

Happy Special Election Day!

The Winner Was Decided for You

Two State Assembly members and two State Senators were elected last November to municipal offices in New York City and Buffalo. Because their seats were vacated mid-term, special elections to fill those vacancies are being held on February 2, 2026.

Together, these four districts represent nearly one million residents across Manhattan, Queens, and downtown Buffalo. Yet rather than a democratic contest, voters in these districts are participating in elections that look more like a coronation.

Like regularly scheduled general elections, special elections for state offices are often uncompetitive. Most Assembly and Senate districts are dominated by a single party - in these cases, the Democratic Party - meaning that the candidate who secures the party's nomination is almost always assured victory.

In state legislative special elections, however, party nominees are not selected through primary elections. Instead, a small group of party officials chooses the nominee, effectively eliminating any opportunity for voters to participate in the selection process.

The result is a system of predetermined elections that encourages patronage and routinely produces voter turnout below 5%, yet is the path that sent nearly one in five current state legislators to Albany.

There is another way. For nearly four decades, New York City has used nonpartisan special elections that generate greater competition, more campaigning, and significantly higher voter participation.

Here are the details.

Special Elections Held on February 2, 2026

- **State Assembly District 36 – Western Queens** (vacated by Zohran Mamdani, who was elected Mayor of New York City)
- **State Assembly District 74 – Manhattan’s East Side** (vacated by Harvey Epstein, who was elected to the New York City Council)
- **State Senate District 47 – Manhattan’s West Side** (vacated by Brad Hoylman-Sigal, who was elected Manhattan Borough President)
- **State Senate District 61 – Downtown Buffalo** (vacated by Sean Ryan, who was elected Mayor of Buffalo)



How Party Nominees Were Chosen

Candidates in state legislative special elections may run as nominees of a political party or as independents (if they collect the required number of signatures).

Unlike general elections, however, there are no party primaries. Instead, a committee made up of a small group of party officials chooses who gets to run on the party line. The composition of that committee varies based on the internal rules of every party in each county; they are commonly controlled or heavily influenced by party leaders, including the chair of the county party.

For the February 2 special elections:

- In **Queens**, Democratic County Chair Gregory Meeks and four district leaders representing Assembly District 36—a total of five individuals—[selected](#) Diana Moreno as the Democratic nominee. Two candidates who ran for other seats before, Rana Abdelhamid and Mary Jobaida, collected signatures to appear on the ballot as independents.
- In **Buffalo**, the Erie County Democratic Executive Committee, chaired by Jeremy Zellner, [selected Zellner himself](#) as the Democratic nominee for Senate District 61. Until announcing his candidacy, Zellner also served as the county's elections commissioner. Other interested candidates, including Assembly Member Jonathan Rivera, were effectively blocked from the ballot.
- In **Manhattan**, Democratic County Committee members residing in the relevant districts voted on nominees. In Senate District 47, Erik Bottcher was [selected unanimously](#) by 130 committee members to run on as the Democratic candidate. In Assembly District 74, Keith Powers received 60% support in [a meeting](#) of 168 committee members to secure the Democratic nomination. Manhattan is an outlier among county parties for operating a comparatively open process within the party-controlled system, yet it still only involved a miniscule fraction of the voters in the district. [In practice, about 0.0007% of enrolled democratic voters in Senate District 47 and 0.002% in Assembly District 74 decided who would be the nominee and therefore be all-but-assured a win in the special election.](#)
- Local leaders of the Republican, Conservative, and Working Family parties also selected their candidates for these seats, in an even less transparent process (Dan Gagliardo in Senate District 61, Charlotte Friedman in Senate District 47, and Joseph Foley in Assembly District 74; the WFP placed Bottcher on their line).

State Special Elections: Party Patronage and Low Turnout

This system means that nearly everywhere in New York, the outcome of state special elections is effectively predetermined, having been set behind closed doors by party insiders



weeks before ballots are cast. Candidates seeking office only need to convince a handful of party leaders – or at best, dozens.

