

Down Ballot Races and Even Year Local Elections

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOCAL ELECTIONS SHARE SPACE ON THE BALLOT WITH FEDERAL RACES?

Executive Summary

- New York City is considering shifting local elections to even years to align with federal contests, aiming to boost voter turnout, reduce disparities in representation, and cut costs.
- A common concern is that longer ballots in consolidated elections may overwhelm voters, leading voters to skip local races that appear down the ballot - a phenomenon known as ballot drop-off.
- The data and findings in this report demonstrate that transitioning to even-year elections increases voter participation across the board, including for down-ballot races, and does not significantly exacerbate ballot drop-off.
- Key findings:
 - New York ballot proposals and State Assembly races in even years consistently receive more votes than anything on the ballot in an odd year, including the New York City mayor's race. In 2024, Prop 6 received more than twice the votes cast for the Mayor of New York City in 2021.
 - Instead of being "drowned out," down-ballot Assembly races in presidential election years benefit from a rise in public interest in politics and see double the turnout than City Council races in odd years, despite similar ballot placement.
 - Election year transitions in places like Los Angeles, Baltimore, and San Francisco, led to dramatic increases in turnout for all local offices—even those further down longer, more crowded ballots.
 - Cities that use Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for local races only that appear on the same ballot with state and federal races still see low drop-off rates (mostly under 10%) and high voter participation for down-ballot RCV Council races.



How Consolidating Elections Could Impact Down-ballot Voter Participation

New York State has been gradually shifting away from its off-cycle, odd-year election calendar by moving local elections to even-numbered years. Aligning local elections with high-profile federal contests significantly increases voter turnout, reduces racial and age disparities in participation, and saves millions of dollars. This November, New York City will vote on a referendum to move its municipal elections to even-numbered years.

Consolidating municipal and federal elections creates a ballot with more elected offices. For example, Brooklyn residents had about eight offices on their November 2024 ballot – from the U.S. President to Civil Court judges (the exact number depends on a voter’s address). If municipal elections had been held at the same time, Brooklyn residents would have seen about 13 elected offices on their ballot – an addition of five more offices (mayor, public advocate, comptroller, borough president, and a city council member).

A common concern is that longer, more crowded ballots could overwhelm voters, discourage them from completing the ballot, and negate the turnout gains from the shift to even years. A mayoral race that tops the ballot and does not share space with federal elections typically receives more attention and votes than anything else on that ballot. But in a consolidated election, the focus is on other high-profile races like the presidential contest, and the concern is that voters might leave the rest of the ballot blank.

This phenomenon, known as ballot drop-off (or voter roll-off or undervoting), refers to the tendency of voters to skip contests further down the ballot after casting their vote for the races at the top of the ballot. It occurs in nearly every U.S. election: turnout typically declines from the top to the bottom of the ballot.

Among the reasons for voters skipping races down the ballot is lack of information about candidates or offices, intentional protest (“voting blank”), a perception that these offices are unimportant, noncompetitive or uncontested races, and unintentional drop-off due to poor ballot design¹. Some studies indicate that drop-off rates are higher among younger voters.² In New York City, an additional concern is that combining municipal Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) contests with non-RCV contests could confuse voters and increase drop-off rates.

This study examines whether moving local elections to even-numbered years would affect ballot drop-off and voter turnout for races appearing further down the ballot. It analyzes:

- Voter turnout for down-ballot races in New York during odd and even years
- Changes in ballot drop-off in cities that shifted their election calendars
- The impact of RCV on ballot drop-off rates in cities that made the transition

How Many People Vote Down the Ballot In New York City?

Studies consistently show that voter turnout in New York City is much higher during even-year presidential elections than in odd-year mayoral contests.³ But does this trend hold for smaller, down-ballot races?

To explore this, we examined two types of down-ballot races over the past decade:

- Ballot proposals, which typically appear on the back of the ballot
- City Council and State Assembly races, which appear mid-to-bottom on the ballot

We found that many more people fill out their votes in contests that are at the bottom of presidential or midterm election ballots than there are total voters who come out for off-cycle elections, including a mayoral race.

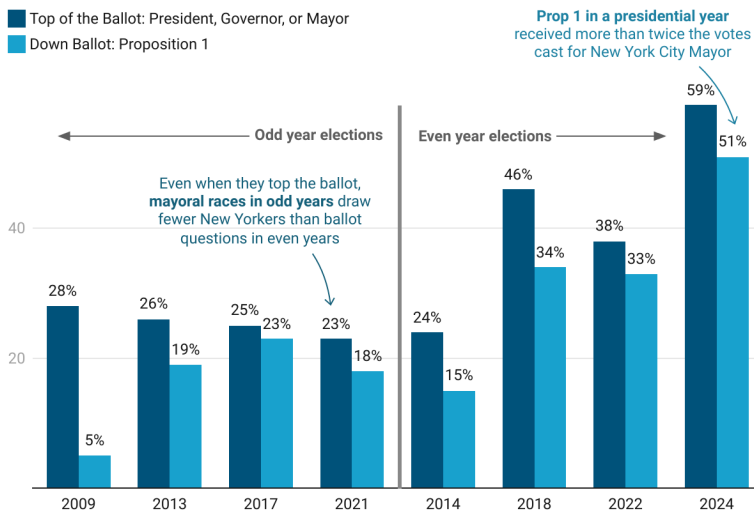
Ballot Questions

Ballot questions are among the most frequently skipped contests. They often appear on the back of the ballot, are difficult to decipher, and lack major campaigns to draw attention. As a result, ballot drop-off rates are typically highest for these questions.

However, even with high drop-off rates, ballot questions in even years receive more votes than anything on the ballot in odd years, including the mayoral race. For example, in 2024, Proposition 1 - placed at the back of the ballot and sharing space with national and state

Top vs. Down Ballot Turnout in NYC - Odd and Even Years

Ballot questions are among the most frequently skipped contests on the ballot. Yet, questions on even years enjoy voter participation that's typically higher than anything on the ballot in odd years, including the mayoral race.



