

ELECTIONS AND REDISTRICTING

Primaries: Many Ways to Select a Party Nominee



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Introduction

A century ago, political parties did not select their nominees through primary elections. Instead, parties ran their own processes using their own rules, and hearing from—mostly—party stalwarts, with little role for rank-and-file members. In other words, nominees were selected in the proverbial smoke-filled back room.

Half a century ago, primaries were still uncommon. By then, in an effort to be more inclusive, caucuses had largely replaced insider decision-making. At a caucus, the rank-and-file could express support for the candidates of their choice. Still, only highly motivated party members attended caucuses, then or now.

Over the last few decades, most parties have switched from caucuses to primary elections to select their nominees for general elections. The motivating factor was—again—to permit participation by more party members, continuing a century-long trend.

Of course, state practices regarding primaries vary considerably. Perhaps the most important variable is, who can participate in the primary? It used to be that only members of a party—those who had affirmatively registered with that party—could participate. That is still the case in eight states, and there is a strong rationale: A primary is a party function, so shouldn't party members be the only ones to choose their nominees? Courts have been largely supportive of this reasoning.

After the theoretical debate about whether a party primary should allow nonparty members to participate, turnout is often the next concern. Many elements impact turnout besides the type of primary used: whether statewide candidates are on the ballot (especially if it is a hotly contested race), traditional patterns of voter participation in the state, the level of partisanship in the state (the more partisan, the higher participation in primaries) and even the weather.

That said, primary type matters too. The Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) report, [2018 Primary Election Turnout and Reforms](#), notes that 19.9% of the eligible electorate participated in 2018's state primaries. To increase turnout in primaries, it referenced an earlier BPC report, [Governing in a Polarized America: A Bipartisan Blueprint to Strengthen our Democracy](#), recommending that states "adopt open or semi-open primaries to allow independents and/or members of the opposite party to cast ballots in a political primary." Most research points to a small but measurable increase in turnout correlating with how open a primary is.¹

¹ See:

- [Study on California Primary System and Turnout](#): Discusses how the new top two primary system in California may affect turnout and other factors that influence primary turnout.
- [University of New Orleans study](#): Argues open primaries increase turnout.
- [LWV study on Florida primary](#): Argues that Florida's closed primary system decreases turnout.
- [CU Boulder study on U.S. Primaries](#): Concludes a minor effect on turnout based on primary system.

Whatever the case, the changing partisan makeup of the electorate begs the question, turnout for whom? Now, [more voters are unaffiliated](#) with any political party than are affiliated as Democrats or Republicans. To give these unaffiliated voters a chance to participate in determining what candidates make it to the general election ballot, some states have shifted to permitting unaffiliated voters, or even voters of other political parties, to participate in any primary.

This report answers many of the key questions legislators may have if they are considering changing their state’s primary type. This report does not attempt to answer questions about presidential preference primaries.

States use different terminology to refer to voters who are not registered with a political party: unaffiliated, nonpartisan, undeclared, independent, decline to select, decline to state, other and non-affiliated. NCSL uses “unaffiliated.”

[Section 1](#) looks at who can participate in a primary, and the merits of different options.

[Section 2](#) looks at the legal landscape on primaries, summarizing guidance from the Supreme Court.

[Section 3](#) answers these questions:

- [Who is in charge of primaries, the state or the political party?](#)
- [Must the two major parties use the same nominating system within a state?](#)
- [In which states is a majority vote required, and thus, where are primary runoffs used?](#)
- [When is a primary held, and what are the political consequences of that choice?](#)
- [Is the presidential primary held with the state primary?](#)
- [What relationship, if any, do primary types and Election Day registration have?](#)

[Section 4](#) reviews the nexus between ranked choice voting and primary elections.

[Section 5](#) and [Section 6](#) provide tables, resources and acknowledgements.

For more information, please contact NCSL’s elections and redistricting team at elections-info@ncsl.org.

Section 1: Primary Systems in Use in the United States

In most states, political parties use primaries to select their nominees to run in the general election. How those primaries work varies state by state. The common ground is that, throughout the nation, *only* registered voters can participate in primaries.

But can *every* registered voter participate in a primary? That question is more alive now than ever. On one hand, it seems to make sense that allowing all voters, not just those affiliated with a party, would increase turnout in primaries.

On the other hand, the constitution gives Americans the right to free association, and a state telling a party that they must include others may tread on that right. Telling a party that they *can't* include others may tread on that right as well. Litigation is not decisive on this point; see [Section 2](#) for more details on the legal landscape for primaries.

Political analysts use the phrases “open” and “closed” to refer to various primary systems, but those categories are too broad for detailed comparisons. NCSL has created a taxonomy that is more precise. It is based entirely on who gets to vote in the primary: just registered members of the party, or other voters too—and if so, which other voters?

These definitions are detailed below, ordered from most restrictive to most open. See [Table 1](#) for a summary table of primary types.

Closed Primaries

A voter seeking to vote in a closed primary must first be a party member. Typically, the voter affiliates with a party on his or her voter registration application, and it is through an update to the voter registration record that party affiliation changes can be made. This system deters “cross-over” voting by members of other parties, or by independent or unaffiliated voters, and may contribute to a strong party organization.

Unaffiliated voters: Cannot participate.

Ten states use closed primaries: Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Pennsylvania.

Partially Closed Primaries

In this system, state law permits political parties to choose whether to allow voters unaffiliated with any party to participate in their nominating contests. The decision can shift before each election cycle. In this system, parties can still exclude members of opposing parties. This system gives the parties more flexibility from year-to-year about which voters to include, and it gives the two parties power over their own systems—they do not have to make the same choice. At the same time, it can create uncertainty about whether or not certain voters can participate in party primaries in a given year.

Unaffiliated voters: May be able to participate, depending on the party’s decision.

