

Understanding Trends in Challenged and Rejected Mailed Ballots in Washington State

Scott W. Allard

Daniel J. Evans Endowed Professor of Social Policy
University of Washington
Evans School of Public Policy & Governance
sallard@uw.edu

Jacob M. Grumbach

Associate Professor
University of California, Berkeley
Goldman School of Public Policy

Isaiah Wright

University of Washington
Evans School of Public Policy & Governance

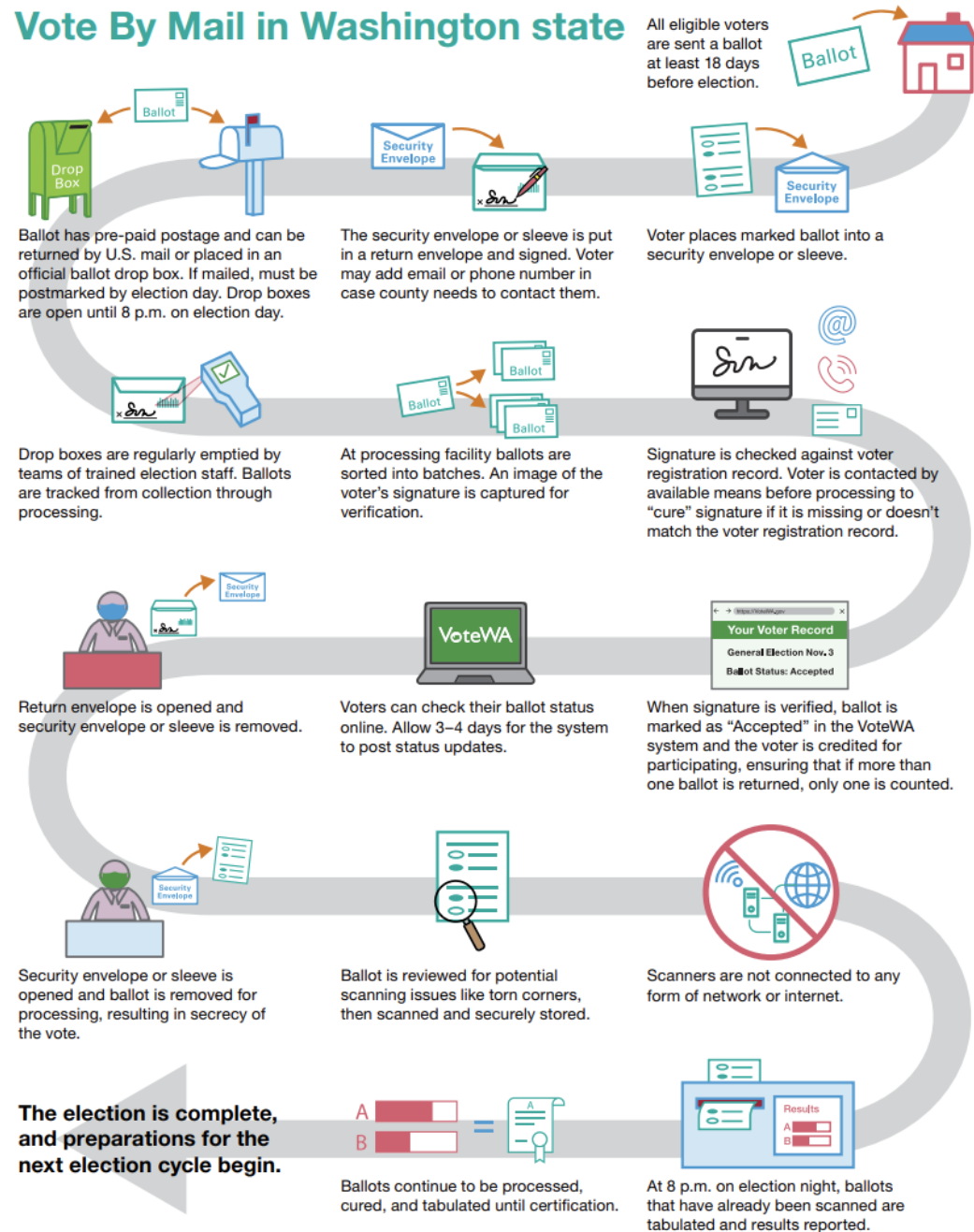
Lauren Woyczynski

University of Washington
Department of Sociology

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Vote By Mail in Washington state



For a ballot to be tabulated, a ballot envelope must be signed, signature must match signature(s) on file, must be postmarked by Election Day or placed in Drop Box by 8pm on Election Day.

A ballot is rejected if it arrives late, is not signed, or signature doesn't match

- Ballot is challenged or rejected, when there is no signature or a mismatched signature
- Some signature challenges are resolved through secondary review by canvassing boards
- Notices sent with invitation to "cure" ballot
 - Mailed within 24 hours of determination that a ballot is challenged
 - Can cure in person, with witnesses, or through signature update form
 - Ballots must be cured by day before election results are certified (within 2-3 weeks of election)
- Identities of voters with rejected or challenged ballots are public information

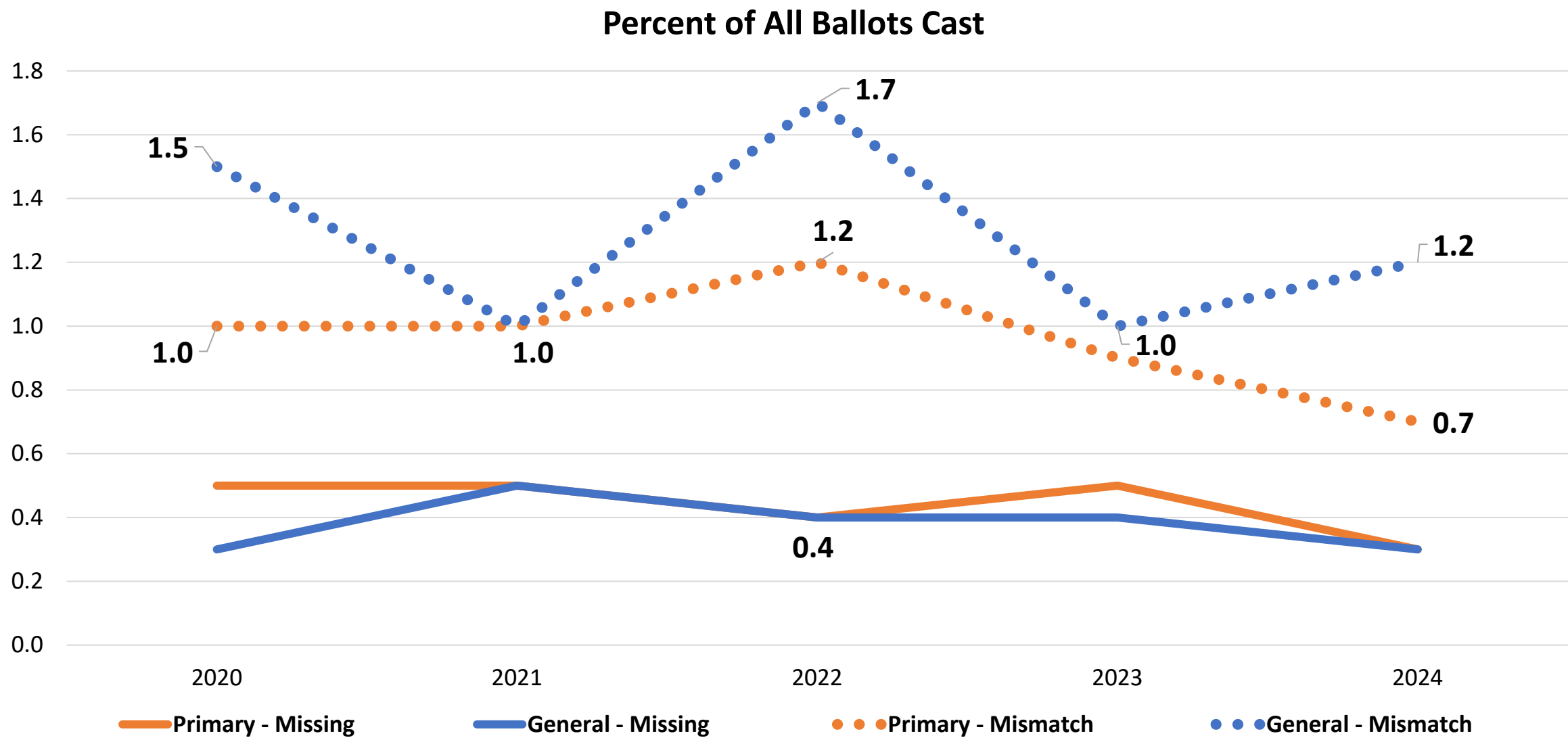
Vote-by-Mail in WA State - Guiding Questions

