

2023 Local Races Turnout: Why New York Needs Even- Year Elections

PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOTER TURNOUT BASED ON THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION

Approximately 2.4 million New Yorkers showed up to the polls in the 2023 November general election, reflecting a statewide voter turnout rate of 18%, according to unofficial election night results.¹ Even with statewide referenda appearing on all ballots, and crucial county, towns, and city races across the state, turnout remained low for this odd-numbered year (“off-cycle”) election. But just last year—the most recent even-numbered year (“on-cycle”) election—about 5.7 million people voted across the state, reflecting an overall turnout rate of 43%.² That’s 2.3 times higher than this year’s off-cycle election turnout.

In June, the State Legislature passed a bill that responds to the uneven turnout we see between on- and off-cycle elections.³ The bill, which still awaits Governor Hochul’s signature, would move certain county and town elections to even-numbered years starting in 2026. The policy is proven to boost voter turnout and diversify the

¹ A look at voter turnout across New York on Election Day, Spectrum News 1
https://nystateofpolitics.com/state-of-politics/new-york/decision_2023/2023/11/08/a-look-at-voter-turnout-across-new-york-on-election-day

² An Initial Look at Voter Turnout in New York’s 2022 General Election, Gotham Gazette
<https://www.gothamgazette.com/state/11676-initial-voter-turnout-new-york-2022-general-election-hochul-zeldin>

³ S3505B (Skoufis)/A4282B (Paulin) <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2023/S3505/amendment/B>



electorate in elections for local government.⁴ This is why advocates and New York City elected officials have also urged Albany lawmakers to start the constitutional amendment process to move city elections to even-numbered years.⁵

The 2023 election presents an opportunity to examine the difference in turnout between off- and on-cycle races. And the results make clear the urgent need to move local elections on-cycle in New York.

In this analysis, we compare voter turnout in key races for county and city offices in 2023 with voter turnout in overlapping areas in November 2022. In all cases, on-cycle elections saw substantially higher voter turnout than off-year elections. Turnout in last year's on-cycle elections was higher by rates of 42% to 169%.

Please note turnout numbers from the 2023 general election are based on unofficial election night results and are likely to slightly change. Complete data and sources for all elections surveyed can be found at the bottom of the document.

Key Countywide Races

County leadership positions in some of the state's highly populated areas were up for election this year. This included Suffolk, Erie, Onondaga, and Monroe. When comparing these odd-year races with the 2022 even-year election for Governor in the same counties, we found that turnout in 2022 was higher by 75% to 100%.

Suffolk County

The pivotal race for an open County Executive seat in Long Island's most populous county saw **about a quarter** of registered voters come out to the polls. In comparison, **more than double** that amount turned out to vote in the county for the top executive position in 2022, the New York Governor's race.

- 2023 Suffolk County Executive election: 27% voter turnout, 277,857 voters
- 2022 Governor election in Suffolk County: 54% voter turnout, 566,073 voters

Erie County

In western New York's most competitive county race, Erie County Executive Mark Poloczak sought to fend off a Republican challenge to a fourth consecutive term. But

⁴ Melissa Marschall and John Lappie. Turnout in Local Elections: Is Timing Really Everything?. Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy. Sep 2018. 221-233.
<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/elj.2017.0462> ; Hajnal, Zoltan L. and Kogan, Vladimir and Markarian, George. Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition (July 16, 2021). American Political Science Review, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3888349

⁵ See for example, New York City Council Resolution 0646-2023
<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6211521&GUID=81B70D65-0B93-4238-98FB-96F211A2C77F&Options=Text|Attachments|&Search=646-2023>



only **about a third** of the voting population came out to vote for this off-year election race. In the most recent even-year election, the 2022 race for Governor, **more than half** of Erie County voters cast a ballot, a 75% increase compared to 2023.

