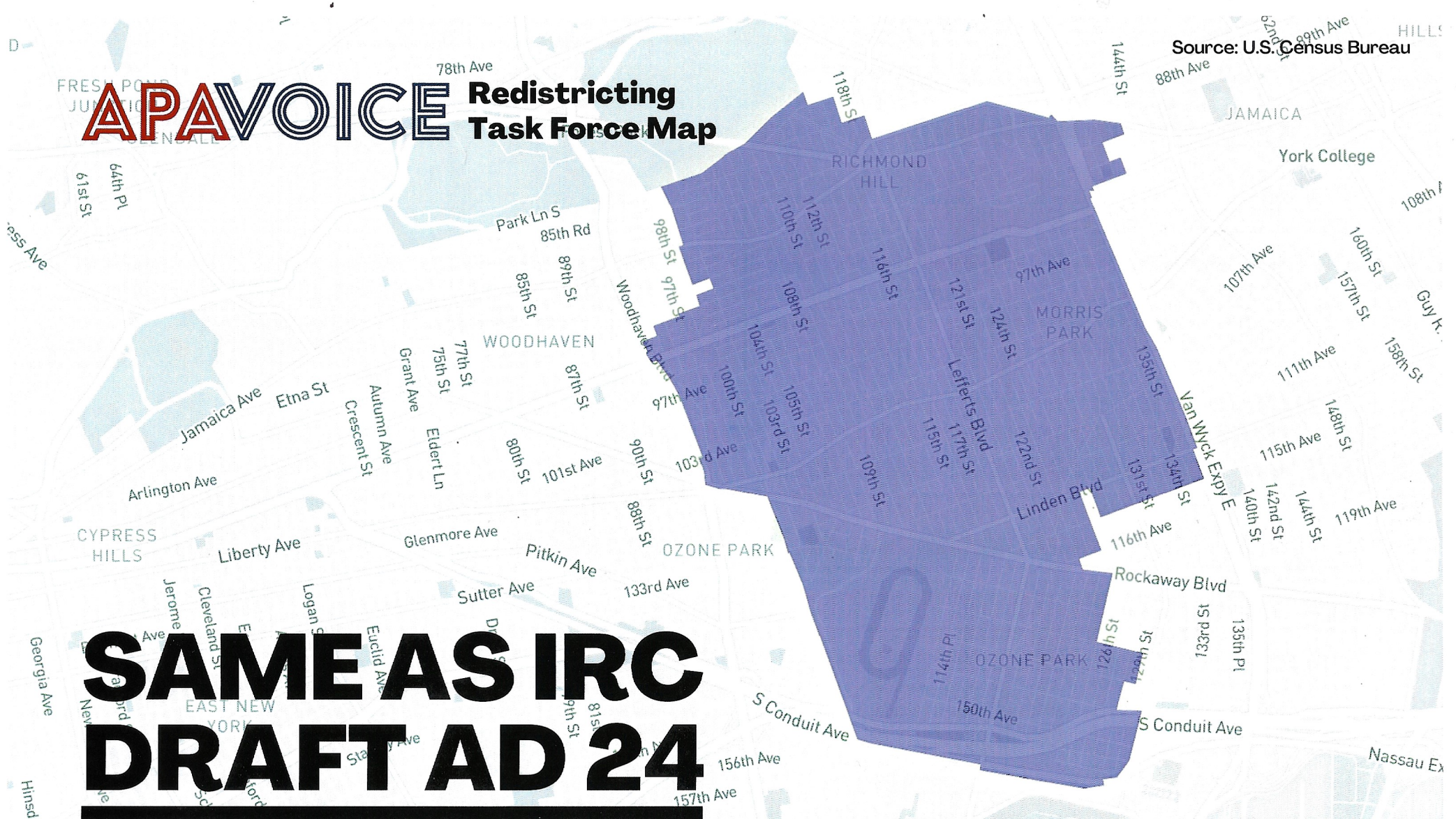


Source: U.S. Census Bureau

APAVOICE Redistricting Task Force Map



SAME AS IRC DRAFT AD 24

Queens - Richmond Hill & South Ozone Park

| IRC Draft Map Voting Age Population | Black | Hispanic | Asian | White | Native | Pacific |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 20,696 19.1% | 29,360 27.2% | 37,528 34.7% | 8,272 7.7% | 5,752 5.3% | 1,031 1.0% |

REDISTRICTING JUSTICE & DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE
125-07 Liberty Avenue
Richmond Hill, NY 11419
ourvoicesunited999@gmail.com

February 9, 2023

Honorable Commissioners
NYS Independent Redistricting Commission,

PLEASE RE-APPROVE ATTACHED ASSEMBLY DISTRICT MAP 24
INTACT AS CONFIGURED AND AGREED TO BY ALL OF YOU IN
BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR MANDATE,
OATH AND DUTY

We are a diverse alliance of over 500 leaders formed to protect AD 24 Map from being gerrymandered again. Thank you ALL for your leadership and wisdom in drawing a consensus, bipartisan agreed upon AD 24 Map, attached, which complies with the principles of the US Constitution, NY State Constitution, census, redistricting, fairness and equity. Special thanks to all of you for your public service, intuition and leadership.

Please pass this map as a conjoint, compact, consensus and contiguous district, defined by natural borders. It cannot get any better than this!

As confirmed recently by the NY Times and other informative sources attached, your initiative complies with the law, human rights and decency. You must defeat decades of gerrymandering, cronyism and special interests strongholds, instituted by the incumbents themselves. As the NY Times has shown, it is impossible for us to hold 7 elected officials accountable, who are all evading us, and consider us filler, apartheid style. “Ejaz Nabie, a pastor in a section of Queens that is heavily Indo-Caribbean and Punjabi, related, “I’m trying to hold seven persons accountable who are all evading me,” he said. That is why we need a voice!

