

# SHIFTING PRIORITIES:

## Participatory Budgeting in New York City is Associated with Increased Investments in Schools, Street and Traffic Improvements, and Public Housing

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In [participatory budgeting](#) (PB), community residents instead of elected officials decide how public money should be spent. City council districts in New York City have been using PB since 2011 to give ordinary people a greater voice in spending decisions—and so have many other cities in the United States and around the world. Yet little is known about whether PB has shifted public spending priorities or made public investments more equitable.

A team of researchers from the Berlin School of Economics and Law, Public Agenda and New York University are among the first to examine whether and how PB shifts spending priorities, supported by a grant from the [Democracy Fund](#). In a peer-reviewed article published in the journal [New Political Science](#), the team analyzed publicly available records on New York City council districts' capital project allocations starting in 2009, before PB was adopted, through 2018, the sixth fiscal year of PB in New York City.

### Participatory Budgeting in New York City is Associated with Increased Investments in Schools, Street & Traffic Improvements, and Public Housing

Average percentage point change in spending associated with adopting participatory budgeting in New York City council districts, by policy area, 2011-2018\*



Average changes in spending that NYC council districts experienced as they moved from non-PB to PB-budgets, taking into account possible non-PB related investment trends or possible effects of individual years where all districts might have seen certain spending shifts.

### Participatory Budgeting in New York City is Associated with Increased Investments in Schools, Street & Traffic Improvements, and Public Housing

Average dollar amount change in spending associated with adopting participatory budgeting in New York City council districts, by policy area, 2011-2018\*



Average changes in spending that NYC council districts experienced as they moved from non-PB to PB-budgets, taking into account possible non-PB related investment trends or possible effects of individual years where all districts might have seen certain spending shifts. Dollar amounts are estimated for a 5 million dollar budget. Since fiscal year 2013, all NYC council districts receive the same discretionary capital budget of 5 million dollars per year.

Key findings from the article include:

- When New York City council districts adopted PB, greater proportions of their discretionary capital budgets were allocated to schools, streets and traffic improvements, and public housing.
- Specifically, when a New York City council district adopted PB, it spent on average about \$300,000 more per year on schools, about \$250,000 more per year on public housing, and about \$100,000 more per year on street and traffic improvements.
- These shifts came at the expense of parks and recreation projects and housing preservation and development. Parks and recreation projects lost on average almost \$350,000 annually and housing preservation and development projects lost an average of about \$200,000 annually when a New York City council district adopted PB.

This research shows that spending priorities can shift when residents play a direct role in decisions over how discretionary capital funds are allocated through PB. These shifts could indicate that PB leads to more equitable spending by shifting money towards schools, public housing and streets and traffic improvements. But future research will be needed to investigate the specific types of projects that are funded in each of these policy areas and which community members—and in particular, *which* schools—are benefitting from those projects.

For more detail on these findings and the methodology, read “Shifting Priorities: Participatory Budgeting in New York City is Associated with Increased Investments in Schools, Street and Traffic Improvements, and Public Housing” by Carolin Hagelskamp, Rebecca Silliman, Erin Godfrey and David Schleifer in [New Political Science](#).