

Act Locally: NYC Civics 101

NYC Elections, GOTV, and Accountability Between Elections



NYC Civics @ Old Stone House

**July
14**

LOCAL GOV 101

Learn how NYC local government works and how residents can influence its decisions.

**July
21**

HOUSING

Understand why housing costs are rising and how residents can shape housing policy and advocate for their interests.

**July
28**

MEDIA LITERACY

Learn how to navigate local news in the age of AI and social media, identify credible information, and avoid misinformation.

**Sept
23**

ELECTIONS AND GOTV

Learn how issue campaigns, primaries, and elections work and how to effectively mobilize voters and participate in campaigns.

**Oct
14**

POLICING & PUBLIC SAFETY

Learn what authority NYC has over policing and how residents can advocate for greater police presence or stronger accountability.

**Oct
21**

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

Learn how services – from libraries and sanitation to parks – are funded and how residents can advocate for improvements.

NYC Civics: GOTV and Issue Advocacy

Thumbs up = True 

Thumbs down = False 

1. If I haven't registered to vote by now, it is too late to vote in November.
2. If my uncle doesn't have a voter ID, he cannot vote in NYC.
3. In NYC elections, ranked choice means I have to rank every candidate.
4. Phone banking does not work.
5. When getting out the vote, it is best to stick to the script.
6. Door knocking is the best method for getting out the vote.
7. Door knocking is the best method for changing voters' minds.
8. Low propensity voters like young people are often a waste of resources because they rarely show up to vote.

Where Can I Make a Difference in Election and Issue Campaigns?



01

Increase Turnout of Low Propensity Voters

Youth turnout surged amid unprecedented campaign mobilization: turnout among registered voters ages 18–29 rose from 11.1% in 2021 to 41.9% in the 2025 general election.



02

Help Voters Make Informed Choices

Volunteers explained ranked-choice voting and candidate differences; 79% of 2025 primary voters ranked more than one candidate. Many ranked candidates with similar priorities.



03

Elevate Community Issues on the Political Agenda

Grassroots organizers made affordability—especially rent, childcare, and transit—a defining issue in the 2025 mayoral election..



04

Pressure Elected Officials Between Elections

Residents can contact officials, testify at hearings, organize petitions and rallies, join advocacy groups, and publicize whether leaders keep their promises.

Part 1: Voter Registration and NYC Elections Literacy

For more information on NYC elections, see the NYPL elections guide:
<https://www.nypl.org/spotlight/voter-information>

What's on the Ballot in 2026

- Governor/Lieutenant Governor
- State Comptroller
- Attorney General
- Representative in Congress
- State Senator
- Member of the Assembly
- Member of the City Council (District 3)
- Justice of the Supreme Court
- Judge of the Civil Court
- Surrogate
- Ballot proposals (see more info [here](#))

Learn more about each office and ballot proposal at the [NYPL Election Guide](#)

Who is Eligible to Vote in NYC and NY State?

- You do not need a state ID to vote or register to vote. Register online or pre-register [here](#).
- U.S. citizens who are 18 years old+ on election day and NY residents (for at least 30 days) can vote in NY City or any NY elections.
- Currently incarcerated people cannot vote in NY, but voting rights are restored upon release.
- You cannot claim the right to vote in other states and vote in NY.

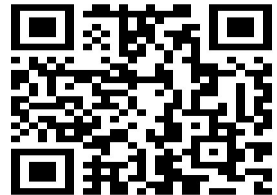


Brad Lander and Mamdani endorse each other before the primary

How Do You Register to Vote in NYC?

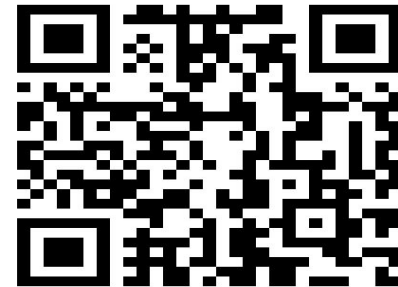
- Online. You can register online by October 24 to vote in the November general elections.
- Mail: Complete and sign a voter registration form and mail it to the NYC Board of Elections.
 - The signature must be handwritten.
- In person: Register at a NYC Board of Elections borough office or another participating state agency.

Note: *Register 10 days before the election.*



How to Help Someone Register to Vote

- Send them the official NY registration link/QR code and have them complete it themselves.
- Help them complete the form online or on paper if they need assistance, while letting them provide/sign their own information.
- Bring paper registration forms to an event and explain where/how to submit them



Note: Register 10 days before the election.

How Do You Check the Status of Your Voter Registration (and make sure your registration is active) ?

Go to the **New York State Voter Lookup:**

[Check your NY voter registration status](#)

Enter:

- First and last name
- Date of birth
- County
- ZIP code/address information

Click **Search**. The official lookup lets you confirm your registration and also find your polling place.



How Do You Find Out Where and When to Vote?

You can find your polling place, election date, and voting hours through your state or local Board of Elections.