Years with no regular citywide race were excluded (2023, 2019)
Source: New York City Board of Elections Data • Created with Datawrapper

races - received 2.4 million votes (51% turnout). That's more than double the 1.1 million votes (23% turnout) cast in the 2021 mayoral election, which topped the ballot. Even the last question on the 2024 ballot, a City Charter amendment with the nondescript title "Proposal Number 6, a Question: Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBs), Film Permits, and Archive Review Boards," received more than twice the votes cast for the mayor of the largest city in the United States.⁴

On average, voter turnout for the first ballot question (Prop 1) in even-numbered years over the past 15 years was 33% turnout. The average turnout for a mayoral race, which tops the ballot in odd-numbered



years, is just 25%. The down-ballot Prop 1 in odd-year mayoral elections saw an average turnout of only 16% of voters.

Down-Ballot Legislative Seats

Another type of down-ballot race that could be impacted by longer, crowded ballots are City Council seats. Some are concerned those important races would be “drowned out” by the presidential race and national issues, leading voters to ignore offices they perceive as less important.

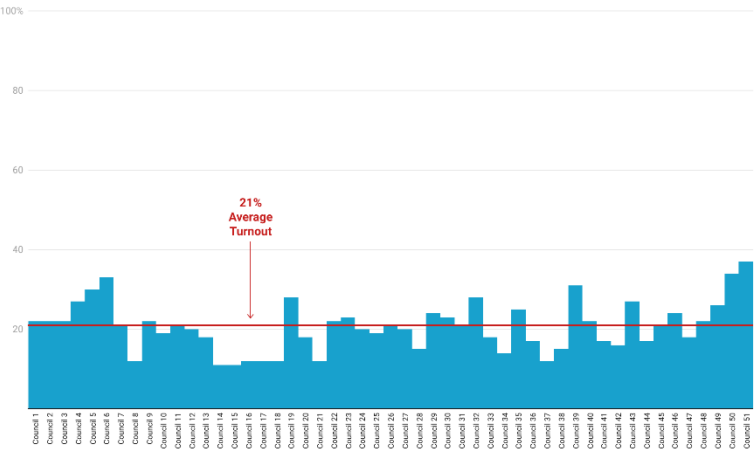
Currently, elections to the City Council occur in odd years, when they “enjoy” having the public theoretically focus on local issues and local races. These races also tend to be more competitive than other legislative offices because they have term limits, a four-year election cycle, and generous public campaign financing. We would expect City Council races to see high voter turnout.

Yet, elections to the State Assembly, a similar legislative office that is elected in even years, consistently see higher turnout. Instead of being “drowned out” by an intense presidential (or midterm) election season, candidates running for these offices – which represent fewer people than city council districts - benefit from a rise in public interest in electoral politics, generated by the national election. These races see high voter participation rates.

A Citizens Union 2022 report⁵ sampled overlapping Council and Assembly districts that had contested elections in several election cycles, in each of the five boroughs, and found that in every case, voter turnout for even year assembly races was higher than the corresponding odd year council races. The chart below presents another recent comparison – turnout rate in every council and every assembly district in the last mayoral and the last presidential election. Down ballot Assembly races saw an average of 49% turnout in 2024 compared to 21% average turnout for down-ballot Council races in 2021, the last odd year mayoral election.

Voter Turnout in City Council Races - 2021 General Election

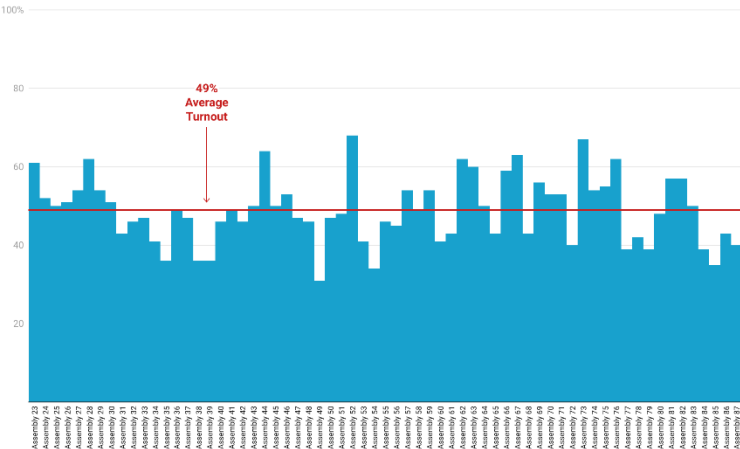
Elections for the New York City Council are held during odd-numbered years. The race typically appears fifth on the ballot.



Source: New York City Board of Elections voter registration and election results data • Created with Datawrapper

Voter Turnout in State Assembly Races - 2024 General Election

Elections for the New York State Assembly are held during even-numbered years. The race typically appears fourth to seventh on the ballot.



Source: New York City Board of Elections voter registration and election results data • Created with Datawrapper



Northeastern Bronx presents a telling example of the decisive impact the election year has on down ballot turnout. City Council District 13 has had two competitive elections in recent years, but turnout remained persistently low. In 2021, this seat was open, but the race to fill it attracted only 18% of eligible voters. In 2023, this district was made more competitive, becoming the highest spending race that year and the only one to “flip,” but it saw only 13% turnout. (Under the current proposal to move New York City’s election to even years, such unique two-year terms will no longer exist.) Covering similar neighborhoods in the northeastern Bronx, voter turnout in the overlapping 82nd Assembly District, is very different. Races tend to be very uncompetitive, and the two-decade incumbent Assembly Member Michael Benedetto easily defeats his competition every other year. Yet, because these Assembly races occur during even years, they see significantly higher voter turnout, from 36% to 57%.

