

# Background

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. Over three-quarters of all municipalities have nonpartisan elections.

Proponents of nonpartisan ballots suggest that:

- Political parties are irrelevant to providing services; and
- 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 he or 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, incumbent status, or single-issue identification; and
- 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 working-class citizens to the polls on Election Day.

Listed below is the election format for a selection of large cities in the United States.

New York, NY, Partisan

Los Angeles, CA, Non-Partisan

Chicago, IL, Non-Partisan

Houston, TX, Partisan

Phoenix, AZ, Non-Partisan

Philadelphia, PA, Partisan

San Antonio, TX, Non-Partisan

Dallas, TX, Non-Partisan

San Diego, CA, Non-Partisan

San Jose, CA, Non-Partisan

Detroit, MI, Non-Partisan

San Francisco, CA, Non-Partisan

Jacksonville, FL, Non-Partisan

Indianapolis, IN, Partisan

Austin, TX, Non-Partisan

Columbus, OH, Non-Partisan

Fort Worth, TX, Non-Partisan

Charlotte, NC, Partisan

Memphis, TN, Non-Partisan

Baltimore, MD, Partisan

Boston, MA, Non-Partisan

El Paso, TX, Non-Partisan

Milwaukee, WI, Non-Partisan

Denver, CO, Non-Partisan

Seattle, WA, Non-Partisan

Nashville, TN, Non-Partisan

Washington, DC, Partisan

Las Vegas, NV, Non-Partisan

Portland, OR, Non-Partisan

Louisville, KY, Partisan

# Sources

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