

Voter Access in New York

New York State: 51st in voter access

Many states encourage voter participation by adopting reforms that make it easier and more convenient for the public to cast their ballot.ⁱ

- **36 states** offer alternative poll access (early voting, no excuse absentee/vote by mail)
- **20 states** have expedited registration (same day, e-registration, extended deadlines)
- **26 states** have increased primary access (open primaries, extended or eliminated deadlines for party registration)

Only 4 states (New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Delaware) have failed to adopt any of these reforms. Among these 4, New York has the most draconian requirements to change parties by far, requiring New Yorkers to “sit out” a primary after they change affiliation.

Table 1: 5 Most Flexible States for Votersⁱ

North Dakota	no registration required; early voting; no excuse absentee; open primary
Idaho	same day registration, early voting; no excuse absentee; open primary
Wisconsin	same day registration, early voting; no excuse absentee; open primary
Iowa	same day registration, early voting; no excuse absentee; open primary
Wyoming	same day registration, early voting; no excuse absentee; closed primary

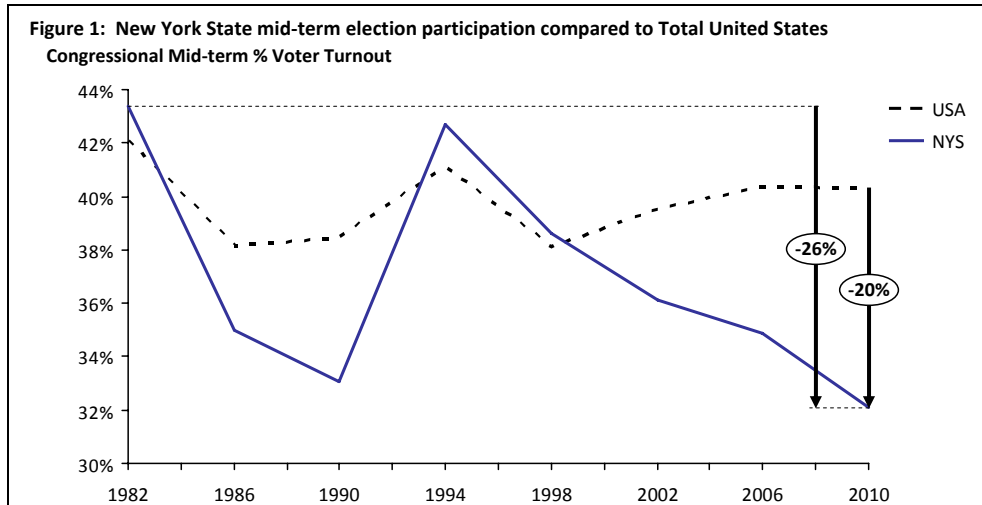
Table 2: 5 Least Flexible States for Votersⁱ

New York	October 8th registration deadline, closed primary, 1 year plus deadline to change parties
Delaware	October 9th registration deadline, closed primary, 5 1/2 month deadline to change parties
Kentucky	October 4th registration deadline, closed primary, 4 1/2 month deadline to change parties
Pennsylvania	October 3rd registration deadline, closed primary, 30 day deadline to change parties
Rhode Island	October 2nd registration deadline, partially closed primary. Same day party registration at primary

