

Common Cause New York Statewide Unaffiliated Voter Research

August – October 2023



Survey Methodology

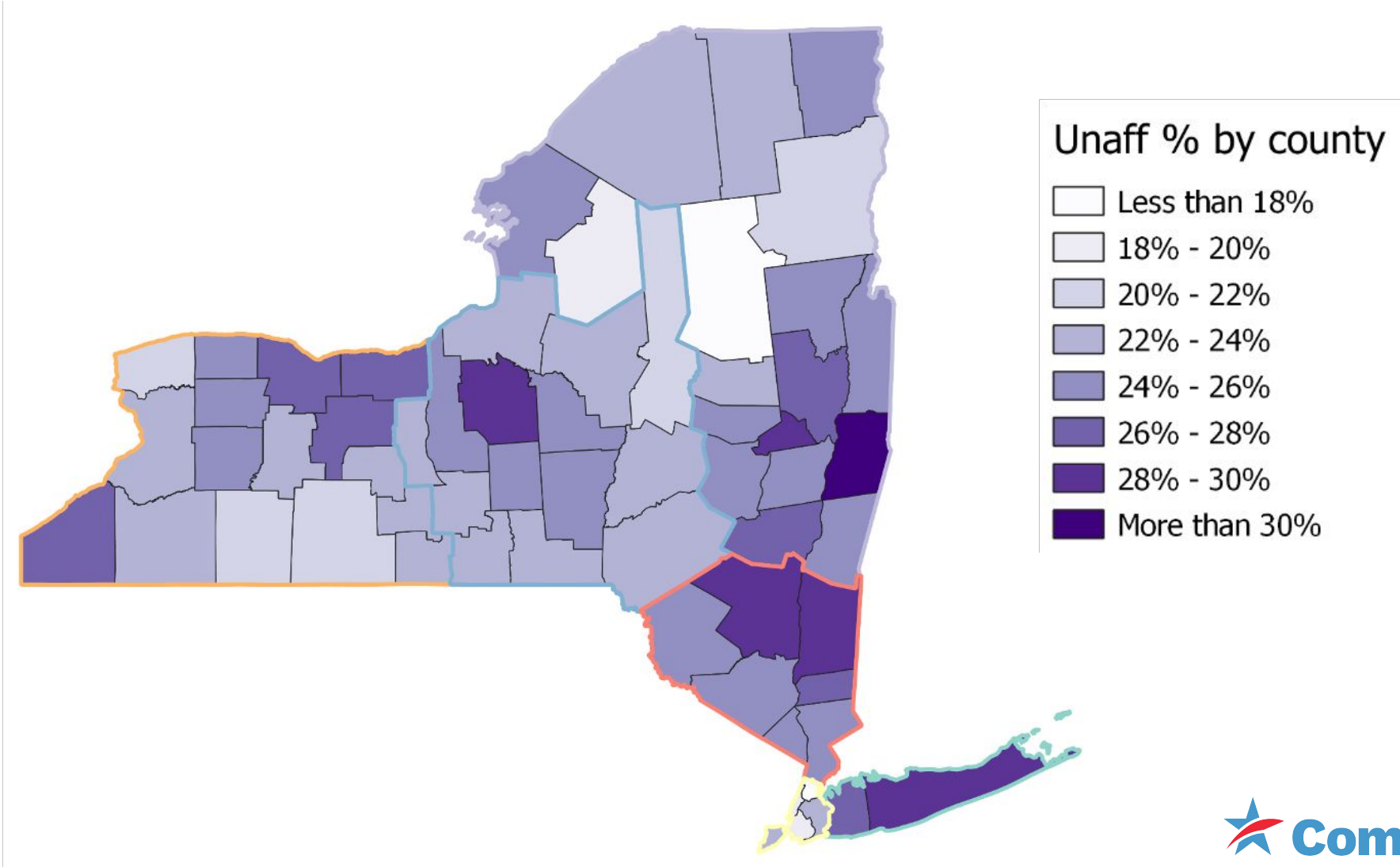
- Survey of Unaffiliated voters in New York State
- Multimodal telephone, email- and text-to-web methodology:
 - Phone interviews (landlines and mobile) conducted by trained, professional interviewers
 - Text and email invitations sent with a link to web survey
- Conducted August 15 – 24, 2023
- 600 collected responses, including an oversample of high propensity voters
 - Overall data weighted to n450; Margin of error ± 4.62 percentage points
 - High propensity voters n287; Margin of error ± 5.74 percentage points

