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The Unmotivated Voter: A Profile of the Unregistered and Non-Participating in Oregon,
Washington, and Colorado

By
Joseph Dietrich

Claremont Graduate University
2021

Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Joseph Dietrich as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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Abstract

The Unmotivated Voter: A Profile of the Unregistered and Non-Participating in Oregon,
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By
Joseph Dietrich

Claremont Graduate University: 2021

One of the central questions facing the political process is why some people regularly vote and others do not. There is abundant evidence to show two things about voting behavior. One is that amongst those who are registered to vote, whether measured by income or race, the less advantaged have not used their power by voting more often or even consistently. The other is that these same people are less likely to register in the first place. Both raise the question of why those with potentially the most to gain from voting choose not to use the tools of the democratic system, for example, to preserve or expand needed social welfare programs or to reform public institutions that have traditionally locked them out.

One answer to this question is that the process of voting has costs in the form of physical, time, and economic barriers to participation and the less advantaged are less able to bear those costs. Voting by mail (VBM) is an attempt at reducing those costs by removing them almost entirely. Ballots are mailed and can be returned for free. The only cost associated with VBM is the modest amount of time required to complete the ballot. This removal of barriers to participation should reduce the disparity in voting between these two groups. It then follows that if this was the main reason for the disparities in voting then the percentage of disadvantaged persons who vote should increase with the use of a VBM voting system. The research presented here finds that this has not happened and that, with regard to race, minority voters have not

consistently increased their participation in voting despite the long-term presence of voting by mail in the three states included in the research.

Previous research on the institution of voting by mail, which is examined in depth, sought to determine whether or not VBM has had the expected result of increasing the relative participation, including among minority groups, has produced mixed results. At best, one can say it is inconclusive in identifying long term advantages for increased participation. As such, the new research presented in this report looks closely at the effects of introducing voting by mail on minority populations in three western states (Washington, Oregon, and Colorado). Each introduced statewide voting by mail in the last 20 years, making them perfect cases for trying to assess its effects on participation by reducing the costs of voting.

To start, the research uses GIS map data to look at whether areas of dense African American or Latinx population in the three states under consideration coincide with precincts displaying a high percentage of voter turnout across federal elections from 2008 through 2018. After demonstrating that these areas actually evince low percentages of voter turnout, the paper considers why this might be occurring using a survey of otherwise eligible voters who have not registered to vote. The intention of the survey is to see what factors underlay their choice to not register or participate in voting, assess the effect of reducing the cost of voting, and discover what might move them to participate in voting. Several possibilities regarding the lack of voting participation emerged from the survey. Many noted that they lack the knowledge of how to register and vote or they lack knowledge regarding candidates or politics in general. Most respondents noted that their issues fell within one of three categories: a lack of interest, a lack of trust in the system or government itself, or actively not liking politics or the participants. The results indicate that some non-participating voters may be persuaded to become voters through

education and get out the vote (GOTV) efforts. Others, the vast majority of respondents, demonstrate a personal, individual psychological disconnection from the political process. They are therefore likely unrecoverable as voters.

Dedication

For Carla:

Her unwavering patience, understanding, caring, and support have seen me through this effort, and it would not have been possible without her. She encourages me when I have doubts, listens when I need to talk, and we celebrate success together.

Thank you for always being there.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the mentorship and support of Dr. Jean Reith Schroedel. She has been nothing less than exceptional in her instruction, encouragement, and advocacy as I have pursued this degree. I am lucky to know her, and I could not have asked for a better person to guide me through this process. I am proud to call her not just my Professor, but also my friend.

Thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Melissa Rogers and Dr. Paul Peretz for their assistance. Their council has always been thoughtful and useful. It is much appreciated.

Thank you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Voting By Mail

The Constitution of the United States provides that each state is responsible to establish a system and manner of elections. As a result, the United States has a patchwork of 50 different sets of law pertaining to elections to state and federal office. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, twenty-two states had laws allowing for all or some elections to be conducted entirely by mail. All states have now allowed some form of voting through the mail (such as no-excuse absentee ballots) as the pandemic continues to impact our ability to gather publicly. Thirty-three states now have permanently adapted their laws to allow for the continued use of some form of mail-based voting even once the pandemic has subsided. As a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, voting by mail is now the most widely adopted and utilized election reform in the United States. Its presence and use is widespread and growing.

Overall, the process is often referred to as “Vote by Mail” or VBM, however, VBM is a far more specific kind of system for voting. In the most basic understanding, what may be called VBM schemes or systems are effectively the ideas of absentee voting mixed with early voting and then extended to all registered voters of a particular precinct regardless of their location within or exterior to the state boundaries. Most states traditionally have limited the use of voting by mail to particular cases such as for “special districts”, rural or low population counties, or for primary elections. Utah currently allows local counties to determine whether they want to run their elections through a VBM system. Beginning in 2020, California began allowing any county to use a VBM system for all elections at their discretion. Three states ---Colorado (2013), Washington (2011), and Oregon (2000) ---have moved to a statewide VBM system for all

elections. As of the 2020 election cycle, Hawaii joined these states in adopting and using a statewide VBM election system.

Vote by Mail, or VBM, has become a catchall term for any mail-in voting system. However, there are differences in schemes which basically break into two categories. The first, let us call it “mail service”, is a vote by mail system wherein the system and its logistics are directed at primarily collecting ballots via the United States Postal Service. The focus of this system is the mail service and all other methods of collecting ballots are significantly reduced or eliminated. The second scheme is really a version of absentee ballots, sometimes called “no excuse”, extended to all voters regardless of their location and then also having capacity to collect ballots in an in-person manner of some kind. The focus on this system is still on the traditional method of in-person voting but with a new twist for vote return. Either of these vote by mail systems coupled with various combinations of in-person return, drop boxes, and polling places along with other voting reforms like same day registration and early voting are sometimes referred to as “VBM plus” systems ---vote by mail plus other methods of voting.

When vote by mail is invoked within a state, all registered voters receive a ballot in the mail from the state. Ballots are mailed out well ahead of the designated Election Day. This results in voters having an “election period” rather than a single day to vote. The voter then marks the ballot and puts it in an envelope designed to ensure privacy. They must be sure to sign the affidavit printed on the exterior of the envelope or the vote will not be counted. The voter then returns the envelope and vote to the state. Different states allow for different methods of return. Some allow the ballot to be returned via the United States Postal Service, and/or by dropping it off at a polling station, and/or at a designated vote return center. Interestingly, in many jurisdictions a statewide VBM scheme being in effect does not also preclude a voter from

in-person voting on or before Election Day (if there is early voting in that state). It remains the choice of the voter how to register their vote. For example, voters in Colorado are mailed a ballot, but they can choose to cast a ballot at an in-person vote center on Election Day, during the early voting period, or they can drop off, or mail back their ballot at any time once it is received. The three states currently using statewide VBM schemes each have different systems making a comparative study of them difficult. In Oregon, all ballots must be mailed or dropped in a ballot return box. Washington State follows a similar system. Colorado allows for both voting by mail and voting at the polls. Ballots that have been returned must be voided, in person, in order to then vote at the polls.

In the 2020 election cycle, most of what were described as VBM reforms due to COVID-19 were in fact directed at creating, extending, or liberalizing the system of absentee ballots to encompass all voters in a respective state. This was most often done by removing excuse requirements for requesting a ballot or extending the excuses to include a public health crisis thus creating de facto “no excuse” absentee systems. States simply tweaked their existing rules to make it easier to use absentee ballots, in this case due to the health crisis. No states passed new laws creating a “mail service” system of comprehensive statewide voting by mail. The efforts to install a form of “mail service” VBM system in Utah, California, and Hawaii that came online in the 2020 election cycle were a fortuitous outcome of efforts that began years prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020.

1.2 The Calculus of Voting, VBM, and Why Unmotivated Voters Do Not Care

For decades, scholars have tried to understand the reasons why citizens choose to participate or abstain from voting. Anthony Downs, in An Economic Theory of Democracy,

described it as $(U^A_t) - E(U^B_t)$.¹ The first term is the utility received from the incumbent over a certain period of time and the second term is the highest possible expected utility received over a period of time. Riker and Ordeshook, in “A Theory of the Calculus of Voting”, described it as $V = pB - C + D$ where the probability of the voter turning out is a function of the vote mattering, the utility benefit of voting, the cost of voting, and citizen duty.² A more basic voting calculus is expressed in a simple model of $R = PB - C$ where R, the reward that one gets from voting, is a function of PB, the perceived difference in benefits from the two parties, minus C, the cost of voting. The research on the cost factor often focuses on physical impediments such as travel distance, economic impediments such as the affordability of gasoline, or the availability of free time. Reforms aimed at bettering the negative effects of the costs to voting have been considered for decades.³

Vote by mail is an attempt to lower the costs of voting (C) by eliminating impediments and time concerns while also raising the comfort of the voter. VBM schemes are designed to lower the “C” factor to the point where a voter will vote regardless of all other matters. What it does not address is the person who does not even bother to register to vote or is uninterested in voting. Thus, there is the problem of the motivated and unmotivated voter to be considered.

¹ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 40.

² William Riker and Peter Ordeshook, “A Theory of the Calculus of Voting,” *American Political Science Review* 62, no.1 (1968): 25-42.

³ See Elizabeth Sanders, “On the Costs, Utilities, and Simple Joys of Voting,” *Journal of Politics* 42, no.3 (1980): 854-863; Steven J. Rosenstone and John M. Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993), 12-14; James G. Gimpel and J.E. Schuknecht, “Political Participation and the Accessibility of the Ballot Box,” *Political Geography* 22 (2003): 471-488; Moshe Haspel and H. Gibbs Knotts, “Location, Location, Location: Precinct Placement and the Costs of Voting,” *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 560-573; James G. Gimpel, Joshua J. Dyck, and Daron R. Shaw, “Location, Knowledge and Time Pressures in the Spatial Structure of Convenience Voting,” *Electoral Studies* 25 (2006): 35-58; John E. McNulty, Conor M. Dowling, and Margaret H. Ariotti, “Driving Saints to Sin: How Increasing the Difficulty of Voting Dissuades Even the Most Motivated Voters,” *Political Analysis* 17, no. 4 (2009): 435-455; Henry E. Brady and John E. McNulty, “Turning Out to Vote: The Costs of Finding and Getting to the Polling Place,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (2011): 115-134.

1.3 Motivated and Unmotivated Voters

Motivated voters are voters who are registered and will likely actively participate in the ritual of voting regardless of the process employed. Most VBM research begins with a discussion of how many actually voted (votes cast) versus the number who could have voted (voting eligible population (VEP) or voting age population (VAP)). That number is called turnout and it is usually expressed as a percentage ($\text{votes cast}/\text{VAP}$ or $\text{VEP} \times 100 = \text{turnout}$). Voting eligible population (VEP) is the preferred standard but is not always available or used. Turnout is also expressed as the number of votes cast versus the number of registered voters ($\text{votes cast}/\text{registered voters} = \text{turnout}$). Regardless of whether using voting age population (VAP), voting eligible population (VEP), or registered voters, turnout is always lower than the total population that could potentially vote, meaning that it is never 100%.

Unmotivated voters are those who are eligible to vote but remain unregistered to vote and non-participatory in the process of voting. They are never a part of the conversation on the success or failure of VBM since the research always focuses on the raw turnout percentage ($\text{votes cast}/\text{VEP}$ or VAP) and how to get more registered voters to cast a vote (by lowering their costs of voting in the VBM calculus). Unmotivated voters are some percentage of the total percentage of the voting eligible population that did not cast a vote (**$((\text{VEP} - \text{votes cast}) - (\text{registered voters} - \text{votes cast})/\text{VEP} \times 100) = \text{unmotivated voters}$**). One might call this the “anti-turnout” percentage of an election. Knowing this “anti-turnout” number of unmotivated voters is important. In order to discuss the efficacy of VBM--- or any other voting reform--- in raising turnout, we must better understand the differences and reasoning among the people who did *not* participate in voting. Instead, we have traditionally just focused on the factors and motivations of the people who expressed an interest by registering but did vote.

The number who did not vote in an election includes registered voters who did not cast a ballot for some reason as well as unmotivated voters who opted to disconnect from the entire process of voting for some reason. To gauge whether the goals of VBM, and its associated lowering of the “C” factor are effective, we must know the split between these two groups. Registered voters will ostensibly eventually vote. Afterall, they took the time to register. The other part of this subset ---unmotivated voters--- are unlikely to do so. If one wants to raise turnout, one has to first differentiate these non-voting groups and then explore the reasons why each group did not vote. Perhaps lowering the cost of voting is an effective method to make motivated voters vote in larger numbers or more reliably. While that issue will be collaterally explored via reference to statewide turn at other points in this report, it is not the focus of this report. Instead, unmotivated voters, as a large unknown group with unknown issues, are the target of this research. Beyond their lack of engagement and the effect that can have on democratic systems vis a vie low turnout, we currently also have no idea how to convert these people into participating voters or even to simply engage with them in the voting process. They are a demographic mystery.

Cost is an accepted factor in the calculus of the motivated voter who is prepared to vote but opts not to for whatever personal reason. The unmotivated voter is not impacted by the costs of voting because they were not even prepared to vote. VBM is designed to ameliorate the barriers to voting for the motivated voter. It does not, and cannot, therefore also address the issues of the unmotivated voter which must by their continued lack of engagement somehow also be different. For example, in the 2020 general election everyone in the voting eligible population (VEP) of the United States had access to some form of voting by mail. Yet only 66.7% of the

voting eligible population voted.⁴ Put another way, 33.3% of eligible Americans opted out of voting entirely despite it being the easiest, most accessible election in U.S. history through the widespread adoption of some vote by mail format coupled with early voting, in-person voting, and drop-off voting. The costs of voting were never lower and the publicity on the many options and the process to vote were never higher. Despite this and being faced with a once in a century deadly public health crisis and a consequential referendum on a controversial president, clearly a great many VEP people remained unmotivated to participate. With the best counts available at the time of this writing, the number of “anti-turnout” unmotivated voters in the 2020 general election was 32,689,599 people or 13.66% of the voting eligible population of the United States. That is a significant number of people by anyone’s count who opted not to engage the process of voting at all. Similar scenarios of high non-participation are repeated throughout the time VBM has been in some form of widespread use. This begins with statewide adoption in Oregon in 1998 where about 41% of registered voters did not vote in the general election and continues through the data into 2018.⁵ If the costs have been lowered and people are still not participating then something other than cost must be influencing why people do or do not participate with voting.

1.4 Purported VBM Advantages and Disadvantages

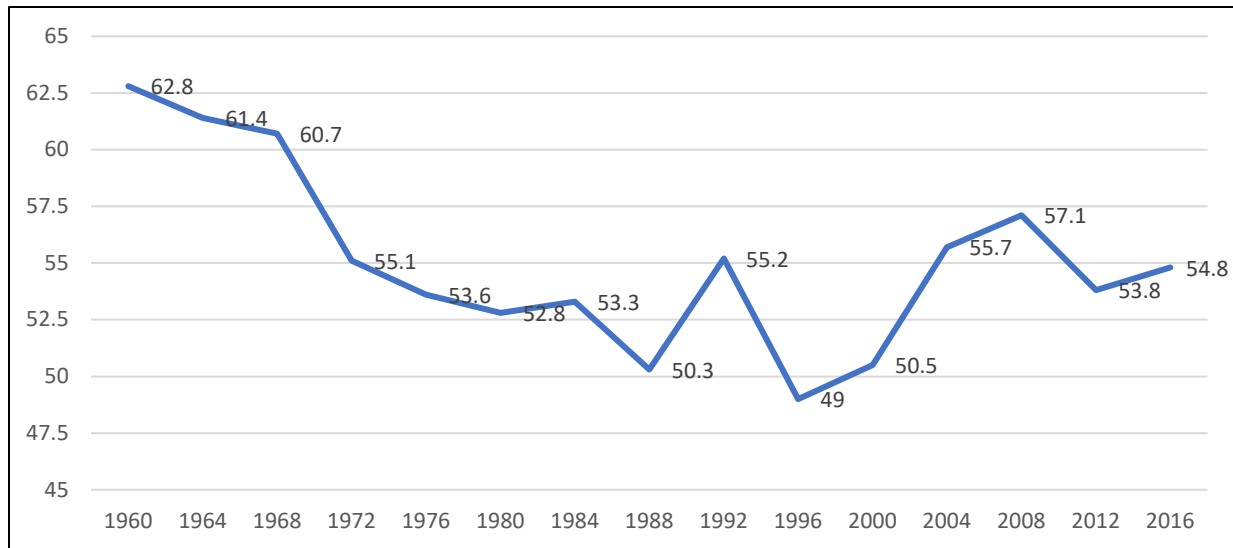
The COVID-19 pandemic added personal safety to the list of advantages of such a system touted by pro-VBM election reformers, who are often aligned as members of the Democratic party. Prior to the public health crisis, the reasons fell into three broad categories. The first is the financial savings to state and local governments. Full vote by mail systems require no local staff,

⁴ “2020 November General Election Turnout Rates,” United States Elections Project, last modified December 7, 2020, <http://www.electproject.org/2020g>.

⁵ “Official Election Participation Statistics / November 3, 1998 General Election,” Oregon Secretary of State, accessed January 24, 2020, <http://records.sos.state.or.us/ORSOSWebDrawer/RecordView/6960140>.

no poll workers, and no voting machines. The second reason is that voting by mail allows for deeper consideration of the candidates because there is increased time and no pressure to make a choice in the booth. Finally, the third reason often stated is that allowing people to vote at home will increase the voter turnout numbers, which, but for the 2012 general election, have seen an overall downward trend (See Figure 1) among the voting age population since at least the 1960s.⁶

Figure 1. Voting Age Population Turnout United States Presential Elections 1960-2016



The literature is mixed regarding vote by mail and its positive effects on these matters. For example, the results of the 2016 election in Colorado indicate that election costs decreased around an average of 40% in 46 of Colorado's 64 counties.⁷ However, this is based on a number of recently instituted voting reforms in effect that year and not just the presence of VBM in the state. Some research indicates small increases in turnout for presidential elections, and even

⁶ "Election Statistics: 1920 to Present," United States House of Representatives, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.

⁷ "Colorado Voting Reforms: Early Results," Pew Charitable Trusts, accessed August 24, 2021, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/03/colorado-voting-reforms-early-results>.

smaller ones for other elections, while other research shows no significant increase in turnout. Initial research showing largescale increases in turnout have since been reconsidered by their authors. One common thread among VBM research is a lack of uniform standards in the methodology for conducting the research and a lack of large scale, statewide, reproducible studies. Thus far nearly all the research has focused on specific areas of each state or on singular types of elections with no comprehensive election to election, state-wide research available.

In their first report on VBM in 2001, R. Michael Alvarez and Charles Stewart, along with their colleagues at Cal Tech and MIT, cited the five “dangers” of increased reliance on mail-in ballots ---coercion, fraud and security, accuracy, speed, and “the loss of the public ceremony of voting”--- as major factors weighing against the widespread use of VBM.⁸ Instead, their group has put their research focus on improving polling places and creating better voting machines, which seemed a righteous argument prior to the COVID19 pandemic. The report strongly recommended that states “restrict or abolish on-demand absentee voting in favor of in-person early voting.”⁹ Stewart remains critical of vote by mail reform efforts, publishing in 2011 a critical assessment of the purported costs savings of VBM.¹⁰ In 2012, he and Alvarez, as part of the Cal Tech/MIT Voting Technology Project, published a report citing the same five “dangers” from their 2001 research. The authors said, “A decade later, our concerns have only grown,” and called upon lawmakers to “discourage the continued rise of no-excuse absentee balloting and resist pressures to expand all-mail elections.”¹¹ In 2013, using data from small county-level

⁸ R. Michael Alvarez et al., “Voting- What It is and What It Could Be,” Cal Tech/MIT Voting Technology Project, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://vote.caltech.edu/reports/1>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Charles Stewart III, “Adding Up the Costs and Benefits of Voting by Mail,” *Election Law Journal* 10, 3 (2011): 297–301, doi:10.1089/elj.2011.1034.

¹¹ R. Michael Alvarez et al., “Voting: What Has Changed, What Hasn’t and What Needs Improvement,” Cal Tech/MIT Voting Technology Project, accessed May 2, 2020, <http://vote.caltech.edu/reports/7>.

VBM elections in California, they noted the predisposition of VBM elections to increase the number of residual, or overvotes, in an election.¹² Their concerns have become an oft-quoted part of the conservative resistance to the adoption of this election reform as this “Blue Surge” in counting overvotes has led to conservative defeats.

Opponents of vote by mail, often of the conservative bend, have cited these aforementioned studies, among others, for being skeptical, if not outright dismissive, of VBM prior to COVID-19. Despite the continuation of the pandemic and its effects, they continue to cite this material as part of their overall objections to expansions in voting. The objection to VBM on financial grounds has, at least for now, gone away as a vocal objection. So too has Stewart and Alvarez’s idea that VBM breaks the civic ritual of voting and is detrimental to the idea of civic engagement of a community which now seems almost quaint during a public health crisis where public gatherings fuel the disease.

Current objections to VBM seem more related to interwoven and somewhat unproven concerns over the handling and processing of ballots ---what Stewart and Alvarez called “coercion, fraud and security, accuracy, speed.”¹³ These ideas are the ones most often used by the anti-VBM crowd. Republican opponents of expanded VBM in the 2020 election cycle, including the President, leaned hard into these objections. There is no evidence that general fraud has ever occurred nor has security ever been compromised in any United States election let alone in a VBM based election. Neither has coercion nor vote selling been demonstrated to be part of VBM systems.

¹² R. Michael Alvarez, Dustin Beckett, and Charles Stewart III, “Voting Technology, Vote-by-Mail, and Residual Votes in California, 1990–2010,” *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2012): 658–70, doi:10.1177/1065912912467085.

¹³ R. Michael Alvarez et al., “Voting- What It is and What It Could Be,” Cal Tech/MIT Voting Technology Project, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://vote.caltech.edu/reports/1>; R. Michael Alvarez et al., “Voting: What Has Changed, What Hasn’t and What Needs Improvement,” Cal Tech/MIT Voting Technology Project, accessed May 2, 2020, <http://vote.caltech.edu/reports/7>.

There is some evidence to support the idea that accuracy and speed could be reduced in a VBM system. Stewart has found that as many as 20% of traditional absentee ballots have been lost in previous elections.¹⁴ In the lead up to the 2020 general election, states were requesting, and Democrats in Congress were demanding, increases in funding for states to increase their vote processing capacities due to the expected number of VBM ballots. Most states process their votes at the county level and these counties have systems designed to handle in-person voting. The expected massive in-flux of VBM ballots had the potential to swamp the capacities of rural and small county election offices. While many places, including major cities, did slow their pace of counting as a result of the overwhelming number of VBM ballots, as of this writing, no jurisdictions have reported any anomaly beyond that slowed pace. It should also be noted that despite the objections of the president and his supporters in the 2020 election cycle, the Constitution of the United States does not require states to report the results of their elections within any specific timeframe allowing time for all the ballots to be counted.

Beyond the challenges to VBM that have been raised by conservatives, who often sit in opposition to any effort to broaden voting access in the United States, there are several other challenges facing VBM systems. The 1975 expansion of the Voting Rights Act guaranteed access to the ballot in the language of the voter (assuming that language is represented above a certain threshold in the state). How will states know the language of each voter at each address? What if there are two different language speakers at the same address (say an immigrant parent and an English-speaking child)? A failure to properly identify language minorities could leave a VBM election in violation of the Voting Rights Act. In a related matter, mail delivery is not the same throughout the United States. Rural populations often face distance and time challenges in

¹⁴ Charles Stewart III, "Losing Votes by Mail," *Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 13 (2010): 580.

receiving or sending mail. Native Americans on reservations, in particular, have difficulty with voting by mail. Reservations often do not have traditional street addresses and Post Office boxes are often shared or are far from a residence.

Literacy can also be an issue in voting by mail. A poorly designed ballot coupled with a lack of helpful local poll workers can make it difficult to register a vote. In their research, Michael Alvarez, Charles Stewart and Dustin Beckett also noted that “voters who vote by mail do not have the benefit of polling place machines, which can ‘tell’ voters if they chose too many candidates or skipped a contest and give them an opportunity to correct mismarked ballots.”¹⁵ The result seems to be that a significant risk exists that votes may not be counted because of a language issue, a misunderstanding, or a mistake in filling out the ballot in a VBM system.

Finally, there is the question of whether a vote by mail system inadvertently introduces a poll tax on citizens. Several VBM systems have required citizens to affix a postage stamp to return the ballot. That could be construed as a poll tax as it creates a financial prerequisite for voting. This would violate the 24th Amendment to the Constitution which specifically forbids poll taxes in the United States. Further, it would likely also violate the provisions of *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966) which said “a state violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution whenever it makes the affluence of the voter or payment of any fee an electoral standard. Voter qualifications have no relation to wealth.”¹⁶

1.5 Efficacy: Does Turnout Actually Rise Under VBM?

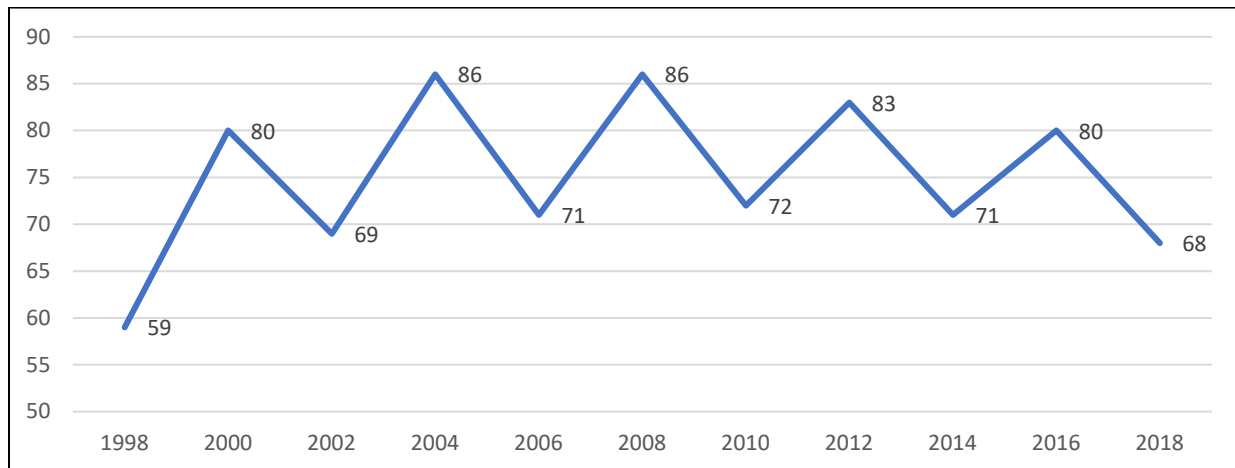
Efficacy in driving turnout is at the heart of VBM reform efforts since the entire point is to lower the cost of voting to raise the levels of participation. This gives rise to a question about

¹⁵ R. Michael Alvarez, Dustin Beckett, and Charles Stewart III, “Voting Technology, Vote-by-Mail, and Residual Votes in California, 1990–2010,” *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2012): 658–70, doi:10.1177/1065912912467085.

¹⁶ *Harper v. Board of Elections*, 383 U.S. 663 (1966).

the VBM system itself. Has turnout significantly and consistently risen at all in places where VBM has been in widespread use? Has it been effective in getting more eligible voters to cast a vote? In a 2012 study, Smith and Sylvester found that regardless of efforts on the part of the state to get voters to change to VBM, only voters who are already likely to vote made the change.¹⁷ Messaging, campaigns, and advertising had no effect on low-propensity voters. In fact, the convenience factor was reported to be the one least likely to cause a switch. Turnout results from Oregon--- the state with the longest history using VBM-- show that other than an initial surge at introduction in 1998 for mid-term elections and in 2000 for a presidential election, the total votes cast has not consistently risen and may now be falling to pre-VBM levels (see Figure 2).¹⁸ Cost lowering seems to have only limited effect in promoting turnout even in the most motivated of voters. Again, there appear to be other factors associated with why people opt not to participate in voting despite the use of a VBM system.

Figure 2. Oregon Election Year Turnout Percentage (Rounded) 1998-2018



¹⁷ Keith Smith and Dari E. Sylvester, "Is It the Message or the Person? Lessons from a Field Experiment About Who Converts to Permanent Vote by Mail," *Election Law Journal* 12 no. 3 (2013): 243–60. doi:10.1089/elj.2012.0183.

¹⁸ "Voter Turnout History for General Elections," Oregon Secretary of State, accessed July 15, 2021, https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/Voter_Turnout_History_General_Election.pdf.

1.6 What Does VBM Get Wrong About Turnout?

The “C” term in the voter calculus that VBM seeks to address is defined in terms of physical or economic barriers that often are faced by lower income or minority voters. What if those are not the only reasons why they avoid voting? For example, there is a utility in lowering the cost of voting (i.e., the burden placed on voters) that is beneficial even if it has no effect on turnout. Additionally, the same challenges do not always exist for middle- and upper-income voters. In other words, VBM as a solution to increasing turnout presupposes that there is only one set of reasons defining why people do not vote and if we simply eliminate these economic, physical, or time barriers for people then everyone will vote. As the above example from the 2020 cycle highlights, this does not appear to be the case. What of the potential voters who are non-participatory--- the unmotivated voter? Are we missing other reasons for why people do not vote? If so, then what are those reasons?

Without understanding the other factors that could be influencing voters’ behavior, such as psychological barriers or group dynamics, it is highly unlikely that current efforts to further increase turnout, such as expanded VBM, will attract, or more importantly retain, more voters. The “C” term, classically defined, does nothing to address other concerns of voters and thus VBM can only ever have a limited effect especially among unmotivated voters. At this point VBM seems to have done all it can do to have an impact on attracting more voters as the number of voters is not significantly increasing and may be decreasing in these states. To understand why unmotivated voters are not participating, researchers need to know more about the factors beyond those defined by the “C” term which are creating barriers to participation. This study seeks to address that gap in knowledge.

Chapter 2. Synopsis, Problem, Question, Significance

2.1 Study Synopsis

This study is not about whether VBM works to raise turnout. Previous studies have shown no benefit to moderate benefit in places such as Oregon using VBM. This study is ultimately about those who choose not to participate in voting at all despite the lowering of the “cost” factor to nearly zero through the use of VBM. Why do they still sit out and chose not to participate? To do this, the research must first establish whether VBM is effective in raising turnout overall. Previous work, and a quick look at the available statewide turnout numbers in these states, indicates that it does not, or if it does it is quixotic, temporary, and marginal at best.

With the general trend established, it would be helpful to know if those generalities apply to sub-groups within the eligible voting population. The paper must therefore establish whether VBM has raised turnout for some groups and not others. As race is an accepted and well used fault line in voting research and a common goal of VBM reforms is that it will increase diversity in turnout, it seems an appropriate grouping. The GIS mapping, unique to this study of VBM, is invaluable in establishing on a precinct-by-precinct level whether this has or is occurring with various racial groups. The mapping allows for turnout data by precinct to be combined with spatial race data on a map over many election cycles. It is possible to witness whether turnout is improving and for whom it is improving (if anyone). Finally, with all initial indicators from previous research and the GIS data maps in this research demonstrating that VBM is at best marginal at increasing turnout for anyone, but especially minority groups, we come to the overarching question of this research. With all costs of voting lowered to or near zero, why are over 30 million otherwise eligible potential voters in the United States actively choosing not to vote? What is motivating them to choose non-participation?

The inclusion of the survey, along with the previous studies of VBM in Washington and Oregon, is included to conclusively demonstrate that turnout is not increasing, especially among minorities, in states with VBM systems. Turnout may be increasing somewhat in areas with more white voters, but this too is marginal (and an ancillary conclusion to the research questions in this paper). When taken in the light of somewhat large population gains in each of these states over the study period, the consistent turnout percentage would mean that while more voting has occurred, voting as a percentage of the total population has decreased. One could therefore argue that turnout, when adjusted on a per capita basis, has declined in the VBM period.

The survey is designed to poll the people who do not vote--- the unmotivated voter. Once the study demonstrates that there is a sizable number of people who do not participate, the survey is there to shed light on the reasons why they do not vote. For some it may simply be a matter of not wanting to be on a computer system, involved in a “government thing”, or included in a voting roll. For others, there is a racial component wherein voting is seen as a white or rich man’s game, “not for me” or failing to represent people of color in some way. Both of these reasons manifest themselves as trust in government or the process issues. For still others, voting is uninteresting, complicated, “too smart” for them, or in some way above their perceived intelligence. These folks have knowledge issues. The final group appears to be people who want to try voting but have not because they do not know how, do not have the paperwork, or do not understand the process. These are people with technical problems.

All of these potential voters have legitimate concerns or complaints about voting and about government representation. The people who report that they do not know how to vote or do not have time can be helped by better engagement. The people who report trust issues are more difficult to reach. It is safe to assume that these people have other issues with state, local,

or federal government institutions as they report high percentages of not trusting government at any level. The data from the survey does indicate a strong correlation between people who reported having a run in with state or local government authorities and not wanting to vote.

The people who report a racial motive for not voting are the most troubling. They have lost faith in not only that government is there to serve their needs but that they are even part of the nation-state. They have also passively moved to register their disgust with how government authorities treat minority groups by refusing to even participate at the most basic level in places where the cost to vote is the lowest. The irony is that in doing so they have left the difficult work of forming a government that would better represent their goals to people who are not like them. By removing themselves from the system out of disgust they have ceded the ground to others who may use the opportunity to vote in their own interest. They have ensured that white, middle, and upper middle-class women, particularly from the suburbs, will make up an increasingly large part of the voting population. As this study will show in chapter 5, the maps clearly demonstrate consistently low turnout among Latinx and Black voting precincts and ever-increasing turnout in areas that have low Black and Latinx populations. Perhaps this is the best reason of all to move from being an unmotivated, potential voter to becoming a participating voter; by not doing so the unmotivated voter ensures that they will remain in the shadows and see none of their interests or goals represented in either promise or policy.

According to the United States Elections Project at the University of Florida, the data on turnout shows that turnout through the 2018 election is not increasing and it is certainly not substantially increasing among minority voters.¹⁹ At best, it can be described nationally as

¹⁹ "Voter Turnout Demographics," United States Elections Project, accessed November 26, 2021, <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/demographics>.

stagnate. With the cost of voting at its lowest possible level through the inclusion of VBM, why are people still choosing not to participate in voting? Is there something specific to minority voting behavior that is preventing making gains in turnout?

2.2 Problem

In the runup to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, voting by mail was gaining prominence as the solution for not only reducing the expense of running elections to the government but also for increasing turnout, especially among Black and Latinx citizens, by lowering the cost of voting to the citizens. With the widespread adoption of a VBM system for the 2020 election cycle, it is almost certain that voting by mail will remain a standard method to register a vote in many, if not all, states. Despite all of this effort to make it cheap and easy to vote, large numbers of people still do not engage with the process of voting.

2.3 Questions

1. Does VBM deliver the goal of increasing turnout, particularly among Black and Latinx citizens?
2. With all costs of voting lowered to or near zero, why are over 30 million otherwise eligible potential voters in the United States actively choosing not to vote? What is motivating them to choose non-participation?

