

Views of the Boston waterfront

Findings from a survey of Boston voters on waterfront issues

December 2, 2021

The MassINC Polling Group

This project was sponsored by the Coalition for a Resilient and Inclusive waterfront

info@massincpolling.com [MassINCPolling.com](https://www.massincpolling.com) [@MassINCPolling](https://twitter.com/MassINCPolling)

11 Beacon St Ste 500 | Boston, MA 02108 | Phone: (617) 224-1647



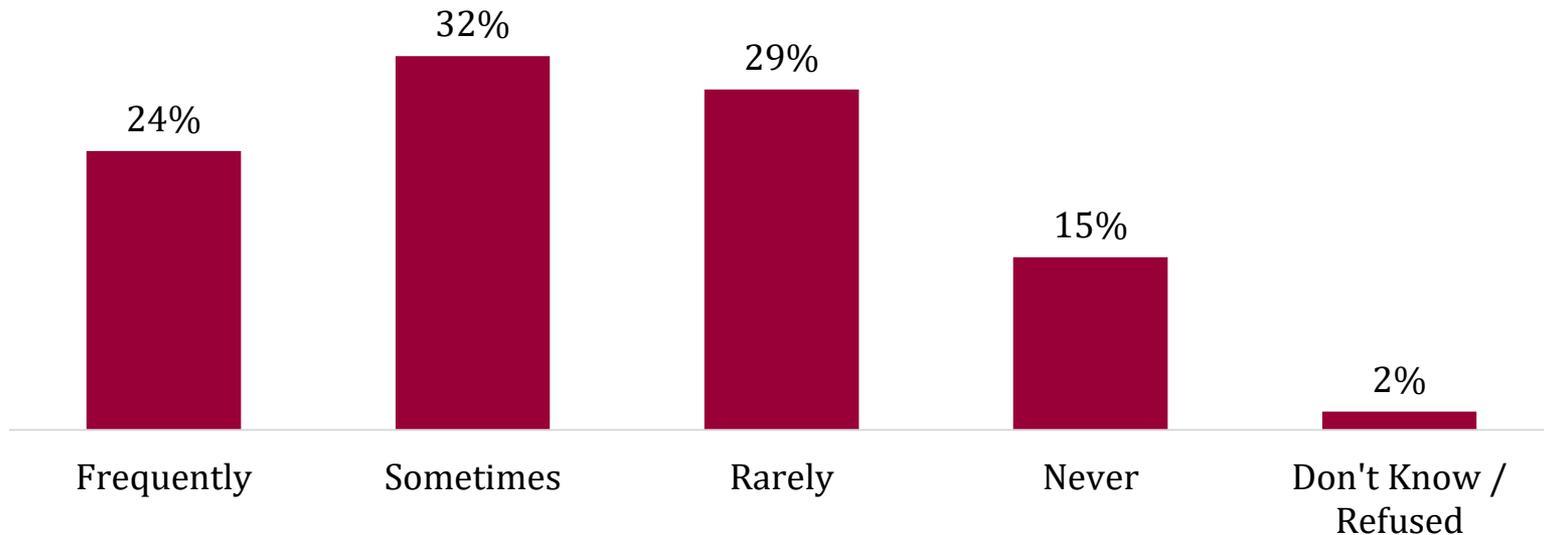
Survey Background

- Results based on a survey of 622 Boston registered voters. Oversamples of Black, Latino, and Asian voters were obtained to allow for separate analysis of each.
- Conducted November 8-15, 2021 via live telephone and online interviewing.
- Results within race and ethnicity were weighted to age, gender, party, and education level for each group. Groups were then combined and weighted to the population parameters for the city as a whole by age, gender, party, race, education, and geography.
- This project was sponsored by the Coalition for a Resilient and Inclusive waterfront.

Waterfront visit frequency

- Just over half of Boston registered voters (55%) say they visit the waterfront “frequently” or “sometimes” in a normal year.

Over half of voters say they visit waterfront at least “sometimes” in a normal year
% who say they visit the waterfront _____ in a normal year