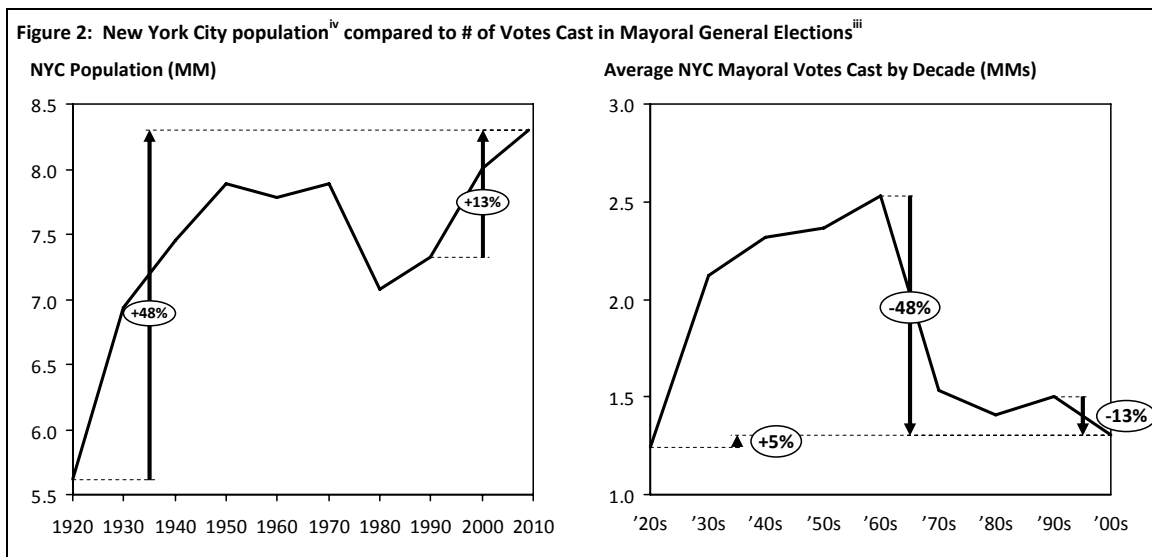
Declining voter turnout at multiple levels of government

At multiple levels of government, voter participation in New York has been declining for decades.

In the 2010 mid-term elections, New York State lagged behind in voter participation, 20% below the nationwide average. Over the last 3 federal elections, New York State ranked 47th in average turnout.ⁱⁱ



Similarly, over the past several decades, voter participation in New York City has been declining precipitously. Municipal elections in the 2000's drew the fewest number of voters since the 1920's (an 80-year low).ⁱⁱⁱ This statistic is even more alarming when considering that the population of New York City has grown by almost 50% since then.^{iv}



Proposed solutions to increase voter access

New York State ranks last in voter participation and voter policy. It is imperative that policy makers develop solutions that can stem declining participation and bring New York in line with the rest of the country. There is substantial opportunity to improve voter access immediately, through simple changes in legislation. Other reforms will take longer to implement because they will require changes to the New York State Constitution. The proposals below represent the best options for New York State to increase voter access and flexibility

Early Voting

- Allow voters to cast their ballot before Election Day at a “super poll site.”
 - Amend state law to allow voters to cast their ballot prior to Election Day (generally 1-2 weeks in other states) at pre-designated “super poll sites,” which would be strategically located throughout the five boroughs (for example, based on assembly or council district distribution).
 - In other states, these “super poll sites” have been located in facilities such as community centers, fire stations, public libraries, and even grocery stores and shopping malls.
 - This would provide voters with greater flexibility as to where and when they cast their ballot and ease traffic and traditional poll sites on Election Day.
- Allow voters to review and fill out their ballots at home, and submit them to the Board of Elections for scanning during the early voting period or on Election Day.
 - Amend state law to allow voters to receive their ballot by mail or through the Internet, review and fill out their ballot at home, and submit their completed ballot to the Board of Elections for scanning at either a “super poll site” during the early voting period or a regular poll site on Election Day.
 - This would allow voters to take their time when reviewing and filling out their ballot.
 - This would ease traffic at regular poll sites on Election Day, or at a super poll site during the early voting period, because voters who filled out their ballot at home would spend less time at the poll site.
- In the long-term, amend the State Constitution to permit voters to cast an absentee ballot without a specific excuse for not voting in person.

Modernized and Extended Voter Registration

- Move the voter registration deadline closer to Election Day.
 - Amend state law to change registration deadline to 10 days prior to Election Day from current 25 days, this would allow a larger number of voters to participate in an upcoming election.
 - A separate deadline could be established for participation during the early voting period.
 - Additionally, amend state law to extend the deadline for changing party affiliation; 20 out of 25 states that require party affiliation to vote in primaries allow for changes within 30 days of Election Day.
- Modernize voter registration processes
 - Via state law and/or executive order, modernize the Board of Elections processes for registering voters in order to reduce processing time and eliminate potential errors.
 - For example, link disparate state and local agency databases with BOE to avoid duplicative data entry.

