

Adopt Partisan Town Elections in Brookline

By Eric Pauer

This warrant article is a question on the election day ballot (March 10) and asks:

“Shall the partisan ballot system for the election of town officers be adopted by this town?”

Under **RSA 669:37–53**, towns may choose to elect local officials using a **partisan ballot**, similar to state and federal elections. Candidates may appear with a party designation, and parties may nominate candidates through caucus. Importantly, **party labels are optional**:

- A town political committee may choose whether to nominate candidates.
- **Each candidate may choose whether or not to have a party designation printed on the ballot.**

This flexibility allows Brookline to adopt the structure of partisan town elections while preserving individual choice and local control. This warrant article does not apply to any school district offices, only town offices.

1. More Information for Voters

Party labels—when candidates choose to use them—give voters additional context about a candidate’s general philosophy, priorities, and approach to governance. This can help voters make more informed decisions, especially when:

- They are new to town
- They do not personally know the candidates
- Multiple candidates are running for the same office

Voters still evaluate individuals, but with more information at hand.

2. Optional Party Designations Respect Local Choice

Brookline’s system would remain flexible:

- Candidates may run **with or without** a party label.
- Parties may choose whether to nominate candidates.
- Independent candidates continue to appear on the ballot.

This ensures that partisan elections do not force labels on anyone—they simply make them available for those who want them.

3. Increased Transparency and Accountability

Partisan elections can make it easier for voters to understand:

- Who supports which candidates
- How elected officials align with stated values
- Which groups or committees are backing particular policy directions

Clearer lines of responsibility can strengthen trust in local government.

4. Higher Voter Engagement and Turnout

Voters tend to participate more when ballots are familiar and easy to navigate. Because partisan ballots resemble state and federal ballots, they can:

- Draw more attention to local races
- Encourage voters who typically skip town elections to participate
- Make it easier for residents to research candidates

Higher turnout means decisions better reflect the will of the community.

5. Stronger Candidate Recruitment and Competition

Under RSA 669:37–53:

- Parties may recruit and support qualified candidates
- More residents may feel encouraged to run
- Elections may become more competitive and issue-focused

This can broaden the pool of potential leaders and improve the quality of public debate.

6. A Familiar, Well-Structured Election Process

Partisan elections follow a clear, well-understood process:

- Caucus nominations
- Filing periods
- General election ballots with optional party labels

This structure is familiar to voters and can reduce confusion.

In Summary

Adopting the partisan ballot system under RSA 669:37–53 would give Brookline voters more information, increase transparency, and potentially boost participation—while still preserving **individual choice**. Party designations are **optional**, not mandatory, allowing candidates and local committees to decide what best fits Brookline’s character.