



Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and the *Electoral Act 1992*

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Ed Cocks MLA

Addressed to: Ms Skye Predavec

In relation to: Seattle voucher scheme

Hearing: 9 December 2025

Uncorrected Proof Transcript p 17

Transcript provided: 16 December 2025

Answer Due: 23 December 2025

Ms Predavec took on notice the following question:

THE CHAIR: Okay. Now, just in terms of the Seattle experience, can you tell me, is there any evidence around whether that has been successful or not?

Ms Predavec: Yes, I can.

THE CHAIR: Or if there have been any other issues arise?

Ms Predavec: So I do not have it with me, and I do not remember exactly where it is, but I would be happy to provide it on notice.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic.

The Australia Institute: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

Seattle has used a system of democracy vouchers to fund political campaigns since 2017, where each of the city's 500,000 voters receives four \$25 vouchers to give to a candidate of their choice. The system is funded through a dedicated annual property tax levy, which generates \$4.5 million USD a year.¹

¹ Sundberg (2025) "Seattle Renews Its Unique Approach to Public Campaign Financing",
<https://boltsmag.org/seattle-democracy-vouchers-renewing/>

Democracy vouchers have been available in five Seattle city council elections, and have had significantly more uptake than traditional cash donations. When they were introduced in 2017, they more than tripled the number of people who made financial contributions to campaigns.²

In the 2025 election, a total of 148,412 vouchers worth \$3.7 million USD were returned.³ In that election, Seattle's incumbent mayor was narrowly defeated by challenger Katie Wilson, who said that without democracy vouchers, "it would have been much harder to run a successful campaign".⁴

This sentiment has been shared by other elected officials in Seattle, including former city councillor Teresa Mosqueda⁵ and former mayor Bruce Harrell.⁶

Before the introduction of democracy vouchers, incumbents had a 66% chance of being re-elected. After democracy vouchers were introduced that declined to 45%, meaning it has made elections genuinely more competitive.⁷ The presence of democracy vouchers has encouraged significantly more people to run in elections, doubling the average number of candidates in each seat (from 3.7 to 7.8).⁸

The scheme has apparently been successful in the eyes of Seattle's voters, who approved the introduction of the scheme via a plebiscite in 2015 and voted 59% to 41% to renew it last year.⁹

The evidence shows that the system has been largely successful in making Seattle's politics more accessible and more competitive.

Participants in the democracy voucher program have been significantly more representative of Seattle's demographics than traditional donors.¹⁰ Democracy vouchers have enabled financial contributors to much more closely match the demographics of voters as a whole: the scheme has meant more women, more people of colour, more lower-income earners and more young people have contributed to political campaigns.¹¹

² Mosqueda (2025) "Guest Rant: I Ran for Office; Democracy Vouchers Made It Possible", <https://www.thestranger.com/guest-editorial/2025/07/24/80162720/guest-rant-i-ran-for-office-democracy-vouchers-made-it-possible>

³ City of Seattle (2025) "Distributed Voucher Funds and Program Data", <https://www.seattle.gov/democracymaker/program-data/distributed-voucher-funds-and-program-data>

⁴ Wilson (2025) "'I'm Always on the Bus': How Transit Advocacy Helped Katie Wilson Become Seattle's Next Mayor", <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2025/12/08/im-always-on-the-bus-how-transit-advocacy-helped-katie-wilson-become-seattles-next-mayor>

⁵ Mosqueda (2025) "Guest Rant: I Ran for Office; Democracy Vouchers Made It Possible"

⁶ Harrell (2025) "Mayor Harrell Proposes Renewal of Seattle's First-in-Nation Democracy Voucher Program", <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WASEATTLE/bulletins/3d632a2>