Citywide publications, good government and democracy groups and demographers have confirmed this, *ad nauseam*. See, e.g., <https://www.thecity.nyc/2021/8/12/22622709/nyc-asian-surg-ing-population->

[electoral-power](#). Even though there was an undercount due to deportation fears, distrust and frustration with the system, and systemic misidentification as Indo-Caribbeans, South Asian, West Indian, Asian Pacific, in Queens, “our Asian population grew 29%, to nearly 706,000 out of 2.4 million residents, far outpacing the borough’s overall 7.8% population growth.” This is common knowledge.

This proposed district will keep our neighborhoods and communities intact, with established ties of common interest, ownership and association, grounded in historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious, and other ties, while preventing conflict with other communities like Rochdale Village, Howard Beach, Woodhaven and Glendale.

We need united, strong voices and responsive leadership to lift our struggling community out of this pandemic. Lack of progress and hope will cripple us, unless you unite us, and let democracy prevail. We have enough constituents to form a mass here, and trailblazers like Albert Baldeo, Taj Rajkumar, Richard and Denny Bhagwandin have shown that we can elect our own representatives also.

This is about us, and not about the politicians who have failed to represent us, while favoring other groups. Our children and adolescents are the leaders of tomorrow. The absence of our schools being united in a common school district in Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and South Ozone Park, has caused us to miss out painfully on a consensus curriculum of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), have no access to common strategy, and greatly, suffer from the absence of teachers who can both connect and understand the diversity of their heritage, culture, strengths and weaknesses.

We are the largest group in New York City, and the largest settlement and conglomeration of folks who can trace their ancestry to South Asia, South and Central America, the Caribbean and the West Indies. Moreover, as new, first and second generation Americans, we share many common bonds, and are one large family.

Our mission is to keep residents and voters in those communities together in one district, so that we can obtain common solutions to our issues and problems that affect our families on a daily basis. Many of us are essential workers and working families, whose children have served, defended and died for America-proudly, yet we are treated like outsiders! Statistics prove we pay more taxes, and depend on less public assistance, than other Americans! Please stop dividing and fragmenting us, and give us justice!

It behooves you to act accordingly and unite us as a community, and not use us as sliced and diced fillers for other more established communities. Our elected officials and their staff do not look like us, nor care about us. They do not understand our customs, language or heritage, and exploit them where possible in a “divide and rule policy.” They treat us as if we are from a different planet. They look down upon us, and are imported from other communities. Many of us are turned away because there is no one who speaks their language, only crony employees as dictated by vested interests.

Gerrymandering has divided and crippled us. Economic engines like Resorts World and JFK Airport, located in our own community, deprive us of jobs and wages, in favor of outsiders. We have no senior centers, food pantries, homeless shelters, public benefits offices, basic federal, city and state services, foreclosure relief, small businesses lifelines, our kids have trailer parks for classrooms and our schools are diminished with poor performances and threatened closures.

Consequently, during COVID-19, we had the highest casualties, and could not even afford to bury our dead. No elected officials came here, not even 1-no masks, no safety equipment, no sanitizers. Our corpses were thrown in multiple trailers and trucks with ice, after being kicked out of hospital beds prematurely, before being buried. Our elected officials treat us as second class citizens-Jenifer Rajkumar, David Weprin, Joe Addabbo are both MIA, and deceive us that they have made strides for us, like falsely proclaiming Diwali a school holiday, refuse to vote for Good Cause Eviction Relief, turn their backs on homeowners who are forced to lose their homes, etc. The Mayor also duped us about Diwali, false promises are made every day, they gaslight and exploit us. This cabal enjoys great personal life styles, but do not help us, feasting on our tax dollars. They do not even live in Richmond Hill, or South Ozone Park, and have no offices here, so what do they care? Jenifer Rajkumar is a carpet bagger who lives in Manhattan, a disinterested implant who could not even hire one of us to help her largest base of constituents! Rajkumar’s entire staff is white, and Manhattan based, in a minority community!

This cycle of poverty and deprivation will continue apartheid-style unabated, unless, and until you intervene to give us a seat where immigrant services, community centers, sports facilities, increased job training and health clinics, and a better standard of living can be obtained. All we want is the basic requirements being Americans confer upon us. It is time you end this disgrace to humanity!

AD 24 deserves a fair chance to elect someone who knows and cares about their issues. District Leader Albert Baldeo was initially declared the new State Senator, when he received 49.5 % of the votes in 2006 for a State Senate seat, but the cronies and status quo strong armed us, reversed his monumental victory by 500 votes. Baldeo was also elected District Leader in 2 different Assembly districts, AD 38 (2008), and AD 24 (2022), which comprise this current district, and another Guyanese-American/Indo-Caribbean/South Asian, Richard David, was elected in the adjoining district of AD 31. This clearly establishes that we should have, at a minimum, a combined Assembly district, encompassing these neighborhoods. Based on history and demographics, it is a spectacular bipartisan district, where constituents know that representation is more important than party affiliation.

Please be wary of being made the scapegoats and publicly shamed if you fail to agree on this bipartisan map, and have the legislators deceive you. They are prepared to betray over 20 million New Yorkers, including hundreds who attended your hearings all over the length and breadth of New York State, and braved and risked the pandemic, and \$4 million of our tax dollars will have been wantonly wasted. The blame game will affect future commissions.

