

Pathway To Power : Building Power in Black, brown, & Immigrant Communities

Chicago Elections Report



**A report by the Center for Racial and Gender Equity and
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights Action
*April 2023***

Campaign Overview

Over the past four years, Chicagoans have had to cope with the election of a vindictive and incompetent Mayor, a conservative City Council that has failed to address longstanding inequities, a once-in-a-century pandemic, continually worsening economic inequality, and ongoing over-criminalization in communities of color.

As if that wasn't enough, Chicago has also faced an influx of people seeking asylum, used by Republicans in former Confederate states as political pawns. Politicians in Chicago have also used them as a wedge to divide and sow resentment between Black and brown communities.

Unfortunately, Chicago continues to be a city run by a political machine that caters to elites and marginalizes BIPOC communities. In order to transform our city into the inclusive, multiracial democracy that it has the potential to become, there must be a shift in power in terms of who runs the city, and whom its government serves.

The **Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights Action** (*ICIRR Action*) and the **Center for Racial and Gender Equity** (*CRGE*) have been working collaboratively over the past couple of years to build bridges across Black, brown and immigrant communities throughout the state. In our respective communities, we have also been developing the social, economic, and political power needed to end the disinvestment and marginalization that have plagued our people for decades.

In 2022, ICIRR Action and CRGE formed a strategic alliance with two primary goals: 1) to pass state-level policies that uplift Black, brown, and immigrant communities; and 2) to run coordinated civic engagement programs at the municipal, county, state and federal levels to elect progressive politicians who share our values. We used the 2022 Midterms as a beta test to run a coordinated program in Bolingbrook, IL, where we helped re-elect progressive champion Dagmara Avelar to a second term as a state representative.

Campaign Overview

This year, we increased the coordination and scale of our work to run one of the largest independent civic engagement programs for the Chicago municipal elections. Our programs focused on electing ICIRR Action-supported candidates by providing technical and data support to over 60 progressive Police District Council candidates. And, for the first time ever, CRGE ran our own slate of members for City Council and Chicago’s newly created Police District Councils in the general election. For the runoff election, our focus shifted to key aldermanic races, described below, and to electing Brandon Johnson to be Chicago’s next Mayor.



2023 Mayoral, City Council and Police District Council Races

During the municipal general election, CRGE ran an unprecedented slate of members vying for aldermanic and Police District Council seats, who came through the membership ranks of our sister organization, the **Workers Center for Racial Justice (WCRJ)**. This slate included:

- **Desmon Yancy for 5th Ward Alderman** - The 5th aldermanic seat was open for the first time in 24 years due to the retirement of longtime Alderwoman Leslie Hairston. The race was one of the most crowded on the ballot, with 11 candidates competing for the seat. Yancy received 25% of the vote in the general election on February 28, securing him a spot in the head-to-head run-off election!
- **Heather Willis for 18th Ward Alderman** - WCRJ member and longtime community organizer Heather Willis ran against an eight-year incumbent, Alderman Derrick Curtis. In her first-ever race for elected office, she secured a number of high-profile endorsements from Run for Something; SEIU; the Girl, I Guess Progressive Voter Guide; the Chicago Tribune; IV-IPO; and others.
- **Anthony Bryant and Krystal Peters for Police District Councils** - Bryant and Peters ran for Chicago's newly created Police District Councils (3rd and 7th Districts, respectively), making a commitment to keeping our communities at the center of decision-making around police oversight, accountability, and policy recommendations.



Anthony Bryant Heather Willis Desmon Yancy Krystal Peters

2023 Mayoral, City Council and Police District Council Races *continued*



In advance of the runoff election, CRGE and ICIRR Action joined forces to build bridges between Black, brown and immigrant communities by working together to elect our respective members to City Council. In addition to those WCRJ members who competed in the runoff, we collaboratively supported these candidates:

- **Ana Guajardo for 10th Ward Alderman** - Guajardo won 27% of the vote in February and took on the moneyed Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) candidate, Peter Chico, during the runoff election.
- **Brandon Johnson for Mayor** - Johnson won 22% of the vote during the general election, securing him a spot in the run-off against Paul Vallas.

