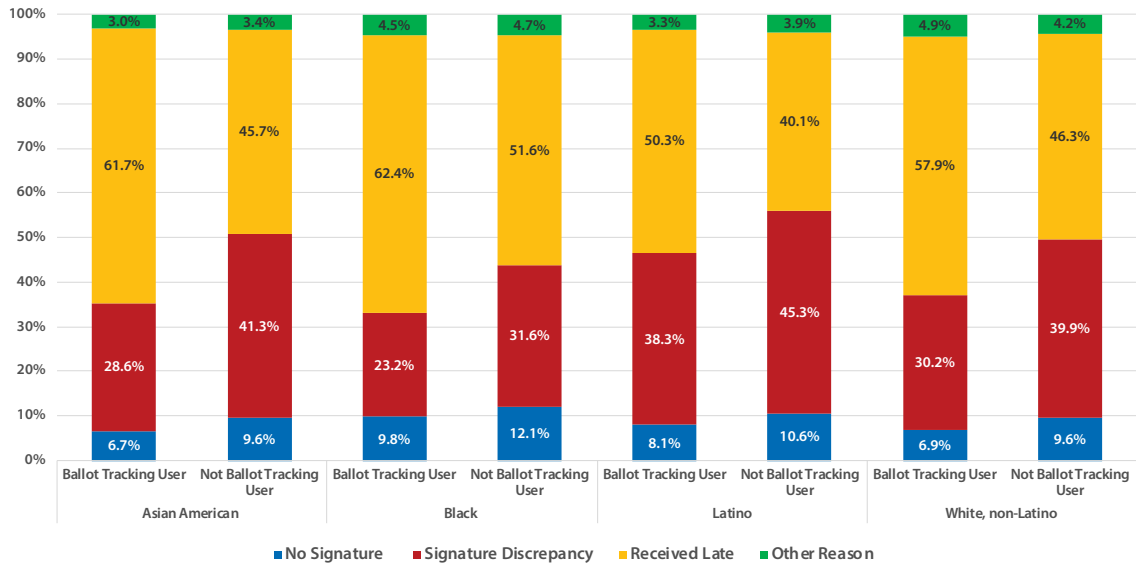
Vote-by-Mail Rejection Reasons by Ballot Tracking Use – Race and Ethnicity

While all racial and ethnic groups saw lower rates of signature discrepancies among ballot tracking users compared to their counterparts not using the tool, Latinos had the smallest difference. In Colorado, over 80% of rejected ballots cast by Latino ballot tracking users were rejected for non-matching signatures, three percentage points lower than Latino non-ballot tracking users (Figure 12). In comparison, there was an 8.2 percentage point difference between Asian-American ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users, 9.3 percentage point difference among Black ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users, and an 11.2 percentage point difference among white, non-Latino ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users. Similar trends were seen in California, although to a lesser extent (Figure 11).

Black and white, non-Latino ballot tracking users had notably higher rates of late ballots compared to their counterparts not signed up for the tool, while Asian-American and Latino ballot tracking users had the highest rates of signature issues.

FIGURE 11

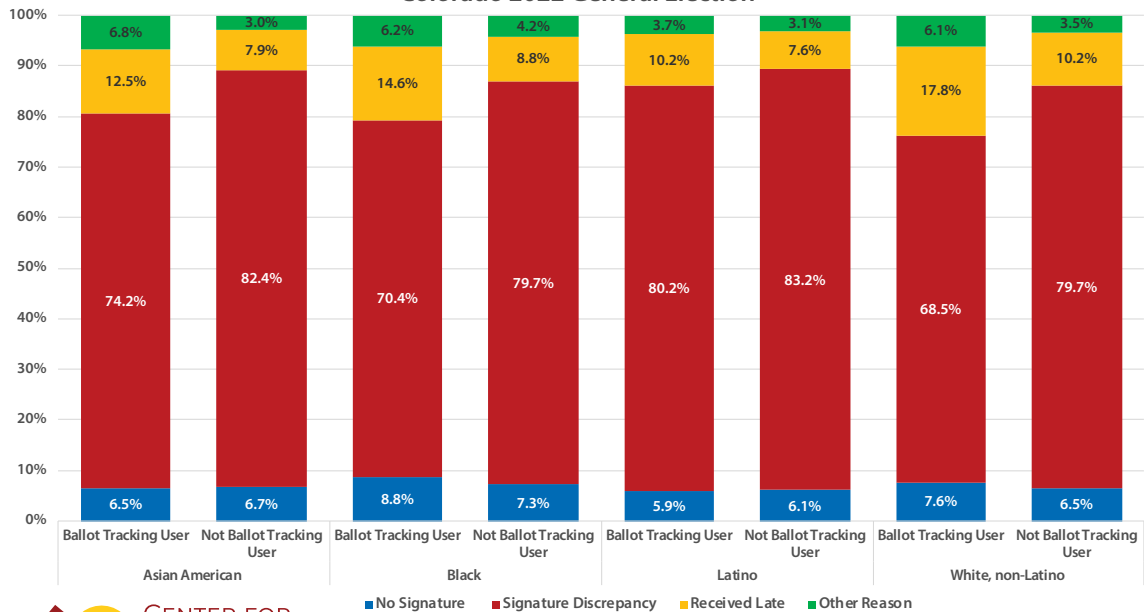
**Vote-by-Mail Rejection Reasons by Ballot Tracking Use
Race and Ethnicity
California 2022 General Election**



