

Connecticut Debate Association

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THP open primaries.

Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia

Primary Election

Primary elections, or direct primary are a voting process by which voters can indicate their preference for their party's candidate, or a candidate in general, in an upcoming general election, local election, or by-election. Depending on the country and administrative divisions within the country, voters might consist of the general public in what is called an open primary, or solely the members of a political party in what is called a closed primary. In addition to these, there are other variants on primaries (which are discussed below) that are used by many countries holding elections throughout the world...

United States

In the United States, various types can be differentiated:

Closed primary

People may vote in a party's primary only if they are registered members of that party prior to election day. Independents cannot participate. Note that because some political parties name themselves independent, the terms "non-partisan" or "unaffiliated" often replace "independent" when referring to those who are not affiliated with a political party. Thirteen states & Washington D.C., – Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming – have closed primaries.[9][10]

Semi-closed.

As in closed primaries, registered party members can vote only in their own party's primary. Semi-closed systems, however, allow unaffiliated voters to participate as well. Depending on the state, independents either make their choice of party primary privately, inside the voting booth, or publicly, by registering with any party on Election Day. Fifteen states – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio,[11] Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, and West Virginia – have semi-closed primaries that allow voters to register or change party preference on election day.[10][12] Massachusetts allows unenrolled voters or members of minor parties to vote in the primary of either major party, but registration or party changes must be done no fewer than 20 days prior to the primary.[13]

Open primary

A registered voter may vote in any party primary regardless of his or her own party affiliation. Fourteen states – Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin – have open primaries.[9] When voters do not register with a party before the primary, it is called a pick-a-party primary because the voter can select which party's primary they wish to vote in on election day. Because of the open nature of this system, a practice known as raiding may occur. Raiding consists of voters of one party crossing over and voting in the primary of another party, effectively allowing a party to help choose its opposition's candidate. The theory is that opposing party members vote for the weakest candidate of the opposite party in order to give their own party the advantage in the general election. An example of this can be seen in the 1998 Vermont senatorial primary with the nomination of Fred Tuttle as the Republican candidate in the general election[citation needed].

Semi-open

A registered voter need not publicly declare which political party's primary that they will vote in before entering the voting booth. When voters identify themselves to the election officials, they must request a party's specific ballot. Only one ballot is cast by each voter. In many states with semi-open primaries, election officials or poll workers from their respective parties record each voter's choice of party and provide access to this information. The primary difference between a semi-open and open primary system is the use of a party-specific ballot. In a semi-open primary, a public declaration in front of the election judges is made and a party-specific ballot given to the voter to

cast. Certain states that use the open-primary format may print a single ballot and the voter must choose on the ballot itself which political party's candidates they will select for a contested office.

Blanket primary

A primary in which the ballot is not restricted to candidates from one party.

Nonpartisan blanket primary

A primary in which the ballot is not restricted to candidates from one party, where the top two candidates advance to the general election regardless of party affiliation. Louisiana has famously operated under this system, which has been nicknamed the "jungle primary." California has used a nonpartisan blanket primary since 2012 after passing Proposition 14 in 2010, and the State of Washington has used a nonpartisan blanket primary since 2008.[14]

Selecting for the Extremes

City Journal, May 4, 2022, Howard Husock

The Empire State's closed-primary system robs independent voters of a political voice and rewards the parties' most ideological candidates.

We may see an outbreak of democracy in New York, thanks to the Court of Appeals' decision to throw out state Democrats' gerrymandered congressional district map. But while the shotgun marriages between Staten Island and Park Slope and between Westchester and Suffolk Counties have been called off, New York still has a long way to go before its elections are truly democratic. That's because the Empire State remains one of only nine states with completely closed primary elections.

It may sound fair and logical to permit only registered Democrats or Republicans to vote in their respective parties' primary elections, but in practice this limits voter choice and selects for candidates whose views tend to their party's extreme wing. Closed primaries also mean that independents—those not enrolled in either party—are the most clearly excluded voters. New York now has more unaffiliated voters (2.75 million) than enrolled Republicans (2.74 million).

Voters who want to join a party or switch parties to have a say in a contested primary are out of luck. One can't simply walk up and switch party affiliation on primary election day. New York election law requires such changes to be made by February 15, more than four months before the primary. That's well before the campaign begins in earnest and the views of candidates become clear. It can even be before we know who will be on the ballot, as in the case of disgraced former lieutenant governor Brian Benjamin.

