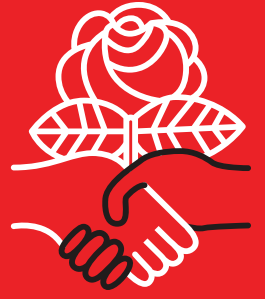


Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America



**November 2
2021
Voter Guide**

**Contact us
electoral@atlds.org**

November 2nd, 2021 Voter Guide

Electoral Committee, Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America

Thank you for using our 2021 municipal voter guide! This guide was written by the Atlanta DSA Electoral Committee and is limited in scope to address the Atlanta elections for Mayor and City Council. Authors approached writing this guide with socialist values and a progressive, pragmatic lens. We see this as an opportunity to share information with fellow Atlanta DSA members, Atlanta voters, and other community members about the central questions shaping Atlanta politics.

Key issues that resurface throughout this voter guide include the vote to [clear-cut the South Atlanta forest and build an 85-acre, \\$90 million Cop City](#), the long-running campaign to [close the Atlanta City Detention Center](#) (ACDC), and grassroots efforts to defund the Atlanta Police Department, including [the Rayshard Brooks Bill](#) and [the vote on the FY22 police budget](#). Where applicable, we assess the candidates based on their stances and votes on these topics. (Special thanks to [Mainline Zine](#) for their thorough coverage of these issues!)

The only candidate endorsed by Atlanta DSA is Rogelio Arcila for City Council District 4. Atlanta DSA's membership votes on endorsements, and we only campaign for endorsed candidates. However, many people already plan on voting and want guidance from a socialist perspective. Where we can, we provide assessments of candidates and identify those we believe are likely to cause the least harm. These assessments come from Atlanta DSA's Electoral Committee, not the entire Atlanta DSA chapter.

If you live in City Council District 4: We encourage you to vote for Rogelio Arcila, a democratic socialist candidate campaigning to Stop Cop City, close the city jail, defund the police, and build real affordable housing for all.

If you already plan on voting: We encourage you to consider which candidates will cause the least harm and be most responsive to grassroots pressure when in office.

Join Atlanta DSA to work towards building a better future. The systemic change we need cannot come from voting for the lesser-evil. Only a mass movement of millions of working people can facilitate the transition to a truly democratic and socialist society, one in which the means of production are democratically and socially controlled. We need to build a working-class party: a mass democratic political organization capable of taking state power with a strategy for social transformation. Our economy and society has been stolen from us by the ultra-rich, but we can take it back if we band together and fight: www.atldsa.org/join

How To Vote

In order to find your polling place or nearby early voting locations, to request an absentee ballot, or to view a sample ballot, please visit the state website, Georgia My Voter Page at www.mvp.sos.ga.gov

Find your City Council Representative [here](#), and a map of Atlanta City Council Districts [here](#).

How Atlanta's Government Works

Atlanta, like most cities in Georgia, is governed by a mayor-council system. The relationship between the Mayor and City Council is similar to the relationship between the President and Congress in the federal government. The Mayor leads the city government on a day-to-day basis, acting as its chief executive officer. The City Council functions as a legislative branch for the City of Atlanta, debating and voting on legislation to determine the city's laws, raise funds through taxes, and allocate that funding to different city projects.

The City Council has sixteen members: one President, twelve district representatives, and three At-Large representatives—each elected to represent distinct "residency posts" (composed of four districts each). To run for an At-Large Council seat, a candidate has to live in the specific "residency post." Atlanta residents can vote in elections for all three at-large representatives regardless of where they live.

Timeline

October 12	Early Voting Begins
October 22	Last Day to Request Absentee Ballot for Nov. 2 Election
October 29	Last Day of Early Voting
November 2	General Election Day
November 19	Last Day to Request Absentee Ballot for Runoff Election
November 30	Runoff Election Day

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Mayor

We have no recommendation in this election.