- How do **ballot signature challenge** rates varied over time?
- To what extent **are signature challenged ballots cured by voters?**
- Do ballot cure and rejection rates vary by **voter demographics or geographic location?**
- And, how might **changes in postmarking policy** affect WA voters?

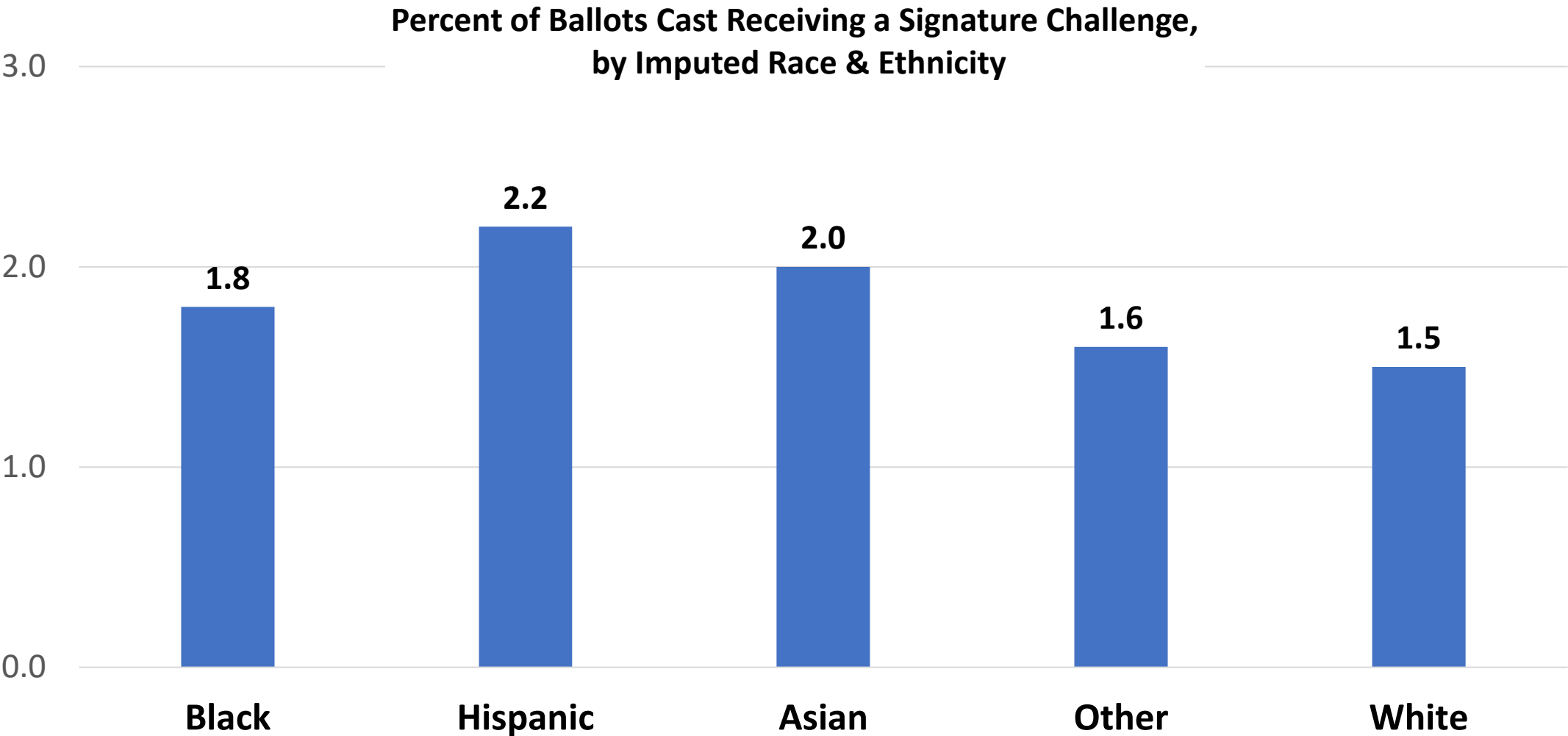
Data and Key Definitions

- **Ballot envelope return information from 24 million ballots cast in August Primary and November General Elections, 2020 to 2024**
 - Self-reported gender, date of birth, date ballot was received, method for ballot return, indicators about reason for ballot challenge, timing of cure notice, indicator that the ballot was cured, reason ballot rejected
 - Append Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG) imputed race/ethnicity
- **Cast ballot:** Returned to county and either accepted, rejected for being late, or rejected for failing to cure a signature challenge
- **Challenged ballot:** No signature on the envelope, or signature was determined not to match the signature(s) on file
- **Cured ballot:** Signature challenged cured by voter or by secondary review
- **Rejected ballot:** Signature challenged ballot not cured, or returned late

