



# ELECTIONS MADE EASY

## A Guide to Voting in Palm Beach County

This guide is published by the  
League of Women Voters of Palm Beach County

 LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF PALM BEACH COUNTY  
PO BOX 6208  
DELRAY BEACH, FL 33482-6208

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## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

P.O. Box 6208, Delray Beach, FL 33482-6208

561-276-4898

[www.lwvpbc.org](http://www.lwvpbc.org)

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to all citizens, women and men, of voting age who are interested in good government. General meetings are open to the public. Information on membership, meetings, voting or other information is available through the above contacts.

### SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS OFFICES

Call or visit the office closest to you for information

<http://pbcelections.org>

- Main Office  
240 South Military Trail  
West Palm Beach, FL 33415  
561-656-6200  
or PO Box 22309  
W. Palm Beach, FL 33416-2309  
561-276-1226 or 1-866-308-6739
- South County  
345 South Congress Ave  
Room #103  
Delray Beach, FL 33445
- North County  
3188 PGA Blvd.  
Room #2401  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410  
561-624-6555
- Belle Glade  
2976 State Road 15  
Belle Glade FL 33430  
561-992-1114

Or e-mail them at: [mailbox@pbcelections.org](mailto:mailbox@pbcelections.org)

### Political Parties

The major political parties, Republican and Democrat, have active organizations in Palm Beach County. Participation is open to the public.

Phones: Republicans: 561-686-1616      Democrats: 561-433-1112

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most baffling things about coming to Florida—or coming of age in Florida—can be learning enough about its government so you can vote wisely. Who is eligible to vote? What are the procedures for voting in a primary? How do I know which representatives and state senators I can vote for? What is the role of a County Commissioner? What are the responsibilities of the Palm Beach County School Board?

These are some of the questions you may have as you prepare to cast your first vote. Or perhaps you've lived in Florida all your life but have questions about Florida government and recent changes that you may have found confusing.

This manual was developed with you in mind by the League of Women Voters of Palm Beach County. The following pages will answer many questions and give you places to contact if your specific questions are not addressed.

*The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

**Visit the League web site at [www.lwypbc.org](http://www.lwypbc.org)  
or phone us at 561-276-4898**

## **PRIMARIES, NONPARTISAN and GENERAL ELECTIONS**

Registered voters may vote in a variety of elections. The most common types are described here. In the spring of each year, most municipalities hold non-partisan elections (see “Municipalities,” page15). In compliance with Florida regulations, elections on referenda and special elections to fill unexpired terms may be called at any time. Information on absentee ballots and early voting may be had by phoning the Supervisor of Elections office at 561-656-6200, or on line at [www.pbcelections.org](http://www.pbcelections.org).

### **WHAT IS A PRIMARY?**

When two or more individuals in either the Republican or Democratic Party qualify as candidates for elected office, the Supervisor of Elections holds a Primary to determine the party’s candidate for the General Election. (Other parties have their own procedures for selecting their candidates.) Primaries are held ten weeks before the general election. The candidate with the highest number of votes in the Primary goes on to represent the party in the General Election.

Florida has closed primaries which means only registered Republicans can vote in the Republican Primary; only registered Democrats in the Democratic Primary. Crossover voting is not permitted. Therefore you must register as a Republican or Democrat to vote for candidates in your respective party primary. You may declare or change your party affiliation if it is done at least 29 days before a primary election (see “How to join a Party” see below).

***Important:*** If all candidates for an office have the same party affiliation and the winner will have no opposition in the general election, then all qualified voters, regardless of party affiliation, may vote in the primary for that office.

After the primary, if there is only one candidate for an elected office, that person is automatically elected and his or her name will not appear on the ballot.

### **HOW TO JOIN A PARTY**

You can declare your party affiliation when you register to vote. This information will then appear on your Voter Information Card (see page 5) and on the precinct register. If you choose not to join a party, you should check “No Party Affiliation” on your Voter Registration Application.

***Important:*** Do not check “Independent” on your Voter Registration Application. This indicates a minor political party in Florida.

## **PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY**

In Florida, early in the year, in presidential election years, Republicans and Democrats may express preferences for their party's presidential candidate. (Note: date is subject to change and is determined by the state legislature.)

## **NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS**

Nonpartisan elections are held in conjunction with **the primary election**. **All voters regardless of party affiliation may participate in the nonpartisan elections.**

In a race when there are three or more candidates and no one receives over 50% of the vote, the 2 candidates receiving the most votes will advance to the General Election for a runoff in November.

