

INDEPENDENT STATE OF MIND:

The Rise of New York's Unaffiliated Voters



By Sarah Goff

ABOUT COMMON CAUSE NEW YORK

Common Cause New York is a 60,000 member strong statewide nonpartisan good government organization. We're leading the charge to transform New York's antiquated elections, hold our government and elected officials accountable, and tirelessly beat the drum of ethics reform. We empower and amplify our grassroots base as well as the voices of communities that have long been ignored by traditional power structures.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are over 3.1 million registered voters in New York who are politically unaffiliated voters, voters who have chosen not to affiliate with any political party, and they are the second largest bloc of registered voters statewide. For context, the share of unaffiliated voters in New York is greater than the total number of voters in 29 other states.¹ Unaffiliated voters represent 24% of the electorate and roughly a third live in New York City. In 2020, unaffiliated voters overtook Republicans as the second largest voting bloc mirroring the longstanding status quo in New York City.

As a long standing political and policy choice, New York has a closed primary system and is only one of nine states that still has a closed primary system. Only voters who affiliate with a political party are allowed to vote in that party's primary election. For decades, this policy choice hasn't been viewed as an urgent area of reform as most voters tended to affiliate with one of the two major political parties in the country.

However, as the number of unaffiliated voters has grown, the calls for primary election reform have only intensified. Despite their rising share of the statewide electorate, little public data exists on who these voters are, what motivates them and if they are even interested in voting in primaries at all. Voting rights advocates have worked hard to reduce the unnecessary barriers political parties placed on voters to participate in primary elections. Until very recently, New York's political party affiliation laws were so restrictive that voters could only affiliate with a party eleven months before a primary election; it is now down to four months. As this voting bloc grows, various electoral reforms have been floated on whether and how to address the issue of unaffiliated voters.

Common Cause New York, a longtime leader in the voting rights and democracy space, received generous funding from The New York Community Trust to conduct a statewide poll and qualitative focus groups of unaffiliated voters in the late summer and fall of 2023. Our research mandate was clear: develop and analyze clear, actionable data on unaffiliated voters, understand their motivations, and identify any policy proposals that could deepen and strengthen their civic and electoral engagement.

This report is the culmination of such efforts and our findings are clear:

- Overall, unaffiliated voters are engaged in politics and think voting is important. Unaffiliated voters believe it's their civic duty to vote and that they want to have a voice.
- **Nearly 90% of unaffiliated voters stated they are likely to vote in primaries if they could and are engaged with down ballot local elections as well.**
- Demographically, unaffiliated voters are predominantly white, college educated, live in the suburbs, and are over the age of 40. Politically, most identify as moderate or independents.
- Unaffiliated voters have a strong, clear preference for flexible policy solutions, specifically policies that do not require them to affiliate with a political party in order to vote in primary elections.
- **Unaffiliated voters are a large and rising group of voters, and New York's elections and election administration are inherently at odds with them in a closed primary system and in a governance structure that is solely bipartisan by design.**

The following data and analysis provides rich insight into who these voters are, what motivates them and how they see themselves in the political system. Our findings show unaffiliated voters would deepen their engagement in the political process if given the opportunity, and there is a viable path forward if there is the political will to do so.

¹ US Census, [Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022](#), Table 4a by State.



METHODOLOGY STATEMENT

The following summarizes the methodology of recent research conducted by EMC Research on behalf of Common Cause New York. The first phase of research consisted of a multi-modal phone and web survey offered in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Both landlines and mobile phones were included, and invitations to the web survey were sent via email and text. 600 responses were collected from voters in New York state between August 15 - 24, 2023, including an oversample of high-propensity voters. Overall data was weighted to n450, with an overall margin of error of ± 4.62 percentage points. A total of 287 high-propensity voters were surveyed with a margin of error of ± 5.74 percentage points.

For the purpose of this survey, a high-propensity voter was defined as someone who has voted in all of the past four general elections (2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022). A mid-propensity voter was defined as having voted in two to three of those elections, and a low-propensity voter voted in one or none.

The second phase of research consisted of four focus groups with twenty-five total participants conducted between October 17th-18th, 2023, comprised as follows:

- Group 1 – Upstate New York, Men: 4 participants
- Group 2 – Upstate New York, Women: 6 participants
- Group 3 – New York City, Ages 45+: 6 participants
- Group 4 – New York City, Ages 18-44: 9 participants

The upstate groups were held virtually to accommodate participants across a wide geographic area and the New York City groups were held in person. Group sizes ranged from four to nine participants. Participants were pre-screened in an effort to include a mix of demographics representative of unaffiliated voters. All focus groups were conducted in English. [The following additional research collateral is available for the public:](#)

- Poll survey instrument
- EMC poll summary slide deck
- Crosstabs for polling
- EMC focus group slide deck

All data presented in this report is either from our poll survey or focus groups unless otherwise noted. The terms focus groups and small group discussions will be used interchangeably.



THE STATUS QUO: PRIMARY ELECTIONS IN NEW YORK

A Closed Primary Election System

As is true for states around the country, New York has considerable latitude to design its own rules around voting and election systems. A narrow but consequential slice of election law deals with which eligible voters are allowed to vote in primary elections. States most typically adopt one of the five following approaches:²

- **Open primaries:** do not require voters to affiliate in a party during the registration process and can vote in any party primary. Examples include Alabama, Texas and Virginia.
- **Partially open primaries:** requires voters to register in a party at registration but they can change party affiliation on election day in order to vote in another primary. Examples include Iowa and Illinois.
- **Open to unaffiliated voters:** allows unaffiliated voters the opportunity to vote in a primary election. This may or may not require temporary party affiliation on election day. Examples include Colorado and New Jersey.
- **Partially closed primaries:** Gives political parties latitude to decide whether or not to allow unaffiliated voters an opportunity to vote in an election. Examples include Idaho and Utah.
- **Closed primaries:** voters must enroll in a political party in order to vote in their primary election. Examples include New York and Florida.

New York is home to over 13 million voters and 9.2 million are enrolled in one of the two major political parties.

Registered Voters by Party Affiliation in New York³

	Democrat	Unaffiliated	Republican	Other & 3rd party	Total
# of Voters	6,401,229	3,133,343	2,885,981	631,287	13,051,840
% of Voters	49%	24%	22.1%	4.8%	100%

2 Adapted from National Conference of State Legislatures overview of [State Primary Election Systems](#), updated June 22, 2023.

3 Voter totals include both active and inactive voters from the New York State Board of Elections, [Enrollment by County](#), 11/1/2023.



WHY PRIMARY ELECTIONS MATTER: HYPER-PARTISAN ELECTORAL DISTRICTS LEAD TO MORE CONSEQUENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS

High-density geographic clustering, largely in cities and suburbs of like-minded voters, has, in part, led to hyper-partisan electoral districts which heavily favor one of the two major political parties. This results in up and down ballot electoral districts with a high number of voters from one party. As a consequence, this state of affairs virtually all but guarantees that the primary election is more consequential than the general election in many cases:

New York Congressional Districts

New York Congressional Districts continue to be some of the most partisan on the Democratic side despite the dysfunction and outcomes from the last round of redistricting. The Cook Political Report releases an analysis of the partisanship of congressional districts annually, and 30% of the top 20 most partisan Democratic districts in the country are in New York City.⁴

New York City Elections

While a citywide elected position does not constitute an electoral district, the city itself is the unit of measurement. Given the lopsidedness of voter registration, just 10% of New York City voters are registered as Republicans, this all but guarantees an uncompetitive general election. The same dynamics largely play out in down ballot races in municipal elections as well.

Unfortunately, that now means nearly 25% of the electorate is potentially shut out of the most consequential federal, congressional, state and local elections in New York's closed primary system. As that number increases, calls for primary reform will only increase.