Antonio Brown is the only candidate for Mayor who opposed Cop City, and he has stated he would [reverse the ordinance](#) if elected. Brown was first elected to City Council District 3 with just 670 votes to fill a vacancy in a 2019 special election. While in office, he has been less accountable to capitalist forces and more responsive to grassroots pressure than any other Councilmember. As of his mayoral campaign's July [campaign finance report](#), he had fundraised \$300k, of which \$200k came from small dollar donations of under \$100. However, he lacks meaningful support from grassroots movements, community organizations, or labor unions. As a result, he has been a very unpredictable vote on City Council. For example, he introduced [the Rayshard Brooks](#) and [other police reform bills](#), but he also voted in favor of the final FY22 budget which included a 7% increase for policing. It is unclear to us how he would govern if elected.

Andre Dickens and Felicia Moore have positioned themselves as “progressive” alternatives to Kasim Reed. However, both of these candidates worked to undermine grassroots opposition to Cop City and the [closure of ACDC](#), and they both rely [overwhelmingly on large donations for fundraising](#). Felicia Moore attended a #StopCopCity People's Town Hall organized by Atlanta DSA and allied community organizations, [but dodged questions and refused to oppose the proposal](#) despite overwhelming opposition from residents. We anticipate that Dickens and Moore would be eager champions for big business interests if elected.

Kasim Reed may be the worst candidate of the race. Reed was Mayor of Atlanta before Keisha Lance-Bottoms and held office for eight years from 2010-2018, overseeing extensive corruption, privatization, and gentrification in Atlanta. To this day, the Federal Justice Department continues [investigating the extensive bribery](#) allegations involving city projects with private contractors that occurred throughout his mayoral administration. Although he could flip on the location, Reed [supports building Cop City](#), plans to [keep the city jail open](#), and received an endorsement from the [Atlanta Police Union](#).

Third-party candidates Alex Barella and Rachele Fruit both failed to qualify for the ballot and failed to qualify as write-in candidates. Neither are worth serious consideration.

As the election currently stands, progressive forces in Atlanta aren't significantly united behind any candidate for Mayor. As such, we have no recommendation in the Mayor's race.

Council President: Natalyn Archibong

We believe Natalyn Archibong is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

A total of five candidates are running for City Council President due to Felicia Moore vacating the seat for her mayoral run. The City Council President only votes to break ties, however, they facilitate meetings and hold considerable power over the City Council's procedures.

Natalyn Archibong is the incumbent Councilmember in District 5. During the final Cop City vote, she was one of only four Councilmembers to vote and speak against the proposal, [explicitly citing outrage against the proposal among her citizen constituents](#) as a key factor in her vote. Her actions regarding Cop City demonstrate that Archibong is more responsive to public pressure and grassroots activism than the typical Councilmember. Although she is certainly not a socialist, an Archibong Council Presidency may better enable mass movements and community organizations to influence the City Council's future decision-making.

City Council At-Large Posts

The City Council has three at-large seats. All Atlanta voters may vote in all three elections, regardless of where they live.

Post 1 At-Large: Alfred "Shivy" Brooks

We believe Alfred "Shivy" Brooks is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Incumbent Councilmember Michael Julian Bond has a record plagued by corruption. He has been charged by the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission with [hundreds of violations that occurred over many years](#), and has been fined tens of thousands of dollars in ethics penalties. Bond supported and voted for Cop City, [attempted to repeal](#) crucial bail reform legislation, and sponsored a bill to lease the city jail to Fulton County to continue its operation rather than close it. If re-elected, Bond will work to expand the police state and further criminalize Atlanta's most disadvantaged communities.

Alfred "Shivy" Brooks is one of many candidates running against Bond. His [website](#) indicates support for the George Floyd protest movement, and he takes more progressive stances on affordable housing than his competitors. Brooks has a background working as a legislative aide for the AFL-CIO and the Georgia Working Families Caucus. We believe his connections to labor and social justice organizing work would make him more responsive to progressive groups and public pressure than other candidates if elected.

Post 2 At-Large

We have no recommendation in this election.

