

Louisiana's Closed Party Primary: A Guide for Voters

Louisiana has rewritten the election rules for congressional and certain state elections, moving to a closed party primary system that will change the sign-up process for how candidates get their names on the ballot and provide new rules for how voters participate.

The closed primary system will change the way millions of state residents cast their ballots, limit the candidates that voters can choose in the primary election and lock tens of thousands of voters out of the primary election entirely.

State lawmakers passed the bill in a January 2024 special session called by Gov. Jeff Landry. The changes begin with the 2026 election cycle.

What Races are in the Closed Party Primary?

Louisiana's closed party primary system only applies to certain offices, and only political parties recognized by the state as a "major party" will hold primary elections. Currently, only the Democratic and Republican parties meet the state's criteria of a major party.

Closed Party Primary Elections

- U.S. Senate
- U.S. House
- Louisiana Supreme Court
- Public Service Commission
- Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

Closed primaries will be used for elections to Congress, the Louisiana Supreme Court, the Public Service Commission and the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. All other races will continue under the open primary system Louisiana has used for years, where all candidates, regardless of party, run against each other at the same time.

In a closed primary election, Republican candidates will face off against each other, and the winner will advance to the general election in the fall. Similarly, Democratic candidates will run against each other, with that party's winner moving to the fall ballot.

If no candidate wins more than 50% of the vote in the first Democratic or Republican primary, the top two vote-getters advance to primary runoff elections to determine which Republican and which Democrat will become each party's nominee.

The top Republican and Democrat to emerge from the closed primaries will compete in the general election against any candidates who are either unaffiliated with a political party or belong to another political party that didn't have a closed primary.

The candidate who receives the greatest number of votes in the general election will win the seat. That means a candidate could win one of the seats held under the closed party primary system without getting a majority – more than 50% – of the vote.

In the 2026 election cycle, seats for the U.S. Senate, U.S. House, Louisiana Supreme Court and Public Service Commission will be on the ballot through the closed primary system.

Louisiana's Closed Party Primary: A Guide for Candidates

Open Primary Elections

- Governor and Lieutenant Governor
- Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Treasurer
- Insurance Commissioner and Agriculture Commissioner
- Louisiana House and Senate
- All state judgeships outside of Supreme Court
- Local elections (sheriff, district attorney, police jury, city council, etc.)

What Changes for Voters?

Voters will cast ballots in different races depending on their party affiliation. Not every voter will make decisions in every race in election cycles that involve closed party primaries.

Republican and Democratic voters will only be able to vote in their party's primary election for the elected positions chosen through closed primaries. Of Louisiana's nearly 3 million voters, about 72% are registered with the two political parties, according to data from the Secretary of State's Office.

Voters not affiliated with a political party, who comprise 27% of the state's voters, will decide in which party primary (Democrat, Republican or neither) they want to vote for closed primary races and sign a form indicating that choice, whether voting in-person or absentee by mail.

Whichever primary voters unaffiliated with a political party choose for the first election must remain the same for the primary runoff. A no-party voter is locked in for the election cycle once choosing a party primary and can't switch back and forth.

Meanwhile, voters affiliated with a political party other than the Democratic or Republican parties – such as the Libertarian or Green parties – won't be allowed to cast ballots in the closed party primaries at all. They will only be able to vote in the general election for those races.

About 1% of Louisiana voters, or more than 25,000 people registered with parties that aren't Republican or Democrat, won't be eligible to vote in the closed party primary system, according to the state voter registration data.

Because only certain offices involve closed primaries, voters often will have elections in which they will face both closed and open primary races on the same ballot.

That means voters will have limitations on how they can cast ballots and which candidates are available to them for the closed primary races (such as for U.S. Senate and House seats) while they will be able to vote for any candidate regardless of party in the open primary races (such as for mayor and local school board seats).

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The switch to a closed party primary system will increase election costs over the next 10 years by \$54 million, according to the Secretary of State's Office. In addition, the change carries more than \$16 million in one-time costs for equipment, election worker training and a voter outreach campaign.

Before going to the polls for closed primaries, voters should do their research. They should make sure they know their party registration; determine if they want to change before the voter registration date expires for that election; and decide in which closed party primary they want to vote if they are unaffiliated with a political party.

The Secretary of State's Office has more information online about [upcoming elections](#) and the [closed party primary process](#).

How to Vote in Closed Primary Elections:

