



Partisan vs. Nonpartisan Elections

Municipal election systems are determined by the nature of the council members' constituency and by the presence or absence of party labels on the ballot. With regard to the latter feature, there are two types of ballots for city council members. In partisan elections, the party affiliation of the candidate is indicated on the ballot, whereas in nonpartisan elections it is not. According to a 2001 survey, 77 percent of the responding cities have nonpartisan elections, and 23 percent have partisan elections.

Proponents of nonpartisan ballots suggest that:

- Political parties are irrelevant to providing services.
- Cooperation between elected officials belonging to different parties is more likely.

Proponents for partisan elections argue that:

- The absence of party labels confuses voters; a voter who must choose from among a group of candidates whom she knows nothing about will have no meaningful basis in casting a ballot.
- In the absence of a party ballot, voters will turn to whatever cue is available, which often turns out to be the ethnicity of a candidate's name.
- Non-partisanship tends to produce elected officials more representative of the upper socioeconomic strata than of the general populace and aggravates the class bias in voting turnout, because in true non-partisan systems there are no organizations of local party workers to bring lower-class citizens to the polls on election day.

Listed below is the form of government for the thirty most populous cities in the United States, based on the most current U.S. Census projections. The table uses updated information from the member database at the National League of Cities.

Election Type of the 30 Most Populous Cities

Rank	City Name	State	Election Type
1	New York	NY	Partisan
2	Los Angeles	CA	Non-Partisan
3	Chicago	IL	Non-Partisan
4	Houston	TX	Partisan
5	Phoenix	AZ	Non-Partisan

6	Philadelphia	PA	Partisan
7	San Antonio	TX	Non-Partisan
8	Dallas	TX	Non-Partisan
9	San Diego	CA	Non-Partisan
10	San Jose	CA	Non-Partisan
11	Detroit	MI	Non-Partisan
12	San Francisco	CA	Non-Partisan
13	Jacksonville	FL	Non-Partisan
14	Indianapolis	IN	Partisan
15	Austin	TX	Non-Partisan
16	Columbus	OH	Non-Partisan
17	Fort Worth	TX	Non-Partisan
18	Charlotte	NC	Partisan
19	Memphis	TN	Non-Partisan
20	Baltimore	MD	Partisan
21	Boston	MA	Non-Partisan
22	El Paso	TX	Non-Partisan
23	Milwaukee	WI	Non-Partisan
24	Denver	CO	Non-Partisan
25	Seattle	WA	Non-Partisan
26	Nashville	TN	Non-Partisan
27	Washington	DC	Partisan
28	Las Vegas	NV	Non-Partisan
29	Portland	OR	Non-Partisan
30	Louisville	KY	Partisan

Sources

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