A similar example comes from South Queens. Assembly district 23 and its overlapping Council District 32 have both become more competitive in recent election cycles. The 2021 City Council race between Republican Joann Ariola and Democrat Felicia Singh was one of the few competitive races in that general election, drawing high spending, attention, and involvement from national political figures. Yet, voter turnout was only 27% (higher than the mayoral race that year). In comparison, the races for State Assembly where Stacey Pheffer Amato was defending her seat, drew significantly higher turnout: 58% in 2024, 42% in 2022, 60% in 2020.

Case Study: Down Ballot Voter Turnout in Northeastern Bronx

Elections to the City Council District 13 in Northeastern Bronx are competitive, draw high campaign spending, and result in narrow margins. Yet voter turnout is substantially lower than in elections for the overlapping Assembly District, which has not been competitive in years. The reason: Council races are on odd years while Assembly races are on even years.

	Race	Election Type	Year	Turnout Rate
	Assembly District 82	Even Year - Presidential	2024	<div><div>52%</div></div>
	Assembly District 82	Even Year - Presidential	2020	<div><div>57%</div></div>
	Assembly District 82	Even Year - Presidential	2016	<div><div>48%</div></div>
	Assembly District 82	Even Year - Gubernatorial	2022	<div><div>36%</div></div>
	Assembly District 82	Even Year - Gubernatorial	2018	<div><div>42%</div></div>
	Council District 13	Odd Year - Council Only	2023	<div><div>13%</div></div>
	Council District 13	Odd Year - Mayoral	2021	<div><div>18%</div></div>
	Council District 13	Odd Year - Mayoral	2013	<div><div>18%</div></div>

Source: New York City Board of Elections Data • Created with Datawrapper



Ballot Drop Off in Cities that have Transitioned to Even-Year Elections

To understand the potential impact of shifting New York City’s elections, we examined voter behavior in major cities that made similar transitions: Los Angeles, Baltimore, El Paso, and San Francisco. We looked at turnout up and down the ballot, before and after the change. ⁶

The evidence is clear: in every case, moving local elections to even years led to dramatic increases in turnout for all local offices—even those further down, on longer, more crowded ballots. While some voters did skip races lower on the ballot after the calendar shift, the number of new votes cast for those same races far outweighed the number of voters who dropped off.

These findings are in line with scholarly research. Academic studies of voter turnout and election timing focus on the number of votes in a race, not the number of ballots cast. This means the well-documented turnout increases when local elections are moved to even years (often doubling or tripling) already account for any increase in drop-off in down-ballot races.

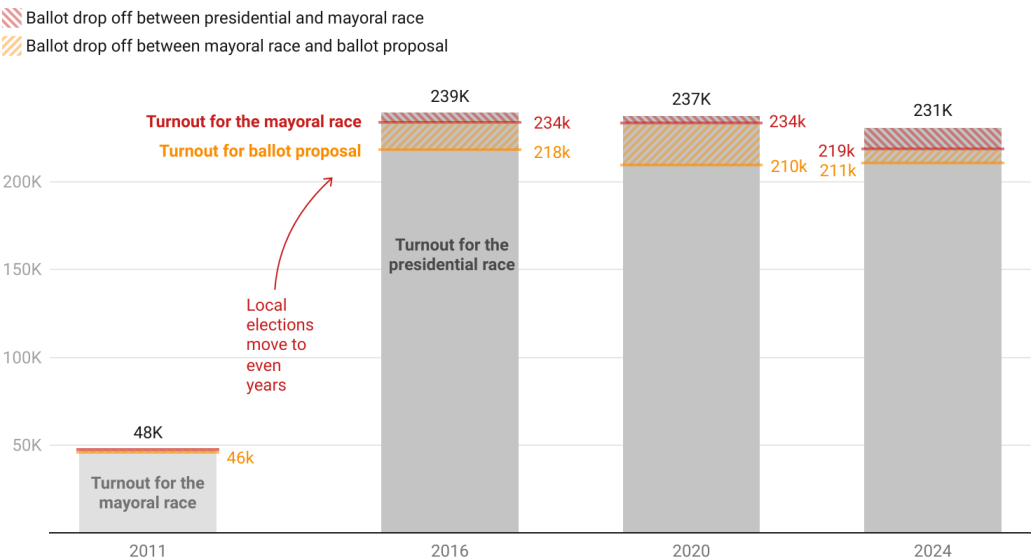
Baltimore, Maryland

Baltimore held its last odd-year citywide election in 2011, where just over 13% of registered voters cast a ballot for mayor—approximately 48,000 votes. Since transitioning to even-year presidential elections, mayoral turnout has surged to between 55% and 60%. Although the mayoral race no longer appears at the top of the ballot, it has consistently drawn far more

voters than before. Down-ballot races have also benefited. Prior to the shift, a citywide ballot proposal – the sixth and last contest on the ballot - received just 12.4% turnout. After consolidation, similar ballot questions appearing even further down the ballot saw turnout rates between 53% and 59%. Last year, Ballot Question H, a contest placed 21st on the ballot, on page number 4,

Ballot Drop Off No Match for Even Year Turnout Gains in Baltimore

When Baltimore moved its local elections to even-numbered years, voter turnout for local offices soared up and down the ballot. The number of new voters far outweighed those who skipped races lower on the ballot.



