



Voting Guide for Pakistani Americans in New York — Fall 2020

A. Why should I vote?

If you are an American citizen, you have the right and responsibility to vote in elections. Given the ongoing pandemic, economic uncertainty, and a divided country, there is a lot at stake in this upcoming election. Your vote will have a bigger impact on the direction of the U.S. and on foreign policy in South Asia than ever before.

Here are some reasons to vote, specifically for Pakistani Americans:

1. Most policy changes occur through voting at a local level

You have the power to decide on the quality of life you want for yourself and future generations. Voting is your chance to stand up for the issues you care about like improving public transportation, raising minimum wage, creating worker protection laws or funding local schools. These issues are

generally decided at the local level, especially in New York City. This is your life: take the time to help decide what's best for your community.

2. You have the power to influence where your tax money goes

Do you know how your tax dollars are being spent by your local, state, and federal governments? Most people have no idea. Voting is an opportunity to speak up about how that money should be spent—for example, on health care and social services. There is a tremendous opportunity to put more attention and money towards issues you care about by voting for elected officials that share your values.

3. Place Pakistani American issues front and center of elected officials' minds

Most candidates running for office in New York are not aware of issues near and dear to our community. By mobilizing Pakistani Americans and then voting, officials will have data to better understand our platform and key issues. Higher voter turnout means more attention.

4. Directly change policies

New York City voters can adopt a change in the State Constitution, change a law or approve spending by voting on “Proposals, Questions, and Referenda” on the ballot.

Sources: <https://vote.nyc/page/nyc-elections>

<https://www.altamed.org/articles/5-reasons-why-you-should-vote>

B. Which elected offices and laws can I vote for?

Primary and General Elections

Primary Elections are held for registered voters of a qualified political party to choose their party's nominees for the general election for partisan offices. Because New York primaries are "closed," only voters registered with one of the parties may vote in their party's primary.

General Elections are held to elect candidates to public offices. For partisan offices, nominees from the party primary elections appear on the ballot, along with independent candidates.

Public Offices That Appear on New York City Ballots

Note: Not all of these positions in the state/local levels will be voted on during this election cycle, but it is important to understand what each office does.

Public Partisan Offices — Federal

President and Vice President of the United States: the head of state and head of government of the United States of America, and his or her deputy. The president directs the executive branch of the federal government and is the commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces.

United States Senators: the upper chamber of the United States Congress, with two senators from

each state; together with the House of Representatives, they compose the U.S. Congress. Members of the House of Representatives: the lower house of the United States Congress, comprising 435 elected members, divided among the 50 states in proportion to their total population; together with the Senate, they compose the U.S. Congress.

State Level

Governor and Lieutenant Governor of New York State: Signs NY bills into law, convenes special sessions of state legislature, appoints people to state/judicial offices, and influences key policies
State Attorney General: top state legal officers who advise and represent their legislature and state agencies, and act as the "People's Lawyer" for the citizens

State Comptroller: The State's chief fiscal officer who ensures that State and local governments use taxpayer money effectively and efficiently

State Senators: Draft and approve changes to the laws of New York

State Assembly: The lower house of the New York State Legislature, the New York State Senate being the upper house.

City/Local Government

Mayor of New York City: the chief executive officer of the city, overseeing 40 city agencies and all city boards and commissions, from the housing authority to consumer affairs to labor relations. The mayor maintains the city's budget and manages relations with federal, state and local governing entities.¹

Public Advocate: a non-voting member of the New York City Council who introduces and co-sponsors legislation. They oversee city agencies, investigate and address citizens' complaints about city services. ²

The City Comptroller: Makes recommendations on City programs and operations, fiscal policies, and financial transactions. ³

Borough Presidents: Make budget recommendations to the mayor of New York, propose laws in the New York City Council, appoint borough representatives to commissions and boards, and hold public hearings on borough issues. ⁴

City Council Members: Represent the 51 council districts throughout the five boroughs, vote on proposed laws covering all aspects of city life. They negotiate the city budget with the mayor and monitor city agencies such as the department of education and the police department. They also review city land use and make decisions about how the city will grow and develop. ⁵

Judicial

State Supreme Court Judges: a state supreme court is the highest court in the state judiciary and has final and binding judgements. ⁶

Surrogate Judges: The Surrogate's Court of the State of New York handles all will-related and estate proceedings. ⁷

Civil Court Judges: the Civil Court of the City of New York decides lawsuits involving claims for damages up to \$25,000 and includes a small claims part for cases involving amounts up to \$5,000 as well as a housing part for landlord-tenant disputes, and other civil matters. ⁸

District Attorneys: the chief prosecutor for a local government area, typically a county. ⁹

Non-Partisan Offices

Special Elections to Fill City Council Vacancies: In New York City, special elections are held to temporarily fill vacancies in city offices resulting from an elected official's resignation, removal, death, or permanent incapacitation.

