FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New USC Research Explores Voting Methods and Preferences in California as November 2024 Election Nears

Center for Inclusive Democracy Study finds 87.8% of California voters used vote-by-mail ballots in 2022 general election, yet nearly 46% state preference for voting in-person in future elections

Los Angeles, June 11, 2024 – California voters overwhelmingly used a Vote-by-Mail (VBM) ballot to cast their vote during the 2022 general election, according to a new study from the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) at the USC Price School of Public Policy. Yet in a companion survey, CID found that California eligible voters appear equally split on their stated preference for voting in-person (45.6%) or by mail-in ballot (41.8%) when it comes to future elections, with higher shares of Latino, Black and young eligible voters aged 18-24 preferring an in-person voting experience, whether early or on election day.

“In 2020, Californians significantly changed the way in which they cast a ballot due to the pandemic, and that’s a trend that continued into the 2022 election cycle,” said Mindy Romero, CID director and assistant professor at USC Price. “Yet many of those surveyed told us that the in-person experience is still of interest to them. While we don’t know how many of these Californians will ultimately vote in-person this November, the findings underscore the importance of providing accessible and convenient in-person options for voters in the upcoming election.”

The new “Voting Methods in California: Disparate Use and Rejection Rates” study found that during the 2022 general election, 87.8% (9.6 million) of California voters used VBM ballots, almost the exact same proportion as in the 2020 general election, when VBM ballots were automatically mailed to all voters statewide for the first time because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 30% of voters submitted their VBM ballot via a drop box, with about 40% submitting them by mail. Nearly 17% of voters submitted their VBM ballot at a vote location drop-off site.

In-person voting at either a vote center or polling place was 12.2% (1.3 million) of all voters in the 2022 general election. When compared to the general voting population, in-person voting was higher for Latino voters (15.3%) and youth voters (14.8%). Republicans also voted in person at a higher rate (17.2%) than both Democrats (9.0%) and No Party Preference voters (12.0%).
Out of nearly 10 million VBM ballots cast statewide in the 2022 general election, 120,935 (1.2%) were rejected, up from 0.5% in 2020. A large portion of rejections (48.7%) were attributed to signature issues, such as non-matching signatures or lack of a signature on the submitted VBM ballot envelope. More than 47% were rejected for being received late, up considerably from 16.1% of rejected ballots in the 2020 general election.

Voters of color had higher ballot rejection rates, with 1.8% for Latinos, 1.4% for Blacks and 1.4% for AAPI voters. Young voters aged 18-24 had by far the highest vote-by-mail rejection rate at 4.3%. Republican voters (1.0%) had the lowest vote-by-mail rejection rates across all party affiliations.

The survey also found that only 28% of eligible voters knew that a VBM ballot could be counted if it arrived after election day with a postmark indicating it was sent on or before the deadline date. Black and Latino eligible voters were less likely than white, non-Latino and AAPI eligible voters to know when a VBM ballot needed to be received in order to be counted. Only 16.9% of eligible voters aged 18 to 24 knew the receipt deadline.

Find both the study and companion survey here.

Using official voter files from the California Secretary of State’s office, the CID study builds on the state’s previously issued official voting methods report by diving deeper into voting methods by race, ethnicity, age and party affiliation. For the companion survey examining Californians’ reasons and preferences for voting methods, CID surveyed 11,827 eligible voters (adult citizens) in the state of California. The survey was fielded between January 10 and February 7, 2024, and conducted online in both English and Spanish.

This research was supported through funding from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

For reference, also see CID’s recently published study on the use of BallotTrax by California voters, as well as CID’s report on voter messaging and knowledge that forecasts low overall voter turnout in California for the November 2024 election.

**Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID)**
The Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy. CID’s mission is to improve the social and economic quality of life in U.S. communities by producing non-partisan 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.

**USC Sol Price School of Public Policy**
For more than 90 years, the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy has sought to improve the quality of life for people and communities through path-breaking research and scholarship.

# # #