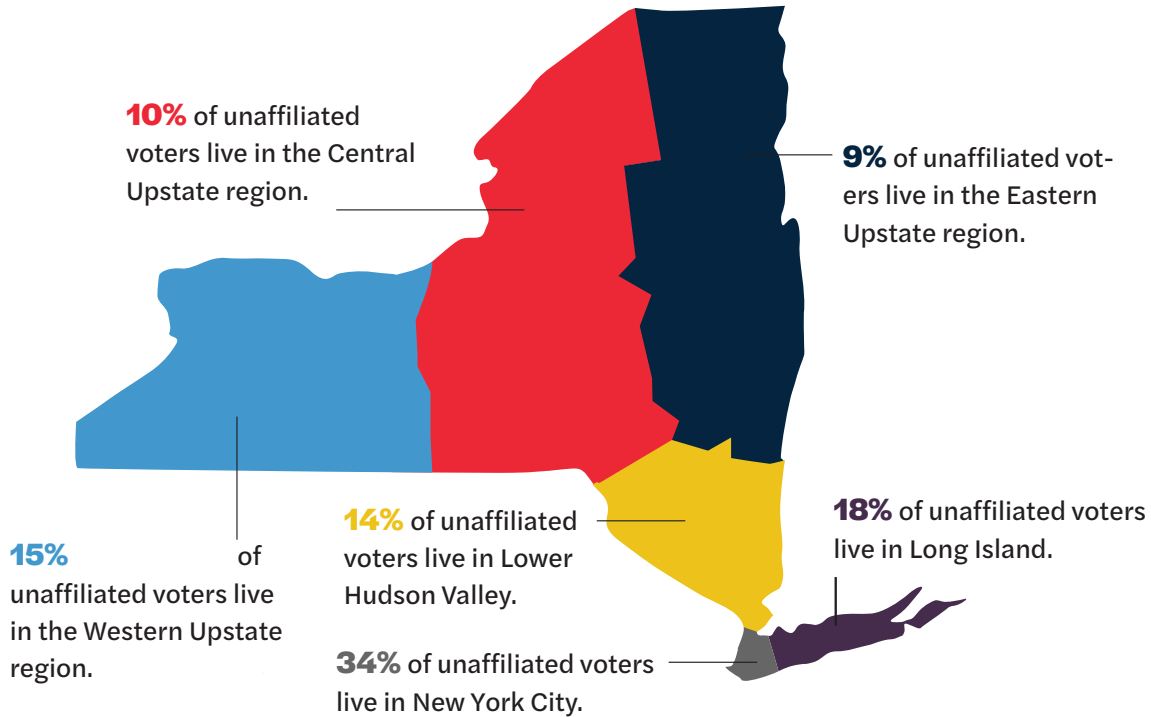
⁴ Cook Political Report, [2023 Cook PVI \(Partisan Voting Index\)](#).



WHO ARE NEW YORK'S UNAFFILIATED VOTERS?

In some ways, New York's unaffiliated voters resemble the broader electorate of New York. For the purposes of comparison, polling data is benchmarked to New York State's voting age population where applicable:

→ Unaffiliated voters are concentrated in New York City and Long Island.



→ Closely tracked with New York's gender split.⁵



Statewide, **52%** of New Yorkers identify as female while **49%** of unaffiliated voters identify as female.



Statewide, **48%** of New Yorkers identify as male while **49%** of unaffiliated voters identify as male.

→ Unaffiliated voters are predominantly white.⁶

- Statewide, 62% of New Yorkers are white and 60% of unaffiliated voters are white.
- Statewide, 14% of New Yorkers are black and 6% of unaffiliated voters are black.
- Statewide, 15% of New Yorkers are Hispanic/Latino and 10% of unaffiliated voters are Hispanic/Latino.
- Statewide, 7% of New Yorkers are AAPI and 7% of unaffiliated voters are AAPI.
- Statewide, 2% of New Yorkers are another ethnicity and 4% of unaffiliated voters are another ethnicity.
- 13% of unaffiliated voters declined to provide their ethnicity when asked.

