

Four Things to Watch in Tuesday's New York Primary Elections; This year will see an avalanche of mailed-in ballots, insurgents targeting incumbents, crowded fields and one candidate fighting on two fronts

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Tuesday's primary elections in New York will be unprecedented in several ways.

They are the first occasion for people to go to polling places since the new coronavirus pandemic hit the state in March.

As a result of different contests being rescheduled by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, the Democratic primary election for U.S. president will be held on the same day as party primaries for the state Assembly and Senate as well as the U.S. House of Representatives. (Republicans canceled their presidential primary in March after President Trump was the only candidate to qualify for the ballot.)

And because of the pandemic, any New Yorker was able to request an absentee ballot. Election officials even mailed every registered voter an application to do so, along with a postage-paid envelope to mail it back.

Here are four things to watch on Tuesday:

PAPER BALLOTS: When Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were trying to secure their parties' presidential nominations in April 2016, New York election administrators processed 115,178 applications for absentee ballots.

Applications related to Tuesday's primaries had to be postmarked by June 16. According to the state Board of Elections, at least 1,949,997 ballots had been distributed as of June 19. The high volume of absentee ballots—which aren't counted by machines at polling places, as in-person ballots are—will make it impossible to determine the results of many contests for more than a week.

But political scientists and campaign officials say it is unclear how that will affect turnout, or which campaigns will find an advantage in voting by mail. Neal Kwatra, a Democrat and founder of the Metropolitan Public Strategies public-affairs firm, said that in other states where mail voting is more common, institutions such as parties and unions have proven more adept at

securing absentee-ballot support than upstart campaigns. He wasn't sure that would be the case on Tuesday.

"We're in a different moment right now: Campaigns with good data and the resources to contact voters will be in as good a place as those with institutions," Mr. Kwatra said.

THE INSURGENTS: Insurgent progressives, many of whom are supported by groups such as the Working Families Party and Democratic Socialists of America, are again taking aim at entrenched incumbents in a series of districts.

And as I've written before—in columns about Jamaal Bowman's challenge to U.S. Rep. Eliot Engel and Matt Toporowski's campaign against Albany County District Attorney David Soares—the elections will give us new data on the never-ending struggle between Democratic progressives and moderates.

The easiest measure would have been the Democratic presidential contest, but organized campaigning all but ceased after U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders endorsed former Vice President Joe Biden in April. The state Board of Elections even tried to cancel the election, but it was reinstated by federal judges.

The best indicators will now be Mr. Bowman's race as well as a series of primary challenges to incumbent Assembly members in Queens, including Aravella Simotas, Jeffrion Aubry, Michael DenDekker and Cathy Nolan.

NYWFP State Director Sochie Nnaemeka said she believed protests against structural racism and the economic malaise that accompanied the pandemic will motivate progressives.

"It is clear and there's an urgent cry for fighters in this moment, for people who are actively thinking about the boldest way about creating material change for the community," she said.

THE CROWDED FIELDS: The retirements of stalwart U.S. Reps. José Serrano in the Bronx and Nita Lowey in Westchester and Rockland counties, have each spawned more than a half-dozen aspirants for the Democratic nominations.

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New York City Councilman Rubén Diaz Sr., a socially conservative Pentecostal minister, emerged as the perceived front-runner for Mr. Serrano's seat. National Democratic groups are wringing their hands about the matter. The other candidates include Assemblyman Michael Blake, Councilmen Ritchie Torres and Ydanis Rodriguez, former City Council Speaker Melissa

Mark-Viverito and Samelys López, who has the backing of the Democratic Socialists of America.

In the Hudson Valley, pharmaceutical heir Adam Schleifer has outspent all of his rivals for Ms. Lowey's seat. They include sitting state lawmakers David Buchwald and David Carlucci; activist Allison Fein; college professor Asha Castleberry-Hernandez; Evelyn Farkas, an Obama administration official; and Mondaire Jones, a government lawyer backed by progressives.

A survey conducted last week by Public Policy Polling showed Mr. Jones leading the field with 25% of the vote, followed by Mr. Schleifer and Ms. Farkas, who both won 14%. Twenty-four percent of the 1,141 Democratic voters surveyed said they were undecided.

Yehudis Gottesfeld and Maureen McArdle Schulman are vying for the Republican nomination in the district.

THE COLLINS SEAT: Republican State Sen. Chris Jacobs is simultaneously fighting on two fronts in his bid to represent the 27th Congressional District, which includes eight counties between the Buffalo and Rochester suburbs.

He was designated by GOP leaders to face off against Democrat Nate McMurray in a special election to fill the seat for the remainder of the year. The seat has been vacant since Chris Collins pleaded guilty to insider-trading charges in November.

But in a separate ballot on the same day, Mr. Jacobs is also fending off two Republicans in a primary for the GOP's general election line. Both Erie County Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw and attorney Beth Parlato say Mr. Jacobs is a moderate who has been a tepid supporter of President Trump. Mr. Trump has endorsed Mr. Jacobs.

"If you're Chris Jacobs, you're not happy that you have to run in the primary the same day you have to run in the general," said Kevin Hardwick, a professor of political science at Canisius College in Buffalo. "They're doing McMurray's work for him—beating him up."

THE QUESTION: Who was elected first: Mr. Serrano or Ms. Lowey?

—Know the answer? Drop me an email!

THE LAST ANSWER: Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan endorsed Mr. Toporowski next to a statue of Philip Schuyler, a Revolutionary War general and the father-in-law of Alexander Hamilton. Ms. Sheehan has ordered the statue be moved from its current location because Mr. Schuyler owned slaves.

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