Worse yet, you will be putting it in the hands of the self-serving, self-preserving State legislators and incumbents who embarrassed us and caused us to be here in the first place, 2 years late already! Thankfully the Court has asked you to review and approve your earlier, objective efforts, over their gerrymandering, corruption and illegality. We plan to go back to the Judge, if these legislators continue to choose their constituents, defy the Court's instructions, instead of having the voters choose them. Don't be party to the corrupt interests who have failed us for decades.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/10/nyregion/redistricting-queens-asians-nyc.html>

The evidence on the record, from the numerous religious, business and community leaders and organizations, who have **ALL** testified to keep South Ozone Park, Ozone Park and Richmond Hill as one Community of Interest as the Redistricting Draft, AD 24, (Assembly District) is both compelling and enlightening. Thank you.

Sgd.

Pdt. Doobay, Rabbi Marchant, Rev. Harris, Imam Chowdhury, and other leaders,

Split 7 Ways, Immigrant Neighborhood Seeks to Unify Its Political Power

As New York begins to draw new legislative districts, partisan fights may overshadow the electoral harm the process can do to some groups.



By Nicholas Fandos

Nov. 10, 2021

6 MIN READ

When Ejaz Nabie saw his congregation in Queens become ensnared in one of New York's worst Covid-19 outbreaks last winter, he did what any desperate community leader would do: He turned to his representative in state government for help.

For Mr. Nabie, the congregation's pastor, that meant trying seven of them.

The extraordinary outreach was not merely zealous, but a reflection of the surreal political geography of his Richmond Hill neighborhood and adjoining South Ozone Park. The south Queens area, whose residents are heavily Indo-Caribbean and Punjabi, is a prime example of the collateral damage caused by the way New York has historically drawn legislative boundaries.

Seven State Assembly districts slice through the few square miles around Mr. Nabie's Faith Assembly church — dividing blocks, congregations, even families. At several intersections, three out of four corners are split among different assembly members, leaving residents with no clear leader to turn to in state government.

"We should have one person who we could hold accountable," said Mr. Nabie, 61, recalling his struggle to secure masks and vaccine doses for his fellow immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad and elsewhere in the Caribbean. "Instead, I'm trying to hold seven persons accountable who are all evading me."

As New York begins the once-a-decade task of reshaping its congressional districts, the focus has mostly been on the kind of seismic clashes between Democrats and Republicans that help determine majorities in Washington and Albany.

But as Mr. Nabie's experience illustrates, redistricting also involves something more fundamental: the battle for representation, and how it can pit communities against one another and, sometimes, even their elected leaders' interests.



An intersection at 114th Street and Liberty Avenue in Queens. Three of four corners fall in different State Assembly districts. James Estrin/The New York Times

Asian American activists in other parts of the city are also trying to capitalize on their surge in population over the past decade to ensure that cohesive legislative districts replace splintered ones in Elmhurst, Queens, and in Sunset Park and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn.

Further afield, cities like Ithaca and Rochester that lean Democratic but were split by Republicans a decade ago for overtly partisan reasons are pushing for more coherent district lines.

But the situation in Richmond Hill may illustrate most clearly just how hard it can be to break decades of political inertia, particularly when those drawing the final lines could have an interest in maintaining the status quo.

"For any community to really come to its rightful place in America, you need folks from that community that rise up take on a leadership position and have a viable way to elected office," said John Albert, a well-connected lobbyist and the founder of Taking Our Seat, a group that has helped organize a campaign to unite the area's fractured legislative districts.

There is no easy answer for why exactly the cracks formed in Richmond Hill or why have persisted. There does not appear to have been an overt effort to keep South Asians out of power or to target the area. Instead, political scientists point to a mix of inertia, self-interest on the part of Democratic incumbents and legal precedents that tend to punish newcomers.

Roman B. Hedges, who helped draw the Assembly maps for three decades as a member of a legislative task force, defended the current boundaries as a best attempt at balancing competing political interests.

Another consideration, he said, involved the complex legal requirements created by the Voting Rights Act and the courts for protecting the ability of African Americans, Latinos and Asians to elect candidates of their choice and draw districts that are all of roughly equal size.

In an area as diverse as Queens, that means mapmakers must essentially preserve existing districts dominated by one of those groups before addressing what to do about newer or less homogeneous ones like Richmond Hill.

Part of the problem may be that the South Asian community's size in the area is hard to measure. Although people of Indo-Caribbeans heritage trace their lineage to India, large numbers choose not to identify as "Asian" on census forms, selecting "other" instead. As a result, at least on paper, there is not the kind of dominant ethnic group that mapmakers must heed.

"Maybe it is not so much a plot to prevent as a hope to create elsewhere for other purposes," Mr. Hedges said. "If you are in the community that is not the focus, maybe it feels like, 'I was not paid attention to and I now am going to make my voice known.'"

But there may be more politically oriented reasons.

Incumbents can pad their districts by slicing off as "filler" small parts of immigrant communities, which redistricting experts said are less likely to vote in primaries. That way, they can maintain the number of constituents required by law without diluting their own base of support.

Once that community matures and becomes more politically engaged, a lawmaker may have little incentive to give up those votes, preferring to keep the district lines intact.

"What I do know is what the community looks like now and what it's looked like for a few decades now," said Aminta Kilawan-Narine, the founder of the South Queens Women's March, an advocacy group. "These lines are not reflective of that history, they are not reflective of the people who live here."



John Albert is pushing to unite the Richmond Hill, Queens, area in one legislative district. For an immigrant group to truly establish itself in America, he said, its members need "a viable way to elected office." James Estrin/The New York Times

South Ozone Park and Richmond Hill, which run north from John F. Kennedy Airport, through streets lined with Queen Anne-style homes and elevated subway lines, are familiar emblems of modern New York City. Traditional white ethnic enclaves have been reformulated by Latino and, later, South Asian immigrants, with stores selling saris and roti replacing Italian bakeries and German beer halls.