⁵ US Census, [ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates](#), 2022: 1 year, Voting Age Population.

⁶ US Census, [Citizen Voting Age Population \(CVAP\) by Race and Ethnicity - A Special Tabulation from the ACS 5-Year Estimates](#), State File.



Race and Ethnicity of New York's Unaffiliated Voters⁷

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Unaffiliated Voters</i>	<i>New York State Voting Age Population</i>
White	60%	62%
Black	6%	14%
Hispanic/Latino	10%	15%
AAPI	7%	7%
Another ethnicity	4%	2%
Declined to answer	13%	n/a

→ Over half of unaffiliated voters are under the age of 50.

- 56% of unaffiliated voters are under the age of 50.
- 20% are 65+ years old.

Age of Unaffiliated Voters

<i>Age range</i>	<i>% Reporting</i>
18-29 years old	9%
30-39 years old	21%
40-49 years old	26%
50-64 years old	24%
65+ years old	20%

→ 6 out of 10 unaffiliated voters are mid-to-high propensity voters.

- 31% are high propensity voters- voters who voted in all of the past four general elections from 2016-2022.
- 29% are mid propensity voters- voters who voted in two or three of the past four general elections from 2016-2022.
- 40% are low propensity voters- voters who voted in one or none of the general elections from 2016-2022.

⁷ Given that 13% of respondents declined to state their ethnicity, it should be noted these percentages could notably shift if the response rate was higher.



UNAFFILIATED VOTERS HAVE COMPLEX, COMPETING MOTIVATIONS AROUND THEIR LACK OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION

A vast majority of unaffiliated voters, roughly 3 out of 4, believe voting is a right that should be extended to anyone. The most common reasons for registering to vote included believing it is a civic duty and wanting to participate in our democracy.

Reasons for Registering to Vote⁸

<i>Rationale</i>	<i>% Reporting</i>
Civic duty	25%
Democracy, have a voice	22%
Turned 18	13%
Registered in school or at the DMV	9%

Nearly 80% of unaffiliated voters were aware they could not vote in primary elections due to their unaffiliated status and 83% stated they were not deterred from voting in the general election despite their lack of voice during primary elections. When asked how they feel about their inability to vote during primary elections the most common self-reported emotions were “neutral” or “frustrated”.

How Unaffiliated Voters Feel About Being Unable to Vote in Primary Elections⁹

<i>Emotion</i>	<i>% Selecting</i>
Neutral	46%
Frustrated	36%
Angry	19%
Other	10%
Sad	7%
Shame	6%
Happy	5%

Despite knowing they could not vote in primaries and being somewhat dissatisfied with their inability to participate, many drew a clear line between wanting to vote in a primary to have more of a say in the candidates who moved to the general election versus wanting to join a party. Unaffiliated voters did not register with a party because they disliked partisanship and the parties themselves and saw themselves as true independents who were free to vote their conscience and remain above the partisan fray.

8 Open-ended question, one response allowed.

9 Multiple responses allowed



Reasons for Registering Unaffiliated¹⁰

<i>Rationale</i>	<i>% Reporting</i>
Dislike partisanship/both parties	36%
Centrist/Moderate/Independent/Nonpartisan	18%
Vote for best candidate/person	15%
Vote based on issues, beliefs, values and views	7%
Freedom or personal choice	7%

Unaffiliated voters are also deeply attached to their status as not beholden to either party and see that as a source of pride and key component of their voting identity.