Challenged Ballots: Missing v Mismatch Signature

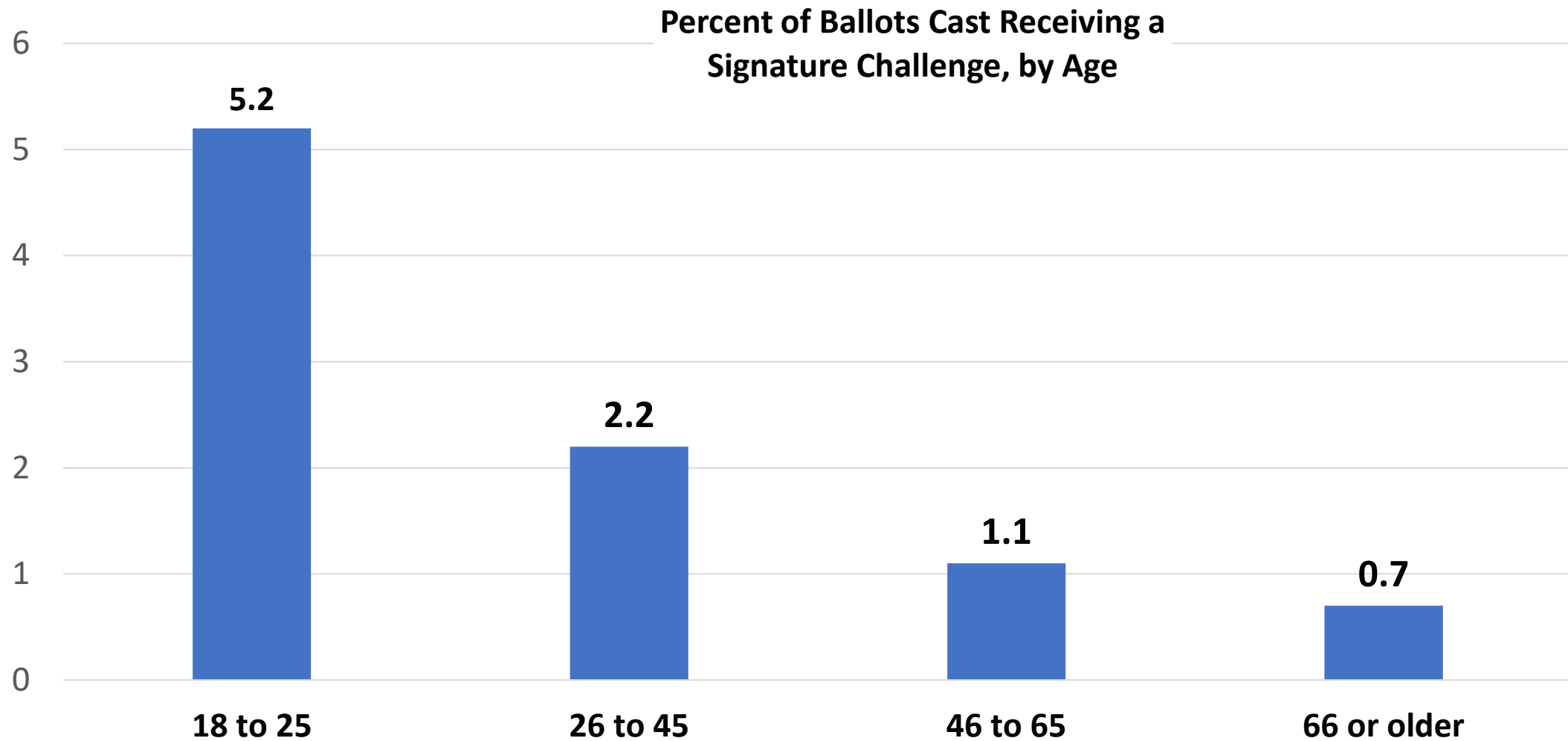


Signature Challenge Rates for Primary and General Elections by Imputed Race & Ethnicity, 2020-24

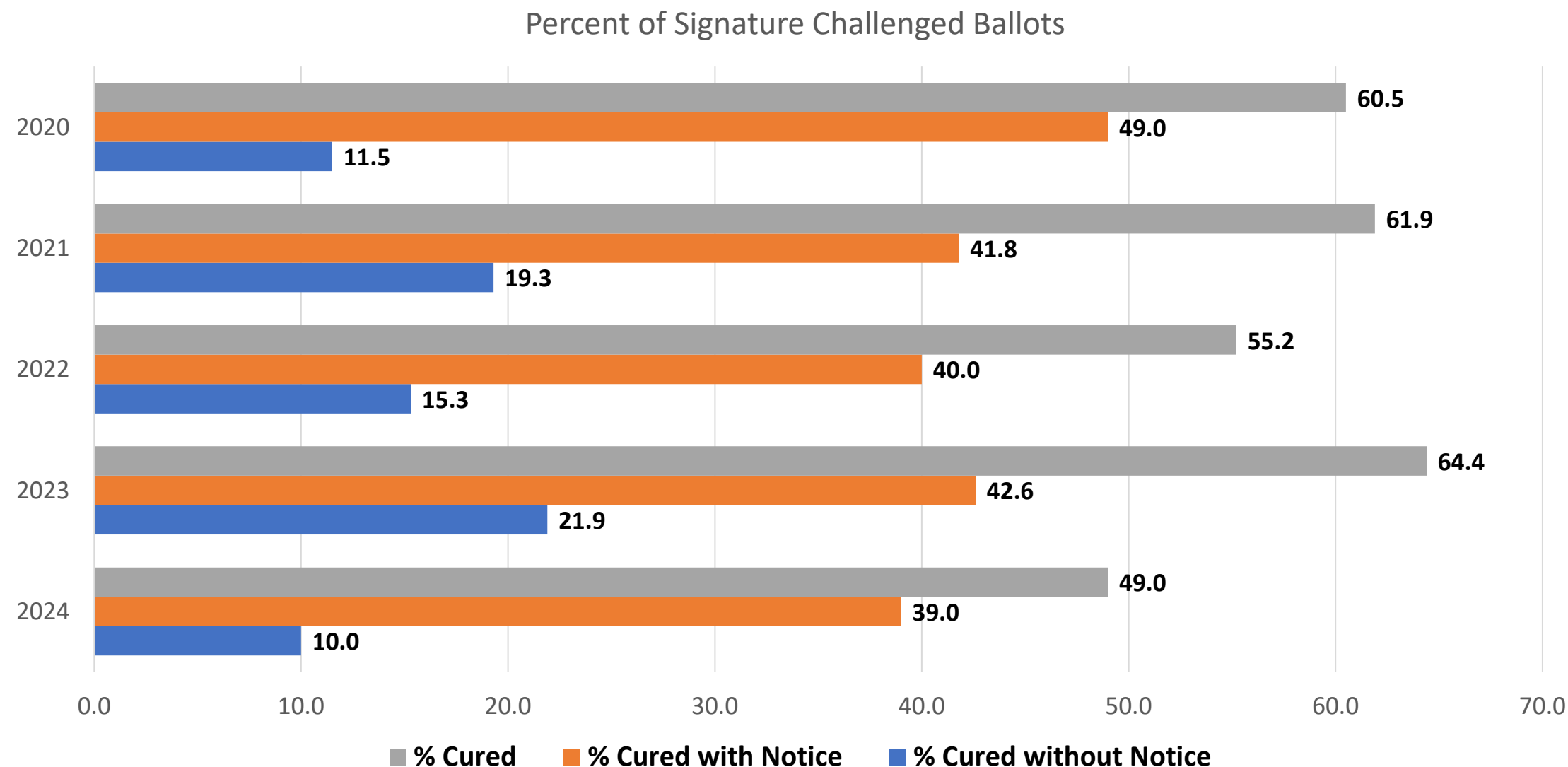


Source: Washington Secretary of State's Elections Data and Statistics

Signature Challenge Rates for Primary and General Elections by Voter Age, 2020-24