As a practical matter, New York's closed-primary system means that, for instance, moderate Republicans who might want to vote for Tom Suozzi, the former Nassau County executive and self-described "common sense Democrat," will not have that choice. It means that Republican candidates Rob Astorino and former Westchester County executive and congressman Lee Zeldin have no immediate interest in appealing to centrist Democrats or independents, who are locked out of the process. The nature of the primary electorate will only serve to push Governor Kathy Hochul further to the left of her party and the state as a whole. The process excludes what political scientists call the "median voter"—those in the broad middle of the political spectrum, who may find themselves without a centrist choice in November. The push toward party extremes caused by the closed-primary system came uncomfortably close to making Bill DeBlasio acolyte Maya Wiley mayor of New York instead of Eric Adams. By contrast, neighboring New Jersey lets independents vote in party primaries, along with such supposedly voter-repressive states as Georgia, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Closed primaries once made good sense. Party leaders gathered in proverbial smoked-filled rooms to nominate candidates and tickets that would appeal to a broad range of voters. But in today's system, candidates are on their own. The backing of party conventions means little compared with name recognition or fundraising ability. The closed-primary system is long past its sell-by date, and New Yorkers are worse off for it.

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Elections: Open Primaries and Runoffs

PoliticsPA, Steve Ulric, June 7, 2022

After one of the most bitter Republican primaries in recent Commonwealth history, it's fair to ask two questions of Harrisburg lawmakers?

1. Should Pennsylvania move to open primaries?
2. Should Pennsylvania consider runoff elections if a primary winner does not achieve a majority?

Open Primaries

According to the Pennsylvania Department of State, nearly 1.1 million voters are registered as unaffiliated with a political party or with a third party. This segment of the state's electorate has been increasing for years, consistent with a national trend of voters identifying as independents.

[Nine states currently hold closed primaries](#) – Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. In general, a voter seeking to vote in a closed primary must first be a registered party member. Typically, the voter affiliates with a party on his or her voter registration application. This system deters “cross-over” voting by members of other parties. Independent or unaffiliated voters, by definition, are excluded from participating in the party nomination contests. This system generally contributes to a strong party organization.

Six states hold partially closed primaries – Connecticut, Idaho, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Utah. In this system, state law permits political parties to choose whether to allow unaffiliated voters or voters not registered with the party to participate in their nominating contests before each election cycle.

Six more states conduct partially open primaries – Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wyoming. This system permits voters to cross party lines, but they must either publicly declare their ballot choice or their ballot selection may be regarded as a form of registration with the corresponding party. Iowa asks voters to choose a party on the state voter registration form, yet it allows a primary voter to publicly change party affiliation for purposes of voting on primary Election Day.

Nine states have primaries that are open to unaffiliated voters – Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and West Virginia. A number of states allow only unaffiliated voters to participate in any party primary they choose, but do not allow voters who are registered with one party to vote in another party’s primary.

According to [a survey conducted by Osage Research](#) of 850 voters last November, 75 percent of respondents would support proposals from Harrisburg that would permit independent voters to vote in the primary election. And 69 percent of independents surveyed said they would be certain to vote if permitted in the 2022 Pennsylvania primary. A [white paper from Ballot PA](#) reported that independent voters in Pennsylvania are more concentrated in the Southeast, the Lehigh Valley, the Poconos, Northeastern Pennsylvania, and a few “college towns” (State College and the Oakland area of Pittsburgh). These voters also seem to be more concentrated in some cities like Allentown, Reading, Lancaster, and York that have seen rapid growth in Hispanic populations, which may reflect the fact that Hispanic voters (and Asian voters) in the Commonwealth are much more likely to register as independents.

In December 2020, state senator **Dan Laughlin** (R-Erie) introduced [Senate Bill 690](#), that would allow voters who are registered as independents, to vote in primary elections. It remains stalled in the [Senate State Government Committee](#) although there was a public hearing in April in Hazleton on the bill.

Runoff Primary Elections

Runoff primary elections have a sordid history. They were devised in the South in the late 19th and early 20th Century to help solidify one-party control of the region. The traditional two-round runoff system comes with additional costs, including taxpayer dollars to fund the administration of a second election and non-monetary societal costs such as reduced voter turnout in the decisive final round.

[Ten states currently conduct runoff elections](#) as part of their party nomination process – Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota (only for congressional and gubernatorial elections), Texas and Vermont (only for tie votes). These runoffs occur when no candidate reaches the required threshold for victory. In nine states, a majority is required. In North Carolina, the threshold is 30 percent of the vote plus one.

In this primary cycle in Pennsylvania, 20 races produced winners that did not receive a majority of the votes cast:

- U.S Senate – GOP (Mehmet Oz 31.21%)
- Governor – GOP (Doug Mastriano 43.79%)
- Lt. Governor – GOP (Carrie Lewis DelRosso 25.65%)
- 6th Congressional – GOP (Guy Ciarrocchi 33.07%)
- 12th Congressional – Dem (Summer Lee 41.89%)
- 14th Senatorial – GOP (Dean Browning 49.12%)
- 14th Senatorial – Dem (Nick Miller 42.45%)
- 4th Legislative – GOP (Jacob Banta 42.06%)
- 8th Legislative – GOP (Aaron Bernstine 49.06%)
- 9th Legislative – GOP (Marla Brown 42.91%)
- 10th Legislative – Dem (Amen Brown 40.01%)
- 12th Legislative – GOP (Stephenie Scialabba 47.57%)
- 24th Legislative – Dem (Latasha Mayes 46.22%)
- 55th Legislative – GOP (Jill Cooper 48.85%)
- 109th Legislative – GOP (Robert Ledbeter 46.47%)
- 116th Legislative – GOP (Dane Watro Jr. 40.5%)
- 117th Legislative – GOP (Michael Cabell 32.47%)
- 139th Legislative – GOP (Joseph Adams 43.28%)
- 182nd Legislative – Dem (Ben Waxman 40.21%)

- 203rd Legislative – Dem (Anthony Bellmon 47.34%)

In three of those 20 races, the winner did not receive even a third of the total vote.

