

THE LOCAL INFORMATION NEEDS OF NEW YORKERS

An overview of new data from a survey of the views and actions of New York City residents related to local news, education, and civic engagement.

MARCH, 2024



INTRODUCTION

A changing media ecosystem, including the collapse of local American print newspapers, has contributed to meaningful challenges — including increased local [government inefficiency and corruption](#), [polarization](#), and [civic disengagement](#). It has also created meaningful opportunities — including new ways to reach people and lower distribution costs.

A [new movement of civic information practitioners](#), supported by [a new coalition of funders](#), is stepping up to these challenges and opportunities. But both need new shared, actionable metrics to prioritize their collaborative efforts and track their impact.

The **Civic Information Needs Census (CINC)** is a tool designed to equip this movement and its supporters with essential data on local civic information needs, media engagement, and civic participation. It is both a community survey and a coalition-building practice designed to bring practitioners and funders together to take action.

This report is for the second **local** CINC, and summarizes the findings of a survey of New Yorkers done in December 2024. It is a part of a pilot effort that has also included a national survey and report that can be [read here](#), and a first local survey and report on the needs of Chicagoans that can be [read here](#).

KEY USES

We hope that the data and analysis in this report is useful to anyone working to serve their community's information needs.

It builds on and complements work studying information ecosystems, including the [Civic Information Index](#), Pew's [surveys on local news](#), and local surveys on information needs [like those done in Philadelphia](#).

Over time, we hope that studies like these are done in ways that are **consistent** (allowing comparison across populations), **persistent** (allowing for comparison over time), and, above all, **actionable** (informing actions by the field).

This survey's structure was informed by feedback from a coalition of New York City civic information providers – leaders from major community news organizations, government, libraries, and academia. The findings were also shared with that coalition, and along with this report the full data is being made public.

We hope this report helps New York City civic information providers think strategically and collaboratively about how they individually and collectively meet community information needs. And we hope it offers urgency and inspiration to New York City civic information funders to support their critical work strategically and generously.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Throughout this report, we'll highlight some key takeaways. Here are a few of the big ones, which you'll see more on as you read.

- On the 7 topics essential for civic health, there is a 26 to 39% gap between the importance New Yorkers place in having local information and their satisfaction with what they have. **(PAGE 16)**
- The gaps between information importance and satisfaction are bigger for New Yorkers than those previously surveyed with these questions, on average 4% bigger than Chicagoans and 21% larger than Americans overall. **(PAGE 19)**
- New Yorkers, like Chicagoans, are much more likely to turn to personal networks for quality info than Americans overall. **(PAGE 21)**
- On 10 of 12 situations surveyed, 50% of New Yorkers or less were satisfied with the info they have in critical life situations like choosing where to work or live, responding to local crime, or reporting potholes or other local infrastructure issues. **(PAGE 24)**
- When it comes to education information, New Yorkers are much more likely than Chicagoans or Americans overall to turn to local parent groups and much less likely to turn to local TV. **(PAGE 29)**
- 16% of New Yorkers say they've advocated or worked on systemic change in their local community. 9% say they've done that on education specifically. **(PAGES 33, 36)**

ABOUT US

CIVIC NEWS COMPANY is the publisher of **Chalkbeat**, **Votebeat**, and **Healthbeat**.

Our newsrooms and bureaus – including [Chalkbeat](#) and [Healthbeat](#) in New York – help people strengthen their communities with journalism that is rooted in local needs and subject matter expertise. Its reporting covers the critical, day-to-day work and life experiences of the people who fight to improve education, voting, and public health outcomes and the people affected by that work.

We are a part of a civic information movement working to rebuild the civic health of our communities that has been devastated by the collapse of for-profit local journalism.

ABOUT US

The **CIVIC INFORMATION NEEDS CENSUS** is the pilot project of a team working in and alongside Civic News Company.

We are:

Kang-Xing Jin

Board Member, Civic News Company

Andrew Golis

COO, Civic News Company

Anika Anand

Commoner Company

Lindsay Green-Barber

Impact Architects

Darryl Holliday

Commoner Company

ABOUT THE SURVEY

EMBOLD research, a non-partisan, non-political data science and research company, led the national survey for CINC.

Excerpts from their report will appear in this report with **blue** or **white** background colors.

METHODOLOGY

On behalf of Civic News, Embold Research surveyed adults in New York City, with a focus on parents and educators, to better understand information needs and media consumption habits of both the general population and civic catalysts. In addition to identifying if, where, and how people get the information they need, the research also focused on information satisfaction, and perception and awareness of key education sources.



Survey of n=1428 adults in New York City, with an oversample of parents and educators, from December 9-20, 2024



Respondents were recruited via dynamic online sampling to obtain a sample reflective of the population.



Post-stratification performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2020 presidential vote.



The modeled margin of error is 3.0%

SAMPLE OVERVIEW



54% Women
44% Men
2% Gender non-conforming



38% White
23% Black
19% Hispanic
18% AAPI
1% Other



30% Under \$50K
23% Between \$50-\$99K
30% \$100K or more
16% Prefer not to say



25% 18-34
26% 35-49
23% 50-64
25% 65+



10% Current/Formal educators
90% Non-educators



30% Parents
70% Non-parents

NEW YORK CITY SURVEY RESULTS:
**OVERALL CIVIC INFORMATION
GAPS AND NEEDS**

CIVIC INFO TOPICS

The civic information portion of the survey is built around responses on 10 topics. We define topics 1-7 as “critical information needs”; they are based on the [2012 FCC Friedland Report](#) and [HHS’s Social Determinants of Health](#). Topics 8-10 fill out the breadth of what’s often in a general interest local news source.

Respondents were asked to rate:

1/ How important information is about each in their everyday life, and

2/ How satisfied they are with the information they have about each.

1/ Local Education

(including school programs, curriculum, and quality)

2/ Local Transportation

(including transit schedules, costs, and traffic)

3/ Local Health + Well-being

(including access to quality care, community needs and trends)

4/ Local Economic Opportunities

(including jobs, housing, personal finance, and business environment)

5/ Local Political Information

(including voting, elected officials, and public policy initiatives)

6/ Local Environment

(including air/water quality, sanitation, and access to recreation)

7/ Local Risks and Emergencies

(including crime/public safety and climate)

8/ Local Community Institutions + Gatherings

(including churches, libraries, clubs, and cultural events)

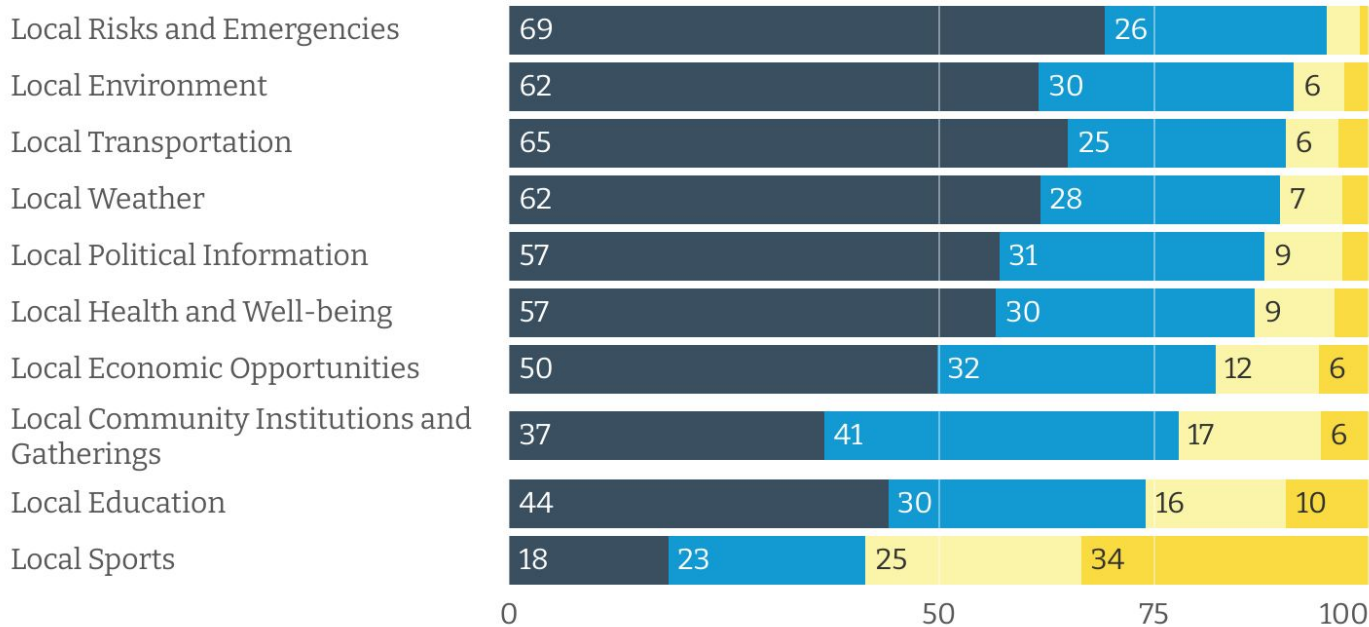
9/ Local Weather

10/ Local Sports

New York City Local Information Importance

How important is it for you to get information about each of the following topics in your everyday life?