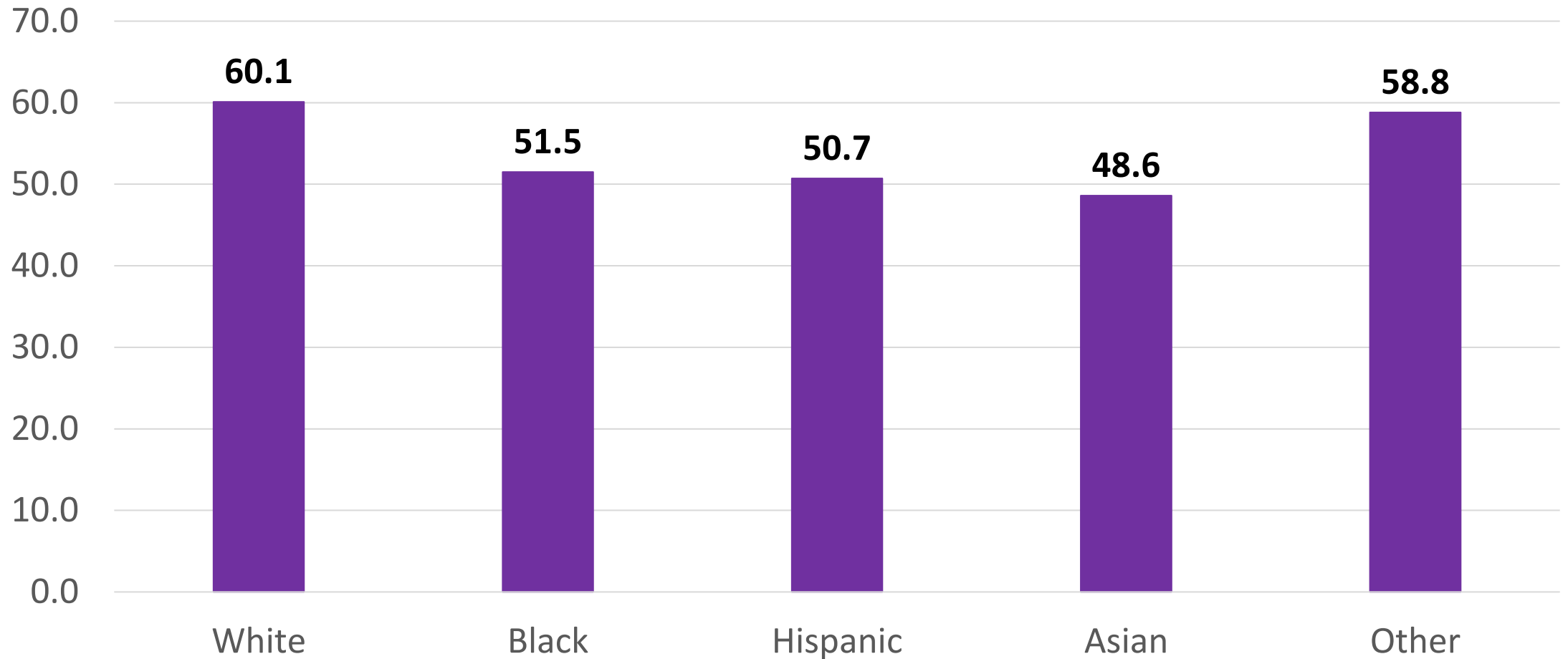


Ballot Curing Rates, General Elections 2020-24



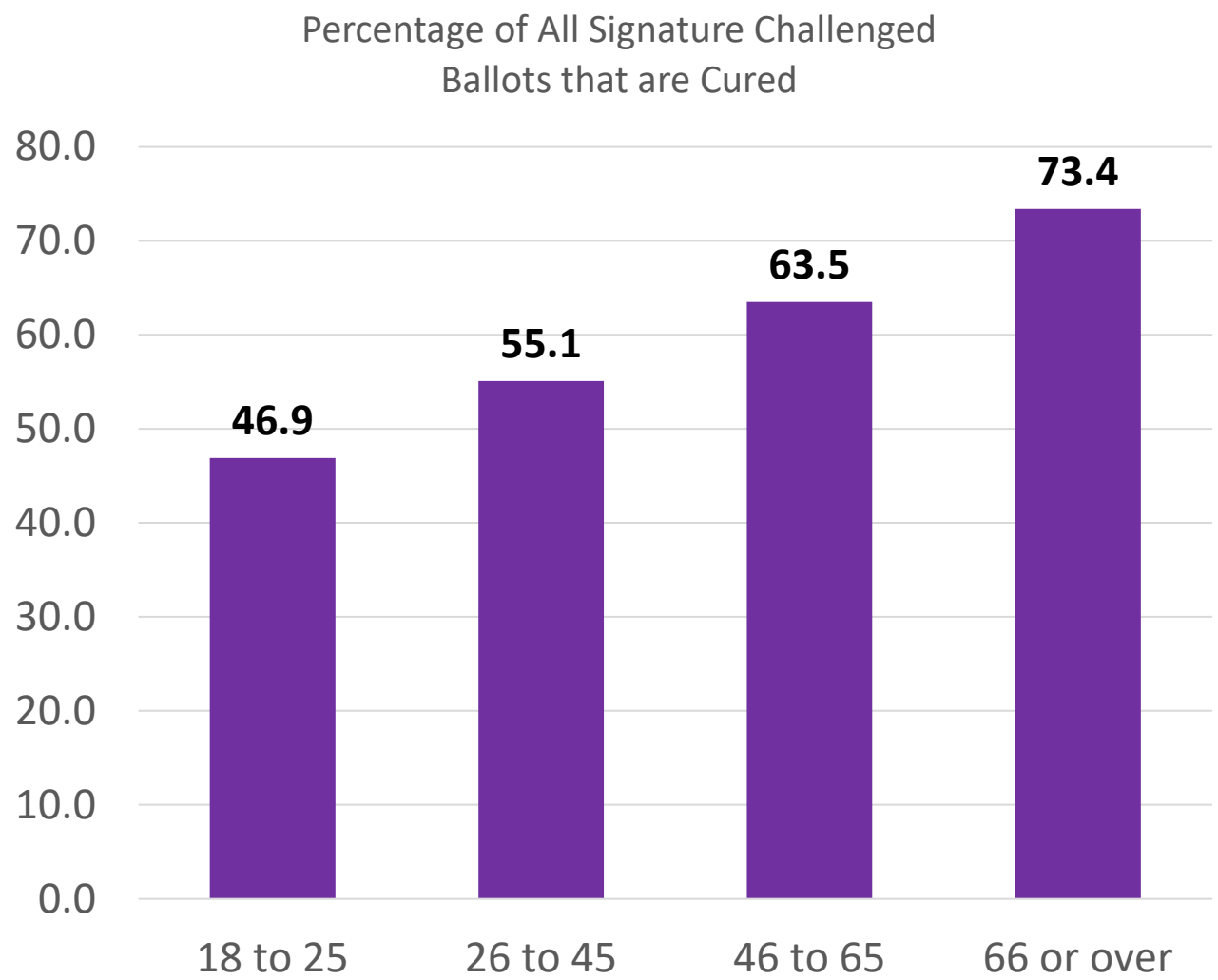
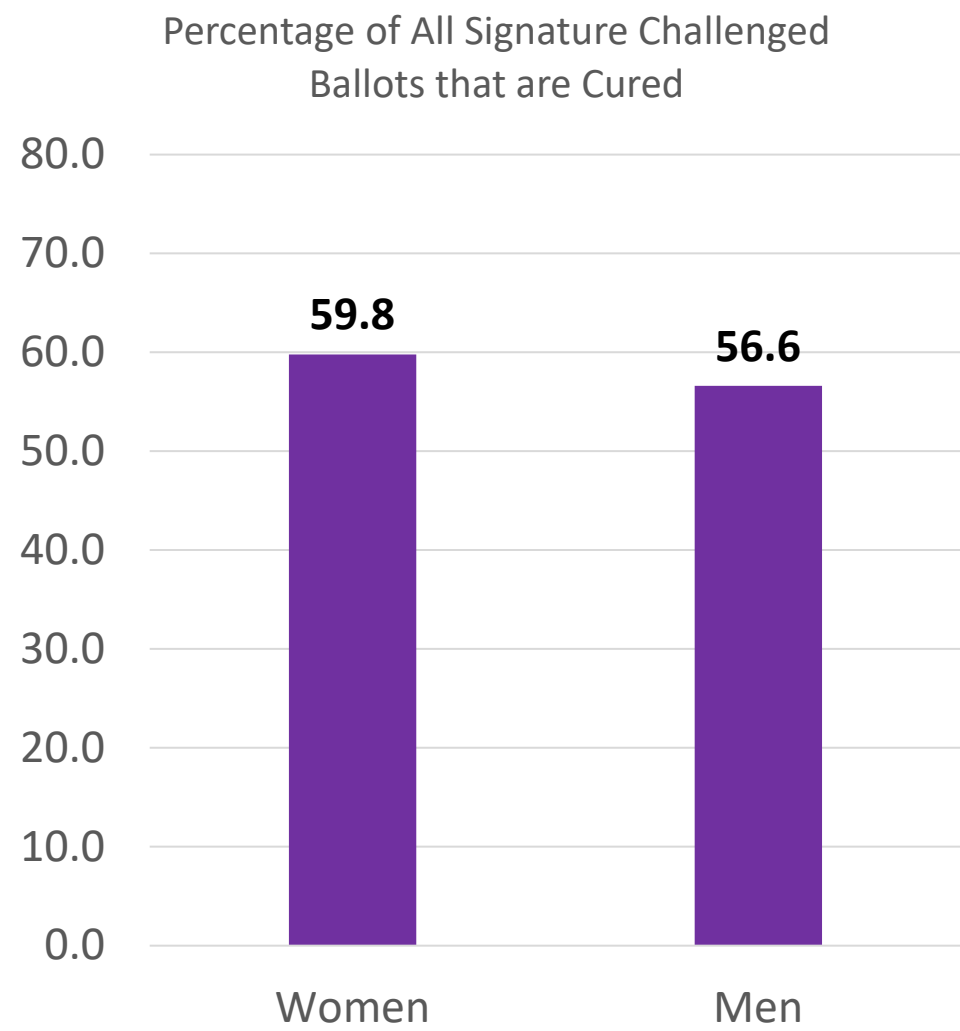
Ballot Curing Primary and General Elections, 2020-24 by Imputed Race & Ethnicity

