

Chapter 7: The Electoral Process

Section 1
Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Explain why the nominating process is a critical first step in the election process.
2. Describe self-announcement, the caucus, and the convention as nominating methods.
3. Discuss the direct primary as the principal nominating method used in the United States today.
4. Understand why some candidates use the petition as a nominating device.

▶ Key Terms

- **nomination:** the naming of those who seek office
- **general election:** regularly scheduled elections for public office
- **caucus:** a group of people who meet to select candidates for election
- **direct primary:** an election held in a party to pick the party's candidates
- **closed primary:** a party's nominating election in which only party members can vote

▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **open primary:** a party's nominating election in which any qualified voter can vote
- **blanket primary:** an election in which all voters can vote for candidates from every party
- **runoff primary:** an election held if no one wins a majority in the main primary
- **nonpartisan elections:** an election in which candidates are not identified by party labels

▶ Introduction

- What methods are used to choose candidates for public office?
 - Candidates are nominated for public office through:
 - Self-announcement
 - Caucus
 - Convention
 - Direct primary
 - Petition

▶ The Nominating Process

- Checkpoint: What is nomination?
 - Nomination is the process of selecting the candidates who will seek public office. It is a key function of American political parties.
 - In our two-party system, the nominating process puts limits on the choices available to voters in the general election.

▶ The Nominating Process, cont.

- In countries where one party wins most general elections, whoever wins the nomination is usually elected to office.
- Nominations can be made by self-announcement, caucus, convention, direct primary, or petition.



► Self-Announcement

- A person who wants to run for office can simply announce that fact. Whenever a write-in candidate appears, self-announcement has been used.
 - Why might wealthy candidates favor self-announcement?



▶ The Caucus

- In the early republic, key party members met in caucuses to nominate candidates.
 - Party members in State legislatures held caucuses to nominate candidates for State offices, while party caucuses in Congress nominated presidential candidates.
 - Caucuses were criticized as being too small, private, and out of touch with everyday party members.

▶ The Convention

- Conventions replaced caucuses.
- Party voters choose delegates who attend conventions, where they pick party candidates and elect delegates to attend higher level conventions.
- Conventions were soon controlled by party bosses.



▶ The Direct Primary

- By law, the direct primary is now the nominating method used by the major parties in most States.
- Qualified voters cast private ballots for their preferred candidate. The person receiving the most votes is nominated.



▶ The Direct Primary, cont.

- The States regulate and conduct party primaries.
- A **closed primary** is closed to all but declared members of a party. Usually this means being a registered party member.
- An **open primary** is open to all qualified voters.



