



redistricting



elections  
analysis

2022-2023

# voter analysis report



ballot  
proposals



legislative  
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NYC  
VOTES



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# Year in Review

# Year in Review

As is the case for all election cycles, the 2022 cycle had its own unique challenges, many of which became apparent in the first few weeks of January. The year began with yet another COVID-19 spike. The rapid spread of the omicron variant and the devastation it caused in New York City communities reignited conversations about economic shutdowns and the City's response to the ubiquitous pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

The “Our City, Our Vote” Law, formally known as Local Law 11 of 2022, was enacted at the start of the year. A broad coalition of advocacy groups and elected officials, including Mayor Eric Adams, supported the bill.<sup>2</sup> The legislation allowed over 800,000 legal permanent residents and those with work authorizations to vote in City elections.<sup>3</sup> However, opponents of the bill promptly challenged the law in January, kickstarting a lengthy court battle about the constitutionality of city-only voting.<sup>4</sup>

Issues surrounding New York State's redistricting process were among the most persistent in 2022. In September 2021, the ten-member New York State Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) disagreed on a set of state legislative and congressional maps.<sup>5</sup> The IRC held several hearings in the months following to solicit feedback from the public and redraw proposed district lines.<sup>6</sup> Despite these efforts, the IRC's first meeting of the year ended in a tense gridlock, as Republicans and Democrats on the Commission could not agree on the congressional and State legislative maps.<sup>7</sup> Democratic majorities in the State Senate

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- 1 Anthes, Emily and Azeen Ghorayshi. “[In Omicron Hot Spots, Hospitals Fill Up, but I.C.U.s May Not.](#)” *The New York Times*, 04 Jan 2022.
  - 2 Our City, Our Vote. “[Campaign Overview.](#)”; and Bergin, Brigid. “[NYC Enacts Law Allowing Noncitizens To Vote In Local Elections.](#)” *Gothamist*, 09 Jan 2022.
  - 3 Bergin, Brigid. “[NYC Enacts Law Allowing Noncitizens To Vote In Local Elections.](#)” *Gothamist*, 09 Jan 2022.
  - 4 Bergin, Brigid. “[Republicans File Lawsuit To Block New York City's Noncitizen Voting Law.](#)” *Gothamist*, 10 Jan 2022.
  - 5 Lewis, Rebecca C. and Zach Williams. “[Takeaways from New York's \(Competing!\) Redistricting Draft Maps.](#)” *City & State New York*, 15 Sept 2021.
  - 6 New York State Independent Redistricting Commission. “[Meetings.](#)”
  - 7 Campbell, Jon. “[New York's Independent Redistricting Process Reaches Gridlock.](#)” *Gothamist*, 03 Jan 2022.

and Assembly created their own maps, which Governor Kathy Hochul approved.<sup>8</sup> However, Republicans quickly challenged the maps, arguing that they were illegally gerrymandered, pushing the redistricting process into the courts.<sup>9</sup> The legislative map-drawing process, designed to make the redistricting process less partisan, did not work as intended.

Meanwhile, New York’s election season had an early start. Between January and May, special elections were held in Assembly Districts 43, 58, and 60 in Brooklyn, Assembly District 68 in Manhattan, as well as Assembly District 72 covering Manhattan and the Bronx.<sup>10</sup> Momentum around the year’s gubernatorial race picked up soon after. By early April, Governor Kathy Hochul’s leading challenger Lee Zeldin was steadily building his base. Hochul’s running mate, former Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin, resigned after being arrested and charged with bribery and other campaign finance violations.<sup>11</sup> At the time of his arrest, New York Election Law prohibited Benjamin from dropping off the ballot. Less than a month later, the New York State Senate passed a bill permitting Benjamin to be removed from the ballot.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Governor Hochul was able to appoint Antonio Delgado as her new running mate.<sup>13</sup>

Elected offices were not the only things on the 2022 election ballots. In March 2021, then-Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the establishment of the Racial Justice Commission (RJC), an eleven-member Charter Revision Commission tasked with proposing changes to the City Charter that would advance racial equity for New Yorkers.<sup>14</sup> After extensive research and a

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8 Associated Press. “[Hochul Signs Newly Drawn Congressional Maps for NY.](#)” 03 Feb 2022.

9 Petition, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#), Index No. E2022-0116CV. 03 Feb 2022.

10 NYC Votes. “[NYS Assembly District 43 Special Election.](#)”; NYC Votes. “[NYS Assembly District 60 Special Election.](#)”; NYC Votes. “[NYS Assembly District 68 Special Election.](#)”; and NYC Votes. “[NYS Assembly District 72 Special Election.](#)”

11 Campbell, Jon. “[New York Lt. Gov. Brian Benjamin Resigns After Arrest.](#)” *Gothamist*, 12 Apr 2022; and Rashbaum, William K., Nicholas Fandos, and Jeffery C. Mays. “[Lt. Gov. Benjamin Resigns Following Campaign Finance Indictment.](#)” *The New York Times*, 12 Apr 2022.

12 New York State Senate. S8929 (2021–22): “[Provides for the Declination of a Designation as a Candidate or Nomination for a Party Position Under Special Circumstances.](#)”

13 Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. “[Governor Hochul Announces Appointment of Representative Antonio Delgado as Lieutenant Governor.](#)” 3 May 2022.

14 New York City Racial Justice Commission. “[Final Report of the NYC Racial Justice Commission.](#)” 28 Dec 2021.

six-month citywide public engagement campaign, the Commission developed three ballot proposals that would go before the voters in the November 2022 general election.

Mayor Eric Adams announced a \$5 million commitment to the RJC’s voter education effort in May 2022.<sup>15</sup> The RJC collaborated with countless organizations, elected officials, and agencies in all five boroughs, including the CFB, to spread the word about the ballot proposals. These efforts culminated in the citywide “Flip the Ballot” campaign that began in mid-October, encouraging voters to flip their ballots to vote on the ballot proposals.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, 2022 was also a year marked by racially-motivated tragedy. In May, ten Black people were killed in a horrific racially motivated mass shooting in Buffalo, New York.<sup>17</sup> The tragedy became one of many hate crimes in the nation, and New York City, that year. Hate crimes against Asian New Yorkers have drastically increased since the pandemic began.<sup>18</sup> There were significant increases in antisemitic attacks in 2022 as well.<sup>19</sup> Those within and outside of the democracy space banded together to support these communities and speak out against the hate and violence. Thankfully, many continue to do so.

As the year progressed, questions about who and what would be on the ballot were nearly as prevalent as questions about when the elections would take place. Tensions between the Republican and Democratic parties in the State Senate, Assembly, and within the IRC escalated in the spring of 2022, resulting in unprecedented levels of chaos.

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15 Office of Mayor Eric Adams. “[Mayor Adams Announces \\$5 Million Commitment to Racial Justice Commission for Ballot Proposal Voter Education Effort.](#)” 02 May 2022.

16 Sundaram, Arya. “[NYC Leaders Launch ‘Flip the Ballot’ Campaign for Racial Justice Ballot Questions.](#)” *Gothamist*, 12 Oct 2022.

17 Thompson, Carolyn. “[Buffalo Supermarket Shooter Could Still Get Death Sentence.](#)” *Associated Press*, 16 Feb 2023; and Federal Bureau of Investigation. “[Statement on the FBI Response to the Shooting in Buffalo, New York.](#)” 16 May 2022.

18 Durkin, Erin. “[New York Asian Hate Crime Spike Puts Pressure on New Mayor.](#)” *Politico*, 26 Mar 2022.

19 ABC7 Eyewitness News. “[Antisemitic Hate Crimes in NYC Rose 125% in November, NYPD Data Shows.](#)” 05 Dec 2022.

Democrats and Republicans appealed a series of court rulings in March<sup>20</sup> and April of 2022, which set various deadlines for the legislature to draft new maps.<sup>21</sup> However, the legislature failed to meet those deadlines, so the responsibility of drawing the State Senate and congressional maps ultimately fell on Dr. Jonathan Cervas, a Carnegie Mellon Institute for Politics and Strategy Postdoctoral Fellow and court-appointed “special master.”<sup>22</sup> On April 27, then-New York Court of Appeals Justice Janet DiFiore reversed part of a lower court’s decision that invalidated the Assembly map, ultimately siding with Republicans who said the maps were unconstitutional.<sup>23</sup>

DiFiore also called for the State to hold two primaries.<sup>24</sup> The gubernatorial and assembly primaries would take place on June 28 as planned.<sup>25</sup> However, the congressional and State Senate elections were set for August 23.<sup>26</sup> The surprise August election sowed confusion amongst voters, election officials, candidates, and everyone involved in the New York elections space.

In the midst of the subsequent primary election mayhem, there were a few victories for New York’s electoral system. Governor Hochul signed the groundbreaking John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act into law in June 2022. The legislation, sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie and Assembly Member Latrice Walker, expanded language assistance beyond the federal

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- 20 Notice of Appeal, [Harkenrider et al v. Hochul et al.](#) E2022-C116CV, 31 Mar 2022.
  - 21 Opinion, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#) No. 60, 27 Apr 2022; Villeneuve, Marina. “[New York Court Rejects Congressional Maps Drawn by Democrats.](#)” Associated Press, 27 Apr 2022; and Price, Michelle L. “[Judge Rejects New York’s Redistricting Plan, Orders New Maps.](#)” Associated Press, 31 Mar 2022.
  - 22 McKinley, Jesse. “[How a Mapmaker Became New York’s Most Unexpected Power Broker.](#)” *The New York Times*, 06 Jun 2022; and Order, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#) Index No. E2022-0116CV, 18 Apr 2022.
  - 23 Opinion, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#) No. 60, 27 Apr 2022.
  - 24 Opinion, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#), No. 60, 27 Apr 2022; and Villeneuve, Marina. “[New York Court Rejects Congressional Maps Drawn by Democrats.](#)” *Associated Press*, 27 Apr 2022.
  - 25 Preliminary Order, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#), Index No. E2022-0116CV, 29 Apr 2022; and Reisman, Nick. “[Federal Judge Sustains Aug. 23 New York Primary for State Senate, U.S. House.](#)” *Spectrum News 1*, 10 May 2022.
  - 26 Preliminary Order, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#), Index No. E2022-0116CV, 29 Apr 2022.

requirements, established a mandatory “preclearance” process for New York State similar to the “Section 5 preclearance” struck down in *Shelby County v. Holder*, and banned acts of voter intimidation.<sup>27</sup> Hochul also signed a bill into law that prohibited the invalidation of complete absentee ballots due to stray marks or stains.<sup>28</sup>

The June primary took place with few issues. However, a judge struck down the Our City, Our Vote law, once again halting New York City’s implementation of city-only voting.<sup>29</sup> Although the City of New York appealed the ruling in July, the law will remain in limbo for the immediate future.<sup>30</sup> The August primary quickly followed, resulting in victories for all incumbent New York senators and heated discussions about redistricting of congressional districts.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the City’s unique primary season and the entirety of the electoral cycle, the CFB’s NYC Votes initiative ran a comprehensive voter education campaign. Through partnerships with local organizations and coalitions, NYC Votes reached millions of New Yorkers online, with advertisements, and with print materials. NYC Votes also coordinated the Youth Ambassador Program, an initiative for New Yorkers ages 14–19 who aspire to become civic leaders and learn more about our City. [For more information about the 2022 Youth Ambassador cohort, see the “NYC Votes in 2022” section of this report.](#)

Other agencies around the City also worked tirelessly to boost civic engagement among New Yorkers in 2022. For example, the NYC Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) launched

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- 27 Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. [“Governor Hochul Signs Landmark John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York Into Law,”](#) 20 Jun 2022.
  - 28 Office of Governor Kathy Hochul. [“Governor Hochul Signs Legislation to Safeguard Absentee Ballots and Protect New Yorkers’ Right to Vote.”](#) 24 Jun 2022; and New York State Senate. S.253A/A.1144A (2022): [“Relates to Ballots Where the Express Intent of the Voter is Unambiguous.”](#)
  - 29 Bergin, Brigid. [“Battle Over Voting Rights for Noncitizen Residents in NYC Elections Officially Enters Courtroom.”](#) *Gothamist*, 07 Jun 2022; and Mays, Jeffery C. [“New York City’s Noncitizen Voting Law Is Struck Down.”](#) *The New York Times*, 27 Jun 2022.
  - 30 Moloney, Síle. [“City Council Lodges Appeal to Court Decision that Stops Non-Citizens from Voting in Municipal Elections.”](#) *Norwood News*, 23 Jul 2022.
  - 31 Cruz, David, Brigid Bergin, Jon Campbell, and Phil Corso. [“NY Primary: 5 Things You Should Know After Tuesday’s Election.”](#) *Gothamist*, 24 Aug 2022; and Glueck, Katie. [“Five Takeaways From Tuesday’s Elections.”](#) *The New York Times*, 24 Aug 2022.

the citywide participatory budgeting (PB) process, “The People’s Money.”<sup>32</sup> The democratic process empowers New Yorkers ages 11 and up, regardless of citizenship status, to determine how \$5 million is appropriated. New York jurisdictions have overseen participatory budgeting processes before.<sup>33</sup> However, The People’s Money is the first citywide PB process.

New York’s redistricting issues didn’t stop at the state level. The New York City Districting Commission, mandated by the Charter to draw the City Council maps, released its preliminary plan in July.<sup>34</sup> However, after several public hearings and thousands of testimonies, the Commission voted against sending the revised plans to the City Council in September. The Commission published its final map on October 6th, well ahead of the December 7th legal deadline. The lines will apply in elections taking place in 2023 and all other elections until the next census. For more information about the City’s redistricting process and the impact of public testimony, see the “[Analysis: New York City Redistricting](#)” section of this report.

Over one million New Yorkers cast a ballot in the 2022 general election and voters approved all four proposals on the ballot. For an in-depth analysis of the November general election, as well as both primary elections, see the “[On the Ballot](#)” section of this report.<sup>35</sup>

Leading up to the general election, there was still a great deal of scrutiny surrounding canvassing and absentee ballots. In late September, Republican and Conservative Party leaders filed a lawsuit against the New York State Board of Elections, Governor Hochul, and others.<sup>36</sup> They argued that two laws—one permitting election officials to accelerate the canvassing process and another allowing voters to request absentee ballots if they are concerned about contracting COVID-19—were unconstitutional.<sup>37</sup>

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32 Office of Mayor Eric Adams. “[Mayor Adams, Civic Engagement Commission Announce Launch Of First-Ever Citywide Participatory Budgeting Process.](#)” 14 Sept 2022.

33 Office of New York State Senator Jesse Hamilton. “[Participatory Budgeting—Voting to spend \\$1 million!](#)” 06 Aug 2018.

34 McDonough, Annie. “[Districting Commission Releases Draft of New York City Council Maps.](#)” *City & State New York*, 15 July 2022.

35 New York State Board of Elections. “[2022 Election Results.](#)”

36 Democracy Docket. “[New York Absentee Voting Challenge.](#)” 01 Nov 2022.

37 Ibid.

The subsequent court rulings caused a great deal of confusion and division among election officials. At one point, over two dozen Republican elections commissioners across New York State either refused to process, or were unwilling to commit to processing, absentee ballots as usual while the decisions were being appealed, despite the court instructing them to do so.<sup>38</sup> A State appeals court ultimately upheld both laws, just one week before Election Day, allowing voters to cast their ballots as planned.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, close races in the Assembly District 23 election in Queens and the State Senate District 50 election in central New York prompted high-profile recounts, in which candidates won by miniscule margins: 15 votes and ten votes respectively.<sup>40</sup>

The 2022 election season continued to present challenges for New York’s fundamental democratic processes and institutions. However, New Yorkers persevered and will continue to do so. There is more that all of us, both in and out of government, can do to improve our elections and encourage New Yorkers to vote. This report includes recommendations that can make our elections more accessible, equitable, and resilient. [For these recommendations, see the “Policy & Legislative Recommendations” section of this report.](#)

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38 Bergin, Brigid and Jon Campbell. [“Absentee Ballot Standoff Temporarily Subsides as Partisan Rift Deepens among NY Elections Officials.”](#) *Gothamist*, 27 Oct 2022.

39 Campbell, Jon and Brigid Bergin. [“Appeals Court Turns Away GOP Challenge to NY Absentee Ballot Laws.”](#) *Gothamist*, 01 Nov 2022.

40 Bardolf, Deirdre. [“Finally an Answer in AD 23.”](#) *Queens Chronicle*, 05 Jan 2023; and Dowty, Douglass. [“Mannion Beats Shiroff by 10 Votes in 50th NY Senate District; Judge Orders Election Certified.”](#) *Syracuse*, 19 Dec 2022.



# NYC Votes in 2022

# NYC Votes in 2022

In 2022 the CFB, mandated by the New York City Charter to conduct voter education and engagement, continued its work through the NYC Votes initiative to:

- Encourage registration and voting by all eligible New York City residents;
- Identify groups of voters that are underrepresented; and
- Increase interest, engagement, and turnout.

Guided by this mandate, our program works to understand the differences within the City's diverse communities in order to prioritize potential voters who have been left out of political discourse.

One of the main stories of the 2022 elections was redistricting, which has an even greater impact on communities with underrepresented voters. With voters potentially feeling more disengaged and disenfranchised in the process, NYC Votes saw 2022 as adding a level of urgency and complexity to the work we did in sharing voting information.

## Who were our priority communities?

Our team identified underrepresented voters through in-depth research and analysis of voter registration, turnout, and engagement throughout New York City. We define underrepresented voters as those with lower turnout who lack power in politics. They include:

- Young voters under the age of 30;
- Immigrant voters including New Americans, and those with limited English proficiency;
- Voters with disabilities; and
- Voters with a criminal or felony conviction.

## How we informed voters

This section will address the different ways we performed our work during the 2022 citywide elections, including how we navigated multiple special elections, forged ahead with our work in spite of court rulings, and shared information on the City’s first ever split primary as a result of redistricting rulings.

## Print advertising campaigns

We worked on a wide-reaching advertising campaign in five languages for the August primary and November general election. The campaign presented get-out-the-vote (GOTV) messaging to New Yorkers in new ways and multiple forms: online, in public spaces, and in print, TV, and radio. Digital ads on YouTube, Google, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Twitch were targeted to youth voters and naturalized citizens. Ads in public spaces were seen on subway entrances, bus shelters, laundromats, mobile billboards, and light projections in our priority neighborhoods with lower voter turnout.

“August Primary Election—Vote Today, Change Tomorrow” was our advertising campaign slogan in 2022’s August primary. Over 4 million voters viewed ads leading up to that election, with a combined total of 45 million impressions from digital and out-of-home ads.



“General Election—Change Tomorrow, Vote November 8” was the headline for the general election. Combined, out of home and digital ads achieved more than 124 million total impressions.

## Print Voter Guide

The Voter Guide, mailed to every registered voter before the November general election, was an important resource for creating awareness and understanding about ballot proposals, how to vote, and offices on the ballot in 2022.

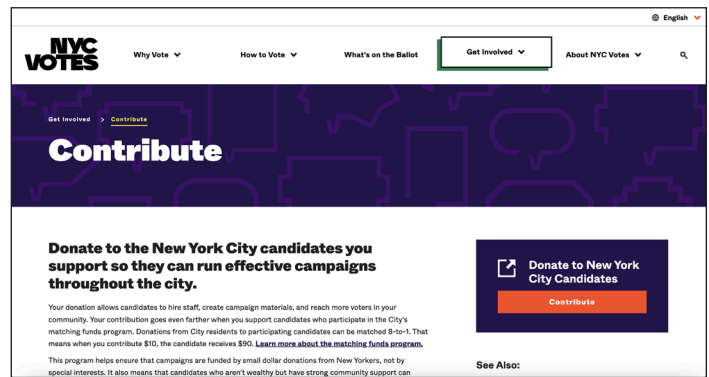
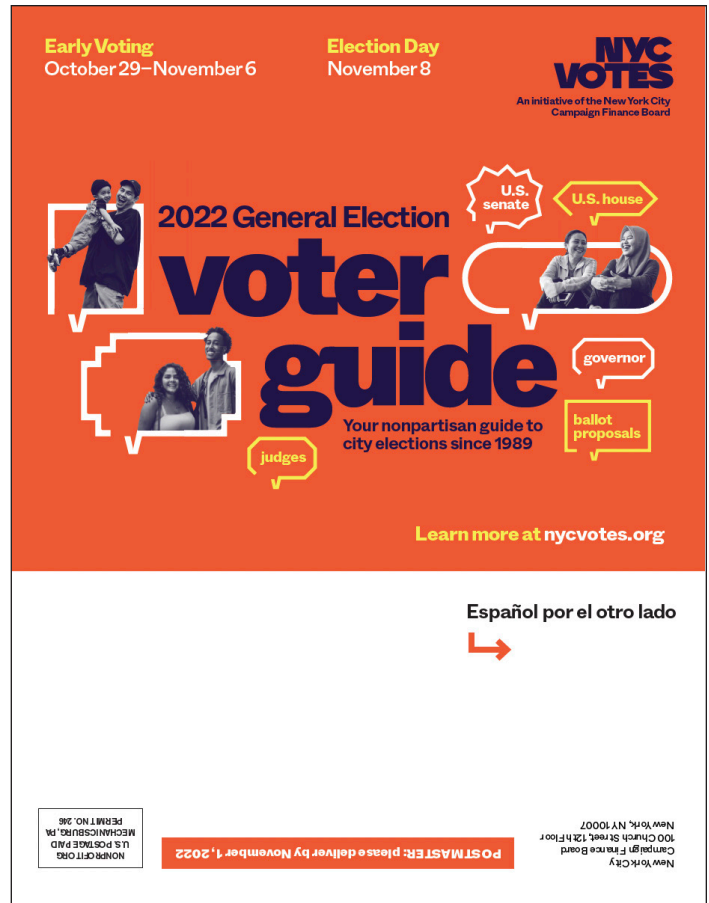
Since there were four proposals on the ballot, we shared details about why they were on the ballot, the actual language voters would see, a plain language summary of the proposal, and what would happen if they passed.

## Online – nycvotes.org

Since 2021, nycvotes.org (formerly voting.nyc) has reached 2 million unique visitors. There were 344,000 website visitors for the 2022 general election, 70% of which were mobile visitors.

On our website, we launched online Voter Guides for every election last year including the special elections in January, February, March, and May in addition to the citywide elections in June, August, and November.

A new feature in the online Voter Guides for the primary and general elections allowed users to search for candidates on their ballot by address and save their choices to take with them to their poll site. We also updated our donation platform, NYC Votes Contribute, to simplify the donation process for contributors and candidates.



## Emails and text messages

We sent out 1 million text messages to voters over the course of the year while responding to voter questions about the elections, and we reached out to the over 30,000 subscribers on our text message list. Over email, we've maintained 32,000 subscribers who had a 36.8% email open rate to the 28 total emails we sent in 2022.

## Social media

We expanded our social media outreach to TikTok in April 2022, another essential step in reaching younger voters where they already are. We also shared several Voter Alerts with local Facebook users throughout the election cycle to spread awareness about deadlines and to support rapid response to questions from voters about everything related to the split primary elections.

## Community outreach

Collaborations with community partners on direct voter outreach through trainings, events, and presentations helped bridge connections between communities that have been traditionally left out of the conversation.

In 2022, we held 103 virtual and in-person events, with over 2,000 attendees. Events included: interactive discussions on local government, civic engagement, and why to vote; key dates and deadlines; offices and proposals on the ballot; ways to vote; and helpful resources for voters. Two key partnerships included one with the Department of Corrections to promote voter registration and voting on Rikers Island, and an East Flatbush Community Partnership voter education workshop series.

## Direct voter outreach

Through text message outreach to voters, over 230 volunteers helped us send 1,068,750 texts over ten text bank events with the messages focusing on younger voters in our priority neighborhoods. Election materials reaching nearly 300,000 New Yorkers were distributed to public libraries, community and advocacy organizations, offices of elected officials, and community boards. Materials included mini Voter Guides, palm cards, large print fliers, and general election Voter Guides. 91,550 pieces of material were distributed for the August primary, 89,050 for the June primary, and 106,088 for the November general election.

## Youth Ambassador Program

Our Youth Ambassador Program continued to engage future voters in fun and exciting ways while uplifting diverse voices and providing inclusive approaches to its selection process. 2022 was the first ever hybrid model of the program which taught students local history, engaged them with other agencies, and created hands-on voter outreach opportunities. Overall, 530 young people applied to be a part of the 2022 NYC Votes Youth Ambassador Program. Applicants, most from the City's public high schools, came from all five boroughs and represented a wide array of races, ethnicities, spoken languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The program had a big impact on its participants:

**“This program, and I may be overreacting, literally changed my life. I never really knew what direction I would go in terms of future careers and such, but being an ambassador was so fulfilling.”**

The 19 selected Youth Ambassadors learned about the voting process, local government history and politics, professional development, media training, and content creation. They worked with Policy and Research staff, conducted surveys and interviewed community members and experts in the field, and presented their preliminary research at the Youth VAAC Hearing before submitting final reports. The Youth Ambassadors gained a positive experience, greater understanding of their role in government, and the leadership skills to move them forward in the next chapter of their lives.

