



# TACIR INSIGHT

TENNESSEE ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS  
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## CONSOLIDATION OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN TENNESSEE

### Background

In Tennessee, dates for federal primary elections, all state and county government elections, and judicial elections—but not city elections—are set by the Tennessee Constitution or by state statute. While the state constitution establishes the date for electing judges and county officers as the first Thursday in August in even-numbered years, it authorizes the General Assembly to set dates for electing state officials and for all federal, state, or county primary elections. The establishment of municipal election dates and the processes and restrictions for changing them—which were last modified by the General Assembly in 2010—depend on the city’s type of charter.

Because of concerns about low voter participation and the cost of municipal elections, House Bill 2265 by Representative C. Sexton and its companion, Senate Bill 2146 by Senator Gardenhire, were introduced in 2018. As amended, the legislation would have required some cities to change their election dates to coincide with either the regular August or November election by 2022. The House Local Government Subcommittee voted to send the study to the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

### Findings and Recommendations

- While aligning municipal elections with countywide elections usually improves turnout and saves cities money, local government representatives, as well as representatives of the Tennessee Municipal League and University of Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service, are concerned about mandating that city elections be combined with county, state, and federal elections. Local government representatives say they understand their communities’ unique needs and issues and should be able to decide when they hold their own elections.
- The report recommends that the Tennessee legislature should continue to authorize, rather than require, municipalities with private act or general law charters to change their election date by ordinance to either the August or November general elections in even-numbered years. The legislature could consider adding one additional even-year election date—the presidential primary election in March—as an option for municipalities to move their election date. Although the presidential primary is held every four years, not every two years, including it as an option for municipal elections in Tennessee might encourage city leaders to move their election dates to coincide with another countywide election.

See TACIR’s full report at the following link for additional information: <https://www.tn.gov/tacir/tacir-publications.html>