- 2023 Erie County Executive election: 32% voter turnout, 199,855 voters
- 2022 Governor election in Erie County: 56% voter turnout, 346,087 voters

Monroe County

In 2019, Democrats won the Monroe County Executive seat for the first time in 30 years. The 2023 November election saw a competitive Republican attempt to win back the seat. Despite strong campaigns on both sides, voter turnout in this race was **lower than 30%**. Last year, **almost 60%** of Monroe County voters came out to vote for the top countywide election, the race for New York Governor.

- 2023 Monroe County Executive election: 29% voter turnout, 140,749 voters
- 2022 Governor election in Monroe County: 57% voter turnout, 277,983 voters

Onondaga County

In Onondaga, a first-term Republican County Executive, Ryan McMahon, sought to keep his seat in a county that regularly votes for Democrats in presidential and statewide elections. Yet **fewer than 30%** of county voters cast a ballot in this off-year race compared to **56%** of Onondaga voters in last year's on-cycle election for Governor.

- 2023 Onondaga County Executive election: 29% voter turnout, 87,661 voters
- 2022 Governor election in Onondaga County: 56% voter turnout, 169,977 voters

Key City Races

In New York City, the entire City Council was up for reelection. Some of these races were highly competitive, receiving substantial media attention and increased campaign spending. Outside New York City, some mayoral races were considered particularly competitive. However, turnout in all those local off-year races was paltry compared to turnout in overlapping races during the on-cycle election of the prior year.

City Council District 13

A highly competitive race in the east Bronx ended with a six-percent margin victory for the Republican challenger, who won the party's first seat in the borough in decades. Yet, this race saw only **approximately 14%** voter turnout. Last year's race



for the overlapping state Assembly District 82 (which covers similar neighborhoods like Throggs Neck, City Island, and Pelham Bay) saw nearly **triple that turnout**.

- 2023 City Council District 13 election: 14% voter turnout, 12,525 voters
- 2022 Assembly District 82 election: 39% voter turnout, 28,991 voters

City Council District 43

The competitive race for the newly created council district in southern Brooklyn—a district with 175,545 residents—gained a lot of attention but ended up with merely about 8,000 cast ballots, reflecting a **13%** turnout rate. In comparison, last year’s general election for Senate District 17, a newly created district covering a similar area in southern Brooklyn, saw **more than double that turnout**.

- 2023 City Council District 43 election: 13% voter turnout, 8,067 voters
- 2022 Senate District 17 election: 29% voter turnout, 36,247 voters

City Council District 19

In northern Queens, a competitive race for a recently-flipped Council District, where both candidates spent more than a half million dollars combined, ended with only **21%** voter turnout. There are two Assembly Districts that cover that area., and they saw **double the turnout** on average in the most recent on-cycle election.

- 2023 City Council District 19 election: 21% voter turnout, 19,355 voters
- 2022 Assembly District 26 election: 44% voter turnout, 34,167 voters
- 2022 Assembly District 27 election: 37% voter turnout, 23,726 voters

Other Cities

- In Yonkers, the race for mayor saw only about 24% voter turnout this year compared to a 43% turnout in the city of Yonkers for the Governor’s race in 2022.
- In Troy, a historic race between two female candidates to succeed a term-limited mayor, which resulted in the first Republican elected to that office since 2007, saw a 33% voter turnout rate. In comparison, nearly half of all Troy voters (47%) came out to vote for Governor in the last even-numbered year election.
- In Poughkeepsie, an open-seat mayoral contest saw roughly 30% of eligible voters cast a ballot. In 2022, 47% of voters in Poughkeepsie turned out to vote for Governor.