What Does Being an Unaffiliated Voter Mean?¹¹

<i>Rationale</i>	<i>% Reporting</i>
Independent, no party affiliation	36%
Freedom, options	19%
Vote for the best candidate	16%
Vote by values, views	8%

In our small group discussions with unaffiliated voters, many expressed a deep sense of attachment and pride of their unaffiliated status. Many participants expressed a dislike for both of the major parties and viewed their unaffiliated status as a means to actively reject both. Their unaffiliated status allowed them “freedom” and “choice”, and the flexibility to vote for a candidate or an issue without being tethered to a political party. As one black male noted, “being independent, I tend to vote by candidate, not by party.”

Interestingly, some seemed comfortable with the contradictory status of being highly engaged voters who had mixed feelings about their choices in a general election, but deliberately self-selected out of the consequential primary elections in which candidates are put forward.

¹⁰ Open-ended question, one response allowed.

¹¹ Open-ended question, one response allowed.



UNAFFILIATED VOTERS FOLLOW POLITICS AND VOTE

Despite their lack of political affiliation, unaffiliated voters report they:

→ **In general, actively follow government and politics**

- 68% report they follow government and politics all or most of the time
- 21% report they follow government and politics some of the time

→ **Follow New York politics**

- 78% report they follow New York politics closely

→ **And 93% believe voting is important**

- 72% strongly agree voting is important to them personally
- 21% somewhat agree voting is important to them personally

→ **Most think it is important to vote in all elections**

- 93% think presidential elections are a priority to vote in
- 81% think federal elections, like US Senate and Congress, are a priority to vote in
- 88% think state elections, like Governor and State Legislator, are a priority to vote in
- 75% think local elections, like Mayor or local Council, are a priority to vote in

→ **So much so, they report actually voting in local elections which are typically low engagement.**

- 72% report voting in every or most local elections.

And while voting matters, and they see themselves as civically engaged, they are to some degree jaded:

→ **They do not feel like they have a voice in the political system.**

- Only 6% strongly agree that they have a “strong voice” in the political system and 22% somewhat agree they have a “strong voice” in the political system.

→ **Nor do they perceive elected officials as caring about them.**

- Only 3% strongly agree elected officials care about them and 24% somewhat agree elected officials care about them.

→ **However, over 50% report feeling like their voter matters in our elections.**

- 22% strongly agree their vote matters and 31% somewhat agree their vote matters in our elections.

In our small group discussions, a strong majority saw themselves as engaged, intentional, and fundamentally anti-party voters. In New York City, unaffiliated voters felt their role was less impactful given the lopsidedness of election outcomes in favor of Democrats, and as one explicitly stated “one of the biggest disadvantages is that you can’t vote in the primary.” Upstate unaffiliated voters thought they could have more of an impact given their different voting habits and election outcomes.



UNAFFILIATED VOTERS WOULD VOTE IN PRIMARIES IF THEY COULD

As previously noted, there has been little hard data to determine if unaffiliated voters would even want to engage in primary elections if given the opportunity. In our small group discussions, some said they would vote in primaries if they could, others did not. For those that didn't, they were quick to identify that the candidate selection process was truly "party business" and questioned why, as an unaffiliated voter, they should have a voice when they actively chose to reject affiliation. Others expressed frustration at having a limited role in the candidate selection process, wishing they had better choices despite knowing they had self-selected out. Some even acknowledged, given New York's status as "deep blue state", their primary vote would be more consequential than their general election vote.

However, when looking at the broader landscape:

→ **Nearly 90% of unaffiliated voters would vote in primary elections if they could**

- 60% stated they were very likely to vote in primary elections and 28% stated they were somewhat likely to vote in primary elections.

→ **Unaffiliated voters would vote in a range of primary elections.**

- 84% reported they would vote in presidential primary elections.
- 75% reported they would vote in federal elections like US Senate and Congress
- 79% reported they would vote in state elections like Governor and state legislator
- 66% reported they would vote in local elections like those for mayor or a city council.

Given the range of projected high engagement in primary elections, unaffiliated voters do have an interest in up and down ballot elections.



