LOS ANGELES GOVERNANCE REFORM PROJECT

PREPARED BY

EBONY MARKETING SYSTEMS

PRESENTED ON

OCTOBER 24, 2023

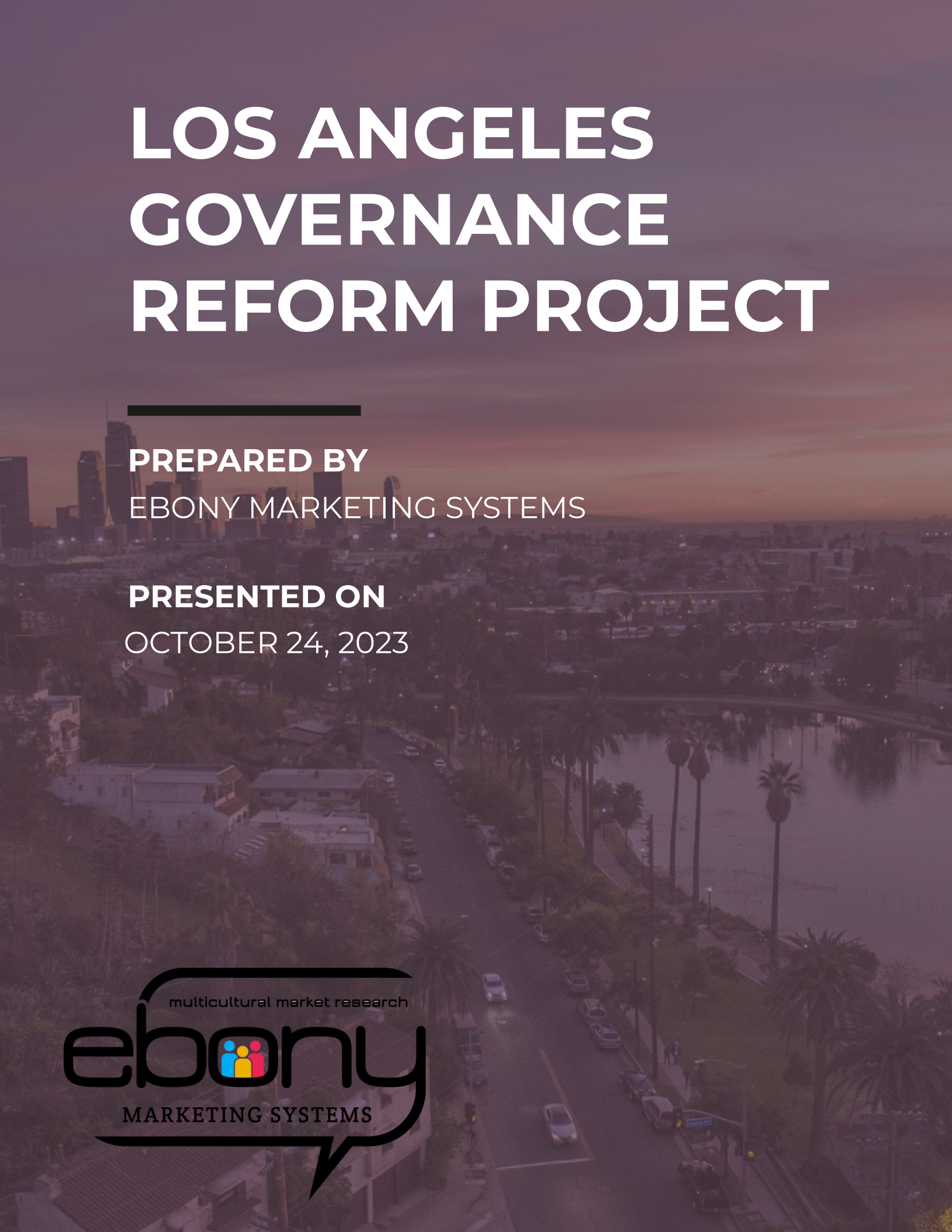


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INTRODUCTION

Background

The LA Governance Reform Project (LAGRP) was formed by researchers with expertise in government and public representation to address challenges in local governance for the City of Los Angeles. The Committee is independent, non-partisan, funded by philanthropic donations, and seeks only to assist the City of Los Angeles and its residents in reframing local institutions to improve the accountability, transparency, equity, ethical standards, and representational capacity of local government.

In pursuit of these goals, the LAGRP engaged Ebony Marketing Systems to conduct qualitative research to assess how different constituencies across the city of Los Angeles view its government and governance.

Ebony Marketing System ("EMS") is a certified minority, woman-owned marketing research and management consulting firm providing a full array of quantitative and qualitative research services.

EMS is an innovative pioneer in conducting marketing research studies among difficult to reach population segments that include multicultural and multilingual recruitment, engagement, and research. EMS has a rich and diverse staff that provides services, including special language capabilities. Over the past 12 years, EMS assembled an enviable cadre of multicultural and multilingual researchers and interviewers that enables it to take on challenging and/or time limited projects.

Key Objectives

The objectives of the current research are to:

1. Assess the current level of understanding and awareness of the local governance for the City of Los Angeles.

2. Determine how voters of different ethnic/racial backgrounds view the City of Los Angeles municipal government.

3. Understand the level of awareness and opinions of the public towards recent events involving the LA City Council.

4. Get feedback and views on representation including number of populations to district representation.

5. Collect recommendations that help inform broader civic and community engagement.

6. See how current residents view the Los Angeles Unified School District and its governing body.

Ultimately, the LAGRP hopes to use information gathered from this research to inform its recommendations to reform the government of the City of Los Angeles.

Research Notes

Qualitative Research

In reviewing this report, it is important to note that findings made during Focus Groups should be considered as directional/indicative and not definitive/significant. Any charts or tallies appearing in the report are purely guides meant to provide some idea of the prominence of beliefs within these interviews and not intended to be representative of a larger population.

While some of the groups had a high number of participants (N=10) there were some groups with a small number (N=2). We have captured their

feedback and opinions and while those groups should not be seen as representative of the larger coalition, it can provide insight for further exploration and understanding.

Quotes

We have attributed the quotes to sex and ethnicity and hidden names to preserve anonymity of the participant. Words, phrases, or sentences in italics are direct quotes, close paraphrases, or aggregated/grouped comments.

OVERALL FINDINGS

- Participants demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm and engagement in what they like about Los Angeles when asked: diversity, culture and local activities were frequently mentioned. Some participants were quite vocal about their positive sentiment towards Los Angeles.

- Group members as a whole identify with their unique neighborhoods and will reach out for help and assistance with more contained issues prevalent in their districts like graffiti and potholes. But when faced with issues related to the complexity and size of LA (and beyond) they become overwhelmed, and inertia sets in. This deters them from taking proactive steps toward change.

- Homelessness was identified as a key indicator of distress in the city, and group members did not see any appreciable elected official effort to remedy it. Participants from a few groups connected the problem with development promoted by city officials which reduced affordable housing options in the city.

- The majority of participants across the groups and ethnicities had minimal understanding and awareness of the City Council. In fact, many group members expressed literal disconnect between their personal lives and the work of the City Council. This impacted their overall willingness to consider increasing City Council membership and number of districts since the current make-up was not an integral part of residents' lives.

- Most groups commented that City Council persons did not reach out to or engage with the community unless it was election season.