But although the influx of newcomers has coalesced and become a dominant force culturally, political power has lagged. That is largely because of an incoherent patchwork of City Council, State Senate and, above all, Assembly districts.

Divided among so many representatives, many in the community have grudgingly concluded that they are the priority of no one.

Take brick-and-mortar district offices, the linchpins of government services and administration that provide a point of contact for constituents, take feedback to Albany and act as clearing houses for state benefit and relief programs. Of the seven Assembly members who represent parts of the area, only one, David I. Weprin, has opened a district office.

"We felt as if we were not a part of the democratic process, we felt neglected, we felt voiceless," said Taj Rajkumar, a Guyanese-American professor who ran unsuccessfully for an Assembly seat in 2000 on a platform that included a call for more immigrant services, a community center for older residents, increased job training and a health clinic.

"All of our struggles and all of our cries were falling on deaf ears," Mr. Rajkumar said. "That was the sentiment of the community then and now."

Those who favor redrawing district lines to unify a community's voice have looked optimistically to New York's new independent, bipartisan redistricting commission, which is supposed to remove lawmakers from the mapmaking process.

When the panel released its first draft maps in September, Democratic members proposed combining most of Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park in one Assembly district.

But it may not be that simple. The commission's Republican members did not agree to the changes, and the panel appears headed for the kind of partisan gridlock that could doom its proposals. If that happens, the process would revert to the State Legislature, which may be less receptive to the community's appeals.

The best hope for proponents of redrawing Richmond Hill's district lines could be that the commission's maps give the Legislature a new starting point, effectively shaming lawmakers.

Mr. Weprin acknowledged that his district made little sense geographically, with a major highway cutting Richmond Hill off from the heart of the district. He said he had done his best to represent an "area I didn't know anything about" before becoming its assemblyman, and that he understood the community's interest in having a single representative.

"I'm not going to actively lobby one way or another," he said. "I could live with whatever the outcome is, but if I was going to lose that area, I'd want to see what they would offer me in terms of making up the population."

Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar, whose Woodhaven-based district collides with Mr. Weprin's in Richmond Hill, has more fully positioned herself behind the drive to draw a single seat based there. In 2020, she became the first South Asian woman ever elected to state office in New York.

"Right now, the South Asian community is hungry and determined to be heard," she said. "Things are changing. We are taking our seat at this table of power both in our state and nationally."

In the pandemic's darkest days, Mr. Nabie eventually succeeded in securing help for his parishioners: Mr. Weprin delivered personal protective equipment; city officials turned the church into an impromptu vaccination site.

Some damage, though, may take longer to repair.

"It has created a sense of apathy and disillusionment with the system," he said. "People feel, 'I don't care anymore, they are not going to listen to me, they are not going to do anything for me.' That's a terrible place to be."

Nicholas Fandos is a reporter on the Metro desk covering New York State politics, with a focus on money, lobbying and political influence. He was previously a congressional correspondent in Washington. @npfandos

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 17 of the New York edition with the headline: Diced Into 7 Districts, a Queens Neighborhood Can't Get Anything Done



You are here > Home > Top Stories > Guyanese listed as second largest immigrant group in Queens

Guyanese listed as second largest immigrant group in Queens

February 7, 2014 TIMES INT'L

In December 2013, the New York City Department of City Planning issued a detailed report showing that Guyanese are the second largest immigrant group in Queens and the fifth largest in New York City.

Immigrants from Trinidad & Tobago occupy the eighth position. The report, The Newest New Yorkers, is based on data collected in the 2010 Census and the 2011 American Community Survey.

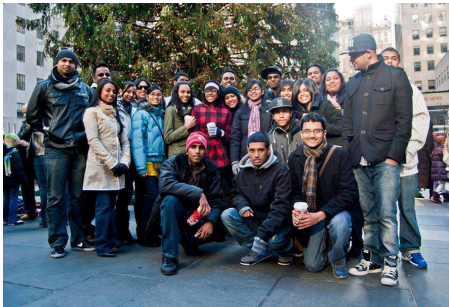
The report details the change in population and provides comprehensive information on the foreign-born population to policy makers, program planners, and service providers to help them gain perspective on a population that continues to reshape the city. The data is based on the foreign born population from specific countries, but the Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Inc. combined the data for Guyana and Trinidad to reflect the overwhelming ethnic and cultural similarities among the two nationalities.

The combination also reflects the propensity for Indo-Caribbean persons from Guyana and Trinidad, and other Caribbean countries, to work closely together for social, political and economic development in New York City.

While this report demonstrates the large Indo-Caribbean population in New York City, it does not account for the population born in the United States. Immigrants from Guyana and Trinidad began moving to New York City in significant waves since the 1960's and many are now first and second generation Americans. If these populations were included, we are confident the number of Indo-Caribbean residents in New York City would be considerably larger.

In New York City, the combined foreign-born population of Guyana and Trinidad is 227,582. This is the 3rd highest foreign-born population in New York City-trailing only the Dominican Republic (380,160) and China (350,231) and ahead of countries such as Mexico, Jamaica and India among others.

In the largest New York metropolitan region, the combined total number of Guyanese and Trinidadian immigrants would be over 288,000, the 5th highest foreign-born population, trailing the Dominican Republic (557,520), China (477,386), Mexico (366,810), and India (330,881).



Some members of the Indo Caribbean Alliance organisation based in Queens N.Y. pose for a photo op.

