



What Are Primary Elections and Why Should I Participate?

Primary elections determine which candidate will represent each political party in advance of a general election.

There are two main types of primaries: closed and open.

- In a closed primary, voters may only cast their ballot for the party in which they are affiliated.
- An open primary allows voters to cast their ballot in either primary regardless of party affiliation, meaning a registered Democrat can vote in a Republican primary and vice-versa.

Why are primary elections important?

- Primary elections give you, the voter, the opportunity to decide who from a pool of candidates should ultimately be nominated by your political party to run in the general election.
- Primary elections generally attract more partisan voters, which is how extreme candidates can end up on the ballot in a general election. Improving participation can help to moderate the outcomes.
- Based on voter turnout and primary results, parties may rework their election strategy and devote more or less attention and resources towards certain demographics, states, and issues.
- States like Iowa and New Hampshire draw disproportionate attention in the presidential primaries because they hold the first caucus and primary election, respectively, and often give a candidate the momentum to win their party's nomination.
- Candidates who receive mass support but ultimately don't win primary elections can sometimes still influence the winning candidate and the platform they take to the general election.

In some states, the political parties hold a “caucus” instead of a primary, but the objective is the same.

What are caucuses and how do I participate in them?

Instead of casting ballots through typical channels, a caucus invites party members to meet and vote in person. Each party holds their own caucuses, separately from the other. They may even occur on different days. Caucuses take place in nine states:

- Iowa
- Nevada
- Kansas
- Hawaii
- Maine
- Alaska
- North Dakota
- Wyoming
- Kentucky (Republican only)
- Washington (Democratic party only)

While it can be challenging to participate in a caucus, some states are opening their participation to overseas voters.

Make sure to check your Election Dates and Deadlines for your state's primary elections or caucus by visiting **U.S. Vote Foundation** or **Overseas Vote Today**

Register, Request Your Ballot and Vote in the 2020 Primaries