

Class Action Claims Resolution Rates in the Northern District of California

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About the Author

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Michael Temprano is a first year student at Stanford Law School. This paper was completed when he was a URAP Fellow at the Civil Justice Research Initiative at Berkeley Law. Working under Professor Anne Bloom, Temprano conducted empirical research on federal class action litigation. His work focuses on analyzing court dockets from the Northern District of California, examining settlement distributions, and evaluating judicial practices in class action proceedings. The data presented in this paper originates from a broader study he conducted for his undergraduate honors thesis, which was awarded the Sociology Departmental Citation at UC Berkeley in 2025. Currently completing his Bachelor of Arts in English and Sociology at UC Berkeley, Temprano has earned consistent Dean's List and Honors accolades. The Cal Alumni Association has also acknowledged him as a two-time Leadership Award recipient. On campus, Temprano has served as the President of the UC Berkeley Latine Pre-Law Society and has edited and published for The Daily Californian newspaper. In addition to his academic pursuits, Temprano works as a Paralegal at Coopers LLP in San Francisco. He has also volunteered with Legal Aid at Work and Bay Area Legal Aid, where he has provided legal resources to over a thousand self-represented litigants. Temprano's research interests include empirical legal studies, access to justice, and the intersection of law and society. He intends to apply to law school after graduating from UC Berkeley in fall 2025.

Abstract

This paper presents an empirical analysis focused exclusively on claims-form class actions — those requiring class members to submit claims forms — in the Northern District of California. By examining 30 claims-form class actions settled between February 2022 to February 2025, this study assesses how claims rates, notice practices, post-distribution accounting compliance, and settlement administration have evolved following the court's adoption of post-distribution reporting requirements in 2018.

The research reveals significant disparities in claims rates across case types, ranging from 30.52% in securities cases to merely 2.24% in data breach litigation, with an overall average participation rate of 17.79%. Multi-channel notification approaches generally achieved higher participation, with combinations of mail, email, and media outreach proving most effective. However, approximately one-third of cases failed to file required post-distribution accounting reports, limiting empirical data for future improvements. Beyond quantitative metrics, this research identifies both structural barriers (such as limited contact information and multi-tiered ownership relationships) and psychological barriers (including information asymmetry and trust deficits) that hinder effective class notification and participation. These patterns illuminate both progress made and opportunities for innovation in notice and settlement administration.

Key Findings

- **Significant variation in claims rates by case type:** Securities cases achieved the highest average claims rate (30.52%), while data breach cases achieved the lowest (2.24%), indicating case-specific factors that substantially affect participation.
- **Multi-channel notice strategies prove most effective:** Notice programs employing multiple communication channels generally achieved higher claims rates than single-method approaches, with "Mail and Media" combinations achieving 18.02% average claims rates.
- **Post-distribution accounting compliance remains incomplete:** Only 63.33% of cases filed required post-distribution accounting reports, representing a 24.33% improvement over previous studies but still limiting transparency and empirical data collection.
- **Settlement design significantly impacts participation:** Cases offering substantial monetary compensation, simplified claims processes, and automatic distribution mechanisms achieved markedly higher participation rates.
- **Technological innovation shows promise:** Cases employing innovative approaches like blockchain notifications and extensive digital campaigns demonstrated the evolving nature of class notification in response to technological changes.

Introduction

Class action litigation serves as a crucial mechanism for aggregating claims of individuals who would otherwise lack resources to seek justice individually. Accessible notice and significant class participation can help to ensure the effectiveness of class actions, particularly those involving claims for money damages.

Depending on case characteristics and available contact information, class actions employ various notification strategies. Traditional mail notice remains common but faces limitations in reaching transient populations and those with outdated addresses. Email notification offers cost efficiency and broader reach but confronts challenges with spam filters and limited email databases. Media notice through newspapers, magazines, and online platforms can reach broader audiences but may lack the specificity needed for effective class member engagement. Some settlements employ automatic distribution mechanisms that eliminate notice requirements entirely by directly paying identifiable class members, typically achieving near-universal participation rates. More innovative approaches include social media campaigns, targeted digital advertising, and case-specific solutions like blockchain notifications for cryptocurrency-related litigation. The choice of notification method significantly impacts both administrative costs and ultimately determines which class members learn of their rights and potential compensation.