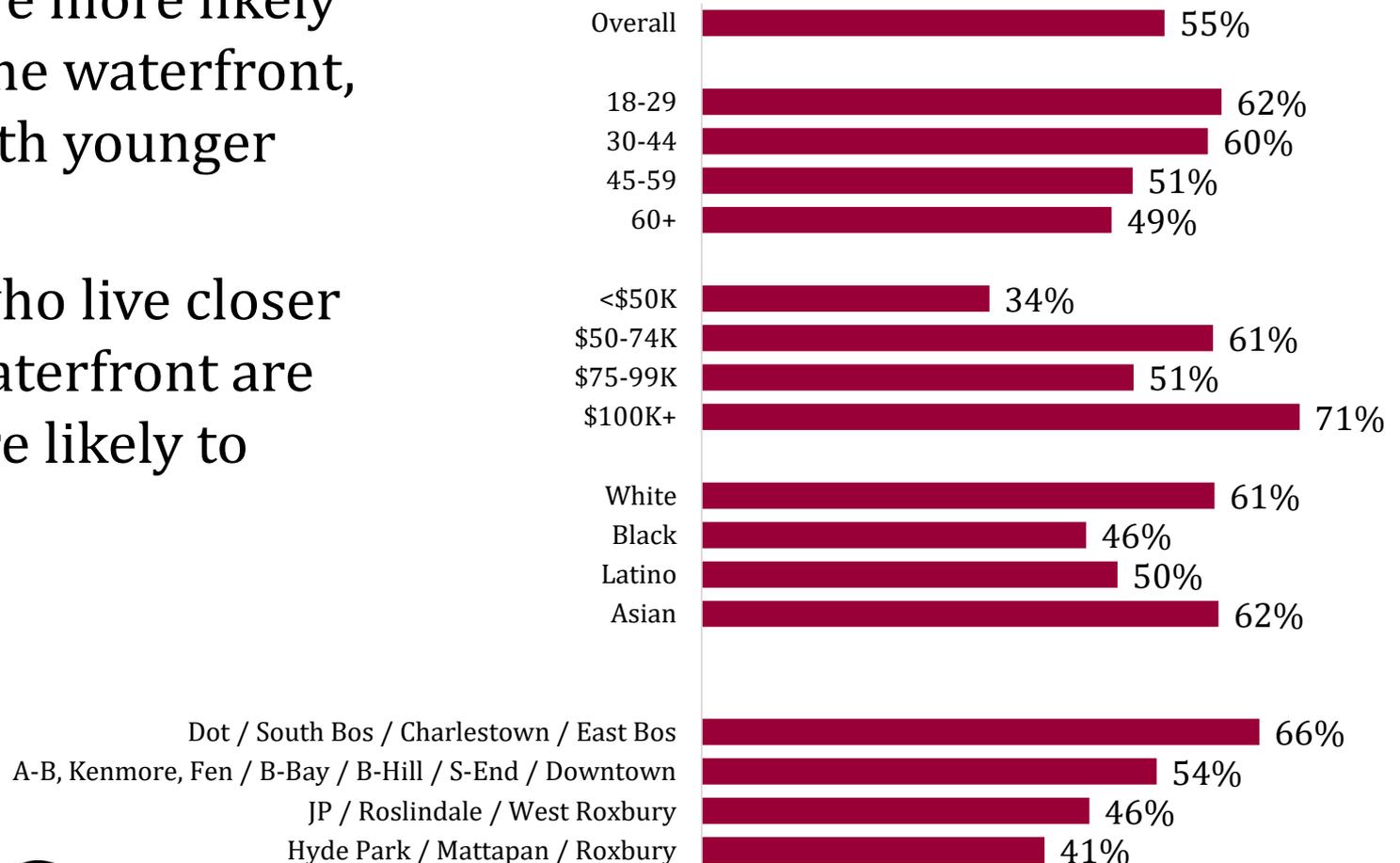


Who visits the waterfront most often?

- White and Asian voters are more likely to visit the waterfront, along with younger voters.
- Voters who live closer to the waterfront are also more likely to visit.

Differences in waterfront visit frequency

% who say they visit the waterfront "frequently" or "sometimes" in a normal year



Wide variety of places visited along waterfront

- About one-in-five voters visit the New England Aquarium, Esplanade / Hatch Shell / Community Boating, or the Seaport area / ICA most often.
- The Charles River is popular – taken together, 44% of voters say this is where they visit most often.
- The diversity of places voters visit suggests the waterfront functions as a neighborhood benefit.

Voters visit many waterfront areas / attractions	
<i>% of voters who say they visit ____ most often</i>	
The New England Aquarium	22%
The Esplanade (Charles River) / Hatch Shell / Community Boating	21%
Seaport / Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA)	20%
Charles River – Fenway / Kenmore / Boston University (BU)	17%
Harbor Islands	17%
Charles River – West End / Beacon Hill / Back Bay	16%
Charles River – Allston / Brighton	16%
Carson Beach / Moakley Park	14%
M Street Beach / Castle Island / South Boston waterfront	14%
North End / Christopher Columbus Park	13%
Children’s Museum / Fort Point	13%
Navy Yard / Charlestown	8%
Neponset River / Mattapan	8%
Mystic River	7%
Other	9%
Unsure	10%

Activities around the waterfront

- While visiting the waterfront, over a third of voters enjoy being outdoors and near the water, walking around, or going to a bar or restaurant.

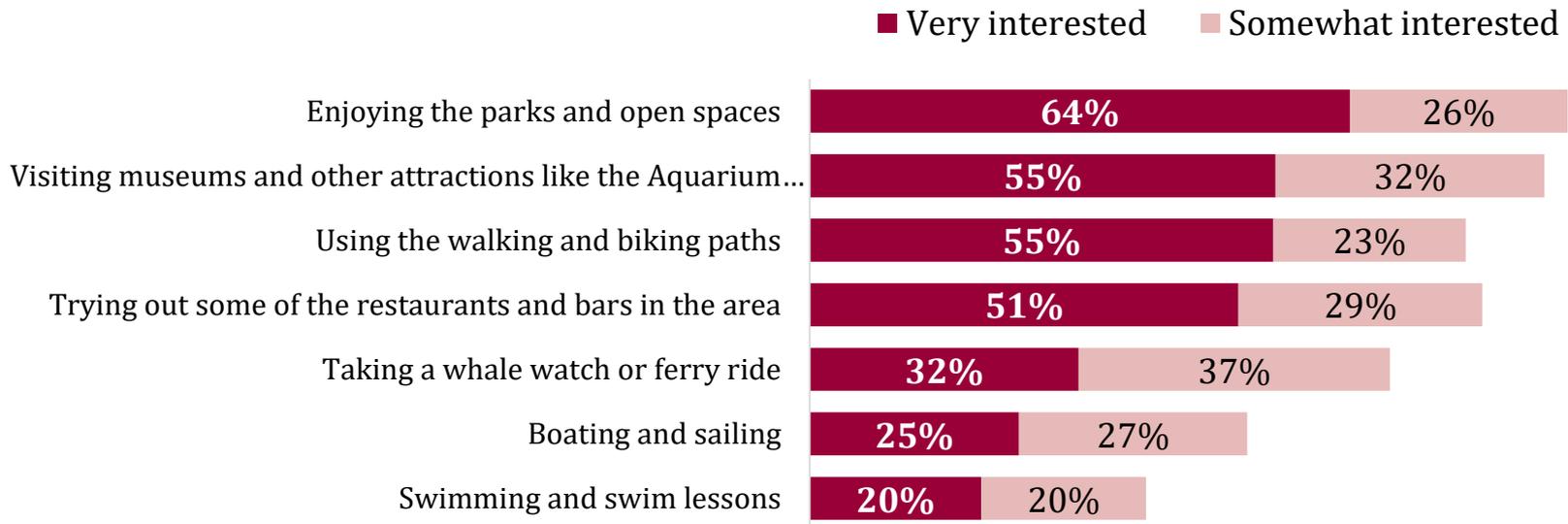
Voters enjoy outdoor activities, bars/restaurants	
<i>% of voters who enjoy ____ when visiting the waterfront</i>	
Enjoying the outdoors / being near water	39%
Walking / walking the dog	39%
Visiting a bar / restaurant	36%
Exercising	23%
Visiting a museum or attraction (Aquarium, Institute of Contemporary Art, etc.)	17%
Visiting the Harbor Islands	15%
Going boating or sailing	14%
Swimming	12%
Going on a whale watch	9%
Taking a ferry or other water transportation	8%
Something else	4%
Unsure	6%

