

Choice Voting in New York City Council Elections: 1937 - 1947

In 1936 New York City voters overwhelmingly approved the adoption of the choice voting method of proportional voting to elect members of its city council. The new system had an immediate impact on voter choice and political energy in the City. In the last election under winner-take-all electoral rules, the Democrats had captured 95% of the seats on city council with only 66% of the popular vote. The results from the five elections with choice voting were very different: the City's first black candidates were elected (including Adam Clayton Powell), seats were won in close proportion to votes and far more small party candidates and independent Democrats were elected. The first winner-take-all election after choice voting voting's repeal (a repeal in which red-baiting succeeded where earlier citywide repeal ballot measures had failed) resulted in immediate return of the old political order. In 1949, the Democrats won 96% (24 of 25) of city council seats.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u># Seats*</u>	<u>% Seats</u>	<u>% Votes**</u>
Democrat	1937	13	50	47
Republican		3	11.5	8.5
Insurgent Democrat		2	8	7
American Labor		5	19	21
Fusion		3	11.5	10.5
Democrat	1939	14	66.5	65.5
Republican		2	9.5	8
Insurgent Democrat		1	5	4
American Labor		2	9.5	11.5
Fusion		2	9.5	11
Democrat	1941	17	65.5	64.0
Republican		2	7.5	6.5
American Labor		3	11.5	11.5
Fusion		3	11.5	12.5
Communist		1	4	5.5
Democrat	1943	10	59	53
Republican		3	17	22
American Labor		2	12	11
Communist		2	12	14
Democrat	1945	14	60	59
Republican		3	13	15
American Labor		2	9	10
Liberal		2	9	7
Communist		2	9	9

* Note that the number of seats fluctuated based on the number of ballots cast

** % votes represents final ballot count

Source: "Repeal of PR in NYC - Ten Years in Retrospect" from American Pol. Sci. Review, Dec. '48.

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