In 2018, the Northern District of California sought to seek better information about notice and other factors that impact claims resolution rates by becoming the first federal court to increase access to settlement data through mandatory post-distribution accounting reports.

In 2023, UC San Francisco School of Law drafted "Preliminary Report on Class Action Settlement Distributions in the Northern District of California." Conducted by researchers Brandon Prince, Vaughn Walker, and Scott Dodson, this UCSF study analyzed 234 class action settlements in the Northern District of California between November 5, 2018 and January 31, 2022. The data revealed several important findings about post-distribution accounting compliance and settlement effectiveness. Only 39% of the 234 settlements contained a post-distribution accounting report, demonstrating limited compliance with the Northern District's pioneering requirements. Among the settlements with available data, the study found an average claims rate of 33%, suggesting that approximately two-thirds of class members did not participate in the settlement distribution process. The study also found that 40% of all settlements provided notice solely by mail, indicating limited adoption of digital communication methods. Additionally, the researchers discovered that settlements used paper checks as the sole form of payment distribution in 76% of cases with distribution reports and 64% of all settlements, despite the availability of electronic payment options. These findings highlighted both the challenges of post-distribution accounting compliance and the opportunities for improving class member participation through modernized notice and payment methods.

Several critical distinctions differentiate this current study from the prior UCSF study. First, by examining a more recent timeframe (February 1, 2022 to February 23, 2025), this research captures the evolution of notice practices and PDA compliance rates following

"[T]his research captures the evolution of notice practices and compliance rates following increased awareness of the Northern District's requirements."

increased awareness of the Northern District's requirements.

Second, whereas the UCSF study included automatic payment suits that typically achieve near-universal participation rates, this analysis focuses exclusively on claims-form class actions — those requiring class members to submit claim forms. This narrower focus provides more targeted analysis of participation when affirmative class member action is required, explaining why this study's average claims rate of 17.79% differs from the UCSF study's broader sample.

In comparing the two studies, encouraging trends emerge from the data:

- A dramatic shift from mail-only notice (dropping from 40% to 16.67% of cases) toward multi-channel approaches
- Improved post-distribution accounting compliance (rising from 39% to 63.33%).

These changes suggest the Northern District's pioneering requirements are beginning to reshape settlement administration practices, though substantial opportunities for improvement remain.

Methodology

Employing a comprehensive document analysis approach, this study examined 30 claims-form class action settlements in the Northern District of California terminated between February 1, 2022, and February 23, 2025. This timeframe extends previous research and provides updated insights into class action efficacy within the jurisdiction.

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Limiting the analysis to claims-form class actions — those requiring class members to submit claim forms — enabled focused examination of participation patterns when affirmative class member action is required. For each case, comprehensive profiles were created summarizing legal issues, notice strategies, participation outcomes, and settlement administration details.

To identify the 30 claims-form class actions comprising the research sample, the Federal Judicial Center's Integrated Database (IDB) was used to extract a list of all 243 class actions that settled within the Northern District between February 1, 2022 and February 23, 2025. Then, all class actions that were either dismissed without data or designed as non-claims-form automatic payment suits were eliminated.

Once the 30 claims-form class actions were identified, their dockets were pulled from Bloomberg Law's Litigation Intelligence Database. The complaints of each case were summarized to gain insight into their key legal issues. Then, the following data points were logged for each case: case type, methods of notice, claims rates, settlement distribution process, and rates of post-distribution accounting compliance. These data points were relatively easy to locate if the class action docket contained a PDA report, which when filed, organizes the data in a comprehensive chart. However, the cases that lacked PDA reports necessitated

a more extensive search through additional docket filings, such as the plaintiffs’ motion for preliminary approval, motion for final approval, and order granting final approval. The cumbersome task of searching through these additional filings for data in cases lacking PDA reports indicated the importance of PDA compliance for data organization.

For the cases that included a PDA report, a simple “yes” was inputted into an Excel data spreadsheet. For those that did not include a report, a simple “no” was inputted. To ensure thorough data analysis, the methods of notice data point was coded into seven categories: Mail Only; Mail and Email; Mail, Email, and Media; Mail and Media; Email Only; Email and Media; and Media Only. This coding was done because cases that use media do not simply state that they used “media” as their method of notice. Instead, these cases state specific media outlets such as People Magazine, Wall Street Journal, Website Advertisements, etc. To organize these various outlets into a single uniform category that could be studied and compared with the other categories, they were coded as “media.”

