city council races

ranked choice voting

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voter turnout

policy and program recommendations

NYC VOTES

New York City Campaign Finance Board

The Campaign Finance Board (CFB) is a nonpartisan, independent city agency that empowers New Yorkers to make a greater impact on their elections. We are dedicated to making our local democracy more open, transparent, and equitable.

Voter Assistance Advisory Committee

The Voter Assistance Advisory Committee (VAAC) advises the CFB on voter engagement and recommends legislative and administrative changes to improve NYC elections.

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Year in Review

Year in Review

The 2023 election year was a transitional one in New York City. With a presidential election one year away—and a mayoral election another year beyond—New Yorkers had good reason to be engaged. A series of national and local issues generated intense public interest and civic engagement among New Yorkers. Still, that energy failed to generate broad excitement about New York City's off-year redistricting elections.

Every decade following the completion of the federal Census, New York State and City complete a redistricting process designed to ensure that district lines reflect the latest population and demographics. While off-year, local elections in New York City often yield lower turnout than federal or State elections held in even years, the City Council redistricting elections of 2023 were the first since 2003 to be held in a year without a citywide race on the ballot. As a result, turnout in both the 2023 primary and general elections was lackluster, reflecting the lack of competitive races on many voters' ballots. Only 7.2% of NYC voters turned out for the primary election in June and 12.8% turned out for the general election in November.

The results highlighted the importance of the Campaign Finance Board's work to engage New Yorkers through its NYC Votes initiative, the need for increased capacity for community-based civic engagement efforts, and the imperative to enact further reforms aimed at increasing participation in City elections. To address these needs, we reiterate our recommendation to align City elections with State and federal elections on even-numbered years, and we propose a new civic engagement fellowship program. See the "Policy and Program Recommendations" section for more details.

New York City's 2023 Elections

On November 7, 2023, all 51 New York City Council seats were up for election due to redistricting to reflect 2020 Census population changes. Despite elections in every district, New Yorkers mostly stayed home. As noted, the 2023 elections did not feature races for citywide offices and saw a relatively small number of competitive races. In the June primary election, 7.2% of NYC voters turned out and 12.8% turned out for the general election in November. Low turnout in New York is a recurring trend. From 2008 to 2018, only 3.1% of registered voters cast a ballot in every eligible election, while more than a fifth of voters

didn't participate in any.[1] See the "On the Ballot in 2023" section in this report for a detailed analysis of the 2023 elections in New York City.

City Council District 9

The primary election in Manhattan's City Council District 9, covering Harlem, generated attention after the incumbent dropped out of the race in May. The primary included two sitting assembly members and Yusef Salaam, who gained recognition as one of the "Exonerated Five."[2] Salaam won the June primary, was uncontested in the general, and has since become the Chair of the Public Safety Committee.[3] Of the 202,722 total voters that cast a ballot in the June primary across the City, District 9's voters comprised 14% of the turnout.

Party Politics

In a surprising election outcome, Republican Kristy Marmorato flipped the Bronx's City Council District 13 seat after Democrats had dominated the borough for decades. Marmorato's victory was likely related to controversy over the Democratic incumbent's support for an affordable housing project.[4] Notably, this was one of only a few City Council races where a challenger defeated an incumbent. Queens District 19 had one of the highest turnout races (22.4% of voters) in the 2023 general election, as the Republican incumbent, Vickie Paladino, defeated former City Council member and Democrat, Tony Avella.[5]

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1   2019–20 Voter Analysis Report. "Participation Score Research."

2   In 1989, five teenage boys of color were wrongly convicted and sent to prison for allegedly assaulting a female jogger in Central Park.

3   Mays, Jeffery C. "Yusef Salaam Is Declared Winner of Harlem City Council Primary Race." *The New York Times*, 05 July 2023.

4   Donaldson, Sahalie and Annie McDonough. "Why Did Marjorie Velázquez Blow It in the Bronx?" *City & State*, 09 Nov 2023.

5   "Vickie Paladino Wins Hotly Contested NYC Council Race in Queens; Many Still Up for Grabs." *ABC 7*, 08 Nov 2023.

New Districts

The redistricting process led to the consolidation of two City Council districts and the creation of a new district, both in South Brooklyn. Merging sections of the Bay Ridge and Coney Island neighborhoods into a redrawn District 47 sparked a heated race between two incumbents, Democrat Justin Brannan and Republican Ari Kagan, who switched party affiliation from Democrat the year prior.[6] The race, fueled by national issues and intra-party divisions, became the most competitive and highest turnout race in the general election at 23.0% turnout. Ultimately, the race ended with victory for Brannan. Brooklyn's District 43, encompassing Sunset Park, covered a vastly different area than before to reflect population changes from the 2020 Census, and in November, Democrat Susan Zhuang won the new seat, drawing a 13.6% turnout in the general election.[7]

Campaign Finance in the 2023 Elections

Campaign funds flowed into the primary and general elections, aided by New York City's matching funds program. The program is designed to reduce barriers to running for office by matching small-dollar contributions with public funds at a rate of $8-to-$1, thereby also increasing the political power of non-wealthy donors. Almost every City Council candidate participated in the program during the 2023 election cycle. In an analysis of the 2023 election cycle, we found that City Council candidates received 45,000 contributions totaling $6.5 million, and program participants received an additional $12.5 million in matched public funds towards their campaigns.

Ranked Choice Voting

New York City used ranked choice voting (RCV) in the 2023 primary election after its rollout in 2021. RCV allows voters to rank up to five candidates in order of preference on their ballots and 56.9% of primary voters took advantage of ranking. NYC Votes, an initiative of the CFB, educated voters on RCV through training and digital campaigns, reaching 4.3 million voters. Research on the impact of NYC's voter education shows a 2.2% increase in voter turnout after viewing ads, particularly among low-turnout groups like young voters.[8] See the "Ranked

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6   Kliger, Hannah. "Justin Brannan, Susan Zhuang Win Key City Council Races in Brooklyn." *CBS News*, 07 Nov 2023.

7   *THE CITY*. "Know Your District: City Council District 43." 08 Nov 2023.

8   Otis, Deb. "What We Learned from New York City's Second Ranked Choice Voting Election." *FairVote*. 2023.

Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section of this report for more information on ranked choice voting implementation and analysis.

To continue efforts to improve turnout, this report recommends a civic engagement fellowship program that allows for more customized support to meet the needs of our partners. See the "Policy and Program Recommendations" section of this report for more information on this recommendation.

Mail-in Voting Changes

New York legislators continued to expand access to our democracy by passing laws including strengthening early voting, voter protections, and ballot measure comprehension.[9] In 2023, New York State passed the New York Early Mail Voter Act, allowing any registered voter to apply for a mail-in ballot.[10] Historically, New Yorkers have only had access to mail ballots through the absentee ballot application process, which requires specific excuses, such as being out of town.[11] Expanding methods to vote is widely seen as a positive, but a lawsuit was quickly filed contesting that the law defied the New York State Constitution. Opponents also referenced the ballot proposal that voters soundly rejected in 2021, which would have amended the Constitution to include no-excuse mail-in voting.[12] In December, the New York State Supreme Court rejected the lawsuit, definitively giving voters the option to use this new system in 2024, with the Congressional District 3 special election as its first major test.[13]

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9   Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. "Governor Hochul Signs Legislative Package to Strengthen Democracy and Protect Voting Rights." 20 Sept 2023.

10   Ibid.; Voters can apply online or by form to receive a ballot at home to be returned on or before election day.

11   During the pandemic, the excuse-only law was suspended and voters had the option to vote by mail.

12   Golden, Vaughn. "GOP Moves to Block Early Mail-In Voting in House Special Election to Fill Seat of Lyin' George Santos." *New York Post*, 28 Dec 2023.

13   Solomon, Joshua. "No-Excuse Vote by Mail Remains Open to All New Yorkers, For Now." *Times Union*, 28 Dec 2023.

What's Ahead in 2024

As of publication, New York City voters can look forward to four scheduled election dates in 2024: two special elections in February, the April presidential primary, the June state and federal primary, and the November general election. In addition to the presidential race, New Yorkers will vote on a general election ballot proposal on whether to amend the State's Equal Rights Amendment to include additional characteristics for protection against discrimination—including ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation.[14]

The world's oldest democracy continues to be tested and challenged. Studies show that 62% of Americans are losing faith in our democracy, coinciding with a stark increase in polarization, violent threats against election workers, and misinformation, much of which is AI-driven.[15] The 2024 elections are predicted to be highly competitive and contentious. Despite low turnout in off-year elections, New Yorkers are more likely to participate in presidential election years, as evidenced by the 2020 elections, when 61.9% of voters turned out, and the 2016 elections, when 60.3% of voters turned out, as compared to the 12.8% turnout in the 2023 general election for city offices.

Decisions at the ballot box were made by very few New Yorkers in 2023 with turnout in the primary and general elections hovering in the single and low-double digits. Organizations across the city continue to educate voters and ensure resources are accessible for our culturally and linguistically diverse city. Still, New Yorkers can all be reminded of President Lyndon B. Johnson's powerful words upon signing the Voting Rights Act in 1965: "this right to vote is the most basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives people [...] control over their destinies."[16]

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14   New York Civil Liberties Union. "Equal Rights Amendment Advances to New York Voters in November 2024." 24 Jan 2023.

15   Vasilogambros, Matt. "In Face of Threats, Election Workers Vow: 'You are Not Disrupting the Democratic Process.'" *Stateline*, 29 Nov 2023.

16   The American Presidency Project. "Remarks in the Capitol Rotunda at the Signing of the Voting Rights Act."

NYC Votes
in 2023

NYC Votes in 2023

In 2023, the CFB continued its voter education and engagement work through the NYC Votes initiative. The goal of this work is to embolden all New Yorkers to take an active role in elections, with special attention given to traditionally overlooked communities and voters.

The CFB identified priority communities using data-driven research and identified barriers to engaging with democracy through thoughtful collaboration with community partners. We implemented relevant marketing and communication strategies to adapt to the changing needs of active and potential voters. Once we identified priority communities, we focused on increasing voter engagement and turnout.

Guided by a City Charter mandate, the CFB's NYC Votes initiative sought to connect with the 4.5 million active registered voters citywide over the course of the three elections, spanning a combined 55 days of voting. The 2023 election cycle resulted in surprising winners in New York City Council races, saw the passage of both ballot proposals, and ended with new court rulings to redraw congressional districts in 2024.

NYC Votes directly met the needs of voters throughout the election season with 8 million print Voter Guides sent to mailboxes across the city. We also provided critical election information through 236 voter engagement events attended by more than 2,600 New Yorkers citywide.
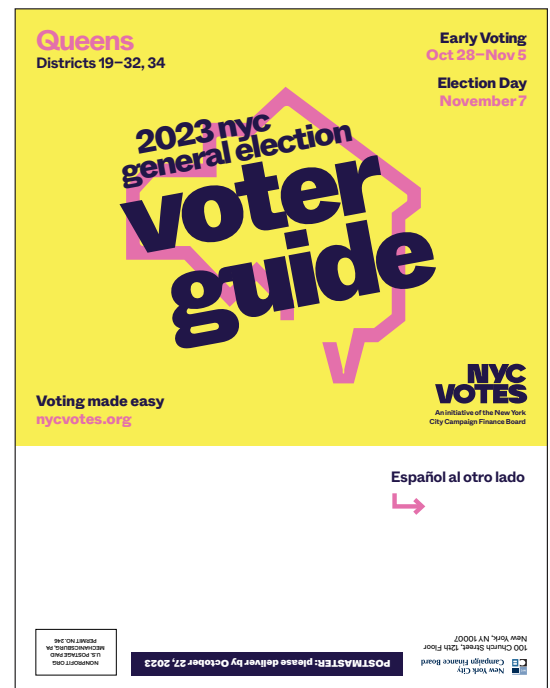
Engaging Low-Resource Communities

NYC Votes identified priority communities through an analysis of voter behavior that identified groups with low average voter turnout, who may lack access to political power. These communities included:

- Voters under the age of 30

- Immigrant voters

- Voters with limited English proficiency

- Voters with disabilities
- Voters impacted by the criminal legal system

Broadening Language Access

One critical component of reaching priority communities is engaging with these communities in the languages they use every day. To meet this need in 2023, NYC Votes expanded language coverage from four languages (Bengali, Traditional Chinese, Korean, and Spanish) to 13 languages (having newly added Arabic, Simplified Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, and Urdu). As mandated by Local Law 48 of 2022, we translated the 2023 Primary and General Election Voter Guides (print, online and video versions) in all 13 languages.

To ensure quality, the CFB's language access team adopted and implemented language industry best practices for its multilingual content. We created the CFB's first language glossary and style guide and procured computer-assisted translation tools to improve consistency, accuracy, and time to market (length of time from conception to launch) for translations across various materials.

In 2023, the language access team worked to translate more than three million target words in 13 languages, representing greater reach to a wider range of diverse communities. Translated materials included the language expansion of nycvotes.org, print assets such as palm cards, posters, and voting fact sheets for outreach events and partners, and videos shared online with in-language voice overs and subtitles. We conducted in-language presentations about ranked choice voting (RCV) and translated social media toolkits containing election-specific information and graphics for community partners, so that we were providing relevant resources needed for local engagement.

As part of NYC Votes' paid advertising campaigns (see more below), language coverage expanded from the four BOE languages (Bengali, Traditional Chinese, Korean, and Spanish), to eight languages (languages added include Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Russian, and Urdu). The languages spoken in our target communities drove the decisions regarding the languages used, placement of ads, and types of materials created.

The language access team delivered multilingual advertising materials for the June primary election and the November general election. We included out-of-home ads, digital and social media ads, video scripts for voice overs and subtitles, radio ads, community ethnic media ads, search engine keywords, and ad copy.

The CFB's language access efforts helped to better serve priority audiences over the past year. Expanding language coverage and adopting best practices led to improved consistency, quality, and delivery times of multilingual content. This ultimately led to more quality engagement with the City's diverse communities.

In 2024, the language access team will continue to strengthen the CFB's commitment to language access by developing its first Language Access Implementation Plan (LAIP). The LAIP will serve as a collective roadmap that focuses on expanding equity, improving services, and furthering an expansion of the language services provided for communities across the city.

Amplifying NYC Votes' Paid Advertising Expansion

In 2023, the NYC Votes initiative launched two paid advertising campaigns throughout the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Each campaign focused on key zip codes and the languages spoken by residents within these communities—primarily English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali. The primary and general election campaigns utilized 333 multilingual design assets and 96 multilingual explainer videos and reached more than 3.3 million unique individuals over the course of six weeks.

voter education

Paid Advertising

acquisition

awareness
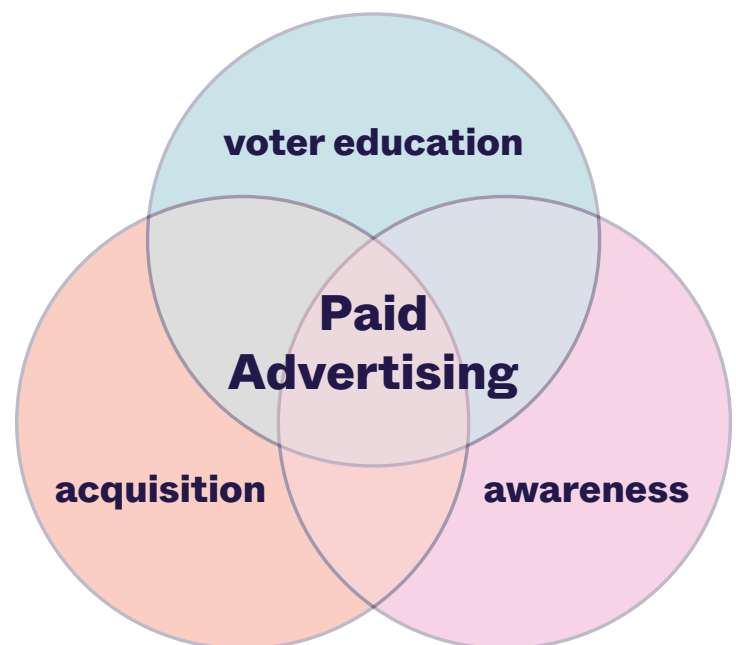
In 2023, the marketing strategy combined a digital-first approach with more traditional out-of-home advertising throughout New York City. Both were amplified with conversational tactics including e-blasts, video explainers, SMS alerts, and daily audience Q&As to further address voter questions and concerns.

Using key digital platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X, CTV display, YouTube, Twitch, Snap Inc.) to focus on voter education and drive urgency around key election dates, NYC Votes employed various audience modeling methodologies to improve targeting for voters under 30 and in-language audiences (two priority audiences), leading to impressive growth metrics. Our data showed that youth voters who saw ads between five to seven times were 2.8% more likely to engage with voting information, while our in-language audience expansion in 2023 led to a 20% increase in reach and engagement compared to the previous year. In 2023, each individual NYC voter saw our ads on average 13 times per week, resulting in about 88 million digital impressions across both campaigns.

The most effective out-of-home placements in both the primary and general election campaigns included traditional print spreads, bus shelters, digital sidewalk kiosks and subway Liveboards, animated screens on buildings and in malls, and LED trucks driving through priority neighborhoods and making stops at key partner events for increased visibility. Guerrilla marketing tactics, such as wheatpasted posters (paper posters adhered to public surfaces such as scaffolding and building facades) also continued to serve as powerful visual aids encouraging voters to head to the polls as they went about their daily lives. Bringing awareness to key election dates in priority neighborhoods drove viewers to the NYC Votes website, resulting in roughly 52 million offline impressions and 300,000 website views. Capitalizing on this

increase in visibility, website traffic, and voters directed to our social channels, NYC Votes expanded audience engagement and retention, further cultivating our relationship with partners, volunteers, voters, and contributors.

Learning from the wealth of data collected in 2023, the NYC Votes paid advertising strategy in 2024 will build on these three pillars of awareness, acquisition, and voter education. Over the next year, we plan on expanding to neighborhood murals, increasing radio reach, and utilizing new digital screens inside sporting arenas and other venues that draw large crowds of voters. 2024 will also see a large increase in efforts to register upwards of 100,000 new voters and grow our marketing lists.

Expanding Digital Reach With @nycvotes

NYC Votes adjusted to the rapidly changing digital landscape in 2023, sharing all voting information online. Across different platforms, engagement remained steady. At the end of 2023, NYC Votes had approximately 24,000 followers on Facebook, 19,000 followers on Instagram, and 13,500 followers on X (formerly Twitter). Instagram saw notable increases in profile reach (+17%), engagement (+69%), and impressions (+12%), indicating growing awareness of the @nycvotes content on that platform.

13,500 followers

24,000 followers

19,000 followers
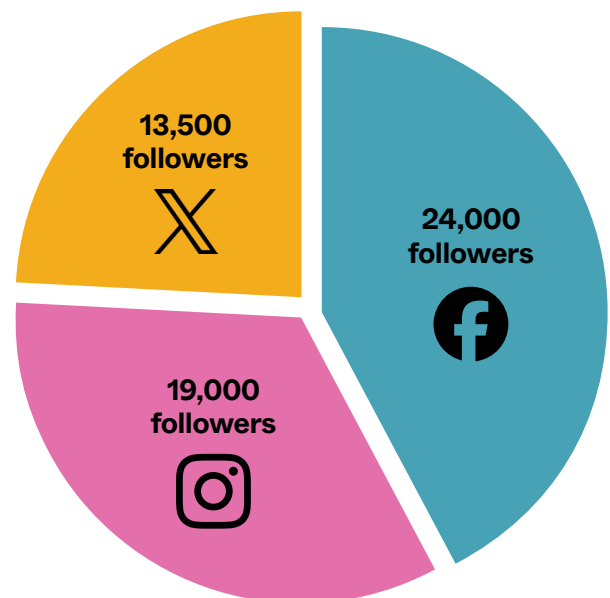
NYC Votes content created and shared online expanded to include the first American Sign Language video, first multilingual video, and additional videos about justice impacted New Yorkers. In an effort to reach new communities by making information more accessible to non-English speakers, we shared our translated versions of social graphics and partner toolkits in all 13 languages. NYC Votes also participated in a National Voter Registration Day campaign to broaden reach by partnering with a national initiative.

