



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the 2025 Charter Revision Commission
Moving City Elections to Even-numbered Years
Bronx Public Input Session
June 10, 2025

Dear Members of the 2025 Charter Revision Commission.

My name is Grace Rauh, and I am the Executive Director of Citizens Union. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm here to speak in strong support of the proposal to move New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years, and provide more details on this issue. The Commission's well-researched report lays out the significant benefits this reform would have on voter participation and raises several key issues worth addressing.

The Need to Amend The New York City Charter

For years, New York State has been consolidating local elections with higher-turnout elections to address declining voter participation. From school board elections in Buffalo to village elections in Onondaga County and runoff elections in New York City, policymakers are acknowledging the negative impact of off-cycle elections.¹

In 2022, state lawmakers empowered courts to consolidate local elections with higher-turnout contests to combat voter disenfranchisement.² By 2023, nearly all county and town elections in the state had been shifted to even years.³ In 2024, the State Senate passed a constitutional amendment removing the requirement that cities hold elections in odd years. Additional amendments are pending and close to passage.

This trend is not going to stop. As turnout continues to fall, New York will continue to transition away from turnout-depressing election calendars. As will other places—in the two months that have passed since we last testified on this issue before this Commission, West Virginia enacted a law moving all

¹ See for example: Chapter 561 of 2019 moved Buffalo school board elections from May to November; Local Law 215 of 2019, a Charter revision adopted by the voters, abolished run-off elections to avoid the drop in turnout and replaced them with Ranked Choice Voting.

² Ch. 226/2022, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York

³ Ch. 741 2023

municipal elections to statewide elections⁴, and the Miami City Commission scheduled a vote on to do the same⁵. New York City should prepare now.

If a constitutional amendment enabling New York City to control its election calendar passes in 2027 (a referendum after two successive legislative approvals), a city charter commission would then be needed in 2028. That would delay a voter referendum on the issue until late 2028, when many affected candidates are already campaigning for the 2029 election. Delaying this reform risks it becoming entangled in active political campaigns, undermining its credibility. If a charter commission is not convened in 2028, or if the Legislature proceeds with a statewide referendum in 2028, the reform could be delayed by up to seven years. That's why 2025 is the ideal time to move forward.

A statewide constitutional amendment requiring all cities to hold their elections in even years would also achieve this goal, making a City Charter change moot. But such a change is unlikely to pass in the state legislature without significant public momentum. A referendum in New York City would help generate public debate and support to the issue.

Voters Would Support Moving to Even-Year Elections

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.⁶ 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.⁷ New York is not an outlier - every survey that has examined views on election timing has found that a clear majority of Americans favor aligning local elections with federal contests. In a divided political climate, it is rare to find reforms with such broad bipartisan support.

In fact, nearly every time this question was put before voters, it has passed with high margins. Data collected on the outcome of vote in 36 municipal ballot questions on election timing found that in 35 of those 36 referenda, voters approved consolidated elections. That approval was met with high margins -

⁴ <https://news.ballotpedia.org/2025/05/11/west-virginia-enacts-bill-aligning-municipal-election-dates/> (this bipartisan bill was passed by a unanimous vote in the West Virginia Senate and near unanimous vote in the state house),

⁵ [Will Miami skip upcoming election? Commission votes next week | Miami Herald](#)

⁶ 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>

⁷ 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>

average support in those referenda was 72 percent, with relatively little variation in support across states.⁸ See details in appendix 1. These are very high rates of voters' approval rarely seen on any issue.

People Running for Office in Odd-Numbered Years Support Moving to Even Years

This reform would impact not only voters, but also candidates. And our research found it is supported by the very candidates it would affect. Citizens Union surveyed candidates running for office in the 2025 NYC municipal election and reviewed candidates' positions on this topic, and found that overwhelming majority of candidates support moving New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years.

87% of the 54 City Council candidates surveyed by Citizens Union expressed support for the reform, including candidates and incumbents running in 26 Council Districts across the five boroughs. 7 out of 8 Mayoral candidates and all of the Comptroller, Public Advocate, and Manhattan Borough President candidates we surveyed expressed support. See appendix 2 for further details.

This data demonstrates that moving local elections to even-numbered years isn't some radical idea supported by one political faction—it's a common sense reform that enjoys broad support among the candidates who would be affected by it – candidates who are currently running on odd years.

Timing of the Shift: Presidential or Gubernatorial Cycle?

The Commission's report raised whether a particular even-year election cycle should be chosen. Citizens Union takes no position on whether the shift should align with presidential or gubernatorial (midterm) elections, and there are arguments for either path. We note that turnout benefits are consistently and significantly higher in presidential years; the benefits in a gubernatorial year depend on the competitiveness of the race for governor or the control of the U.S Congress. Most large cities that have gone through this process chose to align their local elections with the presidential cycle, although Los Angeles have aligned with gubernatorial cycles and saw a dramatic turnout boost as well. Austin and San Jose are two examples of cities that transitioned to presidential cycles after already holding their local elections during the gubernatorial cycle.