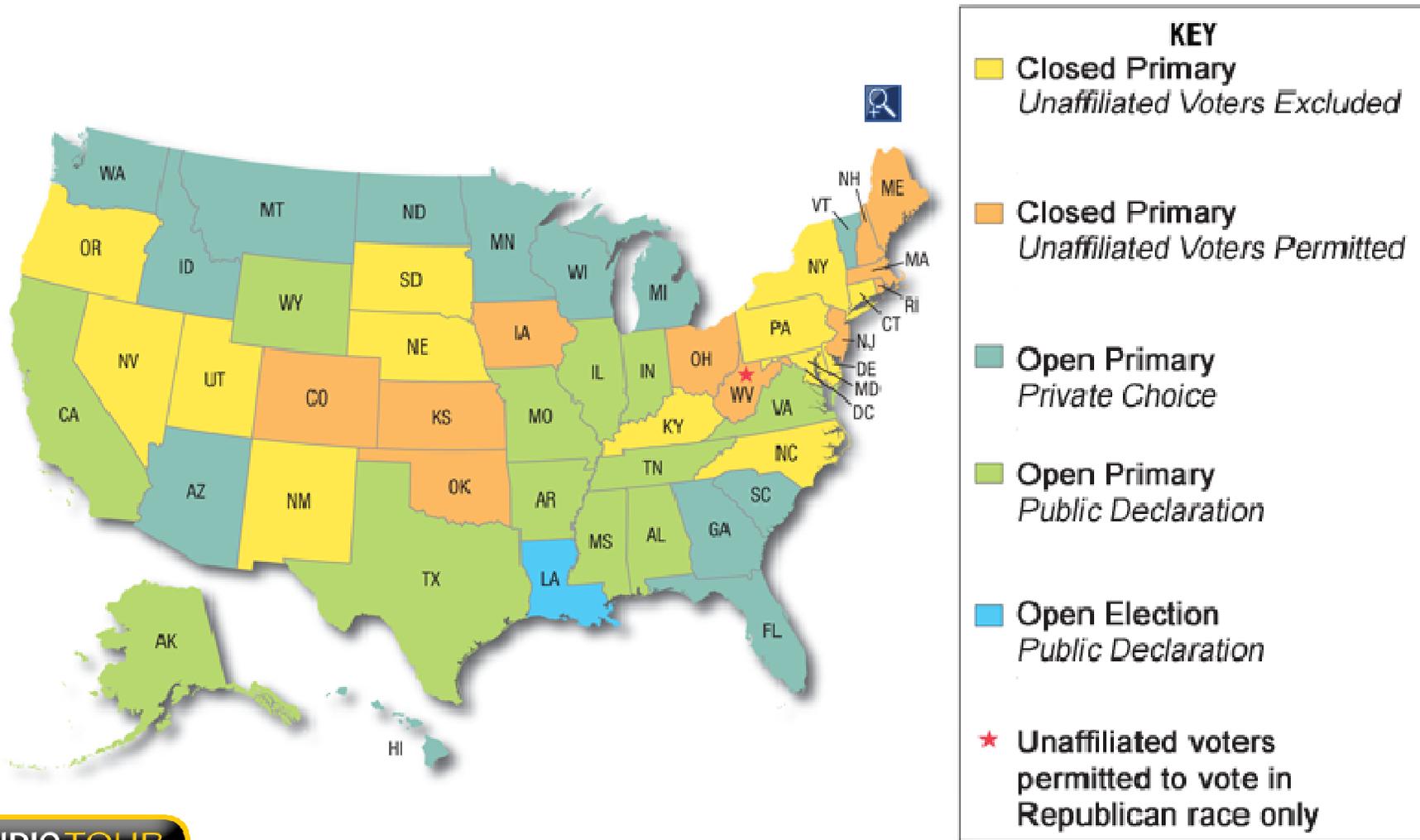
▶ Open v. Closed Primaries

- Closed primaries help make candidates more responsive to their party, force voters to choose a party affiliation, and keep the opposing party from “raiding” a primary and picking the weakest candidates.
- Open primaries do not exclude independent voters. In many cases, open primary voters can also keep their choice of party private.

▶ Other Types of Primaries

- In 8 States the primary winner must receive a majority of the votes. If no one does this, then a runoff primary is held between the top two vote getters.
- In most States, nearly all elected school and municipal officers are elected in nonpartisan elections, where candidates are not identified by party labels. The majority winner may be awarded the office or run unopposed in a general election.

► Forms of Primaries in State Elections



▶ Presidential Primary

- Depending on the State, party voters may use the presidential primary to choose delegates to their national party convention, to choose the candidate they want to be their party's presidential nominee, or both.



▶ Evaluating Primaries

- Checkpoint: What are the benefits and drawbacks of primaries?
 - Primaries put the nominating process into the hands of the everyday party members.
 - Drawbacks include the fact that primaries make campaigns more expensive and voter turnout in primaries is usually less than half what it is for general elections.
 - The primary process also emphasizes name familiarity over talent and can cause divisions within a party.

▶ Petition

- At the local level, candidates may be nominated by petitions signed by a minimum number of qualified voters in the election district.
- Many States require minor party and independent candidates to be nominated by petition.



▶ Review

- Now that you have learned about the methods used to choose candidates for public office, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - How fair and effective is the electoral process?