

What You Need to Know Now About the 2021 Elections in New York City

Feeling lost already? Here are the basics about who is running for what, what's at stake and other essentials to help New Yorkers follow the staggering election season unfolding this year.

BY RACHEL HOLLIDAY SMITH, THE CITY

With everything that happened in 2020 — and so far this year — there's a good chance the New York City 2021 election wasn't top of mind.

But by this time next year, we'll have a new mayor, comptroller, four new borough presidents and a slew of new City Council members, thanks to term limits first approved by voters in 1993. And many of those leaders will be chosen much sooner than you might think.

- The primary — where many Democrats all but clinch their win in our blue city — is set for June 22, 2021.
- The deadline to [register to vote](#) is Friday, May 28 and early voting begins on Saturday, June 12. The deadline to request an absentee ballot is June 15.
- Why so soon this year? An early-voting bill signed into law by the governor in January 2019 also moved New York's primary from September to June.
- The general election is set for Nov. 2, 2021.

This year's race will be busier and more crowded than any in recent memory. Hundreds of people are running for office. The Campaign Finance Board predicts it will dole out \$70 million to candidates taking publicly matched funding, roughly double the previous record of \$36 million in 2001.

And with a new voting method, called ranked-choice voting, casting a ballot in 2021 may require a bit of studying up before heading to the polls.

Here's what you need to know about the 2021 election in New York City right now. And, don't worry — we'll update this story with the latest information as the race moves forward:

Who's Running for Mayor, and Why Should I Care?

There are a lot of people running for mayor — a few dozen candidates by early January — and THE CITY is keeping a list of everyone campaigning [here](#).

But first, let's back up. What does a mayor even do?

A lot. The mayor is the city's top executive and gets to set the agenda. For example, the mayor can choose to prioritize the development of affordable housing or making sure every school has a nurse — and drafts the city budget that serves as a blueprint for how we pay for those things. That alone is a massive task; New York City's budget serving 8.4 million residents is currently \$92 billion, more than the gross domestic product of the Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, or Luxembourg.

The mayor also chooses the heads of every city agency, like the Department of Social Services, Department of Education, and the NYPD, and can approve or veto each piece of legislation passed by the City Council. The mayor took over control of city schools in 2002, though is dependent on the state Legislature to retain that role.

One thing to remember: The mayor, contrary to popular belief, has limited influence over the MTA. That's the purview of the governor, whose relationship with the mayor can be key to the city.

There are of course so many other things the mayor influences. For more information, [this guide](#) from the Campaign Finance Board is helpful.

A City Election Like No Other

Choosing the next mayor is always an important duty of New Yorkers. But the stakes are higher now than during few other periods since Robert Anderson Van Wyck was elected the first mayor of the five boroughs in 1897.

We are facing historic challenges. With lower tax and other revenue due to the economic fallout of the pandemic, the city's budget faces long-term uncertainty. Unemployment and homelessness in New York are very high, and the demand for local food relief is enormous.

For many, keeping a roof over their heads is tougher than ever — and a pause on evictions made by the state Legislature is set to expire on May 1, a few weeks before the June primary.

And the relationship between the law-enforcement agencies and the public remains deeply fraught following months of protests. Candidates this year will reckon with many voters who want to see change in the NYPD as well as a police department long resistant to reform.

(Other) Big Seats to Fill

Finding a new mayor is not the only high-stakes choice voters will make in 2021.

The other citywide offices up for grabs include comptroller — who manages and audits the city's coffers, while playing a key oversight role on city contracts — and many of the borough president seats. Four of five borough president slots are open, and the fifth, filled recently by Donovan Richards in Queens, will go to the voters again in 2021.

The public advocate's office will go to voters, too, though incumbent Jumaane Williams — who won the seat in a 2019 special election — will be hard to beat in 2021.

- Here's our guide on [the comptroller's race](#).
- [Here's our guide on the races for borough president](#) in Manhattan, Brooklyn, The Bronx, Queens and Staten Island.
- Here's what you need to know about [the public advocate race](#).

More than two-thirds of the City Council will also turn over because of term limits. After the changeover on at least 35 out of the Council's 51 seats takes place, the newly installed lawmakers will choose the next Council speaker —

the member who presides over meetings and exerts strong influence on budgets and other deals.

- Here's our guide on what to know about [races in the City Council](#).

Meanwhile, Manhattan voters will choose a district attorney in 2021. That field is already crowded with candidates who are waiting to hear whether current DA Cyrus Vance will seek re-election. As THE CITY previously reported, the entrance of Vance acolyte Lucy Lang signals the incumbent DA will not run again.

On top of everything, New York voters will have a new wrinkle to contend with at the ballot box in 2021: ranked-choice voting. That means instead of just picking one candidate for any given position, you will choose up to your top five. Things only get complicated if no candidate gets more than 50% in the top slot.

- Here's [our guide on how ranked choice voting works](#) and how it may affect this year's race.

The NYC Board of Elections has resources on how to register to vote [here](#), and you can find important dates and deadlines [here](#) (state BOE) and [here](#) (city BOE).