- A majority of participants supported the increase in City Council members after getting additional information of how Los Angeles compares to other cities. This support was conditioned on some assumptions and conditions including term limits, cost, audits and greater transparency.

- Those who didn't agree with the increase felt that there is general dysfunction and malfeasance and that an increase in members would only make that more prevalent. For these participants, the focus should be on quality of Council members and not quantity.

- Participants welcomed having an independent committee that would draw district lines but wanted to set some constraints in the creation of the committee (election vs. assignment) and how it needs to be staffed to represent Los Angeles' diverse community. The issue of 'independence' generated discussion and caused some members to question whether actual independence is achievable.

- Ethical breaches and scandals among the LA City Council cast a long shadow on the conversation of re-districting. Each group had a participant that brought these issues to light fairly early in the discussion. And each group's participants had some level of awareness. Group members, however, were not surprised at these disclosures and considered 'corruption' as almost inevitable with the City Council.

- Many participants didn't understand or weren't aware of the benefits and reasons behind the proposed changes and needed additional information to decide or to answer why a proposed action was good or bad. This low level of awareness stems from disengagement and exhaustion from politics and government in general and in LA politics in particular across all the demographics to whom we spoke.

- All of the groups expressed dissatisfaction with their knowledge of City Council activities and accomplishments. Finding a way to centralize updates, such as an electronic dashboard per district, might facilitate communication and help residents know what these changes are and will translate to in terms of budget.

- While there was disillusionment and discouragement regarding LA governing institutions, group members stayed engaged in the focus group process and one participant stated: *"Inviting us to the table is a great start."*

Findings by Constituency Group

Hispanic/LatinX

- LatinX groups had lower number of individuals who knew their districts or council members – or conversely, a higher number of participants who admitted to their lack of awareness.

- They expressed greater trust in community involvement and grassroots movements rather than elected officials, but they do not know how to get involved at a change making level.

- They were most likely to voice concern that future council members live in districts that they represent and wanted a length of residency requirement.

- Group members reflected a higher level of awareness of the City Council involved in the recording and corruption indictments but a lower level of awareness of their individual district and council member.

- While some remained cynical, disillusioned, and jaded, the overall sentiment expressed in this constituency regarding ethics was a passive acceptance and an attitude of 'business as usual,' governments

being corrupt. This was especially true in the Spanish speaking group, with participants from countries with a history of corrupt government.

- A greater percentage of Latinx participants (88%) thought independent re-districting committee members should be elected rather than appointed.

- Spanish speakers talked about the improvements to the LAUSD needing to be more about how money is used rather than how much money they get.

AAPI

- AAPI participants had a higher percentage of participants that opposed the increase in council members, feeling that the issue is quality not quantity and that the City Council is an outdated way to govern in an area as expansive as LA.

- Participants in the AAPI community had some reservations about expanding the government and committees to include more diversity as they noted issues emerge in Los Angeles because of the increase in diversity. *"Diversity leads to confusion and finding community."*

- Moreover, the AAPI participants were concerned new district lines wouldn't be drawn fairly; partisan gerrymandering could result, and their communities would suffer.

- AAPI was the only group that raised issues about small business needs and hoping to get support from the City Council, which they have not experienced previously.

- AAPI were supportive of the Independent Committee but wanted more information on what "independent" means. One suggestion was non-

LA residents so that they don't have a vested interest in outcomes. If the city wants to move forward with this, there needs to be an awareness campaign about what "independent" means and the selection process.

- AAPI agreed there should be diversity in the council members for race and ethnicity as well as other factors. However, some participants felt that their group is often overlooked and underrepresented.

Black

- The Black community had a greater degree of hope and guarded optimism that the proposed changes would have a positive impact on their city, community and on their own lives.
- The Black groups were more likely to raise affordable housing as a significant issue plaguing Los Angeles, and discussed people being kicked out of their homes, losing homes as being a key issue in their communities.
- More participants in the Black groups, especially women, discussed issues with the public transportation system as being a significant issue for Los Angeles.
- The Black groups were the only groups where every participant felt the City Council should expand.
- The Black groups identified disconnect between the City Council members and neighborhoods, stating that the Council members did not have a presence in the neighborhoods to know what the issues are.

- The groups expressed minimal trust in City Council, what they do, how they get paid, believing corruption is an ongoing problem of people who have too much power, almost like another 'gang.'

- There was more awareness of the lack of diversity across the LAUSD and that the issue of increasing members should be looked at with the lens of better and greater representation of diversity of Los Angeles.

- Black groups talked about incurring hefty penalties if ethics are violated as another method to prevent such lapses that are in the news.

Indigenous

- Both groups talked about their frustration with the apathy of their fellow LA citizens and how many council people run unopposed. Also voiced more than other groups that the ethics breeches only help to drive that apathy.

- The Indigenous participants (4 total) did not think that there should be an increase in the number of council people – and don't think the current members do their jobs. The comparison of the ratio of LA City Council members per population to other cities indicated that having more council members and districts was not a guarantee to success as all the other cities have major problems.

- There was a lower level of trust among the Indigenous group of elected officials in general and City Council in particular.

- Indigenous participants talked about budget – and that there needed to be greater equity and fairness in money spent in different districts. Also recommended conducting neighborhood risk assessments to use as baseline to allocate funds.

- Indigenous FG participants thought diversity leads to schisms and divisiveness within communities – people congregate in their own groups and tend not to help others.

- They thought at-risk, grassroots communities should have more representation in the LAUSD (and more budget) to remove the disparities in quality of public-school education among neighborhoods.

White

- More accepting of the governing challenge that LA poses*: "I get LA—20 different cities—no one LA."* See city council as convoluted, corrupt, and non-responsive.

- White groups were more likely to accept risks of re-districting and the inequities it might bring forth. Laissez-faire perception of corruption, *"LA seems to celebrate corruption."*

- More white participants voiced that while there is a need for change, they knew it would take a long time to happen. Raised the need for council members to 'walk the neighborhoods' to understand the needs and challenges.

- Expanding the City Council could improve city government with the caveat that members required accountability, consequences, and term limits.

- The only group that added non-Angelinos to the mix of diverse independent committee members who might bring expertise in other areas like housing, education that locals might not have.

- Provided recommendations to expand the Code of Ethics – including preventing the ability to lobby for a period of time after serving as a council member.

Non-Binary

- A greater percentage of non-binary participants were active and aware of local government and organizations and attended or watched Council meetings.
- While many participants who contacted their City Council members felt disappointed when their inquiries were not answered, non-binary participants felt “disrespected.”
- Concerns about the City Council expansion on increasing the likelihood of bad actors and actions. The only group that recommended a ranked choice voting method.
- There were differences expressed between the men and women in the notion of a diverse Independent Committee. Women had more of a desire for diversity in ages of committee members.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Introduction

Pew Research Center reports that its latest measures of public trust in government have reached the lowest results since it began polling in nearly seven decades[1]. Fewer than two-in-ten Americans say they trust the government to do what is right "just about always" (1%) or "most of the time" (15%). Asian, Hispanic, and Black adults, 23%, 23% and 21% respectively, have higher level of trust than White adults (13%).

