

A photograph of a busy outdoor market stall in New York City. The stall is filled with various fruits and vegetables, including melons, oranges, and leafy greens. Several people are seen shopping, some with shopping bags and one with a stroller. The background shows a brick building with large Chinese characters on a sign. The overall scene is vibrant and captures the essence of a diverse urban market.

EXAMINING CHINESE, KOREAN, BENGALI, AND ARAB VOTERS' ATTITUDES AND EFFECTIVE MESSAGING ON **RANKED CHOICE** **VOTING** AND ELECTIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

EXAMINING CHINESE, KOREAN, BENGALI, AND ARAB VOTERS' ATTITUDES AND EFFECTIVE MESSAGING ON RANKED CHOICE VOTING AND ELECTIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BETWEEN
MINKWON CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ACTION,
MORE EQUITABLE DEMOCRACY (MED)
NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION (NYIC).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In a 2019 ballot referendum, New York City voters overwhelmingly chose to adopt Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for all municipal elections, beginning in 2021. New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) led extensive advocacy, member engagement, public education, elected official outreach, and direct voter contact in order to enact Ranked Choice Voting. As important leaders in civic engagement among AAPI and immigrant voters, MinKwon and NYIC are now engaging in the same range of activities in order to mobilize voters in upcoming elections.

New York City has 858,385 citizens of voting age who meet the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of Limited English Proficient (LEP). Recognizing that there is a gap in information for voters who speak languages other than English, MinKwon and NYIC partnered with More Equitable Democracy and Democracy Rising to conduct research designed to inform voter education, improve non-English voting information provided to voters, and help government agencies and candidates more meaningfully and successfully engage language communities. This qualitative research project seeks to understand attitudes towards voting and elections, particularly towards Ranked Choice Voting, and identify messaging themes to persuade and motivate voters to participate in the upcoming election.

More Equitable Democracy granted \$20,000 each to MinKwon and the NYIC to organize and conduct in-language and bilingual focus groups and participate in analyzing the findings. More Equitable Democracy developed the research tools, and Democracy Rising participated as a partner, offering technical assistance throughout the project.

FOCUS GROUPS

NYIC and MinKwon conducted 9 virtual focus groups between March 27 and April 5, 2021. A team composed of 1-2 community based facilitators, plus 1-2 staff members from the lead partner organizations, engaged a total of 53 participants in 2-2.5 hour-long focus group discussions.

Focus groups were conducted in Arabic, Bangla, Cantonese, English, Korean, and Mandarin. Two focus groups per ethnic or language community were conducted with emphasis on using the target language in at least one focus group and English for the other, in order to hear perspectives from people who are bilingual. For the Chinese community, one focus group was conducted in Cantonese, one in Mandarin, and one in English with participants who identified as ethnically Chinese. NYIC led focus groups for the Arabic and Bangladeshi communities and MinKwon led focus groups for the Chinese and Korean communities.

虽然是一位华人的选举人不代表我一定会选他因为我最注重的是他的思想。若果思想跟我有冲突的话那我不一定要投他一票。

“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO ME IS A CANDIDATE WITH SHARED VALUES, NOT A SHARED BACKGROUND”

- MANDARIN: IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

KEY FINDINGS

1. Focus group participants across language and ethnicity agreed that voting is very important and listed specific ways that voting may impact their lived experiences and qualities of life. However, they seemed unclear on how local participation impacts their issues.
2. “Justice”, “fairness”, and “equality between races” spontaneously emerged as salient themes within the Arabic: In-language focus group. Both Arabic focus groups cited discrimination against immigrants and Muslims and racism as issues that elected officials should address.
3. Participants felt that voting in the U.S. is unnecessarily burdensome and difficult.
4. There is not enough in-language information about candidates, issues, and the voting process. As a result, communities do not feel that their voices are being heard.
5. Participants were mostly critical about the process of selecting leaders in the U.S.
6. Whether or not a candidate shares an ethnic or language identity, candidates should have shared values and a track record of working in the community’s interest.
7. In-language mediums, in addition to mainstream media, are critical when reaching out to LEP individuals about voting, elections, and candidates.
8. More than 2/3 of participants felt confident about voting in the upcoming election after watching or listening to a basic explanation³ of Ranked Choice Voting .
9. The groups who watched a video explanation of Ranked Choice Voting had significantly fewer questions and less confusion about the voting processes than those who did not.

10. Participants overwhelmingly want more information about candidates in order to rank them in order of preference. They want this information to be easily accessible and in-language.

11. When explaining Ranked Choice Voting, the following resonated the most with participants: having the ability to choose more than one candidate to vote for, ranking “the ones you like” in order of preference, and explaining that you indicate your “1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd, choice.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANDIDATES

1. In order to motivate voters to cast ballots in local elections, candidates should discuss the functions of local government and how they relate to issues that impact people in their neighborhoods. With voters, it is important to relate community-specific issues with the roles and functions of local offices. By highlighting how residents can have a say in issues that impact them and focusing on concrete examples of local impact, voters may be more motivated to turn out in off-year elections and avoid leaving the down-ballot races blank.
2. Candidates should work to provide materials in-language and prioritize materials that help voters identify and differentiate them from their opponents. Learning that voters would need to indicate their favorite candidates in order of preference prompted participants to request more information about candidates and their positions on issues.
3. Candidates should not rely on shared ethnic or language identity alone to win votes. Voters are looking deeply at other factors.

