

Party Nominations and Two-Party Primary Voter Information

Why are there primary elections for some offices and not others?

Political parties may choose their party nominees for offices on the ballot either by a primary or a caucus or party meeting, sometimes also called a “firehouse primary” because they were historically held in firehouses, although that’s not the case today in Arlington.

Primaries

A *primary* is a legal process where the government assists the political party by running the election for them. Some advantages are that all regular polling places are open during regular voting hours on the primary Election Day, and voters who will be away or unable to go to the polls on Election Day can vote by absentee ballot. Primaries also typically reach a wider number of voters, as they do not have restrictions that are sometimes used in caucuses.

A disadvantage for the political parties are that they cannot restrict participation to their own party supporters, especially in a state like Virginia where voters do not register by political parties. Elections also need to follow state election law, which selects the winner on a plurality – the candidate with the most votes wins.

Caucuses

In a *caucus*, the party has complete control over the process with no government assistance. Some party officials believe that caucuses bring out the true party supporters; in fact, voters choosing to participate typically must sign a statement indicating they will support the nominee in the general election. Parties can set their own rules in caucuses, for example requiring the winning candidate to receive a majority of votes cast, usually via instant runoff or ranked choice voting.

Some of the disadvantages of caucuses are that there are usually fewer voting hours available and voting often only takes place in one location, unlike at all regular polling places during a primary. Caucuses also do not give voters the opportunity to vote absentee if they are not available to attend the caucus hours. Consequently, fewer voters typically participate in caucuses.

Each year the political parties decide whether they want to hold primaries or caucuses to select their nominees. In 2017, both the Democratic and Republican parties chose primaries to select their nominees for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General. The Democratic party also selected primaries for House of Delegates.

Both parties chose caucuses to select their nominees for County Board, and the Republicans will select nominees for House of Delegates via caucuses.

If only one candidate qualifies for a party nomination contest, that candidate becomes the party's nominee and no nomination contest is held for that office. This is true whether the nomination contest is a primary or a caucus.

On June 13, 2017, Arlington voters can go to the polls to select either Democratic or Republican nominees for Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Both parties had only one candidate qualify for Attorney General, so those individuals become the party's nominees and will appear on the ballot in November. Democratic candidates running for House of Delegates were also unopposed in primaries and become the nominees for November.

For more information about the primary elections, please visit <http://vote.arlingtonva.us/elections>.

Four candidates qualified with the Democratic party for the County Board nomination. The party will hold an unassembled caucus, meaning voters show up and cast ballots but do not need to remain after they vote, on the following dates and locations:

Tuesday, May 9, Key School, 7-9 pm

Thursday, May 11, Drew School, 7-9 pm

Saturday, May 13, Washington-Lee High School, 11am-7pm

For more information about the Democratic County Board caucus, please contact the Arlington County Democratic Committee at <http://www.arlingtondemocrats.org>.

The Republican Party has not yet set a date to select County Board or General Assembly nominees. Please see <http://www.arlingtongop.org> for more information.

About the June 13 Primaries

Why do I have to state a party preference to vote in this election?

Under Virginia law, a dual primary consists of two separate elections conducted on the same day, often (but not always) for the same office or offices. There are separate ballots (although both are counted on the same machines), and results for each primary are tallied and reported separately. Virginia law only allows you to vote in one of these two separate elections. You must indicate your choice when you arrive to vote or request an absentee ballot.

Is this party registration?

No. Virginia does not register voters by political party. Your name will be marked in the pollbook for the party whose ballot you choose to vote, and the fact that you vote in this or any election is public information after the election. Political parties and candidates often use information about who votes in primaries to help them target campaigns.

But my ballot is supposed to be secret! I don't want to let people know how I vote.

The actual selections you make on your ballot are always confidential. But the fact that you vote in any election is not, as noted above. You must tell the pollworkers which ballot you want to vote so they can mark your name in the pollbook for that party's ballot and give you the correct ballot. There may also be party representatives present in your polling place. They are entitled by law to hear the names of persons voting, and that includes knowing the party ballot chosen by the voter in a dual primary.

Last year I voted in one party's primary, now I want to vote in the other party's primary. Can I do that?

Yes. The fact that you once voted in a particular party's primary does not obligate you to do so again in a future election, nor does it prohibit you from voting in a different party's primary. And your primary choice now does not obligate you to vote for that party's nominee in any upcoming election.

What if I'm given the wrong ballot, or if I change my mind about which party's ballot I want to vote?

As long as you haven't inserted your ballot into the machine, you should notify a pollworker immediately so they can either correct your wrong ballot, or give you the other party's ballot if that is your choice. Once you insert your ballot, however, it is considered cast (because we can't get it back) and you can't change your mind about how you'd like to vote. The same is true if you change your mind about your selections after you insert your ballot. So make sure your ballot is marked the way you want before you insert it!

How is the order in which names appear on the ballot chosen?

The ballot order is determined by when the candidates file with their respective political party chair. If more than one candidate files at the same time, either the Virginia State Board of Elections, for statewide offices, or the local electoral board, for local offices, must hold a drawing to determine the ballot order among those candidates who filed concurrently.

Can I cast a write-in vote if I don't want to vote for any of the candidates whose names are on the ballot?

No, write-in votes are not permitted in primaries.

Can 17-year-olds vote in this election?

Seventeen-year-olds may register to vote if they will be eighteen on or before the day of the November General Election, which this year is Nov. 7, 2017. Virginia law lets them vote in any intervening primary or special election occurring in the jurisdiction where they are registered to vote. So as long as they register to vote by the primary deadline of May 22, they'll be able to vote in the June primary.

More information: Arlington County Elections
 <http://vote.arlingtonva.us>
 703-228-3456