UNAFFILIATED VOTERS PREFER FLEXIBLE PRIMARY ELECTION POLICIES

Primary election reform is not a new conversation in New York. Various reforms are periodically discussed in the hopes of increasing voter engagement or broadening the electorate. Some efforts are successful like Common Cause New York’s efforts to reform New York City’s municipal primary elections by bringing Ranked Choice Voting to primary and special elections.

There are generally two primary election reforms that are considered when discussing unaffiliated voters:

- *Holding open primaries* which would allow any registered voter to vote in any primary election without affiliating with a party during registration or on election day.
- *Holding open primaries for unaffiliated voters only* which may or may not require temporary party affiliation on election day. Voters previously affiliated with a political party could not change their status on election day.

As these two are the simplest way to engage unaffiliated voters, we created a third option that specifically isolated whether or not temporary party affiliation on election day would impact their potential participation in primary elections.

Primary Election Reform Options for Unaffiliated Voters

	Affiliate during registration	Affiliate on election day
Open Primaries	No	No
Open Primaries for Unaffiliated Voters (no temporary party affiliation on election day)	No	No
Open Primaries for Unaffiliated Voters (required temporary party affiliation on election day)	No	Yes

We queried unaffiliated voters in our small group discussions and in our statewide poll if any of the three reforms would incentivize them to vote in primary elections. **Unaffiliated voters were clear that temporary party affiliation on election day would be a dramatic deterrent for them if required during a primary election.**

→ **90% of unaffiliated voters would vote in open primaries for unaffiliated voters without a temporary affiliation component**

- 71% reported they would be much more likely to vote in a primary election with this policy and 19% reported they would be somewhat more likely to vote in a primary election with this policy.
- In our focus groups, this was the most popular policy solution as it would allow them greater participation without the additional step of affiliation that would be logistically more complex and violate their norms around voting.

“That might give more people the feeling of freedom to vote because they don’t have to be affiliated either way.”- White woman in her 50s



→ **88% of unaffiliated voters would vote in open primaries**

- 65% reported they would be much more likely to vote in a primary election with this policy and 23% reported they would be somewhat more likely to vote in a primary election with this policy.
- In our focus groups, unaffiliated voters raised concerns about the potential for “party raiding” or crossover voting which is when a voter may vote for a different party’s candidate to skew results.

“Bad idea.”- Hispanic woman in her 60s

→ **63% of unaffiliated voters would vote in open primaries for unaffiliated voters with a temporary affiliation component**

- 29% reported they would be much more likely to vote in a primary election with this policy and 33% reported they would be somewhat more likely to vote in a primary election with this policy.
- In our focus groups, this was the least popular option as it was seen as both cumbersome and unnecessary.

“I feel like that would be a lot of work and would still be discouraging to people to get out there and do it.”- Hispanic woman in her 30s

Our findings are largely unsurprising given their fierce identification with their status as true “independents”. Seemingly, even a temporary alignment with a political party to vote in a primary election is distasteful enough to be a significant deterrent to participation. As one white male noted in our focus groups, “I’m not planning on registering in any party for any reason. So, if I had to even temporarily register, I probably wouldn’t do it.”



LOOKING AHEAD

Structural reform is never a simple nor easy process. It is in part why it's so hard to do. This is particularly true when the potential change sits at the intersection of public policy, voting rights, and the inner workings of political parties. New York's status as a closed primary state by definition guarantees that most changes to the primary election process directly or indirectly impacts the very partisan business of electing candidates.

However complex, it is imperative to be clear about the goals of primary election reform as this is not simply a change to policy and election law nor a straightforward question of expanding the electorate and increasing access to the ballot. Rather, this requires a much deeper, philosophical culture shift and buy-in from the two main political parties and elected representatives. Culture shifts are notoriously difficult, and would, more than likely, be particularly fraught given the potential implications for both political parties. Opening primary elections to a group of voters who have proactively renounced party affiliation because of their deep dissatisfaction with the political system may be unpalatable to some and introduce a level of risk to the candidate selection process that is untenable.