Matt Westmoreland, the Post 2 At-large incumbent, likes to present himself as progressive. However, his mixed voting record speaks for itself, and makes clear his loyalty to corporate developers and corrupt entities like the Atlanta Police Foundation. While he did vote 'Yes' on the Rayshard Brooks Bill during last summer's uprisings, he also voted to fund a 7% increase in policing during the FY22 budget session, 'Yes' to create a taskforce to explore leasing the Atlanta City Detention Center to Fulton County, and also 'Yes' on the final vote which passed Cop City. As an At-Large Councilmember, he is also inevitably accountable to wealthy, pro-cop Buckhead voters—going as far as to [donate funds](#) towards the private Buckhead police force, the Buckhead Blue. Westmoreland is likely to win re-election.

Westmoreland's opponent, [Sonya Russell-Ofchus](#), is a former cop and federal agent, and perhaps an even worse alternative. Given that Westmoreland is likely to win reelection, and in light of his votes on both Cop City and the FY22 police budget, we are issuing no recommendation on this race.

Post 3 At-Large

We have no recommendation in this election.

Meet the ["First Lady"](#) of the City of Atlanta Department of Corrections, Jacki Labat! If you weren't sure whether we were living in a police state, perhaps the candidacy of Fulton County Sheriff's (Pat Labat) wife will convince you. Labat's victory presents a real threat in that it would further strengthen the ties between City Council and the carceral state at a time when Sheriff Labat is hoping for Fulton County to seize the [very jail \(ACDC\)](#) which [activists have been working to close](#). Not only is Labat a steadfast supporter of police, but her corporate background lends itself to be easily influenced by corporate entities just like the Atlanta Police Foundation.

Opponent [Jodi Merriday](#)'s reactionary platform also focuses heavily on crime, citing Obama's 21st Century Policing plan. Both candidates would likely seek to expand policing and surveillance in office.

City Council Districts

District 1

We have no recommendation in this election.

[Clarence Blalock](#) opposes tenants' right to renew, opposes limits to rent increases, and opposes city spending on [affordable housing](#). However, he attended the #StopCopCity People's Town Hall organized by Atlanta DSA and allied community organizations, where [he spoke against the proposed training facility](#).

[Russell Hopson](#) has been endorsed by the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council. However, his platform calls for increased surveillance and also implies that policing in Atlanta can be improved simply via community policing efforts and increased community engagement. This is a bad take, since "community policing" often only results in increased police presence and narrowly defines "community" to mean homeowners and the business community.

District 2: Blank Ballot

We recommend submitting a blank ballot in this election.

Amir Farokhi is the only candidate on the ballot for District 2. Farokhi, representing Old Fourth Ward, Poncey Highlands and Midtown, is best characterized as a pro-cop neoliberal. He's taken point over the last year to fear-monger over [street racing](#) and other sound violations, repeatedly advocating for increased police presence and [surveillance](#) in his district. He voted 'Yes' to pass Cop City on the Finance Committee and abstained from the final vote. He also voted 'Yes' to explore leasing ACDC to Fulton County and to increase the FY22 police budget.

District 3: Erika Estrada

We believe Erika Estrada is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Councilmember Antonio Brown's mayoral run has left an open seat and a crowded field in this race for District 3. The candidates running include Capacity Builder Inc. CEO Byron Amos, AccuLedger founder Erika Estrada, real estate developer Brandon Graham, and NPU-J chair Keonaa Jones. Of these candidates, Estrada and Amos have led the pack in fundraising, each raising a total of \$15k as of the September 30 [campaign finance report](#). While Amos has [close ties with the Atlanta Police Department](#) and owns a private security company "End All Threat Security," Estrada has committed to police reform and serves on the board of Initiative for Affordable Housing, a nonprofit that helps homeless Atlantans find resources for support.

District 4: Rogelio Arcila

We are proud to endorse our comrade Rogelio Arcila for City Council in District 4.

Rogelio Arcila is a Democratic Socialist and Atlanta DSA member running to win a seat at the table for working people. Arcila became active in Atlanta politics through the 2020 George Floyd protest movement and has ties with left-wing organizations throughout the city. He's fighting to defund the Atlanta Police Department and to reallocate funds back into working-class communities through investing in affordable housing, providing homes for our homeless community, fixing our crumbling infrastructure, and creating green union jobs. Arcila has pledged to continue working alongside grassroots efforts to stop Cop City from being constructed and finally close the Atlanta City Detention Center.