3. https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0B0b34dC_h-ETDqWzLi5rWNSe5OyU6dK

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY- BASED ORGANIZATIONS

1. Conduct more in-language education in LEP communities to explain the voting process. Many participants expressed frustration that the process for voting, including voter registration and the timeline that people are allowed to vote or request ballots, is burdensome and/or confusing. Therefore, basic voter information should be made more widely available in-language.

2. Use visual aids in voter education materials. Participants quickly became familiar with the concept of ranking when provided with visual aids. Participants who did not have visual aids felt significantly less confident in their understanding of the voting process, even if ranking itself was easy to understand.

3. When educating people about Ranked Choice Voting, emphasize the ability of voters to “choose more than one candidate to vote for.” Instruct them to rank “the ones you like” in order of preference, and say “1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd choice...” in your explanation. Use the verb “rank” vs. “vote” (i.e. Rank your candidate of choice.) Participants repeated these words and phrases in-language when asked to explain Ranked Choice Voting to others, indicating that these are salient and accessible terms.

4. Disseminate in-language information about Ranked Choice Voting and elections using multiple mediums. LEP individuals listed many in-language mediums through which they receive news and information, including in-language newspapers, TV, radio, and social media. Mediums that reach a general public, such as subway ads, town halls and forums, and YouTube, should include information in multiple languages, either via written translation or live or recorded interpretation. Organizations and agencies should budget to provide fair compensation to translators and interpreters to ensure high-quality language access.

5. Create easy-to-access in-language guides to inform voters about candidates and issues on the ballot. Learning that voters would need to indicate their favorite candidates in order of preference prompted participants to request more information about candidates and their positions on issues. They said that in order to feel more confident about making informed choices on their ballot, they needed quick and accessible ways to compare and contrast candidates.

6. Effective campaigns should lead with motivational outreach that engages followed by informational outreach that educates. Provide voters with clear and unique messaging based on the focus of the outreach, parsing out the “why vote” messaging from the “how to vote” messaging. If the goal is to motivate participation within voters, engage with outcome-oriented themes such as community impact and positive change. If the goal is to educate voters on the process of voting and their options to vote, focus on voters’ ability to choose candidates based on their preferences and include basic resources about voting.

7. NYC Board of Elections needs to think of the Voting Rights Act as a floor, not a ceiling. Over 600 languages and dialects are spoken in NYC, and the narrow focus on only five has left many New York voters without all the information they need to register and vote. NYC agencies (which does not include NYC BOE) already translate materials into languages that are not covered under the VRA. Having BOE do the same would reach the sizable LEP populations in NYC who are currently underserved.

8. In-language materials cannot replace the critical work of an interpreter. The focus group discussions reinforced that just because materials are created, that does not mean they always reach their intended audience. The knowledge that an interpreter will be available at the poll site if voters have questions instills confidence in voters and may encourage more people to vote. This can be achieved either through the BOE or City Council funding the work of the Civic Engagement Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Follow-up with quantitative research. This research project was qualitative in nature, identifying common themes and providing valuable information about how best to motivate voters and educate them about Ranked Choice Voting and elections in general. The next step is to confirm and expand these findings with quantitative research to explore demographic trends, differences and similarities between groups, their attitudes towards voting, and their experiences as LEP individuals or communities when participating in the democratic process.

2. Expand the research beyond the language communities studied in this project. As more jurisdictions consider implementing Ranked Choice Voting across the country, more communities will need to learn about and engage with the system.

3. Compile and audit in-language materials used by candidates, city agencies, and organizations to assess their effectiveness in explaining Ranked Choice Voting and evaluate the quality of translations with regards to linguistic and cultural relevance.

我们来到这个美国我们有说话的自由和选举的自由，所以我们公民要去做我们的义务。这样才能让我们的社区里面真的选出一个对大家有利的，真的帮到大家的候选人。

“WE COME TO THIS COUNTRY TO HAVE FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND FREEDOM OF ELECTIONS. THAT IS WHY AS CITIZENS WE MUST DO OUR CIVIC DUTIES [TO VOTE]. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN ELECT A CANDIDATE WHOSE LEADERSHIP BENEFITS EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY AND CAN REALLY HELP EVERYONE.”

- MANDARIN: IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS



MINKWON CENTER
For Community Action

MINKWON

MinKwon Center for Community Action is a grassroots, community-action non-profit organization based in Flushing, New York, serving the local working class immigrant community. MinKwon, which means “civil rights” in Korean, engages in advocacy and community organizing, provides social services, encourages civic participation, fosters youth empowerment to achieve economic and social justice for all.



NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION

The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization representing over 200 immigrant and refugee rights groups throughout New York State. The multi-racial and multi-sector NYIC membership base includes grassroots and nonprofit community organizations, religious and academic institutions, labor unions, as well as legal and socio-economic justice organizations. The NYIC not only establishes a forum for immigrant groups to voice their concerns, but also provides a platform for collective action to drive positive social change.



MORE EQUITABLE DEMOCRACY

More Equitable Democracy is a nonprofit organization that builds networks between funders and BIPOC-led organizations to reimagine and co-create an inclusive, representative and racially just democracy. MED fosters collaborative relationships with funding partners and allies, provides technical assistance to BIPOC led organizations, and co-creates electoral transformation strategies.