Seven states use partially closed primaries: Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Utah.

Case Study: New Mexico's Primaries

In 2019 and 2020, the New Mexico legislature passed a number of changes to its election laws, including provisions governing primaries. Some policymakers and reporters have described these provisions as creating “open primaries.” Based on the definitions in this report, however, New Mexico remains a “closed primary” state—albeit a unique one.

Starting in 2021, New Mexico's election code will enable voters to register to vote—or to change their party affiliation—up to Election Day. Commonly described as “same-day” registration, the provisions apply to all voters, including those who are unaffiliated. This provision means that unaffiliated voters can use same-day registration to join a political party and vote in a primary. If they want to return to being an independent voter, they must file paperwork with the secretary of state's office to change back after the election.

The 2020 special session's SB 4 clarified that the ability to make a last-minute change to party affiliation does not extend to already-affiliated voters—thus preventing same-day “crossover” party changes. The specific provision is:

“A voter whose political party affiliation on the voter's certificate of registration is with a major political party shall not be allowed to change party affiliation when updating an existing certificate of registration or registering to vote at an early voting site or polling place during a primary election.” (Section E)

Proponents for this combination of measures see them as opening up primaries for unaffiliated voters while preventing mischief by partisans who might want to interfere in another party's selection of candidates. Opponents see the provisions as confusing at best, and possibly reducing voter choice. Opponents further argue that unaffiliated voters generally oppose joining major political parties on principle and thus are unlikely to change their registration back and forth for each primary.

Open to Unaffiliated Voters

A number of states *require* that parties allow unaffiliated voters to participate in the primary of their choice (while prohibiting voters who are registered with one party to vote in another party's primary). This system differs from a true open primary because a Democrat cannot cross over and vote in a Republican party primary, or vice versa. Party affiliation can be switched back to “unaffiliated” after the election. In Colorado, unaffiliated voters must choose just one party's ballot, but it does not change their unaffiliated status. The voter's choice is public information.

Unaffiliated voters: Can participate.

Eight states use primaries open to unaffiliated voters: Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and West Virginia.

Note: New Mexico and New Hampshire require that unaffiliated voters declare affiliation with the party whose primary ballot they select in order to vote in that party's primary. Some analysts see this as a way for unaffiliated voters to participate in primaries, but because it requires affiliative—even if short lived—we are not considering these two states as open to unaffiliated voters in this report.

Partially Open Primaries

This system permits voters to cross party lines, but they must either publicly declare their ballot choice, or their ballot selection may be regarded as a form of registration with the corresponding party. Political parties keep track of who votes in their primaries as a means of identifying their supporters.

Unaffiliated voters: Can participate.

Six states use partially open primaries: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Tennessee and Wyoming.

Open Primaries

“Open primary” states do not register voters by party, either at the time of registration or when a primary ballot is selected. In an open primary, voters may choose which party’s ballot to vote, and this decision is private and does not register the voter with that party. In this system, voters can cast a vote across party lines for the primary election. Critics argue that the open primary dilutes the parties’ ability to nominate a candidate of their choice. Supporters say this system gives voters maximal flexibility, maintains their privacy, and also may force candidates to appeal to a broader section of the electorate.

Unaffiliated voters: Can participate.

Fifteen states use open primaries: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin.

“Top Two” and “Top Four” Primaries

The “top two” primary format uses a common ballot that lists all candidates on the same ballot. In California, the ballot includes each candidate’s party affiliation, whereas in Washington, each candidate is authorized to list a party “preference” but does not have to. The top two vote-getters in each race, regardless of party, advance to the general election. Advocates of the “top two” format argue that it increases the likelihood of moderate candidates advancing to the general election ballot. Opponents maintain that it reduces voter choice by making it possible that two candidates of the same party face off in the general election. They also contend that it is tilted against minor parties who will face slim odds of earning one of only two spots on the general election ballot.

California and Washington use a “top two primary”, and Alaska will use a “top four” primary for future elections. Alaska adopted this policy in 2020 when voters narrowly approved Measure 2, which also calls for the use of ranked choice voting for general elections.

Unaffiliated voters: Can participate.

Other Primary Processes

In **Louisiana** (LSA-R.S. 18:402), on the general election date, as set by federal law for the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November (2 U.S. Code § 7), all candidates run on the same ballot. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes (50% +1), then the top two vote-getters face a runoff six weeks later. One way to look at this process is to say there is no primary election--just a general election for all candidates, with a runoff when needed. In 2020, the Louisiana legislature enacted [SCR 55](#), creating a Closed Party Primary Task Force to study and make recommendations about switching from the current system to a closed primary system.

In **Nebraska** (Neb. Rev. St. § 32-401), a partisan primary is used for members of congress and statewide office holders. Legislators, on the other hand, are elected on a nonpartisan basis, without a party designation, and with all candidates on the same nonpartisan primary ballot. The top two vote-getters advance to the general election. This system is common for local nonpartisan offices in many parts of the nation.

For information on changes made by states to their primary types, 2010 – present, see [Table 2](#).

Section 2: The Legal Landscape for Primary Elections

Under the U.S. Constitution, the states have the power to regulate the time, place and manner of elections. As different candidate nominating systems have emerged over time, a tension has arisen between the states' power to regulate these systems and the First Amendment rights afforded to voters as well as political parties based on freedom of association. In the last 40 years, as primaries became the dominant mechanism for political parties to identify their general election candidates, the U.S. Supreme Court has weighed in on this conflict in four notable cases concerning the constitutionality of varying state primary systems.