● Very important ● Somewhat important ● Not that important ● Not important at all

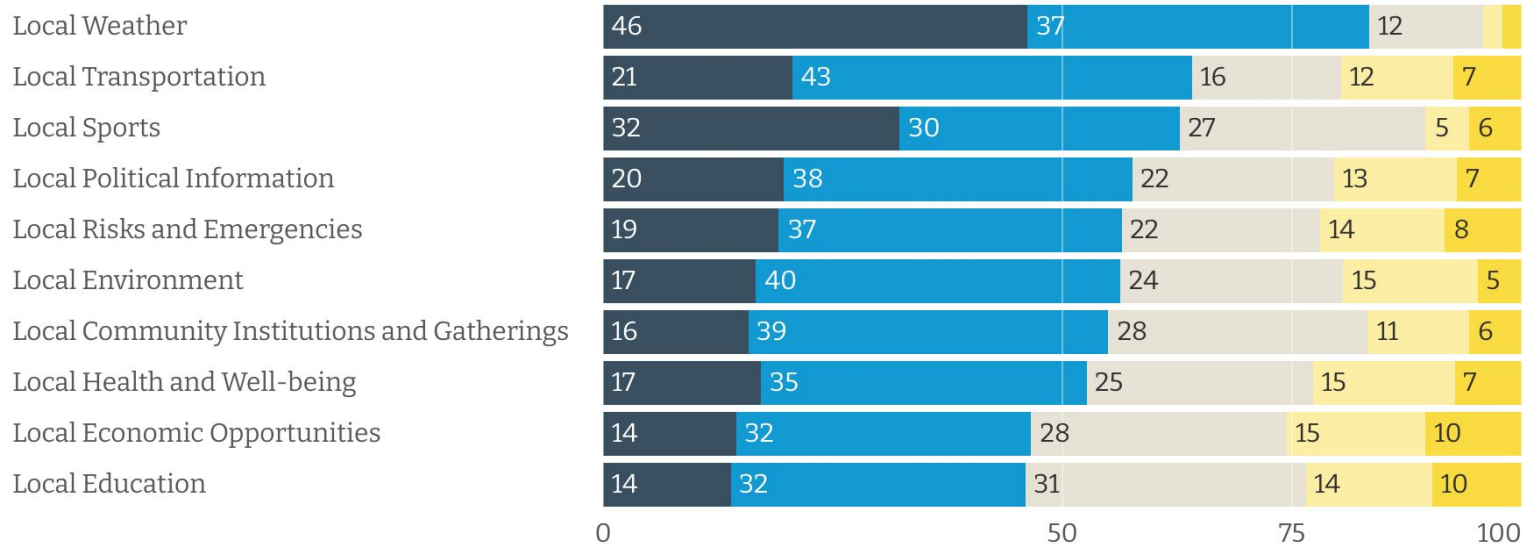


New York City Local Information Satisfaction

When you seek out news and information about each of the following topics, how satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the information you are able to get?

[ASKED OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAID TOPIC WAS “VERY” OR “SOMEWHAT” IMPORTANT]

● Very satisfied ● Somewhat satisfied ● Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied ● Somewhat unsatisfied ● Very unsatisfied

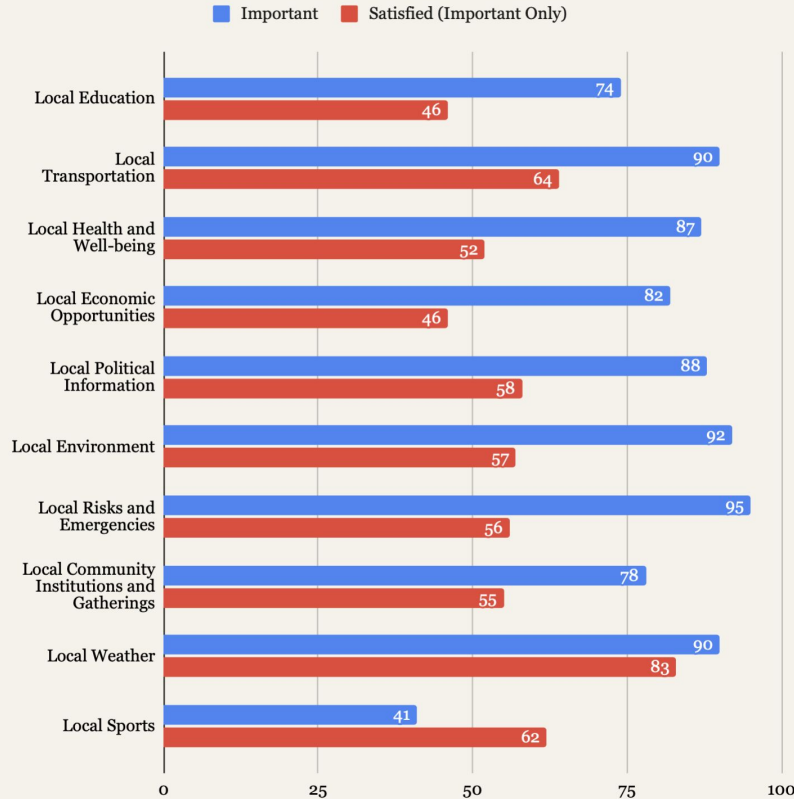


TAKEAWAYS

- Large majorities of New Yorkers (74 to 95%) view information about all but one local topic (sports) at least somewhat important.
- At least half of New Yorkers (50% to 69%) view 6 of the 7 topics critical to civic health as very important.
- While 95% of New Yorkers view information about weather as important, just 5% were unsatisfied with what they have.
- Less than half of New Yorkers view info about sports as important, and just 11% are unsatisfied with what they have on the issue.
- New Yorkers were least satisfied with the information they have on education and economic opportunity, with under 50% of those who viewed each as important saying they were even “somewhat” satisfied.

NYC Local Info Satisfaction + Importance

Total importance (“very” and “somewhat”) and total satisfaction (“somewhat” and “very”) for those who said each topic was



IDENTIFYING INFO NEEDS

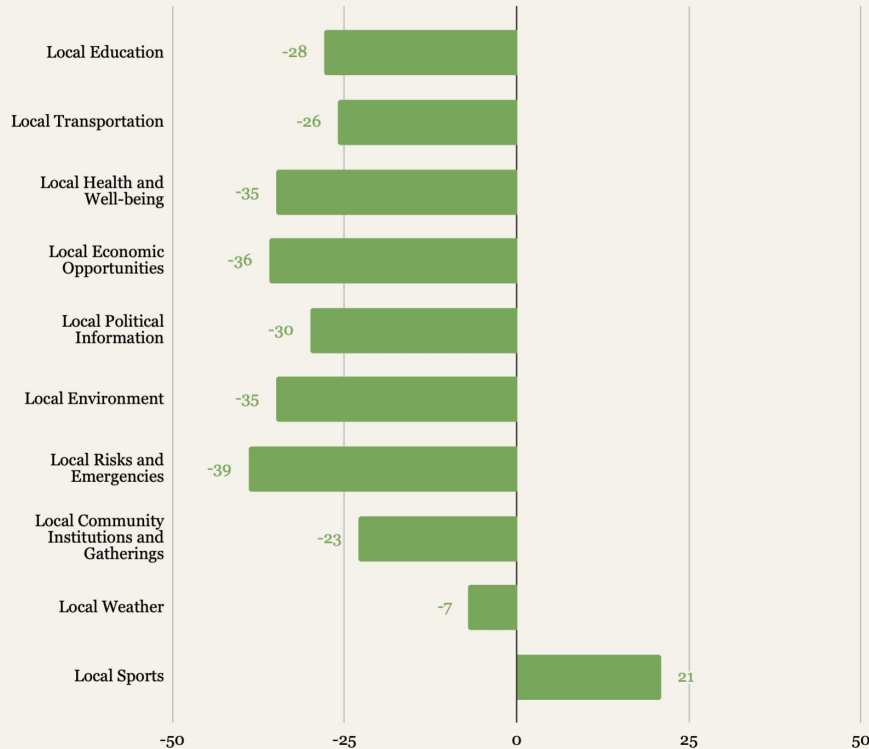
There are many valuable ways of assessing the information needs of a community.

We believe one is by simply turning to a community itself and comparing its views of information importance to views of information satisfaction.

In this look at the data, we see total importance (“very” and “somewhat” important) contrasted with total satisfaction (“somewhat” and “very” satisfied) specifically for those who said each issue was important.

NYC Local Info Needs Across Topics

The gap between satisfaction with + views of the importance of info about 10 local information topics, where negatives represent more importance than satisfaction and positive numbers represent more satisfaction than importance.



IDENTIFYING INFO NEEDS

Simplifying further, we see the gap between overall importance and the satisfaction of those who view a topic as important for each. We interpret this gap as an indication of need.

Notice:

- There are gaps for all 7 topics critical for civic health, ranging from 26 to 39%.
- New Yorkers report the largest information needs on risks and emergencies, economic opportunity, health and well-being, and the environment.
- For local sports, satisfaction far surpasses importance, indicating the absence of a need.

