

The Voters Choice Act: Impact Analysis and Recommendations

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Report examines the impact of the VCA on voter participation gaps and accessibility of the election process.

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- Lori Shellenberger – Report author
- Report funded by the Haas Jr. Fund

Methodologies

- Content Analysis
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Voter File Quantitative Analysis

Talk Summary

- Overall VCA Successes and Challenges
- VCA Impact on Eligible Voter Turnout and Voting Method
- The VCA and Voter Outreach and Education

VCA Advantages

- Strong infrastructure and mechanisms for public engagement and accountability.
- Flexibility in voting – including early voting option, especially for wage earners.
- Elections officials report more public input is helpful, and organizations report that input, when solicited and provided, is generally incorporated into EAPs.
- Vote centers are easier to staff, and fewer problems reported at vote centers during the weekend before on Election Day.

VCA Challenges

- Dramatic voter participation gaps persist across VCA and non-VCA counties – the VCA infrastructure still hasn't been fully utilized to know if the VCA infrastructure could be utilized to help close those gaps.
- Stakeholder surveys and interviews revealed that the mechanisms for public engagement and accountability are being under utilized.
- Counties – especially more recent VCA adopters – are not as engaged with organizations that work with marginalized voters.

VCA Challenges

- There is a lack of public awareness of EAPs and a lack of clarity and transparency on how outreach dollars are being spent.
- Lack of statewide leadership and holding counties accountable was consistently cited as a problem, especially since the VCA Taskforce lapsed.
- Lack of accountability for county voter outreach plans and spending – and how counties are reaching marginalized voters

VCA Challenges

- Vote center use rates and rejection rates continued to vary by race, ethnicity, age, voter frequency, county, and other sub groups.
- About half of the VCA counties are not using the siting criteria required by the Voter's Choice Act
- State law language access requirements don't work under the VCA.

VCA Impact on Eligible Voter Turnout

- Eligible voter turnout is only slightly higher in VCA versus non-VCA counties.
- Participation gaps persist across VCA and non-VCA counties: from 2020 to 2022, white turnout dropped 21 points, but Latino turnout dropped 38 points, Asian American turnout dropped 34 points, and Black turnout was down 29 points.

VCA Impact on Voting Method

- In-person voting is still a critical option:
 - Statewide – 12% of all voters voted in person
 - Higher for Latinos, youth and new voters
 - Numbers are higher in LA County - nearly 20% of voters in L.A. voted in person, and 23% of Latinos in L.A. voted in person
- In-person ballot drop off at a voting location is widely used: Statewide – 17% of all voters voted by drop off.
- 19.5% of Latino and 18.3% of Black voters dropped ballots at cation instead of a drop box.

Voter Outreach and Education

- Both elections officials and voter engagement orgs identified lack of funding for outreach and education as a significant barrier.
- Voter engagement orgs expressed frustrations that EAPs lack specificity on outreach strategies to reach the most marginalized voters.
- When surveyed about how they target outreach to marginalized voters, elections officials largely reported using the same outreach strategies used for the general population.
- A majority of voter engagement orgs reported they did not do VCA-specific outreach – instead, emphasis is on importance of voting, what is on the ballot, and how to cast a ballot regardless of VCA or non-VCA county.

Voter Outreach and Education

Voter org interviews, surveys, and a recent voter poll reveal significant challenges that need to be tackled:

- Lack of civic education and understanding what and who is on CA's daunting ballots and how it impacts community
- Widespread distrust of elections and political institutions
- Accessibility of information and voting materials in languages of origin
- Inadequacies of traditional voter outreach methods

3 Areas of Recommendations

- 1) Stronger Statewide Leadership and State Funding for Voter Outreach
- 2) Greater County Election Official Engagement with Voter Engagement Organizations
- 3) Deeper Philanthropic Investments in Voter Outreach and Education

Recommendation Area One:

Stronger Statewide Leadership and State Funding for Voter Outreach

Steps the Secretary of State Can Take Now

- Reconvene the VCA Taskforce.
- Sound the alarm on participation gaps and lead the push for more voter education and outreach funding.
- Work w/ and convene a wide array of data experts and CBOs to identify, research, and develop solutions to voter file race and ethnicity data challenges and establish minimum standards for uniformity.
- Publish the required VCA reports 6 months after elections.

Steps the Secretary of State Can Take Now

SB 450 Text:

- This bill would also require the Secretary of State to establish a taskforce that includes certain individuals to review all-mailed ballot elections conducted pursuant to these provisions and to provide comments and recommendations to the Legislature within 6 months of each all-mailed ballot election or vote center election.
- Required set of representatives

Steps the Legislature Can Take Now

- Hold a joint elections committee informational hearing on voter participation gaps to explore concrete solutions leading into the 2024 elections.
- Renew the requirement that the Secretary of State convene a VCA Taskforce.
- Push for increased elections funding in the Governor's budget and establish metrics to ensure funds are directed toward closing participation gaps for marginalized voters.

Steps Statewide Organizations Can Take Now

- Participate in a VCA Taskforce.
- Participate in the state LAAC and VAAC.
- Share county EAPs and county outreach plans with local and regional partners.
- Share VCA studies, toolkits, CID siting tool, and other VCA resources.
- Support efforts to secure more state and local funding for voter outreach.

Recommendation Area Two:

Greater County Election Official Engagement with Voter Engagement Organizations

Steps County Elections Officials Can Take Now

- Build authentic and enduring relationships with voter engagement orgs working in marginalized communities.
- Host an election debrief workshop after each election.
- Go above the minimum requirement for vote centers and drop boxes.
- Complete and post the required 2022 VCA election cost analysis.
- Request additional outreach dollars from Boards of Supervisors.

Steps County Elections Officials Can Take Now

- Seek additional input from voter engagement experts on voter outreach strategies.
- Solicit ongoing community input on vote center and drop box siting.
- Increase in-language voter outreach to new and infrequent voters.

Recommendation Area Three:

Deeper Philanthropic Investments in Voter Outreach and Education

Steps Philanthropy Can Take Now

- Fund research on voter trust and attitudes toward voting.
- Invest in voter outreach programs that target marginalized voters.
- Continue to support statewide and regional organizations monitoring VCA implementation.

Questions?

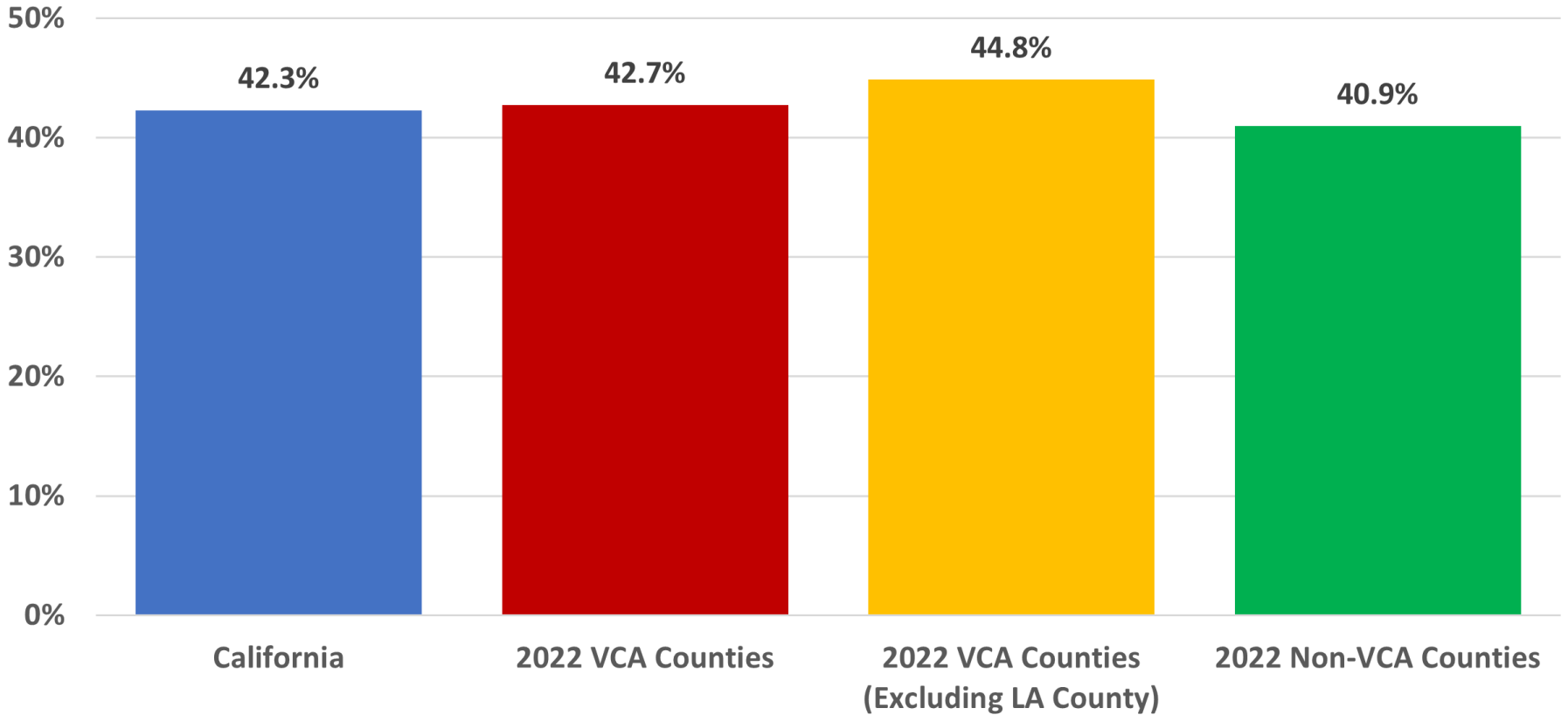
Thank you!

