

2023

# Special Election Report

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**Washington  
Community  
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# Summary

## Voter Turnout

Across Washington, 436,736 voters cast a ballot in this Special Election – an overall turnout of 32.3%. **More than 72% of voters who cast a ballot in this election also voted in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 General Elections**, highlighting the role of frequent voters in deciding Special Election results. In Seattle alone, 154,597 voters cast a ballot – an overall voter turnout of 33.3%, 1.0% greater than the statewide average. This included 15,997 first-time voters, a remarkable feat for an off-year Special Election.

## Election Results

Washington's 2023 February Special Election spanned 29 counties and included 73 total contests. The majority of these were levies related to school funding (57 total) or funding for other municipal and/or county services (15 total, including fire departments and emergency services). **90% of all levies passed, including 88% related to school funding and 100% related to other services.** The final contest, a citywide ballot initiative in Seattle (I-135) to develop and maintain affordable social housing, passed with more than 57% of the vote.

## Voter Outreach

At the end of this report, we include a spotlight on the voter outreach efforts made by one of our network partners, Washington Community Action Network, in collaboration with the House Our Neighbors coalition for Seattle's I-135 campaign. In the ten weeks leading up to Election Day, **the coalition reached out to more than 225,000 Seattle voters** with four waves of outreach: a gradual in-person canvassing campaign across the entire ten weeks, a wave of text messages from the time ballots were mailed until Election Day, a single bout of mailers to low-propensity voters days ahead of Election Day, and a round of phone calls after Election Day to voters whose ballots were rejected but curable. We provide a deep dive into each of these outreach efforts, including the demographic breakdown of the voters they targeted and the impact they had on voter turnout.

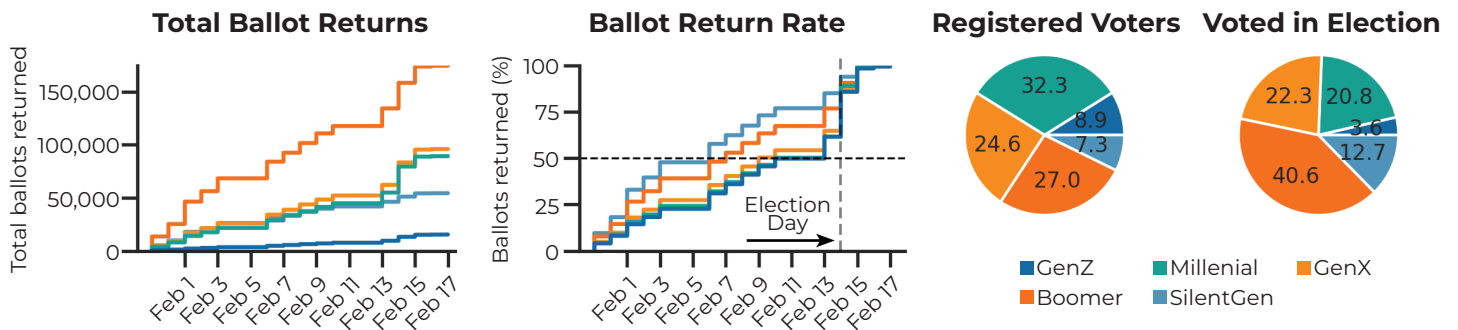
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# Statewide Voter Turnout

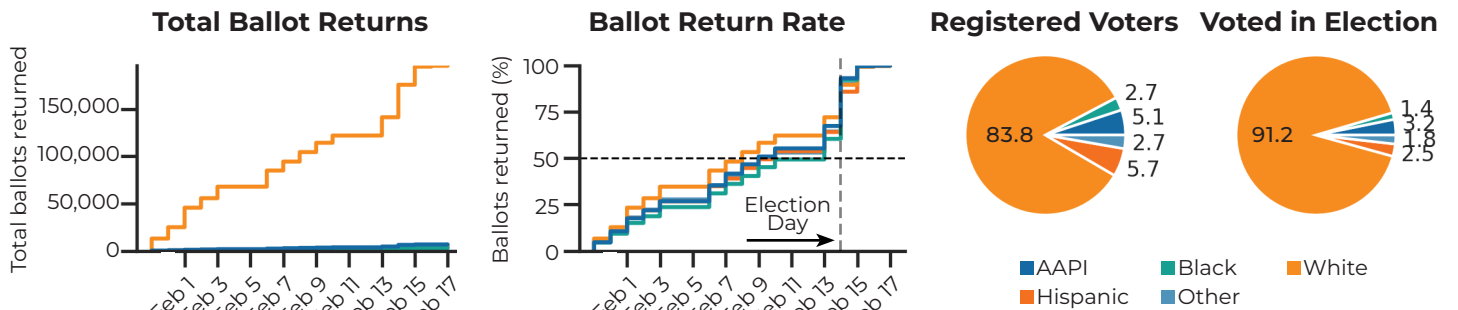
## Ballot returns by age group

Of the 430,369 Washingtonians who voted in this Special Election, more than 40% were Baby Boomers. GenX and Millennial voters made up an additional 45% of the vote, while SilentGen and GenZ voters made up less than 16%. There was a direct effect of age on ballot return rate: SilentGen and Baby Boomer voters returned their ballots early (~50% of ballots returned at least 8 days before Election Day), while GenX, Millennial, and GenZ voters returned their ballots closer to Election Day (~50% of ballots returned on Election Day). Older voters were over-represented in their relative vote share: ~53% of ballots came from Baby Boomer and SilentGen voters, despite those voters making up <35% of the electorate in Washington.