There is an overall level of exhaustion and anger of American voters towards all levels of government and all politicians. Across both parties, 63% say that all or most elected officials in local, state, and federal government ran because they wanted to make a lot of money, while about three-in-ten (29%) say *some* elected officials ran for this reason. In Los Angeles in particular, recent polls demonstrate that this fatigue is local as only 30% of LA voters had a favorable view of the City Council, while half was unfavorable.[2]

It is with this backdrop that EMS held conversations with 93 municipal Los Angeles residents throughout the city and across the political, ethnic, gender and demographic spectrum. The participants in all groups conveyed their disconnect with the city government and skepticism about planned changes discussed during the 2-hour session.

But despite the fatigue, the overall love and hope that participants have towards Los Angeles emerged during the conversations we had and energized this discussion.

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[1] Pew: Public Trust in Government Tracker: 1958-2023, September 19, 2023.
[2] California Community Poll: City of Los Angeles Toplines December 2022



Figure 1

Los Angeles

Every group had similar reasons why they love Los Angeles (*Figure 1*)[3] and the top 3 were consistent across groups:

1. Weather
2. Always Something to Do
3. Diversity

- *"I love all of the creative people in LA. I also love that it's a really big city, but there's lots of outdoorsy stuff and just greenery."* **(White Female)**

- *"I love LA. I love my city. I love everything about it. I wouldn't change it for the world."* **(Black Man)**

- *"I love the free thinking here... that we're very modern as a city, if that makes sense. We're not stuck in a time warp ... and I love the diversity of many cultures. I just feel we're very modern in our thinking."* **(Latinx Woman)**

- *"So many things. I love the fact that we're always fast paced. I do love the weather. I like when they come up with very eclectic pop ups in like restaurants and museums."* **(Black Woman)**

- *"I love the vibe, we're in downtown LA. So, kind of in the middle of everything, you can say that it's never a dull day in LA. We have a lot of good stuff happening..."* **(AAPI Man)**

[3] Full list can be found in the Participant Exercises, Chart 1 of the report.

Issues and Frustrations

There were also shared frustrations across the groups. Participants mentioned most frequently:

1. Homelessness
2. Traffic
3. Affordable housing/rent
4. Potholes/road conditions
5. Graffiti

Other issues emerged with varying levels of importance and frequency of mention.[4] When asked, most participants indicated that they did not reach out to anyone in Los Angeles government or law enforcement to address these problems. This was because they either didn't know whom to contact or how to contact them. To a larger degree, they didn't think the city government would do anything or care.

Experience with LA City Government

Raising Issues with the City

Approximately 31 participants (60% of the total group) reached out for help from a local official. For those who did so, whether through phone, email, webform or in-person meetings, their issues and queries often went unanswered or unresolved. The issues they contacted the City Council about included:

- Traffic/Speed Limits
- Quality of Roads
- Graffiti
- Garbage/Trash
- Rent Increases/Affordable Housing

[4] Full list can be found in the Participant Exercises, Chart 2 of the report.

- Homelessness
- Drug and mental health issues (often tied to Homelessness)
- Public transportation
- Landlord/Tenant issues

Only 6 people said that someone responded to their queries or concerns, and only 4 said their issues were resolved. One of those participants said it took over 5 years to settle. Most said that their issues were unaddressed, and their emails and calls were unanswered or ignored.

- *"Yeah, and that was just it was about a traffic issue. People making illegal U turns. And he wasn't answering several of us from the community... and his staff wasn't answering on social media. So, we let that go."* **(AAPI Man)**

- *"I contacted them about the homelessness and the health department came by and cleaned up our street. And so, like, for a week, everybody left. And then I mean, it comes back. And that's kind of really what the city has been doing. Like if you ask a question, or if you point out the problem. The city comes does a quick like street cleaning of it. But that doesn't ever take care of the issue because they just can easily come back."* **(Latinx Man)**

- *"I wrote an email, this was like a few years ago, to a district rep. I just couldn't tell you their name. And no response. [I was] expecting for them to respond to the email, like within a week or something, I mean, that's what they're there for to represent us. So, when there is no response, it just in the lack thereof, it just doesn't make you feel too comfortable with who's like running the city?"* **(Non-Binary)**

- *“There was a homeless developing encampment right in front of the place I was living at and when I park at night, they started to harass me, so I felt unsafe. And then I even reached out to a police officer that was circling around but they said the sidewalks cleared for people and unless they commit a crime, nothing can be done…I called the hotline about the housing issues, but nothing got resolved.”* **(AAPI Woman)**

Involvement with the Local Government

A majority of participants were not actively involved with the LA City Council. Out of the 93 people in the focus groups, 10 individuals (About 9%) attended a City Council meeting in person or live streamed. Some participants felt getting involved in city government wouldn’t be effective; instead, they got involved in more local groups and organizations to have more impact, like neighborhood watches, and HOAs.

- *"Because I know that there's nothing that they’re gonna do. Like today, I was watching the news. And they were showing all the homeless people, they said that LA is going to help them in 2026. This is 2023.”* **(Black Man)**

- *“Their career is politics, so in other words, in English they are called “career politicians.” They jump from an office, to another office, to another office. They all know each other. No, that is no way to do it. In other words, they are people who live in the politics system. As the constituents, they do not listen to us very much. Everyone has their own opinion, but you feel like you are hitting a wall because they do not hear you. They do not listen to you.”* **(Spanish Speaking, Man)**

- *"Well, I really don't care. Because I know the people don't speak to me. And don't care what I have to say. So, I just keep them moving. They know, I don't care what they think and how they think."* **(Black Men)**

Los Angeles City Council

Awareness of the City Council

While each group had a range of awareness[5] and understanding of the LA City Council and city districts, the majority of participants didn't know or were mistaken in their knowledge. This varying level of understanding resulted in some participants mentioning Congressional members and districts when probed by the Moderators. Most (N=70%) didn't know their City Council member's name or City Council district number.

- *"And when it comes to local government, there's really no clear-cut chain of command. Because I mean, I don't even know who my City Council person is. I might have heard names, the districts, there's just, you know, it's not a clear delineation, where's my district begin? Where's my district end? And a lot of the problems that I see are almost top down, rather than, like grassroots level"* **(White Man)**

- *"I think I think I'm in District 46."* **(AAPI Woman)**

- *"My City Council member is Laura Friedman" (NB: She is California State Assembly)* **(AAPI Woman)**

[5] See Participant Exercises, Chart 3.

- *“Well, my council person is Brad Sherman. And I'm in the 32nd district.” (NB: He is US Congress)* **(Black Woman)**

Overall, there is a low confidence in the current City Council members, and many voiced the belief that they are “career politicians.” Many mentioned they only see/hear from their council members when there are elections.

- *“I kind of feel like the politician you know, like the council people or whatever, you only hear about them right before reelection time. And then you get a stack of flyers in the mail of everything that they're gonna do and everything's gonna be great and not and you never hear from these people ever again. And you don't even know what their names are, and you don't even know who ended up getting elected and it just kind of seems like what's the point you know.”* **(White Woman)**

- *“I don't remember who I voted for on that picture. I know, I got a lot of mail from those people, or whoever that was that I voted for. But I never hear from them again.”* **(AAPI Man)**

- *“I don't know what district I'm in. I used to, I would say, maybe 10 years ago, really be into stuff like that. I just feel like, was so much coming out of news or newspapers about, you know, the stealing and of money or them paying themselves and buying extra houses I got really turned off. But not only that, I just feel like the only time we really hear from anybody is when there's election, then you want to overload me with stuff in the mail.”* **(Black Woman)**

Number of City Council District Members

Group members, overall, were unaware of city council and/or district distinctions. Some participants were asked how many districts or council members there are and returned a range of responses from 5 to 50. Over 15% of participants thought the current number of districts was higher than 15, unaided.