C. What will be on my 2020 ballot?

In the next General Election, your ballot in New York may include candidates for the following offices. The exact list will depend on where you live in New York:

- Your choice of candidate for President and Vice President
- Your district representative in the House of Representatives in the U.S. Congress
- Your senatorial district's State Senator
- Your member of the Assembly
- Justice of the Supreme Court 2nd Judicial District (you will vote for 6)
- Judge of the Civil Court in your Municipal Court District

Follow the instructions on your ballot. In New York, this typically involves completely coloring in the circle next to your preferred candidate's name.

If you feel overwhelmed by the number of different items, you may choose to only vote for the items

that you care most about. Your partial selections will be counted even if you don't make selections for all offices on your ballot.

Your ballot is unique to your district and party. Visit the following website and enter your address for an explanation of your ballot: <https://vote.nyc/page/understanding-ballot>

Source: <https://vote.nyc/page/understanding-ballot>

D. How and when can I vote?

Dates and Deadlines for the Next Election

- Deadline to register to vote in New York State online, by mail, or in-person: Friday, October 9, 2020.
- After registering, your deadline to request a ballot by mail is Tuesday, October 27, 2020.
- Your early voting period runs from Saturday, October 24, 2020 to Sunday, November 1, 2020, but dates and hours may vary based on where you live.
- Election Day (your last day to vote) is Tuesday, November 3, 2020.

Registering to Vote

If you're 18 or older, an American citizen, and a resident of New York State, you can register to vote by:

- Downloading your registration form and mailing it in
- Visiting a NYC Board of Elections office

– Filling out an online registration form: visit <https://vote.nyc/page/register-vote> to get registered!

The election process doesn't end on Election Day! The New York City mayoralty, 4 of 5 borough presidents, and 35 of the 51 New York City Council Members will be on the ballot on Nov 2, 2021!, This means that in 2021 you will have the ability to decide who your district's direct representative will be.

Voting in Person

Enter your information on the following website to find out where you can vote in person: <https://voterlookup.elections.ny.gov/>

To avoid a crowd on Election Day, go to your regular polling place to vote early on these select dates: Saturday, October 24, 2020 to Sunday, November 1, 2020. These dates might change, so be sure to check that link above for any COVID-related updates!

Voting by Mail

You can also vote by mail by requesting an absentee ballot by October 27 at this website: <https://vote.nyc/page/absentee-voting>

You have until November 3 to send in your absentee ballot. This is a safer option during the pandemic, and also gives you more time to think about your voting options.

If you need help (and want to speak to someone in

Urdu or Punjabi), dial the American Pakistani Advocacy Group’s hotline: 1 833 321 2724.

E. How can I be more involved in the voting process post-election?

As a responsible citizen, you can keep track of your elected officials and the work they are doing. You may keep in touch with them via letters, emails, or phone calls in order to register approval or complaints, and you can research alternate options for primary and general elections.

If you are excited about public service and leadership, you may choose to run for office yourself.

Another way to get involved is by joining your local community board — an active, local political format that has a surprising level of influence in shaping how your neighborhood allocates funds and approves construction and development projects. Community boards are also the gatekeepers to the neighborhood’s small business community. You’ll find your neighborhood’s community board here:

<https://on.nyc.gov/3jxsmyB>

You should be able attend meetings as soon as you like!

This document was prepared by New York members of the American Pakistan Foundation.

Lift Your Voice!

Footnotes:

1. <https://on.nyc.gov/3jvIHUs>
2. <https://www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov/about#duties-of-the-office/>
3. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/comptroller>
4. https://ballotpedia.org/Borough_president
5. <https://council.nyc.gov/about/>
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_supreme_court7.
7. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/surrogates/index.shtml>
8. <https://bit.ly/31B00IA>
9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District_attorney
10. <https://bit.ly/31xTZB5>
11. <https://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=896331>

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