



Fact Sheet

SELECTION OF PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES IN NEVADA

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BACKGROUND

States use different methods for selecting presidential nominees—primary preference elections or caucuses. Primary elections for presidential nominees may be open, closed, top-two, or hybrids. Although the use of caucuses was widespread prior to the 1970s, in 2016, only 14 states use the caucus system for presidential nominations. Over the years, Nevada has gone back and forth on the method by which it selects presidential nominees.

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND THE CAUCUS PROCESS IN NEVADA

Presidential Primary

Beginning in 1864, Nevada elected its presidential nominees directly through an election. With an exception in 1912, this practice continued through the presidential election of 1948.

Caucus

In 1949, the practice of directly electing nominees through an election was repealed by the Legislature through the passage of Assembly Bill 3 (Chapter 38, *Statutes of Nevada*) and Assembly Bill 4 (Chapter 14, *Statutes of Nevada*). These bills set out a caucus process that started with mass (precinct) meetings, leading to county conventions, and then continued on to selecting presidential nominees during the political parties' State conventions.

Presidential Primary (Repealed)

In the 1953 Session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 229 (Chapter 299, *Statutes of Nevada*), which called for presidential primary elections every four years. Shortly after its passage, concerns were raised about the timing of the election, its costs, and voter turnout. Consequently, before the 1956 Primary Election, the 1955 Legislature repealed the presidential primary election provisions in S.B. 229 (see Assembly Bill 106 [Chapter 304, *Statutes of Nevada*]).

Caucus

With the repeal of the presidential primary election bill before the 1956 Presidential Election, presidential nominees continued to be nominated through a caucus process by the State's major political parties for the 1956, 1960, 1964, 1968, and 1972 Presidential Elections.

Presidential Primary

In 1973, the Legislature changed course and passed a bill requiring presidential primary elections. Assembly Bill 755 (Chapter 625, *Statutes of Nevada*) created a closed presidential primary election in which only registered Democrats could vote for Democratic candidates and

only registered Republicans could vote for Republican candidates. Presidential primaries were held in 1976 and 1980.

Caucus

The 1981 Legislature enacted Assembly Bill 138 (Chapter 744, *Statutes of Nevada*) repealing the presidential primary election provisions enacted in 1973, and Nevada again abandoned presidential primary elections. Reasons cited for the repeal included the costs of the election and low voter turnout, as well as the determination of the nominees by earlier primary elections in other states. Thus, starting with the 1984 Presidential Election, the major political parties of the State returned to using a closed presidential caucus system to select their presidential nominees.

Presidential Primary (Optional)

After three presidential elections (1984, 1988, and 1992), the Legislature again passed legislation creating a presidential primary election. The 1995 legislation ([Assembly Bill 695](#) [Chapter 685, *Statutes of Nevada*]), gave each major political party the option to participate. The bill stipulated that the election would be conducted by mail, with election materials resembling those distributed for absentee voting. The Republican Party chose to participate in the “presidential preference primary” election, which took place on March 26, 1996. The Democratic party continued with its caucus process. The provisions of A.B. 695 expired by limitation on July 1, 1997.

Caucus

The Democratic Party has used the party caucus system since 1984, and the Republican Party has used caucuses since 2000. In 2008, Nevada was chosen as one of the few states permitted to hold its presidential selection event in February. In 2016, the major political parties allowed only four states to hold an early (pre-March 1) caucus or primary; those states are Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, and South Carolina.

RECENT LEGISLATION

[Senate Bill 212](#) in the 2013 Session proposed a presidential primary to be held in conjunction with a statewide primary election in January of even-numbered years. The bill did not pass out of committee.

In the 2015 Session, the Legislature considered two bills relating to presidential primaries. [Senate Bill 421](#) proposed presidential primary elections but allowed a major political party to opt out subject to certain deadlines. The bill passed the Senate but did not receive a final vote on the Assembly floor. [Assembly Bill 302](#) took the opposite approach and permitted the central committee of a major political party to ask the Secretary of State to hold a presidential preference primary. However, the bill failed to pass out of committee.