### **Examples of nonpartisan elections include:**

- Palm Beach County School Board
- Constitutional Officers (Presidential election years):  
Property Appraiser, Sheriff, and Supervisor of Elections
- Circuit Court and County Court judges
- Retention of Supreme Court Justices and Appellate Court Judges

If you are unsure whether there are contests or issues for which you are eligible to vote, call the Supervisor of Elections at 561-656-6200 or visit the website at [www.pbcelections.org](http://www.pbcelections.org).

## **GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**General elections are held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, in even numbered years.** This is primarily the election for national, state and county offices.

Amendments to the Florida Constitution and local referenda may also appear on the general election ballot.

**All registered voters may vote for any candidate or question on the ballot regardless of party affiliation.**

## ABC's OF VOTING

### A. Voter Registration

- You must be 18 years or older to vote. (You may pre-register if you are 16 and have received a valid Florida driver's permit before your 17th birthday.)
- You must be an American citizen.
- You must be a permanent resident of the state of Florida.
- Anyone convicted of a felony that has not had their civil rights restored cannot register to vote.
- Anyone declared mentally incompetent that has not had rights restored, cannot register to vote.
- **Voters must be registered at least 29 days before an election, to vote in that election.** Registration by mail must be postmarked at least 29 days before the election.
- Information required when registering:
  - a. Full name
  - b. Date of Birth
  - c. Address of Legal Residence  
(Note: If you have a temporary address you can fill it in for now and update later. If you have no permanent address you may use the address of the Supervisor of Elections: 240 South Military Trail, West Palm Beach, FL 33415)
  - d. Valid Florida driver's license number or Florida ID# if possessed. The last 4 digits of your Social Security number may be used only for those without the Florida license or Florida ID#.
  - e. Signature
- Where you can register:
  - a. Supervisor of Elections offices (see back page)
  - b. By mail. ( Call 561-656-6200 to request an application)
  - c. League of Women Voters (Call 561-276-4898)
  - d. When obtaining a new or replacement driver's license or library card or public assistance benefits
  - e. Armed Forces recruiting offices
  - f. Special events

### B. Voter Information Card

Once your registration application has been processed, you will be mailed a Voter Information Card. You are not required to show this when you vote. (See Voting Procedure on age 5.) However, the Voter Information card does provide valuable information (e.g., polling location, etc.) see next page.

## Voter Card

YOUR PRECINCT NUMBER Su Municipio de Distrito (Municipal)		4096
YOUR POLLING LOCATION Su Centro (Electoral)		
ASCENSION CATHOLIC CHURCH 7250 N FEDERAL HWY BOCA RATON		
YOU ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE FOR A REPRESENTATIVE IN EACH DISTRICT LISTED LEYES PUEDE VOTAR POR UN REPRESENTANTE DE CADA DISTRITO NOMBRADO		
US CONGRESS	STATE SENATE	STATE HOUSE
Congreso de los EE.UU.	Senado del Estado	Cámara de Diputados del Estado
22	25	87
COUNTY COMMISSION	SCHOOL BOARD	MUNICIPALITY
Comisión del Condado	Junta Escolar	Municipalidad
4	5	BR
REGISTRATION NO. 112453836		ISSUED BY REGISTRAR
SUSAN BUCHER - SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS / SUPERVISOR DE ELECCIONES		

- District information will help you identify candidates for whom you are entitled to vote.
- Knowing your districts and the candidates running for office in those districts helps you sort through campaign literature and media coverage. Also, watch for public forums held by various groups, to help you assess candidate views.
- In this example, the voter lives in the Congressional district 22\*, State Senate district 25, etc. (BR stands for Boca Raton)
- Your party preference, if you selected one, is on the back of the card.

### \* A Word about the Congressional District

The term “U.S. Congress” as used on your card refers to the U.S. House of Representatives. Generally, U.S. Congress refers to the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives.

### C. Voting Procedure

- Palm Beach County currently uses Opti-Scan Voting Machines. You may contact the Supervisor of Elections for demonstrations of voting equipment and at the polls you may ask for assistance from the poll workers, or view a demonstration on-line at: [www.pbcelections.org](http://www.pbcelections.org).
- You must vote at the precinct where you live.
- To receive your ballot you must show a photo/signature ID. The following forms of ID are acceptable if they contain your name and photograph:

Continued on page 6

- a. Florida Driver's License
- b. Florida ID card
- c. U.S. Passport
- d. Debit or Credit card (with a photo)
- e. Military ID card
- f. Student ID card
- g. Retirement Center ID card
- h. Home Owners Association ID Card

(Note: if your picture ID does not show a signature, an additional signature ID will be required.)