In New York:

1. Go to the official New York State Board of Elections website.
2. Use the Voter Lookup tool to enter your information.
3. Check your listed polling place and voting district.
4. Confirm the election date and voting hours for the election you plan to vote in.
5. On Election Day, go to the polling place assigned to your address.

You can also check whether you are eligible for early voting and find your designated early-voting location through the NY Board of Elections.



What is Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)?

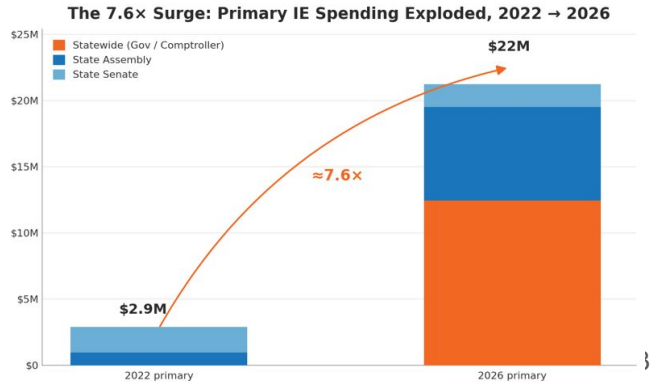
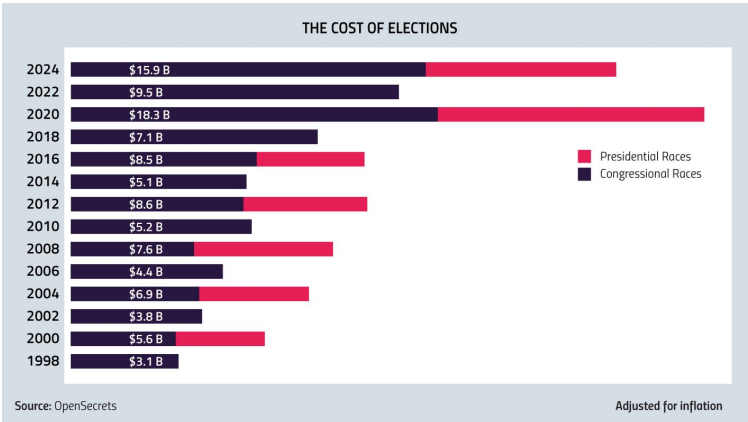
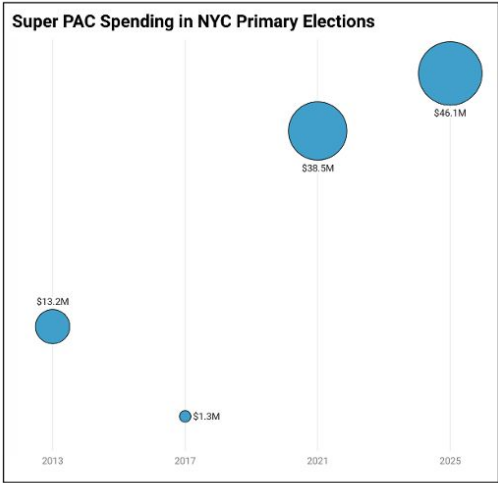
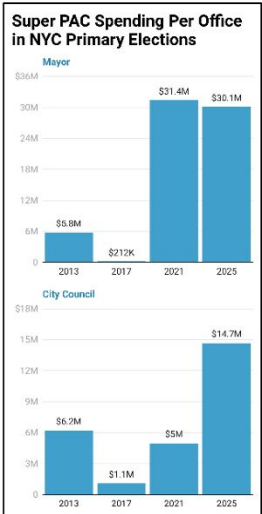
- Up to 5 candidates can get your support in ranked order (instead of just one).
- Candidates need 50% to win in order rather than a plurality (Mamdani won in the final round of RC voting).
- No spoilers or winners with little overall support as can happen in plurality systems.
- Voters can rank an unpopular candidate first and still vote for a top candidate (2nd or 3rd). A vote is not wasted.
- In 2025, 79% of voters ranked more than one candidate in at least one race.
 - Less than half ranked more than one candidate outside of the mayoral election.

Figure 10: New York City Democratic mayoral primary results

CANDIDATE	ROUND 1	ROUND 10	ROUND 11
✓ Zohran Mamdani	43.82%	46.41%	56.39%
Andrew Cuomo	36.12%	39.17%	43.61%
Brad Lander	11.26%	14.41%	—
Adrienne Adams	4.12%	—	—
Scott M. Stringer	1.66%	—	—
Zellnor Myrie	0.99%	—	—
Whitney Tilson	0.79%	—	—
Michael Blake	0.41%	—	—
Jessica Ramos	0.4%	—	—
Paperboy Prince	0.15%	—	—
Selma Bartholomew	0.14%	—	—
Write-ins	0.15%	—	—

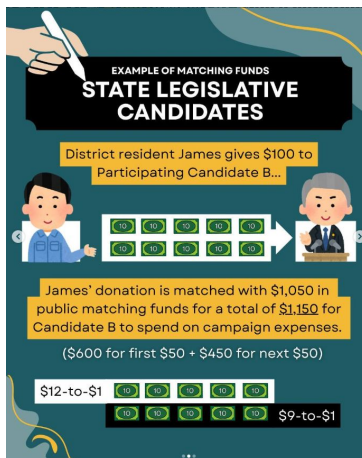
Money in our elections - and what can we do about it?