We expanded into more dynamic video content utilizing an "edu-tainment" approach that weaves complex content ideas with dynamic style. This approach was highly successful; our first viral video on Instagram, which racked up hundreds of thousands of views, was an explainer using Lego bricks to detail how votes are counted using RCV. Mini Voter Guides (condensed versions of the larger print guide) shared on Instagram helped apply the "Bite, Snack, Meal" approach to our content strategy. This approach addresses audience needs

on digital platforms by understanding differing appetites for content consumption. Some want more detailed content, while others want less. Slider posts, which allow users to swipe through several graphics on a single topic, helped us successfully share information on the June primary election. The success of these varied posts on Instagram indicated an appetite for simple and accessible voting information on the visual-dominant platform.

NYC Votes also expanded and achieved success in reaching new voters on Reddit, a platform new to the CFB. As a platform, Reddit allows for more in-depth conversation and substantive engagement with voters, meaning that the agency can gain a better sense of what New Yorkers are interested in talking about. In the profile's infancy, it has seen strong, positive engagement on the r/nyc subreddit.

Content over the past year also expanded to include matching funds and campaign finance explainers that clarified the CFB's initiatives, what the matching funds program is and how it serves New Yorkers, and how to look up who donated to candidates running for city offices.

In August 2023, facing national pressure from a federal ban on TikTok, New York City barred City government employees from using the platform on government-owned devices. This presented an unexpected hurdle in NYC Votes' social media strategy on the burgeoning platform, following the agency's successful entry onto the platform in 2022. The NYC Votes account remains active with 1,000 followers but is no longer managed.

In 2024, the social media strategy will develop a more inclusive approach and expand content that resonates with and informs voters in innovative ways including community partnerships, policy explainers, influencer and partner collaborations, digital events connected with local campaigns, events, and experiences that generate awareness.

Connecting with NYC on the Ground

In 2023, the NYC Votes initiative continued to address barriers to voting through partnerships with community organizations and outreach to voters. This work included identifying the systemic inequities that have historically led to low voter turnout. Examples of this work included: supporting the more than 49,000 people on parole in New York who had their voting rights restored but lacked access to voting information; reaching the 900,000 New Yorkers who experienced a disability, including mobility, hearing, vision, or cognitive impairments; and providing relevant information regardless of social or educational status, language, or location. The CFB focused on reaching neighborhoods in the South Bronx, North Central Queens, and South Brooklyn, which have been historically overlooked socio-politically and economically.

Throughout the year, NYC Votes partnered with 81 organizations through voter education efforts over the course of 467 hours. Education-based programming and events presented key election information and dates, shared the importance of voting, and taught attendees how to vote, who/what was on the ballot, and their rights as a voter.

On the ground outreach included election and voter registration information shared through 8,000 conversations with New Yorkers and 1.3 million text messages sent. This resulted in more than 2,000 newly registered voters, plus an additional 1,800 new citizens registered at naturalization ceremonies, and 28 voter registration events throughout the city. At these events, CFB staff helped New Yorkers register to vote in the days preceding the registration deadline, hosted early voting outreach near early voting sites, and led Get Out The Vote text banks to remind voters to cast their ballots.

8,000 conversations

1.3 million text messages

2,000 newly registered voters

1,800 new citizens registered

28 voter registration events

Lessons learned in the NYC Votes outreach work in 2023 will guide outreach efforts in 2024. Engaging with immigrant communities demonstrated the need to provide access to basic needs that must be met in order to show up and receive voting information, including safety, childcare, and transportation. Reaching voters with limited English proficiency required collaboration with community leaders and local interpreters who were able to facilitate engaging community conversations. Engaging with the Disability community required CFB staff to integrate accessibility measures into our outreach efforts. In engaging with voters impacted by the criminal legal system, CFB staff were reminded of the importance of

showing up year-round to offer a presence in communities in which election information is not always top-of-mind.

Additionally, offering support to event participants, in the form of food, paid transportation, or childcare, helped to enhance equity by providing resources necessary for participation. The CFB's outreach team discovered that peer-to-peer learning helped challenge traditional power dynamics in education, encouraged active participation, and brought diverse experiences to voting education. Finally, youth outreach illustrated the important role that first-generation immigrant youth play in their families and communities in serving as language interpreters, cultural mediators, education ambassadors, caregivers, and financial contributors.

Reaching the Next Generation

NYC Votes increased its efforts to reach youth voters in 2023 by partnering with key collaborators. Over the course of the year, the CFB's youth engagement team conducted 96 hours of youth-specific outreach including training, tabling, classroom visits, and community outreach. These engagement activities reached more than 1,100 young New Yorkers.

The youth initiatives prioritized collaboration with organizations that serve diverse and underserved communities. Collaborations with organizations including We Build the Block, Brownsville In, Violence Out, and The Legal Defense Fund included civic engagement workshops. A broad collaboration with the New York City' Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Office of Equity Strategies included tabling at events (such as ones held at the LGBTQ+ Center) and trained interns to conduct voter registration at ACS offices and sites. The CFB conducted a workshop at Pure Legacee, an organization based in East New York that supports young women impacted by the criminal legal system. A partnership with Urban Word offered four young New Yorkers paid training sessions, supporting them as they planned and hosted an event in May 2023 to inform their peers about the importance of voting. Another workshop was offered at the Children's Center group home to inform youth of their voting rights. Finally, the CFB partnered with the New York City Department of

Education and the Civics For All initiative to host seven trainings in February 2023 to support youth to lead voter registration efforts at their schools during the annual Civics Week.

The NYC Votes Youth Ambassador Program continued to offer opportunities to New Yorkers aged 14–19 committed to increasing youth engagement in local elections. The diverse range of young people came from all across the city, with varied socio-economic backgrounds, speaking more than 11 languages other than English. Ambassadors participated in 54 events across all five boroughs. They attended 47 in-person events, 30 of which were planned and hosted by Ambassadors themselves. Ambassadors registered 484 people to vote, through 83 hours of direct community outreach as part of in-person events and text banks. The program met young New Yorkers where they were while providing a foundation in government, local history, leadership, and advocacy.

"I feel like I've lived in a bubble my whole life and this program really challenged how I see the world and who I am."

Youth engagement efforts made notable progress from previous years. The youth engagement team hosted in-person Civics Week trainings for the first time since 2019. Ambassadors increased the number of direct outreach events from 15 events in 2022 to more than 50 events in 2023. The team also hosted and led the first in-person Youth Voter Assistance Advisory Committee hearing since 2019, sharing research and data presentations that they created over the course of the program.

2023 NYC Votes Youth Ambassadors at the Museum of the City of New York

2023 NYC Votes Youth Ambassadors
(from left to right: Sydnee Lin,
Carina Fu, and Luvaina Zarah)

"Literally the best experience of my entire life."

Looking to the Year Ahead

NYC Votes will look to engage New Yorkers and increase voting awareness in new and exciting ways in 2024 during a presidential election that will likely dominate the cultural conversation. The creation of the CFB's Language Access Implementation Plan will help address a key barrier to reaching all communities by continuing to expand the availability of voting resources in more languages. A thoughtful approach to our digital and marketing strategies will help activate New Yorkers to engage with dynamic voting content. Finally, new outreach with community organizations and expanded engagement with all New Yorkers will help democratize election information in an accessible way.

2023 Elections Turnout Summary

		June Primary	November General
	Eligible Voters	2,818,138	4,528,902
	Voters	202,722	578,877
	Citywide Turnout	7.2%	12.8%
Turnout by Borough	**Manhattan**	10.2%	15.5%
	Bronx	6.0%	9.3%
	Brooklyn	5.6%	12.9%
	Queens	8.6%	13.1%
	Staten Island	N/A	10.8%
Turnout by Age	**18–29**	2.9%	6.1%
	30–39	4.2%	8.8%
	40–49	5.0%	11.0%
	50–59	7.0%	13.8%
	60–69	11.2%	18.9%
	70–79	14.7%	22.9%
	80 and up	9.8%	15.2%
Vote Method	**Absentee**	9.7%	6.5%
	Early	21.9%	14.8%
	Election Day	67.6%	77.6%

Executive Summary

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Although all 51 New York City Council districts held elections in 2023, there were no citywide races, and many incumbents ran in uncompetitive races. Thus, it was a relatively quiet year at the ballot box in New York City and voter turnout reflected this. The 2023 Voter Analysis Report first takes a deep dive into voter registration and turnout trends, then turns to analyses of ranked choice voting (RCV) in its second year of citywide implementation, and concludes with two policy and program recommendations that address low voter turnout and expand the reach of the CFB's voter education and civic engagement mandate.

On the Ballot in 2023

In 2023, New York City had more than 4.5 million active registered voters, representing 81.8% of all citizens of voting age. Nearly 130,000 New Yorkers registered to vote for the first time in 2023, 58.4% of whom were individuals ages 18–29. In the June primary and the November general election, turnout among new registrants hovered just below turnout for already registered voters, although younger newly registered individuals turned out to vote at higher rates in comparison.

Figure 0.1: Voter turnout, newly registered voters and overall, 2023 primary and general election
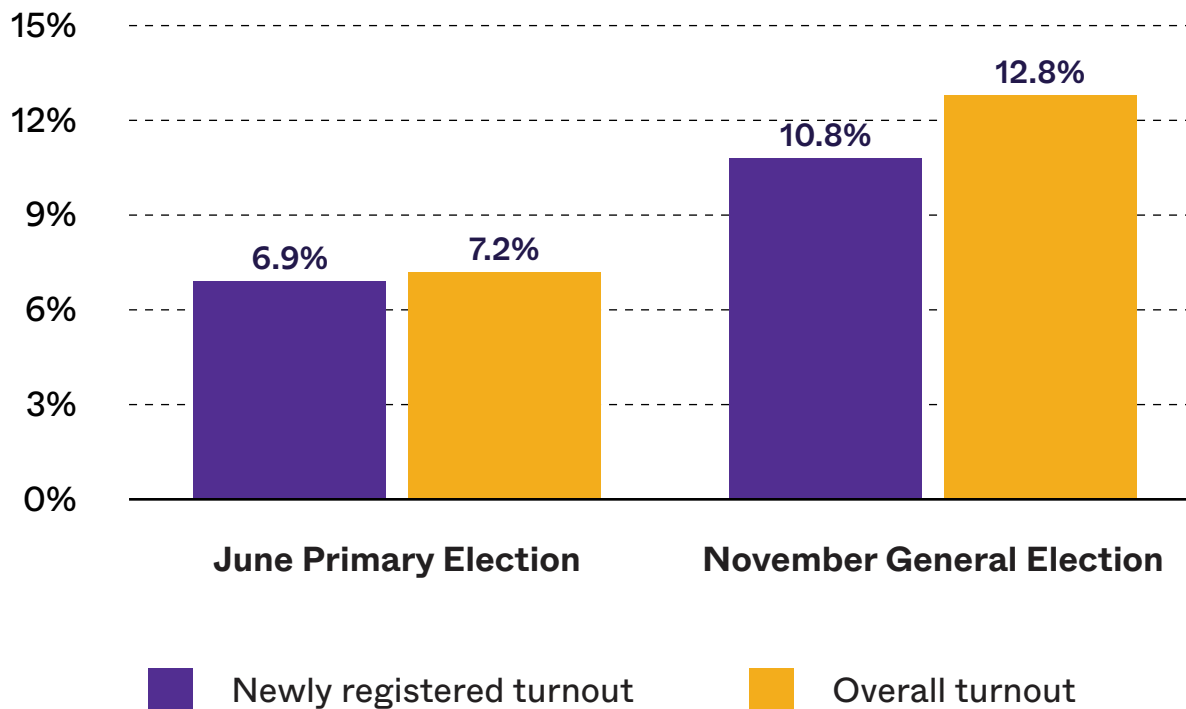
All 51 City Council seats were on the ballot because district lines were redrawn to account for population changes in the 2020 Census. However, most of these races included incumbents running for re-election in uncompetitive races. This likely contributed to low turnout in the primary and the general elections. In June, 202,722 voters cast their ballots, representing 7.2% of all eligible registered voters. In November, 578,877 voters cast their ballots, representing 12.8% of eligible registered voters.

Voter turnout varied by geographic location. In the primary election, turnout was highest in Manhattan and lowest in Brooklyn.[17] In the November general election, turnout was once again highest in Manhattan and lowest in the Bronx.

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17   There were no primary election races held in Staten Island.

Figure 0.2: Voter turnout by borough, 2023 primary and general elections

Borough	June Primary Turnout	November General Turnout
Manhattan	10.2%	15.5%
Bronx	6.0%	9.3%
Brooklyn	5.6%	12.9%
Queens	8.6%	13.1%
Staten Island	N/A	10.8%
Citywide	7.2%	12.8%

Some of the more competitive races drew higher turnout. This report disaggregates voter turnout rates by Community District and City Council district, which is depicted in the map below.

Figure 0.3: Voter turnout by City Council district, 2023 general election

Legend:
- 5.8%–9.2%
- 9.3%–12.7%
- 12.8%–16.1%
- 16.2%–19.5%
- 19.6%–23.0%
- NYC Parks and Greenspace
- Borough Boundaries
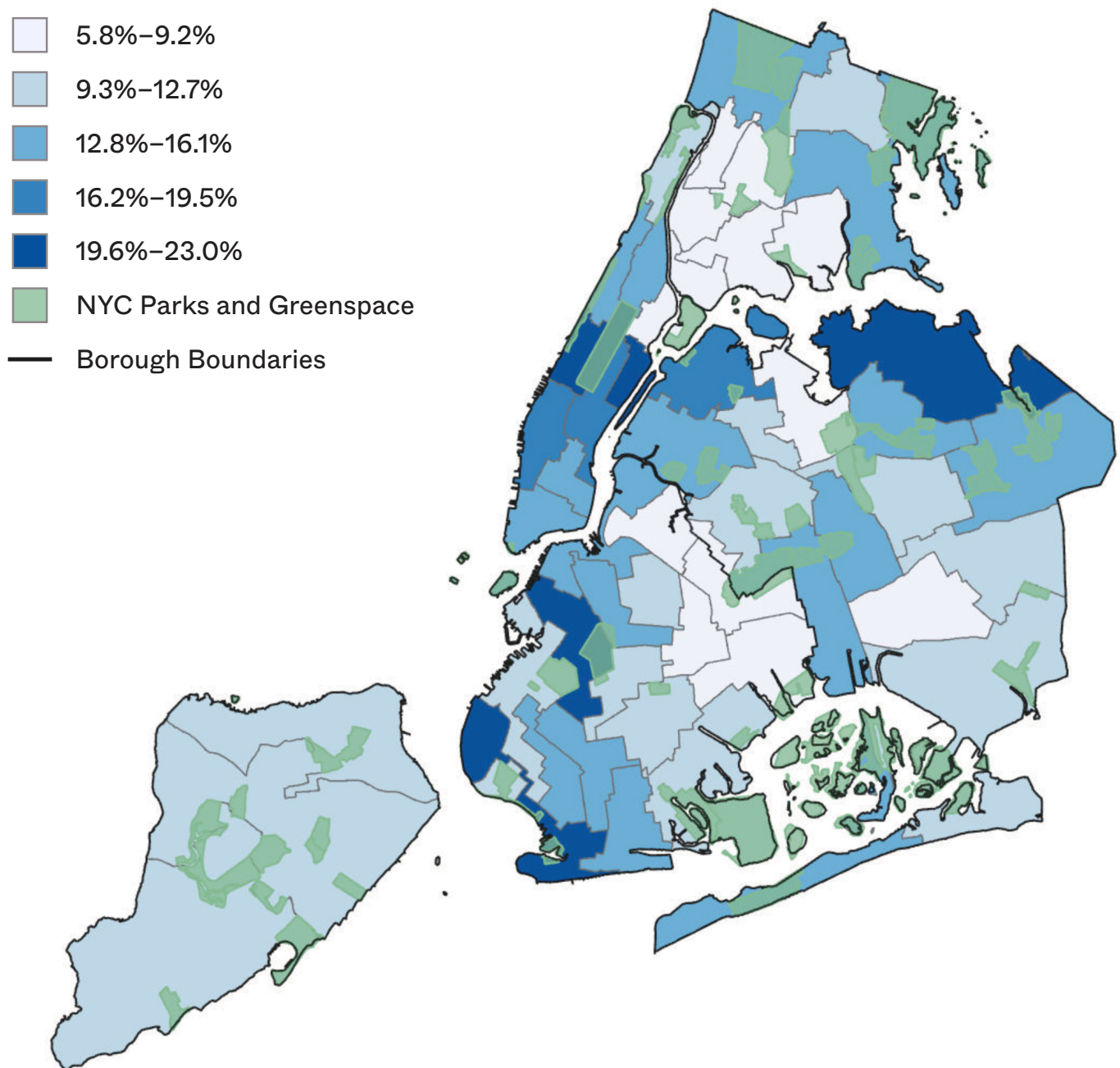
Voter turnout also varied by age, with the average voter skewing older than that of all registered voters in the primary and general elections.

Similar to 2021, more than three quarters of general election voters chose to cast their ballots on election day, while 14.8% utilized early voting and 6.5% voted via absentee ballot.

Finally, New Yorkers voted on two statewide ballot proposals, both related to debt limits for regions outside of the city. Both proposals passed overwhelmingly, city- and statewide.

Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis

2023 was the second year in which New York City utilized RCV in the primary election, following its successful rollout in 2021. However, with only City Council and judicial races on the ballot, and with many incumbents running for re-election in uncompetitive primaries, RCV was less of a defining feature of the election than it was in 2021.[18] In the 2023 primary election, there were 24 races held across 21 districts, all of which used RCV.[19] However, 87.5% of races were decided in the first round.

With a second year of RCV in the books, the CFB conducted analyses to identify RCV voting trends in the 2023 primary election and to compare voter behavior to that in 2021. Across the 24 primary races in 2023, 56.9% of voters ranked more than one candidate, slightly lower than the 65.5% of voters who took advantage of RCV for City Council races in 2021.

This section includes analyses of RCV voter behavior patterns including: bullet voting (ranking one candidate multiple times in the same race); RCV errors, both fatal (invalid) and non-fatal (mismarked but still valid); and exhausted ballots (ballots that do not rank either of the candidates who make it to the final round).

The CFB assigned a voter ranking score using a method developed in 2021 to compare how many choices voters ranked across districts. In 2023, the average ranking score across the city was 51.2 out of 100, meaning that on average, voters utilized just over half of their available rankings. Meanwhile, 2.7% of voters ranked all candidates on the ballot.

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18   Judicial races do not use ranked choice voting.

19   A few districts had closed primaries for multiple political parties.

Finally, we conducted a linear regression model to test the effects of various voter demographic factors on the ranking score. We found that holding all else constant across districts, when the share of the population who had less than a high school diploma increased, there was a significant decrease in the number of choices that voters ranked.

In the future, as more years of RCV data become available, along with collecting qualitative data from voters, the CFB will enhance its understanding of voter trends and target voter education and outreach efforts.

Policy and Program Recommendations

New York City has made great strides in voter education and outreach efforts in recent years but low turnout in the 2023 primary and general elections continued historic trends of low engagement in off-year elections. This year's Voter Analysis Report includes two recommendations to increase voter turnout and targeted voter education.

- **Recommendation 1: Align odd-year City elections with even-year State and federal elections**

  The first recommendation in this section reiterates a recommendation from the 2022–23 Voter Analysis Report to move odd-year City elections to even years to align with State and federal elections. Since even-year elections consistently have higher turnout, eliminating odd-year elections would likely increase New York City turnout for municipal races, meaning that decisions to elect local officials into office would more accurately reflect the voices of New Yorkers.

- **Recommendation 2: Implement a civic engagement fellowship program**

  In its second recommendation, the CFB outlines a plan to implement a civic engagement fellowship program that would place CFB fellows in local community-based organizations (CBOs) to expand the reach of CFB's existing voter education and civic engagement programs. While the CFB already maintains strong partnerships across the city, the fellowship program would deepen these relationships and the level of targeted outreach to CFB priority communities by embedding fellows within CBOs that have pre-existing trusted relationships with voters. This section highlights several local and national grantmaking and fellowship models, all of which are precedents that can be used when designing and implementing the CFB's civic engagement fellowship program.

