



UNDERSTANDING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS in Pennsylvania TUTORIAL

**your VOTE
is your VOICE**

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This tutorial will provide information for eligible voters about:

1. How to understand the difference between;
 - **Closed Primary and**
 - **General Elections**
2. How to understand the difference between:
 - **MUNICIPAL (Local) and**
 - **State and Federal Elections**

The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh is a nonprofit 501 (C)(3) organization and is nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties.

Why Voting is Important in a Democracy?

Why Vote in EVERY Election?

Our government affects many parts of our lives from schools and careers to health care to the environment.

Voting is an important right in our society.

By voting, you make your voice heard on how you think your government should operate.



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YOU MATTER. YOUR VOTE MATTERS. YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

Voting makes your voice heard in one way that affects **real change**--by resulting in the policies and laws that *affect us all*.

The next election is a **Municipal or "Local" Election**. Registered voters have the chance to vote on **November 2, 2021**, where many key officials will be on the ballot.

First, let's figure out the difference between Pennsylvania's Closed Primaries and General Elections.

In PA's CLOSED Primaries



Do I Choose a Political Party or NOT?

Two **MAJOR** parties in the US:

- **Democratic and Republican**

Two **smaller** parties in PA:

- **Green and Libertarian**
- PA has no “Independent” party

IMPORTANT: By Pennsylvania state law, only voters registered in *one of the two major political parties* may participate in the **Closed Primaries**

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A **political party** is an organized group of people who have the same ideas, or who see things the same way and who find candidates for elections who will represent those ideas and positions in government.

- When **registering to vote** a citizen may choose a party to belong to, but this is not required.
- However, in **PA PRIMARIES**, only voters enrolled in the **Republican** or the **Democratic Parties** may vote in the spring to elect their nominees for the fall General Election. In other words, Pennsylvania's Primaries are **CLOSED** to registered voters who are members of other *minor political bodies*, like the Green and Libertarian parties, or who don't belong to a party at all (are unaffiliated), and these voters *may not vote* in a Primary unless...
 - ✓ **there is a ballot question, constitutional amendment, or special election.**
- Update your voter registration by adding or changing party affiliation [here](https://www.vote.pa.gov).

To Register to Vote:

- ✓ **Go to [vote.pa.gov](https://www.vote.pa.gov)**

Two DIFFERENT Elections Each Year

PRIMARY -spring
(May 18, 2021)

GENERAL Election -fall
(November 2, 2021)

THIS Year...

- **Other parties**, besides the Republican and Democratic parties, like the Green and Libertarian, *may* have candidates on the General Election ballot
- There is no “Independent” party in PA



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EACH YEAR, there are *two DIFFERENT elections*:

- The **CLOSED PRIMARY in the spring** where only members of the two major parties-- Democratic and Republican-- may vote, choosing their candidates *for*
- the **GENERAL Election in the fall**, which can be either a Municipal or a Federal and State Election.

In GENERAL Elections:

- **ANY** eligible voter can vote for **ANY candidate** in **ANY** party.
- Straight party voting has been eliminated; eligible voters must go through the entire ballot choosing a candidate for each race.

Two Different TYPES of Elections (Every OTHER Year)



- **Municipal Elections**
Odd-numbered years
(Local, City, and County Officials,
Magistrates, Judges)
- **Federal and State Elections**
Even-numbered years
(PA State Government,
US Congress and President)

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Every OTHER year, there are *different TYPES of elections*:

Municipal Elections (Odd-numbered years)–

- Might include *local, city, and county officials*, like mayors, city council members, district attorneys, sheriffs, school boards, magistrates, and judges

Federal and State Elections (Even-numbered years) --

- *Congressional and Presidential* which include Senators and Representatives in Congress and Presidents and Vice Presidents
- *State* which includes State Senators and Representatives in PA government and other state officials, Governors and Lieutenant Governors

****Special Elections:** Held when an elected official can no longer serve. May be held during General or Primary Elections, or on another designated day. Everyone living in that official's district can vote.

LET'S PUT IT ALL TOGETHER--MUNICIPAL or "LOCAL" Elections in 2021:

The May 18, 2021, election was the PRIMARY.

✓ **The NOVEMBER 2, 2021, election will be the GENERAL Election.**

Put NOVEMBER 2 in your phone calendar NOW!

On Average,
20% - 35%
 of
 Registered
 Voters **VOTE**
 in MUNICIPAL
 ELECTIONS!

YIKES!



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Historically, voter turnout is significantly LOWER in Municipal Elections-- as low as 20 - 35% of eligible voters—for these MOST important elections. Now you know that the officials who are elected in Municipal Elections have **the power to affect your lives**; local issues like housing, schools, roadways, parks, social and criminal justice are issues that may impact you daily!

- Are **YOU and YOUR issues** being represented when turnout is that LOW? What can you do?

VOTE in the MUNICIPAL ELECTION on November 2!