## 2023 Language Access Expansion Preview

Through recommendations in past Voter Analysis Reports, the CFB has advocated for improved language access for voters.<sup>41</sup> Starting in 2020, language access became its own subsection of our recommendations. That year, we called for increasing language support from the City BOE, and also recommended best practices that agencies should implement to ensure quality alongside increased quantity.<sup>42</sup> Last year, we took account of the landscape of different language access services provided by agencies across the City and called for alignment.<sup>43</sup> The goal was to create a process by which a voter could receive materials and services in their language of choice from voter registration to Election Day.

In our Voter Analysis Reports, we have also included commitments for the CFB to improve our language access services. Last year the CFB committed to translating the NYC Votes website into 12 languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), French, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Korean, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. In 2020, we committed to following the City’s language access plan and distributing our materials in the designated citywide languages. Finally, in 2021, Local Law 48 of 2022 mandated a major language expansion of the print, online, and video Voter Guides.<sup>44</sup>

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41 2018–19 Voter Analysis Report. “[Legislative Recommendations—Expanding Translation Services](#).”; and 2019–20 Voter Analysis Report. “[Policy and Legislative Recommendations—Language Access](#).”

42 2020–21 Voter Analysis Report. “[Recommendations to Improve Elections—Expanding Language Access](#).”

43 2021–22 Voter Analysis Report. “[Policy & Legislative Recommendations—Language Access and the New York Voting Rights Act](#).”

44 New York City Council [Local Law 48-2022](#).

To increase staffing capacity, Public Affairs has created a centralized language access team. A Language Access Manager was hired in May 2022 and a Language Access Specialist for Spanish was hired in November 2022. The language access team implemented standards and language industry best practices to ensure that all print and digital materials are translated with accuracy and consistency.

To scale up the number of languages provided, the CFB also had to scale up our linguistic resources and sourcing. The agency has contracted Eriksen Translations to translate our materials into 12 additional languages. The review process was conducted in conjunction with our community partners who helped review translations for quality and community specificity. In the end, Eriksen was chosen because of their work as an independent translation agency based in NYC that has previously worked with City agencies, including the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) and the Civic Engagement Commission (CEC). Eriksen's expertise helps guarantee translations that are tailored to New Yorkers and consistent across agency translations of voting materials.

There has also been a huge change to [nycvotes.org](https://www.nycvotes.org). Before 2022, the NYC Votes website was available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Bengali. To meet voters' language access demands, every page on our website is now available in 13 languages. These are human translations that can be seen on all our dynamic and static web pages. We are proud of how our language access services have grown and improved over the past year.

Language access is also built into our Youth Ambassadors program. Applicants to the program can strengthen their applications by speaking a language other than English. In 2022, 11 of the 19 Youth Ambassadors spoke another language, with six total languages represented: Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. Ambassadors used their language skills to increase civic engagement in their communities. In the summer, Ambassador Tiffany Nieto tabled at two Queens Public Library events providing information in English and Spanish for over 50 voters.



For their research project, the four Youth Ambassadors in the limited-English proficiency (LEP) group sought to answer the question: “What are some barriers to voting that LEP voters and their families face?” To find some answers, the Ambassadors interviewed families or households where at least one person spoke a language other than English. They also spoke with professionals from Dominicanos USA, the MinKwon Center, and Chhaya CDC: organizations that support LEP New Yorkers across the City.

From their interviews, the Ambassadors heard that some voters were unaware of voting in the City. Voters from other countries might not be familiar with the U.S. democratic process and may not receive any education on the process in the language of their choosing. Personal interviewees who were aware of the voting process expressed a lack of interest in voting and felt uninvited to the process. Voters missing support to join in on elections and the resources to fully participate could feel like the process is not for them. The Ambassadors recommended increasing funding for translation and interpretation services in order to improve the number of translations and diversify the kinds of materials LEP voters are receiving.

As the CFB continues to improve its language access offerings, there are a few things coming in the future. We are building the infrastructure to produce and deliver a 13 language Voter Guide and streamlining our translation process for our primary and general election materials. We also want to continue our work with community partners to create a feedback loop in order to meet the changing needs of voters. With these projects, the CFB will be assessing the demands and needs of our team and potentially increasing our staffing.

# 2022 Elections Turnout Summary

		June Primary	August Primary	November General
	Eligible Voters	3,649,595	2,390,215	4,723,497
	Voters	530,272	352,252	1,809,732
	Citywide Turnout	14.5%	14.7%	38.3%
Turnout by Borough	Manhattan	19.6%	21.5%	45.8%
	Bronx	10.5%	9.1%	27.9%
	Brooklyn	14.5%	13.0%	38.7%
	Queens	13.0%	10.3%	36.1%
	Staten Island	13.7%	12.6%	45.9%
Turnout by Age	18-29	8.2%	8.0%	26.6%
	30-39	10.7%	11.0%	32.9%
	40-49	10.8%	11.0%	37.4%
	50-59	14.5%	14.7%	43.8%
	60-69	21.1%	21.6%	49.6%
	70-79	25.6%	26.7%	50.9%
	80+	15.9%	16.8%	32.2%
Vote Method	Absentee	6.5%	13.8%	6.9%
	Early	16.3%	21.7%	23.9%
	Election Day	76.0%	63.4%	67.7%

# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

With a complex redistricting process, a split primary, a series of special elections, and four ballot proposals, 2022 was an unconventional year for New York City elections. This year's Voter Analysis Report examines the different ways these matters impacted the electorate. It also contains structural and focused recommendations that could increase turnout and make election information more accessible to the public.

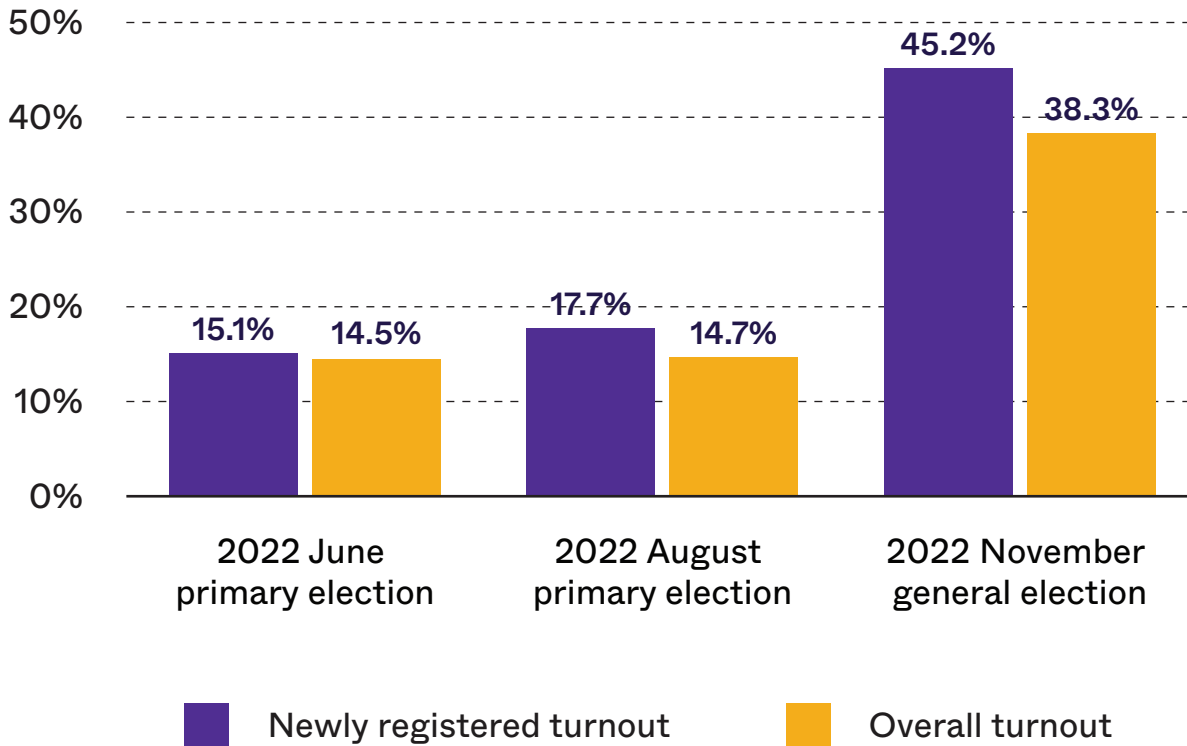
## On the ballot

The first section of this report focuses on voter turnout, behavior, and demographics. In 2022, New York City had nearly five million voters, representing a voter registration rate of 85.2%.<sup>45</sup> Roughly 154,000 of those voters were newly registered. Overall turnout, and turnout for newly registered voters, increased over the course of the election season. In fact, voter turnout for newly registered voters exceeded overall turnout in the June and August primaries and the November general election.

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45 The estimate for the eligible voting population in NYC comes from the [2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates](#).

**Figure 0.1: Newly registered voter turnout compared to overall turnout**



Though younger people (aged 18–29) made up a significant portion of newly registered voters, the average age of actual voters overall skewed older: the average age of registered voters in 2022 was 49 and the average age of voters in the 2022 primaries was 57.

The year’s three major elections had stark differences in turnout. Over 530,000 voters cast their ballot in the June primary. More than 352,000 voters turned out in the August primary, and over 1.8 million in November’s general election. Most voters chose to vote on Election Day, but the rates of in-person voting still varied between elections. In the August primary, 63% of voters chose to vote on Election Day. Roughly 76% and 68% voted in-person on Election Day for the June and November elections respectively.

[This report also includes data on turnout by the City’s boroughs and neighborhoods. Manhattan had the highest turnout in both 2022 primaries, and the Bronx had the lowest turnout.](#)

**Figure 0.2: Voter turnout in June and August 2022 by borough**

Borough	June 2022		August 2022	
	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout
Manhattan	152,485	19.6%	153,933	21.5%
Bronx	61,482	10.5%	26,633	9.1%
Brooklyn	167,811	14.5%	115,838	13.0%
Queens	118,076	13.0%	27,771	10.3%
Staten Island	30,418	13.7%	28,077	12.6%
Citywide	530,272	14.5%	352,252	14.7%

New York City voters had four ballot proposals on their general election ballots: one statewide proposal about environmental protection and three citywide proposals centered around racial justice. Voters overwhelmingly approved all four ballot proposals, with 1.8 million voting in favor of them.

## Redistricting analysis

Our redistricting section examines public testimony that New Yorkers submitted during the City’s redistricting process and makes a strong case for sustaining public engagement, both in this process and others. There are four primary areas of focus for this section: word frequency, overall sentiment, testimony similarity, and the impact of testimony on the drawn district lines.

**Figure 0.3: Word cloud of the top 75 most common words in the testimony when template testimony is omitted**



Part of this analysis focuses on the types of language people used in their testimony and the sentiments behind them. This includes a review of commonly used words, positive and negative tones, and similarities between testimonies written by different community-based groups. These words provided valuable insight into the unique qualities of the neighborhoods they represent. For example, the top words in Brooklyn Council District 33 were “Williamsburg,” “orthodox,” and “appeal.” Several testifiers who self-identified as Orthodox Jewish were concerned that the lines would split the community. Testifiers in three Manhattan Council Districts expressed concerns about draft lines that divided Hell’s Kitchen.

**Figure 0.4: Top three words with highest rates in phase one**

Borough	District	#1 Word	#2 Word	#3 Word
Manhattan	1	Single	Interest	Identifiable
Queens	24	Transfer	Rabbi	Uddin
Brooklyn	43	Redistrict	Preliminary	Asian
Brooklyn	44	Hasidic	Boro	Midwood
Brooklyn	47	Beach	Coney	Bensonhurst

The end of the section provides evidence that testimony had an impact on the final district maps drawn. For example, testifiers from Queens Council Districts 19 and 23 were concerned that the initial district lines would divide the Bayside Hills community, impacting the representation of the area’s AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) communities. In the final plan, the entirety of Bayside Hills was contained in Council District 23.

## **Policy & legislative recommendations**

New York City has taken great strides towards making our elections more accessible since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Campaign Finance Board is eager to work with local organizations, government officials, City agencies and voters to support these efforts. This year’s policy and legislative recommendations address low turnout rates, the legacy of disenfranchising legislation, and the ways that language barriers impact the voting process.

- **Recommendation 1:** Changing the timing of City elections
- **Recommendation 2:** Require ballot proposals to be written in plain language



# **On the Ballot in 2022**

# On the Ballot in 2022

The CFB works to increase voter turnout by engaging with voters that are underrepresented in the electorate, working with community groups to distribute educational materials, and hosting education events. We also analyze voter registration, turnout, and socioeconomic data to identify districts that have the greatest need for outreach and voter education.

2022 was an atypical election year, with major changes brought by redistricting, and an unexpected August primary. Typically, we compare turnout numbers to turnout four years prior, because it has a comparable slate of offices on the ballot. Throughout this section, we will be comparing 2022 to 2018 and 2014, which also had State and federal races on the ballot.

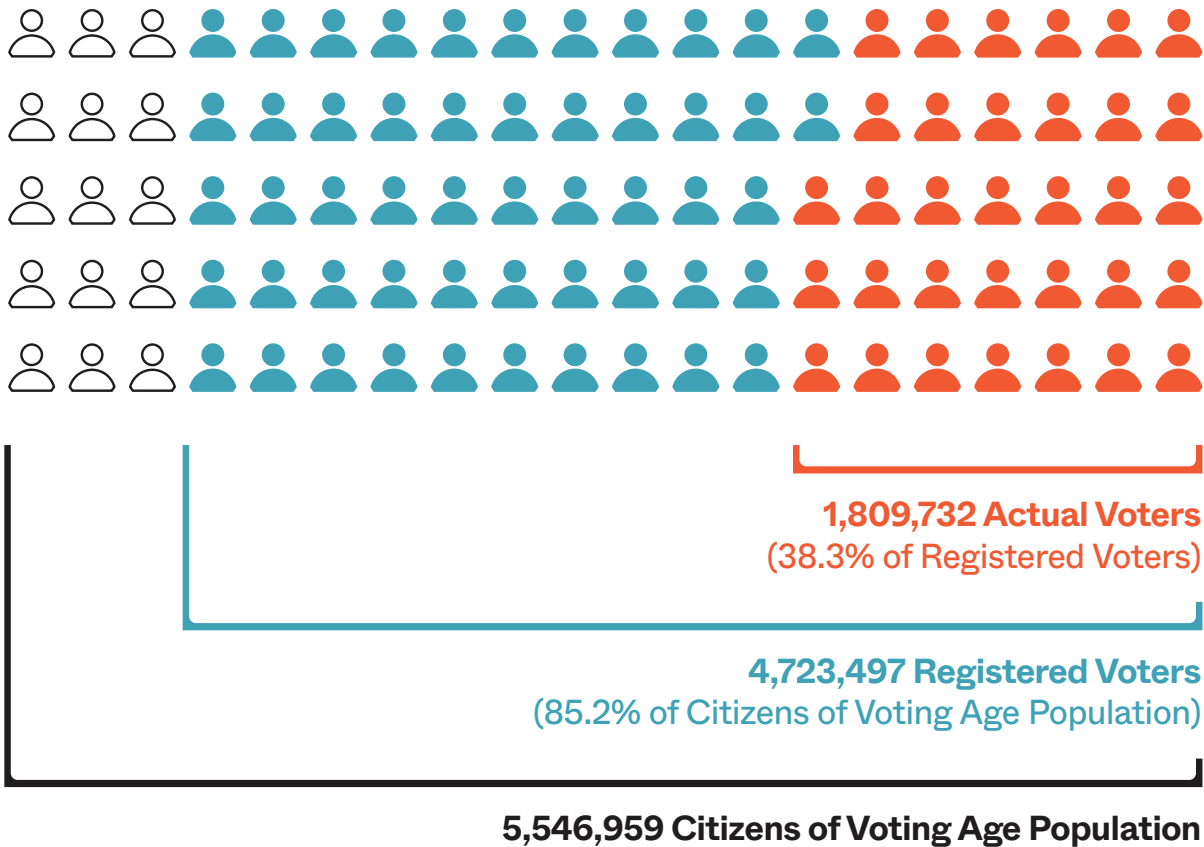
**Figure 1.1: Historic voter turnout by election cycle**

Year	Election	On the Ballot	Primary	General
2018	Federal	U.S. Congress	11.3%	46.0%
	State	Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, State Senate, State Assembly	28.4%	
	NYC	Ballot Proposals		
2019	NYC	Council District 45, Queens District Attorney	11.9%	17.2%
	NYC	Public Advocate, Ballot Proposals	N/A	
2020	Federal / State / NYC	President, U.S. Congress, State Senate, State Assembly, Queens Borough President	25.7%	61.9%
	NYC	Council District 37		
2021	NYC / State	Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, City Council, District Attorney, Judges	26.5%	23.3%
	State	Ballot Proposals		
2022	State	Governor, Lt. Governor, Comptroller, Attorney General, State Assembly, Judges	14.5%	38.3%
	Federal/ State	U.S. Congress, State Senate	14.7%	
	NYC/State	Ballot Proposals		

## Voter registration

By the end of 2022, the New York City voter rolls contained nearly five million active registered voters, representing a voter registration rate of 85.2%.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure 1.2: 2022 general election turnout shown with registered voters and citizens of voting age<sup>47</sup>**



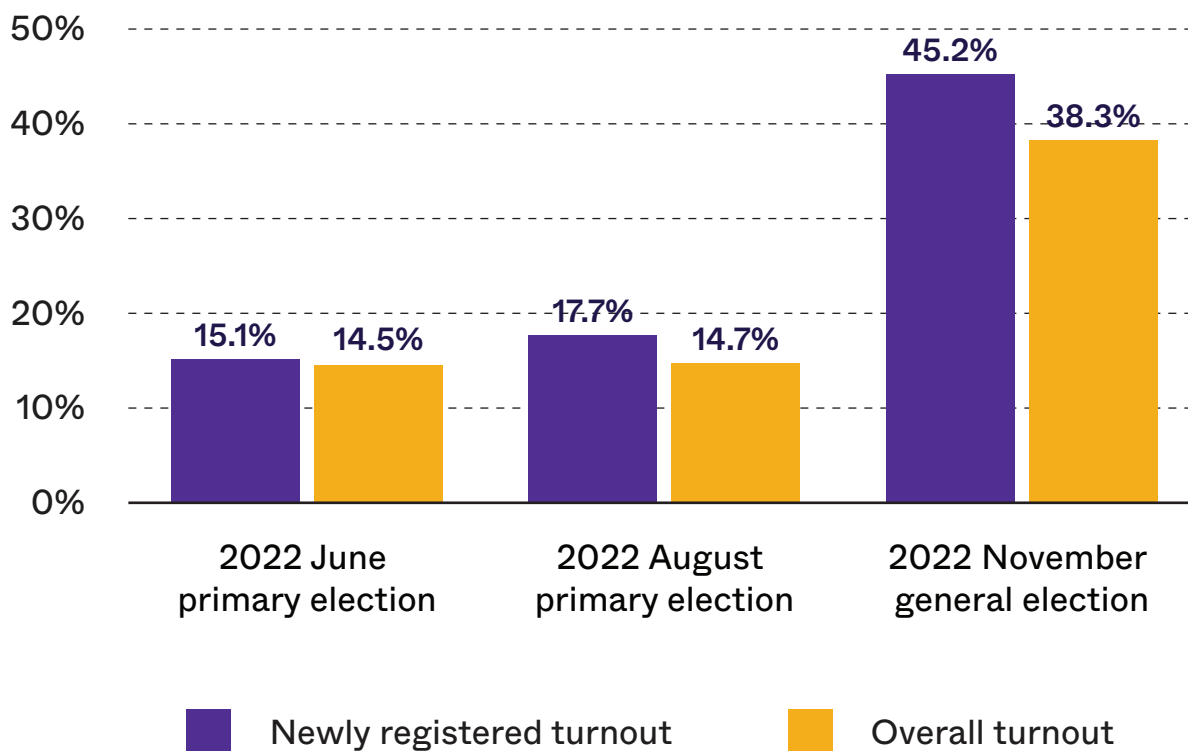
46 The estimate for the eligible voting population in New York City comes from the [2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates](#).

47 Turnout rate is calculated as the ratio of the number of votes cast in an election to the number of registered voters eligible for the election. Turnout calculations for the 2022 general election are based on the New York City Board of Elections voter history file compiled in January 2023.

A total of 154,456 new voters registered to vote for the first time in 2022. Of these new registrants, 47,406 registered before the deadline to vote in the June primary election, 22,844 registered after the June primary but before the deadline for the August primary election, and 44,001 registered after the August primary deadline but before the deadline to vote in the general election.

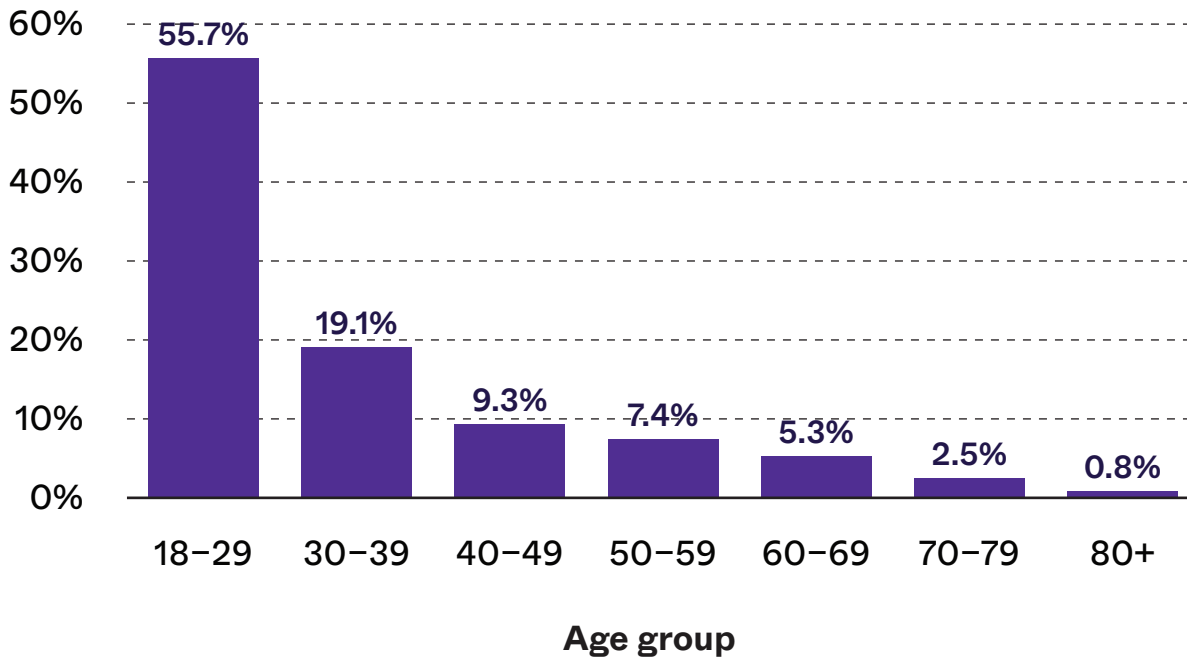
Among those who were eligible to vote in the June 2022 primary, 15.1% of newly registered voters turned out to vote. The turnout rate among newly registered voters exceeded the overall turnout rate in the June primary election by less than 1%. Similarly, 17.7% newly registered voters turned out to vote in the August 2022 primary, which exceeds the overall turnout for that election by 3%. In the general election, the turnout rate among newly registered voters also exceeded the overall turnout rate. While 38.3% of all eligible voters turned out to vote in the general election, 45.2% of newly registered voters did the same.

**Figure 1.3: Newly registered voter turnout compared to overall turnout**



Newly registered voters skew younger than those who have been registered for a year or more. The average age of newly registered voters in 2022 was 32, while the average age of all registered voters was 49. However, though nearly 56% of newly registered voters were 18–29 years old, newly registered voters came from all age groups. As shown in Figure 1.4, close to 1% of newly registered voters were older than 80.

**Figure 1.4: Age distribution of newly registered voters**



## 2022 primary elections analysis

New York holds closed primary elections, which means voters must be registered party members to vote in a primary election. Voters who are not registered political party members or are registered to a political party that is not holding a primary election are not eligible to vote.

In 2022, two primary elections were held, on June 28 and August 23, after New York State's highest court rejected redrawn election maps earlier in the year. (For more information about redistricting see the "[Year in Review](#)" and "[Analysis: New York City Redistricting](#)" sections of the report.) Just over 350,000 New Yorkers voted in the August primary, making up 14.7% of eligible registered voters, and over 530,000 voters in New York City voted in the June primary, making up 14.5% of eligible registered voters.

**Figure 1.5: Citywide voter turnout in the 2022 primary elections<sup>48</sup>**

	June 2022	August 2022
Voters	530,272	352,252
Registered eligible voters	3,649,595	2,390,215
Citywide turnout	14.5%	14.7%

Turnout for the primary in August was 14.7%, which was slightly higher than the June primary at 14.5%. The following sections further discuss turnout across location, age, and vote methods in the 2022 primary elections.

### Location of voters

Turnout for the June primary was highest in Manhattan (19.6%). Conversely, the Bronx had the lowest turnout (10.5%). Turnout for the August primary was again highest in Manhattan (21.5%) and lowest in the Bronx (9.1%). Across both primaries, Manhattan had the highest turnout and the Bronx had the lowest turnout, which may reflect turnout disparity at the borough level.

