

Primary Elections:

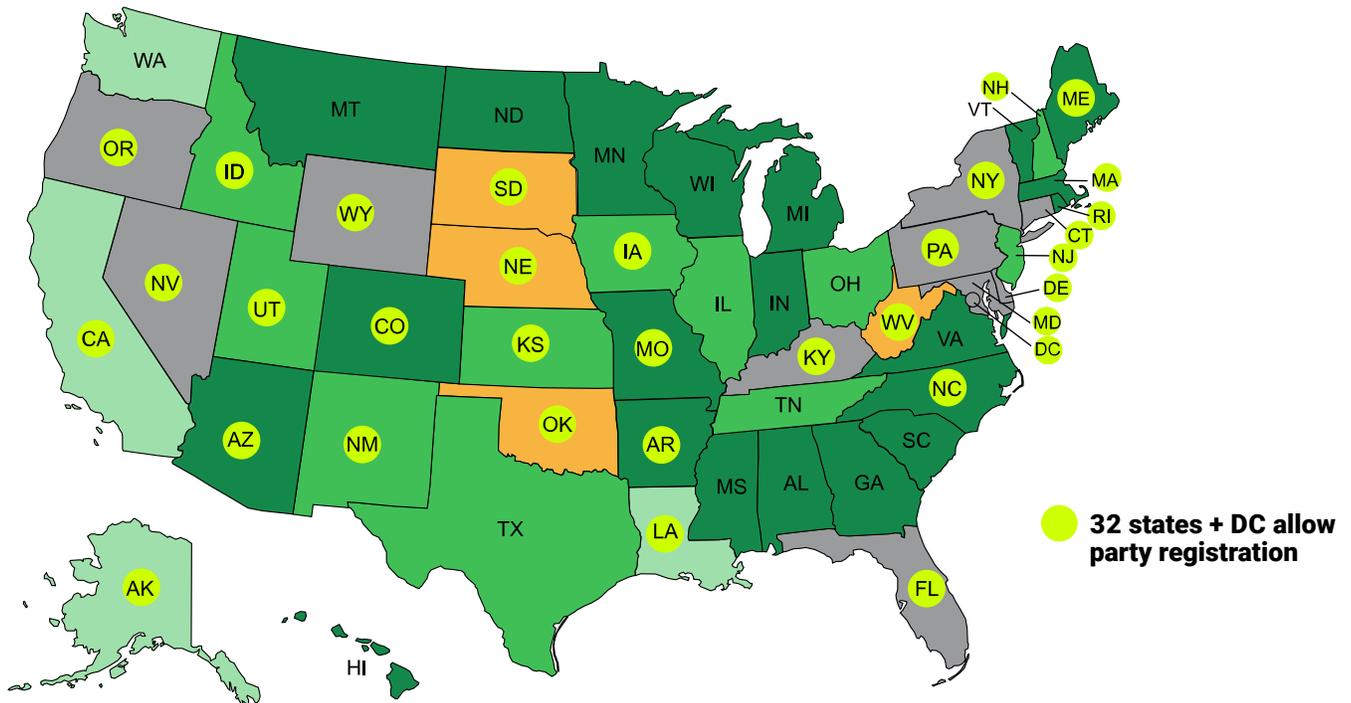
Voters Unaffiliated with a Political Party Can Participate in Most of the Country

Voters across the country (except in North Dakota) must first register before being able to participate in elections.¹ State practices for allowing voters to register by party and determining who may participate in party primary elections, however, vary.

- In 32 states and DC, voters may choose to register as a member of a political party, and if they do not, they are considered unaffiliated voters.
- In 17 states, including Tennessee, all voters are unaffiliated as they do not have the option to register by party.
- Voters who are unaffiliated with a party in all but 10 states and DC may participate in primary elections.

Voters unaffiliated with either party may participate in primary elections in 40 states.*

In just 10 states and DC, voters must be registered members of the party in order to participate in the primary election. In 40 states, unaffiliated voters may participate in primary elections.



21 STATES

Unaffiliated voters can **choose which party** primary to participate in

11 STATES

Unaffiliated voters can **affiliate with a party** at the polling place**

4 STATES

Primaries are nonpartisan—**any voter** can participate***

4 STATES

Unaffiliated voters can **participate in one party's** primary

10 STATES

Voters must be **registered party members**

In four states, participation in primaries by unaffiliated voters is limited. The Democratic party allows participation while the Republican party does not in: WV, SD, NE, and OK**

*Unaffiliated voters can participate in Republican Congressional candidate primaries in NE.

**A miscommunication has resulted in OK unaffiliated voters being unable to participate in either party's primary in 2026-2027.

**States vary on whether this affiliation is temporary (just for the primary) or permanent (until the voter changes it).

***For presidential preference primaries, both parties in CA allow unaffiliated voters to participate, and voters in WA must affiliate with a party to participate. LA holds mostly nonpartisan primaries, though for the few partisan races, unaffiliated voters may participate.

Unaffiliated voters may have to demonstrate their allegiance to a party in some way.

Unaffiliated voters in 11 states must first affiliate with a party at the polling place before participating in its primary, while four additional states, including Tennessee, require some other demonstration of affiliation or intention, short of registering for the party.



South Carolina voters take an oath saying they haven't participated in the other party's primary or nominating process for that election cycle.



Alabama voters acknowledge a statement that indicates their preference for the party and that they will support its nominees in the general.²



Indiana voters are eligible to vote in a party's primary if they voted for a majority of that party's candidates in the previous general election (or if they did not vote in the previous election, that they intend to do so in the upcoming one).³



Tennessee voters declare allegiance to the party whose primary ballot they request and state that they intend to affiliate with the party.⁴

States allow both registered party members and unaffiliated voters to change affiliation.

While unaffiliated voters may affiliate with a party at the polling place in some states, there are deadlines to change from one party to another. Just 14 states set those deadlines separate from (and earlier than) their voter registration deadlines.

Unaffiliated voters may choose to affiliate with different parties in different cycles.

States acknowledge this change in various ways:



The Georgia Election Division FAQ page states that, "If a voter wants, (their) choice can be different each time they vote in a primary election."⁵



Texas voters remain affiliated with the party whose primary they participate in for the calendar year. With the start of the new year, they can choose to affiliate with a different party.⁶



Iowa voters swear or affirm that they have in good faith changed their previously declared affiliation and now desire to be a member of the party in whose primary they are participating in.⁷



Ohio voters who previously voted in a different party's primary make a statement under penalty of election falsification that they desire to be affiliated with, and support, the party in whose primary they are participating in.⁸

1. North Dakota does not have voter registration.

2. AL Code § 17-13-7 (b) (2024) says that parties may require this be added to all poll lists for primary elections.

3. IN Code § 3-10-1-6 (2024)

4. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-7-115 (b)(2).

5. See "Do I register by party in Georgia?" <https://sos.ga.gov/page/elections-faq#Voting>.

6. TX Code § 162.010

7. IA Code § 43.43

8. OH Revised Code § 3513.20

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