

WHO VOTES EARLY IN CALIFORNIA?

An Examination of In-person Voters Casting a Ballot Before Election Day

RESEARCH BRIEF • DECEMBER 2025

Expanded voting options throughout California in recent years—with legislation such as the Voter’s Choice Act and universal vote-by-mail ballots—have greatly impacted the ways in which Californians vote and when they cast their ballot.

After a significant increase in vote-by-mail voting in the 2020 presidential election due to COVID-19 concerns (see page 11 for more information), the 2024 presidential election saw in-person voting increase by fifty percent from just four years earlier. While [vote-by-mail remains the most common form of voting](#) for Californians, the notable return to in-person voting in the recent election has raised questions about who is voting in person and when they cast their ballots.

In July 2025, the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) released a research report detailing voting methods used during recent presidential elections. **As a companion, this brief explores *who* voted in person early or on Election Day during recent General Elections (2022 and 2024) in California and when those ballots were cast.**

For a detailed discussion about the make-up of all in-person voters, early and Election Day combined, see the CID companion brief, [California’s 2024 General Election: An Examination of In Person Voters](#).

For an examination of early voting that includes vote-by-mail voters, see CID’s report [California’s 2024 General Election: Voting Methods and Early Voting](#).

Note: While early voting has been a vital option for Californians for many election cycles, this brief only examines early voting in the 2022 midterm election and the 2024 presidential election due to data limitations in voter files in earlier election years.

Voting Methods in California

California voters have multiple options when casting a ballot. As seen in Table 1, Californians can vote with a vote-by-mail ballot that can be returned in three ways:

1) to a drop box; 2) to a staffed polling place or vote center; or 3) through the mail (U.S. Postal Service). If voters don’t want to vote with a vote-by-mail ballot or are unable to because they need accessible voting options, can’t locate their ballot, didn’t receive one, or need to use the conditional voter registration process, they can vote in person at a vote center or polling place, depending on their county’s election model, and complete a ballot in person. **For the purpose of this brief, CID only examined voters who cast their ballot in person at a vote center or polling place.**

Table 1: Definition of Voting Methods in the 2024 Election Cycle	
Drop Box	A vote-by mail ballot that was returned to a drop box location (internally or externally placed).
Drop Off Location	A vote-by-mail ballot that was returned to a polling place or vote center.
Mail	A vote-by-mail ballot that was returned using the mail.
In-Person	A ballot that was cast in person at a polling place or vote center. Includes conditional voter registration and provisional ballots.

For an explanation of the Voter’s Choice Act, the methodology used in this brief and a discussion on the data limitations in identifying race and ethnicity, see the appendix on page 11.

Early In-Person Voting California

With the expansion of vote centers through the Voters Choice Act (see page 12 for more information), Californians are able to cast an in person ballot up to ten days prior to Election Day.¹ Vote Centers offer a variety of services, such as language assistance, accessible machines and same day voter registration options. Voters also have the option to return their vote-by-mail ballot to vote centers up to ten days prior to Election Day (see Table 1), although this brief only examines those who cast in-person ballots and does not include vote-by-mail ballots returned to staffed vote centers or polling places. Additionally, this brief examines early voting statewide and does not take delineate by individual counties' voting models (Voters Choice Act or Non-Voters Choice Act). Some counties have fewer options for early voting than others, while Voters Choice Act counties have consistent, expanded early voter options. For early voting use by voting model, see the appendix.

1 For more information about how vote centers differ from polling places, see <https://elections.saccounty.net/VoteCenters/Pages/What-is-a-Vote-Center.aspx>

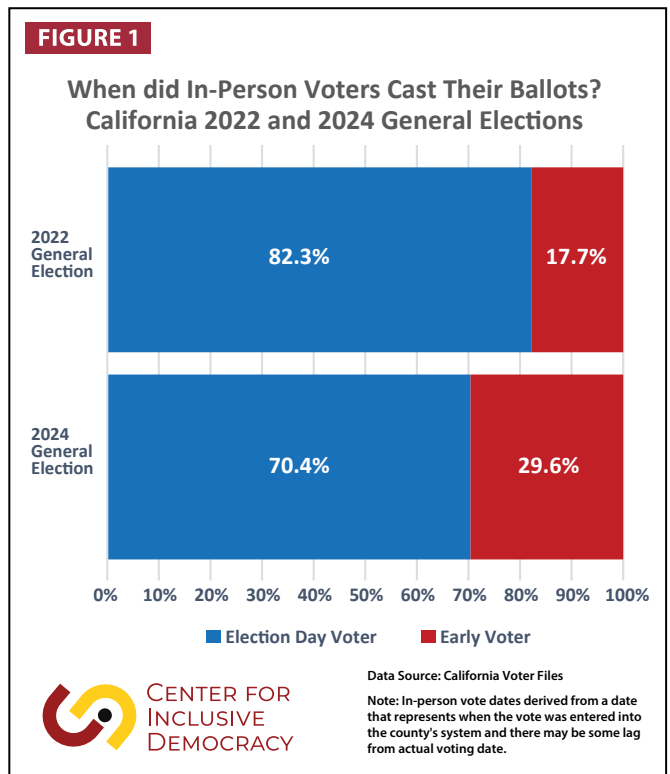
Early In-Person Voter	A registered voter who cast their ballot in person between <u>October 26, 2024</u> through <u>November 4, 2024</u>
Early In-Person Voter E-10 to E-4	A registered voter who cast their ballot in person between <u>October 26, 2024</u> through <u>November 1, 2024</u>
Early In-Person Voter E-3 to E-1	A registered voter who cast their ballot in person between <u>November 2, 2024</u> through <u>November 4, 2024</u>
Election Day In-Person Voter	A registered voter who cast their ballot on Election Day (<u>November 5, 2024</u>)

For the purpose of this brief, early voting is separated into two date ranges (Table 2). The following analysis only includes voters who cast their ballot in person at a polling place or vote center. An early voter is defined as a registered voter who cast a ballot before Election Day.

When Did In-Person Voters Cast Their Ballots in Recent General Elections?