Public open spaces highly valued

- The waterfront is valued as a resource for outdoor recreation, whether parks and open spaces, walking/biking paths, or water activities. Attractions and dining are also popular.

High interest in outdoor recreation around waterfront

% who say they are very/somewhat interested in _____ at the waterfront over next 2 years



Biggest issues facing the waterfront

- Voters see flooding / sea level rise / climate change as the biggest issue facing the waterfront.
- Democrats, those with higher levels of education and who live in Fenway / Back Bay / Downtown or JP / Roslindale are more likely to name climate change as the top issue.

Voters name climate change as biggest issue facing waterfront

% of voters who say ___ is the biggest issue facing the waterfront

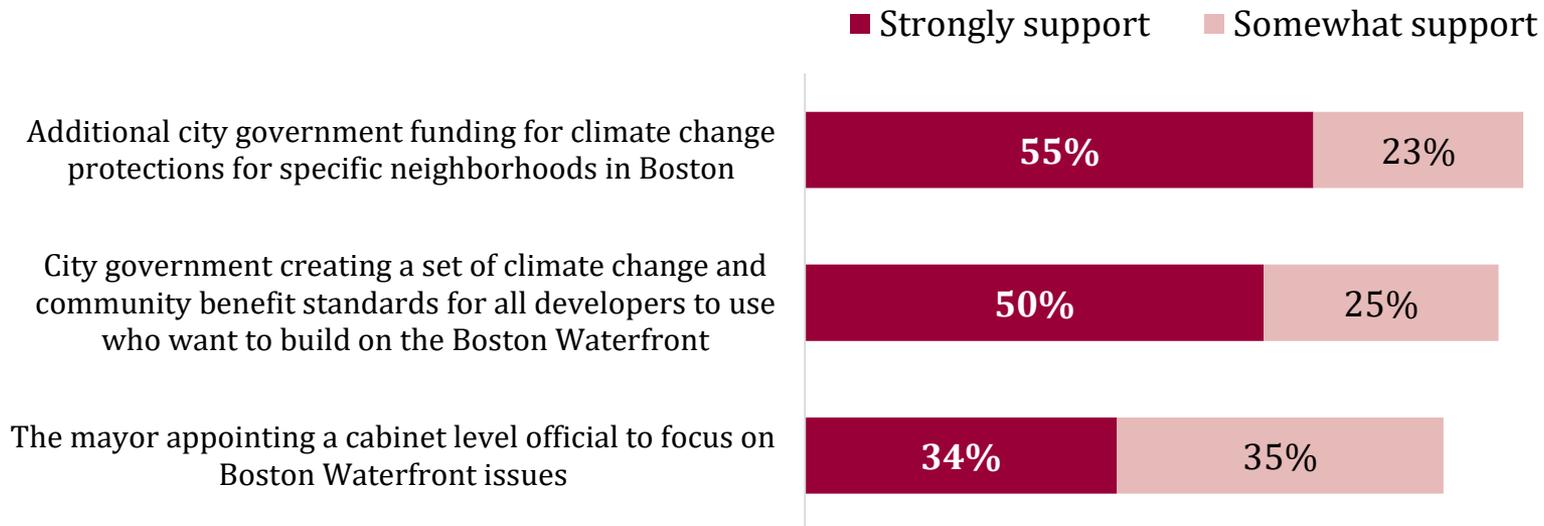
Flooding / sea level rise / climate change	34%
Too much development	26%
Lack of affordable attractions and dining	13%
Lack of connected paths for walking / biking	13%
Lack of activities for children	12%
Gentrification	12%
Too hard for residents to get to	11%
Poorly maintained public spaces	10%
It is not welcoming to people like me	7%
It does not provide enough jobs for local residents	7%
Something else	7%
Unsure	16%

Call to action on waterfront for new mayor

- Over half of voters “strongly support” additional city government funding for climate change protections in specific neighborhoods. This is particularly true for Latino voters (64%).
- Echoing their concern over development, voters support the creation of climate change and community benefit standards for developers.

