



## LESSON 3: THE PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES

It used to be that a political party's nominee for president was selected by influential party members at the party's national convention – generally after a lot of wheeling and dealing in smoke-filled rooms. Realizing that this was not a very democratic way to choose a major-party presidential candidate, the Democratic and Republican parties have over the last half century opened up the process to voters. The result is today's often confusing schedule of primaries and caucuses which makes voters – and not party leaders – the VIPs in choosing the parties' presidential nominees.

The series of Presidential primary elections and caucuses is a very important step in the long, complex process of electing the President of the United States of America. The primary elections are run by state and local governments in the states that do not have caucuses.

The goal of the primaries and caucuses are to choose delegates that have committed themselves to a particular candidate that they will represent at the party's national convention. Although voters may see the candidate's name at the primary poll, they are actually voting for delegates that will represent the candidate. Sometimes the delegates name and party is listed and shows the candidate they will represent.

A caucus is a meeting of members of a political party on the precinct level, the smallest election district. Thousands of caucuses occur at the same time and date throughout a state.

In most states, only voters registered with a party may vote in that party's primary, known as a closed primary. In some states, a semi-closed primary is practiced, in which voters unaffiliated with a party (independents) may choose a party primary in which to vote. In an open primary, any voter may vote in any party's primary.

Often less than 25 percent of eligible voters participate in the primaries and less than 10 percent for caucuses. These voters tend to be more partisan than general election voters. That means that Republican primary voters tend to be more conservative; Democrat voters more liberal.

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## PARTY PLATFORM

Using the newspaper and online resources create a chart of the party platform (core beliefs) for the Republican and Democratic Parties.

*Newspapers for this educational program provided by:*