Rogelio is running against incumbent Councilmember Clela Winslow. Over the course of her 27-year tenure, Winslow has consistently sided with big business, developers, and police over the interests of working people, who she [openly disdains](#). Winslow is pro-police, having voted against the Rayshard Brooks bill and for both Cop City and the FY22 police budget increase. She has committed electoral fraud on multiple occasions, refusing to file campaign finance reports, using [taxpayer money to pay for campaign events and materials](#), and even [exploiting the homeless with sub-minimum-wage campaign jobs](#).

Rogelio Arcila is the clear choice in this election for voters who believe that city resources should be used to meet people's needs instead of enriching corporations and developers. With Rogelio in office, we will have a Councilperson who will be accountable to and fight for Atlanta's working people.

District 5: Liliana Bakhtiari

We believe Liliana Bakhtiari is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Since current District 5 representative Natalyn Archibong is vacating her seat to run for Council President, a total of five candidates are running for district 5—Lilianna Bakhtiari, Katie Kissel, Samuel Bacote, Mandy Mahoney, and Douglas Williams.

Liliana Bakhtiari ran against and [nearly beat](#) Archibong in 2018. While Bakhtiari is no socialist (she advocates for [filling police vacancies](#) which have already been budgeted for, and “community policing”—a misleading term which often expands police presence and narrowly defines “community” to mean homeowners and business interests), she is likely the most progressive candidate in the race. Her website advocates increased funding for the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Program (P.A.D), a \$15 minimum wage (although this legislation must be passed at the state level), the expansion of affordable housing, and support for

homeless Atlantans. She has also voiced support for local Nabisco and [IATSE strikers](#), and spoke [against the Cop City legislation](#) early on when it was first introduced.

While opponent Katie Kissel co-authored a resolution by the [Kirkwood Neighbors Organization](#) to relocate the police training facility, the resolution ultimately still advocated for the installation of a facility elsewhere. Of note, Kissel showed support for Libertarian Gary Johnson in the 2016 presidential elections.

District 6

We have no recommendation in this election.

One notable candidate is [Alex Wan](#), who previously held office in District 6 for eight years until launching a failed bid for City Council President in 2017. His most recent filing indicates he has nearly \$77,000 in cash on hand. Wan's previous bid for City Council President was endorsed by the Buckhead Coalition and Atlanta Board of realtors, indicating his friendliness among the city's elite. The only candidate with comparable fundraising is Courtney Dedi, who is running on a [reactionary platform](#) that includes "stricter enforcement of noise violations and nuisance complaints for bars and restaurants to better protect our neighborhoods." The lack of any progressive candidates with viability, and the strong advantage Alex Wan has in this race, leads us to no recommendation.

District 7: Blank Ballot

We recommend submitting a blank ballot in this election.

There is nothing redeeming to say about five-term incumbent [Howard Shook](#), who is running unopposed in Atlanta's [second wealthiest and second whitest district](#) in Buckhead. Shook is your typical right-wing, pro-cop cartoon villain. In the midst of the pandemic he introduced [legislation](#) to offer police bonuses, and similar to Westmoreland and Shook, donated funds to Buckhead's [private police force](#). Unsurprisingly, his votes on Cop City, the Rayshard Brooks Bill and surveillance reflect a pro-police stance. We recommend a blank ballot in this race.

District 8: Blank Ballot

We recommend submitting a blank ballot in this election.

Mary Norwood, a racist right-wing Republican, is the only candidate in this election. She has previously held office as an At-Large Councilmember and has run multiple failed campaigns for Mayor. With a base of privileged, white Buckhead residents, she has been a key ally to the

police and a fighter for "tough-on-crime" legislation. Mary Norwood [signed onto an effort to throw out Georgia's presidential election results](#) for entirely fictitious "voter fraud" which she also alleges caused her to lose her past failed mayoral campaigns. She is in staunch opposition to the closure of the Atlanta City Detention Center—so much so that she has [circulated communications](#) amongst Buckhead constituents, urging them to call in to City Council public comment in favor of keeping the jail open.