2.4 Hypothesis

VBM has not significantly or consistently increased voter turnout in any demographic minority group in any of the three states in the study. It also does little to attract those not already motivated to vote to become participating voters. While VBM does decrease certain costs in voting such as travel distance and time it does little to address other issues, such as psychological or group dynamics, which may also be a barrier to voting, especially among minority groups. A lack of trust in government institutions, a desire to not be

“found” or “in the system” or have to participate in jury duty, or apathy about government’s commitment to address issues of concern may play as big, or bigger, a role in determining why substantial numbers of people still mostly ignore VBM schemes. Convenience is not the only factor at play in determining why people do or do not vote.

2.5 Significance

Phil Keisling, of Portland State University, noted in a review of academic research on election reforms that “no study of Oregon’s fifteen-year experience has been based on statewide voter files and individual voter history” yet exists. He also noted that Washington and Oregon are often excluded from research on voter turnout because their systems are the exception. He concludes by saying that “the major point here is that far too much of the research cited in discussing [VBM] suffers from one or more key shortcomings.”²⁰ A review of research on Washington state’s efforts reveal a similar gap in the literature. As Colorado is just now beginning to introduce a statewide VBM system, again there has been little time and little data to be studied. Small scale studies, a scarcity in the application of new data modeling capacities, and a lack of extensive data at a granular level have hampered previous efforts at comprehensive analysis.

Voting by Mail has clearly been of inestimable utility to the participation of millions of votes in every corner of the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, that does not mean that it is not without faults or limitations. For example, it has been of somewhat limited utility on Native American reservations in the upper and western United States given the unique mix of postal abnormalities, geography, and distance faced in these communities. Its expansion

²⁰ Phil Keisling, “The Measure- and Mismeasurement- of Universal Vote by Mail,” *Washington Monthly*, January 19, 2016, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2016/01/19/the-measure-and-mismeasurement-of-universal-vote-by-mail>.

has become a lightning rod for controversy among conservatives and a litmus test for liberal credos, providing another point of division in the political world. The mixed results of the research that has been done on VBM prior to 2020 along with the limited success it has had in consistently raising turnout is concerning. That coupled with notions of democratic theory, criticisms of the VBM systems themselves, and the 2020 example of the utility of the vote in a modern democracy demands that we move cautiously as we consider its utility and further use.

That said, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the voting by mail movement into the spotlight in 2020. VBM systems have been adopted in many states and the movement to widespread inclusion of VBM as part of a system of voting options (so-called “VBM plus”) now seems inevitable. Despite the limitations of previous studies, and in an effort to overcome their limitations, now seems an appropriate time to finally address these shortcomings. A look at the efficacy of VBM, whether its goals have been met, and consider what else might be working to suppress voting turnout, especially among minority populations in as comprehensive and statewide manner as possible seems not only appropriate but necessary.

A last cautionary point related to the significance and importance of this research is over the zeal for reform shared by many different political constituencies. Famous British author G.K. Chesterton once lamented the speed and ignorance with which reforms are often pursued. It resulted in the postulate that is now known as “Chesterton’s Fence” and it seems especially appropriate at this juncture in the development of VBM. He said:

“In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, 'I

don't see the use of this; let us clear it away.' To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: 'If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.'²¹

Voting by mail is a powerful reform that has the potential to reshape how we conduct elections, change the power of the ballot, and influence how we as citizens relate to our government. As such, it would seem prudent to at least attempt to survey and summarize the results of the efforts in these three states before encouraging more states to follow suit with evermore liberalized voting systems. From a policy perspective, it may make prudent sense to follow a slow path toward this particular voting reform despite its utility in the current health crisis and especially while its impact on turnout is in question. As this reform concerns the ballot itself, the very representation of our democratic philosophy in the United States, deep consideration of its impact on our chosen system seems sensible. Further, as previously noted, VBM is not without criticisms. Most of these will prove to be nothing more than phantoms released by opponents of election reform based on political concerns in order to scare people away. However, some may also prove to have real substance and thus need to be addressed before this process of reform should continue.

Mistakes in election reform shake the foundation of democracy because they deeply impact the trust and confidence that the American people place in their governmental institutions. Further, the idea is not without economic costs whether it is a success or failure. From a pragmatic standpoint, mistakes in government systems are expensive to fix due to years

²¹ Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton, "The Drift of Domesticity," in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton: Vol. 3*, eds. George Marlin, Richard Rabatin, and John Swan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 157.

of litigation, the cost of new reform efforts, and infrastructure like replacing voting machines. Repeated, rapid changes due to those mistakes also have the potential to further confuse voters, further eroding trust in the government and its processes. Chesterton's caution to "Go away and think" should give pause to anyone arguing to quickly rewrite how fundamental and basic civil notions like voting are carried out.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

3.1 Literature on Vote by Mail Systems

There is little real-world research of VBM reforms and what there is of it is flawed. Several researchers have looked at the effect in relatively small scale, localized studies in the states that have implemented some type of VBM based reform (either some or all elections as vote-by-mail). The results of these studies suggest that the effects of VBM are small at best,²² possibly non-existent,²³ or even detrimental.²⁴ There is also the further issue of what exactly the researchers were studying. No state uses the same system and the quality of the data available can vary by county or municipality. There is some consensus that relying on state voter files to see the preferences of various demographic groups over time would be the best method for studying the effects of VBM. This could lead to some insights into not just voting style preference but also candidate preferences and would include race and gender information (along with other citizen data collected by the state). Unfortunately, this data is notoriously difficult to access and thus rarely (actually, never in VBM studies) used. In the three states under review here, voter files are unavailable to the public.

²² See Patricia Southwell and Justin Burchett, "The Effect of All-mail Elections on Voter Turnout," *American Politics Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2000): 72-79; Thad Kousser and Megan Mullin, "Does Voting by Mail Increase Participation? Using Matching to Analyze a Natural Experiment," *Political Analysis* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 428-445; Paul Gronke, Eva Galanes-Rosenbaum, Peter A. Miller, and Daniel Toffey, "Convenience Voting," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 437-455; Sean Richey, "Voting by Mail: Turnout and Institutional Reform in Oregon," *Social Science Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2008): 902-915, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2008.00590.x; Alan S. Gerber, Gregory A. Huber, Seth J. Hill, "Identifying the Effect of All-Mail Elections on Turnout: Staggered Reform in the Evergreen State," *Political Science Research and Methods* 1, no. 1 (2013): 91-116, doi:10.1017/psrm.2013.5 ; Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

²³ See Paul Gronke and Peter Miller, "Voting by Mail and Turnout in Oregon: Revisiting Southwell and Burchett," *American Politics Research* 40, no. 2 (2012): 976-997.

²⁴ See Dennis F. Thompson, "Election Time: Normative Implications of Temporal Properties of the Electoral Process in the United States," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (2004): 51-63; Patricia Funk, "Social Incentives and Voter Turnout: Evidence from the Swiss Mail Ballot System," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 8, no. 5 (2010): 1077-1103.

The two types of vote by mail systems, mail service and “no excuse”, create very different systems. These systems therefore produce very different kinds of data for researchers to utilize thus making comparative study of the systems very difficult. Depending on the date, location, and even jurisdiction of the study, what form of VBM the researchers were analyzing could be very different and lead to dissimilar and uncorrelated conclusions. In fact, a look at the results of the literature shows just this type of pattern.

As voter files are unavailable, there is no consensus on the proper method for studying VBM systems. In reality, most studies of the effect of vote by mail or similar schemes on voter turnout do not rely on heavy statistical treatments of the voter turnout data. They rely upon simple comparisons of voter roll numbers before and after, or pre and post, the introduction of vote by mail in specific precincts chosen for their respective unique characteristics. As such, some version of a pre/post format has become the de facto standard for conducting research. A few have tried to introduce some kind of a stats-based methodology. Regression analysis, assorted correlations, and weighted least squares logit models to look at turnout, vote by mail, and control for the impact of other factors have been tried.²⁵

A survey of this literature reveals that statistical treatments, when used, often create confusing or obscured results making them of little utility. However, simple comparisons of the data do seem to lead to better, more useful conclusions. Despite the presence of statistics and numbers, these studies often take on the characteristics of a qualitative analysis, wherein the method of presentation of the data serves as much purpose in telling the story as does the data itself. The results of these statistical studies yielded similar results as the simple pre/post method

²⁵ See Sean Richey, “Who Votes Alone? The Impact of Voting by Mail on Political Discussion,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (2005): 433–440, doi:10.1080/10361140500203985.

while also introducing questions about the appropriateness or effectiveness of the statistical method used. Thus, more complex data analysis techniques have yet to do anything in this area other than confuse and complicate matters.

The result has been that many studies of voting by mail continue to look at a comparison of the ratio between who should have voted, either using the Voting Age Population (VAP) or the Voting Eligible Population (VEP) (VEP is generally better), and who submitted a vote to determine impact of voting reforms. It is a reasonable data point on which to rely given that the point of VBM is to raise the number of votes cast in an election. Keisling, however, is critical of research utilizing a ratio between VAP or VEP and votes cast such as this calling them lazy interpretations of the result of Oregon's system.²⁶ He does have a stake in its success, however, being that he was Secretary of State when Oregon adopted the VBM reforms. It also still ignores the impact, or lack thereof, of VBM on those that are not registered to vote and getting them to vote. It also has the potential to overinflate the success and failure of VBM schemes depending on whether VAP, VEP, or registered voters is used as the basis. Further, neither of these solutions does anything to discuss why those who did not vote chose that option. If the point of VBM is to raise votes cast, and we know from other studies that it does keep those who already vote voting, then an understanding of this part of the unmotivated/unregistered population seems to be where research should be heading. Unfortunately, it is not.

In what has become the most widely cited research on vote by mail, Gronke and Miller (2011) published an examination of the effect of VBM in Oregon using data from elections not held in May or November (where general interest might be higher). They tried to replicate a

²⁶ Phil Keisling, "The Measure- and Mismeasurement- of Universal Vote by Mail." *Washington Monthly*, January 19, 2016, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2016/01/19/the-measure-and-mismeasurement-of-universal-vote-by-mail>.

much earlier, and well cited, study by Southwell and Burchett wherein a 10% increase in turnout was observed.²⁷ They were unable to replicate the results. This, coupled with their own analysis of data going back to 1960, lead them to the conclusion that Oregon's VBM system had not increased turnout in presidential and midterm elections. The initially reported boosts by Southwell and Burchett of 10% or more were a passing "novelty effect." Their study was based on an empirical observation of the raw data rather than a statistical refinement as in Southwell.

Southwell has attempted to update her research on vote by mail. In both 2009 and 2010, she performed a new study of Oregon's experience with vote by mail.²⁸²⁹ Contrary to her 2000 study, she found in both of these studies that the impact of vote by mail on turnout was more nuanced than previously reported. While VBM has been a "major stimulus to voter participation" in presidential election years, it has had little effect in other elections. While her new results are still contradicted by the Gronke/Miller study, she does report less sensational and less optimistic results than she did a decade prior. This puts her more in line with Gronke's results but decidedly positive on vote by mail reforms.

In 2001, in a study of Oregon's VBM system, Dr. Adam Berinsky and his colleagues asserted that "VBM does increase voter turnout in the long run, primarily by making it easier for current voters to continue to participate, rather than by mobilizing nonvoters into the electorate. These effects, however, are not uniform across all groups in the electorate."³⁰ They go on to

²⁷ See Patricia Southwell and Justin Burchett, "The Effect of All-mail Elections on Voter Turnout," *American Politics Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2000): 72-79

²⁸ Patricia Southwell, "Analysis of the Turnout Effects of Vote by Mail Elections, 1980-2007," *Social Science Journal* 46, no. 1 (2009): 211-17, doi:10.1016/j.soscij.2008.12.010.

²⁹ Patricia Southwell, "Voting Behavior in Vote-by-Mail Elections," *Analyses of Social Issues & Public Policy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 106-15. doi:10.1111/j.1530-2415.2010.01218.x.

³⁰ Adam J. Berinsky, Nancy Burns, and Michael W. Traugott, "Who Votes by Mail?: A Dynamic Model of the Individual-Level Consequences of Voting-by-Mail Systems," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2001): 178-197. doi:10.1086/322196.

state that "...VBM increases, rather than diminishes, the resource stratification of the electorate... VBM advantages the resource-rich by keeping them in the electorate, and VBM does little to change the behavior of the resource-poor." In other words, those that already vote will continue to do so; VBM does little to motivate those who do not already vote; and wealthy people, not poor people, see the most benefit from VBM schemes. In contrast, Gerber et al. found that VBM reforms in Washington state increased aggregate participation by two to four percentage points. They further found that "the reform increased turnout more for lower-participating registrants than for frequent voters, suggesting that all-mail voting reduces turnout disparities between these groups."³¹ Each study takes a different approach to the problem in two different locales and the informational take away is, at best, ambiguous. This highlights the problem with comprehensive research on VBM and its effects.

Menger, Stein, and Vonnahme found complementary results in their 2018 study of Colorado's VBM election. It showed that ballot completion rates rose in Colorado with the introduction of VBM. They hypothesize that this is the result of people having more information available to them while they vote. They can look for candidates on the internet and research their positions. They do point out, however, that the effect appears to only occur in presidential elections where it is considered that more is at stake.³²

There is also the problem of "lost" votes. Stewart of the CalTech/MIT Voting Technology Project notes that the "pipeline that moves mail ballots between voters and election

³¹ Alan S. Gerber, Gregory A. Huber, Seth J. Hill, "Identifying the Effect of All-Mail Elections on Turnout: Staggered Reform in the Evergreen State," *Political Science Research and Methods* 1, no. 1 (2013): 91-116, doi:10.1017/psrm.2013.5.

³² Andrew Menger, Robert M. Stein, Greg Vonnahme, "Reducing the Undervote With Vote by Mail," *American Politics Research* 46, no. 6 (2017): 1039-1064, doi.org/10.1177/1532673X17737059; See also Robert M. Stein and Greg Vonnahme, "When, Where, and How We Vote: Does it Matter?" *Social Science Quarterly* 93, no.3 (2012): 692-712.

officials is very leaky.”³³ In comparison to in-person voting, there are many more places where mail-in voting can be derailed. These include: a local election official not receiving the ballot request, difficulties in verifying registration, ballot not being received by voter, voter having problems with marking the ballot, voter not signing a ballot, marked ballot not being received by local election official, difficulties in verifying identification of the voter, additional questions about registration, and finally vote tabulation errors. Again, in 2013, Stewart noted in his study of small California elections that vote by mail seems to exacerbate overvotes, or votes that are not counted for various reasons.³⁴

Using national data from surveys conducted by the CalTech/MIT Voting Technology Project in 2008, Stewart estimates that slightly more than 20% of all attempts to vote by mail are lost at some point in the VBM pipeline.³⁵ In a more limited study, Yasinac found many Minnesota mail-in ballots were lost in the 2008 election. These included losses due to minor voter errors, such as failure to sign, signing in the wrong place, and problems with the packaging of the ballot such as including more than one family member’s ballot in the same envelope. Administrative processing errors resulted in at least 13% of Minnesota mail-in ballots being mistakenly rejected. Yasinsac also included numerous examples of postal system loss of ballots.³⁶

Sean Richey, of Georgia State University, has done the closest thing to a comprehensive review of Oregon’s Vote by Mail system.³⁷ His work is basically supportive of the Oregon VBM

³³ Charles Stewart III, “Losing Votes by Mail,” *Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 13 (2010): 575.

³⁴ R. Michael Alvarez, Dustin Beckett, and Charles Stewart III, “Voting Technology, Vote-by-Mail, and Residual Votes in California, 1990–2010,” *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2012): 658–70, doi:10.1177/1065912912467085.

³⁵ Charles Stewart III, “Losing Votes by Mail,” *Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 13 (2010): 575–576

³⁶ Alec Yasinsac, “Did Your Mailed Ballot Count: The Unrecognized Unreliability of Voting by Mail,” *Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics* 10, no. 5 (2012): 55–60.

³⁷ Sean Richey, “Voting by Mail: Turnout and Institutional Reform in Oregon,” *Social Science Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2008): 902–915, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2008.00590.x.

system. A prior study, in 2005, found that civic engagement actually increases in a VBM system because people seek conversation and input on candidates during the voting period.³⁸ In his comprehensive 2008 study, he looked at Oregon voting patterns in presidential elections from 1980 through 2004 and midterm elections from 1982 through 2006. Interestingly, his study relied on a comparison of votes cast from year to year not a comparison of the ratio between Voting Age populations (VAP) versus votes cast. He notes that since VBM has no ability to get unregistered people to vote it makes sense to look at registered voters. He notes that there is “a significant positive effect from voting by mail of around 10 percentage points of registered voters in both mid-term and presidential elections” over the time period of the study (which is bisected by the introduction of VBM in Oregon). His model, and his dissertation, is a significant influence on the research being presented in this study.

3.2 Literature on Minority Political Participation

The Pew Research Center reports that in a 2016 survey, minorities indicated that they did not vote because either they felt “my vote wouldn’t count” (15%) or they “did not like candidates or the issues” (25%).³⁹ This would indicate that regardless of VBM at least some of these potential minority voters were not swayed to participate by the lowered “cost of voting.” This finding is consistent with the literature on Minority Political Behavior in the United States which identifies five major theories or models ---Socioeconomic Status, Group Consciousness, Group Conflict Theory, Social Connectedness, and Psychological Resources--- that impact

³⁸ Sean Richey, “Who Votes Alone? The Impact of Voting by Mail on Political Discussion,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (2005): 433–440, doi:10.1080/10361140500203985.

³⁹ “Dislike of Candidates or Campaign Issues was Most Common Reason for Not Voting in 2016,” Pew Research Center, last modified June 1, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/01/dislike-of-candidates-or-campaign-issues-was-most-common-reason-for-not-voting-in-2016/>.

participation.⁴⁰ Of these five, two (Social Connectedness and Psychological Resources) are most relevant to the theoretical underpinnings of the study conducted here. However, Psychological Resources seems to most clearly and directly address both the hypothesis and data presented in this paper.

Socioeconomic Status is the classic construction of mass political behavior first proposed by Verba and Nie in 1972.⁴¹ Individuals with high levels of education and income are more likely to develop the orientations that motivate participation in the political system. Repeated studies have demonstrated that people with more education, income, and status vote more often, organize more often, and campaign more often than those at lower levels.⁴² While this is generally considered to be one of the closest things we have to a scientific law in the study of Political Science, newer evidence indicates that its effect among racial and ethnic groups is mixed. For example, Harris (1994) found that education and income are only “occasionally”

⁴⁰ Jan Leighley and Arnold Vedlitz, “Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations,” *Journal of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 1092-1114. doi.org/10.2307/2647555.

⁴¹ Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

⁴² See Mary M. Conway, *Political Participation in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991); Christopher Kenny, “Political Participation and Effects from the Social Environment,” *American Journal of Political Science* 36, no. 1 (1992): 259-267; Jan E. Leighley, “Social Interaction and Contextual Influences on Political Participation,” *American Politics Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1990): 459-475, doi.org/10.1177/1532673X9001800404; Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, “Individual and Systematic Influences on Turnout: Who Votes? 1984,” *Journal of Politics* 54, no. 3 (1992): 718-740; Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, “Socioeconomic Class Bias in Turnout, 1964-1988: The Voters Remain the Same,” *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 3 (1992): 725-736; Jan Leighley, “Attitudes, Opportunities and Incentives: A Field Essay on Political Participation,” *Political Research Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1995): 181-209. Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People’s Voice in the New Gilded Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, and Norman H. Nie, “Race, Ethnicity and Political Resources: Participation in the United States,” *British Journal of Political Science* 23, no. 4 (1993): 453-497; Henry Brady, Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation,” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (1995): 271-294, doi.org/10.2307/2082425. Leighley (1999) also provided a meta-review of many of these studies. See Jan Leighley and Arnold Vedlitz, “Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations,” *Journal of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 1092-1114. doi.org/10.2307/2647555.

related to participation among Black Americans.⁴³ The effect of this research shows that that factors that motivate one racial or ethnic group may not be the same for other groups and different factors may be involved.

While Barth (1969),⁴⁴ Jackman and Jackman (1973),⁴⁵ and Tajfel (1981)⁴⁶ did much to define the concept of objective group identities and make it available for use in Political Science, Miller, Gurin, and Gurin in 1980,⁴⁷ and again in 1981,⁴⁸ introduce why and how these psychological and sociological factors may be influencing political participation among American minority groups. **Group Consciousness**, or interchangeably **Group Identity**, posits that an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connections with a broader community, category, practice, or institution is a powerful motivating factor in determining their political activity.⁴⁹ In their 1981 study, Miller et al. found that what they labeled as "group consciousness" has a strong positive correlation with participation for blacks, the poor and women. However, a later, more nuanced study by Wilcox and Gomez found that one aspect of "group consciousness", described as "group identity" (in this case "religion"), was what was actually responsible for participation.⁵⁰ Other studies from that era were mixed in their findings

⁴³ Fredrick C. Harris, "Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African-American Political Activism," *Journal of Politics* 56, no. 1 (1994): 42-68.

⁴⁴ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969).

⁴⁵ Mary R. Jackman and Robert W. Jackman, "An Interpretation of the Relation between Objective and Subjective Social Status," *American Sociological Review* 38, no. 5 (1973): 569-582.

⁴⁶ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁴⁷ Patricia Gurin, Arthur H. Miller, and Gerald Gurin, "Stratum Identification and Consciousness," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1980): 30-47.

⁴⁸ Arthur H. Miller, Patricia Gurin, Gerald Gurin, and Oksana Malanchuk, "Group Consciousness and Political Participation," *American Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1981): 494-511.

⁴⁹ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283-305.

⁵⁰ Clyde Wilcox and Leopoldo Gomez, "Religion, Group Identification, and Politics among American Blacks," *Sociological Analysis* 51, no.3 (1990): 271-85.

of the impact of Group Identity on other racial and ethnic groups such as Asians and Latinos (Lien 1994; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989).^{51 52}

Group Conflict Theory, or intergroup relations theory, finds its roots in a 1949 observation by V.O. Key in Southern Politics in State and Nation where he reports that as the number of blacks increased, so did the fear among whites, which resulted in increased negative and controlling behavior by whites. The theory focuses on the in-group identification by individuals and its impact on out-group relationships among the various external groups. Each of these groups have historical and on-going interactions for scarce resources, distinct cultural values, and political power the further pursuit of which creates constant hostility and competition between the groups. In 1967, Blalock characterized this as the “power threat” theory wherein he defined an increase in minority voting percentage should result in a concurrent increase in racial discrimination.⁵³ This is because of the perception of more competition and therefore an increased threat to political power. Throughout the 1990s, Michael Giles’ work in this area found repeated evidence for a refined version of Blalock’s model. Giles argues that individuals from the dominant group will act to protect their interests as threats to their power increase from minority groups.⁵⁴ In essence, wherever there was increasing minority political power, Giles

⁵¹ Pei-te Lien, "Ethnicity and Political Participation: A Comparison between Asian and Mexican Americans," *Political Behavior* 16, no. 2 (1994): 237-64.

⁵² Carole J. Uhlaner, Bruce E. Cain, and D. Roderick Kiewiet. 1989. "Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities in the 1980s," *Political Behavior* 11, no. 3 (1989): 195-231.

⁵³ Hubert Blalock, Jr., *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967).

⁵⁴ See Michael W. Giles and Arthur S. Evans, "External Threat, Perceived Threat, and Group Identity," *Social Science Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1985): 50-66; Michael W. Giles and Arthur S. Evans, "The Power Approach to Intergroup Hostility," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 30, no. 3 (1986): 469-86; Michael W. Giles and Melanie A. Buckner, "David Duke and Black Threat: An Old Hypothesis Revisited," *Journal of Politics* 55, no. 3 (1993): 702-13; Michael W. Giles and Kaenan Hertz, "Racial Threat and Party Identification," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 317-326; Michael W. Giles and Melanie A. Buckner, "Comment," *Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4 (1996): 1171-80.

found a concurrent increase in affiliation with groups or politicians opposed to that rise by the group in power.

Teixeira⁵⁵, Putnam⁵⁶, Uslaner⁵⁷ have written extensively and with great fanfare that the decline in political participation seen in United States elections over the past 40 years is the direct result of an ever-decreasing **Social Connectedness** between individuals and the larger social community including the political one. Using indicators of social connectedness, such as community organizational involvement, church attendance, home ownership, and marital status, these studies have highlighted the breakdown of traditional community-based organizational resources and used that as evidence of larger socio-structural declines. In general, these studies tend to ignore the psychological aspects of social connectedness in favor of quantifiable evidence of fewer memberships or lowered participation statistics showing larger and deeper trends. Further, few studies have found that ethnic groups rely solely upon social connectedness as a mechanism of action for political activity. Tate, for example, found that home ownership in the black community is not associated with voting in presidential primary elections.⁵⁸ However, she does show that blacks who belong to a politicized black organization or church are more likely to vote in presidential primary elections. This finding is supported by a similar finding by Harris a few years later.⁵⁹ Together these findings might indicate that group consciousness is more of a factor in motivating these communities to political action than is social connectedness.

⁵⁵ Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992).

⁵⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster 2000).

⁵⁷ Eric M. Uslaner, *Segregation and Mistrust: Diversity, Isolation, and Social Cohesion*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵⁸ Katherine Tate, "Black Political Participation in the 1984 and 1988 Presidential Elections," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 4 (1991): 1159-76.

⁵⁹ Fredrick C. Harris, "Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African-American Political Activism," *Journal of Politics* 56, no. 1 (1994): 42-68.

All of the models of participation so far discussed, share in the fact that they are based on a positive connection between individuals which results in some kind of coordinated, collective action with the motive for that action being the key difference. The fact remains, however, that as income has risen, or minority political power has grown, or the social life of citizens has evolved we are still left with the circumstance that participation in elections has fallen especially among minority groups despite actions designed to remediate the problems perceived by the other models described here. However, what all the other models fail to recognize is the internal **Psychological Resources** of the voter and their impact on action. The work of Abramson and Aldrich⁶⁰, Conway⁶¹, Aldrich⁶², and Rosenstone and Hansen⁶³ have emphasized the importance of individual psychological orientation on participation with attention paid to factors such as political interest, political efficacy, trust in government, and civic duty. Rosenstone and Hansen⁶⁴ and Teixeira⁶⁵ indicate that simple political interest may play the biggest role in determining participation in electoral politics by minority groups. The result of the Pew survey quoted at the beginning of this chapter also reinforces this idea. **While the other models look for collective action, psychology offers an individual motive that simply may be repeated by thousands of citizens with similar feelings.** The result on the election is the same as the positive coordinated actions of the other models, but it lacks the same impetus. It is solitary. It therefore may not respond to efforts like VBM which offer group-oriented solutions.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Paul R. Abramson and John H. Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation in America," *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 3 (1982): 502-21.

⁶¹ Mary M. Conway, *Political Participation in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991).

⁶² John H. Aldrich, "Rational Choice and Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (1993): 246-78.

⁶³ Steven J. Rosenstone and John M. Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992).

⁶⁶ Jan Leighley and Arnold Vedlitz, "Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations," *Journal of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 1092-1114. Doi.org/10.2307/2647555.

3.3 Additional VBM Literature

The context of the VBM election does not appear to change the outcome of academic research on VBM elections for minority voters. New and differing contexts still yield a mix of results. For example, using a 2016 dataset drawn from California precincts that have chosen to use VBM, Elul et al. setup a natural experiment that found that turnout among registered voters in VBM precincts is discernibly lower than in traditional precincts in general elections.⁶⁷ Further the negative effect is generally consistent across all ethnic groups. This is interesting because it is a new context for VBM research, but the results are mostly consistent with results from work in other jurisdictions. It would also appear based on this work that VBM has not met its goal of raising the votes cast among minority groups, at least in California. In a 2010 study, Southwell analyzed 2004-2007 U.S. Census data from citywide VBM elections in Denver, Colorado, then a new context for vote by mail, in order to determine if the new format facilitated participation by Latino and Black voters. Her results suggest that both Latino and Black voters participated more often in vote by mail elections. She does admit that the Black turnout increase was also affected by other recent changes in Colorado's registration policies.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Gabrielle Elul, Sean Freeder, and Jacob M. Grumbach, "The Effect of Mandatory Mail Ballot Elections in California," *Election Law Journal* 16, no. 3 (2017):397 doi.org/10.1089/elj.2016.0390.

⁶⁸ Patricia Southwell, "A Panacea for Latino and Black Voters? Elevated Turnout in Vote by Mail Elections," *Social Science Journal* 47, no. 4 (2010): 819-828, 10.1016/j.soscij.2010.04.006.

Chapter 4. Methodology

Initially, the primary goal of this study was just to determine whether VBM delivers on the goal of increasing voter turnout particularly among Black and Latinx voters as well as identify what other factors may also influence turnout. To do this, the methodology of this study is two-fold. First, the turnout percentages of previous elections have been mapped to each voting precinct in the three states under review for both presidential and mid-term elections ranging from 2008 through 2018. Each of these statewide maps has then been overlaid with census data reflecting the racial makeup of the areas around each voting district. This allows for the identification of areas within the state of high Black, Latinx, and white populations. In doing this it is possible to visually identify whether areas of high minority population (in this study defined as Black and Latinx) have also seen increases in turnout. In contrast, it is also possible to identify whether areas not high in minority population (white) have seen increases in turnout.

A survey was also carried out just prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in each of the three states which targeted Latinx, Black, and white citizens who are non-registered and non-participating. Using the results of the survey will allow for a better understanding of what is keeping these people from participating in voting. The results of the GIS work will also be used to validate the results of the survey and vice-versa. The expectation is that the GIS work will show that areas of high minority residency have not seen significant or consistent increases in voting during the VBM era in that state. Further, the survey will find that there are psychological factors at work beyond those addressed by the cost factor inherent in VBM. Thus, the reasons for low VBM turnout will be apparent.

This survey was initially intended to validate the results of the mapping by showing that minority residents of the areas in question, in fact, did not vote. However, the results also

uncovered something unexpected ---**the unmotivated voter**. The survey contained a number of questions on why they choose not to participate in voting despite the presence of VBM, what factors contribute to their non-participation in voting, and what they feel might motivate them to begin to participate in voting.⁶⁹ The answers to these questions in each of the jurisdictions had strikingly similar results which indicated an active choice to not participate in voting and even a disdain for the process of politics as a whole.

4.1 2020, Data, and this Research

The 2020 election cycle saw the largest voter turnout since at least 1960 and possibly as far back as 1900 (depending on if one uses VEP or VAP in the calculation). There is no doubt that expanded and liberalized rules for absentee voting across the country and new “mail service” VBM systems in three states combined with expanded early voting, drop off voting, and other reforms played a role in that large number. However, 2020 is also an anomalous year. The outbreak of a life-threatening pandemic, the repeated lightning rod controversies surrounding the presidency, the collapse of sectors of the national economy, and the new isolation and realities of time Americans experienced also played a significant role in that number. Without additional data, it is impossible to know whether this new level of voter turnout will continue or if it is a one off given the previously unheard-of circumstances surrounding the election.

As such, data from the 2020 election cycle has not been included in the GIS analysis of voting by mail. With all that has happened 2020 may well be a break point for a new engagement with VBM, but it is equally as true that it may not. Without more data points in the future, we cannot be certain which way the trend is heading. Current expansions to VBM systems may not survive after the pandemic. Republicans in several state legislatures are already moving to

⁶⁹ See Appendix A: Unmotivated Voter Survey Questionnaire

tighten voting reforms carried out as a result of COVID-19.⁷⁰ There are also the continued efforts to resist the liberalizing forces of voting reform in a great many states which existed prior the events of 2020. Other states may pause further VBM expansions until after economic and social recovery has occurred. There is simply no way to know what the future will hold for VBM so to better understand it we have to look to the moments leading up to the unique event. Therefore, given the chaos surrounding the little data that is available regarding 2020 it is of little utility in determining whether VBM really does raise turnout and for whom. The data collected prior to the 2020 election cycle is much more normalized and consistent from year to year in that it follows the same procedure even if the number of votes cast and turnout change. It will be the basis of any analysis in this report.

4.2 GIS Mapping Work of Oregon, Washington, and Colorado

Previous studies of VBM in Oregon and Washington have mostly speculated as to the effect of VBM on turnout. Southwell and Burchett were forced to admit that previous studies, which were effusive about the power of VBM to increase turnout, picked up a “novelty effect” of VBM.⁷¹ Their analysis of data going back to 1960 showed that VBM had little effect on overall turnout in Oregon. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping of voting precincts and the ability to link data to geographic locations has created the ability to make more precise and

⁷⁰ Zach Montellardo, Politico, “State Republicans Push New Voting Restrictions After Trump’s Loss,” accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/24/republicans-voter-id-laws-461707>; Cameron Peters, Vox, “Florida Republicans Want to Impose New Voting Restrictions. They’re not the Only Ones,” accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/2021/2/21/22293921/florida-republicans-new-voting-restrictions-arizona-iowa-georgia>; Adam Brewster and Caitlin Huey-Burns, CBS News, “In Wake of 2020 Election, State GOP Lawmakers Aim to Change Election Laws,” accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/2020-election-republicans-state-election-laws/>; Stephen Fowler, National Public Radio, “Georgia Republicans File Sweeping Elections Bill to Limit Early and Absentee Voting,” accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/19/969497398/georgia-republicans-file-sweeping-elections-bill-to-limit-early-and-absentee-vot>.

⁷¹ Patricia Southwell and Justin Burchett, “The Effect of All-mail Elections on Voter Turnout,” *American Politics Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2000): 72-79.

accurate appraisals of voting behavior in real time with the event. A visual identification of whether voting by mail has made significant impacts in overall voter turnout is now possible. Further, GIS has created the ability to see disparate impacts of VBM on various racial groups --- groups with higher turnout than others--- as well as how the racial makeup of the precincts themselves have changed over the study period. In this study, this has been accomplished by linking voter turnout during the '08, '10, '12, '14, '16, '18 elections in the three states (OR, WA, and CO) that have history with statewide vote by mail systems to a map of each precinct. It is now therefore possible to visually identify whether vote by mail has made a significant impact in overall voter turnout in these states by comparing the maps from various years. Previously, researchers were left with the ability to only compare county level or state level turnout data. The ability to do this comparison at a more granular precinct level is has only recently become available.

These elections were chosen for GIS mapping for three reasons: 1) Oregon's system and precincts were adjusted in the first few years of VBM use; 2) Oregon's precinct level data for the years prior to 2006 is mostly inaccessible or incomplete; and 3) the VBM systems in Washington and Colorado did not come online until 2012 and 2014, respectively. By using this time period for analysis, the study is utilizing data from both the pre- and post- vote by mail introduction in two of the states (WA and CO). It uses data from the years when the brand-new and untested system was engrained, stabilized, and embedded from the third (OR). As previously discussed, raw statewide turnout data shows that after an initial rush in 2000, statewide turnout has remained the same or may be falling especially given the rise in population in Oregon over the same period.⁷² The GIS mapping in this project has been able to determine where specifically

⁷² See Figure 2

VBM has failed to raise turnout and offer some discussion about the factors which may be at play.