Data Source: California voter files, BallotTrax

FIGURE 12

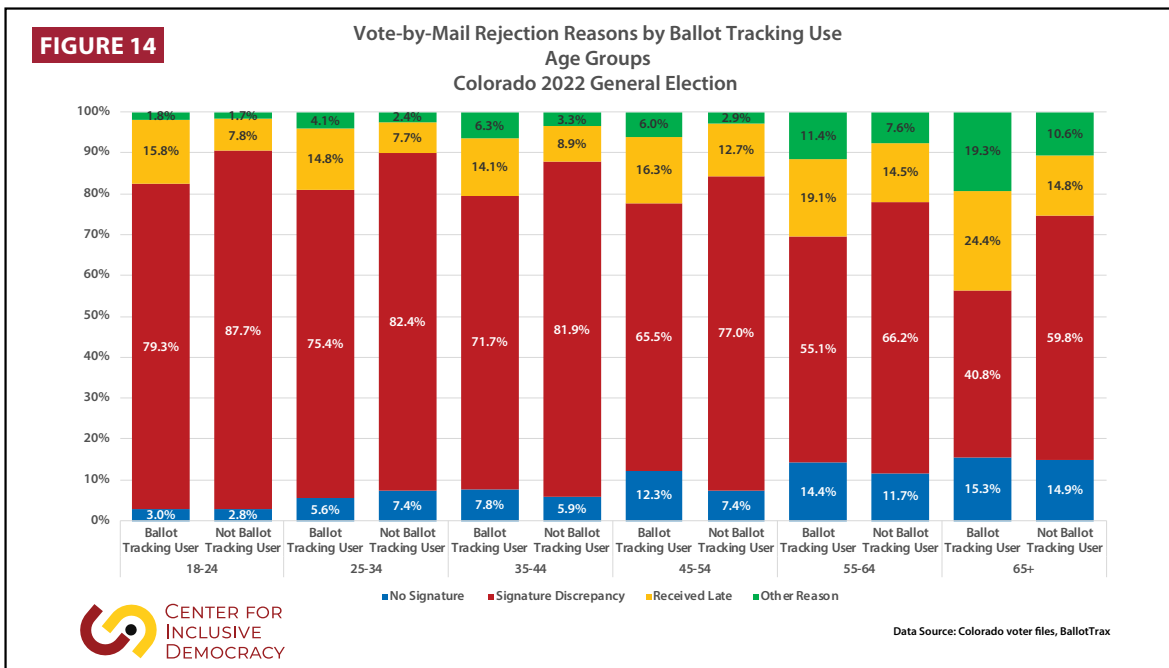
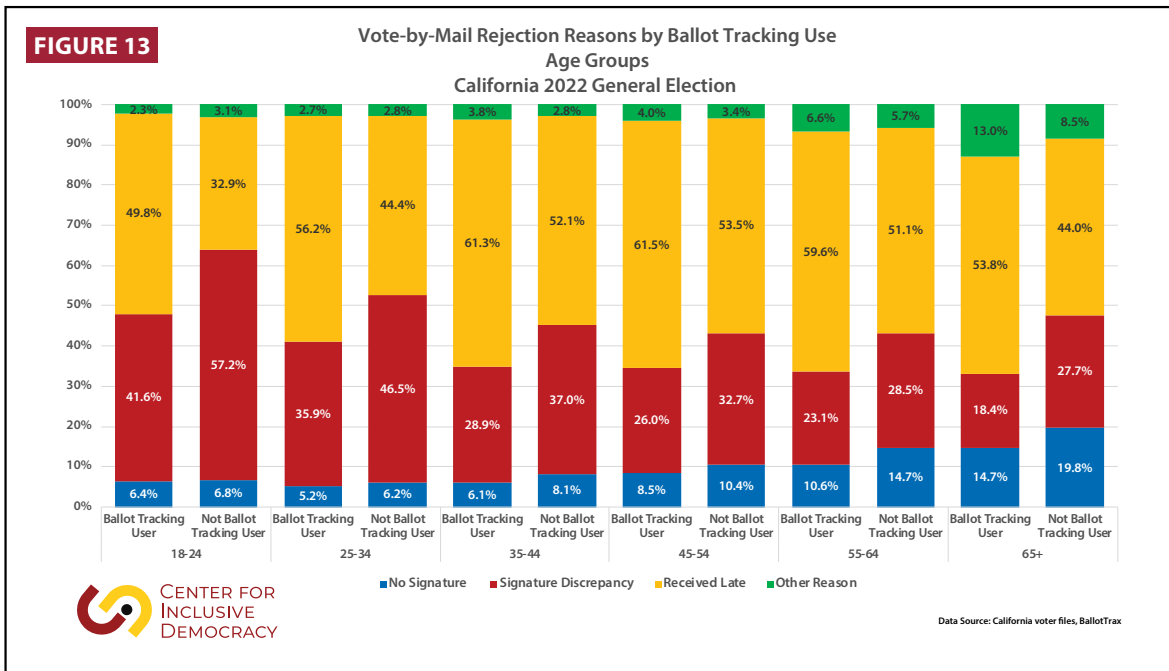
**Vote-by-Mail Rejection Reasons by Ballot Tracking Use
Race and Ethnicity
Colorado 2022 General Election**



Data Source: Colorado voter files, BallotTrax

Vote-by-Mail Rejection Reasons by Ballot Tracking Use – Age Groups

Young ballot tracking users in Colorado had the smallest difference in signature discrepancies compared to non-ballot tracking users, while young ballot tracking users in California had the largest. While ballot tracking users of all age groups had smaller rates of signature discrepancies compared to non-ballot tracking users, the two states observed had opposite trends. In Colorado, as age groups increase, so do the differences in signature discrepancies between ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users (Figure 14). In California, as age groups increase, the differences in signature discrepancies between ballot tracking and non-ballot tracking users decrease (Figure 13). For example, 79.3% of rejected ballots cast by young Colorado ballot tracking users were rejected for non-matching signatures, compared to 87.7% of young non-ballot tracking users (8.4 percentage points difference), while there was a nineteen-percentage point difference among older ballot tracking and non-Ballot tracking users. In California, over 41% of rejected ballots cast by young ballot tracking users were rejected for non-matching signatures, compared to 57.2% of young non-ballot tracking users (15.6 percentage points difference), while older voters had a difference of 9.3 percentage points.

