



What's the difference between a primary and a caucus?



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- DURING THE NEW HAMPSHIRE PRIMARY, REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MITT ROMNEY VISITS BEDFORD HIGH SCHOOL, JANUARY 8, 2008.

Primary elections and caucuses differ in how they are organized and who participates. And rates of participation differ widely.

Primaries: State governments fund and conduct primary elections much as they would any election: Voters go to a polling place, vote and leave. Voting is anonymous and quickly accomplished. Some states hold “closed” primaries in which only declared party members can participate. For example, only registered Democrats can vote in a closed Democratic primary. In an open primary, all voters can participate, regardless of their party affiliation or lack of affiliation.

Caucuses: State political parties organize caucuses, in which faithful party members speak openly on behalf of the candidates they support for the party nomination. They are communal events in which participants vote publicly. Caucuses tend to favor candidates who have dedicated and organized supporters who can use the caucus to elect convention delegates pledged to their favored presidential candidate. Caucus participants also identify and prioritize issues they want to include in the state or national party platform. Participation in a caucus requires a high level of political engagement and time. Consequently, caucuses tend to attract fewer participants than primaries.