Campaign Highlights

Our impact in numbers

CRGE and ICIRR's collective voter engagement work included:



59K

texts sent by ICIRR
Action & CRGE to
Chicago voters



68K

doors knocked by ICIRR
Action & CRGE (12% of
overall Chicago electorate)



102K

calls made by ICIRR
Action & CRGE to
Chicago voters

CRGE ran digital ads for two aldermanic candidates (Desmon Yancy and Heather Wills), two Police District Council candidates (Anthony Bryant and Krystal Peters), and one mayoral candidate (Brandon Johnson):

192,606

PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH
CRGE DIGITAL ADS

24,145

VOTERS VISITED THE CRGE
ELECTION INFO WEBPAGE

Campaign Highlights

Canvassing is key

Ward	Turnout			Voter Turnout						ICIRR Action Universe	
	Feb.	April	Change	Brandon Johnson Feb.	Brandon Johnson April	Growth	Paul Vallas Feb.	Paul Vallas April	Growth	Voters	Doors
13	13,063	12,672	-391	789	2,268	287.45%	7151	10,404	145.49%	7,336	4,858
14	4,896	4,283	-613	464	1,748	376.72%	1093	2,535	231.93%	4793	3303
23	9,156	8,999	-157	608	2,036	334.87%	4264	6,963	163.30%	6421	4200

THE TABLE ABOVE REFLECTS THE GROWTH IN VOTES FOR JOHNSON BETWEEN THE FEBRUARY GENERAL AND APRIL RUNOFF ELECTIONS IN THE SW SIDE WARDS WHERE ICIRR ACTION FOCUSED THEIR OUTREACH.

THESE WARDS WERE WRITTEN OFF AS LIKELY PAUL VALLAS STRONGHOLDS, AND WERE CONSIDERED TO BE AREAS THAT WOULD HELP DRIVE UP HIS MARGINS. THOSE IDEAS WERE DISRUPTED AS OUR TARGETED OUTREACH IN THESE WARDS TRIPLED SUPPORT FOR JOHNSON.

THE CHART ALSO INCLUDES THE TOTAL NUMBER OF VOTERS THAT WE SET OUT TO REACH (OUR UNIVERSE) AND THE NUMBER OF VOTERS WHO SAID THEY PLANNED TO VOTE FOR JOHNSON (JOHNSON IDS) THAT WERE CAPTURED DURING CANVASSING AS OF 7PM ON ELECTION NIGHT. AND CAN POSSIBLY CHANGE AS MAIL BALLOTS ARE STILL GETTING COUNTED).

Key Victories in Chicago

CRGE and ICIRR Action’s partnership resulted in a robust field and digital campaign that secured progressive municipal seats and shifted Chicago’s political power toward creating a city that is fair, equitable, and inclusive of all people.

Our targeted field campaign helped secure the following victories:



Desmon Yancy won his runoff election for Alderman of Chicago’s 5th Ward, winning 51.8% of the vote in his race against an establishment opponent from Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s administration.



Anthony Bryant won his race for 3rd District Police Council member, ensuring that the priorities of WCRJ and ICIRR Action members will be represented in this newly created position.



In spite of being outspent by nearly two-to-one, Brandon Johnson emerged as the people’s candidate for Mayor, inspiring widespread grassroots action on his behalf. He won the runoff election against the conservative Paul Vallas with over 51.4% of the vote on election night.

Key Victories in Chicago

In all of the wards where CRGE mobilized, Brandon Johnson won at least 75% of the vote. CRGE was successful in converting voters who had selected Lori Lightfoot in the general election into voters for Brandon Johnson by the time of the runoffs.

ICIRR Action's goal in the 13th, 14th, and 23rd wards was to identify predominantly Latine voters who supported Congressman Jesus "Chuy" Garcia in the general election and ensure that they voted for Brandon Johnson in the runoffs. In areas that were expected to be strongholds for Vallas, ICIRR Action was able to triple support for Johnson between the general election and the runoff.

With vivid memories of the havoc that Paul Vallas wrought upon the Chicago Public Schools during his tenure as CEO of the school system, voters of color again rejected his candidacy, carrying Brandon Johnson to victory.



Takeaways and Lessons Learned

Stay true to our values - the path to victory was not certain for any of the candidates we supported, and many residents doubted the viability of candidates with limited name recognition and machine support. However, we knew that the key candidates we endorsed were committed to racial justice and equity, and that securing their seats would get us closer to the ideal of a city that is fair and equitable, where everyone belongs. We will continue to throw our support behind candidates whose values align with ours, strategically plan for victory, and lean into our hopes rather than fears.

Some neighborhoods are harder to walk in than others - neighborhoods in Black and brown communities sometimes present challenges for canvassers because of inaccessible apartment buildings and a higher prevalence of violence, rooted in the overcriminalization, economic inequality, and structural racism that pervades Chicago's systems and institutions at every level.

The majority of 5th Ward residents live in high-rise buildings where entry wasn't possible, and our canvassers were exposed to numerous shootings while working. We learned to be creative, reaching as many voters as possible by sending canvassers out in groups, with morning shifts instead of evening, for improved safety; doing literature drops, leaving information about voting and candidates for voters in the form of fliers, door hangers, and other printed materials; increasing our use of text messaging and phone calls; and expanding upon the traditional "three-knock rule" of canvassing. Since so many people weren't reachable in their large buildings, we knocked accessible doors as many times as needed to reach voters who lived there.