After completing data extraction and coding, empirical analysis began by finding the maximum, average, median, and minimum claims rates in the sample. Sample percentages were logged for each method of notice as well as for PDA compliance. Finally, claims rates were studied by case type and method of notice to observe potential factors impacting class participation.

Findings

Claims Rate Analysis

Substantial variation in class action participation emerged across the 30 settlements examined. **Claims rates ranged from a minimum of 0.60% to a maximum of 62.81%, with an average rate of 17.79%** (Table 1). This wide range indicates that case and settlement characteristics significantly influence participation levels.

TABLE 1: CLAIMS RATES IN THE SAMPLE

Claims Rates	Distribution Reports	All Settlements
Number of Settlements with Data	19	30
Maximum Percentage	62.81%	62.81%
Average Percentage	22.65%	17.79%
Median Percentage	16.73%	11.58%
Minimum Percentage	1.22%	0.60%

Representing a 15.21% decrease from the UCSF study's average claims rate of 33%, this study's 17.79% average claims rate reflects its exclusive focus on claims-form class actions. By evaluating a broader sample that included automatic payment suits, the UCSF study captured cases capable of direct payment without requiring claims forms, explaining its higher average claims rate.

In this more recent study, *Tsantes v. BioMarin Pharmaceutical*, a securities case involving alleged misleading statements about a gene therapy product, achieved the highest observed claims rate of 62.81%. Several factors potentially influenced this exceptional participation rate: the case's substantial \$39 million settlement fund, comprehensive notice program utilizing multiple channels, active follow-up with claimants about uncashed checks, and perhaps greater interest due to the case's connection to gene therapy development.

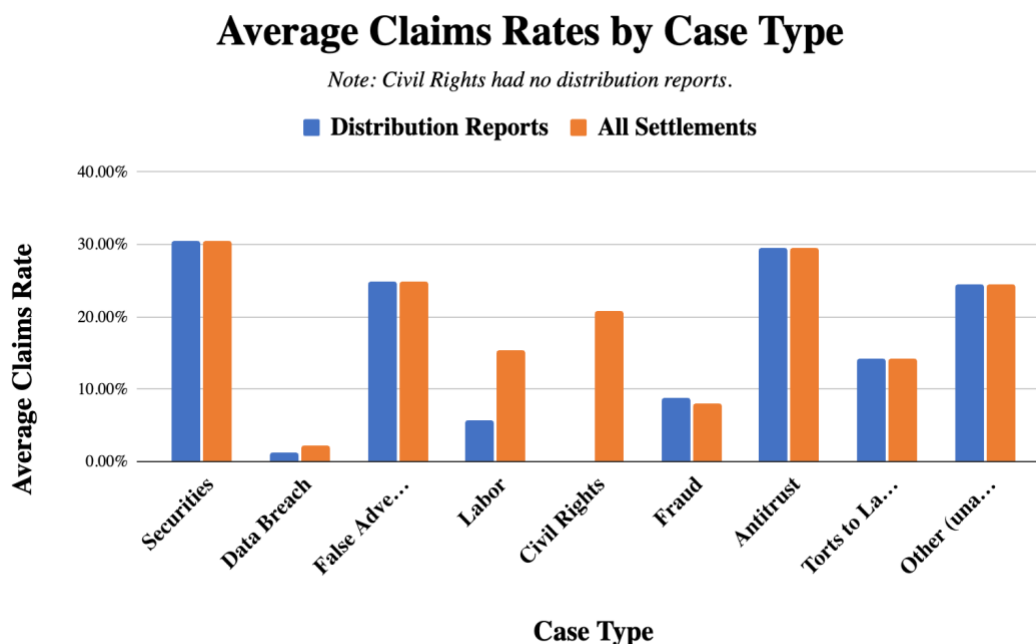
Conversely, *Zuccherro v. Heirloom Roses*, a data breach case involving payment card information, recorded the lowest claims rate of 0.60%. Multiple factors likely contributed to this minimal participation: the claims-based structure limited eligibility to those who experienced actual financial harm; federal reimbursement protections had already compensated most affected consumers; the breached information was limited in sensitivity (only names and payment card information); and significant time had elapsed since the breach.

