



How are presidential candidates chosen?



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- DEMOCRATS WAVE SIGNS FOR THEIR PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE, BARACK OBAMA, DURING THE 2008 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION.

During the summer of a presidential election year, the Republicans and Democrats each hold a national convention where they adopt a “platform” of policies and nominate their party’s candidates for president and vice president. Today, a simple majority of delegates’ votes is needed to capture the nomination.

In earlier times, the conventions were exciting, with outcomes uncertain and candidates rising and falling with each ballot. Sometimes negotiations were held in “smoke-filled” hotel rooms, where cigarette- and cigar-smoking party leaders cut deals to secure their preferred candidate the required delegate votes.

Today the process is more transparent, and for about the last 60 years, each party’s presidential nominee was known before its convention began.

Each state (plus the District of Columbia and several U.S. territories) is allotted a number of delegates—typically determined by the state’s population but adjusted by a formula that awards bonuses for factors like whether a state voted for the party’s candidate in the last presidential election. Most delegates are “pledged” to support a particular candidate, at least on the first ballot, and no convention has required more than one ballot to nominate its presidential candidate for many years.