Percentage of Signature Challenged Ballots that are Cured

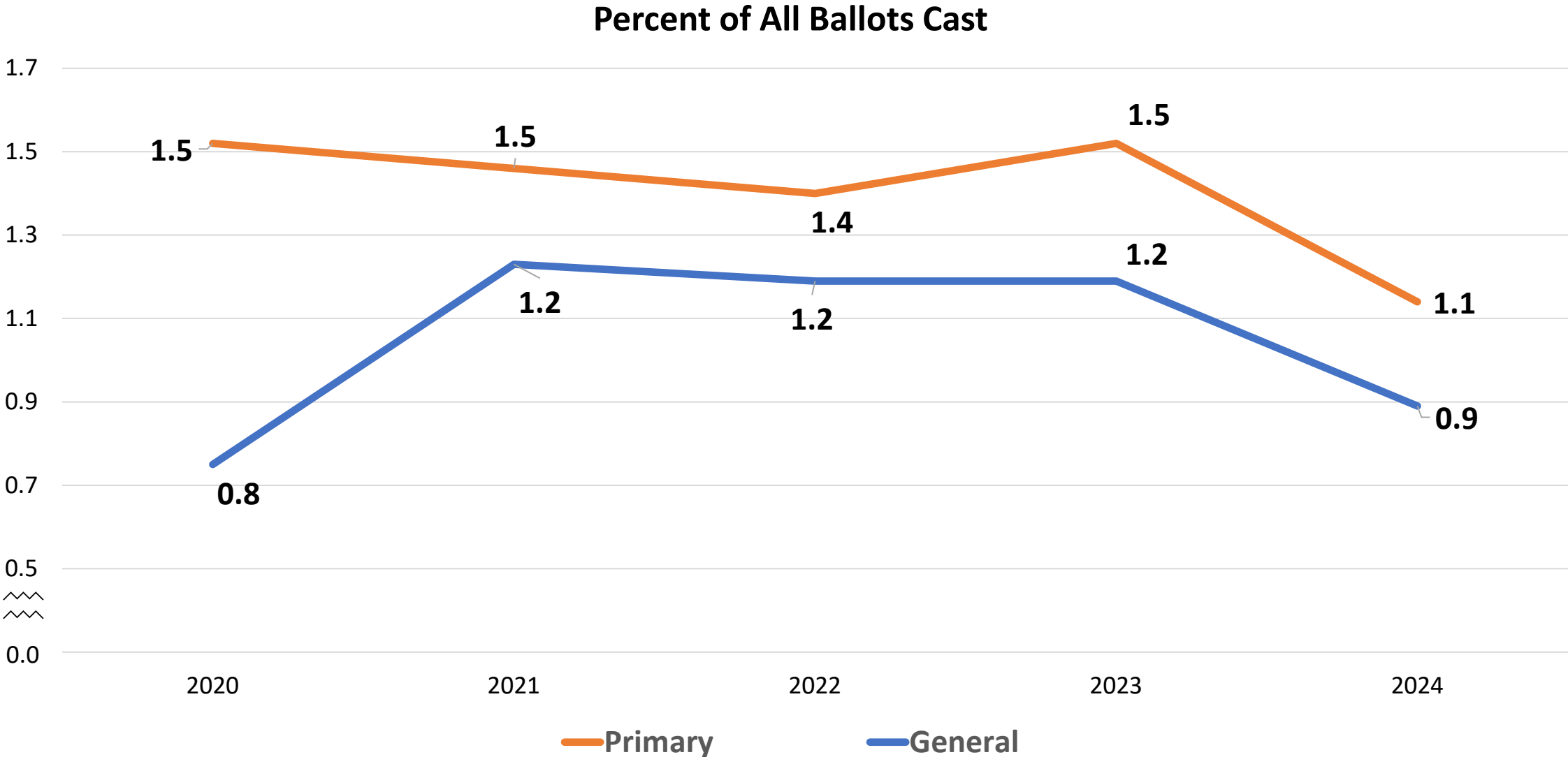


Ballot Curing Primary and General Elections, 2020-24

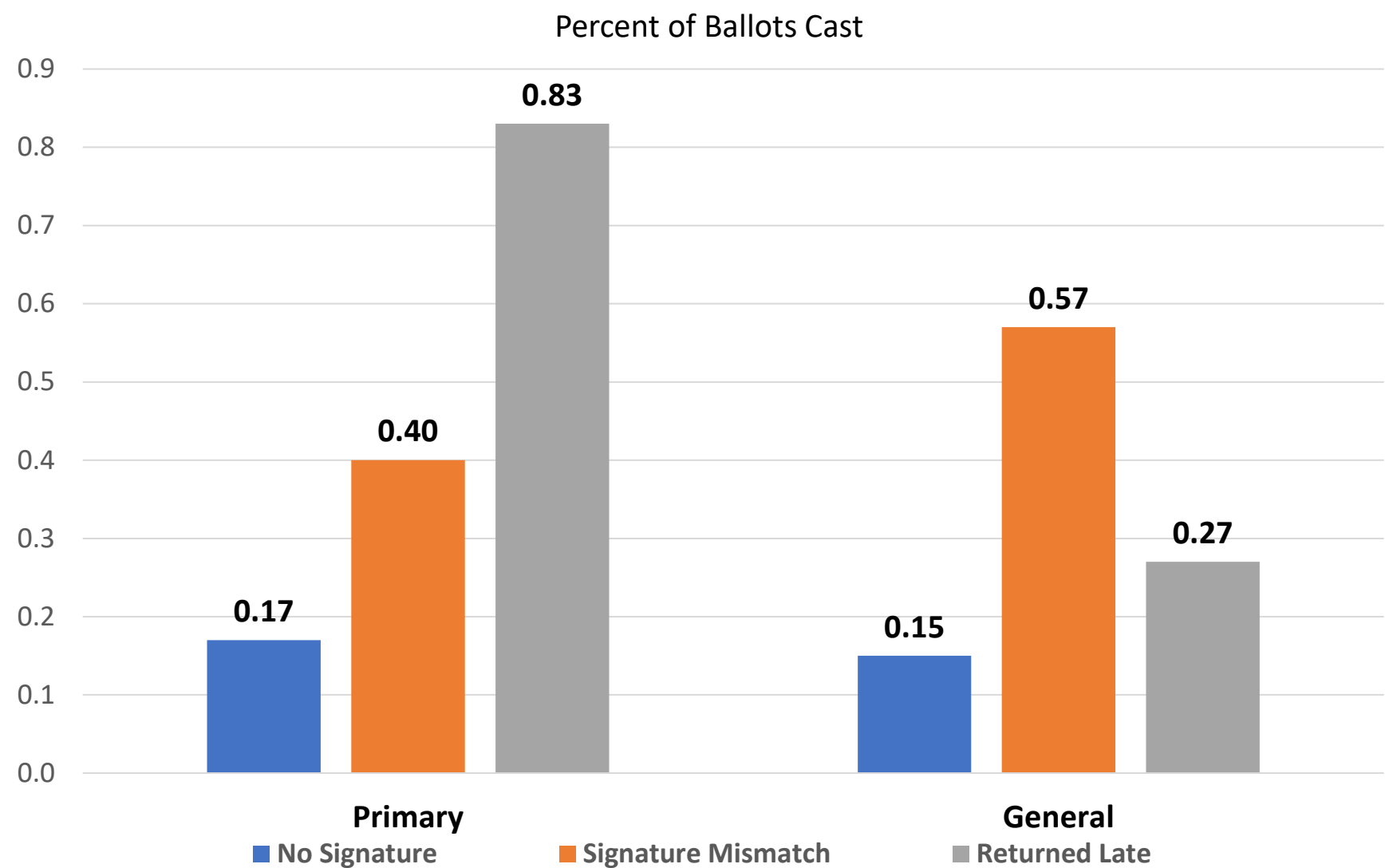
by Gender & Age



Trends in Rejected Ballots