Special Elections for State Legislative Districts in New York City in the Last Decade

Date	Office	Turnout
May 23, 2017	30th Senate District	4.4%
April 24, 2018	39th Assembly District	2.0%
April 24, 2018	74th Assembly District	6.2%
April 24, 2018	32nd Senate District	5.4%
April 24, 2018	80th Assembly District	1.2%
January 18, 2022	68th Assembly District	1.8%
February 15, 2022	60th Assembly District	3.7%
February 15, 2022	72nd Assembly District	3.1%
March 22, 2022	43rd Assembly District	4.3%
May 24, 2022	58th Assembly District	3.4%
September 12, 2023	27th Assembly District	7.4%
February 13, 2024	77th Assembly District	2.5%
May 20, 2025	22nd Senate District	8.6%

Campaigns are then truncated to a few short weeks, and challengers are locked out before the public ever hears their names. Candidates who receive party backing in one-party districts face little incentive to introduce themselves to voters, articulate policy platforms, or conduct robust outreach.

Standalone special elections already suffer from low turnout due to limited notice and reduced media coverage. The insider-controlled nomination process further suppresses participation. [Over the past decade, average voter turnout in New York City state legislative special elections has been approximately 4%, and in some races has fallen below 2%.](#)

Instead of energizing democracy, the current special election system actively promotes party patronage.

A Common Path to State Office

Today’s special elections are not a rare occurrence.

[Nearly one in five current members of the New York State Legislature, about 19 percent \(including the ones elected today\), first entered office through this process.](#) Given the legislature’s high incumbency rate, candidates who secure party nominations before special elections are often assured a lifetime position in the legislature, should they seek it.

The current cohort of state lawmakers includes eight members first elected to office through a special election over three decades ago.

How State Lawmakers Were First Elected?

	Total Members	First Elected in Special Elections	As Share of Chamber
Senate	63	11	17.5%
Assembly	150	29	19.3%
Legislature - Total	213	40	18.8%

There Is a Better Model – in New York City

New York City offers a proven alternative to the party-controlled, competition-depressing state special election system.

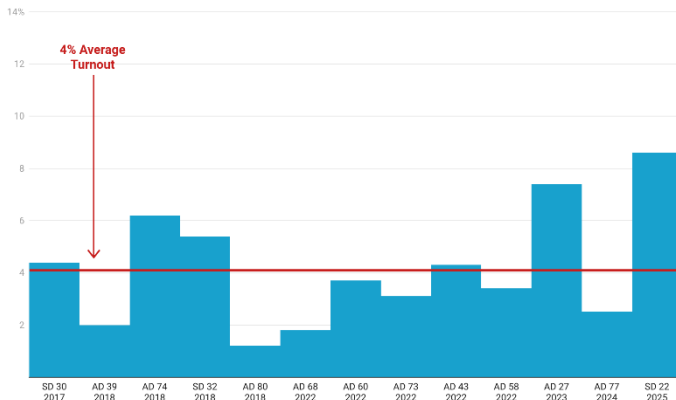
When vacancies occur in New York City offices — including City Council, Borough President, and even citywide positions — the city holds non-partisan special elections. There are no primaries, candidates collect signatures, party labels are removed from the ballot, and all voters can participate in a single election.

These non-partisan elections do not change the party composition in the City Council. Once candidates win, they join either the Democratic or the Republican conferences in the Council.

New York City adopted this model in 1988, and it has worked well for nearly four decades. Special elections for city offices see more competition, more campaigning, and far greater voter engagement than ones for state offices.

Voter Turnout in Special Elections for State Legislative Offices

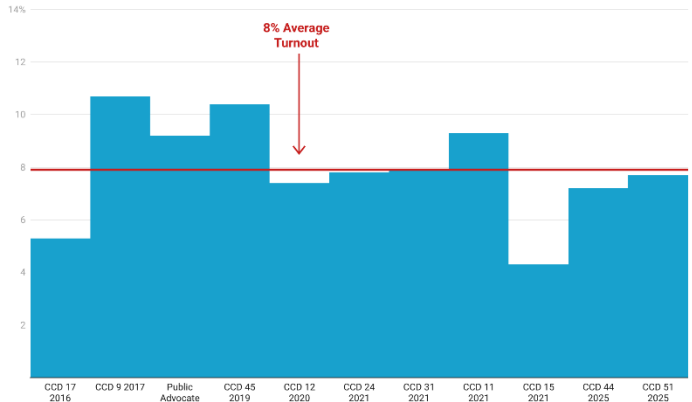
All special elections for the State Senate or State Assembly districts in New York City from 2016 to 2025. In these special elections, party nominees are selected by party insiders behind closed doors, and the race is essentially predetermined.