## Ballot returns by racial group

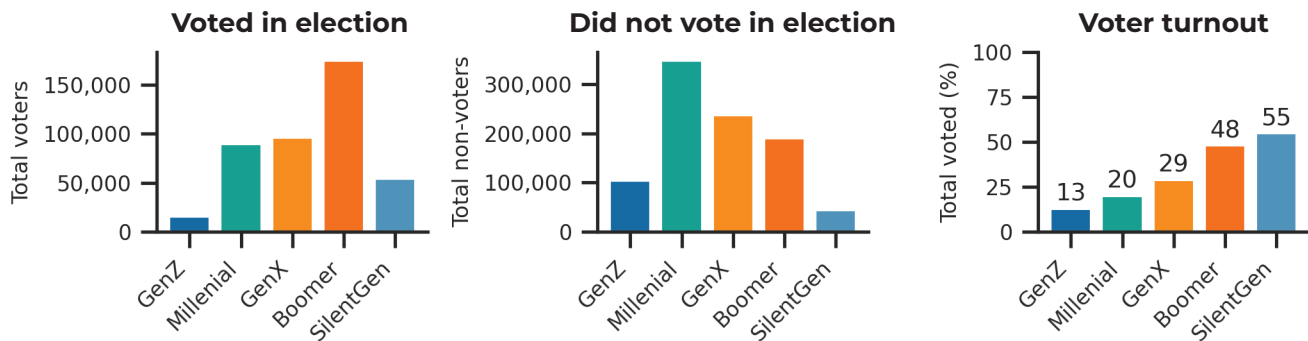
White voters made up the overwhelming majority of votes cast in this Special Election, accounting for >91% of all votes. There was a small effect of race on ballot return rate: White voters returned their ballots earlier (~50% of ballots returned 6 days before Election Day), while AAPI, Black, and Hispanic voters returned their ballots later (~50% of ballots returned 4 days before Election Day). White voters were over-represented in their relative vote share, while BIPOC voters (AAPI, Black, and Hispanic) were under-represented.



# Statewide Voter Turnout

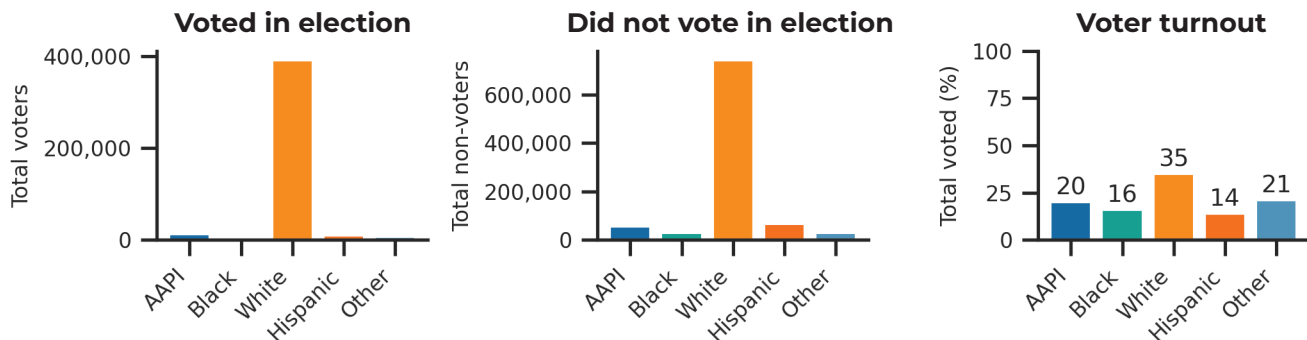
## Voter turnout by age group

Across all age groups, the largest number of ballots were cast by Baby Boomer (174,852), GenX (96,184), and Millennial (89,405) voters. Conversely, the largest numbers of registered voters who did not vote in this Special Election were Millennial (347,879), GenX (236,698), and Baby Boomer (190,409) voters. Voter turnout increased proportionally with age: turnout was lowest for GenZ (13%) and Millennial (20%) voters and highest for Baby Boomer (48%) and SilentGen (55%) voters.



## Voter turnout by racial group

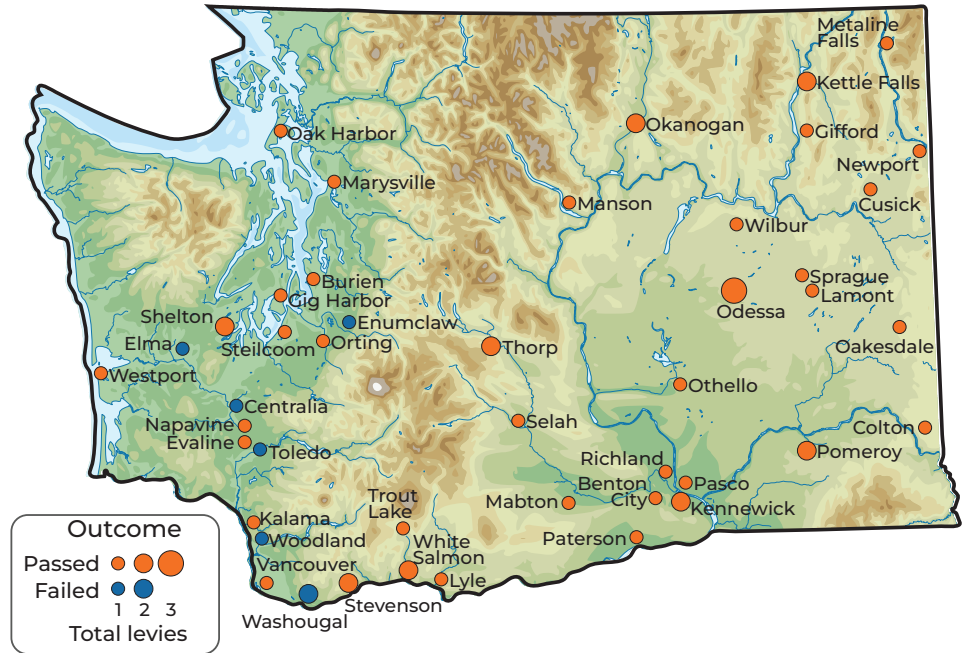
Across all racial groups, the largest number of ballots were cast by White voters (392,467), followed by AAPI (13,615), Hispanic (10,708), Other (7,758), and Black (5,820) voters. Similarly, White voters made up the group with the largest number of registered voters who did not vote in this Special Election (743,029), followed by Hispanic (66,396), AAPI (55,229), and Black (30,121) voters. Voter turnout was highest among White voters (35%) and lowest among Black (16%) and Hispanic (14%) voters.



# Statewide Results

## Election results for school levies

The majority of contests on the ballot for this Special Election – 57 out of 73 – were levies for school funding. 50 these levies passed (88%), including every levy east of the Cascades. The seven that failed included Washougal #112, Woodland #404, Toledo #237, and Centralia #401 in Southwestern Washington; Elma #68 on the Peninsula; and Enumclaw #216 in South King County. These results show broad support for education across Washington state, with no obvious rural/urban disparity. Individual levies are colored based on the outcome, and the dot size is proportional to the number of levies in that city/town.



## Election results for other levies and initiatives

The other 16 contests on the ballot in this Special Election all passed, including eight levies related to funding for fire districts, four levies for funding countywide services, and three citywide initiatives.