Three-quarters of voters want additional funding for climate change

% voters who strongly/somewhat support _____

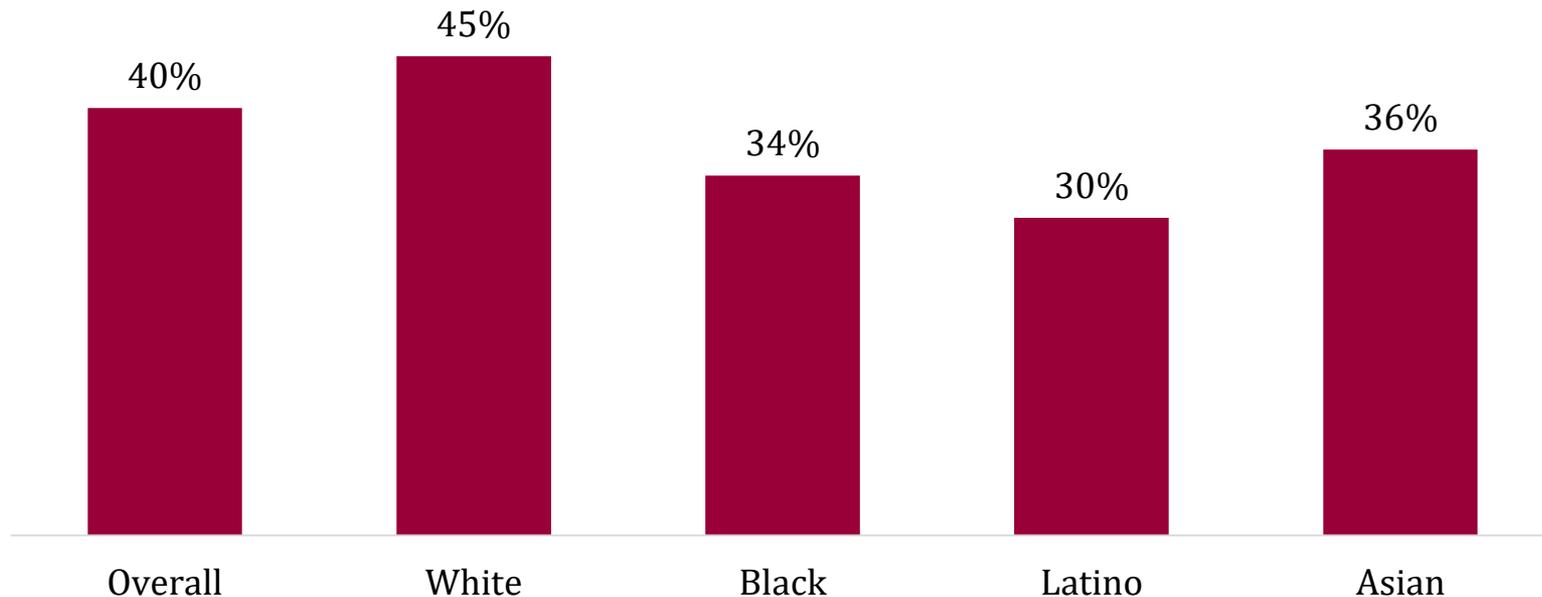


Access to the waterfront

- White voters are more likely to say it is “very easy” to get to the parts of the waterfront they visit most often, while Latino voters are least likely to say so.

White voters more likely to report easiest time getting to waterfront

% of voters who say it is “very easy” to get to the parts of the waterfront they visit most often

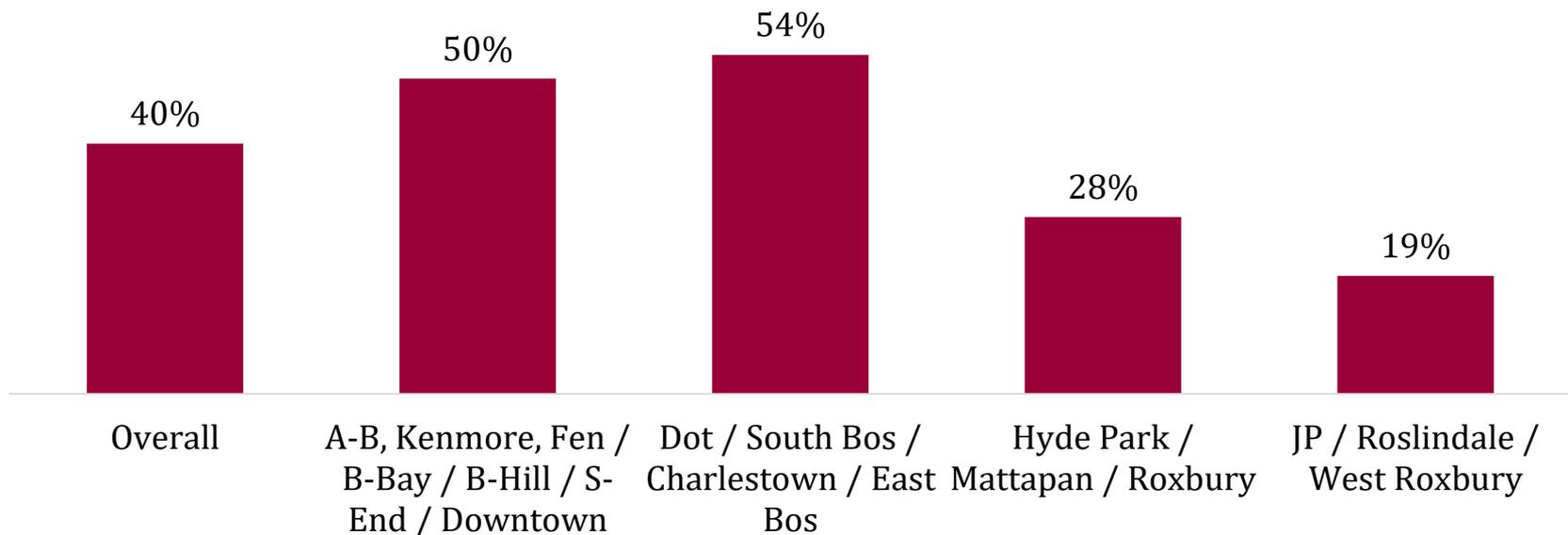


Waterfront access depends on neighborhood

- Voters who live closer to the waterfront are more likely to say they have a “very” easy time visiting, emphasizing the role the waterfront plays in a given neighborhood.