TOPIC NEEDS BY SUBGROUP

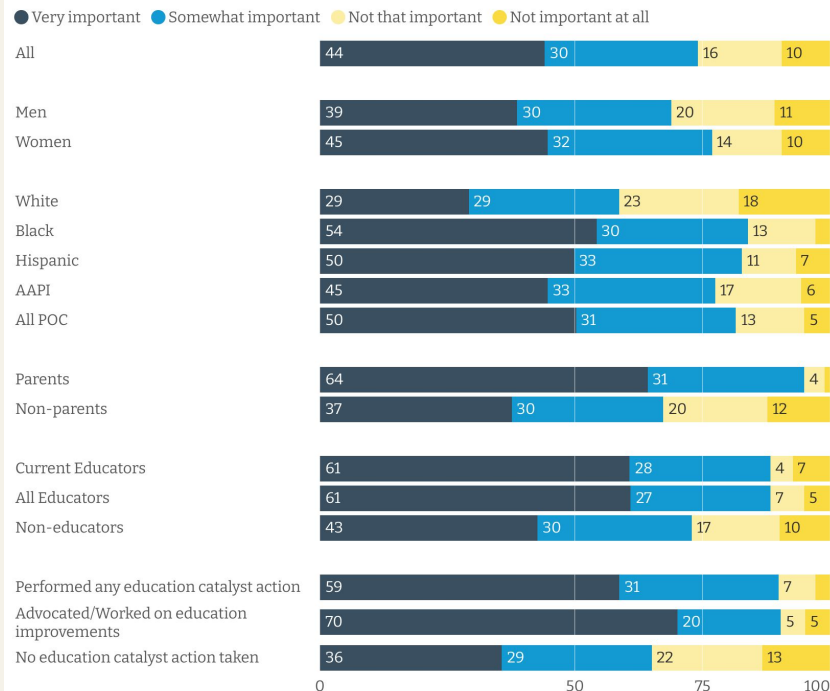
But the overall results paint an incomplete picture. Responses vary significantly on each topic between subgroups.

For example, the importance of education varies to different New Yorkers:

- Those directly engaged with education (parents, educators) are much more likely to view education info as important.
- Women and POC are also more likely to see local education as important.
- There is a correlation between viewing education as important and taking civic action related to it.

NYC Local Info Needs Breakdown: Education

The importance of local education as a topic according to each subgroup.



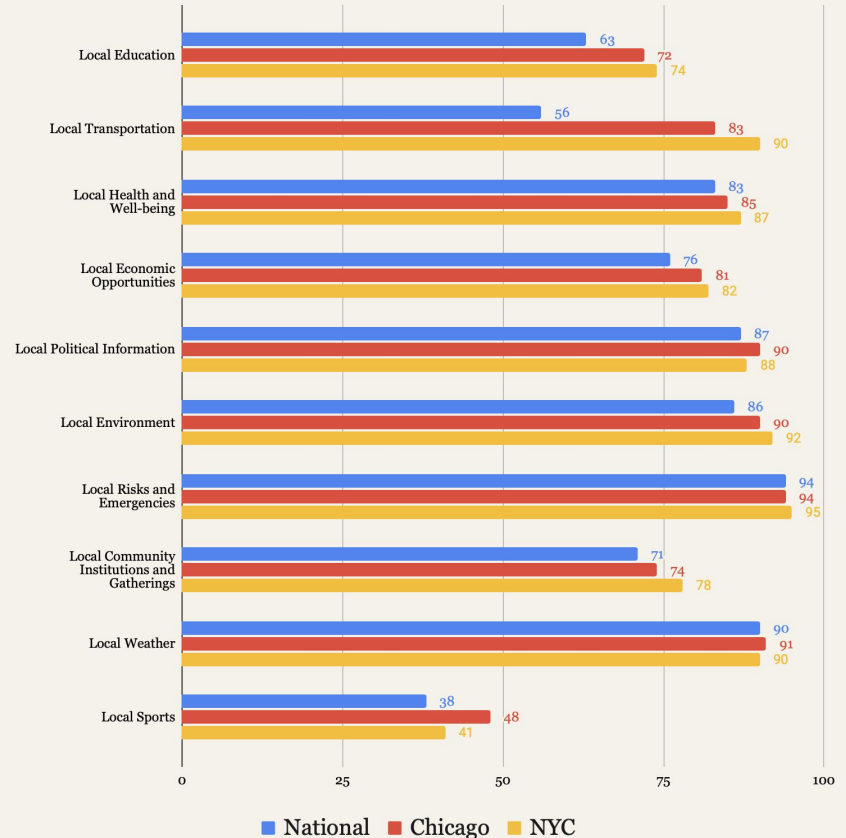
IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL INFO: NYC vs. CHICAGO vs. NATIONAL

When we compare New Yorkers' views on local topic importance to those of Chicagoans and Americans we previously surveyed, we see both similarities and differences:

- Respondents in the cities were view info about these issues as more important than Americans overall: environment (4 and 6% more), economic opportunities (5 and 6% more), education (9 and 11% more), and especially transportation (37 and 44% more).
- Each group had statistically insignificant differences on local info about health and well being, politics, risks and emergencies, and weather.
- Chicagoans care more about sports.

Local Info Importance: NYC vs. Chicago vs. National

Total numbers of respondents who viewed each local topic as “very” or “somewhat” important in the country overall, Chicago, and New York City.



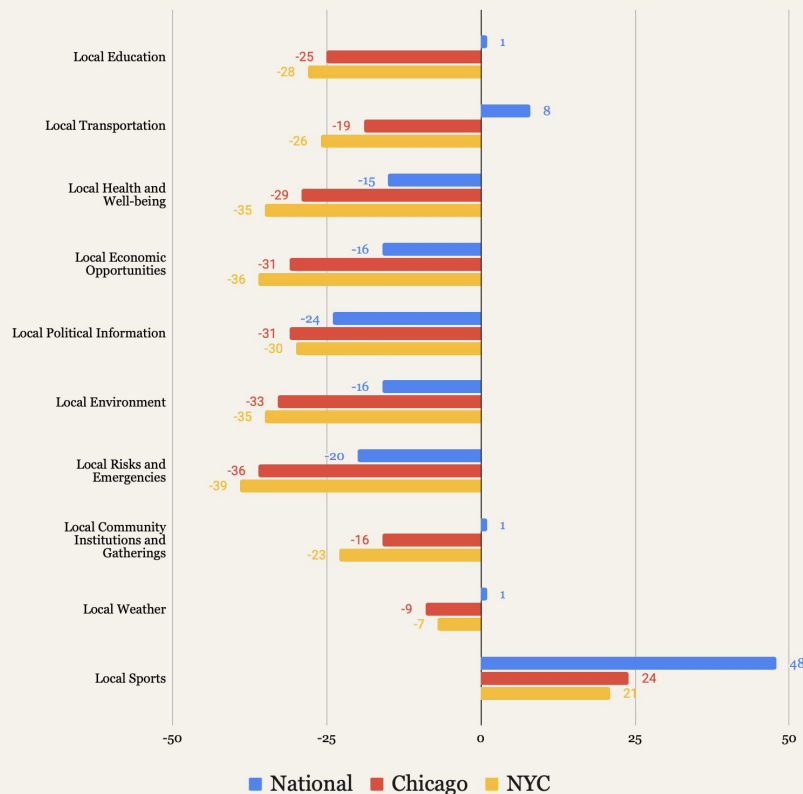
INFO NEEDS: NEW YORK CITY vs. CHICAGO vs. NATIONAL

When we compare the gaps between satisfaction and importance across the three surveys we've conducted, we notice:

- The info needs of New Yorkers generally align with (while often slightly exceeding) those of Chicagoans,
- The info needs of respondents in both cities exceeds those of Americans overall in every topic, and
- Across all topics, New Yorkers have a 4% larger need than Chicagoans, and a 21% larger need than Americans overall.

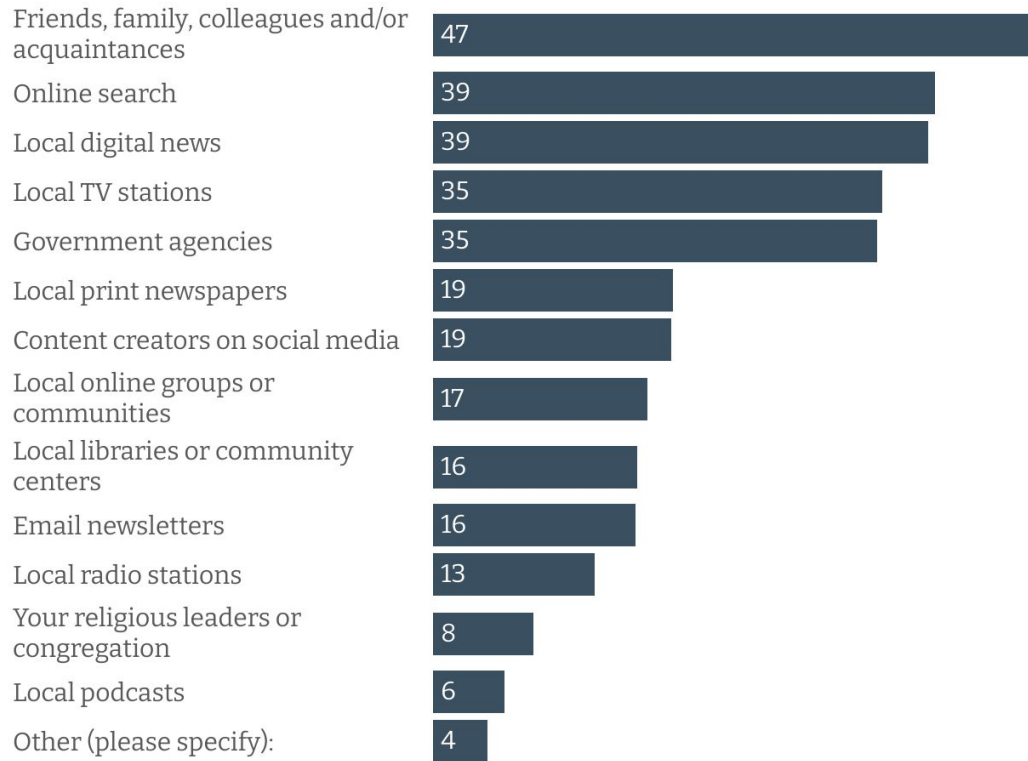
Local Info Gaps: NYC vs. Chicago vs. National

The gap between satisfaction with + views of the importance of info about 10 local information topics, where negatives represent more importance than satisfaction and positive numbers represent more satisfaction than importance.