Source: Baltimore City Board of Elections, data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper



received 53% voter turnout. While the number of voters skipping these races did increase—from 1,300 in 2011 to up to 28,000 in 2020—the overall number of votes cast in these contests rose by over 200,000, making the drop-off effect negligible. ⁷

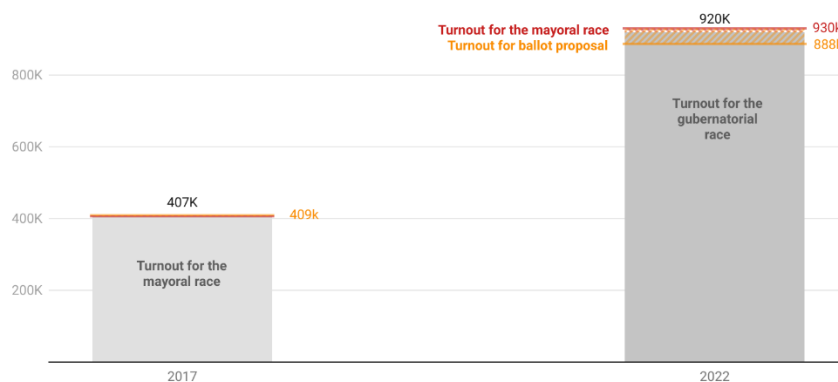
Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles transitioned from odd-year municipal elections after 2017, with its first citywide mayoral election held in 2022 alongside federal midterm and state gubernatorial contests. Before the change, mayoral turnout was 20%, with just over 400,000 votes cast. By contrast, in 2022, over 900,000 people voted for mayor, with turnout reaching nearly 44%, despite the contest appearing further down the ballot, under more prominent federal and state offices, like the U.S. Senate and California Governor. In fact, 9,500 more people voted in the mayor's race than in the gubernatorial contest, which was uncompetitive. Way further

LA Mayoral Race Gets More Votes Than Governor's Race Despite Moving Further Down the Ballot

After moving Los Angeles City elections to even years, the mayor's races appeared under more prominent federal and state offices, like the U.S. Senate and California Governor. Still, mayoral turnout more than doubled compared to the last odd-year race, and the municipal contest even outnumbered the top of the ticket.

 Ballot drop off between gubernatorial race and mayoral race
 Ballot drop off between mayoral race and ballot proposal



Source: Los Angeles County Registrar's Office. Data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper

down the ballot, under about 15 other federal, state, county, and municipal contests, the last municipal proposal on the ballot saw 42% turnout – that's only 1.5 percentage points lower than turnout for the top-of-the-ballot. In 2017, a similar municipal down-ballot measure in a less-crowded ballot saw 22% turnout. ⁸

Los Angeles's example shows that down-ballot drop-off in consolidated, longer, even-year ballots may be virtually non-existent, and could be equally affected most by the competitiveness of other races. ⁹

San Francisco, California

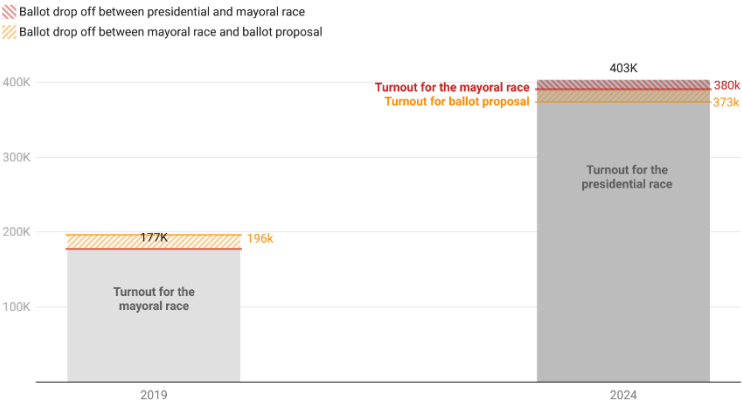
San Francisco provides the best opportunity to examine concerns related to placing municipal races on complex federal and state ballots. Because the local City Council (Board of Supervisors) is formally part of the San Francisco city-county, it has been elected in even-years for decades, while the city's more "important" citywide executive positions - Mayor, Sheriff, District Attorney, City Attorney and Treasurer – have been elected in odd-numbered years, until recently. Yet the primacy of position on the ballot or the importance of an office did not matter nearly as much as the election year. In San Francisco's last odd-year citywide election in 2019, voter turnout for the mayoral race – first on the ballot - was 36%. The following year, turnout for members of the Board of Supervisors – a down-ballot race of lesser power - ranged between 71% and 79%.



San Francisco's citywide races were moved to even years for the first time during the 2024 presidential cycle. Turnout for president reached 77%. Although the mayoral race was now in tenth place on the ballot – below school board elections - it still received 76% turnout—more

SF Mayoral Election Moves Below School Boards but Doubles Turnout

San Francisco's citywide races moved to the presidential cycle in 2024. Although the mayoral race was now placed 10th on the ballot – below school board elections - it still received 76% turnout, more than double than in 2019.



Source: San Francisco Department of Elections. Data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper

than double the participation seen in 2019. And there was a small drop in votes from the presidential race – just one percentage point.

The shift did lead to more drop-off from the top to the bottom of the ballot. In 2019, there was no drop-off; in fact, 19,000 more people voted for a ballot proposal than for mayor. ¹⁰

In 2024, about 30,000 fewer people voted for the down-ballot proposal than for president. Nevertheless, the total number of votes cast in that race nearly