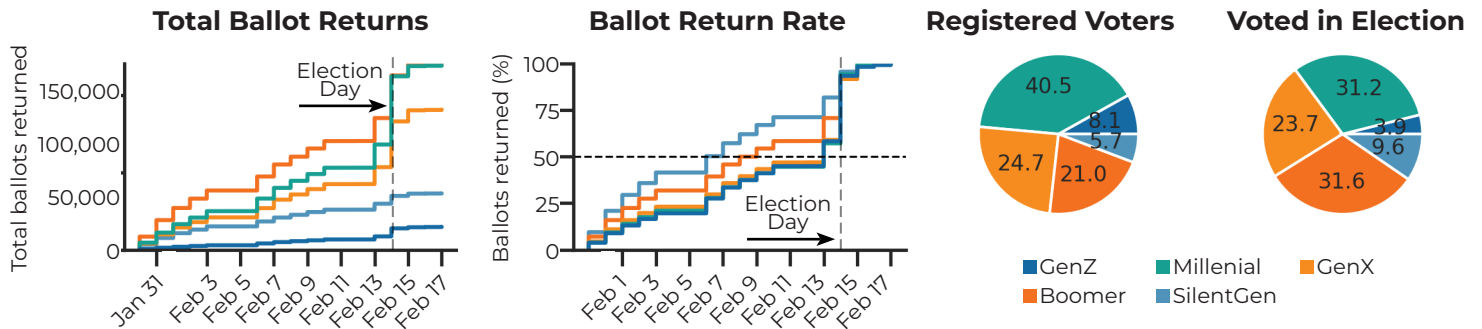
Arlington's Prop 1, an Emergency Medical Services Levy, passed with 69% of the vote. Seattle's I-135, a Social Housing Initiative, passed with 57% of the vote. Vancouver's Prop 3, an Affordable Housing Levy, passed with 54% of the vote.



# Seattle Voter Turnout

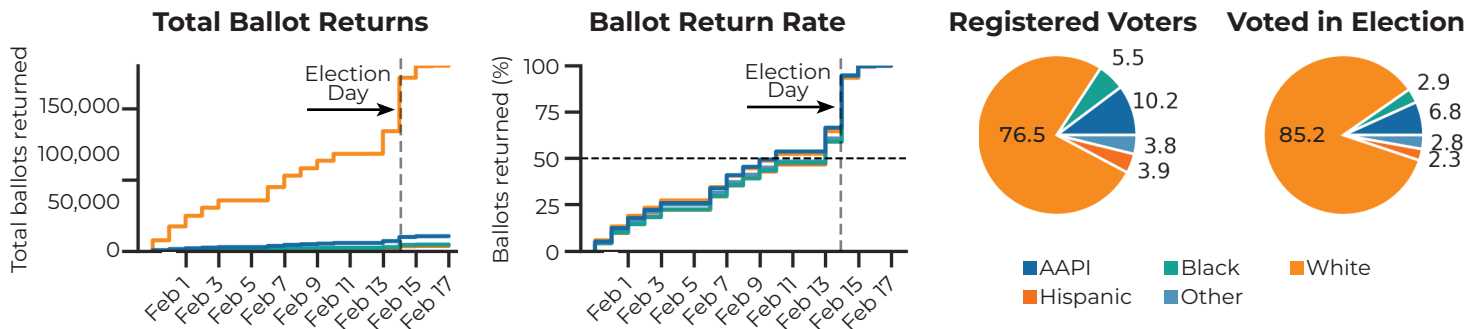
## Ballot returns by age group

36% of all ballots cast in this Special Election (152,927) were from Seattle voters. More than 63% of all votes came from Baby Boomer and Millennial voters, with an additional 24% from GenX voters and ~13% from SilentGen and GenZ voters. There was a direct effect of age on ballot return rate: SilentGen voters returned their ballots earliest (~50% of ballots returned at least 8 days before Election Day), followed by Baby Boomer voters (~50% of ballots returned 5 days before Election Day); GenX, Millennial, and GenZ voters returned the majority of their ballots on Election Day (<50% of ballots returned prior to Election Day). Older voters were over-represented in their relative vote share: ~42% of ballots came from Baby Boomer and SilentGen voters, despite those voters making up ~27% of the electorate in Seattle.



## Ballot returns by racial group

White voters made up the overwhelming majority of votes cast in Seattle in this Special Election, accounting for >85% of all votes. There was a small effect of race on ballot return rate: AAPI and White voters returned their ballots earliest (~50% of ballots returned 4 days before Election Day), while Black, Hispanic, and Other voters returned their ballots later (~50% of ballots returned by the day before Election Day). White voters were over-represented in their relative vote share, while BIPOC voters (AAPI, Black, and Hispanic) were under-represented.

