

What is a Caucus?

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Party Members Have to Choose

In U.S. politics, Party members have to decide which candidate they want to represent their Party in the national election. Some states hold a Primary, and Party members go to the polls and vote. Other states hold a Caucus.

It Starts with a Local Meeting

A caucus is a neighborhood gathering of Party members who discuss which candidate they want to represent their Party in the national election. The caucus can be held in the town hall, library, or someone's home, and it takes about 1-2 hours.

Different Parties, Different Styles

The Republicans caucus by first listening to speeches about the candidates and then filling out a secret ballot. The results are counted and reported to the media.

The Democrats have a more complicated process. They break into groups, separating themselves from other folks with a different candidate preference. If a candidate doesn't have 15-25% of the total, his or her supporters must go join another group. People argue and debate and attempt to woo smaller groups to join them. Once everyone is in a group, delegates to a county convention are apportioned. If you get 50% of the people in your corner, you get 50% of the delegates.

From Neighborhood to County to State to National

At the county convention, delegates are chosen for the state convention. And at the state convention, delegates are chosen for the national convention. Finally, at the national convention, delegates from all over the country choose a candidate to represent their Party in the general election.

Where does that word come from?



Caucus can be a noun, meaning a *closed meeting of a group of people belonging to the same political party*, or it can be a verb meaning *to meet*. No one is sure where the word caucus comes from. Some say it comes from *caulkers*, who helped build ships; some trace it to the Latin word *caucus*, which comes from the Greek *kaukos*, a drinking vessel; others say it comes from the Algonkian Indian word *caucausu*, which means elder or counselor.



Do All the States Do it This Way?

A few states hold caucuses, but most hold primaries. At a primary, voters do not "caucus" with each other. They simply vote for the candidate that they want to represent their party.

For Discussion:

1. Which would you prefer—the open debate style of the Democrats or the secret ballot of the Republicans? Why?
2. Talk about a time you "caucused" with someone—at home, at work, or in your community. Was it a valuable process?

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