There are some serious downsides to runoff elections, [according to a report written](#) by Third Way Senior Political Analyst **David de la Fuente** and FairVote Senior Research Analyst **Deb Otis**: not only do runoff elections require voters to return to the polls later, they cost voters and taxpayers an exorbitant amount. The study focuses on runoffs in Texas and Louisiana, in which they found that runoffs on average cost \$7 per voter in Texas. In Louisiana, statewide runoffs cost almost as much as the first-round election, doubling voting expenditures and amounting to \$5 million spent each time.

In addition to skewed results and high costs, turnout is meager in runoff elections. Previous [FairVote research](#) cited in the study found that turnout typically declines by 38% between primary elections and primary runoff elections. Also in December, 2020, state senator **Anthony Williams** (D-Philadelphia) reintroduced legislation not only calling for runoffs but also for ranked-choice elections as [Senate Bill 59](#). It is one of 78 bills currently residing with the Senate State Government Committee.

A CASE FOR KEEPING PRIMARY VOTING CONFINED TO PARTY MEMBERS

Pacific Standard, Seth Masket, MAR 19, 2018

Political parties at every level of government choose their nominees through primaries. That's the most important decision a party can make—and an organization's most important decisions should be made by members of that organization.

Last week, [Open Primaries](#), a non-partisan voting advocacy group, posted several tweets making the argument that no American should be required to join a political party in order to exercise their right to vote. [One of these](#) tweets focused on a man claiming that participating in a primary election was his "birthright." I issued some [responses](#) on Twitter, which invited further tweets. But I thought it would be helpful to actually have something of a discussion here. So I'll try to make my argument for keeping primaries closed while, to the best of my ability, fairly addressing objections to this position.

Here's my main pitch: Political parties at every level of government choose their nominees through primaries. That's the most important decision a party can make—and an organization's most important decisions should be made by members of that organization. Joining a political party in the United States is a pretty simple procedure; it most often requires that you check a box on a voter registration form. American parties do not require membership dues or loyalty oaths. If you want to participate in a party's primary, you should at the very least be a member. Allowing Independents and Republicans to select the Democrats' next nominees, or some other combination, is a good way to destroy a party and its meaning.

Below, I explore in greater depth the arguments for and against open primary laws.

THE CONSTITUTION GIVES ME THE RIGHT TO VOTE. CLOSED PRIMARY LAWS SHOULDN'T PREVENT ME FROM VOTING.

You have a right to vote in a general election. That's where we choose who represents us in government. This is a vital task in a representative democracy and barriers to voting should be as low as possible. But this does not extend to primary elections, which are used to determine nominees for parties. A party is not a government, and your rights are not being violated if you're told you can't vote in a primary because you're not a member of that party.

YOU SEEM PRETTY COMFORTABLE WITH DEMANDING THAT PEOPLE JOIN PARTIES TO VOTE IN PRIMARIES. ISN'T THIS LIKE SAYING THAT PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE TO GET AN ID CARD TO VOTE IN A GENERAL ELECTION? THAT'S A PRETTY LOW BAR TOO.

No. Primary elections are not the same as general elections and it's a mistake to treat them that way. Political scientists sometimes refer to parties as "semi-public utilities." That is, they serve important public functions—such as determining who may run for office and who may not—but they are also quasi-private organizations that can set rules for their own memberships. Because of their semi-public roles, there are limits on their abilities to set rules for themselves—they can't discriminate on the basis of race or gender, even though many parties once did. But again, parties are not governments, and even [thinking about them as democracies is problematic](#). They are organizations, with leaders and rank-and-file members. And their decision-making processes are not open to just anyone who wants to show up. General elections, conversely, are supposed to be open to any adult citizen. An [ID card requirement](#) is a barrier to general election voting that is experienced differently across different racial and income groups and thus is highly problematic from a constitutional perspective.

BUT I PAY FOR PRIMARY ELECTIONS AS A TAXPAYER. I SHOULDN'T BE EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATING IN SOMETHING THAT I'M PAYING FOR.

You pay for highways, but those are only available to licensed drivers. You pay for an Air Force, but you have to pass a lot of tests to join that. You pay for public schools you and your kids might not be able to attend. Nonetheless, this is an important objection. The state got involved in party nominations in large part to solve the problem of

multiple people and groups claiming to be the true party in various parts of the country. A state-run primary election made those decisions final and obvious. See work by [John Reynolds](#) and [Alan Ware](#) for more on this.

