

The Electoral Process

SECTION 1

THE NOMINATING PROCESS

TEXT SUMMARY

Nomination—the selecting of candidates for office—is a critical step in the American democratic system. It precedes the **general election**, when voters select the officeholders.

In the United States, nominations are made in five ways. By self-announcement, a person who wants to run for office simply announces the fact. Nominations may also be made in a **caucus**, or a group of like-minded people. Another option is nominating at a convention, or a meeting of the party's members.

Most States now nominate candidates through a **direct primary**—an election held within a party to pick its candidates—of which there are multiple kinds. In **closed primaries**, generally only registered party members may vote. In **open**

primaries, any voter may vote in one party's primary. Until 2000 when it was ruled unconstitutional, three States used a **blanket primary**, in which voters could choose among all contenders, regardless of party. In some States a candidate must get more than half the votes to win a primary. If no candidate does, the two top vote-getters hold a **runoff primary** to determine the winner. In most States, nearly all elected school and municipal offices are filled through **nonpartisan elections**, in which candidates are not identified by party. Also common is nomination by petition, by which a candidate gets a certain number of qualified voters to sign a petition.

THE BIG IDEA

The nominating process is a key part of an election because it narrows the field of possible candidates.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Five Ways to Nominate Candidates

<input type="checkbox"/> Self-Announcement A person declares him or herself to be a candidate.
<input type="checkbox"/> Petition A candidate gets a certain number of qualified voters to sign a petition.
<input type="checkbox"/> Caucus A group of like-minded people meet to select candidates.
<input type="checkbox"/> Convention A political party's members meet to select candidates.
<input type="checkbox"/> Direct Primary An election is held within a party to pick its candidates.

Candidates in most States are now nominated in direct primaries.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. At what point do voters select officeholders?
2. **Chart Skills** What is the difference between a convention and a caucus?