The tables of turnout ratios and percentages that other studies have relied upon to demonstrate pre- and post- VBM efficacy in raising turnout are not a factor in this study. Instead, they will be replaced by the maps and visual data displays. This makes it novel relative to other studies on VBM while still creating the pre- and post-analysis that has become the hallmark of VBM effectiveness studies. Further, by identifying areas where there are significant Latinx or African American voters, we can also visually identify whether vote by mail has made significant inroads in raising turnout among minority groups, which has been a key goal of this type of legislation in the respective states. We can also see if any disproportionate effects have been created by the use of this voting reform program--- for example if areas of white voting precincts have risen relative to non-white areas. As far as this research is aware, this is the first project to use comprehensive GIS mapping to compare turnout at the precinct level. Further, it is the first large scale project to create and utilize statewide precinct level turnout data for analysis. It is also the first project to attempt to determine comprehensive statewide efficacy of VBM in raising turnout especially among minority voters.

The voter data (votes cast, VEP, and registered voters) used to determine turnout was gathered from the respective state databases where available. In Colorado, county websites were used as the state data was incomplete. In the years where it was available, the votes cast data reflects votes cast in the presidential election as not all voters vote in every election on the ballot in a given year. When a presidential election was unavailable, the highest ranking statewide public official election was used starting with Gubernatorial, then Senate, then sundry other state

offices including Judges if needed. House of Representative election results were never utilized as they are not statewide elections in any of the states included in the project.

The primary tool of analysis for the GIS work has been ArcGIS, which is the standard software program for engaging in mapping and spatial data analysis. The required ArcGIS shapefiles containing the precinct boundaries upon which the overall maps of Washington and Colorado were primarily sourced from the respective state or county elections websites. Where not available from those sources, the Harvard Election Data Archive and the United States Election Project at the University of Florida have provided the necessary shapefiles. Precinct maps often change from election to election, so each election year included in the study required the creation of a new map--- 18 overall precinct maps in total. The map used in the Oregon analysis had to be created from scratch as the state provides no comprehensive voting precinct maps and several of the counties under review have no such map in a digital format. Thankfully, the Portland Metro regional government was able to provide considerable assistance in developing significant portions of the appropriate maps.

Turnout data for the thousands of individual voter precincts was again collected from state and county election websites. All the states included in this study have robust election data reporting available to the public on centralized websites. They also offer significant assistance via the telephone or email in finding the required data files among their repositories. However, they provide no assistance with interpretation or understanding. With this election information, the GIS maps of the Washington, Oregon, and Colorado voting precincts were linked to the state information on voter turnout in each precinct for each election year. There are over 7300

precincts in Washington State, about 450 in the Oregon research, and over 3200 in the state of Colorado.⁷³

With the linking of these two pieces of data, it is now possible to see a color-coded map of turnout overlaid to the precincts from the various election years. It is a visual pre- and post-test ---the standard by which all other studies of VBM effectiveness have been conducted ---of the effectiveness of vote by mail in driving turnout. Further, the turnout maps have also been overlaid with density dots showing higher proportions of Latinx and African American populations. From these maps, it is possible to see the impact of vote by mail on driving minority group turnout in these states. In effect, these maps offer a detailed picture of not just whether turnout has or has not increased, but where it has increased and among which populations.

4.3 Survey of Non-Participatory Citizens: “The Unmotivated Voter”

Surveys of one type or another provide deeper insights into the motivations and logic employed by participants, or non-participants, in voting than any state or county level empirical observation of voting patterns can ever hope to accomplish. Therefore, surveys are commonly used in voting behavior research. The hypothesis of this paper states, in part, that there are underlying psychological and emotional barriers that keep people from participating in elections and that VBM fails to address these issues. Understanding what those barriers may be and why VBM has failed to raise participation levels significantly is best accomplished with a survey instrument. As such, a short survey has been undertaken to accompany the results of the GIS analysis.

⁷³ “2018 Analysis of August Primary and November General Election,” Washington Secretary of State, accessed January 20, 2021, https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/research/2018%20report%20of%20elections%20in%20washington%20state.pdf

The survey instrument consists of 24 multiple choice questions and open-ended questions covering the respondent's awareness of VBM, their lack of participation in the system, trust in government, and other relevant areas.⁷⁴ The instrument also has several follow-up questions programmed to reveal themselves depending on the response of the participant. For example, a question asking about whether a participant has ever had an encounter with local authorities asks further questions about the encounter if the initial answer is yes. The survey instrument was primarily designed by the principal investigator with input from Alchemer as to appropriateness for use with their panels. The design of this instrument, along with the use of an outside survey research company, was approved by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Claremont Graduate University. The data was collected in February and March of 2020 just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. The collated data was returned from Alchemer almost instantly and clients have access to a robust set of proprietary tools to help analyze the data. Analysis of the survey data was performed by the principal investigator using the tools provided by Alchemer.

The survey was limited exclusively to respondents who were unregistered and self-identified as White, Latinx, or Black people in the three VBM states. Unregistered voters, or what the study has termed unmotivated voters, are the target because they have clearly chosen to not participate in elections despite the longstanding presence of VBM schemes in their respective states. Age was not asked beyond a screening question to ensure that the respondent was over the legal voting age of 18. Gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs were also not included as questions as they were deemed of little value in what needed to be a very short survey on voting participation. Political belief was not asked directly although respondents were asked in separate

⁷⁴ See Appendix A

questions if they had favorable views of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. No personally identifiable information was collected and there is no way to link the surveys with any specific individual.

The survey is fronted by an informed consent agreement outlining the rights of the respondent, purpose and usage of the responses, names of the investigators, and their absolute right to withdraw their participation at any time.⁷⁵ To proceed, the respondent had to click two different check boxes affirming their consent to participate in the survey. If they did not click both boxes, then they were rejected and sent to a screen informing them that they were ineligible for the survey. The survey then proceeds to six pre-screening questions. As the project requires input from people belonging to particular demographic groups (Black, Latinx, White, Non-Registered to Vote, Non-Participating in Voting), the questions are designed to ensure that participants belong to necessary groups without signaling their intention. The first question asks how does the individual primarily define their racial heritage. Any answer other than white, Hispanic/Latino (in Oregon and Colorado), or Black (in Washington and Colorado) sends the respondent directly to the ineligible screen. The next question asks if the participant is 18 and a “No” response sends them to the ineligible screen. People under 18 cannot vote in these states in the general election. The third question asks if they are a resident of the state in question with a “No” response sending them to the ineligible screen. Non-residents cannot vote in elections in these states. To remove anyone who may be not voting for legal instead of person reasons, the fourth question asks if the person is currently barred from voting in the state. A “Yes” sends them to the intelligible screen. The fifth question asks if they are registered to vote in the state and if they respond with “Yes” they are sent to the ineligible screen. A person who is registered

⁷⁵ See Appendix A

to vote is not an unmotivated voter by the definition of this project. However, an “I Do Not Know” will allow them to proceed. Finally, the last questions asks if they have ever voted in an election in the state with a “Yes” sending them to the ineligible screen. Again, voting in an election would not qualify someone for the unmotivated voter status defined by this project. If the respondent, successfully answers these questions (white/Black/Latino; Yes; Yes; No; No; No) they are then taken to the first set of survey questions. All other sets of responses send the respondent to the ineligible screen which also should register that IP address as barred from future attempts.

The survey company Alchemer (formerly SurveyGizmo) was contracted to identify participants from their registered panels. The use of a survey proved invaluable and made the study feasible. No individual researcher working on their own could identify and contact the specific group required in this study. Further, they would be unlikely to be able to draw the proper sample from such a large and geographically diverse set of states. The scale of the project is simply too big without the help of a professional survey company.

The study included a total of 350 participants gathered from across Oregon, Washington, and Colorado. 50 white and 50 black citizens were interviewed in Washington State; 50 white and 50 Latinx citizens were interviewed in Oregon; and 50 white, 50 black, and 50 Latinx citizens were interviewed in Colorado. The required number of respondents from each racial group in each state were determined in advance and the survey company continued to allow enrollments until completed responses reached the predetermined levels. Black citizens were drawn from Washington State as it has a much larger population of Black people than Oregon. Oregon was chosen for Latinx respondents for the same reason. Colorado had sufficient numbers of all three categories to allow surveying to proceed with all three groups.

Owing to the use of a professional surveying company and their panels of respondents, the overall response rate was 81%. This means that even after screening questions were applied and the potential respondent was cleared to complete the survey approximately 19% did not do so. However, if a chosen respondent did not complete the survey then another enrollment was added until 100 surveys had been completed. In that way one could argue that the response rate was 100% as all of the final target response numbers were met. To reach that target number of 350 participants required the enrollment and then pre-screening of thousands of individuals. Not all enrollments will become completers of the survey as they can be removed by the prescreening questions or they can choose simply not to finish the survey. Washington required 1234 enrollments before a suitable pool of respondents was collected. Colorado required 1129 enrollments and Oregon required 601. These are an unusually high number of enrollments for a short survey such as this one but owing to the very specific group of people the survey was required to reach (unregistered, never voted, eligible Black, white, or Latinx) the unusual occurrence is not without an explanation. It is also the reason that the survey took the company twice as long as they initially predicted to complete in each of the states. This group of people is specifically, and likely, intentionally difficult to find. This speaks more about their panel participants than about potential voters in the respective states.

The survey was given in an exclusively online format and was available to respondents. Survey respondents were denied the ability to take the survey multiple times as previously registered IP addresses were restricted by Alchemer along with simply not allowing their panel participants to log into the same survey twice. Alchemer charged a total of \$2000 to develop the pools, conduct the survey, and gather the data. Those associated costs were covered by the principal investigator along with an additional \$500 to remain enrolled as a client after the

COVID-19 pandemic delayed completion of the overall research project. Although not directly discussed with Alchemer, ancillary information indicates that each participant was paid from \$2-\$5 by them for taking the short survey. The principal investigator was not involved in any way with paying participants for their time.

Chapter 5. Mapping Turnout in Washington and Oregon

5.1 GIS Data Maps

Study area maps are not necessarily meant to be compared year over year which is why the scale (turnout percentage) has been hidden to emphasize that visual contour of turnout. That scale is also variable (another reason to deemphasize it) as it is relative only to the year presented. In other words, it is different for each map. For example, 83% is slightly different in one year versus another as votes cast and registered voters change slightly. Therefore, the representative color is more important. So, then what is the utility of the map? They can demonstrate if turnout rises and falls, particularly between presidential and mid-term election years. A comparison of the color gradient indicates that, except for a few specific precincts, the maps for mid-term elections (2010, 2014, and 2018) are very consistent as are the maps for presidential election years (2008, 2012, and 2016). The differences between presidential and mid-term election turnout is demonstrated as expected.

The maps can also show that areas of the map encompassing multiple precincts stay the same year over year to greater or lesser extent. When combined with demographic data demonstrating where the largest concentrations of Latinx and Black people reside, they can show whether minority voting has risen or stayed the same in the VBM era. On the maps for Oregon, Black residents are signified by black squares and Latinx residents are signified as grey circles. The larger the symbol the greater the number of residents from that group. Areas without symbols can be assumed to contain majority white residents, or at the very least assumed to have a very mixed racial profile. For maps in Washington State, Black residents are signified by black dots and Latinx residents by red dots. The denser the dots the more residents of a racial group. An absence of dots can be assumed to be areas of high white density. The different mapping

strategies are the result of different map projections and zoom. Each style simply looked better on those respective maps.

If an area remains green or greenish yellow year in and year out, then turnout remains consistently low. In Oregon, precincts with high minority residency have been highlighted with a circle. These areas remain consistently low in turnout regardless of the ongoing presence of VBM in Oregon. This is evidence of consistently low minority turnout in the state. By comparison, areas of high white residency show consistently high turnout or turnout growth, particularly in the suburbs. In Washington, areas of high minority residency have not been highlighted with a circle as the study area is much larger than a single metropolitan area as in Oregon. Instead, metropolitan maps of the largest cities in the state have been provided and the areas of high minority residency are plain. The area maps for Oregon included in this section highlight the full study area over the six study years (2008 through 2018). The maps from Washington highlight 2008 through 2012 as there was a change in precinct reporting requirements which made precinct level analysis for 2014 through 2018 impossible at this time. Maps including the demographic data overlay on minority turnout have been included in these specific state discussions.

5.2 GIS Data Collection in Oregon

Oregon presents a special challenge in that their statewide voting data is unavailable prior to 2014 in a digital format, and they do not have comprehensive voting precinct maps available from any statewide or outside source. Even the Harvard Election Data Archive bemoans this fact. At the outset of this project, this problem could have been handled in one of several ways. Shapefiles of the precincts for ArcGIS could have been created from scratch and then the precinct level turnout data transferred manually from the datafiles available in an archive in

Salem, Oregon according to the state elections office. The other option was to focus the study on the primary area of population in the state. For sake of convenience and accuracy, this was the option that was chosen.

The Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) covering Portland OR covers a five-county region in the northwest of the state along the Columbia River. It includes Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, Yamhill, and Columbia Counties. The combined population of the MSA is 1,985,029 (out of a total state population of 4,190,713) according to the most recent United States Census data available.⁷⁶ Based on this information 47.3% of the state lives in the metropolitan Portland area. Further, individual counties are responsible for providing precinct maps to the public along with the votes cast statistics by precinct for their county, but they do not have to do so as ArcGIS shapefiles or in any digital format. However, all but two of the counties in the MSA of Portland (Yamhill and Columbia) have this data available electronically through the Portland Metro regional government and their data sources. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of several other counties in the state. Further, these counties all have access to consistent home delivered mail, a critical component of VBM, and this also cannot be said for other parts of rural Oregon. Given that nearly 50% of the state population lives in the five Portland MSA counties, the data required to study them is available, and barring an unforeseen advantageous turn in the data available, the choice was made to use only these counties in metropolitan Portland as representative of the state of Oregon and its experience with vote by mail.

⁷⁶ “Quick Facts: Columbia County, Oregon; Yamhill County, Oregon; Washington County, Oregon; Clackamas County, Oregon; Oregon; Multnomah County, Oregon,” United States Census Bureau, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/columbiacountyoregon,yamhillcountyoregon,washingtoncountyoregon,clackamascountyoregon,OR,multnomahcountyoregon/PST045218>

Phil Keisling of Portland State University notes that the data at the center of studies on VBM is their biggest shortcoming.⁷⁷ There has been no study of Oregon's experience with VBM based on any systematic, official data source such as statewide voter files. Henrickson et al. attempted a state-wide assessment of VBM and other election reforms in a 2019 study but again relied on turnout data instead of voter files.⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, the study found that VBM had a positive effect on turnout (in a primary) because they only studied registered, already participating voters. A more detailed analysis using voter files, or precinct level data, would go a long way to identifying who votes, which in turn could lead to a better understand of why others choose not to vote. Unfortunately, this research is time consuming and thus expensive. It is also difficult and possibly illegal depending on local and state law, to retrieve the state voter files which obviously limits their utility to voting research. The more detailed data collection from a variety of sources, the ability to use GIS to gather various data points into a visual representation and combine the results of a person-to-person survey (discussed in Chapter 6) helps create a more comprehensive analysis than was previously available. However, it is still labor intensive to bring that data together. Due to the limited availability of comprehensive data on voters, sampling voters remains the primary method for gathering information on voter preferences (which has been included here as well).

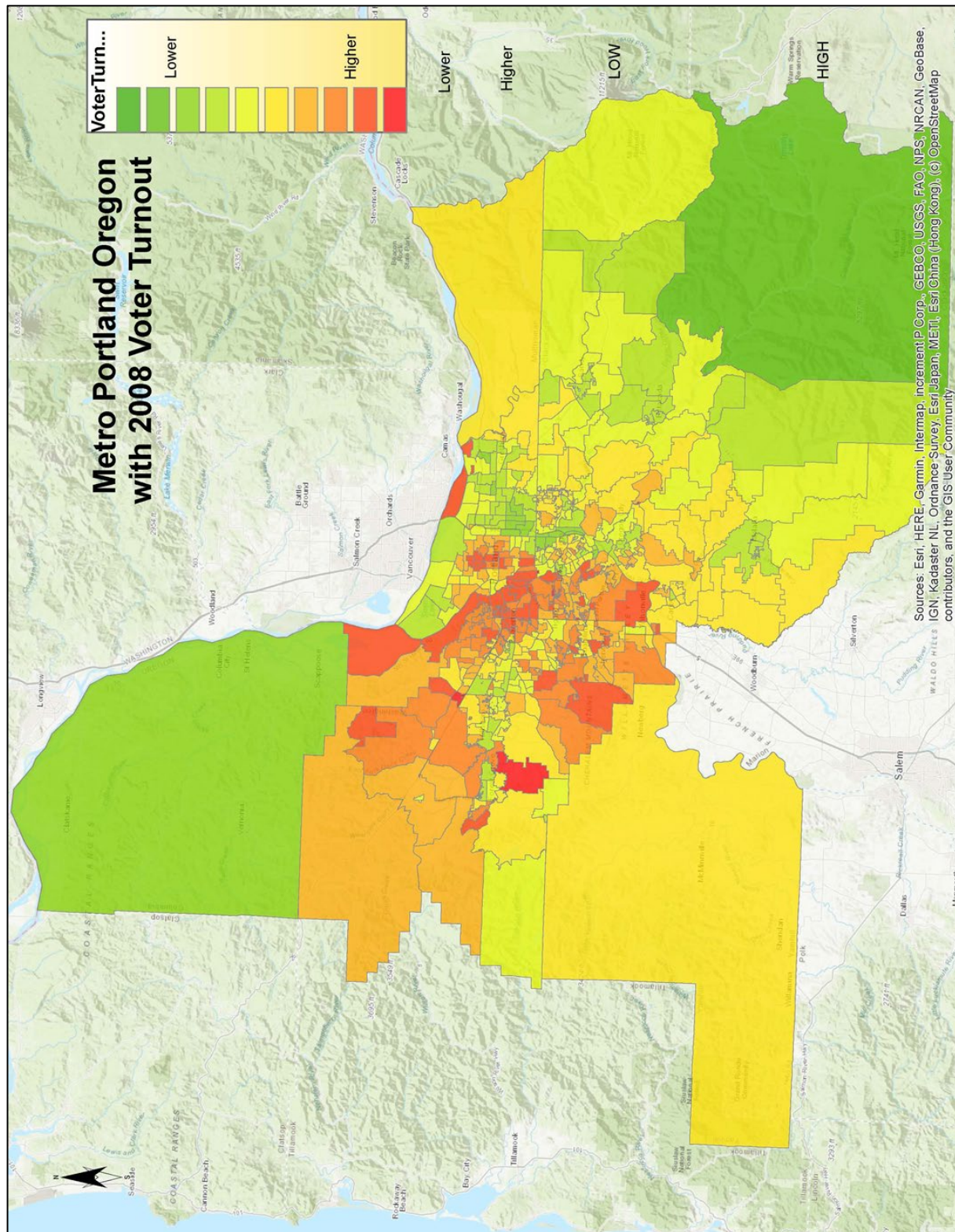
Maps 1 through 6 are GIS maps of metropolitan Portland for national elections from 2008 through 2018 that have been overlaid with voting turnout data correlated by precinct. Green represents lower the turnout and red represents higher turnout on the map. Even a quick review of the six maps provided shows that turnout shifts from year to year with some areas growing

⁷⁷ Phil Keisling, "The Measure- and Mismeasurement- of Universal Vote by Mail" *Washington Monthly*, January 19, 2016, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2016/01/19/the-measure-and-mismeasurement-of-universal-vote-by-mail>.

⁷⁸ Kevin E. Henrickson and Erica H. Johnson, "Increasing Voter Participation by Altering the Costs and Stakes of Voting*," *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 3 (2019): 869–84. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12583.

redder and some becoming greener. For example, the large “D”-shaped precinct to the northwest of Portland that is shaded in green in the 2008 map, which is called St. Helens, indicates low turnout for that year. However, turnout in 2010, 2012, and 2014 turned the area from green to red indicating that turnout was high in these years. The precinct was divided in 2016 and the results from those new precincts show the geographic area had mixed turnout but by 2016 the area had returned to lower turnout. The color of the precinct in a given year corresponds with whether turnout was high or low for that year. If the colors remain the same year after year, then turnout has remained relatively the same, if they go from red to green then turnout has dropped, and if they go from red to green then turnout has increased. These maps will be the basis of analysis in determining whether turnout is increasing in areas that concurrently have high minority populations.

Map 1. Metro Portland Oregon with 2008 Voter Turnout



**Metro Portland Oregon
with 2010 Voter Turnout**

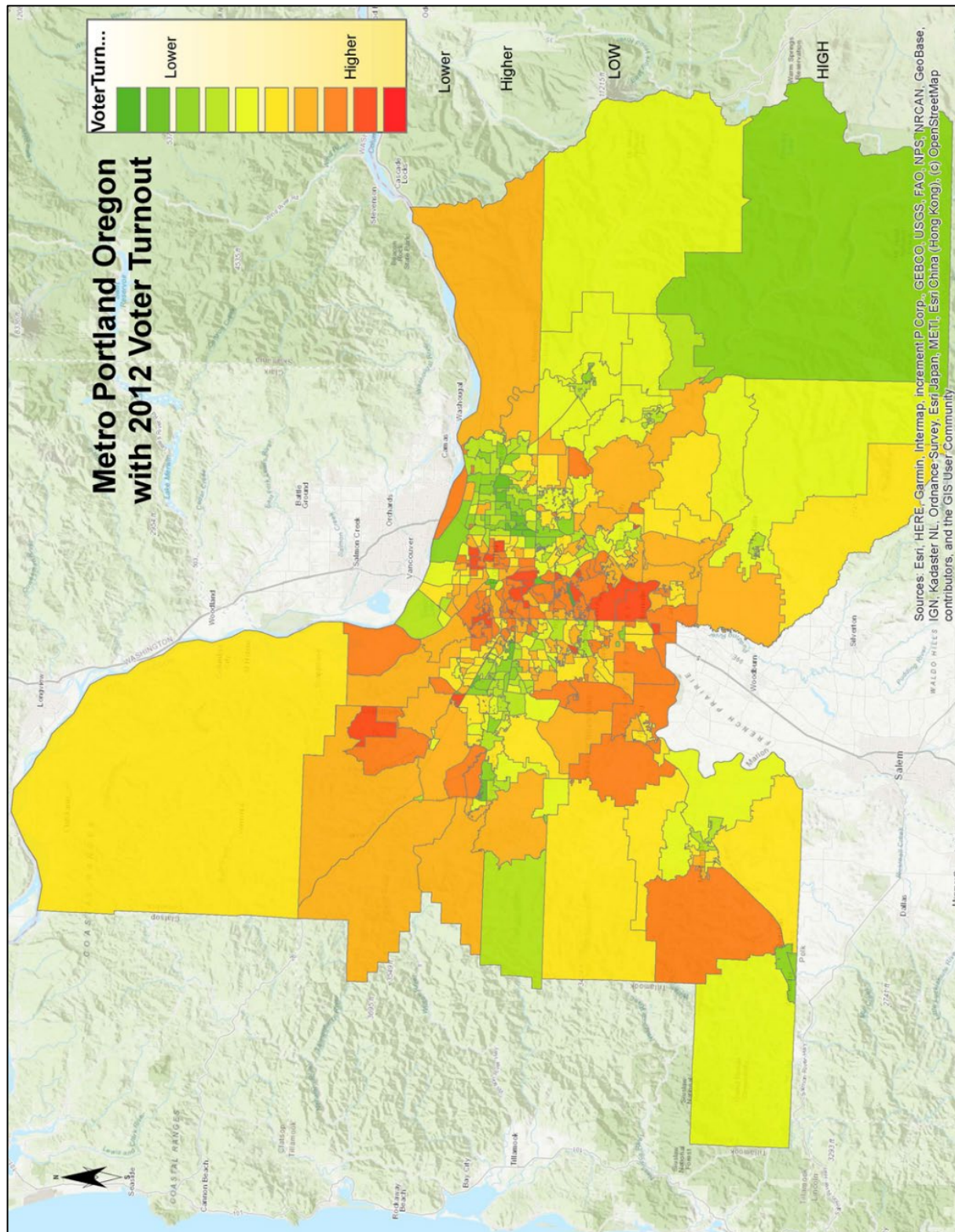
Voter Turnout 2010

Lower Higher Lower

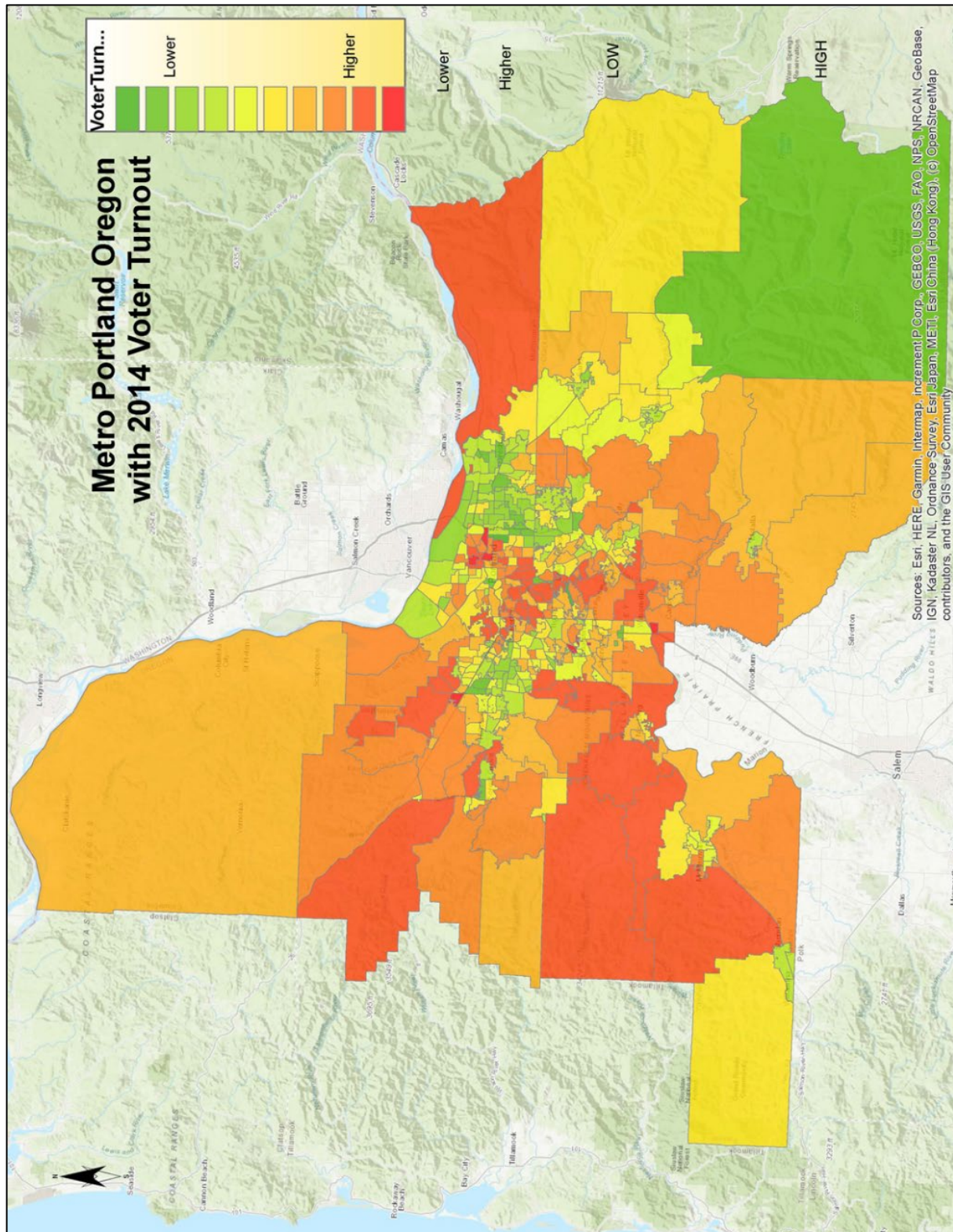
Higher LOW HIGH

Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, incrementP Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

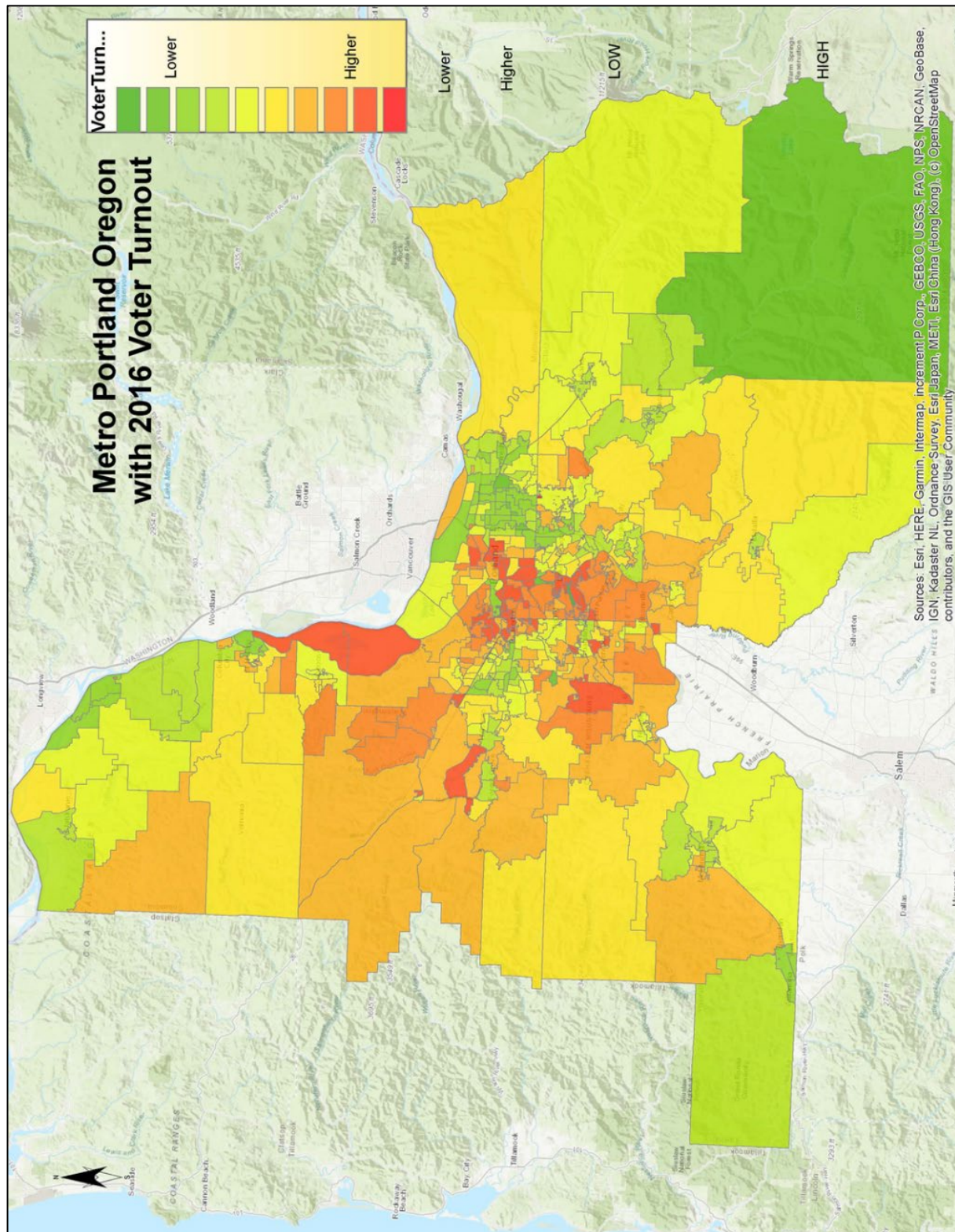
Map 3. Metro Portland Oregon with 2012 Voter Turnout



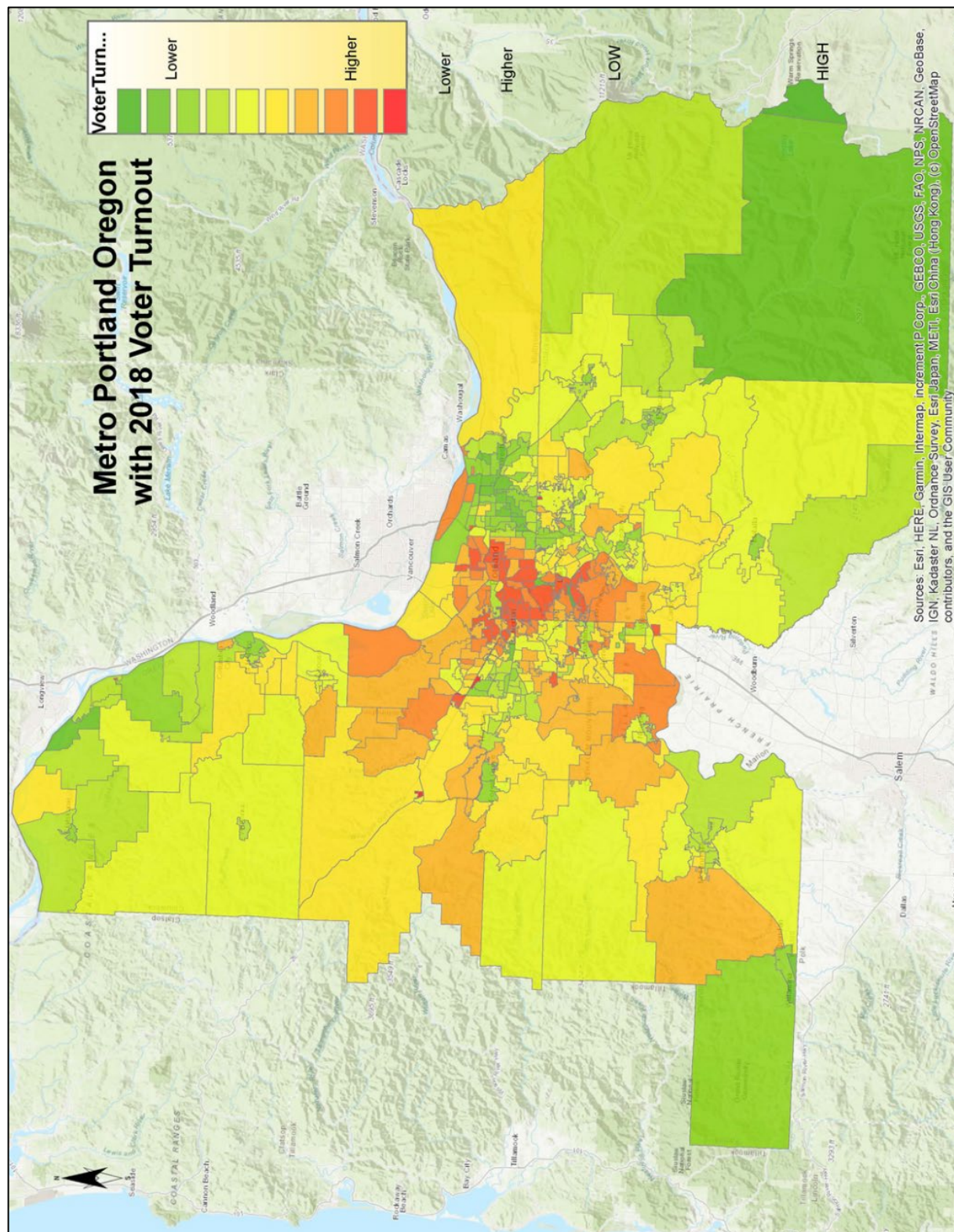
Map 4. Metro Portland Oregon with 2014 Voter Turnout



Map 5. Metro Portland Oregon with 2016 Voter Turnout



Map 6. Metro Portland Oregon with 2018 Voter Turnout



5.3 GIS Data Collection in Washington

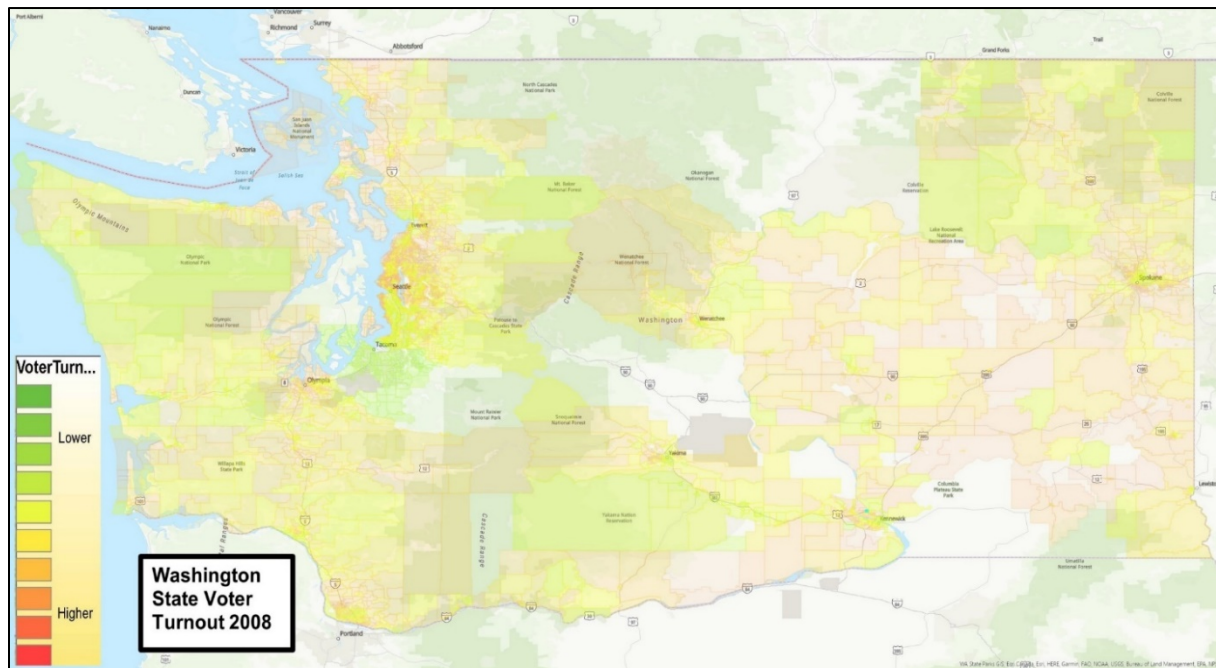
Washington State has built the most comprehensive, open, and transparent publicly accessible election data archive in the United States. All information required to analyze voting and elections in the state is available in one location via the internet and is clearly marked. If a person cannot find the information required, they can call the office and a state elections staffer will either direct you to it on the internet or send it to you on a CD-ROM by mail or as a file via email. Precinct maps and votes cast from 2004 through 2020 are all available at the precinct level. This data can be further confirmed on the respective county elections websites which often also include copies of the official certification paperwork submitted by the county to the state. General turnout data and registrations are available at the precinct level through the 2012 election cycle. After this point, this data is no longer reported on the state website at the precinct level, just the county level. It is up to the counties to report the precinct data, and most do not provide it at this time. King County, the location of Seattle, and Pierce County, the location of Tacoma, are the largest counties in the state and have stellar elections data resources publicly available at the precinct level for all elections. No other state in the United States appears to have such a complete system of data available openly to the public.