In **Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut (1986)**, the Court considered a challenge to a Connecticut statute that required voters wishing to participate in a party primary to be registered members of that party. In 1984, the Republican Party of Connecticut issued a rule that allowed unaffiliated voters to vote in Republican primaries for federal and statewide offices, even though state law called for closed primaries. The Republican Party then filed suit challenging the constitutionality of the Connecticut law, arguing it restricted the First Amendment rights of the Party to enter into political association with individuals of its own choosing. The District Court ruled in favor of the Party, and the Court of Appeals affirmed. The Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment prevents a state from implementing regulations that significantly affect a political party's right to define their membership: "The State of Connecticut's interest in preventing raiding was not sufficient basis for statute mandating closed primaries, where political party wished to open its primary elections only to unaffiliated voters and not to members of other political parties, and election statute provided that [an] unaffiliated voter could register as [a] party member as late as noon on last business day preceding primary." This case set a precedent; from then on, the Court would heavily weight a party's First Amendment rights as compared to a state's interest in regulating primary elections.

The next challenge to come before the Supreme Court was in 2000, in **California Democratic Party v. Jones**. The Democratic Party challenged California's blanket primary system, in which any voter could vote for a candidate regardless of party affiliation. The Court struck down the California system, reasoning that the blanket primary impermissibly burdened the party's right to select its own representative. The Court ruled that California did not assert a compelling enough state interest; the state had offered rationales including ensuring candidates were widely represented and increasing turnout. This decision then led to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals invalidating Washington's blanket primary system in **Washington State Republican Party v. Washington (2006)**.

The Supreme Court considered a suit challenging Oklahoma's semi-closed primary system in **Clingman v. Beaver (2005)**. State law allowed parties to open their primaries to independent voters, but voters registered for one party could not vote in a different party's primary. The Libertarian Party sought to open their primary to all registered voters, but the state only agreed to allow independent voters to participate in the Libertarian primary. The Libertarian Party and various voters challenged the primary statute on First Amendment grounds. The Supreme Court ruled that the "Constitution grants States broad power to prescribe the time, places, and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives, which power is matched by state control over the election process for state offices." Further, "Oklahoma's semi-closed primary system, under which a political party could invite only its own registered members and voters registered as Independents to vote in its primary, did not severely

burden the associational rights of the state's citizenry, so as to require application of strict scrutiny when the system was challenged as unconstitutionally burdening First Amendment right to freedom of political association.” The Court upheld Oklahoma’s semi-closed primary system, marking a departure from the previous two cases (**Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut** and **California Democratic Party v. Jones**) in that the Court sided with the state and its interests in this case.

The Supreme Court again considered Washington state’s primary system in **Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party (2008)**. Following the invalidation of Washington’s blanket primary system, voters passed an initiative implementing a “top two” primary system. A challenge was soon brought by multiple political parties. The Court upheld the top two system, relying on the state’s constitutional power to regulate elections, and reasoning that the parties’ assertion of the possibility of voter confusion as to which candidate was preferred by the party was based on speculation. This case continued the trend set in **Clingman v. Beaver** of the Court siding with state interests in disputes over primary election systems.

Conclusion: The Supreme Court is yet to weigh in directly on the constitutionality of primary systems in which a voter can choose to participate in the party primary of their choice. In other words, whether open primaries—no matter how that phrase is defined—also bump up against the right of free association—has not been tested in the highest court yet, and lower court rulings have been inconsistent.

Case Study: New Mexico Litigation

A New York based organization, Open Primaries Education Fund, representing four New Mexico voters, filed suit in 2018 seeking to invalidate New Mexico’s closed primary system. They were represented in court by Paul Bardacke, the former New Mexico Attorney General. The suit was filed as a writ of mandamus directly to the state supreme court, seeking to bypass the lower courts.

The plaintiffs argued that the state’s closed primary system violated the “anti-donation” clause of the state constitution, which prohibits government support for private entities. Because primaries are publicly funded, the plaintiffs asserted that this was an unconstitutional donation to private entities, the political parties. The attorneys for the state countered that primaries are a government function managed by the secretary of state and county clerks, and therefore the clause relied on by the plaintiffs did not apply.

Although the New Mexico secretary of state was a vocal supporter of open primaries, she was also the named defendant in the lawsuit and defended the law in court, arguing that the legislature should decide on any changes. Lawmakers had considered legislation to establish open primaries before and during this litigation, but the bills failed.

The New Mexico supreme court ruled in favor of the state in a summary order that did not address the substantive arguments in the case or provide guidance to plaintiffs or defendants as to the rationale for their decision.

Section 3: Other Ways Primaries Differ Between the States

Each state's election system is unique, and how they structure their primaries is unique as well. While a primary is likely to be run with the same ground rules as are used for general elections (when and how absentee voting is permitted, polling place standards, voter identification requirements, etc.), a number of primary-specific questions remain.

Who is in charge of primaries, the state or the political party?

Caucuses are run by political parties, and in recent years party-run presidential primaries have cropped up. State primary elections so far have been run by the state, following state law. The cost of primary elections is borne by the state, with South Carolina as an exception, where the political parties are required to provide some funding for the primaries. (Note: presidential preference primaries have more variation than state primaries. Between 2016 and 2020, [11 states replaced caucuses](#) with primaries.)

Must the two major parties use the same nominating system within a state?

In most states, all major parties must hold their primaries on the same day, following the same rules about who can participate and how the election will be run. For state primaries, Alaska and Idaho allow each party to determine its preferred primary process. This may be advantageous when the two parties are in disagreement about their preferences, and perhaps for the minority party in a heavily one-party state. The minority party might prefer to gather at a convention, or, as in the 2020 presidential nominating process, run a separate election under their own auspices.

In which states is a majority vote required, and thus where are primary runoffs held?