DEMOCRACY RISING

Democracy Rising launched in the Summer of 2020 with a goal to create a democracy where all communities have political equality and are fully able to participate, where anyone with a vision for their community can viably run for office, and where communities are empowered to hold elected officials accountable. To achieve this goal Democracy Rising provides technical assistance to help groups or coalitions on the ground build successful reform efforts and continued engagement to ensure that reforms are implemented justly.



MINKWON CENTER
For Community Action



FULL REPORT

METHODOLOGY

NYIC and MinKwon conducted 9 virtual focus groups between March 27 and April 5, 2021 in 6 languages. A team composed of 1-2 community based facilitators, plus 1-2 staff members of the lead partner organizations, engaged a total of 53 participants in 2-2.5 hour-long focus group discussions.

The following section outlines the rationale for the language and ethnic communities who were included in this research, processes for language translation and interpretation, facilitator information, and a summary of participant demographic information.

TARGET LANGUAGES

Partners chose to focus this research on Korean, Cantonese, Mandarin, Bangla, and Arabic languages and ethnic groups due to their sizable Limited-English Proficient (LEP) populations within New York City. Many of the open city council district races also have sizable LEP communities that speak the aforementioned languages.

Section 203 of the Federal Voting Rights Act requires the NYC Board of Elections (NYC BOE) to provide translated voting information in all of these languages except Arabic. NYC BOE must also provide interpreters at certain poll sites in two or more of these languages in the following counties: New York (Manhattan), Kings (Brooklyn), Queens. The purpose was to study the effectiveness and reach of translated materials into less populous language communities covered under the VRA (hence the inclusion of Bangla, Cantonese, Korean, and Mandarin), while also including one language, Arabic, which is not covered under the VRA. Partners made the decision not to include Spanish among the languages in this iteration of the project because of existing plans to do research in this community by other local entities.

Partners conducted two focus groups per ethnic or language community with emphasis on using the target language in at least one focus group and English for the other. This allowed inclusion of perspectives from both the LEP community and those who are bilingual or English-dominant. For the Chinese community, one focus group was conducted in Cantonese, one in Mandarin, and one in English with participants who identified as ethnically Chinese. NYIC led focus groups for the Arabic and Bangladeshi communities. MinKwon led focus groups for the Chinese and Korean communities.

For the purposes of this document, focus groups will be referred to by their name and the primary language the group was conducted in. Example: Arabic: In-language, Arabic: Bilingual.

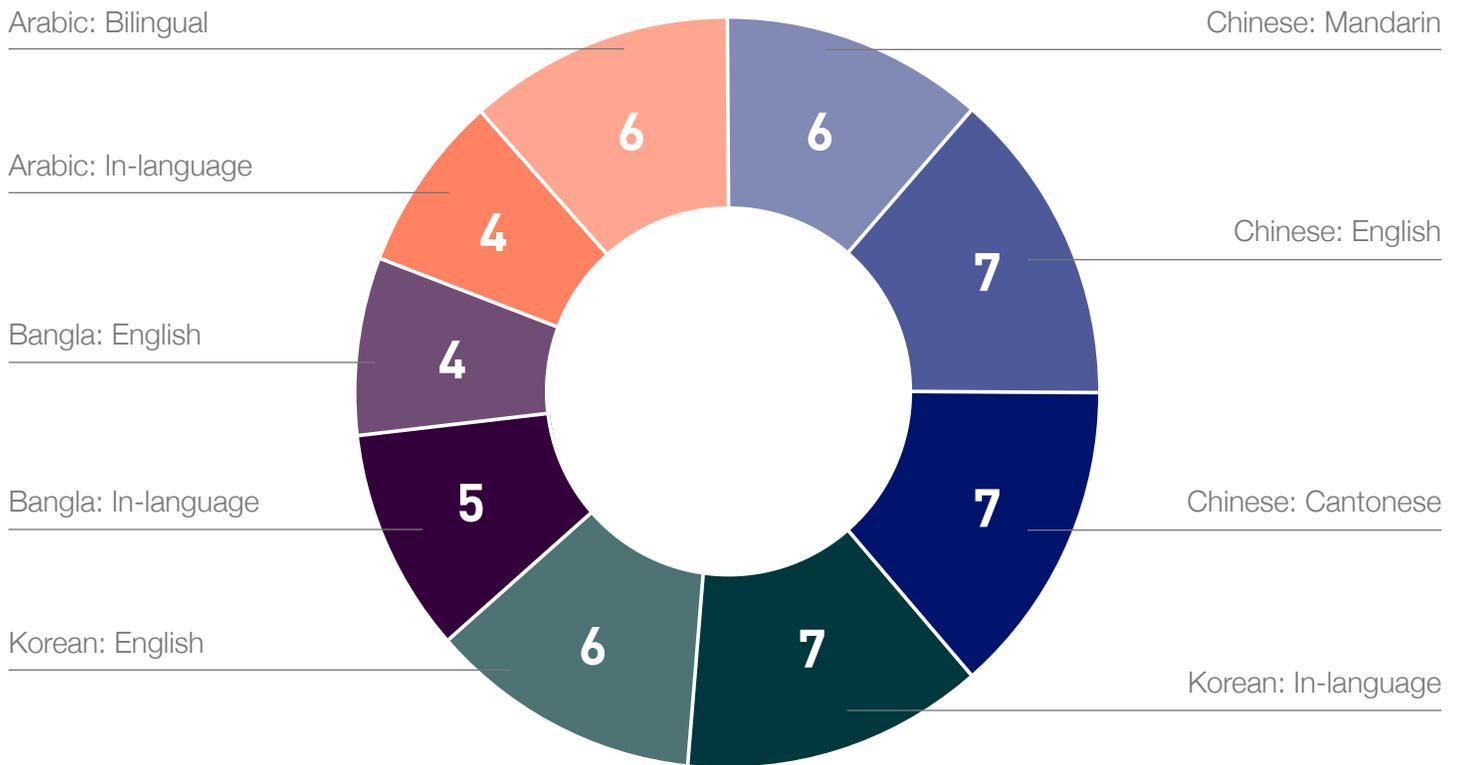
LANGUAGE TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION PROCESSES

