



## Preparing for Presidential Primaries

By: Alecia Bryner, Education Programs Coordinator,  
Morven Park Center for Civic Impact

*“We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”*  
~Thomas Jefferson

This statement sums up the issue we have had in our democracy since its inception: not everyone is represented because not everyone is participating. For the first century of American history, and well into the second century, many citizens didn’t have the right to participate. Despite our fellow citizens challenging the injustices and fighting to gain the right to vote, too many people are still absent at the polls.

Presidential elections have higher voter turnout than any other elections, but the country has never had full participation in a presidential election. The closest we came was back in 1876 when 81.8 percent of eligible voters hit the polls. In fact, over the past 40 years the country has struggled to even hit 60 percent of voters—and these are the elections that are the busiest!<sup>1</sup> (This means that a lot of people aren’t allowing their voices to be heard.)

Voter turnout is even lower during primaries and special elections.

### Primary and Caucus Elections

There are two types of elections that select the presidential party nominees: primary and caucus elections. The rules and the occurrence of these elections vary by state. Primaries include secret ballots, just like a standard election vote. Caucuses are large meetings in which attendees vote at the conclusion. Candidates will then be formally nominated at the National Convention of each party.

Virginia holds open primaries, meaning you can vote in either a Democratic or Republican primary regardless of your party affiliation. However, you can only vote in one primary—you cannot vote in both for one election.

Many voters choose to skip primary elections, but primaries give citizens the important opportunity to select the presidential candidates that will appear on the November ballot. The Virginia presidential primary is being held on **“Super Tuesday,” March 3, 2020**, when 16 states will be voting.

Virginia and a handful of other states have cancelled the Republican primaries and caucuses due to party support for incumbent President Donald Trump. This means there will be only a Democratic primary in Virginia, but all voters are welcome to cast their ballot for the Democratic presidential candidate, regardless of party affiliation.

---

<sup>1</sup> National General Election VEP Turnout Rates, 1789-Present. <http://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present>

With the presidential election quickly approaching on **Tuesday, November 3, 2020**, voters need to be well informed about deadlines for registration, absentee ballots, and the candidates!

Here is some important information about voting in Virginia:

- Primary Registration Deadline: **February 10, 2020**
- General Election Registration Deadline: **October 12, 2020**
- Virginia **voting times**: 6:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. (you can vote if you are in line by 7:00 p.m.)
- If you are a Virginia citizen and need to **register to vote**, visit:  
<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/citizen-portal/>
- For information on **absentee voting** visit:  
<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/casting-a-ballot/absentee-voting/>
- Updated **candidate lists** can be found at:  
<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/casting-a-ballot/candidate-list/>

Let's cast our votes this March and again in November so that the majority will be heard!