When it comes to finding quality information, respondents primarily rely on word-of-mouth, followed by online search and local digital news.

Top Useful Information Sources



Q: When it comes to the topics where quality information is the most important to you, which of the following sources do you find most useful? Select up to THREE.



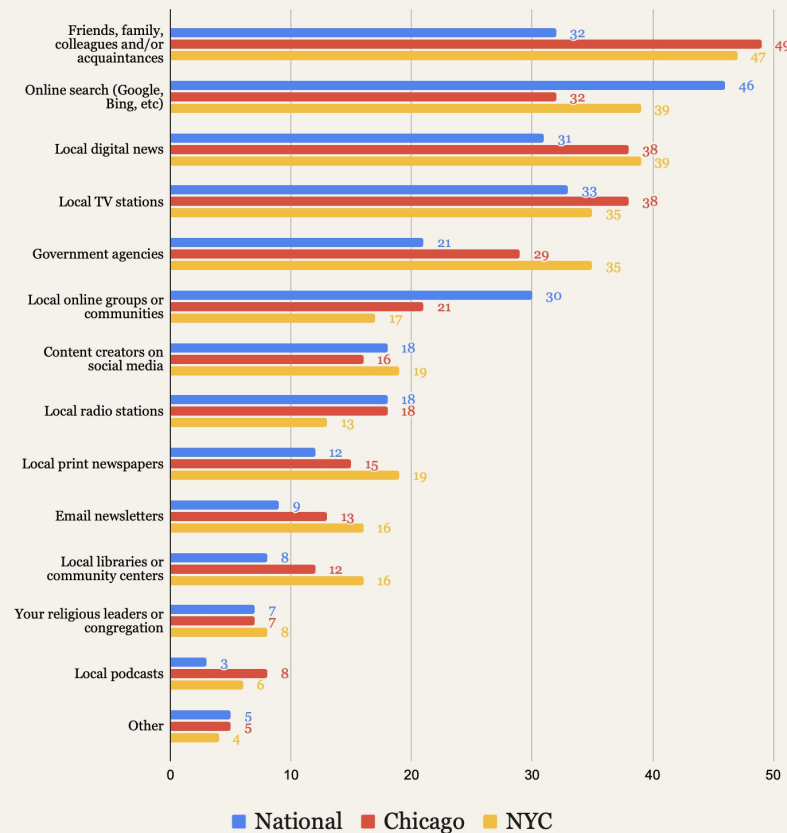
INFO SOURCES: NEW YORK CITY vs. CHICAGO vs. NATIONAL

When we compare the sources of local information in New York City compared to our previous survey groups, we notice:

- ➔ New York City and Chicago respondents were much more likely to rely on their personal networks and government agencies for information.
- ➔ National respondents were much more likely to turn to local online groups.
- ➔ Social media creators, local radio, and newspapers were all in the teens in all three, with New Yorkers more likely to turn to print and less likely to radio.

Local Info Sources: NYC vs. Chicago vs. National

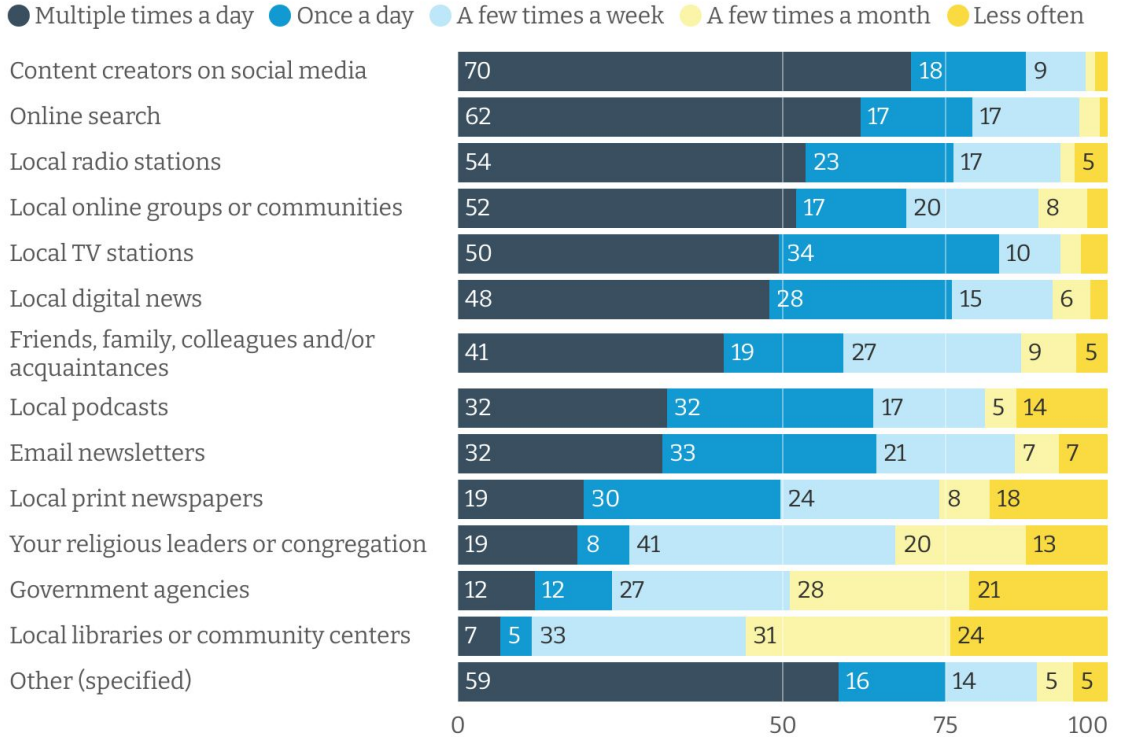
When it comes to the topics where quality information is the most important to you, which of the following sources do you find most useful? Select up to THREE.



Digital sources and local news stations tend to be the sources respondents turn to the most frequently.

Frequency of Accessing Sources

Among sources considered "most useful"



Q: How often do you access the following news sources:

Respondents were shown the 1-3 sources they selected as "most useful" in accessing quality information



Preferred Language for Information

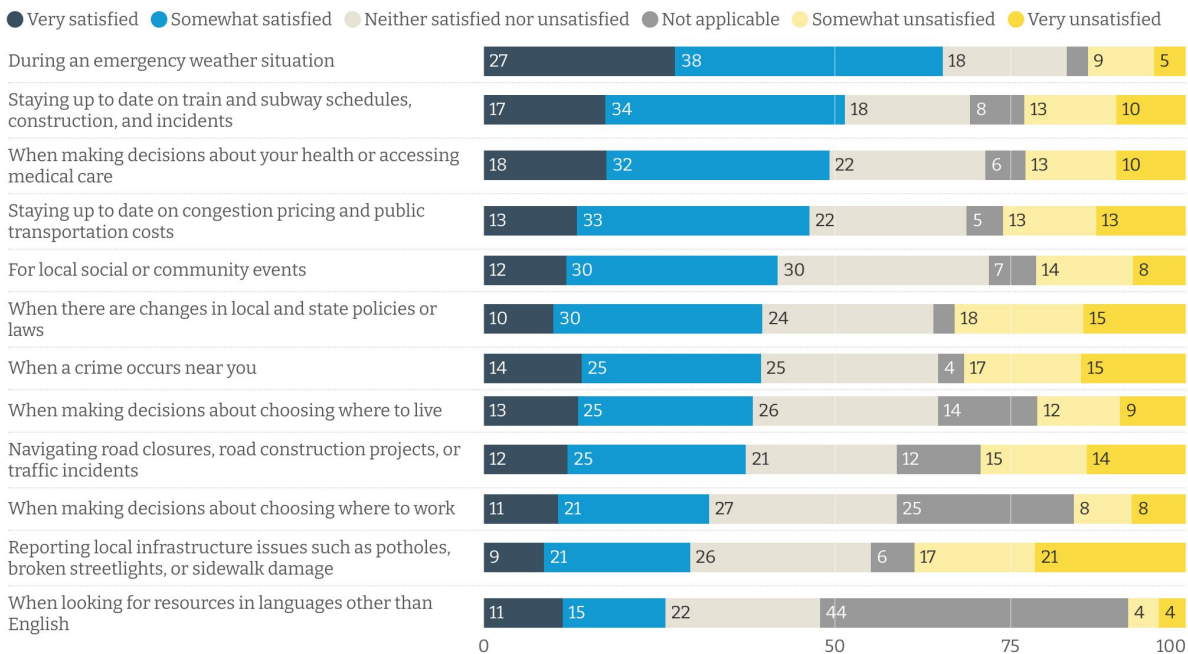
New Yorkers overwhelmingly prefer receiving their news in English, however, there are notable portions who prefer news in Spanish or Chinese.

