

## What Are Primaries and Caucuses?

There are two major political parties in the United States: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Sometimes people run as independents, not



belonging to any party, or as third-party candidates representing some new party that's trying to form but almost all elected officials, especially in the federal government, belong to one of the two major parties. Presidents in recent history have been either Democrats or Republicans.

When it's time to elect a new president, as many as 10 or 12 people want to be the Republican or Democratic nominee and run for president. Somehow the members of that party must not only select a good candidate but a candidate who has the best chance of winning the Presidential Election in November. The primary election helps each party in selecting their presidential candidate. Voters select from their preferred candidate from the larger group of potential candidates in the primary election.

In a closed primary, only voters who are registered as Democrats can vote for the potential Democratic nominee and only registered Republicans can vote for the potential Republican nominee. In an open primary, any registered voter can vote in the Democratic or Republican primary. Primary elections are run by state governments and each state decides whether or not it will hold a primary election and whether it is closed or open. The results of primary elections do not always select a nominee; the party's nominee is finally selected at the party's National Convention, a national meeting of party representatives.

A few states like Iowa and Texas do not hold primary elections but instead representatives of the party in the state meet together and decide which of the potential candidates they will support at the National Convention. Each state caucus group decides its rules and how they will select a candidate to support.

Primaries and caucuses do not directly choose a candidate but instruct the state's delegates how to vote at the convention. If a candidate is not selected on the first ballot at the convention, delegates can then change who they vote for on later ballots. Before so many states had primary elections, presidential candidates were selected by the party delegates at their national convention.