



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

Resolution 189-A 2024 (Ung)

Resolution calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the voters to approve, an amendment to the New York State Constitution to move New York City elections to even-numbered years

December 4, 2024

Citizens Union strongly supports Resolution 189-A, which calls the State Legislature to approve legislation moving New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years.

Aligning our city's elections with federal and statewide elections is the best way to combat the worsening rates of voter participation in our municipal elections. It would dramatically boost voter turnout, reduce racial and age-based gaps in participation, and save the City tens of millions of dollars each election cycle. It would also reduce voter fatigue and reflect the wishes of New Yorkers, who strongly support this policy. Continuing the use of the off-cycle election calendar poses a real challenge to the democratic legitimacy of our local government in the long term. Given the decades-long persistent trend in declining participation, mayoral elections could soon fall below 20% voter turnout.

State lawmakers have taken steps to achieve this goal by requiring that nearly all local county and town elections across New York be held on even years.¹ New York City should follow suit. Our local election calendar dates back to 1894 and no longer meets the needs of current-day voters.

Relevant legislation has already been introduced. If passed by the Legislature and approved by voters, New York City's elections would be held in presidential election years, with the earliest election occurring in 2032.² Incumbents would finish their terms, and nearly all officials will be term-limited by then.

Approving Resolution 189-A would send a clear message to Albany lawmakers that New York City prioritizes an inclusive local democracy that encourages New Yorkers to vote, rather than one that discourages participation.

The following memorandum summarizes the benefits of this policy, and addresses issues specific to New York City.³ It covers the following topics:

- Impact on voter turnout and the experience of other cities that switched to even years
- Increasing engagement among young people
- Reducing racial and ethnic gaps in voter participation
- Saving money and assisting election administration
- Reflecting voters' preferences
- Elevating local issues
- Down-ballot drop-off
- Using Ranked Choice Voting in even-year elections

¹ Chapter 741 of 2023

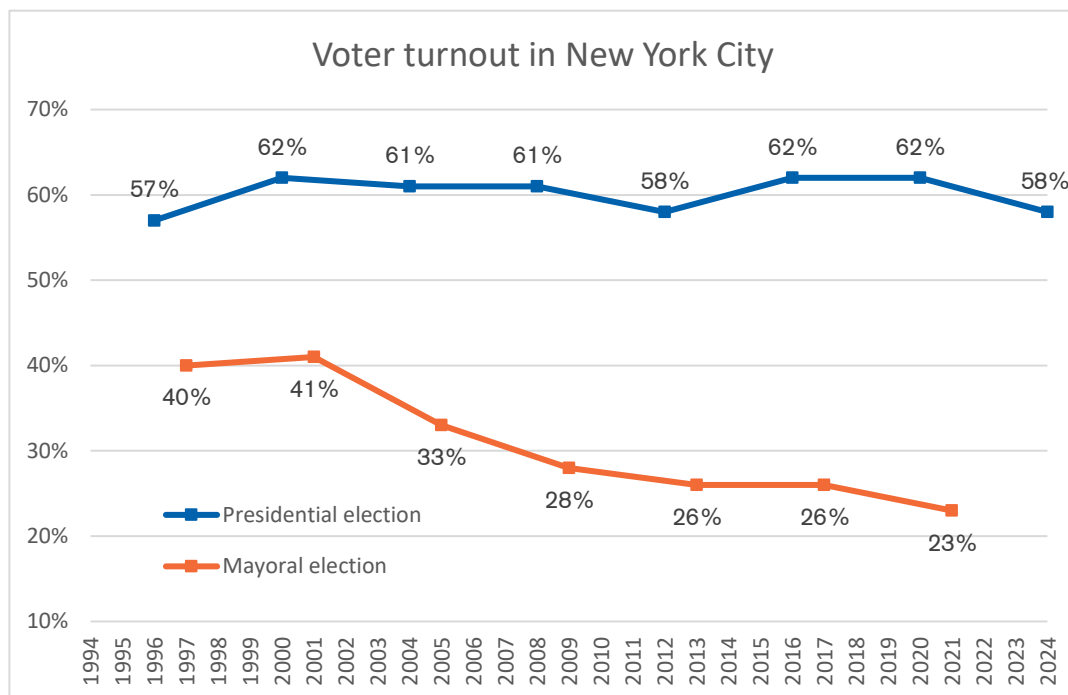
² S9126 (Skoufis)/A10466 (Walker), 2024

³ For more information, see: Citizens Union 2022 report, [Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years](#).

INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT

All academic studies on the topic of election timing have found that off-cycle elections significantly depress voter turnout.⁴ When local elections are not held on the first Tuesday in November alongside national races, information is less available, resources for voter engagement are lower, and the majority of voters stay home. However, when elections are held during high-profile national races, voters are much more engaged. These so-called “on-cycle” elections roughly double local voter turnout and have been found to be more effective at increasing turnout than any other reform.

New York City is no different. Turnout in odd-year municipal general elections has consistently declined over the last two decades, regardless of the competitiveness of the mayoral race, whether it's an open seat, or how many candidates are running. In comparison, turnout in even-year presidential elections has remained steady for about three decades, hovering around 60%. This means that for every person who votes for mayor, nearly three people vote for president. Even the most recent dip in turnout during the 2024 presidential election was still 2.5 times higher than that of the 2021 mayoral election. That's over 1.6 million New Yorkers who came out to vote for president in 2024 but stayed home in the 2021 mayoral election.⁵



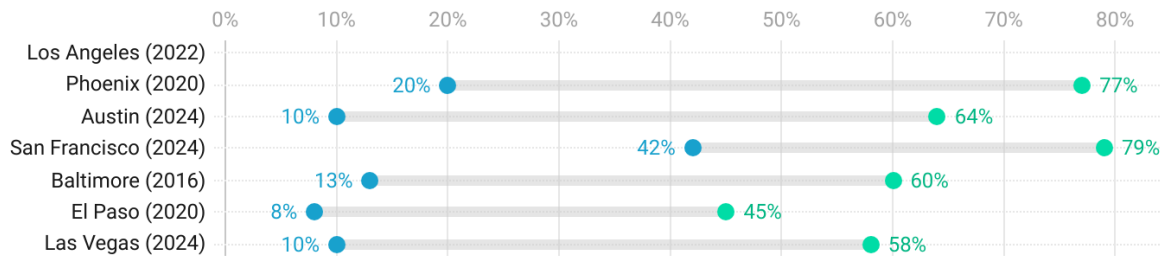
⁴ A partial list: Hajnal, Zoltan L., Vladimir Kogan, and G. Agustin Markarian. 2022. "Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition." *American Political Science Review* 116: 374-83. Marschall, Melissa, and John Lappie. 2018. "Turnout in Local Elections: Is Timing Really Everything?". *Election Law Journal* 17. De Benedictis-Kessner, Justin, and Christopher Warshaw. 2024. "The Electoral and Policy Effects of Election Timing in City and County Governments." Kogan, Vladimir, Stéphane Lavertu, and Zachary Peskowitz. 2018. "Election Timing, Electorate Composition, and Policy Outcomes: Evidence from School Districts." *American Journal of Political Science* 62: 637-51. Caren, Neal. 2007. "Big City, Big Turnout? Electoral Participation in American Cities." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29: 31-46.

⁵ NYC Turnout numbers are based on election results and enrollment numbers published by the NYC Board of Elections

Close to 100 jurisdictions and several states have successfully moved their local elections to even years over the past decade to combat low turnout rates. Every jurisdiction that has shifted its local election calendar has experienced significant increases in turnout. Some of the nation’s largest cities have made the switch and have seen turnout double, triple, or even quadruple immediately after.

The impact of moving city elections to even-numbered years on voter turnout

Voter turnout rates in mayoral elections before and after switching from odd-numbered years to even-numbered years. First election post change in parentheses.