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Power hungry

82,000 individuals trailing only Chinese immigrants who account for over 142,000. The report also found that nearly half of all Queens' residents are foreign born as of 2011 out of a total population of 2.2 million residents.

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CENSUS

NYC Asian Activists Seek to Turn Surging Population Into Electoral Power

New Census numbers showing a 43% increase of Asian New Yorkers in Brooklyn and a 29% jump in Queens fuel demands for more representation as the process for redrawing elected officials' district lines heats up.

BY CHRISTINE CHUNG, CLIFFORD MICHEL AND WILL WELCH | AUG 12, 2021, 8:37PM EST



 SHARE
 





The southern side of 8th Ave. at 46th St. in Sunset Park, Brooklyn which is in a different Senate district than the northern side of the street. | Jason Scott Jones/THE CITY

New Census numbers out Thursday show a robust 7.7% population increase for New York City since 2010 — and even bigger surges for Asian New Yorkers at a time when Asian candidates and community groups are moving to build out political power.

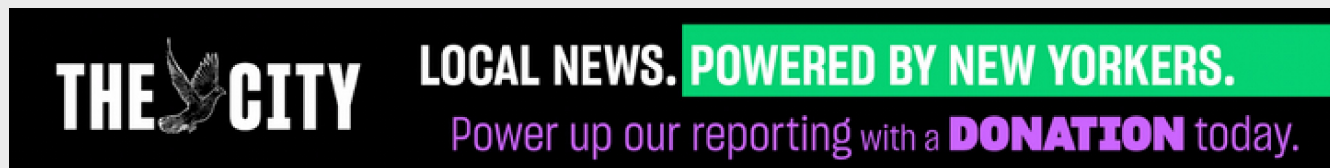
In Queens, the Asian population grew 29%, to nearly 706,000 out of 2.4 million residents — far outpacing the borough’s overall 7.8% population growth.

In Brooklyn, the number of Asian residents counted by the Census swelled to nearly 420,000, a nearly 43% increase from 2010, compared with a 9.2% hike in the borough’s population overall.

With strength in numbers, New York City’s diverse Asian communities are organizing to build political power that reflects them and their needs, as a state

“In the past, they would divide a neighborhood or a community who they felt were not politically engaged or were not visible,” said Elizabeth OuYang, who is coordinating a redistricting task force composed of 20 Asian community groups across the city. “We are going to make sure that we are very visible in this redistricting round.”

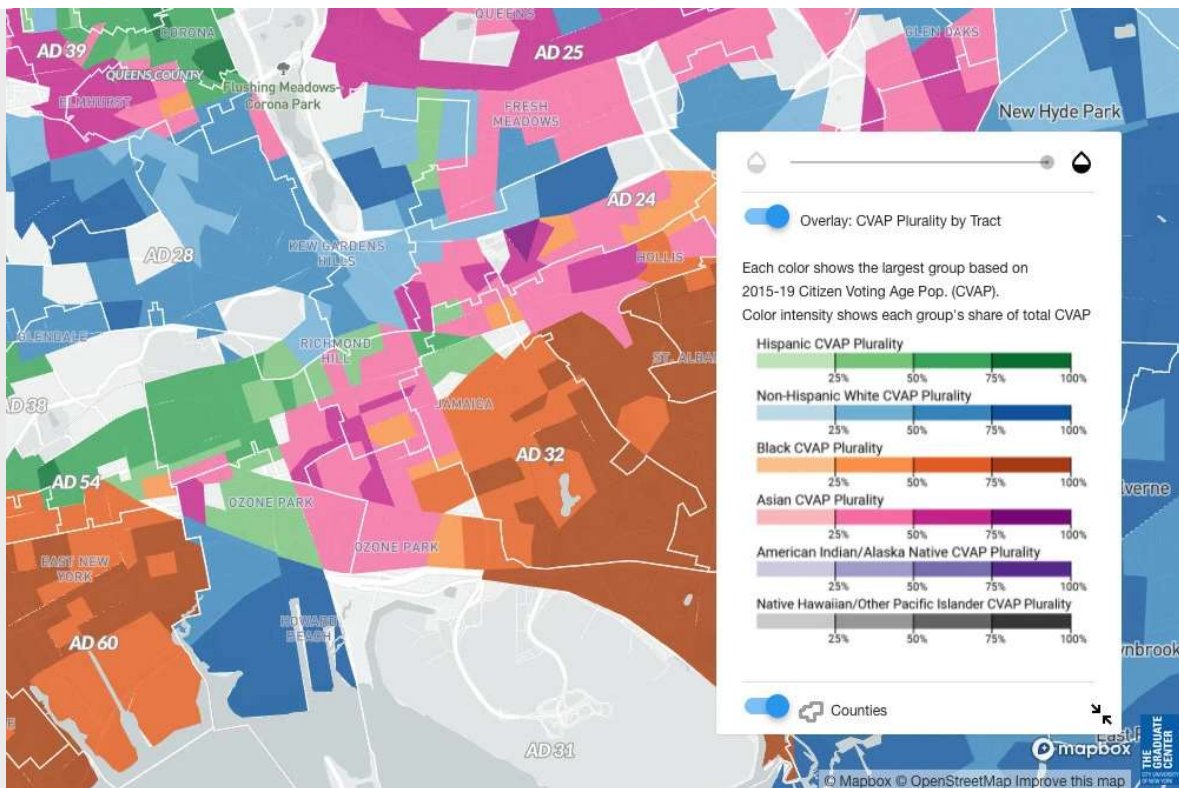
The new coalition is already at work to break down what members call artificial borders dividing communities and leaving them shortchanged on elected leadership and public services.