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48 Turnout rate is calculated as the ratio of the number of votes cast in an election to the number of registered voters eligible for the election. Turnout calculations for the 2022 primaries are based on the New York City Board of Elections voter history file compiled in October 2022.

**Figure 1.6: 2022 primary elections turnout by borough**

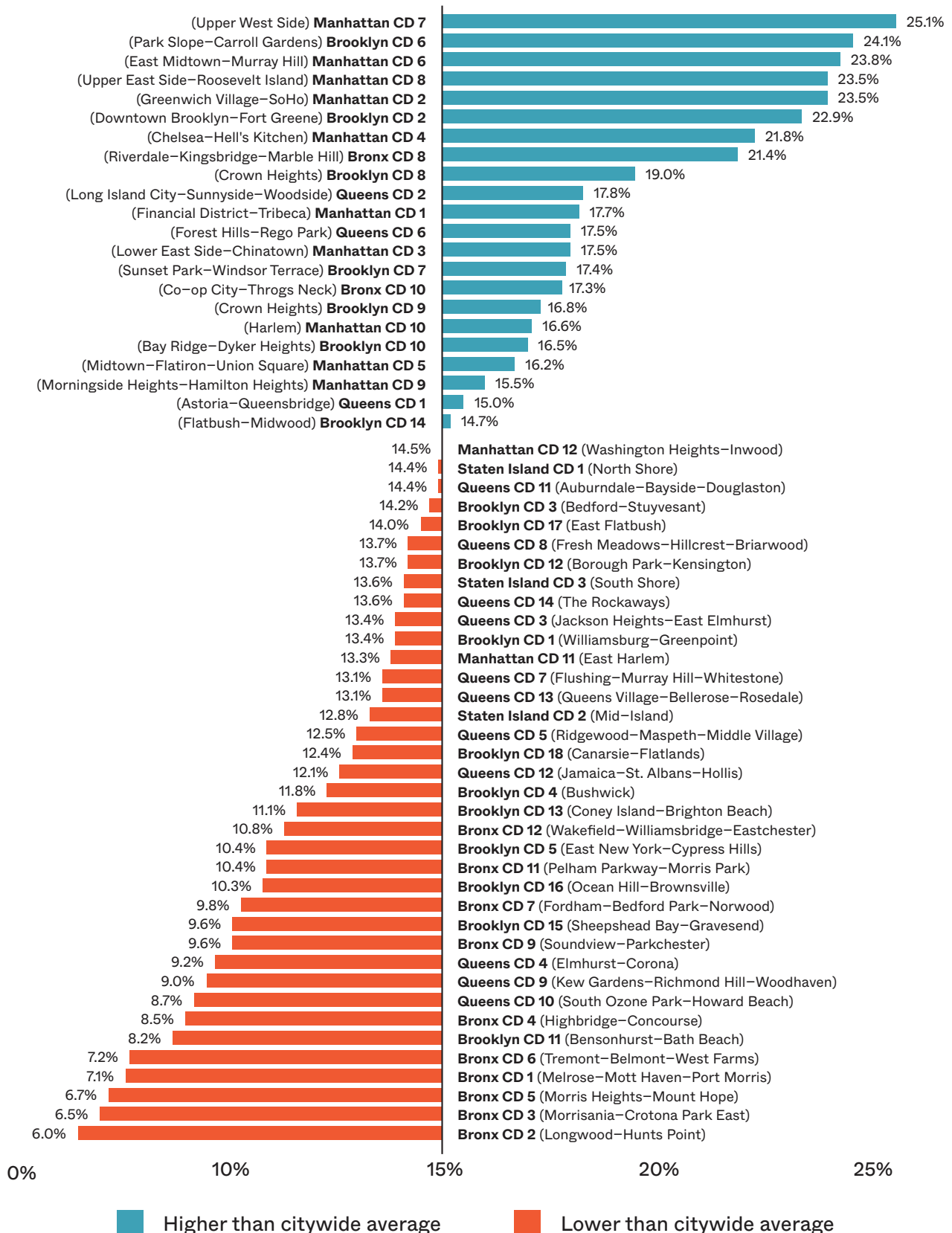
Borough	June 2022		August 2022	
	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout
Manhattan	152,485	19.6%	153,933	21.5%
Bronx	61,482	10.5%	26,633	9.1%
Brooklyn	167,811	14.5%	115,838	13.0%
Queens	118,076	13.0%	27,771	10.3%
Staten Island	30,418	13.7%	28,077	12.6%
Citywide	530,272	14.5%	352,252	14.7%

Turnout by community district in the August primary ranged from 1.8% in Bronx Community District 3 (Crotona Park East, Morrisania) to 32.1% in Manhattan Community District 7 (Upper West Side). In addition, turnout by community district in the June primary ranged from 6.0% in Bronx Community District 2 (Hunts Point, Longwood) to 25.1% in Manhattan Community District 7 (Upper West Side).

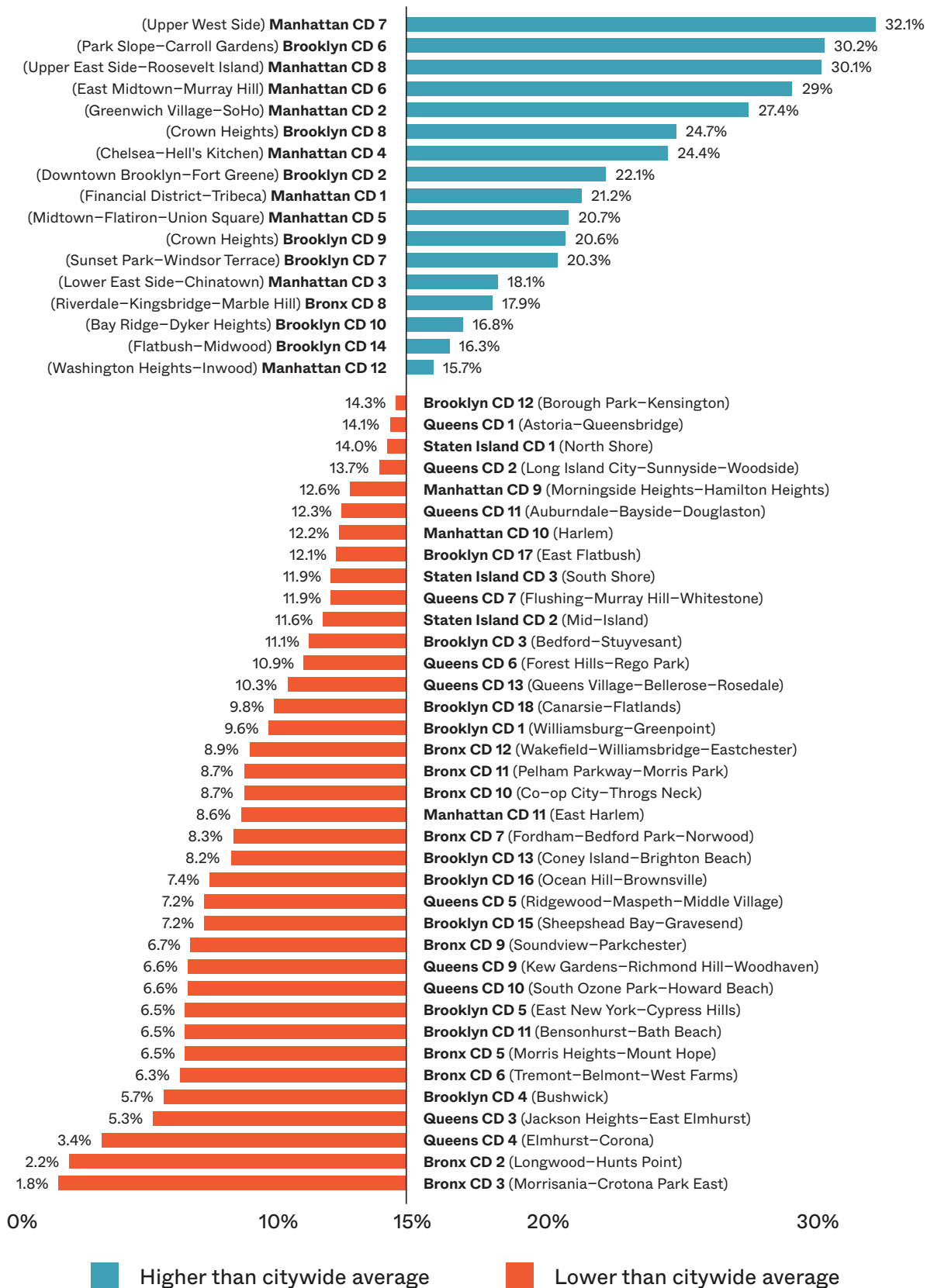
In both primaries, some community districts had a higher turnout rate compared with citywide turnout. About 42% of community districts exceeded citywide turnout in the June primary, whereas for the August primary only 33% of community districts exceeded citywide turnout. The difference in turnout range between both primaries could be attributed to the June primary having more offices on the ballot and including all districts. Figure 1.7 and Figure 1.8 demonstrate the community districts whose turnout exceeded and underperformed the citywide turnout.



**Figure 1.7: June 2022 primary voter turnout by community district**



**Figure 1.8: August 2022 primary voter turnout by community district**



## Age of voters

The average age of voters in the 2022 primaries was 57, nearly eight years older than the 49 year-old average registered voter.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that older voters turned out more than younger voters. Likewise, this pattern is reflected in the primary elections in 2018.

**Figure 1.9: 2022 primary elections average age of voters<sup>50</sup>**

	All registered voters	June 2022 voters	August 2022 voters
Mean Age	49	57	57

Both 2022 primaries demonstrated similar turnout outcomes by age. Youth turnout is shown to fall short with a low rate of participation from voters aged 18–29 years (8.0% in the August primary, and 8.2% in the June primary). On the other hand, older age groups were shown to have the highest turnout in the 2022 electorate. 21.6% of voters aged 60–69 years turned out in the August primary, and 21.1% in the June primary. 26.7% of voters aged 70–79 years turned out in the August primary, and 25.6% in the June primary. Youth turnout in primary elections in 2018 and 2014 has followed the same pattern.

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49 The actual average for August 2022 primary voters was 56.6 and the actual average for June 2022 primary voters was 56.8.

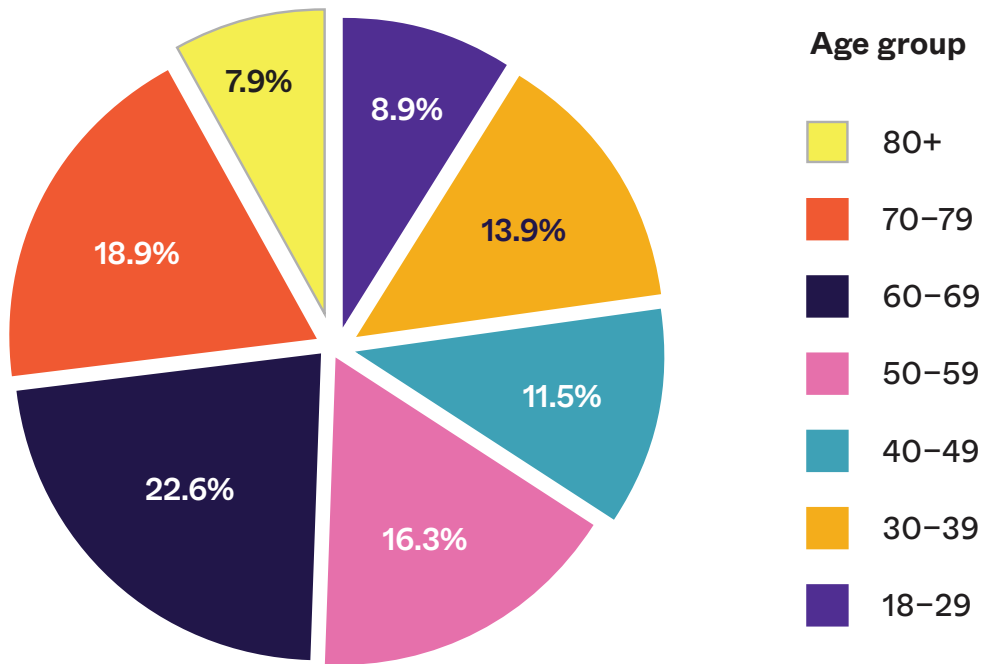
50 The actual average for all registered voters was 49.3.

**Figure 1.10: 2014, 2018, and 2022 primary elections turnout by age**

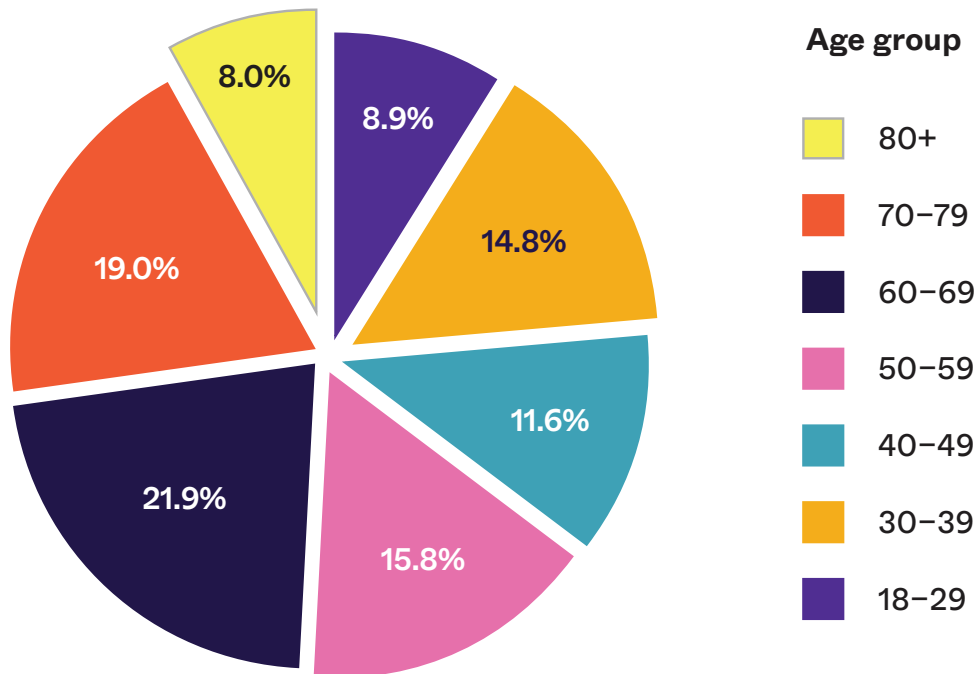
Age Group	June 2014	September 2014	June 2018	September 2018	June 2022	August 2022
18–29	2.2%	3.2%	7.0%	18.5%	8.2%	8.0%
30–39	3.2%	4.8%	8.8%	23.4%	10.7%	11.0%
40–49	5.7%	7.6%	8.8%	25.6%	10.8%	11.0%
50–59	9.4%	12.3%	11.0%	31.2%	14.5%	14.7%
60–69	13.7%	18.7%	16.0%	38.4%	21.1%	21.6%
70–79	16.0%	22.4%	19.1%	39.7%	25.6%	26.7%
80+	11.7%	16.1%	13.5%	24.9%	15.9%	16.8%

In New York City overall, voters aged 60–69 years made up the largest portion of the electorate in the 2022 primaries (21.9% in the August primary, and 22.6% in the June primary). Voters aged 18–29 years (8.9% in the August primary and June primary) and voters 80 years and above (8.0% in the August primary and 7.9% in the June primary) made up the smallest.

**Figure 1.11: June 2022 primary distribution of voters by age group**



**Figure 1.12: August 2022 primary distribution of voters by age group**

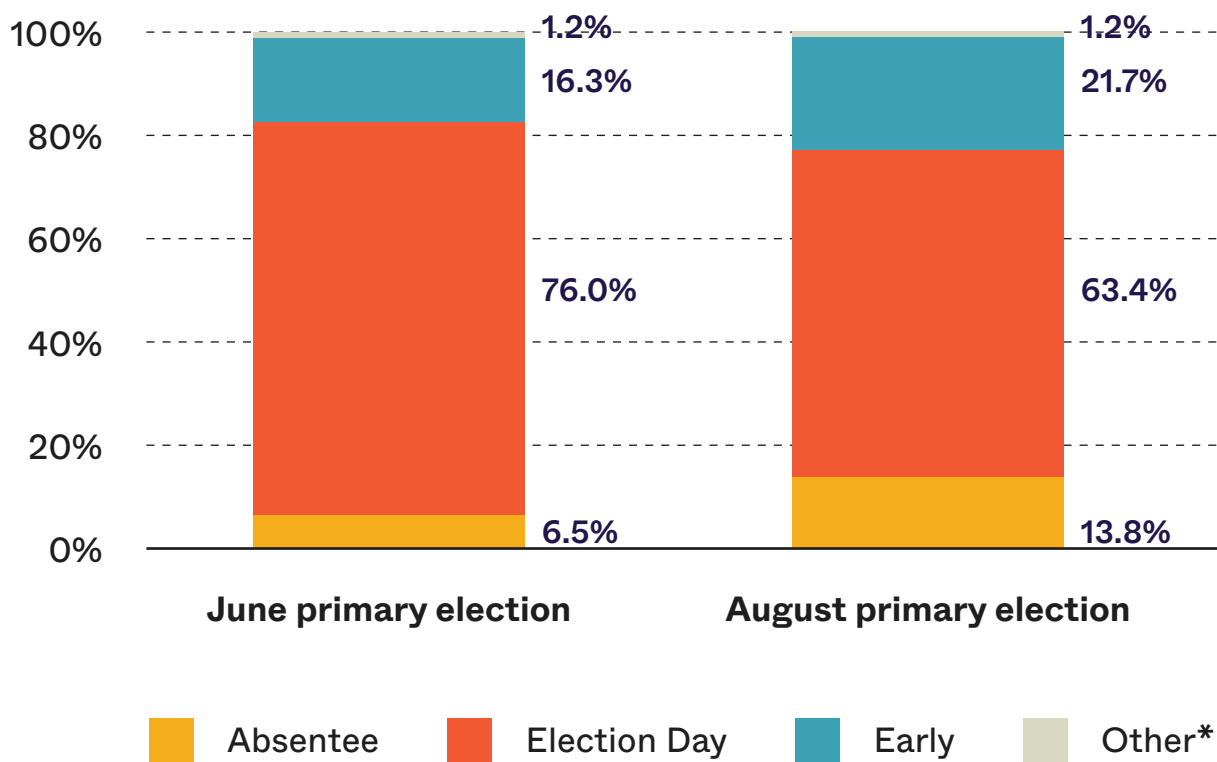


## Voting method comparisons: 2022 primary elections

In the 2020 general election, we witnessed an explosion in the number of New Yorkers voting by absentee ballot. Changes to State Election Law in response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed all New Yorkers to vote absentee by simply checking the box on the absentee ballot application for “temporary illness or physical disability.”

All voters in the City were still permitted to vote by absentee ballot in the 2022 primary elections. However, in both primaries, the majority of voters chose to vote on Election Day. 63.4% voted on Election Day in the August primary and 76.0% of voters in the June primary voted on Election Day. In the August primary, we see slightly more voters voting early (21.7%) and absentee (13.8%) instead of voting in-person on Election Day. In the June primary, 16.3% of voters voted early, while 6.5% voted by absentee ballot.

**Figure 1.13: 2022 primaries voting method comparison**



\* Includes ballot categories special, affidavit, and military ballots

## 2022 general election analysis

All registered voters in New York City, regardless of political party affiliation, are eligible to vote in the general election. The total number of eligible, registered voters in New York City was 4,723,497, at the time of the general election.

Turnout was higher in the general election than in the primary elections in 2022. In the general election, 1,809,732 eligible registered voters in New York City voted, with a turnout rate of 38.3%. This is a lower turnout percentage than in the 2018 general election but significantly higher than the 24.7% turnout of the 2014 general election.<sup>51</sup>

**Figure 1.14: 2022 general election citywide turnout**

Voters	Registered eligible voters	Turnout
1,809,732	4,723,497	38.3%

### Location of voters

Staten Island slightly edged out Manhattan for the highest voter turnout (45.9%) of the general election, a change from the primary elections when Manhattan had significantly higher turnout than the rest of the boroughs. Staten Island also had the highest turnout in the 2014 general election of all five boroughs. Like the 2022 primary elections, turnout was lowest in the Bronx (27.9%), which suggests consistent turnout disparity at the borough level for both primary and general elections in 2022. This was also the case for the Bronx in the 2018 (41.3%) and 2014 (22.1%) general elections.

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51 Turnout for the 2018 general election was 46.0%.

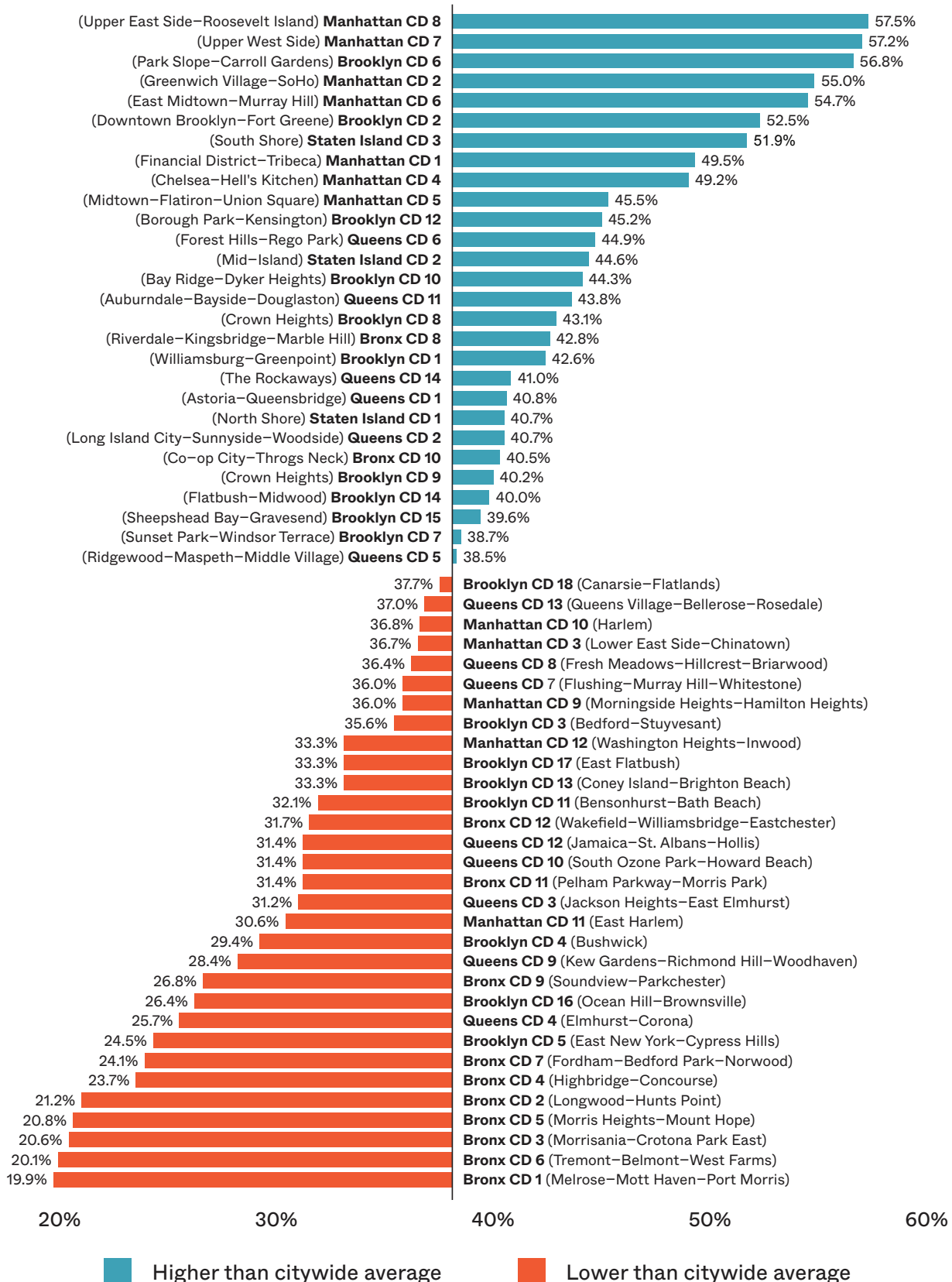
**Figure 1.15: 2014, 2018, and 2022 general elections turnout by borough**

Borough	2014 General		2018 General		2022 General	
	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout
Manhattan	255,743	28.0%	528,840	53.6%	453,264	45.8%
Bronx	142,770	22.1%	294,810	41.3%	203,653	27.9%
Brooklyn	307,636	23.7%	642,668	44.8%	569,920	38.7%
Queens	239,432	23.3%	501,096	43.4%	440,811	36.1%
Staten Island	79,915	30.3%	140,329	48.5%	142,084	45.9%
Citywide	1,026,132	24.7%	2,108,903	46.0%	1,809,732	38.3%

In the general election, turnout by community district ranged from the lowest at 19.9% in Bronx Community District 1 (Melrose-Mott Haven-Port Morris) to the highest at 57.5% in Manhattan Community District 8 (Upper East Side-Roosevelt Island). Figure 1.16 demonstrates the community districts whose turnout exceeded and underperformed the citywide turnout.