- More money is spent on elections - from the U.S. president to your local council race
- More Super PACs involved in more contests
- The U.S. Supreme Court limits how we can fight back



Small Donors and NYC Public Matching

- The best antidote for outside spending - small donor public matching programs
- New York City - national role model
- New York State - biggest program in the country



**The program
amplifies small
contributions
to a candidate.**



For contributions up to \$250, the program matches it at an 8 to \$1 rate. If you contribute \$10 to a candidate, the campaign gets \$90.

**NYC
VOTES**

Public Financing Vs. Big Money in Funding Campaigns

- Public campaign finance works
- It is widely used by candidates
- It crowds out large donors
- Grassroots campaigns can beat big money
- More transparency

Goal of Super PAC Spending	Amount	Outcome
Mayor – for Andrew Cuomo	\$26,687,612	Lost
Council District 21 – for Yanna Henriquez	\$864,023	Lost
Council District 30 – for Dermot Smyth	\$695,771	Lost
Council District 38 – for Ling Ye	\$489,174	Lost
Council District 39 – for Maya Kornberg	\$453,839	Lost
Manhattan Borough President – for Keith Powers	\$340,444	Lost
Bronx Borough President - for Rafael Salamanca	\$163,199	Lost
Council District 39 – against Chris Marte	\$320,392	Won

Deluge of Money Against DSA Candidates

Super PACs spent \$2.9 million against DSA candidates this primary cycle.

■ Spending For ■ Spending Against

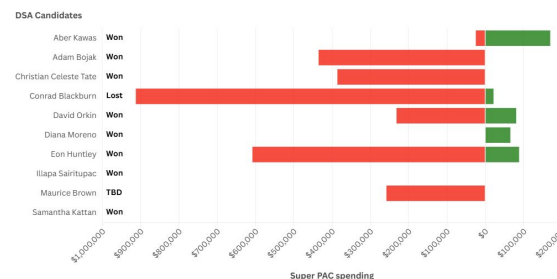


Figure 6: 2025 program participation by office

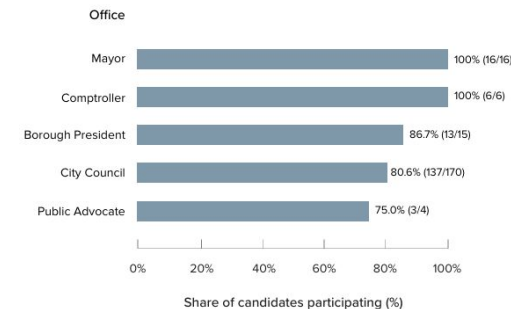
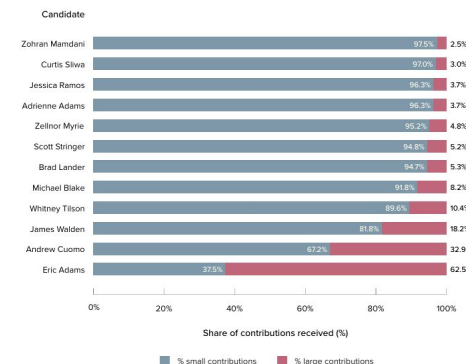


Figure 18: Share of small versus large contributions received by mayoral candidates