doubled compared to the odd-year election. ¹¹

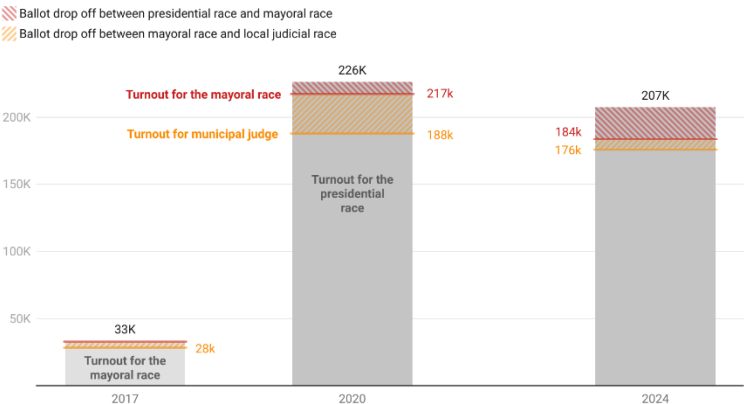
El Paso, Texas

El Paso experienced one of the most dramatic increases in turnout following its transition to even-year elections. In 2017, the city's last odd-year election, only about 33,000 residents voted for mayor, representing 9% of registered voters. A judicial race at the bottom of the ballot that year saw slightly lower turnout, with 4,700 fewer votes. In 2020, El Paso's first consolidated municipal election, turnout multiplied more than sixfold, with over 217,000 people voting for mayor. Although the mayoral race was now placed under federal, state, and county elections on the ballot, it saw minimal drop-off from the presidential race, which had 55% turnout.

In the next consolidated cycle, the 2024 presidential election, voter turnout for president was 40%, while turnout for mayor, located several races below on the ballot, was 35%. The ballot proposal at the end of the ballot received 34% turnout. Despite appearing further down the ballot, these races saw significantly higher participation than before the shift to even years. ¹²

In El Paso, Even Races for Local Judges See High Turnout After Election Year Shift

The lowest contest on the El Paso ballot—for the city's Judge Court of Appeals—received 660% more votes after moving to a presidential years, despite appearing under a much longer ballot.



Source: El Paso County Elections Department. Data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper

Down-ballot Drop-off in Ranked Choice Voting Cities

There have been questions raised about whether voters will understand the difference between Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and non-Ranked Choice Voting contests on an even year ballot, possibly exacerbating ballot drop-off for the local races.

New York City's Use of Mixed Voting Methods

New York City residents are already mixing RCV with non-RCV contests with little to no negative effects. In 2021, 2023, and 2025 New Yorkers saw three different voting methods on their primary ballots:

1. Ranked Choice Voting: for City offices, including Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, and City Council
2. First-past-the-post voting: for district attorneys, judges, and certain party positions
3. Cumulative voting ("vote for #"): for delegates to party conventions and certain party positions.

New York City has followed the best practice recommendations of the Center for Civic Design by clearly separating RCV and non-RCV contests with a page turn and providing instructions on the ballot.¹³ Voter guides and educational materials from the Campaign Finance Board and NYC Board of Elections provide further guidance. If municipal races were moved to even years, this method would simply continue.

Sample Ballot - 2025 Primary Election Ranked Choice Voting (left) and Non-Ranked Choice Voting

Analysis of the 2021 and the 2025 municipal elections found no substantial issues with mixing those separate voting methods.

In 2021, 87% of Democratic Primary voters ranked two or more candidates for mayor, higher than the national average in other RCV jurisdictions.¹⁴ In the 2025 election, the share of voters that used all five rankings on their ballot increased from 40% to 48%.¹⁵

The image displays two sample ballots for the 2025 Primary Election. The left ballot is for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and the right is for Non-Ranked Choice Voting. Both ballots show contests for Mayor, Comptroller, Borough President, and City Council, with instructions for voters to rank candidates.

Sample Ballot - 2025 Primary Election (Left - Ranked Choice Voting)

Remember to vote both sides / Recuerde votar en ambos lados

Mayor
Rank all five candidates in order of preference.
Mayor todos los candidatos en orden de preferencia.

CHOICE	OPCIÓN			
1	2	3	4	5
Zohran Kwaname Mamdani	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scott M. Stringer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Selma K. Bartholomew	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zelina Myrie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adrienne E. Adams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Andrew M. Cuomo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jessica Ramos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whitney R. Tilson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michael Blake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brad Lander	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paperboy Love Prince	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comptroller
Rank all five candidates in order of preference.
Comptroller todos los candidatos en orden de preferencia.

CHOICE	OPCIÓN			
1	2	3	4	5
Mark D. Levine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Imael Malave Perez	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justin Brannan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Karen S. Parker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Borough President
Rank all five candidates in order of preference.
Presidente del Consejo Municipal todos los candidatos en orden de preferencia.

CHOICE	OPCIÓN			
1	2	3	4	5
Antonio Reynoso	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Robert C. Ellman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

City Council
Rank all five candidates in order of preference.
Miembro del Consejo todos los candidatos en orden de preferencia.

CHOICE	OPCIÓN			
1	2	3	4	5
Crystal Hudson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hector Robertson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kenny Lever	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dion M. Ashman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public Advocate
Rank all five candidates in order of preference.
Defensor Público todos los candidatos en orden de preferencia.

CHOICE	OPCIÓN			
1	2	3	4	5
Jumaane D. Williams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marty Dotan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jennifer Rajgumar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sample Ballot - 2025 Primary Election (Right - Non-Ranked Choice Voting)

Remember to vote both sides / Recuerde votar en ambos lados

Judge of the Civil Court - County
Jefe de la Corte Civil - Condado

CHOICE	OPCIÓN			
1	2	3	4	5
Janice Chen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marisa Arrabito	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Susan Liebman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Janice P. Purvis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sample Ballot



Voter Turnout in Cities That Hold Ranked Choice Voting Local Elections in Even-Numbered Years

To better understand the effects of mixing the two voting methods, we analyzed voter behavior up and down the ballot in three municipalities that hold local RCV elections concurrently with non-RCV elections: Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco. These cities are helpful case studies because they have used Ranked Choice Voting in even-numbered years for multiple election cycles, and they use both presidential and gubernatorial cycles because City Council terms are staggered.¹⁶

We found that in those cities, RCV in even-numbered years did not negatively affect voter turnout due to ballot drop-off or voter confusion, and we found that voter turnout remained significantly higher in local council races down the ballot.