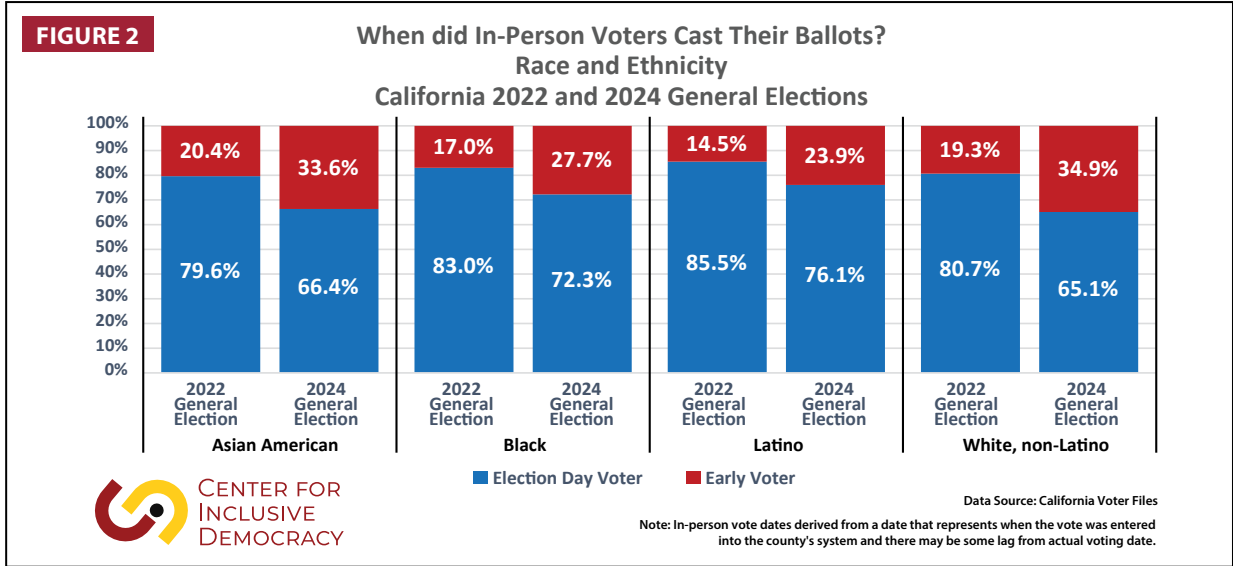
The share of in-person voters who cast their ballots early varied across election years, and across demographic groups. **Early voting rates were notably higher in the 2024 presidential election compared to the 2022 midterm election, particularly among Asian American, white, non-Latino and registered Republican in-person voters.** The following section examines the share of in-person voters by race, ethnicity, age group and party affiliation who cast their ballot early compared to the share of in-person voters who voted on Election Day in the 2022 midterm election and 2024 presidential election.

Early voting options were more widely used in the 2024 presidential election than in the 2022 midterm election. In the 2024 presidential election, 18.2% of all voters cast their ballot in person (*not shown, see companion brief*). Of those in-person voters, nearly 30% cast their ballot 1-10 days before Election Day (Figure 1). While early voting was used by many in-person voters (17.7%) in the 2022 midterm election, the share of all in-person voters who cast their ballot early was 12 percentage points lower than in the 2024 presidential election.



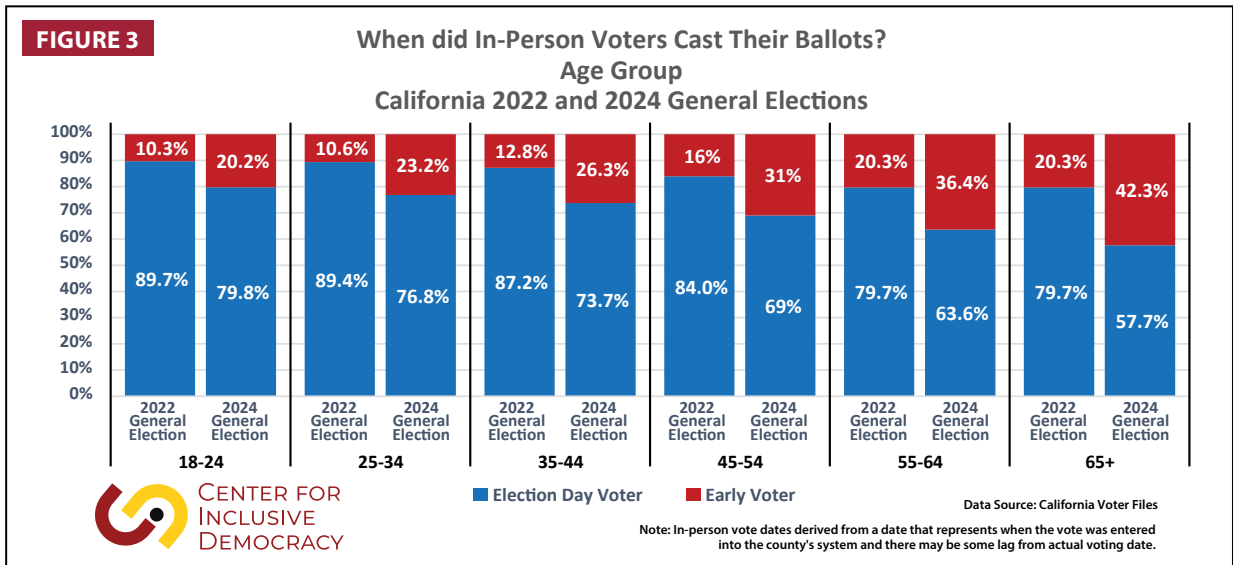
Asian American and white, non-Latino in-person voters had the largest growth in early voting between 2022 and 2024. Over 33% of Asian American in-person voters cast their ballot early in the 2024 presidential election, a thirteen percentage point increase from the 2022 midterm election (20.4%, Figure 2). Similarly, early voting increased by nearly sixteen percentage

points among white, non-Latino in-person voters between 2022 (19.3%) and 2024 (34.9%). Black and Latino in-person voters also had notable increase in early voting rates (10.7 ppt and 9.4 ppt, respectively), but the growth was not as large as other racial and ethnic groups.