Gathering elections data is very easy in Washington, however, analyzing that data is far more difficult as the state provides raw files for its precinct level data. As previously stated, some data is only available at the county level after 2012 making precinct mapping of turnout impossible at this time. There are also issues with the quality of the files provided. Often files have not been cleaned of small errors or erroneous information. There are many leftover inclusions such as former precincts no longer in use or blank lines. With over 7000 precincts and a study covering 3 elections cycles, 21000 lines of Washington voting precinct data had to be

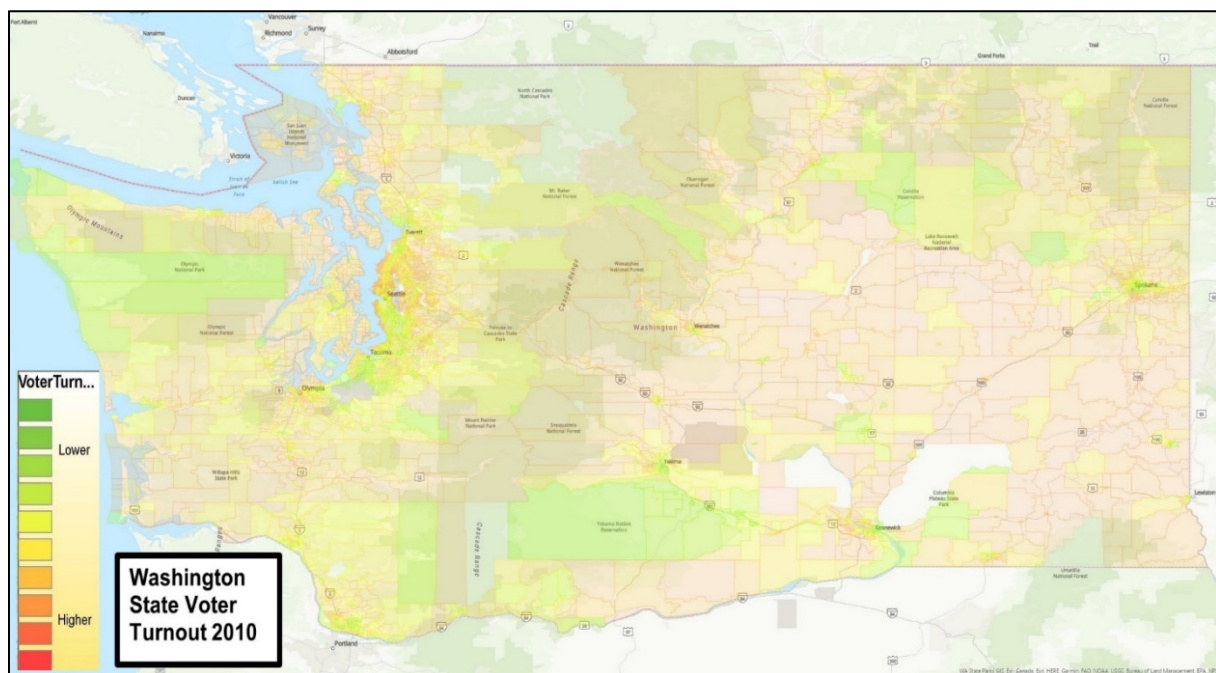
checked by hand; a tedious process to prepare and clean the data. There were gaps in the data, particularly in rural areas with special districts, national or state parks, or large water features, as the information from these areas is processed differently than the vast majority of the state. Overall, the data from Washington across the 3 sets of GIS maps proved to be over 95% complete, which is an accomplishment considering the vast amount of territory, the remoteness of parts of the state, and the fact that Washington was in the process of assembling and releasing their new statewide system of data reporting while this project was gathering its data.

Maps 7 through 9 are statewide GIS maps of Washington State for national elections from 2008 through 2012, which is the last year precinct level data is available statewide. These maps have been overlaid with voting turnout data correlated by precinct. The 2008 map for Washington State does have areas with unreported data as the county did not report precinct data to the state for that year so those areas are without a color. As with the Portland, Oregon maps, green represents lower the turnout and red represents higher turnout on the map and changes in color indicate shifts in turnout from year to year. For example, the precincts that comprise the northeast corner of the state north of Spokane predominately indicate low turnout for 2008 as they are colored green. However, turnout in 2010 turned the area from green to redder indicating that turnout was higher but that receded to yellow for 2016 indicating middling turnout. The color of the precinct in a given year corresponds with whether turnout was high or low for that year. If the colors remain the same year after year then turnout has remained relatively the same, if they go from red to green then turnout has dropped, and if they go from red to green then turnout has increased. These maps will be the basis of analysis in determining whether turnout is increasing in areas that concurrently have high minority populations.

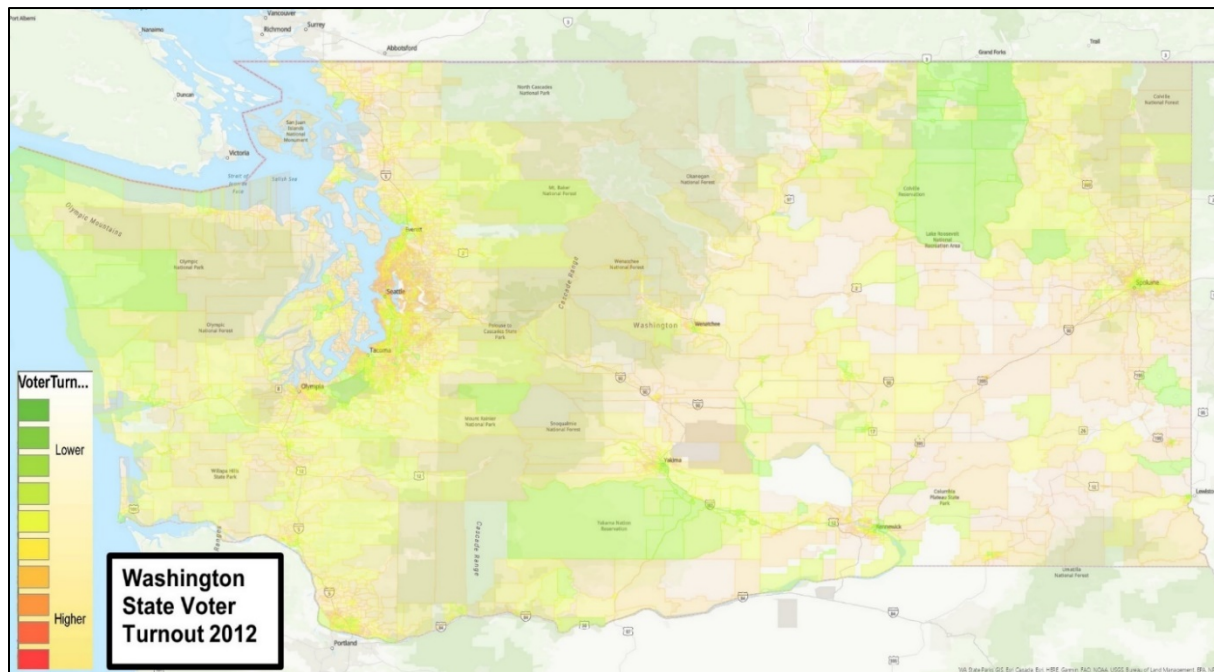
Map 7. Washington State Voter Turnout 2008



Map 8. Washington State Voter Turnout 2010



Map 9. Washington State Voter Turnout 2012



5.4 GIS Data Collection in Colorado

At the time this study was conducted, GIS data collection about elections in Colorado was very difficult. Whereas Washington has built a comprehensive and searchable system for election data, Colorado has not--- at least not yet. Precinct maps are a particular issue. For example, the state offers a statewide precinct map on its election website. However, the map is undated and currently contains precincts that are no longer in use or is missing precincts that have been added. While non-official sources like the Harvard Election Data Archive and the United States Election Project at the University of Florida have some maps available, they do not have all of the maps for each year available at this time. Further, these maps are also of unknown date and origin and may contain the same errors as the official state map.

Colorado officially leaves it to the counties to administer elections and therefore each county has the primary jurisdiction of elections data. Those counties routinely update their

precinct maps but apparently the state updates the statewide map only with each census. This means that rapidly growing counties, like in metropolitan Denver where the population mostly lives, often have different precinct maps year to year. In this study, which includes 6 election cycles, it means that the statewide map is likely very different in each iteration in many places. The state elections office cannot provide any assistance in noting where changes have occurred referring such questions back to each county level office. Every county must be consulted and many of those counties do not have electronic version of their precinct maps. The metropolitan Denver counties have robust elections systems in place and detailed data available. However, rural counties, even large ones, often have a single person overseeing the data and rarely have the precinct maps as anything other than drawings on paper. Therefore, Colorado maps have to be assembled from multiple sources and hand checked against the map provided by each county to ensure accuracy. This is incredibly tedious work and even still gaps would still remain in the maps throughout the state. It also assumes that it is possible to get a copy of these maps for each year to confirm the accuracy, which is a doubtful assumption for many counties. The best attempt yielded a map that was approximately 65% accurate based on population distribution and 40% accurate based on land area for only one of the study years. All other years had much lower rates of accuracy. As such, GIS mapping of Colorado has not been completed for this project at this time. The results would be unreliable and of little analytical use. It is hoped that as Colorado evolves their data reporting systems and repositories of GIS elections mapping such an effort will yield better future results.

Collecting turnout data in Colorado had similar issues owing to the same reasons. The state has a spreadsheet available for all election data for each election, however that spreadsheet has errors such as precincts that have changed names or numbering schema. As such, the data

must be hand checked against the data from the individual counties. Unfortunately, data from rural counties is often not available on a website or in a file that is publicly accessible. Like the maps, the turnout data requires communication with just a few people in the county who may or may not be willing to share it. There appears to be no requirement to do so easily. This narrow pipeline which limits access to the required data was further restricted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as all state and county offices were effectively closed in March 2020. As of January 2020, many of them had still not fully reopened and, if they had, were preoccupied with the 2020 general election preparations in the later part of the year. The events that followed the 2020 Presidential election cycle, coupled with the ongoing pandemic, further limited the ability to access elections data in many places in the state. Like the GIS mapping of the state, this limited access to the necessary data, along with its inherent inaccuracies and inability to independently confirm its accuracy, has left gaps in the data in geographically large portions of the state but not in populous parts of the state. This renders the assembled data on turnout of little use in this comprehensive and state-wide study.

5.4 Results of Oregon Data Collection

5.4.1 GIS Precinct Analysis

The maps included in this section start with the previously described colored maps of voting turnout by voting precinct as a base. They then add to them data on where the highest African American and Latinx populations reside. In this way, one can observe where turnout is highest while also viewing where minority populations live. African American populations are represented by black squares and Latinx populations are represented by grey circles. The larger the square or the circle the higher the population of African Americans or Latinx in that area. From that information, one can discern whether areas of high minority population have

experienced growth in turnout over the years that VBM has existed in Oregon. The maps in this section (Maps 10 through 15) have been provided featuring a zoomed-in view of the metropolitan area of Portland for clearer detail of African American and Latinx neighborhoods. This set also features large circles to highlight areas of high minority population. Since areas with large circles or squares are areas of high Black or Latinx population, small circles or squares can be assumed to be predominately white.

Table 1 presents average turnout for the precincts contained within the highlighted circles. The data was provided by Metro, the regional government for the counties of Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington, via a custom data request. The data for Yamhill and Columbia counties was gathered from their election websites and merged to the Metro data.⁷⁹ The averages are drawn from precincts within the highlighted area east of downtown Portland (East Circle), in north central Portland (Central Circle), and to the west of Portland (West Circle) featured on the metropolitan map (Maps 10 through 15). These averages support the assertion based on observations drawn from the maps that voting in areas of high minority population remain consistently low. Also included in Table 1 is a control which represents an area of low minority population situated between the West Circle and Central Circle highlighted area. This non-minority area posts turnout numbers that are significantly higher than areas of high minority population alone.

⁷⁹ “Previous Elections,” Yamhill County, OR County Clerk, accessed December 29, 2020, <https://www.co.yamhill.or.us/content/prior-year-elections>; “Past Election Results,” Columbia County, OR County Clerk, accessed December 29, 2020, <https://www.columbiacountyor.gov/departments/Elections/past-election-results>.

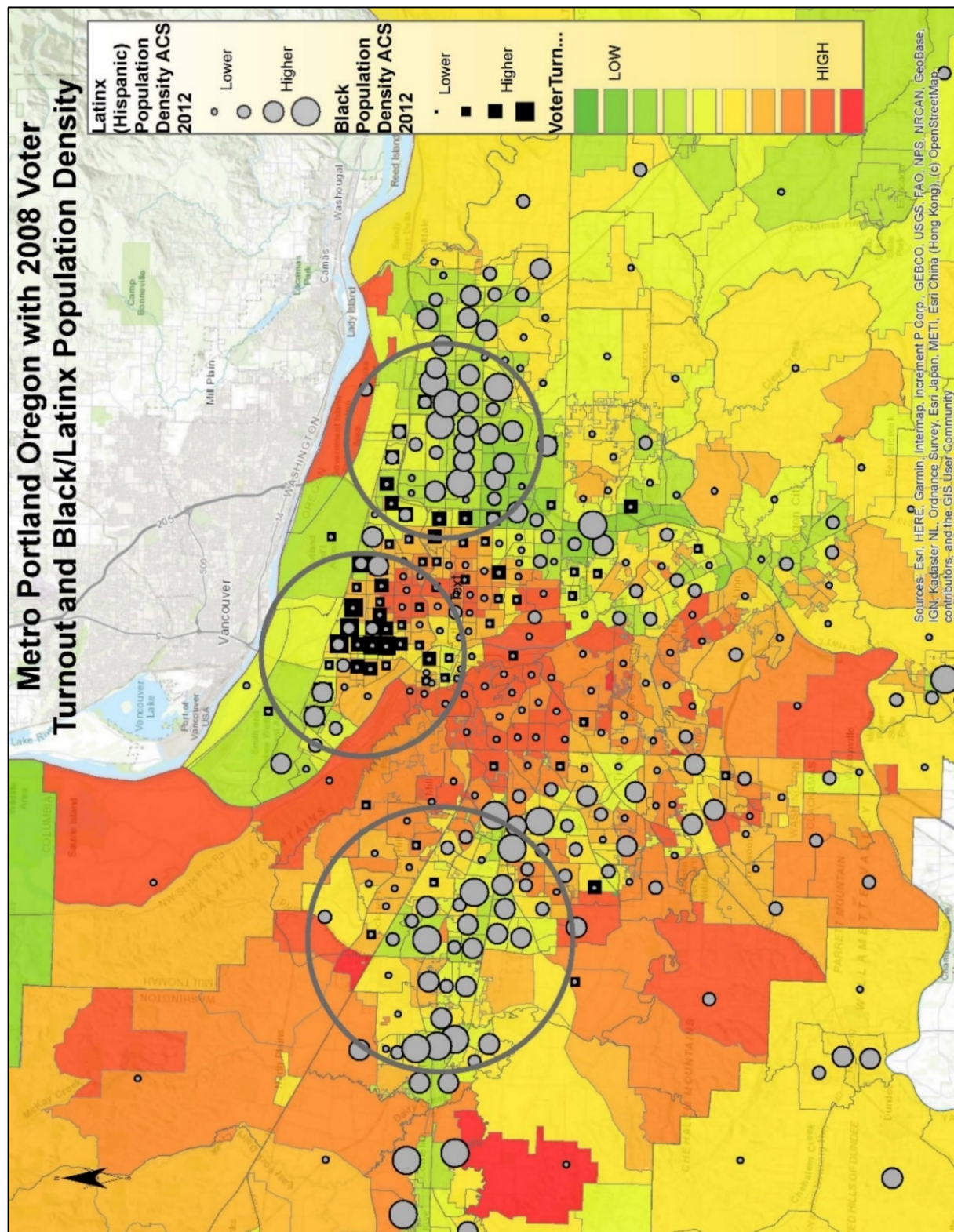
Table 1. Average Turnout by Year in Geographic Areas of High Minority Population in Metropolitan Portland, Oregon

| Areas | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| East Circle | 78.82% | 60.89% | 76.21% | 57.5% | 65.89% | 60.87% |
| Central Circle | 86.02% | 66.91% | 84.29% | 69.53% | 83.84% | 78.91% |
| West Circle | 83.40% | 63.56% | 77.38% | 62.51% | 76.36% | 65.78% |
| Non-Minority Area | 91.44% | 78.65% | 87.66% | 75.02% | 86.36% | 80.47% |

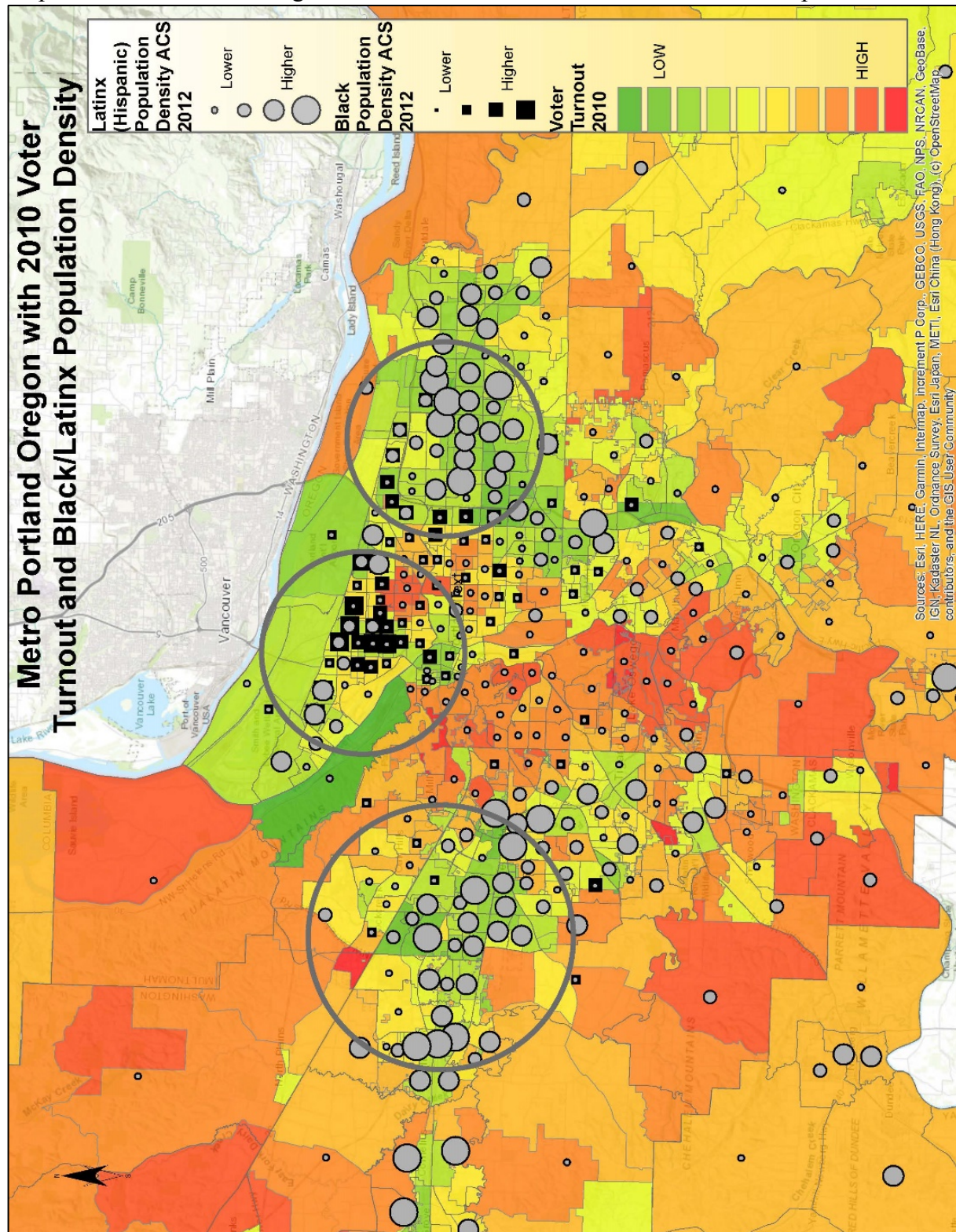
The maps of metropolitan Portland from 2008 through 2018 show a general trend of lower turnout in areas of high African American and/or Latinx population. These areas remain mostly green across each of the 6 yearly maps. The maps clearly show that areas with the highest minority population, especially those with high Latinx populations in the East Circle, maintain consistently low voter turnout numbers.

The Central Circle begins in 2008 by showing a mostly yellow color but as the years progress it becomes more red. The map data also indicates that this area of the city, while high in both African American and Latinx populations, is also high in white population and thus very mixed demographically. The mixed nature of this general area could be the reason that, despite the relatively high minority population, turnout in the Central Circle precincts also averages increasingly higher. Minority voters may still be voting low numbers in this area, but the turnout numbers are higher because of the additional presence of a substantial and increasing number of white voters in these precincts. Neither Portland Metro nor the State of Oregon disaggregates votes cast in a precinct by race, so it is impossible to know exactly why voting remains high in this area. This is a common thread between the data in Oregon and Washington. Areas with precincts of significantly mixed population show higher turnout than areas of high minority population alone and lower than areas of white alone.

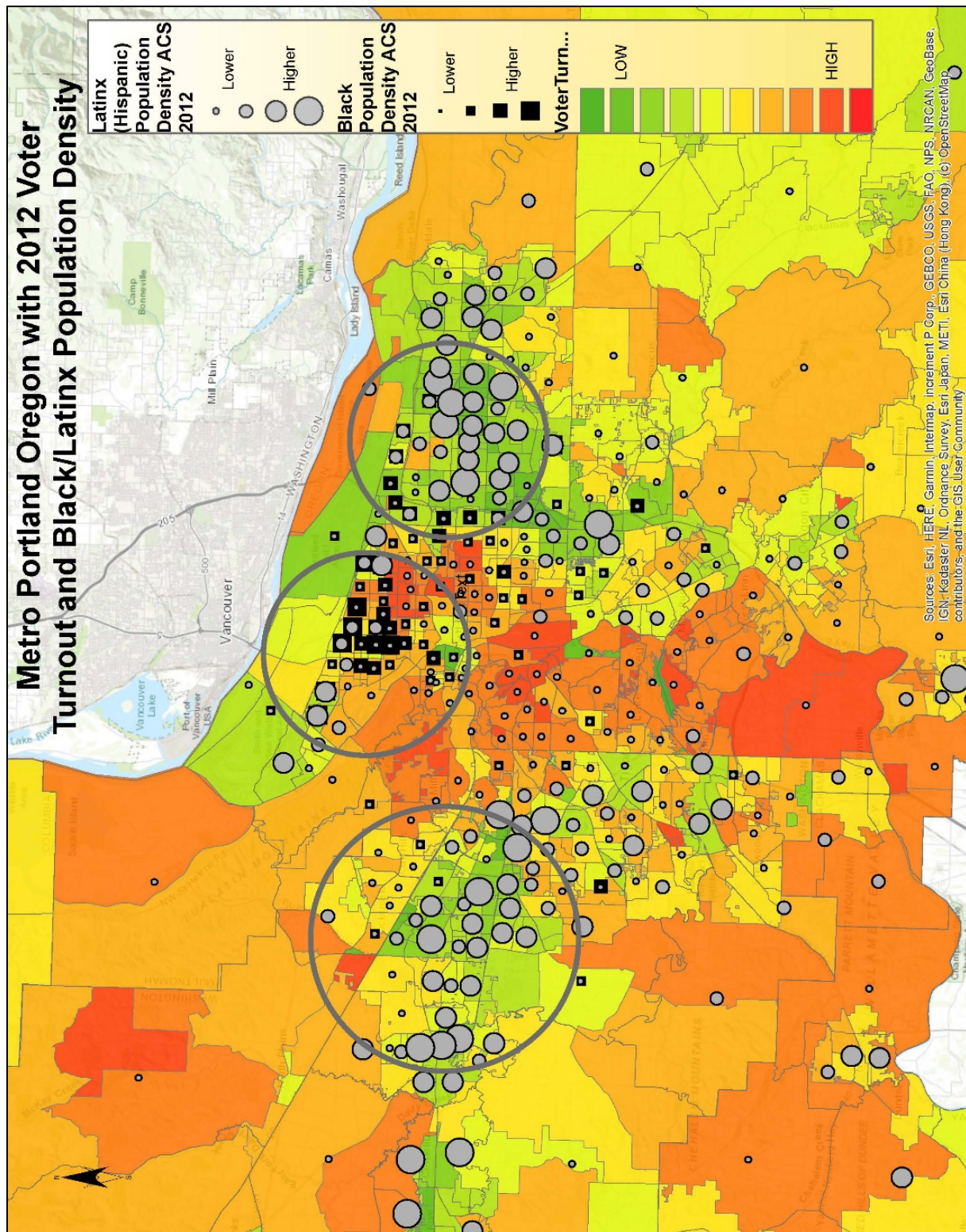
Map 10. Metro Portland Oregon with 2008 Voter Turnout and Black/Latinx Population Density



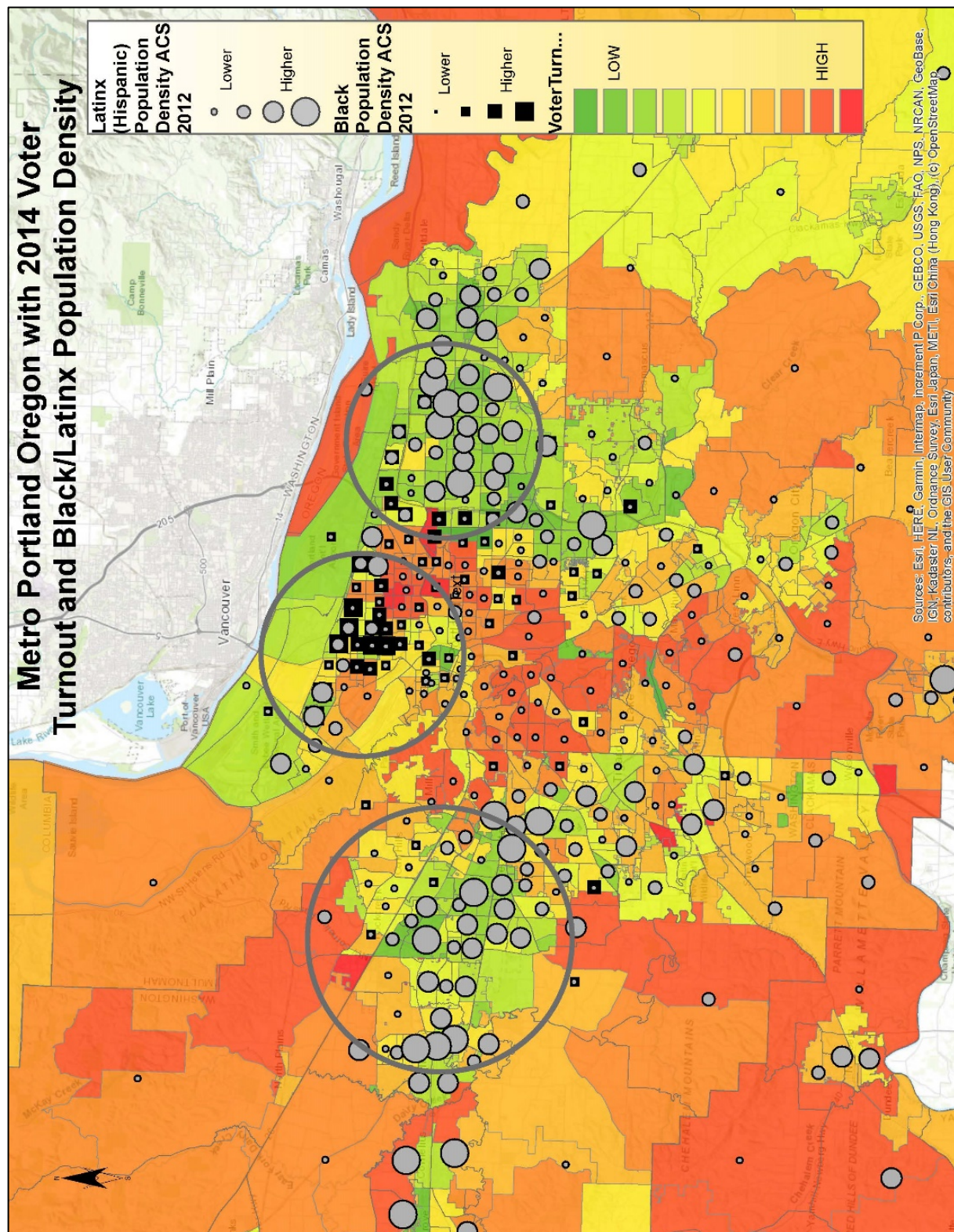
Map 11. Metro Portland Oregon with 2010 Voter Turnout and Black/Latinx Population Density



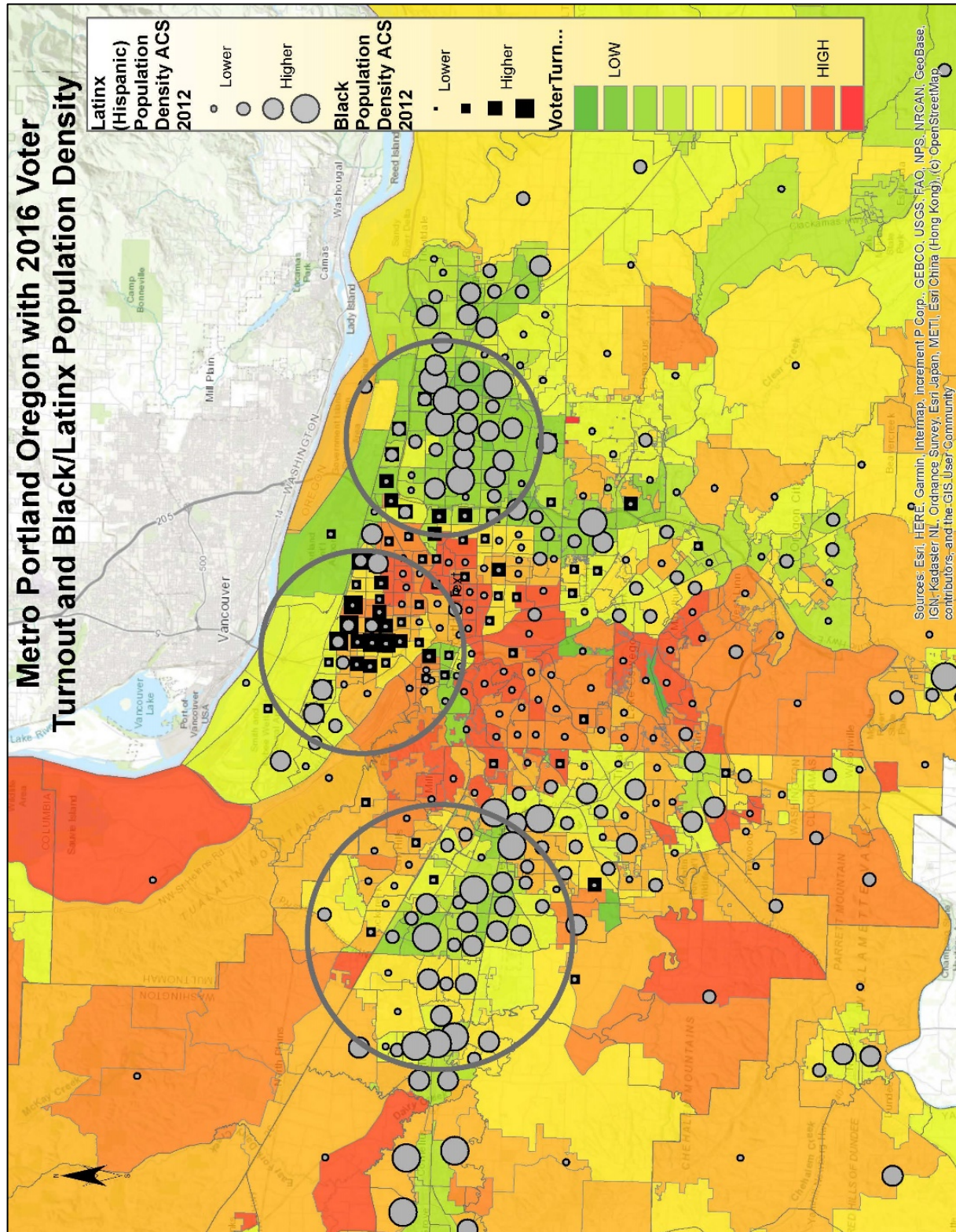
Map 12. Metro Portland Oregon with 2012 Voter Turnout and Black/Latinx Population Density