That being said, the continued wholesale exclusion of unaffiliated voters in our closed primary system is equally unpalatable as they are effectively barred from choosing who will appear on their ballots during general elections. Unaffiliated voters represent over 3 million registered voters and nearly a quarter of the statewide electorate. As noted earlier, their quarter share of the electorate is larger than the entire voting populations of 29 states. Their sustained, continued growth should be a wake up call to both political parties and it is at their peril to ignore a clear statewide trend.

One of the guiding principles of both state election law and Article II of New York's Constitution, which deals with suffrage, is that the two main political parties have an outsize role in all aspects of our elections as they must be explicitly bipartisan in nature. It starts at the top with a bipartisan elections commission structure for counties and the state, and then permeates all aspects from mundane election administration jobs to the selection of poll workers to how candidates are selected for special elections at the state level. But what happens when the second largest voting bloc belongs to neither? **At a minimum, it is immediately clear that unaffiliated voters need, more broadly, a role in how our elections are run and, at least, be given the opportunity to vote in primary elections.**

Our research provides a much needed starting point to a larger conversation. The survey data and focus group discussions provide a rich snapshot of the unaffiliated voter's worldview, an interesting and complicated peek into their motivations, values and voting aspirations. As noted throughout this report, unaffiliated voters are engaged in politics and think voting is important. They want to have a voice in the political process and would vote in primaries if they could. They also have a strong, clear preference for flexible policy solutions, specifically policies that do not require them to affiliate with a political party in order to vote in primary elections.

We strongly encourage elected officials, political party members and New York voters to use our findings as an entry point into the messy business of cracking open our calcified electoral politics. Too often, we hear complaints about our state's abysmal voter turnout that conveniently ignore the reality that we maintain a system that essentially disenfranchises over 3 million voters by shutting them out of primaries. It does indeed beg the question, do our election systems align with our professed values of having a truly representative government when a quarter of the electorate can not vote in consequential elections? Which then naturally leads to interrogating our assumptions around the utility and inherent value of closed primary elections given New Yorkers' increased desire to untether themselves from a party identity.



We hope our research challenges the longstanding assumptions among the political class that unaffiliated voters are truly “blank”¹² voters. They aren’t checked out, they are engaged and have a very distinct identity that is being dismissed out of hand. New York is not unique by having a high number of unaffiliated voters, but we are among the few that have firmly locked them out of the primary process. What does it say about New York when these voters are met with a closed door at the beginning of the electoral process?

Political parties and electoral systems must be adaptive. The parties themselves are stand-ins, a way for a large number of people to aggregate their opinions or values. Given the trendlines, it is fair to ask whether they are truly fulfilling their roles in a system that gives them special status and power. Given the realities of voter registration rates and our research, either the parties or the systems should change. Our research clearly demonstrates there is a feasible roadmap to do so. We look forward to engaging in a fruitful discussion with the public and leaders to address this situation. It is our hope legislative and political leaders will find the political will to do right by the three million unaffiliated New Yorkers who are still important voters and their constituents nonetheless.

12 Unaffiliated voters are given the designation “blank” in official election data reporting to denote their status as unaffiliated.



APPENDIX: UNAFFILIATED VOTER PROFILES & KEY INDICATORS

In order to avoid redundant repetition, demographic segmentation and analysis is provided in this appendix for interested parties. Our statewide polling sample allowed us to segment data by vote propensity and racial demographics across key areas of research and policy interest. Full crosstabs can be found [here](#).

Unaffiliated Voters & Key Indicators by Ethnicity

Interestingly, for the most part, unaffiliated voters across demographics largely held similar opinions, opinions within the overall margin of error of ± 4.62 percentage, on specific issues and policy solutions. Given the smaller sample sizes for Hispanic and BIPOC voters, results should be interpreted with caution.