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Eligible Voter Turnout

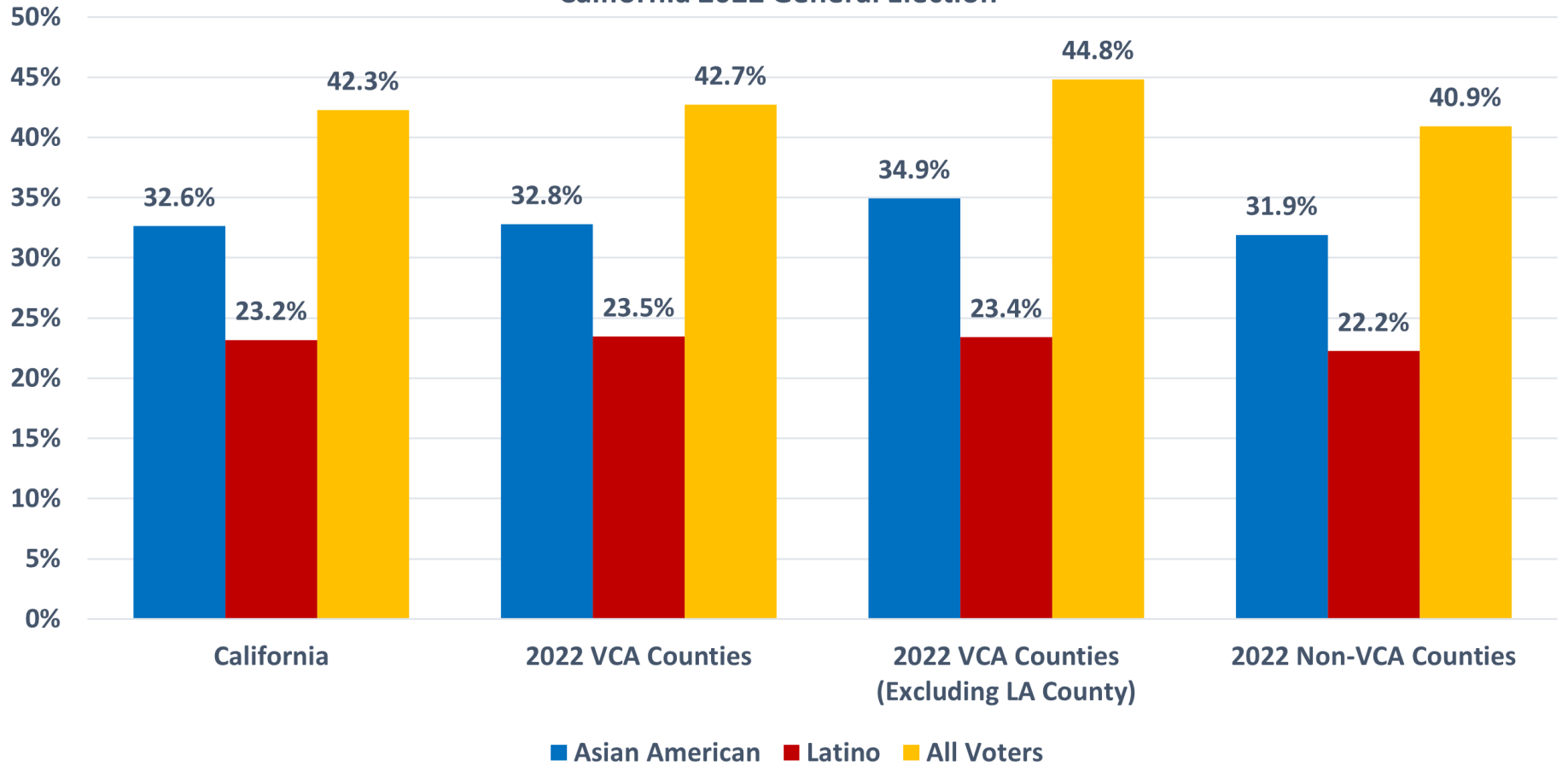
Data Sources: California Secretary of State, California Department of Finance

Eligible Voter Turnout All Voters California 2022 General Election



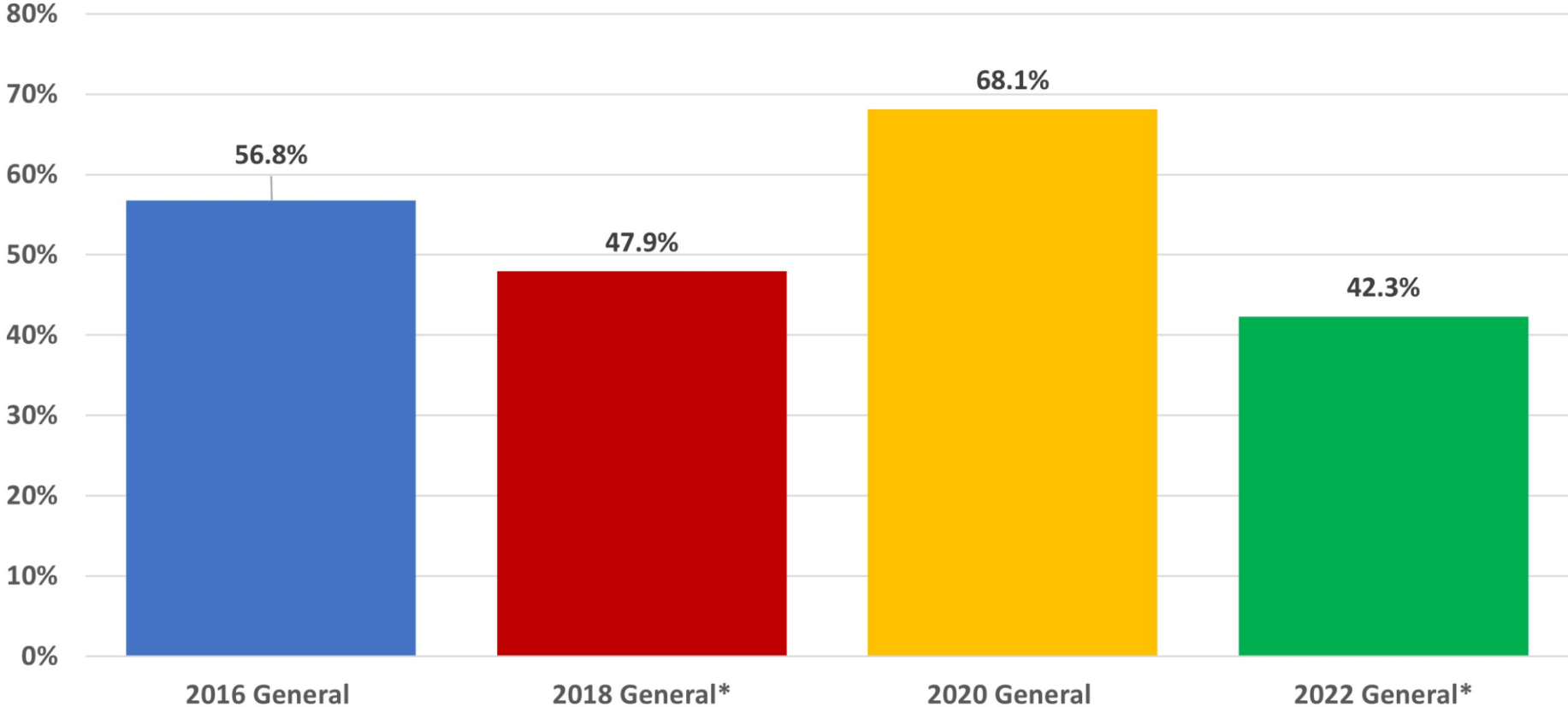
Data Source: County Voter Files. California Department of Finance