Focus Group Methodology

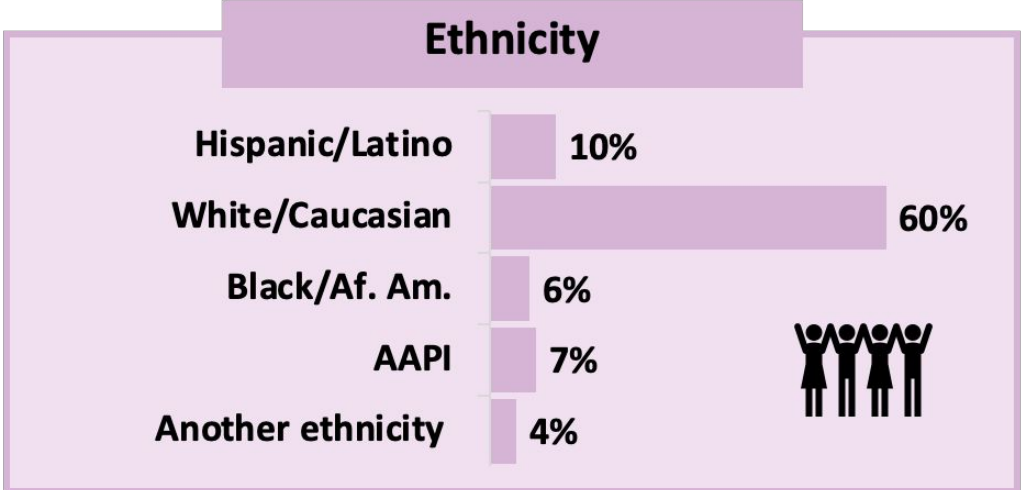
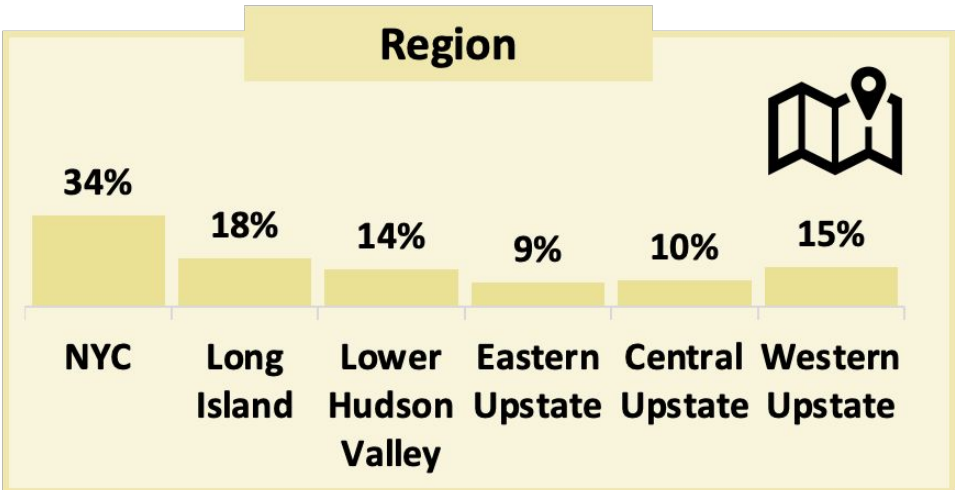
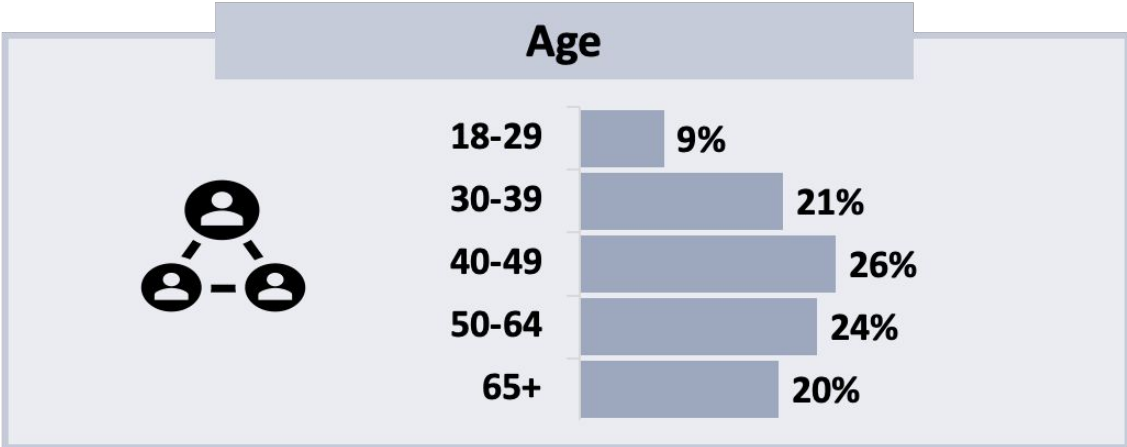
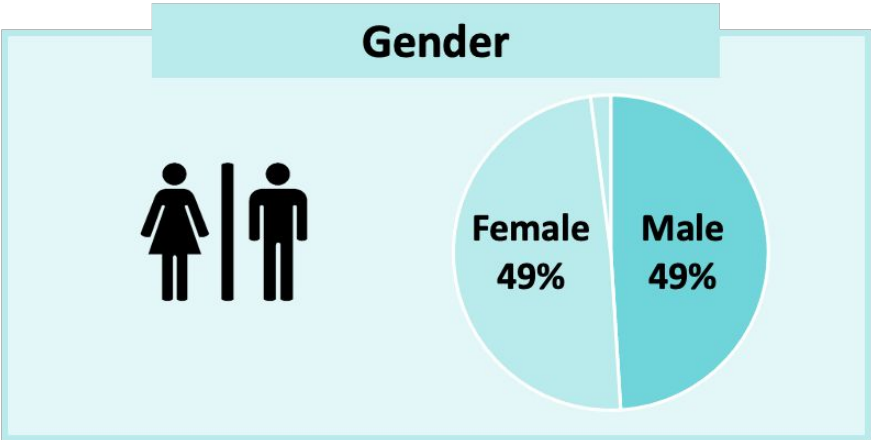
Four focus groups were conducted October 17-18, 2023 among unaffiliated New York voters:

Online	Oct. 17	Group 1 – 5:30 pm	Upstate New York - Men	4 participants
		Group 2 – 7:30 pm	Upstate New York - Women	6 participants
In Person	Oct. 18	Group 3 – 5:30 pm	New York City – 45+	6 participants
		Group 4 – 7:30 pm	New York City – 18-44	9 participants

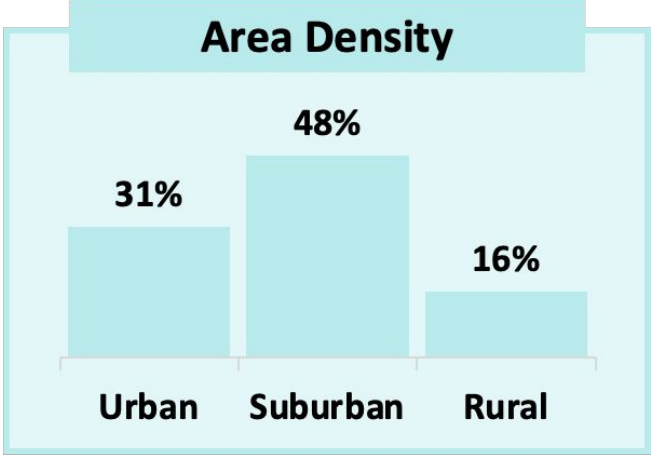