Special elections held on the same day as general elections were not included in this analysis
Source: New York City Board of Elections data • Created with Datawrapper

Voter Turnout in Special Elections for New York City Offices

All special elections for the New York City Council and other City officers from 2016 to 2025. These special elections are non-partisan, with multiple candidates running in a relatively competitive race.



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

The difference is striking. Average turnout in New York City's non-partisan special elections in the last decade was roughly double that of state legislative special elections in the five boroughs held under the current insider-controlled system. Thousands more New Yorkers choose to participate in non-partisan special elections. That is not an accident. When multiple candidates — often several Democrats — compete for the same seat, they are forced to knock on doors, articulate positions, and energize supporters. Voters respond when their choices feel real.

The Solution

The case for reform is obvious. New York should adopt a non-partisan special election model for state legislative vacancies, like the one already used successfully in New York City. Such a system would open the field to more candidates, reduce the power of party gatekeepers, and give voters a genuine choice — without leaving districts unrepresented for a long time.

Governor Kathy Hochul publicly committed to reforming the special elections process last year, yet no changes were made. Now, in 2026, voters across the state are once again being asked to head to polls under this broken system.

At a moment when faith in democracy is fragile, the state should be doing everything possible to increase voter engagement — not running elections designed to minimize participation. If state leaders are serious about strengthening democracy, this is a reform they can no longer put off.

Appendix A: Voter Turnout in Special Elections in New York City, 2016-2025

Date	Level	District	Eligible voters	Votes	Turnout
2/23/2016	City	17th Council District	71,136	3,764	5.3%
2/14/2017	City	9th Council District	109,189	11,663	10.7%
5/23/2017	State	30th Senate District	201,809	8,938	4.4%
4/24/2018	State	39th Assembly District	43,699	856	2.0%
4/24/2018	State	74th Assembly District	75,233	4,642	6.2%
4/24/2018	State	32nd Senate District	191,299	3,650	5.4%
4/24/2018	State	80th Assembly District (uncontested)	67,235	2,447	1.2%
2/26/2019	City	Public Advocate	4,650,188	427,355	9.2%
5/14/2019	City	45th Council District	94,157	9,750	10.4%
12/22/2020	City	12th Council District	101,482	7,521	7.4%
2/2/2021	City	24th Council District	87,664	6,853	7.8%
2/23/2021	City	31st Council District	94,857	7,451	7.9%
3/23/2021	City	11th Council District	102,617	9,555	9.3%
3/23/2021	City	15th Council District	93,211	3,976	4.3%
1/18/2022	State	68th Assembly District	81,018	1,436	1.8%
2/15/2022	State	60th Assembly District	82,105	3,017	3.7%
2/15/2022	State	72nd Assembly District	81,018	2,520	3.1%
3/22/2022	State	43rd Assembly District	78,405	3,344	4.3%
5/24/2022	State	58th Assembly District	74,064	2,504	3.4%
9/12/2023	State	27th Assembly District	62,976	4,632	7.4%
2/13/2024	State	77th Assembly District	60,482	1,533	2.5%
3/25/2025	City	44th Council District	78,527	5,656	7.2%
4/29/2025	City	51st Council District	123,913	9,591	7.7%
5/20/2025	State	22nd Senate District	155,468	13,382	8.6%
<i>Special elections held on the same day as general elections or presidential primaries were not included in this analysis (4/19/2016: 59th, 62nd, 65th Assembly Districts; 11/2/2021: 30th Senate, 86th Assembly Districts)</i>					

Appendix B: How Current State Lawmakers Were First Elected to Office

New York State Senate				
District	First Name	Last Name	Type of First Election to Office	Year First Elected
1	Anthony	Palumbo	General	2020
2	Mario	Mattera	General	2020
3	Dean	Murray	General	2022
4	Monica	Martinez	General	2022
5	Steven	Rhoads	General	2022
6	Siela	Bynoe	General	2024
7	Jack	Martins	General	2022
8	Alexis	Weik	General	2020
9	Patricia	Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick	General	2022
10	James	Sanders Jr.	General	2012
11	Toby Ann	Stavisky	Special	1999
12	Michael	Gianaris	General	2010
13	Jessica	Ramos	General	2018
14	Leroy	Comrie	General	2014
15	Joseph	Addabbo, Jr.	General	2008
16	John	Liu	General	2018
17	Steve	Chan	General	2024
18	Julia	Salazar	General	2018
19	Roxanne	Persaud	Special	2015
20	Zellnor	Myrie	General	2018
21	Kevin	Parker	General	2002
22	Sam	Sutton	Special	2025
23	Jessica	Scarcella-Spanton	General	2022
24	Andrew	Lanza	General	2006
25	Jabari	Brisport	General	2020
26	Andrew	Gounardes	General	2018
27	Brian	Kavanagh	Special	2017
28	Liz	Krueger	Special	2002