It is important to note that city council terms are staggered in many cities; elections for council members are then held in every even-numbered year (gubernatorial and presidential).

New York State has taken a flexible approach without naming the specific cycle localities must transition to. The 2023 Even Year Election Law and pending legislation to move city elections allow for different transition paths depending on a locality's current election calendar. For example, New York City, Buffalo, Albany, Syracuse, and Rochester—whose elections currently occur the year after a presidential election—would shift to presidential years. Yonkers, whose elections are held the year after the gubernatorial election, would move to gubernatorial years.

To retain flexibility and prepare for future state changes, we recommend the charter language refer to “even-numbered years” rather than specifying a presidential or gubernatorial cycle.

⁸ Data collected and provided by Professor Zoltan Hajnal of the University California San Diego. See appendix for details.

Transition From the Odd-Year Calendar to Even Years

Cities that move to on-cycle elections typically consider whether to extend or shorten terms to adapt to new election calendar, whether sitting officials will be affected, and how long the process takes. Citizens Union reviewed transitions in other cities and states and found varied approaches.

We believe a key element in transition between election calendars is to allow elected officials who are in office during the enactment of the policy (through a referendum or otherwise) to finish their regular term, so that another odd-year election would be held after, in which officials are elected for a transition term. Voters should know that they are voting for someone for a non-ordinary transition term as they head to the ballot box, and candidates should know the length of their prospective term when they decide to run.

The 2023 Even Year Election Law and the current pending legislation uses a similar, gradual transition mechanism. Local jurisdictions in which elected officials are completing their term in 2025, will hold elections this year for a truncated term to sync up with the next even year. In those localities where incumbents have yet to complete their term in 2025, another election for a truncated term will be held in 2027.

Addressing Concerns: Ballot Length and Drop-Off

The Commission's report asked to consider the extent to which moving local elections to even-years may lead to more complex ballots and voter fatigue and confusion. Citizens Union appreciates these valid concerns and takes them seriously.

The evidence from cities that have consolidated their elections suggests that the votes gained from moving elections on-cycle far exceed the votes lost to ballot drop-off in an extended ballot. In other words, significantly more voters cast ballots for contests at the bottom of an even year ballot than voters who participate at all in odd-year elections.

Baltimore's example is illustrative. In its first consolidated election in 2016, 221,063 voters cast ballots for City Comptroller, compared to just 42,181 in the prior off-cycle election. 18,391 people "dropped off" the ballot in 2016 – significantly lower than the fivefold overall participation increase. In Phoenix, ballot drop-off rate increased from 0.36% in 2015 to 13.6% in 2020, while overall turnout increased from 20% to 77%.⁹

Even today, ballot propositions during even-numbered years in New York City, which appear on the reverse side of the ballot, receive more attention and votes than the mayoral contest during off-cycle elections. In 2024, proposition 1 to amend the New York State Constitution saw a 51% voter turnout in

⁹ Citizens Union. December 2022. Policy Report: Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years. https://citizensunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Moving-Municipal-Elections-to-Even-Numbered-Years-Citizens-Union-report_FINAL.pdf

New York City.¹⁰ The 2021 election for the Mayor of New York City saw less than half that turnout. More people vote for down ballot races on even years than for the mayor of the largest city in the United States. See appendix 3 for further details.

Addressing Concerns: Focus on Local Issues

The Commission's report also asked whether election consolidation could detract from focus on local elections. Historically, that was the theory behind odd-year municipal elections. Although voter knowledge is difficult to measure, existing research does not indicate that voters who vote in consolidated, even year elections are less aware of local issues.¹¹

In fact, 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.

Research shows that increasing turnout in local elections - through intense mobilization - leads newly mobilized voters to become much more informed about local politics. Greatly increasing turnout among low propensity voters does not lead to an overall lower level of knowledge among voters.¹²

Impact of Proposed Change on Minority and Marginalized Communities

The Commission's report asked to consider the impact this change would have on the voting rights of protected classes of voters, including voters of color. All research on this topic has indicated that the voting electorate in the current odd-year election calendar does not reflect the overall demographic makeup of New York City and tends to skew whiter than that of even-year elections.

Research by the Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School presented to the New York City Council¹³ concluding that 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. A separate comparison of odd- and even-year elections conducted by Citizens Union found that

¹⁰ Citizens Union Memorandum of Support for City Council Resolution 189-A 2024 (Ung), December 4, 2024 <https://citizensunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CU-Memo-of-Support-Reso-189-A-2024-for-Gov-Ops-12.4.24-hearing.pdf>

¹¹ See studies on local school boards elections in California detailed in Citizens Union's 2022 Policy Report: Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years.