Eligible Voter Turnout Race and Ethnicity California 2022 General Election



Data Source: County Voter Files, California Department of Finance

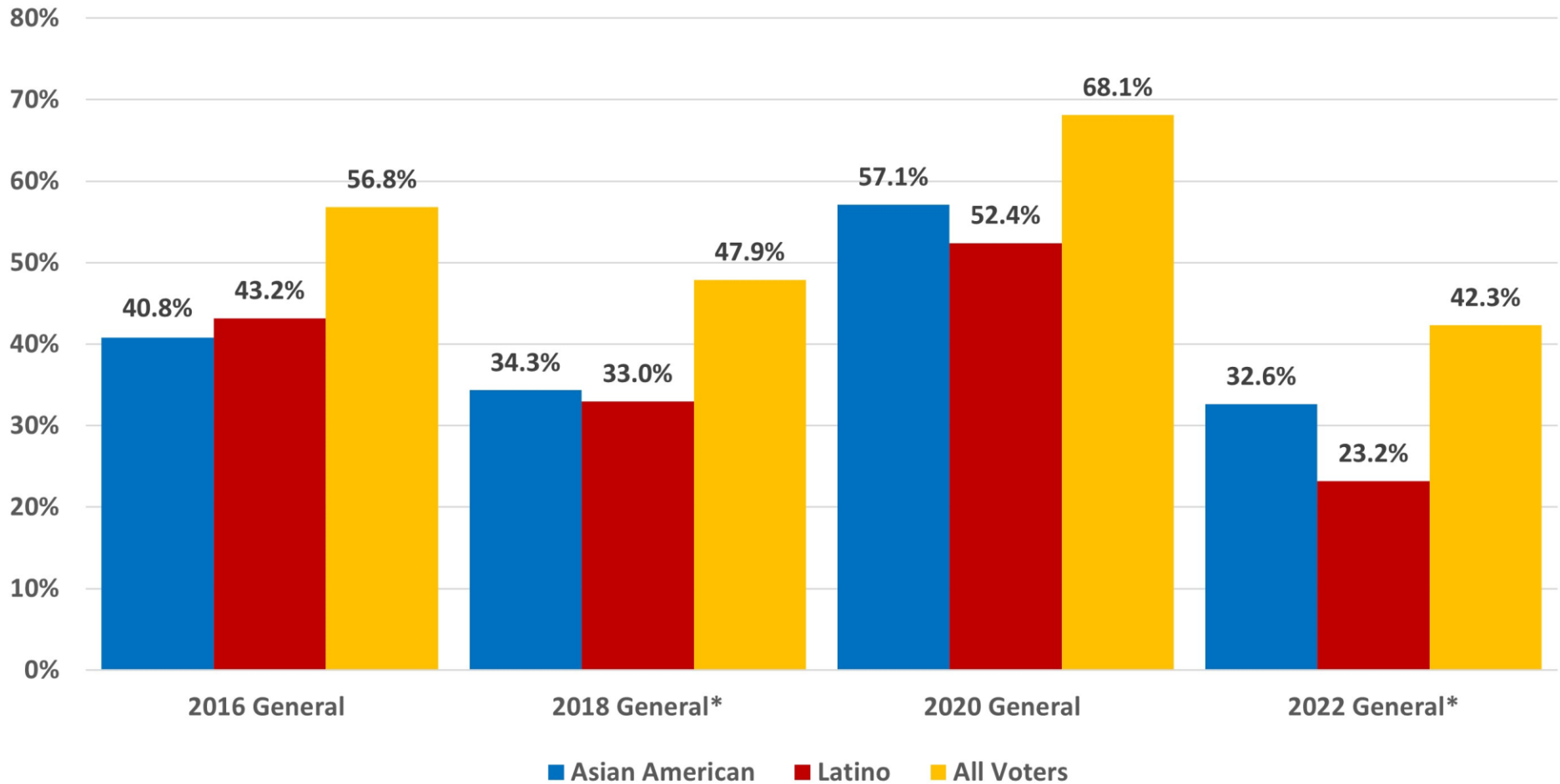
Eligible Voter Turnout 2016-2022 California General Elections



*Midterm Election

Data Source: California county voter files, California Department of Finance

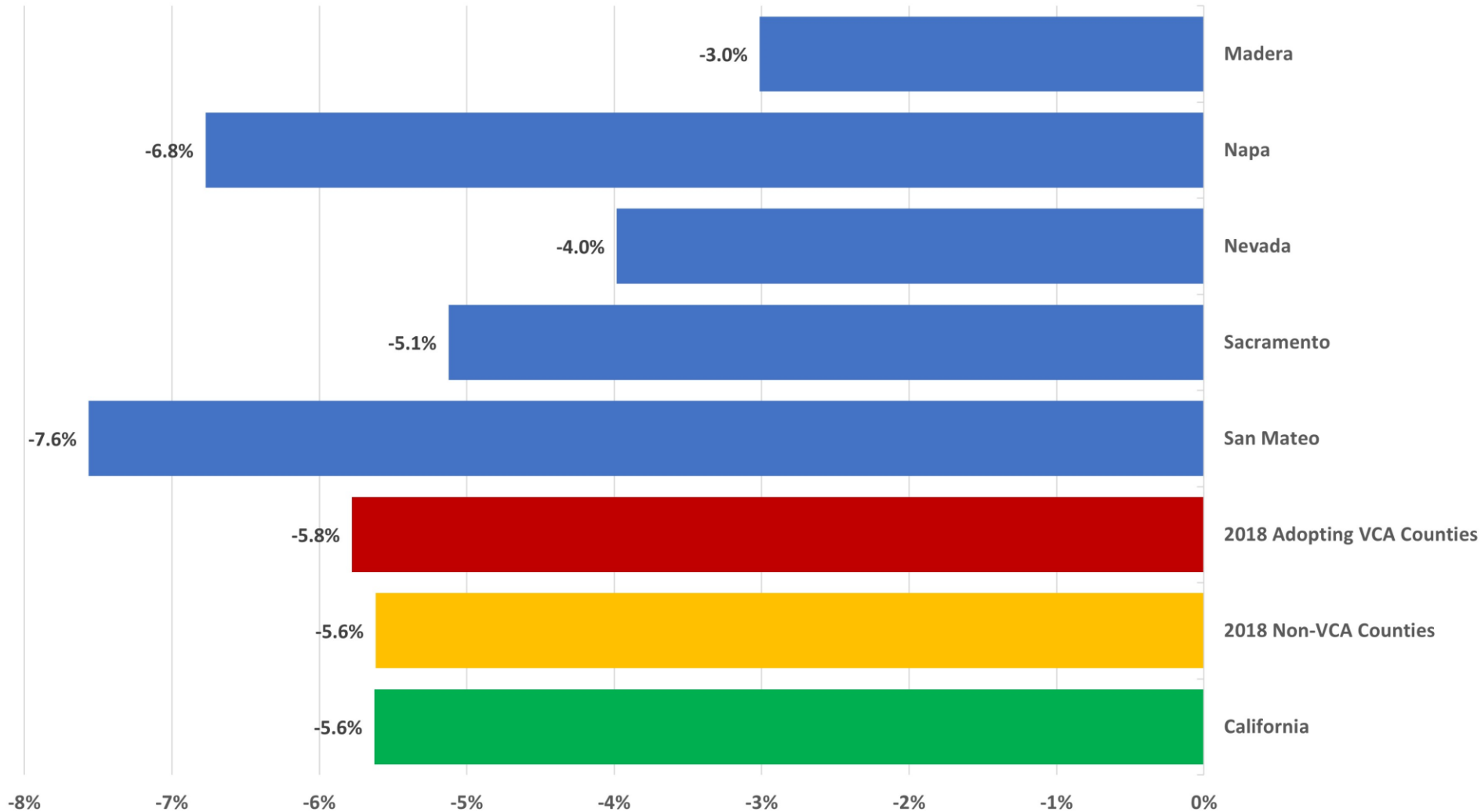
Eligible Voter Turnout Race and Ethnicity 2016-2022 California General Elections