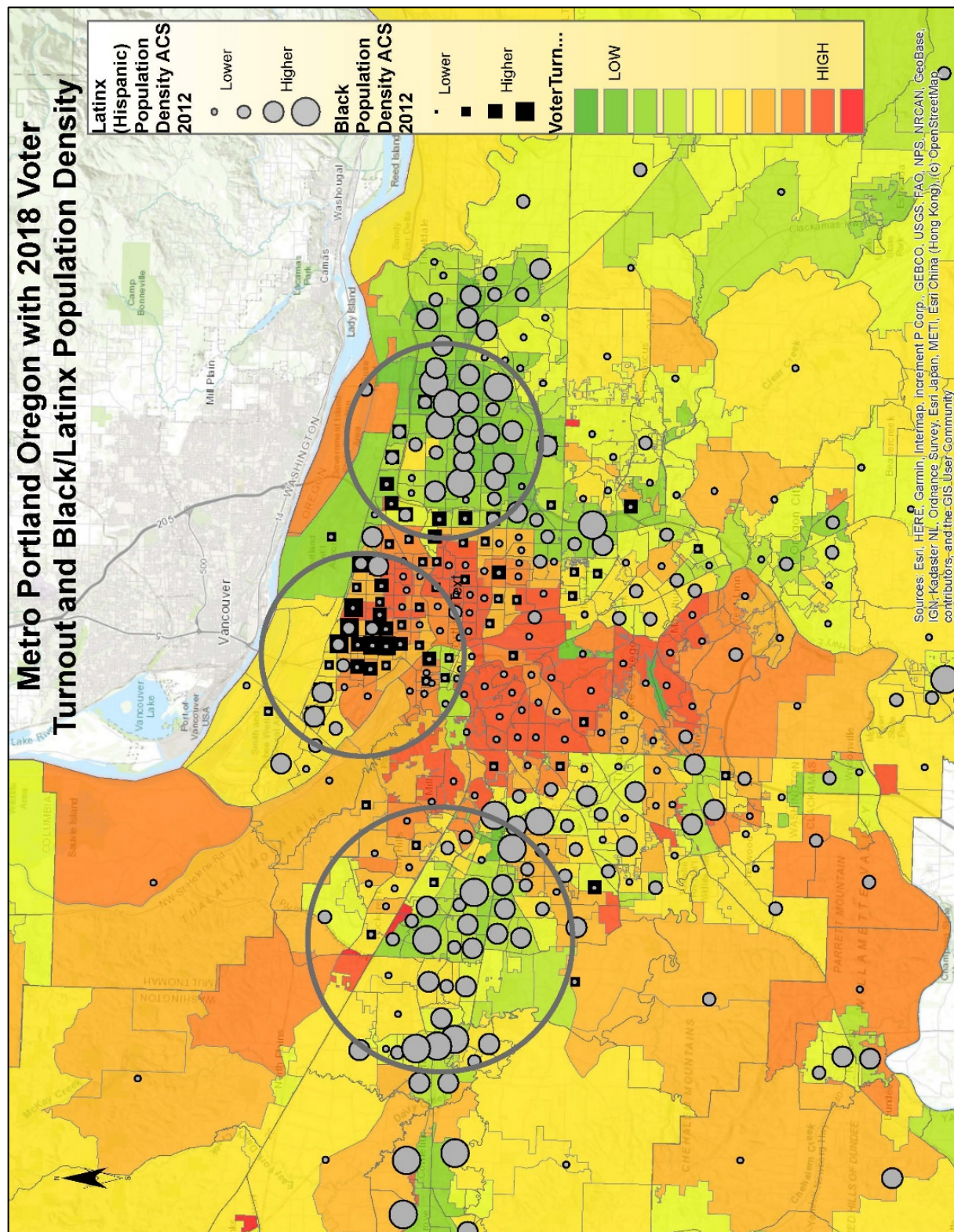
Map 13. Metro Portland Oregon with 2014 Voter Turnout and Black/Latinx Population Density



Map 14. Metro Portland Oregon with 2016 Voter Turnout and Black/Latinx Population Density



Map 15. Metro Portland Oregon with 2018 Voter Turnout and Black/Latinx Population Density



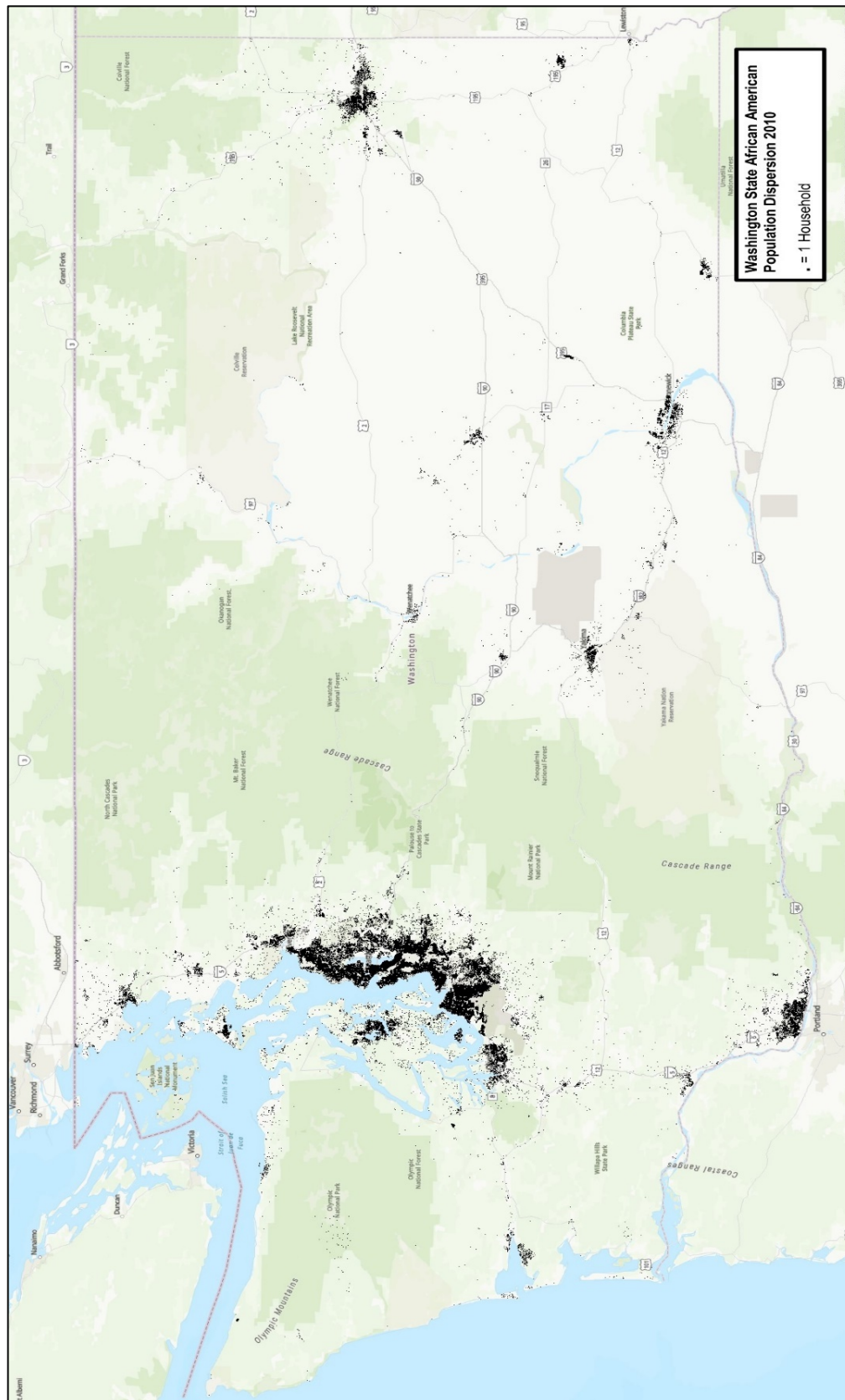
5.5 Results of Washington Data Collection

5.5.1 WA State Turnout Maps

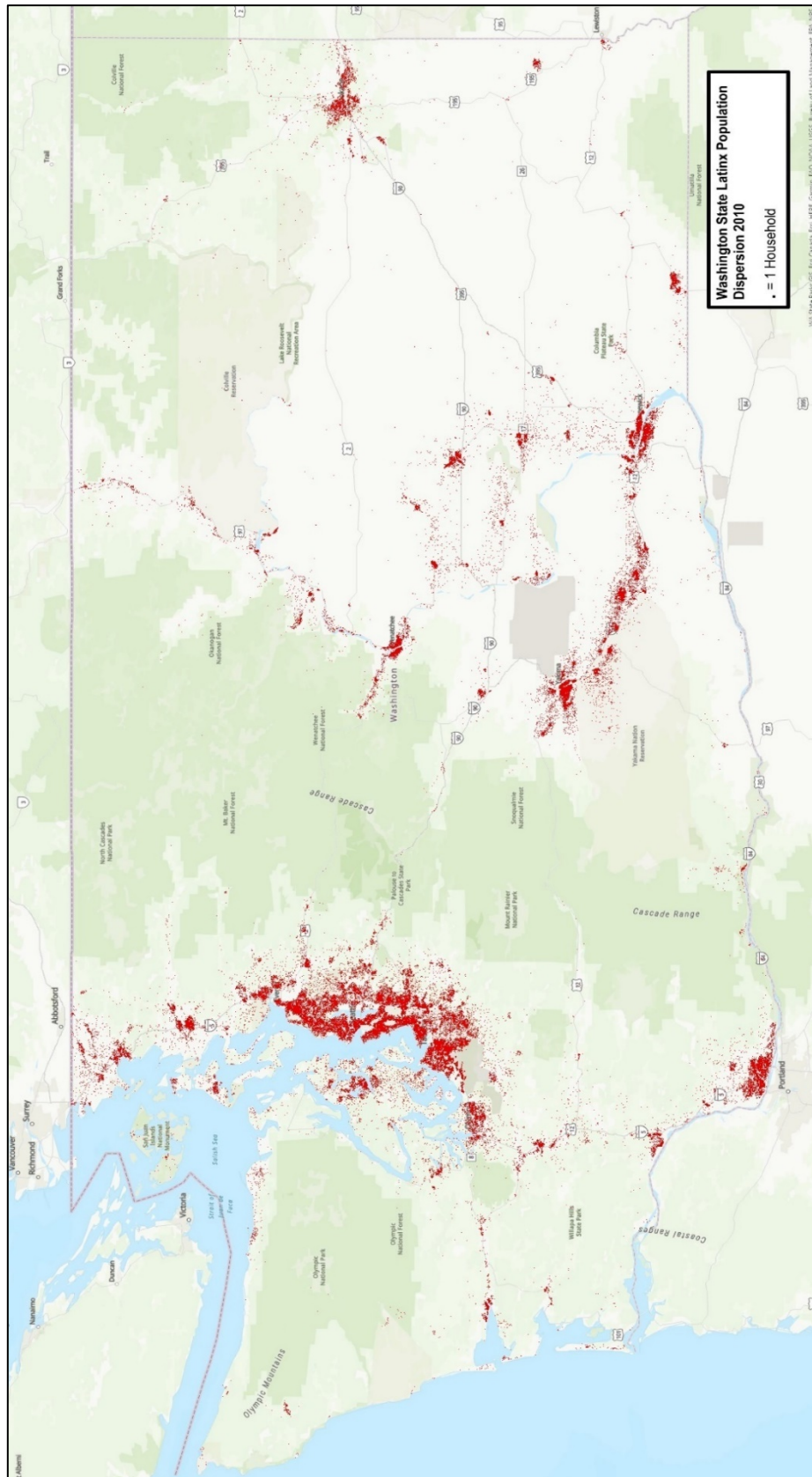
The maps included in this section start with the statewide maps showing the highest concentrations of African American and Latinx people in Washington (Maps 16 and 17). This data is then overlaid on the maps of voting turnout by voting precinct previously described to show where the highest African American and Latinx populations reside and where voting turnout is highest. In this way, one can observe where turnout is highest while also viewing where minority populations live. From that information, one can discern whether areas of high minority population have experienced growth in turnout over the years that VBM has existed in Washington.

The combined maps of turnout by precinct and Black and Latinx population dispersion show little to no useful detail at a statewide zoom. As such, a second set of maps (Maps 18 through 35) have been provided featuring a zoomed in view of the largest cities and metropolitan areas (Seattle, Tacoma/Olympia, Vancouver, Yakima, Pasco/Kennewick, and Spokane) for clearer detail of African American and Latinx neighborhoods in Washington. On all maps provided, African American populations are represented by black dots and Latinx populations are represented by red dots. The higher the density of dots, the higher the population of African Americans or Latinx respectively. Areas with few dots can be assumed to be predominately white. As previously noted, the representation of populations on the maps differs between the Washington and Oregon maps because each of these symbologies worked best for the differing projections and data used for analysis.

Map 16. Washington State African American Population Dispersion 2010



Map 17. Washington State Latinx Population Dispersion 2010



5.5.2 GIS Precinct Analysis

The maps of turnout for year 2010 through 2014 from the six metropolitan areas throughout Washington State show a general trend of lower turnout in areas of high African American and/or Latinx populations. These areas remain green across each of the 3 yearly maps in each of the 6 selected metropolitan areas. Further, areas that can be assumed to be predominantly white (meaning few dots) are consistently red, or get redder across time, indicating that voting by whites remains high election after election. The metropolitan maps clearly show that areas with the highest minority population maintain consistently low voter turnout numbers.

Table 2 presents average turnout for the ten areas of highest minority population within each of the 6 geographic areas included in the analysis (Seattle, Tacoma/Olympia, Vancouver, Yakima, Pasco/Kennewick, and Spokane).⁸⁰ These averages further support the assertion based on observations drawn from the maps that voting in areas of high minority population remain consistently low. Also included in Table 2 is a control which represents the ten areas of highest white population within each of the same 6 geographic areas. As the averages demonstrate, these areas of high white population post turnout numbers that are significantly higher than areas of high minority population alone. Interestingly, many of the areas of highest white population included in the metropolitan averages are also high minority population, rendering highly diverse precincts. Similar to Oregon, in those diverse precincts, voting is higher than in it is high minority alone precincts but lower than it is in high white alone precincts. This an indication that

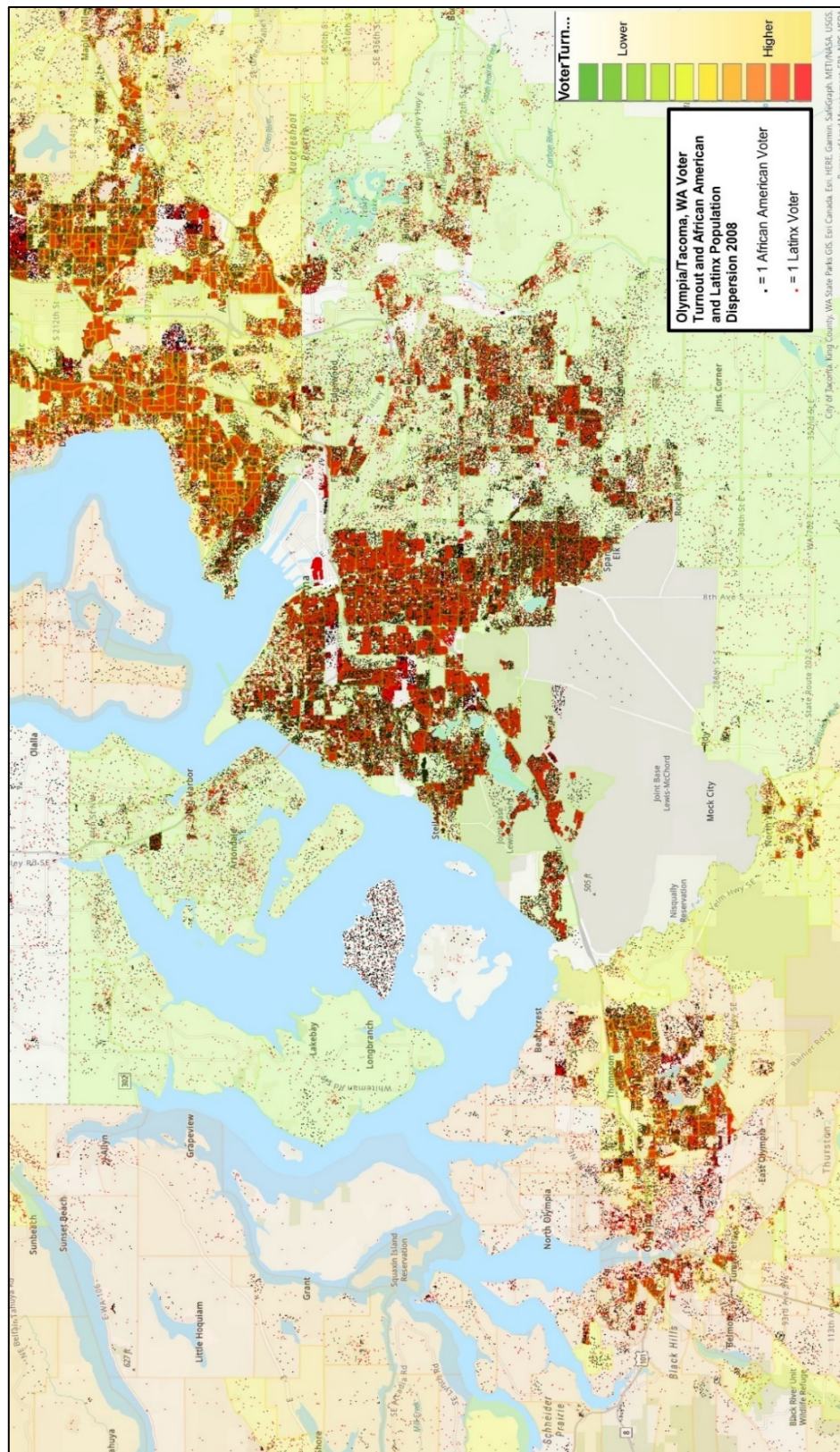
⁸⁰ "Elections: Data and Statistics," Washington Secretary of State Elections Office, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/research/data-and-statistics.aspx>.

the minority voting behaviors observed in this study could still be in effect and the presence of many more white voters is raising turnout numbers in these areas.

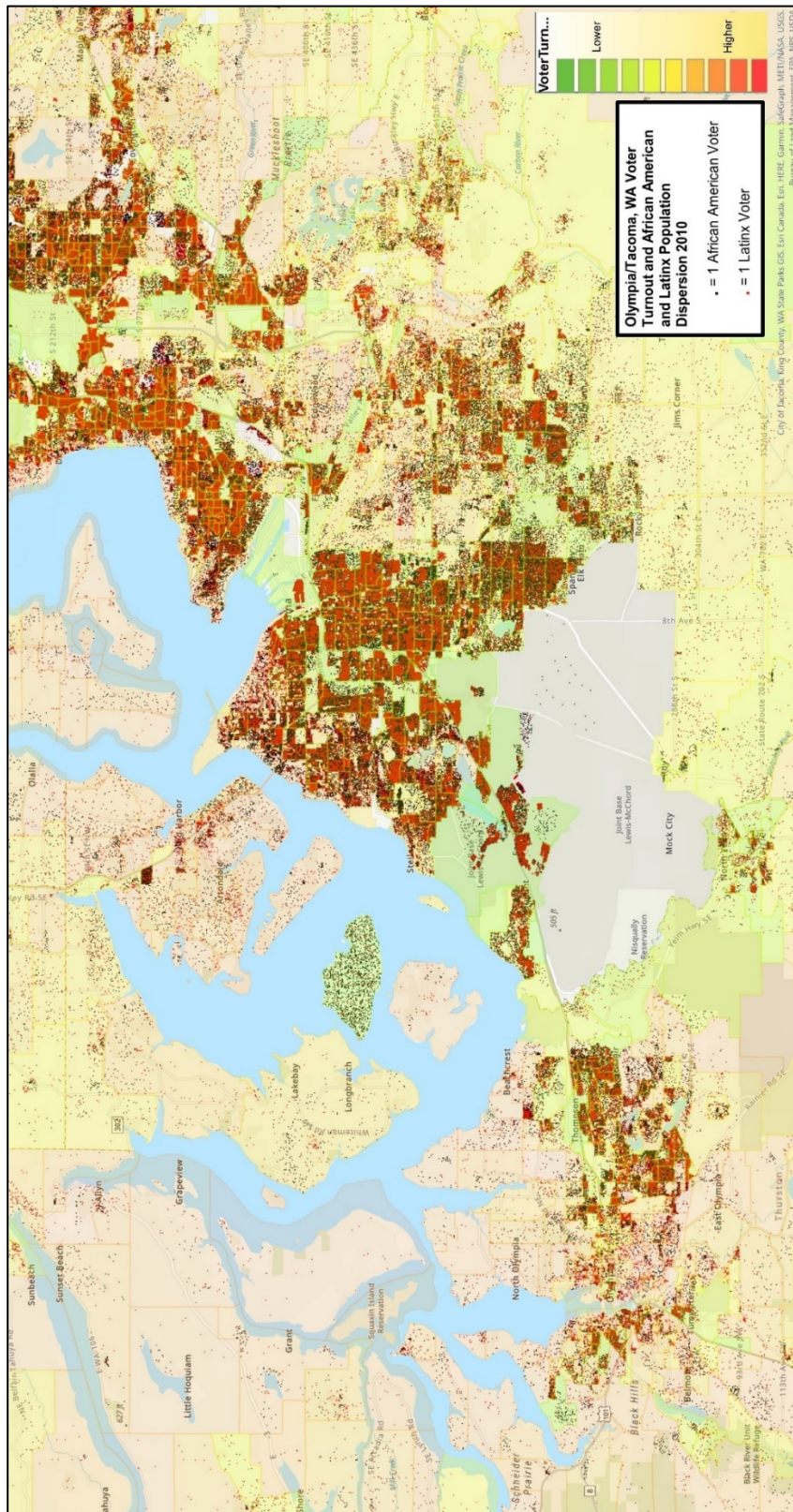
Table 2. Average Turnout by Year in Geographic Areas of High Minority Population in Various Metropolitan Areas of Washington State

| Area | Race | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Seattle | Minority | 69.56% | 53.55% | 69.04% |
| | White | 78.07% | 61.25% | 73.82% |
| Pasco | Minority | 74.87% | 54.64% | 67.82% |
| | White | 79.51% | 56.79% | 70.89% |
| Spokane | Minority | 79.41% | 60.89% | 73.98% |
| | White | 90.49% | 70.61% | 82.56% |
| Tacoma/Olympia | Minority | 84.14% | 58.41% | 72.68% |
| | White | 85.97% | 67.10% | 77.90% |
| Yakima | Minority | 70.62% | 48.99% | 62.72% |
| | White | 76.13% | 67.54% | 80.91% |
| Vancouver | Minority | 77.71% | 55.81% | 71.02% |
| | White | 83.05% | 61.79% | 76.44% |

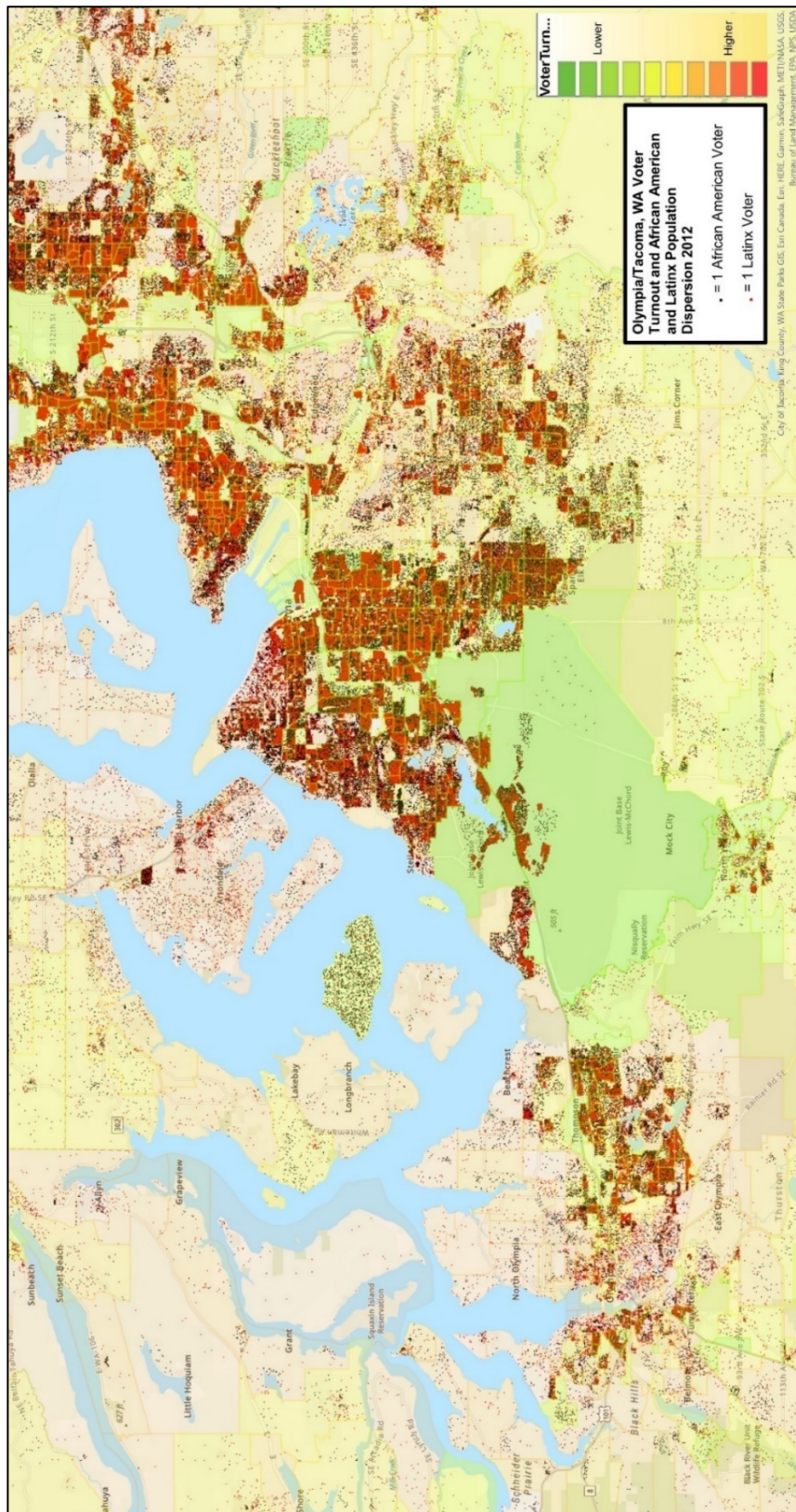
Map 18. Olympia/Tacoma, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2008



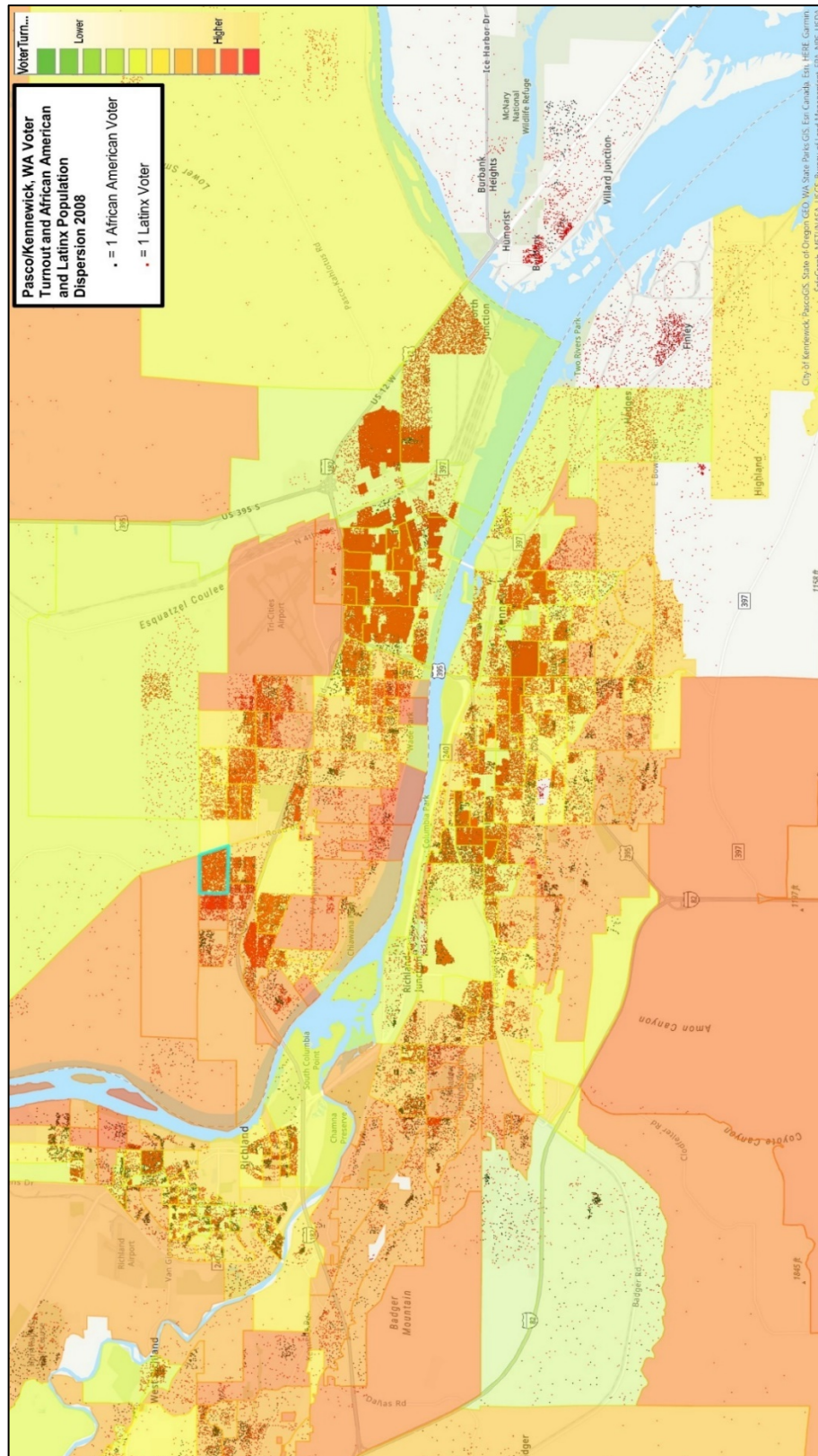
Map 19. Olympia/Tacoma, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2010



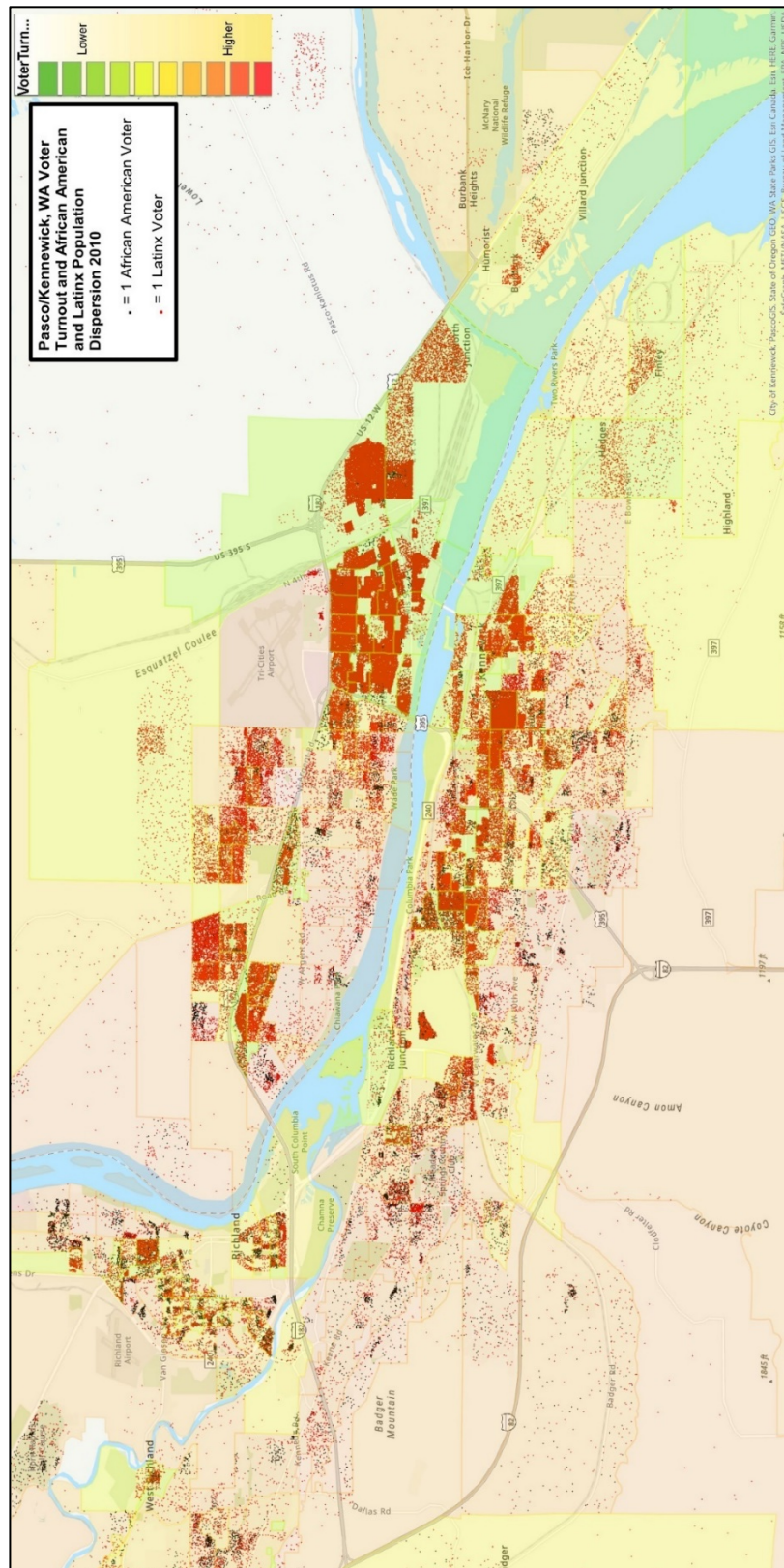
Map 20. Olympia/Tacoma, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2012