- You will be asked to sign the precinct register next.
- You will now receive your ballot and be directed to a privacy booth.
- If you need assistance with the equipment or if you damage your ballot, ask a Poll Worker for assistance.
- When voting is completed, insert your ballot in equipment provided for this.
- Congratulations! You have exercised your right to vote.

#### **D. Absentee/Early Voting/Provisional**

- All voters are permitted to vote absentee under Florida law. Contact the Supervisor of Elections at 561-656-6200 to receive an absentee ballot. Your ballot must be received by 7 PM on Election evening at the Supervisor of Elections office.

(Note: be aware of these deadlines for returning it, importance of a clear, complete signature on the ballot, and providing correct postage.)

- All qualified voters are also permitted to vote early (if they prefer that to Election Day or Absentee). Early voting begins 15 days before an election, and ends on the 2nd day before the election. Contact the Supervisor of Elections for locations available.
- All registered voters are allowed to vote, even if they forget their ID. They will be given a PROVISIONAL ballot.

#### **E. Miscellaneous**

- If you MOVE:
  - a. If you move within the county, contact the Supervisor of Elections office for a new Voter Information card.
  - b. Visit a Supervisor of Elections Office (See back page.)

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- c. Complete a new Registration Form.
- d. Submit a written request that contains your signature.
- e. Complete a downloadable form on-line, print and sign it, and mail to the Supervisor of Elections.
- f. If you move from a different county or state, complete a new Registration application.
  - Name changes, party changes, and signature updates all require a new Registration application.
  - Rights restoration: The Parole Commission will determine if an ex-felon is eligible for restoration of civil rights, based on completion of sentence, completion of probation, etc.  
(Contact LWVPBC at 561-276-4898 for more information or contact Officer of Executive Clemency at 1-800-435-8286.)
  - Disabled Voters: If you are unable to read or write or because of a disability you need assistance voting, you may designate someone to assist you. (Note: This cannot be your employer or an agent of your union.)

**F. Polling Place Hours: 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM**

**G. Informed Voting**

- Before you vote, try to familiarize yourself with the candidates and issues. This can be done via newspapers and other media, candidate websites, forums (e.g. debates), etc.
- You are permitted to take a marked sample ballot or other information with you when you vote, or information to assist you with your decisions. However, this information is for your use only.

*The following pages summarize the terms and conditions for all elected offices. Space below is provided to write in your own district numbers for each office.*

# I. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

## EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Elections for president and vice president of the United States are held every four years in even years divisible by four.

### **Terms and Conditions for President & Vice President**

- Election is partisan.
- Term is four years.
- Election is in November; term begins Jan. 20th the next year.
- Term limit: two terms.

## LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The United States Senate consists of 100 senators, two from each of the fifty states. Both Senators represent the entire state.

Each Florida U.S. Representative represents a small area of the state.

Every ten years (based on the U.S. Census), House districts are redrawn to contain as closely as possible the same number of voters. The districts are identified by number. Your U.S. House District appears on your Voter Information Card as “U.S. Congress”.

### **Terms and Conditions for U.S. Legislators**

#### **U.S. Senate**

- Term is six years. Terms are staggered so that only one U.S. Senator from any state is elected in any given year.
- Election is in November; term begins in January.
- Term limit: None.

#### **U.S. Congress (U.S. Representative)**

- Term is two years.
- Election is in November; term begins in January.
- Term limit: None.

## II. STATE GOVERNMENT

The State of Florida's government system is patterned after the U.S. government, with executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Proposed amendments to the Florida constitution may appear on the ballot. They may be proposed by citizens petition initiative, a legislative resolution, a Constitutional Convention, Constitution Revision Commission or Commission on Budget and Taxation.

### THE STATE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The executive branch includes a Governor, a Lieutenant Governor and three elected cabinet members.

- **GOVERNOR** - The Governor approves or vetoes acts passed by the Legislature, submits a budget to the Legislature, recommends measures of public interest, appoints and supervises the heads of agencies and departments, and appoints Supreme Court and Appellate Justices, and other officials, if vacancies occur.
- **LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR** - The Lieutenant Governor succeeds the Governor in case of death or inability to fulfill his/her duties. The Governor may also assign responsibilities to the Lieutenant Governor. The Lieutenant Governor is selected by the Governor candidate as a running mate.
- **ATTORNEY GENERAL** - The Attorney General oversees the Department of Legal Affairs. Responsibilities include defending most appeals from criminal convictions in lower courts, enforcing antitrust and consumer protection laws and prosecuting criminal racketeering.
- **CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER (CFO)** - The CFO has direct responsibility and enforcement powers for eleven divisions including Treasury, Insurance Fraud, Accounting and Auditing and Workers' Compensation. The CFO manages all state funds and securities.
- **COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE** - The Commissioner heads the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, which safeguards the public and supports Florida's agricultural economy through inspection and testing programs and controlling unfair and deceptive business practices.