EMS used stimuli[6] created from the Meet your Government section (See Stimuli 1) in order to establish a basic level of understanding of the City Council including its representative size per population. Some participants pointed out, unaided, that the ratio was too high.

The sentiment most often expressed: ***"We are too many for so few members."*** **(Spanish Speaking, Woman)**

About 8% of participants thought the number of City Council districts and members was sufficient.[7] This judgment was based more on the lack of accomplishments and/or improvements in the districts or neighborhoods.

Expansion of City Council District Members

The last district expansion in Los Angeles was about a century ago. Using information provided by LAGRP, EMS presented district numbers per population for the 5 top US cities.[8] This chart served to support the argument that Los Angeles City Council district should shift from 15 to 25.

- *"I would like to add, it makes me feel sad for the city of Chicago, because they have 50. Council members. And the city is in such despair. And*

[6] See Stimuli 1 in Appendix.
[7] See Participant Exercises, Chart 4.
[8] See Stimuli 2 in the Appendix.

maybe I would like to bump up to Los Angeles, maybe 25. You know, add. I'm not crazy about the salary." **(Latinx Woman)**

- *"The more representation is good. It gives us more [power]...it can bring our voice. So that's the benefit."* **(AAPI Man)**

- *"Well, I just think the population number of Los Angeles alone shows why it needs to increase. I mean, I do agree with possibly Chicago with 50 for 2 million people. But you also have to understand New York's got 8.8. And they are 51. So, I think yeah, to increase it even by 10 would be good. I'd like to see the representation around 150,000."* **(Latinx Man)**

- *"It would allow people to actually get more so in touch, and I mean, on the ground in neighborhoods and speak to the people and actually see what's going on. versus you know, just a, you know, oversizing type of situation or supervising deal. But actually, get down on the ground and see and check in with the people in neighborhoods and see some of the streets and some of the issues firsthand. Versus just on paper, or effect. You know, statistics."* **(Black Man)**

Concerns Raised About the Council Expansion

While a majority of participants agreed with the increase (87%), many participants voiced concerns and questions, especially regarding the budget and how the increased number will be funded. Other participants were unsure if the additional members would make a difference or positively impact the city or City Council.

- *"I could see a positive. But again, what's the budgeting? Are we going to pay more taxes?"* **(AAPI Woman)**

- *“We cannot compare LA with New York or Chicago, they have 50 plus. Remember that each city council costs us money in those salaries. So, I don't I don't think it's a good idea to add more in they're gonna cost us more in they come out from our taxes.”* **(Latinx Man)**

- *“It's the idea that everybody has is let's throw more money at the problem. And basically, hiring more people is throwing more money at the problem. I don't think it's worth it. I think they should figure out how to do it with what they have, you know.”* **(Indigenous Woman)**

- *“But the first thing I was thinking about was money. I just wonder about the money because there's so many programs that say, oh, we can't do this and that anymore, because there's not any funds; they close this down and that down? So, I just wonder where the money's coming from...What the stats are what they have put my putting money into? I want to know they're doing their jobs.”* **(Black Woman)**

- *“More people isn’t the answer—you need people who are more productive, efficient. More council members would result in more infighting.”* **(AAPI Man)**

Constraints around Council Expansion

Participants thought that if the Council expanded, they would like to see some limits imposed and a greater level of transparency on the individual City Council members and their collective activities.

- *“I was thinking to myself to have a real superhero that they could put in there to check everybody and make sure they're doing [the right thing.] I just think, in some ways, all of the career politicians should be made to*

[have] term limits. Because I feel like council people don't have term limits. And, you know, they need to get termed out, you know, because they need to get different types of people doing these jobs. So maybe term limits is a thing." **(Indigenous Woman)**

- *"They hold office for too long. There should be a time limit that they can be in office. Two terms, one term. When the term is up... It is like everything. When you get to a certain point in time, you think you know how to do everything, and no one is going to touch me."* **(Spanish Man)**

- *"I would also want to know if there will be a change in the term-limits. So how long they could get reelected for."* **(Latinx Woman)**

- *"I want to know what are the term-limits? And because they would have to cut up new districts, you can't just make a district out of the richest part of LA, and that'd be one person's district, they've got to have a bit of diversity. So how are you going to split that up and have, you know, working class people in there with the Pacific Palisades or whatever? Because, you know, you can't just have a council person who's got the richest people in LA, as their only constituents"* **(White Man)**

- *"I would like complete transparency; I would like to see how the funding is given to every community, how was developed. I want like a risk assessment made for each community."* **(Indigenous Man)**

Independent Committee

Receptivity to the Independent Committee

Having an Independent committee to draw district lines was met with overall positive sentiment.[9] Questions arose over how the committee would work – including how it would be established, who would be on the committee, and for what (and to whom) the committee would be responsible.

- *"In an ideal world I think the Independent Commission is still in my mind, is still the ideal. We've seen an independent commissions for redistricting aren't always as independent and unbiased as you'd like, or as I'd like, but, you know, because people in power like to stay in power, typically, an independent, unbiased commission of citizens and people with more experience I think in government is the ideal ...there should be. limits. And, you know, they need to get termed out because they need to get different types of people doing these jobs. So maybe term limits is a thing."* **(AAPI Woman)**

- *"Yeah. Well, I mean, I'm in support of anything that's going to be better for the citizens. But just because you'd label something an independent Council doesn't mean it's actually going to do what we want it to do or do the job right. So actually, it has to depend on what, who is in that independent [Committee]? And what is their goal for working for that independent [Committee]. Is it 'You want money?' or 'You want to serve your friends, you want to help your community, you want to make it better, and keep the things that are good, and then make the things that are bad or better?'"* **(Latinx Man)**

[9] See Participant Exercises, Chart 5 of the report.

- *"I think that would give it a fresh set of eyes and an unbiased opinion. You know, we get independent to come in there and take a look at things and they may not be able to be swayed as easy as perhaps somebody that's already say in place like our Councilman."* **(Black Man)**

Diversity on the Independent Committee

Diversity was important when contemplating an independent committee, but what diversity meant differed among groups and genders. Some talked about diversity of race/ethnicity, some in jobs positions, and others in ages. Some welcomed diversity and others considered it divisive.

Participants mentioned the following types of people to be part of the Independent Committee:

- Social workers
- Statisticians
- Physicians
- Small business owners
- Urban planners
- "Average folks"
- Church leaders
- Housewives

Requirements for the Independent Committee

Many participants wanted to have a say in the formation of the Independent Committee, including having the ability to elect the members to serve, so that the people of LA could 'supervise the supervisors.'