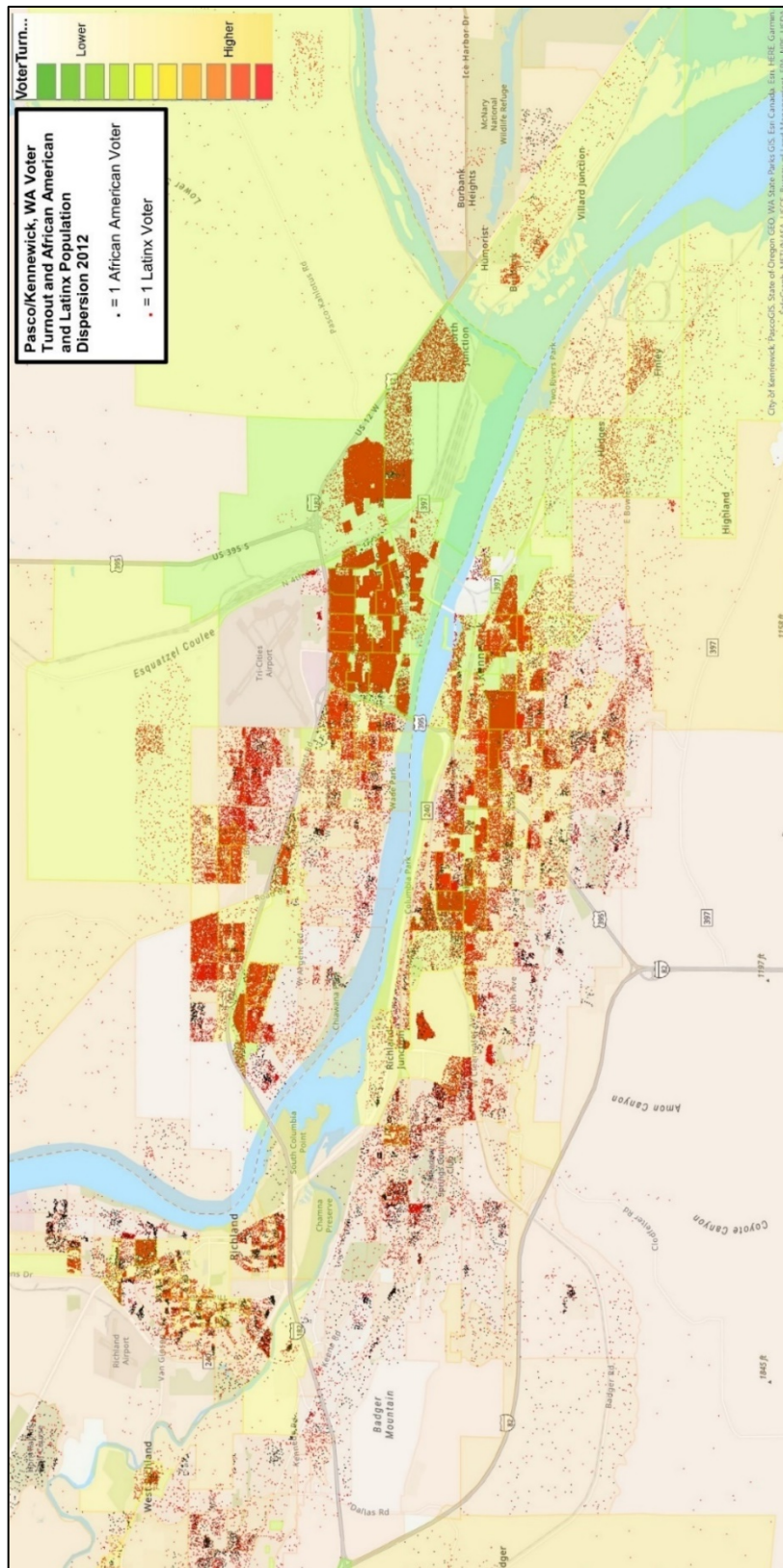
Map 21. Pasco/Kennewick, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2008



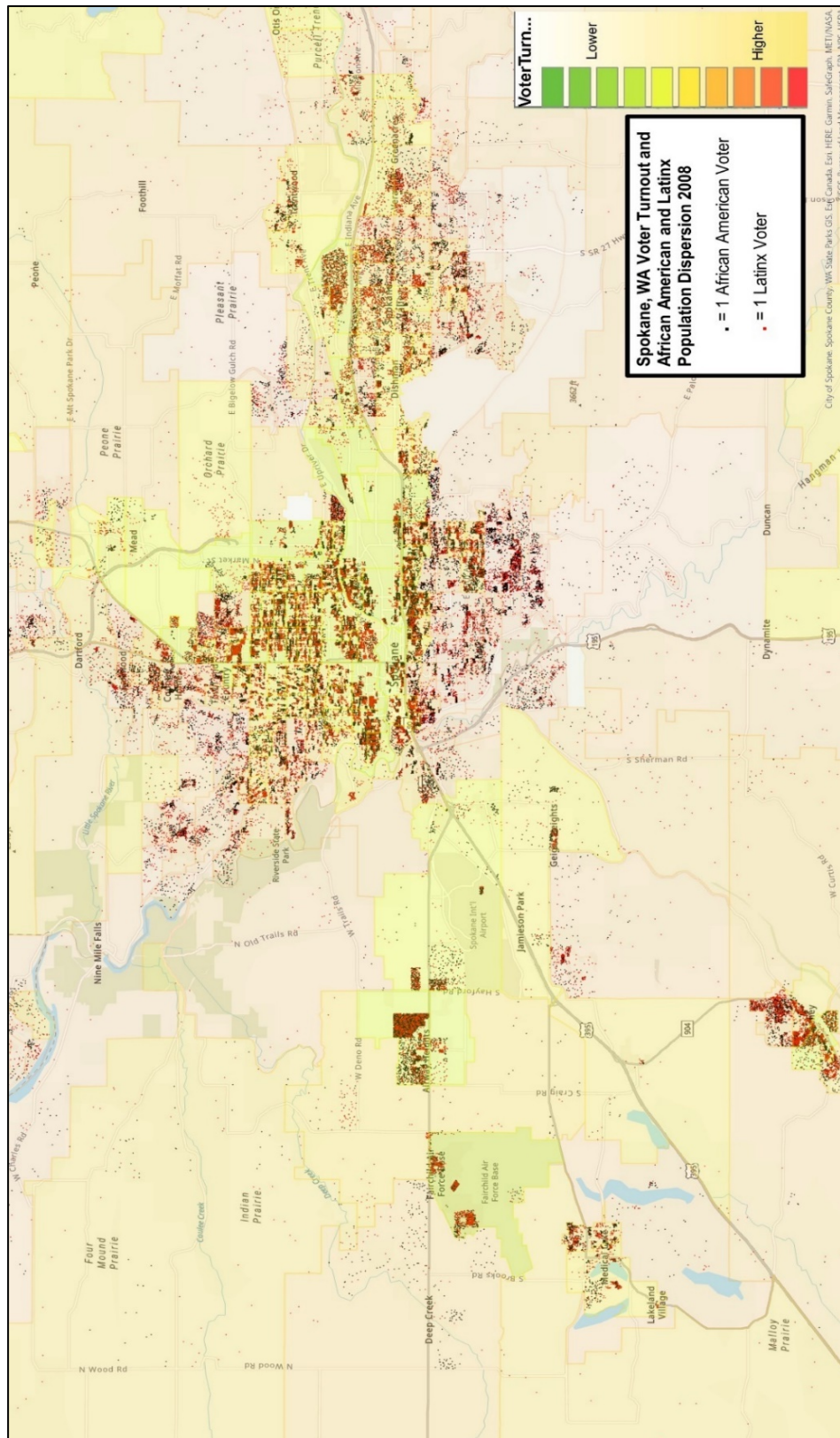
Map 22. Pasco/Kennewick, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2010



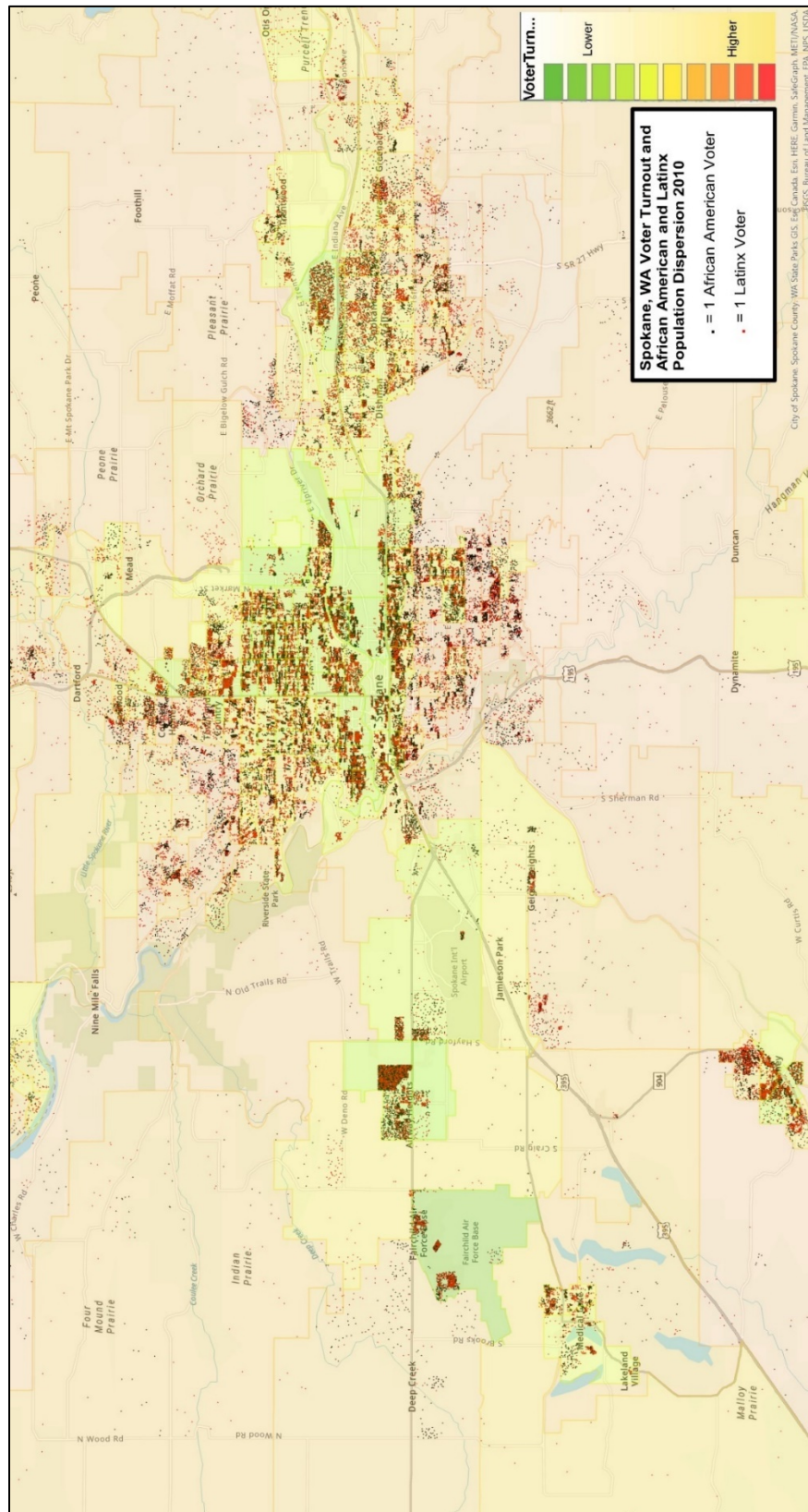
Map 23. Pasco/Kennewick, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2012



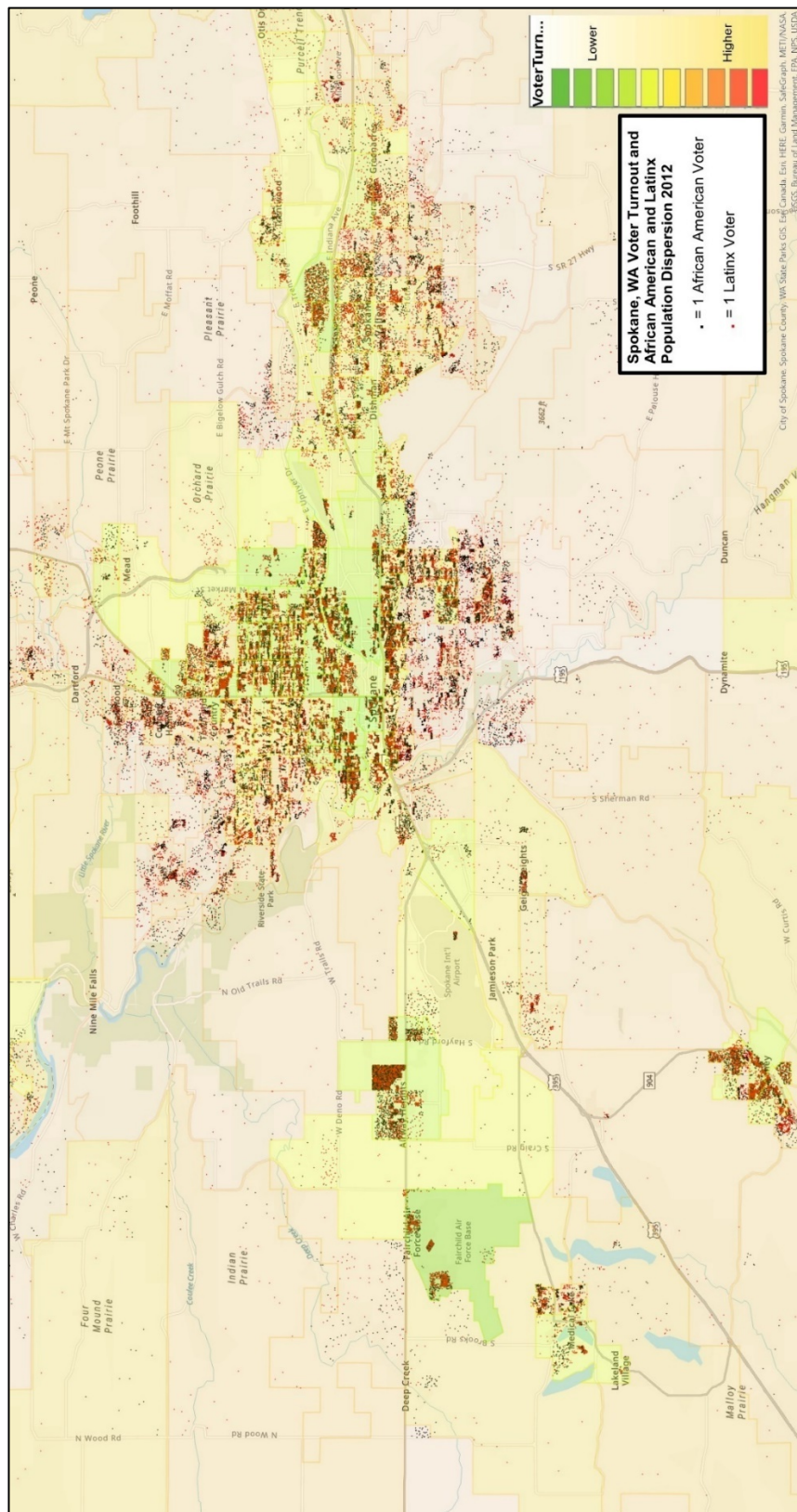
Map 24. Spokane, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2008



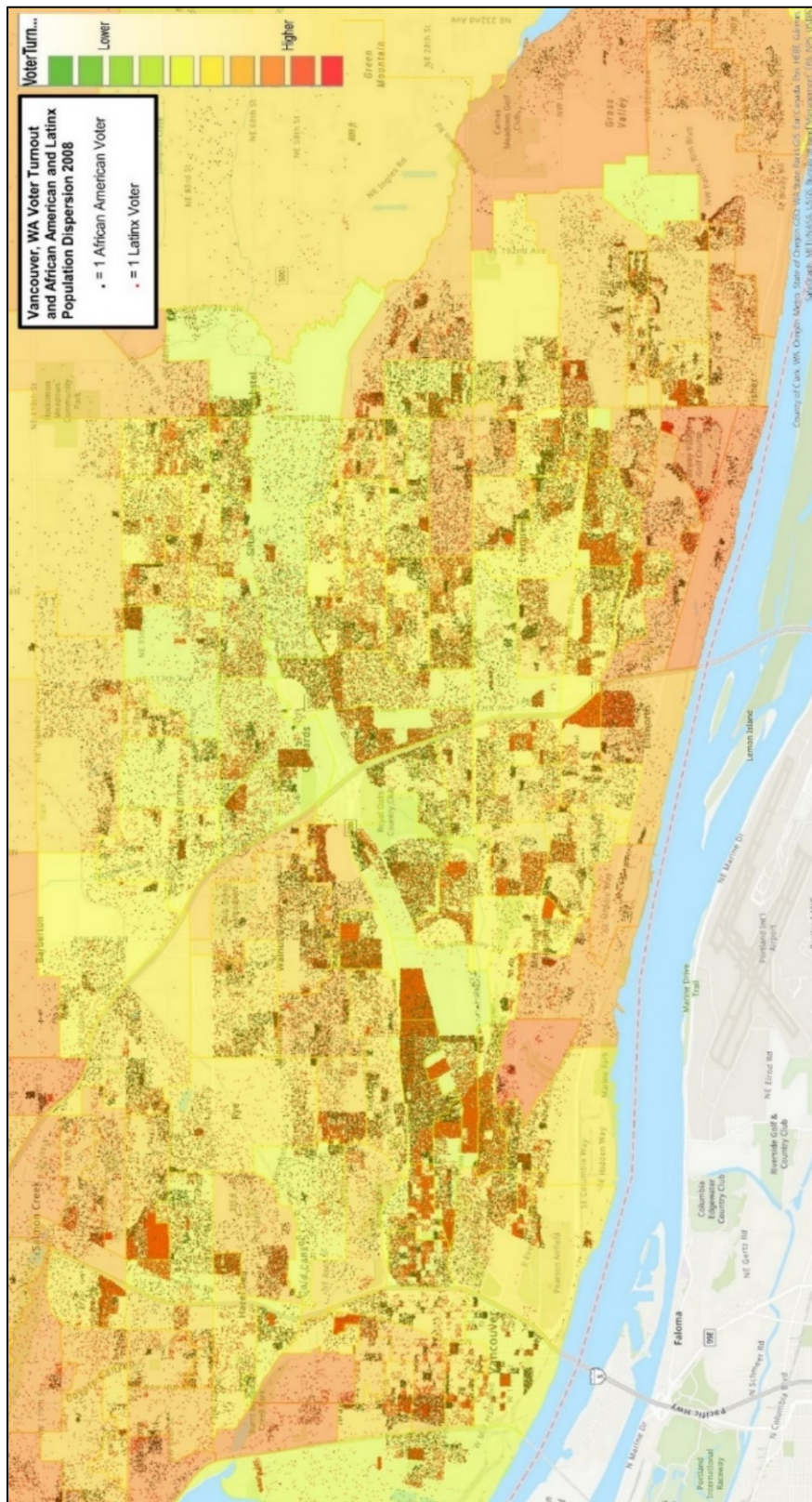
Map 25. Spokane, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2010



Map 26. Spokane, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2012



Map 27. Vancouver, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion
2008



Vancouver, WA Voter Turnout and African American and Latinx Population Dispersion 2010

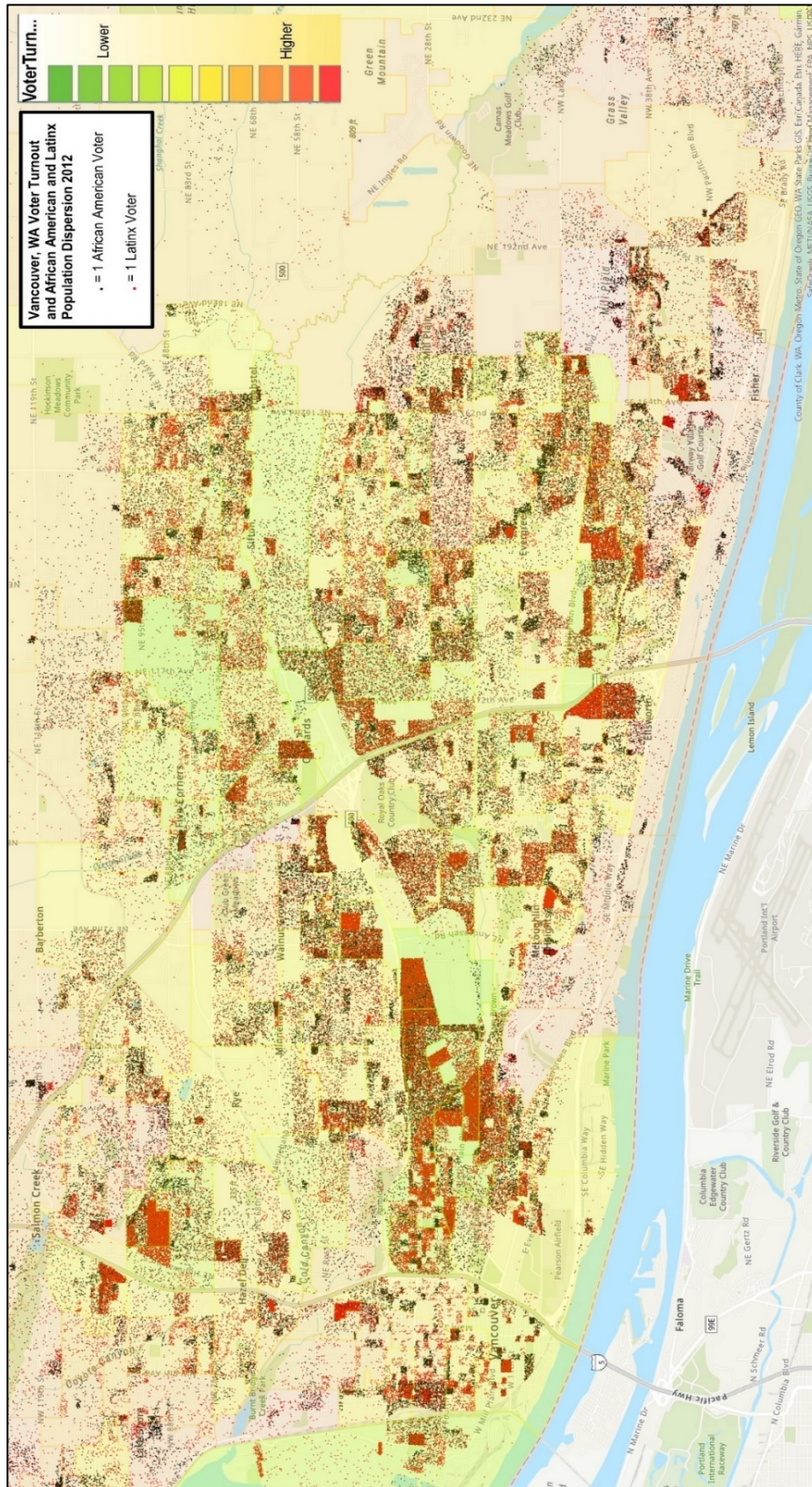
- = 1 African American Voter
- = 1 Latinx Voter

Zip Codes: 97085, 97086, 97087, 97088, 97089, 97090, 97091, 97092, 97093, 97094, 97095, 97096, 97097, 97098, 97099.

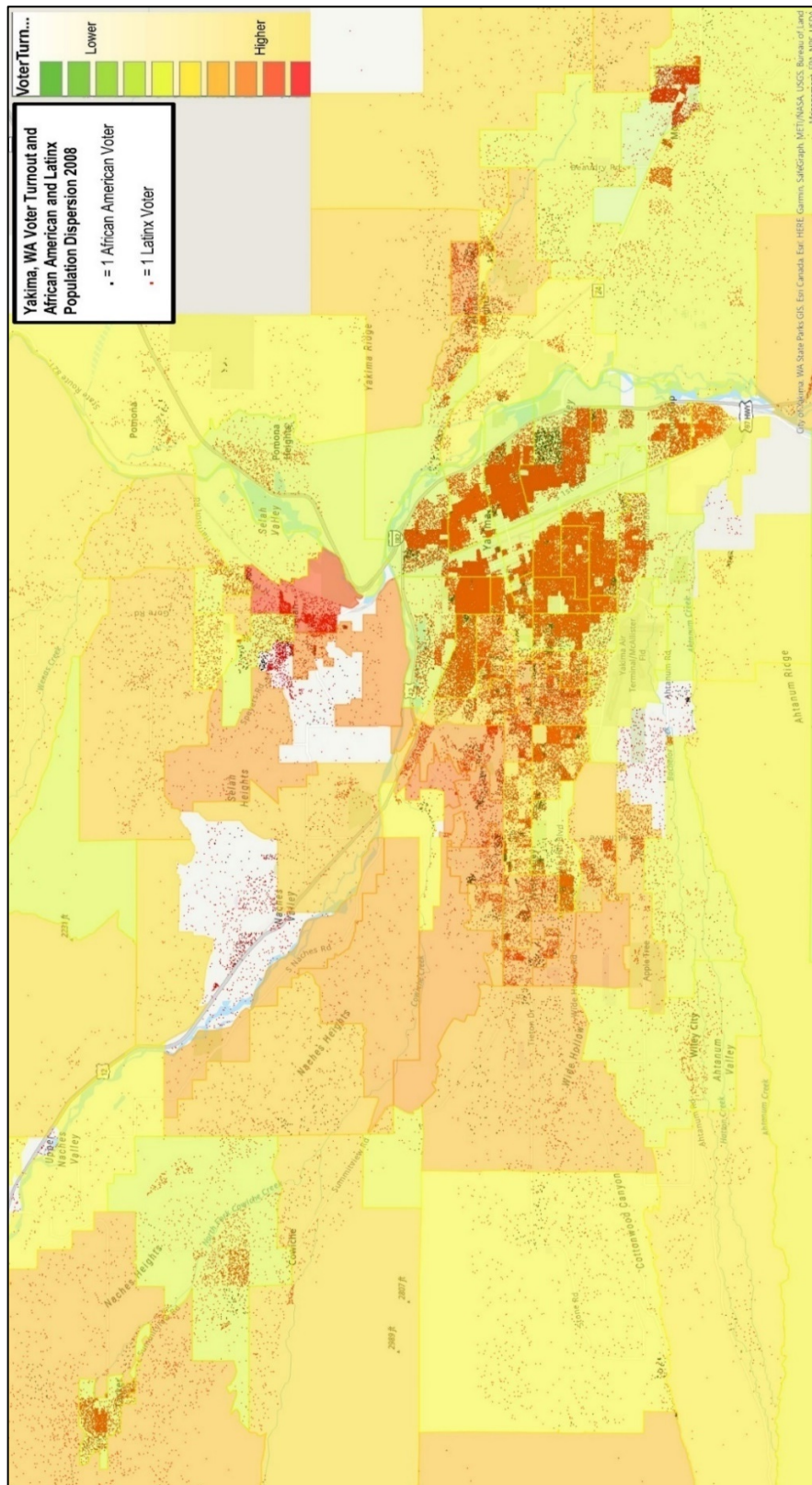
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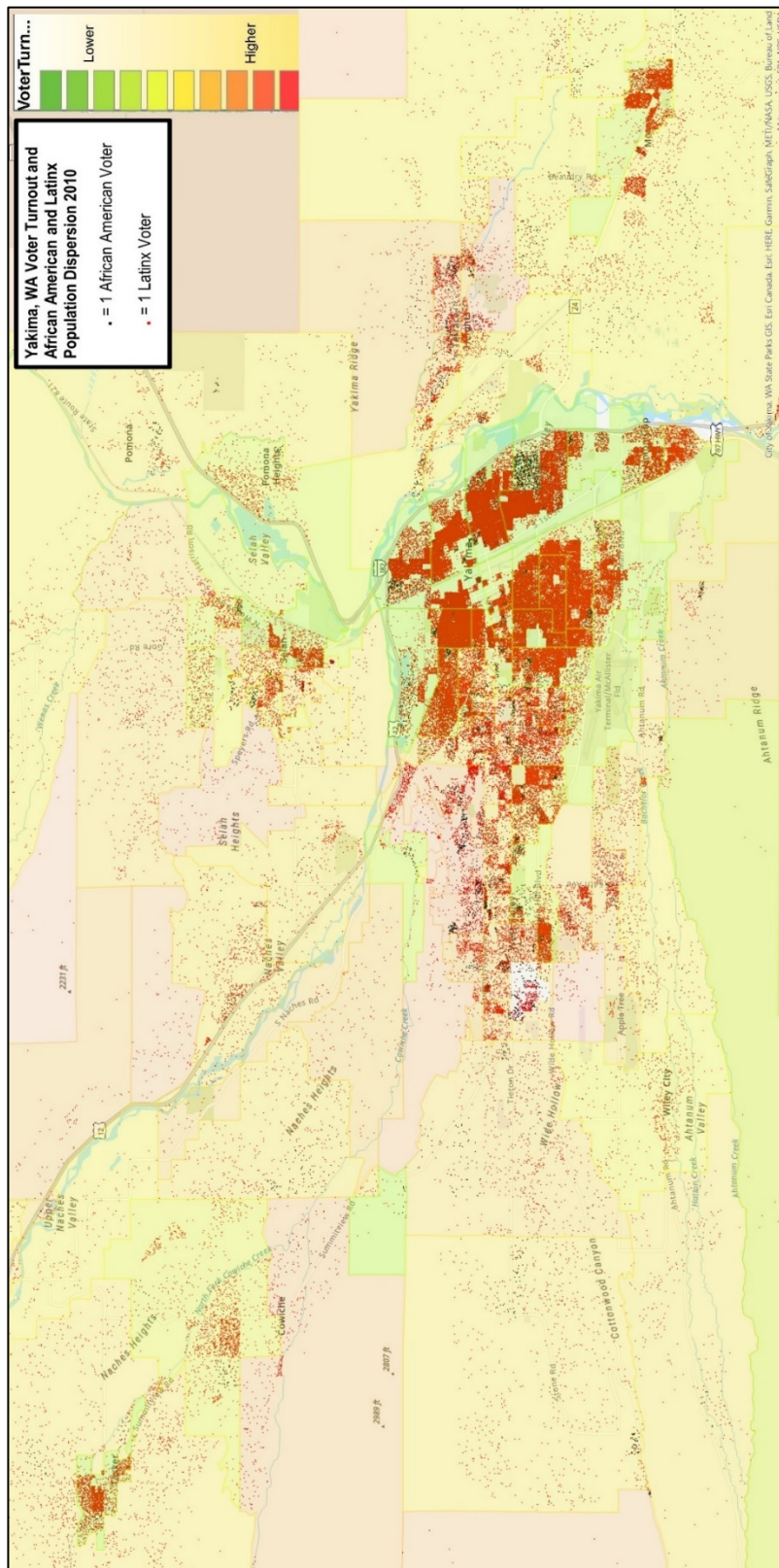
Map 29. Vancouver, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2012



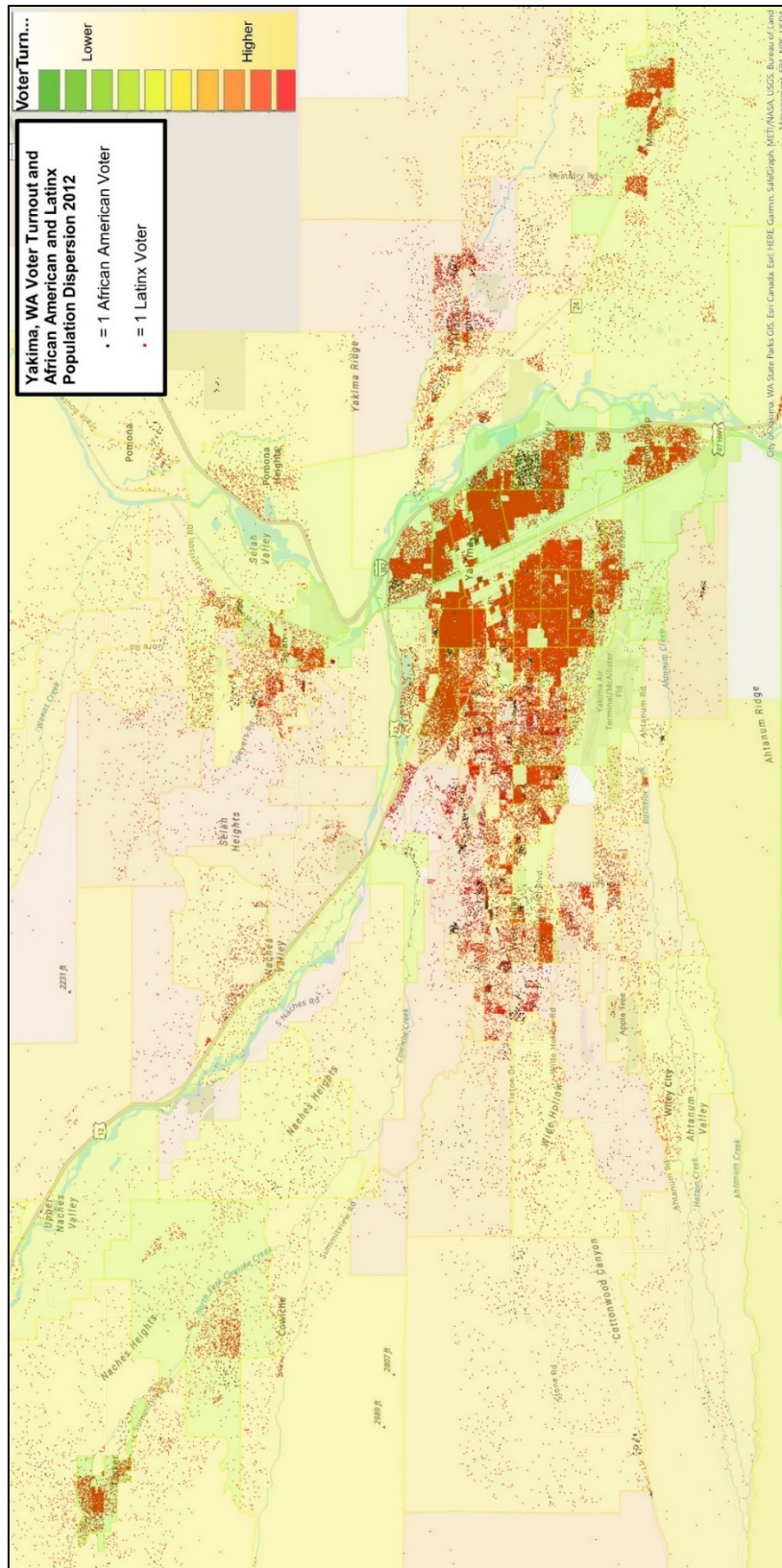
Map 30. Yakima, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2008