Redesigned Ballot

- Provide voters with a simple, easy-to-understand ballot.
 - Amend state law to ensure the ballot is easy to read, understand, and complete.
 - State law should require plain language instructions that avoid the use of complex bureaucratic jargon.
 - State law should require that instructions be posted on the ballot in a place where they are most likely to be read by voters, the upper left-hand corner according to experts. Current state law allows instructions to be posted anywhere on the front or back of the ballot, unnecessarily increasing risk of voters overlooking the instructions and making mistakes.
 - State law should require a ballot design that is simple and easy to read. Current requirements add a great deal of text, often without adding any additional information, making the ballot crammed with text and difficult to read.

Appendix 1: State by State Review of Voter Access Policiesⁱ

Rank	State	Alternative poll access		Ease of Registration		Primary Type			Deadlines	
		Early Voting	No Excuse Absentee	Same Day	Online	Open/Partially Open	Partially Closed	Closed	Last Date to Register (2010)	Change party (closed primary)
1	N. Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes*		Yes				
2	Idaho	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			2-Nov	
3	Wisconsin	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			2-Nov	
4	Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			23-Oct	
5	Wyoming	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	2-Nov	0 days
6	Maine	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	2-Nov	15 days
7	D.C.	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	2-Nov	30 days
8	Ohio	Yes	Yes	Yes*		Yes			4-Oct	
9	N. Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes*			Yes		8-Oct	25 days
10	Washington	Yes*	Yes*		Yes	Yes			18-Oct	
11	Utah	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes		27-Oct	30 days
12	Arizona	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes		4-Oct	29 days
13	Colorado	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes		4-Oct	29 days
14	Kansas	Yes	Yes		Yes			Yes	18-Oct	14 days
15	Nebraska	Yes	Yes			Yes			22-Oct	
16	Vermont	Yes	Yes			Yes			20-Oct	
17	California	Yes	Yes				Yes		18-Oct	14 days
18	Maryland	Yes	Yes				Yes		12-Oct	21 days
19	Oregon	Yes	Yes				Yes		12-Oct	20 days
20	Oklahoma	Yes	Yes				Yes		9-Oct	25 days
21	S. Dakota	Yes	Yes				Yes		8-Oct	15 days
22	Illinois	Yes	Yes			Yes			5-Oct	
23	Arkansas	Yes	Yes			Yes			4-Oct	
24	Georgia	Yes	Yes			Yes			4-Oct	
25	Hawaii	Yes	Yes			Yes			4-Oct	
26	Alaska	Yes	Yes			Yes			3-Oct	
27	Montana	Yes	Yes			Yes			2-Oct	
28	New Mexico	Yes	Yes					Yes	5-Oct	28 days
29	Florida	Yes	Yes					Yes	4-Oct	29 days
30	Nevada	Yes	Yes					Yes	2-Oct	21 days
31	Indiana	Yes			Yes	Yes			4-Oct	
32	Louisiana	Yes			Yes	Yes*			4-Oct	
33	Minnesota			Yes		Yes			2-Nov	
34	New Hampshire			Yes			Yes		23-Oct	
35	W. Virginia	Yes					Yes		12-Oct	20 days
36	Tennessee	Yes				Yes			3-Oct	
37	Texas	Yes				Yes			3-Oct	
38	Alabama					Yes			22-Oct	
39	Missouri					Yes			5-Oct	
40	Virginia					Yes			4-Oct	
41	Mississippi					Yes			1-Oct	
42	New Jersey		Yes					Yes	12-Oct	50 days
43	S. Carolina					Yes			3-Oct	
44	Michigan					Yes			2-Oct	
45	Connecticut						Yes		19-Oct	90 days
46	Massachusetts						Yes		13-Oct	20 days
47	Rhode Island						Yes		3-Oct	0 days
48	Pennsylvania							Yes	3-Oct	30 days
49	Kentucky							Yes	4-Oct	140 days
50	Delaware							Yes	9-Oct	165 days
51	New York							Yes	8-Oct	1 year plus