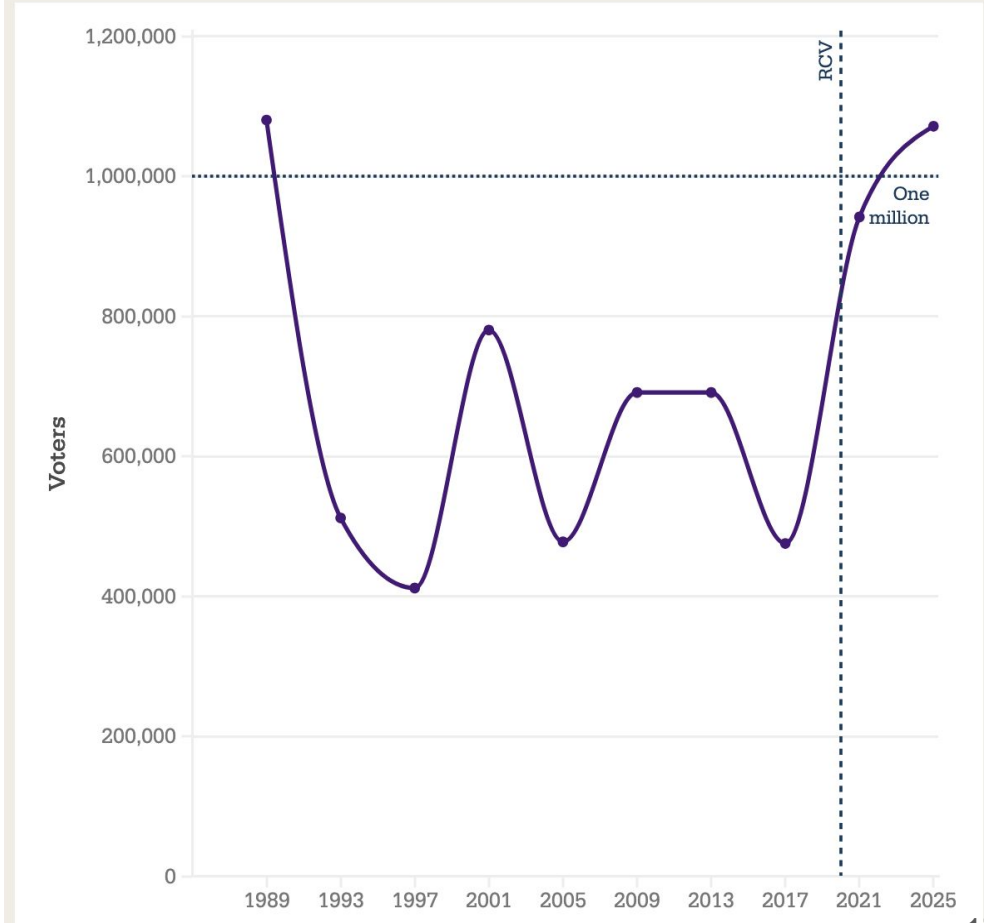


Publicly Matched Funds Made Up More Than Half of Support for the Top 2 Candidates



Part 2: Turnout and GOTV

Figure 2: New York City voter turnout over time



Context: Why is NYC Turnout Usually Low? Timing

- NYC elections take place in off-years (no presidential, midterm, or gubernatorial elections).
 - This is the number one reason for very low turnout in local races.
- When elections at multiple levels are happening, voters get contacted much more with better funded state and national campaigns.
- Voters generally care less about local elections than national ones.

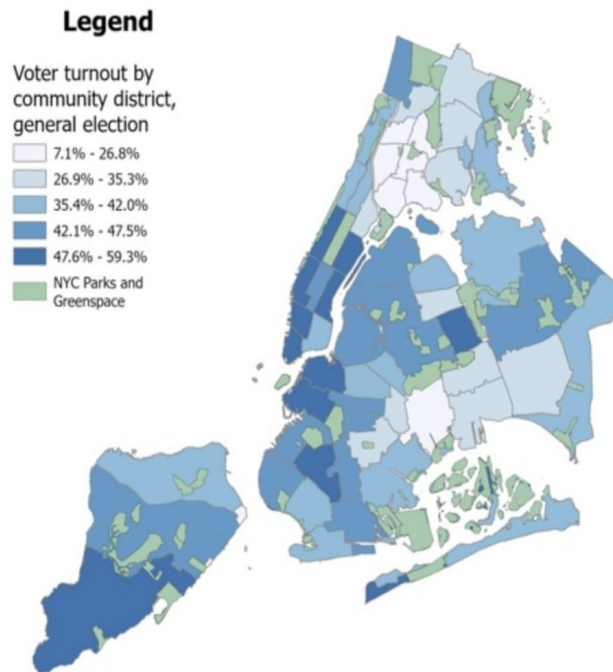


Explaining Variation in NYC Turnout? Demographics

- Turnout in NYC elections is substantially higher in Manhattan (48.3%) than in the Bronx (30.3%).
- Demographics predict turnout in all elections in the US and places with more low-income voters without college degrees vote less in NYC elections.

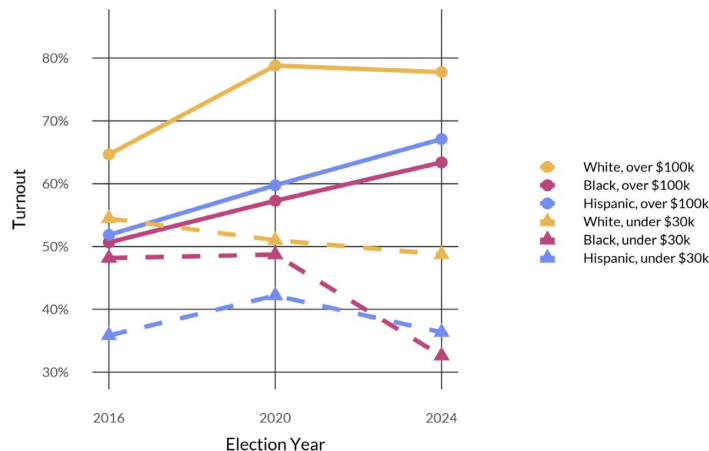
Double digit increases in turnout in all boroughs from 2021 and 2025 shows that this can be changed.

General Election Voter Turnout by Community District



What Do Lower Income Non-Voters Say is the Reason They Don't Vote? (Evidence from PA, Daniel Laurison)

- **Rarely, if ever, hear from political or civic organizations outside election seasons.**
 - Short-term outreach creates skepticism, while consistent presence builds trust. A need to invest in long-term presence in lower income communities.
- **View politics as not for them or their concerns.**
 - Need to see the connection between their problems and solutions that involve getting involved in politics.
- **Don't feel represented**
 - Need to see more working class politicians and people in government to see the connection.
- **See politics is not likely to change anything**
 - Need to see that politics makes a difference in their lives.