Proximity to waterfront increases ease of visiting waterfront

% of voters who say it's “very” easy to get to the parts of the waterfront they visit most often

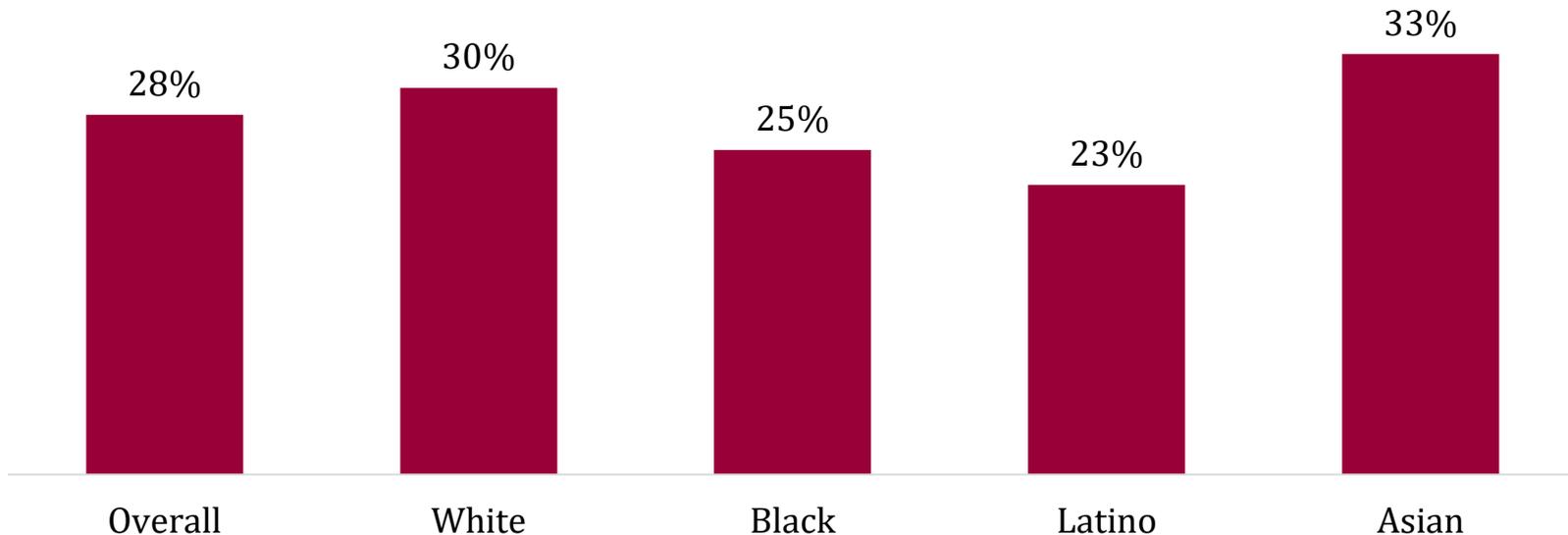


Public transit and waterfront access

- When asked how easy it is to get to the waterfront by public transit, the differences by race narrow. This suggests walkability is an important function of waterfront access and once again emphasizes the neighborhood connection.

Smaller differences in waterfront access by public transit

% of voters who say it is "very easy" to get to the parts of the waterfront they visit most often using public transportation

