



Senate Counsel, Research, and Fiscal Analysis

State of Minnesota

Presidential Nomination Primary FAQ

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This document provides brief answers to frequently asked questions about the presidential nomination primary. This document is not a comprehensive review of all aspects of the presidential primary.

1. What is the presidential nomination primary?

The presidential nomination primary is the method for determining how political party delegates from Minnesota will vote at their party's respective national conventions. The delegates at each national convention cast votes to determine who will represent that party on the ballot at the general election in November. Unlike the state primary where the winners of a primary appear on the ballot, the presidential nomination primary does not determine which presidential candidates will ultimately appear on the general election ballot in Minnesota.

2. When is the 2020 presidential nomination primary?

The presidential nomination primary is Tuesday, March 3, 2020, which is often referred to as "Super Tuesday."

3. Can any party participate in the presidential nomination primary?

No. Only major political parties that send delegates to a national convention are eligible to participate in the presidential nomination primary.

4. Who is on the ballot at a presidential nomination primary?

The presidential nomination primary is only for presidential candidates. Other state and federal candidates will appear on the state primary ballot in August.

5. How do candidates get placed on the ballot?

The major political parties determine which candidates will appear on the ballot for that party. The selection process is determined by the party.

6. Is the presidential nomination primary the same as the state primary?

No. The presidential nomination primary is held in March and is only for presidential candidates of major parties. The state primary is for state and federal offices for all parties and is held in August.

7. Who can vote in the presidential nomination primary?

Any eligible and registered voter in Minnesota may vote in the presidential nomination primary.

8. Do I have to pick which party to vote for?

Yes, a person must request the ballot for the party the voter wants to vote for. Each party is on a separate ballot. By selecting a party, you indicate your general agreement with the principles of that party; see question 11 for more information. If a person does not select a party, the person will not be allowed to vote in the presidential nomination primary.

9. Is my party selection recorded? Who can see which party I selected?

When a voter selects a party ballot, that selection is recorded in the polling place roster. The party selection becomes part of the voter's voting history. Party selection data is governed by the Data Practices Act and is classified as private data on individuals; this means that the data is not available to the public from a government source. However, the Secretary of State must maintain a list of the voters who voted in the presidential nomination primary and the party selected by each voter. The secretary of state must provide this list to the chair of each major political party. Because the political parties are not subject to the Data Practices Act, use of the data is not limited and the parties may use the data in the manner they choose.

10. Is there a way to participate in the presidential nomination primary without selecting a party?

No. A voter who refuses to select a party is not allowed to sign the polling place roster or cast a ballot. An absentee voter who refuses to select a party will not be mailed a ballot.

11. Do I have to be a member of the party to vote for that party?

No, but you do have to indicate a general agreement with the principles of the party for which you vote. At a presidential nomination primary, the polling place roster where voters sign-in includes this statement: "I am in general agreement with the principles of the party for whose candidate I intend to vote." The felony penalty that applies for providing false information on the polling place roster does not apply to the agreement to party principles.

12. Can I vote by absentee ballot in the presidential nomination primary?

Yes. A voter may vote by absentee ballot in much the same manner as for other elections. On the application for an absentee ballot, the voter indicates which major political party ballot the voter is requesting. If the voter does not indicate a party, the voter will not be sent a ballot.

13. Do I get time off from work to vote in the presidential nomination primary?

Yes, in the same manner as other elections. An employee who is eligible to vote has the right to be absent from work for the time it takes to vote. The employee must not be penalized or have their salary or wages reduced because of the absence.

14. Will there still be precinct caucuses to endorse candidates?

Yes, major political parties will continue to hold precinct caucuses to endorse candidates and elect delegates to send to party conventions. While the results of the presidential nomination primary are binding on the major political parties that participate in the primary, major political parties are not prevented from also holding non-binding precinct caucuses for presidential candidates.

15. Do the results of the presidential nomination primary bind the election of delegates?

Yes. The results bind the election of delegates in each party. The law does not specify whether all of the delegates are bound for the winner or whether delegates may be apportioned to the candidates in proportion to the number of votes received by each candidate. The party's procedures govern this decision.

16. Who conducts the presidential nomination primary?

The presidential nomination primary is generally conducted by the same state and local election officials that conduct all other elections.

17. Who pays for the presidential nomination primary?

The state pays for the costs of the presidential nomination primary. Local governments that incur expenses for the presidential nomination primary are reimbursed by the state for their costs.

18. What is the cost of a presidential primary?

The Secretary of State estimates that the state and local cost of administering the presidential nomination primary in 2020 will be \$11.9 million. The law requires the Secretary of State to certify the estimated amount of state and local costs to the Commissioner of Management and Budget in September in the year before the primary. The Secretary of State may make supplemental certifications if new information indicates the cost will be higher. Within 15 days of the certification, the Commissioner of Management and Budget must transfer the certified amount from the general fund to the presidential nomination primary account.

19. Has Minnesota had a presidential primary in the past?

Yes, in 1916, 1952, 1956, and 1992.

20. What laws govern the presidential nomination primary?

Minnesota Statutes chapter 207A and Minnesota Rules chapter 8215 are the main laws governing the presidential nomination primary. Other election laws found throughout chapters 200-206 also apply.