

New York Note Special Edition: Post-Election Debrief

On Friday, November 15, the Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies New York team held an election debrief. Key insights from our team are below.

Presidential Race

Donald Trump will enter the White House in January and has promised to dismantle several aspects of the federal government. He is beginning to appoint agency heads, who service the American people in a variety of substantive areas. These agency heads will need to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The Senate may decide to allow Trump to conduct recess appointments, or they may utilize their institutional powers by blocking some of these appointees. Political mobilization may be essential in pushing Senators on some of these appointment votes.

Congressional Races in New York

Democrats John Mannion, Josh Riley, and Laura Gillen all flipped seats and beat incumbent Republicans, while Republicans Mike Lawler and Nick LaLota, and Democrat Pat Ryan kept their seats. Despite these wins in New York, Democrats were not able to win the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Conversations have begun positioning Mike Lawler, who currently represents the Hudson Valley, as a Republican candidate for Governor against incumbent Kathy Hochul in 2026. Hakeem Jeffries from Brooklyn has been selected as leader of the House Democrats in the minority party. Elise Stefanik has also been appointed by Trump as the United Nations Ambassador, creating an opening in Republican leadership and triggering a special election in upstate New York in the weeks to come.

State Legislature

Although there was a 10-point swing to the right amongst voters in the state, there was not much change in the partisan makeup of the New York State legislature. There were four open Senate seats and 13 open Assembly seats. Six incumbents lost their seats. Assemblymember Pat Fahy won the race for retiring Senator Neil Breslin's seat, and Democratic labor leader Chris Ryan won a very tight race in Central New York. Senator Iwen Chu was the only incumbent Senator to lose, costing Senate Democrats their supermajority. Two incumbent Democrats and three incumbent Democrats lost their seats in the Assembly. Ultimately, Democrats will maintain their supermajority in the Assembly and, pending a few races still too close to call, may have picked up a few seats in the Assembly, despite the otherwise rightward shift.

Currently, the open Chair positions include Consumer Protection, Insurance, Libraries, and People with Disabilities in the Senate, and Speaker Pro Tempore, Ways and Means, Local Governments, Veterans Affairs, Tourism, Parks, Arts and Sports Development, Mental Health, Higher Education, Subcommittee on Women's Health, Subcommittee on Occupational Licenses, and the Subcommittee on Foster Care in the Assembly, although appointments may cause a domino effect. The legislature will also decide whether or not to come back for a special session prior to January.

Ballot Proposals

The statewide ballot measure known as Proposition 1, New York's version of an Equal Rights Amendment, passed. The language in the proposition does not actually use the word abortion; the amendment expands anti-discrimination and equal protection rights to include ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive health care. Although these items are protected under New York State



Rose Christ

Co-Chair, New York Practice, Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies

rchrist@cozen.com
Phone: (212) 883-2248
Fax: (646) 880-3654



Katie Schwab

Co-Chair, New York Practice, Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies

kschwab@cozen.com
Phone: (212) 883-4913
Fax: (646) 880-3652

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law, the legislature wanted to enshrine abortion rights in the constitution and protect this right for generations to come.

In NYC, there were five items on the ballot, and four of them were adopted with fairly slim margins. In June, NYC Council overwhelmingly passed a local law that would have expanded their own advice and consent powers over mayoral appointments in the executive branch. This would have required a charter amendment that could only be done by referendum. The Mayor quickly took advantage of a NYC law that prohibits both the City Council and Mayor from having their own ballot initiatives, by convening his own Charter Revision Commission. Proposition 2 clarified and expanded the role of the Department of Sanitation, and enforced some new rules regarding containerization. Proposition 3 requires the NYC Council to submit a more in-depth fiscal impact statements before adopting legislation, entrenching the executive branch of government more deeply in the legislative process. Proposition 4 requires the Council to provide additional notice to the Administration before adopting legislation that affects public safety (NYPD, DOC, or FDNY). Proposition 5 amends the City Charter to require more thoughtful capital planning, and the language is fairly vague. Proposition 6, the only one that did not pass, would have created a permanent role of Chief Business Diversity Officer, which already exists in the current mayoral administration, and contained administrative items about media permits. There has been speculation that Proposition 6 was voted down because voters viewed it as a diversity initiative.

Governor Kathy Hochul

Governor Hochul had a very positive Election Night, gaining four Congressional seats for Democrats and successfully passing Proposition 1. Hochul invested a great deal of energy into the state Democratic party. Although Senate Democrats lost their supermajority, this may actually give Hochul a leverage point moving forward. It is generally unknown how the Governor's race in 2026 will play out; Governor Mario Cuomo was the last incumbent Governor to lose a race, and he was running for a fourth term. In the days since the election, Governor Hochul has reinstated congestion pricing and lowered the price from \$15 to \$9, which has been unpopular on both sides of the aisle. We expect a challenge from the right, potentially from Mike Lawler, and potentially from the left, depending on the NYC mayoral race in 2025.

Mayor Eric Adams

Mayor Adams may have unintentionally endorsed Trump via his claim that migrants were overrunning New York City and that Democrats had turned their back on crime, which were major focuses of Trump's campaign. Trump may reciprocate this favor by directing his Justice Department to drop the charges against Adams. On December 4, City Council will be considering the Mayor's City of Yes for Housing Opportunity, an ambitious rezoning proposal. On January 20, Damian Williams, the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, will resign his position and make way for a Trump appointee coming in. Williams has not yet indicated whether he will continue a series of indictments against Adams and his political confidants, or turn the files over to Alvin Bragg, Manhattan District Attorney, with whom he has been working closely, and have some of these cases continue at the state level.

In February, nominating petitions for the Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough Presidents, and City Council will begin, formalizing the candidates for the race. Tish James and Andrew Cuomo are rumored to enter the race, and they will need to decide very shortly in order to put together volunteers for the petitioning process. The Democratic primary will take place in June 2025, and all citywide candidates will be part of the ranked choice voting process.

City Council

The entire NYC Council will be on the ballot next year. There are 10 open seats, including Kalman Yeger's, who will be stepping down in January because he won his election for State Assembly. There will be a special election for his Brooklyn seat. This class of incumbent Councilmembers has been before the voters very often due to redistricting, and many of them have been on the ballot three or four times in the last few years. Southern Brooklyn has gone darker red in the last few election cycles, along with areas of Queens and the Bronx. We expect increasing pressure on the Council to address pocketbook issues that voters care most about, along with the results of the

City of Yes negotiations.

Members of the Common Sense Caucus, a caucus of Republicans and Democrats who vote with Republicans, now represent 9 out of 51 Councilmembers, up from 6 several years ago. Republicans may continue to make inroads in the Council. However, most of the issues in recent Council elections have been local issues, including homeless shelters and proposed development in districts. Progressive members of the Council will also look to serve as a counterbalance against federal policies. The outcome of the mayoral election may also determine the next Council speaker, as Speaker Adrienne Adams is term limited next year; a more progressive mayor may lead to a moderate speaker and vice versa. The Council has also recently created their own Charter Revision Commission and will look to come up with new ballot measures and potentially take power away from the mayoral administration.