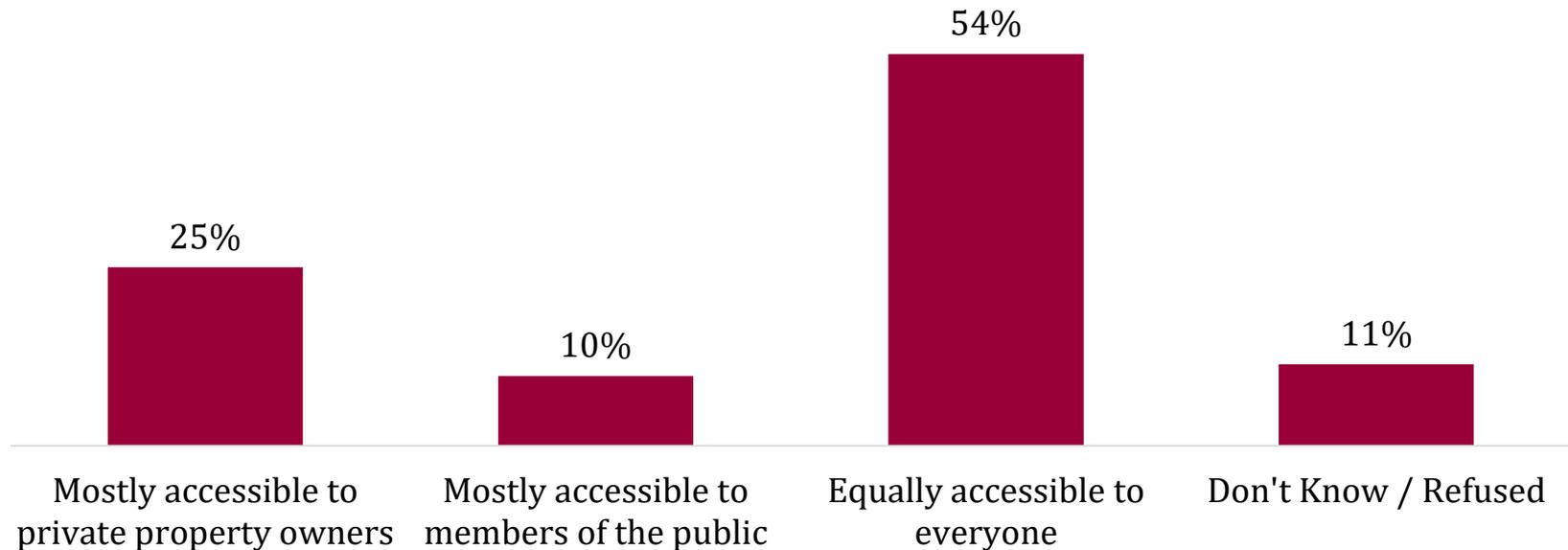


Who has more access to the waterfront?

- The majority of voters say the waterfront is equally accessible to everyone, although a quarter say it is mostly accessible to private property owners.

Majority of voters say waterfront is equally accessible to everyone

% of voters who say the waterfront is ____



Waterfront accessibility priorities

- Voters are supportive of policies that would increase access to the waterfront, especially affordable family activities and opening more parks and public spaces.
- Black and Latino voters are particularly supportive of creating more affordable housing and family activities.

Initiatives that would increase accessibility of waterfront important to voters

% of voters who say ____ is a "major priority" for the new mayor when it comes to promoting the accessibility of the waterfront

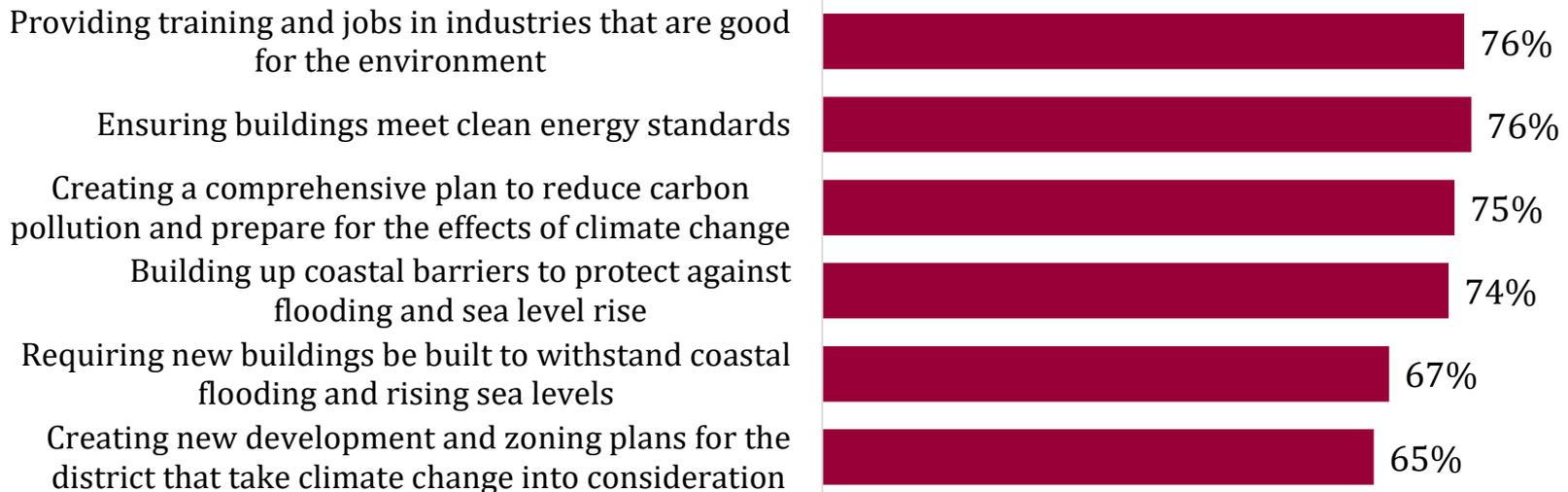
	Overall	White	Black	Latino	Asian
Creating more affordable activities for families	65%	59%	79%	70%	57%
Converting more land along the Waterfront into parks and other public spaces	55%	60%	52%	54%	43%
Putting more affordable housing units along the Waterfront	49%	41%	63%	58%	34%
Making it easier for groups to get permits to host events and gatherings at the Waterfront	38%	31%	50%	47%	36%

Waterfront climate priorities

- Over two-thirds of voters in Boston call each proposal a “major priority” for the new mayor when it comes to protecting the waterfront and city from the impacts of climate change.
- Roughly three-quarters say that building energy standards, providing training & jobs, and creating a carbon emissions reduction plan is a “major priority”.

Nearly two-thirds of voters see all climate proposals as “major priority” for mayor.

% overall who say ___ should be a a “major priority” to protect the waterfront



Differences in climate priorities

- Black and Latino voters are especially likely to say each climate proposal is a “major priority.” This echoes other surveys where climate change is of particular concern to communities of color.