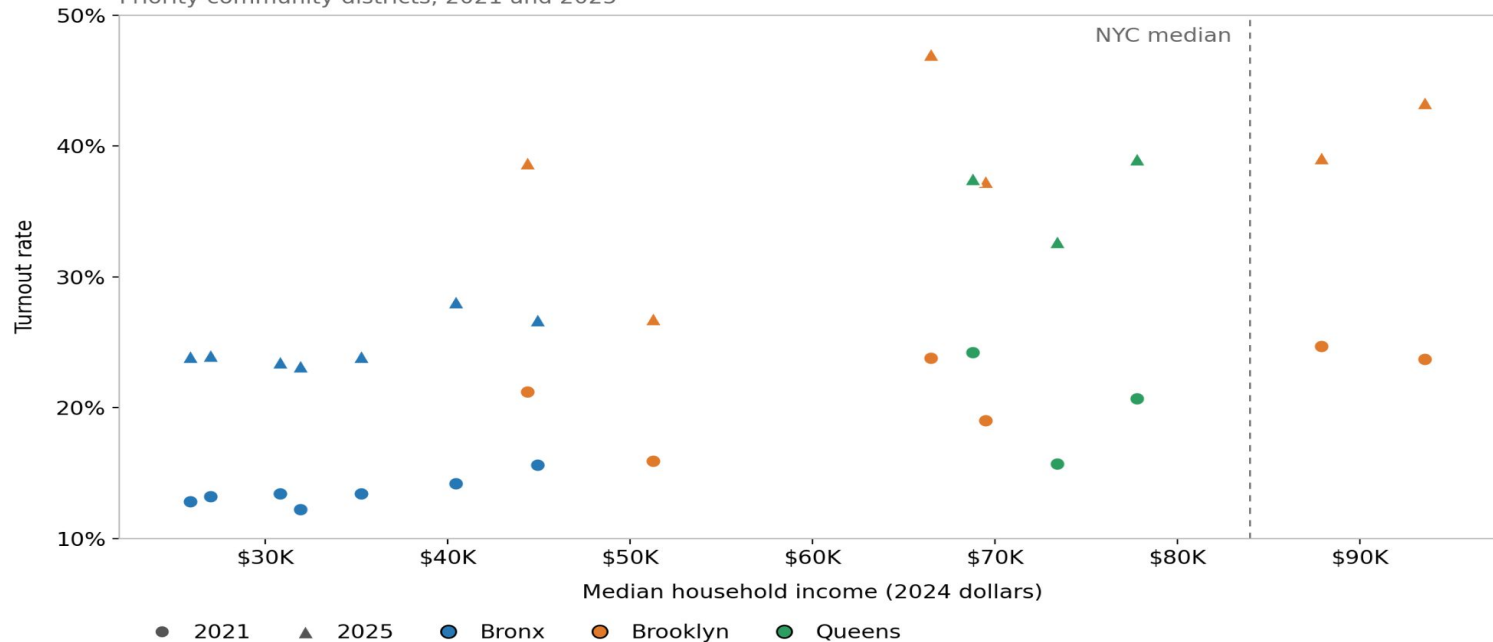


Note: Authors' analysis, Cooperative Election Study data for the 2024 Presidential election. Voters are validated by matching to election records.²

Progress in Lower Income Districts from 2021 to 2025 NYC General Elections

Turnout rose across the income range, while the income gradient persisted

Priority community districts, 2021 and 2025



Income is the ACS 2024 median household income of the district/PUMA—not individual voters' income. Bronx CDs 1-2 and 3-6 share PUMA estimates and are slightly offset. Turnout: NYC Campaign Finance Board, 2025 Voter Analysis Report, Appendix C. Income: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2024 1-year, table B19013.

What Did Young Non-Voters Say in 2024 (Presidential)?

- Too busy
- Not informed about registration deadlines and requirements.
- Financial struggles made younger voters less likely to vote and navigate voting.
- Black voters were least likely to absentee vote (despite voting lines being longer in some Black areas).

Youth Who Said They Didn't Register to Vote Because of Time Constraints Are More Likely To Be Struggling Financially

The percentage of young people, ages 18-34, who agreed with each statement about their financial situation

■ Youth Who Did Not Register Because They Were Too Busy or Missed the Deadline ■ All Youth

I often struggle to meet my basic financial needs.

29%

14%

I can meet my basic financial needs, but it can be difficult at times.

32%

29%

I am financially stable, with enough to cover basic needs and some extra spending money.

23%

33%

I am financially secure and able to comfortably afford my needs and wants.

13%

19%

I have significant financial resources and wealth.

3%

4%

CIRCLE | Tufts University Tisch College • CIRCLE

Progress in Youth Turnout in NYC

- Youth turnout increased by over 30% from 2021 to 2025.
- It also increased in every age category but not by as large a margin.
- What is behind this?