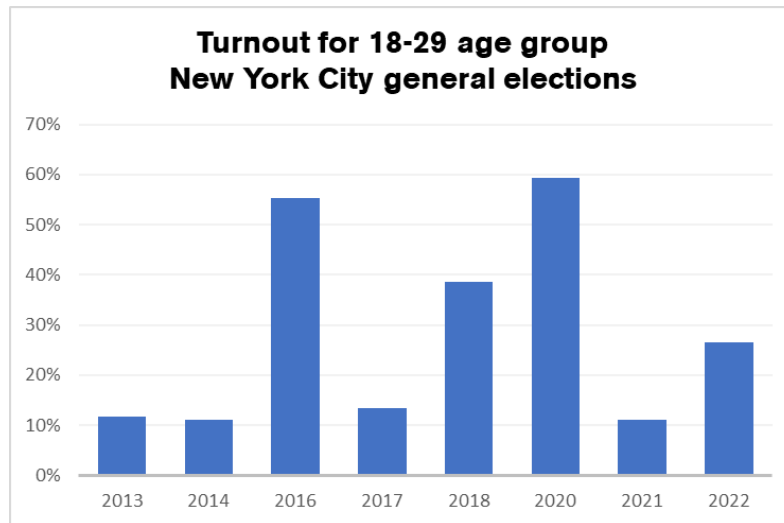


Note: Austin first moved to a midterm election cycle in 2014 and then to a presidential cycle in 2024

Chart: Citizens Union • Source: Election results data by local election officials • Created with Datawrapper

INCREASING ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Young voters in New York City are far better represented in even-year elections than in odd-year local elections. In the last two open mayoral elections, turnout among 18- to 29-year-olds was around 11%, compared to average turnouts of 57% and 33% during presidential and gubernatorial elections, respectively.⁶



⁶ Based on data retrieved from the New York City Campaign Finance Board Voter Analysis Reports. Age-based data about the 2024 election will be available in 2025

As studies have repeatedly shown, our city’s odd-year electorate is significantly older than the actual makeup of the city’s voting-age population. When cities switch to on-cycle elections, the turnout rate for younger voters nearly doubles, while the share of older adult voters drops by up to 22 percentage points.⁷

Moving the city’s elections to even years presents a rare opportunity to capitalize on the energy seen in federal election years, bringing more young people into local civic life and giving them a stronger voice in how the city is run.

REDUCING RACIAL AND ETHNIC GAPS IN PARTICIPATION

The low-turnout problem of odd-year elections is exacerbated by the uneven nature of that turnout. The electorate that votes in our city elections does not reflect the overall demographic makeup of New York City and tends to skew whiter than that of even-year elections. A recent study by The Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School found that New York State’s odd-year elections result in severe racial disparities in participation and disproportionately depress minority turnout in counties throughout the state.⁸

A similar study of New York City elections, presented to this Committee, found a comparable trend: Although voters of every race turn out at significantly higher rates in presidential years compared to midterm and odd-year elections, the increase in turnout is especially dramatic for minority voters in odd-year elections.⁹ Furthermore, a separate comparison of odd- and even-year elections conducted by Citizens Union found that the sharpest turnout gains occurred in minority-majority assembly districts, with Latino-majority districts seeing increases of up to 250%.¹⁰

To illustrate the differences in voter turnout gains across New York City communities, the maps on the following page present voter turnout rates broken down by assembly districts in recent elections for mayor (2017, 2021), governor (2018, 2022), and president (2020, 2024).