29	Jose	M. Serrano	General	2004
30	Cordell	Cleare	Special	2021
31	Robert	Jackson	General	2018
32	Luis	Sepulveda	Special	2018
33	J. Gustavo	Rivera	General	2010
34	Nathalia	Fernandez	General	2022
35	Andrea	Stewart-Cousins	General	2006
36	Jamaal	Bailey	General	2016
37	Shelley	Mayer	Special	2018
38	William	Weber Jr.	General	2022
39	Robert	Rolison	General	2022
40	Peter	Harckham	General	2018
41	Michelle	Hinchey	General	2020
42	James	Skoufis	General	2018
43	Jacob	Ashby	General	2022
44	James	Tedisco	General	2016
45	Daniel	Stec	General	2020
46	Patricia	Fahy	General	2024
47	Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2		Special	2026
48	Rachel	May	General	2018
49	Mark	Walczyk	General	2022
50	Christopher	J. Ryan	General	2024
51	Peter	Oberacker	General	2020
52	Lea	Webb	General	2022
53	Joseph	Griffo	General	2006
54	Pamela	Helming	General	2016
55	Samra G.	Brouk	General	2020
56	Jeremy A.	Cooney	General	2020
57	George M.	Borrello	Special	2019
58	Thomas	O'Mara	General	2010
59	Kristen	Gonzalez	General	2022
60	Patrick	Gallivan	General	2010
61	Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2		Special	2026
62	Robert	Ortt	General	2014
63	April	Baskin	General	2024



New York State Assembly				
District	First Name	Last Name	Type of First Election to Office	Year First Elected
1	Thomas	Schiavoni	General	2024
2	Jodi	Giglio	General	2020
3	Joseph	DeStefano	General	2018
4	Rebecca	Kassay	General	2024
5	Doug	Smith	Special	2018
6	Philip	Ramos	General	2002
7	Jarett C.	Gandolfo	General	2020
8	Michael	Fitzpatrick	General	2002
9	Michael A.	Durso	General	2020
10	Steven H.	Stern	Special	2018
11	Kwani	O'Pharrow	General	2024
12	Keith	Brown	General	2020
13	Charles	Lavine	General	2004
14	David	McDonough	Special	2002
15	Jake	Blumencranz	General	2022
16	Daniel	Norber	General	2024
17	John K.	Mikulin	Special	2018
18	Noah	Burroughs	General	2024
19	Edward	Ra	General	2010
20	Eric Ari	Brown	Special	2022
21	Judy A.	Griffin	General	2024
22	Michaelle	Solages	General	2012
23	Stacey G.	Pheffer Amato	General	2016
24	David	Weprin	Special	2010
25	Nily	Rozic	General	2012
26	Edward	Braunstein	General	2010
27	Sam	Berger	Special	2023
28	Andrew	Hevesi	Special	2005
29	Alicia	Hyndman	Special	2015



30	Steven	Raga	General	2022
31	Khaleel	Anderson	General	2020
32	Vivian	Cook	General	1990
33	Clyde	Vanel	General	2016
34	Jessica	Gonzalez-Rojas	General	2020
35	Larinda	Hooks	General	2024
36	Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2		Special	2026
37	Claire	Valdez	General	2024
38	Jenifer	Rajkumar	General	2020
39	Catalina	Cruz	General	2018
40	Ron	Kim	General	2012
41	Kalman	Yeger	General	2024
42	Rodneyse	Bichotte Hermelyn	General	2014
43	Brian	Cunningham	Special	2022
44	Robert C.	Carroll	General	2016
45	Michael	Novakhov	General	2022
46	Alec	Brook-Krasny	General	2022
47	William	Colton	General	1996
48	Simcha	Eichenstein	General	2018
49	Lester	Chang	General	2022
50	Emily	Gallagher	General	2020
51	Marcela	Mitaynes	General	2020
52	Jo Anne	Simon	General	2014
53	Maritza	Davila	Special	2013
54	Erik	Dilan	General	2014
55	Latrice	Walker	General	2014
56	Stefani L.	Zinerman	General	2020
57	Phara	Souffrant Forrest	General	2020
58	Monique	Chandler-Waterman	Special	2022
59	Jaime	Williams	Special	2016
60	Nikki	Lucas	Special	2022
61	Charles D.	Fall	General	2018
62	Michael	Reilly	General	2018
63	Samuel	Pirozzolo	General	2022
64	Michael	Tannousis	General	2020