	All Respondents	White	Black	Hispanic	AAPI
English	95	98	99	88	90
Spanish	7	1	2	34	0
Traditional Chinese	3	0	0	0	19
Simplified Chinese	2	0	0	0	14
French	1	1	1	0	0
Russian	1	2	0	0	0
Arabic	0	1	1	0	0
Polish	0	1	1	0	0
Haitian Creole	0	0	1	0	0
Bengali	0	0	0	0	1
Korean	0	0	0	0	0
Urdu	0	0	0	0	0
Other (please specify)	1	1	0	3	1

Q: In what language do you prefer to access local news and information when possible? Select all that apply.

While respondents are overwhelmingly satisfied with finding information during emergencies, respondents are more neutral or divided in other critical situations

Satisfaction with Critical Information



Q: How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with getting the information you need in the following situations?

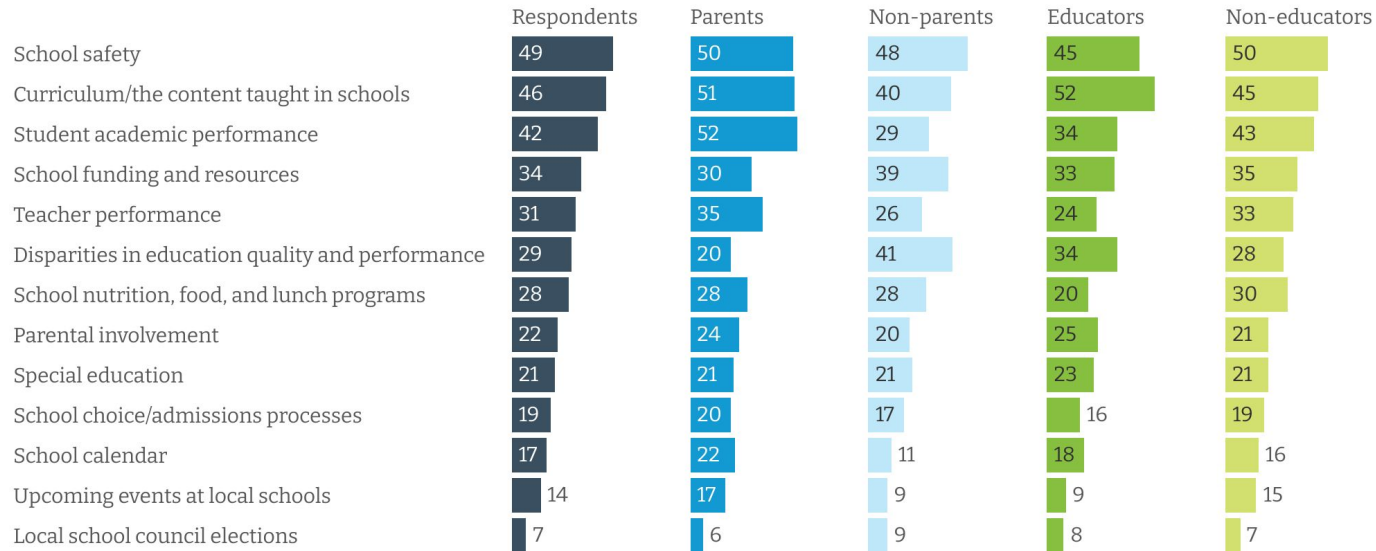


NEW YORK CITY SURVEY RESULTS:
**EDUCATION INFORMATION
GAPS AND NEEDS**

School safety, curriculum, and student performance are most often selected as the most important education issues.

Importance of Education Information by Subgroup

Asked only of parents, teachers, and those who have done at least one action to make changes in local or state public education



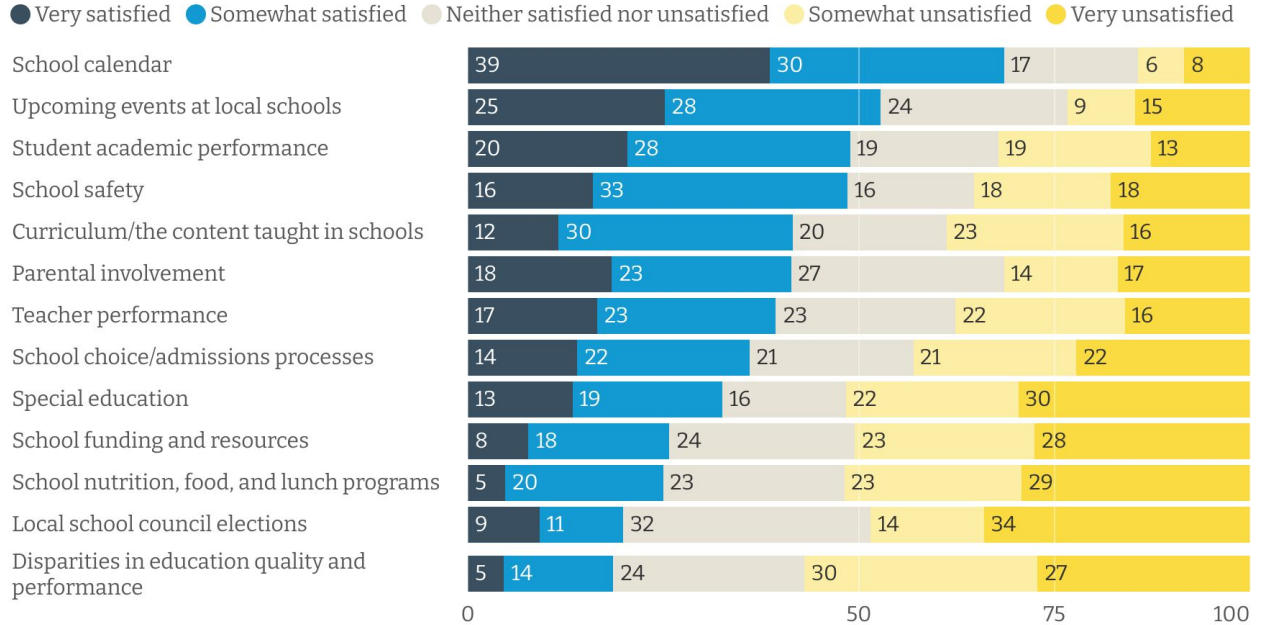
Q: Thinking specifically about schools and education, which are most important to you to get information about for your daily life? Select up to THREE.



NYC respondents show relatively high satisfaction with getting information on key topics such as student performance and school safety, but minorities report being satisfied elsewhere.

Satisfaction with Education Topics

Asked only of parents, teachers, and those who have done at least one action to make changes in local or state public education



Q: And how satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the information you are able to get on each of the following topics?

Respondents only shown items selected as top three most important topics about schools and education

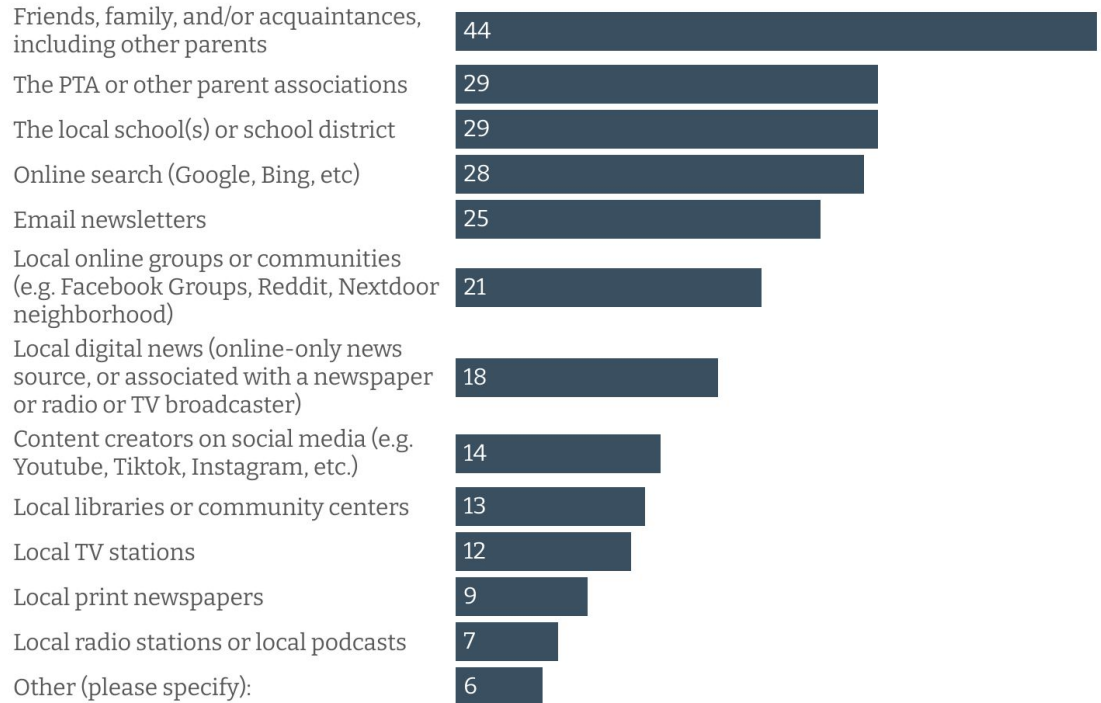


NYC respondents primarily rely on their personal networks to get education and school-related information, but also turn to parent associations and the school district

Notably, 31% of parents select email newsletters as a top source of information

Frequently Used Education Sources

Asked only of parents, teachers, and those who have done at least one action to make changes in local or state public education