Seven largely southern states require a candidate to win a primary election with a majority of the votes: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. If no candidate for a given office receives 50%+1 of the vote in the primary election, a separate [primary runoff election](#) is scheduled for a few weeks later. In that second election, only the top two vote-getters run, ensuring that one of them will receive a majority. (In addition, North Carolina uses runoffs with a 30% threshold; South Dakota uses runoffs only for the offices of U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative and governor; and Vermont uses runoffs but only in the case of a tie vote.) The advantage of having a majority vote requirement is that the party nominee has proven to have broad support; a disadvantage is that the state pays to run two separate elections, the primary and the runoff.

When are state primaries held, and what are the consequences of that choice?

Each state makes its own decision on when to hold its state primaries. State primaries begin in early spring and the last few are held in early September. (Primaries cannot be held any later than that because federal law requires that general election ballots be sent to military and overseas voters at least 45 days in advance of the general election; primaries held after approximately September 10 would make preparation for mailing out general election ballots to overseas voter's problematic.)

The choice of state primary dates dictates candidate filing dates and marks the beginning of the campaign season. On average, in any two-year election cycle, one or two state legislatures move their state primary date earlier or later. To see state and presidential primary dates in 2020, see [Table 3](#).

The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) recommends coordinating with nearby states to hold primaries on the same day. In fact, the BPC suggests a single national primary day for federal (congressional) primaries. [The Brookings Institute](#) also favors a national primary day. These ideas have not gained

traction. Evidence from naturally occurring shared dates is correlated with a modest increase in participation, perhaps because nearby states may share media markets.

Is the presidential primary held on the same date as the state primary?

Every four years, presidential preference primaries (PPPs) are an option states can, and mostly do, use. (As recently as 50 years ago, only a handful of states had a PPP, with most state parties determining their preferred presidential candidate through caucuses or other means.)

The laws in 31² states plus D.C. call for their presidential preference primary or presidential nominating event to be held separately from (and earlier than) their state primary. The perceived advantage is that states get more attention early in the season before the candidate pool has been narrowed or the final candidate has already been determined. (In 2020, because of COVID-19, three of these states—Connecticut, Georgia and New York—moved their presidential primary later in the year to coincide with their state primary.)

The laws in 19 states³ call for their presidential preference primary to be held in conjunction with their state primary. This only works when the state primary is scheduled in June or earlier, in time to identify the party's presidential preference before the summer conventions. The advantage is that one election can serve two purposes, offering significant cost savings for the state. It is likely that turnout is improved, because of the interest in the presidential race.

What relationship, if any, do primary types and Election Day registration have?

Based on a cross tabulation of states that have Election Day registration and their primary types, there is not an obvious correlation. Of the 19 states that have implemented Election Day registration:

- 2 states use closed primaries (Maryland and Nevada).
- 3 states use partially closed primaries (Connecticut, Idaho, and Utah).
- 3 states open primaries to unaffiliated voters (Colorado, Maine and New Hampshire).
- 2 states use partially open primaries (Iowa and Wyoming).
- 7 states use open primaries (Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Vermont and Wisconsin).
- 2 states use top two primaries (California and Washington).

² Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

³ Alabama, Arkansas, California, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, West Virginia—this adds to 19

Section 4: Ranked Choice Voting and Primaries

What is Ranked Choice Voting?

Ranked choice voting (RCV) is a vote counting system, not a primary type. In a [ranked choice voting](#) system, whether or not the election is a primary or a general election, voters rank all the candidates for a given office by their order of preference—first choice, second choice, etc. The votes are first tallied based on the first choice on every ballot. If no single candidate wins a first-round majority of the votes, then the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated and another round of vote tallying commences. If a voter's first choice is eliminated, then the vote goes to the second choice on their ballot and so on. Eventually one candidate receives a majority (over 50%) and wins the election. The result is similar to traditional [runoff elections](#), but voters make just one trip to the polls. That is why RCV is also known as “instant runoff voting.” RCV works for multi-winner elections as well.

While much of the debate about RCV is about how the system works, the underlying question is whether having elections won by a plurality—the highest vote-getter—or by a majority—over 50% of voters is preferable. A number of state constitutions are clear that a plurality determines an election's winner; others are silent. It is up to policymakers to decide if an elected official who won based on a plurality below the 50% mark can be an effective leader. That is, will they represent the greater population or feel the need to focus only on the needs of their base?

RCV can be used in any kind of primary—open, closed, top two, etc. The vote counting system does not dictate who can participate in an election.

Some say that RCV is particularly useful in primaries. In primaries with many candidates, as was the case in the Republican presidential field in 2016 and the Democratic presidential field in 2020, RCV would mean voters could select their true first choice, and have more well-known or traditional candidates as their second, third and so on choices.

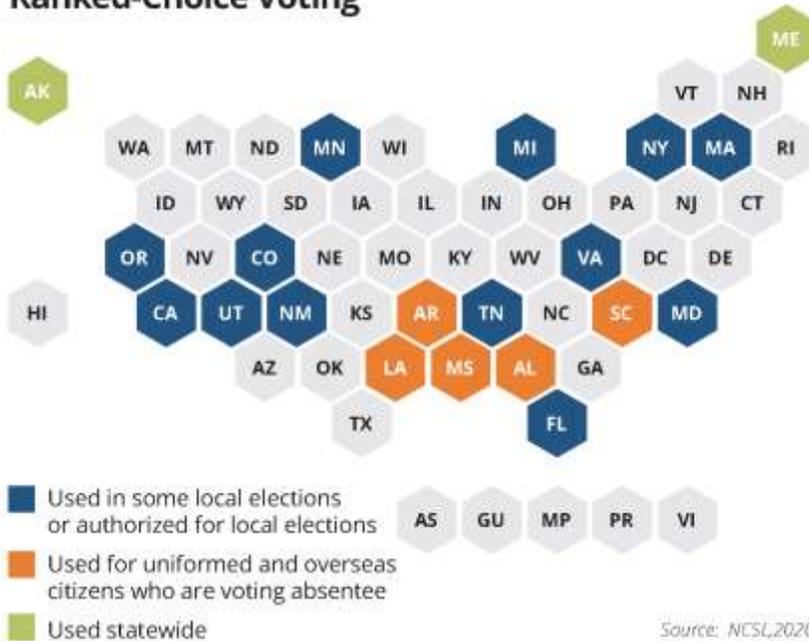
RCV could also be used to combine a primary with a general election. In Louisiana, on the general election date nominees from all parties run together, and a runoff between the top two vote getters is held the first Saturday in December. Louisiana—or any state that chose to do so—could combine the first election and the runoff election into one RCV election.