Takeaways and Lessons Learned

Voters in any neighborhood can be swayed, if we put in the effort -

Brandon Johnson's historic victory required many organizations to take on specific work to turn out their community members. By taking on wards on the southwest side that were expected to be Vallas strongholds, ICIRR Action was able to "stop the bleeding" and triple Johnson's support between the general and the runoff elections.

Progressive campaigns and candidates might not always look at wards like the 13th, 14th, and 23rd for their support, but it is necessary to build momentum, show movement power, and stop racist, white supremacist candidates from completely fortressing entire geographic areas. Support for movement candidates can be found anywhere, and the necessary, hard work of finding every voter is needed to win a narrow election.

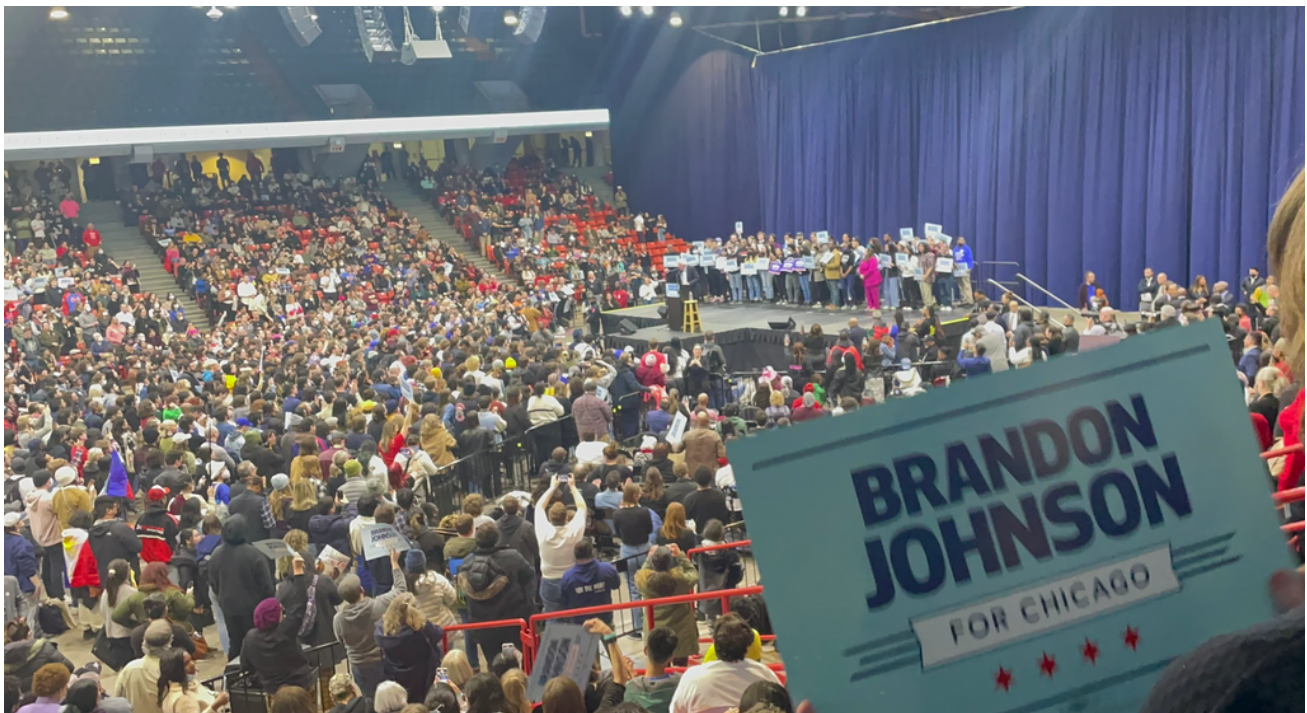
Team work makes the dream work - CRGE and ICIRR Action's partnership has helped to build solidarity between communities that political forces are actively trying to divide. It is an example of the kind of multiracial collaboration that we believe is the best path forward to an inclusive democracy in Chicago and beyond. By centering our values and finding alignment across communities who share many of the same challenges and priorities - as well as a wide variety of community assets and networks - we can advance progressive values and move towards our shared vision of collective liberation.

What's Ahead?

CRGE and ICIRR Action have achieved a proof of concept with the wins described above, and will continue to grow our partnership, build strong relationships across our membership bases, and bring home victories that benefit all marginalized Chicagoans.

Next up, we will build our multicultural movement and leverage our electoral wins to advocate for our Equitable Public Safety Reinvestment Proposal, which proposes a decrease in police spending in favor of resources and services that address the root causes of community violence.

[Learn more about our proposal at center4racialjustice.org/reinvest.](https://center4racialjustice.org/reinvest)



ICIRR
ACTION



Center for
Racial and Gender
EQUITY