- *"Are they appointed or elected? I think they should be elected."* **(Black Man)**

- *"What does independent really mean? If the [committee member] can really prove that they're not biased then I like the idea I think it's great, like if they can really see like, both sides of things and like if they're the type of person who can like bring people together and like, then I'm all for it."* **(White Woman)**

- *"Who is going to appoint these people? What power will these groups have? All of that is important before saying, "We are going to build another group of supervisors." If it is not independent, who are the ones who will choose them? Who are the ones who will pay them? "* **(Spanish Man)**

Benefits of Proposed Changes

Participants were asked and additional probes were added by the LAGRP observers to understand how, and if, they think they would benefit from the proposed changes to the districts. The earlier focus groups revealed that individuals needed help in imagining the advantages in redistricting, and EMS created a list of benefits to help move the conversation along.[10]

- *"The benefits would be getting my email answered quicker than a month, you know, because everything takes a month it seems. Just things getting done and cleaning up my area, you know, so forth. My neighborhood, you know, that would be a benefit."* **(AAPI Woman)**

- *"Yeah, and anything that we can do to bring down? Corruption, that's always a great thing. I think maybe we can bring more accountability to council members, and to diversify in all shapes and sizes. To be more*

[10] See Stimuli 3 in the Appendix

reflective of the people that they serve. I feel like it'll be beneficial to the entire city." **(Latinx Man)**

- *"[The benefit is that it can] mirror who I am. I mean, I'm Native, I want my district as well as other districts to be self-sufficient and open equity. I want people that can foster a community, people will be welcome...whether LGBT or other individuals who are trying to develop themselves. I want to mirror how I'm in my living situation and ... and not just benefit me but benefit other people.*" **(Indigenous Man)**

- *"For me personally, probably the opening of spots for more diverse candidates, and the potential reduction of corruption.*" **(Non-Binary)**

City Council Ethics

City Council Scandals and Indictments

The skepticism most participants had about the proposed expansion of the City Council, or the Independent Committee is connected to the recent scandals and indictments featuring City Council members. It was top of mind with many groups, with some recalling many of the details and others who had rough ideas.

Most participants were not surprised by the number of scandals that involved the council members. Mentions of the stories were met with feedback that these issues are shocking and concerning due to their frequency, but not because they occur.

- *"I'm gonna be honest, I could be conflating both of these stories as the same one in my mind. No, because it's like it's happened repeatedly. That's why it's confusing to me.*" **(White Woman)**

- *“I guess, probably because I'm much older than probably most of everyone is here. I've seen a lot with this city and this city council, and it's just been corrupt for a long time. And it just it needs to be overseen and even if you have to take senior citizens to oversee it ... there's got to be something done; it can't remain the same way that it is.”* **(Black Woman)**

- *“I think the most frustrating part, all the corruption that's going on. So, it makes you wonder the size of the council. That will make a difference if we increase it; will that increase the corruption as well? Do we leave our individuals accountable... I think this is my personal opinion that this is the reason why people don't vote because these are the issues that continue to evolve, and people have no trust in our government.”* **(Indigenous Man)**

City Council Code of Ethics

Most participants understood that a Code of Ethics exists, but that ‘no one is following it’ as the recent scandals demonstrate. Participants believe that the code is open to interpretation and not enforced.

- *“I'm laughing because when you asked that question, is it a strong ethic requirement? I say absolutely. It absolutely is. One they just not following.”* **(Black Woman)**

- *“It's from July of 2005. So, it's a while ago, I think it needs to be looked at every five years, 10 years, just because...as technology changes, things change. And as the needs of the citizenry change, how to affect effective governance. This is to create effective governance, yet it's too generic, or people are oblivious to it or don't really care, it means nothing to them.”* **(White Man)**

- *“Creating another committee to oversee another committee to oversee more committees just doesn't really sound logical, or practical. But I mean, based off this ethics sheet, I think from what I saw, was amended in 1979. I think a lot has changed in 50 years, or 40 years. But I guess I'm just more curious about what sort of screening I guess goes into this. Because if it's just an oath, you swear or swore, there's not really those sort of checks and balances with this, it's just kind of, we take your word for it, that you're a good person, and that you'll follow these things. And that's why it's disappointing when people are found out to be corrupt or lack morals or whatever.”* **(Non-Binary)**

Enforcement of City Council Code of Ethics

Participants shared several ways that they thought the Code of Ethics could be enforced and how oversight and accountability could prevent such malfeasance in the future.

- *“The code is pretty standard; it's just like, is it enforced? And how much oversight is there the rules are, there's your framework, but you know, anything without enforcement, like there's no teeth?”* **(White Man)**

- “*Maybe there are whistleblower rewards, where the reward to the whistleblower is greater than the payoff of staying silent. So, you have to make it worth someone's while to whistle blow. It's the whistleblower reward has to be bigger than ‘what if I'm going to lose my job because I'm blowing the whistle?’ The whistle blower rewards got to be bigger than the hush money payment.*” **(AAPI Woman)**

- *“Maybe we don't need to change that document. Maybe we need to give more power to the people who are supposed to be enforcing it. And watchdogging our council members.*” **(White Woman)**

- *“There needs to be punishment…if they were to break any of these ethics' agreements, because obviously some of these are crimes that would be handled by like police. There's also, you know, additional penalties that would go on like their record or like and inhibit them from taking up office in any capacity in LA or somewhere else.”* **(Non-Binary)**

- *“At the end of the day, I think it's tough for us sometimes as citizens to just own up to the fact that it's our responsibility. Yeah, we have to really pay attention. So that kind of brings me back to what I was saying before, if we force them to send us out what they're doing, what they're working on who they're meeting with, then we can be more on top of it. Not everybody's going to do it. But any entity that is going to be in charge of holding them accountable is also available to be corrupted. So, it is a tricky situation, if we keep trying to pass it off to some other entity, organization person. And so therefore, they can betray us as well. So, we can as citizens…I feel like that's the only answer. But if we're not going to do that, then we may want to turn it over to some other governing committee.”* **(Black Woman)**

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Background

The negative perceptions participants had about the LA City Government followed through to the Los Angeles School District.

In the groups where Moderators were able to question participants about the LAUSD, most indicated that there are significant issues with Los Angeles' school system, with inequity in levels of education deepening depending on which district the school is located.

- *"And you see there's a lack of educational development for the school systems in [some areas], versus the advanced communities and these other individuals in this neighborhood."* **(Indigenous Man)**

- *"[The LAUSD] is the second-biggest school district of the United States, and that we will have significant diversity of students and teachers in this district. Due to the same, we have— not problems—but many challenges to ascertain the education of all these students.* **(Spanish Woman)**

- *"I've heard they're kind of corrupt to you. And they're not really the students aren't really getting the best education was what I've heard, or and the schools are overcrowded, and things like that."* **(Black Woman)**

- *"[The LAUSD] is underfunded. It's mismanaged. One of the least recent things is that children aren't graduating near the rate that they used to, and the education level is low. People can't read."* **(White Man)**

When participants were asked about the number of LAUSD board members, the answers ranged from 10-50. Using stimuli[11] developed by EMS, participants were able to verify their guesses of the number of Board members – which surprised many to see only 7.

- *"I think that [7] is ridiculous. I'm appalled by this. And seven, individuals. It's no wonder charter schools are taking so much money from public school education, and private schools."* **(Indigenous Man)**

- *"It's terrible. Because Los Angeles School District is the number two district as far as largest number one is New York and we're number two. So why is that amount so small when you're talking about 1000s of children? And parents are 1000s of children?"* **(Black Woman)**

- *"I believe they have to do the same thing for schools and raise it. I believe that few supervisors or few districts... I believe that a smaller group could focus more on its own district and educate those students. Competition between schools or districts would be something that would increase—I believe—education for all students."* **(Spanish Man)**

- *"Education is very, very important. And for you to have just seven. It tells me that you're not serious."* **(Black Man)**

[11] See Stimuli 4 in the Appendix.