More Equitable Democracy drafted the focus group guide in English and translated it into the relevant languages through Atlas Language Services. Facilitators were briefed on the English guide, then given the translated copy and asked to **localize**⁴ the guide to be culturally and linguistically relevant to the specific communities in the respective focus groups.

Partners recruited both participants who are fluent and most comfortable in the target languages of this project as well as bilingual participants and monolingual English speakers. Participants were placed into focus groups based on their preference to communicate primarily in-language (Bengali, Arabic, Korean, Cantonese, or Mandarin), or in English.

4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_localisation

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER FOCUS GROUP



FACILITATION

Atlas Language Services worked with their team of interpreters to record live simultaneous interpretation of the focus group recordings that could be used for research review and analysis.

Note that a true voice-over interpretation of the sessions would have consisted of a process that included transcription, translation, hiring of voice actors, and editing. Because of budgetary and time constraints, partners chose the above method for interpretation of non-English focus groups. Partners employed several measures to ensure that the analysis would capture the true essence of dialogue in the in-language focus groups, including soliciting facilitator feedback on the analysis and conducting analysis directly in-language.

Partners of this project hired a team of community-based facilitators who were either community leaders or experienced community organizers (or both) to conduct focus groups. All facilitators were native-level speakers of the target languages of this project. This approach was taken to ensure that the facilitator of the group would share linguistic and cultural backgrounds with participants, and could therefore glean culturally specific take-aways as well as conduct the groups in a culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive manner.

Community facilitators each attended a 2-hour workshop to learn or review best practices for facilitating focus groups and to thoroughly review the focus group guide in English and ask questions. Though community facilitators had a range of experience in conducting focus groups for the purposes of research, all had extensive experience in community organizing and facilitating meetings of large and small groups.

PARTICIPANTS

Partners recruited individuals who belonged to one of the project's target language or ethnic communities and who were: eligible to vote, not considered "community leaders" or advocates, people of mixed income, age and gender, people who had mixed housing tenure, and people with a range of experience with voting.

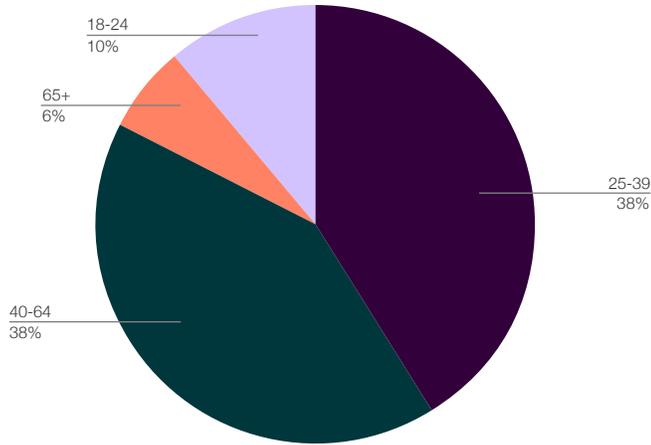
65% of participants in the study identified as female and 76% of all participants were between the ages of 25 - 64. More than half of participants lived in Queens and 85% of participants have lived in the US for 10 years or longer. Participants were largely middle- and low-income earners and reported earning less than \$100,000 per year in salary, with approximately 1/3 of participants making below \$25,000 per year and the other 1/3 making between \$25,000 and \$49,000 per year.

“[The way the U.S. chooses leaders is] not unlike choosing a sports team. The players may change and the game just keeps going. If they’re Democrats, they’ll say, Democrats, they won’t really consider the other side, or vice versa. I would explain that sometimes [the process of selecting leaders in the U.S.] doesn’t make sense.”