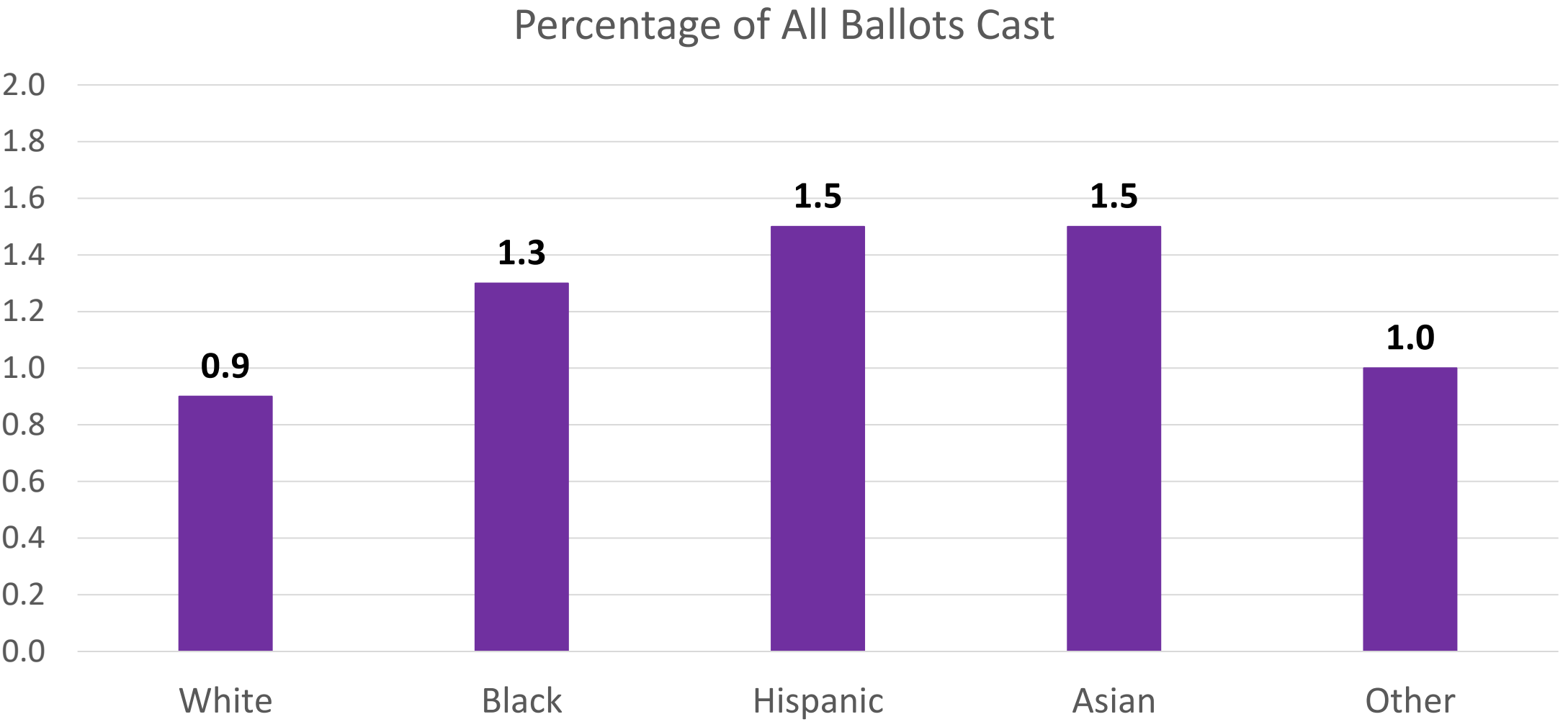


Rejected Ballots by Reason, Primary and General Elections 2020-24



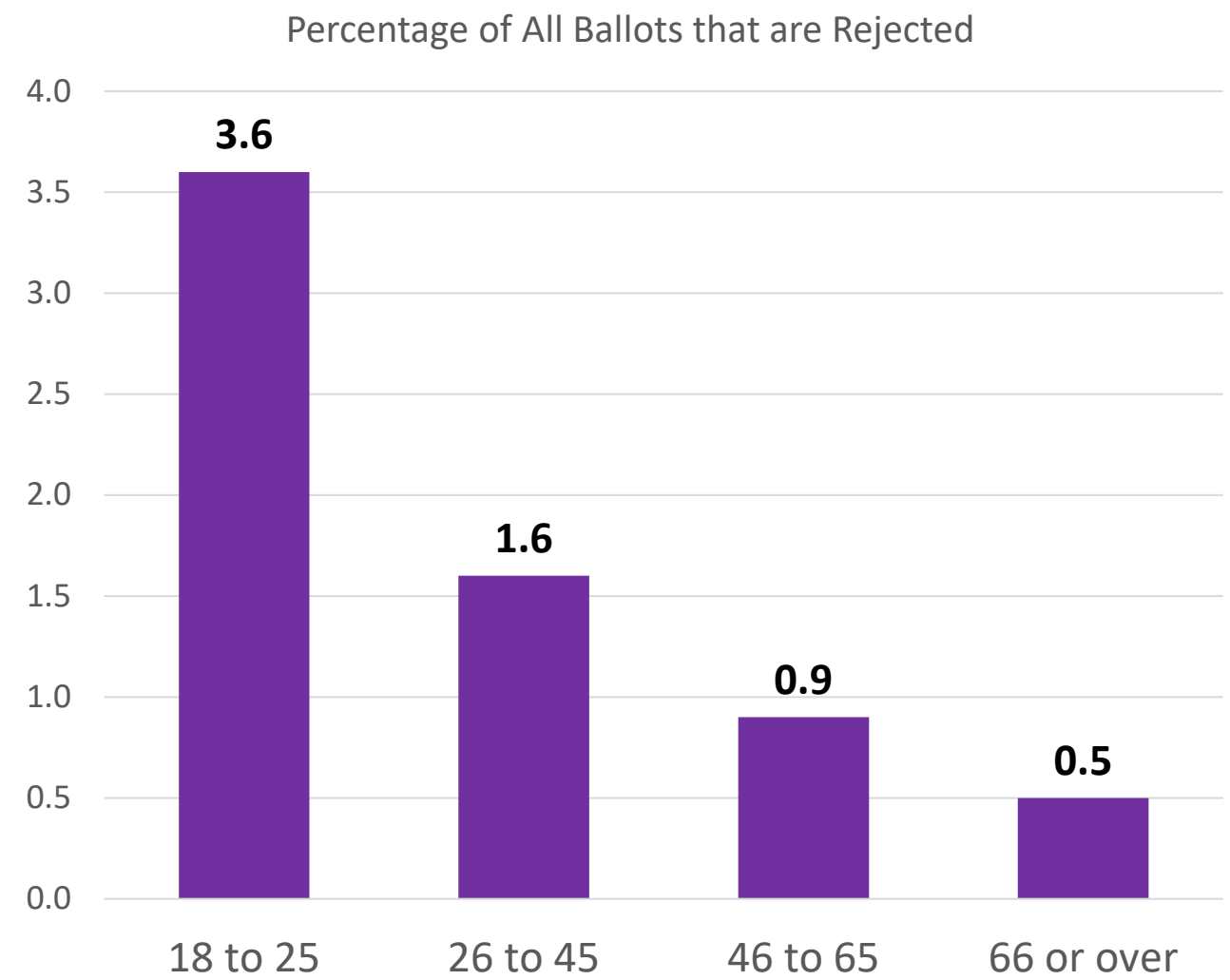
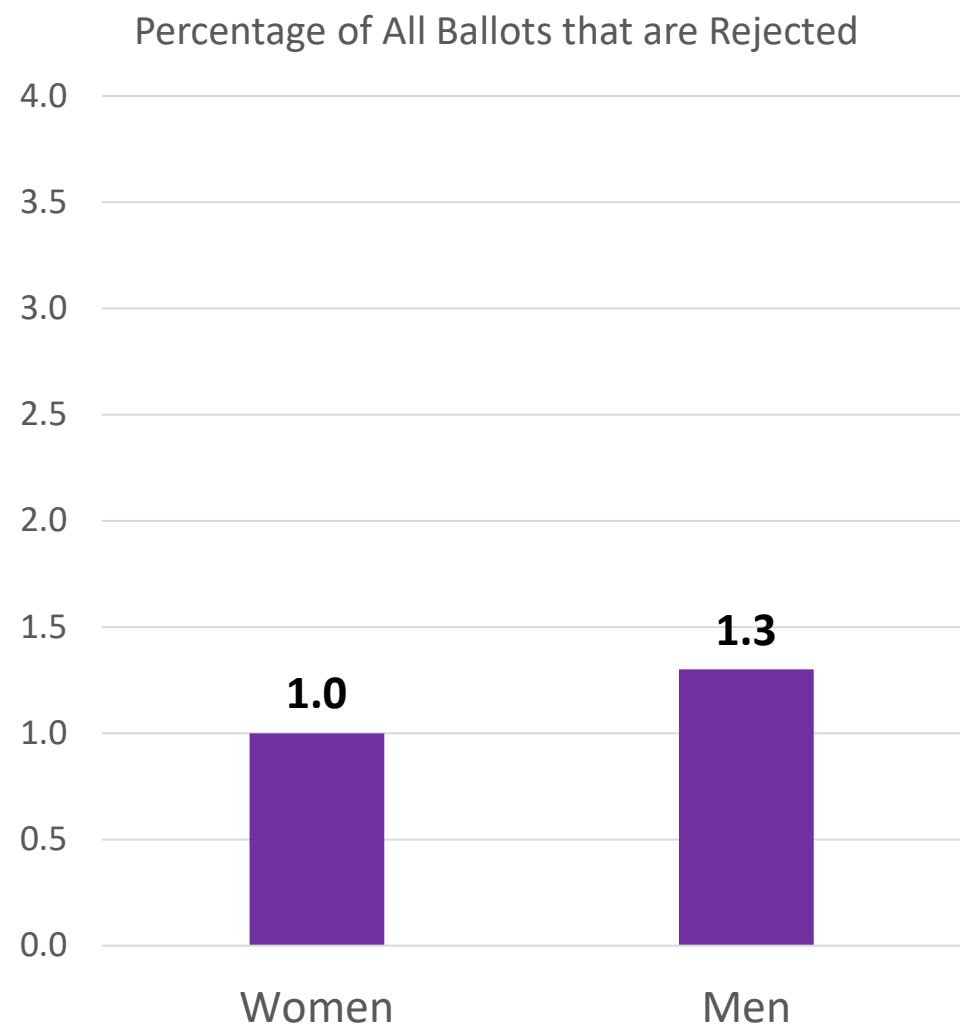
Source: Washington Secretary of State's Elections Data and Statistics

