

OPEN VS. CLOSED PRIMARIES

WHAT ARE PRIMARY ELECTIONS?

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

TYPES OF PRIMARIES

How primary elections are conducted varies widely from state to state. There are two main types of primaries: closed and open, but it gets more involved than that. Primaries can be categorized as closed, partially closed, open to unaffiliated voters, partially open, or open.

When registering to vote, there is usually a place to provide the voter's political party preference. If a voter does not provide their political party preference on their voter registration form, they are known as an "unaffiliated voter" unless they add their political party at a later date. Whether a political party preference is provided on the voter registration form may impact the voter's ability to participate in a primary election.

CLOSED PRIMARIES

In a closed primary, voters may only vote in the primary election of the political party they are affiliated with on their voter registration. Voters registered as "Independent" or who are unaffiliated with any political party are excluded from participating in the primary election.¹

- **States with Closed Primaries:**² Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania

PARTIALLY CLOSED PRIMARIES

States with partially closed primaries permit political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters or voters not registered with the party to participate in the primary. In partially closed primary states, political parties may let in unaffiliated voters, while excluding members of a different party.³

- **States with Partially Closed Primaries:**⁴ Connecticut, Idaho, Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia

1. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

2. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

3. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

4. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

**Voter Hotline: 1-888-API-VOTE
(1-888-274-8683)**

Bilingual assistance is available in English, Mandarin (普通话/普通話), Cantonese (广东话/廣東話), Korean (한국어), Vietnamese (Tiếng Việt), Tagalog, Urdu (اردو), Hindi (हिन्दी), and Bengali/Bangla (বাংলা).



OPEN VS. CLOSED PRIMARIES

OPEN PRIMARIES FOR UNAFFILIATED VOTERS

Several states only allow unaffiliated voters to participate in any party primary they choose. Those states do not allow voters registered as affiliated with one party to vote in another party's primary. Unlike a true open primary, Republicans cannot vote in a Democratic party primary or vice versa.⁵

- **States with Open Primaries for Unaffiliated Voters:**⁶ Arizona, Colorado,⁷ Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island

PARTIALLY OPEN PRIMARIES

In states with primaries that are partially open, voters are able to cross party lines. Unlike true open primaries, their ballot selection may be regarded as a form of registration with the corresponding party. The voter's ballot selection is also publicly reordered by the state.⁸

- **States with Partially Open Primaries:**⁹ Illinois, Indiana, Iowa,¹⁰ New Jersey, Ohio, Wyoming

OPEN PRIMARIES

Open primaries allow voters to cast their vote across party lines for the primary election if they choose to do so.¹¹ This decision remains private and does not register the voter with the party for which they decide to vote.

- **States with Open Primaries:**¹² Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin

5. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

6. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

7. In Colorado, unaffiliated voters return one party's mail ballot, or request which party ballot they want to vote for at the polls. Their choice is recorded and becomes public information, but it does not change the voter's unaffiliated status.

8. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

9. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

10. Iowa's voter registration asks voters to choose a party, but the state allows voters to publicly change their party affiliation for purposes of voting in the primary election

11. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

12. National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Primary Election Types," June 22, 2023 <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-primary-election-types>

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