⁷ Hajnal, Z., Kogan, V., & Markarian, G. 2022. “Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition”. *American Political Science Review*, 116(1), 374-383

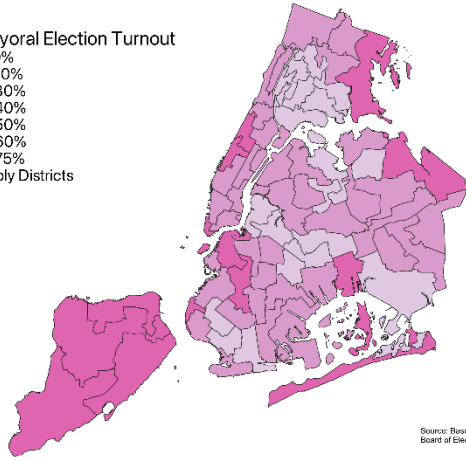
⁸ December 11, 2023 letter from voting rights groups to Governor Kathy Hochul regarding Support for the Election Alignment Bill (A4282B/S3505B) <https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023.12.11-Letter-to-Gov.-Hochul-in-Support-of-A.4282B-S.3505B-Civil-and-Voting-Rights-Organizations.pdf>

⁹ December 3, 2024 written testimony submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60a559b59cfc63389f67f892/t/674f8d5c29915c7b8d59c005/1733266780394/Letter+to+NYC+Council+re+NY+Election+Alignment+vF.pdf>

¹⁰ Analysis in Citizens Union even year election report, page 38-42.

2017 Mayoral Election Turnout

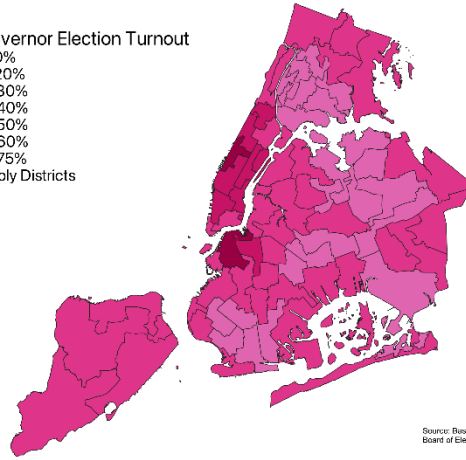
- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- Assembly Districts



Source: Based on New York City Board of Elections data

2018 Governor Election Turnout

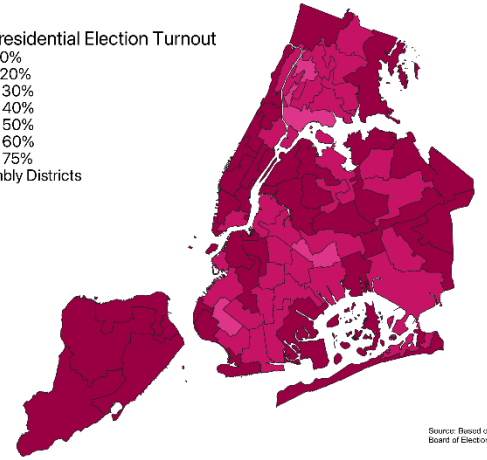
- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- Assembly Districts



Source: Based on New York City Board of Elections data

2020 Presidential Election Turnout

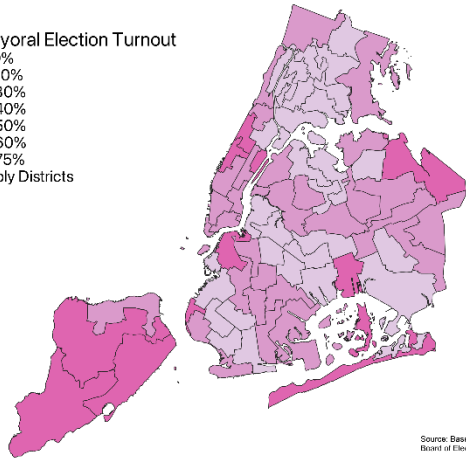
- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- Assembly Districts



Source: Based on New York City Board of Elections data

2021 Mayoral Election Turnout

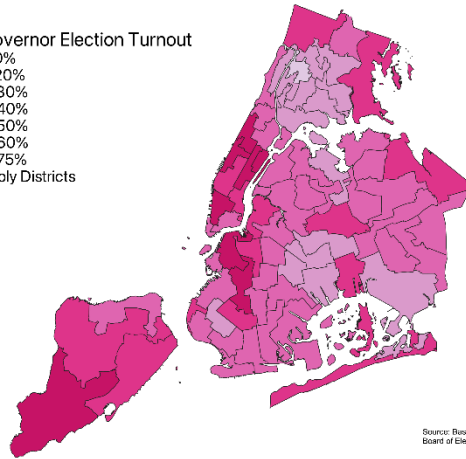
- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- Assembly Districts