Considerations:

- The cost of running primaries would be eliminated, and the candidate filing deadline would be later in the year. The cost of runoff elections would also be eliminated.
- The requirement to get on the ballot would need to be reviewed, perhaps set higher than to get on a primary ballot.
- Is the public served by having a smaller pool of candidates to choose from at the general election? In other words, is it advantageous to use a two-step process?
- Does the state's voting technology support a RCV election?
- Would RCV boost the participation and visibility of minor party or independent candidates, and is that a value the state wants to pursue?
- As a new form of voting, RCV does require public education efforts but tends to be popular once implemented.

Where is RCV used now?

Ranked-Choice Voting



- At the state level, Maine was the first to adopt RCV for presidential primaries, state primaries and general elections, including presidential elections. In 2020, Alaska adopted RCV for presidential elections, state primaries and general elections, but not for primaries.
- The Democratic state parties in Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas and Wyoming used RCV in their recent presidential preference primaries. These events were run by the parties, not by the state. RCV can help winnow a large field of candidates.
- Twenty or more municipalities use ranked choice voting. This is often available to home rule municipalities without any statutory or constitutional changes.
- Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina are among the states that require a majority vote to establish a party's nominee, and thus use primary runoffs. These states provide instant runoffs for overseas voters. One ranked choice primary ballot is sent to overseas voters. If their first-choice candidate doesn't make it to the primary runoff, their second-choice candidate is counted in the runoff.

Section 5: Conclusion, Resources and Acknowledgements

One of the thorniest election policy concerns that state legislatures address is how primary elections, or party nominating functions more broadly, are best run. Historically, the trend (albeit a slow one) is to allow more voters to participate, but that runs directly counter to the belief that political parties are private entities and can therefore determine who participates.

In recent years, the changing complexities of the American electorate and particularly the increase in the number of voters who do not affiliate with a major party have led to more legislative interest in a full array of options.

With that in mind, this report offers a lens into the options currently used around the nation. While we have “bucketed” state primary systems based on NCSL’s taxonomy (closed, partially closed, partially open, open to unaffiliated voters, open primaries and top two primaries), we fully recognize that the specifics of each state’s system make each state’s system unique. In other words, the categories are helpful, but not definitive.

We note, too, that new options are developing all the time. Alaska voters approved a citizen initiative in 2020 that creates a “top four” primary system, with the general election to be run with ranked choice voting. Louisiana, which has used a system where the nation’s general election serves as the primary, with a runoff scheduled weeks later for decades. In 2021, its legislature will be studying other options.

In fact, the state of state primaries is fluid, and one of the areas where policy is most changeable. This report is intended to provide insights for those who are thinking of future needs and not as a limited menu of options.

NCSL Resources and Acknowledgements

- [State Primary Election Types](#)
- [2020 State Primary Dates](#)
- [Ranked Choice Voting](#)
- [Primary runoffs](#)

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Section 6: Appendices

Table 1: Who Can Vote in a State Primary and How Do They Register

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
Alabama (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Within fourteen days prior to the election. Code of Ala. § 17-3-50 Voter needs to be registered and may choose which primary or party ballot to vote. It holds that voter to that affiliation in case of a runoff election. However, it does not register the voter with that party.	No. Ala. Code § 17-3-52	No.
Alaska (Partially Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle.	Thirty days before an election. Alaska Stat. § 15.07.070	Yes.	Yes.
Arizona (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only Republicans: their primary only Unaffiliated: either major party primary	Twenty-nine days before an election. Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 16-120	Yes. Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 16-152	Yes.
Arkansas (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Thirty days before an election. Ark. Const. Amendment 51, §9 Voter needs to be registered and may choose which primary or party ballot to vote. It holds that voter to that affiliation in case of a runoff election. However, it does not register the voter with that party.	Yes.	No, Arkansas does not have online voter registration.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
California (Top Two Primary)	A common ballot listing all candidates with top two vote-getters advancing to the general election. Democrat: any candidate. Republican: any candidate. Unaffiliated: any candidate.	Fifteen days before an election. Same-day registration is permitted 14 days before an election and on Election Day. Cal. Elec. Code § 2102, Cal. Elec. Code § 2170	Yes. Cal. Elec. Code § 2150	Yes, to change your political party preference, you must re-register to vote.
Colorado (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Eight days before an election to receive a ballot by mail. Deadlines for voter registration drives are 22 days before an election. Colo. Rev. Stat. § 1-2-201	Yes. Colo. Rev. Stat. § 1-2-204	Yes, under Colorado’s “Find My Voter Registration.” After finding their record, the voter can change party affiliation.
Connecticut (Partially Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-431	The registration deadline is up to noon the day before the primary. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g A voter switching political affiliation must do it three months before election.	Yes.	Yes.
Delaware (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only Unaffiliated: none	Before a primary election: anytime except from the last Saturday in May through the date of the primary. 15 Del. C. § 2049	Yes. Del. Code tit. 15, § 1302	Yes.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
		<p>Before a presidential primary: anytime except from the 59th day before the presidential primary through the date of the election. 15 Del. C. § 3189</p> <p>The last date to register to vote for any presidential primary, primary and general election shall be the fourth Saturday prior to the date of the election. 15 Del. C. § 2036</p>		
Florida (Closed Primary)	<p>Democrats: their primary only.</p> <p>Republicans: their primary only.</p> <p>Unaffiliated: none.</p>	<p>The deadline to submit a party change before a primary election is twenty-nine days before that election. Fla. Stat. § 97.055</p>	<p>Yes. Fla. Stat. § 97.052</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
Georgia (Open Primary)	<p>Democrats: either major party primary.</p> <p>Republicans: either major party primary.</p> <p>Unaffiliated: either major party primary.</p>	<p>Twenty-nine days before an election. Ga. Code § 21-2-224</p>	<p>No. Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-221.2, Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-220</p>	<p>No.</p>
Hawaii (Open Primary)	<p>Democrats: either major party primary.</p> <p>Republicans: either major party primary.</p> <p>Unaffiliated: either major party primary.</p> <p>HRS § 12-31</p>	<p>Twenty-nine days before an election.</p> <p>Same-day registration is permitted during early voting and on Election Day. Hawaii Rev. Stat. §11-24</p>	<p>No. Haw. Rev. Stat. § 11-15</p>	<p>No,</p>
Idaho (Partially Closed Primary)	<p>Democrats: their primary only.</p> <p>Republicans: their primary only.</p>	<p>For a primary election, an elector may change their political party affiliation or become “unaffiliated” by filing a signed form with the county</p>	<p>Yes. Idaho Code § 34-411</p>	<p>Yes, affiliate with a political party or change your status</p>