Appendix: Turnout Data

County or City	Year	Race	Number of Voters	Voter Turnout	Source
Suffolk	2023	County Executive	277,857	27%	https://apps2.suffolkcountyny.gov/boe/eleres/23qe/index.html#at/0541e6cf-d5f5-402d-bc88-4fbaae88332d/ar/14005/ct/1002
	2022	New York Governor	566,073	54%	https://apps2.suffolkcountyny.gov/boe/eleres/22qe/default.htm
Albany	2023	County Executive	49,744	25%	https://apps.albanycounty.com/boe/electionresults/default.asp?type=2023g
	2022	New York Governor	116,965	59%	https://apps.albanycounty.com/boe/electionresults/default.asp?type=2022g
Monroe	2023	County Executive	140,749	29%	https://enr.monroecounty.gov/#at/11fd159c-56d7-41bc-90e6-b1758b160d1b/ar/1/ct/1002
	2022	New York Governor	277,983	57%	https://www.monroecounty.gov/files/boe/GE22%20Certification%20COMBINED%2020221215%20-%20AMENDED.pdf
Erie	2023	County Executive	199,855	32%	https://erie.resultscaster.com/r/GE23?usersessionid=none
	2022	New York Governor	346,087	56%	https://elections.erie.gov/ElectionArch?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1
Onondaga	2023	County Executive	87,661	29%	https://ongov.resultscaster.com/r/GE2023Unofficial?usersessionid=none
	2022	New York Governor	169,977	56%	https://ongov.resultscaster.com/r/GE22PostHandcount?usersessionid=none
Yonkers	2023	Mayor	26,077	24%	https://www.westchestergov.com/boe99/link25.aspx
	2022	New York Governor	47,752	43%	https://citizenparticipation.westchestergov.com/images/stories/pdfs/genanvasbook.pdf
Troy	2023	Mayor	8,172	33%	https://www.rensco.com/DocumentCenter/View/3240/2023-General-Election-Results-1113-PM-HTML#1005
	2022	New York Governor	11,517	47%	https://www.rensco.com/439/Previous-Election-Results
Oswego	2023	Mayor	2,322	22%	https://cms3.revize.com/revize/oswegocountyny/Board%20of%20Elections/Summary%20of%20Election%20Results%20(2009-2018)/UNOFFICIAL%20End%20of%20Night%20for%20GE2023_ABS%2099.pdf
	2022	New York Governor	5,061	49%	https://cms3.revize.com/revize/oswegocountyny/Election Book GE2022 Official.pdf
Poughkeepsie	2023	Mayor	4,689	30%	https://app.enhancedvoting.com/results/public/DutchessCounty/elections/GE23
	2022	New York Governor	7,272	47%	https://elections.dutchessny.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ED-Level-Results-for-Distribution.pdf
Bronx	2023	NYC Council District 13	12,525	14%	https://enr.boenyc.gov/CD261420.html
	2022	Assembly District 82	28,991	39%	https://www.vote.nyc/sites/default/files/pdf/election_results/2022/20221108General%20Election/00202000082Bronx%20Member%20of%20the%20Assembly%2082nd%20Assembly%20District%20Recap.pdf
Queens	2023	NYC Council District 19	19,355	21%	https://enr.boenyc.gov/CD261480.html
	2022	Assembly District 26	34,167	44%	https://www.vote.nyc/sites/default/files/pdf/election_results/2022/20221108General%20Election/00402000026Queens%20Member%20of%20the%20Assembly%2026th%20Assembly%20District%20Recap.pdf
	2022	Assembly District 27	23,726	37%	https://www.vote.nyc/sites/default/files/pdf/election_results/2022/20221108General%20Election/00402000027Queens%20Member%20of%20the%20Assembly%2027th%20Assembly%20District%20Recap.pdf
Brooklyn	2023	NYC Council District 43	8,067	13%	https://enr.boenyc.gov/CD261720.html
	2022	Senate District 17	36,247	29%	https://www.vote.nyc/sites/default/files/pdf/election_results/2022/20221108General%20Election/00301900017Kings%20State%20Senator%2017th%20Senatorial%20District%20Recap.pdf

* Voter registration is based on the State Board of Elections 11/1/23 and 11/01/22 voter enrollment totals, except for voter registration in NYC council districts, which is based on the New York City Board of Election February 2023 voter enrollment totals