On the Ballot in 2023

On the Ballot in 2023

In 2023, all 51 City Council seats were up for election because district lines were redrawn in 2022 to account for population changes from the 2020 United States decennial census. New Yorkers also voted on two statewide ballot proposals. Notably, there were no citywide office races.

The 2023 primary election, held on June 27, included primaries in 21 of the 51 council districts. This year was the second municipal election that used ranked choice voting (RCV) in the primary election. The general election, held on November 7, included elections in all 51 council districts, as well as two ballot proposals.

In both the primary and general elections, the competitiveness of the races varied by council district. One highly competitive race was in Brooklyn's District 43, a newly drawn district reflecting the growing Asian American population in South Brooklyn and the first district to have a majority-Asian American electorate. The open race was competitive in both the primary and general elections. Another competitive race in the general election was in Brooklyn's District 47, also in South Brooklyn, where the redrawn district included large swaths of two previously existing districts and therefore became a showdown between two incumbents.

The best recent comparison for the 2023 election cycle is 2003, the last time City Council seats were filled in a non-mayoral election year after the districts were redrawn to account for the decennial census population changes. However, the CFB does not have a historical record of the 2003 voter file. Instead, we chose to compare 2023 to the 2021 and 2017 election cycles. 2021 serves as a good comparison year because its elections also used RCV (then in its first year of implementation). However, most of the 2021 council races did not have incumbents running for re-election, whereas the majority of 2023 races did include incumbents. 2017 also serves as a useful comparison because, similar to in 2023, there were very few open races. However, 2017 included major citywide races such as Mayor and Comptroller that were not on the ballot in 2023.

Figure 1.1: Historic voter turnout by election cycle

Year	Election	On the Ballot	Primary	General
2017	City	Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, City Council	14.6%	25.2%
2018	Federal	U.S. Congress	11.3%	46.0%
	State	Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, State Senate, State Assembly	28.4%	
	City	Ballot Proposals	N/A	
2019	City	Council District 45, Queens District Attorney	11.9%	17.2%
	City	Public Advocate, Ballot Proposals	N/A	
2020	Federal/ State/City	President, U.S. Congress, State Senate, State Assembly, Queens Borough President	25.7%	61.9%
	City	Council District 37	N/A	
2021	City/State	Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, City Council, District Attorney, Judges	26.5%	23.3%
	State	Ballot Proposals	N/A	

2022	State	Governor, Lt. Governor, Comptroller, Attorney General, State Assembly, Judges	14.5%	38.3%
	Federal/ State	U.S. Congress, State Senate	14.7%	
	City/State	Ballot Proposals	N/A	
2023	City	City Council, District Attorney, Judges	7.2%	12.8%
	State	Ballot Proposals	N/A	

Voter Registration

At the end of the 2023 election cycle, the New York City voter file contained 4,528,902 active registered voters, representing a voter registration rate of 81.8% of the eligible voter population (citizens of voting age). This represents a decrease of 171,690 registered voters, or 3.6%, from the previous year.[20] Figure 1.2 displays the total number of eligible voters, the portion of eligible voters registered ("Registered Voters"), and the portion of registered voters who voted in the 2023 general election ("Actual Voters").

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20   As per New York State Election Law § 5-400, voters are deemed inactive if they moved outside the state, died, were convicted of a felony, or personally requested removal.

Figure 1.2: Shares of registered and actual voters, 2023 general election

578,877 Actual Voters
(12.8% of Registered Voters)

4,528,902 Registered Voters
(81.8% of of Eligible Voter Population)

5,534,353 Eligible Voter Population (Citizens of Voting Age)
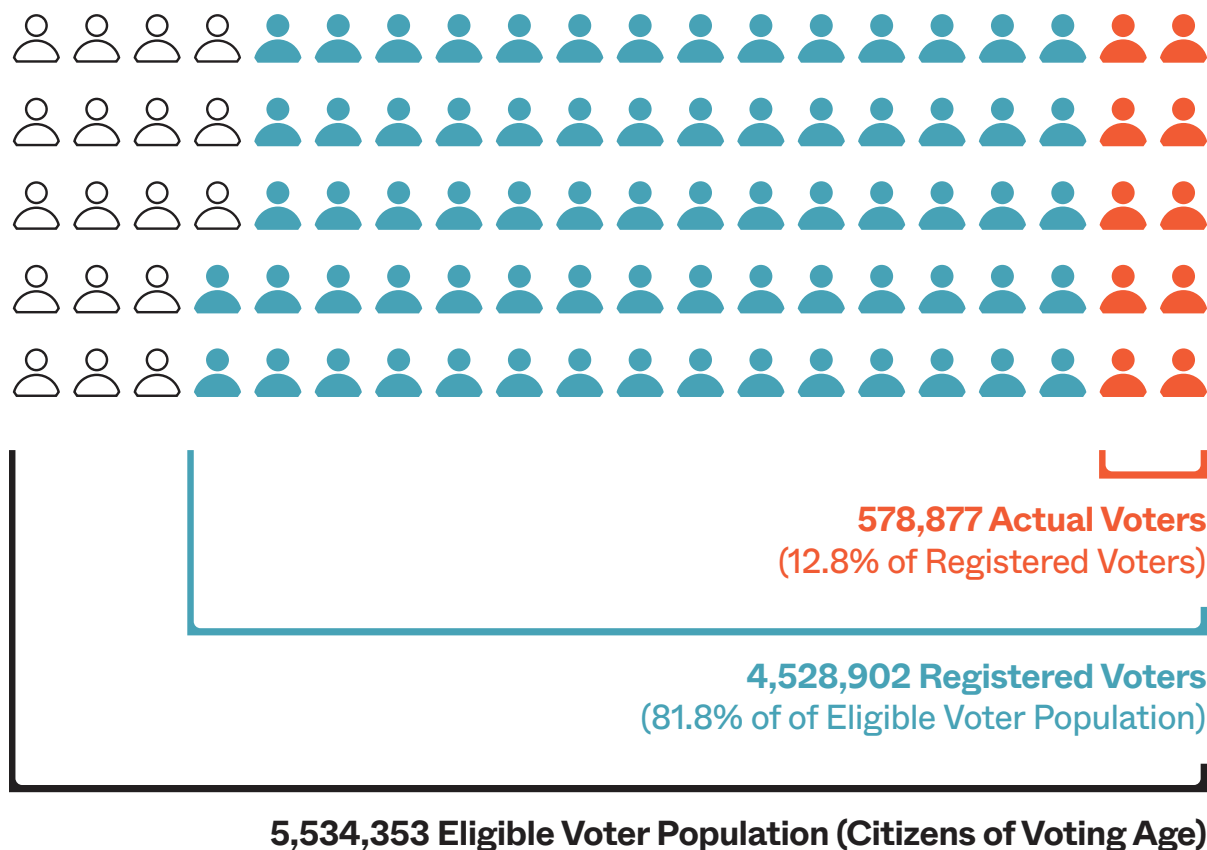
A total of 129,682 new voters registered for the first time in 2023. Of these new registrants, 52,980 registered before the deadline to be able to vote in the June primary election and 53,797 registered after the June primary election registration deadline but before the deadline to vote in the general election.

Of the newly registered voters eligible to vote in the primary, 6.9% turned out to vote, which is just shy of total turnout among all voters in the primary election (7.2%). In the general election, the turnout rate among newly registered voters was 10.8%, which fell behind turnout among all voters in the general election (12.8%).

Figure 1.3: Voter turnout, newly registered voters and overall, 2023 primary and general election
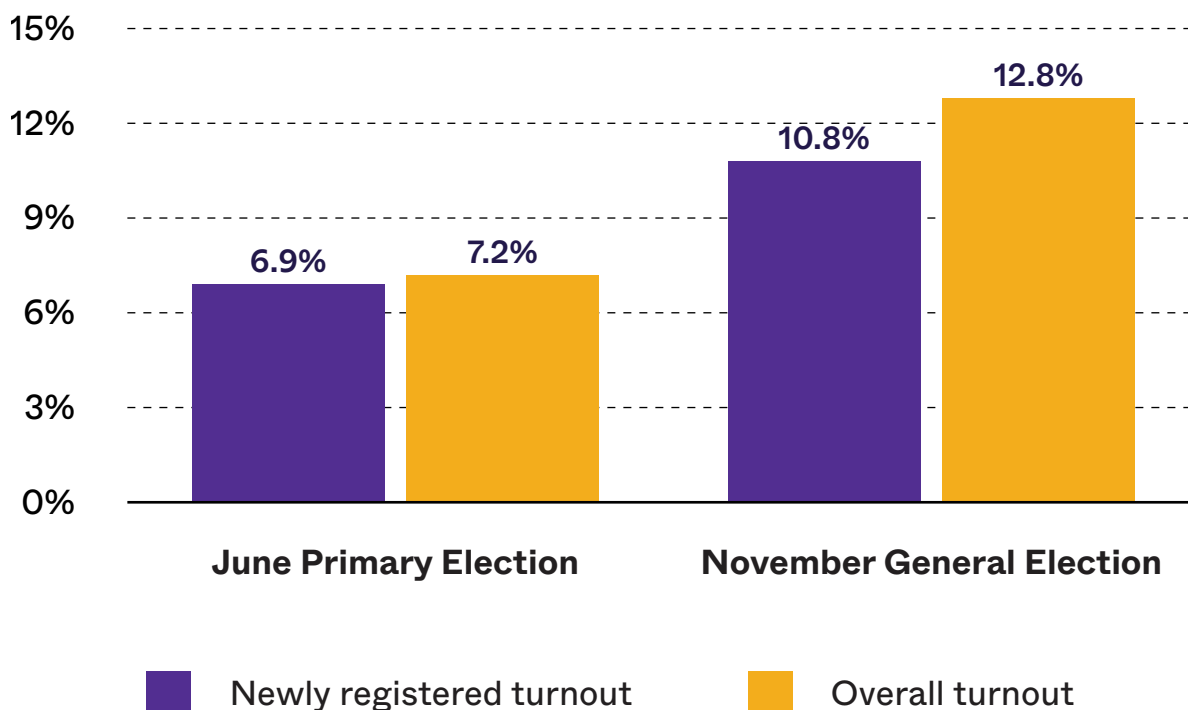
Newly registered voters skewed significantly younger than those who had been registered for a year or more, at an average age of 32 compared to 50.[21] While nearly 60% of newly registered voters were aged 18–29, newly registered voters were represented across all age groups, as shown in Figure 1.4 below.

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21   Age is calculated as of the date of the 2023 general election.

Figure 1.4: Distribution of newly registered voters by age group, 2023
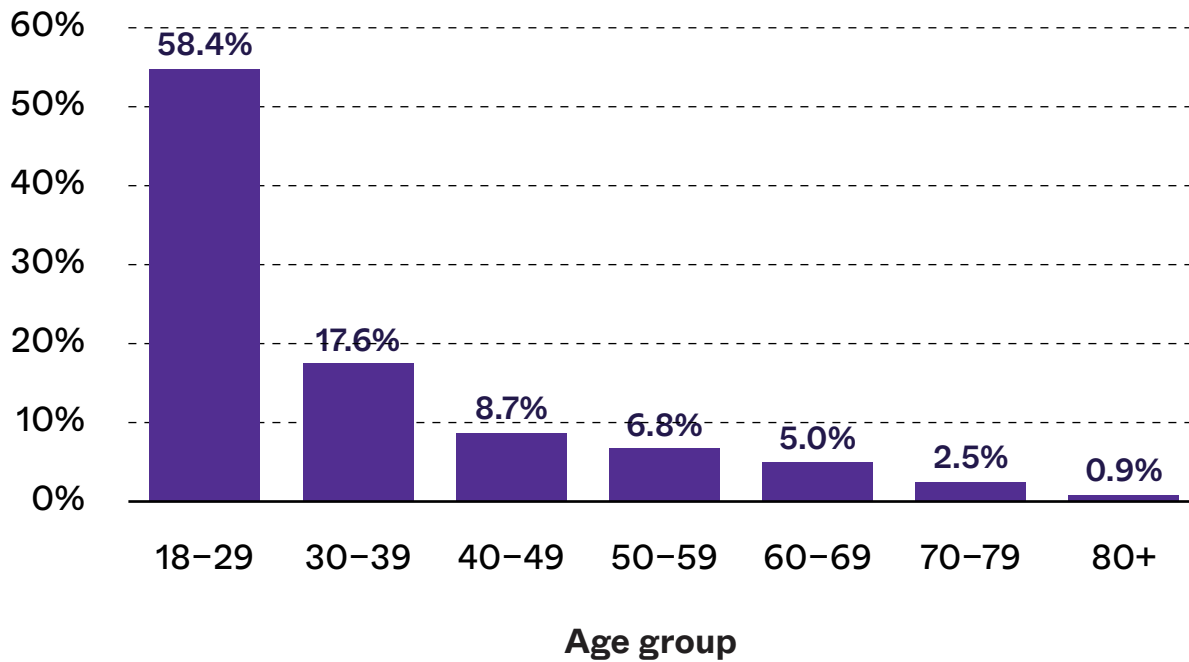
Not only were a majority of newly registered voters younger, but they also turned out to vote at higher rates than their already registered counterparts, surpassing overall voter turnout for all age groups below 60. For example, turnout among newly registered voters aged 30–39 and 40–49 was 3.0% higher than overall voter turnout in those age groups. This trend was reversed for groups aged 60–69 and 70–79, in which newly registered voters turned out at lower rates, though the share of newly registered voters was much smaller among these age groups.

Figure 1.5: Voter turnout by age group, newly registered voters and overall, 2023 general election

Legend: Newly registered voters (purple), All voters (orange)

Values by age group:
- 18–29: 8.5% (Newly registered), 6.1% (All voters)
- 30–39: 11.9%, 8.8%
- 40–49: 14.0%, 11.0%
- 50–59: 15.1%, 13.8%
- 60–69: 17.8%, 18.9%
- 70–79: 19.3%, 22.9%
- 80+: 19.4%, 15.2%
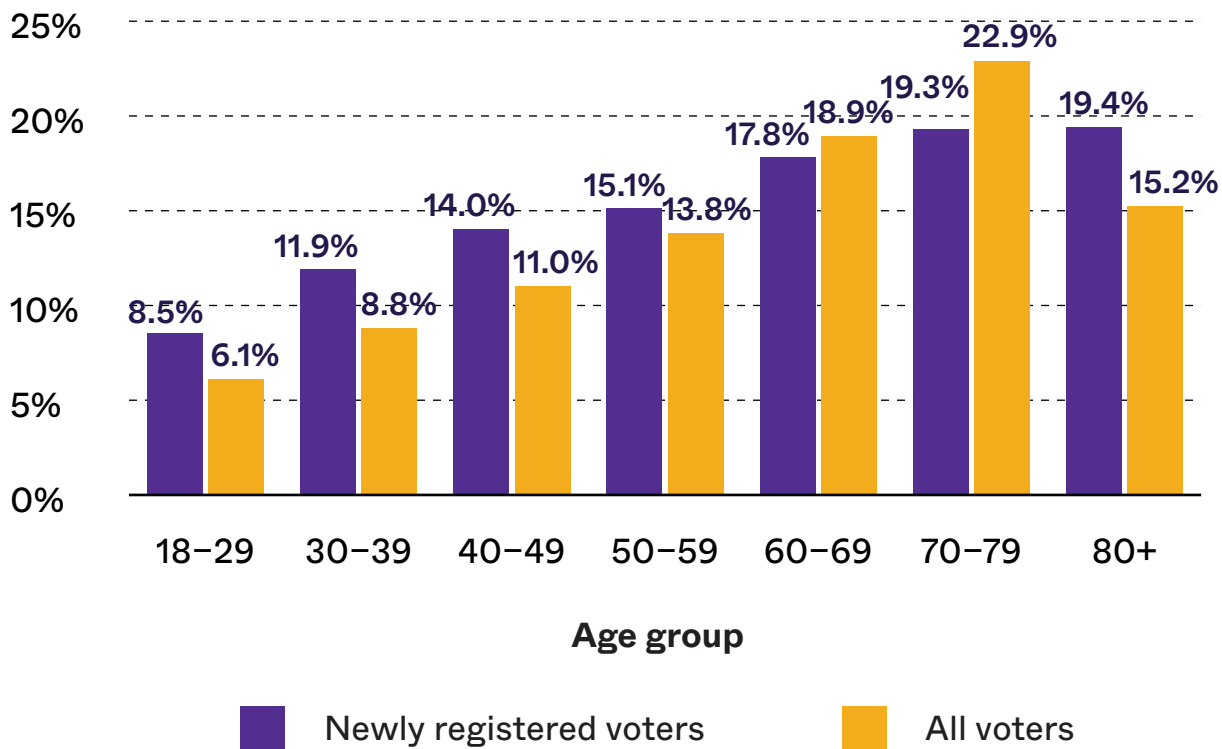
Primary Election Analysis

New York holds closed primary elections, meaning that a voter must be a registered member of a party to vote in that party's primary election. Voters who are not registered party members or who are registered with a political party that is not holding a primary election are not eligible to vote in primary elections. In the June primary, 202,722 voters cast their ballot, representing 7.2% of eligible registered voters.

Figure 1.6: Citywide voter turnout, 2023 primary election

Actual voters	Eligible registered voters	Citywide voter turnout
202,722	2,818,138	7.2%

Voter turnout in the primary election was remarkably low. In comparison, turnout was nearly quadruple the 2023 rate in the 2021 primary (26.5%) and double the 2023 rate in the 2017 primary (14.9%). The following sections further discuss 2023 primary election turnout across geography and age groups.

Location of Voters

Voter turnout for the 2023 primary varied by borough. Turnout was highest in Manhattan (10.2%), consistent with prior year trends (highest in Manhattan in 2021 at 33.4% and 2017 at 17.7%). Turnout was lowest in Brooklyn (5.6%), unlike in 2021 (lowest in Bronx at 19.1%) and 2017 (lowest in Staten Island at 11.5%). No primaries were held in Staten Island in 2023.

Figure 1.7: Voter turnout by borough, primary election, 2017, 2021, and 2023

Borough	2017 (September)		2021 (June)		2023 (June)	
	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout
Manhattan	121,250	17.7%	274,264	33.4%	44,911	10.2%
Bronx	68,889	12.3%	117,445	19.1%	32,595	6.0%
Brooklyn	162,194	15.7%	336,591	27.5%	59,509	5.6%
Queens	90,013	12.0%	233,836	25.0%	65,707	8.6%
Staten Island	14,536	11.5%	51,291	22.4%	N/A	N/A
Citywide	457,111	14.5%	1,013,427	26.5%	202,722	7.2%

Age of Voters

The average age of voters in the 2023 primary was 60, approximately ten years older than the average age of all registered voters. On average, voters in 2023 were older than voters in 2021, for which the average age was 54.

Figure 1.8: Average age of voters, 2023 primary election

	All registered voters	Actual voters
Average age	50	60

While voters under 30 have historically turned out in low numbers, youth voter turnout in 2023 was remarkably low, at 2.9% of all registered young voters, compared to 17.9% in 2021 and 7.0% in 2017.

On the flip side, the age group with the highest voter turnout in the 2023 primary was voters aged 70–79, at 14.7%, more than double the overall turnout. Voters aged 70–79 also had the highest turnout in 2017 and 2021.

Figure 1.9: Voter turnout by age group, primary election, 2017, 2021, and 2023

Age group	2017 (September)	2021 (June)	2023 (June)
18–29	7.0%	17.9%	2.9%
30–39	10.0%	21.7%	4.2%
40–49	12.3%	24.0%	5.0%
50–59	16.6%	28.8%	7.0%
60–69	22.7%	35.3%	11.2%
70–79	25.9%	37.7%	14.7%
80+	17.3%	23.2%	9.8%

Overall, voters aged 60–69 made up the largest share of the electorate in the primary (24.1%), closely followed by voters aged 70–79 (21.9%). Voters aged 18–29 made up the lowest share of the electorate (6.3%).

