

City of Austin Single-member District (SMD) Election and Voter Turnout History

Austin has held 6 SMD elections:

- 1973 -6 districts and 5 at-large seats (including the Mayor). The proposition failed 63/37%.
- 1978 -8 districts and the Mayor elected at large. The proposition failed 71/28%.
- 1985 -Same proposition failed 57/43%.
- 1988 -Same proposition failed 57/43%. Ballots cast 59,855 (25,457 for). Turnout 23% (63,841)
- 1994 -The same proposition failed 52/48%. Ballots cast 77,766 (37,395 for). Turnout 26% (85,028)
- 2002 -8 districts and 3 at-large seats (including the Mayor). The proposition failed 58/42%.

The plan that did the best was 8 districts + mayor in 1994, winning **37,395 votes** (48%). Note that the total turnout for the May 2011 city council election was only 32,880 (see reverse).

This was the election where term limits passed (59% for); concurrent terms failed (60% against); candidate filing fee of \$500 passed (61% for). Other charter amendments were on initiative and referendum (passed 67% for); City Attorney report directly to Council (failed 54% against); two-thirds of the Planning Commission must be lay members not connected with real estate or development (passed 67% for); a raft of others, concluding with the measure denying benefits to unmarried partners of city employees (passed 62% for).

In this election, Bruce Todd and Daryl Slusher were thrown into a runoff for the mayor's seat. In Place 6, Ron Davis took the lead with 36% (in a field of 8 candidates); Eric Mitchell got 28% but went on to win the runoff with 52%. Voter turnout in the first vote was 26%; the runoff was 16%. After this 1994 election, turnout for city council elections declined steadily. By 2002, total turnout had dropped to about the same number of voters who voted for SMDs in 1994.

In 2002, 8 districts with 2 at-large + mayor got only 42%. A charter measure for public financing of council campaigns failed (74% against); repeal of the \$100 campaign contribution limit failed (51% against); repeal of term limits failed (55% against); electronic publication of campaign finance reports passed (63% for); requiring appointees to resign to run for elective office passed (72% for).

A charter committee in 2007 recommended that the Council consider an SMD system on the May 2008 ballot, but they did not propose a specific system. From the final minutes: "The overall vote was 4-2-1. Committee Member Ricardo Chapa made a motion recommending the Austin City Council consider an election system that includes single-member districts on the May 2008 ballot. Committee Member Stephen Shang seconded the motion. Chair Gus Garcia and Committee Member Janis Pinnelli voted in favor of the recommendation. Vice-Chair Chad Williams and Committee Member Roxanne Evans voted against the recommendation. Betty Baker was off the dais. Chair Gus Garcia noted that sample maps have been drawn for various election scenarios if the Council seeks further recommendations from the Charter Revision Committee."

The City Council then decided to wait for the results of the 2010 Census. The City Council resolutions governing the current 2012 charter revision effort consider it a continuation of the 2007 effort.

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Austin City Council Election Turnout, 1988-present

(SMD results and November turnouts in bold):

1988: May 7 Mayoral election, Barnstone-Guzman race, overall turnout 63,841, 23%

SMD yes 25,457

no 34,398

total 59,855

1989: July bond election, turnout 18.5%

1990: May CC election, turnout 16%

1991: May 4 Mayoral election, Garcia-Martinez race, turnout 23%

1992: Aug SOS election, with an alternative measure on the ballot, turnout 72,433, 27.6%

SOS yes 64%

alt no 65%

1993: May CC election, turnout 29%

1994: May 7 Mayoral election, Davis-Mitchell race, overall turnout 85,028, 26%

SMD yes 37,395

no 40,371

total 77,766

1995: Oct bond election for baseball stadium, turnout 16%

1996: May CC election, turnout 13%

1997: May Mayoral election, turnout 17% (Gus Garcia tried to break the gentlemen's agreement by switching places. Manuel Zuniga got 43% in Garcia's vacated seat, Bill Spelman got 28%. Spelman won in the runoff. Eric Mitchell ran in Place 6 as an East Austin candidate and got 47.5% to Willie Lewis's 44.8%. Lewis won in the runoff.)

1997: **Nov 4** election, overall turnout 61,382, 12.8%, but on city charter amendments to regulate political fund raising, 43,520 ballots were cast, only **9.1%**

1998: May 2 bond election, no CC races, turnout 177,079, 35%

1998: **Nov 3** election, on city bonds and Palmer lease, 124,001 ballots were cast, **24.8%**

1999: May 1 CC election, turnout 34,211, 8%

2000: May 6 Mayoral election, Quintanilla-Alvarez race, turnout 38,166, 7%

2000: **Nov 7** election overall turnout 44.7%, on city bonds 202,772 ballots were cast, **39.7%**

2001: **Nov 6** special Mayoral election, turnout 59,794, **14%**

2002: May 4 CC election, turnout 42,431, 9%

SMD yes 16,249

no 22,456

total 38,705

2003: May 3 Mayoral election, 15%

2004: May 15 Firefighter proposition, 10.3%

2005: May 7 CC election and smoking ordinance, 16.5%

2006: May 13 Mayoral election and 7 charter propositions, 11.2%

2006: **Nov 7** election overall turnout 40.2%, on 7 city bond props **37%**

2008: May 10 CC election, 8.3%

2008: **Nov 4** election overall turnout 65%, on 2 city props **52%**

2009: May 9 Mayoral election, 13.1%

2010: **Nov 2** election, on 1 city bond prop, **35%**

2011: May 14 CC election, turnout 32,880, 7.4%

2011: June 18 CC runoff, turnout 42,511, 9.6%