

Californians' Use of BallotTrax to Track Vote-By-Mail Ballots: Key Findings

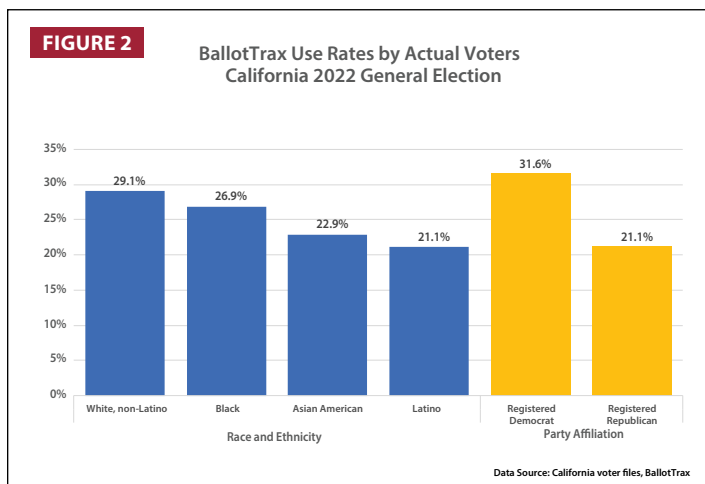
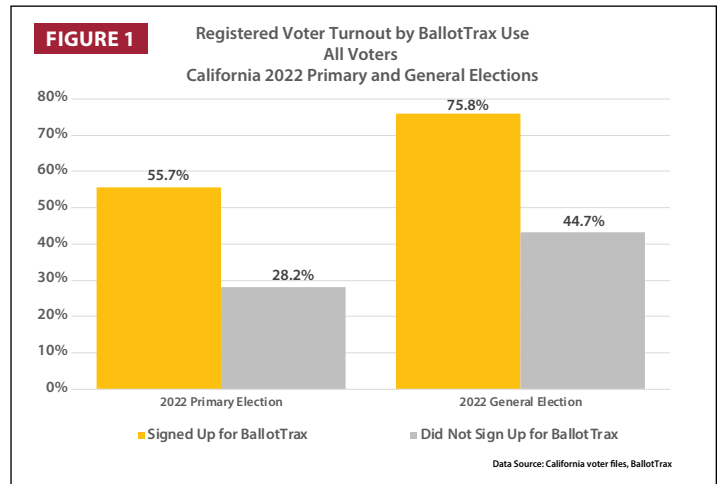
This research brief is a companion two-page summary of the USC Center for Inclusive Democracy Report titled, [“California’s Ballot Tracking Service: Who Is Using It and How Does It Impact Voter Confidence and Behavior?”](#) The report examines Californians’ knowledge and views of the BallotTrax tracking tool, as well as use of BallotTrax and voting behavior of BallotTrax users compared to non-users in the 2022 election cycle.

Voting by mail is by far the most common method of voting in California. Since 2020, voters across the state have had the option to track their vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot by signing up for the free BallotTrax tracking tool. BallotTrax sends updates by email, text, or voice message informing registrants when their VBM 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. Once a voter has signed up for BallotTrax, they receive notifications for all future elections unless they opt out. Since implementation in 2020, BallotTrax participation in California has remained relatively stable with around five million signed up. As of the day of the 2024 primary election, 4,776,411 registered voters were signed up to track their ballot. While millions of Californians are signed up for BallotTrax, its use is not evenly distributed across voter groups. A potentially under-appreciated benefit of BallotTrax is that voters are notified if a problem with their VBM ballot can be fixed in time for the ballot to be counted.

Who Uses BallotTrax?

Over three million Californians used BallotTrax in 2022.