**Figure 1.16: 2022 general election voter turnout by community district**



## Age of voters

The average age of voters in the 2022 general election was 52, which exceeds the average age of all registered voters in the City by three years but is almost five years younger than the average age of voters in the 2022 primary elections (57).

**Figure 1.17: 2022 general election average age of voters<sup>52</sup>**

	All registered voters	General election voters
Mean Age	49	52

Turnout in general elections among young voters, aged 18–29 years, has consistently remained low compared to other age groups when looking at the midterm election years of 2014, 2018, and 2022. Following a low turnout of 11.4% in the 2014 general, young voters' electoral participation spiked by 27% from 2014 to 2018. The shift in voting behavior among young voters may indicate an increased interest in midterm elections, and in making their voices heard in years with State races on the ballot. However, the number of youth turning out still declined by 12% from 2018 to 2022.

Furthermore, older age groups, such as voters aged 60–69 years (49.6%) and voters aged 70–79 years (50.9%) had the highest turnout in 2022. This is consistent with the turnout in the 2018 and 2014 general elections. Overall, all age groups had a higher turnout in general elections 2022, 2018, and 2014 than in their respective primary elections.

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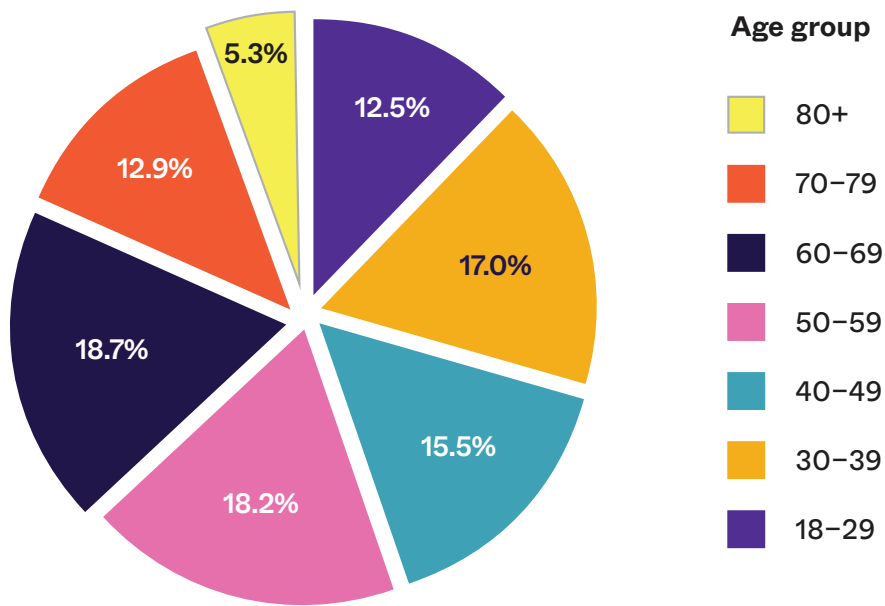
52 The actual average age of all registered voters was 49.2 and the actual average age of voters in the 2022 general election was 52.3.

**Figure 1.18: 2014, 2018, and 2022 general elections turnout by age**

Age group	2014 General	2018 General	2022 General
18–29	11.4%	39.3%	26.6%
30–39	16.2%	42.6%	32.9%
40–49	22.6%	46.0%	37.4%
50–59	30.7%	51.2%	43.8%
60–69	38.6%	55.2%	49.6%
70–79	40.5%	53.1%	50.9%
80+	27.4%	33.2%	32.2%

Young voters in the 2022 general election made up a slightly larger proportion (12.5%) of total voters than in the 2022 primary elections (8.9% in the August primary and June primary). Similar to the 2022 primaries, voters aged 60–69 years made up the largest portion of voters in the 2022 general election (18.7%), while those aged 80 years and above (5.3%) made up the smallest.

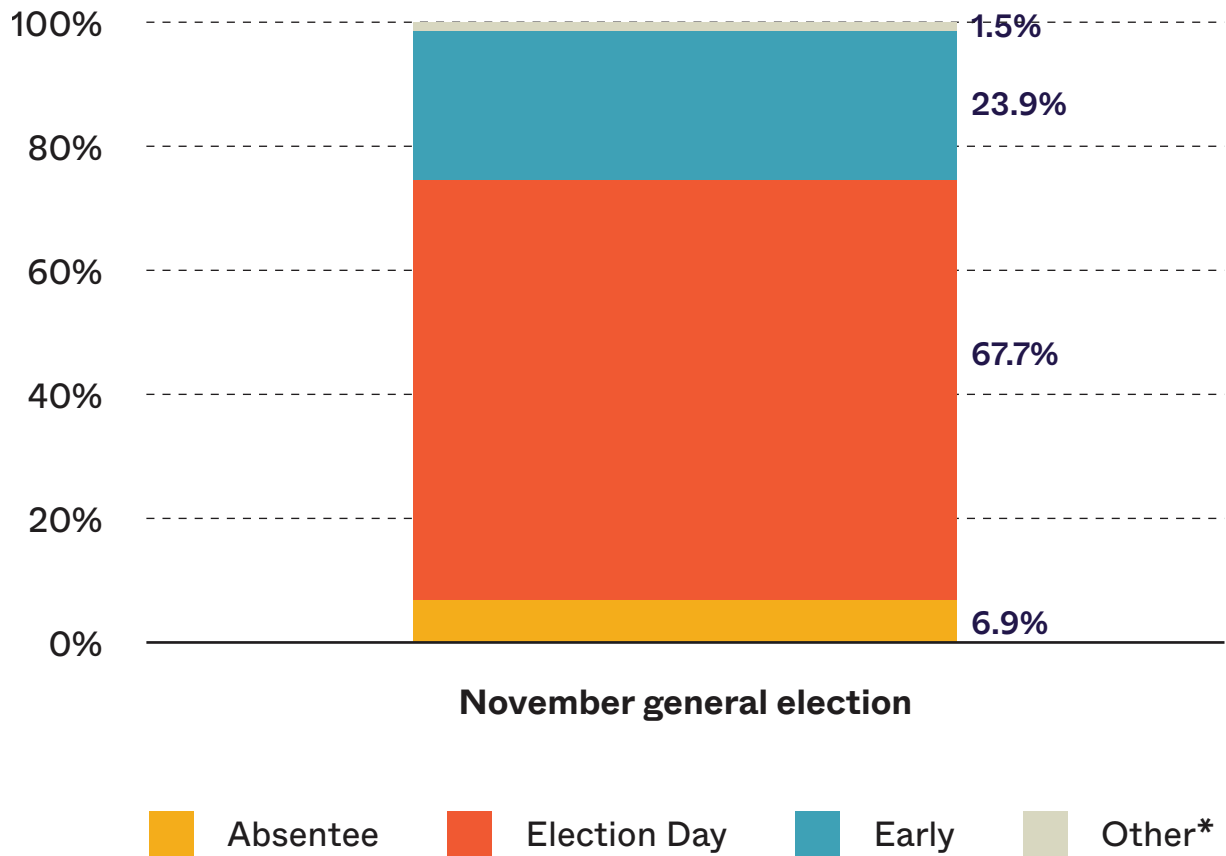
**Figure 1.19: 2022 general election distribution of voters by age**



## Voting method

Voting on Election Day was most popular for voters in the general election, with 67.7% of all voters voting in-person on Election Day. These findings are consistent with voting method comparisons for primary elections in 2022. In the general election, 23.9% voted early and 6.9% voted by absentee ballot.

**Figure 1.20: 2022 general election voting method**



\* Includes ballot categories special, affidavit, and military ballots

## Ballot proposals

In the general election, New Yorkers voted on ballot proposals, as is becoming a more regular occurrence—ballot proposals were on the ballot in the last four general elections. The first ballot proposal would have amended the New York State Constitution. Ballot questions 2, 3, and 4 amended City law.

- **Ballot Proposal 1** would allow New York State to borrow \$4.2 billion through a bond issuance for environmental protection, natural restoration, resiliency, and clean energy projects.
- **Ballot Proposal 2** would create a preamble to the City Charter that incorporates a statement of “values and vision.” This preamble aims to promote a just and equitable City for all New Yorkers.
- **Ballot Proposal 3** would create an Office of Racial Equity, require a citywide Racial Equity Plan every two years, and create a Commission on Racial Equity.
- **Ballot Proposal 4** would require the city to measure the actual cost of living for City residents to meet essential needs.

Voters in New York City overwhelmingly voted to pass all four ballot questions. Total “yes” vote percentages for the City are shown in Figure 1.21.

**Figure 1.21: Percent “yes” votes for 2022 general election ballot proposals**

Ballot proposals	Citywide votes "yes"
Ballot Proposal 1: Environment	81.2%
Ballot Proposal 2: Values	72.4%
Ballot Proposal 3: Racial Equity Office	69.9%
Ballot Proposal 4: Cost of Living	81.1%

The drop-off percentages listed in Figure 1.22 refer to the percent of voters who chose not to vote on each ballot proposal. There was a relatively high rate of drop-off between the total number of ballots cast in the general election and the number of votes cast for each of the proposals. This may be a result of voters experiencing decision fatigue, a concept that describes how more people abstain from decision-making as they are asked to make more and more decisions.

For ballot proposals 2, 3, and 4, over one-fifth of voters chose to leave the question blank on their ballot. However, ballot proposal 1 was the exception with a slightly lower dropoff rate of -17.5%, possibly due to it being the first question asked which voters are more likely to answer.

**Figure 1.22: Ballots cast for general election 2022 ballot proposals**

	Votes	Drop-off
Total Ballots Cast	1,820,157	—
Ballot Proposal 1: Environment	1,543,233	-17.5%
Ballot Proposal 2: Values	1,504,984	-20.5%
Ballot Proposal 3: Racial Equity Office	1,498,043	-21.1%
Ballot Proposal 4: Cost of Living	1,510,524	-20.1%

Drop-off rates for the ballot proposal varied considerably at the borough level. Brooklyn had the highest rate of drop-off for each of the four proposals and Manhattan had the lowest rate. For each proposal, the drop-off rate among voters in Brooklyn had a 10% gap between voters in Manhattan.

**Figure 1.23: Ballots cast for ballot proposals in 2022 general election by borough**

		<b>Ballot Proposal 1</b>	<b>Ballot Proposal 2</b>	<b>Ballot Proposal 3</b>	<b>Ballot Proposal 4</b>
<b>Borough</b>	<b>Total Ballots</b>	<b>Drop-Off</b>	<b>Drop-Off</b>	<b>Drop-Off</b>	<b>Drop-Off</b>
Manhattan	459,747	-9.6%	-12.1%	-12.4%	-11.4%
Bronx	203,402	-18.4%	-20.8%	-21.8%	-21.2%
Brooklyn	572,595	-20.0%	-21.9%	-22.5%	-22.1%
Queens	442,438	-12.9%	-14.8%	-14.7%	-13.9%
Staten Island	141,975	-12.8%	-14.5%	-14.9%	-14.5%

## 2022 special elections analysis

When New Yorkers vote in citywide elections, they usually only cast a ballot in the primary in June and in the general election in November. But in some cases, voters have additional opportunities to vote during the year if a special election is called. Special elections are held to fill temporary vacancies in public offices resulting from an elected official’s resignation, removal, or death. Unlike other elections where candidates are registered with a political party, special elections are nonpartisan elections where candidates are allowed to write in a party name of their choosing.

Special elections are of interest for multiple reasons. It is not uncommon to have multiple special elections in one year. In early 2022, there were four special elections for five state assembly seats. This was the highest number of special elections since 2009 when the City held four special elections in seven districts. Though multiple specials are held, they do not occur on set dates, hurting efforts to prepare and raise awareness. This makes it confusing for voters who want to understand who is eligible to vote for a special election and when



voting is taking place. These factors may lead to the low voter turnout seen in many specials held in the City. Voter fatigue, when voters become less likely to vote the more often they are called to do it, may also play a role in the low voter turnout. With the number of variables impacting special elections, the CFB wanted to take a closer look at their impact.

The first special election in 2022 was held in January in East Harlem, after the former Assemblyman was appointed as Secretary of State of New York. Unfortunately, this election had a record low turnout of 1.8%.

In February, two districts—one in East New York in Brooklyn and the other in upper Manhattan—had elections after their former assembly members were voted into city council seats, and their combined turnout was 3.4%.

The March and May special elections were both for assembly districts in Brooklyn, and their turnout rates were also slightly over 3%. The winners of the special election assembly seats held their positions until January 2023, after which they were replaced by assembly members who had been elected to their newly redistricted seats.

**Figure 1.24: 2022 special elections turnout**

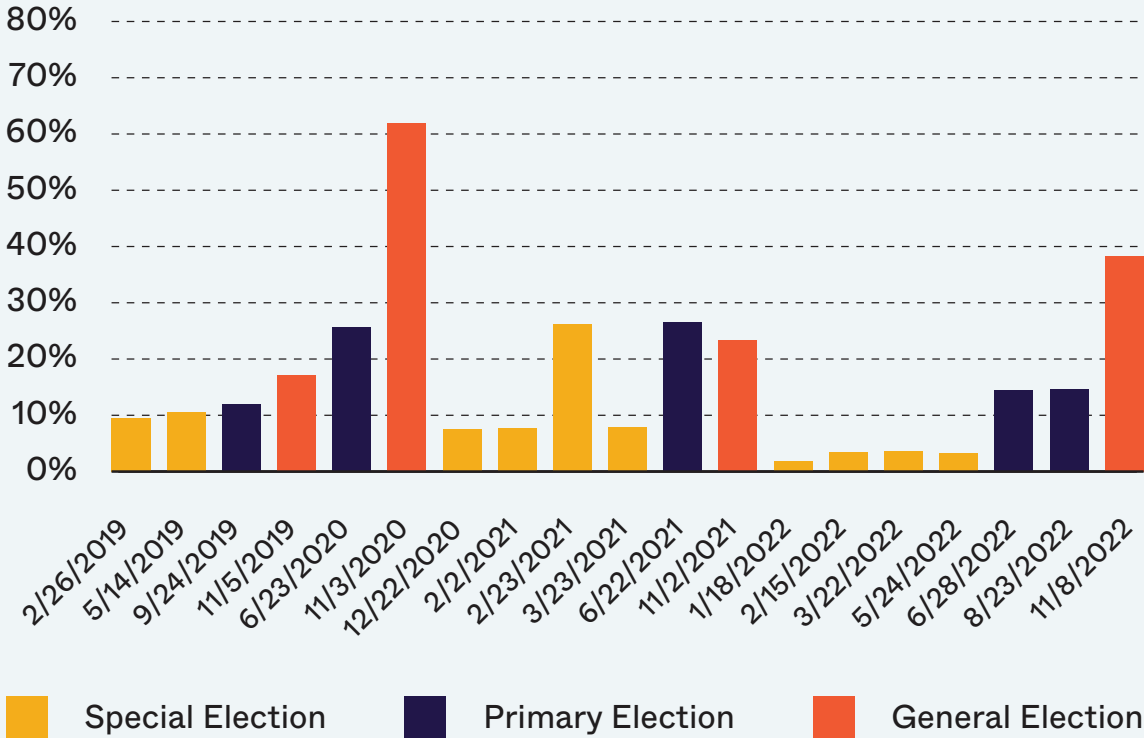
Date	Districts	Voters	Eligible voters	Turnout
1/18/2022	Assembly District 68 (Manhattan)	1,436	81,293	1.8%
2/15/2022	Assembly Districts 60 (Brooklyn) & 72 (Manhattan)	5,084	150,605	3.4%
3/22/2022	Assembly District 43 (Brooklyn)	3,052	84,930	3.6%
5/24/2022	Assembly District 58 (Brooklyn)	2,358	73,327	3.2%

# Who turns out to vote in special elections?

As part of the CFB’s Charter mandate to analyze factors that influence voter participation in New York City, the agency pursues original research to help policymakers, administrators, and advocates better understand which New Yorkers vote and why. In an effort to explore why special election turnouts are so low, this year the CFB looked further into which voters are more likely to turn out in special elections.

Turnout trends from recent special elections in New York City show that the low turnout rates seen in 2022 are not necessarily unique. When compared to primary and general elections, special elections turnouts have historically fallen short. Figure 1.25 shows how special elections turnout stacks up in comparison to all primary and general elections over the last four years.

**Figure 1.25: Turnout in special, primary, and general elections 2019–2022**



In past Voter Analysis Reports, we have used publicly available information to analyze voter behavior across different time periods.<sup>53</sup> This year, to further explore special elections, we looked at special elections between 2015 and 2022.

**Figure 1.26: Special elections 2015–2022<sup>54</sup>**

Date	Type	District
5/5/2015	City	Congressional District 11 (Brooklyn, Staten Island)/ Assembly District 43 (Brooklyn)
2/23/2016	City	City Council District 17 (Bronx)
4/19/2016	State/Federal	Assembly Districts 59 (Brooklyn), 62 (Staten Island), 65 (Manhattan)
2/14/2017	City	City Council District 9 (Manhattan)
5/23/2017	State/Federal	Senate District 30 (Manhattan)
4/24/2018	State/Federal	Assembly Districts 39 (Queens), 74 (Manhattan), 80 (Bronx)/ Senate District 32 (Bronx)

53 The 2020 Voter Analysis Report included demographic information that correlated with voter turnout in a ten-year longitudinal study, and the 2018 Voter Analysis Report included demographics that correlated with 2018 general election turnout at the neighborhood level. Both studies indicated that certain demographic factors had huge impacts on voter turnout.

54 Only registered voters located within the designated district can vote in a special election in that district. The only special election during this time period for which every registered voter in the City was eligible to vote was the 2019 citywide Public Advocate special election.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>District</b>
2/26/2019	City	Citywide Public Advocate
5/14/2019	City	City Council District 45 (Brooklyn)
12/22/2020	City	City Council District 12 (Bronx)
2/2/2021	City	City Council District 24 (Queens)
2/23/2021	City	City Council District 31 (Queens)
3/23/2021	City	City Council Districts 11, 15 (Bronx)
1/18/2022	State/Federal	Assembly Districts 68 (Manhattan)
2/15/2022	State/Federal	Assembly Districts 72 (Manhattan), 60 (Brooklyn)
3/22/2022	State/Federal	Assembly District 43 (Brooklyn)
5/24/2022	State/Federal	Assembly District 58 (Brooklyn)

Over this time period, turnout has remained low on average, but with a large range between 1.8% to 29.0%.<sup>55</sup> The average special election turnout from 2015 to 2022 was a little over 8%.

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55 Turnout for the April 16, 2016 special election for three State Assembly seats was significantly higher than the rest of the special elections in part due to being paired with the 2016 presidential primary.

Using the voter file information available to the CFB, we sought to answer the following research questions:

- Which areas of New York City had the lowest voter turnout in special elections across the last seven years?
- Who lives in those low turnout areas?
- Which demographic and socioeconomic factors influenced the voting behaviors of New Yorkers in special elections over the last seven years?

As discussed in greater detail at the end of this section, there were some limitations to how far we could answer some of our research questions due to the unique nature of the special elections data available to us and a lack of in-depth research on special elections overall.

## Special elections participation score

In order to compare different areas of the City and to adjust for variations in the number of special elections, we adapted our “participation score” from the 2020 Voter Analysis Report for each individual voter in New York City, just for special elections. Instead of looking at turnout within a single special election, our participation score looks at a seven-year time frame of 16 special elections in 24 districts. This allowed us to identify voters who score highly because they vote in every special election or most special elections, versus voters who vote intermittently or not at all.<sup>56</sup>

Our participation score is the ratio of the number of special elections a person voted in over the number of special elections they were eligible to vote in. The participation score ranges from zero to 100.<sup>57</sup> The study includes a total population of 4,722,484 voters. The mean participation score for the City is 9.5. For more information about how this score was put together, please visit [Appendix A on page 106](#).

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56 Information about methodology for the participation score can be found in [Appendix A](#).

57 The table with participation score calculations does not contain any personally identifiable information, except the CountyEMSID. The CFB will not reveal individual participation scores with personally identifiable information attached.

## Descriptors of special election voters

Using information available in the voter file, the CFB first looked at the location of voters and whether different areas of the City and political boundaries turned out at a higher rate for special elections.

Looking at the special election participation score across five boroughs, Manhattan tops all boroughs with a mean participation score of 11.6. Meanwhile, the Bronx had the lowest mean participation score at 6.7. This indicates disparity at the borough level in special elections, which is similar in all primary and general elections.

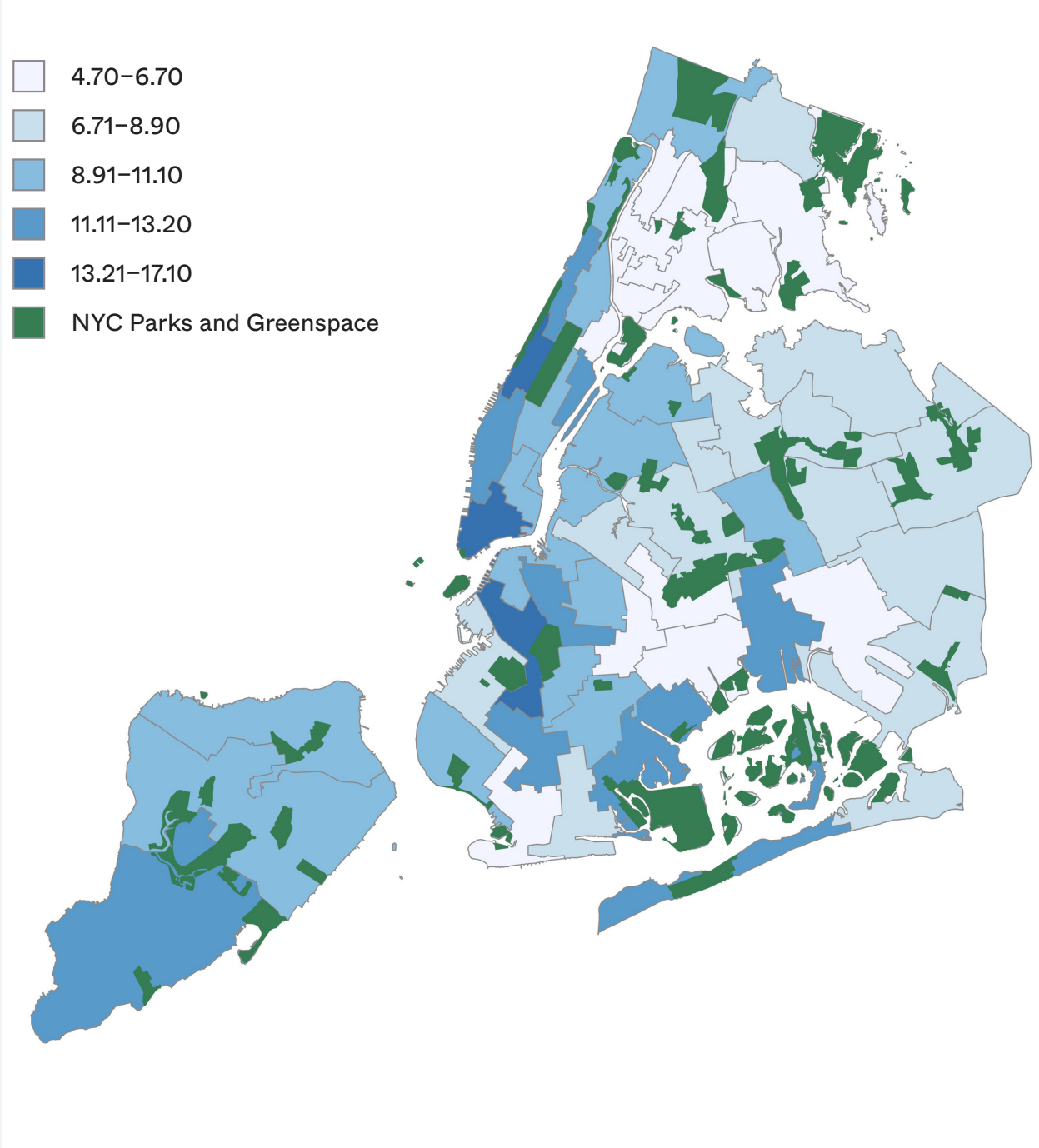
**Figure 1.27: Participation score citywide and by borough**



Mean participation score by Council district ranged from the lowest at 4.7 in Bronx Council District 17 to the highest at 17.1 in Brooklyn Council District 39. Almost 60% of council districts underperformed the citywide participation score, and the majority of these districts are located in the Bronx and East Brooklyn. Participation in special elections among boroughs and Council districts suggests disparity at the geographic level. Figure 1.28 demonstrates the Council districts whose participation exceeded and underperformed the citywide participation score.