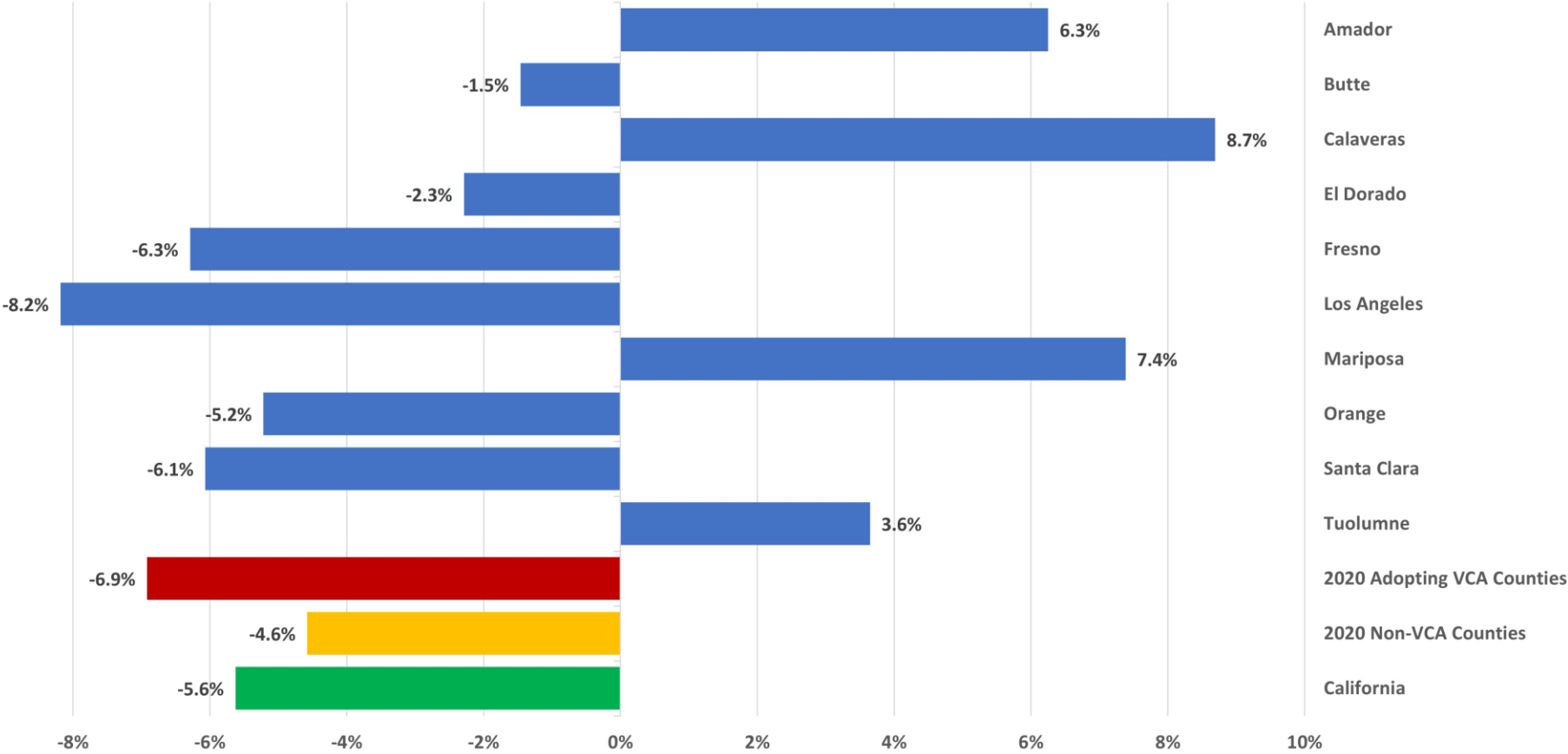
*Midterm Election

Data Source: California county voter files, California Department of Finance

Eligible Voter Turnout Change 2018 Voters Choice Act Adopting Counties California 2018 to 2022 General Elections

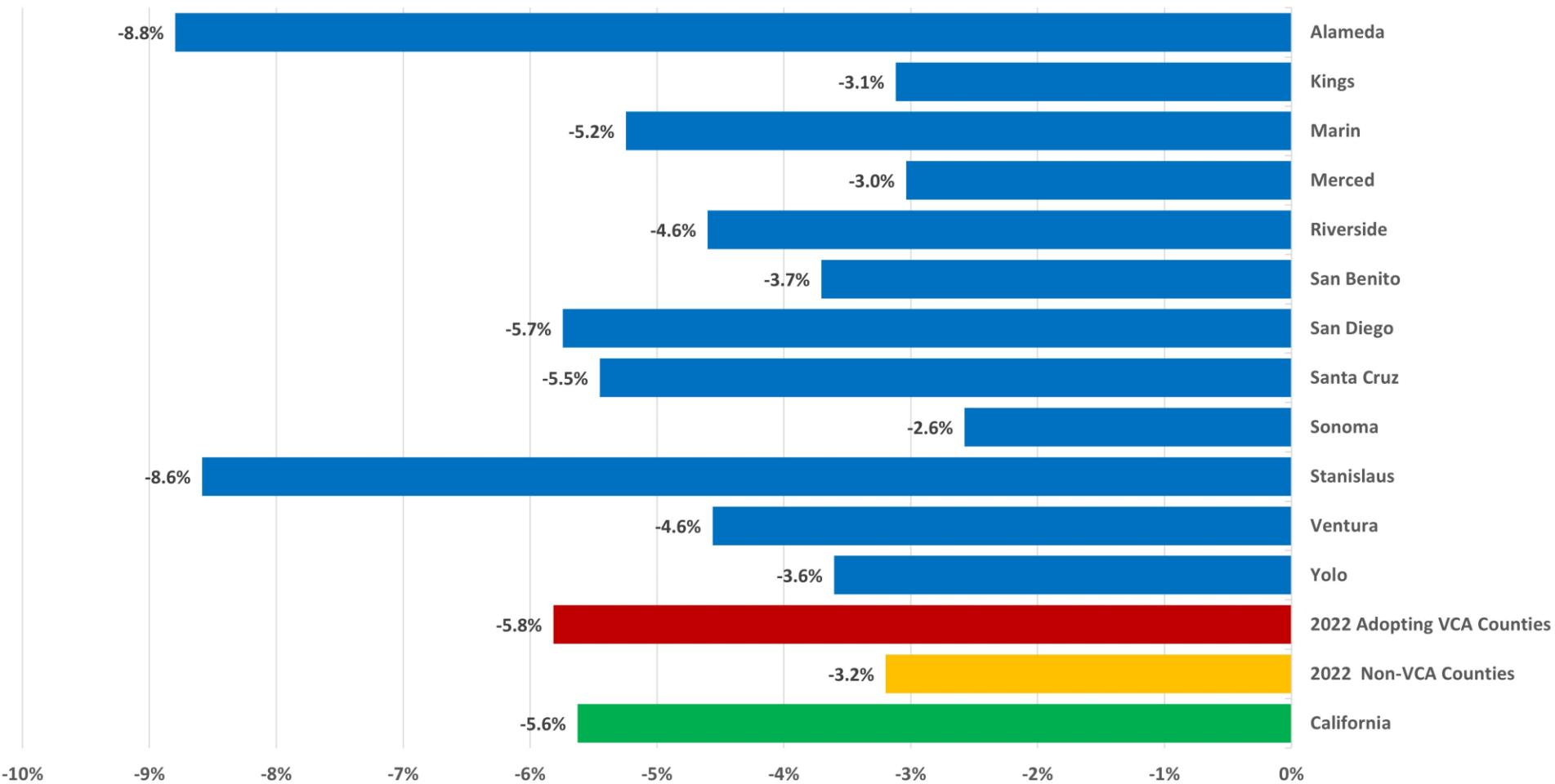


Eligible Voter Turnout Change 2020 Voters Choice Act Adopting Counties California 2018 to 2022 General Elections