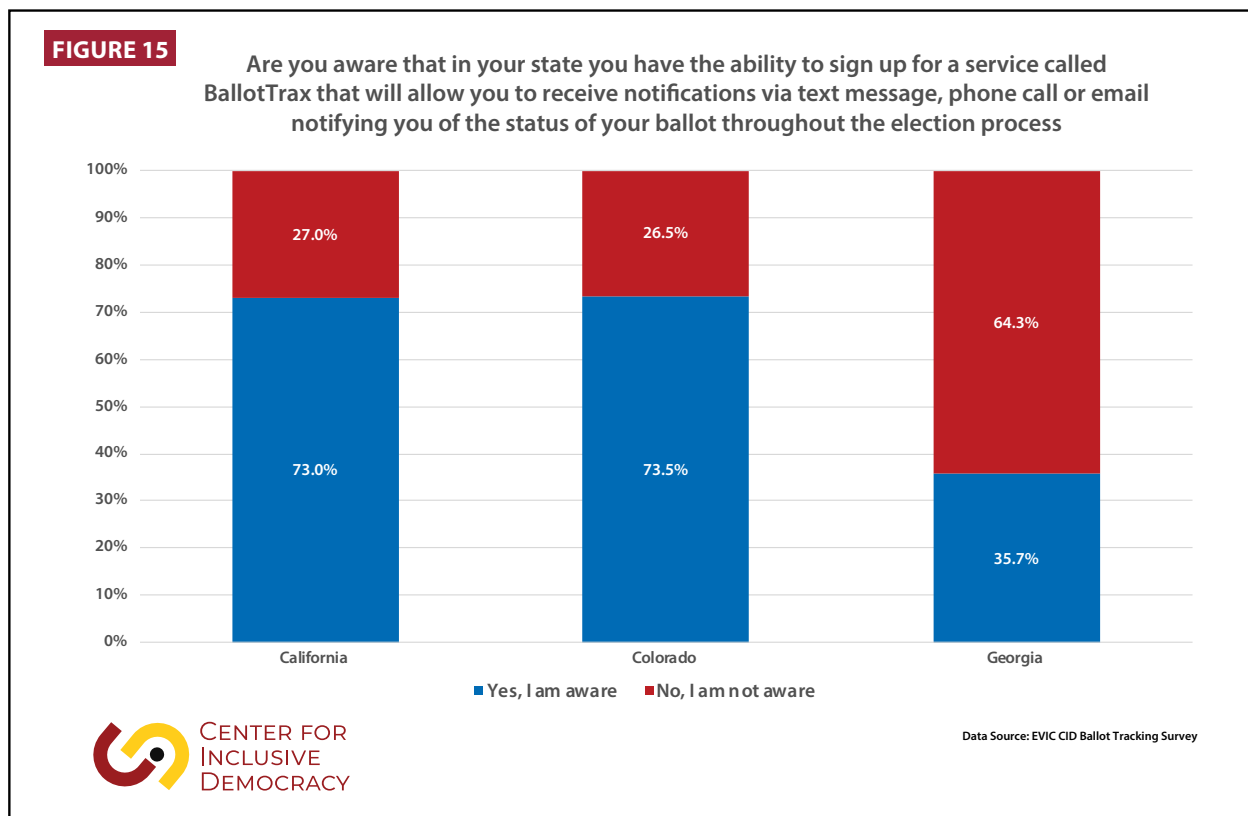


Ballot Tracking Survey

To better understand voters' knowledge of ballot tracking and their views of the service, we surveyed 2022 general voters in California, Colorado, and Georgia. The survey focused on voters' awareness of the availability of the ballot tracking tool and reasons for either using or not using the tool. **Awareness of ballot tracking was highest in California and Georgia, states with high levels of vote-by-mail voting.** There were a variety of reasons respondents opted to receive ballot notifications. **Concerns about ballots being received and counted were the top reasons respondents said they were signed up to track their ballot.** In contrast, many respondents who were not signed up for the tool cited confidence and trust in the voting process.

