

## Primary Elections in Oklahoma

In the State of Oklahoma, primary elections have one purpose and one purpose only: To allow members of a recognized political party to select that party's nominees to go on the General Election ballot. Primary and runoff primary elections often are referred to as "party primaries," and with good reason. Persons who are not registered members of a party may not participate in the selection of that party's nominees.

By law, Oklahoma has a closed primary system. That means that in primary and runoff primary elections, only registered voters of a political party may vote to select their party's nominees. In other words, at primary and runoff primary elections, registered Democrats may vote only for Democratic candidates, and registered Republicans may vote only for Republican candidates. Persons who are registered Independent (No Party) may not vote for partisan candidates in primary elections. All Independent candidates appear on the ballot only at general elections.

On occasion there are elections on nonpartisan issues scheduled to be held in conjunction with primaries, such as a school bond election or a state question election. All registered voters are entitled to vote on nonpartisan issues during primaries if there are any such issues.

Any registered Democrat who votes in a primary or runoff primary election will receive the Democratic ballot and may vote for any of the Democratic candidates on the ballot. Republican candidates do not appear on the Democratic ballot.

Any registered Republican who votes in a primary or runoff primary election will receive the Republican ballot and may vote for any of the Republican candidates on the ballot. Democratic candidates do not appear on the Republican ballot.

At general elections, however, all voters receive exactly the same ballot and may vote for any candidate whose name appears on it, without regard to the political affiliation of the candidate or the voter.

If all candidates for a given office are Democrats, then the race will be decided at a Democratic Primary Election, and neither Republicans nor Independents may vote in that election. If all candidates for a given office are Republicans, then the race will be decided at a Republican Primary Election, and neither Democrats nor Independents may vote in that election. But if both a Democrat and a Republican are candidates for the same office, their names will appear on the ballot at a general election—along with the names of all Independent candidates—and they may be voted on by all registered voters, regardless of political affiliation.

A voter always can vote for any candidate whose name appears on any ballot that he or she is eligible to receive. But it is important to understand that only persons who have chosen to be affiliated with a political party can participate in selecting the party's nominees at a primary or runoff primary election. A voter who does not wish to be affiliated with a political party is not entitled to influence the selection of its nominees.