About 30% of primary election voters and more than one quarter of general election voters used BallotTrax, representing more than three million people in each election. While nearly 60% of respondents in a 2023 statewide representative survey reported being aware of the option to track their vote-by-mail ballot with BallotTrax, a substantial proportion of eligible voters may not know about the tracking service. People more engaged with the voting process (i.e., more likely to cast a ballot) may also be more likely to hear about and sign up for BallotTrax. In the 2022 primary and general elections, registered voter

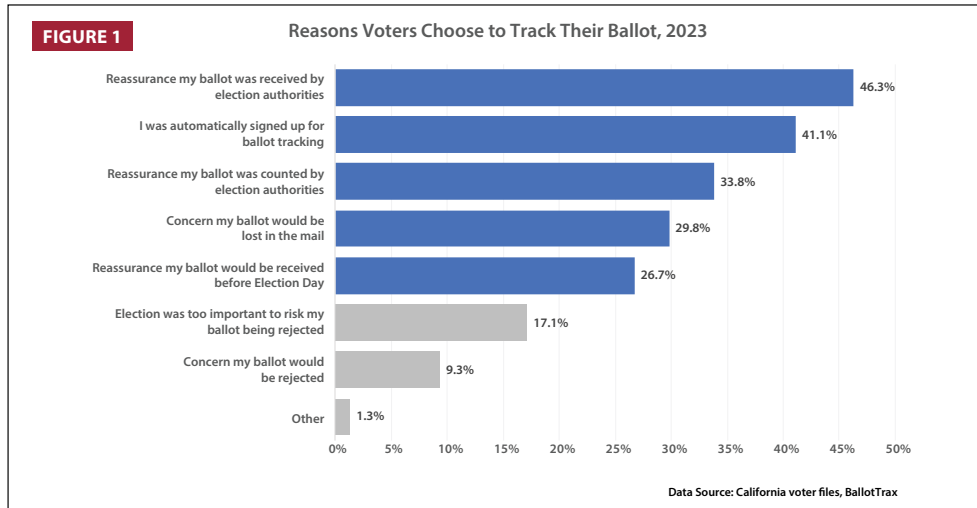


turnout among those who signed up for BallotTrax was far higher than among those who did not sign up (Figure 1).

Democrats, middle-aged voters, Black voters, and white, non-Latino voters were more likely than others to use BallotTrax. BallotTrax use in 2022 varied by race and ethnicity, party affiliation, and age. Specifically, white, non-Latino and Black voters used BallotTrax at higher rates than Latino or Asian-American voters (Figure 2). Registered Democratic voters used BallotTrax at much higher rates than registered Republicans. BallotTrax use by age group was highest among those aged 35 to 54 and lowest in the youngest group (aged 18-24, not shown). These trends were similar in the primary and general elections.

What Do Voters Look For—and Gain From—BallotTrax?

Voters most commonly looked to **BallotTrax for assurance that their ballot was received and counted**. On CID’s voter survey, respondents who reported signing up for **BallotTrax** were asked to select reasons they chose to track their vote-by-mail ballot. The most commonly selected reasons had to do with wanting to know that their ballot had been received or counted (Figure 3). Concerns about ballot rejection were less frequently selected. A large share of respondents said they were automatically signed up for the tool, despite there being no automatic sign-up option.



Respondents who were aware of **BallotTrax** but did not sign up for ballot notifications most often reported that they trusted that their vote-by-mail ballot would be received and counted without needing to track it. In addition, almost one third (29.8%) of those who had not signed up for **BallotTrax** said they were unaware that they could track their ballot.

Most **BallotTrax users whose ballot was initially rejected but fixable were able to correct it in time to be counted**. A small percentage of vote-by-mail ballots in every election are rejected for issues such as a signature discrepancy. **BallotTrax** notifies its users if there is a problem with their ballot and if it can be fixed (“curable”). A majority (62%) of **BallotTrax** users with rejected yet curable ballots in the general election corrected the issue and their vote was counted (Figure 4). Ballot cure rates varied by race and ethnicity as well as age. For instance, Asian-American **BallotTrax** users cured their rejected vote-by-mail ballots at higher rates than other voters of color, while Latino **BallotTrax** users had the lowest ballot cure rate. In addition, **BallotTrax** users aged 65 and over had a vote-by-mail cure rate around sixty percent higher than those aged 18 to 24. In both 2022 elections, **BallotTrax** users had lower vote-by-mail rejection rates than those who did not sign up for ballot tracking (Figure 5).