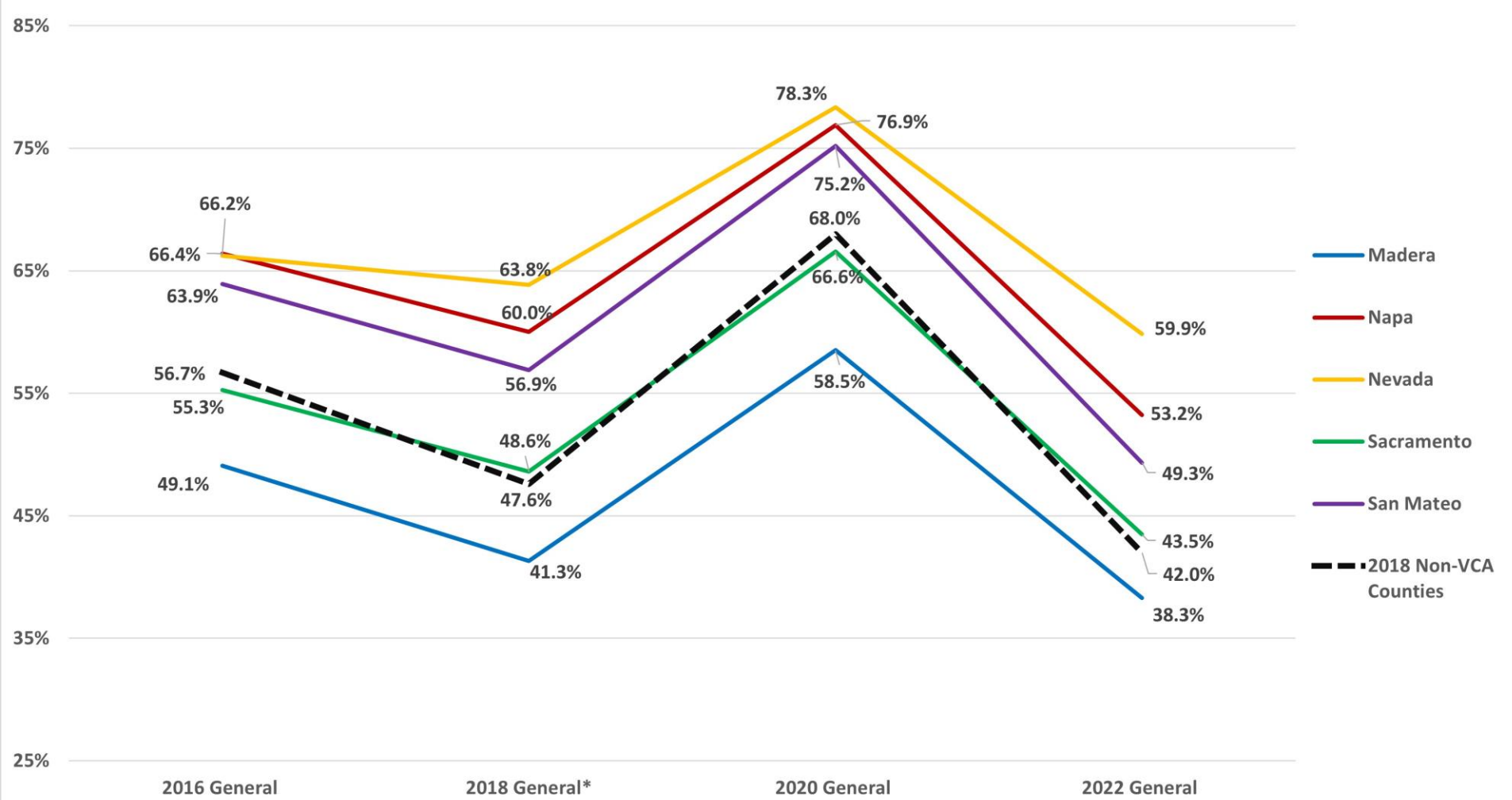
Data Source: California County Voter Files, CA Department of Finance

Eligible Voter Turnout Change 2022 Voters Choice Act Adopting Counties California 2018 to 2022 General Elections



Data Source: California County Voter Files, CA Department of Finance

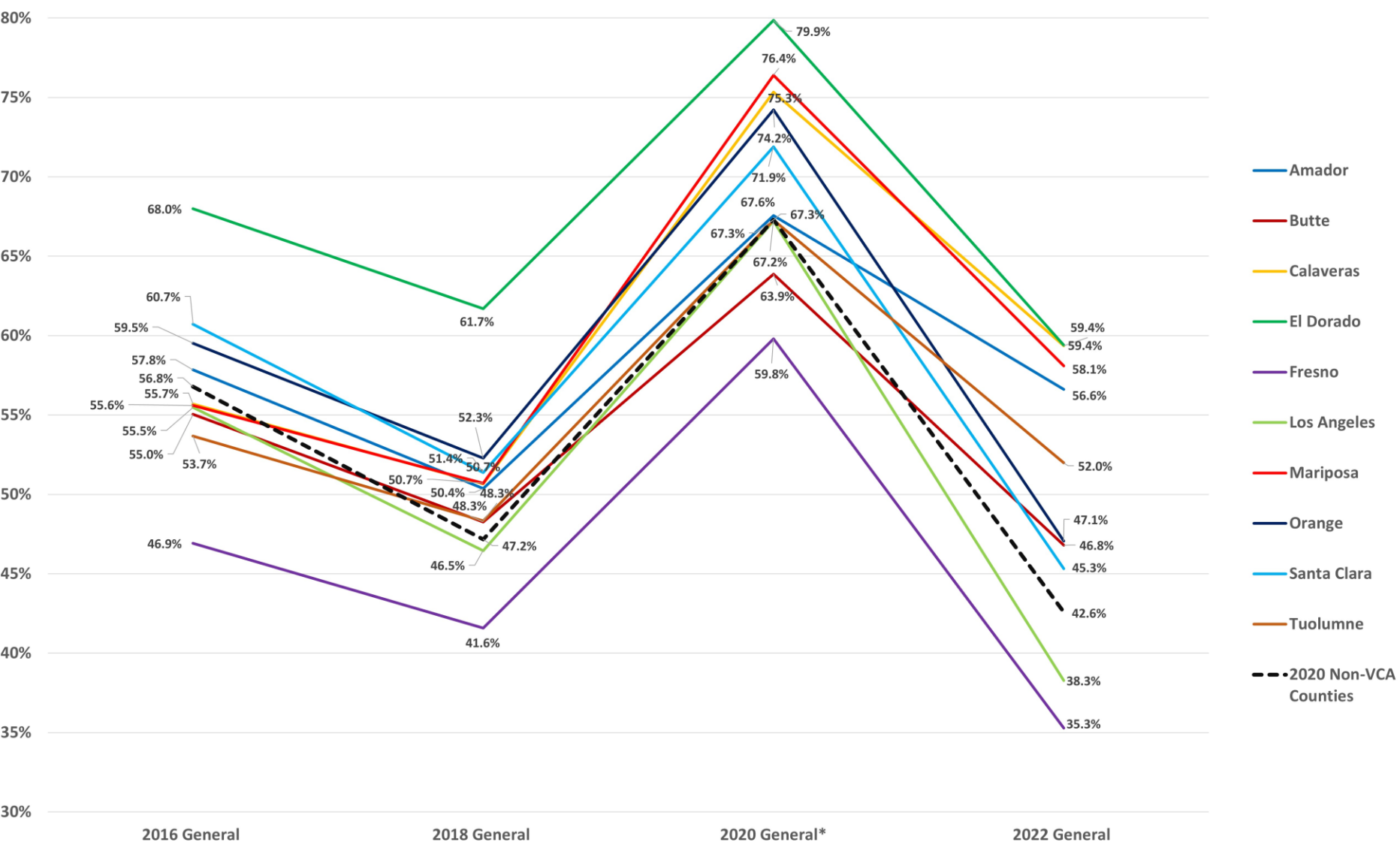
Eligible Voter Turnout Change 2018 Voters Choice Act Adopting Counties California 2016 to 2022 General Elections