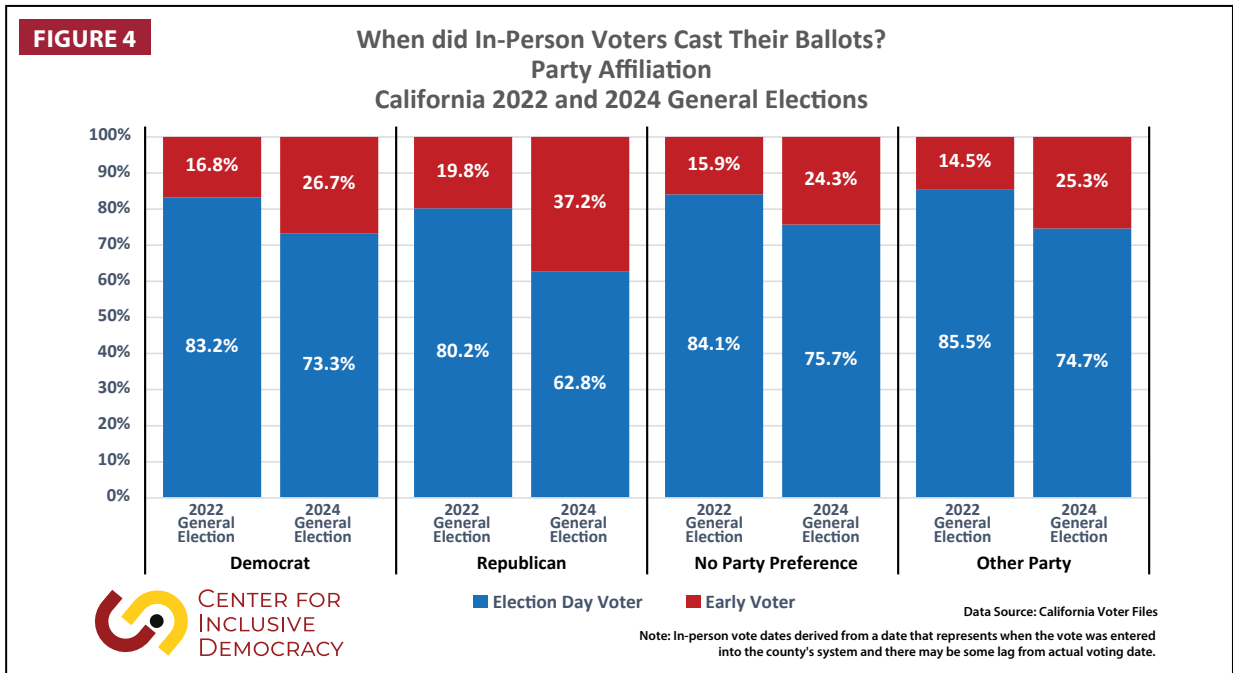
Early voting rates doubled for many age groups, with growth being the largest among the oldest Californians. Between 2022 and 2024, early voting rates among in-person voters aged 65 and older increased from 20.3% to 42.3% (22 ppt increase, Figure 3). Large growth was also seen among in-person voters aged 55 to 64 (16.1 ppt) and 45 to 54 (15 ppt).

Young in-person voters also saw notable increases in early voting rates between the 2022 midterm and 2024 presidential elections (9.9 ppt among 18 to 24 year olds and 12.5 ppt among 25 to 34 year olds), although it was notably smaller than their older counterparts.



Registered Republicans had nearly the twice the growth in early voting rates between 2022 and 2024 compared to registered Democrats. While registered Democrats and registered Republicans had similar early voting rates in the 2022 midterm election (16.8% and 19.8%, respectively), early voting was more than ten percentage points higher among registered Republicans (37.2%) than registered Democrats (26.7%) in the 2024 presidential midterm (Figure 4).

This growth came after the Republican party launched efforts to encourage [early voting](#) after years of discouraging it. Additionally, in-person voters who registered as having no party preference (NPP) had slightly lower early voting rates (15.9%) than their registered Democratic and Republican counterparts in the 2022 midterm election, which rose by more than eight percentage points in the 2024 presidential election to 24.3%.