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
	Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle.	<p>clerk no later than the last day a candidate may file for partisan political office prior to such primary election. Idaho Code § 34-704. (5 p.m., on the tenth Friday preceding the primary election).</p> <p>An “unaffiliated” elector may affiliate with the party of the elector's choice by filing a signed form up to and including Election Day. Idaho Code § 34-1002. (Application for absentee ballot).</p> <p>An “unaffiliated” elector may affiliate with the party of the elector's choice on or before Election Day, by declaring such political party affiliation to the poll worker.</p>		to unaffiliated.
Illinois (Partially Open Primary)	<p>Democrats: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p> <p>Republicans: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p> <p>Unaffiliated: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p>	<p>Registration deadline is twenty-eight days before an election. Sixteen days before if registering online.</p> <p>Election Day registration is permitted from twenty-seven days before the election and on Election Day. 10 ILCS 5/4-6, 4-16, 5-5, 6-29, 1A-16.5</p> <p>In Illinois, a voter is not required to declare a party at the time they register to vote and is considered independent until the time the voter casts a party ballot at a primary election.</p>	No. 10 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/1A-16	No.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
		There is no form to change party affiliation.		
Indiana (Partially Open Primary)	<p>Democrats: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p> <p>Republicans: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p> <p>Unaffiliated: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p>	<p>Registration deadline is twenty-nine days before an election. Ind. Code §3-7-13-10</p> <p>A voter must select either a Democratic or Republican ballot to vote in the primary election. In Indiana, your party affiliation is determined by how you voted in the last primary election in which you voted.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Ind. Code Ann. § 3-7-31-5, Ind. Code Ann. § 3-7-22-5</p>	No.
Iowa (Partially Open Primary)	<p>Democrats: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p> <p>Republicans: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p> <p>Unaffiliated: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.</p>	<p>Voters can change their party affiliation any time before Election Day or at the polling place on Election Day. Iowa Code § 43.42</p> <p>Any registered voter who desires to change or declare a political party affiliation may, before the close of registration for the primary election, file a written declaration stating the change of party affiliation with the county commissioner of registration who shall enter a notation of such change on the registration records. Iowa Code § 43.41</p>	Yes. Iowa Code § 48A.11	Yes.
Kansas	Democrats: their primary only.	Twenty-one days before an election.	Yes.	Yes, a voter must re-