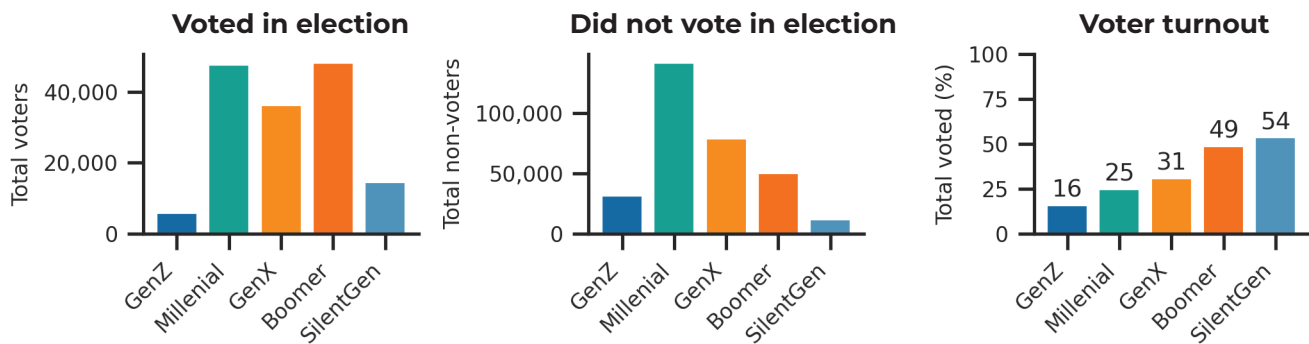




# Seattle Voter Turnout

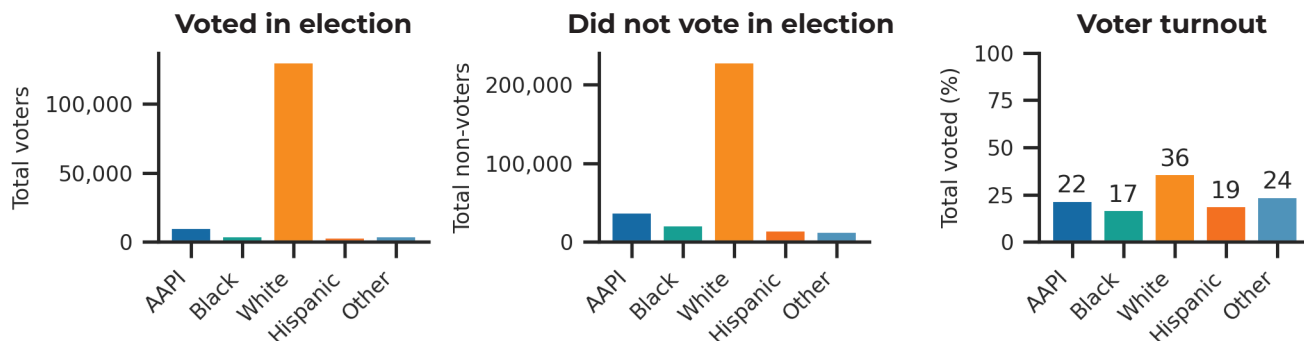
## Voter turnout by age group

Across all age groups, the largest number of ballots were cast by Baby Boomer (48,308) and Millennial (47,760) voters. The largest numbers of registered voters who did not vote in this Special Election were Millennial (142,378), GenX (79,601), and Baby Boomer (50,494) voters. Voter turnout increased proportionally with age: turnout was lowest for GenZ (16%) and Millennial (25%) voters and highest for Baby Boomer (49%) and SilentGen (54%) voters. However, turnout was higher among young Seattle voters than young voters in the rest of the state (3 to 5% higher), and lower among older Seattle voters than older voters in the rest of the state (1% lower).



## Voter turnout by racial group

Across all racial groups, the largest number of ballots were cast by White voters (130,349), followed by AAPI voters (10,334). Similarly, White voters made up the group with the largest number of registered voters who did not vote in this Special Election (228,908), followed by AAPI (37,715), Black (21,579), and Hispanic (14,966) voters. Voter turnout was highest among White voters (36%) and lowest among Black (17%) and Hispanic (19%) voters. However, turnout among BIPOC voters was higher in Seattle than in the rest of the state (+1% for Black voters, +2% for AAPI voters, and +5% for Hispanic voters).

