

Restoring Accountability, Delivering Results, and Structuring El Paso for a Decade of Growth

Why El Paso Should Return to a Strong Mayor Form of Government

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Introduction

My name is Arturo R. Alluin. I'm a father, businessman, employer, and taxpayer - not a career politician. Over the past decade, while City Hall has consistently mismanaged money, missed deadlines, avoided accountability, and increased taxes to remedy operational inefficiencies and fund pay raises, I've spent my career balancing budgets, creating jobs, developing systems, improving efficiency, solving problems, and delivering results. I know what accountability looks like because I've lived it. In any business, performance and results aren't optional and, in most cases, you don't get a second chance if you fail to deliver the first time. If you underperform, you don't get a bonus or pay raise - you get fired. If you overspend, you don't get a larger budget next year, you go out of business. Throughout my career, I've learned that leadership isn't measured by intentions, but by results. I believe that our government should operate the same way. El Paso doesn't need more excuses. It needs leadership, transparency, and results.

Today, El Paso is the 22nd largest city in America, the second-largest Hispanic-majority city in the United States, and the economic center of a binational region of more than 2.7 million people. As one of the largest cities in America and one of the most important border communities in the world, we should have a government that is accountable to the people, focused on results, disciplined with taxpayer dollars, and committed to a long-term vision for our future. We should be driving innovation, spearheading growth, and improving the quality of life for everyone in our community.

Instead, we're lagging in every sense and we've come to accept - or endure - the harsh reality that everything is over budget, that nothing gets done, and that no one is accountable. Critical infrastructure projects drag on for years, our streets continue to deteriorate, taxpayers are asked to pay more, and residents are left wondering when City Hall will finally deliver the results they were promised. And when something goes wrong, nobody seems to know who is responsible.

Why This Conversation Matters

El Paso is not a small city. The reality is that cities of our size increasingly require decisive leadership, clear accountability, and efficient execution. When we compare ourselves to America's largest cities, one fact becomes impossible to ignore. Among the 30 largest cities in the United States, 19 operate under Strong Mayor governments, while only 10 use the Council-Manager system. In other words, 63% of America's largest cities have chosen the Strong Mayor model.

The trend becomes even clearer among the nation's largest urban centers:

- 63% of the Top 30 cities operate under Strong Mayor governments
- 65% of the Top 20 cities operate under Strong Mayor governments
- 70% of the Top 10 cities operate under Strong Mayor governments
- 80% of the Top 5 cities operate under Strong Mayor governments

This includes cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, San Diego, Seattle, Denver, Boston, and many others. This is not accidental. As cities become larger and more complex, residents demand faster decisions, clearer leadership, and direct accountability from those they elect. El Paso should be no different.

Representative Government Requires Elected Leadership

At its core, this issue is not about politics. It is about democracy. The people of El Paso elect a Mayor. They elect City Representatives. They expect those elected officials to lead – and deliver. Yet under the current system, many of the most important operational decisions affecting city government are controlled by an appointed City Manager who is never elected by voters, never appears on a ballot, and are often detrimental to our community and our growth.

That creates a disconnect between representation and authority. When citizens vote for leadership, they, conceptually, vote for individuals who they believe possess both the responsibility and the authority to implement the priorities they campaigned on – not to mention, that ideally also have strong morals and values.

If voters elect leaders who promise:

- Safer neighborhoods
- Better roads
- Faster permitting
- Stronger economic development
- More responsible spending

Those leaders should have the power to deliver those results. And if they fail, voters should have the power to remove them. That is how a representative government is supposed to work. Those promises above were my initial campaign pillars and platform – however, as I began diving deeper into the role, I realized that delivering any of this was way out of a City Representative's immediate control given the current structure of our local government. Not to mention, those are things that we should already have and the bare minimum we should expect to receive, in my opinion, given the amount of taxes we pay and trust we place in our leadership – El Paso is the highest taxed city in Texas for the record. Elected leaders should set direction, make decisions, and be held accountable for outcomes. In a city approaching 700,000 residents, executive authority should flow directly from the voters -not from appointment.

The principle is simple: ***The people who run government should be chosen by the people.***

The Accountability Problem

Governments work best when responsibilities are clear. When government succeeds, the public should know who deserves credit. When government fails, the public should know who is responsible. Today, El Paso's Council-Manager system often makes that distinction difficult and, quite frankly, blurs all accountability. The Mayor serves as the public face of the city but has limited executive authority. City Council establishes policy but does not manage daily operations. The City Manager directs city departments but is appointed rather than elected. The result is a system where accountability becomes fragmented.

When problems arise, residents frequently hear:

"That's a City Manager issue."

"That's a Council issue."

"That's an administrative issue."

"That's a departmental issue."

In practice, responsibility becomes diluted and we fall into a finger pointing game. When everyone shares responsibility, nobody truly owns the outcome. A Strong Mayor system solves that problem. Citizens know exactly who is responsible for performance because executive authority is vested in a leader directly elected by the people. There is no confusion. There are no excuses. There is accountability. Therefore, a strong Mayor leads to a strong Council, and a strong council creates a strong city.

Twenty Years Later: Are We Better Off?

In 2004, when El Paso transitioned from a Strong Mayor system to a Council-Manager form of government, the goal was to create professional management and improve efficiency. Twenty years later, we should be willing to ask ourselves a simple question: **Has the system delivered?**

Many taxpayers would argue that it has not. Projects continue to take years to complete. Costs continue to rise. Departments avoid accountability. Permitting and development moves too slow. Residents struggle to identify who is ultimately responsible when government falls short. And the answer is always increasing taxes to balance our budgets. Year after year.

Most importantly, the economic results have failed to keep pace with many of the cities we should be competing against. In 2004, per-capita income in the El Paso metropolitan area was approximately \$22,244. Today, that figure stands at approximately \$29,956—an increase of just 34.7% over the past two decades. By comparison, many of America's largest metropolitan areas experienced per-capita income growth ranging from approximately 110% to 150% during the same period. Government structure alone does not determine economic success. But leadership structure influences every major factor that contributes to growth:

- Economic development
- Infrastructure investment
- Permitting efficiency
- Business recruitment
- Capital investment
- Long-term planning

Cities that move faster attract opportunity.

Cities that cannot execute fall behind.

El Paso deserves a government designed to compete – and compete at the highest level.

Conclusion

Twenty years ago, El Paso chose a different path than most of America's largest cities. Since then, most major cities have continued to embrace Strong Mayor governments because they provide clearer leadership, direct accountability, and faster decision-making. At the same time, El Paso's economic progress has failed to keep pace with many of those peer cities. The question is no longer whether the Council-Manager system sounded good in theory. The question is whether the results justify continuing it. I don't think so.

We need a government structure built for accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and results.

Most importantly, we need a government that reflects the fundamental principle of representative democracy:

The people who run government should be chosen by the people.

The goal is not to give more power to politicians. The goal is to give more power to voters. We should know exactly who is responsible for running our city, implementing policies, managing departments, and delivering results. And we should have the ability to reward success—or demand change—through the ballot box. That is, at its core, what accountability looks like and what representative government requires. This, in essence, is why I support the idea of returning El Paso to a Strong Mayor form of government. Not because it is a partisan issue. Not because it is a political issue. Because it is an accountability issue. Because it is a taxpayer issue. Because it is a results issue. And because the people of El Paso deserve leadership that answers directly to them.

Not to mention, cutting City Management would save us between \$3,000,000 - \$4,000,000 annually. If you did not know, we have the best paid City Management Department in the State. Oh, and the worst performing one. Perhaps, if we put that money into resurfacing our streets we wouldn't run through the same pothole every six months...