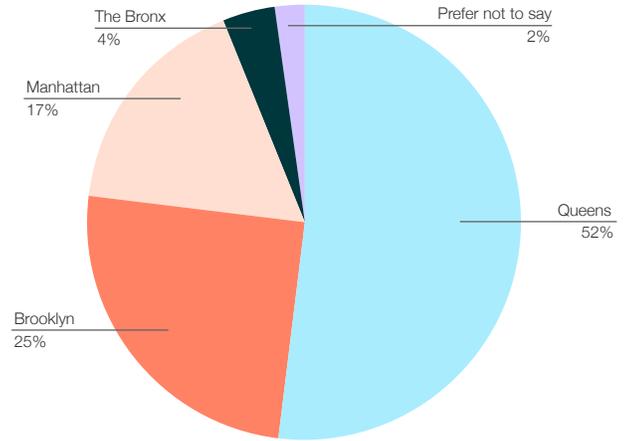
- CHINESE-ENGLISH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

PARTICIPANTS

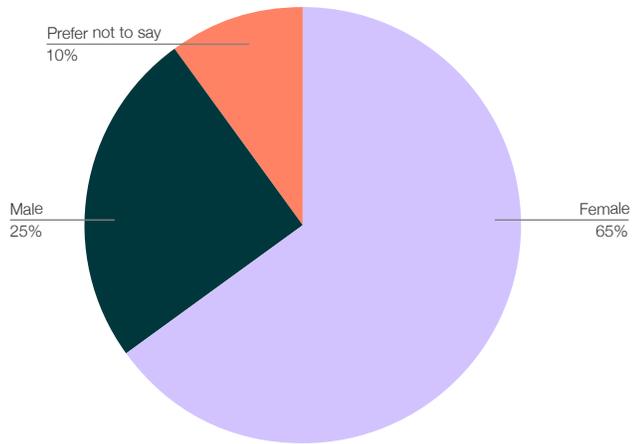
PARTICIPANTS BY AGE



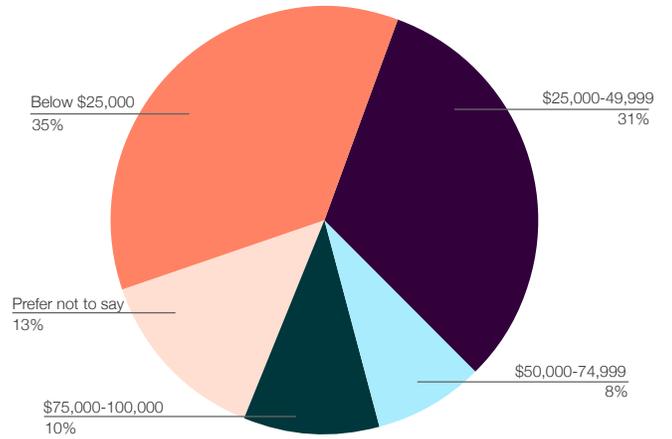
PARTICIPANTS BY BOROUGH



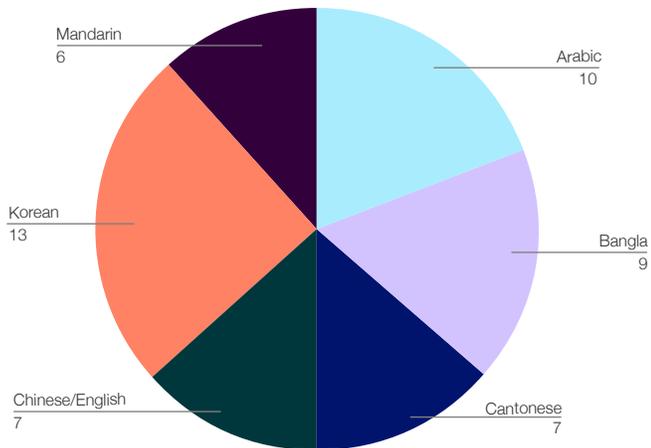
PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER



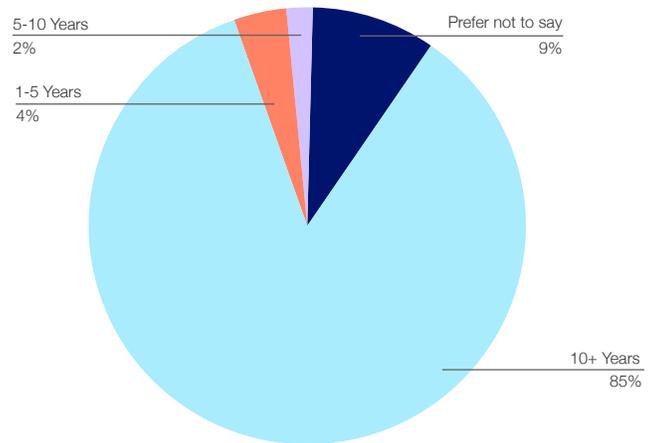
PARTICIPANTS BY INCOME



PARTICIPANTS BY LANGUAGE



PARTICIPANTS BY YEARS SPENT IN THE U.S.



FINDINGS

ATTITUDES ABOUT VOTING, ELECTIONS, AND CANDIDATES

GENERAL ATTITUDE

Many focus group participants voiced concerns about safety in their communities, largely referring to the neighborhoods or geographies where they lived. For many of these groups, Anti-Asian hate was a source of feelings of danger or anxiety. They also expressed anxiety and concern due to COVID and the health, economic, and social hardships it has caused.

IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

Focus group participants across language and ethnicity agreed that voting is very important and listed specific ways that voting may impact their lived experiences and qualities of life, but were unclear on how local participation impacts their issues. Participants stated that they would actively participate in national elections, but were less likely to participate in local-level elections. Enthusiasm towards local-level elections was lacking, as the roles of these elections and offices appeared unclear to participants. Participants named local issues such as garbage management (or lack thereof), the high cost of housing, homelessness, transportation, and education as examples of issues they would like to see addressed in their communities. Two groups, Bangla: In-language and Korean: English, expressed that although they believed voting in national elections is important, national offices were too far-removed to affect the local issues they named.