Figure 1.10: Distribution of voters by age group, 2023 primary election

Age group

- 18–29
- 30–39
- 40–49
- 50–59
- 60–69
- 70–79
- 80+

6.3%
11.2%
11.0%
15.5%
24.1%
21.9%
9.8%
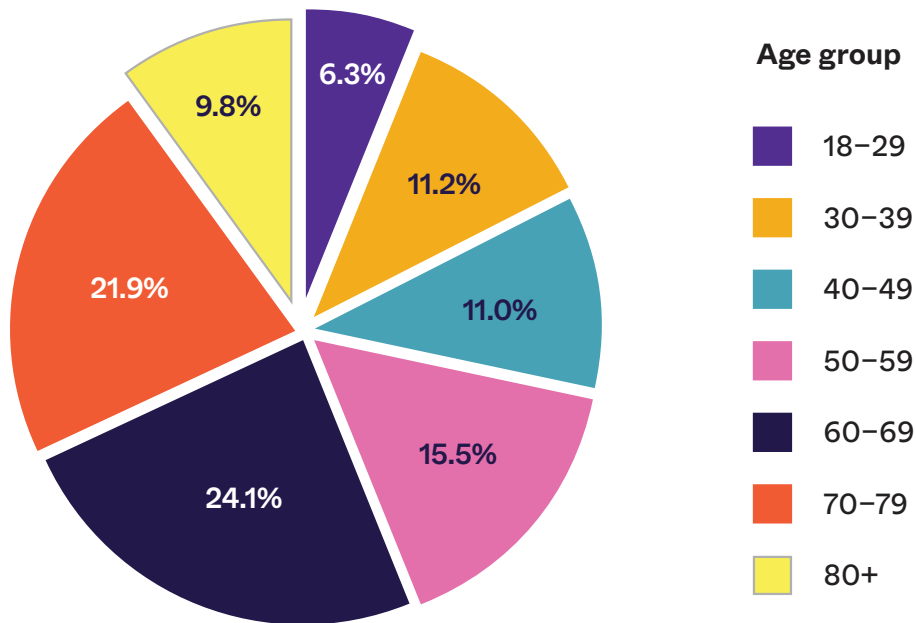
Special Election Analysis

On September 12, 2023, New York City held a special election in Queens Assembly District 27, called on July 24, after former Assembly member David Rosenthal stepped down.[22] The nominees were Sam Berger (Democrat) and David P. Hirsch (Republican, Conservative). Voter turnout was relatively low at 7.3%, a turnout rate typical of special elections in NYC. Older voters turned out at the highest rates, with voters aged 70–79 at 14.3%, voters aged 60–69 at 10.8%, and voters aged 80 years and above at 10.5%. On the other hand, younger voters had the lowest turnout, with voters aged 30–39 at 3.6% and voters aged 18–29 at 3.9%. Democrat Sam Berger won the election with 2,555 total votes and now holds the seat for the Assembly District 27.[23]

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22   Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. "Governor Hochul Announces Special Election in 27th Assembly District." 24 Jul 2023.

23   City of New York, Board of Elections. 2023 Special Election - Assembly District 27 - September 26, 2023.

General Election Analysis

All registered voters in New York City are eligible to vote in the general election, regardless of political party affiliation. At the time of the 2023 general election, there were 5,528,902 eligible registered voters in New York City.

As is usually the case, turnout was higher in the general election than in the primary election. In the general election, 12.8% of eligible registered voters turned out to vote, compared to 7.2% in the primary. However, general election turnout in 2023 was substantially lower than in 2021 (23.3%) and 2017 (25.2%).

Figure 1.11: Citywide voter turnout, general election, 2017, 2021, and 2023

	2017 General	2021 General	2023 General
Actual voters	1,149,469	1,147,555	578,877
Eligible registered voters	4,586,427	4,919,037	4,528,902
Citywide voter turnout	25.2%	23.3%	12.8%

Location of Voters

Unlike in the primary election, Manhattan had the highest voter turnout of all boroughs in the general election, at 15.5%. In both 2017 and 2021, Staten Island had the highest turnout in the general election. Conversely, the Bronx had the lowest general election turnout, at 9.3%. In both 2017 and 2021, the Bronx also had the lowest general election turnout.

Figure 1.12: Voter turnout by borough, general election, 2017, 2021, and 2023

Borough	2017 General		2021 General		2023 General	
	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout
Manhattan	265,953	26.7%	274,879	26.3%	143,572	15.5%
Bronx	150,410	20.8%	133,923	17.5%	64,182	9.3%
Brooklyn	351,265	24.6%	345,238	22.4%	183,049	12.9%
Queens	281,010	24.4%	286,445	22.9%	155,178	13.1%
Staten Island	99,600	34.4%	107,070	33.7%	32,896	10.8%
Citywide	1,149,469	25.2%	1,147,555	23.3%	578,877	12.8%

In the 2023 general election, turnout by community district ranged from a low of 5.1% in Bronx Community District 1 (Melrose, Mott Haven, and Port Morris) to a high of 25.0% in Brooklyn Community District 10 (Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights). Figure 1.13 displays voter turnout by community district compared to the overall turnout across the city.

Bronx Community Districts 1 through 6, covering neighborhoods in the South Bronx, accounted for the six of the seven lowest turnout districts in 2023, and were also six of the seven lowest turnout community districts in 2021. Meanwhile, the three community districts with the highest turnout in 2023—Manhattan 7 (Upper West Side), Brooklyn 10 (Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights), and Brooklyn 6 (Park Slope and Carroll Gardens)—were all also in the top five in 2021.

Figure 1.13: Voter turnout by Community District, 2023 general election

District	Turnout
(Bay Ridge-Dyker Heights) **Brooklyn CD 10**	25.0%
(Upper West Side) **Manhattan CD 7**	21.4%
(Park Slope-Carroll Gardens) **Brooklyn CD 6**	20.6%
(Auburndale-Bayside-Douglaston) **Queens CD 11**	19.8%
(East Midtown-Murray Hill) **Manhattan CD 6**	19.4%
(Upper East Side-Roosevelt Island) **Manhattan CD 8**	18.6%
(Flushing-Murray Hill-Whitestone) **Queens CD 7**	17.8%
(Chelsea-Hell's Kitchen) **Manhattan CD 4**	17.7%
(Downtown Brooklyn-Fort Greene) **Brooklyn CD 2**	17.1%
(Greenwich Village-SoHo) **Manhattan CD 2**	16.9%
(Co-op City-Throgs Neck) **Bronx CD 10**	16.9%
(The Rockaways) **Queens CD 14**	16.5%
(Riverdale-Kingsbridge-Marble Hill) **Bronx CD 8**	16.4%
(Forest Hills-Rego Park) **Queens CD 6**	16.1%
(Astoria-Queensbridge) **Queens CD 1**	15.7%
(Sunset Park-Windsor Terrace) **Brooklyn CD 7**	15.5%
(Coney Island-Brighton Beach) **Brooklyn CD 13**	15.5%
(Long Island City-Sunnyside-Woodside) **Queens CD 2**	14.6%
(Financial District-Tribeca) **Manhattan CD 1**	14.6%
(Borough Park-Kensington) **Brooklyn CD 12**	13.8%
(Bensonhurst-Bath Beach) **Brooklyn CD 11**	13.7%
(Crown Heights) **Brooklyn CD 8**	13.6%
(Flatbush-Midwood) **Brooklyn CD 14**	13.5%
(Sheepshead Bay-Gravesend) **Brooklyn CD 15**	13.4%
(Lower East Side-Chinatown) **Manhattan CD 3**	13.3%
(Fresh Meadows-Hillcrest-Briarwood) **Queens CD 8**	13.1%
(Queens Village-Bellerose-Rosedale) **Queens CD 13**	13.0%
(Midtown-Flatiron-Union Square) **Manhattan CD 5**	13.0%
(Harlem) **Manhattan CD 10**	13.0%

Turnout	District
12.4%	**Bronx CD 11** (Pelham Parkway-Morris Park)
11.7%	**Queens CD 3** (Jackson Heights-East Elmhurst)
11.5%	**Manhattan CD 9** (Morningside Heights-Hamilton Heights)
11.4%	**Brooklyn CD 9** (Crown Heights)
11.3%	**Staten Island CD 1** (North Shore)
11.2%	**Brooklyn CD 18** (Canarsie-Flatlands)
10.7%	**Staten Island CD 3** (South Shore)
10.6%	**Queens CD 5** (Ridgewood-Maspeth-Middle Village)
10.5%	**Staten Island CD 2** (Mid-Island)
10.5%	**Brooklyn CD 3** (Bedford-Stuyvesant)
10.0%	**Manhattan CD 12** (Washington Heights-Inwood)
9.8%	**Queens CD 12** (Jamaica-St. Albans-Hollis)
9.8%	**Brooklyn CD 1** (Williamsburg-Greenpoint)
9.6%	**Bronx CD 12** (Wakefield-Williamsbridge-Eastchester)
9.5%	**Brooklyn CD 17** (East Flatbush)
9.4%	**Manhattan CD 11** (East Harlem)
8.5%	**Queens CD 9** (Kew Gardens-Richmond Hill-Woodhaven)
8.4%	**Queens CD 10** (South Ozone Park-Howard Beach)
8.2%	**Brooklyn CD 4** (Bushwick)
8.1%	**Bronx CD 9** (Soundview-Parkchester)
8.0%	**Queens CD 4** (Elmhurst-Corona)
7.5%	**Brooklyn CD 16** (Ocean Hill-Brownsville)
7.2%	**Brooklyn CD 5** (East New York-Cypress Hills)
7.1%	**Bronx CD 4** (Highbridge-Concourse)
6.8%	**Bronx CD 7** (Fordham-Bedford Park-Norwood)
6.6%	**Bronx CD 5** (Morris Heights-Mount Hope)
6.0%	**Bronx CD 2** (Longwood-Hunts Point)
5.9%	**Bronx CD 6** (Tremont-Belmont-West Farms)
5.7%	**Bronx CD 3** (Morrisania-Crotona Park East)
5.1%	**Bronx CD 1** (Melrose-Mott Haven-Port Morris)

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25%

🟧 Lower than citywide average　　🟦 Higher than citywide average

Since some races were more competitive than others, it is difficult to meaningfully compare turnout across districts and years. Despite these challenges, there are still patterns to note.
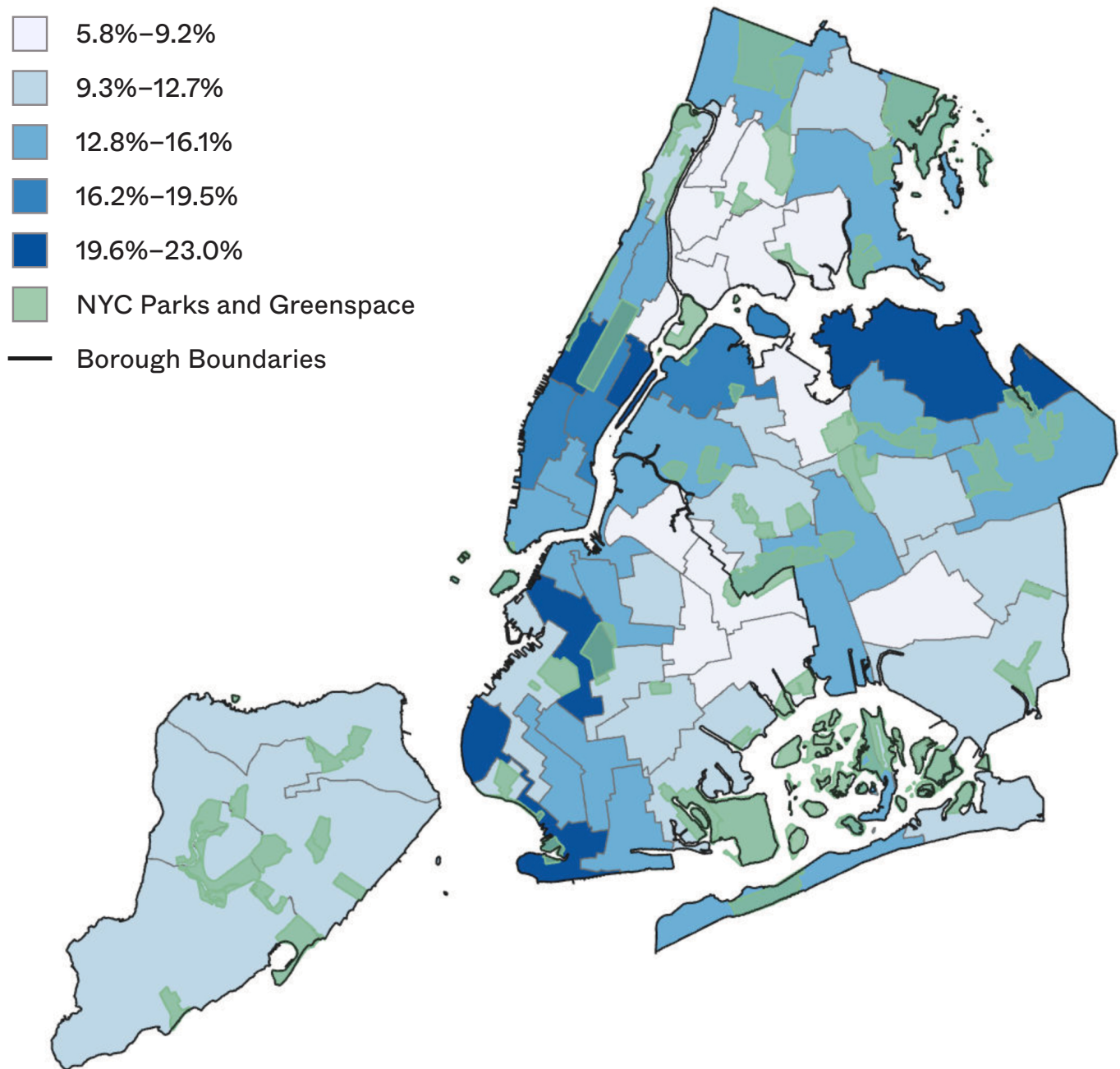
Some of the Community Districts that saw increases in voter turnout from 2021 represent neighborhoods that fell within competitive City Council districts races in 2023.

- Increased turnout in **South Brooklyn** Community Districts 7 (Sunset Park and Windsor Terrace), 10 (Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights), and 13 (Coney Island and Brighton Beach) can likely be attributed to competitive races in Council Districts 43 (currently represented by Democrat Susan Zhuang), 47 (currently represented by Democrat Justin Brannan), and 48 (currently represented by Republican Inna Vernikov).

- Increased turnout in **Queens** Community Districts 7 (Flushing, Murray Hill, and Whitestone) and 10 (South Ozone Park and Howard Beach) overlap with the competitive races in Council Districts 19 (currently represented by Republican Vickie Paladino), 20 (currently represented by Democrat Sandra Ung), and 23 (currently represented by Democrat Linda Lee).

- Increased turnout in **Bronx** Community District 10 (Co-op City and Throgs Neck) was likely a result of the competitive race in Council District 13 (currently represented by Republican Kristy Marmorato).

Figure 1.14 below displays voter turnout in the 2023 general election by City Council district. The competitive races listed above all had voter turnout rates that surpassed overall citywide turnout in 2023.

Figure 1.14: Voter turnout by City Council district, 2023 general election

- ☐ 5.8%–9.2%
- ☐ 9.3%–12.7%
- ☐ 12.8%–16.1%
- ☐ 16.2%–19.5%
- ☐ 19.6%–23.0%
- ☐ NYC Parks and Greenspace
- — Borough Boundaries

Age of Voters

On average, voters in the general election once again skewed older (average age of 57) than that of all registered voters (average age of 50). However, those voting in the general election were slightly younger than those voting in the primary election (average age of 57 compared to 60, respectively).

Figure 1.15: Average age of voters, 2023 general election

	All registered voters	Actual voters
Average age	50	57

As in the primary, youth turnout fell short of overall turnout in the general election. Only 6.1% of eligible registered voters aged 18–29 cast their ballots. While still relatively low, voters under 30 turned out at higher rates in previous years (11.1% in 2021 and 14.0% in 2017). Older voters aged 60–69 and 70–79 turned out in 2023 at higher rates than their younger peers, at 18.9% and 22.9%, respectively.

Figure 1.16: Voter turnout by age, general election, 2017, 2021, and 2023

Age group	2017 General	2021 General	2023 General
18–29	14.0%	11.1%	6.1%
30–39	19.9%	16.3%	8.8%
40–49	24.8%	22.1%	11.0%
50–59	30.2%	28.7%	13.8%
60–69	35.7%	35.4%	18.9%
70–79	36.2%	37.9%	22.9%
80+	22.4%	23.2%	15.2%

When looking at the distribution of voters by age, in the general election, voters aged 50−79 made up nearly 60.0% of the electorate (with aged 60−69 making up the largest share at 21.6% followed by aged 70−79 at 18.0% and aged 50−59 at 17.0%). Once again, voters aged 80 and above made up the smallest share (7.7%). Young voters in the general election made up a slightly larger share of the electorate than they did in the primary election (8.3% compared to 6.3%).

Figure 1.17: Distribution of voters by age group, 2023 general election

Age group

- 18−29
- 30−39
- 40−49
- 50−59
- 60−69
- 70−79
- 80+
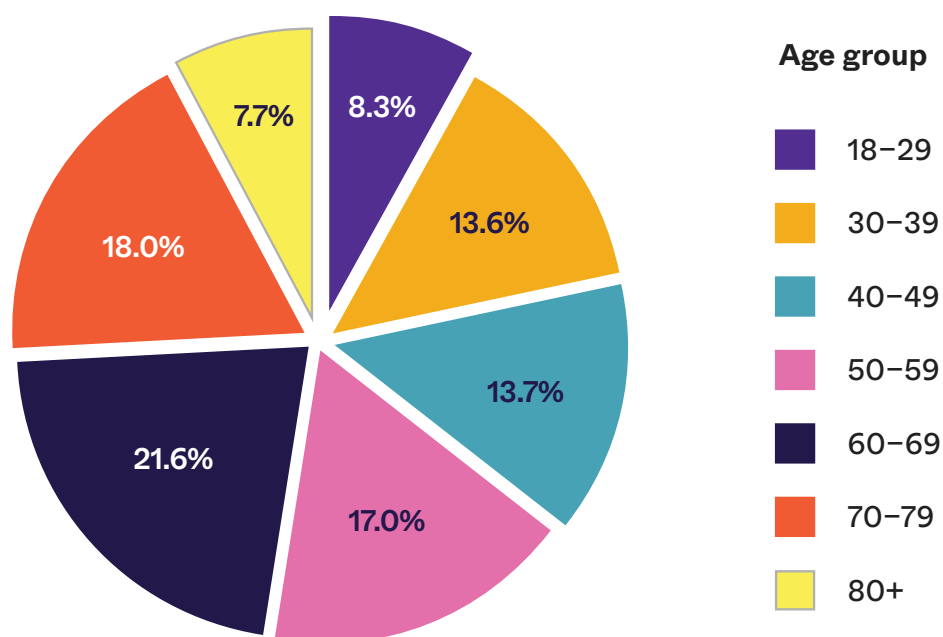
Voting Method

In the 2023 general election, 77.6% of voters cast their ballot on election day and 14.8% utilized early voting; this was nearly identical to the 2021 general election, when 77.5% of voters cast their ballot on election day and 14.8% voted early. In the 2023 primary election, a smaller share of voters cast their ballot on election day (67.6%) compared to during the general election, while early and absentee voting both represented larger shares of primary election voters. This mirrors the voting method breakdown in the 2021 primary, although 2021 saw a slightly higher share of people voting by absentee ballot and a slightly lower share of people voting early.