Source: Based on New York City Board of Elections data

2022 Governor Election Turnout

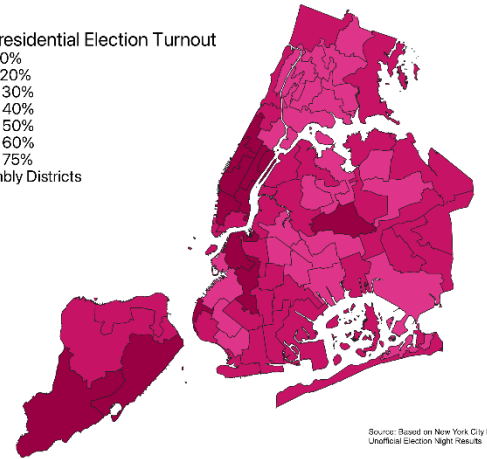
- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- Assembly Districts



Source: Based on New York City Board of Elections data

2024 Presidential Election Turnout

- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- Assembly Districts



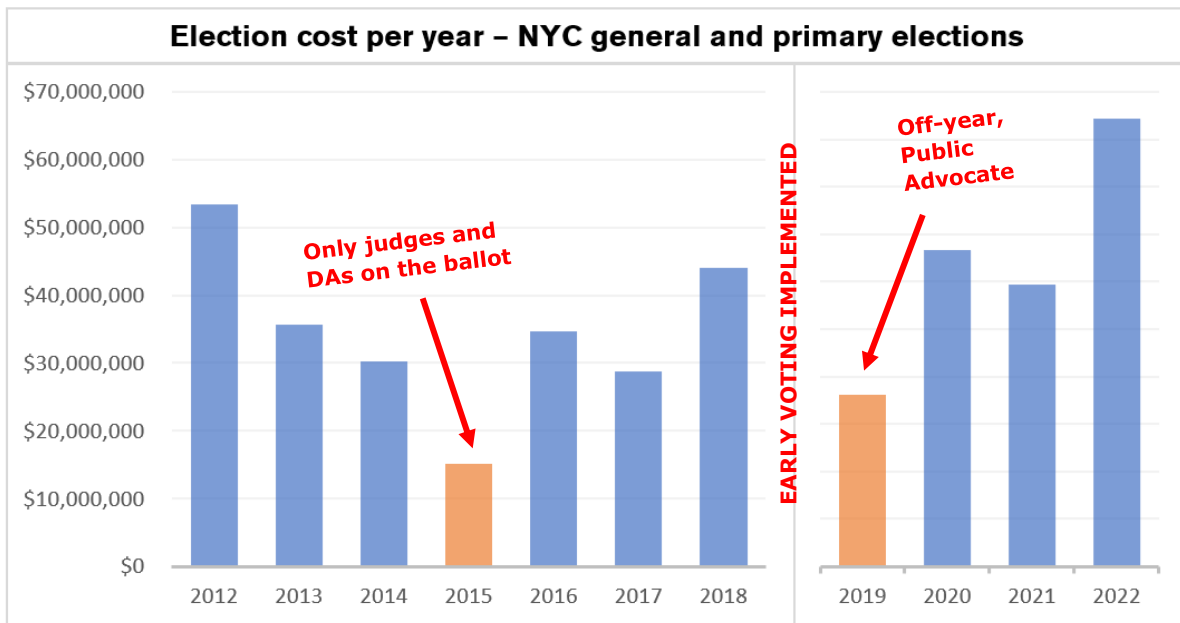
Source: Based on New York City Board of Elections Unofficial Election Night Results

SAVING MONEY AND ASSISTING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The money to run New York City’s elections comes from the municipal budget. According to the New York City Board of Elections, administering the 2021 general election cost New York City taxpayers about \$60 million. By 2023, election costs had increased to \$96 million.