This analysis compares City Council districts across three election cycles - 2020, 2022, and 2024. We inspect how voters in the district cast their ballots for the top-ballot presidential or governor's race, which uses "regular" first-pass-the-post, and the down-ballot City Council races, which uses Ranked Choice Voting. This provides a total of 40 cases with Ranked Choice Voting to examine down ballot drop off. Turnout for president or governor within a particular council district was calculated using the precinct-by-precinct election results.

Because state and local referenda are very common in California, voters in these council districts faced substantially longer ballots than in New York. As an example, the November 2024 ballot in San Francisco included 34 non-Ranked Choice Voting contests - nine federal, state and local races, and 25 ballot measures – and five municipal Ranked Choice Voting contests - Mayor, City Attorney, District Attorney, Sheriff, and Board of Supervisors.

Down ballot drop-off has remained minimal in virtually all cases, despite mixing RCV and non-RCV elections. Except for two uncontested council races, no more than 10% of people who voted for the president or governor skipped voting for a council representative. In over a third of cases, ballot drop-off was at or below one percent.

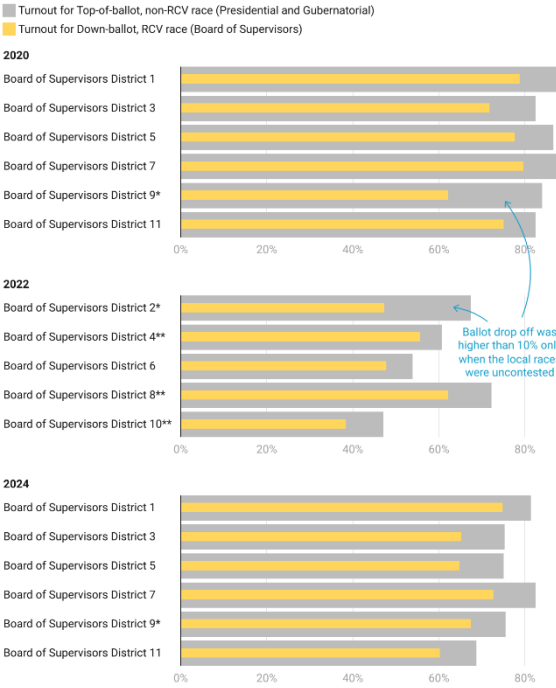
San Francisco has been using Ranked Choice Voting in even years since 2004, for a total of 11 election cycles.¹⁷ It consistently sees turnout in the 60-80% range for its local legislative body, the Board of Supervisors. Oakland began using RCV in 2010 and has done so eight times, all during even years. In most cases, turnout for city council races is very similar to the turnout for president or governor in the very same council districts. Berkeley, which began using RCV at the same time as Oakland, sees similar rates of voter turnout, with no significant ballot drop off for city council races.

The following page includes charts presenting these findings.

In summary, other cities have, over the past two decades, successfully paired local RCV races with state and federal non-RCV contests. Although these ballots were long, ballot drop-off between the presidential (or gubernatorial) race and down-ballot city council races was low.

Voter Drop Off When Mixing RCV and Non-RCV Elections on Even Year Ballots - San Francisco

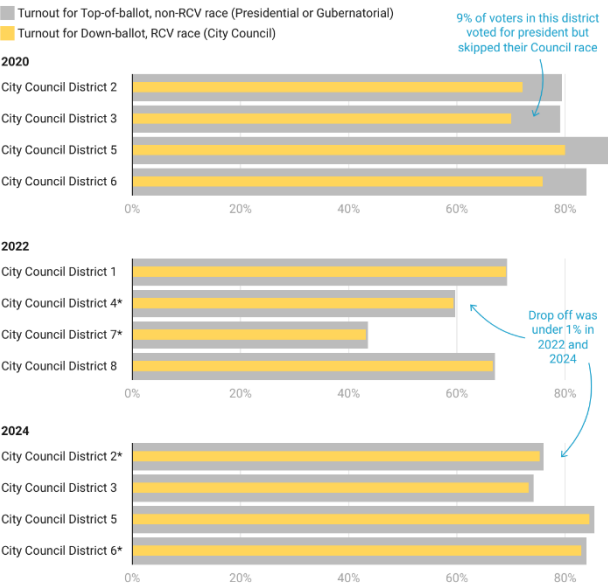
Every two years, San Francisco holds a consolidated election with municipal RCV races and dozens of non-RCV races (federal, state, local, and ballot measures). Despite an array of voting methods, drop-off is miniscule.



Source: San Francisco Department of Elections, data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper

Mixing RCV & Non-RCV Races in Even Year Ballots: Voter Turnout in Berkley

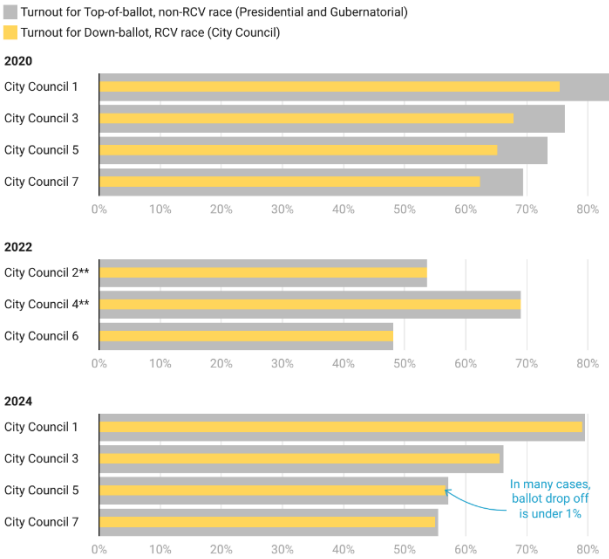
Every two years, Berkley holds a consolidated election with two municipal RCV races and dozens of non-RCV races (federal, state, local, and ballot measures). Despite an array of voting methods, drop-off is miniscule.