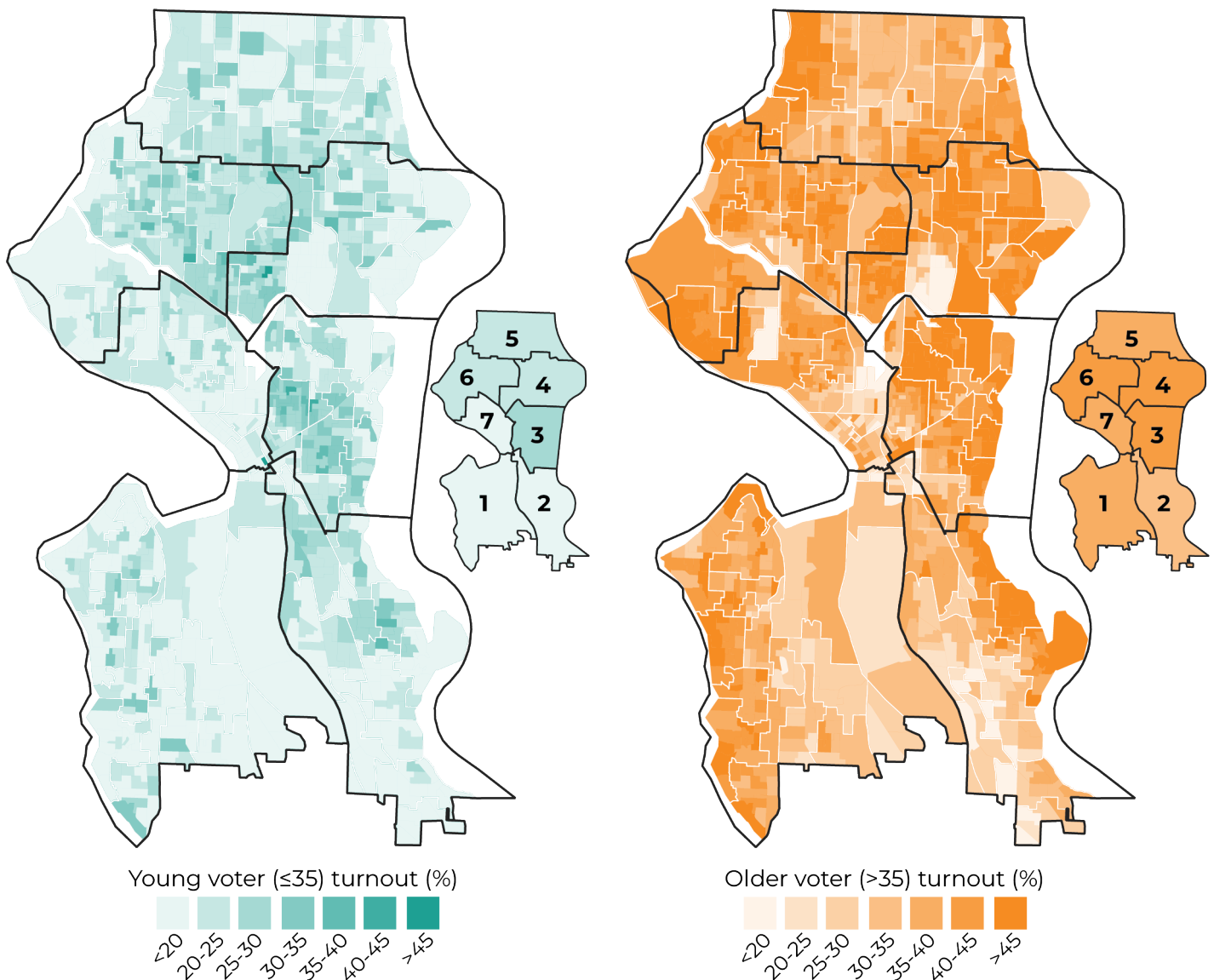




# Seattle Voter Turnout

## Voter turnout: young and older voters

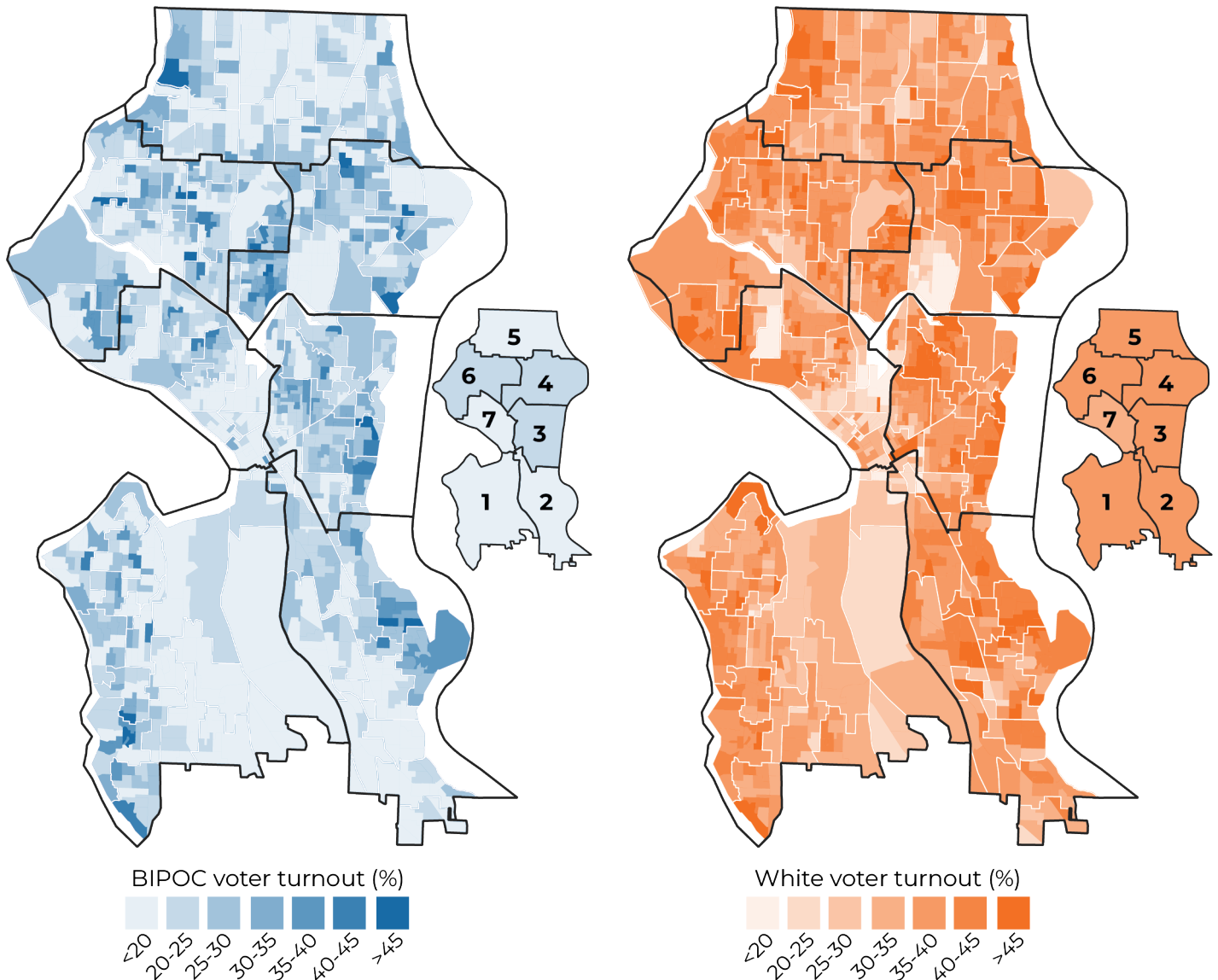
Citywide turnout for young voters ( $\leq 35$  years old) was 22.2%, 16% lower than turnout for older voters ( $>35$  years old; 38.3%). Across the city, turnout among young voters was higher than turnout among older voters in just 24 precincts (2% of all precincts). Within Seattle's seven City Council districts, young voter turnout ranged from 18% (District 1) to 27% (District 3), but young voter turnout was lower than older voter turnout in all seven districts. Within Seattle's City Council districts, older voter turnout ranged from 31% (District 2) to 43% (District 4). Turnout by young voters was highest in the Central District, Capitol Hill, Fremont, and Columbia City; turnout by older voters was highest in wealthy neighborhoods bordering Lake Washington and Lake Union (Seward Park, Madrona, Madison Park, Montlake, Magnolia). There were an average of 127 young voters per precinct who did not vote in this special election (range: 0 to 510), compared to an average of 182 older voters per precinct (range: 6 to 446). 94% of young voters who voted in this Special Election also voted in the 2022 General Election, compared to 97% of older voters.



# Seattle Voter Turnout

## Voter turnout: BIPOC and White voters

Citywide turnout for BIPOC (AAPI, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and multiracial) voters was 20.4%, 16% lower than turnout for White voters (36.3%). Across the city, voter turnout among BIPOC voters was greater than among White voters in just 45 precincts (4% of all precincts). Within Seattle's seven City Council districts, BIPOC voter turnout ranged from 18% (District 1) to 24% (District 3), but BIPOC voter turnout was lower than White voter turnout in all seven districts. White voter turnout ranged from 33% (District 7) to 38% (District 2) across Seattle's City Council Districts. Turnout by BIPOC voters was highest in Fremont, Wallingford, Seward Park, Leschi, and parts of West Seattle; turnout by White voters was highest in Magnolia, Madrona, Seward Park, and North Capitol Hill. There were an average of 86 BIPOC voters per precinct who did not vote in this special election (range: 2 to 547), compared to an average of 222 White voters per precinct (range: 3 to 522). 93% of BIPOC voters who voted in this Special Election also voted in the 2022 General Election, compared to 97% of White voters.