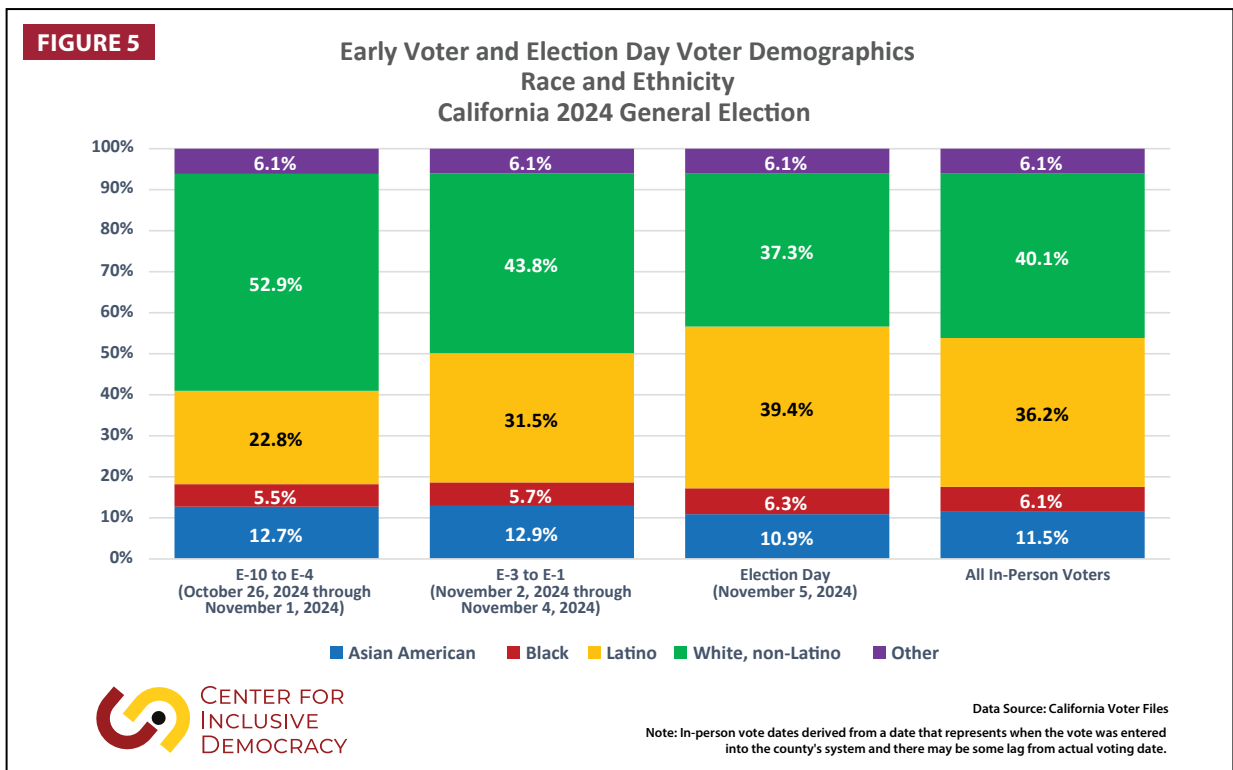


What Were the Demographics of Early and Election Day In-Person Voters in the 2024 General Election?

The demographic makeup of early voters in the 2024 general election did not match the demographic makeup of all in-person voters. **Early in-person voters were older and more likely to be registered Republican than all in-person voters, while Black, Latino and young in-person voters were underrepresented among those who cast their ballot before Election Day.** The following section examines the demographics of early voters and how they differ from Election Day voters and in-person voters as a whole.

Black and Latino in-person voters were underrepresented among early voters compared to their share of all in-person voters. Latinos represented more than 36% of all in-person voters in the 2024

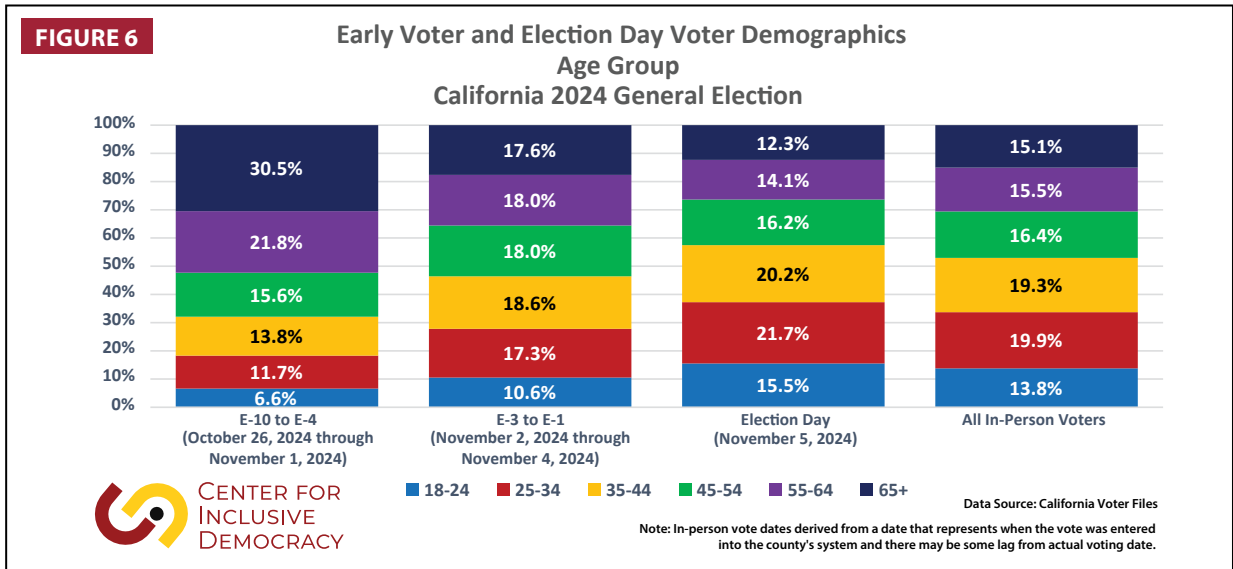
general election, but just 22.8% of those who cast their ballot 4-10 days (E-10 to E-4) before Election Day and 31.5% of those who cast their ballot 1-3 days (E-3 to E-1) before Election Day (Figure 5). Similarly, 6.1% of all in-person voters were Black, slightly higher than their share of those who voted 4-10 days (E-10 to E-4, 5.5%) and 1-3 days (E-3 to E-1, 5.7%) before Election Day. White, non-Latinos were overrepresented among early voters, representing over half of those who voted 4-10 days before Election Day (E-10 to E-4) and nearly 44% of those who voted 1-3 days before Election Day (E-3 to E-1) compared to representing 40.1% of all in-person voters. Asian Americans were also overrepresented among voters who voted 4-10 days (E-10 to E-4, 12.7%) and 1-3 days (E-3 to E-1, 12.9%) before Election Day compared to their share of all in-person voters (11.5%).



Note: For an exploration of the demographics of in-person voters compared to the demographics of all Californians who cast a ballot in the 2024 general election, see CID's brief [California's 2024 General Election: An Examination of In Person Voters](#).