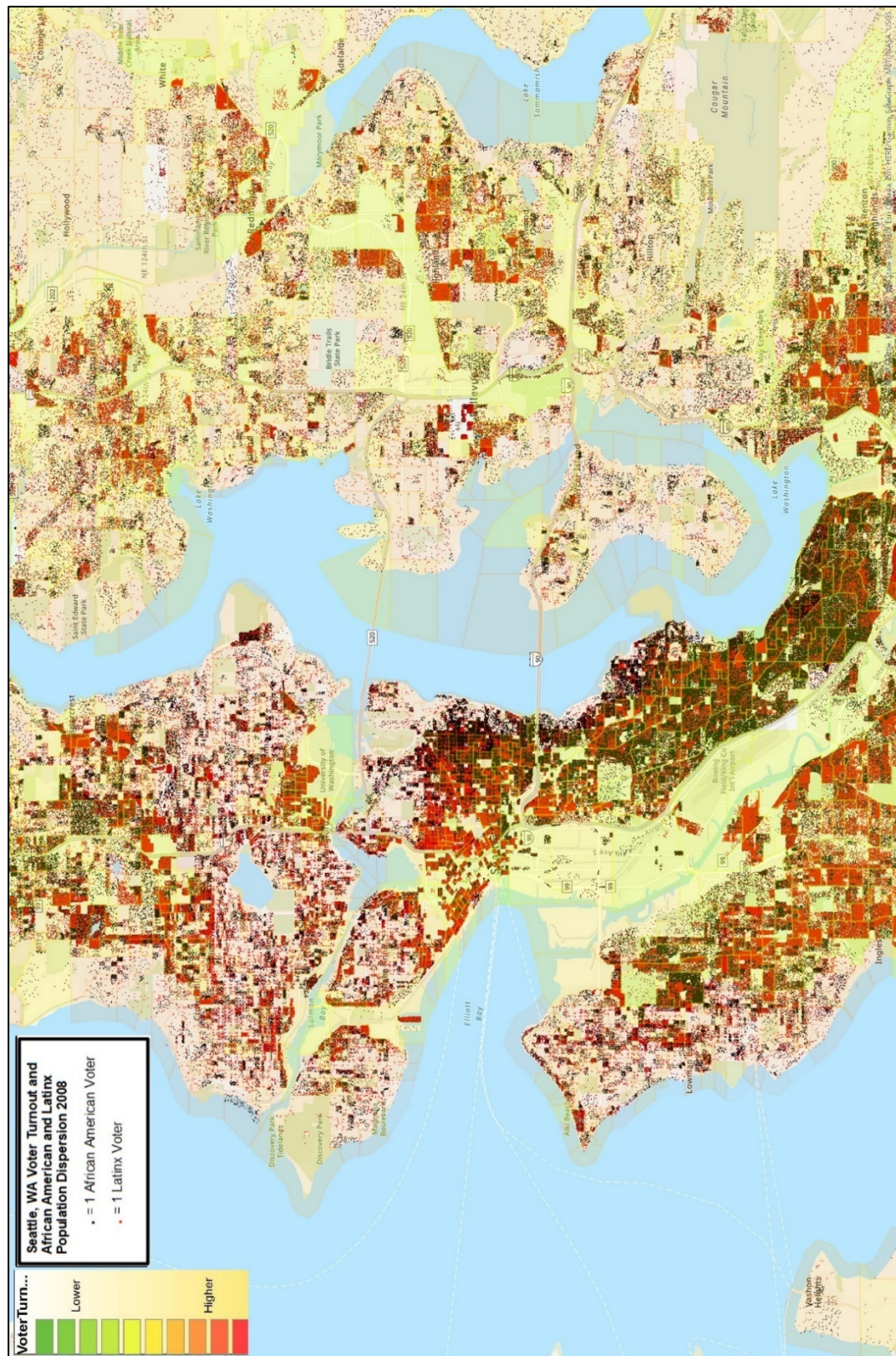
Map 31. Yakima, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2010



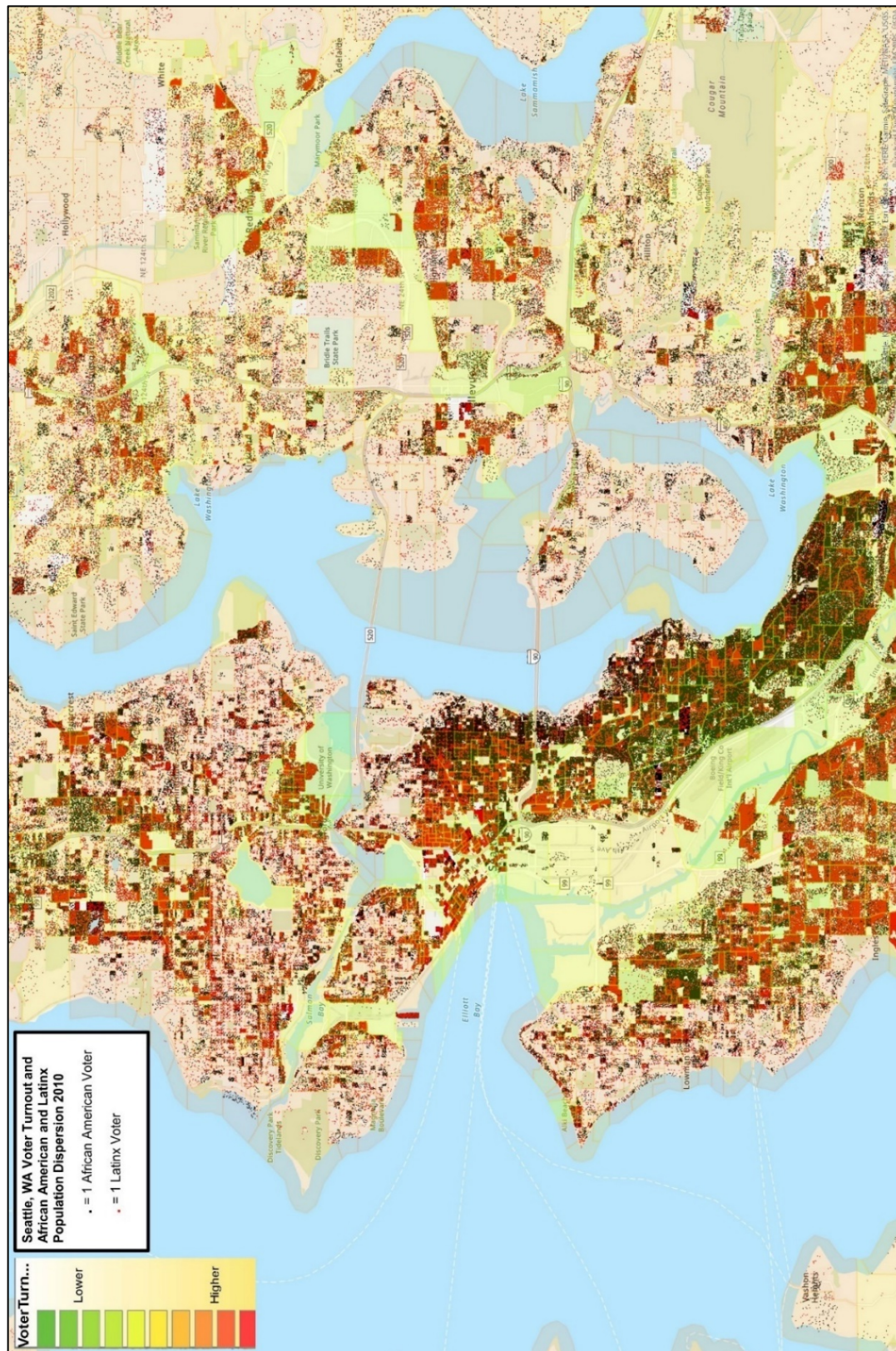
Map 32. Yakima, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2012



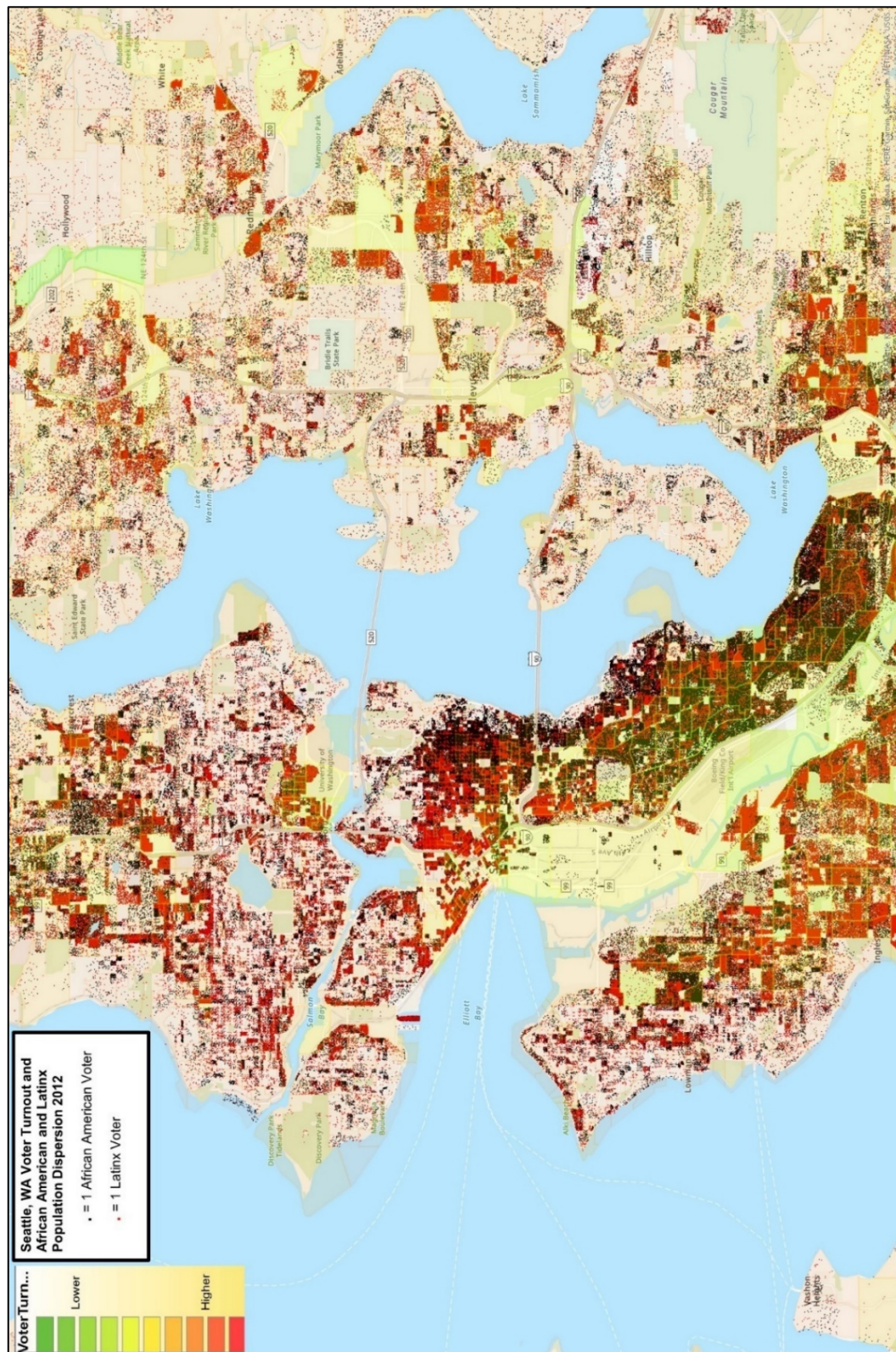
Map 33. Seattle, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2008



Map 34. Seattle, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2010



Map 35. Seattle, WA Voter Turnout and African American/Latinx Population Dispersion 2012



5.6 Conclusions Regarding Washington Data

It is clear that after viewing the turnout overlaid with the Latinx and African American population centers that there is consistently low voter turnout in minority areas. As both Washington and Oregon are vote by mail only states, it can be concluded that voting by mail has not driven higher voter turnout numbers in these elections. In the case of Washington, previous studies of voting by mail have shown that initial enthusiasm wanes once VBM has been introduced so it is unlikely that more recent elections in 2014, 2016, and 2018 would have produced any significantly higher turnout results in these communities.

Chapter 6. Survey of Non-Participating Eligible Voters in WA, OR, and CO and the Emergence of the Unmotivated Voter

6.1 Overall Survey Data Collection

The survey for this study consisted of 24 multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey was released into the field beginning with residents of Metro Portland on January 29, 2020 and remained available until March 8 (40 days) when an oversample had been achieved. A statewide release in Washington State followed on February 20, 2020 and remained available until March 16 (26 days) when again an oversample had been reached. The last iteration of the survey was released statewide in Colorado on February 21, 2020 and was available until March 30 (39 days) when an oversample had been achieved there. In all cases the survey was implemented entirely online and Alchemer utilized invitations to make its panel participants aware of its availability.

Once completed, the survey data was cleaned of incomplete, ineligible, or questionable responses to get to 350 fully complete surveys from all the states involved in this project. Surveys with questionable responses were quarantined from analysis but not destroyed. Survey attempts were removed for a combination of reasons including not meeting the pre-screening requirements (i.e., lying) or violating one of several additional answer quality criteria such as answering questions too quickly or “speeding,” “gibberish,” and “patterning.” “One-word answers” was also a criterion utilized. However, these responses were only removed if they also violated other criteria as one-word answers were possible to several open-ended questions. Despite the best efforts of the cleaning process, several of the included complete surveys may also still violate the rules criteria on one question, or the respondent may have provided illegible or indecipherable responses to particular questions. Those responses, but not the survey

containing them, were removed manually where appropriate. Also, some people did not answer every question. Therefore, several of the questions may have fewer than the 100 or 150 responses per question that were sought.

Of the 601 enrollments in Oregon, 115 survey attempts were removed because respondents did not meet the criteria established in the questionnaire pre-screening and an additional 386 were removed because they violated answer quality criteria. This left 100 responses (50 white and 50 Latino). In Washington, of the 1234 enrollments, 125 were removed because they violated the pre-screening requirements and an additional 1009 were quarantined because of the answer quality criteria. There were 100 responses (50 white and 50 Black). In Colorado, of the 1129 enrollments, 122 were removed because they did not meet the pre-screening requirements and an additional 857 were removed because they violated one or more of the answer quality criteria. The process left the project with 150 responses (50 white, 50 Latinx and 50 Black) in Colorado. Once the process had been applied, the best 100 survey responses from Oregon and Washington respectively and 150 from Colorado were combined, analyzed, and conclusions drawn. Despite the best efforts of the cleaning process, several of the 100 completed survey respondents still were included even though their answers may also still violate these rules on one question, or they lied in the pre-screening. Those responses were removed manually. Therefore, several of the questions may have fewer than the total number of responses (100 or 150).

6.2 Survey Data Collection in Oregon, Washington, and Colorado

The collection of survey data from the Portland, Oregon MSA was uncomplicated. While it did take an extraordinarily large number of enrollments (601) to reach the required 100 respondents, separated into 50 Latinx and 50 white, these initially came in very quickly.

However, finding the last dozen or so Latinx respondents took quite a long time. Alchemer claimed that this was because the study had exhausted their reserve of Latinx panel participants, and they need some time to find more in the specific area of the study. Eventually, these final surveys were completed.

The collection of survey data from Washington State was more complicated than it was in Oregon. Like Oregon, Washington too took an extraordinarily large number of enrollments (1234) to reach the required 100 respondents, separated into 50 Black and 50 white. However, the time it took to find the respondents was remarkable. It took a full two months to fill out the entire pool of respondents. Again, Alchemer claimed that this was because the study had exhausted their reserve of panel participants in the state of Washington. Unlike Oregon where they could focus on the largest area of the state to draw their sample panels, Washington required responses from more remote and less connected areas to create representative samples. They had great difficulty finding that representative sample and at one point asked if the study could be reduced to just the area around the Puget Sound, which was rejected. They were eventually able to draw the needed individual respondents and the survey completed without further complications.

The collection of survey data from Colorado was even more complicated than it was in Washington. Like Washington, it too took an extraordinarily large number of enrollments (1129) to reach the required 150 respondents, separated into 50 Black, 50 Latinx, and 50 white. It took more than two full two months to fill out the entire pool of respondents. It appeared that the study in Colorado may have to be suspended due to the onset of COVID-19. However, Alchemer managed to fulfill the required quotas just as the pandemic was taking hold in the United States in March 2020. The difficulty again lay with the specificity of the characteristics of the required

participants. Like the two previous states, this had exhausted their reserve of panel participants in the state.

6.3 Conclusions Regarding Survey Data from the Three States

The survey data gathered from eligible non-voters in Oregon, Washington, and Colorado indicates that unmotivated voters in these states are not participating deliberately. In all cases, they are making a choice not to even register let alone vote. That implies a reasoning behind a willful action. The open-ended questions of the survey provide deeper insight into why the unmotivated voter behaves the way that they do. Based on the responses to two open-ended questions in particular, the underlying reasons are varied but can be sorted into five broad categories of specific and generalizable reasons--- Technical, Lack of Interest, Do Not Like Politics, Political Information and Knowledge, and Lack of Trust.⁸¹ Technical encompasses reasons such as new to the state or uninformed about the registration or voting process. Lack of Interest is self-evident but indicates a passivity of feeling about politics in general. In contrast, Do Not Like Politics indicates a very specific dislike of political things. Political Information and Knowledge contains answers which reference the potential voter's feeling that they do not know enough to be voter. Finally, Lack of Trust encompasses responses that indicate the voter does not believe their vote will count or matter or that they do not trust the government or their processes.

A substantial number of responses to these open-ended questions in the survey (29.4%) indicated that they do not vote for technical reasons such as they do not understand how to do so, or they have been in legal trouble. There was a slight difference in Washington and Colorado

⁸¹ The open-ended questions are: "You have indicated in the pre-screening for this survey that you are currently unregistered and have not participated in voting for political candidates. Why?" and "Your state offers the option to Vote by Mail. Despite this voter friendly reform to the process of voting, you still have not participated in voting. Why?".

where 18% and 24.4%, respectively, indicated that they do not vote for technical reasons. Both states reinstate the voting rights of felons so this may suggest that these respondents are unaware of this policy. This indicates that they may not be permanent unmotivated voters and could be encouraged to become participating voters. More disturbingly, 25.8% of the total respondents indicated that they had a lack of interest in politics. Coupled with the 9.4% who said they do not like politics and the 10.5% who do not trust the government or that the vote will count, 45.7% of respondents to the open-ended questions indicate they have profound issues with the political system, the system of voting itself, and/or the government it represents. It is difficult to see how these voters might be converted into future participants.

It is worth noting here that 29% of respondents to another open-ended question, which deals with what might motivate someone to vote, said nothing would motivate them to vote.⁸² Nine percent more were unsure if anything would motivate them. Five percent of respondents to this question indicated that they might vote if they were paid or coerced. There is some room for hope however, as 19% of respondents to this question said that they would vote if they felt there was a worthy candidate and another 5% could be persuaded by relevant issues. Five percent said they planned to vote someday.

The responses to these open-ended questions from the combined results in the three states indicate that a substantial number of unmotivated voters are not participating because of a “Lack of Interest” (26.1%) which might indicate a more passive choice not to participate in voting pervades the overall group. A portion of these unmotivated voters may be convertible. However, when “Don’t Like Politics” (13.8%) is combined with “Lack of Trust/Does Not Matter” (13.5%), 27.3% show a rationalized stance for why they are not voting. This is an important percentage.

⁸² The open-ended question is “What might motivate you to participate and vote in future elections?”

The “Lack of Interest” group may be convertible to voters given that it is a passive stance, but the other groups are more difficult if not impossible as they have taken a position. For them, the lack of voting is personal and reasoned. It is a willful, psychological action. In both cases, however, the organizing principles of voting by mail (convenience and speed) miss the reasoning of these potential voters entirely. For them, the “C” factor is not a factor. This is borne out in the responses to Question 7, which asked what might motivate them to vote, 25.2% said nothing would motivate them, 6.5% said restoring their trust in government or the process, 20.3% said worthy candidates, and 4.2% said relevant issues. Only 6.8% said that easy voting or convenience would motivate them to vote. For the unmotivated voter in these states, their concerns are not based on the process of casting a vote. They are concerned with who or what they would be voting for by participating. It would appear then that the unmotivated voter is a voter with a conscience looking for substance and meaning from the system.

What is not being said directly in these results is also important. Among total respondents, convenience is not a motivating factor to vote. Only 6.8% of total respondents to the question on what might motivate them to participate in voting indicated that an easier way to vote would do it. Convenience, at 12.2%, is much more of a factor for the subset of eligible Colorado non-voters than the other states. However, in the open-ended responses from Colorado, only one voter (.006%) reported monetary costs as a reason they do not vote. No one mentioned distance or transportation as an issue. It seems then that while the administrative process to register to vote may be ripe for reform to attract new voters in the state, these physical barrier and convenience issues are still unimportant in the thinking of both Colorado voters specifically and voters from all the survey states generally. In the overall sample of non-voters, five people out of 350 (1.4%) specifically stated that mail-in voting would help them because of childcare or

work demands. One additional person said that lack of money was an issue, and another said that being disabled was a problem for voting in person.

With the possible exception of a subset of non-participating voters in Colorado, it seems then that these barriers play little into the overall thinking of voters at large with respect to why they do or do not vote. This calls into question the value of the primary factor behind voting by mail; the lowering of the “cost factor”. It seems more likely that these potential voters are simply unmotivated to participate. These non-voters do not identify convenience as a problem they need solved. More importantly, voters have indicated that they do have a substantial number of problems with their relationship to the government, the value of voting, knowledge about the process of voting, and voting and the worth of the political system overall. The unmotivated voters in this study indicate in no uncertain terms that their issues with these problems are what keep them from voting. These issues, again, all reference some aspect of individual psychological bonds with the political system, with voting being the most common and accessible manifestation of that system. A lot of unmotivated voters appear to be disconnected for psychological reasons not physical ones.

Interestingly, the results of the question on why do you not vote highlights another point that has little to do with the emphasis of VBM systems. Twenty-eight percent of unmotivated voters indicated that they do not participate because they do not know how to participate, do not have proper identification, are new to the area, or have not been given clear instructions when they tried to register. These are technical issues that can be overcome with better organization, information campaigns, and possibly legal reforms to identification requirements or places of registration. They are surmountable obstacles that would have real impact in attracting unmotivated voters. Fully 60% of respondents said no one had ever explained vote by mail to

them or they were unsure if it had been explained. On the question regarding what might motivate you to vote, 13.7% said that they either plan to vote or would vote if they could get better information about the candidates and/or the process. It is important to note that all three states in this study mail ballots to every registered voter. However, if the process is failing to get all willing voters registered or properly informed then voting by mail will do little to increase turnout or raise participation for any individual groups. Public information campaigns aimed at a broader demographic seem more than appropriate in these circumstances.

If unmotivated voters are psychologically detached from the system and a smaller subset of those same potential voters are confused as to the process of registering and voting, then how can VBM address these real issues to attract more voters into the system? The short answer is that it cannot because it was not designed to do so. It would appear then that whether by design or circumstance what VBM does best is to reinforce voting among those already motivated or participating in voting. It does little to attract new voters. In a 1993 study on mobilization, Rosenstone and Hansen note that, “Participation in politics, has a price, a price that is some combination of money, time, skill, knowledge, and self-confidence.”⁸³ Those with a sense of political efficacy are better able to bear the costs of all forms of political participation. VBM works best for those already able to bear these costs such as the wealthy, those who do not work professionally or work from home, and those already familiar with the system and how it works.

The combined survey data from all the states demonstrates a deep mistrust of government and its systems. Trust (Figures 2 through 4) seems to run higher in local governments with 66% saying that they do not trust the federal government, while 53% and 52% say they do not trust

⁸³ Steven J. Rosenstone and John M. Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993), 12-14.

state and local governments. Second, they hold both parties in contempt--- although Democrats fair slightly better at a 45% favorability score to the Republicans 22% (Figures 5 and 6). Third, in the over three years that passed between the 2016 presidential election and this survey in early 2020, nearly two thirds of respondents (62%) still did not regret their choice to not vote in that election (Figure 7). This indicates that there are few who regret their choice to not participate in voting despite the ensuing political chaos they have observed. Fifty-two percent say that they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country ---30.5% said they were unsure (Figure 8). Nearly 70% (69.2%) of respondents said that presidents should not have more authority indicating a wider fear of government (Figure 9). Sixty-five percent say that they are not very or not satisfied at all by the way democracy is working in the United States (Figure 10). This further continues the trend of eroded confidence in the government, democratic theory, and institutions. This pattern is repeated throughout the states individually in the survey results.

Figure 3. Do you trust your federal government?

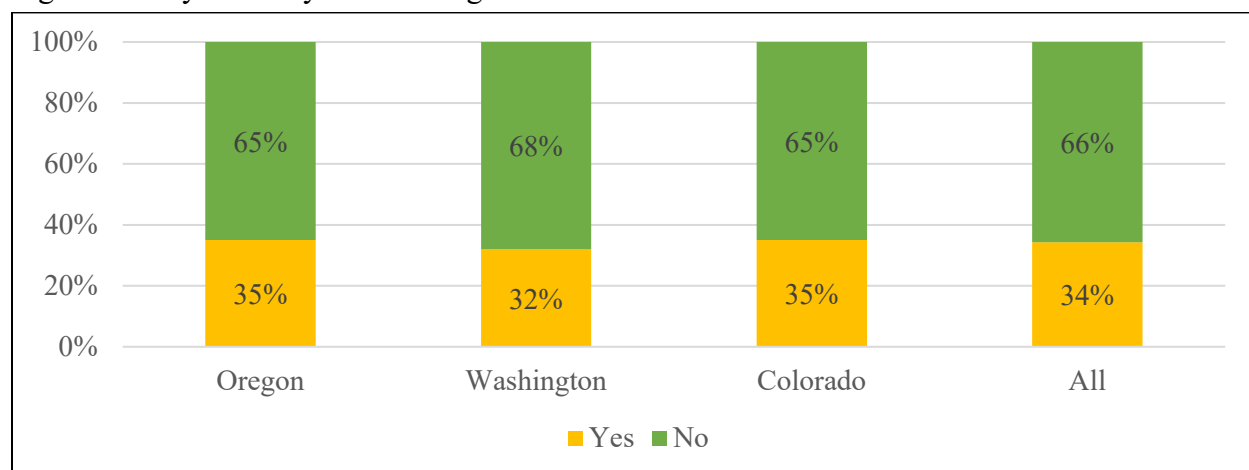


Figure 4. Do you trust your state government?

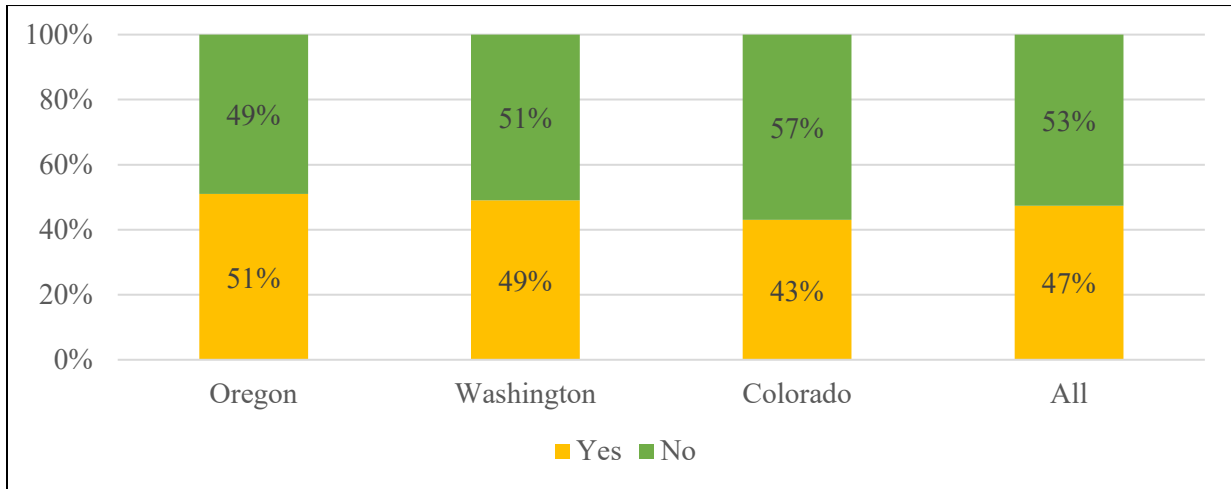


Figure 5. Do you trust your county and/or city government?

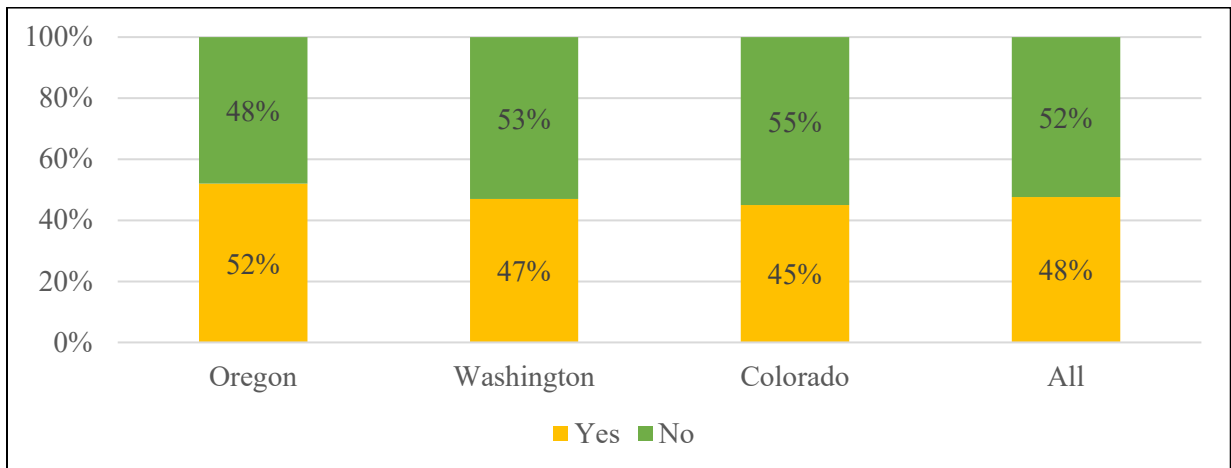


Figure 6. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Democratic Party?

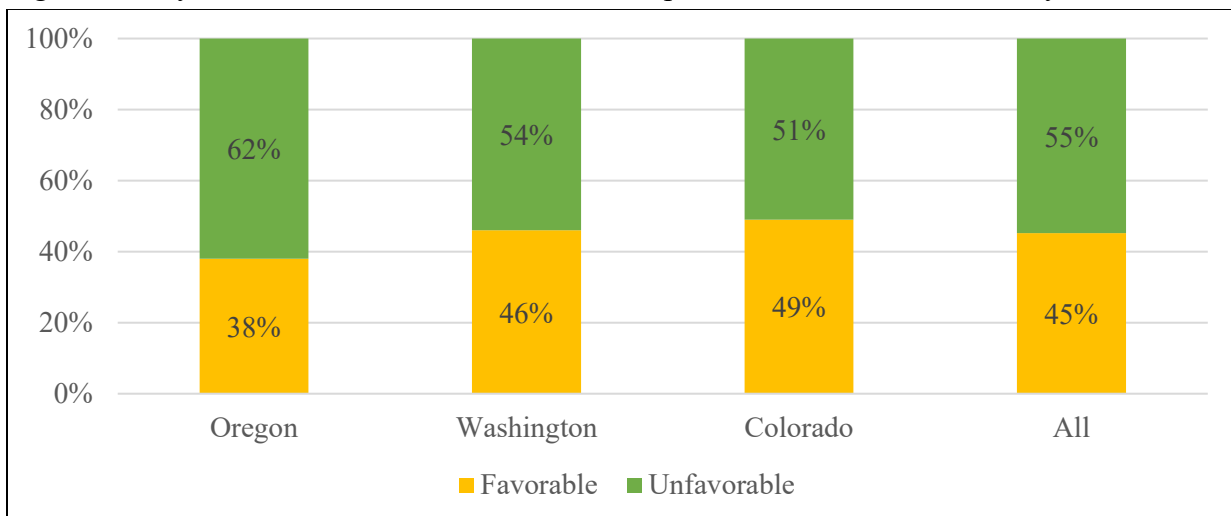


Figure 7. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Republican Party?

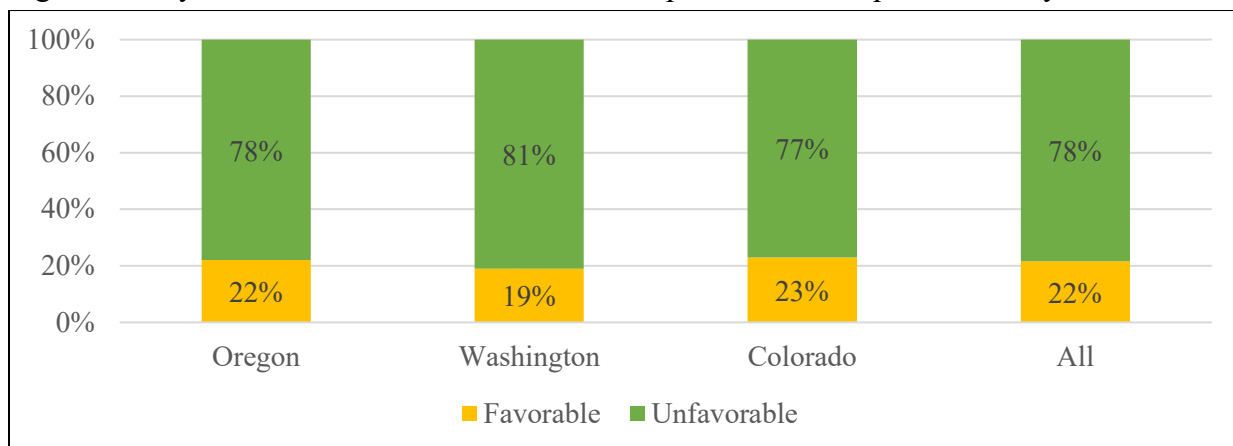


Figure 8. Do you wish that you had voted in the 2016 election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton?

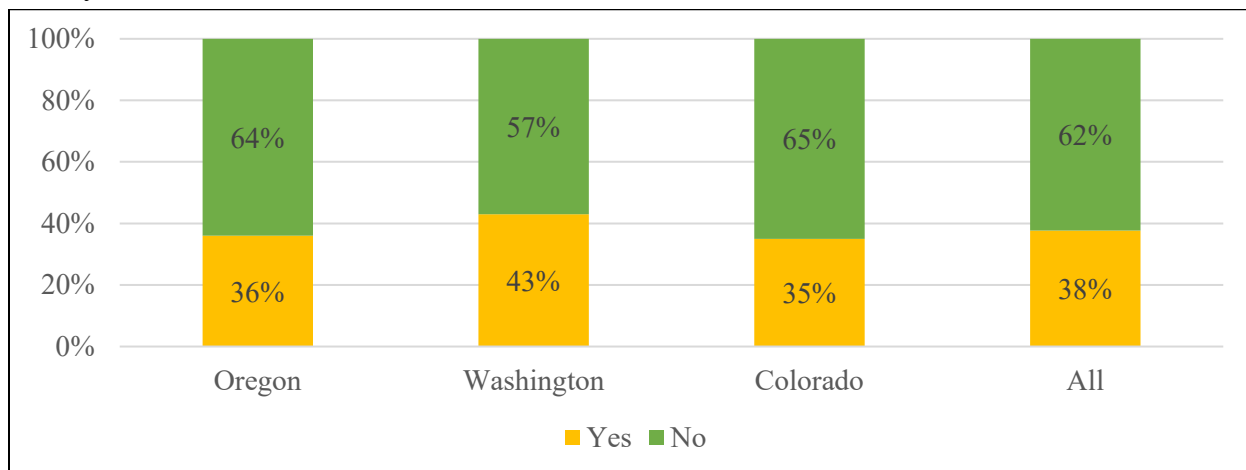


Figure 9. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country today?