Source: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper

Voter Drop Off When Mixing RCV and Non-RCV Elections on Even Year Ballots - Oakland

Every two years, Oakland holds a consolidated election with municipal RCV races and dozens of non-RCV races (federal, state, local, and ballot measures). Despite an array of voting methods, drop-off is miniscule.



Source: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, data analysis by Citizens Union • Created with Datawrapper

Appendix: Voter Turnout in Cities that Hold Local Ranked Choice Voting Elections in Even Numbered Years

Berkeley			
District	Voter Turnout – top of the ballot (Presidential and Gubernatorial, non-RCV)	Voter Turnout – City Council (Down ballot, RCV)	Ballot Drop-off
2020 on the ballot: 31 non-RCV contests (9 federal, state, and local, 22 ballot measures), 2 municipal RCV contests (Mayor, City Council Member) ¹⁸			
City Council District 2	79.4%	72.2%	-7.2%
City Council District 3	79.0%	70.0%	-9.0%
City Council District 5	88.1%	80.1%	-8.0%
City Council District 6 (only two candidates)	84.0%	75.9%	-8.1%
2022 on the ballot: 42 non-RCV contests (31 federal, state and local, 11 ballot measures) ,2 municipal RCV contests (City Auditor, City Council Member)			
City Council District 1	69.4%	69.2%	-0.2%
City Council District 4 (uncontested)	59.8%	59.3%	-0.5%
City Council District 7 (uncontested)	43.6%	43.2%	-0.4%
City Council District 8	67.1%	66.7%	-0.4%
2024 on the ballot: 35 non-RCV contests (11 federal, state, and local, 24 ballot measures), 2 municipal RCV contests (Mayor, City Council Member)			
City Council District 2 (uncontested)	76.12%	75.25%	-0.87%
City Council District 3	74.21%	73.31%	-0.90%
City Council District 5	85.56%	84.53%	-1.03%
City Council District 6 (uncontested)	83.91%	82.95%	-0.96%
Source: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, Berkeley Statement of Vote. 2020, 2022, 2024			

Oakland			
2020 on the ballot: 24 non-RCV contests (9 federal, state, and local, 18 ballot measures); 4 RCV municipal contests (City Attorney, the City Council Member At-Large, a local City Council Member, School Director)			
City Council District 1	84.4%	75.4%	-9.0%
City Council District 3	76.2%	67.8%	-8.4%
City Council District 5	73.3%	65.1%	-8.2%
City Council District 7	69.4%	62.3%	-7.1%

2022 On the ballot: 56 non-RCV contests (38 federal, state, and local, 18 ballot measures), 4 municipal RCV contests (Mayor, City Auditor, City Council Member, School Director)			
City Council District 2 (only two candidates)	53.7%	53.7%	0.0%
City Council District 4 (only two candidates)	69.1%	69.0%	-0.1%
City Council District 6	48.1%	48.1%	0.0%
2024 on the ballot: 20 non-RCV contests (7 federal, state, and local, 13 ballot measures), 4 municipal RCV contests (City Attorney, the City Council Member At-Large, local City Council Member, School Director.			
City Council District 1	79.60%	79.00%	-0.60%
City Council District 3	66.10%	65.50%	-0.60%
City Council District 5	57.20%	56.70%	-0.50%
City Council District 7	55.50%	55.00%	-0.50%
Source: Alameda County Registrar of Voters, Oakland Statement of Vote. 2020, 2022, 2024			

San Francisco			
2020 on the ballot: 32 non-RCV contests (7 federal, state and local, 25 ballot measures), 1 municipal RCV contest (Board of Supervisors member)			
Board of Supervisors District 1	87.9%	78.8%	-9.1%
Board of Supervisors District 3	82.5%	71.9%	-10.6%
Board of Supervisors District 5	86.6%	77.8%	-8.8%
Board of Supervisors District 7	89.3%	79.8%	-9.5%
Board of Supervisors District 9 (uncontested)	84.0%	62.2%	-21.8%
Board of Supervisors District 11	82.5%	75.2%	-7.3%
2022 on the ballot: 51 non-RCV contests (30 federal, state and local, 21 ballot measures), 4 municipal RCV contests (Assessor-Recorder, District Attorney, Public Defender, Board of Supervisors member)			
Board of Supervisors District 2 (uncontested)	67.5%	47.5%	-19.9%
Board of Supervisors District 4 (only two candidates)	60.7%	55.8%	-4.9%
Board of Supervisors District 6	54.0%	47.9%	-6.2%
Board of Supervisors District 8 (only two candidates)	72.2%	62.2%	-10.0%
Board of Supervisors District 10 (only two candidates)	47.2%	38.4%	-8.7%
2024 on the ballot: 34 non-RCV contests (9 federal, state and local, 25 ballot measures), 5 municipal RCV contests (Mayor, City Attorney, District Attorney, Sheriff, Board of Supervisors).			
Board of Supervisors District 1	81.5%	74.8%	-6.7%
Board of Supervisors District 3	75.4%	65.4%	-10.0%

Board of Supervisors District 5	75.2%	64.8%	-10.4%
Board of Supervisors District 7	82.5%	72.7%	-9.8%
Board of Supervisors District 9	75.5%	67.5%	-8.0%
Board of Supervisors District 11	68.9%	60.2%	-8.7%
San Francisco Department of Elections, Statement of Vote. 2020, 2022, 2024			

