

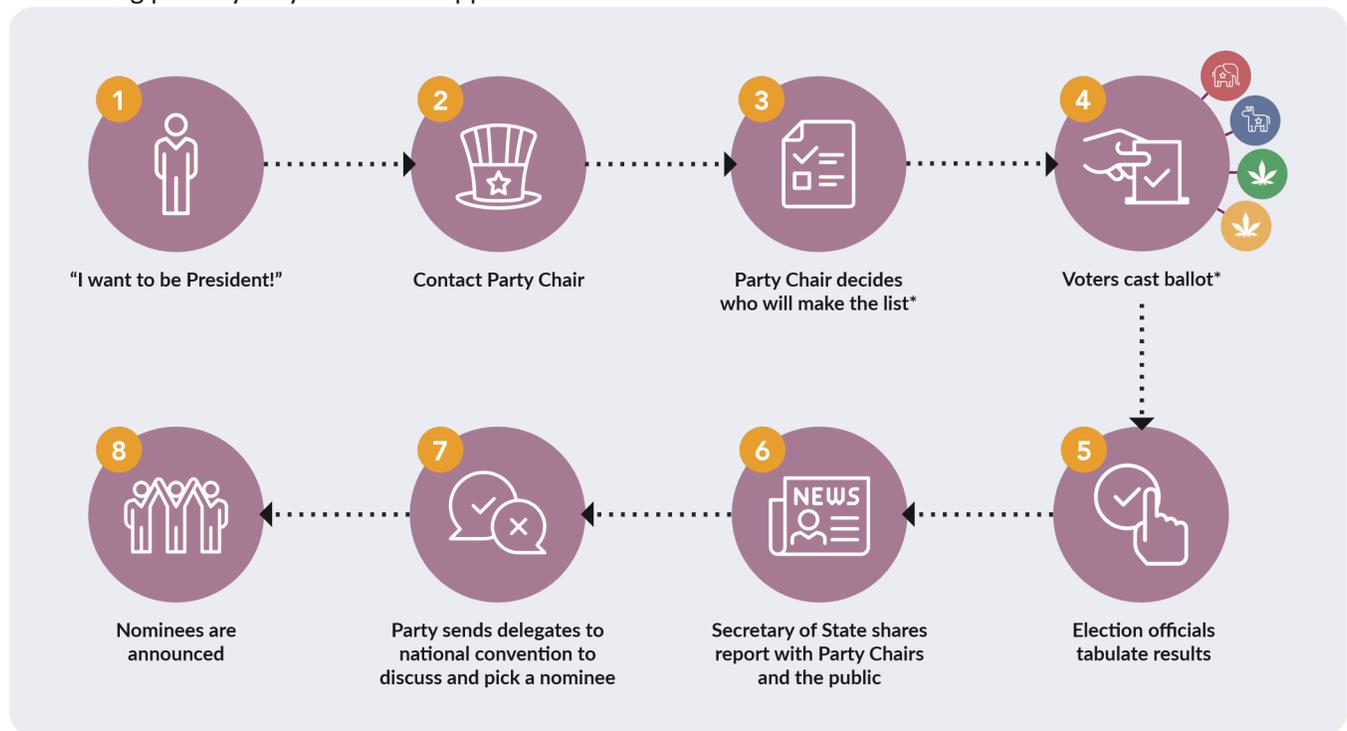
Picking the President

Part 1 – The Presidential Nominating Primary

Most voters think of the presidential election as happening in November every four years. But the process that voters use to pick our president actually extends long before election day. Campaigning by candidates often starts well over a year before election day, and voters begin to actually pick the final candidates for election several months before election day. The first official step in the process in Minnesota is the **presidential nominating primary**.

SUMMARY

The presidential nominating primary is a process by which voters cast a vote for their preferred presidential candidate on a ballot of their preferred major political party. The day for the presidential nominating primary is March 3 (also known as “Super Tuesday”), but early voting begins January 17. The result of the presidential nominating primary may affect who appears on the ballot in November.



***Notes on Diagram:**

Step 3: Party Chair decides whether to have Primary, whether the ballot includes write-ins or “undecided” and which candidates will appear on the ballot.

Step 4: There may be up to four party ballots available. Voters choose their candidate from ONE party’s ballot.