¹² Shineman, V. A. (2018). If You Mobilize Them, They Will Become Informed: Experimental Evidence that Information Acquisition Is Endogenous to Costs and Incentives to Participate. *British Journal of Political Science*, 48(1), 189–211. doi:10.1017/S0007123416000168

¹³ 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>

the sharpest turnout gains occurred in minority-majority assembly districts, with Latino-majority districts seeing increases of up to 250%.¹⁴

The Commission must consider this potential impact in light of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York, which prohibits voter dilution and establishes a preclearance mechanism for covered jurisdictions. We welcome the Commission's plan for a rigorous voting rights impact study, and look forward to seeing its results.

¹⁴ Analysis in Citizens Union even year election report, page 38-42.

APPENDIX 1: RESULTS OF REFERENDA TO MOVE TO ON-CYCLE ELECTIONS

City	Vote in favor	Did the measure pass?
Arcadia	67%	Yes
Austin	67%	Yes
Austin	76% (2012) 66% (2021)	Yes
Boulder	63%	Yes
Burbank	81%	Yes
Chandler	91%	Yes
Compton	64%	Yes
Dallas	66%	Yes
El Paso	50%	Yes
Fort Collins	76%	Yes
Gainesville	71%	Yes
Glendale	83%	Yes
Inglewood	75%	Yes
Jersey City	58%	Yes
Long Beach	75%	Yes
Los Angeles	77%	Yes
Modesto	67%	Yes
Pasadena	83%	Yes
Phoenix	73%	Yes
Pomona	75%	Yes
Redwood	87%	Yes
San Francisco	71%	Yes
San Jose	56%	Yes
San Mateo	81%	Yes
Santa Fe	80%	Yes
Scottsdale	90%	Yes
St Paul	61%	Yes
St Petersburg	70%	Yes
Takoma Park	76%	Yes
Temple City	77%	Yes
Tucson	42%	No
Data collected and provided by Professor Zoltan Hajnal, The Yankelovich Center for Social Science Research, The University of California, San Diego		

APPENDIX 2: SUPPORT FOR MOVING NYC’S ELECTIONS TO EVEN-NUMBERED YEARS AMONG CANDIDATES RUNNING IN THE 2025 NYC MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Office	Surveyed	Yes	%
Mayor	8	7	88%
Public Advocate	2	2	100%
Comptroller	3	3	100%
Manhattan Borough President	2	2	100%
City Council (candidates surveyed by CU plus incumbent cosponsors of even-year resolution)	54	47	87%
All candidates surveyed, except for mayoral candidates	61	54	89%
All candidates surveyed	69	61	89%

A full list of candidates who indicated they support this reform:

Mayoral Candidates: Adrienne Adams, Michael Blake, Andrew Cuomo, Brad Lander, Zellnor Myrie, Jessica Ramos, Whitney Tilson

Zohran Mamdani did not submit a questionnaire; Scott Stringer did not express support for the reform.

Public Advocate: Jumaane Williams, Jenifer Rajkumar

City Comptroller: Mark Levine, Justin Brannan, Ismael Malave Perez

Manhattan Borough President: Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Keith Powers

City Council: Jess Coleman (CD1), Andrea Gordillo (CD2), Harvey Epstein (CD2), Sarah Batchu (CD2), Allie Ryan (CD2), Benjamin Wetzler (CD4), Faith Bondy (CD4), Rachel Storch (CD4), Vanessa Aronson (CD4), Virginia Maloney (CD4), Collin L. Thompson (CD5), Julie Menin (CD5), Gale Brewer* (CD6), Clarisa Alayeto (CD8), Elsie Encarnacion (CD8), Raymond Santana (CD8), Wilfredo Lopez (CD8), Rosa Diaz (CD8), Bryan Hodge Vasquez (CD14), Pierina Ana Sanchez (CD14), Antirson Ricardo Ortiz (CD17), Elvis Santana (CD17), Justin Edward Sanchez (CD17), Jasmine Uribe (CD17), Alexander J. Caruso (CD19), Sandra Ung* (CD20), Erycka Montoya (CD21), Sandro Navarro (CD21), Yanna M Henriquez (CD21), Tiffany Cabán* (CD22), Shekar Krishnan* (CD25), Natasha Williams* (CD27), Japneet Singh (CD28), Tyrell Hankerson (CD28), Dermot Smyth (CD30), Selvena Brooks Powers* (CD31), Mike Lopez (CD31), Crystal Hudson* (CD35), Sandy Nurse* (CD37), Alexa Aviles (CD38), Ling Ye (CD38), Maya Kornberg (CD39), Shahana Hanif (CD39), Darlene Mealy (CD41), Chris Banks* (CD 42), Susan Zhuang*, Farah Louis* (CD45)

*Incumbent Councilmembers running for re-election who have co-sponsored City Council Resolution 189-A 2024 in support of even-year municipal elections.

APPENDIX 3: COMPARING VOTER TURNOUT FOR DOWN-BALLOT PROPOSITIONS ON EVEN YEARS AND MAYORAL ELECTIONS ON ODD YEARS