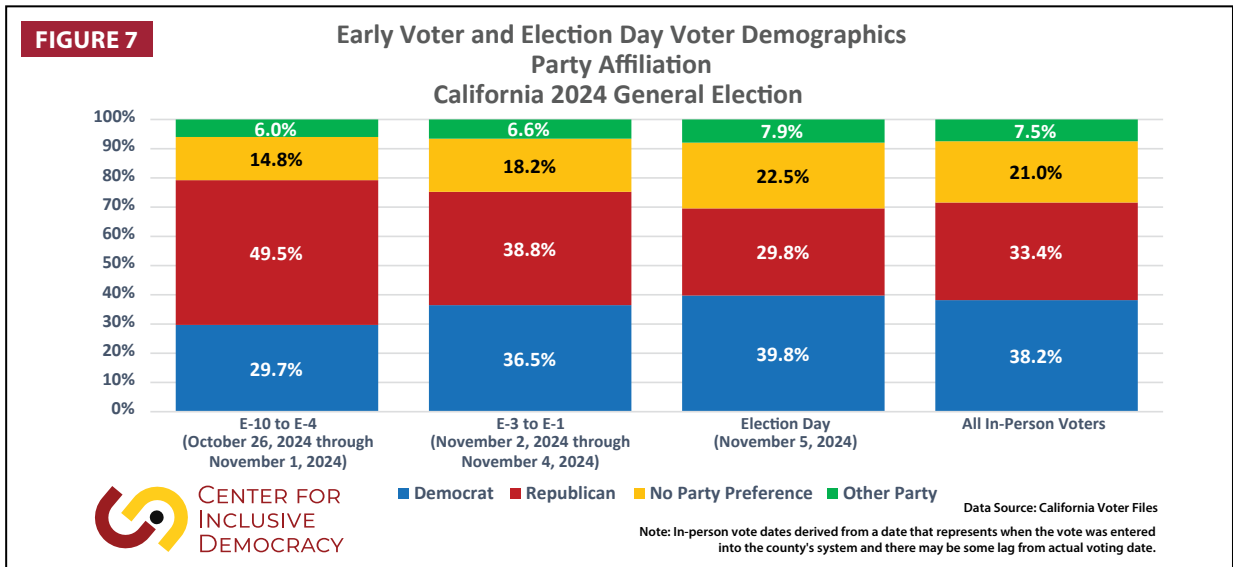
Early in-person voters in the 2024 general election were older than all in-person voters, while Election Day voters were younger. In-person voters aged 65 and older represented twice the share of early voters who voted 4-10 days before Election Day (30.5%) than their share of all in-person voters (15.1%, Figure 6). Voters aged 55 to 64 were also overrepresented among those voting 4-10 days early (21.8%) compared to their share of all in-person voters (15.5%). In contrast, in-person voters under the age of 45 were

notably underrepresented among in-person voters who cast their ballot 4-10 days before Election Day. Voters aged 18 to 24, for example, represented half the share of early voters who voted ten to four days before Election Day than their share of all in-person voters (6.6% versus 13.8%, respectively). Similar trends were seen among early voters who voted three to one days before Election Day, although the over- and underrepresentation were not as stark.



Registered Republicans were overrepresented among early in-person voters. Nearly half of early voters who cast their ballot 4-10 days before Election Day were registered Republicans, 16 percentage points higher than their share of all in-person voters (Figure 7). Registered Republicans were also overrepresented

among early voters who cast their ballot 1-3 days before Election Day (38.8%). Nearly 40% of Election Day in-person voters were registered Democrats, slightly higher than their share of all in-person voters.

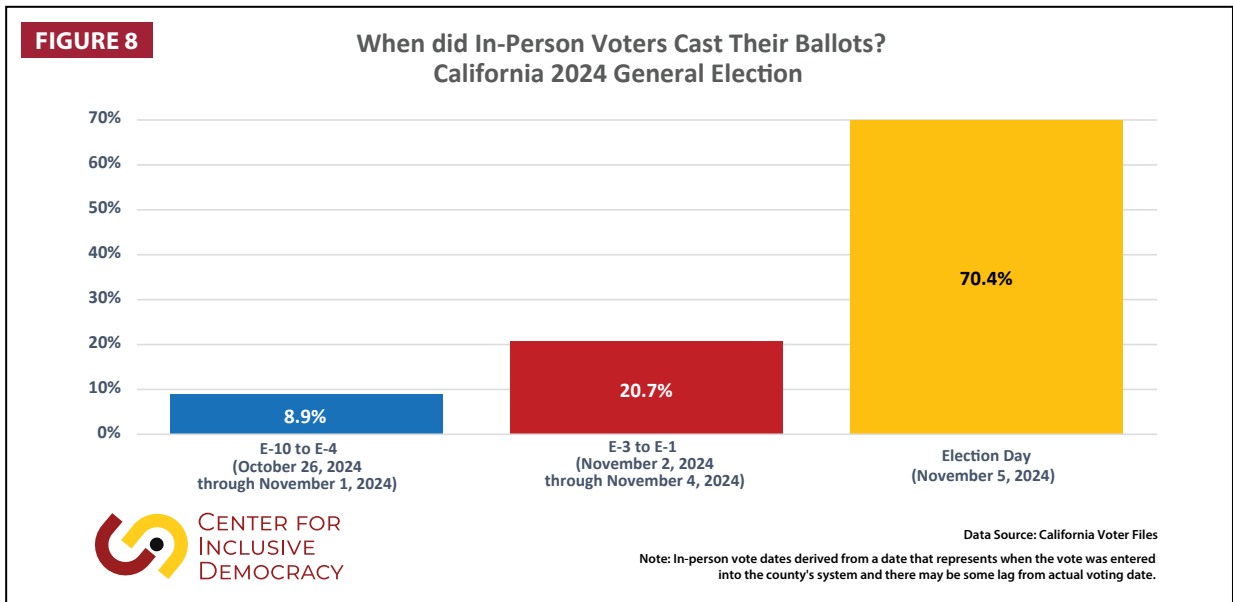


When Did Early Voters Cast Their Ballot in the 2024 General Election?