If the constitutional amendment introduced in the Legislature passes, no elections would be held during odd-numbered years. Consolidating these contests into even years would not significantly increase costs for those years, as the infrastructure for conducting elections would already be in place and paid for. New expenses, such as increased printing of ballots and promotional materials, would be relatively minor.

A recent analysis by the Independent Budget Office (IBO) found that holding on-cycle local elections could result in fiscal year savings of approximately \$42 million every other year.¹¹ Given that election costs have risen significantly since the introduction of early voting and other reforms, actual savings could be even higher.

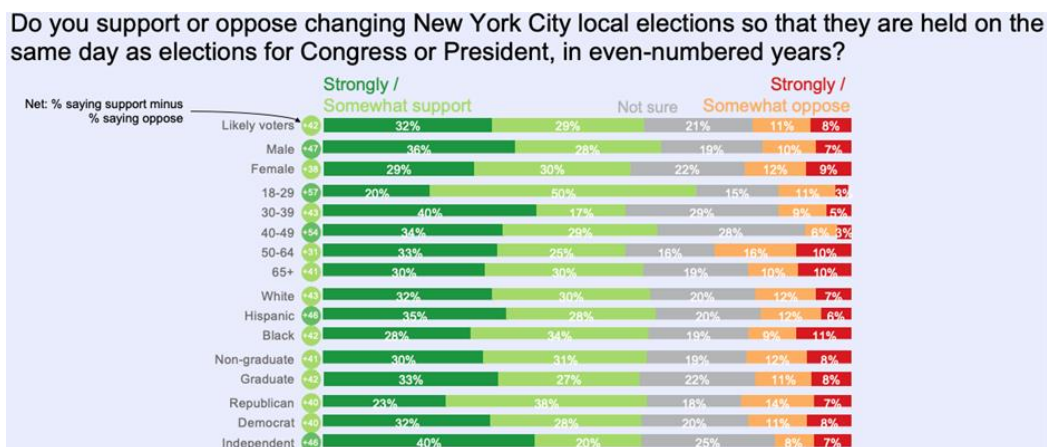


Having a year off between election cycles would allow election officials to recuperate and adequately prepare for the next election. The New York City Board of Elections, tasked with running multiple elections each year, could see significant long-term benefits. Additionally, the gradual implementation process, spanning several years, provides ample time for election officials, lawmakers, and the public to prepare for the new election calendar.

¹¹ “Fiscal Impact of Shifting Local Elections to Even-Numbered Years.” City of New York Independent Budget Office, 15 August, 2024, <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/fiscal-impact-of-even-year-elections-august-2024.pdf>

REFLECTING VOTERS' PREFERENCES

Consolidating elections is a popular policy with voters across political, demographic, and geographic groups. This reform appeals to voters because it reduces “voter fatigue” and gives people a break from campaign ads, mailers, learning about candidates, and finding time to go to the polls. An April 2024 survey of New York City voters found strong support for moving NYC’s elections, with nearly three-to-one approval rates regardless of age, race and ethnicity, education, or party affiliation.¹² The highest net support was among young voters, with 70% in favor and only 14% opposed. A Siena College poll conducted in June 2023 found that statewide, New Yorkers support this policy by a margin of two to one, with the highest support coming from NYC voters.¹³ In a divided political climate, it is rare to find reforms with such broad bipartisan support.



ELEVATING LOCAL ISSUES

Aligning municipal elections with the high-information environments of presidential and gubernatorial election cycles—when more voters pay attention to electoral politics—elevates the importance of local issues within the electorate. Over time, this would create a larger, more informed voter base for issues related to city government.