“I work at the poll site and I see that there are elders who don’t speak English, or know the candidates. They say that, even though they don’t know the candidates or have trouble with the voting process, no matter what, [they want] politicians to know that they matter, that their vote matters... By voting, you’re showing them that [your community] matters.”

- CHINESE: ENGLISH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

我们来到这个美国我们有说话的自由和选举的自由，所以我们公民要去做我们的义务。这样才能让我们的社区里面真的选出一个对大家有利的，真的帮到大家的候选人。

“We come to this country to have freedom of speech and freedom of elections. That is why as citizens we must do our civic duties [to vote]. This is the only way we can elect a candidate whose leadership benefits everyone in the community and can really help everyone.”

- MANDARIN: IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

IMPORTANCE OF VOTING (CONT'D)

“Justice,” “fairness,” and “equality between races” spontaneously emerged as salient themes within the Arabic: In-language focus group. Both Arabic focus groups cited discrimination against immigrants, Muslims, and racism as issues that elected officials should address.

Though these themes were not introduced as a part of this research project, participants listed these themes. This may coincide with feelings in both groups of feeling oppressed, discriminated against, ignored, not being respected, and being the targets of racism. These feelings were clearly top-of-mind for many participants.

ATTITUDES ABOUT US ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES

Most participants gave a critical assessment of US elections, saying that voting in the US is very difficult and that information about candidates and how to vote is not easily accessible for people who speak languages other than English.

Voting in the U.S. is unnecessarily burdensome and difficult. Focus group participants in several groups lamented that the process of voting is burdensome and overly bureaucratic, sometimes intentionally so, in order to prevent certain people from voting. They cited the voter registration process, the process to request mail ballots, the lack of a voting holiday for working people to participate, and the emphasis of voting on one day (election day), as examples.

There is not enough in-language information about candidates, issues, and the voting process, leading to communities feeling that their voices are not being heard. Focus group participants felt that language was a big barrier for themselves and people in their communities to be informed about issues and candidates, and that they had trouble receiving quality assistance at poll sites (Arabic: In-language, Arabic: Bilingual). This included feeling intentionally discriminated against because of race or ethnicity (Mandarin: In-language). In contrast to themselves, focus group participants felt that the wealthy and a small handful of people who are already in power are valued more and their voices are more influential in elections.

ATTITUDES ABOUT US ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES (CONT'D)

Participants were mostly critical about the process of selecting leaders in the U.S. When describing the U.S. process for selecting leaders, some participants felt that the system is “fair and square” and an improvement from their home country where corruption is viewed as a major issue. These participants had concerns about the accuracy of vote counts in their home countries (Bangla: In-language, Arabic: In-language). However, most expressed concern about a lack of fairness in terms of how elected leaders are chosen. Participants cited gerrymandering, the two-party system, and the electoral college as ways that the electoral system is manipulated, causes polarization and makes it difficult to “get anything done” (Bangla: Bilingual). These tactics compromise the principle of “one person, one vote,” respectively, particularly on the national level.

美国选举的制度是公平的但是太多人用一些法律漏洞来提升自己。譬如穷的社区的声音就未必给社会听到。这个制度是完善的只不过它未必平均地帮到每一个人。

“The US voting system is fair, but it has loopholes that allow some to have a louder voice than others. The voices of poorer communities go unheard. This system is well-intentioned but in application, it doesn’t always fairly help everyone.”

- CANTONESE: IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

IMPORTANCE OF CANDIDATE AND ELECTED OFFICIAL REPRESENTATION

Whether or not a candidate shares an ethnic or language identity, candidates should have shared values and a track record of working in the community's interest. Focus group participants had mixed opinions on the importance of candidates or elected officials sharing their ethnic or other identity-based backgrounds. Some participants said that similar experiences, ethnic or language identity, or whether or not a person is an immigrant matters a lot. Those same participants emphasized that if candidates do not share their identity, it's important for them to have empathy and understanding of the communities who they would represent, and to show-up in community--but not just in order to get elected (Arabic 1, Arabic 2, Korean in-language, Korean English). Others felt that sharing an ethnic or language identity did not matter at all compared to the candidate's positions on issues, track record, and alignment with what the community needs (Chinese - English, Cantonese). All participants were interested in knowing the candidates' backgrounds, what work they have done in the past, and what work they have done in communities in order to make a determination for how to rank candidates on their ballots.

من المهم أن يكون هناك أشخاص مننا مروا بتجارينا كمهاجرين بمركز قوة وذلك للقيام بتوعية المجتمع عن الانتخابات والمرشح وخطته الانتخابية، أو يرشحوا أنفسهم للانتخابات لخدمة المجتمع وتوعيته في الحياة.

“It is important that there are people of us who have experienced our experiences as immigrants in a position of strength in order to educate the community about the elections, the candidate and his electoral plans, or to nominate themselves for the elections to serve the community and educate it in life.”

- ARABIC: BILINGUAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

虽然是一位华人的选举人不代表我一定会选他因为我最注重的是他的思想。若果思想跟我有冲突的话那我不一定要投他一票。

“The most important thing to me is a candidate with shared values, not a shared background”

- MANDARIN IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

“The politician that I vote for doesn’t have to have the same experiences as me. I do it based on values and what they can give to the community. So if they can help the community, my community, get more affordable housing for instance, then I would look more into them.”

