



New York City Comptroller
Scott M. Stringer

NEWS

PRESS RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE

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WITH VOTER TURNOUT AT ALL-TIME LOW, COALITION CALLS FOR REFORMS TO INCREASE ACCESS TO THE BALLOT BOX IN NEW YORK CITY

New York City voter turnout in the 2014 Midterm Election was 25% – the lowest on record

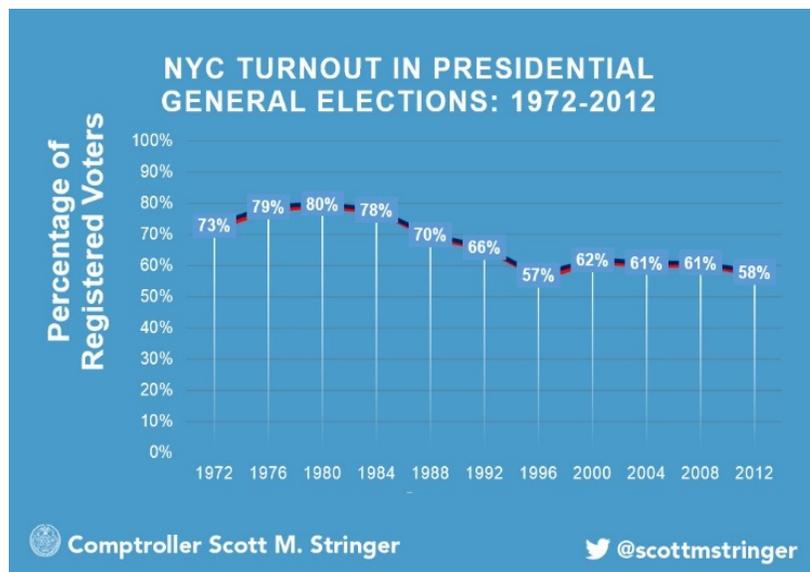
Same-day registration, early voting, streamlined election administration can boost voter participation and save taxpayer money

(New York, NY) —Only 1 in 4 registered New York City voters participated in the 2014 midterm general election, continuing a trend of declining voter turnout that has resulted from arcane City and State election laws, according to a coalition of elected officials, advocates and community leaders. With just weeks until New York’s presidential primary on April 19th, a report from Comptroller Scott M. Stringer, “Barriers to the Ballot,” examines voting data over the last 60 years and presents 16 innovative ideas to increase voter access, boost turnout, and improve how elections are administered.

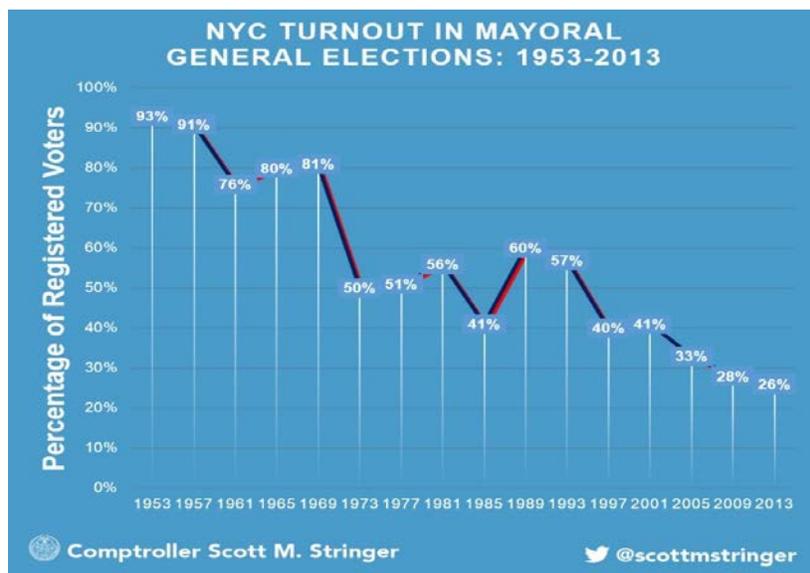
“As New Yorkers head to the polls to elect our next president, it’s important to remember that voting is not only a fundamental right – it is the most important tool we have to ensure accountability in our democracy,” Comptroller Scott M. Stringer said. “Turnout in recent elections in New York has been abysmal and yet our laws often prevent, rather than encourage, people from participating. We need to make it easier for every New Yorker to register and vote.”