Comparison of Voter Turnout by Age Group in 2021 & 2025 General Election

Age group	2021	2025	Percentage point difference
18-29	11.1%	41.9%	30.8
30-39	16.3%	37.2%	20.9
40-49	22.1%	39.2%	17.1
50-59	28.7%	44.7%	16.0
60-69	35.4%	47.9%	12.5
70-79	37.9%	48.7%	10.8
80+	23.2%	30.2%	7.0

What Do You Need to Know Before You Canvas for the First Time

- Nothing to get started.
- Know the issue/candidate
 - Main policies or positions you are canvassing about
 - 2-3 key talking points you can explain simply
 - Where to direct people for more information
 - Be able to talk without reading a script.
- Know the goal of the canvass
 - Is it to...
 - Persuade someone?
 - Identify supporters?
 - Encourage registration?
 - Remind people to vote?
- Know the local voting context
 - Registration deadlines and requirements
 - Locally important issues that are relevant to people.



Strategies for Voter Turnout

- Phone banking and texting
- Canvassing (Door Knocking)
- Motivating friends and family (Relational Mobilizing)
- Deep campaigning (long-term mobilization)
- Social media content engagement



Does Phone Banking Work?

- In a study comparing phone banking and in-person campaigning, Gerber and Green (2000) found that commercial, non-partisan, scripted phone banking had no impact on turnout.
- Nickerson (2006) ran eight randomized experiments with volunteer phone banks where callers were encouraged to engage voters in conversation, and found that calls increased turnout by about 3.8 percentage points.
- Insight: from Nickerson (2006): More unscripted, engaging calls can be impactful.
- Insight: from Nickerson (2007): Final week GOTV calls can be effective often regardless of the message (and ineffective one week prior).



Best Practices for Phone Banking

- Phone calls have some effects when we consider successfully contacted people but most contact attempts fail – which makes this method inefficient.
- Low salience elections (like local elections) have more potential for phone calls to be impactful because many may not know when the election is taking place.
- Text messages are effective in low salience elections just before the election as a reminder to vote.
- Contacting people you know or who share local ties can make calls more effective (Relational Campaigning).



Do Texts and Emails GOTV?

- **SMS reminders can modestly increase turnout, particularly among low propensity voters.**
 - Haenschen, Mann & DeMora (2026) found a **0.25** percentage-point increase in turnout in an experiment involving 7.1 million voters. Message quality varied the impact.
- **Cold emails generally have no effect on turnout**
 - Early randomized experiments involving 232,716 people across 13 email GOTV campaigns found that email did not significantly increase turnout.
 - Rivera, Hughes & Gell-Redman (2023) found that unsolicited email **reduced turnout by 0.53 percentage points** in a 2016 Florida experiment.

Caveat: These effects may differ in more recent years but studies are often older.



AI Can Support Outreach, but Relationships Mobilize Voters

- **Personalized GOTV messages:** AI can help campaigns tailor texts, emails, and social media messages to different groups of voters based on factors like location, voting method, or election history.
- **Targeted outreach:** AI can analyze large voter files to identify people who are less likely to vote and help campaigns prioritize outreach efforts.
- **Chatbots & voter assistance:** AI-powered chatbots can answer common questions about registration, polling locations, early voting, deadlines, and voting procedures.
- **Automated reminders:** AI can target reminders about registration deadlines, early voting, and Election Day.



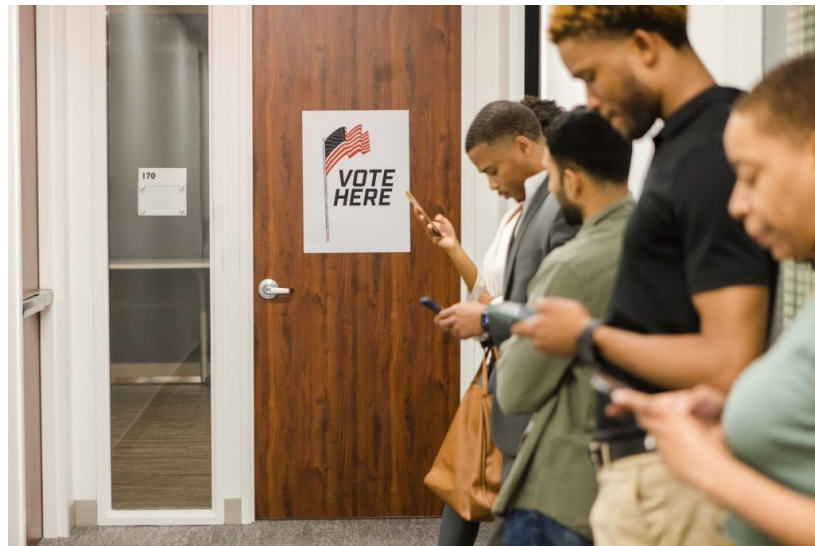
Best Practices for Canvassing to Increase Turnout?

- In-person contact outperforms phone calls and mailers.
- Canvassing works better when contacting occasional and first time voters (in local elections this might be a large pool).
- Engaging conversions for in-person interactions makes a difference with turnout (like with phone calls).
- One-off contact tends to work better the last week of the campaign – sustained engagement for lower propensity voters.