However, although many felt the LAUSD should be expanded, the majority of participants thought that there were greater needs than increasing the number of members of the LAUSD's oversight committee (e.g., teacher salaries, school improvements, books and supplies). This stemmed from participants concerned with budget issues.

- *"And then I'm sure the other board members, it's like, what do you what do you need five more people to talk about or decide on? You know, that's just extra salaries that are going out? I see, that could be used into the schools, you know."* **(AAPI Woman)**

- *"Again, what I thought was interesting...but I'm just curious at how much they make per year, and how much the city council people make per year...So we add 50 or 100, more, all of a sudden, we don't have a budget over here, because we got all these other folks. But if the taxpayers are paying their salary, then maybe they should have the most say."* **(Black Man)**

- *"It should go teachers, teachers, aides, you know, office staff. People that can be out on the street, making sure the kids are safe, you know, instead of giving more executives money to sit in offices, listen, discuss things and have meetings, you know, we should be giving it to the people that are interacting with the kids."* **(Indigenous Woman)**

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Screener and Recruit

LAGRP created the screener process for EMS to use in recruiting participants for the study with EMS leveraging its relationships within diverse communities across Los Angeles.

The breakdown of the initial screener pools was as follows:

- A total of 11 separate groups for men and women, by race and ethnicity with one additional group for non-binary.
- Ethnic groups represented included:
    - Black (2)
    - Indigenous (2)
    - Asian/Pacific Islander (AAPI) (2)
    - Latin/Hispanic (3)
    - White (2)
- One of the three Latin/Hispanic groups was dedicated for Spanish speakers.
- One additional group was members who self-identify non-binary persons regardless of race/ethnicity.
- All participants needed to meet the following requirements:
    - Residents of the city and county of Los Angeles
    - Resident for at least three years
    - Registered to Vote

- Not employed by a political party or elected officials.

Final Participants

The final participant count included 93 individuals. While some groups were more difficult to recruit than others, the following pool represents participants:

Participants: By Number of Years in Los Angeles

- **Number of Years in LA**
  - 4-9 years **17%**
  - 10-15 years **14%**
  - 16-20 years **13%**
  - 21 years + **56%**

Participants: By Neighborhoods Los Angeles

Los Angeles Neighborhood	District Number	Number of Participants
Atwater	**4**	**1**
Beverly Hills	**5**	**1**
Boyle Heights	**14**	**1**
Culver City	**11**	**2**
Los Angeles (Downtown)	**14**	**9**
East Los Angeles	**14**	**4**
Echo Park/Silverlake	**13**	**8**
El Segundo	**2**	**1**
El Serano	**14**	**1**
Granada Hills	**12**	**1**
Hollywood	**13**	**9**
Hollywood Hills	**3**	**1**
Jefferson Park	**8**	**1**
Koreatown	**10**	**6**
LAX	**11**	**1**
Lement Park	**10**	**1**
Lincoln Heights	**14**	**1**
Los Feliz	**13**	**1**

Mar Vista	**11**	**1**
Mid City	**10**	**1**
Mt. Washington	**1**	**1**
Northridge	**12**	**3**
Palms	**11**	**1**
Playa Del Ray	**11**	**1**
Porter Ranch	**12**	**1**
Valley	**6**	**2**
San Pedro	**15**	**1**
Santa Monica	**11**	**1**
Sherman Oaks	**4**	**3**
South Central/South	**9**	**10**
Studio City	**2**	**1**
Sunland	**7**	**2**
Toluca Lake	**2**	**1**
Torrance	**15**	**1**
Tujunga	**7**	**1**
Valley Glen	**2**	**1**
Valley Village	**2**	**1**
Venice Beach	**11**	**1**
West LA	**11**	**3**
Westwood	**5**	**4**
Woodland Hills	**3**	**1**
Total		**93**

Participants: By Districts Los Angeles

There were participants representing every Los Angeles District, with District 13, 14 and 11 having the top 3 number of participants.

District Number	Number of Participants
1	**1**
2	**5**
3	**2**
4	**4**
5	**5**
6	**2**

7	**3**
8	**1**
9	**10**
10	**8**
11	**11**
12	**5**
13	**19**
14	**16**
15	**2**

Participants: Demographics

The participants fit into the following demographics[12]:

- **Age**
  - 18-24 **3%**
  - 25-34 **19%**
  - 35-44 **24%**
  - 45-54 **29%**
  - 55-64 **17%**
  - 65 or older **8%**
- **Sex**
  - Male **47%**
  - Female **47%**
  - Non-Binary **6%**
- **Education**
  - High school/GED **8%**
  - Some college/technical school **40%**
  - Four-year degree or more **52%**
- **Political Affiliation**
  - Strong Democrat **33%**
  - Lean Democrat **19%**

[12] Information about the participants can be found in the appendix of the report.

- Independent **30%**
- Lean Republican **8%**
- Strong Republican **9%**
- Other **1%**

PARTICIPANT EXERCISES

During the Focus Groups, participants were asked to answer several questions to better understand level of awareness, interest and to provide feedback on several issues regarding the Los Angeles City Council, Independent Committee, Ethics and the LAUSD. This information helped build our understanding of perceptions, attitudes and experience regarding the study's subject matter and help illustrate the findings in this paper.

Positive Attributes of Los Angeles

Chart 1

Number of Instances	Words or Terms
17	diversity
16	weather
12	always_something_to_do
7	beach
6	food
6	culture
4	entertainment
3	sunshine
4	family
3	mountains
2	creativity
2	laid-back
2	individuality
1	healthy
1	lifestyle
1	opportunities
1	fast-paced
1	museums
1	convenience
1	community

1	outdoors
1	mountains
1	shopping
1	beaches
1	hiking
1	home
1	holistic
1	veteran-friendly
1	Hollywood