Ballot Rejection Rates by Imputed Race & Ethnicity, Primary and General Elections - 2020 to 2024



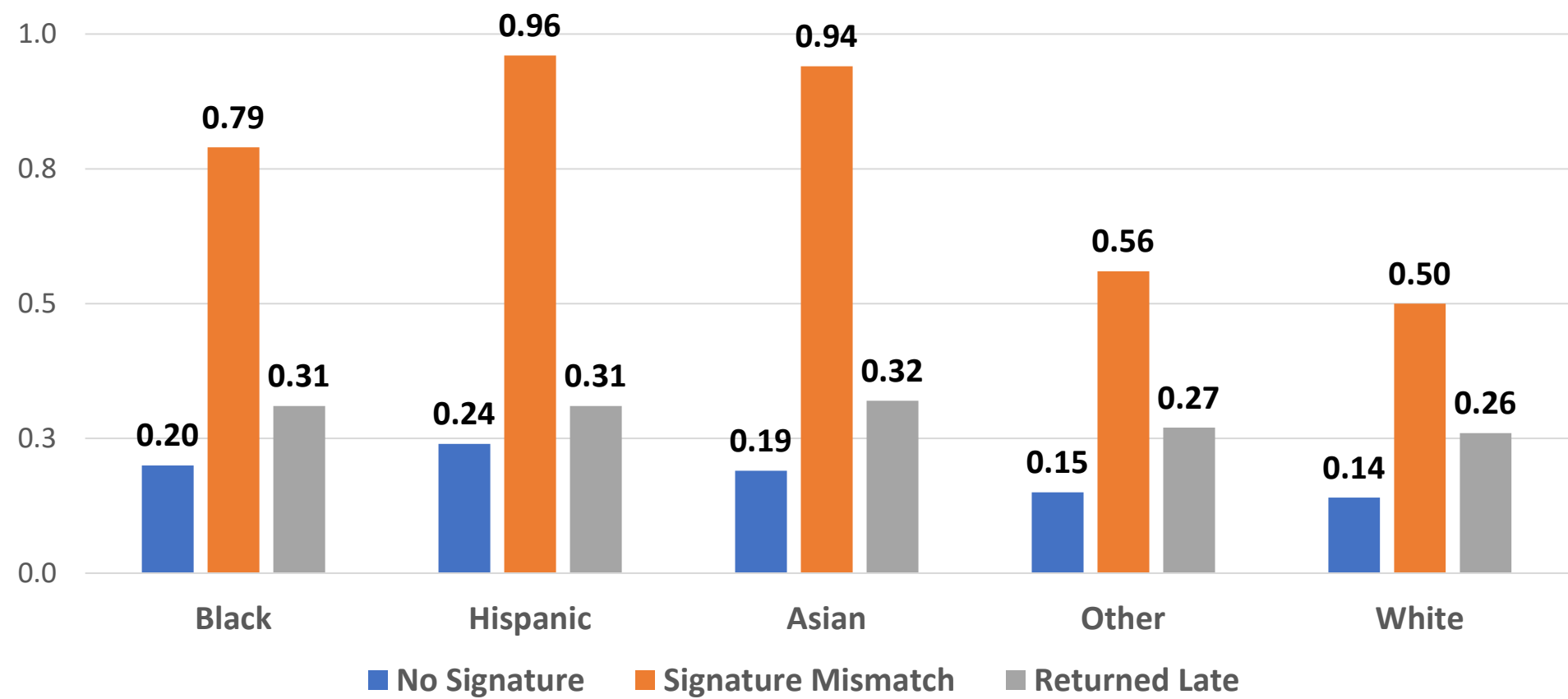
Source: Washington Secretary of State's Elections Data and Statistics