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Case in point: Richmond Hill and Ozone Park. These Queens neighborhoods have more Asian residents — including many of Guyanese, Trinidadian or Punjabi heritage — than Black or white ones, past population surveys have shown.

Yet these hubs of Asian life in Queens are currently sliced into seven different Assembly districts — making it difficult for the communities to coalesce around a representative focused on their priorities or receive services tailored to their language, dietary or other needs, activists say.



The Queens neighborhood of [Richmond Hill](#) (center) is split between seven Assembly districts. | Redistricting & You/CUNY Center for Urban Research (redistrictingandyou.org)

“For us, redistricting is not an academic exercise, nor simply a mathematical equation. It means power, accountability, and equal access to services that we are entitled to for the next 10 years,” OuYang said.

No Representation

Every decade, following the U.S. Census, lawmakers [redraw district lines](#) to reflect population changes, with the goal of achieving equal representation. By law, and backed by litigation, so-called communities of interest, such as racial groups, are not supposed to be divided in a way to weaken their political power.

This year, for the first time in New York, the process for seats in Congress and the state Senate and Assembly is being overseen by an independent commission.

Its 10 members are largely appointed by the party leaders of the state Legislature, and working under updated rules that explicitly require equal

Queens and Brooklyn residents packed online hearings last month to voice concerns about what they described as divisive lines thwarting their chances of electing representation.

For much of the July 22 Queens hearing's five hours, the focus was on Richmond Hill and surrounding neighborhoods. During the July 29 Brooklyn hearing, speakers pointed out that despite continued Asian population growth in southern Brooklyn neighborhoods such as Bensonhurst and Sheepshead Bay, Asian residents are outnumbered in every single Assembly and Senate district as currently drawn.

Brooklyn has no Asian representatives in the state Senate or Assembly, Congress or City Council.

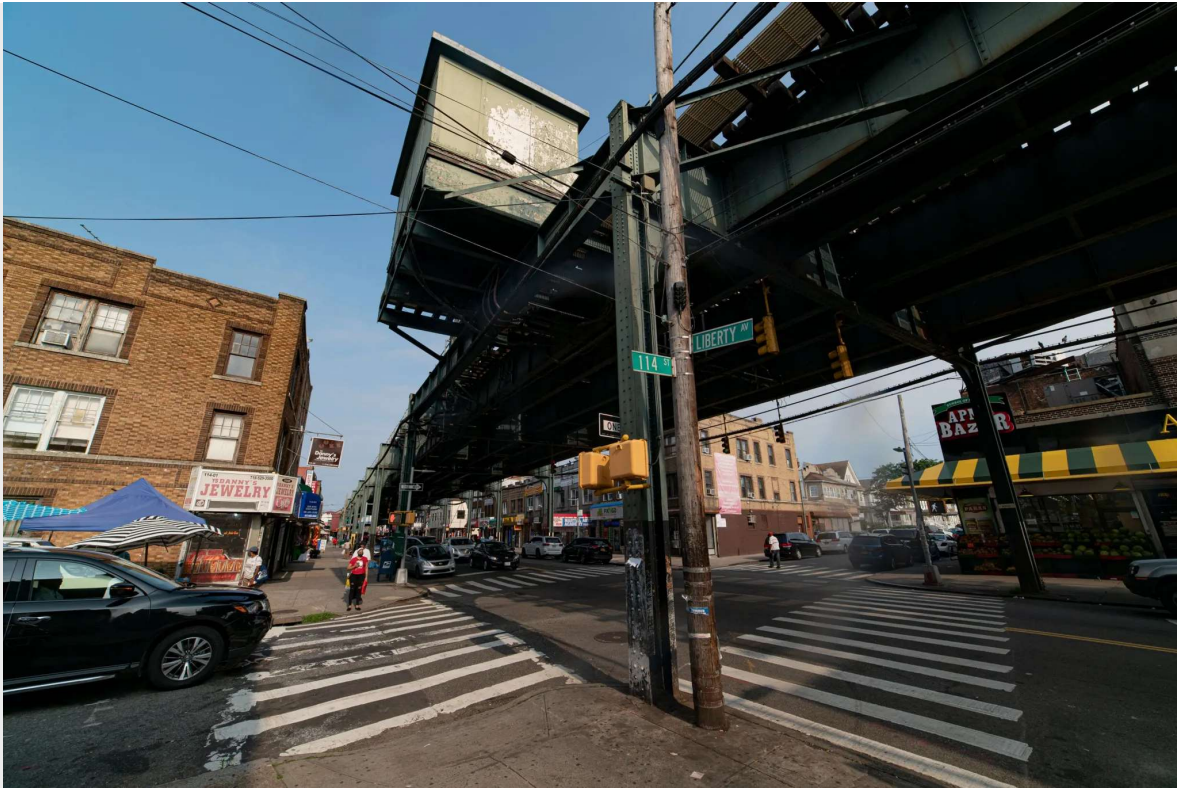
District Divided by Water

Richard David, a Guyanese-American district leader who ran for an Assembly seat last year spanning South Ozone Park and part of the Rockaways, said that area's political divisions have created dire outcomes for the community, including a lack of funding for social services.

There are no city or state-funded senior centers in Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, or South Ozone Park that primarily serve South Asians and Indo-Caribbean people, he told THE CITY. When constituents seek to reach elected officials, they either don't know whom to call or are overwhelmed by the long list of people to contact, David added.

He cited his District 31, which encompasses parts of South and Southeast Queens, along with the Rockaways, as a "textbook example of gerrymandering."

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South Ozone Park, Queens, near the convergence of three Assembly districts. | Jason Scott Jones/THE CITY

The eight neighborhoods within the district, especially those in the Rockaways, each have a very distinct cultural identity, he noted, making it challenging for one candidate to build a broad coalition of support.