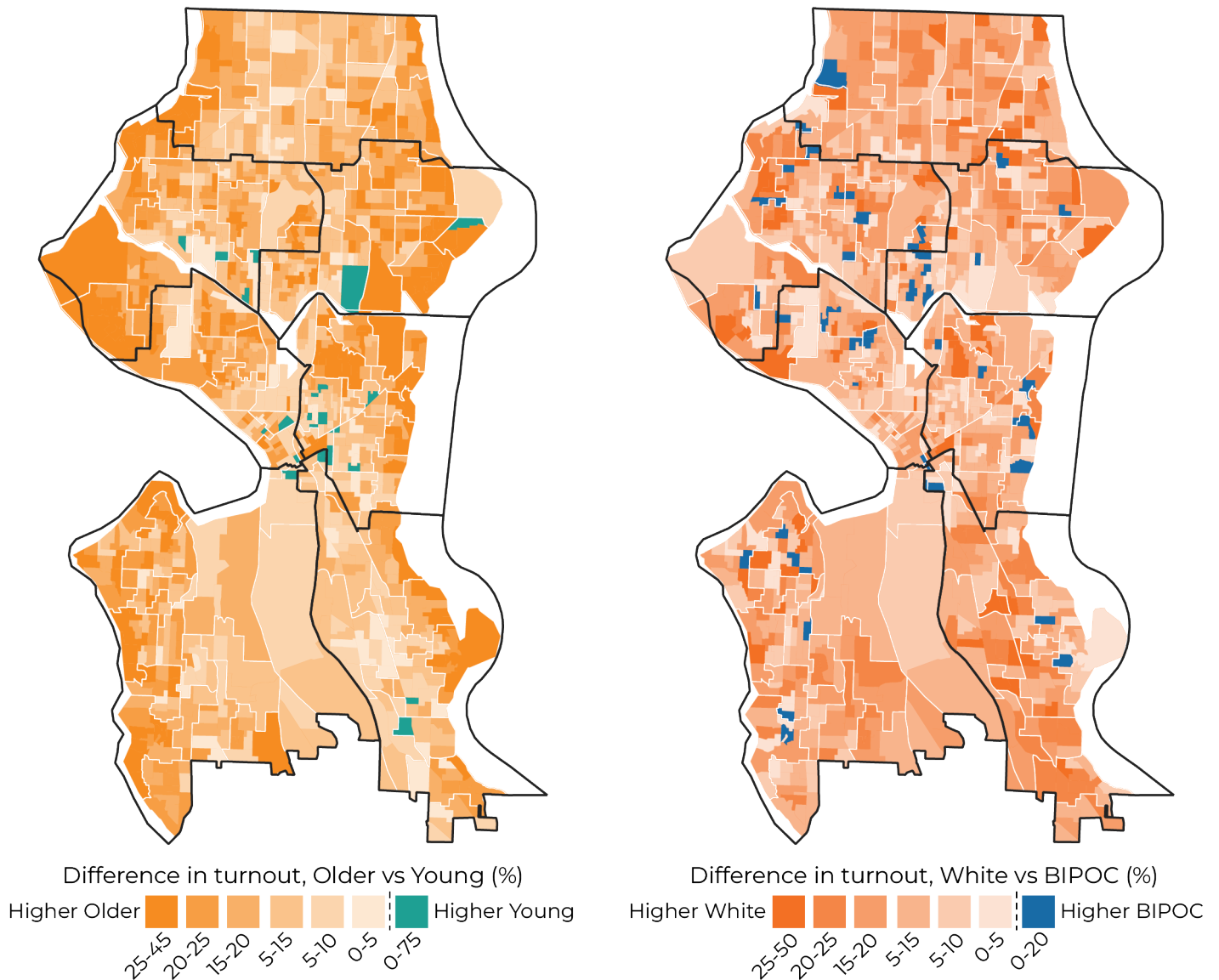


# Seattle Voter Turnout

## Turnout disparity by age and race

Across Seattle, young voters ( $\leq 35$  years old) cast more votes than older voters ( $>35$  years old) in 74 precincts (7%), concentrated in First Hill, South Lake Union, the University District, and Fremont. Older voters cast more ballots than young voters in all seven City Council Districts. Accounting for the relative density of young voters in each precinct, there was a young voter deficit in 98% of all precincts. In other words, controlling for the number of young voters in a given precinct, turnout among older voters outpaced turnout among younger voters in all but 20 precincts.

Similarly, BIPOC voters (AAPI, Black, Hispanic, Native American, or multiracial) cast more votes than White voters in just 38 precincts (4%), concentrated in the International District and South Beacon Hill. White voters cast more ballots than BIPOC voters in all seven City Council Districts, with the closest vote share in District 2. Accounting for the relative density of BIPOC voters, there was a BIPOC voter deficit in 96% of precincts; turnout among White voters outpaced turnout among BIPOC voters in all but 45 precincts, including many majority-BIPOC areas of the city.