Black and Latino voters more likely to say each proposal is a “major priority”

% of voters who say ___ should be a “major priority” for the new mayor when it comes to climate change

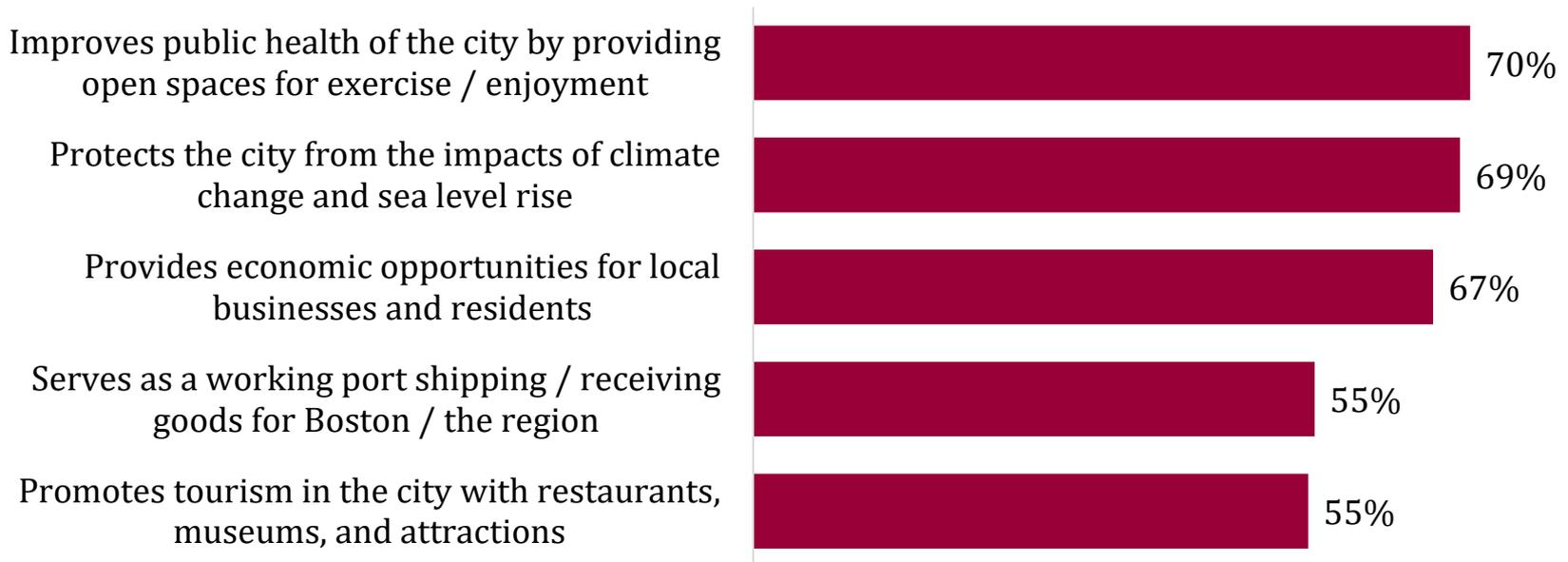
	Overall	White	Black	Latino	Asian
Providing training and jobs in industries that are good for the environment	76%	72%	81%	82%	65%
Ensuring buildings meet clean energy standards	76%	74%	83%	82%	59%
Creating a comprehensive plan to reduce carbon pollution and prepare for the effects of climate change	75%	71%	79%	81%	70%
Building up coastal barriers to protect against flooding and sea level rise	74%	70%	83%	78%	64%
Requiring new buildings be built to withstand coastal flooding and rising sea levels	67%	62%	72%	73%	71%
Creating new development and zoning plans for the district that take climate change into consideration	65%	61%	71%	73%	63%

Benefits of the waterfront

- Voters understand the value the waterfront brings to the city, from public health benefits and climate change protection to being a driver of a range of economic activities.

Voters call public health, climate benefits of waterfront “very important”

% of voters who say it is “very important” that the waterfront ___ for the city



Climate, tourism important to Black/Latino voters

- Black and Latino voters are more likely to say it is “very important” the waterfront protects the city from the impacts of climate change, echoing earlier findings.
- Black voters are also particularly likely to value the waterfront as a way to promote tourism in the city.

