


POLITICS

Does Party Preference Matter On Council's Reapportionment Panel?

A charter amendment would lift a cap on how many people from one party can help redraw Honolulu City Council district boundaries.

ABOUT 10 HOURS AGO · By Chad Blair   

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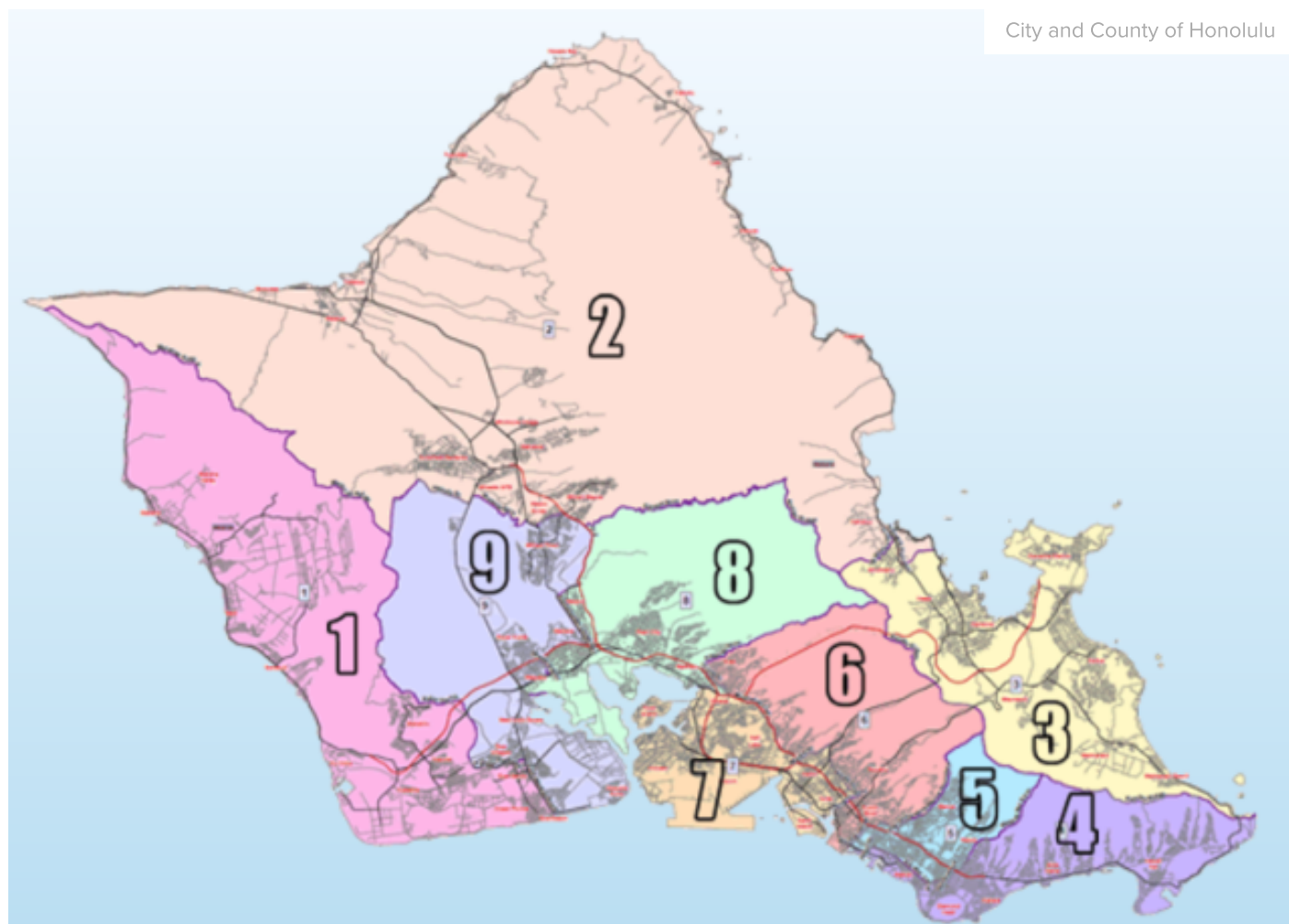
The [City Council Reapportionment Commission](#) draws the boundaries of Honolulu's nine districts after each 10-year census based on changes in population numbers.

But even though City Council offices have been nonpartisan for nearly 20 years, a Honolulu charter provision says that no more than five of the nine members of the reapportionment commission may come from the same political party.

That will change if voters approve [Charter Amendment 19](#).

To Lynne Matusow, a downtown resident and community activist, the change can't come soon enough.

In her testimony to the [Honolulu Charter Commission](#) calling for repeal of the requirement, she referred to it as "a vestige of another age," and one that should be changed to "conform to reality."



Current Honolulu City Council district boundaries.

The last time reapportionment happened was in 2011.

Matusow recalled that it was discovered at the time that five of the proposed members already belonged to the same party, and so an additional member had to resign his party membership.

“The commission also had to verify, with the parties, whether its members were members of a particular party,” Matusow said in her testimony in February. “That information is confidential.”

Charter Commission member Paul Oshiro, who served in the House of Representatives from 1984 to 1999, agreed that a change was needed, and so he submitted a proposed charter amendment.

It is now [Charter Amendment 19](#) on the ballot of Oahu voters.

It reads as follows:

Should the requirement be repealed that no more than five of the City Council Reapportionment Commission's nine members be from the same political party?

If it passes, appointments to the reapportionment commission would be made without limits based on party affiliation.

But there is opposition.

[Common Cause Hawaii](#), a nonpartisan, grassroots group dedicated to protecting and improving the political process, warns that eliminating the party cap would make it easier “to manipulate” City Council elections because it “removes a safeguard that helps to ensure fairness.”

Executive Director Corie Tanida said in a press release last month, “While the races are nonpartisan, the candidates are not and their affiliations with parties are well known. If this proposal passes, the foxes will guard the henhouse and one party could use its power to turn City Council redistricting into one more partisan political battleground instead of ensuring fair representation for our communities.”

Potentially, all nine members of the reapportionment commission could come from the same party and possibly draw district boundaries to favor their candidates.

“Voters should select their lawmakers, not the other way around,” she said.

Hawaii politics have been dominated by the Democratic Party for half a century.

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A conservative faction of the state Republican Party also opposed charter amendment No. 19, and for the same reason: a fear of gerrymandering.

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“In theory, this could result in a single party commission,” the [Hawaii Republican Assembly](#) states in its [2016 voter guide](#).

There are 20 charter amendment questions in total for City and County of Honolulu voters.

A “yes” vote means a voter is in favor of the amendment and the County Charter will be changed as proposed. A “no” vote means a voter is against the amendment and the charter will not be changed.

Blank votes are not counted, and a simple majority of votes will cause the amendment to pass or fail.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the 20 ballot questions.

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There have been some curious district lines drawn in the recent past. A mixed-party reapportionment commission provides at least some checks and balances, and a watchful eye or two. Better yet - how about a Non-Partisan Reapportionment Commission. With all Independents as commission members. What a concept.

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**Natalie Iwasa** *4 minutes ago*

We have to be careful with the term "Independent," since that is also a political party.

**Natalie Iwasa** *2 minutes ago*

As we've seen with the current mayoral race, even though the office is nonpartisan, some people are playing the partisan card. Vote "no" on #19.

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