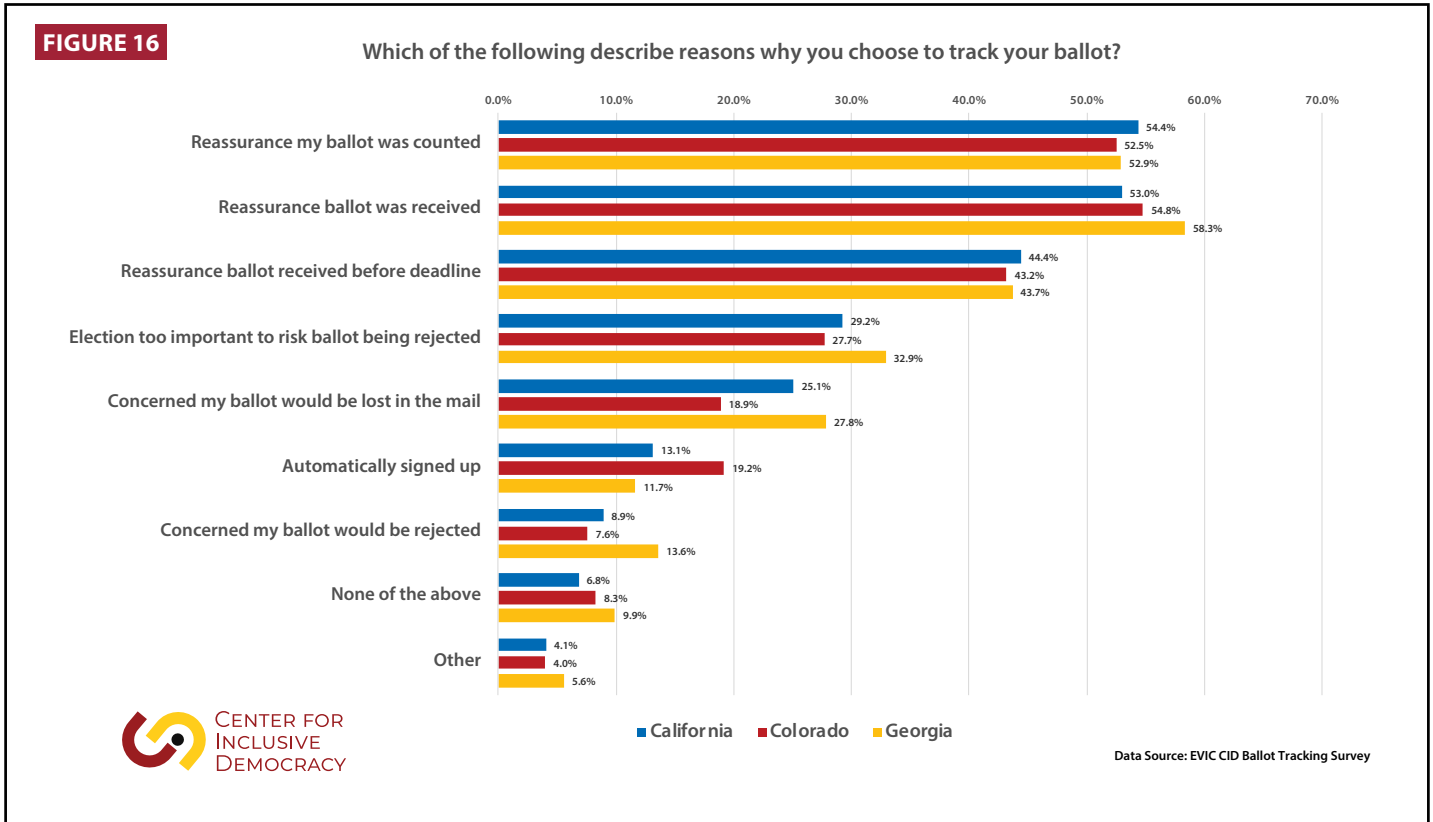
Survey Question 1: Are you aware that in California you have the ability to sign up for a service called BallotTrax that will allow you to receive notifications via text message, phone call or email notifying you of the status of your ballot throughout the election process (e.g., mailed, received, opened)?

Awareness of the availability to track vote-by-mail ballots was highest in states that had higher ballot tracking use rates. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed in California and Colorado, the states with the highest ballot tracking use rates, were aware that they had the option to track their vote-by-mail ballot (Figure 15). In Georgia, a state where only 6.5% of registered voters were signed up for the ballot tracking tool at the time of the 2022 general election, just over one-third of respondents said they were aware of the tracking tool. This is likely due to the lower number of people voting by mail, but could also be due to differences in voter education campaigns by election officials.