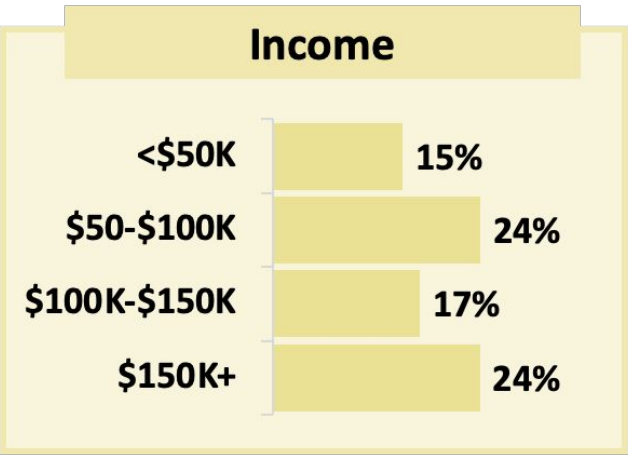
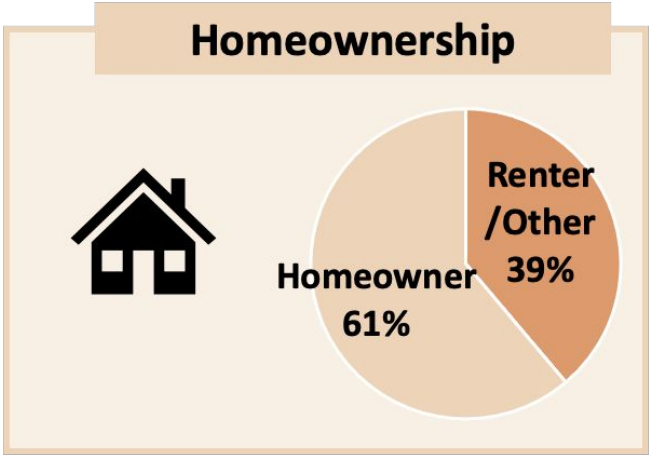
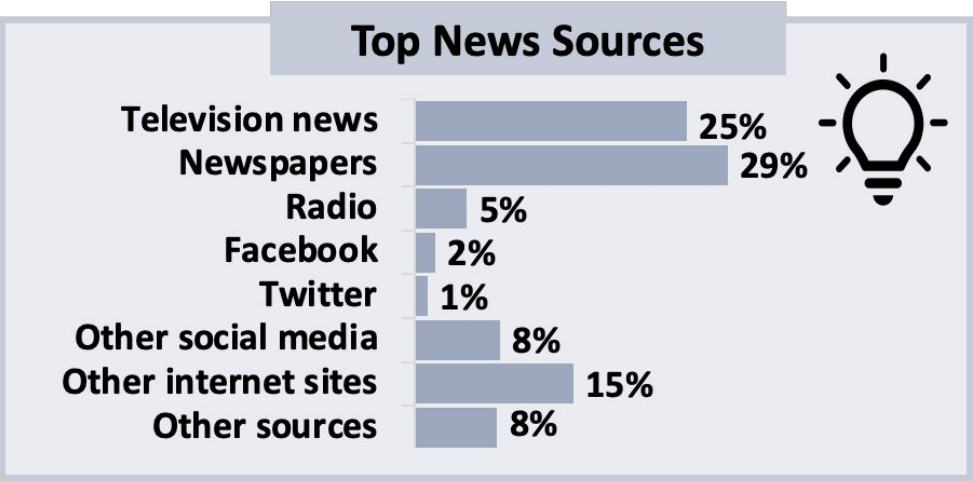
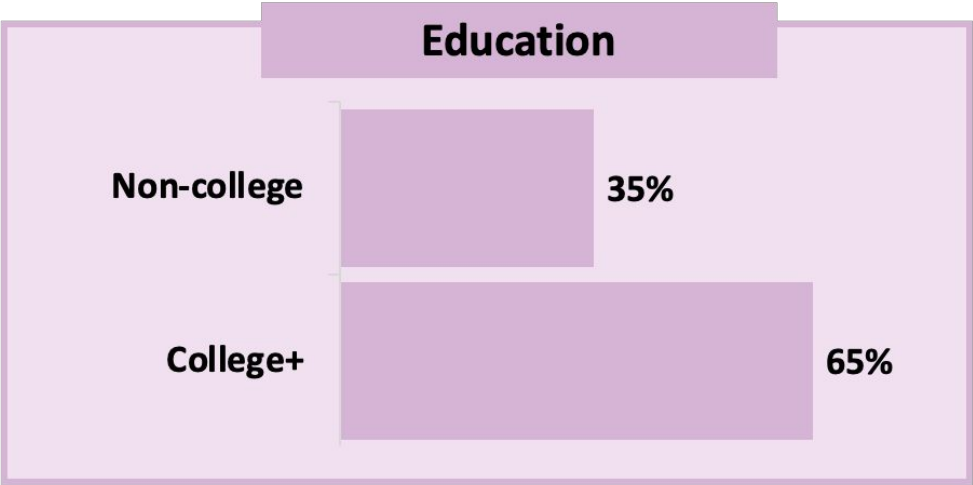
Unaffiliated Voters by County



Profile of Survey Respondents



Profile of Survey Respondents, Cont.