With most Californians having access to in-person voting options for the ten days leading up to Election Day, many policymakers, advocates and researchers want to know when during the early voting period that voters cast their ballot. To address this question, this analysis breaks out the number of ballots cast in the first seven days of the 10-day early voting period versus the last three days. **While early voting was most common in the three days leading up to Election Day, Asian American, white, non-Latino, registered Republican, and older early in-person voters cast their ballots 4-10 days before Election**

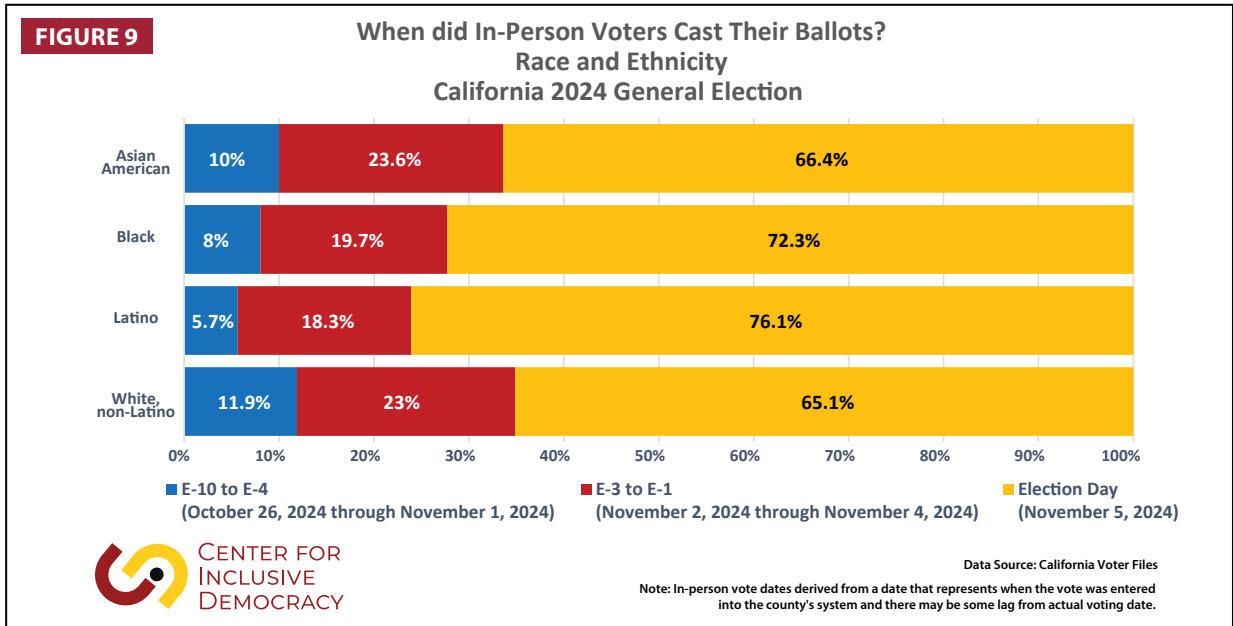
Day at higher rates than the general population. The following section examines when early voters voted in the 2024 general election, and how it varied across race, ethnicity, age group and party affiliation.

Early voting was most common in the three days leading up to Election Day in the 2024 general election. Nearly 21% of in-person voters cast their ballot 1-3 days before Election Day, more than twice the share who voted 4-10 days leading up to November 5 (8.9%, Figure 8). Even though nearly 30% of in-person voters cast their ballot early, the majority of those voting in person did so on Election Day.



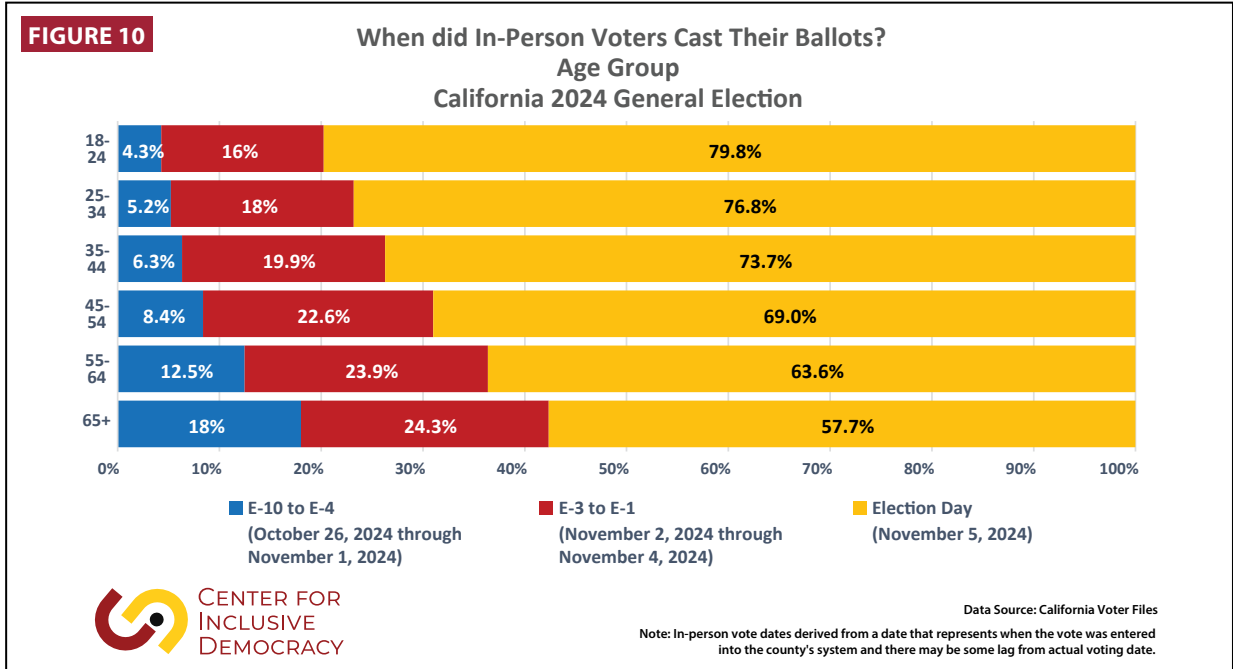
Asian American and white, non-Latino voters utilized early voting at higher rates than Black and Latino voters, regardless of when they cast their ballot before Election Day. Just under 12% of white, non-Latino in-person voters and 10.0% of Asian American in-person voters cast their ballot ten to four days before November 5, compared to 8.0% of Black and 5.7% of Latino in-person voters (Figure 9). Similar trends are seen in the three days leading up to

Election Day, with 23.6% of Asian American and 23.0% of white, non-Latino in-person casting their ballots early, compared to 19.7% of Black and 18.3% of Latino in-person voters. Instead, Black and Latino in-person voters voted on Election Day (72.3% and 76.1%, respectively) at higher rates than their Asian American and white, non-Latino counterparts (66.4% and 65.1%, respectively).