Ballot Rejection Rates by Gender & Age, Primary and General Elections 2020-24



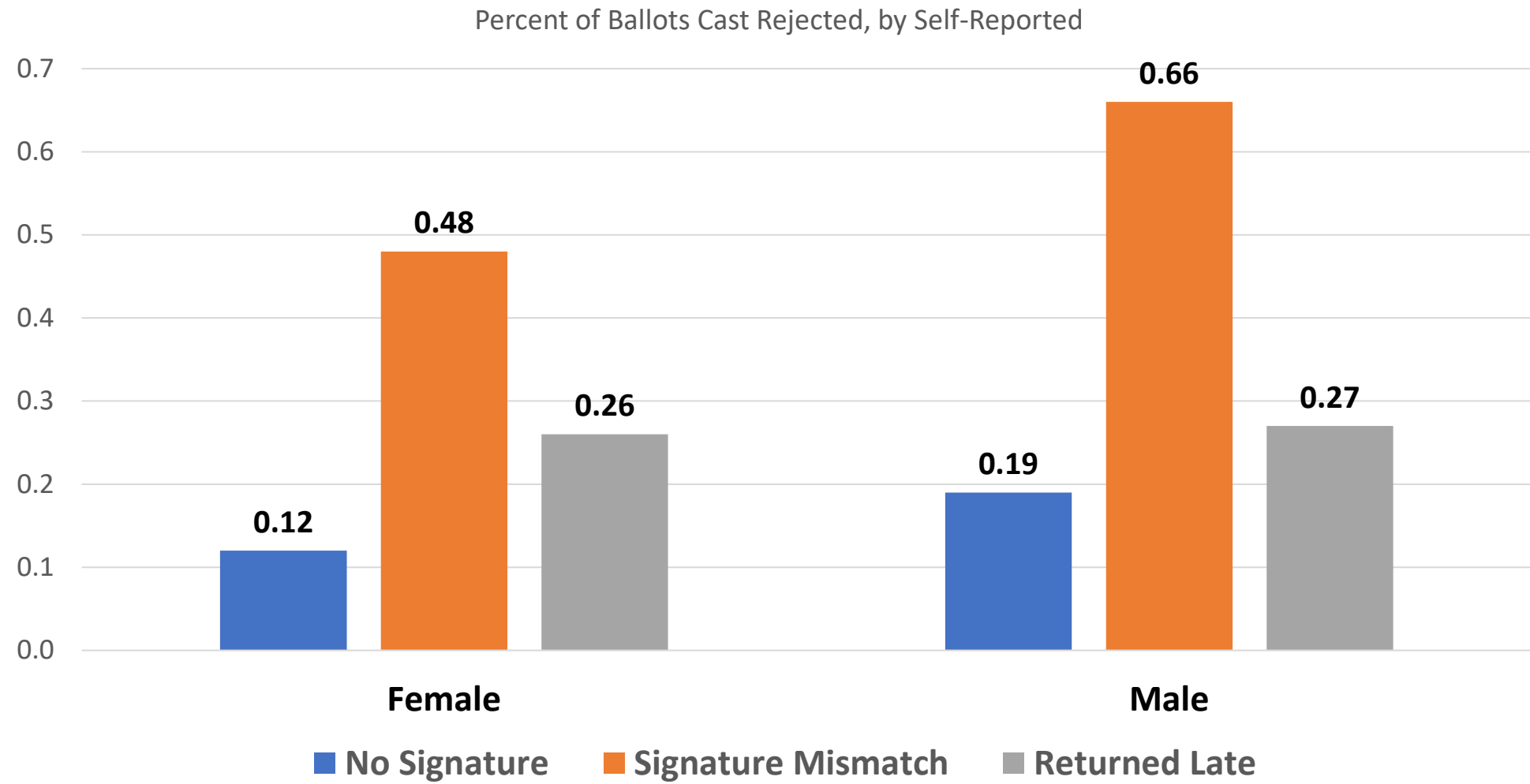
Rejected Ballots by Reason across Imputed Race & Ethnicity, General Elections 2020-24

Percent of Ballots Cast Rejected, by Imputed Race & Ethnicity

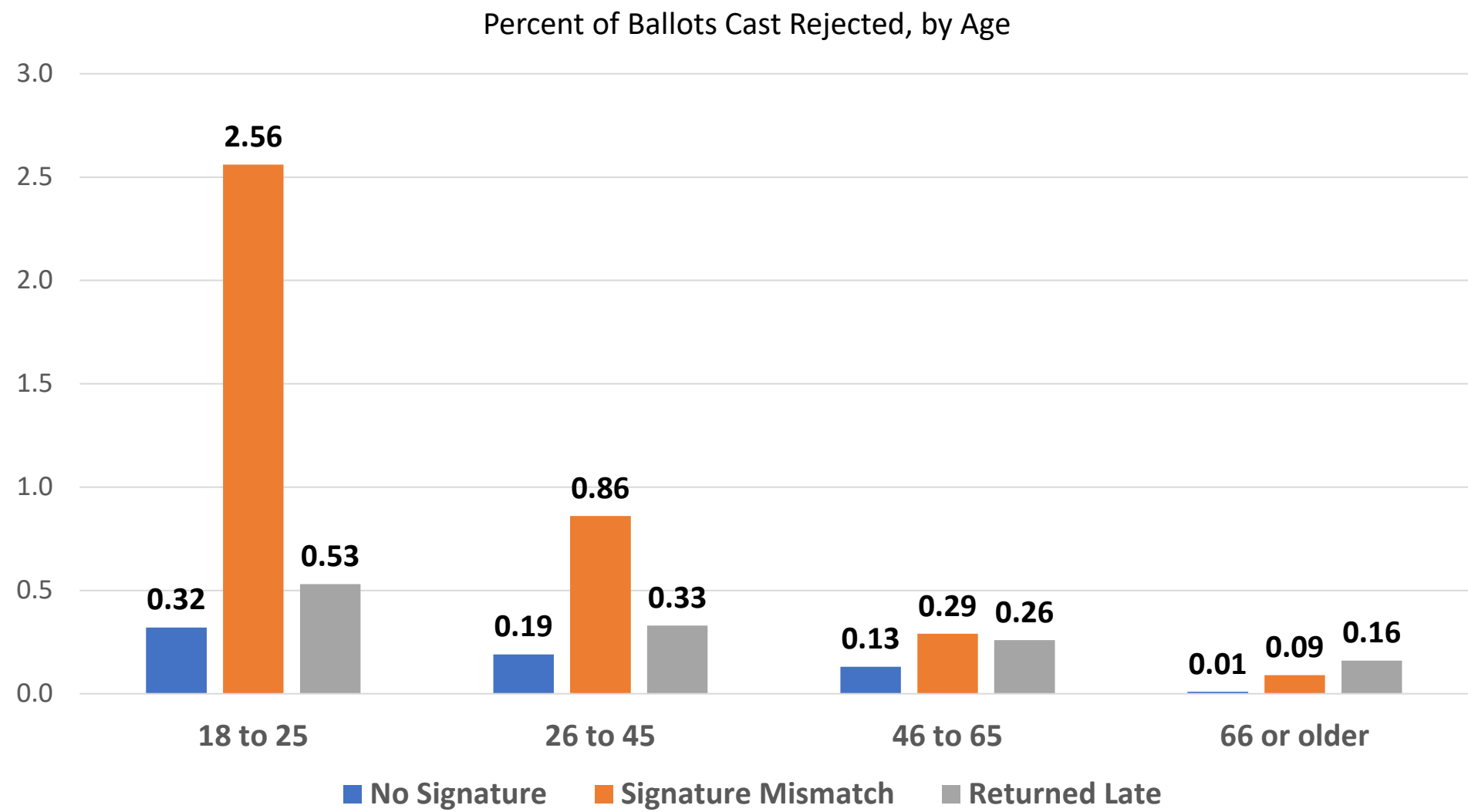


Source: Washington Secretary of State's Elections Data and Statistics

Rejected Ballots by Reason across Gender, Primary and General Elections 2020-24



Rejected Ballots by Reason across Voter Age, Primary and General Elections 2020-24



Conclusions & Next Steps

- **Young adults & voters of color more likely to experience ballot challenges, less likely to cure ballots & more likely to have ballots rejected**
- **Potential changes to postmarking policy could have a significant impact**
- **Policy recommendations**
 - Ballot envelope redesign
 - Greater access to language translation
 - More ballot drop boxes & signature reminders on ballot drop boxes
- **Future Research**
 - Trends in registration, turnout, and ballot challenges within tribal reservations
 - Explore factors associated with ballot curing
 - Signature update letters
 - Longitudinal analysis of voter experiences

Thank You!!!