“Public transportation does not connect these three parts, so in addition to a car, it would be faster to go by boat to the different parts of the district,” said David, who lives in South Ozone Park.

More than 42% of the district’s population is foreign born, nearly double the rate in New York State. Closer looks within the district’s lines more clearly illuminate significant racial disparities.

The borough’s Community District 14, which encompasses most of the Rockaway peninsula, is about 36% Black, about 34% white, and roughly 4% Asian. Community District 10, including Ozone Park and South Ozone Park, is 23.7% Asian, 21% white, and 14% Black.

In the June 2020 Democratic primary, David won the district’s northern half in

Black progressive candidate who then won the November general election. The overall Assembly district is now 45% Black and 12% Asian, the new Census numbers show.

Aminta Kilawan-Narine, founder of the South Queens Women's March, contends that the lines reflect a "blatant disregard for the natural communities of interest that exist." She contends that they also run afoul of the federal Voting Rights Act's requirement for compact and contiguous districts.

"The way in which the lines have been drawn divides and dilutes our ability to be a stronger voice," Kilawin-Narine added. "When a naturally occurring community of interest like ours is so very divided, electeds don't have the kind of vested interest in serving us — after all, we become but a fraction of their constituency."

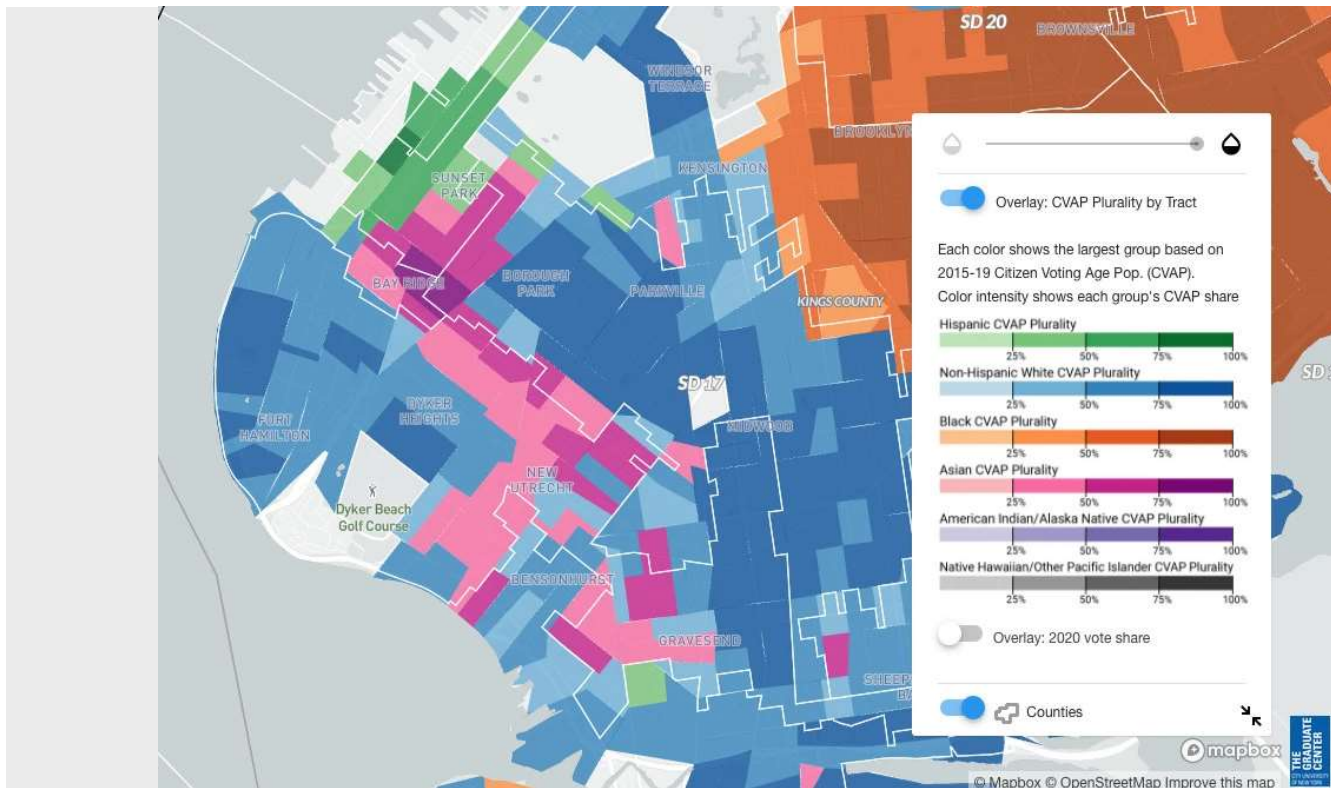
A Neighborhood Divided

Brooklyn's Sunset Park was once defined by the docks where its largely white residents worked — only to change dramatically after the region's ports mostly moved to New Jersey in 1958.

Today, in addition to a sizable Hispanic population, the area is home to a large number of Asian residents and businesses, part of a revival that is redefining commercial strips in several southern Brooklyn neighborhoods.

But walking north on the area's bustling Eighth Avenue corridor, with scores of Asian-owned businesses, a short stroll from 46th street to 39th street takes a pedestrian through three different State Senate districts.

Those districts and two others in southern Brooklyn are home to more than 220,000 Asian residents. But because the population is splintered into three districts, activists argue they can't effectively rally around a political candidate.



The Brooklyn neighborhood of [Sunset Park](#), upper left, is divided between three state Senate districts. | Redistricting & You/CUNY Center for Urban Research (redistrictingandyou.org)

The lines were drawn a decade ago by Albany Republicans with the objective of diluting downstate Democrats' power.