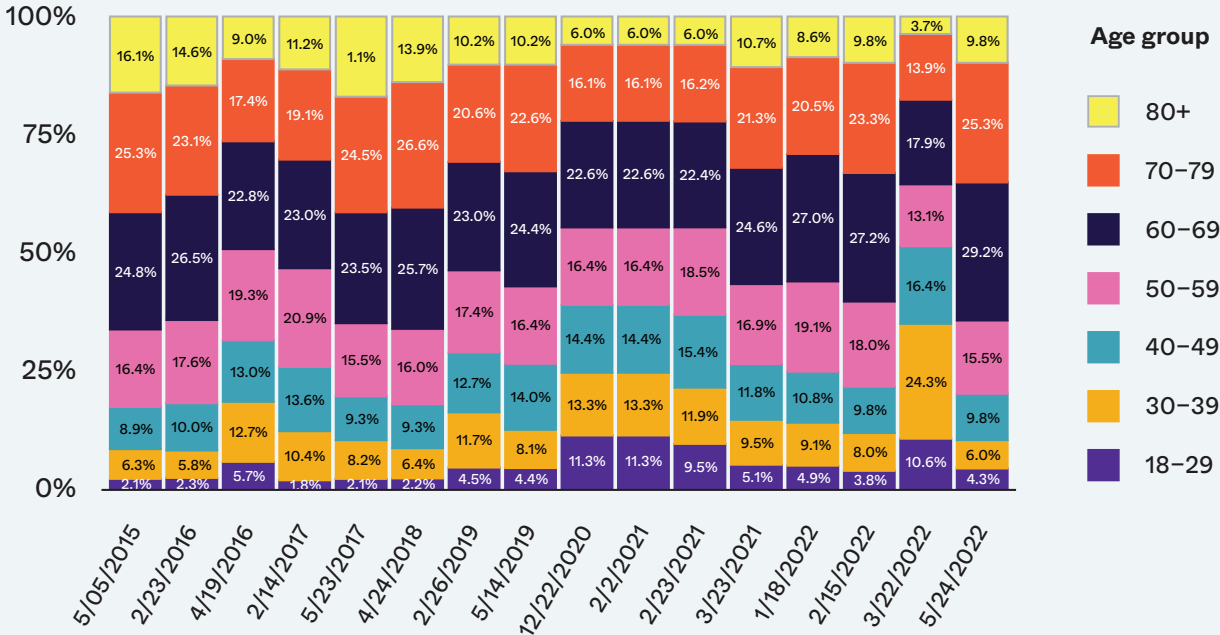
**Figure 1.28: Special elections participation score by Council district**

- 4.70–6.70
- 6.71–8.90
- 8.91–11.10
- 11.11–13.20
- 13.21–17.10
- NYC Parks and Greenspace



Next, again using information available in the voter file, we looked at the age of voters who turnout in special elections. The mean age of all voters in this dataset was 49.<sup>58</sup> Older voters, voters aged 60–69 years and 70–79 years, made up the largest proportion of total voters in each special election since 2015. On the opposite end, the youngest cohort, voters aged 18–29 years, made up the smallest distribution in the majority of special elections alongside voters aged 80 years and above. This indicates that older voters are more likely to turn out than younger voters in special elections. Likewise, these findings are reflected in primary and general elections, thus demonstrating that older voters represent a larger proportion of total voters compared to younger voters in City elections.

**Figure 1.29: Age distribution in special elections from the last seven years**



58 The actual average age of all registered voters is 49.4.



## Future research

While our analysis of special election turnout found that these voters were older than average, and were more likely to come from historically high turnout boroughs like Manhattan and Staten Island, there are notable limitations when analyzing current special election data.

Some limitations include:

- the data follows a non-normal distribution;
- the need for more data to effectively model who participates or does not participate in special elections;
- the lack of scholarship on local special elections; and
- the makeup of voters in local, state, and federal special elections.

These limitations made it impossible to answer our third research question: “Which demographic and socioeconomic factors influenced the voting behaviors of New Yorkers in special elections over the last seven years?”

The unique and inconsistent nature of special election data may require research practices beyond what has been conducted in our previous research on elections. Future research should consider alternative approaches when tackling special elections data, such as data transformations, nonparametric tests,<sup>59</sup> or bootstrapping.<sup>60</sup> In addition, we may consider collecting survey data and conducting focus groups to understand New Yorkers’ knowledge, perceptions, and engagement with special elections.

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59 Nonparametric tests are another option to analyze data and do not require normally distributed data.

60 Bootstrapping is another option to analyze data and does not require normally distributed data. Instead of assuming that the means follow a normal distribution, one can directly “observe” the distribution of the means and use this empirical distribution to make inferences; Sainani, Kristin L. “[Dealing With Non-normal Data](#).” *American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, Dec 2012.



# **Analysis: New York City Redistricting**

# Analysis: New York City Redistricting

Redistricting is the process of redrawing legislative districts based on population changes following the decennial census. When done right, redistricting helps ensure that elections are fair and inclusive: a key priority of the CFB and the NYC Votes initiative. In this study, we analyzed 5,704 pieces of public testimony submitted to the New York City Districting Commission regarding the 2022–2023 redistricting process. Our analysis focused on word frequency, overall sentiment, testimony similarity, and whether the testimony affected the drawing of district lines.

Our study elevates the concerns of district residents and provides evidence that testimony had a significant impact on the final maps drawn by the NYC Districting Commission. Given the increasing level of controversy surrounding redistricting at every level of government, it is essential to conduct ongoing research on the influence of public testimony.

## Redistricting process and history

Every decade, New York City’s 51 City Council districts are redrawn by the New York City Districting Commission. The group consists of 15 commissioners, eight appointed by the City Council and seven appointed by the Mayor. The Commission must have at least one member from each of the five boroughs and reflect the City’s population of racial and language minority groups. The City Charter sets the following guidelines the Commission must follow when redrawing districts, including making districts roughly equal in population size, ensuring the fair and effective representation of racial and ethnic minorities, keeping neighborhoods and communities with established ties intact, and avoiding partisan gerrymandering (intentionally drawing districts to advantage a certain political party).<sup>61</sup>

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61 New York City Charter § [52](#).

## Figure 2.1: Redistricting guidelines in the New York City Charter

The following paragraphs shall be applied and given priority in the order in which they are listed.

- The difference in population between the least populous and the most populous districts shall not exceed ten percentum (10%) of the average population for all districts, according to figures available from the most recent decennial census. Any such differences in population must be justified by the other criteria set forth in this section
- Such districting plan shall be established in a manner that ensures the fair and effective representation of the racial and language minority groups in New York City which are protected by the United States voting rights act of nineteen hundred sixty-five, as amended.
- District lines shall keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other.
- Each district shall be compact and shall be no more than twice as long as it is wide
- A district shall not cross borough or county boundaries.
- Districts shall not be drawn for the purpose of separating geographic concentrations of voters enrolled in the same political party into two or more districts in order to diminish the effective representation of such voters
- The districting plan shall be established in a manner that minimizes the sum of the length of the boundaries of all of the districts included in the plan

Each district shall be contiguous, and whenever a part of a district is separated from the rest of the district by a body of water, there shall be a connection by a bridge, a tunnel, a tramway or by regular ferry service.

If any district includes territory in two boroughs, then no other district may also include territory from the same two boroughs.

The 2022–2023 City Council redistricting process followed a tumultuous Congressional, State Senate, and Assembly redistricting process at the State level. On January 10, 2022, the State Legislature rejected both of the maps submitted by the New York State Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC).<sup>62</sup> On January 24, the IRC announced that they had reached a stalemate and would be unable to produce a second plan to send to the State Legislature.<sup>63</sup> As a response, the State Legislature drew their own maps, which were approved by Governor Hochul on February 3. On April 27, the Chief Justice of the New York Court of Appeals declared the State Senate and congressional maps (but not the Assembly maps) unconstitutional.<sup>64</sup> The court ordered a “special master” (a person appointed by a court to carry out a certain action) to redraw the maps. The maps could not be drawn in time for the June primary, so a second primary was scheduled to be held in August 2022 to vote on Congressional and State Senate races. Only Assembly elections were held in June 2022.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the chaos of the State redistricting process, the City redistricting process was relatively smooth. The NYC Districting Commission sent their draft maps on time, and they were quickly approved by the Council.<sup>66</sup> A statement released by Citizens Union, a good government organization that offered free trainings and resources to New Yorkers about the redistricting process, asserted that in 2022, “New York City was able to avoid the chaos we saw last year during the State’s redistricting process.”<sup>67</sup>

Before sending their preliminary maps to the City Council, the Districting Commission held several hearings to gather input from New Yorkers about the redistricting process.<sup>68</sup> Five public hearings, one in each borough, were held prior to the Commission releasing its preliminary plan for the new maps on July 15.

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62 Harding, Robert. “[NY Legislature Rejects Redistricting Commission’s Proposed Maps.](#)” *Auburnpub*, 12 Jan 2022.

63 Opinion, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#) No. 60, 27 Apr 2022.

64 Opinion, [Harkenrider et al. v. Hochul et al.](#) No. 60, 27 Apr 2022.

65 As of publication, Assembly lines are currently part of a filed lawsuit.

66 Coltin, Jeff and Annie McConough. “[City Council Approves Redistricting Maps, and Only One Member is Furious.](#)” *City & State New York*, 28 Oct 2022.

67 Citizens Union. “[Citizens Union Responds to NYC Districting Commission Approval of the Final City Council District Maps, Ending a Ten-Month Long Process.](#)” 01 Nov 2022.

68 The main maps produced by the NYC Districting Commission are not reproduced within this report and can be viewed on the Commission’s website at <https://www.nyc.gov/site/districting/maps/maps.page>.

The Districting Commission then held six additional hearings (including a virtual hearing) between July 15 and September 22, when they released new draft maps to the public. On the same day, they voted against submitting those maps to the City Council, opting to make additional revisions. They did not hold any additional in-person public hearings and on October 6, voted 13-1 to send the new maps to the City Council.<sup>69</sup> On October 27, the City Council approved the final maps.

New Yorkers also had the opportunity to submit written testimony, either by mail or email, at any point during the redistricting process. Testimony gives New Yorkers the opportunity to tell the Commission which landmarks (such as parks, schools, and roadways) are defining elements of their districts and which historical, racial, economic, ethnic, or religious communities in their areas must be kept together. This is information the Commission may otherwise be unaware of and it helps them keep intact neighborhoods and communities as mandated by the City Charter. Using the written testimony submitted, we conducted various statistical analyses to gain insight into how New Yorkers in different districts viewed this year’s redistricting process and evaluated whether their feedback was incorporated into the final maps.

## Methodology and summary of testimony population

The data used in this study is from the Commission’s website, where testimony submitted in PDF form was organized by borough, hearing date, and by whether it came from an individual, elected official, or organization. Only testimony submitted by individuals was included in this analysis and each piece of testimony was assigned to a specific Council district.<sup>70</sup> Using the listed hearing dates, we also categorized testimony based on when it was submitted in a “phase” of the redistricting process. We broke up the redistricting process timeline into the following four phases, shown in Figure 2.2.

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69 Honan, Katie, George Joseph, and Haidee Chu. “[Redistricting Commission Sends Contentious Draft Maps to City Council After Re-Do.](#)” *City & State New York*, 06 Oct 2022.

70 The Commission also organized testimony submitted prior to July 15 by district and by the name of the individual submitting it. Because they did not organize testimony after July 15 by districts, we used a line of code that defined a search pattern for matching text to identify whether a district was explicitly referenced by name in the testimony. For the regex code used to identify whether a district was explicitly mentioned in the testimony, please see [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#).

**Figure 2.2: Phases of the 2022–2023 redistricting process**

Phase	Description	Dates
1	Before the Commission released the first draft maps.	Any date prior to July 15
2	After the Commission released the first draft maps, but before they released the second draft maps to the public. The Commission voted against submitting them to the City Council.	July 15 to September 22
3	After the second draft maps were voted down, but before the final maps were approved and sent to City Council.	September 22 to October 6
4	After the final maps were sent to City Council.	Any date after October 6

In order to analyze the testimony, which was uploaded to the Commission’s website in PDF form, we converted the testimonies from PDF to text using optical character recognition (OCR) technology. We also corrected spelling and spacing errors, translated pieces of non-English testimony into English, and removed testimony that only contained a subject line.

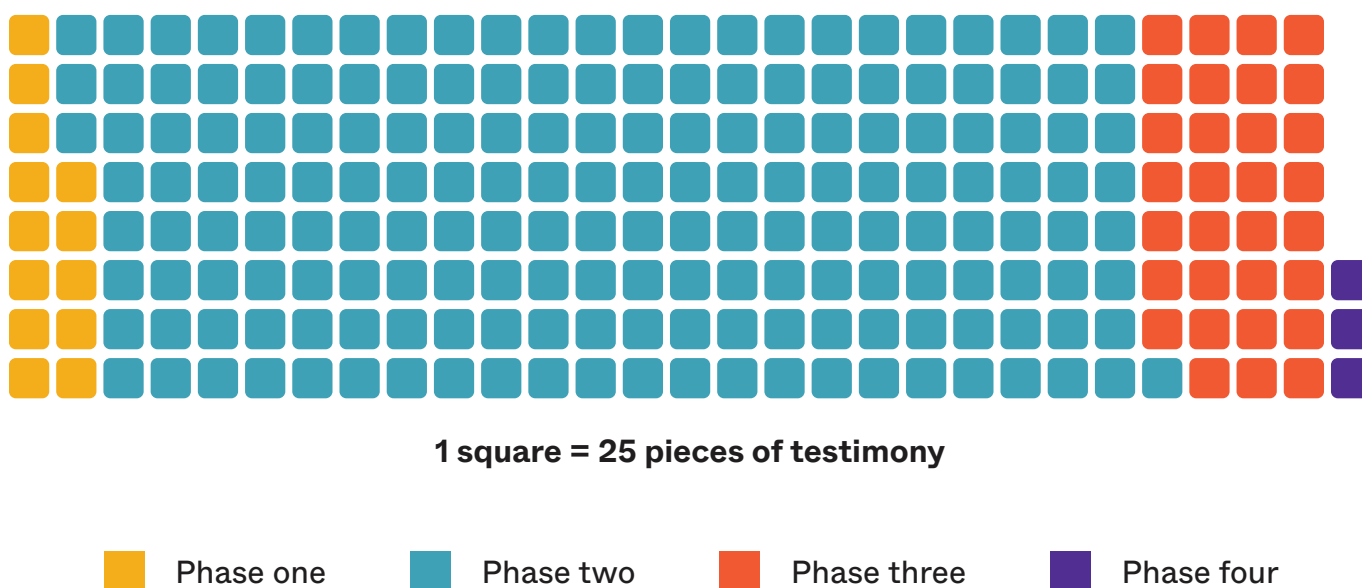
To clean the testimony prior to analysis, we removed email headers, subject lines, greetings, and signatures. We added a delimiter symbol—a character used to separate strings of text—to distinguish each individual piece of testimony and converted each testimony into its own text file. We also removed exact duplicates of testimonies that were erroneously listed multiple times on the Commission’s website. We then removed all URLs, images, numbers, symbols, punctuation, and common words deemed insignificant for analysis like “the” and “redistricting.” For a list of words removed, please visit [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#). We then “lemmatized” the text to convert variant forms of the same word to its present tense and singular form (i.e. changing “running” to “run” and “communities” to “community”).



Finally, we created a collection of documents, or a corpus, for each district, borough, phase, borough/phase combination, as well as a corpus including all testimonies. For a greater level of technical detail on our data cleaning procedures, please see [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#).

In total, we included 5,704 pieces of individual testimony in this analysis. A distribution of the number of testimonies submitted in each phase is shown in Figure 2.3. A majority of testimony was submitted in phase two (78.9%) and very little was submitted in phase four (1.3%).

**Figure 2.3: Waffle chart of % testimony in each phase of the redistricting process**



A plurality of testimony was submitted from Manhattan and very few (28) testimonies were submitted from Staten Island (Figure 2.4). However, Staten Island residents had a high turnout at the in-person hearings, with approximately 35 residents attending the July hearing and around 50 attending the August hearing.<sup>71</sup>

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71 Liotta, Paul. [“Staten Islanders to Commission: Keep Other Boroughs Out of Our City Council Districts.”](#) *SI Live*, 19 Aug 2022.

**Figure 2.4: Number of testimonies submitted by borough and phase<sup>72</sup>**

	Phase one	Phase two	Phase three	Phase four	All phases	% of Borough population submitting testimony <sup>73</sup>
Manhattan	24	1,837	313	17	2,191	0.13%
Bronx	9	295	0	0	304	0.02%
Brooklyn	183	1,134	294	24	1,635	0.06%
Queens	97	1,228	185	36	1,546	0.06%
Staten Island	20	8	0	0	28	0.006%
All boroughs	333	4,502	792	77	5,704	0.07%

[Appendix C](#) shows the number of testimonies submitted in each district during each phase of the redistricting process. It's important to note that a district being infrequently mentioned does not mean its residents were not affected by redistricting. Like with most public hearings, those who submitted testimony made up only a small percentage of City residents and may not be representative of the population on the whole.

The districts that were mentioned most frequently were also more likely to have more residents who identify as white and non-hispanic, which indicates that people of color

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72 The figure makes the simplifying assumption that each piece of testimony was submitted by a different person.

73 United States Census Bureau. "[New York State Population Topped 20 Million in 2020.](#)" 25 Aug 2021.

may have been underrepresented in the testimony.<sup>74</sup> It's worth taking into consideration that people of color have historically been excluded from participating in the democratic process.<sup>75</sup> Broader studies have also found that people who participate in public hearings are more likely to be male, older, and have a higher income than those who do not.<sup>76</sup> Because many people face barriers to participating in the democratic process, we should be mindful that the fact that a district received only a few mentions does not mean that only a few residents were affected by the new district lines.

Queens City Council District 26 garnered the most attention from the public, with 910 testimonies (16.0% of all testimonies) specifically referencing the district. Nearly all of them were submitted during phase two (between the release of the first and second draft maps). The interest in this district was likely due to the fact that the preliminary draft maps made Council District 26 a crossover district (a district that covers more than one borough), moving Roosevelt Island and a portion of the Upper East Side from Manhattan Council District 5 to Queens Council District 26.

Manhattan Council District 5 was the second most mentioned district with 778 testimonies mentioning the district. Much of the testimony submitted regarding Council Districts 5 and 26 resulted from a letter-writing campaign organized by Roosevelt Island resident Joyce Short, opposing the redrawing of these districts and arguing that Roosevelt Island should remain in Manhattan Council District 5.<sup>77</sup> In the updated revised map, the Commission drew these areas back into Manhattan Council District 5, keeping Queens as the only borough represented by Queens Council District 26.

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- 74 The number of pieces of testimony submitted referencing a Council district was positively correlated with the percent of residents in that district that identify as White and Non-Hispanic ( $r=0.29$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.089$ ) NYC Department of City Planning. "[2020 Census Data & Resources.](#)"
- 75 National Museum of African American History and Culture. "[150 Years and Counting.](#)"; Ferguson-Bohnee, Patty. "[How the Native American Vote Continues to be Suppressed.](#)" *American Bar Association*, 09 Feb 2020; Mahoney, Eleanor. "[Ballot Blocked Episode 5: Mexican American Voting Rights.](#)" *National Park Service*, 08 Dec 2021; and Minnis, Terry Ao, and Mee Moua. "[50 Years of the Voting Rights Act: An Asian American Perspective.](#)" *Asian Americans Advancing Justice*, 04 Aug 2015.
- 76 McComas, Katherine A. "[Public Meetings About Local Waste Management Problems: Comparing Participants to Nonparticipants.](#)" *Environmental Management*, Jan 2001; and Einstein, Katerine Levine et al. "[Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes.](#)" 29 Jun 2018.
- 77 On Roosevelt Island. "[Queens Community Board 2 Zoom Meeting.](#)"

It is worth noting that Manhattan Council District 5 underwent the most significant change in area between the initial draft map released on July 15 and the final map released on October 6. It more than doubled in size, although this includes both land mass and areas of the East River adjacent to the island. Because the shape files (drawings on a map associated with latitude and longitude coordinates) the Commission uploaded to its website contained water area, we were unable to omit water area from the analysis. The district with the second-largest change in area was Queens Council District 30, which decreased by 17.6%. Queens Council District 26 was also among the top five districts in terms of change in area, growing 11.7% larger between the first and final draft maps. For more detailed information on the changes in area of each district throughout the redistricting process, an interactive map is available at [nyccfb.info/redistricting](https://nyccfb.info/redistricting).

Brooklyn Council District 44, Manhattan Council District 3, and Queens Council District 24 were also frequently discussed by testifiers. Testimonies in these districts each raised concerns about the splitting up of tight-knit communities. Testimony about Brooklyn Council District 44 mostly requested that the current district lines be preserved, arguing that the district is largely composed of Orthodox Jewish communities whose needs differ from residents in other districts. Similarly, those submitting testimony about Queens Council District 24 also conveyed concerns about the maps dividing Orthodox communities, expressing relief when the Commission rejected the second draft map on September 22, which would have removed the Hillcrest/Fresh Meadows community from the 24th Council District. Those testifying on Manhattan Council District 3 were largely concerned that the Commission's first draft map split the neighborhood of Hell's Kitchen into three separate districts. The Commission's final map submitted to the City Council kept Hell's Kitchen contained in one district.<sup>78</sup> Many of the testimonies mentioning one of these four districts contained identical language, suggesting that templates were widely circulated around the districts, though no single source could be ascertained from the documents.

Overall, a large majority (81.6%) of all testimony contained identical or nearly identical language as another piece of testimony. We refer to these testimonies as template testimony. In every borough except for Staten Island, a majority of the submitted testimony was template testimony.

Template testimony can be a useful tool for community organizations to help their members articulate their concerns and priorities in a consistent and effective way, while also

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78 Mays, Jeffery C. "[The Redistricting Mess Comes to New York's City Council.](#)" *The New York Times*, 20 Sept 2022.

maximizing the impact of volume. [Appendix D](#) displays the percentage of testimony in each district that shared identical or nearly identical language.<sup>79</sup>

## Analysis

To better understand the content of each testimony submitted to the NYC Districting Commission, the CFB conducted several analyses that highlighted unique or distinctive characteristics about different testimonies across phases of the redistricting process and location of the testimony. We conducted:

- Sentiment analysis to look more closely at feelings evoked by different words
- Most common words analysis to see how often certain words were used in each testimony
- Unique word frequency analysis to see which words showed up more often in some district testimonies than others

The results of these analyses are outlined in the preceding sections and allowed us to compare different districts to one another and draw conclusions about which types of testimony were most likely to result in changes to the redistricting lines. Our conclusions and research findings can be found in the last section of this chapter.

## Sentiment analysis

To better understand the content and tone of each testimony, we conducted a sentiment analysis calculating the percent of positive, negative, and neutral words. This analysis allowed us to compare the testimony submitted for different Council districts to each other.

To do this, we used the sentiment dictionary “Bing” which contains 6,787 words categorized as either positive or negative.<sup>80</sup> Words not included in the dictionary are considered neutral. Positive words receive a score of +1, negative words receive a score of -1, and neutral words receive a score of 0. The average sentiment score for a group of testimonies is equal to the sum of sentiment scores divided by the total number of words.

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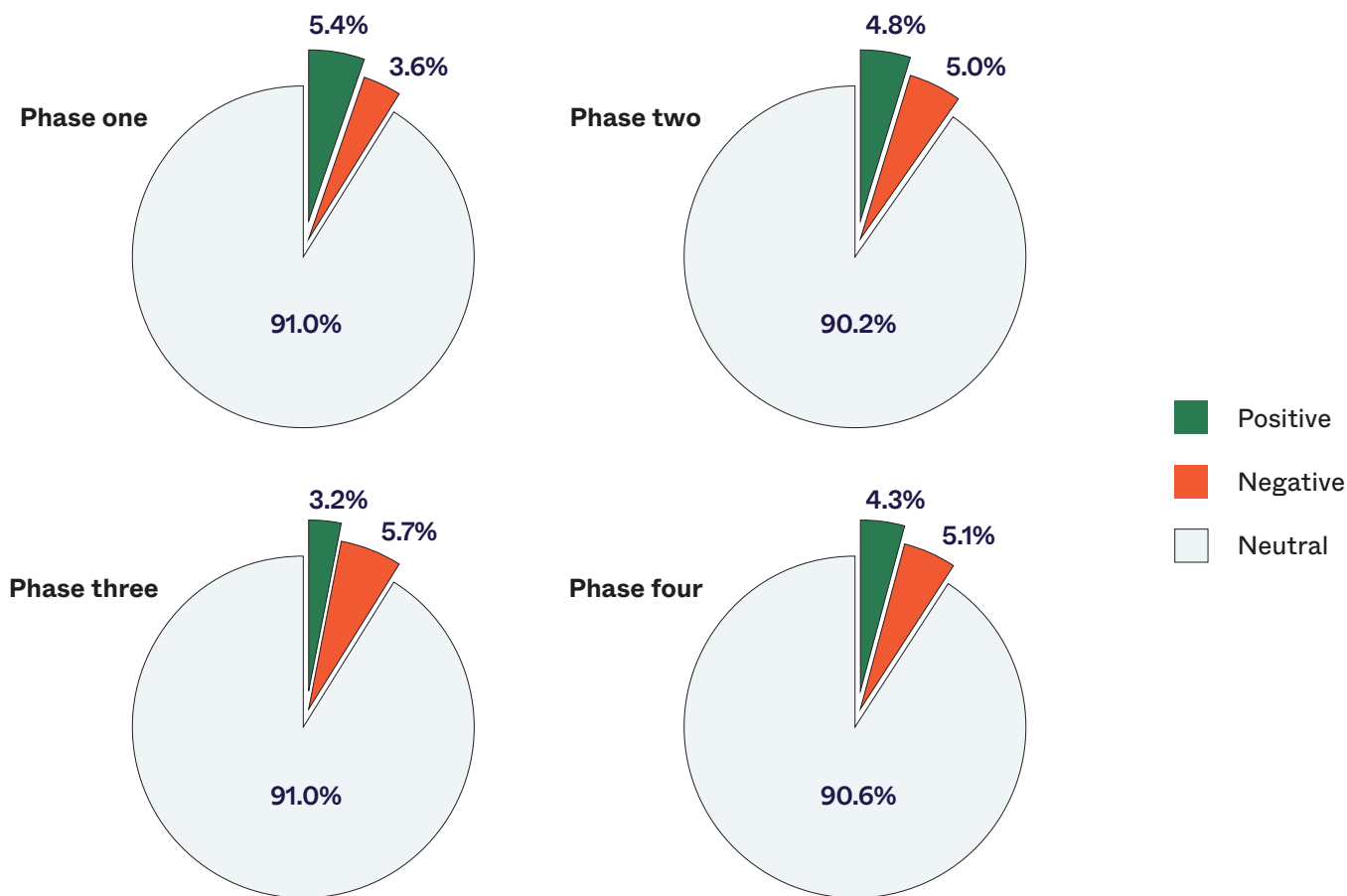
79 Neary identical language was defined as having a Jaro-Winkler distance under 0.2. Jaro-Winkler distance is a statistical measure of how different two texts are. Black, Paul E. “[Jaro-Winkler](#).” *National Institute of Standards and Technology*, 02 Aug 2022.