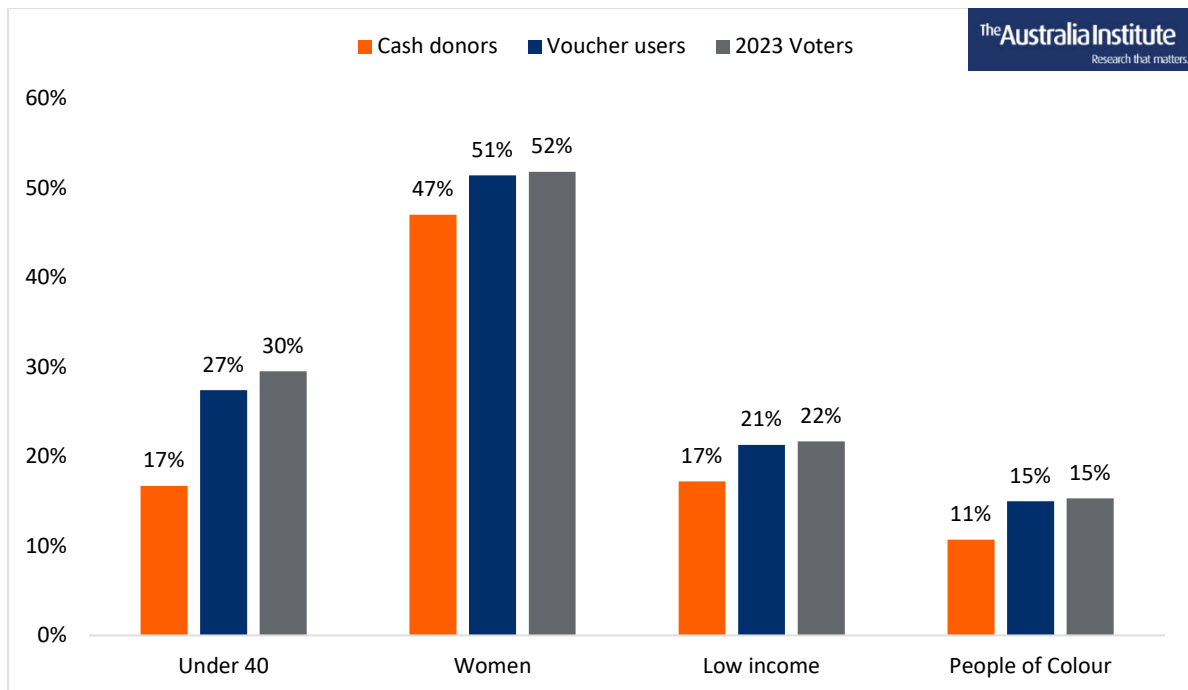
⁷ Griffith & Noonan (2022) "The effects of public campaign funding: Evidence from Seattle's Democracy Voucher program", *Journal of Public Economics*, 3.3

⁸ Griffith & Noonan (2022) "The effects of public campaign funding: Evidence from Seattle's Democracy Voucher program", *Journal of Public Economics*, 3.4

⁹ King County (2025) "August 2025 Primary Election", results of Seattle's Proposition 1, <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/elections/results/2025/august-primary-election>

¹⁰ Heerwig & McCabe (2023) *Participation and Representation: Results from the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in 2023*, <https://georgetown.app.box.com/v/mccabe-democracy-voucher>

¹¹ Heerwig & McCabe (2023) *Participation and Representation: Results from the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in 2023*; Griffith & Noonan (2022) "The effects of public campaign funding: Evidence from Seattle's Democracy Voucher program", *Journal of Public Economics*, Conclusion

Figure 1: Share of cash donors, voucher users and voters belonging to underrepresented groups

Source: Heerwig & McCabe (2023) *Participation and Representation: Results from the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in 2023*

For example, as shown in Figure 1 above, despite almost 30% of Seattle's voters being younger than 40 in 2023, they made up just 17% of cash donors. On the other hand, 27% of democracy voucher participants were under 40, making it far more representative of the city's population.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders

Signature:

Date: 13/01/2026

By the Australia Institute Researcher, Skye Predavec