As these sample cases illustrate, variables such as the size of the settlement fund, the amount awarded to each individual, prior compensation, time elapsed since the injuries, and the overall structure of the settlement itself are all factors that likely contribute to the claims resolution rate.

Case Type Analysis

Claims rates varied dramatically by case type, revealing important patterns about class member engagement across different legal domains.

FIGURE 1: BAR CHART OF AVERAGE CLAIMS RATES BY CASE TYPE



Analysis by case type reveals striking disparities in class member participation, with claims rates varying by more than thirteen-fold across different legal domains. These variations suggest that the nature of the underlying legal claim, the characteristics of the affected population, and the complexity of demonstrating harm all significantly influence class member engagement with settlement processes.

Securities cases demonstrated the highest average claims rate at 30.52%, followed by Antitrust cases at 29.55%. The strong performance of securities cases is notable given their highly technical nature, suggesting that when substantial monetary relief is available, participation may increase significantly despite case complexity. This performance likely reflects several interconnected factors. Institutional investors often possess both resources and connections necessary to navigate complex claims processes. For instance, *Purple Mountain Trust v. Wells Fargo* achieved a 45.66% claims rate with payments up to \$16 million, demonstrating how substantial monetary relief can drive participation even in technically complex cases.

Particularly striking is the data breach category's average claims rate of merely 2.24%, significantly below other case types. This disparity illuminates unique challenges in data breach litigation. Unlike securities cases where harm is quantifiable and immediate, data breach victims often experience no immediate tangible harm. Many remain unaware that they have been affected, particularly when breaches involve middleware companies with which consumers have no direct relationship. Moreover, a paradox emerges wherein victims of privacy violations may be reluctant to provide additional personal information required for claims submission.

The dramatic variation in participation rates across case types — from securities cases achieving 30.52% average participation to data breach cases managing only 2.24% — demonstrates that effective notice and settlement design must be tailored to the specific characteristics of each legal domain. Courts and practitioners should consider these case-type patterns when developing notice strategies and evaluating the adequacy of settlement administration, recognizing that one-size-fits-all approaches may inadequately serve the diverse populations affected by different types of class action litigation.

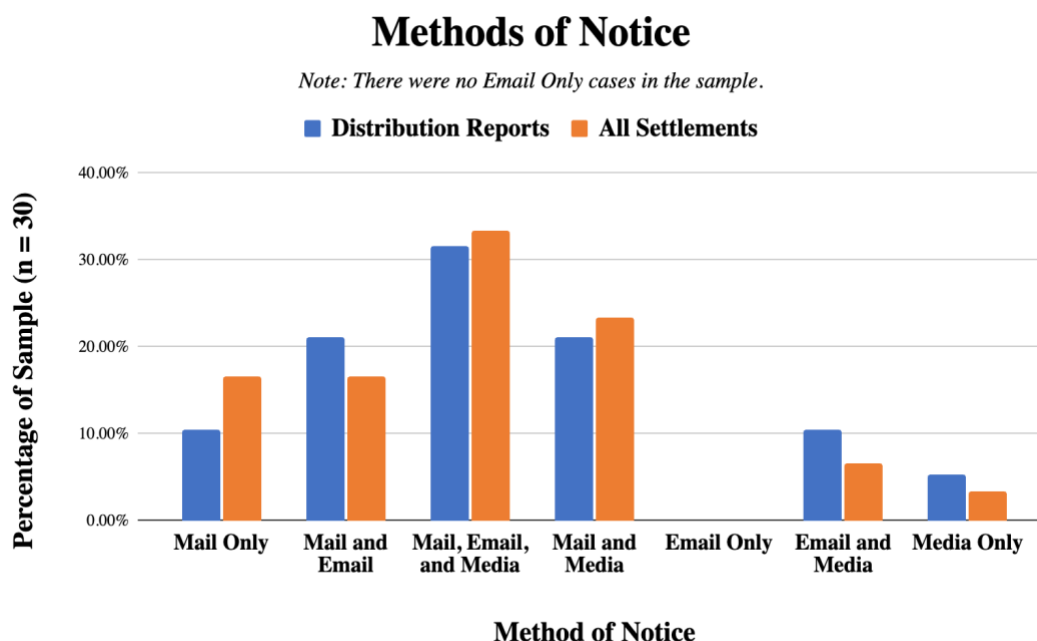
“[E]ffective notice and settlement design must be tailored to the specific characteristics of each legal domain.”