*Year VCA Adopted

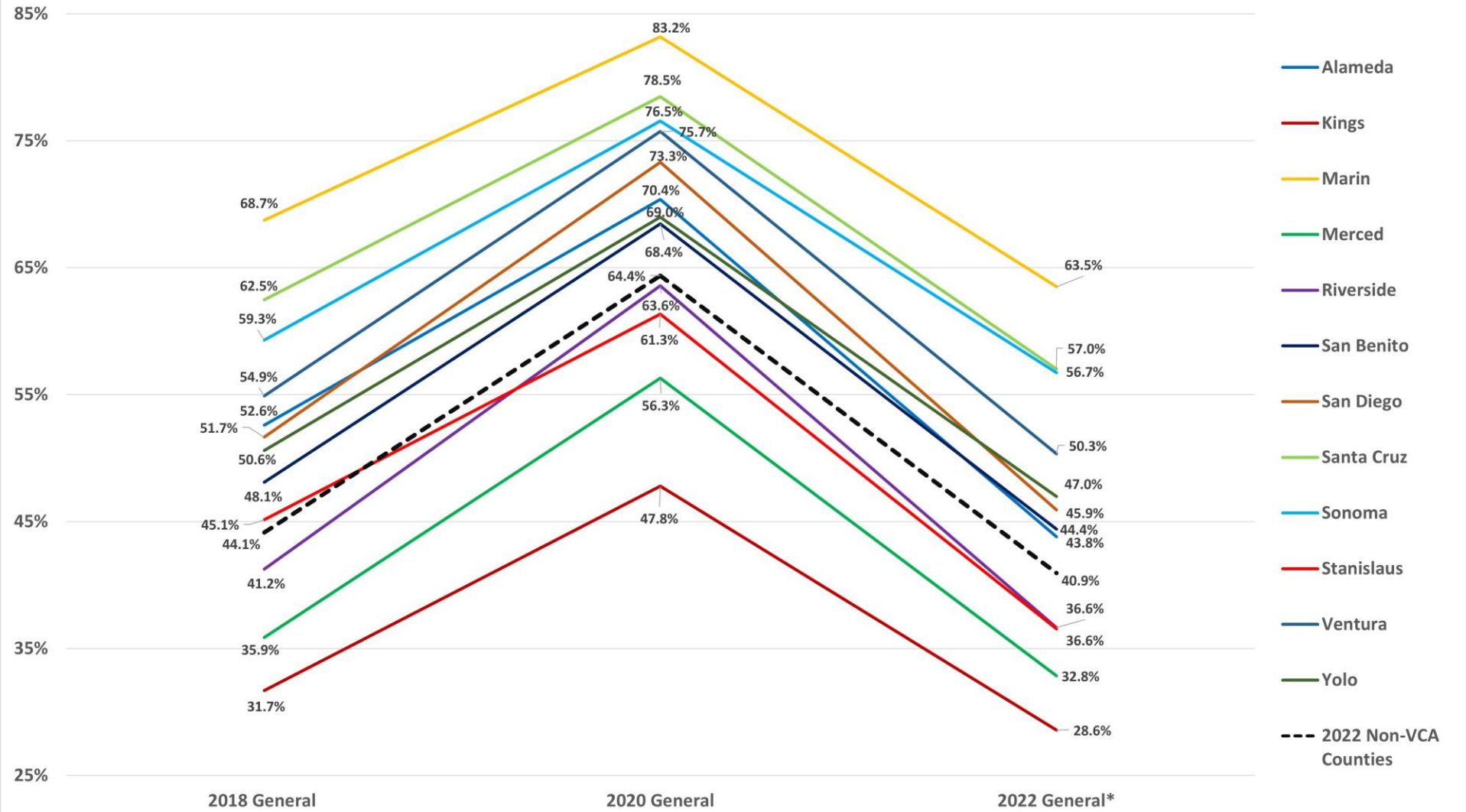
Data Source: California County Voter Files, CA Department of Finance
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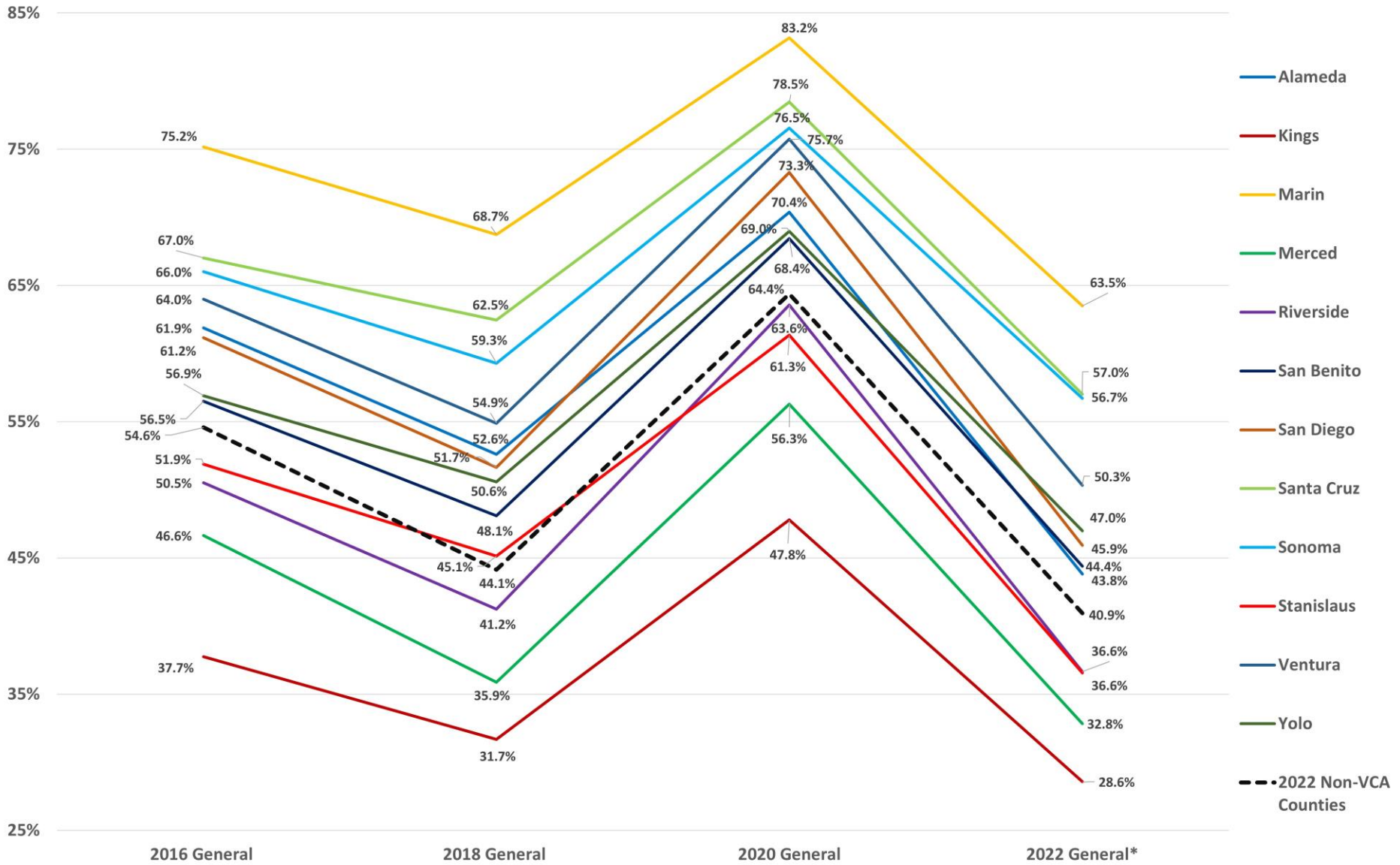
*Year VCA Adopted
Data Source: California County Voter Files, CA Department of Finance

Eligible Voter Turnout Change 2022 Voters Choice Act Adopting Counties California 2018 to 2022 General Elections