BUT A LOT OF GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THIS COUNTRY ARE UNCOMPETITIVE. IN THOSE CASES, THE PRIMARY REALLY IS THE ELECTION—IT'S THE ONLY PLACE WHERE VOTERS HAVE A REAL CHOICE. SHOULDN'T ANYONE BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THOSE PRIMARIES?

In lopsided districts, that seems like an even more important place to join the dominant political party and try to steer its choices more toward your preferences. You may disagree with a lot of what that party does, but you'll have a lot more influence in it as a member than as a non-member. And your vote will be more consequential in that primary than in the general election. You could also join the minority party and try to help it recruit candidates and appeal to voters to make it more competitive.

JOINING A PARTY IS AN OVERT ACT OF PARTISANSHIP—IT'S PUBLIC RECORD. IF I'M A JOURNALIST, OR AN ACADEMIC, OR A LAWYER, OR SOMEONE ELSE TRYING TO AVOID LOOKING BIASED, THIS MIGHT LOOK BAD FOR ME, BUT I STILL WANT TO VOTE.

There are many perfectly legitimate reasons for not wanting to join a party or any other organization. But that decision has consequences, such as not getting to participate in that organization's decision-making processes. I might legitimately not want to join a union, but in doing so I accept that certain jobs may be unavailable to me as a result. I can't vote in Coca Cola's board elections if I don't own stock in that company. I might get angry at the American Political Science Association and withdraw my membership; I don't still get to vote in its leadership elections.

LOOK, I JUST DON'T LIKE ANY OF THESE PARTIES. I DON'T FEEL LIKE ANY OF THEM REPRESENTS MY VIEWS WELL, AND I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO JOIN ONE TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS.

You're not alone! Nonetheless, our political system is shot through with parties, and it turns out that parties are pretty vital to maintaining a healthy democracy. They're not about to go away. What's more, if you want to get anything done in our political system—create a law or prevent one, get someone you like elected to office, get yourself elected to office—it's far more effective to do so operating through a political party. Your best bet is to pick one and get active in it, attending meetings, donating time and money, etc., but always pushing for the types of candidates and policies you like. People can actually transform political parties, and that's been done more times and more effectively than non-partisans transforming governments.

Democrats are voting in GOP primaries. Did they sink Madison Cawthorn?
Washington Post, Christopher Cooper and Michael Bitzer, June 16, 2022

More Americans are trying 'strategic crossover voting' in this year's primaries. Here's when it works. Incumbent members of Congress rarely lose their primaries. The few occasions when they do lose are usually chalked up to the effects of scandal, redistricting or massive investment by external groups. That's been changing, partly because in safe districts, more extreme candidates are increasingly challenging mainstream politicians, and occasionally winning.

But something else is underway as well. Reports from Georgia and Colorado suggest that an increasing number of strongly partisan and highly strategic voters are using open primary systems to attempt to sabotage a particularly distasteful opponent. Political scientists call this "strategic crossover voting." How successful are these attempts? We examined freshman member of Congress Madison Cawthorn's recent defeat in North Carolina's 11th Congressional District (NC-11) to establishment Republican Chuck Edwards to test whether strategic crossover voting can be a newly effective tool in the partisan toolbox. While Cawthorn's behavior became notorious enough to alienate some Republicans, we find compelling evidence that large numbers of NC-11 voters engaged in strategic crossover voting -- enough to cause Cawthorn's defeat.

The rules and the background

North Carolina voters can register as affiliated with the Democratic, Republican or Libertarian parties, or they can eschew party affiliation altogether and register as unaffiliated. In a system called a "semi-closed primary," which several states have, registered partisans can only vote in their own party's primary. But unaffiliated voters (North Carolina's largest group of registered voters) can vote in any party primary they choose.

From time to time, politicians and political entrepreneurs take advantage of this by trying to persuade unaffiliated voters who usually favor one party to instead vote in and sabotage the opposing party's primary. For instance, during 2008's presidential election, right-wing radio host Rush Limbaugh urged voters to use this strategy in what he called "operation chaos," although evidence suggests that it did not work.

In 2022, a number of groups in NC-11, including the "American Muckrackers" Political Action Committee (also known as the "Fire Madison PAC") tried this tactic, encouraging NC-11 Democratic voters to temporarily change their party affiliation to unaffiliated, vote in the Republican primary, and support centrist Republican Wendy

Nevarez. Because this gambit involved both strategic party switching and strategic crossover voting, we refer to this plan as the "strategic two-step."