WHAT IS THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY?

The presidential nominating primary is part of the way that Minnesota voters determine which presidential candidates appear on their ballot in November. The presidential nominating primary is **not** an official election. It is a process for the political party that looks and feels just like an election because

local election officials administer it in the same way that the election officials administer an election. But it is not actually an election for a candidate. For most voters this distinction means very little in practice. But voters should not to confuse the presidential nominating primary, which is a political party process, for an official election.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY?

Candidates who wish to be nominated by a major political party use the presidential nominating process. They let the major political party know that they want to be nominated by the political party. Then each major political party notifies the Secretary of State if they want to participate in the presidential nominating primary process; major political parties are not required to participate. Voters then vote in the presidential nominating primary to select the candidate they want to see on the general election ballot in November. Only major political parties that participate in a national convention may participate in the presidential nominating primary.

Major political parties use the results of the presidential nominating primary to determine which candidate or candidates to nominate. Typically, they do this by sending delegates to support specific candidates at the national party convention. Whichever candidate receives the nomination at the national party convention gets on the general election ballot in November. Exactly how each major political party uses the results of the primary depends on the party's rules. For example, candidates can win delegates proportionally, rather than "winner take all." Or the party might only give delegates to candidates that meet a certain threshold of votes. Voters should contact the party of their preference for more details.

MAY A MAJOR PARTY THAT DOES NOT HAVE A NATIONAL CONVENTION PARTICIPATE?

No, only major parties that participate in a national convention may participate in the presidential nominating primary. If the major party of your choice does not participate in a national convention, it will have a different process to pick a presidential candidate nominee, or it might not nominate anyone at all.

MAY MINOR POLITICAL PARTIES OR CANDIDATES UNAFFILIATED WITH A PARTY PARTICIPATE?

No, only the major political parties may participate in the presidential nominating primary. Minor political parties or unaffiliated candidates must use a petition process to get on the general election ballot in November. They also may have an internal process for nominating a candidate for president. Voters who want to vote for a minor party candidate should contact the minor party of their preference for details on nominations for president by minor parties.

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL PARTIES OF MINNESOTA?

The major political parties of Minnesota in alphabetical order are:

- Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party
- Grassroots-Legalize Cannabis Party
- Legal Marijuana Now Party
- Republican Party of Minnesota

"Major political party" is defined by Minnesota Statute 200.02, subdivision 7.

The minor political parties of Minnesota in alphabetical order are:

- Green Party of Minnesota
- Independence Party of Minnesota
- Libertarian Party of Minnesota

“Minor political party” is defined by Minnesota Statute 200.02, subdivision 23.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I VOTE IN PERSON IN THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY?

The process begins the same way as if you were voting in an election: You will locate your polling place, enter it, and sign the voter roster. However, before the election judge gives you a ballot, you must indicate to the election judge which major political party’s ballot you want to vote on. You must also sign the following statement: “I am in general agreement with the principles of the party for whose candidate I intend to vote.” Polling places are required to have a balance of election judges from different parties, and all election judges sign an oath to faithfully execute their duties impartially.

Once you receive the ballot of your party preference, you vote just as you do in an election. You will take your ballot to a private voting booth and fill in the ballot to select the candidate of your preference. Only your chosen party’s candidates will appear on the ballot; you will not see candidates for other parties. You then place your ballot in the ballot tabulator.

The only significant difference in the presidential nominating primary, from a typical election, is that you must tell an election official which party’s ballot you want to vote on. If you are not comfortable verbally stating your party preference, LWVMN suggests you write it down on a note before you enter the polling place and then pass the note to the election judge.

WHAT IF I WANT TO VOTE ABSENTEE BY MAIL?

The absentee ballot process for the presidential nominating primary is also very similar to the process for an election. On the absentee ballot request form, you must indicate which party’s ballot you want to vote on for the presidential nominating primary. Because you must indicate your party preference, you must submit a new and unique application for the presidential nominating primary. You still must submit a new form even if you have already requested absentee ballots for other elections. You will also sign a statement saying, “I am in general agreement with the

principles of the party for whose candidate I intend to vote.”

WHAT AND WHO WILL BE ON MY BALLOT? MAY I WRITE IN A CANDIDATE OR VOTE FOR “UNCOMMITTED” DELEGATES?