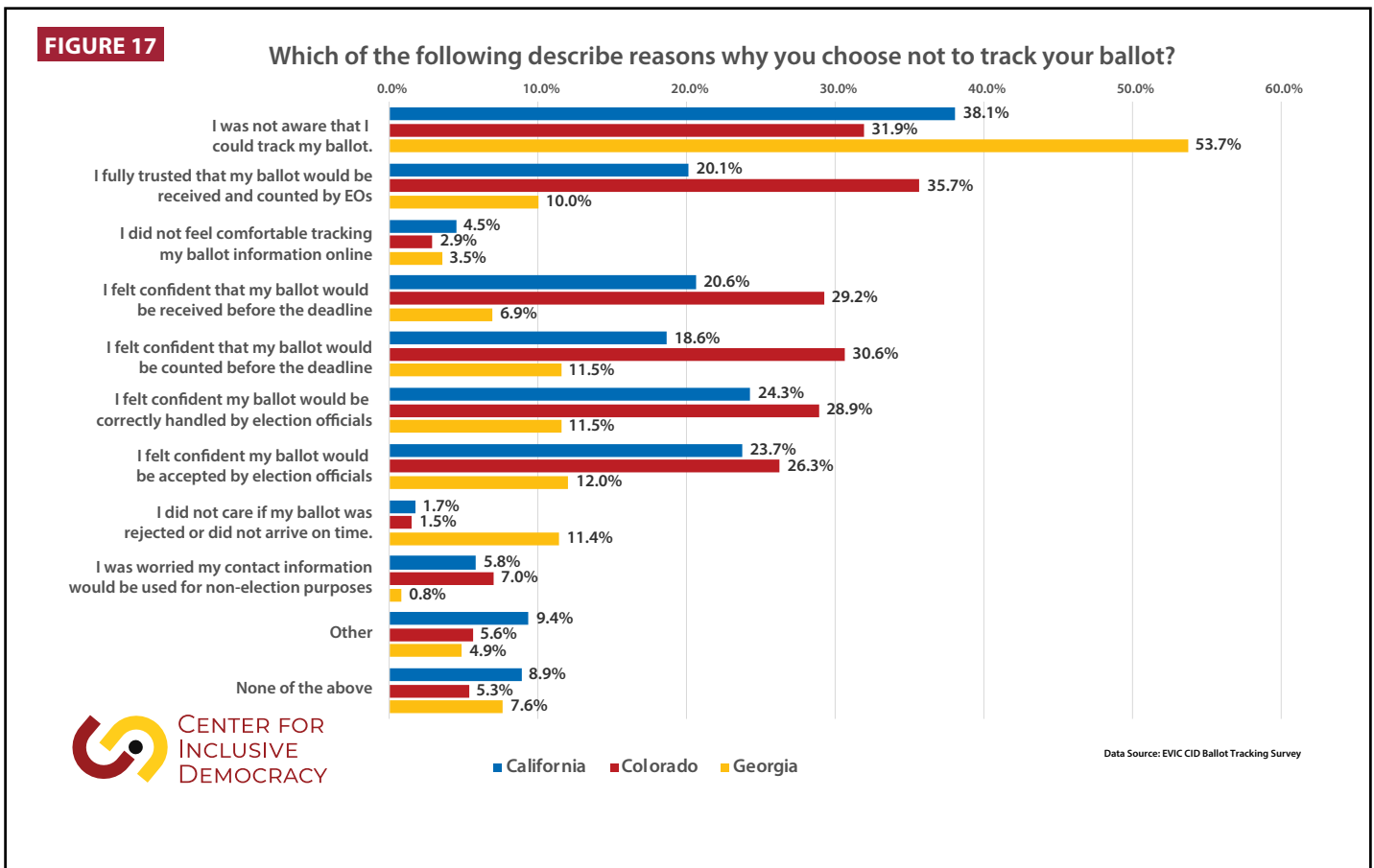
Survey Question 2a: Which of the following describe reasons you chose to track your ballot?

Across all three states, wanting reassurance that their ballot was received, and their ballot was counted were reported as the top two reasons for tracking their ballot. As seen in Figure 16, the third most common reason in all states was to receive reassurance their ballot was received by the deadline, which varies by state. Approximately 30 percent of voters in all three states reported that belief the 2022 election was too important to risk their ballot being rejected as a reason for signing up for the service. About 20 percent of respondents reported that they had some concern their ballot would be lost in the mail. Interestingly, fewer than ten percent of voters reported concerns that their ballot would be rejected as a motivating factor. Another ten percent reported that they were automatically signed up.



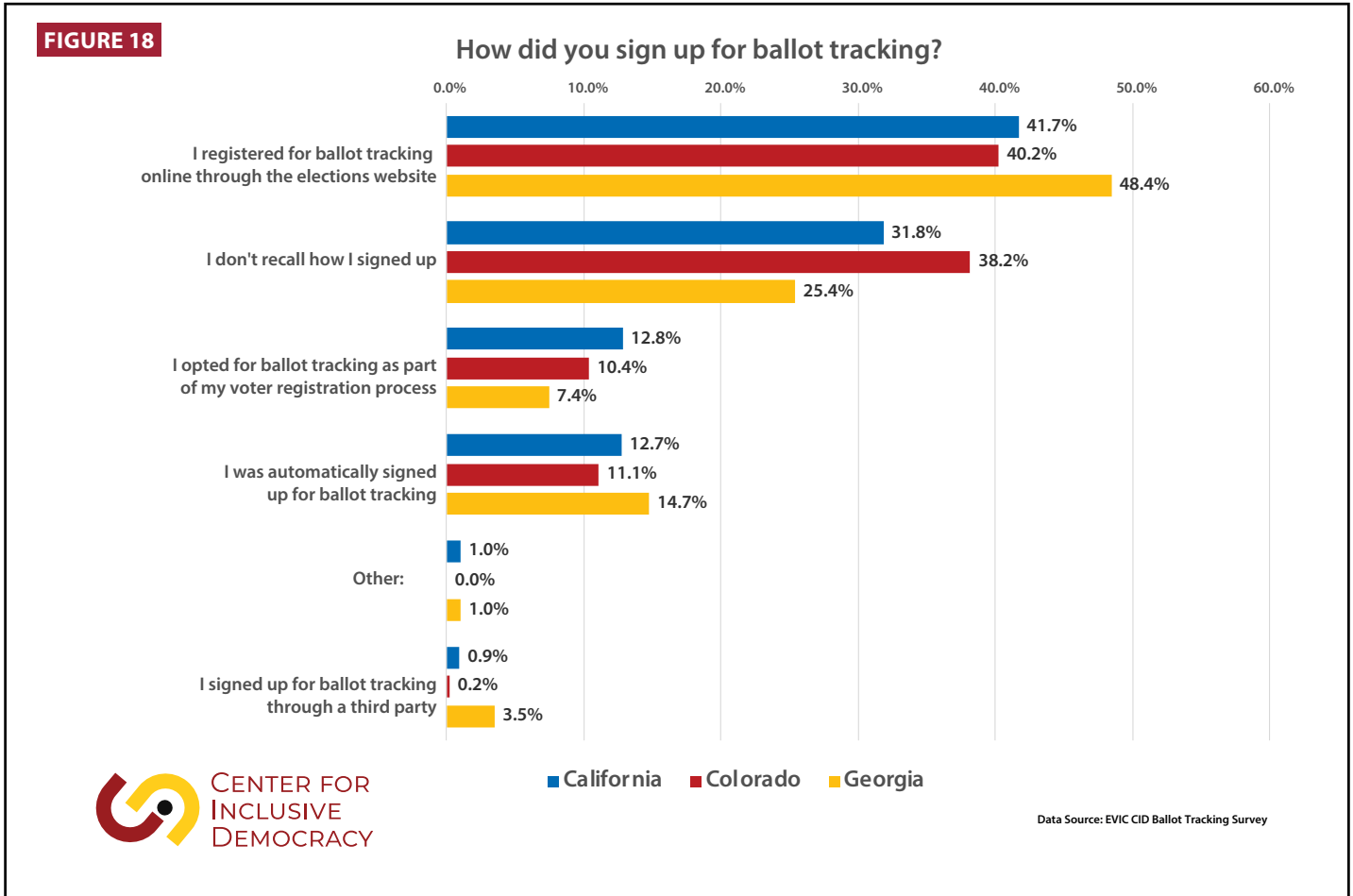
Survey Question 2b: Which of the following describe reasons you chose not to track your ballot?