- CHINESE-ENGLISH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

“[I want to know] The candidate’s past. Have they been in politics or not? Do their words match their past actions? I think it’s pretty important they match, because it could be all glitter that they’re throwing at us, just to get us to vote.”

- KOREAN-ENGLISH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

“For me, [shared experiences are] not important. I look at the candidates and their track record and see if they are consistent with their policy - that they are not just going to say nice things to win the election. I see if they have connections to corporations, and whether or not they’re making corporate money, and making policies that are only beneficial to corporations. For me race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation is not important.”

- CHINESE - ENGLISH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

HOW DO YOU WANT TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT VOTING AND ELECTIONS?

In-language mediums, in addition to mainstream media, are critical when reaching out to LEP individuals about voting, elections, and candidates. Participants cited in-language social media and traditional media such as WeChat, Line, newspapers, radio, and TV as common mediums where they would like to receive information about voting and elections. Participants also listed English-language media, candidate websites, trusted friends and family, mail, email, Youtube, and organizational newsletters as places where they would like to receive information in multiple languages.

“I would like to see [information about candidates] in several places. It indicates that they have the budget to compete, so that I feel more hopeful and encouraged by what they’re doing, and that my little vote won’t go wasted. So if I see them in my mail, that’s good - and then if I see them on TV, that’s also good.”

- CHINESE: ENGLISH FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

我觉得在地铁呢些屏幕因该有不同的语言（的信息）因为大多数人都不会看新闻和电视但是地铁一定要搭的。

“I think there should be multilingual resources on the subway screens. Some people don’t read the newspaper or watch TV, but everyone has to ride the subway.”

- CANTONESE: IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

REACTIONS TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING

CONFIDENCE IN VOTING BY RANKING CANDIDATES

More than 2/3 of participants felt confident about voting in the upcoming election after watching or listening to a basic explanation of **Ranked Choice Voting**. Facilitators showed a short **video**⁵ that explains Ranked Choice Voting in New York that was produced by NYC Votes and the NYC Campaign Finance Board. Participants watched the video either in-language or in English, depending on the main language spoken in the focus group.

5. https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0B0b34dC_h-ETDqWzLi5rWNSe5OyU6dK

제가 원래 표를 던진 후보자가 예비 선거에서 당선이 안되면 제 표가 무효가 되는데... 제가 원하는 분들을 총 다섯명까지 투표할 수 있어서 제 표가 무효가 될 확률이 적어지고 좀 더 의외의 결과가 나올 수 있을 것 같아요. 좀 더 재미있는 신선한 투표 결과가 나올 것 같습니다.

“Normally, if the candidate I originally voted for doesn’t advance in the primary, my vote will be wasted. But if I can select the five candidates I want to vote for, my vote becomes valuable... It [Ranked Choice Voting] makes elections more interesting and dynamic.”

- KOREAN-IN LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

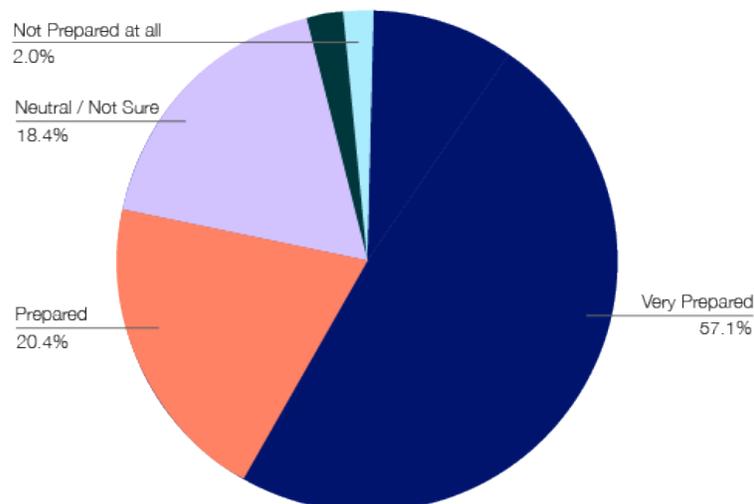
The groups that watched a video explainer of Ranked Choice Voting in-language had significantly fewer questions and less confusion about the voting processes than those who did not (Arabic: In-language, Arabic: Bilingual, Cantonese: In-language) Because the NYC Campaign Finance Board video was not available in Arabic or Cantonese, focus group participants were given a verbal summary of the process.

في حال لم يتم توضيح طبيعة الانتخابات لي هذا العام، فلن أكون مستعداً (للتصويت) على الإطلاق.

“If no one had explained to me how the election would look like this year, I wouldn’t be ready [to vote] at all”

- ARABIC: BILINGUAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**PREPAREDNESS TO VOTE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION
AFTER RECEIVING BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT RCV**



CONFIDENCE IN VOTING BY RANKING CANDIDATES (CONT'D)

Participants overwhelmingly want more information about candidates in order to be able to rank them in order of preference. They want this information to be easily accessible and in-language. A common concern heard from multiple in-language groups was a lack of in-language information about how the new system works and about candidates. Across all groups, participants said that they needed to know more about candidates, and wanted easy ways to read and compare candidates' positions on issues they care about and about their backgrounds and wanted this information to be easily accessible in-language.

