



# NEWS

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## **Over 1 Million New Yorkers Without Local Representation, Political Parties Taking No Action**

*Grassroots Initiative Calls for Action to Fill 13,000 Vacancies*

**New York, NY** – As New Yorkers head to the polls next week, many will find empty spaces on the ballot where party representatives should be; others will find only one candidate to choose from. And over half of all New York residents will still find themselves without local political representation.

“Democracy Takes a Nap: Party Politics in New York’s Five Boroughs,” a landmark report released today by Grassroots Initiative, takes an in-depth look at the crisis of local political party representation permeating each New York’s five boroughs. According to the report, 53 percent of political party seats remain vacant; yet, New York’s Republican and Democratic Parties show no signs of challenging politics as usual.

“Now more than ever, political parties – and the fringe groups that control them – are reshaping the American political landscape, from the judges in our nation’s highest courts to the way we define national security. Americans cannot afford to turn a blind eye to who is controlling our parties; there is too much at stake,” said Grassroots Initiative president and report author Jeff S. Merritt.

“Across New York, over a million people are being disenfranchised from the political process. If New Yorkers want to have a say in who their party is selecting for political offices, we must all wake up and take responsibility. That means Republican and Democratic party officials too,” said Merritt.

Key findings include:

- In New York City, over half of all local political party committee seats are vacant, totaling over 13,000 open seats in the Republican and Democratic county committees.
- 97% of all elected committee persons run uncontested; they need only file their paperwork to get elected.
- Over 5,000 election districts – and over 1 million citizens – in New York City are without any local party representatives.

- Both Republicans and Democrats neglect specific communities, including the Eastern region of the Bronx, Northern Queens, and Central Staten Island, among others
- A majority of New Yorkers do not feel that their party represents them and roughly one-third show interest in running for office; yet very few are aware of what local party committees do or how they can run for office.

These findings suggest that New York's political parties are failing to effectively engage and represent New York's 8 million plus residents.

"New York City is not an anomaly. Millions of Americans are not being represented at the most grassroots levels of our democracy," explains Merritt. "While democracy takes a nap, party decision-making rests in the hands of a small group of people in-the-know, who are elected with little, if any, opposition. Thankfully, there is a silver lining. People want change. People want representation. People want to fill these vacancies. With just a little action and education, we will see an awakening of local democracy."

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Grassroots Initiative is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization committed to rebuilding democracy by opening doors, breaking down barriers and establishing effective dialogue between community residents and public decision makers. Grassroots Initiative promotes resident involvement and enables decision makers to utilize public input.

Jeff S. Merritt is the president and founder of Grassroots Initiative. He is an expert citizen mobilization and empowerment, having worked with the U.S. Department of State and USAID-funded democratization programs in Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and East Timor. Mr. Merritt has also led political outreach and community-based initiatives in New York, New Jersey, Michigan and California. He has authored several publications on civic identity, over 50 analytical pieces and reports for the U.S. Department of State, and is currently preparing a chapter for an upcoming book on sustainable democracy building.

Mr. Merritt is available for questions and interviews.