80 Hvitfeldt, Emil. “[Textdata—Bing sentiment lexicon — lexicon\\_bing](#).” *Github.io*, 25 Mar 2023.

While this approach is objective and efficient, some nuance may be lost since it relies on specific words to determine sentiment, but does not take context into account. For example, testimony that is highly critical of the maps but also describes the positive attributes of the testifier’s neighborhood may derive a positive sentiment score, even though the testifier is unhappy with the district lines. Therefore, we should use caution when drawing conclusions about the feelings and opinions of individual testifiers. However, it is useful tool to approach the general feelings of community members when looking at groups of testimony.

Overall, the sentiment score of all testimony combined was slightly negative (-0.0051), indicating that there were more distinctly negative words than distinctly positive words. Figure 2.5 shows the sentiment score breakdown by phases of the redistricting process. Testimony submitted in phase one contained a higher percentage of positive words (5.4%) and lower percentage of negative words (3.6%) than any other phase in the redistricting process. On the other hand, phase three had a lower percentage of positive words and a higher percentage of negative words than the other phases.

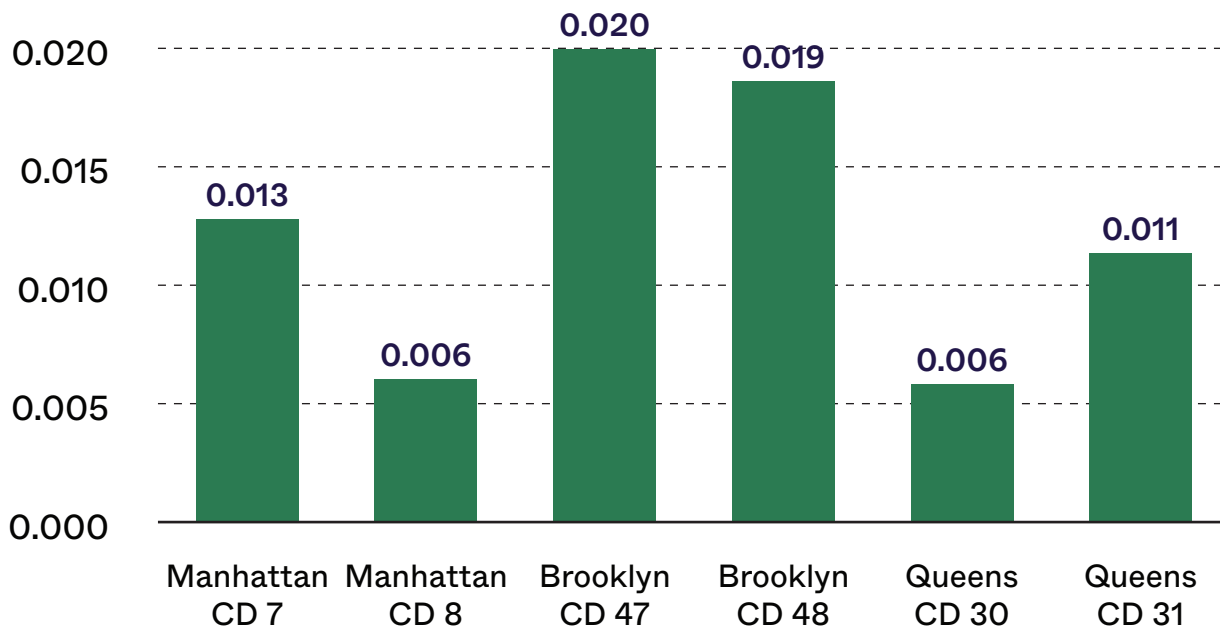
**Figure 2.5: Distribution of sentiment scores**



Overall, testimony submitted from Queens had a more negative sentiment score (-0.020) compared to testimonies from other boroughs. Manhattan was the only other borough with a negative sentiment score (-0.0090). Testimony submitted from Brooklyn, the Bronx and Staten Island all had positive sentiment scores (0.0061, 0.024, and 0.033 respectively), meaning that the text contained more distinctly positive words than negative ones.

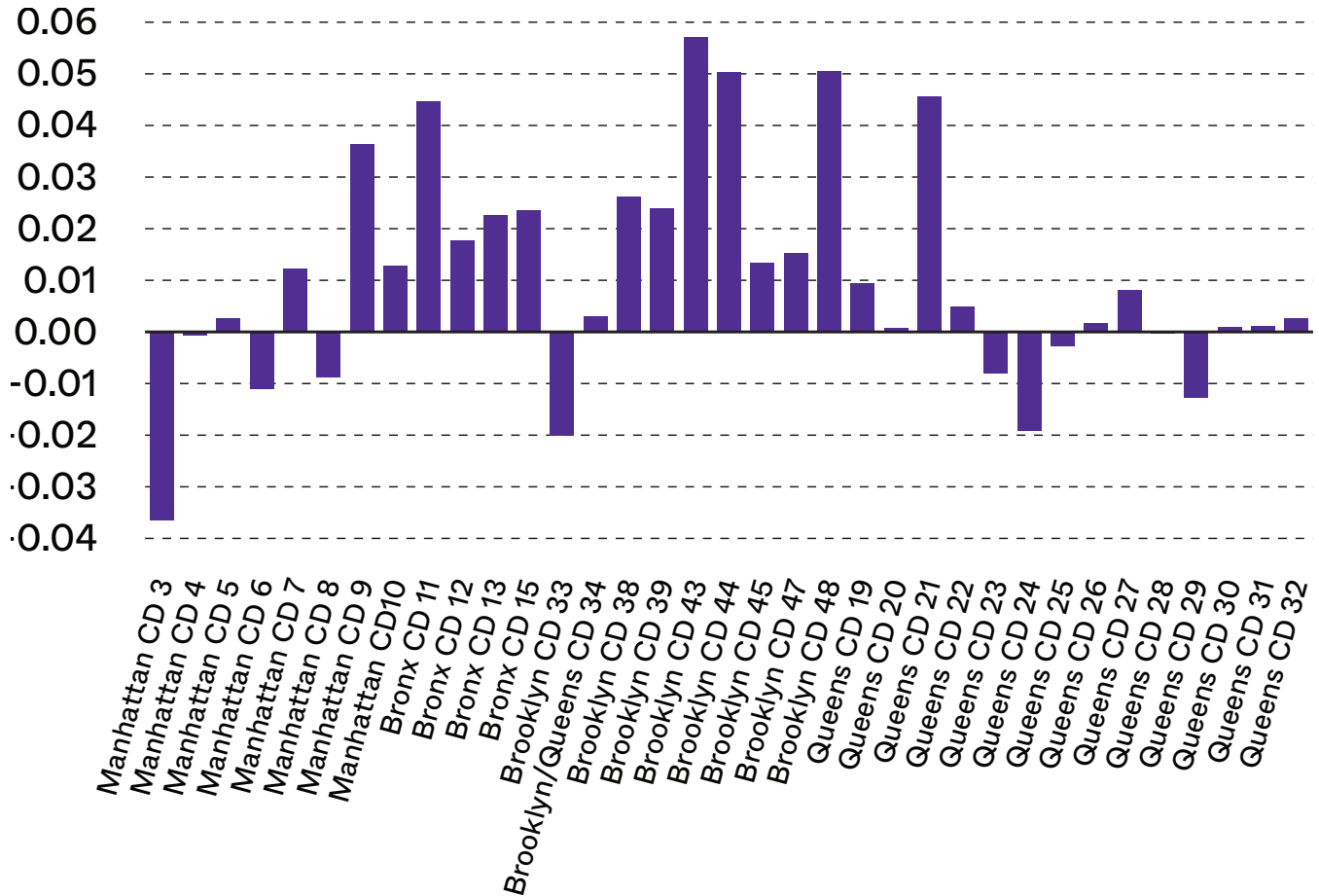
We also analyzed the sentiment of testimonies submitted for specific Council districts. In phase one, each of these districts had a positive sentiment score (Figure 2.6), meaning there were more positive words included in the testimonies mentioning those districts than negative words.

**Figure 2.6: Sentiment scores in phase one**



During phase two, nine of the Council districts analyzed had negative sentiment scores while 25 had positive scores (Figure 2.7). Among the council districts analyzed, Brooklyn Council District 43 had the highest positive sentiment score. Many testimonies praised the Commission for creating the first majority Asian Council district in Brooklyn. The district with the most negative sentiment score was Manhattan Council District 3. This district also received the second highest number of mentions (behind Queens Council District 26) in phase two. As further discussed in the unique word frequency section of this chapter, those testifying on Manhattan Council District 3 were upset that the first draft maps drew Hell’s Kitchen into three separate districts.

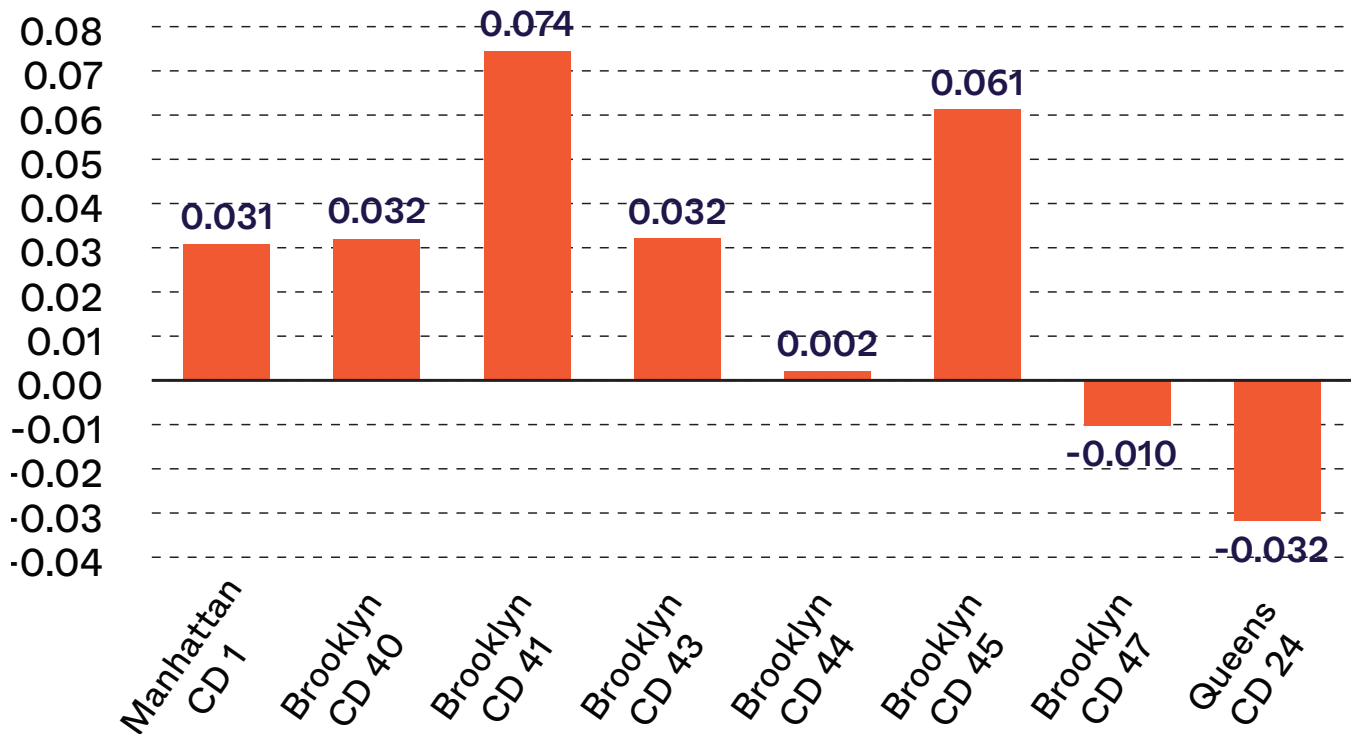
**Figure 2.7: Sentiment scores in phase two**



In phase three, six of the Council districts analyzed had positive sentiment scores while three had negative sentiment scores (Figure 2.8). Among the districts with positive scores were Brooklyn Council Districts 40, 41, and 45, which were frequently mentioned together in testimonies. Many testimonies expressed agreement with the Commission’s decision to keep the boundaries of these districts similar to their previous configuration prior to redistricting.

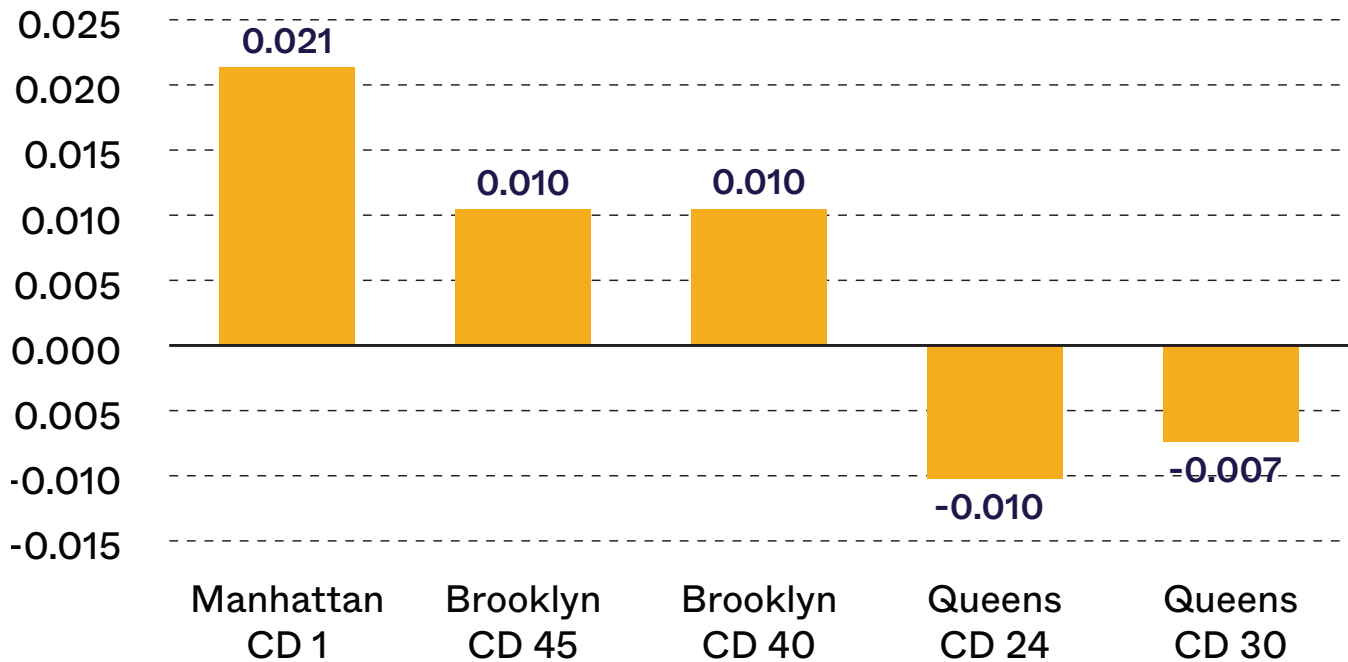


**Figure 2.8: Sentiment scores in phase three**



Three of the districts analyzed in phase four received positive scores while two received negative scores (Figure 2.9). Counterintuitively, the district with the highest sentiment score, Manhattan Council District 1, was also a district that had many grievances with the redistricting process. Testimony on this district criticized the Commission for dividing SoHo/NoHo into two separate districts and expressed anger about this decision. Although the testimony did not discuss the Commission, draft maps, or redistricting process in positive terms, it described the SoHo/NoHo area itself as such, noting the neighborhoods’ “distinctive appearance”, “historic nature”, “luxury” buildings, “artistic tradition”, among many other positive qualities. This illustrates why the sentiment score is not a perfect indicator of people’s opinions but rather a useful tool to identify the issues and concerns raised during the redistricting process.

**Figure 2.9: Sentiment scores in phase four**



### Most common words analysis

Figure 2.10 displays a word cloud of the 75 words most frequently mentioned in all testimonies. The word “community” was mentioned 19,233 times—on average more than three mentions per testimony. The word “neighborhood” was also mentioned on average more than once in each piece of testimony. This exemplifies the importance of Section 52 of the City Charter which states: “District lines shall keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other.”<sup>81</sup> The fact that the words “community” and “neighborhood” were so frequently mentioned in testimony also highlights that these are crucial factors for residents when considering the impact of redistricting on their daily lives. By keeping intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties, the redistricting process can help maintain local representation that is responsive to the needs and concerns of the people who live in those areas.

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81 New York City Charter § [52\(c\)](#).



**Figure 2.12: Word cloud of the top five most common words**

**Phase one**



**Phase two**



**Phase three**



**Phase four**



In phase one, the word “Parkway” was frequently mentioned in the submitted testimonies. This term was used to refer to various parkways across the City, such as the Belt Parkway, Mosholu Parkway, Ocean Parkway, Pelham Parkway, and Eastern Parkway, which all show up as examples of contested district boundaries. After the second draft map was released, “SoHo” and “NoHo” were both frequently mentioned in the testimony. Testifiers were concerned that, in the second draft map, SoHo and NoHo, which were previously both contained in Manhattan Council District 1, were split across Manhattan Council District 1 and Manhattan Council District 2. The Commission did not change the boundaries for these districts in the final maps. “Glendale” was one of the words most frequently used in the testimony submitted after the final draft maps were sent to City Council. Those in the neighborhood were dismayed that Glendale, a neighborhood once fully contained in Queens Council District 30, had been split across Queens Council District 30 and Queens Council District 31. Despite this concern, these maps were approved by the City Council.

## Unique word frequency

We also calculated a measurement called the term frequency inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) of the words in the testimony. This statistical measure identifies words that are used more frequently in a certain document compared to the whole collection of documents. For example, in a collection of classic novels, “Atticus,” would have a high TF-IDF in *To Kill a Mockingbird* because the main character Atticus is mentioned frequently in the book compared to other classics. On the other hand, “Tom” may have a low TF-IDF in *To Kill a Mockingbird* because, despite also being the name of a main character, the name also appears frequently in other classical works, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The TF-IDF measure identifies which words and themes are most distinctive to the testimony mentioning specific districts.

Figures 2.13, 2.14, and 2.15 show the top three words with the highest TF-IDF for each district in each phase of the redistricting process.<sup>83</sup> The TF-IDF measure proved invaluable in highlighting the most pressing issues affecting each district during this phase of the redistricting process. It revealed concerns that the maps based on the 2010 census had grouped together areas of the South Bronx, Ward’s Island, and East Harlem that did not share the same interests. Despite these concerns, the final maps still divided Manhattan/Bronx Council District 8 between Manhattan and the Bronx. In Brooklyn Council District 47, testers called for several communities to be included in a single Council district, as was the case prior to the 2002 redistricting process. The final maps controversially split the Warbasse Houses between Brooklyn Council District 47 and Brooklyn Council District 48.<sup>84</sup>

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83 Due to limited time and space, we only report the TF-IDF for districts that were mentioned in at least five pieces of testimony. To prevent the language in the templates from dominating the results and causing any bias, we excluded template testimony from this analysis.

84 Honan, Katie, Joseph George, and Haidee Chun. “[Redistricting Commission Sends Contentious Draft iMaps to City Council After Re-Do.](#)” *The City*, 06 Oct 2022.

**Figure 2.13: Top three words with highest TF-IDF in phase one**

<b>Borough</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>#1 Word</b>	<b>#2 Word</b>	<b>#3 Word</b>
Manhattan/Bronx	8	Harlem	Percent	African
Queens	25	Homeowner	Shop	Live
Brooklyn	47	Brighton	Trump	Brightwater
Brooklyn	48	Brighton	Trump	Brightwater

Queens Council Districts 25 and 30 had the same three words with the highest TF-IDF scores. Testifiers raised the issue that although both neighborhoods are in the same district, residents of Elmhurst and Jackson Heights have different lifestyles. Elmhurst has more homeowners than Jackson Heights, and shopping patterns differ between the two neighborhoods. They requested that the Commission consider moving Elmhurst to Queens Council District 30, but ultimately the decision was made to keep both neighborhoods in Queens Council District 25. Testifiers in each of these districts in phase two echoed many of the same concerns as those in phase one.

**Figure 2.14: Top three words with highest TF-IDF in phase two**

Borough	District	#1 Word	#2 Word	#3 Word
Manhattan	3	Hell	Kitchen	Clinton
Manhattan	4	Whereas	Hell	Kitchen
Manhattan	5	Roosevelt	Whereas	Sutton
Manhattan	6	Hell	Kitchen	Side
Manhattan	8	Whereas	Roosevelt	Garifuna
Manhattan	10	Washington	Riverside	Save
Bronx	11	Kingsbridge	Armory	Bedford
Bronx	12	Pelham	Parkway	NYCHA
Bronx	13	Pelham	Parkway	Nest
Bronx	15	Pelham	Parkway	NYCHA
Queens	19	Linden	Mitchell	AAPI
Queens	21	Corona	Lefrak	Citifield
Queens	22	Woodside	Sunnyside	Roosevelt
Queens	23	Bayside	Marginalize	Bloc
Queens	24	Hillcrest	Jamaica	Downtown
Queens	25	Elmhurst	Maspeth	Triangle
Queens	26	Tibetan	Sutton	Whereas
Queens	27	Jamaica	Downtown	Shop

<b>Borough</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>#1 Word</b>	<b>#2 Word</b>	<b>#3 Word</b>
Queens	28	Rochdale	Resort	Village
Queens	29	Forest	Rego	Assessment
Queens	30	Elmhurst	Maspeth	Triangle
Queens	31	Springfield	JFK	Arvene
Brooklyn	33	Williamsburg	Orthodox	Appeal
Brooklyn/Queens	34	Woodside	Sunnyside	Roosevelt
Brooklyn	38	Sunset	Hook	Red
Brooklyn	39	Hook	Red	Gowanus
Brooklyn	47	Beach	Brighton	Sephardic

Testimony from several individuals regarding Bronx Council Districts 11, 12, and 13 expressed concern about the use of Mosholu Parkway as a dividing line between districts. They also argued against the draft maps that split the Pelham Parkway Greenway between two districts (Bronx Council Districts 13 and 15) and put the Kingsbridge Armory in Bronx Council District 11. The final maps revised kept the Pelham Parkway Greenway in Bronx Council District 13 and the Kingsbridge armory in Bronx Council District 14. Additionally, the final maps did not use Mosholu Parkway as a dividing line.

In Brooklyn Council District 33, many testifiers self-identified as Orthodox Jewish and raised concerns that the draft maps divided their community, and its shared interests, into two separate districts. Although the final maps still split some parts of South Williamsburg between Brooklyn Council District 33 and Queens/Brooklyn Council District 34, it appears that the Commission addressed some of the community's concerns. Those testifying on Brooklyn Council District 38 raised concerns that the draft maps would split Sunset Park into two districts. Some worried about the separation of the Latino communities in Red Hook and Sunset Park, while others supported moving Red Hook into Brooklyn Council District 39 with Gowanus, Carroll Garden, and Park Slope. Ultimately, the Commission moved Red Hook



back into Brooklyn Council District 38 but still split Sunset Park between Brooklyn Council Districts 38 and 43.