## STATE EXECUTIVE BRANCH (cont.)

Elections for the Governor and Cabinet are held statewide every four years between presidential election years.

### **Terms and Conditions for Executive Officers**

- Election is partisan.
- Term is four years.
- Election is in November; term begins in January.
- Term limit: two terms.

## THE STATE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Palm Beach County is represented by senators and representatives, whose districts are totally or partially within the county. The representatives set statewide policies and enact laws with the power to levy taxes and appropriate funds. Florida has 40 State Senators and 120 State Representatives.

To identify the State Senator and State Representative for whom you vote, see your Voter Information Card. You can also get this information from [www.lvw.org](http://www.lvw.org). Click on “Take Action,” then click on “Find Your Representative,” then enter your zip code +4.

### **Terms and Conditions for State Legislators**

#### **Florida State Senate**

- Term is four years. Terms are staggered.  
Odd numbered districts vote in presidential election years;  
Even numbered districts vote in alternate even years.
- Election is in November; term begins the next day.
- Term limit: two terms.

#### **Florida House of Representatives**

- Term is two years.
- Election is in November; term begins the next day.
- Term limit: four terms.

(Note: The state legislature usually meets for its regular session in Tallahassee for sixty consecutive days, beginning on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March.)

### **III. JUDICIAL BRANCH: STATE AND COUNTY**

The judicial system of Florida and Palm Beach County consists of the Florida Supreme Court, the Appellate Courts, and Circuit and County Trial courts.

#### **SUPREME COURT JUSTICES and APPEALS COURT JUDGES**

Justices and Appellate Judges are appointed by the Governor from a list recommended by a Judicial Nominating Committee. Appointments last six years, after which the names are placed on the ballot for merit retention. Voters vote “yes” or “no” to retain individuals on the bench, based on their performance. There are five District Courts of Appeal in the state. Palm Beach is within the 4th District which also includes Broward, Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee, and Indian River counties.

#### **TRIAL COURT JUDGES**

Circuit Court Judges and County Court Judges are elected by the voters in nonpartisan elections.

Most criminal and civil cases originate at the Circuit Court level. Palm Beach County is the 15th Judicial Circuit.

The County Court has jurisdiction over designated misdemeanor cases, small claims, ordinance violations, certain traffic infractions and civil cases up to \$15,000. The Circuit Court handles cases over \$15,000.

#### **Terms and Conditions for Judges**

**All are nonpartisan and must retire at age 70**

##### **Supreme Court Justices and Appellate Judges**

- Term is six years.
- Vote on merit retention in November.
- Term begins in January.

##### **Circuit Court and County Court Judges**

- Term is six years.
- Election is on Primary Day; runoff is in November if necessary.
- Term begins in January.

## IV. COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Palm Beach County has adopted a charter to govern its affairs. It is a concise document approved by the voters in 1984.

More than 1,000,000 people now live in the county, about half in 38 incorporated municipalities covering an area of 186 square miles. The other half reside in the unincorporated area which covers 2,392 square miles. West Palm Beach is the county seat.

### THE COUNTY COMMISSION

The county is governed by a Board of County Commissioners. There are seven commissioners, each representing one of seven districts. The commissioners establish policies and enact laws related to the unincorporated areas and may enact specific county-wide ordinances outlined in the charter.

Commissioners specific duties are to:

- Pass and oversee the County budget
- Provide for fire protection and disaster relief
- Oversee construction of county buildings, roads and bridges
- Enforce programs for pollution, flood control, and beach erosion
- Initiate community redevelopment and enforce building codes
- Prepare and enforce the Comprehensive Land Use Plan for unincorporated areas
- Support cultural and recreational facilities

If municipal and county ordinances are in conflict, the municipal ordinances take precedence. For example, sign restrictions in Boca Raton take precedence over less strict rules in the county.

The Commissioners appoint a County Administrator to carry out executive functions.

#### **Terms and Conditions for Commissioners**

- Election is partisan.
- Commissioners must live in the district they represent and are elected only by voters in their own districts.
- Term is four years.
- Election is in November; term begins two weeks later.
- Term limit: two terms.

Districts 1, 3, 5, & 7 vote in presidential election years.

Districts 2, 4, & 6 vote in alternate even years.

## COUNTY CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

The Florida Constitution mandates local elections of seven county officers. Hence the term “Constitutional Officers.” All counties in Florida have the same positions. These officers are independent of the County Commission, which has no jurisdiction over them.