Survey Key Findings

- Unaffiliated voters **tend to be white, college-educated, and one-third live in NYC.**
 - They also make up larger shares of the electorate in the Lower Hudson Valley, around Albany, and on Long Island
- Unaffiliated voters are **engaged in politics, think voting is important, and are overwhelmingly pessimistic** about New York politics.
- A significant majority stated they are **likely to vote in primaries if they could**, and supported all proposed policies that would allow them to vote in primaries
- These voters say they **registered as Unaffiliated because they dislike the parties**, and that it provides them independence and freedom of choice.

Focus Group Key Findings

- **Participants expressed disdain toward political parties** and were more conservative in their ideology, but with some populist tendencies.
- Most participants are **politically aware and highly engaged, although young people tended to be less engaged and more disenchanted** with the political system as a whole.
- A majority were **aware that they are unable to vote in primaries** and interest in voting in primaries varied greatly
- Of all the primary policy proposals discussed, **semi-closed primaries were received most positively.**

Unaffiliated Voter Motivations

Unaffiliated Voter Motivations: Survey

Response	%
Dislike partisanship/both parties	36%
Centrist/Moderate/Independent/Non-partisan	18%
Vote for best candidate/person	15%
Beliefs/Views/Values/Vote by issue	7%
Freedom/Personal choice/Rights	7%
Anti-Democrat/Pro-Republican	3%
Trust nobody/Trust myself	2%
Uninformed/Low information voter	2%
Other	4%
Don't Know/Unsure	1%
None/Nothing	1%
Refused	4%

Just over a third indicated disliking partisanship/parties as the reason they registered unaffiliated.

Others cited political freedom, conflicting political views, disdain for both parties as influences in their decision

Initial Registration Motivations: Focus Groups

- Participants had a wide variety of reasons for initially registering as independent, although **many stated that they have remained independent because they prefer to vote based on candidates** rather than parties.
- A few were initially registered with parties and changed their affiliations for various reasons. Most view themselves as independent, moderate thinkers.

Primary Election Attitudes

Primary Election Awareness & Vote Propensity: Survey

- More than three-in-four voters are aware they cannot vote in primaries. Just under a majority feel neutral about it, and just over a third feel frustrated.
- A strong majority would vote in primaries if they could. And of those who are likely, a majority indicated all elections as elections they would vote in.