Figure 1.18: Voting methods, primary and general elections, 2021 and 2023

Absentee   Election Day   Early   Other*
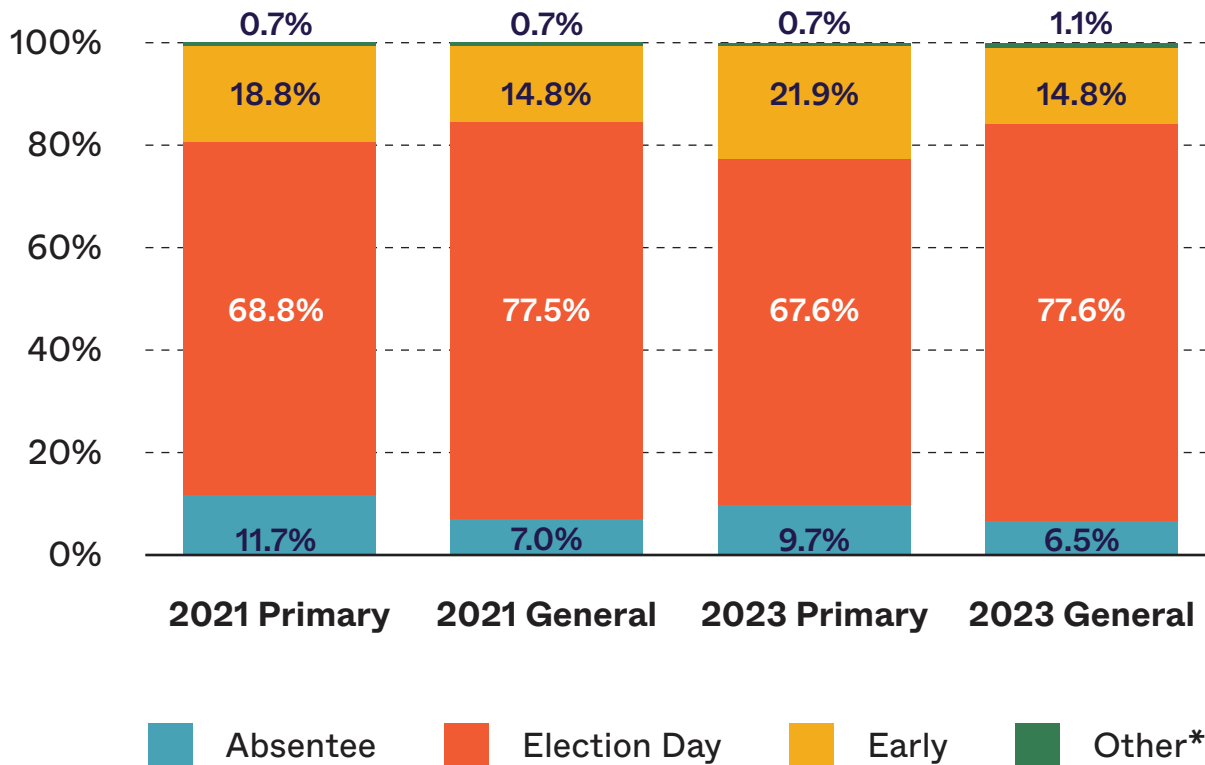
* Includes ballot categories such as special, affidavit, and military ballots

Ballot Proposals

New Yorkers had two ballot proposals on their general election ballots. Ballot proposals are becoming increasingly common during general elections, as evidenced by their inclusion in the last five election cycles. Ballot proposal language has historically been confusing to voters. In November 2023, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation requiring all ballot proposals to be written in "plain language."[24] Therefore, 2023 marks the last year that ballot proposals were not written in plain language.

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24   New York State Senate. S1381 (2023–24): "Requires proposed amendment to the constitution or other question provided by law to be submitted to a statewide vote be submitted to the people for their approval in plain language."

The two ballot proposals included on the general election ballot were:

- **Ballot Proposal 1:** This constitutional amendment removes the special debt limit for small city school districts, in which districts can only incur debt up to five percent the value of taxable real estate in the district. Debt limits would instead be established in state law and be the same for all school districts, regardless of district size.

- **Ballot Proposal 2:** The New York State Constitution limits the debt that counties, cities, towns, and villages can incur. This debt limit does not include debt for sewage treatment and disposal construction projects. The sewer debt exception expires on January 1, 2024. This amendment extends the sewer debt exception for ten more years until January 1, 2034.

Both ballot initiatives, which were on all ballots statewide, passed by a wide margin, within and outside New York City. Figure 1.19 shows the total "yes" vote percentages. Citywide, 72.9% of voters voted "yes" on Ballot Proposal 1, compared to 61.9% of voters in New York State residing outside of the city (passing with a total of 64.3% of "yes" votes statewide). For Ballot Proposal 2, 76.1% of citywide votes and 65.7% of non-city voters voted "yes" (passing with a total of 68.0% "yes" votes statewide). Notably, both ballot proposals had higher "yes" vote percentages in the city, even though both proposals only impacted budgets for regions outside the city.

Figure 1.19: Percent "yes" votes for ballot proposals, 2023 general election

Ballot proposals	Citywide "yes" votes	Non-NYC "yes" votes	Overall Statewide "yes" votes
Ballot Proposal 1: School Debt Limit	72.9%	61.9%	64.3%
Ballot Proposal 4: Sewage Debt Exception	76.1%	65.7%	68.0%

The percentages listed in Figure 1.20 below signify the "drop-off" rates of voters who chose not to vote for each ballot proposal. There are numerous possible reasons that voters might not vote for ballot proposals, such as a lack of understanding of the ballot proposal language or decision fatigue. The drop-off rate was slightly higher for the second ballot proposal (0.6%), likely attributable to the fact that voters are more likely to answer the questions that appear first on the ballot compared to ones that appear later. This trend is consistent with drop-off patterns in past election cycles.

Figure 1.20: Ballot proposal votes and drop-off rates, 2023 general election

	Total Votes	Drop-off Rate
Total Ballots Cast	579,673	—
Ballot Proposal 1: School Debt Limit	512,735	-11.5%
Ballot Proposal 2: Sewage Debt Exception	509,432	-12.1%

As was the case with voter turnout, drop-off rates varied by borough. In 2023, Staten Island saw the lowest drop-off rates (7.2% for ballot proposal 1 and 7.8% for ballot proposal 2), meaning they completed both ballot proposals at the highest rates, with Manhattan following by less than a percentage point (7.8% and 8.1%). The Bronx had the highest drop-off rates (14.0% and 15.5%), meaning the highest rates of voters who did not vote on one or both proposals, with Brooklyn (13.6% and 14.1%) and Queens (12.6% and 13.1%) slightly lower but still far from those of Staten Island and Manhattan.

Figure 1.21: Ballot proposal votes and drop-off rates by borough, 2023 general election

Borough	Total Ballots	Ballot Proposal 1: School Debt Limit	Ballot Proposal 2: Sewage Debt Exception
		Drop-Off	Drop-Off
Manhattan	143,956	-7.8%	-8.1%
Bronx	64,182	-14.0%	-15.5%
Brooklyn	183,243	-13.6%	-14.1%
Queens	155,389	-12.6%	-13.1%
Staten Island	32,903	-7.2%	-7.8%

Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis

Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis

New York City's primary on June 27, 2023 marked the city's second time using ranked choice voting (RCV) in a primary election. New York City first implemented RCV in 2021, when voters cast their ballots for the Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, and City Council, after voters approved an amendment to the City Charter in November 2019. When using RCV, voters can rank up to five candidates in order of preference, instead of just choosing one.

Figure 2.1: Sample ballot, City Council race, 2021 primary election

Before the introduction of RCV in New York City, primary elections for city offices were decided using single choice voting, in which voters selected one candidate, and a run-off election was scheduled if no candidate received a majority of votes. The RCV method involves a different vote counting process. All first-choice votes are tallied and if any candidate secures more than 50.0% of the votes, they are declared the outright winner. However, if no candidate manages to surpass the 50.0% threshold with first-choice votes alone, the vote counting process enters subsequent rounds that consider voters' second through fifth choices. In each round, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and ballots cast for

that candidate are redistributed to the voter's next highest ranked candidate. This process continues until only two candidates remain, and the candidate with the most votes among those two wins the election.

Figure 2.2: Visualization of ranked choice voting counting process

	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate A	○	○	○	●	○
Candidate B	○	○	●	○	○
Candidate C	○	●	○	○	○
Candidate D	●	○	○	○	○

Candidate A — 27%
Candidate B — 39%
Candidate C — 22%
Candidate D — **12%**

	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate A	○	○	○	●	○
Candidate B	○	○	●	○	○
Candidate C	○	●	○	○	○
Candidate D	○	○	○	○	○

Candidate A — 27%
Candidate B — 39%
Candidate C — **22%**
Candidate D — 12%

	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate A	○	○	○	●	○
Candidate B	○	○	●	○	○
Candidate C	○	●	○	○	○
Candidate D	○	○	○	○	○

Candidate A — 31%
Candidate B — 45%
Candidate C — **24%**
Candidate D

	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate A	○	○	○	●	○
Candidate B	○	○	●	○	○
Candidate C	○	○	○	○	○
Candidate D	○	○	○	○	○

Candidate A — 31%
Candidate B — **45%**
Candidate C — 24%
Candidate D

	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate A	○	○	○	●	○
Candidate B	○	○	●	○	○
Candidate C	○	○	○	○	○
Candidate D	○	○	○	○	○

Candidate A — 42%
Candidate B — **58%**
Candidate C
Candidate D

Following the 2023 primary election, the NYC Board of Elections posted Cast Vote Record (CVR) files, which are anonymized tables of voters' candidate rankings. These CVR files enable the CFB to analyze voters' rankings in the 2023 primary election. For example, these files show how many voters circled Christopher Marte in rank one and Susan Lee in rank two in the Democratic race in Manhattan's Council District 1. Information about the methodology for processing the CVR files can be found in Appendix A. The CVR files provides a unique and highly valuable opportunity to explore the idiosyncrasies of and variations in voter choices. It also allows us to calculate the frequency of fatal errors (a ballot-marking mistake that invalidates a voter's ballot) and improve our voter education efforts and outreach for future RCV elections.

The CFB conducted an analysis of voter behavior in the 2023 primary election, examining individual ballot ranking trends and aggregate trends by City Council district. We wanted to evaluate whether our findings in 2021 were consistent with what we observed in 2023 on ranking usage (how a voter utilizes their ranks in RCV), bullet voting (ranking one candidate multiple times in the same race), and exhausted ballots (ballots that do not rank either of the candidates who make it to the final round). See Appendix B for a glossary of commonly used terms in RCV ballot analysis.

In continuation of our voter ranking behavior research across various districts and races, we employed our 2021 ranking score, a score out of 100 that measures the number of available rankings that voters utilized. We then averaged these scores at both the office and City Council district levels for 2023. This statistic allows us to address the following key questions:

- In which council districts did voters make more extensive use of ballot ranking choices and how did this vary across boroughs and political parties?

- How many council districts surpassed or fell below the citywide ranking score?

- What indicators influenced the ranking score and did they remain consistent with findings from the 2021 primary election?

Historically, the CFB has not distinguished voter behavior by political party. Nevertheless, when examining the CVR files for the 2021 primary election, it was essential to separate the analysis by Democratic, Republican, and Conservative party primary ballots because of the differences in ranking possibilities afforded to voters of each political party and to better determine trends in voter ranking behavior. In some instances, the CFB only analyzed Democratic races because the Democratic primaries had the most candidates to rank and the most races. All subsequent analyses clearly state which population of voters were included.

New York City's RCV law permits voters to rank up to five candidates on a primary ballot, one of which can be a write-in candidate. In races with fewer than five candidates, a voter can rank up to the number of candidates in that race plus one write-in. In races with more than five candidates, all candidates are listed but voters can only rank their top five preferences. Races with only one candidate running are uncontested and therefore do not appear on the ballot.

The 2023 primary election was more subdued than in 2021 because of the lack of higher-profile citywide races, like Mayor and Comptroller, and the significant number of incumbents running in uncompetitive races. In 2023, incumbents ran in 66.6% of all races, compared to 28.3% in 2021, when many City Council members were term-limited out of office. The 2023 primary election also coincided with a redistricting year for the City Council.

In 2023, there were 24 races across the Democratic, Republican, and Conservative Party primaries, all of which used RCV. Figure 2.3 breaks out the number of races on the ballot for each political party.

Figure 2.3: RCV races on the 2023 primary ballot, by political party

Party	Number of RCV Races
Democratic	17
Republican	6
Conservative	1
Total	24

Of the 24 races that used RCV, 87.5% were decided in the first RCV round, which is more than twice the rate of 2021 (37.5%). These differences between the 2021 and 2023 RCV elections could explain why our results, outlined below, differed between the two years.

Analysis of Voter Ranking Behavior

RCV introduces another lens through which to analyze voter behavior in New York City. Many factors can influence how voters utilize their rankings beyond voter preferences, such as the number of candidates in a race, education about and confidence in RCV, and candidates' expressed views on or promotion of RCV.

Since RCV's New York City debut in 2021, research on ranking patterns and voter behavior in citywide races has grown. The CFB is expanding this research by conducting analysis on the 24 City Council races that were on the ballot in the 2023 primary election. Since 2023 primarily featured uncompetitive City Council races with incumbents, we do not discuss the same analysis from our 2021 report. Some 2021 analyses were excluded in 2023, such as ranking sequences, ranking frequencies, consistent single ranking, write-ins, and skipped races, as these analyses are more suited to competitive races like Mayor or Comptroller or require more than one office for comparison.

More than half of all voters in the 2023 primary (56.9%) ranked more than one unique candidate, which is less than in 2021 and suggests that voters made less extensive use of their ballot choices.[25] 58.9% of Democrats and 40.1% of Republicans ranked more than one unique candidate.[26] This corresponds with the 2021 finding that more Democrats tended to rank more than one unique candidate in City Council races when compared to Republicans.[27] See Appendix C for the percentage of races with ballots utilizing all five rankings.

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25   If a voter selects the same candidate for multiple rankings, that candidate is counted as one unique ranking.

   In 2021, 65.5% of voters ranked more than one unique candidate in City Council races.

   In the CFB's analysis, we did not count multiple rankings for one candidate, or bullet voting, as unique ranked counts.

26   This population does not count ballots with fatal errors. Democratic and Republican races that only had two candidates were included.

27   In 2021, 65.8% of Democrats and 51.3% of Republicans ranked multiple unique candidates in City Council races.

Bullet Voters

Bullet voters are voters who ranked one candidate multiple times in the same race. In our analysis, there are two ways to bullet vote:

- **Single choice bullet voting:** Voting for only one candidate across all choices or voting for one candidate across multiple ranks and leaving the other ranks blank.

- **Multiple choice bullet voting:** Voting for one candidate for more than one rank and another candidate for at least one rank.

While ballots that include bullet voting are valid, bullet voting can indicate a voter's misunderstanding of the RCV vote counting process.[28] A vote only moves from a voter's first preference to their second preference when their first preference is eliminated. Hence, a single choice bullet vote (voting for the same candidate multiple times) is essentially the same as a single choice vote (voting for the same candidate once). In the multiple choice bullet voting scenario in which a voter selects a candidate's name twice and another candidate's name once in a three-candidate race, this vote has the same effect as ranking each candidate only once. It is possible that these voters thought that bullet voting indicated a particularly strong expression of support for their preferred candidate. This assumption could lead them to believe that casting more than one vote for the same candidate might enhance their chance of winning. As discussed in the 2021–22 Voter Analysis Report, it is challenging to intuit voter intentions and understanding of the RCV process without surveying this group of voters.

Figures 2.4 and 2.5 show examples of both types of bullet voting as they appear in the CVR files.

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28   Analyses of bullet voting exclude instances of fatal overvoting, which occur when a voter marks more than one candidate in the first rank.

Figure 2.4: Examples of single choice bullet voter rankings

	Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Choice 4	Choice 5
Voter 1	Candidate A	Candidate A	Candidate A	Candidate A	Candidate A
Voter 2	Candidate B	Candidate B	Candidate B	Candidate B	Candidate B
Voter 3	Candidate C	Candidate C	Candidate C	Candidate C	Candidate C
Voter 4	Candidate A	Candidate A	Undervote	Undervote	Undervote
Voter 5	Candidate D	Candidate D	Candidate D	Candidate D	Candidate D
Voter 6	Write-in	Write-in	Write-in	Write-in	Write-in

Figure 2.5: Examples of multiple choice bullet voter rankings

|	Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Choice 4	Choice 5
Voter 1	Candidate C	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate D	Candidate A
Voter 2	Candidate A	Candidate D	Candidate B	Candidate C	Candidate C
Voter 3	Candidate C	Candidate C	Candidate A	Undervote	Undervote
Voter 4	Candidate C	Candidate A	Write-in	Candidate D	Write-in

Overall, bullet voting was rare in the 2023 primary election. Citywide, 4.3% of voters bullet voted, either single choice or multiple choice. Republicans used bullet voting more than Democrats (6.5% and 4.0%, respectively).

Citywide, 3.2% of all voters used single choice bullet voting, meaning that they voted for one candidate multiple times. Of all voters who only selected one candidate for City Council, 7.5% of them were single choice bullet voters. Republicans used single choice bullet voting at just over twice the rate as Democrats, at 6.0% and 2.9%, respectively. The race with the highest proportion of single choice bullet voters was the Republican race in Brooklyn's Council District 48, at 12.5%. See Appendix D for a full table of the percentage of single choice voters by each race in the primary.

Multiple choice bullet voting was less common, as was the case in 2021. Citywide, 1.0% of all voters used multiple choice bullet voting, meaning that they ranked one candidate at least twice and at least one other candidate at least once, including write-ins. Democrats used multiple choice bullet voting more than Republicans, at 1.1% and 0.48%, respectively.[29]

Errors

Fatal errors in voting occur when it is impossible to determine a voter's choice in a particular race due to the way they have filled out their ballot, resulting in the invalidation of their vote. The most common type of ballot error is an overvote, which happens when a voter marks more than one candidate for the same preference. Only overvotes in the first preference result in the complete invalidation of the race on the voter's ballot, otherwise known as a fatal overvote.
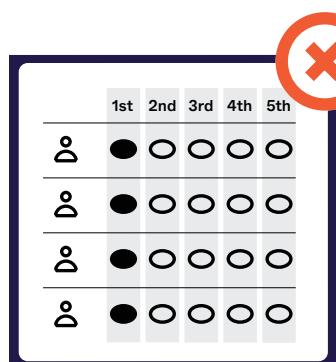
Figure 2.6: Example of a ballot with a fatal overvote

In the 2023 primary election, only 0.59% of ballots had a fatal overvote, which is an improvement from 2021 (1.2%). Eight of the 21 council districts that had RCV races, or 38.1%, had fatal overvote rates that surpassed the citywide average.[30] The three

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29 In the 2021 City Council races, 0.90% of Democrats and 0.75% of Republicans ranked one candidate at least twice and at least one more candidate at least once, including write-ins.

30 For the City Council districts that had multiple primary races across multiple political parties, fatal overvote rates include all races in those districts.

council districts with the highest incidence of fatal overvote errors were Council District 41 (Brooklyn) at 1.4%, Council District 42 (Brooklyn) at 1.3%, and Council District 12 (the Bronx) at 1.1%.

