



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
INDEPENDENT BUDGET OFFICE

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VIA EMAIL

August 15, 2024

Betsy Gotbaum, Executive Director
Citizens Union

bgotbaum@citizensunionfoundation.org

Dear Betsy,

At your request, the Independent Budget Office (IBO) has evaluated what the fiscal impact would be on New York City's budget if all local odd-year elections were shifted to even-numbered years alongside state and federal elections. IBO calculated the five-year average of recent odd-year elections using data published in the New York City Board of Elections (BOE) annual reports to assess what the potential impact of making this shift would be.

IBO estimates that, if the City held on-cycle local elections, there would be fiscal year savings of approximately \$42 million every other year. IBO does not anticipate that the costs to run elections in even years would significantly change as the infrastructure for conducting elections would already be in place and paid for in these years. However, IBO recognizes there may be additional incidental costs such as increased printing and other promotional materials. Additionally, there may also be costs related to operational challenges in handling larger volumes, such as ranked choice voting analysis and other costs.

Depending on what office is being elected, the timing of elections varies. For federal offices, Election Day is the Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even-numbered years. Consequent to the 1894 Constitutional Convention, the New York State Constitution was amended to require that all City elections be held in odd-numbered years. The language specifically dictates that biennial town elections "shall be held on the Tuesday next succeeding the first Monday in November of every odd-numbered year." ¹ Since the timing of local elections is prescribed by the State Constitution, a change at the State level would be necessary to facilitate a shift to even-year ("on-cycle") elections.

For preliminary context, BOE has spent over \$200 million per year in recent years, inclusive of standard operating costs and the cost to conduct elections. Standard operating costs account for the bulk of BOE expenditures and include, but are not limited to, personnel costs and other than personnel costs. Staffing costs cover BOE's central office (including executive management and finance) and borough-based offices, for which there are currently over 500 full-time active positions. Other than personnel expenses cover items such as equipment, rent for buildings, and other contractual costs such as printing for ballots. In the past five years, from 2019 through 2023, total BOE Expenditures ranged from \$173 million in 2019 up to \$258 million in 2023, according to the City's Financial Management System. (All years refer to fiscal years, unless otherwise specified.)

To determine costs specific to conducting elections, IBO used BOE [annual reports](#) published for each calendar year and totaled election-related costs over the past 10 fiscal years for the period 2014 through 2023, which includes five cycles of elections in odd-numbered years. For the purpose of this analysis, IBO calculated costs based on elections occurring within each fiscal year, not calendar year, in order to appropriately determine the potential impact on the City's budget. Even-numbered fiscal years contain

costs for the November general election of the prior odd-numbered calendar year. For example, the total for 2022 includes the election-related costs for the November 2021 general election. General and primary elections were included in IBO’s analysis while special elections were omitted, as the timing and frequency of those are variable. Because the annual report for calendar year 2024 has not yet been published, there are incomplete data for 2024.

For Most Odd-Year Election Cycles, Primary Elections Comprised the Largest Share of Total Costs			
<i>Dollars in Millions</i>			
Fiscal Year	Cost of General Elections	Cost of Primary Elections	Total
2014	17	23	40
2016	10	5	15
2018	14	21	35
2020	20	35	55
2022	31	32	63

SOURCE: New York City Board of Elections Annual Reports

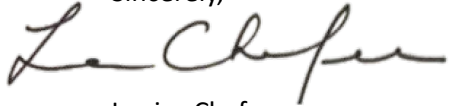
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Total election-related costs for the past five odd-year elections range from \$15 million in 2016 up to \$63 million in 2022. The five-year average of election costs for these years is \$42 million. Even if IBO excludes 2016, for which there was only one primary election compared with two in most other years, the average for the other four years is \$48 million.

To provide additional context about the breakdown of election-related costs, IBO analyzed costs by category over the past three fiscal years. The cost of poll workers is consistently the largest share of election costs, while line items such as poll site furniture rentals and election day staff transportation have cost relatively less. As reported in the [calendar year 2023 BOE annual](#) report, there were approximately 36,000 BOE appointed poll workers for the 2023 general election.

The Largest Component of Election-Related Costs Has Been for Poll Workers in Recent Years			
Cost Category	2021	2022	2023
Poll Workers	\$33,108,961	\$32,071,690	\$44,060,938
Technical Support	2,020,982	7,300,000	10,501,219
Voting Equipment Trucking	5,051,599	4,482,817	8,046,498
Ramps	-	1,735,000	6,855,000
Ballot Printing	1,094,547	2,586,663	5,931,265
Election Event Printing	4,937,116	2,562,613	5,005,002
Miscellaneous Election Event Equipment	4,146,549	3,493,112	3,735,000
Poll Site Rental	1,948,829	2,715,677	3,417,904
Postage-Notice to Voters	4,170,507	1,219,250	3,125,557
Advertising	2,214,831	3,617,545	2,714,799
Election Day Staff Transportation	1,042,165	974,993	2,418,075
Poll Site Furniture Rentals	353,621	332,478	763,353
TOTAL	\$60,089,707	\$63,091,838	\$96,574,611
SOURCE: New York City Board of Elections Annual Reports			
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If you have any questions, please contact me at louisac@ibo.nyc.ny.us or Cassandra Stuart, who conducted the analysis, at cassandras@ibo.nyc.ny.us.

Sincerely,

 Louisa Chafee
 Director

¹ [NYS Open Legislation | NYSenate.gov](https://www.nysenate.gov)