Notice Methods and Their Impact

Analysis of notification strategies reveals a strong preference for multi-channel approaches, marking a significant departure from earlier practices. This suggests an encouraging trend toward future improvement of methods of notice.

"Mail, Email, and Media" was the most common method (33.33% of settlements), followed by "Mail and Media" (23.33%), and "Mail Only" and "Mail and Email" (each at 16.67%). Notably, no settlements relied solely on "Email Only" as a notification method, demonstrating recognition of the risks of spam filters and limitations of exclusive electronic notification.

FIGURE 2: BAR CHART OF METHODS OF NOTICE AS SAMPLE PERCENTAGES

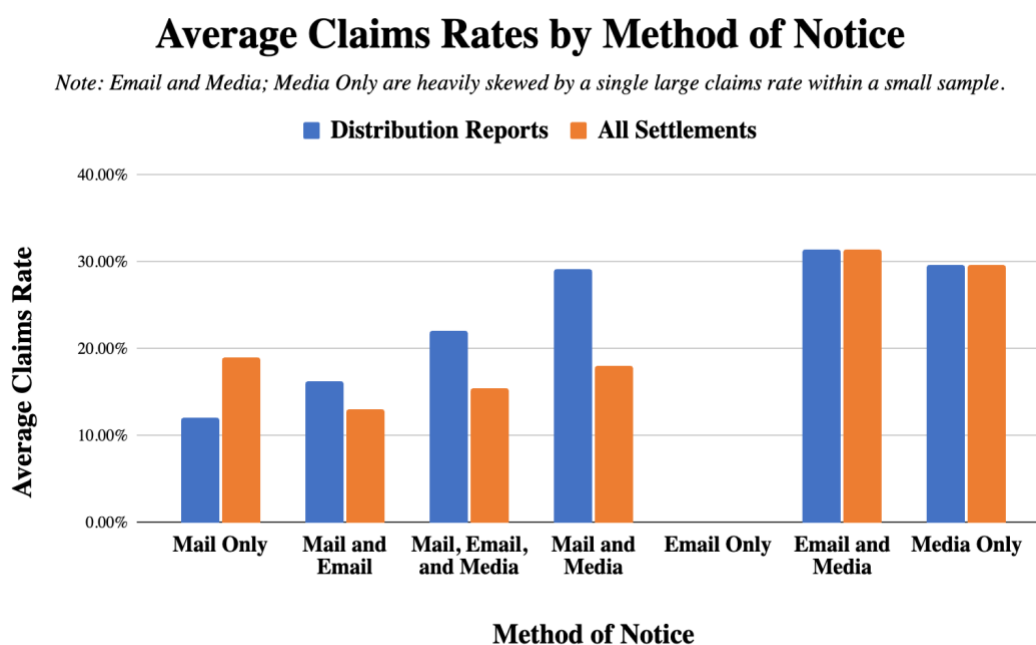


The evolution of class action notice methods reflects both technological advancement and growing recognition that traditional single-channel approaches may inadequately reach diverse class populations.

This data distribution differs markedly from UCSF's preliminary report, which found "mail only" to be the most frequent method at 40% of all class actions. Such a pronounced shift toward multi-channel approaches in the more recent time frame demonstrates a clear trend away from mail-only notification toward comprehensive multi-channel strategies that combine traditional and digital outreach methods.

Beyond documenting the shift toward diversified notification strategies, the data reveals meaningful findings between notice method selection and ultimate participation outcomes. Examining the relationship between notice methods and claims rates demonstrates that multi-channel approaches generally outperformed single-channel methods:

FIGURE 3: BAR CHART OF AVERAGE CLAIMS RATES BY METHOD OF NOTICE



Specific cases within the sample exemplify how creative multi-channel approaches can overcome traditional barriers to class notification and achieve exceptional participation rates. *Smith v. Keurig Green Mountain* typifies an effective multi-channel approach, achieving an extraordinary 61.27% claims rate through a comprehensive notice plan including email, publication in People Magazine, press releases, and online advertisements. Remarkably, this success occurred despite having limited direct contact information for class members, demonstrating how creative, multi-faceted approaches can overcome structural barriers.

