

[https://poststar.com/news/local/imported-votes-raise-concern-in-new-york/article\\_cdfb0e81-ce63-531f-a24a-1cd12ea4753e.html](https://poststar.com/news/local/imported-votes-raise-concern-in-new-york/article_cdfb0e81-ce63-531f-a24a-1cd12ea4753e.html)

## 'Imported' votes raise concern in New York

**VALERIE BAUMAN**

**Associated Press**

Aug 22, 2009



'Imported' votes raise concern in New York  
Hans Pennink

**VALERIE BAUMAN**  
Associated Press

**A**LBANY - Mary Woods, a real estate manager in Greenwich Village, is a Democrat in Manhattan where there are six Democratic votes for every Republican.

There, her ballot is a drop in a very blue bucket.

That was part of the 69-year-old's recent decision to switch her registration to vote in a region where Republicans have a narrow enrollment advantage.

She has a part-time home in Pine Plains, about 90 miles north of New York City.

"There's a gazillion people who vote like me in New York City," Woods said. "There's not so many up here."

These weekend and holiday upstaters may have helped seal a narrow win in March by newcomer Democrat Scott Murphy in the 20th Congressional District, a traditionally Republican and mostly rural district stretching from Dutchess County to near the Canadian border.

"Quite frankly, they're stealing my vote," said Joseph Mondello, chairman of the state Republican Committee and a Long Islander.

---

## People are also reading...

- 1 Missing Eagle Bridge woman's body found in Cherry Plain State Park**
- 2 Argyle man killed in fatal vehicle-pedestrian crash in Fort Ann**
- 3 Police: South Glens Falls man broke into home, assaulted resident**
- 4 Fort Edward man charged with predatory sexual assault against child**

---

"It appears to me that their vote counts more than someone who has to vote where they live," said Christopher Callaghan, a Republican and former Saratoga County Treasurer who ran unsuccessfully for state comptroller in 2006.

Records show at least 153 New Yorkers actively registered in both New York City and at their upstate homes voted in the 20th Congressional District's special election in March, 76 percent of whom were enrolled Democrats, according to elections records obtained by The Associated Press. Nearly 250 more in the district are actively registered upstate and down, but didn't vote in that particular election.

It's illegal to be registered in two places at once, but the state Board of Elections said it probably happens because New York City boroughs are behind on eliminating voters from the city database after they switch their registration. The votes won't be thrown out and there aren't penalties to the voter.

The board said people are legally required to vote from their primary residence, but that's not clearly defined.

"Certainly if you voted in the morning in Manhattan and then drove to your summer home and voted there the same day, that would absolutely be illegal," said Bob Brehm, a spokesman for the state Board of Elections. "If you're at your summer home and there's a local election - that's where the debate (over registration) is."

Mondello said the party is investigating. He suspects at least some of the trend comes by design - an assertion Democrats deny.

Barry Burden, a professor of political science at University of Wisconsin-Madison who focuses his research on U.S. elections, says New York may be ripe for strategic voting, because it has a partisan split between upstate and downstate voters and a high volume of city residents owning upstate homes.

"Any election system is going to encourage that kind of thing if voters learn to maximize their leverage," he said. "I'm not surprised."

After a monthlong count, Murphy won by 726 votes of more than 160,000 cast in the 20th district. It has 70,000 more enrolled Republicans than Democrats.

"It did play a role in the 20th Congressional District (race)," said June O'Neill, the executive chair of the state Democratic Committee. "And, in that instance, it obviously accrued to our advantage, but people have the legal right to choose where they want to cast that vote."

O'Neill said she first heard about the issue when Republicans started complaining about imported votes during the 20th Congressional race. But she said it's hard to track and impossible to know voter motivation.

New York's Republican party has grown more concerned about these so-called imported votes with each passing election as their influence wanes.

The effect of the exported New York City Democratic vote is magnified in rural Republican towns, like picturesque Pine Plains where Pine Plains United, a community group, has reached out to New York City voters with homes in the area, encouraging them to move their vote upstate.

That's where Woods got involved at her upstate home, pushing for a local politician who supported zoning laws. The candidate won.

"Some of those races go by 10 votes," said Mondello, the state GOP chairman. "You get 10 or 15 people to do that and you can change the outcome of an election."

Charles Napoli, chairman of the Town of Pine Plains Republican Committee, said he's aware of the increase in weekend home owners shifting their registration upstate, but that just means his party has to reach more people.

"When you're confronted with the opposition party increasing its numbers rapidly, you have to increase yours, too," he said.

Dale Peterson, 60, says he made the switch to vote upstate because he's gradually felt more connected to Columbia County, where he's owned a home in the 20th Congressional district for more than 20 years. He and his wife became increasingly interested in local issues and elections. He voted for Murphy.

He moved his registration to his upstate address in time for the general election in November.

"Certainly, as long-term property owners begin to retire and spend more and more time upstate, you get a bigger and bigger influence of people who are from the city - and I would expect that to continue," said the Democrat, who lives most of the time on Manhattan's West Side.

While he says the races upstate are "more competitive," he didn't have a strategy behind his switch.

"I'm not making the argument that you should sort of pick which district you're voting in, 'where it counts the most,'" he said. "I'm saying we identify with that district, and we want to be represented by people we agree with."

For Deborah Masters, the registration was practical and political. She and her boyfriend rented in Brooklyn, but owned property in Columbia County that they wanted to be eligible for a tax rebate. The 58-year-old artist has been spending most of her time in recent months at her upstate residence.

Concerned about the environment and agriculture industry in upstate New York, the Democrat was already considering changing her registration. The 20th Congressional race was the catalyst she needed.

"I just kind of knew it was a very Republican area when I moved here," said Masters, who voted for Murphy. "I knew my vote would count more, which was very exciting to me."