The only electoral race on the ballot will be for the United States President. Party chairs must submit to the Secretary of State before December 31, 2019, a list of the candidates that will appear on the party’s ballot. The party chair has the final authority to submit the list and determine which candidates are on—or are not on—the list. The party chair also decides whether the ballot will have a space to write in candidates and whether there will be the option to vote for uncommitted delegates.

If a party chair submits a list that includes a candidate who later drops out of the race, the candidate will still appear on the ballot.

IF MY PREFERRED CANDIDATE WINS THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY FOR MY PREFERRED PARTY, DOES THAT GUARANTEE THAT THEY WILL APPEAR ON THE GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT?

No. Winning the presidential nominating primary in Minnesota will likely help the chances of the candidate to win the party’s nomination (and thus appearance on the general election ballot), but does not guarantee it. For example, there may be more delegates at the national convention from other states supporting a different candidate than the one who “wins” the primary. Also note that a party may allocate delegates proportionally, rather than “winner take all.” However, this also depends on the party’s rules. Contact your preferred party for details.

IF MY PREFERRED CANDIDATE LOSES THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY FOR MY PREFERRED PARTY, DOES THAT GUARANTEE THAT THEY WILL NOT APPEAR ON THE GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT?

Also no. Losing the presidential nominating primary in Minnesota will hurt the chances of the candidate winning the party’s nomination, because less delegates will be sent from Minnesota to the national convention to support that candidate. But

it does not necessarily prevent them from winning the nomination at the convention. They still might win the party's nomination due to popularity in other states, receive the party's nomination, and appear on the general election ballot.

DO I HAVE TO BE 18 TO VOTE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY?

Yes. Under the old system using caucuses to pick a party's nominee for president, individuals who would be 18 by the general election could participate in the party's process for selecting the president. This is no longer the case. Only individuals eligible to vote, i.e., age 18 or older on the day of the presidential nominating primary day (March 3), may vote in the presidential nominating primary.

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO TAKE TIME OFF FROM WORK TO VOTE, LIKE I DO DURING A TYPICAL ELECTION? HOW LONG ARE POLLS OPEN?

Yes. The right for time off from work to vote

in a presidential nominating primary is protected by the same law. Hours for most polling places are 7:00 am - 8:00 pm.

WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT ME WILL BE AVAILABLE TO OTHERS IF I VOTE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PRIMARY?

The same information that is public when you register to vote and vote in a typical election will also be public if you vote in the presidential nominating primary. This information includes your name, address, and birth year, as well as which elections you have voted in. If you provided your phone number when you registered to vote, this also will become public information. If you provided your email address when you registered to vote, that does **not** become public information.

Election officials do **not** make your party preference public. **However**, the law requires the state to share your party preference with the chairs of the

major political parties. This is because the political parties need to know who voted in their presidential nominating primaries. (Remember, the presidential nominating primary is a political party process, not a traditional election.) If you have questions about if/how/ with whom the party chairs will share that information, you will need to contact the parties directly. Typically, the parties use this information to build voter contact lists for campaign purposes.

How you voted, such as the candidate you voted for or if you submitted a write-in candidate, will **not** be public information.

I THOUGHT MINNESOTA PICKED PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES THROUGH PARTY CAUCUSES? WILL THERE STILL BE PARTY CAUCUSES AND STATE PARTY CONVENTIONS?

Minnesota did use party caucuses for presidential nominations, including nominations for the 2016 presidential election. In 2016, the state legislature changed the process to a presidential nominating primary by ballot. The presidential nominating primary only replaces one piece of party caucuses and conventions. Political parties can still hold precinct caucuses and local and state conventions for other party business, such as nominating candidates for other electoral races, selecting party officers, adopting resolutions, or changing the party platform. Caucuses are still on Tuesday, February 25 at 7:00 pm.

WHAT ABOUT PRIMARIES FOR OTHER ELECTORAL RACES LIKE U.S. CONGRESS OR THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE?

The primary election for all other electoral races remains August 11. Early voting begins in June.

HAVE QUESTIONS OR NEED MORE INFORMATION?

Contact your county election official at:
www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/findcounty-election-office/

Web page version: www.lwvmn.org/picking-the-president-part1

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