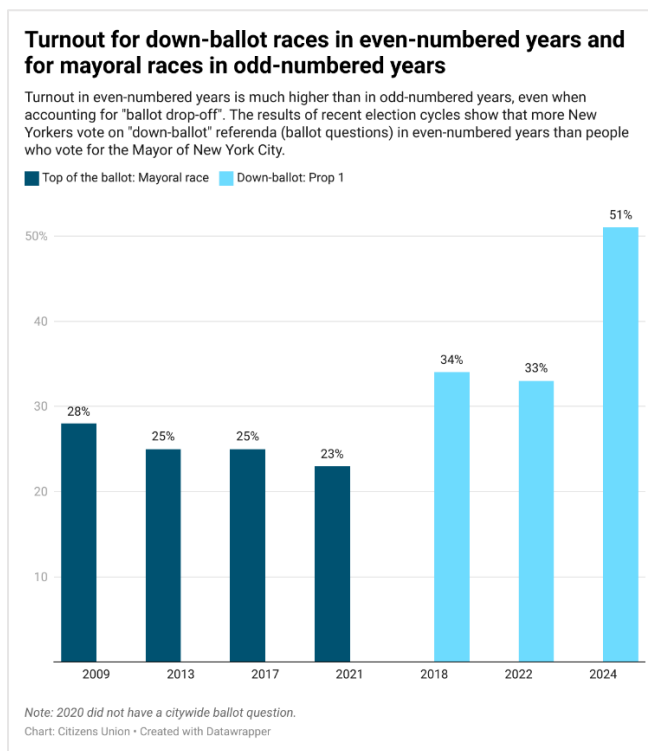
ELECTION GAINS REMAIN EVEN WHEN CONSIDERING BALLOT DROP-OFF

A common concern about consolidating elections is that as ballots become longer, fewer voters complete the entire ballot, leaving down-ballot contests blank. This is known as ballot drop-off or roll-off. However, evidence from cities that have consolidated elections and from New York City demonstrates that the overall vote gains from moving elections on-cycle far exceed the votes lost to ballot drop-off. In other words, significantly more voters cast ballots for contests at the bottom of a presidential election ballot than voters who participate at all in off-cycle elections.

¹² Polling NYC Survey Analysis of 2025 Likely Mayoral Voters on Politics, Crime, Migrants, and Electoral Reform. *Manhattan Institute*, Jesse Arm, 18 April 2024, <https://manhattan.institute/article/polling-nyc-survey-analysis-of-2025-likely-mayoral-voters>

¹³ NYers Oppose Using SUNY Dorms to Temporarily House New Migrants to New York, 54-33%. *Siena College Research Institute*, 28 June 2023, <https://scri.siena.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SNY-June-2023-Poll-Release-FINAL.pdf>

As the following chart demonstrates, even ballot propositions during even years, which appear on the reverse side of the ballot in New York City, receive more attention and votes than the mayoral contest during off-cycle elections.



RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN EVEN YEAR ELECTIONS

Another concern is how Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) might interact with non-RCV contests in even years and whether it would cause confusion. However, New York City voters already use more than one voting method when casting ballots in local elections: (1) RCV for city offices, (2) “regular” first-past-the-post voting for district attorneys, judges, and party district leaders, and (3) “multiple votes” for party county committee members and delegates to party conventions. In the 2021 mayoral election, voters received two separate ballots, with RCV appearing on a separate page, and this approach would likely continue if municipal races were held on the same primary day as federal and state (legislative/statewide) races.

Across the country, several cities use RCV for local elections held in even-numbered years, including San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland. Voters in these cities receive multiple ballot cards, including a separate RCV ballot card. This system differentiates between RCV and non-RCV elections, guiding voters effectively. These practices have functioned seamlessly for years. San Francisco introduced RCV in 2004 and has run ten even-year RCV elections; Berkeley and Oakland introduced RCV in 2010 and have run seven even-year RCV elections.

Additionally, Citizens Union conducted soon-to-be-published research on these three cities to assess whether significant ballot drop-off occurred. The findings show that voter turnout for local RCV offices, like city council and board of supervisors, remained very high due to the increased turnout rates experienced in even-year elections. RCV did not negatively impact voter turnout due to ballot drop-off or voter confusion.