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Elections Division  
 Department of the State Secretary  
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 Secretary of State

# ★ Elections

## Local Elections in Massachusetts

### CAUCUSES

Continued from other side

their local town elections. At these caucuses, the members of each political party decide which candidates will represent their party in the town election. Members of one political party may not attend the caucus of another party. In some of the twenty-five communities, unenrolled or independent voters may vote in a party caucus; in others, they may not.

Each party caucus nominates one candidate for each office to be elected. This candidate will be designated as that party's caucus nominee on the local election ballot. Other candidates may run in the local election but will not have an official party designation next to their names.

### CITY ELECTION

In most cities, voters elect a mayor. In all cities, city councillors or aldermen and school committee members are elected. In some cities there are other offices on the ballot and sometimes questions on local issues. These elections are held every odd-numbered year in November.

Most cities conduct non-partisan elections preceded by preliminary elections. The only exceptions are Melrose, Cambridge, and Leominster which have no preliminary elections, and Northampton which has a partisan local election preceded by a party primary.

### TOWN ELECTION

Each year, usually in the spring, town voters elect local officials such as selectmen, moderator, clerk, treasurer, and school committee members. Many towns elect other town officers; check with your town to determine its elected positions. Towns that have adopted a representative town meeting in place of an open town meeting elect town meeting members to represent their neighborhoods and to vote directly on local issues.

Most towns hold only a local general election. Some towns have a preliminary or non-partisan caucus and others have primaries or partisan caucuses before the final election.

The following table indicates how many Massachusetts cities and towns conduct local elections only or local elections preceded by primaries, preliminaries, partisan caucuses, or non-partisan caucuses. You may contact your local officials to determine which system your community uses.

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Local Election Systems	Towns	Cities
Local election only	213	3
Local election preceded by a party primary	3	1
Local election preceded by a preliminary	11	35
Local election preceded by partisan caucuses	25	
Local election preceded by a non-partisan caucus	60	

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## LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Voters in Massachusetts may participate in both state and local elections. In state elections, you vote to fill federal, state and county offices. In local elections, you vote for your city or town officials and express your views on local questions. This pamphlet describes local elections and the various kinds of preliminary and primary elections and caucuses which often precede them.

In addition to these elections, a special election may be held if an office becomes vacant during the term. These special elections are held in the same way as the regular election for that office would be held. Another pamphlet, **State Elections in Massachusetts**, describes presidential primaries and state primaries and elections.

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## LOCAL ELECTIONS

The 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts elect their local officials in various ways. Some have only a local general election. In others, the general election is preceded by partisan primaries or caucuses or by a non-partisan preliminary or caucus to reduce the number of candidates who will appear on the final election ballot. A preliminary or a primary is a formal election to choose candidates; a caucus is a meeting of voters to choose candidates.

- **Local Election Only**—If the city or town only holds a local general election, the election is always non-partisan and candidates names appear on the ballot without party designation. Three cities and 213 towns have only a local election.

- **Non-Partisan Preliminary or Caucus**—Thirty-five cities and seventy-one towns which hold non-partisan local elections use either a preliminary election or a non-partisan caucus to reduce the number of candidates who will appear on the local election ballot.
- **Partisan Primary or Caucus**—One city and three towns in Massachusetts conduct a partisan local election with a party primary election preceding it. Twenty-five other towns with partisan elections have partisan town caucuses to select their final party candidates for the local election.

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## PRELIMINARY AND PRIMARY ELECTIONS

### Preliminary Election

In communities which hold a preliminary election, the preliminary is held prior to the final election to reduce the number of candidates who will appear on the local election ballot. Only those offices for which more candidates are running than twice the number to be elected, appear on the preliminary ballot.

Preliminaries are non-partisan elections and candidates are not designated by political party. Any voter in a city or town may vote in a preliminary; party enrollment is not required. You vote for the number of persons to be finally elected to each office. The preliminary reduces the number of candidates on the final ballot to twice the number to be elected. Only the preliminary winners and candidates for offices for which no preliminary was needed are printed on the local election ballot.

### Party Primary

Party primaries are held by the Democratic and Republican parties in three towns and one city to choose party candidates to run for each local office.

The primary is a political party election held prior to the final election for the two officially recognized parties in Massachusetts. Both the Democratic and Republican party primaries are held on the same day in September, seven weeks before the November election.

Several party candidates for each office may appear on the party primary ballot. Voters in each party primary choose one person for each elective position. These party nominees will appear on the final election ballot, along with any independent or minor party candidates.

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## CAUCUSES

Caucuses are meetings organized for the purpose of nominating candidates for a local election. There are two kinds of caucuses: non-partisan town caucus (citizen caucus) and partisan town caucus (political party caucus).

- **Non-partisan town caucus**—In sixty towns, voters of the community meet in a non-partisan caucus to nominate the

candidates who will appear on the local election ballot. Any voter of the town may attend and vote. The two candidates for each office who receive the highest number of votes will appear on the town election ballot designated as "caucus nominee."

- **Partisan town caucus**—Twenty-five towns hold partisan caucuses before →