*Year VCA Adopted
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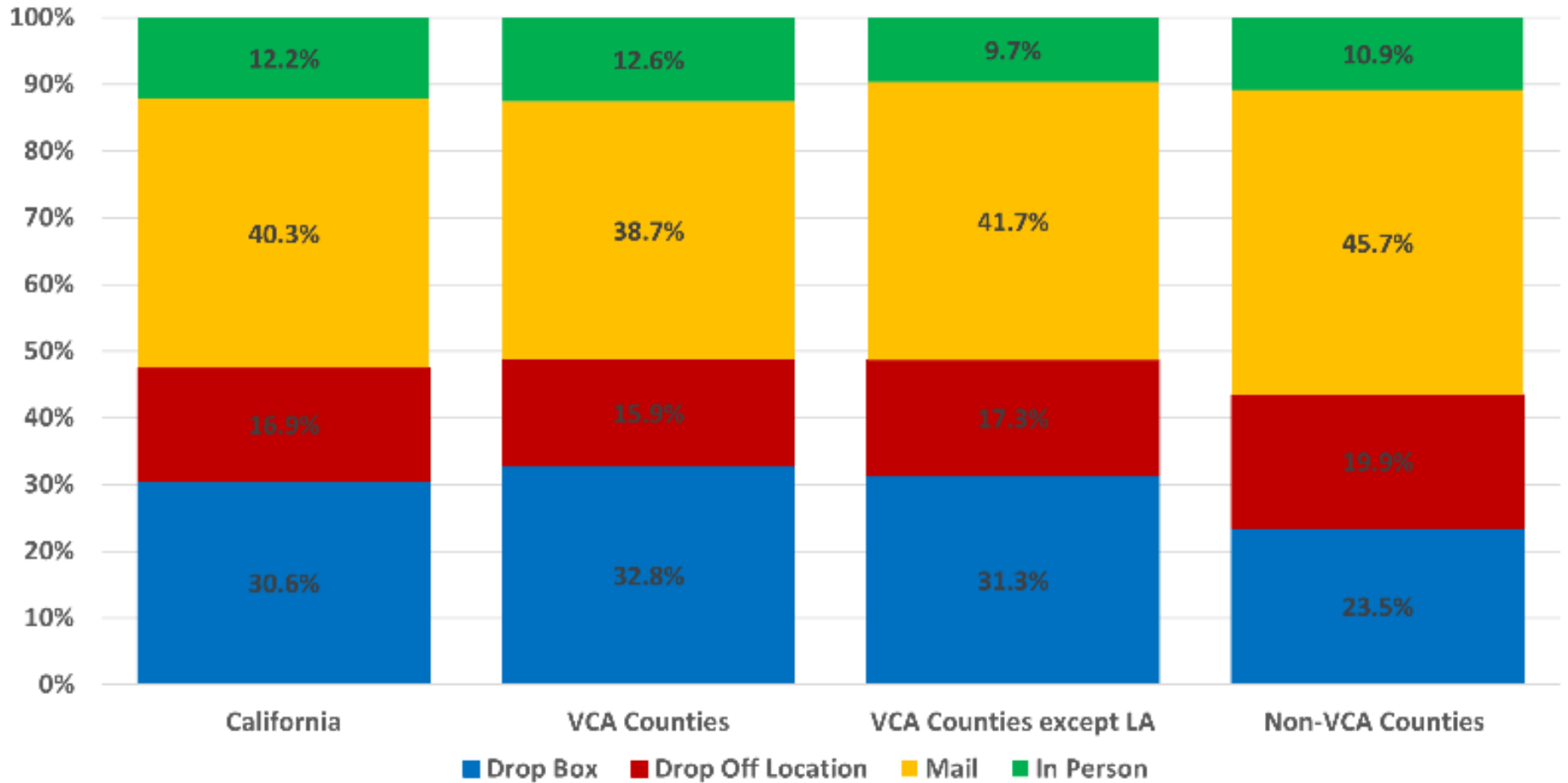
Eligible Voter Turnout Change 2022 Voters Choice Act Adopting Counties California 2016 to 2022 General Elections



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Method of Voting Changes

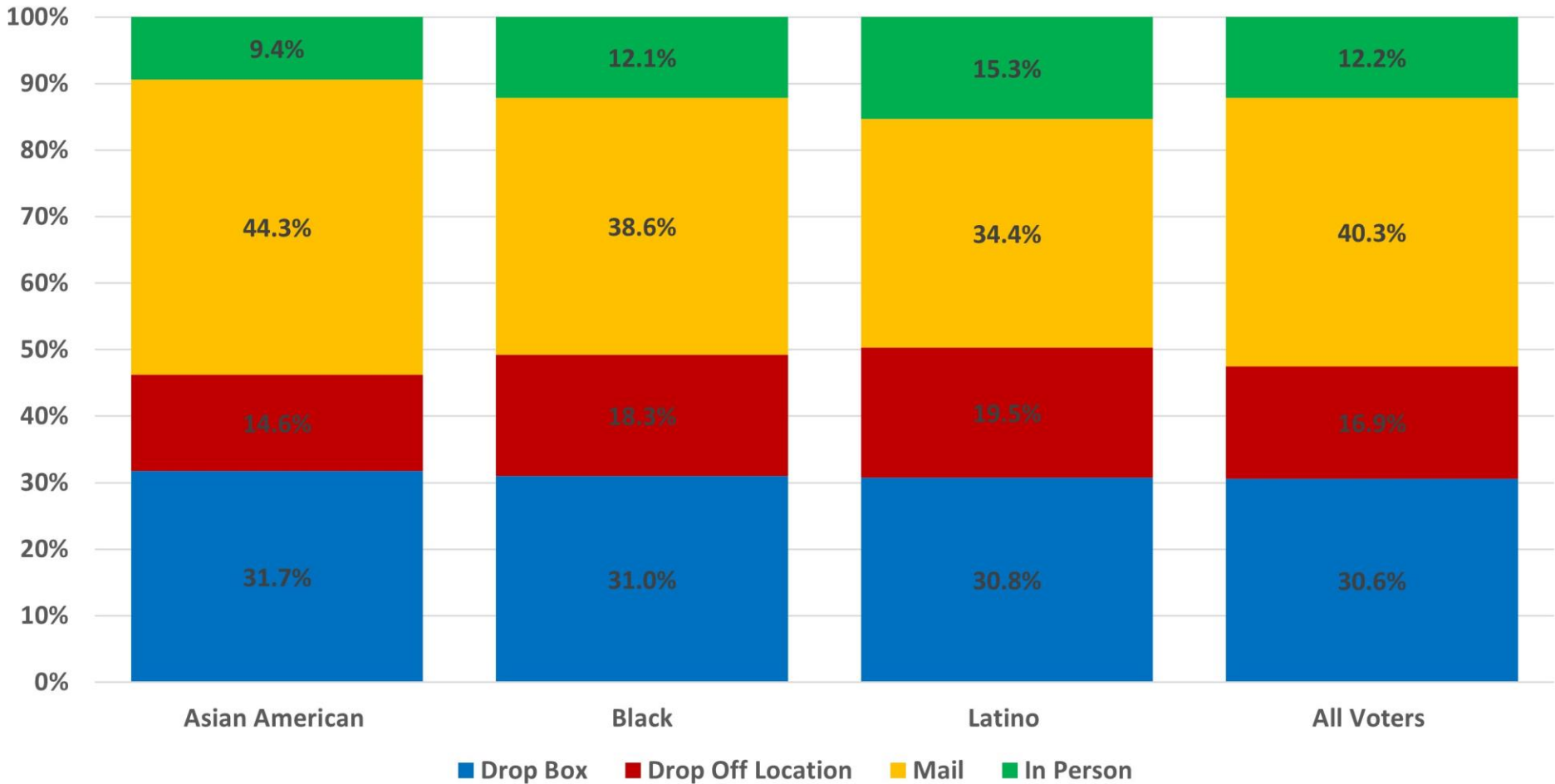
Voting Methods All Voters 2022 General Election



Data Source: California County Voter Files

Note: Ballots cast via fax are excluded. In-person votes include conditional voter registration and provisional ballots