As previously discussed, testimony on Manhattan Council Districts 3, 4, and 6 expressed concerns about the initial draft maps that divided Hell’s Kitchen among these three districts. That decision was ultimately reversed in the final maps. In Manhattan Council District 5, preliminary draft maps drew Roosevelt Island and portions of Sutton Place and Upper East Side into Queens, but that decision was also reversed. Some testimony drew comparisons to the crossover district, Manhattan/Bronx Council District 8, which remained divided between the boroughs in the final maps. Those testifying on Manhattan Council District 10 asked the Commission to “Save the 160’s” because they wanted streets named in the low 160s to remain in Manhattan District 7 rather than being moved to Manhattan Council District 10. While the initial draft plan did not include any of the 160s streets in Council District 7, the final plan included all 160s south of 163rd Street east of Broadway in Council District 7, as well as those south of 165th Street between Henry Hudson Parkway and Riverside Drive W and between Fort Washington Avenue and Broadway.

Those writing from Queens Council District 19 were worried about the preliminary draft maps splitting the Mitchell-Linden neighborhood between two districts. But in the final plan, some blocks were added back to the district. Residents discussing Queens Council Districts 19 and 23 were also worried about the AAPI community’s representation, fearing that the draft maps would split Bayside Hills between these two districts. In the final plan, Bayside Hills remained entirely in Queens Council District 23. Testimony about Queens Council District 21 was generally positive, with many expressing gratitude for the district keeping Corona, East Elmhurst, and Lefrak City together. Some residents writing on Queens Council District 22 wanted the district to include Woodside Houses, so that students attending PS 151 would be in the same district as the school. However, in the final plan, Woodside Houses were not moved to that district.

In phase two, testimony regarding Queens Council District 25 was similar to that of phase one, with residents asking the Commission to move Elmhurst to Queens Council District 30, the district containing Maspeth. Testimony discussing Queens Council Districts 27 and 28 raised concerns that the preliminary plan removed Downtown Jamaica from the 27th District and divided Rochdale Village into three separate districts. In the final plan, Downtown Jamaica was drawn back into Queens Council District 27, but Rochdale Village remained divided. The testimony mentioning Queens Council District 29 largely praised the Commission for keeping Richmond Hill North and South (including Rego Park, Forest Hills, and Kew Gardens) in one district. Finally, those speaking about Queens District 31 were happy that the district was redrawn to include JFK airport, which had been moved out of the district during the previous redistricting process.

**Figure 2.15: Top three words with highest TF-IDF in phase three**

Borough	District	#1 Word	#2 Word	#3 Word
Manhattan	1	Single	Interest	Identifiable
Queens	24	Transfer	Rabbi	Uddin
Brooklyn	43	Redistrict	Preliminary	Asian
Brooklyn	44	Hasidic	Boro	Midwood
Brooklyn	47	Beach	Coney	Bensonhurst

As discussed in the “word cloud” section of the chapter, those testifying about Manhattan Council District 1 in phase three were concerned that the second draft map split SoHo and NoHo into two separate districts despite the two neighborhoods sharing similar interests. All those testifying on Brooklyn Council District 43 stated that they supported the new maps and commended the representation of the Asian American communities in the district. The majority of testimony on Brooklyn Council District 44 also supported the maps and urged the Commission to keep the Hasidic community united within the district. Testimonies about Brooklyn Council District 47 requested that Coney Island, Sea Gate, Warbasse Houses, Trump Village, Luna Park, and Brightwater Towers remain in the district and applauded the district for reversing the decision in the first draft maps to add Bay Ridge to the district.

Testimonies on Queens Council District 24 expressed frustration that the second draft maps removed some of the Orthodox Community from the district, with several submissions referencing a joint statement by Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, the Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis, and Michael Nussbaum, the President of the Queens Jewish Community Council. The final maps added most of the areas that had been removed from Queens Council District 24 back into the district.

## Testing map outcomes

In order to evaluate if the testimony was effective in influencing the Commission, we assigned one of three categories to each district studied in the TF-IDF analysis based on the extent to which the suggestions made in the testimony were incorporated into the final maps.

- **Category 1** refers to Council districts for which most or all of the changes recommended in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps. We determined that Manhattan Council District 3, Manhattan Council District 4, Manhattan Council District 5, Manhattan Council District 6, Bronx Council District 11, Bronx Council District 12, Bronx Council District 13, Queens Council District 19, Queens Council District 23, Queens Council District 26, and Queens Council District 31 fall under this category.
- **Category 2** refers to districts for which at least some but not most of the changes suggested in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps. We determined that Manhattan Council District 10, Queens Council District 24, Queens Council District 27, Queens Council District 28, Brooklyn Council District 33, Brooklyn Council District 34, and Brooklyn Council District 47 fall under this category.
- **Category 3** includes districts for which, to the best of our determinations, very few or none of the suggestions in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission. Manhattan Council District 8, Queens Council District 22, Queens Council District 25, Manhattan Council District 1, and Queens Council District 30 fall under this category. All other districts were determined to be uncategorizable.

First, it should be commended that so many of the suggestions made by those submitting testimony were incorporated by the Commission. Our analysis finds evidence that the more testimonies written about a certain district overall (including all four phases of the redistricting process), the more likely the Commission redrew the district as recommended in the testimony. We found that Council districts for which most of the changes recommended in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps (Category 1) were discussed in nearly four times the number of testimonies as districts for which very few or none of the changes suggested in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps (Category 3).

**Figure 2.16: Average number of testimony submitted by category**

Category	Definition	Average number of testimonies
1	Most or all of the changes recommended in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps	242
2	At least some but not most of the changes suggested in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps	113
3	Very few or none of the changes suggested in the testimony were incorporated by the Commission into the final maps	62

We also found a moderate positive correlation between the number of testimonies that mentioned a Council district in phase two and the change in area in the districts between the first and second draft maps.<sup>85</sup> This indicates that districts with a relatively higher number of mentions also saw a greater change in size on average.

There was also a slight positive correlation between the number of testimonies submitted mentioning a district in phase three and the change in area in the districts between the second and final draft maps, but the correlation was not statistically significant.<sup>86</sup> However,

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85 For this analysis, the r statistic is 0.5895254 and the p-value is < .0001. The correlation coefficient r measures the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables. The value of r is always between +1 (a perfect positive linear relationship) and -1 (a perfect negative linear relationship). P-values (or probability values) are calculated for a statistical test to describe how likely it is that the observed data would occur if there was no true relationship. The lower the p-value, the less likely the observations would occur if there was no relationship. A test with a calculated p-value of 0.05 or less is considered “significant” and tells us that there is a meaningful statistical relationship between the variables measured.

86 For this analysis the r statistic is 0.07872186 and the p-value is 0.5829. See footnote above for an explanation of the correlation coefficient r and p-values.

we did find that districts that did not change between the second and final draft maps were mentioned in substantially fewer pieces of phase three testimony on average than districts that did change (6.7 vs 24.0). Only three of the 21 districts that did not change between the second and final draft maps were mentioned in more than five testimonies, and over half of the 21 districts that did not change were never mentioned in the testimony. Altogether, this provides strong evidence that the Commission was more likely to redraw districts that were discussed more in the testimony.

Only nine districts were mentioned in testimony submitted in phase four after the final maps were released and sent to the City Council; all are shown in Figure 2.17.

**Figure 2.17: Post-redistricting testimony received by borough and district**

Borough	District	Number of testimony
Manhattan	1	5
Queens	24	9
Queens	29	4
Queens	30	14
Queens	32	2
Brooklyn	40	5
Brooklyn	44	2
Brooklyn	45	5
Brooklyn	48	2

In Manhattan Council District 1, testifiers expressed dissatisfaction that SoHo and NoHo had been separated into two separate districts. Testifiers also disagreed with the Commission's decision to remove Rego Park from Queens Council District 29 and add it to Queens Council Districts 24 and 30. Additionally, they expressed opposition to Glendale being moved from District 30 to District 32. They also argued that the drawing of District 24 resulted in a weakened Orthodox Jewish community. Those testifying on Brooklyn Council District 44 and 48 also expressed apprehension that the new maps would divide the Orthodox Jewish community. Those testifying on District 40 asked the Commission to add additional blocks that would include their South Asian neighbors and those testifying on Brooklyn Council District 45 asked for Remsen Village to be added to the district. Finally, those testifying on Queens Council District 29 said they believed the new maps fractured the Asian American community in the Richmond Hill/South Ozone area.

On Friday, February 24, 2023, a lawsuit was filed in New York State Supreme Court alleging that the new maps violate the City Charter by splitting South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities in South Ozone Park and Richmond Hill across three districts: Queens Council Districts 28, 29, and 32.<sup>87</sup> According to Jerry Vattamala of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, this is the first time that the Commission has been sued over Section 52 Subsection b of the Charter, which mandates that the maps “be established in a manner that ensures the fair and effective representation of the racial and language minority groups in New York city.”<sup>88</sup> This lawsuit has the potential to delay the June 2023 primary election if the Court rules that the maps must be redrawn.

## Research findings and conclusion

The analysis in this chapter reveals that although voters expressed dissatisfaction throughout the redistricting process, much of the constructive criticism offered in the testimonies was incorporated by the Commission into the final maps. These findings have important implications for the role of public input in the democratic process. They suggest that when given the opportunity to share their opinions, community members can have a real impact on decision-making.

While it is laudable that public testimony had a meaningful impact on the redistricting process, more work can be done to ensure the process is equitable. Not everyone is aware of when redistricting is happening or that they have the opportunity to testify about district

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87 Schwach, Ryan. “[Advocates Sue City Over Redistricting Lines in Queens.](#)” *Queens Eagle*, 24 Feb 2023.

88 New York City Charter § [52\(b\)](#).

lines. We found that Council districts with a greater proportion of people of color tended to be mentioned in fewer testimonies, indicating that a lack of information about the redistricting process could be particularly acute in historically marginalized communities. To address this, it is important to ensure that information about redistricting is widely disseminated. One way to do so would be to send a mailer to each household in the City informing them that redistricting is happening and that they can submit written testimony or testify at an in-person or virtual hearing. Ideally, outreach efforts about the process would also be targeted toward historically marginalized communities.

Our findings also underscore the importance of transparency and accountability during redistricting. There are several examples discussed in this chapter where the Commission decided against incorporating the suggestions offered in these testimonies, with one of these examples resulting in a lawsuit filed against the Commission for allegedly failing to ensure fair and effective representation of the racial and language minority groups in New York City.<sup>89</sup> In future redistricting processes, it would be good practice for the Commission to release public statements along with each draft map detailing how public testimony influenced the changes that were made.

Overall, our study highlights the critical role of public testimony and underscores the power of community and civic engagement and organizing during the 2023 redistricting process.

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89 Schwach, Ryan. "[Advocates Sue City Over Redistricting Lines in Queens.](#)" *Queens Eagle*, 24 Feb 2023.





# **Policy & Legislative Recommendations**

# Policy & Legislative Recommendations

This past year challenged New Yorkers on their way to the polls. Ever-changing district lines, election dates, and eligibility requirements made the 2022 elections less straightforward. Despite these hurdles, voters showed up and made their voices heard. With reflection on the unexpected changes of the past year along with longstanding barriers to voting, there is space for elections to be easier for voters. What follows are recommendations to improve the voting experience by reducing the frequency voters have to show up to the polls and giving them everything to make fully informed decisions once they get there.

## Changing the timing of city elections

Since 1894, New York City elections have remained out of step with their federal and State counterparts. The current NYC election schedule was enshrined in the 1894 State Constitution and mandates that local elections occur on the first Tuesday in November in an odd-numbered year.<sup>90</sup> Federal and State elections take place in even-numbered years, while NYC elections still occur in odd-numbered years.<sup>91</sup>

The NYC election schedule changed multiple times before 1894. In 1849, the City Charter was amended to hold City elections with State and federal races but was changed back to off-cycle elections in 1857. The schedule was changed to even years one last time in 1870 before shifting the elections calendar off-cycle for good in 1894. This final separation was part of a trend in the late 1800s and early 1900s to distance local elections from State and federal corruption, and to discourage voter turnout from non-supporters.<sup>92</sup> In NYC, on-cycle elections allowed Tammany Hall to win multiple races, and reformers wanted to weaken them by moving away from electing candidates based on affiliation to the political machine. They received support from New York Republicans who wanted to weaken Democrats and ultimately succeeded in enshrining their proposal in the Constitution.<sup>93</sup>

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90 New York Constitution [Article XIII, § 8](#).

91 Federal and state elections are also known as even-year elections, on-cycle elections, or aligned elections. Odd-year elections are also known as off-cycle elections or unaligned elections.

92 Williams, Keith. "[The Odd Timing of City Elections in New York](#)." *The New York Times*, 07 Sep 2017; and *Ibid*.

93 Kaminsky, Dan and Ben Weinberg. "[Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years](#)." *Citizens Union*, Dec 2022.

Whatever the intended benefits, this reform opened up a wide gap between local and federal elections. As seen in Figure 3.1, average turnout in the City for mayoral elections from 2001 to the present is 29.5%, while turnout for gubernatorial and presidential elections in the same time period is 35.6% and 60.8%, respectively. With fewer New Yorkers turning out to choose their local elected officials, reversing 20th century election scheduling could benefit NYC voters.

**Figure 3.1: Average turnout for NYC elections (2001–present) by election type**

Mayoral elections	Gubernatorial elections	Presidential elections
29.5%	35.6%	60.8%

### Potential benefits of even-year elections

Analyses of turnout data show that on-cycle elections have larger voter turnout. Recently, Citizens Union compared the six largest cities in the U.S. that hold their local elections in odd-numbered years to the six largest cities in the U.S. that hold their local elections in even-numbered years. They found that cities with off-cycle elections had a lower average turnout compared to the higher turnout average in on-cycle election cities (Figure 3.2).<sup>94</sup>

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94 Ibid.

**Figure 3.2: Average turnout in mayoral elections in even-year and odd-year cities**

Cities with Even-Year Elections		Cities with Odd-Year Elections	
City	Average turnout	City	Average turnout
San Diego, CA	75%	New York City, NY	27%
San Jose, CA	49%	Los Angeles, CA	24%
Honolulu, HI	64%	Chicago, IL	38%
Portland, OR	73%	Houston, TX	19%
Baton Rouge, LA	57%	Philadelphia, PA	24%
Richmond, VA	73%	San Antonio, TX	10%

In recent years, multiple cities across the U.S. have shifted their local elections to even-numbered years including Los Angeles, Austin, Baltimore, El Paso, and Phoenix. After Baltimore aligned their local elections with presidential elections in 2016, turnout jumped from 13.3% in 2013 to 62.2% in 2016 and 60.9% in 2020.<sup>95</sup> Los Angeles began voting for local races in even years in 2020. For the Los Angeles City Council races that took place in both 2015 and 2020, voter turnout doubled in all districts, with some districts seeing four times more voters than before.<sup>96</sup> Aligning local elections with gubernatorial or presidential races could increase the number of New Yorkers casting ballots for their local representatives and issues.

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95 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.](#)”

96 Regardie, Jon. “[How One Big Change Made a Huge Impact on Elections in Los Angeles.](#)” *Los Angeles Magazine*, 01 Oct 2020.

Turnout for off-cycle elections is also skewed toward specific groups. Researchers conducted an eight-year analysis of elections across California to compare the demographics of voters in those elections to the demographics of the cities as a whole.<sup>97</sup> They found that white voters made up a much larger share of voters in off-cycle elections than they represented in the population. This overrepresentation decreased in on-cycle or presidential elections where the percentage of Latinx and Asian American voters seen in those elections were more similar to the number of residents in those areas. Moving to on-cycle elections could help the demographic makeup of the City’s voters look more like the City as a whole.

Other than depressed voter turnout, off-cycle elections are connected to multiple other negative consequences. Voters have to learn about how and where they will vote for each separate local election and make a dedicated trip to the polls for those races.<sup>98</sup> Including local elections on presidential or gubernatorial race ballots means voters have to do the legwork of voting less often.

The smaller and more uneven turnout seen in these elections benefits special interest and highly mobilized groups.<sup>99</sup> With increased legwork needed to vote, highly mobilized voters can organize and have a greater impact on the outcome of an election. This could lead to elected officials whose policies align with the dominant interest groups more than officials elected in on-cycle elections.

Off-cycle elections also increase election administration costs.<sup>100</sup> Consolidating elections would mean the City BOE would spend less on running elections year to year and concentrate on delivering crucial election services in dedicated election years.

Even-year elections help both voters and election administration officials focus on voting in election years rather than NYC’s current annual cycles.

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97 Hajnal, Zoltan, Vladimir Kogan, and G. Austin Markarian. “[Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition.](#)” *American Political Science Review*, 16 Jul 2021.

98 Ibid.

99 Anzia, Sarah F. “[Election Timing and the Electoral Influence of Interest Groups.](#)” *The Journal of Politics*, 13 May 2011.

100 Williams, Keith. “[The Odd Timing of City Elections in New York.](#)” *The New York Times*, 07 Sept 2017.

## Potential opposition to even-year elections

Though there are many benefits to moving elections to even years, there is not total consensus. Opponents to moving to even-year elections cite overshadowing as a major concern. State or federal elections have high-profile races, including the presidential race, that could distract media attention and public focus from local issues.<sup>101</sup> Another concern is that on-cycle elections would increase the amount of influence that national partisanship has on local elections.<sup>102</sup> Off-cycle elections potentially give local candidates greater opportunities to reach voters with their message and issues. This could also decrease the amount of information a voter has to retain for each election. In on-cycle elections, voters have to learn about more races down the ballot to cast an informed vote, but with off-cycle elections they can focus solely on local races during odd years.

Although concerns about the public's engagement in local races are well meaning, there is no evidence that including local races on the ballot with federal or State elections would detract from those races.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, there are legal and policy solutions to this problem. For example, some jurisdictions, including Los Angeles, have designed their ballots with local races appearing first, which discourages ballot drop-off.

One concern specific to City elections would be county races. If the City moved on-cycle, elections for judges, elections for district attorney, and ballot proposals would still occur off-cycle. This change could decrease voter turnout for these elections even further, as suggested by the City's historically low turnout for special elections and those with few races on the ballot. In order to ensure that elections at all levels are aligned, legislation will need to be put in place at the State Legislature to also move some county level offices to the same schedule.

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101 Twin Cities Pioneer Press. "[Editorial: Weighing Odd-Year vs. Even-Year Voting for City Elections.](#)" 27 Sept 2017.

102 O'Sullivan, Joseph. "[King County Considers Moving Most Elections to Even Years.](#)" *Crosscut*, 27 Jun 2022.

103 Kaminsky, Dan and Ben Weinberg. "[Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years.](#)" *Citizens Union*, Dec 2022.

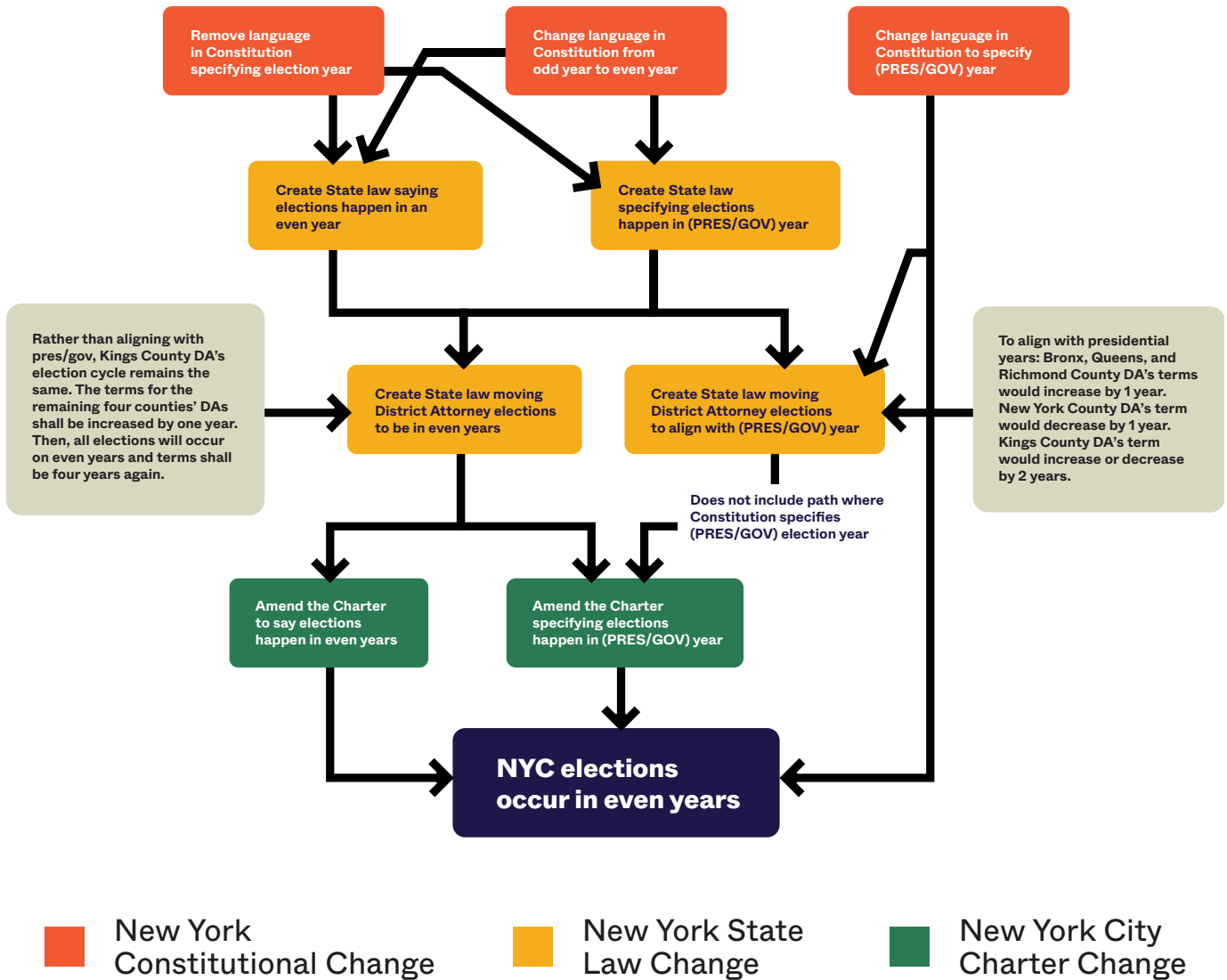
## Recommendation 1: Align Elections with Even-Year Races

Multiple changes are necessary to smoothly transition municipal elections to even-numbered years in New York City. Since the current schedule is dictated by the State Constitution, the main path requires amending the Constitution.<sup>104</sup> Through the legislative process, lawmakers could remove the language which designates an election schedule. They can either replace the current language with new guidelines for holding elections in even-numbered years, or create a specific schedule for municipal elections. Figure 3.3 explores many of the options available at the State and City level for implementing even-year elections. After a constitutional amendment, the State Legislature can include language in the Election Law either reiterating what is in the Constitution or specifying the language.

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104 Amending the New York Constitution can happen either through a legislative process or through a Constitutional Convention. Recently, the more common option for amending the constitution is the multi-year legislative process that requires participation from both elected officials and voters. The amendment process begins when a State Senator or Assemblyperson introduces a constitutional amendment in the legislature. If the amendment passes both houses, it does not go to the Governor. It waits until a new two-year legislative session and must get passed in both houses again. After the second passage, the amendment becomes a yes-or-no question on the ballot in the next general election. If a majority of voters across the State vote “Yes” on the proposal, the amendment goes into effect.

**Figure 3.3: Flowchart of even-year election implementation options**





The choice between generally calling for even-year elections and calling for alignment with either presidential elections or gubernatorial elections has consequences. If no year is specified, each jurisdiction in the state would have the option of deciding when to hold their elections. However, it would make aligning county races, including district attorney and judges, easier as there would be more flexibility on when they could occur. Making a decision on what cycle to align with would mean that counties all hold elections at the same time, including county-level races.

If the State does not specify an election cycle to align with in the State Constitution, New York City will have to amend the Charter to reiterate that City elections happen in even years. This is because of the Municipal Home Rule law that gives jurisdictions the power to adopt legislation relating to their local affairs as long as it does not interfere with the State Constitution.<sup>105</sup>

Moving elections to even years has many clear and tangible benefits. However, all avenues for making this change will take time and extensive analysis. Lawmakers who would like to shift to an on-cycle election schedule should carefully consider which path will work best for New York voters.

## **Improving accessibility of ballot proposals**

In addition to voting for candidates, New Yorkers occasionally vote for or against ballot proposals, which put forth amendments to state or local laws. These amendments typically impact governing documents such as the City Charter or the State Constitution. However, many voters have difficulty understanding the proposals. To address this issue, lawmakers should pass legislation that requires all State and local ballot proposals to be written in plain language.

### **Background**

There are a few ways to get a proposal on a citywide ballot. New York City Council members frequently pass laws that amend sections of the City Charter. However, some types of local laws must be approved by the voters. For example, State and local laws require New Yorkers to approve Charter amendments for certain laws that might impact the powers of specific

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105 New York State Municipal Home Rule Law § [10](#).

elected offices.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, a proposal must be put before voters to change the method of election of any City office.<sup>107</sup>

A Charter Revision Commission (CRC), a temporary government body tasked with reviewing and proposing amendments to the Charter, can also place proposals on the ballot. The Mayor, through executive order, or the City Council can create a CRC.<sup>108</sup> Most recently, CRCs have put proposals on the ballot that have established a new method of electing City officials in a primary election using ranked choice voting, created the Civic Engagement Commission, and significantly expanded the public matching funds program. These examples are relevant to the democracy space; however, proposals initiated by a CRC can cover any area of the Charter.

