

THE ELECTION PROCESS

THINK ABOUT IT

1. **What is the purpose of having a primary?
A general election?**
2. **How does a candidate get on the primary ballot?
On the general election ballot?**

On the Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even-numbered years, voters in Alabama and the rest of the nation go to the polls. This election is called the *general election*. The process of electing persons to state offices begins long before that November day. The process involves the party system.

During the spring in election years, campaigning begins for the June *primary* elections. These primary races draw many candidates.

A primary is a party election. In the past, the parties conducted their own primaries. Today, however, government conducts the primaries according to the Alabama Election code.

Primaries give voters a chance to participate in *nominating* the candidates whose names will appear on the general election ballot in November. In the Democratic primary, Democrats run against each other. Democratic voters choose one person for each race in the general election. Meanwhile, in the Republican primary, other voters choose Republican candidates.

What happens if no one runs in the primary of one of the parties? The person chosen in the other primary would be unopposed in the general election (This is often the case in a one-party state.).

A party may nominate its candidates in other ways. In the past, they were often chosen at state conventions or at a caucus (a meeting of party leaders). Today, the primary system is almost always used.

Alabama's primaries are called "open" primaries. This means that both the Democratic and Republican primaries are open to any registered voter. One does not have to be a member of the party organization to vote in a primary. A voter can switch parties from year to year.

However, if a voter decides to vote in, let's say, the Republican primary in a certain year, that voter cannot also vote in the Democratic primary. If no candidate wins the majority vote and a runoff is necessary, the voter has to stick with the same party.

In the November general election, the names of all candidates for President, opposed or unopposed nominated in primaries or by petition appear on the ballot (Of course, the names of candidates for local, state, and federal offices will also be on the ballot.).

In this election there are no rules governing party voting. A voter may choose all Democrats or all Republicans, some from each party, any independents on the ballot, or may write in the name of a person not on the ballot.

If no candidate in a race gets a majority, a runoff is held three weeks after the regular general election. A runoff is seldom needed, though, because usually only two names appear on the ballot for each race in the general election.

The winner of the general election takes office the following January.

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