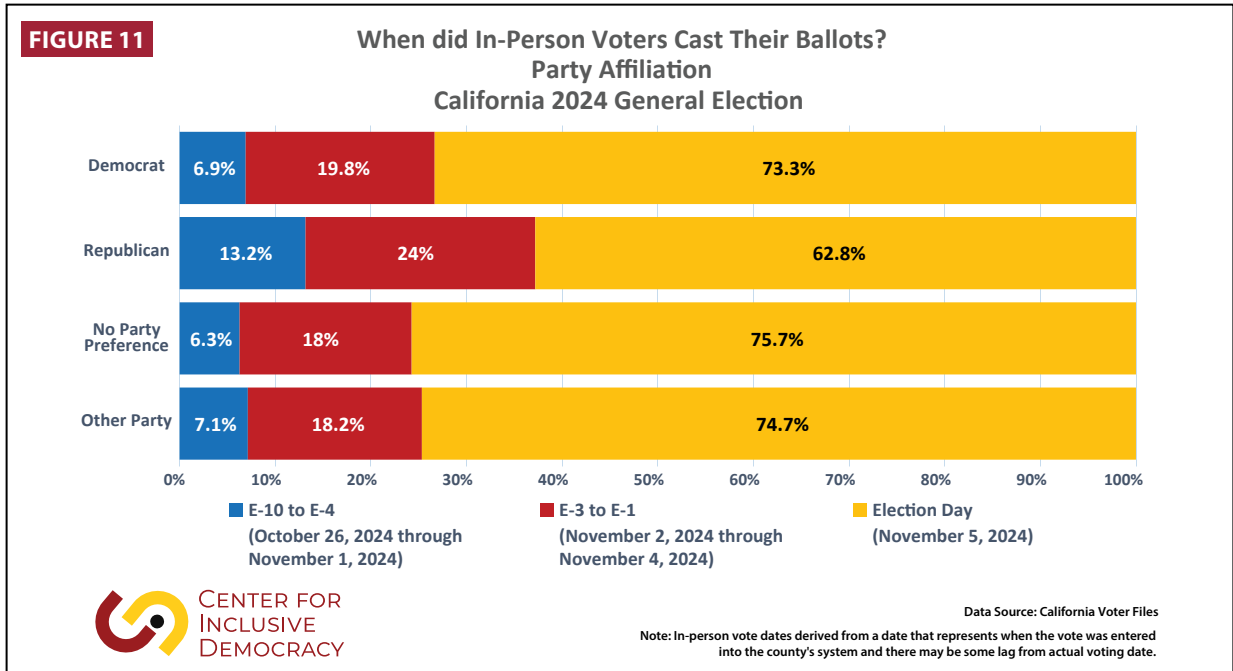
The oldest in-person voters cast their ballot 4-10 days before Election Day at more than four times the rate of the youngest in-person voters. Approximately 18% of in-person voters aged 65 and older voted between October 26 and November 1 in the 2024 general election, compared to just 4.3% of those aged 18 to 24 (Figure 10). In-person voters aged 55 to 64 also

cast their ballot 4-10 days before Election Day (12.5%) at higher rates compared to other age groups. Early voting in the three days leading up to Election Day, however, remained the most common timeframe in which all age groups cast their ballots early.



Registered Republican in-person voters cast their ballot in the earlier days before Election Day at notably higher rates than registered Democrats. High shares of registered Republican in-person voters cast their ballots early, with 13.2% of them voting 4-10 days before Election Day (Figure 11). In comparison, 6.9% of registered Democratic in-person voters

cast their ballots during the same timeframe. While early voting was more common among registered Republicans than registered Democrats, large shares of both party affiliations cast their ballot in the three days leading up to November 5 (24% and 19.8%, respectively).



Conclusion

Early voting continues to be an important option for Californians, with nearly 30% of in-person voters in the 2024 presidential election casting their ballot before Election Day. While large numbers of voters cast their ballot early, early voters did not fully represent in-person voters as a whole. Early voters were older and more likely to be registered Republican compared to all in-person voters, while historically underrepresented groups, such as Black, Latino, and young voters represented smaller shares of early voters than their share of all voters. Past research has shown there is a continued disparity in

awareness as to where and when ballots can be cast, with historically underrepresented Californians having lower awareness about voting options compared to the general population.² Continued and expanded education and outreach surrounding early voting options throughout the state could help decrease the knowledge disparity and the representation gap in future elections.

2 For more information on voters knowledge about voting options, see <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57b8c7ce15d5dbf599fb46ab/t/61920a425974697567451ab7/1636960840042/USC%2BCID%2B2020%2BGENERAL%2BELECTION%2BRESEARCH%2BREPORT%2B8-27-21%2BWEBSITE%2BRELEASE.pdf>

Appendix

Methodology

The principal data source for this analysis was the California voter file provided by the California Secretary of State. The voter file provided an individual registrant's date of birth (used to identify age), party affiliation, voting activity, voting method and gender. Race and ethnicity data were not available for the majority of voters in these files. Registered voters in California have the option to self-report their gender, race and ethnicity on the voter registration application, but only a small percentage of registrants typically do so. For this brief, we identified registrants' race and ethnicity in county voter files with the R package Who Are You (WRU), which computes the probability of each racial category for registrants using surname, neighborhood demographics (geocoding with census tract data) and other characteristics, such as gender, party and age.³ Geographical data used in the process to identify registrants' race and ethnicity was provided by Political Data, Inc.

Due to data limitations, the exact day on which Californians cast their in-person ballot is not available. Instead, in-person vote dates were derived from a date that represents when the vote was entered into the county's system. For this reason, there may be some lag from actual voting dates.