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
(Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Kan. Stat. §25-2311	Kan. Stat. § 25-2309	register each time they change their party affiliation for voting.
Kentucky (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	A voter may change their political party registration at any time on or before December 31 to remain eligible to vote in the following political party primary election. KRS § 116.045	Yes. Ky. Rev. Stat. § 116.155	Yes.
Louisiana	N/A - all candidates run on the same ticket in general elections.	Changes must be made at least 20 days prior to an election if registering through the online registration system with a Louisiana driver's license or Louisiana special ID card or 30 days prior to an election if registering in person or by mail. La R.S. 18:101(B) and La R.S. 18:135(C)	Yes. La. Rev. Stat. § 18:104	Yes.
Maine (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	By the close of business on the 15th day before the election.	Yes.	No, Maine does not have online voter registration
Maryland (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	The deadline to change party affiliation is twenty-one days before an election. To change party affiliation, a voter can use Maryland's Online Voter Registration System (OLVR) or submit a new voter registration application or a signed written request to your local board of elections.	Yes. Md. Code, Elec. Law § 3-202	Yes.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
Massachusetts (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Twenty days before an election.	Yes.	Yes.
Michigan (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Registration deadline is fifteen days before an election. There is no political party registration requirement in Michigan. Any registered voter can participate in the primary. The voter must make a ballot selection in writing by completing the Application to Vote/Ballot Selection Form on Election Day; or on the Absent Voter Ballot Application form. Mich. Comp. Laws Serv. § 168.615c	No.	No.
Minnesota (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Registration deadline is twenty-one days before an election. Minn. Stat. Ann. §201.054, 201.061	No. Minn. Stat. § 201.071	No.
Mississippi (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Registration deadline is thirty days before an election.	No. Miss. Code § 23-15-39	No, Mississippi does not have online voter registration.
Missouri (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Registration deadline is twenty-seven days before an election. Mo. Rev. Stat. § 115.135	No.	No.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
Montana (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Registration deadline is thirty days before an election. MCA 13-2-301, MCA 13-2-304	No. Mont. Code § 13-1-210	No, Montana does not have online voter registration.
Nebraska	All candidates are on the same nonpartisan primary ballot.	A voter may change party affiliation at any time.	Yes. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 32-312	Yes.
Nevada (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	Registration deadline is twenty-eight days before an election in-person; postmarked twenty-eight days before if registering by mail; five days before if registering online.	Yes.	Yes.
New Hampshire (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	A voter may change your party affiliation or at any scheduled meeting of the supervisors of the checklist except for during the period of time between the first day of the filing period for the primary election and/or the presidential primary election and the date of the primary election itself. Six to thirteen days before an election, depending on local supervisors of the checklist. N.H. Rev. Stat. §654:7, 654:7-a	Yes. N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 654:7	No, New Hampshire does not offer online voter registration.
New Jersey (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	A registered voter who wishes to change their party affiliation must file a Political Party Affiliation Declaration Form 55 days before a Primary Election. N.J. Stat. § 19:31-13.2, N.J. Stat. § 19:23-45	Yes, optional. N.J. Stat. § 19:31-6.4	No.
New Mexico	Democrats: their primary only.	A voter needs to fill out a new registration form to change	Yes.	Yes.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
(Closed Primary)	Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	party affiliation twenty-eight days before an election. N.M. Stat. § 1-4-8	N.M. Stat. § 1-4-5.4	
New York (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	The voter registration form is used to change party enrollment. A change of enrollment needs to be received by February 14 each year before the June primary. NY CLS Elec § 5-210	Yes. N.Y. Elec. Law § 5-210	Yes.
North Carolina (Partially Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle.	Registration deadline is twenty-five days before an election. N.C. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 163-82.6 The North Carolina Voter Registration Application may be used to change party affiliation. The change notification must be signed, and should be sent to the appropriate county board of elections by the voter registration deadline	Yes. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 163-82.4	Yes, Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) customers may update their voter registration, including party affiliation through the DMV's Online Voter Registration Service.
North Dakota (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	N/A - North Dakota does not maintain or require voter registration.	N/A - North Dakota does not maintain or require voter registration.	N/A - North Dakota does not maintain or require voter registration.
Ohio (Partially Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice. Republicans: either major party primary	Registration deadline is thirty days before an election. Ohio Rev. Code Ann. §3503.19 A voter declares a political party affiliation by requesting the	No. Ohio Rev. Code § 3503.14	No.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
	but must declare their ballot choice. Unaffiliated: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.	ballot of a political party in a partisan primary election.		
Oklahoma (Partially Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle.	The last day a voter may change their political affiliation is March 31. Changing party affiliation is not allowed from April 1 through August 31. All requests to change party affiliation submitted after March 31 will be processed September 1. Okla. Stat. tit. 26, § 4-119	Yes. Okla. Stat. tit. 26, § 4-109.3; Okla. Stat. tit. 26, § 4-112	Yes.
Oregon (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	Registration deadline is twenty-one days before an election. Ore. Rev. Stat. § 247.017	Yes.	Yes.
Pennsylvania (Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: none.	Fifteen days before an election. 25 P.S. § 3071	Yes.	Yes.
Rhode Island (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	To vote in a party primary you must disaffiliate from any other party at least 30 days before the primary date. R.I. Gen. Laws Section 17-9.1-24	Yes. R.I. Gen. Laws Section 17-9.1-6, R.I. Gen. Laws Section 17-9.1-7, R.I. Gen. Laws Section 17-9.1-9	Yes.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
South Carolina (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Thirty days before an election. S.C. Code Ann. § 7-5-150	No, S.C. Code § 7-5-320	No, South Carolina does not have online voter registration.
South Dakota (Partially Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle.	To change party affiliation, a voter must update their voter registration by completing a voter registration form, then mail or return to their county auditor fifteen days before an election. S.D. Codified Laws § 12-4-15, S.D. Codified Laws § 12-4-5	Yes.	No, South Dakota does not have online voter registration.
Tennessee (Partially Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice. Republicans: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice. Unaffiliated: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.	Registration deadline is thirty days before an election. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-109	No. Tenn. Code § 2-2-116	No.
Texas (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Registration deadline is thirty days before an election. Tex. Elec. Code § 13.143 A registered voter is not required to pre-register or take any steps towards affiliating themselves with a party before voting in a party's primary election. Tex. Elec. Code § 162.003, 162.006	No. Tex. Elec. Code § 13.121, Tex. Elec. Code § 13.122	No, Texas does not offer online voter registration.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
Utah (Partially Closed Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters to participate before each election cycle.	To change political parties, a voter will need to update their voter registration online, by mail, or in-person by the voter registration deadline of eleven days before an election. Utah Code Ann. § 20A-2-107, Utah Code Ann. § 20A-2-102.5	Yes. Utah Code § 20A-2-104	Yes.
Vermont (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	All registered voters can vote in the primary election—but can only vote on one ballot. Same-day registration is permitted through Election Day. Vt. Stat. Ann. Tit. 17, § 2144	No. 17 V.S.A. § 2145	No, there is no party registration in Vermont.
Virginia (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Virginia does not have registration by political party. Registration deadline is twenty-eight days before an election. Va. Code Ann. § 24.2-416	No. Va. Code Ann. § 24.2-418	No, Virginia does not have registration by political party.
Washington (Top Two Primary)	A common ballot listing all candidates with top two vote-getters advancing to the general election. Democrat: any candidate. Republican: any candidate. Unaffiliated: any candidate.	Washington does not register voters by political party or party affiliation. The registration deadline is no later than eight days before the day of the primary. Rev. Code Wash. § 29A.08.140	No. Wash. Rev. Code § 29A.08.210	No, Washington does not register voters by political party or party affiliation.
West Virginia (Open to Unaffiliated Voters Primary)	Democrats: their primary only. Republicans: their primary only. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	Any registered voter who desires to change his or her political party affiliation may do so by filing, no later than the close of voter registration. Voter registration closes on the	Yes. W. Va. Code § 3-2-5	Yes.

