

THE CASE FOR RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN NEW YORK CITY

Election reform in New York City has languished over the years. Meanwhile, the city continues to be plagued by two recurring electoral outcomes that fly in the face of our democratic values: elections that are won with less than majority support and voters who are hesitant to vote their true preference.

The City has a unique opportunity to bring transformative change to how New Yorkers vote. The Mayor's Charter Revision Commission is considering Ranked Choice Voting¹ as a possible recommendation to be approved by voters in November. **COMMON CAUSE NY STRONGLY URGES THE COMMISSION TO RECOMMEND RANKED CHOICE VOTING FOR ALL NEW YORK CITY ELECTIONS.**

Ranked Choice Voting provides many benefits to voters. Ranked Choice Voting builds majority support for candidates in multi-candidate races, inspires voters to vote their preference- not the lesser of two evils - and avoids costly run offs. With Ranked Choice Voting, elected officials would start their term with a clear mandate from their constituents. And voters would back the majority winner while truly engaging in the democratic process.

Common Cause analyzed election results for primary and general elections during the last three election cycles to determine the frequency of multi-candidate elections² and the frequency of primary and general elections that are won with less than a majority.³ We found that 66.1% of primaries were multi-candidate races, races where Ranked Choice Voting could be triggered. As a result, our analysis of election outcomes is largely focused on the multi-candidate primaries since 2009.

More importantly, over the last three election cycles, we discovered an alarming trend- **63.6% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 50% of the vote, 29.8% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 40% of the vote, and 7.7% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 30% of the vote.**

We found little evidence that this trend persists into the general election.

¹ Ranked Choice Voting allows voters to rank candidates from first to last choice on the ballot. A candidate who collects a majority of the vote wins. If there's no majority, then the last-place candidate will be eliminated and votes reallocated. The process is repeated until there's a majority winner.

² In this instance, Common Cause defines multi-candidate races as those with more than 2 candidates.

³ For the purposes of this analysis, majority is defined as 50% or greater.

2009-2017 Primary Election Outcomes

Multi-Candidate Primary Elections in New York City

Since 2009 there have been 121 primary elections in the city. The majority were city council races. 33.8% of these primaries were two candidate races and 66.1% were multi-candidate races.

2009-2017 Candidates in Primary Elections

| Total Primary Elections | # of Two Candidate Primaries | # of Multi-Candidate Primaries |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 121 | 41 | 80 |

Overall, we found:

- Just 36.3% of multi-candidate primaries won with more than 50% of the vote.
- 63.6% of multi-candidate primaries won with less than 50% of the vote.
- 29.8% of multi-candidate primaries won with less than 40% of the vote.
- 7.7% of multi-candidate primaries won with less than 30% of the vote.
- Three multi-candidate primaries resulted in run-off elections.

2009-2017 Multi-Candidate Primary Election Outcomes

| % of Primaries won with more than 50% | % of Primaries won with less than 50% | % of Primaries won with less than 40% | % of Primaries won with less than 30% | # of Runoffs |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| 36.3% | 63.6% | 29.8% | 7.7% | 3 |

2009 Election Cycle

In September, there were 37 primaries in New York City. The vast majority were city council races, but also included several borough and citywide positions including the Mayor, Comptroller, and Public Advocate. Just 7 of these primaries had two candidates, the remaining 30 races were multi-candidate primaries.

2009 Primary Election Cycle

| % of Two Candidate Primaries | % of Multi-Candidate Primaries | # of Citywide Primaries | # of Borough Primaries | # of City Council Primaries |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 18.9% | 81% | 3 | 1 | 33 |

Multi-Candidate Primary Outcomes

- 42.8% of multi-candidate primaries were won with over 50% of the vote.
- 57.1% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 50% of the vote.
- 35.7% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 40% of the vote.
- 10.7% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 30% of the vote.
- Two runoff races were triggered for the office of the Comptroller and Public Advocate.
 - Neither John Liu or David Yassky achieved threshold support to win the Comptroller primary.
 - Neither Bill de Blasio or Mark Green achieved threshold support to win the Public Advocate primary.



General Election Outcomes

In the general election, one candidate won their city council race with less than 50% of the vote.

- Peter Koo won Council District 20 with 49.6% of the vote.

2013 Election Cycle

In September, there were 46 primaries in New York City. The vast majority were city council races, but also included several borough and citywide positions including the Mayor, Comptroller, and Public Advocate. Just 17 of these primaries had two candidates, the remaining 29 races were multi-candidate primaries.

2013 Primary Election Cycle

| <i>% of Two Candidate Primaries</i> | <i>% of Multi-Candidate Primaries</i> | <i># of Citywide Primaries⁴</i> | <i># of Borough Primaries</i> | <i># of City Council Primaries</i> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 36.9% | 63% | 4 | 3 | 39 |

Multi-Candidate Primary Outcomes

- 28.5% of multi-candidate primaries were won with over 50% of the vote.
- 71.4% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 50% of the vote.
- 32.1% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 40% of the vote.
- 10.7% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 30% of the vote.
- A runoff race was triggered for the office of the Public Advocate.
 - Neither Letitia James or Daniel Squadron achieved threshold support to win the Public Advocate primary.

General Election Outcomes

In the general election, all candidates won their races with over 50% of the vote.

2017 Election Cycle

In September, there were 38 primaries in New York City. The vast majority were city council races, but also included several borough and citywide positions including the Mayor, Comptroller, and Public Advocate. 17 of these primaries had two candidates, the remaining 21 races were multi-candidate primaries.

2017 Primary Election Cycle

| <i>% of Two Candidate Primaries</i> | <i>% of Multi-Candidate Primaries</i> | <i># of Citywide Primaries</i> | <i># of Borough Primaries</i> | <i># of City Council Primaries</i> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 44.7% | 55.2% | 2 | 1 | 35 |

Multi-Candidate Primary Outcomes

- 38% of multi-candidate primaries were won with over 50% of the vote.
- 61.9% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 50% of the vote.
- 19% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than 40% of the vote.

⁴ In 2013, Democrats and Republicans had mayoral primaries.



General Election Outcomes

In the general election, two candidates won their city council races with less than 50% of the vote.

- Margaret Chin won Council District 1 with 49.9% of the vote.
- Mark Gjonaj won Council District 13 with 48.7% of the vote.

A Clarion Call for Ranked Choice Voting in New York City

As our analysis demonstrates multi-candidate primaries in New York City tend to result in negative electoral outcomes:

- Over the last three election cycles, 63.6% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than majority support.
- In 2009, 57.1% of multi-candidate primaries were won with less than majority support.
- In 2013, 71.4% multi-candidate primaries were won with less than majority support.
- In 2017, 61.9% multi-candidate primaries were won with less than majority support.

The handful of multi-candidate races in the general election which produced a winner with less than majority support did so on the margins. Two races were within a 0.5% of the majority and one was within 1.3% of securing the majority.

Implementing Ranked Choice Voting would avoid the troubling pattern of anti-democratic electoral outcomes in New York City. Candidates would move to the general election with majority support from their district. Constituents are well served when their elected representative is able to garner majority support, while the elected official benefits from a broader base of support as well. As an additional benefit, the city would avoid the occasional but costly run-off election. Ultimately, New Yorkers would feel truly invested in the electoral process as our elected officials would be chosen by a majority of voters.