New York City voters also can kickstart the process of getting a proposal on the ballot by submitting a petition to the City Clerk, calling on New Yorkers to vote on a Charter amendment in an upcoming general election.<sup>109</sup> Upon receiving the petition and reviewing the signatures, the Clerk must send the petition to the City Council, which may take steps to get the proposed amendment on the next general election ballot.<sup>110</sup>

Ballot proposal processes for the City and State level share a few similarities. Like the New York City Charter, the New York State Constitution prohibits lawmakers from making certain changes without voters' approval. For instance, Article VII, Section 11 of the New York State Constitution prohibits laws that authorize the State to contract certain debts from taking effect without the approval of New York voters.<sup>111</sup> However, State legislators can pass laws that include provisions requiring New Yorkers to vote for or against a proposal. This was the

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106 New York State Municipal Home Rule Law § [23](#); New York City Charter § [38](#).

107 New York City Charter § [38](#).

108 New York City Council [Local Law 91-2018](#); Office of Mayor Bill De Blasio. Executive Order No. 66: "[New York City Racial Justice Commission](#)." 24 Mar 2021; and Racial Justice Commission, "[Final Report of the NYC Racial Justice Commission](#)." 28 Dec 2021.

109 New York State Constitution [Article XIX](#).

110 The City Clerk assesses the sufficiency of the petition and signatures upon receiving the petition. However, the Clerk must send the petition to the legislature even if the petition and signatures are insufficient.

111 New York State Constitution [Article VII, § 11](#); see also New York State Finance Law [Article V](#).

case for Senate Bill S8008C, which authorized the inclusion of the Environmental Bond Act ballot proposal in the November 2022 general election.<sup>112</sup>

Most statewide ballot questions propose Constitutional changes. Article XIX of the State Constitution establishes two ways to amend the document. First, the State Legislature may introduce bills that have been reviewed by the attorney general detailing a potential Constitutional amendment. If the bill passes, members of the State Legislature in the following legislative session vote on the bill again. If the bill passes the second time, the legislature can send the proposals to the State BOE, which certifies the language before it goes before voters in an upcoming general election.

Second, New Yorkers may vote to convene a Constitutional Convention. The Constitution requires New Yorkers to vote for or against a convention every 20 years. Legislators can also call for voters to vote for or against holding a convention at any time. If voters decide to have a convention, they would then vote for three delegates to represent their senate district in the following election. Those delegates would review and propose amendments to the Constitution. New Yorkers would vote for or against those proposals in a future election.

This is a rather unpopular method to amend the Constitution. The last constitutionally mandated ballot proposal about a convention failed in 2017, with roughly 80% of New Yorkers rejecting the proposal.<sup>113</sup> In fact, the last convention took place over 50 years ago, in 1965.<sup>114</sup>

Although the City Charter and New York State Constitution clearly elucidate the process of submitting proposed amendments to voters, the guidelines related to the language used in the proposals are limited. Section 41 of the City Charter requires the city clerk, with the advice of a counsel, to prepare an abstract summarizing each proposal in “clear language.”<sup>115</sup>

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112 New York State Senate. S8008C (2021–22): “[Enacts into law major components of legislation necessary to implement the state transportation, economic development and environmental conservation budget for the 2022–2023 state fiscal year.](#)”

113 New York State Board of Elections. “[NYS Board of Elections Proposal Election Returns Nov. 7, 2017.](#)”

114 New York State Library. “[New York State Constitutional Conventions and Constitutional History.](#)”

115 New York City Charter § 41.

State election law requires the Board of Elections to send all voters abstracts of ballot proposals.<sup>116</sup>

Despite those specifications, New York ballot proposals are notoriously confusing, incorporating legal and policy-related terminology that is unfamiliar to most voters. While the abstracts can be helpful, it is impossible to guarantee that all voters will have read them before casting their ballot. Figure 3.4 includes excerpts from or the entirety of recent ballot citywide and statewide ballot proposals. Each was run through the Hemingway Editor, an online writing tool that assesses text readability and assigns each submission a U.S. grade level.<sup>117</sup>

**Figure 3.4: Reading level of recent ballot proposals**

Entity	Ballot text	Grade level
<p><b>November 2022 General Election NYC Ballot Proposal: Add a Statement of Values to Guide Government</b></p>	<p>This proposal would amend the New York City Charter to:</p> <p>Add a preamble, which would be an introductory statement of values and vision aspiring toward “a just and equitable city for all” New Yorkers; and</p> <p>Include in the preamble a statement that the City must strive to remedy “past and continuing harms and to reconstruct, revise, and reimagine our foundations, structures, institutions, and laws to promote justice and equity for all New Yorkers.”</p> <p>The preamble is intended to guide City government in fulfilling its duties.</p> <p>Shall this proposal be adopted?</p>	<p>10</p>

116 New York State Election Law § [4-117\(2\)](#).

117 Hemingway Editor. “[About.](#)”

Entity	Ballot text	Grade level
<p><b>November 2022 General Election NYC Ballot Proposal: Establish a Racial Equity Office, Plan, and Commission</b></p>	<p>This proposal would amend the City Charter to:</p> <p>Require citywide and agency-specific Racial Equity Plans every two years. The plans would include intended strategies and goals to improve racial equity and to reduce or eliminate racial disparities;</p> <p>Establish an Office of Racial Equity and appoint a Chief Equity Officer to advance racial equity and coordinate the City’s racial equity planning process. The Office would support City agencies in improving access to City services and programs for those people and communities who have been negatively affected by previous policies or actions, and collect and report data related to equity; and</p> <p>Establish a Commission on Racial Equity, appointed by City elected officials. In making appointments to this Commission, elected officials would be required to consider appointees who are representative of or have experience advocating for a diverse range of communities. The Commission would identify and propose priorities to inform the racial equity planning process and review agency and citywide Racial Equity Plans.</p> <p>Shall this proposal be adopted?</p>	<p>13</p>

Entity	Ballot text	Grade level
<p><b>November 2022 General Election NYC Ballot Proposal: Measure the True Cost of Living</b></p>	<p>This proposal would amend the City Charter to:</p> <p>Require the City to create a “true cost of living” measure to track the actual cost in New York City of meeting essential needs, including housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other necessary costs, and without considering public, private, or informal assistance, in order to inform programmatic and policy decisions; and</p> <p>Require the City government to report annually on the “true cost of living” measure.</p> <p>Shall this proposal be adopted?</p>	<p>11</p>
<p><b>November 2022 General Election New York State Ballot Proposal: Clean Water, Clean Air, And Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022</b></p>	<p>To address and combat the impact of climate change and damage to the environment, the "Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022" authorizes the sale of state bonds up to four billion two hundred million dollars to fund environmental protection, natural restoration, resiliency, and clean energy projects. Shall the Environmental Bond Act of 2022 be approved?</p>	<p>Post-Graduate</p>

Proposals like these may be difficult for New Yorkers with low levels of literacy to understand. According to a Gallup analysis of the U.S. Department of Education study, 54%, or 130 million, U.S. adults lack literacy proficiency.<sup>118</sup> A Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) published data from a survey of 12,330 U.S. adults, finding that literacy rates for New Yorkers were lower than the national average.<sup>119</sup> By writing ballot questions that contain excessive amounts of legalese and jargon, proposal drafters disenfranchise significant portions of the electorate.

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118 Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. “[Assessing the Economic Gains of Eradicating Illiteracy Nationally and Regionally in the United States.](#)” 08 Sept 2020.

119 “The National Center for Education Statistics [housed in the U.S. Department of Education] surveyed 12,330 U.S. adults ages 16 to 74 living in non-institutionalized dwelling units from 2012 to 2017 for the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), an international study involving over 35 countries.” The U.S. Background Questionnaires were administered in English and Spanish. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. “[U.S. Skills Map: State and County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy.](#)”; and Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. “[What PIAAC Measures.](#)”

## Recommendation 2: Require Ballot Proposals to be Written in Plain Language

To ensure that all voters can easily understand ballot proposals, State and City legislators should pass laws mandating that ballot proposals in all languages be written in plain language. Notably, plain language does not “dumb down” information.<sup>120</sup> It simply presents communications in a clear and concise manner using everyday terms that are easy to understand.<sup>121</sup>

Using plain language has several benefits. It decreases the likelihood of populations being disenfranchised due to the complexity of information presented to them. It can also lessen the burden on those who produce the communications, as they may not need to answer as many questions about the information once it is distributed.<sup>122</sup> Using plain language can also make information more accessible for voters with disabilities, including voters with cognitive and intellectual disabilities, as well as those with low vision.

That said, a small amendment to election law is not enough to ensure that ballot questions are successfully written in plain language. Grade level assessment tools like the Hemingway Editor can be helpful to quickly evaluate readability. However, grade level is an imperfect proxy for readability, and few assessment tools are available in non-English languages. Furthermore, one cannot use the same principles to assess clarity of text written in different languages, especially languages with multiple dialects.

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120 Mayor’s Office of Adult Education and Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. “[Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communication.](#)”

121 If passed, this legislation would not be the first New York law requiring the use of plain language. For example, New York General Obligation Law § [5-702](#) requires consumer transaction agreements to be written in plain language. New York City [Local Law 8 \(2023\)](#) requires the select City agencies to publish multilingual settlement offer information on their websites in plain language. Notably, federal agencies are required to use plain writing for various communications and resources. [U.S. Plain Writing Act \(2010\)](#).

122 Plain Language Action and Information Network. “[Benefits.](#)”



Lawmakers must be intentional in determining which entities will be responsible for drafting proposals in plain language, especially those who will be translating into and transcreating in non-English languages.<sup>123</sup> Every aspect of this process must involve experts who understand strategies for writing in plain language.<sup>124</sup> Proposals should not be placed on the ballot without the solicitation of feedback from New York voters of different socioeconomic statuses, cultures, and language proficiencies across the political spectrum. This process will not be quick or easy. However, it will help voters understand the critical changes that may impact our everyday lives when they cast their votes.

New York has taken strides to improve accessibility over the past several years. We should continue along this path of making our elections more accessible and making it easier for voters to engage with our democratic process.

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- 123 One bill in the New York State Senate, S1381/A1722, would require proposed ballot amendments to be written in plain language. The bill details guidelines for proposals written in English, ensuring that language is clear and concise. 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.”](#); and New York State Assembly. A1722 (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.”](#)
- 124 The Center for Civic Design, one of the nation’s leading organizations promoting accessibility in government and elections, has published several resources about writing plain language, primarily for those writing in English. Center for Civic Design. [“Plain Language.”](#)



# Appendices

# Appendix A: Technical Documentation for Analysis of Special Elections

Two types of files from the New York City Board of Elections were analyzed: the active voter file, which lists an up-to-date address registered to each voter, thus allowing us to determine eligible special elections for each voter in each year, and the voter history file used to determine every special election a voter voted in.

Both files identify each registered voter with a CountyEMSID, a unique serial number given to every registered voter in the City.

The New York City Board of Elections active voter file contains the following pertinent information: CountyEMSID, and identifying information about each voter (including address, date of birth, date of voter registration, gender, political party affiliation), and the following political districts: election district, state assembly district, congressional district, city council district, state senate district, civil court district, and judicial district.

The New York City Board of Elections voter history file lists every election that each registered voter participated in while they were registered to vote in New York City. It includes the following pertinent information: CountyEMSID, the political party the voter was affiliated with at the time of voting, and the election date and type. If a voter did not vote in an election, the history file does not list their EMSID for that election date. The voter history file does not include information on which candidate a person voted for.

The CFB was able to gather seven years worth of active voter files to trace back eligibility for each special election that occurred in New York City from 2015–2022, even in the case of active voters moving within the City during that seven-year period. We used the October 2022 history file, which contains every special election a voter voted in up through the May 2022 special election, to determine whether a person voted in an eligible election or not.

The New York City Board of Elections voter file already contains political districts for each voter based on their address. Each of the ten active voter files were geocoded using the New York City Department of City Planning's Geosupport tool to place all voters in a community district, neighborhood tabulation area (NTA), and census tract and block.

Creating a participation score for each individual voter was a three step process:

1. We combined all voter files in order to collate all active voters. This process also incorporated newly registered voters and voters who became active after being inactive, as well as new address information for voters who moved.
2. We then used the 2022 history file to identify which elections from 2015–2022 a voter actually participated in.
3. If a voter was in the voter file from a previous year but was no longer active in 2022, we took them out of the study. All other voters who were eligible for an election and were found to have voted in an election were given a “1” for that election. If a voter was not eligible for a particular election (for instance, they were not living in a district with a special election or their registration date was after the election), they were given an “NA” for that election. If a voter was eligible for an election but was not in the history file as having voted in that election, they were given a “0” for that election.

# Appendix B: Technical Documentation for Analysis of NYC Redistricting Process

First, we identified whether a district was explicitly referenced by name in the testimony using the regex code shown below. Regex, short for regular expression, are patterns used to match character combinations in string data.

```
(?i)(?<!community |assembly |election |congress |school )  
(districts? 1(?![a-z0-9])(?! [0-9])|c?cds? ?1(?![a-z0-9])  
(?! [0-9])|(?<![a-z0-9])1st c?o?u?n?c?i?l?district|(?<![a-  
z0-9])1st and [0-9][0-9]?n?d?s?t?r?d?  
c?o?u?n?c?i?l?districts?|d1(?![a-z0-9])(?! [0-9]))).
```

We used hearing dates to determine which phase the testimony was submitted in. The Commission organized testimony based on which hearing date the testimony’s submission was closest to—even if the testimony was submitted after the hearing took place. Therefore, we could not exclusively rely on the hearing date in order to organize the testimony by phase. We manually sorted through testimony for which, based on the hearing date it was closest to, the phase the testimony was submitted in was ambiguous. We also contacted the Commission to confirm the submission dates for pieces of testimony that did not include a date. We excluded one piece of testimony as we could not determine if it was submitted during phase one or phase two. We also removed from the analysis one unreadable testimonial and one that only contained a subject line but no text body.

We removed exact duplicates of testimonials that were erroneously listed multiple times on the Commission’s website. We uploaded a PDF containing one piece of testimony on each page to Adobe Acrobat and used the AutoSplit plugin to identify testimonials that were at least 98% similar to another piece of testimony. We then used regex to pull lines that began with “From:” using the regex code `^.*(From:).*$` and we exported matches to Google Sheets and grouped by name to identify duplicates. We then checked the PDF containing all the testimony to confirm it met the criteria for a duplicate. We classified testimonials in email for as duplicates if they were sent from the same email address with the same timestamp as another testimonial. We classified handwritten testimonials as duplicates if they appeared physically identical to another testimonial and were headed by the same name and home address as another testimonial.

We removed email headers, subject lines, greetings, and signatures from all testimonials. We excluded one piece of testimony from the analysis that only contained a subject line but no text body. Email headers and subject lines were removed using the text cleaning tool “Text Mechanic”. Email greetings were removed using this regex code we wrote to match common greetings:

```
(?m)(?i)^(hello|greetings|good evening|to the|good day|good morning|good afternoon|dear|to|hi|chair|nyc districting commission|nyc districting commission|new york city districting commission|nyc redistricting commission|new york city redistricting commission|members of the)(?=(?= chair| dennis| walcott| commissioner| representatives| districting| members| member| sir| sirs| whom it may concern| mr| nyc| New| redistricting| board| members| commission|,|:|.|!|\"|'|\b| \b|that\b|\bhave\b|\bI\b|\ba\b|\bfor\b|\bnot\b|\bon\b|\bwith\b|\bhe\b|\bas\b|\byou\b|\bdo\b|\bat\b|\bthis\b|\bbut\b|\bhis\b|\bby\b|\bfrom\b|\bthey\b|\bwe\b|\bsay\b|\bher\b|\bshe\b|\bor\b|\ban\b|\bwill\b|\bmy\b|\bone\b|\bwould\b|\btheir\b|\bthere\b|\bwhat\b|\bso\b|\bup\b|\bout\b|\bif\b|\babout\b|\bwho\b|\bget\b|\bwhich\b|\bgo\b|\be\b|\bwhen\b|\bmake\b|\bcan\b|\blike\b|\btime\b|\bno\b|\bjust\b|\bhim\b|\bknow\b|\btake\b|\bpeople\b|\binto\b|\byear\b|\byour\b|\bgood\b|\bsome\b|\bcould\b|\bthem\b|\bsee\b|\bother\b|\bthan\b|\bthen\b|\bnow\b|only\b|\bcome\b|\bits\b|\bover\b|\bthink\b|\balso\b|\bback\b|\bafter\b|\buse\b|\btwo\b|\bhow\b|\bour\b|\bwork\b|\bfirst\b|\bwell\b|\bway\b|\beven\b|\bwant\b|\bbecause\b|\bany\b|\bthese\b|\bgive\b|\bday\b|\bmost\b|\bus\b))*$(\s*)
```

To separate individual pieces of testimony, we replaced the greetings with a delimiter symbol “{”. We manually sorted through the testimony and removed greetings not matched by the regex code and replaced them with the delimiter symbol. Very few greetings were not matched by this regex code. We also manually added a delimiter symbol to the start of testimonials that did not begin with a greeting. Very few testimonials did not begin with a greeting.

Email signatures were removed using this regex code we wrote to match common signatures:

```
(?m)(?i)^(best|regards|have a|cheers|sincerely|take care|looking forward|fond|kind|yours|cordially|all the best|thanks|respectfully|thank you|warm|earnestly|my best|all best|many thanks|love
```

```
) (?:(?!the\b|\bbe\b|\bto\b|\bof\b|\band\b|\bin\b|\bthat\b|\bhave\b|\bit\b|\bI\b|\ba\b|\bfor\b|\bnot\b|\bon\b|\bwith\b|\bhe\b|\bas\b|\byou\b|\bdo\b|\bat\b|\bthis\b|\bbut\b|\bhis\b|\bby\b|\bfrom\b|\bthey\b|\bwe\b|\bsay\b|\bher\b|\bsh\b|\bor\b|\ban\b|\bwill\b|\bmy\b|\bone\b|\bwould\b|\btheir\b|\bthere\b|\bwhat\b|\bso\b|\bup\b|\bout\b|\bif\b|\babout\b|\bwho\b|\bget\b|\bwhich\b|\bgo\b|\be\b|\bwhen\b|\bmake\b|\bcan\b|\blike\b|\btime\b|\bno\b|\bjust\b|\bhim\b|\bknow\b|\btake\b|\bpeople\b|\binto\b|\byear\b|\byour\b|\bgood\b|\bsome\b|\bcould\b|\bthem\b|\bsee\b|\bother\b|\bthan\b|\bthen\b|\bnow\b|\bonly\b|\bcome\b|\bits\b|\bover\b|\bthink\b|\balso\b|\bback\b|\bafter\b|\buse\b|\btwo\b|\bhow\b|\bour\b|\bwork\b|\bfirst\b|\bwell\b|\bway\b|\beven\b|\bwant\b|\bbecause\b|\bany\b|\bthese\b|\bgive\b|\bday\b|\bmost\b|\bus\b))*$ (\s*.*)(\s*)
```

Signatures and greetings that were not matched using this method were manually removed.

We used the tm package in RStudio to convert the testimony into both corpora and dataframes, remove all URLs, images, symbols, numbers, extra white spaces, convert the text to all lowercase, lemmatize the text, and remove stop words. For a complete list of standard stop words omitted visit <https://rdrr.io/rforge/tm/man/stopwords.html>. We also removed “custom” stop words, which are words frequently used in the testimonials that are not relevant to the substance of the testimony. These words were “redistricting”, “commission”, “comissioner”, “commissioners”, “council”, “district”, “districts”, “name”, “thanks”, “thank”, “consideration”, “time”, “advance”, “hello”, “greetings”, “chair”, “chairman”, “dennis”, “walcott”, “propose”, “proposed”, “proposing”, “member”, “members”, “manhattan”, “new”, “york”, “brooklyn”, “kings”, “county”, “staten”, “island”, “richmond”, “queens”, “bronx”, “looking”, “forward”, “north”, “west”, “east”, “south”, “public”, “testimony”, “board”, “resident”, “residents”, “map”, “maps”, “proposal”, “also”, “borough”, “january”, “february”, “march”, “april”, “may”, “june”, “july”, “august”, “september”, “october”, “november”, “december”, “testimony”, “testimonies”, “hearing”, “nyc”, and “city”.



# Appendix C: Testimony Submitted to NYC Districting Commission by Council District and Phase of Redistricting<sup>1</sup>

Borough	Council district	Phase one	Phase two	Phase three	Phase four	All phases
Manhattan	1	3	4	104	5	116
Manhattan	2	1	1	3	4	9
Manhattan	3	1	353	4	0	358
Manhattan	4	2	125	1	0	128
Manhattan	5	4	774	0	0	778
Manhattan	6	2	12	2	0	16
Manhattan	7	6	16	1	0	23
Manhattan/Bronx	8	5	9	0	0	14
Manhattan	9	4	11	0	0	15
Manhattan	10	3	23	0	0	26
Bronx	11	2	35	0	0	37
Bronx	12	1	10	0	0	11
Bronx	13	2	249	0	0	251

<sup>1</sup> The district and borough labels in this table, as well as all other tables in this appendix unless otherwise stated, refer to the borough the district was contained in prior to this year's redistricting process.

Borough	Council district	Phase one	Phase two	Phase three	Phase four	All phases
Bronx	14	2	2	0	0	4
Bronx	15	3	243	0	0	246
Bronx	16	2	4	0	0	6
Bronx	17	2	2	0	0	4
Bronx	18	1	1	0	0	2
Queens	19	4	7	0	0	11
Queens	20	1	6	0	0	7
Queens	21	2	72	0	0	74
Queens	22	2	10	0	0	12
Queens	23	4	12	3	0	19
Queens	24	4	54	289	6	353
Queens	25	59	31	3	0	93
Queens	26	3	906	1	0	910
Queens	27	4	25	0	0	29
Queens	28	3	68	0	0	71
Queens	29	2	11	0	4	17
Queens	30	12	49	2	14	77
Queens	31	18	123	0	0	141
Queens	32	6	47	0	2	55

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Council District</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>Phase 4</b>	<b>All Phases</b>
Brooklyn	33	2	225	1	0	228
Brooklyn/Queens	34	2	5	1	0	8
Brooklyn	35	4	3	1	0	8
Brooklyn	36	3	2	0	0	5
Brooklyn	37	1	0	0	0	1
Brooklyn	38	2	25	0	0	27
Brooklyn	39	1	12	1	0	14
Brooklyn	40	1	7	5	5	18
Brooklyn	41	1	0	6	0	7
Brooklyn	42	1	0	1	0	2
Brooklyn	43	2	29	12	0	43
Brooklyn	44	1	144	377	2	524
Brooklyn	45	1	45	7	5	58
Brooklyn	46	1	1	0	0	2
Brooklyn	47	9	38	28	0	75
Brooklyn	48	8	143	2	2	155
Staten Island	49	1	1	0	0	2
Staten Island	50	2	2	0	0	4
Staten Island	51	1	2	0	0	3

# Appendix D: Testimony Submitted to NYC Districting Commission Defined as Template Testimony by Council District

Borough	District	Number	Percentage of Total Testimony
Manhattan	1	98	84.5%
Manhattan	2	8	88.9%
Manhattan	3	326	91.1%
Manhattan	4	97	75.8%
Manhattan	5	703	90.4%
Manhattan	6	0	0.0%
Manhattan	7	18	78.3%
Manhattan/Bronx	8	2	14.3%
Manhattan	9	8	53.3%
Manhattan	10	20	76.9%
Bronx	11	28	75.7%
Bronx	12	4	36.4%
Bronx	13	243	96.8%
Bronx	14	0	0.0%
Bronx	15	237	96.3%

<b>Borough</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Testimony</b>
Bronx	16	0	0.0%
Bronx	17	0	0.0%
Bronx	18	1	50.0%
Queens	19	0	0.0%
Queens	20	6	50.0%
Queens	21	57	77.0%
Queens	22	0	0.0%
Queens	23	0	0.0%
Queens	24	306	86.7%
Queens	25	58	62.4%
Queens	26	787	86.5%
Queens	27	6	20.7%
Queens	28	4	5.6%
Queens	29	7	41.2%
Queens	30	10	13.0%
Queens	31	111	78.7%
Queens	32	43	78.2%
Brooklyn	33	218	95.6%

<b>Borough</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Testimony</b>
Brooklyn/Queens	34	1	12.5%
Brooklyn	35	1	12.5%
Brooklyn	36	0	0.0%
Brooklyn	37	0	0.0%
Brooklyn	38	2	7.4%
Brooklyn	39	2	14.3%
Brooklyn	40	12	92.3%
Brooklyn	41	0	0.0%
Brooklyn	42	2	100.0%
Brooklyn	43	27	62.8%
Brooklyn	44	513	97.9%
Brooklyn	45	54	93.1%
Brooklyn	46	2	100.0%
Brooklyn	47	55	73.3%
Brooklyn	48	145	93.5%
Staten Island	49	2	100.0%
Staten Island	50	0	0.0%
Staten Island	51	1	33.3%