The duties of the seven Constitutional Officers are:

- **Property Appraiser (Nonpartisan)** This office determines the value of all real estate and other property for the purpose of taxation. The assessment role developed by this office is used by all taxing units.
- **Sheriff (Nonpartisan)** This office provides protection to the unincorporated areas as well as some municipalities. Additionally, the sheriff is responsible for the care, custody and control of incarcerated persons in the county.
- **Supervisor of Elections (Nonpartisan)** This office registers voters, maintains voter rolls, conducts elections, recruits and trains all poll workers, reports financial disclosures, reports campaign financing, and handles all candidates’ filings.
- **Clerk and Comptroller (Partisan)** This office oversees the courts and county funds. The Clerk and Comptroller keeps the court’s records and seal, serves as clerk of the Board of County Commissioners and as auditor, recorder and custodian of all county funds.
- **Public Defender (Partisan)** This office provides legal services to those charged with a criminal offense who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. It handles appeals in the Fourth District Court of Appeals.
- **State Attorney (Partisan)** This office investigates and prosecutes all violations of criminal law occurring within the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit (Palm Beach County). The State Attorney also represents the State in all matters occurring within the circuit.
- **Tax Collector (Partisan)** This office collects property taxes for every governing body in the county, certain Florida sales taxes and the Tourist Development Tax; titles and registers motor vehicles and boats; and issues occupational and hunting/fishing licenses.

## COUNTY CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICES (cont.)

**Election is every four years coinciding with the Presidential Election.**

### **Terms and Conditions for Constitutional Officers**

- Some offices are partisan, some are nonpartisan (as noted on page 13).
- Term is four years.
- Nonpartisan elections are on Primary Day.
- Partisan elections are in November.
- Term begins in January.
- Term limit: none.

## V. PALM BEACH COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

In Florida, each county constitutes a separate school district. In Palm Beach County voters select a seven member School Board which is the policy making authority. Funding is provided by a combination of local property taxes and state funds. State statutes control many of the functions of the school system.

Municipalities have no authority over the administration and policies of the schools that are geographically within their boundaries. Similarly, the County Commission has no authority over the school system. The School Board appoints the Superintendent of Schools, who is the chief executive officer of the school system.

**There are seven School Board districts.**

**See your Voter Information Card for the number of your district.**

### **Terms and Conditions for School Board**

- Election is nonpartisan.
- Board members must live in the district they represent and are elected only by voters in their own district.
- Term is four years; elections are staggered.
- Election is on Primary Day; runoff is in November, if necessary.
- Term begins two weeks after deciding election.
- Term limit: none.

## VI. MUNICIPALITIES

The 38 incorporated municipalities are governed by local charters that give them considerable independence in managing their own affairs. These municipalities usually hold annual elections in the spring to choose local officials and resolve local issues.

At these elections voters choose a Mayor and/or a City Council or Commission which passes laws and ordinances that apply to the municipality. Call your City Clerk's office for specific information about your municipality.

**Voters in unincorporated areas of Palm Beach County do not vote in municipal elections.**

## VII. SPECIAL TAXING DISTRICTS

Palm Beach County has its share of Special Taxing Districts which have been established for a variety of purposes over the years. Most of the tax districts have substantial budgets and the monies are administered by Boards of citizens. Many of these Boards are elected and when two or more candidates are vying for a seat on the Board, their names will appear on the ballot of the voters living in the Tax District.

Some of the elections are held in conjunction with the Primary elections; others are held on General Election Day in November.

Most of the terms are 4 years. Some of the Taxing Districts that may appear on the ballot:

- Acme Improvement District
- Boca Raton Beach and Park District
- Briger Community Development District
- Children's Services Council
- East Beach Water Control District
- East Shore Water Control District
- FIND (Florida Indian Navigational District)
- Gladeview Drainage District
- Hamil Community Development District
- Highland Glades Drainage District
- Health Care District of Palm Beach County

- Indian Trail Improvement District
- Journey's End Community Wide
- Jupiter Inlet Water District
- Lake Worth Drainage District
- Loxahatchee Groves Water Control District
- Loxahatchee River Environmental Control District
- Northern Palm Beach County Improvement District
- North Palm Beach Heights Water Control District
- Pal-Mar Water Control District
- Pahokee Water Control District
- Palm Beach County School District
- Palm Beach County Library District
- Pelican Lake Water Control District
- Pine Tree Water Control District
- Port of Palm Beach District
- Ritta Drainage District
- Seminole Improvement District
- Shawano Drainage District
- Solid Waste Authority
- South Florida Conservancy District
- South Shore Water Association
- South Florida Water Management District
- South Indian River Water Control District