When explaining Ranked Choice Voting, having the ability to choose more than one candidate to vote for, ranking “the ones you like” in order of preference, and explaining that you indicate your “1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd, choice” emerged as salient themes. After discussing ranked choice voting, participants were asked how they would explain it to others. Participants also noted that this way of voting is “a better way to make your opinion known” (Bangla: In-language), and called the process of ranking “pretty simple” (Chinese: English). Notably, when asked to explain the process, the Arabic groups - who did not have the benefit of an explainer video in-language or visual-aids - had more questions about the process and felt less confident in their ability to explain it to others.

আপনি আপনার মূল্যবোধ ও প্রাধান্য অনুযায়ী
আপনার পছন্দের প্রার্থীদের ভোট দিতে পারবেন।

**“You can vote for candidates
based on your values and
preference.”**

- BANGLA 1 - BILINGUAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

我喜欢这个制度因为可以有多个选择。有时候你不喜欢的候选人你就不喜欢呢。但有时候如果您喜欢两个的话你可以都给机会。不喜欢的候选人你肯定不会选但是有时候你两个都喜欢，那你可以都投。至少如果一个没有机会，你另外喜欢的候选人都有机会。以前只能选一个。

“I like this system because you can have more choices. Sometimes if you do not like a candidate, you just won't vote for them. But now if you like more than one candidate, you can vote for them all. If one of your choices does not win, at least the other candidate(s) has a chance. Before, you only had one choice.”

**- CANTONESE IN-LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUP
PARTICIPANT**

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANDIDATES

1. In order to motivate voters to cast ballots in local elections, candidates should discuss the functions of local government and how they relate to issues that impact people in their neighborhoods. With voters, it is important to relate community-specific issues with the roles and functions of local offices.

By highlighting how residents can have a say in issues that impact them and focusing on concrete examples of local impact, voters may be more motivated to turn out in off-year elections and avoid leaving the down-ballot races blank.

2. Candidates should work to provide materials in-language and prioritize materials that help voters identify and differentiate them from their opponents. Learning that voters would need to indicate their favorite candidates in order of preference prompted participants to request more information about candidates and their positions on issues.

3. Candidates should not rely on shared ethnic or language identity alone to win votes. Voters are looking deeply at other factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

1. Conduct more in-language education in LEP communities to explain the voting process. Many participants expressed frustration that the process for voting, including voter registration and the timeline that people are allowed to vote or request ballots, is burdensome and/or confusing. Therefore, basic voter information should be made more widely available in-language.

2. Use visual aids in voter education materials. Participants quickly became familiar with the concept of ranking when provided with visual aids. Participants who did not have visual aids felt significantly less confident in their understanding of the voting process, even if ranking itself was easy to understand.

3. When educating people about Ranked Choice Voting, emphasize the ability of voters to “choose more than one candidate to vote for.” Instruct them to rank “the ones you like” in order of preference, and say “1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd choice...” in your explanation. Use the verb “rank” vs. “vote” (i.e. Rank your candidate of choice.) Participants repeated these words and phrases in-language when asked to explain Ranked Choice Voting to others, indicating that these are salient and accessible terms.

4. Disseminate in-language information about Ranked Choice Voting and elections using multiple mediums. LEP individuals listed many in-language mediums through which they receive news and information, including in-language newspapers, TV, radio, and social media. Mediums that reach a general public, such as subway ads, town halls and forums, and YouTube, should include information in multiple languages, either via written translation or live or recorded interpretation. Organizations and agencies should budget to provide fair compensation to translators and interpreters to ensure high-quality language access.

5. Create easy-to-access in-language guides to inform voters about candidates and issues on the ballot. Learning that voters would need to indicate their favorite candidates in order of preference prompted participants to request more information about candidates and their positions on issues. They said that in order to feel more confident about making informed choices on their ballot, they needed quick and accessible ways to compare and contrast candidates.

6. Effective campaigns should lead with motivational outreach that engages followed by informational outreach that educates. Provide voters with clear and unique messaging based on the focus of the outreach, parsing out the “why vote” messaging from the “how to vote” messaging. If the goal is to motivate participation within voters, engage with outcome-oriented themes such as community impact and positive change. If the goal is to educate voters on the process of voting and their options to vote, focus on voters’ ability to choose candidates based on their preferences and include basic resources about voting.

7. NYC Board of Elections needs to think of the Voting Rights Act as a floor, not a ceiling. Over 600 languages and dialects are spoken in NYC, and the narrow focus on only five has left many New York voters without all the information they need to register and vote. NYC agencies (which does not include NYC BOE) already translate materials into languages that are not covered under the VRA. Having BOE do the same would reach the sizable LEP populations in NYC who are currently underserved.

8. In-language materials cannot replace the critical work of an interpreter. The focus group discussions reinforced that just because materials are created, that does not mean they always reach their intended audience. The knowledge that an interpreter will be available at the poll site if voters have questions instills confidence in voters and may encourage more people to vote. This can be achieved either through the BOE or City Council funding the work of the Civic Engagement Commission.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the support of key stakeholders. The authors of this report would like to recognize our focus group participants, facilitators and additional support provided by civic organizations including Women's Empowerment Coalition of NYC, Chhaya CDC, South Asian Council for Social Services, Shetu, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese American Planning Council, and Democracy Rising. We thank them for their important role in bringing critical voices to the table.