Black, Latino voters value waterfront to protect city from climate change

% voters who say it is “very important” that the waterfront _____

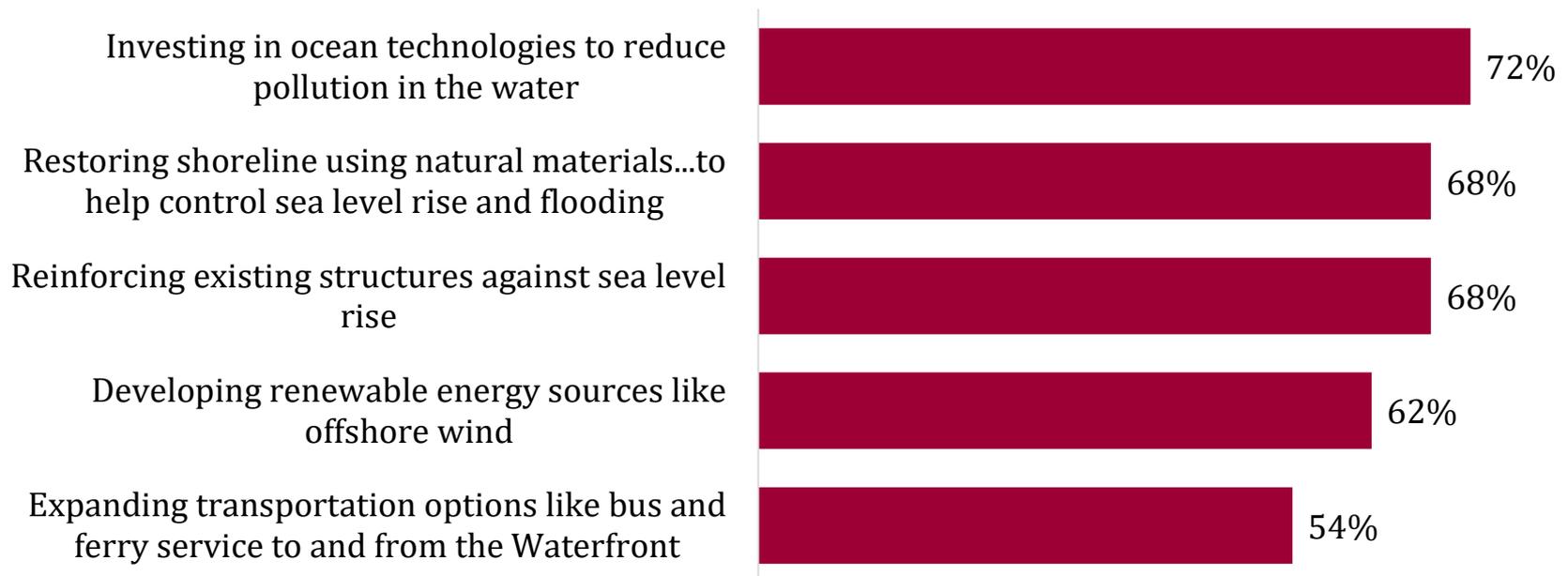
	Overall	White	Black	Latino	Asian
Improves public health of the city by providing open spaces for exercise / enjoyment	70%	71%	73%	65%	62%
Protects the city from the impacts of climate change and sea level rise	69%	66%	77%	73%	59%
Provides economic opportunities for local businesses and residents	67%	65%	73%	68%	54%
Serves as a working port shipping / receiving goods for Boston / the region	55%	58%	56%	53%	33%
Promotes tourism in the city with restaurants, museums, and attractions	55%	50%	63%	58%	50%

ARPA funding priorities

- Voters call a range of proposals for the waterfront a “major priority” when it comes to expected funding from the American Rescue Plan.

Wide array of ARPA funding proposals a “major priority” to voters

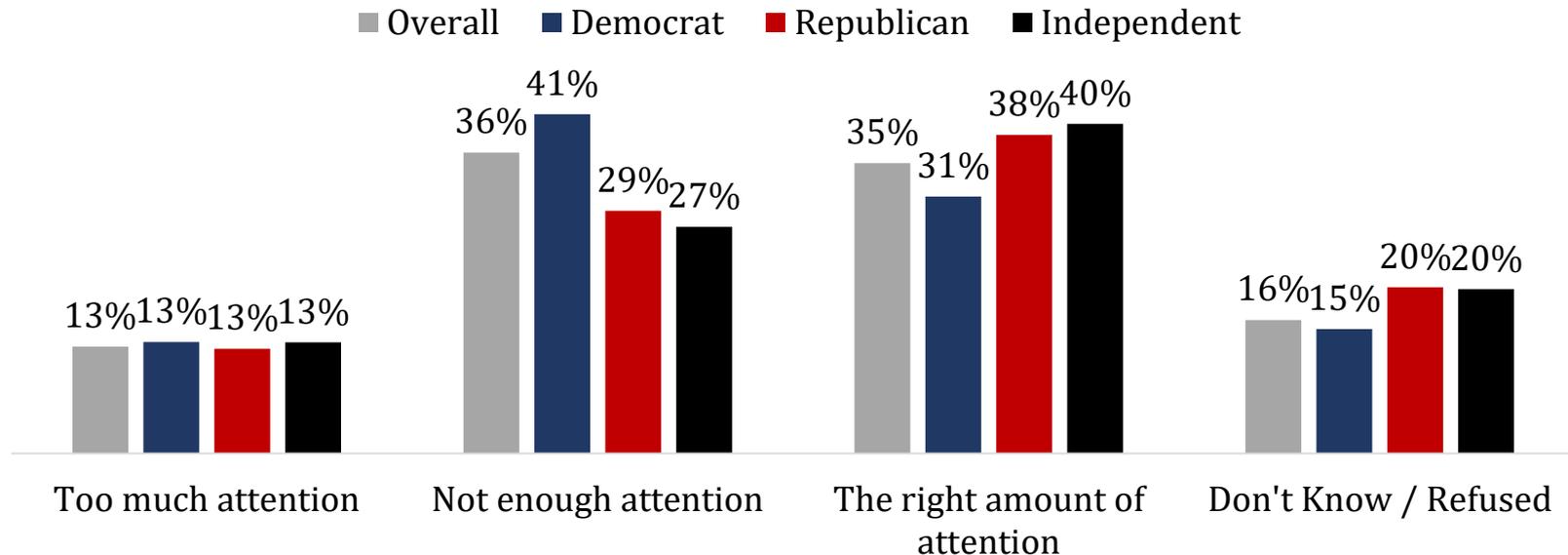
% of voters who say ___ should be a “major priority” for ARPA funding for the waterfront



Not enough attention from city leaders

- A third of voters say the waterfront does not receive enough attention from city leaders. Democrats are particularly likely to feel this way.

A third of voters say waterfront does not receive enough attention from city leaders
% of voters who say waterfront gets ____ from city leaders





info@massincpolling.com MassINCPolling.com [@MassINCPolling](https://www.instagram.com/MassINCPolling)

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