The superior performance of multi-channel notice approaches validates the 2018 Federal Rule 23 amendments that expanded permissible notification methods beyond traditional mail. These findings suggest that courts should encourage or require comprehensive notification strategies that leverage multiple

communication channels, particularly for cases involving large or diverse class populations where single-method approaches may fail to achieve adequate reach.

Structural and Psychological Barriers to Class Participation

Persistent structural challenges impede effective notification across case types, with contact information deficiencies ranging from minimal (1.2% in *Sanders v. The RealReal*) to substantial (27% in *Roe v. SFBSC Management*). Securities cases confronted unique multi-tiered ownership challenges, as exemplified in *Purple Mountain Trust v. Wells Fargo*, where the majority of class members were beneficial purchasers whose securities were purchased by brokerage firms.

Consumer product cases faced particularly acute challenges with limited direct purchaser relationships. *Julian v. TTE Technology* possessed emails for only 5,555 of 1.1-1.6 million class members. Meanwhile, data breach cases grappled with enormous class sizes coupled with limited awareness of middleware companies, as demonstrated by *Cottle v. Plaid Inc.*'s approximately 98 million affected individuals.

“[D]ata breach cases grappled with enormous class sizes coupled with limited awareness of middleware companies...”

Temporal factors created additional hurdles, with substantial time gaps between events and notification in cases like *Bitmouni v. Paysafe Limited*.

Beyond logistical obstacles, significant psychological and cognitive barriers affect class member engagement:

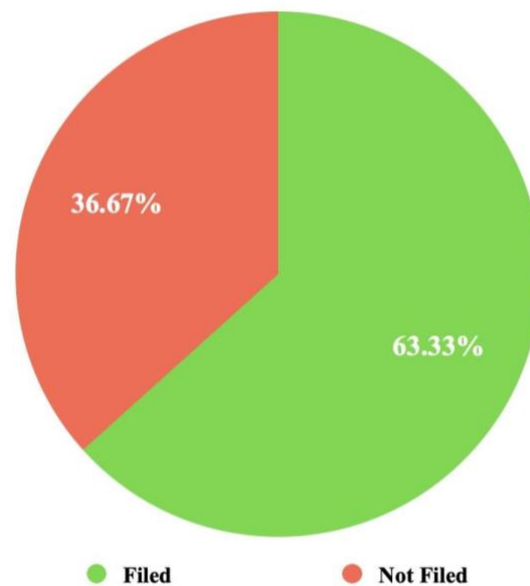
- Information asymmetry created substantial obstacles, as in *Julian v. TTE Technology*, where 58% of purchasers claimed absolutely no understanding of refresh rate (Hz), which was a critical component to the harm.
- Trust deficits further complicated participation, as the harm creating the cause of action can diminish willingness to respond to notices.
- Motivational factors also proved influential. In *Chen v. Premier Financial Alliance*, inactive policyholders achieved a 17.4% claims rate compared to active policyholders' 4.8% rate. This stark contrast occurred because "active policyholders who did not claim retained a valuable benefit — their life insurance policy."

Post-Distribution Accounting Compliance

Across the sample, 63.33% of cases filed Post-Distribution Accounting (PDA) reports, representing a 24.33% increase from the UCSF study's finding of 39% compliance. While this improvement suggests growing recognition of PDA's importance, substantial room for enhancement remains.