Figure 2.7: Percentage of fatal overvotes by City Council district, 2023 primary election


Legend:
- 0.05%–0.20%
- 0.21%–0.35%
- 0.36%–0.49%
- 0.50%–0.90%
- 0.91%–1.35%
- Council districts without a primary
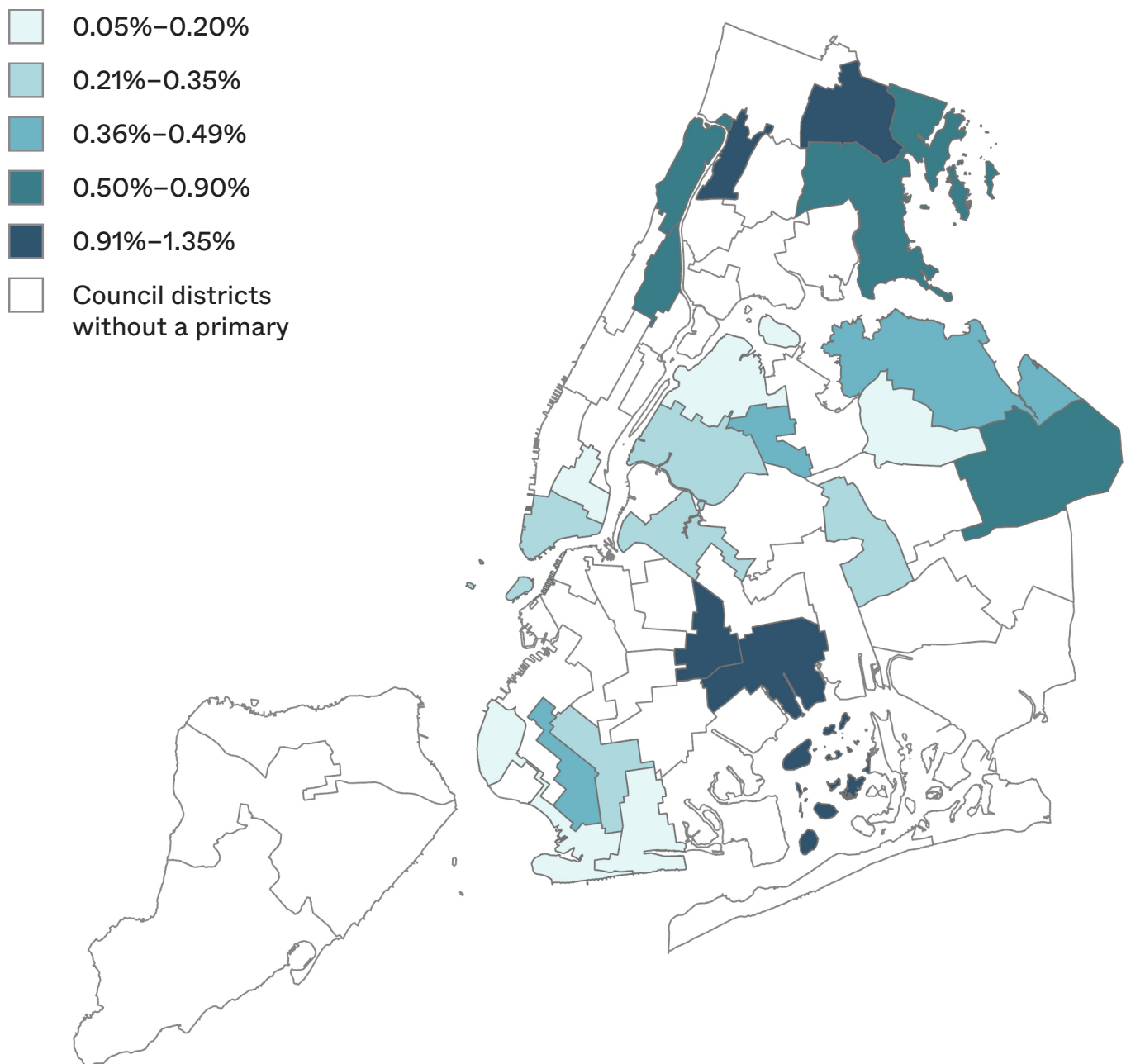
In order to place New York City's RCV trends within the larger national context of RCV, the CFB chose to compare NYC fatal overvote rates to those in San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Oakland. The CFB chose to analyze data from these cities' mayoral elections because of their potential to capture the voice of all eligible voters in the city. While there was no mayoral election for New York City in 2023, every City Council seat was up for re-election in the general election—therefore, we were able to make a citywide-to-citywide election comparison.

Figure 2.8 shows New York City's fatal overvote rates within the context of municipalities across the country that employ RCV. Minneapolis, Oakland, and San Francisco have each adopted RCV at varying points and have all held RCV elections for over a decade longer than New York City.[31] New York City has the second highest rate of fatal overvotes, which has stayed relatively consistent in its first two years of RCV implementation. Minneapolis has both the lowest and one of the most consistent fatal overvote rates. In contrast, Oakland has had climbing fatal overvote rates to percentages that are more than double that of New York City's. San Francisco's fatal overvote rates have been declining consistently since their second mayoral election. The variations in fatal overvote rates across cities and election cycles can be due to any number of conditions. As can be observed in New York City, each city has a unique and ever-changing political landscape as well as an ever-evolving approach to elections and voter education.

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31   Additionally, there are other differences in RCV implementation across the chosen municipalities, such as whether they use RCV for primary and/or general elections and how many ranking options voters are given.

Figure 2.8: Percentage of fatal overvote for mayoral races in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Oakland, and New York City
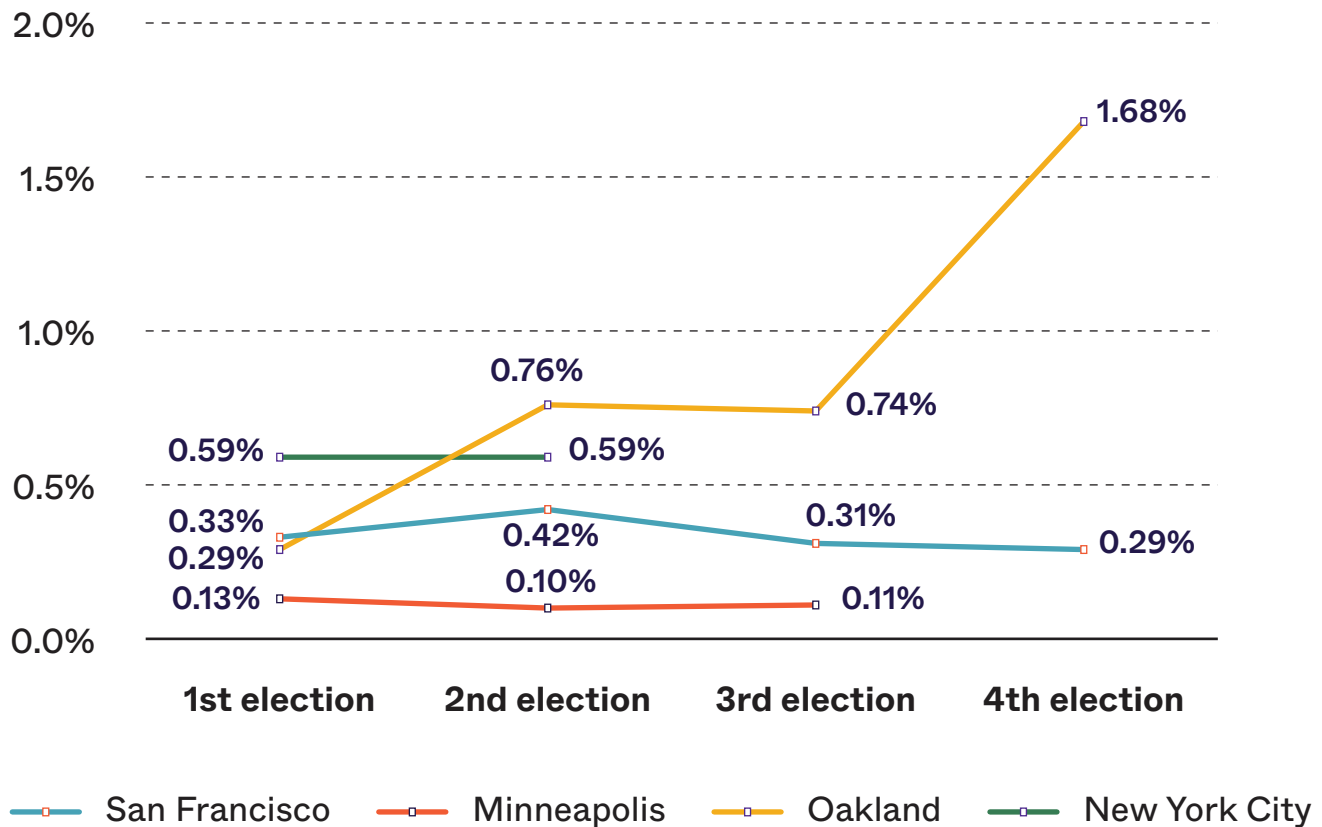
Fatal overvotes rates were derived using data from Fairvote.org.

In addition to fatal errors, some ballots had non-fatal errors, or errors that do not invalidate a voter's RCV ballot. Even still, these non-fatal errors could indicate a fundamental misunderstanding on behalf of voters of how to accurately mark a ballot. The most common non-fatal error on a ballot is an undervote, also described as "skipped ranks," which occurs when a voter leaves a choice blank.[32] Among all ballots in the 2023 primary election, 2.0% of voters had an undervote in the first rank, which aligns with our findings from 2021 (1.9%).

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32 Undervotes are counted as follows: if a voter skips their first rank, the candidates they voted for in other ranks move up. For example, if a voter skips their first preference, but marks Candidate A as their second preference, then skips their third and fourth preferences and marks Candidate B as their fifth preference, the ballot is counted as if Candidate A is the first preference and Candidate B is preferred second.

Another non-fatal error in RCV involves a voter overvoting in ranks other than the first rank. In this case, a voter's ballot is not considered invalid, but it is a voter error. Of all ballots, 0.41% of voters had an overvote in a rank other than first place, which is a substantial improvement from 2021 (1.4%).

While undervotes and overvotes in a rank other than the first rank do not invalidate a ballot, they do indicate ballot mismarking. CFB voter education material shown in Figure 2.9, produced in consultation with the Center for Civic Design, focused on visualizing the proper way to mark a ballot and additionally showed how not to mark a ballot.

Figure 2.9: NYC Votes ranked choice voting large print flyer (Haitian Creole)

The correctly marked ballot is denoted by a green checkmark. The smaller ballot on the top right shows an example of bullet voting, which, while not a fatal error, may indicate that the voter misunderstood how their vote is counted using RCV. The other smaller ballot in the bottom right shows an incorrectly marked overvoted ballot. Although the error rates were relatively low and comparable to those in other municipalities using RCV, explaining how to correctly mark a ballot will continue to be a focus of the CFB's voter education efforts in 2025, particularly in places where error rates surpassed the citywide rate.

Exhausted Ballots

An exhausted ballot is a ballot in which the voter has not assigned a rank to either of the two candidates who moved to the final round of the RCV vote counting process. A ballot is also exhausted when all of a voter's ranked candidates have been eliminated during the RCV vote counting process.

In the 2021–22 Voter Analysis Report, we discussed a few factors that can lead to an exhausted ballot. First, voters who rank fewer candidates than the number of available rankings have a higher likelihood of their ballot being exhausted. Voters who rank less popular candidates also have a higher likelihood of their ballot being exhausted. Finally, races that have more candidates often have higher rates of exhausted ballots.[33]

Figures 2.10 and 2.11 show the City Council races with the five highest and five lowest percentages of exhausted ballots. As expected, the five races with the highest percentages of exhausted ballots were those with a high number of possible candidates (four or five, including write-ins). Conversely, the five races exhibiting the lowest percentages of exhausted ballots were races with the minimum number of possible candidates (two candidates, including a write-in). These results are consistent with our finding in 2021 that a higher number of possible candidates corresponds to higher rates of exhausted ballots. See Appendix E for a full table of the percentages of exhausted ballots by race.

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33   2021–22 Voter Analysis Report. "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis."

Figure 2.10: City Council races with the highest percentages of exhausted ballots

Race		Percentage of Exhausted Ballots	Number of Candidates
CD 19	Queens	Democratic	6.6%	4
CD 25	Queens	Democratic	6.5%	4
CD 47	Brooklyn	Republican	5.2%	3
CD 13	Bronx	Democratic	4.6%	4
CD 9	Manhattan	Democratic	4.1%	4

Figure 2.11: City Council races with the lowest percentages of exhausted ballots

Race		Percentage of Exhausted Ballots	Number of Candidates
CD 44	Brooklyn	Republican	0.40%	2
CD 48	Brooklyn	Republican	0.33%	2
CD 20	Queens	Republican	0.27%	2
CD 14	Bronx	Democratic	0.26%	2
CD 34	Queens	Democratic	0.22%	2

When disaggregating by political party, 2.6% of Democratic ballots were exhausted, meaning they did not rank either of the top two finalists in the last round, whereas 2.1% of Republican ballots and 0.91% of Conservative ballots were exhausted.[34]

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34   Does not include fatal errors.

It is worth noting that the concept of exhausted ballots is a relatively less studied topic and there is little evidence that certain kinds of voters are more or less likely to have their ballots exhausted.[35] We ran a linear regression model to assess the impact of demographic and voter-related factors on ballot exhaustion.[36] Our model revealed no significant influence, indicating that these factors might not be relevant to ballot exhaustion. More years of RCV data will be needed to better understand ballot exhaustion in New York City. See Appendix F for the model output.

As future candidates increasingly realize the benefits of forming alliances and coalitions between like-minded candidates, New Yorkers will gain more understanding of RCV as a voting method. We expect more candidates in the future to encourage voters to rank third, fourth, or fifth choices to prevent ballots from "going to waste." While fatal errors and ballot exhaustion were relatively low in 2023, the CFB will continue to conduct voter education efforts focused on how to avoid errors and keep ballots valid in the years ahead, with a focus on the 2025 election cycle.

Ranking Score

In 2021, the CFB constructed a ranking score, which is a score out of 100 that is calculated by dividing the number of unique ranks a voter made in a race by the number of possible rankings on the ballot.

Figure 2.12: Mathematical representation of ranking score

$$\text{ranking score} = \frac{\text{unique ranks}}{\text{number of possible rankings}} \times 100$$

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35 *FairVote*. "RCV Elections and Runoffs: Exhausted Votes vs Exhausted Voters in the Bay Area." 19 Oct 2016.

36 We utilized independent variables from our ranking score research, which includes the percentage of registered Democrats aged 65 and older, the average Democratic participation score, the number of candidates running in a Democratic council race, the percentage of the population whose race is White, and the percentage of the population that has less than a high school diploma.

For example, in Democratic Council District 1 (Manhattan), there were four named candidates on the ballot, meaning there were five total ranking opportunities (including the option for a write-in). In that race, if the voter ranked three candidates, they would have a ranking score of 60.0 (three divided by five multiplied by 100), which would indicate that the voter used 60.0% of their available rankings in that race. We can then calculate the average ranking score for all ballots in a council district and compare it to average scores across other districts.

The ranking score is meant to serve as a standardized way of comparing different districts and/or offices to one another without penalizing voters living in districts with fewer candidates on the ballot, who therefore do not have as many opportunities to rank candidates. Ranking behavior in those districts can be inaccurately assessed by descriptive statistical analyses that only capture the number of ballots ranking a specific number of candidates. Other analyses use average rankings as a metric to compare voter behavior, but that statistic again does not take into consideration that some races may have fewer candidates on the ballot.

Figures 2.13 and 2.14 show the City Council races with the five highest and lowest average rankings scores. The top average ranking scores were as follows: the Democratic race in Manhattan's Council District 9 with an average ranking score of 58.1 (with four candidates on the ballot), the Conservative race in the Bronx's Council District 13 with an average ranking score of 57.7 (with three candidates on the ballot), the Democratic race in Brooklyn's Council District 41 with an average ranking score of 56.0 (with four candidates on the ballot), the Democratic race in Queens' Council District 29 with an average ranking score of 55.8 (with three candidates on the ballot), and the Democratic race in Queens' Council District 19 with an average ranking score of 55.4 (with three candidates on the ballot). Although the races with the highest average ranking scores varied by borough, most were Democratic races and all featured the highest number of candidates on a ballot in 2023, which is consistent with our 2021 finding that having more candidates on a ballot may correlate with a higher ranking score.

The City Council races with the five lowest average ranking scores varied across political parties and boroughs. These races were the Democratic race in Manhattan's Council District 1 with an average ranking score of 45.4 (with four candidates on the ballot), the Republican race in Brooklyn's Council District 47 with an average ranking score of 45.2 (with three candidates on the ballot), the Democratic race in the Bronx's Council District 14 with an average ranking score of 44.8 (with two candidates on the ballot), the Republican race in Brooklyn's Council District 48 with an average ranking score of 39.7 (with two candidates on the ballot), and the Republican race in Queens' Council District 20 with an average ranking score of 38.9 (with two candidates on the ballot).

Figure 2.13: City Council races with the highest average ranking scores

Race			Average Ranking Score	Number of Candidates
CD 9	Manhattan	Democratic	58.1	4
CD 13	Bronx	Conservative	57.7	3
CD 41	Brooklyn	Democratic	56.0	4
CD 29	Queens	Democratic	55.8	3
CD 19	Queens	Democratic	55.4	3

Figure 2.14: City Council races with the lowest average ranking scores

Race			Average Ranking Score	Number of Candidates
CD 1	Manhattan	Democratic	45.4	4
CD 47	Brooklyn	Republican	45.2	3
CD 14	Bronx	Democratic	44.8	2
CD 48	Brooklyn	Republican	39.7	2
CD 20	Queens	Republican	38.9	2

Although results for the five districts with the highest average ranking scores in the 2023 RCV election aligned with results from the 2021 RCV election, one of the bottom five council races, Manhattan Council District 1, deviated from our expected results. We anticipated that the bottom five council races would have fewer candidates on the ballot, but Manhattan Council District 1 had four candidates. Some possible explanations for this result are the popularity of the elected candidate of the race, Christopher Marte, who won a majority of the vote in the first round at 62.6%, and his incumbency status, which means high name recognition and an established track record, which may have led voters to rank fewer candidates in this race.[37]

On average, ranking scores differed between council races with an incumbent running and those without an incumbent running. Races with an incumbent running had a slightly higher average ranking score (51.9) than races without an incumbent running (47.8).[38] Although this deviates from the results in Manhattan Council District 1, further RCV data will be needed to explore the link between incumbency and voter ranking behavior.

Overall, the citywide average ranking score was 51.2, indicating that the average New Yorker utilized just over half of their available rankings. This is a slight decrease from 2021 (52.0). Among political parties, Democrats averaged a score of 51.8, while the Republicans and Conservatives averaged scores of 45.9 and 57.7, respectively, which closely reflects 2021 findings.[39] Figure 2.15 maps the average overall ranking score for the 2023 primary by council district.

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37   New York City Board of Elections. "2023 Primary Election - City Council District 1 - June 27, 2023."

38   There were 16 races with incumbents and 8 races without incumbents.

39   There was only one Conservative party primary in 2021 and one in 2023, which occurred in different districts.

   These scores include all two-candidate races and only count unique candidate rankings (i.e. bullet voting counts as a single rank).

   In 2021, Democrats averaged a score of 54.8, Republicans averaged a score of 49.5, and Conservatives averaged a score of 48.5 in City Council races.

Figure 2.15: Average ranking score by City Council district, 2023 primary election

Legend:
- 38.9–39.7
- 39.8–46.9
- 47.0–51.3
- 51.4–54.3
- 54.4–58.1
- Council districts without a primary
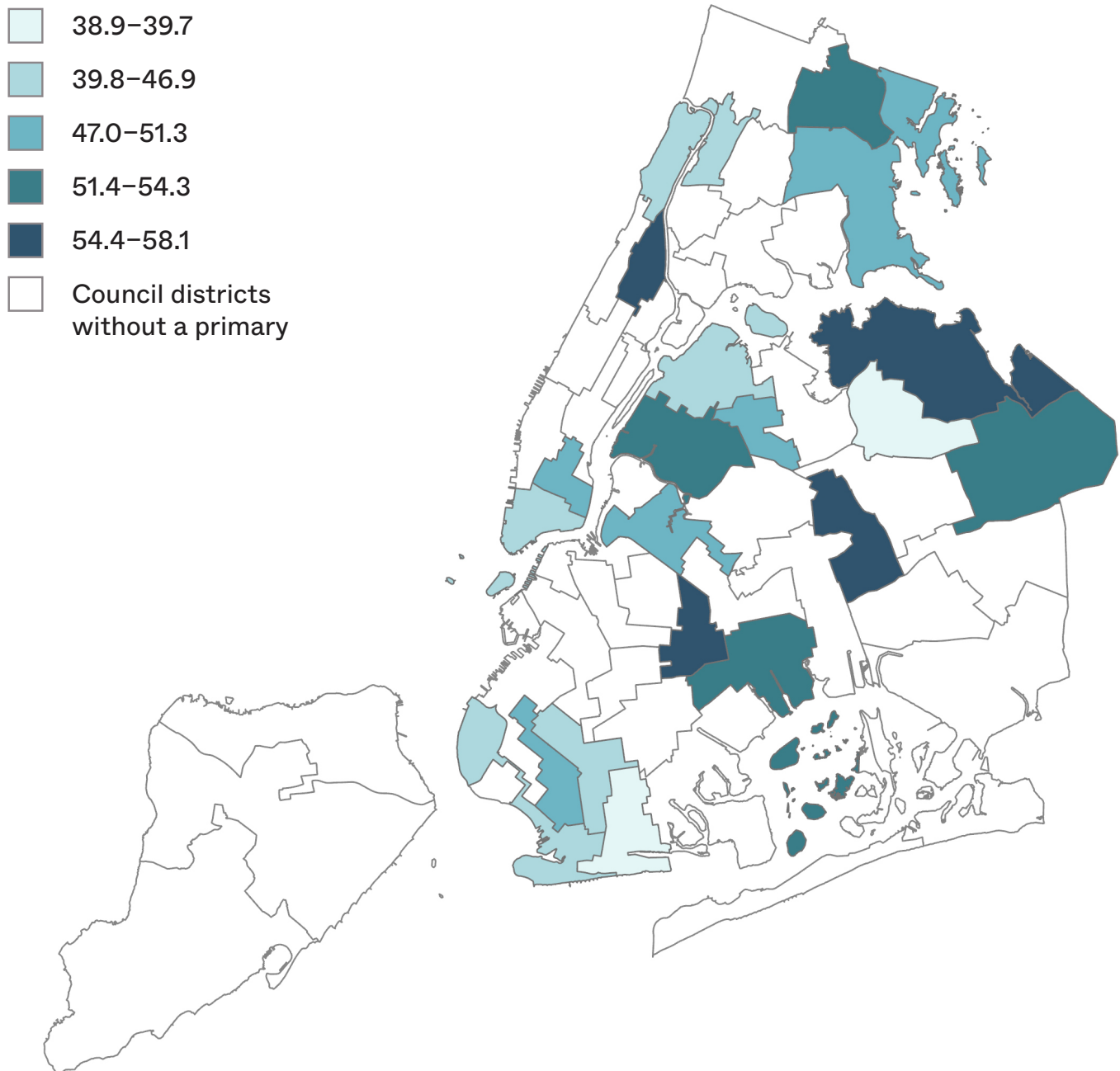
Altogether, 2.7% of the entire voter population attained a 100.00 overall ranking score, indicating that they made selections for every possible ranking available to them. This citywide ranking score is notably low and did not meaningfully vary by political party.