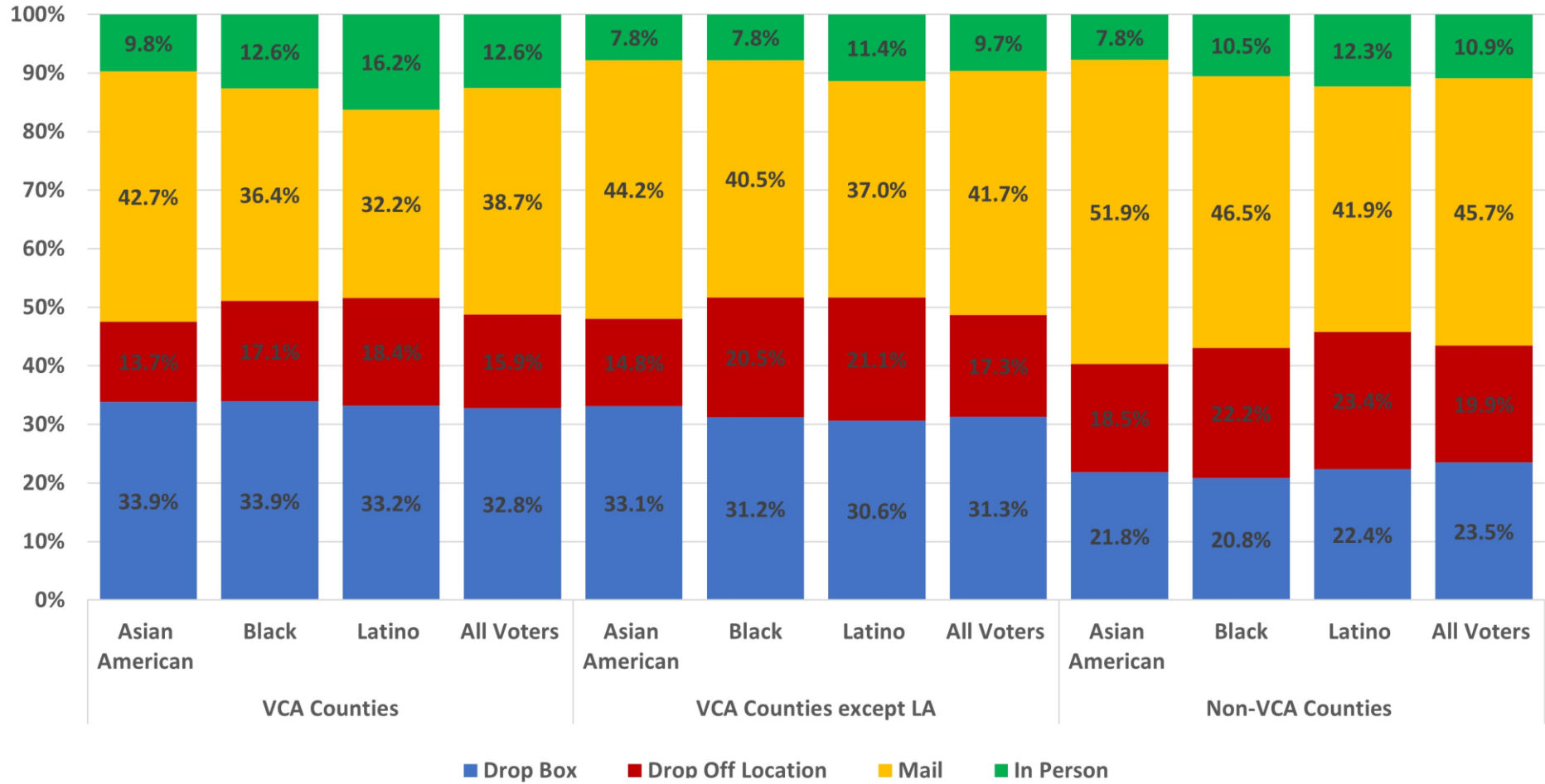
Voting Methods in California Race and Ethnicity 2022 General Election



Data Source: California County Voter Files

Note: Ballots cast via fax are excluded. In-person votes include conditional voter registration and provisional ballots

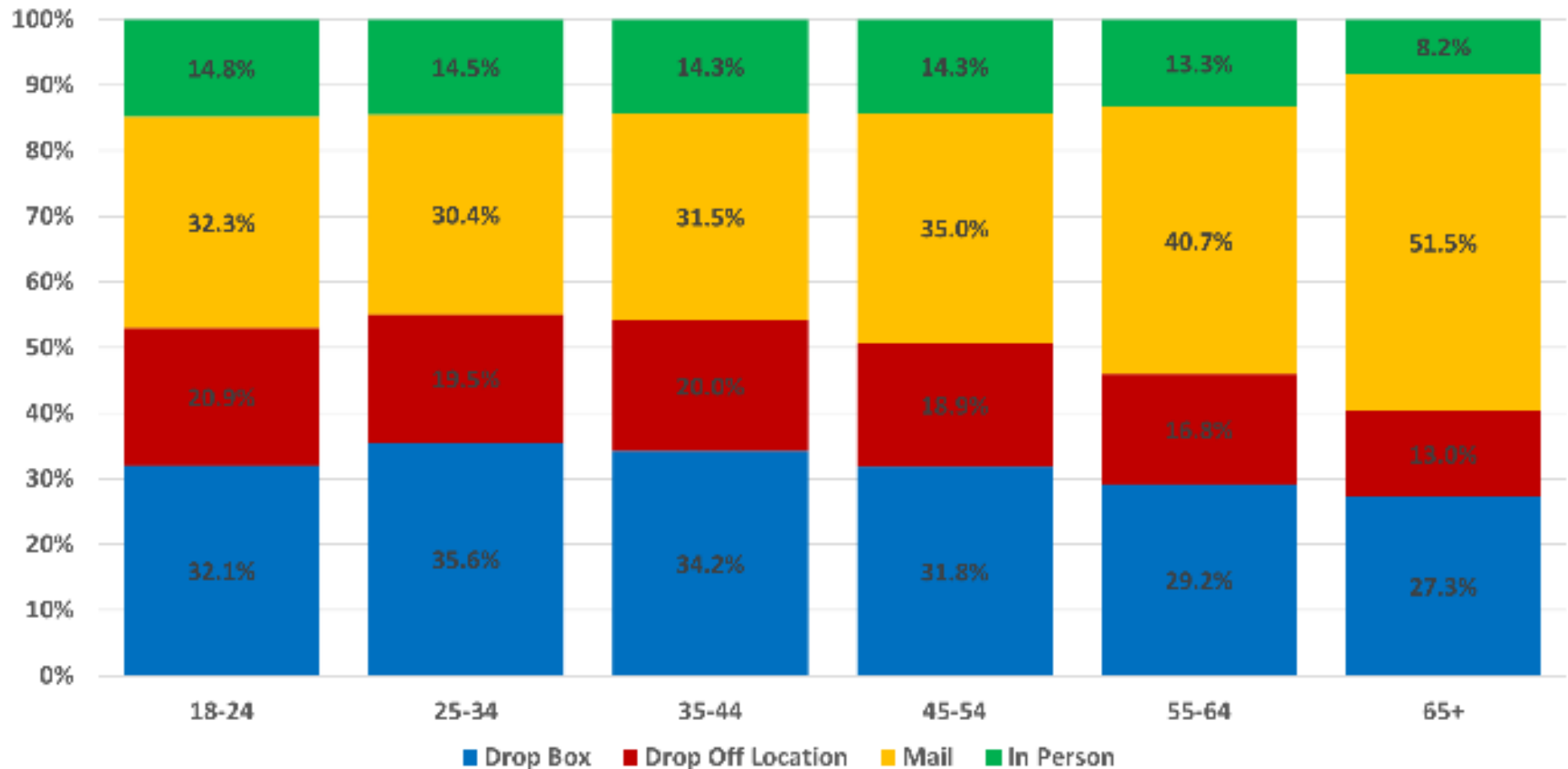
Voting Methods in Voters Choice Act Counties Race and Ethnicity 2022 General Election



Data Source: California County Voter Files

Note: Ballots cast via fax are excluded. In-person votes include conditional voter registration and provisional ballots

Voting Methods Age Groups 2022 General Election



Data Source: California County Voter Files

Note: Ballots cast via fax are excluded. In-person votes include conditional voter registration and provisional ballots