Mobilize Your Friends and Family: The Impact of Relational Campaigning

- **Texting between friends can work**
 - A large digital field experiment found that friend-to-friend text messages increased voter turnout by 8.26 percentage points.
- **Social media posts showing friends voting can increase turnout.**
 - In Facebook's 61 million person randomized experiment, it was shown that people who were shown a social voting message friends who had voted were more likely to vote than those simply shown the informational message.
- In New York City's November 2022 midterm election, **42% of voters reached through relational outreach**—turned out, compared with 33% reached through door-knocking, 31% through texting, and 27% by phone.



Content Creators and Turnout: Who Does it Reach?

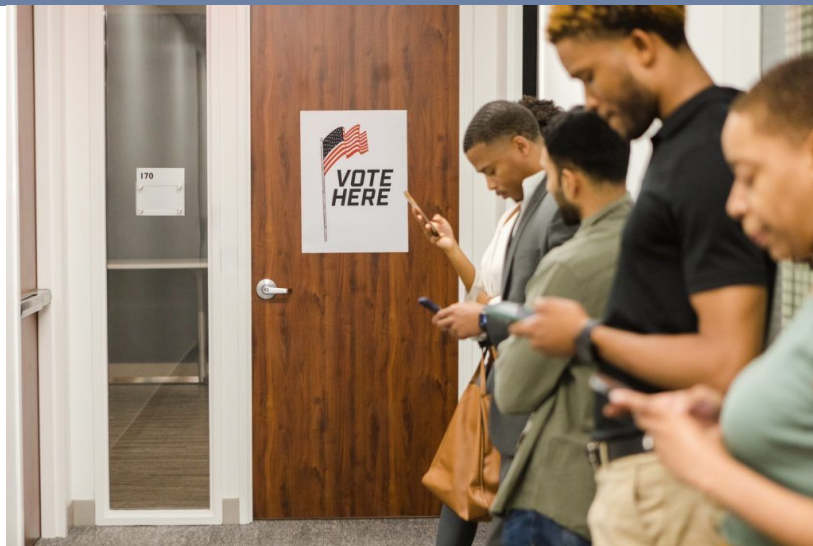
Who Engages with Short Political Videos from Candidates and Influencers Online?

- Younger voters – who are more reliant on TikTok and other social media for political information.
 - Pew: 72% of 18–29-year-olds find influencers helpful for understanding current events.
- More ideological populations (not so many moderates).
- Lower propensity voters
 - Nextgen America Voter Impact Study: 20% of voters reached through influencer posts had NEVER voted before.



How Does Viral Content by Candidates Serve Campaigns on the Ground?

- Viral videos are often the first way that voters learn about a new candidate. Plays a key role in exposure and showing viability.
- Viral videos nudge people toward participation or financial support.
- Viral content creates a feeling that something big is happening and you want to be a part of history.
- Viral content combined with canvassing makes a candidate seem ubiquitous while creating ways to show a candidate can represent different sub-groups of people (South Asian New Yorkers, food delivery workers, etc.).



Evidence on the effect of viral content creator politicians (Mamdani) on turnout is sparse

What is Different About (Deep) Grassroots Campaigning: Long-Term Organizing

- We know that lower income voters especially distrust short-term strategies from strangers during elections.
 - GOTV campaigns often focus on the final weeks of the election campaign.
- Deep campaigning prioritizes relational strategies including working with community groups, recruiting neighbors to motivate neighbors, and long-term repeated contact with voters.
- This is an effective strategy, particularly for low-propensity voters who feel disconnected from politics (low trust) or face additional hurdles to voting.



Community Organizations Getting Out the Vote and Boosting Registration in NYC

- **NYC Votes** — Uses nonpartisan text banks, phone banks, voter-registration events, and community messengers to explain when, where, and how to vote.
- **League of Women Voters NYC** — Trains volunteers to register voters and answer election questions; serves the general public, including first-time and newly eligible voters.
- **HeadCount** — Registers voters at concerts, festivals, and cultural events; particularly effective at reaching young people and first-time voters.
- **DRUM**: Uses multilingual neighborhood outreach, canvassing, and long-term relationship-building to mobilize working-class voters, particularly in Queens



Part 3:

Bottom-Up Pressure and Accountability Between Elections

Good News: There is a Political Opportunity for Bottom-Up Pressure When Leaders Share Your Goals

- Research shows that activism is most effective when there is a sympathetic government administration.
- The Mamdani administration is receptive to demands for improving services, housing reform, etc. – and is responsive to voter input online and offline.
- We've seen pretty responsive reactions to residents pushing for more services and funding consistent with the affordability agenda and basic services (repairing parks).

How Can You Pressure NYC Government

1. Define the specific change you want.
2. Identify the decision-maker—and who influences them.
3. Build a coalition of support (neighbors, local organizations)
4. Apply pressure in multiple areas

Public Meetings, calls to elected leaders, petitions, testimony, media, social media, protests, and elections.