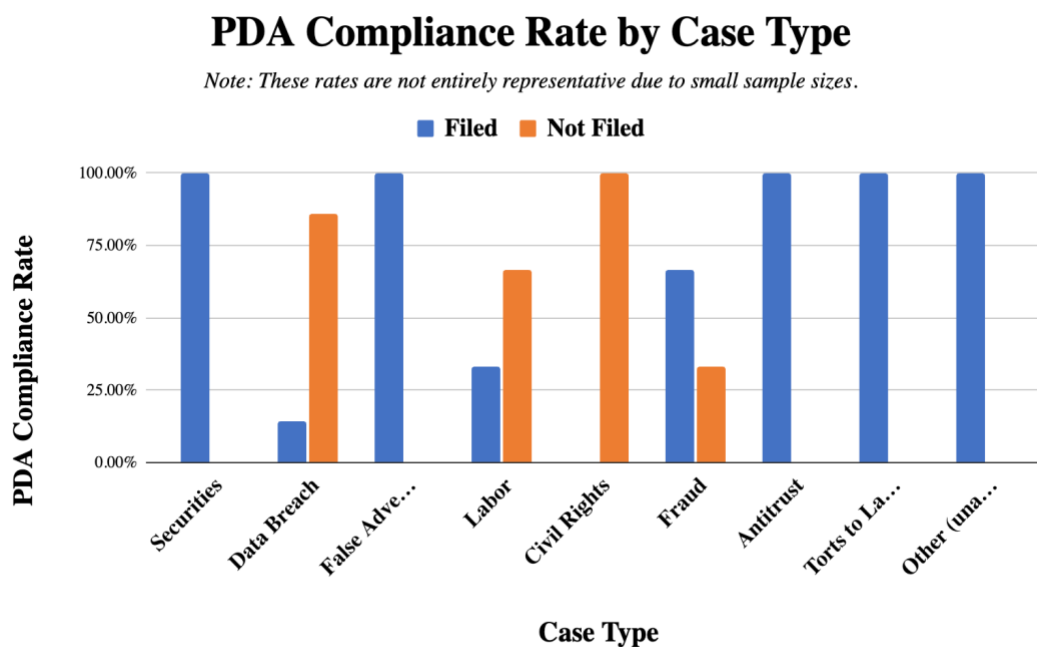
“63.33% of cases filed Post-Distribution Accounting (PDA) reports”

FIGURE 4: PIE CHART OF SAMPLE-WIDE PDA COMPLIANCE RATES



When examined across different case types, PDA compliance rates exhibit dramatic disparities:

FIGURE 5: BAR CHART OF PDA COMPLIANCE RATES BY CASE TYPE



Perfect PDA compliance in securities cases might reflect greater scrutiny of financial matters, higher settlement amounts warranting more thorough documentation, and possibly enhanced judicial oversight in such complex cases. By contrast, poor compliance in data breach cases might relate to their typically lower claims rates producing less impetus for detailed accounting, or potentially different judicial expectations for these newer types of litigation.

The stark variation in PDA compliance across case types — from universal compliance in securities cases to minimal compliance in data breach litigation — suggests that enforcement mechanisms may need strengthening and that different practice areas may require tailored approaches to settlement accounting.

Settlement Design Factors That Enhance Participation

Several design elements emerge as particularly effective in enhancing participation across case types:

- Automatic Distribution Mechanisms:** Eliminating the need for claims forms achieved dramatically higher participation rates. *Hernandez v. Wells Fargo* achieved a 100% participation rate for economic damages through automatic payments, though claims remained necessary for emotional distress damages.

“Eliminating the need for claims forms achieved dramatically higher participation rates.”
- Substantial Individual Recovery:** Despite challenges reaching former debtors, *Norton v. LVNV Funding* achieved a 10.15% claims rate driven by substantial individual payments averaging \$6,103.66 per claimant.
- Simplified Claims Processes:** *Yamagata v. Reckitt Benckiser* enhanced participation by utilizing a simple form with just two questions. Payment method diversity also proved important, with *Cottle v. Plaid Inc.* accommodating different preferences by providing direct deposit, PayPal, Venmo, and mailed check via USPS.
- Innovative Technology Adoption:** Cutting-edge approaches demonstrated potential for overcoming traditional barriers. *Johnson v. Maker Ecosystem Growth* successfully used blockchain technology to disseminate notice directly to 329 class members with valid blockchain addresses, illustrating how case-specific technological solutions can enhance reach within specialized communities.

“Cutting-edge approaches demonstrated potential for overcoming traditional barriers.”

Understanding Success: Beyond Claims Rates

While claims rates provide valuable insights into settlement reach, they represent an incomplete metric of success. Settlement distribution data offers additional perspective on economic efficiency. Despite

achieving a 61.27% claims rate, *Smith v. Keurig Green Mountain* distributed only \$3,472,143 of its \$10 million settlement fund, illustrating how high participation does not necessarily translate to full fund distribution.

Check-cashing rates provide another analytical dimension. *Hessefort v. Super Micro Computer* achieved a 100% check-cashing rate, suggesting effective notice comprehension and legitimacy perception among claimants. These multiple metrics underscore the complexity of measuring class action success and the value of comprehensive post-distribution accounting.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, several key recommendations emerge for improving claims rates and access to settlement data in the Northern District of California and beyond.

