COLLECTION II — CIVIC PARTICIPATION & VOTING

Your Ballot Explained

A plain-language guide to what's on your ballot, from federal races to ballot proposals.

By Daniel P. Devine · Civest Sphere · November 2026

Get a sample ballot first

Your county Board of Elections publishes sample ballots before each election. Reading yours ahead of time is the single best way to vote with confidence.

How a New York ballot is organized

Ballots usually run from the top of the government down:

1. **Federal offices:** President (every four years), U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.
2. **State offices:** Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General and Comptroller (every four years), plus State Senate and Assembly (every two years).
3. **Judicial offices:** state Supreme Court, county and family court judges, and others.
4. **County and local offices:** county executive, legislators, town supervisor, town board, clerk, receiver of taxes, highway superintendent and more.
5. **Ballot proposals:** usually on the back of the ballot.

Party lines and fusion voting

New York lets a candidate appear on more than one party's line. You might see the same name listed under two or three parties. Your vote counts for the candidate whichever line

you choose, but the line you pick also counts toward that party's vote total, which affects whether the party keeps its place on future ballots.

Primaries vs. general elections

- **Primaries** (usually in June) pick each party's nominees. New York's primaries are closed: only voters enrolled in that party can vote.
- **General elections** (in November) decide who takes office. Every registered voter can vote.

Ballot proposals

Proposals ask you to approve or reject constitutional amendments, bond issues or local questions. Read the full text and the plain-language summary, which your Board of Elections and many civic groups publish in advance. Leaving a proposal blank doesn't count as a yes or a no.

Write-ins and skipping races

You can write in a candidate who isn't on the ballot. You can also skip any race; your votes in other races still count.

Fill it out carefully

Fill in ovals completely with the pen provided. If you make a mistake, ask a poll worker for a new ballot. Don't cross things out.

> OFFICIAL SOURCES
>
> - NY State Board of Elections (https://elections.ny.gov)

Last reviewed November 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws, deadlines and procedures change, so confirm details with the official source before you act.

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