In recent years, New York City’s voting rates in presidential, midterm/statewide, and mayoral elections have reached historic lows:

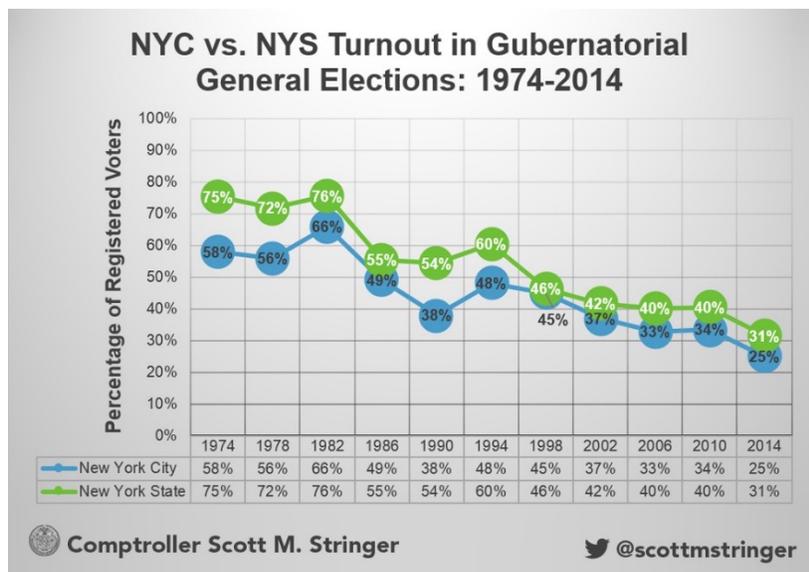
- In the 2008 presidential election, just 61 percent of registered voters showed up to vote, the lowest ratio in any major American city.
- In 2012, only 58 percent of registered voters cast ballots in the general election – the lowest rate since 1996 and the second-lowest on record.



- In 2013, only 26 percent of registered New York City voters went to the polls in the general election, the lowest rate ever recorded, continuing a decades-long slide.



- In the 2014 gubernatorial and midterm elections, only 25 percent of registered voters in New York City filled out a ballot – and New York State’s turnout was ranked 48th out of the 50 states.



The report puts forth 16 ideas on how to reform elections and increase voter participation in our City. The solutions are focused on four areas: voter registration, access to the polls, Election Day operations, and election administration. In many cases, State legislation already exists to advance these ideas.

“At a time when states across the country are taking steps to disenfranchise voters, New York should lead the fight to ensure equal access to the ballot box,” Comptroller Stringer said. “Everyone deserves to have their voice heard. These reforms will remove barriers to voting and boost turnout in the nation’s largest City.”

Recommendations include:

Voter Registration

- Allowing pre-registration for 16 and 17-year olds, which will become active when they turn 18 (Kavanagh [A2529](#)/ Carlucci [S857](#)).
- Permitting voters to register on Election Day (i.e. same-day registration), as 11 other states already do (Kavanagh [A5891](#)/ Gianaris [S2391](#)).
- Expanding automatic voter registration using a variety of State and City databases, including, but not limited to, the Department of Motor Vehicles (Kavanagh [A5972](#)/ Gianaris [S2538](#)).

Access to the Polls

- Enacting no-excuse absentee voting, which lets any voter request an absentee ballot for any reason (Kavanagh [A2644](#)/ Brennan [A3874B](#)).
- Ensuring absentee ballots are accessible for all voters – including those with vision impairment (Weprin [A2104A](#)/Griffo [S5085](#)).
- Permitting early in-person voting for at least seven days prior to Election Day, including on weekends (Kavanagh [A8582A](#)/ Stewart-Cousins [S3813B](#)).
- Exploring a vote-by-mail system, which has already been adopted in Oregon, Washington, and Colorado (Krueger [S2739](#)).
- Requiring the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to inform formerly incarcerated New Yorkers of the need to re-register to vote (Perry [A6491](#))

and giving New Yorkers convicted of felonies the right to vote while on parole (Hassell-Thompson [S2023A](#)).

Improving Election Day Operations

- Instructing the City Board of Elections to notify New Yorkers about upcoming elections more than once per year and employ modern methods of communication, including email and text message.
- Improving training, recruitment, and compensation for New York City poll workers.
- Expanding poll inspections to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and surveying voters about their experience at the polls.
- Passing the Voter Friendly Ballot Act, which calls for ballots that are easier to understand (Kavanagh [A3389](#)).

Election Administration

- Expanding access for Limited English Proficiency New Yorkers by publishing voting materials in additional languages and ensuring availability of telephonic “Language Line” service at poll sites (Colton [A4749](#)/ Golden [S1703](#)/ Eugene [Int. 0255-2014](#)).
- Instituting Instant Runoff Voting, which allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference, instead of holding costly runoff elections two weeks after primaries (Kavanagh [A5571](#)/ Lanza [S4586](#)).
- Consolidating federal and state primary elections in New York instead of holding two separate primaries in even years, and three primaries in presidential years.
- Strengthening laws against deceptive practices to prohibit the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information with the intent to keep an eligible voter from casting a ballot (Kavanagh [A5841](#)/ Stewart-Cousins [S2352](#)).

"Voting is our most fundamental democratic right," said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. "With voting rights under attack across the country and low voting rates right here in New York, the time for action is now. All of us must work together to end obstacles to voting and encourage every single New Yorker to exercise their right to vote."

"There is no good reason why our citizens are made to jump through hoops just to exercise their democratic rights," said **State Senator Michael Gianaris**. "We must do all we can to increase New York's dismal voter participation rates and automatically registering eligible citizens to vote would be a great start."