Q: When it comes to education- or school-related topics, which of the following sources do you use most often? Select up to THREE



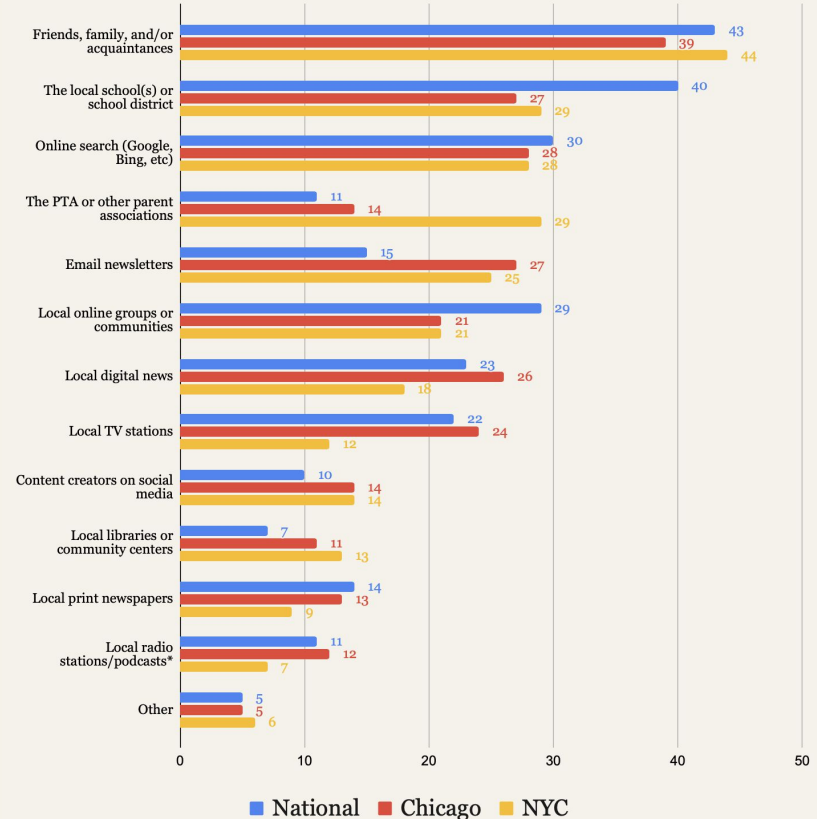
EDUCATION INFO SOURCES: NYC vs. CHICAGO vs. NATIONAL

When we compare the sources of local education information in New York City compared to our previous survey groups, we notice:

- ➔ Personal networks (friends and family) are consistently the most cited source.
- ➔ New Yorkers and Chicagoans are much less likely to cite local schools or school districts as sources they turn to.
- ➔ New Yorkers and Chicagoans are much more likely to cite newsletters as a source.
- ➔ New Yorkers are much more likely to cite the PTA / parent associations, and much less likely to cite local TV stations.

Education Info Sources: NYC vs. Chicago vs. National

When it comes to the education or school-related topics that you most need information on, which sources do you find most useful in providing that information? Select up to THREE.



New Yorkers feel that many education topics are not significantly covered, but the lack of information on school curriculum, safety, and funding are the most cited.

*When it comes to the way education- and school-related issues are covered in New York City, what is one issue you wish was covered **more**?*

“Beside test scores, what are students being taught to make better connections between their studies and the real world. What has the past shown them to see what changes have been made, and what has not changed in today's world. How can they be agents of change.” - *Black woman, 65+, Democrat, non-parent, former educator, potential education catalyst*

“There is a huge lack of safety in our schools. That needs to change.” - *White man, 35-49, Democrat, parent, non-educator, potential education catalyst*

“Academics, English Grammar, Literature, Mathematics, American History, Sciences, etc. etc. All Need To Be Taught. Parents Do Not Want Our Children to be discussing any “Woke” Gender, or Transgender Topics!! [sic]” - *White woman, 50-64, Republican, parent, current educator, potential education catalyst*

“Amount of money the board of education spends on consultants and their limited educational experience, the increasing role of evangelicals and MAGA groups who seek to ban books and limit history teaching” - *AAPI woman, 50-64, non-parent, current educator, potential education catalyst*



New Yorkers express frustration toward hyper-political coverage with a focus on hot-button topics often related to curriculum, like DEI and transgender youth rights.

*When it comes to the way education- and school-related issues are covered in New York City, what is one issue you wish was covered **less**?*

“Anything with DEI or sexuality. Transgender information especially” - Hispanic man, 35-49, Republican, parent, non-educator, potential education catalyst

“LGBT. children don't need that in education. They just need to learn academics.” - White man, 18-34, Republican, parent, non-educator, potential education catalyst

“Any nonsense surrounding the small group of parents advocating against trans students--they should not be platformed.” - White woman, 35-49, Democrat, non-parent, current educator, potential education catalyst

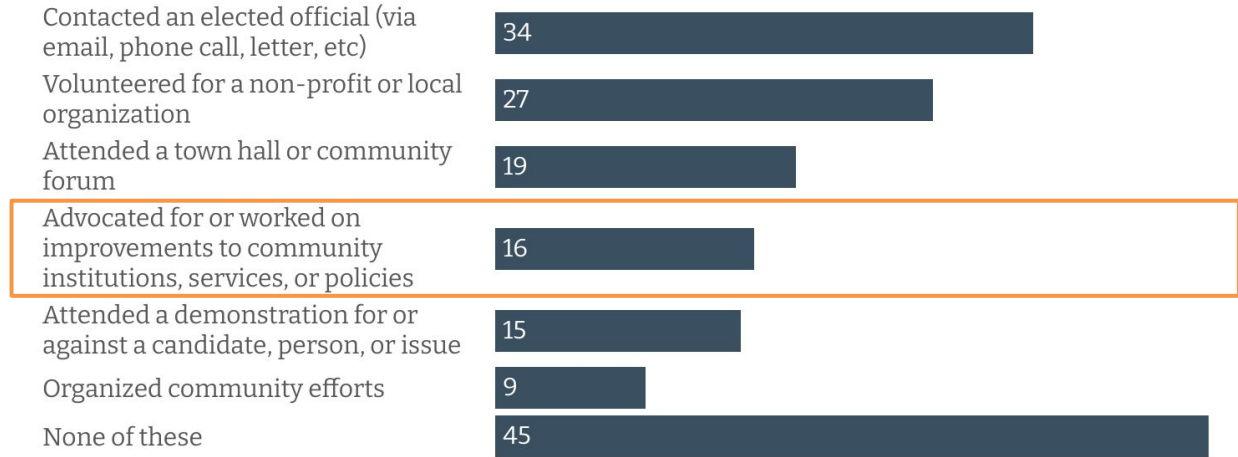
“I want less coverage of school equity problems, I just want it to be solved” - Black man, 35-49, Democrat, parent, non-educator, potential education catalyst



NEW YORK CITY SURVEY RESULTS:
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Although over half of New Yorkers have been involved in their communities in some way, only 16% say they have advocated or worked on improvements to the community.

Catalyst Actions



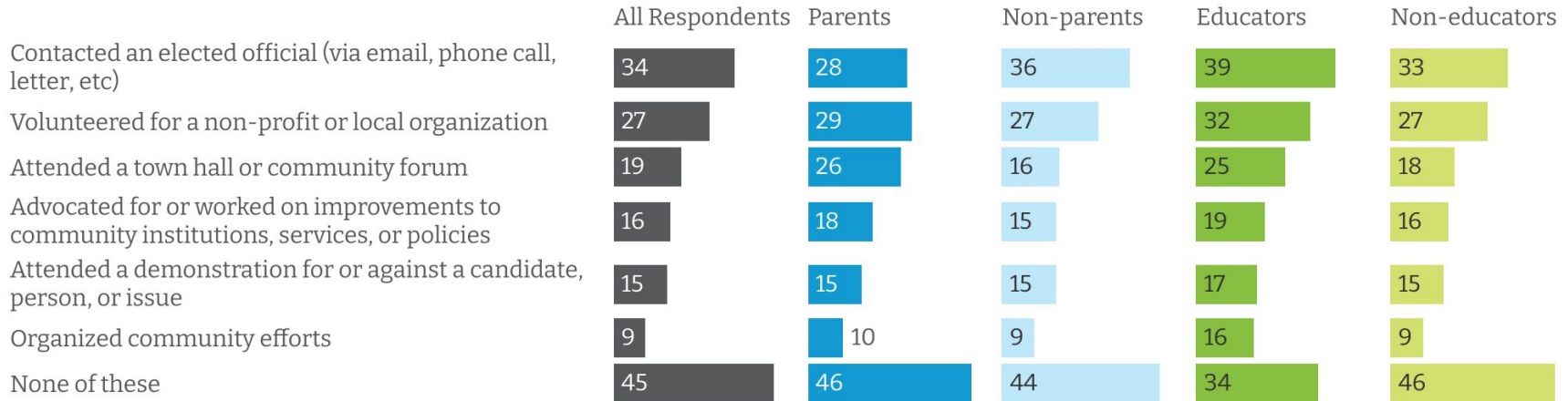
Q: These are some things that some people do to get involved and make changes in their community. Which of the following have you done in the last year? Select all that apply.



New York Educators are slightly more likely than their peers to be generally civically engaged.

Notably, parents and non-parents have roughly the same levels of general civic engagement.