Identifying Race and Ethnicity of Registrants. The voter files used in this analysis were provided by the California Secretary of State. Registered voters in California have the option to self-report their gender, race, and ethnicity on the voter registration application, but not many registrants have typically done so. Current research methods in election science used to identify the race and ethnicity of voters in official voter files 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),

which computes the probability of each racial category for registrants using surname, neighborhood demographics (geocoding with census tract data) and other characteristics, such as gender, party and age. For this research brief, analysis of the voter file by race and ethnicity is limited to Latino, Asian American, Black and white, non-Latino registrants because imputation for other racial and ethnic groups can have a high degree of inaccuracy. However, some error in measurement is present for these groups, particularly for Black and white registrants, and caution is appropriate when interpreting small effects. Data presented in this research brief for the category of white registrants consists of data for all white, non-Latino registrants, non-Black and non-Asian-American registrants combined. The analysis in this report focuses on the party registration by Californians across these four racial and ethnic groups, age groups and party affiliations. Due to voter file data limitations, we are unable to examine voting methods specific to Californians who are limited English proficient or Californians with disabilities.

Vote-by-Mail Legislation

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the California legislature passed bills directing changes to how the 2020 general election was administered in order to ensure a safe and accessible election. Among various bills, Assembly Bill 860 made significant changes to vote-by-mail (VBM) access by requiring that county election offices mail all registered voters a VBM ballot in the 2020 general election.⁴ In fall 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 37, which made this vote-by-mail option permanent.⁵ In late 2023, the California legislature passed Assembly Bill 626 expanding voting options for vote-by-mail ballot users. Assembly Bill 626 allows voters to return their VBM ballots to their local in-person voting center or polling place without requiring them to place the ballot in

4 For more information on AB 860, see https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB860

5 For more information on AB 37, see https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB37

3 Imai, K., & Khanna, K. (2016). Improving ecological inference by predicting individual ethnicity from voter registration records. *Political Analysis*, 24(2), 263-272. See: <https://imai.fas.harvard.edu/research/files/race.pdf>

the identification envelope required when a ballot is returned to a drop box or through the mail.⁶ Instead of using the signed identification envelope, AB626 allows the voter to go through the usual in person voting process of identification by providing their name, address and signature. After confirming the voter has not already voted in the election, the VBM ballot goes through the counting process that in-ballots go through, ideally speeding up the counting process. While these ballots are processed like in person ballots, they are counted as vote-by-mail ballots as the voting method.

Voter’s Choice Act

In 2016, Governor Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 450, which allows California counties to choose to adopt a voting system known as the Voter’s Choice Act (VCA).⁷ The voting model replaces neighborhood

6 For more information on AB 626, see <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB626/id/2845259>

7 For more information on the California Voter’s Choice Act, see: http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450

polling places with multi-service vote centers available up to 10 days before Election Day. VCA counties send vote-by-mail ballots to all registered voters who can return them by mail, at a vote center or at a secure ballot drop box. Voters may also vote in person by completing a ballot at a vote center. Since the passage of the Voter’s Choice Act, 29 counties have adopted this election model. Five counties (Sacramento, San Mateo, Madera, Napa, and Nevada) first adopted it in the 2018 election cycle. Another 15 counties (Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Tuolumne) adopted the election model in the 2020 election cycle. In the 2022 election cycle, an additional 12 counties adopted the VCA election model, including Alameda, King, Marin, Merced, Riverside, San Benito, San Diego, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Ventura and Yolo. Lastly, in the 2024 election cycle, Humboldt and Placer Counties adopted the VCA election model. Currently, nearly three quarters (77%) of all registered voters in California are in a VCA participating county.

Table 3: When did In-Person Voters Cast Their Ballots? County Type California 2022 and 2024 General Elections		
	Election Day Voters	Early Voters
Voters Choice Act Counties	64.3%	35.7%
Non-Voters Choice Act Counties	98.2%	1.8%
Statewide	70.4%	29.6%

Data Source: California Voter Files

Note: In-person vote dates derived from a date that represents when the vote was entered into the county’s system and there may be some lag from actual voting date.

Table 4: When did In-Person Voters Cast Their Ballots? Race, Ethnicity and County Type California 2022 and 2024 General Elections						
		Asian American	Black	Latino	White, non-Latino	Other
Voters Choice Act Counties	Election Day Voters	61.7%	66.2%	71.0%	57.7%	63.2%
	Early Voters	38.3%	33.8%	29.0%	42.3%	36.8%
Non-Voters Choice Act Counties	Election Day Voters	97.1%	98.0%	98.8%	97.9%	98.0%
	Early Voters	2.9%	2.0%	1.2%	2.1%	2.0%
Statewide	Election Day Voters	66.4%	72.3%	76.1%	65.1%	69.9%
	Early Voters	33.6%	27.7%	23.9%	34.9%	30.1%

Data Source: California Voter Files

Note: In-person vote dates derived from a date that represents when the vote was entered into the county's system and there may be some lag from actual voting date.

Table 5: When did In-Person Voters Cast Their Ballots? Age Group and County Type California 2022 and 2024 General Elections							
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Voters Choice Act Counties	Election Day Voters	75.4%	72.1%	67.9%	62.7%	56.5%	49.1%
	Early Voters	24.6%	27.9%	32.1%	37.3%	43.5%	50.9%
Non-Voters Choice Act Counties	Election Day Voters	98.4%	98.4%	98.4%	98.0%	97.8%	97.8%
	Early Voters	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	2.0%	2.2%	2.2%
Statewide	Election Day Voters	79.8%	76.8%	73.7%	69.0%	63.6%	57.7%
	Early Voters	20.2%	23.2%	26.3%	31.0%	36.4%	42.3%

Data Source: California Voter Files

Note: In-person vote dates derived from a date that represents when the vote was entered into the county's system and there may be some lag from actual voting date.

Table 6: When did In-Person Voters Cast Their Ballots? Party Affiliation and County Type California 2022 and 2024 General Elections					
		Democrat	Republican	No Party Preference	Other Party
Voters Choice Act Counties	Election Day Voters	68.1%	54.6%	71.0%	68.9%
	Early Voters	31.9%	45.4%	29.0%	31.1%
Non-Voters Choice Act Counties	Election Day Voters	98.2%	97.9%	98.4%	98.3%
	Early Voters	1.8%	2.1%	1.6%	1.7%
Statewide	Election Day Voters	73.3%	76.8%	75.7%	74.7%
	Early Voters	26.7%	37.2%	24.3%	25.3%

Data Source: California Voter Files

Note: In-person vote dates derived from a date that represents when the vote was entered into the county's system and there may be some lag from actual voting date.