- **Enhance Multi-Channel Notice Strategies:** Courts should encourage or require comprehensive notification approaches that combine traditional mail with digital outreach including email, social media, and targeted online advertising. Empirical evidence demonstrates that multi-channel approaches generally achieve higher participation rates than single-method strategies, with some combinations nearly doubling participation compared to mail-only approaches. Settlement administrators should be required to document why specific notification methods were chosen and how they address the particular demographics of the class. Given the dramatic shift from 40% mail-only notice in the UCSF study period to just 16.67% in this study, the trend toward diversification should be accelerated through formal guidelines.

“Empirical evidence demonstrates that multi-channel approaches generally achieve higher participation rates than single-method strategies.”
- **Strengthen Post-Distribution Accounting Compliance:** Although PDA compliance improved from 39% to 63.33% between studies, over one-third of cases still fail to file the required reports. This persistent gap undermines data transparency and limits empirical information necessary for future improvements. Courts should implement stronger enforcement mechanisms, including mandatory post-approval status conferences specifically focused on notice implementation and claims rates. Cases must remain open until all settlement money has been distributed and finalized. Furthermore, the stark differences in compliance rates across case types — from 100% in securities cases to 14.29% in data breach cases — necessitates case-type-specific guidance and expectations.

“Cases must remain open until all settlement money has been distributed and finalized.”
- **Address Case-Specific Participation Barriers:** With claims rates varying dramatically from 30.52% in securities to 2.24% in data breach cases, targeted interventions become essential. For data breach cases, courts could consider presumptive eligibility structures that eliminate documentation requirements for small-value claims, tiered claim processes that provide simplified paths for common scenarios, and extended claims periods

recognizing the delayed awareness often characterizing these cases. Securities cases could benefit from simplified notice programs leveraging existing broker-dealer relationships to improve reach while reducing costs. Settlement design should prioritize automatic distribution mechanisms wherever possible, as demonstrated by cases achieving near-universal participation through direct payment structures.

Conclusion

Despite the Northern District's innovation in class action litigation, notice and settlement administration remain capable of further improvement. When courts cannot effectively notify class members of their rights or transparently account for settlement funds, the consequences extend beyond individual cases — they undermine the empirical foundation necessary for future reforms.

This empirical analysis of 30 class action settlements in the Northern District of California reveals both significant progress and persistent challenges in class action notice and settlement administration. With an average claims rate of 17.79% — varying dramatically from 30.52% in securities cases to 2.24% in data breach litigation — there remains considerable opportunity to extend justice to affected individuals.

Clear evolution in notice practices emerges from the data, with multi-channel approaches now dominating where mail-only notice once prevailed. Combined with improving post-distribution accounting compliance, this shift suggests growing recognition of the need for innovation in class action administration. Nevertheless, persistent gaps — over 80% of class members not participating on average, one-third of cases failing to file accounting reports, and dramatic disparities across case types — illuminate the distance yet to travel.

“[P]ersistent gaps — over 80% of class members not participating on average, one-third of cases failing to file accounting reports, and dramatic disparities across case types — illuminate the distance yet to travel.”

Differential access to legal knowledge and resources directly shapes participation rates, as revealed by these findings. Securities investors with institutional connections achieve participation rates over 13 times higher than data breach victims who may be unaware of their rights or relationships with breached entities. Such patterns substantiate long-standing critiques about barriers to legal participation, particularly for those without specialized knowledge or institutional connections.

Looking forward, the Northern District's demonstrated commitment to procedural innovation positions it ideally to lead in developing enhanced notification strategies, simplified claims processes, and consistent transparency requirements. As courts continue to refine their approach to class action administration, making these mechanisms increasingly accessible and transparent to all affected individuals — regardless of their social position or resources — must remain paramount.

“[T]he Northern District's demonstrated commitment to procedural innovation positions it ideally to lead...”

Future research should examine demographic analysis of claims rates, longitudinal tracking of notice method effectiveness, and cost-benefit analysis of different notification strategies. Additionally, controlled experiments comparing notice formats could provide actionable insights for optimizing class member engagement.

Through dedication and discourse between scholars and practitioners, courts can realize the full potential of collective litigation, strengthening this crucial legal mechanism for aggregate justice.

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