District 9: Devin Barrington-Ward

We believe Devin Barrington-Ward is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Devin Barrington-Ward is an activist running against incumbent Dustin Hillis for City Council District 9. Ward, who works with Movement for Black Lives and other groups, has been involved with grassroots organizing efforts including the campaigns to close the city jail, Stop Cop City, and defund the Atlanta Police Department. Ward [opposed right-wing efforts to repeal crucial bail reform legislation](#), and spoke against [Georgia House Bill 286](#), which passed earlier this year and restricts local governments from decreasing police budgets by over 5%.

Incumbent Dustin Hillis has a track record of voting in favor of efforts to expand policing and incarceration—'Yes' on Cop City, 'Yes' on increased surveillance, and 'No' on the Rayshard Brooks Bill. We expect that Devin Barrington-Ward would be far more responsive to the interests of working people if elected.

District 10: Jason Hudgins

We believe Jason Hudgins is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Incumbent Councilmember Andrea Boone has a decisively anti-worker track record. Boone co-sponsored the Cop City ordinance to authorize a ground lease for the Atlanta Police Foundation, and sponsored legislation to expand surveillance in Atlanta through [Operation Shield](#), authorizing \$56,000 from District 10 accounts as part of a total \$175,000 in funding.

Jason Hudgins is a more progressive candidate running to unseat Boone. His [website](#) includes claims that "crime is a symptom" that follows "systemic economic oppression," as well as opposition to gentrification and tax incentives for rich for-profit developers. Hudgins publicly opposed the Cop City proposal before it came to a vote. Hudgins takes a more left-wing position than Boone on all major issues in this election.

District 11: Ron Shakir

We believe Ron Shakir is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Incumbent Councilmember Marci Collier Overstreet's voting record tends to favor police and corporate interests over those of the working class. Along with four other Councilmembers, Overstreet voted to give the Atlanta Police Foundation a total of \$175,000 from their district funds for "[Operation Shield](#)" to purchase security cameras for their respective districts. Overstreet also supported and voted for Cop City.

The only challenger on the ballot is Ron Shakir, a producer at [People TV](#). People TV is a nonprofit public access cable TV channel that covers various topics in local news. While Shakir has only recently entered the race and as of October 10 has not released a full platform, he has expressed several progressive stances on his talk show. He has condemned excessive policing, pointing to the role that economic stability and community support play in preventing crime. He has also condemned the increasing privatization of public services in the city, and is a vocal opponent to charter schools. As the only opponent to Overstreet, we believe Shakir would be more responsive to the needs of working people in office.

District 12: Antonio Lewis

We believe Antonio Lewis is the candidate likely to cause the least harm in office.

Last but not least, we have Joyce Sheperd—the fifth-term incumbent City Councilmember behind the worst piece of legislation of the year, [Cop City](#)! At the behest of the corporate Atlanta Police Foundation, Joyce Sheperd is responsible for [shoving through the Cop City legislation](#) without the consent, feedback, or buy-in from her constituents. She also authorized giving the Atlanta Police Foundation a total of \$175,000 from her and other Councilmembers' district funds to purchase security cameras for their respective districts. Safe to say, Joyce Sheperd has got to go!

Also running in the election is Jenné Shepherd, unrelated to Joyce. Jenné Shepherd advocates for increased police pay and pensions, and expressed that a new APD training facility needs to be "[earned.](#)" She does indicate support for plans to increase affordable housing, prevent displacement, and significantly increase access to public transit in southwest Atlanta

[Antonio Lewis](#), a labor organizer and activist running in the election, cites food deserts and income inequality as some of the major issues plaguing Atlantans. He has publicly supported the #StopCopCity and George Floyd movements, and was endorsed by the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council. For these reasons, we believe that he would expand community organizations' and organized labor's influence over the City Council's decision-making if elected.