The three City Council races with the highest proportion of ranking scores of 100.0 were as follows: the Republican race in Brooklyn's Council District 43 at 4.7%, the Democratic race in Queens' Council District 26 at 4.4%, and the Democratic race in the Bronx's Council District 13 at 3.8%.

Figure 2.16: Top three City Council races with the highest percentage of overall ranking scores of 100.0

Race			Percentage of 100.0 overall ranking score	Number of Named Candidates
CD 43	Brooklyn	Republican	4.7%	2
CD 26	Queens	Democratic	4.4%	2
CD 13	Bronx	Democratic	3.8%	4

Indicators that Influence Ranking Score

In the 2021–22 Voter Analysis Report, we tested the influence of various factors on the average RCV ranking score for Democratic City Council races in 2021 by employing a linear regression model.[40] The dependent variable was the average ranking score in each council district and the independent variables were demographic and voter behavior at the council district level.[41] A linear regression model calculates the impact the independent variables have on the dependent variable (ranking score). Our model findings in 2021 showed that only the number of candidates running in a race had a significant impact on the ranking score.

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[40] A model that included all political parties did not have any significant variables that would have impacted ranking score.

[41] U.S. Census Bureau. "2015–2019 American Community Survey"; Data was estimated at the Council District level by the Esri ArcGIS Living Atlas Layer. Voter data from the NYC Board of Elections was aggregated at the council level.

We utilized the same variables from 2021. The independent variables included the percentage of registered Democrats aged 65 and older, the average Democratic participation score, the number of candidates running in a Democratic council race, the percentage of the population whose race is White, and the percentage of the population that has less than a high school diploma.[42] The results of our linear regression model diverged from our findings in 2021. The percentage of the population that had less than a high school diploma had a significant negative impact on the average ranking score. The remaining predictors did not significantly impact the ranking score when all remaining variables were held constant.

Overall, in council districts with a Democratic primary in 2023, districts with more residents without a high school education were less likely to rank their candidates. For each increase in the percentage of the population that had less than a high school diploma, the ranking score decreased by 0.72 points.[43] See Appendix G for the model output.

This analysis is an extension of our prior work on ranking usage and is a topic of national research. Our finding in this analysis differs from our findings in 2021 and the findings from FairVote's extensive research on RCV elections nationally, in which they find that a higher number of City Council candidates leads to a higher-ranking score.[44] While the CFB found that the percentage of the population that had less than a high school diploma was a statistically significant factor in the 2023 primary, this also contradicts existing literature. According to research from FairVote, ranking usage depended more on the context of each election than any single demographic factor.[45] We anticipate that data on future RCV elections will allow us to more fully investigate the influence of demographic factors on ranking usage in NYC.

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42 See the 2019–20 Voter Analysis Report for information on the construction of the participation score.

U.S. Census Bureau. "2017–2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates." Data was estimated at the Council District level by the Esri ArcGIS Living Atlas Layer.

43 $p < 0.01$; R2 = 0.46

44 Dell, Nora and Deb Otis. "Ranked Choice Voting in New York City Report." *FairVote*, Dec 2021.

45 Otis, Deb. "What We Learned from New York City's Second Ranked Choice Voting Election." *FairVote*, 2023.

Areas for Further Research

Overall, findings from the 2023 primary election suggest a need for further research in future RCV elections in New York City. Discrepancies between our findings from the 2021 and 2023 RCV elections suggest that our conclusions may not apply universally to elections with varying degrees of competitiveness. More years of RCV data from future elections will better equip us to identify patterns and assess consistency of findings.

To date, most of the research in the United States on voter behavior as it relates to RCV is conducted through survey-based studies instead of data from actual ballots. Additional qualitative data may help us broaden our comprehension of voter behavior, as previously discussed in the 2021–22 Voter Analysis Report. Qualitative data from focus groups could help us understand questions about individual voter motivations and intentions, such as:

- What motivates a voter to single choice bullet vote or multiple choice bullet vote?

- Why do voters not make extensive use of their ballots?

- Why does a voter with an exhausted ballot not vote for the top two candidates in their race?

- What motivates a voter to overvote in the first rank?

Furthermore, it's crucial to note that the citywide fatal overvote rate is higher than that of other cities implementing RCV, meaning that we are trailing behind other cities in the rate of valid ballots. This highlights room for potential improvements in RCV voter education and outreach efforts in 2025 to make sure every New Yorker's vote counts. See the "Policy and Program Recommendations" section for a detailed recommendation on how to expand the reach of CFB voter education and outreach efforts in communities.

Policy & Program Recomm-
endations

Policy and Program Recommendations

New York City has seen dramatic changes in the election landscape over the past few years, from passing ranked choice voting (RCV) in 2019 to establishing early vote by mail in 2023.[46] The CFB continues to evolve as it responds to these shifts and anticipates changes in the future, while constantly keeping voter engagement at the forefront.

Turnout for the 2023 local elections was low, in keeping with New York City's trend of low levels of engagement for odd-year elections. This was especially true in communities with historically low turnout rates, which has informed CFB's selection of priority communities. The persistent pattern of low turnout confirms the need for structural change alongside continued, and even expanded, voter education programming. The CFB outlines two recommendations to address low voter turnout and expand civic engagement in the City:

- **Recommendation 1:** The CFB reiterates its recommendation from the 2022–23 Voter Analysis Report to align odd-year City elections with even-year State and federal elections to increase voter turnout.

- **Recommendation 2:** The CFB plans to develop a civic engagement fellowship program to expand the reach of the existing voter education and civic engagement programs.

Recommendation 1: Align Odd-Year City Elections with Even-Year State and Federal Elections

First, in response to low turnout in 2023, we are reiterating the 2022–23 Voter Analysis Report recommendation to change New York City's municipal elections to even years to combat the issue of low voter turnout. Historically, New York City voters participate in State and federal elections, held during even years, at much higher rates than they participate in City elections, held during odd years. The average turnout for City mayoral elections from 2001 to 2023 was 29.5%, compared to 35.6% for State elections and 60.8% for federal elections during the same period.[47] Meanwhile, non-mayoral City elections typically have even lower turnout, as evidenced by the 12.8% general election turnout in 2023.

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46   New York City Charter § 1057-g; New York State Election Law § 481-55.

47   2022–23 Voter Analysis Report. "Policy & Legislative Recommendations."

New York State Governor Hochul set the precedent in 2023 when she signed legislation that shifted most county and local elections to even years to limit election fatigue and boost voter turnout.[48] A comparable change for cities, including New York City, requires a constitutional amendment. During the bill signing, the Governor declared, "every eligible New Yorker deserves the right to participate in the democratic process without unnecessary barriers." [49] Voters in the five boroughs, which make up approximately 40.1% of the State's voter population, should also have this same right.

Cities across the country that hold even-year municipal elections consistently yield higher turnout than those that do not. For example, San Diego and Portland, Oregon have average voter turnouts of 75% and 73%, respectively.[50] Cities that have changed their election timing from odd to even years show a stark boost in voter turnout. For example, Los Angeles made the change in 2020 and doubled overall turnout, with some districts seeing upwards of a fourfold increase.[51] Similarly, Baltimore changed its election timing in 2016 and saw a 48.9% increase in turnout.[52]

There are also disparities in voter demographics between even- and odd-year elections, as White voters make up a disproportionately large share of the turnout in odd-year elections, while the voter population is more representative of district compositions in even-years.[53] Other benefits include lower election costs, a decrease in the influence of special interests,

48   The change does not apply to city or village elections, and races for county clerk, sheriff, district attorneys, local judges and others protected in the state Constitution, like New York City offices, to be held in odd-numbered years.

      Spectrum News Staff. "Hochul Signs Bill Moving Local Elections to Even-numbered Years." *Spectrum News 1*, 22 Dec 2023.

49   Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. "Governor Hochul Signs Voting Rights Legislation to Expand Access to the Ballot Box and Improve Voter Participation." 22 Dec 2023.

50   Kaminsky, Dan and Ben Weinberg. "Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years." *Citizens Union*, Dec 2022.

51   Regardie, Jon. "How One Big Change Made a Huge Impact on Elections in Los Angeles." *Los Angeles Magazine*, 01 Oct 2020.

52   Linskey, Annie and Julie Scharper. "Next Baltimore Election Delayed for 1 Year." *Baltimore Sun*, 02 Apr 2012; and Baltimore City Board of Elections. "Election Results."

53   2022–23 Voter Analysis Report. "Policy & Legislative Recommendations."; and Hajnal, Zoltan, Vladimir Kogan, and G. Austin Markarian. "Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition." *American Political Science Review*, 16 July 2021.

and increased voter enthusiasm.[54] Moving odd-year elections to align with even-year races would make the City's voter population better reflect New Yorkers.

The positive impact of this change would likely outweigh the obstacles and hurdles that would arise. Opponents fear that voters would feel overloaded with information for races across the entire spectrum of local, state, and federal politics.[55] The process itself requires significant effort as well; since the current election cycle is dictated by the New York State Constitution, a Constitutional amendment is required.[56] Constitutional amendments happen either through legislation at the state level or through a Constitutional Convention. The "Policy and Legislative Recommendations" section of the 2022–23 Voter Analysis Report includes a flowchart that depicts the various pathways to implementation (Figure 3.3 on page 96).[57] When Governor Hochul signed the legislation shifting most county and town elections to even years, she signaled support for amending the State Constitution in the future.[58]

Recommendation 2: Implement a Civic Engagement Fellowship Program

The CFB also looks inwards to address the trend of low voter turnout. In this section, we recommend that the CFB plan to implement a civic engagement fellowship program to further our collaboration with community-based organizations (CBOs) in educating and engaging New Yorkers around voting and civic engagement more broadly. This fellowship program would enable the CFB to expand voter education and outreach in its priority communities, thus expanding the CFB's capacity to respond to its City Charter mandate, detailed below.

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54   Anzia, Sarah F. "Election Timing and the Electoral Influence of Interest Groups." *The Journal of Politics*, 13 May 2011; and Williams, Keith. "The Odd Timing of City Elections in New York." *The New York Times*, 07 Sept 2017.

55   O'Sullivan, Joseph. "King County Considers Moving Most Elections to Even Years." *Crosscut*, 27 June 2022.

56   Odd-year elections were enshrined in the New York State Constitution in 1894.

57   2022–23 Voter Analysis Report. "Policy & Legislative Recommendations."

58   Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. "Governor Hochul Signs Voting Rights Legislation to Expand Access to the Ballot Box and Improve Voter Participation." 22 Dec 2023.

Charter Mandate and the CFB's Voter Education Efforts

Amended in 2010, the New York City Charter outlines the CFB's responsibility to educate voters, especially "residents who are underrepresented among those registered."[59] Chapter 46, §1054 mandates that the CFB is responsible for:

- Identifying communities in New York City that are underrepresented within the electoral process.

- Coordinating activities and initiatives to increase voter registration and participation.

- Recommending programs and policies to increase participation of underrepresented communities.

- Engaging in voter education through internal and external initiatives.[60]

The CFB meets this mandate through a variety of initiatives and partnerships with other government agencies and CBOs. In 2023, NYC Votes, the branch of the CFB focused on outreach and education, conducted 236 educational events with 2,680 attendees and 1,059 people trained. NYC Votes currently has 81 event-partnering organizations and 387 partner contacts at CBOs across the city.

NYC Votes initiatives include the Youth Ambassador Program, language access, and mixed modality community learning sessions, all of which are discussed in more detail in the "NYC Votes in 2023" section. These programs were developed to offer education directly to the CFB's "priority communities," discussed in more detail below. The CFB identified priority communities that are underrepresented in the electoral process, based on voter education, turnout, and engagement.

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59   New York City Charter Revision Commission. "Final Report of the 2010 New York City Charter Revision Commission." 23 Aug 2010; and New York City Charter §1054.

60   Ibid.

Priority Communities

In the 2022–23 Voter Analysis Report, the CFB identified four priority communities that were underrepresented in the electoral process, in terms of voter engagement, registration, and participation. Also outlined in the "NYC Votes in 2023" section of this report, the four priority communities are as follows:

- Voters under the age of 30

- Immigrant voters including New Americans, and those with limited English proficiency

- Voters with disabilities

- Voters with a criminal or felony conviction.

In addition to priority communities, the CFB has also identified several priority Community Districts. These are identified by looking at US Census data, voter turnout, and the proportions of our identified priority communities that reside within each Community District. For example, the CFB identified neighborhoods in the South Bronx, South Brooklyn, Northern Queens, and Central Queens as communities in need of targeted voter outreach because of the number of recently naturalized citizens that speak languages the CFB has not historically included in voter outreach.

Civic Engagement Fellowship Overview

While the CFB's partnerships and outreach efforts are expansive, collaboration with local CBOs often hinges on the passion and commitment both parties have for serving their communities. CBOs often face challenges in engaging their constituents in the electoral process due to limits on capacity, resources, and reach. CFB outreach is then limited in our ability to ensure the circulation of educational materials, capacity for data collection, and the scope with which we can target priority communities.

We recommend that the CFB implement a civic engagement fellowship pilot program that would enable us to formalize relationships with our partners, establish long-term investment within our priority communities, and increase CBO capacity to do this work. While the CFB currently provides partner CBOs with educational materials and opportunities, the civic engagement fellowship would offer monetary compensation and professional support for an additional staff member to bolster already existing civic engagement efforts and further expand the scope of work, on a two-year program cycle. Fellows would act as conduits for personalized CFB support as we train them and develop the necessary skills to bring robust and tailored civic engagement programming to interested CBOs and their communities.

Fellowship Structure

We recommend that the civic engagement fellowship program span two-year cycles. This would allow for direct investments in voter education, with the opportunity to focus more long-term and more broadly on issues of civic engagement.

The CFB would rely on our robust network of diverse CBOs and other public channels to distribute a Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) at the beginning of each two-year cycle for CBOs to express interest in receiving a civic engagement fellow. The RFEI would outline the qualifying criteria for partnering CBOs and the terms of the fellowship. CBOs would then respond with their interest and any specific needs. The CFB would aim to select CBOs that serve the priority community populations and districts. The CBOs would also be able to list any specific requirements that their fellows should meet, such as language requirements. This would enable us to match CFB fellows, who would have their own application process, with CBOs so that the unique skillsets and lived experiences of fellows would align to best meet the needs of the priority communities served.

Equity for voters and our partnering CBOs is central to this recommendation. Through training and fair compensation, the CFB would help build CBO capacity to do direct-to-voter outreach work, which would in turn bolster the CFB's commitment to equity. This fellowship would allow the CFB to partner with a wider range of CBOs that could address the needs of our priority communities but may have previously lacked the capacity to partner with us. Equity would continue to be a pillar through the selection process to ensure that the pools of fellows and CBOs alike are both representative of our priority communities and can serve the specific educational needs of their respective communities.

Program Precedents

Municipalities across the country use a variety of models to engage CBOs in providing or improving public goods and services. This section discusses several local and national precedents, some of which are fellowship models and others which are outright grant models. These programs have been successful in identifying priority communities and their needs while engaging with governmental, community-based, religious, and private organizations to fill them. Each program has a unique implementation approach according to the needs of their identified priority communities as well as the available resources.

National Precedents

The San Francisco Department of Elections began administering the **Equitable Voter Partnership Outreach Grant** in 2019. The grant program is embedded within the City Council's budget and expands their capacity for targeted voter education to priority communities.[61] CBOs receive grants on an election-to-election basis with the scope of work, length of the period, and funding amount dependent upon each election's specific parameters. Within each partnership, there is a provision stating that grantees must promote the recruitment of linguistically diverse poll site workers that can respond to the language needs of their community at the poll sites.[62]

The **LEAD Fellowship** is administered by the New York University's Democracy Project. This program offers master's and undergraduate students an opportunity to gain hands-on experience with non-partisan organizations across the country. Fellows are placed in organizations that are focused on preserving and promoting democracy in a variety of communities.[63] While fellows gain experience working in diverse communities and political climates, partnering organizations gain new talent from fellows that are in tune with the newest scholarship on issues of American democracy.

The **King County Voter Education Fund** (VEF) is administered in Seattle, Washington. The VEF is a partnership between King County Elections and the Seattle Foundation, a non-governmental philanthropic foundation.[64] The VEF is structured around larger two-year grant periods as well as shorter-term seed grants. The program was first piloted in 2016 and launched in 2017 to partner with CBOs best positioned to provide "non-partisan voter education" to "historically excluded communities."[65] Recipients of the multi-year grant can receive up to $50,000 to hold voter registration events, deliver education, and track data.[66] Recipients of the smaller seed grants of between $5,000-$10,000 are organizations that are new to the election space or possess a limited capacity for education. The King County Elections Language Services and Community Outreach team hosts quarterly progress

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61   City and County of San Francisco. "Our Racial Equity Action Plan."

62   City and County of San Francisco, Department of Elections. "Voter Outreach and Education Plan, November 8, 2022 Consolidated General Election." 04 Aug 2022.

63   New York University, Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. "The NYU Democracy Project."

64   King County Elections. "Voter Education Fund."

65   Ibid.

66   Ibid.

check-ins with grantees, administers technical assistance via informational voter content sessions, offers guidance in developing educational materials/plans, and provides pre-developed and approved educational materials.

The **San Francisco Fellowship Program** provides full-time placement in a city agency for one year and fellows gain experience with public administration and policy development. Fellows are placed in a wide array of positions where they can pursue roles in analysis, planning, and program development. Regular learning sessions are built into the work schedules of the fellows for a well-rounded professional development program.[67]

The **Mayor's Office Fellowship Program** is administered through the Chicago Mayor's Office. This program is an 11-week, full-time fellowship for graduate-level students. Fellows are paid to work closely with policymakers across Chicago's city agencies. Fellows can develop policy and implementation plans, work with senior staff at the Mayor's office, and work directly with Chicago residents. While fellows can pursue their public service interests, a few suggested focuses for the 2024 cycle are: workforce development in the Chicago area; affordability and environmental sustainability; public safety and youth engagement; and the development of technology for City functions.[68]

The Carolina Center for Public Service administers the **Community Engagement Fellowship** in North Carolina**. This fellowship offers funding once a year to a class of eight fellows to support "scholarship projects that are responsive to community priorities."[69] Fellows collaborate with faculty mentors and community partners to conduct these projects. Fellows are expected to consistently plan with their faculty mentor, attend quarterly professional development sessions, and produce a mid-year progress report.[70]

67   City and County of San Francisco, Department of Human Resources. "San Francisco Fellows Program."

68   Chicago Office of the Mayor. "The Mayor's Office Fellowship Program."

69   The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Carolina Center for Public Service. "Community Engagement Fellowship."