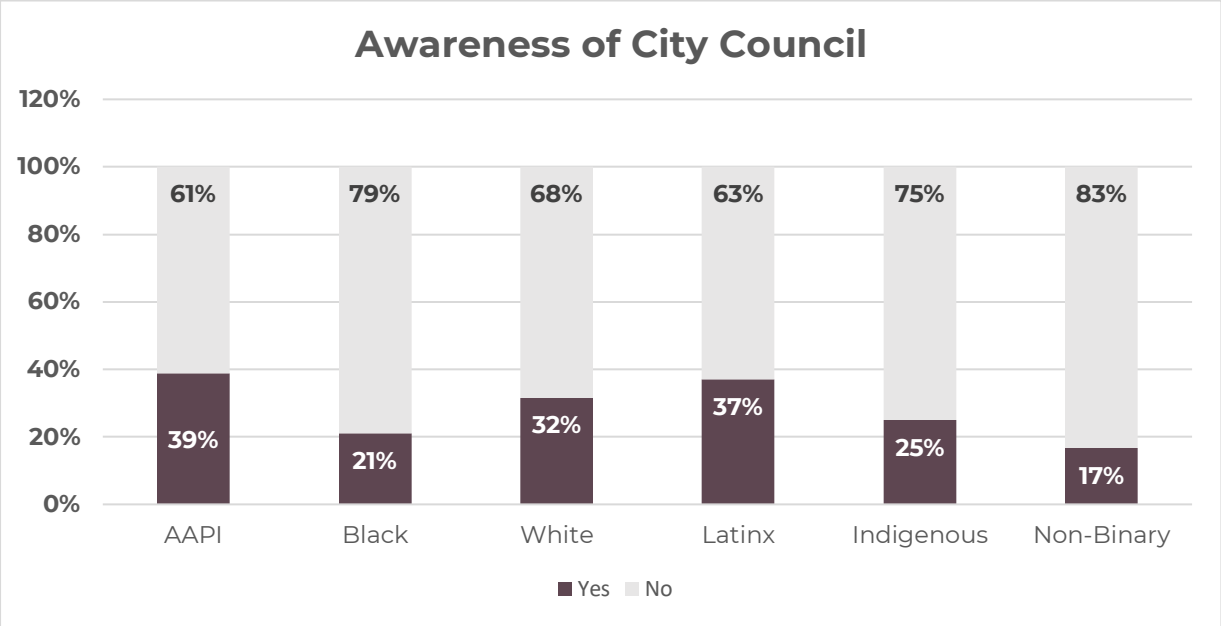
Negative Issues and Problems of Los Angeles

Chart 2

Number of Instances	Issue
10	Homelessness
9	Traffic
7	Housing/Rent
6	Potholes/Road Conditions
5	Graffiti
5	Cost of Living
4	Crime
2	Public Transportation
2	Overdevelopment
2	Pollution
2	Overcrowding
1	Racism
1	Small Businesses