5. Track the government's response—and increase public pressure if officials do not act.

Example 1: Expand Rental Assistance in the 2027 Budget

1. Demand

Expand CityFHEPS housing vouchers to cover more renters and people in shelters outside the main system

2. Identify Decision-Makers

The Mayor controls the budget and whether laws get carried out; the City Council can pass laws and control some funding, but needs the Mayor to agree and act

3. Organize

Legal Aid Society, housing advocacy groups (like WIN), and progressive Council members joined together and stayed aligned for years, through both the Adams and Mamdani administrations

4. Apply Pressure

- **Legal:** Sued the city when Mayor Adams refused to follow the 2023 laws and won in court
- **Political:** Council members threatened to block the entire city budget unless more funding was included
- **Public:** Advocates held rallies at City Hall to keep the issue visible

5. Track & Escalate

When Mamdani (despite supporting the cause) paused progress over cost concerns, the Council Speaker walked away from a near-final budget deal just days before the deadline, turning up the pressure at the moment it mattered most, which finally produced the June 2026 agreement

6. Result

Mamdani agreed to end the legal battle and commit **\$300 million over FY2027–28** to a new rental-assistance program potentially reaching **30,000 additional New Yorkers**.
[NYC Council](#)

Why Did it Work?

The same pressure tactics failed under one mayor and worked under the next → The difference was **shared goals**

Why it didn't work with Adams:

Adams was not sympathetic to the goal, he saw the expansion as too costly, not as a priority and even after the Council passed the law, he simply refused to carry it out.

Why it worked with Mamdani:

- Mamdani already cared about protecting renters and low-income New Yorkers
- However, once in office, he paused progress and kept fighting the lawsuit, citing the city's budget deficit
- But, the courts had already ruled the city had to follow the law
- And council members threatened to block the whole budget, which made the decision expensive
- And the Council Speaker walked away from a deal right before the deadline, which forced action

Mamdani supported the goal but delayed and continued the legal appeal until pressure from the Council and advocates led to the June 2026 agreement.

Example 2: End Solitary Confinement at Rikers

1. Define the Demand

Ban solitary confinement in city jails and replace it with safer alternatives.

2. Identify Decision-Makers

The City Council could pass a law; the mayor and Department of Correction were responsible for implementing it.

3. Build a Coalition

Formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, affected families, public defenders, civil-rights organizations, and supportive Council members organized for more than a decade.

4. Apply Pressure

Advocates shared personal testimony, rallied at City Hall, testified at hearings, publicized deaths and psychological harms, and lobbied Council members.

5. Monitor & Increase Pressure

When Mayor Adams vetoed the legislation, advocates helped secure a **42–9 Council override**. When Adams suspended the law, the Council, Public Advocate, and advocates took the administration to court.

6. Result

In January 2026, Mayor Mamdani directed the city to work with the federal monitor and litigants on implementing Local Law 42 and ending solitary confinement. [Mayor's announcement](#).

Why Did it Work?

- **Tangible demand focused on relevant decision makers:** Advocates focused on a specific policy and pressured the officials with the power to enact it.
- **Sustained multi-pronged strategy:** Organizers combined testimony, lobbying, publicity, elections, social media campaigns, and litigation—and persisted after vetoes and noncompliance.
- **The administration agreed with the policy goal:** Mamdani entered office already committed to ending solitary confinement, unlike Adams, who opposed and suspended the law.
- **Advocates had already secured the legal mandate:** Years of organizing produced Local Law 42, a veto override, and litigation—so Mamdani did not need to begin from scratch.

How to keep track and keep them accountable?

- **Follow the legislation**
 - NYC Council legislation tracker
- **Follow the money**
 - Campaign finance: CFB *Follow the Money*
 - Lobbying: City Clerk database
 - Financial disclosures: COIB
- **Follow the budget**
 - Checkbook NYC
 - Council discretionary funds
- **Show up**
 - Council hearings & committee meetings
 - Community Board meetings
- **Use Transparency tools and AI**
 - Search, summarize, compare, and track public records.

The screenshot displays the New York City Council's website, specifically the COIB (Council Office of Inspection and Budget) section for Zohran Mamdani. The page is titled "COIB | Electronic Financial Disclosures" and is labeled "Report For Zohran Mamdani". It is page 5 of 6. The page is divided into several sections, including "Agency Interactions For", "Other Income: Filer", and "Payments for City-Related Travel".

Agency Interactions For

Interaction 1:	New York State Assembly
Name Of State/Local Agency	New York State Assembly
Type Of Interaction	Unknown
Comments	

Other Income: Filer

POSITIONS, INCOME AND REIMBURSEMENTS	
Income 1:	
Source Of Income	American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers
Amount Of Income	\$1,000.00 - \$4,999.99
Type Of Income	Royalties
Comments	

Payments for City-Related Travel

POSITIONS, INCOME AND REIMBURSEMENTS	
Reimbursement 1:	
Entity or Person Who Paid	Zohran Mamdani Transition 2025
Description Of Expenses Reimbursed	Flight and Hotel
Value Of Payments	\$1,000.00 - \$4,999.99
Comments	This trip was to Puerto Rico for the annual SOMOS conference, which brings together New York State political leaders.