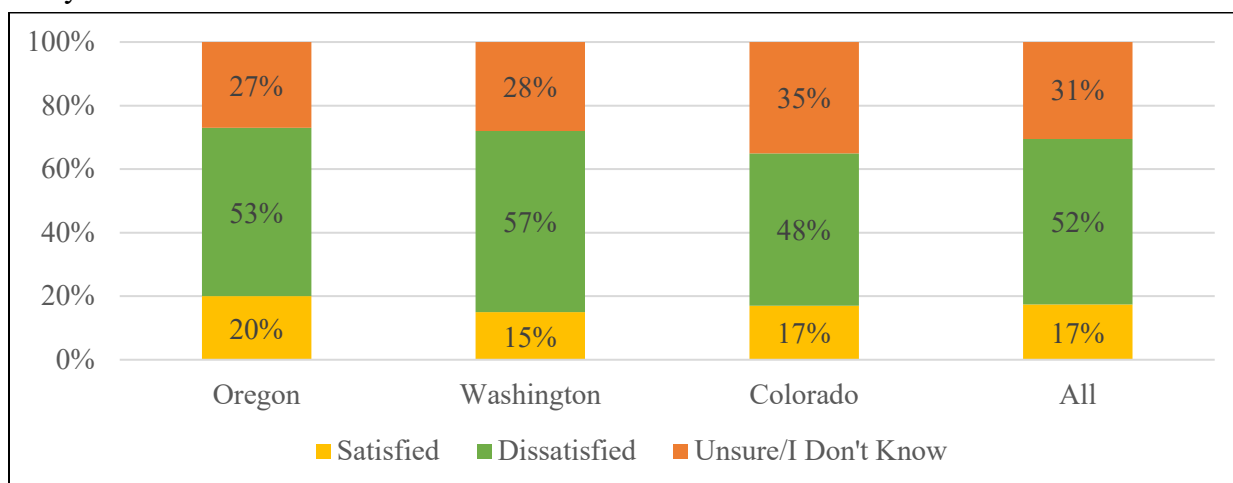


Figure 10. Presidential Authority

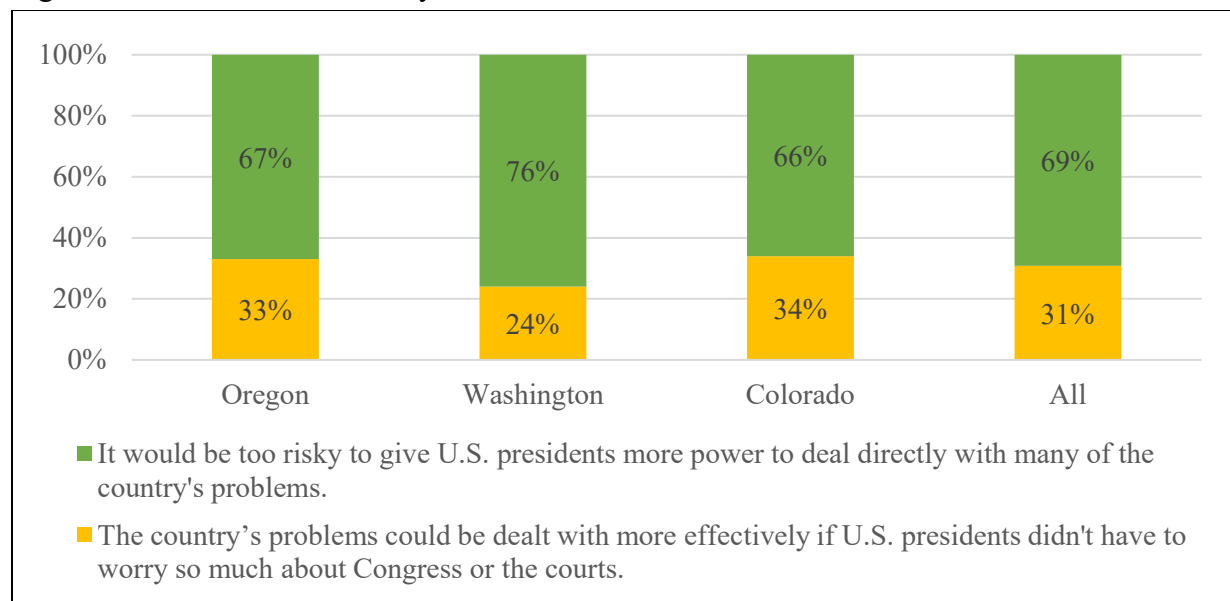
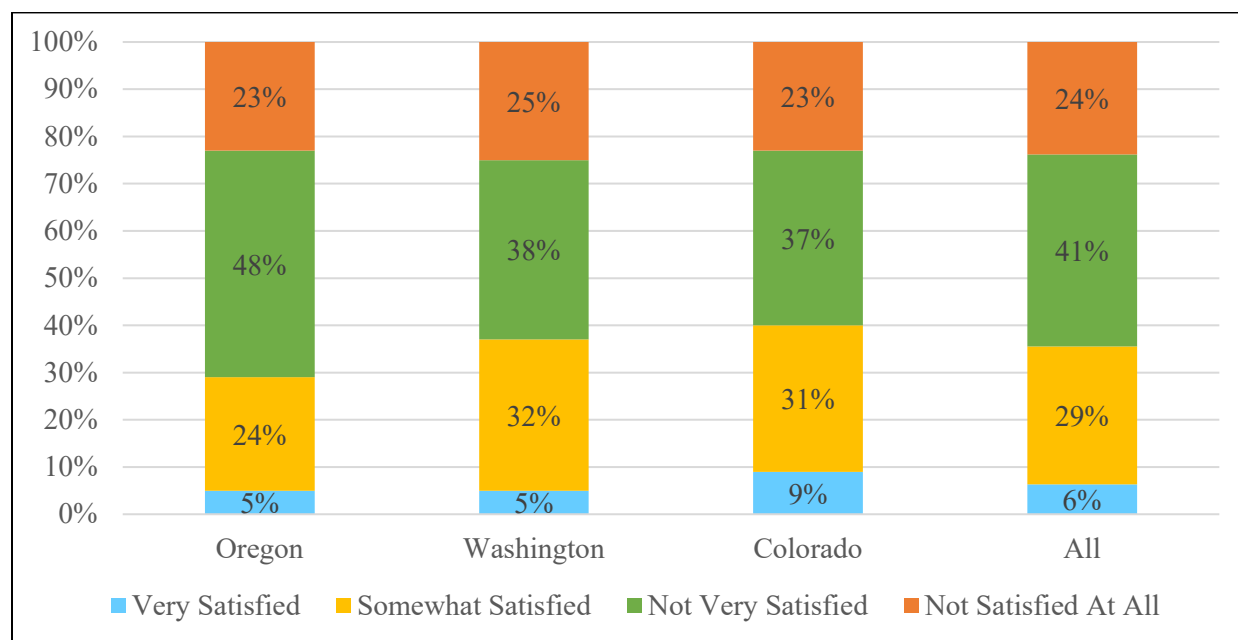


Figure 11. How satisfied are you with the way democracy is working in the United States?



As expected, the internet and television scored highest as sources of information about government and public affairs. At 60.5%, most respondents said television was a major source of information while 73.7% of responses also indicated that the internet is a major source of

information. Of those respondents who said the internet, 71.5% said that they get their information on the internet from various, non-specific social media services. Sixty-three percent of these respondents said they also got information from a news media website. In a pyrrhic victory for print media, 38.9% of respondents said that they still read newspapers and magazines to get political and public affairs information. Radio fared even worse at 17.7%. Interestingly, 31.2% of respondents in Colorado said that “other people” were their source of political information which may be the result of the much higher newly arrived Latinx immigrant population in the state.

Over 28% of all respondents to this survey indicated that they were unaware of the ways in which they could vote in their state (Figure 11). Beyond that 56% indicated that no one had explained the vote by mail option to them (Figure 12). Fifty-seven percent mostly or completely disagree with the idea that voting gives people some say about how the government works continuing the prevailing theme of lacking trust in government and its institutions (Figure 13). Both responses indicate that unmotivated but potential voters are either so disconnected as to have no contact with the GOTV efforts in the state or that the state’s efforts to reach this population of eligible but unregistered and non-voting citizens are lacking. Given the emphasis to use vote by mail as a tool to get registered voters to vote, as well as the openly displayed animus toward voting by the unmotivated voter, both seem likely issues. However, the responses to the survey about sources of information indicates that there are clearly channels to reach these unmotivated, non-registered voters. Unlike the respondents who have turned their back on the idea of participation and indicate nothing will bring them back, there remains with this group the possibility of conversion to participating voter if they can be reached through one of the media channels they actively use for information.

Figure 12. Are you aware of the different ways in which you can vote in your home state?

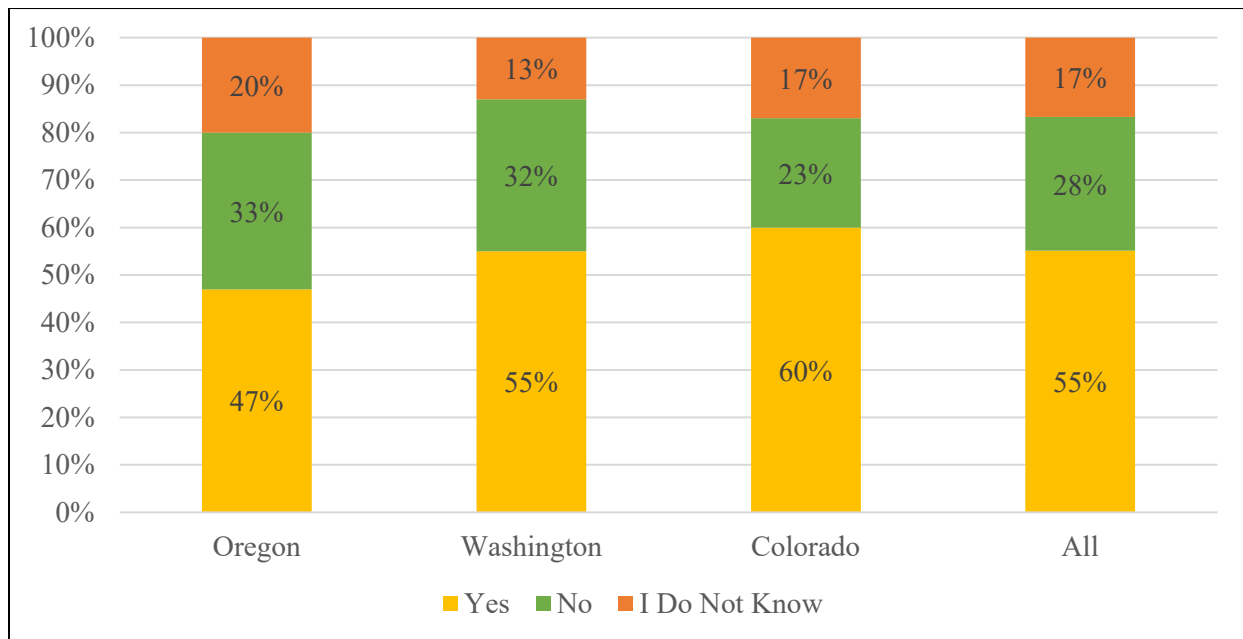


Figure 13. Has anyone ever explained Vote by Mail to you?

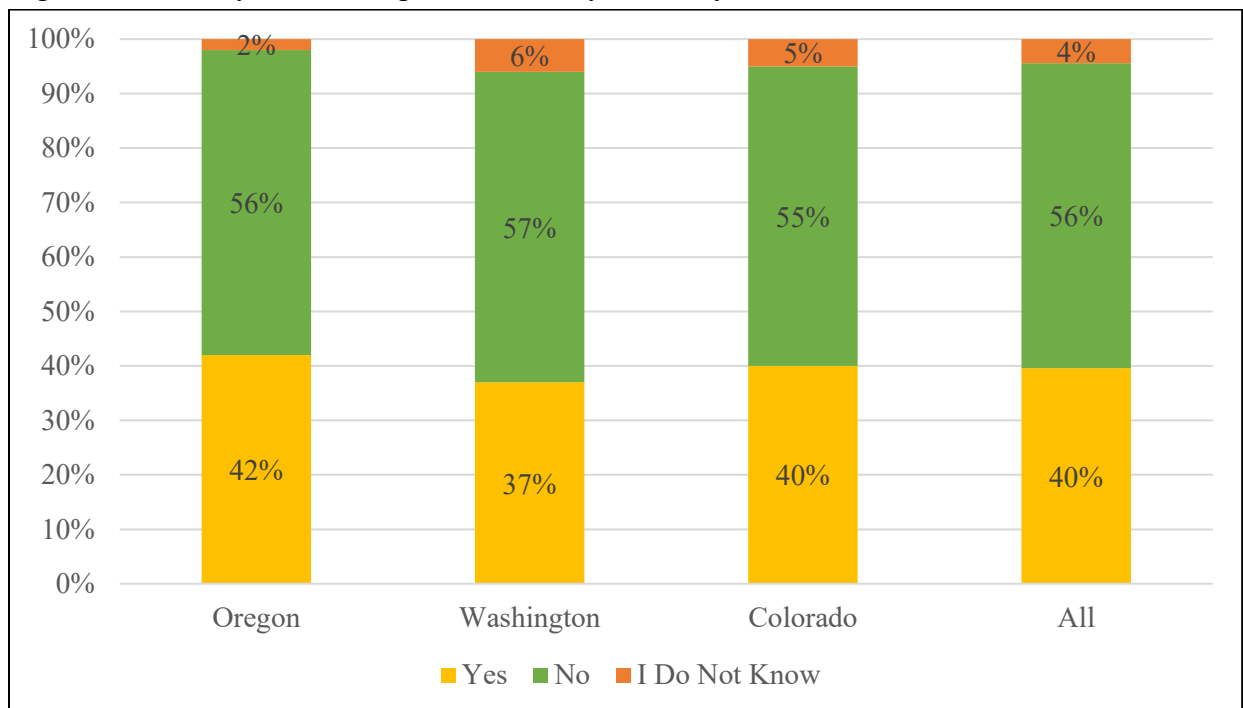
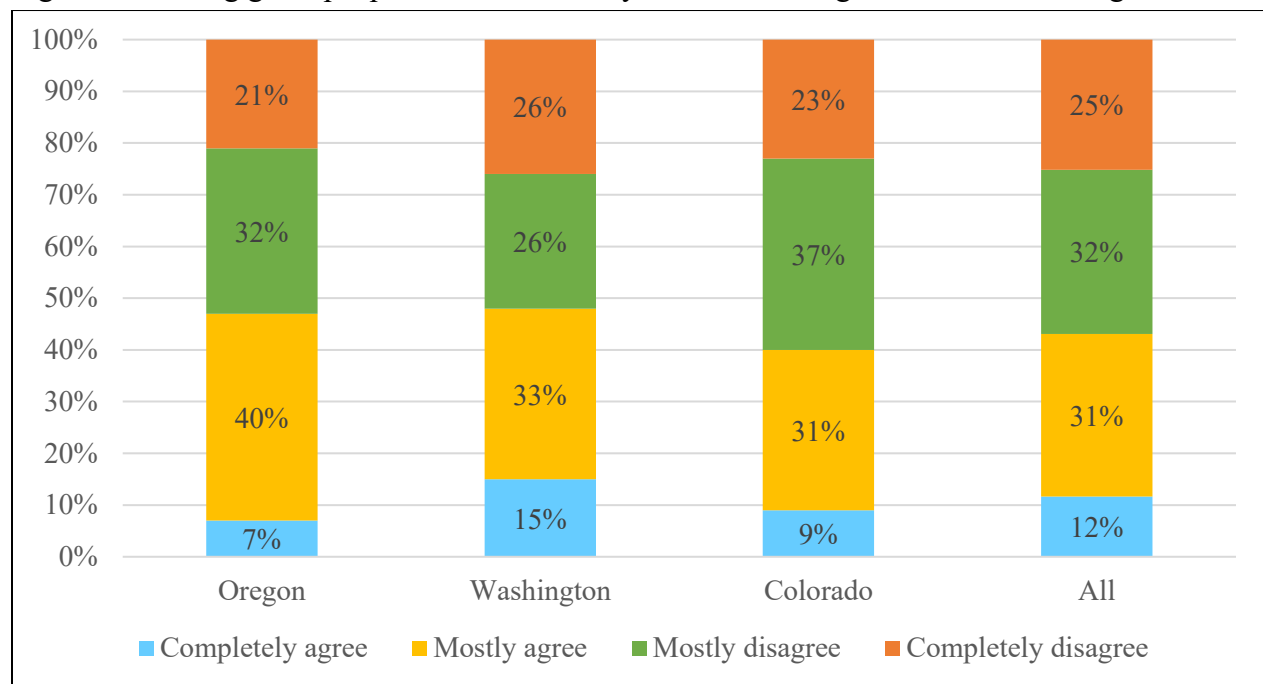


Figure 14. Voting gives people like me some say about how the government runs things...



In an experimental section of the survey, respondents were asked several Likert-style response questions with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 3 being Neutral, and 5 being Agree Strongly. The questions asked respondents to what extent they agree or disagree that particular words explained their actions in not participating in elections. The words were Confidence, Dejection, Apathy, Indifference, Racial Trauma, and Oppression. Each was provided not with a definition but instead an explanatory phrase intended to clarify to the respondent the meaning of these terms within the question.

At 36.8%, Apathy (“nothing for me in the political system”) played a strong role in their decision-making about voting. Dejection (“people like me get shut out of the system all the time”) and Confidence (“I don’t know much about politics”) were each cited by 38% of the respondents as playing a role in their decision-making on voting. Oppression (“the government only works to keep me and people like me down”) was cited by 34% of respondents. All four of these responses also elicited strong neutral responses of 27% or more indicating that respondents

certainly had rejected the opposite responses. Given the high marks for Apathy, Dejection, Confidence and Oppression as being part of the thinking of respondents, one might conclude that the whole of the body of respondents was mostly distant from politics and its processes. However, 40.1% of respondents said that Indifference (“I don’t care what happens”) was *not* part of their thinking (and another 35.8% were neutral). This indicates that this body of people do care about some aspect of public life but that something else, not convenience or pure apathy or lack of trust, is keeping them from participating in voting. This something else could be described as psychological or emotional factors as described in the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. However, their responses do also generally align with the negative sentiments expressed in the results from questions in the other parts of the survey.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

7.1 Overall Conclusions

This study begins with a simple question: Does VBM deliver the goal of increasing turnout, particularly among Black and Latinx citizens? In the three jurisdictions with the longest history of voting by mail (Oregon, Washington, and Colorado) the answer is an unquestionable no. The mapping work and supporting data included in this study clearly demonstrates that in the voting precincts with the highest residency of Black and Latinx citizens turnout remains persistently low regardless of whether a VBM system is in use. Urban and rural divisions appear to make little, if any difference, as well. The fact is that after decades of effort voting by mail has made little impact on attracting otherwise eligible minority citizens to begin participating in voting. The question then becomes what other factors are working within the system that drive down turnout and participation.

This leads to the second question in this research: With all costs of voting lowered to or near zero, why are over 30 million otherwise eligible potential voters of all races in the United States actively choosing not to vote? In this research, these people are labeled the unmotivated voter. People with technical reasons, such as immigration or residency issues, or knowledge reasons, such as not knowing how to register or cast a vote, are certainly part of this group, but they are by no means the preponderance of this group. It also finds that these issues are largely surmountable with more targeted registration and Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaigns. In other words, these technical and knowledge issues are curable, and these people have the potential to become active voters.

The lack of minority participation also raises a question about whether there are any other individual groups that might be benefitting relative to other groups by this lack of participation?

The maps also demonstrate that whiter and wealthier areas of Oregon and Washington appear to have at least consistently high voter turnout, if not rising turnout in some areas. This would indicate that white voters are overrepresented in the sample of voters in each state. The proportion of total votes cast will be cast by more white people, or at least by people who are not Latinx or Black. This reality could have profound effects on the mix of issues represented by politicians in these states as they seek to curry favor with those most likely to vote.

There are large percentages of the population that report that they have simply given up on the need to vote. The survey results included in this research demonstrate that a large number (50-65%) of respondents have simply given up on voting. They report that they are disinterested in politics, do not like politics, or simply do not trust politicians. When quizzed further, they reveal that they do not like the choice of candidates, feel the issues discussed do not represent them, simply are unsure of why they are not voting. For the unmotivated voter in these states, their concerns are not based on the process of casting a vote. They are concerned with who or what they would be voting for by participating. Like the technical and knowledge issues, these responses indicate that there is some potential for these individuals to become voters if they can make a psychological connection to the process and the people it produces.

The most disturbing group are the group who report they do not trust the government or the process of voting and there is nothing that can get them to vote. These otherwise eligible unmotivated voters are simply gone from the system. They are also potential voters with a conscience looking for substance and meaning from the system but have decided that the system, at least as it is currently constructed, cannot offer them what they seek. Unlike the technical or knowledge issue, or the candidate or issue voter, these unmotivated voters cannot be moved.

Their psychological break with the system of voting appears to be so profound that short of revolution in that system they cannot be brought to participate.

It is interesting that convenience is not reported to be a motivating factor to vote. The very heart of voting by mail is to lower the cost of voting by making it more convenient through removing physical barrier and personal constraints. Less than 4% of all voters indicated that an issue related to convenience was keeping them from voting. Voters themselves do not identify it as a problem they need solved.

More importantly, voters have indicated that they do have a substantial number of problems with their relationship to the government, the value of voting, knowledge about the process of voting, voting and the worth of the political system overall. The unmotivated voters in this study indicate in no uncertain terms that their issues with these problems are what keep them from voting. These issues, again, all reference some aspect of individual psychological bonds with the political system, with voting being the most common and accessible manifestation of that system. Unmotivated voters appear to be disconnected for psychological reasons not physical ones.

As noted in Chapter 3, the work of Abramson and Aldrich⁸⁴, Conway⁸⁵, Aldrich⁸⁶, and Rosenstone and Hansen⁸⁷ have emphasized the importance of individual psychological orientation on participation with attention paid to factors such as political interest, political efficacy, trust in government, and civic duty. The results of the survey presented in this research demonstrate that once knowledge issues are removed as a factor these previously identified

⁸⁴ Paul R. Abramson and John H. Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation in America," *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 3 (1982): 502-21.

⁸⁵ Mary M. Conway, *Political Participation in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991).

⁸⁶ John H. Aldrich, "Rational Choice and Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (1993): 246-78.

⁸⁷ Steven J. Rosenstone and John M. Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993).

factors of interest, trust, efficacy, and duty are at the root of why these otherwise eligible citizens do not vote. They lack motivation to participate in this civic ritual because they either do not trust it or lack interest in politics.

Rosenstone and Hansen,⁸⁸ along with Teixeira,⁸⁹ further indicate that simple political interest may play the biggest role in determining participation in electoral politics by minority groups. Again, once knowledge issues are removed from the discussion, the remaining people interviewed in this survey have displayed no interest in politics or worse a distrust of it and the system it supports. While the other models look for collective action as the root cause of why certain groups of citizens fail to participate in voting, what was described in the literature review as *psychological resources* offers the best motive for what is underpinning the unmotivated voter. It is that individual action, based on deep-seated distrust or lack of interest, repeated by thousands of citizens with similar feelings, leads to what appears to be mass coordinated action to not participate. While the result on the election is the same as the positive coordinated actions of the other models, lower voter turnout, the source of the action is entirely different. It is solitary. It therefore may not respond to efforts like voting by mail which offer group-oriented solutions. The results of the map data presented in this research would seem to bear this out.

7.2 What Can Be Done to Improve Voting?

The results of this research point to some fundamental reforms that would very likely increase voter turnout in Oregon, Washington, and Colorado. Solve problems that voters actually want solved. No one who is not already registered and already voting is asking for increased

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992).

convenience or raising cost of voting issues. The part of the population that is eligible but not participating is asking for reforms that will attract them back and make them want to vote and be participatory. That is not to say that voting by mail is in and of itself a bad thing. VBM, along with reforms to registration, loosening of identification laws, and extended ballot counting deadlines, are all fine reforms that have increased turnout wherever they have been used. However, in these three states in particular, potential voters are asking for better candidates, more focus on the issues that are meaningful to them, and better access to information before reforms on how to vote will be effective.

There also appears to be a deep need to solve technical issues in order to convert unmotivated voters into participating voters. Get them information on registering, felony voting rights restoration, better candidate information, and how to use the VBM system in the state. VBM will not increase participation without first attracting more registrants with an understanding of how to use the system. A substantial number of respondents indicated that being provided this kind of information would go a long way to converting them into participants in the process so provide the help that they say they need.

Finally, the bigger problem in the system with non-participating, unmotivated potential voters is not in the method or methods used to vote whether that is the polls or VBM. It is trust. The unmotivated voter does not trust the system, the government, the candidates, or the process. They have no interest in politics because they do not trust the system will provide anything for them or they feel that the system is somehow rigged so their votes will not count. Working to restore trust, or possibly develop it anew, should be the fundamental job of every state election worker, politician, and concerned citizen. Whichever system we use to cast a vote will not matter if they citizens who cast those votes lose faith in the process that underlays our electoral system.

Appendix A: Unmotivated Voter Survey Questionnaire

(STATE) Non-Registered Voters

Informed Consent to Participate: Agreement to Participate in a Survey of Non-Participating Potential Voters in (STATE) (IRB#3627)

You are invited to participate in a research project. Volunteering will not benefit you directly, but you will be helping the investigator to understand what motivates people to participate in voting. If you decide to volunteer, you will receive compensation in the amount described by your panel provider to its panel participants. The researchers have no information or influence on this matter. Participation in this survey will take about 15 to 20 minutes of your time. Volunteering for this study involves no more risk than what a typical person experiences on a regular day. Your involvement is entirely up to you. You may withdraw at any time for any reason. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

Study Leadership: This research project is led by Dr. Joseph Dietrich of the Claremont Graduate University, who is being supervised by Dr. Jean Reith Schroedel of Claremont Graduate University.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to ascertain why otherwise eligible voters are not participating in elections despite the presence of voter participation reforms such as Voting by Mail.

Eligibility: Eligible participants must reside in the state of (STATE). They must be 18 years of age and self-identify as Black, Latino, or White in any way. They must also not be registered voters in any state. They must also be eligible to register to vote under the current laws of the state in which they reside (STATE).

Participation: During the study, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions related to voting. Although there is no time limit, this participation is expected to take about 15 to 20 minutes of your time.

Risks of Participation: The risks that you run by taking part in this study are low constituting no more risk than the average person's average day. No identifiable information about the participants identity is being recorded. There is no deception utilized in this study. What minimal potential risk does exist includes the possibility that you may be asked questions that could evoke feelings of discomfort such as embarrassment or awkwardness.

Benefits of Participation: There is no expectation for the study to benefit you personally. This study will benefit the researcher(s) by providing insight into why people choose not to participate in elections. This study is also intended to benefit the academic field of Political Science.

Compensation: Any compensation for your participation will be paid directly to you by your panel provider and the amount or substance of it is unknown to the researchers conducting this survey. The researchers will not be providing any compensation to participants.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time without it being held against you. Your decision whether or not to participate will have no effect on your current or future connection with anyone at CGU, your panel provider, or with Alchemer (formerly SurveyGizmo).

Confidentiality: Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. Individually identifiable information is not part of the intended goals of this project. In order to protect the confidentiality of your responses, no personally identifiable information or information that maybe linked in order to reveal an individual identity will be collected or stored. Basic demographic information such as gender, political affiliation, or state of residence may be collected but no addresses or personal details will be transmitted to the researchers. The data from the informed consent form here, which does not contain your name, will be stored in a locked file and later destroyed 5 years after the data has been collected. We may use the data we collect for future research or share it with other researchers, but we will not reveal, nor would we be able to reveal, your identity with it.

Sponsorship: This study is being paid for by the principal investigator.

Further Information: If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Dr. Joseph Dietrich at joseph.dietrich@cgu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Jean Schroedel at jean.schroedel@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board has certified this project as exempt. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu. You may print this form for your records if you wish to keep it.

1. Consent: By checking the boxes below you are agreeing to participate in the research study described in the above document and have your responses saved. It further demonstrates that you understand the information on this form, that someone has answered any and all questions you may have about this study, and you voluntarily agree to participate in it. Checking the boxes carries with it the same implications as a signature. In order to proceed and participate in the survey you must check both of the boxes. *

I agree to participate in this study and have read and understand the statement about risks

I consent to having my information collected and stored.

Survey Pre-Screening

1. How do you primarily define yourself as it relates to your racial heritage? (Please pick one) *

- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other - Write In

Are you currently 18 years of age? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. Are you currently a resident of (STATE)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you currently legally barred from voting in elections in (STATE)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you currently registered to vote in (STATE)? *

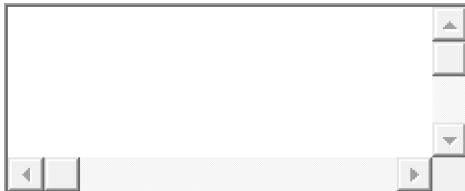
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I Do Not Know

Have you ever voted in an election in (STATE)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Voting by Mail

3. You have indicated in the pre-screening for this survey that you are currently unregistered and have not participated in voting for political candidates. Why? (Please say as much as you like in the box below) *



4. Are you aware of the different ways in which you can vote in your home state? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I Do Not Know

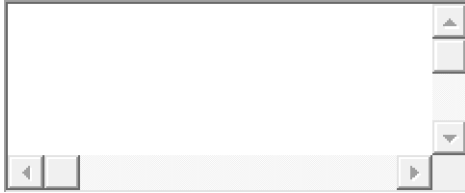
5. Your state offers the option to Vote by Mail. Despite this voter friendly reform to the process of voting, you still have not participated in voting. Why? (Please say as much as you like in the box below) *



6. Has anyone ever explained Vote by Mail to you? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I Do Not Know

7. What might motivate you to participate and vote in future elections? (Please say as much as you like in the box below) *



Collateral Impacts and Choosing to Vote

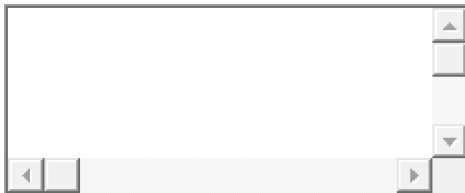
8. Have you ever had an encounter with police?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Was that encounter positive or negative? *

- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Negative

If negative, describe what was negative about the experience? (Please say as much as you like in the box below)



9. Do you trust the federal government? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. Do you trust your state government? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Do you trust your county and/or city government? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

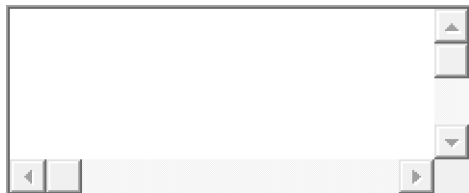
12. Have you ever had an encounter with a federal government agency? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Was that encounter positive or negative? *

- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Negative

If negative, describe what was negative about the experience? (Please say as much as you like in the box below)



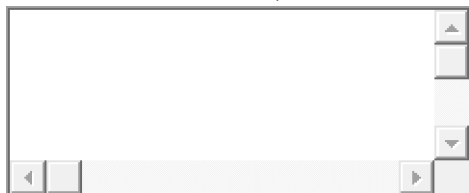
13. Have you ever had an encounter with a state government agency? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Was that encounter positive or negative? *

- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Negative

If negative, please describe what was negative about the experience? (Please say as much as you like in the box below)



14. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today? *

- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Unsure/I Don't Know

Political Opinions

15. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs? *

- | Most of the time | Some of the time | Only now and then | Hardly at all | Never |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

16. What would be your primary source of information about government and public affairs? (Check all that apply) *

- ☐ Television
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Newspapers/Magazines
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Other People
- ☐ Pamphlets and Other Printed Material

You indicated that the internet is your primary source of information on government and public affairs, specifically which internet sources? *

- ☐ Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc...)
- ☐ Blog Sites
- ☐ News Channels (Fox, CNN, MSNBC, The Flame, Newsmax, etc...)
- ☐ Other

17. Please indicate with which statement you agree more: *

- ☐ It would be too risky to give U.S. presidents more power to deal directly with many of the country's problems.
- ☐ The country's problems could be dealt with more effectively if U.S. presidents didn't have to worry so much about Congress or the courts.

18. How satisfied are you with the way democracy is working in the United States? *

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Not Very Satisfied | Not Satisfied At All |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

19. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Democratic Party? *

- ☐ Favorable
- ☐ Unfavorable

20. Voting gives people like me some say about how the government runs things... *

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Completely agree | Mostly agree | Mostly disagree | Completely disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

21. Do you think the elections this past November in your community were run and administered: *

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Well | Somewhat Well | Not Too Well | Not At All Well | Unsure/I Don't Know |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

22. Do you wish that you had voted in the 2016 election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

23. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Republican Party? *

- ☐ Favorable
- ☐ Unfavorable

Voting Related Words and Phrases

24. Do any of these words or phrases explain why you choose to not participate in voting?

Confidence... “I don’t know much about politics” *

| | 5 Agree Strongly | 4 | 3 Neutral | 2 | 1 Disagree Strongly | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| This influenced my decision to not vote | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | This did not influence my decision to not vote |

Dejection... “people like me get shut out of the system all the time” *

| | 5 Agree Strongly | 4 | 3 Neutral | 2 | 1 Disagree Strongly | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| This influenced my decision to not vote | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | This did not influence my decision to not vote |

Apathy... “nothing for me in the political system” *

| | 5 Agree Strongly | 4 | 3 Neutral | 2 | 1 Disagree Strongly | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| This influenced my decision to not vote | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | This did not influence my decision to not vote |

Indifference... “I don’t care what happens in politics” *

| | 5 Agree Strongly | 4 | 3 Neutral | 2 | 1 Disagree Strongly | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| This influenced my decision to not vote | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | This did not influence my decision to not vote |

Racial Trauma... “my relatives and ancestors have been mistreated for decades” *

| | 5 Agree Strongly | 4 | 3 Neutral | 2 | 1 Disagree Strongly | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| This influenced my decision to not vote | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | This did not influence my decision to not vote |

Oppression... “the government only works to keep me and people like me down” *

| | 5 Agree Strongly | 4 | 3 Neutral | 2 | 1 Disagree Strongly | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| This influenced my decision to not vote | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | This did not influence my decision to not vote |

Thank You!

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your answers will contribute to our understanding of why people choose to vote or not to vote and the impact that Voting by Mail is having on your state.