State Senator Jose Peralta (D-Queens), noted, "We must ensure that we put all the pieces in place to reverse the downward trend in voter registration, in New York City. Technology is here to stay, and what better way to increase voter registration and access to the polls than using high tech models that get rid of our antiquated system. It is time to modernize our voting registration system, and bring our democratic process into the 21 Century."

"As a State Senator from a district with a high concentration of low-income and minority communities, I understand the importance of protecting voting rights for all our citizenry," said **State Senator Gustavo Rivera**. "By increasing voter access, boosting voter turnout and improving our State's electoral system, we will re-engage New Yorkers in our democratic process. I commend Comptroller Stringer for leading these efforts and calling for the necessary reforms that will increase voter participation in New York State."

Assistant Speaker of the Assembly Felix W. Ortiz said, "New York has some of the most complicated election laws in the nation, making it harder and harder for people to vote and participate in our democratic process. We need to reform our election system, allowing people to vote without intimidation and bureaucratic red tape. Voter registration must be made as easy as possible along with a simpler absentee ballot process. And we must eliminate the LLC loophole permitting special interest groups to funnel tens of millions of dollars into political campaigns."

"As Chair of the Assembly Task Force for People with Disabilities, I praise Comptroller Stringer for making it easier to vote." said **Assemblyman David Weprin**. "Keeping voting accessible for New Yorkers with disabilities ensures that our most vulnerable citizens have a voice in government."

"We applaud the Comptroller's call to expand automatic voter registration and to streamline rights restoration for formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, along with other enfranchising reforms," said **Jonathan Brater, counsel for the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice**. "The legislature should act on these proposals right away."

Steven Choi, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition said, "Comptroller Scott Stringer's new report provides an essential framework to reduce barriers to voting. We know that in New York City, tens of thousands of people, including new Americans, have difficulty casting their ballot due to lack of interpretation and translation at poll sites, disenfranchisement, and other structural issues. Through our civic engagement program, NYIC has worked with dozens of partners and led initiatives such as Immigrants Vote!, Engage Immigrant NY, Student Voter Registration Day, and more to boost immigrant voter engagement. This is vital for our communities to feel truly represented on the national and local level."

"Our democracy works best when every eligible voter has a voice at the ballot box," said **Carolyn DeWitt, Chief Operating Officer of Rock the Vote**. "We're thrilled to support efforts to increase access in New York state, and throughout the nation, by improving election administration, ensuring the right to vote for disenfranchised communities, and encouraging engagement across the board."

Christopher Kui, Executive Director of Asian Americans for Equality said, "Asian Americans for Equality applauds the bold reforms being proposed by Comptroller Stinger to increase voter access and participation in New York City. Specifically, Comptroller Stringer's comprehensive proposal will ensure that Asian and immigrant communities can exercise their constitutional right to vote, while also empowering their community by increasing their voter turnout. As a result, elected officials will be more accountable to the needs of these communities regarding funding and resource allocations, as well as providing cultural and linguistically appropriate services".

Donna Lieberman, Executive Director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said, "The Comptroller's report documents alarmingly low voter turnout in NYC and lays out important, common sense recommendations to improve voter registration and access to voting. Same day and online registration, early voting, and reducing impediments for formerly incarcerated New Yorkers to vote will improve voter participation – and thus, strengthen our democracy."

Debra Raskin, President of the New York City Bar Association, states “The City Bar has long supported measures to attract more voters to the voting booth and bring more integrity to the electoral process. Many of those measures appear in the Comptroller’s Report and we applaud him for so clearly identifying what can be done right now to improve ballot access in New York City.”

Grace Shim, Executive Director of the MinKwon Center for Community Action, stated, “Against the backdrop of a national decline in voter turnout and engagement, this is a welcome announcement by Comptroller Stringer. A good democracy is one in which all peoples are engaged and empowered – and we believe these changes to New York’s system of elections would be unparalleled in its impact on voter engagement. This comprehensive package will serve all New Yorkers well, especially newer voters, such as those in the Korean American and Asian American communities.”

Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director of the Asian American Federation said, “The Asian American Federation supports Comptroller Scott Stringer’s leadership in increasing voter engagement and turnout in New York City. It is well-documented that Asian New Yorkers often face barriers to voting, like language access, reaching polling sites, and voter harassment. Comptroller Stringer’s efforts to enfranchise voters by making it easier to register and access the polls is a positive step in increasing civic participation of not only the Asian American community, but all voters.”

APA VOICE (Asian Pacific Americans Voting and Organizing to Increase Civic Engagement) issued the following statement: “The coalition of APA VOICE supports these reforms. Asian Pacific Americans face multiple barriers to full civic participation. Arcane election laws and poor election administration should not be among them. The majority of our community members are immigrants, and 2016 will be the very first time for thousands to vote as citizens in the United States. Our state should be leading in voting rights and reforms to open up the process to as many New Yorkers as possible. Instead, we have been lagging behind, to the point where incremental improvements may be insufficient, and we need an overhaul of our election system. We call on our elected officials in Albany and at City Hall to act on these reforms immediately.”

To see a full list of the Comptroller’s recommendations, [click here](#)
To read the full report, [click here](#)