

Primaries & Caucuses



The two common forms of first-round voting in the presidential election are caucuses and primaries. Read the information below to explore the general similarities and differences between the system and consider the question: “Which form of voting do you think is more democratic? Why?” [Click here](#) to learn which states follow which system.

Primary

What is it?

An election in which voters cast ballots for one candidate of their choosing from a political party. The results determine the number of delegates pledged or bound to vote for a given candidate at the party’s state convention.

Caucus

Meetings where voters openly discuss, seek to persuade each other, and vote for candidates. The results determine the number of delegates pledged or bound to vote for a given candidate at the party’s state convention.

Who can vote?

Registered voters ([Register here](#))

Registered voters ([Register here](#))

Is the ballot secret?

Yes

No

How do people vote?

In a closed primary, voters choose one candidate from the party that they are registered with (that is, Republican voters can only vote for Republican candidates and likewise for Democrats.

In an open primary, voters can cast a ballot for a candidate without being a registered member of that candidate’s party. They can vote in only one party’s primary.

Voters gather at the designated meeting place in their voting precinct. Voters usually hear from presidential campaign representatives before voting begins. People may discuss why they support their chosen candidate in order to convince other voters. Voters divide themselves into groups based on preferred candidate, and can switch groups before the number of people supporting each nominee is finally recorded.

How long does it take to vote?

Minutes to cast a ballot at a polling location.

Potentially hours as voters take informal public polls, make speeches, break into groups, hold discussions, deliberate on candidates, and re-group.



Note: California has a very high proportion of registered Independents. These voters will not be able to vote for the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate in the state’s primary without additional steps. Learn more [here](#).