Catalyst Action by Subgroup



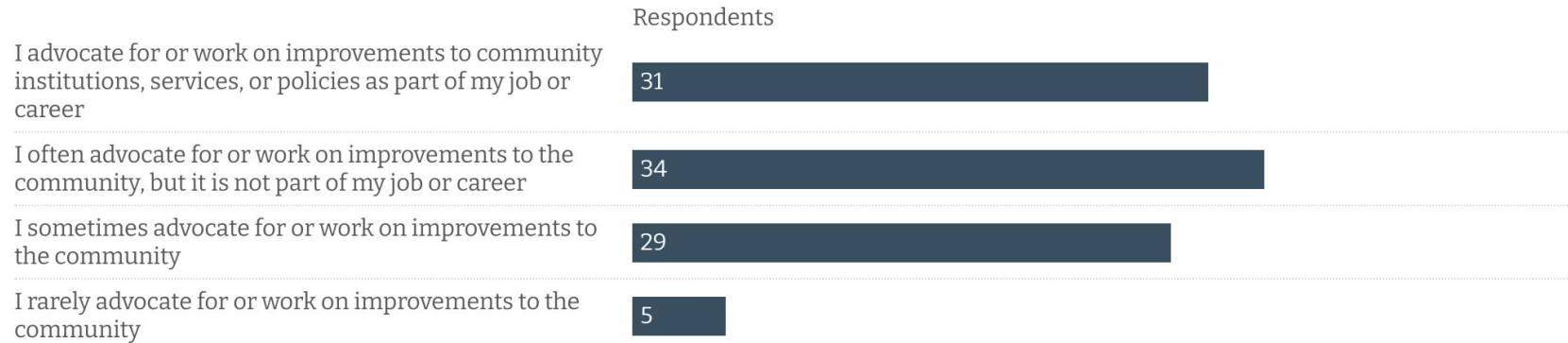
Q: These are some things that some people do to get involved and make changes at a local or state level. Which of the following have you done in the last year? Select all that apply.



Of those who have advocated or worked on improvements, the majority do so regularly.

Educators are slightly more likely than their non-educator counterparts to say that they advocate “often” or “as part of [their] job.”

Frequency of General Advocacy Efforts

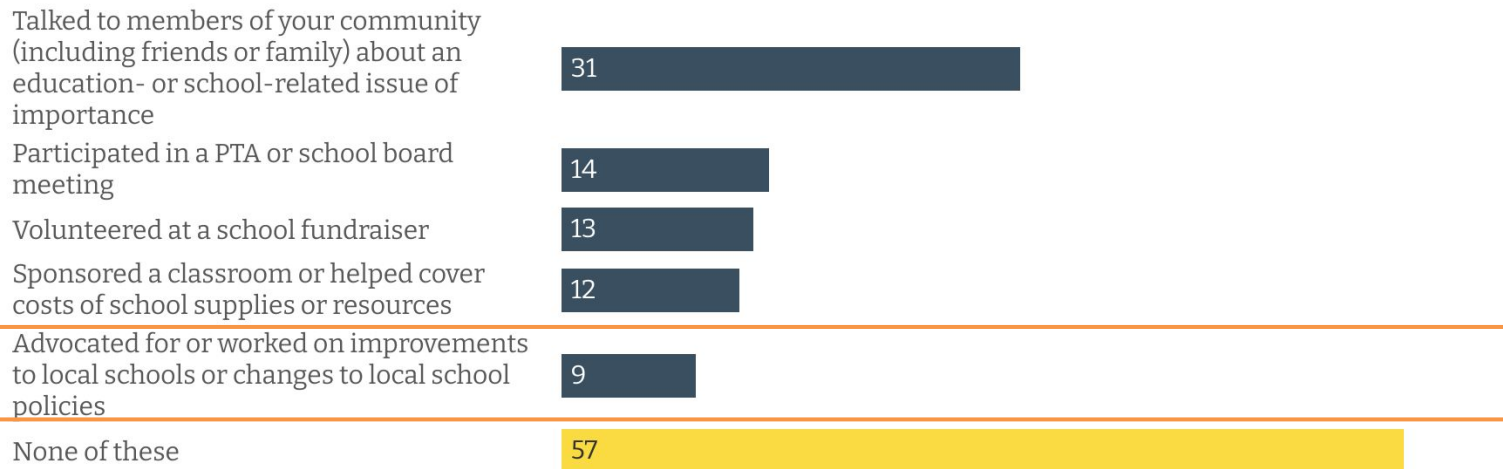


Q: [ASKED ONLY OF PEOPLE WHO SELECT “Advocated for or worked on improvements to institutions, services, or policies at a local or state level”] Which of the following best describes you?



Just under half of New Yorkers have gotten involved in local or state education in some way, with only 9% describing themselves as advocating or working for improvements.

Education Catalyst Actions

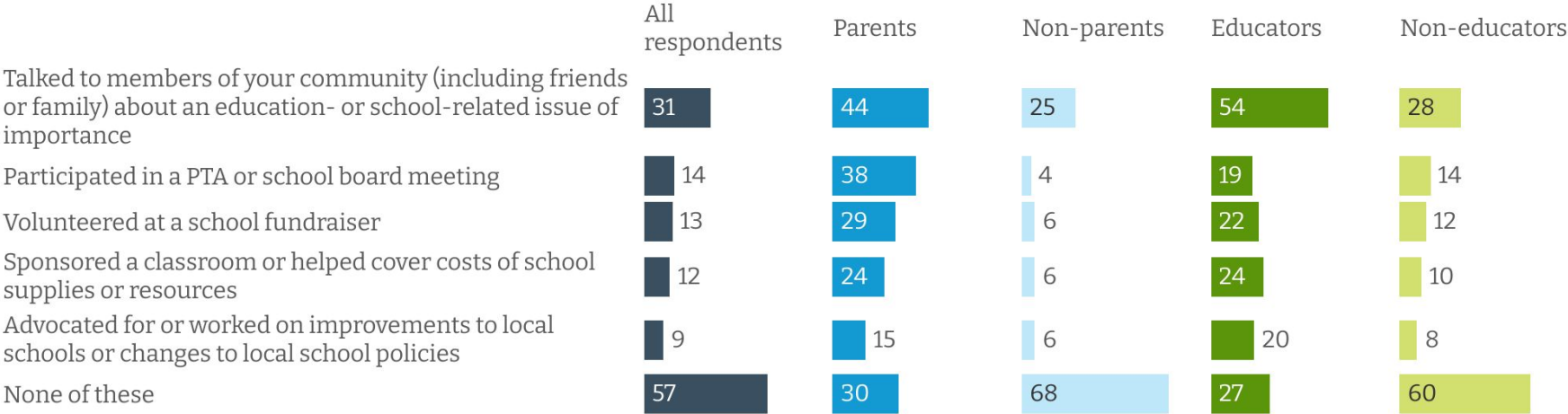


Q: These are some things that some people do to get involved and make changes in their local schools and state public education. Which of the following have you done in the last year? Select all that apply.



Parents and educators are much more likely to be civically engaged in an education setting than their counterparts.

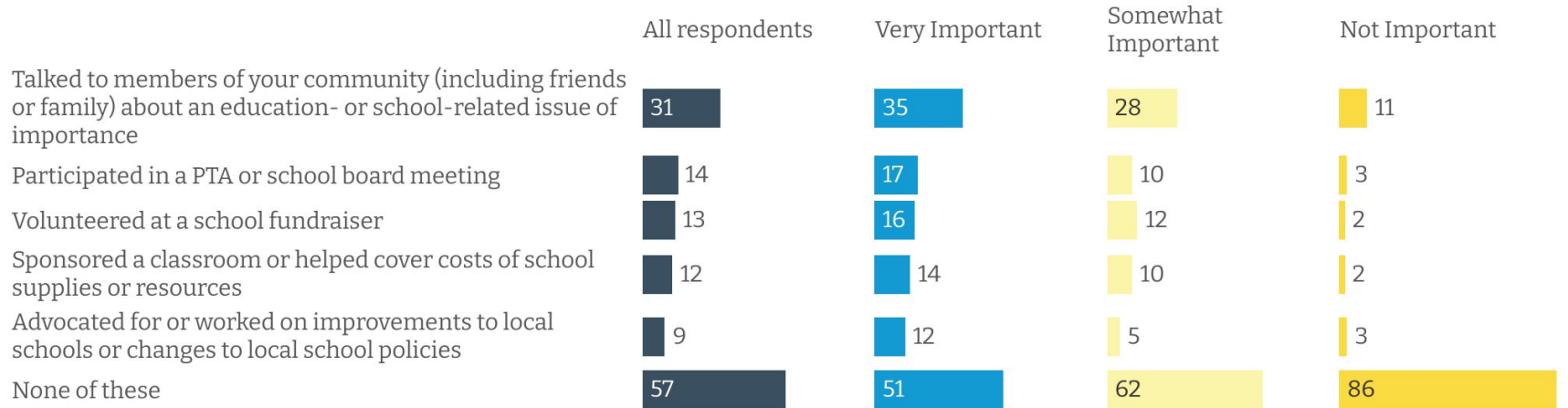
Education Catalyst Actions by Subgroup



Q: These are some things that some people do to get involved and make changes in their local schools or state public education. Which of the following have you done in the last year? Select all that apply.

When education is an important component of their day-to-day lives, respondents are much more likely to have engaged in education at a local or state level.