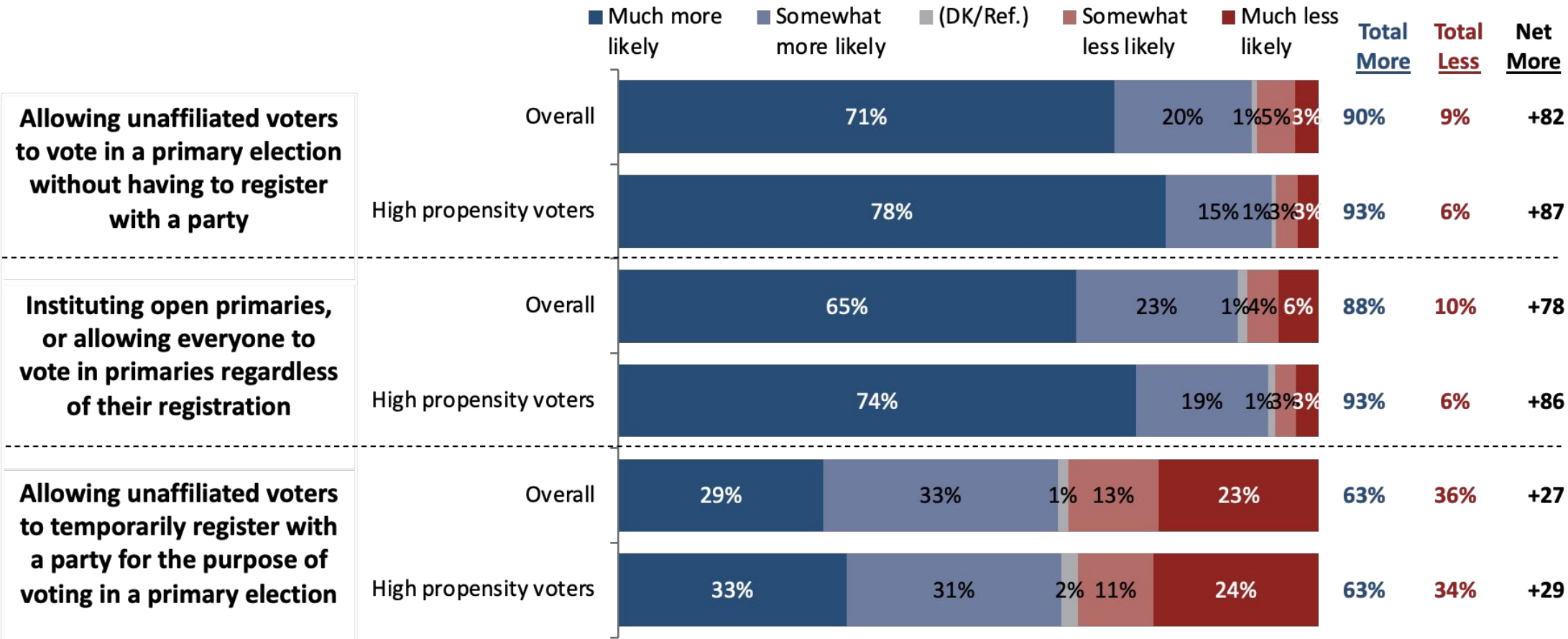
Primary Election Awareness & Vote Propensity: Focus Groups

- Respondents had a wide variety of attitudes toward primary elections; some felt it was unfair that they couldn't vote while others were unbothered.
- Top motivations for wanting to vote in primaries included having a stronger voice in determining general election candidates and the principle of unaffiliated voter representation.
 - On the other hand, some in each group said they would not be interested in the primary because they view it as the party members' responsibility to choose the candidate who represents them.
- Avoiding targeted campaign materials was another reason why one participant was happy to stay out of the primaries.

Election Policy Proposals: Survey

Election Policy Outcomes: Survey

Voters are split on temporarily registering with a party for the purpose of voting in a primary.



Election Policy Proposals: Focus Groups Discussion

Election Policy Proposals: Focus Groups

Open Primaries:

- Few participants were aware of what an open primary means. Once given the definition, responses were varied.
- All groups were concerned that voters from one party could infiltrate the other party's primary so that a weaker candidate advances to the general.

Temporary Registration:

- Of all the policies discussed, temporary registration was the least popular. It was viewed as a hassle and unnecessary. There was also little desire to affiliate with a party.

Allowing Unaffiliateds in Primaries:

- A semi-closed primary was better received than other primary policies. Participants felt it was a good balance of allowing unaffiliated voters to be better represented without the burden of having to temporarily register, and was viewed as potentially more secure than a fully open primary.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions & Recommendations: Survey

- Unaffiliated voters are **highly engaged/involved with politics but dissatisfied with the current environment**, and most see their Unaffiliated status as a point of pride.
- Unaffiliated voters' **frustration with the party barrier does not seem to inhibit them from voting in other elections**, and voters are likely to vote in primaries if barriers were removed.
 - Barriers that do not require them to affiliate with a party are likely to see better engagement.
- Unaffiliated voters indicate **high levels of feeling disenfranchised by politicians and the government** and overwhelmingly feel that voting is a right/civic duty that they do not fully have
 - Majorities also believe elected officials do not care about people like them

Conclusions & Recommendations: Focus Groups

- Many participants showed **some interest in politics and current affairs, though overall they lacked an understanding of civics and mechanics of voting**—meaning any effort to change the voting system will require some level of education.
- A strong majority of **participants see themselves as engaged, intentional, and anti-party**. Democracy access efforts moving forward are not likely to be successful if they require party affiliation or are perceived by these voters as treating them as uneducated.
- The semi-closed “Massachusetts style” primary change was the most palatable to voters, but **participants expressed little meaningful appetite for the change and were not able to reach a consensus** on what they would want to see happen

Questions