



NEWS FROM NYC CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

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MANY VOTERS FACED WITH NO CHOICE IN NOVEMBER *Voter Participation Lowest in Modern History*

NEW YORK CITY, SEPT. 17 -- Voters in nine City Council Districts representing approximately 1.4 million residents will be offered a ballot but not a choice in the general election.

Five City Council incumbents who defeated primary election challengers will face no general election opposition (Comrie, Jennings, Liu, Monserrate, and Vann), while four other incumbents who faced no primary election competition will also be running without an opponent in the general election (Felder, Gallagher, Katz, and Sears).

Examining voter participation in the 2003 primary election presents an opportunity for voter education about participation in the system of nonpartisan elections proposed by the Charter Revision Commission.

Three differences should be noted between the current and proposed system:

- First, under the proposed system more than a half-million additional voters (independents, Republicans, and third party members) would have been eligible to participate in the election contests held on September 9th.
- Second, under the proposed system, in the five Council districts holding a primary but not a general election, all voters, and not just Democrats, would have had a choice in the election of their Council member. In these five districts, the percentage of voters registered as independents, Republicans, and third party members ranged from 41.8 percent (CD 20) to 17.5 percent (CD 27) of voters. Democrats, too, who vote in general but not primary elections would have the opportunity to choose, rather than confirm, the election winner.
- Third, under the proposed system, of the five districts discussed above, there would have been no primary election in the four that featured only two candidates. Instead, the two candidates in each of the four races would have automatically advanced to the general election open to all voters. November general elections usually have significantly higher rates of participation than September primary elections.

In the September 9th primary election, 141,341 voters cast ballots for the office of City Council, more than 10,000 voters less than the average population of a Council district. In districts holding primary elections, voter turnout averaged 11 percent among eligible voters, the lowest rate for a regularly scheduled election in recent history. In the 1991 election, the last citywide race in which only Council seats were up for election, the turnout rate among eligible voters was 20 percent.

The low rate of voter turnout among eligible voters, combined with the fact that many registered voters were not eligible to participate, means that a small percentage of voters – often less than 5 percent – determined the outcome of elections. Winning candidates received between 12.3 percent (CD 1) and 3.6 percent (CD 45) percent of the vote from registered Democrats, and between 8.0 percent (CD 1) and 2.7 percent (CD 13) of the vote from the total number of registered voters.

For instance, in Council district 28 in Queens, the winner received votes from 47 percent of primary election voters, or 4.2 percent of eligible voters (2,111 votes out of 50,028 eligible voters). Of the total number of registered voters (65,441), 96.8 percent did not vote for the winner, and 53% of voting Democrats voted for the winner's opponents. The winner, however, does not face a general election opponent. As a result, independents, Republicans, third party members, as well as Democrats who chose not to participate until November, will not be offered a choice on the November ballot. Nor will the ballot offer a choice to the majority of primary voters who preferred a different Democratic candidate.

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