65	Grace	Lee	General	2022
66	Deborah	Glick	General	1990
67	Linda	Rosenthal	Special	2006
68	Eddie	Gibbs	Special	2022
69	Micah	Lasher	General	2024
70	Jordan	Wright	General	2024
71	Alfred	Taylor	Special	2017
72	Manny	De Los Santos	Special	2022
73	Alex	Bores	General	2022
74	Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2		Special	2026
75	Tony	Simone	General	2022
76	Rebecca	Seawright	General	2014
77	Landon	Dais	Special	2024
78	George	Alvarez	General	2022
79	Chantel	Jackson	General	2020
80	John	Zaccaro Jr.	General	2022
81	Jeffrey	Dinowitz	Special	1994
82	Michael	Benedetto	General	2004
83	Carl	Heastie	General	2000
84	Amanda N.	Septimo	General	2020
85	Emerita	Torres	General	2024
86	Yudelka	Tapia	Special	2021
87	Karines	Reyes	General	2018
88	Amy	Paulin	General	2000
89	J. Gary	Pretlow	General	1992
90	Nader J.	Sayegh	General	2018
91	Steven	Otis	General	2012
92	Maryjane	Shimsky	General	2022
93	Chris	Burdick	General	2020
94	Matthew	Slater	General	2022
95	Dana	Levenberg	General	2022
96	Patrick	Carroll	General	2024
97	Aron	Wieder	General	2024
98	Karl	Brabenec	General	2014
99	Christopher	Eachus	General	2022



100	Paula	Kay	General	2024
101	Brian	Maher	General	2022
102	Christopher	Tague	Special	2018
103	Sarahana	Shrestha	General	2022
104	Jonathan G.	Jacobson	General	2018
105	Anil	Beephan Jr.	General	2022
106	Didi	Barrett	Special	2012
107	Scott	H. Bendett	General	2022
108	John T.	McDonald III	General	2012
109	Gabriella	Romero	General	2024
110	Phil	Steck	General	2012
111	Angelo	Santabarbara	General	2012
112	Mary Beth	Walsh	General	2016
113	Carrie	Woerner	General	2014
114	Matthew J.	Simpson	General	2020
115	Michael	Cashman	Special	2025
116	Scott	Gray	General	2022
117	Kenneth	Blankenbush	General	2010
118	Robert J.	Smullen	General	2018
119	Marianne	Buttenschon	General	2018
120	William	Barclay	General	2002
121	Joe	Angelino	General	2020
122	Brian	Miller	General	2016
123	Donna	Lupardo	General	2004
124	Christoper	Friend	General	2010
125	Anna	Kelles	General	2020
126	John	Lemondes Jr	General	2020
127	Al	Stirpe	General	2012
128	Pamela	Hunter	Special	2015
129	William	Magnarelli	Special	1998
130	Brian D.	Manktelow	General	2018
131	Jeff L.	Gallahan	General	2020
132	Philip	Palmesano	General	2010
133	Andrea	K.Bailey	General	2024
134	Josh	Jensen	General	2020



135	Jennifer	Lunsford	General	2020
136	Sarah	Clark	General	2020
137	Demond L.	Meeks	General	2020
138	Harry	Bronson	General	2010
139	Stephen	Hawley	Special	2006
140	William C	Conrad	General	2020
141	Crystal	Peoples-Stokes	General	2002
142	Patrick B.	Burke	General	2018
143	Patrick	Chludzinski	General	2024
144	Paul	Bologna	General	2024
145	Angelo	J. Morinello	General	2016
146	Karen M.	McMahon	General	2018
147	David	DiPietro	General	2012
148	Joe	Sempolinski	General	2024
149	Jonathan	Rivera	General	2020
150	Andrew	Molitor	General	2024