How we did our research

There is, of course, no way to conclusively determine who an individual voter cast their vote for. But thanks to publicly available data maintained by the North Carolina State Board of Elections, we can gather reliable estimates for each component of the strategic two-step. These data include voting histories and registration details for more than 7 million registered voters. It's updated weekly to indicate any registration changes, including party switches. First, we determined how many people in NC-11 switched their party registration from Democrat to Unaffiliated from Jan. 1 to April 22, 2022, the deadline for registration changes before the primary. We compared that number to previous patterns in the district and patterns during the same few months in other congressional districts. Second, we reviewed voter history data to determine how many unaffiliated voters voted in the Republican primary in 2022, and compared that with recent history and with other North Carolina congressional districts in 2022. Finally, we investigated how many of the unaffiliated voters who cast a Republican primary ballot in 2022 were previously Democratic primary voters.

In NC-11, high proportions of Democrats switched to unaffiliated

We found that NC-11 Democrats switched to unaffiliated at unusually high rates. As you can see in the figure below, from Jan. 1 to the deadline for switching affiliations, more than 3,050 voters switched from registered Democrat to unaffiliated, compared to an average of 1,050 voters doing the same in the state's other congressional districts.

Then they voted in the Republican primary

What's more, far more people in NC-11 switched in 2022 than had done so in earlier primary years. For example, from Jan. 1, 2020, to the March 2020 primary, only 752 people switched from Democrat to unaffiliated in NC-11 -- four times fewer than during the same period in 2022.

Apparently, the 2022 call to switch party affiliations resonated with an unusually large number of voters. But what about the second step? Did they follow through and vote in the Republican primary?

Of the 3,050 Democrats-turned-unaffiliated in NC-11, more than 1,700, or 57 percent, cast Republican primary ballots. The remaining party switchers voted in the Democratic primary (15 percent) or didn't vote in the 2022 primary (28 percent).

All signs indicate that these recent switchers were by and large highly committed and consistent Democratic voters. Of those who voted in the 2020 primary election, 99 percent of them pulled the Democratic primary ballot.

In the end, 1,754 Democrats-turned-unaffiliated voters cast ballots in the NC-11 Republican primary. Edwards defeated Cawthorn by 1,384 votes. Clearly the effort to convince unaffiliated voters to vote in the Republican primary was successful. Apparently, however, they did not vote for centrist Nevarez, who garnered just 5 percent of the vote.

Strategic crossover voting may be on the rise

In past research, political scientists and economists have found that strategic crossover voting hasn't made much difference in how elections turn out. But those studies were conducted in a different era. What's more, they generally focused on national political contests where small changes don't have as much of an effect as in an individual district. Observers are on the lookout for similar behavior in Colorado's 3rd District primary where, much as with Cawthorn, incumbent Lauren Boebert has incensed Democrats and Republicans alike.

With highly heated primaries underway and with many voters increasingly believing that they are weighing in on the future of democracy, we may well see more strategic crossover voting this year -- and perhaps in the future.

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Why We Need Political Parties

New York Times, Moisés Naím, Sept. 19, 2017

In less than a decade, the world went from worrying about financial crashes to worrying about crashing democracies.

Starting in 2008, we were distressed over which economy would topple next, or whether the next banking crisis would wipe out people's savings. Yet the Great Recession was not as prolonged as we feared — the hardest-hit economies have recovered, or are in the process of doing so.

What has not returned to precrisis mode is politics. Today political parties — essential to strong democratic systems — are becoming something of an endangered species.

The aftermath of the economic downturn paved the way for the success of nontraditional political leaders like Donald Trump and made viable some once-unimaginable ideas, like [Brexit](#).

Longstanding trends also took a stronger hold in the West. As salaries stagnated or even declined in the United States, Britain and other economically advanced democracies, the embattled middle class blamed [automation](#) and globalization. Immigration and international trade were seen as costly downsides to international integration. Surprisingly, even emerging markets with fast-growing economies and stellar records of lifting people out of poverty, like Brazil, faced challenges from angry populations disappointed with their governments and empowered by social media and other new technologies.

In developing countries, it is common for people's expectations to grow at a faster pace than the capacity of the state to meet them. Money is always short, and public institutions are often ineffective. So even though the lives of hundreds of millions of people in Asia, Latin America and Africa are improving, that doesn't mean that people are content. And it has become clear that economic progress and prosperity do not always buy political stability. The global wave of political anger sweeping many rich and poor countries alike is also fed by a newfound impatience with corruption.

In the last decade, societies in which corruption used to be treated as a fact of life developed a strong intolerance to official thievery and ousted once-untouchable politicians. In Brazil and India, Russia and Spain, people took to the streets to denounce corruption by the powerful.

And too often those in power were also leaders of traditional political parties. When such leaders are caught stealing, it becomes another stain on parties, whose prestige and allure have been steadily waning. These days, political parties are seen not as natural habitats for idealists but for fast-talking and often hypocritical opportunists and careerists.

The disdain for politics as usual — and therefore for parties locked in the status quo — is intense, widespread, global. This is why anti-politics, the rejection of traditional politics and its practitioners, is such a popular instinct today.

