INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

Demographic Breakdown of City Councils in Cities with Mixed Systems

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Core Question

This brief explores the demographic profiles of city councilors across cities with mixed election systems.[1]

Summary of Topline Findings

In 11 of the 22 cities, the percentage of minority city councilors meets or exceeds the combined percentage of African American, Hispanic, and Asian members of the community (% POC), while in 14 of the 22, the percentage of minority councilors representing at-large seats meets or exceeds % POC of the community.

But in 8 of the 12 cities where people of color constitute a majority of the population, there is parity or parity plus between people of color in the population and people of color serving as at-large councilors. In 6 of the 10 cities where people of color constitute fewer than half of the population, there is parity or parity plus between people of color in the population and people of color serving as at-large councilors.

Background and Context

The spreadsheet labeled "KREBS_mixed_system_analysis"[2] details the demographic profiles each city and their city councilors in the 22 cities identified in the brief labeled "Hybrid City Council Election Systems—Research Brief" submitted by Francisco Jasso.

I want to provide a bit more context and explication here for understanding the data presented. The cities range in size from very large Houston, Texas (pop. 2,304,580) to very small Wheaton, Illinois (pop. 53,970). There is also substantial variation in racial/ethnic group profiles, which mirrors differences in population volumes across these cities. For example, the percentage of Houston residents who identify as white (24.1%) is second lowest only to Detroit (10.1%), while the percentage of Wheaton residents who identify the same way is three times greater (78.4%).

The key pieces of data relate to the implications for descriptive representation of hybrid or mixed election systems. In 11 of the 22 cities, the percentage of minority city councilors meets or exceeds the combined percentage of African American, Hispanic, and Asian members of the community (% POC), while in 14 of the 22, the percentage of minority councilors representing at-large seats meets or exceeds % POC of the community. But in 8 of the 12 cities where people of color constitute a majority of the population, there is parity or parity plus between people of color in the population and people of color serving as at-large councilors. That the Houston city council has only one Hispanic member despite the size of the Hispanic community there, is at the heart of LULAC's voting rights case against the city. In 6 of the 10 cities where people of color

[1] Mixed systems refer the election of councilmembers through a mixture of district and at-large elections.
[2] Appended at the end of this brief.

constitute fewer than half of the population, there is parity or parity plus between people of color in the population and people of color serving as at-large councilors.

Given the sample size one cannot suggest anything definitive about the electoral implications of mixed or hybrid systems, in particular their at-large components. Combined with racialized campaigns and racial block voting, at-large systems are clearly unconstitutional. In their absence and in places where % POC exceeds 50, they could be a vehicle for minority communities to gain seats.

City	District	At-Large	% W pop	% AA pop	% Hisp pop	% Asian pop	% POC	CC% W	CC% AA	CC% Hisp	CC% Asian	% POC CC	% POC AL
Houston	11	5	24.1	22.6	44.5	6.8	73.9	56.3	37.8				
Nashville	35	5	56.4	27.2	10.6	3.9	41.7	72.5					
Philadelphia	10	6	33.8	40.8	15.4	7.4	63.6		62.5			68.75	80
Jacksonville	14	5	49.2	30.7	10.9	4.9	46.5	57.8	42.1				60
Columbus	0	7	53.8	29.2	6.5	5.9	41.6	28.6	57.1	14.3		71.4	71.4
Charlotte	7	5	40.2	35.2	14.9	6.5	56.6	8.3	75			83.3	80
Seattle	7	2	62.2	6.8	7.2	16.3	30.3			33.0		44.1	50
DC	8	5	37.5	45	11.7	4.9	61.6		61.5			61.5	100
Denver	11	2	54	9	29.4	3.6	42	69.2					50
Boston	9	4	44	23.5	19.8	9.7	53	46.2	30.8	23.1		53.9	
Portland	0	4	68.8	5.6	10.3	8.5	24.4	25	25	50.0		75	75
Detroit	7	2	10.1	77.9	7.8	1.6	87.3	0	88.9	11.1		100	100
Kansas City	6	7	55.5	26.5	10.7	2.7	39.9	61.5	38.5				42.9
Atlanta	13	3	39.1	48.2	5	5	58.2	31.3	50		6.3		50
Raleigh	5	2	52.4	28.6	11.3	4.7	44.6	62.5	37.5				
Oakland	7	1	28.6	22	27.2	15.7	64.9	37.5	37.5		25		
New Orleans	5	2	30.6	58.1	5.6	2.7	66.4	14.3	71.4	14.3		85.7	100
Greensboro	5	4	39.5	43.1	8.4	5.3	56.8	55.5	44.4				
Durham	3	4	40.6	37.2	13.2	5.3	55.7	0	85.7	14.3		100	100
Rochester	4	5	37.1	38.4	18.7	3.5	60.6	22.2	55.6	22.2		77.8	80
Peoria	5	6	55.5	26.7	6.8	6.5	40	63.6	27.2		9.1		
Wheaton	4	3	78.4	3.5	7.1	6.6	17.2	100					
Total	8.0	4.0	45.1	31.2	13.8	6.3	51.2		43.7			56.4	57.5

NOTE:
Red==group is underrepresented;
W==White; AA==African American;
Hisp==Hispanic; POC==people of color

City	NOTES		
Houston	LULAC filed suit in Dec 2022 against AL districts		
Nashville			
Philadelphia			
Jacksonville			
Columbus			
Charlotte	1 MENA member of the CC, not included in %; mayor is included in council total		
Seattle			
DC			
Denver			
Boston	*2 Afro-Carribbean		
Portland			
Detroit			
Kansas City	mayor is included in council total		
Atlanta	2 MENA members of CC, not included in %		
Raleigh			
Oakland			
New Orleans			
Greensboro	mayor is included in council total		
Durham	mayor is included in council total		
Rochester			
Peoria	mayor is included in council total		
Wheaton	mayor is included in council total		
Total			
NOTE: Red==group is underrepresented; W==White; AA==African American; Hisp==Hispanic; POC==people of color			