Appendix 2: State by State Overview of Voter Turnout (Last 3 Federal Elections)ⁱⁱ

Rank	State	Voter turnout (2006)	Voter turnout (2008)	Voter turnout (2010)	3 cycle avg. turnout (06,08,10)
1	Minnesota	60.1%	78%	55.4%	64.4%
2	Maine	54.2%	71%	54.5%	59.9%
3	Wisconsin	53.2%	72%	51.6%	59.0%
4	S. Dakota	57.8%	64%	52.8%	58.2%
5	Alaska	51.0%	68%	53.2%	57.3%
6	Montana	56.4%	67%	47.6%	56.9%
7	Oregon	52.5%	68%	49.8%	56.6%
8	Vermont	54.9%	67%	47.5%	56.5%
9	Iowa	48.1%	70%	50.3%	56.0%
10	Colorado	47.3%	70%	47.6%	55.0%
11	Michigan	52.1%	68%	44.4%	55.0%
12	Massachusetts	48.8%	66%	47.8%	54.2%
13	Wyoming	51.1%	65%	46.0%	53.9%
14	Washington	47.3%	67%	47.5%	53.8%
15	Missouri	50.0%	67%	43.7%	53.6%
16	Ohio	47.5%	67%	46.0%	53.4%
17	Connecticut	46.6%	67%	45.4%	53.1%
18	Maryland	46.7%	67%	44.7%	52.9%
19	Rhode Island	51.0%	62%	45.3%	52.7%
20	New Hampshire	41.4%	71%	45.0%	52.5%
21	Delaware	42.3%	67%	48.6%	52.5%
22	N. Dakota	44.9%	64%	47.9%	52.4%
23	Idaho	45.4%	64%	42.6%	50.6%
24	Virginia	44.0%	68%	38.3%	49.9%
25	Pennsylvania	44.1%	64%	41.1%	49.6%
26	Nebraska	47.6%	63%	37.3%	49.4%
27	Florida	39.6%	67%	41.8%	49.4%
28	Kansas	43.6%	62%	41.2%	48.9%
29	New Mexico	42.5%	62%	42.4%	48.9%
30	California	40.2%	61%	45.1%	48.8%
31	Illinois	40.2%	63%	41.4%	48.3%
32	New Jersey	39.5%	67%	35.6%	47.4%
33	Alabama	37.5%	61%	42.8%	47.2%
34	Kentucky	40.4%	58%	42.3%	46.9%
35	Nevada	36.9%	59%	42.5%	46.0%
36	N. Carolina	31.0%	66%	39.0%	45.4%
37	Georgia	34.7%	62%	38.5%	44.9%
38	Indiana	36.6%	59%	37.3%	44.4%
39	Tennessee	41.4%	57%	34.3%	44.2%
40	S. Carolina	34.6%	59%	39.1%	44.1%
41	Oklahoma	36.4%	56%	39.2%	44.0%
42	Arizona	38.9%	55%	36.6%	43.5%
43	Louisiana	29.7%	61%	38.8%	43.2%
44	Hawaii	37.9%	51%	41.1%	43.2%
45	Arkansas	38.7%	53%	37.4%	42.9%
46	Mississippi	29.4%	61%	36.0%	42.3%
47	New York	34.9%	58%	32.1%	41.8%
48	Utah	34.3%	55%	32.2%	40.3%
49	W. Virginia	32.8%	51%	37.0%	40.2%
50	Texas	30.9%	54%	32.2%	39.2%
51	D.C.	28.3%	62%	26.2%	38.7%

ⁱ Source: State Board of Elections websites, National Conference of State Legislatures

ⁱⁱ Source: George Mason University Elections Project (Turnout defined as Votes for Highest Office divided by Voting Eligible Population)

ⁱⁱⁱ New York City Board of Elections and Encyclopedia of New York City

^{iv} United States Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program