Among voters who were not signed up for the tracking tool, the most common response in California and Georgia was that they were not aware they could track their ballot. This suggests that more educational outreach by election officials could increase the number of people using the service. In Colorado, the most common response was that the voters fully trusted election officials would receive and count their ballots (Figure 17). Respondents from Colorado appear the most confident in all questions about confidence in the process, from their ballot being received by the deadline to being counted and correctly handled by election officials. Taken together, these responses send quite a positive message for election officials in Colorado. Very few people reported that they didn't care or they were worried about their personal information being misused.



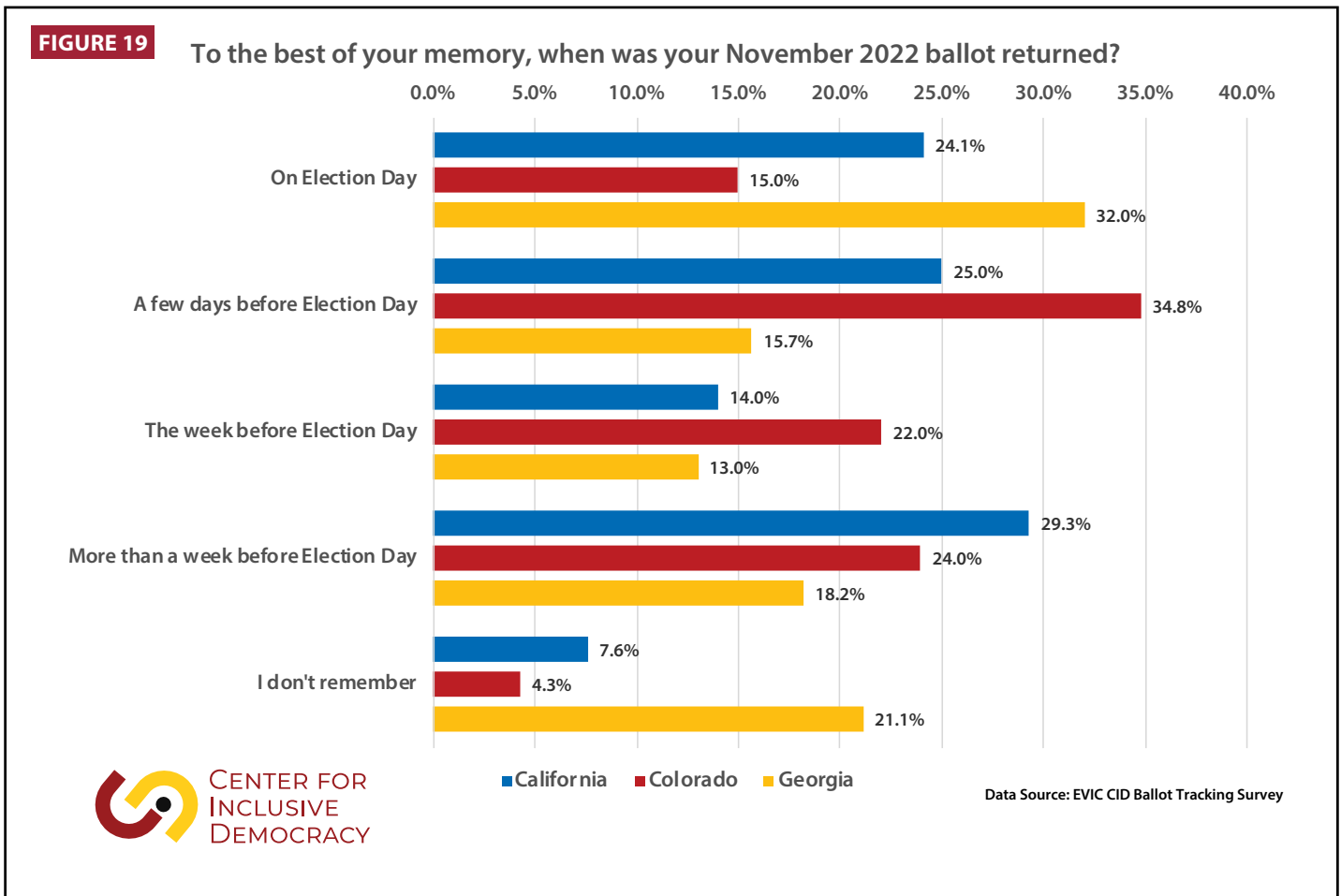
Survey Question 3: How did you sign up for ballot tracking?