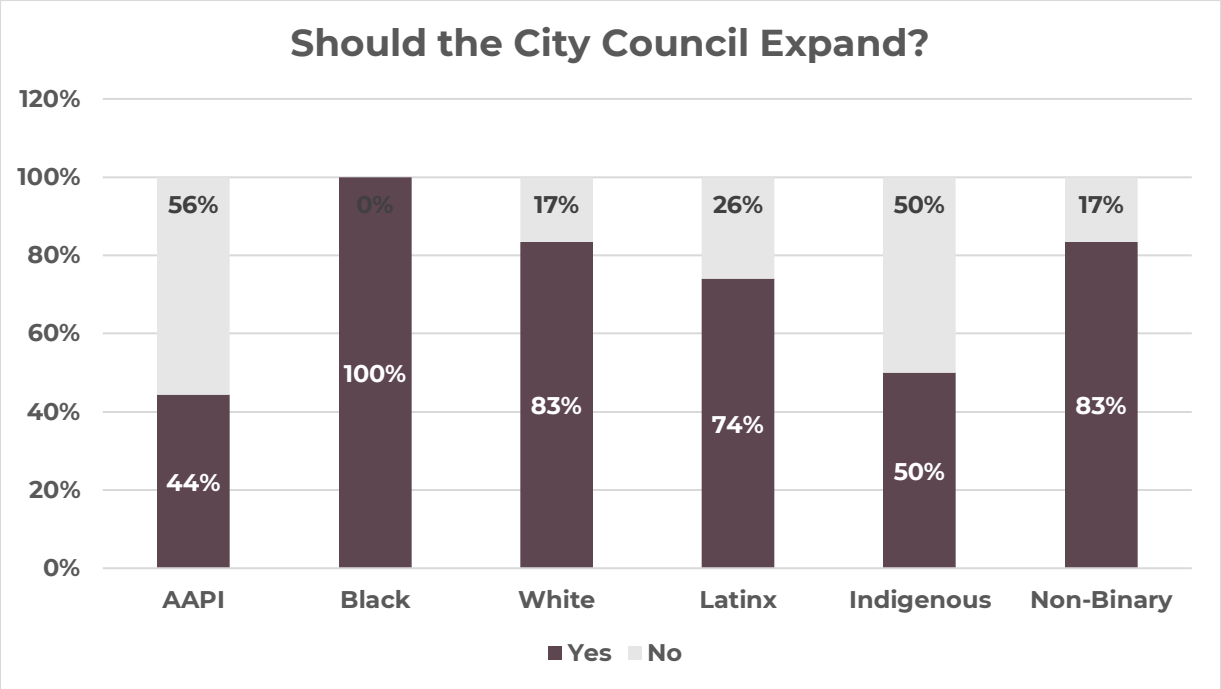
Familiarity with the City Council

Chart 3



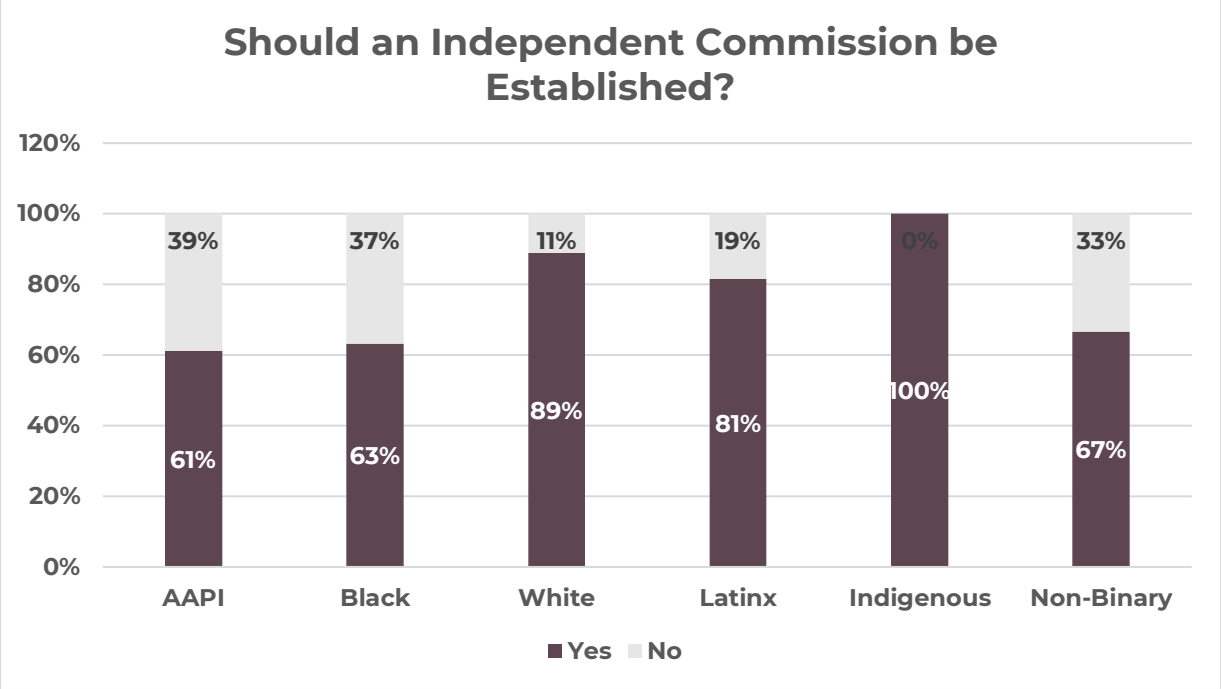
Desire to Expand the City Council

Chart 4



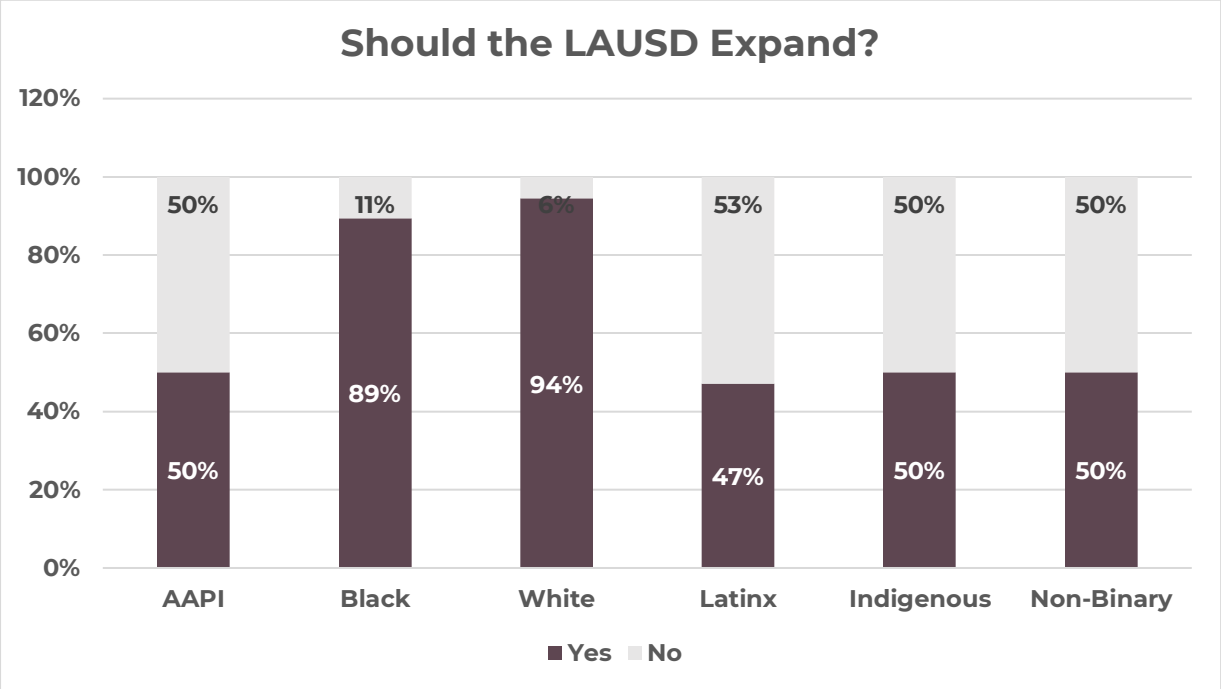
Desire for an Independent Commission

Chart 5



Desire to Expand the LAUSD

Chart 6



METHODOLOGY

EMS conducted 12 focus groups, led by 4 EMS Moderators with experience and understanding of each constituent group. The discussion guide was authored by LGRP, with input and re-framing from EMS to explore perceptions of and attitudes toward the municipal government of Los Angeles.

Interview Style

EMS and LGRP agreed that Focus Groups (FGs) would be the best research methodology based on the objectives of the study. FGs are a qualitative research method to garner information. The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' beliefs and attitudes, that are more likely to be revealed through social interaction and sharing of opinions to get varied views within the group. By having the groups split by gender and ethnicity we were able to gain broader information in a shorter period of time and assess similarities and differences amongst these demographics.

Each of the FGs was conducted via Zoom and was 2 hours in length. The interviews took place between September 5, 2023-October 4, 2023. In attendance at each session were representatives from EMS, and members of the LAGRP. Those listening had videos off with their initials in order to guarantee confidentiality and reinforce the safe and secure environment of the Zoom.

Interview Guide

EMS used the guide authored by LGRP and modified it for a Focus Group setting. EMS also created visual stimuli which included explainers and charts

to aid in the discussions. Both the guide and the stimuli were translated for the Spanish group.[13]

The agreed-upon objectives and their relative importance helped shape the guide and set the flow as follows:

- **Welcome and Ground Rules**
- **Introduction**
- **Living in Los Angeles**
    - Positives
    - Frustrations/Negatives
- **City Council Feedback**
    - Awareness of the City Council
    - Level of satisfaction with the current City Council
    - Opinions of current number of City Council members
    - Feedback on potential City Council expansion
- **City Districts**
    - Discussion on Re-districting and adding districts
    - Feedback on the Independent Redistricting Committee
    - Benefits of redistricting
- **City Council Ethics**
    - Awareness and knowledge of City Council scandals
    - Discussion of ethics rules and administration of rules
- **School Board**
    - Awareness of the LAUSD
    - Discussion of the LAUSD board
    - Feedback on potential LAUSD expansion
- **Wrap-Up & Close**
    - Follow-up questions

[13] See Discussion Guide(s) in Appendix

Although the moderator utilized the official discussion guide, depth of coverage for the information areas varied among the groups. Therefore, some specific subject areas were not covered to the same extent and with the same approach in all groups.

APPENDIX

Discussion Guide

English Version

LosAngeles_discussionguide_Ebony_e

Spanish Version

LosAngeles_discussionguide_Ebony_e

Stimuli

Stimuli 1

The City Council is the governing body of the City, except as otherwise provided in the Charter, and enacts ordinances subject to the approval or veto of the Mayor. It orders elections, levies taxes, authorizes public improvements, approves contracts, and adopts traffic regulations. The Council adopts or modifies the budget proposed by the Mayor and provides the necessary funds, equipment, and supplies for the budgetary departments. The Council confirms or rejects appointments proposed by the Mayor and prescribes duties of boards and officers not defined by Charter.

There are 15 members of the City Council who represent the City of Los Angeles. Each member is elected by the people of Los Angeles. Each City Council Member represents approximately 260,000 people based on the population of approximately 3.8 million people.

Stimuli 2

City	# of Districts/ Council Member	Population	# of People/ Council Member
Los Angeles	**15**	**3,800,000**	**253,333**
New York	**51**	**8,804,190**	**172,631**
Houston	**14**	**2,302,878**	**164,491**
Philadelphia	**11**	**1,603,797**	**145,800**
San Francisco	**11**	**808,437**	**73,494**
Chicago	**50**	**2,665,039**	**53,301**

Stimuli 3

Benefits of Redistricting

- **Opening of spots for new and more diverse types of candidates to run, compete, and perhaps win council seats in addition to effective incumbents keeping their seats.**
- **A greater number of council members and staff to serve fewer constituents per district for better coverage.**
- **Expanded representation for smaller ethnic communities.**
- **Potential reduction of corruption due to smaller districts not as much power for commerce and land development.**

Stimuli 4

LA Unified School District

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the 2nd largest public school district in the United States. During the 2016–2017 school year, LAUSD served around **734,641 students**, including 107,142 students at independent charter schools and 69,867 adult students. During the same school year, it had **26,556 teachers** and **33,635 other employees**. It is the second largest employer in Los Angeles County, after the County Government.



Geroge McKenna — Board District 1

Rocio Rivas — Board District 2

Scott Schmerelson — Board District 3

Nick Melvoin — Board District 4

Jackie Goldberg — Board District 5

Kelly Gonez — Board District 6

Tanya Ortiz Franklin — Board District 7