



The Research Bureau

Bureau Brief—Worcester’s 2023 Election, a Primer

On Tuesday, November 7, 2023, the City of Worcester will hold an election for its major municipal offices: the City Council and the School Committee. These elections are held on odd-numbered years, and each member of the City Council and School Committee serve two-year terms. All of Worcester’s election rules can be found within the [Worcester City Charter](#), which serves as Worcester’s governing document, and on the website of the [Board of Election Commissioners](#).

Key Dates for the 2023 Municipal Election:

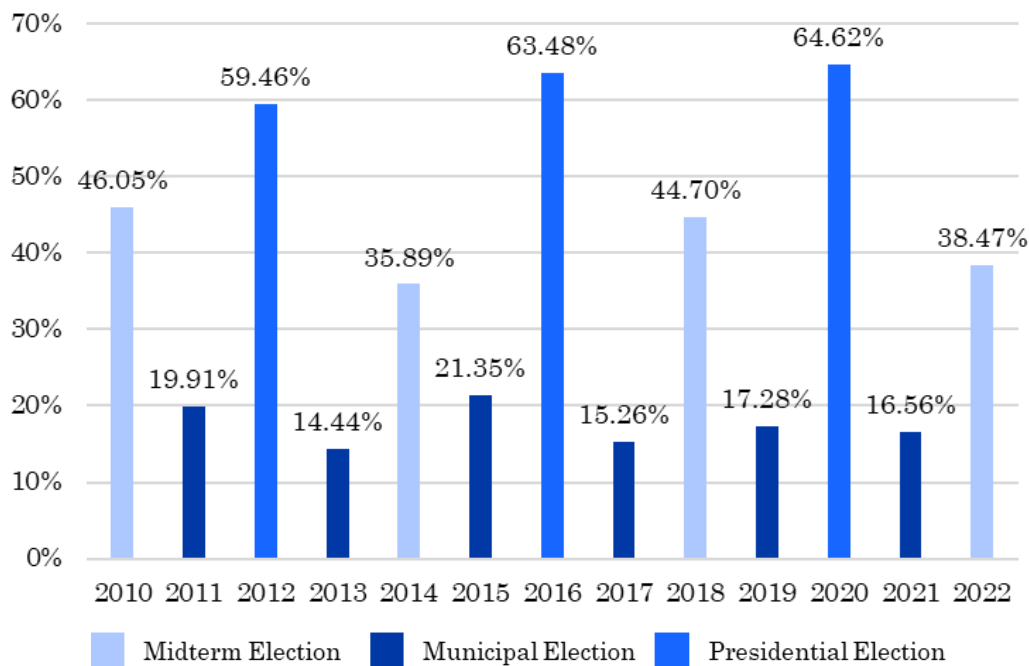
- **May 30:** Last day to submit nomination papers for certification of signatures.
- **June 8:** Last day to withdraw or object to nomination of candidates
- **August 26:** Last day to register to vote in preliminary election.
- **September 5:** Preliminary Election
- **September 12:** Last day to decline nomination for Mayor, Council, or School Committee
- **October 28:** Last day to register to vote in general election
- **November 7:** Municipal General Election

Research in the Public Interest

Worcester's City Council consists of 11 members. Six of its members are considered "at-large." Any resident of the city may vote for an "at-large" member. Five Council Members represent one of five City Council districts; residents of those districts may vote for their district’s candidates for City Council. Worcester’s Mayor serves as the Chair of both the City Council and the School Committee, and is the official head of the city for all ceremonial purposes. Every at-large candidate for City Council is automatically a candidate for Mayor unless they choose only to run for councilor at-large and not additionally for mayor.

Worcester's School Committee consists of nine members. As of the 2023 election, the Worcester School Committee consists of two at-large members (for whom any registered voter in the city can vote), and six district committee members (for whom any registered voter living in that district can vote). These districts, labelled "A-F," are distinct from the City Council districts. The Mayor serves as the Chair of the School

Turnout Percentage in November Elections Since 2010



Source: City of Worcester Election Commission, Worcester City Clerk

Committee, but has no additional powers besides the ability to vote on issues before the Committee.

There are generally only two requirements to run for a City Council or School Committee seat: (1) to be a registered voter and (2) pass a residency requirement. At-Large members of either group must have been residents of the City for at least one year before their election. District members of each group must be residents of the district in which they are running for at least one year before their election as well. If both conditions are met, then a city resident can choose to pull nominating papers to run for a particular seat.

Once someone has pulled nominating papers, they need to acquire a certain number of signatures from registered voters living in the city in order to appear on a ballot at all. District based candidates must get 100 signatures from residents living in their districts, and At-Large candidates must get 300 signatures from anyone living in Worcester. For the 2023 election, residents looking to run for office must receive their signatures by May 30—giving them about two months from when the nominating papers are available to when they must return them to City Hall.

Once all nominating papers are in, and signatures have been checked for validity, the final election of members of the City Council and the School Committee may have to potentially pass through one more major step. The "preliminary election," which in 2023 is scheduled for Tuesday, September 5th, is necessary only if there are more than twice as many candidates as there are the number of available seats. This election reduces the number of candidates in the general election in November to two for each district seat, twelve for at-large City Council, and four for at-large School Committee.

Those running for an at-large seat will "win" their seat if they are among the (1) top six vote getters if they are running for a City Council seat or (2) the top two if they are running for a School Committee seat.