The case of Tiririca vividly illustrates why. In 2010 Francisco Everardo Oliveira Silva, known professionally as [Tiririca the clown](#), ran for a congressional seat in Brazil, campaigning in costume. His message was honest and straightforward: "I don't know what a representative in Congress does, but if you send me there I will tell you." He also explained that his goal was "to help people in need in this country ... but especially my family."

At the time, it was easy to dismiss Tiririca's run as an extreme anti-political gesture that could happen only in a rowdy young democracy like Brazil's. But not for long. The sentiment that propelled Tiririca to victory is similar to that which drove the political success of the comedian [Beppe Grillo](#) in Italy, or that of Mr. Trump, a reality TV show host.

Both men were able to undermine the power of dominant parties. While Mr. Grillo's [Five Star Movement](#) sought to displace Italy's political machine by positioning himself as a radical outsider, Mr. Trump took on traditional politics as a radical insider, staging a hostile takeover of the Republican Party.

Mr. Trump's appeal to "[drain the swamp](#)" in Washington. Mr. Grillo's scorching denunciation of the "caste" that in his view ran Italy to the ground. Demonstrators' banners in Brazil imploring voters to "throw them all out." These examples resonate in similar ways.

These days, calls for a new political order usually require the ouster of political parties and elected leaders, and in many cases that is the correct call. Corrupt and ineffectual organizations need to be replaced by effective ones. Yet many activists harbor the misconception that the answer lies in nongovernmental organizations, or in loose, nonhierarchical movements.

Democracies, however, need political parties. We need permanent organizations that earn political power and govern, that are forced to articulate disparate interests and viewpoints, that can recruit and develop future government leaders and that monitor those already in power.

Political leaders need to have a stance on preschool education and nuclear weapons, health care and agriculture, and have well-articulated views on fighting terrorism and regulating banks, among myriad other policy issues. And political parties are the training camps of these leaders.

To survive, political parties must regain the ability to inspire and mobilize people — especially the young — who might otherwise disdain politics or prefer to channel whatever political energy they have through single-issue groups. Parties must be willing to overhaul their structures, mind-sets and methods to adapt to a new world. We also need to bring party renewal to the foreground in any discussion of contemporary politics.

In the decade since the financial crisis, almost everything we do — eating, reading, shopping, dating, traveling and communicating — was disrupted by new technologies and innovation. Everything, that is, except the way we govern ourselves.

We need a disruptive innovation that pulls democratic parties into the 21st century.

Changing How Primaries Work Probably Won't Make Politics Less Divisive **Geoffrey Skelley, Five Thirty Eight, July 19, 2021**

Republican candidates around the country are trying to win over former President Donald Trump's supporters before the 2022 midterm elections, so it's no surprise that many are choosing to go all in on the false claim that the 2020

election was stolen from him. The idea is that by embracing this lie, they might boost their electoral chances; it's one reason many GOP lawmakers haven't disputed this falsehood.¹

This extreme jockeying would seem to support the argument that our primary elections greatly contribute to the increased polarization and conflict we see in our politics. Yet, as a report from the think tank New America by FiveThirtyEight contributor Lee Drutman details, primaries are not really a major catalyst for why Congress is so polarized — thus, changing how primaries work may not actually do that much to fix the problem.

Incumbent politicians have moved further toward the political extremes in recent elections partly because they are worried about a primary challenge. But studies suggest that the primary electorate itself isn't any more ideologically extreme than the general electorate. Rather, the bigger problem is the decline in competitive congressional districts. Only about 1 in 6 congressional districts were “swinging” in the 2020 general election, compared with roughly 2 in 5 in 2000.

The rapid decline in competitive elections isn't because of our primary system, though. It's due mainly to partisan sorting, whereby Democratic areas are becoming more Democratic and Republican areas more Republican — either because people are changing their attitudes to better match their party or they're moving to areas where their preferences are already dominant.

The upshot, of course, is that with fewer competitive districts, a primary is often more important than the general election, as it's in this stage that the eventual winner is selected. That's one big reason why incumbents fear a primary challenge even though few incumbents lose primaries — it's the primary that increasingly matters for electoral survival.

Yet the argument that primaries generate more polarization doesn't necessarily hold true, as studies don't clearly show primary voters as being more extreme than those who vote only in the general election. That is, the average Democrat voting in a primary may not be much more liberal than the average Democrat who votes only in November; the same premise goes for Republicans.

This lack of an obvious ideological gap between primary and general election voters helps explain why reforms aimed at broadening the primary electorate haven't produced meaningful results. Reformers argue that a more open primary system — such as an open primary, in which no party registration is required, or a top-two primary, where all candidates run regardless of party and the top-two vote-getters advance — will produce a more moderate electorate and more moderate candidates. However, neither has really happened.

Studies suggest that changing the primary system from a closed system, where only party registrants can vote, to an open primary or a top-two primary doesn't really alter the makeup of the primary electorate. In fact, the electorate in more open primaries may be slightly more extreme. (This probably shouldn't surprise us, though, considering that most independents vote similarly to openly partisan voters and that moderates often hold idiosyncratic and sometimes extreme views.)