Education Catalyst Actions by Education Issue Importance

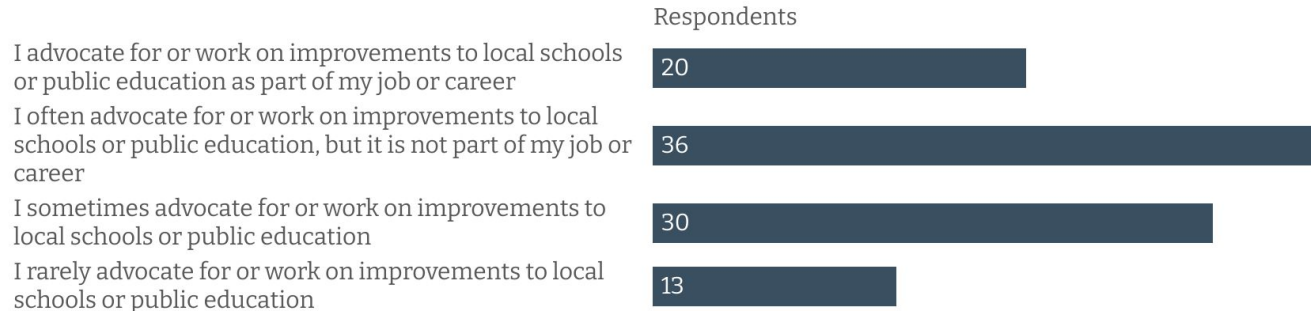


Q: These are some things that some people do to get involved and make changes in their local schools or state public education. Which of the following have you done in the last year? Select all that apply.



Similar to those engaged in general advocacy, of those who have advocated or worked on improvements in education, the majority do so regularly.

Frequency of Education Advocacy Efforts

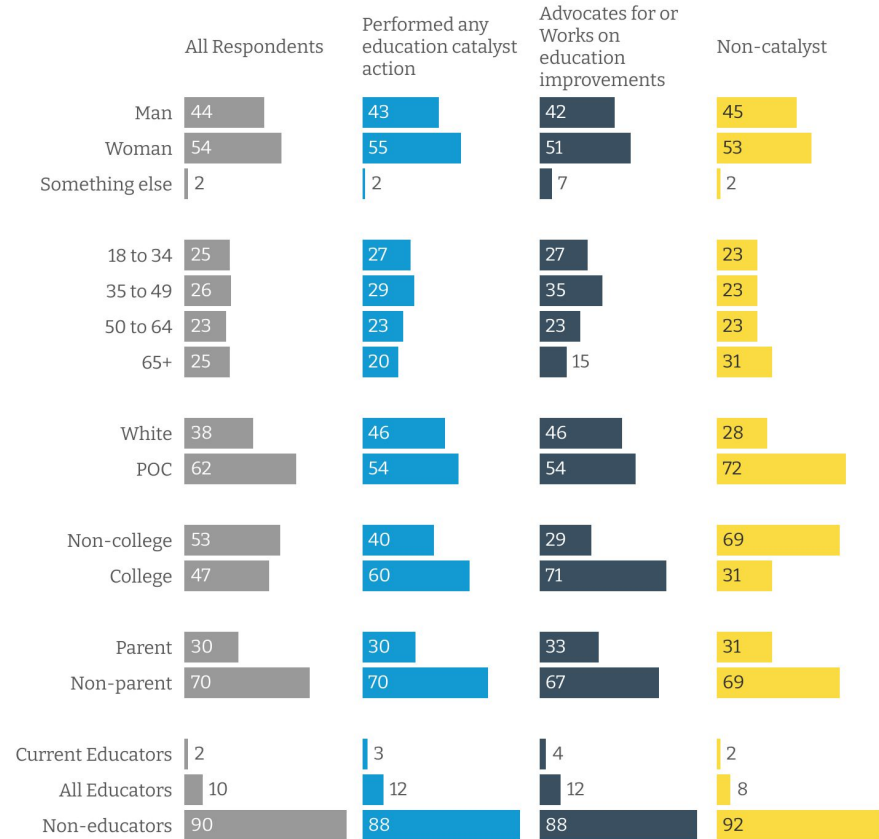


Q: [ASKED ONLY OF PEOPLE WHO SELECT "Advocated for changes or worked on improvements in local schools or in public education"] Which of the following best describes you?



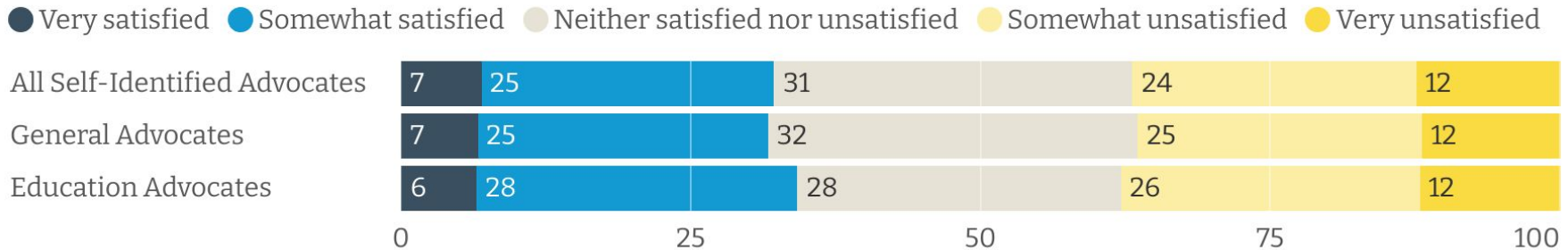
Respondents who are most likely to be “education catalysts” tend to be parents and educators, and are more likely to be college-educated.

Profile of "Education Catalysts"



Self-identified Civic Catalysts tend to be divided on their satisfaction with the information and tools they currently have for their advocacy.

Satisfaction with Information for Advocacy



Q: [IF “advocated for or worked on...” IN EITHER CATALYST QUESTION] How satisfied are you with the information and tools you currently have to help you advocate for or work on improvements at a local or state level?

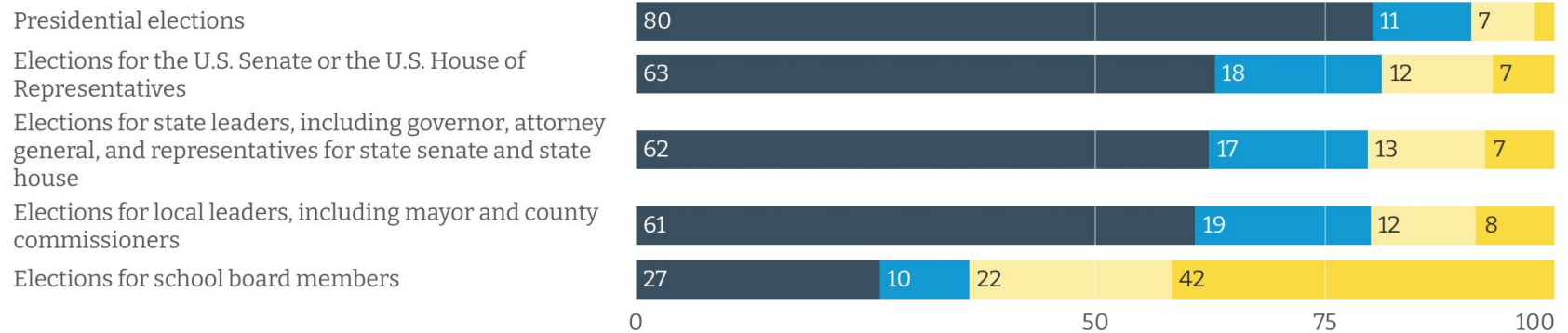


Among registered voters, substantial majorities say they always vote in presidential and local elections; however, voting participation drops significantly in school board elections.

Election Participation

Asked among registered voters

● Always ● Often ● Sometimes ● Rarely or never



Q: [If registered to vote] How often do you vote in each of the following types of elections?



NEW YORK CITY SURVEY RESULTS:
CONCLUSIONS + NEXT STEPS

CONCLUSION

This analysis only scratches the surface of the insights that may be available in this data.

And we hope this is just a starting point: we believe that as more similar local surveys are done we'll be able to learn more about New York City via comparison. In a few places, we drew comparisons to the data gathered in Chicago and the country overall in response to the same questions in similar surveys.

We also know that by repeating this research on a regular intervals in New York City we'll be able to see how the community is changing and whether efforts in New York City are improving

its civic information health. We hope this is just the first of many New York City CINCs.

New Yorkers have distinct and urgent information needs. Media behaviors are changing and responses vary depending on life circumstances and background, but that core truth remains.

Civic information should be the fuel of our civic life. It should motivate and inspire us to improve our communities and its institutions, for our own sake and for our neighbor's.

We hope this work can help the people who care about New York City fuel its civic health.

NEXT STEPS

You made it to the end and you're thinking: what now? We've got answers.

1/ Share this report and / or its data.

We want this to be in the hands of anyone who might find it useful. If you did, chances are you know someone else who will as well.

2/ Dig into the raw data.

You can find the [topline results of the survey here](#), the [full crosstabs here](#), and the [full survey and methodology here](#).

3/ Read our previous CINC reports.

You can [find the national report here](#) and [the Chicago report here](#).

4/ Reach out.

Interested in doing this in your community? In comparing other data or adding analysis? Reach out to agolis at [civicnews dot org](mailto:agolis@civicnews.org).