- ¹ Meredith, M., & Morse, M. (2019). *Learning About Undervotes from Ballot-Level Data: Evidence from the 2018 Florida Midterm Election*. MIT Election Data and Science Lab. <https://electionlab.mit.edu/articles/learning-about-undervotes-ballot-level-data>; Fisk, C. A. (2020). *No Republican, No Vote: Undervoting and Consequences of the Top-Two Primary System*. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 20(3), 292–312. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/state-politics-and-policy-quarterly/article/abs/no-republican-no-vote-undervoting-and-consequences-of-the-toptwo-primary-system/C51FCA099A914A2898A017263906467F>; Herrnson, P. S., Hanmer, M. J., & Niemi, R. G. (2012). *The Impact of Ballot Type on Voter Errors*. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(3), 716–730. University of Maryland. <https://gvpt.umd.edu/sites/gvpt.umd.edu/files/pubs/Herrnson%20Hanmer%20Niemi%20AJPS%20Ballot%20and%20Errors.pdf>; Pew Research Center. (2017). *How ‘Drop-Off’ Voters Differ From Consistent Voters and Nonvoters*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/09/14/how-drop-off-voters-differ-from-consistent-voters-and-non-voters/>; Clark, A. L., & Peterson, G. D. (2002). *Too Far to the Bottom? Exploring the Phenomenon of Voter Roll-Off*. City of Minneapolis Legislative Information Management System. <https://lms.minneapolismn.gov/Download/FileV2/26913/Voter-Rolloff.pdf>; Bonneau, C. W., & Loepp, E. (n.d.). *Getting Things Straight: The Effects of Ballot Design and Electoral Structure on Voter Participation*. Ohio State University Department of Political Science. https://polisci.osu.edu/sites/polisci.osu.edu/files/Bonneau_Paper.pdf
- ² Zoltan L. Hajnal, Vladimir Kogan, and G. Agustin Markarian, “Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition,” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 1 (2022): 374–83, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000915>. Appendix H
- ³ Dr. Lisa Handley (2025) The Voting Rights Implications of Changing the Election Cycle and Adopting Open Primaries and Top-Two General Elections https://www.nyc.gov/assets/charter/downloads/pdf/2025/dr_handley_nyva_report.pdf. Citizens Union. (2022). Policy Report: Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years; Hajnal, Z. L., & Green, A. (2024). Big Cities – Tiny Votes? America’s Urban Voter Turnout. Yankelovich Center for Social Science Research, University of California San Diego; Election Law Clinic, Harvard Law School. (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> NYC Campaign Finance Board, 2022- 2023 Voter Analysis Report
- ⁴ Election Results and Voter Registration Numbers from the New York City Board of Elections
- ⁵ Citizens Union. (2022). Policy Report: Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years
- ⁶ Other large cities that transitioned from odd to even years, including Phoenix, Austin, and Las Vegas, did not make available to us voter turnout numbers for president of governor at the city level.
- ⁷ Baltimore City Board of Elections, Statement of Votes Cast - 2011, 2016, 2020, 2024. 2011: <https://boe.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/2011%2520Baltimore%2520City%2520General%2520Election.pdf> 2016: https://boe.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/EL45A_Election%20Summary.pdf, 2020: https://boe.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11-30%20%201027%20-%2003PG%20%20EL45%20Election%20Summary%20Official%20Report_0.pdf, 2024: <https://boe.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/2024%20PG%20EL45%20Official.pdf>
- ⁸ Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder. 2017: <https://results.lavote.gov/#year=2017&election=3577>, 2022: https://content.lavote.gov/docs/rccc/svc/4300_community.pdf?v=2
- ⁹ In 2017, Mayor Eric Garcetti was running for reelection and won with 81%, while further down the ballot, a proposal for a moratorium on certain types of developments in the city called Measure S drew controversy <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-measure-s-20170307-story.html>
- ¹⁰ In 2019, Mayor London Breed was running for reelection and won with 71%. Down ballot was a proposal dealing with campaign finance reform known as Proposition F <https://files.amlegal.com/pdf/files/sanfran/2019-11-05-PropF.pdf>

¹¹ Data from San Francisco Department of Elections. 2019: <https://sfelections.org/results/20191105w/index.html>, 2024: <https://sfelections.org/results/20241105w/index.html>

¹² El Paso County Elections Department. 2017: https://el-paso-county-elections.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/files/000/001/310/original/Official_Final_Election_Results.pdf?1495555000, 2020: https://el-paso-county-elections.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/files/000/003/188/original/Official_Final_Precinct_by_Precinct_Results.pdf?1605641831, and <https://epcountyvotes.com/maps/city-representatives-map>, 2024: https://ep-county-elections-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/files/000/005/794/original/PCT_BY_PCT_RES.pdf?1732132444,

¹³ Center for Civic Design, Best Practices Designing Ranked Choice Voting Ballots, July 2022 <https://civicedesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/OCD-RCV-Best-Practices-Ballot-Design-2022-1.pdf>

¹⁴ The Impact of Ranked Choice Voting on the Democratic Primary Elections of 2021. Center for Urban Research, The Graduate Center, City University of New York. July 4, 2022 <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/2022-07/CUR-Report-on-RCV-Final.pdf>

¹⁵ Presentation by Steven Romalewski, Director, CUNY Mapping Service, Center for Urban Research at the CUNY Graduate Center, The View from Inside: Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) & Its Impact on New York City Elections, September 9, 2025

¹⁶ FairVote lists 50 jurisdictions using RCV - two states, three counties, and 47 cities - but most hold their local election in odd-numbered years, like New York City, or use RCV for state and federal elections too. Others use RCV on even years, but are too small for a meaningful comparison, including Albany, CA; Benton County, OR; Corvallis, OR; Palm Desert, CA; San Leandro, CA; Westbrook, ME.

¹⁷ San Francisco is a consolidated city-county. Its legislative branch – the Board of Supervisors – has had elections on even-years, while all other executive positions, including Mayor, Sheriff, District Attorney, City Attorney and Treasurer, were elected in odd-numbered years until their first even-year appearance during the 2024 election.

¹⁸ The exact number of races on a ballot could change from voter to voter, in all cities and years covered in this report.