When asked how they signed up to track their ballot, respondents across all three states provided remarkably similar responses. Of those who recall how they signed up, the majority report that they signed up for the service through a state or local election website (Figure 18). Approximately 11 to 15 percent report that they were automatically signed up for the service, and roughly 7 to 13 percent report signing up for tracking as part of their voter registration process. Very few voters report that they joined ballot tracking via a third party.



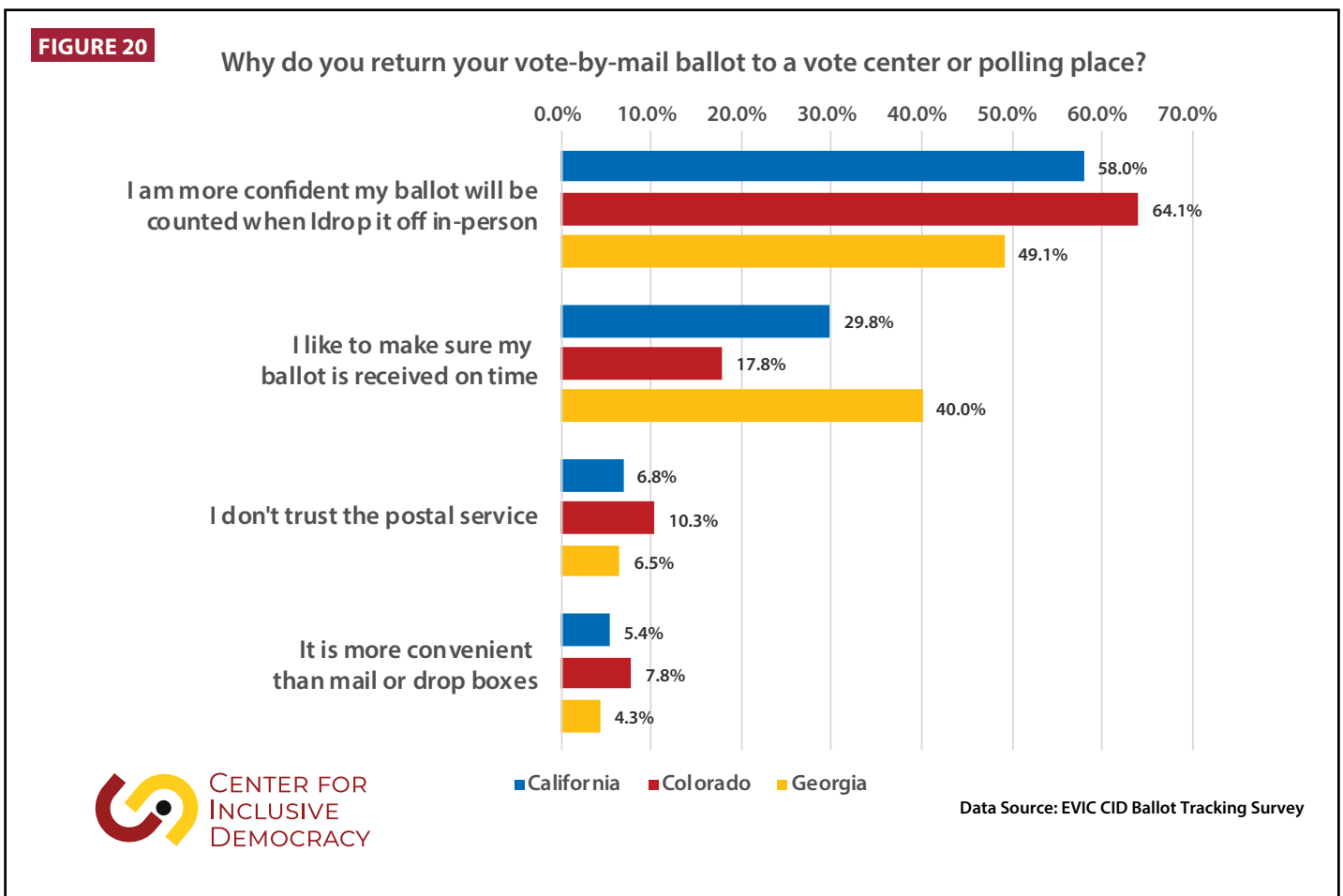
Survey Question 4: To the best of your memory, when was your November 2022 ballot returned?

Timing of voting among ballot tracking users varied by state election policy. California and Colorado send ballots to registered voters nearly a full month before Election Day (22 days in Colorado and 28 days in California), and drop boxes are set up prior to ballots being mailed. This allows the opportunity for voters to return their ballots early, as is encouraged by political parties and campaigns. Georgia allows voters to request an absentee ballot between 78 and 11 days prior to the election and sends ballots out as applications are processed. These differences across states produce different patterns of return. One-third of respondents in Georgia reported returning their ballot on Election Day, while the same was true for only 24% of respondents in California and 15% of those in Colorado (Figure 19). Almost 30% of those in California returned their ballots more than a week before Election Day, and 35 percent of voters in Colorado returned their ballots a few days before Election Day.



Survey Question 5: Why do you return your vote-by-mail ballot to a vote center or polling place?