Moreover, more open primary systems haven't attracted more middle-of-the-road candidates — or gotten them elected. Multiple studies find little or no evidence that more open primary systems attract more moderate candidates to run or to win more often. Tellingly, in his study, Drutman examined the average ideological position of House members over the past five congresses based on the type of primary used to nominate them and found little difference by primary type for either party. Rather, ideology was much more aligned with how red or blue the district was.

That said, there is a new primary system — Alaska's top-four primary — that could pay dividends in a way the others have not. In 2022, candidates from all parties will run in a primary, and the top-four vote-getters will advance to the general election, where voters will use ranked-choice voting to decide the winner. In theory, such a system could reduce incumbents' concerns about getting “primaried” because, with high name recognition and bountiful resources, they're more likely to reach the general election if four candidates, rather than just one or two, advance. However, the top-four primary could still suffer from some of the same problems that have afflicted the top-two primary in the two states that currently use it, California and Washington. Namely, a top-two primary in a deep blue or red district sometimes sends two candidates from the dominant party to the general election. In that situation, reformers expected voters from the other party to support the more moderate contender, but that hasn't really panned out. Instead, voters from the other party often don't bother voting because they may struggle to differentiate between the candidates from the dominant party. In other words, a Democrat may see two Republican candidates as being two sides of the same coin and choose to abstain; similarly, a Republican may have the same reaction when two Democrats are on the ballot.

We may see a similar problem arise in a top-four system's general election, whereby voters may have to rank two or more candidates from the opposing party. This may not be a big problem in a high-profile race like Alaska's 2022 Senate contest because voters will be more informed about that race. But in a race getting comparably less attention — like a House election in a state with many districts (if such a state implemented this system) — it's less likely that voters in a random district would be able to easily discriminate between who is more moderate among the other party's candidates.

Even in a high-profile contest like Alaska's 2022 Senate race, the top-four system won't necessarily help an incumbent like Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a moderate Republican who has actively defied Trump in a state he won by 10 points in 2020. While other major contenders could still enter the race and Murkowski hasn't officially announced her reelection bid, it looks increasingly like she will face one other notable Republican running to her right: former commissioner of Alaska's Department of Administration Kelly Tshibaka. And Murkowski's moderation could actually hurt her because it has significantly eroded her standing in the Alaska GOP in what is, remember, a fairly red state. The state party, for instance, has censured her for voting to convict Trump in his second impeachment trial and then endorsed Tshibaka, who also earned Trump's coveted endorsement. Murkowski is no stranger to hard-fought races, though. After losing renomination in the GOP primary in 2010, she won reelection as a write-in candidate in the general election, thanks to her ability to appeal to broad swaths of the state's electorate, such as Alaskan Natives and some Democrats. Yet her anti-Trump bona fides could make it more difficult for her to win this time around, as she could struggle to hold on to a significant chunk of the GOP base, which may be necessary to win.

Murkowski should still be able to advance to November in the top-four primary, but she could be in trouble if something like the following scenario plays out in the ranked-choice voting process: In the first-choice vote, Tshibaka wins a majority of Republican voters and Democrats have a high-profile candidate who they largely back instead of Murkowski. In this situation, Murkowski could easily find herself in third place among the first-choice votes. So even if she's the preferred second-choice candidate for most of the voters who backed the fourth-place candidate, she might still be in third after those votes are reallocated, which would mean game over. In other words, even if Murkowski were the preferred option for the state's electorate in a head-to-head matchup with Tshibaka, that wouldn't matter if she never got into a position to find out. So contrary to reformers' expectations, a top-four primary might not be the ticket to victory for more moderate candidates either.

To be sure, this doesn't mean primary reforms aren't worth pursuing. Considering many elections are decided in the primary and not the general election, the top-four is, in a way, more democratic because it gives the larger general electorate more say. It's just that more open primary systems — even Alaska's top-four — aren't likely to do much to diminish polarization. And that's likely because the biggest driver of polarization is the widening chasm between the two parties. Ultimately, the divide between the parties is a much stronger source of our nation's increasingly polarized politics than any candidate maneuvering in the primaries — or how the primaries themselves work.

Sarah Palin loses special election for Alaska House seat

Eric Bradner, CNN, August 31, 2022

Democrat Mary Peltola won the special election to fill Alaska's House seat for the remainder of 2022, according to unofficial results released by the Alaska Division of Elections, halting former Gov. Sarah Palin's bid at a political comeback.

Palin, the Republican Party's 2008 vice presidential nominee, will get another shot at the House race in a few months, as she and Peltola are among those vying to fill the full term in a separate election in November.

Peltola emerged as the victor Wednesday when Alaska's Division of Elections tabulated ranked-choice ballots in the state's first use of the system.