- You will see all the candidates who won in the spring Primary on the Municipal Election ballot, (the same one for every eligible voter).
- ✓ *Deadline to register to vote or update registration information is **October 18, 2021**. Update voter registration by adding name change, new address, or changing party affiliation [here](#).*
- ✓ *[Make a Plan to Vote](#) on **November 2nd**. Learn more about in-person voting and approved ID with this infographic.*
- ✓ ***BTW do you know your voting rights? Click [here](#) for more.***

Our unique INFOGRAPHICS

2021 LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER PITTSBURGH

JQ CITIZEN and CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTIONS in PA

Now that I REGISTERED TO VOTE, tell me WHEN I need to vote!

There are TWO ELECTIONS EVERY YEAR: A CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTION in the spring (May 18, 2021), and a GENERAL ELECTION in the fall (November 2, 2021).

What is a CLOSED Primary Election in Pennsylvania??

THE CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTION is when members of ONLY the TWO MAJOR political parties—REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRATIC—choose their CANDIDATES for the GENERAL ELECTION.

When I registered to vote, I saw the Democratic, Republican, Green, and Libertarian parties on my application. Where was the INDEPENDENT party?

There is no "INDEPENDENT" party in Pennsylvania, but candidates in the Libertarian and Green parties can run for office in the GENERAL Election. (ANY registered voter CAN VOTE for ANY candidate of ANY party in the General Election.)

I also remember that when I registered to vote, I could have CHOSEN to JOIN the Republican or Democratic Party.

Yes. When you REGISTERED TO VOTE,* in order to vote in a Closed Primary Election, you had to CHOOSE either the DEMOCRATIC or REPUBLICAN PARTY. PA Primary Elections are CLOSED to voters who haven't picked a party or who chose a "third" party.

So, if I don't join one of the two major parties, I CANT VOTE in the PA CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTION?? That's right, except...

Those voters who are NOT registered as Democratic or Republican MAY VOTE in a PA Primary Election ONLY IF there is a ballot question, constitutional amendment or special election.

***IMPORTANT!!** At any time, you can add or change your "party affiliation" by going to [VotesPA.com](https://www.votespa.com). If you choose either the Democratic or Republican party, then on PRIMARY ELECTION DAY when you go to your polling place, you will receive a ballot that has candidates only from the party you chose—Republican or Democratic.

WHY VOTE IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS?

Local and Municipal Elections Affect you the MOST!

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
Are held in ODD YEARS—these are the elected officials who SET PROPERTY TAX RATES and MAKE SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES.
Municipal Elections affect you the most!

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
Include Local, City, and County Officials who make LAWS and REGULATIONS that affect your own township, city, and county.
Municipal Elections affect you the most!

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
Include MAYORS, CHIEFS OF POLICE, city council members, district attorneys, sheriffs, SCHOOL BOARDS, magistrates, and JUDGES.
Municipal Elections affect you the most!

2 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
Involve a CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTION in the spring and a GENERAL ELECTION in the fall—AND ONLY 20% and 40% of eligible voters TURN OUT!
Municipal Elections affect you the most!

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
VOTE if you care about your TAXES!
VOTE if you care about your SCHOOLS and JUDGES!
VOTE if you care about your ROADS, WATER, and AIR!
Municipal Elections affect you the most!

SO IF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AFFECT CITIZENS THE MOST, WHY DON'T MORE PEOPLE VOTE? Maybe They Don't Know HOW Municipal Elections Affect Their Lives! YOUR VOTE can affect Municipal Elections the most!

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EVERY Election Counts. YOU Count. VOTE !

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These two INFOGRAPHICS will help:

CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTIONS-- helps voters understand that the Pennsylvania Primaries are the first and most important and that they are "closed". They are closed to any voter who is NOT registered with one of the two major political parties—Democratic or Republican-- *unless there are constitutional amendments, ballot questions, or if it is a special election.*

✓ **CLICK [here](#) to view or download "Closed Primary Elections".**

To SHARE, please COPY this direct link: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=734142

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS-- Explains **how important it is to vote** in these local elections as these are the elected officials who *set local tax rates, and school board policies, make the local laws, enforce and interpret them.*

✓ **CLICK [here](#) to view or download "Municipal Elections".**

To SHARE, please COPY this direct link: www.lwvpgh.org/docs.ashx?id=733743

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Reliable
Voter
Information?*



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vote.pa.gov: [here](#)

- Where you can **register to vote**, change your name or address, your party affiliation, find your registration status, find your polling place, and more.

Vote411.org: [here](#)

- At this *League of Women Voters* website, a few weeks before every election, **type in your address and view the candidates who will be on your ballot**, and more. If candidates have answered three questions, you will be able to compare their answers side-by-side. You can also make a cheat sheet of your candidate choices by creating your **customized ballot** list, which will be emailed to you.

[League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh](https://lwpvpg.org): lwpvpg.org

- For the most current, nonpartisan election, voting, and government information.
- Find other **Tutorials** and other **unique infographics** in the [Voter Resource Library](#).

Still have questions? Please contact us at: civic.education@lwpvpg.org.

BECOME A SUPER-VOTER AND VOTE IN EVERY ELECTION
“Democracy is NOT a spectator sport!”