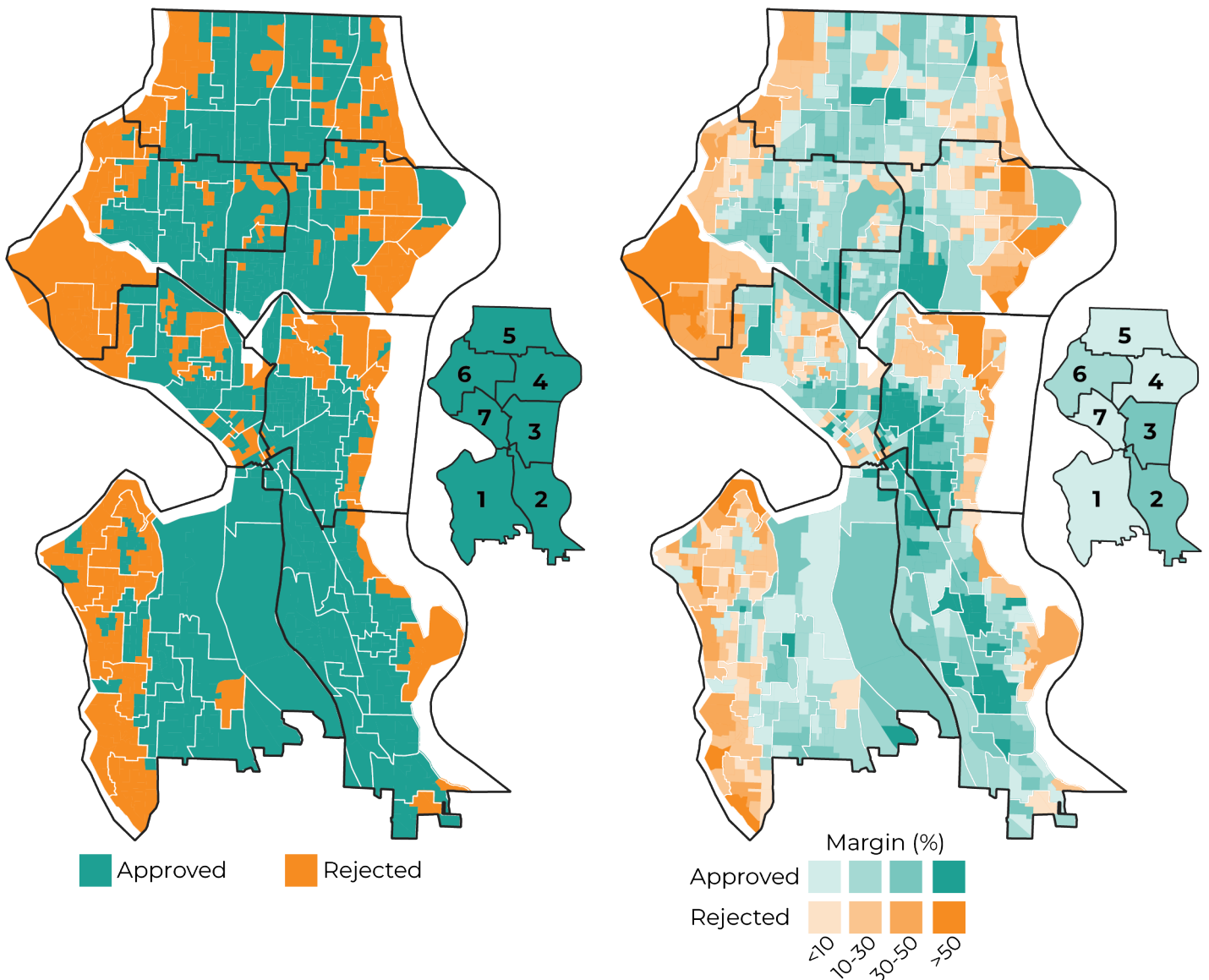
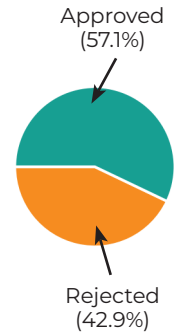


# Seattle I-135 Results

## Results by voting precinct and city council district

Seattle voters approved I-135 by more than 14%, with 702 precincts (68%) and all seven City Council districts voting to approve. Voting precincts that rejected the measure were centralized to West Seattle, Magnolia, Madison Park/Montlake, Sand Point, and Seward Park. With the exception of Fremont, Wallingford, the University District, and Lower Queen Anne, all precincts touching water rejected the measure.

Strongest support for I-135 came from the Central District, Capitol Hill, the International District, Beacon Hill, Columbia City, and the University District. Precincts that voted in favor of I-135 had an average approval vote share of 66% while those who voted in opposition to I-135 had an average rejection vote share of 60%, demonstrating broad support even within precincts that opposed the





# Seattle Voter Outreach

## Highlight: WA CAN and House Our Neighbors!

Seattle's Social Housing measure (I-135) was spearheaded by House Our Neighbors: a coalition of advocates who believe that everyone deserves safe and stable housing. In the 10 weeks leading up to this Special Election, the coalition contacted a total of 228,644 voters in Seattle, spanning 99% of Seattle's voting precincts. Turnout among voters who received in-person outreach leading up to Election Day were 6.3% more likely to cast a ballot than voters who received no outreach, and voters who received follow-up phone calls to correct a ballot issue were 78% more likely to cure their ballot than voters who received no follow-up. Moreover, 13% of voters contacted by the coalition who voted (9,625 voters) did not vote in at least two of the last three General Elections, and 15,997 voters contacted by the coalition voted for the first time ever.

Total outreach attempts

463,642

Precincts with some attempts

99%

Total first-time voters

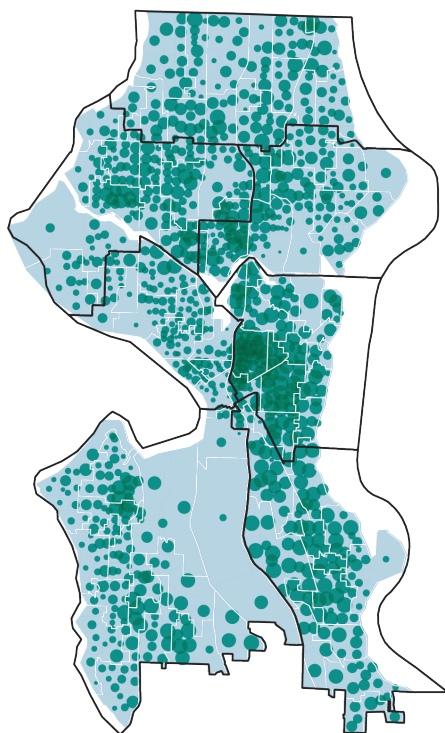
15,997

### CO-CHAIRS

Tiffani McCoy  
Tye Reed

### MEMBERS

Mauricio Ayon  
Myra Lara  
Jeff Paul  
Suresh  
Chanmugam  
Rebecca Lavigne  
Joy Randall  
LéTania Severe  
Camille Gix  
Nikkita Oliver  
Jacob Schear



Bubbles indicate voter outreach attempts, and bubble size is proportional to total outreach attempts.

• 10 attempts    ● 1,500 attempts

“ We are people with lived experience and advocates who are committed to ending the homelessness crisis in Seattle. We represent many organizations that have spent decades proposing concrete solutions to improve people's lives, funded by progressive taxation, that provide paths for people to gain permanent housing, and end the conditions that lead to homelessness.

**Mauricio Ayon, Organizer & Coalition Member**

“ The initiative provides an incredibly logical approach to Seattle's housing crisis that directly targets one of its root causes (unsustainably high prices) and is built on a very clear, tested model that is designed to be self-sustaining and self-expanding. It was easy to talk to voters about the initiative because there was always a good answer to the questions they had and the more they learned, the more they got excited about it. And the community the campaign has built is beautiful—driven, passionate, founded on relationships.

**Meera Sethi, Voter & Volunteer**

“ I volunteered because I saw I-135 as an opportunity to improve the material conditions of all Seattleites and an opportunity to tip the power imbalance between landlords and tenants. I-135 envisions a bold future where housing is not a commodity beholden to capital interests, but built for and controlled by the people of Seattle. When communicating this vision to perspective supporters at the doors, people instantly connected with it. In a city of mostly renters, everyone has had a negligent landlord, or a landlord who prices gouges, or finds any excuse to take their security deposit or evicts one's neighbor/family/friend to nominally increase their net-worth. These, in Seattle, are universal experiences and the I-135 victory is a step towards a future where they are not.