Among ballot tracking users who returned their vote-by-mail ballot to an in-person location, the majority stated they had more confidence that their ballot would be counted if returned to in person. In California and Georgia, the modal method of return is via the US Postal Service, while in Colorado, the majority of voters place their ballots in an official drop box. A smaller number of voters return their ballots directly to a polling place, vote center or clerk’s office. This varied by state, with a low of 10.6 percent of respondents in Colorado, 15 percent of vote-by-mail voters in Georgia, and 21.3 percent of respondents in California. We asked respondents why they returned their ballots in person and the majority of voters in all three states reported that they were more confident that their ballots would be counted when ballots were returned in person (Figure 20). The next most common reason was to make sure their ballot was received on time.



Conclusion

In the 2022 midterm election, millions of vote-by-mail voters tracked their ballot through the voting process using ballot tracking tools. Introduced to California, Colorado, and Georgia in 2020, the ballot tracking tool sends updates via email, text, or voice messages informing registrants when their vote-by-mail ballot has been mailed to them, when it has been received by their county elections office, and the status of their ballot as it is processed.

Ballot tracking use ranged across the three states examined, with participation being the highest in states with higher vote-by-mail ballot use. Nearly half of voters in Colorado, where over 95% of ballots cast were vote-by-mail ballots, were signed up for the tool, while over one-quarter of voters in California, 88% of whom used vote-by-mail ballots, were ballot tracking users. In comparison, Georgia had the lowest ballot tracking use rate among voters (9.1%) and the lowest vote-by-mail ballot use rate (6.2%). Among vote-by-mail voters, however, Georgia had a higher ballot tracking use rate than California.

Registered voter turnout rates among ballot tracking users of all racial, ethnic, and age groups examined were notably higher than among their counterparts not using the ballot tracking tool in the 2022 general election. Nearly 76% of ballot tracking users in California cast a ballot in the 2022 midterm election, more than fifty percent higher than the turnout seen among those not using the tool. Additionally, historical turnout gaps between voters of color and white, non-Latino voters were narrower among ballot tracking users compared to non-ballot tracking users. In Georgia, for example, there was a 1.4 percentage point turnout gap between Black and white, non-Latino ballot tracking users, yet an 8.1 percentage point turnout gap among their counterparts not signed up for the tool.

While vote-by-mail rejection rates could only be examined in California and Colorado, notable differences between BallotTrax and non-ballot tracking users were apparent. Voters not using the tool consistently had at least fifty percent higher vote-by-mail rejection rates compared to ballot tracking users. While rejection rates were 0.8% in both California and Colorado among those signed for the tool, non-ballot tracking users had rejection rates of 1.4% in California and 1.3% in Colorado. Among many voters of color, vote-by-mail rejection gaps with white, non-Latinos were narrower among ballot tracking users compared to non-ballot tracking users. Additionally, vote-by-mail rejection rates are often associated with age, resulting in younger voters having vote-by-mail rejection rates notably higher than older voters. While this trend continues regardless of BallotTrax use, the difference was narrower among ballot tracking users.

Vote-by-mail rejection reasons varied between BallotTrax and non-ballot tracking users. Signature discrepancies, or non-matching signatures, were notably higher among non-ballot tracking users compared to voters signed up for the tool. Instead, ballot tracking users had higher rates of ballots being rejected for being received late.

The multi-state survey revealed that awareness of the option to track ballots via BallotTrax was higher in states with higher ballot tracking use. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed in California and Colorado, the states with the highest ballot tracking use rates, were aware that they had the option to track their vote-by-mail ballot. In Georgia, a state where only 6.5% of registered voters were signed up to track their ballot at the time of the 2022 general election, just over one-third of respondents said they were aware of the tracking tool.

The survey showed that the most common reason voters said they signed up for BallotTrax was a desire for reassurance that their ballot was received and that their ballot would be counted. Among voters who were not signed up for the tracking tool, the most common response in California and Georgia was that they were not aware of the option, while respondents in Colorado, the state with the highest ballot tracking use rate, stated they trusted their ballot would be received and counted.

Ballot tracking has enabled millions of voters to track their vote-by-mail ballot throughout the entire voting process. In the 2022 midterm election, ballot tracking users voted in higher numbers than the general population and had lower vote-by-rejection rates than non-ballot tracking users. At the same time, a large proportion of eligible voters remain unaware of the availability of ballot tracking tools, with awareness lowest in Georgia, a state with low rates of vote-by-mail voters.

Many voters would benefit from greater outreach and education around tracking their vote-by-mail ballot. Voters' awareness of their options for ballot tracking could be increased through outreach programs, such as personalized postcards informing voters of their ballot tracking account and instructions on how and where to track their ballot. With voter outreach and education, ballot tracking tools could play a critical role in motivating electoral participation and decreasing ballot rejection rates.

Notes

1. For more information about voting by absentee ballot in Georgia, see <https://georgia.gov/vote-absentee-ballot>
2. For more information about states contracting with BallotTrax, see <https://ballottrax.com/>
3. For more information about voting by absentee ballot in Georgia, see <https://georgia.gov/vote-absentee-ballot>
4. For more information about states that send all registered voters a ballot in the mail, see <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-18-e%2BLatino%2C%2BBlack%2Band%2BAsian-American%2BVote%2B%281%29.pdf>
5. For more information about historically underrepresented groups in the voting electorate, see CID's <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57b8c7ce15d5dbf599fb46ab/t/65b84a94aa8f0b421c20f4c1/1706576540400/USC%2BCID%2BThe%2BNew%2BElectorate%2B-%2BThe%2BStren>