With her victory, the former state lawmaker will flip the seat held for nearly half a century by the late GOP Rep. Don Young, and is set to become the first Alaska Native in Congress.

Mary Peltola could make history as the first Alaska Native in Congress

The race for Young's seat had been viewed nationally through the lens of the attempted political comeback of Palin, who, after the 2008 presidential election, resigned midway through her lone term in the governor's office in 2009.

Palin, who has not run for office since leaving the governor's office, had been endorsed by former President Donald Trump. He called into tele-rallies for her campaign and appeared at an event in Alaska in July to back Palin and other Republican candidates he has endorsed in this year's races.

Palin criticized ranked-choice voting in a statement after the results were released on Wednesday, calling it a "new crazy, convoluted, confusing" system.

"Though we're disappointed in this outcome, Alaskans know I'm the last one who'll ever retreat. Instead, I'm going to reload. With optimism that Alaskans learn from this voting system mistake and correct it in the next election, let's work even harder to send an America First conservative to Washington in November," she said.

The special election process began when a field of 48 candidates — including Santa Claus, a North Pole councilman and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders supporter — was whittled down to a final four in a June primary in which candidates of all parties ran together on one ballot.

Palin; Peltola; Nick Begich III, a Republican businessman from the state's most famous Democratic political family; and independent Al Gross were the four that advanced. But shortly after the primary, Gross dropped out of the race, a move that consolidated Democratic support behind Peltola.

Peltola, meanwhile, sought to seize on the Supreme Court's decision ending federal abortion rights protections, campaigning as a pro-abortion rights, pro-labor union candidate with a deep connection to issues like fishing that are closely tied to Alaska's identity and economy.

Peltola's stint in the state legislature overlapped with Palin's governorship, and the two displayed a warm relationship on the campaign trail. Peltola also has connections to Young's family: Her father taught school with Young before he was elected to Congress. And Peltola once spent Thanksgiving with Young's family in the Washington, DC, area.

Alaska's Division of Elections ran its ranked-choice calculation at 8 p.m. ET on Wednesday, more than two weeks after Election Day. Elections in Alaska are conducted largely by mail, and because some votes come from remote regions disconnected from road systems, the state allows 10 extra days for ballots to arrive and be counted.

The state's voters in 2020 approved a measure to adopt a ranked-choice voting system: In open primaries that include candidates of all parties, voters cast one ballot for their top choice, and the top four vote-getters advance. Then, in the general election, voters rank those four candidates, first through fourth.

A wrench was thrown into the process when Gross dropped out of the race shortly after making it into the top four. Gross' exit simplified the ranked-choice system: Instead of potentially having to eliminate two candidates and tabulate those candidates' supporters' second- and third-place choices, Alaska had to only eliminate one: Begich, who got 28% of the vote in the August 16 election to Peltola's 40% and Palin's 31%.

Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin arrives at a federal court in Manhattan to resume a case against the New York Times after it was postponed because she tested positive for Covid-19 on February 03, 2022 in New York City. Palin, a one-time vice presidential candidate, has filed a libel lawsuit against The New York Times on claims that an editorial in the Times damaged a career as a conservative political commentator. The editorial was later partly retracted.

How Alaska's ranked-choice voting system works

The switch to ranked-choice voting appeared to go smoothly, despite the potential for confusion among voters who were casting primary ballots on August 16 for a single candidate for November's general election on the same day they were ranking the four candidates in order in the House special election.

"Alaskans are a pretty savvy bunch. We've elected independent governors, US senators with a write-in campaign. We're used to elections looking a little bit different than most places," said Jason Grenn, a former independent member of the state legislature who is now the executive director of Alaskans for Better Elections, a group that pushed for the ranked-choice voting system.

He was referring to former Gov. Bill Walker, an independent who is running again this year against Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy, as well as Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a Republican who in 2010 lost the Republican primary to Tea Party candidate Joe Miller but then won November's general election as a write-in candidate.

"Opening up the primaries, letting voters choose who they want to regardless of party affiliation, combined with ranked-choice voting – it was really two different approaches that allow voters to have more power and have a louder voice," Grenn said. "They like to vote for the person, not the party."

Murkowski, who's running for reelection this fall, congratulated Peltola on Wednesday, noting the history she is making. "While it will be impossible for Alaska to replace Congressman Young, Mary has a long track record of public service to our great state," she said in a statement on Twitter.

All three candidates will get another shot at the House seat in November. Peltola, Palin and Begich were the top three finishers in the primary for the regular election for the next full term. Republican Tara Sweeney, an Alaska Native who is backed by the state's powerful Native corporations, finished fourth. But Sweeney only drew a small share of the primary vote at 4% compared to Peltola's 37%, Palin's 30% and Begich's 26% in that primary.

Sweeney has said she plans to drop out of the race because she doesn't "see a path to victory, nor to raise the resources needed to be successful this November." Questions remain about the official timing of her exit from the race and whether Alaska elections officials will replace her on the ballot.