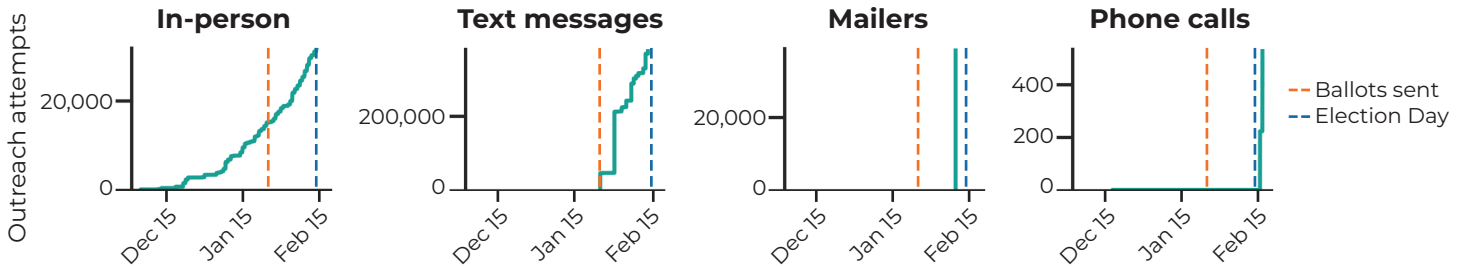
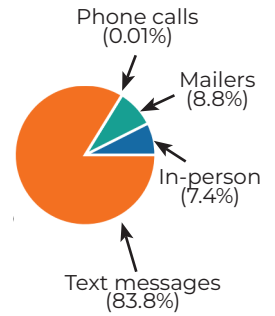
**Eric Lee, Voter & Volunteer**

# Seattle Voter Outreach

## Outreach by contact method and time

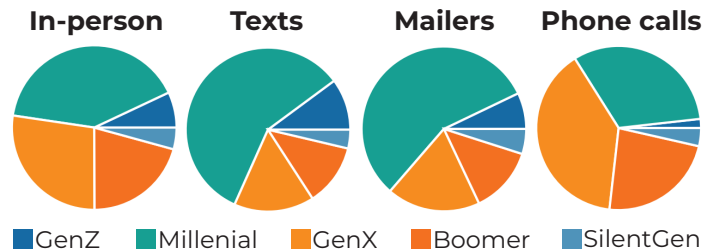
Voter outreach included ten weeks of in-person outreach leading up to Election Day, three weeks of text messages leading up to Election Day, a single round of mailers, and two days of phone calls after Election Day.

Between mid-December and Election Day, 31,769 voters were contacted by in-person outreach. 38.6% of voters canvassed in-person voted in this election, a turnout rate 6.3% higher than citywide. From the day ballots were mailed until Election Day, 380,894 voters were canvassed over texts. 29.3% of voters who received texts voted, a turnout rate 4% lower than citywide. The week before Election Day, 38,694 voters were sent mailers reminding them to vote. 27.1% of voters who received mailers voted, a turnout rate 5.2% lower than citywide. After the last day of voting, 501 voters whose ballots had been rejected but were curable received phone calls. 85% cured their ballots, compared to 7% of all voters whose ballots were rejected but curable.

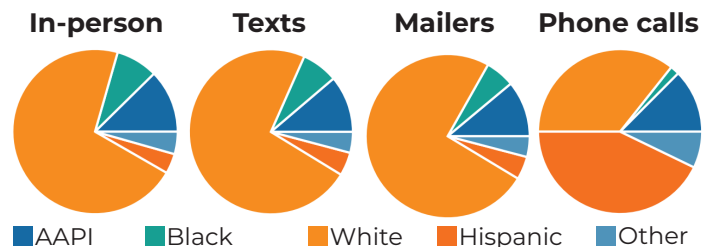


## Outreach by age and racial group

Millenials were the largest target of outreach, receiving 62% of all outreach and the largest share of in-person canvassing, texts, and mailers. Millenials, GenZ, and GenX voters received the largest number of texts and mailers, while GenX, Millenial, and Baby Boomer voters received the largest number of in-person canvassing and phone calls.



White voters were by-far the largest target of outreach, receiving 73% of all outreach and the largest share of in-person canvassing, texts, and mailers. AAPI voters were the second largest target of outreach with 12%, while Hispanic voters received the largest number of phone calls (42%) but the smallest amount of overall outreach (4%).



# Methodology

## Election Results

Results for the 2023 Special election were downloaded from [sos.wa.gov/elections](https://sos.wa.gov/elections), processed with Python, and visualized with Python and QGIS. Absolute and relative vote shares were calculated for each candidate or position (support/oppose) and displayed with bar and pie charts, respectively. The candidate with the most votes (“Winner”) and the difference in votes between the first and second place candidates (“Vote margin”) were calculated for each precinct in Seattle, and the resulting data were displayed via maps. Neighborhood boundaries (downloaded from [data.seattle.gov](https://data.seattle.gov)) were added to all maps and visualized with solid white lines.

## Voter Turnout

Voter data was accessed through the WA state voter file, via a Civis connection to VAN. Data was processed using Python, and visualized using Python and QGIS. Since WA state does not collect race information, race data is modeled by Catalist using census tract data as a guide. For several analyses throughout this report, voters were clustered into groups based on their generation (GenZ: born after 1999; Millennial: born between 1981 and 1999; GenX: born between 1965 and 1981; Baby Boomer: born between 1946 and 1965; SilentGen: born between 1928 and 1946) or race (BIPOC: AAPI, Black, Hispanic, Native American, or multiracial; White: White only). The matchbacks report from [sos.wa.gov/elections](https://sos.wa.gov/elections) was mapped onto the voter file to calculate voter turnout.

## Voter Outreach

Data on partner outreach ahead of the Special Election was accessed through the WA state voter file, via a Civis connection to VAN. Data was processed using Python, and visualized using Python and QGIS. Outreach data was clustered by contact-type and demographics to analyze the relative breakdown of outreach per group and to compare voter turnout between voters who received outreach and those who did not. All outreach included in this report was done using Washington Community Action Network’s VAN, in collaboration with the House Our Neighbors committee of Real Change News.