



## OFFICE OF THE COOK COUNTY TREASURER

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**FOR RELEASE**

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## **Pappas Urges Citizens to Vote on April 1 as Study Reveals Racial and Income Disparities in Referendum Turnout**

In a first-of-its-kind analysis, the Cook County Treasurer's Office found much higher property tax referendum turnout in wealthier, predominantly white communities where nearly all people own their homes than in areas with mostly minority populations, lower incomes and lesser rates of home ownership.

The study also found tax referendum turnout in 2024 topped 50% in fewer than five of 10 cases and 33% in fewer than four of 10 cases — leaving the few to decide for the many in most cases.

"Rising property taxes always anger property owners. Despite that, most don't vote in referendums that determine whether their taxes go up or down," Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas said.

### **Key Findings:**

- **Demographic Disparities:**

- Tax districts with median incomes that top \$100,000 had turnout rates in 2024 that exceeded 50%, while areas with incomes below the median county income of \$81,797 had an average turnout rate of 34%
- Predominantly white taxing districts showed greater participation with an average turnout rate in 2024 of 55.2% compared to 33.3% in Black majority districts and 29.2% in districts with Latino majorities.
- Communities with more renters also had lower referendum turnout. In districts where 80% or more of residents own their own homes, average turnout neared 59% compared to about 34% where more than a fifth of residents rent.

- **Low Overall Voter Turnout:**

- In 2024, 35 property tax-related referendums were held, with 26, or 74% passing. Voter turnout averaged 45.9% in 2024, up from 33.7% in the previous four years.
- The March primary referendum vote averaged just 20.9%, while the November presidential general election referendum vote averaged 62.6%.

- **Property Tax Measures:**

- **Bond Votes:** Fourteen of 15 bond issuances passed, totaling \$563 million in new debt.
- **Tax Levy Increases:** Eight local governments sought approval for tax increases beyond state-imposed caps.

Two examples from the low-turnout March primary highlight the demographic disparities.

In Robbins, a majority Black low-income south suburb where less than 73% of residents own their own homes, just 14.1 percent of voters weighed in on whether to raise taxes to pay for the construction of new parks and a recreation facility. Less than 240 residents voted to raise the levy, and the measure passed by 45 votes.

Compare that to Kenilworth, a majority white, high-income North Shore suburb where 97% of residents own their homes. In the same election 33.5% of voters went to the polls — the highest turnout in the primary. They approved a bond issuance by a nearly 3-1 margin.

With less than a week to go before the April 1 consolidated election in which more than \$200 million of taxes and debt are on county ballots, Pappas says the numbers are troublesome.

“These findings highlight the pressing need for increased outreach to lower-income and minority communities, where participation is often the lowest. As property tax decisions impact all residents, it’s vital that more people educate themselves and exercise their right to vote, because right now, the few are deciding for the many,” Pappas said.

A link to the full study is available [here](#).

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