	Who can vote in a state primary?	What is the deadline for affiliating with a political party?	Does registration give voters an opportunity to affiliate?	Can a voter change affiliation through an online voter registration portal?
		twenty-first day before the election. W. Va. Code § 3-2-22, W. Va. Code § 3-2-6		
Wisconsin (Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary. Republicans: either major party primary. Unaffiliated: either major party primary.	All registered voters can vote in the primary election but can only vote on one ballot. Twenty days before an election if registering online or by mail. Friday before election if registering in-person. Wis. Stat. § 6.28	No. Wis. Stat. § 6.33	No, Wisconsin does not register voters by party affiliation.
Wyoming (Partially Open Primary)	Democrats: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice. Republicans: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice. Unaffiliated: either major party primary but must declare their ballot choice.	To change your party affiliation, a voter must complete the Wyoming Voter Registration Application & Change Form and submit it to their county clerk's office not later than fourteen days before the primary election. Wyo. Stat. § 22-3-102	Yes. Wyo. Stat. § 22-3-103	No, Wyoming does not have online voter registration.

Table 2: Changes to State Primary Types, 2010 - present

State	Year Enacted	Bill/Ballot Measure	Change
Alaska	2020	Measure 2	From Partially Closed to Top Four
New Mexico	2020	Senate Bill 4	Closed to Open to Unaffiliated Voters
Colorado	2016	Colorado Proposition 108	Closed to Open
Utah	2014	Senate Bill 54	Partially Open to Partially Closed
Idaho	2011	House Bill 351	Open to Partially Closed
California	2010	California Proposition 14	Closed to Top Two
Washington	2004	Washington Initiative 872	Blanket Primary to Top Two (when blanket primary was declared unconstitutional)

Table 3: State Primary Dates in 2020

State	State Primary Date	Presidential Primary Date
Alabama	March 3* March 31 runoff (rescheduled to July 14)	March 3
Alaska	Aug. 18	April 4 (Democratic only)
Arizona	Aug. 4	March 17 (Democratic only)
Arkansas	March 3 March 31 runoff	March 3
California	March 3	March 3
Colorado	June 30	March 3
Connecticut	Aug. 11	April 28 (rescheduled to August 11)
Delaware	Sept. 15	April 28 (rescheduled to July 7)
District of Columbia	No district-specific primary	June 2
Florida	Aug. 18	March 17
Georgia	May 19 (rescheduled to June 9) July 21 runoff (rescheduled to August 11)	March 24 (rescheduled to June 9)
Hawaii	Aug. 8	April 4 (Democratic only)
Idaho	May 19	March 10
Illinois	March 17	March 17
Indiana	May 5 (rescheduled to June 2)	May 5 (rescheduled to June 2)
Iowa	June 2	Feb. 3 (caucus)
Kansas	Aug. 4	May 2 (Democratic only; in-person voting was cancelled, and the election was held entirely by mail.)
Kentucky	May 19 (rescheduled to June 23)	May 19 (rescheduled to June 23)
Louisiana	Nov. 3*	April 4 (rescheduled to July 11)
Maine	June 9 (rescheduled to July 14)	March 3
Maryland	April 28 (rescheduled to June 2)	April 28 (rescheduled to June 2)
Massachusetts	Sept. 1	March 3
Michigan	Aug. 4	March 10
Minnesota	Aug. 11	March 3
Mississippi	March 10* March 31 runoff (rescheduled to June 23)	March 10
Missouri	Aug. 4	March 10
Montana	June 2	June 2

State	State Primary Date	Presidential Primary Date
Nebraska	May 12	May 12
Nevada	June 9	Feb. 22 (caucus, Democratic only)
New Hampshire	Sept. 8	Feb. 11
New Jersey	June 2* (rescheduled to July 7)	June 2 (rescheduled to July 7)
New Mexico	June 2	June 2
New York	June 23	April 28 (rescheduled to June 23)
North Carolina	March 3 May 12 runoff** (rescheduled to June 23)	March 3
North Dakota	June 9	March 10
Ohio	March 17 (rescheduled to April 28)	March 17 (rescheduled to April 28)
Oklahoma	June 30 August 25 runoff	March 3
Oregon	May 19	May 19
Pennsylvania	April 28 (rescheduled to June 2)	April 28 (rescheduled to June 2)
Rhode Island	Sept. 8	April 28 (rescheduled to June 2)
South Carolina	June 9 June 23 runoff	Feb. 29 (Democratic only)
South Dakota	June 2 Aug. 11 runoff	June 2
Tennessee	Aug. 6	March 3
Texas	March 3 May 26 runoff (rescheduled to July 14)	March 3
Utah	June 30	March 3
Vermont	Aug. 11	March 3
Virginia	June 9* (rescheduled to June 23)	March 3 (Democratic only)
Washington	Aug. 4	March 10
West Virginia	May 12 (rescheduled to June 9)	May 12 (rescheduled to June 9)
Wisconsin	Aug. 11	April 7
Wyoming	Aug. 18	February-March (Republican caucus) April 4 (Democratic caucus; in-person caucus was cancelled, and deadline for mail ballots was extended to April 17.)

*No primary for state legislative seats in 2020.

**In certain circumstances, North Carolina holds a second primary. It did not do so in 2020, but those dates were either April 21 or May 12.