If there was notable deviation, unaffiliated Hispanic voters were most likely to have a different opinion as noted below:

- Hispanic voters were least likely to say they registered to vote because they disliked partisanship or both parties.
- Overall, 36% of unaffiliated voters stated they registered unaffiliated because they disliked partisanship or both parties while 26% of Hispanic voters did.
- Hispanic voters were least likely to support any of the changes to primary elections.
- Overall, 88% of unaffiliated voters would vote in open primaries while 79% of Hispanic voters would.
- Overall, 90% of unaffiliated voters would vote in open primaries for unaffiliated voters without a temporary affiliation component while 83% of Hispanic voters would.
- Overall, 63% of unaffiliated voters would vote in open primaries for unaffiliated voters with a temporary affiliation component while 48% of Hispanic voters would.



Unaffiliated Voters and Key Indicators by Ethnicity

Areas of Research		Overall	White	Hispanic	BIPOC ¹³
	Sample size	450	327	45	78
	Percent	100%	73%	10%	17%
KEY INDICATOR					
Voter registration & affiliation status	Civic duty to register to vote	25%	26%	21%	24%
	Registered unaffiliated: Disliked partisanship/both parties	36%	37%	26%	40%
	Being an unaffiliated voter means: Independent	36%	35%	37%	37%
Voter engagement	Not discouraged to vote in general elections despite lack of voice in primary election	83%	84%	81%	81%
	Voting is important to me	93%	92%	93%	97%
	I feel like my vote matters	53%	52%	59%	57%
Policy solutions: expand access	Likelihood to vote in primaries if allowed	88%	89%	89%	85%
Policy solutions: More likely to vote in a primary if...	Open primaries	88%	91%	79%	82%
	Without temporary party affiliation	90%	93%	83%	83%
	With temporary party affiliation	63%	63%	48%	70%

Unaffiliated Voters and Key Indicators by Vote Propensity

While the overall sample is weighted to 450, we oversampled high propensity voters¹⁴ as we wanted to make sure we accurately captured their sentiments as they would be the most likely to benefit from any change to primary elections. Unlike other subgroups, in some areas, if there was notable variation in sentiment it moved in tandem with vote history.

For example, overall 25% of unaffiliated voters stated they registered to vote because it was their civic duty to register to vote. Meanwhile, only 16% of low propensity voters did, 28% of mid propensity voters did and 35% of high propensity voters did. It stands to reason low propensity voters would be the least likely to feel like it was their civic duty to register to vote and high propensity voters would be the most likely. This is repeatedly demonstrated in the table below.

As a reminder, a high-propensity voter is defined as someone who has voted in all of the past four general elections (2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022). A mid-propensity voter was defined as having voted in two to three of those elections, and a low-propensity voter voted in one or none. The margin of error for high propensity voters is ± 5.74 percentage points.

¹³ The term BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

¹⁴ actual n=287



Unaffiliated Voters and Key Indicators by Vote Propensity

Areas of Research		Overall	Low Propensity	Mid Propensity	High Propensity
	Sample size	450	180	131	140
	Percent	100%	40%	29%	31%
KEY INDICATOR					
Voter registration & affiliation status	Civic duty to register to vote	25%	16%	28%	35%
	Registered unaffiliated: Disliked partisanship/both parties	36%	38%	37%	34%
	Being an unaffiliated voter means: Independent	36%	29%	41%	38%
Voter engagement	Not discouraged to vote in general elections despite lack of voice in primary election	76%	63%	79%	89%
	Voting is important to me	93%	91%	92%	98%
	I feel like my vote matters	53%	50%	51%	60%
Policy solutions: expand access	Likelihood to vote in primaries if allowed	88%	84%	87%	95%
Policy solutions: More likely to vote in a primary if...	Open primaries	88%	87%	86%	93%
	Without temporary party affiliation	90%	89%	89%	93%
	With temporary party affiliation	63%	58%	69%	63%





New York