Elections for city-wide offices are officially (Section 7-3 of the Worcester City Charter) non-partisan. Even if a candidate personally identifies as part of a political party, that identification is not present whatsoever on any official election materials. In addition, the names are placed on ballots in a random order, based on a drawing done by the Board of Election Commissioners before the election.

Historically, elections for municipal office simply have not had the same turnout as statewide or federal offices (and especially not the same as Presidential years). In 2021, out of 104,595 voters, turnout in the general election was only 16.56% (the preliminary election for City Council Districts 1 and 5 had only 10.38% turnout from voters eligible to vote in those elections!). Compared even to the 2022 midterm election, in which there were 110,357 registered voters and 38.47% turnout was low for the 2021 municipal election. The November 2020 presidential election, in which there were 111,318 registered voters, had 64.62% turnout.

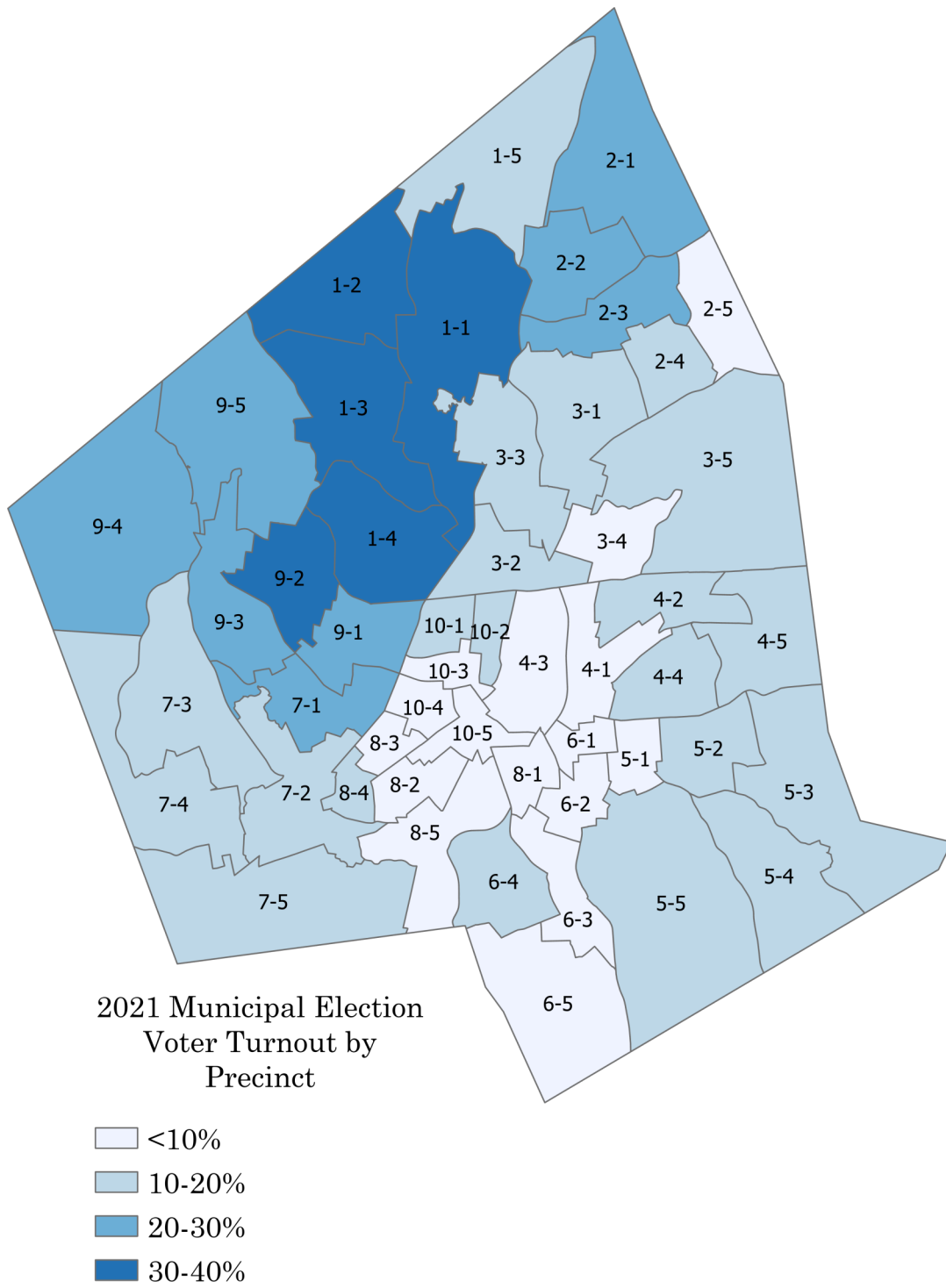
Turnout for municipal elections is crucial; decisions made in City Hall by the City Council or the School Committee have direct and tangible effects on the lives of all City residents, in ways that decisions made in Boston or Washington D.C., sometimes do not. Participation in elections, both in going out to vote in preliminary and general elections and in running for office, is important for a well-run, vibrant, and prosperous city for all.

For information about where to vote and in which City Council and School Committee district you reside, The Research Bureau has created an easy-to-use online tool. [You can find that tool here.](#)

Finally, prior to the November election, The Research Bureau will release a report on “Questions for the Candidates” and host a series of debates for City Council and School Committee elections throughout September and October.

Voter Turnout by Precinct in the 2021 Municipal Election

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Source: City of Worcester Election Commission, Worcester City Clerk