70   Ibid.

New York City Precedents

The **New York City Council Fellowship** offers a one-year paid fellowship for people who are interested in pursuing a career in local government. Fellows gain experience "in legislative operations, community engagement projects, capital programs, participatory budgeting, public policy and more" in district offices across the city.[71] City Council offices around the City benefit from the addition of a new perspective and additional staffing.

The **New York City Complete the Count Fund** was created in 2019 and allocated $19 million dollars to a joint public education investment between the Mayor's Office and the City Council to ensure the highest possible participation in the 2020 Census. The grant was administered through The City University of New York (CUNY), which directly sent funds to CBOs to aid in their work as "messengers of important and sensitive information within New York City's diverse communities."[72] Likely partially as a result of the rigorous educational messaging, New York City had a 61.9% self-response rate to the 2020 Census, outpacing other large cities such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami. In addition, New York City exceeded the U.S. Census Bureau's pre-Covid estimated response rate of 58.0%.[73]

The **New York City Urban Fellows Program** is a nine-month fellowship program that is sponsored by the City of New York and administered by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). Fellows are placed in mayoral offices and City agencies to learn about public policy and its implementation while attending weekly learning seminars.[74] City agencies benefit from receiving talent from across the country as they build out teams and processes.

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71   New York City Council. "Fellow."

72   New York City, Office of the Mayor. "Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Johnson, City University of New York Announce the New York City Complete Count Fund, A $19 Million Investment to Support Community-Based Census Education and Organizing." 24 Sept 2019.

73   New York City, Office of the Mayor. "NYC Census 2020 Campaign Final Report: The Next 10 Years—A Model for NYC's Future." 25 Oct 2021.

74   New York City, Department of Citywide Administrative Services. "Urban Fellows Program Information."

The **Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City** is a grant program that allocates funding based on the current identified needs and varying priorities of New Yorkers. The Mayor's Fund was launched in 1994 and partners with 50 City agencies and offices, 300 institutional funders, and 100 community-based partners to advance its identified initiatives.[75] Some of the many Mayor's Fund initiatives include:[76]

- Youth professional development and career services

- The conservation of art and historical objects

- Equitable access to mental health care

In 2020, this program provided the city's partnering organizations with $770 million, funded 100 programs, and engaged 150 CBOs.[77] The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City set a precedent for a long-standing program in its ability to respond to the changing needs of New York City while maintaining its commitment to working with CBOs.

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75   City of New York, Mayor's Fund to Avance New York City. "About the Mayor's Fund."

76   City of New York, Mayor's Fund to Avance New York City. "Current Initiatives."

77   City of New York, Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City. "2020 Year in Review: Partnering for Good." 27 Apr 2021.

Case Study: Implications for Ranked Choice Voting

One long-term education effort is the way that New Yorkers understand and engage with ranked choice voting (RCV). RCV education serves as an interesting case study through which to understand the need for increased voter education and outreach, but it is just one example of the work that the civic engagement fellows would cover. Additionally, overlap exists in the target populations and challenges faced when providing voter education and outreach, regardless of whether the topic is RCV, voter registration, voter turnout, or an entirely different civic engagement topic.

When RCV passed in New York City in 2019, the CFB understood the need for a robust public education campaign to ensure that voters were prepared to cast their vote. Despite an ever-changing voting landscape, as well as accessibility and communication challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic, the CFB continued to hold remote RCV informational training sessions and returned to in-person sessions once restrictions eased. The CFB also developed multimedia educational content to inform voters of RCV in our local elections. Our partner CBOs received many of these materials to distribute, depending on their capacity. City organizations that prioritized voting access collaborated on a collective effort to inform voters of RCV and its impacts on voting.

New York City has now held two major election cycles using RCV in the primary election—the 2021 Mayoral election and the 2023 City Council election. One way that the CFB is measuring the progress of RCV is by analyzing the rates of fatal overvotes. As discussed in the previous "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section, fatal overvotes occur when a voter marks two or more candidates for the first rank, resulting in an invalidation of the voter's ballot for that race. Higher rates of fatal overvotes indicate a gap in voters' understanding of the correct usage of their ballots and leads to uncounted votes.

Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 show the four City Council districts with the highest and lowest rates of fatal overvotes in the 2023 primary election and includes the corresponding neighborhoods and racial/ethnic composition. The four City Council districts with the highest fatal overvote rates have rates that are approximately double the City's average (0.59%), meaning that voters in these districts were twice as likely to have their ballots invalidated in the 2023 primary election. These council districts, all of which align with CFB priority communities of underrepresented voters, are comprised of majority-Black and Latinx individuals. This pattern is consistent with prior research; a 2005 study in San Francisco found that Black and Latinx voters were more likely to have less prior knowledge of RCV and therefore higher rates of ballot errors.[78] Conversely, the council districts with the lowest fatal overvotes rates are predominantly made up of White voters, apart from District 47, which is made up predominantly of Asian voters.

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78   Cormack, Lindsey. "More Choices, More Problems? Ranked Choice Voting Errors in New York City." *Sage Journal*. 15 Dec 2023.

Figure 3.1: City Council Districts with the Highest Rates of Fatal Overvotes[79]

City Council District	Percent Fatal Overvotes	Corresponding Neighborhoods	Racial/Ethnic Composition
41	1.4%	Bedford–Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Weeksville	70.0% Black 16.0% Hispanic or Latinx 7.0% Other/Multiracial 6.0% White 2.0% Asian
42	1.3%	East New York, Starrett City, and East Flatbush	63.0% Black 24.0% Hispanic or Latinx 6.0% Other/Multiracial 4.0% Asian 3.0% White
12	1.1%	Wakefield, Baychester, Eastchester, Edenwald, Williamsbridge and Co-op City	62.0% Black 29.0% Hispanic or Latinx 4.0% Other/Multiracial 3.0% White 2.0% Asian
14	1.1%	Kingsbridge, Fordham, University Heights, Mount Eden, and Mount Hope	72.0% Hispanic or Latinx 20.0% Black 3.0% White 2.0% Other/Multiracial 2.0% Asian

79   Demographic data and corresponding neighborhoods have been pulled from Smith, Holliday Rachel, Ari Ephraim Feldman, Sam Rabiyah, and Suhail Bhat. "Get to Know Your City Council District." *THE CITY* & *Spectrum News NY1*, 01 June 2023.

Figure 3.2: City Council Districts with the Lowest Rates of Fatal Overvotes[80]

City Council District	Percent Fatal Overvotes	Corresponding Neighborhoods	Racial/Ethnic Composition
22	0.17%	Astoria, Steinway-Ditmars, Jackson Heights	50.0% White 25.0% Hispanic or Latinx 15.0% Asian 5.0% Black 5.0% Other/Multiracial
2	0.15%	Murray Hill (Manhattan), Flatiron, Union Square, Greenwich Village, and the East Village	56.0% White 18.0% Hispanic or Latinx 14.0% Asian 6.0% Black 5.0% Other/Multiracial
47	0.05%	Coney Island, Bay Ridge, and Bath Beach	49.0% White 20.0% Asian 18.0% Hispanic or Latinx 8.0% Black 4.0% Other/Multiracial
20	0.06%	Flushing, Murray Hill (Queens)	72.0% Asian 15.0% Hispanic or Latinx 9.0% White 2.0% Black 2.0% Other/Multiracial

Several of the CFB's metrics show that while a lot of work has been done to educate New Yorkers on RCV, more voter education is needed to ensure that every voter in the city is able to have their vote counted.

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80   Ibid.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The continued pattern of low voter turnout during odd-year local elections confirms the need for structural change as well continued targeted voter education. The CFB once again recommends changing local elections to even years to increase voter turnout, with the new precedent set for the rest of the State, except for New York City. Additionally, we recommend that the CFB pilot a civic engagement fellowship program, first with a more limited scope that focuses on one priority community with an inaugural class of fellows, and evaluate program efficacy before potentially scaling up the model. This fellowship program is both scalable and dynamic, and allows the CFB to provide resources without coming up against City contracting process that often poses hurdles for grant models.

So much work has already been done in the voter education space by engaging CBOs, and national and local precedents serve as examples on how to best engage talented individuals in local communities and expand the capacity of CBOs. Partnering with CBOs is vital to the civic engagement work that the CFB conducts to best serve New Yorkers. These recommendations build upon the strong foundation of collaboration and commitment to voters.

Appendices

Appendix A: Technical Documentation for Processing the Cast Vote Record Files

Appendix A provides additional context on how the Cast Vote Record (CVR) files, discussed in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section, were processed.

To conduct our ranked choice voting (RCV) analyses, we combined several CVR files published by the New York City Board of Elections after the June 2023 primary election. The 12 CVR files were separated by borough and ballot type (including regular, affidavit, absentee, and emergency ballots). This appendix outlines the steps taken to process and prepare these files for analysis. We did not use the combined file to recreate RCV tabulation rounds or to determine election winners.

To examine voting behavior across political districts, we first combined the individual files into one single file. We recoded and reorganized the original files because some of the ballots ranking candidates existed across multiple CVR files and were split by ballot type. In the example below, each Democratic City Council choice column was named with the council district and ballot race ID number. In the combined CVR file, all voters (regardless of ballot type) were combined into one file, and the Democratic City Council choice columns were combined into five columns. Each row in the combined CVR file, exemplified below, represents a single voter's ballot. We also created a unique ID number for each ballot.

Cast Vote Record	2	4	6	8
Ballot Type	ELE	EAR	OTH	ELE
Precinct	AD: 60 ED: 004	AD: 70 ED: 044	AD: 25 ED: 020	AD: 49 ED: 011
dem_council_member_choice_1_of_5_024307	236932	236808	237120	239577

Cast Vote Record	2	4	6	8
dem_council_ member_ choice_2_ of_5_224307	236461	236597	undervote	undervote
dem_council_ member_ choice_3_ of_5_324307	242359	236871	undervote	undervote
dem_council_ member_ choice_4_ of_5_424307	undervote	240759	undervote	undervote
dem_council_ member_ choice_5_ of_5_525756	undervote	undervote	undervote	undervote
unique_id	3ELE1802	1EAR180	4OTH24006	3ELE31492
cast vote record	1802	180	24006	271
precinct	AD: 60 ED: 004	AD: 70 ED: 044	AD: 25 ED: 020	AD: 49 ED: 011
meta_ information	2023P3V1_ELE. xlsx	2023P1V1_EAR. xlsx	2023P4V1_OTH	2023P3V1_ELE
borough code	3	1	4	3
political party	DEM	DEM	DEM	DEM
ad	60	70	25	49

Cast Vote Record	2	4	6	8
ed	004	044	020	011
CongressDistrict	08	13	06	10
SenateDistrict	19	30	16	17
CouncilDistrict	42	09	23	43
ballot method	ELE	EAR	OTH	ELE
ballot type	ELE	EAR	OTH	ELE
dem_council_ member_ choice_1_of_5	236932	236808	237120	239577
dem_council_ member_ choice_2_of_5	236461	236597	99	99
dem_council_ member_ choice_3_of_5	242359	236871	99	99
dem_council_ member_ choice_4_of_5	99	240759	99	99
dem_council_ member_ choice_5_of_5	NA	99	NA	NA

Note: Data has been rearranged to improve readability.

There was no "Ballot Style" column in the 2023 CVR files that identified the type of ballot the voter used, so we had to identify political parties differently this year. First, we identified columns for each political party starting with "dem-" (Democrat), "rep-" (Republican), and "con-" (Conservative). Then, by applying a loop over each row in the CVR files, we pinpointed occurrences of values different from undervote (ranking preferences left blank) in these columns. We then assigned a political party to each respective row. In the instances in which every value in the row was an undervote, it would then not be assigned a political party since it could not be determined from the information provided.

Based on each voter's election district, assembly district, and political party, the CFB recoded cells to identify undervotes. Ballots in which voters were eligible to vote in a race but left a choice blank or skipped a ranked choice were counted as legitimate undervotes. However, the original CVR files did not distinguish between legitimate undervotes and races that did not appear on the ballot because the voter did not live in that district or was registered to a different political party. For example, on a Republican ballot, Democratic races appeared as undervotes in the original files. In these cases, the CFB recoded these cells to "N/A" in our combined file to reflect that the voter was not eligible to vote in these races.

Some ballots reflected an undervote for every ranking. The CFB categorized these as blank ballots and excluded these ballots from the overall analysis. In the 2023 CVR files, 0.22% of ballots were completely blank and 1.0% of ballots did not have any votes for their City Council race but did have votes in other non-RCV races.

Appendix B: Commonly Used Terms in Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis

Appendix B provides a glossary for terms commonly used in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section.

Fatal error: A ballot error that renders the vote invalid.

Undervote: Occurs when a voter leaves one or more of their available choices blank. Also referred to as "skipped ranks.

Overvote: Occurs when a voter marks more than one candidate for the same preference. Only when a voter overvotes for their first preference is it considered a fatal error.

Bullet voters: Voters who rank the same candidate for multiple preferences.

- **Single choice bullet voters:** Voting for only one candidate across all choices or voting for one candidate across multiple ranks and leaving the other ranks blank.

- **Multiple choice bullet voters:** Voting for one candidate for more than one choice and another candidate for at least one choice.

Skipped race: When a voter does not vote in a race on their ballot but votes for other races.

Exhausted ballots: When a voter does not rank any of the candidates who end up in the final RCV tabulation round.

Ranking sequence: The order in which a voter ranks each candidate for a given race on a ballot.

Ranking score: A calculation created by the CFB that divides the number of unique candidates that a voter ranks in a race, divided by the number of total possible choices the voter can rank for a given race.

Participation score: A calculation created by the CFB that divides the number of elections across the number of years that a registered voter voted in over the number of total elections in which they were eligible to vote. See the "NYC Votes in 2023" section of the 2019–20 Voter Analysis Report for information on the construction of the participation score.

Consistent single rankers: Voters who rank only one unique candidate in all races on their ballot.

Appendix C: Percentage of Races with Ballots that Utilized All Five Rankings

Appendix C shows the percentage of races with ballots utilizing all five ranks, as discussed in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section.

Race			Percentage of Ballots Utilizing Five Rankings
CD 1	Manhattan	Democratic	1.5%
CD 9	Manhattan	Democratic	2.2%
CD 41	Brooklyn	Democratic	3.4%
CD 13	Bronx	Democratic	3.8%

Appendix D: Percentage of Single Choice Voters by City Council Race

Appendix D shows the percentage of single choice voters, or voters who only selected one candidate in one rank, by City Council race. We also include the percentage of single choice voters that were single choice bullet voters, as discussed in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section.

	Race		Percentage of Single Choice Voters (of All Valid Ballots)	Percentage of Single Choice Bullet Voters Out (of All Single Choice Voters)	Number of Candidates
CD 1	Manhattan	Democratic	42.8%	3.0%	4
CD 2	Manhattan	Democratic	54.4%	6.7%	2
CD 9	Manhattan	Democratic	19.6%	9.4%	4
CD 10	Manhattan	Democratic	61.9%	9.5%	2
CD 12	Bronx	Democratic	37.2%	6.3%	3
CD 13	Bronx	Democratic	38.1%	4.6%	4
CD 14	Bronx	Democratic	68.1%	13.6%	2
CD 19	Queens	Democratic	30.5%	5.9%	3
CD 22	Queens	Democratic	64.2%	5.0%	2

	Race		Percentage of Single Choice Voters (of All Valid Ballots)	Percentage of Single Choice Bullet Voters Out (of All Single Choice Voters)	Number of Candidates
CD 23	Queens	Democratic	38.1%	7.4%	3
CD 25	Queens	Democratic	45.1%	5.1%	3
CD 26	Queens	Democratic	41.5%	7.8%	2
CD 29	Queens	Democratic	29.5%	5.4%	3
CD 34	Queens	Democratic	50.2%	6.6%	2
CD 41	Brooklyn	Democratic	29.8%	15.6%	4
CD 42	Brooklyn	Democratic	36.6%	13.7%	3
CD 43	Brooklyn	Democratic	43.6%	4.7%	3
CD 13	Bronx	Republican	44.3%	9.6%	3
CD 20	Queens	Republican	83.6%	2.0%	2
CD 43	Brooklyn	Republican	63.8%	9.8%	2
CD 44	Brooklyn	Republican	62.6%	13.3%	2
CD 47	Brooklyn	Republican	56.4%	9.5%	3
CD 48	Brooklyn	Republican	81.6%	15.4%	2
CD 13	Bronx	Conservative	26.4%	6.9%	3

Appendix E: Percentage of Exhausted Ballots by City Council Race

Appendix E provides a table for the percentage of exhausted ballots by City Council race, as discussed in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section.

Race			Percentage of Exhausted Ballots	Number of Candidates
CD 1	Manhattan	Democratic	1.0%	4
CD 2	Manhattan	Democratic	0.41%	2
CD 9	Manhattan	Democratic	4.1%	4
CD 10	Manhattan	Democratic	1.4%	2
CD 12	Bronx	Democratic	1.4%	3
CD 13	Bronx	Democratic	4.6%	4
CD 14	Bronx	Democratic	0.26%	2
CD 19	Queens	Democratic	6.6%	3
CD 22	Queens	Democratic	0.60%	2
CD 23	Queens	Democratic	2.8%	3
CD 25	Queens	Democratic	6.5%	3
CD 26	Queens	Democratic	0.67%	2
CD 29	Queens	Democratic	3.3%	3

	Race		Percentage of Exhausted Ballots	Number of Candidates
CD 34	Queens	Democratic	0.22%	2
CD 41	Brooklyn	Democratic	1.9%	4
CD 42	Brooklyn	Democratic	1.8%	3
CD 43	Brooklyn	Democratic	3.4%	3
CD 13	Bronx	Republican	2.7%	3
CD 20	Queens	Republican	0.27%	2
CD 43	Brooklyn	Republican	1.4%	2
CD 44	Brooklyn	Republican	0.40%	2
CD 47	Brooklyn	Republican	5.2%	3
CD 48	Brooklyn	Republican	0.33%	2
CD 13	Bronx	Conservative	0.91%	3

Appendix F: Exhausted Ballots Regression Output

Appendix F includes the output from our linear regression model used to assess the impact of demographic and voter behavior factors on ballot exhaustion, as discussed in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section. This analysis is limited to Democratic City Council races in the 2023 primary election.

Deviance Residuals				
Minimum	**First Quarter**	**Median**	**Third Quarter**	**Maximum**
-3.1149	-0.8491	0.1231	0.6153	3.7927

Coefficients				
	Estimate	**Std. Error**	**t value**	**p-value**
(Intercept)	-8.01392	7.28799	-1.09961	0.29499
Percentage registered DEM voters age 65+	0.17845	0.11307	1.57816	0.14283
Average DEM participation score	0.04891	0.16509	0.29629	0.77253
Number of DEM Council candidates	1.13831	0.67652	1.68260	0.12059
Percentage White residents	0.00947	0.03413	0.27760	0.78647

Coefficients				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p-value
Percentage residents with less than a high school diploma	0.04851	0.13491	0.35957	0.72597

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 1.942 on 11 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.3909	Adjusted R-squared: 0.1141
F-statistic: 1.412 on 5 and 11 DF	p-value: 0.2935

Appendix G: Ranking Score Linear Regression Output

Appendix G includes the output of our linear regression model, used to assess the impact of demographic and voter behavior factors on the average RCV ranking score, as discussed in the "Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Analysis" section. This analysis is limited to Democratic City Council races in 2023 primary election.

Deviance Residuals				
Minimum	**First Quarter**	**Median**	**Third Quarter**	**Maximum**
-3.3792	-1.3019	-0.4766	0.94	4.8715

Coefficients				
	Estimate	**Std. Error**	**t value**	**p-value**
(Intercept)	71.471009	11.02475	6.483	4.53e-05 ***
Percentage registered DEM voters age 65+	-0.003912	0.171048	-0.023	0.98216
Average DEM participation score	-0.297709	0.249735	-1.192	0.2583
Number of DEM Council candidates	1.019463	1.023391	0.996	0.34058
Percentage White residents	-0.111243	0.051623	-2.155	0.05418

Coefficients				
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p-value
Percentage residents with less than a high school diploma	-0.718508	0.204075	-3.521	0.00479 **

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 2.937 on 11 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.631	Adjusted R-squared: 0.4633
F-statistic: 3.762 on 5 and 11 DF	p-value: 0.03127