"It's always said that we don't vote in the right numbers, but no one ever talks about how our communities are gerrymandered that even if we all would come out to vote it would not make a difference," said Don Lee, the chairperson of Homecrest Community Services, a nonprofit that provides meals, translation services and social events for Asian American immigrants and seniors.

Homecrest was started in 1997 after its founders saw Asian seniors riding the N train daily to Chinatown in Manhattan to receive social services in a language they could understand. Today, activists say that there are still many needs that aren't being met for vulnerable Asian residents.

Many Asians in New York City were born outside of the U.S., and the need is pressing for services offered in languages other than English. As of 2018, 21.7% of Asian New Yorkers lived in poverty, according to an annual City Hall survey,

'No Rhyme or Reason'

Yet, nonprofits and civic groups say it's difficult to get the ear of elected officials to support these communities.

"The most active in Sunset Park is Senator [Zellnor] Myrie, but he definitely does spend more time in the Crown Heights neighborhood that he also represents because that is the majority of his district," said Mon Yuck Yu, vice president and chief of staff of the Academy of Medical and Public Health Services, which focuses on helping immigrant New Yorkers.

"A lot of resources go there and Sunset Park is seeing less. In terms of the other senators that represent Sunset Park, we've hardly seen any active outreach or activity or funding levels coming into the neighborhood."

Matt Baer, a spokesperson for Myrie, said that the senator's office does a "particularly good job" at representing constituents in Sunset Park — and that there is no "rhyme or reason" as to how the lines were drawn for the district.

"I couldn't find anybody to defend why Brownsville and Sunset Park are in the same district," Baer said. "I don't think any rational person could explain why the lines are drawn the way they are."

State Sen. Diane Savino (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn), whose two-borough district juts into Sunset Park, agreed that the neighborhood was overly divided in the last redistricting cycle.

"This time there should be an effort to provide more complete representation. A Senate district is always going to be difficult," said Savino. The redistricting commission, she said, "should examine whether this form of gerrymandering is fair to anyone."



Brooklyn State Senator Simcha Felder attends a meeting in Albany, March 20, 2019. | Photo Courtesy of NY Senate Media Services

Not all of its reps see the division of Sunset Park as unfair.

State Sen. Simcha Felder, whose predominantly Borough Park and Midwood district includes small slice of Sunset Park, said that “since the beginning of creation, every part of the district complains that the other part is getting more attention.”

He said he’s allotted a “disproportionate amount” of attention and resources to Sunset Park.

A decade ago, the Republicans who controlled the state Senate created his Brooklyn district with the objective of electing an Orthodox Jewish state senator to help support GOP control — a possible precedent for creating an Asian-centered district now.

Drawing New Lines

Over the past 10 years, the number of Asian residents in Brooklyn increased by

Activists see an opportunity to unite Sunset Park, Bensonhurst and Sheepshead Bay — the three Asian population centers of Brooklyn — into a Senate district that could elect an Asian senator.

Dr. Wah Lee, a lifelong Bensonhurst resident who has a private medical practice in the neighborhood, said he hopes a unified district brings more focused attention to issues like the [increase in assaults on Asian New Yorkers](#).

Lee said that he and his wife were both recently accosted — and that patients have been showing him items they’ve purchased for self-defense.

Said Lee: “If there were enough services the citizens wouldn’t have to do this on their own.”

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Covid rates soaring in South Queens

Area exceeds rest of the borough after months of high positivity

by Max Parrott, Associate Editor

Jan 7, 2021



Lines wrap around the block next to the Richmond Hill testing site prior to Thanksgiving after the neighborhood had seen high Covid spread.

FILE PHOTO BY RACHEL SHERMAN

As the city's seven-day Covid positivity jumped from 6.92 percent on Monday to 9.25 by Wednesday, South Queens has remained near the top of the city's infection rate.

Three neighborhoods in the area have surpassed the rest of the borough in Covid positivity. Richmond Hill/South Ozone Park's 11419 ZIP code had climbed to the third-highest rate of Covid in the entire city at 15.71 percent. Three surrounding ZIP codes 11420, 11416 and 11417, encompassing Ozone Park and South Ozone Park, had also ascended to be the next-highest rates in all of the borough — all with rates hovering near or above 15 percent.

After that area, Flushing and Murray Hill had the highest rate in Queens at 13.9 percent positive.

The South Queens area has continuously contained some of the highest Covid rates, ever since they started to tick up across the city in the month of October.

City data showed by the end of October that the Ozone Park-Richmond Hill area had exceedingly low rates of testing, contributing to the problem. Five neighboring ZIP codes in South Queens were among the 10 areas with the lowest rates of Covid testing in the whole city. The efforts of Councilwoman Adrienne Adams (D-Jamaica) to set up more sites in the area had met bureaucratic resistance.

Finally in mid-November, the city opened a testing site at the Lefferts Library at 103-34 Lefferts Blvd. The site is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., with molecular and antigen testing available, although the Health + Hospitals website says that rapid testing may be limited.

As the second wave spread through the area, residents have puzzled about why Covid's spread in those neighborhoods have surged ahead of the rest of the borough.

Kamini Doobay, an emergency medicine resident physician at NYU Langone Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital who lives in the area, pointed out back in October that housing in the area tends to be in small houses that often quarter between four to eight people instead of apartment buildings with lower density units.

Councilman Eric Ulrich (R-Ozone Park) has also opened up his Rockaway office at 114-12 Beach Channel Drive in Rockaway Park to create a testing site on Mondays and Tuesdays except for Jan. 18 for the rest of the month of January.

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